

Institutional change and values

In K. Gërkhani and J. van Breemen (2019), 'Social Values and Institutional Change: An Experimental Study', *Journal of Institutional Economics* 15(2): 259-280 we experimentally investigate whether and how individuals change formal institutions governing an organization. The focus is on formal rules prescribing individual cooperation to achieve a collective goal. Our analysis accounts for the role of social norms and individuals' social values. We observe that prosocial individuals –who value cooperation and have a conflict between this value and existing rules allowing for low cooperation– attempt to change this rule. In line with our theoretical discussion, we also find that prosocial individuals first try to change the institutional environment by changing social norms. If this fails, these individuals change formal rules directly.

Institutional change and inequality

In K. Gërkhani, B. Volker and J. van Breemen (2018), 'Change of Cooperation Rules: The Interaction between Material Interests and Social Preferences' (*Working paper*), we examine whether and under what conditions individuals change the rules governing cooperation when both their material incentives to cooperate and their social preferences for outcome distributions differ. Our experimental findings show that proselves who benefit the most from cooperation are most likely to initiate a rule change to a higher minimum contribution level. Regarding prosocials, we find that their underlying motives in favor or against this rule change vary depending on their relative earnings' position. If they are 'wealthy', that is they have a higher earnings potential, they are more concerned about equality. When they are relatively 'less wealthy', they seem to care more about enhancing collective outcomes.

Institutional change and time lag

In Gërkhani, K. and J. Bruggeman (2015), 'Time Lag and Communication in Changing Unpopular Norms'. *PLoS ONE*, Vol. 10, e0124715, we address the question of what explains the conformity to unpopular norms (like female circumcision in Africa, bribery and corruption in various cultures, or the easy access to and possession of guns in the United States), and why people do not succeed in implementing change. We investigate experimentally how a time lag between individual support of a norm change and the change itself hinders such change, related to the critical mass of supporters needed to effectuate the change, and the (im)possibility of communicating about it. As predicted, we find unambiguous effects of time lag on precluding norm change; a higher threshold for a critical mass has the same effect. Communication facilitates choosing superior norms but it does not necessarily lead to norm change when the uncertainty on whether future norm change will materialize is high. Communication seems to help coordination on actions at the present but not the future. Hence, the uncertainty driven by time lag makes individuals choose the status quo, here the unpopular norm.

Interaction between welfare formal rules and perception of social norms

In Gërkhani, K. and F. Koster (2012), 'I Am Not Alone': Understanding Public Support for the Welfare State. *International Sociology* 27(6): 768-787, we explore to what extent and how individuals' welfare state attitudes relate to their subjective assessment of the

available social support. Using various sociological and sociopsychological theories, we first provide a theoretical analysis of the micro–macro links between perceived social support (micro), social trust in support availability (macro) and public attitudes towards welfare states (micro). An empirical test based on a large cross-country dataset of 31,122 respondents in 25 European countries shows that the more welfare is provided by the state, the less of it is desired in countries where individuals have the general belief that they can rely on each other for support. Importantly, only when considered jointly, do welfare state provision and social trust in support availability become essential in explaining welfare state attitudes.

Compliance between social norms and formal rules

In Benneker, V., K. Gërxhani and S. Steinmetz (2018), 'Violating your own human rights? The role of social norms in compliance with human rights treaties' (*Working paper*), we argue that although scholars are increasingly able to explain why states (do not) comply with human rights treaties, the role of social norms within populations on compliance has been neglected. This is remarkable, because human rights often directly address social norms. To our knowledge, this is the first study showing empirically that social norms are related to compliance with human rights treaties. It does so by using a quantitative multilevel model. Thereby, findings from additional in-depth interviews suggest that bargaining over social norms is an important process through which compliance with human rights can be influenced.