The Politics and Policy of Climate Change and Sustainability
GV4L2

2025 Winter Term
Lecture: 11.00–12.00, Mondays, FAW.2.04
Group 01 Seminar: 11.00–12.30, Tuesdays, PAN.2.02
Group 02 Seminar: 15.30–17.00, Tuesdays, FAW.1.03

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Book appointments via the LSE Student Hub

Course description

This course introduces students to the political interventions and underlying political dynamics that shape the pace and direction of efforts to mitigate climate change and improve sustainability. Students will unpack the conceptual foundations of climate politics, assess climate and sustainability problems across a variety of practical cases, and learn to prescribe and justify policy interventions to accelerate sustainability transitions.

A unifying theme of the course will be its frequent attention to the political economy of climate (in)action. Specific topics include carbon lock-in; climate advocacy and obstruction; environmental authoritarianism; corporate climate governance; national climate institutions; just transition agreements; energy subsidies and carbon pricing; and geoengineering. The case studies in this course focus primarily, but not exclusively, on domestic environmental politics in advanced industrialized democracies.

Course objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- **Unpack** the political problems posed by climate change and their implications for climate and sustainability policy
- **Assess** the political dynamics that drive variation in climate and natural resource governance
- **Diagnose** the political economy of support and opposition to specific climate change and sustainability policies
- **Prescribe** and justify policy interventions to accelerate sustainability transitions

Course structure

The course is listed as an optional paper for the MSc in Political Science (Conflict Studies and Comparative Politics), MSc in Political Science (Global Politics), MSc in Political Science (Political Science and Political Economy), MSc in Public Policy and Administration, and MSc in Regulation. It consists of ten seminars and ten lectures in Winter Term.

The first three weeks of the course focus on the conceptual foundation for climate politics, exploring different understandings of climate change, obstacles to climate action, and ways in

which policy interventions can accelerate sustainability transitions. The following weeks center on advocacy for and against climate action, climate policymaking across political institutions and models of climate governance. We end the course with a consideration of five ongoing and emerging issues in climate policy.

Preparation for each session
To prepare for the seminars, it is essential to read all the required readings. In addition, students are encouraged, but not required, to supplement their learning by exploring the "Media spotlight." Finally, there is a list of optional readings and media content students may choose to read to further develop their knowledge of the topic.

Assessment
Students will be required to submit two video blog posts (one of which is assessed) and an assessed policy report. The assessed video blog post counts for 20% of the final mark and the assessed policy report counts for 80% of the final mark. Students must also submit an unassessed outline of the policy report to aid the learning process.

Video blog posts
Each video blog post will consist of 1) a 4–6 minute video and 2) written talking points. In the video, students must state a clear interpretation of a recent event relating to climate change and sustainability and justify their position with explicit reference to at least one course concept (and associated readings(s)). Students should assume the audience is already aware of the facts of the event. Students must use the talking points to guide their remarks, which must be delivered in a conversational and extemporaneous manner.

In addition to other marking criteria (see Department of Government MSc marking criteria), a strong submission will make **a credible argument** about the meaning, cause, or effect of the event, anticipate and **rebut at least one alternative position** a reasonable person could take, and use a **conversational tone**. If it appears a student is reading directly from a written script, they will be asked to re-record the video (without penalty) or receive a 50% penalty.

Students will submit two video blog posts in total, one during the first five weeks of the term and one during the last five weeks of the term. At the end of the term, students will select one of their two video blog posts to be assessed. Students will receive feedback on both video blog posts prior to selecting their best work for summative assessment. If a student fails to submit at least one video blog post, they will be awarded a Zero Incomplete for the whole course and cannot be awarded the degree until they submit the work at resit.

Assessed policy report
For the policy report, students will select a sustainability metric, an industrial sector, and jurisdiction of their choice (e.g., carbon emissions from steel production in Sweden, water use from rare earth mining in Bolivia) and 1) diagnose the role of politics and policy in shaping the pattern and current trajectory of resource use and 2) identify and critically assess possible policy interventions to accelerate the sector's transition to sustainability. Successful analyses will combine the substantive and methodological content of the course with country- and sector-

specific knowledge to produce feasible, strategically plausible, and meaningful strategies for moving toward sustainable and climate-compatible economic production.

