

Needed: Indicators for Measuring Injustice and Societal Decay

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Adequate housing, healthcare, food, public services, education, mass transit, health & safety standards, and environmental protections are the prerequisites for a humane democracy.

Economic indicators – data points, trends, and micro-categories – are the widgets of the big information industry. By contrast, indicators for our society’s democratic health are not similarly compiled, aggregated, and reported. Its up and down trends are presented piecemeal and lack quantitative precision.

We can get the process started and lay the basis for qualitative and quantitative refinement. Years ago, when we started [“re-defining progress”](#) and questioning the very superficial GDP and its empirical limitations, professional economists took notice. Unfortunately, with few exceptions, economists cling to the yardsticks that benefit and suit the plutocrats and CEOs of large corporations.

Here are my offerings in the expectation that readers will add their own measures:

1. **A society is decaying when liars receive mass media attention while truth-tellers are largely ignored.** Those who are chronically wrong with outrageous and baseless predictions are featured on news broadcasts, op-ed pages, and as convention and conference speakers. On the other hand, those who forewarn and are proven to be accurate are not regaled, but instead, they are excluded from the media spotlight and significant gatherings. Consider the treatment of George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and Paul Wolfowitz post-Iraq invasion, compared to people like Congressman Dennis Kucinich, Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn who factually warned Washington not to attack illegally a country that didn’t threaten us.
2. **A society is decaying when rampant corruption is tolerated, and its perpetrators are rewarded with money, votes, and praise.** When President Eisenhower’s chief of staff, former New Hampshire Governor Sherman Adams, accepted a vicuña coat from a textile manufacturer, he was forced to resign. The daily corruption of Trump and the Trumpsters towers beyond measure over Adams’ indiscretion. Yet calls for Trump and his cronies to resign are rare and anemic. Tragically, the law and the norms of decency have done little to curb the corrupt, criminogenic, and criminal excesses of Trump & company. Even government prosecutors and inspectors generals have been

fired, chilled, and sidelined by Trump and his toady, Attorney General Barr.

3. A society is decaying when **a growing number of people believe in fantasies instead of realities**. Social media makes this an ever more serious estrangement from what is actually happening in the country and in the world. Believing in myths and falsehoods leads to political servitude, economic disruption, and social dysfunction. The corrupt concentration of power ensues.
4. An expanding economy focusing increasingly on 'wants and whims' while ignoring the meeting of basic 'needs and necessities' shatters societal cohesiveness and deepens miseries of many people. Adequate housing, healthcare, food, public services, education, mass transit, health & safety standards, and environmental protections are the prerequisites for a humane democracy. The economy is in shambles for tens of millions of Americans, including hungry children. Minimal economic security is beyond the reach of tens of millions of people in our country.
5. With few exceptions, the richer the wealthy become, the more selfish they behave, from severely diminished contributions to charities to the failure to exert leadership to reverse the breakdown of society. Take all the failures of the election machinery from obstructing voters to simply counting the votes honestly with paper records. The U.S. Senate won't vote to give the states the \$4 billion needed for administering the coming elections despite the Covid-19-driven need for expanded voting by mail. The Silicon Valley, undertaxed, mega-billionaires could make a \$4 billion *patriotic donation* to safeguard the voting process in November and not even feel it.
6. Rampant commercialism knowing no boundaries or restraints even to protect young children is running roughshod over civic values. Every major religion has warned about giving too much power to the merchant class going back over 2000 years. In our country, justice arrived after commercial greed was subordinated to humane priorities such as abolishing child labor and requiring crashworthy cars, cleaner air, water, and safer workplaces. Mercantile values produce predictable results, from excluding civic groups from congressional hearings and the mass media to letting corporations *control* what the people *own* such as the vast public lands and public airwaves.
7. Then there is the American Empire astride the globe, enabled by an AWOL Congress and propelled by the avaricious military-industrial complex. In his 1961 farewell address, President Dwight Eisenhower presciently forewarned that "[W]e must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist." All Empires devour themselves until they collapse on the countries of their origins. Over 55% of the federal government's operating spending goes to the Pentagon and its associated budgets. The military-industrial complex increasingly leads to quagmires and creates adversaries abroad, as it starves the social safety net budgets in our country. Our country's military spending with all its waste is surging and unaudited. The U.S. spent more than \$732 billion on direct defense spending in 2019; this is more than the next ten countries with the largest military expenditures.
8. **A society that requires its people to incur crushing debt** to survive, while relying on casinos and other forms of gambling to produce jobs, is going backward into the future.
9. Public officials who repeatedly obstruct voters from having their votes received

and counted accurately and in a timely fashion continue with impunity to try to steal elections. Then Georgia Secretary of State Brian Kemp (now governor of Georgia) “stole” the election in 2018 from gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams. Abrams said Kemp was an “architect of voter suppression.” And that because Kemp was the Georgia Secretary of State during the race, he was “the referee, the contestant and the scorekeeper” for the 2018 gubernatorial election. He escaped accountability. Democracy decays.

10. Access to justice is diminishing. Tort law – the law of wrongful injuries – has been weakened in many states with arbitrary caps on damages for the most serious injuries. It also is harder than ever for citizens to get through to real people in government agencies.

Time to conclude and look forward to *your* indicators of societal decay. Send them to info@csrl.org or CSRL, P.O. Box 19367, Washington, DC 20036. The more Americans know where their country is heading, the more they may just want a better future and participating in or supporting the movements dedicated to turning our democracy around.

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Ralph Nader is a consumer advocate, lawyer, and author. His latest books include: [To the Ramparts: How Bush and Obama Paved the Way for the Trump Presidency, and Why It Isn't Too Late to Reverse Course](#), [How the Rats Re-Formed the Congress](#), [Breaking Through Power: It's easier than we think](#), and [Animal Envy: A Fable](#)

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