The effect of societal culture on (ad)opting different democratic institutions: a cross-national study

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Abstract

Examining the relation between cultural orientations and political institutional arrangements (i.e. democratic models) is a new theme in institutional research. The results of a few recent studies have provided a general picture of how societal culture and models of democracy walk hand in hand. However, much more should be done to elucidate more details of this striking, mysterious picture. To this aim, the effect of cultural orientations on the institutional choices that forming models of democracy should be studied. These choices are manifestations of the political preferences of people in each society. They can be considered outcomes of the interaction between a constellation of cultural orientations and an arrangement of institutional choices. While cultural orientations are durable and hard to change, institutional settings can be reformed and manipulated. In this study, I want to zoom in on the interrelations between cultural orientations and some underlying institutional elements forming different models/patterns of democracy. The preference for and superiority of one political institutional option over another (e.g. presidential vs parliamentary; proportional vs majoritarian electoral system; provision of direct democracy and adoption of compulsory voting) is a challenging, crucial and endless debate among political scientists. Using a comparative, cross-national and empirical approach, this study tries to demonstrate how cultural orientations (should) co-determine opting and adopting the constitutional/institutional choices. The importance of compatibility between institutional arrangements and cultural orientations should, in my estimation, be a part of the debate agenda on designing democratic institutions. Indeed, the involvement of societal culture would change the starting point of the debate; from ‘what is the best model/institutional choice?’ to ‘what is the most compatible model/institutional choice?’
1- Introduction

The relation between institutional arrangements, or models of democracy, and the outcome and legitimacy of democratic systems is an ongoing, important question in comparative politics. Many scholars theorize about, and some put effort into examining, which institutional setting would outperform others, as well as what the best practice or superior constitutional/institutional arrangement (or model of democracy) is (Crepaz 1996; Doorenspleet & Pellikaan 2013; Horowitz 1990; Lijphart 1999; Linz 1990). These efforts have brought about mixed results. Not only could no definite trend of convergence of democratic models be observed in established democracies over the past decades (Vatter et al. 2014), but different institutional settings are adopted in new democracies across the world. Moreover, the most recent study by Bernauer and Vatter (2019: 208) concludes that ‘at the level of political institutions, change is limited over time’ and the evidence for institutional convergence is conditional and uncertain.

Now the question is why do different countries (ad)opt different patterns (or models) of democracy in practice, or more precisely, why different countries have (ad)opted different democratic political institutions? Among many contextual factors that codetermine the preference for a set of institutions in a country, the influence of societal culture have been less studied. Cross-national studies on the relation and interaction between institutional structure, societal culture and system performance are scant in comparative politics (Maleki & Hendriks, 2015). This is even more understudied for non-Western, developing democracies. This paper aims to contribute to this theme of research by theorizing and examining the interrelation and interaction between the institutional choices and societal culture.

There is a growing scholarly attention to explain the variety and endurance of different patterns of democracy or political-institutional arrangements of democratic models (Bernauer and Vatter 2017, Vatter et al. 2014). Among different institutional choices, much attentions have been devoted to explain the electoral system choice (Boix 1999, Benoit 2007, Colomer 2005, Bol et al. 2015). There has been also a hot debate on the preference for the presidential or parliamentary regime types in which the advocates of each type argue for the superiority or suitability of the one over the other (Lijphart 1991, 1992, Horowitz 1990, Linz 1990, Shugart and Carry 1992). The unitary versus federal structure is another institutional choice that has received attention in the literature. There seems a consensus of findings that country area, population size and ethnic heterogeneity can explain the adoption of this institutional choice (Lijphart 1999, Doorenspleet and Pellikaan 2013, Bernauer and Vatter 2017).

There are also some institutional/constituional choices that affect the participation dimensions of democracy namely the provision of (different types and levels of) referendums and having compulsory voting. Although political scholars have studied the effect of compulsory voting on the level of electoral participation (Panagopoulos 2008, Birch 2016, Jackman 2001), there is scant literature to study why some countries adopt this institutional element and others not, and how societal culture may explain this.