The assessed policy report will be 3000 words in length and is due in the Spring exam period. Late submissions of assessed work will be penalized as per Department of Government policy (5% for every 24hrs, up to 5 days). The deadline will only be extended under exceptional circumstances, such as documented family or medical emergencies. Students experiencing such circumstances must submit an Extension Request Form via the Student Services Centre.

Students will also be required to submit a formative (unassessed) detailed outline of at least 3 pages in length describing their plans for the policy report. The outline will consist of an abstract and main facts, claims, quotes, figures, and citations for each section and subsection. The outline will be due in Week 6.

Key dates and deadlines

- Friday, 21 February 2025: Submit first video blog post by 17.00 GMT
- Friday, 28 February 2025: Formative outline due at 17.00 GMT
- Friday, 4 April 2025: Submit second video blog post by 17.00 GMT
- Tuesday, 13 May 2025: Assessed policy report due at 17.00 GMT

Course schedule

Week 1	The many causes of climate change
Week 2	Switching paradigms: Toward sustainable development
Week 3	Accelerating transitions to sustainability
Week 4	Approaches to making ambitious climate and sustainability policy
Week 5	The political economy of climate obstruction
Week 6	*Reading week* (OL)
Week 7	Professional and grassroots environmental advocacy
Week 8	Institutions and models of climate governance (+ Peer discussion of policy report outlines)
Week 9	The politics of energy subsidies and carbon pricing
Week 10	Grand gestures or grandstanding? Corporate ESG commitments and divestment
Week 11	Geoengineering: Break glass in case of emergency?

(OL) A pair of optional lectures on methodology will be posted online. See below for details.

Week 1: The many causes of climate change

Why is climate change (still) happening? How "big" of a problem is it? We will place the climate crisis in the broader context of unsustainable resource use, consider perspectives on the causes of climate change, and examine the political roots of climate inaction.

Required readings

- Carter, Neil. "The environment as a policy problem." in *The Politics of the Environment: Ideas, Activism, Policy*. Cambridge University Press (2018). Chapter 7. Link
- Stoddard, Isak, et al. "Three decades of climate mitigation: Why haven't we bent the global emissions curve?" *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 46 (2021): 653-689. Link
- Watkins, Michael D. and Bazerman, Max H. "Predictable surprises: The disasters you should have seen coming." *Harvard Business Review*. April (2003): R0303E. Link

Media spotlight

Harford, Tim and Andrew Wright. "That turn to Pascagoula." *Cautionary Tales with Tim Harford* (podcast). 10 July (2020). Link

"For years, people had warned that New Orleans was vulnerable – but when a hurricane came close to destroying the city, the reaction was muted. Some people took the near miss as a warning – others, as confirmation that there was nothing to worry about. So why do we struggle to prepare for disasters? And why don't we draw the obvious lessons from clear warnings?"

Optional readings

The political challenge of climate change and sustainability

- Bernauer, Thomas. "Climate change politics." *Annual Review of Political Science* 16 (2013): 421–448. Link
- Jacobs, Alan M. "Policy making for the long term in advanced democracies." *Annual Review of Political Science* 19 (2016): 433–454. Link
- Schwander, Hanna and Jonas Fischer. "From a cultural to a distributive issue: Public climate action as a new field for comparative political economy." *Regulation & Governance* (2024). Link
- Shields, Katy. "Maybe we did want to save the world (Part 2)" *Tipping Point: The True Story of 'The Limits to Growth'* (podcast). 12 May (2023). Link

Climate inaction

- Tollefson, Jeff. "The hard truths of climate change—by the numbers." *Nature.* 18 September (2019). Link
- Gifford, Robert. "The dragons of inaction: Psychological barriers that limit climate change mitigation and adaptation." *American Psychologist* 66.4 (2011): 290–302. Link
- Beiser-McGrath, Liam F. "COVID-19 led to a decline in climate and environmental concern: evidence from UK panel data." *Climatic Change* 174 (2022): 31. Link

Week 2: Switching paradigms: Toward sustainable development

Is Ecological Modernization just an excuse for business-as-usual? Is Sustainable Development really a viable alternative? We will discuss climate action from a systems thinking perspective, considering the dynamics of carbon lock-in and tipping points in the effort to transition toward sustainability.

