

The Trends in Global Issues

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ABSTRACT

An increasingly common attitude about the world is that things are going downhill. Whether or not this is true is not immediately clear. There are many factors to consider when asking a question like this, and no single metric will tell a complete story. This project's purpose was to analyze various global metrics to come to a conclusion about whether the state of our global society is trending more positively or negatively. I found that, although certain areas of the world face may face increasing hardship in some metrics, the trend across most metrics is consistently positive.

1 INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has been defined by an immense increase in access to information. All you need is a small handheld device in order to watch videos or read articles about something that just happened on the other side of the planet. Being informed about events around the world has never been easier - but not all events are good. If you turn on the news or open basically any social media platform, you're bound to be bombarded with terrible things that have happened to random people that likely don't deserve it. With so much negative information flowing into us, it's no wonder that many people feel the world is getting worse faster than it's getting better. Some claim that it only seems like the world is getting worse because information access has exposed us to suffering that already existed, but that we just never had the chance to see. Others say that while there is certainly a lot of suffering that already existed, it doesn't mean suffering isn't increasing on a whole. The purpose of this project is to explore various global metrics in the interest of making a clear statement on the state and direction of humanity across the world.

2 RELATED WORK

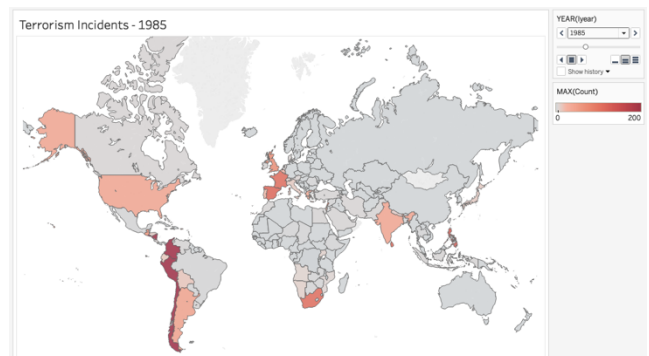
Many individuals and organizations are concerned with the state of the world, so there are abundant resources when it comes to researching global issues. The United Nations has an overview of more than 20 global issues and how they're evolving over time, as well as what they're doing to try and address said issues [1]. On a more recent timescale, the UN Foundation publishes a list of top global issues to watch at the start of the year [2]. A resource that has been vital to the success of this project is the World Bank, which releases annual country rankings on the metrics of multiple pressing issues such as poverty, life expectancy, and education [3]. The World Bank also publishes analyses and research meant to inform solutions for individual issues such as poverty [4]. The Center for Disease Control has a lot of research related to public health, including suicide rates amongst the US population [5]. Some groups have gone further and studied connections between various metrics, such as the National Center for Biotechnology Information, which published a study analysing the link between social fragmentation, poverty, and suicide [6]. There is also the World Inequality Report, which seeks to track down the causes and solutions to global inequality (Alvaredo). The Harvard Gazette also published an article that narrows the major causes of inequality down to education access (Ireland).

3 DESCRIPTION

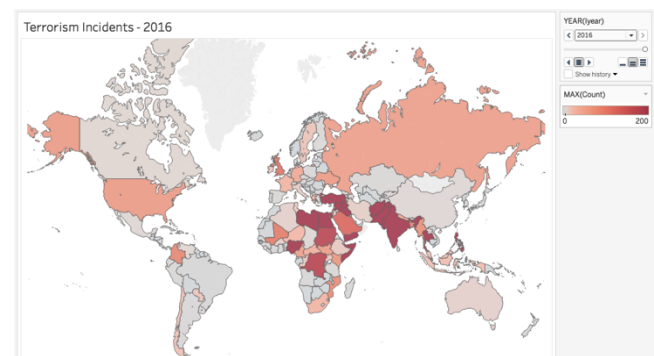
To best capture the trends of various global issues I decided I would be visualizing the data in a map format. Visualizing this kind of information on a map enables geographic insights that you would be much less clear if the data were simply applied to something like a scatter plot. The issues I chose to explore were terrorism, suicide, inequality, life expectancy, and education. To conduct my analysis, I used a mix of publicly available data from World Bank, Kaggle.com, and Data.world. The data was not always sufficiently readable, so I made adjustments and added calculations to some of the datasets using Python. Once the data was ready to be used it was plotted on a map using Tableau. The visualizations animate through each year in order to emphasize how these trends evolve with time. Since this paper cannot be animated, important years and regions will be compared to demonstrate and emphasize findings. Subsection Two

