



Research Note

Political ideological distance and tourism demand: The cultural–political interplay☆



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Introduction

The past decade has been characterized by increasing political polarization within nations and a dramatic surge in geopolitical discord on the global stage. Recent events, such as the Brexit referendum, the US–China trade war, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, may cast a long shadow over international flows of goods, services, and personnel. Although a growing literature has emerged to evaluate how political relations influence tourist flows, extant studies have predominantly conducted analyses based on case studies of selected countries, stand-alone political events, or historical incidences (see appendix A.1). Their context-specific findings may provide little basis for generalization of results. It is therefore imperative to examine the political–tourism nexus in a more systematic manner underpinned by international large-scale assessments.

Specifically, the politics–tourism tie can be interpreted through two lenses: (1) an individual choice channel based on tourist behaviors, and (2) a government control channel operated through travel policy intervention (Su et al., 2022; Yu et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2021). There is a void of concrete quantification of these underlying mechanisms in the literature. In addition, despite the general belief that political conflicts impair tourism demand, this impact could be notably different across countries (Su et al., 2022). Such heterogeneity might be attributed to the cultural underpinning that, by a large margin, shapes tourist behaviors (Lin et al., 2022) and political engagement (Zanocco & Jones, 2018). Cultural dimensions convey distinct intrinsic needs and preferences, and are expected to condition responses to political dissonance in different manners (see appendix A.2). This intersection of cultural dimensions and political forces is another uncharted area.

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This research note aims to investigate (1) the connection between political ideological distance and bilateral tourism, (2) the strength of individual choice and government intervention channels, and (3) the cultural–political interplay in tourism. Our contribution is threefold. First, this study is the first to scrutinize the politics–tourism relationship in a holistic, cross-country setting. Utilizing a novel dataset that consistently estimates political ideology based on United Nations (UN) voting records, our analysis covers 190 countries and 25 years (1995–2019), which guarantees empirical validity and enhances the generalizability of our findings. Second, merging our data with a time-series cross-country visa regulation indicator, we shed light on the relative magnitude of the two aforementioned channels. Third, employing Hofstede National Cultural Dimensions (Hofstede et al., 2010), our findings not only recognize the cultural characteristics that lead to heterogeneous effects in general, but also identify the distinct sets of cultural dimensions that function through the two aforementioned channels, respectively.

Data and methodology

Baseline model

A panel regression model was adopted to explore variations of variables of interest both over time and across different countries. Our baseline specification is as follows:

$$\ln \text{Tourism}_{ijt} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PD_{ijt} + \beta_2 X_{it} + \beta_3 X_{jt} + \beta_4 Z_{ijt} + \mu_i + \mu_j + \mu_t + \varepsilon_{ijt} \quad (1)$$

where i, j , and t stand for source country, destination country, and year, respectively. The dependent variable $\ln \text{Tourism}_{ijt}$ is the (natural logarithm of) tourist arrivals in country j from country i at year t . PD_{ijt} , our key independent variable, captures the political ideological distance between the two countries. As in existing gravity-like studies, we incorporate a set of time-varying country-specific characteristics for both the source (X_{it}) and the destination countries (X_{jt}); two additional time-variant country-pair attributes are controlled through Z_{ijt} (see appendix A.3). The model is estimated using panel data with source-, destination-, and year-fixed effects (the Hausman test ($p < 0.001$) suggests that the fixed effects model is more appropriate in this research). The robust standard errors are clustered at the source–destination dyadic level.

Two channels

To disentangle the potential channels of individual behavior and government policy control, we augment Eq. (1) with a bilateral travel policy variable, $Visa_{ijt}$, yielding:

$$\ln \text{Tourism}_{ijt} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PD_{ijt} + \beta_2 X_{it} + \beta_3 X_{jt} + \beta_4 Z_{ijt} + \beta_5 Visa_{ijt} + \mu_i + \mu_j + \mu_t + \varepsilon_{ijt} \quad (2)$$

where $Visa_{ijt}$ measures the visa restrictiveness for tourists from country i to enter country j in year t . Furthermore, we examine the potential impact of political distance on travel restriction by adopting $Visa_{ijt}$ as the dependent variable:

$$Visa_{ijt} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PD_{ijt} + \beta_2 X_{it} + \beta_3 X_{jt} + \beta_4 Z_{ijt} + \mu_i + \mu_j + \mu_t + \varepsilon_{ijt} \quad (3)$$

