Ethnic Studies 455B

Israel's Happiness

Professor Ibrahim Auode

Connor Sonoda

12-12-2019

Abstract

Israel is in constant conflict with its surrounding countries. Despite this, a study done by the United Nations known as the World Happiness Report showed that Israel is very happy. My thesis is that Israel's World Happiness Index reflects life within Israel and the propaganda supporting it. Its people don't reflect the geopolitical and international issues surrounding the country. Research shows that the World Happiness Index is based on 6 values and ranks 156 countries. Israel ranks 13th compared to the United States at 20th. Researching Propaganda in Israel led me to find that Propaganda is widely used to support nationalist views both internally and externally. Many groups have a department specifically to support nationalist views. This is further supported by the book The General's Son. However, no conclusive evidence was found supporting that propaganda was used to influence the results of the survey. However, results were found that the Happiness value is based mostly on GDP. Israel also scored low in the area of Corruption, which was based on two questions. "Is corruption widespread through the government?" and "Are businesses corrupt?" which can be further researched to see if there is more data stating if the people of Israel question the government.

Introduction

The region surrounding Israel is in constant conflict. Geopolitical issues are a huge issue in the region. However, a study done by the United Nations known as The World Happiness Report showed that some countries in the region are very happy. Israel ranked 13th out of 156 countries that were studied. How does Israel maintain its high World Happiness Index? In a region where conflict is commonplace, is it possible for the people of Israel to be that happy?

My Thesis is that Israel's World Happiness Index reflects life within Israel and the propaganda supporting it. Its people don't reflect the geopolitical and international issues surrounding the country.

This paper mainly focuses on the World Happiness Report, the validity of the report, and the results of the report over the years. The paper is broken down into three parts; Background, Research and Analysis. The background overviews the World Happiness Report and goes over the History of Israel. The Research goes over the World Happiness report, who edits, takes the polls and the results of the polls. This section also covers the influence of propaganda in Israel. The Analysis goes over the results of the data, how the data is influenced and how it compares to current events in Israel. It also goes over the validity of the poll as a result of the data.

Background

The World Happiness Report is a United Nations sponsored survey. The survey started in April 2012 and ranks 156 countries by how happy their people perceive themselves to be. The reports use data that come from the Gallup World Poll and are ranked based on questions asked in the poll.[1] The survey asks respondents to rank their own life from a scale of zero to ten. The score is broken down into six factors: Levels of GDP, life expectancy, generosity, social support, freedom, and corruption. These factors were chosen to reflect what the authors have found in research literature to be important in explaining national-level differences in life evaluations.

Israel started out from the Zionist movement following World War II. Conflict between Arabs who lived in Palestine arose as they resisted the Zionist movement. In 1947, the United

---

[1] Helliwell, J. F., Layard, R. D., & Sachs, J. undefined. (2019). World Happiness Report. World Happiness Report. Retrieved from

https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2019/

Nations approved a plan to partition Palestine into a Jewish and Arab state in 1947, but the Arabs rejected it. In May 1948, Israel was declared an independent state. Following the announcement, five Arab nations, immediately invaded the region in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. A cease-fire agreement was reached in 1949. Another significant event was the Six-Day War. A surprise attack led to an invasion which defeated Egypt, Jordan and Syria in six days. Israel took control of the Gaza Strip, Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank and Golan heights. These areas were considered "occupied" by Israel. Since then, numerous wars and attacks occurred in the region.[2] Much of the conflict has centered around areas lie the Gaza Strip, Golan Heights and the West Bank. These conflicts are still present in 2019. Both Palestine and Israel cite Jerusalem as their capital. Several countries have pushed for peace agreements in recent years. Many have suggested a two-state solution but acknowledge that Israelis and Palestinians are unlikely to settle on borders. A less popular opinion is a singular united state. Israeli Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu supports the two-state solution but is pressured to change his stance.

