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# Changing Values among Western Publics from 1970 to 2006

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*In 1971 it was hypothesised that intergenerational value changes were taking place. More than a generation has passed since then, and today it seems clear that the predicted changes have occurred. A large body of evidence, analysed using three different approaches – (1) cohort analysis; (2) comparisons of rich and poor countries; (3) examination of actual trends observed over the past 35 years – all points to the conclusion that major cultural changes are occurring, and that they reflect a process of intergenerational change linked with rising levels of existential security.*

More than 35 years ago, I suggested that ‘a transformation may be taking place in the political culture of advanced industrial societies. This transformation seems to be altering the basic value priorities of given generations as a result of changing conditions influencing their basic socialization’ (Inglehart 1971: 991). Survey evidence from six West European societies revealed large differences between the value priorities of older and younger generations. Among the older cohorts, ‘materialist’ values, emphasising economic and physical security, were overwhelmingly predominant – but as one moved from older to younger birth cohorts, ‘post-materialist’ values, emphasising autonomy and self-expression, became increasingly widespread. The differences were striking. Among those aged 65 or older, materialists were fully 12 times as numerous as post-materialists; among those born after World War II (who were under 25 in 1970), post-materialists were slightly more numerous than materialists.

If, as I argued, these age differences reflected intergenerational value change (and not simply a tendency for people to get more materialist as they aged), then we should expect to find a gradual shift from materialist to post-materialist values as younger birth cohorts replaced older ones in the adult population. The implications were far-reaching, for these values were closely linked with a number of important orientations ranging from emphasis on

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political participation and freedom of expression, to support for new issues and new types of political parties.

Intergenerational value change, by its very nature, moves slowly. But its long-term impact can be profound. More than 35 years have passed since the hypothesised shift from materialist to post-materialist values was published. Have the predicted changes actually taken place?

The implications of the underlying theory are clear. It holds that post-materialist values emerge as people come to place increasing emphasis on autonomy, self-expression and the quality of life. This shift is linked with changing existential conditions – above all, the change from growing up with the feeling that survival is precarious, to growing up with the feeling that survival can be taken for granted.

Throughout most of history, survival has been uncertain for the vast majority of the population. But the remarkable economic growth that occurred during the era following World War II, together with the rise of the welfare state, brought fundamentally new conditions in advanced industrial societies. The post-war birth cohorts spent their formative years under levels of prosperity that were unprecedented in human history, and the welfare state reinforced the feeling that survival was secure, producing major differences in the priorities of older and younger generations that became evident when the first post-war cohort emerged into political relevance two decades after World War II.

As we will see, a massive body of evidence demonstrates that an intergenerational shift from materialist to post-materialist priorities has been occurring. But it is only one aspect of a broader cultural shift from survival values to self-expression values, which is bringing new political issues to the centre of the stage and motivating new political movements.

This theory of intergenerational value change is based on two key hypotheses (Inglehart 1977):

1. *A scarcity hypothesis.* Virtually everyone aspires to freedom and autonomy, but people tend to place the highest value on the most pressing needs. Material sustenance and physical security are immediately linked with survival, and when they are scarce people give top priority to these ‘materialistic’ goals; but under conditions of prosperity, people become more likely to emphasise ‘post-materialist’ goals such as belonging, esteem, and aesthetic and intellectual satisfaction.
2. *A socialisation hypothesis.* The relationship between material conditions and value priorities is not one of immediate adjustment: to a large extent, one’s basic values reflect the conditions that prevailed during one’s pre-adult years and these values change mainly through intergenerational population replacement.

The scarcity hypothesis is similar to the principle of diminishing marginal utility. It reflects the basic distinction between the material needs for

physical survival and safety, and non-material needs such as those for self-expression and aesthetic satisfaction.

During the past several decades, advanced industrial societies have diverged strikingly from the prevailing historical pattern: most of their population has *not* grown up under conditions of hunger and economic insecurity. This has led to a gradual shift in which needs for belonging, esteem and intellectual and self-expression have become more prominent. The scarcity hypothesis implies that prolonged periods of high prosperity will tend to encourage the spread of post-materialist values – and that enduring economic decline will have the opposite effect.

But there is no one-to-one relationship between socio-economic development and the prevalence of post-materialist values, for these values reflect one's subjective sense of security, not simply one's objective economic level. One's sense of security is shaped by a society's social welfare institutions as well as its income level, and is also influenced by the general sense of security prevailing in one's society. Furthermore, people's basic value priorities do not change overnight: the scarcity hypothesis must be interpreted in connection with the socialisation hypothesis.

