

Ancestral Origins of Democratic Preferences: The Role of State Experience

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Abstract

Early statehood may foster proto-democratic values by demonstrating the effectiveness of balancing between central authority and local autonomy in addressing coordination problems. However, further consolidation of authoritarian systems entrench hierarchical structures, thereby undermining norms of democratic participation. In this view, we propose an inverted U-shaped relationship between ancestral state experience and democratic preferences, with intergenerational transmission as a channel for its lasting impact. Country-level evidence supports our hypothesis. Using data from the Ethnographic Atlas, we show that moderate exposure to ancestral statehood is positively associated with democratic preferences, while excessive exposure has the reverse effect. Individual-level evidence from the Integrated Values Survey and the General Social Survey corroborates this pattern, confirming the intergenerational transmission of the ancestral legacy on democratic preferences. We find no comparable results for other cultural traits, highlighting the unique impact on democratic attitudes.

Keywords: Ancestral state experience, democratic preferences, intergenerational transmission

JEL Codes: N90, O57, Z13.

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1 Introduction

Democratic cultures play a crucial role in shaping the dynamics of political regimes. Following the seminal work of Lipset (1959) and Almond et al. (1963), many studies have examined the role of political cultures in the development of democracy (Putnam, 1994; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005; Welzel, 2007, 2013). Building on this, recent studies further emphasize the interplay between political cultures and regimes. Besley and Persson (2019) theoretically argue that the complementarity between democratic values and institutions leads to an equilibrium in which democracy persists without any formal institutional commitment. Supporting this view, Acemoglu et al. (2024) provide survey-based evidence that exposure to democracy and its successful performance strengthens support for democratic institutions, potentially contributing to the positive feedback of their interaction.

On this basis, this study focuses on the deep root of democratic preferences. We argue that ancestral experiences of centralized state control have significantly influenced attitudes toward democracy, but that this relationship has not been linear. Our hypothesis suggests that exposure to a centralized state initially has a positive effect on preferences. In pre-state societies, the emergence of primary states improves the capacity to address collective action problems (Bardhan, 2016; Allen et al., 2023), while still preserving elements of individual and small group autonomy (Carneiro, 1970; Diamond, 2013). As positive experiences from balancing centralization and local autonomy evolve, they foster the development of proto-democratic values. However, as pre-modern statehood consolidates, centralized authoritarian regimes solidify and entrench hierarchical power structures. Over time, centralized control dominates individual autonomy and undermines the balance between autonomy and authority, weakening the need for coordination among diverse interests that underlines democratic preferences.

Our proposition suggests an inverted U-shaped relationship between ancestral state experience and democratic preferences today. For the empirical analysis, ancestral state experience is measured using the Ethnographic Atlas (Murdock, 1967a), a database of pre-industrial characteristics on 1,265 ethnic groups, which has been widely used in the literature (e.g., Gennaioli and Rainer, 2007; Nunn and Wantchekon, 2011; Alesina et al., 2013; Alsan, 2015; Enke, 2019; Corno et al., 2020). The ancestry-based measure of state experience is derived from the “jurisdictional hierarchy beyond the local community” variable, which is aggregated at the country level using the distribution of ancestral ethnicity identified from information on spoken languages and dialects (Giuliano and Nunn, 2018). Based on this, we test its nonlinear relationship with democratic preferences across

a range of specifications. First, we present the country-level evidence. Countries with ancestors who had more experiences of centralized states are likely to show higher political participation and stronger preferences for democratic institutions up to a moderate level of ancestral state experience. Beyond this, the relationship reverses, indicating a negative association with democratic preferences. These results are robust to semiparametric models, different sample compositions, and a battery of historical and contemporary controls. In particular, the inclusion of different indices of contemporary institutional quality does not affect our findings, suggesting that the potential impact of current political regimes does not confound our results.

Despite extensive robustness checks, the country-level evidence could still be affected by other country-specific characteristics and may have limitations in establishing the role of intergenerational transmission. To address this concern, we explore the individual-level impact of ancestral state experience, conditional on the characteristics of the country of residence. We employ two strategies. The first examines the impact of ancestral statehood on democratic preferences among second-generation immigrants across countries. Using the Integrated Values Surveys, a merged dataset of the World Values Survey and the European Values Study, we construct a sample of individuals with immigrant parents and estimate the impact of ancestral state experience based on their parental nationality. The results support our hypothesis. Individual attitudes toward democracy, measured by questions on the personal importance and evaluation of the democratic system, display a hump-shaped relationship with ancestral state experience, conditional on a range of individual characteristics and country fixed effects. Moreover, this finding does not apply to other cultural traits, confirming the direct legacy on democratic preferences.

The second strategy draws on self-reported ancestry among US residents. Using the General Social Survey data, we leverage a question asking respondents from where their ancestors came. Consistent with our previous findings, ancestral state experience based on self-reported ancestry exhibits an inverted U-shaped relationship with different measures of democratic participation and consciousness. This result is conditional on state fixed effects, indicating that the lasting impact of ancestral statehood persists even under identical within-country institutional conditions. We do not observe comparable effects on alternative cultural attitudes.

Our findings add to the literature on the deep roots of democracy. Given the critical role of democratic institutions in economic development (e.g., Persson and Tabellini, 2006; Madsen et al., 2015; Acemoglu et al., 2019),¹ recent literature has explored its determinants

¹Beyond growth and development, the impact of democracy on economic outcomes has been explored in various contexts, including economic reforms (Murtin and Wacziarg, 2014), educational spending (Stasavage,

in various contexts, such as economic inequality (Boix, 2003; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2005), education (Glaeser et al., 2007; Spilimbergo, 2009), natural resource endowments (Tsui, 2011; Caselli and Tesei, 2016), and colonization experiences (Hariri, 2012).² This paper is particularly related to studies that trace the ancestral origins of democracy. For example, Giuliano and Nunn (2013) suggest a persistent link between indigenous democratic practices and contemporary representative democracy, while Bentzen et al. (2019) further claim that this relationship depends on the relative strength of indigenous groups. In line with this, Schulz (2022) provides evidence that strong ancestral kin networks have long-term negative effects on the development of democratic institutions. Beyond their impact on political regimes, we propose an ancestral origin of democratic *preferences*, a fundamental element in the formation and persistence of democratic institutions (Besley and Persson, 2019; Acemoglu et al., 2024)

More broadly, this paper contributes to the understanding of the role of historical institutions in cultural formation. For example, Guiso et al. (2016) show that Italian cities with a history of self-government exhibit higher levels of civic capital today, while Becker et al. (2016) present similar evidence in the context of historical Habsburg affiliation. Schulz et al. (2019) echo these findings in a broader context, highlighting a negative link between medieval kin-based institutions and prosocial attitudes today. Similarly, Rustagi (2024) shows that a historical shock on self-governance in Switzerland has had persistent effects on norms of cooperation. More closely related to our work, several studies emphasize the significance of state history in shaping cultural traits. Lowes et al. (2017) document that historical state centralization, as exemplified by the legacy of the Kuba Kingdom, led to weaker norms of rule following, and Dell et al. (2018) find that Vietnamese areas with a longer history of centralized governance exhibit stronger cooperative norms and greater civic capital today. Our focus on democratic preferences builds on these ideas by extending their implications to political culture.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 discusses the hypothesis of this study, and Section 3 presents country-level evidence. Section 4 provides individual-level evidence, focusing on the intergenerational transmission of democratic preferences. Section 5 concludes the paper.

2005), health outcomes (Gerring et al., 2012). For empirical studies that do not support the growth effects of democracy, see Burkhart and Lewis-Beck (1994), Murtin and Wacziarg (2014), and Pozuelo et al. (2016).

²Hariri (2012) argue that precolonial state development constrained the spread of democratic institutions by hindering European colonization, which was crucial for their transfer. While its focus on pre-modern state history is analogous to our study, the mechanisms and outcomes of interest differ significantly.