Required readings

- Carter, Neil. "Sustainable Development, Ecological Modernisation, and Green Growth." in *The Politics of the Environment: Ideas, Activism, Policy*. Cambridge University Press (2018). Chapter 8. Link
- Seto, Karen C., et al. "Carbon lock-in: Types, causes, and policy implications." *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 41 (2016): 425-452. Link
- Kirshnan, Mekala, et al. "The net-zero transition: What it would cost, what it could bring." McKinsey Global Institute. January (2022). Link

Media spotlight

McKibben, Bill. "It's not science fiction." *The New York Review of Books*. 17 December (2020). Link
"In Kim Stanley Robinson's anti-dystopian novel, climate change is the crisis that finally forces mankind to deal with global inequality."

Optional readings

Transition theory

- Beisner, Beatrix E., Daniel T. Haydon, and Kim Cuddington. "Alternative stable states in ecology." *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 1.7 (2003): 376–382. Link
- Lenton, Timothy M., et al. (eds). "Key Concepts" in *The Global Tipping Points Report* (2023). University of Exeter. Link

Conceptualizing sustainability

- Lélé, Sharachchandra M. "Sustainable Development: A critical review." World Development 19.6 (1991): 607–621. Link
- Dolšak, Nives and Aseem Prakash. "Three faces of climate justice." *Annual Review of Political Science*. 25 (2022): 283–301. Link

Lock-in and transition pathways

- Unruh, Gregory C. "Understanding carbon lock-in." *Energy Policy* 28.12 (2000): 817–830.
- Bernstein, Steven, and Matthew Hoffmann. "Climate politics, metaphors, and the fractal carbon trap." *Nature Climate Change* 9.12 (2019): 919–925. Link
- Westley, Frances, et al. "Tipping toward sustainability: Emerging pathways of transformation." *AMBIO* 40.7 (2011): 762–780. Link

Week 3: Accelerating transitions to sustainability

What strategies are there for accelerating the transition to sustainability? Why do some strategies succeed when others fail? We will discuss interventions for sustainability transitions, the role of commitment and sequencing, and potential failure points along the way.

Required readings

- Meadows, Donella H. "Leverage points – Places to intervene in a system" in *Thinking in Systems: A Primer*. Earthscan (2009). Link
- Levin, Kelly, et al. "Overcoming the tragedy of super wicked problems: constraining our future selves to ameliorate global climate change." *Policy Sciences*. 45.2 (2012): 123–152. Link
- Farmer, J. Doyne, et al. "Sensitive intervention points in the post-carbon transition." *Science* 364. 6436 (2019): 132–134. Link

Media spotlight

MacGillis, Alec. "What Germany's effort to leave coal behind can teach the U.S." *ProPublica* and *The New Yorker* 31 January (2022). Link

"The country embarked on an ambitious plan to transition to clean energy, aiming to lead the fight against climate change. It has not been easy."

Optional readings

Interventions for system transitions

- Nohrstedt, Daniel. "When do disasters spark transformative policy change and why?" *Policy and Politics* 50.3 (2022): 425–441. Link
- York, Richard, et al. "The rebound effect and the challenge of moving beyond fossil fuels: A review of empirical and theoretical research." *WIREs Climate Change* 782 (2022). Link

Transition policy

- Bernstein, Steven, et al. "God gave Physics the easy problems: Adapting Social Science to an unpredictable world." European Journal of International Relations 6.1 (2000): 43–76. Link
- Rosenbloom, Daniel, et al. "Why carbon pricing is not sufficient to mitigate climate change—and how 'sustainability transition policy' can help." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117.16 (2020): 8664–8668. Link
- Morgan, M. Granger. "Climate policy needs more than muddling." Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 113.9 (2016): 2322–2324. Link
- Stechemesser, Annika, et al., "Climate policies that achieved major emission reductions: Global evidence from two decades." *Science* 385.6711 (2024): 884-892. Link

Week 4: Approaches to making ambitious climate and sustainability policy

What strategies facilitate ambitious climate and sustainability policy? We will consider the merits of different approaches to selecting, formulating, and gaining support for climate and sustainability policy.

