

SOSC6030P: Political Culture

Spring 2026

Friday 9-11:50

Room: 2612B

Instructor: Professor Yue HOU (Associate Professor, Division of Social Science)

Office Hour: Friday noon-1pm & by appointment (Office 3348)

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Office Hour: by appointment

This version: Jan 21, 2026

This is a graduate-level seminar that offers an overview of theoretical and empirical approaches to the study of political culture. The study of culture is highly interdisciplinary, and this course surveys insights from fields such as political science, economics, public policy, psychology, evolutionary biology, and anthropology. We will define the term culture using the tools of social science and discuss questions including where culture comes from, how culture is transmitted, and how culture changes. We then examine the possible implications of culture in areas such as economic growth, public goods provision, ethnicity, and social movement. Throughout the course, we will read analyses drawn from many parts of the world, particularly Asia, Africa, North America, and Europe.

AI Policy

This course recognizes that AI-assisted tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, DeepSeek, Gemini) can be very useful in aiding academic research. Students may use such tools **only in ways that support—rather than replace—Independent thinking and scholarly judgment**. We want you to embrace AI and use it effectively. For all written work, you must include a statement at the end indicating whether and how AI tools were used. Students are fully responsible for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of all submitted work, including any content generated or suggested by AI tools.

Please see specific assignment instructions below for specific AI usage instructions.

Assignments and Grading

1. Participation (15 percent)

Active participation is required for this seminar. Participation includes both attendance in class and thoughtful contribution to discussion. Thoughtful contribution can only be achieved by completing all required readings prior to attending classes.

You may bring your laptop to class to access readings and notes. But please do not use your laptop for any other purposes.

2. Presentation and Discussion Leader (15 percent)

In one week, you will present a required reading and serve as a discussion leader. You should prepare slides for your presentation, summarize the broad points and methodology of the paper/book chapter, and highlight issues for discussion (e.g., what you would change, further suggestions on the paper, future directions, etc.).

The role of a discussion leader is also to jump start the week's discussion of the readings, key themes after the presentation. You will be evaluated on the quality of questions and how well you are able to facilitate discussion.

[AI Policy] You may use AI to aid your presentation and to raise discussion question. You may choose at most two discussion questions raised by AI, and mark them clearly (e.g., this question is proposed by Claude Sonnet 4.5).

Please circulate your questions (5-10 questions) on Canvas by 8pm on the day before our class meets.

3. Three Reading Responses (20 percent)

Students are expected to write three reading responses (2-3 pages, single-spaced), circulated to me and the other class members (by posting it on Canvas) no later than **noon (12:00) on Thursday before class meets.**

Your response paper should make an argument, not summarize. No summarization is necessary at all—we all have read the papers. Instead, these papers should try to build upon what the authors have argued, point out claims that do not follow from the evidence, spell out important implications the authors do not recognize, propose alternative hypotheses, develop a critique of the argument, method, and/or results.

[AI Policy] For response papers, you have the option of (a) either not using AI at all; or (b) using AI to come up with the initial critique. If you opt for (b), you should write a rebuttal of the AI-generated critique point by point (you may agree with some of their points and disagree with

others). Rebuttals will be evaluated on analytical depth. Students may agree with AI-generated critiques when appropriate but must justify their agreement using evidence and reasoning.

You should integrate previous weeks' readings when possible. You can choose to respond to one article/book chapter or multiple articles assigned for that week. You may choose the week when you serve as the discussion leader. Late papers will be penalized one third of a grade (e.g., A- to B+) for every day.

4. Research Paper Proposal (50 percent)

Due Date: May 15, 2026

The research proposal should be around 15-20 pages long (no more than 5,000 words). It should ask a precise research question, present hypotheses, address alternative explanations, provide concrete/detailed information about the research design and be placed in the relevant scholarly literature. Note that I expect a research paper to have every single component in an empirical political science paper *except the data analysis section*. The expectation is that you will be able to turn the research proposal into a publishable paper once you are able to collect the data.

Students who already have access to the requisite data to complete the analysis are strongly encouraged to conduct some preliminary data analysis and submit it as a part of the research proposal.

[AI Policy] You should **not** use AI tools to generate substantive ideas including research questions, hypotheses and design choices, but you may use them to polish your writing, and to clarify the presentation of your research questions and design. You must include a detailed statement at the end indicating whether and how AI tools were used.

- Example: “I used ChatGPT(GPT-5.2) to suggest alternative phrasings for clarity and to check grammar. I did not use AI to generate arguments, critiques, hypotheses, or research design.”

Note: this assignment does not require new data collection, therefore, I will not allow submission of a paper that you i) have previously submitted to another class or ii) plan to submit as a part of a different class.