One of the most pervasive concepts in social science is that one's basic personality structure crystallises by the time one reaches adulthood. A large body of evidence indicates that people's basic values are largely fixed when they reach adulthood, and change relatively little thereafter (Rokeach 1968, 1973; Inglehart 1977, 1997). If so, we would expect to find substantial differences between the values of the young and the old in societies that have experienced a rising sense of security. People are most likely to adopt those values that are consistent with what they have experienced first-hand during their formative years. This implies that intergenerational value change will occur if younger generations grow up under different conditions from those that shaped earlier generations – so that the values of the entire society will gradually change through intergenerational replacement.

These two hypotheses generate several predictions concerning value change. First, while the scarcity hypothesis implies that prosperity is conducive to the spread of post-materialist values, the socialisation hypothesis implies that fundamental value change takes place gradually; to a large extent, it occurs as younger generations replace older ones in the adult population. After an extended period of rising economic and physical security, one would expect to find substantial differences between the value priorities of older and younger groups, since they would have been shaped by different experiences in their formative years. But a sizeable time lag would occur between economic changes and their political effects. Fifteen or 20 years after an era of prosperity began, the birth cohorts that had spent their formative years in prosperity would begin to enter the electorate.

Per capita income and educational levels are among the best readily available indicators of the conditions leading to the shift from materialist to post-materialist goals, but the theoretically crucial factor is not per capita

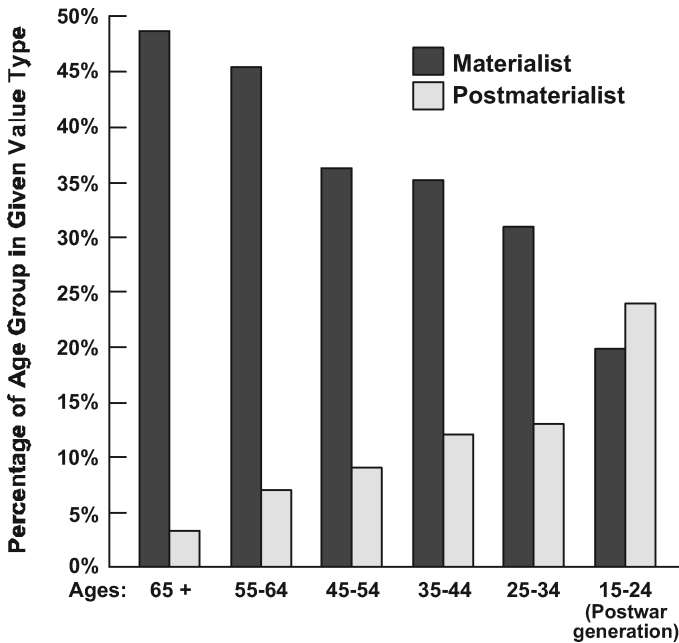
income itself, but one's sense of existential security – which means that the impact of economic and physical security is mediated by the given society's social security system.

In order to test the value change hypothesis, we asked people which goals they considered most important, choosing between such things as economic growth, fighting rising prices, maintaining order, and the fight against crime (which tap materialist priorities); and freedom of speech, giving people more say in important government decisions, more say on the job, and a society where ideas count (which tap post-materialist priorities). Representative national surveys in six West European countries in 1970 revealed huge differences between the values of young and old in all of these societies. As Figure 1 indicates, among those aged 65 and older, people with materialist value priorities outnumbered those with post-materialist value priorities by more than 12 to 1. But as one moves from older to younger cohorts, the balance gradually shifts towards a diminishing proportion of materialists and a growing proportion of people with post-materialist values. Among the youngest cohort (those from 18 to 25 years old in 1970) post-materialists outnumber materialists. If we assume that the value priorities of given birth cohorts are stable, this implies that in the 1930s, when the two oldest cohorts were in their 20s and 30s, materialists must have outnumbered post-materialists by at least a ratio of ten to one among the adult population of these countries. In that era, the Marxist model of politics being dominated by class conflict and economic issues provided a reasonably good first approximation of reality. But the cross-sectional evidence in Figure 1 also implies that as the four oldest birth cohorts die off during the four decades following 1970, we should observe a major shift in the motivations of these societies, with post-materialists becoming as numerous as materialists, bringing a corresponding shift away from economic issues toward increasing emphasis on quality of life and expressive issues.

But *are* these value differences stable? Do these age differences reflect enduring birth cohort effects or transient life-cycle effects? With data from just one time point, one cannot be sure – and the two interpretations have very different implications. The life-cycle reading implies that the young will become increasingly materialist as they age, so that by the time they are 65 years old they will have become just as materialist as the 65 year olds were in 1970 – which means that society as a whole will not change at all. The cohort-effects interpretation implies that the younger cohorts will remain relatively post-materialist over time – and that as they replace the older, more materialist cohorts, the prevailing values of society will change profoundly.