Required reading

- Rogge, Karoline S. and Kristin Reichardt. "Policy mixes for sustainability transitions: An extended concept and framework for analysis." Research Policy 45.8 (2016): 1620–1635. Link
- Meckling, Jonas. "Governing renewables: Policy feedback in a global energy transition." *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 37.2 (2018): 317–338. Link
- Meckling, Jonas, et al. "Why nations lead or lag in energy transitions." *Science* 378.6615 (2022): 31–33. Link

Media spotlight

Brangham, William. *Texas Goes Green: How Oil Country Became the Renewable Energy Leader*. PBS NewsHour (video). 5 December (2023). Link

"If you had to guess which state in America was, hands-down, producing the most green, renewable energy, what would you guess? California? Massachusetts? It's Texas. The state that epitomizes oil has got rich powering the nation for decades now as the biggest producer of wind and solar. So how did deep-red Texas turn so green?"

Optional reading

Authoritarian and democratic policymaking

- Gilley, Bruce. "Authoritarian environmentalism and China's response to climate change." *Environmental Politics* 21.2 (2012): 287–307. Link
- Lo, Kevin. "How authoritarian is the environmental governance of China?" *Environmental Science & Policy* 54 (2015): 152–159. Link
- van der Kamp, Denise. *Clean Air at What Cost? The Rise of Blunt Force Regulation in China* (2023). Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1. Link

Sequencing

- Pahle, Michael, et al. "Sequencing to ratchet up climate policy stringency." *Nature Climate Change* 8.10 (2018): 861–867. Link

Green Deals

- Green, Fergus. "Green New Deals in comparative perspective." WIREs Climate Change 15.4 (2024): e885. Link
- Meckling, Jonas and Jesse Strecker. "Green bargains: Leveraging public investment to advance climate regulation." *Climate Policy* 23.4 (2022): 418–429. Link
- Bolet, Diane, Fergus Green, and Mikel González-Eguino. "How to Get Coal Country to Vote for Climate Policy: The Effect of a 'Just Transition Agreement' on Spanish Election Results." *American Political Science Review* (2023). Link

Week 5: The political economy of climate obstruction

Who opposes climate action, and why? Is climate obstruction changing over time and, if so, how? We consider the drivers, composition, and tactics of climate obstruction, as well as strategies for overcoming this opposition.

Required readings

- 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. Link
- Meckling, Jonas, and Jonas Nahm. "Strategic state capacity: How states counter opposition to climate policy." *Comparative Political Studies* 55.3 (2021): 493–523. Link
- Vormedal, Irja and Jonas Meckling. "How foes become allies: The shifting role of business in climate politics." *Policy Sciences* 57 (2024): 101–124. Link

Media spotlight

Westervelt, Amy. "Aggressive think tanks, shouty pundits, and a new religious argument." *Drilled* (podcast). September (2018). Link

"A true-crime podcast about climate change. To make media manipulation and lobbying truly effective, oil companies and their public relations firms also had to shift the culture, influencing everything from civil discourse to how religious groups viewed the issue of climate change."

Optional readings

The landscape and impact of climate obstruction

- Brulle, Robert J. and Riley E. Dunlap. "A sociological view of the effort to obstruct action on climate change." *Footnotes* 49.3 (2021). Link
- Upin, Catherine. *Climate of Doubt*. PBS Frontline (video). Episode 21 (2012). Link [YouTube Link]
- Ekberg, Kristoffer, et al. *Climate Obstruction: How Denial, Delay, and Inaction are Heating the Planet*. Routledge (2022). Introduction and Chapter 3. Link
- Milani, Carlos R.S., et al. "Is climate obstruction different in the Global South? Observations and a preliminary research agenda." CSSN Position Paper. Climate Social Science Network 4 (2021). Link
- Galen Hall, Trevor Culhane, and J. Timmons Roberts. "Climate coalitions and anti-coalitions: Lobbying across state legislatures in the United States." *Energy Research & Social Science* 113 (2024): 103562. Link

Corporate climate strategies

- Meckling, Jonas. "Oppose, support, or hedge? Distributional effects, regulatory pressure, and business strategy in environmental politics." *Global Environmental Politics* 15.2 (2015): 19–37. Link
- Cory, Jared, Michael Lerner, and Iain Osgood. "Supply chain linkages and the extended carbon coalition." American Journal of Political Science 65.1 (2021): 69–87. Link
- Kupzok, Nils, and Nahm Jonas. "The decarbonization bargain: How the decarbonizable sector shapes climate politics." Perspectives on Politics. 22.4 (2024): 1203–1223. Link

Week 6: Reading week (no class)

***A pair of optional lectures on methodology will be posted online to help students start to think about the assessed research paper. The content of these lectures will introduce students to 1) research questions and research design and 2) concepts and measurement in political science.*

Week 7: Professional and grassroots environmental advocacy

Who is pushing for climate action, and how? We will discuss the role and function of environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the strengths and weaknesses of different advocacy strategies and tactics, and the relationship between grassroots and professional environmental advocates.

