

Course Title	LAI204 Comparative Political Issues		Instructor(s)	Rui Saraiva
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Class Style	Lecture		Office Hours	TBA
Track	Global liberal arts		Mode of Instruction	Single
Credits	2		Allocated Year	2 <sup>nd</sup> year, Spring
Active Learning	2.3. Presentations, 4.1. Interactive lectures, 4.3. Free discussions, 4.4. Case studies, 4.8. Informal debates, 4.9. Group work on questions, 4.10. Think-pair-share and Think-group-share.		Compulsory or Elective	Elective
Course Overview	<p>This course analyzes comparative political issues through fundamental questions of political organization: How should communities make collective decisions? What balance between individual freedom and social order optimizes welfare? When is coercion legitimate? How should authority be distributed? Through comparative analysis, students examine how political systems address tensions between freedom and security, diversity and cohesion, tradition and progress, local and central authorities, individual rights and communal duties. The course addresses contemporary issues—urban governance, intergenerational conflict, immigration, national identity—through systematic examination of political problems, constraints, and evidence. Students examine institutional arrangements across political systems to identify competing solutions and trade-offs inherent in political choices.</p>			
Course Objectives	<p>Upon completion of this course, students will analyze political problems by identifying foundational questions about authority, political and socio-economic coordination, and institutional trade-offs. Students will examine how different institutional arrangements produce varying outcomes across comparative cases, distinguish between empirical claims, normative claims, and practical constraints in political analysis, and evaluate evidence systematically rather than seeking normative solutions. Through comparative institutional analysis, students develop capacities to assess competing evidence-based explanations for political phenomena, recognize that political choices involve inherent costs and benefits, and develop independent analytical perspectives on contemporary political issues while understanding alternative political frameworks.</p>			
Prerequisite				
Course Schedule	No	Contents	Homework	
	1	Foundations—Why Do We Need Politics at All? What problems does political organization solve? Why can't everything be handled through voluntary cooperation, markets, or family structures? The prisoner's dilemma and collective action problems.	Preparatory readings and assignments.	
	2	The Question of Authority—Who Should Rule? Examining justifications for political authority across history and cultures: divine right, democratic consent, expertise, tradition, force. What makes any government legitimate?	Preparatory readings and assignments.	

	3	The Individual vs. The Community. Comparing individualist and communitarian approaches to politics. Western liberalism vs. Confucian harmony vs. Ubuntu philosophy. Can these be reconciled?	Preparatory readings and assignments.
	4	Property, Ownership, and Economic Systems. What is property and why does it matter politically? Comparing private property systems, commons management, and mixed approaches. How do property rules shape social relations?	Preparatory readings and assignments.
	5	Freedom—Positive vs. Negative Liberty. What does "freedom" actually mean? Freedom from interference vs. freedom to achieve capabilities. Why do people disagree about whether welfare states increase or decrease freedom?	Preparatory readings and assignments.
	6	National Identity and Belonging. Who counts as "us"? Examining different bases for national identity: ethnicity, civic values, shared history, territory. Cases: Japan, Switzerland, United States, Singapore.	Preparatory readings and assignments.
	7	Midterm Review and Assessment	Students present analyses of one contemporary political challenge related to topics covered in weeks 1-6
	8	Immigration and Borders—The Right to Include or Exclude? Does a political community have the right to control who enters? What are the moral and practical arguments on different sides? Comparing approaches: Japan, Canada, UAE, European Union.	Preparatory readings and assignments.
	9	The Family and State—Who Raises the Next Generation? What is the relationship between family authority and state authority? Education, child welfare, parental rights. Comparing approaches across cultures and political systems.	Preparatory readings and assignments.
	10	Generations in Conflict—Age, Power, and Justice. How should societies balance obligations across generations? Youth unemployment vs. elder pensions, inheritance vs. opportunity. The politics of aging societies.	Preparatory readings and assignments.
	11	Crime, Punishment, and Social Order. Why do we punish? Deterrence, retribution, rehabilitation, or	

