

Colombia: Unlivable but Happy. Fool's Paradise?

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tighten up and shorten This mostly theoretical and review article attempts to resolve the apparent contradiction between happy Colombians living in unlivable conditions. Colombia is one of the several very happiest countries. At the same time Colombia is apparently unlivable—by Western standards—Colombia's poor, corrupt, dangerous, and roads and ports are bad, too. But objective livability of a society usually expressed mostly in terms of money/consumption/physical stuff misses 2 points: 1) only basic physical stuff is good enough to satisfy human needs and produce wellbeing; 2) non-physical attributes such as personal freedom and social connection not only matter, but also are hampered by excessive pursuit of money. For instance, impeccable organization and physical infrastructure such as that in Singapore or richest parts of the US not only is unnecessary and insufficient for neither livability nor happiness, but it may actually decrease them by having to focus on what's unimportant and overwork, and by making environment unhuman, sanitized, hospital/airport-like. Arguably the solution of the apparent paradox of unlivability but happiness is that the good outweighs the bad—Colombia is very happy because it is actually quite livable. The world has much to learn from Colombia how to be happy. Yet another possibility that we cannot fully rule out is that ignorance is a bliss—Colombia is a fool's paradise. More research is needed.

LIFE SATISFACTION, HAPPINESS, SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING, QUALITY OF LIFE, LIVABILITY, BEST PLACES TO LIVE, COLOMBIA, SINGAPORE, ALIENATION, MARX, MARX THEORY OF ALIENATION, DEGROWTH

Happy Colombia

Colombia is the very happiest country in the World (e.g., Roos 2019), ¹or at least one of a handful of the happiest countries—both World Values Surveys and World DataBase of Happiness ranks it top 3 in table 1.²

Colombia shines. The happiest countries are either very most developed, rich and equal or rather poor and very unequal Latin countries. Still, Colombia is happier than all other Latin countries and about as happy as Mexico, but Colombia is significantly poorer than Mexico, at least 25% poorer either in nominal or PPP terms³

happiness of above 8, even like 8.5! this is huge! a truly outstanding score

top 10 countries just costa rica and colombia from latin america, and colombia poorer than costa rica; Colombia is a truly outstanding case of achieving world's highest happiness at low development level

¹but then it went from the happiest to 66th <https://www.infobae.com/en/2022/03/18/even-happiness-was-lost-in-colombia-survey-places-it-among-the-worlds-happiest-countries/>

²Gallup happiness surveys are not helpful for research—the Gallup data is not meant for research but for commerce—Gallup charges \$30,000 (per year) for data access (authors' inquiry). Clearly happiness industry (Davies 2015), not happiness research. In general, private corporations are often making fortune from tax dollars and students tuition—scholars should resist corporatization of academia (Mills 2012a, Cox 2013, Mills 2012b, Catropa and Andrews 2020, Schmidlin 2015), and corporatization of happiness research (Davies 2015).

³[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_\(nominal\)_per_capita](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_(nominal)_per_capita) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_\(PPP\)_per_capita](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_(PPP)_per_capita)

Table 1: 10 happiest countries in the world. Data from World Database of Happiness (WDH) at <https://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/rank-reports/satisfaction-with-life/> and WVS https://worlddatabaseofhappiness-archive.eur.nl/hap_nat/desc_na_genpublic.php?cntry=122; and worldvaluessurvey.org: out of 88 countries waves 5-7: 2005-2022.

WDH			WVS		
rank	country	happiness (1-10)	rank	country	happiness (1-10)
1	Denmark	8.2	1	Puerto Rico	8.4
2	Mexico	8.1	2	Mexico	8.3
3	Colombia	8.1	3	Colombia	8.3
4	Switzerland	8	4	Qatar	8.0
5	Finland	8	5	Norway	7.9
6	Iceland	8	6	Nicaragua	7.9
7	Costa Rica	7.9	7	Tajikistan	7.9
8	Norway	7.9	8	Switzerland	7.9
9	Canada	7.9	9	Uzbekistan	7.9
10	Qatar	7.8	10	Ecuador	7.8

have first across space v other countries—paradox and then over time—another paradox—it improved a ton, but swb flat or decreased; LATER: similarly to table enumerating qol show over time great progress; ya so 2 main sections static now and dynamic 2000-2020; like GDP per cap and PPP; kkz; etc etc

Unlivable Colombia

Table 2: Objective indicators of quality of life or livability.

Value	Indicator	Source
2019 poverty (national benchmark)	42%	https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.NAHC?locations=CO
2011 median daily income/cap PPP USD	\$7	https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/09/23/seven-in-ten-people-globally-live-on-10-or-less-per-day/
2019 percent on <\$5.5/day	30%	https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.UMIC?locations=CO
2017 R/P 10%	40	https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.DST.10TH.10
2020 unemployment rate	15%	https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS?locations=CO
2020 freedom rank	96/210	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores
2021 corruption rank	87/180	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/col
2020 political stability, no violence/terrorism pctile	20th	https://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/Home/Reports
2020 rule of law pctile	34th	https://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/Home/Reports
2021 working conditions decile	bottom decile	https://www.globalrightsindex.org/en/2021/countries/col
2018 quality of roads rank	110/137	https://reports.weforum.org/pdf/gci-2017-2018-scorecard/WEF_GCI_2017_2018_Scorecard_EOSQ057.pdf

In sharp contrast to awesome (subjective) Colombian happiness, Colombia is not livable or has low (objective) quality of life in terms of objective indicators listed in table 2.⁴ Colombia scores mediocre or low on all of them.⁵ In a remarkable contrast to Colombia's happiness, some of the objective indicators of quality of life are grim: about a third of Colombians live on less than \$5.50 a day (2019).

⁶ The ratio of the average income of the richest 10% to the poorest 10% (R/P 10%)—Colombia ranks 3rd out of 70 at a whooping 40-top decile of Colombians makes on average 40x the average for the poorest decile; even greater disparity than in the unequal US at 30. Unemployment rate is at 15%, with informal labor at about 50% of the workforce (cited in ?).⁷ All of that, notably precarious labor, poverty, and inequality should lead to unhappiness. Notably inequality is associated with a multitude of negative outcomes

⁴There are many different perspectives on measurement of quality of life. USNEWS, for instance, is typical example of materialist approach to quality of life—it ranks colombia 68/78 and defines QOL as: A good job market, Affordable, Economically stable, Family-friendly, Income equality, Politically stable, Safe, Well-developed public education system, Well-developed public health system <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/colombia>.

⁵And may see for additional indicators appendix: World Economic Forum report.

⁶Poverty (national benchmark) is at 42%—the whole nation has a higher poverty rate than one of the poorest cities in the US, Camden NJ, at 36%. Camden also rated using a national poverty benchmark <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/camdennewjersey>. Median daily per capita income in PPP in 2011 was at \$7 (US was at \$56).

⁷Colombia has a high prevalence of informal work above 50% and workers in informal sector are less happy (Hurtado et al. 2017).

(Wilkinson and Pickett 2010).⁸ Specifically in Latin America, inequality was found to have negative effects on happiness as it seems to be a signal of persistent unfairness (Graham and Felton 2006).

