

Colombia: Unlivable but Happy—"Fool's Paradise"?

Quality of Life (QOL) and Subjective Wellbeing (SWB) 2000-2020

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Happiness and Place in Colombia: Urban-Rural and Regional patterns from World Values Survey (WVS)
preliminary evidence especially regarding regional differences—small sample, need more evidence using more data as data becomes available in the future

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Colombia is the very happiest or at least one of a handful happiest countries in the World (e.g., ?).

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

Table 1: Colombia's happiness on scale 1-4 over time and on scale 1-10 across space (23 happiest countries in the world) . Data from World Database of Happiness at https://worlddatabaseofhappiness-archive.eur.nl/hap_nat/desc_na_genpublic.php?cntry=122, originally from ??? and Latinobarometro.

year	happiness (1-4)	happiness rank	country	happiness (1-10)
1997	2.5	1	Denmark	8.2
2000	2.4	2	Mexico	8.1
2001	3.06	3	Colombia	8.1
2003	3.16	4	Switzerland	8
2004	3.14	5	Finland	8
2004	3.45	6	Iceland	8
2005	3.17	7	Costa Rica	7.9
2005	3.36	8	Norway	7.9
2006	3.25	9	Canada	7.9
2006	3.4	10	Qatar	7.8
2007	3.36	11	Sweden	7.8
2008	3.39	12	Austria	7.7
2009	3.3	13	Nicaragua	7.7
2009	3.4	14	Uzbekistan	7.7
2010	3.46	15	Netherlands	7.6
2010	3.18	16	Ecuador	7.6
2011	3.22	17	Israel	7.6
2013	3.3	18	Luxembourg	7.6
2015	3.3	19	Belgium	7.5
2016	3.28	20	United Arab Emirate	7.5
2017	3.34	21	Bosnia Herzegovina	7.5
2018	3.35	22	Panama	7.5
2020	3.37	23	Brazil	7.4

over time big improvement from around 2.5 in late 90s to around 3.35 in late 2010s, 34 percent improvement, perhaps can be explained that in 80s and early 90 Colombia experienced much violence, and by late 90s became much safer, so Colombians became happier.

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I thank XXX. All mistakes are mine.

ya, 2.5 on 1-4 scale is .6 of the way, 8 on 1-10 is .8 of the way, indeed huge improvement

asymmetric low-intensity armed conflict between government forces, leftist guerrilla groups and right wing paramilitaries. The conflict escalated in the 1990s mainly in remote rural areas. Since the beginning of the armed conflict, human rights defenders have fought for the respect for human rights, despite staggering opposition. Several guerrillas' organizations decided to demobilize after peace negotiations in 1989-1994.

The administration of President Alvaro Uribe (2002-10), adopted the democratic security policy which included an integrated counterterrorism and counterinsurgency campaign. The Government economic plan also promoted confidence in investors. As part of a controversial peace process the AUC (right wing paramilitaries) as a formal organization had ceased to function. In February 2008, millions of Colombians demonstrated against FARC and other outlawed groups.

the Colombian government of President Juan Manuel Santos and the guerrillas of the FARC-EP announced a final agreement to end the conflict. the Colombian government and the FARC signed a revised peace deal in November 2016. In 2016, President Santos was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The Government began a process of attention and comprehensive reparation for victims of conflict. Colombia shows modest progress in the struggle to defend human rights, as expressed by HRW.

In June 2018, Ivan Duque, the candidate of the right-wing Democratic Center party, won the presidential election. Protests started on 28 April 2021 when the government proposed a tax bill which would greatly expand the range of the 19 percent value added tax.

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

1 QOL v SWB

Colombia is a social indicators v happiness puzzle. It scores low on most social indicators, but tops rankings of both global overall cognitive life satisfaction and momentary affective happiness. In other words it is unlivable but happy, hence so called "Fool's Paradise," a place where people are subjectively happy, despite objective misery (?)—for other examples of fool's paradise and fool's hell see ?.

Colombia has an extraordinarily grim objective indicators of quality of life or very poor livability—for a list see table 2.

Table 2: Objective indicators of quality of life or livability v subjective wellbeing or life satisfaction.

