



Juries and the political economy of legal origin

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Legal origin has been brought forward as a key influence on modern finance, because common law institutions protect investors better than do civil law institutions, it is claimed. These institutional differences are said, in the legal origin explanation, to have been hard-wired into nations centuries ago. Daniel Klerman and Paul Mahoney challenge the legal origin description of the jury as emerging and achieving prominence in 12th- and 13th-century England while remaining unimportant in France. That contrast has been offered as a key difference between common and civil law, one dependent on the differences in relative power between the English monarch and the French one in the 13th century. But the investigation of the jury here should give pause to those promoting the overall legal origin thesis. The first reason to hesitate is that the jury is not central to protecting outside investors in common law nations. Indeed America's premier corporate court—the Delaware Chancery court—sits without a jury, and the usual view in legal circles is that the jury's absence (and the resulting decision-making by expert judges, not juries) is a strength of the court, not a weakness. The second reason is that Britain did *not* generally transfer the jury system to its colonies, because to have done so would have conflicted with its colonial goals. That is not a secondary point: political economy issues regularly trump issues like legal origin—colonial policy was just one example of how political goals displace secondary institutions. The third reason is that analysis for the jury differences between civil and common law nations depends on political economy differences centuries ago. But if political economy differences determined institutional differences in the earlier centuries, it is plausible that political economy differences in the intervening centuries would also have affected financial outcomes. Indeed modern political economy differences that lead some nations to support capital markets and others to denigrate them could explain modern financial differences as much as, or more than, 13th century political differences. *Journal of Comparative Economics* 35 (2) (2007) 294–308. Harvard Law School, Griswold 502, Cambridge, MA, USA.

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0. Introduction

Legal origin—common law versus civil law—is important to the past decade’s finance theory. Peculiarly, the theory has not had traction in the academic legal literature, which might be surprising given academic disciplines’ understandable tendency to see their own issues as central and determinative. What legal academic commentary that the theory has provoked has either been skeptical that the legal origins channels that the law and finance literature promotes are really so important or skeptical that origin could be as important as modern political economy considerations. That is, while the legal literature hardly denigrates law’s importance, it has doubted the importance of legal origin to financial development. Mahoney (2001), although sympathetic in part (particularly to the idea of a detrimental statist nature of civil law), denigrates the idea that civil law codification can be as important as the legal origin theory had hypothesized, since so much of American corporate and commercial law is codified. Coffee (2001) sees the propensity of some countries to disrupt their stock markets, which would have provided the needed investor protections regardless of underlying legal institutions, as central. Roe (2000, 2006) shows that, while property rights and investor protection are important, legal origin differences cannot explain the institutional differences, since common law countries use non-common-law institutions, such as securities regulators, and not just common-law-oriented fiduciary duties. He shows that modern political economy forces are likely to explain modern financial and investor protection differences in wealthy nations better than legal origin.

In *Legal Origins?* Klerman and Mahoney investigate central elements of Edward Glaeser and Andrei Shleifer’s (2002) analysis of how differences between common and civil law emerged in the 13th century, critiquing a paper called, simply enough, “Legal Origins.” There, Glaeser and Shleifer said that the English judiciary was decentralized relative to the French and that political differences between England and France at the time best explained that relative decentralization. The relative power of the king in each nation differed, the barons feared the king more than one another in one nation (and one another in the other nation), and each nation’s economic structure differed, with large contiguous land holdings in France giving the 13th century French barons more power and autonomy than the British barons.

I had much admired Glaeser and Shleifer’s investigation and explanation, because it focuses on power and politics in the 13th century as explaining legal structure outcomes, despite that I am not a fan of the legal origins strand in the law and finance literature overall, as the citations in the first paragraph of this note suggest. I am skeptical of their big picture story because, first, it exaggerates the impact on financial outcomes of differences in legal style, when there are much more important—and more modern—explanations for the differences than legal origin. It also privileges corporate legal institutions in finance, which while important are usually less critical than whether the polity has an ongoing antagonism to, or affinity for, capital markets. If the polity likes capital markets, then capital markets will tend to get the supporting institutions that they need. While older legal institutions are important, they are only part of the story and probably not the central one. Equally importantly, the differences in institutions between the legal origins are not so wide that either one is disabled or privileged in achieving the goals sought, such as investor protection primarily and property protection more broadly. Indeed, common law countries use regulators, such as the Securities and Exchange Commission, and codes, such as the

securities regulations and the uniform commercial code, to deal with commercial disputes among investors and merchants. When we use those kinds of institutions, we forgo whatever advantages common law institutions, such as fiduciary duties, could have provided. Investor protection can be achieved through institutions available to both legal traditions. The big picture issue is more likely to lie in whether the polity is ready to accept and promote financial markets, not what institutional forms it classically preferred.

But I admired the 2002 Legal Origins piece because it convincingly focused on the issues of power and politics in the 13th century, cogently analyzing how differing political configurations in England and France then seemed to have yielded strong juries in England and centralized judging in France. I also admired the 2002 piece as a sustained effort to link legal origins institutions to outcomes in a tight way; the legal origin literature displays many regressions but few extended inquiries beyond the 2002 piece linking origins to outcomes theoretically and historically. So, it is disappointing to see that Klerman and Mahoney view the history there as not fully accurate, with the actual structures (English courts were quite centralized, they say, and under the king's thumb in the 12th century and for centuries thereafter) the opposite of what Glaeser and Shleifer described. Since both sides rely on standard sources, perhaps there is an uncertain historical record. It is also possible that some of Glaeser and Shleifer's jury decentralization story can be preserved if we move beyond their jury story, which Klerman and Mahoney say is inaccurate, to a more general explanation for 13th century English decentralization. I shall explain how below.