Colombia is still being haunted by violence and conflict, much of which is rural (line cite???)

Colombia is only partly free ranked at 96/210 Colombia is a corrupt country ranking 87/180 on Corruption Perceptions Index.

Political stability and absence of violence and terrorism—is only 20th percentile—Colombia is less stable and more violent than 80 percent of the countries. Voice and accountability and government effectiveness and control of corruption are at around median, Colombia scores best at Regulatory Quality better than about 2/3 of countries, and Rule of Law is problematic—below about 2/3 of countries.

Colombia is one of the 10 worst countries in the world for working people: Murders and impunity, union-busting and dismissals. This is one of the most troubling statistics as it involves clear violations of human rights.

In terms of quality of roads Colombia ranks 110/137—part of the problem is mountains, yet roads are precarious as one of the authors of the study found out when his bus crashed—roads are not only a basis for commerce and trade but also for everyday getting around, especially in absence of rail—transport is the blood of the society CITE. (Singapore scores 2nd).

Unlivable but Happy—“Fool’s Paradise”?

goal of this study to explain the massive mismatch or paradox of apparently low or mediocre livability and top life satisfaction; and again Singapore apparently opposite situation

An apparent conclusion so far is that SWB doesn’t have much to do with money or other indicators of objective quality of life—Colombia scores mediocre or poor on all of them and yet is one of the very happiest countries in the world.

Colombia is arguably the biggest Quality of Life v Happiness puzzle. It scores mediocre or low on most quality of life indicators, but tops rankings of both global overall cognitive life satisfaction and momentary affective happiness. In other words, it appears to be unlivable but happy, hence so called “Fool’s Paradise,” a place where people are subjectively happy, despite objective misery (Michalos 2014)—for other examples of fool’s paradise and fool’s hell see Okulicz-Kozaryn and Valente (2019).

In explaining the paradox, it is useful to start with a major and ideally fitting happiness theory, which is specifically about the link between livability and SWB, livability theory.

theoretical background: happiness theories

Needs/livability theory (Veenhoven and Ehrhardt 1995) is a key happiness theory, next to the other 4 theories, genes/set point (eg Schnittker 2008), adaptation/adjustment; hedonic treadmill (Brickman et al. 1978), comparison/discrepancies (Michalos 1985) happiness just a motivator (Carver and Scheier 1990)

DO SEE ORG FOR CIV AND ITS DISCONTENTS AND CP society as tool to satisfy needs; exact opposite in Freud civ and its discontents;;;rt! ideally society is to serve human needs! But in capitalism it serves interests of capitalists; as it earlier did to serve feudal lords; kings, etc etc

Societies are systems for meeting human needs, but not all societies do that job equally well. Consequently, people are not equally happy in all societies.

Improvement of the fit between social institutions and human needs will result in greater happiness.

(p. 3645 Veenhoven 2014)

⁸But see criticism Snowdon (2010).

The chasm between objective quality of life or livability and subjective wellbeing may point to limitations of livability theory CITE. Or perhaps alternatively, there are aspects of objective quality of life and livability that are not captured by usual rankings such as those cited above. Notably, nature is extraordinary in Colombia. Colombia has 2nd largest biodiversity (after Brazil), despite being 7x smaller than Brazil. Colombia has just about any type of natural amenities. And we know that nature (as opposed to cities) is the key ingredient for happiness PRETTY earth only endures, tesson, walden

Another key to happiness is social capital PUTNAM BOWLING ALONE LANE mwerket demcoracies MCMAHON history TOENIES, and thgere is plenty of social Capital in colombia—Colombians are extraordinarily social, firendly, outgoing and sponatenous, there are festivals and social events vbery frequently.

freedom from (negative)[objective]: be no slave, live in a free country, have no coercion, free from restrictions/impediments; lack of obstacles FH freedom to (positive)[subjective]: be able to choose, control and direct one's own life; presence of control WVS eg US more objectively free in than MEX but MEX actually feeling more free than US (give numbers for both)!! (Okulicz-Kozaryn 2014, 2015)

world avg from wvs 1981-2020: 6.9 .25

COL 8.0 0.1

more consumption/physical stuff—less time and energy for non-physical stuff; opportunity cost civ and its discontents—more civilization, less freedom

make sure make references to this theory later The folklore theory, a less known theory, defines happiness in terms of the reflection of broadly held perceptions about life which are rooted in traditions and the culture of a society. For example, if a culture has an optimistic outlook in life regardless of their circumstances, future generations will remain positive. Thus, a society may be happy, regardless of the socioeconomic situation, because of cultural influences (Veenhoven and Ehrhardt 1995).

talk here about col

brickman getting used to stuff It may be resilience, positive outlook, ability to make out most of little, deeply social society's fabric.

Another explanation for the colombian paradox of high subjective wellbeing despite objective poverty is adaptation BRICKMAN—humans are able to adapt to just about anything—then perhaps colombians have adapted, at least to some degree, to poverty, inequility, and even violence having syfferered through recent civil war and breakdown of the state, now that things are better than they used to be just few decades ago, colombians are making best out of the conditions.

This is not to say that the objective problems, notably abject poverty and violations of human rights, are not important and don't need to be addressed. Indeed, one of the happiness metric shortcomings is that humans adapt to just about anything (Brickman et al. 1978).

theoretical background: Marxist thery of alienation

see i wish i hadnt worked so hard: on money and Marx!

Arguably there is one overall overarching alienation, which can be specifically described from four perspectives (?): the product of labour, the activity of labour, one's own specific humanity, others/society. And the alienation means “separation of an actor or agent from the conditions of meaningful agency”—a typical situation is when a person does not own means of production—such person is only an appendage of a machine (?). For elaboration see marxists.org/subject/alienation.

right so for instance Starbucks workers (not to mention McDonalds and other fastfoods) do seem to be alienated both from the product and the activity—they have no freedom, autonomy or latitude over the product (it is given) and alomost none over labor (there are procedures that must be followed).

Same holds for other chains that dominate the US, and could extended to other businesses, delivery for instance. US Amazon drivers have cameras, motion detectors, etc in the truck so to meet the they have to sometimess pee in the bottle; similarly in warehouses,

wearing bracelet with gps, and to meet the quota sometimes have to restore to painkillers that are freely available from dispensaries CITE. What else could be a better example of loss of humanity or de-humanization than a human wearing a bracelet with gps eating painkillers and working alongside robots in a giant warehouse? Of course, not all workers have such dire conditions, but this is arguably the trend, if Amazon does it, others will follow or be forced out of business.

In Colombia, on the contrary, much of delivery is informal—often a guy on a motorcycle who has much more autonomy and freedom over execution of his job.

