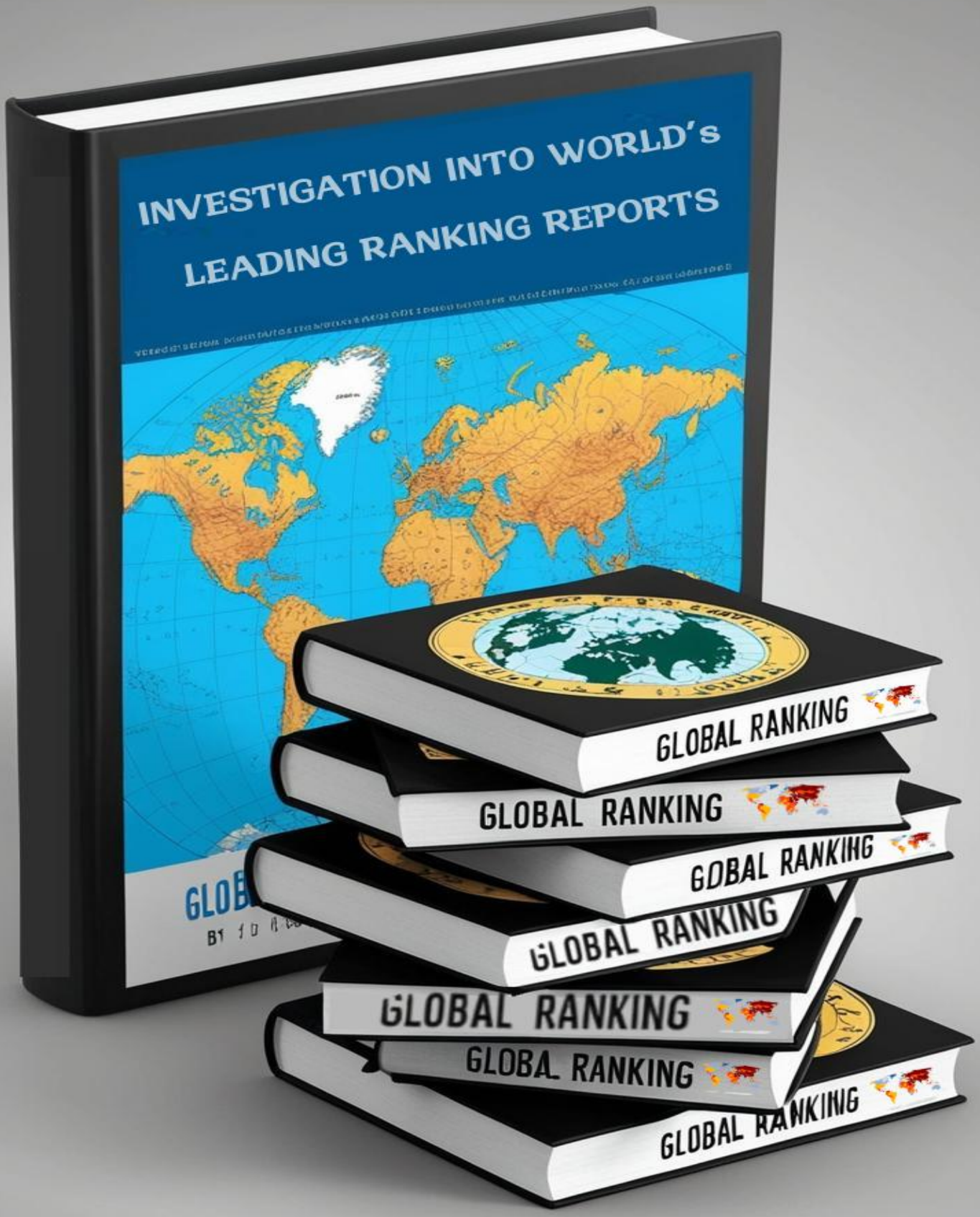

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE REPORTS?

A Report by Ij-Reportika

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What's Wrong with the Reports?

An investigation into the world's leading ranking reports (Part I)

Introduction

Global ranking reports such as the ***World Press Freedom Index*****, *Corruption Perceptions Index*****, and *World Happiness Report*** have become benchmarks for assessing nations on critical issues. Governments, policymakers, and international organizations often use these rankings to guide decisions, shape perceptions, and influence geopolitical strategies. Media outlets amplify their findings, while opposition parties leverage them to criticize ruling governments. Yet, despite their widespread importance, **these reports are not beyond scrutiny**.

Investigative Journalism Reportika uncovers the startling reality behind these globally celebrated indices: they are often riddled with **inaccuracies, methodological flaws, data limitations** and in some cases, **blatant propaganda**. While these reports claim to offer unbiased assessments, they sometimes perpetuate biases, create misleading narratives, or fail to account for the cultural and regional complexities they aim to measure.

This investigative series delves deep into the reliability of these reports. In this first instalment of this report, we focus on several widely referenced indices, exposing severe issues. From unexpected discrepancies to controversies surrounding their credibility, we examine the gaps that question their validity. In Part Two, we will explore additional reports, continuing to unravel their systemic flaws.

This report is the result of months of meticulous investigation by the experts at ***Investigative Journalism Reportika***. Drawing from on-the-ground studies, in-depth data reviews, and insights from leading economists, geopolitical analysts, and seasoned researchers, our team has dissected the inner workings of these reports to reveal their shortcomings. Each finding is backed by rigorous analysis, contextual understanding, and a commitment to uncovering the truth beyond the numbers.

Read on to uncover why these indices, often regarded as authoritative and objective, may not be the definitive guides they claim to be. Behind the glossy presentations and widely publicized rankings lie deep-seated issues that threaten their credibility.

World Press Freedom Index

The **World Press Freedom Index (WPFI)**, published annually by **Reporters Without Borders (RSF)** since 2002, ranks countries based on their press freedom records from the previous year. According to its official website, the Index is intended to provide an **"accurate reflection of the situation at the time of publication."** The WPFI seeks to assess the degree of freedom available to journalists, news organizations, and netizens in each country, along with the extent of governmental efforts to respect and uphold this freedom. However, it specifically focuses on press freedom and does not evaluate the quality of journalism or broader human rights conditions in the countries assessed.

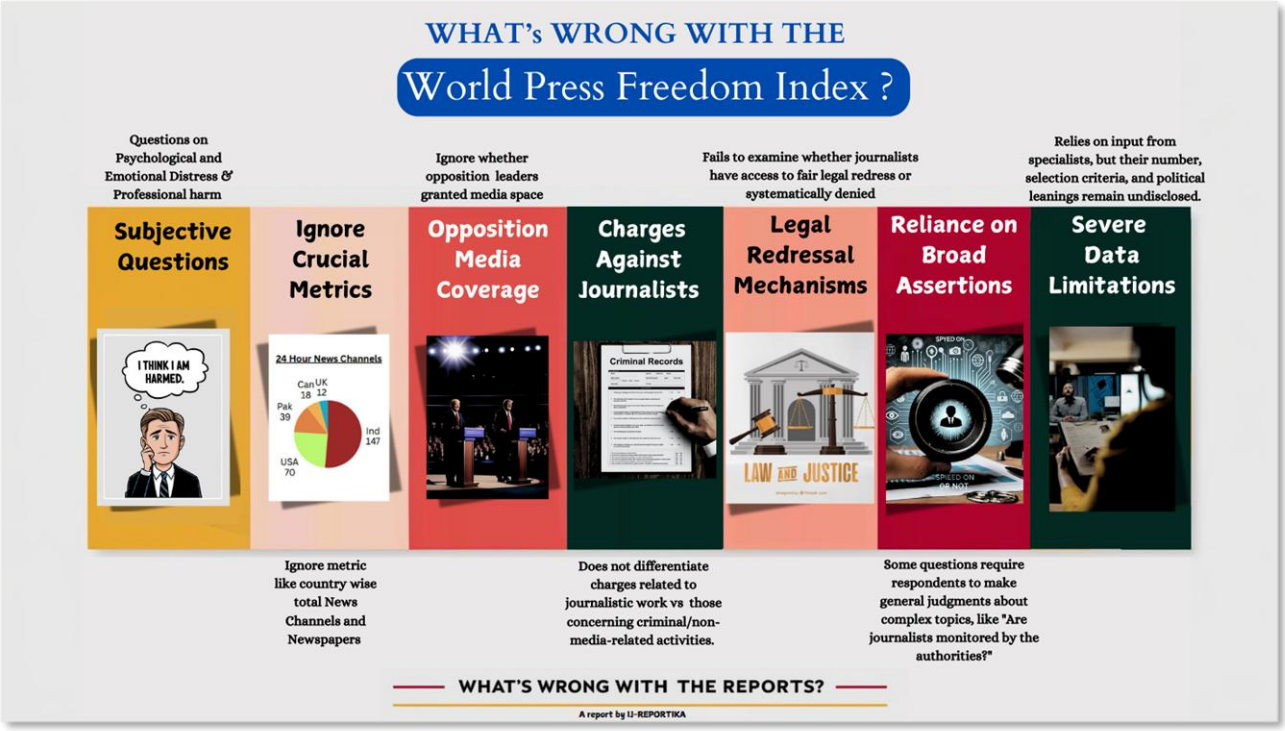


Figure 1 What's wrong with the World Press Freedom Index

Since 2020, a **seven-member panel of experts** has assisted in revising the Index's methodology to enhance its accuracy and relevance. This panel includes notable figures such as **Thomas Hanitzsch**, a specialist in global journalism cultures at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, and **David Levy**, a senior research associate at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

Other members include **Sallie Hughes**, a journalism professor from the University of Miami, **Herman Wasserman** from the University of Cape Town, **Laura Moore**, head of research at Deutsche Welle Akademie, and **Thibaut Bruttin** and **Blanche Marès** from RSF. Together, these experts bring extensive experience in global media studies, comparative methodology, and press freedom evaluation, aiming to ensure the Index remains a credible reflection of global press freedom challenges.

The Index is a snapshot of the situation during the calendar year (January-December) prior to its publication. Nonetheless, it is meant to be seen as an accurate reflection of the situation at the time of publication. Therefore, when the press freedom situation changes dramatically in a country between the end of the year assessed and publication, the data is updated to take account of the most recent events possible. This may be related to a new war, a coup d'état, a major attack on journalists, or the sudden introduction of an extreme repressive policy.

Figure 2 World Press Freedom Index as per the RSF Website
(Source: https://rsf.org/en/methodology-used-compiling-world-press-freedom-index-2024/)

Despite its intended objectivity, the WPFI has faced criticism over the years, particularly regarding its methodology, reliance on subjective perceptions, and alleged political bias in the rankings. In this investigative report, we will examine the **key controversies**, **methodological flaws**, and **data limitations** surrounding the Index, alongside its impact on perceptions of press freedom globally.

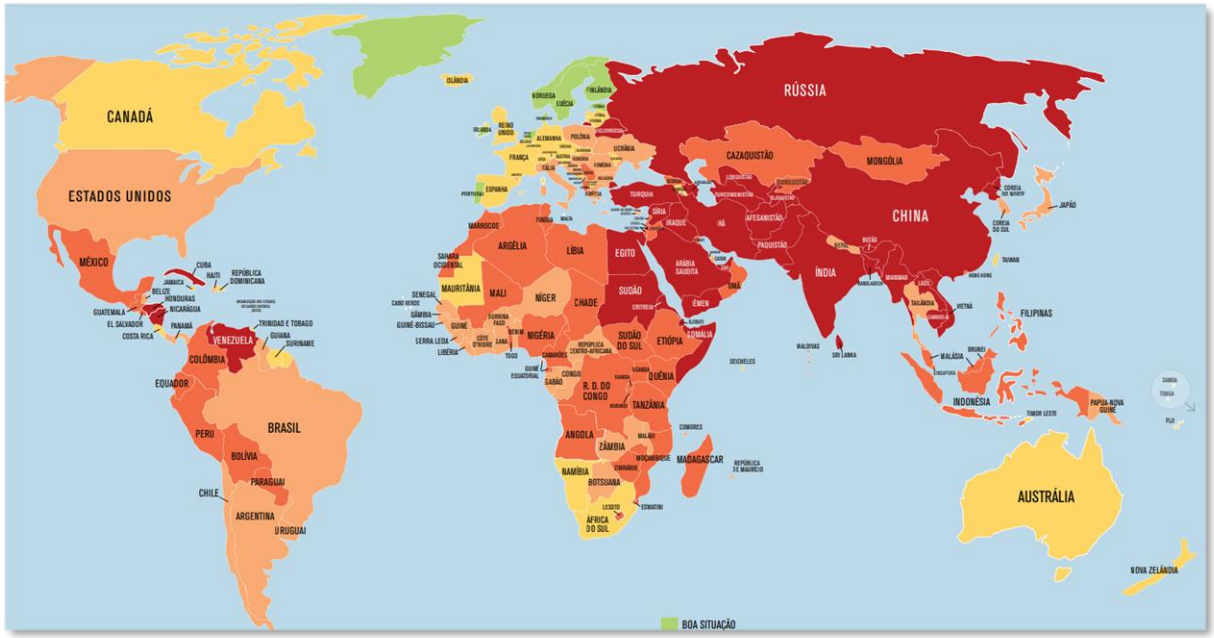


Figure 3 World Press Freedom Index 2024 Map (Source: https://rsf.org/en/index/)

Methodological Flaws

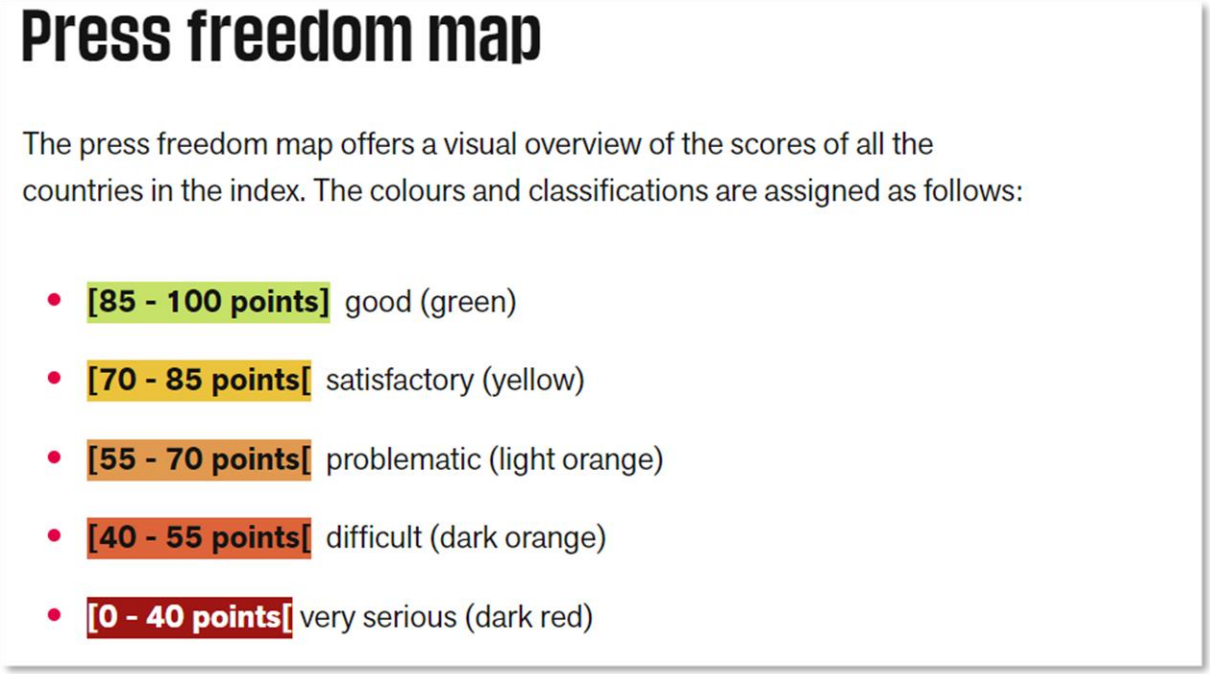


Figure 4 Press Freedom Map (Source: https://rsf.org/en/methodology-used-compiling-world-press-freedom-index-2024/)

The World Press Freedom Index (WPFI) uses a scoring system where each country or territory receives a score between 0 to 100, with 100 being the highest level of press freedom. While this system is designed to provide a comprehensive overview of press freedom worldwide, several methodological flaws have been pointed out, particularly regarding the **subjectivity** and **data gathering processes**.

1. **Subjective Nature of Qualitative Analysis**

A significant portion of each country's score in the **World Press Freedom Index** is based on a qualitative analysis derived from responses to a questionnaire completed by press freedom specialists, including journalists, academics, and human rights defenders. While intended to **capture nuanced, on-the-ground realities, this approach introduces a considerable level of subjectivity into the ranking**. Our findings indicate that many of these **experts hold strong biases**, often aligned either **with or against specific political establishments**. To avoid scrutiny, their identities are not made public. This reliance on potentially biased individuals skews the data, making it difficult to verify whether their assessments offer an objective reflection of the media environment. Additionally, their responses are shaped by **personal experiences** and **perspectives**, which undermines consistency across different countries and contexts.

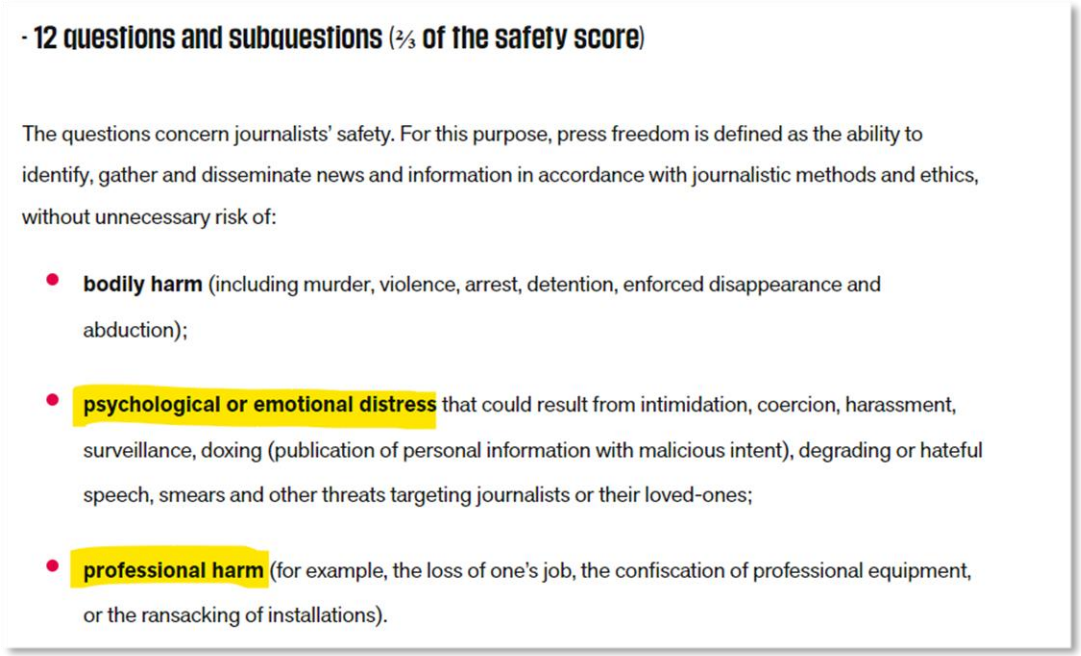


Figure 5 Scoring of WPFI (Source: https://rsf.org/en/methodology-used-compiling-world-press-freedom-index-2024/)

2. **Psychological and Emotional Distress as Criteria**
   Another challenge lies in the **sociocultural and safety indicators**, which include assessing journalists' risk of **psychological or emotional distress** due to intimidation, harassment, and doxing. While these are genuine threats to press freedom, the impact of these stressors is highly **subjective** and difficult to measure accurately. Emotional distress varies from person to person, and it's challenging to quantify how significantly these factors impact a journalist's work environment. This subjectivity raises concerns about whether such an evaluation can be uniformly applied across countries and whether the data reflect the real extent of threats journalists face.

3. **Professional Harm Criteria**

   The **inclusion of professional harm**, such as the confiscation of journalistic equipment or job loss, is also problematic. It is difficult to ascertain whether a journalist was dismissed due to their work or due to unrelated reasons, such as **professional inefficiency**. This ambiguity introduces further uncertainty into the Index, as professional consequences that are unrelated to press freedom may still affect a country's overall score.

4. **Questionnaire Language and Cultural Bias**

   Although the questionnaire is available in **24 languages**, the framing of questions still carries cultural bias, particularly as it is designed by a panel with Western perspectives. This disadvantages non-western countries where media practices differ from the norms established by the Index, leading to a **misrepresentation of press conditions** in those regions.

5. **Equal Weight for Questions and Indicators:** The Index evaluates press freedom using five indicators: political, legal, economic, sociocultural, and safety contexts. However, **all questions and sub-questions are weighted equally**, which does not account for the varying degrees of severity of different challenges faced by the media. For example, the lack of access to information may not be as serious as bodily harm to journalists, yet both factors are given equal importance, potentially distorting the overall score.

6. **Lack of Comprehensive Metrics on Media Presence**: The Index does not account for **the total number of media platforms** (TV, radio, print, online) in a country. A vibrant media landscape with diverse outlets indicates a healthier press environment but goes unacknowledged. For instance, in **Singapore** (Rank 126), the media environment includes a mix of government-influenced outlets and private platforms, such as ***The Straits Times*** and ***CNA***. While most mainstream outlets are tightly regulated, the presence of alternative online news platforms like ***The Online Citizen*** adds layers of media diversity.

   Similarly, **India's** (Rank 159) media landscape is one of the largest and most diverse in the world, encompassing thousands of TV channels, newspapers, radio stations, and online platforms in multiple languages. However, the Index fails to recognize the range and scope of these outlets, which contributes to an incomplete assessment of the country's media presence.

7. **Ownership Dynamics Ignored:** No distinction is made between **government-controlled and privately owned media**. Countries with state-dominated media systems scores similarly to those with a mix of independent and state outlets, masking the level of editorial freedom. For instance, in **Pakistan** (Rank 152), a significant portion of media ownership is concentrated among a few private conglomerates like **the *Jang* and *Dawn* groups**. However, these entities operate under immense pressure from both the government and the military, including direct censorship and financial manipulation. The distinction between nominal private ownership and actual government influence is crucial but remains unaddressed in the Index.

8. **Discretion in Licensing Media:** The Index overlooks whether governments exercise discretion in awarding or revoking media licenses, which stifles press freedom by selectively shutting down critical voices. For instance, In **Saudi Arabia** (Rank 166), Licensing is a key control tool, as the government has absolute discretion to shut down outlets critical of its policies. Media houses are licensed under strict conditions, deterring independent journalism.

9. **Sustained Anti-Government Coverage:** It fails to evaluate whether mainstream media continues to criticize the government without facing repercussions, a critical indicator of press freedom. For instance, despite harsh crackdowns by **Turkey** (Rank 158), certain independent outlets, such as ***Cumhuriyet***, continue anti-government reporting, but the Index fails to acknowledge this resilience.

10. **Opposition Media Coverage:** No assessment is made of whether opposition parties or leaders are granted media space, a factor essential to gauging the plurality of viewpoints in the media landscape. For example, **Tajikistan** (Rank 155) tightly controls state media, barring opposition voices entirely, while **India** (Rank 159) allows opposition coverage in private outlets, highlighting a crucial difference in press plurality despite similar rankings.

11. **Nature of Charges Against Journalists:** The index does not differentiate between charges related to journalistic work and those concerning criminal or other non-media-related activities. This lack of specificity distorts the portrayal of press freedom violations. The misuse of media for disinformation or dubious activities harming the interest of the nation remains a critical yet underreported dimension. In **Turkey** (Rank 158), numerous journalists face accusations of supporting terrorism, some of which involve credible links to banned organizations. Conversely, others are arrested for merely criticizing government policies.

12. **Legal Redressal Mechanisms**: The Index fails to examine whether journalists and media houses have access to fair legal redress or whether such avenues are systematically denied. Some countries demonstrate a disconnect between legal protections for journalists and their press freedom rankings. For instance, **South Africa (Rank 38)**, despite strong constitutional protections, scores modestly due to occasional harassment and intimidation of journalists. Conversely, **Mauritania (Rank 33)**, with limited practical press freedom, ranks relatively well, indicating potential overvaluation of legal frameworks in the Index. Such discrepancies highlight the Index's challenge in balancing legal provisions with on-the-ground realities.

13. **Overlooked Factors in Assessing Press Freedom:** The World Press Freedom Index overlooks several critical factors that shape media environments globally. Issues such as selective blocking of media or online platforms, censorship of foreign media outlets, and restrictions on journalists' internal movement are not uniformly assessed, despite their significant impact on press freedom. Moreover, the Index does not consider the size of a country or the complexity of its governance, which influences media accessibility and oversight. In large or highly decentralized states, regional disparities in press freedom often go unreported, highlighting gaps in the Index's ability to provide a comprehensive analysis.

Issues with the Questionnaire:

1. **Subjectivity and Bias**: Many questions, such as those asking participants to rate the degree of government influence or transparency, rely heavily on personal opinion. For instance, questions like ***"How easily can the government achieve the dismissal of public broadcast journalists?"*** require individuals to provide subjective assessments that often is influenced by their personal experiences or political leanings. This skews the data and reduce its reliability across different respondents.

