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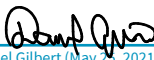


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The undersigned, appointed by the  
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The Illusion of Moral Decline

presented by Adam M. Mastroianni

candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy and hereby  
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The Illusion of Moral Decline

Adam M. Mastroianni

May 2021

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**Abstract**

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The Illusion of Moral Decline

A majority of Americans say that “addressing moral breakdown” should be a “top priority” of the government. Do people really think that morality has declined, and could they be right? Seven empirical studies and two meta-analyses suggest that a) indeed, people do believe that morality has declined and b) this perception is likely an illusion. A meta-analysis of surveys spanning 90 years, 44 countries, and 1.1 million participants reveals that large majorities perceive moral decline. Further studies show that people believe that decline has been happening at least since they were born, and that people today are less moral than people were even a few years ago. People attribute decline both to individuals getting worse over time and to worse cohorts replacing better ones. Another meta-analysis of 127 surveys spanning 4.4 million participants suggests this is an illusion, as indicators of morality have not changed over time. Finally, I propose a computational model that can explain why people think morality has declined even when it hasn't: people encounter mainly negative information about the people they don't know, but the negativity of that information fades over time, leading people to mistakenly believe that things have gotten worse. Three further studies provide support for this mechanism.

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## **Chapter I: Do people believe morality has declined?**

Donald Trump ended his 2017 inauguration speech with these four promises:

“Together, we will make America strong again. We will make America wealthy again. We will make America proud again. We will make America safe again, and yes, together, we will make we will make America great again.”

The most important word in these promises is not “strong,” “wealthy,” “proud,” “safe”, or even “great”. The most important word is “again.” With that simple word, Trump was invoking a seductive idea: things are bad now, but they used to be good, and they can be good once more. That idea was powerful enough to take a man like Trump—who had never held public office, was riddled with scandals and vehemently opposed even by some members of his own party—and catapult him into the White House.

I seek to understand that idea. The historian Arthur Herman (1999) called the idea of decline “the single most influential theme in culture and politics in the twentieth century,” and Trump’s election makes clear that influence is as strong as ever. Though historians have traced the various incarnations of this idea through modernity, social scientists have yet to plumb its depths. We have little idea who believes in decline, why they believe it, and even what, exactly, they think is declining.

I begin that work here by attempting to understand one potent formulation of the idea of decline: moral decline. In every year since pollsters started asking in 2002, over two-thirds of Americans have reported that “the state of moral values in this country” is “getting worse” (Gallup Organization, 2020). Americans today say that people are less respectful, less civil, and less polite than they used to be (Gallup Organization, 2020; Smith, Davern, Freese & Morgan, 2018). They said as much in the 90s (Washington Post/Henry J. Kaiser Family

Foundation/Harvard University, 1998), 80s (U.S. News and World Report, 1985), 70s (Gallup Organization, 1976), 60s (The Catholic Digest/Gallup Organization, 1965), and 50s (Ben Gaffin and Associates, 1952). They seem to have been as exasperated about moral decline 50 years ago as they are today—in 1964, 64% of Americans agreed that “moral standards are declining so quickly that something drastic must be done” (Potomac Associates/Gallup Organization, 1964).

If people are right that morality has tanked, we should all be very concerned. Prosociality is the foundation of a society where life is worth living. When people are good to each other, friendships can flourish. People can build the edifice of their lives without fear that someone will snatch it away or burn it down. Customer and merchant can gain from trade thanks to the mutual trust between them: you let me drive a Honda off the lot today, I pay you back over the next few years. Cops and courts can't enforce these norms alone; our communities thrive mainly because regular people choose to cooperate when they could defect. A breakdown in morality would spell doom for our way of life.

If that's what's happening, we should do something about it, and scientists have a part to play. Social scientists have long sought to understand how people determine right from wrong, and to encourage people to do more right. A rapid rise of wrongness presents both a profound problem—how do we stem the tide of evil?—and an unprecedented opportunity—can we use this dramatic change to understand what makes people choose evil in the first place?

With stakes so high, we need to know: could people possibly be right? Before we can tell whether morality has gone up, down, or sideways, however, we need to know what people mean when they say it's declined. Everyone knows that some moral rules change over time. A majority of Americans used to believe that premarital sex is wrong; now the majority believes otherwise (Smith et al., 2018). In 1955, 64% of Americans disapproved of women wearing Bermuda shorts



(Gallup Organization, 1955), but few would object today. Only 40% of Americans in 2001 believed that homosexuality was morally acceptable, while today 66% say that it's fine (Smith et al., 2018). When people complain about moral decline, then, are they referring to these shifting standards?

The available data suggest that people mean something more fundamental. In 2010, Gallup asked people who believed that morality is declining in America to explain what, exactly, had changed, allowing respondents to list as many items as they wished. Fifteen percent—the largest proportion—simply restated the question and gave no further insight into their answers. Another 15% cited “disrespect of others”, and 8% mentioned “parents not spending time with children,” “dishonesty in government/business,” and “rising crime/violence.” All other topics were mentioned by only 7% of respondents or less. Similarly, when Gallup asked Americans in 2012 what they thought the biggest problem was with the state of moral values, the largest proportion (18%) listed “consideration of others/compassion/caring/tolerance/respect”. All other answers received 10% or less of the vote. When people complain of declining morals, then, they are not primarily referring to changing moral fashions. Profanity on television and the risqué clothing habits of teenagers, for example, earned only a few percent of mentions in both studies, and homosexuality got just 3% both times. Instead, when people say that morality has declined, they seem to mean that the fundamental, timeless elements of morality—kindness, respect, care for others—are in shorter supply today than in the past.

There are three puzzles here, each of which I will attempt to solve in the next three chapters. First, do a majority of people really believe that morality has declined? I'll answer this question in Chapter II by both collecting preexisting public opinion data and conducting original surveys. Second, has morality actually declined? In Chapter III I'll conduct a meta-analysis of

longitudinal data that will aimed at answering that question. Finally, in Chapter IV I'll propose and test a cognitive mechanism that could give rise to the perception of moral decline even when morality hasn't changed at all.

## **CHAPTER II: Do people believe morality has declined?**

While the few pieces of data I've presented so far suggest the answer is *yes*, they represent only a tiny fraction of all the relevant polling data that have been collected over decades. Assembling those data will provide a more precise estimate of the perception of moral decline and it could help us better understand the contours around that perception. In what ways do people think that people have declined, since when, and how much? Is this belief endemic to the United States and the rest of the West, or is it universal? Answering these questions could also provide some clues as to why people might believe this, and whether they could be right.

### **STUDY 1**

#### **Method**

To find surveys that included items asking participants about their perceptions of moral decline, I conducted keyword-term searches of several large databases of public opinion surveys (my search terms are reported in the Supplement) and manually searched the databases of six major survey research providers: the Gallup Organization, Pew Research Center, the American National Election Studies, the World Values Survey, the European Values Survey, and the General Social Survey. I excluded surveys and items that suffered from one or more problems that could potentially have biased my results.

*Unrepresentative samples.* I included items from surveys that were conducted with a nationally representative sample of US participants, and excluded items from surveys that were conducted with convenience samples. I collected and analyzed non-US samples separately, and included non-representative samples to maximize coverage outside the US.

*Incomplete reports.* I included items from surveys whose reports allowed me to calculate the proportion of participants who did and did not perceive moral decline, and I excluded items whose wording precluded this calculation.

*Specific targets.* I included items that asked participants about relatively general targets (“people today” or “Americans”) and I excluded items that asked participants about highly specific targets (e.g. “Evangelicals” or “the Wisconsin legislature”). I did this because participants may have believed that morality declined in a specific group (e.g., politicians or bankers) without also believing that it declined in general.

*Items that were non-consensual indicators of morality.* I included items whose moral implications were likely to be widely shared by participants (e.g., treating the elderly with respect), and excluded items whose moral implications were not likely to be widely shared by participants (e.g., support for gay marriage). I did this because some participants may have believed that change on such an item indicated moral progress, while others may have believed that the very same change indicated moral decline.

*Items that were unstable indicators of morality.* I included items that asked about topics that were indicators of morality in both the past and the present (e.g., helping strangers), but I excluded items that asked about topics that were indicators of morality in the past but may not be indicators of morality in the present (e.g., men holding doors for women). I did this because participants may have believed that such behaviors declined without also believing that morality has declined.

*Items that were unreliable indicators of morality.* I included items that asked about changes that clearly indicated perceived changes in morality, but excluded items that asked about changes that might just as easily have indicated perceived changes in the world. For example,

concern for the unemployed may be a consensual moral indicator, but answers to the question “Has concern for the unemployed gone up or down in the last few years?” may be more indicative of perceived changes in the unemployment rate than of perceived changes in morality.

*Items that overestimated moral decline.* The phrasing of some items was such that they likely provided an underestimate or overestimate of perceived moral decline. I included questions that likely provided an underestimate and excluded questions that likely provided an overestimate. For example, the question “What do you think is the single most urgent problem facing this country today: crime, or education, or the environment, or foreign trade, or government spending, or inflation, or the moral decline of society, or unemployment, or the fear of war, or what?” does not merely ask participants whether they perceive moral decline, but rather, it asks whether they perceive moral decline *and* consider it the single most urgent problem in the nation. The answers to such questions likely provided an underestimate of perceived moral decline because although participants who perceived moral decline may not have considered it the single most urgent problem, participants who considered it the single most urgent problem must have perceived it. Therefore, the percentage of participants who identified moral decline as the single most urgent problem can underestimate—but cannot overestimate—the percentage of participants who perceived moral decline.

## Results

Of the items I reviewed, 178 met my inclusion criteria. These items are shown in column 2 of Table 1. The number of participants who responded to the item is shown in column 3 of Table 1.

## Perception of moral decline

Did participants in these surveys perceive moral decline? Indeed they did. On average across all items, 66.0% of participants perceived moral decline (median = 62.34%).

## Item dimensions

The items varied on many dimensions. Did these dimensions influence the perception of moral decline? To find out, I first coded each item on three key dimensions:

*Type.* Each item measured participants' perceptions of change on a moral indicator. Some of these were indicators of a general moral tendency or *trait* ("Compared with ten years ago, would you say morality in the United States is lower today, higher, or not changed much?"), some were indicators of a moral belief, standard, or *value* ("Do you think moral standards in this country are changing? If yes, in what way?"), and some were indicators of specific morally-relevant *behaviors* ("Would you say that there is more crime in this community now than there was 5 years ago—or less?"). Each item's coding on this dimension appears in column 3 of Table 1.

*Time.* Each item measured participants' perceptions of changes that occurred between the time at which the survey was administered and some past time. Some items precisely specified the past time ("Do you believe that society as a whole is less moral today than it was 50 years ago, or do you not believe that?") and some items did not specify the past time ("Generally speaking, are moral values in the U.S. improving, getting worse, or staying about the same?"). Each item's coding on this dimension appears in column 4 of Table 1. Column 6 of Table 1 shows the time at which the survey was administered. For those items that precisely specified the

past time, Column 7 of Table 1 shows the difference between the past time and the time at which the survey was administered.

*Target.* Some items asked about people in general (“Compared to 20 or 30 years ago, do you think people are more rude, less rude, or about the same?”) and others asked specifically about fellow citizens (“Do you agree or disagree: In general, Americans lived more moral and ethical lives 50 years ago”). The target described by each item is shown in column 8 of Table 1.

To find out whether these dimensions influenced perceptions of moral decline, I entered each of these predictors into an exploratory linear model with the amount of decline as the outcome. Only the effect of type was significant. Compared to questions that asked about behaviors, participants were more likely to perceive moral decline when asked about traits:  $b = 12.17$ ,  $t(170) = 3.95$ , 95% CI = [4.38, 19.96],  $p = .002$ , or values:  $b = 12.15$ ,  $t(170) = 3.78$ , 95% CI = [4.68, 19.62],  $p = .001$ . No other effects were significant (all  $ps > .05$ ).

### **Non-US samples.**

Was the perception of moral decline limited to Americans? To find out, I separately collected data from outside the US. Because this data was more limited, I included both representative and non-representative surveys. My sample ultimately included 59 surveys spanning over 50 countries. I did not apply the same coding scheme to this data as I did to the US samples because most of the questions had the same type, target, and time.

As shown in Table 2, these surveys had similar results. On average, 77.64% of participants in these studies perceived moral decline (median = 82.00%). People perceived moral decline in Western countries (UK, France, Germany), Eastern countries (Japan, South Korea,

India), developed countries (Canada, Russia, Italy) and developing countries (Bangladesh, Kenya, Guatemala).

### **Discussion**

The studies collected in Study 1 differed in many ways, but they converged on a clear conclusion: people believe that morality has declined. A majority of Americans agreed that moral standards and values have fallen and that people possess fewer prosocial traits—like honesty and respectfulness—than they did in the past.

Americans were split on whether moral behaviors have decreased, mainly because they recognized that people treat minority groups better than they used to. At least half of Americans reported in 2013 that people have become kinder and more considerate toward African Americans (59%), people with physical handicaps (51%), and gay people (50%) (Pew, 2013). When asked about behavior outside of these domains, however, they tended to report decline. For instance, 74% of Americans reported in 2016 that Americans behave more rudely than they did 20 or 30 years ago (NORC/Associated Press, 2016). Another 74% said in 2005 that people don't "live as good lives--honest and moral--as they used to" (Pew Research Center, 2005). The fact that people respond sensibly to these questions and report improvement in areas that have obviously improved suggests that the perception of moral decline is an earnestly held belief and not simply an idle complaint that everything has gotten worse.

People all over the world agreed with the Americans' assessment of decline. Between 2002 and 2006, the Pew Research Center asked citizens of 40 countries whether moral decline was a problem in their country. A majority of people in every single country reported that it was



at least a “moderately big” problem, as shown in Figure 1. The perception of moral decline is a global phenomenon.



**Figure 1.** Every country surveyed by the Pew Research Center in 2002 or 2006 is highlighted in red. In all of those countries, a majority of respondents reported that moral decline was a “moderately big” or “very big” problem.

Unfortunately, most of the surveys included in the meta-analysis have considerable limitations. Many questions probe people’s opinions of moral values without specifying what those values are. Some fail to specify the year of comparison (“Has morality declined?”), making it difficult to interpret people’s responses. And every single survey asks participants for a categorical comparison of two points, preventing anyone from measuring those points directly, investigating the size of the difference between them, or tracing trends over more than one interval.

## STUDY 2

I addressed these limitations in Study 2. Rather than inquiring about “morality,” I asked participants to judge people using a few straightforward dimensions: kindness, honesty, niceness, and goodness. To get a more accurate picture of people’s perceptions than one categorical comparison of two points, I asked participants to rate people in general today, then in 2010, and then 2000.

### Method

*Participants.* I recruited a nationally representative sample of American adults using Prolific, an online sample provider. This sample was constructed to represent the American adult population in terms of gender, race, and age. Nine-hundred and ninety-nine people completed the study (507 female, 487 male, 5 “other”, Mage = 45.74, 73% White, 13% Black, 7% Asian, 4% Hispanic, 1% American Indian or Alaska Native, 1% other, 2% “more than one of the above”) in exchange for \$0.75.

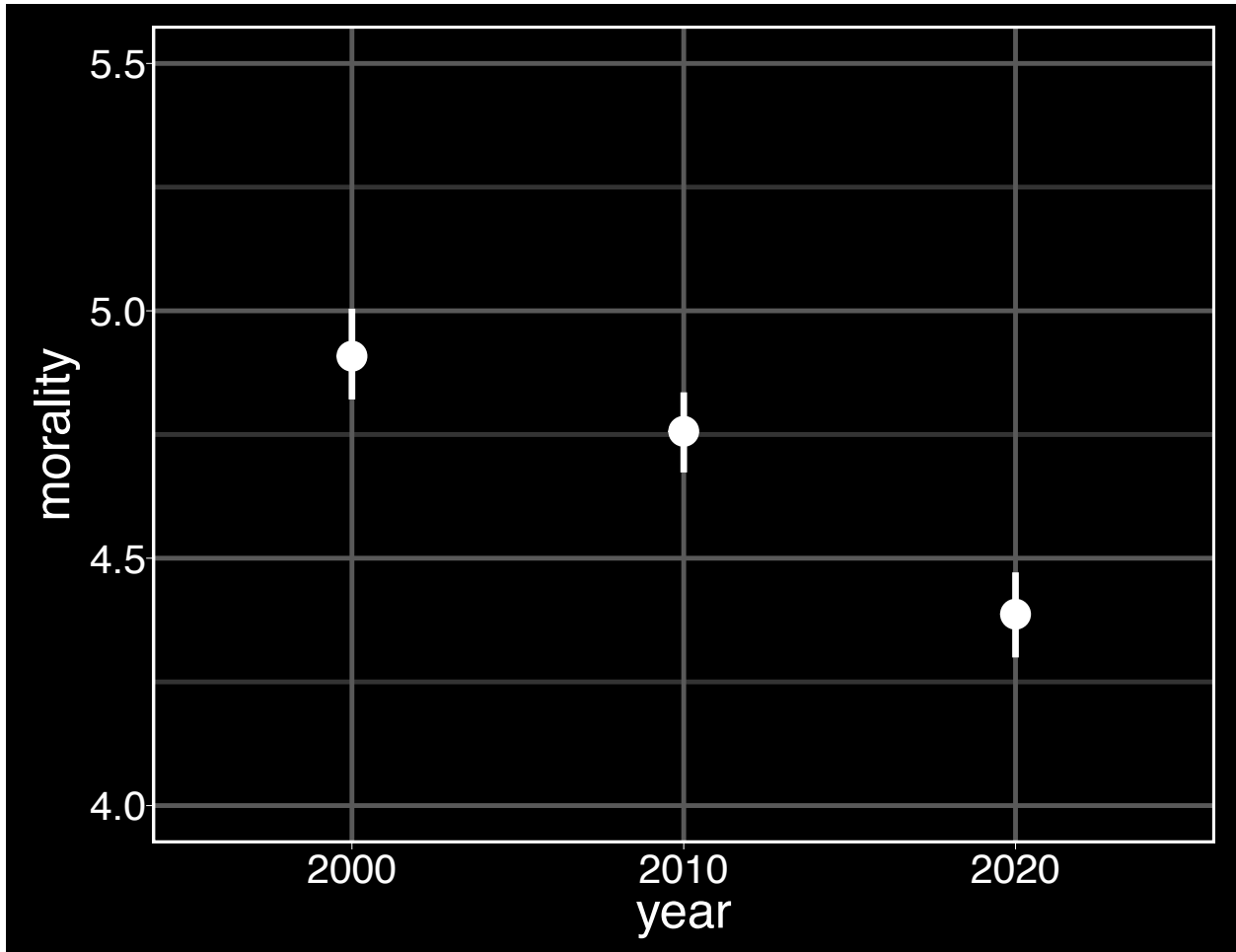
*Procedure.* After completing a consent form, participants confirmed their Prolific ID, per the site’s usage policy. They then read the following instructions: “Thanks! In this study, we’ll ask you how kind, honest, nice, and good people were at various points in time. If you’re not sure, that’s okay, just give your best guess.” Participants then rated how “kind, honest, nice, and good” people are today, were 10 years ago, and were 20 years ago, all using 7-point Likert scales with endpoints labeled *not very* and *very*. As a quality control check, participants were then asked to recall whether they had given higher, equal, or lower ratings to people today compared to people 20 years ago. They then answered open-ended exploratory questions that asked them to further explain the thought process behind their answers. Finally, participants completed a

battery of demographics questions. Embedded in these questions was an attention check that required participants to select the option “other” and type in the word “sky.” Participants were then compensated and dismissed.

## Results

*Exclusions.* One-hundred and eighty-one participants failed the attention check embedded in the demographics questions. Another 120 participants failed the quality control check. These participants were excluded from all analyses, leaving 698 participants (372 female, 322 male, 4 “other,” Mage = 46.37, 74% White, 12% Black, 6% Asian, 4% Hispanic, 1% American Indian or Alaska Native, 2% “more than one of the above”).

*Moral decline.* I fit a linear mixed effects model using the lmer package in R (Bates, Mächler, Bolker, & Walker, 2014), extracted  $p$ -values using the lmerTest package (Kuznetsova, Brockhoff, & Christensen, 2017), and calculated planned contrasts using the emmeans package (Lenth et al., 2018). The model included a fixed effect of the year of each rating and a random intercept for each participant. The planned contrasts indicated that participants thought people were less moral in 2020 ( $M = 4.39$ ) than in 2010,  $M = 4.76$ ,  $b = -0.37$ , 95% CI = [-0.46, -0.28],  $t(1394) = -9.38$ ,  $p < .001$ , and 2000,  $M = 4.91$ ,  $b = -0.52$ , 95% CI = [-0.62, -0.43],  $t(1394) = -13.23$ ,  $p < .001$ . Additionally, participants gave significantly lower ratings for 2010 than 2000,  $b = -0.15$ , 95% CI = [-0.25, -0.06],  $t(1394) = -3.85$ ,  $p < .001$ . These results are illustrated in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Results from Study 2. Points represent means and error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

*Other predictors.* In order to further explore other predictors of the perception of moral decline, I created a decline score for each participant by subtracting their rating for today from their rating for twenty years ago. Thus, the more negative this number, the more decline they perceived. I used this decline score as the outcome in each of the analyses below. In each case I fit a linear model and employed post-estimation contrasts with a Holm-Bonferroni correction where appropriate. These models indicated that perceived decline did not differ by age, gender, race, education, or being a parent.