Grading System: A (93%-100%); A- (90%-92%); B+ (87-89%); B (83-86%); B-(80-82%); C+(77-79%); C (73-76%); C-(70-72%); D (60-69%); F (0-59%)

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to adhere to the university's academic integrity policy. Students are expected to uphold HKUST's Academic Honor Code and to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. The University has zero tolerance of academic misconduct. Please refer to [Academic Integrity | HKUST – Academic Registry](#) for the University's definition of plagiarism and ways to avoid cheating and plagiarism.

AGENDA

* implies required reading.

Part 1: Understanding Culture

Meeting 1 (2/6): Introduction & Housekeeping

Meeting 2 (2/13): Colloquial and academic understanding of culture

- *Henrich, Joseph. 2016. The secret of our success. Ch1; Ch4
- *Fehr, Ernst and Karla, Hoff. 2011. "Introduction: Tastes, Castes and Culture: The Influence of Society on Preferences." *The Economic Journal*, 121(Nov) 396-412.
- James Bednar and Scott Page. 2007. "Can Game(s) Theory Explain Culture? The Emergence of Cultural Behavior within Multiple Games" *Rationality and Society* 19(1): 65098.

Meeting 3 (2/20): Individual meetings about final project

Meeting 4 (2/27): Where does culture come from

- *Talhelm, T. et al. "Large-scale Psychological differences within China explained by rice versus wheat agriculture" *Science*. 344.6184 (2014): 603-608.
- *Acharya, A, Blackwell Matthew and Sen, Maya. 2016. "The Political Legacy of American Slavery" *Journal of Politics* 78(3): 621-641.
- *Nunn, Nathan and Leonard Wantchekon. 2011. "The Slave Trade and the Origins of Mistrust in Africa" *AER*, 101(7): 3221-52.
- Alesina, Alberto, Giuliano, Paola and Nunn, Nathan. 2013. "On the Origins of Gender Roles: Women and the Plough" *QJE* 128(2): 469-530
- Galor, Oded, and Omer Ozak, 2016. "The Agricultural Origins of Time Preference" *AER*, 106(10) 3064-3103.

Meeting 5 (3/6): Cultural Persistence and Change

- * Bursztyn, Gonzalez and Yanagizawa-Drott. 2020. "Misperceived social norms: Women working outside the home in Saudi Arabia" *AER* (110):10.

- * Balcells, L., & Voytas, E. (2025). The Troubles and Beyond: The impact of a museum exhibit on a post-conflict society. *American Journal of Political Science*.
- Bazzi Samuel and Martin Fiszbein. 2025. "When Do Migrants Shape Culture?" *NBER Working Paper* 34001.
- Fouka, Vasiliki and Marco Tabellini. 2025. "Culture and Contemporary Political Preferences" Book chapter in *Handbook of Culture and Economic Behavior*. <https://vfouka.stanford.edu/research>.
- Guiso, Luigi, Sapienza Paola and Zingales Luigi. 2007. "Social Capital as Good Culture" *NBER WP* 13712.
- Cohen, D., Nisbett RE, Bowdle BF & Schwarz N. 1996. "Insult, Aggression and the Southern Culture of Honor: An 'Experimental Ethnography'" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 70(5): 945.
- Carter C. L. (2024). Extraction, Assimilation, and Accommodation: The Historical Foundations of Indigenous–State Relations in Latin America. *American Political Science Review*, 118(1).

Meeting 6 (3/13): Social Norms and the Enforcement of Culture

- * Choi, Poertner and Sambanis 2023. "The Hijab Penalty: Feminist Backlash to Muslim Immigrants" *AJPS*, 67(2).
- * Esberg, Jane. 2020. "Censorship as reward: evidence from pop culture censorship in Chile" *APSR* 114 (3)
- *Kim, Eunji. 2022. "Entertaining Beliefs in Economic Mobility" *AJPS*, 67(1).
- Enke, Benjamin. 2024. "Moral Boundaries" *Annual Review of Economics*, Vol 16.
- Biccieri, Cristina. 2017. Oxford U. Press. Chapter 1

Meeting 7 (3/20): Cultural Transmission

- * Bleck J., Bonan J., Lemay-Boucher P., & Sarr B. (2023). Drinking Tea with the Neighbors: Informal Clubs, General Trust, and Trustworthiness in Mali. *American Political Science Review*, 118(2).
- * Mousa, S. 2020. "Building Social Cohesion between Christians and Muslims through soccer in Post-ISIS Iraq" *Science*, 369 (6505).
- Fernandez, R Fogli A and Olivetti C. 2004. "Mothers and Sons: Preference Formation and Female Labor Force Dynamics" *QJE* 1249-99.
- Bisin Alberto and Verdier Thierry. 2010. "The Economics of Cultural Transmission and Socialization" *NBER Working Papers Series*. DOI:10.3386
- Dohmen, T. Falk, A., Huffman, D. and Sunde, U. 2012. "The Intergenerational Transmission of Risk and Trust Attitudes" *RES* 79(2): 645-677.

