



Stossel Column: Don't Freak Out!

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Worried about Tuesday?

Remember: The most important parts of life happen outside politics.

Love, friendship, family, raising children, building businesses, worship, charity work -- that is the stuff of life! Politicians get in the way of those things. But despite the efforts of power-hungry Republicans and Democrats, life gets better.

You may not believe that. Surveys show most people think life is getting worse.

But it isn't, as Marian Tupy and Ron Bailey point out in [their new book](#), "Ten Global Trends Every Smart Person Should Know."

"Child labor was once ubiquitous. Now it's limited to a few countries in Africa. Women did not have a vote (until New Zealand granted it at the end of the 19th century). Today, women vote everywhere except for the Vatican," Tupy reminds us.

"Gays and lesbians, persecuted for millennia, are free to marry. Slavery was universal; now it is illegal. The world has never been more peaceful, more educated and kinder."

But the nastiness of today's politics may stop progress! Make life worse!

It's possible, but "worse" compared to what?

I've lived through the Vietnam War, a military draft, 90% income tax rates, price controls, indecency laws, widespread racism and sexism, Jim Crow, the explosion of crime in the 1970s...

Overall, life got better.

With Donald Trump and Joe Biden claiming the other will destroy what's good, it's hard to see improvement. But the world has made progress, largely thanks to libertarian ideas.

"For millennia the world was marked by despotism, slavery, hierarchy, rigid class privilege, and literally no increase in the standard of living," says Cato Institute Vice President David Boaz in the May/June 2020 Policy Report.

"Then libertarian ideas came into the world. Of course, they weren't called that at the time. ... (T)hey were the ideas of human rights, free markets, property rights, religious toleration, the value of commerce, the dignity of the individual - life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

These ideas created a wave of progress unlike anything in history.

"Look at the chart of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, or any measure of economic growth," adds Boaz. "It looks like a hockey stick: flat for almost all human history, and then it rockets upwards."

The media shriek hysterically about every problem, and we have problems: pandemic, lockdowns, unemployment, wildfires, bad cops, violent riots, crime...

But no matter who wins on Tuesday, life will probably get better.

Entrepreneurs will invent cool things.

This year, while Democrats and Republicans fought, the private sector found cheaper and better ways to send people into space.

The World Bank complained about governments not providing all people clean drinking water. So private companies are doing it. A billboard in Peru turns humidity into potable drinking water. A drinking straw, LifeStraw, removes bacteria and parasites from water.

Forests are expanding because modern farming uses less land, allowing the forests to regrow.

Thanks to often-despised free markets, poverty continues to decline. In 1981, 42% of the world lived in extreme poverty. By 2018, only 8.6% did. Do politicians ever highlight those gains? No.

Probably because most of those good things happened in spite of them, not because of them.

Most good things do.

Yes, we still have lots of problems: trillion dollar deficits, mental illness, crushing regulation, endless wars (although fewer of them), criminal injustice, inequality, climate change...

But it's always been that way. Evolution programmed humans to focus on problems. Our ancestors survived in a very dangerous world. If they weren't hypervigilant, they wouldn't have lived long enough to give birth to the people who gave birth to us.

I obsess about problems. But I try not to let that distract me from the big picture:

More people in more places enjoy prosperity, religious freedom, personal freedom, democratic governance, largely equal rights, civility, better health and longer lives.

Neither Trump nor Biden is likely to destroy that.