

# The Cultural Determinants of Democracy and Dictatorship

Are certain cultures incompatible with democracy?

Cultural arguments generally fall into two categories:

1. **Primordialist arguments** treat culture as something that is objective and inherited – something that has been fixed since ‘primordial’ times.
2. **Constructivist arguments** treat culture as something that is constructed or invented rather than inherited.

The notion that political institutions such as democracy and dictatorship are more suited to some cultures than others is not new.

In *The Persians* (472 BC), **Aeschylus** argued that authoritarianism was suited to Asia and that democracy was suited to Athens.

**Montesquieu** argued that different forms of government required certain cultures.

- Monarchy is suited to Europe.
- Despotism is suited to the Orient.
- Democracy is suited to the ancient world.

Only by chance can one successfully export the institutions of one country to another.

**John Stuart Mill** stated that “no one believes that every people is capable of working every sort of institutions.”

Legislators should take account of “pre-existing habits and feelings” when making laws and creating institutions.

But Mill also thought culture was malleable.

Although “people are more easily induced to do, and do more easily, what they are already used to, . . . [they] . . . learn to do things new to them. Familiarity is a great help; but much dwelling on an idea will make it familiar, even when strange at first.”



**Cultural modernization theory** argues that socioeconomic development does not directly cause democracy; instead, economic development produces certain cultural changes, such as the emergence of a civic culture, and it is these cultural changes that ultimately produce democratic reform.

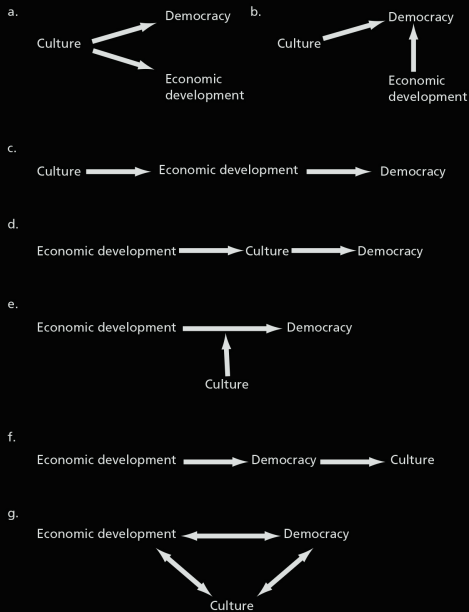
Problems inherent in the arguments of **Montesquieu** and **Mill** continue to characterize culturalist arguments today.

What exactly is it about culture that matters?

What is the causal relationship between cultural, economic, and political factors?

**FIGURE 7.1**

**Culture, Economic Development, and Democracy:  
Some Potential Causal Relationships**



Does democracy require a civic culture?

In *The Civic Culture* (1965), **Almond and Verba** identify three types of political culture.

**Parochial** – Traditional system of African tribes.

**Subject** – Centralized authoritarian systems.

**Participant/Civic** – Democracy

Only a participant or civic culture is compatible with democracy.

Political culture is determined by how individuals think and feel about the political system.

**Almond** and **Verba** studied political culture by conducting surveys.

Almond and Verba conceptualized **civic culture** as a shared cluster of attitudes that included things like a high level of interpersonal trust, a preference for gradual societal change, a high level of support for the existing political system, and high levels of life satisfaction.

**They claimed that countries with a civic culture were more likely to become and stay democratic.**

Inglehart and Welzel (2005) claim that there are two major dimensions of cross-cultural variation in the world today.

1. Traditional values versus secular-rational values
2. Survival values versus self-expression values



## Traditional values

- Religion, traditional family roles, and deference to authority.
- National pride and rejection of divorce, euthanasia, suicide, and abortion.

## Secular-rational values

- Less emphasis on religion, traditional family roles, and deference to authority.
- Cosmopolitan and more support for divorce, euthanasia, suicide, and abortion.

