

In-class homework 1: Genes and Institutions.

Your Name

Consider these points

1. Both scholars are highly recognized, and widely cited, and pretty much, super respected within the academic community. Robinson thinks that institutions shape people's behavior. McDermott thinks that genes shape people's behavior.
2. Each approach has a "hard-to-change" component. Robinson thinks that individuals are always profit-maximizers (e.g., people will innovate—create patents—only if there are incentives to do so). McDermott, in turn, thinks that individuals are mostly determined by their genes.
3. Each approach has a "path-dependent-like" component. Institutions, even the "bad" ones, tend to get stuck via a path-dependent mechanism, decreasing the amount of social welfare in the long run. Genes, too, were presumably product of lengthy evolutionary processes. Certain unsatisfied needs, fears, among other factors, changed the genetic composition of certain individuals. After centuries, these genes "got stuck," shaping things like political ideology today.

Now answer all these questions in the back of the page. One paragraph each, minimum.

1. Which approach convinces you the most? Why? Explain.
2. What do these two approaches tell us for the study of comparative politics? Are we giving up on the study of **politics** by focusing (too much) on economics and/or genetics?
3. Some people might think: "Long gone are the days when comparativists used to spend time in the field, learning in person about the communities they were studying. Not only data-mining is harming the subfield (Mahoney). In the desire to 'become a respected science,' it seems also that stuff like a 'simple' blood work of people might replace what was beautiful about the study of politics." Do you agree? Why? Explain.