In fact, more than half of the Colombian economy (measured by employment CHECK!!) is informal. A typical set of (CHECK) jobs includes selling juice, bbq, and other food or glassess, hats, and other apparell on sidewalk or a roadside. grep tex and bib for 'informal' and goog sch; see lina papers on it

the two other types of alienation: from oneself and society—if one performs highly specialized task in a repetitive fashion (such as much of the US economy), one becomes alienated from herself and the society. This can be easily observed after working hours—the US workers are like ghosts without much life in them and without much interactionPUTNAM BOWLING ALONE SUBURNBAN NATION

Colombians are not alienated!

less money orientation, less alienation

Totly foundation of all this happiness premium in col is Marx: ppl live here to have fun to have life; in us ppl live to make money and spend, consumerism; and it fails! They are less happy. Works only for capitalists

It's real here. Not fake Not anxious.

Capitalism alienates. In col much less of it! Much less alienation

En col much less dinero, eg most work in informal economy, help ech other, real community etc

Can fuck it all up anywhere with greed. Need moderation everywhere.

Popular culture and popular media explanations for happiness—Extremely Good Energy (popular media observations, anecdotal evidence authors observations)

To have fully explored all the possible explanations for the unexpected Colombian happiness, we present here common wisdom and speculations.

difficult to measure and operationalize nd capture more scientifically hence we allow these speculations here that could be a start to form the hypotheses to be tested in the future

"good energy" is diffcult to quantify and not studied much scientifically. thsi section lists anecdotal evidence and popular explabations for colombia's happiness—future research can test them properly and systematically ok one sec for all; first have a para: lets start with anecdotal evidence/personal observations [organize what i have so far!]

Lets start with authors' personal observations, anecdotal evidence.

In Colombia there is human factor, good energy. We have lost in the West(?). For instance, pull over from the road and right there on a roadside you get a friendly personal cup of coffee. In the US, you can go go to Starbucks that feels like hospital or airport—robotic and inhuman.

Colombians' attitude and approach to life is spontaneous unbirdeled joy—Marcuse's and Fromm's ideal (?????). Also reminiscent of Nietzsche's ideal of a child—curious, spontaenous, creative, and innocent ?. It is present time orientation—not living in the past or worrying about future, happy-go-lucky free spirit without shame or guilt—in sharp contrast to the West, where anxiety and calculating behavior prevail.⁹ The US way of life is unnaturally fast and mostly about money , aka "bysyness." CITE from wish hadnt work so hard But it is also full of stress and anxiety even outside of work and money pursuit. Another source of stress and anxiety may be

⁹but that could be also culture of poverty cite that italian guy banfield unheveny city i guessCITE. Yet not caring too much can be actually what is needed for much of a socety in the west—see wonderful subtle art of not giving f

the constant drive to excell in everything, be perfect, and keep up with joneses—so well portrayed in AND “American Beauty” and “Crash” movies. bob frank darwins economy CITE and subt;e art of not giving fuck ¹⁰

Yet another source of stress and anxiety is quantity and quality of social relationships—in the US, a capitalistic society, social relationships are about business, not about actual meaningful social contact CITE rom wish hadnt work so hard

As compared to calculating and fake Americans, Colombians are more innocent, closer to human nature, and more real. Colombians don't seem to be weighted down by civilization and its discontents (?), or ghosts of the past ???.

Colombians do not pay much attention to bad news and politics, life is more about family, friends, and fun.

Next, lets move to popular media/culture explanations.¹¹

Two popular media articles seem most informative: ??

According to an Englishman living in Medellin these are things that make it happy in Colombia: putting most importance on family, friends and fun, bravado and blind optimism may help too¹²; having less entitlement and appreciating what one has, having joy in small things, e.g., cheap coffee/alcohol are just fine; not worrying and not expecting much (“tranquilo”)

? makes 2 important points: “Colombia violence and cruelty became frighteningly routine”—indeed people can get used to just about anything BRICKMAN, and perhaps happy now because it was even worse in 80s and 90s MDT cite “Trauma and grief are stitched into the collective consciousness. But so is resilience and the drive to enjoy life despite it all [...] Colombians being happy is not such a contradiction after all.”

Colombia is easy-going and natural: In Colombia emotions change seamlessly and effortlessly between shame and pride, despair and hope, sorrow and happiness CITEP-wp—but shouldn't they? As opposed to the US, where one is supposed to pretend to just be perfect, happy, and busy working.¹³ There is good and bad as everywhere, but in Colombia it's all more easy-going and simple, and people are remarkably cheerful and helpful. , warm, open and humorous (?).

? offers many illustrative quotes: “Money is nice but it's not the most important thing,” “In general we are a culture that values what you have,” and “We love people and music” -see elaboration in section on marx “Colombians are innocent. They're curious.”—marcuse, nietzsche, fromm “Colombians have become indifferent to situations of war. In other words, if the problem does not touch me directly, I must feel grateful, satisfied, optimistic, lucky.” “Colombians have always demonstrated incredible, Herculean and powerful resilience to war, death and to the harsh history of violence and diplomatic failures,” “Colombians feed this resilience through human connections and the communal experience”—can get used to just about anything;

And there is dance, indeed it is as if Colombians have music in them—“We live for parties, holidays, and fill the void with a fanaticism for sporting events and beauty pageants and entertainment” “The dance frees you. It is a way of expression and feeling. Here the music is carried in the blood, in the veins, in our heart. It's a great passion we carry throughout our lives” ¹⁴

? adds few more: warm and polite, deeply affectionate among friends, and kind to strangers; loves to party, reveres, and adores their family, and is so enthusiastic about life.

? lists some intriguing hypotheses as to happiness predictors that could be used in the future research: biodiversity, climate diversity, plenty of festivals/holidays, healthy lifestyle and food, dancing.

¹⁰Excellence is pervasive, e.g., Plano TX, has on its official logo “City Of Excellence.” Pursuit of perfection/excellence generates arms race and constantly raises the bar, creating even more stress and anxiety in a vicious cycle, and ultimately by definition creates mass failure—humans by definition are not perfect, and there can only be one or a handful of winners in any race bob frank drawings economy agaign. In addition to stress and anxiety, shame and guilt are likely created as well.

¹¹As a sidenote, perhaps start with colombia.co which appears an official governemnt website advertising Colombia to the world, producing the Colombia brand, it does talk about great positive energy, eg “Boundless Enthusiasm”, but then also blends in usual Western business talk about entrepreneurship and so forth, and this is good, colombia does need investments. See <https://www.colombia.co/en/colombia-country/what-are-colombian-people-like>

¹²Ignorance is a bliss?

¹³“Surface acting” (faking emotions that are deemed appropriate) is emotionally draining (?).

¹⁴“Colombian salsa, as opposed to other forms, is denoted by faster syncopations that match the people's natural energy. It's an egalitarian genre, accessible to everyone, and it seems to make the entire country happy. But is it a different experience than in other countries, like, say, with Brazilians and samba?” “I think there are several differences [...] Our dance is much more sociable. It's necessary to dance salsa as a couple or in a group. There is a more direct connection. For these reasons, it's been gaining importance in the world.” “Salsa is a refresher of human dignity. It overshadows inequity and discontent with sharp rhythms and the madness of love. It closes social distances because it requires people to embrace each other in a moment of eye contact, the feel of the skin, bringing them together with movement, helping them to know each other and see the best in each other. It has a long cultural heritage of peace.”