## Survival values

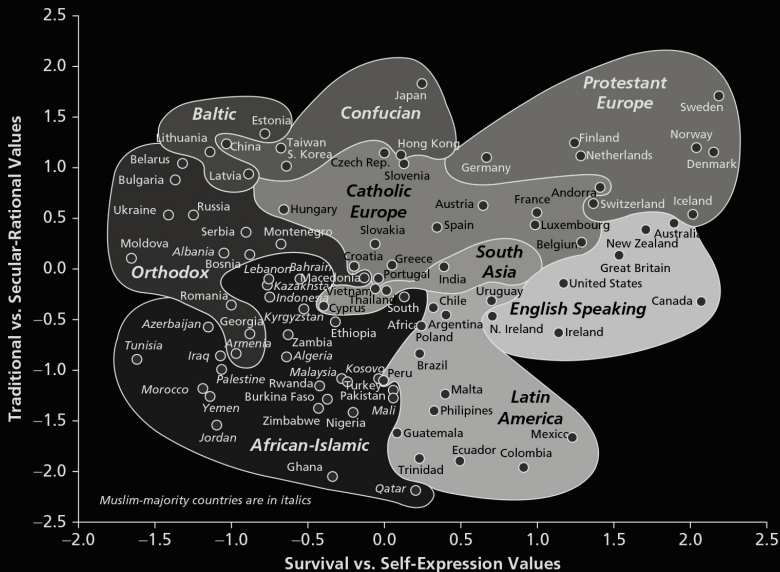
- Emphasis on physical and economic security.
- Ethnocentric world view and low levels of interpersonal trust and tolerance.

## Self-expression values

- Emphasis on gender, racial, and sexual equality; environmental protection; tolerance of diversity; civic activism; and life satisfaction.
- High levels of interpersonal trust and desire for a greater say in how political and economic decisions are made.

**FIGURE 7.2**

# A Cultural Map of the World



Economic development produces predictable cultural changes that help the democratization process.

The **industrialization phase** sees countries move away from traditional values to secular-rational values.

The **post-industrialization phase** sees countries move away from survival values to self-expression values

There has been considerable debate about the causal relationship between culture, economic development, and democracy.

### Values Story (Cultural Modernization Theory)

- Economic development produces cultural change that leads to democratization.

### Institutional Story

- Economic development leads to democratization, which, in turn, leads to cultural change.

Today, scholars frequently use **surveys** to evaluate attitudes toward democracy.

“Democracy may have problems, but it’s better than any other form of government. Could you please tell me if you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree?”

**World Values Survey**, click [▶ here](#)

Comparative politics researchers often confront problems when conducting surveys.

## Problem 1: Sensitive topics and preference falsification

**Social desirability bias** refers to the tendency of individuals to overreport 'good behavior' and underreport 'bad behavior.'

Depending on the topic of the survey, there can be strong social incentives to lie or not even participate.



## Problem 2: Differential item functioning

Differential item functioning (DIF) exists when individuals or groups understand survey items differently or evaluate survey items using different scales.

This is particularly problematic when we survey people from different regions, countries, or cultures.

“the state of Kerala has the highest rates of literacy . . . and longevity . . . in India. But it also has, by a very wide margin, the highest rate of reported morbidity among all Indian states . . . At the other extreme, states with low longevity, with woeful medical and educational facilities, such as Bihar, have the lowest rates of reported morbidity in India. Indeed, the lowness of reported morbidity runs almost fully in the opposite direction to life expectancy, in interstate comparisons . . . In disease by disease comparison, while Kerala has much higher reported morbidity rates than the rest of India, the United States has even higher rates for the same illnesses. If we insist on relying on self-reported morbidity as the measure, we would have to conclude that the United States is the least healthy in this comparison, followed by Kerala, with ill provided Bihar enjoying the highest level of health. In other words, the most common measure of the health of populations is negatively correlated with actual health.” (**Amartya Sen**)

Political scientists are increasingly aware of these problems with surveys and have begun to develop ingenious methods to get around them.

## Problem 1: Sensitive topics and preference falsification

### Potential solutions:

1. Survey administration
2. Randomized response techniques
3. List experiments
4. Endorsement experiments

## Problem 2: Differential item functioning

### Potential solutions:

- Anchoring vignettes

Recent arguments linking culture and democracy have increasingly focused on religion.

**Samuel Huntington**, *The Clash of Civilizations* (1993).

- Conflicts in the world will be cultural rather than ideological or economic.
- “The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.”
- **Civilizations:** Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin America, Africa.

Huntington argues that the Western belief in the universality of the West's values and its insistence on imposing those values through democratization efforts will only antagonize other civilizations and lead to conflict.

“Western ideas of individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free markets, the separation of church and state, often have little resonance in Islamic, Confucian, Japanese, Hindu, Buddhist, or Orthodox cultures.”



**Edward Said** on *Clash of Civilizations*, click [▶ here](#)

Certain religions are incompatible with democracy.

- Islamic and Confucianist countries cannot sustain democracy.
- Catholic countries will find it hard to sustain democracy.
- Violent conflict will be particularly prevalent between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Arguments like this have a long history.

