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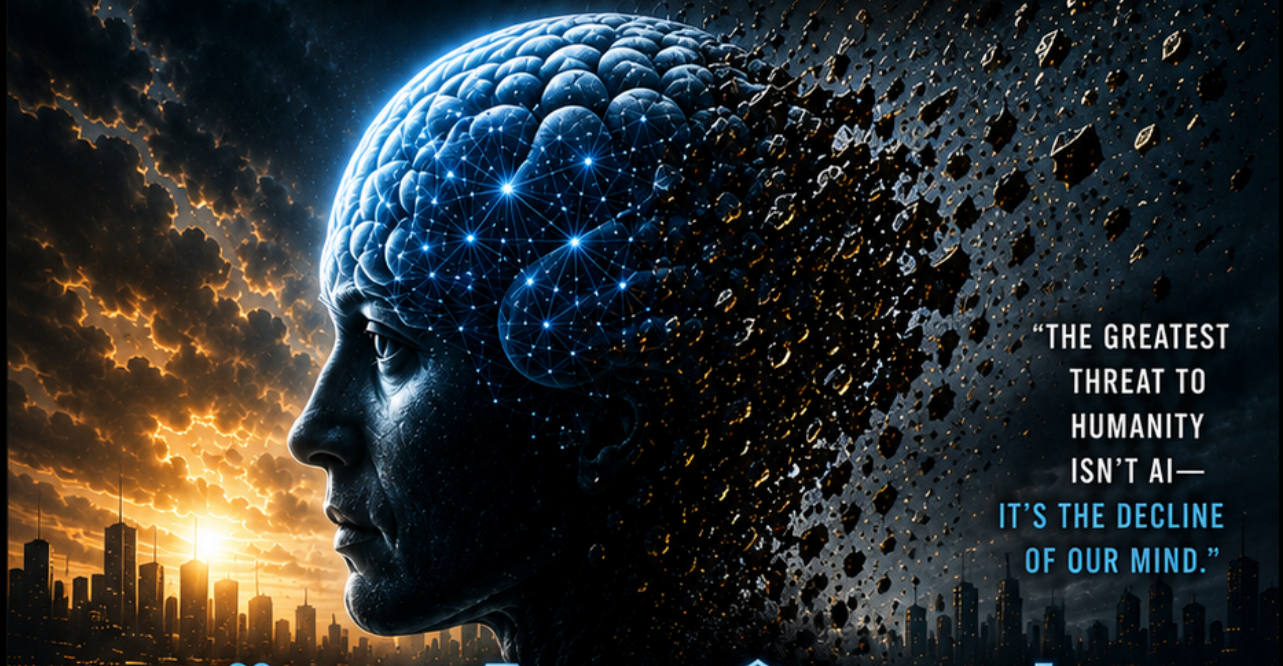
NEW RESEARCH. NEW CHAPTERS. UPDATED FOR 2026.

THE GREAT DIMMING

2026 EXPANDED EDITION

THE MODERN IQ DECLINE



"THE GREATEST THREAT TO HUMANITY ISN'T AI— IT'S THE DECLINE OF OUR MIND."

UNCOVERS THE ROOT CAUSES

EXAMINES THE SCIENCE

OFFERS PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

A ROADMAP FOR THE FUTURE

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BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

FEATURING NEW RESEARCH, NEW CHAPTERS, AND UPDATED FINDINGS

ISBN: 979-8-90329-156-4

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CHAPTER 1: UNPACKING THE GREAT DIMMING

Alright folks, buckle up, because we're about to take a deep dive into the murky waters of humanity's collective brainpower. And I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but the data that's been bubbling up lately paints a picture that's more "uh-oh" than "a-ha."

But before we jump into the numbers, let's talk about how we actually measure intelligence, because this isn't as straightforward as checking your temperature or stepping on a scale. When researchers track cognitive capabilities, they're looking at a complex web of mental skills, from raw problem-solving power to memory, from pattern recognition to verbal comprehension. It's like trying to judge a decathlon rather than a simple foot race.

