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The Mental Map of National Hierarchy in Europe

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Abstract

We theorize that people's perceptions of national hierarchy are aligned not only with longstanding cultural schemas of development but also with schemas of cultural wealth. We use data from the Nation Brands Index surveys to examine how European publics' evaluate their own country and other European countries across many attributes. We find that European publics rank northwest European countries highest on developmental attributes and southwestern European nations highest on cultural attributes, while they rank eastern European countries lowest in both categorizations. Moreover, we show that publics' rankings of countries load to two related yet distinct factors, the contents of which closely reflect schemas of development and cultural wealth. This evidence suggests that these two distinct schemas are simultaneously present in Europeans' perceptions of national hierarchy.

Keywords

public perceptions; national hierarchy; Europe; developmental idealism; cultural wealth

INTRODUCTION

People's perceptions about the relative status position of people and countries are based, in part, on their evaluations of the quality, value, and desirability of countries in relation to one another. Such perceptions of national hierarchy constitute a set of status beliefs or assumptions that associate more or less esteem and competence to some social groups and less to others (Ridgeway et al. 2009). They shape how individuals, organizations, and nation-states imagine themselves and others (Alasuutari and Qadir 2016; Buchanan and Cantril 1953). Even when perceptions of national hierarchy match some observable measured differences in material conditions (e.g. gross domestic product per capita), they are nevertheless powerful and influential in their own right. Perceptions, rankings, and evaluations can shape behavior both when they are accurate and inaccurate (Davis et al. 2012; Espeland and Sauder 2007; Frye 2017; Kelley 2017; Merry 2016). For example,

perceptions of countries quietly inform which countries receive loans from intergovernmental organizations like the International Monetary Fund or World Bank (Babb 2009). They may also stimulate nation-branding campaigns aimed at improving a country's image and reputation (Rivera 2008). How nations perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others is especially important because such perceptions are a primary motivating factor in geopolitical military activity and trade wars among countries that have interest in boosting their status position (Melegh 2006).

Because of their underlying importance in motivating many decisions net of their empirical accuracy, we seek to understand, measure, and describe publics' perceptions of national hierarchy. In doing so, we contribute to literature on national hierarchies. This literature spans four related areas. The first analyzes how global indices of nations are socially constructed (e.g. Merry 2016). The second tests how countries' position on global indices affects how they perceive themselves (e.g. Towns and Rumelili 2017) and how other countries interact with them in terms of trade, tourism, and politics (e.g. Babb 2009). The third examines how nations' attempt to "brand" and market themselves as desirable, modern, and cultured (e.g. Rivera 2008). A fourth and especially relevant strand of the literature for our purposes examines publics' perceptions of the hierarchical organization of countries (e.g. Thornton et al. 2015). Current scholarship in this area theorizes that dominant cultural schemas about what constitutes societal "development" and which societies are identified as more or less developed inform publics' perceptions of national hierarchy (e.g. Thornton et al. 2012).

We advance literature on national hierarchies by assessing publics' perceptions of nations across many different dimensions and attributes. This allows us to consider the possibility of "heterarchy" (Lamont 2012), that is, simultaneously existing yet independent national hierarchies based on unique cultural schemas. We theorize that in addition to schemas of development another set of schemas about cultural wealth forms the basis of a distinct perceived hierarchical organization of nations. In doing so, we draw upon literature outlining cultural wealth as a form of symbolic capital that countries can convert into other forms of capital that produce economic benefits (Bandelj and Wherry 2011; Elliott and Schmutz 2016; Rivera 2008; Schmutz and Elliott 2017). In this view, countries leverage their technological advancement, economic wealth, stocks of education, *and* their distinctive cultural resources as they market themselves abroad or justify their inclusion in international communities such as the European Union.

We focus our analysis on Europeans' perceptions of national hierarchy given its long-standing efforts at regional integration. Scholars trace the invention of a perceived European hierarchy of nations to the rise of enlightenment philosophy and the eastward expansion of Europe's boundaries (Melegh 2006; Neumann 1999; Wolff 1994). They explain that European publics think of an intra-European hierarchy of nations that favors western and northern countries and disfavors eastern and southern ones. Some scholars examining contemporary quantitative measures of public opinion find evidence of a single east-to-west slope of perceived levels of national development (Kiss 2017; Melegh et al. 2013; 2016). However, the possibility of heterarchy in Europeans' perceptions of nations is yet to be assessed. What is the extent of similarity and dissimilarity in how European citizens perceive

and evaluate one another across different dimensions of the nation-state? Are their evaluations of nation-states tied to a single, latent schema of national hierarchy or are multiple, distinct schemas of national hierarchy apparent in their evaluations?

We leverage data collected from national samples in eight European countries in which respondents evaluated 23 European countries, including their own, on a large number of attributes across multiple dimensions of the nation-state. Using descriptive and factor analyses, we examine publics' evaluations of countries across dimensions, and we evaluate whether their evaluations load to a single or multiple national hierarchies. Our results describe the mental map of national hierarchy in Europe. The dynamics of these perceptions influence international relations between European countries, including trade, politics, tourism, and debates around countries' inclusion in the European Union.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE

Schemas of “Development” and Perceptions of National Hierarchy

Cultural schemas can take myriad forms, but research on perceptions of national hierarchy has primarily focused on the importance of globally pervasive schemas of national development, which many scholars describe as being part of *developmental idealism* (Thornton 2005; Thornton et al. 2015). Like other ideologies, developmental idealism is comprised of various schemas about what constitutes a “developed” country, as well as the causes and consequences of “development.” These schemas can be traced to longstanding theories of universal development that scholars and policymakers have advanced for centuries, which posit that a basket of attributes is necessary for a country to progress to a higher level of national development (Nisbet 1969; Thornton 2005). In these schemas, desirable attributes include open and democratic governance, capitalist economic institutions, science and technology, a modern demographic regime, personal freedoms, human rights protections, and gender equality, to name a few (Meyer et al. 1997). Scientists, policymakers, civil society organizations, and governments have widely disseminated ideas about the attributes of the “ideal” nation and prescriptions for how countries labeled as “less developed” can progress toward “modernity” (Alasuutari and Qadir 2016; Towns and Rumelili 2017). They have diffused their ideas to ordinary publics through a variety of means, including public education, museums and cultural exhibits, magazines and books, international organizations, and national marketing campaigns (Boli and Thomas 1999; Lerch et al. 2017; Thornton et al. 2015).

