



The Secular Circular

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

www.SBHumanists.org

MAY 2023

Please join us for our May speaker meeting on Zoom!

The History and Theology of Mormonism: Contextualizing *The Book of Mormon* Musical

Our Program: In this talk, we will explore the history and theology of Mormonism, contextualizing it within the framework of the popular musical, *The Book of Mormon*.

We will delve into the origins of the Latter-Day Saints movement, tracing its roots back to Joseph Smith and the publication of the *Book of Mormon*. We will also explore the unique beliefs and practices of the LDS church, such as the doctrine of eternal families and the practice of baptisms for the dead.

Additionally, we will examine how these beliefs are portrayed in the musical, and how the show's creators use humor to comment on the more controversial aspects of Mormonism.

By the end of this talk, we hope to provide a deeper understanding of the history and theology of Mormonism, and how it relates to the popular cultural phenomenon that is *The Book of Mormon* musical.



Assoc. Professor Richard Phillips

Our Speaker: Richard Phillips is a social scientist specializing in the study of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the LDS, or Mormon Church).

He grew up in a typical Mormon household in Utah and served a full-time mission for the church.

His work examines the evolution of Mormon identity and solidarity, particularly among the descendants of the original pioneers that settled in the Great Basin before Utah became a state. He received a PhD in sociology from Rutgers University, and is currently Associate Professor of Sociology and Religious Studies at the University of North Florida in Jacksonville Florida.



When: Saturday May 20, 3:00 p.m. PST

Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88193881833>.

The State of The World Scorecard: Seeking Insight and Power from Measurement

4-15-23

By Robert Bernstein

Dave Flattery is a board member of HSSB and is also the spouse of HSSB President Judy Flattery. Dave is a statistics nerd, which I can relate to.

He spoke for almost two hours about the state of the world in numbers. He kindly shared his slides, which I have posted [here](#).

The talk was edited to 1 hour 20 minutes and can be viewed [here](#) on our HSSB YouTube channel.

Before I begin to summarize his talk, I need to give some background that I found essential. The State of the World Scorecard has been prepared each year since 2006 for the Conference for Global Transformation. The conference has been held each May since 2000 and is sponsored by Landmark Worldwide, (formerly Landmark Education). Landmark

offers personal development programs based in part on Werner Erhard's est (Erhard Seminar Training) programs from the 1970s. The Flatterys did est training back in the 1980s and found it valuable. The Landmark programs allow people to understand themselves more fully to be more effective in life. When they do, they often find themselves wanting to make a positive difference in the world, and Landmark supports them in doing so through its continuing educational program offerings and the annual conference.

Graduates of Landmark have created a number of organizations over the years with that goal in mind. One that I had heard of is The Hunger Project, which was chartered in 1977 with a goal of ending hunger in 25 years (as measured by declining infant mortality). The end of hunger was not fully achieved but the organization is continuing to lead community-based development programs in 13 countries facing issues with hunger, while monitoring declining infant mortality data, which is a key measure of persistent, systemic hunger in a community.

How the Measures Align with Humanist Principles*

We are committed to the application of reason and science to the understanding of the universe and to the solving of human problems.	Why we measure, thoughtfully and objectively
We believe in an open and pluralistic society and that democracy is the best guarantee of protecting human rights from authoritarian elites and repressive majorities.	Political Rights
We cultivate the arts of negotiation and compromise as a means of resolving differences and achieving mutual understanding.	Peace Index
We are concerned with securing justice and fairness in society and with eliminating discrimination and intolerance.	Civil Liberties, Gender Gap
We attempt to transcend divisive parochial loyalties based on race, religion, gender, nationality, creed, class, sexual orientation, or ethnicity, and strive to work together for the common good of humanity.	Civil Liberties, Gender Gap
We want to protect and enhance the earth, to preserve it for future generations, and to avoid inflicting needless suffering on other species.	Environmental Measures
We believe in the cultivation of moral excellence.	Corruption Perceptions
We respect the right to privacy. Mature adults should be allowed to fulfill their aspirations, to express their sexual preferences, to exercise reproductive freedom, to have access to comprehensive and informed health-care, and to die with dignity.	Child Mortality, HDI
We believe in the fullest realization of the best and noblest that we are capable of as human beings.	Happiness Index, Giving Index, Poverty, HDI



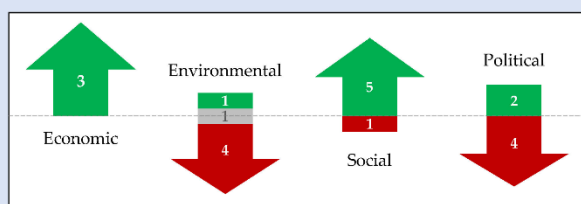
To support the Conference for Global Transformation, a team of Landmark graduates prepares the Scorecard for presentation at the conference. They do not do the basic research themselves; instead they collect data from reputable sources in order to measure progress on a variety of social, political, economic, and environmental indicators. I hope this back story helps to understand what Dave presented.

