

SYLLABUS
POL-UA 993: Politics of Climate Change
Spring 2023, New York University
Mondays & Wednesdays 3:30pm-4:45pm

Prof. Eric Dickson
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Office Hours (beginning on Feb 7): Tuesdays 11am-noon & 2pm-3pm
Office Hours will usually be accessible both virtually and in-person, see ericdickson.net/officehours

Teaching Assistants:
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Course Description: Climate change is one of the great challenges of our times. This course surveys the contemporary politics of climate change. The course is roughly divided into four unequal parts. First, we will briefly survey the phenomenon of climate change – why it is happening now and what some of its effects are likely to be. Second, we will cover reasons why climate change is such a difficult problem for human beings to solve, and the political roots of many of these difficulties. This will be considered from the perspectives of individual and social psychology; the logic of collective action problems from economics; and discussion of the role of lobbying and entrenched interests in today’s political systems. Third, the course will discuss climate change *mitigation* – methods of trying to reduce the problems that climate change is likely to pose. We will cover experimental research on public outreach and messaging, to learn what if any techniques might be effective in changing citizens’ attitudes or behavior regarding climate-facing issues. We will also cover various kinds of policy initiatives, including carbon taxes, the use of carbon offsets, and other forms of regulation and technological investment. This part of the course also discusses international negotiations regarding climate issues. Fourth and finally, the course will discuss climate change *adaptation* – that is, how individuals and societies will adapt and be affected by whatever degree of climate change ultimately does occur. Our discussion of adaptation will include a variety of topics, including the likely effects of climate change on important political phenomena such as global conflict, national and racial inequality, migration and governance.

Course Prerequisites: There are no formal prerequisites for this course. Any concepts that may be used in class will be introduced and discussed at length as we go along.

Covid-19 Policies: The class will follow whatever Covid-19 policies NYU may put in place over the course of the semester, as the pandemic continues to evolve.

Teaching Modality: The course is offered in-person. Thanks to the pandemic, we also have access to Zoom technology if this becomes necessary (e.g., the professor is sick, a significant fraction of the class is sick at the same time, university policies on in-person

teaching change as the pandemic progresses, etc.). The lecture on Wednesday, February 2 will be held via Zoom only however as I will be physically away at a climate change conference.

Intellectual Integrity: Instances of plagiarism, or the use of artificial intelligence (AI) programs in generating student assignments, will result in a grade of zero on the relevant assignment, and at the professor's discretion may potentially result in a grade of F for the course as a whole and referral to the Dean's Office.

Course Requirements: Your course grade will be determined by a combination of the following factors: (1) one in-class midterm exam (25%); (2) a (comprehensive) in-class final exam (40%); (3) a brief term paper (20%); and (4) attendance and participation in recitation sections (15%).

The exams will cover material from lectures and from the readings listed on the syllabus. I do not take attendance in lecture; however, you cannot reasonably expect to do well in the course without having assimilated the contents of the lectures.

The brief term paper, which will be due on Friday 21 April, will be on a topic of your choosing, conditional on pre-approval from the professor or your teaching assistant. You may wish to invent your own messaging campaign to inspire citizens to reduce their carbon footprints; describe climate outreach actions you have undertaken over the course of the semester; propose a novel policy to help grapple with the climate crisis or its consequences; or study the coming impacts of climate change on New York City. Your paper in some way must use or relate to ideas from class, and involve some degree of individual research or action, but you have considerable scope for creativity based on your own interests and talents.

The recitation sections are meant to enhance your understanding of the lectures and readings. Some of them will involve interactive activities – for instance, your section may engage in interactive scenarios demonstrating the logic of collective action problems; brainstorm successful new strategies for communicating to the public about climate change; or simulate international negotiations over carbon emissions limits. Sections are a place where student engagement helps everyone learn better. Attendance is therefore required.

Course Books & Readings: The required course readings, listed below, take a variety of forms. Some are published articles in academic journals; others are reports by think tanks, local governments, or international organizations; yet others are articles that have appeared in the popular press. There are quite a few readings on the syllabus, but note that a good number of the articles are very short. Some of the readings will have some degree of technical content – it is an important skill (and one highly relevant to climate science) to be able to glean the essential meaning from scientific documents without getting bogged down in any technical details. You are not expected to have a background in statistics or any other technical material, you will never have to do any math, and you will not be examined on such aspects of the readings. You will be able to get all of the points on exams based on a layperson's understanding of anything we cover in class.