*Political party and ideology.* I coded participants' self-reported political party affiliation such that strong Democrats were -2, people who lean Democrat were -1, independents were 0, people who lean Republican were 1, and strong Republicans were 2. A linear model indicated that the more Republican participants were, the more decline they perceived,  $b = -0.17$ , 95% CI = [-0.25, -0.09],  $t(696) = -4.12$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, post-hoc one-sample t-tests indicated that both participants who leaned Democrat ( $M = -0.38$ , 95% CI = [-0.56, -0.21],  $t(189) = -4.24$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and who were strong Democrats ( $M = -0.29$ , 95% CI = [-0.45, -0.12],  $t(170) = -3.43$ ,  $p < .001$ ) still perceived decline, on average.

I used the same coding scheme for political ideology. An analogous linear model indicated that the more conservative participants were, the more decline they perceived,  $b = -0.20$ , 95% CI = [-0.28, -0.11],  $t(696) = -4.52$ ,  $p < .001$ . Again, participants who were somewhat liberal ( $M = -0.40$ , 95% CI = [-0.54, -0.25]  $t(262) = -5.28$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and very liberal ( $M = -0.25$ , 95% CI = [-0.46, -0.04],  $t(135) = -2.35$ ,  $p = .02$ ) still perceived decline, on average.

## Discussion

While people may mean many things when they tell a pollster that morality has declined, Study 2 confirms that people believe that people are less kind, honest, nice, and good than they were ten and twenty years ago. They also reported that people were less moral in 2010 than they were in 2000, meaning this perception is not simply a reaction to any number of recent events. People seem to believe that morality is on a steady march downward.

In Studies 3 and 4, I sought to further understand people's perceptions of decline. Is it still going on today? When did it start? How fast is it going?

### STUDY 3

Study 2 was run using a nationally representative sample on the Prolific platform, and the rest of my studies were run on Amazon Mechanical Turk. In order to ensure that results from the two platforms were comparable, I replicated Study 2 on mTurk and the results were not meaningfully different. This study is reported in full in the Supplement.

#### Method

*Participants.* Two-hundred and thirty-six people responded to an advertisement for a study on Amazon Mechanical Turk. Respondents first took a three-item test of English language and American culture that required them to know that children in kindergarten are three or four years old, that an American ZIP code is a series of five digits, and that eating turkey is not an activity associated with Halloween. Thirty-six respondents answered at least one of these three questions incorrectly and were not allowed to participate. The remaining 200 respondents (81 female, 119 male,  $M_{\text{age}} = 35.81$ , 72% White, 12% Black, 9% Hispanic, 6% Asian, 3% “more than one of the above”) became participants in the study in exchange for \$0.75.

*Procedure.* Participants followed Study 2’s procedure except they were asked about different target years. Participants were first asked, “How kind, honest, nice, and good are people today?” and were then asked the same question for “two years ago,” “four years ago,” “six years ago,” “eight years ago,” and “ten years ago,” in that order. All questions were answered using a 7-point Likert scale with endpoints labeled *not very* and *very*. As a consistency check, participants then answered the following question: “When it comes to being kind, honest, nice, and good—are people more so today compared to ten years ago, less so today compared to ten years ago, or the same?” Participants were then asked to explain their answer in an open-ended

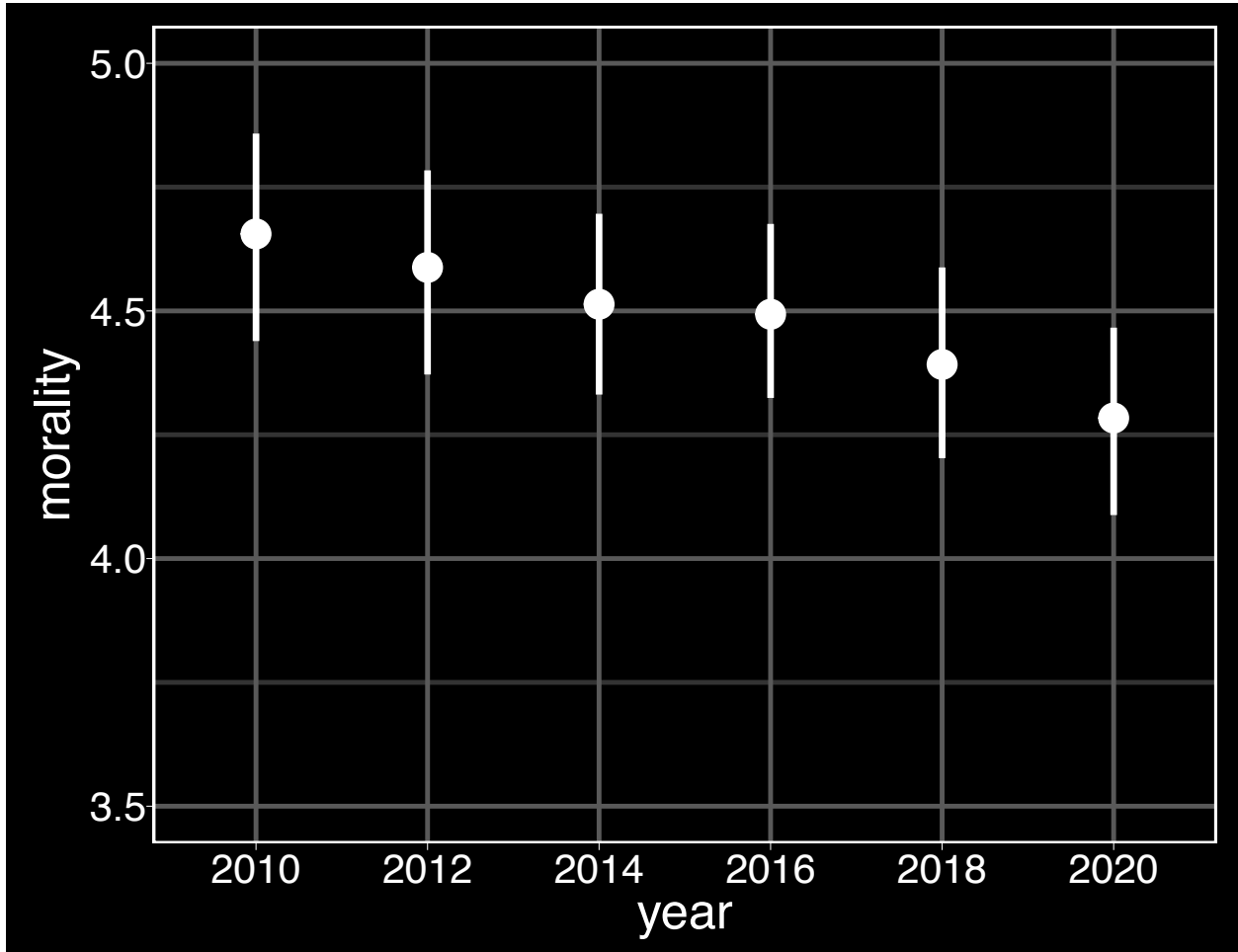
question. Finally, participants completed a battery of demographic questions, embedded in which was an attention check that required them to select the option “Other” and type the word “day.” Participants were then dismissed and compensated.

## Results

*Exclusions.* Fifteen participants failed the attention check and were excluded. An additional 37 participants gave a different answer to the consistency check question than they did to the individual Likert scales and were also excluded. The remaining 185 participants (75 female, 110 male,  $M_{\text{age}} = 36.06$ , 72% White, 11% Black, 9% Hispanic, 5% Asian, 1% Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 3% “more the one of the above”) were included in all analyses.

*Moral decline.* As in Study 2, I fit a mixed linear effects model with year of rating as a fixed effect and random intercepts for each participant. I then used post-estimation contrasts to compare ratings for each year, employing a Holm-Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. Participants rated people in 2020 ( $M = 4.28$ ) as less kind, honest, nice, and good than in each of the previous years except 2018 (2018:  $b = -0.11$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.32, 0.12]$ ,  $t(735) = -1.60$ ,  $p = .55$ ; 2016:  $b = -0.21$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.43, -0.01]$ ,  $t(735) = -3.10$ ,  $p = .02$ ; 2014:  $b = -0.23$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.45, -0.01]$ ,  $t(735) = -3.39$ ;  $p = .007$ ; 2012:  $b = -0.30$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.52, -0.09]$ ,  $t(735) = -4.16$ ,  $p < .001$ ; 2010:  $b = -0.37$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.52, -0.09]$ ,  $t(735) = -5.08$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Participants rated people in 2018 as less, kind, honest, nice and good than in 2010; no other comparisons were significant, 2016:  $b = -0.10$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.32, 0.11]$ ,  $t(735) = -1.39$ ,  $p = .84$ ; 2014:  $b = -0.12$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.34, 0.09]$ ,  $t(735) = -1.66$ ,  $p = .68$ ; 2012:  $b = -0.20$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.41, 0.02]$ ,  $t(735) = -2.68$ ,  $p = .07$ ; 2010:  $b = -0.26$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.48, -0.05]$ ,  $t(735) = -3.61$ ,  $p =$

.004). There were no significant differences in ratings for 2016, 2014, 2012, and 2010 (all  $ps > .05$ ). These results are illustrated in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** Study 3 results. Points represent means and error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

*Other covariates.* As in Study 2, I created a decline score by subtracting participants' ratings for the earliest time point (2010) from their ratings for the most recent time point (today). I used this decline score in all subsequent exploratory analyses. Linear models indicated no significant effects of age, gender, race, education, or political ideology.



## Discussion

Not only do people believe morality has declined, they believe it *is declining*. Participants reported a significant decline even in the last four years, which implies a rather large and rapid descent. The perception of moral decline, then, is not simply nostalgia for a distant past. Nor is it the result of changes in the definitions of my target words, since the definition of “kindness” almost certainly did not change from 2016 to 2020. Once again, this perception was shared across all demographic groups.

If everyone believes that moral decline is still ongoing, when do they think it started its descent? The answer could help illuminate why people believe in decline in the first place. For example, some have suggested that perceptions of decline may arise from the shift in outlook that comes from entering adulthood (Eibach, Libby, & Ehrlinger, 2012). On the other hand, if people perceive decline since their youth, regardless of when that youth occurred, it’s consistent with two possibilities: people perceive decline because it has actually happened, or that the perception is a cognitive distortion that has little to do with age or stages of life.

## STUDY 4

### Method

*Participants.* I sought to recruit a sample that included a wider range of ages. As such, I created a survey with a quota of 50 participants in each of the following age groups: 18-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-44, 45-49, 50-54, 55-59, 60-64, 65-69. Respondents selected their age group upon accessing the study, and once the quota for a group was reached, respondents from that group were not permitted to participate. Anyone younger than 18 or older than 69 was not

allowed to participate. Two thousand five hundred and thirty-five people responded to an advertisement for this study on Amazon Mechanical Turk. Twenty-one of these opened the study but did not complete it. One thousand seven hundred and fifty respondents responded after the quota for their age group had been reached and were not allowed to participate in the study.

Respondents who responded before the quota for their age group was reached were asked to complete a test of their English proficiency and their knowledge of American culture. Specifically, they were required to demonstrate that they knew (a) that bell bottoms are not a type of footwear, (b) that an RSVP is a required response to a wedding invitation, and (c) that a sign reading “out of order” is best paired with an elevator. Three hundred and one respondents answered one or more of these questions incorrectly and were not allowed to participate in the study. The remaining 484 respondents (225 female, 257 male, 2 “other”,  $M_{age} = 41.27$ , 72% White, 15% Black, 7% Asian, 4% Hispanic, 1% American Indian or Alaska Native, 2% “more than one of the above”) were allowed to participate in the study in exchange for \$0.75.

*Procedure.* After providing informed consent, participants first reported how kind, honest, nice, and good people are today. They then reported how kind, honest, nice, and good people were when they were about 20 years old, and at about the time they were born. This was done by adjusting the wording of the subsequent questions based on the participant’s age. For example, if the participant was between 30 and 34 years old, they were asked “How kind, honest, nice, and good were people about ten years ago?” and then “How kind, honest, nice and good were people about 30 years ago?” If participants were under 25, they answered only the questions for today and when they were born. All questions were answered using a 7-point Likert scale with endpoints labeled *not very* and *very*. As in previous studies, participants were then

asked a categorical consistency question that required them to remember whether they had rated people today as more, equally, or less moral compared to people in the year they were born.

Participants then answered some pilot questions which are reported in the Supplement. They then answered open-ended questions and completed a battery of demographics questions, embedded in which was an attention check that required them to select the option “other” and type the word “apple”.

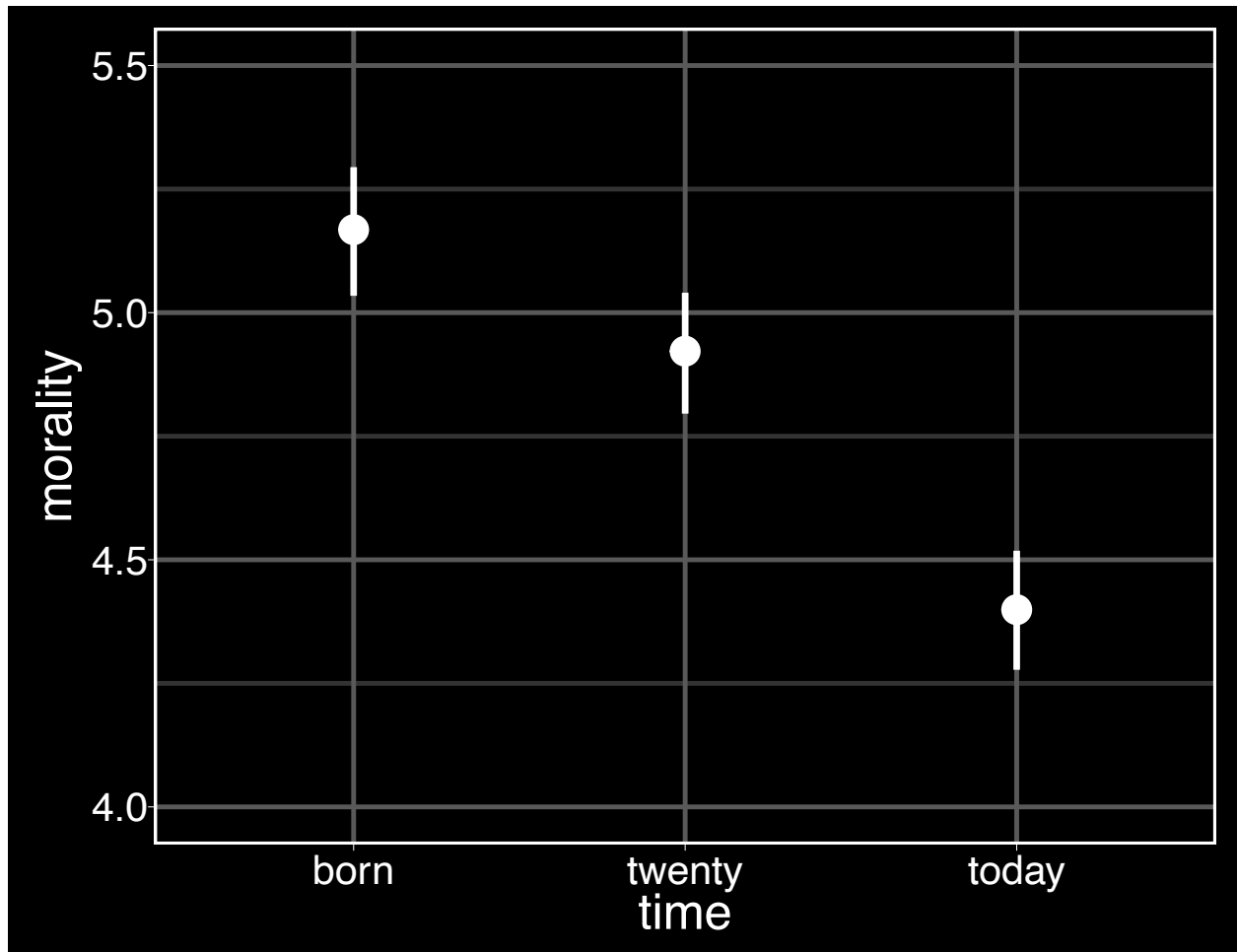
## Results

*Exclusions.* Twenty-eight participants failed the attention check embedded in the demographics and were excluded. Seventy-three additional participants reported an age at the end of the study that was inconsistent with the age group they selected at the beginning of the study and were also excluded. An additional 64 participants failed the consistency check and were excluded. The remaining 347 participants (174 female, 172 male, 1 “other”,  $M_{\text{age}} = 42.57$ , 78% White, 9% Black, 7% Asian, 4% Hispanic, 2% “more than one of the above”) were included in all analyses.

*Moral decline.* I fit a mixed linear effects model with rating as the outcome, a fixed effect of time of rating (today, when the participant was 20 years old, when the participant was born), and random intercepts for each participant. I then used post-estimation contrasts to compare ratings for each time point, employing a Holm-Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. Participants gave lower ratings for today than for both of the earlier timepoints (twenty:  $b = -0.61$ , 95% CI = [-0.77, -0.45],  $t(675) = -9.21$ ,  $p < .001$ ; born:  $b = -0.92$ , 95% CI = [-1.07, -0.76]  $t(667) = -14.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Participants also gave lower ratings for when they were twenty

compared to when they were born,  $b = -0.31$ , 95% CI = [-0.47, -0.15],  $t(675) = -4.70$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

These results are illustrated in Figure 4.



**Figure 4.** Study 4 results. Points represent means and error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

*Age.* I created two perceived decline scores by a) subtracting ratings at age 20 from ratings for today and b) subtracting ratings when born from ratings today. A linear model indicated that older participants perceived more decline than younger participants both compared to when they were twenty:  $b = -0.02$ ,  $t(320) = -3.30$ , 95% CI = [-0.03, -0.007],  $p < .001$ , and when they were born:  $b = -0.02$ ,  $t(345) = -3.77$ , 95% CI = [-0.04, -0.01],  $p < .001$ .

Did older participants believe that more decline had occurred simply because they were reporting the amount of decline across a longer period of time? To find out, I created a “decline per year” score by first subtracting participants’ rating for the year they were born from their rating for today, then dividing that number by their age. I then fit a linear model with this score as the outcome and age as a predictor. The main effect of age was not significant,  $b = -.0002$ , 95% CI = [-0.01, 0.007],  $t(345) = -0.36$ ,  $p = .72$ . In other words, younger and older participants did not report different annual rates of decline, but rather, they reported different total amounts of decline simply because they were reporting on decline across different numbers of years.

### **Discussion**

People believe that morality has been declining at least since their birth. It didn’t stop when they reached adulthood, they say; it’s kept right on falling since then. This helps explain why it might seem like only old people complain about moral decline when in fact all ages agree on the subject. The older you are, the greater your perceived distance between the apex of kindness and goodness (your arrival on Earth) and the nadir (today). But that’s simply because there is more space in between those points. The slope of the line between them is constant across age, so young people simply see the world as beginning its slide toward immorality, while older people think the slide is complete, but the slope of the slide is the same. This is also consistent with my previous studies in which older and younger participants reported the same amount of decline from a fixed point in the past.

### **STUDY 5**

So far we've seen that people believe that people in general have become less kind, honest, nice, and good. While this might seem straightforward, people could actually mean two very different things. They might mean that *individuals* have declined: Arnold, Bella, and Cameron were nicer ten years ago than they are today. I'll call this possibility *individual change*. They might mean that a less moral cohort has replaced a more moral cohort: sweet old Al, Betty, and Catherine died and now we're stuck with the young troublemakers Amy, Brittany, and Callum. I'll call this possibility *cohort replacement*.

While both of these possibilities could lead to moral decline, their implications are very different. If people attribute moral decline primarily to cohort replacement, their perception could be entirely driven by their opinions of the young of today and the elderly of yesterday. If people attribute it to individual change instead, those groups may not matter to them at all. When Americans cry out for the government to do something about the moral breakdown of the country, then, they might be saying "do something about these awful kids" or they might be saying "do something about these awful *everybody*".

