

Migrants as agents of institutional and cultural Change

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Cultural Change and Persistence

- ▶ Culture can be very persistent (Guiso et al., 2006), which is explained by deep-rooted factors such as genetic composition (Ashraf and Galor, 2013), geographic conditions (Giuliano & Nunn, 2021, Galor & Savitskiy, 2018); but some dimensions change rapidly (Fernandez et. al 2019).
- ▶ What happens within countries? (Desmet & Wacziarg, 2021, Bertrand & Kamenica, 2018) Across countries?
- ▶ Is globalization creating a “global village” (McLuhan and Fiore 1997, Pieterse 2015), “Americanization” (Ritzer, 2012), polarization (Huntington, 2000, Inglehart and Norris, 2003)?
- ▶ How do dimensions of globalization such as trade and migration affect cultural formation in exporting/importing countries, and cultural similarity between them? Trade seems to lead to cultural convergence (MTV, 2014). What about migration?

Migration-based cultural change



Migration-based cultural change

Compositional/Static Channels

Cultural Selection:

Migrants move to countries with norms and values most similar to their own

→ *Cultural Divergence*

Cultural Mixing:

Migrants bring their culture to the destination country

→ *Cultural Convergence*

Diffusion/Dynamic Channels

Cultural Dissemination:

Natives adopt migrants' values

→ *Cultural Convergence*

Cultural Assimilation:

Migrants adopt host-country values

→ *Cultural divergence*

Cultural Backlash:

Native differentiate away from migrants' culture

→ *Cultural divergence*

Cultural Remittances:

Migrants remit host-country culture back home

→ *Cultural Convergence*

Evidence for channels

Evidence of Cultural Selection:

- ▶ On political views (or "exit")
 - ▶ Hirschman's exit and voice (1970, 1993)
 - ▶ Exit and Voice: Germany 1848-1933 (Barsbai and Rapoport, 2026)
- ▶ On individual values / social norms
 - ▶ Italian students self-select out of Southern Italy on "civicness" (non-cheating) - Michaeli et al. (EJ2022)
 - ▶ Emigrants from Scandinavia self-selected on individualism in the Age of Mass Migration (Beck-Knudsen, 2025)
- ▶ On fertility preferences (Livi Bacci, "A Short History of Migration", 2012)

Evidence for channels

International rural-to-rural migration ... required stable families with large numbers of children. Families of that sort ... were well suited to the destination countries where land was abundant and so a large family of workers an advantage. Similarly advantageous were the traditional social and family values of those migrants. [On the contrary] Migration from the countryside to cities and industrial regions, where workers were employed primarily as wage workers in manufacturing and construction, favored instead a different profile, namely, ... individuals whose family ties were looser, ... nuclear families able to carefully plan births - Livi Bacci (2012)

Evidence for channels

Evidence of Cultural Mixing:

- ▶ Even if people change locations they take with them values and beliefs from their origin, creating a melting pot at destination.
- ▶ Used in the literature as evidence of cultural persistence
 - ▶ Women's laborforce participation (Fernandez, 2007, 2012)
 - ▶ Gender attitudes (Almond et al., 2013)
 - ▶ Family ties and living arrangements (Giuliano, 2007)
 - ▶ Preference for redistribution (Luttmer and Singhal, 2011)
 - ▶ Differences in persistence by topic (Giavazzi et al., 2019)

Evidence for channels

Evidence of **Cultural Assimilation**:

- ▶ Abramitzky and Boustan (2022), "Streets of Gold: America's untold story of immigrant success", Public Affairs.
- ▶ Fouka et al., 2022; Saavedra 2021; Biavaschi et al. 2017
- ▶ Norris & Inglehart (2012): assimilation of Muslims in the United States
- ▶ Guidotti et al. (LNCS2021) use scanned data from a large supermarket chain in Italy converge to locals in terms of consumption patterns.