In addition, selected chapters will be assigned from the following books:

Leah Cardamore Stokes. 2020. *Short Circuiting Policy: Interest Groups and the Battle Over Clean Energy and Climate Policy in the American States*. Oxford University Press.

Danny Cullenward and David Victor. 2020. *Making Climate Policy Work*. Wiley.

Recitation sections will generally relate to material covered in lecture the previous week. Thus you should make sure to complete all readings listed for a given week by the end of that week. Whether you prefer to do these readings before or after the lectures for that particular week is a choice you can make depending on your personal learning style.

Course Outline *dates approximate*

Part I: What is the problem?

What is climate change? What is the nature of the evidence behind climate change and the degree to which is it caused by human activity? What are the factors contributing to climate change, and their relative importance?

Week 1 (23, 25 January 2023) Introduction & Some Climate Change Basics

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Working Group I). 2021. "Climate Change 2021, The Physical Science Basis: Summary for Policymakers." Available at https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGI_SPM_final.pdf

The Hamilton Project and EPIC. 2017. "Twelve Economic Facts on Energy and Climate Change." Available at https://www.hamiltonproject.org/assets/files/twelve_economic_facts_energy_climate_change.pdf

Yangyang Xu, Veerabhadran Ramanathan, and David G. Victor. 2018. "Global Warming Will Happen Faster Than We Think." *Nature* 564: 30-32. Available at <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-07586-5>

Part II: Why is the problem so hard to solve?

This section of the course focuses on social, psychological, and institutional factors that make climate change such a hard problem to tackle. Dealing with climate change is a collective action problem; it requires paying short-term costs to achieve longer-term benefits; humans have myriad psychological motivations to minimize or disbelieve in the threat posed by climate change; these are exacerbated by political processes and rhetoric; and entrenched interests fight against climate reforms.

Week 2 (30 January, 2 February 2023) Collective Action & Distributive Politics

Note: the Wednesday, 2 February lecture will be delivered via Zoom only.

Garrett Hardin. 1968. "The Tragedy of the Commons," *Science* 162(3859): 1243-1248.

Michäel Aklin and Matto Mildenerger. 2020. "Prisoners of the Wrong Dilemma: Why Distributive Conflict, Not Collective Action, Characterizes the Politics of Climate Change." *Global Environmental Politics* 20(4): 4-27.

Jonas Meckling, Nina Kelsey, Eric Biber, and John Zysman. 2015. "Winning Coalitions for Climate Policy." *Science* 349 (6253): 1170-1171.

Matto Mildenerger. 2019. "The Tragedy of 'the Tragedy of the Commons.'" *Scientific American* blogpost, available at <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/voices/the-tragedy-of-the-tragedy-of-the-commons/>

Week 3 (6, 8 February 2023) Cognitive Biases, Political Polarization, and Public Opinion

Patrick J. Egan and Megan Mullin. 2016. "Recent Improvement and Projected Worsening of Weather in the United States." *Nature* 532: 357-360.

Patrick J. Egan and Megan Mullin. 2017. "Climate Change: US Public Opinion." *Annual Review of Political Science* 20: 209-227.

Chad Hazlett and Matto Mildenerger. "Wildfire Exposure Increases Pro-Environment Voting within Democratic but Not Republican Areas." *American Political Science Review* 114(4): 1359-1365.

Uscinski, Joseph E. and Santiago Olivella. 2017. "The Conditional Effect of Conspiracy Thinking on Attitudes Toward Climate Change." *Research and Politics* 4(4):205316801774310.

M.T. Ballew, A. Leiserowitz, C. Roser-Renouf, S. A. Rosenthal, J. E. Kotcher, J. R. Marlon, E. Lyon, M. H. Goldberg and E.W.Maibach. 2019. "Climate Change in the American Mind: Data, Tools, and Trends." *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development*, 61(3): 4-18.

L. Van Boven, P. J. Ehret and D. K. Sherman. 2018. "Psychological Barriers to Bipartisan Public Support for Climate Policy." *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 13(4): 492-507.

