

PLSC 441: The Politics of Climate Change in Developing States

Instructor: Dr. Cleo O'Brien-Udry (coudry@illinois.edu)

Semester: Fall 2025

Meeting Times: Monday and Wednesday, 2:00-2:50 pm

Location: 1001 Lincoln Hall

Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesday, 1-2 pm in 309 David Kinley Hall and by appointment

Teaching Assistant: Joseph Acheampong (joa5@illinois.edu)

Office Hours: TBA

Course Description

How does climate change affect politics in the developing world? How do domestic and international actors confront the challenges of a warming world? What explains different strategies for mitigating climate change? This upper-level political science course equips students to answer these questions by introducing key concepts in climate politics and development discourse. While the industrialized world is responsible for the vast majority of historical emissions, the developing world is disproportionately vulnerable to the effects of climate change. This class will seek to understand the historic disparities in emissions and income that separate the Global North and Global South. We will explore the unique aspects of politics in developing states that explain differences in climate policy and the impacts of climate change.

Student Learning Outcomes

1. Understand and evaluate the distinct effects of climate change in developing countries
2. Connect key concepts in politics to the realities of climate impacts and mitigation efforts
3. Engage with and intervene into debates about the political causes and consequences of climate change
4. Critically analyze the relationship between international politics and climate in developing contexts

Prerequisites

PS 280 or PS 281 or PS 283, or at least six hours of Political Science credit, or consent of the instructor.

Course Requirements

Notebook and writing utensil. Laptops are not permitted in class unless the student has received prior permission from the instructor.

Readings

All reading materials will be posted on the course website.

Credits and Hours

This is a three-credit hour course. Your commitment to this course exceeds the time spent in class meetings. You should expect to spend about 9 to 12 hours each week outside of class time completing the required readings and course assignments.

The course consists of two fifty-minute lectures and one fifty-minute section per week.

Course Requirements

In-class participation (20%)

Case studies (25%)

Direct action (15%)

Midterm exam (20%)

Final exam (20%)

Grade Scale:

$\geq 93\%$: A

90-92.99%: A-

87-89.99%: B+

83-86.99%: B

80-82.99%: B-

77-79.99%: C+

73-76.99%: C

70-72.99%: C-

67-69.99%: D+

63-66.99%: D

60-62.99%: D-

Below 60%: F

Assignments

In-class and section participation (20%):

I expect you to have come to class and have done the readings beforehand in order to participate and engage with the material.

- **Attendance (5%):** Attendance in lecture is required. Attendance will be taken via poll and coursework uploaded to Canvas.

- **Reading (5%):** Readings are posted on Perusall. Please post *at least* one comment each week (one comment on *any* reading from the week—though ideally you would engage with all of the readings).
- **Class participation (10%):** Active engagement in class is a large part of your grade! This includes asking/answering questions in lecture, participating in small group activities, and fostering an inclusive and curious environment.

Case studies (25%):

Pick one country or subnational region to focus on throughout the course. The goal of the case studies is for you to engage with concepts in class by applying them to a specific context you're interested in. You will propose a case in Week 3 (**½ page, Times New Roman, 12-pt font, 1-in margins, single-spaced**). Starting in Week 5 (for Group A) or 6 (for Group B), you will submit **four one-page reflections (Times New Roman, 12-pt font, 1-in margins, single-spaced) every two weeks**.

- **Case study proposal (5%):** Identify a location and describe how climate change has or will impact the location physically.
- **Case reflections (4 case studies, each 5%):** Apply concepts from class to your chosen location. How is your location an example of, or an exception to, issues facing developing countries in relation to climate change? Engage with course readings as they relate to your location.

Direct climate action (15%):

Choose a form of climate action to pursue across the semester. Types of action include (but are not limited to!): starting a composting bin in your dorm/apartment, joining a local climate or environmental group, participating in citizen science initiatives, volunteering for a pro-climate cause, writing or creating public-focused climate information or art, etc. See end of curriculum for an extensive list of suggestions.

- **Propose direct action (5%):** Short description of how you plan to take action.
- **Evidence of direct action (5%):** Take a photo of you engaging in a form of direct climate action.
- **Report on direct action (5%):** Reflect on the process of finding and engaging with climate action (500 words).

Midterm exam/essay (20%):

The final exam will be a combination of short answers and essay questions covering material from the first half of class. The midterm will be held in Week 7 (Wednesday, October 8th).

- **Short answers (10%):** Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of key concepts in class.
- **Long essay (10%):** Pick one of two questions to answer in detail using examples from class and your case studies.

