Data Article

A novel dataset on a culture of cooperation and inclusive political institutions in 90 European historical regions observed between 1000 and 1600

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Article history:
Received 11 July 2019
Received in revised form 11 October 2019
Accepted 21 October 2019
Available online 28 October 2019

Keywords:
Culture of cooperation
Inclusive political institutions

Abstract

A culture of cooperation, which is the implicit reward from cooperating in any prisoner’s dilemma and investment types of activity, and inclusive political institutions, which enable the citizenry to better select public-spirited representatives and check their decisions, are key for economic development. To foster research on the determinants and impact of these institutions, we illustrate a novel data set employed in [1] and [4] and gathering a measure of the activity of the Cistercians and the Franciscans, which is a proxy for the citizens’ culture, and a constraints on the elite’s decision-making power score, which is a proxy for the inclusiveness of political institutions, for a panel of 90 European historical regions spanning the 1000–1600 period.

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1. Data

The main data set, which is reported in the “CI” excel file, consists of observations on a culture of cooperation and inclusive political institutions for 90 historical regions, part of 16 present-day European countries, for which we have sufficient geographic and institutional information for each half-century between 1000 and 1600. As illustrated below, we also report in the “Monasteries” excel file the location and starting and ending years of activity of each monastery used to obtain our proxy for culture.

2. Experimental design, materials and methods

As [10], we construct each historical region by merging those neighboring NUTS 2 administrative units that, according to Ref. [9], were part of the same polity for most of the 1000–1600 period (see Table 1 for the match between historical regions and medieval polities and [1] for the match between historical and NUTS 2 regions). This sample design considers as cross-section identifiers exactly the areas within which institutions were selected, since both the Cistercian and Franciscan provinces oversaw the expansion of the two monastic orders and roughly corresponded to the historical regions [7,11]. We concentrate, moreover, on the first six centuries of the second millennium for three reasons. First, the within-country variation in political institutions significantly drops with the rise of the nation-state during the 19th century [1]. Second, the Protestant Reformation deprived Western monasticism of its pivotal role by stigmatizing ecclesiastic property and professional preaching [1]. Third, the 17th-19th centuries witnessed innovations making economic activities far more complex than those prevailing in our sample [1].
2.1. A culture of cooperation

The proxy for the citizens’ culture is the cumulated discounted number of years of activity of Cistercian and Franciscan houses per square km, i.e., Culture (see Table 2 for the summary statistics of all variables). For each of the 699 (2979) Cistercian (Franciscan) houses and each half-century, this figure equals the difference between the number of years in which the house had operated and those elapsed from its possible closure per square km, if positive, and zero otherwise. Three observations are key. First, we rely on the number of years of activity of each house since we lack sufficient information on the number of monks working in each house. Second, the discounting emphasizes the importance of the monks’ activities [8]. Finally, scaling the years of activities by the historical region’s area rather by its population is key to correctly represent the diffusion of the two monastic orders since a minimum distance between houses was compulsory [1]. To obtain the raw data, which we report in the “Monasteries” excel file, we eliminate from the lists in Refs. [7,11] the houses not listed in http://www.cistercensi.info/, http://users.bart.nl/~roestb/franciscan/ and the references therein.

As discussed in Ref. [1], both monastic orders dictated norms of respect and trust in exchange for guidance on how to share consumption risk, and under the threat of defecting, to the populations subject to high—but not excessive—risk of harvest destruction and, thus, more interested in obtaining their services. Given the homogeneity of the two monastic orders’ group work and their unicity within Western monasticism [1], Culture captures the input to the technology that transformed the citizens’ interest in cooperating into evolutionarily stable norms, and higher values represent a stronger culture.

To emphasize the role of each monastic order, we also report the cumulated discounted number of years of activity of the Cistercian (Franciscan) houses per square km, i.e., Culture-C (Culture-F).

2.2. Inclusive political institutions

The inclusiveness of the political process consists of “the proportion of people possessing [the right to better select public-spirited representatives and check their decisions] and the degree to which they possess it” [2]. To gauge both these extensive and intensive margins, we construct the “constraints on the executive authority” score proposed by the Polity IV project, i.e., Democracy. To do so, we build on the events within a 40-year window around each date (see for details the Internet appendix of [1]), and we code a score ranging between one and seven and assuming higher values when the policy-making power of the citizens vis-à-vis the elite—i.e., when the institutionalized constraints on the elite’s decision-making power, whether individuals or collectivities—became more forceful [6]. The communities of Aragon and Cataluña, the “Giudicati” of Sardinia as well as the communes of Northern Italy,
first, and the Provinces and the Reign of England, then, witnessed the most robust rise in the inclusiveness of political institutions, even if they never became what we nowadays consider “democracies.” [1,4].

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Raffaella Paduano for the invaluable help in organizing the monastery data, and Mariyana Angelova and Yan Ostapchenko for the outstanding research assistance.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dib.2019.104731.

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Table 2
Summary of variables.

| Variables   | Definition and Sources                                                                 | Statistics     |
|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| Democracy:  | Constraints on the elite’s power.                                                      | 1.833 (1.130)  |
| Culture:    | Cumulated discounted number of years of activity of Cistercian and Franciscan houses per square km. | 0.127 (0.261)  |
| Culture-C:  | Cumulated discounted number of years of activity of Cistercian houses per square km.  | 0.035 (0.051)  |
| Culture-F:  | Cumulated discounted number of years of activity of Franciscan houses per square km.  | 0.092 (0.241)  |

Note: The last column reports the mean value and, in parentheses, the standard deviation of each variable. Both are computed for the panel of 90 historical regions detailed in Table 1 and observed each half-century between 1000 and 1600.