Colombia is a genuinely wonderful place to be as many locals, travelers and tourists would attest (e.g., Roos 2019, ?, ?)
So is Colombia “Unlivable” but “Happy,” a so called Fool’s Paradise ? Arguably not.

Singapore, a Fool’s Hell?

An useful counterexample for Colombia could be “fool’s hell”—a place that has high objective quality of life or livability, but low subjective wellbeing or life satisfaction.

A first guess could be the US, as the world-renown best country in the world, home to the American dream, notably the very richest country in the world (excluding tiny oil producing countries such as Norway), and yet ranks only 46/160 in WDH, the best country in the world doesn’t even make it to the top happiness quartile, and more on the US and american dream later.

Yet, it is not the US, but Singapore that scores even better on objective quality of life indicators.

Singapore, Switzerland of Asia, is impeccably/squeaky clean, extremely stable/predictable/disciplined and safe (??). Singapore, by many standards, one of the best, if not the best place in the World. It has World’s third highest (after Qatar and Luxembourg) Gross Domestic Product per Capita Purchasing Power Parity adjusted (IMF 2017). It has also third highest (after Monaco and Japan) life expectancy in the World (Central Intelligence Agency 2017), second highest economic freedom (Heritage 2017). Singaporean children score highest on educational tests (Coughlan 2017), it is making greatest progress in health (Fullman et al. 2017), has the World’s fastest internet (McSpadden 2015). It even has world’s strongest passport (Chandran 2017). In short, one could say that Singapore is one of most livable places in the World, if not the very most livable in the World. Singapore’s life satisfaction rank is 68/160, again, Colombia is 3/160. This is one of the most striking paradoxes in the social indicators field—given poor or average objective quality of life indicators, Colombia is an extremely happy country. How?

But being impeccably clean, extremely disciplined and safe can hamper freedom and ultimately happiness. For instance, no smoking in Singapore—but cigars help great deal (Freud). No marijuana, no gum chewing, and a list of prohibitions continues (??)¹⁵

really Colombia better than Singapore? discuss more!!

US a Fool’s Pardise or Fool’s Hell?

clear from the picture that Cali for people, Philly for business

16

easterlin piursuit of money=pursut of happiness, but we know money does not buy happiness cite easterlin and other guys from i wish i hadnt worked so hard, annie leonard and kasser especially

miles corak etc

the major culprit is consumerism! cp from i wish i hadnt worked so hard; can make a good living, make good salary, the problem is people spend it on stuff they dont need and end up on hamsters wheel

Us fools apradiae American dream false corak

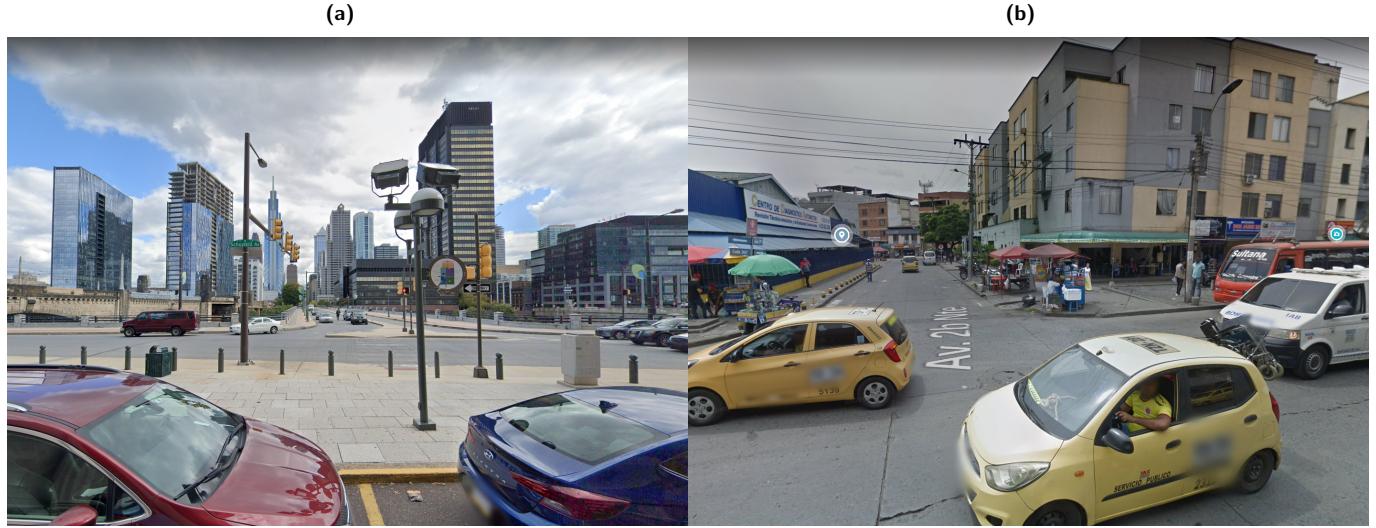
Col qol if anything us is fools paradise money doesn’t buy happiness

a remarkably important point is that Americans don’t even seem to realize they are alienated, indeed travel to a place like Colombia may be necessary to open one’s eyes

¹⁵ “Smoking is one of the greatest and cheapest enjoyments in life, and if you decide in advance not to smoke, I can only feel sorry for you,” “[Cigars have] served me for precisely fifty years as protection and a weapon in the combat of life ... I owe to the cigar a great intensification of my capacity to work and a facilitation of my self-control” . Per Freud see <https://www.freud.org.uk/2020/04/22/freud-and-his-cigars/> and ?. Of course, as with everything, moderation should be exercised, for instance, smoking more than 2 cigars a day increases probability of health problems much more than smoking less than 2 cigars per day, and while some studies find no health effects of smoking less than 2 cigars per day, some studies do find negative effects (e.g., ?).

¹⁶ it is getting worse in colombia however—notably the urban landscape is getting littered with commercial centers “centro comercial” (Western-like malls), villages are still spared

Figure 1: Getting out of the train station and bus terminal. (Note: no trains in Colombia.)



US and singapore and west rather fool hell-livable but unhappy; but again are they really livable? \$ is not everything! ppl think of them as paradise, many migate tehre but happiness is not to be found there; you want happiness—come to colombia (or mexico)

to be fair, there are many great things about the US: vibrant international melting pot, relative lack of (crude) corruption, working independent courts, uncorrupt law enforcement, abundance of goods and services (not that need that much for livability), and arguably the biggest advantage: the highest wages in the world¹⁷

alternatives to capitalism such as communism did have failed spectacularly say as in soviet union CITE perterson and continue to fail in Venezuela and elsewhere. But what about luxury communism CITE!

1 Discussion and Conclusion

The world has much to learn from Colombia how to be happy.¹⁸ This paper argues that Colombia is one of the very best countries to visit, and it may even be one of best places to live.

CONCLUSION: only apparently great happiness is possible in unlivable conditions! BUT what matters for livability is not only gdp, kkz, roads, etc; social capital—Rt so col is livable!! argue that dont need much to satisfy human needs, so ya livability theory holds!!and Stuff like gdp governance roads not most important, social stuff is the key and stressless spontaneous attitude like from Marcuse

conclusion: why awesome wealth impeccable discipline and physical infrastructure if it is not related to human wellbeing?

conclusion/limitations: much furtger research needed, especially in terms of systematic and deeper approaches; here the goal was to paint a broad picture

Despite all the problems with poverty, roads, corruption, etc as enumerated at the beginning in 2, Colombia actually seems to be quite a livable place.

