

HANDBOOK OF CULTURE AND ECONOMIC BEHAVIOR

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Summary

The handbook will provide an overview of an emerging field of research within economics that studies the causes, evolution, and consequences of culture, which we define to be “values, beliefs, and knowledge that affects human behavior and is transmitted between individuals.”

The handbook will cover all aspects of this body of research starting with the issue of how one measures cultural differences across societies. The literature relies heavily on the use of lab-based behavioral experiments, as well as large-scale survey-based efforts that document global variation in cultural traits.

The second section of the handbook will cover the recent advances that have been made in understanding the (mathematical) theory behind culture, its transmission between individuals, and how it directs human behavior. This section will provide overviews of theories of cultural transmission from economics, as well as the seminal models from evolutionary anthropology that provide the foundation of this economic literature.

The third section will survey the empirical literature that seeks to better understand the historical roots of contemporary cultural variation. The studies typically combine historical and ethnographic data with contemporary lab and survey-based measures of cultural values and test for relationships between them, while employing strategies to infer causality.

The fourth section will provide overviews of the empirical evidence about the nature of cultural change. The chapters will consider studies that examine how experiences within a person’s lifetime can alter and shape their values and beliefs, how government policies can shape cultural values, and how values in turn can shape policies, laws, and institutions.

The fifth and final section will include summaries of recent research that attempts to understand the effects that culture can have on economic outcomes. The studies not only examine the proximate importance of culture for economic policy today but also the importance of broader macro-level cultural differences in explaining the vast differences in economic well-being that we observe between societies.

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