Here I make three points about the interplay between the emergence of the jury in 13th century England and modern finance. The first is that legal origins proponents should have paused in their other work in which they assert that legal origin has a major impact on financial outcomes around the world, because the jury is not central to financial regulation in many important common law nations. Indeed, its existence on the periphery of finance may be detrimental to financial development. If it is the jury that needs to be explained to understand differences in legal origin, but the jury is not important to finance (or is in fact detrimental), then that suggests legal origin differences may be less important to modern finance than the origins literature has it.

Second, for the jury story to resonate with the overall legal origin story, Britain would have had to have generally transferred the jury system to its colonies. As Glaeser and Shleifer state (at 1194), in the 13th century, "France went in the direction of adjudication by royally controlled professional judges, while England moved toward adjudication by relatively independent juries. Over the subsequent millennium, the conditions in England and France reinforced the initial divergence in the legal systems. Moreover, the transplantation of the two legal systems . . . may account for some crucial differences in social and economic outcomes in countries that are reported in empirical studies."

But *did* Britain uniformly transplant the jury to its colonies? While the jury has had a long, deep, and important role in the United States and Britain, it seems that most British colonies did not usually use the jury for civil trials and many, perhaps close to a majority, did not for criminal trials. The jury clashed with British colonial policy: decentralization and local empowerment was not something that the British sought, particularly after its experience with the jury in Ireland. Britain's wariness in transferring the jury around the world exemplifies a general and deeper point—it illustrates the bigger concept that legal origin institutions are trumped, and perhaps trumped easily, by modern political economy forces. Britain was in the business of running a colonial empire. If the jury conflicted with its colonial strategy, then out it went.

Third, the structure of the legal origins jury argument is in tension with the overall, bigger picture legal origins thesis. The overall legal origin thesis is that differences in French civil law and common law legal origin determine (or strongly influence) differences in modern financial markets. Why are there differences in institutions? The answer lies, the theory has it, in important part in differences in the political economies of 13th century England and France: powerful barons with contiguous land holdings in France, a strong king in England. Differing legal institutions emerged then based on the differing political configurations of the time—so far, so good—those institutional differences persisted, and those persisting differences in institutions determine differences in financial markets in the 20th and 21st centuries.

It is the conclusion in that chain that the legal origins' authors ought to have been more wary of: If the political economy of the 13th century explains 13th century outcomes, why should we not look as well to 20th century political economy explanations to explain 20th century outcomes? Should we not look to historical experiences more recent than the 13th century as well? If political economy differences were important in the 13th century, might political economy differences of the 20th century also be important, perhaps even dominant?

I explore some of these issues below.

1. The emergence of juries in the 13th century

1.1. *Thirteenth century political differences between England and France*

Medieval, thirteenth century France was unstable, while England was at peace. England's king decentralized judicial decision-making, while the French king centralized it. A key piece of English decentralization was the emergence of the jury, say Glaeser and Shleifer.

According to Glaeser and Shleifer, the relative power of the king in Britain and France induced centralized French courts, because this was the only way that the relatively weak French king could control proceedings and because the rivalrous barons acceded to the king's control since they feared one another more than they feared the king. Meanwhile, the more confident English monarch in the more peaceful realm could allow for decentralized juries and courts that could counter the local barons. Glaeser and Shleifer focus in particular on bullying, with the powerful French barons more likely to bully local juries successfully than would the weaker English barons.

1.2. *The Klerman–Mahoney reconsideration*

Klerman and Mahoney say this story just was not so: British courts were, they report, centralized in the 12th century and for centuries thereafter. Indeed, this is as one might expect (and indeed Glaeser and Shleifer expected that the powerful English king would have centralized judicial power and were surprised to conclude that he had not): The powerful monarch tries to, and succeeds in, centralizing authority, while the weaker monarch cannot. Moreover, the doctrines and institutions that emerged then that could have had later pro-investor effects seem to have emerged from the most centralized, most “French-like” features of the English courts, say Klerman and Mahoney. If there is a true institutional difference between the common law and the civil law, say Klerman and Mahoney, it emerged centuries later.

Klerman and Mahoney point out that rather than dispersing the English judiciary, the English kings, from Henry II onward, kept the judges on a short leash. Physically the king kept them close at Westminster, that is, close to the king. Typically when they traveled through England,

they did so with the king. And the English judges were a small group that the king controlled more easily than he could have controlled a larger group of judges. And, yes, the king's judges sought to build a common law, but common in the sense of *uniform* throughout the king's lands. Moreover, they point out, doctrines and institutions like fiduciary duties—useful to modern outside investors in enterprises—emerged not in the law courts that practiced the common law, but in the king's chancery courts, which emerged in the 14th century as the most centralized of the English courts, the most under the king's control, and the least tied to juries. Hence, they say, whatever differences there are today between common and civil law emerged after the 13th century and, hence, the 13th century history does not give one the opportunity to reject the basic idea that law and social/economic/political institutions are largely determined simultaneously in favor of a legal origins theory. Whatever emerged in the 13th century does not seem to have determined later institutions, mostly because England was centralized in the 13th century. Perhaps, they say, the divergence occurred later, when British merchants obtained more political power in the 17th century and then got the kind of court system they preferred. And, they suggest, perhaps the later, continuing divergences had much to do with the continuing ascendancy of the Whig commercial interests in England, an ascendancy that presumably allowed the Whigs to get—and keep—a legal system that was not antagonistic to their interests.

