



The Cooperative Society 2020 Report

An update of the 2018 book *The Cooperative Society –
The Next Stage of Human History*, Second Edition

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Coronavirus (COVID-19)

As we write this note on March 24, 2020, [396,000 people](#), living in 196 countries and territories have contracted the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). [Almost 17,243 people](#) have **died from** it. China, South Korea and a small number of other countries are reporting decreasing numbers of cases.

It is too early to predict the long-term trajectory of this virus. No matter what, however, it will have serious consequences for our health and economic well-being in 2020 and, possibly, beyond.

We insert this note at the beginning of *The Cooperative Society 2020 Report* because the coronavirus will negatively impact movement toward the improved political, economic, social, and environmental future that this report is about. It will particularly hurt our near-term quality of life. It will also slow the world's implementation of carbon-reducing projects because of the disruption of the international supply chain on which the production of solar panels, wind turbines, electric vehicles, and other sustainable technologies depend. On the other hand, near-term carbon emissions are likely to decline because of a world-wide slowdown in the use of fossil fuels, especially in manufacturing and transportation.

So, keep the potential consequences of the coronavirus in mind as you read this report. It will have an as-yet-unknown impact on the trends and recommendations featured in the report.

Preface

Is the world on the verge of a new stage of human history, one characterized by cooperation and equitable access to resources rather than by conflict and extreme inequality?

We posed this question in the 2016 and 2018 editions of [The Cooperative Society: The Next Stage of Human History](#). The purpose of this *2020 Report* is to update the information presented in these two editions of the book, and to make revised recommendations on how to make our world a better place to live.

We strongly recommend that the 2018 edition of the book and this *2020 Report* be read as companion pieces, so that the context of this *2020 Report* is better understood. Note that both the [book](#) and the report are available as free downloads

In the two editions of the book, we analyzed seven broad measures of economic, political, social, and environmental change in order to gauge progress toward a more cooperative society. We discovered that in some ways, we are moving in the right direction. In other ways, we are not.

The Cooperative Society Project

The Cooperative Society Project is intended to communicate with a broad range of people, especially those who are interested in understanding and improving the state of the world today. We ask where things may be headed in the near future and what we can do to make conditions better for our species and for the planet.

There are three core premises of the two editions of the book and of this *2020 Report*:

- We have reached a point in human history at which there are adequate resources for all human beings to experience a decent quality of life. Similarly, humans

are now able to establish and maintain a sustainable relationship with nature.

- We need to measure to what extent humans are moving toward a sustainable quality of life for all, and, when we are falling short, to take corrective action.
- A sustainable quality of life doesn't depend on forces outside of our control. Humans have the power to shape the conditions of our lives and those of future generations. We are the agents of history, not its powerless subjects.

In addition to the thousands of people who read and comment on our books and newsletter articles, The Cooperative Society Project is made possible by a team of four people: E.G. Nadeau, Luc Nadeau, Sue Filbin (editor and designer), and Jill Stevenson (social media coordinator).

March 2020



E.G. Nadeau, Ph.D.

E.G. Nadeau has a Ph.D. in sociology and has spent most of his more-than 45-year career developing, researching, writing, and teaching about cooperatives and community development in the United States and in developing countries.



Luc Nadeau, M.S.

Luc Nadeau has a Masters of Science degree in ecology and is an active environmentalist and artist. He prepared most of the visuals for this book.

Executive Summary

The Cooperative Society 2020 Report is organized around the same seven measures of human and environmental well-being as is the 2018 edition of *The Cooperative Society: The Next Stage of Human History* – Economic power, Wealth, Conflict, Democracy, Population, Quality of life, and Environment.

1. Economic power

Recent data indicate that the international pattern of economic concentration continues to be a major problem in the past few years. There is also inadequate evidence to indicate that more socially responsible business forms such as cooperatives and social enterprises are increasing or decreasing their role in the world economy.

The biggest factors that would alter this current stalemate are changes in the policies of International bodies such as the United Nations and the world's most developed countries toward large, for-profit businesses. Tighter international anti-trust policies and enforcement of these policies, concerted efforts to thwart tax evasion by large companies, and progressive corporate taxation systems could reduce the inordinate influence on the world economy by large companies.

2. Wealth

Overall, the concentration of wealth in the world continues to decrease modestly. But inequality between the rich and the poor is still dramatically high.

Economic opportunities, international and domestic mechanisms to increase jobs and financial security, and progressive taxation policies are all means to move the world toward greater equality and financial security for the poor.

3. Conflict

In recent decades, there has been a pattern of

reduced violence in the world – both from armed conflicts and from homicides, but we have a long way to go before we can claim that we live on a peaceful planet.

4. Democracy

Available resources show there was not a resurgence of increasingly democratic governments in 2019, but some data indicate that there is a strong popular will in a number of countries to move in such a direction. 2020 may prove to be the year in which that will is transformed into an upturn in world democracy.

5. Population

The UN Population Report appears to overestimate the world's population growth rate because it underestimates future use of birth control around the world.

The World Population International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (WP) estimates the potential impact of improvements in reproductive health as they relate to significantly reducing the rate of population growth.

The results of these different methodological assumptions are dramatic. The UN projects 11.1 billion people by 2100, and WP projects 8.9 billion. What a difference comprehensive, international reproductive health programs could make!

6. Quality of life

There has been a recent slowdown in accomplishing the quality-of-life measures targeted by the UN and The Cooperative Society Project. This appears to be the result of reduced commitment by UN members; an overly ambitious agenda by the UN; and the magnitude of the climate-change crisis overshadowing other quality-of-life issues.

7. Environment

The recent increase in severe weather-related events around the world (at least partly attributable to global warming), slow and uneven progress in reducing carbon emissions, and the continued weak commitments of many countries to strong carbon-reduction policies are all worrying events. However, there are also some signs of optimism, such as science-based projections that we can still achieve 2030 carbon-emission-reduction goals, and increased commitments from the private sector, some countries, and sub-national government entities that are accelerating their involvement.

Conclusion

We conclude *The Cooperative Society 2020 Report* with cautious optimism. The increased political participation in many countries, mentioned above, may be a precursor to increased democracy and positive movement toward other components of the cooperative society. However, there is no guarantee that the recent uptick in political participation will result in widespread political reform.

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Introduction

To quote from the [2018 edition of our book](#) *The Cooperative Society: The Next Stage of Human History*:

We define “the cooperative society” as a potential new stage of human history, characterized by economic and political democracy, cooperative international relations, and a symbiotic relationship with nature. The cooperative society would succeed our current stage of history, which is characterized by a small number of large countries and for-profit corporations that dominate the world economy; a mix of authoritarian and democratic governments; a low quality of life for many of us; conflict-based interaction within and among nations; and a destructive relationship with the environment.

We may already have begun the transition to the cooperative society in the latter half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. If such a transition is occurring:

- This emerging society would be a major paradigm shift, on a scale that has happened only a few times since we evolved as a species about 300,000 years ago.
- For the first time in over 5,000 years, we would have a society that is not dominated by religious, military, political, and/or economic elites.
- This society would be based on cooperation and democracy rather than conflict, control by the few, and extreme inequality.

