

IR430: The Politics of International Trade

University of Southern California
Spring 2026

- Location: TBA
- Days: Mondays & Wednesdays
- Time: 3:30-4:50 PM
- Instructor: Valentina Gonzalez-Rostani (she/her/hers)
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- Office: DMC 303

Office Hours & Resources

Office Hours: Monday 1:00-3:30 PM
(make an appointment here)

Course resources: TBD

1 Course Description

Welcome to IR 430! This course will introduce you to the interaction between global politics and economics. We explore how political decisions influence trade, finance, and development, and how economic shifts in turn affect international relations. Key topics include trade policy, foreign investment, multinational corporations, automation, global supply chains, exchange rates, debt, and international institutions such as the WTO and IMF.

The course combines classic works in international political economy with recent scholarship to examine both long-standing debates and emerging issues—especially around technological change and its impact on labor, inequality, and development, particularly in the Global South. Weekly readings include both foundational texts and contemporary articles to give students a broad and accessible entry point into the field. For updates on current research, students are encouraged to explore the Global Research in International Political Economy webinar archive and recent programs of the International Political Economy Society annual meetings

2 Learning Objectives

By the conclusion of this course, students should be able to:

- **Analyze Core Concepts:** Explain and apply key theories and concepts of international political economy to contemporary issues.
- **Understand Global Dynamics:** Evaluate how global and domestic political factors shape economic policies and outcomes, and vice versa, with attention to both advanced economies and developing countries.
- **Evaluate Policy Responses:** Examine the role of international institutions and national policies in managing trade disputes, financial crises, development aid, and emerging challenges like technological disruption and climate change.

- **Research and Communication Skills:** Develop research and writing skills by investigating an IPE topic in depth or crafting policy memoranda, formulating evidence-based arguments and recommendations.

3 Course Format: Discussion-Based

This course is structured around in-class discussion, case analysis, and active engagement with readings. Rather than relying solely on lectures, sessions will involve guided conversations that connect theoretical concepts to real-world developments. Students are expected to come prepared, having completed the readings in advance and ready to contribute thoughtfully. Participation will be evaluated based on the quality of engagement rather than frequency alone.

4 Text and Readings

- **Required Textbook:** *Thomas Oatley, International Political Economy*, 7th edition (2023). (Referenced in schedule as [O])
- **Additional Readings:** A collection of articles, case studies, and reports is assigned to complement the textbook ([C] in the schedule). These readings focus on applied and current issues – including perspectives from the Global South and journalistic case studies (e.g. pieces from The Guardian, The Economist, Project Syndicate) – and will be made available via the course website.

Students are expected to complete the required readings before each class meeting, as they form the basis for lectures and discussion. Optional readings (marked “Optional” in the schedule) provide further depth for those interested but are not required.

5 Methods of Evaluation

- Exams (Midterm and Final): 40%
- Class Attendance and Participation: 20%
- Writing Assignments (Research Paper or Policy Memos): 40%

Type of Assignments

- **Exams (Midterm and Final):** A midterm exam and a cumulative final exam will test understanding of key concepts, theories, and cases discussed in class and in the readings. The exams will include a combination of multiple-choice questions, short answers, and essay questions.
- **Class Attendance and Participation:** Active participation is crucial. Students are expected to attend all classes, contribute to discussions, and engage with in-class activities and case analyses. Quality of contribution is valued over quantity; thoughtful comments and questions that reflect engagement with the readings will earn credit. (If you must miss a class for a valid reason, please inform the instructor in advance.)

Our classroom is a professional and inclusive space where a range of perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences are not only welcome but vital to our collective learning. Constructive disagreement is expected in a course like this, but it should be grounded in evidence and directed toward ideas—not individuals. We critique arguments by addressing their reasoning or assumptions, never by targeting the person who presents them. Equally important, productive discussion involves both speaking and listening. Please be mindful not to dominate conversations or interrupt others, and help ensure that all voices have the chance to be heard.

