

Topic: Human Security and Sociopolitical Change

Instructor: Ronald Inglehart

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Abstract. The extent to which humans feel secure or insecure has a major impact on their values and behavior. A revised version of modernization theory developed by Inglehart, Norris, Welzel, Baker, Dalton and others argues that high levels of development bring increasing economic security and physical security that lead to changes in human motivations and behavior. Economic growth brings much higher levels of per capita income, and the emergence of the welfare state makes these resources more widely and more predictably distributed. They find that existential insecurity leads to xenophobia, strong in-group solidarity and rigid adherence to traditional cultural norms.

Conversely, a sense of security is conducive to interpersonal trust, tolerance of foreigners and other out-groups, support for gender equality, openness to social change, a diminishing role for religious authority, and to less corrupt governance and democratic political institutions.

Working independently, and largely without awareness of converging findings from other disciplines, anthropologists, psychologists, evolutionary biologists and neuroscientists have been developing theories of cross-cultural differences that are strikingly similar to this revised version of modernization theory. For example, Thornhill, Fincher et al. (2009, 2010) find that societies that are relatively vulnerable to infectious disease tend to have collectivist attitudes, low levels of support for gender equality, and xenophobia—all of which hinder the emergence of democracy. Conversely, they argue, relatively low vulnerability to disease has historically led to economic growth, which is conducive to a culture of tolerance and democracy. Chiao and Blizinsky (2009) find linkages between genetic factors and collectivist attitudes, arguing that cultural values have evolved, and are adaptive to the social and physical environments under which genetic selection operates.

Pelto (1968) introduced the concept of “tight” cultures (having strong norms and low tolerance of deviant behavior) and “loose” cultures (having weak social norms and high tolerance of deviant behavior), demonstrating wide cross-cultural variation in adherence to social norms. Building on this, Gelfand et al. (2011) distinguish between cultures that are “tight” versus “loose” in terms that are strikingly similar to the distinctions between “Traditional vs. Secular-rational values” and “Survival vs. Self-expression values” developed in the revised version of modernization theory. Gelfand et al. argue that tightness vs. looseness is shaped by the ecological and human-made threats that societies historically encountered. These threats increase the need for strong norms and punishment of deviant

behavior, which encourage social coordination in order to deal with resource scarcity, defend against territorial threats, and contain the spread of disease or maintain order in nations with high population density. Since many of these threats to survival are closely linked with a society's GNP per capita, they tend to vary with a society's level of economic development, in accordance with modernization theory.