But 2 points to problems in terms of metrics that are mostly economic, some legal/institutions, and physical infrastructure. But these things are not the only things that matter¹⁹ there are other things that matter for human flourishing or happiness.

¹⁷arguably if you do not make a lot of money, the US is not the best place to be—it's not worth alienation for little money

¹⁸Note that the arguments and results presented here likely generalize to some degree to other Latin countries, perhaps especially the Caribbean—there may be Caribbean energy. Ecuador's energy, for instance, is more flat.

¹⁹As long as the problems are not extreme, and in Colombia they sometimes are. For instance, mediocre or relatively poor road condition does not hamper human flourishing much, but extremely bad condition such as falling bridge does create great unhappiness. Same with poverty—one can live happily on very little, indeed be poor by western standards, without hot water, without car, etc, but abject poverty such as malnutrition does create great unhappiness. There is considerable abject poverty in Colombia, and no amount of nature, festivals, or cheerfulness can help with it.

and in fact the more focus on economy, the less human friendly the place is—marx sec on alienation

It has wonderful nature, extremely good energy, cheerful welcoming people, and so forth. *iii*these washington post hufington post etc here

Colombia is a wonderful place, it has everything: Pacific, Caribbean, jungle, desert, mountains, you name it, like Lat Am in one country, 2nd greatest biodiversity in the world so it is striking that according to WEF in terms of Prioritization of Travel & Tourism colombia ranks 97th out of 136 countries (World Economic Forum 2017). Given that its air transport infrastructure is good 60th, but Ground and Port Infrastructure bad 116th. And Safety and Security 136th/136—surely Colombia should work to improve safety, but much progress has already been done, and it is important to point out that much of the country is safe, and dangerous colombia is more of a stigma of the past than present reality.

iii

!!!as per fool paradise question in the title: no, wonderful place, yes, poor, but not only material things matter for livability

The concept of fool's paradise is related to the concept of 'ignorance is a bliss,' and there may be a grain of truth there. if anything ignorance is a bliss—colombians may not know about good life, especially those in poor and isolated areas

ya a grain of truth in fool's paradise, it is similar to saying ignorance is the bliss or people simply do not know better; like that ecuador airbnb quito old hotel owner said!

inhabitants of poor municipalities in the Choco are happy to know only that environment in which they were born and raised, but when they know and live in other municipalities with greater socio-economic development their demands and expectations increase (Muñoz-Cardona 2018).

many poor may be relatively segregated and isolated into their neighborhoods, not knowing better, and thus being satisfied with little what they have. Similarly, to women in rural China, who only became unhappy once they became exposed to higher standard of living (Rosenthal 1999).

Curiously, Martínez and Short (2020) reports that in Cali residents in the poorest districts were more satisfied with their lives, and speculates that it may be so due to the high resilience of this population being affected by crime, poor health, and insufficient provision of public goods. Here it may be similar, country was ravaged by largest civil conflict in Latin America and drug-trafficking related violence in 80s and 90s (Martínez and Short 2020), and now while still poor and unsafe as compare to West, much better than 20 or 0 years ago; and what it went through might have made it resilient

There is obviously large migration from latin america to the US, and surely more people want to come to the US than leave it, but this doesn't mean that the US is the best place to live—people mostly come to the US for the money, not necessarily for quality of life.

Indeed recent media reports argue the opposite—people are leaving the US for latin america for better quality of life there, eg californians and others moving to mexico; and anecdotal evidence—many westerners fall in love with colombia

future research can perhaps use MLM to include country level variables, now with only 3 or 4 waves, there is not enough time variability to test these variables statistically

Future Research and Questions that Remain

improve on anecdotal evidence who would move where col->us or us->col

ideally actual moving, not self-reported as it is likely to be biased especially if a person haven't experienced life in both countries

So while presumably many Colombians would like to move to USA and not many Americans would like to move to Colombia, it should be noted that indeed many westerners from better objective conditions do move to Colombia FIND SOME CITES

this is background information and further elaboration is beyond the scope of this paper focusing in Happiness within Colombia across space

big elephant in the room may be the bias of authors: it may be just money: having Western salary in a poor country buys a lot of happiness arguably authors would be less excited about colombia if they lived on a colombian salary

yes, survey data shows that colombians living in colombia and making colombian salary are happy, but would they still be happy if they knew life, salary, ad opportunities in the US, would they stay in Colombia, so again ignorance is a bliss? it's a paradise but only because people don't know any better?

And sure money helps. But it's locals making pesos being more happy than American

cannot really test or properly exclude fools paradise hypothesis, but anecdotal evidence, contrary to popular opinion that if colombians could most would go to united states; indeed this rather seems exception that the rule and many colombians who can live in the US chose to live in Colombia, likewise many westerners go and stay in col

To provoke discussion and spark research, these are only speculations so far

ONLINE APPENDIX

incorporate somewhere Colombia is one of the happiest countries in the world, or indeed the happiest (Roos 2019). Colombia scores in top decile in terms of life satisfaction (Scandinavia often tops the rankings). Yet in terms of emotions and daily life experience: smiling and laughter, respect, enjoyment, worry, sadness and anger: positive daily experiences and emotions, the top countries are: Colombia, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Of the 10 countries that rank highest on positive experiences, 7 are Latin American (Roos 2019). Colombians seem to have warm, welcoming, and unshakable spirit; and they appear resilient—grateful, satisfied, optimistic, lucky, and even innocent (?).

elaborate on affect, momentary happiness as per that huffpost; and add washington post i think—that col is the very happiest!!!

Brief Definitions

incorporate somewhere or footnote or SOM, different parts can go different places

Overall Subjective WellBeing (SWB) can be broken down into components. Notably, there is affective happiness (feel happy) v cognitive life satisfaction (perceive/evaluate life as satisfying).

The two would overlap/corelate moderately but they are conceptually different—e.g., I am happy at the moment because I see blue sky and eat a tasty burger, but I am dissatisfied with my life because I have no friends, no money, and bad health. Or I can be satisfied with my life as a whole because I have many friends, excellent health, and great job, but I am unhappy now because the weather is bad and my lunch is not tasting good.

Likewise, a typical Scandinavian, say from Iceland, looks grumpy, cold, unfriendly, and rather sad, doesn't talk much, doesn't smile, yet Scandinavians consistently report very high life satisfaction. Latinos report quite high life satisfaction, and are extremely happy: warm, cheerful, friendly.

Another notable distinction is hedonia: more joy and fun than pain and misery (Bentham) v eudamonia: good life, realizing one's potential, becoming who you are (Aristotle, Nietzsche). **todo somewhere eg discussion where i say ignorance is a bliss its like be satisfied pig v unhappy socrates, so perhaps Colombia is more about hedonia than eudamonia**

For discussion see diener for public policy and boilerplate from earlier like meyers etc cite mcmahon and weires (sp?) guy who wrote philosophical dissertation on that; CITE RYFF guess that youtube vid i

Existing Limited Research

a small subsection where list existing research on swb in col-lina-any other?