Cohort analysis provides the only conclusive way to answer this question and it requires: (1) survey data covering a long time period; (2) surveys carried out at numerous time points, enabling one to distinguish period effects from life-cycle and cohort effects; and (3) large numbers of respondents in each survey – because when one breaks a single national

FIGURE 1  
VALUE TYPE BY AGE GROUP AMONG THE PUBLICS OF BRITAIN, FRANCE,  
WEST GERMANY, ITALY, BELGIUM AND THE NETHERLANDS IN 1970



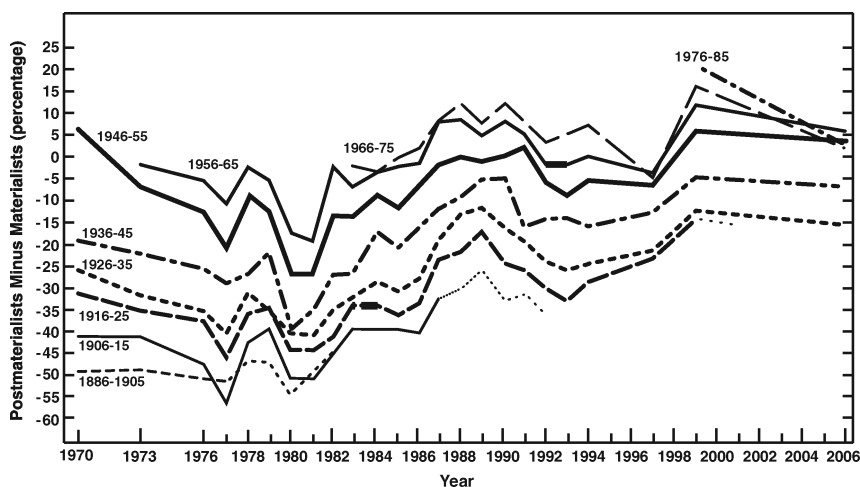
*Source:* European Community survey of February 1970, based on original four-item materialist/post-materialist values battery. Reprinted from Inglehart (1990: 76).

sample down into six or seven birth cohorts, the sampling error margin rises to the point where noise begins to drown out the signal.

Figure 2 shows the results of a cohort analysis that follows given birth cohorts over 35 years, using data from Euro-barometer surveys that included the materialist/post-materialist battery in almost every year from 1970 to 1997; supplemented with data from the fourth and fifth waves of the Values Surveys, carried out in 1999 and 2006.<sup>1</sup> This figure pools the data from Britain, France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands in order to provide large samples and relatively stable estimates of each cohort's position at a given time – which is calculated by subtracting the percentage of materialists from the percentage of post-materialists. Thus, at the zero point on the vertical axis, the two groups are equally numerous. The proportion of post-materialists increases as one moves up; and the proportion of materialists increases as one moves down on Figure 2.

If the age differences shown in Figure 1 reflected a life-cycle effect, then each of the cohort lines would move downward, towards the materialist pole, with each cohort becoming more materialist as one moves across Figure 2, from 1970 to 2006. If the age differences reflect stable birth cohort

FIGURE 2  
COHORT ANALYSIS: % POST-MATERIALISTS MINUS % MATERIALISTS IN SIX  
WEST EUROPEAN SOCIETIES, 1970–2006



Source: Based on combined weighted sample of Eurobarometer surveys and World Values Surveys in West Germany, France, Britain, Italy, the Netherlands and Belgium, in given years, using the four-item materialist/post-materialist values index.

effects, the pattern would be horizontal, with each birth cohort remaining about as post-materialist at the end of the time series as it was at the start.

But we also need to take period effects into account. Our theory implies that negative short-term effects such as a major recession will tend to push all cohorts downward in response to current conditions; but with recovery, they will return to their former level, so that in the long run they will remain about as post-materialist as they were at the start. Over short periods, a period effect that pushed all the cohorts downward could give the misleading impression that the age differences reflected life-cycle effects. But in the long run, positive and negative fluctuations tend to cancel each other out.

Because we have data from numerous time points, we can see that period effects clearly *are* present. As Inglehart and Welzel (2005) demonstrate, they reflect current economic conditions, particularly inflation levels. But these period effects have no lasting impact: the younger cohorts remain relatively post-materialist despite short-term fluctuations, and over a period of 35 years we find no overall tendency for the members of given birth cohorts to become more materialist as they age – indeed most cohorts are slightly more post-materialist at the end of this time series than they were at the start.

