



Gallup Pakistan History Project's Weekend Read 37:

Measuring Happiness in Pakistan: An Analysis of Trends in 2015 by Abdullah WaqarTajwar, Research Executive at Gallup Pakistan

*Abstract: The analysis presented in this article is predicated on the findings gleaned from the End of Year Survey, 2015, an annual publication by WIN/Gallup International. The international survey, conducted in 68 countries and from 66040 people, at an error margin of 3-55 at the 95% confidence level asked three major questions out of which only one will be analysed in this article. **"In general, do you personally feel very happy, happy, neither happy nor unhappy, unhappy or very unhappy about your life?"** On a global scale, 66 percent of the respondents claimed to be happy whereas 10 percent reported being unhappy about their lives, with Net Happiness (percentage of people who are happy minus the percentage of people who are unhappy) at 56 percent. In Pakistan, a majority of 64 percent claimed to be happy about their lives whereas 4 percent claimed to be unhappy, with net happiness at 60 percent.*

In recent years, there has been an increasing thrust towards including people's general well-being as a measure to guide public policy. This need to define and quantify people's happiness has also gained importance because of a growing need to include it as a measure of economic growth, particularly in lieu of the fact that the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the dominant statistic in use today for measuring a country's economic growth, is unable to inform policy makers about a citizen's happiness or well-being. That is because happiness is dependent on a myriad of factors, of which income (or material wealth) is but one. Thus, the world has now awakened to the fact that happiness should be measured and used as a guide when formulating policy and tracking social progress. This was witnessed in the 2011 when the UN General Assembly passed a resolution calling on member states to measure the happiness of their citizens and use that figure as a benchmark for formulating and evaluating public policies. Bhutan is one such county that took lead on this matter by adopting the Gross National Happiness Index (GNH) in place of GDP and GNP in the early 1970's. The adoption of the GNH by Bhutan can therefore rightfully be considered as the catalyst that has inspired future leaders, economists, researchers and intellectuals to consider happiness as an indicator of socio-economic development.

The empirical data that will form the basis of analysis in this edition of the Weekend Read comes from the End of Year Survey 2015, an annual publication by WIN/Gallup International that will complete its 39th cycle at the close of this year. This End of Year Survey 2015, hereinafter referred to as EOY 2015, was

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carried out by the WIN/Gallup International Association in 68 countries around the world, drawing on the opinion of a total of 66040 people. Within each country, a representative sample of around 1000 men and women was interviewed either face to face (30 countries; n=32172), via telephone (15 countries; n=11800) or online (23 countries; n=22068). The field work was conducted during September 2015 - December 2015 at an error margin of +3-5% at the 95% confidence level. The respondents of the EOY 2015 were asked three major questions to gauge their views, opinions and expectations on the indicators of happiness, hope and economic optimism. The questions that were put forward to the interviewees are as follows:

1. **In general, do you personally feel very happy, happy, neither happy nor unhappy, unhappy or very unhappy about your life?**
2. **As far as you are concerned, do you think that 2016 will be better, worse or the same than 2015?**
3. **Compared to this year, in your opinion, will next year be a year of economic prosperity, economic difficulty or remain the same for your country?**

This particular weekend read will thus focus on interpreting and analyzing the responses generated only on the first question, which attempts to empirically measure people's happiness, in light of the growing importance of happiness as an indicator for measuring growth, human development and socio-economic prosperity.

On a global scale, 66 percent of the respondents claimed to be happy whereas 10 percent reported being unhappy about their lives. Furthermore, 23 percent of respondents were indifferent i.e. they were neither happy nor unhappy about their lives at the moment. The study also has a **Net Happiness** statistic which is calculated by taking the difference between the percentage of people who are happy and the percentage of people that are unhappy. Global net happiness, therefore, comes out to be 56 percent (66-10). A pie chart depicting these results is given below to illustrate the difference between the proportion of people who are happy and those who are unhappy.