Research

The World Happiness report is edited and compiled by three main authors. John F. Helliwell, Richard Layard and Jeffery D. Sachs. John F. Helliwell is a Canadian Economist and is the Professor Emeritus of Economics at the University of British Columbia. He is also a leading researcher on Social Interactions, Identity and Well-Being. Richard Layard is a British labor economist currently working as program director of the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics and Political Science. His focus on research is on how better mental health could improve our social and economic life. He has also written multiple books

---

[2] History.com Editors. (2017, June 30). Israel. Retrieved from https://www.history.com/topics/middle-east/history-of-israel.

about Happiness. Jeffery D. Sachs is an American economist and public policy analyst. He holds the title of University Professor at Columbia University where he was the former director of The Earth Institute.

The Gallup World Poll is an American analytics and advisory company based in Washington, D.C. and became known for its public opinion polls conducted worldwide. The Poll regular conducts public opinion polls. The poll continually surveys citizens in 160 countries, representing 98% of the world's adult population.

The Poll follows a certain methodology when surveying people. Their target population is the entire civilian, non-institutionalized, aged 15 or older population. The questionnaire is translated into the major languages of each country. The survey uses two main methods to cover much of the population. Telephone surveys are used in countries where telephone coverage represents at least 80% of the population or is the customary survey methodology. In these countries a random-Digit Dial or nationally representative list of phone numbers is used. Otherwise, an area frame design is used for face-to-face interviews. These interviews are approximately 1 hour, while telephone interviews are about 30 minutes. Quality Control is used to validate that correct samples are selected and that the correct person is randomly selected in each household. Typical surveys have at least 1,000 participants. The survey is not conducted in certain areas where the safety of the staff is threatened or places that interviewers can only reach by foot, animal or small boat. The survey can also affect by measurement error associated with the questionnaire, such as translation issues and coverage error, where parts of the target population have a zero probability of being selected. [3]

[3] Gallup, Inc. (2019, November 22). Analytics & Advice About Everything That Matters. Retrieved from https://www.gallup.com/home.aspx.

Israel took part of the World Happiness Report since 2006, when the report first started.
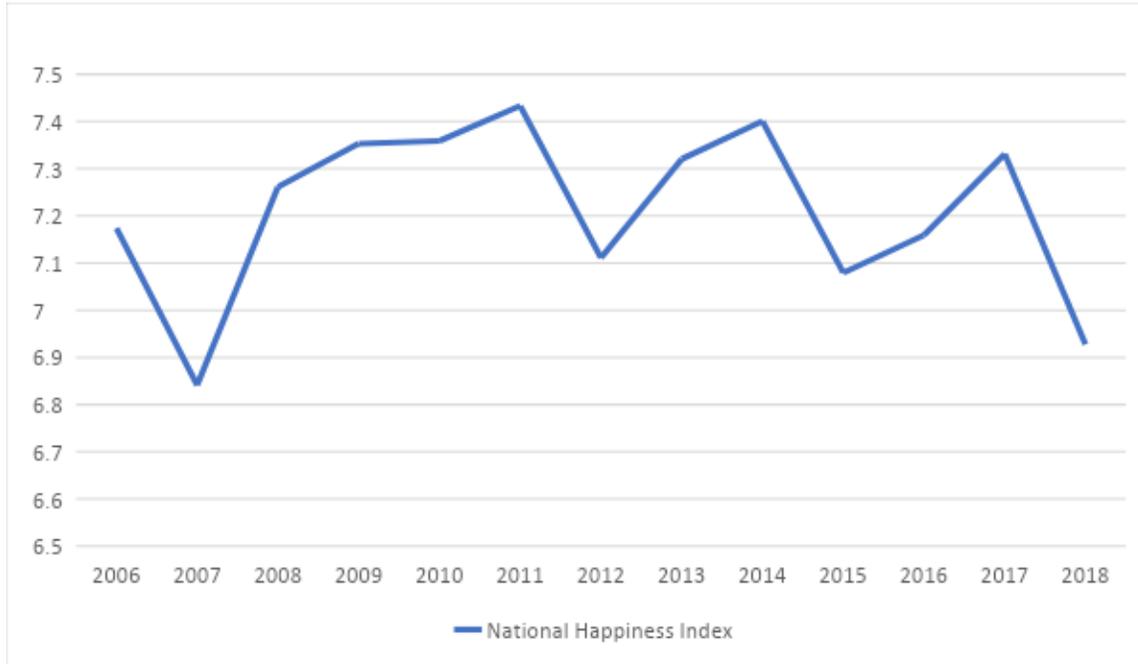
The country has scored an average of 7.2 from 2006. It initially started at a 7.2 but dropped down in 2007. From 2008 to 2017 the score varied slightly but remained over 7 points. The score dropped in 2018. In 2019 Israel ranked 13th, the United States 19th, the United Arab Emirates ranked 21st and Iran ranked 117th. Palestine is not included in the World Happiness Report. These numbers are broken down into 7 sub-categories. GDP per capita, Social Support, Healthy Life expectancy, Freedom to Make Life Choices, Generosity Perceptions of Corruption and Dystopia. The data collected for GDP is in terms of Purchasing Power Parity. The details of the date were taken from the World Bank on November 14, 2018. Social support is the national average of the binary responses (either 0 or 1) to the 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?" The timer series of healthy life expectancy at birth are created based on data from the World Health Organization's Global Health Observatory data. Freedom to make life choices is the national average of the binary responses to the question "Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your freedom to choose

