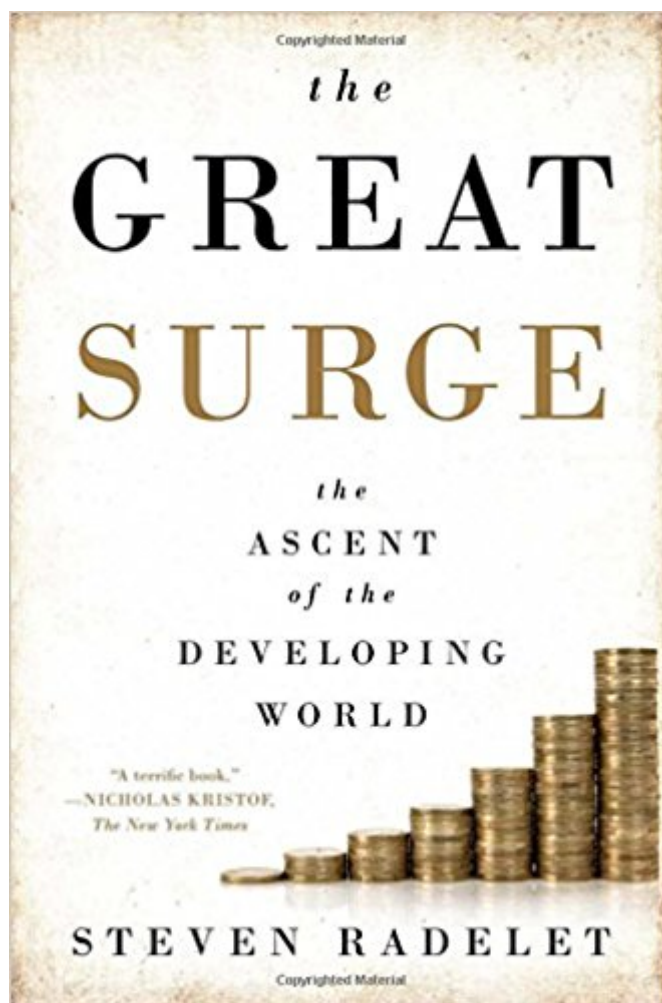


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# The Great Surge: The Ascent Of The Developing World



## Synopsis

The untold story of the global poor: “Powerful, lucid, and revelatory, *The Great Surge* offers indispensable prescriptions about sustaining global economic progress into the future” (George Soros, chairman of Soros Fund Management). We live today at a time of great progress for the global poor. Never before have so many people, in so many developing countries, made so much progress, in so short a time in reducing poverty, increasing incomes, improving health, reducing conflict and war, and spreading democracy. Most people believe the opposite: that with a few exceptions like China and India, the majority of developing countries are hopelessly mired in deep poverty, led by inept dictators, and have little hope for change. But a major transformation is underway—and has been for two decades now. Since the early 1990s more than 700 million people have been lifted out of extreme poverty, six million fewer children die every year from disease, tens of millions more girls are in school, millions more people have access to clean water, and democracy—often fragile and imperfect—has become the norm in developing countries around the world. “A terrific book” (Nick Kristof, *The New York Times*), *The Great Surge* chronicles this unprecedented economic, social, and political transformation. It shows how the end of the Cold War, the development of new technologies, globalization, and courageous local leadership have combined to improve the fate of hundreds of millions of people in poor countries around the world. Most importantly, *The Great Surge* reveals how we can accelerate the progress.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Steven Radelet in a brilliant new book demonstrates out how the world has actually gotten better in recent years, not by a little but by a lot. This is a careful antidote to today's fashionable pessimism and should be read by everyone."--Francis Fukuyama, author of *The End of History* "With the airwaves filled with news of insurrection, desperation, and still stubborn diseases, this book jars you out of a cliched response. With his typical care and detail, Steve describes humanity's greatest hits over the last twenty years--never have we lived in a time when so many are doing so well. The job surely isn't done, but these pages provide the evidence the job can be done, if we choose to do it."--Bono, lead singer of U2 and co-founder of ONE and (RED) ""The Great Surge" is one of the most optimistic and compelling looks at global development of our time. It challenges us to rethink both economic progress and environmental sustainability, especially when they come in conflict. While this dilemma has mystified many development experts for decades, Radelet charts a path forward that is not only possible, but imperative."--Howard W. Buffett, lecturer in International and Public Affairs, Columbia University "Human nature is evolutionarily wired to notice bad news much more than good news. But good news there is, for billions of people on the planet. Using compelling stories and data, Steve Radelet shows us just how far developing countries have come and makes a convincing case that understanding this positive history is essential for future decision-making."--Anne-Marie Slaughter, President and CEO of New America, Director of Policy Planning, U.S. Department of State 2009-2011 "Steven Radelet is one of the leading development thinkers and practitioners in the world today. This captivating book shows that progress for the world's poor is not just possible, it is happening right now all around the world."--Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of Liberia "At a time when doom, danger, and disaster dominate analysis of global trends, Steven Radelet pushes back against the pessimists with mountains of evidence and breathtaking vision. "The Great Surge" tells the other side of the story of global change over the past two decades, a story of unprecedented human progress in reducing poverty, hunger, illiteracy, oppression, childhood deaths, and even (despite the headlines) violent conflict. This is far from a naive book. A leading development economist with deeply policy experience, Radelet readily acknowledges the enormous work still to be done, and the tenacious obstacles that persist. But in lucidly exposing the factors that have delivered transformative development progress, he shows us how leadership and cooperation at the global and developing country levels, combined with continued investments in technology, can continue to bring reductions in human misery that were once nearly beyond imagination. This is a stunning, wise, and deeply hopeful book that anyone concerned about global development must read."--Larry Diamond, Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution

