

Global Polling: Which Nations Are Happiest? Unhappiest?

By [Eric Zuesse](#)

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Results have recently been published from surveys of 68,759 people in 69 countries around the world during 2016 by WIN/Gallup International, which organization had asked each of these scientifically sampled persons:

“In general, do you personally feel very happy, happy, neither happy nor unhappy, unhappy, or very unhappy about your life?”

The resulting raw percentages were posted online at [“WIN/Gallup International’s 40th Annual Global End of Year Survey”](#), but the nations weren’t ranked there; W/G’s report is more like a data-dump than like a report.

So, based upon their numbers, I have here actually ranked the 69 nations, from the happiest, to the unhappiest, according to WIN/Gallup’s own calculations of “Net happiness,” which are their study’s bottom-line figures for each nation. WIN/Gallup says that “Net happiness (happy minus unhappy) globally is +59%,” and this indicates that the world’s average person is happy with his/her life, but not very happy with it. That’s good performance, but not terrific, worldwide.

However, as will be explained below this first-ever presentation of W/G’s rankings, the figures upon which the “Net happiness” calculations were based could be deceptive, because they largely reflect people’s expectations of whether things are getting better in their country, or instead getting worse there; this measure of ‘happiness’ is an indication “about your life,” instead of a report that necessarily reflects how they feel right now (or how they did feel at the time they were answering the question). Nobody knows for certain about his/her “life,” but only about what it was or has been, at times that a pollster’s question might specify in the most recent past, such as “yesterday” — anything that’s in the future, even “tomorrow,” or the totality of “your life,” is partly speculative, and might be somewhat unrealistic. (Furthermore, people might be more optimistic in some cultures, and more pessimistic in others, and yet the difference might have little to do with how happy the people there are.) A survey to determine a population’s actual “happiness” shouldn’t *invite* its respondents to be at all speculative. This is a fundamental methodological flaw in the WIN/Gallup study, but it’s common for pollsters to be so sloppy about wording the questions they’re asking; and no poll-results can be any clearer (i.e., any more meaningful) to interpret, than were the questions which were asked. WIN/Gallup is normal in this regard. They’d deserve a “C” rating on meaningfulness. But that’s still something; their findings aren’t total trash — these data weren’t an utter waste of their time and money to produce (and of readers’ attention to consider), but the results do indicate some *combination* of how happy a person is, mixed in with how happy the person *expects* the rest of his/her life to be. And they should be interpreted in that light.

Here, then, were the poll's actual findings:

NET HAPPINESS RANKINGS, pp. 23-24, WIN/Gallup Int'l., 2016 end-yr. report:

| Rank | Country | NET Result |
|-------|-------------|----------------------|
| 1 | Fiji | 89% |
| 2 | Colombia | 87% |
| 3-4 | China | 79% |
| 3-4 | Philippines | 79% |
| 5-6 | Indonesia | 78% |
| 5-6 | Vietnam | 78% |
| 7-8 | Panama | 77% |
| 7-8 | Papua | 77% |
| 9-10 | Bangladesh | 74% |
| 9-10 | Paraguay | 74% |
| 11-12 | Argentina | 72% |
| 11-12 | Mexico | 72% |
| 13 | Pakistan | 71% |
| 14-16 | Ecuador | 70% |
| 14-16 | Iceland | 70% |
| 14-16 | Mongolia | 70% |
| 17 | Peru | 65% |
| 18 | Thailand | 63% |
| 19 | Armenia | 61% |
| 20 | Poland | 60% |
| 21-22 | Austria | 59% (Global Average) |
| 21-22 | Brazil | 59% (Global Average) |
| 23-25 | Azerbaijan | 56% |
| 23-25 | Denmark | 56% |
| 23-25 | Norway | 56% |
| 26 | Japan | 55% |
| 27 | Sweden | 54% |
| 28 | Slovenia | 53% |
| 29 | Russia | 51% |
| 30-31 | Canada | 50% |
| 30-31 | Portugal | 50% |
| 32-33 | Ireland | 49% |
| 32-33 | Spain | 49% |
| 34-35 | US | 48% |
| 34-35 | Bosnia | 48% |
| 36-37 | Estonia | 47% |
| 36-37 | UK | 47% |
| 38-41 | Belgium | 46% |
| 38-41 | Congo | 46% |
| 38-41 | Germany | 46% |
| 38-41 | Lithuania | 46% |
| 42 | Kosovo | 45% |

