



DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

**UNPACKING THE GLOBAL
'HAPPINESS' RANKINGS**

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UNPACKING THE GLOBAL 'HAPPINESS' RANKINGS

Context

- **Finland tops the** World Happiness Report for the eighth consecutive year, followed closely by Denmark, Iceland, and Sweden. Meanwhile, India ranks below Pakistan—despite its political instability—raising questions about the report's methodology and metrics.

Understanding the World Happiness Report

- It is released annually by the **Wellbeing Research Centre** at the University of Oxford, in partnership with the **United Nations SDSN** and **Gallup**.
- It draws from the **Gallup World Poll**, where individuals **rate their lives** on a **scale from 0 to 10**.
 - ♦ The model integrates six variables — **GDP per capita, social support, life expectancy, freedom, generosity, and perceived corruption**.
 - ♦ However, perception is subjective and culturally contingent.
- Societies with **lower expectations** often report **higher happiness** simply because people adapt to scarcity.
 - ♦ In contrast, **rising democracies** like India — with dynamic media and growing aspirations — experience **relative dissatisfaction** despite material progress.
 - ♦ The unhappiness, paradoxically, stems from **ambition**, not despair.
- **The United States ranks 24th (2025)** despite immense wealth, while the **Nordic countries** with high taxes but deep social trust dominate.
 - ♦ The report itself concedes that **'belief in community kindness'** and **social trust** predict happiness more accurately than income levels.

Do You Know?

- The UN declared **March 20** as the **International Day of Happiness** in 2012.
- The concept of **World Happiness Day** was **first proposed by Bhutan** in the 1970s, a country known for prioritizing **Gross National Happiness over Gross Domestic Product**.

Key Reasons Behind India's Low Ranking

- **Methodological Biases in the Report:** The World Happiness Report relies heavily on self-reported life satisfaction, which may not translate uniformly across cultures.
 - ♦ India's diverse population and linguistic complexity can skew survey responses, making comparisons with smaller, homogeneous nations problematic.
- **Migration & Digital Lifestyles:** Indians increasingly live prosperous but isolated lives as migration and digital lifestyles fragment real-world communities.
 - ♦ Global data shows that **19% of young adults** say they have **no one to rely on** — a 39% jump since 2006.
- **Western Perception Biases:** The **Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM)**, in **2022**, highlighted how indices such as **Freedom House** and **V-Dem** depend on **limited, opaque panels of Western 'experts'**.
 - ♦ Such frameworks inadvertently reward **calm conformity** over **democratic noise**.
 - ♦ A one-party state appears 'stable' because dissent is silenced, while democracies like India get penalised for their openness.
 - ♦ Hence, India's low score may actually signify **self-awareness** and **democratic maturity** — not genuine misery.
- **Governance and Public Services:** **National Centre for Good Governance (NCGG)**'s research highlights gaps in public service delivery, trust in institutions, and access to basic amenities as underlying factors.
 - ♦ Poor infrastructure and bureaucratic inefficiencies affect day-to-day well-being.

- **Overlooking Collective Trust Networks:** In Finland, citizens have deep institutional trust. But in India, **governance unevenness** weakens that confidence.
 - ♦ During the COVID-19 lockdown, millions returned to their villages not just due to job losses but to rediscover the **security of community bonds**.
 - ♦ It overlooks **collective trust networks** in countries like India, where family and community still anchor well-being.

Way Forward

- For India to rise on the happiness index, it needs to complement its **economic ambition** with **empathy infrastructure**. It involves:
 - ♦ **Rebuilding Social Capital:** Create community spaces, foster shared meals, and bridge generations.
 - ♦ **Restoring Institutional Trust:** Simplify citizen-state interactions for transparency and reliability.
 - ♦ **Recognising Mental Health as Economic Policy:** Embed psychological resilience within development planning.
- Policies such as **Tele-MANAS** and **Mind India** now frame mental health as a **public policy priority**. Emotional wellbeing, once dismissed as indulgence, is emerging as **a developmental goal**.
 - ♦ The World Health Organization (WHO) notes that every **\$1 spent on mental health yields \$4 in productivity gains** — evidence that happiness is not just a moral pursuit but an **economic investment**.

[Source: TH](#)

Daily Mains Practice Question

[Q] How do cultural diversity, socio-economic disparities, and methodological biases influence a country's position in global happiness rankings. What reforms could make these indices more representative of India's lived realities?