2. **Vague Response Categories**: The use of response categories like "Somewhat," "Regularly," or "Occasionally" introduces ambiguity. For example, the question ***"Do***

public media outlets ignore sensitive information?" offers answers like **"Rarely"** and **"Systematically"** without clear criteria for what qualifies as either. This lack of specificity leads to inconsistent interpretations by respondents.

3. **Lack of Contextual Nuance**: Questions like ***"Is the news media able to achieve financial stability?"*** do not account for **varying national circumstances,** such as differences in economic systems, media ownership structures, or press freedom laws. This leads to oversimplified responses that do not reflect the complexities of the media landscape in different countries.

4. **Over-reliance on Broad Assertions**: Some questions require respondents to make general judgments about complex topics, like ***"Are journalists monitored and/or spied on by the authorities?"*** These questions leads to oversimplification or sweeping statements that do not capture the full range of practices or legal structures in place.

5. **Inconsistent Application Across Contexts**: Questions that assume a uniform experience for all journalists, such as ***"Have journalists been murdered in the past 12 months?"*** or ***"Are journalists at risk of having their equipment seized?"*** are not relevant or appropriately scaled for every country. Countries with different media environments will experience these issues differently, yet the questionnaire doesn't allow for nuance in these variations.

6. **Limited Explanation for Responses**: The final section offers limited space for elaboration, and many of the responses are single-option answers. This restricts the ability of respondents to provide context or explain why they selected certain answers. For example, when answering whether **press coverage is independent, respondents have no opportunity to explain specific political or economic pressures that might exist.**

Unexpected or Flawed discrepancies

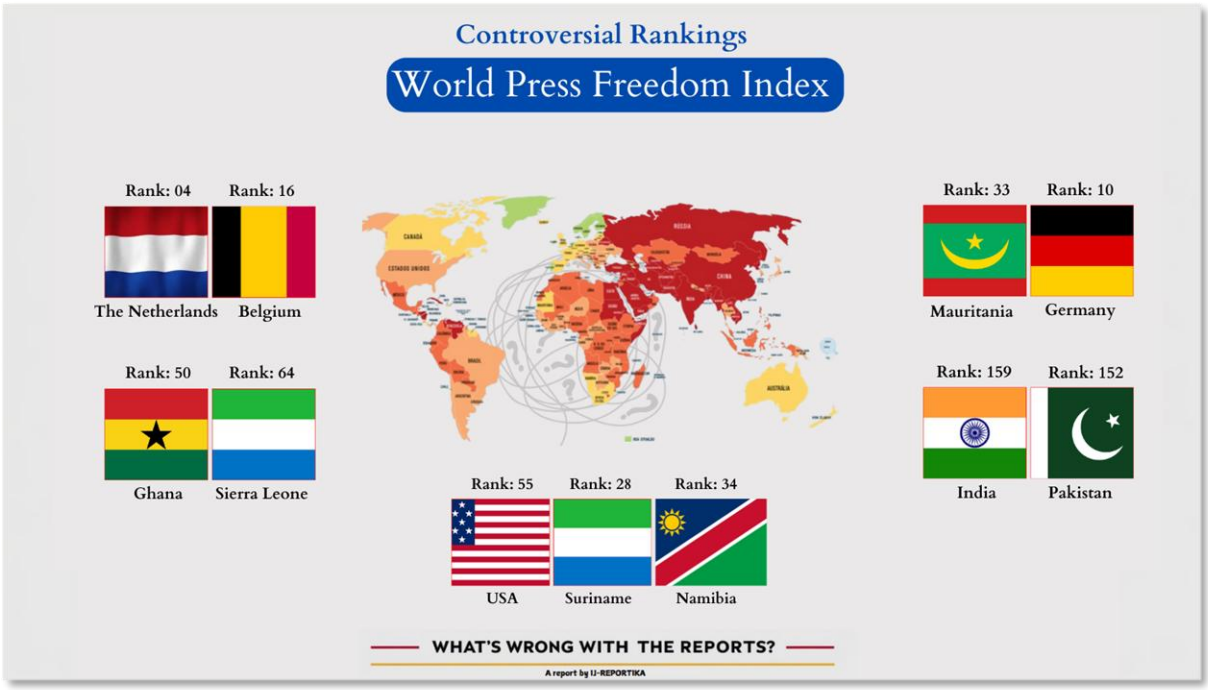


Figure 6 Unexpected or Flawed discrepancies in the World Press Freedom Index 2024

- **The Netherlands vs. Belgium**: Despite Belgium's steady performance in recent years, ranking 16th with 81.49 points in 2024, the Netherlands, which faced a steep drop to 28th in 2022 (77.93 points), managed to climb to 4th place by 2024 with 87.73 points. This sharp recovery raises questions about the consistency and accuracy of the criteria used, especially when both countries share similar media landscapes and challenges.

- **Mauritania vs. Germany**: **Mauritania saw a dramatic rise** to **33rd place** with 74.20 points in 2024 from **97th in 2022**, despite ongoing concerns about press freedom, censorship, and political interference in media. In contrast, **Germany ranks 10th** with 83.84 points, despite its stable and well-established free press. The **vast gap in institutional strength** between these two countries doesn't seem well reflected in the rankings.

- **Ghana vs. Sierra Leone**: **Ghana** ranks **50th** in 2024 with 67.71 points, while **Sierra Leone**, despite its ongoing challenges with press freedom, ranks at **64th** with 64.27 points. Considering Ghana has a more robust media ecosystem, this ranking disparity highlights flaws in the evaluation process.

- **USA** vs. **Suriname** and **Namibia**: The USA **ranked at 55th in 2024**, a global media leader with strong protections for freedom of speech under the First Amendment, ranks much lower than countries like Suriname **at 28th** and Namibia **at 34th**. While the USA faces issues related to media polarization, corporate influence, and the spread of misinformation, the stark contrast in rankings between a major democratic country and smaller nations with fewer media challenges seems **overly critical**. This suggests a flaw in how factors like media influence and the scale of freedom are evaluated.

- **India vs. Pakistan**: In 2024, India ranks **159th with 31.28 points**, while Pakistan is ranked slightly higher at **152nd with 33.90 points**. This close ranking between two countries with contrasting media landscapes raises questions about the assessment criteria. India, a democratic nation with a vast and diverse media scene, faces significant issues like political interference, and polarized media coverage. In contrast, Pakistan, where the media operates under tighter restrictions and frequent pressures from both government and military influences, has a marginally better ranking. This narrow gap suggests that **India's press freedom challenges** may be weighted heavily in the ranking criteria, potentially underestimating the **more severe forms of control that Pakistani media outlets often encounter.**

Figure 7 Scoring of the WPFI (Source: https://rsf.org/en/methodology-used-compiling-world-press-freedom-index-2024/)

Data Limitations

The ranking methodology includes a qualitative analysis based on responses from **press freedom specialists, including journalists, researchers, academics, and human rights defenders**. However, critical information regarding the **number and list of these specialists** is not disclosed, nor is the **basis of their selection** or their **political ideologies** made public. This **lack of transparency** raises questions about the representativeness and impartiality of the data.

While the **quantitative tally** of abuses against media and journalists provides a more concrete basis for assessment (though it **still faces issues outlined in the report**), the qualitative analysis suffers from **severe data limitations**. The heavy reliance on subjective responses introduces a level of variability that does not accurately reflect the press freedom situation across countries, making the rankings potentially sensitive to bias and individual perspectives.

Cultural and Regional Bias

The methodology for evaluating press freedom, despite aiming for a universal framework, still embeds cultural and regional biases. Each country's score is based on five contextual indicators: **political context, legal framework, economic context, sociocultural context, and safety.** While these indicators are uniformly applied, they reflect diverse regional norms and expectations, which results in varying interpretations of press freedom.

For instance, in countries like **France** and **Germany**, legal restrictions on hate speech and extremist content are seen as measures to protect social harmony, but they are interpreted as censorship in the context of press freedom evaluations. In contrast, **Saudi Arabia**, **Iran** and many other Middle Eastern countries have strict restrictions on media coverage of political or religious issues, as these are often deeply ingrained in **their societal norms and governance frameworks**. When measured by a universal standard, such countries receive low scores despite public acceptance of these norms in the local context.

In terms of political context, **Turkey** and **India** face criticism for **political interference in media**, yet the nature of political influence differs. In Turkey, the **government directly controls major media channels,** while in India, political influence is often exerted through **economic pressures**, such as advertising and ownership, and the use of investigation agencies to build pressure. These distinctions are not fully captured by a single set of evaluation questions, potentially disadvantaging countries where political influence on media takes different forms.

Similarly, in the sociocultural context indicator, countries with strong religious or cultural identities, such as **Pakistan** and **Indonesia**, may score lower due to pressures on journalists not to criticize religious institutions or traditional practices. However, these constraints are often culturally embedded and may not face the same local resistance as they would in secular or Western countries. The uniform weighting of all questions also leads to **inconsistencies in evaluation**; for example, both **Finland** and **South Korea** face issues around gender equality in media, but these are perceived and addressed differently due to regional cultural norms.

Overall, these examples highlight that a "one-size-fits-all" approach does not fully capture the complexities of press freedom across different cultural and regional settings, leading to ratings that favour Western-style press freedom norms over other governance and societal structures.

Controversies

Following are the controversies surrounding the World Press Freedom Index (WPFI) raised by different countries:

- **China:** China views the Index as a politicized tool that overlooks improvements in access to news, digital technology, and economic stability while focusing on criticisms from foreign perspectives.

- **Russia:** Russia frequently dismisses the Index as an instrument of Western propaganda, pointing out that it fails to account for Russian security concerns and local standards of media regulation.

- **Middle Eastern Countries (e.g., Saudi Arabia, UAE):** Leaders contend the Index fails to respect "cultural norms" and regional values around media, instead promoting Western ideals that don't align with their governance approach.

- **Hungary:** The Hungarian government and its supporters argue that RSF disproportionately targets countries with conservative policies, reflecting a Western, liberal bias in its assessments.

- **India:** The Indian government and certain media bodies have argued that RSF's assessments lack transparency and overly emphasize incidents of violence and intimidation against journalists, which they claim are outliers.

Corruption Perceptions Index

The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) is a widely used tool for evaluating perceived levels of public sector corruption across **180 countries**. Compiled annually by **Transparency International since 1995**, the index scores nations on a scale from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean) based on assessments by experts and business leaders. **The 2023 CPI, covering the period from May 2022 to April 2023, places Denmark, Finland, and New Zealand at the top of the list, while Somalia, South Sudan, and Syria are ranked as the most corrupt.**

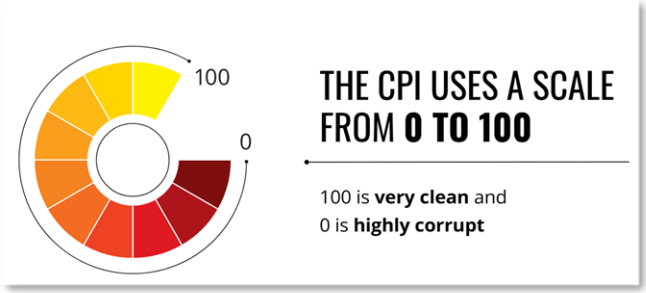


Figure 8 The CPI Scale (Source: https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2023/)

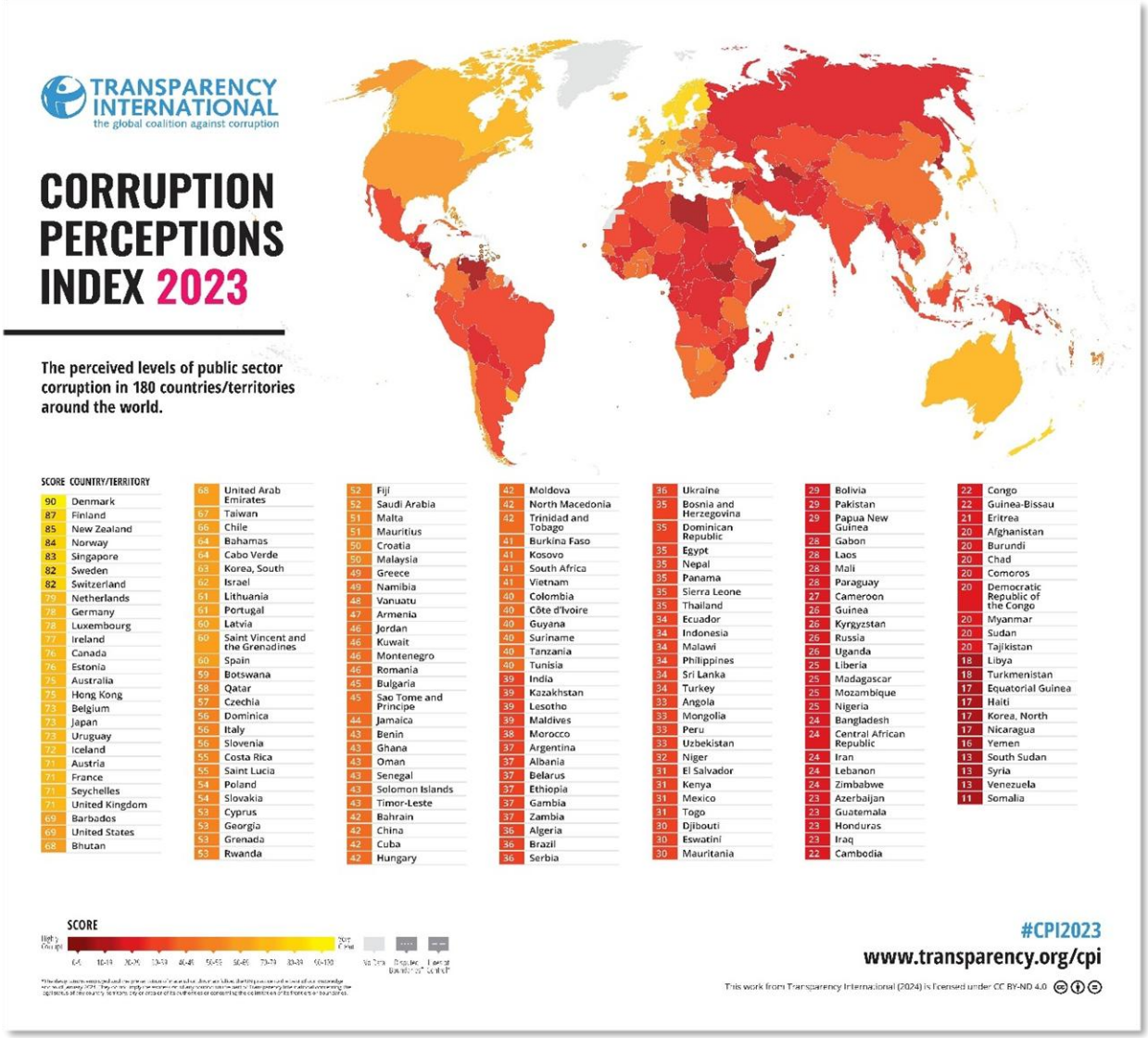


Figure 9 Corruption Perceptions Index Map (Source: https://images.transparencycdn.org/images/CPI2023_Map_EN.pdf/)

Investigative Journalism Reportika exposes critical methodological flaws and biases that undermine the reliability of the Corruption Perceptions Index, as detailed in the following sections.

Methodological Flaws

Figure 10 What's wrong with the Corruption Perceptions Index

1. **Reliance on Perception-Based Data**: The CPI's reliance on perception-based data—collected from expert assessments and business leaders—leads to subjective scores influenced by media exposure and individual biases. For example, **China, ranked 76th with a score of 42, has extensive government control** over media, likely influencing business executives' views and potentially leading to lower perceived corruption. In contrast, countries with a freer press receive higher corruption perceptions despite open reporting, highlighting the subjectivity inherent in perception-based scores.

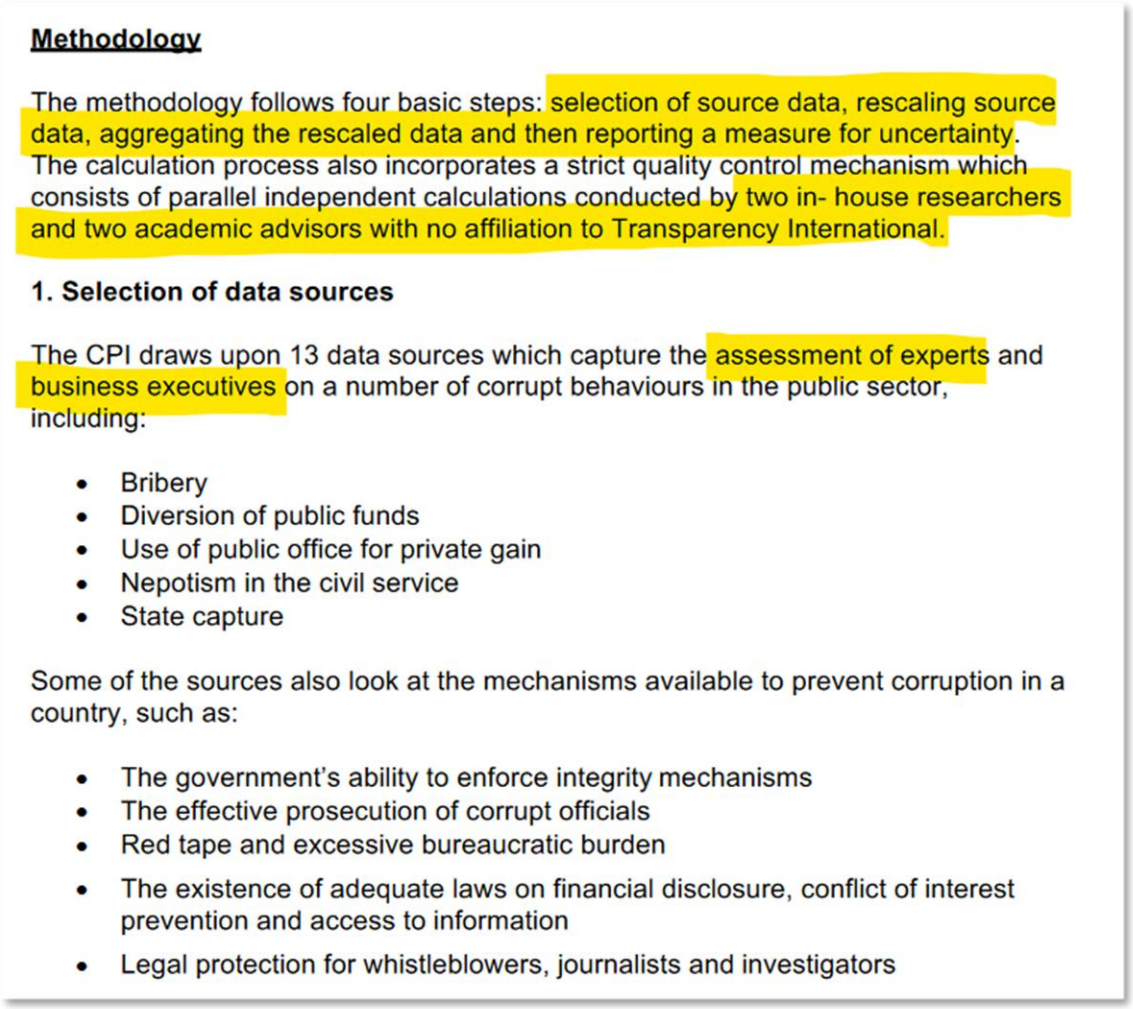
2. **Source Consistency and Cross-Country Comparability**: The CPI requires a range of data sources that cover a global set of countries. However, in countries like **Somalia, ranked 177th with a score of 13, and South Sudan, ranked 177th with 13**, limited data availability leads to imputed scores that does not accurately reflect corruption. This process risks generalizations that oversimplifies the distinct corruption profiles of each nation, especially in regions with constrained data sources.

3. **Standardization and Rescaling Issues**: The CPI's methodology involves standardizing scores on a scale from 0 to 100, where 0 is highly corrupt, and 100 is low corruption. Reversing scores from sources like the **Economist Intelligence Unit** creates inconsistencies, especially in countries like **Brazil, ranked 104th with a score of 36, and India, ranked 93rd with 39**, where regional corruption complexities differ significantly. This approach oversimplifies local dynamics, failing to capture the

nuanced corruption issues within diverse national contexts.

4. **Lack of Transparency in Private Source Data**: Transparency International does not release original scores from private data sources, which limits transparency in CPI results. In countries **like Saudi Arabia, ranked 53rd with a score of 52, and Qatar, ranked 40th with 58, restricted media environments** influence executive perceptions. Without access to these original data points, it's difficult to understand how these scores were derived or to critique their objectivity, which obscures the true corruption landscape.

5. **Overemphasis on Public Sector Corruption**: The CPI emphasizes public sector corruption, often missing corruption in the private sector and organized networks, which significantly affects corruption perceptions. In countries like Russia, ranked **141st with a score of 26, and Mexico, ranked 133rd with 29, private sector corruption and ties to organized crime play a significant role**. By focusing predominantly on the public sector, the CPI understates corruption in nations where private sector misconduct is equally influential.



Methodology

The methodology follows four basic steps: selection of source data, rescaling source data, aggregating the rescaled data and then reporting a measure for uncertainty. The calculation process also incorporates a strict quality control mechanism which consists of parallel independent calculations conducted by two in- house researchers and two academic advisors with no affiliation to Transparency International.

1. Selection of data sources

The CPI draws upon 13 data sources which capture the assessment of experts and business executives on a number of corrupt behaviours in the public sector, including:

- Bribery
- Diversion of public funds
- Use of public office for private gain
- Nepotism in the civil service
- State capture

Some of the sources also look at the mechanisms available to prevent corruption in a country, such as:

- The government's ability to enforce integrity mechanisms
- The effective prosecution of corrupt officials
- Red tape and excessive bureaucratic burden
- The existence of adequate laws on financial disclosure, conflict of interest prevention and access to information
- Legal protection for whistleblowers, journalists and investigators

Figure 11 Methodology of CPI (Source: https://images.transparencycdn.org/images/CPI_2023_Methodology.zip/)

6. **Inconsistent Sampling Across Regions**: The CPI combines data sources with uneven coverage across different countries and regions, leading to regional biases**. In Western countries like Sweden, ranked 6th with a score of 82, and New Zealand, ranked 3rd with 85, more comprehensive data sources ensure robust rankings**. Conversely, in many Sub-Saharan African countries with limited data, the CPI relies on **perception and imputed scores**, which does not fully capture the region's complex corruption challenges. This imbalance skews perceptions of corruption in lower-income nations where reliable data is scarce.

The following steps are followed to calculate the CPI:

1. **Select data sources:** Each data source that is used to construct the CPI must fulfil the following criteria to qualify as a valid source:
   - Quantifies perceptions of corruption in the public sector
   - Be based on a reliable and valid methodology, which scores and ranks multiple countries on the same scale
   - Performed by a credible institution
   - Allow for sufficient variation of scores to distinguish between countries
   - Gives ratings to a substantial number of countries
   - The rating is given by a country expert or business person
   - The institution repeats their assessment at least every two years

   The CPI is calculated using 13 different data sources from 12 different institutions that capture perceptions of corruption within the past two years. These sources are described in detail in the accompanying source description document.

2. **Standardise data sources** to a scale of 0-100 where a 0 equals the highest level of perceived corruption and 100 equals the lowest level of perceived corruption. This standardisation is done by subtracting the mean of each source in the baseline year from each country score and then dividing by the standard deviation of that source in the baseline year. This subtraction and division using the baseline year parameters ensures that the CPI scores are comparable year on year since 2012. After this procedure, the standardised scores are transformed to the CPI scale by multiplying with the value of the CPI standard deviation in 2012 (20) and adding the mean of CPI in 2012 (45), so that the data set fits the CPI's 0-100 scale.

3. **Calculate the average:** For a country or territory to be included in the CPI, a minimum of three sources must assess that country. A country's CPI score is then calculated as the average of all standardised scores available for that country. Scores are rounded to whole numbers.

4. **Report a measure of uncertainty:** The CPI is accompanied by a standard error and confidence interval associated with the score, which captures the variation in scores of the data sources available for that country/territory.

