

Second Term, Academic Year 2025–2026

Political Culture

Time and Place: Tuesday 9:00–11:00, Seminar Room 2

Given by: Elias Dinas

Administrative Contact: Pia Dittmar (pia.dittmar@eui.eu)

Nomothetic accounts of politics have postulated a deductive framework to explain political behavior, in principle applicable across space and over time. In this framework, self-interest is the driving force of human action, dictating decisions based on two ingredients, both exogenously given: preferences and institutions. Within this set-up, culture has been treated as a residual quantity, devoid of any analytic power.

The purpose of this course is to unpack this residual. We will look at the following questions:

- What is culture?
- How is it formed?
- How does it persist over time?
- What forces lead to cultural change?
- What are the economic and political implications of culture?

We will try to think about the impact of culture on the way people understand politics, form their attitudes and act politically. We will also pay attention to institutions and processes that either help culture transcend from one generation to the next or lead to its rupture.

Learning Outcomes

Embedded in the discussion about culture are also other important concepts that we will look at, such as group identities and social norms. We will examine how social norms form, persist, foster cultural persistence and under what conditions they change. We will look at the implications of culture on both economic and non-economic outcomes. In so doing, we will look at work on historical persistence and long-term effects. Finally, we will look at how culture is linked to the formation of group identity. We will look at both theoretical and empirical work on social identity theory. Finally, we will look at the role of history in shaping political culture, paying also attention to institutions put in place to decide what historical narratives are to be transmitted within the polity.

The seminar will be run via a discussion on the readings. Neither presentations nor response papers will be requested. You will however be eagerly asked to contribute in the discussion. Auditing is only accepted if you let me know well in advance, i.e. at least a week before the seminar. You will be expected to be as prepared as if you were taking credits.

Political culture is more culture than political, unfortunately. This means that many of the readings will not necessarily come from political science; instead you will have to confront research in evolutionary biology, cultural anthropology and cognitive science. In general, the evolutionary logic of

“adaptation” and “fitness” is central in the course and will be often juxtaposed to the rational choice principle of *utility maximization*. In this respect, feel free to bring your own insights and private readings on the topic as the ones provided here are only indicative and by no means comprehensive for a strong grasp in these concepts.

Time of the class: 9-11am on Tuesdays, in Seminar Room 2—unless otherwise told. There might be some exceptions to this rule, unfortunately, but you will be notified well in advance.

Assignment

After the end of the seminar, you will have to write a 2,000 word essay. We can discuss this in more detail as the course proceeds. Tentative deadline will be **May 15, 2026** at noon.

Course Outline

Required readings denoted by *, although the distinction between what is compulsory and what is optional reading should be treated with caution. Ideally we all read everything and talk about all of the readings. Note that this is a **preliminary schedule**, and both the content and the order of readings will change prior to the first day of class. Here are some text that might be worth looking at in preparation ahead of the class:

- * Henrich, Joseph. 2020. *The WEIRDest People in the World: How the West Became Psychologically Peculiar and Particularly Prosperous*. Prelude: Your Brain has been Modified, Ch. 1 & 2.
- Jared Rubin, “Culture in Historical Political Economy:” [Broadstreet](#)
- Harari, Yuval Noah, *Sapiens, Part I*

Day 1: The Meaning of Culture

- * Henrich, Joseph. 2015. *The Secret of Our Success: How Culture Is Driving Human Evolution, Domesticating Our Species, and Making Us Smarter*. Ch. 1-6.
- * D’Andrade, Roy. 2008. “Some Kinds of Causal Powers That Make Up Culture” In *Explaining Culture Scientifically*, by Melissa Brown (ed), pp. 19-36.
- * Boyd, Robert and Peter J. Richerson, *Not by Genes Alone*, p. 58-98.
- D’Andrade, Roy Goodwin. “The cultural part of cognition.” *Cognitive science* 5.3 (1981): 179-195.
- Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind, Part I*.
- Fehr, Ernst, and Karla Hoff. Tastes, castes, and culture: the influence of society on preferences. The World Bank, 2011. Link [here](#)
- Gintis, Herbert. "Solving the puzzle of prosociality." *Rationality and Society* 15.2 (2003): 155-187.
- Henrich, Joseph, Steven J. Heine, and Ara Norenzayan. “The weirdest people in the world?.” *Behavioral and brain sciences* 33.2-3 (2010): 61-83.