But during this 35-year span the three oldest birth cohorts have left the sample: first the 1886–1905 cohort, then the 1906–15 cohort and finally the 1916–25 cohort disappeared as the number of surviving members in the

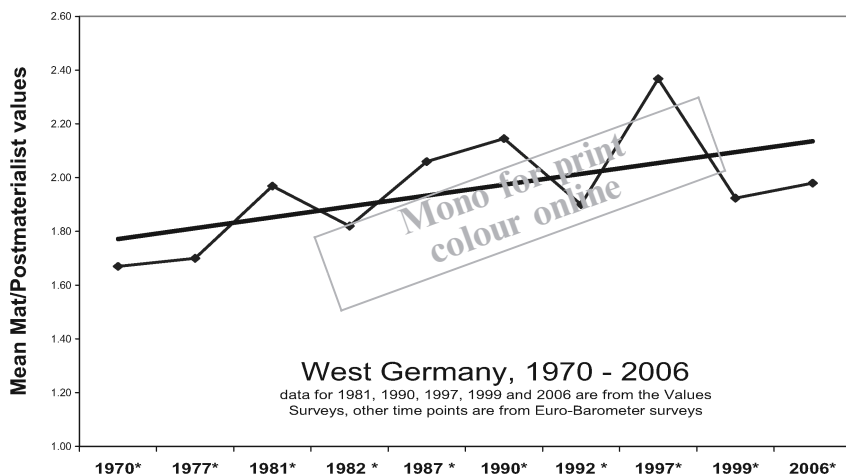
cohort became too small to provide reliable estimates. These cohorts were replaced by three new ones, born in 1956–65, 1966–75 and, most recently, 1976–85. Although the 1956–65 birth cohort was significantly more post-materialist than the 1946–55 cohort (reflecting the fact that the formative years of the 1956–65 cohort were more secure than those of the immediate post-war cohort), the two youngest cohorts are *not*. West European levels of economic security have not continued to rise during the past two decades. Despite some economic growth, rising levels of income inequality have brought little or no increase in real income for most of the population; the impact on economic security has been reinforced by cutbacks in the welfare state and high levels of unemployment, particularly among youth. Thus, in the most recent survey, the two youngest cohorts seem to be slightly *less* post-materialist than the next two cohorts. The differences are small: all four of the post-war cohorts fall at about the same point, +5 on the vertical scale, reflecting the fact that post-materialists outnumber materialists but only narrowly. The two surviving pre-war cohorts remain relatively distinct, with materialists still outnumbering post-materialists. As the two pre-war cohorts drop out of the sample during the next two decades, intergenerational population replacement will still be conducive to a gradual shift toward post-materialist values, but (barring a reprise of rising existential security) the intergenerational shift would then come to an end. Already, the gap between the values of the oldest and youngest cohorts has dwindled to less than half the size that it had at the start of the time series in 1970.

The cohort analysis presented in Figure 2 shows no evidence whatever of life-cycle effects. Time series evidence covering 35 years makes it clear that the age-related differences that were found in 1970 reflect lasting cohort differences. This implies that as the younger, less materialist cohorts replace the older ones in the adult population, these societies should shift from materialist toward post-materialist values.

This is precisely what happened. Figure 3 shows the net shift from 1970 to 2006 among the five publics for which we have data from 1970 through 2006, plus the US. In every country, we find a substantial net shift toward post-materialist values. The vertical scale of this figure shows the mean score on the materialist/post-materialist index, with a mean of 2.0 indicating the point at which materialists and post-materialists are equally numerous. In the early 1970s, materialists heavily outnumbered post-materialists in all of these countries. In the six West European countries as a whole, materialists were four times as numerous as post-materialists (and 21 times as numerous as post-materialists among the oldest cohort). Similarly, in the US materialists were three times as numerous as post-materialists. During the next 35 years a major shift occurred. By 2006, post-materialists were slightly more numerous than materialists in Western Europe and post-materialists were twice as numerous as materialists in the US. Despite substantial short-term fluctuations and the negative economic conditions of recent years, the predicted shift toward post-materialist values took place.



FIGURE 3  
THE CHANGING DISTRIBUTION OF MATERIALIST/POSTMATERIALIST  
VALUES, 1970–2006



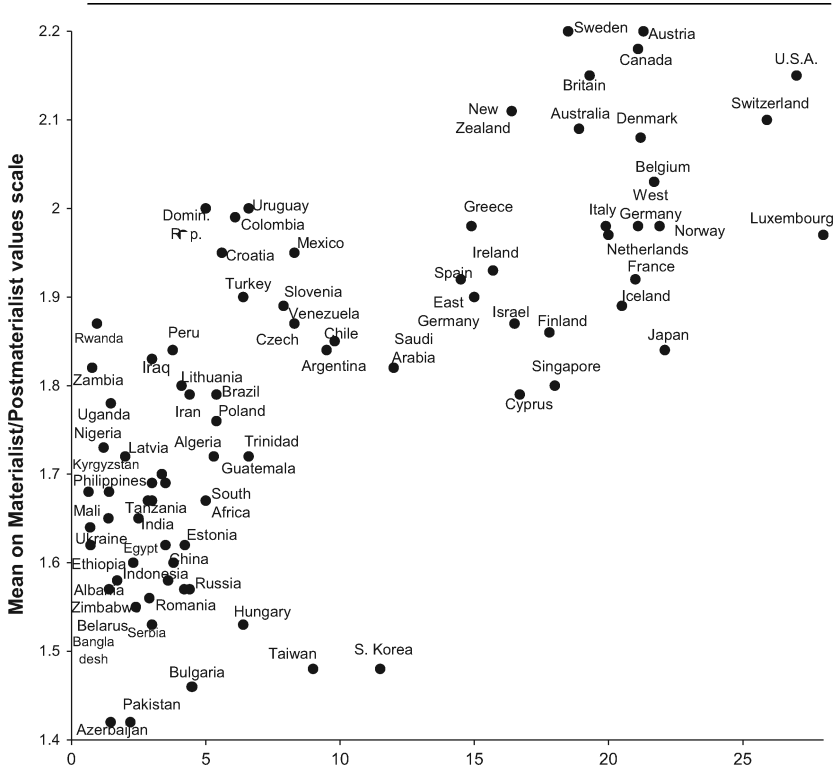
Note: Graphs are based on mean scores where 1 = Materialist, 2 = Mixed, 3 = Postmaterialist. Thus if a country would have a mean score of 1 if 100% of the population were Materialists; with a mean score of 2, Materialists and Postmaterialists are evenly balanced; and the country would have a mean score of 3 if 100% of the population were Postmaterialists.