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 pctl	20th	https://info.worldbank.org/governance/ugi/Home/Reports
2020 rule of law pctl	34th	https://info.worldbank.org/governance/ugi/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
2010-2019 average life satisfaction rank	3/160	https://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/rank-reports/satisfaction-with-life/

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

Poverty (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%¹ Median daily per capita income in PPP in 2011 was at \$7 (US was at \$56). Likewise 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! 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 whopping 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 ?).² All of that, notably

¹Camden also rated using a national poverty benchmark <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/camdennewjersey>.

²Colombia has a high prevalence of informal work above 50% and workers in informal sector are less happy (?).

precarious labor, poverty, and inequality should lead to unhappiness. Notably inequality is associated with a multitude of negative outcomes (?).³ Specifically in Latin America, inequality was found to have negative effects on happiness as it seems to be a signal of persistent unfairness (?).

Colombia is still being haunted by violence in conflict, much of which is rural (lina cite???), and so in that respect it is notable that rural is happier than urban.

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. (Singapore scores 2nd).

And finally life satisfaction is at 8.1 (3rd out of 160 countries after Denmark at 8.2 and Mexico at 8.1)

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. 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 (?). It has also third highest (after Monaco and Japan) life expectancy in the World (?), second highest economic freedom (?). Singaporean children score highest on educational tests (?), it is making greatest progress in health (?), has the World’s fastest internet (?). It even has world’s strongest passport (?). 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?

Colombia is one of the happiest countries in the world, or indeed the happiest (?). Colombia scores in top decile in terms of life satisfaction (Scandinavia 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 (?). Colombians seem to have warm, welcoming, and unshakable spirit; and they appear resilient—grateful, satisfied, optimistic, lucky, and even innocent (?).

So is Colombia “Unlivable” but “Happy,” a so called Fool’s Paradise ?? Arguably not. Colombia is a genuinely wonderful place to be as many locals, travelers and tourists would attest (e.g., ??), and so is Cali THAT WASHINGTON POST OR NYT BETH REFRERD AND GUESS MANBY AOTHERS

This is not to say that the objective problems, notably violations of human rights, are not important and don’t need to be addressed.

It may be resilience, positive outlook, ability to make out most of little, deeply social society’s fabric.

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 democracies MCMAHON history TOENIES, and there is plenty of social Capital in Colombia—Colombians are extraordinarily social, friendly, outgoing and spontaneous, there are festivals and social events very 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)!! (??)

world avg from wvs 1981-2020: 6.9 .25

COL 8.0 0.1

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, inequality, and even violence having suffered 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.

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

1

Colombia has one large city, Bogotá, at about 8m, Medellín and Cali are at about 2.5m, and Baranquilla and Cartagena at about 1m, and about 7 cities .5-1m.

³But see criticism ?.

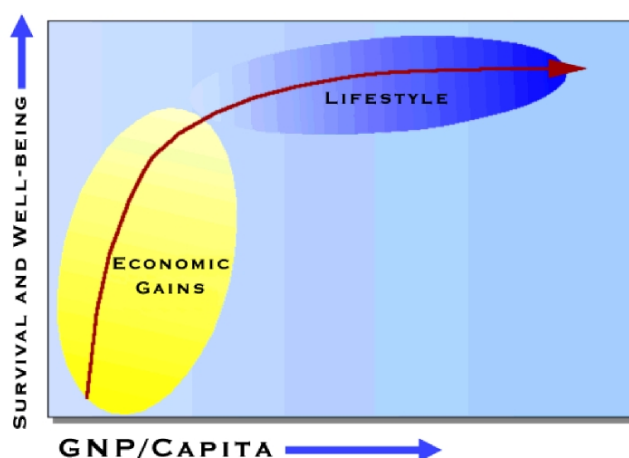


Figure 1: Well-being and income, (?).

Then it makes sense that Bogota is a category on its own, and likewise medellin and cali should be separated out and this is how we will proceed

Only about 20 perc of Colombia population is rural, similar to the US, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS?locations=CO>
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS?locations=US> Yet the UN/WB definition has urban-rural cutoff very low, if looking at medium and large cities 2.5m v elsewhere, only about 20m out of about 50m colombian population live there, less than half.