## Protestantism

- **Max Weber** (1904-1905): Protestantism promotes democracy because of its connection to capitalism and economic development.
- **Lipset** (1959): “Protestantism’s emphasis on individual responsibility furthered the emergence of democratic values.”
- **Woodberry** (2004): The depth and breadth of Protestant missionary activity during colonial periods explains why some countries are democratic.

## Catholicism

- **Huntington:** Catholicism is seen as antithetical to democracy.
- The emphasis on there being only one church and one truth is seen as incompatible with democracy's need to accept various different and competing ideologies as legitimate.
- Hierarchy in the Catholic church and the distinction between clergy and laity is seen as posing problems for the acceptance of more socially and politically egalitarian institutions such as democracy.

## Confucianism

- **Huntington:** Confucian democracy is a contradiction in terms.
- Some argued in the **Asian Values Debate** of the 1990s that Confucianism's respect for authority and its emphasis on communalism make it incompatible with democracy.

## Islam

- **Huntington:** Islam has a violent streak that predisposes Islamic countries to authoritarianism.
- Islam is unable to disassociate religious and political spheres.
- Islam treats women unequally.

A common thread in these arguments is that there is something in the doctrines of these religions that make them incompatible with democracy.

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However, nearly all religions have doctrinal elements that make them seem both compatible and incompatible with democracy.



## Confucianism

- While Confucianism has no concept of civil society, rule of law, or individual rights, it does have a tradition of limited government, it recognize the right of rebellion against rulers who deviate from the prescribed 'Way', and it is religiously tolerant.

## Islam

- The basic tenets of Islam have lent themselves to more or less anti-democratic interpretations over time.
- Some argue that concepts such as *shura* (consultation), *ijma* (consensus of the community), and *ijtihad* (reinterpretation), and *maslaha* (public welfare) provide the basis for parliamentary government, representative elections, and religious reform.
- Many believe that the emphasis on God's laws is just an alternative way of seeking to limit the power of the state.

All religions contain doctrinal elements that can be viewed as conducive or detrimental to democracy.

Thus, it becomes an empirical question as to whether certain religions pose difficulties for the emergence and survival of democracy.

Growing evidence that cultures are invented, constructed, and malleable rather than primordial, inherited, and unchanging.

Considerable evidence that the stance of different religions towards political institutions often depends less on religious doctrine and more on the interests of religious leaders at the time.

The empirical reality is that all religions have historically been compatible with a wide range of political institutions.

## Islam and Democracy

- With the exception of Iran since 1979 and Afghanistan under the Taliban, there have been few historical precedents for Mullahs controlling political power in Islamic countries.
- Constitution of Medina, 622 AD.

Are some cultures *more or less* compatible with democracy than others?

Several studies suggest that Islam is particularly bad for democracy.

But ...



Most of the studies examine the effect of Islam on democracy at a fixed point in time.

## Western Civilization

- “It is hard to see the inter-war experiment with democracy for the novelty that it was: yet we should certainly not assume that democracy is suited to Europe . . . Triumphant in 1918, it was virtually extinct twenty years on . . . Europe found other, authoritarian, forms of political order no more foreign to its traditions” (**Mazower 1998**).

## Fixed point in time.

- Arguments that Protestantism is good for democracy were common when most democracies were Protestant.
- Arguments that Catholicism is bad for democracy were common when there were few Catholic democracies.
- Contemporary arguments that Islam is bad for democracy are common because there are few Islamic democracies.

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We should look at the effect on religion on democracy **over time**.

## Catholic Hypothesis

- Countries with a majority Catholic population are less likely to become and stay democratic.

## Protestant Hypothesis

- Countries with a majority Protestant population are less likely to become and stay democratic.

## Islam Hypothesis

- Countries with a majority Muslim population are less likely to become and stay democratic.

**TABLE 7.1****Countries with a Majority Muslim, Protestant, or Catholic Population**

Religion of majority	Countries
Muslim	Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Brunei, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Gambia, Guinea, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, (Republic of) Yemen
Protestant	Angola, Antigua, Bahamas, Barbados, Denmark, Fiji, Finland, Iceland, Liberia, Marshall Islands, Namibia, Norway, Papua New Guinea, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Sweden, Tonga, United Kingdom, United States, Vanuatu, Western Samoa
Catholic	Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Burundi, Cape Verde, Chile, Colombia, Congo, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, France, Gabon, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kiribati, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Malta, Mexico, Micronesia, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Rwanda, St. Lucia, San Marino, Sao Tomé and Príncipe, Seychelles, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Uruguay, Venezuela, Yugoslavia

*Note:* "Catholic" includes both Roman Catholic and Orthodox religions.