There is economic research focusing on SWB and inequality in Latin America (Graham and Felton 2006) and Colombia specifically (?), but it doesn't address livability-happiness paradox. The top 1% of the income distribution accounts for over 20% of total income in 2010—the rich Colombians are mostly rentiers and capital owners. (?) Yet, regardless of the income level, Colombians are optimistic about their mobility (?).

Adaptation is strong in Latin America, for instance poor people such as peasants can be happy because of adaptation; crime and corruption decrease happiness, but less so when they are more prevalent—again people adapt (?).

Then there is a useful volume on happiness in Latin America: "Handbook of Happiness Research in Latin America" making two relevant points about SWB in Colombia. In the poorest income quintile life satisfaction was above 8 on a 10-point scale (?). Family is the most important relational good, main social support—family is the meaning of life—the end that justifies efforts (?).

In conclusion—there is still very little research on happiness in Colombia, and the existing research is rather indirect and tangential only to our topic, and hence, we turn to anecdotal evidence to explain high happiness amidst low livability

again see tag col in ebib

A look over time

Colombia was ravaged by largest civil conflict in Latin America and drug-trafficking related violence in 80s and 90s (Martínez and Short 2020).

armed conflict between government forces, leftist guerrilla groups and right wing paramilitaries. The conflict escalated in the 1990s mainly in remote rural areas.

so we focus on the aftermath—how's Colombia doing in the last 20 years 2000-2020

Here we focus on 20 year span.

about a third of Colombians live on less than \$5.50 a day in 2019, but strikingly, that's a progress, it is down from about 2/3 of Colombians in 2000!

We use www.worldvaluessurvey.org

SWB question reads "All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days? Using this card on which 1 means you are "completely dissatisfied" and 10 means you are "completely satisfied" where would you put your satisfaction with your life as a whole?"

Freedom q and some elab from free from and to

GDP per capita, PPP (constant 2017 international \$) in thousands https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP_PP.KD?locations=CO

Colombian GDP went up by 50% over 1997-2018. Colombians happiness and feeling of freedom are among the highest in the world, but they did not change over 1997-2018. In Colombia, GDP has no relationship with SWB, i.e., the Easterlin Paradox holds.

like 1st caption on swb, wave 5-7: 3 most free countries, plus USA, Germany UK CP some explanation from free from and free to Puerto Rico 8.4 Mexico 8.3 Colombia 8.1 Germany 6.9 UK 7.2 USA 7.7

swb flat—but given enormous improvement in QOL these should be increasing—so again, arguably GDP has little to do with QOL, just as in a cross section

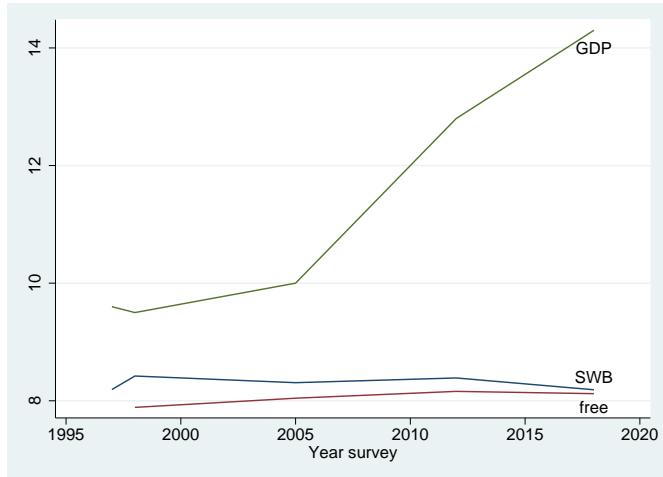


Figure 2: XXX

The US v Colombia in Pictures

note these are screenshots on full screen of res at 1200 860

The point is that the apparent economic or even livability superiority of the US over Colombia actually is only economic—more expensive physical infrastructure doesn't make it more livable and actually can make it less livable.

It is often overlooked point that something less developed economically and cheaper is actually better (happier).

The US infrastructure is great for business or making money, but it is bad for living there. It could be a difficult tradeoff to solve: economic growth v wellbeing, except that a very convincing argument has already been made that we do not need any more economic growth KALLIS

Some inspiration comes from Quercia (2014)—the idea is that what matters when travelling is not only speed and distance.

US has this strange obsession with excellence/perfection and productivity, also in terms of built environment apparently thinking that the more ordered, organized, and man-made, the better. But the thinking was not always this way. Thoreau, for instance, was an American (Thoreau 1995 [1854], 1993).

The following are one of the author's own subjective/anecdotal opinions. Note when picking images I dropped the Google's yellow man more or less randomly only given rural, urban, suburb, toll, etc and took first useful image. I tried to avoid cherry pick positive and negative imagery. Comments welcomed! Contact the corresponding author.

For best results zoom as much as screen allows.

In fig 3 obvious difference is width or 6 v 2 lanes, and economically 6 beats 2—can move more stuff faster, but assuming the same traffic, it is more interesting and fun or joy to ride on smaller roads.²⁰ The other less obvious difference is vegetation—around I-95 it is pedigreed nicely trimmed man made fake nature; around 25 it is real wild nature—more happiness there too.

I-95 misery v bad Colombian road fun!

Keep in mind that 25 is not some small rural road—it's one of the most major ones, the Pan Americana.

²¹.

have captions and/or in text: like robotic/alien-like v human

²²

²⁰ And adding more lanes does not automatically mean less traffic, often on the contrary, people decide to drive more—adding more lanes for traffic is like loosening your belt for obesity (e.g., Duany et al. 2001).

²¹ And why not more fun highway, say from rural mountainous TN? Because the contrast is for the flat, dense, developed and wealthy North East—that's where economic productivity thrives

²² 295 not NJ Turnpike, to be conservative, NJ Turnpike is even more fake

Figure 3: A major road/highway in the middle of nowhere.

(a) US I-95 rural MD, couple miles N of Susquehanna River



(b) Colombian 25 (PanAmericana), between Cali and Popayan



fig 4 here we are passing through towns—on 295 through cherry hill, but who would have noticed looks the same as I-95 in previous picture, whether rural or urban, there's the same fake nature on the side.

Figure 4: Passing through a town.

(a) El Bordo on 25



(b) Cherry Hill on 295



fig 5 Approaching Del Mem Br toll—looks unwelcoming, like an entrance to minimum security prison. Peaje on 25 looks better, again natural wild vegetation, can pull over and rest a bit, buy an organic orange.

in fig 6 even toll booth looks more human in Colombia, a friendlier more welcoming place, the one in the US looks like entrance to a minimum security prison

Last but not least let's hang out in a city, in fig 7 Say you are a weary traveller arriving at 30th st station in Philly. You get out of the station, and it's a desert—nowhere to hangout, have to keep walking. You arrive to terminal de transporte in Cali, get out of the building and plenty of places to buy food, drinks, and sit down.

fig 3:

https://www.google.com/maps/@39.6003437,-76.0444379,3a,75y,249.22h,83.1t/data=!3m7!1e1!3m5!1s0wpnM0Yc9KK6YD62e0!6shhttps%2F%2Fstreetviewpixels-pa.googleapis.com%2Fv1%2Fthumbnail%3Fpanoid%3D0wpnM0Yc9KK6YD6ZhdgiJQ%26cb_

Figure 5: Approaching toll.