The Cooperative Society examines the premise that humans are on the threshold of such a momentous historical change, making possible the realization of our most broadly and deeply held social values.

The Cooperative Society 2020 Report is organized around the same seven measures of human and environmental well-being as the 2018 edition of

The Cooperative Society: The Next Stage of Human History – Economic power, Wealth and income, Conflict, Democracy, Population, Quality of life, and Environment.

In the report, we provide an update on information related to each measure, as well as revised recommendations for actions that we can take to increase the level of cooperation in society.

That is, the *2020 Report* focuses on new quantitative and qualitative data related to the seven measures that were not available at the time of the 2018 publication of the book. In addition, the report revises recommendations for action based on these new data.

General comments on overall trends in these measures and recommendations for action are presented in the Conclusion of the report.

A condensed update on the seven measures and recommended actions is presented in the Executive Summary.

As noted in the Preface, we recommend that the 2018 edition of the book and the *2020 Report* be read as companion pieces. Note that both the [book](#) and the report are available as free downloads.



Measure 1

Economic Power

Key questions: To what extent is the world's economy dominated by a small percentage of corporations and countries? Is this level of domination increasing or decreasing? Are checks and balances, along with alternative forms of business, being developed and applied to reduce the negative consequences of this concentration?

Importance of this measure: As long as economic decision-making is dominated by the few, the rest of us are dependent on the choices that they make. This has consequences for fluctuations in the economy (for example The Great Recession of 2008-2010), jobs and income, the quality of life, and the quality of the environment.

Large publicly traded corporations

Forbes publishes The Global 2000, an annual review of the largest 2000 publicly traded companies in the world. The [most recent report](#) was published in May 2019. The report indicated that these corporations represent about four percent of all listed corporations in the world, and that their gross revenue is equal to almost half of the [gross world product](#) (GWP). GWP is the sum of all of the national gross-domestic products in the world.

The fact that these 2000 companies' gross revenues are equal to such a high percentage of the world's production shows an alarming level of concentration. As illustrated in the following graph, this high concentration has fluctuated between 40 and 50 percent of GWP during the

past decade.

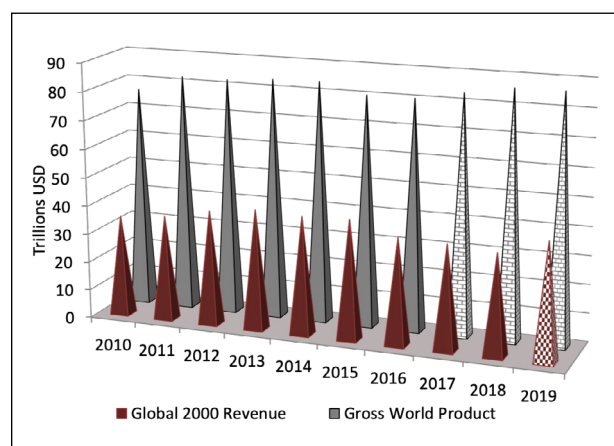


Figure 1.1 Global 2000 companies' sales revenue compared with Gross World Product, in real dollars. New data since 2018 book is patterned. Sources: [Forbes Global 2000](#); [The World Bank](#)

Cooperatives and social enterprises

In contrast to the Global 2000 and other for-profit corporations, cooperatives (co-ops) and social enterprises put service to customers ahead of profits. (See a longer discussion on these organizations in the 2018 edition of the [book](#) *The Cooperative Society: The Next Stage of Human History*.)

How are co-ops and social enterprises doing in today's marketplace?

Recently, co-ops have been showing mixed results, although it is important to keep in mind that year-to-year fluctuations are relatively minor.

[The World Cooperative Monitor](#) is published

annually by the European Union Research Institute on Cooperatives and Social Enterprises (Euricse) and the International Cooperative Alliance. The main feature of this annual report is a financial review of the economic performance of the largest 300 cooperatives in the world. During the past few years, the gross revenue of the “Co-op 300” peaked in 2014 and then declined through 2017, the most recent year for which data is available.

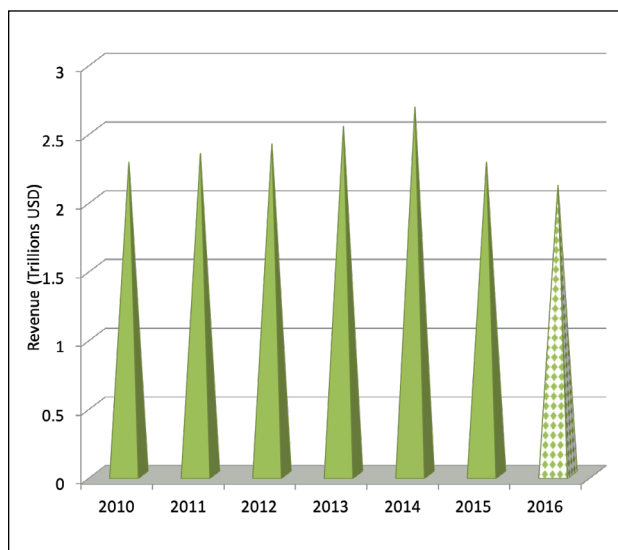


Figure 1.2 Revenue of the top 300 cooperatives. New data since the 2018 book is patterned. Source: [World Cooperative Monitor](https://www.cooperativemonitor.org/)

It is too early to draw a long-term conclusion about this recent downward pattern.

Similarly, mutual and cooperative insurance membership was increasing until about 2016, then had a [fairly significant drop in 2017](#).

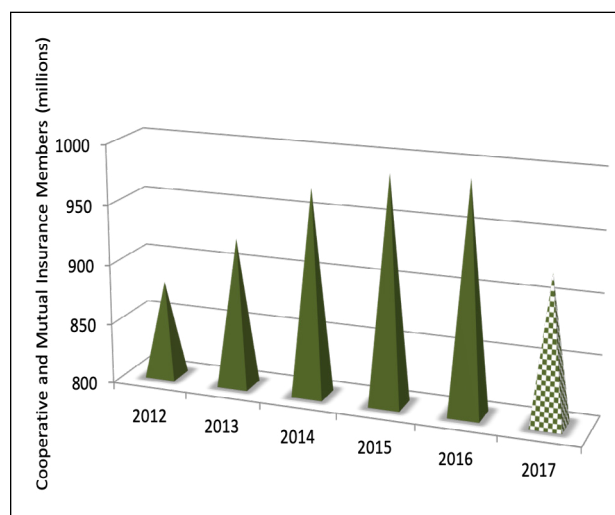


Figure 1.3 Cooperative and mutual insurance members/policyholders (millions). New data since the 2018 book is patterned. Source: [The International Cooperative and Mutual Insurance Federation](https://www.internationalcooperativeandmutualinsurancefederation.org/)

Insurance is important to watch because it is the largest co-op sector. As with the “Co-op 300,” it is too early to draw any long-term conclusions about the recent declines in membership.

In contrast, credit unions, the co-op category with the second-largest number of members, has had an [accelerating rate of membership](#) increase during the past several years.