2. The legal origin theory's bigger picture

Let us take a step back from Klerman and Mahoney's critique. For the moment, let us take Glaeser and Shleifer's view of the 13th century differences as accurate, despite Klerman and Mahoney's criticisms. What impact should that analysis have on legal origins' bigger picture? The jury analysis in "Legal Origins" does not fit well with the legal origins big picture on several important margins.

First, the historical record does seem to be contestable here, since both sides use standard sources. Not being a legal historian or even someone who consults legal histories of the English 13th century regularly, I am not well-positioned to arbitrate. Moreover, even if Glaeser and Shleifer's sources are inaccurate, perhaps enough of their basic 13th century story could still be preserved to be useful. That is, Glaeser and Shleifer interpret the Magna Carta's judgment by one's peers as guaranteeing a jury trial. Klerman and Mahoney point out that the jury trial was not so used, that "judgment" required judging not jurying. The Magna Carta did not guarantee jury trials, they argue, using standard historical sources. However, the core of Glaeser and Shleifer's specific argument here could be saved if they view the judgment of one's peers as a decentralizing move, one that reduced the king's power, even if King John never agreed to give the barons a true jury. Still, Klerman and Mahoney say that the next phrase in the Magna Carta—or the law of the land—reasserts the king's authority. Here Glaeser and Shleifer might argue that this still confined the king to avoid actions based on caprice, requiring consistency with prior rulings.

So, let us consider the implications if Glaeser and Shleifer's 13th century view is, on the whole or in important part, correct. How does it fit with the bigger legal origins picture? It still fits awkwardly.

2.1. *What is the bigger picture?*

The bigger picture is straightforward: Legal origin is important to modern finance because common law nations protect outside investors in firms better than do French civil law nations.

Common law nations use fiduciary duties to protect outside investors *ex post*, after transactions occur; they also prefer transparency and property rights; and they are relatively decentralized and non-statist. The emergence of the 13th century jury—in the version Glaeser and Shleifer promote—fits the bigger picture, they say, because the jury decentralizes power, reflecting and promoting the barons' independence from the English king. The less centralized state allowed institutions that could protect property rights to emerge in a way that a centralized state might not have allowed.

They state: “starting in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the relatively more peaceful England developed trials by independent juries, while the less peaceful France relied on state-employed judges to resolve disputes. It may also explain many differences between common and civil law traditions with respect to both the structure of legal systems and the observed social and economic outcomes.” English systems promote commerce, French systems promote state power, and some important packet of those differences trace back to the 13th century.

2.2. How important for modern commerce?

One can see how the jury *could* be important to commerce. With the jury drawn from the populace, the state would find it harder to dominate decisions left to the judiciary. Judicial decentralization would facilitate commerce. Property owners would be less fearful of state incursion. In contrast, a system of state-appointed judges operating without juries could promote state power at the expense of property interests in medieval times and business interests generally in modern times.

On the surface, there's something appealing in the idea. But some facts cause problems, problems that should induce us to rethink the idea and possibly reject it. First, the facts. The key on-the-ground American lawmaking institutions that affect outside investors are the Delaware Chancery Court and the Securities and Exchange Commission. The SEC operates without a jury, of course. It is staffed by government-appointed officials. But—and here is the problem for this arm of the legal origins theory—so does the Delaware Chancery Court, as Klerman and Mahoney note. Yet the absence of the jury is regularly seen by legal commentators to be an *advantage* of the Delaware courts over others, as Kahan and Kamar (2002, pp. 708, 709) assert. A lively literature in legal academic circles has arisen on why American firms incorporate away from their original place of business and what the consequences of that movement are. It is quite plausible and consistent with the range of that literature that American corporations are incorporating into Delaware in part, perhaps in major part, to *escape* the jury.¹

Moreover, English civil courts do *not* use juries, Klerman and Mahoney point out. Hence, the jury idea could have induced legal origins theorists to re-think whether the core common-civil law differences are really important to finance. If the jury is a key characteristic of the common law, but if financial interests try to *escape* the jury and often prefer (French-like) expert judges to juries, then it is open to question whether the common law generally, or this feature of traditional American and British law, is basic to finance.

¹ To be sure here, other states' corporate laws are often dealt with via jury trials and when the SEC sues wrongdoers it usually needs to operate before a jury. Trials for securities damages go to juries, but my understanding is that players consider the jury's awards to be erratic. And recall that Britain hardly uses the jury at all in non-criminal trials.

2.3. *Is the jury uniformly important in common law nations?*

For the jury story to resonate with the overall legal origin story, Britain would have had to have generally transferred the jury system to its colonies. But did it? It is true that juries have had a long and storied role in English and American jurisprudence. But it appears that many, perhaps most, former British colonies do *not* use juries for civil trials and perhaps a majority do not for criminal trials. For Britain, a colonial jury clashed with British colonial policy: Decentralization and local empowerment was not something that the British sought, particularly after their difficult experience with the jury in Ireland. This is not a secondary point—it fits with the bigger concept that political economy considerations trump legal origin institutions.

