

Summary

This dissertation investigates the relationship between culture and political institutions. While policy-makers and the general public typically assign a high importance to culture and cultural differences in explaining political regime outcomes, political scientists have been more skeptical. In an age of increasing disillusion with liberal democracy across the world, it is appropriate to assess to what extent this also portends future setbacks for democracy around the globe.

The dissertation consists of seven articles that each seeks to answer questions about the relationship between national institutions, culture and local democracy. Four concern the relationship between political culture and political institutions and seek with different hypotheses, research designs and data to contribute to our knowledge of how political culture affects institutions and vice versa. Two of the articles instead concern how regime transitions happen at the subnational level, to what extent different transitions are similar to national-level transitions and the role of national actors in inducing and preventing subnational regime transitions. One final article is methodological and relates to geography and subnational analysis.

I revisit the theme of culture and institutions with a view to improving causal identification over existing cross-national studies of democratic demand and supply. By using particular situations in which we can separate 'people' with internal cultural beliefs from 'places' with geographically fixed institutions that are external to the individual, I am able to separate the effects of culture and institutions to some extent. I do this by first studying individuals exposed to new institutions due to moving borders or migration and second by studying subnational democracy.

The dissertation shows that extraordinarily high Scandinavian trust is mostly attributable to post-1920 institutional factors such as the welfare state rather than to deep cultural legacies by using historical and contemporary data from the area affected by the Danish-German border changes in 1864 and 1920. Next, it shows that while migrants' political participation in Europe is shaped by their ancestral culture, it changes upon arrival and with time to increasingly resemble that in the destination country. Subnational and individual-level evidence suggest that national institutions are not responsible, but rather that natives pass on their norms for participation to their new migrant neighbors through bottom-up cultural diffusion and social interaction.

Next, we move to the study of subnational democracy and regime change. The dissertation first shows that in both democracies and autocracies, strong local coalitions can sometimes undertake subnational regime transitions that create or increase territorial unevenness in democracy. In both democracies and autocracies, equally, national institutions can also reverse these transitions after a while unless subnational leaders make themselves indispensable to national leaders. Focus then turns to the differences and similarities between subnational regime transitions and national regime transitions. Existing literature has emphasized marked differences, but this dissertation shows instead that some modes of subnational transition are very similar to national transitions, while others differ greatly. Specifically, subnational transitions with little outside interference and without violence are similar to many national transitions, while outside involvement and violent transition processes lead to the distinctive character of subnational regime transitions identified in the existing literature.

In the second-to-last chapter, I use this subnational approach to study the 'democracy gap' in Muslim majority countries. If the lower levels of democracy found in Muslim majority countries are due to political culture and a relative absence of local-level accountability pressures, then within-country analyses of religiously divided countries should show less democracy where more Muslims live. However, on the African continent territorial differences in perceived democracy do not line up with religious divisions, even when examining only the perceptions of local religious minorities to measure subnational democratic quality. A final chapter discusses how geographical information systems can help political scientists carry out subnational analysis.

Together, the dissertation shows the importance of moving beyond analysis of national institutions and engaging with local politics to better understand not just political culture, but also to bring about meaningful democracy.