

The Pursuit of Happiness & The Price of Progress: A Global Story

Imagine a world at the turn of the **20th century**—cities still growing, industries taking shape, and the air crisp and clean. Fast forward to today, where **skylines are taller and economies are stronger, but the air is heavier**—with CO₂. As nations have chased **prosperity, innovation, and a better life**, they've also left behind an undeniable footprint.

But has this progress **truly made us happier**? And at what cost?

This journey through **happiness, economic growth, and CO₂ emissions** reveals how our choices have shaped **not just our planet but also our well-being**.

The Rise of CO₂

For much of history, CO₂ levels were **barely a concern**. From **1880 to 1923**, gas-based CO₂ emissions were at their lowest as economies relied on simpler energy sources. But then came the **industrial revolution, the oil boom, and the post-war economic explosion**.

By 1950, emissions skyrocketed. The world was growing, consuming, and advancing at an unprecedented pace. What started as a **few factories and coal plants** turned into **global dependence on fossil fuels**.

Today, **coal accounts for nearly half (48.64%) of all CO₂ emissions**, followed by **oil (35.09%) and gas (16.27%)**. These numbers tell a story of a world fueled by convenience—but also one struggling with sustainability.

Who Bears the Weight of Emissions?

If we look at the biggest contributors to CO₂ emissions, it's no surprise:

Asia and High-Income Countries are leading the charge, powered by industry and urbanization.

China stands at the forefront—its meteoric rise in GDP has gone hand in hand with increasing emissions, making it both an economic powerhouse and a key player in climate impact.

But one surprising insight? **Bahrain**. This small nation has seen a **CO₂ per capita increase of over 6000**, a sign of rapid industrialization that outpaces even some of the largest economies.

We've always been told that economic growth equals success. But does it equal happiness?

Does More Growth Mean More Joy?

If CO₂ emissions are a price for progress, then countries like China, the U.S., and European nations should be among the happiest, right? **Not necessarily**.

China ranks high in GDP, emissions, and happiness, proving that economic strength can contribute to well-being. But countries like **Malawi and Malta tell a different story**—where CO₂ emissions have **negatively impacted happiness levels**, showing that industrial growth doesn't always translate to a better life.

What makes people happy? **Social support, health, and trust in government**. And in this, **China once again takes the lead**, ranking high in **social security, life expectancy, and lower corruption perception**.

So maybe it's not just about the economy—it's about how we live, who we trust, and how we care for each other.

The CO₂ Timeline

Looking back over the last **120 years**, the data shows us a clear **cause-and-effect relationship**:

From 1905 onwards, CO₂ emissions started their relentless climb.

By 1950, industrialization had taken full hold, pushing annual growth rates higher than ever.

More recently, we have seen efforts to slow down emissions, but are they enough?

The question is no longer **"How did we get here?"** but rather **"Where do we go from here?"**

Can We Have It All?

Looking at the data, one thing is clear: **growth and happiness don't have to come at the cost of the planet.**

- ✓ Countries need to invest in **sustainable energy solutions** to reduce reliance on coal and oil.
- ✓ Economic policies should focus on **happiness, not just GDP growth**—with **healthcare, education, and governance** playing key roles.
- ✓ We can learn from nations that have successfully **balanced prosperity and sustainability**—because a better future isn't just about **less CO₂**; it's about **more well-being**.

The world stands at a crossroads: **continue on the same path or rewrite the story of progress.**

The data tells us where we've been. **Now, we must decide where we're going.**