Meeting 8 (3/27): How to measure culture and cue

- * Blaydes and Grimmer. 2020. "Political Cultures: Measuring values heterogeneity" *PSRM*.
- * Zhu, J., Bai, S., Kang, S., Wang, J., & Liu, K. (2025). Authoritarian cue effect of state repression. *American Journal of Political Science*, 69(4).
- * Fryer R and Levitt S. 2004. "The cause and Consequences of Distinctively black names" *QJE*. 119(3): 767-805

- Bursztyn and Yang. 2022. “Misperception about others” *Annual Review of Economics*.
- Glaeser E et al. 2000. “Measuring Trust” *QJE* 115 (3).

(4/3 No class - Good Friday)

Part 2: Implications of Culture

Meeting 9 (4/10): Economic Growth

- * Cantoni D. 2015. “The Economic Effects of the Protestant Reformation: Testing the Weber Hypothesis in the German Lands” *JEEA*, 13(4).
- * Guiso, L Sapienza P and Zingales L. 2006. “Does Culture Affect Economic Outcomes?” *JEL* 20(2).
- * Yan Xiaochang and Yao Yang. 2025. “Culture and the Performance of Government Officials” *Economic Development and Cultural Change*.
- Grasse D. 2023. State Terror and Long-Run Development: The Persistence of the Khmer Rouge. *American Political Science Review*, 118(1).
- Zhang, Chuanchuan. 2020. “Clans, entrepreneurship, and development of the private sector in China” *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 48(1).
- Gorodnichenko Y. and Roland G. 2011. “Which dimensions of culture matter for long-run growth” *AER* 101(3).
- Tabellini Guido. 2010. “Culture and Institution: Economic development in the Regions of Europe” *JEEA*, 8(4).

Meeting 10 (4/17): Cooperation, Diversity and Public Goods Provision

- * Herrmann B Thoeni C and Gaechter S. 2008. “Antisocial Punishment Across Societies” *Science* 319 (5868)
- * He et al. 2023. “Reducing single-use cutlery with green nudges: evidence from China’s food-delivery industry” *Science*.
- * Cohn et al. 2019. “Civic honesty around the globe” *Science* 365 (6448).
- Henrich J Boyd et al. 2005. “Economic Man” in Cross-cultural perspective: behavioral experiments in 15 small-scale societies” *Behavioral and Brain Science*, 28(6)
- Miguel E. 2004. “Tribes or Nation? Nation Building and public goods in Kenya vs Tanzania” *World Politics* 56.

Meeting 11 (4/24): Quality of institutions

- * Jha Saumitra. 2013. “Trade, Institutions and Ethnic Tolerance: Evidence from South Asia” *APSR* 107(4)
- * Harris A. P. 2024. Can Racial Diversity among Judges Affect Sentencing Outcomes? *American Political Science Review*, 118(2).
- * Putnam, Robert, *Making Democracy Work*. Chapters 1
- Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*. Chapters 4-5.

- Lowes Nunn and Weigal. 2016 “The Evolution of Culture and Institutions: Evidence from the Kuba Kingdom” *Econometrica*

5/1 Labor Day – no class

Meeting 12 (5/8): Identity: ethnicity, nationality, and gender

- * Fouka V. 2020. “Backlash: The Unintended effects of language prohibition in US schools after world war I” *RES* 87(1).
- * Goldin and Rouse. 2000. “Orchestrating Impartiality: The impact of ‘blind’ Auditions on Female musicians” *AER* 90(4).
- * Hou and Truex. 2022. “Ethnic discrimination in criminal sentencing in China” *JOP*, 84(4).
- Minni, Virginia, Nguyen Kieu-Trang, Sarsons Heather and Srebot Carla. 2025. “Managers and the Cultural Transmission of Gender Norms” *Working Paper*.
- Sarsons, Heather. 2023. “Interpreting Signals in the Labor Market: Evidence from Medical Referrals” *Working Paper*.
- Weiss et al. 2023. “Educating for inclusion: Diversity education programs can reduce prejudice toward outgroups in Israel”

Learning Objectives and Outcomes:

On successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Be well-versed in both the classics and the frontier of research on the topic of political culture
2. Demonstrate how to critically evaluate empirical research, focusing on the quality of evidence that underpins claims made by empirical studies and generalized causal inference
3. Understand the basics of conducting empirical research on culture and related topics using rigorous empirical methods
4. Develop holistic and interdisciplinary perspectives including political science, economics, public policy, and other aspects of social science.

Communication and Feedback

Assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be communicated via Canvas or via email within two weeks of submission. Students who have further questions about the feedback including marks should consult the instructor or the course TA within five working days after the feedback is received.