Patriotism and GDP

Cultural difference, though difficult to define, plays a role in income differences among countries. Some attributes of a society, like trust or the value of hard work, produce obvious effects on growth. However, other aspects of culture, such as patriotism, impact growth in more complicated ways. The amount of patriotism and style in which it is expressed can influence whether or not a country adopts policies that are good for growth. Examining data indicates that there is a correlation between healthily expressed patriotism and GDP. If there is a causal relationship between the two, most of the causation must run from increased wealth to increased “healthy” patriotism, but there is likely a weaker, but still present, causation running from patriotism to GDP.

In a general sense, patriotism is a sense of positive identification with and feelings of affective attachment to one’s country.1 However, patriotism can take more two basic forms. While both attitudes are called patriotism, they are really two distinct perspectives. As defined in a study by Schatz et al., the first, “blind” patriotism, is the “perception of national superiority and an orientation toward national dominance” while the second, “constructive” patriotism, is characterized by “a desire to support for questioning and criticism of current group practices that are intended to result in positive change.”2 A study among American college students found that those who took the “constructive” view were more likely to support policies like openness to foreign ideas and support for infrastructure/institutional improvement, policies that growth economics

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1 (Schatz, Staub, & Lavine, 1999)
2 Ibid
demonstrates are essential to economic efficiency. The study also found that both blind and constructive patriotism were correlated with feelings of positive attachment to the United States.

For this reason, it seems reasonable to hypothesize that a nation with many constructively patriotic citizens would be more likely to succeed than a country with blindly patriotic citizens. Data from two questions in the World Values Survey support this hypothesis. Respondents in 52 countries were asked how proud they were of their nationality, while respondents in 50 countries (the majority of which were the same) were asked to indicate their willingness to participate in peaceful protests. The first question has obvious relevance to patriotism. The second one, though not an exhaustive or guaranteed indicator of constructive patriotism, is the best measure offered by the World Values Survey. Because protesting requires some degree of personal risk and active participation, it provides a strong measure of the average citizen’s level of constructive patriotism. The first question, “How proud are you to be [nationality]?” shows a negative correlation (-0.36) between national pride and GDP. The second question, “Have you attended, or would you ever attend a lawful/peaceful demonstration?” indicates a positive correlation between willingness to protest and GDP (0.47) (see Appendix).

The results of the first comparison are particularly surprising. It might seem that citizens of rich nations with economically helpful institutions would have more reason to feel national pride than those in developing countries. In fact, national pride seems to occur most where the economy is weakest. Since there is no rational reason why citizens should be proud of their country’s economic difficulties, this seems to indicate that the question essentially measures levels of blind patriotism, which is not based in critical

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3 (World Values, 2009)
evaluation of national policies. The results support the hypothesis that blind patriotism is more prevalent in poor countries than rich ones.

The fact that poor countries generally lack good institutions and policies might suggest that it makes more sense for the citizens of poor countries to protest more often, but the results of the second question demonstrate the opposite. Peaceful activism, a characteristic of constructive patriotism, is positively correlated with a country’s wealth.

The survey data also indicates that national pride has a slightly negative correlation with willingness to protest in a country (-0.11). This does not mean that a country with high levels of protests has unpatriotic citizens. Rather, drawing from the results of the study done by _____, both national pride and political activism suggest that citizens feel positive attachment to their country, but their patriotic feelings manifest themselves differently. Thus, a high level of one should be correlated with a low level of the other. Since constructively patriotic individuals critically analyze their country, they are aware of its flaws, and may be less likely to indicate strong national pride. The essential question, then, is that of causality: whether one form of patriotism is better for economic growth, or whether each is simply the result of economic conditions.

The first reasonable conclusion from these findings is that an increase in GDP probably causes an increase in constructive patriotism. Individuals in wealthier countries have easier access to accurate political information, and run a much smaller risk of unjust opposition by the government or other groups. Furthermore, their effort is more likely to result in some concrete benefit. In a country with good institutions, the government presumably pays attention to the needs and views of its citizens, while a corrupt regime...
will suppress dissent. The tradeoff between risk/effort and reward is more favorable in wealthy nations, so they will be more likely to foster constructive patriotism.

However, despite these objections, it seems likely that constructive patriotism itself affects GDP, even if this feedback is much weaker than the original effect. If two countries start out with all other factors equal, but for some reason the average citizen in one is much more constructively patriotic, it makes sense to assume that this country will grow faster than the other. If more people in a country express their patriotism by supporting policies that create better infrastructure and open the country to international interaction, these policies will certainly be more likely to be adopted. Basic economic theory demonstrates that these policies are major factors in the efficiency of a country’s production. While this data does not provide positive proof that constructive patriotism increases GDP (to prove that, it would be necessary to show that an exogenous change in patriotism increases GDP, which would require another natural experiment), it does not seem far-fetched to assert that the presence of constructively patriotic individuals in a country would increase GDP. Constructive patriotism may not make workers more skilled at their jobs or create any direct monetary benefit, but by encouraging positive change in major areas of growth, it has the potential to contribute to economic growth.

YYYYY.
As is clear from the last paragraph, you are sort of stuck here in terms of inference. I agree that a priori constructive patriotism is probably good for output. But if I wanted to argue in the other direction, I could point to, say, India, where constructive patriotism leads to paralyzed governments, instability, and so on, thus lowering output. But in any case, these a priori views are not informed by the data. In the end, there is just the correlation, which we both agree is dominated by the effect of income (and associated education, institutions, etc.) on constructive patriotism. So we haven’t learned anything from the data. Further, we knew that this would be the case going in.

It might have been interesting to think about cases where there were exogenous changes in patriotism. For example, when sports teams win there is an upsurge of patriotism – do we see an expression of this in other outcomes?
The graph shows GDP/capita on the y-axis and average willingness to protest-1 on the x-axis, since this data was originally reported on a 1-3 scale.

Note: This analysis was not taken from the World Values Survey website; I did it.

Works Cited