4 DISCUSSION

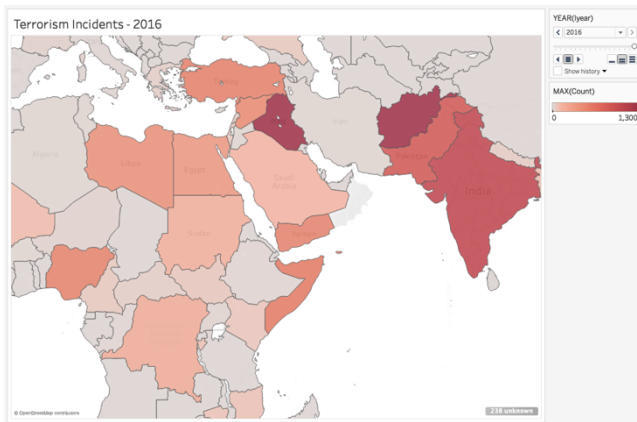
The first issue that I explored was terrorism. With 9/11, the rise of ISIS, and escalating tensions between India and Pakistan, terrorism has been at the forefront of global issues for most of the 2000s.



In 1985 most terrorism incidents took place in a few select regions; notably South Africa, South America, and Western Europe.

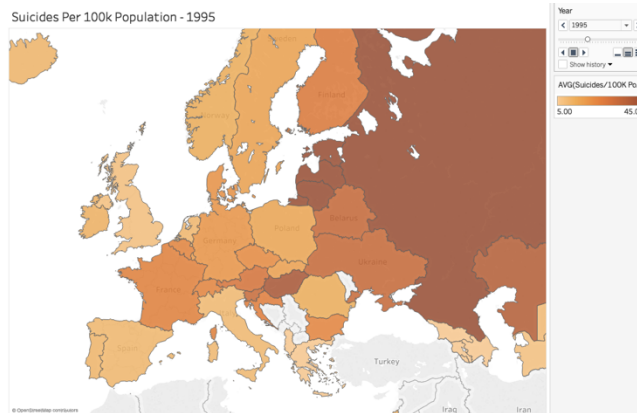


By 2016 terrorism had become vastly more common, consuming much of the Middle east, Northern Africa, and Southern Asia. However, this color scale only goes up to 200.

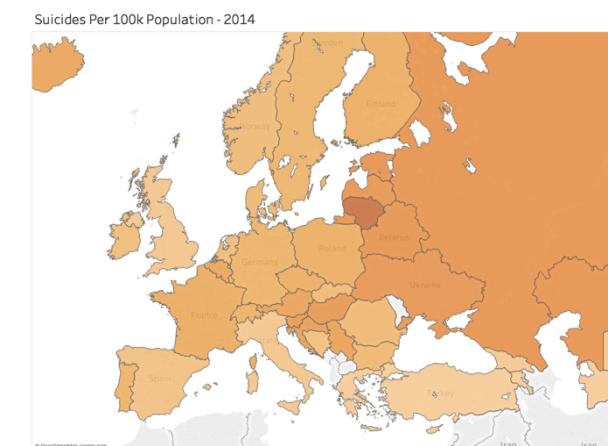


Focusing in on these regions and increasing the color scale, an even more grim picture of the region is painted. Tensions between India and Pakistan are reaching new heights. Libya and Egypt are still recovering from the turmoil that started with the Arab Spring. Even though the color scale is limited to 1,300 incidents, Iraq had over 3,000 terrorist attacks alone in 2016. Terrorism has become much more prevalent across the world as political tensions that have been simmering for decades finally start boiling over.