2 Ancestral State Experience and Democratic Preferences

Democratic institutions incorporate a variety of features, a fundamental characteristic of which is the balance between individual liberty and government authority (Dahl, 1971; Heper, 1992; Diamond, 1994; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2023). The possibility of a non-linear relationship between state experience and democratic cultures may be explored within this framework.

In pre-state societies, the absence of a central authority allowed for a high degree of autonomy and self-governance at both the individual and group levels, yet hindered the ability to address coordination and collective action problems (Carneiro, 1970; Greif, 2006; Diamond, 2013). The emergence of primitive states served to deal with these issues by improving the efficiency of coordination among varying interests, thus enhancing the capacity to provide public goods (Bardhan, 2016; Allen et al., 2023). This transition can be characterized by increased effectiveness in collective decision-making through the introduction of centralized governance, while still retaining elements of individual and small group autonomy. As positive experiences with this balance between centralization and local autonomy evolved, the early development of governance structures may have fostered exposure to proto-democratic values.

However, this implication does not hold in a monotonic way. The consolidation of pre-modern statehood often involved the reinforcement of authoritarian regimes. The strengthening of discretionary decision-making systems by elites entrenched power structures that prioritize hierarchy and centralization, undermining channels for reflecting individual autonomy in resolving collective action problems (Weingast, 1997; Dower et al., 2018). As a society remains under strong state control, effectiveness rooted in a balance between autonomy and authority gradually diminishes, thereby reducing the demand for coordination among distinct interests.³

The above discussion suggests a nonlinear relationship between the stage of state formation and exposure to democratic principles. While the initial development of centralized political systems introduces a balance between autonomy and authority, further consolidation of state control undermines individual participation in collective decision-making. Given the significant influence of institutional environments on political attitudes (e.g., Careja and Emmenegger, 2012; Mazumder, 2018; Giuliano and Tabellini, 2020), this

³This view echoes Acemoglu and Robinson (2019). They argue that inclusive democratic institutions emerge only from a delicate equilibrium between a “society” that seeks liberty and a “state” that seeks power, which corresponds to the narrow corridor between the “Absent Leviathan” and the “Despotic Leviathan” in their terminology. However, while Acemoglu and Robinson (2019) address conflicts between contemporaneous polities, our analysis centers on the emergence and perpetuation of centralized authority within a society over time. Moreover, we extend these implications to cultural dimensions in the long-run.

relationship may be extended to democratic preferences. In primitive tribal societies, the rise of early statehood likely promoted norms and attitudes that favored democratic values. However, the strengthening of a centralized state would have eroded these norms, diminishing the emphasis on individual autonomy in political decision-making and negatively impacting democratic preferences.

Therefore, we hypothesize that the relationship between ancestral state experience and contemporary democratic preferences follows an inverted U-shaped pattern, where the strongest preferences for democratic values emerge at a moderate level of pre-modern state consolidation.⁴ Extensive literature highlights the cultural persistence rooted in ancestral characteristics across various dimensions, with intergenerational transmission being a key channel (Alesina et al., 2013; Enke, 2019; Giuliano and Nunn, 2021). If historical state experience left a mark on contemporaneous democratic preferences, it could manifest as an ancestral legacy in political cultures today.

3 Country-Level Persistence

This section provides country-level evidence for our hypothesis. Section 3.1 describes the data sources and the measure of ancestral state experience. Section 3.2 presents the estimation results, and Section 3.3 tests the robustness of our findings.

3.1 Measuring Ancestral State Experience

Our measure of ancestral state experience is derived from the Ethnographic Atlas, which documents the cultural, institutional, and socioeconomic characteristics of 1,265 pre-industrial ethnic societies based on the earliest available ethnographic observations. Given its extensive coverage, the Ethnographic Atlas has been widely used across various fields (Wood and Eagly, 2002; Galor and Özak, 2016; Séguérel and Bon, 2017; Ashraf et al., 2020; Giuliano and Nunn, 2021). Moreover, its records align with self-reported data from the descendants of the portrayed ethnicities, supporting its validity for measuring ancestral traits (Bahrami-Rad et al., 2021).

Ancestral exposure to centralized states is proxied by the level of “Jurisdictional Hierarchy Beyond the Local Community,” which has been commonly used in the literature

⁴It should be noted that this proposition is not about the direct experience of democracy, which is thought to reinforce support for democratic regimes (Mishler and Rose, 2007; Fuchs-Schündeln and Schündeln, 2015; Acemoglu et al., 2024). Instead, we focus on the tension between individual liberty and centralized authority, which forms the long-term foundation for democratic principles. In this context, our study also differs from the works of Giuliano and Nunn (2013) and Bentzen et al. (2019), which examine the long-term impact of primitive forms of democratic institutions.

to measure the degree of political complexity and centralization in pre-modern societies. Previous studies have applied this measure against various cross-cultural dimensions, including public goods provision (Gennaioli and Rainer, 2007), gender roles (Alesina et al., 2013), economic development (Michalopoulos and Papaioannou, 2013), moral values (Enke, 2019), and religious prevalence (Bentzen and Gokmen, 2023).

Jurisdictional hierarchy is coded as an ordinal scale with five categories. A value of zero indicates the absence of political hierarchies beyond autonomous bands or villages, and a value of four represents the theoretical maximum level of state development, characterized as a “complex state” (Murdock, 1967b). The ethnic-level observations of statehood are matched to current country-level populations using the geographic distribution of over 7,000 language and dialect groups from the *Ethnologue 16* and global population density data from the *Landscan 2007* database.⁵ The country-level index of ancestral state experience is calculated by aggregating the ethnic-level data on jurisdictional hierarchy, weighted by the population composition of ancestral characteristics of each country.⁶

The Ethnographic Atlas covers a wide range of ethnicities but lack records for European societies, partly due to the perception at the time that pre-modern Europe had abundant written records. Given the significance of European origins in cross-country variation, we also employ the Ancestral Characteristics database compiled by Giuliano and Nunn (2018), which includes the data for ethnic groups omitted in the Ethnographic Atlas, mainly those in Siberia and Europe.

⁵The majority of ethnicities were recorded in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but the periods of record vary widely, ranging from 2000 BC for the Babylonians to 1984 for the Aeta people of the Philippines. We take two approaches to address potential measurement errors due to this variation. First, our baseline specification controls for the log of the average years since ethnic groups in a country were recorded in the Ethnographic Atlas, similar to Enke (2019) and Le Rossignol and Lowes (2022). Second, Table A1 shows the robustness our results to excluding countries that include the Babylonians or pre-1000 BC ethnic groups as ancestors.

⁶The specific calculation follows the method of Giuliano and Nunn (2018), as shown in the following fraction:

$$\frac{(0 \times Level0_c) + (1 \times Level1_c) + (2 \times Level2_c) + (3 \times Level3_c) + (4 \times Level4_c)}{1 - Missing_c}$$

$Leveli_c$, where i takes an integer value from 0 to 4, denotes the share of ancestral societies in country c that had i levels of jurisdictional hierarchy beyond the local community. Societies with missing data are excluded from this calculation as reflected in the denominator. Table A2 shows that our results are robust to excluding Portugal, Romania, and Uzbekistan where societies with missing data account for over 60% of the total ancestral composition. Additionally, Table A5 confirms that our results are not sensitive to an alternative classification of the jurisdictional hierarchy.