Day 2: The Origins of Culture

- * Bazzi, Samuel, Martin Fiszbein, and Mesay Gebresilasse. "Frontier culture: The roots and persistence of "rugged individualism" in the United States." *Econometrica* 88.6 (2020): 2329-2368.
- * Alesina, Alberto, Giuliano, Paola and Nunn, Nathan. 2013. "On the Origins of Gender Roles: Women and the Plough,"
- * Nunn, Nathan and Leonard Wantchekon. 2011. "The Slave Trade and the Origins of Mistrust in Africa." *American Economic Review*, 101(7):3221-52.
- Michalopoulos, Stelios. 2012. "The Origins of Ethnolinguistic Diversity," *American Economic Review*, 102(4): 1508-39.
- Benjamin Enke, Kinship, Cooperation, and the Evolution of Moral Systems, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Volume 134, Issue 2, May 2019, Pages 953–1019, <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjz001>
- Avner Greif, "Family structure, institutions, and growth: the origins and implications of western corporations." *American Economic Review* 96.2 (2006): 308-312.
- Henrich, Joseph. 2020. *The WEIRDest People in the World: How the West Became Psychologically Peculiar and Particularly Prosperous*. Part II.
- Galor, Oded, and Ömer Özak. "The agricultural origins of time preference." *American Economic Review* 106.10 (2016): 3064-3103.
- Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, (Princeton University Press, 1993), ch. 5: "Tracing the Roots of Civic Community", pp. 121 – 162.
- Acharya, Avidit, Matthew Blackwell, and Maya Sen. "The Political Legacy of American Slavery." *The Journal of Politics* 78, no. 3 (2016): 621–641.
- Dinas, Elias, and Ksenia Northmore-Ball. "The ideological shadow of authoritarianism." *Comparative Political Studies* 53:12 (2020): 1957-1991.
- Alesina, Alberto and Nicola Fuchs-Schündeln. 2007. "Goodbye Lenin (or Not?): The Effect of Communism on People's Preferences," *American Economic Review*, 97(4):1507-1528.

Day 3: Cultural Transmission

- * Bisin, Alberto and Verdier, Thierry. 2011. "The Economics of Cultural Transmission and Socialization," in Benhabib, Jess and Bisin, Alberto and Jackson Matthew O. (eds.) *The Handbook of Social Economics* Vol. 1A. Link [here](#).
- * Miho, Antonela, Alexandra Jarotschkin, and Ekaterina Zhuravskaya. "Diffusion of gender norms: Evidence from Stalin's ethnic deportations." *Journal of the European Economic Association* 22.2 (2024): 475-527.
- * Charnysh, Volha, and Leonid Peisakhin. "The Role of Communities in the Transmission of Political Values: Evidence from Forced Population Transfers." *British Journal of Political Science* (2021): 1-21.
- Bisin, Alberto, and Thierry Verdier. "The economics of cultural transmission and the dynamics of preferences." *Journal of Economic theory* 97.2 (2001): 298-319.
- Henrich, Joseph, and Francisco J. Gil-White. "The evolution of prestige: Freely conferred deference as a mechanism for enhancing the benefits of cultural transmission." *Evolution and human behavior* 22.3 (2001): 165-196.

- Axelrod, Robert. "The dissemination of culture: A model with local convergence and global polarization." *Journal of conflict resolution* 41.2 (1997): 203-226.
- Salganik, Matthew J., and Duncan J. Watts. "Leading the herd astray: An experimental study of self-fulfilling prophecies in an artificial cultural market." *Social psychology quarterly* 71.4 (2008): 338-355.
- Apicella, Coren L., et al. "Social networks and cooperation in hunter-gatherers." *Nature* 481.7382 (2012): 497-501.
- Lyons, Derek E. "The rational continuum of human imitation." *Mirror neuron systems*. Humana Press, 2008. 77-103. Elsevier.

Day 4: Cultural Persistence

- * Cohen, D., Nisbett, R. E., Bowdle, B. F., & Schwarz, N. 1996. "Insult, Aggression, and the Southern Culture of Honor: An "Experimental Ethnography." *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 70(5), 945.
- * Grosjean, Pauline. 2014. "A History of Violence: The Culture of Honor and Homicide in the US South." *Journal of the European Economic Association* 12.5: 1285-1316.
- * Guiso, L., Sapienza, P., & Zingales, L. (2008). Social capital as good culture. *Journal of the European economic Association*, 6(2-3), 295-320.
- * Guiso, Luigi, Paola Sapienza, and Luigi Zingales. "Long-term persistence." *Journal of the European Economic Association* 14.6 (2016): 1401-1436.
- * Voigtlander, Nico and Voth, Hans-Joachim. 2012. "Persecution Perpetuated: The Medieval Origins of Anti-Semitic Violence in Nazi Germany," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 127(3), 1339-1392.
- * Fouka, Vasiliki and Hans-Joachim Voth. 2020. Collective Remembrance and Private Choice: German-Greek Conflict and Consumer Behavior in Times of Crisis. Working Paper.
- * Rozenas, Arturas, and Yuri Zhukov. "Mass Repression and Political Loyalty: Evidence from Stalin's' Terror by Hunger'." *American Political Science Review*, 113:12, 2019:569-83.
- Dinas, Elias, and Elli Palaiologou. "Interrupted Continuities: Local History and Support for the Radical Right." *Journal of Historical Political Economy* 4.3 (2024): 391-428.
- Cantoni, Davide, Felix Hagemeister, and Mark Westcott. "Persistence and activation of right-wing political ideology." (2019).
- Ochsner, Christian & Felix Roesel. 2020. Mobilizing History. Working Paper.
- Lupu, Noam, and Leonid Peisakhin. "The legacy of political violence across generations." *American Journal of Political Science* 61.4 (2017): 836-851.
- Michalopoulos, Stelios, and Melanie Meng Xue. *Folklore*. No. w25430. National Bureau of Economic Research, 2019.
- Charnysh, Volha. "Historical Legacies of Interethnic Competition: Anti-Semitism and the EU Referendum in Poland." *Comparative Political Studies* 48.13 (2015): 1711-1745. (2019).