On development and limits of institutional design, Fukuyama (2007) argues that there is no optimal institutional arrangement or design for all societies. He explains that theoretical models relying only on formal institutions, would fail to predict the success or failure of an institutional arrangement because they do not consider the importance of contextual factors (or informal institutions) such as social structure and political culture.
We know that there are a large body of literature about the importance of ‘political culture’ on institutional arrangements, political behavior and outcomes, however, the effect of ‘societal culture’ on the institutional design, behavior and outcomes has been less studied. Political culture, based on its definition, is about “attitudes toward the political system and its various parts, and attitudes toward the role of the self in the system” (Almond and Verba 1963:12) while societal culture is about ‘shared values, beliefs and interpretations that guide the way social actors act and evaluate, and explain their actions and evaluations’ (House et al., 2002, Schwartz, 1999). The former is about attitudes and the latter is about values; the former is more transitory and the latter is more durable. And more important, the emphasis on the concept of political culture can trigger an exclusionary view of democratization while the attention to the concept of societal culture can result in an inclusionary mentality about democratization.

In a relevant study, Maleki and Hendriks (2015) theorized and examined the relation between societal cultural orientations and models of democracy. The results have provided a general picture of how culture and democracy walk hand in hand. However, much more should be done to elucidate more details of this striking, mysterious picture. Thus, for having a better understanding of interrelations between the dimensions of culture and democracy, the effect of cultural orientations on the institutional choices should be studied. The institutional choices are manifestations of the political preferences of people in each society. The institutional arrangement determines the possibilities and constraints of political options, and societal culture codetermines people’s preferences and choices of those options. While cultural orientations are durable and hard to change, institutional setting can be reformed and manipulated.

This paper aims to empirically examine to what extent the diversity of institutional choices in different countries may be explained by their different societal cultures. To this aim, I will utilize the empirical dimensions of societal culture operationalized at the cross-national level. I also use the cross-national data on political institutions of 80 electoral democracies for examining the effect of societal culture on four important institutional choices namely regime type (presidentialism vs. parliamentarism), electoral system (majoritarian vs proportional), direct democracy provision and compulsory voting.

In the following sections, after identifying the dimensions of culture and political-institutional choices, we discuss the conceptual and examine the empirical links between the cultural orientations and institutional choices. In presenting these interrelations, we will discuss, in the concluding section, the importance of involving culture in designing, tailoring and reforming democratic models by introducing the Cultural Compatibility Thesis of democracy.

2- Societal culture and its many dimensions

Culture is a contested concept in social science. There is less consensus on its definition and much less agreement on its operationalization. However, the concept is widely used and referred to wherever contextual factors are discussed. The concepts of civic culture and political culture (Almond and Verba 1963, Inglehart 1988) are widely known among scholars of political science, however, the concept of societal culture and the dimensions of national culture, adopted from cross-cultural psychology and management disciplines, have been less utilized in comparative politics and political institutional studies.
Societal culture is defined as ‘software of the mind’ (Hofstede, 1991) or as a set of “shared motives, values, beliefs and interpretations” that “guide the way social actors select actions, evaluate people and events, and explain their actions and evaluations” (House et al., 2002, p. 5; Schwartz, 1999, p. 24). Since 1980s, after the seminal empirical study by Hofstede on dimensionalization of national culture, several scholars have put efforts into measuring cultural dimensions at cross-national level (Hofstede 1980, Chinese Culture Connection 1987, Minkov 2007, Inglehart 1997, Schwartz 1999, House et al. 2002).

Figure 1: Nine clusters of cultural dimensions from five empirical studies (adopted from Maleki and de Jong, 2014: 131)

In a systematic review and analysis, Maleki and de Jong (2014) have analyzed the similarities and differences between different empirical dimensions extracted by the main five projects of dimensionalization of national culture. They have recognized nine exclusive clusters of cultural dimensions as seen in Figure 1.