American colonists used the power of the jury to subvert the authority of royal governors and the Crown. Jury nullification resulted in the acquittal of John Peter Zenger (tried for criminal libel against British interests), smugglers prosecuted under the Navigation Acts, rioters against the Stamp Act, and participants in the Boston Tea Party, as Vogler (2001, p. 528) retells. One royal governor complained that a “Customs House Officer has no chance with a jury let his cause be what it will,” Moore (1973, p. 110) reports. Irish juries were reluctant to enforce the law, which they saw as a tool of English domination. Their reluctance led to lower conviction rates for all crimes in Ireland than in England and Wales, Johnson (1996, pp. 273–277) states, such that Britain suspended Irish juries during periods of unrest (Quinn, 2001, p. 200). As a 19th century colonial power, the British had reason from experience not to deeply embed the jury in its new colonies. As Young (1988) concludes, even if the French origin systems had more centralizing and less litigious potential than the British: “By the time of the British imperial occupation of African territory, the dangers to colonial hegemony in indiscriminate transfer of British legal practices was well recognized. Thus, there was no question of application of the jury system of criminal law, which had so undermined the effectiveness of the law as a vehicle for colonial control in Ireland and the North American colonies.”

The British did introduce the jury trial to India, extended it haltingly, but never fully embedded it throughout India. They used it in India to convince Europeans to feel safe working and living there, because trial by a jury (of one’s European peers) protected Europeans from answering for crimes against Indians, Pullan (1946, p. 109); India abolished it after independence, Vogler (2001, p. 532), presumably because Indians saw it as a tool of hegemonic power. African encounters with the jury are parallel: Britain limited its use and, where used, used it primarily to protect Europeans against native Africans (Mawer, 1961, p. 893; Vogler, 2001, p. 539). This illustrates the complexity of context: The jury might well have been a *decentralizing* institution in 13th century England. But, in some colonies Britain used it to *centralize* power by freeing colonizing Europeans from native justice.

To be specific here and current, several representative common law countries do not seem to systematically use juries: Botswana, Kenya, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, and South Africa. Others do, but usage is by no means uniform. Hence, if the purpose of examining the jury’s emergence in England is to find a foundation for jurisprudence and decentralization in English legal origin countries, that showing has not been made. And a preliminary look at the legal history suggests it would not have been easy to find that jury foundation throughout the common law world.

2.4. *Rebuilding Glaeser and Shleifer’s jury-decentralization view*

Legal origins theorists might have re-thought the jury’s impact in the following way: The current *direct* presence or absence of the jury in corporate and commercial cases is not really

so important (recanting some of the implications of the 2002 article), they might concede. But, overall the jury represents a decentralized system that protects property. It is an example of decentralization but not intrinsic to it.

Here is how, they might say: For governments (or the powerful, such as landowners in the 13th century and corporate insiders in the 20th) to take property from another, they needed to get courts to approve or acquiesce. But, the argument would run, if property owners are well distributed through the populace—or at least among those who could be selected for jury service—property would be protected. If the judge—appointed by the legislature, the king, or those in authority—acted alone, civil-law-like, the judge might run roughshod over property rights if the judicial institution lacked a check from a property-sympathizing jury, one composed typically of property owners. Hence, the ubiquity of common law jury trials protected property, with the operational tool being that the jury would be chosen from a populace of property-holders.²

Though plausible, that argument gets tied up in knots when we try to tie it to the bigger legal origin theory. What makes that kind of jury work is that property is well-enough distributed that property-owners dominate juries, or the rules for jury selection make property-ownership a likely characteristic of the median jury member. But the same pro-property result would be reached if property-owners dominate the *legislature* (or, again, if the rules for legislative composition favored property-owners). If property owners dominate the legislature, then it will produce property-oriented legislation. It will set up rules for its courts that protect property. But if so, then the judicial system derives from the composition of society (or, better, from the composition of its legislative commanders). Even if the polity had *no* jury, if the *legislature* (or the electorate or the relevant decision-makers) were dominated by property-owners, then that society's rules would protect property and the composition of the jury would not matter, because even if there were no jury, judges would have to respect property.

Hence, it is *not* whether a nation uses a jury that matters but whether the nation's *political institutions* support or denigrate property rights. If the legislature supports property and the legislature is powerful, then in the end even judges without juries will protect property. If they would not protect property, the legislature (or the executive, or the electorate) would not let them be appointed. If property-disrespecting judges did somehow get appointed, the legislature would take away their authority. Most likely, severe conflict would not arise, because judges and legislators would come from the same milieu—the same law schools, for example—and have similar world-views. If property is not well distributed among the jury population (and if the jury did thwart property rights), then the property-oriented legislature would disband or control juries (so as to protect property). Or courts would adapt to the legislative realities, in the way Spiller and Gely (1992) suggested. Perhaps through happenstance, this sequence occurred in the United States: A property-oriented polity allowed a corporate law institution—Delaware Chancery Court judges operating without a jury—to emerge and become important because it would protect corporate property better than a jury-based court would.

And the converse is true as well: If the legislature is antagonistic to property, then, first, the composition of the jury pool probably would not be property-protecting and, second, even if it is, the rules and institutions would not last long against a property-defiling but powerful legislature.

² Or, if they gave up their jury argument, Glaeser and Shleifer might say that the Magna Carta, by providing for judgment by one's peers, protected property owners enough in the 13th century that the baronial property owners would invest in improving their property.

Thus, the common law jury argument standing on its own is a dead-end.

