

**POL410H1S – Topics in Comparative Politics III: The Politics of Human Rights  
Winter 2023**

Time: Thursdays 2-4pm

Location: TF203

Instructor: David Zarnett

[david.zarnett@utoronto.ca](mailto:david.zarnett@utoronto.ca)

Office hours: By appointment

Location: By phone or on Zoom

Course website: Quercus

**Course Description:**

Today, the idea of human rights is central to political practice. This course examines this phenomenon in two main parts. First we will investigate how state and non-state actors have used the idea of human rights to pursue certain objectives, including empire building, the weakening of strategic rivals and material self-interest. This section of the course explores a variety of historical and contemporary cases, including French colonialism in West Africa, the origins of the welfare state, LGBTQ+ activism, the creation of the International Criminal Court, and campus social justice activism, among others.

Second, we will examine some of the major questions and controversies surrounding the politics of human rights today. Our discussion will focus on the relationship between the state and human rights, the reliability of quantitative human rights data, the domestic effects of human rights foreign policies, why people join human rights campaigns, why good intentions can lead to bad human rights outcomes, and what constitutes the most pressing threat to human rights today.

In addressing these and other issues, we will also explore important diversity- and identity-relevant topics, including colonialism and representations of the Global South, Indigenous perspectives of the state, and corporate strategies to promote workplace managerial diversity, among others.

**Course Objectives:**

This course has four main objectives:

1. To provide you with an opportunity to develop a deep and nuanced understanding of what human rights are;
2. To provide you with an opportunity to develop a historically- and theoretically-informed account of the political uses of human rights and related concepts;
3. To provide you with an opportunity to engage in a fair and open-minded way with some of the most pressing questions and controversies surrounding the politics of human;
4. To provide you with an opportunity to develop important transferable skills useful for a variety of different professions, including academia, advocacy, consulting, government, and law.

## Marking Scheme & Course Requirements

Evaluation for this course will be based on the following four components:

Assignment Name	Value	Deadline
Participation	15%	Ongoing
Presentation & Two-Page Memo	20%	See presentation sign-up sheet; memo due before presentation given to the class.
Analytical Essay #1	30%	February 16 <sup>th</sup> , 2023
Analytical Essay #2	35%	April 13 <sup>th</sup> , 2023

### *Participation (15%)*

Class participation is an essential part of this course. You are expected to attend all classes having read and thought about the week's readings, and to be prepared to ask and answer questions about them. Additional ways to participate in this class include attending office hours to speak with me about the course content and assignments.

### *Presentation & Two-Page Memo (15%)*

For this assignment, you will give a 5-10 minute presentation to the class on a human rights issue that you think is important and worth knowing about. In your presentation, provide a clear and evidence-based overview of the issue and use at least two (2) course readings covered in class so far to help us understand its significance for understanding the politics of human rights.

In addition, **before your presentation** you must also submit a two-page memo, which includes your description of the human rights issue and your analysis of it using the readings you have selected. Your memo should be uploaded to Quercus in .doc or .docx format.

This assignment is designed to give you an opportunity to apply course content to issues that matter to you, to give you practical experience in public speaking and to help you improve your ability to condense a significant amount of material into a short, clearly written document.

For this assignment, please use the following formatting guidelines:

- Times New Roman or Garamond font, 12 point.
- Normal margins
- Footnotes in any accepted scholarly style
- No bibliography needed
- 2 pages maximum; any content beyond 2 pages will not be read.

### *Analytical Essay #1 (30%) – Due Week #6, February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023*

For this assignment, you will produce a 5-page double-spaced essay that answers the following question:

So far in this course we have examined the politics of human rights through a “human rights as tools” perspective. This perspective can make us quite cynical because it suggests that the human rights idea is best understood as political cover for the pursuit of objectives that often have nothing to do with helping victims of rights abuse. In this essay, think critically about the “human rights as tools” perspective. What are its strengths and weaknesses? Are there other, more effective approaches that can help us better understand the politics of human rights? If so, what are they?