Required reading

- Carter, Neil. "Environmental groups." in *The Politics of the Environment: Ideas, Activism, Policy*. Cambridge University Press (2018). Chapter 6. Link
- Haddad, Mary A. "Conclusion: Replenishing the commons." in *Effective Advocacy: Lessons from East Asia's Environmentalists*. MIT Press (2021). Link
- Pacheco-Vega, Raul, and Amanda Murdie. "When do environmental NGOs work? A test of the conditional effectiveness of environmental advocacy." *Environmental Politics* 30.1–2 (2020): 180–201. Link

Media spotlight

Remnick, David. "Andreas Malm on 'How to Blow Up a Pipeline'." *The New Yorker Radio Hour* (podcast). 24 September (2021). Link

"Malm advocates for "intelligent sabotage" of fossil-fuel infrastructure to prevent more carbon from being emitted in the atmosphere. 'I am in favor of destroying machines, property—not harming people. That's a very important distinction," he tells Remnick.'"

Optional reading

Advocacy strategy

- Hadden, Jennifer. *Networks in Contention: The Divisive Politics of Climate Change*. Cambridge University Press (2015). Chapter 1. Link
- Green, Fergus. "Anti-fossil fuel norms." *Climatic Change* 150 (2018): 103–116. Link
- Malm, Andreas. *How to Blow Up a Pipeline: Learning to Fight in a World on Fire*. Verso Books (2021). Link
- Ostarek, Markus, Brent Simpson, and Cathy Rogers, et al. "Radical climate protests linked to increases in public support for moderate organizations." *Nature Sustainability* 7 (2024): 1626–1632. Link

Advocacy effectiveness

- Longhofer, Wesley, et al. "NGOs, INGOs, and environmental policy reform, 1970–2010." Social Forces 94.4 (2016): 1743–1768. Link
- Chenoweth, Erica. *Civil Resistance: What Everyone Needs to Know.* Oxford University Press (2021). Chapter 2. Link

Case studies

- Speece, Darren Frederick. *Defending Giants: The Redwood Wars and the Transformation of American Environmental Politics.* University of Washington Press (2017). Chapter 1 and Chapter 2. Link
- Zhuang, Hao, John A. Zinda, and James P. Lassoie. "'Crouching Tiger, Hidden Power': A 25-year Strategic Advocacy Voyage of an Environmental NGO in China." *The Journal of Environment & Development* 31.4 (2022): 331–351. Link

Week 8: Institutions and models of climate governance

How do political institutions affect resources, capacity, and political will for climate action? We will discuss the role of democracy, elections, and national institutions dedicated to environmental governance.

In the second half of this week's seminar, we will hold a peer discussion of students' plans for the policy report. **Please plan to come prepared to discuss your outline.**

Required reading

- Finnegan, Jared J. "Institutions, climate change, and the foundations of long-term policymaking." *Comparative Political Studies* 55.7 (2022): 1198–1235. Link
- Guy, Jonathan, Esther Shears, and Jonas Meckling. "National models of climate governance among major emitters." *Nature Climate Change* 13 (2023): 189–195. Link
- Dubash, Navroz K., et al. "National climate institutions complement targets and policies." *Science* 374.6568 (2021): 690–693. Link

Media spotlight

Mann, Michael and Malcolm Turnbull. "How Australia's electoral system allowed voters to finally impose a ceasefire in the climate wars." *The Guardian* 27 May (2022). Link

"Preferential voting opened a pathway for independents to bypass the right's hyperpartisan approach to climate policy.'"

