Ruilin (Ray) LAI

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Education

Washington University in St. Louis
Ph.D. in Political Science — *expected* 2027
Committee: Margit Tavits (Chair), Deniz Aksoy (Co-Chair), Christopher Lucas, and Carlo Horz
Graduate Research Fellow, Weidenbaum Center — 2025-2027
M.A. in Political Science — 2024

Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
M.Phil. in Social Science — 2022
Committee: Jean Hong (Chair), Li Han, and Han Zhang
M.Sc. in Global China Studies — 2019

Hong Kong Baptist University
B.Soc.Sc. (First Class Honors) in Government and International Studies — 2018

Sciences Po (Institut d'études politiques de Paris)
One-year exchange study — 2016-2017

Additional Training

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor
ICPSR Summer Program in Quantitative Methods of Social Research — 2019

Interests

Substantive: Authoritarian politics, judicial politics, political communication

- Propaganda and (judicial) repression in autocracies
- Media bias and media capture in democracies
- Comparative judicial behavior
- Hong Kong politics; Chinese politics; Taiwanese politics

Methodological: Text-as-data

Publications

[1] "Can Autocratic Power Influence Media in Democracies? Evidence from China's Expulsion of American Journalists" [Link]
2026, ***Political Science Research and Methods*** 14(1)

[2] "Capturing the Fourth Estate: Government Influence on U.S. Newspaper Coverage of Foreign Leaders" [Link]
2025, ***British Journal of Political Science*** 55

[3] "Who Funds Whose Infrastructure: Country Dyadic Analysis of Global Project Finance Loans" with Jean Hong (Michigan) and Ilker Karaca (Iowa State) [Link]
2025, ***Review of International Political Economy*** 32(2)

[4] "Political Institutions and Global Project Finance Loans" with Jean Hong (Michigan) and Ilker Karaca (Iowa State) [Link]
2023, ***International Studies Quarterly*** 67(2)

Working Papers

R&R

[1] "Liberal Education and Illiberal Judgments" with Jean Hong (Michigan) ***R&R, American Political Science Review***

Under Review

[1] "After Repression: The Impacts of Confession Propaganda upon Failed Uprisings" with Eddy Yeung (Emory) and Matthew Gabel (WashU)

[2] "Brand Cues as a Source of Perceived Media Bias" with Leonid Peisakhin (NYU Abu Dhabi) and Greg Chih-Hsin Sheen (Academia Sinica)

[3] "Judicial Involvement and Public Reactions to Repression" with Deniz Aksoy (WashU)

Available Upon Request

[1] "Judicial Repression and Opposition to Autocracy: Evidence from Hong Kong"

- *Young Scholar Best Paper Award*, APSA Conference Group on Taiwan Studies
- *Best Graduate Paper Award*, Department of Political Science, WashU

[2] "Prosecutors, Lawyers, and Repression in Autocratic Courts" with Jean Hong (Michigan)

[3] "Dissidents' Acquittals in Autocratic Courts"

[4] "Populist Rhetoric Engages but Does Not Persuade: Evidence from 90 Countries and Three Experiments" with Christopher Lucas (WashU), Jacob M. Montgomery (WashU), Margit Tavits (WashU)

[5] "Public Reactions to Judicial Resistance during Democratic Backsliding" with Hsu Yumin Wang (NTHU) and Matthew Gabel (WashU)

Other Writing

[1] "China's Vaccine Scandal 2018: Pharmaceutical Companies Facing Heightened Regulatory Risks" with Gang Chen (East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore) 2018, *East Asian Institute Background Brief* 1386.

Honours, Grants, and Fellowships

External

Academic Mentoring Grant (US$8,000) | Institute for Humane Studies	2026
Humane Studies Fellowship (US$5,000) | Institute for Humane Studies	2026
Academic Mentoring Grant (US$8,000) | Institute for Humane Studies	2024

Internal

Arts & Sciences Conference Travel Grant (US$4,783) | WashU	2023-2026
Weidenbaum Center Small Grant (with Matthew Gabel) (US$15,000) | WashU	2026
Global Futures Small Grant (US$1,500) | WashU	2025
Weidenbaum Center Graduate Fellowship (US$5,000) | WashU	2025
LSQ Research Grant (US$5,000) | WashU	2025
Department Seed Grant (US$2,500) | WashU	2024
Weidenbaum Center Small Grant (with Matthew Gabel) (US$13,720) | WashU	2024
Weidenbaum Center Small Grant (with Deniz Aksoy) (US$15,000) | WashU	2023
Arts & Sciences Graduate Fellowship | WashU	2022-2027