Among Europeans, perceptions of a developmental hierarchy of nations traces to widely disseminated historical narratives of a north-to-south gradient of societal advancement, with the origin of “civilization” imagined as beginning first from the seat of Greek, and later, Roman, empire in southern Europe (Antohti 2000). With the economic, military, and technological ascendancy of western European countries beginning in the 17th century, the perception of a north-to-south civilization slope was gradually replaced by a perceived east-to-west developmental spectrum that closely tracks to the invention of “Eastern Europe” (Melegh 2006; Wolff 1994). Many other perceived cultural distinctions reinforced belief in an east-to-west gradient of nations, including an ethno-linguistic divide between Germanic and Slavic peoples, a religious divide between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy

(and further still between Christianity and Islam), and more recent economic and political divides that imagine a democratic-capitalist west and communist east (Neumann 1999; Schimmelfennig 2001).

One piece of evidence for the longstanding prevalence of such hierarchical views of different European nations is the use of categorical language to classify societies and places, such as the historically common labels of “savage” versus “civilized” peoples or “primitive” versus “modern” nations (Swindle 2019). In certain periods of Europe, pejorative adjectives like “barbaric,” “heathen” or “backward” have been ascribed to Slavic nations, places that fell outside of the Roman Empire and also to Eastern Orthodox religious adherents (Melegh 2006; Thornton et al. 2015:299–301; Wolff 2004). This classification practice continues to be widespread today, although generally with different adjectives (e.g. “less developed” versus “developed”).

Motivated by prior research on beliefs about developmental hierarchy, Thornton et al. (2012) used surveys to test the prominence of such perceptions among lay publics in a number of countries spanning all major world regions, including Albania, Argentina, Bulgaria, China, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Malawi, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan and the United States. Respondents rated countries by perceived level of “development.” From the accumulated country ratings, Thornton et al. (2012) constructed country-specific developmental hierarchies—one hierarchy of nations for each measured public—and compared them to one another. Cross-country comparisons showed that respondents from different countries produced similar developmental hierarchies. Within-country comparisons of developmental hierarchies also found little variation by age, education, or gender in how people rank ordered countries on development (Binstock et al. 2013). Results from additional surveys fielded in other countries, including several European nations, document a clear east-to-west European slope of perceived levels of national development, in line with prior historical analyses (Kiss 2017; Melegh et al. 2013; 2016; see also Lai and Mu 2016; Thornton and Yang 2016). Furthermore, perceived global developmental hierarchies were strongly correlated with the rank ordering of countries on the United Nations Human Development Index and gross domestic product per capita. Thornton et al. (2012) recognize that some people are aware of the “objective” material realities of various countries and can correctly match their own rankings of countries to nations’ metrics. However, they note alongside many other scholars that global indices of national development and national culture are themselves social constructs that perpetuate the world they seek to objectively measure (Davis et al. 2012; Kelley 2017; Merry 2016; Wherry 2004).

Multidimensional Perceptions of National Hierarchy and Schemas of “Cultural Wealth”

Despite the uniformity of empirical findings concerning the prevalence of national hierarchies, there is a theoretical tradition of multidimensionality in conceptions of the nation-state (e.g. Smith 2008). Research on “nation branding,” for example, posits that the concept of the nation-state is multidimensional and comprised of a country’s people, government, economy, cultural goods, and natural environment (e.g. Anholt 2007; 2010; Buhmann 2016). This conceptualization posits that a country’s economy may be viewed favorably while its governance structure is simultaneously viewed negatively. Likewise, a

country may be perceived as having an abundance of natural amenities, but lacking in prestigious cultural heritage. This type of dimensionality cannot be captured on surveys that ask respondents to rate countries according to their level of “development.”

One of the few studies that has examined Europeans’ perceptions of national hierarchy across multiple dimensions (as opposed to the use of a single omnibus construct such as “development”) found that Europeans’ perceptions reflect an east-to-west slope with little variation by dimension (Delhey and Kohler 2006). The dimensions of the nation-state they examined (economy, employment, environment, social welfare, and quality of life) did not include the elements of *cultural wealth* that we describe below and which we believe may diverge from developmental conceptions of the nation-state. Even where prior scholarship has considered the importance of nations’ cultural attributes on perceptions of national hierarchy, it has tended to be more concerned with cultural compatibility in language or religion, rather than perceived differences in the cultural wealth of nations (Delhey 2007; Deutschmann et al. 2018).

The edited volume *The Cultural Wealth of Nations* (Bandelj and Wherry 2011) documents how nations engage in the cultivation and branding of their societies for economic growth, from the cultivation of the *Mundo Maya* in Central America to the expansion of the Thai silk industry. Scholarship in this paradigm defines cultural wealth as “the value added derived from the intangible qualities of products and services emanating in part from the perceived cultural heritage of the people engaged in their production” (Bandelj and Wherry 2011:26). Countries with widely known and successfully branded cultural heritage may be perceived as less risky places to visit or invest. Such distinctions have motivated national marketing campaigns to leverage the particularistic elements of perceived national culture and heritage (Napolitano and De Nisco 2017).