Figure 6: Paying toll.

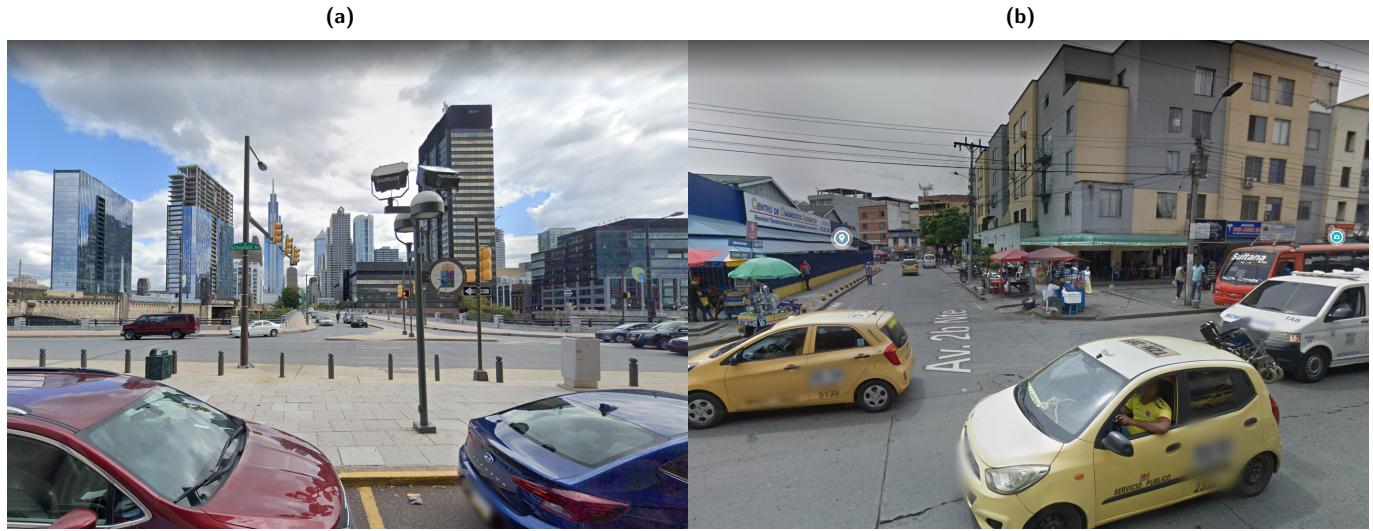


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client%3Dmaps_sv.tactile.gps%26w%3D203%26h%3D100%26yaw%3D150.322%26pitch%3D0%26thumbfov%3D100!7i16384!8i8192
https://www.google.com/maps/@2.7886904,-76.5521276,3a,75y,177.41h,100.48t/data=!3m7!1e1!3m5!1sDBBN1UaixNJL9t9
2e0!6shttps:%2F%2Fstreetviewpixels-pa.googleapis.com%2Fv1%2Fthumbnail%3Fpanoid%3DDBBN1UaixNJL9uUrulT5g%26cb_
client%3Dmaps_sv.tactile.gps%26w%3D203%26h%3D100%26yaw%3D259.4146%26pitch%3D0%26thumbfov%3D100!7i13312!8i6656
fig 4
https://www.google.com/maps/@39.9151715,-74.9812986,3a,75y,355.06h,94.72t/data=!3m7!1e1!3m5!1svjTItcXHUaaWE
2e0!6shttps:%2F%2Fstreetviewpixels-pa.googleapis.com%2Fv1%2Fthumbnail%3Fpanoid%3DvjTItcXHUaaWEkdG9iXbg%26cb_
client%3Dmaps_sv.tactile.gps%26w%3D203%26h%3D100%26yaw%3D108.39489%26pitch%3D0%26thumbfov%3D100!7i16384!8i8192
https://www.google.com/maps/@2.1191142,-76.9827811,3a,75y,29.76h,78.92t/data=!3m7!1e1!3m5!1sLImUajMcEKyf6eLx
2e0!6shttps:%2F%2Fstreetviewpixels-pa.googleapis.com%2Fv1%2Fthumbnail%3Fpanoid%3DLImUajMcEKyf6eLxRirjGw%26cb_
client%3Dmaps_sv.tactile.gps%26w%3D203%26h%3D100%26yaw%3D155.053%26pitch%3D0%26thumbfov%3D100!7i13312!8i6656
fig 5

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Figure 7: Getting out of the train station and bus terminal. (Note: no trains in Colombia.)



https://www.google.com/maps/@3.1520675,-76.460229,3a,75y,181.56h,83.61t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1s27q_DTIQZ3Tc67jR2e0!7i13312!8i6656

<https://www.google.com/maps/@39.6962957,-75.5445256,3a,75y,284.53h,94.14t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1s6XzK4mx61AETyW2e0!7i16384!8i8192>

fig 6

same as above just move ahead

fig 7

<https://www.google.com/maps/@39.9556825,-75.1809809,3a,75y,98.3h,91.96t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sx0T6m0Tfk7frupGV2e0!7i16384!8i8192>

<https://www.google.com/maps/@3.4656412,-76.5213045,3a,75y,89.77h,81.78t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sWYCkArtZNxDNuhKT2e0!7i13312!8i6656>

World Economic Forum report 2017

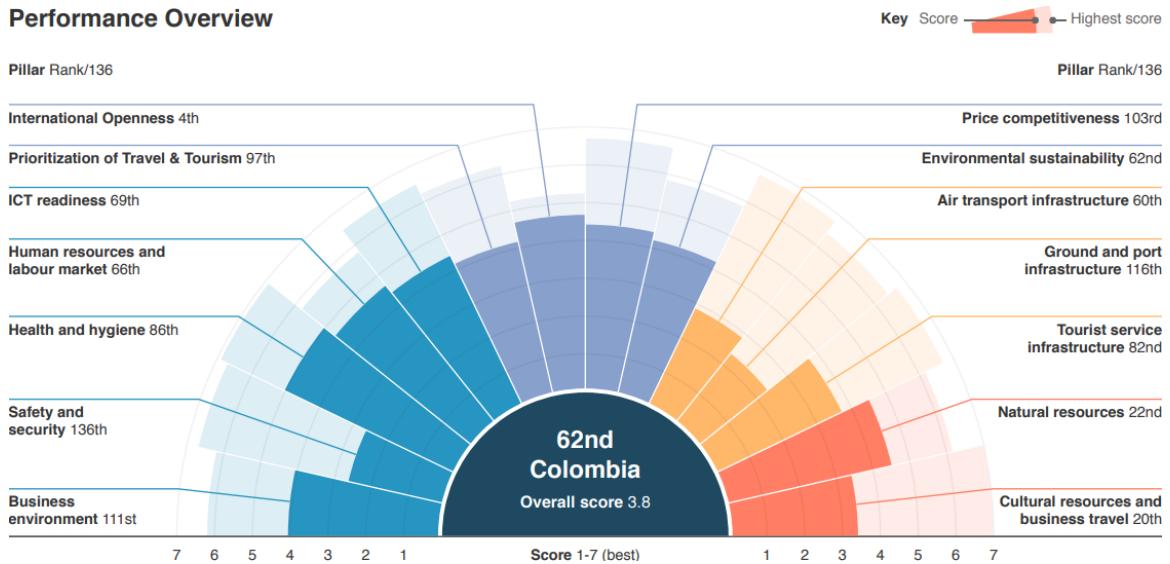


Figure 8: World Economic Forum report 2017. https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_TTCR_2017_web_0401.pdf