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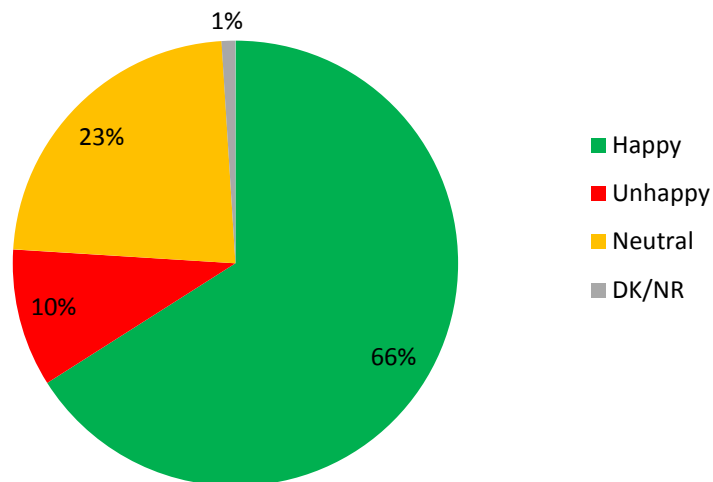


Fig. 1

End of Year Survey 2015; 66040 men and women across 68 countries surveyed.

Furthermore, the study reveals that out of the 68 countries that were part of this survey, Colombia had the highest proportion of citizens who were happy with their lives (at 85 percent net happiness). On the other end of the spectrum was Iraq, which had the highest percentage of unhappy people (at -12 percent net happiness).

On this question, the results from Pakistan undoubtedly present an optimistic outlook. In the EOY 2015, a majority of 64 percent in Pakistan stated that they were happy about their lives. In comparison, a meager 4 percent of the Pakistani public stated that it was unhappy. On the other hand, a relatively larger proportion of 29 percent were indifferent regarding this question. Thus, Pakistan's net happiness score comes out to be 60 percent, 4 percentage points above the global net happiness score. However, it must be stated here that despite scoring above the global score in the net happiness mark, a direct comparison shows us that Pakistan's figure for happiness (64%) is lower than the global figure (66%). Furthermore, the figure of unhappiness is also lower in Pakistan (4%) than globally (10%). In the indifference category, Pakistan also outscores the global figure by 5 percentage points. A pie chart of Pakistan's results is given below.

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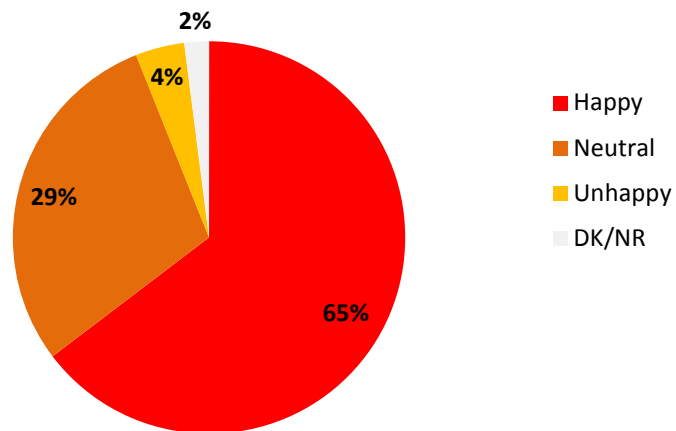


Fig. 2

End of Year Survey 2015; 1000 men and women across all four provinces of Pakistan surveyed.

The EOY 2015 also provides us with Pakistan’s trend on this particular question, from the year 2011 onwards, in order to ascertain whether there has been an increase or a decrease in people’s happiness over the years. The statistics are presented below.

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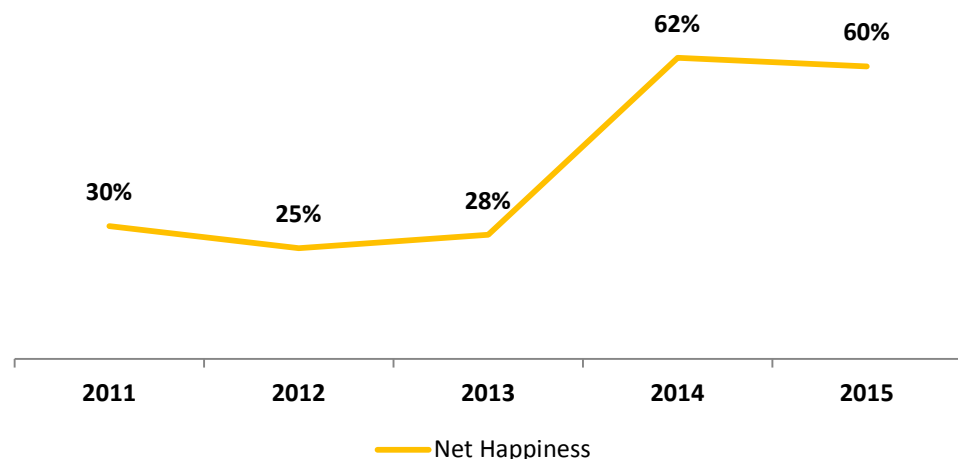