In answering this question, you should draw only on the course material, including the weekly readings, lecture slides and your lecture notes. The purpose of this assignment is to encourage you to think carefully and critically about the course material presented to date.

For this assignment, please use the following formatting guidelines:

- Times New Roman or Garamond font, 12 point.
- Normal margins
- Footnotes in any accepted scholarly style
- No bibliography needed
- 5 pages maximum; any content beyond 5 pages will not be read.

*Analytical Essay #2 (35%) – Due April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023*

For this assignment, select one of the questions below and answer it to the best of your ability in a 8-page, double-spaced paper. Each set of questions asks you to put on a different “hat”, including that of a political theorist, data analyst, policymaker, activist, campaign organizer, professor and human rights NGO executive director. Select the “hat” that you find most interesting *and* that you think might be most useful to you on your desired career path. In developing your essay, you should draw on the course readings and any additional research you need to help you advance a compelling and thoughtful answer.

1. **Political theorist:** The nation-state remains the most important political unit in the international system. Is this a good thing for the protection and advancement of human rights? Or do we need to start envisioning a global political system that is organized around a different kind of political unit? If so, what should that political unit look like?
2. **Data analyst:** The use of quantitative data is central to the study of human rights, especially in regards to assessing what impact various tools of statecraft have on human rights and the extent to which humanity has made progress in creating more just societies. Find some quantitative data about a specific human rights issue of your choosing. Assess the reliability of the data and interpret it.
3. **Policy advisor:** For a policymaker, deciding how to respond to distant human rights abuses is not straightforward. They have various policy options to choose from, all of which come with numerous pros and cons. For this assignment, imagine you are a policy advisor for Global Affairs Canada and have been tasked with outlining the best policy response to a particular case of rights abuse abroad. What policy would you recommend and why? You may select any case of human rights abuse that interests you.

4. **Activist:** Activists have to work hard to get people to care about their cause. How can they do this effectively? In this assignment, select a human rights issue and devise a strategy to get others to care and do something about it. You may select any human rights issue that interests you.
5. **Campaign organizer:** In building an activist campaign, organizers must be aware that their well-intended efforts can make the issue they seek to address worse. For this assignment, develop your own activist campaign on a human rights issue of your choosing and outline your strategy for ensuring your good intentions do not lead to bad outcomes.
6. **Professor:** Teaching about human rights is not easy. Not only are there thorny and sensitive issues that need to be carefully addressed but there is also an array of important topics and not enough time to engage with all of them. For this assignment, think about the topics in this class that have not been discussed but that you think should be. If you were teaching this course, what one topic would you add to the syllabus? Explain your choice and outline how you teach your students about it.
7. **NGO Executive Director:** With limited resources, human rights NGOs have to make tough decisions about what issues to focus on and what to ignore. For this assignment, imagine you are the Executive Director of a human rights NGO and have decided to run a campaign on the most pressing threat to human rights that exists today. What threat do you focus on and why?

For this assignment, please use the following formatting guidelines:

- Times New Roman or Garamond font, 12 point.
- Normal margins
- Footnotes in any accepted scholarly style
- No bibliography needed
- 8 pages maximum, any content beyond 8 pages will not be read.

### **Course Materials**

There are no readings or textbooks that need to be purchased. Most of the readings are available online through the University of Toronto's library catalogue. Others will be scanned and posted on Quercus under the section entitled "Pages."

### **Assignment Submission & Plagiarism Detection:**

All assignments that will be graded must be submitted on time via Quercus. Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>).

Use of the plagiarism detection tool is voluntary and students do have the right to opt-out. If you would like to opt-out, please come speak to me directly so we can determine an alternative assignment submission method.