what you do with your life?" Generosity is the national average of the response to the question "Have you donated money to a charity in the past month?" Perceptions of corruption are the average of two binary questions: "Is corruption widespread through the government or not?" and is Corruption widespread within the businesses or not?" [4]The last subcategory, Dystopia compares a fictitious country known as "Dystopia" because its values are equal to the world's lowest national averages for 2016-2018. The data compares the country to Dystopia and measures the extent to which life evaluations are higher or lower than predicted.

In the research paper Public Relations and Nation Building: Influencing Israel, it talks about Israel's usage of propaganda to deal with unique internal and external challenges. The paper talks about a persuasive communication effort, either by the State of Israel in defense of its image externally, or in attempts to promote social integration within its borders, or to convey a social marketing message known as Hasbara. Hasbara is a Hebrew noun form of the verb le'hasbir, which means "to explain." Many Government and non-governmental institutions use Hasbara departments to communicate with internal and external publics.[5] Israelis also have strong concerns ass individuals about the image of the state and its legitimization by the world. The paper is written by two Professors at the department of Management communication at the University of Waikato, New Zealand. Margalit Toledano and David McKie.

In the book The General's Son, the story revolves around the author Miko Peled. The Son of Matti Peled a Israeli General. The story follows Miko through his life as he joins the military and becomes a Red Beret in the Israeli Military. [6]He later leaves the country following his niece

[4] Helliwell, J. F., Layard, R. D., & Sachs, J. undefined. (2019). World Happiness Report. World Happiness Report. Retrieved from https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2019/

[5] Toledano, M., & McKie, D. (2013). *Public relations and nation building: Influencing Israel*. Routledge.

[6] Peled, M. (2016). *The general's son journey of an Israeli in Palestine*. Charlottesville: Just World.

Smadar's death. In San Diego he learns how far Israeli propaganda runs as most of his knowledge did not match up to what the rest of the world had known. Re-evaluating himself, Miko moves on to become a Rotarian where he fully learns the extent of tyranny when he tries to deliver supplies to Gaza and the Israeli government prevents them from entering. Towards the end of the book, Miko concludes that Israel is hiding the truth behind their solution to their conflict with Palestine. Miko believes that a Unified one-state solution is necessary to stop conflict between Palestine and Israel.

