

Clash of Brothers in a Contagious World: Wars to Avoid Diffusion

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Abstract

Does sharing the same religion, civilization or racial proximity lead to more peaceful relations between countries? This paper argues that cultural similarity actually causes wars. These wars occur between a democracy and a dictatorship when the dictator tries to combat the diffusion of political institutions. The paper presents a game-theoretic model, two case studies and statistical evidence. The model combines Acemoglu and Robinson (2006) and Fearon (1995), and shows that cultural similarity can lead to more warfare when old elites are afraid of losing their position to a newly inspired citizenry, as these elites try to destroy the external source of inspiration. The microfoundation for inspiration is derived from revealed information about the income level under given institutions, which is assumed to have positive correlation with cultural proximity. The case studies are on the First World War (Austrian invasion of Serbia) and the 1848 revolutions (Russian invasion of Hungary). In the statistical analysis, I use genetic proximity, religious similarity, civilizational similarity and similar values from the World Values Survey to measure cultural proximity. I confirm the hypothesis with all of these measures that cultural similarity causes wars in the presence of institutional differences.