

Climate Justice in the U.S. Context from a Political Perspective

While climate change is a global issue, its impacts, which can have lasting legacies on the welfare of individuals, are felt differently across social groups. These effects can be acute, such as displacement or property loss from natural disasters (e.g. wildfires, flooding), or they can be longstanding and often less immediately-perceptible, like summertime heat in urban areas. In this course we will explore the social and political components of these systematic inequalities (i.e. consequences and mitigation). Over the course of our exploration, we will encounter important environmental justice concepts such as race relations, indigenous land use, intergenerational inequalities, and other sources of uneven distributional outcomes associated with climate change.

This course is divided into six sections. First, we begin with an overview of environmental justice broadly defined to help situate our examination of U.S.-based climate justice. Next, we will look at common sources of climate-induced systematic inequalities in the U.S. During this section, students will get a sense of the breadth and severity of this issue. We then move to a large section on societal approaches (i.e. social movements) to addressing climate justice issues, which can further be split into protest-based approaches such as Fridays for Future, and legal-institutional, like climate change court cases. Next, we spend some time on understanding public perceptions toward climate justice, part of this touching on climate skepticism and political polarization. Finally, in the last section of the course, we take a step back from the U.S. context and apply what we learned to consider other climate justice topics around the world in a comparative manner.