THEORY:

the folklore theory defines happiness in terms of the reflection of broadly held perceptions about life which are rooted in traditions and the culture of a country. For example, if a society has a pessimistic outlook on life, generations to come might hold the same beliefs even if the situation in their country has improved. Nevertheless, if a culture has an optimistic outlook in life regardless of their circumstances, future generations will remain positive. This Thus, through the folklore theory one can predict that Paraguayans will be happier, regardless of the socioeconomic situations the country has gone through, because of cultural influences (?).

2 QOL v SWB

add from my livability paper

3 Data and methods; REPHRAZE! copied from earlier

Here we focus on 20 year span.

We use www.worldvaluessurvey.org, which is representative of about 90% of the world population,⁴ and as elaborated in previous section, is much better suited for the study than an inadequate and poorly designed Gallup data. The variables are listed in table ???. Country codes and descriptive statistics are in SOM (Supplementary Online Material).

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?"

Urbanicity is operationalized with WVS variable X049—note that it is objective and recorded by reviewer, not respondent. There are eight categories ranging from '< 2k' to '> 500k.' This is important advantage, because as elaborated earlier, urbanicity or urbanness is a continuum, not a binary urban v rural. We conduct the analysis using a set of dummy variables for all eight categories (leaving out the base case) in the SOM. However, for simplicity and ease of exposition we present simplified results in the body of the paper using three categories only. In other words, this study will use 8 categories of urbanicity, and summarize results for ease of presentation with 3 categories.

Because in many countries, there are either no observations or few observations in the first two bottom categories -2k and 2-5k, we combine them together for the analyses in the main body of the paper. These two categories together proxy free of city natural environment most closely resembling human natural habitat where we have evolved, and it includes: wilderness, open country, and small villages. The other critical category that must be measured based on earlier review of theory is large cities, again, there is likely to be a threshold at several hundred thousand, hence we use the top category on WVS variable X049 '>500k' to proxy large cities. Such places, are the least resembling of human natural habitat and are mostly consisting of man made objects such as

⁴While WVS is conducted in about 100 countries that represent about 90% of the world population, due to missing data for the particular variables of interest, the present's study coverage is slightly smaller, about 70 countries (depending on the model and specification).

asphalt, concrete, glass, etc, and as per theory as reviewed earlier, are likely to be least happy. The third category in our main analyses are places in between, 5–500k.

wvs boilerplate (bash gallup) and ols boilerplate

As ? put it, it's not happiness research, it's "happiness industry." There are multiple problems with Gallup data. First, it is not meant for research but for commerce—Gallup charges \$30,000 for access (per one year!). (author's email inquiry)

—private corporations are making fortune from tax dollars and students tuition—scholars should resist corporatization of academia (?????), and corporatization of happiness research (?).

Second, urbanicity classification is twofold less precise than in WVS: 4 v 8 categories. Third, while WVS uses precise population size numeric cutoffs, Gallup uses fuzzy concepts such as "rural area", "small town or village", "large city". Fourth, (and this compounds third problem) Gallup uses self-reports of urbanicity, which is highly subjective and problematic in this case—many, if not most people, would likely classify themselves completely arbitrarily into "rural area" v "village" and so forth. WVS uses interviewer's information about the place. Fifth, apparently much of data are missing—? notes that in 14 countries "rural area" responses were exceptionally low. Also, about half of the world population is urban, but ? reports that in their dataset only about quarter of respondents report rural residence.

Table ?? lists control variables used in the body of the paper.

In choice of controls we generally follow (?). There are specific controls worth discussing. Young, single and childless persons and young men with tertiary education are relatively more satisfied with urban areas as place of residence (?). Income, class, and education are important controls—not only predict greater SWB, but are also confounded and higher in cities.⁵

One great advantage of city living that is often forgotten is freedom "City air makes men free (Stadt Luft macht frei)" ?, p. 12⁶, hence we control for freedom.

Likewise, trust is important, it predicts SWB, and it is lower in cities (?).

Health is a key predictor of SWB, and also note that subjective health measure used here is a reasonable measure of actual health (?).

We use a standard OLS regression with robust standard errors. We treat the 10-step happiness variable as continuous. Ordinal happiness can be treated as a continuous variable (?). OLS has become the default method in happiness research (?). Theoretically, while there is still debate about the cardinality of SWB, there are strong arguments to treat it as a cardinal variable (??).