For most of the 20th century, IQ scores around the globe were actually on a pretty nifty upswing. Each new generation that came along seemed to be outperforming the one before when it came to these standardized

brainteasers. The trend was so steady, in fact, that researchers coined a catchy nickname for it: the Flynn Effect, after the psychologist James Flynn who made a career out of documenting the phenomenon.

But then, right around the turn of the millennium, something changed. Those perennially climbing IQ scores suddenly screeched to a halt and then started sliding backwards. And this wasn't just a blip on the radar in one or two isolated countries. This was happening across a whole swath of the developed world, like someone flipped a switch and threw the collective human brain into reverse.

Now, I know what some of you might be thinking. IQ tests, really? Don't those have a ton of baggage and limitations? And you'd be right to be skeptical. These tests have their critics, and for good reason. They can be culturally biased, they don't capture every type of intelligence, and they've changed significantly over the years.

Methodological Considerations in Cognitive Assessment

While the data presented reveals compelling trends in cognitive performance, a critical examination of the measurement tools themselves is paramount to understanding these findings. The evolution of IQ testing represents a complex narrative of scientific

measurement, fraught with both methodological sophistication and inherent limitations.

Historical Evolution of IQ Testing Methodologies

IQ tests have undergone significant transformations since their inception:

1900 to 1950: Early Standardization

Binet-Simon Scale (1905)

Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scales (1916)

Focused on verbal reasoning and problem-solving

Limited cross-cultural applicability

Primarily Western, white, middle-class normative samples

1950 to 1990: Refinement and Expansion

Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS)

Multiple sub scales measuring different cognitive domains

Increased attempt to capture comprehensive intelligence

More subtle scoring mechanisms

Began addressing cultural bias

1990-Present: Multidimensional Assessment

Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory

Neuropsychological testing approaches

Digital and adaptive testing methodologies

Greater emphasis on cultural and contextual intelligence

Comparative Methodological Evolution

The transformation of IQ testing methodologies reveals a serious shift:

From linear, single-dimensional assessment

To multifaceted, contextually sensitive evaluation

Incorporating broader understanding of cognitive capabilities

Critical Methodological Limitations

Cultural Bias

Historical tests predominantly designed by Western researchers

Inherent linguistic and cultural assumptions

Limited representation of diverse cognitive processing styles

Narrow Intelligence Conceptualization

Traditional tests prioritize logical-mathematical intelligence

Undervalues emotional, creative, and practical intelligence

Fails to capture full spectrum of human cognitive capabilities

Technological Mediation

Increasing digital literacy impacts test performance

Generational differences in technology interaction

Potential algorithmic biases in adaptive testing

Potential Testing Biases

Socioeconomic Representation

Disproportionate sampling from middle-class backgrounds

Limited representation of marginalized communities

Educational Access Disparities

Testing heavily influenced by formal educational exposure

Penalizes alternative learning experiences

Neurological Diversity

Traditional testing often disadvantages neurodivergent people

Limited accommodation for different cognitive processing styles

Comparative Performance Insights

Key observations across testing methodologies:

Verbal reasoning skills have shown most significant variations

Spatial and pattern recognition abilities increasingly valued

Cultural context significantly impacts cognitive assessment outcomes

Recommendations for Future Cognitive Assessment

Develop culturally responsive testing frameworks

Incorporate multiple intelligence paradigms

Create more adaptive, comprehensive assessment tools

Integrate qualitative cognitive performance metrics

Increase interdisciplinary research collaboration

Global Perspectives

International research suggests:

No single testing methodology captures universal intelligence

Cognitive capabilities are deeply contextual

Cultural variations significantly impact cognitive expression

Conclusion

While IQ tests provide valuable insights into cognitive performance, they represent a complex, imperfect measurement tool. The trends observed must be interpreted with careful consideration of methodological limitations and ongoing scientific refinement.

The presented data should be viewed not as absolute truth, but as a complex, evolving understanding of human cognitive capabilities, a snapshot of intelligence that continues to be reframed and reunderstood.

Our comprehension of human intelligence remains a work in progress, demanding continuous critical examination and interdisciplinary exploration.

