

Cours spécialisé, Spring Semester 2025-2026

Politics and the environment

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Overview

Scientific consensus is clear about the severity of the climate and biodiversity crises, calling for ambitious and transformational changes to mitigate the consequences and adapt to inevitable changes wrought by these crises. Emerging environmental issues have led to the establishment of a broad range of institutions and policies, and Western democracies increasingly prioritize environmental issues such as air pollution, biodiversity threats and global climate change in their political agendas. Nevertheless, as the effects of global environmental crises continue to accelerate, they exacerbate vulnerabilities throughout social and natural systems. As a result, Green social movements and political parties have developed, contributing relevant critiques of industrialized economies and their role in creating and accelerating socio-ecological disasters.

The goal of this course is to critically examine how individuals, societies, and governments respond to socio-ecological complexity, and how these actors shape green political action at a time when the global ecological crisis is no longer in doubt. This course is **not** a comprehensive overview of the literature in political ecology or environmental governance, but rather aims to offer a sense of *ecologism* as a distinctive ideology that developed as a reaction to the ecological crisis. Together, we will explore some of the fundamental theories and notions that underlie the relationship between the environment, politics, and society.

The course is divided into two distinct sections. The first section, "Ecologism", focuses on the ideas, questions and concepts that contribute to the ideological movement known as ecologism. The second section, "Politics and the environment", addresses the main actors, events, and institutions that drive environmental politics and policymaking, nationally and globally.

This course primarily addresses ecologism in Western democracies. Students are invited to consult the attached bibliography if they wish to dive deeper into themes addressed in this course.

Course objectives

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

- Identify the main intellectual currents that have contributed to ecologism
 - Demonstrate knowledge of (some of) the ways that Western societies have reacted to the environmental crisis,
 - Identify political institutions, policy processes, and power relations that bring about environmental policy
 - Reflect on linkages between social, political, and ecological systems,
 - Pursue their own interests and inquiries from perspectives rooted in political ecology and environmental politics.
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Format

This course is part lecture, part discussion, and student participation is essential!

Each class will start with a 30-minute collective reflection on the weekly reading or video assignments, followed by a lecture. Since the course material provides both important course background and a basis for our in-class discussions, I am counting on you to stay up-to-date with the weekly assignments and to come to class with your readings notes, comments, and questions. Collective debates and respectful argumentation are welcome.

Course materials

All texts and videos can be accessed via the “documents” rubric in Chamilo.

Academic integrity

Plagiarism: Learning is a collective undertaking that involves engaging with discussions, lectures, theories, and texts. We strongly encourage you to do your weekly readings with your classmates – reading as a social experience is often more fun and more fruitful! – and you are of course welcome to expand your reading and learning beyond the assigned texts. (Some suggestions are provided in the attached bibliography.)

That said, you are *not* allowed to copy exact text or ideas without proper reference to the original person or text. This is true for academic articles; it is equally true for a classmate’s ideas.

AI: There is a strict “no AI” policy for this course, for three primary reasons:

1. This is a class about ideas and problems, and it is evaluated based on a critical research assignment where you will need to engage your own thoughts in a scholarly conversation with existing work. This can sometimes be hard and time-consuming, but it can also be exciting – and this hard-but-exciting intellectual space is at the heart of your academic learning!

Artificial intelligence doesn't give you that kind of a learning experience. For that, you need to mobilize your personal capacity for idea-building and critical reflection. (If you're feeling stuck in your paper writing, try talking about it with a friend or a mentor.)

2. This is a class about a culture of productivism and consumerism that has led to major social, political, and environmental upheaval. AI is directly contributing to these changes. It requires vast amounts of energy and environmental resources in order to be built, trained, and maintained, as well as to respond to even simple queries; and it contributes to the exacerbation of social inequalities in terms of its training model, economic model, accessibility, and environmental impacts.