The shift toward post-materialist values has tapered off in the six West European countries first surveyed in 1970. But the logic of the underlying process remains relevant to much of the world. Though the rates vary widely from country to country, the world as a whole is experiencing unprecedented economic growth. India and China are currently experiencing annual growth rates of about 7 per cent and 10 per cent, respectively. For the time being, these countries are still in the phase of rising materialism that characterises early industrialisation. But if they continue on their present trajectories, they will eventually reach a stage where younger generations emerge that have grown up under conditions in which they take survival for granted. Many other countries from Mexico to Singapore are approaching or have already attained this level.

In the world as a whole, the ratio between materialists and post-materialists varies tremendously according to a society's level of economic development, as Figure 4 demonstrates. Low-income countries and strife-torn countries show an overwhelming preponderance of materialists, while prosperous and secure ones show a preponderance of post-materialists. Thus, materialists outnumber post-materialists in Pakistan by a ratio of 55 to 1, and in Russia by a ratio of 28 to 1; but in the US post-materialists outnumber materialists by 2 to 1, and in Sweden post-materialists prevail by 5 to 1. The world as a whole is currently experiencing the most rapid rate of



FIGURE 4  
MATERIALIST/POST-MATERIALIST VALUES BY GNP/CAPITA



Note: 1 = 100% materialist; 2 = materialist and post-materialist evenly balanced; 3 = 100% post-materialist; GNP per capita in thousands, 1995 (PPP estimates)  $r = .64$ .

economic growth in recorded history. There is no guarantee that it will continue, but in those countries that do attain high levels of existential security, we would expect processes of intergenerational value change to take place.

### Post-materialist Values: A Component of a Broader Cultural Change

The shift towards post-materialist values is itself only one aspect of a still broader process of cultural change that is reshaping the political outlook, religious orientations, gender roles, and sexual mores of advanced industrial society (Inglehart 1990, 1997; Inglehart and Welzel 2005). The emerging orientations place less emphasis on traditional cultural norms, especially those that limit individual self-expression.

In order to identify the main dimensions of global cultural variation, Inglehart and Baker (2000)<sup>2</sup> carried out a factor analysis of each society's

mean level on scores of variables, tapping a wide range of values. The two most significant dimensions that emerged reflected: (1) a polarisation between *traditional* and *secular-rational* values and (2) a polarisation between *survival* and *self-expression* values.

*Traditional* values place strong emphasis on religion, respect for authority, and have relatively low levels of tolerance for abortion and divorce and have relatively high levels of national pride. *Secular-rational* values have the opposite characteristics. Agrarian societies tend to emphasise traditional values; industrialising societies tend to emphasise secular-rational values.

The second major dimension of cross-cultural variation is linked with the transition from industrial society to post-industrial societies – which brings a polarisation between *survival* and *self-expression* values. As Table 1 demonstrates, the polarisation between materialist

TABLE 1  
ORIENTATIONS LINKED WITH SURVIVAL VS. SELF-EXPRESSION VALUES

Item	Correlation
<b>SURVIVAL VALUES emphasise the following:</b>	
<i>Materialist/Post-materialist Values</i>	.87
Men make better political leaders than women	.86
R. is not highly satisfied with life	.84
A woman has to have children to be fulfilled	.83
R. rejects foreigners, homosexuals and people with AIDS as neighbours	.81
R. has not and would not sign a petition	.80
R. is not very happy	.79
R. favours more emphasis on the development of technology	.78
Homosexuality is never justifiable	.78
R. has not recycled something to protect the environment	.76
R. has not attended a meeting or signed a petition to protect the environment	.75
A good income and safe job are more important than a feeling of accomplishment and working with people you like	.74
R. does not rate own health as very good	.73
A child needs a home with both a father and a mother in order to grow up happily	.73
When jobs are scarce, a man has more right to a job than a women	.69
A university education is more important for a boy than for a girl	.67
Government should ensure that everyone is provided for	.69
Hard work is one of the most important things to teach a child	.65
Imagination is not of the most important things to teach a child	.62
Tolerance is not of the most important things to teach a child	.62
Leisure is not very important in life	.61
Scientific discoveries will help, rather than harm, humanity	.60
Friends are not very important in life	.56
You have to be very careful about trusting people	.56
R. has not and would not join a boycott	.56
R. is relatively favourable to state ownership of business and industry	.54
<b>SELF-EXPRESSION VALUES take opposite position on all of above</b>	