Increasingly, the marketing of a nation’s unique cultural and natural assets is understood to be essential for differentiating one’s own country from its “competitors.” The importance of UNESCO world heritage site designations for international tourism and global legitimacy represent one way that nations may display and promote their cultural wealth, heritage, and peculiarity while conforming to universal standards (Elliott and Schmutz 2016; Reyes 2014; Schmutz and Elliott 2017). Other examples include the marketing of a nation’s distinct cuisine, fashion, music, and art (Surak 2011). Countries with a history of conquest, border expansion, and outsize regional influence have enjoyed a greater degree of cultural wealth. They are better known among lay people and they often enjoy greater international legitimacy. In Europe, the cultural wealth of former empires such as France, Germany, Spain, and the UK is widely apparent, leading eastern European nations to embark on their own nation branding campaigns aimed at emphasizing their unique cultural heritages (Ociepka 2018; Rivera 2008).

The underlying presence of these two schemas—development and cultural wealth—resembles social psychology theories of out-group stereotyping (Fiske et al. 2002). According to this literature, the primary basis for stereotypes is competence and warmth. Though these categories are distinct, they overlap in some ways with schemas of development and cultural wealth. Competence is often about a social group’s perceived

ability, achievement, and, in a word, “development.” Warmth reflects the perceived affective characteristics of a social group, such as its respectability and heritage, which are essential to for the creation of cultural wealth.

The literatures we have reviewed lead us to expect broad cross-national agreement in a developmental hierarchy of nations that is primarily based on the kinds of economic, political, and social characteristics that feature prominently in schemas of developmental idealism. At the same time, we hypothesize the existence of a distinct hierarchy of nations based on schemas of national cultural wealth and heritage. We also expect that publics’ orderings of nations along developmental and cultural factors correlate with indices of “national development” and “national culture,” respectively.

Scholarship on perceptions of national hierarchy has also identified some evidence of self-bias among publics. Melegh et al. (2013; 2016) found that respondents in Bulgaria and Albania saw their own countries as less developed than did respondents from other countries (see also Todorova 1997). Yet, Dorius (2016) and Lai and Mu (2016) found that self-evaluations of national development by Chinese citizens were *higher* than evaluations of China by respondents from other countries and studies on transnational perceptions of trust and attachment across European nations find similar evidence of positive self-bias (Delhey 2007; Deutschmann et al. 2018; Hagendoorn 1993). Given these conflicting observations, we examine whether Europeans tend to over-rate or under-rate their own country compared to how other European publics rate them, but we do not formulate an empirical hypothesis.

DATA AND METHODS

We conducted a data search to locate cross-national data that would allow us to test our assertions about the dimensionality of public perceptions of national hierarchy in Europe. This would contrast our findings with those based on surveys with an omnibus question about countries’ level of “development,” as in Thornton et al. (2012) and other studies.

Our data search identified national-level aggregated data from the *Nation Brands Index* surveys as containing many measures of Europeans’ perceptions of different countries (Anholt and GfK 2015). The *Nation Brands Index* (NBI) surveys were originally designed in 2005 by Simon Anholt, an early leader of place branding research (Anholt 2005; Roper 2008). Partnering with the widely used survey company GfK, online surveys were administered in 2008 and 2009 to approximately 1,000 respondents in each of 20 countries, amassing over 40,000 completed questionnaires. Samples were weighted to reflect the national-level demographic characteristics of each surveyed country, matching recommendations in survey methodology literature about internet-based non-probability samples (Baker et al. 2013). Respondents eighteen and older completed an ex-post standardized survey containing identical questions and response categories in which they evaluated 50 countries on a large number of attributes theorized to measure dimensions of the nation-state (e.g. Anholt 2007; 2010; Buhmann 2016; Smith 2008). The dimensions of the nation-state in which NBI administrators grouped survey questions were: *Governance*, *Immigration and Investment*, *People*, *Products*, *Tourism*, and *Culture*.

Results of these studies were reported as a series of national indexes, ranging from 1 to 50, that reflected how each surveyed public rated every country on the measured attributes (Anholt and GfK 2015). A score of one identified the most favorably rated country and a score of 50 identified the least favorably rated country. In the results reported below, we reverse coded the rankings so that higher values reflect more positive evaluations to simplify interpretation of correlations with measures of development and cultural wealth.

Eight of the 20 national surveys in the NBI studies were administered within European countries, and among the 52 countries that were rated in either the 2008 or 2009 national surveys, 23 were from Europe. Owing to our interest in beliefs about European national hierarchies, we restricted our analysis to data collected in the eight European countries—France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Russia, Sweden, Turkey, and the United Kingdom (UK)—about their perceptions of the 23 European countries, as listed in Table 1. We note that four of these countries are in north and west Europe and the other four are in south and east European. Our dataset therefore included just over 2200 country rankings (8 surveyed publics * 23 rated countries * 6 indices * 2 waves) organized into 96 national hierarchies: one hierarchy per index, year and surveyed public.¹ We reverse scaled the country rankings so 50 identified the first ranked country.

The individual-level data collected from these surveys are not publically available, but the aggregated, national-level data are widely used in the growing literature on “nation branding” in international business research, alongside other similar country image indices (e.g. Kalamova and Konrad 2010; Kemming and Humborg 2010; Mariutti and Tench 2016; see also Buhmann 2016:29–35; Merkelsen and Rasmussen 2019:69–76). Though these data may not be familiar to sociologists, the national-level NBI data are similar to other national-level aggregated data compiled from cross-national individual-level surveys that social science researchers use, such as PEW global surveys.

Our interest in the NBI data is that they permit us to examine publics’ perceptions of nations across a large number of attributes, far more so than any other cross-national survey. The full set of questions used in the NBI surveys is given in Table 2. Most questions relied on seven-point Likert scales in which one indicated strong disagreement and seven indicated strong agreement. A small number of questions presented respondents with a list of word associations and asked them to select one that most represented a country.