Figure 12 Methodology of CPI (Source: https://images.transparencycdn.org/images/CPI_2023_Methodology.zip/)

Unexpected or Flawed discrepancies

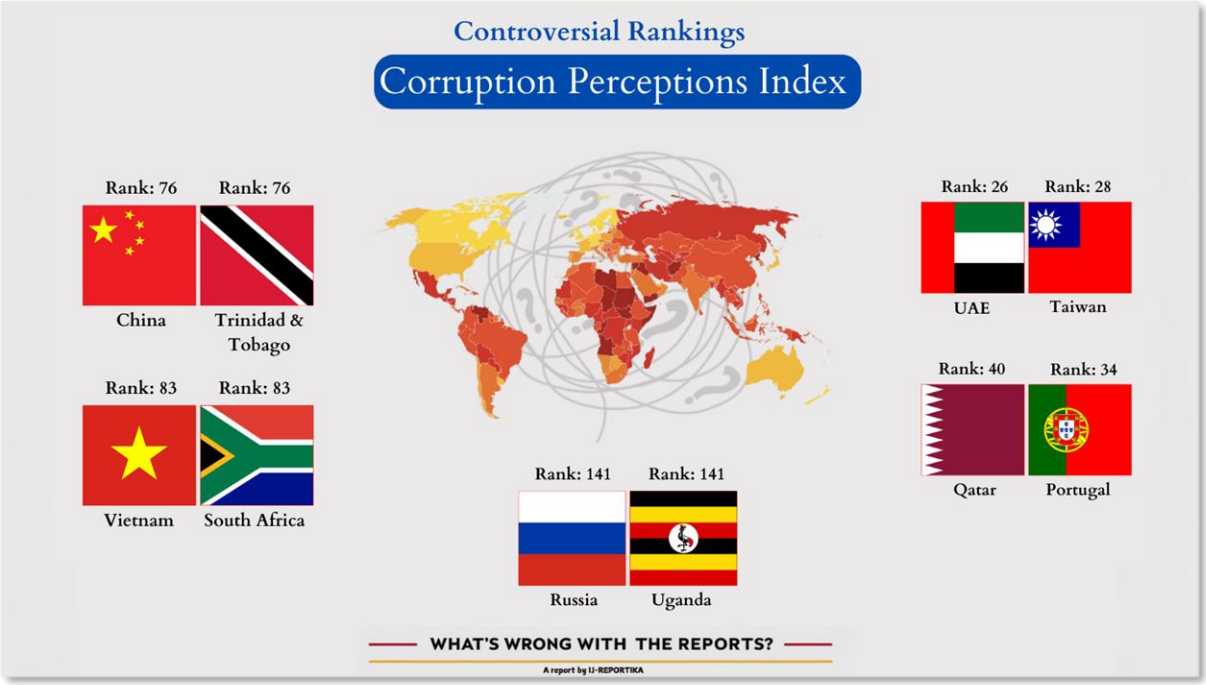


Figure 13 Unexpected or Flawed discrepancies in the Corruption Perceptions Index 2023

- **China (Rank: 76) vs. Trinidad and Tobago (Rank: 76):** China, ranked **76th** with a score of **42**, is a highly centralized state where opaque governance and high-level corruption allegations are common. **Trinidad and Tobago, which shares the same rank and score**, faces corruption issues primarily at the bureaucratic level. The close ranking does not capture the vast difference in the scale and systemic nature of corruption, with **China's state policies operating in a far less transparent environment than Trinidad and Tobago's more open governance**.

- **Vietnam (Rank: 83) vs. South Africa (Rank: 83)**: Vietnam, ranked **83rd** with a score of 41, is governed with significant state control, allowing for persistent, high-level corruption that often goes unchecked. **South Africa, also at 83rd** with the same score, is a democratic nation where corruption is frequently exposed by a free press, and efforts toward transparency are ongoing. The equal rank here downplays South Africa's institutional measures **against corruption, which contrast with Vietnam's centralized, politically influenced anti-corruption campaigns**.

- **United Arab Emirates (Rank: 26) vs. Taiwan (Rank: 28):** The **UAE**, ranked **26th** with a score of **68**, operates **with limited public oversight and extensive state control**, placing it close to **Taiwan**, ranked **28th with 67 points**. Taiwan, a democratic nation with stringent transparency standards, upholds stronger anti-corruption policies than the UAE. This close scoring overlooks **Taiwan's well-established institutional checks**, compared to the UAE's centralized, lower-transparency governance.

- **Qatar (Rank: 40) vs. Portugal (Rank: 34): Qatar**, ranked **40th with a score of 58**, has less transparent governmental processes, while **Portugal, ranked 34th with a score of 61**, benefits from strong EU-backed anti-corruption frameworks and public

accountability measures. The narrow score gap downplays the checks on power in Portugal, contrasting sharply with Qatar, where **decision-making often occurs without similar transparency or public oversight.**

- **Russia (Rank: 141) vs. Uganda (Rank: 141)**: **Russia and Uganda are both ranked 141st** with a score of 26, yet the types of corruption differ significantly. **Russia faces systemic corruption ingrained at high levels of government**, with centralized control enabling widespread graft. **Uganda's corruption, while prevalent, is typically localized within its bureaucracy and lacks the organized scale seen in Russia**. The similar score does not reflect these contrasting corruption dynamics, which vary greatly in scope and influence across their political systems.

Controversies

Following are the controversies surrounding the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) raised by different countries:

- **China**: China has dismissed the CPI as biased and politically motivated, arguing that it disproportionately focuses on perceived corruption rather than measurable improvements. Chinese officials contend that the index overlooks their extensive anti-corruption campaigns, including the high-profile "**Tigers and Flies**" crackdown. They also accuse Transparency International (TI) of using Western-centric parameters that fail to account for cultural and governance differences.

- **Russia**: The Russian government views the CPI as an instrument of political pressure, claiming it unfairly portrays the country as highly corrupt. Officials argue that the index does not recognize Russia's legal reforms or the work of its Anti-Corruption Directorate. Russia also criticizes the CPI's heavy reliance on subjective perceptions, which it believes are influenced by geopolitical narratives.

- **Brazil**: Brazilian authorities have expressed concerns over the CPI's failure to reflect the impact of their comprehensive anti-corruption measures, such as Operation Car Wash (Lava Jato). They argue that despite high-profile corruption cases being prosecuted, the CPI does not adequately factor in these efforts, creating a skewed perception of the country's progress in combating corruption.

- **Indonesia**: Indonesia has objected to the CPI for failing to account for significant progress made through its Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) and various legal reforms. Officials claim that the index overlooks tangible improvements in governance and instead relies on outdated perceptions that do not reflect recent advancements.

- **South Africa**: South African officials argue that the CPI downplays efforts like the Commission of Inquiry into State Capture, which have been instrumental in uncovering corruption at the highest levels. They believe the index fails to capture these strides, focusing instead on lingering perceptions of corruption without acknowledging ongoing reforms.

- **Turkey**: Turkey has raised concerns about the CPI's methodology, arguing that it exaggerates corruption levels by relying heavily on perceptions from foreign business leaders and organizations. Turkish officials claim the index does not consider internal anti-corruption mechanisms and reforms such as increased digitalization of public services to reduce opportunities for bribery.

The Corruption Perception Index (CPI) faces criticism for its methodology, which has raised concerns about accuracy and bias. Political scientist **Dan Hough** points out that **corruption is a complex issue and cannot be adequately represented by a single score**; for example, the types of corruption seen in rural Kansas differ vastly from those in New York City, yet the CPI scores them similarly. Experts also argue that relying on perceptions rather than tangible instances of corruption **reinforces stereotypes** and does not capture true corruption levels.

The CPI only assesses public sector corruption, neglecting significant cases in the private sector, such as the VW emissions scandal or the Odebrecht bribery case. Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer, which uses direct public surveys, has also been criticized for an elite bias. Additionally, some media misuse CPI scores as indicators of government performance without explaining the nuances, as seen when Bangladesh's CPI scores improved due to a methodology change, which local media misinterpreted as reduced corruption. Furthermore, **Alex Cobham** in ***Foreign Policy*** argues the CPI fosters an elite-driven bias that can mislead public perception and policy. Transparency International warns that high CPI scores do not mean a nation is free from international corruption, as in Sweden's case, where its **state-owned TeliaSonera** faced **bribery allegations** abroad despite Sweden's high CPI ranking.

Global Corruption Barometer

Since its debut in 2003, **Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer (GCB)** has aimed to provide a public opinion survey that captures people's direct experiences with and views on corruption worldwide. Unlike the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) discussed above, the GCB attempts to gauge corruption through everyday citizen experiences. However, IJ-Reportika's analysis identifies several critical issues with the GCB's methodology that raise questions about **the reliability and validity of its findings.**

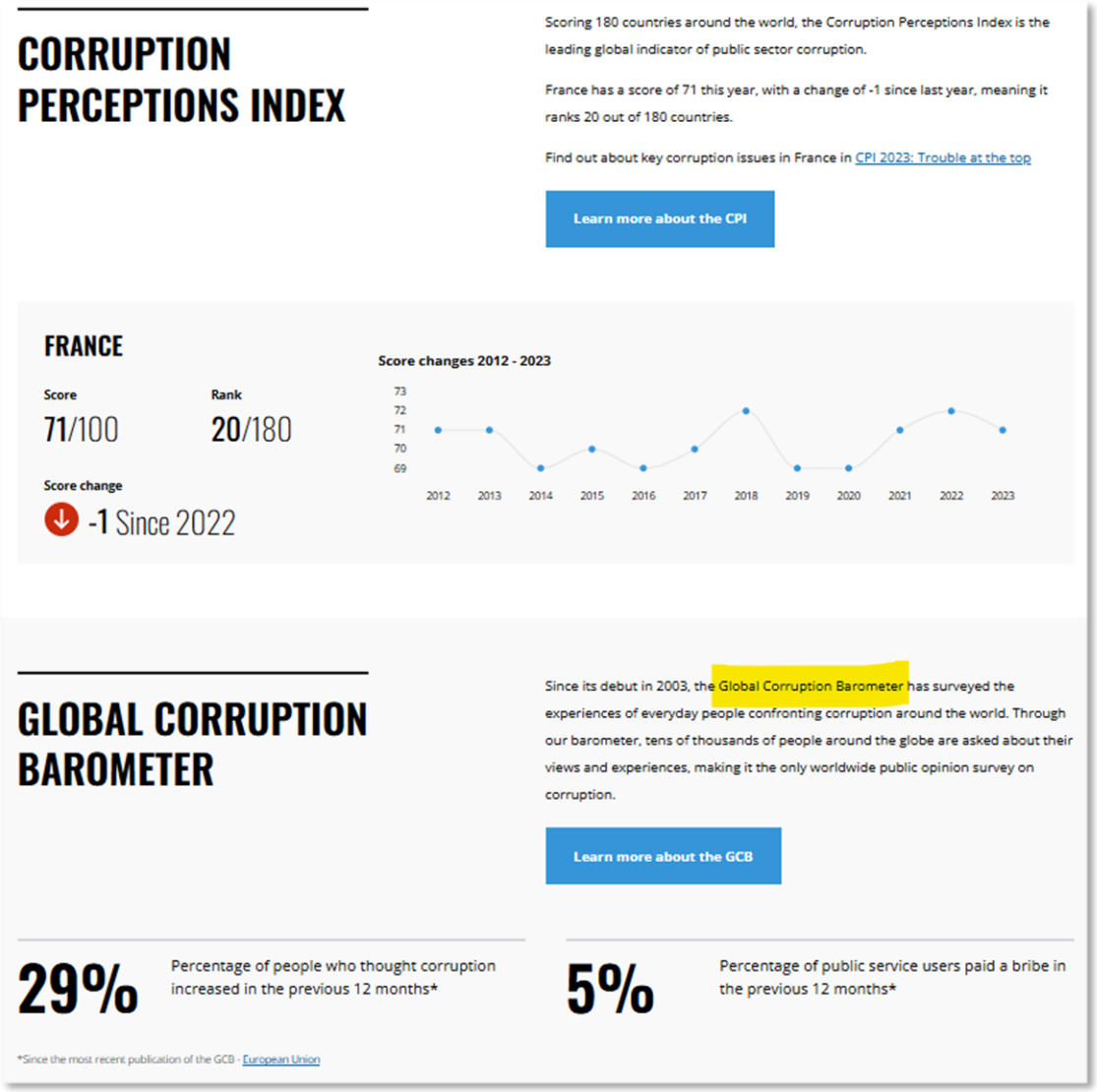


Figure 14 Global Corruption Barometer of France (Source: https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/france/)

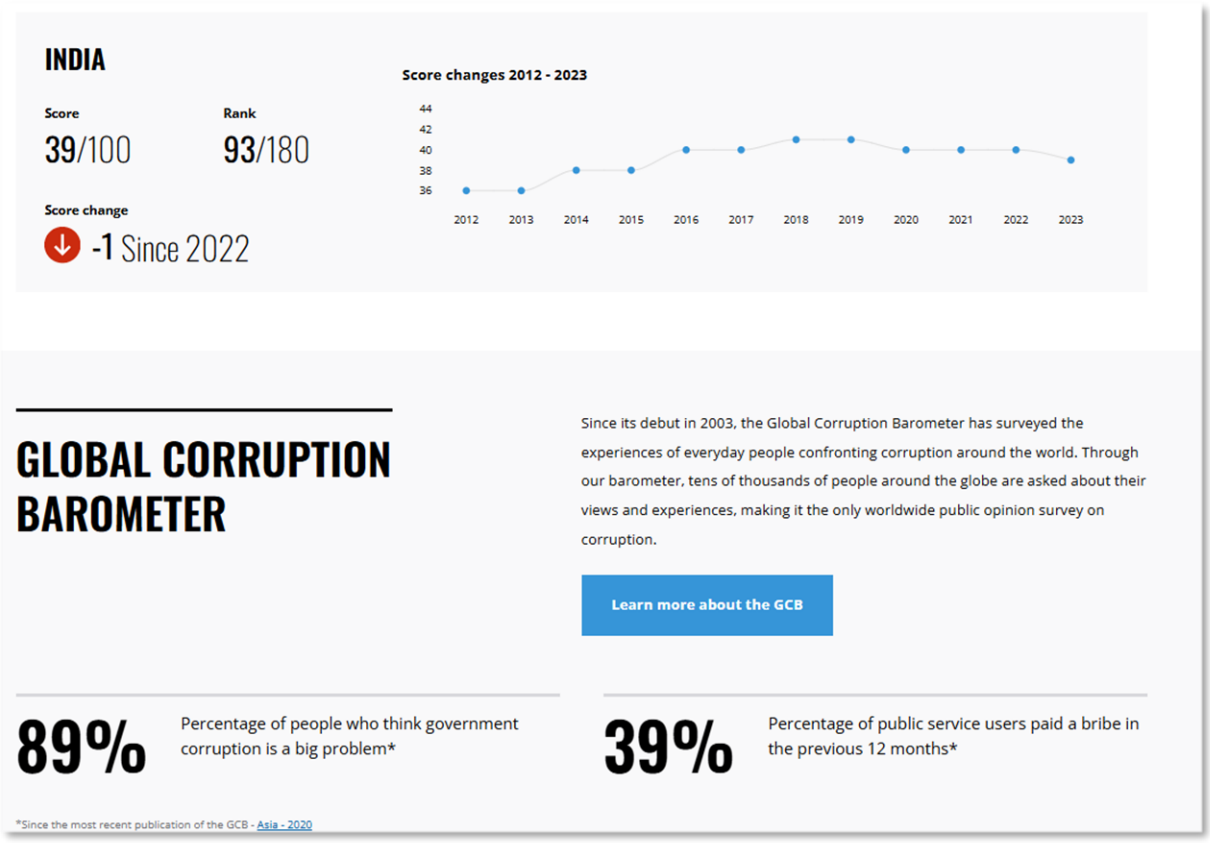


Figure 15 Global Corruption Barometer of India (Source: https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/India/)

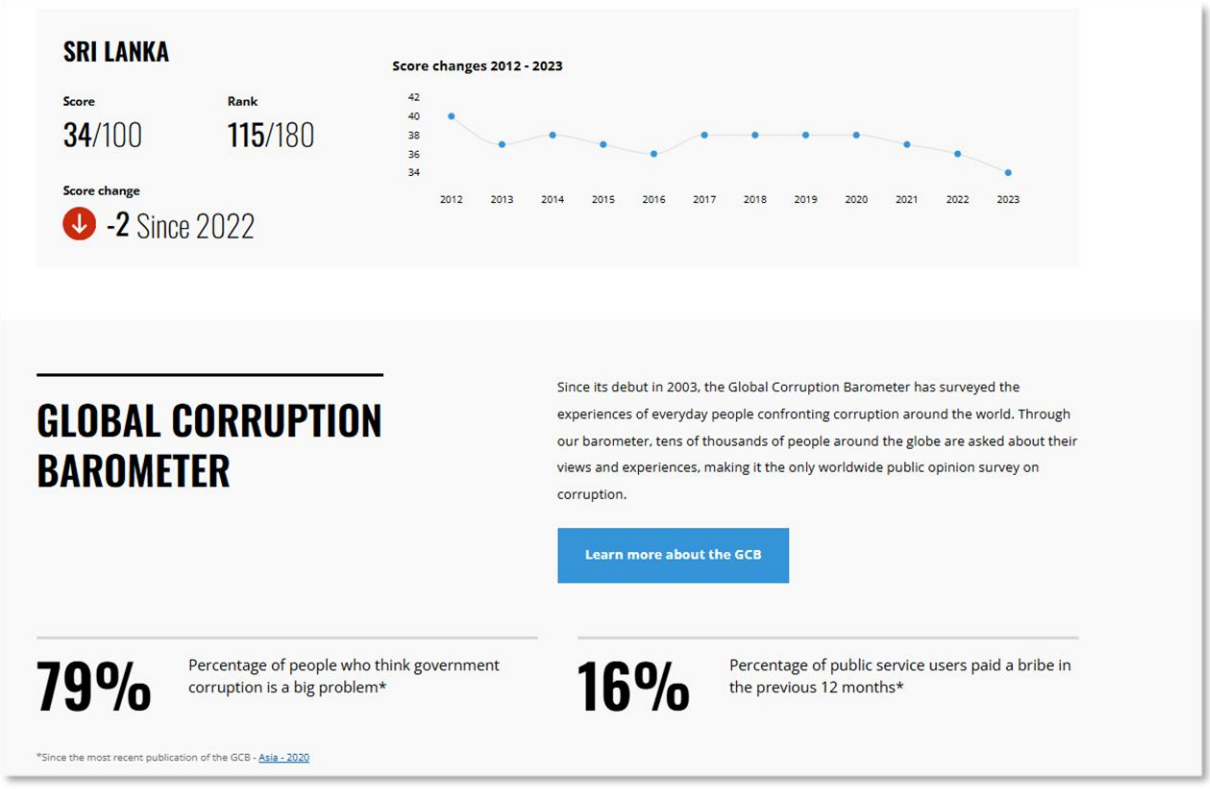


Figure 16 Global Corruption Barometer of Sri Lanka (Source: https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/sri-lanka/)

Methodological Flaws
in the Global Corruption Barometer

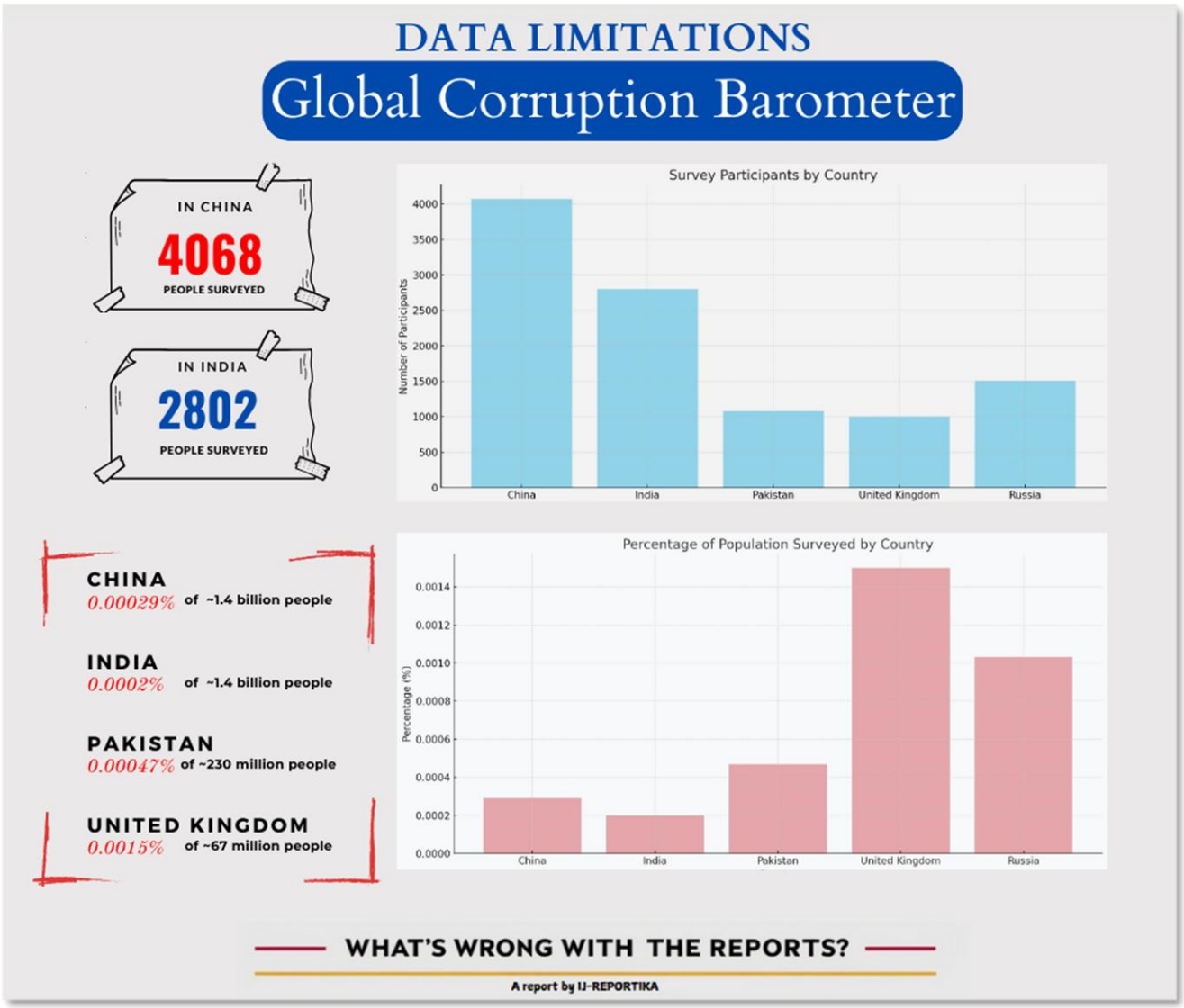


Figure 17 Global Corruption Barometer Data Limitations

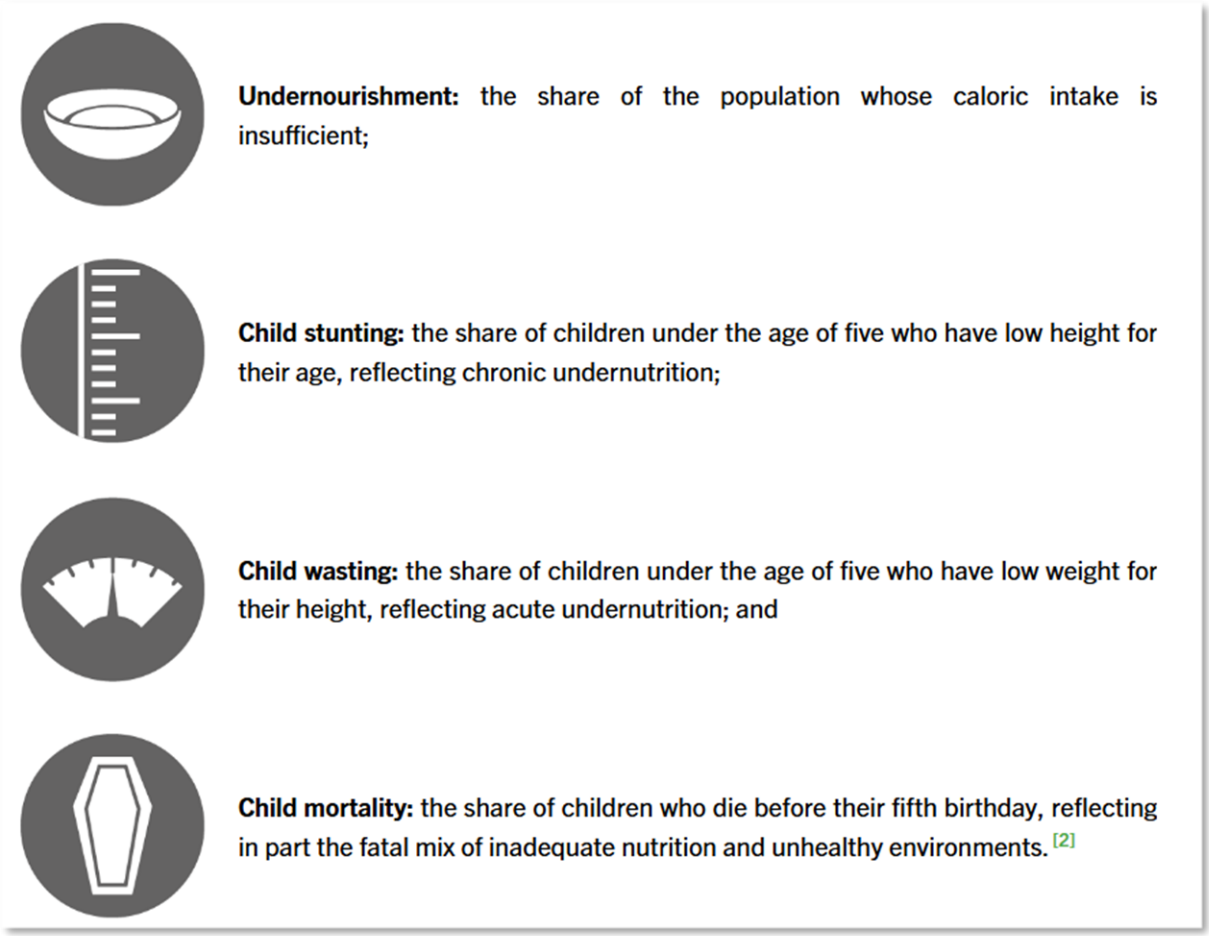
1. **Insufficient Sample Sizes**: The GCB's sample sizes are **alarmingly small** compared to national populations, limiting the representativeness of its findings. For example:
    - **China:** With a population of about ~1.4 billion, only 4,068 participants were surveyed—representing approximately **0.00029% of the population.**
    - **India:** Out of ~1.4 billion people, only 2,802 participants were included, accounting for a mere **0.0002% of the population**.
    - **Pakistan:** Surveyed only 1,078 participants out of a population of over 230 million, roughly **0.00047%.**
    - **United Kingdom:** With over 67 million people, only 1,004 respondents contributed, **representing 0.0015% of the population**.

