

**ESM 208: Environmental Politics and Policy, Spring 2025**  
**Mondays and Wednesdays, 9:30 - 10:45 AM**

**Professor:** Mark Buntaine ([buntaine@bren.ucsb.edu](mailto:buntaine@bren.ucsb.edu))

**TA:** Renae Marshall ([rmarshall@ucsb.edu](mailto:rmarshall@ucsb.edu))

**Materials:** All course materials can be accessed at: [canvas.ucsb.edu](https://canvas.ucsb.edu)

**Slack:** All course communications by Slack workspace ([invitation link](#))

**Office hours: Buntaine:** Mondays 12-1 ([link to book 15 min. appointment](#)) and by appointment arranged using Slack

**Marshall:** Wednesdays 2-4 PM, Bren 3017 and by appointment

**Overview**

This course explores why some environmental policies move forward while others fail to advance. While technical and economic feasibility are important aspects of policy design, they do not determine which policies become law or which policies are implemented according to their intended design. Instead, political, institutional, and strategic factors shape the fate of environmental policies.

In this course, we will analyze the political barriers and enablers of policy change—including public opinion, interest group influence, institutional veto points, election cycles, and international dynamics. By the end of the course, you will be able to systematically assess the political feasibility of environmental policies in a cohesive framework. This course will equip you to understand when there are opportunities for policy change. As we will see, careful analysis of interests and institutions help understand when ideas gain traction in the policy process.

We will explore questions such as:

- Why do some policies pass while others fail to move forward, even when they are economically or scientifically sound?
- How do elections, public opinion, and lobbying shape which types of environmental policy proposals succeed?
- What makes a policy politically viable at the local, national, or international level? When are there opportunities for policy change?

### **Course Outcomes**

1. **Analyze Policy Feasibility** – Learn a structured approach to assessing whether a policy can pass based on political, institutional, and strategic factors.
2. **Develop Strategic Policy Insights** – Gain practical skills in political analysis, stakeholder mapping, and political assessment that are valuable for working within the policy process in government, nonprofits, and the private sector.
3. **Use Data to Inform Policy Strategy** – Work with polling, lobbying, and electoral data to forecast the likelihood of policy adoption in different domains.

While our primary focus will be on the U.S. political system, the framework that we will explore can be used to understand how different systems of government and institutions influence policy feasibility more generally. Our goal is to explore a series of concepts that can be applied to the policy process across different levels of government and different settings. The course is structured around case studies, data-driven analysis, and assignments that mimic real-world professional activities to provide students with practical skills for understanding and engaging in the policy process.

### **Procedures and Requirements**

Please see detailed policies and resources at the end of this document.

### **Deliverables**

The deliverables for ESM 208 are five weekly assignments, each due before the next week begins on Monday at 9am. You may choose to work in groups of up to three people in your section for each of the assignments, except the final assignment. You may only work with another person two times during the course, to ensure that you are rotating and working with different people and teams. You may choose to work alone on any assignment.

- Veto Players Analysis (15%, due M 4/7)
- Stakeholder Mapping (15%, due M 4/14)
- Public Communication Mock-Up (15%, due M 4/21)
- Science to Policy Memo (15%, due M 4/28)
- Political Strategy (25%, due M 5/5, *individual assignment*)
- Active participation in class and section (15%)

**Late Policy:** You may take a 48-hour extension for any assignment without seeking instructor approval. Absent significant extenuating circumstances no additional

extensions will be allowed without instructor approval. Late assignments will be marked down by 10% per day after the allowable extension period.

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## Unit 1: Foundations of Political Feasibility

### ● Session 1 (M 3/31): Institutions and Veto Players

- **Key Question:** Who can stop a policy from advancing?
- **Concepts:** Veto points, filibuster, and legislature process
- **Case Study:** Water Resources Development Act (2007) and the Build Back Act (2020)
- **Skill:** Mapping policy veto points

Dan Butler video: [Pivotal Politics](#)

Madden, N. J. (2014). [Green means stop: veto players and their impact on climate-change policy outputs](#). *Environmental Politics*, 23(4), 570-589.

