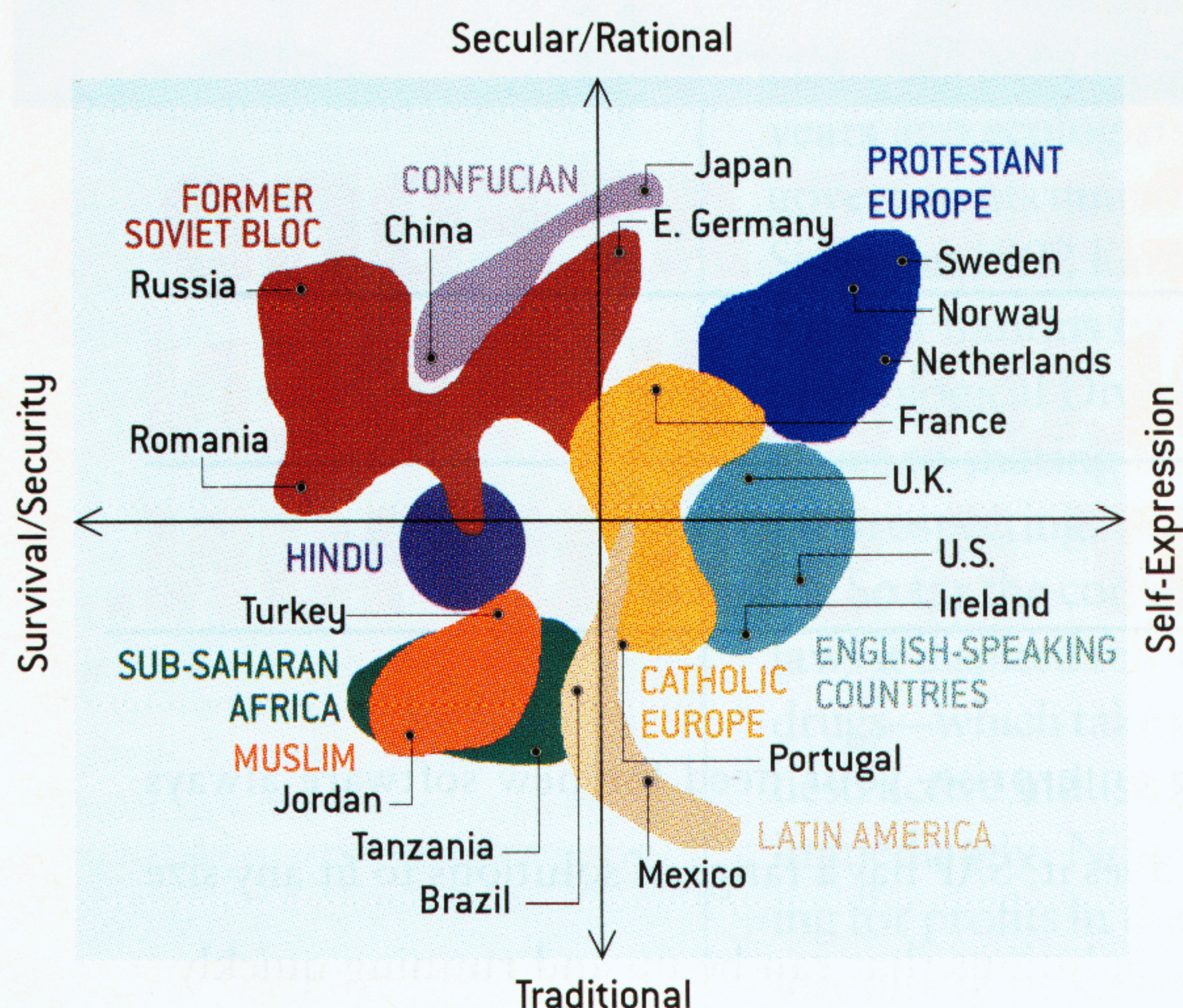


Measuring Modernity

THE U.S. IS NOT NUMBER ONE BY RODGER DOYLE

WORLD ATTITUDES, RELATIVE STANDING BY CULTURE GROUP



Modernization, the subject of intense scrutiny at least since the time of Marx and Nietzsche, has seldom been measured systematically. One of the most useful attempts to do so has been done by political scientists Ronald Inglehart and Wayne E. Baker of the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.

In their approach, being modern implies

not only a lack of traditional beliefs but also a need for free expression. To measure these attributes, they use responses from the World Values Survey, an international collaborative study based on extensive questioning of people in scores of countries making up more than 80 percent of the world's population. The first of these dimensions—the traditional versus secular-

rational scale in the chart—derives from attitudes toward religion, respect for authority, and patriotism. The second dimension—survival versus self-expression—derives from questions about physical security, trust in other people, gender roles, and personal happiness. Self-expression, almost by definition, implies freedom from extreme need.

The data for individual countries are combined into nine cultural groups to form the bounded areas seen in the chart. As might be expected, most Western countries tend to be in the upper right, indicating high modernization scores, whereas developing societies are generally in the lower left, indicating low modernization scores. Countries with a Confucian heritage, which hold relatively secular values, tend to be high on the secular scale but have lower self-expression values than Western countries. The position of former Soviet bloc countries reflects decades of

indoctrination in atheism as well as their recent economic troubles.

Among Western countries there are distinct differences, with Protestant Europe occupying the most modern position above Catholic Europe and the English-speaking countries. This positioning reflects extremely low levels of religious involvement together with high levels of well-being and the tolerance and trust characteristic of the European Protestant heritage. Catholic societies, as Inglehart and Baker suggest, may have a lower position on the scale because of the heritage of the Roman Catholic Church, the prototype of a hierarchical, centrally controlled institution. The lower position of the English-speaking countries is a function of, among other influences, their higher religious commitment, particularly in the U.S.

Economic condition and religious-cultural heritage are the basic forces accounting for the position of societies on the chart, but within any society, homogeneity wields substantial power. In the U.S., for example, the basic values of Catholics resemble those of Protestants, rather than those of Catholics in predominantly Catholic countries, whereas in Nigeria the values of Christians are far closer to those of Muslims than to those of Western Christians.

The common wisdom is that the world is becoming Americanized, but the Inglehart-Baker analysis suggests that Americanization is occurring largely at the superficial level of Coca-Cola and Big Macs. As they put it in a February 2000 *American Sociological Review* article, "industrializing societies in general are *not* becoming like the United States... [for] its people hold much more traditional values and beliefs than do those in any other equally prosperous society." It is not the U.S. but northern European cultures, such as those of the Nordic countries, that are on the cutting edge of modernity.

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FURTHER READING

Modernization Theory and the Study of National Societies: A Critical Perspective.

Dean C. Tipps in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 15, No. 2, pages 199–226; March 1973.

Democracy and Economic Development: Modernization Theory Revisited.

Zehra F. Arat in *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 21, pages 21–36; October 1988.

Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values.

Ronald Inglehart and Wayne E. Baker in *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 65, No. 1, pages 19–51; February 2000.

SOURCE: Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change around the World, by Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris (Cambridge University Press, 2003). Data are for 77 countries from the World Values Survey, with most countries being surveyed in 1999–2001. Not all countries are shown.