Likert-scaled questions comprising the *Governance*, *Immigration and Investment* and *Products* dimensions showed strong overlap with international development discourse found in academic literature, public policy documents, and historical writings. For example, questions asked respondents if each country was respectful of human rights, a place they would like to work and a producer of science and technology (Drori et al. 2002; Thornton et al. 2017). Questions listed under the *People* dimension were similar but less clearly tied to developmental schemas, asking respondents to evaluate people from each country as hosts, friends, and employees. These four dimensions also included many unique word

¹Except Iceland and Norway, which were not evaluated in 2009, and the Netherlands, which was not evaluated by German respondents in 2009.

associations for terms extensively used in academic writing and lay discourse about world development, such as *corrupt*, *dangerous*, *transparent*, *backward*, *developing*, and *modern* (Dorius and Swindle 2019; Swindle 2019). In the questions categorized in the final two dimensions, *Tourism* and *Culture*, respondents were asked to consider each country's buildings and monuments, music, films, literature, sports, urban attractions, and design, among other things, all of which are discussed in the literature as symbolic resources of cultural wealth (Bandelj and Wherry 2011). As seen in Figure 1, the distribution of country rankings on each index was modestly left-skewed, reflecting that views of European countries is generally more favorably than views of the non-European countries that were also rated in the NBI surveys. The average correlation between the 2008 and 2009 country rankings was 0.97 across publics and indices, indicating that European publics held remarkably stable views about the attributes of their regional neighbors. All correlations were greater than 0.93 except for Turkey, which evinced greater variation on the *People* index.²

We also compared the NBI data to four external criterion variables: two of which we compare against schemas of development and two of which we compare against schemas of cultural wealth. We report in Table 3 the descriptive statistics for these four variables.

Our first interest was to assess the level of similarity between how publics' ranked countries in the NBI surveys and how publics rated countries on "development," as measured in nationally representative sample surveys fielded between 2005 and 2014 in four European countries, including Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania (Kiss 2017; Melegh et al. 2013; 2016; Thornton et al. 2012). Since the goal of these surveys was to measure people's views of national hierarchy based on schemas of developmental idealism (DI), we refer to the data acquired from these surveys as "DI data." Respondents rated countries on development using a 0–10 scale, with higher values indicating higher levels of development. Respondents were not given a definition of "development" to ensure that they rated countries according to their own understanding of the concept (Thornton et al. 2012).³ Fifteen European countries were rated in both the NBI and DI data, including Romania, Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland, Russia, Spain, Italy, Denmark, Norway, France, Austria, Sweden, the UK, Germany, and Switzerland.

The second external criterion measure we employ is the 2000 Human Development Index (United Nations 2017), based on country estimates of logged gross domestic product, literacy, gross school enrollment and life expectancy at birth. This measure is of interest given prior scholarship showing a high correlation between DI data and the Human Development Index. The third is the logged total number of United Nations world heritage cultural sites in each country (UNESCO 2017), motivated by prior scholarship arguing that a country can demonstrate its cultural wealth by receiving world heritage recognition of specific in-country destinations (Bandelj and Wherry 2004). The fourth variable is the

²Turkish public opinion of France, Lithuania, Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, Ireland, and Romania on the *People* index experienced substantial absolute change from 2008 to 2009 (deviations in rank of 30, 15, 13, 9, 7, 7, and 7, respectively). To put Turkish deviations into perspective, the average deviation in 2008 and 2009 country rankings on the *People* index was 1.42.

³The list of rated societies was the same in each sample except for the Bulgarian sample, which presented most but not all the same societies (see Melegh et al. 2013 for details).

logged total tourist arrivals to each country in 2000 (World Bank 2017), evidence of successful nation branding and global desirability as a tourist destination (Rivera 2008). The Czech Republic and Hungary were missing tourism data, so we excluded them from our analyses using this measure.

Our analysis begins with summary data on country rankings for each of the six indices that constitute the NBI data. We then used exploratory and confirmatory factor models to assess the level of association between country rankings on the six indices and we evaluated the validity of the extracted factors using external criterion measures. From here, we extracted factor scores so that we could consider the geography of perceived European hierarchy. In the final step, we investigated how European publics rated themselves relative to how people in other European countries rated them.

RESULTS

Descriptive Analysis

Country rankings on the six indices are reported in columns 1–6 of Table 4, each of which are averaged over the 2008 and 2009 data collections to simplify presentation of the data and to ensure we retain those countries ranked only in 2008 or 2009. We also report each country's average rank across the six indices (column 7) and country specific deviations over the indices (column 8). The latter column can be interpreted as a measure of agreement among the several publics concerning the ranked attributes of each country listed in Table 4. A small deviation score indicates high inter-country consensus about a country and a large deviation indicates the opposite. Countries are sorted from the most to least favorable average ranking across the six indices.

As measured by average country ranking, European publics placed Germany at the top of the regional hierarchy of nations, followed by Sweden and France. The top ranked countries for each index were: Sweden for *Governance* and *People*, Switzerland for *Immigration & Investment*, Germany for *Products*, France for *Culture* and Italy for *Tourism*. Romania was the lowest ranked country overall, followed by Lithuania, and Estonia. Each of the bottom ranked countries is located in what has historically been referred to as eastern Europe, while all the top ranked countries are located in western Europe. These data offer further evidence of an entrenched and durable east-to-west perceptual slope of societal hierarchy among European publics.

The average standard deviation (SD) was 7, which suggests that Europeans in different countries relied on common evaluative criteria when ranking their continental peers. Austria received the most consistent ranking (SD=4.1), followed by Hungary (SD=4.5). The least consistent rankings were given to Russia (SD=13.9), which had a high average ranking of 44.5 on *Culture*, but the lowest average ranking of all ranked European countries on *Governance* at 11.1. We observed several other notable inconsistencies in countries' rankings across indices that indicated a possible bifurcation in Europeans' perceptions of national development and culture. Spain and Italy received above average rankings on the attributes comprising the *Tourism* and *Culture* indices, but below average rankings on the

Governance index. Conversely, Nordic countries tended to rank high on all but the *Tourism* and *Culture* indices.

