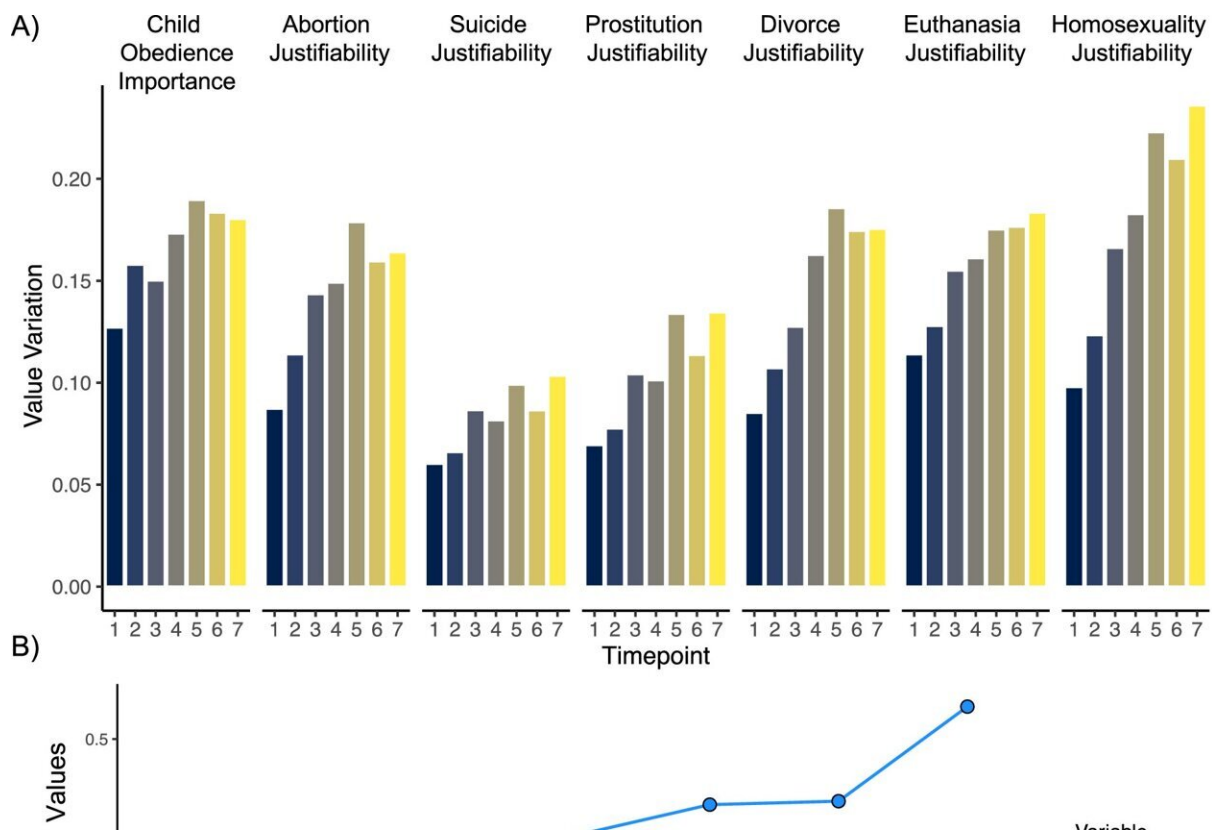


# Are the world's cultures growing apart?

April 10 2024



Divergence of key values over time. A Value variation (SD of the global distribution of normalized country means) at each WVS timepoint for the 7 items which have diverged most over time. Item labels are at the top of the figure. Bars are shaded by timepoint. B Normalized mean endorsement of the same 7 items by timepoint, with separate lines for continents. Credit: *Nature Communications* (2024). DOI: 10.1038/s41467-024-46581-5

Cultural values may have become more different globally, but more similar regionally, over the past 40 years according to a paper [published](#) in *Nature Communications*. The authors suggest that over time, high-income Western countries have grown increasingly culturally distinct from other world regions. In contrast, countries in the same world region have developed more similar cultural values.

In a modern world, globalization, [mass media](#), and the spread of technology have made many forms of culture more similar, but not necessarily cultural values. Competing theories have debated whether [economic development](#) would encourage self-expression and tolerance or facilitate the development of distinct national identities.

Joshua Conrad Jackson and Danila Medvedev analyzed data from the World Values Survey from more than 400,000 people in 76 countries across all inhabited continents between 1981 and 2022. They measured cultural variation for 40 values, many which related to openness, obedience, and faith.

The authors also measured the similarity in values between countries over this time period. They found evidence for global divergence in cultural values, such as the importance of children learning [religious beliefs](#) or the justifiability of prostitution, but also a convergence among countries in the same region. For example, while people in Australia and Pakistan found divorce equally unjustifiable decades ago, their views have evolved in opposite ways, as has the importance they place on child obedience.

The authors suggest that globalization alone may not result in the

convergence of cultural and social values and that wealth may have different effects on cultural values in different regions. For example, the increase in wealth per person has been similar in Hong Kong and Canada between 2000 and 2020, but the acceptance of homosexuality has increased at a faster rate in Canada. Moreover, the importance of child work ethic decreased in Canada, but increased in Hong Kong. The authors note that future studies on other values would help improve the generalizability of these findings.

**More information:** Joshua Conrad Jackson et al, Worldwide divergence of values, *Nature Communications* (2024). [DOI: 10.1038/s41467-024-46581-5](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-024-46581-5)

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