Importantly, the relative contributions of individual change and cohort replacement depend on the time horizon in question. If morality has declined from 1800 to today, it must be entirely due to cohorts replacing each other, since nobody who was alive in 1800 made it to 2021. If morality has declined since yesterday, on the other hand, it's likely due to individuals changing—people die and people are born every day, but probably not in large enough numbers to produce meaningful shifts in overall morality. So when people told me in Study 3 that morality declined from 2016 to 2020, they were most likely referring to individual change. When people compare the year of their birth to today, however, both individual change and cohort replacement could explain any of the differences they see. Accordingly, in Study 5 I picked a

timespan where both could be the driving force of moral decline and asked participants to tell me which one was at the wheel.

### **Method**

*Participants.* As in Study 4, I sought to recruit a sample with a wide range of ages. I created a survey with quota of 150 for each of three age groups: 20-34, 35-49, and 50-64. Anyone younger than 20 or older than 64 was not allowed to participate. One thousand four hundred and eighty-four people responded to an advertisement for this study on Amazon Mechanical Turk. Seventeen respondents accessed the study but did not complete it. Seven hundred and eighty-one respondents were ultimately not allowed to participate in the study because they accessed it after the quota for their age group had been reached. Respondents then were asked to complete the same test of English language and American culture as in Study 4. Two hundred and forty-two respondents answered at least one of the questions incorrectly and were not allowed to participate. The remaining 444 respondents (202 female, 242 male,  $M_{\text{age}} = 40.42$ , 77% White, 9% Black, 7% Asian, 5% Hispanic, 1% “more than one of the above”) completed a consent form and became participants in my study in exchange for \$0.75.

*Procedure.* Participants first reported how kind, honest, nice, and good people are today and “about 15 years ago” and then completed a consistency check as in previous studies. They then answered the following questions using the same 7-point Likert scales: “How kind, honest, nice, and good are people who are currently between the ages of 35 and 95?”, “How kind, honest, nice, and good are people who are currently between the ages of 20 and 35?”, “Thinking again of people who are currently between the ages of 35 and 95, how kind, honest, nice, and good were they about 15 years ago?”, and “About 15 years ago, how kind, honest, nice, and good

were people who were then between the ages of 80 and 95?”. They then completed a suite of demographics questions, embedded in which was an attention check that required them to select the option “other” and type the word “cloud”. Participants were then dismissed and compensated.

## Results

*Exclusions.* Forty-eight participants failed the attention check embedded in the demographics questions and another 15 participants reported an age at the end of the study that was inconsistent with the age group they reported at the beginning of the study. Another 77 participants failed the consistency check. All of these participants were excluded. The remaining 319 participants (154 female, 165 male,  $M_{\text{age}} = 41.02$ , 77% White, 8% Black, 8% Asian, 5% Hispanic, 1% “more than one of the above”) were included in all analyses.

*Moral decline.* A two-tailed paired samples t-test indicated that participants gave lower ratings for today ( $M = 4.35$ ) than for about 15 years ago ( $M = 4.89$ ),  $t(318) = -9.88$ , 95% CI = [-0.65, -0.44],  $p < .001$ .

*Predictors of moral decline.* I created an *individual change* variable by subtracting ratings of 20 to 80-year-olds 15 years ago from ratings of 35 to 95-year-olds today. I created a *cohort replacement* variable by subtracting ratings of 80 to 95-year-olds 15 years ago from ratings of 20 to 35-year-olds today. I fit a linear model using these two variables to predict overall moral decline. Both effects were significant, individual change:  $b = 0.50$ , 95% CI = [0.40, 0.59],  $t(316) = 9.96$ ,  $p < .001$ ; cohort replacement:  $b = 0.17$ ,  $t(316) = 6.52$ , 95% CI = [0.12, 0.22],  $p < .001$ .



*Age.* Did these effects depend on age? To find out, I re-fit the model including interaction effects of age with both individual change and cohort replacement. The interaction of age and cohort replacement was significant,  $b = 0.005$ , 95% CI = [-0.009, -0.0003],  $t(313) = -2.11$ ,  $p = .04$ . This means that older participants' ratings of moral decline were more strongly related to their perceptions of cohort replacement than younger participants' ratings were.

### **Discussion**

When participants said that morality declined from 2005 to 2020, they could have meant that individuals got worse or that worse cohorts replaced better ones. They meant both. Moral decline must be due to cohort replacement in the long run and would probably be due to individual change in the very short run. In the medium run, where both factors could be at play, participants reported that they are both indeed at play. When people demand the government fix the problem of moral decay, they want not only better moral training for children, then, but also remedial moral education for adults.

### CHAPTER III: Has morality actually declined?

People all over the world believe that morality has declined. Americans believe that it's been declining at least since they were born, and they believe that decline has continued even in recent years. They think both that individuals have changed for the worse and that worse cohorts have replaced better ones. Could people be right?

The evidence I have collected already casts some doubt. First, in Study 1, the proportion of people who perceive moral decline did not vary over time. If morality really is declining, we might expect more people to notice it as time goes on. Only the most astute driver can tell when her tires have lost a little air, but everyone notices once the wheels are scraping against the asphalt. It's possible, of course, that morality really is declining year after year and just as many people perceived its descent fifty years ago as they do today—perhaps the wheels have been scraping for decades—but such invariant answers seem more in line with a fact about human psychology than a fact about the world they inhabit.

The results of Study 1 also fail a simple gut check: it's hard to imagine how morality could decline for so long without hitting rock bottom. People were already crying out for the government to do something about moral breakdown in 1964. If things were bad then and only got worse in the 57 years that followed, shouldn't we be living in a post-apocalyptic *Mad Max*-esque hellscape by now? Shouldn't you expect passersby to mug you, cashiers to cheat you out of your change, and even friends and family to betray you whenever it suited them? Shouldn't businesses fail because employees refuse to report for work or show up merely to cart off anything of value? Shouldn't cops routinely shake down citizens for bribes, and shouldn't principal's offices and juvenile detention centers be packed with misbehaving youths? In a morally broken world, shouldn't it be ludicrous to send your credit card details to someone

you've never met and expect to receive goods in return? This, of course, is not the world we live in. It seems unlikely that our world is the result of at least half a century of unrelenting moral decline.

Finally, some of participants' claims of moral decline are at odds with findings from elsewhere in psychology. In Study 5, participants claimed that individuals declined morally as they aged from 20-80 to 35-95. In contrast, a meta-analysis of longitudinal studies found that agreeableness holds steady over the lifespan until it increases in old age, and these increases have been even larger for more recent cohorts (Roberts, Walton, & Viechtbauer, 2006). The target words I used in Study 5 are very similar to those used to assess agreeableness ("kind", "warm", "considerate") (Graziano & Tobin, 2009), suggesting my participants and these studies are tapping the same facet of human personality. It's unlikely that the past fifteen years were the one period in which age- and cohort-related gains in agreeableness not only stalled, but reversed.

Further afield from psychology, there are several more strikes against the possibility that morality has declined. Violence and warfare have decreased across the globe (Pinker, 2011; Roser, 2018; Roser & Ritchie, 2013). Slaughter, conquest, and genocide have all become rarer (Roser & Nagdy, 2013). Local forms of violence are less common, too. People today are less likely to be murdered, stabbed, assaulted, or burgled than they were even a few decades ago, even though people mistakenly think that crime has increased (Esberg & Mummolo, 2018). While war and crime are driven by economic conditions and historical happenstance as well as the goodness of people's hearts, it's unlikely that a moral recession would coincide with a drop in conflict and lawbreaking.

Meanwhile, social movements have beaten back the moral scourges of racism and sexism worldwide. Sixty years ago, a Black man in the US could not sit at a white lunch counter; now a

Black man has sat in the Oval Office. Apartheid fell in South Africa, women can drive in Saudi Arabia, and ethnic groups in Rwanda, the Balkans, and Sri Lanka who were once bent on each other's extinction now live in something resembling peace. These are major markers of moral progress, and the evidence for moral decline would have to be exceptionally strong to offset them.

Nevertheless, it's possible this isn't what's on people's minds when it comes to moral decline. While crime, violence, racism, and sexism seem quite unkind—to put it lightly—the kindness that participants are thinking about may be much less dramatic. Most people will not be murdered, for example, nor will anyone they know. A drop in the murder rate may thus be a boon for society at large but it matters little to the average person whose life was never touched by it in the first place. Instead, people's perceptions of morality may depend more on myriad interpersonal mundanities: whether the bus driver waits an extra second for you to catch it, whether your coworkers remember your birthday, whether your spouse takes out the trash after you've asked him nicely for the third time. Perhaps, then, participants are thinking less about whether their neighbor might break into their home with an M-16 and more about whether their neighbor will return the lawnmower if they lend it to them.

Adjudicating whether that kind of morality has changed over time requires a different approach. Crime statistics can tell us whether people are killing each other in the streets, but they can't tell us whether people are being kind to each other in their homes. There is no longitudinal and objective assessment of people's everyday, interpersonal morality. There is, however, a wealth of data on people's *perceptions* of that morality. If moral traits and behaviors are truly scarcer today than they were in the past, I should be able to find some evidence of it in the hundreds of questions that public opinion pollsters have asked multiple times over many years.

The data I collect to answer this question will be different from what I have presented so far, which are all within-subjects comparisons made in the present. In the surveys I collected in Study 1, participants stood in the present, gazed into the past, and reported the difference between people today and back then. In my own studies, participants stood in the present and rated people today, gazed into the past and rated people back then, and I calculated the difference between those ratings. In Study 6, I'll collect a new kind of data: between-subjects reports from participants today and participants in the past. If today's participants give people the same score today that yesterday's participants gave people yesterday, the perception of moral decline must be an illusion.

## **STUDY 6**

### **Method**

I searched several large databases of public opinion surveys for items that investigated actual changes in morality and moral behavior. Questions were considered relevant to morality if they asked about values, attitudes, traits, and behaviors that would be nearly unanimously considered related to being kind, honest, nice, and good. Full documentation of my search terms is reported in the Supplement. I also manually searched major providers of survey research: the Gallup Organization, Pew Research Center, the American National Election Studies, the World Values Survey, the European Values Survey, and the General Social Survey. As in Study 1, I included US samples only if they were nationally representative, but also collected non-representative samples if they were collected outside the US in order to maximize non-US representation. The latter were analyzed separately. In order to be included, each survey had to be administered at least twice, and the most recent data collection could not be earlier than 2010.

## Results

*Sample.* I identified 110 studies that fit my criteria. To determine whether responses changed over time, I fit a linear model for each study. The year of each study was always entered as a predictor, and the outcome was always the average response. The results of each of these analyses are in Table 5.

*Main analysis.* Because these studies generally had large samples—some with hundreds of thousands of participants—the significance of  $p$ -values is not very meaningful. Instead, I included  $R^2$  values as a measure of effect size. To shed further light on the size of these effects, I also fit analogous models in a Bayesian framework using the Rstanarm package in R (Goodrich, Gabry, Ali, 2020) and extracted the percentage of the 89% high density interval (HDI) that was contained in the region of practical equivalence (ROPE), which was by default defined as  $\pm 0.1$  SDs.

The results were overwhelmingly clear: the vast majority of responses essentially did not change over time. In no case did the year of data collection explain more than 9% of variance in the data and in almost all cases it explained less than 1%. This was confirmed in the Bayesian analysis as well; 100% of the high-density interval was within the ROPE in almost all cases, indicating that any changes over time were negligible. For example, responses to the question “How would you rate the overall state of moral values in this country today?” were essentially identical in 2002 and 2020. 46% of Americans agreed that “people are generally helpful” in both 1972 and 2018. 68% of Americans in 2007 reported that they had recently helped a stranger out; this number was 64% in 2019.

*Self vs. other.* I coded whether each question asked participants to report on their own moral behavior (“[In the past month, have you] offered your seat on a bus or in a public place to a stranger who was standing?”) or the moral behavior of others (“Were you treated with respect all day yesterday?”).  $R_2$  values did not significantly differ between these two groups,  $t(83) = -0.25$ , 95% CI = [-0.00, 0.00],  $p = .81$ .

*Non-US samples.* [This data is still being collected and analyzed.]

## Discussion

The perception of moral decline is an illusion. If morality was really declining, we should be able to find some sign of it somewhere. The citizens of the present should report doing fewer favors, trust each other less, and rate the state of morality lower than the citizens of past. Instead, each of these—and 107 other indicators of morality—have remained remarkably stable for as long as pollsters have asked them. Not only is there an absence of evidence, but there is evidence of absence, as Bayesian analysis indicates that any changes in these data over time are so small that they are almost certainly not different from zero.

That profound lack of change is remarkable given the diversity of the questions included. Some asked about participants’ view of things in general: how would you rate current morals and standards, do you feel safe walking alone in your neighborhood at night, do you think people in general are helpful or just looking out for themselves? Others asked participants about specific people and behaviors: do your coworkers take credit for your work, has anyone stolen money from you, could you rely on your family and friends for help if you needed it? Still others asked about participants’ own behavior: have you let a stranger go ahead of you in line, have you volunteered for a charitable organization, have you looked after someone’s plants, pets, or mail

while they were away? In none of these cases did participants' answers meaningfully change over the years.

That should be a relief to everyone. Even if people aren't happy with the current state of morality around them—and many of their answers suggest they aren't—they can at least take solace in the fact that they were just as unhappy yesterday as they are today. Perhaps knowing that might make today look a little less dire. Our world has plenty of problems, but a dwindling supply of kindness is not one of them. The government can shelve its plans for rolling out Moral Reeducation Centers nationwide; they will not be needed.

That leaves one final puzzle. If morality hasn't actually declined, why do people think it has? I'll offer an explanation in Chapter IV.



**CHAPTER IV: Why do people think morality has declined?***Previous explanations*

The perception of moral decline cannot arise from the facts, so it must arise from the mind. Several previous findings can explain parts of the data I've observed so far, but they struggle to account for the entire pattern of results.

People can mistake changes in themselves for changes in the world (Eibach, Libby, & Gilovich, 2003), which could lead them to believe that morality has declined when in fact their outlook has changed. For example, parents believe the world became more dangerous around the date of the birth of their first child (Eibach et al., 2003). While this has been put forward as a possible explanation of the perception of moral decline (Eibach et al., 2012), its claims don't match the data. Perceiving moral decline was unrelated to having children at all. Furthermore, in Study 5 people believed that decline had occurred both from their birth to age 20 as well as from age 20 to today. If people think morality has declined because people used to treat them well as children and now treat them poorly as adults, we would only expect decline in the first interval, not the second. Furthermore, older and younger participants reported the same amount of decline when anchored on a specific point in the past, suggesting that any life changes that could be mistaken for changes in the world do not have any consistent effect on the perception of moral decline.

Others have suggested that the perception of moral decline could be due to people believing that a new, immoral cohort has arrived on the planet. American adults do indeed believe that the youth of today are lacking compared to their younger selves, a perception driven by raters' own traits—authoritarian adults, for example, think that today's youth no longer respect their elders (Protzko & Schooler, 2019). This phenomenon could only be a partial

explanation for the perception of moral decline. In Study 5, people's overall perception of moral decline was not only due to their belief in cohort replacement, but also to their belief that individuals have changed for the worse. Plus, older and younger people perceive the same amount of decline and the same rate of decline per year. If the perception of moral decline is mainly people complaining about the cohorts that have arrived after them, older people should have a lot more to complain about than younger people.

People may also point out moral decline because it makes them look good (Pinker, 2018). Complaining about the disappearance of kindness and honesty might make you look both like a moral person and a wise judge. While this explanation could be consistent with the data I collected in my original surveys, it struggles to explain some of the nuances in the survey data collected in Study 1, in which people obstinately reported moral decline even when the question made it seem somewhat foolish to do so. For instance, 33% of Americans still claimed that violence has increased even when informed that the opposite was true. A majority of Americans said that addressing moral decline should be a "priority" of the government (roughly equivalent to the proportion who said the same about "protecting the environment" and "race relations"). When asked whether the purported decrease in courtesy and respect might just be nostalgia for a past that never existed, three-quarters of Americans emphatically said *no*.

Another possibility is that people encounter biased cultural narratives about the past, which leads them to the mistaken conclusion that morality has declined (Herman, 1999). Perhaps we simply learn from watching *Leave It to Beaver* or listening to our grandparents that the 1950s were a better time. While these biased narratives no doubt exist, they don't seem to fit well with the data I collected in Studies 2-5. People believed that morality had declined even since 2016, a

year that is hardly well-known for its good feelings and neighborliness. It's unlikely, then, that grandpa's yarns are the main source of the illusion of moral decline.

*A new account*

Though each of these phenomena could contribute to the illusion of moral decline, another explanation can offer a more comprehensive account. Two factors may combine to produce the illusion. First, humans' attention is naturally tuned to pick up negative information, and people encounter an abundance of information about the immoral actions of people in general. Then, as that information becomes memories, a feature of the human mind causes the badness of those memories to fade faster than the goodness, leading to the illusion that people have changed for the worse when they haven't changed at all.

People naturally pay more attention to negative information than positive information (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001), and there's an abundance of information about people's immorality. Crack open a paper or flip on the news and you'll be treated to a nonstop parade of immorality. On the day that I write this, the homepage of the *New York Times* has four articles about riots in Washington, D.C., one about people cutting in line for Covid-19 vaccination, another about government stimulus money being wasted on fraudulent claims, and one about a Chinese company using slave labor. Scroll down a bit and you'll find that someone is under fire for wearing a "Camp Auschwitz" shirt, Deutsche Bank has been ordered to pay millions in fines for offering bribes (perhaps they bribed the wrong people), and a university coach has lost his job after he tweeted something "hateful" about the Georgia politician Stacey Abrams. I can't find a single story about someone doing something nice, though if you read far enough into an article about sperm donors you will meet a kind fella who donates his sperm for

free, minus travel costs. The human brain is already tuned to find negative information and it does not have to look hard to find it.

As experiences turn into memories, however, the mental digestive system dissolves their badness faster than their goodness, a phenomenon called the *fading affect bias* (FAB) (Walker & Skowronski, 2009). Some memories hold on to their potency (you may still break into a sweat years later when you remember getting pants'ed at prom) and others take on the opposite valence with the benefit of hindsight (losing your job may seem like a blessing after you land a better one). On average, however, both the highs and the lows tend to get leveled out over time, and the lows gain altitude faster than the highs lose it. This may be because the mind works especially hard to reframe and rationalize misfortunes (Gilbert, Pinel, Wilson, Blumberg, & Wheatley, 1998), which blunts the sting of negative memories.