Pre-doctoral (Total: ∼US$162,000)

Li Po Chun Charitable Trust Fund Scholarship (HK$8,000) | HKUST	2022
Dr Charles Chan Postgraduate Scholarship (HK$54,090) | HKUST	2020
Postgraduate Studentship (HK$415,920) | HKUST	2019-2022
EITM Certification Scholarship for ICPSR Summer Program (US$3,700)	2019
MGCS Program Scholarship (HK$20,000) | HKUST	2019
MGCS Program Conference Grant (HK$11,000) | HKUST	2019
Scholarship for Global Attachment Opportunities (HK$6,000) | HKBU	2018
Reaching Out Award (HK$10,000) | Hong Kong SAR Government	2018
Social Sciences Scholarship for Global Exchange (HK$4,000) | HKBU	2018
Exchange Sponsorship (HK$34,000) | HKBU	2017
Full Admission Scholarship (HK$680,000) | HKBU	2014-2018

Awards

Department Nominee, Dean's Award for Graduate Research Excellence | WashU	2026

Conferences & Talks

Annual Meetings († = discussant)

Association of Chinese Political Studies	2026† (Scheduled)
American Political Science Association	2021, 2024, 2025†, 2026 (Scheduled)
Midwest Political Science Association	2019-2026
International Studies Association	2021-2022
Western Political Science Association	2020

Small Conferences and Workshops (⋆ = invited, † = discussant)

APSA Mini-Conference on Chinese Politics	2026 (Scheduled)
New Faces in Chinese Politics Conference, MIT	2026 (Scheduled)
Comparative Politics Annual Conference,† WashU	2026
Emerging Scholars Conference in Public Law, University of Texas at Austin	2026
Authoritarian Institutions and State Dynamics,⋆ Arizona State University/IHS	2026
Protests and Politics Around the World,⋆ Yale University	2025
Virtual Workshop on Authoritarian Regimes (VWAR)	2025
SPSA Mini-Conference on The Politics of Authoritarian Regimes	2025
Pacific International Politics Conference (*co-author presented*)	2021

Talks

Weidenbaum Center Interdisciplinary Workshop Series, WashU	2026
Online Seminar, Global Research Association of Politics in Hong Kong (GRAPH)	2025

Service

Student Coordinator | Comparative Politics Annual Conference XIV 09/2026-

Assistant | Authoritarian Political Systems Group 11/2023-05/2024

Editorial Assistant | *American Political Science Review* 10/2023-05/2024

Research Experience

Research Assistant | Division of Social Science, NYU Abu Dhabi
PIs: Leonid Peisakhin and Peter van der Windt 01/2021-08/2022

Research Assistant | East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore
PIs: Gang Chen and Wei Shan 06/2018-08/2018

Fieldwork in townships of Guangdong Province, China
PI: Guojun He 05/2018-06/2018

Teaching Experience

Assistant Instructor | Department of Political Science, WashU

The Politics of Law and Order (advanced undergraduate)	Spring 2026
The Politics of the U.S. Supreme Court (advanced undergraduate)	Fall 2025
Research Design and Methods (advanced undergraduate)	Spring 2025
Data Science for Politics (undergraduate)	Fall 2024
Senior Thesis Research (advanced undergraduate)	Spring 2024
Political Violence (advanced undergraduate)	Fall 2023

Teaching Assistant | Division of Social Science, HKUST

Quantitative Data Analysis for Social Research (undergraduate)	Spring 2022
Politics Through Films (undergraduate)	Fall 2020

Skills

Language
Mandarin Chinese (Native), English (Fluent), Cantonese (Intermediate)

Software
R, Python, Java, Stata, LaTeX, Gephi, Visone

References

Margit Tavits
Dr. William Taussig Professor in Arts and Sciences
Washington University in St. Louis
Email: tavits@wustl.edu

Jean Hong
Associate Professor of Political Science and Korea Foundation Professor of Korean Studies
University of Michigan
Email: jeanhong@umich.edu

Deniz Aksoy
Associate Professor of Political Science
Washington University in St. Louis
Email: denizaksoy@wustl.edu

Christopher Lucas
Associate Professor of Political Science
Washington University in St. Louis
Email: christopher.lucas@wustl.edu

Matthew Gabel
Professor of Political Science
Washington University in St. Louis
Email: mgabel@wustl.edu

Other

Citizenship: Hong Kong