This sequence parallels Klerman and Mahoney's hypothesis that the history of British property protection emanates not from the 13th century jury but from the 17th century legislature. Their conjecture seems plausible, because that is when commercial interests asserted themselves and came to dominate the British power structure. It also parallels Roe's (2000, 2003, 2006) argument that 20th century politics could have overturned prior property protection, and did in some nations. When those in power were not interested in supporting financial markets, financial markets did not develop. Nations' legal traditions were less important than their contemporaneous political economy features.

This is not just history. The process of legislative property protection is happening here and now, in the United States. Consider the *Kelo* case, which the United States Supreme Court decided in 2005. The court said that state legislatures were free to define what the public purpose was when they took property from property owners for economic development. (There is more detail here for a law school property course, but we need not go into it.) This decision would not be a good one for a legal origin theory that sees fundamental importance in common law judicial property protection. But then the issue became a public one, going on the ballot in eleven states, with nine of them confining their decision-makers from expanding the notion of property that could be taken (Castle Coalition, 2006; Cooper, 2006). Today it is the American property-oriented polity, not the judges, that restricts takings.

3. Juries' interaction with the bigger picture

There's another interaction between the Glaeser–Shleifer article and the bigger picture of the legal origin analysis—and it may well be more important. Let us pursue it here and see how it could lead us to higher ground and better insights. That higher ground is the ascendancy of political economy considerations in understanding the foundations for financial markets.

3.1. *Political economy foundations in the 13th century*

First, let us analyze the core legal origins perspective, step by step.

The central argument in this literature is that law that protects investors is important for financial markets. (Few would dispute this in its ordinary form.) Law though is not primarily the creation of modern political and economic forces, the legal origin theorists assert, but the result (primarily, largely, in important measure) of longstanding legal traditions that date back centuries. Figure 1 illustrates the view that modern property protection is rooted in medieval institutions.

What caused the common and civil law legal systems to diverge? Well, political differences in the 12th, 13th, and perhaps the 17th centuries, political differences having to do with the relative power in England and France of the king and of the complementary relative power of the barons in each nation. I illustrate with Fig. 2.

With these two sequences in mind, we can, in the legal origins theory, understand much of modern finance.

3.2. *Political economy foundations in the 20th century?*

So in the legal origins theory, politics is indeed important, but its importance is in how it induced institutional differences to arise in the 12th, 13th, and maybe the 17th centuries. Modern

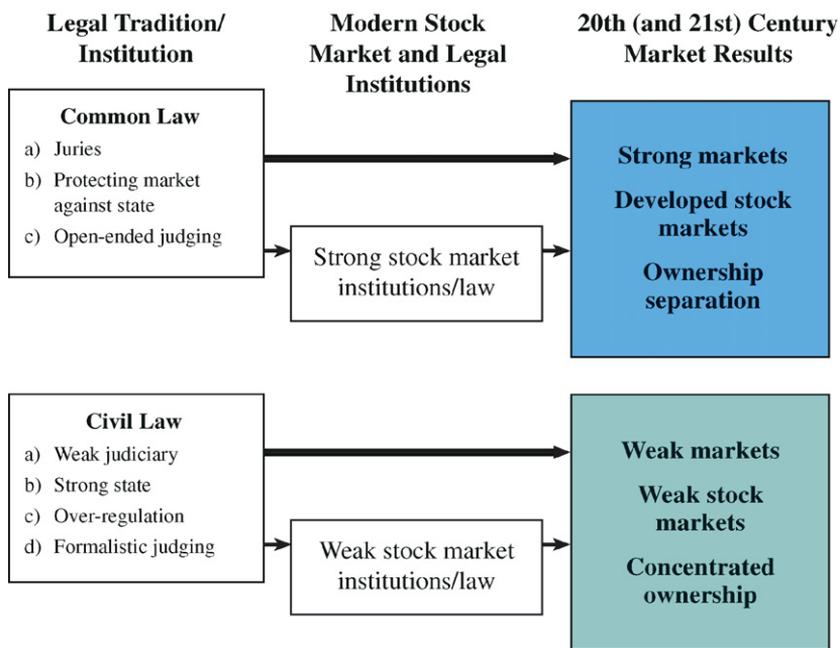


Fig. 1. From medieval legal origin to modern financial markets.