The cultural–political interplay

We further include the interactions between political distance and different Hofstede cultural measurements:

$$Visa_{ijt} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PD_{ijt} + \beta_1^C PD_{ijt} \times C_j + \beta_2 X_{it} + \beta_3 X_{jt} + \beta_4 Z_{ijt} + \mu_i + \mu_j + \mu_t + \varepsilon_{ijt} \quad (4a)$$

$$\ln \text{Tourism}_{ijt} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PD_{ijt} + \beta_1^C PD_{ijt} \times C_i + \beta_2 X_{it} + \beta_3 X_{jt} + \beta_4 Z_{ijt} + \beta_5 Visa_{ijt} + \mu_i + \mu_j + \mu_t + \varepsilon_{ijt} \quad (4b)$$

Eqs. (4a) and (4b) demonstrate how the cultural characteristics of the destination (C_j) and the source country (C_i) shape the impact of political distance on visa restrictions and tourist travel decisions, respectively. The cultural dimensions include individualism, power distance, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence.

A key challenge is to construct a reliable and consistent measure of political distance at a global scale. Most existing studies rely on case-based regional conflicts or specific historical events, thus limiting the scope and generalizability of the analyses. This paper utilizes a novel dataset that estimates state preferences based on time-series UN voting records (Bailey et al., 2017). The ideal points are rigorously estimated through dynamic ordinal spatial models based on UN resolutions that are identical across years, which guarantees the comparability of our constructed distance measure across country-pairs and across time. Specifically, we define political ideological distance as

$$PD_{ijt} = \left| \text{Ideal Point}_{it} - \text{Ideal Point}_{jt} \right|$$

where $Ideal\ Point_{it}$ measures country i 's state position in year t with normalization. A larger PD_{ijt} reflects a higher degree of dissimilarity of political ideologies.

Definitions, descriptive statistics, and data sources of the variables are provided in the appendices A.2 and A.3.

Results

Table 1 presents the results based on Eqs. (1)–(3). First, Column (1) shows a significantly negative relationship between political ideological distance and cross-country tourism. One percentage increase in political distance is associated with a 0.65 percentage decline in tourist flows.

Second, Column (2) evaluates the impact of government travel policy through Eq. (2). Consistent with our conjecture, a more restrictive visa policy lowers the tourist arrivals. The estimated coefficient of PD_{ijt} , which becomes smaller in absolute magnitude, remains negative and statistically significant. This signals that part of the political–tourism link operates through the government-level policy intervention; individual behavior in terms of tourism demand is still affected by political distance after accounting for the travel restriction channel. Quantitatively, the marginal effect of political distance declines by 31 % (from -0.6504 in Column (1) to -0.4471 in Column (2)).

The result in Column (3) further corroborates the fact that political distance creates a significantly positive impact on government travel policy. The further apart two countries are on the political ideological spectrum, the more likely the destination country imposes visa restrictions on tourists from the source country.

Tables 2 and 3 present results of the cultural–political interplay based on Eqs. (4a) and (4b), respectively. Table 2 reports that the effect of political distance on visa is significantly influenced by the destination country's culture underpinning. On the one hand, countries with higher degrees of individualism and masculinity are less likely to implement stricter travel policies for tourists from countries that they disagree with politically, as their nationals demonstrate assertiveness and are less prone to the effects of normative influences. On the other hand, high-power-distance and long-term-orientated countries tend to impose a stronger visa policy, due to obedience to the authority's decisions and a future-oriented perspective that resorts to visa policies as a predictable political maneuver.

Table 3 shows how the different culture attributes of the source country matter in terms of the political–tourism relationship. We identify a significantly positive role for the interactive terms of individualism, masculinity, and indulgence. For countries that

Table 1
The impact of political distance on tourist flow and visa restriction.