- **Weekly Discussion Questions** To support active engagement and prepare for class discussion, each student must submit two questions to the “Discussion Board” on Canvas for each class session. These should be posted by 3:30pm the day before class (i.e., 24 hours in advance). Your questions should reflect thoughtful engagement with the assigned readings and lecture material, focusing on central themes, debates, or analytical frameworks. These submissions will help guide our in-class discussion and highlight areas where clarification or deeper exploration may be helpful. They will also serve as a valuable resource when reviewing for exams. These questions count toward your participation grades.
- **Writing Assignments:** You will choose between two formats to demonstrate your analytical skills. You may work individually or in a group of up to three students.
 - **Research Paper:** One in-depth research paper (3500-4000 words, excluding references) on an IPE topic of your choice. This paper will be due near the end of the semester (tentatively due on the last day of classes, April 20, 2026).

Students pursuing the research paper option will complete the project in stages to stay on track and receive feedback:

 - * **Pre-Proposal Discussion (Week 4):** In-class brainstorming session to workshop topics and approaches.
 - * **Proposal (Week 5):** Submit a 1-page proposal outlining your research question, why it matters, and how you plan to approach it using course concepts.
 - * **Progress Update (Week 8):** Class dedicated to discuss progress and any challenges.
 - * **Final Paper (Week 14):** Submit your complete paper, incorporating feedback from earlier stages.
 - **Policy Memos:** Two shorter policy memos (approximately 2000 words, each excluding bibliography). If this option is chosen, you will write one memo in the first half of the course (Week 7) and a second memo in the second half (due by Week 14). Each memo will present analysis and concrete recommendations in a real-world scenario.
 - * **Case Distribution 1 - Week 2:** Two case options with prompts will be shared. These will focus on topics such as trade policy, investment rules, or economic development.
 - * **Memo 1 Due (Week 7):** Submit your first memo.
 - * **Case Distribution 2 (Week 8):** Two new case options will be distributed, covering areas such as multinational firms, global finance, or monetary politics.
 - * **Memo 2 Due (Week 14):** Submit your second memo.

Each memo should be written as a professional policy document that provides background on the issue, outlines key options, and recommends a specific course of action. Write from the perspective of an advisor addressing a particular policymaker, organization, or business, using only the information available at the time of the case. Focus on clarity, brevity, and relevance. Avoid omitting important trade-offs or perspectives that could later affect decision-making. Your memo should be easy to scan quickly, but also allow for deeper reading if needed. Each submission must include:

- * General background information to orient the reader
- * Policy options available to decision-makers
- * Analysis of the issue and policy considerations
- * Specific recommendations on how to proceed.

Both the research paper and the policy memos are expected to incorporate course concepts and evidence from readings or outside research. Further guidelines will be provided in class. If you choose the policy memo option, each memo will count for roughly half of the writing assignment grade.

Grading policies

Grading Scale: Course final grades will be determined using the following scale:

Letter Grade	Numerical Point Range
A	95–100
A–	90–94
B+	87–89
B	83–86
B–	80–82
C+	77–79
C	73–76
C–	70–72
D+	67–69
D	63–66
D–	60–62
F	59 and below

Re-grade

- You have one week after you receive your graded work to request a re-grade. You need to include a written statement about why you think your work needs to be re-graded and which part(s) I should re-grade. Remember that after re-evaluating your work, your grade may remain the same, go up or go down.

6 Class Schedule and Readings

Below is the schedule of topics and assigned readings for each class meeting. Readings marked [O] refer to chapters in the Oatley textbook. Readings marked [C] are in the optional readings are indicated in parentheses as “Optional”.)

