FAQ

What is the theme of this year's report?

This is the 10th anniversary of the World Happiness Report, written as the world is entering the third year of COVID-19. As a result, the Report has a triple focus, first looking back, then taking another close look at how individuals and countries are doing in the face of COVID-19, and finally looking ahead to how the science of well-being, and the societies under study, are likely to evolve in the future.

Looking back involves studying the trends of happiness over the first 15 years of data from the Gallup World Poll (in Chapter 2) and examining how interest in happiness measures and policies has evolved before and since the first World Happiness Report published in 2012 (in Chapter 3).

The analysis of how life has changed for people during the first two years of COVID-19 is in Chapter 2 and, for a selection of countries, using large samples of Twitter data (in Chapter 4). A striking feature of the 2021 data is the globe-spanning upsurge in three types of benevolent activity: helping strangers, volunteering, and donations.

The final three chapters look ahead to consider some new types of evidence and analysis that are likely to contribute to future understanding of happiness. These include the use of big data (in Chapter 4), a deeper understanding of the biological correlates of happiness (in Chapter 5), and some illustrative findings from using measures of balance and peace to broaden the empirical base (in Chapter 6).

What is the original source of the data for Figure 2.1? How are the rankings calculated?

The rankings in Figure 2.1 of *World Happiness Report 2022* use data from the Gallup World Poll surveys from 2019 to 2021. They are based on answers to the main life evaluation question asked in the poll. This is called the Cantril ladder: it asks respondents to think of a ladder, with the best possible life for them being a 10 and the worst possible life being a 0. They are then asked to rate their own current lives on that 0 to 10 scale. The rankings are from nationally representative samples for the years 2019-2021. They are based entirely on the survey scores, using the Gallup weights to make the estimates representative. The sub-bars in Figure 2.1 show the estimated extent to which each of six factors (levels of GDP, life expectancy, generosity, social support, freedom, and corruption) is estimated to contribute to making life evaluations higher in each country than in Dystopia. Dystopia is a hypothetical country with values equal to the world's lowest national averages for each of the six factors (see FAQs: What is Dystopia?). The sub-bars have no impact on the total score reported for each country but instead are just a way of explaining the implications of the model estimated in Table 2.1. People often ask why some countries rank higher than others - the sub-bars (including the residuals, which show what is not explained) attempt to answer that question.

What is your sample size for Figure 2.1?

The typical annual sample for each country is 1,000 people. However, many countries have not had annual surveys. If a typical country had surveys each year, the sample size would be 3,000. We use responses from the three most recent years to provide an up-to-date and robust estimate of life evaluations. In this year's report, we combine data from 2019-2021 to make the sample size large enough to reduce the random sampling errors. Tables 1-5 of the online Statistical Appendix 1 show the sample size for each country.

Our interest in exploring how COVID-19 influenced happiness for people in different countries and circumstances, we have done much of our analysis using individual-level data (as reported in Tables 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4).

Is this sample size really big enough to calculate rankings?

A sample size of 2,000 to 3,000 is large enough to give a reasonably good estimate at the national level. This is confirmed by the 95% confidence intervals shown at the right-hand end of each country bar.

What is a data "wave"?

Gallup refers to the surveys collected in each calendar year as part of that year's survey wave. Waves correspond to calendar years in an overwhelming majority of cases, but there are a few exceptions. Some surveys completed in early 2022 are considered part of the 2021 wave. Not every country is surveyed every year. Thus, the size of the survey waves also varies from year to year.

What is the confidence interval?

As shown by the horizontal lines (or light grey highlight) at the right-hand end of the country bars, the confidence intervals show the range of values within which there is a 95% likelihood of the population mean being located. These are useful for readers wishing to see whether countries differ significantly in the average life evaluations; countries with non-overlapping 95% confidence intervals are estimated to have statistically different average life evaluation ratings.

Where do the sub-bars come from for each of the six explanatory factors?

The sub-bars show, tentatively, what share of a country's overall score can be explained by each of the six factors in Table 2.1. The sub-bars

are calculated by multiplying average national data for the period of 2019-2021 for each of the six factors (minus the value of that variable in Dystopia) by the coefficient on this variable in the first equation of Table 2.1. This product then shows the average amount by which the overall happiness score (the life evaluation) is higher in a country because they perform better than Dystopia on that variable. More on this under the question relating directly to Dystopia.

