

“Eliciting values, social norms and moral foundations from Folklore”

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It is often maintained that values, norms and moral systems have important effects on the long-term economic performance of societies. Values and norms are complementary to other (formal) institutional elements and therefore affect institutional quality and development, which is itself crucial for economic growth. Further, most values, norms and moral systems are expected to be largely time invariant as they tend to be transmitted from one generation to the next. Yet, empirical evidence supporting that claim has been virtually non-existent, also because a reliable source for historically held values and norms would be necessary. This study is a first step to change that. Since folktales, such as legends and fairy tales, are often transmitted virtually unchanged from generation to generation, we rely on them to extract information about the moral foundations held dear by different societies in the past. We present first results from our inspection into a database collecting about 15,000 folktales from more than 100 countries. We find important differences in the values, social norms and moral foundations promoted via folktales in different historical societies and highlight the potential of this informational resource for future research.