3. I spend a lot of time evaluating and providing feedback for each individual paper in order to help you develop your writing and critical thinking skills, and in order to give you a space to explore new ideas and issues that you are curious about. Evaluating AI work is a waste of my time and of no value to you. Plus, AI-derived papers are boring—and since I will be reading dozens of these papers, I am hoping to learn and be inspired by your own unique contributions to this course!

All instances of plagiarism or AI use will be immediately reported the IEP's disciplinary services office.

Coursework and grading

Reading, videos, and discussion

Discussions, readings, and videos will not be graded. **This does not mean that they do not matter.** On the contrary, students are expected to come to class having completed the (short) readings or videos for each week.

Essay workshop

An in-class essay workshop will focus on selecting the topic for your final essay and will provide you with an opportunity to discuss your choices with fellow students, find appropriate ideas and references, and formulate your research puzzle and paper outline.

Paper outline (20%)

Final puzzles, outlines, and bibliographies will need to be sent by email before the final class.

Research essay (80%)

A research essay (2,500 words, +/- 100 words) will be due on April 22nd. Final submissions should be sent as a .doc (MSWord) to esther.hathaway@iepg.fr with subject heading "Course name - Final paper – YOUR NAME". *More information can be found in the accompanying document.*

Contact

If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact the course lecturer*:

- esther.hathaway@iepg.fr

**Please review the syllabus before asking a question that has already been answered.*

Course outline

Week 1. The environment: whose problem is it, anyway ?

Introduction and presentation of syllabus

Part 1: Ecologism

Week 2. Globalization and the great acceleration

Key concepts: Industrial revolution, Productivism, Consumer society

Week 3. Divided we stand? Unity and disagreement within ecologism

Key concepts: ecocentrism, anthropocentrism, ecological modernization

Week 4. Disrupting the nature/culture divide: perspectives in critical ecology

Key concepts: ecofeminism, indigenous ecology, essentialism, materialism

Part 2: Politics and the environment

Week 5. Environmental movements and global resistance

Key concepts: Environmental activism, environmental movement organizations

Week 6. Green parties and greening parties

Key concepts: Green parties, Political ideology, Electoral systems

Week 7. Paper workshop

→ Come to class with your chosen keywords, 1-2 news articles, and 3-4 academic articles.

Week 8. Green governance: Institutions and the environment

Key concepts: Institutions, Instruments, Policy

Week 9: Who cares about the climate?

→ Final paper outline and research puzzle due by email before class

Key concepts: Issue attention, Public opinion, Elite-citizen congruence, Values

Optional recommended reading

Dobson, A. (2007). *Green Political Thought*. Routledge. [Book available for check-out at the IEPG library.]

Downs, A. (2016). Up and down with ecology: The “issue-attention cycle”. In *Agenda setting* (pp. 27-33). Routledge. [[Article available via your university Taylor & Francis Online access.](#)]

Dryzek, J. S. (2022). *The politics of the earth: Environmental discourses*. Oxford university press. [Book available for check-out at the IEPG library.]

Gordon, R. (2014). *US Economic Growth is Over: The Short Run Meets the Long Run*. Brookings Institute. [[Text available online as PDF.](#)]

Healy, H., Martinez-Alier, J., Temper, L., Walter, M., Gerber, J-F. (eds.) (2013). *Ecological economics from the ground up*. Routledge. [Book available for check-out at the IEPG library.]

Inglehart, R. (2008). *Public support for environmental protection: Objective problems and subjective values in 43 societies*. *West European Politics* 31(1-2), 130-146. [[Article available online as PDF.](#)]

Kirk, J., Nyberg, D., & Wright, C. (2023). Divided yet united: Balancing convergence and divergence in environmental movement mobilization. *Environmental Politics*, 32(1), 1-20. [[Article available via your university Taylor & Francis Online access.](#)]

Spoon, J. J., Hobolt, S. B., & De Vries, C. E. (2014). Going green: Explaining issue competition on the environment. *European Journal of Political Research*, 53(2), 363-380. [[Article available via your university Wiley access.](#)]

Persico, S. (2015). En parler ou pas?. *Revue française de science politique*, 65(3), 405-428. [[Article available via your university Cairn access.](#)]