### **Late Penalties & Extensions:**

The penalty for late assignments is 5% per day. If the assignment is not submitted within one week (7 days including the weekend) after the due date, a mark of zero will be assigned. If you become ill and it affects your ability to do your academic work, please feel free to come speak to me directly. Normally, you will be asked for medical documentation in support of your specific medical circumstances. The University's Verification of Student Illness or Injury (VOI) form is recommended because it indicates the impact and severity of the illness, while protecting your privacy about the details of the nature of the illness. You can submit a different form (like a letter from the doctor), as long as it is an original document, and it contains the same information as the VOI. For more information, please see <http://www.illnessverification.utoronto.ca/> If you get a concussion, break your hand, or suffer some other acute injury, you should register with Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

Late work must also be submitted to me directly via Quercus AND email. Students are strongly advised to keep draft work and hard copies of their assignments until the marked assignments have been returned and grades posted online.

### **Re-Grading Policy**

If you would like to challenge a grade, you will have to submit a one-page typed (single or double-spaced) document explaining in detail why a re-grade is necessary. This document must be submitted to me no sooner than 48 hours after the assignment has been returned to you and no later than one week after it has been returned. As the instructor, I reserve the right to reject this request. If I agree to re-grade the assignment, there is a chance your new grade may be lower than the first grade you received.

### **Office Hours**

Office hours will be done through appointment and held in-person, over Zoom or the phone. If you would like to speak, please email me and we can set up a convenient time to connect.

### **Email Policy:**

You can contact me anytime via email and I will get back to you within 24 hours from Monday to Friday. I will not be checking email on the weekend. While I am happy to correspond via email, please note that discussions with me are often a more productive use of time.

### **Plagiarism and Academic Integrity:**

The University and this course treat cases of cheating and plagiarism very seriously. The University of Toronto's Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters outlines the behaviours that constitute academic dishonesty and the processes for addressing academic offences.

Potential offences in papers and assignments include:

- using someone else’s ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement;
- submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor;
- making up sources or facts;
- obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment.

On tests and exams cheating includes:

- using or possessing unauthorized aids;
- looking at someone else’s answers;
- misrepresenting your identity, or falsifying or altering any documentation required by the University, including (but not limited to) doctor’s notes.

If you have concerns about plagiarism, please come speak to me directly. As you prepare your analytical essays, please make sure to review this link for useful guidance:

<http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize>.

### **Accessibility:**

I am committed to creating a course environment that is accessible for all students. If you require accommodation for a disability, or have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom or course materials, please feel free to discuss this with me and get in touch with Accessibility Services as soon as possible:

<https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/departments/accessibility-services/>

### **Harassment & Discrimination**

The University of Toronto is a diverse community and as such is committed to providing an environment free of any form of harassment, misconduct, or discrimination. In this course, I seek to foster a civil, respectful, and open-minded climate in which we can all work together to develop a better understanding of key questions and debates through meaningful dialogue. As such, I expect all involved with this course to refrain from actions or behaviours that intimidate, humiliate, or demean persons or groups or that undermine their security or self-esteem based on traits related to race, religion, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, marital status, family status, disability, receipt of public assistance or record of offences.

### **Mental Health & Wellbeing**

Mental health is a growing concern among students. If you are in need of some assistance, please feel free to come speak to me. The University has also a number of services available to help you with your emotional wellbeing. Visit Health & Wellness for more information:

<https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/departments/health-wellness/>

### **Educational Supports**

If you require any assistance with the course material and assignments, please come speak with me and I will do my best to help you. For additional support, you may want to visit one of U of T’s writing centres (<https://writing.utoronto.ca/writing-centres/>) as well as U of T’s Academic Success Centre (<https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/departments/academic-success/>).

## Course Schedule & Readings

### **Week #1 (January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023) – Course Introduction and a Brief History of Human Rights**

- Sam McFarland, “The Slow Creation of Humanity,” *Political Psychology* Vol. 32 No. 1 (February 2011), pp. 1-20.
- Aryeh Neier, *The International Human Rights Movement: A History* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012), chapter 1.
- Makau Mutua, “Savages, Victims and Saviors: The Metaphor of Human Rights,” *Harvard International Law Journal* Vol. 42 No. 1 (Winter 2001), pp. 201-245.