Optional reading

Regimes

- von Stein, Jana. "Democracy, autocracy, and everything in between: How domestic institutions affect environmental protection." *British Journal of Political Science* 52.1 (2020): 339–357. Link
- Doyle, Timothy, and Adam Simpson. "Traversing more than speed bumps: Green politics under authoritarian regimes in Burma and Iran." *Environmental Politics* 15.5 (2006): 750–767. Link

Parties and elections

- Carter, Neil. "Party politics and the environment." in The Politics of the Environment: Ideas, Activism, Policy. Cambridge University Press (2018). Chapter 5. Link
- Gulzar, Saad, Appoorva Lal, and Benjamin Pasquale. "Representation and Forest Conservation: Evidence from India's Scheduled Areas." American Political Science Review. 118.2 (2024): 764-783. Link
- Colantone, Italo, et al. "The political consequences of green policies: Evidence from Italy." American Political Science Review. 118.1 (2024):108-126. Link

Environment-specific institutions

- Sommerer, Thomas, and Sijeong Lim. "The environmental state as a model for the world? An analysis of policy repertoires in 37 countries." *Environmental Politics* 25.1 (2015): 92–115. Link
- Limberg, Julian, Yves Steinebach, and Jacob Nyrup. "Dedicated climate ministries help to reduce carbon emissions." *njp Climate Action* 3 (2024). Link

Week 9: The politics of energy subsidies and carbon pricing

Why do governments still subsidize fossil fuels? How much can be expected from proposals to price greenhouse gas emissions? We will discuss the logics of energy subsidies and strategies for addressing equity, durability, and stringency in carbon pricing schemes.

Required reading

- Breetz, Hanna, Matto Mildenberger, and Leah Stokes. "The political logics of clean energy transitions." *Business and Politics* 20.4 (2018): 492-522. Link
- Rabe, Barry G. *Can We Price Carbon?* MIT Press (2018). Chapter 3. Link
- Sanchez, Lourdes, et al. "53 ways to reform fossil fuel consumer subsidies and pricing." *Subsidy Watch Blog*. Global Subsidies Initiative 19 August (2020). Link

Media spotlight

Matthew, Alex. "How should Indian companies deal with European Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism?" *BQ Prime* (video). NDTV Profit 15 May (2023). Link

"In conversation with XKDR Forum's Ajay Shah and Trilegal and Trustbridge's Akshay Jaitly, what are the implications of the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism for Indian companies?"

Optional reading

Energy subsidies

- Stokes, Leah C. *Short Circuiting Policy: Interest Groups and the Battle over Clean Energy and Climate Policy in the American States*. Oxford University Press (2020). Chapter 1. Link
- Timperley, Jocelyn. "Why fossil fuel subsidies are so hard to kill." *Nature*. 20 October (2021). Link
- Beaton, Christopher, et al. "A guidebook to fossil-fuel subsidy reform for policymakers in Southeast Asia: Executive Summary." Global Subsidies Initiative and the International Institute for Sustainable Development. (2013). Link
- Finnegan, Jared J. "Changing prices in a changing climate: Electoral competition and fossil fuel taxation." *Comparative Political Studies* 56.8 (2023): 1257–1290. Link

Carbon pricing

- Steinebach, Yves, Xavier Fernández-i-Marín, and Christian Aschenbrenner. "Who puts a price on carbon, why, and how? A global empirical analysis of carbon pricing policies. *Climate Policy* 21.3 (2021): 277–289. Link
- Green, Jessica F. "Does carbon pricing reduce emissions? A review of ex-post analyses." *Environmental Research Letters* 16.4 (2021): 43004. Link
- Stokes, Leah C. and Matto Mildenberger. "The trouble with carbon pricing." *Boston Review* 24 September (2020). Link
- Ankel-Peters, Jörg, Bensch, Gunther, Dabadge, Ashwini, et al. "Tax carbon cautiously for sub-Saharan Africa." Naure. Climate Change 15, 7–9 (2025). Link
- Naef, Alain. "The impossible love of fossil fuel companies for carbon taxes." *Ecological Economics* 217 (2024): 108045. Link

Week 10: Grand gestures or grandstanding? Corporate ESG commitments and divestment

What makes a corporate climate commitment credible? Will divestment from environmentally responsible firms make a meaningful difference? We will discuss the peril and promise of corporate ESG (environmental, social, and governance) commitments, as well as the debate over ESG investing.