Additional Information

9

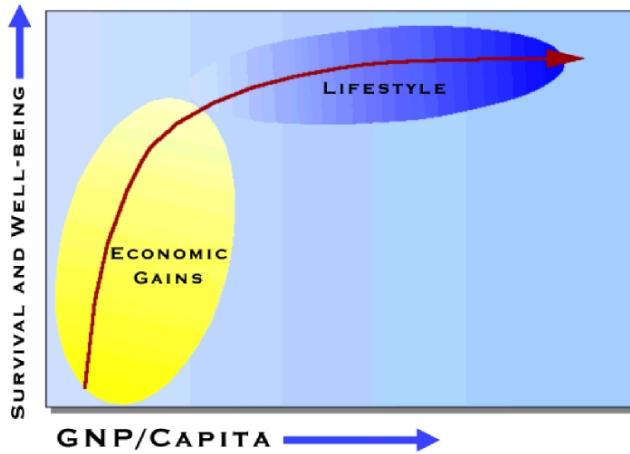


Figure 9: Well-being and income, (Inglehart 1997).

TO n org later can redo with latinobarometer, goes back every year to like 95, but at least since 05 has 8 step urbanicity, but top one is 100k and then there is capital ad
and then can do size with province :)

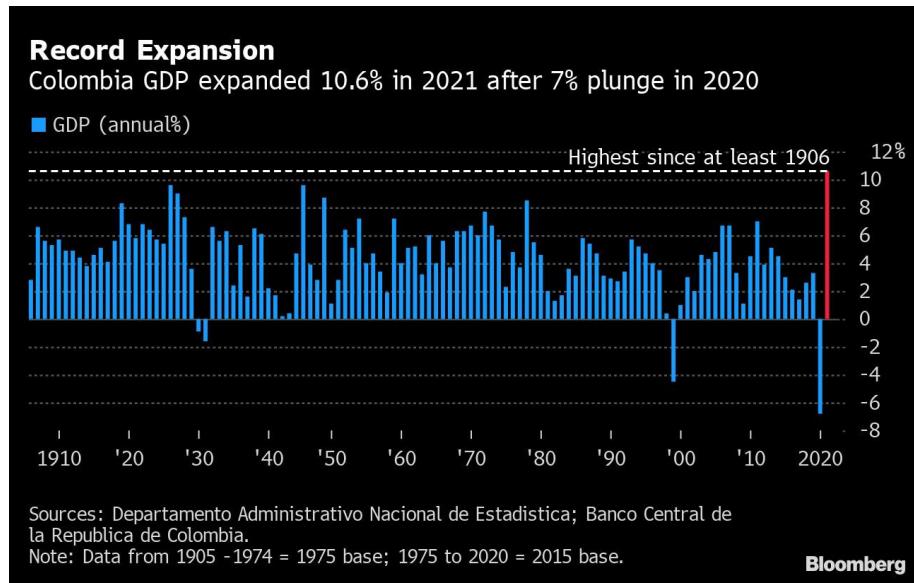


Figure 10: Long term GDP from Colombian government.

	a1	a2	a3	a4	a5	a5A	a5b
-10	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
10-50k	-0.04	-0.02	-0.04	-0.07	-0.08	-0.18	-0.18
50-500k	-0.03	-0.01	-0.10	-0.15	-0.14	-0.11	-0.17
500k-	-0.05	-0.02	-0.18	-0.25+	-0.23+	-0.20	-0.31*
1998	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
2012	-0.03	-0.02	0.01	-0.06	-0.02	0.00	0.00
2018	-0.24***	-0.21**	-0.19**	-0.20**	-0.18*	-0.19*	-0.13+
age	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.03+	0.03
age2	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00
male	0.01	-0.10*	-0.11*	-0.05	-0.13	-0.12	-0.12
married or living together as married	0.21***	0.22***	0.22***	0.19**	0.16+	0.17+	0.17+
divorced/separated/widowed	-0.02	-0.00	-0.01	-0.03	-0.11	-0.12	-0.12
health	0.61***	0.59***	0.58***	0.59***	0.59***	0.62***	0.62***
class	0.12***	0.07*	0.06*	0.05	0.05	0.06	0.06
education	-0.03**	-0.06***	-0.06***	-0.06***	-0.06**	-0.06**	-0.06**
income		0.08***	0.07***	0.09***	0.09***	0.10***	0.10***
Full time			0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Part time			0.08	-0.10	-0.10	-0.10	-0.10
Self employed			-0.04	-0.14	-0.14	-0.16	-0.16
Retired			0.13	0.19	0.20	0.20	0.20
Housewife			0.08	0.03	0.05	0.05	0.05
Students			0.02	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.12
Unemployed			-0.25**	-0.26+	-0.26+	-0.27+	-0.27+
Other			-0.13	-0.18	-0.18	-0.15	-0.15
religious services			0.02	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
No religious denomination			0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Buddhist			0.18	0.04	0.04	0.09	0.09
Christian			0.05	0.10	0.08	0.08	0.08
Evangelical			0.01	-0.14	-0.14	-0.13	-0.13
Jehovah witnesses			0.40+	0.61	0.52	0.52	0.52
Jew			0.38				
Muslim			0.94***	1.44***	1.19***	1.19***	1.19***
Other			0.07	-1.02+	-1.02+	-1.03*	-1.03*
Pentecostal			1.11**	1.16**	1.16**	1.20**	1.20**
Protestant			0.38	0.14	0.08	0.08	0.08
Roman Catholic			0.06	0.13	0.13	0.13	0.13
Seven Day Adventist			0.76+	0.76	0.82+	0.82+	0.82+
Wicca			1.15***	1.37***	1.37***	1.36***	1.36***
AU: Uniting Church			-0.26*	-0.42**	-0.42**	-0.27+	-0.27+
victim of a crime last year				-0.21*	-0.21*		
freq felt unsafe from crime at home				-0.17***	-0.17***		
constant	8.46***	8.25***	5.49***	5.53***	5.46***	5.40***	4.97***
N	6025	6024	5895	5874	5853	2885	2885

+ 0.10 * 0.05 ** 0.01 *** 0.001; robust
std err

Table 3: OLS regressions of satisfaccionvida. See coef on 2018—they're becoming less happy!!

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