& Freeman Spogli Institute, Director, Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law, Peter E. Haas Faculty Co-Director, Haas Center for Public Service --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Steven Radelet holds the Donald F. McHenry Chair in Global Human Development at Georgetown University and is a Nonresident Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution. His work focuses on economic growth, poverty reduction, foreign aid, and debt, primarily in Africa and Asia. He has worked in developing countries around the world for thirty years and currently serves as economic adviser to the President of Liberia. He is the author of *The Great Surge: The Ascent of the Developing World* and *Emerging Africa: How 17 Countries Are Leading the Way*.

Every once in a while a book comes along that can change how you see the world. This is one such book. If you pay attention to world news, and even more so if you don't, it is easy to get the impression that the world is going rapidly downhill, especially in the developing countries. The author of this book takes a step back and looks at the big picture of trends over the past several decades, and shows how much better it has gotten in terms of income, health care, education, and government. For a good review see Nicholas Kristof's article (Google "nicholas kristof the most important thing"). As he states, 95% of Americans believe the level of developing world poverty has remained the same or gotten worse over the last 20 years. That 95% are wrong. The book can be a bit dry, since he is showing lots of data, but it is well written and easy to get through. And you may come out of it seeing the world differently. Highly recommended.

I bought this 2015 book after hearing it praised as an excellent introduction to development economics. Its author, Steven Radelet, has several decades of experience as an academic, consultant and advisor to governments and agencies working to improve and implement programs to help people escape poverty, disease, ignorance and oppression. The book is easy to read, with numerous examples and clear explanations of basic and advanced concepts, as well as an historical perspective that puts various development ideas into perspective. Although I am familiar with nearly all the ideas and examples in the book, I would be hard pressed to write so clearly and provide such a helpful framework to first time readers interested in these topics. The book thus provides a better introduction than either a textbook (too dense and/or inapplicable) or opinion piece (e.g., Easterly, Sachs, Moyo, et al.). That said, Radelet sometimes uses too many examples or repeats some points, so I suspect that the book could have been about 20 percent shorter and thus

easier and clearer for the reader. The book is organized into three parts: The Surge, the Catalysts, and The Future. The Surge explains how the end of the Cold War "freed" many countries from the need to align themselves to either the US or USSR as well as US or Soviet manipulation of those countries' politics in favor of their geopolitical goals. (Radelet explains how many bad colonial policies would have faced criticism in states that won their independence after WWII -- he lived and worked 5 years in Indonesia -- except for the influence of Cold War dynamics.) The upshot was that many regimes needed to adopt liberal political and economic policies as their leaders became more dependent on domestic legitimacy and lost the benefit of outside patronage. At the same time, there was also more opportunities for leaders who wanted to develop, as the end of the First-World/Second World (US/USSR) dichotomy meant that neighbors could trade based on their comparative advantages rather than political orientation. There are many exceptions to this generalization, but Radelet uses a dataset of 109 developing countries (neither too small nor too rich) to show how development surged for the average country in that dataset, i.e., "My basic argument is that beginning in the 1980s and 1990s, many of the 'unfreedoms' that had inhibited development began to be removed. The combination of huge geopolitical shifts, changing economic and political systems, deepening globalization, access to new technologies, stronger leadership, and courageous action created the conditions, opportunities, and drivers necessary for progress. The result was the great surge." Radelet notes that this basic progress did not get a lot of attention from academics or the press, as the former are more interested in studying specific examples in detail and the latter are more interested in extremes and disasters. These points make sense to me. I've visited over 100 countries and the most consistent thing I've learned is that everyday normal dominates occasional exceptional. (I'm writing this in Japan where we've not encountered a single earthquake, sumo wrestler or tea ceremony!) Radelet also makes a good point when he reminds us that "development" is not just something bought off the shelf. In a world of private goods (e.g., mobile phones), it is indeed easy to set up towers and charge subscriptions to people who have bought handsets from factories on the other side of the world. In a world of collective goods, one cannot ignore or avoid the need to cooperate with neighbors in the provision of public safety, taxation and spending on education and healthcare, etc. It takes time and effort (and often outside existential threats) to form the institutions that separate the "developed" from "developing," i.e., "The history of more mature democracies shows that it takes many years to build the institutions, public attitudes, expectations, checks on power, and other systems required for democracy and accountability to become established. They must be monitored and strengthened. Democracy is a process: there are no

