

# “Behavioral Path Dependence”

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## Abstract

To what extent do political attitudes, norms and beliefs persist over time? And if they do persist, how can we detect and interpret these lasting historical effects? This talk reviews some recent research in the political economy of development that addresses these questions, including work by the presenter on the persistence of political and social attitudes in the American South.

In the forthcoming book, *Deep Roots: How Slavery Still Shapes Southern Politics* (coauthored with Matt Blackwell and Maya Sen), Avidit Acharya shows that contemporary differences in political attitudes across counties in the American South trace their origins in part to slavery’s prevalence more than 150 years ago. Acharya argues that these and other related findings in the political economy literature can be understood as manifestations of “behavioral path dependence”—the idea that behavioral and cultural characteristics can follow development trajectories akin to the development paths followed by institutions.

James Robinson, coauthor of *Why Nations Fail*, called *Deep Roots* “a seminal look at how America’s extractive past has fundamentally determined its current politics.” Anthony Badger, author of *FDR: The First Hundred Days*, called it “a must read for those who seek to understand the modern South.” *Deep Roots* is being published by Princeton University Press in May, 2018.

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## About the Presenter

Avidit Acharya is an assistant professor of political science at Stanford University, where he is also a faculty associate of the Center for South Asia and the Center on Global Poverty and Development. He is a formal political theorist and political economist who has written in the fields of bargaining theory, voting theory, principal-agent theory, behavioral political economy, statistical methodology, distributive politics, and long-run development. His research has been published in the leading political science and economic theory journals, including the *American Political Science Review* and *Econometrica*. Acharya earned a Ph.D. in political economy from the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University in 2012, and a B.A. in economics and mathematics from Yale University in 2006. He was on the faculty of the political science and economics departments at the University of Rochester before joining Stanford in 2014.