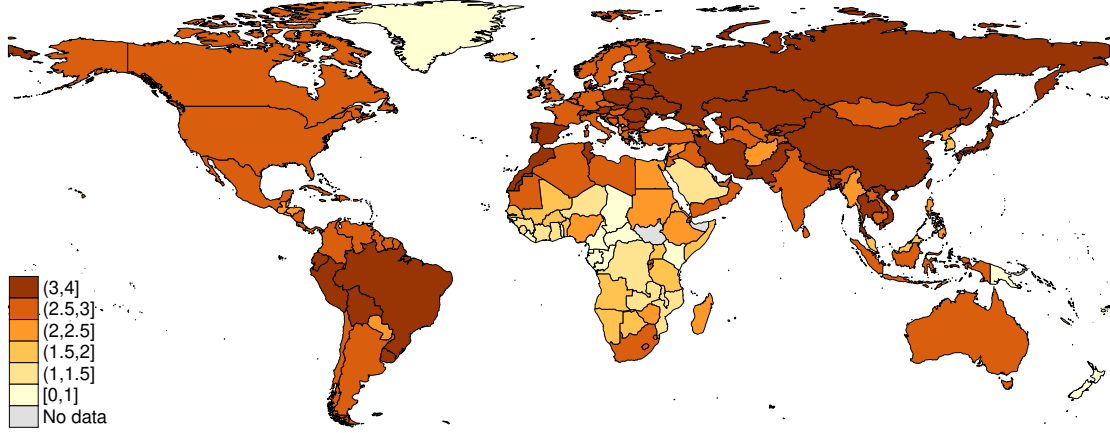


Figure 1: Ancestral State Experience Calculated by Country

Figure 1 illustrates the country-level distribution of the index of ancestral state experience. The lowest values of the index are found in Sub-Saharan African countries, while the highest values are primarily observed in South America and Asia. European and neo-European countries tend to fall in the middle. This pattern suggests that the relationship between ancestral exposure to statehood and political cultures may not be strictly linear.

3.2 Results

We begin by estimating the nonlinear relationship between ancestral state experience and democratic cultures across countries. Our baseline specification follows Equation 1. The outcome variable Democracy_i takes different proxies for democratic cultures of country i . StateExp_i is the index of ancestral state experience, while StateExp_i^2 is its squared term, allowing us to test the inverted U-shaped relationship between ancestral statehood and democratic cultures. X_i^G is a vector of geoclimatic controls, including distance to the nearest coast, country area, latitude, precipitation, temperature, elevation, terrain ruggedness, agricultural suitability, irrigation potential, cereal grain suitability, landlocked status, and malaria suitability.⁷

$$\text{Democracy}_i = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{StateExp}_i + \beta_2 \text{StateExp}_i^2 + \gamma'_G X_i^G + \gamma'_H X_i^H + \delta_c + \epsilon_i \quad (1)$$

X_i^H is a vector of historical controls, which could potentially be associated with ancestral state experience and contemporary political cultures, including ancestral economic

⁷Beyond agricultural suitability, we control for irrigation potential in consideration of its persistent impact on political regimes (Bentzen et al., 2017). Cereal suitability is included to account for its effect on state formation (Mayshar et al., 2022).

complexity, primitive democratic traditions, log population density in the year 1900, and the log average years since the ethnic groups for a given country entered the Ethnographic Atlas.⁸ Importantly, it should be noted that our estimates are conditional on primitive democratic traditions, represented by the share of ancestral societies that appointed leaders through an electoral process, which could have directly influenced attitudes toward democratic institutions (Giuliano and Nunn, 2013; Bentzen et al., 2019). The baseline estimating equation does not control for contemporary country characteristics due to the “bad control” issue; however, the results in the even-numbered Columns of Table 1 confirm that their inclusion does not affect our results. Lastly, all regressions include continent fixed effects (δ_c).

Table 1 shows the results using three country-level proxies for democratic cultures. All outcome variables have been normalized to have values between zero and one. The first is voter turnout, widely regarded a key indicator of civic cultures (Knack, 1992; Putnam, 2000; Bowler and Donovan, 2013). Conditional on other country characteristics, variation in turnout would arguably be interpreted as a reflection of democratic attitudes. Using the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) database, we calculate the country-level average of the voting-age population (VAP) turnout between 1990-2023, based on relevant elections according to each country’s political system.⁹ Columns 1 and 2 indicate an inverted U-shaped relationship between ancestral state experience and voter turnout: the coefficients of the linear and quadratic terms are positive and negative, respectively. According to Column 1, in our preferred specification without contemporaneous controls, voter turnout peaks at approximately the 70th percentile of the country-level index of ancestral state experience. The estimates change little when controlling for contemporaneous controls—log GDP per capita, urbanization rate, and the share of manufacturing value added in GDP—suggesting that the long-term impact of state

⁸Ancestral economic complexity is measured by the “Settlement Complexity” variable in the Ethnographic Atlas, which is frequently used to proxy for the degree of economic development at the corresponding time period (Alesina et al., 2013; Michalopoulos and Papaioannou, 2013; Giuliano and Nunn, 2021). Population density in 1900 is based on current country boundaries, with the data from Goldewijk (2005).

⁹For example, in a country with a presidential system, the average turnout is calculated using only executive elections, excluding legislative elections. This accounts for the salience of elections depending on political institutions, a factor known to influence voter interest and turnout (Siaroff and Merer, 2002; Tavits, 2009; Stockemer and Calca, 2014). Political systems are classified according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) database (IPU, 2024), which categorizes countries into five systems: Communist, Monarchy, Parliamentary, Presidential, Presidential-Parliamentary, and Transitional. “Transitional” indicates the absence of a fully functioning representative body, often due to military coups or state failure. To focus on stable electoral systems, we exclude countries that experienced periods of “Transition” during the sample years, including Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, and Sudan. In Columns where turnout is the outcome variable, controls also include the presence of compulsory voting laws in each country to account for their mechanical correlation with turnout. As shown in Table A3, our findings are robust to different sampling methods and specifications related to electoral systems.

history on economic development does not confound our findings.

Table 1: Ancestral state experience and democratic preferences

Dependent Variables:	Voter Turnout		Democratic Culture Index		Importance of Democracy	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Ancestral State Experience	0.182*** (0.064)	0.172*** (0.064)	0.198*** (0.050)	0.189*** (0.042)	0.105** (0.048)	0.095* (0.051)
Ancestral State Experience Squared	-0.032*** (0.012)	-0.031** (0.012)	-0.043*** (0.011)	-0.037*** (0.008)	-0.022*** (0.008)	-0.019** (0.008)
Continent Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geoclimatic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Historical Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Contemporaneous Controls		Yes		Yes		Yes
Observations	118	118	130	130	84	84
R-squared	0.38	0.39	0.50	0.63	0.31	0.34

Notes: Robust standard errors are reported in parentheses.

Despite its widespread use as a proxy for civic culture, voter turnout may be limited in capturing individual attitudes toward democracy due to its potential association with other factors, such as institutional conditions (Endersby and Krieckhaus, 2008). Therefore, we next consider the democratic culture index provided by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). This index offers a comprehensive assessment of democratic culture, rather than focusing on institutional or procedural aspects—a unique feature compared to other indicators of democracy (Graziano and Quaranta, 2024). It measures the level of democratic culture of each country on a 0 to 10 scale, and we average the scores over the available period, from 2006 to 2023.¹⁰ As shown in Columns 3 and 4, the results are consistent with the findings from turnout. The estimates support the hump-shaped relationship, with the democratic culture index reaching its maximum at a similar level of ancestral state experience.

Given the possibility that expert opinion introduces bias into the democratic culture index (Graziano and Quaranta, 2024), Columns 5 and 6 examine self-reported attitudes toward democracy using the Integrated Values Surveys (IVS), a dataset combining the

¹⁰The index of democratic culture consists of eight sub-indices, six of which are based on survey data, while the other two reflect expert opinions on the democratic culture in each country. Each sub-index is given a score of 0, 0.5, or 1, with the total sum converted to a 0 to 10 scale. The index was published in 2006, 2008, and annually from 2010 onwards. Elff and Ziaja (2018) validate the comparability of the EIU democracy indices with other measures of comparative democracy from various perspectives.

European Values Study (EVS) and the World Values Survey (WVS). We focus on the E235 variable, which asks respondents to rank how important it is for them “to live in a country that is governed democratically,” a measure used to assess democratic preferences in related studies (Giuliano and Nunn, 2013; Besley and Persson, 2019; Facchini and Melki, 2021; Bryan, 2023).¹¹ The outcome variable is the country-level average of the E235 responses across all waves that include this question. While its sample covers fewer countries, the results support our findings. The self-reported importance of democracy initially increases with ancestral state experience but declines at higher levels.

