Happiness of the younger, the older, and those in between

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How have the rankings changed since last year? While the top ten countries remain largely unchanged, there has been much more action in the top twenty. Costa Rica and Kuwait are both new entrants[10] to the top 20, at positions 12 and 13. The continuing convergence in happiness levels between the two sides of Europe led last year to Czechia and Lithuania being in the top twenty, nearly joined now by Slovenia in 21st place. The new entrants are matched by the departures of the United States and Germany from the top 20, dropping from 15 and 16 last year to 23 and 24 this year.

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Ranking of Happiness 2021-2023

Countries are ranked according to their self-assessed life evaluations (answers to the Cantril ladder question in the Gallup World Poll), averaged over the years 2021-2023.[4] The overall length of each country bar in Figure 2.1 represents the average response to the ladder question. The confidence intervals for each country's average life evaluation are shown by horizontal whiskers at the right-hand end of each country bar. Confidence intervals for the *rank* of a country are are shown as part of the online version of Figure 2.1.[5] These ranking ranges are wider where there are many countries with similar averages, and for countries with smaller sample sizes.[6]

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Why do happiness levels differ?

In Table 2.1 we present our latest modelling of national average life evaluations and measures of positive and negative emotions (affect) by country and year.[11] The results in the first column explain national average life evaluations in terms of six key variables: GDP per capita, healthy life expectancy, having someone to count on, freedom to make life choices, generosity, and freedom from corruption.[12] Taken together, these six variables explain more than three-quarters of the variation in national annual average ladder scores across countries and years, using data from 2005 through 2023.[13] The six variables were originally chosen as the best available measures of factors established in both experimental and survey data as having significant links to subjective well-being, and especially to life evaluations.
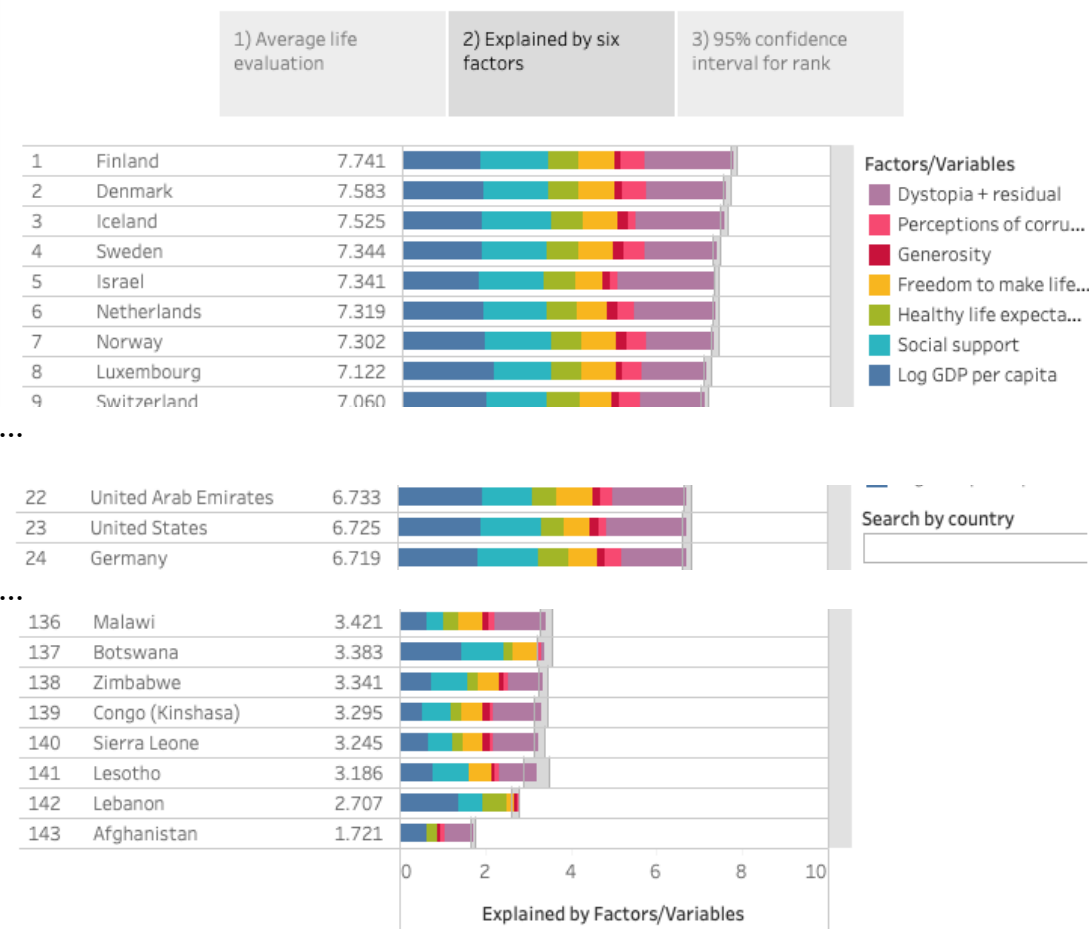
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Figure 2.1: Country Rankings by Life Evaluations in 2021-2023