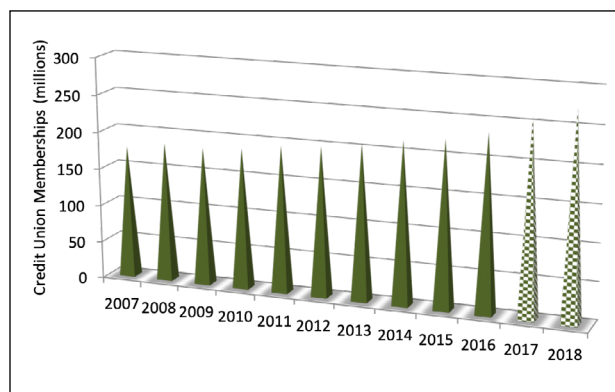


Figure 1.4 Credit union memberships (millions). New data since the 2018 book is patterned. Source: [World Council of Credit Unions](https://www.councilofcreditunions.org/)

As of yet, there is no good, worldwide annual analysis of growth or decline among social enterprises. The information that is available suggests

that this type of business is [growing at a healthy rate in many countries](#), but we will have to wait for more systematic data to draw definitive conclusions.

Assessment

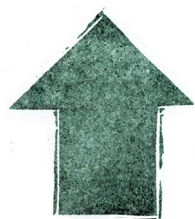
Recent data indicate that the international pattern of economic concentration continues to be strong, but not consistently growing or declining in the past few years. There is also inadequate evidence to indicate that more socially responsible business forms such as co-ops and social enterprises are increasing or decreasing their role in the world economy.

The biggest factors that would alter this current stalemate are changes in the policies of International bodies such as the UN and the world's most developed countries toward large, for-profit businesses. Tighter international

anti-trust policies and enforcement of these policies, concerted efforts to thwart tax evasion by large companies, and progressive corporate taxation systems could reduce their inordinate influence on the world economy.

On the other hand, supportive policies toward co-ops and social enterprises could provide a boost to these businesses that emphasize service over profit – for example, the kind of legislation that catapulted social enterprises into an important role in Italy's service economy during the past several decades.

There are [antitrust proposals](#) currently under consideration in the United States, and similar discussions in some European countries. However, there is not yet any indication that these words will be turned into action in the near future.



Measure 2

Wealth

Key questions: Is the distribution of wealth becoming more or less unequal among the world's households? Among households within each country?

Importance of this measure: The concentration of wealth has consequences for everyone's economic well-being. Large economic differences mean that many of us earn less, receive fewer social benefits, and have less influence over the political decision-making that affects our

day-to-day lives than we would in a more equitable society.

Wealth inequality

A simple definition of [wealth](#) is the current value of one's assets less liabilities. According to the [Credit Suisse Global Wealth Report 2019](#), wealth inequality continues to slowly decline. Much of this is the result of a rising global middle class, especially in China. Most regions of the world are also experiencing reduced within-country

inequality. But, notably, North America and high-income Asia Pacific countries are continuing to see increases in within-country inequality.

Between 2015 and 2019, the percent of the world's adults who have less than \$10,000 in wealth decreased by 20%. Also, as we will see in the quality-of-life section of this report, there have been significant reductions since 1990 in the number of people living in extreme poverty, although that trend has been slowing in recent years.

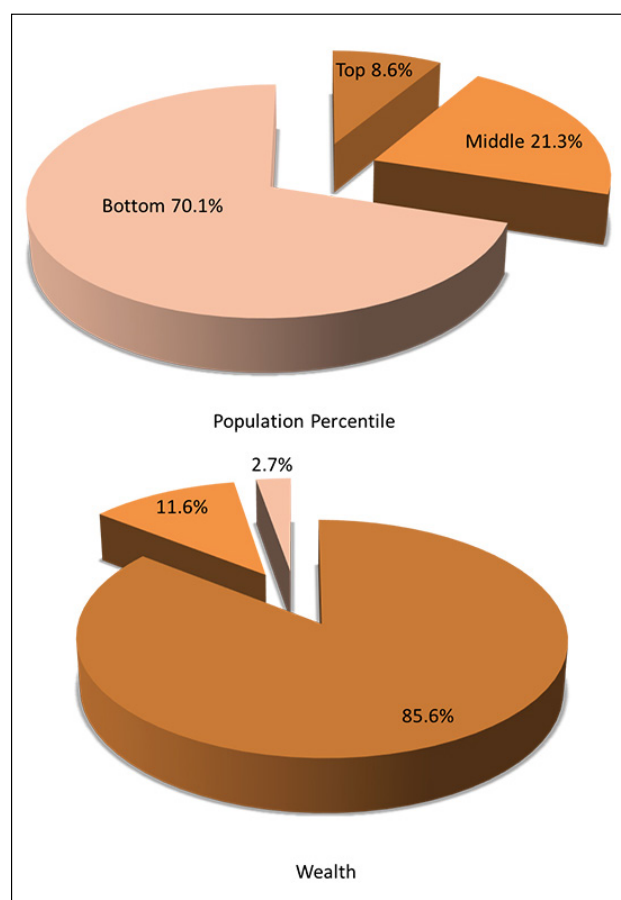


Figure 2.1 In 2015, the top 8.6% (those with \$100,000+) owned 85.6% of global wealth. The middle 21.3% (\$10,000-\$100,000) owned 11.6%, whereas the bottom 70.1% (under \$10,000) owned just 2.7% of wealth. Source: [Credit Suisse](#)

Despite these improvements, it is important to note that there remains a huge global disparity. More than half of adults have less than \$10,000 in wealth. Furthermore, a January 2020 report by [Oxfam](#) concluded that the world's richest 1% have

more than twice as much wealth as the poorest 6.9 billion people.

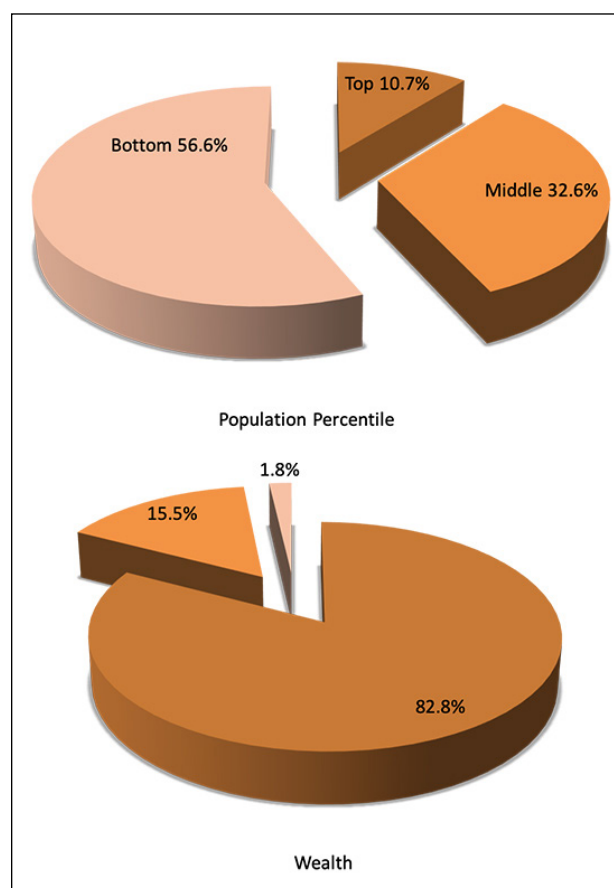


Figure 2.2 In 2019, more people joined the ranks of those with over \$100,000 (even as the share of wealth of that group dropped). More people also moved out of the group with under \$10,000 and into the middle group (\$10,000-\$100,000). Source: [Credit Suisse Global Wealth Report 2019](#)

Assessment

Overall, the concentration of wealth in the world continues to decrease modestly. But inequality between the rich and poor is still dramatically high. Economic opportunities, international and domestic mechanisms to increase jobs and financial security, and progressive taxation policies are all means to move the world toward greater equality and financial security for the poor.