- **Russia:** With a population of nearly 146 million, only 1,507 participants were surveyed, which is **about 0.001% of the population**.

2. **Non-Representative Sampling**: The limited number of participants, especially in large, diverse countries, risks producing non-representative results by under-sampling important demographic or geographic groups.
3. **Potential for Elite Bias**: Responses from business and social elites reflects national biases, particularly in countries where political influences shape the public narrative on corruption.
4. **Inconsistent Definitions of Corruption**: Varying individual interpretations of "corruption" undermine the GCB's comparability across countries.
5. **Lack of Transparency on Sampling Methodology**: Transparency International's limited disclosure about how respondents are chosen raises questions about the GCB's consistency and reliability across countries.

Global Hunger Index

The GHI is an annual report that measures and tracks hunger at global, regional, and national levels, providing insights into the severity of hunger and undernutrition across various countries. The GHI is a tool to highlight areas requiring urgent attention, but it has faced scrutiny for its methodology, scoring, and for how it portrays certain countries' situations.



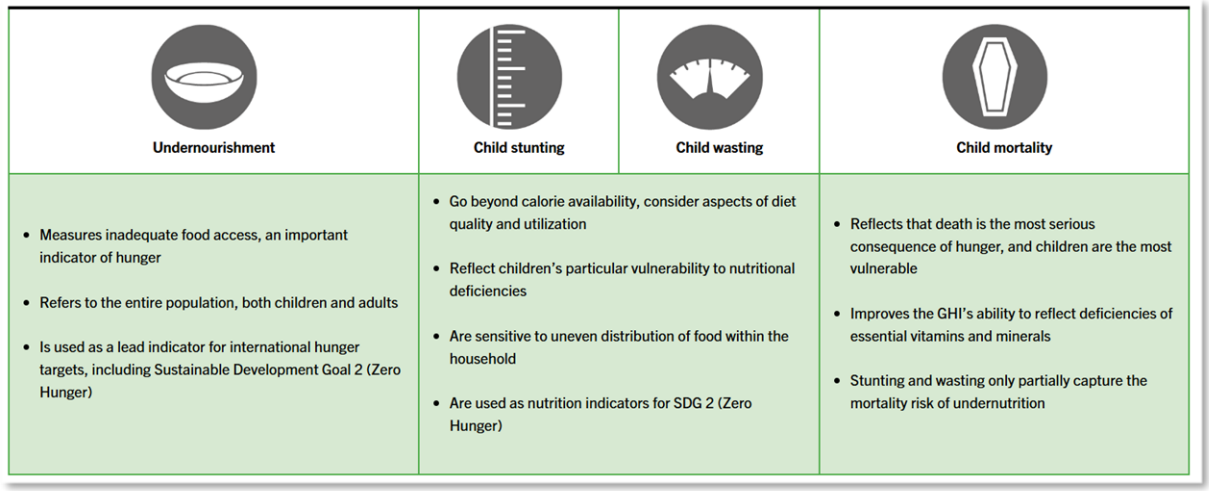


Figure 18 The indicators for GHI
(Source: https://www.globalhungerindex.org/)

The Global Hunger Index calculates hunger levels by considering four main indicators:

Undernourishment: The share of the population whose caloric intake is insufficient;

Child Stunting: The share of children under the age of five who have low height for their age, reflecting chronic undernutrition;

Child Wasting: The share of children under the age of five who have low weight for their height, reflecting acute undernutrition; and

Child Mortality: The share of children who die before their fifth birthday, reflecting in part the fatal mix of inadequate nutrition and unhealthy environments.

These indicators are combined to give each country a score between 0 and 100, where higher scores indicate higher levels of hunger. The scores are then categorized as "low," "moderate," "serious," "alarming," or "extremely alarming.

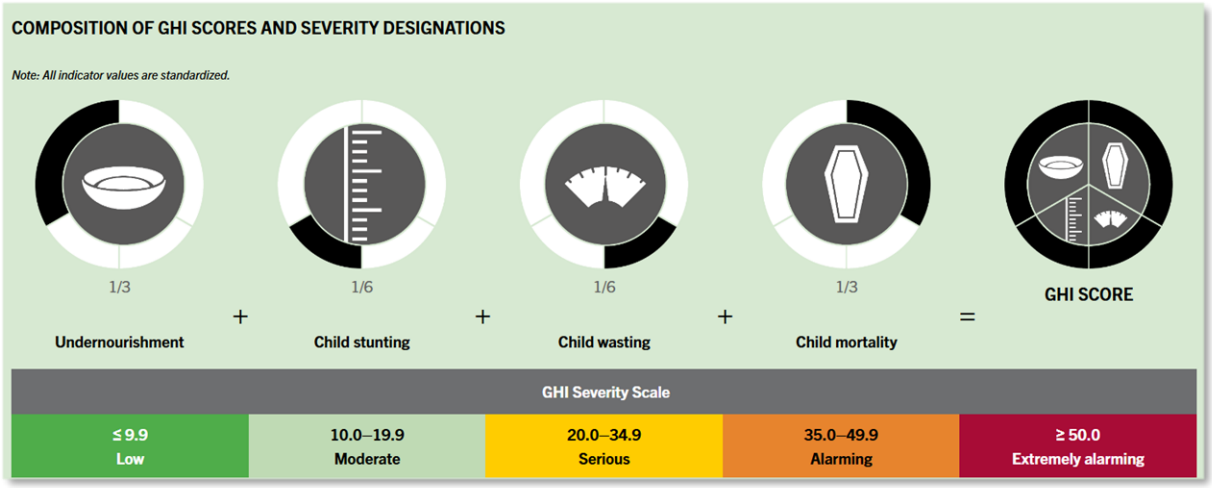


Figure 19 Composition of GHI Scores and Severity Designations
(Source: https://www.globalhungerindex.org/)

Methodological Flaws

1. **Simplified Weighting**: The four indicators **(undernourishment, child stunting, child wasting, and child mortality)** are each weighted differently, but this approach oversimplifies the complexity of hunger. Child mortality and undernourishment each contribute one-third, while child stunting and wasting each make up only one-sixth, potentially skewing results by emphasizing certain factors over others.

2. **Standardization Flaws**: Standardized scores are calculated based on thresholds set slightly above historical maximum values for each indicator, but this approach results in unrealistic comparisons. **For example, the undernourishment threshold is set at 80%, even though the highest observed value since 1988 is 76.5%.** This approach distorts scores for countries with high levels of hunger, underestimating their situation.

3. **Dependency on Outdated Data**: GHI scores are based on the most recent data from sources like the FAO, WHO, and UNICEF. However, some data are as old as five years, which does not reflect current conditions, particularly in countries experiencing rapid changes in food security or conflict situations.

4. **Incomplete Data in Conflict Zones**: For countries with missing data due to conflict or political unrest, the GHI assigns provisional severity designations based on historical data or regional trends. This method often underrepresents the severity in conflict zones, where hunger is more intense than estimated.

5. **Inconsistent Country Comparisons**: Due to reliance on available historical data and regional trends, some countries are not directly comparable, leading to skewed rankings. Countries like South Sudan, where data is lacking, might be categorized conservatively, potentially underestimating their hunger crisis. **Investigative Journalism Reportika suggests adopting region-based standards** to better contextualize hunger evaluations. This approach would rationalize findings by accounting for local socio-economic factors, enhancing the accuracy of inter-country comparisons within similar developmental and geographic contexts.

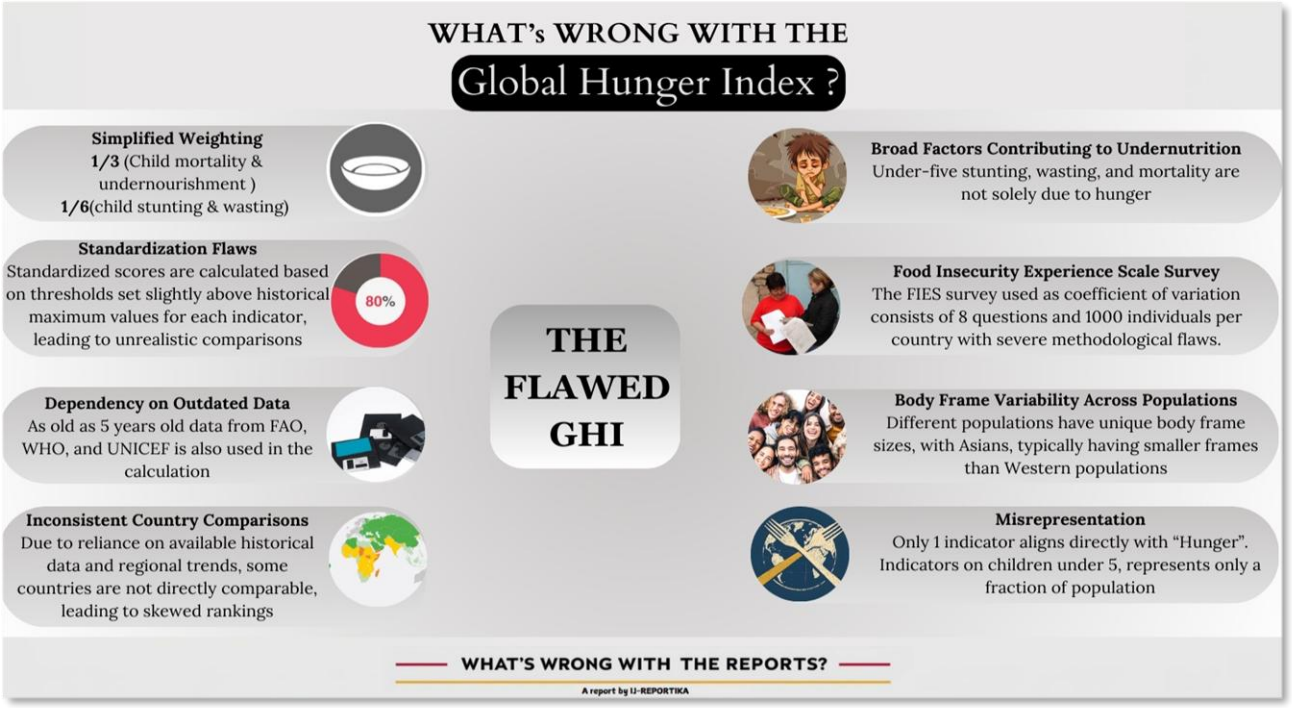


Figure 20 What's wrong with the Global Hunger Index

The GHI's methodology and choice of indicators create a **skewed representation of hunger**, often conflating it with broader health and nutrition issues. Following are some of the **structural issues** in the parameters used by GHI.

1. **Misrepresentation of Hunger**: According to the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), "hunger" is defined as an uncomfortable or painful sensation due to insufficient dietary energy consumption. **Only one of the GHI indicators, the "proportion of undernourished population," aligns directly with this definition**. The other three indicators—wasting, stunting, and child mortality—reflect broader issues of health and nutrition rather than hunger specifically. Labelling this index as a "Hunger Index" is misleading, as it fails to capture the FAO's definition of hunger comprehensively and specifically.

2. **Broad Factors Contributing to Undernutrition**: While hunger can lead to undernutrition, studies indicate **that under-five stunting, wasting, and mortality are not solely due to hunger**. For instance, international research highlights that factors such as **poor sanitation, inadequate healthcare, and infectious diseases** play significant roles in **child mortality and malnutrition**. The prevalence of stunting and wasting does not necessarily correlate with hunger alone, as other biological and environmental influences contribute to these conditions.

   Research published in journals such as the *American Journal of Human Biology* and the *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition* suggests that stunting is not always a direct indicator of hunger or malnutrition. Stunting has been observed in affluent populations, indicating that genetic and environmental factors, rather than hunger alone, can influence child height.

3. **Narrow Focus on Children Under Five**: Three out of the four GHI indicators—stunting, wasting, and under-five mortality—**focus exclusively on children under five, representing only a fraction of the overall population**. This narrow demographic focus is problematic as it cannot adequately represent the hunger levels of the entire population. By heavily weighting these indicators (**two-thirds of the total index weight**), the GHI creates a distorted picture of **hunger**, disproportionately reflecting issues faced by **young children** and overstating the hunger problem.

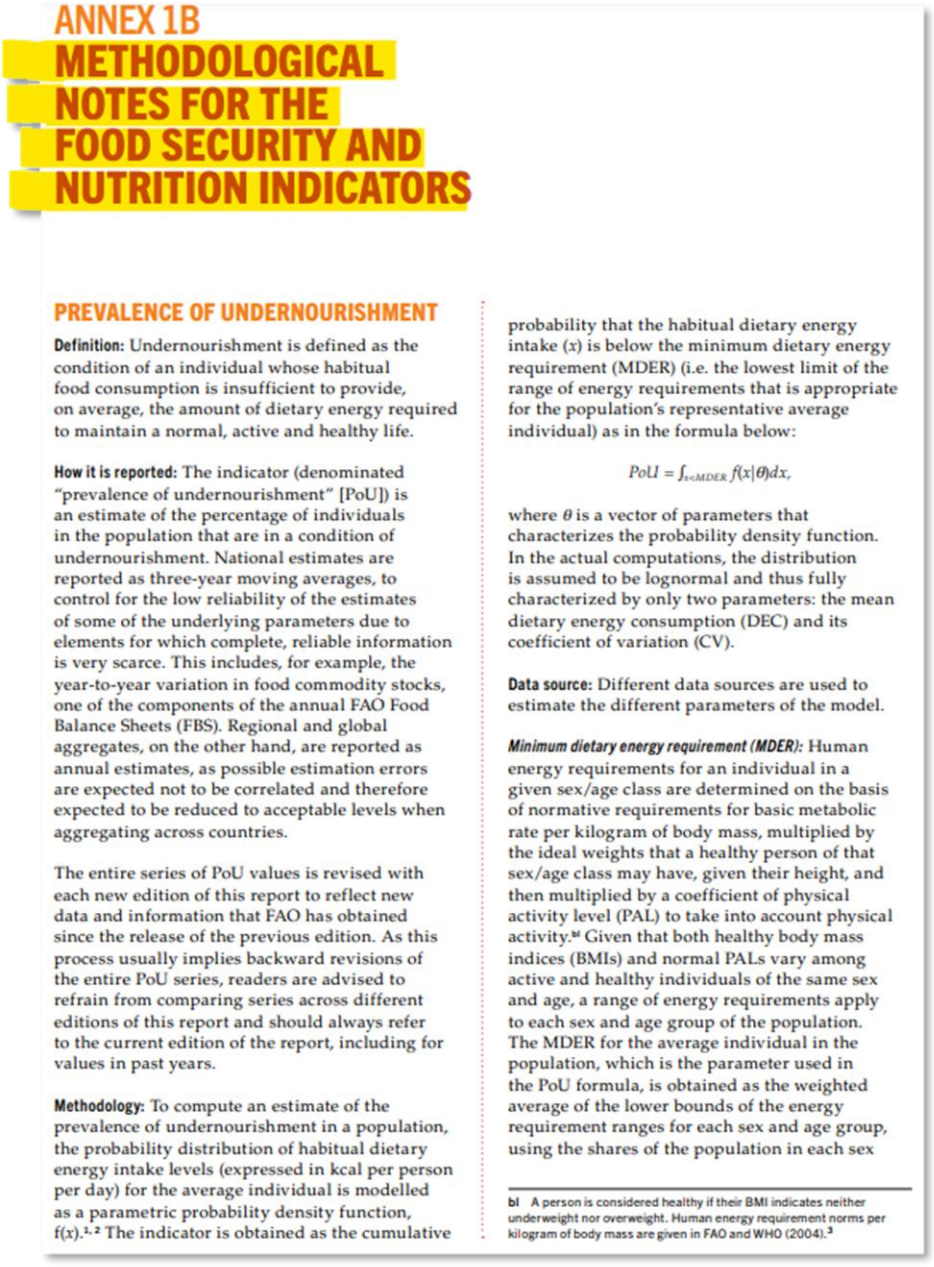
4. **Double-Counting of Undernourished Population**: The GHI includes the **undernourished population indicator, which already accounts for undernourished children.** This creates an upward bias in the index by effectively double-counting the population of undernourished children. The issue of multicollinearity among the selected indicators—due to their correlation with each other—leads to statistically biased results, further impacting the index's accuracy.

5. **Body Frame Variability Across Populations**: Different populations have **unique body frame sizes, with Asians, typically having smaller frames than Western populations**. Consequently, the standard indicators for obesity and undernutrition may not accurately apply to all populations. For instance, international studies argue that overweight and obesity classifications for Asians should have lower cut-offs. This variability implies that standard GHI indicators does not effectively capture the nutritional status in countries with smaller average body frames.

6. **High Minimum Dietary Energy Requirement (MDER) Benchmark**: The GHI uses a **Minimum Dietary Energy Requirement (MDER) of 1800 kcal/day** to assess undernutrition. However, this threshold is too high in certain cultural contexts. For example, populations with **lower Basal Metabolic Rates (BMR) and Physical Activity Levels (PAL)** may require fewer calories to maintain a healthy, active life. In such cases, applying a high MDER inflates the estimates of undernourished individuals, thus overestimating hunger levels.

Data Limitations

Our investigation into the data sources of the Global Hunger Index (GHI) underscores several methodological limitations in calculating the **"Prevalence of Undernourishment" (PoU),** a key indicator within the **GHI**. PoU estimates depend on various components, including Dietary Energy Consumption (DEC), Minimum Dietary Energy Requirement (MDER), and the coefficient of variation (CV), each with its own set of data sources and assumptions. DEC values are primarily derived from the **FAO's Food Balance Sheets (FBS)** and are supplemented by household surveys in some cases. However, due to the limited frequency of these surveys, DEC is estimated through dietary energy supply (DES) data. Waste factors are then applied to calculate DEC values, but the use of outdated or extrapolated waste data introduces potential inaccuracies in determining energy availability at the national level.



ANNEX 1B

METHODOLOGICAL NOTES FOR THE FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION INDICATORS

PREVALENCE OF UNDERNOURISHMENT

Definition: Undernourishment is defined as the condition of an individual whose habitual food consumption is insufficient to provide, on average, the amount of dietary energy required to maintain a normal, active and healthy life.

How it is reported: The indicator (denominated "prevalence of undernourishment" [PoU]) is an estimate of the percentage of individuals in the population that are in a condition of undernourishment. National estimates are reported as three-year moving averages, to control for the low reliability of the estimates of some of the underlying parameters due to elements for which complete, reliable information is very scarce. This includes, for example, the year-to-year variation in food commodity stocks, one of the components of the annual FAO Food Balance Sheets (FBS). Regional and global aggregates, on the other hand, are reported as annual estimates, as possible estimation errors are expected not to be correlated and therefore expected to be reduced to acceptable levels when aggregating across countries.

The entire series of PoU values is revised with each new edition of this report to reflect new data and information that FAO has obtained since the release of the previous edition. As this process usually implies backward revisions of the entire PoU series, readers are advised to refrain from comparing series across different editions of this report and should always refer to the current edition of the report, including for values in past years.

Methodology: To compute an estimate of the prevalence of undernourishment in a population, the probability distribution of habitual dietary energy intake levels (expressed in kcal per person per day) for the average individual is modelled as a parametric probability density function, $f(x)$.[1,2] The indicator is obtained as the cumulative probability that the habitual dietary energy intake (x) is below the minimum dietary energy requirement (MDER) (i.e. the lowest limit of the range of energy requirements that is appropriate for the population's representative average individual) as in the formula below:

$$PoU = \int_{x<MDER} f(x|\theta)dx,$$

where θ is a vector of parameters that characterizes the probability density function. In the actual computations, the distribution is assumed to be lognormal and thus fully characterized by only two parameters: the mean dietary energy consumption (DEC) and its coefficient of variation (CV).

Data source: Different data sources are used to estimate the different parameters of the model.

Minimum dietary energy requirement (MDER): Human energy requirements for an individual in a given sex/age class are determined on the basis of normative requirements for basic metabolic rate per kilogram of body mass, multiplied by the ideal weights that a healthy person of that sex/age class may have, given their height, and then multiplied by a coefficient of physical activity level (PAL) to take into account physical activity.[bl] Given that both healthy body mass indices (BMIs) and normal PALs vary among active and healthy individuals of the same sex and age, a range of energy requirements apply to each sex and age group of the population. The MDER for the average individual in the population, which is the parameter used in the PoU formula, is obtained as the weighted average of the lower bounds of the energy requirement ranges for each sex and age group, using the shares of the population in each sex

bl A person is considered healthy if their BMI indicates neither underweight nor overweight. Human energy requirement norms per kilogram of body mass are given in FAO and WHO (2004).[3]

Figure 21 Prevalence of Undernourishment (PoU) on the Methodological Notes (Source: The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2024)

Indicator	Data sources	Reference years for indicator data			
		2000 GHI scores (123 countries)	2008 GHI scores (126 countries)	2016 GHI scores (127 countries)	2024 GHI scores (127 countries)
Prevalence of undernourishment	FAO 2024a	2000–2002[a]	2007–2009[a]	2015–2017[a]	2021–2023[a]
Child stunting and wasting	WHO 2024; UNICEF et al. 2023; UNICEF 2024, 2013, and 2009; MEASURE DHS 2024	1998–2002[b]	2006–2010[c]	2014–2018[d]	2019–2023[e]
Child mortality	UN IGME 2024a	2000	2008	2016	2022

Figure 22 Data Sources for PoU (Source: https://www.globalhungerindex.org/)

(table of contents) (home)	I_2.3 - Prevalence of Undernourishment, 3-year averages
Data set identifier	I_2.3
Title	Prevalence of undernourishment, 3-year averages
Unit of measure	%
Source data	FAOSTAT and ESS calculations.
Original source data	
Statistical concepts and definitions	The prevalence of undernourishment expresses the probability that a randomly selected individual from the population consumes an amount of calories that is insufficient to cover her/his energy requirement for an active and healthy life. The indicator is computed by comparing a probability distribution of habitual daily dietary energy consumption with a threshold level called the minimum dietary energy Requirement. Both are based on the notion of an average individual in the reference population.
Relevance	This is the traditional FAO hunger indicator, adopted as official Millennium Development Goal indicator for Goal 1, Target 1.9.
Time coverage	The indicator is calculated in three year averages, from 2000-02 to 2021-23, to reduce the impact of possible errors in estimated DES, due to the difficulties in properly accounting of stock variations in major food.
Sector coverage	All the countries and regions as reported by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) regional classification.
Data compilation	The aggregates are computed using a weighted population average.
Comment	More details on the methodology for computing the prevalence of undernourishment are in Annex 1B of the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report (http://www.fao.org/publications/sofi/en/).
Contact Person	Food-Security-Statistics@FAO.org

Figure 23 FAO - Food Security Indicators for PoU (Source: https://openknowledge.fao.org/)

The reliance on MDER introduces further challenges. MDER estimates use demographic information on age, sex, median height, and activity level from sources like the UN World Population Prospects and Demographic Health Surveys (DHS), though these sources are updated infrequently. This creates potential discrepancies when population structures shift due to **demographic or health changes** that aren't captured in **real-time data**. Additionally, the coefficient of variation (CV) attempts to account for income-based differences in energy consumption across households and individual variation within households. CV calculations often rely on older data, such as **past surveys or FIES data**, which are adjusted based on severe food insecurity trends. This adjustment methodology assumes food insecurity changes correlate directly with **PoU shifts**, though this assumption is not fully account for complex factors influencing hunger.

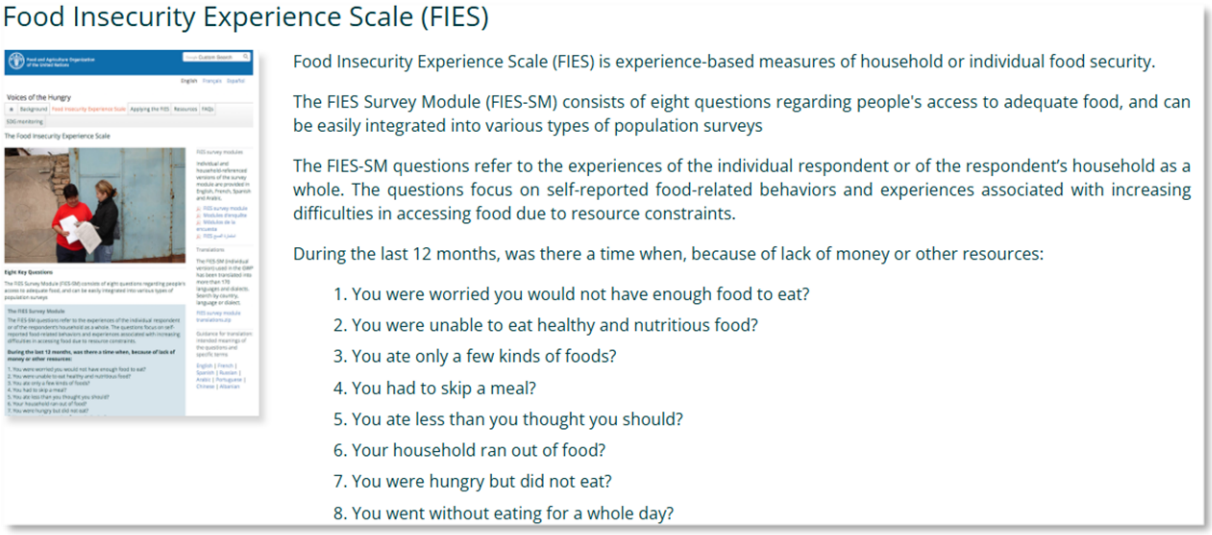


Figure 24 FIES Questionable Questionnaire
(Source: https://www.fao.org/policy-support/tools-and-publications/resources-details/en/c/1236494/)

The **Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES)** further compounds these limitations. The FIES survey consists of eight questions regarding food access and is conducted among small, random samples, often around **1,000 individuals per country** (or slightly higher for larger countries like **China and India**), with a mix of face-to-face and telephone methods. This **small sample size, coupled with limited access to certain demographics—particularly in regions relying on telephone interviews**—raises questions about the representativeness of FIES data.

