

# The State of Humanity – some numbers

The often-accepted narrative of a world in decline is inconsistent with the facts. Judging the state of humanity from first principles – that of a species of evolved, fallible apes on a rock with no rule book, making it up on the fly – is not only the most realistic way to think about human civilisation, but lends itself to a profoundly optimistic, big-picture reinterpretation of today's social, economic and geopolitical realities.

Our world is getting better. If we keep our cool, a sense of perspective, and set long-term policy appropriately, there's every reason to hope it will continue to get better.

Here are some numbers:

- Globally, **life expectancy** is the highest it has ever been, having risen from 20-30 years in prehistory, to 31 years in 1900, 47 years in 1950 and 67 years in 2010. It continues to rise steadily across the world.
- The global **homicide rate** is now by far the lowest it's been since humans evolved. **Battle deaths** in international wars – the most deadly form of human conflict – have fallen from 65,000 per year in the 1950s to 2,000 per year in the 2000s (a factor of 30 in just 50 years).
- **Global fertility** has plummeted from 4.47 in 1970 to 2.55 today, and continues to fall in every region of the world. The **global population** is projected to be in decline by 2100.
- **Infant mortality** has plummeted from historical levels of 20%, to 15.7% in 1950 and to 5.7% in 2003. It continues to fall in nearly every part of the world.
- Average daily **calorie intake** per person worldwide increased by 24% between 1961 and 2002. Inflation-adjusted prices of food commodities declined by 75% between 1950 and 2000. **Chronic undernourishment** in the developing world decreased from 37% in 1971 to 17% in 2002. A wide range of developing and emergent technologies hold out the possibility of further improvements in human nutrition, at ever lower rates of environmental impact.
- **Global literacy** has risen from less than half the human population in 1970 to over three quarters of it today. The number of years spent in education is rising in every region of the world.
- In 1900 no country in the world was a full **democracy**. Now 44% of the people alive live in democracies and 18% live in limited democracies. Since 1974 multiparty election systems have been introduced in 113 countries.
- Globally, **average wealth** has risen from \$450 per year in 1000 AD, to \$700 in 1800 AD, to \$1261 in 1900 AD and to over £9,000 in 2010 – it continues to rise even in these difficult economic times. The world economy is 100 times larger than it was in 1800 AD. The average human is ten times richer.

The problems humanity faces are considerable. However, the momentum of human civilisation is decisively upwards and we currently live during the greatest golden age humanity has ever seen, by every measurable parameter of human welfare. And this is only the beginning.

**Tom Mansfield:** Co-founder of the [League of Pragmatic Optimists](#)

**Peter Baker:** Author of [The Jolly Pilgrim](#)

*We are at the very beginning of time for the human race. It is not unreasonable that we grapple with problems.  
But there are tens of thousands of years in the future.*

**- Richard Feynman**

## Sources

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