Final exam/essay (20%):

The final exam will be a combination of short answers and essay questions covering material from the second half of class. Final exam date TBA

- **Short answers (10%):** Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of key concepts in class.
- **Long essay (10%):** Pick one of two questions to answer in detail using examples from class and your case studies.

Course Policies (adopted from Professor Rana Khoury)

Classroom interactions should remain respectful and engaged. Your responsibility is to contribute to a comfortable climate. My responsibility is to facilitate and maintain such a climate. You may reach out to me if you feel that we are falling short in this mandate.

Learning takes diverse forms. *Accommodations* can be made in coordination with the Division of Disability Resources and Educational Services, reachable at (217) 333- 4603 or disability@illinois.edu.

Late work will be penalized by 5% for each day it is late unless we have discussed in advance or in case of an emergency.

Computers and phones are permitted for course work. If they become a distraction, I will change our course modalities so that they will not be used in class at all.

Email is an effective mode of communication with me if you have a quick question or if you need to set up an appointment outside of office hours to discuss a substantive question. If I have not responded within 36 hours, feel free to send a follow-up.

Regrading is something I am willing to do upon receiving a one-page memo that explains why the assessment might have been a misjudgment.

This syllabus is *subject to change*. Please pay attention to emails or other communications indicating changes as we go. Some possible reasons for change include lack of engagement with course material prior to course meetings (I am not above pop quizzes!), overuse of artificial intelligence for writing assignments, and misuse of electronic devices.

Academic Integrity

Scholars build upon the work of others, citing and crediting them along the way. Plagiarism is not acceptable.

Don't cheat! Cheating is unauthorized collaboration on exams and solo-authored writing assignments. As described in the University of Illinois Student Code, the consequences of plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty can include a zero (0) in the given assignment, failure in the course, or dismissal from the university.

Artificial Intelligence (adopted from policies of Oxford University Press, International Studies Association, and Professors Aleksander Ksiazkiewicz and Rana Khoury)

Using AI to write your assignments is cheating as per (a)(1) in the academic integrity policy above. It will be treated as such, just like if you have plagiarized a published work or had someone else write your essays for you. Our guiding principle will be transparency. Detailed statements of the exact use of AI tools must be disclosed. Such statements should include information on the AI tool and where it was used in the creation of the essay (for example, were AI tools used in word choice, choosing a thesis statement, or in citation generation?) You must put any direct quotations in quotation marks.

Class schedule

Week	Dates	Unit	Assignment	Due date (12am)
1	8/25, 9/27	Climate anxiety		
2	9/3	Climate science		
3	9/8, 9/10	Historical climate politics I	Case study proposal	9/10
4	9/15, 9/17	Historical climate politics II	Direct action proposal	9/17
5	9/22, 9/24	Historical climate politics III	Case study 1 (Group A)	9/24
6	9/29, 10/1	Basics of climate politics	Case study 1 (Group B)	10/1
7	10/6, 10/8	Climate cooperation I		
8	10/13, 10/15	Climate cooperation II	Midterm exam 3/12	10/15
9	10/20, 10/22	Domestic politics I	Case study 2 (Group A)	10/22
10	10/27, 10/29	International politics I	Case study 2 (Group B)	10/29
11	11/3, 11/5	Domestic politics II	Case study 3 (Group A)	11/5
12	11/10, 11/12	International politics II	Case study 3 (Group B)	11/12
13	11/17, 11/19	Domestic politics III	Case study 4 (Group A)	11/9
14	12/1, 12/3	International politics III	Case study 4 (Group B)	12/3
15	12/8, 12/10	TBA	Direct action evidence due 12/10	12/10

Week 1 -8/25, 8/27

Climate anxiety

1. Introduction, strategies for dealing with climate anxiety.

Week 2 - 9/3

Climate science

1. TBA
2. What are the physical consequences for developing countries
 - a. Michael Franczak and Olúfẹ́mi O Táíwò. "Here's how to repay developing nations for colonialism – and fight the climate crisis." *The Guardian*. 14 January 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jan/14/heres-how-to-repay-developing-nations-for-colonialism-and-fight-the-climate-crisis>

Week 3 -9/8, 9/10

Historical climate politics

1. Colonialism
 - a. Sultana, Farhana. "The unbearable heaviness of climate coloniality." *Political Geography* 99 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S096262982200052X>
 - b. Táíwò, Olúfẹ́mi O. *Reconsidering reparations*. Oxford University Press, 2022. Ch 5: What's Next: Why Reparations Require Climate Justice
2. Industrialization
 - a. Inikori, Joseph E. "Africans and the industrial revolution in England." Cambridge: Cambridge (2002). Ch 9. Atlantic Markets and the Development of the Major Manufacturing Sectors in England's Industrialization