When national data is missing or inconsistent, estimates are imputed based on regional trends or historical data, creating an additional layer of assumptions that does not accurately reflect present conditions. Such methodological compromises, when layered onto other **PoU indicators**, weaken the reliability of the GHI in accurately capturing and ranking global hunger trends.

Overall, the cumulative effects of these data limitations and assumptions call into question the accuracy and timeliness of PoU estimates, and, by extension, the GHI rankings. The use of three-year averages, outdated demographic data, and projected variations often overlook the real-time dynamics of food insecurity in countries experiencing rapid change.

Indicator	Data sources	Reference years for indicator data			
		2000 GHI scores (123 countries)	2008 GHI scores (126 countries)	2016 GHI scores (127 countries)	2024 GHI scores (127 countries)
Prevalence of undernourishment	FAO 2024a	2000–2002[a]	2007–2009[a]	2015–2017[a]	2021–2023[a]
Child stunting and wasting	WHO 2024; UNICEF et al. 2023; UNICEF 2024, 2013, and 2009; MEASURE DHS 2024	1998–2002[b]	2006–2010[c]	2014–2018[d]	2019–2023[e]
Child mortality	UN IGME 2024a	2000	2008	2016	2022

Figure 25 Data Sources for Child Mortality (Source: https://www.globalhungerindex.org/)

The Child Mortality Indicator, sourced from the UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UN IGME), faces substantial accuracy issues due to its reliance on various data sources, primarily from civil registration systems and large-scale surveys like the **UNICEF**-supported **Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and USAID's Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS).** In countries with weak civil registration systems, mortality estimates often depend on household surveys that fail to comprehensively reflect reality, as they rely on self-reported data concerning child survival from parents.

Data quality issues are pervasive; survey methodologies lack consistency, and data gaps are frequently filled using modeled estimates rather than direct records, which distorts precision. The **UN IGME's** reliance on **over 20,400 country-year data points adjusted across time series** introduces significant biases due to omitted non-sampling errors. These continuous updates and adjustments to the data set directly impact the trend reliability, undermining the consistency of mortality estimates over time.

TABLE 1.1 **GLOBAL HUNGER INDEX SCORES BY 2024 GHI RANK**

Note: As always, rankings and index scores from this table cannot be accurately compared to rankings and index scores from previous reports (see Appendix A).

Rank[1]	Country	2000	2008	2016	2024	Rank[1]	Country	2000	2008	2016	2024
2024 GHI scores less than 5, collectively ranked 1-22.[2]	Belarus	< 5	< 5	< 5	< 5	71	Venezuela (Boliv. Rep. of)	14.3	8.7	14.4	15.1
	Bosnia & Herzegovina	9.4	6.4	< 5	< 5	72	Senegal	34.3	22.1	16.1	15.3
	Chile	< 5	< 5	< 5	< 5	73	Honduras	21.5	18.7	13.9	15.6
	China	13.4	7.2	< 5	< 5	74	Eswatini	24.8	24.9	19.6	15.7
	Costa Rica	6.6	< 5	< 5	< 5	74	Myanmar	40.2	29.9	17.1	15.7
	Croatia	5.5	< 5	< 5	< 5	76	Bolivia (Plurinat. State of)	27.0	21.2	14.3	16.8
	Estonia	< 5	< 5	< 5	< 5	77	Indonesia	25.7	28.2	18.3	16.9
	Georgia	12.0	6.6	5.4	< 5	78	Gabon	21.0	19.2	16.7	17.4
	Hungary	< 5	< 5	< 5	< 5	79	Cameroon	36.0	29.0	20.8	18.3
	Kuwait	< 5	< 5	< 5	< 5	80	Togo	38.2	28.2	24.4	18.6
	Latvia	< 5	< 5	< 5	< 5	81	Comoros	38.1	28.9	21.3	18.8
	Lithuania	< 5	< 5	< 5	< 5	81	Guatemala	28.5	24.0	20.1	18.8
	Montenegro	—	5.7	< 5	< 5	83	Libya	14.2	12.9	19.3	19.2
	North Macedonia	7.6	5.3	5.1	< 5	84	Bangladesh	33.8	30.6	24.7	19.4
	Romania	7.9	5.7	5.0	< 5	84	Solomon Islands	20.4	18.2	21.7	19.4
	Russian Federation	10.4	5.9	5.4	< 5	86	Namibia	26.5	27.5	20.6	19.7
	Serbia	—	5.9	< 5	< 5	87	Lao PDR	44.2	30.3	21.2	19.8
	Slovakia	6.0	< 5	< 5	< 5	88	Gambia	29.0	23.1	17.8	19.9
	Türkiye	11.4	6.5	5.4	< 5	89	Côte d'Ivoire	33.1	35.2	21.5	20.6
	United Arab Emirates	5.1	6.3	< 5	< 5	90	Botswana	27.5	26.3	21.4	20.7
	Uruguay	7.6	5.3	< 5	< 5	91	Mauritania	30.4	18.8	22.3	21.1
	Uzbekistan	24.3	13.2	5.9	< 5	92	Djibouti	44.2	33.9	24.0	21.2
23	Armenia	19.2	11.7	6.4	5.1	93	Malawi	43.0	28.1	22.8	21.9
23	Bulgaria	8.9	7.8	7.5	5.1	94	Tanzania (United Rep. of)	40.5	29.7	25.0	22.7
25	Kazakhstan	11.2	11.1	5.6	5.3	95	Guinea	40.1	31.5	28.2	23.2
26	Moldova (Rep. of)	17.6	14.7	6.1	5.6	96	Congo (Republic of)	34.9	32.2	26.8	24.0
26	Mongolia	29.7	16.7	7.5	5.6	96	Mali	41.9	31.8	24.7	24.0
28	Colombia	10.8	10.1	7.2	5.7	98	Burkina Faso	44.9	33.7	25.6	24.6
29	Tunisia	10.1	7.4	6.1	5.9	99	Benin	33.7	26.9	23.6	24.7
30	Paraguay	11.5	7.5	5.0	6.0	100	Kenya	36.3	29.0	24.0	25.0
31	Mexico	10.1	9.7	6.6	6.1	101	Rwanda	49.6	36.4	28.6	25.2
32	Azerbaijan	25.0	15.0	8.1	6.2	102	Ethiopia	53.4	37.8	26.2	26.2
33	Argentina	6.6	5.4	5.2	6.6	103	Angola	63.8	42.7	25.9	26.6
33	Brazil	11.7	6.7	5.5	6.6	104	Timor-Leste	—	44.8	29.4	27.0
35	Algeria	14.5	11.0	8.5	6.7	105	India	38.4	35.2	29.3	27.3
36	Kyrgyzstan	17.2	12.9	8.6	6.8	105	Uganda	36.1	28.5	30.3	27.3
37	Saudi Arabia	12.7	10.8	9.4	6.9	107	Mozambique	48.3	35.6	38.5	27.5
38	Iran (Islamic Republic of)	13.7	9.1	8.0	7.4	108	Zimbabwe	35.3	29.9	28.5	27.6

38	Peru	21.1	13.7	7.6	7.4	109	Pakistan	36.6	31.4	24.6	27.9
40	Jamaica	8.4	8.5	9.0	7.7	110	Nigeria	39.5	30.7	30.6	28.8
41	Dominican Republic	15.0	13.8	8.3	7.8	110	Papua New Guinea	33.7	32.8	30.0	28.8
42	Albania	16.0	15.5	6.2	7.9	110	Sudan	—	—	28.3	28.8
43	El Salvador	14.5	11.7	9.4	8.0	113	Syrian Arab Republic	13.9	16.9	25.9	30.3
43	Panama	18.7	12.7	8.1	8.0	114	Guinea-Bissau	37.6	29.6	30.2	30.5
45	Lebanon	10.2	9.1	7.5	8.1	115	Zambia	53.1	41.3	32.6	30.7
46	Ukraine	13.0	6.9	7.2	8.6	116	Afghanistan	49.6	35.7	27.1	30.8
47	Guyana	17.0	14.9	10.7	9.1	117	Sierra Leone	57.2	45.2	32.8	31.2
48	Cabo Verde	14.7	11.7	11.3	9.2	118	Korea (DPR)	43.7	30.5	26.2	31.4
48	Morocco	15.5	11.7	8.7	9.2	119	Central African Republic	48.0	43.5	32.6	31.5
50	Turkmenistan	20.2	14.4	10.5	9.5	120	Liberia	48.0	36.6	32.3	31.9
51	Oman	15.2	11.5	11.9	9.9	121	Niger	53.1	39.6	32.8	34.1
52	Thailand	18.9	12.2	9.5	10.1	122	Haiti	39.8	39.8	30.0	34.3
53	Fiji	9.6	8.8	10.6	10.2	123	Dem. Rep. of the Congo	47.2	41.2	36.2	34.9
54	Trinidad & Tobago	10.8	10.6	8.6	10.8	*	Lesotho	—	—	—	20–34.9*
55	Suriname	14.8	10.6	11.0	10.9	124	Madagascar	42.3	36.6	33.2	36.3
56	Sri Lanka	21.7	17.6	15.0	11.3	125	Chad	50.5	44.8	38.8	36.4
56	Viet Nam	26.1	20.1	14.4	11.3	126	Yemen	41.6	36.8	39.6	41.2
58	Ecuador	19.3	17.8	11.8	11.6	127	Somalia	63.3	59.0	49.8	44.1
59	Jordan	10.5	7.5	7.8	12.0	*	Burundi and South Sudan	—	—	—	35–49.9*
60	South Africa	18.0	16.9	14.0	12.5						
61	Malaysia	15.4	13.7	13.4	12.7						
62	Mauritius	15.4	13.9	13.4	12.8						
63	Egypt	16.1	16.8	15.4	13.2						
64	Nicaragua	21.7	17.1	14.0	13.6						
65	Tajikistan	39.9	28.1	16.0	13.7						
66	Ghana	28.5	22.2	16.7	13.9						
67	Philippines	24.9	18.9	17.9	14.4						
68	Cambodia	41.3	24.9	18.9	14.7						
68	Nepal	37.1	29.2	21.2	14.7						
70	Iraq	22.9	19.8	14.3	14.9						

= low = moderate = serious = alarming = extremely alarming

Note: For the 2024 GHI report, data were assessed for 136 countries. Out of these, there were sufficient data to calculate 2024 GHI scores for and rank 127 countries (by way of comparison, 125 countries were ranked in the 2023 report).

[1] Ranked according to 2024 GHI scores. Countries that have identical 2024 scores are given the same ranking (for example, Armenia and Bulgaria are both ranked 23rd).

[2] The 22 countries with 2024 GHI scores of less than 5 are not assigned individual ranks, but rather are collectively ranked 1–22. Differences between their scores are minimal.

— = Data are not available or not presented. Some countries did not exist in their present borders in the given year or reference period.

* For 9 countries, individual scores could not be calculated and ranks could not be determined owing to lack of data. Where possible, these countries were provisionally designated by severity: 1 as *serious* and 2 as *alarming*. For 6 countries, provisional designations could not be established (see Table A.3 in Appendix A).

Figure 26 Global Hunger Index 2024 Ranking

Unexpected or Flawed discrepancies

- **Vietnam (Rank: 56) vs. Tanzania (Rank: 94):** Vietnam, ranked 56th, has achieved remarkable success in reducing hunger through agricultural innovation and export-driven food production. Tanzania, at 94th, continues to grapple with high rates of food insecurity and dependence on subsistence farming. **The ranking disparity does not reflect the stark differences in hunger mitigation strategies and outcomes between the two nations.**

- **India (Rank: 105) vs. Uzbekistan (Rank: 65):** India, ranked 105th, faces significant challenges in malnutrition and hunger, but it also has **extensive food distribution programs like the Public Distribution System (PDS)** and large-scale agricultural production. Uzbekistan, ranked significantly higher at 65, has far fewer resources and **ongoing concerns about equitable food access** and **distribution due to governance issues**. The rankings fail to account for India's strides in food security infrastructure compared to Uzbekistan's limited reach.

- **Bangladesh (Rank: 84) vs. Cameroon (Rank: 79):** Bangladesh, ranked **84th**, has made significant strides in combating hunger through microfinance initiatives and women-led agriculture. Cameroon, at **79th,** struggles with **internal conflicts that disrupt food production and distribution**. The rankings fail to adequately reflect Bangladesh's relative success prior to 2024 in stabilizing food security compared to Cameroon's ongoing challenges. (Note: It doesn't take into account the recent internal challenges in Bangladesh and the impact on the food security)

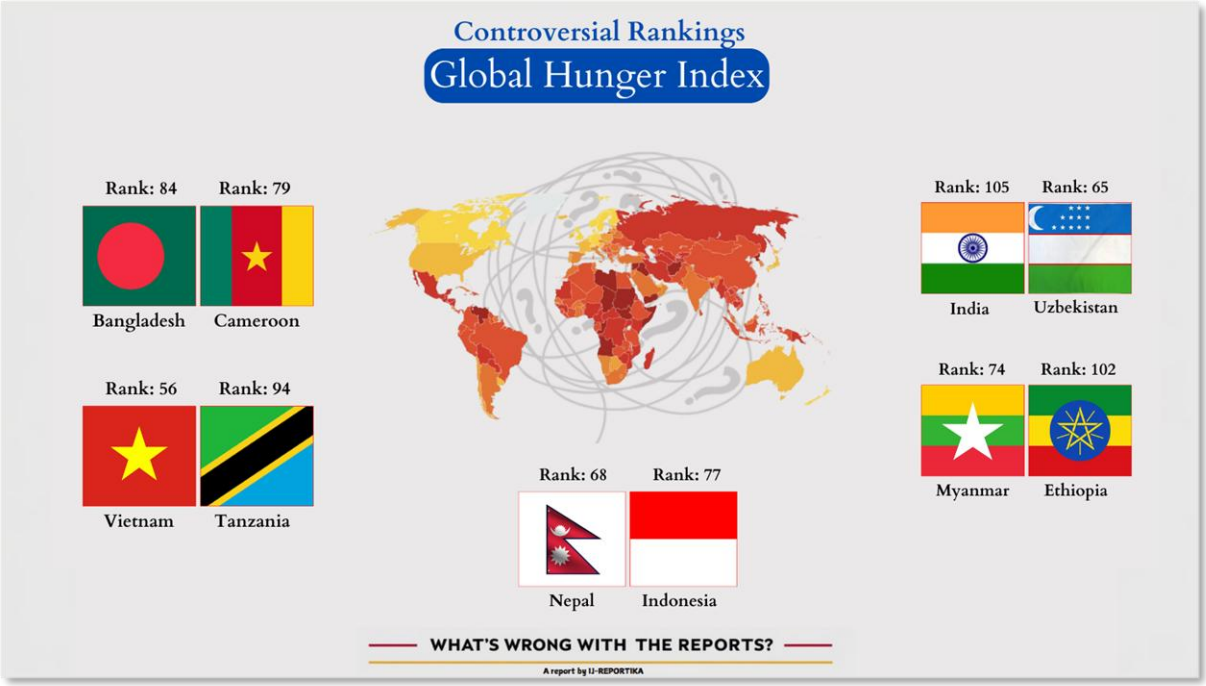


Figure 27 Unexpected or Flawed discrepancies in the Global Hunger Index 2024

- **Myanmar (Rank: 74) vs. Ethiopia (Rank: 102):** Myanmar, ranked 74th, is **grappling with political instability that directly impacts food availability**, yet it is ranked **significantly higher than Ethiopia**, at **102nd**. Ethiopia's government has implemented large-scale hunger relief programs in response to droughts and conflict. The rankings fail to capture **the immediate impact of Myanmar's political turmoil** on food security compared to Ethiopia's concerted mitigation efforts.

- **Nepal (Rank: 68) vs. Indonesia (Rank: 77):** Nepal has made commendable progress in reducing hunger despite its limited resources, challenging terrain, and reliance on subsistence agriculture. However, in **2022, 20.3% of Nepal's population lived below the national poverty line**, highlighting the nation's ongoing struggles with poverty. In contrast, Indonesia, ranked lower, is more economically developed country.

  By March 2023, Indonesia's poverty rate was 9.36%, having declined from 10.2% in September 2020. Despite its relatively lower poverty rate and greater economic capacity, Indonesia faces challenges **like unequal food distribution**. The rankings however, do not fully reflect Indonesia's potential and resources compared to Nepal's more significant structural challenges.

Controversies

Following are the controversies surrounding the Global Hunger Index (GHI) raised by different countries:

- **China**: China has raised objections over data inconsistencies in the GHI, particularly regarding Dietary Energy Supply and food distribution metrics. The Chinese government argues that incomplete or outdated datasets distort its actual food security achievements and economic progress.

- **Bangladesh**: The Bangladeshi government has raised concerns over data reliability, particularly for indicators like stunting and wasting. It argues that the GHI overlooks significant progress made through programs like the Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) and the National Nutrition Services, leading to an inaccurate portrayal of its hunger situation.

- **India**: The Indian government has criticized the GHI for using flawed methodologies, particularly its reliance on subjective indicators like Prevalence of Undernourishment (PoU) and Child Mortality. It argues that these do not capture the effectiveness of its large-scale food security programs such as the Public Distribution System (PDS) and the National Food Security Act (NFSA).

- **Ethiopia**: Ethiopian authorities argue that the GHI does not consider the country's post-conflict recovery and its impact on food security. They claim the index overlooks how conflict and displacement affect hunger, thereby failing to reflect progress in these areas.

- **Vietnam**: Vietnam has criticized the GHI for ignoring its significant agricultural advancements and economic growth. Officials argue that the index fails to account for improved food availability and access through modern farming techniques and government policies aimed at reducing poverty and hunger.

United States Commission on International Religious Freedom Annual Reports (USCIRF Report):

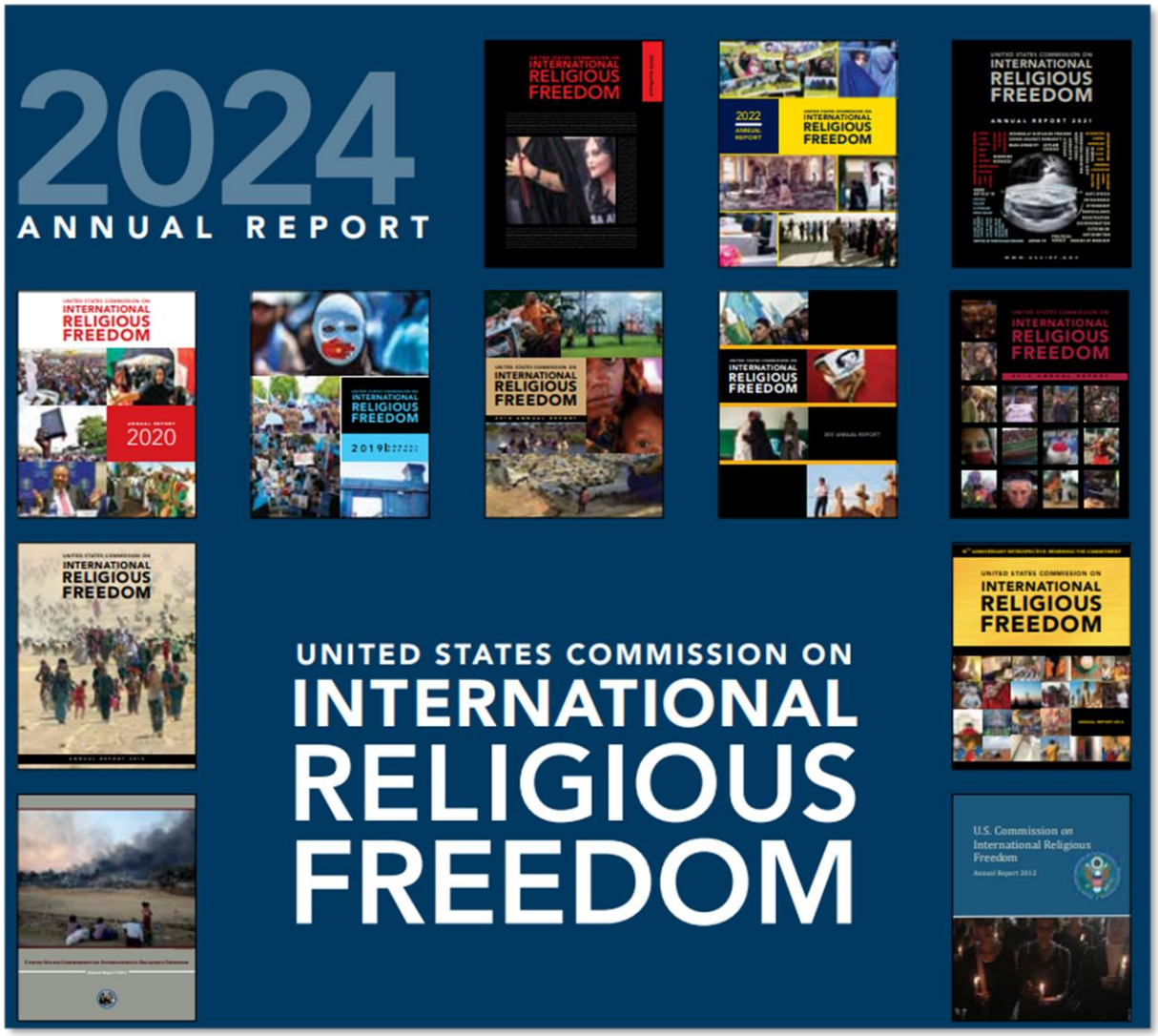


Figure 28 United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2024 Annual Report Cover

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) Annual Reports are a product of the U.S. federal government, established under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) of 1998. USCIRF operates independently to assess global religious freedom violations and recommend policies to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress. Its work complements the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom, which publishes annual reports and designates "Countries of Particular Concern" (CPCs) based on severe violations. Over the years, USCIRF's scope expanded, especially after the 2016 Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act, which allowed for non-state actors' inclusion in its evaluations.

USCIRF's annual reports compile data from international fact-finding missions and hearings, offering insights into global religious freedom trends. However, in this report from **IJ-Reportika**, we have revealed critical methodological flaws and biases within these reports, challenging their objectivity and reliability. Further analysis is provided in the sections below.

Figure 29 2024 Countries of Particular Concern and Special Watch List

2023 STATE DEPARTMENT DESIGNATIONS	
CPC Designations	Burma, China, Cuba, Eritrea, Iran, Nicaragua, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan
SWL Countries	Algeria, Azerbaijan, Central African Republic, Comoros, and Vietnam
EPC Designations	Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the Houthis, ISIS-Sahel (formerly known as Islamic State in Greater Sahara), the Islamic State in West Africa, Jamaat Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin, and the Taliban

Figure 30 2023 Countries of Particular Concern and Special Watch List

Methodological Flaws

1. **Inconsistencies in CPC Designations:** Despite documented religious freedom violations, countries like **Nigeria** were excluded from the CPC list, even though USCIRF has consistently recommended their inclusion. This disparity undermines the credibility of the designation process, suggesting that political considerations outweigh objective legal criteria.

2. **Strategic Influence on Designations:** Many CPC-designated countries, such as **China**, **Iran**, **Russia**, and **India**, have strained or adversarial relations with the U.S from time to time. The geopolitics experts of the Investigative Journalism Reportika suggests that CPC designations are influenced by geopolitical strategy rather than purely religious freedom metrics.

3. **Omission of Countries with Religious Discrimination:** Several nations with significant religious discrimination issues, including **Sri Lanka**, **Bangladesh**, and **Egypt**, have not been consistently included, despite evidence of systematic violations against minorities. Additionally, **cases of racism** and ethnoreligious discrimination, particularly in **Europe** and the **Americas**, are underrepresented or not represented at all.

Figure 31 What's wrong with the USCIRF Annual Reports

4. **Subjectivity in SWL and EPC Recommendations:** Designations such as **Azerbaijan's** inclusion on the Special Watch List (SWL) have raised questions about transparency. The process lacks clear benchmarks, leading to subjectivity in assessments, particularly regarding nonstate actors like **HTS** and **ISWAP** under the Entities of Particular Concern (EPC) framework.

5. **Overreliance on U.S.-Centric Initiatives:** Tools like the **Global Magnitsky Act** and the **Without Just Cause Political Prisoners Initiative** dominate USCIRF's policy recommendations. While these enhance accountability, their integration into religious freedom frameworks prioritizes U.S. foreign policy goals over a balanced global perspective.

6. **Flawed Refugee and Temporary Protected Status (TPS) Policies:** While the U.S. has extended TPS for vulnerable groups (e.g., **Afghans** and **Nicaraguans**), these policies remain reactive, lacking a comprehensive strategy to address the root causes of persecution faced by religious minorities.

7. **Selective Reporting:** USCIRF's selective focus on issues like **antisemitism** and **transnational repression** fails to extend uniformly across all regions. This inconsistent application limits the report's comprehensiveness as a tool for global religious freedom analysis.

