

# Curriculum and Ideology

Davide Cantoni (LMU) David Yang (Harvard) Noam Yuchtman (LSE)

CEPR e-book, “Nation Building”

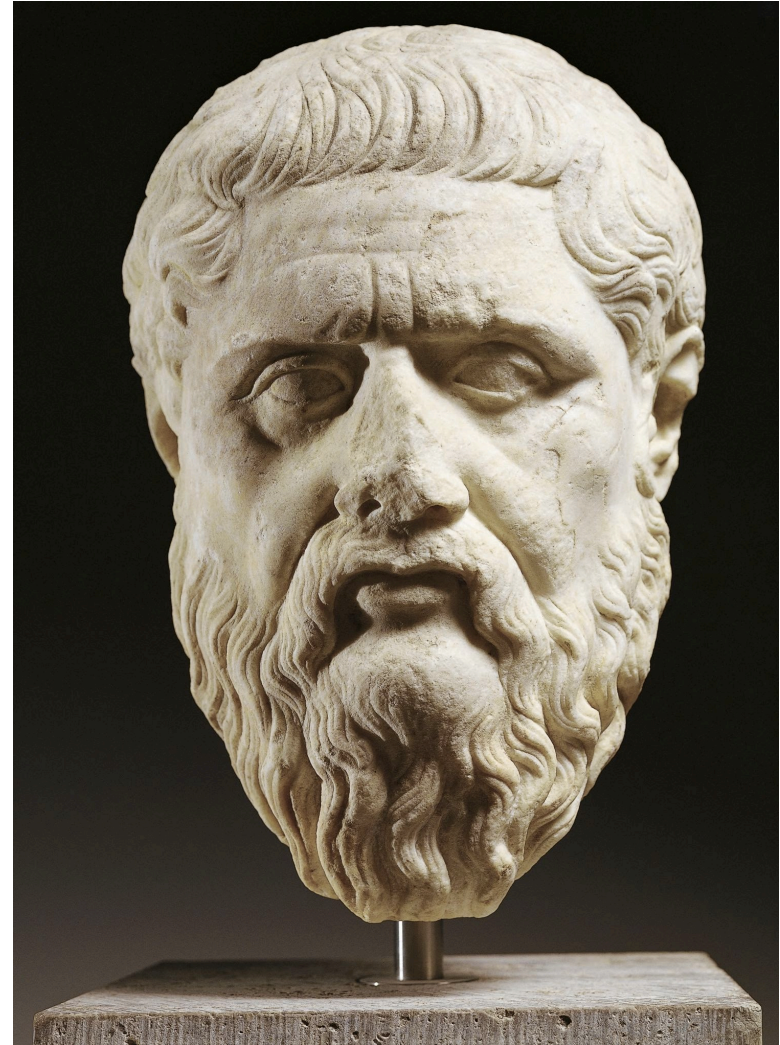
Launch Event

February 28, 2023

# Education to build a nation

Plato's *Republic* (book 2)  
on the Guardians:

“Then we have found the desired natures; and now that we have found them, how are they to be reared and educated? Is not this an enquiry which may be expected to throw light on the greater enquiry which is our final end – How do justice and injustice grow up in States?”



# The choice of educational content

Plato's *Republic* (book 2):

*SOCRATES:* And shall we just carelessly allow children to hear any casual tales which may be devised by casual persons, and to receive into their minds ideas for the most part the very opposite of those which we should wish them to have when they are grown up?

*ADIEMANTUS:* We cannot.

*SOCRATES:* Then the first thing will be to establish a censorship of the writers of fiction, and let the censors receive any tale of fiction which is good, and reject the bad

# Can school curricula shape national identity and ideology?

- Social scientists have long seen a link:
  - the formation of a French national identity in the 19th century (Weber 1976, and Blanc and Kubo 2021 featured in Chapter 8);
  - a Russian identity encompassing the Ukraine (Plokhly 2017);
  - an ultranationalist, Nazi ideology in the Third Reich (Voigtlaender and Voth 2015);
  - the development of Catalan identity (Clots-Figueras and Masella 2013, described in Chapter 10);
  - the cultivation of citizens capable of participating in the US democratic system in the 19th and 20th centuries (Dewey 1916, Lipset 1959, and Bandiera et al. 2019, described in Chapter 9).