| | | |
|-------|----------------|-----|
| 43-44 | Australia | 44% |
| 43-44 | Ukraine | 44% |
| 45 | France | 43% |
| 46-49 | Ghana | 42% |
| 46-49 | India | 42% |
| 46-49 | Ivory Coast | 42% |
| 46-49 | Macedonia | 42% |
| 50-52 | Czech Republic | 40% |
| 50-52 | South Korea | 40% |
| 50-52 | Latvia | 40% |
| 53-55 | Finland | 38% |
| 53-55 | Italy | 38% |
| 53-55 | Serbia | 38% |
| 56-58 | Lebanon | 37% |
| 56-58 | Palestine | 37% |
| 56-58 | South Africa | 37% |
| 59 | Albania | 35% |
| 60-61 | Israel | 34% |
| 60-61 | Romania | 34% |
| 62 | Bulgaria | 33% |
| 63 | Afghanistan | 32% |
| 64-65 | Iran | 30% |
| 64-65 | Turkey | 30% |
| 66 | Nigeria | 29% |
| 67 | Greece | 21% |
| 68 | Hong Kong | 14% |
| 69 | Iraq | 1% |

To help understand these findings in perspective, WIN/Gallup explains:

The most optimistic countries about economic prosperity are Ghana and Bangladesh (+67% net optimistic each). In contrast, South Korea, Hong Kong and Greece are the most pessimistic (-62%, -56% and -53% respectively).

On page 6, W/G shows that, to a large extent, there is a correlation between, on the one hand, a country's "Happiness Index" (Happiness minus Unhappiness "about your life"), and, on the other hand, each of two other measures in that poll, both of which were based upon different questions: the "Hope Index," and the "Economic Optimism Index." In other words: countries where "Hope" and "Economic Optimism" are high (and this reflects not where people currently are, in their happiness, but where they *think* they are *heading*) are generally scoring high also in W/G's "Net Happiness."

One might therefore say that Iraqis had the least optimism and hope, whereas Fijians, Colombians, and Chinese, had the most. Of course, if two other countries besides Iraq, which were also recently invaded and destroyed by the U.S. — such as Syria and Libya — had been surveyed by W/G, they might have scored even lower than Iraq did, but Syria and Libya were excluded from W/G's poll. So: scoring at the bottom of these 69 countries doesn't necessarily mean being the worst in the world.

Generally, high-population countries, such as China, and Indonesia, scored higher in “happiness” than small-population ones, such as Iraq, Hong Kong, and Greece. That fact (plus the favorable global economic trend, that most of the world’s nations are improving economically, not declining) might help to explain why the global average in W/G’s system is a rather high 59% — clearly in the positive range of “Net happiness,” or at least of “Hope” and of “Economic Optimism.”

The fact that U.S., Bosnia, Estonia, and UK, occupy spots 33 through 36, right in the middle of the list of the 69 countries, and yet they have 47% to 48% net-happiness, which is considerably lower than the 59% global average of happiness, is due to the smaller-population countries dominating the lower half of the list, and the larger-population countries dominating the upper half. The bigger-population group above these middle four, tend to be the larger-population countries.

OTHER RECENT RANKINGS OF NATIONS’ HAPPINESS

To provide a fuller picture of “happiness” or “welfare” around the world, the findings by other prominent systems for ranking “Happiness” or “Well-Being” in the world’s nations will here be summarized.

The U.N. has commissioned annual studies of this, which are done not by WIN/Gallup, but by [the original Gallup organization](#), which is based in the U.S. The latest of these is the “World Happiness Report 2017”, and here are the top 20 in that system:

1. Norway (7.537)
2. Denmark (7.522)
3. Iceland (7.504)
4. Switzerland (7.494)
5. Finland (7.469)
6. Netherlands (7.377)
7. Canada (7.316)
8. New Zealand (7.314)
9. Australia (7.284)
10. Sweden (7.284)
11. Israel (7.213)
12. Costa Rica (7.079)
13. Austria (7.006)
14. United States (6.993)
15. Ireland (6.977)
16. Germany (6.951)

17. Belgium (6.891)
18. Luxembourg (6.863)
19. United Kingdom (6.714)
20. Chile (6.652)

Here are the bottom 20 of the 155 nations ranked there:

136. Malawi (3.970)
137. Chad (3.936)
138. Zimbabwe (3.875)
139. Lesotho (3.808)
140. Angola (3.795)
141. Afghanistan (3.794)
142. Botswana (3.766)
143. Benin (3.657)
144. Madagascar (3.644)
145. Haiti (3.603)
146. Yemen (3.593)
147. South Sudan (3.591)
148. Liberia (3.533)
149. Guinea (3.507)
150. Togo (3.495)
151. Rwanda (3.471)
152. Syria (3.462)
153. Tanzania (3.349)
154. Burundi (2.905)
155. Central African Republic (2.693)

That report also includes, on page 88, a remarkable table “Figure 4.2: Ranking of Happiness in Africa, 2014-2016,” at the top of which, as the happiest African nations, are (and this notably includes Libya, after the 2011 U.S. invasion):

1. Algeria (6355)
2. Mauritius (5.629)
3. Libya (5.615)
4. Morocco (5.235)
5. Somalia (5.151)
6. Nigeria (5.074)
7. South Africa (4.829)
8. Tunisia (4.805)
9. Egypt (4.735)
10. Sierra Leone (4.709)

The U.N.'s Human Development Index rankings, of 188 countries, are a separate such system. Its latest available edition (data from 2015), presents as the topmost countries, which are the ones having the highest [“Inequality-Adjusted Human Development Index” or IHDI](#):

1. Norway (.898)
2. Iceland (.868)
- 3-4. Australia & Netherlands (.861)
- 5-6. Switzerland & Germany (.859)
7. Denmark (.858)
8. Sweden (.851)
9. Ireland (.850)
10. Finland (.843)
11. Canada (.839)
12. Slovenia (.838)
13. UK (.836)
14. Czech Republic (.830)
15. Luxembourg (.827)
16. Belgium (.821)
17. Austria (.815)
18. France (.813)
19. U.S. (.796)

20. Japan (.791)

The bottom twenty, in order from the worst (#188), are: Central African Republic, Chad, Niger, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Burundi, Mozambique, Liberia, Mali, Ivory Coast, Congo, Benin, Djibouti, Yemen, Afghanistan, Malawi, Ethiopia, Togo. Healthways occasionally calculates nations' well-being, on the basis of the U.S.-headquartered Gallup data, including such things as how often people in a country [smile](#), and what percentage of the respondents answer yes and no to ["Your friends and family give you positive energy every day."](#) The latest ["State of Global Well-Being: 2014 Country Well-Being Rankings"](#) of 145 countries, places at the top:

1. Panama
2. Costa Rica
3. Puerto Rico
4. Switzerland
5. Belize
6. Chile
7. Denmark
8. Guatemala
9. Austria
10. Mexico
11. Uruguay
12. Argentina
13. Colombia
14. Kyrgyzstan
15. Brazil
16. Norway
17. Netherlands
18. El Salvador
19. Turkmenistan
20. Myanmar

The bottom 20, starting with the worst, were: Afghanistan, Bhutan, Cameroon, Togo, Tunisia, Congo, Ivory Coast, Benin, Haiti, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Uganda, Senegal, Burundi, Chad, Egypt, Ukraine, China, Georgia, Zambia.

The ["Social Progress Index 2017"](#), from an [NGO that is financed by and represents the views](#)

[of international corporations](#), presents as its top-twenty rankings, in order:

Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, Canada, Netherlands, Sweden, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, UK, Germany, Austria, Belgium, Spain, Japan, U.S., France, Portugal.

The bottom 20 there are mostly the same as shown in both of the U.N.'s bottom-20 lists.

At the bottoms of all of these rankings tend to be the poorest and most heavily exploited former colonies, whereas the tops of these lists are much more variable, because some of the lists measure actually a combination of happiness and hope. The people in the bottom-ranked countries combine low happiness with low hope; so, at the bottoms of all of these lists tend to be found the same countries, though in different orders of misery or rankings, from one-another.

The societal measurements for “happiness” are only in an early phase of scientific investigation — it’s not yet a scientifically mature field (not even in its basic concepts). (For example: most of the studies that are done of how happy the people in a given nation are, measure the presence or absence of purported hypothesized societal causes of happiness, and don’t measure at all how happy the given respondent really is. The designers of these investigations are full of beliefs that are themselves dubious if not false, and are nothing but hypotheses, not even theories, just badly-thought-out guesses. The designers apparently think that an empirical science can be built on such a shoddy hypothetical foundation.)

Investigative historian Eric Zuesse is the author, most recently, of [They're Not Even Close: The Democratic vs. Republican Economic Records, 1910-2010](#), and of [CHRIST'S VENTRILOQUISTS: The Event that Created Christianity](#).

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About the author:

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