Date	Topic(s)	Assigned Readings (to be completed before class)
Jan 12 (Mon)	Course Overview and Introduction	Course syllabus; [O.1]; [C] IMF World Economic Outlook (July 2025)
Jan 14 (Wed)	Global Transactions; Trade Rationale I	[O.3]; [C] Feenstra & Taylor (Optional) “Trade and Resources: The Heckscher-Ohlin Model”
Feb 16 (Mon) – No Class – Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday		
Jan 21 (Wed)	Trade Rationale II; Contemporary Trade Challenges	[O.4]; [C] Wolff et al., “Have trade agreements been bad for America?” [C] US-China trade war timeline (Skim)
Jan 26 (Mon)	Domestic Interests; China Shock	[C] Acemoglu, Autor, and Hanson “The China Shock: Learning from Labor-Market Adjustment to Large Changes in Trade” [C] Colantone and Stanig The Trade Origins of Economic Nationalism: Import Competition and Voting Behavior in Western Europe
Jan 28 (Wed)	Domestic Economic Interests and International Trade	[C] Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala. 2023. “Why the World Still Needs Trade: The Case for Reimagining—Not Abandoning—Globalization.” Foreign Affairs, July/August 2023.
Feb 2 (Mon)	Governing Trade: Global Regime	[O.2]; [C] Wolff Can the World Trade Organization be saved? Should it? Policy Briefs 2023
Feb 4 (Wed)	Trade Agreements; Supply Chains	[C] Allison Carnegie, 2014. “States Held Hostage: Political Hold-Up Problems and the Effects of International Institutions.” American Political Science Review 108(1), pp. 54-70., [C] Iain Osgood. 2018. “Globalizing the Supply Chain: Firm and Industrial Support for US Trade Agreements.” International Organization 72(2): 455-484
Feb 9 (Mon)	Industrial Policy	[O.5]
Feb 11 (Wed)	Investment Screening & Security	[C] Sarah Bauerle Danzman and Sophie Meunier. 2023. “Mapping the Characteristics of Foreign Investment Screening Mechanisms: The New PRISM Dataset.” International Studies Quarterly 67(2) (11 pp), [C] Biden CFIUS Executive Order on Evolving National Security Risks and CFIUS Enforcement Guidelines 2022 (skim), [C] U.S. Pauses Exports of Airplane and Semiconductor Technology to China, New York Times 2025 (skim)
Feb 16 (Mon) – No Class – President’s Day Holiday		

Date	Topic(s)	Assigned Readings (to be completed before class)
Feb 18 (Wed) – Midterm Examination		
Feb 23 (Mon)	Development and the Global Economy	[O.6]
Feb 25 (Wed)	Trade, Development and Growth	[O.7]; [C] Dani Rodrik Prospects for global economic convergence under new technologies, 2022
Feb 25 Writing Assignment Due (Policy Memo 1)		
Mar 2 (Mon)	Multinational Production	[O. 8 & 9]
Mar 4 (Wed)	MNCs: Risk, Tax, Offshoring	[C] Autor, et al The Fall of the Labor Share and the Rise of Superstar Firms, 2020 [C] Betz, Timm and Pond, Amy. 2019. Foreign Financing and the International Sources of Property Rights. World Politics 71(3):503-41.
Mar 9 (Mon)	Global Supply Chains & Labor	[C] Greenhill, Mosley, and Prakash, A. (2009). Trade-based diffusion of labor rights: A panel study, 1986–2002. American Political Science Review, 103(4), 669-690.
Mar 11 (Wed)	Offshoring	[C] Owen and Johnston Occupation and the Political Economy of Trade: Job Routineness, Offshorability, and Protectionist Sentiment, 2017
Mar 11 (Wed)	IMF & Global Finance	[C] Pop-Eleches, 2009. Public Goods or Political Pandering: Evidence from IMF Programs in Latin America and Eastern Europe. International Studies Quarterly 53(3): 787-816. [C] Ballard-Rosa, Mosley, Wellhausen (2021) Contingent Advantage? Sovereign Borrowing, Democratic Institutions and Global Capital Cycles British Journal of Political Science. 51(1):353-373.
Mar 16–18 – No Class – Spring Recess		
Mar 23 (Mon)	Domestic Institutions and Trade Policy Politics	[C] Betz, Fortunato and OBrien. 2021. Womens Descriptive Representation and Gendered Import Tax Discrimination. American Political Science Review. 115(1):307-315. [C] Gowa and Hicks (2013). Politics, institutions, and trade: Lessons of the interwar era. International Organization, 67(3), 439-467.