8. **Gaps in Addressing Structural Racism:** Structural and systemic forms of **racial and religious discrimination** in developed nations, including some U.S. allies, are often

overlooked. This selective attention limits the report's effectiveness in promoting a truly universal standard for religious freedom.

9. **Reliance on Media Reports Over Judicial Verification:** One of the significant issues with the USCIRF reports is their reliance on media reports and third-party advocacy groups rather than verified court records or official judicial findings.

10. **Lack of Historical Context:** The reports often fail to account for historical contexts, such as India's long-standing communal tensions between **Hindus-Muslims** and a history of mistrust between different religious groups, which shape contemporary incidents. Similarly, **Iraq's** sectarian violence often arises from a history of **Sunni-Shia** conflicts. However, the report attributes current persecution to state actions, ignoring these deep-seated historical rivalries.

11. **Overlooking Minority Provocations:** Instances of religious violence are sometimes reactions to provocations by minority groups. These provocations, however, are rarely highlighted, resulting in a one-sided portrayal. For instance, in Nigeria While the USCIRF highlights violence against **Christians** in northern **Nigeria**, it seldom acknowledges retaliatory attacks by minority groups or provocations by militant factions such as **Boko Haram**. Similarly, in Turkey, the Kurdish minority's conflict with the state, including provocations by militant groups like the PKK, is not fully captured, leading to a one-dimensional assessment of state actions.

12. **Ignore Constitutional Safeguards:** The reports do not adequately consider the strength of constitutional and legal protections for minorities in countries like **India**, where multiple safeguards aim to protect minority rights. Similarly, despite its restrictive laws on religious practices, **Kazakhstan** has constitutional guarantees that protect religious freedom to some extent, which are not highlighted adequately.

13. **Questionable Sources:** The antecedents of reporting channels are not scrutinized. Some organizations reporting religious freedom violations have agendas that promote selective or biased narratives, further complicating an objective assessment. For instance, some reports from advocacy groups on religious violence in **Egypt** lack thorough vetting, occasionally portraying isolated incidents as systemic issues.

Nature of Charges Categories	Number of Individuals Charged	Percentage of Individuals Charged
Abuse (Physical, Sexual, Psychological)	1	<1%
Aid & Abetment	14	1%
Apostasy	4	<1%
Arms Trafficking & Illicit Use of Weapons	19	1%
Assault & Battery	10	<1%
Banned Organization	616	28%
Blasphemy	112	5%
Breach of Privacy & Disclosure	2	<1%
Conversion	29	1%
Crimes Involving Minors	5	<1%
Criminal Premeditation & Conspiracy	25	1%
Cult	312	14%
Defamation	2	<1%
Drug Trafficking & Illicit Drug Use	12	1%
Embezzlement & Fraud	20	1%
Environmental Crimes	1	<1%
Espionage	7	<1%
Extremism	306	14%
Fabricating & Destroying Evidence	3	<1%
Filing a False Police Report	1	<1%
Forgery	5	<1%
Harboring a Fugitive	5	<1%
Hate Speech	110	5%
Illegal Assembly	152	7%
Illegal Business Activity	5	<1%
Illegal Migration & Entry/Exit of Country	7	<1%
Illicit Financing	65	3%
Immorality	12	1%
Incitement to Commit Crime & Violence	54	2%
Insulting Public Officials & Institutions	33	1%
Leaking State Secrets	5	<1%
Mercenarism	2	<1%
Miscellaneous Religious Crimes	15	1%
Murder & Attempted Murder	28	1%
Negligence	1	<1%
Not Applicable	76	3%
Public Disorder	118	5%
Refusing & Absconding Military Service	25	1%
Separatism	31	1%
Spreading Propaganda & False or Misleading Ideas, Information, or Materials	218	10%
Subversion	85	4%
Terrorism	328	15%
Theft & Robbery	4	<1%
Threat	3	<1%
Treason & Sedition	248	11%
Unknown	603	27%
Unlawful Disobedience	51	2%

Figure 32 Nature of Charges Categories in the FoRB Victims List (Source: USCIRF 2024 Annual Report)

14. The **Nature of Charges Categories:** In the FoRB Victims List reveals critical methodological flaws. The dataset is skewed, categorizing charges like ***terrorism*** (15%), ***treason*** (11%), and ***spreading propaganda*** (10%) alongside religiously motivated crimes such as ***blasphemy*** (5%) or ***apostasy*** (<1%). However, many charges listed are inherently criminal and **not directly tied to religious persecution**. This selective approach is problematic because **similar charges against majority religious** groups are not accounted for, which distorts the picture.

    For example, widespread hate speech or illegal assembly by majority communities rarely appears in USCIRF's data. Furthermore, over **27% of cases have "unknown" charges**, and categories like ***public disorder*** **and** ***illegal assembly*** are overly broad, leaving room for misinterpretation. These gaps question the objectivity and reliability of the report's conclusions, emphasizing a need for greater rigor in distinguishing between criminal offenses and genuine cases of religious persecution.

Data Limitations

The **USCIRF Annual Reports** face significant criticism for relying on **unverified media narratives and advocacy group data**, which often lack judicial confirmation. For instance, the **Frank R. Wolf Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) Victims List** documents only around 2,200 cases globally, a dataset too small to represent broader trends. This reliance leads to **skewed conclusions**, as seen in reports on **Indonesia and India**, where violence against minorities is often based on media accounts rather than court-verified facts. Similarly, in **China** and **Saudi Arabia**, where media is state-controlled, advocacy reports are the only source of information, making it difficult to establish the validity of claims. The limited dataset also excludes contextual data like **population growth**, **poverty statistics**, and **educational initiatives for minorities**, further weakening the objectivity and comprehensiveness of USCIRF's conclusions.

The **USCIRF Annual Reports** and specifically the **Frank R. Wolf Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) Victims List** aims to document religious freedom violations, but several **data limitations** compromise its utility and accuracy:

1. **Incomplete Coverage of Victims:** Despite documenting over **2,200 individuals** by the end of 2023, the report admits that:
    - **More than 1,300 remain in custody**,
    - **600 were released**,
    - **300 cases have unknown detention status**, and
    - **9 individuals died in custody.**

    This dataset is incomplete as USCIRF **relies on submissions from external sources** and lacks the capacity to identify all victims independently.

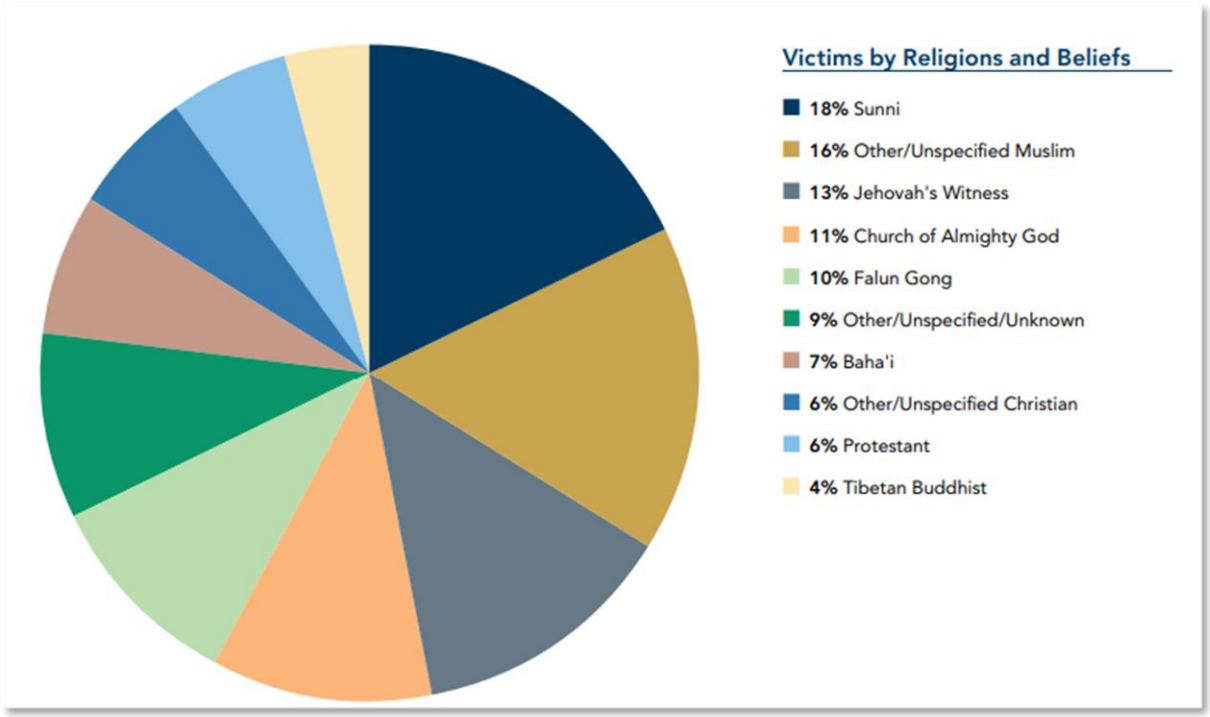


Figure 33 Victims by Religion and Beliefs in the FoRB Victims List (Source: USCIRF 2024 Annual Report)

2. **Small and Misleading Sample Sizes:** For some religious groups, the reported persecution numbers are **too low** to be statistically significant:
    - **Sikhs in Afghanistan**: Once a thriving minority, the population is now negligible, yet only **1 case** is documented.
    - **Hindus, Buddhists** and Christians in countries like **Pakistan** and **Bangladesh** face systemic discrimination, yet only **10 cases** appear in the FoRB database.

These small datasets do not accurately reflect the true scale of violations, making percentage-based interpretations unreliable. Moreover, the country reports often lack substantial evidence to justify a nation's designation as a CPC or placement on the SWL, undermining the credibility of the recommendations.

Religion or Belief	Number of Victims Documented
Adivasi	1
Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light	3
Baha'i	166
Bon	1
Buddhist - Hoa Hao	6
Buddhist - Theravada	3
Buddhist - Tibetan	93
Buddhist - Unspecified/Other	32
Christian - Catholic	57
Christian - Church of Almighty God	236
Christian - Jehovah's Witness	282
Christian - Orthodox	20
Christian - Protestant	139
Christian - Unspecified/Other	64
Duong Van Minh	4
ECKist (Eckankar)	1
Erfan-e Halgheh Practitioner	3
Falun Gong	217
Hindu	10
Humanist	1
Jewish	1
Muslim - Ahmadiyya	20
Muslim - Qur'anist	1
Muslim - Shi'a	39
Muslim - Sufi	63
Muslim - Sunni	406
Muslim - Unspecified/Other	232
Santería	5
Scientologist	1
Shaman	1
Sikh	1
Yarsani	38
Unknown/Unspecified	81
Total	2,228

Figure 34 Number of Victims by Religion and Beliefs in the FoRB Victims List (Source: USCIRF 2024 Annual Report)

3. **Ignored Broader Contexts:** The report often omits critical socio-economic and demographic data:

   - **Population Growth and Stability:** In several countries designated as CPCs or included on the Special Watch List, minority populations have demonstrated resilience or growth. For example, in **Vietnam**, the **Christian** population has expanded to approximately 7**%,** even under restrictive religious policies. Similarly, **Egypt's Coptic Christians** have consistently made up about **10**% of the population, reflecting stability despite claims of discrimination. In **India**, the **Muslim** population has grown from **13.4% in 2001 to 14.2% in 2011**, with ongoing estimates indicating similar upward trends. Likewise, the **Christian** community remains steady at around 2.3%, underscoring no evident demographic suppression despite periodic instances of violence

- **Affirmative Action and Educational Initiatives:** Countries like **Malaysia** implement active affirmative action policies benefiting minorities, particularly through **education** and **poverty alleviation schemes**. In **Malaysia**, the **Bumiputera** affirmative action indirectly supports minorities in access to education. In **Sri Lanka**, despite a history of ethnic tension, **educational programs targeted at Tamil minorities** show efforts to address disparities.

4. **Lack of Transparency in Evaluation:** USCIRF employs broad and ambiguous criteria for assigning countries to either the **Country of Particular Concern (CPC)** or **Special Watch List (SWL)** categories. The distinction between these designations lacks standardization, leading to inconsistencies and misinterpretations. This vague framework creates data limitations and undermines the credibility of the country assignments, as some nations with similar religious freedom violations are placed in different categories without clear justification.

5. **Disparities in Reporting Specific Violations:** The report highlights:
   - **190 cases of torture**, with **China** (77) and **Iran** (20) leading.
   - **144 cases of medical neglect**, concentrated in **Iran** (62), **China** (17), and others.

   However, many countries accused of abuses lack an independent judiciary or media freedom, making **data verification nearly impossible**.

6. **Data Limitations in Special Watch List (SWL) Designations:** The **Special Watch List (SWL)** designations in USCIRF reports reveal clear data inconsistencies and methodological flaws. Countries such as **Algeria**, **Egypt**, **Indonesia**, and **Malaysia** are often accused of systematic religious violations, but the allegations frequently stem from **unverified media reports** and **NGO submissions**, bypassing thorough legal scrutiny. In **Egypt**, for instance, reports of forced conversions and discriminatory laws against **Copts** lack corroboration from independent investigations, skewing the narrative. Similarly, in **Uzbekistan** and **Kazakhstan**, strict religious laws are cited without comprehensive evidence of widespread victimization.
   In **Syria** and **Turkey**, the reliance on second-hand data due to **restricted access and conflict zones** further compromises accuracy. Moreover, these designations disregard critical socio-economic indicators, such as **minority population growth**, **educational access**, and **poverty alleviation programs as previously mentioned in the report**, which contextualize alleged violations. The result is a politically skewed process that undermines the credibility of SWL designations.

Controversies

The **U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)** Annual Report often sparks controversy worldwide due to its assessments and recommendations. Here's a breakdown of notable reactions from specific countries:

- **China:** China frequently condemns USCIRF's allegations of severe religious persecution, including the treatment of Uyghur Muslims and restrictions on Christians and Buddhists. The Chinese government calls these reports interference in its internal affairs, dismissing them as politically motivated.

- **India**: India has consistently rejected USCIRF's claims, criticizing the report for its "biased and inaccurate" portrayal of religious freedom. The Indian government disputes USCIRF's findings on violence against minorities, asserting that the country guarantees religious rights under its constitution.

- **Saudi Arabia:** Despite being a longstanding Country of Particular Concern (CPC), Saudi Arabia often downplays USCIRF's criticisms, particularly regarding restrictions on non-Muslim worship and blasphemy laws. It argues that its legal framework aligns with its Islamic traditions and governance

- **Nigeria:** USCIRF's designation of Nigeria as a CPC due to religious violence and government inaction has triggered mixed reactions. Some civil society groups support the scrutiny, while the Nigerian government argues that the report fails to consider its efforts to combat terrorism and protect religious communities.

- **Azerbaijan**: The Azerbaijan's government denies accusations of systematic repression of religious groups, highlighting its efforts to promote interfaith dialogue.

World Happiness Report

The **World Happiness Report** is a globally influential publication that examines the state of happiness and well-being across nations, offering a unique lens through which to evaluate societal progress. Established in 2012 as part of a **UN initiative** to redefine development metrics, the report highlights how happiness—measured through individual life evaluations and correlated with key quality-of-life factors—can inform public policy. Drawing primarily on data from the **Gallup World Poll**, it provides annual rankings of countries based on their citizens' reported happiness levels. Published in partnership with the **Oxford Wellbeing Research Centre, Gallup, the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network**, and an **expert editorial board**, the report underscores the growing recognition of happiness as a vital component of sustainable development.

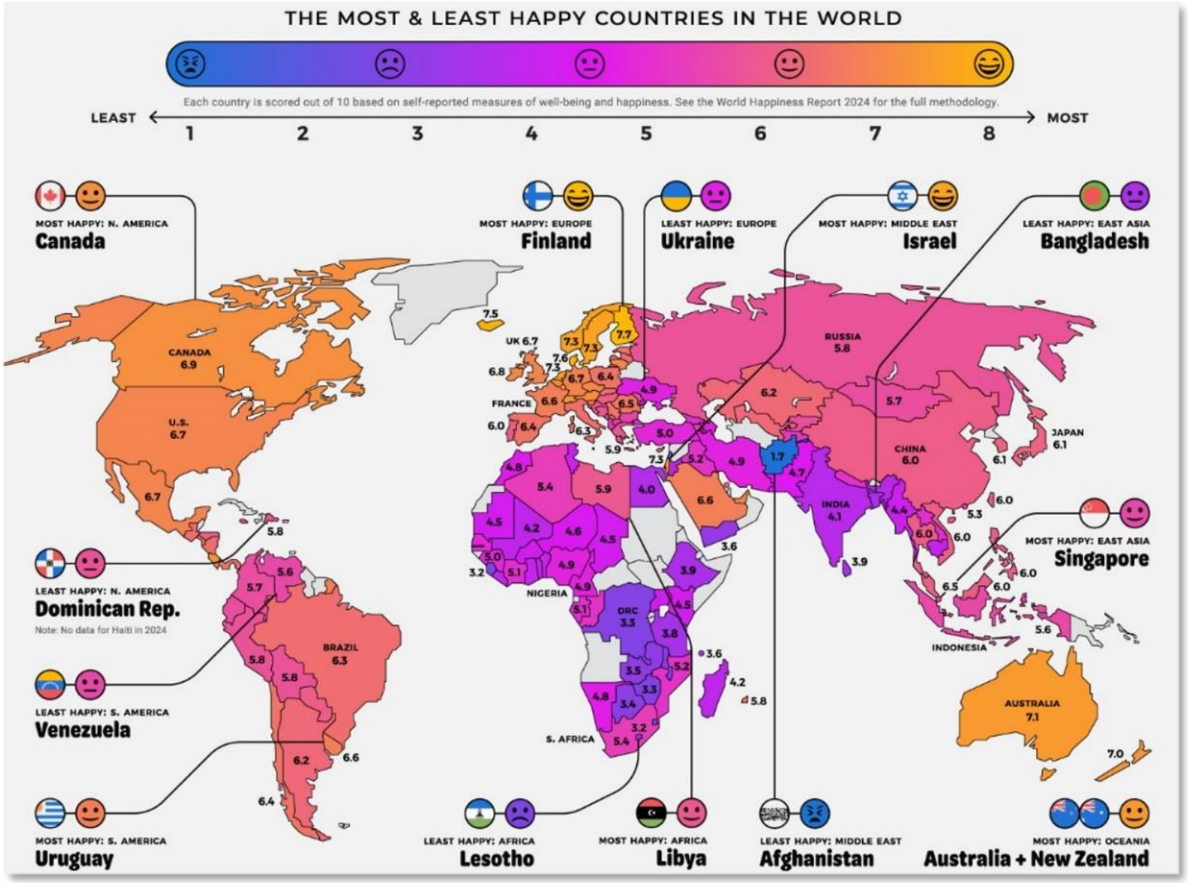


Figure 35 World happiness Report Map
(Source : https://www.visualcapitalist.com/a-map-of-global-happiness-by-country-in-2024/)

S.No	Country	Continent	Score
1	FI Finland	Europe	7.7
2	DK Denmark	Europe	**7.6**
3	IS Iceland	Europe	**7.5**
4	SE Sweden	Europe	**7.3**
5	IL Israel	Middle East	**7.3**
6	NL Netherlands	Europe	**7.3**
7	NO Norway	Europe	**7.3**
8	LU Luxembourg	Europe	**7.1**
9	CH Switzerland	Europe	**7.1**
10	AU Australia	Oceania	**7.1**
11	NZ New Zealand	Oceania	**7.0**
12	CR Costa Rica	Central America	**7.0**
13	KW Kuwait	Middle East	**7.0**
14	AT Austria	Europe	**6.9**
15	CA Canada	North America	**6.9**
16	BE Belgium	Europe	**6.9**
17	IE Ireland	Europe	**6.8**
18	CZ Czechia	Europe	**6.8**
19	LT Lithuania	Europe	**6.8**
20	GB UK	Europe	**6.7**
21	SI Slovenia	Europe	**6.7**
22	AE UAE	Middle East	**6.7**
23	US U.S.	North America	**6.7**
24	DE Germany	Europe	**6.7**
25	MX Mexico	North America	**6.7**
26	UY Uruguay	South America	**6.6**
27	FR France	Europe	**6.6**
28	SA Saudi Arabia	Middle East	**6.6**
29	XK Kosovo	Europe	**6.6**
30	SG Singapore	Asia	**6.5**
31	TW Taiwan	Asia	**6.5**
32	RO Romania	Europe	**6.5**
33	SV El Salvador	Central America	**6.5**
34	EE Estonia	Europe	**6.4**
35	PL Poland	Europe	**6.4**
36	ES Spain	Europe	**6.4**
37	RS Serbia	Europe	**6.4**
38	CL Chile	South America	**6.4**
39	PA Panama	Central America	**6.4**
40	MT Malta	Europe	**6.3**
41	IT Italy	Europe	**6.3**
42	GT Guatemala	Central America	**6.3**
43	NI Nicaragua	Central America	**6.3**
44	BR Brazil	South America	**6.3**
45	SK Slovakia	Europe	**6.3**
46	LV Latvia	Europe	**6.2**
47	UZ Uzbekistan	Asia	**6.2**
48	AR Argentina	South America	**6.2**
49	KZ Kazakhstan	Asia	**6.2**
50	CY Cyprus	Europe	**6.1**
51	JP Japan	Asia	**6.1**
52	KR South Korea	Asia	**6.1**
53	PH Philippines	Asia	**6.0**
54	VN Vietnam	Asia	**6.0**
55	PT Portugal	Europe	**6.0**
56	HU Hungary	Europe	**6.0**
57	PY Paraguay	South America	**6.0**
58	TH Thailand	Asia	**6.0**
59	MY Malaysia	Asia	**6.0**
60	CN China	Asia	**6.0**
61	HN Honduras	Central America	**6.0**
62	BH Bahrain	Middle East	**6.0**
63	HR Croatia	Europe	**5.9**
64	GR Greece	Europe	**5.9**

65	BA Bosnia & Herzegovina	Europe	**5.9**
66	LY Libya	Africa	**5.9**
67	JM Jamaica	North America	**5.8**
68	PE Peru	South America	**5.8**
69	DO Dominican Republic	Central America	**5.8**
70	MU Mauritius	Africa	**5.8**
71	MD Moldova	Europe	**5.8**
72	RU Russia	Europe	**5.8**
73	BO Bolivia	South America	**5.8**
74	EC Ecuador	South America	**5.7**
75	KG Kyrgyzstan	Asia	**5.7**
76	ME Montenegro	Europe	**5.7**
77	MN Mongolia	Asia	**5.7**
78	CO Colombia	South America	**5.7**
79	VE Venezuela	South America	**5.6**
80	ID Indonesia	Asia	**5.6**
81	BG Bulgaria	Europe	**5.5**
82	AM Armenia	Asia	**5.5**
83	ZA South Africa	Africa	**5.4**
84	MK North Macedonia	Europe	**5.4**
85	DZ Algeria	Africa	**5.4**
86	HK Hong Kong	Asia	**5.3**
87	AL Albania	Europe	**5.3**
88	TJ Tajikistan	Asia	**5.3**
89	CG Congo	Africa	**5.2**
90	MZ Mozambique	Africa	**5.2**
91	GE Georgia	Europe	**5.2**
92	IQ Iraq	Middle East	**5.2**
93	NP Nepal	Asia	**5.2**
94	LA Laos	Asia	**5.1**
95	GA Gabon	Africa	**5.1**
96	CI Ivory Coast	Africa	**5.1**
97	GN Guinea	Africa	**5.0**
98	TR Turkey	Asia	**5.0**
99	SN Senegal	Africa	**5.0**
100	IR Iran	Middle East	**4.9**
101	AZ Azerbaijan	Asia	**4.9**
102	NG Nigeria	Africa	**4.9**
103	PS Palestine	Middle East	**4.9**
104	CM Cameroon	Africa	**4.9**
105	UA Ukraine	Europe	**4.9**
106	NA Namibia	Africa	**4.8**
107	MA Morocco	Africa	**4.8**
108	PK Pakistan	Asia	**4.7**
109	NE Niger	Africa	**4.6**
110	BF Burkina Faso	Africa	**4.5**
111	MR Mauritania	Africa	**4.5**
112	GM Gambia	Africa	**4.5**
113	TD Chad	Africa	**4.5**
114	KE Kenya	Africa	**4.5**
115	TN Tunisia	Africa	**4.4**
116	BJ Benin	Africa	**4.4**
117	UG Uganda	Africa	**4.4**
118	MM Myanmar	Asia	**4.4**
119	KH Cambodia	Asia	**4.3**
120	GH Ghana	Africa	**4.3**
121	LR Liberia	Africa	**4.3**
122	ML Mali	Africa	**4.2**
123	MG Madagascar	Africa	**4.2**
124	TG Togo	Africa	**4.2**
125	JO Jordan	Middle East	**4.2**
126	IN India	Asia	**4.1**
127	EG Egypt	Africa	**4.0**
128	LK Sri Lanka	Asia	**3.9**

129	BD Bangladesh	Asia	**3.9**
130	ET Ethiopia	Africa	**3.9**
131	TZ Tanzania	Africa	**3.8**
132	KM Comoros	Africa	**3.6**
133	YE Yemen	Middle East	**3.6**
134	ZM Zambia	Africa	**3.5**
135	SZ Eswatini	Africa	**3.5**
136	MW Malawi	Africa	**3.4**
137	BW Botswana	Africa	**3.4**
138	ZW Zimbabwe	Africa	**3.3**
139	CD DRC	Africa	**3.3**
140	SL Sierra Leone	Africa	**3.2**
141	LS Lesotho	Africa	**3.2**
142	LB Lebanon	Middle East	**2.7**
143	AF Afghanistan	Asia	**1.7**

