

WORLD HAPPINESS REPORT: A COMPARISON

**An Analysis of the World's Happiest Countries in Comparison
to the United States**

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Objective

Some people value money and success, others put a stronger focus on family and experiences. Overall, however, most everyone seeks to be happy. Happiness is the state of being content with life. It is the basis for how we perceive the world – does this make me happy, does that make me unhappy. Happiness is crucial to both an individual's mental and physical wellbeing. For this reason, it is also crucial to a nation's wellbeing. If citizens are dissatisfied with a country's laws, social system, and/or policy, it can result in unrest and instability.

In this report, I will analyze data from the World Happiness Report (2006 – 2021). I will compare the United States (ranked #19 out of 149 countries) to the top ten happiest countries (according to the 2021 report) based on the variables Healthy Life Expectancy and Perceptions of Corruption. I also aim to identify trends within the U.S. based on the variable Life Ladder.

Research Questions:

1. Has the United States seen an overall increase or decrease in happiness over the past 15 years?
2. How does the U.S. compare to the top ten happiest countries in healthy life expectancy?
3. How does the U.S. compare to the top ten happiest countries in perceptions of corruption?

Interesting Observations

- Of the top ten happiest countries, five were based in Scandinavia (Finland, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Denmark).
- Only one country was based outside of Europe (New Zealand).
- Afghanistan was ranked as the least happy country (#149).

Question 1

Has the United States seen an overall increase or decrease in happiness over the past 15 years?

Conclusion: The United States has seen an overall **decrease** in happiness over the past 15 years.