3.3 Robustness

Contemporary Institutions The role of contemporary institutions may confound the interpretation of the results: if ancestral statehood had a lasting impact on political institutions, it could serve as an alternative channel influencing democratic preferences, independent of the proposed mechanism.

Table 2: Robustness to contemporary political institutions

Dependent Variables:	Voter Turnout		Democratic Culture Index		Importance of Democracy	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Ancestral State Experience	0.203*** (0.064)	0.179*** (0.068)	0.173*** (0.054)	0.127** (0.055)	0.106** (0.050)	0.110** (0.045)
Ancestral State Experience Squared	-0.037*** (0.012)	-0.031** (0.013)	-0.037*** (0.011)	-0.025** (0.011)	-0.023*** (0.008)	-0.023*** (0.008)
Continent Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geoclimatic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Historical Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Polity V	Yes		Yes		Yes	
V-Democracy		Yes		Yes		Yes
Observations	117	118	129	130	83	84
R-squared	0.39	0.38	0.54	0.60	0.37	0.31

Notes: Robust standard errors are reported in parentheses.

To address this concern, Table 2 tests the robustness of our findings to contemporary institutional quality, while acknowledging the possibility of bad controls. We control for the Polity V score in the odd-numbered columns and include the Electoral Democracy

¹¹Table A4 presents the estimates using the E117 variable, which assesses subjective evaluation of democratic political system. The results show minimal change.

index from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project in the even-numbered columns.¹² The results remain stable in both cases, confirming that the impact of ancestral state experience is not attributable to contemporary political institutions.

Additional Historical Controls Despite a wide range of controls, our baseline estimates could still be affected by alternative country characteristics linked to both state development and political cultures. To mitigate this concern, Table 3 tests the robustness of our findings to additional historical controls. In Column 1, we account for ethnic fractionalization, which is masked in the country-level aggregate of ancestral state experience but may have a lasting impact on political cultures (Burgess et al., 2015; Larson and Lewis, 2017). Column 2 includes the log years since neolithic transition, considering its impact on state formation (Borcan et al., 2021) and its enduring influence on collectivism (Olsson and Paik, 2016), which could be negatively related to democratization (Gorodnichenko and Roland, 2021).¹³

The remaining columns consider three ancestry-based characteristics from the Ethnographic Atlas.¹⁴ Column 3 controls for the degree of “cousin term differentiation,” a proxy for the strength of kinship network, which could have lasting effects on civic cultures (Alesina and Giuliano, 2011) and democratic institutions (Schulz, 2022). Given its potential impact on the rise and consolidation of autocratic regimes (Galor and Klemp, 2017; Bentzen et al., 2017), Column 4 includes a measure of social stratification, reflecting the existence of any form of class distinctions at the time. In Column 5, we control for ancestral dependence on agriculture, for reasons similar to those considered in Column 2. Column 6 includes all additional controls. Across all specifications, the results remain consistent with the baseline estimates.

¹²Both indices are averaged across the years based on the period of which the outcome variables are constructed.

¹³The data on ethnic fractionalization and years since neolithic transition is obtained from Alesina et al. (2003) and Putterman (2008), respectively.

¹⁴The country-level variables are calculated in the same way as the index of ancestral state experience.

Table 3: Robustness to additional historical controls

Dependent variable: Voter Turnout						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Ancestral State Experience	0.174*** (0.061)	0.201*** (0.067)	0.158** (0.072)	0.175** (0.077)	0.161** (0.067)	0.168** (0.072)
Ancestral State Experience Squared	-0.029** (0.011)	-0.034*** (0.012)	-0.028** (0.014)	-0.031** (0.013)	-0.026** (0.013)	-0.023* (0.013)
Observations	118	118	117	118	118	117
R-squared	0.43	0.38	0.38	0.38	0.39	0.45
Dependent variable: Democratic Culture Index						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Ancestral State Experience	0.196*** (0.048)	0.168*** (0.051)	0.162*** (0.054)	0.203*** (0.053)	0.187*** (0.051)	0.157*** (0.057)
Ancestral State Experience Squared	-0.042*** (0.010)	-0.040*** (0.010)	-0.036*** (0.012)	-0.044*** (0.011)	-0.039*** (0.011)	-0.034*** (0.012)
Observations	130	130	128	130	130	128
R-squared	0.53	0.53	0.53	0.50	0.51	0.57
Dependent variable: Importance of Democracy						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Ancestral State Experience	0.098* (0.053)	0.118** (0.051)	0.099** (0.049)	0.142*** (0.050)	0.105** (0.049)	0.151** (0.063)
Ancestral State Experience Squared	-0.020** (0.009)	-0.023*** (0.008)	-0.020** (0.009)	-0.027*** (0.008)	-0.021** (0.008)	-0.026** (0.011)
Observations	84	84	83	84	84	83
R-squared	0.31	0.34	0.32	0.34	0.31	0.40
Additional Historical Controls						
Ethnic Fractionalization	Yes					Yes
Neolithic Transition		Yes				Yes
Kinship Networks			Yes			Yes
Social Class Distinctions				Yes		Yes
Dependence on Agriculture					Yes	Yes
Continent Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geoclimatic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Historical Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes. Robust standard errors are reported in parentheses.

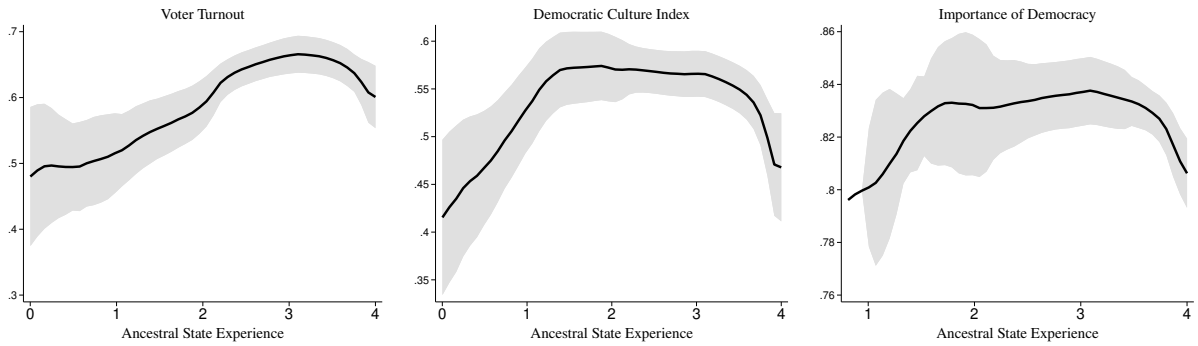
Semiparametric Estimation To verify that the hump-shaped relationship we observe is not a mechanical result of the quadratic specification, we replicate our estimates using a semiparametric model in Equation 2. Here, $f(\cdot)$ is an unknown smooth function of ancestral state experience. X_i^G , X_i^H , and δ_c are geoclimatic controls, historical controls,

and continent fixed effects, respectively. This specification allows us to estimate the nonparametric relationship between ancestral state experience and democratic preferences, conditional on the parametric effects of country characteristics. Specifically, γ is estimated in the first step, followed by a kernel regression to estimate the nonparametric relationship between $\text{Democracy}_i - \gamma X_i$ and $f(\text{StateExp}_i)$ (Robinson, 1988).¹⁵

$$\text{Democracy}_i = \alpha + f(\text{StateExp}_i) + \gamma'_G X_i^G + \gamma'_H X_i^H + \delta_c + \epsilon_i \quad (2)$$

Figure 2 shows the results of the semiparametric estimation. Consistent with the baseline estimates, ancestral state experience is related to the proxies for democratic preferences in an inverted U-shaped pattern. While voter turnout increases more steadily with increasing levels of ancestral state experience, the indicators of democratic preferences commonly decline once the index of ancestral statehood reaches a value of around 3, which echoes the results from Equation 1.

Figure 2: Ancestral State Experience and Democratic Preferences: Semiparametric Results



Notes: The shaded area indicates the 95% confidence interval.