The original polarities vary; the above statements show how each item relates to this values index.

and post-materialist values is a sensitive indicator of this dimension, for the conditions that give rise to post-materialist values are also conducive to self-expression values. But self-expression values encompass a number of issues that go well beyond the items tapped by post-materialist values. For example, self-expression values reflect mass polarisation over such issues as whether 'When jobs are scarce, men have more right to a job than women'; or whether 'Men make better political leaders than women'. This emphasis on gender equality is part of a broader syndrome of tolerance of outgroups, including foreigners, gays and lesbians. Self-expression values give high priority to environmental protection, tolerance of diversity and rising demands for participation in decision making in economic and political life.

The shift from survival values to self-expression values also includes a shift in child-rearing values, from emphasis on hard work toward emphasis on imagination and tolerance as important values to teach a child. Societies that rank high on self-expression values also tend to rank high on interpersonal trust and have relatively high levels of subjective well-being. This produces an environment of trust and tolerance, in which people place a relatively high value on individual freedom and self-expression, and have activist political orientations – the attributes that the political culture literature defines as crucial to democracy.

A major component of the rise of self-expression values is a shift away from deference to all forms of external authority. Submission to authority has high costs: the individual's personal goals must be subordinated to those of external authorities. Under conditions of insecurity, people are generally willing to do so. Under threat of invasion, internal disorder or economic collapse, people eagerly seek strong authority figures that can protect them from danger.

Conversely, conditions of prosperity and security are conducive to tolerance of diversity in general and democracy in particular. This helps explain a long-established finding: rich societies are much more likely to be democratic than poor ones. Under conditions of insecurity, people may be willing to submit to authoritarian rule, but with rising levels of existential security they become less willing to do so.

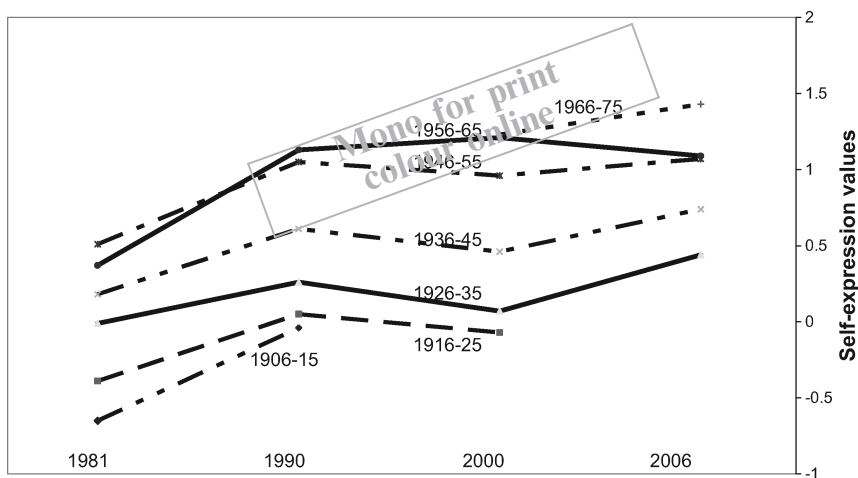
The rise of self-expression values brings an intergenerational change in a wide variety of basic social norms, from cultural norms linked with survival of the species, to norms linked with the pursuit of individual well-being. For example, younger birth cohorts are markedly more tolerant of homosexuality than their elders. And younger cohorts become increasingly permissive in their attitudes toward abortion, divorce, extramarital affairs, prostitution, and euthanasia. Economic accumulation for the sake of economic security was the central goal of industrial society. Ironically, their attainment set in motion a process of gradual cultural change that has made these goals less central – and is now bringing a rejection of the hierarchical institutions that helped attain them.