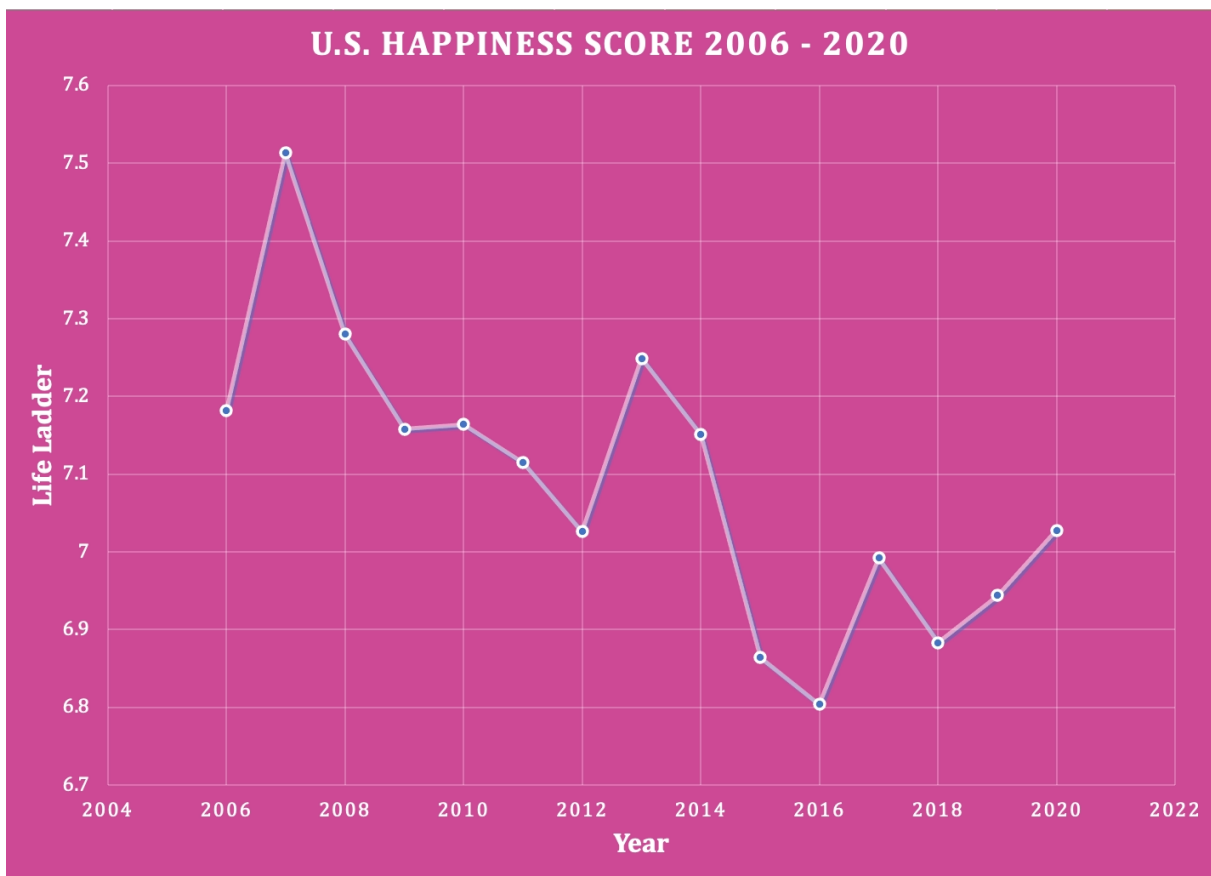


Figure 1

The World Happiness Report bases the happiness score or Life Ladder score on how citizens answer this question from the Gallup World Poll: “Please imagine a ladder, with steps numbered from 0 at the bottom to 10 at the top. The top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you. On which step of the ladder would you say you personally feel you stand at this time?”

As seen in Figure 1, the United States has only exceeded its 2006 Ladder Score (7.182) three times – in 2007 (7.513), 2008 (7.28), and 2013 (7.249). The remaining years between 2006 – 2020 and 2021 (not listed on chart: 6.951) are both below the 2006 Ladder score and the average of the 2006 – 2020 scores (7.0902).

Question 2

How does the U.S. compare to the top ten happiest countries in healthy life expectancy?

Conclusion: The United States has a **significantly lower** Healthy Life Expectancy score than the top ten happiest countries.

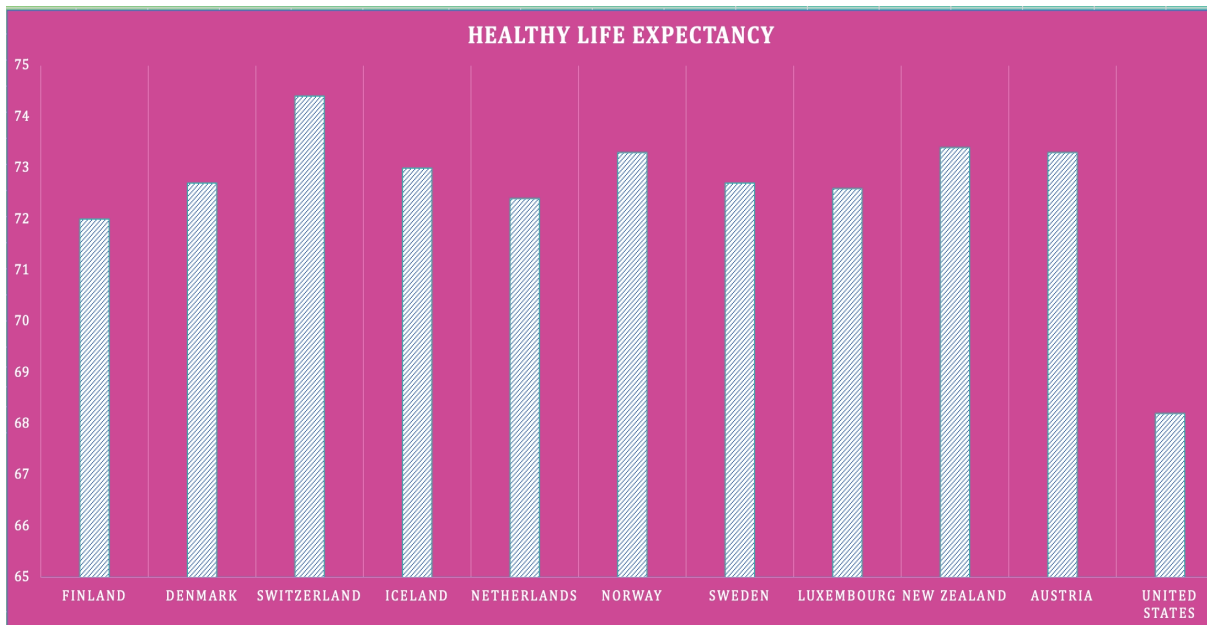


Figure 2

The data for Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) is based off records from the World Health Organization (WHO).

As seen in Figure 2, the U.S. falls steeply behind the Top Ten in HLE. The U.S. has a HLE of 68.2 years. The average HLE of the Top Ten is 72.98 years. That is a difference of 4.78 years.