# Can school curricula shape national identity and ideology?

- Social scientists have long seen a link:
  - the formation of a French national identity in the 19th century (Weber 1976, and Blanc and Kubo 2021 featured in Chapter 8);
  - a Russian identity encompassing the Ukraine (Plokhy 2017);
  - an ultranationalist, Nazi ideology in the Third Reich (Voigtlaender and Voth 2015);
  - the development of Catalan identity (Clots-Figueras and Masella 2013, described in Chapter 10);
  - the cultivation of citizens capable of participating in the US democratic system in the 19th and 20th centuries (Dewey 1916, Lipset 1959, and Bandiera et al. 2019, described in Chapter 9).

# Can school curricula shape national identity and ideology?

- Social scientists have long seen a link:
  - the formation of a French national identity in the 19th century (Weber 1976, and Blanc and Kubo 2021 featured in Chapter 8);
  - a Russian identity encompassing the Ukraine (Plokyh 2017);
  - an ultranationalist, Nazi ideology in the Third Reich (Voigtlaender and Voth 2015);
  - the development of Catalan identity (Clots-Figueras and Masella 2013, described in Chapter 10);
  - the cultivation of citizens capable of participating in the US democratic system in the 19th and 20th centuries (Dewey 1916, Lipset 1959, and Bandiera et al. 2019, described in Chapter 9).

# Can school curricula shape national identity and ideology?

- Social scientists have long seen a link:
  - the formation of a French national identity in the 19th century (Weber 1976, and Blanc and Kubo 2021 featured in Chapter 8);
  - a Russian identity encompassing the Ukraine (Plokhyy 2017);
  - an ultranationalist, Nazi ideology in the Third Reich (Voigtlaender and Voth 2015);
  - the development of Catalan identity (Clots-Figueras and Masella 2013, described in Chapter 10);
  - the cultivation of citizens capable of participating in the US democratic system in the 19th and 20th centuries (Dewey 1916, Lipset 1959, and Bandiera et al. 2019, described in Chapter 9).

# Can school curricula shape national identity and ideology?

- Social scientists have long seen a link:
  - the formation of a French national identity in the 19th century (Weber 1976, and Blanc and Kubo 2021 featured in Chapter 8);
  - a Russian identity encompassing the Ukraine (Plokyh 2017);
  - an ultranationalist, Nazi ideology in the Third Reich (Voigtlaender and Voth 2015);
  - the development of Catalan identity (Clots-Figueras and Masella 2013, described in Chapter 10);
  - the cultivation of citizens capable of participating in the US democratic system in the 19th and 20th centuries (Dewey 1916, Lipset 1959, and Bandiera et al. 2019, described in Chapter 9).



# The causal inference challenge

- Difficult to disentangle the effects of curriculum from those other social, political or economic changes which also shape preferences.
- For example, curriculum changes introduced across cohorts, but cohorts also exposed to different environments.
- We try to address this challenge in Cantoni et al. (2017), described in Chapter 11.

# The causal inference challenge

- Difficult to disentangle the effects of curriculum from those other social, political or economic changes which also shape preferences.
- For example, curriculum changes introduced across cohorts, but cohorts also exposed to different environments.
- We try to address this challenge in Cantoni et al. (2017), described in Chapter 11.

# China's 8<sup>th</sup> Textbook Reform

- Textbook reform affects curriculum of senior high school (grades 10–12).
- We focus on the *Politics* curriculum: (almost) every province updated from the same old version of the textbook to the same new version.
- High stakes: all students examined on *Politics* material as part of the college entrance process.

