

Course Title	LAI304 World Politics		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	3 rd 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	This course examines world politics through the lens of technological revolutions, using first principles reasoning to investigate one fundamental question: Do technologies liberate humanity or create new forms of political control and centralization? We trace human political organization from hunter-gatherer groups to algorithmic societies, analyzing how each major technological shift—agricultural, industrial, digital, and artificial intelligence—has restructured power relations, created new forms of exploitation, and generated resistance movements. Rather than presenting information to memorize, we engage in structured inquiry that questions assumptions, breaks down complexity, and builds understanding from basic truths. Through Socratic method, students will examine whether decentralized technologies and decentralized communities represent genuine resistance to new forms of authoritarianism, surveillance capitalism and state control.			
Course Objectives	By the end of this course, students will be able to: (1) develop critical thinking skills to challenge assumptions about technology and political power; (2) Use first principles reasoning to analyze complex world politics phenomena; (3) Trace causal chains from technological change to political outcomes across historical periods; (4) Identify patterns of exploitation and resistance across different technological epochs; (5) Construct original arguments about contemporary political-technological challenges; (6) Evaluate competing claims about AI, algorithms, and digital or technocratic governance using evidence-based reasoning; (7) Articulate their own reasoned position on the future of human freedom in technological societies.			
Prerequisite				
Course Schedule	No	Contents	Homework	
	1	What Is Power? Is it something you have or a relationship you're in? If power is military strength, why do superior states lose wars?	Preparatory readings and assignments.	
	2	The Agricultural Trap: Why did humans "choose" agriculture if hunter-gatherers worked less and lived better? Who benefited? Was this progress or humanity's greatest mistake?	Preparatory readings and assignments.	
	3	Writing and Money as Control: Why was writing invented? Is all information technology fundamentally about control? What is money, really?	Preparatory readings and assignments.	
	4	Empires: Controlling Millions. How do you control		

	a million people you've never met? Are empires political or technological achievements? What happens when information systems fail?	Preparatory readings and assignments.
5	Industrial Revolution: Humans as Machines. When did humans become machine components? Who owned the machines, the product, the workers' time? Why did labor-saving technology increase human toil?	Preparatory readings and assignments.
6	Colonialism and Technological Violence. Could the Industrial Revolution have happened without colonialism? Is technology designed for domination or liberation?	Preparatory readings and assignments.
7	Midterm Review and Assessment	Based on Sessions 1-6, we will answer these questions: What patterns emerge from technological revolutions? How do technologies re-shape power across eras?
8	Technocracies and Surveillance Capitalism: When did you become the product? Is surveillance built into digital technology's architecture? What's the difference between persuasion and manipulation?	Preparatory readings and assignments.
9	Social Media and Algorithmic Control: Who decides what you see online? Can there be democracy if citizens live in algorithmic filter bubbles? When does influence become control?	Preparatory readings and assignments.
10	Cryptography: Math as Resistance? Can mathematics be political power? Does cryptography liberate from state control or create new oligarchies? Who should control money?	Preparatory readings and assignments.
11	AI and Automated Inequality: Can algorithms be neutral? Where does bias come from if "it's just math"? If we can't create unbiased data, can we create unbiased AI?	Preparatory readings and assignments.
12	From the Gig Economy to UBI: Freedom or Optimization? What does 'freedom' mean when algorithms control your income, consumption, and information? Is this the same exploitation pattern repeating?	Preparatory readings and assignments.
13	The Social Credit System: Efficient Governance or Totalitarian Control? What if surveillance feels	Preparatory readings and assignments.

		like security rather than oppression? Where's the line between reputation and oppression?	
	14	The Technological-Biological Interface: Cognitive Sovereignty in the Electromagnetic Age. When does technological infrastructure become biological intervention? What future do we want—and do we still have the sovereignty to choose it?	Preparatory readings and assignments.
	15	Final Review and Synthesis	Based on this course we will analyze the following questions: Do technologies primarily liberate or control? What's your reasoned position? What questions remain unanswered?
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 or other materials that will be provided by the instructor. Students should bring printed or digital copies of the assigned reading to each class.		
References	Baylis, J., Smith, S., & Owens, P. (2023). <i>The globalization of world politics: An introduction to international relations</i> (9th ed.). Oxford University Press. Brunton, F. (2019). <i>Digital cash: The unknown history of the anarchists, utopians, and technologists who created cryptocurrency</i> . Princeton University Press. Diamond, J. (1997). The worst mistake in the history of the human race. <i>Discover Magazine</i> , 18 (5), 64-66. Eubanks, V. (2018). <i>Automating inequality: How high-tech tools profile, police, and punish the poor</i> . St. Martin's Press. Foucault, M. (1977). <i>Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison</i> . Pantheon Books. Graeber, D. (2014). <i>Debt: The first 5,000 years</i> . Melville House. Harari, Y. N. (2015). <i>Sapiens: A brief history of humankind</i> . Harper Collins. Mumford, L. (2010). <i>Technics and civilization</i> . University of Chicago Press. O'Neil, C. (2016). <i>Weapons of math destruction: How big data increases inequality and threatens democracy</i> . Crown. Scott, J. C. (1998). <i>Seeing like a state: How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed</i> . Yale University Press. Scott, J. C. (2020). <i>Against the grain: A deep history of the earliest states</i> . Yale University Press. Thompson, E. P. (1967). Time, work-discipline, and industrial capitalism. <i>Past & Present</i> , 38 (1), 56-97. Winner, L. (1980). Do artifacts have politics? <i>Daedalus</i> , 109 (1), 121-136. Zuboff, S. (2019). <i>The age of surveillance capitalism: The fight for a human future at the new frontier of power</i> . PublicAffairs.		

NOTES

Attendance is 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.

Preparation is essential: This course only works if everyone completes the readings and preparatory questions before class.

Policy on AI Usage: AI tools raise the same questions this course explores: Do they enhance thinking or replace it? Permitted Uses: Research assistance and finding data sources; Grammar checking and clarity improvements. Prohibited Uses: Having AI write your examinations and submitting AI-generated text without understanding it.