In order to see how this mental quirk could be the machinery behind the perception of moral decline, it's helpful to express it as a formula:

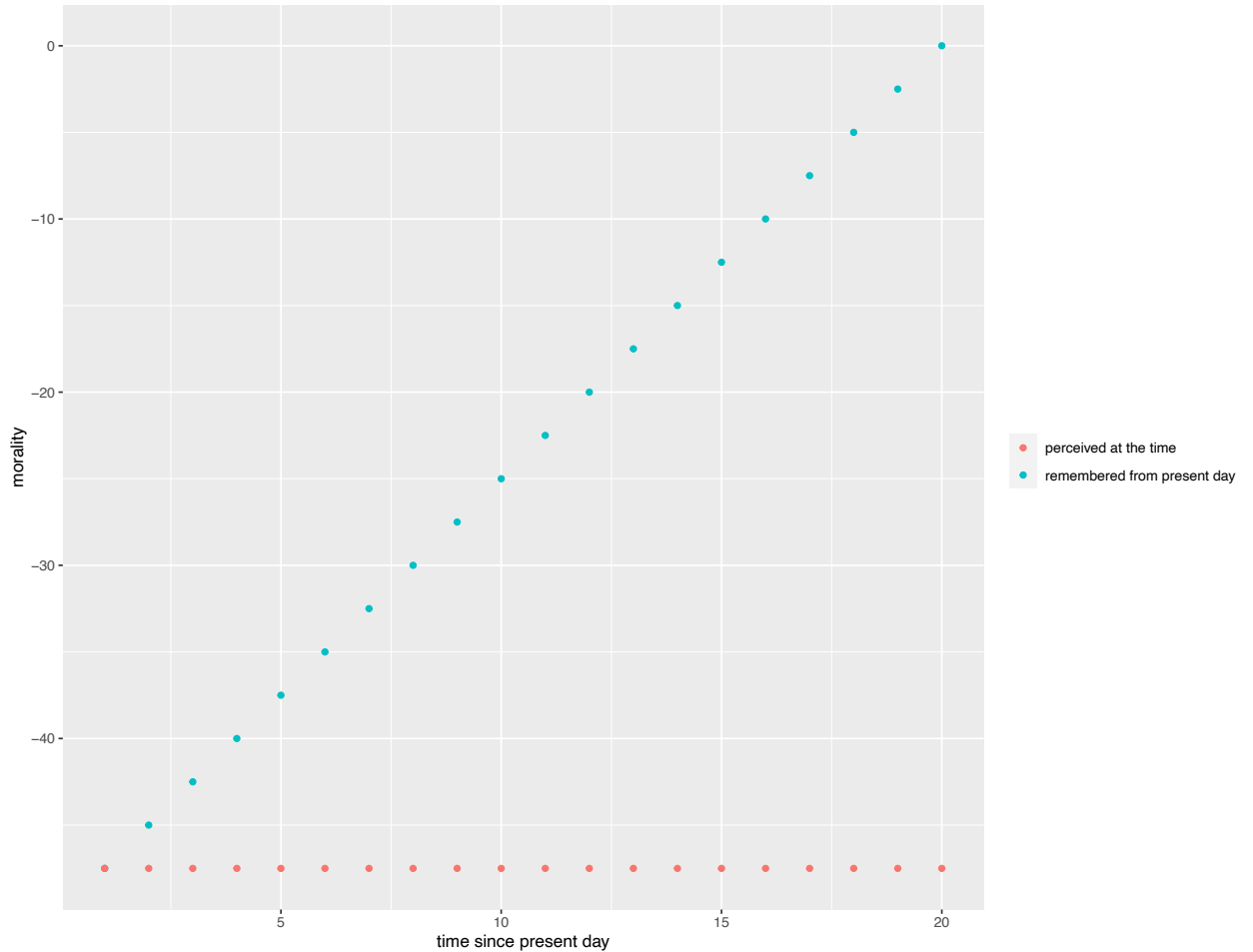
$$M = \min[n_n(A_n + t*r_n), 0] + \max[n_p(A_p - t*r_p), 0]$$

Where  $M$  is the overall perceived morality for a given time,  $n_n$  is the number of negative units of information,  $n_p$  is the number of positive units of information,  $A_n$  is the average negativity of the negative information expressed as a negative number,  $A_p$  is the average positivity of the positive information expressed as a positive number,  $r_p$  is the rate at which the positivity of positive information fades,  $r_n$  is the rate at which the negativity of negative information fades, and  $t$  is time (expressed in years, for convenience). The exact values of  $r_p$  and  $r_n$  are not known, but  $r_p < r_n$ . The *max* and *min* functions and the trailing zeroes merely prevent the overall amount of

negativity or positivity from crossing zero. This is because memories may asymptote to zero as they fade, but negative and positive memories do not swap valences on average.

With this formula in mind, we can see how the fading affect bias plus exposure to an abundance of negative information about people in general could give rise to the illusion of moral decline. To model the fact that people likely encounter and attend to more negative information about the behavior of others than positive information, let  $n_p = 5$  and  $n_n = 15$ . Assume the positivity of the positive information is equivalent to the negativity of the negative information, so  $A_p = 5$  and  $A_n = -5$ . To model the fading affect bias, let  $r_p = 0.1$  and  $r_n = 0.2$ , meaning that, per year, positive information loses .1 units of positivity and negative information loses .2 units of negativity.

Figure 5 illustrates how this state of affairs leads perceived and remembered morality to diverge over time, creating the illusion of moral decline. At each time point, people perceive the same low level of morality, as indicated by the red dots. The green dots represent how people in the present day *remember* morality in the past. Even though people have always perceived morality to be at a dismal -47.5, time drains the potency of that negative information, causing people in the present day to *remember* morality being higher in the past. A -47.5 in experience rises to -35 in memory after only five years. After 15 years, it seems like it was only a -10 at the time. And after 20 years of fading, morality that was perceived to be quite negative at the time is now *remembered* as being exactly neutral. An excess of negative information plus the fading affect bias can thus create the illusion that times were once far more moral—even though times have always been bad.

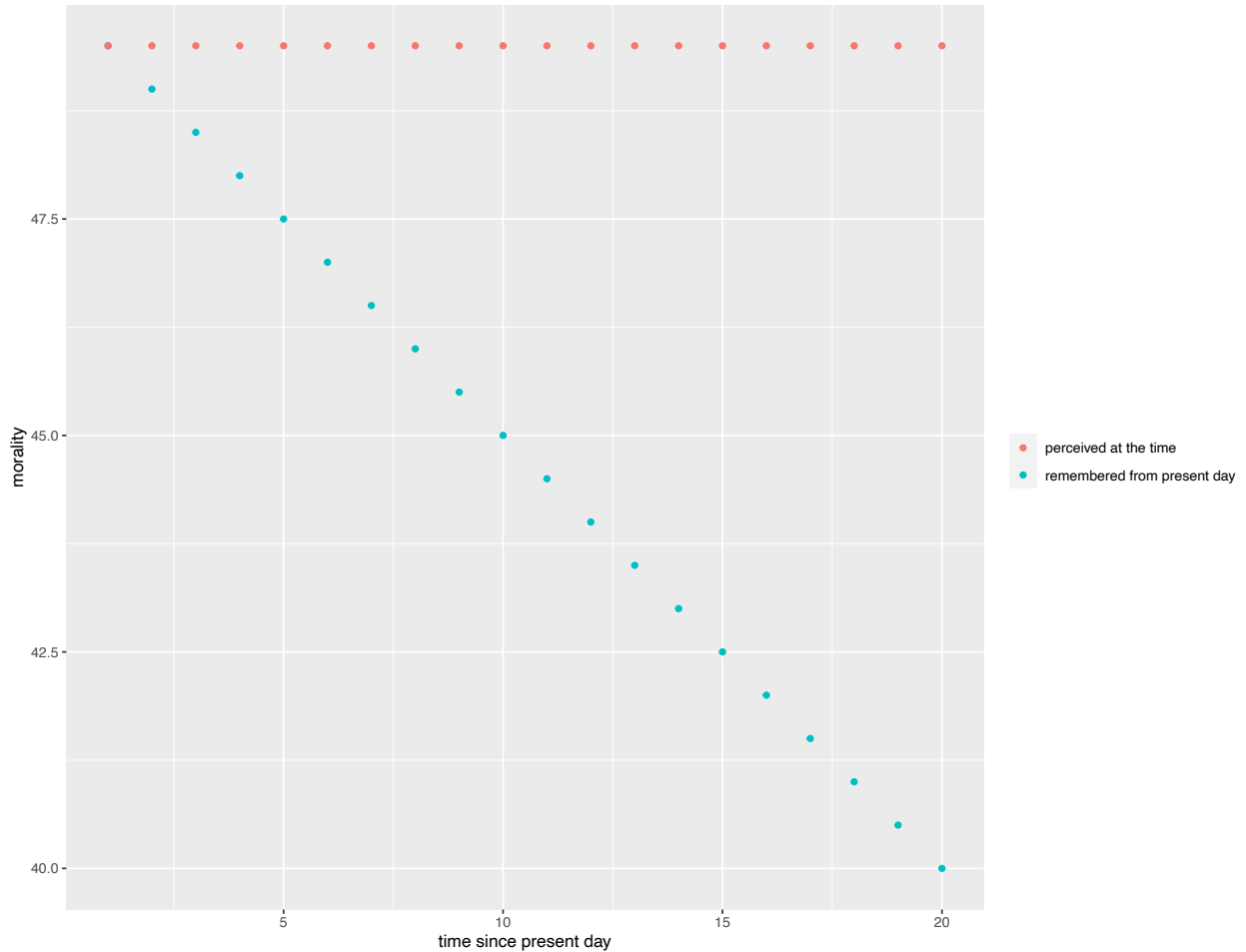


**Figure 5.** Simulated data generated by setting  $n_p = 5$ ,  $n_n = 15$ ,  $A_p = 5$ ,  $A_n = -5$ ,  $r_p = 0.1$ , and  $r_n = 0.2$ .

A glance back at today’s headlines makes it easy to see how this happens in practice. Today, Deutsche Bank got caught taking bribes—outrageous! But only a few years ago, it was Wells Fargo in the hot seat for creating fraudulent accounts without costumers’ consent. The riots at the Capitol in 2021 succeeded the nationwide protests of summer 2020, which themselves were presaged by a wave of protests in 2014. And an offensive tweet about a Black politician? That’s been a daily occurrence since Twitter launched. The fading affect bias makes all of yesterday’s events feel less bad than today’s, and it’s perfectly sensible for the painful,

pointy edges of these memories to dull with time. Banks can't defraud you from yesterday, rioters can't reach out from 2014 and break your windows today, and the provocations of the past seem almost quaint compared to the outrages of now. Indeed, the FAB is especially potent for events that are less important to the self, possibly because self-relevant events are rehearsed more often, which maintains affect (Ritchie et al., 2006). Even though those events may seem muted in memory, however, they were originally experienced at full volume.

Importantly, the fading affect bias alone cannot make the past look rosier than the present; the illusion also depends on the proportion of positive and negative information. Goodness and badness both fade, badness just fades faster. The present will seem *better* than the past if you mostly experience good things, since those fond memories lose their luster over time. I illustrate this in Figure 6 by simply swapping the number of negative and positive pieces of information; now let  $n_p = 15$  and  $n_n = 5$ . The red dots are once again constant, only this time they are above zero, signifying that things are consistently good. Over time, however, that goodness fades. Even though people rate morality at 49.5 every day and always have, they *remember* morality being lower.



**Figure 6.** Simulated data generated by setting  $N_p = 15$ ,  $N_n = 5$ ,  $A_p = 5$ ,  $A_n = -5$ ,  $r_p = 0.1$ , and  $r_n = 0.2$ .

This account comports with the facts in ways that other accounts cannot. The formulae I have proposed can create data that look remarkably similar to the data I have observed; note the stepwise function in people’s answers in Study 3, for example. Furthermore, the fading affect bias has been observed across diverse populations (Skowronski, Walker, Henderson, & Bond, 2014), so we would not expect to see meaningful differences in the perception of moral decline across age, race, gender, and so on—and indeed, there aren’t any. We would also expect people to perceive decline over any sufficiently large chunk of time—and indeed we do; it is not limited



to specific ages or life stages. We would also expect people to report greater decline over greater intervals, since the FAB has had more time to do its work—and indeed, people report more decline from more distant points.

This account suggests a few testable predictions. First, it suggests that people should only perceive decline in domains where the incoming information is consistently negative. In domains where that information is instead consistently positive, people should perceive *improvement*. One of those domains may be people’s personal worlds; people generally have good experiences with the people they know, so they might exempt their families and friends from the general trend of decline. I tested this possibility in Study 7.

## STUDY 7

### Method

*Participants.* One thousand and twenty-one people responded to an advertisement for a study on Amazon Mechanical Turk. First, they completed the same test of English language and American culture as in Study 5. Five hundred and twenty-one respondents answered at least one of the questions incorrectly and were not allowed to participate. The remaining 500 respondents (204 female, 293 male, 3 “other”,  $M_{\text{age}} = 37.74$ , 65% White, 24% Black, 7% Asian, 2% Hispanic, 1% American Indian or Alaska Native, 1% “more than one of the above”) completed a consent form and became participants in the study in exchange for \$0.75.

*Procedure.* Participants were first asked to think about “people in general” and complete the following sentence: “I think people today are generally \_\_\_\_\_ kind, honest, nice and good than people generally were 15 years ago.” Participants responded using the following options: “Much less (-2),” “Somewhat less (-1),” “Equally (0),” “Somewhat more (1),” “Much more (2).”

Participants were then asked to think about two groups of people in general: “today’s 20-35 year-olds” (people who are today between the ages of 20 and 35) and “yesterday’s 80-95 year-olds” (people who are no longer living, and who 15 years ago were between the ages of 80 and 95). They then completed the following sentence using the same options as above: “I think today’s 20-35 year-olds are \_\_\_\_ kind, honest, nice and good than yesterday’s 80-95 year-olds were.”

Next, participants were asked about people in their “personal world today, which refers to all the people with whom you currently interact, in person or otherwise, in your everyday life. This probably includes friends, family members, co-workers, classmates, neighbors, etc. Were any of the people who are in your personal world today also in your personal world 15 years ago?” Participants responded using the options “No,” “Yes, one was,” or “Yes, more than one was.” If participants did not answer “No”, they then completed the following sentence using the same response options as before: “I think the people in my personal world today who were also in my personal world 15 years ago are \_\_\_\_ kind, honest, nice, and good than they were 15 years ago.”

Participants then reported whether anyone in their personal world today is between the ages of 20 and 35, and whether anyone in their personal world 15 years ago was then between the ages of 80 and 95. Participants responded using the options “No,” “Yes, one was,” or “Yes, more than one was.” If participants did not answer “No” to both of the preceding questions, they then answered completed the following sentence using the same response options as before: “I think the 20-35 year-olds who are in my personal world today are \_\_\_\_ kind, honest, nice and good than the 80-95 year-olds who were in my personal world 15 years ago.”

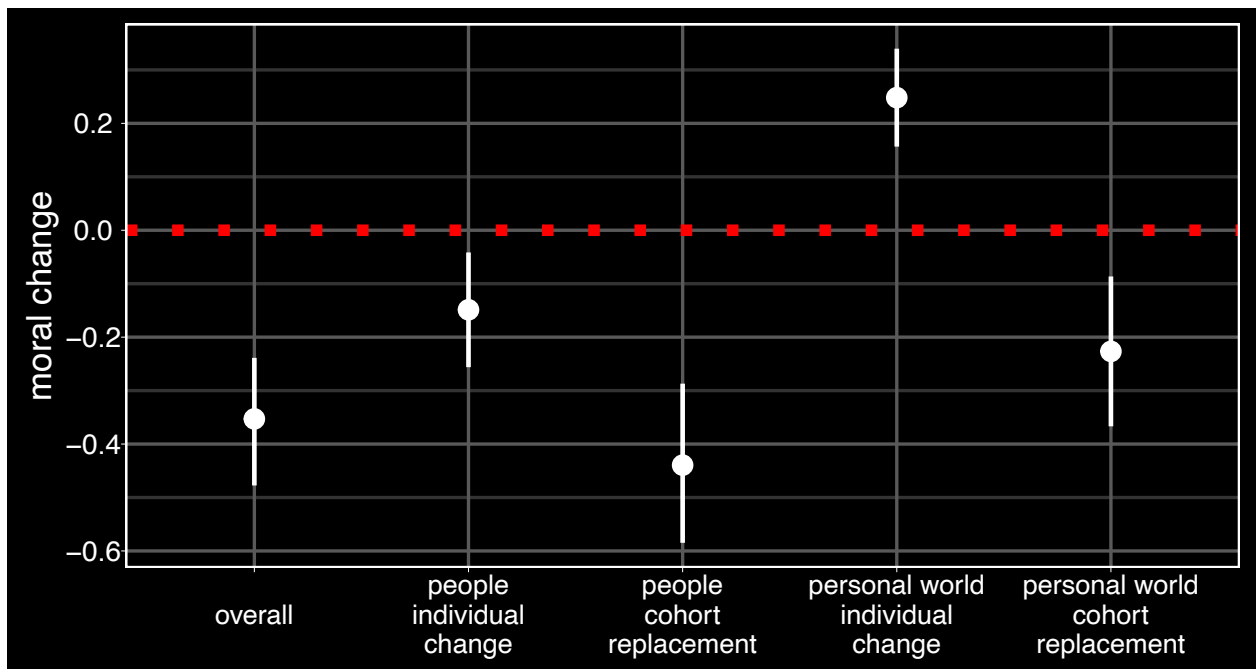
All participants then answered an attention check question that resembled the other questions they had answered but instructed them not to select an answer and merely click the “next” button. They then completed a suite of demographics questions, in which was embedded an attention check question that required them to select the option “Other” and type in the word “shoe.” Participants were then compensated and dismissed.

## Results

*Exclusions.* One hundred and seventy-nine participants failed the first attention check, and an additional twenty-one failed the second attention check. Another nine participants reported an age at the end of the study that was inconsistent with the birth year they reported at the beginning. All of these participants were excluded. The remaining 289 participants (140 female, 148 male, 1 “other”,  $M_{\text{age}} = 38.72$ , 77% White, 11% Black, 8% Asian, 2% Hispanic, 1% American Indian or Alaska Native, 1% “more than one of the above”) were included in all analyses.

*Moral decline.* I tested whether each moral change score was significantly above or below zero using two-tailed one-sample t-tests. On average, participants reported that people in general today are not as kind, honest, nice and good as they were 15 years ago ( $M = -0.35$ ),  $t(288) = -5.86$ , 95% CI = [-0.47, -0.23],  $p < .001$ . Individual change scores and cohort replacement scores for people in general were significant and negative, individual change:  $M = -0.15$ ,  $t(288) = -2.62$ , 95% CI = [-0.26, -0.04],  $p = .009$ , cohort replacement:  $M = -0.44$ ,  $t(288) = -5.80$ , 95% CI = [-0.59, -0.29],  $p < .001$ . Participants who had witnessed individual change in their personal world reported that change was positive, on average,  $M = 0.25$ ,  $t(261) = 5.15$ , 95% CI = [0.15, 0.34],  $p < .001$ . Participants who had witnessed cohort replacement in their personal

world reported that change was negative on average,  $M = -0.23$ ,  $t(149) = -3.17$ , 95% CI = [-0.37, -0.09],  $p = .002$ . A t-test indicated that cohort replacement scores were more negative for people in general than for people in participants' personal worlds,  $t(406) = -2.04$ , 95% CI = [-0.42, -0.01],  $p = .04$ . These results are illustrated in Figure 7.



**Figure 7.** Study 7 results. Points represent means and error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. All means below the red dotted line signify moral decline; means above signify moral improvement.

*Predictors of moral decline.* What explained participants' overall perception of moral decline: their theories about individual and cohort change within their personal worlds, or without? To find out, I fit three linear models on subsets of participants depending on the amount of information that they provided. The results are shown in Table 4. For each subset of participants, both individual change and cohort replacement for people in general were strong predictors of how much overall moral decline they perceived. For those participants who

experienced individual change in their personal world, that change was not related to their overall perception of moral decline. For those participants who experienced both individual change and cohort replacement in their personal world, individual change was related to their overall perception of moral decline.

<b>Subset</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Individual change for people in general</b>	<b>Cohort replacement for people in general</b>	<b>Individual change in personal world</b>	<b>Cohort replacement in personal world</b>
Did not experience individual change or cohort replacement in personal world	27	0.49***	0.42***	--	--
Experienced individual change in personal world	262	0.50***	0.31***	0.09	--

Experienced both individual change and cohort replacement in personal world	146	0.44***	0.30***	0.20*	0.07
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**Table 4.** Regression coefficients for each of the four models fit in Study 5. Note: four participants provided a cohort replacement score for their personal world but not an individual change score.

### Discussion

Participants had the opposite view of the world within and the world without: people inside their personal world have improved while the people outside have declined. This is the only time in any of my studies that participants reported moral improvement rather than moral decline. While participants also thought that the old people they used to know were better than the young people they know now, this negative cohort replacement effect was smaller for their personal world than for people in general.

These results are consistent with the mechanism that I suspect is behind the illusion of moral decline. People like their families and friends. As I showed in Figure 6, when things are consistently good, it can create the illusion that today is *better* than the past. In line with this trend, people reported that the individuals that they know are better today than they were in

2005. It's unlikely that everyone's intimates actually became kinder over the past 15 years, since agreeableness is mostly stable until it increases in older age (Roberts et al., 2006). Instead, people may have mistakenly perceived improvement because the positive experiences of today are more vivid than the slightly faded—but still positive—experiences of the past.

Study 7 also sheds further light on the origins of the perception of moral decline. When people say that morality has declined, they aren't talking about their families, friends, classmates, neighbors, or coworkers. Instead, they're talking about people that they don't know very well and don't interact with very often, perhaps at all. Participants' overall perception of moral decline always depended on their beliefs about how distant others have both changed and been replaced by new cohorts, but it had nothing to do with their perception of cohort replacement in their personal world and was only weakly related to their perception of individual change in their personal world. This is consistent with my claim that people perceive moral decline because they encounter lots of negative information about people “out there”, likely through the media and word of mouth.

Another domain that might be consistently positive is the *competence* of people in general. Competence is one of the two fundamental dimensions on which people perceive each other, the other being *warmth*, which is closely related to the type of morality I have been studying (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). There's plenty of evidence that people are smart: scientists publish breakthroughs, pharmaceutical companies develop vaccines, and every year Apple releases a sleeker, faster iPhone. If people in general seem generally competent and always have, people should believe that competence has increased over time. I test this possibility in Study 8.

Lastly, this account suggests that people might only perceive decline in periods they have observed firsthand. It's possible that people could extrapolate their experience into times when they have none, but if people believe that the beginning of the end coincided with their arrival on earth, it is strong evidence that the perception of moral decline is directly related to people's personal experience, which is consistent with the FAB playing an important role. I'll test this possibility in Study 9, in which I predict that perceived decline will be smaller or nonexistent in time periods before participants' dates of birth.