Intelligence is not a fixed trait to be measured, but a dynamic, contextual capability to be understood and nurtured.

"While these IQ score changes have been documented across multiple studies, the interpretation remains debated among researchers. Some experts, such as James Flynn himself, caution that IQ tests measure specific cognitive skills rather than overall intelligence. Researchers such as Ritchie and Tucker-Drob have

shown that environmental and educational changes, rather than genetics, are the most likely drivers of these shifts, and the timing and pattern of the reversal vary substantially from one country to the next, suggesting complex interactions between environmental, educational, and demographic factors."

But here's the thing: when you've got multiple independent studies, using different types of tests, across various populations, all pointing in the same direction, well, that's when you need to start paying attention. It's like if every medical test you took, from blood pressure to cholesterol to glucose levels, started trending the wrong way. Any one result might be a fluke, but the pattern? That's telling you something important.

Let's look at some of the most compelling evidence. Several independent lines of research point the same way. The systematic review by Dutton, van der Linden, and Lynn documented negative Flynn effects across a range of developed countries, and the Norwegian analysis by Bratsberg and Rogeberg traced a steady decline of roughly two IQ points per decade in the cohorts born after the mid-1970s. The slide is not uniform across all skills. Some abilities, like visual-spatial processing and pattern recognition, appear to be holding steady or even improving. But the core capabilities, abstract reasoning, verbal comprehension, and working memory, are the ones showing the clearest decline.

And this isn't just showing up in IQ tests. The latest data from the Global Cognitive Function Project, which tracks various measures of mental performance across populations, shows similar trends. They've documented declines in everything from mathematical reasoning to reading comprehension, from critical thinking to problem-solving ability. We're talking about a broad-spectrum dimming of our cognitive lights.

One of the most impressive studies comes from the Ragnar Frisch Center for Economic Research in Norway. These folks did something really clever, they looked at IQ scores from nearly a million Norwegian men born between 1962 and 1991, tracking each person's scores at multiple points in their lives using military testing records. This isn't just a snapshot, it's a whole cognitive movie, playing out over decades.

What they found was startling. For men born after 1975, IQ scores dropped by about seven points per generation. Now, seven points might not sound like much, but in the world of cognitive science, that's huge, it's nearly half a standard deviation. To put it in perspective, that's like taking the average person today and dropping them into the 31st percentile of cognitive performance compared to their counterparts from the 1970s.

But here's where it gets really interesting. The researchers controlled for all sorts of factors, education levels, family background, nutrition, even immigration

patterns. The decline persisted. It wasn't just about demographics or social changes. Something more fundamental was happening.

And Norway isn't alone. The Netherlands has been running a fascinating multi-generational study, tracking cognitive performance across 750 families spanning four generations. That's right, we're talking about great-grandparents down to their great-grandkids, all taking similar cognitive tests. The 20th century data shows exactly what you'd expect from the Flynn Effect, steady improvements' generation over generation. But then, starting with people born in the mid-1970s, the trend reverses.

The French military has inadvertently provided another goldmine of data. Since the 1970s, they've been giving standardized cognitive assessments to all their conscripts. In 2020, researchers finally analyzed this treasure trove of information, and guess what they found? French men born after 1975 showed the same pattern of decline, particularly in tests measuring fluid intelligence, the ability to solve novel problems and think flexibly.

"Tellingly, the cognitive patterns observed in Western countries don't universally apply globally. Research from China and India shows continuing IQ gains in many regions, while some urban centers demonstrate patterns similar to Western countries. This geographic variation provides important clues

about potential environmental and cultural factors influencing cognitive development."

"Now, you might be wondering, couldn't these results just be because we're testing differently? Maybe today's tests are harder, or we're measuring different things? It's a fair question, and researchers have looked into it carefully. Even after accounting for changes in testing methods, question formats, and population sampling, much of the observed decline remains, which is why the trend continues to be taken seriously rather than waved away as a testing artifact."

