

POLS 280: Politics of Development and Foreign Aid

Class 4:
Modernization theory

Recap

- Development as a multifaceted phenomenon
- The politics of development:
 - Contestation
 - The importance of the state and its functions

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Why?

- Why are some parts of the world so poor, repressive, and violent while others are rich, democratic, and peaceful?
- Why is poverty / lack of development concentrated in particular parts of the world?
- What explains the development / poverty / inequality trends?

Progress



Modernization

- Modernization in Comparative Politics

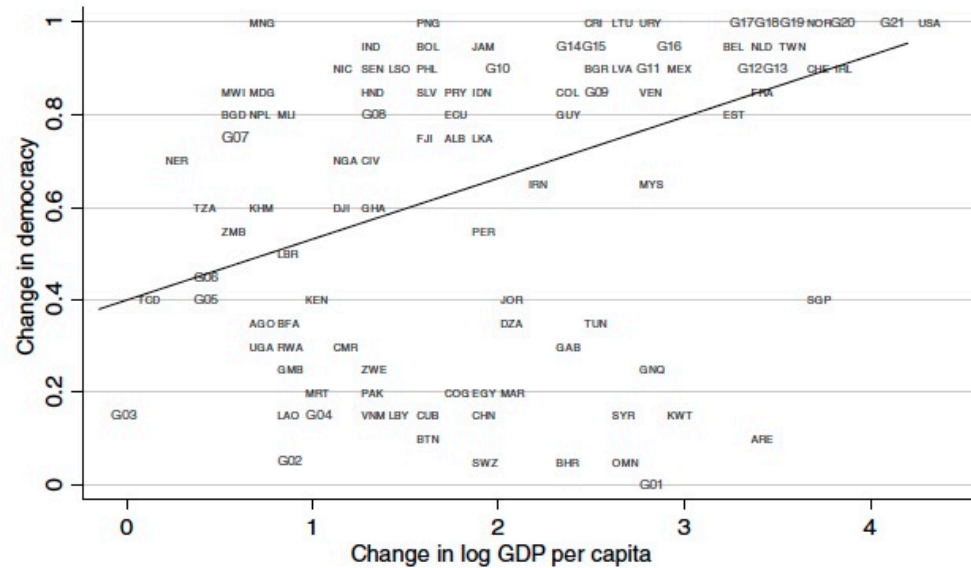


FIGURE 5. CHANGE IN DEMOCRACY AND CHANGE IN INCOME, 1500–2000



- Modernization in Development Theory / Studies

Modernization theory

- Modernization: systemic and endogenous progression from a traditional (parochial) to a modern society.
- Binary: traditional vs. modern



What are the characteristics of traditional societies according to Rostow?

Traditional society according to Rostow

- Agricultural
- Hierarchical
- Decentralized
- Landowner-dominated
- Kinship (family and clan)-based
- Fatalistic

- Rostow, W.W. 1990. *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



What are the characteristics
of modern societies?

Modernity according to Huntington

- Urbanization, media, literacy, Western enlightenment, Protestant work ethic
- Psychological shift in values, attitudes, and expectations
- Intellectual diffusion of knowledge
- Increased mobility and life expectancy
- Complex social organization that complements family ties
- Complex economy requiring complex jobs and skills, commercial agriculture, capitalism



• Huntington, Samuel. 1968. *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

[PollEv.com/karolczuba247](https://www.pollevo.com/karolczuba247)

How does the progression from the traditional to the modern unfold according to Rostow?

Modernization process according to Rostow

- Traditional society ->
- Preconditions for take-off:
 - Origins:
 - Endogenous in Western Europe
 - Exogenous elsewhere: “from some external intrusion by more advanced societies”
 - Recognition of the possibility of economic progress ->
 - Recognition of the necessity of economic progress ->
 - Some economic progress (specialization, surpluses, infrastructure) constrained by existing economic, political, and social institutions and structures ->

Modernization process according to Rostow

- Take-off:
 - Domination of society of “the forces making for the economic progress”
 - Industrialization, investment, political change ->
- Drive to maturity:
 - Diversification, innovation, more investment, less reliance on exports ->
- Age of high mass consumption:
 - Consumerism, service economy ->
- Beyond mass consumption
 - Rostow, W.W. 1990. *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Modernization process

- Linear
- Benign
- Single:
 - “Behavioral and institutional compulsions common to all”
 - Lerner, David. 1958. *The Passing of Traditional Society*. New York: Free Press.
- Catch-up

Modernization process: Huntington's revision

- Not linear
- Reversible
- Potentially destructive
- Political development != modernization

- Huntington, Samuel P. 1971. "The Change to Change: Modernization, Development, and Politics." *Comparative Politics* 3 (3).

Modernization theory: historical context

- Destruction of Europe in WWII
- Global political and economic realignment:
 - Rise of the US and USSR
 - Cold War
 - Decolonization
- History of modernization theory:
 - Max Weber
 - Talcott Parsons

Contributions of modernization theory (take with a grain of salt)

- Universalistic
- Normative
- (Somewhat) dynamic:
 - Recognition of the possibility of change
 - Transformation of a spatialized global hierarchy into a temporalized historical sequence

What are the problems with modernization theory?

Problems with modernization theory

- Simplistic
- Ahistorical
- Teleological
- Apolitical
- Predicated on a false dichotomy:
 - Reification of both the traditional and the modern
- Universalistic
- Eurocentric

Problems with modernization theory

- Used to justify Western expertise and management techniques
- Ekbladh: intended to reinforce American hegemony
 - Ekbladh, David. 2011. *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Excessively focused on the (nation-)state
- Economy-centric
- Not empirical
- Advocated unsuccessful policies

Influence of modernization theory

- State-led efforts to facilitate and hasten modernization
- The continuing power of the idea of modernization

Takeaways

- The first theory of development and a product of its time
- Important for historical reasons
- Negligible explanatory value—but far-reaching influence