Date	Topic(s)	Assigned Readings (to be completed before class)
Mar 25 (Wed)	Globalization I	[C] Hays (2009) Globalization and the New Politics of Embedded Liberalism. Oxford University Press. Chapters 1. [C] Hays, Lim, and Spoon (2019). The Path from Trade to Right-Wing Populism in Europe. Electoral Studies 60: 10238
Mar 30 (Mon)	Globalization II	[C] Ballard-Rosa, Malik, Rickard, and Scheve. (2021) The Economic Origins of Authoritarian Values: Evidence from Local Trade Shocks in the United Kingdom. Comparative Political Studies. [C] Gonzalez-Rostani and Hays (2025) Love of Variety? An Experimental Study of Heterogeneous Responses to Foreign Brands in the Marketplace
Apr 1 (Wed)	Political Economy of Migration	[C] David Leblang and Margaret E. Peters. 2022. Immigration and Globalization (and Deglobalization). Annual Review of Political Science 25(1): 377-399. [C] Hainmueller, Jens and Michael J. Hiscox. 2010. Attitudes Towards Highly Skilled and Low Skilled Immigration: Evidence from a Survey Experiment. American Political Science Review 104(1): 61-84.
April 6 (Wed) – Final Examination		
Apr 8 (Wed)	Political Economy of Climate Change	[C] Amanda Kennard. 2020. “The Enemy of my Enemy: When Firms Support Climate Change Regulation.” International Organization 74(2): 187-221. [C] Gonzalez-Rostani, Beiser-McGrath, and Aklin (2025) The Threat of Automation and Public Support for Environmental Policies.
Apr 13 (Mon)	Political Economy of Automation	[C] Gonzalez-Rostani (2025), Elections, Right-wing Populism, and Political-Economic Polarization: The Role of Institutions and Political Outsiders, The Journal of Politics [C] Gallego, Kurer, (2022). Automation, digitalization, and artificial intelligence in the workplace: implications for political behavior. Annual Review of Political Science, 25(1), 463-484.
Apr 15 (Wed)	Political Economy of Automation and Fragmented Production	[C] Boix, Gonzalez-Rostani, and Owen The Political Economy of Automation and Fragmented Production in a Global Economy: Evidence from Mexico, 2025
Apr 20 (Mon)	Writing Assignments	Work in Final Projects
Apr 22 (Wed)	Writing Assignments	Work in Final Projects

Date		Topic(s)	Assigned Readings (to be completed before class)
Apr (Wed)	22	Wrap-up & Final Review	Review session
Apr (Mon)	27	Presentations Policy Memos	Final Project Oral Presentation
Apr (Wed)	29	Presentations Research Projects	Final Project Oral Presentation
April 29 Writing Assignment Due (Research Project or Policy Memo 2)			

Final Exam: Date TBD

7 Course Policies

Late Work

Deadlines are firm. Late submissions for writing assignments will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade per day (for example, from A to A-), unless you have made arrangements with the instructor before the due date or have an officially documented excuse. If you anticipate any issues meeting a deadline, communicate as early as possible.

Academic Integrity

The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the USC Student Handbook. All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

Academic dishonesty has a far-reaching impact and is considered a serious offense against the university. Violations will result in a grade penalty, such as a failing grade on the assignment or in the course, and disciplinary action from the university itself, such as suspension or even expulsion.

For more information about academic integrity see the Student Handbook, the Office of Academic Integrity's website, and university policies on Research and Scholarship Misconduct.

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

Use of AI and Online Tools

You are welcome to use AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT) and online resources (e.g., news databases, Stack Overflow) to support your learning—especially for brainstorming, clarifying concepts, or proofreading.

Please follow these guidelines:

- Use these tools to assist—not replace—your own thinking. Do not submit AI-generated text as your own work.
- Refine your prompts and critically evaluate the answers. Poor inputs often yield poor outputs.
- Always verify any data or claims sourced via AI or crowd-sourced platforms.
- Clearly disclose any use of AI or external help in a short note at the end of your assignment (e.g., “Used ChatGPT to clarify definitions and suggest structure.”)
- Undisclosed use of AI or copied content may be treated as a breach of academic integrity.

When in doubt, ask. Assignments should reflect your own understanding of IPE concepts and engagement with course materials.