Table 1: nine operationalization of national culture using in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Dimension</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individualism vs. Collectivism</td>
<td>Individualism stands for a society in which the ties between individuals are loose: a person is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family only. Collectivism stands for a society in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which continue to protect them throughout their lifetime in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Distance</td>
<td>The extent to which the less powerful members of society expect and accept that power is distributed unequally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty Avoidance</td>
<td>The extent to which members of society feel uncomfortable with uncertain, unknown, ambiguous, or unstructured situations. The fundamental issue here is how a society deals with the fact that the future can never be known.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity vs. Femininity</td>
<td>Masculinity represents a preference in society for achievement, competition, heroism, assertiveness and material reward for success. Its opposite, femininity, stands for a preference for cooperation, consensus, modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life. This dimension is also related to the division of emotional roles between women and men.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indulgence vs. Restraint</td>
<td>Indulgence is defined as a tendency to allow relatively free gratification of some desire and feelings (leisure, casual sex, spending and consumption). Restraint stands for the tendency to curb the gratification of desires and feelings by strict social norms and prohibitions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional vs. Secular-Rational Values</td>
<td>In traditional cultures religion is very important and a main goal in most people’s lives is to make their parents proud; they idealize large families, and have large numbers of children. They also have high levels of national pride, favor more respect for authority and reject divorce, abortion, euthanasia and suicide. Societies with secular-rational values have the opposite preferences on all these topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Collectivism</td>
<td>the degree to which organizational and societal institutional practices encourage and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertiveness</td>
<td>the degree to which individuals in organizations or societies are assertive, confrontational, and aggressive in social relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>the extent to which an organization or a society minimizes gender role differences and gender discrimination</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this study, I will use the selected operationalization of each cultural cluster which are in bold in Figure 1. These cultural dimensions have been briefly defined and explained in Table 1.

3- Political Institutional Choices in Democracies

Table 2 shows the list of four important institutional choices/elements that can be selected and tailored in constitutional/institutional design. These elements will directly or indirectly affect the democratic model of a country. The preference for and superiority of one institutional option over another is a challenging, crucial and endless debate among political scientists. This study tries to demonstrate the importance of involving the role of cultural orientations in the selection and adoption of constitutional/institutional choices. This issue should, in my estimation, be a part of the debate agenda on designing democracy. Indeed, the involvement of societal culture would change the starting point of the debate; from ‘what is the best model/institutional choice?’ to ‘what is the most compatible model/institutional choice?’.

Table 2: List of institutional choices and their operationalizations used in this study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional choices</th>
<th>Operationalizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regime type</td>
<td>Categorical: presidential/semi-presidential/parliamentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interval: Presidential-Parliamentary Power (PPP) index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral system</td>
<td>Categorical: Majority/Mixed/PR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interval: Average District Magnitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compulsory voting</td>
<td>compulsory/non-compulsory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referendum provision</td>
<td>Direct Democracy Index (DDI)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4- Analyzing the relation between cultural dimensions and institutional choices

Regime Type: Presidential vs. Parliamentary

In designing democracy, the presidential versus parliamentary regime type is considered one of the most important constitutional choices. Despite all debates on the superiority of one over another, there is no convergence towards one regime type. This institutional choice is mostly operationalized with a dichotomous/dummy variable in empirical analysis, however, sometimes a third category of semi-presidentialism is involved. Moreover, the literature on presidential and parliamentary powers show that we can recognize a variety of presidential and parliamentary (and even semi-presidential) regime types based on the presidential and parliamentary powers in different countries (Siaroff 2003, Frye 1997, Shugart & Carey 1992). In a recent study, an interval measure of regime types, based on the balance between presidential and parliamentary powers, has been developed. This is called the Presidential-Parliamentary Power index (PPP hereafter) and measured for 115 countries (Maleki, 2019). Higher scores of PPP show the stronger parliamentary system and its lower scores indicate the stronger presidentialism.

We will use both dichotomous and interval measures of regime types to examine how cultural dimensions would explain the variation of regime types in different democracies. Table 3 presents the Spearman correlations of two measures of regime type with nine dimensions of national culture. Individualism, low power distance and secular-rational values have strong and significant correlations with the regime types in favor of parliamentary system. Societies with a high Institutional collectivism (which represents the team-working orientation of societies)
and low uncertainty avoidance may also be inclined towards a stronger parliamentary system than presidential one.

Table 3: Correlations between measures of regime type and cultural dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regime Type (0: presidential, 1: parliamentary)</th>
<th>PPP</th>
<th>Individualism</th>
<th>Power Distance</th>
<th>Uncertainty Avoidance</th>
<th>Masculinity</th>
<th>Secular-Rational</th>
<th>Institutional Collectivism</th>
<th>Assertiveness</th>
<th>Gender Egalitarianism</th>
<th>Indulgence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.81*** (73)</td>
<td>.69*** (47)</td>
<td>-.64*** (47)</td>
<td>-.34** (47)</td>
<td>.03 (47)</td>
<td>.59*** (62)</td>
<td>.37** (43)</td>
<td>.15 (43)</td>
<td>.15 (43)</td>
<td>-.30** (60)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential-Parliamentary Power (PPP) Index</td>
<td>1.0 (73)</td>
<td>.67*** (47)</td>
<td>-.58*** (47)</td>
<td>-.29** (47)</td>
<td>-.09 (47)</td>
<td>.64*** (62)</td>
<td>.35** (43)</td>
<td>.13 (43)</td>
<td>.14 (43)</td>
<td>-.06 (60)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of common countries is in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10

In a presidential system, a person/party would be delegated, in a direct vote, to take the significant part of political power, while in the parliamentary system the power could be much more fragmented. That is, in a presidential system, the concentration of power can be larger than in the parliamentary one. Therefore, we expect that the cultural orientation of power distance can play a role in this institutional choice as Table 3 confirms. That is, societies with higher power distance would incline more toward accepting and adopting the presidential system.