# China's 8<sup>th</sup> Textbook Reform

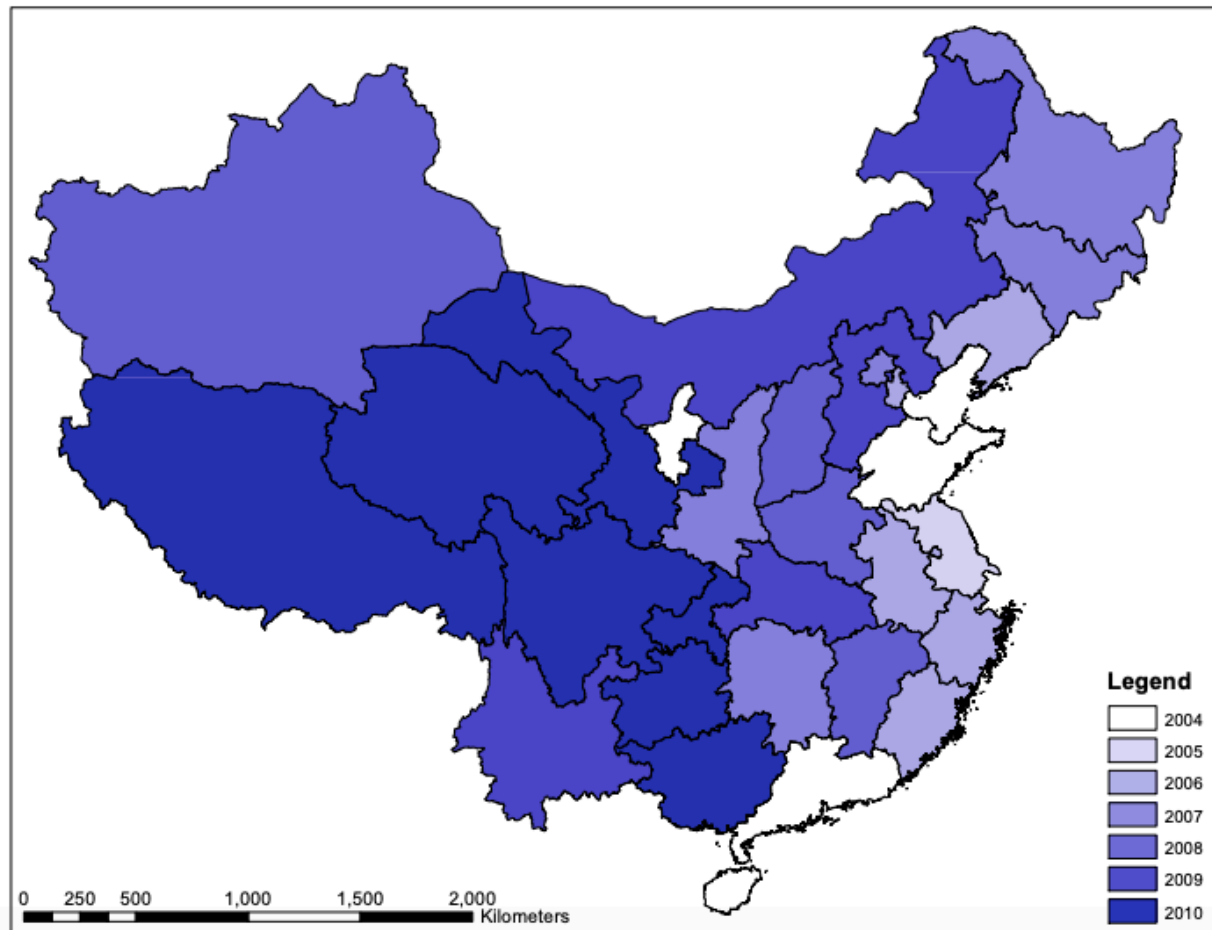
*“Writing the Politics textbook is an act at the state level, rather than an academic activity of the individual author ... With a large readership, it will influence an entire generation of young people.”*

– Tian Xinming, *Politics* textbook author



# Staggered introduction

- Crucially, different provinces introduced the new curriculum in different years:



# Aims of the textbook reform

Consulting government documents, we identify the following objectives:

1. Views on **governance**: teaching students about institutions that legitimised the Chinese government and its officials, especially adherence to rule of law.
2. Views on Chinese **political institutions**: teaching students about ‘socialist democracy’. This notion of democracy is more limited than the Western concept – it involves the participation of citizens while maintaining the political status quo of one-party rule.
3. Views on **economic institutions**. Emphasising the importance of the ‘socialist market economy’ (as opposed to a free market economy) for economic and social development.
4. Views on Chinese **identity**. Cultivating a ‘national spirit’ encompassing both the majority Han Chinese and the minority ethnic groups in China.
5. Attitudes towards the **environment**. Instilling consciousness of the environment as a value.

# Aims of the textbook reform

Consulting government documents, we identify the following objectives:

1. Views on **governance**: teaching students about institutions that legitimised the Chinese government and its officials, especially adherence to rule of law.
2. Views on Chinese **political institutions**: teaching students about ‘socialist democracy’. This notion of democracy is more limited than the Western concept – it involves the participation of citizens while maintaining the political status quo of one-party rule.
3. Views on **economic institutions**. Emphasising the importance of the ‘socialist market economy’ (as opposed to a free market economy) for economic and social development.
4. Views on Chinese **identity**. Cultivating a ‘national spirit’ encompassing both the majority Han Chinese and the minority ethnic groups in China.
5. Attitudes towards the **environment**. Instilling consciousness of the environment as a value.