Dave started his talk showing how the Scorecard Measures align with Humanist principles and the Affirmations of Humanism by Paul Kurtz. [The slide](#) explains it well. The first principle listed is “We are committed to the application of reason and science to the understanding of the universe and to the solving of human problems.” Dave commented, “That is why we measure, thoughtfully, and as objectively as possible.”

The [Scorecard Measures align](#) well with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) but there are differences. Sometimes the SDG measure is used directly; in other cases, another measure is used if, for example, the UN data has a high fraction of missing raw data from member countries or if the UN is measuring an input variable rather than an outcome. The Scorecard tracks outcome data.

Overall, Dave noted trends in four broad domains. Each domain contained sub-measurements. Results over the past 22 years as defined by the measuring organization are:

Overall Global Trends for the Last 22 Years



Economic: 3/3 measures improved

Environmental: 4 down, 1 neutral (not significantly different than zero), 1 up

Social: 5 up, 1 down

Political: 4 down, 2 up

SDG	Scorecard
No Poverty	●
Zero Hunger	○
Good Health & Well Being	◐
Quality Education	◐
Gender Equality	●
Clean Water & Sanitation	◐
Affordable & Clean Energy	●
Decent Work and Economic Growth	◐
Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure	○
Reduced Inequalities	◐
Sustainable Cities & Communities	◐
Responsible Consumption & Production	◐
Climate Action	●
Life Below Water	◐
Life on Land	◐
Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions	●
Partnerships for the Goals	○

● Scorecard metric

◐ Component/partial

○ Not measured

Overlap between United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the Scorecard Measures.

In other words, Economic and Social measures are solidly improving. Environmental and Political measures are solidly declining.

Dave repeatedly emphasized that a lot is lost in this aggregated information and that it is important to look at the details in the underlying data. Each of his graphs identified the source of the data and indicates what the ‘good’ direction is on the Y-axis. A red border on the graph indicates a statistically significant undesirable trend, and a green border indicates a statistically significant desirable trend.

He first reviewed the **Economic Measures**. Measuring poverty is challenging. Both the percent of the global population and total population living in extreme poverty (threshold

of \$2.15/day) has declined steadily over the last 40 years. At the poverty threshold of \$6.85/day, percentages are declining but the total population below this threshold is increasing because the population is increasing.

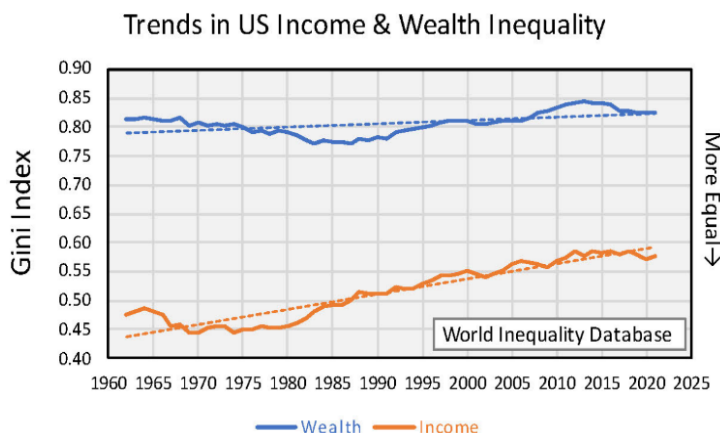
Dave noted that it takes fewer resources to get out of poverty in a poor country than in a rich country.

The US has a low poverty rate when measured on a global threshold of \$3.65 per day, but that threshold makes little sense in the US. Dave noted that the poverty rate in the US is fairly flat.

Overall, South Asia is escaping poverty more quickly than Sub-Saharan Africa. Two billion people in the world live below the \$3.65/day poverty level.

The Scorecard only recently included the Gini Coefficient, a measure of income or wealth inequality. The Gini Index ranges from 0 for full equality to 1 for full inequality.

Note that wealth inequality is generally considered a bigger problem than income inequality. The latter is transient, but wealth accumulates over time and across generations. A small income inequality can grow to a large wealth inequality. It is also harder to redistribute wealth than income, so wealth inequality is more persistent.



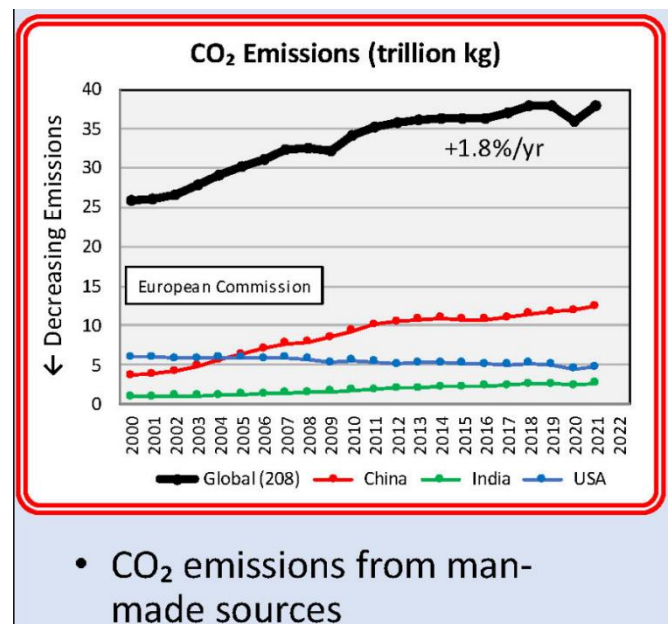
In the US, both income inequality and wealth inequality are heading in the 'wrong' direction (more inequality).