Moreover, we know from the literature of cross-cultural research that the two cultural dimensions of individualism and power distance are not perfectly orthogonal, but rather interrelated. That is, individualistic cultures have often low power distance and collectivist culture have usually high power distance. However, beyond that interrelation, one can theoretically argue that individualism bears an affinity with parliamentarism because this type of regime can better satisfy the attribute of ‘representation’ in a democratic system. Indeed, people in an individualist culture prefer more autonomy and less embeddedness; and smaller communities and minorities are stronger in individualist cultures, and there is greater concern over their representation. Although the choice of an electoral system is the main determinant of representation, it is widely believed that parliamentarism is better matched with the inclusive electoral system (Lijphart, 1999). Accordingly we observe that individualist societies are more inclined to adopt parliamentarism, whereas presidentialism would be more accepted in collectivist nations.

Traditionalism (or monumentalism as Minkov calls it) is another cultural orientation that is conceptually, as well as statistically, associated with presidentialism. This cultural trait (which is the opposite pole of secular-rational values) relates to pride and conviction. It is argued that in the traditionalist/monumentalist culture, charismatic characteristics are praised and encouraged; and hence, people would like to see charismatic leaders in power. Thus, having a powerful president is more expected in societies with higher traditional (and lower secular-rational) values.

Furthermore, we can argue that why those societies with higher uncertainty avoidance would show a stronger inclination toward a presidential system than a parliamentary one. In a presidential system, the ministers and ruler of the government are appointed shortly after the elections, while in the parliamentary system, negotiations for making coalitions are started the day after the election, and cabinet formation may take months. This means that the uncertainty
in a parliamentary system is higher than a presidential system and explains why presidentialism might be more popular in uncertainty-avoidant cultures.

In a multi-party parliamentary system, consensus building is crucial in forming the cabinet, while this is less needed in a presidential system, in which the winner president/party is under less pressure to collaborate. Thus, we expect that societies with a weaker teamwork spirit (or lower institutional collectivism or collaborativeness) might have more inclination towards the presidential system. The positive correlation between institutional collectivism and parliamentarism seen in Table 3, corroborates this assertion.

Finally, the multiple linear regression analysis (see Table 6), including the most significant correlated dimensions, shows that individualism and secular-rational dimensions are the main explanatory cultural factors for adopting regime types. Figures 2 and 3 show the correlations between these dimensions and the interval measure of regime type (PPP) which is based on the balance of presidential and parliamentary powers.

Figure 2: The relation between the interval measure of regime type (PPP) and cultural dimension of individualism
The electoral system is an important institutional element in forming the democratic model of a country. The electoral system affects both the parliamentary electoral disproportionality as well as the effective number of parties in the parliament (ENPP). However, the electoral system per se is not the only determinant of the outcomes. This means that we may see democracies with a majoritarian electoral system that have higher ENPP than democracies with a PR system. This implies that people’s political behavior is not regulated merely by the institutional setting. Societal culture is another important factor that affects political preferences. Therefore, I argue that each society inclines to adopt a kind of electoral system that is more compatible with its societal culture.

There is a famous trichotomous classification of electoral systems namely majoritarian, mixed and proportional. In practice, the diversity of electoral systems especially within mixed and proportional systems cannot be operationalized by the trichotomous typology. The average district magnitude, defined as the average number of members to be elected in each electoral district, is considered a better indicator for recognizing the variance of electoral systems in action. The average district magnitude is measured by dividing the number of parliamentary seats (S) over the number of electoral districts/constituencies (E). Using the electoral system database by Johnson & Wallack (2012), I gathered countries’ average district magnitude for 80 electoral democracies in 2005\(^2\). In responding to skewness of large values, I use the logarithmic scale of the average district magnitude.