		incapacitation? Comparing penal philosophies: Scandinavian rehabilitation vs. American incarceration vs. restorative justice models.	Preparatory readings and assignments.
	12	Free Speech—Absolute or Limited? Should societies permit all speech, or are some restrictions justified? Hate speech laws, defamation, national security. Comparing US First Amendment with European restrictions.	Preparatory readings and assignments.
	13	The City vs. the Countryside. Urban-rural political divides across democracies. Why do cities and rural areas vote differently? Land use, resource allocation, cultural values. Is geographic polarization inevitable?	Preparatory readings and assignments.
	14	Political Scale—Small Communities vs. Large States. Does size matter for governance? Comparing small-scale political communities (Singapore, Iceland, city-states) with large federal systems. What trade-offs exist between small and large systems?	Preparatory readings and assignments.
	15	Final Review and Synthesis	Students present comparative analyses applying course frameworks to one contemporary political challenge.
Grading	Participation (30%) Assignments and presentations (20%) Midterm Examination (25%) Final Examination (25%)		
Textbooks	Students will be asked to read sections of the books listed in the reference section. Other relevant reading materials will be provided by the instructor. Students should bring printed or digital copies of the assigned reading to each class.		
References	Bell, D. A. (2009). <i>Beyond liberal democracy: Political thinking for an East Asian context</i> . Princeton University Press. Berlin, I. (1990). <i>Four Essays on Liberty</i> . Oxford University Press. Boonin, D. (2008). <i>The problem of punishment</i> . Cambridge University Press. Brighouse, H., & Swift, A. (2014). <i>Family values: The ethics of parent-child relationships</i> . Princeton University Press. Dahl, R. A., & Tufte, E. R. (1973). <i>Size and democracy</i> . Stanford University Press.		

	<p>De Soto, H. (2000). <i>The mystery of capital: Why capitalism triumphs in the West and fails everywhere else</i>. Basic Books.</p> <p>Hardin, G. (1968). The tragedy of the commons. <i>Science</i>, 162 (3859), 1243-1248.</p> <p>Mill, J. S. (1869). <i>On liberty</i>. John W. Parker and Son.</p> <p>Miller, D. (1995). <i>On nationality</i>. Oxford University Press.</p> <p>Rodden, J. (2019). <i>Why cities lose: The deep roots of the urban-rural political divide</i>. Basic Books.</p> <p>Taylor, M. (1987). <i>The possibility of cooperation</i>. Cambridge University Press.</p> <p>Thomson, D. (1996). <i>Selfish generations? How welfare states grow old</i>. White Horse Press.</p> <p>Wellman, C. H. (2008). Immigration and freedom of association. <i>Ethics</i>, 119 (1), 109-141.</p> <p>Students seeking deeper engagement may explore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aristotle. (1984). <i>The Politics</i> (S. Everson, Ed.). Cambridge University Press.</li> <li>• Fukuyama, F. (2011). <i>The origins of political order</i>. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.</li> <li>• Hayek, F. A. (1960). <i>The constitution of liberty</i>. University of Chicago Press.</li> <li>• Nozick, R. (2013). <i>Anarchy, state, and utopia</i>. Basic Books.</li> <li>• Rawls, J. (1999). <i>A theory of justice</i>. Harvard University Press.</li> <li>• Sandel, M. J. (1998). <i>Liberalism and the limits of justice</i>. Cambridge University Press.</li> <li>• Sen, A. (2001). <i>Development as freedom</i>. Oxford University Press.</li> <li>• Tocqueville, A. de (2000). <i>Democracy in America</i>. University of Chicago Press.</li> </ul>
NOTES	<p>Attendance: Mandatory. Missing more than 2 sessions significantly impacts your participation grade. Missing more than 5 sessions means you will not be able to pass this course.</p> <p>Academic Integrity: All work must be original. Use of AI tools to generate written work or discussion points is prohibited, as the goal is to develop your own capacity for critical thinking.</p> <p>Preparation: Students must complete the reading assignment before each class and come prepared with at least two questions or observations about the text.</p> <p>Evidence and logic, not rhetoric: Political buzzwords, emotional appeals, and ideological labels are shortcuts that prevent thinking. If you catch yourself using them, stop and articulate the actual claim based on evidence.</p>