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“Why are some countries richer than others? Cross-country and cross-regional empirical studies”

Why are some countries richer than others? An immediate answer is that they invest more and innovate or adopt more new technologies. But why do some countries then invest more and experience more technological progress? The economic literature agrees on three deeper factors: Institutions, culture, and geography. The idea is that some countries have set up institutions that create better environments for investments and technological progress, or that some countries were simply enriched with a culture or a geography that created such a productive environment. With my PhD dissertation, I set out to explore empirically subsets of these causes. Chapter 1 is motivated by climate change and its economic consequences, usually thought of as being borne mainly by poor agricultural countries. But how does climate influence Western economies? We document how a natural phenomenon, lightning, has deterred growth in the World's leading economy; the US. The reason is our increasing dependence on IT technologies. Chapter 2 explores Max Weber's hypothesis that Protestants had an advantage when it came to obtaining modern prosperity, because of their culture of hard work and thrift. Chapter 3 investigates the impact of corruption on GDP per capita across countries. Chapter 4 explores one technology that might help countries fight corruption, namely the Internet, which facilitates transparency.