\[\text{Average District Magnitude} = \frac{S}{E}\]

\(^2\) I use the highest value (or the only available value) between two different measures of district magnitudes by Johnson & Wallack (2012) namely ‘standard average district magnitude’ and ‘average district magnitude faced by a legislator’.
Table 4 shows the correlations between two measures of electoral system and nine dimensions of national culture. Strikingly we see remarkable differences between the results of correlational analysis of two measures of electoral system. Although there is a significant correlation between the ordinal and interval measures of electoral system, it is not very strong (0.66). This indicates that the interval measure can recognize some differences in electoral systems of countries that cannot be differentiated by a categorical or ordinal measure. Accordingly, we rely more on the results based on the interval measure.

Mastery orientation (masculinity), power distance and traditionalism are negatively correlated with the average district magnitude or proportional electoral system.

Table 4: Correlations between measures of electoral system and cultural dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Avg. District Magnitude</th>
<th>Individualism</th>
<th>Power Distance</th>
<th>Uncertainty Avoidance</th>
<th>Masculinity</th>
<th>Secular - Rational</th>
<th>Institutional Collectivism</th>
<th>Assertiveness</th>
<th>Gender Egalitarianism</th>
<th>Indulgence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electoral system (0: majority, 1: mixed, 2: PR)</td>
<td>.66***</td>
<td>-1.13</td>
<td>-1.16</td>
<td>.46**</td>
<td>-.29**</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average District Magnitude (2005)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.35**</td>
<td>.25*</td>
<td>-.36***</td>
<td>.37***</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of common countries is in parentheses. *** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.10

In their analysis of the relation between cultural values and models of democracy, Maleki and Hendriks (2015) assert that countries with a higher mastery orientation are more inclined to adopt a majoritarian model of democracy. Considering the close connection between models of democracy and the institutional elements, we can argue that mastery-oriented cultures (or masculine cultures in the term of Hofstede) accept, and even prefer, the majority/plurality electoral system, whereas the PR system is more popular in low mastery cultures.

Moreover, one can argue that PR would be considered a more egalitarian system of representation. The distribution of power in a PR system decreases the hierarchical dominance of a party or a coalition of parties. Therefore, we can speculate that the proportional system is more likely to be adopted in societies with a low power distance culture. On the other hand, the electoral systems that use majority/plurality rule - even partly as in mixed systems - would be accepted more in societies with higher power distance. Table 4 confirms these assertions. Finally, we can argue that countries having high uncertainty avoidant cultures cannot tolerate a surprised result of elections in a majoritarian system. The results of elections in single-member majoritarian/plurality systems, like the UK and the USA, is harder to be measured and predicted using national polls while the results of elections with proportional system are often predicted with a higher accuracy. Given this, a positive correlation between more proportional system and uncertainty avoidance is understandable.

The multiple linear regression analysis with the most significant variables (see Table 6) shows that masculinity (or mastery orientation) is the most important cultural factor that explains 20% of the variance of electoral systems in democracies. Figure 4 shows the relation between masculinity and average district magnitude for 51 democracies. Strikingly, all countries using majoritarian electoral system have masculinity score more than 40. Japan as a most masculine country, according to Hofstede, has had a majoritarian system till 1996 when the system has changed to a mixed majoritarian model.
Regarding the selection of district size as an important element that forms the implicit threshold for a proportional system, we can conceptually argue that teamwork spirit should matter. A lower district magnitude (which results in a higher electoral threshold (Taagepera 1998)) decreases the number of small parties in the parliament and makes coalition forming easier. It is expected that societies showing a strong culture of collaborativeness (or institutional collectivism) will be more open to work with many political parties while societies with lower teamwork spirit prefers less effective number of parties in parliament and less need for collaboration. We examine this assertion through the relationship between the average district magnitude and the cultural dimension of institutional collectivism for countries with proportional electoral systems. Figure 5 shows that there is a significant correlation (0.44, N=26, p<0.001) between the two variables.
Choosing electoral systems is a matter of importance in designing the democratic model of a country. This paper posits that the selection of the electoral system is affected by cultural orientations and that the affinity between societal culture and electoral system would matter for a credible and workable model of democracy.

