



## A Realistic, Positive Picture of the State of Humanity

**Things are on the up.**

Marian Tupy

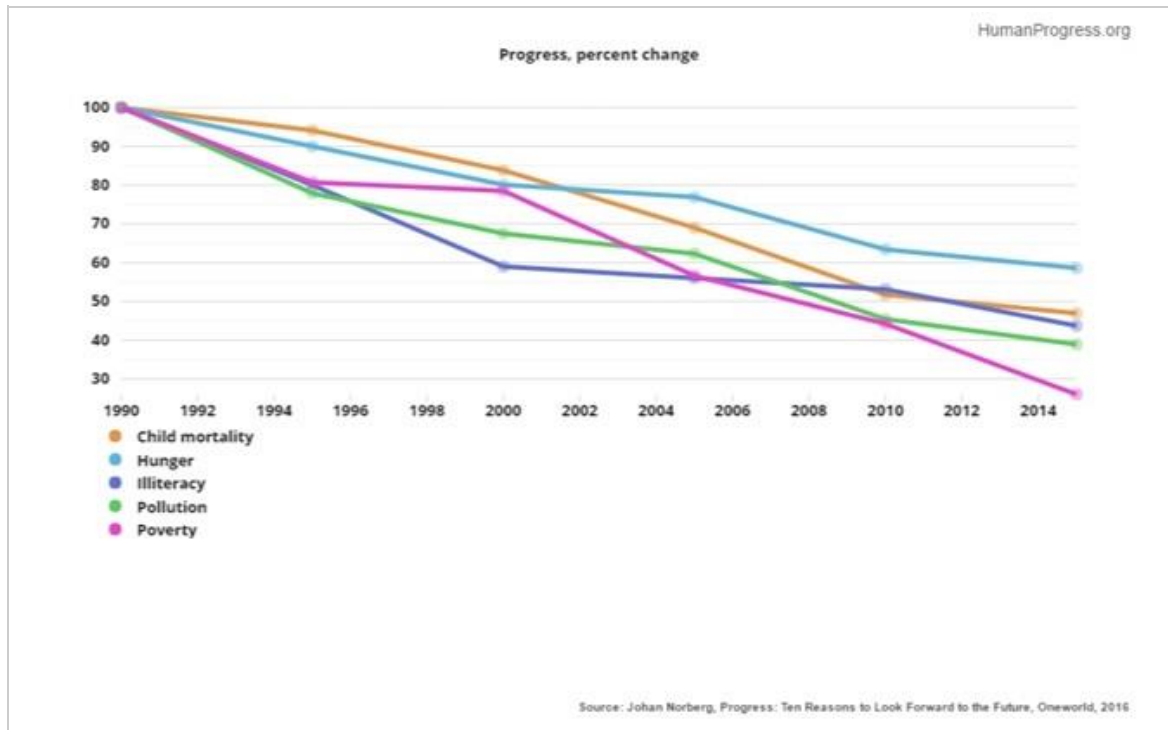
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My colleague, [Johan Norberg](#), has come out with a new book called *[Progress: Ten Reasons to Look Forward to the Future](#)*. Along with [Ronald Bailey's](#) *[The End of Doom: Environmental Renewal in the Twenty-first Century](#)*, which came out last year, it is a must-read for anyone interested in a realistic picture of the state of humanity. In fact, the two authors offered their insights on the scope and speed of improvements in human well-being during a Cato Institute [book forum](#) last week.

Norberg, whose previous work includes the highly successful *[In Defense of Global Capitalism](#)*, looked at the global food supply, sanitation, life expectancy, poverty, violence, environmental quality, literacy, political freedom and child labor. He found that:

Despite what we hear on the news and from many authorities, the great story of our era is that we are witnessing the greatest improvement in global living standards ever to take place. Poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy, child labor and infant mortality are falling faster than at any other time in human history. Life expectancy at birth has increased more than twice as much in the last century as it did in the previous 200,000 years. The risk that any individual will be exposed to war, die in a natural disaster, or be subject to dictatorship has become smaller than in any other epoch. A child born today is more likely to reach retirement age than his forbearers were to live to their fifth birthday.

Norberg suggests three reasons for the massive improvements in global standards of living. First, he credits the intellectual Enlightenment, which replaced traditions and superstitions with reason and empiricism. Second, he points to the ideas of classical liberalism, which replaced serfdom and authoritarianism with individual liberty and liberal democracy. Third, he notes the role played by the Industrial Revolution in replacing hunger and poverty with prosperity and abundance.



As we near the culmination of an election season that sees the ideas of classical liberalism, the Enlightenment and free enterprise in retreat, and demagoguery, authoritarianism and protectionism in ascendency, it is good to remind ourselves of the progress that humanity has made thanks to economic and civil freedoms. As such, I include Norberg's chart showing the extraordinary global decline in child mortality, hunger, illiteracy, pollution and poverty since the fall of communism and rise of globalization in 1990.

*Marian L. Tupy is a policy analyst at the Cato Institute's Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity and editor of [www.humanprogress.org](http://www.humanprogress.org)*