The French Revolution, Political Modernization, and Legal Secularization around the World: 1850-2000

Part of IERES' European Politics Series

with

H. Zeynep Bulutgil, Tufts University

Why do some countries adopt secular legal systems while others do not? How do processes of political modernization such as the emergence of nation states and democratization relate to legal secularization? To what extent are the experiences of early secularizers transferable to other parts of the world? This talk tackles these questions by presenting new data on legal secularization from 1850 to 2000. Findings show that the early wave of legal secularization from the mid-19th to mid-20th century was largely driven by historically conditional factors. Main empirical findings are threefold. First, countries that were significantly influenced by the French Revolution, directly through invasion by the Revolutionary Armies or indirectly via international interactions with Revolutionary France, were much more likely to develop secularized legal systems. Second, this Revolutionary influence had a positive impact on legal secularization only if and when the country in question adopted a political system based on the idea of a nation. Third, in contexts that were influenced by the French Revolution, the emergence of a democratic system further increased the chances of legal secularization. In countries that were not subject to this influence, the relationship between democracy and legal secularization either did not exist or was actually negative.

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Friday, February 13, 2015
12:00 pm – 1:30 pm
Voesar Conference Room
1957 E St. NW, Suite 412

Please RSVP at http://go.gwu.edu/bulutgil

This event is on the record.