**Referendum Provision**

The provision of referendums is an important institutional choice for promoting direct democracy in a society. As discussed in the literature of direct democracy, there are different types of referendums, on different levels and with different effectiveness (Altman, 2012; Kaufmann et al. 2010, Vatter, 2009). The provision of this variety of referendums varies across different electoral democracies. The referendum is known as the crucial element of self-determination in a ‘voter democracy’. Hendriks (2010, p. 28) notes that “the strength of voter democracy lies in citizens’ non-dependence on others for having their voices heard and their preferences in public matters counted.” He argues that this model of democracy has an affinity with the cultural type of Individualism. Therefore, I assert that the provision of referendum would be higher in societies with strong individualistic and weak power distant cultures.

We can also argue that having more direct democracy and referendums would result in more uncertainty and unpredictability of politics. The number of veto players will increase when people directly can decide about different policies. Thus, we expect to have a negative association between uncertainty avoidance and the direct democracy provision. Considering that in traditional and religious societies, the powerholders or religious authorities have the final say on matters of policies for a long time over history, we expect to see less inclination towards direct democracy and referendums in traditional societies.
To examine these assertions, I use the Direct Democracy Index (DDI) measured by Fiorino & Ricciuti (2007), which categorizes countries based on their institutional and practical possibilities for referendums. Table 5 shows the correlations between the direct democracy index and the nine dimensions of national culture. The findings corroborate the abovementioned assertions about the effect of societal culture on the institutional choice of referendum provision.

Table 5: Correlations between direct democracy index and cultural dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct Democracy Index</th>
<th>Individualism</th>
<th>Power Distance</th>
<th>Uncertainty Avoidance</th>
<th>Masculinity</th>
<th>Secular-Rational</th>
<th>Institutional Collectivism</th>
<th>Assertiveness</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Egalitarianism</th>
<th>Indulgence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.69***</td>
<td>-.54***</td>
<td>-.31**</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.47***</td>
<td>.41**</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(44)</td>
<td>(44)</td>
<td>(44)</td>
<td>(44)</td>
<td>(44)</td>
<td>(56)</td>
<td>(40)</td>
<td>(40)</td>
<td>(55)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of common countries is in parentheses *** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.10

The results of multiple linear regression in Table 6 indicate that the cultural dimension of individualism is the dominant explanatory factor that can explain 40% of the variance in adopting different levels of direct democracy within democracies. Figure 6 illustrates the high correlation between individualism and level of referendum provision among 44 democracies. As seen, the UK, among individualistic societies has the lowest engagement with direct democracy. It is not surprising then to see that the country has one of the most challenging crisis of its democratic history around a referendum known as Brexit.

Figure 6: The relation between direct democracy index and cultural dimension of individualism
Compulsory Voting

There are few institutional choices that can affect the participation level of democracy. Compulsory voting is one of them, as it can promote the level of electoral participation. This rule defines voting as an obligation of citizens so that they have to participate in the democratic process. I gathered the list of countries with the compulsory voting from the IDEA (2019) database. Table 7 presents the spearman’s correlations between the provision of compulsory voting and dimensions of societal culture.

Compulsory voting decreases the uncertainty of electoral participation by forcing people to vote. That is why we see a significant positive correlation between Hofstede’s uncertainty avoidance and the dummy variable of compulsory voting. Moreover, there is a strong, negative correlation between GLOBE’s institutional collectivism and compulsory voting. Societies with lower collaborativeness have a weaker inclination for electoral and non-electoral participation. Therefore, people in these societies need more of a push to participate and accordingly, compulsory voting would be more employed in countries with a lower teamwork orientation.

Table 7: Spearman’s correlations between compulsory voting and cultural dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Individualism</th>
<th>Power Distance</th>
<th>Uncertainty Avoidance</th>
<th>Masculinity</th>
<th>Secular-Rational</th>
<th>Institutional Collectivism</th>
<th>Assertiveness</th>
<th>Gender Egalitarianism</th>
<th>Indulgence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compulsory Voting (0: no, 1: yes)</td>
<td>-0.17 (51)</td>
<td>0.20 (51)</td>
<td>0.42*** (51)</td>
<td>0.06 (51)</td>
<td>-0.12 (67)</td>
<td>-0.50*** (46)</td>
<td>-0.01 (46)</td>
<td>-0.07 (46)</td>
<td>0.22 (65)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of common countries is in parentheses. ***p < 0.01, **p < 0.05, *p < 0.10

All in all, we found interesting associations between six dimensions of societal culture and institutional choices. Three cultural dimensions of assertiveness, gender egalitarianism and indulgence have shown no significant correlations with any institutional choices under study.
5- Conclusions

We have observed that there are significant correlations between dimensions of societal culture and political institutions of democracy. But what do these correlations imply? How does each institutional element have a correlation with several dimensions? Does societal culture affect institutional choices or whether the direction of causality is reverse? These are questions that may arise from the associations observed above.