## **STUDY 8**

### **Method**

*Participants.* Two hundred and eighteen people responded to an advertisement for a study on Amazon Mechanical Turk. Respondents first completed the same three-item test of American culture and English language as in Study 3. Seventeen respondents answered at least one of these three questions incorrectly and were not allowed to participate. The remaining 201 respondents (102 female, 92 male,  $M_{\text{age}} = 38.83$ , 79% White, 7% Asian, 6% Hispanic, 5% Black, 1% "more than one of the above") became participants in the study in exchange for \$0.75.

*Procedure.* Participants completed the same procedure as in Study 2, but rated people using the target words "smart, competent, and intelligent" instead of "kind, nice, honest, and good".

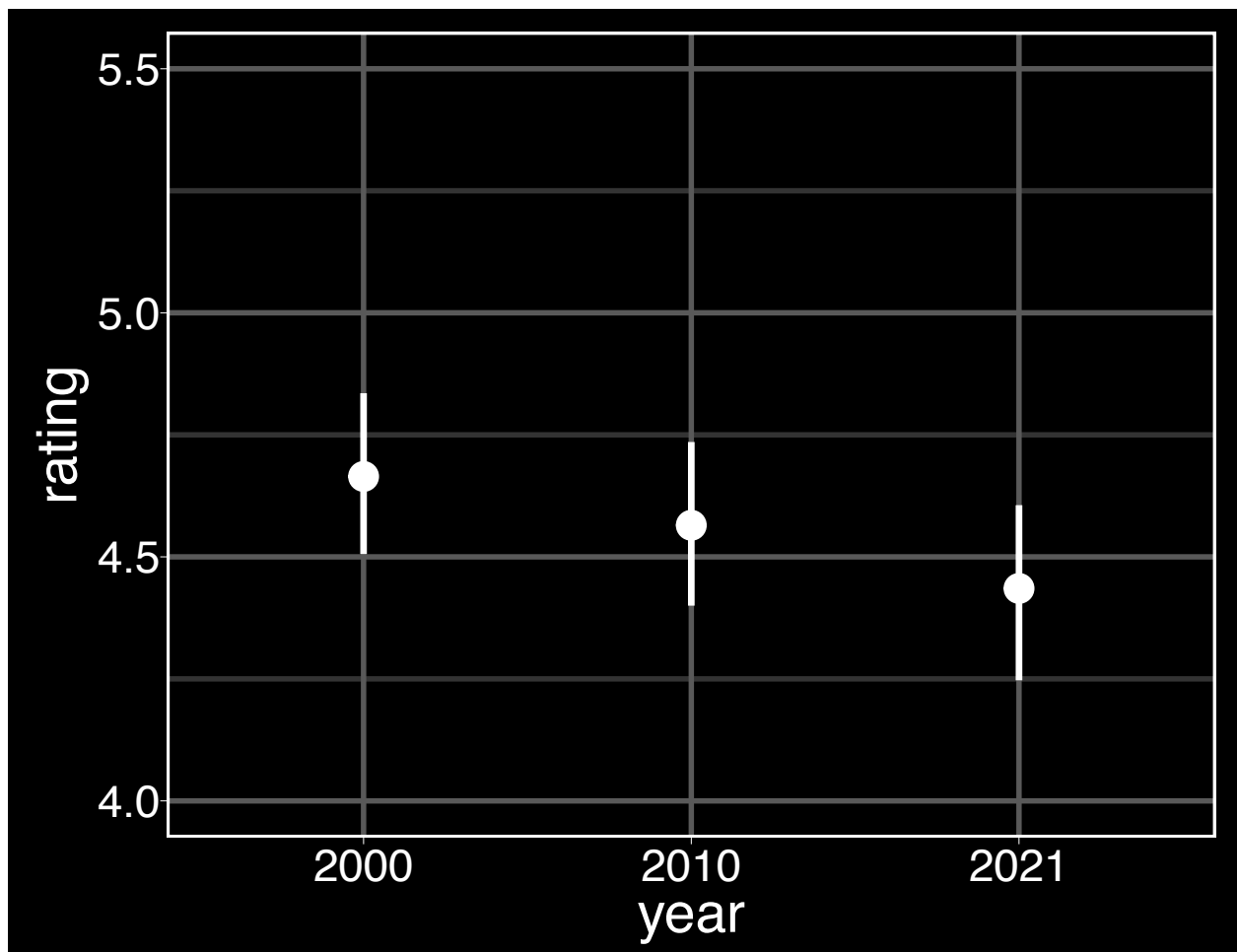
### **Results**

*Exclusions.* Eleven participants failed the attention check embedded in the demographics questions. Another three participants reported different ages at the beginning and end of the



survey. Another 17 participants failed the quality control check. These participants were excluded from all analyses, leaving 170 participants (89 female, 81 male,  $M_{\text{age}} = 39.12$ , 82% White, 6% Asian, 5% Black, 5% Hispanic, 2% “more than one of the above”).

*Competence decline.* I used the same analysis as in Study 2, which revealed that participants did not perceive a decline in competence between 2010 ( $M = 4.56$ ) and 2021 ( $M = 4.44$ ),  $b = -0.13$ , 95% CI = [-0.31, 0.05],  $t(338) = -1.73$ ,  $p = .17$ . They also did not perceive decline between 2010 and 2000 ( $M = 4.66$ ),  $b = -0.10$ , 95% CI = [-0.28, 0.08],  $t(338) = -1.34$ ,  $p = .18$ . They did perceive decline between 2000 and 2021,  $b = -2.23$ , 95% CI = [-0.41, -0.05],  $t(338) = -3.07$ ,  $p = .007$ . These results are illustrated in Figure 8.



**Figure 8.** Study 7 results. Points represent means and error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

## STUDY 9

### Method

*Participants.* I used the same recruitment strategy as in Study 4. One thousand eighty two people responded to an advertisement for this study on Amazon Mechanical Turk. Twenty-one of these opened the study but did not complete it. Five hundred and sixty people responded after the quota for their age group had been reached and were not allowed to participate in the study.

Respondents who responded before the quota for their age group was reached completed the same three-item test of American culture and English language as in Study 4. Twenty-three respondents answered one or more of these questions incorrectly and were not allowed to participate in the study. The remaining 499 respondents (225 female, 241 male, 3 “other”,  $M_{\text{age}} = 43.96$ , 78% White, 10% Asian, 5% Black, 4% Hispanic, 3% “more than one of the above”) were allowed to participate in the study in exchange for \$0.75.

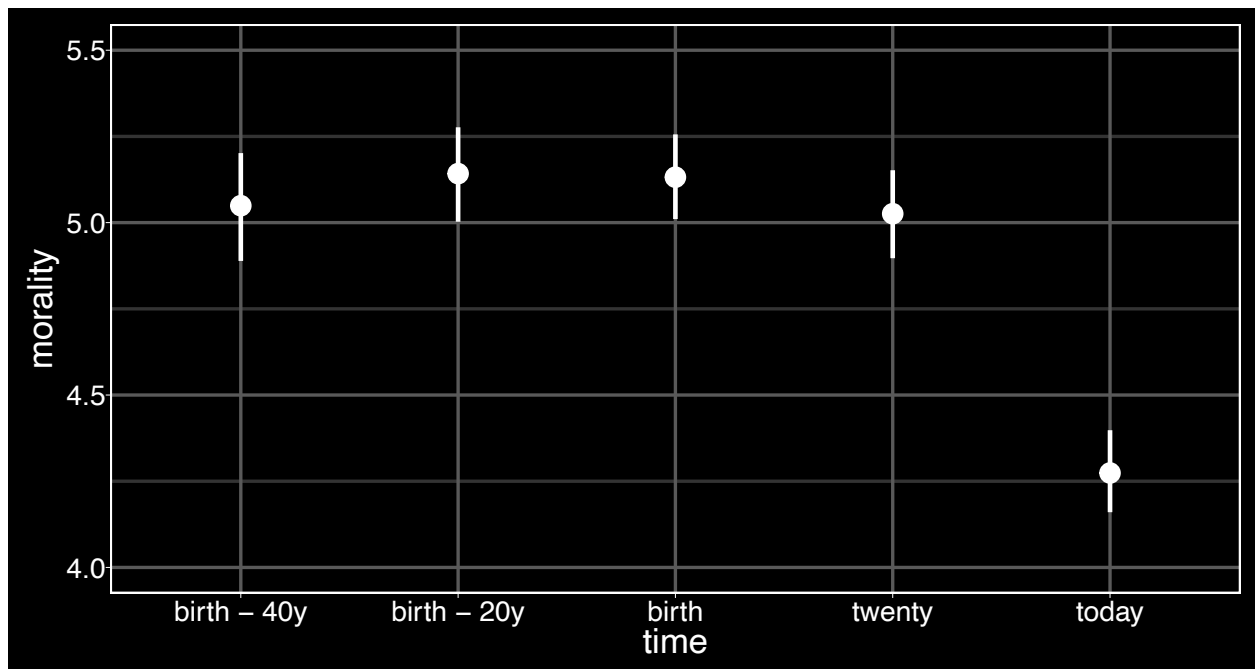
*Procedure.* Participants completed the same procedure in Study 4. They additionally rated people’s morality 20 and 40 years before the year that they were born.

### Results

*Exclusions.* Forty-four participants failed the attention check embedded in the demographics and were excluded. Seven additional participants reported an age at the end of the study that was inconsistent with the age group they selected at the beginning of the study and were also excluded. Sixty-one additional participants failed the consistency check and were excluded. The remaining 387 participants (206 female, 178 male, 3 “other”,  $M_{\text{age}} = 44.04$ , 79%

White, 11% Asian, 4% Black, 3% Hispanic, 2% “more than one of the above”) were included in all analyses.

*Results.* I fit the same model as in Study 4. Planned contrasts indicated no significant difference between ratings for 40 years before birth (5.05), 20 years before birth (5.14), and birth (5.13), all  $p$ s > .05. Participants did perceive moral decline between birth and today (4.27),  $b = 0.86$ , 95% CI = [0.67, 1.04],  $t(1506) = 13.08$ ,  $p < .001$  and between twenty (4.96) and today,  $b = 0.68$ , 95% CI = [0.49, 0.87],  $t(1513) = 10.07$ ,  $p < .001$ , and as well as between birth and twenty,  $b = 0.18$ , 95% CI = [-0.01, 0.37],  $t(1513) = 2.60$ ,  $p = .048$ .



**Figure 9.** Study 9 results. Points represent means and error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

### Discussion

Studies 7-9 produced results that were consistent with my proposed source of the illusion of moral decline. If people believe morality has declined in part because they encounter predominately negative information about people in general and the negativity of that

information fades faster than the positivity of positive information, two things should follow. First, the perception of moral decline should be attenuated or reversed in domains where people perceive predominately mixed or positive information. Indeed, it was. In Study 7, participants claimed the individuals they know have *improved* morally, and that the effects of cohort replacement are less negative inside their personal worlds than outside it, likely because people predominately perceive their personal worlds positively. In Study 8, participants perceived no decline in competence between 2010 and 2021 and only a slight decline between 2000 and 2021, likely because people perceive mixed evidence that people in general are smart or stupid.

Second, if the illusion of moral decline arises because of features of human memory, it should not arise when people have no memories. Indeed, it did not. In Study 9, people perceived no decline between 40 years and 20 years before their birth, nor between 20 years before their birth and their birth. They only believed that decline began after their arrival on Earth.

Like any psychological phenomenon, the illusion of moral decline is likely multiply determined. However, this explanation can account for the facts in a way that no other explanation can on its own. A key source of this illusion, then, is the combination of two factors: the never-ending stream of stories about people's immorality, and the simple fact that negativity fades faster than positivity in human memory.

### **Future research**

My hope is that this work inspires a broad stream of research investigating the potentially spurious beliefs people have about society and how it is changing. The candidates people vote for, the policies they support, and even the values they hold dear depend in part on their lay theories of society and change within it. Are these theories right? If they aren't, can they be corrected? To that end, I am interested in answering two questions next.

*Is there a cure for the illusion of moral decline?*

It is not easy to change people's deeply held beliefs, and I don't expect this belief to be any different. Even though I've been steeped in this research for years, it still *feels* viscerally true that people are nasty today and they used to be nice. The antidote to that gut feeling may be interrogation. Probing the depths of an illusion of explanatory depth can dispel it (Rozenblit & Keil, 2002), so perhaps it can do the same to the illusion of moral decline. If people had to account for who, exactly, had declined, when they declined, how, and why, perhaps they would see a little less decline.

Such an intervention might undo the Fading Affect Bias with conscious reflection. While the moral outrages of yesteryear may not seem as bad as the moral outrages of today, that intuitive feeling is hard to justify explicitly. Today Myanmar is the midst of an ethnic cleansing; is it any worse than what happened in Rwanda in the 90s? When put side-by-side, are the murders and rapes in the newspaper today really more heinous than the murders and rapes in the newspaper twenty years ago? When recalled in excruciating detail, is the snub from the waiter today really worse than the snub from a different waiter in 2015?

My hunch is that this approach will be more effective than inundating participants with the data I collected in Study 6. Anecdotally, non-scientists tend to receive that data with congenial disbelief. "But what about social media," they ask. "What about Trump?" Line graphs and  $R^2$  values and percentages of 95% HDIs inside ROPEs may be compelling to eggheads but not to regular-heads. Experience trumps data for most people, so the most effective route to changing their minds might be changing the way they think about their experience.

*In what other cases do people mistake bad for worse?*

Many people claim that many things are declining. At your local bookstore you can find titles like *The Decadent Society*, *Nervous States: Democracy and the Decline of Reason*, *Not with a Bang but with a Whimper: The Politics and Culture of Decline*, *The Decline and Fall of Western Art* and so on. These may or may not be illusions, but they sure sound familiar, and the same mechanism may be at work. If something seems bad and always has, people may spuriously think it's declining. There have always been corrupt politicians, consumer society has always seemed frivolous, and every era of art has had its detractors. The authors stocking bookshelves with stories of decline may have been fooled into thinking these things have ever been different. These other potential illusions of decline are worth investigating because their believers very fervently want something to be done about decline, and if we are to take their demands seriously, we should at least know whether they're imagining things.

## Conclusion

A majority of humans believe that morality has declined. They believe decline began at their birth and continues to this day, that it is driven both by individuals changing for the worse and worse cohorts replacing better ones, and that it fortunately spares those they love most. People from Alaska to Zimbabwe agree: people aren't as kind, honest, nice, and good as they used to be.

People are wrong. The earth-shaking kind of immorality—wars, genocides, terrorist attacks—have become scarcer. The mundane forms of immorality—lying and cheating and being plain nasty—haven't become any more or less scarce.

Though there are likely multiple mechanisms that contribute to the illusion of moral decline, the mechanism I have proposed can uniquely fit the entire constellation of data. People encounter predominately negative information about the morality of people in general and the negativity of that information fades faster than any positivity, and those two factors can produce the data I observed across seven original surveys.

People pay a pointless price for falling fool to the illusion of moral decline. It must be miserable to believe that the beginning of your life on Earth coincided with the end of human kindness, that human decency is slipping away even at this very moment, that everyone gets a little colder every year, that every death robs the world of a saint and every birth gives it a sinner. What painful truths these would be if they were true!

Even those of us who don't believe in moral decline—and by now I hope you're one of us—still bear a burden. We all live under the charlatans and strongmen who ascend to power on spurious claims of decline. We all want to live in a world without violence, prejudice, and hatred. To create that world, we first need to understand that—contrary to popular belief—there is less

violence, prejudice, and hatred than ever before. If we can continue these trends, our future will be great—not great *again*, but greater than ever before.



**Table 1.**

source	question	N	Type	Time	Year	Interval size	target	% decline	% same	% improvement
Pew	(As I read a list of some problems, please tell me if you think the country is making progress, losing ground, or if things are about the same as they have been.)...Low moral and ethical standards...Do you think the country is making progress, losing ground, or are things about the same as they have been when it comes to...low moral and ethical standards?	1489	values	general	2008	NA	Americans	56	30	10
NBC News/ Wall Street Journal	(For each of the decades I name, please tell me whether you feel the nation's morals and values were much higher in that decade than they are now, somewhat higher than now, somewhat lower than now, or much lower than they are now.)... The 1960s	2003	values	specific	1996	30	Americans	70	6	19
NBC News/ Wall Street Journal	(For each of the decades I name, please tell me whether you feel the nation's morals and values were much higher in that decade than they are now, somewhat higher than	2003	values	specific	1996	20	Americans	56	9	31

	now, somewhat lower than now, or much lower than they are now.)... The 1970s									
NBC News/ Wall Street Journal	(For each of the decades I name, please tell me whether you feel the nation's morals and values were much higher in that decade than they are now, somewhat higher than now, somewhat lower than now, or much lower than they are now.)... The 1980s	2003	values	specific	1996	10	Americans	47	16	34
Center for Survey Research, University of Virginia	(How strong would you say the US (United States) decline or improvement is in each of the following areas...strong decline, moderate decline, holding steady, moderate improvement, or strong improvement?)... American moral and ethical standards	2047	values	general	1996	NA	Americans	70	24	6
NORC	(I'd like to ask you a few questions about civility in our society. By civility, I mean showing respect for the people you deal with. For example, respecting other people's opinions, being courteous, helping others, and showing good sportsmanship.)...In general, when most Americans debate issues facing the country do you think they are	1006	behavior	specific	2011	10	Americans	53	35	10

	more civil today compared to 10 years ago, less civil, or about as civil as they were 10 years ago?									
Gallup	(I'm going to read you several more statements and ask you whether, in general, you agree or disagree.)... Moral and ethical standards are declining so much in America these days that something drastic must be done.	1564	values	general	1964	NA	Americans	68	NA	NA
Pew	(Now I'd like to ask some questions about some of the problems we face in this country today. For each problem I mention, please tell me how you think affecting this country today, and how much this problem affects you personally.)...Do you think the problem of...low moral and ethical standards is about the same as it has been, that the country is making progress in this area, or that the country is losing ground?	1204	values	general	1996	NA	Americans	62	24	12
NBC News/ Wall Street Journal	(Over the past decade of 2000 to 2009, do you feel that America has gained ground, has stayed about the same, or has lost ground in each of the	1008	values	specific	2009	5	Americans	66	23	7

	following areas?)...Moral values									
NBC News/ Wall Street Journal	(Over the past decade of 2000 to 2009, do you feel that America has gained ground, has stayed about the same, or has lost ground in each of the following areas?)...Treating one another with respect	1008	behavior	specific	2009	5	Americans	55	27	14
Center for Survey Research, University of Virginia	(Please consider the following statements and tell me whether you completely agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree, or completely disagree with each statement.)... In general, Americans lived more moral and ethical lives 50 years ago.	2047	behavior	specific	1996	50	Americans	71	NA	NA
NBC News	(Thinking about where America stands today as compared to four years ago, for each of the following things, please tell me whether you think that things are better off, about the same, or worse off than they were four years ago.)...Moral values and standards	1007	values	specific	2005	4	Americans	37	37	23
NBC/ Wall Street Journal	Compared to ten years ago, would you say that Americans now are more polite to each other or less polite to each other?	1006	behavior	specific	1999	10	Americans	75	7	15

NORC	Compared with 10 years ago, would you say that when it comes to...the willingness of people to help each other, things in this country have generally gotten better, gotten worse, or stayed about the same? (If Better/Worse, ask:) Is that a lot better/worse or a little better/worse?	1087	trait	specific	2011	10	Americans	33	45	22
NORC	Compared with 10 years ago, would you say that when it comes to...the willingness of people to help each other, things in this country have generally gotten better, gotten worse, or stayed about the same? Is that a lot better/worse or a little better/worse?	1008	trait	specific	2013	10	Americans	35	45	19
Harris Survey	Compared with ten years ago, would you say morality in the United States is lower today, higher, or not changed much?	1600	trait	specific	1971	10	Americans	65	21	10
CBS News/ New York Times	Considering just the moral climate of the country today, do you feel things in this country are generally going in the right direction or do you feel things have pretty seriously gotten off on the wrong track?	885	values	general	2004	NA	Americans	60	NA	36

Illusion of Moral Decline

Pew	Do you think that Americans used to treat each other with more respect and courtesy in the past, or is this just nostalgia for a past that never existed?	2013	trait	general	2002	NA	Americans	73	NA	NA
Parents Magazine Poll	Do you think that over the last few decades our society has become less honest and ethical in its behavior, more honest and ethical, or has there been no change in the extent to which people behave honestly and ethically?	1000	behavior	specific	1989	15	Americans	75	18	4
Gallup	Generally speaking, do you think moral values have become stronger in the U.S. (United States) in the last twenty-five years, do you think they have become weaker or do you think they have stayed about the same?	1001	values	specific	1996	25	Americans	77	16	7
Pew	Here is a list of things that may or may not be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all. Moral decline.	739	trait	general	2006	NA	Americans	81	NA	NA
Time/Yankelovich	Now here are some statements which represent some traditional American values.	951	trait	general	1976	NA	Americans	83	NA	NA