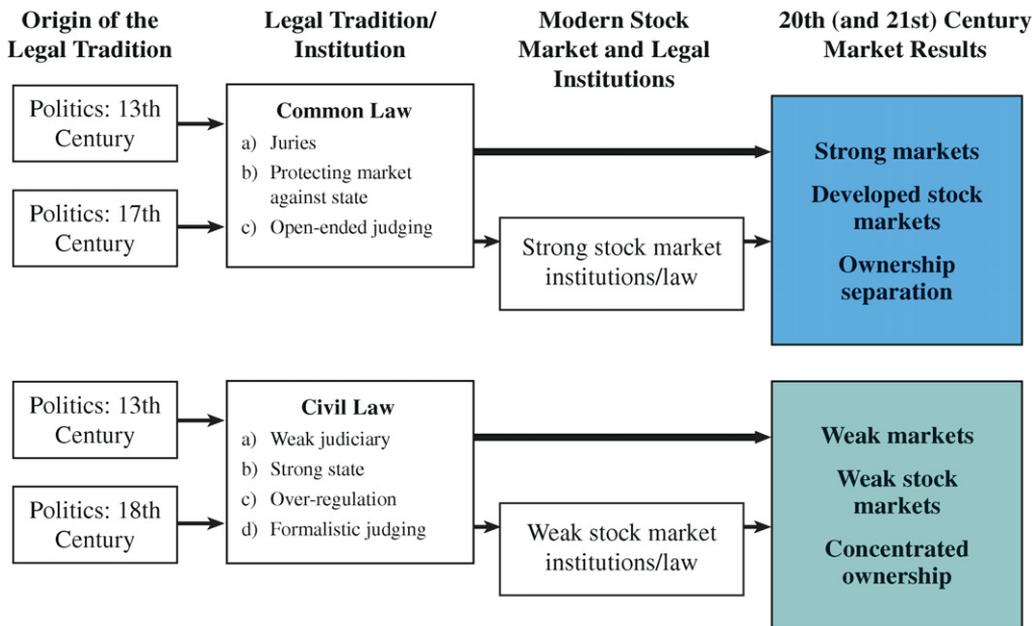


Fig. 2. From medieval political foundations to legal origins differences.

politics in the theory is relatively unimportant. For example, in one legal origins piece, [Botero et al. \(2004\)](#) argue that left–right power and the relative importance of labor interests are not as important to European labor legislation in the past few decades as legal origin. One might—dropping the theory’s transmission institution of legal origin—call the thesis one of the medieval origins of modern financial markets. I illustrate with [Fig. 3](#) the legal origin advocates’ rejection of modern politics as a key determinant of financial markets. (Surely the authors would not deny that modern politics has some effect, but their idea would be that its effect is smaller than legal origin, or interacts so closely with legal origin that it is really origin that determines the lion’s share of the political economy configurations and the financial outcomes.)

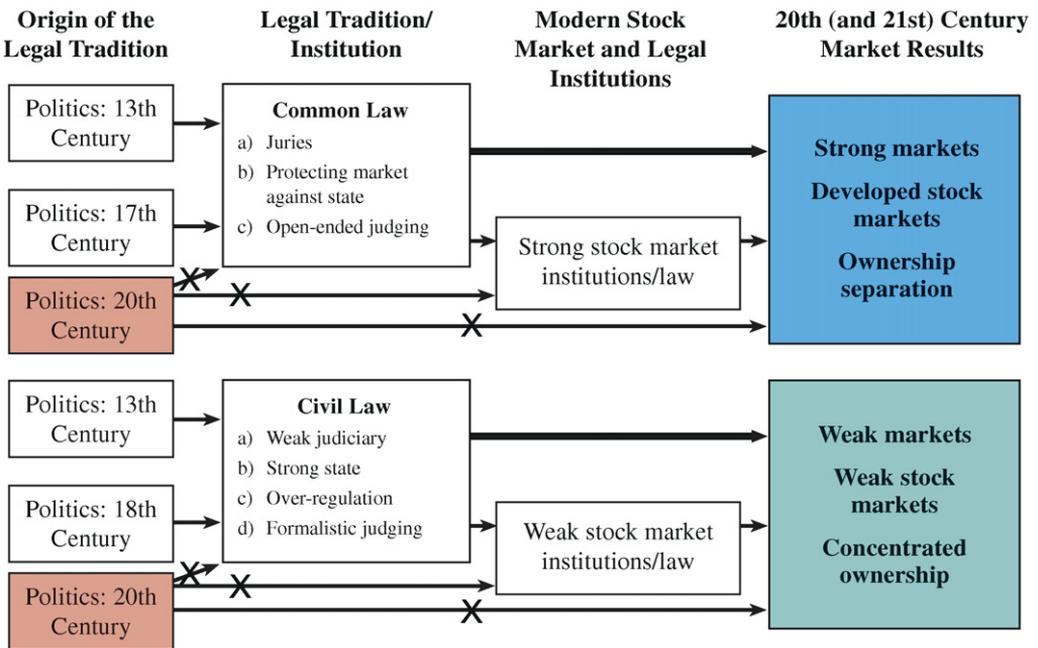


Fig. 3. Medieval legal origins and the unimportance of modern politics to modern financial markets.

An alternative view, one that I illustrate with [Fig. 4](#), is that modern politics *is* quite important to modern financial markets. Some polities favor capital markets; others are hostile to financial markets. The first will build supporting institutions; the second will not. And even if the second does build those institutions at times—or does allow them to emerge privately—they will not do much good in developing deep financial markets because capital owners are wary of letting go of their capital in a hostile (or indifferent) political environment. [Roe \(2000, 2003, 2006\)](#) develops this theory.

The point here is not to deny that institutions, particularly legal institutions, are sticky. They are. And their stickiness can persist for years, even decades, impeding some changes ([Roe, 1996; Bebchuk and Roe, 1999](#)). But stickiness does not mean that, once constructed, they are impervious to subsequent influences. If history had ended in the 13th or 17th centuries in Europe, then it is plausible that the institutional objects, having been set in motion would persist. And if those institutional differences were central to financial differences (a view disputed in part by [Klerman and Mahoney here and Mahoney \(2001\)](#) and [Roe elsewhere](#)—because both sets of institutions