Evidence for channels

Evidence of Cultural Dissemination:

- ▶ Economics literature
 - ▶ Miho, Jarotschkin & Zhuravskaya (JEEA2024): populations adopted gender values from deported immigrants in Stalin's Russia
 - ▶ Giuliano & Tabellini (2024): dissemination of preferences for redistribution in the US
 - ▶ Bazzi et al. (forthcoming Restud): The Confederate Diaspora
- ▶ In the public debate:
 - ▶ Collier (2014): the dilution of the host country's culture
 - ▶ Borjas (2015): "bad" culture, institutions, and norms imported and propagated by migrants

Evidence for channels

Evidence of Cultural Dissemination:

Every species of government has its specific principles. Ours perhaps are more peculiar than those of any other in the universe. (...) To these nothing can be more opposed than the maxims of absolute monarchies. Yet from such we are to expect the greatest number of emigrants. They will bring with them the principles of the government they leave, imbibed in their early youth; (...) These principles, with their language, they will transmit to their children. In proportion to their numbers, they will share with us the legislation. They will infuse into it their spirit, warp and bias its directions, and render a heterogeneous, incoherent and distracted mass.

Thomas Jefferson, Notes on Virginia, 1785

Evidence for channels

Evidence of Cultural Dissemination

[P]arvenue à un degré de décomposition répugnant, l'Europe occidentale n'était plus en état de se sauver elle-même – pas davantage que ne l'avait été la Rome antique au V^e siècle de notre ère. L'arrivée massive de populations immigrées empreintes d'une culture traditionnelle encore marquée par les hiérarchies naturelles, la soumission de la femme et le respect dû aux anciens constituait une chance historique pour le réarmement moral et familial de l'Europe (...).

Michel Houellebecq, Soumission, 2015

Evidence for channels

Evidence of Cultural Dissemination

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Politics

Trump: Immigration is ‘changing the culture’ of Europe and its leaders ‘better watch themselves’



Evidence for channels

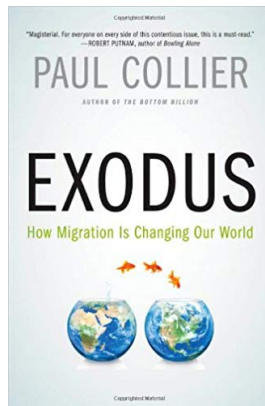
Evidence of Cultural Dissemination

"The track record of culturally diverse societies is not so encouraging...In most societies for most of history high diversity has been a handicap."

- Collier (2014)

"For immigrants to generate substantial global gains, it must be the case that billions of immigrants can move to the industrialized economies without importing the "bad" organization, social models, and culture that led to poor economic conditions in the source countries in the first place"

- Borjas (2015)



Evidence for channels

Evidence for **Cultural Backlash**:

- ▶ Activation of history papers (Fouka and Voth, APSR2023; Ochners and Roesel, AEJA2024)
- ▶ Immigrants react to natives' hostility (Fouka, Restud2020)
- ▶ Identity and conflict (Shayo, APSR2009; Atkin, Colson-Sihra and Shayo, JPE 2021)
- ▶ Political and cultural backlash against globalization: Norris and Inglehart (2019), Docquier and Rapoport, "The Vicious Circle of Xenophobia" (Economic Policy, 2025).

Evidence for channels

Evidence for Cultural Remittances:

- ▶ Emigrants remit values, norms and knowledge back home
 - ▶ Dominicans in Boston (Levitt, IMR1998)
 - ▶ Social distancing during Covid in Mexico (Tian et al., JEBO2022)
- ▶ Political Remittances
 - ▶ Barsbai et al. (2017) for Moldova; Batista and Vicente (2011) for Cape Verde; Chauvet and Mercier (2014) for Mali
- ▶ Malthusian Remittances
 - ▶ Fargues (2007) on Morocco vs. Egypt;
 - ▶ 19th century France, Daudin, Franck and Rapoport (2019)
 - ▶ Godlonton Theoharides on reproductive health behavior (AER2025)
 - ▶ Melki, Rapoport, Spolaore and Wacziarg (2024) on the diffusion of the fertility transition out of France to the rest of Europe.