Table 1 World happiness Report Map (Source: World Happiness Report 2024)

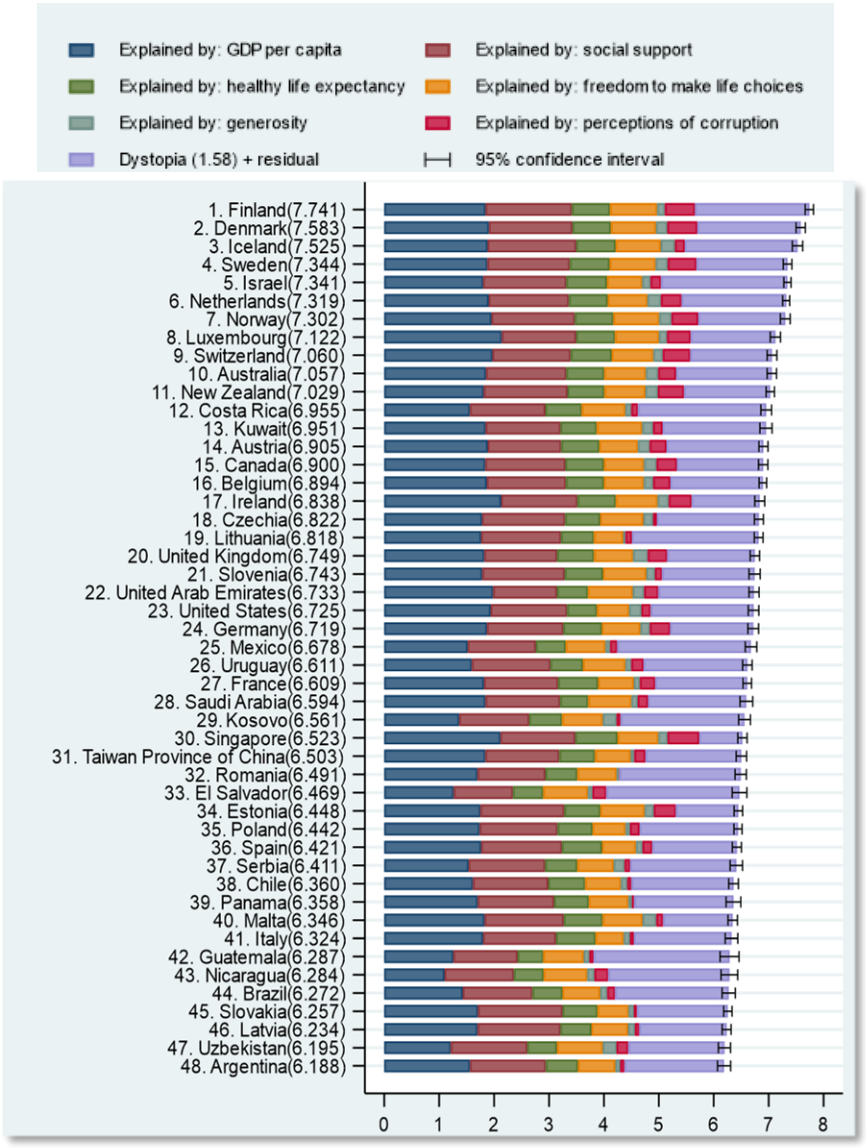


Figure 36 World Happiness Report 2024 Ranking and Scores (Source: https://worldhappiness.report/)

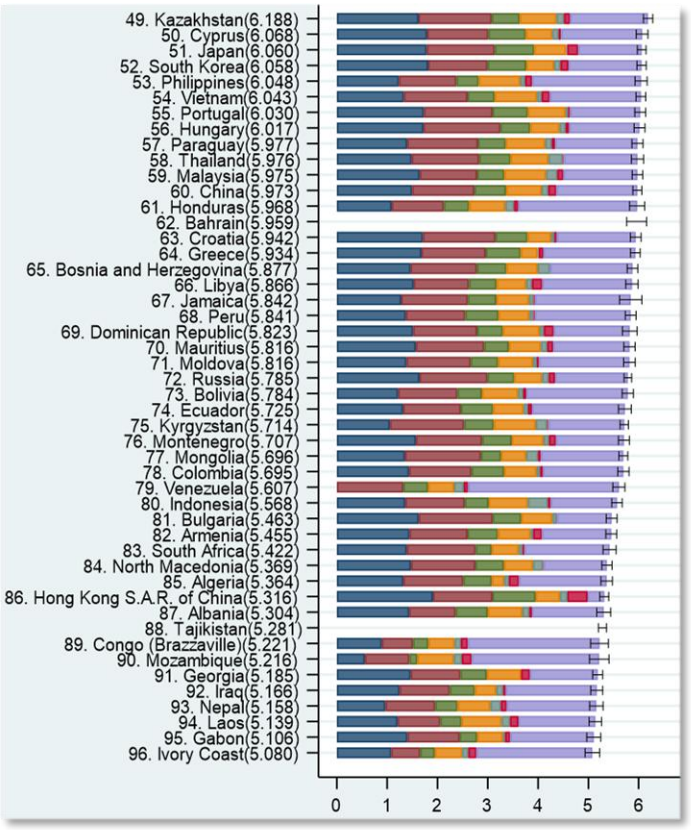


Figure 37 World Happiness Report 2024 Ranking and Scores (Source: https://worldhappiness.report/)

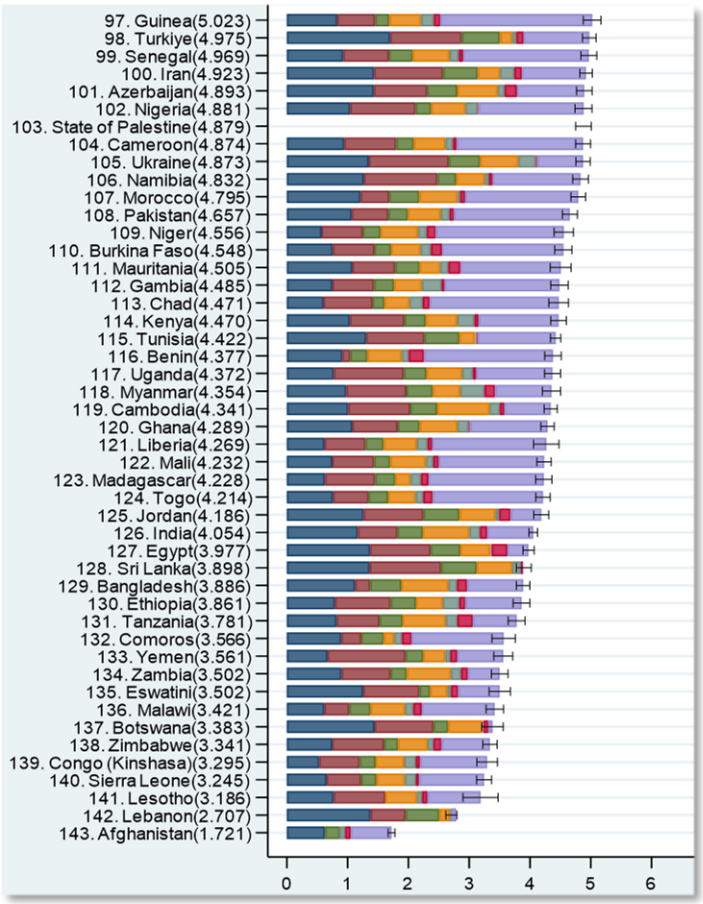


Figure 38 World Happiness Report 2024 Ranking and Scores (Source: https://worldhappiness.report/)

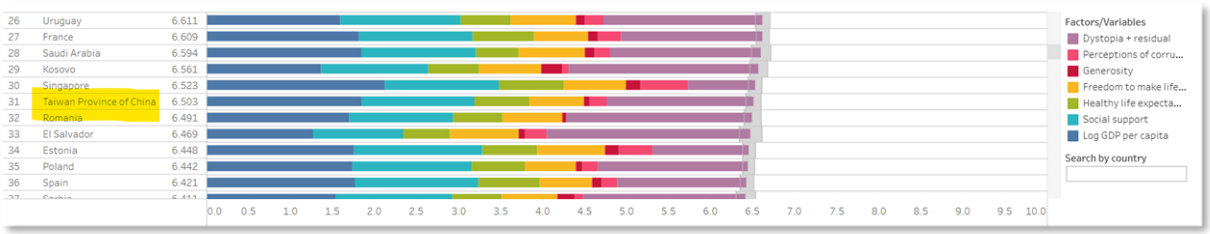


Figure 39 Taiwan mentioned as Taiwan Province of China in the World Happiness Report

Data Sources and Variable Definitions

- Happiness score or subjective well-being (variable name *ladder*): The survey measure of SWB is from the February 15, 2024 release of the Gallup World Poll (GWP) covering years from 2005/06 to 2023. Unless stated otherwise, it is the national average response to the question of life evaluations. The English wording of the question is "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?" This measure is also referred to as *Cantril life ladder*, or just *life ladder* in our analysis.
- The statistics of GDP per capita (variable name *gdp*) in purchasing power parity (PPP) at constant 2017 international dollar prices are from World Development Indicators (WDI, version 23, Metadata last updated on - Sep 27, 2023). The GDP figures for Taiwan, Syria, Palestinian Territories, Venezuela, Djibouti and Yemen are from the Penn World Table 10.01.
  - GDP per capita in 2023 are not yet available as of October 2023. We extend the GDP-per-capita time series from 2022 to 2023 using country-specific forecasts of real GDP growth in 2023 first from the Economic Outlook No 113 (June 2023) and then, if missing, forecasts from World Bank's Global Economic Prospects (Last Updated: 06/06/2023). The GDP growth forecasts are adjusted for population growth with the subtraction of 2021-22 population growth as the projected 2022-23 growth. A few countries/territories have their GDP figures from the Penn World Table that ends in 2019. We derive their 2021-2023 GDP values based on the 2019 values and the projected growth rates if they are available.
- Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE). Healthy life expectancies at birth are based on the data extracted from the World Health Organization's (WHO) Global Health Observatory data repository (Last updated: 2020-12-04). The data at

Figure 40 Data Sources in World Happiness Report
(Source: https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2024/#appendices-and-data/)

the source are available for the years 2000, 2010, 2015 and 2019. To match this report's sample period, interpolation and extrapolation are used.

- Social support (or having someone to count on in times of trouble) is the national average of the binary responses (either 0 or 1) to the GWP question "If you were in trouble, do you have relatives or friends you can count on to help you whenever you need them, or not?"

- Freedom to make life choices is the national average of responses to the GWP question "Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your freedom to choose what you do with your life?"

- Generosity is the residual of regressing national average of response to the GWP question "Have you donated money to a charity in the past month?" on GDP per capita.

- Corruption Perception: The measure is the national average of the survey responses to two questions in the GWP: "Is corruption widespread throughout the government or not" and "Is corruption widespread within businesses or not?" The overall perception is just the average of the two 0-or-1 responses. In case the perception of government corruption is missing, we use the perception of business corruption as the overall perception. The corruption perception at the national level is just the average response of the overall perception at the individual level.

- Positive affect is defined as the average of three positive affect measures in GWP: laugh, enjoyment and doing interesting things in the Gallup World Poll. These measures are the responses to the following three questions, respectively: "Did you smile or laugh a lot yesterday?", and "Did you experience the following feelings during A LOT OF THE DAY yesterday? How about Enjoyment?", "Did you learn or do something interesting yesterday?"

- Negative affect is defined as the average of three negative affect measures in GWP. They are worry, sadness and anger, respectively the responses to "Did you experience the following feelings during A LOT OF THE DAY yesterday? How about Worry?", "Did you experience the following feelings during A LOT OF THE DAY yesterday? How about Sadness?", and "Did you experience the following feelings during A LOT OF THE DAY yesterday? How about Anger?"

- Institutional trust: The first principal component of the following five measures: confidence in the national government, confidence in the judicial system and courts, confidence in the honesty of elections, confidence in the local police force,

Figure 41 Methodology of World Happiness Report
(Source: https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2024/#appendices-and-data/)

Methodological Flaws

Figure 42 What's wrong with the World Happiness Report

The **World Happiness Report** relies on carefully constructed variables, yet its methodology presents several severe flaws:

1. **Subjectivity of Life Ladder Evaluations**: The "**Cantril life ladder**" relies on individuals' self-reported evaluations of their lives, which are inherently subjective. These responses are influenced by **cultural norms, expectations, or temporary emotional states**, making cross-country comparisons less precise.
2. **Interpolation and Extrapolation of Data**: Variables like **Healthy Life Expectancy** and **GDP per Capita** are estimated for missing years using interpolation and extrapolation. This introduces assumptions that do not accurately reflect real-world trends, particularly in rapidly changing economies or regions with limited reliable data.
3. **Proxy Measures for Missing Data**: In the absence of government corruption data, **perceptions of business corruption** are used. This substitution does not adequately capture the broader corruption landscape, skewing results.
4. **Use of Residuals for Generosity**: Generosity is calculated as the **residual of donations** after accounting for GDP per capita. This method isolates generosity from economic conditions but ignores other social or cultural factors influencing charitable behaviour.
5. **Simplified Aggregation of Social and Institutional Trust**: Institutional trust is derived using **principal component analysis** from a limited set of survey questions. This aggregation oversimplifies nuanced perceptions of governance, judiciary, and public services.

6. **Exclusion of Diverse Measures of Affect**: Positive and negative affect are calculated using a limited number of questions about recent emotional states (e.g., laughter, worry). These measures capture short-term feelings but does not reflect deeper, long-term emotional well-being.
7. **Population Forecast Adjustments in GDP Data**: Extending GDP estimates involves adjusting for population growth, introducing additional layers of assumptions. These misrepresent the economic realities in nations with fluctuating demographics and inaccurate population projections.
8. **Cultural Bias in Responses**: Questions like **"Do you have someone to count on?"** or **"Are you satisfied with your freedom to choose?"** elicit responses influenced by cultural norms and social desirability bias, which leads to disparities in comparative rankings.
9. **Incomplete Data Coverage**: Some nations lack comprehensive data for all variables, such as institutional trust or specific affect measures. This results in incomplete or uneven analysis, potentially disadvantaging certain countries in the rankings.
10. **Temporal Mismatch in Data Sources**: Variables such as Healthy Life Expectancy (last updated in 2020) does not align temporally with newer data like 2023 GDP projections. This inconsistency distorts the relationship between indicators.

Data Limitations

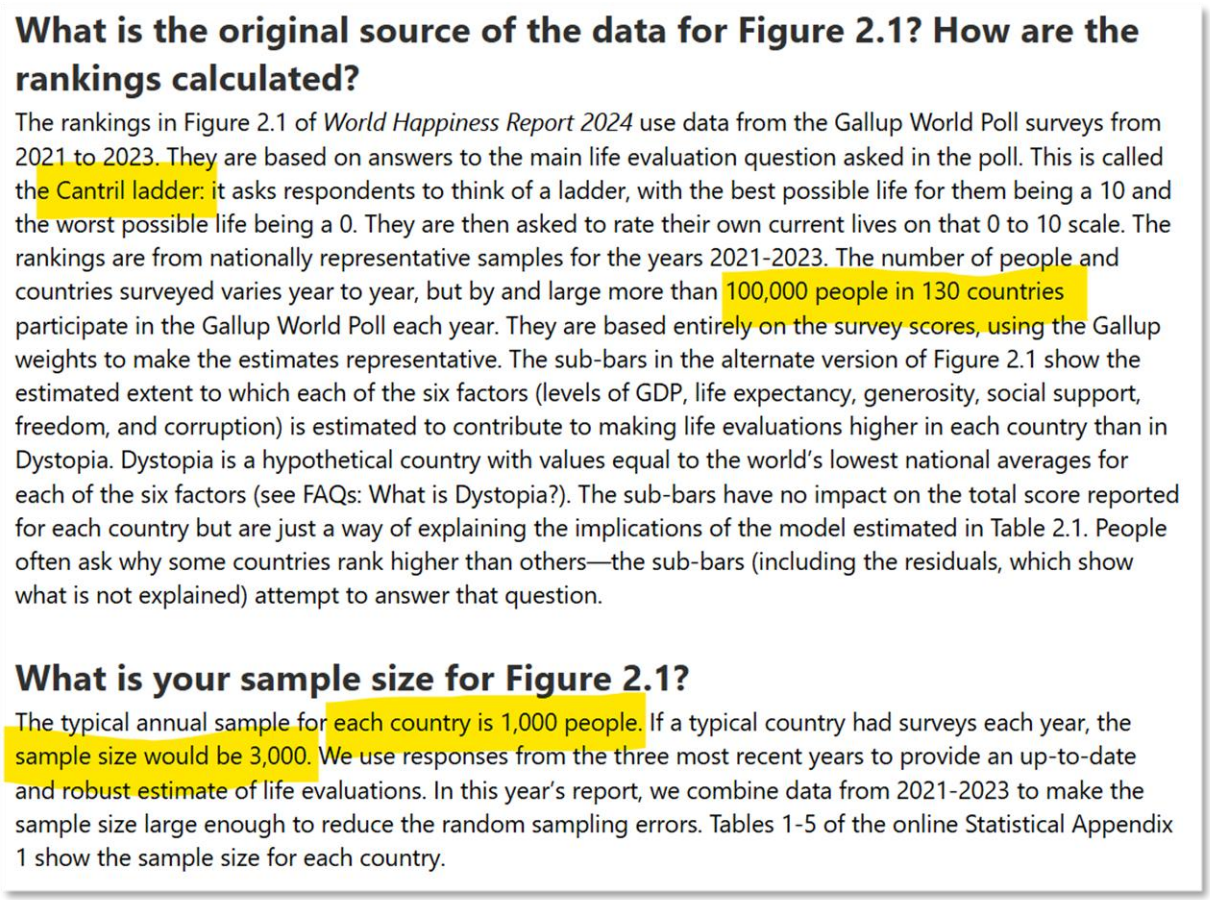
Regressions to Explain Average Happiness across Countries (Pooled OLS)

	Dependent Variable			
Independent Variable	Cantril Ladder	Positive Affect	Negative Affect	Cantril Ladder
Log GDP per capita	0.349	-.015	-.002	0.382
	(0.068)***	(0.009)	(0.007)	(0.066)***
Social support	2.563	0.315	-.342	1.936
	(0.349)***	(0.056)***	(0.045)***	(0.349)***
Healthy life expectancy at birth	0.028	-.0007	0.003	0.029
	(0.011)***	(0.001)	(0.001)***	(0.011)***
Freedom to make life choices	1.378	0.376	-.090	0.571
	(0.295)***	(0.044)***	(0.039)**	(0.273)**
Generosity	0.487	0.084	0.029	0.296
	(0.252)*	(0.032)***	(0.027)	(0.241)
Perceptions of corruption	-.733	-.012	0.093	-.724
	(0.256)***	(0.027)	(0.022)***	(0.243)***
Positive affect				2.206
				(0.33)***
Negative affect				0.193
				(0.381)
Year fixed effects	Included	Included	Included	Included
Number of countries	155	155	155	155
Number of obs.	2103	2098	2102	2097
Adjusted R-squared	0.757	0.43	0.343	0.781

Notes: This is a pooled OLS regression for a tattered panel explaining annual national average

Cantril ladder responses from all available surveys from 2005 through 2023. See Technical Box 2 for detailed information about each of the predictors. Coefficients are reported with robust standard errors clustered by country (in parentheses). ***, **, and * indicate significance at the 1, 5, and 10 percent levels respectively.

Figure 43 Regressions to Explain Average Happiness across Countries
(Source: https://worldhappiness.report/faq/)



What is the original source of the data for Figure 2.1? How are the rankings calculated?

The rankings in Figure 2.1 of *World Happiness Report 2024* use data from the Gallup World Poll surveys from 2021 to 2023. They are based on answers to the main life evaluation question asked in the poll. This is called the Cantril ladder: it asks respondents to think of a ladder, with the best possible life for them being a 10 and the worst possible life being a 0. They are then asked to rate their own current lives on that 0 to 10 scale. The rankings are from nationally representative samples for the years 2021-2023. The number of people and countries surveyed varies year to year, but by and large more than 100,000 people in 130 countries participate in the Gallup World Poll each year. They are based entirely on the survey scores, using the Gallup weights to make the estimates representative. The sub-bars in the alternate version of Figure 2.1 show the estimated extent to which each of the six factors (levels of GDP, life expectancy, generosity, social support, freedom, and corruption) is estimated to contribute to making life evaluations higher in each country than in Dystopia. Dystopia is a hypothetical country with values equal to the world's lowest national averages for each of the six factors (see FAQs: What is Dystopia?). The sub-bars have no impact on the total score reported for each country but are just a way of explaining the implications of the model estimated in Table 2.1. People often ask why some countries rank higher than others—the sub-bars (including the residuals, which show what is not explained) attempt to answer that question.

What is your sample size for Figure 2.1?

The typical annual sample for each country is 1,000 people. If a typical country had surveys each year, the sample size would be 3,000. We use responses from the three most recent years to provide an up-to-date and robust estimate of life evaluations. In this year's report, we combine data from 2021-2023 to make the sample size large enough to reduce the random sampling errors. Tables 1-5 of the online Statistical Appendix 1 show the sample size for each country.

Figure 44 Sample Sizes used in the World Happiness Report
(Source: https://worldhappiness.report/faq/)

1. **Sample Size and Representativeness:** The dataset includes responses from 155 countries over several years (2005–2023), but the annual sample size for each country (1,000 individuals) limits the statistical precision, particularly for countries with highly diverse populations. Survey waves vary in coverage and participation across years, which leads to gaps in representation for certain regions.

2. **Correlation vs. Causation:** The regression analysis highlights correlations between variables but does not establish causal relationships. For example, happier individuals might perceive less corruption or more freedom, reversing the assumed direction of causality.

3. **Generosity Data Ambiguity:** Generosity is significant at only the 10% level in the Cantril Ladder regression, suggesting limited robustness in explaining variations in happiness. It does not adequately capture differences in altruistic behaviors globally.

4. **Aggregated Data Issues:** The coefficients are based on pooled Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression across countries, which assumes uniform effects of variables like GDP and social support across all nations. However, these effects likely vary by region or socioeconomic context.

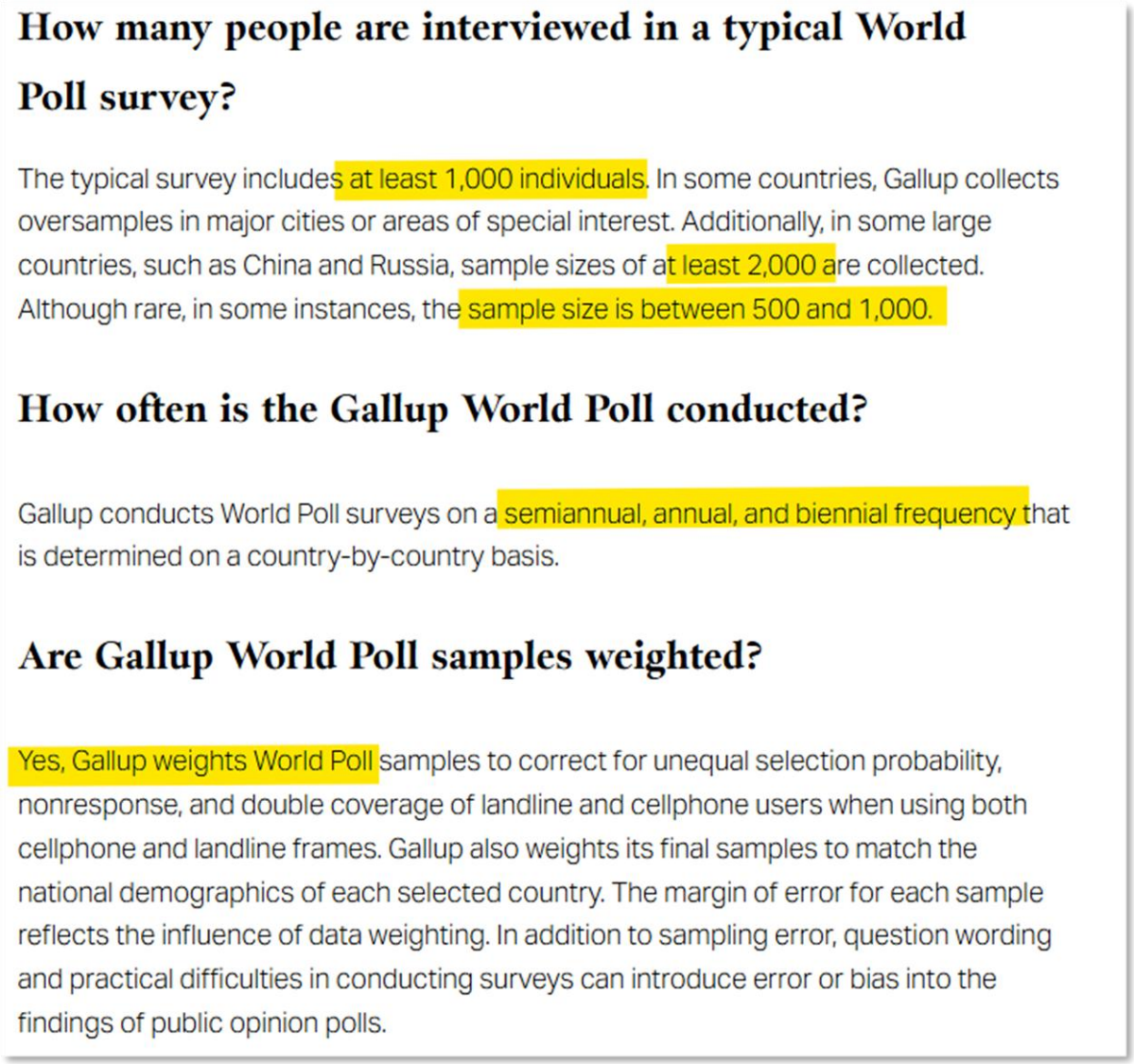
Flaws in the Gallup World Poll

- STEP 1 -- Selecting Primary Sampling Units (PSUs): In countries where Gallup conducts face-to-face surveys, the first stage of sampling is the identification of PSUs, consisting of clusters of households. PSUs are stratified by population size and/or geography and clustering is achieved through one or more stages of sampling. Where population information is available, sample selection is based on probabilities proportional to population size; otherwise, Gallup uses simple random sampling. In countries where telephone interviewing is employed, Gallup uses a RDD method or a nationally representative list of phone numbers. In select countries where cellphone penetration is high, Gallup uses a dual sampling frame. Gallup makes at least three attempts to reach a person in each household.