### An Intergenerational Shift from Survival Values toward Self-expression Values

Throughout advanced industrial societies, the younger age cohorts emphasise self-expression values much more heavily than their elders do, in a pattern similar to that found with post-materialist values. As we have seen, given birth cohorts did not become more materialistic as they aged. This seems to hold true of the shift from survival to self-expression values as well, though we do not yet have a massive time series data base comparable to what is available with materialist/post-materialist values. But we do have evidence from five waves of the Values Surveys, carried out from 1981 to 2006. As Figure 5 demonstrates, from the start of this time series, younger birth cohorts have placed more emphasis on self-expression values than older cohorts did, and they did not move away from self-expression values toward survival values as they aged from 1980 to 2000. Throughout this period, younger birth cohorts continued to place more emphasis on self-expression values than older ones. And although each of the birth cohorts aged by 25 years during the period covered by the Values Surveys, none of them placed less emphasis on self-expression in 2006 than they did in 1981 – as would have happened if these age differences simply reflected life-cycle effects.

The inference that these age-related differences reflect intergenerational change rather than life-cycle differences gains further support from the fact that the populations of rich post-industrial societies show large

FIGURE 5  
SELF-EXPRESSION VALUES BY BIRTH COHORT, 1981–2006



Note: Mean scores on self-expression values dimension combined data from France, Britain, W. Germany, Italy and Netherlands.

intergenerational differences, with the younger cohorts placing much stronger emphasis on self-expression values than do the older cohorts. But low income societies that have not experienced substantial economic growth during the past five decades do *not* display intergenerational differences – younger and older cohorts are about equally likely to display traditional values. This suggests that these intergenerational differences reflect historical changes, rather than anything inherent in the human life cycle.

The evidence suggests that major cultural changes are occurring through an intergenerational value shift linked with the fact that the younger birth cohorts have grown up under higher levels of existential security than those that shaped the formative years of the older cohorts.

The rise of post-materialism does not mean that materialistic issues and concerns will vanish. Conflicts about how to secure prosperity and sustainable economic development will always be important political issues. Nevertheless, if people's values are indeed shifting from survival to self-expression values, the implications are far-reaching. It implies that the main axis of political conflict should gradually shift from class-based issues such as income redistribution and state ownership of industry toward increasing emphasis on quality of life issues. As Inglehart (1971) predicted, social class voting has declined in most advanced industrial societies; in the last two US presidential elections, for example, the vote polarised much more strongly on life-style issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage than on social class, which had declined to the point where it had relatively little impact on voting.

The impact of changing values goes far beyond these changes in electoral behaviour. The central issues of political conflict have shifted, with the rise of environmentalist movements, the women's movement, gay liberation and other lifestyle movements. As Berry (1999) argues, post-materialist values are motivating consumer, environmental, civil rights, and civil liberties groups to mount an increasingly effective challenge to corporate power. As Nevitte (1996) demonstrates, the rise of post-materialist values is producing less deferential, increasingly elite-challenging publics. And as Gibson and Duch (1994) show, emerging post-materialist values played a key role in the emergence and survival of democracy in the Soviet Union. Materialist/post-materialist values are just one indicator of a much broader cultural shift from survival values to self-expression values that is bringing changing values concerning gender roles, sexual orientation, work, religion, and child-rearing.

One particularly important aspect of self-expression values is their close linkage with the rise of gender equality. In the post-industrial phase of development, a trend towards gender equality becomes a central aspect of modernisation (Inglehart and Norris 2003: 29–48). This transformation of established gender roles is linked with rising self-expression values, bringing increasing tolerance of human diversity and anti-discrimination movements on many fronts. Even today, women are confronted with societal

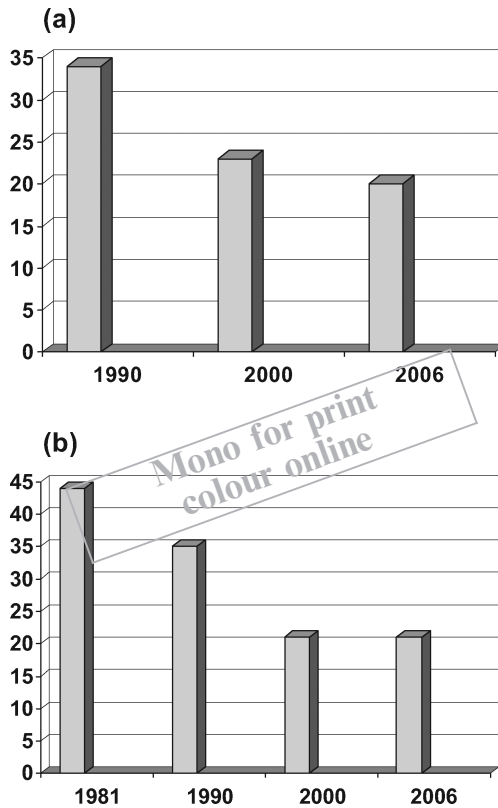
disadvantages that make it more difficult for them than for men to develop their talents in careers outside the household. They have been socialised to accept these role limitations until very recently in history.