Measure 3

Conflict

Key questions: Are the number of deaths from international and civil wars increasing or decreasing? Are there more or fewer deaths from homicides in different countries and regions of the world?

Importance of this measure: The primary issue is the everyday safety of individuals, families, and communities. We will all be safer when we – as countries, and as ethnic, religious, and other organized groups as well as individuals – resolve our differences through negotiation, cooperative agreements, and non-lethal forms of violence.

So, how have we been doing lately on reducing conflict in the world?

The short answer to this question is: There have been minor improvements in the past few years.

To provide a longer answer, it is important to distinguish between two kinds of violence: Deaths from armed conflicts, and homicides.

[International humanitarian law](#) distinguishes two types of armed conflicts, namely:

- “International armed conflicts, opposing two or more States, and
- Non-international armed conflicts, between governmental forces and non-governmental armed groups, or between such groups only.”

[Intentional homicide](#) is defined as “unlawful death inflicted upon a person with the intent to

cause death or serious injury.” It excludes “killings related to armed conflict and war.”

Armed conflicts

The planet has become a much more peaceful place since the end of World War II. This is the case, despite hundreds of regional wars, civil wars, and other armed conflicts that have occurred during the past 75 years.

In the past decade or so, there has been an uptick in the number of deadly conflicts, but, counter-intuitively, a reduction in the number of fatalities resulting from these conflicts.

According to [the Uppsala Conflict Data Program](#) (UCDP):

The number of fatalities in organized violence decreased for the fourth consecutive year [in 2018], to reach the lowest level since 2012. In 2018, UCDP recorded almost 76,000 deaths – a decrease of 20% compared to 2017, and 43% compared to the latest peak in 2014.

The general decline in fatalities from organized violence does not correspond with the trend in the number of active conflicts. In fact, [in 2018] the world has seen a new peak in the number of conflicts after 2014, matched only by the number of conflicts in the early 1990s.

The following figures illustrate this pattern of decreasing fatalities despite the increasing number of conflicts:

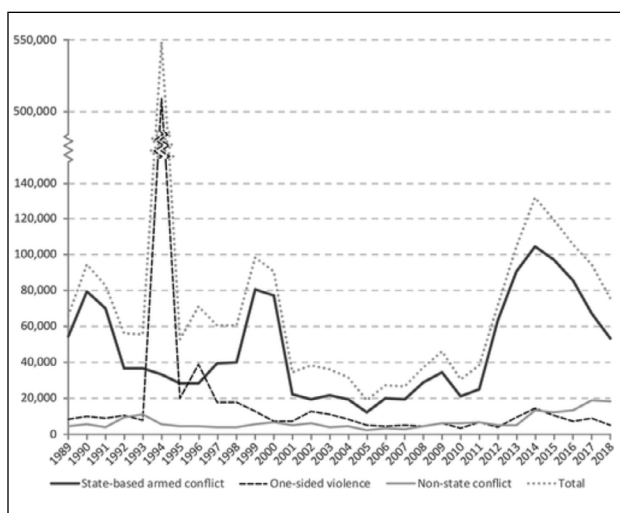


Figure 3.1 Fatalities in organized violence by type, 1989–2018. Source: “[Organized violence, 1989-2018 and peace agreements](#)”

Note the steep rise in the number of armed conflicts from 2014 to 2018, and the steep decline in the number of fatalities during the same period.

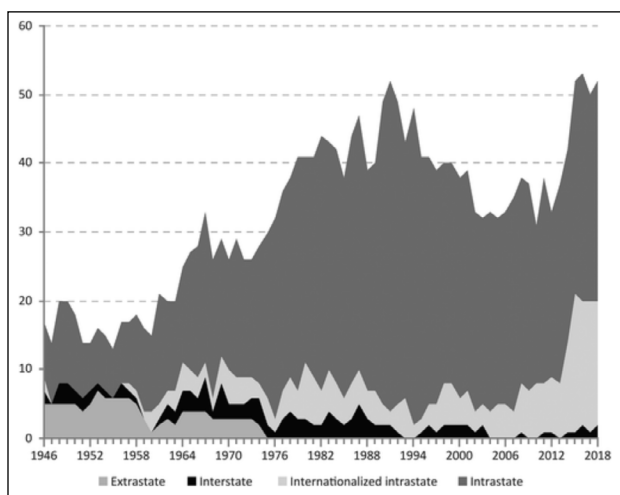


Figure 3.2 State-based armed conflict by type, 1946–2018. Source: “[Organized violence, 1989-2018 and peace agreements](#)”

This pattern of reduced conflict-related fatalities is also reflected in more recent data from the [Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project](#) (ACLED). ACLED’s highly detailed dataset on “political violence and protest events” shows a decline of fatalities between the first ten months of 2018 and the same time period in 2019, from about 254,000 to 129,000. That’s a reduction of almost 50%.

It is too soon to tell whether these data indicate a temporary reduction in conflict-related fatalities, or a long-term trend toward less-lethal resolution of differences among conflicting parties.

Homicides

It may seem surprising, but intentional homicides are far more common than deaths from armed conflict – **in recent years about five times more common.**

[The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime](#) (UNODC), published a report in July 2019 estimating that:

[A] total of 464,000 deaths were caused by intentional homicide worldwide in 2017. The largest share (37 percent) was registered in the Americas, closely followed by Africa, which accounted for just over a third (35 percent) of the total. Despite its large population, Asia accounted for less than a quarter of the total (23 percent), while Europe (4.7 percent) and Oceania (0.2 percent) accounted for by far the smallest shares.

There are different causes for these regional homicide patterns. In Central and South America, many homicides are due to gang violence, especially related to the drug trade. In Africa, much of the unorganized violence stems from fighting among different ethnic groups.

As a side note to these data, UNODC reports that the homicide rate in the United States increased by 14 percent between 2010 and 2017, following several decades of decline. The United States has [one of the highest homicide rates](#) of the 30 or so most-developed countries in the world. The discrepancy between homicides in the United States and other developed countries is often attributed to the much easier access to guns in the US than in these other countries.

Despite the high numbers for homicides on a

world scale, UNODC reports that they have shown a gradual downward trend in recent decades, “... from a peak of 7.4 per 100,000 in 1993 to 6.1 per 100,000 in 2017.”

