Geographic Data that is Wide and Deep: Uncovering Socio-political Behavior Using Big Data

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Many theories of social and political behavior implicate geographic context by attributing influence to the environment in which the behavior occurs or the people that fill that environment. Yet, there is a disconnect between theory and evidence: while modern social science has developed sophisticated measures of individual behavior, our measures of context are relatively crude, often relying on aggregate summaries and small samples that bring imprecision and possible bias. Here, I review the use of data on the scale of hundreds of millions of individuals combined with detailed information on behavior and activity. Such data can overcome our previous limitations by being geographically and temporally broad in addition to providing in-depth analysis of individual behavior. These studies allow new insights into the powerful influence of geographic context on human behavior.

Bio: Ryan D. Enos is a political scientist at Harvard University, where he is a Professor of Government and Director of the Center for American Political Studies and the founder and director of the Harvard Digital Lab for the Social Sciences. He researches at the intersection of politics, psychology, and geography to study behavior and attitudes in the United States and other countries. His research has appeared in leading scholarly journals, and he is frequently cited in major media outlets. His 2017 book *The Space Between Us* was called “among the most important and fascinating books about the uniquely psychological consequences of political geography ever written.”