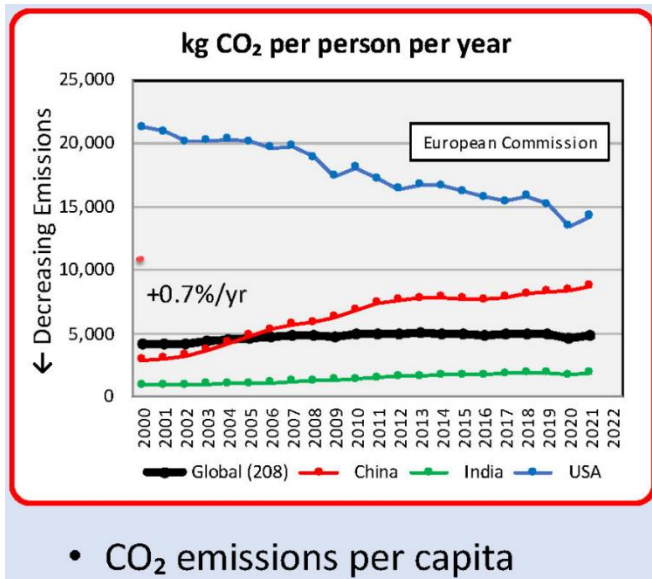
The Netherlands has the lowest level of wealth inequality in the world (Gini index = 0.64) and South Africa has the highest level of wealth inequality (Gini Index = 0.96), with half of the South African population owing more than they own, and 1% of their population fully owning 55% of the nation's available wealth.

Dave then reviewed the **Environmental Measures**. He used the analogy of us 'digging ourselves into a hole' with carbon emissions that are warming the planet. US emissions are starting to decline after decades of increase, but, China and India emissions (along with the composite of the rest of the world) are rising.

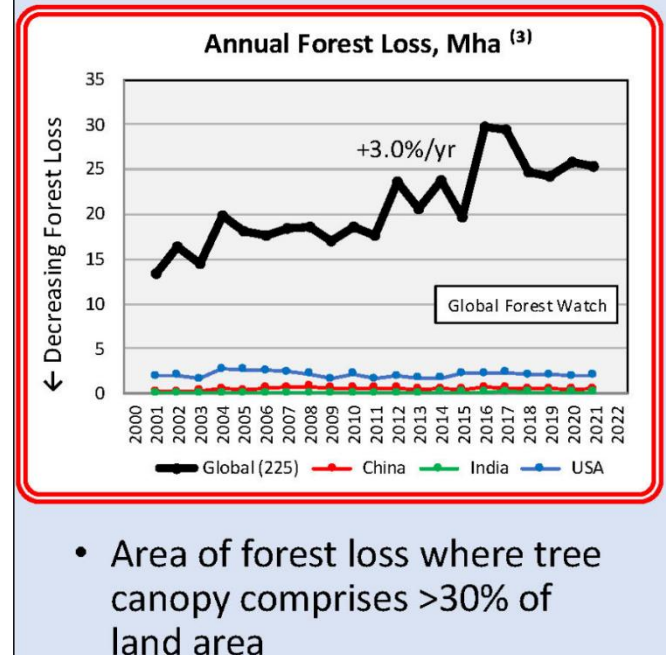
In this analogy, the hole we find ourselves in keeps getting deeper and we are digging at a faster rate globally.

We first have to slow down our rate of digging and then we have to start filling in the hole.