The following figure from the 2019 UNODC report illustrates both the gradual decline in worldwide homicides and the different levels and historical patterns of regional homicides.

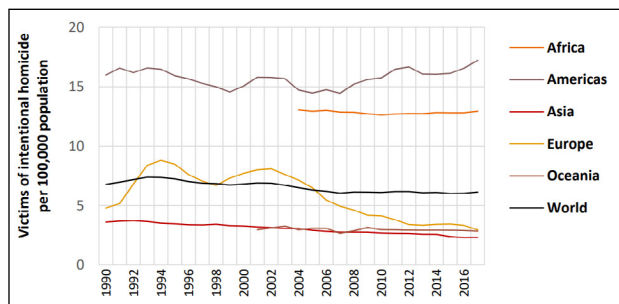


Figure 3.3 Trends in homicide rate, by region, 1990-2017. Source: [UNODC Global Study on Homicide](https://www.unodc.org/globalstudy/)

Assessment

In recent decades, there has been a pattern of reduced violence in the world – both from armed conflicts and from homicides – but we have a long way to go before we can claim that we live on a peaceful planet.



Measure 4

Democracy

Key questions: Is the number of countries with democratic governments rising or falling? Is the percentage of people living in democratic countries increasing or decreasing?

Importance of this measure: The ability to elect our political leaders and participate in other decision-making that affects our lives is the hallmark of a democratic society.

According to the [Center for Systemic Peace](#), the number of democratic countries grew dramatically between the end of World War II and the early 2000s, and at a slower pace up to 2017.

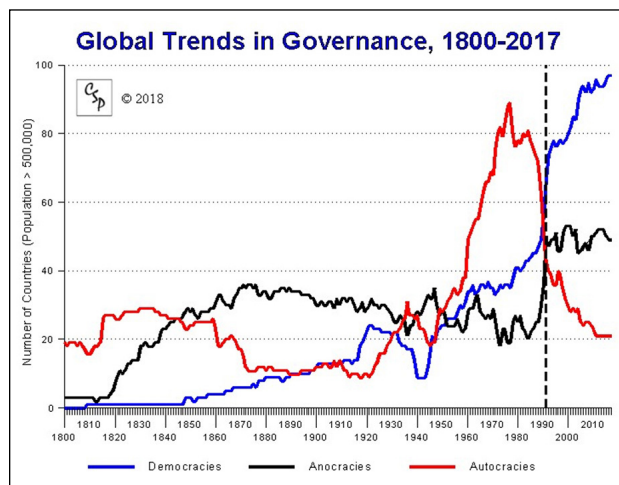


Figure 4.1 Global trends in governance, 1800-2017.
Source: [The Polity Project](#)

However, the Economist Intelligence Unit's [Democracy Index 2019](#) and Freedom House's [Freedom in the World Index 2020](#) indicate that the number of democracies and the number of people living in democracies has declined slightly since 2006.

The different trends documented by these indices reflect small variations in their definitions of “democracy.”

In this section, we provide a quick summary of key points from the 2019 report from *The Economist* and Freedom House. (The Center for Systemic Peace did not have a 2019 report.)

The Economist

The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index provides “an annual snapshot of democracy worldwide for 165 independent states and two territories.”

The Democracy Index is based on five categories: Electoral process and pluralism; civil liberties; the functioning of government; political participation;

and political culture. Based on its scores on a range of indicators within these categories, each country is then itself classified as one of four types of regime: “Full democracy,” “flawed democracy,” “hybrid regime,” and “authoritarian regime.”

The first Democracy Index was published in 2006. The 2019 edition reviews global democracy in 2018.

The results are mixed. For the first time in three years, the global score for democracy remained stable ... Forty-two countries experienced a decline in their total score compared with 2017; 48 registered an increase in total score. But as a percentage of the world's population, fewer people lived in some form of democracy (47.7% in 2018 compared with 49.3% in 2017).

The 2019 report noted that its measure of “political participation” has registered improvements during the past decade, while other components of its democracy index had declined. This was true in most regions of the world, and particularly with political participation of women. The report concluded that the decline in democracy may now be at a turning point as a result of this increase in political participation.

Freedom House

Since 1972, Freedom House has published an annual *Freedom in the World* report that rates countries in three broad categories: “Free,” “Partly Free,” and “Not Free.”

[Freedom House's 2020 Report](#) recorded the 14th consecutive year of decline in global freedom.

The gap between setbacks and gains widened compared with 2018, as individuals in 64 countries experienced deterioration in their political rights and civil liberties while those in just 37 experienced improvements. The negative pattern affected all regime types, but the impact was most visible near the top and the bottom of the scale. More than half of the countries that were rated

“Free” or “Not Free” in 2009 have suffered a net decline in the past decade.

Ethnic, religious, and other minority groups have borne the brunt of government abuses in both democracies and authoritarian states. The Indian government has taken its Hindu nationalist agenda to a new level with a succession of policies that abrogate the rights of different segments of its Muslim population, threatening the democratic future of a country long seen as a potential bulwark of freedom in Asia and the world. Attacks on the rights of immigrants continue in other democratic states, contributing to a permissive international environment for further violations. China pressed ahead with one of the world’s most extreme programs of ethnic and religious persecution, and increasingly applied techniques on the general population and even to foreign countries that were first tested on minorities. The progression illustrated how violations of minority rights erode the institutional and conventional barriers that protect freedom for all individuals in a given society.

The unchecked brutality of autocratic regimes and the ethical decay of democratic powers are combining to make the world increasingly hostile to fresh demands for better governance. A striking number of new citizen protest movements have emerged over the past year, reflecting the inexhaustible and universal desire for fundamental rights. However, these movements have in many cases confronted deeply entrenched interests that are able to endure considerable pressure and are willing to use deadly force to maintain power. The protests of 2019 have so far failed to halt the overall slide in global freedom, and without greater support and solidarity from established democracies, protesters are more likely to succumb to authoritarian reprisals.

The following graph illustrates the changing

pattern from increasing country-level freedom to decreasing freedom during the past 30 years.

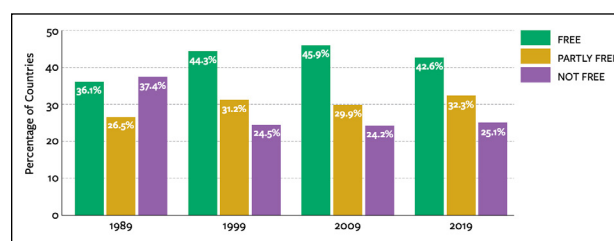


Figure 4.2 After years of major gains, the share of “Free” countries has declined over the past decade, while the share of “Not Free” countries has risen.

Source: [Freedom In The World 2020](#)

Between 1989 and 2009 the share of “Free” countries grew from 36 to 46 percent, but then declined to less than 43 percent by 2019.

The Global Freedom Index, thus, does not show the likelihood of a shift back toward increasing freedom in the world anytime soon.