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Tourism OLS	Tourism OLS	Visa PROBIT
PD_{ijt}	-0.6504^{***} (0.022)	-0.4471^{***} (0.022)	0.6234^{***} (0.023)
$\ln Population_{it}$	0.1221 (0.082)	0.5067^{***} (0.092)	1.0592^{***} (0.102)
$\ln Population_{jt}$	-0.0665 (0.085)	0.3161^{***} (0.102)	0.3825^{***} (0.141)
$GDP_per_cap_{it}$	0.0039^{***} (0.001)	0.0020^{**} (0.001)	-0.0027^{**} (0.001)
$GDP_per_cap_{jt}$	0.0091^{***} (0.001)	0.0055^{***} (0.001)	-0.0067^{***} (0.002)
$Government_effectiveness_{it}$	0.1671^{***} (0.028)	0.0608^* (0.033)	-0.1668^{***} (0.039)
$Government_effectiveness_{jt}$	0.2358^{***} (0.026)	0.0363 (0.031)	-0.1382^{***} (0.047)
$KOF_globalization_index_{it}$	0.0086^{***} (0.003)	0.0016 (0.003)	-0.0205^{***} (0.004)
$KOF_globalization_index_{jt}$	0.0399^{***} (0.002)	0.0230^{***} (0.003)	-0.0371^{***} (0.004)
$\ln Price_diff_{ijt}$	-0.0327 (0.026)	-0.0457 (0.029)	-0.1414^{***} (0.036)
RTA_{ijt}	1.0850^{***} (0.028)	0.8285^{***} (0.026)	-0.4295^{***} (0.020)
$Visa_{ijt}$		-1.7311^{***} (0.049)	
Constant	11.1822^{***} (2.241)	-1.1806 (2.605)	25.1686^{***} (3.362)
Country and year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	186,395	122,919	122,919
Within R-squared	0.682	0.715	–

*** $p < 0.01$.
 ** $p < 0.05$.
 * $p < 0.1$.

Table 2
The impact of cultural attributes of the destination country on the political–visa relationship.

Variables	(1) Visa PROBIT	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
PD _{ijt}	0.5240*** (0.017)	0.2769*** (0.081)	0.8830*** (0.070)	0.7308*** (0.085)	0.5386*** (0.054)	0.6189*** (0.058)
PD _{ijt} *Individualism _j	−0.0011*** (0.000)					
PD _{ijt} *Power_distance _j		0.0059*** (0.001)				
PD _{ijt} *Masculinity _j			−0.0048*** (0.001)			
PD _{ijt} *Uncertainty_avoidance _j				−0.0013 (0.001)		
PD _{ijt} *Long-Term_orientation _j					0.0030*** (0.001)	
PD _{ijt} *Indulgence _j						0.0009 (0.001)
Controls & fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	94,077	94,077	94,077	94,077	81,874	76,946

*** $p < 0.01$.

are more individualistic, masculine, and indulgent, the residents tend to follow their own instincts and prioritize their human desires and leisure; therefore, their travel decisions are less affected by the country-level political distance. On the contrary, the (negative) marginal effect of political disagreement on outbound tourism is further amplified in source countries characterized by a higher degree of uncertainty avoidance.

Analyses with a one-year lag of political distance also produced the same results (provided on request).

Our key findings are diagrammatically summarized in Fig. 1.

Conclusion

Our study is the first to systematically identify the impact of political distance on outbound tourism, and the first to quantitatively partial out the channel of government policy. It is also novel in identifying different sets of cultural dimensions that matter for the government intervention channel and the individual choice channel, respectively. The findings help to improve the accuracy of tourism demand forecasting, and facilitate tourism marketing organizations and travel agencies to strategize their plans given contemporary political dynamics and cultural diversities.

We acknowledge that a policy measurement based on official visa requirement is likely to generate a lower-bound estimation of the government intervention channel, which may involve a large range of implicit controls, such as delaying passport issuance or increasing difficulties in visa application. However, this interference is difficult to document in a consistent, cross-country

Table 3
The impact of cultural attributes of the source country on the political–tourism relationship.

