

Terms and Ideas

- Modernization
- Spirit of capitalism
- Empathy
- Economic maturity
- Relative backwardness
- Traditional vs. secular-rational values
- Survival vs. self-expression values
- Determinism

Questions

Q: What drives what in economic development?

A: This is one of the main questions to keep in mind for the readings from this week because the authors differ to a considerable degree on the causal mechanisms. The broad sequence in each account is approximated in the table below. Note the different cultural, economic, and institutional factors in each path.

Name	General Development Path
Weber	Protestant religious doctrine (calling, asceticism) → frugality, accumulation of capital, and reinvestment → spirit of capitalism → modern capitalist economy
Lerner	Urbanization → literacy → mass media exposure → greater empathy and mobile personalities → wider economic and voting participation
Rostow	Traditional (subsistence, fatalism) → preconditions to take-off → take-off → drive to maturity → age of high mass-consumption (focus on welfare, consumer goods)
Gerschenkron	Greater backwardness → greater social tensions and development potential → borrowing technology and institutional involvement (banks, state) → ideological mobilization → industrial development
Inglehart and Welzel	Industrialization → shift from traditional to secular-rational values → postindustrialization → shift from survival to self-expression values

Q: Should we consider development a linear or varied process?

A: Both Lerner and Rostow present linear and predictable paths for countries to follow in their development. Weber focuses on a single historical case but appears to also suggest a linear progression from Protestantism to capitalism. Gerschenkron on the other hand rejects the idea of a single path outright; latecomers feature different industries and institutions. Inglehart and Welzel take a middle ground as their argument sees modernization as encompassing broad and probabilistic changes but with different trajectories due to separate cultural and historical legacies.

Q: Do internal or external factors explain economic development?

A: While all of the readings describe internal factors, some leave room for external influences. Rostow mentions that the preconditions for take-off (investment, new elites, infrastructure) in most countries were the result of foreign intrusion. Meanwhile, Gerschenkron notes that backward countries borrow technologies and industrial models from advanced peers, and that their development is often spurred by military threats. The other authors are more silent on the issue.

Q: Does economic development inevitably lead to changes in values?

A: Rostow and Lerner believe that modernization reshapes values and leads fatalistic and traditional people to become modern citizens. Inglehart and Welzel share this view in their argument that economic development produces predictable shifts from traditional to secular-rational and later from survival to self-expression values. Weber meanwhile sees value changes as preceding economic development. Gerschenkron is an outlier as he does not focus much on value change (outside of describing how elites generate ideologies to push forward industrialization).

Takeaways

Last week, we considered the four approaches (economic, cultural, voluntarist, and institutional) used in comparative politics; this week, we saw their first application in the readings. The outcome examined throughout was the notion of "modernity." However, each author has a somewhat different idea of what this term encompasses: rational capitalism (Weber), empathetic democratic participation (Lerner), high mass-consumption (Rostow), industrial maturity (Gerschenkron), or self-expression values (Inglehart and Welzel). Perhaps it is therefore better to view modernization not as a single theory but instead as a cluster of arguments about how societies are transformed.

It should also be noted that these are large theories. Are these too ambitious and neat, or do we think that we are able to make broad and general statements about how economies develop? Answers to this and other questions covered this week will directly connect to the coursework in the weeks ahead. For instance, next week, we will consider the role of the state versus the market in economic development, and further ahead, we will consider how countries become democratized and what the role of economic development is in that process. In other words: the issues raised in these readings remain relevant for the rest of the course. I encourage you all to come back to their arguments further down the road to consider how useful modernization theory is, what parts ought to be discarded, and which arguments continue to merit consideration today.

Some more questions that I would like you all to reflect on:

- How do the different notions of modernity interact with each other?
- What should be the role of agents in modernization theories?
- How can these theories explain modern phenomena such as the Arab Spring?
- Is modernization a necessarily positive phenomenon?