### **Week #2 (January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023) – What are Human Rights?**

- Frans de Waal & Stephen A. Sherblom, “Bottom-up Morality: The Basis of Human Morality in our Primate Nature,” *Journal of Moral Education* Vol. 47 No. 2 (2018), pp. 248-258
- Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (McClelland & Stewart, 2016), Chapter 2 (pp. 22-44).
- Lynn Hunt, “Revolutionary Rights,” in Pamela Slotte & Miia Halme-Tuomisaari (eds.), *Revisiting the Origins of Human Rights* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 105-118.
- Micheline Ishay, “What are Human Rights? Six Historical Controversies,” *Journal of Human Rights* Vol. 3 No. 3 (2004), pp. 359-371.

### *Unit 1: Human Rights as Political Tools*

### **Week #3 (January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2023) – Human Rights as a Tool for Empire Building**

- Alice Conklin, “Colonialism and Human Rights, A Contradiction in Terms? The Case of France and West Africa, 1985-1914,” *American Historical Review* Vol. 103, No. 2 (April 1998), pp. 419-442.
- Roxanne Doty, *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 23-49.

### **Week #4 (February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023) – Human Rights as a Tool for Undermining Political Rivals**

- Sidney Fay, “Bismarck’s Welfare State,” *Current History* Vol. 18 Mp 101 (January 1950), pp. 1-7.
- Alan Kuperman “Darfur: Strategic Victimhood Strikes Again?” *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal* Vol. 4 No. 3 (2009), pp. 281-303.
- Clifford Bob, *Rights as Weapons: Instruments of Conflict, Tools of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), chapter 8.

### **Week #5 (February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023) – Human Rights as a Tool to Pursue Material Self-Interest**

- Jay Goodliffe & Darren Hawkins, “A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Rome: Explaining International Criminal Court Negotiations,” *Journal of Politics* Vol. 71 No. 3 (July 2009), pp. 977-997.

- Jason Brennan & Phillip Magness, *Cracks in the Ivory Tower: The Moral Mess of Higher Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 134-156.
- Helen Lewis, “How Capitalism Drives Cancel Culture,” *The Atlantic* (July 14, 2020). Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2020/07/cancel-culture-and-problem-woke-capitalism/614086/>

## *Unit 2: Questions & Controversies*

### **Week #6 (February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023) – What Impact Has “The State” Had on Human Rights?**

#### **\*\*\*\*\*Analytical Essay #1 Due**

- Charles Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime,” in Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschmeyer & Theda Skocpol, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 169-191.
- John Lanchester, “The Case Against Civilization: Did Our Ancestors Have it Better?” *New Yorker* (September 11, 2017).
- Jeff Corntassel & Marc Woons, “Indigenous Perspectives on International Relations Theory,” *E-International Relations* (January 23, 2018). Available at: <https://www.e-ir.info/pdf/72490>
- Cengiz Gunes & Cetin Gurer, “Kurdish Movement’s Democratic Autonomy Proposals in Turkey,” in Efraim Nimni & Elcin Aktoprak (eds.), *Democratic Representation in Plurinational States: The Kurds in Turkey* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 159-175.

### **READING WEEK (February 20-24<sup>th</sup>, 2023) – NO CLASS**

#### **Week #7 (March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023) – Are Quantitative Human Rights Data Reliable?**

- Robert Justin Goldstein, “The Limitations of Using Quantitative Data in Studying Human Rights Abuses,” *Human Rights Quarterly* Vol. 8, no. 4 (1986): 607-627.
- Diane Orentlicher, “Bearing Witness: The Art and Science of Human Rights Fact-Finding,” *Harvard Human Rights Journal* Vol. 3 (1990), pp. 83-135.
- Alison Brysk, “The Politics of Measurement: The Contested Count of the Disappeared in Argentina,” *Human Rights Quarterly* Vol. 16 (1994), pp. 676-692.
- David Cingranelli & David Richards, “The Cingranelli and Richards (CIRI) Human Rights Data Project,” *Human Rights Quarterly* Vol. 32 (2010), pp. 401-424.