4 Results

these stats from table 1 over 20yr period

focus on over time and yr * sociodemographics interactions (if any significant)—who got less happy over time

first show raw as below then margins like in joanie more unequal in incoem, more unequal in wellbeing

in addition to key SWB, we also look at two additional subjective wellbeing indicators, trust and freedom (SEE MY ERALIER PAPERS ON TRUST AND FREEDOM—what control for)

rt super interesting, swb flat; but trust went down a lot to a mere .05!! makes sense all the politics and unrest; but freedom if anything went up, indeed as some protesters would often say "we're not afraid anymore"

```
. tabstat ls, stat(count mean sd) by(yr) format(%9.1f)
tabstat ls, stat(count mean sd) by(yr) format(%9.1f)
```

Summary for variables: ls
by categories of: yr (Year survey)

yr	N	mean	sd
1997	3009.0	8.2	2.3
1998	2995.0	8.4	1.7
2005	3018.0	8.3	1.9
2012	1512.0	8.4	1.8
2018	1520.0	8.2	2.2
Total	12054.0	8.3	2.0

```
. tabstat trust, stat(count mean sd) by(yr) format(%9.2f)
tabstat trust, stat(count mean sd) by(yr) format(%9.2f)
```

Summary for variables: trust
by categories of: yr (Year survey)

yr	N	mean	sd
1997	2995.00	0.10	0.31
1998	2986.00	0.11	0.32

⁵where i discuss controls in data and to literature where i slam burger and indeed as shown later comparing unadjusted means results in cities being happier notably due to confounding of higher income education and class—see appendix for tables with and without controls

⁶It originated in the Middle Ages, and it meant freedom from feudalism, non-feudal islands in a sea of feudalism (?).

2005		2993.00	0.14	0.35
2012		1501.00	0.04	0.20
2018		1520.00	0.05	0.21

Total		11995.00	0.10	0.30

```
. tabstat freedom, stat(count mean sd) by(yr) format(%9.2f)
tabstat freedom, stat(count mean sd) by(yr) format(%9.2f)
```

Summary for variables: freedom
by categories of: yr (Year survey)

yr		N	mean	sd

1997		0.00	.	.
1998		2996.00	7.89	2.09
2005		3002.00	8.04	2.20
2012		1507.00	8.16	1.96
2018		1520.00	8.12	2.31

Total		9025.00	8.02	2.15

big change 50perc change in trust, and small about 3perc in freedom; swb flat—but given enormous improvement in QOL these should be increasing

	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		
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	0.03+	0.03
age2		-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
married or living together as married		0.21***	0.22***	0.22***	0.19**	0.16+	0.17+
divorced/separated/widowed		-0.02	-0.00	-0.01	-0.03	-0.11	-0.12
health			0.61***	0.59***	0.58***	0.59***	0.62***
class			0.12***	0.07*	0.06*	0.05	0.06
education			-0.03**	-0.06***	-0.06***	-0.06**	-0.06**
income				0.08***	0.07***	0.09***	0.10***
Full time					0.00	0.00	0.00
Part time					0.08	-0.10	-0.10
Self employed					-0.04	-0.14	-0.16
Retired					0.13	0.19	0.20
Housewife					0.08	0.03	0.05
Students					0.02	0.12	0.12
Unemployed					-0.25**	-0.26+	-0.27+
Other					-0.13	-0.18	-0.15
religious services					0.02	0.01	0.01
No religious denomination					0.00	0.00	0.00
Buddhist					-0.18	0.04	-0.09
Christian					0.05	0.10	0.08
Evangelical					0.01	-0.14	-0.13
Jehovah witnesses					0.40+	0.61	0.52
Jew					0.38		
Muslim					0.94***	1.44***	1.19***
Other					0.07	-1.02+	-1.03*
Pentecostal					1.11**	1.16**	1.20**
Protestant					0.38	0.14	0.08
Roman Catholic					0.06	0.13	0.13
Seven Day Adventist					0.76+	0.76	0.82+
Wicca					1.15***	1.37***	1.36***
AU: Uniting Church					-0.26*	-0.42**	-0.27+
victim of a crime last year						-0.21*	
freg felt unsafe from crime at home						-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!!

5 Discussion and Conclusion

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

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

TODO: have separate som-r.tex as opposed to having it below; and in paper say see supplementary material as opposed to see appendix!