Day 5: Social Norms

- * Bicchieri, Cristina. 2006. "The Rules We Live By," in her *Grammar of Society*.
- * Bicchieri, Cristina. 2017. Norms in the Wild: How to Diagnose, Measure, and Change Social Norms. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter 1.
- * Elster, Jon. 1989. *The Cement of Society: A Study of Social Order*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Ch. 3.
- * Robert Ellickson, Order Without Law, Ch. 1-6 & 11-13.
- Elster, Jon. "Norms." in The Oxford handbook of analytical sociology. 2009.
- Timur Kuran, 1997. *Private Truths, Public Lies: The Social Consequences of Preference Falsification*, Ch. 1.
- Hoff, Karla, Mayuresh Kshetramade, and Ernst Fehr. "Caste and punishment: The legacy of caste culture in norm enforcement." *The economic journal* 121.556 (2011): F449-F475.
- Heckathorn, Douglas D. "Collective action and the second-order free-rider problem." *Rationality and society* 1.1 (1989): 78-100.
- Axelrod, Robert. "An evolutionary approach to norms." *The American political science review* (1986): 1095-1111.

Day 6: Cultural Change

- * Mackie, Gerry. 1996. "Ending Footbinding and Infibulation: A Convention Account." *American Sociological Review*, 999-1017.
- * Vogt, Sonja, Nadia Ahmed Mohammed Zaid, Hilal El Fadil Ahmed, Ernst Fehr, and Charles Efferson. 2016. "Changing cultural attitudes towards female genital cutting." *Nature* 538, no. 7626: 506-509.
- * Bursztyn, Leonardo, Georgy Egorov, and Stefano Fiorin. From extreme to mainstream: How social norms unravel. No. w23415. National Bureau of Economic Research, 2017.
- * Bursztyn, Leonardo, Alessandra L. González, and David Yanagizawa-Drott. Misperceived social norms: Female labor force participation in Saudi Arabia. No. w24736. National Bureau of Economic Research, 2018.
- * Dinas, Elias, Sergi Martínez, and Vicente Valentim. "Social norm change, political symbols, and expression of stigmatized preferences." *The Journal of Politics* 86.2 (2024): 488-506.
- Greif, Avner, and David D. Laitin. "A theory of endogenous institutional change." *American political science review* (2004): 633-652.
- Tankard, Margaret E., and Elizabeth Levy Paluck. "The Effect of a Supreme Court Decision Regarding Gay Marriage on Social Norms and Personal Attitudes." *Psychological Science* 28, no. 9: 1334-44.
- Álvarez-Benjumea, Amalia, and Fabian Winter. "Normative Change and Culture of Hate: An Experiment in Online Environments." *European Sociological Review* 34, no. 3: 223-37.
- Valentim, Vicente, Elias Dinas, and Daniel Ziblatt. "How Mainstream Politicians Erode Norms." (2023).
- Valentim, Vicente. "Parliamentary representation and the normalization of radical right support." *Comparative Political Studies* 54.14 (2021): 2475-2511.

- Dinas, Elias, Sergi Martínez, and Vicente Valentim. 2020. "The Normalization of Stigmatized Political Symbols." Available at SSRN 3516831.
- Fearon, James D. "Chunky Shoes." (1998).
- Fouka, Vicky, "Social Change" in [Broadstreet](#)

Day 7: The Effects of Culture

So, you really need to read at least the basics from Weber's protestant ethic thesis:

- * Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.

For two empirical examinations of the thesis, see:

- Becker, S. O., and Woessmann, L. 2009. "Was Weber Wrong? A Human Capital Theory of Protestant Economic History." *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 531-596.
- Cantoni, D. 2015. "The Economic Effects of the Protestant Reformation: Testing the Weber Hypothesis in the German Lands," *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 13(4), 561-598.