Factor Analysis

We next used factor analysis to measure the latent structure of the NBI country rankings. High loadings to a single factor suggests a uniform and singular way of perceiving national hierarchy in Europe. Put another way, a single factor would indicate that respondents' evaluations of countries on six different indices are informed by a single, common cultural schema. If country specific cultural schemas influence publics' beliefs about national hierarchy, factor analysis should identify eight factors, one for each surveyed public. If public perceptions transcended national boundaries but vary by national attributes, we should observe six factors, one for each index. We excluded publics' self-rankings of their own nation from these analyses given the literature on self-evaluation bias.

As shown in Table 5, we first estimated eight exploratory factor models—one for each surveyed public—to measure the interrelationship between country rankings on the data *within* measured publics. These models, which we estimated on Kendall's (tau) correlation matrices due to the ranked nature of the data, showed that the six indices evinced similar scale properties within each of the eight measured publics. According to conventional standards, loadings for each index were either moderate or strong. Estimation of eight additional country specific factor models that allowed the six indices to load to more than one factor revealed a two factor model within each surveyed public. In the two factor models, country rankings on the *Government*, *Immigration-Investment*, *People* and *Products* indices loaded to the first factor and country rankings on the *Tourism* and *Culture* indices loaded to the second factor. Oblique rotation, which assumes the two factors were related, yielded high correlations between the two factors that ranged from 0.63 (France) to 0.74 (UK). With few exceptions, country rankings on each index loaded strongly to one or the other factor. Only the *Products* index consistently loaded to both factors at levels considered moderate or high. The factor patterns suggest a relatively straightforward interpretation: country rankings on the six indices are closely related, but load to two distinct dimensions.

A formal test of model fit reported in Table 6, estimated from a multi-group confirmatory factor model, indicated that the two-factor model was a better fit to the data than a single factor model. Inspection of model fit statistics (χ^2 , CFI, TLI and SMRM) for a scalar invariant measurement model, in which factor loadings and means were constrained to equality in the eight measured publics, showed that the two factor model was an appreciably better fit, though slightly below conventional cut-offs (Hu and Bentler 1999).

We draw two broad conclusions from these analyses. First, the results show that respondents from eight countries spanning the diversity of European geography and culture relied on similar cultural schemas that agrees with historical narratives of an east-to-west civilization slope. This stands in stark contrast to the null hypothesis that each public evaluated countries based on their unique histories, cultures, and understandings. Second, these data form two distinct but related scales. The content of the survey questions on the four indices comprising the first factor is strongly related to schemas of development. The content of the survey questions for the indices that load on the second factor relate to schemas of countries'

distinctive national heritage and culture. Although the two factors are correlated, their unique content suggest that Europeans relied on two distinct cultural schemas when they evaluated countries' attributes.

To validate our interpretation of the factor model results, we calculated bivariate correlations between factor scores extracted from the scalar invariant, two-factor model and four external criterion variables, which we report in Table 7. In line with our expectations, the correlation between the development factor and rankings of countries' perceived levels of development from the DI data was very high ($r=0.94$). The development factor was also highly correlated with a country's HDI score in 2000 ($r=0.88$). These two criterion variables were also highly correlated with the cultural wealth factor, though the level of association was lower than what we observed for the development factor. The cultural wealth factor scores were associated with world heritage sites ($r=0.63$) and annual tourist arrivals ($r=0.65$). Criterion variables for cultural wealth manifest much lower correlation with the development factor. These results provide additional support for our proposition that publics hierarchically distinguish European nations based on schemas of development and cultural wealth.

The Geography of European National Hierarchy

Viewed spatially in Figure 2, Europeans views of national hierarchy shows a clear gradient from east-to-west Europe. Publics perceived the countries of north and west Europe as the most developed countries in the region, and the countries of south and east Europe as the least developed (Panels A and C). This perceptual line of demarcation tracks closely to long-standing divisions in Europe. The persistence of this divide over such a long period of time is a likely reason that perceptions of national hierarchy in Europe are so broadly shared and entrenched.

There were also several distinctions across perceptions of national hierarchy based on schemas of cultural wealth (Panels B and D). First, Europeans perceived some Nordic countries to be of lower cultural status relative to their position in the developmental hierarchy. Similarly, European publics ranked Germany first overall in the NBI data, as previously shown in Table 3, but Panel D of Figure 2 shows that Germany trailed Italy, France, Spain, the UK and Austria on its perceived cultural wealth. Italy, which was the ninth ranked country on the development factor, was the first ranked country on the cultural wealth factor. Russia was viewed as one of the least developed countries in the region but was evaluated much more favorably in terms of its cultural attributes. These results further substantiate our overall finding that Europeans rely on two schemas of national hierarchy.

Average Ranking Versus Self-ranking

In conclusion, we contrast in Table 8 how publics rate themselves with how other countries rate them. Our analysis shows that self-evaluations evinced an almost universal *positive* bias. Publics were most likely to over-rate themselves on the *People* and *Culture* indices and were least likely to over-rate themselves on the *Governance* index. Two eastern European countries, Russia and Poland, had the lowest self-rating, but the discrepancy between their self-ratings and other publics' ratings of them was greater than all nations except Turkey. The five north or western European countries all rated themselves among the top four

countries (across the fifty measured countries in the original NBI studies) in every index except *Government*.