# Aims of the textbook reform

Consulting government documents, we identify the following objectives:

1. Views on **governance**: teaching students about institutions that legitimised the Chinese government and its officials, especially adherence to rule of law.
2. Views on Chinese **political institutions**: teaching students about ‘socialist democracy’. This notion of democracy is more limited than the Western concept – it involves the participation of citizens while maintaining the political status quo of one-party rule.
3. Views on **economic institutions**. Emphasising the importance of the ‘socialist market economy’ (as opposed to a free market economy) for economic and social development.
4. Views on Chinese **identity**. Cultivating a ‘national spirit’ encompassing both the majority Han Chinese and the minority ethnic groups in China.
5. Attitudes towards the **environment**. Instilling consciousness of the environment as a value.



# Aims of the textbook reform

Consulting government documents, we identify the following objectives:

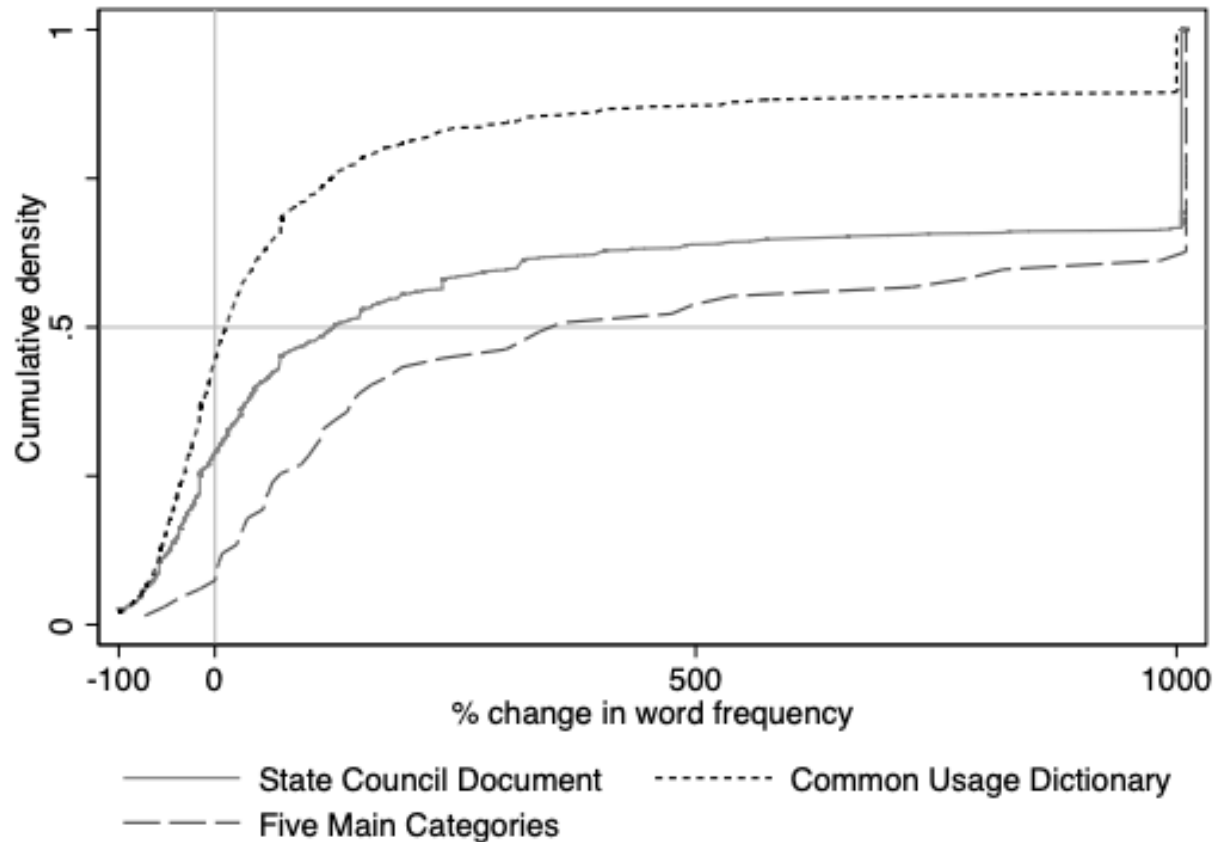
1. Views on **governance**: teaching students about institutions that legitimised the Chinese government and its officials, especially adherence to rule of law.
2. Views on Chinese **political institutions**: teaching students about ‘socialist democracy’. This notion of democracy is more limited than the Western concept – it involves the participation of citizens while maintaining the political status quo of one-party rule.
3. Views on **economic institutions**. Emphasising the importance of the ‘socialist market economy’ (as opposed to a free market economy) for economic and social development.
4. Views on Chinese **identity**. Cultivating a ‘national spirit’ encompassing both the majority Han Chinese and the minority ethnic groups in China.
5. Attitudes towards the **environment**. Instilling consciousness of the environment as a value.