4 Intergenerational Transmission

Our country-level evidence supports the inverted U-shaped relationship between ancestral state experience and democratic preferences. However, the cross-country relationship may not necessarily reflect the long-term impact through cultural persistence. Despite a range of robustness checks, we cannot rule out the possibility of other contemporary country characteristics confounding our findings. To fill this gap, this section examines intergenerational transmission of democratic attitudes using survey-based datasets. The results confirm that the impact of ancestral state experience is attributable to cultural

¹⁵We select a kernel bandwidth of 0.4 to address under-smoothing due to the sparsely populated nature of the country-level variation. The results remain qualitatively stable across different bandwidth values.

transmission over time.

4.1 Second-Generation Immigrants

This section explores the individual-level relationship between ancestral statehood and democratic preferences among second-generation immigrants. The analysis uses the IVS, which combines the EVS and the WVS. To focus on intergenerational transmission among second-generation immigrants, we restrict our sample to native individuals whose parents were both foreign-born.

Our estimation follows Equation 3. $Democracy_{i,c}$ indicates the response to questions about democratic preferences from individual i residing in country c . For interpretation, the response values are normalized to a 0-to-1 scale, as in the country-level analysis. $ParentStateExp_i$ is the index of ancestral state experience based on the origin country of foreign parents, and $ParentStateExp_i^2$ is its squared term. X_i is a vector of individual controls, including gender, age, age squared, labor force participation, marital status, educational attainment, and income level.¹⁶ δ_c is the country-of-residence fixed effects, which allows us to evaluate the role of intergenerational transmission among individuals sharing identical institutional and political contexts. δ_w and ϵ_i denotes survey-wave fixed effects and an error term, respectively. Standard errors are clustered by the country of residence.

$$Democracy_{i,c} = \alpha + \beta_1 ParentStateExp_i + \beta_2 ParentStateExp_i^2 + \gamma' X_i + \delta_c + \delta_w + \epsilon_i \quad (3)$$

Table 4 shows the results using the E235 variable, which asks respondents about the subjective importance of living in a democratic country, previously employed as an outcome variable in Section 3.¹⁷ Column 1 demonstrates the impact of the average index of ancestral state experience of both foreign parents. In line with the country-level estimates, the personal priority of democracy among second-generation immigrants exhibits an inverted U-shaped relationship with ancestral state experience based on their parental nationality. This suggests that the attitudes of foreign-born parents, rooted in their ancestral statehood, significantly influences the formation of the democratic preferences of their children. Given that over 85% of the foreign parents in our sample are from the same country, an analysis based on individual parent nationality may not be necessary.

¹⁶Education and income levels are categorized into three groups, for consistent measurement across all waves sampled in our analysis.

¹⁷Since only one wave of the IVS contains both the E235 variable and parental birth countries, survey-wave fixed effects are omitted in this table.

Nevertheless, Columns 2 and 3 confirm that the relationship remains robust to using the ancestral state experience of each parent. Across all specifications, the subjective importance of democracy peaks around the 70th percentile of parental state experience, consistent with the country-level estimates. Given that the estimates are conditional on country-of-residence fixed effects, these results support the idea of cultural persistence through intergenerational transmission rather than confounding effects of contemporary factors.

Table 4: Evidence from second-generation immigrants: importance of democracy

Dependent Variable:	Importance of Democracy		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Parental State Experience	0.065* (0.035)		
Parental State Experience Squared	-0.012* (0.006)		
Fathers State Experience		0.096* (0.052)	
Fathers State Experience Squared		-0.019* (0.010)	
Mothers State Experience			0.094** (0.045)
Mothers State Experience Squared			-0.016* (0.009)
Country Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	2961	2961	2961
R-squared	0.10	0.10	0.10

Notes: Standard errors clustered by country of residence are reported in parentheses.

In Table 5, we present complementary evidence using the E117 variable, which asks respondents to evaluate whether “having a democratic political system” is desirable to govern their country. It should be noted that the E117 question pertains to country governance rather than to personal preferences. However, given shared exposure to identical political regimes, *within*-country variation in assessment of the desirability of democracy may reflect differences in individual attitudes toward it. Along this line, the results support our hypothesis: its relationship with ancestral state experience based on parental origins follows an inverted U-shaped pattern.

Table 5: Evidence from second-generation immigrants: democratic evaluation

Dependent Variable:	Having a Democratic Political System		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Parental State Experience	0.080** (0.040)		
Parental State Experience Squared	-0.013* (0.008)		
Fathers State Experience		0.073* (0.041)	
Fathers State Experience Squared		-0.013* (0.007)	
Mothers State Experience			0.131*** (0.047)
Mothers State Experience Squared			-0.022** (0.009)
Country Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Survey Wave Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	3782	3782	3782
R-squared	0.12	0.12	0.12

Notes: Standard errors clustered by country of residence are reported in parentheses.

While evidence supports the long-term impact through intergenerational transmission, it may not reflect a direct effect on democratic preferences, but rather its influence on other cultural traits correlated with political attitudes. To address this concern, Table 6 shows the results of falsification tests using three proxies for cultural attributes, which could potentially be associated with attitudes toward democracy. Columns 1-3 use an indicator of social trust, a core element of civic culture that could be closely linked to democratic values and institutions (Newton and Zmerli, 2011; Nannicini et al., 2013).¹⁸ Columns 4-6 consider the “locus of control,” which may relate to preferences for political participation (Cohen et al., 2001).¹⁹ Lastly, Columns 6-9 use the measure of individualistic norms, proxied by the importance of independence in child quality, in consideration of the association between individualism and democracy (Gorodnichenko and Roland,

¹⁸Social trust is proxied by the A165 question, which asks whether the respondent thinks “most people can be trusted in general.”

¹⁹We use the A173 question, which asks about the perceived sense of choice and control one has over oneself.

2021; Jung, 2024).²⁰ In all specifications, we do not observe a pattern comparable to that estimated with democratic preferences. Although the sign of the coefficients suggest a nonlinear pattern, they are not statistically significant. Moreover, the weak nonlinear association is not surprising, given the potential correlation between democracy and the alternative cultural traits. As shown in appendix Table A6, the coefficients are highly sensitive to controlling for democratic preferences, suggesting that democratic attitudes could be a channel for the observed correlation between ancestral state experience and the alternative cultural traits.

Table 6: Evidence from second-generation immigrants: falsification outcomes

Dependent Variables:	Social Trust			Locus of Control			Independence		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Parental State Experience	0.034 (0.063)			0.032 (0.061)			-0.109 (0.113)		
Parental State Experience Squared	-0.007 (0.011)			-0.007 (0.012)			0.018 (0.020)		
Fathers State Experience		0.043 (0.067)			0.018 (0.064)			-0.110 (0.109)	
Fathers State Experience Squared		-0.008 (0.011)			-0.006 (0.012)			0.018 (0.020)	
Mothers State Experience			0.054 (0.092)			0.019 (0.060)			-0.042 (0.140)
Mothers State Experience Squared			-0.011 (0.019)			-0.004 (0.011)			0.007 (0.025)
Country Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Survey Wave Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	3899	3899	3899	3926	3926	3926	3884	3884	3884
R-squared	0.13	0.13	0.13	0.09	0.09	0.09	0.11	0.11	0.11

Notes: Standard errors clustered by country of residence are reported in parentheses.