## Ethnic Group Hypothesis

- Countries with a large number of ethnic groups are less likely to become and stay democratic.

## Religious Group Hypothesis

- Countries with a large number of religious groups are less likely to become and stay democratic.

## Cultural Group Hypothesis

- Countries with a large number of cultural groups are less likely to become and stay democratic.

TABLE 7.2

## Cultural and Economic Determinants of Democratic Emergence

Dependent variable: Probability that a country will be a democracy this year if it was a dictatorship last year

Independent Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	
Muslim majority	-0.28** (0.12)	-0.18 (0.16)	-0.23 (0.17)	-0.25 (0.19)	-0.18 (0.16)	← Coefficient ← Standard error
Protestant majority	-0.56 (0.35)	-0.42 (0.38)	-0.40 (0.38)	-0.45 (0.39)	-0.43 (0.38)	
Catholic majority	0.33*** (0.10)	0.31*** (0.12)	0.26** (0.12)	0.26** (0.13)	0.31** (0.13)	
GDP per capita		0.00004* (0.00002)	0.00003* (0.00002)	0.00003* (0.00002)	0.00004* (0.00002)	
Growth in GDP per capita		-0.02** (0.01)	-0.02** (0.01)	-0.02** (0.01)	-0.02** (0.01)	
Oil production		-0.15 (0.18)	-0.12 (0.19)	-0.13 (0.19)	-0.15 (0.18)	
Effective number of ethnic groups			-0.02 (0.02)			
Effective number of religious groups				-0.06 (0.09)		
Effective number of cultural groups					0.02 (0.08)	
Constant	-2.06*** (0.07)	-2.05*** (0.10)	-1.94*** (0.13)	-1.91*** (0.23)	-2.06*** (0.19)	
Number of observations	4,379	2,578	2,563	2,578	2,563	
Log-likelihood	-418.75	-318.64	-317.85	-318.46	-318.35	

\* $p < 0.10$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$



## Emergence of Democracy

- Increased income makes democratic transitions more likely.
- Increased economic growth makes democratic transitions less likely.
- Catholic countries are more likely to become democratic.
- Having a Protestant or Muslim majority has no effect on democratic transitions.
- Ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity have no effect on democratic transitions.

TABLE 7.3

## Cultural and Economic Determinants of Democratic Survival

Dependent variable: Probability that a country will be a democracy this year if it was a democracy last year

Independent Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Muslim majority	-0.61*** (0.18)	-0.30 (0.26)	-0.46 (0.28)	-0.48 (0.30)	-0.39 (0.27)
Protestant majority <sup>†</sup>					
Catholic majority	0.02 (0.13)	-0.27* (0.16)	-0.41** (0.20)	-0.43* (0.22)	-0.39** (0.18)
GDP per capita		0.0001*** (0.00003)	0.0001*** (0.00003)	0.0001*** (0.00003)	0.0001*** (0.00003)
Growth in GDP per capita		0.02* (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)
Oil production		0.29 (0.31)	0.43 (0.31)	0.35 (0.29)	0.40 (0.31)
Effective number of ethnic groups			-0.09* (0.05)		
Effective number of religious groups				-0.19 (0.15)	
Effective number of cultural groups					-0.23 *** (0.12)
Constant	2.06*** (0.10)	1.50*** (0.16)	1.88*** (0.28)	1.92*** (0.37)	1.99*** (0.30)
Number of observations	2,408	1,784	1,784	1,784	1,784
Log-likelihood	-252.28	-163.19	-161.41	-162.33	-161.74

\* $p < 0.10$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$

## Survival of Democracy

- Increased income helps democratic survival.
- Increased economic growth helps democratic survival.
- Having a Muslim majority does not harm democratic survival.
- Having a Protestant majority helps democratic survival.
- Ethnic and cultural (but not religious) diversity is bad for democratic survival.

In the **Ultimatum Game**, two people use the following procedure to split some amount of money  $\$c$ .

- The proposer offers the responder an amount of money up to  $\$c$ .
- If the responder accepts this offer, then the proposer receives the remainder of the  $\$c$ .
- If the responder rejects the offer, then neither player receives any payoff.

**How much would you offer?**

The Dictator Game is exactly the same as the Ultimatum Game except that the responder is not given an opportunity to accept or reject the offer.

How much would you offer?