# Aims of the textbook reform

Consulting government documents, we identify the following objectives:

1. Views on **governance**: teaching students about institutions that legitimised the Chinese government and its officials, especially adherence to rule of law.
2. Views on Chinese **political institutions**: teaching students about ‘socialist democracy’. This notion of democracy is more limited than the Western concept – it involves the participation of citizens while maintaining the political status quo of one-party rule.
3. Views on **economic institutions**. Emphasising the importance of the ‘socialist market economy’ (as opposed to a free market economy) for economic and social development.
4. Views on Chinese **identity**. Cultivating a ‘national spirit’ encompassing both the majority Han Chinese and the minority ethnic groups in China.
5. Attitudes towards the **environment**. Instilling consciousness of the environment as a value.

# Quantifying the change in content



*Example: "election" increases in raw count from 2 to 120 across curricula.*

# Surveying Chinese students

- Web survey with Peking University undergraduate students conducted in April and May 2013.
- All students emailed, nearly 2,000 completed surveys, for a response rate around 19% — low, but not atypical for large, web-based surveys (Shih and Fan, 2008).
  - Crucially, no differential response by treatment status.
- For each one of the textbook reform's goals listed above, we designed a series of survey questions aimed at identifying changes in relevant attitudes.

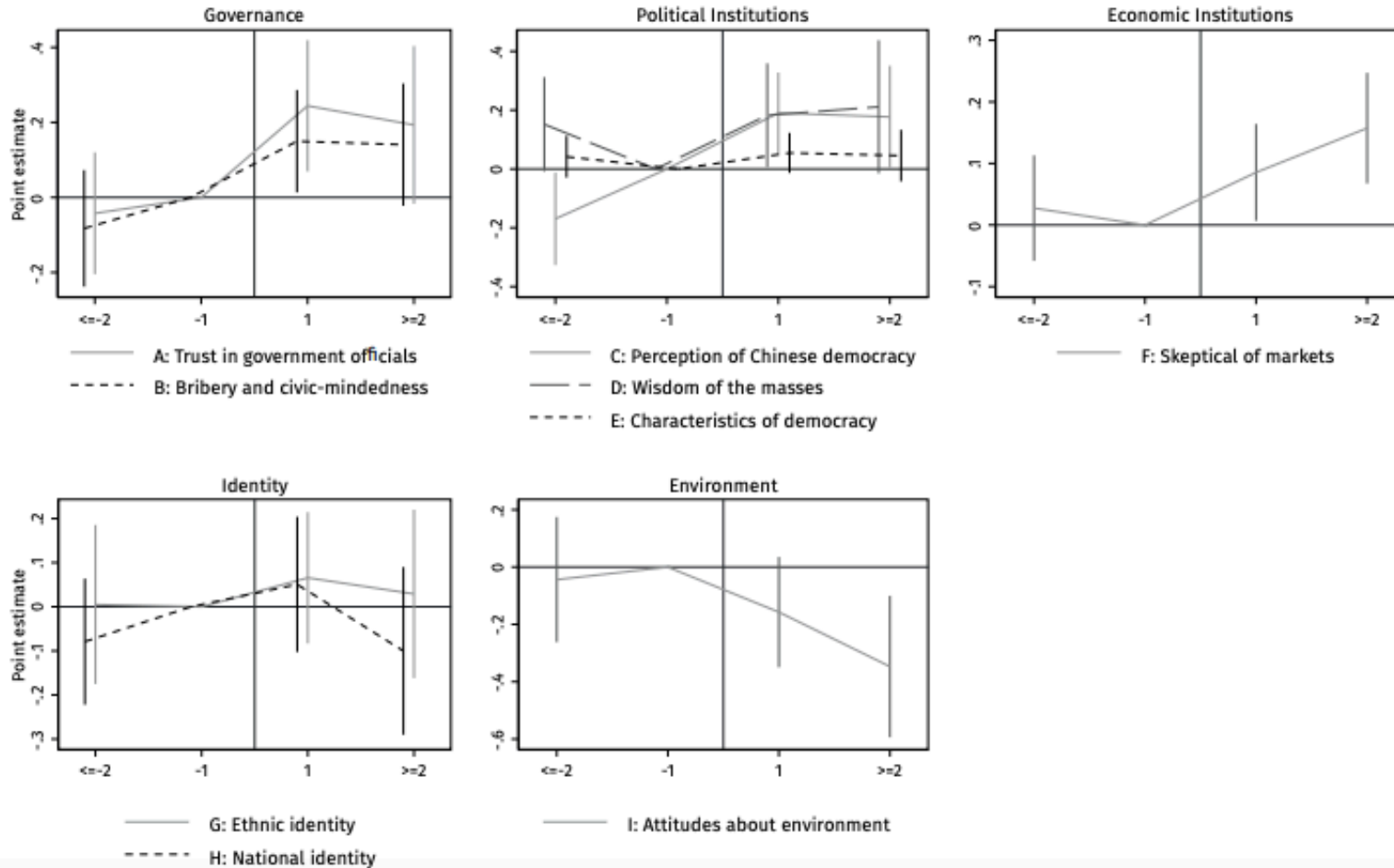
# Surveying Chinese students

- Web survey with Peking University undergraduate students conducted in April and May 2013.
- All students emailed, nearly 2,000 completed surveys, for a response rate around 19% — low, but not atypical for large, web-based surveys (Shih and Fan, 2008).
  - Crucially, no differential response by treatment status.
- For each one of the textbook reform's goals listed above, we designed a series of survey questions aimed at identifying changes in relevant attitudes.

# Surveying Chinese students

- Web survey with Peking University undergraduate students conducted in April and May 2013.
- All students emailed, nearly 2,000 completed surveys, for a response rate around 19% — low, but not atypical for large, web-based surveys (Shih and Fan, 2008).
  - Crucially, no differential response by treatment status.
- For each one of the textbook reform's goals listed above, we designed a series of survey questions aimed at identifying changes in relevant attitudes.