	Will you tell me for each one whether you strongly believe in this statement, partially believe it or don't believe it. The state of morality in this country is bad and getting worse.									
Center for Survey Research and Analysis, University of Connecticut	Overall, would you say that the moral values in American society are improving, deteriorating, or aren't they changing all that much?	1026	values	general	1997	NA	Americans	78	14	6
Gallup	Right now, do you think the state of moral values in this country as a whole is getting better or getting worse?	1009	values	general	2019	NA	Americans	77	NA	19
Gallup	Right now, do you think the state of moral values in this country as a whole is getting better or getting worse?	1024	values	general	2018	NA	Americans	77	NA	18
Gallup	Right now, do you think the state of moral values in this country as a whole is getting better or getting worse?	1011	values	general	2017	NA	Americans	77	NA	16
Gallup	Right now, do you think the state of moral values in this	1025	values	general	2016	NA	Americans	73	NA	NA

	country as a whole is getting better or getting worse?									
Gallup	Right now, do you think the state of moral values in this country as a whole is getting better or getting worse?	1024	values	general	2015	NA	Americans	74	NA	NA
Gallup	Right now, do you think the state of moral values in this country as a whole is getting better or getting worse?	1028	values	general	2014	NA	Americans	74	NA	NA
Gallup	Right now, do you think the state of moral values in this country as a whole is getting better or getting worse?	1535	values	general	2013	NA	Americans	72	NA	NA
Gallup	Right now, do you think the state of moral values in this country as a whole is getting better or getting worse?	1024	values	general	2012	NA	Americans	73	NA	NA
Gallup	Right now, do you think the state of moral values in this country as a whole is getting better or getting worse?	1018	values	general	2011	NA	Americans	69	NA	NA
Gallup	Right now, do you think the state of moral values in this country as a whole is getting better or getting worse?	1029	values	general	2010	NA	Americans	76	NA	NA
Gallup	Right now, do you think the state of moral values in this country as a whole is getting better or getting worse?	1015	values	general	2009	NA	Americans	71	NA	NA
Gallup	Right now, do you think the state of moral values in this	1017	values	general	2008	NA	Americans	81	NA	NA



	country as a whole is getting better or getting worse?									
Gallup	Right now, do you think the state of moral values in this country as a whole is getting better or getting worse?	1003	values	general	2007	NA	Americans	82	NA	NA
Gallup	Right now, do you think the state of moral values in this country as a whole is getting better or getting worse?	1002	values	general	2006	NA	Americans	81	NA	NA
Gallup	Right now, do you think the state of moral values in this country as a whole is getting better or getting worse?	1005	values	general	2005	NA	Americans	77	NA	NA
Gallup/ CNN/ USA Today	Right now, do you think the state of moral values in this country as a whole is getting better or getting worse?	1015	values	general	2004	NA	Americans	64	NA	NA
Gallup	Right now, do you think the state of moral values in this country as a whole is getting better or getting worse?	1000	values	general	2004	NA	Americans	77	NA	NA
Gallup	Right now, do you think the state of moral values in this country as a whole is getting better or getting worse?	1005	values	general	2003	NA	Americans	67	NA	NA
Gallup	Right now, do you think the state of moral values in this country as a whole is getting better or getting worse?	1012	values	general	2002	NA	Americans	67	NA	NA
Opinio n Researc	Some people say there has been a general letdown in ethical and moral standards	1021	values	general	1964	NA	Americans	51	30	6

h Corpor ation	among the American people as a whole in recent years. Others say ethical and moral standards are as good as ever. Which do you agree with?									
Time/Y ankelov ich	The following are a number of criticisms that have been made in recent years about American society. Will you tell me for each one how you personally feel? The state of morals in this country are pretty bad and getting worse.	1238	values	general	1974	NA	Americans	85	NA	14
NBC News/ Wall Street Journal	Thinking back to when you were growing up, would you say that the social and moral values in the United States were the same as today, higher than today, or lower than today?	2011	values	varies	1999	NA	Americans	67	9	22
Market Strategi es	Thinking specifically about the state of the country's morals and values, do you feel things are generally going in the right direction, or do you feel things have pretty seriously gotten off on the wrong track?	800	values	general	1999	NA	Americans	75	NA	20
NBC News/ Wall Street Journal	Which of the following statements comes closest to expressing how you feel about the state of morals in this country at the present time...	2003	values	general	1996	NA	Americans	73	NA	23

	they are pretty bad and getting worse, they are pretty bad but getting better, they are pretty good but getting worse, or they are pretty good and getting better?									
NORC	Which of the statements on this card comes closest to expressing how you feel about the state of morals in this country at the present time? They are pretty bad and getting worse, they are pretty bad but getting better, they are pretty good but getting worse, they are pretty good and getting better	1975	values	general	1964	NA	Americans	62	4	30
NBC News/ Wall Street Journal	Which one of the following statements comes closest to expressing how you feel about the state of morals in this country at the present time?...They are pretty bad and getting worse, they are pretty bad but getting better, they are pretty good but getting worse, they are pretty good and getting better	1003	values	general	2004	NA	Americans	63	NA	32
YouGov - PTN	Thinking about the nation as a whole, do you think crimes motivated by hatred (racist, anti-religious, homophobic and anti-ethnic) over the past	1500	behavior	specific	2019	10	Americans	59	22	9

	12 months are higher or lower compared to ten years ago?									
Economist - PTN	Thinking about the nation as a whole, do you think the number of violent crime incidents (homicide, sexual assault, robbery, serious assault) over the past 12 months is higher or lower compared to ten years ago?	2692	behavior	specific	2017	10	Americans	53	13	20
Economist - PTN	In the last year would you say crime in the country has increased, decreased, or stayed about the same?	2692	behavior	specific	2017	1	Americans	53	20	15
Economist - PTN	Thinking about the nation as a whole, do you think the number of violent crime incidents (homicide, sexual assault, robbery, serious assault) over the past 12 months is higher or lower compared to ten years ago?	2692	behavior	specific	2017	1	Americans	53	13	20
YouGov - PTN	Compared with 20 years ago, has the rate of violent crime in the United States increased or decreased?	1000	behavior	specific	2014	20	Americans	50	15	22
Kaiser Family Foundation	Compared with 20 years ago, has the rate of violent crime in the United States increased or decreased?	1514	behavior	specific	1996	20	Americans	91	NA	NA
Gallup - PTN	Has the crime rate in the US increased, decreased, or stayed the same in the past 10 years?	1235	behavior	specific	1989	10	Americans	84	5	5

Barna Research Group - PTN	Percentage of Americans who believe the values and morals of America are declining.	2083	values	general	2013	NA	Americans	77	NA	NA
NBC News - PTN	Now I would like to read you several more statements about some of the social issues facing America. For each issue, please tell me whether you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with that statement: traditional moral values have grown weaker and need to be strengthened	1502	values	general	1993	NA	Americans	92	NA	7
Marist	Do you think Americans overall are more respectful, less respectful, or about as respectful of each other as they were a few years ago?	1084	trait	specific	2019	3	Americans	67	25	7
NPR	From what you have read or heard, do you think, compared to 25 years ago, the per capita gun murder rate in the U.S. is higher, lower, or about the same?	880	behavior	specific	2019	25	Americans	59	23	12
Economist	Compared with 20 years ago, has the number of gun crimes in America gone up, gone down or stayed the same?	1000	behavior	specific	2013	20	Americans	45	12	25

Pew	(And compared to the past, have things gotten better, worse or stayed the same?)...Being friendly and helpful toward their neighbors	2013	behavior	general	2002	NA	people	32	47	19
Pew	(And compared to the past, have things gotten better, worse or stayed the same?)...Being kind and considerate toward people with physical handicaps	2013	behavior	general	2002	NA	people	12	35	51
Pew	(And compared to the past, have things gotten better, worse or stayed the same?)...The problem of littering	2013	behavior	general	2002	NA	people	40	31	27
Pew	(And compared to the past, have things gotten better, worse or stayed the same?)...Treating African Americans with respect and courtesy	2013	behavior	general	2002	NA	people	9	29	59
Pew	(And compared to the past, have things gotten better, worse or stayed the same?)...Treating gay people with respect and courtesy	2013	behavior	general	2002	NA	people	15	24	50
Pew	(And compared to the past, have things gotten better, worse or stayed the same?)...Treating Hispanics with respect and courtesy	2013	behavior	general	2002	NA	people	13	37	41

Pew	(And compared to the past, have things gotten better, worse or stayed the same?)...Treating the elderly with respect and courtesy	2013	behavior	general	2002	NA	people	43	36	18
Gallup	(Does the following word apply more to young people in their teens and 20s today or young people in that same age group 20 years ago?)... Conformist	1249	trait	specific	1989	NA	people	42	6	41
Gallup	(Does the following word apply more to young people in their teens and 20s today or young people in that same age group 20 years ago?)... Materialistic	1249	trait	specific	1989	NA	people	79	3	15
Gallup	(Does the following word apply more to young people in their teens and 20s today or young people in that same age group 20 years ago?)... Patriotic	1249	trait	specific	1989	NA	people	65	6	24
Gallup	(Does the following word apply more to young people in their teens and 20s today or young people in that same age group 20 years ago?)... Reckless	1249	trait	specific	1989	NA	people	73	10	14
Gallup	(Does the following word apply more to young people in their teens and 20s today or	1249	trait	specific	1989	NA	people	81	9	6

	young people in that same age group 20 years ago?)... Selfish									
CBS News	Compared to 10 years ago, do you think more people today are willing to take responsibility when they have done something wrong, fewer people today are willing to take responsibility when they have done something wrong, or hasn't this changed much in the past 10 years?	871	trait	specific	1994	10	people	62	26	9
Associated Press/Inpos	Compared to 20 or 30 years ago, do you think people are more rude, less rude, or about the same?	1001	trait	specific	2005	25	people	69	26	4
NORC	Compared to 20 or 30 years ago, do you think people are more rude, less rude, or about the same?	1004	trait	specific	2016	25	people	74	21	4
Gallup	Compared to ten years ago, are people more honest, less honest, or about the same today?	1005	trait	specific	1987	10	people	54	37	5
Roper/US News & World Report	Compared to ten years ago, are people more honest, less honest, or about the same today?	1005	trait	specific	1987	10	people	54	37	5
LA Times	Do you believe that life today is getting better or worse in terms of morals?	2308	values	general	1985	NA	people	70	10	17



Gallup	DO YOU BELIEVE THAT LIFE TODAY IS GETTING BETTER OR WORSE IN TERMS OF: MORALS?	1536	values	general	1968	NA	people	78	12	8
Washington Post/Harvard/Kaiser	Do you think people in general lead as good lives honest and moral as they used to?	1018	behavior	general	1998	NA	people	71	NA	NA
Roper/US News & World Report	Do you think people in general today are more honest and moral than they were in the 1950's, or less honest and moral than then, or about the same as they were in the 1950's?	1003	trait	specific	1985	30	people	55	28	11
Pew	Do you think people in general today lead as good lives - honest and moral - as they used to?	2002	behavior	general	2002	NA	people	73	NA	NA
Ben Gaffin and Associates	Do you think people in general today lead as good lives--honest and moral--as they used to?	2987	behavior	general	1952	NA	people	46	NA	NA
Gallup	Do you think people in general today lead as good lives--honest and moral--as they used to?	2783	behavior	general	1965	NA	people	52	NA	NA
Gallup	Do you think people in general today lead as good lives--honest and moral--as they used to?	1538	behavior	general	1976	NA	people	66	NA	NA

Pew	Do you think people in general today lead as good lives--honest and moral--as they used to?	1505	behavior	general	2005	NA	people	74	NA	NA
Gallup	Do you think that people today are more willing or less willing to help each other than they used to be, say ten years ago?	1729	trait	specific	1982	10	people	72	12	14
Louis Harris and Associates	Do you think that people's motivation to work today is stronger or not as strong as it was ten years ago?	1201	trait	specific	1980	10	people	73	NA	NA
Gallup	Do you think the human race is getting better or worse from the standpoint of moral conduct?	1500	behavior	general	1949	NA	people	52	22	20
NBC News/Wall Street Journal	For each of the decades I name, please tell me whether you feel the nation's morals and values were much higher in that decade than they are now, somewhat higher than now, somewhat lower than now, or much lower than they are now.... The 1950s	2003	values	specific	1996	40	people	82	3	7
Barna Research Group	How have people's attitudes, lifestyles and behaviors changed in the last 10 years: moral values?	687	behavior	specific	1993	10	people	22	65	9
NBC	In general, do you think people today are a lot more	504	trait	specific	1996	20	people	74	15	6

	honest, somewhat more honest, somewhat less honest, a lot less honest or about the same as 20 years ago?									
NBC News	In general, do you think people today are a lot more honest, somewhat more honest, somewhat less honest, a lot less honest or about the same as 20 years ago?	1009	trait	specific	1995	20	people	71	18	8
NBC News	In general, do you think people today are a lot more honest, somewhat more honest, somewhat less honest, a lot less honest or about the same as 20 years ago?	504	trait	specific	1996	20	people	74	15	6
Barna Report	When it comes to moral values, do you think things have gotten better, gotten worse, or stayed about the same compared to 10 years ago?	1205	values	specific	1993	10	people	22	65	9
Barna Report	When it comes to people's selfishness, do you think things have gotten better, gotten worse, or stayed about the same compared to 10 years ago?	1205	trait	specific	1993	10	people	35	52	9
American Enterprise	Would you say that people are more willing, less willing, or about as willing to help their neighbors as they were twenty-five years ago?	1500	trait	specific	1981	25	people	72	21	6

Institute										
World Public Opinion - PTN	Thinking about the course of your lifetime, would you say, compared to the past, people of different races and ethnicities are now treated much more equally, a little more equally, a little less equally, much less equally, or that there has been no real change?	1819	behavior	general	2008	NA	people	8	10	82
CBS News - PTN	In the last eight years, do you think crime has increased, decreased, or stayed about the same?	1533	behavior	specific	1989	8	people	71	22	4
Associated Press	Compared to 20 or 30 years ago, do you think people are more rude, less rude, or about the same?	1004	behavior	specific	2016	25	people	74	21	4
Associated Press	Compared to 20 or 30 years ago, do you think people are more rude, less rude, or about the same?	NA	behavior	specific	2005	25	people	69	26	4
Pew	(Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all.)...Moral decline	1501	trait	general	2002	NA	Americans	80	NA	NA

LA Times	Generally speaking, would you say the nation is undergoing a period of moral improvement, or a period of moral decline?	3583	trait	general	1989	NA	Americans	64	5	23
Roper	Here is a list of possible causes of some of our problems in this country. (Card shown respondent) Would you call off the ones you think are the major causes of our problems today? (Lack of good leadership, Permissiveness in the courts, Permissiveness of parents, Selfishness - people not thinking of others, Wrongdoing in government, Radical attempts to force change, Growing conservatism, Too much emphasis on money and materialism, Too much technology, A letdown in moral values, Too much commitment to other nations in the world, Too little interest in other nations in the world).	2000	values	general	1982	NA	Americans	57	NA	NA
LA Times	What do you think is the single most urgent problem facing this country today: crime, or education, or the environment, or foreign trade,	2095	trait	general	1989	NA	Americans	22	NA	NA

	or government spending, or inflation, or the moral decline of society, or unemployment, or the fear of war, or what? I could repeat those, if you wish. Is there another one of those problems you consider almost as important?									
Newsw eek - PTN	Do you think the United States is in a moral and spiritual decline?	600	trait	general	1994	NA	Americans	76	NA	NA
Knight Ridder - PTN	Do you think the United States is in a moral and spiritual decline?	1387	trait	general	1992	NA	Americans	65	NA	NA
Marist College	In general, do you believe moral values in this country are headed in the right direction or the wrong direction?	2243	values	general	2009	NA	Americans	67	NA	NA
Public Religio n Researc h Institut e	Now, as I read some statements on a few different topics, please tell me if you completely agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree or completely disagree with each one....The main cause of America's problems is moral decay.	3003	trait	general	2012	NA	Americans	72	NA	NA
TIPP/In vestor's Busines s Daily/C	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would	1008	values	general	2004	NA	Americans	56	NA	NA

Christian Science Monitor	you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?									
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	903	values	general	2019	NA	Americans	76	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	907	values	general	2019	NA	Americans	72	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	903	values	general	2019	NA	Americans	71	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the	823	values	general	2018	NA	Americans	75	NA	NA

Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?									
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	900	values	general	2018	NA	Americans	71	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	905	values	general	2018	NA	Americans	71	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied,	929	values	general	2018	NA	Americans	67	NA	NA



Monitor	not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?									
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	900	values	general	2018	NA	Americans	71	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	905	values	general	2018	NA	Americans	71	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	900	values	general	2018	NA	Americans	71	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms	902	values	general	2018	NA	Americans	72	NA	NA

Daily/C hristian Science Monito r	of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?									
TIPP/In vestor's Busines s Daily/C hristian Science Monito r	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	901	values	general	2018	NA	Americans	75	NA	NA
TIPP/In vestor's Busines s Daily/C hristian Science Monito r	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	900	values	general	2018	NA	Americans	71	NA	NA
TIPP/In vestor's Busines s Daily/C hristian Science Monito r	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	901	values	general	2018	NA	Americans	68	NA	NA

TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	901	values	general	2017	NA	Americans	75	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	905	values	general	2017	NA	Americans	74	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	904	values	general	2017	NA	Americans	70	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very	903	values	general	2017	NA	Americans	73	NA	NA

Science Monitor	satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?									
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	901	values	general	2017	NA	Americans	70	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	904	values	general	2017	NA	Americans	67	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	904	values	general	2017	NA	Americans	75	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business	In general, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time	909	values	general	2017	NA	Americans	64	NA	NA

s Daily/C hristian Science Monito r	in terms of morals and ethics?...Very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, not at all satisfied									
TIPP/In vestor's Busines s Daily/C hristian Science Monito r	How satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics?...Very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, not at all satisfied	885	values	general	2017	NA	Americans	63	NA	NA
TIPP/In vestor's Busines s Daily/C hristian Science Monito r	In general, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics?...Very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, not at all satisfied	934	values	general	2016	NA	Americans	70	NA	NA
TIPP/In vestor's Busines s Daily/C hristian Science Monito r	How satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics?...Very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, not at all satisfied	921	values	general	2016	NA	Americans	68	NA	NA

TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	How satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics?...Very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, not at all satisfied	908	values	general	2016	NA	Americans	66	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	How satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics?...Very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, not at all satisfied	902	values	general	2016	NA	Americans	68	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	How satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics?...Very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, not at all satisfied	914	values	general	2016	NA	Americans	66	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very	1008	values	general	2004	NA	Americans	56	NA	NA

Science Monitor	satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?									
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	938	values	general	2004	NA	Americans	59	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	1003	values	general	2004	NA	Americans	62	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	981	values	general	2004	NA	Americans	63	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is	1003	values	general	2004	NA	Americans	63	NA	NA

s Daily/C hristian Science Monito r	going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?									
TIPP/In vestor's Busines s Daily/C hristian Science Monito r	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	958	values	general	2004	NA	Americans	64	NA	NA
TIPP/In vestor's Busines s Daily/C hristian Science Monito r	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	920	values	general	2004	NA	Americans	74	NA	NA
TIPP/In vestor's Busines s Daily/C hristian Science Monito r	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	905	values	general	2003	NA	Americans	62	NA	NA



TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	903	values	general	2003	NA	Americans	59	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	901	values	general	2003	NA	Americans	57	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	901	values	general	2003	NA	Americans	59	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very	901	values	general	2003	NA	Americans	56	NA	NA

Science Monitor	satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?									
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	919	values	general	2003	NA	Americans	47	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	906	values	general	2003	NA	Americans	46	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	928	values	general	2003	NA	Americans	55	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is	900	values	general	2003	NA	Americans	56	NA	NA

s Daily/C hristian Science Monito r	going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?									
TIPP/In vestor's Busines s Daily/C hristian Science Monito r	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	902	values	general	2003	NA	Americans	57	NA	NA
TIPP/In vestor's Busines s Daily/C hristian Science Monito r	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	900	values	general	2002	NA	Americans	58	NA	NA
TIPP/In vestor's Busines s Daily/C hristian Science Monito r	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	900	values	general	2002	NA	Americans	57	NA	NA

TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	912	values	general	2002	NA	Americans	57	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	914	values	general	2002	NA	Americans	59	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	903	values	general	2002	NA	Americans	60	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very	924	values	general	2002	NA	Americans	58	NA	NA

Science Monitor	satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?									
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	900	values	general	2002	NA	Americans	55	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	906	values	general	2002	NA	Americans	58	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	900	values	general	2002	NA	Americans	55	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is	921	values	general	2002	NA	Americans	53	NA	NA

s Daily/C hristian Science Monito r	going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?									
TIPP/In vestor's Busines s Daily/C hristian Science Monito r	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	902	values	general	2002	NA	Americans	47	NA	NA
TIPP/In vestor's Busines s Daily/C hristian Science Monito r	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	906	values	general	2002	NA	Americans	48	NA	NA
TIPP/In vestor's Busines s Daily/C hristian Science Monito r	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	921	values	general	2001	NA	Americans	39	NA	NA

TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	920	values	general	2001	NA	Americans	38	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	925	values	general	2001	NA	Americans	39	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	909	values	general	2001	NA	Americans	56	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very	949	values	general	2001	NA	Americans	64	NA	NA

Science Monitor	satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?									
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	909	values	general	2001	NA	Americans	65	NA	NA
TIPP/Investor's Business Daily/Christian Science Monitor	Okay, and generally speaking, how satisfied are you with the direction that the country is going in at this time in terms of morals and ethics? Would you say you are...very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?	909	values	general	2001	NA	Americans	60	NA	NA
Economist - PTN	The government has reported a steady decline in the rate of violent crime over the last twenty years. Do you think the government is correct and the rate of violent crime has decreased or do you think the rate of violent crime has remained the same or even increased over the past twenty years?	1500	behavior	specific	2019	20	Americans	32	NA	NA



Kaiser Family Foundation - PTN	For each issue I read please tell me if you think it is a major problem facing our country, a minor problem or not a problem at all. Decline in moral values.	3884	values	general	1999	NA	Americans	93	NA	NA
YouGov	The government has reported a steady decline in the rate of violent crime over the last twenty years. Do you think the government is correct and the rate of violent crime has decreased or do you think the rate of violent crime has remained the same or even increased over the past twenty years?	1000	behavior	specific	2014	20	Americans	33	NA	NA

Table 2.

