

# Five Graphs That Will Change Your Mind About Poverty

Angus Deaton, the Nobel-prize winning economist (who also sits on the advisory board of [HumanProgress.org](http://HumanProgress.org)), recently reiterated his belief that ["on the whole the world is getting better"](#) if not, as he accepted, everywhere or for everyone at once. Perhaps that comes as no surprise, but the idea that the world is getting better in regards to poverty is actually a deeply unpopular view.

Ask most people about global poverty, and chances are that they'll say it is unchanged or getting worse. A survey released late last year found that 92 per cent of Americans believe the share of the world population in extreme poverty has either increased or stayed the same over the last two decades.

Americans aren't alone in that belief. Across all surveyed countries, an only slightly smaller majority " 87 per cent " believe that extreme poverty has risen or remained an intractable problem.

There are a number of [cultural and psychological explanations](#) for the persistence of such pessimism. Bad news makes for good headlines, and tends to dominate media coverage. Psychologically, people [tend to](#) idealize the past, and recall dramatic and unusual events more easily than steady long-term trends. They may also use pessimism as a means of virtue signaling.

Indeed, of those rare people who realize that extreme poverty has declined, almost all underestimate the extent of that decline. In fact, global poverty has halved over the past 20 years " but [only one person in 100](#) gets it right.

Unsurprisingly, people in areas that have seen the [most](#)

[dramatic reductions](#) in poverty are the most likely to be more aware of what's really going on. But even in China, where [hundreds of millions of people](#) have risen out of destitution over the last four decades, half of the population remains ignorant of the broader collapse in world poverty that has occurred within their lifetimes.