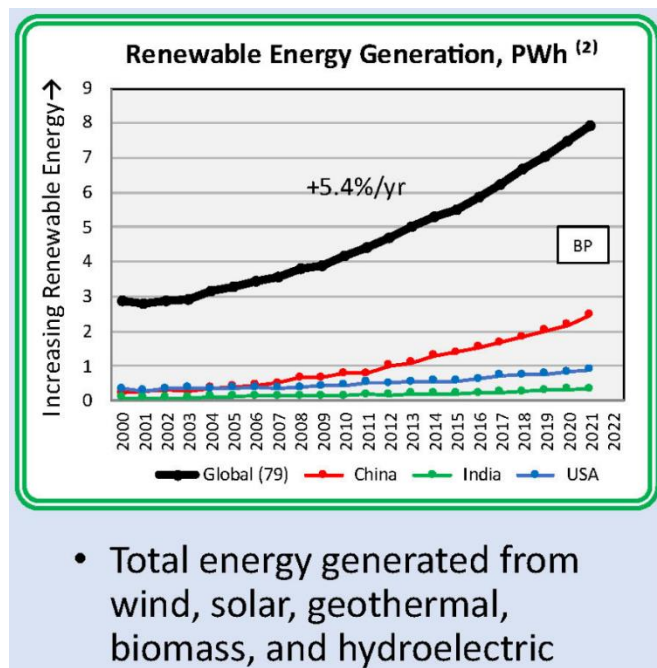




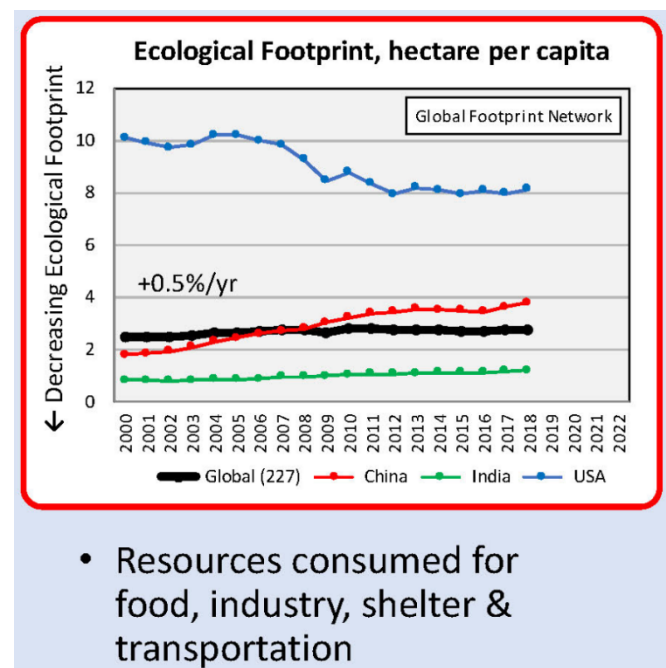
Some good news: renewable energy production is increasing at 5.4% per year globally, but China is still building new coal-fired power plants. Forest loss is still rising at the rate of 3% per year.



The Environmental Performance Index is a composite of 29 measures, including emissions and biodiversity. The measure is a bit erratic but has been declining significantly since 2016.



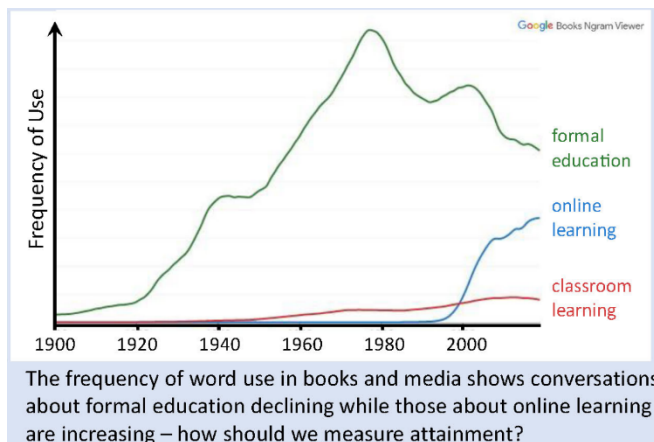
The US ecological footprint per person is declining, but is still unsustainable. If everyone consumed resources like the US, it would take approximately five earths to support the total global population at the US standard of living.



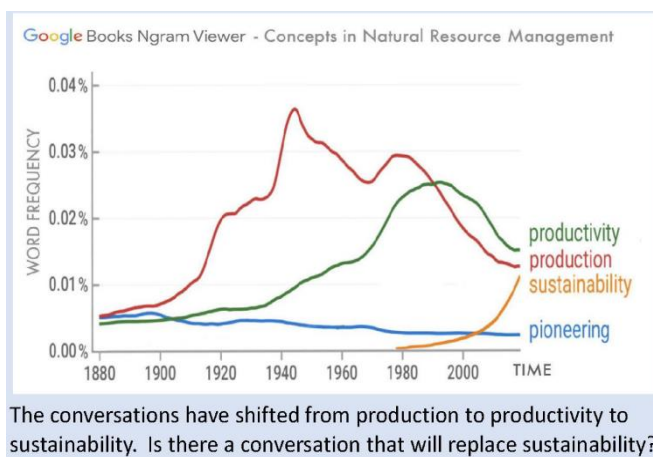
Dave offered an intriguing approach to anticipate where we may be heading: by measuring what people are writing about in books, magazines, and on the internet ('Measuring Conversation') using Google ngram

viewer. This looks at the prevalence of English words and phrases going back over 100 years. This may be a leading indicator of new ideas, practices, and priorities.