Fig.3

Source: WIN Gallup International Annual Global Poll/EOY, December 2015

Note: Net Happiness here is defined as the net score of Happy over Unhappy

The Net Happiness Index in Pakistan stood at 30% in 2011. This statistic took a dip in 2012, falling by five percentage points to 25 percent. By 2013, it was still unable to recover completely as it rose by 3 percentage points to 28 percent. However, in 2014, this figure took a huge leap as net happiness soared to 62%. By 2015, this statistic decreased by just two percent points to 60 percent. A closer comparison of Pakistan's results in 2015 to those in 2014 show a minor decline on the happiness index. In 2014, 68% respondents had claimed to be happy with their life which is 2% higher than the present figure (66% in 2015). Those who claimed to be neutral (i.e. neither happy nor unhappy) were more in 2015 (29%) than in 2014 (25%) whereas those who claimed to be unhappy this year (4%) were less than those who said the same in 2014 (6%). Nevertheless, by 2014 onwards, the Net Happiness Index in Pakistan had soared. This rise in net happiness necessitates an explanation. Perhaps an obvious starting point for explaining a rise in people's net happiness in 2014 as compared to 2013 can be found in Pakistan's political climate of the time. The general elections of 2013 heralded the first successful democratic transition in the history of Pakistani politics, as the Pakistan's People's Party was able to complete its five year term and handed over power to the winning party of the 2013 general elections, the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz. Furthermore, these elections also witnessed a record amount of voter turnout of over 50 percent of the population, as reported by Pakistan Television Network's Official Election 2013 Web Portal. Thus, it can be reasonably argued that these elections

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partially mirrored a growing optimism within the Pakistani public regarding Pakistan's future in the aftermath of a political change that had primarily been brought about by the power of their votes. This political empowerment that was experienced by Pakistanis in the elections of 2013 did play a part in the rise in Pakistan's Net Happiness Index. This optimism also stemmed from the inefficiencies of the previous government which had performed rather poorly on all fronts. Terrorism was still rampant. The energy crisis showed no signs of slowing down whereas the already fragile state of Pakistan's economy had only gotten worse, with prices of basic necessities such as petroleum rising to abominable levels. Thus, 2013 was a year of fresh starts for Pakistan in some ways. A new government was ushered into power and with the rise of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, led by Imran Khan; political fervor in the Country was at an all-time high. Furthermore, the PML-N, once in power, also inaugurated a number of developments focusing on infrastructure development, such as the metro bus project in Islamabad and Rawalpindi as well as a number of other projects aimed at tackling Pakistan's energy crisis. The National Action Plan was also brought into action with the aim of reestablishing law and order in Pakistan's largest city Karachi, which had plunged into a chaotic state, characterized by widespread cases of extortion, kidnappings, gang wars and terrorism. Furthermore, the China Pakistan Economic Corridor, more popularly referred to as CPEC, and the construction of the Gwadar Deep Sea Port all helped in creating a feeling of optimism among the Pakistani masses. Hence, for better or for worse, it was increasingly felt that the government was at least doing something instead of doing absolutely nothing, which had been the case in the years prior to 2013. Pakistan's economy also experienced some positive upturn, as a fall in the global prices of oil and other commodities gave some much needed respite to the public.

In order to enable a holistic analysis, the results of Pakistan have also been compared with the results of other countries belonging to the South Asian Region in the EOY 2015. It has been found that Pakistan, when compared to India, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, did reasonably well. The results that were calculated show that Pakistan performed markedly well in comparison to India in the Net Happiness rankings, with Pakistan's score of 60 percent dwarfing India's net happiness score of 39 percent. Furthermore, compared to Afghanistan which had a net happiness score of 14 percent, Pakistan also performed considerably better. However, Bangladesh slightly outperformed Pakistan on the Net Happiness score with a score of 61 percent compared to Pakistan's 60 percent. The results are presented below in a table.