Assessment

In summary, there was not a resurgence of increasingly democratic governments in 2019, in either the Economist or Freedom House indices. But from the Economist Index and other sources, there appears to be a strong popular will to move in such a direction. 2020 may in fact prove to be the year in which that will is transformed into an upturn in world democracy.

It is still too soon to tell. What happens in the United States, culminating in the November presidential elections, may be a critical bellwether for democratic tendencies around the world.



Measure 5

Population

Key questions: What is the estimated rate of worldwide population growth? Is this rate increasing or decreasing?

Importance of this measure: The more people on the planet, the greater the pressure we put on finite resources and the quality of the environment. If we can slow the rate of population growth, and eventually reduce it to zero – through non-coercive means – we can more easily improve the quality of life of all humans with less danger of degrading the environment.

The United Nations [World Population Prospects 2019](#) estimates that the world's population will rise from 7.7 billion in 2019 to 10.9 billion by 2100.

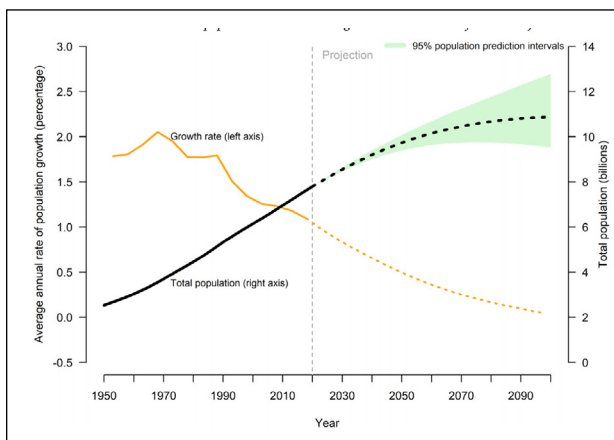


Figure 5.1 Population size and annual growth rate for the world: estimates, 1950-2020, and medium variant projection with 95% prediction intervals, 2020-2100. Source: [World Population Prospects 2019](#)

Just two years previously, the UN's 2017 report

projected a 2100 population of 11.2 billion – 300 million more people than the 2019 estimate.

Why the difference? As the UN itself observed: Birth rates have “fallen markedly.”

Unfortunately, the UN's population projections have a long history of being on the high side. For example, its 1958 projection for the world's population in 2000 was overestimated by more than 200 million people.

One can draw two main conclusions from the UN's track record on population projections.

- The Population Division, housed in the UN's Department of Economic and Social Affairs, appears to have a bias toward underestimating the world's long-term decline in birth rates.
- There appears to be a disconnect between the Population Division, on one side, and the UN Population Fund, the Division of Sustainable Development Goals, and other UN agencies that support and carry out programs related to reproductive health education, access to birth control, and improved economic well-being that all play key roles in long-term decreases in birth rates.

For example, in a [2014 report](#), the Guttmacher Institute and the UN Population Fund estimated that there were more than 200 million women in developing countries who “want to prevent or delay pregnancy but do not have access to contraceptives.” If the UN, in cooperation with international and national partners, is successful in meeting the birth-control needs of these and other

women, there would be a huge multi-generational impact on population growth. However, there is no reference in the reports of the Population Division to the role that such a campaign would have on its projections.

Demographers outside of the UN Population Division have done a better job of taking into account the interaction between reproductive health initiatives, education, and population growth. For example, The [World Population International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis](#) (WP) comment that, “The UN and IIASA population projections use very different approaches for defining the assumptions underlying future fertility and mortality trajectories.”

There is considerable disagreement between UN and WC-IIASA (WP) projections. Even the medium projections vary significantly between the two institutions: The UN projects a population in Africa of 4.5 billion [in 2100] while WC-IIASA projects a population of only 2.6 billion. This difference of 2 billion is almost as large as the difference between the projection for the global

population by the UN (11.2 billion in 2100) and by WC-IIASA (9 billion in 2100).

These different population-growth estimates are enormous, with the UN projecting 3.3 billion more people on the planet by 2100 than the World Population Institute. (Note that these WP projections don’t include reproductive health initiatives outside of Africa. These initiatives would very probably make the discrepancy between the two projections even greater.)

Assessment

The UN population report is methodologically flawed in its projection of birthrates, and strategically flawed in its failure to take into account the ability of women, couples, communities, countries, and international bodies like the UN to “bend the population curve” downward. WP provides an example of an approach to population projections that does factor in the potential impact of improvements in reproductive health in significantly reducing the rate of population growth.



Measure 6

Quality of life

Key questions: Overall, are humans living healthier and more economically secure lives than in the past? In recent years, to what extent are these trends improving or declining?

Importance of this measure: A decent quality of

life for all humans is a fundamental international goal embodied in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.

There are many ways to measure changes in quality of life around the world. In this report,

we have selected five criteria – poverty, hunger, education, child mortality, and maternal mortality – as our primary indicators.

The Cooperative Society Project's [March 2019 eNewsletter](#) described the UN's Millennium Development Goal and Sustainable Development Goal programs, designed to achieve a number of major quality-of-life and other goals between 1990 and 2030.

Overall, these United Nations programs have done very well in addressing these goals since 1990. However, improvement has slowed in the past couple of years.

Poverty

According to a [May 2019 report](#) from the UN's Economic and Social Council:

The decline of global extreme poverty continues, but has slowed. The deceleration indicates that the world is not on track to achieve the target of less than three percent of the world living in extreme poverty by 2030. People who continue to live in extreme poverty face deep, entrenched deprivation often exacerbated by violent conflicts and vulnerability to disasters.

The report continues:

The share of the world population living in extreme poverty declined to 10 percent in 2015, down from 16 percent in 2010 and 36 percent in 1990. However, the pace of poverty reduction is decelerating, with a “nowcast” of 8.6 percent in 2018. Moreover, baseline projections suggest that 6 percent of the world population will still be living in extreme poverty in 2030, missing the target of ending poverty.

Hunger

The same UN report goes on to say:

An estimated 821 million people – approximately 1 in 9 people in the world – were undernourished in 2017, up from

784 million in 2015. This represents a worrying rise in world hunger for a third consecutive year after a prolonged decline. Africa remains the continent with the highest prevalence of undernourishment, affecting one-fifth of its population (more than 256 million people).

Child mortality

Some good news from the report on child mortality:

The under-5 mortality rate fell to 39 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2017, a 6.7 percent reduction from 42 deaths in 2015, and an overall reduction of 49 percent from 77 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2000. The total number of under-5 deaths dropped to 5.4 million in 2017 from 9.8 million in 2000. Still, most of these deaths were from preventable causes and almost half, or 2.5 million, occurred in the first month of life – the most crucial period for child survival. The global neonatal mortality rate has continued to decline after a long downward trend from 31 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2000 to 18 in 2017, a 41-percent reduction.

Maternal mortality

From [another UN report](#):

The global maternal mortality ratio has fallen from 342 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in 2000 to 211 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2017. In many countries, maternal deaths have fallen as women have gained access to family planning and skilled-birth attendance with backup emergency obstetric care. Some countries have halved their maternal deaths in the space of a decade.

But much more must be done. High rates of maternal mortality persist, particularly in impoverished communities. Of the hundreds of thousands of women who died during pregnancy or childbirth in 2017, approximately 86 percent lived in

sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia.