The next issue I looked at were the number of suicides per 100k population.

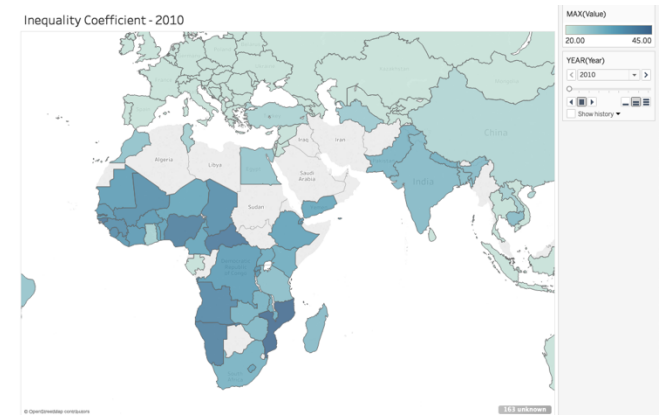


In 1995 the Soviet Union had just fallen, and many former Eastern Bloc countries were undergoing large and difficult transformations to their societies and economies. Before the collapse of the USSR, Russia and the Eastern Bloc had relatively normal suicide numbers. But shortly after the collapse these numbers nearly doubled in the span of a few years.

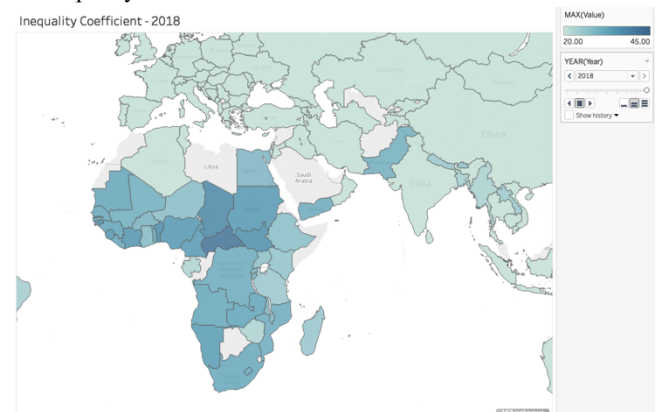


By 2014 enough time had passed for these countries to lay a new foundation and start to build off of it. Eastern Europe still struggles with higher suicide rates than Western Europe, but great progress has been made in the reduction of suicides.

Inequality has recently become an issue of major focus, especially as people begin to notice that there is so much excess wealth, yet still so much poverty and suffering. The inequality coefficient takes various metrics between the richest and poorest of a country and outputs a number that represents the divide between these two groups. The higher the coefficient is, the less equal a country is.

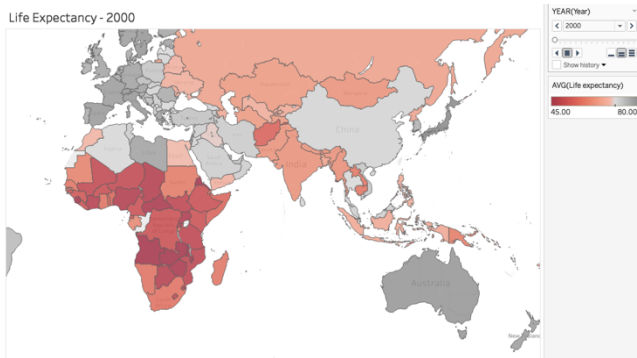


In 2010, much of Europe and Central Asia were relatively equal. Unfortunately, many African countries suffered from extreme levels of inequality. Southern Asia was also facing moderate issues of inequality.

