Syllabus

Climate and Social Vulnerability: Concepts and Policy Approaches*

Professor Jesse C. Ribot
Meeting Three Hours Each Week
This course is offered in the Fall semester of every other year: 2011, 2013, 2015.

Course Description

Existing climate variability and likely climate change call for policies to protect vulnerable people who eke out their livelihoods in a changing environment. Students will explore: 1) causes of climate-related stress and disaster; 2) theories of vulnerability and adaptation; 3) practices and policies designed to reduce economic loss, hunger, famine and dislocation in the face of climate trends and events. Focus on multiple policy scales affecting poor and marginal populations, who are disproportionally vulnerable when facing climate stress, drawing on case examples primarily from the developing world.

This course explores how policy can produce or reduce vulnerability. The course will examine:
2. Theories of vulnerability and adaptation.
3. Practices and policies designed to reduce economic loss, hunger, famine and dislocation in the face of climate trends and events.

The course will focus on multiple policy scales affecting poor and marginal populations, who are disproportionately vulnerable when facing climate stress. It will draw on case examples primarily from the developing world.

As course assignments, students will be asked to 1) provide comments on the weekly readings and 2) write a twelve-page research proposal or analysis of the causal structure of vulnerability in a specific case. The assignments (and how they differ for graduate and undergraduates) are described in detail below the syllabus.

The course will provide students with a theoretical base and policy-analytic skills applicable to increasing security and wellbeing of the poor.

Grading

- 20% attendance & participation in class. Two or more unexcused absences = F grade.
- 20% one-paragraph ‘Comments on weekly readings’. You must submit for all but two classes. If you miss more than two = F grade.
- 10% lead class discussion for at least two assigned articles.
- 15% take home midterm essay exam, assigned week 7 due week 8.
- 35% 12-page ‘writing project’ (policy research proposal) due at final class session.

* The development of this course has been generously supported by the Environmental Change Institute (ECI) of the University of Illinois—see: http://eci.illinois.edu/.
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SYLLABUS

CLIMATE AND SOCIAL VULNERABILITY: CONCEPTS AND POLICY APPROACHES

Professor Jesse C. Ribot

Course Text Books:

Course Assignments (see assignments description at end of Syllabus):
- Weekly comments on readings
- Twelve-page research proposal or analysis of the causal structure of vulnerability

Week 1: Introduction—Why Climate and Vulnerability?
- Objectives
- Structure of course/syllabus
- Assignments
- Student understandings of vulnerability
- My model of vulnerability

WEEK 2: Reading Vulnerability

Required Readings
  - Ch. 3: “Not the Day after Tomorrow: Learning from Recent Climate Disasters,” pp. 67-102.

**Suggested Additional Readings**

This class introduces some basic concepts in the field of climate and society. I discuss how to draw out theories implicit in the definitions used in articles and books on climate and vulnerability or adaptation.

**WEEK 3: Entitlements—defining the concept**

**Required Readings**
  - Ch 1: Introduction, pp. 3-19.
  - Ch 2: Entitlements and Depravation, pp. 20-34.
  - Ch 4 (section 4.1): Society, Class and Gender, pp. 46-47.
  - Ch 8: Experience and Lessons, pp. 122-164.

**Suggested Additional Readings**

In this class we discuss the basic elements of the entitlements approach to the analysis of
vulnerability. There are basically three approaches you will come across in your readings. Hazards literature characterizes the consequences of events on static communities. They view risk as being an attribute of a hazard (event or trend). The entitlements literature gives us a basis for understanding the social and political economic causes of risk, viewing risk as residing within social organization (rather than as something that comes from the sky). Integrated approaches build on entitlements (using the ‘livelihoods’ literature) while exploring the links between social organization and context.

WEEK 4: Critiquing and Expanding Entitlements

Required Readings


Recommended Readings:


WEEK 5: Entitlements, Vulnerability and Environment

Required Readings


**Additional Readings on Vulnerability and Environment**


This section outlines an approach to analyzing the causal structures of vulnerability in the face of environmental variability and change. How do we take environment and social forces into account? What are the gender, class, caste, ethnic and other social divisions along which vulnerability is differentiated and produced and reproduced? How do we identify the causes of that vulnerability?