# Effects of the reform



Curricula remain contested



# Curricula remain contested



*Hong Kong, 2012*

# Curricula remain contested



ANNALS OF EDUCATION NOVEMBER 7, 2022 ISSUE

## THE RIGHT-WING MOTHERS FUELLING THE SCHOOL-BOARD WARS

*Moms for Liberty claims that teachers are indoctrinating students with dangerous ideologies. But is the group's aim protecting kids—or scaring parents?*

By Paige Williams

October 31, 2022

USA, 2022

# Policy implications

- Stealing from Melvin Kranzberg: education is neither good nor bad; nor is it neutral.
- Education shapes ideologies – to what purpose?
- Nation-building might be of some benefit to social, political, and economic welfare in increasingly polarised democracies, like the US. Hope to find and build some common ground.
- Nation-building may be a threat to social, political, and economic welfare in autocracies like China and Russia. Hope for some civil society backlash (see Fouka 2020, described in Chapter 13).

# Policy implications

- Stealing from Melvin Kranzberg: education is neither good nor bad; nor is it neutral.
- Education shapes ideologies – to what purpose?
- Nation-building might be of some benefit to social, political, and economic welfare in increasingly polarised democracies, like the US. Hope to find and build some common ground.
- Nation-building may be a threat to social, political, and economic welfare in autocracies like China and Russia. Hope for some civil society backlash (see Fouka 2020, described in Chapter 13).

# Policy implications

- Stealing from Melvin Kranzberg: education is neither good nor bad; nor is it neutral.
- Education shapes ideologies – to what purpose?
- Nation-building might be of some benefit to social, political, and economic welfare in increasingly polarised democracies, like the US. Hope to find and build some common ground.
- Nation-building may be a threat to social, political, and economic welfare in autocracies like China and Russia. Hope for some civil society backlash (see Fouka 2020, described in Chapter 13).

# Policy implications

- Stealing from Melvin Kranzberg: education is neither good nor bad; nor is it neutral.
- Education shapes ideologies – to what purpose?
- Nation-building might be of some benefit to social, political, and economic welfare in increasingly polarised democracies, like the US. Hope to find and build some common ground.
- Nation-building may be a threat to social, political, and economic welfare in autocracies like China and Russia. Hope for some civil society backlash (see Fouka 2020, described in Chapter 13).