- STEP 2 -- Selecting Households: Gallup uses random-route procedures to select sampled households. Unless an outright refusal occurs, interviewers make up to three attempts to survey the sampled household. To increase the probability of contact and completion, interviewers make attempts at different times of the day, and when possible, on different days. If the interviewer cannot obtain an interview at the initial sampled household, he or she uses a simple substitution method.

- STEP 3 -- Selecting Respondents: In face-to-face and telephone methodologies, random respondent selection is achieved by using either the latest birthday or Kish grid method. In a few Middle Eastern and Asian countries, gender-matched interviewing is required, and probability sampling with quotas is implemented during the final stage of selection. Gallup implements quality control procedures to validate the selection of correct samples and that the interviewer selects the correct person in each household.

Figure 45 Steps for Gallup World Poll
(Source: https://www.gallup.com/178667/gallup-world-poll-work.aspx/)



How many people are interviewed in a typical World Poll survey?

The typical survey includes at least 1,000 individuals. In some countries, Gallup collects oversamples in major cities or areas of special interest. Additionally, in some large countries, such as China and Russia, sample sizes of at least 2,000 are collected. Although rare, in some instances, the sample size is between 500 and 1,000.

How often is the Gallup World Poll conducted?

Gallup conducts World Poll surveys on a semiannual, annual, and biennial frequency that is determined on a country-by-country basis.

Are Gallup World Poll samples weighted?

Yes, Gallup weights World Poll samples to correct for unequal selection probability, nonresponse, and double coverage of landline and cellphone users when using both cellphone and landline frames. Gallup also weights its final samples to match the national demographics of each selected country. The margin of error for each sample reflects the influence of data weighting. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

Figure 46 Steps for Gallup World Poll
(Source: https://www.gallup.com/178667/gallup-world-poll-work.aspx/)

The Gallup World Poll provides a broad global dataset on key issues, but its methodology has notable limitations and flaws that affects the reliability and interpretation of its findings. Below is an analysis of these flaws:

1. **Sampling Limitations:**

- **Sample Size Issues:** The percentage of survey participants compared to the total population is extremely small in all countries. For large populations (e.g., **China, India**), even surveys with **2,000 participants** represent a negligible fraction of the population **(0.00014%)**.

  Countries with smaller populations, such as **Italy** (**0.0017%**) and **Canada** (**0.0026%**), show higher percentages of surveyed participants relative to their populations. However, these percentages are still extremely low in absolute terms.

Across all top economies, the percentage of surveyed individuals is less than **0.003%** of the **total population**, emphasizing that large-scale surveys rely heavily on statistical modelling rather than raw population coverage for reliability.

- **Exclusion of Marginalized Groups:** Despite claims of national representation, the sampling frame **excludes institutionalized populations** (e.g., **prisoners and hospital patients**) and regions deemed or seemingly **unsafe for interviewers**. These omissions lead to **underrepresentation of vulnerable groups** who often have unique perspectives on well-being and social issues.

  Similarly, oversampling in cities or areas of interest disproportionately skew the representation of urban populations, particularly in countries like **China** and **Russia**, where large rural populations might not be adequately sampled. The issue of representation becomes even more pronounced in **African countries**, where **population sizes and logistical hurdles**, such as limited **infrastructure, poor internet penetration**, and **inadequate access to rural areas**, make it challenging to collect representative survey samples.

  In **African Nations** and countries with authoritarian regimes, marginalized and persecuted communities (e.g., **Uyghurs in China**, **Rohingyas in Myanmar**, **Minority Groups** in conflict zones, or **Displaced Populations in Africa**) are often excluded from sampling. This exclusion reduces the overall representativeness of the data.

  Even though Gallup employs **weighting techniques** to correct for nonresponse, certain groups as mentioned above remain underrepresented due to practical difficulties in accessing them.

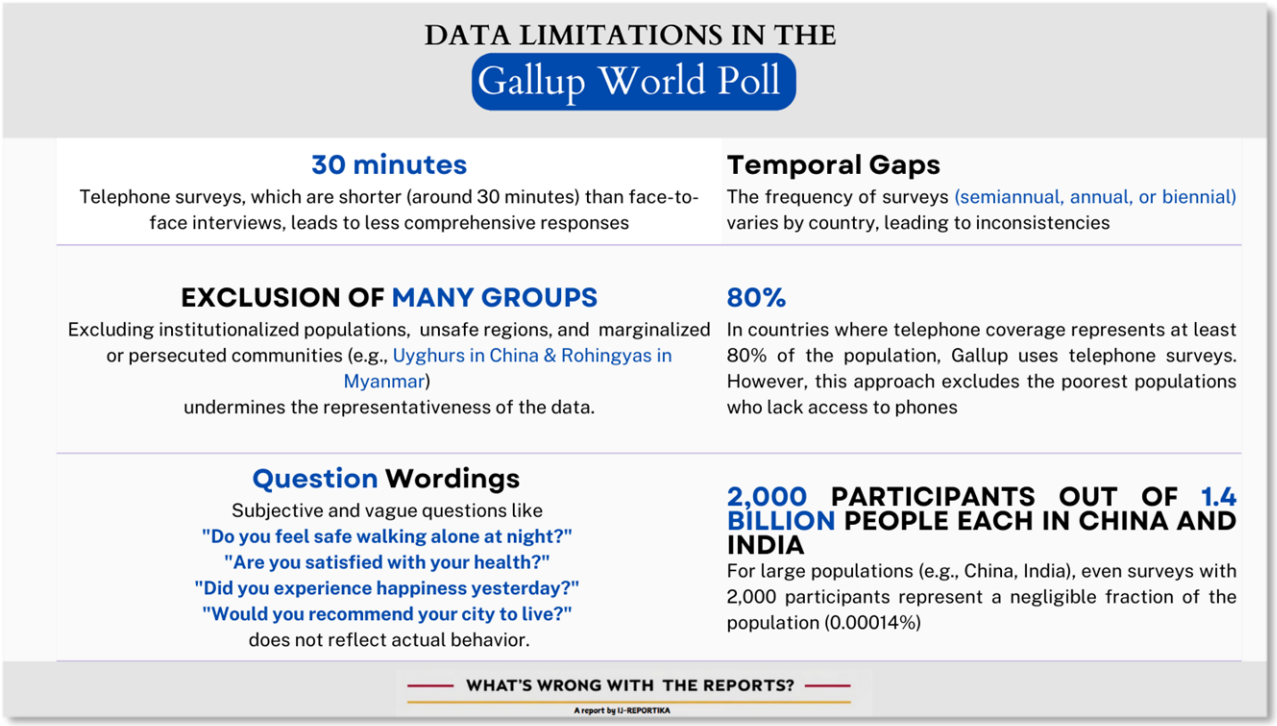


Figure 47 Data Limitations in the Gallup World Poll

2. Reliance on Telephone Surveys

- **Coverage Issues:** In countries where **telephone coverage represents at least 80%** of the population, Gallup uses **telephone surveys**. However, this approach excludes the poorest populations who lack access to phones, particularly in developing nations where landline infrastructure is minimal and cellphone penetration is uneven.
- **Random-Digit-Dialing (RDD) Methodology:** RDD sampling leads to inefficiencies and sampling biases, especially in countries with **outdated or incomplete telecommunication databases**.
- **Response Quality:** Telephone surveys, which are shorter (**around 30 minutes**) than face-to-face interviews, leads to less comprehensive responses. Respondents provide socially desirable answers when discussing sensitive topics over the phone.

3. Cultural Bias and Subjectivity

- **Question Standardization:** While using the same questions globally allows for year-to-year trends and cross-country comparisons, it ignores cultural differences in interpreting survey items. For example, terms like "**well-being**" or "**freedom**" have different connotations across **linguistic and cultural contexts**, leading to measurement errors.
- **Social Desirability Bias:** Respondents in certain cultural settings are reluctant to express dissatisfaction with government or leadership, especially in authoritarian regimes like China, which skews the results.

4. Weighting Challenges

- While Gallup weights its data to align with national demographics, this process **amplifies inaccuracies** if the underlying demographic data (e.g., census statistics) are outdated or incomplete.
- Weighting cannot fully correct for biases introduced during the sampling process, such as those caused by urban oversampling or nonresponse as discussed previously.

5. Question Wording and Design Flaws

- The Gallup World Poll includes a broad range of questions, offering valuable insights into global well-being, economics, and social issues. However, some questions demonstrate methodological limitations. For instance, subjective phrasing, such as **"Do you feel safe walking alone at night in the city where you live?"** or **"Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your personal health?",** leads to varying interpretations across cultures, impacting the reliability of cross-country comparisons. The focus on individual perceptions without context—**like crime rates or healthcare access**—also skew data, as **perceptions** may not align with **objective conditions**.

- Additionally, questions about well-being, such as **"Did you experience happiness during a lot of the day yesterday?"** or the ladder-based self-assessment of life **satisfaction**, rely heavily on **short-term emotions** and **recall bias**, which does not

accurately reflect long-term well-being. Questions on hypothetical actions, like **"Would you recommend the city where you live as a place to live?",** also face limitations since responses differ from actual behaviours.

6. Temporal Gaps

- The frequency of surveys (semiannual, annual, or biennial) varies by country, leading to inconsistencies in time-series analysis. For example, a country surveyed annually show different trends than a country surveyed biennially simply due to the timing of data collection.

7. Underrepresentation of Dynamic Issues

- The World Poll focuses on a standardized set of questions and rarely adapts to rapidly evolving issues like climate change, pandemics, or political crises. As a result, the data does not reflect the most pressing concerns in certain regions during specific periods.

Unexpected or Flawed discrepancies

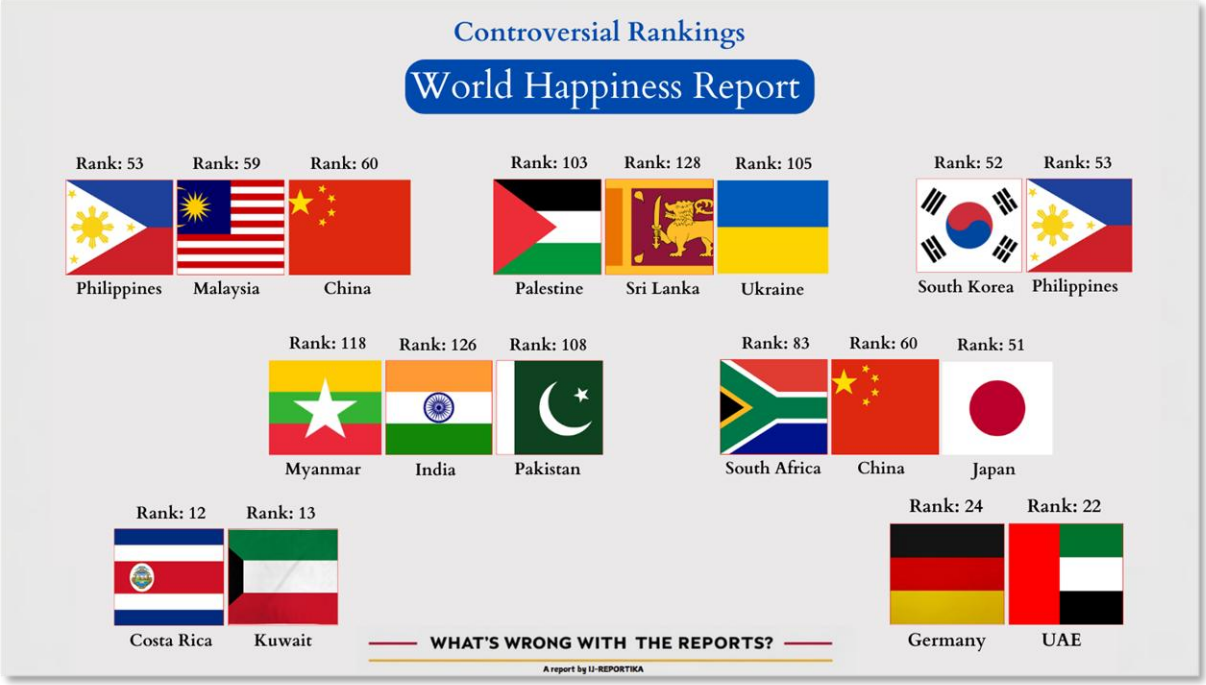


Figure 48 Unexpected or Flawed discrepancies in the World Happiness Report 2024

- **Costa Rica (7.0, Rank 12) vs. Kuwait (7.0, Rank 13):** Costa Rica is globally recognized for its **"Pura Vida"** lifestyle, emphasizing happiness, environmental sustainability, and community well-being. The country consistently outperforms many others in indices like the **Happy Planet Index**, which measures sustainable happiness.

  Kuwait, despite having high GDP per capita and strong public services, struggles with **social and political freedoms**, a lack of natural scenery, and a generally **restrictive societal structure** that impacts personal happiness. Yet, they are tied in score.

- **Philippines (6.0, Rank 53) vs. Malaysia (6.0, Rank 59) vs. China (6.0, Rank 60):** While all three countries share a score, the Philippines has a strong sense of community, family values, and resilience despite economic and political challenges. Surveys often highlight the **Filipinos' optimism** and **religious faith** as contributors to happiness.

  Similarly, Malaysia offers a relatively free society with vibrant democratic practices, media freedom, and cultural diversity. It has a stronger emphasis on civil liberties compared to the other two countries.

  However, while economically successful, **China's authoritarian model suppresses personal freedoms, media, and dissent**, which should impact perceived happiness. Issues like stringent censorship, urban stress, and limited individual rights are notable. The countries have the same score, which overlooks open governance system compared to restrictive environment.

- **India (4.1, Rank 126) vs. Pakistan (4.7, Rank 108):** India has a rapidly growing economy, diverse cultural heritage, and significant advancements in sectors like technology, education, and healthcare. Despite challenges, the country also enjoys strong community and familial bonds.

  Pakistan on the other hand faces political instability, economic struggles, and high levels of insecurity, which typically lowers the happiness levels. The substantial gap between India and Pakistan in favor of the latter seems inconsistent with overall global narratives.

- **South Africa (5.4, Rank 83) vs. China (6.0, Rank 60):** South Africa boasts beautiful natural landscapes and a strong sense of cultural identity despite its socio-economic challenges. China, while achieving economic milestones, has significant restrictions on personal freedoms as mentioned above.

  The 23-rank difference seems disproportionate considering the unique yet comparable challenges both countries face.

- **Germany (6.7, Rank 24) vs. UAE (6.7, Rank 22):** Germany is known for its robust social welfare, healthcare, and education systems, combined with strong democratic values. The UAE, despite its economic prosperity, lacks the **same level of personal freedoms, diversity, and rights**.

  The UAE's higher ranking suggests the metrics overweighs material prosperity and overlook broader societal factors.

- **South Korea (6.1, Rank 52) vs. Philippines (6.0, Rank 53):** South Korea excels in economic power, technological innovation, and quality of life indices compared to the Philippines, which faces economic struggles. The narrow ranking gap undervalues these distinctions.

- **China (6.0, Rank 60) vs. Japan (6.1, Rank 51):** Japan's high life expectancy, advanced healthcare, and emphasis on societal harmony starkly contrast with China's issues around censorship, pollution, and urban stress. The minimal gap seems surprising given these disparities.

- **India (4.1, Rank 126) vs. Myanmar (4.4, Rank 118):** India is the world's largest democracy, with an expanding middle class and global influence. Myanmar, on the other hand, is grappling with military rule, widespread poverty, and the humanitarian crisis involving the Rohingya Muslims.

  The ranking does not adequately reflect Myanmar's ongoing internal conflicts, suppression of democracy, and displacement of Rohingyas, which should weigh negatively on happiness metrics.

- **Palestine (4.9, Rank 103) vs. Sri Lanka (3.9, Rank 128):** While both countries face economic difficulties, Sri Lanka has stronger institutions and fewer territorial conflicts. Palestine's situation, marked by restricted freedoms, should weigh more heavily on its happiness score.

- **Ukraine (4.9, Rank 105) vs. Sri Lanka (3.9, Rank 128):** Ukraine, despite the ongoing war, demonstrates remarkable resilience, strong community solidarity, and international support. The war-torn country has seen a surge in patriotism and global aid, which boost morale but it is still living under constant panic, fear and war anxiety.

  On the other hand, Sri Lanka has faced severe economic challenges, including a debt trap crisis from China and protests against political corruption. However, it is not embroiled in war, and its cultural richness and natural beauty often provide a psychological buffer.

  While Ukraine's ranking reflects its resilience, the significant 23-rank gap overlooks Sri Lanka's recovery potential and peace relative to Ukraine's active conflict.

- **UK (6.7, Rank 20) vs. Poland (6.4, Rank 35):** The UK has faced recent disturbances, including Brexit-related economic strains, widespread strikes, rapid conversions and urban riots, leading to a polarized society. These issues detracts people from overall happiness.

  While, Poland has seen economic growth and stability in recent years, with robust social welfare systems. While it faces political controversies, they do not seem to be as disruptive to daily life as the UK's challenges. The 15-rank gap seems exaggerated given the UK's social tensions and Poland's steady progress. Poland could reasonably rank closer to the UK.

Controversies

Following are the controversies surrounding the World Happiness Report raised by different countries/regions and subject experts:

1. **China (6.0, Rank 60)**: Geopolitics experts argue that the report overlooks political repression and censorship, which significantly impact citizens' well-being. High rankings for China have been questioned due to the lack of freedom and transparency in its governance.
2. **India (4.1, Rank 126)**: With low rankings, India has pointed out issues related to inadequate consideration of its diverse population's happiness metrics, such as rural-urban disparities and the impacts of caste systems. Experts claim the report's reliance on subjective well-being surveys doesn't capture these intricacies effectively.
3. **African Nations**: The report struggles in many African countries where data collection is hindered by political instability and weak infrastructure. Additionally, factors like systemic poverty, lack of education, and healthcare access are often underrepresented in the rankings.

Rank	Country	Score
66	LY Libya	5.9
70	MU Mauritius	5.8
83	ZA South Africa	5.4
85	DZ Algeria	5.4
89	CG Congo	5.2
90	MZ Mozambique	5.2
95	GA Gabon	5.1
96	CI Ivory Coast	5.1
97	GN Guinea	5.0
99	SN Senegal	5.0
102	NG Nigeria	4.9
104	CM Cameroon	4.9
106	NA Namibia	4.8
107	MA Morocco	4.8
109	NE Niger	4.6
110	BF Burkina Faso	4.5
111	MR Mauritania	4.5
112	GM Gambia	4.5
113	TD Chad	4.5
114	KE Kenya	4.5
116	BJ Benin	4.4
117	UG Uganda	4.4
120	GH Ghana	4.3
121	LR Liberia	4.3
122	ML Mali	4.2
123	MG Madagascar	4.2
124	TG Togo	4.2
127	EG Egypt	4.0
130	ET Ethiopia	3.9
131	TZ Tanzania	3.8
133	YE Yemen	3.6
134	ZM Zambia	3.5
135	SZ Eswatini	3.5
136	MW Malawi	3.4
137	BW Botswana	3.4
138	ZW Zimbabwe	3.3
139	CD Democratic Republic of Congo	3.3
140	SL Sierra Leone	3.2
141	LS Lesotho	3.2

Figure 49 Poor Reflection of African Nations in the World Happiness Report 2024

4. **Nordic Countries**: While Nordic nations consistently rank high, our experts argue that this reflects biases favouring developed nations with stable economies. They suggest the model underemphasizes unique cultural factors in other regions.

Rank	Country	Score
1	FI Finland	7.7
2	DK Denmark	7.6
3	IS Iceland	7.5
4	SE Sweden	7.3
7	NO Norway	7.3

Figure 50 Nordic Countries in the World Happiness Report 2024

5. **United States (6.7, Rank 23)**: Despite wealth and resources, the U.S. ranks lower than expected, drawing attention to social inequality, gun violence, and a fragmented healthcare system. Experts question the weight given to these factors in happiness assessments.

6. **Middle East**: The report often ranks countries with significant economic wealth but strict societal restrictions higher than expected. This creates scepticism about whether freedom and societal openness are adequately considered.

Rank	Country	Score
5	IL Israel	7.3
13	KW Kuwait	7.0
22	AE UAE	6.7
28	SA Saudi Arabia	6.6
62	BH Bahrain	6.0

Figure 51 Middle Eastern Countries in the World Happiness Report 2024

7. **Taiwan:** The report lists Taiwan as "**Taiwan, Province of China**," reflecting the pressure exerted by China's political stance. This designation is controversial, as Taiwan operates independently with its own government. Our experts argue that labelling undermines Taiwan's status and politicizes the report, reducing its credibility.

France	27	48	23	26	25	LowerMiddle	Old
Saudi Arabia	28	42	39	14	27	UpperMiddle	LowerMiddle
Kosovo	29	23	37	33	39	Young	Old
Singapore	30	54	36	25	26	UpperMiddle	Old
Taiwan Province of China	31	25	35	31	34	Young	Old
Romania	32	8	26	35	48	Young	Old
El Salvador	33	17	38	45	52	Young	Old
Estonia	34	44	24	30	35	LowerMiddle	Old

Figure 52 Taiwan mentioned as Taiwan Province of China in the World Happiness Report

8. **Ukraine**: Despite facing severe challenges from the ongoing war with Russia, Ukraine's relatively good ranking has been attributed to the resilience and solidarity of its citizens. However, some argue that the report does not adequately account for the long-term psychological and economic toll of war.

Azerbaijan	101	95	103	103	108	Young	Old
Nigeria	102	108	95	87	130	UpperMiddle	Old
State of Palestine	103	102	105	109	99	Young	UpperMiddle
Cameroon	104	106	102	98	107	Young	Old
Ukraine	105	82	90	110	115	Young	Old
Namibia	106	105	106	101	114	Young	Old
Morocco	107	98	108	107	113	Young	Old
Pakistan	108	107	109	113	122	Young	Old
Niger	109	116	110	114	101	Old	UpperMiddle
Burkina Faso	110	117	107	116	105	LowerMiddle	UpperMiddle
Mauritania	111	119	112	106	93	Old	LowerMiddle
Gambia	112	110	116	115	112	Young	LowerMiddle

Figure 53 Palestine and Ukraine in the World Happiness Report

9. **Palestine**: Palestine's rankings often spark debate, as they reflect a comparatively high level of happiness given the occupation and ongoing conflict with Israel. Observers suggest that the report's findings overlook the deep societal strains caused by restricted freedoms and economic hardship

Conclusion

In conclusion, global indices such as the World Press Freedom Index, Corruption Perceptions Index, and others wield significant influence in shaping international narratives, government policies, and public perceptions of nations. These indices often act as benchmarks, not only for assessing performance but also for influencing geopolitical alliances, public opinion, and domestic political debates. Their rankings are frequently cited by **governments, opposition groups, media outlets, and international organizations**, lending them an air of authority and credibility. However, as this report demonstrates, the accuracy and objectivity of these indices are far from assured.

Through a comprehensive investigation, **Investigative Journalism Reportika** has revealed the deep-rooted methodological flaws, inherent biases, and data limitations that plague these indices. By relying heavily on qualitative inputs from a select group of specialists—whose selection criteria, affiliations, and political ideologies remain undisclosed—these rankings often fail to provide an impartial and transparent assessment. Furthermore, the over-reliance on subjective perceptions, coupled with a lack of consistency in data collection methods, undermines their credibility. In many cases, these indices appear to serve not as neutral tools but as mechanisms for shaping narratives that align with particular agendas or ideologies.

The findings in this report underscore the urgent need to critically evaluate these indices, especially given their outsized impact on global discourse. Policymakers, scholars, and media professionals must question their methodologies, demand greater transparency, and resist the temptation to treat these rankings as definitive truths. **Blind reliance on flawed data risks perpetuating misconceptions and amplifying biases that have far-reaching consequences for governance, international relations, and public trust.**

As part of its commitment to truth and accountability, Investigative Journalism Reportika will continue to delve into these issues in the **second part of this report**. By analyzing additional indices and their methodologies, we aim to further expose the ways in which these tools can mislead, oversimplify, and, at times, manipulate. The ultimate goal is to foster a more informed global conversation—one that prioritizes accuracy, fairness, and integrity over convenience or ideology.

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