Economic Effects:

- * Fernández, Raquel. "Does culture matter?." *Handbook of social economics* 1 (2011): 481-510.
- * Tabellini, Guido. 2010. "Culture and Institutions: Economic Development in the Regions of Europe," *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 8(4): 677-716.
- Campante, Filipe and Yanagizawa, David. 2015 "Does Religion Affect Economic Growth and Happiness? Evidence from Ramadan," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 130(2), pp.615-658.
- Guiso, L., Sapienza, P. and Zingales, L. 2006. "Does Culture Affect Economic Outcomes?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 20(2): 23 - 48.
- Bénabou, R., and Tirole, J.. 2005. "Belief in a Just World and Redistributive Politics," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 121(2), 699-746.

Effects on Trust, Public Good Provision and Politics:

- * Herrmann, B., Thoeni, C. and Gaechter, S. 2008. "Antisocial Punishment Across Societies." *Science*. 319(5868), 1362-1367.
- * Kulkarni, Parashar. 2017. "Are There Cultural Prerequisites to Effective Property Rights? Evidence from Inheritance Rights of Widows in Colonial India," *British Journal of Political Science*.
- Charnysh, Volha (2019). Diversity, Institutions, and Economic Outcomes: Post-WWII Displacement in Poland. *American Political Science Review*, 113(2), 423-441.
- Ziblatt, Daniel, Hanno Hilbig, and Daniel Bischof, 2020. *Wealth of Tongues: Why Peripheral Regions Vote for the Radical Right in Germany*. A draft can be found [here](#).
- Miguel, E. and Mary Kay Gugerty. 2005. "Ethnic Diversity, Social Sanctions, and Public Goods in Kenya," *Journal of Public Economics* 89:325-68.

Day 8: The Politics of Culture

- * Lowes, Sara, Nathan Nunn, James A. Robinson, and Jonathan L. Weigel. "The evolution of culture and institutions: Evidence from the Kuba Kingdom." *Econometrica* 85, no. 4 (2017): 1065-1091.
- * Bau, Natalie. "Can policy change culture? Government pension plans and traditional kinship practices." (2019).
- * David Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture: Politics and Religious Change among the Yoruba*, University of Chicago Press, 1986, Ch. 1, "The Two Faces of Culture", p. 1-20.
- * Posner, Daniel N. "The political salience of cultural difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas are allies in Zambia and adversaries in Malawi." *American Political Science Review* (2004): 529-545.
- Myron Aronoff, *Israeli Visions and Divisions: Cultural Change and Political Conflict* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1995), ch. 3. "The Manipulation of Political Culture under the Likud", pp. 43 – 67
- Sebastian M. Büttner & Anna Delius, 2015. "World Culture in European Memory Politics? New European Memory Agents Between Epistemic Framing and Political Agenda Setting," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 23:3, 391-404.
- Neumayer, L., 2015. "Integrating the central European past into a common narrative: the mobilizations around the "crimes of communism" in the European Parliament." *Journal of contemporary European studies*, 23, 344–363.
- Subotić, Jelena. *Yellow star, red star: Holocaust remembrance after communism*. Cornell University Press, 2019, ch. 2,3.

Day 9: Ethnic and national identity

Two sets of readings: a) on identity formation as well as its consequences for the way we see the world and others; and b) the role of culture in forging such identities by (ab)using history and public memory. Let's see where this will get us.

Group Identity: Causes and Consequences

- * Shayo, Moses. "A model of social identity with an application to political economy: Nation, class, and redistribution." *American Political Science Review* (2009): 147-174.
- * Akerlof, George A., and Rachel E. Kranton. "Economics and identity." *The quarterly journal of economics* 115.3 (2000): 715-753.

Culture as an ingredient of national identity

- * Armstrong, John. 1982. *Nations before Nationalism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. pp. 3-7, 14-53.
- * Eric Hobsbawm, "The Social Formation of the Past: Some Questions" *Past and Present*, no. 55 (May, 1972), pp. 3 – 17.
- * Fouka, Vasiliki. "Backlash: The unintended effects of language prohibition in US schools after World War I." *The Review of Economic Studies* 87.1 (2020): 204-239.
- Hugh Trevor-Roper, "The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland", in *The Invention of Tradition*, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Rangers, eds. (Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 15 – 41

- Barry Schwartz, “Social Change and Collective Memory: The Democratization of George Washington”, *American Sociological Review*, vol. 56, no. 2 (April, 1991), pp. 221 – 236.
- Russel Shorto, “How Christian Were the Founders?”, *The New York Times Magazine*, February 11, 2010.

Day 10: Discussion – Research Project Proposals/What have we learned so far, and what remains to be explored?