Overall health assessment

The May 2019 Economic and Social Council Report concludes:

Major progress has been made in improving the health of millions of people, increasing life expectancy, reducing maternal and child mortality and fighting against leading communicable diseases. However, progress has stalled or is not happening fast enough with regard to addressing major diseases, such as malaria and tuberculosis, while at least half the global population does not have access to essential health services and many of those who do suffer undue financial hardship, potentially pushing them into extreme poverty. Concerted efforts are required to achieve universal health coverage and sustainable financing for health, to address the growing burden of non-communicable diseases, including mental health, and to tackle antimicrobial resistance and determinants of health such as air pollution and inadequate water and sanitation.

Education

According to a [2019 UNESCO report](#), 258 million youth between the ages of six and 17 were not in school in 2018. Although, this is a marked improvement from 376 million youth who were out of school in 2000, progress is not anywhere near on track to meet the goal of universal education by 2030.

In addition, just being in school is not enough. As [another UNESCO report](#) shows: In 2017, “more than half of children and adolescents are not meeting minimum proficiency standards in reading and mathematics.”

Assessment

There appears to be three main causes of the slowdown in accomplishing the quality-of-life measures targeted by the UN and The

Cooperative Society Project.

- One of these causes is a reduction in commitment and coordination among government leaders during the past few years. The Trump administration, in particular, has ceased to be a prominent advocate for the accomplishment of these UN goals, and of the UN in general. The administration is not alone in this neglect, but because of the historical leadership role of the US in supporting the United Nations, the effects of its current lack of action are far-reaching.
- A second major factor affecting reduced commitments to UN quality-of-life goals may very well be the sheer [number of goals and objectives](#) that the UN is trying to accomplish by 2030. Altogether, there are 17 goals, subdivided into 169 targets that were established in 2015 for completion by 2030. It is very difficult to establish and maintain enthusiastic support for, and financial commitment to, such a huge and diverse agenda. UN members may accomplish more by highlighting a small number of key goals rather than attempting to achieve such a broad array of goals in a short period of time.
- A third factor is the presence of the elephant in the room called climate change. The effects of human-caused global warming are already contributing to weather-related disasters around the world in the form of record-high land and ocean temperatures, droughts, catastrophic fires, major precipitation events, and other problems. Clearly there are many very worthwhile goals embodied in the UN Sustainable Development Program, but, far and away, the negative consequences of global warming far outweigh, and often contribute to, the difficulties in achieving other sustainable development goals. The fact that the US – the world’s largest per-capita carbon emitter – is withdrawing from the Paris Agreement on Climate Change also sets a terrible example for other countries. (The next section of the report, Environment, focuses on how well we are addressing this enormous problem on a worldwide scale.)



Measure 7

Environment

Key questions: Are human actions worsening or improving the environment? In particular, what is the current status and projected impact of global warming?

Importance of this measure: The quality of the environment affects the health of humans, other animals, and plants. If we degrade our climate, we harm all forms of life. In particular, the emission of greenhouse gases, primarily caused by humans, could cause major damage to the earth and its inhabitants in the 21st century.

The latest news on climate change is not good. 2020 began with the Earth's [warmest January on record](#). The same report shows that the past five years are also the warmest years ever recorded, with 2019 as the second warmest. [Catastrophic wildfires](#) have devastated parts of Australia, Russia, the United States, and other countries. Flooding, storms, hurricanes, drought, and extreme heat continue to kill thousands of people every year, and in 2019 caused over \$100 billion in damage.

[The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) (IPCC) has determined that, to avoid even more catastrophic and possibly irreversible increases in these kinds of severe weather events (as well as sea-level rise, large-scale displacement, increased famine and conflict, ecosystem destruction, and increased species extinction) warming should be limited to less than 1.5°C above pre-industrial temperatures. In 2019, the global average

temperature was 1.15°C above pre-industrial temperatures.

In the fall of 2016, the nations of the world enacted [The Paris Agreement](#), with the primary goal of “holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.” In order to keep temperatures below 1.5°C, the [United Nations Environment Program](#) (UNEP) has set a goal of reducing greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions to 25 billion metric tons of carbon (GtCO₂) per year by 2030, with continued reductions to follow.

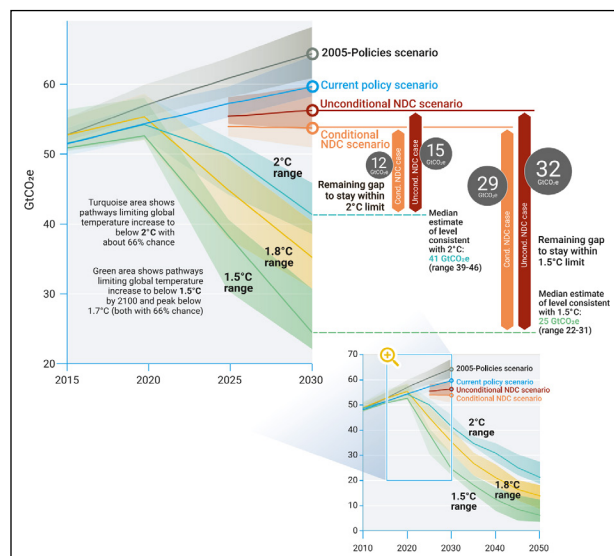


Figure 7.1 Global GHG emissions under different scenarios and the emissions gap by 2030. Source: [Emissions Gap Report 2019](#)

In 2018, GHG emissions reached a record high

of 55.3 GtCO₂e. In order to achieve the goal set by UNEP, we need to reduce our annual GHG emissions by about 30 billion metric tons between 2020 and 2030, or by about 3 billion metric tons each year. The good news is that UNEP feels that this is feasible:

Emissions could be reduced by up to 30 to 40 GtCO₂e per annum, with costs below US\$100/tCO₂e [metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent]. It is remarkable that a large part of this potential comes from just six relatively standardized categories: solar and wind energy, efficient appliances, efficient passenger cars, afforestation and stopping deforestation. These six categories present a combined potential of up to 22 GtCO₂e per annum.

Furthermore, the UN has determined that climate-change mitigation will largely have positive synergistic effects with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 (eradicating poverty and hunger, better health and education, increased equality, etc.).

But for the world to achieve this greenhouse-gas-reduction goal, immediate, widespread, and forceful action is required, especially in those countries with the largest impacts, like the United States. However, President Donald Trump has formally begun the process of withdrawing the United States from the Paris Agreement, which is scheduled to go into effect in November 2020.

The [UN Climate Change Conference](#) (COP25) took place in Madrid in mid-December 2019. The event saw some progress made by the private

sector, and by some national, regional, and local governments. However, there was widespread disappointment that no overall consensus was reached on increased national climate commitments.

An exception to this lack of progress was the European Union's commitment to carbon neutrality by 2050. Seventy-three nations also announced that they will submit enhanced climate-action plans in time for the 2020 Climate Change Conference at the end of 2020.