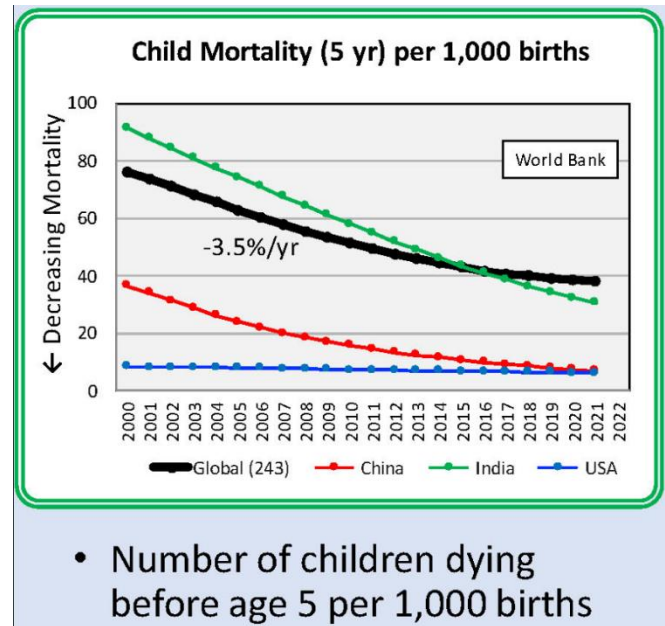
For example, this graph shows a decline in the use of the phrase 'formal education' and an increase in the use of the phrase 'online learning' that predates the pandemic. Is this a tool that can be useful in anticipating trends?



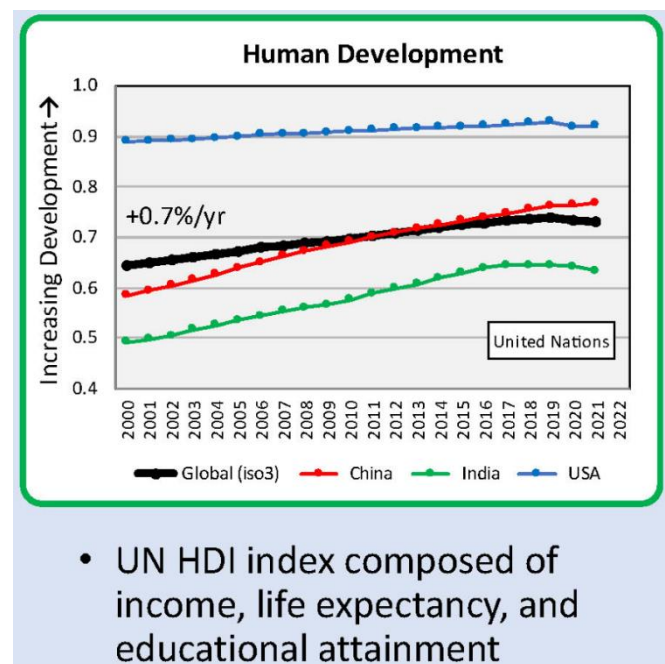
A shift to online learning can help developing countries leapfrog to better education. There is also a growing emphasis on 'sustainability' at least in the words people are expressing in writing.



Dave then spoke about the **Social Measures**. Child mortality has been dropping worldwide at a rate of -3.5% per year since 2000. This is one of the measures used by The Hunger Project as an indicator of chronic, persistent hunger.



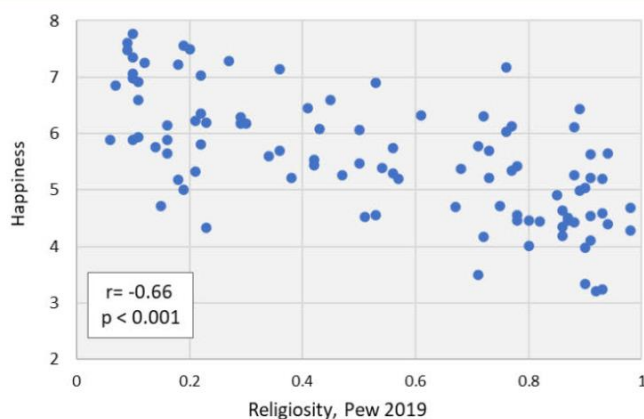
The Human Development Index (HDI) includes income, life expectancy, and educational attainment. It has been rising steadily for over 30 years but declined over the last two years, possibly due to the COVID pandemic.



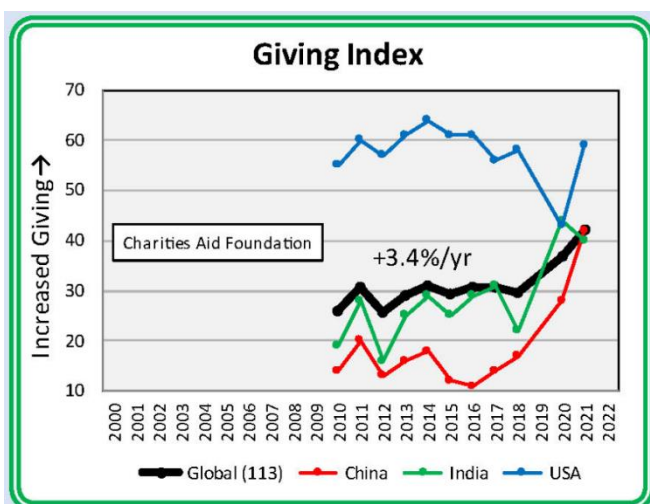
With the projected recovery time, this represents a setback of about 5 years of progress in human development.

Overall, World Happiness is fairly flat or declining slightly. Dave noted that higher levels of happiness are positively correlated with higher levels of education and with higher levels of GDP. Countries with more education and higher GDPs tend to have happier citizens.

