There is a large literature in economics and law suggesting that countries’ legal origins — whether a country’s legal regime was based on British common law or German, French, or Nordic civil law — profoundly impacts a range of outcomes. However, it is still unclear whether countries with shared legal origins actually have similar substantive laws in many fields. We leverage new cross-country datasets that provide detailed coding of two areas of laws — property and antitrust — to study this question. We find that having shared legal origins strongly predicts whether countries have similar property law regimes, but does little to predict whether countries have similar antitrust regimes. Our results suggest that legal origins may be an important predictor of legal substance in long standing legal regimes, but do little to explain substantive variation in newer areas of law. This paper is a joint work with Anu Bradford, Adam Chilton and Nuno Garoupa.

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