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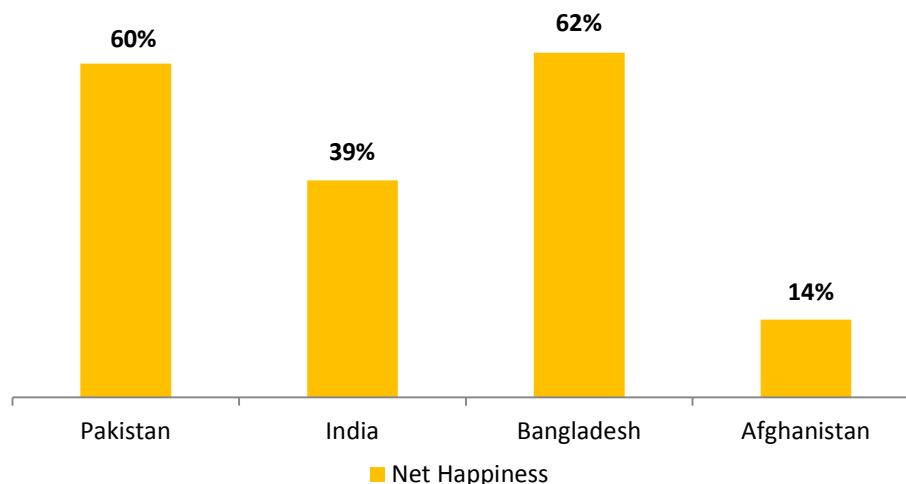


Fig. 4

Source: WIN Gallup International Annual Global Poll/EOY, December 2015

Note: Net Happiness here is defined as the net score of Happy over Unhappy

In order to make an analysis of the indicator of happiness more detailed, a further global classification was done to group countries on the basis of their socio-economic status. The resulting categories include: 'Prosperous Countries' (including G7 countries) 'Emerging Countries' (including G20 countries other than the G7.) and 'Aspiring Countries' (including all others). Within these blocs or groups, the 'Emerging' category has the highest net happiness figure at 59 percent. This is followed by the 'Aspiring' tier at 54 percent followed finally by the 'Prosperous' tier at the lowest rung of the ladder at 42 percent. Pakistan's comparison with the 'aspiring' category thus shows that its net happiness level is 6 percent greater than the average net happiness of 'aspiring' tier (at 54 percent). These figures are presented in a tabular format so as to elucidate comparison between the different socio economic classifications of the countries that were covered in this study.

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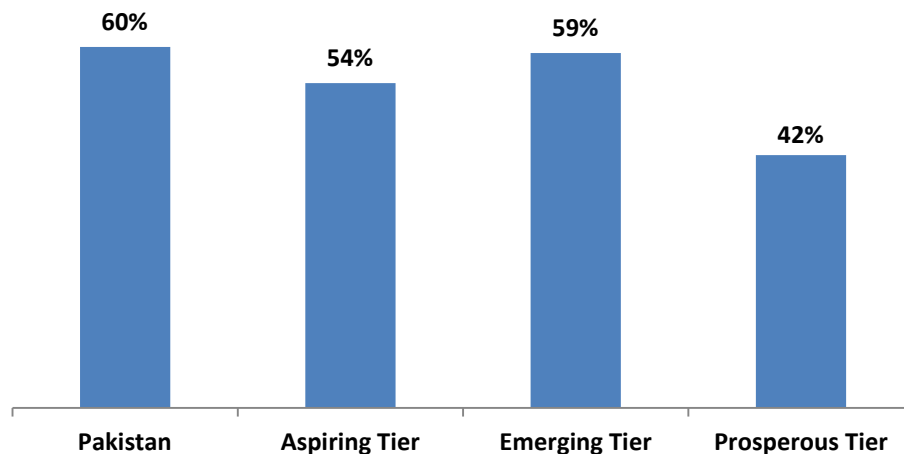