Source	Question	N	Type	Time	Year	Interval size	Sample	% decline	% same	% improvement
Gallup	Do you believe that society as a whole is less moral today than it was 50 years ago, or do you not believe that?	1000	trait	specific	1996	50	UK	75	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may or may not be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all. Moral decline.	700	trait	general	2006	NA	Brazil	94	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may or may not be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a	600	trait	general	2006	NA	Chile	71	NA	NA

	problem at all. Moral decline.									
Pew	Here is a list of things that may or may not be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all. Moral decline.	1005	trait	general	2006	NA	Guatemala	93	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may or may not be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all. Moral decline.	655	trait	general	2006	NA	Kenya	94	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may or may not be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a	650	trait	general	2006	NA	Nigeria	91	NA	NA

	moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all. Moral decline.									
Pew	Here is a list of things that may or may not be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all. Moral decline.	800	trait	general	2006	NA	South Africa	82	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may or may not be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all. Moral decline.	726	trait	general	2006	NA	India	98	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may or may not be problems in our country. As I read each	1000	trait	general	2006	NA	Philippines	93	NA	NA

	one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all. Moral decline.									
Pew	Here is a list of things that may or may not be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all. Moral decline.	600	trait	general	2006	NA	South Korea	94	NA	NA
YouGov	Compared with ten years ago, when Labour came to power, do you think Britain is a fairer society, or less fair, or has there been little change?	589	trait	specific	2007	10	UK	13	19	67
Eurobarometer	If you compare the situation with 5 years ago, would you say that the following types of discrimination are more common or	5171 8	behavior	specific	2007	5	EU	48	NA	42

	less common in our country? Discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin.									
Eurobarometer	If you compare the situation with 5 years ago, would you say that the following types of discrimination are more common or less common in our country? Discrimination on the basis of gender.	51718	behavior	specific	2007	5	EU	27	NA	63
Eurobarometer	If you compare the situation with 5 years ago, would you say that the following types of discrimination are more common or less common in our country? Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.	51718	behavior	specific	2007	5	EU	31	NA	58
Eurobarometer	If you compare the situation with 5 years ago, would you say that the following types of discrimination are more common or less common in our country?	51718	behavior	specific	2007	5	EU	38	NA	51

	Discrimination on the basis of age.									
Eurobarometer	If you compare the situation with 5 years ago, would you say that the following types of discrimination are more common or less common in our country? Discrimination on the basis of religion or beliefs.	51718	behavior	specific	2007	5	EU	42	NA	48
Eurobarometer	If you compare the situation with 5 years ago, would you say that the following types of discrimination are more common or less common in our country? Discrimination on the basis of disability.	51718	behavior	specific	2007	5	EU	30	NA	62
Market & Opinion Research International - PTN	I am going to read out some statements. I would like you to tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with each. Young people today do more for society and the community than their	NA	behavior	general	2000	NA	UK	45	NA	29

	parents' generation did.									
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all...moral decline. [351]	780	trait	general	2002	NA	Angola	76	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all...moral decline. [351]	814	trait	general	2002	NA	Argentina	93	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a	689	trait	general	2002	NA	Bangladesh	98	NA	NA



	problem at all...moral decline. [351]									
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all...moral decline. [351]	782	trait	general	2002	NA	Bolivia	81	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all...moral decline. [351]	1000	trait	general	2002	NA	Brazil	87	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a	501	trait	general	2002	NA	Britian	74	NA	NA

	problem at all...moral decline. [351]									
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all...moral decline. [351]	514	trait	general	2002	NA	Bulgaria	79	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all...moral decline. [351]	500	trait	general	2002	NA	Canada	63	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a	500	trait	general	2002	NA	Czech Republic	84	NA	NA

	problem at all...moral decline. [351]									
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all...moral decline. [351]	507	trait	general	2002	NA	France	82	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all...moral decline. [351]	1000	trait	general	2002	NA	Germany	73	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a	702	trait	general	2002	NA	Ghana	86	NA	NA

	problem at all...moral decline. [351]									
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all...moral decline. [351]	500	trait	general	2002	NA	Guatemala	94	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all...moral decline. [351]	506	trait	general	2002	NA	Honduras	94	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a	2189	trait	general	2002	NA	India	63	NA	NA

	problem at all...moral decline. [351]									
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all...moral decline. [351]	1017	trait	general	2002	NA	Indonesia	96	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all...moral decline. [351]	5018	trait	general	2002	NA	Italy	92	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a	708	trait	general	2002	NA	Ivory Coast	81	NA	NA

	problem at all...moral decline. [351]									
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all...moral decline. [351]	702	trait	general	2002	NA	Japan	95	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all...moral decline. [351]	658	trait	general	2002	NA	Kenya	80	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a	1000	trait	general	2002	NA	Lebanon	90	NA	NA

	problem at all...moral decline. [351]									
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all...moral decline. [351]	697	trait	general	2002	NA	Mali	90	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all...moral decline. [351]	996	trait	general	2002	NA	Mexico	82	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a	1000	trait	general	2002	NA	Nigeria	84	NA	NA

	problem at all...moral decline. [351]									
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all...moral decline. [351]	2032	trait	general	2002	NA	Pakistan	82	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all...moral decline. [351]	711	trait	general	2002	NA	Peru	84	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a	700	trait	general	2002	NA	Philippines	86	NA	NA



	problem at all...moral decline. [351]									
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all...moral decline. [351]	500	trait	general	2002	NA	Poland	79	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all...moral decline. [351]	1002	trait	general	2002	NA	Russia	81	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a	700	trait	general	2002	NA	South Africa	81	NA	NA

	problem at all...moral decline. [351]									
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all...moral decline. [351]	719	trait	general	2002	NA	South Korea	83	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all...moral decline. [351]	710	trait	general	2002	NA	Senegal	87	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a	500	trait	general	2002	NA	Slovakia	90	NA	NA

	problem at all...moral decline. [351]									
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all...moral decline. [351]	720	trait	general	2002	NA	Tanzania	86	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all...moral decline. [351]	1005	trait	general	2002	NA	Turkey	90	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a	1008	trait	general	2002	NA	Uganda	83	NA	NA

	problem at all...moral decline. [351]									
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all...moral decline. [351]	500	trait	general	2002	NA	Ukraine	78	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a problem at all...moral decline. [351]	700	trait	general	2002	NA	Uzbeki stan	76	NA	NA
Pew	Here is a list of things that may be problems in our country. As I read each one, please tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem, or not a	700	trait	general	2002	NA	Venezu ela	82	NA	NA

	problem at all...moral decline. [351]									
ICM/Guardian	The Labour government came to power in 1997. With that in mind, do you agree or disagree with the following statement? People have become more selfish about money.	NA	trait	specific	2006	9		77	NA	NA
European Values Survey	Do you think that people today are more willing or less willing to help each other than they used to be, say ten years ago?	NA	trait	specific	NA	10		[data is still being collected and analyzed]	NA	NA

Table 5.

Source	Question	Response options	Years	N	b	R <sup>2</sup>	% of HDI in ROPE	Self vs. other	note
Gallup	How would you rate the overall state of moral values in this country today?	Excellent [4], Good [3], Only Fair [2], Poor [1]	2002-2020	20,863	-0.006***	0.002	100	other	
Gallup	Next, we'd like to know how you feel about the state of the nation in each of the following areas. For each one, please say whether you are -- very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. If you don't have enough information about a particular subject to rate it, just say so. How about -- the moral and ethical climate?	Very satisfied [4], Somewhat satisfied [3], Somewhat dissatisfied [2], Very dissatisfied [1]	2001-2008, 2012-2020	17,015	-0.01***	0.008	100	other	
Gallup	Which of the following things, if any, have you, personally, done in the past 12 months? How about Donated money to any other charitable cause	Yes [1], No [0]	2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2013, 2017, 2020	9,222	-0.02	0.002	100	self	

Gallup	Which of the following things, if any, have you, personally, done in the past 12 months? Given blood	Yes [1], No [0]	2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2017, 2020	7,131	-0.01**	0.001	100	self	
Gallup	Which of the following things, if any, have you, personally, done in the past 12 months? Volunteered your time to any other charitable cause	Yes [1], No [0]	2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2013, 2017, 2020	9,222	0.006	0.0003	100	self	
Gallup	Does your supervisor always create an environment that is trusting and open, or not? (asked only of those with a job and a supervisor)	Yes [1], No [0]	2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014	957,762	0.02***	0.0001	100	other	
Gallup	Do you feel safe walking alone at night in the city or area where you live?	Yes [1], No [0]	2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013	1,774,388	0.01***	0.00005	100	other	
Gallup	On a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please rate your level of agreement with the following items. You always feel safe and secure.	1 [strongly disagree] - 5 [strongly agree]	2014-2017	691,671	0.001	0.000001	100	other	
Gallup	Have you done any of the following in the past month? How about volunteered your time to an organization?	Yes [1], No [0]	2007-2019	12,126	-0.02***	0.001	100	self	
Gallup	Within the last 12 months, have you had money or	Yes [1], No [0]	2006-2019	12,561	0.002	0.000007	100	other	

	property stolen from you or another household member?								
Gallup	Now, please think about yesterday, from the morning until the end of the day. Think about where you were, what you were doing, who you were with, and how you felt. Were you treated with respect all day yesterday?	Yes [1], No [0]	2006-2019	14,255	0.009	0.0002	100	other	
Gallup	Do you feel safe walking alone at night in the city or area where you live?	Yes [1], No [0]	2006-2019	12,505	-0.02**	0.0007	100	other	
Gallup	If you were in trouble, do you have relatives or friends you can count on to help you whenever you need them, or not?	Yes [1], No [0]	2006, 2008-2019	12,935	-0.04***	0.004	100	other	
Gallup	Please tell me which, if any, of these incidents have happened to you or your household within the last twelve months? Your house or apartment broken into.	Yes [1], No [0]	2000-2019	19,348	-0.004	0.00006	100	other	
Gallup	Within the past 12 months, have you been assaulted or mugged?	Yes [1], No [0]	2015-2019	4,118	-0.11	0.002	87.59	other	
Gallup	Next, I'm going to read some things people do because of their concern over crime. Please tell me	Yes [1], No [0]	2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2007	6,064	-0.004	0.00002	100	other	



	which, if any, of these things you, yourself, do or have done. Keep a dog for protection.								
Gallup	Have you done any of the following in the past month? How about helped a stranger or someone you didn't know who needed help?	Yes [1], No [0]	2007-2019	12,126	0.0009	0.000002	100	self	
Gallup	Next, I'm going to read some things people do because of their concern over crime. Please tell me which, if any, of these things you, yourself, do or have done. Avoid going to certain places or neighborhoods you might otherwise want to go to.	Yes [1], No [0]	2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2007	6,064	-0.01	0.0002	100	other	
Gallup	Next, I'm going to read some things people do because of their concern over crime. Please tell me which, if any, of these things you, yourself, do or have done. Carry mace or pepper spray.	Yes [1], No [0]	2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2007	6,064	-0.03	0.0006	100	other	
Gallup	Next, I'm going to read some things people do because of their concern over crime. Please tell me which, if any, of these	Yes [1], No [0]	2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2007	6,064	0.06***	0.004	100	other	

	things you, yourself, do or have done. Had a burglar alarm installed in your home.								
Gallup	Next, I'm going to read some things people do because of their concern over crime. Please tell me which, if any, of these things you, yourself, do or have done. Carry a knife for defense.	Yes [1], No [0]	2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2007	6,064	0.03*	0.001	100	other	
Gallup	Next, I'm going to read some things people do because of their concern over crime. Please tell me which, if any, of these things you, yourself, do or have done. Carry a gun for defense.	Yes [1], No [0]	2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2007	6,064	0.005	0.0000 2	100	other	
Gallup	Next, I'm going to read some things people do because of their concern over crime. Please tell me which, if any, of these things you, yourself, do or have done. Bought a gun for protection of yourself or your home.	Yes [1], No [0]	2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2007	6,064	-0.004	0.0000 2	100	other	
Gallup	Have you, personally, EVER been the victim of a crime where you were physically harmed, or	Yes [1], No [0]	2000, 2011	2,024	-0.02	0.001	100	other	

	threatened with physical harm?								
Gallup	Next, I'm going to read a list of problems facing the country. For each one, please tell me if you personally worry about this problem a great deal, a fair amount, only a little or not at all? First, how much do you personally worry about crime and violence?	Great deal [4], fair amount [3], only a little [2], not at all [1]	2001-2008, 2010-2020	18,789	-0.005***	0.001	100	other	
Gallup	Please tell me which, if any, of these incidents have happened to you or your household within the last twelve months? You or another household member had your computer or smartphone hacked and the information stolen by unauthorized persons.	Yes [1], No [0]	2003-2011, 2014	10,154	0.06***	0.005	100	other	
Gallup	Please tell me which, if any, of these incidents have happened to you or your household within the last twelve months? You or another household member had information from a credit card used at a store stolen by computer hackers.	Yes [1], No [0]	2014-2016	3,049	-0.007	0.000005	100	other	
Gallup	Please tell me which, if any, of these incidents have	Yes [1], No [0]	2017-2019	3,089	-0.05	0.0003	100	other	

	happened to you or your household within the last twelve months? You or another household member had personal, credit card or financial information stolen by computer hackers								
Gallup	Please tell me which, if any, of these incidents have happened to you or your household within the last twelve months? You or another household member was the victim of identity theft.	Yes [1], No [0]	2009, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2015-2019	9,212	0.06***	0.007	100	other	
Gallup	Please tell me which, if any, of these incidents have happened to you or your household within the last twelve months? You or another household member was sexually assaulted.	Yes [1], No [0]	2000, 2002-2011, 2013-2019	18,337	0.01	0.0003	100	other	
Gallup	Please tell me which, if any, of these incidents have happened to you or your household within the last twelve months? You or another household member mugged or physically assaulted.	Yes [1], No [0]	2000-2011, 2013-2019	19,348	-0.008	0.0003	100	other	
Gallup	Please tell me which, if any, of these incidents have happened to you or your	Yes [1], No [0]	2000-2011, 2013-2019	19,348	-0.002	0.00001	100	other	

	household within the last twelve months? Money or property taken from you or another household member by force, with gun, knife, weapon or physical attack, or by threat of force.								
Gallup	Please tell me which, if any, of these incidents have happened to you or your household within the last twelve months? A home, car, or property owned by you or another household member vandalized.	Yes [1], No [0]	2000-2011, 2013-2019	19,348	-0.008*	0.0003	100	other	
Gallup	Please tell me which, if any, of these incidents have happened to you or your household within the last twelve months? A car owned by you or another household member stolen.	Yes [1], No [0]	2000-2011, 2013-2019	19,348	-0.02*	0.001	100	other	
Gallup	Please tell me which, if any, of these incidents have happened to you or your household within the last twelve months? Money or property stolen from you or another member of your household.	Yes [1], No [0]	2000-2011, 2013-2019	19,348	0.006	0.0002	100	other	
Gallup	How often do you, yourself, worry about the following things -- frequently,	Frequently [4], Occasionally	2014, 2016	2,065	0.01	0.0001	100	other	

	occasionally, rarely or never? How about -- Having your email, passwords or electronic records hacked into?	[3], Rarely [2], Never [1]							
Gallup	How often do you, yourself, worry about the following things -- frequently, occasionally, rarely or never? How about -- Having the credit card information you have used at stores stolen by computer hackers?	Frequently [4], Occasionally [3], Rarely [2], Never [1]	2014-2016	3,080	-0.02	0.0001	100	other	
Gallup	How often do you, yourself, worry about the following things -- frequently, occasionally, rarely or never? How about -- Having your personal, credit card, or financial information stolen by computer hackers?	Frequently [4], Occasionally [3], Rarely [2], Never [1]	2017-2019	3,089	0.04	0.001	100	other	
Gallup	How often do you, yourself, worry about the following things -- frequently, occasionally, rarely or never? How about -- Being a victim of identity theft?	Frequently [4], Occasionally [3], Rarely [2], Never [1]	2009, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2015-2019	9,212	0.003	0.0000 7	100	other	
Gallup	How often do you, yourself, worry about the following things -- frequently, occasionally, rarely or	Frequently [4], Occasionally [3], Rarely	2001-2011, 2013-2019	18,336	-0.02***	0.01	100	other	

	never? How about -- Being a victim of terrorism?	[2], Never [1]							
Gallup	How often do you, yourself, worry about the following things -- frequently, occasionally, rarely or never? How about -- Being the victim of a hate crime?	Frequently [4], Occasionally [3], Rarely [2], Never [1]	2000, 2001, 2003-2011, 2013-2019	18,346	0.01***	0.005	100	other	
Gallup	How often do you, yourself, worry about the following things -- frequently, occasionally, rarely or never? How about -- Being attacked while driving your car?	Frequently [4], Occasionally [3], Rarely [2], Never [1]	2000, 2001, 2003-2011, 2013-2019	18,346	-0.008***	0.002	100	other	
Gallup	How often do you, yourself, worry about the following things -- frequently, occasionally, rarely or never? How about -- Having a school-aged child of yours physically harmed while attending school?	Frequently [4], Occasionally [3], Rarely [2], Never [1]	2000-2011, 2013-2019	19,348	-0.005***	0.0008	100	other	
Gallup	How often do you, yourself, worry about the following things -- frequently, occasionally, rarely or never? How about -- Being assaulted or killed by a coworker or other employee where you work?	Frequently [4], Occasionally [3], Rarely [2], Never [1]	2000-2011, 2013-2019	19,348	0.001	0.0001	100	other	
Gallup	How often do you, yourself, worry about the following	Frequently [4],	2000-2011, 2013-2019	19,348	-0.005***	0.0007	100	other	

	things -- frequently, occasionally, rarely or never? How about -- Having your car stolen or broken into?	Occasionally [3], Rarely [2], Never [1]							
Gallup	How often do you, yourself, worry about the following things -- frequently, occasionally, rarely or never? How about -- Being sexually assaulted?	Frequently [4], Occasionally [3], Rarely [2], Never [1]	2000-2011, 2013-2019	19,796	-0.0004	0.000005	100	other	
Gallup	How often do you, yourself, worry about the following things -- frequently, occasionally, rarely or never? How about -- Your home being burglarized when you are not there?	Frequently [4], Occasionally [3], Rarely [2], Never [1]	2000-2011, 2013-2019	19,796	-0.004***	0.00006	100	other	
Gallup	How often do you, yourself, worry about the following things -- frequently, occasionally, rarely or never? How about -- Your home being burglarized when you are there?	Frequently [4], Occasionally [3], Rarely [2], Never [1]	2000-2011, 2013-2019	19,796	-0.002	0.00008	100	other	
Gallup	How often do you, yourself, worry about the following things -- frequently, occasionally, rarely or never? How about -- Getting murdered?	Frequently [4], Occasionally [3], Rarely [2], Never [1]	2000-2011, 2013-2019	19,796	0.004***	0.00006	100	other	
Gallup	How often do you, yourself, worry about the following	Frequently [4],	2000-2011, 2013-2019	19,796	0.001	0.00007	100	other	