**PROJECT: Please submit one paragraph describing your intended project. Please specify your**
research question or case to be studied and why it is important or interesting. Please also include a bibliography with at least five key documents you will use for background. I will provide feedback over the next two weeks.

Week 6: Vulnerability and Livelihoods

Required Readings

  - Ch 1: Livelihoods, Diversification, and Agrarian Change, pp. 3-27.
  - Ch 4: Poverty and Income Distribution, pp. 77-96.
  - Ch 6: Environment and Sustainability, pp. 117-137.

Suggested readings:

  - Ch 3: Determinants of Livelihood Diversification, pp. 55-75.
  - Ch 7: Gender and Rural Livelihoods, pp. 139-158.

Livelihoods approaches are widely used in the analysis and treatment of poverty, vulnerability and the enhancement of ‘adaptation’ and ‘adaptive capacity’ (to be discussed in more detail next week). What does a livelihoods approach contribute to an understanding of the causes and persistence of vulnerability? How does this approach help to identify pathways toward reduced vulnerability?

Week 7: Adaptation/Adaptive Capacity: Is there a Theory?

Required Readings

Recommended Readings:

Week 8: Resilience Approaches

Required Readings

PROJECTS: Discuss Progress on Assignments
Each student gives a 5 minute outline of their idea

Week 9: Climate and Migration – vulnerability and adaptation

Required Readings


Suggested Readings


PROJECT: Please submit a draft of your project today and sign up to see me in my office hours so we can discuss your proposal.

Week 10: Measures and Indicators

Required Readings


**Recommended Readings**


**Week 11: Adaptation Policy**

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


**PROJECTS: Project Discussions (30 minutes each with assigned discussants)**
Week 12: Global Policy on Climate and Adaptation

Required Readings

- Two current policy documents TBA

Recommended Readings

- Original text of the UNFCCC and Kyoto Protocol and some IPCC material:
  - UNFCCC: [http:// unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/conveng.pdf](http:// unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/conveng.pdf)

PROJECTS: Project Discussions (30 minutes each with assigned discussants)

Week 13: Justice, Representation and Human Rights

Required Readings

  - Ch 2: A Model of North-South (Non-) Cooperation, pp. 25-66.

Recommended Readings

**PROJECTS: Project Discussions (30 minutes each with assigned discussants)**

**Week 14: Justice, Representation and Human Rights**

**Required Readings**


**PROJECTS: Project Discussions (30 minutes each with assigned discussants)**

**Week 15: Future Research Directions**

**Required Readings**


**Course Synthesis Discussion**

**PROJECTS: Project Discussions (30 minutes each with assigned discussants)**

**PROJECT: Final project is due one week from final class.**
Course Assignments

1. Comments on weekly readings:
Weekly comments on the readings should touch on each article and should not exceed one-page per week (minimum 12-point font, single spaced, 1.5-inch margins). Please try to evoke in your comments:
   a. What do the articles contribute to theory or to data?
   b. What are the interesting hypothesis or research questions in the articles?
   c. Vis-à-vis your own interests, what do you find surprising, new and interesting in the articles, and why?
   d. What are some strengths and shortcomings of the articles?
   e. Compare and contrast the arguments or theoretical positions of the paper where possible.
   f. What was incomprehensible to you in the articles? What did you not understand?

In short, this assignment is designed so that you come in with good discussion questions grounded in the readings. One paragraph is enough. One page is maximum.