Fig. 5

Source: WIN Gallup International Annual Global Poll/EOY, December 2015

Note: Net Happiness here is defined as the net score of Happy over Unhappy

These figures are worth looking at closely. A rational mind would undoubtedly question these statistics. It is hard to comprehend the stark contrast between Pakistan's net happiness (60 %), a country which is undoubtedly at one of the lower rungs of the socio-economic ladder of prosperity, and the net happiness of the developed countries of the prosperous tier (42%). Do these figures then prove the hypothesis that material well-being is not a guarantee for individual happiness? It would appear so. It is hard to wrap one's head around the fact that on the one hand, there is a country in turmoil, suffering from a myriad of serious challenges pertaining to security, terrorism, power shortages, food and water insecurity etc. and yet the people of that country are happier on average than the citizens of more advanced nations where there are no critical problems pertaining to the basic necessities of people. However, before making such a claim, it is fundamental to explore this paradox in detail so as to identify the potential causes behind a lower level of net happiness among the developed countries as compared to the developing as well as under-developed countries. In fact, part of this contrast in net happiness scores also has to do with the fact that developed states do not suffer from the problems of the developing and under-developed countries. For people living in the US, for example, regular power cuts are unheard of. The overall standard of living is far better than in Pakistan. One doesn't have to worry about cooking food at specific hours because there would be a load-shedding of gas at various instances in the day. There is a greater regard for human rights and one feels far more secure driving along the roads of say, Washington D.C. than one would while driving along the roads of Karachi. However, it is this disparity between the developed and the under-developed countries that is part of the explanation for the net happiness conundrum. Quite simply, the problems that Pakistanis have to face are more or less

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non-existent within the countries belonging to the 'Prosperous' tier. For them, these basic amenities in life are a given. Not for Pakistanis, though. A bulk of the issues and problems that are currently facing Pakistan and similar countries, are, for lack of a better word, primitive in nature. One would not find the American Congress debating on how to alleviate food insecurity of the American public. One would find more nuanced issues under discussion. Such as healthcare reform, immigration reform, climate change, clean energy, affordability of colleges, etc.

This also puts Pakistan's sudden rise in net happiness as seen in fig. 3 further into perspective. The experience of a first democratic transition, a stronger anti-terrorism policy, a steadily improving economic condition, the promise of a positive upturn regarding the energy crisis and a greater feeling of national security and law and order tied, for the most part, to the actions of a certain Pakistan Army General who is immensely popular with the public, have all combined to make a significantly positive impact on the overall mood of the Pakistani public. A mood that is reflective of the happiness of a majority of the Pakistani public, a public that has an increasing number of reasons for being optimistic, hopeful and happy about their present and their future.

In contrast, citizens of the developed countries of the world have less to be cheerful for, considering that most of their immediate problems are of a supra-national nature. The foremost example of a growing lack of happiness among the populations of prosperous states is the ensuing Syrian Refugee crisis that has engulfed Europe. A mass migration of refugees escaping to Europe from the war ravaged regions of Syria have begun to exact a growing strain on the resources of European countries and have thus dampened the mood of the citizens of these countries. Another example is the growing threat of the Islamic state, a prime example of which is the all too recent tragedy of the terror attacks on Paris on the 15th of November, 2015. Add to that the very real and growing global threat of climate change, which was highlighted in the Paris Climate Summit of 2015, and one gradually realizes that there isn't much cause to be overly happy or optimistic about. It is this feeling that has perhaps caused the 'Prosperous Tier' to have the lowest net happiness ranking out of all the other socio-economic groupings. Pakistanis, on the other hand, cannot afford to be overly concerned with global problems, since their most basic needs are still chronically short of being fulfilled. Hence, this difference in priorities is what has brought about this contrast in the relative net happiness of Pakistanis when compared with net happiness experienced by the people living in the developed nations of the world.

The End of Year Study 2015 provides valuable insights regarding the general happiness and well-being of citizens of the states that were a part of the study. These insights are undoubtedly a valuable resource to policy makers and intellectuals for they, for the most part, attest to the hypothesis that material well-being is not the only source of general well-being in people but is merely one out of a number of factors. Statistics measuring people's happiness therefore serve as an important reminder to statesmen and politicians that economic prosperity is not directly proportional to public happiness and well-being.

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