

A strong argument can be made that our country is like a bicycle whose wheels are kept spinning by economic growth. If the wheels of a bicycle are spinning rapidly, it is a very stable vehicle indeed. Should that forward-propelling motion slow or cease the bicycle crashes. A country that loses that momentum finds the pillars that define it - political democracy, individual liberties, social tolerance and more - begins to teeter, even when the absolute level of material prosperity remains high. Society becomes an increasingly ugly place, one defined by a scramble over limited resources, money and jobs and a rejection of anyone outside of our immediate group.

It should come as no surprise that we are currently on this uncertain path but just how close are we to reaching the point where we begin to teeter, experiencing increasing social upheaval? Things are certainly getting tense both within and outside of our borders and building walls isn't going to release that tension.

The two main factors that are driving this tension and will continue into the foreseeable future are ecological strain and economic stratification. The ecological category is the more widely understood and recognized especially in terms of depletion of natural resources such as groundwater, soil, fisheries and forests – all of which are being worsened by climate change and population growth.

That economic stratification may lead to increasing tension on its own may not be as obvious. The elites are pushing society toward instability by hoarding huge quantities of wealth and resources, and leaving less and less for the diminishing middle class who vastly outnumber them. Eventually, the working population crashes because the portion of wealth allocated to them is not enough. The inequalities we see today both within and between countries already point to such disparities.

Western civilization is not a lost cause, however. Using reason and science to guide decisions, paired with extraordinary leadership - which

we presently lack - and exceptional goodwill - which appears to be fraying - human society can progress to higher and higher levels of well-being and development. Even as we weather the coming stresses of climate change, diminishing resources and global population growth we can maintain our societies and better them. But that requires resisting the very natural urge, when confronted with such overwhelming pressures, to become less cooperative, less generous and less open to reason. The question is, how can we manage to preserve some kind of humane world as we make our way through these changes?