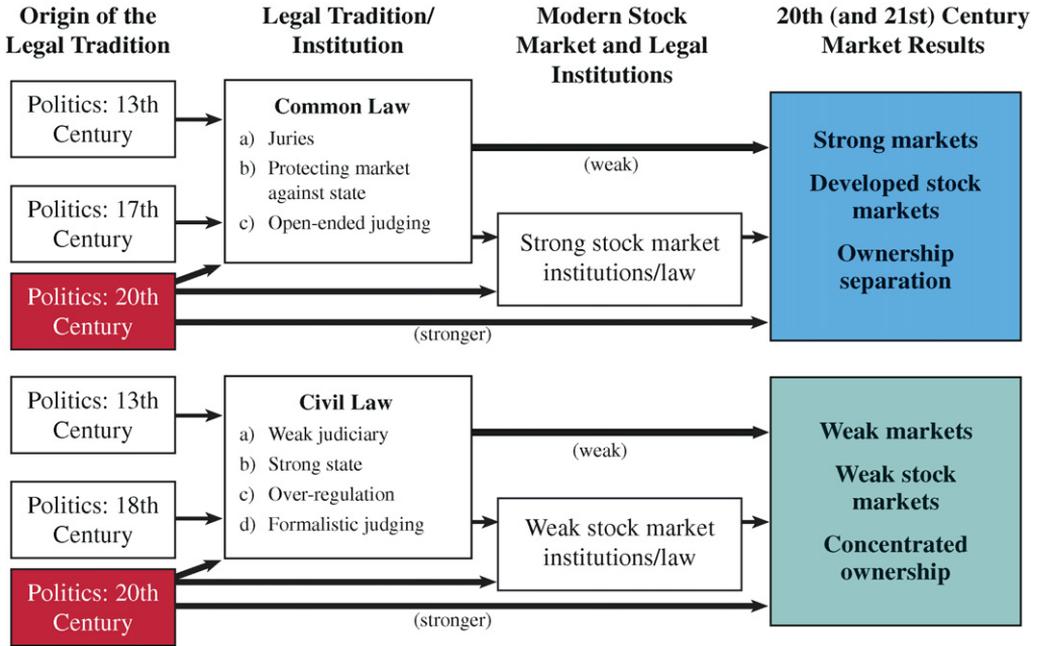


Fig. 4. The importance of modern politics to modern financial markets.

can achieve the same investor protection ends if the political will is there), then modern finance could well have been determined by centuries-old institutions. More plausibly, other institutional differences arose in the interim, replacing, strengthening, and changing earlier ones. The residue of events from the 13th century was certainly an input, but only one and probably not the determinative one. Certainly the English Civil War and the Glorious Revolution were central to English history, substantially influenced the English economy in the 17th century, and had continuing influence into the 18th century and beyond. Certainly the welfare state’s rise in the 20th century and its intensity in continental Europe could have affected finance and property. The point is not that institutions are not sticky, but that the events that influence them occur more frequently than once every seven centuries.

3.3. Differences due to wars and insecurity

A parallel analysis of the legal origins argument can be made—parallel in the sense that the influence of 13th century (or 17th century) institutional differences has strong modern parallels, forcing us to wonder whether it’s the medieval influence or the modern one that is the stronger one.

Starting in the 12th and 13th centuries, Glaeser and Shleifer state (at 1194), “France went in the direction of adjudication by royally controlled professional judges, while England moved toward adjudication by relatively independent juries. Over the subsequent millennium, the conditions in England and France reinforced the initial divergence in the legal systems. Moreover, the transplantation of the two legal systems . . . may account for some crucial differences in social and economic outcomes [around the world].” Glaeser and Shleifer say that this happened because the French situation in the 13th century was unstable, while the English enjoyed (relative) tranquility. This—relative order and tranquility in England—induced differential institutional de-

velopment. As Glaeser and Shleifer plausibly state (at p. 1208): “we estimate that between 1100 and 1800, France had a war on its soil during 22 percent of the years, whereas England only 6 percent (one can also argue that the wars on English soil were relatively bloodless). The constant war on the French soil meant that weapons and warriors were readily available to anyone who wanted to subvert justice.”

Glaeser and Shleifer focus on the stability of the jury system: “It is not entirely surprising . . . that tight state control of adjudication has often been introduced as part of national liberation or unification, often in the aftermath of national liberation or civil war and other disorder. Without internal peace to begin with, a system of juries may simply not work.” Glaeser and Shleifer (2002, p. 1211).

Again, the jury system might not be so central to modern finance, for the reasons I gave a few pages ago, and may not have been transplanted around the common law world, but one could stick with the basic elements of the Glaeser–Shleifer argument by substituting the consequence as being one of a decentralized state, one amenable to local, property interests (for which the jury could have been a manifestation, but not a necessary one) and which internal and external disorder would weaken.

Some of this relative order arose, I shall add to give some texture to Glaeser and Shleifer’s argument, from the differences of geography: the open areas of the European continent put differing, often hostile, populations next to one another. The English had the advantage of being separated by a channel of water, with the Scots and Welsh as the only immediate hostile neighbors. (Invasions of England, like the Norman one in 1066 and what could be characterized as the Dutch one of 1688, were difficult to pull off.) The contrasting geography of the 13th century gave a geographic impetus to a powerful prince in Europe in general and France in particular, one who could fend off hostile neighbors. The English had an easier time thinking of suppressing a standing army and decentralizing power than would most states on the continent.

From these differences in internal and external order, in the Glaeser and Shleifer perspective, it is plausible that a centralized civil law system emerged on the continent in France, perhaps as early as the 13th century, and a less centralized one emerged in England. Centuries later, these contrasts affected finance, with the English courts better equipped institutionally to protect property, shareholding, and creditor interests than the centralized, statist civil law systems, as Fig. 5 illustrates.

