

Legal Disagreement

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Perception-based measures of legal institutions generally ignore variation in perceptions across individuals within the same jurisdiction, a phenomenon we call legal disagreement. This article defines the concept of legal disagreement, identifies its potential causes and consequences, and shows that it can and ought to be measured using data from cross-country surveys. We argue that legal disagreement is likely to be caused by differences in the knowledge bases that individuals use to form beliefs about the legal system, or put simply, differences in perspectives. We also suggest that understanding why individuals have different perspectives on legal systems is valuable for several reasons, particularly when the perspectives vary systematically across demographic categories. We use data from World Justice Project population surveys to create quantitative measures of legal disagreement for 128 countries or jurisdictions. We identify correlations between legal disagreement and measures of its potential causes and consequences, such as perceptions of discrimination and ethnic fractionalization.