

# Theories of Social Change

## Theories of Social Change

An organized overview for quick study and reference

### 1. What Is Social Change?

| Aspect     | Description                                                                                                    |
|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Definition | Transformations in the structure, culture, institutions, or behavior of a society over time.                   |
| Scope      | Can be <b>micro</b> (individual attitudes, small groups) or <b>macro</b> (national economies, global systems). |
| Dimensions | Economic, political, technological, cultural, demographic, ecological.                                         |
| Rate       | <b>Gradual</b> (e.g., demographic transition) vs. <b>rapid</b> (e.g., revolutions, pandemics).                 |

### 2. Classical Theories

| Theory               | Key Proponent(s)                | Core Idea                                                        | Main Mechanism                                                       |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Evolutionary Theory  | Herbert Spencer, Auguste Comte  | Societies develop from “simple” to “complex” like organisms.     | Natural selection of cultural traits; competition among societies.   |
| Cyclical Theory      | Oswald Spengler, Arnold Toynbee | Civilizations rise, mature, decline, and are replaced in cycles. | Repetitive patterns driven by internal decay and external pressures. |
| Conflict Theory      | Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels     | History is a series of class struggles over material resources.  | Revolutionary change when contradictions become untenable.           |
| Functionalist Theory | Émile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons | Social change is an adjustment that restores equilibrium.        | Institutional adaptation to new needs or problems.                   |

### 3. Modern Theoretical Frameworks

# Theories of Social Change

## 3.1. Modernization Theory

- **Origin:** 1950s–60s (Walt Rostow, Talcott Parsons).
- **Premise:** All societies follow a linear path from traditional to modern industrial states.
- **Stages (Rostow):**
  1. Traditional society
  2. Preconditions for take-off
  3. Take-off (rapid industrial growth)
  4. Drive to maturity
  5. Age of high mass consumption

## 3.2. Dependency & World-Systems Theory

- **Key Figures:** Andre Gunder Frank, Immanuel Wallerstein.
- **Core Idea:** Global capitalist system creates a core-periphery structure; peripheral nations are locked into dependent economic roles.
- **Implication:** Social change in the periphery is constrained by external exploitation.

## 3.3. Structural-Functional Change (Systems Theory)

- **Proponents:** Niklas Luhmann, Talcott Parsons (later work).
- **Concept:** Societies are complex systems of interrelated subsystems (economy, politics, law, etc.). Change occurs when a subsystem can no longer perform its function, prompting reorganization.

## 3.4. Cultural Diffusion & Diffusion of Innovations

- **Founders:** Everett Rogers, Gabriel Tarde.
- **Mechanism:** New ideas, technologies, or practices spread through communication channels among members of a social system.
- **Adopter Categories:** Innovators ? Early adopters ? Early majority ? Late majority ? Laggards.

## 3.5. Social Movement Theory

| Sub-approach          | Focus                                      | Representative Scholars   |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Resource Mobilization | Availability of money, labor, organization | John McCarthy, Mayer Zald |

# Theories of Social Change

| Sub?approach         | Focus                                        | Representative Scholars    |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Political Process    | Political opportunities, state openness      | Doug McAdam                |
| Framing              | Construction of meaning & identity           | Erving Goffman, David Snow |
| New Social Movements | Post?material values (environment, identity) | Alain Touraine,            |