Lower levels of happiness are correlated with higher levels of religiosity in a country. Correlation does not imply causality so it is not clear if unhappy people turn to religion, or if religiosity in a country leads to unhappiness, or if something else is operating in the background impacting both measures.



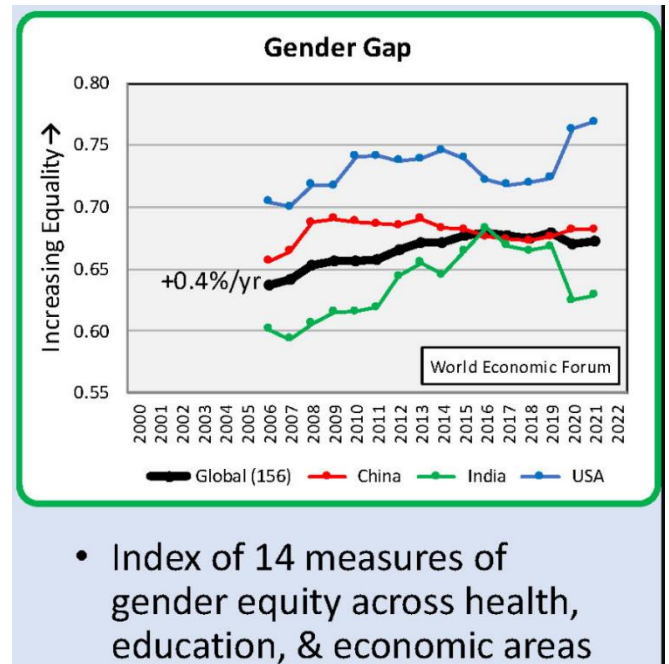
The Giving Index is rising at 3.4% globally, meaning that people are helping each other



- Index of contributions of money or time to benefit others

directly with contributions of time and/or money.

Globally, the Gender Gap is closing again after a setback during 2019-2020.

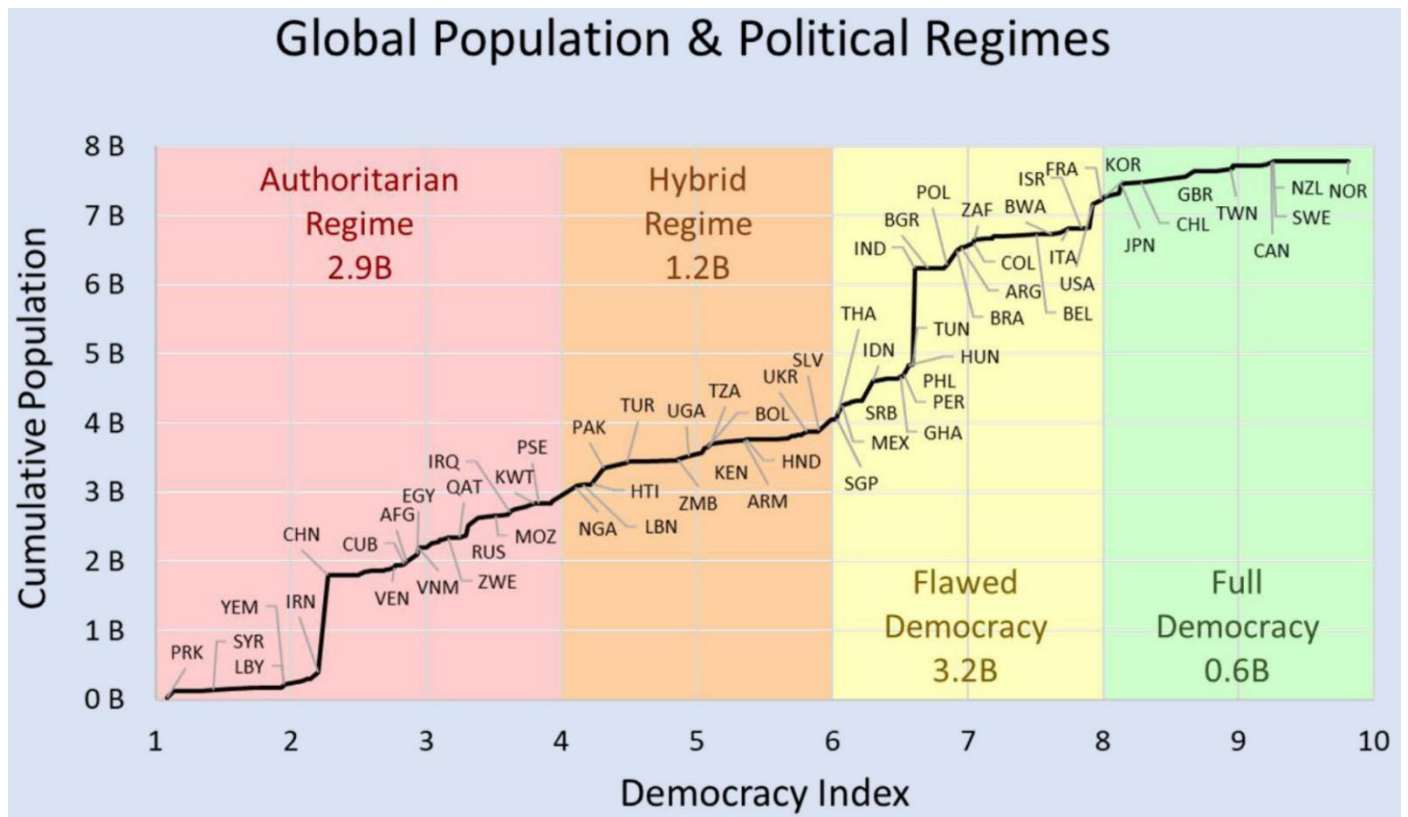


Dave continued to speak about the **Political Measures**. Freedom on the Internet is a new measure and it is getting worse. China is particularly bad at restricting internet freedom.