### ● Session 2 (W 4/2): Elections and Policy Positions

- **Key Question:** How do electoral incentives shape politicians' policy positions? Why do politicians keep or break environmental promises?
- **Concepts:** Electoral incentives, prospective and retrospective voting
- **Case Study:** Green New Deal and electoral positioning
- **Skill:** Crafting policies to be electorally successful

McAlexander, R. J., & Urpelainen, J. (2020). [Elections and policy responsiveness: evidence from environmental voting in the US congress](#). *Review of Policy Research*, 37(1), 39-63.

Grose, C. R. (2020). [Reducing legislative polarization: Top-two and open primaries are associated with more moderate legislators](#). *Journal of Political Institutions and Political Economy*, 1(2), 267-287.

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## Unit 2: Interest Groups and Lobbying

### ● Session 3 (M 4/7): Interest Groups

- **Key Question:** Who benefits from environmental policy—and who fights it?

- **Concepts:** Corporate influence, environmental advocacy, regulatory capture
- **Case Study:** Fossil fuel lobbying and the failure of the Waxman-Markey bill
- **Skill:** Stakeholder assessment and influence analysis

Daniel Butler Wilson-Lowi matrix video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0EV19dAapnQ>

Bang, G. (2025). [The US Inflation Reduction Act: Climate policy as economic crisis response](#). *Environmental Politics*, 1-22.

Culhane, T., Hall, G., & Roberts, J. T. (2021). [Who delays climate action? Interest groups and coalitions in state legislative struggles in the United States](#). *Energy Research & Social Science*, 79, 102114.

### ● Session 4 (W 4/9): Lobbying and Organizing

- **Key Question:** How do interest groups seek to exert pressure in the policy process? What strategies work best?
- **Concepts:** Corporate influence, environmental advocacy, regulatory capture
- **Skill:** Assessment of strategies to influence policy-making

Kalla, J. L., & Broockman, D. E. (2016). [Campaign contributions facilitate access to congressional officials: A randomized field experiment](#). *American Journal of Political Science*, 60(3), 545-558.

Méndez, M. (2020). *Climate change from the streets: How conflict and collaboration strengthen the environmental justice movement*. Yale University Press. [Ch. 5. "Cap and Trade-Offs"](#)

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## Unit 3: Public Opinion and Agenda Setting

### ● Session 5 (M 4/14): Framing and Public Opinion (Lecture by TA Renae Marshall)

- **Key Question:** How do political actors shape public opinions? How much does public support matter for policy change? When will public opinion affect the positions that politicians take?
- **Concepts:** Framing, public opinion
- **Case Study:** Public support for carbon pricing vs. subsidies
- **Skill:** Designing effective communication strategies

Levine, A. S., & Kline, R. (2017). [A new approach for evaluating climate change communication](#). *Climatic Change*, 142(1-2), 301-309.

Hai, Z., & Perlman, R. L. (2022). [Extreme weather events and the politics of climate change attribution](#). *Science Advances*, 8(36), eabo2190.

“The Republicans Pushing Trump to Save Biden’s Clean Energy Tax Credits”  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/17/climate/biden-clean-energy-tax-credits-trump.html>

### ● Session 6 (W 4/16): Agenda Setting and Policy Windows (Guest Speaker: Alex Phillips)

- **Key Question:** How do policies get onto the political agenda?
- **Concepts:** agenda setting, focusing events, issue salience
- **Skill:** Identifying and forecasting policy windows

Birkland, T. A., & Schwaebler, K. L. (2019). [Agenda setting and the policy process: Focusing events](#). In *Oxford research encyclopedia of politics*.

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## Unit 4: Policy Design and Implementation

### ● Session 7 (M 4/21): Science in the Policy Process

- **Key Question:** When does science translate into policy?
- **Concepts:** Policy learning, technical expertise, uncertainty in decision-making
- **Case Study:** The EPA’s shifting climate regulations
- **Skill:** Communicating science for policymakers

Pearson, H. (2024). [Science could solve some of the world’s biggest problems. Why aren’t governments using it?](#) *Nature*, 636(8041), 26-30.