4.2 Self-Reported Ancestry

Beyond the parental nationality, this section exploits self-reported information on family ancestry, extending the inter-temporal reach of our analysis. Using the General Social Survey (GSS) (Davern et al., 2024), a nationally representative survey of US adults, we utilize a question that asks respondents about the origin of their ancestors. Given that respondents are allowed to report multiple ancestries, we take the average of country-level

²⁰Importance of independence in child quality is based on question A029. While the IVS has questions that ask directly about the individualistic orientation of respondents, they are not available in the waves that include information on the origin of foreign-born parents.

measures of ancestral state experience across all reported origin countries, maximizing the preservation of ethnic heritage.²¹

In Equation 4, AncestStateExp_i indicates ancestral state experience based on the origin countries reported by individual i , and $\text{AncestStateExp}_i^2$ is its squared term. $\text{Democracy}_{i,s}$ denotes the responses to questions about democratic preferences, which are normalized to have values between zero and one. X_i is a vector of individual and household controls, including gender, age, age squared, race, nativity, parental nativity, labor force participation, marital status, educational attainment, and household income.²² Important to our analysis, we control for state-of-residence fixed effects δ_s , which allows us the estimation among individuals subject to identical institutional conditions. δ_w is the survey-wave fixed effects, and ϵ_i is the error term. Standard errors are clustered at the state level.

$$\text{Democracy}_{i,s} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{AncestStateExp}_i + \beta_2 \text{AncestStateExp}_i^2 + \gamma' X_i + \delta_s + \delta_w + \epsilon_i \quad (4)$$

Since the GSS does not directly ask about democratic preference, we use a range of questions on perceptions of democracy and political participation. Table 7 shows the results using three proxies for democratic participation. Column 1 considers individual voter turnout, measured by an indicator of whether the respondent voted in the last presidential election. Consistent with the country-level estimates in Section 3.2, we find a hump-shaped relationship between ancestral state experience and the propensity to vote. Columns 2 and 3 examine two forms of political engagement: participation in political rallies and contacting government officials. In line with the previous findings, the estimates indicate an inverted U-shaped relationship with ancestral state experience, suggesting that the descendants of societies with moderate levels of statehood are more likely to engage in politically motivated activities.²³

²¹The origin of ancestors is reported either as a country or other regional units. Our country-level measures of ancestral state experience are matched to approximately 87% of the observations with ancestry information available.

²²Education levels are categorized into three groups, which are consistently available across all waves included in our analysis.

²³We use two questions that ask whether and when the respondent had attended a political meeting or rally, or contacted a member of government to express their political views, respectively. As shown in Table A7, the results remain robust to probit specifications with these variables recoded as binary. Table A8 also presents that the estimates are not sensitive to scaling methods of the survey responses.

Table 7: Evidence from self-reported ancestry: democratic participation

Dependent Variable:	Voted	Rally	Contact
Ancestral State Experience	0.841*** (0.138)	1.795*** (0.468)	2.442** (0.934)
Ancestral State Experience Squared	-0.126*** (0.021)	-0.273*** (0.072)	-0.370** (0.148)
State Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Survey Wave Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	31591	1896	1894
R-squared	0.18	0.12	0.16

Notes: Standard errors clustered by state of residence are reported in parentheses.

Next, we examine the impact of ancestral state experience on democratic consciousness, which may reflect latent preferences for democratic norms, particularly in embedded democracies such as the US. Table 8 shows the results using measures of political knowledge, interest, and deliberation. In Column 1, we consider political awareness, assessed by a question about how well the respondent perceives themselves to be informed about politics. The outcome variables in Columns 2 and 3 measure the degree of political interest and the frequency of political discussion, respectively.²⁴ The results align with those for democratic participation, suggesting that the nonlinear association between ancestral statehood and democratic values extends to personal manifestations of political attitudes.

²⁴Given that these questions were asked with different response scales across waves, we test the robustness of the results to alternative scaling methods in Tables A7 and A8. Detailed information on the variables is provided in the data appendix.

Table 8: Evidence from self-reported ancestry: democratic consciousness

Dependent Variables:	Informed	Interest	Discuss
Ancestral State Experience	1.462*** (0.378)	0.980** (0.446)	1.751*** (0.585)
Ancestral State Experience Squared	-0.214*** (0.056)	-0.148** (0.068)	-0.261*** (0.091)
State Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Survey Wave Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	3189	5601	2981
R-squared	0.18	0.12	0.09

Notes: Standard errors clustered by state of residence are reported in parentheses.

Lastly, we conduct falsification tests to address concerns that ancestral state experience may influence alternative cultural traits, potentially serving as a confounding mechanism. As in the analysis in Section 4.1, Table 9 presents the results using proxies for social trust, locus of control, and independence, which suggests no clear connection with ancestral state experience.²⁵ This confirms that the long-term impact on democratic preferences is not a byproduct of other cultural imprints. Overall, the individual-level analyses using second-generation immigrants and self-reported ancestry support two key aspects: the legacy of ancestral state experience is not confounded by contemporary country characteristics, and intergenerational transmission has played a significant role in its persistent impact.

²⁵As in Section 4.1, the value of independence is measured by its perceived importance in child quality. More details of the variables can be found in the data appendix.

Table 9: Evidence from self-reported ancestry: falsification outcomes

Dependent Variables:	Social Trust	Locus of Control	Independence
Ancestral State Experience	0.116 (0.184)	0.639 (0.497)	-0.024 (0.176)
Ancestral State Experience Squared	-0.010 (0.028)	-0.101 (0.078)	0.025 (0.027)
State Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Survey Wave Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	20677	922	18904
R-squared	0.13	0.10	0.13

Notes: Standard errors clustered by state of residence are reported in parentheses.

5 Conclusion

Democracy is widely recognized as a key factor in comparative development, leading to extensive research on its determinants. Building on this, our study explores the deep roots of democratic preferences, which play a critical role in shaping political and institutional environments.

We propose that pre-modern statehood may influence proto-democratic values. The early introduction of central political systems could promote democratic norms, as people experience increased effectiveness in collective decision-making through a balance between autonomy and authority. However, further consolidation of centralized states would entrench hierarchical structures and undermine the norms of democratic participation. In this view, we hypothesize that democratic preferences would follow an inverted U-shaped relationship with ancestral state experience, reflecting cultural persistence through intergenerational transmission.

For the empirical analysis, we construct a country-level index of ancestral state experience using the Ethnographic Atlas (Murdock, 1967a). Evidence supports our hypothesis. Based on three proxies for democratic preferences—voter turnout, democratic culture index, and a survey-based measure—we find that countries with greater ancestral state experience show stronger democratic preferences up to a moderate level, after which the relationship reverses. This result is robust to additional controls, different sample compositions, and semiparametric specifications.

Beyond the country-level relationship, we provide individual-level evidence in two contexts. First, using the Integrated Values Surveys data, we examine the role of intergener-

ational transmission among second-generation immigrants. The results consistently show an inverted U-shaped relationship between the ancestral state experience of foreign-born parents and democratic preferences of their children, conditional on country-of-residence fixed effects. Second, we leverage self-reported ancestral information among US residents using the General Social Survey data. The evidence corroborates the lasting impact of ancestral state experience, conditional on state fixed effects, confirming that its legacy on democratic preferences persists independently of current institutions.

Our findings suggest deep-rooted variations in political cultures across societies. On top of this, understanding how these differences translate into institutional outcomes would be crucial for exploring their long-term implications. For a more comprehensive understanding, future studies should investigate a broader range of historical factors shaping political attitudes and their consequences.

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Appendices

A Data Appendix

Geoclimatic Controls

Geographic characteristics Distance to coast, country area, elevation, precipitation, temperature, absolute centroid latitude are obtained from the Yale G-Econ Project (Nordhaus et al., 2006).

Agricultural Suitability The grid-cell level data from Ramankutty et al. (2002) is aggregated at the country level.

Irrigation Potential Country-level data from Bentzen et al. (2017).

Cereal Grain Suitability The first principal component of potential caloric yields for all cereal grains. Data from Mayshar et al. (2022).

Terrain Ruggedness Country-level terrain ruggedness index from Nunn and Puga (2012).

Percentage of Population at Risk to Malaria Country-level aggregates constructed by the World Bank, original data from Hay et al. (2009).

Historical Controls

Log Population Density in 1900 Data from Goldewijk (2005)

Settlement Complexity Variable *V30* in the Ethnographic Atlas. Coded as an ordinal scale from 1 to 8, depending on the prevailing type of settlement pattern. The values are increasing in settlement complexity and permanence.

Share of Democratic Succession Variable *V72*, which records the rules of succession applying to local government, without reference to higher levels of political organization. Societies with nonhereditary rules of succession based on elections or consensus are considered to be democratic.