Political rights and civil liberties are also getting worse. Corruption perceptions are slightly improving. The US is good, but getting worse.

The slide marked 'Another View of Political Rights' was one of the most interesting for me. It shows four political domains: Authoritarian, Hybrid, Flawed Democracy, and Full Democracy.

Notably, the US is in the Flawed Democracy category! Mexico and India are also listed as flawed democracies. Interesting to see that former dictatorships Korea and Taiwan are in the Full Democracy category. The source of these data is the *Economist Intelligence Unit, 2020*, which publishes an annual Democracy Index.



Based on [this measure](#), less than half the world population lives in a democracy (full or flawed).

Dave then moved on to cover a couple of special topics.

He noted to be careful of reading too much into data averages; averages can mask important details about the underlying data distributions. You may have to dig deeper than region or even state data to see what's really happening.

For example, the tiny District of Columbia (where I grew up) has the [highest percentage of residents with post-secondary education](#) in the country. That sounds great; however, when we look at educational attainment by zipcode within DC we find there is as much variation in educational attainment over those few miles than across state averages of the entire country.

Dave said it is often useful to look at notable outlier countries to learn what they may be doing especially well or especially poorly.

In general, higher levels of human development means consuming more global resources. What countries are doing the best job and the worst job of managing this trade-off for longer term sustainability?

Uruguay is a 'good' outlier: it is the only country in the world which has both a 'Very High Human Development Index' and whose population consumes a low, 'fair share' of global resources. Theoretically, if everyone lived like Uruguay does, the entire current global population could live sustainably at a high level of development on this one earth. All other countries either consume more than their fair share of resources or have low scores in their Human Development Index. [What can we learn from Uruguay?](#)

Conversely, United Arab Emirates (ARE on the graph) was another outlier, with a high Human Development Index, but consuming far more than their 'fair share' of global resources.

However, looking at their progress over time shows that they are making faster progress in reducing their environmental footprint than any

other country. [What can we learn from the United Arab Emirates?](#)

Looking for global bright spots across all the measures, the top 10 countries are in Europe or Oceania. The bottom 10 are all in Africa and Asia. [No country in North or South America makes either list.](#)

Highest 10		Lowest 10	
Iceland	0.88	Burkina Faso	0.38
Denmark	0.86	Myanmar	0.38
Norway	0.85	Ethiopia	0.37
New Zealand	0.83	Cameroon	0.37
Sweden	0.83	Chad	0.36
Finland	0.82	Iraq	0.36
Switzerland	0.81	Pakistan	0.35
Netherlands	0.81	Afghanistan	0.34
United Kingdom	0.80	Mali	0.34
Austria	0.80	Congo, Dem. Rep.	0.32
Others			
World	0.48	USA	0.65

Population growth rate drives many other metrics. Globally, population is still rising, but the rate of rise is flattening.

Dave noted that there are [two curves that match each other well over the last 3,000 years](#):

- 1) An aggregate of human development – prosperity, life expectancy, technological capability, democracy, and
- 2) Atmospheric concentration of CO₂

His final slide notes that although it is difficult to summarize so much complex data, he would summarize by saying that things are improving for most of humanity, but in a clearly unsustainable manner.

Dave emphasized that measurements themselves often cause a change in behavior, for example, the [Hawthorne Effect](#).

Ideally, this can lead to better future measures. His final slide also included references for follow up.

Finally, Dave said that good data are becoming more and more accessible. If there is something you care about, look for the data and track it. You'll be surprised what you can find with just a little digging.

And he encouraged us all to do so!

I Swear On The Pale Blue Dot!

Submitted by Dr. Andy Thomson

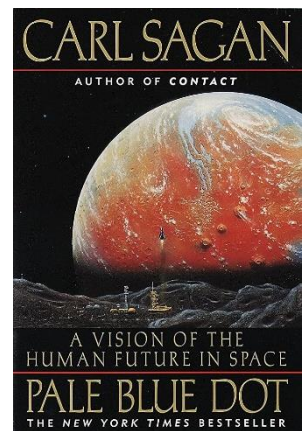
Dr. Thomson shared an inspiring [news article](#) from the U.S. edition of the UK's *Independent*, which describes how Makenzie Lystrup, the first woman in NASA's history to be appointed director of the Goddard Space Flight Center, took her oath this April 6th on a copy of Carl Sagan's 1994 book, *Pale Blue Dot* instead of using the *Bible*.



