

Ronald F. Inglehart

Ronald F. Inglehart was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on 5 September 1934. His childhood was marked by the last years of the Great Depression and by the Second World War, which he followed with great fascination on the radio and in the press with his older brother. In high school, in a Chicago suburb, he was a news editor and a passionate actor in plays and musicals, a passion he never lost. He began his undergraduate studies at Harvard, switched to Stanford, and finally graduated from Northwestern University. He joined the army for a couple of years, where he made his dream of visiting Europe come true. He was responsible for analysing world events for the troops, an activity that led him to study political science. He obtained his doctorate from the University of Chicago in 1967 and that year he formally began his career as a professor at the University of Michigan, where decades later he would become a professor emeritus.

In 1968 he went to France to conduct a survey on the reasons for the May protests and understand voters' choices in that summer's elections. His results contradicted the dominant Marxist view of class voting; they also captured a series of new and distinctive concerns among young people. His curiosity led him to conduct a survey among students from various European countries while he was a Fulbright scholar in the Netherlands in 1969. The survey's central theme was the prospects for European integration. His findings and interpretations went against the tide again, this time against one of the great figures of Modernisation Theory, Karl W. Deutsch. The publication of his results in a renowned scientific journal caught the attention of a high-ranking official in the European Community, Jacques René Rabier, who invited Inglehart to be a consultant on the design and implementation of European comparative surveys.

The first survey was conducted in 1970 in several countries and had as a central component the questions Inglehart posed to measure his hypothesis: that an intergenerational change in values was taking place in post-industrial societies. These data allowed Inglehart to publish in 1971 one of the most cited articles in the discipline, 'The Silent Revolution in Europe', in which he lay the foundations of a theory of value change that he would continue to develop during the next fifty years, which eventually became Evolutionary Modernisation Theory. Eurobarometer surveys were crucial in accumulating empirical evidence of intergenerational value change, and, amidst debate and controversy, Inglehart's theory became an example of successful prediction in political science. It also represented a paradigm shift, posing substantial differences from the Almond and Verba model of civic culture, based on citizen allegiance to the political system.

Inglehart documented an intergenerational shift in values from materialist priorities, focused on physical and physiological security, to postmaterialist

values, guided by a sense of self-expression and quality of life. The young post-materialists were highly defiant of political elites, while they also showed new forms of democratic expression. Their findings influenced academic research on issues like political action, environmental values, the women's movement, and other areas that reflected the emergence of new issues of political and party conflict, as well as the redefinition of the classic axis of left and right into a new left and a new right divide. Inglehart's theory explained cultural evolution and the role that existential security plays, but it reflected an evolution in itself through the continuous collection of survey data. Inglehart was involved in the effort to continually study the values of Europeans, a project that gradually became, under his leadership, a study of values at a global level. The World Values Survey is today the most widely used resource in the social sciences and has served as a model for developing other international comparative surveys.

With more than 250 academic publications and multiple books, Inglehart stands out as the most cited political scientist. His various accolades include the Johan Skytte Prize, which is considered the equivalent of a Nobel Prize in political science. The Laboratory for Comparative Social Research (LCSR) that he founded in Russia in 2010 bears his name today. His work is one of the examples of scientific dedication throughout a lifetime. After battling a lung disease for the past decade, Inglehart passed away peacefully at his home in Ann Arbor on 8 May 2021. He is survived by his wife Marita, three daughters, two sons, and several grandchildren.

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