Week 4 (13, 15 February 2023) Lobbying & Entrenched Interests

Leah Cardamore Stokes. 2020. *Short Circuiting Policy: Interest Groups and the Battle Over Clean Energy and Climate Policy in the American States*. Oxford University Press. (selected

chapters)

Justin Farrell. 2016. "Corporate Funding and Ideological Polarization About Climate Change." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 113(1): 92-97.

John Cook, Geoffrey Supran, Stephan Lewandowsky, Naomi Oreskes, and Ed Maibach. 2019. "America Misled: How the Fossil Fuel Industry Deliberately Misled Americans About Climate Change." George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication. Available at https://www.climatechangecommunication.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/America_Misled.pdf

No class on Monday, 20 February due to Presidents' Day Holiday

Part III: What can we try, and how well will it work? (Climate Change Mitigation)

This section of the course focuses on ways that progress might be made in preventing the worst-case outcomes from climate change. They involve various forms of public outreach and attempts to influence individual behavior; economic and policy interventions like carbon taxes; techniques such as carbon offsets; investments in new technology; and international cooperation and negotiations.

Weeks 5 and 6 (22, 27 February 2023) Research on Climate Change Messaging and Science Communication

Thomas Bernauer and Liam McGrath. 2016. "Simple Reframing Unlikely to Boost Public Support for Climate Policy." *Nature Climate Change* 6(7): 680-683.

Adrian Rinscheid, Silvia Pianta, and Elka U. Weber. 2021. "What Shapes Public Support for Climate Change Mitigation Policies? The Role of Descriptive Social Norms and Elite Cues." *Behavioural Public Policy* 5(4): 503-527.

David K. Sherman, Michelle F. Shteyn, Hahrie Han, and Leaf Van Boven. 2021. "The Exchange Between Citizens and Elected Officials: a Social Psychological Framework for Citizen Climate Activists." *Behavioural Public Policy* 5(4): 576-605.

Gregg Sparkman, Lauren Howe, and Greg Walton. 2021. "How Social Norms Are Often A Barrier to Addressing Climate Change But Can Be Part Of The Solution." *Behavioural Public Policy* 5(4): 528-555.

Weeks 6 and 7 (1, 6 March 2023) Research on Behavioral Nudges

Thomas Dietz, Gerald T. Gardner, Jonathan Gilligan, Paul C. Stern, and Michael P. Vandenbergh. 2009. "Household Actions Can Provide A Behavioral Wedge To Rapidly Reduce US Carbon Emissions." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 106(44): 18452-

18456.

Micha Kaiser, Manuela Bernauer, Cass R. Sunstein and Lucia A. Reisch. 2020. "The Power of Green Defaults: the Impact of Regional Variation of Opt-out Tariffs on Green Energy Demand in Germany." *Ecological Economics* 174: 106685.

Claudia F. Nisa, Jocelyn J. Bélanger, Birga M. Schumpe and Daiane G. Faller. 2019. "Meta-analysis of Randomised Controlled Trials Testing Behavioural Interventions to Promote Household Action on Climate Change." *Nature Communications* 10:4545.

Paul C. Stern. 2020. "A Reexamination on How Behavioral Interventions Can Promote Household Action to Limit Climate Change." *Nature Communications* 11:918.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. 2017. *Tackling Environmental Problems with the Help of Behavioural Insights*. OECD Publishing. (selected chapters)
Available online at <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264273887-en> by clicking "READ."

IN-CLASS MIDTERM on Wednesday, 8 March 2023

No class week of 13 March 2023 (Spring Break)

Week 8 (20, 22 March 2023) Carbon Offsets, Green Norms, and Moral Licensing

Axel M. Burger, Johannes Schuler, Elisabeth Eberling. 2022. "Guilty Pleasures: Moral Licensing in Climate-Related Behavior." *Global Environmental Change* 72: 102415.

Fergus Green. 2018. "Anti-Fossil Fuel Norms." *Climatic Change* 150: 103-116.

Michael F. Maniates. 2001. "Individualization: Plant a Tree, Buy a Bike, Save the World?" *Global Environmental Politics* 1(3): 31-52.

Plus one additional reading on carbon offsets to be announced later via email.

Week 9 (27, 29 March 2023) Carbon Markets, Carbon Taxes, and Regulation

Jeff Colgan, Jessica Green, and Thomas Hale. 2021. "Asset Revaluation and the Existential Politics of Climate Change." *International Organization* 75(2): 586-610.

