



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. 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.

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 number and 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.

The environment is best described as an ecosystem, one that exists as the interplay of multiple parts including 8.7 million species of life. However, dozens of species are going extinct every day, a number 1,000 times to 10,000 times the normal "background rate" and the highest rate since the dinosaurs disappeared 65 million years ago. The Center for Biological Diversity states that this extinction crisis, unlike previous ones caused by natural disasters, is "caused almost entirely by us" (Center for Biological Diversity, n.d.). The growth of the human population, currently over seven billion and expected to rise to nine or ten billion by 2050, perfectly correlates with the rising extinction rate of life on earth.

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 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. 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/>



Questions 27 – 31

Choose the correct letter, **A**, **B**, **C** or **D**.

Write the correct letter in boxes 27-31 on your answer sheet.

27. Children in developing nations have little to no daily access to computers and the Internet, while children in developed nations are constantly exposed to this technology. This is an example of:

- A. the digital divide
- B. human ecology
- C. modernization theory
- D. dependency theory

28. When sociologists think about technology as an agent of social change, which of the following is *not* an example?

- A. Population growth
- B. Medical advances
- C. The Internet
- D. Genetically engineered food

29. A nation undergoing a shift in industry, increasing labour specialization and the amount of differentiation present in the social structure exemplifies:

- A. human ecology
- B. dependency theory
- C. modernization
- D. conflict perspective

30. Developed nations that work to propel developing nations toward modernization need to be aware of:

- A. preserving peripheral nation cultural identity
- B. preparing for pitfalls that come with modernization
- C. avoiding hegemonistic assumptions about modernization
- D. all of the above

31. In addition to social movements, social change is also caused by technology, social institutions, population and _____.

- A. the environment
- B. modernization
- C. social structure
- D. new social movements



Questions 32-36

Complete the summary using the list of words, A-H, below.

Write the correct letter, A-H, in boxes 32-36 on your answer sheet.

Modernisation and Social Change

It is often assumed that all countries wish to achieve the same level of modernization that most Western nations have attained however this is an **32.** view held by developed nations that may not necessarily be true.

Technological advancements have not always brought the **33.** promised, as shown by the statistic that the people spend as much time doing housework today as they did fifty years ago. Working life has also been made more **34.** by the relentless arrival of email and the expectation that workers can be on call 24/7.

In addition, when developed nations attempt to modernize other countries, they need to be aware of their own **35.** and to recognize the need to maintain the ethnic **36.** of the developing nation while the process of modernization takes place.

A irksome	D ethnocentric	G benefits
B prejudice	E efficient	H biased
C national	F identity	

Questions 37 – 40

Do the following statements agree with the claims of the writer in Reading Passage 3?

In boxes 37-40 on your answer sheet, write

- Yes** *if the statement agrees with the claims of the writer*
No *if the statement contradicts the claims of the writer*
Not Given *if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this*

- 37** Demographic shifts drive changes in all facets of society.
- 38** Humans are causing more natural disasters to occur.
- 39** Due to smaller family sizes, farms became industrialised.
- 40** Western countries need to change the way they think about developing countries.