2. Writing Project:
   Undergraduate Writing Project: The writing project for Graduates is expected to be considerably more in-depth than for Undergraduates. For the undergraduates, either of the two kinds of projects outlined below (for Graduate students) may be chosen. Undergraduates, however, also have the option of writing a policy brief. A policy brief involves 1) identifying a specific policy problem in a specific place, 2) reviewing the literature on the causes and solutions for the target problem, 3) writing a set of recommendations for resolving the policy problem, and 4) justifying those recommendations. A policy brief is a maximum of eight double-spaced pages (not including bibliography). The policy brief must clearly identify its policy audience (a specific set of policy makers, a specific set of funding agencies, or a group of practitioners involved in the design and implementation of vulnerability reduction policies and projects). A policy brief must be written in a specific format that begins with a one-page (single spaced) executive summary that includes prominently the need for a policy change, the recommendations, and their justification. A more detailed outline for the policy brief will be distributed by the professor. You can also find your own sample policy brief after which to model your assignment.

   Graduate Writing Project:
   Twelve-page double-spaced paper (minimum 12-point font) to be written in the form of:
   - an analysis of the causal structure of vulnerability for a specific case, or
   - a policy research proposal.

Please submit one paragraph describing your intended project by week five of class. Please
specify your research question or case to be studied, and why it is important or interesting. Please also include a bibliography with at least five key documents you will use for background.

Please submit a draft of your project by the eighth week of class. I will provide feedback. The final paper is due on the last day of class.

If you choose to analyze the causes of vulnerability in a specific case, you will need to choose a case, evaluate the causal structure of vulnerability using one of the theoretical frameworks from the literature, and develop vulnerability-reduction strategies for an existing group exposed to environmental stressors. You can choose any group anywhere in the world. You must choose a case with sufficient data available in the secondary literature to support your analysis.

If you choose to write a policy research proposal, the assignment requires:
1. developing a policy research question or hypothesis;
2. locating it within the literature;
3. explaining its broader policy significance (that is, making it clear why anyone should care about what is being investigated and what might be found);
4. explaining what data are necessary for answering the question;
5. explaining the methods to be employed for obtaining and analyzing the data (i.e. tracing out how empirical observations will be related to the question or hypothesis);
6. estimating a time line; and
7. estimating funding needs.

A policy research question addresses an unresolved problem (related to climate adaptation or vulnerability reduction) that has policy relevance. The question must also have theoretical relevance—let us know how answering it will contribute to the broader understanding of this problem for instances other than your particular case. At a minimum, your proposal should identify a problem where better understanding or information is likely to help us to formulate a better solution.

A typical policy-research proposal has the following components (this is just an example—you can use a different outline if you wish):

I. Abstract—200 words
II. Introduction
   a. Problem statement
      i. What is the problem to be explored
      ii. Why is it important and to whom is it important
   b. Summary of debates around the problem
   c. Summary of hypothesis and research questions
III. Background—What does the literature have to say about your problem
IV. Research Questions and Hypotheses
V. Case
VI. Methods
   a. How you get from your questions to answers
   b. Time line

One useful way to organize a methods discussion is to break down the problem as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis or Primary Research Questions</th>
<th>Operational Questions</th>
<th>Data Required to answer operational questions</th>
<th>Methods for gathering data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 1: Decentralization reforms leads to better representation.</td>
<td>How has representation changed over time (before and after decentralization)?</td>
<td>Measure of representation (i.e. accountability plus responsiveness) change over time in each case: -Change in accountability -Change in responsiveness -Change in citizen engagement -Change in popular demands being reflected in decisions being taken</td>
<td>Measures before and after decentralization policy implementation of: -Observation of sanctioning by population -Surveys of popular demands -Surveys of decision maker understanding of popular demand -Observation of decision making processes -Decisions (or policies) made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 2: More democratic representation leads to more efficient forest management</td>
<td>How have outcomes varied over time (before and after decentralization reforms)?</td>
<td>Measure of outcomes over time -Change in forest management -Change in hectares under management -Quality of forest</td>
<td>-Observation and historical interviews concerning change in forest management -Documentation of forest service of forests under</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: What is the relation between representation and forestry management outcomes before and after decentralization reforms?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change in local income from forests</td>
<td>Transect studies of ligneous density and species mix before and after decentralization reform</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table is just an example—in the problem definition or background section you would also have to define your variables and explain what theory has to say about the relations—and why you expect a particular kind of relation.

VII. Budget
VIII. Bibliography