Danny Cullenward and David Victor. 2020. *Making Climate Policy Work*. Wiley. (selected chapters)

Jesse D. Jenkins. 2014. "Political Economy Constraints on Carbon Pricing Policies: What Are the Implications for Economic Efficiency, Environmental Efficacy, and Climate Policy Design?" *Energy Policy* 69:467-477.

Gilbert E. Metcalf. 2020. "How To Set a Price on Carbon Pollution." *Scientific American* 322(6): 62-69. Available at <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-to-set-a-price-on-carbon-pollution/>

Leah C. Stokes and Matto Mildenerger. 2020. "The Trouble with Carbon Pricing," *Boston Review*, available at <https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/leah-c-stokes-matto-mildenerger-tk/>

Endre Tvinnereim and Michael Mehling. 2018. "Carbon Pricing and Deep Decarbonisation." *Energy Policy* 121: 185-189.

Week 10 (3, 5 April 2023) Carbon Capture, Climate Engineering, Technological Investment, and Industrial Policy

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2019. *Negative Emissions Technologies and Reliable Sequestration: A Research Agenda*. The National Academies Press. (selected chapters) Available at <https://doi.org/10.17226/25259>.

Edward Parson. 2017. "Climate Policymakers and Assessments Must Get Serious About Climate Engineering." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114(35): 9227-9230.

Danny Cullenward and David Victor. 2020. *Making Climate Policy Work*. Wiley. (selected chapters)

Week 11 (10, 12 April 2023): International Cooperation and Its Prospects

Robert O. Keohane and David Victor. 2016. "Cooperation and discord in global climate policy." *Nature Climate Change* 6: 570-575.

Manjana Milkoreit. 2019. "The Paris Agreement on Climate Change – Made in USA?" *Perspectives on Politics* 17(4): 1019 – 1037.

Noah M. Sachs. 2019. "The Paris Agreement in the 2020s: Breakdown or Breakup?" *Ecology Law Quarterly* 46(3): 865-909.

Jen Iris Allan. 2019. "Dangerous Incrementalism of the Paris Agreement," *Global Environmental Politics* 19(1): 4-11.

Part IV: What does the future hold? (Climate Change Adaptation)

This section of the course focuses on some potential long-term effects of climate change, including effects on migration, racial and class inequality, conflict, and governance.

Week 12 (17, 19 April 2023) Distributional Effects of Climate Change: Nationality, Race, Class, and Migration

The City of Providence's Climate Justice Plan: Creating an Equitable, Low-Carbon, and

Climate Resilient Future. 2019. Available at <https://www.providenceri.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Climate-Justice-Plan-Report-FINAL-English-1.pdf>

Carmen Gonzalez. 2020. "Climate Change, Race, and Migration." *Journal of Law and Political Economy* 1(1): 109-146.

Jamie Draper. 2022. "Labor Migration and Climate Change Adaptation." *American Political Science Review* 116(3): 1012-1024.

Jochem Marotzke, Dirk Semmann, and Manfred Malinski. 2020. "The Economic Interaction Between Climate Change Mitigation, Climate Migration and Poverty." *Nature Climate Change* 10: 518-525.

Week 13 (24, 26 April 2023) Effects of Climate Change on Conflict and Governance

Solomon M. Hsiang, Marshall Burke, and Edward Miguel. 2015. "Quantifying the Influence of Climate on Human Conflict." *Science* 341 (6151).

Colin P. Kelley, Shahrzad Mohtadi, Mark A. Cane, Richard Seager, and Yochanan Kushnir. 2015. "Climate Change in the Fertile Crescent and Implications of the Recent Syrian Drought," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 112 (11): 3241-3246.

Vally Koubi. 2019. "Climate Change and Conflict." *Annual Review of Political Science* 22: 343-60.

Ross Mittiga. 2022. "Political Legitimacy, Authoritarianism, and Climate Change." *American Political Science Review* 116(3): 998-1011.

Weeks 14 and 15 (1, 3, 8 May 2023) Our Future, And How We Can Shape It
Wrap-Up, and additional readings TBA based on poll of student interests during Week 12 or 13

Last class is Monday 8 May

IN-CLASS FINAL EXAM will be scheduled by the Registrar during Final Exam Period in May. (Stay tuned for exact timing.)