Week 4 - 9/15, 9/17

Historical climate politics II

1. Trade
 - a. Barak, On. "Outsourcing: Energy and empire in the age of coal, 1820-1911." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*(2015): 425-445.
 - b. Bailey, Ronald. "The other side of slavery: black labor, cotton, and textile industrialization in Great Britain and the United States." *Agricultural History* 68.2 (1994): 35-50.
2. Environmental Kuznet's Kurve
 - a. "Exporting pollution." *VoxDev Talks*. 5 May 2021. <https://voxdev.org/topic/energy-environment/exporting-pollution>

Week 5 - 9/22, 9/24

Historical climate politics III

1. OPEC
 - a. Colgan, Jeff. *Partial hegemony: Oil politics and international order*. Oxford University Press, 2021. Chapter 3 - The Rise of OPEC

2. Energy and imperialism

- a. Immerwahr, Daniel. *How to hide an empire: A short history of the greater United States*. Random House, 2019
- b. Shulman, Peter A. *Coal and empire: The birth of energy security in industrial America*. JHU Press, 2015. Ch 5 The Debate over Coaling Stations.

Week 6 - 9/29, 10/1

Basics of climate politics

1. Tragedy of the commons/Distributional effects
 - a. Keohane & Victor. (2016). "Cooperation and discord in global climate policy." *Nature Climate Change*.
 - b. Aklin & Mildenerger. (2020). "Prisoners of the wrong dilemma: Why distributive conflict, not collective action, characterizes the politics of climate change." *Global Environmental Politics*.
2. Different in the Global South?
 - a. Yazar, Mahir, Irem Daloglu Cetinkaya, Ece Baykal Fide, and Håvard Haarstad. "Diffusion of global climate policy: National depoliticization, local repoliticization in Turkey." *Global Environmental Change* 81 (2023): 102699.
 - b. Bush, Sarah Sunn, and Amanda Clayton. "Facing change: Gender and climate change attitudes worldwide." *American Political Science Review* 117.2 (2023): 591-608.

Week 7 - 10/6, 10/8

Climate cooperation I

1. Montreal, Kyoto, and Paris
 - a. Maizland, Lindsay. "Global climate agreements: Successes and failures." *Council on Foreign Relations* 23 (2021).
 - b. Sunstein, Cass R. "Of Montreal and Kyoto: a tale of two protocols." *Harv. Envtl. L. Rev.* 31 (2007): 1.
2. Climate negotiations
 - a. Genovese, Federica. *Weak states at global climate negotiations*. Cambridge University Press, 2020.

Week 8 - 10/13, 10/15

Climate cooperation II

2. IOs
 - a. Graham, Erin R., and Alexandria Serdaru. "Power, control, and the logic of substitution in institutional design: The case of international climate finance." *International Organization* 74.4 (2020): 671-706.
 - b. Johnson, Tana. "Institutional design and bureaucrats' impact on political control." *The Journal of Politics* 75.1 (2013): 183-197.
3. Climate finance
 - a. Skovgaard, Jakob, Kevin M. Adams, Kendra Dupuy, Adis Dzebo, Mikkel Funder, Adam Moe Fejerskov, and Zoha Shawoo. "Multilateral climate finance coordination: Politics

and depoliticization in practice." *Global Environmental Politics* 23, no. 2 (2023): 125-147.

Week 9 - 10/20, 10/22

Domestic politics I

1. Climate migration
 - a. Tandon, Ayesha. "In-depth Q&A: How does climate change drive human migration?" Carbon Brief. 10 April 2024.
 - b. Scheffran, Jürgen, Elina Marmer, and Papa Sow. "Migration as a contribution to resilience and innovation in climate adaptation: Social networks and co-development in Northwest Africa." *Applied geography* 33 (2012): 119-127.
2. Migration attitudes
 - a. Spilker, Gabriele, Quynh Nguyen, Vally Koubi, and Tobias Böhmelt. "Attitudes of urban residents towards environmental migration in Kenya and Vietnam." *Nature Climate Change* 10, no. 7 (2020): 622-627.
 - b. Castellano, Rachel, Nives Dolšak, and Aseem Prakash. "Willingness to help climate migrants: A survey experiment in the Korail slum of Dhaka, Bangladesh." *PloS one* 16.4 (2021): e0249315.

