

SOSC 3630 Democracy and Democratization around the World

Fall semester, 2026

Classroom: 1410, Lift 25-26

Tuesday and Thursday: 16.30 -17.50

Instructor: Prof. Wenkai He

Office: Room 4579, Academic Building

Email: hewenkai@ust.hk

TA: Ruiming Zhang

Email: rzhangu@connect.ust.hk

Course Description:

The rise and fall of democracy is one of the most important political and social phenomenon in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A deep understanding of how such phenomenon occurred in various times and places has both theoretical and practical implications. There are quite different research paradigms to address this issue in existing literature of social science, including individual-rationality based political economy, class-based or social group-based political sociology, and both agent-based or structure-oriented approaches in historical sociology. Meanwhile, the scholarship to study the rise and fall of democracy is one active field in social science. Scholarship of state formation and state legitimation is increasingly integrated to the study of democratization and failure of democracy. It is thus important for the students to learn to evaluate the merits and defects in each research paradigm. This training of critical reasoning is also important to cultivate the students' ability to come up with new research questions or research agendas.

The course aims to introduce classical and cutting-edge studies in the scholarship to study the rise and fall of democracy to the students. It aims to train the students' ability to critically evaluate the existing scholarship and think about new research questions. It also aims to encourage the students understand the interactions between context and social science theories, as well as the relationship between normative theories of democracy and empirical studies of democracy.

AI policies:

This course aims to be an AI-integrated one. You are encouraged to use AI as a tool for learning, research, and access to information, subject to the guidelines below. Throughout the course we will treat AI as an object of critical evaluation as much as an aid: the central skill you are expected to develop is judging whether the information AI produces is accurate or fabricated, how to organize that information into arguments and counterarguments, and how to assess its intellectual merits against the scholarship we read.

1. Readings and class discussion. You are encouraged to use AI to gather additional information related to each week's readings and to deepen your understanding of the theories and debates we cover. You are expected to verify anything AI tells you against the assigned texts and other reliable sources, because AI models frequently fabricate citations, quotations, and facts. We will regularly practice this kind of verification in class.

2. Group research project. For the group project, you may use AI to help identify sources, gather background information, and translate primary materials and scholarship written in languages you do not read, so that your case study can draw on genuine primary evidence. However:

- AI may not substitute for your own analysis. The project must reflect your team's own reasoning in applying course theories to your chosen case.

- You remain fully responsible for the accuracy of everything you submit. Verify AI-generated translations, facts, and citations against the original materials; fabricated or misattributed sources will be treated as errors regardless of their origin.

- Because your presentation and final paper are graded principally on how well your team answers questions during and after the presentation, you must genuinely understand every part of your work. Content you cannot explain or defend in the live Q&A will not earn credit, whatever tool produced it.

- Disclose your use of AI. In the final paper, include a brief note describing how AI tools were used (for example, for translation, source discovery, or drafting), and cite AI-assisted translations of primary materials so that others can trace your evidence.

3. Final exam. The final exam is closed-book. No electronic AI-enabled devices of any kind will be allowed.

Grading:

1. Group Project and presentation of the group project: 60%

A group of some 4 students to conduct a research project. It should apply theories introduced in class to examine a specific case of democratic transition or collapse of a democracy. You must choose a case that you can read some primary materials (English, Chinese, Japanese, Korea, Spanish, etc.). You are encouraged to use AI translation to have access to primary materials or existing scholarship on democratization of a country that you don't read its language.

The project should be a one-case in-depth analysis. The project research must address the following questions: what are the features of mass society in a non-democratic society before transition to democracy; what are the legal means of political participation before democratic transition; who are the promoters or agents to push for democratic transition; how are the ruling elites reacted to demands for democracy; the actual process of a transition to democracy. The project team should be formed by Week 4.

In the end of the semester, each project team will make a presentation in class (40 minutes, including Question and Answer). Each team will submit collectively a final research paper which addresses questions raised during class presentation. The paper will be around 14 pages (double-spaced and Times New Roman, font 12). I will announce the due date after finishing all class presentations.

The evaluation of your presentation is mainly determined by how well you answer the questions after your presentation. The final submitted paper will be assessed by how well you address questions after your presentation.

2. One final exam: 40%:

The remaining 40 percent of your grade is determined by a final exam at the end of the term, which is accumulative and covers the content taught in the entire semester. The final exam will be a closed-book one and no electronic devices (including AI eye-glasses) are allowed in exam. The exam questions are mainly analytical short answer questions.