There are some plausible answers to these questions. First of all, the correlations imply that cultural dimensions and institutional choices are compatible in a majority of countries, as otherwise no significant correlations would emerge. This compatibility could be formed organically through the influence of societal culture on the decisions of political actors who design the institutional arrangement of a country.

There are different cultural orientation(s) that codetermine each institutional choice. That is, a constellation of cultural dimensions, and not a sole dimension, codetermines the inclination of a society toward one institutional choice or another. Cultural dimensions interact with each other, and their integration shapes the political preference of a society. This is why several cultural orientations are associated with each institutional element. We should bear in mind that the institutional choices of some countries are not as compatible with their societal culture as they should be. This means that some countries might suffer from cultural incompatibility; and they are indeed out-of-pattern cases.

Finally, it is more plausible to assume the direction of causality from societal culture to political institutions since the former is antecedent to the latter. Moreover, considering the fact that most of the countries under study are new and young democracies, we can argue that the cultural orientation codetermines the institutional choices, although undoubtedly there is an interaction between the institutional setting and societal culture.

Cultural values codetermine the way people, think, decide and act. Collective actions are affected by collective values. We can argue that the preferences and behaviors of political actors, both power-holders and citizens, are partly regulated by societal culture. Accordingly, the main proposition of this study is that the preference for different institutional settings in different countries can be explained by the diversity of cultural orientations. This assertion has been examined in this paper.

Empirical examination of the presence and importance of this interrelation is not an easy task that can be accomplished fully in a paper. What this study tried to do, however, is problematizing this interrelation and involve the dimensions of culture into the discussion on institutional design.

Why do we have different institutional arrangements in different countries? This has been the key questions of this study. Based on what we found regarding the relation between dimensions of societal culture and elements of democratic institutions, one can assert that the emergence of various democratic institutional arrangements and their survival and workability in different countries are not contingent. The cultural compatibility thesis of democracy asserts that the compatibility of societal culture and institutional settings matters in designing democratic institutions in new democracies as well as in reforming institutions in established democracies (Maleki 2015). This study proposes that the ignorance of societal culture in the process of tailoring a democratic model for a new democracy may result in a much too tight or too loose democratic dress that would not fit the country.
The ignorance of cultural compatibility in designing institutional arrangements of a transitional and fragile democracies may bring about some serious consequences. As an example, Iraq’s electoral system seems incompatible with its societal culture. Using a full PR system could be problematic in a country with a high power distance and strong mastery (masculinity) culture. The institutional setting in Iraq has been designed to make an inclusive political structure, but the large number of parties, weak consensual culture and strong monumentality lead to a very fragile and weak political system. In 2010, the government was formed nine months after the election (Aljazeera, 2010). This can partly explain why just a while after the Iraqi parliamentary election in 2014, the ISIS used the power vacuum and seized a large part of the country in a few weeks. The model of democracy in Iraq was designed very similarly to the Belgian model. It seems that it has many institutional elements of a consociational democracy; but the question is whether this institutional setting is the most proper and most compatible with Iraq’s context. When once it took 589 days until a government could be formed in Belgium (Greene, 2011), what can we expect from Iraq’s new and fragile democracy?

The cultural compatibility thesis suggests that the transplantation of democratic institutions could be less problematic and more successful if the cultural difference between host and donor countries is low. That is, transplanting a democratic model from a country with a similar societal culture to a new democracy is more likely to be successful due to ‘the goodness of fit’ principle (De Jong et al., 2002). However, this does not mean that the cultural compatibility alone will guarantee the effectiveness of the adopted institutions. This would be, indeed, a sine qua non but not per se adequate. This assertion that the cultural-institutional compatibility does affect the performance of the political system should be empirically examined in the follow-up research.

Needless to say that there are many factors that play a role in the formation and success of democratic political institutions in the country. Societal culture is one of the important, but less studied, contextual factors that may affect the credibility and workability of a democratic model. This means that transplanting a so-called ‘best practice’ of democratic institutions into a country without considering the compatibility with the cultural orientations of that society might bring about a non-functional democracy. Thus, the mentality of adopting a best institutional arrangement should be replaced with the attitude of finding the most compatible one.

References


