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Reading

If you read or watch the news, you'll likely think the world is falling to pieces. Trends like terrorism, climate change, and a growing population straining the planet's finite resources can easily lead you to think our world is in crisis.

But there's another story, a story the news doesn't often report. This story is backed by data, and it says we're actually living in the most peaceful, abundant time in history, and things are likely to continue getting better.

We offer twelve data points that tell us why the world is getting better and will get better still.

- Over the last 30 years, the share of the global population living in absolute poverty has declined from 53% to under 17%. While there is still room for improvement (especially in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia), the quality of life in every region above has been steadily improving and will continue to do so. Over the next 20 years, we have the ability to extinguish absolute poverty on Earth.
- In the last 16 years, child labor including those working in hazardous conditions has been reduced by more than 50%. As we head to a world of low-cost robotics, where such machines can operate far faster, far cheaper and around the clock, the basic rationale for child labor will completely disappear, and it will drop to zero.
- In the last 25 years, children under-five mortality rates have dropped by 50%. Infant mortality rates and neonatal mortality rates have also dropped significantly.

- Guinea worm is a nasty parasite that used to affect over 3.5 million people only 30 years ago. Today, thanks to advances in medical technologies, research and therapeutics, the parasite has almost been eradicated. In 2008, there were just 4,647 cases.
- There has been a dramatic decline in the number of teen birth rates in the United States since 1950. At its peak, 89.1 out of 1,000 teenage women were giving birth. Today, it's dropped under 29 out of 1,000.
- Western Europe used to be a very dangerous place to live. Over the last 700+ years, the number of homicides per 100,000 people has decreased to almost zero. It is important to look back this far (700 years) because we humans lose perspective and tend to romanticize the past, but forget how violent life truly was in the Middle Ages, or even just a couple of hundred years ago. We have made dramatic and positive changes. On an evolutionary time, scale 700 years is NOTHING, and our progress as a species is impressive.
- We've made significant progress in reducing violent crimes in the United States in the last 50 years. As recent as the early 80s and mid-90s, there were over 50 violent crime victims per 1,000 individuals. Recently, this number has dropped threefold to 15 victims per 1,000 people.
- With the decision by Saudi Arabia to allow women to vote starting in 2015, women can now vote in every country in the world, with the exception of Brunei which does not allow voting by anyone.
- The polio vaccine has nearly wiped out the disease worldwide. In the 64 years since Jonas Salk developed the first polio vaccine, many countries have made concerted efforts to get people vaccinated. China saw its last cases in the mid-1990s and India about 20 years later. In 2016, there were fewer than 40 new cases logged worldwide. Currently, just three countries have yet to eradicate polio.
- Greater numbers of sewer connections and water treatment plants are helping to clean up the world. Over the last 25 years, the percentage of people relying on unsafe sanitation has fallen from 57% to 33%.
- Live in Africa is getting better. The average life span for women in sub-Saharan Africa has increased by 16 years since 1960 from 41 to 57 years of age. Seven of the world's top ten fastest-growing economies are in Africa. The percentage of children in Africa who are in school has almost doubled since 1970.
- The percentage of the population in developing countries that has an inadequate caloric intake has declined 58% in the last 25 years. Globally, 18.6 percent of the population was undernourished in 1991; by 2015, it dropped to 10.8 percent.

Many people don't believe it's possible to end the persistent global problems we're facing. However, looking at history, we can see many examples where creative ideas new tools have unlocked resources that previously seemed scarce.

We need social change and policy solutions as much as we need technology solutions. But we have seen time and time again, that powerful tools in the hands of innovative, change-makers can make the seemingly impossible happen.

Source: <https://singularityhub.com/2016/11/01/why-the-world-is-better-than-ever-and-will-get-better-still/>