CONCLUSION

Our analyses indicate that Europeans' evaluations of countries tended to cluster around two latent concepts, the contents of which closely relate to cultural schemas of "development" and "cultural wealth." Taken together with the accumulated literature on a perceived developmental hierarchy of nations in Europe (Kiss 2017; Melegh et al. 2013; 2016), our findings suggest that developmental and cultural conceptualizations of national hierarchy are firmly and centrally embedded in the mental maps of most Europeans, so much so as to constitute an implicit European hierarchy of nations. This suggests that publics' perceptions of national hierarchy are informed not only by their own observations of material factors but from their exposure to cultural schemas of national hierarchy.

Our results gathered from Nation Brand Index surveys produced country rankings that are highly correlated to those found in surveys measuring people's perceptions of countries' level of development. This is remarkable, considering the substantial differences in how the two survey programs sampled, surveyed, and measured concepts. That two very different research designs produced such similar national rankings leads us to conclude that (a) developmental schemas are fundamental to how European publics evaluate their regional neighbors, and that (b) the uniformity of Europeans' perceptions concerning national hierarchy is likely itself a reason why such beliefs are perpetuated over time. These hierarchies appear so widespread that many publics may turn to them in an automatic way, as a form of habit.

Our results showing a unique perception of a culturally based national hierarchy, on the other hand, supporting literature arguing about the importance of cultural wealth in nations' public reputations. While we found that European publics perceived northwestern countries to be the most developed and many southwestern countries to be the most culturally rich, they viewed eastern countries lowest in both national hierarchies. The distinction between schemas of national hierarchy based on concepts of development and culture merits testing in other regions of the world, as historically dominant European nations are likely especially rich in perceived cultural wealth. Place-branding efforts by countries in other regions of the world suggest that cultural wealth matters beyond Europe (Bandelj and Wherry 2011), but other perceptions of national hierarchy may take different forms in different places (Lamont 2012).

Our findings also imply that countries that can both preserve and successfully market distinctive elements of their national culture stand to reap a *perceptual* benefit, which other scholarship indicates can have meaningful political and economic consequences (e.g. Babb 2009; Davis et al. 2012; Kelley 2017; Merry 2016). Potential consequences might be inclusion in the European Union or other international and regional communities and new avenues for economic growth through increased tourism or international trade agreements (Melegh 2006; Rivera 2008; Wolff 1994). But preserving or constructing distinctive elements of perceived national culture requires a careful balancing act. Countries of central

and especially eastern Europe must balance seeking acceptance into European proper while still being distinctive enough to attract tourists and foreign direct investment in a global marketplace. A recent Polish marketing slogan reflects this: “Poland is part of the West and also understands the East” (Olins 2006).

We also found that European publics ranked their own nation much more favorably than did their regional neighbors. Further research with wider sampling across eastern European countries beyond the three large countries we examined is needed to see if this pattern holds. Also of interest is whether or not positive self-rankings bias is a global phenomenon that extends beyond Europe. These questions are of foremost importance for literature on nation branding given the widespread reliance on the NBI data and other similar indices capturing publics’ perceptions of national hierarchies.

For our purposes of cross-national descriptive analysis, aggregated national-level data from the NBI surveys are sufficient. Still, the examination of the original individual-level NBI data is of interest should it become publically available in the future. Individual-level NBI data would be especially valuable if they are additional covariates that would allow researchers to assess the influence of different mechanisms of individual-level exposure to various cultural schemas (e.g. Boyle et al. 2002; Pierotti 2013). Researchers could merge the individual-level NBI data with external datasets at the administrative- or national-level to estimate proxy measures of societal exposure to such schemas, such as the number of international organizations, UNESCO world heritage sites, tourists, or other measures of globalization (e.g. Hadler 2012; Roberts 2018).

Much has changed in Europe since the NBI surveys we analyzed were collected in 2008 and 2009. However, publically available top ten summary rankings for all NBI surveys fielded annually from 2008 to 2017 indicate that changes in the order of publics’ perceptions of national hierarchy were minimal at least through 2017.⁴ Of the six European countries in the top ten rankings, all of which were of northwestern origin, none experienced a change in rank position in excess of three places over the entire ten-year period. More recent current events since 2017, such as Brexit, turns to authoritarianism by Turkish and Russian governments and populist movements across many countries, may have brought about contemporary changes in perceived hierarchies. These events are also stimulated by nations’ frustration with their status position (Adler-Nissen 2016; Melegh 2016). We encourage new data collection and research on Europeans’ and other publics’ perceptions of countries across multiple dimensions.

Our research on public perceptions of national hierarchies helps explain the contours of European status hierarchies, including the reactionary anxieties of some countries toward the bottom of the regional hierarchy and the self-confidence of those at the top. The consistency we show between our analysis across multiple dimensions and prior research based on a single omnibus question of “development” suggests a widely acknowledged and shared hierarchy of nations. Still, our ability to distinguish between countries’ perceived

⁴Data available on the Wikipedia-German entry for “Nation Branding.” Accessed January 30, 2018. https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nation_Branding.

hierarchical positions across developmental and cultural attributes helps in anticipating which countries are likely to be especially anxious about their position. For example, countries at the bottom of one hierarchy but not both may be especially likely to turn to authoritarian governance, whereas countries low on both may instead focus their efforts on nation-branding campaigns. Further research could correlate nations' positions in the national hierarchies we outline with the degree and manner in which they attempt to increase their status.

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Figure 1.
Distribution of European Country Rankings on Six Nation Brand Indices

Figure 2 -
Perceptions of European National Hierarchy Based on Development and Cultural Wealth
Factor Scores

Table 1.

Surveyed Publics and Evaluated Countries from Anholt-GfK Nation Brands Index Surveys

Surveyed Publics (N=8)	Evaluated Countries (N=23)
France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Russia, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom	Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom

Notes: Norway and Iceland were only rated in 2008. Germany did not rate the Netherlands in 2009. Scotland excluded from the present analysis due to lack of data on external criterion.