Dr. Makenzie Lystrup.
Source: NASA/Keegan Barber

Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space, is inspired by the famous Pale Blue Dot photograph of planet Earth taken in 1990 by the Voyager 1 space probe from a distance of about six billion kilometers.

"I'm humbled and honored to lead such an



amazing and diverse world-renowned team,” Dr Lystrup said.

“To build upon our legacy, I’m keenly focused on growing the next generation of innovators along with ensuring our team has the resources and tools to advance technologies and make new discoveries that boost the space economy and benefit us all,” she said.



Swearing in Dr. Makenzie Lystrup. Source: Dr. Jessie Christiansen twitter post, 4/6/23 @1:50pm

The article states the “The center is responsible for the oversight and execution of a \$4B portfolio, NASA pointed out. The center is also home to the US’s largest concentration of scientists, engineers, and technologists dedicated to Earth and space science.”

Congratulations Dr. Lystrup!

Axios Report: Our Lawmakers are More Religious Than We Are

Submitted by Wayne Beckman

On April 23rd, Russell Conreras reported in Axios.com that Congress and our state legislators are more religious overall than the people they represent, which leads to all sorts of legislative mischief.

For example, 90% of Congress professes to be Christian while only 65.4% of U.S. adults claim the same. In contrast, only 3.7% of Congress professes to be unaffiliated or “do not know” but

26.8% of U.S. adults are in the unaffiliated or “do not know” category.

The author claims that the two-party system with its partisan primaries, favors candidates who openly profess a faith, even as the number of religiously unaffiliated grows.

He goes on to describe how this discrepancy and misrepresentation contribute to the mismatch between how Americans feel about policies and issues such as abortion, LGBTQ rights, book bans, race relations, climate change, etc. and the laws which are enacted by their legislative representatives..

The article lists many examples of this disconnect.

There's an inherent bias in the political system toward religious elected officials, Azhar Majeed, director of government affairs for the Center for Inquiry, told Axios.

"It's an unpopular position to take to declare oneself to be nonreligious or nonbeliever or humanist, certainly to declare oneself an atheist or an agnostic."

This remains the case even as the country changes demographically, Majeed said.

[Note that Azhar Majeed, quoted in this article, will be speaking at the Center For Inquiry West on July 9. See Upcoming Events below for more details.]

Upcoming Events of Interest to Humanists

Submitted by Diane Krohn

- May 5-7: American Humanist Association 82nd Annual Conference, Denver, CO. Event is in-person and online. [AHA 82nd Annual Conference](#)

- May 10: Charles Montgomery. *Happy City: Transforming Our Lives Through Urban Design*. UCSB Arts & Lectures event. [Charles Montgomery](#)
- May 18: Maria Ressa: *How to Stand Up to a Dictator*. UCSB Arts & Lectures event. [Maria Ressa](#)
- May 21: Mick West: *The Grey Birds of UFOlogy*. Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles. [Mick West](#)
- May 28: Leo Igwe: *Advocacy Against Witch Hunting in Africa*. Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles. [Leo Igwe](#)
- June 18: Daniel Phelps: *Kentucky's Creation Museum and Ark Encounter: Anti-Science with Government Assistance*. Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles. [Daniel Phelps](#)
- July 9: Azhar Majeed: *Fighting for Science and Secular Rights in the Halls of Power*. Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles. [Azhar Majeed](#)

Pale Blue Dot By Matt Maley



"There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another, and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known." - Carl Sagan, 1994

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To Join or Donate to HSSB: Annual Membership dues are \$36 for an individual, \$60 for a couple, \$100 for a Society Supporter, and \$300 (or more) for a Society Patron. Dues payments and other donations can be made via PayPal (Paypal.me/SBHumanists) or check. Include your name and contact information when submitting payments. Make checks out to *Humanist Society of Santa Barbara* and mail to Mary Wilk, P.O. Box 30232, Santa Barbara, CA 93130. mwilk@cox.net. Dues, donations, and payments can also be remitted via this PayPal QR code. Once at the site, select 'Send' then log into your PayPal account to complete the transaction.:



Watch our speaker videos on [YouTube](#). Subscribe to our [Meetup](#) page to be notified of upcoming events.



HSSB Board Elections are happening this month. Look for your on-line ballot and cast your votes. Thank you for your support!



Humanist Society of Santa Barbara
P.O. Box 30232
Santa Barbara, CA 93130

HSSB Calendar

Tuesday May 16, 5:00 p.m. HSSB Board Meeting. Join as early as 4:45pm for socializing. Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83592300667>. Members always welcome to attend.

Saturday May 20, 3:00 p.m. Prof. Rick Phillips. *The History and Theology of Mormonism: Contextualizing The Book of Mormon Musical* . <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88193881833>.

Sunday May 21, 1pm. *The Book of Mormon Musical*. Granada Theater, Santa Barbara, CA

Tuesday June 13, 5:00 p.m. HSSB Board Meeting. Join as early as 4:45pm for socializing. Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83592300667>. Members always welcome to attend.

Saturday June 17, noon – 3pm. HSSB Summer Solstice Picnic. Stow Grove Park. \$10, bring a dish to pass.