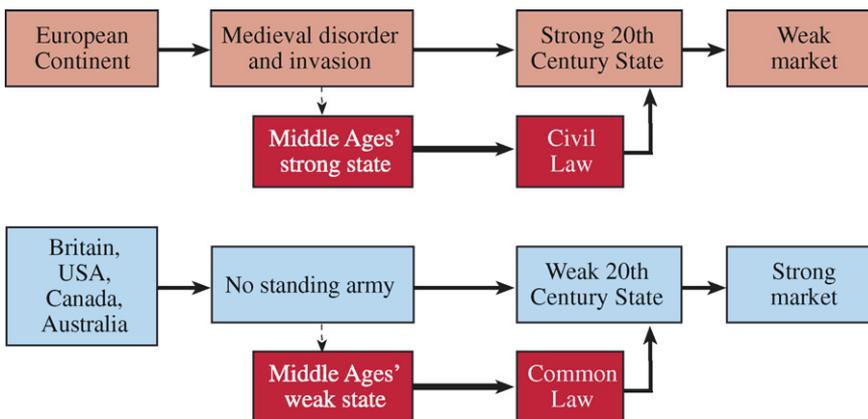


Fig. 5. Medieval disorder and stability.

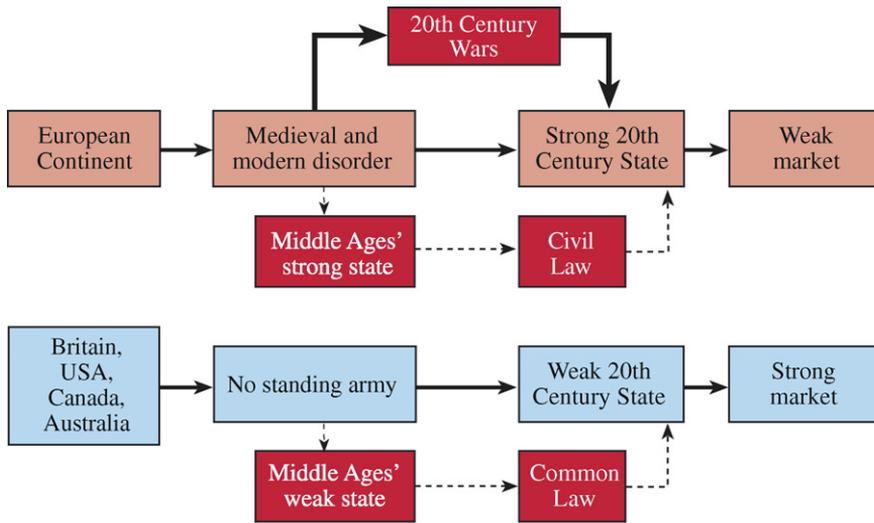


Fig. 6. Modern disorder and stability.

But the problem is that this kind of continental European disorder did not end once and for all in the 13th century, nor even in the 17th century. This contrast persisted up through 1945 and the end of World War II, or perhaps until 1989 and the collapse of traditional communism and the Berlin Wall. Figure 6 illustrates. Proponents of the legal origin story may simply be seeing in medieval legal origins the back reflections of more modern—and more important—political economy differences of the 20th century, differences arising in large measure from the contrasting levels of 20th century disorder and destruction, and their political consequences. And that, I suspect, is where, for modern financial outcomes, the real political economy story begins in earnest.

4. Conclusion

Legal origin has been brought forward as a key influence on modern finance, with the perspective being advanced that common law institutions are intrinsically better adapted to protect investors than civil law institutions. Glaeser and Shleifer (2002) offer a creative inquiry into the early emergence of the jury in common law nations and its relative unimportance in civil law nations. They offer it as one of the significant continuing differences between common and civil law, one dependent on the differences in relative power between the English monarch and the French one in the 13th century, with the powerful British monarch able to forgo centralization, while the weaker French monarch needed to assert control over localities via a more powerful judiciary. Daniel Klerman and Paul Mahoney provide an excellent analysis of the difficulties of doing this kind of historical work, as it turns out that much evidence indicates that the powerful British monarch in fact centralized judicial authority. If differences emerged, say Klerman and Mahoney, they emerged later on. Moreover, they say that one cannot yet reject the possibility that law is determined simultaneously with social, political, and economic facts, as the 13th century structures did not seem to predetermine the later ones. If by simultaneous, we mean over the course of decades, with multiple feedback effects, their thesis is one I'd sympathize with and indeed put forward in Roe (2000, 2003, 2006).

And the basic investigation here of the jury should give pause to those promoting the overall legal origin thesis. The first reason to hesitate is that the jury is not central to protecting outside investors in common law nations. Indeed America's premier corporate court—the Delaware Chancery court—sits without a jury and the usual view in legal circles is that the jury's absence (which results in decision-making by expert judges, not juries) is a strength of the court, not a weakness. The second reason is that Britain often did not transfer the jury to its colonies. The transplantation assumption in the legal origin literature is weaker, maybe much weaker, than the law and finance literature has it. The third reason is that the analysis for the jury differences between civil and common law nations depends on political economy differences of centuries ago. But if political economy differences determined institutional differences in the earlier centuries, it is plausible that political economy differences in intervening centuries *also* have affected financial outcomes. Indeed modern and contemporary political economy differences that lead some nations to support capital markets and some to denigrate them could be as important to modern financial outcomes as 13th and maybe even 17th century political differences. Perhaps more so.

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