But history has recently taken a fundamentally new direction. In post-industrial societies, women no longer accept their traditional role limitations, and female empowerment has moved to a high place on the political agenda. Gender equality has become a central element in the definition of human development, for it is an essential aspect of human equality, like civil and political liberties and human rights. Never before in the history of civilisation have women enjoyed more equality and more freedom in choosing their education, their careers, their partners and their lifestyles than in contemporary post-industrial societies. This change is recent. Although it can be traced back to the introduction of female suffrage in some countries after World War I, female empowerment only recently became a pervasive trend. It is reflected in a massive tendency toward increasing female representation in national parliaments and in a shift towards gender equality that is closely linked with the rising emphasis on self-expression values.

The United Nations Development Programme has introduced a 'gender empowerment measure' that taps female representation in parliaments, in management positions and in administrative functions as well as gender equality in salaries. As Inglehart and Welzel (2005) have demonstrated, emphasis on self-expression values is strongly linked with the extent to which a given society actually approaches gender equality in political and social life ( $r = .85$ ). Even more strikingly, as Inglehart and Welzel (2005) demonstrate, the shift toward self-expression values is conducive to good governance and the spread and flourishing of democratic institutions.

The intergenerational shift from survival values to self-expression values is contributing to substantial changes in West European publics' social and political orientations. It is linked with a shift toward rising support for gender equality, as Figure 6a demonstrates. In the 1990 Values Surveys, fully 34 per cent of the publics of France, Great Britain, West Germany, Italy and the Netherlands agreed with the proposition that 'When jobs are scarce, men have more right to a job than women'. A decade later, the proportion agreeing had fallen to 23 per cent and in 2006 it had dropped to 20 per cent. Similarly, in 1981, fully 44 per cent of these publics said that homosexuality is never justifiable – placing themselves at point 1 on a ten-point scale ranging from 'Never justifiable' to 'Always justifiable'. Twenty-five years later, in 2006, only 21 per cent still took this extreme position: the proportion viewing homosexuality as absolutely unacceptable was less than half what it had been in 1981. Intergenerational change is clearly not the only factor involved in these shifts, which do not move in a smooth linear fashion but are also affected by current conditions. Nevertheless, intergenerational population replacement seems to play a major role, and large intergenerational differences are present. For example, in the 1981

FIGURE 6  
 CHANGING ATTITUDES TOWARD (A) GENDER EQUALITY, 1990–2006, AND (B)  
 HOMOSEXUALITY, 1981–2006



(a) (% agreeing that men have more right to a job than women among publics of France, Britain, W. Germany, Italy and Netherlands), (b) (% saying that homosexuality is 'never' justifiable among publics of France, Britain, W. Germany, Italy and Netherlands).

survey, among those 65 years and older fully 75 per cent of the respondents in these five countries agreed with the extreme position that homosexuality is never justifiable. Among those 18 to 24 years old less than half as many – only 34 per cent – took this position.

### Conclusion

In 1971 it was hypothesised that intergenerational value changes were taking place. More than a generation has passed since then, and today it seems clear that the predicted changes have occurred. A large body of evidence, analysed using three different approaches – (1) cohort analysis; (2) comparisons of rich and poor countries; (3) examination of actual trends observed over the past 35 years – all points to the conclusion that major



cultural changes are occurring, and that they reflect a process of intergenerational change linked with rising levels of existential security.

In the shift from materialist to post-materialist values, the massive differences between the values of young and old that were present in 1970 have dwindled. The birth cohorts born before World War II continue to place significantly more emphasis on materialist values than to the younger cohorts in Western Europe, but the post-war cohorts show relatively similar values. This means that intergenerational population replacement no longer exerts as strong a pressure towards post-materialist values as it once did. But with the broader survival/self-expression values dimension, large intergenerational value differences are still present, as Figure 5 demonstrates, which implies that West European publics will continue to show significant movement toward self-expression values as younger cohorts replace older ones in the adult population.

Intergenerational value change is not a uniquely West European phenomenon. It seems to occur whenever the formative experience of the younger birth cohorts are substantially different from those that shaped the older generations. In regard to both post-materialist values and self-expression values, a key factor is the extent to which a given generation grows up under conditions that permit it to take survival for granted. In Western Europe (together with North America, Japan and a few other countries), the economic miracles of the post-war era and the emergence of the welfare state contributed to long-term processes of intergenerational value change. There is no guarantee that other regions of the world will become prosperous, but the world as a whole is currently experiencing the highest rate of economic growth ever recorded. In so far as other countries attain high levels of existential security, the logic of value change developed here implies that they too will experience intergenerational shifts toward post-materialist and self-expression values.

## Notes

1. The samples are weighted to reflect each country's population. Since the 2006 World Values Survey did not include Belgium, we used data from the 1999 Belgian survey in the pooled analysis. This tends to reduce the amount of change observed from 1999 to 2006, but the distortion is minimal since Belgium contains only 4 per cent of the population of the six countries.
2. For details on how these factor analyses were carried out, at both the individual and societal levels, see Inglehart and Baker (2000).

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