Week 10 - 10/27, 10/29

International politics I

1. Foreign direct investment I
 - a. Haraguchi, Masahiko, and Upmanu Lall. "Flood risks and impacts: A case study of Thailand's floods in 2011 and research questions for supply chain decision making." *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 14 (2015): 256-272.
 - b. Gamso, Jonas. "Does climate aid reduce perceived climate risks to foreign direct investors?." *Climate and Development*(2025): 1-11.
2. Foreign direct investment II
 - a. Zeng, Ka, and Joshua Eastin. "Do developing countries invest up? The environmental effects of foreign direct investment from less-developed countries." *World Development* 40.11 (2012): 2221-2233.
 - b. Bernauer, Thomas, and Quynh Nguyen. "Free trade and/or environmental protection?." *Global Environmental Politics* 15.4 (2015): 105-129

Week 11 - 11/3, 11/5

Domestic politics II

1. Climate change and conflict
 - a. Mach, K.J., Kraan, C.M., Adger, W.N. *et al.* Climate as a risk factor for armed conflict. *Nature* 571, 193–197 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-019-1300-6>
2. Climate change and conflict?
 - a. Selby, Jan, and Clemens Hoffmann. "Beyond scarcity: rethinking water, climate change and conflict in the Sudans." *Global Environmental Change* 29 (2014): 360-370.

Week 12 - 11/10, 11/12

International politics II

1. Energy transition – supply
 - a. Kyra Bos, Joyeeta Gupta. 2018. "Climate change: the risks of stranded fossil fuel assets and resources to the developing world." *Third World Quarterly* 39 (3), 436-453
 - b. Colgan, Jeff D., Jessica F. Green, and Thomas N. Hale. "Asset revaluation and the existential politics of climate change." *International Organization* 75.2 (2021): 586-610.
2. Energy transition – demand
 - a. Mohlakoana, Nthabiseng, et al. "Varieties of just transition: Public support in South Africa's Mpumalanga coal community for different policy options." *PLOS Climate* 2.5 (2023): e0000205.
 - b. Dubash, Navroz K., Ashwini K Swain, Parth Bhatia. "The Disruptive Politics of Renewable Energy." *The India Forum*. July 5, 2019
<https://www.theindiaforum.in/article/disruptive-politics-renewable-energy>

Week 13 - 11/17, 11/19

Domestic politics III

1. Decentralization
 - a. Kahn, Matthew E., Pei Li, and Daxuan Zhao. "Water pollution progress at borders: the role of changes in China's political promotion incentives." *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 7.4 (2015): 223-242.
 - b. Sanford, Luke. "Democratization, elections, and public goods: the evidence from deforestation." *American Journal of Political Science* 67.3 (2023): 748-763.
2. Bureaucrats
 - a. Iza Ding. 2020. "[Performative Governance](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/world-politics/article/abs/performative-governance/AAC558378BEA651DB7E2480ECFFB4E10)." *World Politics* 72 (4): 1-32.
<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/world-politics/article/abs/performative-governance/AAC558378BEA651DB7E2480ECFFB4E10>

Week 14 -12/1, 12/3

International politics III

1. Firms
 - a. Goicoechea, Ana, and Megan Lang. "Firms and Climate Change in Low-and Middle-Income Countries." *Development Research* (2023).
2. Carbon offsets
 - a. Andonova, Liliana B., and Yixian Sun. "Private governance in developing countries: Drivers of voluntary carbon offset programs." *Global Environmental Politics* 19.1 (2019): 99-122.

Week 15 - 12/8, 12/10

Review

Direct climate action

- Start a composting bin in your dorm/apartment
- Volunteer with a local environmental group
- Attend a climate protest
- Switch to biking, walking, or riding the bus when commuting
- Conduct research
- Create art that brings attention to climate/the environment
- Communicate climate science via blog, podcast, vlog
- Connect with city government
- Call and write your representative
- Track your consumption habits and try to reduce them
- Take the train or bus instead of flying
- Reduce your red meat and dairy consumption
- Participate in citizen science initiatives
- Join a national or international movement
- Organize an event on campus
- Advocate for heat pumps, electrification, and energy efficiency in buildings
- Volunteer for the local bike coop (<https://thebikeproject.org/>)
- Join me (your professor) on Chloride Watch at select dates throughout the semester to check on salt run-off levels at sites in Champaign-Urbana

Additional resources:

<https://heatmap.news/decarbonize-your-life>

<https://www.meer.org/>

<https://climatefresk.org/world/>

<http://sunrisemovement.org/>

<https://rebellion.global/>

<https://guides.library.illinois.edu/citizen-science/find-a-project>