Contemporaneous Controls

Log Real GDP per Capita World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2023), averaged across the years 1990-2023.

Urbanization Rate The proportion of the urban population from World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2023), averaged across the years 1990-2023.

Manufacturing share of GDP World Bank World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2023), averaged across the years 1990-2023.

Compulsory Voting Using the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) database (International IDEA, 2024), we classify a country as having “Compulsory Voting” if IDEA designates its elections as such for more than half of the period ranging from 1990 to 2023. Italy and Chad had compulsory voting laws during this period but are classified as non-compulsory under this criterion. In Columns 5 and 6 of Table A3, we merge elections with compulsory voting data from the V-dem database (Coppedge et al., 2024) to filter compulsory elections based on the severity of enforcement.

Additional Historical Controls

Ethnic Fractionalization Degree of ethnic fractionalization from Alesina et al. (2003)

Neolithic Transition Log of the number of years since the Neolithic transition from Putterman (2008)

Kin Networks In the Ethnographic Atlas, the V27 variable codes the extent to which ethnic groups had specific terms distinguishing between cousins. Following the classifications used in Schulz (2022), we categorize ancestral civilizations with cousin terms similar to those of “Eskimo (Inuit)” or “Hawaiian” as not distinguishing between cousins in their terminology.

Social Class Distinctions In the Ethnographic Atlas, the V66 variable codes the existence and/or types of class stratification, aside from purely religious and political statuses. We classify a society as “stratified” if any form of social class distinction exists.

Agricultural Dependence in the Ethnographic Atlas, the V5 variable codes the degree to which the society relied on agriculture-based activities relative to other forms of subsistence on a 10-point scale.

Country-Level Outcome Variables

Voter Turnout Turnout data is from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) database (International IDEA, 2024), merged with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) database of political systems (IPU, 2024).

Democratic Culture Index The “Democratic Political Culture” sub-index from the Democracy Index of the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). Each of the eight categories that make up the sub-index is given a score of 0, 0.5, or 1. These scores are then summed and converted to a 0 to 10 scale, which we then average across the years 2006-2023.

IVS-Based Variables

Importance of Democracy Variable *E235* from the IVS Dictionary. Originally coded in integer values from 1 to 10, the values are normalized to lie within 0 and 1. Higher values indicate stronger preferences towards democracy. Country-level aggregates are averaged across all waves including the question. Variable available in 7th wave of the World Values Survey and the 5th wave of the European Values Study.

Having a Democratic Political System Variable *E117* from the IVS Dictionary. Originally coded in integer values from 1 to 4, where 1 indicates most positive attitudes towards democracy. In accordance to other dependent variables in our analysis, the values are reversed and normalized to lie within 0 and 1. Country-level aggregates are averaged across all waves that include the question. Variable available in the 7th wave of the World Values Survey and the 4th, 5th waves of the European Values Study.

Countries of Origin IVS Variable *G027A* codes whether the respondent was born in the current country of residence or not, and is equal to 1 if the respondent is a native to the current country of residence. IVS Variables *V001* and *V002* codes whether the father or mother of the respondent was born in the current country of residence, in equal fashion to variable *G027A*. Country of birth information is coded in IVS variables *V001* and *V002*. Variables are available in the 7th wave of the World Values Survey and the 4th, 5th waves of the European Values Study.

Social Trust Variable *A165* from the IVS. Coded as a binary indicator that takes a value of 1 if the respondent thinks most people can be trusted, and 0 otherwise.

Locus of Control Variable *A173* from the IVS. Originally coded in integer values from 1 to 10, the values are normalized to lie within 0 and 1. Higher values indicate a stronger sense of choice and control over life.

Independence Variable *A029* from the IVS. Coded as a binary indicator that takes a value of 1 if the respondent thinks independence is an important quality for children to have, and 0 otherwise.

GSS-Based Variables

Voted Using variables that record whether the respondent voted or not in presidential elections by election year, this is a dummy variable that is equal to 1 if the respondent voted in the last presidential election before the survey took place.

Rally Variable *attrally* in the GSS codes whether the respondent attended a political meeting or rally in the past year, in the more distant past, have never but might, or have never and would never. We assign scores of 1, 0.5, 0, and 0 respectively, as we do not differentiate respondents with no history of participation and endow the same score of 0. Supplementary results under binary coding and normalizing the original 4-point scale are reported in the Appendix.

Contact Variable *cntctgov* in the GSS codes whether the respondent has contacted, or attempted to contact, a politician or a civil servant to express their views in the past year, in the more distant past, have never but might, or have never and would never. We assign scores of 1, 0.5, 0, and 0 respectively, as we do not differentiate respondents with no history of participation and endow the same score of 0. Supplementary results under binary coding and normalizing the original 4-point scale are reported in the Appendix.

Informed Constructed by appending GSS variables *poleff15* and *poleff20*, which measure the degree of agreement to the statement “Most people are better informed about politics and government than I am”, on a 5-point scale where a higher value indicates more disagreement. The values are reversed and normalized to have values between 0 and 1.

Interest Constructed by appending GSS variables *intpol*, *polint*, and *polint1*. Only variable *polint* is measured on a 5-point scale. The variables measure the degree of interest in politics on either a 4- or 5-point scale, where higher values indicate less interest. The values are reversed and normalized to have values between 0 and 1. We match observations collected under the 4-point scale to the observations in the 5-point scale by excluding the median. While we use the 5-point scale in our baseline specification in order to preserve maximum variation in responses, regressions under alternative constructions of the variable including binary coding and 4-point scales that drop the median observation in variable *polint* are included in the Appendix.

Discuss Constructed by appending GSS variables *discpol* and *talkpol*, which measure how often the respondent discusses political issues with persons close to them, in a 4-point scale where a higher value is associated with a lower frequency. The values are reversed and normalized to have values between 0 and 1.

Social Trust Variable *trust* from the GSS. Coded as a binary indicator that takes a value of 1 if the respondent thinks most people can be trusted, and 0 otherwise.

Locus of Control Variable *cntrlife* from the GSS. Originally coded in integer values from 1 to 7, the values are normalized to lie within 0 and 1. Higher values indicate a stronger sense of choice and control over life.

Independence Variable *obey* from the GSS. Originally coded in integer values from 1 to 5, the values are normalized to lie within 0 and 1. Lower values indicate the respondent strongly thinks obedience is an important quality for children to have.

B Additional Robustness Checks

B.1 Country-Level Estimates

Alternative Sample Compositions Table A1 presents the robustness to excluding countries where the ancestry information in the Ethnographic Atlas is from excessively old periods. The odd-numbered columns exclude countries with Babylonian ancestry, such as Iran, Iraq, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and the United Arab Emirates. The even-numbered columns exclude Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates, where the log average number of years since inclusion in the Ethnographic Atlas exceed 8, equivalent to approximately 1000 BC.

Table A2 excludes Portugal, Romania, and Uzbekistan, where societies with missing data account for over 60% of the total ancestral composition. Table A3 tests whether the results based on voter turnout are robust to alternative sample countries depending on their electoral regulations. Even-numbered columns include an indicator for compulsory voting laws. Voter turnout in Columns 1 and 2 is calculated following our baseline specifications, focusing on relevant elections subject to each country's political system. In Columns 3 and 4, voter turnout is averaged across all elections, regardless of the political system. Based on the classification by V-Dem, Columns 5 and 6 exclude countries where penalties for non-voting are enforced, resulting in the exclusion of Australia, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Libya, Peru, and Uruguay.

Table A1: Robustness to sample restrictions

Dependent Variables:	Voter Turnout		Democratic Culture Index		Importance of Democracy	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Ancestral State Experience	0.182*** (0.064)	0.175*** (0.066)	0.201*** (0.053)	0.198*** (0.050)	0.111** (0.049)	0.111** (0.049)
Ancestral State Experience Squared	-0.031** (0.012)	-0.028** (0.012)	-0.043*** (0.011)	-0.043*** (0.011)	-0.023*** (0.008)	-0.023*** (0.008)
Continent Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geoclimatic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Historical Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	114	115	124	126	81	82
R-squared	0.36	0.37	0.49	0.50	0.32	0.33

Notes: Robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. The sample in odd-numbered columns exclude countries with Babylonian ancestry, and even-numbered columns exclude countries where the log average number of years since its ethnographic information were recorded exceed 8.