Rubrics:

Both components—the group research project and presentation (60%) and the final exam (40%)—are graded according to the following descriptors. The project and presentation are assessed on how well the team applies course theories to a chosen case, grounds its argument in genuine primary and scholarly evidence, and defends its work in the live question-and-answer session; the final exam is assessed on the analytical quality of short answers covering the whole semester.

Grades	Short Description	Elaboration on subject grading description
A	Excellent Performance	Demonstrates a deep understanding of the competing theories of democratization and democratic breakdown covered in the course. Exhibits exceptional critical thinking in evaluating rival research paradigms and in applying them to a specific case, grounds the argument in genuine primary materials and scholarship that are accurately cited and, where AI assistance is used, properly disclosed and verified, and produces insightful, original analysis. Answers questions in the live Q&A with independence and command, and communicates complex arguments clearly and persuasively.
B	Good Performance	Shows a solid grasp of the fundamental theories of democratization and their application to cases. Demonstrates sound critical thinking in evaluating and applying rival research paradigms, generally supports the argument with appropriate primary and scholarly evidence that is correctly cited, and produces accurate analysis. Responds competently to questions in the Q&A and communicates research ideas clearly.
C	Satisfactory Performance	Shows an adequate understanding of the main theories of democratization. Displays basic critical thinking in evaluating and applying research paradigms, uses primary and scholarly evidence sufficiently but with limited depth or sophistication, and produces correct but sometimes shallow analysis. Communicates the basic framework of the argument and answers questions at a general level.
D	Marginal Pass	Possesses only basic knowledge of the theories of democratization. Shows limited critical thinking in evaluating and applying research paradigms, uses primary and scholarly evidence with minimal effectiveness, and produces incomplete

Grades	Short Description	Elaboration on subject grading description
		or weak analysis. Answers to questions and communication of ideas are often unclear or superficial.
F	Fail	Demonstrates insufficient understanding of the theories of democratization. Lacks critical thinking in evaluating and applying research paradigms and the ability to use primary and scholarly evidence effectively. Fails to answer questions or to communicate and justify the analysis adequately.

Readings:

Week 1: Minimal Democracy for Democratization?

Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, 250-296.

Adam Przeworski, "Minimalist Conception of Democracy: A Defense," in Ira Shapiro and C. Hacker-Cordón, eds. *Democracy's Value* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 23-55.

Recommended: Phillippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, "What Democracy Is ... and Is not," *Journal of Democracy* 2, no. 3 (1994): 75-88.

Week 2: Three Waves of Democracy

Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 3-108.

Week 3: Structural Approaches to democratization: The Modernization School

Seymour Martin Lipset, "Some social requisites of democracy," *American Political Science Review*, 53, no. 1 (March 1959): 69-105.

Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), chapters 1-2

Recommended:

Evelyn Huber, Dietrich Rueschemeyer and John D. Stephens, "The Impact of Economic Development on Democracy," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, vol. 7, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 71-85.

Week 4: Actor-based approaches to democratization

Dankwart A. Rustow, "Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model," *Comparative Politics*, 2, no. 3 (April 1970): 337-63.

Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996): 3-65.

Recommended:

Thomas Carothers, "The End of the Transition Paradigm," *Journal of Democracy*, 13, no. 1 (January 2002): 5-21.

Week 5: The Bureaucratic Authoritarian State and Democratization

Samuel J. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

Francis Fukuyama, *State-building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

Recommended: Hyug Baeg Im, "The Rise of Bureaucratic Authoritarianism in South Korea," *World Politics*, vol. 39, no. 2 (January 1987): 231-257.

Week 6: The Political Economy Approach to Democratization

Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1-87.

Ben W. Ansell and David J. Samuels, *Inequality and Democratization: An Elite-Competition Approach* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), chapters 1-3.

Week 7: Elite Origins of Democracy

Michale Albertus and Victor Menaldo, *Authoritarianism and the Elite Origins of Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018),

Week 8: Conservative Parties and Democratization

Daniel Ziblatt, *Conservative Parties and the Birth of Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), introduction and chapters on Britain.

Week 9: Civil Society and Democratization:

Dylan Riley, *The Civic Foundations of Fascism in Europe: Italy, Spain, and Romania, 1870-1945* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), pp. 1-22.

Theda Skocpol, "The Tocqueville Problem: Civic Engagement in American Democracy," *Social Science History*, Vol. 21, Issue 4 (Winter 1997): 455-79.

Week 10: Taiwan's transition to democracy

Dan Slater and Joseph Wong, *From Development to Democracy: The Transformation of Modern Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022), introduction chapter and the chapter on Taiwan

Week 11-13: Group Presentation of Research Projects