Table 2.**Survey Questions Comprising Each Dimension of the Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index****GOVERNANCE**

- a. [country] is competently and honestly governed (1–7)
- b. [country] respects the rights of its citizens and treats them with fairness.
- c. [country] behaves responsibly in the areas of international peace and security (1–7)
- d. [country] behaves responsibly to protect the environment (1–7)
- e. [country] behaves responsibly to help reduce world poverty (1–7)
- f. WORD ASSOCIATION: Each country's level of association with the following adjectives: corrupt, dangerous, reassuring, reliable, transparent, trustworthy, unpredictable, unstable

IMMIGRATION & INVESTMENT

- a. Willingness to live and work for a substantial period in the country (1–7)
- b. Quality of life (1–7)
- c. Good place to study for educational qualifications (1–7)
- d. [country] has businesses I'd like to invest in (1–7)
- e. Equal opportunity (1–7)
- f. WORD ASSOCIATION: Which adjective best describes the current economic and business conditions in [country]? ambitious, backward, declining, developing, forward-thinking, isolated, modern, stagnant

PRODUCTS

- a. The country's perceived contribution to innovation in science and technology (1–7)
- b. The degree to which the country is seen as a creative place with cutting-edge ideas and new ways of thinking (1–7)
- c. The effect of a product or service's country of origin on people's attitudes towards purchasing it (1–7)
- d. WORD ASSOCIATION: Each country's level of association with the following industries: advertising, automotive, crafts, agriculture, banking, fashion, film and television, food, high technology, oil

PEOPLE

- a. If I visited [country], the people would make me feel welcome (1–7)
- b. I would like to have a person from [country] as a close friend (1–7)
- c. A well-qualified person from [country] would be a valuable employee (1–7)
- d. WORD ASSOCIATION: Choose the adjective that best describes the people of [country] from among the following: aggressive, fun, hard-working, honest, ignorant, lazy, rich, skillful, tolerant, unreliable

TOURISM

- a. Would you like to visit [country] if money were no object (1–7)
- b. [country] is rich in natural beauty (1–7)
- c. [country] is rich in historic buildings and monuments (1–7)
- d. [country] has a vibrant city life and urban attractions (1–7)
- e. WORD ASSOCIATION: Which adjective best describes the experience of visiting [country] from among the following: boring, depressing, educational, exciting, fascinating, relaxing, risky, romantic, stressful, spiritual

CULTURE

- a. [country] excels at sports (1–7)
- b. [country] is an interesting and exciting place for contemporary culture such as music, films, art and literature (1–7)
- c. [country] has a rich cultural heritage (1–7)

- d. WORD ASSOCIATION: Which of the following are most expected to be produced in [country]: circus, films, modern design, museums, music, opera, pop videos, sculpture, street carnival, sports
-

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Table 3.

Descriptive Statistics for External Criterion Measures.

External Criterion Measure	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Developmental Idealism Ratings	15	7.2	1.30	4.48	8.9
Human Development Index	22	83.1	5.67	70.6	91.7
Total World Heritage Cultural Sites (log)	22	2.3	0.87	0.69	3.81
Total Annual Tourist Arrivals (log)	20	15.8	1.39	12.6	18.2

Table 4.

Country Rankings on Six Nation Brand Indices

Ranked countries	Average Country Rankings by Index						Mean	Std. Dev.
	Governance	ImmigInvest	Products	People	Tourism	Culture		
Germany	46.0	45.6	48.1	40.3	36.6	46.1	43.8	6.3
France	39.4	44.7	44.1	35.9	46.6	48.4	43.2	6.3
Sweden	48.5	45.1	44.3	45.5	36.7	39.1	43.2	5.4
Italy	33.7	40.1	39.9	40.9	49.0	48.1	42.0	6.6
United Kingdom	38.7	44.9	44.2	37.3	40.6	45.6	41.9	8.9
Switzerland	47.3	46.8	44.3	40.1	35.6	30.4	40.8	7.7
Spain	37.2	37.4	35.1	43.2	46.7	44.7	40.7	5.6
Norway	46.9	41.3	39.5	43.0	34.3	32.1	39.5	6.5
Netherlands	42.9	38.9	38.8	40.1	32.3	36.4	38.3	4.9
Austria	39.9	38.0	36.3	34.8	37.8	36.5	37.2	4.0
Finland	43.8	37.7	38.3	38.9	28.0	29.2	36.0	6.9
Denmark	43.6	40.0	37.3	37.3	27.1	29.6	35.8	8.1
Ireland	35.0	33.6	32.4	36.1	34.8	31.2	33.9	6.7
Belgium	38.6	35.1	34.1	33.4	21.9	25.7	31.4	6.7
Iceland	36.8	30.1	28.4	31.8	24.9	18.9	28.5	7.0
Czech Republic	29.8	28.6	25.0	28.0	21.9	28.7	27.0	5.3
Russia	11.1	23.3	31.0	20.4	29.9	44.5	26.7	14.1
Hungary	29.1	28.1	22.9	27.3	21.1	23.4	25.3	4.6
Poland	26.8	24.3	22.9	23.3	16.3	23.1	22.8	9.4
Turkey	16.0	14.5	15.1	15.1	23.4	24.1	18.0	12.7
Estonia	23.2	19.2	14.2	16.8	7.8	11.4	15.4	8.1
Lithuania	23.8	18.1	14.5	15.3	7.8	11.6	15.2	7.7
Romania	17.8	9.4	7.8	10.4	8.4	15.9	11.6	7.0

Notes: Country rankings are averaged over the results from the 2008 and 2009 data.

Table 5.