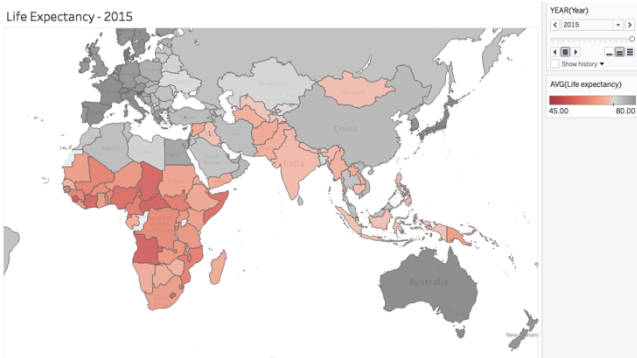


Over the course of 8 years, almost every country that suffered from very bad inequality made great progress. Countries like India and Mozambique became considerably more equal, while smaller but consistent progress towards equality was made all throughout Africa. Unfortunately, countries such as Pakistan, Chad, and the Central African Republic were consistently unequal.

The next issue I looked at was life expectancy. Life expectancy is one of the most popular single metrics used to determine how well a country and its people are doing.

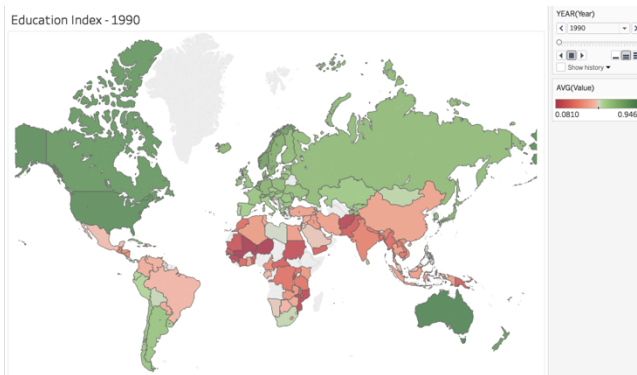


At the start of the century, life expectancy across Asia and Africa was significantly lagging behind that of regions like Europe and North and South America. Many of these countries were suffering from widespread poverty, famine, or conflict.

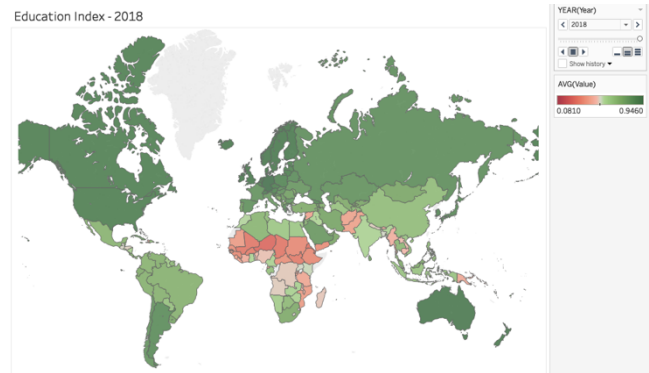


After 15 years, substantial progress had been made in increasing the longevity of people's lives across the world. Central Asia and Eastern Europe have made large strides towards matching the life expectancy of Western Europe. While much of Africa still lags behind the global average, there has been a significant increase in longevity all across the continent.

The final metric I analyzed was education. How educated a country's population is can help greatly increase its productivity, wealth, and living standards.



In the 90s, much of the world was either somewhat educated or decently undereducated. Only a few countries such as the US, Canada, and Australia were very highly ranked on education.



By 2018, the change in education levels across the world was incredible. Most countries were at least somewhat educated, with a significant increase in the number of countries that are very well educated. Moreso, countries in Africa and South Asia have risen substantially, even if there is still work to be done.

5 CONCLUSION

At times, it is very easy to become pessimistic about the direction the world is heading. But despite what we might hear or read, the world is undeniably improving in many of the metrics that matter most. Even though issues like terrorism are significantly more common today than 20 years ago, the lives of people everywhere are improving at a relatively brisk speed. Countries like Iraq have been ravaged by terrorism in recent years, yet its education index went up nearly 15 points. Even as individual countries may suffer unfortunate events that hold it back or renege on progress in some metrics, it is clear that the world is trending greatly in the direction of positive progress. We shouldn't grow complacent, as there is much work to be done. But as the situation stands, things are looking up for many parts of the world.

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