Table A2: Robustness to excluding countries with substantially missing data

Dependent Variables:	Voter Turnout	Democratic Culture Index	Importance of Democracy
Ancestral State Experience	0.177*** (0.065)	0.199*** (0.050)	0.099** (0.048)
Ancestral State Experience Squared	-0.030** (0.012)	-0.043*** (0.011)	-0.020** (0.008)
Continent Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geoclimatic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Historical Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	115	127	81
R-squared	0.39	0.51	0.38

Notes: Robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. Countries sampled exclude Portugal, Romania, and Uzbekistan, where societies with missing data account for over 60 percent of the total ancestral composition.

Table A3: Robustness to alternative samples and specifications for turnout

Dependent Variable:	Include		Ignore		Exclude Somewhat	
	Political System		Political System		Compulsory	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Ancestral State Experience	0.130** (0.060)	0.141** (0.065)	0.120* (0.060)	0.130* (0.066)	0.123* (0.063)	0.132* (0.067)
Ancestral State Experience Squared	-0.023** (0.011)	-0.025** (0.012)	-0.020* (0.011)	-0.022* (0.012)	-0.023** (0.011)	-0.025** (0.012)
Continent Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geoclimatic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Historical Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Compulsory Voting Dummy		Yes		Yes		Yes
Observations	126	126	126	126	118	118
R-squared	0.36	0.38	0.38	0.40	0.34	0.34

Notes: Robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. Even-numbered columns include an indicator for the presence of compulsory voting laws. Voter turnout in Columns 1 and 2 is constructed according to our baseline specifications, based on relevant elections subject to each country's political system. Voter turnout is averaged across all elections in Columns 3 and 4, regardless of the political system. In Columns 5 and 6, we exclude countries where penalties for non-voting are enforced, based on the classification by V-Dem. Countries excluded on this basis include Australia, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Libya, Peru, and Uruguay.

Additional Outcome Variable Table A4 shows the country-level estimates using the *E117* variable from the IVS, which was employed in the individual-level analysis in Section 4.1. Columns 1 and 2 follow the specifications in Table 1, and Columns 3 and 4 apply the specifications in Table 2.

Table A4: Additional survey measure for democratic preferences

Dependent Variable:	Having a Democratic Political System			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Ancestral State Experience	0.103** (0.047)	0.093* (0.049)	0.098** (0.045)	0.108** (0.044)
Ancestral State Experience Squared	-0.022** (0.009)	-0.019** (0.009)	-0.022*** (0.008)	-0.023*** (0.008)
Continent Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geoclimatic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Historical Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Contemporaneous Controls		Yes		
Polity V			Yes	
V-Democracy				Yes
Observations	89	89	88	89
R-squared	0.42	0.44	0.46	0.42

Notes: Robust standard errors are reported in parentheses.

Alternative Measure of Ancestral State Experience Our baseline index of ancestral state experience is based on the 5-point scale classification of jurisdictional hierarchy in the Ethnographic Atlas. Table A5 shows that our results remain robust when using an alternative classification of jurisdictional hierarchy into three levels: ethnicities with values of zero and one, two and three, and four of jurisdictional hierarchy are each assigned values of zero, one, and two, respectively.

Table A5: Robustness to alternative measure of ancestral state experience

Dependent Variables:	Voter Turnout	Democratic Culture Index	Importance of Democracy
Ancestral State Experience 3-point scale	0.425*** (0.118)	0.311*** (0.086)	0.176*** (0.059)
Ancestral State Experience 3-point scale squared	-0.161*** (0.043)	-0.149*** (0.034)	-0.074*** (0.021)
Continent Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geoclimatic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Historical Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	118	130	84
R-squared	0.41	0.51	0.32

Notes: Robust standard errors are reported in parentheses.

B.2 Individual-Level Estimates

B.2.1 IVS-Based Results

Table A6: Effects on other cultural traits: conditional on democratic preferences

Dependent Variables:	Social Trust			Locus of Control			Independence		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Parental State Experience	0.019 (0.063)			-0.003 (0.073)			-0.080 (0.124)		
Parental State Experience Squared	-0.004 (0.012)			-0.001 (0.014)			0.010 (0.023)		
Fathers State Experience		0.023 (0.065)			-0.023 (0.081)			-0.048 (0.109)	
Fathers State Experience Squared		-0.004 (0.011)			0.002 (0.016)			0.005 (0.021)	
Mothers State Experience			-0.035 (0.093)			-0.004 (0.074)			-0.049 (0.156)
Mothers State Experience Squared			0.006 (0.020)			0.000 (0.014)			0.006 (0.029)
Country Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Survey Wave Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	2931	2931	2931	2940	2940	2940	2910	2910	2910
R-squared	0.14	0.14	0.14	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.09	0.09	0.09

Notes: Standard errors clustered by country of residence are reported in parentheses.

B.2.2 GSS-Based Results

Table A7 report the probit regression results for the outcome variables discussed in Section 4.2, which can also be interpreted as binary. Voting status is originally recorded in binary form, and four outcome variables are recoded for this analysis.²⁶ For variables “Rally” and “Contact”, respondents that reported to have taken part in the respective activity at least once are assigned a value of 1, and 0 if never. The median observation (“neither agree nor disagree”) for variable “Informed” is dropped, and the remaining observations are given a score of 1 if the respondent agrees to the statement, and 0 if not. As “Interest” is combined across waves that measure political interest in both 4- and 5-point scales, we drop the median observation for waves that were conducted using the 5-point scale. We then assign a value of 1 to respondents that express some level of interest (“very interested” and “fairly interested”) and 0 to those who do not (“not very interested” and “not at all interested”). Table A8 shows nonlinear regression results where the dependent variables are measured in a 4-point scale. Variables “Rally” and “Contact” keep their original 4-point scales. For variables “Informed” and “Interest”, we drop the median value observation for survey waves using the 5-point scale as in Table A7. All dependent variables are normalized to have values between 0 and 1.

Table A7: Probit regressions under binary outcome variables

Dependent Variables:	Voted	Rally	Contact	Informed	Interest
Ancestral State Experience	3.025*** (0.550)	6.158** (2.856)	10.450** (4.370)	10.438*** (3.014)	3.384* (1.824)
Ancestral State Experience Squared	-0.461*** (0.083)	-0.918** (0.437)	-1.575** (0.681)	-1.512*** (0.452)	-0.518* (0.278)
State Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Survey Wave Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	31591	1891	1893	2391	4727
Pseudo R-squared	0.17	0.10	0.13	0.19	0.09

Notes: Standard errors clustered by state of residence are reported in parentheses. Table reports probit regression results where the outcome variables are converted to binary form.

²⁶We do not convert variable “Discuss” into binary form, as its measurements are inappropriate to distinguish clear divisions across responses. For example, questionnaire labels for variable *discpol* in the 2004 and 2014 GSS waves are labeled as often, sometimes, rarely, or never.

Table A8: Robustness to alternative scaling methods

Dependent Variables:	Rally	Contact	Informed	Interest
Ancestral State Experience	1.988*** (0.557)	2.487** (0.981)	1.695*** (0.477)	1.111** (0.530)
Ancestral State Experience Squared	-0.303*** (0.085)	-0.379** (0.152)	-0.251*** (0.070)	-0.168** (0.080)
State Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Survey Wave Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1896	1894	2397	4737
R-squared	0.16	0.21	0.21	0.13

Notes: Standard errors clustered by state of residence are reported in parentheses. Outcome variables Rally and Contact are normalized and preserve the original 4-point scale. Outcome variables Informed and Interest drop the median value of the 5-point aggregation, and normalize the observations in the remaining 4-point scale.