Country Specific Exploratory Factor Analyses of Country Rankings

Single Factor Model	France		Germany		Italy		Poland		Russia		Sweden		Turkey		UK	
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1	Factor 2
Governance	0.78		0.81		0.65		0.72		0.68		0.83		0.67		0.69	
ImmigInvest	0.91		0.94		0.92		0.87		0.90		0.90		0.86		0.92	
People	0.91		0.92		0.92		0.85		0.94		0.88		0.86		0.90	
Products	0.81		0.85		0.85		0.64		0.92		0.83		0.73		0.80	
Tourism	0.73		0.74		0.84		0.67		0.87		0.68		0.79		0.80	
Culture	0.65		0.65		0.74		0.64		0.87		0.68		0.68		0.71	
Two Factor Model	France		Germany		Italy		Poland		Russia		Sweden		Turkey		UK	
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1	Factor 2
Governance	0.80	0.12	0.86	0.09	0.73	0.09	0.82	0.04	0.72	0.20	0.90	0.11	0.73	0.12	0.77	0.11
ImmigInvest	0.88	0.22	0.84	0.32	0.77	0.42	0.82	0.27	0.75	0.44	0.69	0.48	0.83	0.27	0.71	0.49
People	0.78	0.36	0.72	0.46	0.77	0.42	0.71	0.37	0.64	0.59	0.69	0.45	0.77	0.33	0.64	0.53
Products	0.68	0.35	0.80	0.25	0.64	0.47	0.40	0.45	0.47	0.72	0.80	0.23	0.36	0.59	0.64	0.41
Tourism	0.30	0.73	0.31	0.74	0.34	0.79	0.21	0.73	0.28	0.83	0.23	0.73	0.28	0.78	0.34	0.72
Culture	0.21	0.74	0.19	0.76	0.24	0.76	0.20	0.69	0.27	0.83	0.21	0.75	0.20	0.72	0.20	0.75
corr (F1, F2)	0.63		0.64		0.72		0.68		0.72		0.67		0.73		0.74	

Notes: Each column represents a separate factor model in which country rankings for each of the six indices were assumed to measure either a single, underlying latent factor (top panel) within the measured public, or two latent factors (bottom panel). N=23, except Germany, which did not rate the Netherlands in 2008. Self-rankings are excluded

Table 6.

Cross-national Measurement Invariance Analysis of a One and Two Factor Model of Country Rankings

	Single Factor Model			Two Factor Model		
	Configural	Metric	Scalar	Configural	Metric	Scalar
<u>Model Statistics</u>						
Parameters	80	66	52	112	91	70
DF	32	46	60	48	69	90
χ^2	396	408	424	254	268	295
Diff test: χ^2 (DF) p	..	12.3(14)0.59	16.4(14)0.29	..	13.7(21)0.88	26.5(21)0.19
AIC	4820	4804	4793	5857	5829	5813
BIC	5074	5014	4958	6212	6117	6035
CFI	0.68	0.68	0.68	0.85	0.86	0.85
TLI	0.52	0.67	0.75	0.75	0.83	0.87
SRMR	0.41	0.42	0.42	0.09	0.11	0.12
<u>Country-specific χ^2 contribution</u>						
Germany	58.0	58.1	58.6	46.8	46.8	47.6
France	56.4	56.5	56.6	37.3	37.8	37.9
UK	46.5	47.5	49.9	44.3	45.5	48.6
Italy	53.5	55.0	57.4	22.8	24.6	27.0
Poland	30.4	31.6	32.2	32.6	33.9	39.1
Russia	72.5	74.3	78.3	18.6	20.7	28.0
Sweden	59.0	60.6	65.2	28.9	30.6	36.4
Turkey	19.5	24.4	26.2	23.0	28.1	29.9

Notes: All Nation Brand Indices are used in each model. All parameters are free in the configural model. The metric model constrains factor loadings to equality. The scalar model constrains factor loadings and latent means to equality. The Immigration & Investment Index is fixed at 0 in the single factor model. The Culture Index is fixed at 0 in the two factor model. Diff test assesses changes in χ^2 from one model to the next. Sample size: N = 176, N2 = 8. Models are estimated in Mplus v7.1.

Table 7.

Bivariate Correlations between Factor Scores from Nation Brand Indices and External Criterion Measures

External Criterion Measure	Development Factor	Cultural Wealth Factor
Developmental Idealism Ratings	0.94	0.78
Human Development Index	0.88	0.59
Total World Heritage Cultural Sites (log)	0.40	0.63
Total Annual Tourist Arrivals (log)	0.35	0.65

Notes: Values in the cells are Pearsonian pairwise correlations between the criterion variable and the factor score.

Table 8.

Self-rankings Compared to Average Rankings by Other European Publics

Country	Self-rankings							Average Country Rankings (Excluding Self-rankings)						
	Gov	ImmInv	Products	People	Tourism	Culture	Mean	Gov	ImmInv	Products	People	Tourism	Culture	Mean
Sweden	48.5	49	49	49	48.5	47.5	48.6	47.4	43.4	42.4	43.9	33.9	36.7	41.3
Germany	45	49	49	49	49	49	48.3	45	43.9	46.8	37.9	33.7	44.6	42.0
France	41.5	49	49	47.5	49	49	47.5	37.9	42.9	42.3	33.1	45.1	47.1	41.4
UK	37	49	49	49	49	49	47.0	37.8	43.2	42.4	34.5	38.2	44	40.0
Turkey	38	44	47.5	49	49	49	46.1	11.7	9.1	9.4	9.1	18.6	19.4	12.9
Italy	31	48	48	49	49	49	45.7	32.9	37.9	37.6	38.6	47.9	46.9	40.3
Russia	22	40.5	46.5	49	48.5	49	42.6	8.4	19.7	27.6	15.2	26.1	42.7	23.3
Poland	26	31.5	41.5	48.5	43.5	41.5	38.8	25.7	22.1	19.1	18.6	11.2	19.4	19.4

Notes: The left panel reports country rankings based on self-rankings and the right panel reports average country rankings based on the responses of the other seven European publics. Countries are sorted from most to least favorable self-rankings.