

# Ronald F. Inglehart

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Ronald F. Inglehart died on May 8, 2021. He was born on September 5, 1934, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. When he was 12 years old, he and his three siblings moved with their parents to Glencoe, Illinois, to be closer to the drug company in Chicago where his father was a pharmacist and executive. Ron Inglehart's interest in politics arose early during World War II when his uncle served as a soldier. He attended New Trier High School in Glencoe which at that time and now is one of the top ranked high schools in the U.S. He was the high school news editor, an engaged actor in plays and musicals, and a passionate wrestler. After graduating from high school, he went to Harvard University on a full scholarship, then transferred to Stanford University after two years and ultimately received his bachelor degree in 1956 from Northwestern University. After graduating, he was drafted into the army and quickly became the editor of the army newspaper. While he had originally intended to study medicine and become a psychiatrist, he changed his mind after leaving the army and instead applied to Harvard for law school and was admitted. At the last moment, he changed his mind again and studied political science at the University of Chicago where he obtained his master degree in 1962 and his Ph.D. in 1967.

Living through World War II motivated him strongly to gain a better understanding of how war could be prevented. Driven by this question already during his graduate studies, his life long search for a better understanding of different cultures and nations began. In 1963–64, he became a Fulbright scholar at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands. From 1966 until he died, Inglehart taught comparative politics at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor where he was the Amy and Alan Loewenstein Professor of Democracy, Democratization and Human Rights,

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and Research Professor Emeritus at the Department of Political Science and the Institute for Social Research (ISR). He also was the founding director of the Ronald F. Inglehart Laboratory for Comparative Social Research at the Higher School of Economics in St. Petersburg, Russia.

Even among the best in our discipline, Inglehart is a giant whose reputation has reached far beyond political science. His work is cited by anthropologists, demographers, economists, psychologists and sociologists. Among his more than 250 peer-reviewed academic publications, a large share has been published in the top-tier journals of various disciplines, including political science, sociology and psychology. This indicates an interdisciplinary outreach of unmatched dimensions. He authored or co-authored 14 monographs including *The Silent Revolution* 1973, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Societies* 1990, *Modernization and Postmodernization* 1997, *Rising Tide* with Pippa Norris 2003, *Sacred and Secular* with Pippa Norris 2004, *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy* with Christian Welzel 2005, *Cosmopolitan Communications* with Pippa Norris 2009, *Cultural Evolution* 2018, *Cultural Backlash* with Pippa Norris 2019 and *Religion's Sudden Decline* 2021, have been published by the three highest ranking university presses (Cambridge, Oxford, Princeton). Many of them are among the most widely cited monographs in the social sciences. Not surprisingly, these works have been translated into French, German, Iranian, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Swedish and Vietnamese. With more than 120,000 citations, Inglehart is the third-most cited political scientist of all time.

Clearly, such a track record does not pass by without official recognition. Accordingly, Inglehart was guest professor at the Academia Sinica in Taipei, the Free University Berlin, the Social Science Center Berlin (WZB), Jacobs University Bremen, Kyoto University, Leiden University, the Mannheim Institute for Social Research, the National Research University—Higher School of Economics in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and the University of Rome. Inglehart was also Wisdom Professor at the Bremen International Graduate School of Social Sciences (BIGSSS) and received honorary doctorates from Free University of Brussels, Uppsala University and Leuphana University Lueneburg. He was a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences as well as the American Academy of Political and Social Science. In 2011, Inglehart received the Johan Skytte Prize (with Pippa Norris), the unofficial Nobel prize in our discipline.

Given such reputation, a brief look into Inglehart's intellectual development is insightful. In 1968–69, he spent two years in France and the Netherlands to conduct surveys, inspired by the May unrests in Paris and other places in Western Europe where flower power and the anti-Vietnam war movement was unfolding. In analyzing his survey data, Inglehart saw the indications of a generational value shift by which Western Europe's youth distanced itself from their parent's "materialist" priorities on economic and physical security and discipline. Instead, the new generation adopted "postmaterialist" values, which prioritize freedom of expression and creativity combined with an intuitive suspicion of authority. This discovery inspired Inglehart's first milestone publication in the *American Political Science Review*: "The Silent Revolution in Europe" (published 1971, belonging to the APSR's 30 most cited

articles ever) and led to the publication of his monograph *The Silent Revolution* in 1973 (second edition: Princeton University Press, 2016).

The theoretical development did not stop here. In collaboration with scholars such as Russell J. Dalton, Pippa Norris and myself, Inglehart continued to develop a data-based cultural version of a “revised” and eventually “evolutionary” theory of modernization. According to this theory, human values respond to existential conditions and as conditions improve, human mentalities climb the Maslowian motivation ladder, thus placing increasing emphasis on human freedoms. Where it happens, this process challenges unconsented authority and emits an elite-challenging/democratizing impulse into political and social institutions—fueling a process of human empowerment. Universalism and relativism coexist in this process: cultures differ, depending on their religious and other traditions, in the starting points of this process, yet the logic of the empowerment process is the same in all branches of humanity.

Back in the early 1970s, observers in the European Union became attentive to Inglehart’s work, which led one of the officials—Jacques René Rabier—to invite Inglehart to work as a collaborator with him on what eventually became the Eurobarometer surveys. Consequently, Inglehart was part of what developed into the European Values Study. This experience stimulated Inglehart to start building the World Values Survey—indeed the most valuable data collection in the social sciences, “a true gold mine” as Inglehart used to say.

To close with a personal note, I met Ronald F. Inglehart for the first time in the summer of 1998 at a World Values Survey summit near Stockholm. This was the beginning of a most congenial intellectual companionship and personal friendship, for which I am left with deep gratitude. For academia, the loss of Ron Inglehart is colossal: a beautiful mind has gone. We are left with a monumental legacy, to which we owe the motivation to carry it on to new shores.

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