Variables	(1) Tourism	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
PD _{ijt}	−0.6842*** (0.057)	−0.3387*** (0.074)	−0.5731*** (0.056)	−0.3207*** (0.069)	−0.4124*** (0.051)	−0.5171*** (0.068)
PD _{ijt} *Individualism _i	0.0058*** (0.001)					
PD _{ijt} * Power_distance _i		−0.0015 (0.001)				
PD _{ijt} * Masculinity _i			0.0029*** (0.001)			
PD _{ijt} * Uncertainty_avoidance _i				−0.0017* (0.001)		
PD _{ijt} * Long-Term_orientation _i					−0.0000 (0.001)	
PD _{ijt} * Indulgence _i						0.0022* (0.001)
Controls & fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	95,412	95,412	95,412	95,412	84,829	80,512
R-squared	0.720	0.719	0.719	0.719	0.729	0.730

*** $p < 0.01$.

* $p < 0.1$.

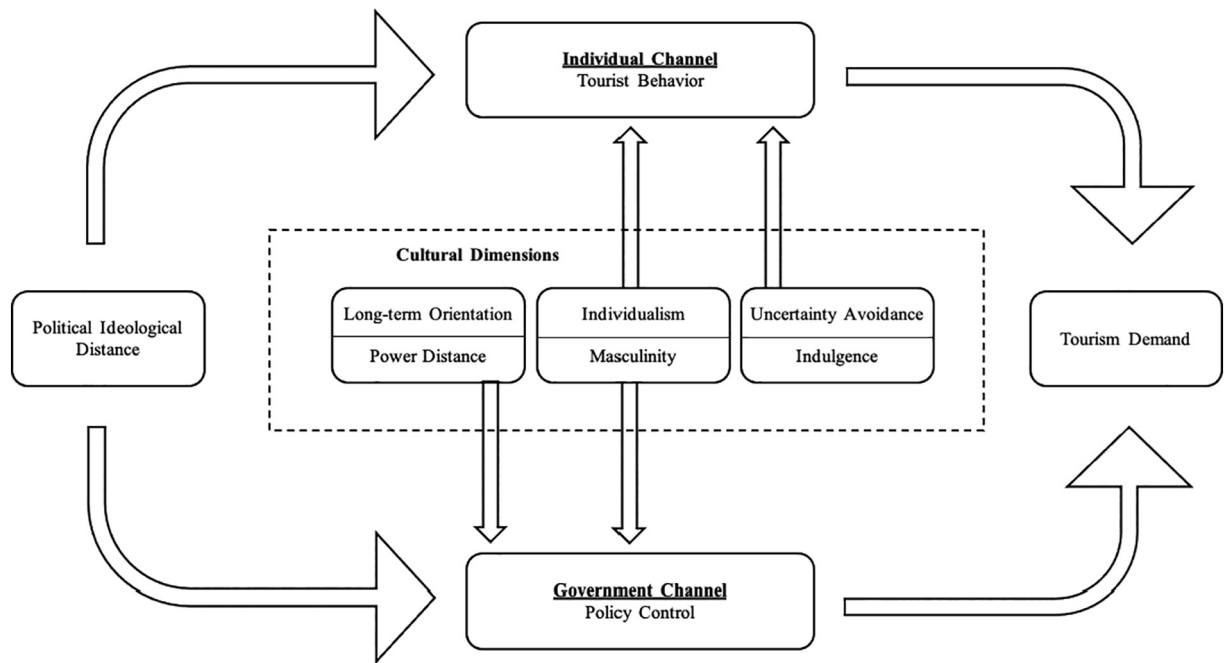


Fig. 1. A diagram of the cultural-political interplay on tourism demand.

manner. In addition, future investigations could explore additional moderators to generate better insights for the heterogeneity effects. Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic further magnifies the role of government on regulating cross-border travel, apparently at varying degrees across countries with different political systems and culture backgrounds. Therefore, the dynamics between politics, culture, and international tourism are likely to be strengthened in post-COVID years, which we leave for future research.

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Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2022.103525>.

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