

**University of São Paulo**  
**Institute of International Relations**

**The Political Dimension of Human Rights Protection - BRI0053 - 2026**

**Professor:** Cristiane Lucena  
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**Time and room:** Sala da Congregação;  
 Wednesdays, 13:30 - 17:10pm

**Teaching Assistant:** Nicoli França Rocha  
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**Student Q&A Session:** Room B, Wednesdays,  
 12:15pm - 13:00pm (first meeting on 12  
 August 2026)

**Course Description and Objectives:**

This course introduces students to the politics of international human rights protection, with a particular emphasis on issues of enforcement, institutional design, and regime effectiveness. The course is organized around five themes: 1. The scientific study of human rights protection, in which scholars analyze human rights protection through the paradigms of the social sciences. Particular attention is given to the historical evolution of the international human rights system and to the theoretical foundations for the scientific study of the subject. 2. Theory, methods, and data. In this section, we deepen the analysis of theoretical approaches and explore methodological challenges, as well as the available data for conducting empirical research on human rights protection across time and geographic context. 3. Democracy and democratization. This section examines the consequences of political regime change for the level of human rights protection. The assumption that these processes necessarily produce positive outcomes will be critically assessed. 4. International Human Rights Law. 5. International Human Rights Law and Domestic Politics. This section draws upon the rationalist paradigm to explore the incentives that encourage States to voluntarily comply with their international human rights obligations.

Throughout the course, students will have the opportunity to engage with contemporary academic debates on international human rights protection from the perspective of Political Science. They will be exposed to different viewpoints regarding the themes covered in the syllabus while also becoming familiar with methodological practices and datasets frequently employed in academic research and public policy debates in the field.

It is important to clarify what this course does not cover. This course does not address the philosophical foundations of human rights, nor does it engage with debates on human rights from the perspective of political theory. Likewise, it is not intended to replace a course on International Human Rights Law. With these caveats in mind, the course may nevertheless be of considerable value to students who intend to pursue future studies on international human rights protection within the fields of Law or Philosophy.

**Course Format and Assessment:**

Classes will consist of lectures, asynchronous activities, and student-led presentations (group seminars).

Group seminars constitute a central component of the course. Students, working in groups, will select and present a case decided by either the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights or the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. The use of audiovisual resources is encouraged, and presentations are expected to be creative.

There will be a final assessment covering course content.

The final grade will be distributed as follows:

**Group seminar:** 30%

**Asynchronous activities:** 30%

**Final assessment:** 40%

**Attendance:** minimum of 70% of classes.

### **Bibliography:**

Guerra, Sydney. 2011. *Direito Internacional dos Direitos Humanos*. Ed. Saraiva.

Hillebrecht, Courtney. 2014. *Domestic Politics and International Human Rights Tribunals*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.

Landman, Todd. 2006. *Studying Human Rights*. Routledge, New York, NY.

Simmons, Beth A. 2009. *Mobilizing for Human Rights: International Law in Domestic Politics*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.

\* The readings associated with this syllabus are available on Moodle, in the USP libraries, and/or directly from the course instructors.

### **Course Schedule:**

#### Human Rights Protection in the Social Sciences

Week 1 - 12 August 2026

- Introductions, course presentation. There are no readings for this class.

**Note:** On 12 August 2026, **the class will be held in the Computer Lab** instead of the regular classroom.

- Buergenthal, T. 2006. "The Evolving International Human Rights System." *The American Journal of International Law*, 100(4), pp. 783–807.
- Asynchronous activity

Recommended reading:

- Guerra, Sydney. 2011. *Direito Internacional dos Direitos Humanos*. Chapter 8.

Week 2 - 19 August 2026

- Hafner-Burton, Emilie. 2013. *Making Human Rights a Reality*. Introduction.
- Buergenthal, Thomas. 1997. "The Normative and Institutional Evolution of International Human Rights." *Human Rights Quarterly*, 19(4), pp. 703–723.
- Asynchronous activity: Conversations with History, interview with Jeremy Waldron, "Dignity, Human Rights, and Torture."