shortcuts, and there are many setbacks along the way. Occasionally countries can evolve into strong democracies in a decade or two, especially when they have strong and gifted leaders, a unified society, and a favorable regional context. However, it often takes longer. It took more than a century for democracy to solidify in Western Europe, and the process continues to unfold today. It took the United States 185 years to achieve universal suffrage, with numerous violent conflicts, a bloody civil war, disputed elections, massacres of American Indians, a divisive battle for basic civil rights, recurrent episodes of corruption, countless inside business deals, and human rights abuses along the way. The United States, for all its many strengths, today is far from an ideal democracy. The history of the world's oldest and strongest democracies teaches us that the democratic transition is neither fast nor easy, and that it does not progress in an orderly fashion."Although this quote gives me hope in a time of Trump and Brexit,\* it also provides a warning of how hard it is to rebuild what some politicians so casually dismiss. Indeed, Radelet's prescriptions for the hopeful path (in the Future section) rely on a US leader who is democratic, willing to work with international institutions, focused on dealing with climate change and willing to work with China -- four characteristics that define the anti-Trump and indicate just what a disaster Trump is for the world. Returning to the book, Radelet discusses four catalysts: technology, globalization, leadership and foreign aid. He does a good job at describing how each can help as well as fail, i.e., technology that helps some countries get ahead of others, globalization which brings cheaper goods but job losses, and leaders who can make or break a country. The discussion of leadership fits well with his earlier points on democracy and the institutions that keep bad leaders from doing damage and help good leaders move the country ahead. On international aid, Radelet is right to note that it is often helpful but not the only means to development. In most cases, development takes place as individuals work out ways to improve their lives and provide a better future for their children. This path (better examined by Scott in *Seeing Like a State and Two Cheers for Anarchism*) also explains how development has slipped under the radar of politicians, wonks and journalists who can only understand anecdote or oversimplified explanations. The final section on the Future covers three paths: all goes well, middling along, and things turn bad. These last chapters are a bit tiresome for someone who would like a concise trajectory but Radelet is right to explain how various forces interact to help or hinder development. Although it's hard to be optimistic and easy to be pessimistic (easy if you worry about over population, populism and climate change), Radelet makes a good point in enumerating the many helpful steps on trade, cooperation, governance and technology that aided development after the horrors of World War II. Those decentralized advances took place in a time when a nuclear war could have killed billions and

environmental damages rose to terrifying levels -- problems with modern equivalents in terrorists threatening nuclear war and climate change. It's not hard to see human civilization as a series of two steps forward and one step back developments, so perhaps that is a good default to use, should we be thinking probabilities more than possibilities. Bottom Line: I give this book FOUR STARS for its useful overview of the development that we have seen, the causes of that development and where we, as humans, might go in the future. I recommend it to anyone seeking to understand the basics and our common future.=====\* The Economist on populists: If there is anything that unites the policies of Mr Trump with Brexit and the beliefs of European populists, it is a promise to break free of constraints. But a populist upswing propelled by unhappiness with established institutions raises an awkward question: if these institutions are worthwhile, why are people so frustrated by them? The authors argue that populists highlight the short-run advantages of wrecking institutions while downplaying the long-run consequences.

The Great Surge is an extremely well researched and important book that dispels the pervasive myth that the world is falling apart. It is not. There has never been a better time to be alive almost anywhere in the world, and progress in the less developed countries has been phenomenal. Problems aplenty persist, but they are far fewer and less severe than before, and we are learning how to continue the growth. Radelet's remarkable book lays out the facts and the prescriptions for sustaining the momentum.

In a world full of cynics, it is great to read a knowledgeable, insightful and optimistic view of global development. It is convenient to lump developing countries into one group, and even more convenient to criticize efforts without providing clear alternatives to tackling the difficult challenges facing much of our world. Radelet succeeds in breaking the mold by providing a much needed evidence-based and optimistic view of the progress being achieved in the developing world.

Hugely important work. Needs to be read by policy makers and ALL economists. Has profound implications for historians and political scientist's view of the links of contemporary political systems to social and economic well being. David Shear

Again, I haven't finished reading it entirely, so cannot comment on it as a whole. However, it has certainly given me a contrasting view to the usual media's take on the "third world."

A fantastic read about the oft-ignored positive trends of the past two decades. Definitely an important contribution to the world of international development literature.

A refreshing look at socio-economic conditions and recent progress in the developing countries. Includes a lot of positive developments that escape our news reporting.

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