



## Social Change and Modernization

Social Change is the change in society created through social movements as well as external factors like environmental shifts or technological innovations. Below are some of the likely causes.

### Technology

Some would say that improving technology has made our lives easier. Imagine what your day would be like without the Internet, the automobile, or electricity. In *The World Is Flat*, Thomas Friedman (2005) argues that technology is a driving force behind globalization, while the other forces of social change (social institutions, population, environment) play comparatively minor roles.

But also consider that technology can create change in the other three forces social scientists link to social change. Advances in medical technology allow otherwise infertile women to bear children, which indirectly leads to an increase in population. Advances in agricultural technology have allowed us to genetically alter and patent food products, which changes our environment in innumerable ways. From the way we educate children in the classroom to the way we grow the food we eat, technology has impacted all aspects of modern life.

Of course there are drawbacks. The increasing gap between the technological haves and have-nots—sometimes called the digital divide—occurs both locally and globally. Further, there are added security risks: the loss of privacy, the risk of total system failure, and the added vulnerability created by technological dependence.

### Social Institutions

Each change in a single social institution leads to changes in all social institutions. For example, **the industrialization of society meant that there was no longer a need for large families to produce enough manual labour to run a farm<sup>39</sup>**. Further, new job opportunities were in close proximity to urban centers where living space was at a premium. The result is that the average family size shrunk significantly.

This same shift toward industrial corporate entities also changed the way we view government involvement in the private sector, created the global economy, provided new political platforms, and even spurred new religions and new forms of religious worship like Scientology

### Population

**Regardless of why and how it happens, population trends have a tremendous, interrelated impact on all other aspects of society<sup>37</sup>**.

Many developed nations are experiencing an aging population combined with a decreasing birth rate, which will in turn change the way many of our social institutions are organized. There is concern about labour shortages, not to mention the knowledge gap as the most senior and accomplished leaders in different sectors start to retire. Further, as this large generation leaves the workforce, the loss of tax income and pressure on pension and retirement plans means that the financial stability of the country is threatened.

In contrast, many countries still have high birth rate however, often the countries with the highest fertility rates are least able to absorb and attend to the needs of a growing



population. On a macro level, the increased population, particularly in the poorest parts of the globe, also leads to increased stress on the planet's resources.

## The Environment

We know that individuals and the environment affect each other. As human populations move into more vulnerable areas, we see that human interaction with the environment increases the impact of natural disasters. Part of this is simply the numbers: the more people there are on the planet, the more likely it is that some will be affected by a natural disaster.

## Modernization

The level of modernity within a society is judged by the sophistication of its technology, particularly as it relates to infrastructure, industry, and the like. However, it is important to note the inherent ethnocentric bias<sup>40</sup> of such assessment which assumes that those living in developing nations would want to become more like the developed nations.

One contradiction of all kinds of technology is that they often promise time-saving benefits, but somehow fail to deliver. The average amount of time spent on housework is the same today as it was fifty years ago. In addition, 24/7 e-mail and has simply increased the amount of time employees are expected to be responsive and available often to the detriment of their mental and physical health.

There is also a delicate line to walk when developed nations seek to bring the assumed benefits of modernization to more traditional cultures. For one, it is short-sighted for western governments and social scientists to assume all other countries aspire to follow in their footsteps.<sup>40</sup> It takes a very careful hand to understand both the need for cultural identity and preservation as well as the hopes for future growth.

Adapted from: <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/alamo-sociology/chapter/reading-social-change/>



Answers:

- 27. A
- 28. A
- 29. C
- 30. D
- 31. A
- 32. D
- 33. G
- 34. A
- 35. B
- 36. F
- 37. Yes
- 38. Not Given – it states the impact of natural disasters is increasing, doesn't mention if human are causing more natural disasters.
- 39. No
- 40. Yes