### Theoretical Approaches, Methods, and Data

#### Week 3 - 26 August 2026

- Landman, T. 2006. *Studying Human Rights*. Chapters 1 and 2.
- Asynchronous activity.

**Note:** There will be no class on **2 September 2026**, as the instructor will be participating in an international academic conference. Classes will also be suspended during the **week of 7 to 11 September 2026** in observance of Brazilian Independence Week.

#### Week 4 - 16 September 2026

- Simmons, B. 2009. *Mobilizing for Human Rights: International Law in Domestic Politics*. Chapter 2.
- Asynchronous activity

#### Recommended reading:

- Pauselli, Gino e Beth Simmons. 2026. "From Barriers to Abuse: Border Hardening and Torture." *International Organization* 80, pp. 324-358.

#### Week 5 - 23 September 2026

- Landman, T. 2006. *Studying Human Rights*. Chapters 4 and 5.
- CIRI; The Political Terror Scale; Freedom House.
- Asynchronous activity.

### Democracy and Democratization

#### Week 6 - 30 September 2026

- Moravcsik, A. 2000. "The Origins of Human Rights Regimes: Democratic Delegation in Postwar Europe." *International Organization*, 54(2), pp. 217–252.
- Seminar.

**Note:** There will be no class on **7 October 2026**, as the instructor will be participating in an international academic conference

#### Week 7 - 14 October 2026

- Davenport, Christian. 2004. "The Promise of Democratic Pacification: An Empirical Assessment." *International Studies Quarterly*, 48(3), pp. 539–560.
- Seminar.

#### Recommended reading:

- Hathaway, Oona. 2002. "Do Human Rights Treaties Matter?" *The Yale Law Journal*, Vol. 111, pp. 1935–2042.

#### Week 8 - 21 October 2026

- Hillebrecht, Courtney. 2014. *Domestic Politics and International Human Rights Tribunals*. Chapters 1 and 2.
- Seminar.

**Note:** There will be no class on **28 October 2026** in observance of Brazilian Public Servants' Day.

#### Week 9 - 04 November 2026

- Bueno de Mesquita, B., Cherif, F. M., Downs, G. W., and Smith, A. 2005. "Thinking Inside the Box: A Closer Look at Democracy and Human Rights." *International Studies Quarterly*, 49(3), pp. 439–458.
- Seminar.

## International Human Rights Law: Commitment and Compliance

### Week 10 - 11 November 2026

- Simmons, B. A. 2009. *Mobilizing for Human Rights*: International Law in Domestic Politics. Chapters 1 and 3.
- Seminar.

### Recommended reading:

- Koh, Harold. 1999. "How is International Human Rights Law Enforced?" *Indiana Law Journal*, 74(4), pp. 1397–1417.

### Week 11 - 18 November 2026

- Hafner-Burton, E. M., and Tsutsui, K. 2007. "Justice Lost! The Failure of International Human Rights Law to Matter Where Needed Most." *Journal of Peace Research*, 44(4), pp. 407–425.
- Creamer, Cosette, and Beth Simmons. 2020. "The Proof is in the Process: Self-Reporting Under International Human Rights Treaties." *American Journal of International Law*, 114(1), pp. 1–50.
- Seminar.

## International Human Rights Law and Domestic Politics

### Week 12 - 25 November 2026

- Simmons, B. A. 2009. *Mobilizing for Human Rights*: International Law in Domestic Politics. Chapter 4.
- Hillebrecht, Courtney. 2012. "The Domestic Mechanisms of Compliance with International Human Rights Law: Case Studies from the Inter-American Human Rights System." *Human Rights Quarterly*, 34(4), pp. 959–985.
- Seminar.

### Week 13 - 02 December 2026

- Final Assessment