

# Increasing individualism?

Social, economic, and technological changes have helped create more individualistic societies. This is disrupting many traditional business models and practices. However, greater individualism doesn't necessarily mean a more selfish society. Further social and environmental changes may, though, lead to greater collectivism.

## What we're seeing

### Have we reached "peak individualism"?

Every generation tends to view the next one as more self-absorbed. Though there is some evidence to support that. Some psychologists note that individualism has been increasing for centuries. They point out that people tend to be the most focused on themselves, and independent, in their twenties.<sup>1</sup>

One study in 2017 reported that "individualism" had increased by 12% globally since 1960.<sup>2</sup> However, another analysis suggested that "peak individualism" may have been reached in the 1980s, and we are now plateauing.<sup>3</sup>

### Drivers of individualism

Many factors influence individualism. Increased socio-economic development appears to be a key.<sup>4</sup> Marrying later, or not at all, is another.<sup>1</sup> Digital technologies enable more personalised lifestyles too.<sup>5</sup>

### Individualistic doesn't mean selfish

It is often assumed that the more individualistic a society is the more selfish it can be. The "Tragedy of the Commons" is cited.

Aotearoa NZ currently ranks fifth in terms of individuality.<sup>6</sup> However, it is also one of the most charitable countries, as are some other highly individualistic nations.<sup>7</sup> This is often due to their people being more likely to help strangers. The Student Volunteer Army is an example of charitable younger kiwis.<sup>8</sup>

Several studies claim that more individualistic societies had more Covid cases & mortality, and lower compliance with protective measures than more collective countries.<sup>9,10</sup> But NZ doesn't fit that pattern either.

More individualistic countries can be more innovative, and show stronger economic performance.<sup>11</sup>

### Individualism disrupts old ways

Nonetheless, changing demands on work and leisure time, have shifted behaviours and expectations. More personalised services and information are provided digitally.<sup>5</sup> On-demand learning, micro-degrees, micro-credentials,<sup>12</sup> and massive open online courses<sup>13</sup> provide very tailored educational and learning opportunities.

Clubs and other social organisations now need to focus more on providing the experiences that the customer or participant wants.<sup>14</sup>

### A move toward collectivism again?

Individualism is typically a western concept. Māori and Pacific cultures emphasise collectivism, and their influences are becoming more common now in Aotearoa NZ.<sup>15</sup> Addressing climate & other environmental changes may also stimulate more collective approaches.

## Potential implications

### Create

- More innovative society

### Relate

- Risk of less compassionate society developing

### Consume

- Increase in consumption or engagement as products and services better meet the needs or wants of individuals

### Degrade

- Risk that collective actions seen as less necessary or desirable

### Connect

- Rise in transactional relationships
- More effort needed to develop collective perspectives & responses

### Define

- Society defined more by individual values than collective ones

### More information (links)

<sup>1</sup> [Getting some me time](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Individualistic practices & values increasing](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Peak individualism?](#)

<sup>4</sup> [A more individualistic & altruistic world?](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Technological advances spur individualism](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Global individualism rankings](#)

<sup>7</sup> [World Giving Index 2021](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Student Volunteer Army](#)

<sup>9</sup> ["The Tragedy of the Commons"](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Individualism and the fight against Covid-19](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Individualism, innovation, and long-run growth](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Wikipedia – Micro-degrees](#)

<sup>13</sup> [MOOCs were dead, but now they are booming](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Navigating a new fitness landscape](#)

<sup>15</sup> ["Māori has gone mainstream"](#)