World Happiness Report 2024

Figure 2.1: Country Rankings by Life Evaluations in 2021-2023

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Notes

Tabs 1 & 2: The 95% confidence interval is shown in the grey-shaded area at the end of each life evaluation bar.

Tab 2: The sub-bars have no impact on the total score reported for each country. Instead, they are a way of explaining the implications of the model estimated in Table 2.1. The few countries that have empty bars do not have sufficient information for the calculation of portions explained by individual factors. These countries still have their overall scores, though, which are based entirely on survey responses, and are independent of our efforts to explore the underlying support factors of happiness.

	1) Average life evaluation	2) Explained by six factors	3) 95% confidence interval for rank

1	Finland	7.741	
2	Denmark	7.583	
3	Iceland	7.525	
4	Sweden	7.344	
5	Israel	7.341	
6	Netherlands	7.319	
7	Norway	7.302	
8	Luxembourg	7.122	
9	Switzerland	7.060	

Factors/Variables
- Dystopia + residual
- Perceptions of corru...
- Generosity
- Freedom to make life...
- Healthy life expecta...
- Social support
- Log GDP per capita

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22	United Arab Emirates	6.733	
23	United States	6.725	
24	Germany	6.719	

Search by country

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136	Malawi	3.421	
137	Botswana	3.383	
138	Zimbabwe	3.341	
139	Congo (Kinshasa)	3.295	
140	Sierra Leone	3.245	
141	Lesotho	3.186	
142	Lebanon	2.707	
143	Afghanistan	1.721	

Explained by Factors/Variables

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For the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, happiness has decreased in all age groups, but especially for the young, so much so that the young are now, in 2021-2023, the least happy age group. This is a big change from 2006-2010, when the young were happier than those in the midlife groups, and about as happy as those aged 60 and over. For the young, the happiness drop was about three-quarters of a point, and greater for females than males.

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Figure 2.2 shows the happiness rankings for the young (under 30), and Figure 2.3 does the same for those over 60.[31]

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Table 2.2: Ranking of life evaluations by age group, 2021- 2023

Country	All Ages	The Young	Lower Middle	Upper Middle	The Old	Happiest	Least Happy
Finland	1	7	1	1	2	Old	Young
Denmark	2	5	3	4	1	Old	Young
Iceland	3	4	4	2	5	Young	LowerMiddle
Sweden	4	18	8	3	4	Old	Young
Israel	5	2	2	7	18	Young	Old
Netherlands	6	9	5	5	7	Old	Young
Norway	7	20	6	6	3	Old	Young
Luxembourg	8	6	11	8	12	Young	LowerMiddle
Switzerland	9	13	9	11	14	Young	UpperMiddle
Australia	10	19	14	10	9	Old	LowerMiddle
New Zealand	11	27	18	13	6	Old	LowerMiddle
Costa Rica	12	11	15	23	17	Young	UpperMiddle
Kuwait	13	16	20	9	13	Old	LowerMiddle
Austria	14	12	17	18	15	Young	UpperMiddle
Canada	15	58	28	12	8	Old	Young
Belgium	16	24	13	15	19	LowerMiddle	Old
Ireland	17	21	21	21	16	Young	UpperMiddle
Czechia	18	10	12	22	23	Young	Old
Lithuania	19	1	7	20	44	Young	Old
United Kingdom	20	32	27	19	20	Old	LowerMiddle
Slovenia	21	15	10	27	32	Young	Old
United Arab Emirates	22	35	25	16	11	Old	LowerMiddle
United States	23	62	42	17	10	Old	LowerMiddle