

Could A More Individualistic World Also Be A More Altruistic One?

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Individualism is that rugged frontier quality that reflects a mix of independence, valuing free expression, and eschewing close family ties relative to more distant relationships.

And it is on the rise. Not just in the United States — which has long been ranked as one of the world's most individualist countries — but nearly everywhere.

In a 2017 [study](#) examining five decades worth of data across 78 countries — from Norway to Nigeria, and Canada to Colombia — psychologists Henri Santos, Michael Varnum, and Igor Grossmann found that people increasingly report that they value friends more relative to family, want their children to be independent, and value free expression. All of these values are closely associated with individualism.

As the researchers reported in the journal *Psychological Science*, individualism has increased by roughly 12 percent worldwide since 1960. This increase appears to be due mostly to increasing socio-economic development, including higher incomes, more education, urbanization, and a shift toward white-collar jobs. Increases in these factors in a given region are reliably followed by gains in individualist beliefs and practices in the ensuing decade. Those few countries that bucked the global trend toward individualism included some with the lowest socio-economic development, including Armenia, Malaysia, Mali, and Uruguay.