	things -- frequently, occasionally, rarely or never? How about -- Getting mugged?	Occasionally [3], Rarely [2], Never [1]							
Gallup	Overall, how would you describe the problem of crime in the area where you live -- is it extremely serious, very serious, moderately serious, not too serious or not serious at all?	Extremely [5]. Very [4], Somewhat [3], Not too [2], Not at all [1]	2000, 2003-2011, 2013-2019	17,819	0.002	0.0001	100	other	
Gallup	Overall, how would you describe the problem of crime in the United States - - is it extremely serious, very serious, moderately serious, not too serious or not serious at all?	Extremely [5]. Very [4], Somewhat [3], Not too [2], Not at all [1]	2000, 2003-2011, 2013-2019	18,025	-0.0002	0.000002	100	other	
Gallup	Is there any area near where you live -- that is, within a mile -- where you would be afraid to walk alone at night?	Yes [1], No [0]	1965, 1967, 1968, 1972, 1975, 1977, 1979, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1989, 1990, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1997, 2000-2011, 2013-2019	37,882	-0.006***	0.002	100	other	
General Social Survey	Now I'm going to read you a list of statements that might or might not describe your main job. Please tell			7,301	-0.004**	0.001	100	other	

	me whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with each of these statements. I. At the place where I work, I am treated with respect								
General Social Survey	Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful, or that they are mostly just looking out for themselves?	Helpful [1], Depends [2], Looking out for self [3]	1972, 1973, 1975, 1976, 1978, 1980, 1983, 1984, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018	41,009	0.002***	0.0006	100	other	
General Social Survey	Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements: A. People should be willing to help others who are less fortunate	Strongly agree [5], Agree [4], Neither agree nor disagree [3], Disagree [2], Strongly disagree [1]	2002, 2004, 2012, 2014	5,248	0.001	0.00006	100	self	
General Social Survey	Now I'm going to read you another list of statements about your main job. For	Very true [4], Somewhat	2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018	7,235	-0.001	0.0001	100	other	

	each, please tell me if the statement is very true, somewhat true, not too true, or not at all true with respect to the work you do. N. The people I work with can be relied on when I need help	true [3], Not too true [2], Not at all true [1]							
General Social Survey	During the past 12 months, how often have you done each of the following things: D. Allowed a stranger to go ahead of you in line	More than once a week [6], Once a week [5], Once a month [4], At least 2-3 times in the past year [3], Once in the past year [2], Not at all [1]	2002, 2004, 2012, 2014	4,916	0.003	0.0002	100	self	
General Social Survey	During the past 12 months, how often have you done each of the following things: G. Offered your seat on a bus or in a public place to a stranger who was standing	More than once a week [6], Once a week [5], Once a month [4], At least 2-3 times in the past year [3], Once in the past year [2], Not at all [1]	2002, 2004, 2012, 2014	5,138	0.0006	0.000006	100	self	

		[2], Not at all [1]							
General Social Survey	During the past 12 months, how often have you done each of the following things: I. Carried a stranger's belongings, like groceries, a suitcase, or shopping bag	More than once a week [6], Once a week [5], Once a month [4], At least 2-3 times in the past year [3], Once in the past year [2], Not at all [1]	2002, 2004, 2012, 2014	5,157	0.003	0.0001	100	self	
General Social Survey	During the past 12 months, how often have you done each of the following things: J. Given directions to a stranger	More than once a week [6], Once a week [5], Once a month [4], At least 2-3 times in the past year [3], Once in the past year [2], Not at all [1]	2002, 2004, 2012, 2014	4,978	-0.001***	0.003	100	self	
General Social Survey	During the past 12 months, how often have you done each of the following things: A. Donated blood	More than once a week [6], Once a week [5], Once a	2002, 2004, 2012, 2014	5,257	-0.01***	0.004	100	self	

		month [4], At least 2-3 times in the past year [3], Once in the past year [2], Not at all [1]							
General Social Survey	During the past 12 months, how often have you done each of the following things: B. Given food or money to a homeless person	More than once a week [6], Once a week [5], Once a month [4], At least 2-3 times in the past year [3], Once in the past year [2], Not at all [1]	2002, 2004, 2012, 2014	5,091	0.01**	0.002	100	self	
General Social Survey	During the past 12 months, how often have you done each of the following things: C. Returned money to a cashier after getting too much change	More than once a week [6], Once a week [5], Once a month [4], At least 2-3 times in the past year [3], Once in the past year	2002, 2004, 2012, 2014	5,181	-0.02***	0.01	100	self	

		[2], Not at all [1]							
General Social Survey	During the past 12 months, how often have you done each of the following things: E. Done volunteer work for a charity	More than once a week [6], Once a week [5], Once a month [4], At least 2-3 times in the past year [3], Once in the past year [2], Not at all [1]	2002, 2004, 2012, 2014	5,084	0.005	0.0003	100	self	
General Social Survey	During the past 12 months, how often have you done any of the following things for people you know personally, such as relatives, friends, neighbors or other acquaintances? B. Lent quite a bit of money to another person	More than once a week [6], Once a week [5], Once a month [4], At least 2-3 times in the past year [3], Once in the past year [2], Not at all [1]	2002, 2004, 2012, 2014	4,041	-0.02***	0.005	100	self	
General Social Survey	During the past 12 months, how often have you done each of the following things: K. Let someone you didn't	More than once a week [6], Once a week [5], Once a	2002, 2004, 2012, 2014	5,198	-0.004	0.0003	100	self	

	know well borrow a item of some value like dishes or tools.	month [4], At least 2-3 times in the past year [3], Once in the past year [2], Not at all [1]							
General Social Survey	During the past 12 months, how often have you done each of the following things: H. Looked after a person's plants, mail, or pets while they were away	More than once a week [6], Once a week [5], Once a month [4], At least 2-3 times in the past year [3], Once in the past year [2], Not at all [1]	2002, 2004, 2012, 2014	5,149	-0.01**	0.002	100	self	
General Social Survey	The following are things that you may experience in your daily life. Please tell me how often these occur. A. I feel a selfless caring for others.	Many times a day [6], Every day [5], Most days [4], Some days [3], Once in a while [2], Never or almost never [1]	2002, 2004, 2012, 2014	5,151	-0.0002	0.000004	100	self	

General Social Survey	Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements: C. Personally assisting people in trouble is very important to me	Strongly agree [5], Agree [4], Neither agree nor disagree [3], Disagree [2], Strongly disagree [1]	2002, 2004, 2012, 2014	5,247	0.005*	0.001	100	self	
General Social Survey	Is there any area right around here--that is, within a mile--where you would be afraid to walk alone at night?	Yes [1], No [0]	1973, 1974, 1976, 1977, 1980, 1982, 1984, 1985, 1987, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018	39,441	-0.01***	0.005	100	other	
General Social Survey	Other people take credit for my work or ideas.	Often [4], Sometimes [3], Rarely [2], Never [1]	2004, 2012	2,931	0.03***	0.008	100	other	
General Social Survey	D. People at work treat me in a manner that puts me down or address me in unprofessional terms, either publicly or privately.	Often [4], Sometimes [3], Rarely [2], Never [1]	2004, 2012	2,937	0.006	0.0008	100	other	



General Social Survey	H. People at work throw things, slam doors, or hit objects when they are upset with me.	Often [4], Sometimes [3], Rarely [2], Never [1]	2004, 2012	2,942	-0.003	0.0003	100	other	
General Social Survey	I. People at work shout or yell at me in a hostile manner.	Often [4], Sometimes [3], Rarely [2], Never [1]	2004, 2012	2,940	0.006	0.001	100	other	
General Social Survey	M. At work, people are treated with respect.	Strongly agree [4], Agree [3], Disagree [2], Strongly disagree [1]	2004, 2012	2,939	-0.006	0.001	100	other	
General Social Survey	N. In my workplace, people "look the other way" when others are threatened, intimidated, or put down.	Strongly agree [4], Agree [3], Disagree [2], Strongly disagree [1]	2004, 2012	2,887	0.06***	0.09	100	other	
General Social Survey	Generally speaking, would you say that people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?	Can trust [3], Depends [2], Can't be too careful [1]	1972, 1973, 1975, 1976, 1980, 1983, 1984, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006,	41,258	-0.006***	0.008	100	other	

			2008, 2010, 2012, 2014						
General Social Survey	During the past 12 months, how often have you done any of the following things for people you know personally, such as relatives, friends, neighbors or other acquaintances? A. Helped someone outside of your household with housework or shopping	More than once a week [6], Once a week [5], Once a month [4], At least two or three times in the past year [3], Once in the past year [2], Not at all in the past year [1]	2002, 2004, 2012, 2014	5,042	-0.05***	0.03	100	self	
General Social Survey	During the past 12 months, how often have you done any of the following things for people you know personally, such as relatives, friends, neighbors or other acquaintances? C. Spent time talking with someone who was a bit down or depressed	More than once a week [6], Once a week [5], Once a month [4], At least two or three times in the past year [3], Once in the past year [2], Not at all in the past year [1]	2002, 2004, 2012, 2014	5,043	-0.02***	0.004	100	self	

General Social Survey	During the past 12 months, how often have you done any of the following things for people you know personally, such as relatives, friends, neighbors or other acquaintances? D. Helped somebody to find a job	More than once a week [6], Once a week [5], Once a month [4], At least two or three times in the past year [3], Once in the past year [2], Not at all in the past year [1]	2002, 2004, 2012, 2014	5,047	0.001	0.00003	100	self	
General Social Survey	There are different opinions as to what it takes to be a good citizen. As far as you are concerned personally on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 is not at all important and 7 is very important, how important is it, Å¶ H. To help people in America who are worse off than yourself	1 [not at all important] - 7 [very important]	2004, 2014	2,712	-0.02***	0.005	100	self	
General Social Survey	There are different opinions as to what it takes to be a good citizen. As far as you are concerned personally on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 is not at all important and 7 is very important, how	1 [not at all important] - 7 [very important]	2004, 2014	2,689	-0.02**	0.003	100	self	

	important is it,Ä¶ I. To help people in the rest of the world who are worse off than yourself								
General Social Survey	During the past 12 months, how often have you done each of the following things: F. Given money to a charity	More than once a week [6], Once a week [5], Once a month [4], At least two or three times in the past year [3], Once in the past year [2], Not at all in the past year [1]	2002, 2004, 2012, 2014	3,568	-0.02***	0.005	100	self	
KC Research	Generally speaking, do you believe there is a major problem, minor problem, or not much of a problem with the general tone and level of civility in the country today?	Major problem [3], Minor problem [2], Not much of a problem [1]	2010-2017, 2019	9192	0.006**	0.0008	100	other	
KC Research	In an average 7-day week, how many times would you say you encounter incivility, in your in-person interactions with people and online in social networks [2016-2019: "and	0, 1-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16+	2013-2017, 2019	5628	-0.13***	0.005	100	other	

	in your online interactions with people]? Please use your best estimate. IN-PERSON INTERACTIONS.								
KC Research	In an average 7-day week, how many times would you say you encounter incivility, in your in-person interactions with people and online in social networks [2016-2019: "and in your online interactions with people]? Please use your best estimate. ONLINE INTERACTIONS.	0, 1-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16+	2013-2017, 2019	5628	0.03	0.0002	100	other	
KC Research	[ASKED OF THOSE EMPLOYED] How would you describe the general tone and level of civility in your place of employment?	Very civil [4], Somewhat civil [3], Somewhat uncivil [2], Very uncivil [1]	2016, 2017, 2019	1606	-0.002	0.00001	100	other	
KC Research	Which of the following, if any, have you personally experienced? [instances of incivility]	Any [1], None [0]	2011-2016	6,134	-0.04	0.0007	100	other	
World Values Survey	Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you	Can't be too careful [1], Most people	1981, 1995, 1999, 2001, 2006, 2011, 2017	8,902	0.003***	0.003	100	other	

	need to be very careful in dealing with people?	can be trusted [0]							
World Values Survey	Here is a list of qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important? Please choose up to five. UNSELFISHNESS	Not mentioned [0], Mentioned as important [1]	1981, 1995, 1999, 2001, 2006, 2011, 2017	14,154	0.002***	0.001	100	self	
World Values Survey	How much respect is there for individual human rights nowadays (in our country)?. Do you feel there is:	A great deal of respect for individual human rights [1], Fairly much respect [2], Not much respect [3], No respect at all [4]	1999, 2001, 2006, 2011, 2017	8,304	0.02***	0.005	100	other	
World Values Survey	Here is a list of qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important? Please choose up to five. TOLERANCE	Not mentioned [0], Mentioned as important [1]	1981, 1995, 1999, 2001, 2006, 2011, 2017	14,154	0.004***	0.004	100	self	
World Values Survey	I would like to ask you how much you trust people from various groups. Could you	Trust completely [1], Trust	2006, 2011, 2017	5932	0.02	0.001	100	other	

	tell me for each whether you trust people from this group completely, somewhat, not very much or not at all? People of another religion.	somewhat [2], Don't trust very much [3], Do not trust at all [4]							
World Values Survey	I ,Äòd like to ask you how much you trust people from various groups. Could you tell me for each whether you trust people from this group completely, somewhat, not very much or not at all? People of another nationality.	Trust completely [1], Trust somewhat [2], Don't trust very much [3], Do not trust at all [4]	2006, 2011, 2017	5921	-0.006	0.0002	100	other	
World Values Survey	I ,Äòd like to ask you how much you trust people from various groups. Could you tell me for each whether you trust people from this group completely, somewhat, not very much or not at all? People you know personally.	Trust completely [1], Trust somewhat [2], Don't trust very much [3], Do not trust at all [4]	2006, 2011, 2017	5958	0.003	0.00009	100	other	
World Values Survey	I ,Äòd like to ask you how much you trust people from various groups. Could you tell me for each whether you trust people from this group completely, somewhat, not very much or not at all? People you meet for the first time.	Trust completely [1], Trust somewhat [2], Don't trust very much [3], Do not trust at all [4]	2006, 2011, 2017	5971	0.002	0.00001	100	other	

World Values Survey	I would like to ask you how much you trust people from various groups. Could you tell me for each whether you trust people from this group completely, somewhat, not very much or not at all? Your neighborhood.	Trust completely [1], Trust somewhat [2], Don't trust very much [3], Do not trust at all [4]	2006, 2011, 2017	5965	0.008	0.0003	100	other	
World Values Survey	I would like to ask you how much you trust people from various groups. Could you tell me for each whether you trust people from this group completely, somewhat, not very much or not at all? Your family.	Trust completely [1], Trust somewhat [2], Don't trust very much [3], Do not trust at all [4]	2006, 2011, 2017	5978	0.02***	0.003	100	other	
World Values Survey	Do you think most people would try to take advantage of you if they got a chance, or would they try to be fair? Please show your response on this card, where 1 means that "people would try to take advantage of you," and 10 means that "people would try to be fair":	Most people try to take advantage of me [1] - Most people try to be fair [10]	2006, 2011	3436	0.001	0.00003	100	other	

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$



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**SUPPLEMENT**

**STUDIES 1 & 6**

*Search terms.* The following search terms were used to locate relevant survey data in the Roper iPoll system.

- Moral/morality
- Kind/kindness
- Honest/honesty
- Nice/niceness
- Good/goodness
- Polite/politeness
- Rude/rudeness
- Ethics/ethical
- Lazy/laziness
- Hardworking
- Selfish/selfishness/selflessness
- Trust/trustworthy/untrustworthy
- Values
- Standards
- Safer place

In Study 1, to find surveys that specifically asked participants to compare people today to people at some point in the past, I also combined the above search terms with these terms:

- Compared

- Generation
- Today
- “Years ago”
- Worse/better/same
- More/less/same
- Past

I also searched for surveys that had the following tags in the Roper iPoll system:

- Morality
- Civility
- Crime rate
- Young people
- Values

Note that this search was conducted over several months in 2019 and 2020, before Roper iPoll transitioned to a new database and search interface. As such, it may not be possible to completely recreate these results in the new iPoll system.

### STUDY 3

*Additional questions.* After the main dependent measures in Study 3, I piloted some additional measures that I later updated and used in Study 5. Participants answered three questions using the same Likert scales: “How kind, honest, nice, and good are people who are currently your age or older?”, “How kind, honest, nice, and good are people who are currently

younger than you?”, and “Thinking of people who are currently your age or older, how kind, honest, nice, and good were they when they were younger?”.

## STUDY S1

Study 2 was run on Prolific, while Studies 3-5 and 7 were run on Amazon Mechanical Turk. To ensure that these two platforms were comparable, I replicated Study 2 on mTurk.

### Method

*Participants.* Three-hundred and two people responded to an advertisement for a study posted on Amazon Mechanical Turk. Respondents first took a three-item test of English language and American culture that required them to know that children in kindergarten are three or four years old, that an American ZIP code is a series of five digits, and that eating turkey is not an activity associated with Halloween. One hundred and two respondents failed to answer one or more of the questions correctly and were not allowed to participate. The remaining 200 respondents became participants in my study in exchange for \$0.75 (68 female, 131 male, 1 “other”,  $M_{\text{age}} = 37.45$ , 60% White, 28% Black, 6% Hispanic, 4% Asian, 1% “more than one of the above”).

*Procedure.* After consenting to participate, participants read the following instructions:

“Thanks! In this study, we'll ask you how kind, honest, nice, and good people were at various points in time. If you're not sure or you weren't alive at that time, that's okay, just give your best guess.”

They then answered the following question using a seven-point Likert scale with endpoints labeled *not very* and *very*: “How kind, honest, nice, and good are people

today?”. Using the same scale, they then answered the same question about people “ten years ago,” “twenty years ago,” and “thirty years ago.”

As a consistency check, participants were then asked to choose which of the following options best represented their opinion: “People are MORE kind, honest, nice, and good today compared to thirty years ago,” “People are LESS kind, honest, nice, and good today compared to thirty years ago,” or “People are equally kind, honest, nice, and good today compared to thirty years ago.”

If participants selected either of the first two options, they then answered an open-ended question that asked them “What do you think caused people to be [more/less] kind, honest, nice, and good today compared to thirty years ago?”. Finally, participants completed a suite of demographics questions. Embedded in these questions was an attention check that asked participants to select the option “other” and type in the word “sky”. Participants were then compensated and dismissed.

## Results

*Exclusions.* Thirteen participants failed the attention check embedded in the demographics and were excluded from all analyses. Another participant reported that they are 300 years old and was excluded from all analyses. Finally, 53 participants gave answers to the consistency check question that were inconsistent with their previous answers; they were also excluded. This left 134 participants in all analyses (45 female, 88 male, 1 “other”,  $M_{\text{age}} = 38.09$ , 70% White, 19% Black, 5% Hispanic, 4% Asian, 1% “more than one of the above”, 1% “other”).

*Overall effects.* I fit a linear mixed effects model with year of rating as a fixed effect and random intercepts for each participant. I then used post-estimation contrasts to compare ratings

for each year, employing a Bonferroni-Holm correction for multiple comparisons. Participants rated people in 2020 ( $M = 4.75$ ) as less kind, honest, nice, and good compared to all previous years (2010:  $b = -0.26$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.51, -0.009]$ ,  $t(399) = -2.75$ ,  $p = .02$ ; 2000:  $b = -0.57$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.83, -0.32]$ ,  $t(399) = -6.05$ ,  $p < .001$ ; ,1990:  $b = -0.50$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.75, -0.25]$ ,  $t(399) = -5.27$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Participants rated people in 2010 ( $M = 5.01$ ) as less kind, honest, nice, and good compared to all previous years (2000:  $b = 0.31$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.57, -0.06]$ ,  $t(399) = -3.30$ ,  $p = .004$ ; 1990:  $b = -0.24$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.49, 0.013]$ ,  $t(399) = -2.51$ ,  $p = .02$ ). The difference in ratings for 2000 ( $M = 5.33$ ) and 1990 ( $M = 5.25$ ) was not significant,  $b = 0.07$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.18, 0.33]$ ,  $t(399) = 0.79$ ,  $p = .43$ .

*Age.* Was participants' age related to the amount of decline they perceived? To find out, I re-fit the model above with the additional interaction effect of age and year. The model indicated one significant interaction effect: older participants perceived more decline from 1990 to 2020 than did younger participants,  $b = 0.02$ , 95% CI =  $[0.003, 0.04]$ ,  $t(396) = 2.32$ ,  $p = .02$ . No other interaction effect or main effect was significant.