

Material metadata

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Article abstract

Social norms regulate our behavior in a variety of mundane and far-reaching contexts, from tipping at the restaurant to social distancing during a pandemic. However, how social norms emerge, persist, and change is still poorly understood. Here the authors investigate experimentally whether spontaneously emerging behavioral regularities (i.e., conventions) gain normativity over time and, if so, whether their normative underpinning makes them resistant to changes in economic incentives. To track the coevolution of behavior and normativity, the authors use a set of measures to elicit participants' first- and second-order normative beliefs and their (dis)approval of other participants' behaviors. The authors find that even in the limited duration of their lab experiment, conventions gain normativity that makes these conventions resistant to change, especially if they promote egalitarian outcomes and the change in economic incentives is relatively small. These findings advance our understanding of how cognitive, social and economic mechanisms interact in bringing about social change.

Materials description

DTA: data.dta: Stata data file comprising 11520 observations and 83 labeled variables;
DO: analysis.do: Documented Stata syntax file. Running the syntax on the data reproduces the results, figures and tables reported in the paper.

Source of data

none

Software information

Stata 14 and higher

Complementary information

The data were produced in a behavioral, computerized laboratory experiment conducted in the Decision Science Lab (DeSciL) of ETH Zürich.

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