Required reading

- Fankhauser, Sam, et al. "The meaning of net zero and how to get it right." *Nature Climate Change* 12.1 (2022): 15–21. Link
- Braungardt, Sibylle, Jeroen van den Bergh, and Tessa Dunlop. "Fossil fuel divestment and climate change: Reviewing contested arguments." *Energy Research & Social Sciences* 50 (2019): 191–200. Link
- Green, Jessica, et al. "Transition, hedge, or resist? Understanding political and economic behavior toward decarbonization in the oil and gas industry." *Review of International Political Economy* (2021): 1–28. Link

Media spotlight

Schacht, Kira. "How these companies tried to greenwash their plastic waste." *DW Planet A* (video). 14 October (2022). Link

"Europe's food and drinks companies make big promises to cut plastic waste. But they don't deliver. We checked. A story about ambitious commitments, hidden failures and how to hold firms accountable."

Optional reading

ESG commitments

- Katz-Rosene, Ryan M. and Peter Andrée. "Corporate social responsibility." *The EcoPolitics Podcast* (podcast). Season 1, Episode 14. (2020). Link
- Tangpuori, Alice D., et al. "Talking trash: The corporate playbook of false solutions to the plastic crisis." Changing Markets. September (2020). Link
- Rogelj, Joeri, et al. "Net-zero emissions targets are vague: three ways to fix." *Nature* 591.7850 (2021): 365-368. Link
- Stokes, Leah, Katherine Wilkinson, and Paasha Mahdavi. "Bold vs. BS in corporate climate pledges." *A Matter of Degrees* (Podcast). Season 3, Episode 6. (2022). Link

ESG investment

- Archer, Matthew. *Unsustainable: Measurement, Reporting, and the Limits of Corporate Sustainability*. New York University Press. (2024). Chapter 1. Link
- Piu, Stefano. "ESG Investing: What does the research say?" Man Institute (2020). Link
- Ameli, Nadia, Sumit Kothari, and Michael Grubb. "Misplaced expectations from climate disclosure initiatives." *Nature Climate Change* 11 (2021): 917-924. Link
- Gelles, David. "How environmentally conscious investing became a target of conservatives." *The New York Times* 28 March (2023). Link

Week 11: Geoengineering: Break glass in case of emergency?

What role could and should carbon capture play in climate action? How does the prospect of geoengineering affect other efforts to mitigate climate change and unsustainable resource use? We will discuss the contribution and limits of carbon capture and carbon offsets, as well as the potential consequences of more vigorous approaches to geoengineering.

Required reading

- Victor, David G. "On the regulation of geoengineering." Oxford Review of Economic Policy 24.2 (2008): 322–336. Link
- Muffett, Carroll and Steven Feit. "Fuel to the fire: How geoengineering threatens to entrench fossil fuels and accelerate the climate crisis." The Center for International Environmental Law (2019). Link
- Rayner, Steve, et al. "The Oxford principles." *Climatic Change* 121.3 (2013): 499-512. Link
- Joppa, Lucas, et al. "Microsoft's million-tonne CO2-removal purchase – lessons for net zero." *Nature* 597 (2021). Link

Media spotlight

Buchsbaum, Michael and Edward Donnelly. "Fossil fuel companies made bold promises to capture carbon. Here's what actually happened." DeSmog 25 September (2023). Link

"A DeSmog review of 12 large-scale projects reveals a litany of cost-overruns and missed targets, with a net increase in emissions."

Optional reading

Geoengineering debate

- Gardiner, Stephen M. and Augustin Fragnière. "The Tollgate Principles for the governance of geoengineering: Moving beyond the Oxford Principles to an ethically more robust approach." *Ethics, Policy & Environment* 21.2 (2018): 143–174. Link
- Wagner, Gernot. "We need to talk about geoengineering." Project Syndicate. 22 September (2021). Link
- Berwyn, Bob. "Should solar geoengineering be a tool to slow global warming, or is manipulating the atmosphere too dangerous?" *Inside Climate News* 26 March (2021). Link
- McLaren, Duncan and Corry, Olaf. "Solar geoengineering research faces geopolitical deadlock." *Science* 387.6729 (2025): 38–30. Link

Carbon capture

- Johnson, Jeff. "Capturing carbon: Can it save us?" *Chemical & Engineering News*. 97.8 (2019). Link
- Morgan, Abi. "These trees are not what they seem." Bloomberg Storylines. Film. 20 April (2021). Link
- Carton, Wim, et al. "Net zero, carbon removal, and the limitations of carbon offsetting." *CSSN Position Paper*. Climate Social Science Network 1 (2022). Link
- Financial Times. "Carbon capture: The hopes, challenges, and controversies." FT Film (video). April 6 (2022). Link