ONLINE APPENDIX

World Economic Forum report 2017

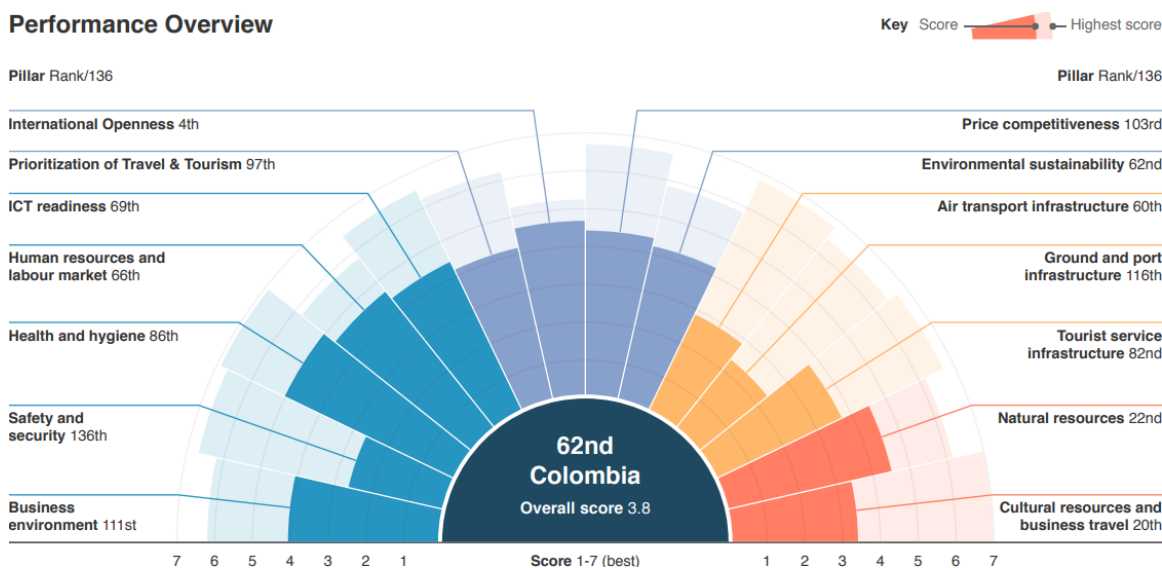


Figure 2: World Economic Forum report 2017. https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_TTCR_2017_web_0401.pdf

Variables' definitions, coding, and distributions

Additional Descriptive Statistics

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 :)

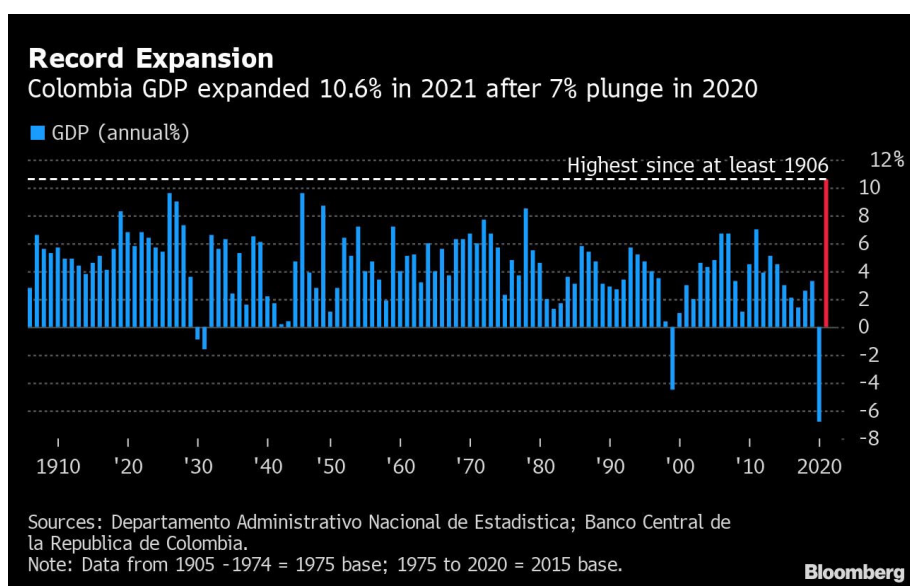


Figure 3: Long term GDP from Colombian government.