Cologna, V., Freundt, J., Mede, N. G., Howe, L., Bertson, E., Gloor, J., ... & Schäfer, M. S. (2024). [How scientists’ collective climate advocacy affects public trust in scientists and voting behavior](#). *Environmental Research Letters*, 20(1), 014043.

### ● Session 8: Policy Implementation and the Executive (Guest Speaker: Kyle Meng)

- **Key Question:** Who implements and enforces environmental laws?

- **Concepts:** Executive discretion, agency rulemaking, legal challenges
- **Case Study:** The Trump administration’s rollback of environmental rules
- **Skill:** Regulatory analysis and policy risk assessment

VIDEO: [Executive Agencies and Rulemaking](#)

Berardo, R., & Holm, F. (2018). [The participation of core stakeholders in the design of, and challenges to, the US Clean Power Plan](#). *Climate policy*, 18(9), 1152-1164.

Cama, “Biden’s electric car push sparks lobbying surge”

<https://www.eenews.net/articles/bidens-ev-push-sparks-lobbying-surge/>

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## Unit 5: Global & Strategic Perspectives

### ● Session 9: International Cooperation

- **Key Question:** When are countries able to cooperate to produce
- **Concepts:** Global agreements, policy diffusion, carbon leakage
- **Case Study:** From Kyoto to the Paris Agreement
- **Skill:** Forecasting the benefits and limits of international environmental policy

Victor, D. G. (2006). [Toward effective international cooperation on climate change: Numbers, interests and institutions](#). *Global environmental politics*, 6(3), 90-103.

Podcast: “Trump 2.0 and the future of global climate action”

<https://www.iiied.org/trump-20-future-global-climate-action-make-change-happen-podcast-episode-30>

### ● Session 10: Workshop—Forecasting Policy Success + final open Q&A

- **Activity:** Students predict whether a current policy proposal will pass
- **Data-Driven Analysis:** Students use polling, legislative dynamics, stakeholder positions to forecast policy success, decide on other venues and approaches
- **Final Assignment:** Feasibility forecast memo for a real-world policy

Jakob, M., Steckel, J. C., Jotzo, F., Sovacool, B. K., Cornelsen, L., Chandra, R., ... & Robins, N. (2020). [The future of coal in a carbon-constrained climate](#). *Nature Climate Change*, 10(8), 704-707.

Brugger, “Big Oil and the Chamber plan to defend Biden’s climate law from Trump”  
<https://www.politico.com/news/2024/05/24/big-business-biden-democrats-climate-law-00156378>

Syllabus version history

1 – posted syllabus on the first day of class

### **Detailed Policies and Procedures**

We are committed to creating a safe and inclusive climate for all at Bren. We are available to talk with you if you have any concerns. Below we've collected many of the policies and resources that you might need. But we're also happy to help you to find the resources. Please feel free to be in touch if you have questions.

### **Individual Differences and Accommodations**

UCSB is committed to providing reasonable academic accommodations to students with disabilities (<http://www.ada.ucsb.edu>). If you anticipate experiencing difficulty in this course for any reason, please consult with the instructor. If you have a disability that may prevent you from fully demonstrating your abilities, you should contact the Disabled Students Program. Any student wishing to receive accommodations for a verified disability should request academic accommodations through the Disabled Students Program (<http://dsp.sa.ucsb.edu>, 893-2668) as soon as possible.

### **Academic integrity/Responsible Scholarship**

Honesty and integrity in all academic work are essential for a valuable educational experience. The Office of Judicial Affairs has policies, tips, and resources for proper citation use, recognizing actions considered to be cheating or other forms of academic theft, and students' responsibilities, available on their website at: <http://judicialaffairs.sa.ucsb.edu>. Students are responsible for educating themselves on the policies and to abide by them. Assignments with plagiarism will be given zero points and referred to appropriate campus bodies.

### **Religious Observances**

UCSB is committed to providing reasonable academic accommodations to allow students observances of their religious beliefs. Whenever possible, students will be given reasonable time to make up any academic assignment that is missed due to participation in a religious observance. It is your responsibility to inform us as soon as possible of any intended absences for religious observances.