## Ultimatum Game

- The proposer offers  $\epsilon$ , where  $\epsilon$  is close to 0.
- The responder accepts  $\epsilon > 0$ .

## Dictator Game

- The proposer offers 0 and keeps  $c$  for herself.

## Ultimatum Game

- The proposer offers  $\epsilon$ , where  $\epsilon$  is close to 0.
- The responder accepts  $\epsilon > 0$ .

## Dictator Game

- The proposer offers 0 and keeps  $c$  for herself.

But what actually happens when people play these games?

## Ultimatum Game

- Proposers nearly always make positive offers.
- Mean offer is 44%. Modal offer is nearly 50%.
- Responders reject a lot of positive offers, especially if they are low.



Players seem to care about fairness and reciprocity.

Ultimatum Game (Numbers), click [▶ here](#)

Ultimatum Game (Kids), click [▶ here](#)

Are these behaviors universal or do they vary across economic and cultural settings?

## Fifteen Small-Scale Societies

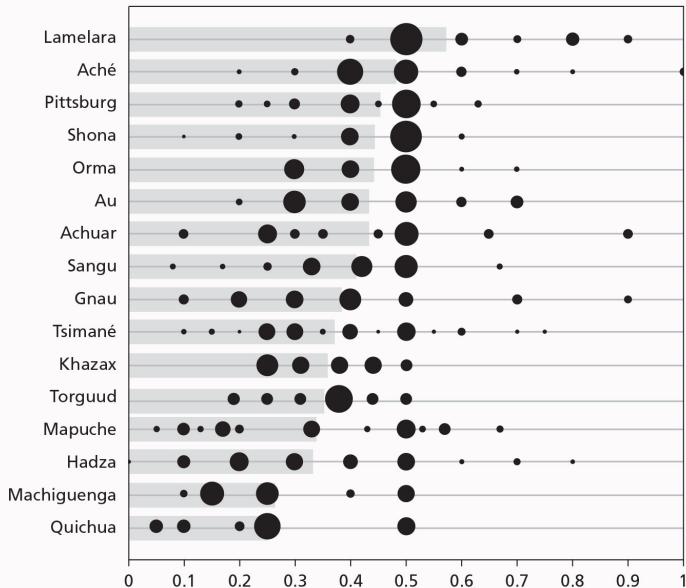
- Three foraging societies.
- Six slash-and-burn horticulture societies.
- Four nomadic herding societies.
- Two sedentary, small-scale agriculture societies.

**TABLE 7.4****Fifteen Small-Scale Societies**

Group	Country	Environment	Economic base
Machiguenga	Peru	Tropical forest	Horticulture
Quichua	Ecuador	Tropical forest	Horticulture
Achuar	Ecuador	Tropical forest	Horticulture
Hadza	Tanzania	Savanna-woodlands	Foraging
Aché	Paraguay	Semi-tropical woodlands	Foraging and horticulture
Tsimané	Bolivia	Tropical forest	Horticulture
Au	Papua New Guinea	Mountainous tropical forest	Foraging and horticulture
Gnau	Papua New Guinea	Mountainous tropical forest	Foraging and horticulture
Mapuche	Chile	Temperate plains	Small-scale farming
Torguud	Mongolia	High-altitude desert, seasonally flooded grassland	Pastoralism
Khazax	Mongolia	High-altitude desert, seasonally flooded grassland	Pastoralism
Sangu (farm/herd)	Tanzania	Savanna-woodlands, seasonally flooded grassland	Agro-pastoralists
Orma	Kenya	Savanna-woodlands	Pastoralism
Lamelara	Indonesia	Tropical island coast	Foraging-trade
Shona	Zimbabwe	Savanna-woodlands	Farming

**FIGURE 7.3**

# Offers from an Ultimatum Game



The whale hunters of the Lamelara had a mean offer of 58%.

The economically independent Machiguenga had a mean offer of 26%.

The Au and Gnau, with their culture of gift giving, rejected both unfair and hyper-fair offers.

The Hadza, with their culture of 'tolerated theft', made low offers and had high rejections rates.

What explains this variation?

It had nothing to do with individual characteristics such as age, gender, wealth, or education.

Instead, it had to do with:

1. Payoffs to cooperation.
2. Market integration.



When faced with a novel situation, individuals look for analogs in their daily experience. They then use these analog to decide how to act in the new situation.

Culture is a shared way of playing games.

- Life is made up of lots of strategic situations and our culture affects how we play these games.

What are the implications for the relationship between culture and democracy?