Interestingly, the country with the highest Ladder Score (happiness score) does not have the highest HLE. Finland has a HLE of 72 years. The highest HLE (74.4) goes to Switzerland, which is ranked third in overall happiness. To further this point, Finland actually had the lowest HLE among the Top Ten. Therefore, there is a difference of 2.4 years in HLE within the Top Ten.

Question 3

How does the U.S. compare to the top ten happiest countries in perceptions of corruption?

Conclusion: The United States has a **significantly higher** Perception of Corruption score than the top ten happiest countries.

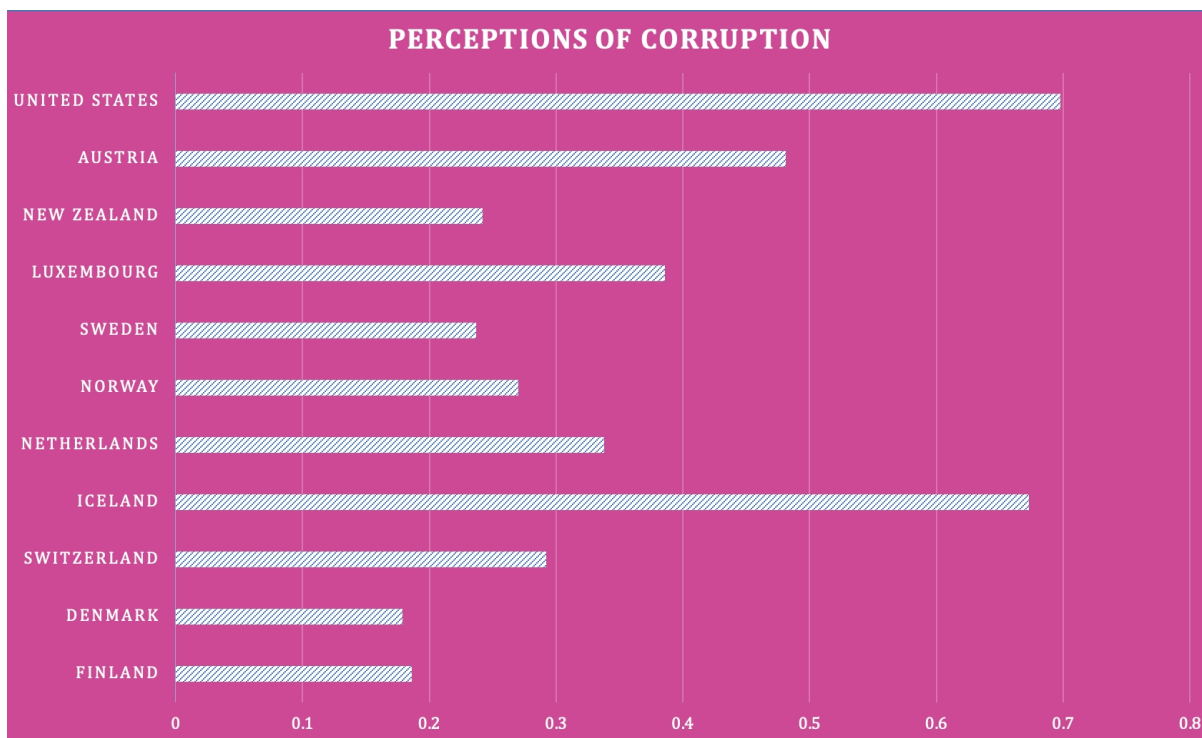


Figure 3

The Perceptions of Corruption (POC) value is taken from two Gallup World Poll questions: "Is corruption widespread throughout the government or not" and "Is corruption widespread within businesses or not?" The questions are answered in the format 0 = "No" and 1 = "Yes". The POC value is the average of the responses to both questions.

As seen in Figure 3, the U.S. has a significantly higher POC than the majority of the Top Ten (apart from Iceland). The U.S. has a POC of 0.698. The Top Ten have an average POC of 0.3284. This results in a difference of 0.3696 (more than double the Top Ten POC).

In Closing

Though the United States is ranked only nine places outside of the top ten, it still must make large strides to reach that threshold. Over the past 15 years, The U.S. hasn't been on track to raise its happiness score. It has not exceeded its 2006 score in almost a decade (since 2013). Based on the other factors I analyzed, U.S. citizens have almost five years less in Healthy Life Expectancy. It is also seen as being over two times more corrupt as the average Top Ten country.