To describe an example, let's look at the variable of life expectancy in the case of Brazil. First, we calculate the number of years by which healthy life expectancy in Brazil exceeds that of the country with the lowest life expectancy. Then, we multiply this number of years by the estimated coefficient for life expectancy in the first column of Table 2.1. This product then shows the average amount by which the overall happiness score (the life evaluation) is higher in Brazil because life expectancy is higher than in the country with the lowest life expectancy. This process is repeated for each country and for each of the six variables.

Because of how these six bars were constructed, they will always total to less than each country's average life evaluation. They will not alter in any way the width of the overall life evaluation bar on which the rankings are based. The difference between what is attributed to the six factors and the total life evaluations is the sum of two parts. These are the average life evaluations in Dystopia and each country's residual. You may find the following FAQs useful: What is Dystopia? What are the residuals?

What is Dystopia?

Dystopia is an imaginary country that has the world's least-happy people. The purpose in establishing Dystopia is to have a benchmark against which all countries can be favorably compared (no country performs more poorly than Dystopia) in terms of each of the six key variables, thus allowing each sub-bar to be of positive (or zero, in six instances) width. The lowest scores observed for the six key variables,

therefore, characterize Dystopia. Since life would be very unpleasant in a country with the world's lowest incomes, lowest life expectancy, lowest generosity, most corruption, least freedom, and least social support, it is referred to as "Dystopia," in contrast to Utopia.

What are the residuals?

The residuals, or unexplained components, differ for each country, reflecting the extent to which the six variables either over- or under-explain average 2019-2021 life evaluations. These residuals have an average value of approximately zero over the whole set of countries.

Why do we use these six factors to explain life evaluations?

The variables used reflect what has been broadly found in the research literature to explain national-level differences in life evaluations. Some important variables, such as unemployment or inequality, do not appear because comparable international data are not yet available for the full sample of countries. The variables are intended to illustrate important lines of correlation rather than to reflect clean causal estimates since some of the data are drawn from the same survey sources. Some are correlated with each other (or with other important factors for which we do not have measures). There are likely two-way relations between life evaluations and the chosen variables in several instances. For example, healthy people are overall happier, but as Chapter 4 in *World Happiness Report 2013* demonstrated, happy people, are overall healthier. Statistical Appendix 1 of *World Happiness Report 2018* assessed the possible importance of using explanatory data from the same people whose life evaluations are being explained. We did this by randomly dividing the samples into two groups and using the average values for, e.g., freedom gleaned from one group to explain the life evaluations of the other group. This lowered the effects, but only very slightly (e.g., 2% to 3%), assuring us that using data from the same individuals is not seriously affecting the results.

Social media are now even more important for people around the globe. How do they influence happiness?

There was a special chapter on social media in *World Happiness Report 2019*, emphasizing the damaging effects of social media use on the happiness and self-image of adolescents, mainly based on data from the United States. This runs parallel to evidence from earlier Reports showing that in-person friendships support happiness, while online connections do not. But COVID-19 and its limitations on in-person meetings offered a chance for electronic connections to develop their potential for creating and maintaining the social bonds that support happiness. Social media have, in consequence, become much more social in the uses to which they have been put, as virtual hugs have been used to fill in for the real thing.

Can I download any of the data used in the Report?

Yes. The online data appendices show how the data are constructed and include the main national and regional averages underlying the figures and tables in Chapter 2. Those wishing access to more detailed data from the Gallup World Poll should contact Gallup directly.

Why is Bhutan not listed in the 2022 WHR?

During the pandemic, Bhutan once again provided an inspiring example for the world about how to combine health and happiness. They made explicit use of the principles of Gross National Happiness in mobilizing the whole population in collaborative efforts to avoid even a single COVID-19 death in 2020, despite having strong international travel links. Although it has not been possible to have Bhutan in the rankings this year, because Gallup did not survey the country in recent years, they continue to inspire the world, particularly the World Happiness Report. There was a special chapter on Bhutan in the first *World Happiness Report*.

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