Course Content Distribution and Synchronous Session Recordings Policies

USC has policies that prohibit recording and distribution of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment. Recording a university class without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class, or unless conducted pursuant to an Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) accommodation, is not allowed. Recording can inhibit free discussion in the future, and thus infringe on the academic freedom of other students as well as the instructor. (Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook, page 13).

Distribution or use of notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property, based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study is also prohibited. This includes but is not limited to providing materials for distribution by services publishing course materials. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information that has been distributed to students or in any way displayed for use in relation to the class—whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media. Distributing course material without the instructor’s permission will be presumed to be an intentional act to facilitate or enable academic dishonesty and is strictly prohibited. (Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook, page 13).

Inclusivity and Respect

Our classroom is a safe and inclusive space for everyone. I am committed to creating an environment where a diversity of backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences is not only respected but seen as an asset to learning. Please treat your classmates with courtesy and respect during discussions and group work. Disagreement is part of academic debate, but it must be expressed civilly – no personal attacks or derogatory remarks. Help foster a climate where all students feel comfortable participating. Harassment or discrimination of any kind (whether based on race, nationality, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, ability, etc.) is not tolerated. If you experience or witness any form of bias, please reach out – you can talk to me, or contact USC’s Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) to report concerns and get support.

8 University Academic and Support Systems

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Student Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress:

To be eligible for certain kinds of financial aid, students are required to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) toward their degree objectives. Visit the Financial Aid Office webpage for undergraduate- and graduate-level SAP eligibility requirements and the appeals process.

Support Systems:

- **Counseling and Mental Health:** (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call. Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.
- **988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline:** Dial 988 for 24/7 calls and texts. Offers free and confidential support for people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress across the U.S.
- **CARE-SC:** (213) 740-9355 (WELL) – 24/7/365 on call. Offers confidential advocacy, prevention education, and professional counseling to address gender- and power-based harm.
- **Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX):** (213) 740-5086. Provides resources and reporting options related to harassment, discrimination, and protected class rights.
- **Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment:** (213) 740-2500. Reports are directed to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX for appropriate investigation and support.
- **USC Campus Support and Intervention:** (213) 740-0411. Helps students and families address complex personal, financial, and academic issues affecting student success.
- **USC Emergency Information:** emergency.usc.edu. Offers updates and plans in the event of an emergency that disrupts campus access.
- **USC Department of Public Safety:**
 - Emergency: UPC (213) 740-4321, HSC (323) 442-1000
 - Non-Emergency: UPC (213) 740-6000, HSC (323) 442-1200
- **Office of the Ombuds:** UPC (213) 821-9556 / HSC (323) 442-0382. A confidential place to explore and resolve university-related issues with a trained Ombuds.
- **Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice:** (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu. Offers confidential Lifestyle Redesign services to help students improve well-being and academic performance.

Lastly, I want you to know that my door is always open. If something is going on that impacts your performance in class, please communicate with me. Whether it's an illness, personal challenge, or you just need an extension on an assignment, reach out – we can usually work something out. I am invested in your learning and well-being. Let's have a great semester learning how to make sense of data!

9 Free Suggestions

This course will help you understand global political and economic dynamics. Your active participation will make the difference. Here are a few tips:

1. **Come prepared.** Read assigned materials before class. Lectures will be fast-paced and assume basic familiarity.
2. **Stay organized.** Keep all slides, notes, and files in one place. Good file management helps with assignments and group work.
3. **Engage in class.** We'll work with real-world cases and group exercises. Ask questions and learn from mistakes—this is part of the process.
4. **Use office hours and resources.** I'm happy to help with concepts, assignments, or project ideas. Don't wait until the last minute.
5. **Think beyond the classroom.** Read the news, connect class ideas to current events, and bring those reflections to discussion. The world of international political economy is constantly evolving, and your perspectives will enrich our class discussions.
6. **Enjoy the process.** Global political economy is complex but exciting. Ask tough questions, debate ideas, and stay curious.

10 Acknowledgements

Inspired by the previous versions of this course offered by Professors Jude Hays and Layna Mosley.