But here's something really fascinating, and maybe a tiny bit hopeful. While traditional cognitive measures are declining, we're seeing improvements in other areas. Today's young people are absolutely crushing it when it comes to visual-spatial processing, pattern recognition, and certain types of multitasking. It's like our brains are adapting to a new cognitive environment, trading some old skills for new ones.

"At the same time, there is real evidence that digital natives outperform older generations at certain tasks: rapid information processing, visual pattern recognition, and parallel attention management. They can work through complex digital interfaces with an ease that would have seemed almost superhuman a few decades ago."

This suggests we might not be getting dumber so much as different. But and this is a big but, the skills we're losing might be more essential for deep understanding and complex problem-solving than the ones we're gaining. It's like trading your Swiss Army knife for a really excellent bottle opener. Sure, you're better at one specific thing, but you've lost a whole toolkit of other capabilities.

"The implications become clear when you look at real-world performance. Employers increasingly report difficulty finding workers who can handle complex analytical tasks, solve novel problems, or construct detailed written arguments. The skills gap isn't just about technical knowledge; it's about fundamental cognitive capabilities."

Another concerning trend emerges from the latest educational data. The International Student Assessment Database, which tracks academic performance across 65 countries, shows that even as access to information and educational resources has increased, performance on tasks requiring deep analysis and critical thinking has steadily declined. Students today can access more information than ever before, but they seem less able to process it meaningfully.

This brings us to what, I think, is one of the most worrying aspects of this whole situation. The decline isn't just affecting one particular group or skill set. It's showing up across the board, from basic processing speed to

complex problem-solving, from memory function to analytical capability. It's like we're experiencing a broad-spectrum dimming of our cognitive lights.

But perhaps most troubling is what we're seeing in the development of critical thinking abilities. A 2024 analysis of college entrance essays spanning the past three decades shows a marked decline in argument complexity, logical coherence, and analytical depth. We're not just losing our ability to solve abstract problems; we're losing our capacity to think deeply and critically about complex issues.

Now, I know this all sounds pretty doom-and-gloom. And you might be thinking, "Come on, how bad could it really be? We've got smartphones and AI and all these amazing tools to help us think!" And you're not wrong about the tools. We've never had more impressive cognitive prosthetics at our disposal.

But here's the thing: these tools might be part of the problem. The latest neuroscience research suggests that outsourcing our mental heavy lifting to digital devices might be like putting our brains in cognitive cruise control. We're losing the mental muscle memory that comes from wrestling with complex problems and retaining detailed information.

"Research on memory points in the same direction. When people know they can easily look up information later, they tend to put less effort into understanding and

remembering it in the moment. It's as though our brains are becoming efficient at knowing where to find information, but less practiced at actually processing and using that information in complex ways."

The evidence is compelling, but it's also complex. We're not just getting dumber, we're undergoing a transformation in how our brains work, process information, and solve problems. Some of these changes might be adaptations to a new cognitive environment. Others might be warning signs of a serious problem with how we're developing and using our mental capabilities.

And that's really what this book is about, understanding this transformation in all its complexity. Because if we're going to have any hope of addressing this Great Dimming, we need to understand not just what's happening, but why it's happening and what it means for our future.

In the chapters ahead, we'll explore the various factors that might be contributing to this change, from environmental toxins to educational practices, from technological habits to cultural shifts. We'll look at what the science tells us about protecting and enhancing our cognitive capabilities. And above all, we'll examine what we can do, both individually and collectively, to ensure that the next chapter in human cognitive evolution is one of enhancement rather than decline.

Because here's the thing, folks: our brains, our ability to think, reason, analyze, and understand, are what make us uniquely human. They're the source of every breakthrough, every innovation, every solution to every problem we've ever faced. If we're really experiencing a broad decline in these capabilities, it's not just an academic concern. It's an existential challenge that demands our attention and action.

We can dive deeper into this mystery. Let's follow the evidence wherever it leads and figure out what we can do to keep our collective cognitive candle burning bright. Because the stakes couldn't be higher, and the time for action couldn't be more urgent.

The process ahead won't be comfortable, it might challenge some of our assumptions and force us to confront some uncomfortable truths. But understanding is the first step toward a solution. And that's exactly where we're headed next.