#### **Week #8 (March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023) – What Are The Domestic Effects Of Human Rights Foreign Policies?**

- James Franklin, “Shame on You: The Impact of Human Rights Criticism on Political Repression in Latin America,” *International Studies Quarterly* Vol. 52 (2008), pp. 187-211.
- Niheer Dasandi & Lior Erez, “The Donor’s Dilemma: International Aid and Human Rights Violations,” *British Journal of Political Science* Vol. 49 (2017), pp. 1431-1452.
- Dursun Peksen, “Better or Worse? The Effect of Economic Sanctions on Human Rights,” *Journal of Peace Research* Vol. 46 No. 1 (2009), pp. 59-77.



- Amanda Murdie, “R2P, Human Rights and the Perils of a Bad Human Rights Intervention,” *Global Responsibility to Protect* Vol. 9 (2017), pp. 267-293.

**Week #9 (March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023) – Why Do People Join Human Rights Campaigns?**

- Robert Cialdini, “The Science of Persuasion,” *Scientific American* (February 2001), pp. 76-81.
- Alan Schussman & Sarah Soule, “Process and Protest: Accounting for Individual Protest Participation,” *Social Forces* Vol. 84 No. 2 (December 2005), pp. 1083-1108.
- Kyla Jo McEntire, Michele Leiby & Matthew Krain, “Human Rights Organizations as Agents of Change: An Experimental Examination of Framing and Micromobilization,” *American Political Science Review* Vol. 19 No. 5 (August 2015), pp. 407-426.

**Week #10 (March 23<sup>th</sup>, 2023) – TBD**

- This week’s topic will be decided by the class.

**Week #11 (March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023) – When Do Good Intentions Lead To Bad Outcomes?**

- Basian Jaeger & Mark van Vugt, “Psychological Barriers to Effective Altruism: An Evolutionary Perspective,” *Current Opinion in Psychology* Vol. 44 (April 2022), pp. 130-134.
- Frank Dobbin & Alexandra Kalev, *Getting to Diversity: What Works and What Doesn’t* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2022), pp. 35-63.
- Alexander Cooley & James Ron, “The NGO Scramble: Organizational Insecurity and the Political Economy of Transnational Action,” *International Security* Vol. 27 No. 1 (Summer 2002), pp. 5-39.
- Rochelle Terman, “Backlash: The Unintended Consequences of Western Human Rights Intervention,” *OpenDemocracy* (December 10, 2013). Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/backlash-unintended-consequences-of-western-human-rights-intervention/>

**Week #12 (April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2023) – What Poses The Most Significant Threat To Human Rights Today?**

- Thomas Homer-Dixon, “Environmental Scarcities and Violent Conflict: Evidence from Cases,” *International Security* Vol. 19 No. 1 (Summer 1994), pp. 5-40.
- Stephen Hopgood, “Human Rights on the Road to Nowhere,” in Stephen Hopgood, Jack Snyder & Leslie Vinjamuri (eds.), *Human Rights Futures* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 283-310.
- Human Rights Watch, “China’s Global Threat to Human Rights.” 2020.
- “Edward Snowden, Glenn Greenwald & Chris Hedges on NSA Leaks, Assange & Protecting a Free Internet,” *Democracy Now!* (December 24, 2021). Available at: [https://www.democracynow.org/2021/12/24/edward\\_snowden\\_glenn\\_greenwald\\_chris\\_hedges](https://www.democracynow.org/2021/12/24/edward_snowden_glenn_greenwald_chris_hedges)

**\*\*\*\*\*Analytical Essay #2 Due April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023**