

OSTROM WORKSHOP COLLOQUIUM SERIES

Nathan Nunn

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“Understanding Cultural Persistence and Change”

Monday, April 24, 2017

12:00 – 1:00 p.m.

Ostrom Workshop, 513 N. Park



When does culture persist and when does it change? We examine a determinant of extent of cultural persistence that has been put forth in the evolutionary anthropology literature: the stability of the environment. A prediction, which is standard in a variety of micro-founded models, is that valuing tradition and placing greater importance on maintaining the customs of the previous generation is relatively more beneficial in stable environments. When the environment is stable, the culture of the previous generation provides valuable information that is relevant in this generation. We test this hypothesis by measuring the stability of average temperature across 20-year generations between 500 and 1900. Looking across countries, ethnic groups, and descendants of immigrants, we find that groups with ancestors who lived in environments with more stability, place a greater importance in maintaining tradition today. These populations also exhibit more persistent cultural traits, and traditions that are less likely to undergo change.



Nathan Nunn is Frederic E. Abbe Professor of Economics at Harvard University. Professor Nunn was born in Canada, where he received his PhD from the University of Toronto in 2005. Professor Nunn’s primary research interests are in economic history, economic development, cultural economics, political economy, and international trade. He is an NBER Faculty Research Fellow, a Research Fellow at BREAD, and a Faculty Associate at Harvard’s Weatherhead Center for International Affairs (WCFIA). He is currently a co-editor of the *Journal of Development Economics* ([website](#)).

Presentations are open to the public and are live streamed (see our website for URL and papers). You are welcome to bring your lunch. For questions, contact Allison Sturgeon (sturgeon@iu.edu; 812/855–3151).