[The Rhodium Group](#) announced a sliver of good news in early January 2020. Greenhouse gas emissions decreased in 2019 in the United States by 2.1 percent from its 2018 level. The decrease is almost entirely due to a drop in coal consumption. Slightly higher-percentage drops during the next six years could put the U.S. on target to reach the preliminary Paris Agreement goal of a reduction of 26-28 percent below 2005 levels by 2025.

Assessment

The recent increase in severe weather-related events around the world – at least partly attributable to global warming – the lack of progress in reducing carbon emissions, and the continued weak commitments of many countries to strong carbon-reduction policies are all worrying events. However, there are also some signs of optimism, such as science-based projections that we can still achieve 2030 carbon-emission-reduction goals, and increased commitments from the private sector, some countries, and sub-national government entities to accelerate their involvement.

Length shows strength of connection



The overall size of the coloured bars depict the relative potential for synergies and trade-offs between the sectoral mitigation options and the SDGs.

Shades show level of confidence



Very High

Low

The shades depict the level of confidence of the assessed potential for **Trade-offs/Synergies**.

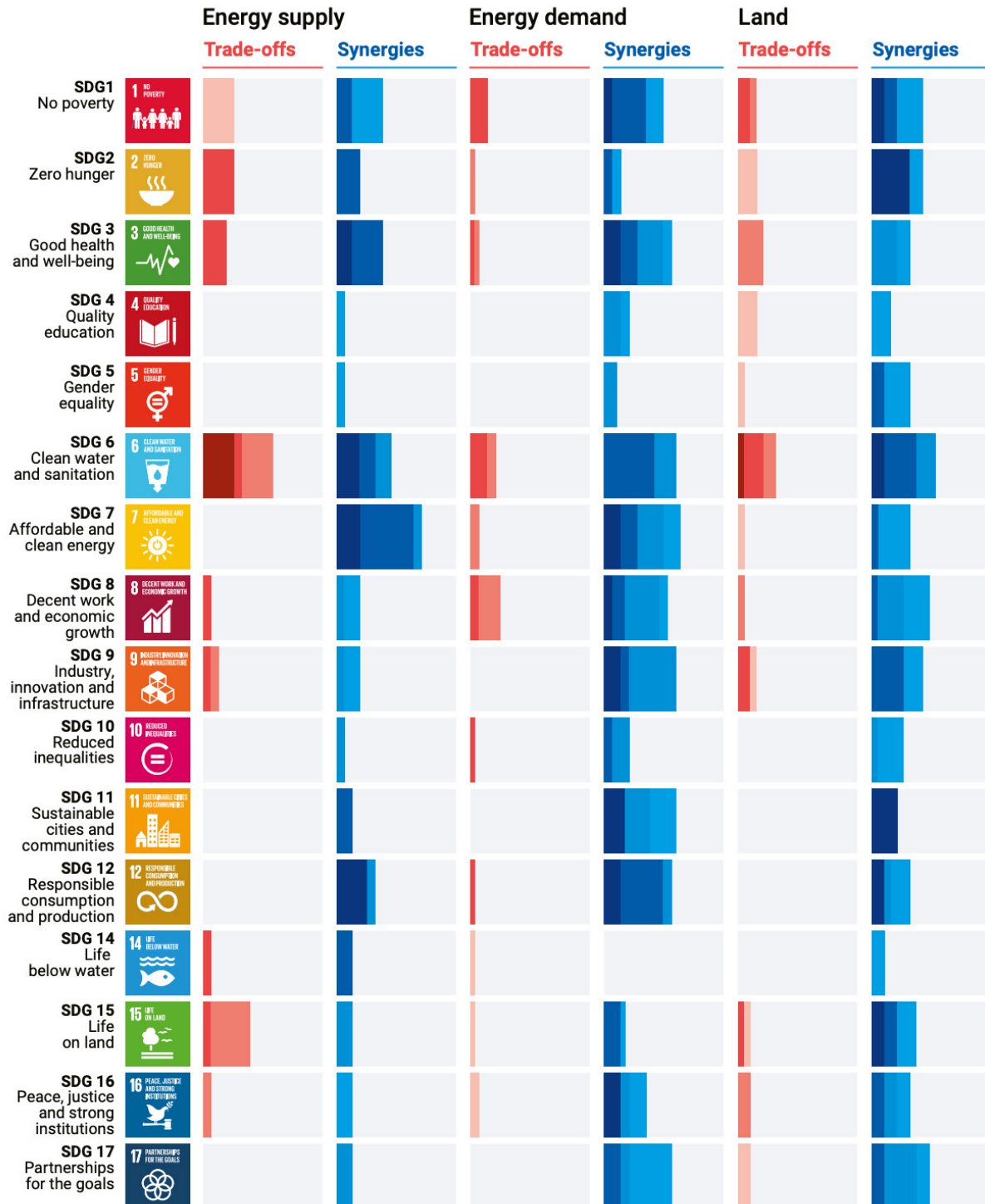


Figure 7.2 Potential synergies and trade-offs between the sectoral climate change mitigation options and the SDGs.

Source: [Emissions Gap Report 2019](#)

Conclusion

Findings

The Cooperative Society 2020 Report presents mixed messages on whether or not we are moving toward a more cooperative society.

International economic power and wealth are still highly concentrated, although there appears to be slow movement toward reduced wealth inequality and away from extreme poverty.

Deaths from armed conflict and from intentional homicides have both continued to decrease gradually in recent years.

Democracy has ebbed slowly in the last 15 years or so after substantial growth since the end of World War II, but there are some signs that this decline may be at a turning point.

There is inconsistent data about population growth because of different assumptions about the rate at which women and couples in Africa and other developing countries will increase their adoption of birth control techniques in the 21st century. Those demographers who project more rapid adoption estimate that there will be about 9 billion people on the planet by 2100. The UN demographers who project slower adoption of birth control procedures estimate that there will be about 11 billion people by 2100.

The quality of life continues to improve around the world, but at a slower pace than in previous years.

The reduction of carbon dioxide emissions is not yet occurring at a fast enough pace to head off catastrophic changes in our environment. However, a number of scientists calculate that it is not too late to avoid catastrophe if we rapidly accelerating climate change actions in the next few years.

Where do we go from here?

Several recent changes related to The Cooperative Society indicate that we may be at a positive turning point.

In particular, we may be at the beginning of a resurgence in democracy around the world. The Economist Intelligence Unit and other sources indicate a recent increase in political participation in many countries.

It is still too soon to tell whether or not this increase will result in a shift to more democratic countries. What happens in the United States, culminating in the November presidential elections, may be a critical bellwether for democratic tendencies around the world.

If a movement toward greater democracy does occur, all of the other six measures related to the cooperative society could be positively affected. This is the case, because democratic governments are more likely to enact domestic and international policies that reduce inequalities and violent deaths from conflict and homicide; support programs that are beneficial to low-and-medium income people (including reproductive health programs); and accelerate the response of national governments and International organizations to moving toward net zero carbon emissions by 2030.

However, we must conclude with a note of caution. Political participation may be a precursor of increased democracy and positive movement toward other components of the cooperative society, but there is no guarantee that the recent uptick in political participation will result in widespread political reform.