Modernization Before Industrialization: Cultural Roots of the Demographic Transition in France by Guillaume Blanc, Brown University

Summary of results
– First to identify the cause of the early demographic transition in France: secularization
– Use of a novel crowdsourced individual-level historical dataset to identify a causal effect

Introduction

The puzzle
– Exceptionally early decline in fertility in France, in the 18th century and more than a hundred years before the rest of Europe, although:
  - France: "country of savages" (Weber 1986)
  - England: cradle of the Industrial Revolution

Hypothesis
secularization (dechristianization) caused the early decline in fertility in France

Historical accounts
important and early process of secularization starting around 1740-1750 (see paper): "liberation of Frenchmen from the teachings, the restrictions, and the yoke of the Catholic Church" (Braudel, 1986)

I find that, after secularization, religiosity and development are positively correlated → rural peasants secularized first!

Causes of secularization
– distrust of and backlash against the elites
– why: austere moral norms of the counter reformation imposed by elites
  - political and religious
– context: strong counter reformation after demise of protestantism in France + absolute monarchy
– see paper for more details + discussion of measures

Data
– marital fertility index $I_g$ (Coale and Watkins 1986) département level
– individual-level crowdsourced genealogies (Kaplanis et al. 2018, Blanc 2019)
– religiosity after secularization (Tackett 1986) at département and district levels + pre-secularization measures

Empirical strategy
Cross-sectional regression of fertility on religiosity after secularization
→ Always control for pre-secularization religiosity in order to capture secularization and not pre-existing differences

Main empirical findings at the département level
→ Religiosity fully accounts for the early decline
Robust to accounting for spatial correlation + omitted variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>dep var: First year with fertility index $I_g$ lower than  .5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1780</td>
<td>98.180*** 99.841*** 120.265*** 111.727*** 112.623*** 114.165*** 115.143***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religiosity (pre-secularization) Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Region fixed effects Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural and institutional factors Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education and schooling Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-industrial development Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contemporary development Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standard deviation of dep var 34 34 34 34 34 34 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perc. 25-75 Religiosity (1791) 36 36 44 41 41 42 42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observations 85 80 80 80 80 80 78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R-squared 0.40 0.45 0.62 0.74 0.75 0.75 0.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Individual-level results
→ causal effect of secularization with historical individual-level data
1-by accounting for time varying département-level unobservables w FE
2-second generation migrants analysis: district of birth FE absorb unobserved institutional characteristics
3-by comparing the effect of treatment (religiosity after secularization) before and after secularization (differences in differences)
→ Without this: no data w/ spatial variation before 1831

Main References