### **Copyright and Course Recording Policy**

All course materials (class lectures and discussions, handouts, examinations, web materials) and the intellectual content of the course itself are protected by United States Federal Copyright Law, the California Civil Code. The UC Policy 102.23 expressly prohibits students (and all other persons) from distributing or selling lectures notes and all other



course materials without the prior written permission of the instructor (See <http://policy.ucop.edu/doc/2710530/PACAOS100>). Students are permitted to make notes solely for their own private educational use. Exceptions to accommodate students with disabilities may be granted with appropriate documentation. To be clear, in this class students are forbidden from completing study guides and selling them to any person or organization. In addition, students and class visitors may not make audio or visual recordings of lectures, class discussions, or class presentations without the advance written consent of the instructor. Approved recordings are to be solely used for the purposes of individual or group study by students enrolled in the class. If the recordings are to be used in any other manner, including any form of reproduction or distribution on the Internet or any other media, then in addition to the advance written consent of the instructor, the person making the recording shall obtain written consent from any student whose words or likeness appear in the recording. Inherent within this policy, instructors recognize that they must take into consideration and make accommodations to students who require access to course materials in compliance with the University's obligations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

### **Discrimination and Sexual Harassment**

We seek to create a learning environment free of discrimination and sexual harassment. **As faculty members and instructors, we are required to report discrimination, sexual harassment, or sexual violence involving students.** All UC employees including faculty and supervisors (except those specifically identified as confidential employees) are required to notify the Title IX office if anyone in the University community brings information about, or an employee becomes aware of, a possible incident of discrimination, sexual violence, or sexual harassment. Such reports are not confidential and all parties must be named.

The Title IX Compliance and Sexual Harassment Policy Compliance Office (TIX/SHPC) provides assistance in preventing and resolving & investigating complaints of sexual harassment/sexual violence and gender discrimination. It is also illegal to discriminate against a woman because of pregnancy, childbirth, or a medical condition related to pregnancy or childbirth. <http://www.oeosh.ucsb.edu/> If you believe you may be experiencing discrimination, exclusion from or denial of benefits of any program at UCSB, on the basis of your sex, gender or gender presentation, the TIX/SHPC is available to receive and respond to your complaint.

**If you would like confidential support**, the CARE: Campus Advocacy, Resources, and Education program can provide confidential emotional support, connect you with medical

care, give you options for filing a report, help you understand your legal rights, facilitate housing needs, and connect survivors to campus and community funding sources.

Resources can be found at: <http://sexualviolence.ucsb.edu/get.help/>

### **Distressed Students**

UCSB is committed to providing a quality learning environment for its students. It is not uncommon for students to encounter emotional and mentally stressful challenges over the course of their studies. If you would like to talk with a counselor, please reach out to [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) at 805-893-4411. If you know of someone else in distress who may need help, please encourage them to contact CAPS or submit a referral online. UCSB's [Student Wellbeing site](#) and the [Bren School's Student Resources](#) website include other links to resources that can help you take care of yourself and others in our community. Please be kind to yourself and others and reach out if you need support.

### **Assignment completion policy**

You must complete all assignments to pass the course, even if skipping an individual assignment would not result in a non-passing grade by percentage.

### **Grading**

We take student evaluation seriously and do not entertain requests to re-grade assignments unless we receive a formal, written request for a re-grade that compellingly documents a serious oversight on our part. A serious oversight on our part indicates that the entire assignment should receive further attention. Your score may go up or down if we decide that an assignment needs this kind of attention, so plan accordingly. We strongly encourage you to meet with us to discuss feedback on your assignments.

### **Syllabus Subject to Minor Changes**

You agree to complete the assignments in a timely manner in accordance with the schedule printed in the syllabus and to participate in the class using proper student conduct and etiquette. As part of this agreement, your responsibilities are printed clearly within this syllabus with deadlines so that you will know well in advance when readings and assignments are due. The syllabus is also subject to change if deemed necessary by the instructor. You will be afforded ample warning before any new responsibility or assignment is due. Most often, a change to the syllabus will constitute a minor change in reading materials or the cancellation of a day of class. If such a change occurs, a revised syllabus will be made available to students and replace any old copies of the syllabus.