Analysis

Based on the research about the World Happiness Report, I was curious to see if there were any relations between Israel and the report. All the authors did not have any connections to Israel and the Poll did not either. Based on the results of the World Happiness index I noticed that
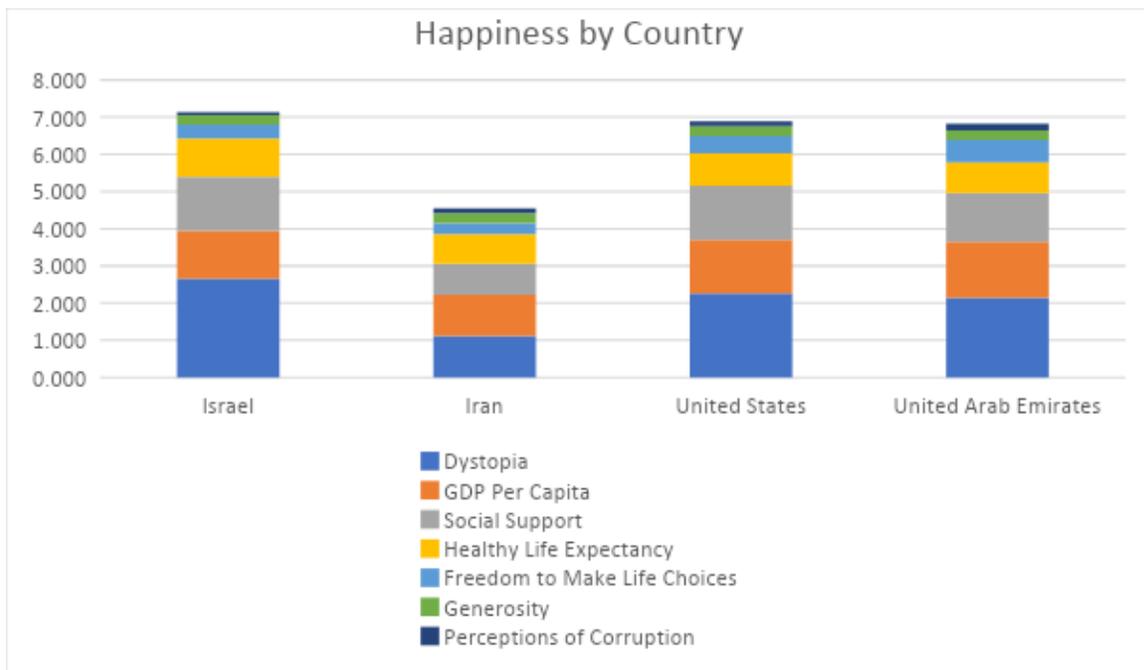
one of the largest factors to the Happiness rating was GDP per capita. For example, Israel and the United Arab Emirates ranked much higher than Iran mostly based off that value**. Most of the

region ranked lower in the World Happiness Report. This is also reinforced by the fact that all the authors of the Report are economists. The part that was most interesting to me was Israel's Perception of corruption. Israel's perception of corruption wasn't ranked as high when compared to other countries. The report does not go into details about specifics, so its hard to determine this. The World Happiness report also does not cover Palestine in its 156 countries. The report and the Gallup Polls both do not mention how polls are taken within Israel. When comparing the report to propaganda it appears that there is little correlation between the two. The report is based off factors that depend less on politics other than the category of corruption. However, there are multiple factors that can be influenced by propaganda and political influence. The data may be skewed towards a certain population as the data does not specify what covers the population. In the research paper Public Relations and Nation Building, the Hasbara are used to sway internal public towards nationalistic views. Supporting this, in The General's Son, Miko had a very different understanding of history and politics that the rest of the world did not have as a result of Israeli media and propaganda. Propaganda while not a direct influence on the answers of the people, may influence their answers in other ways by controlling their belief in the system that they currently reside in. This would result in a skewed result. An interesting comparison which could also be further researched upon would be a comparison to the Israeli people's knowledge of current events surrounding Israel including things like the West Bank and Gaza and what their opinions are on the answer of that survey. I believe that while the data is inconclusive, through further research, this topic could be further explained by taking in more points of data by asking different questions.

Conclusion

Based off the research found, there is no conclusive evidence that Israel's World Happiness Index is influenced by propaganda. However, the research did show that the values may be skewed as a result of Propaganda. The target group does not specify if political views are considered in choosing their surveying audience. This also leads the question of the validity of the Report and the values of the test itself. Israel also showed low scores in view on corruption. Which means much of the population viewed businesses and/or the government to be corrupt. This was an especially surprising result of the survey which also raises more questions that could be further pursued with more tests. Another point is that GDP also plays one the larger factors in deciding Happiness in the report. As some countries in the region do not have high GDP, they also have lower rankings too.

Bibliography

Helliwell, J. F., Layard, R. D., & Sachs, J. undefined. (2019). World Happiness Report. World

Happiness Report. Retrieved from https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2019/

Gallup, Inc. (2019, November 22). Analytics & Advice About Everything That Matters.

Retrieved from https://www.gallup.com/home.aspx.

Peled, M. (2016). *The general's son journey of an Israeli in Palestine*. Charlottesville: Just

World.

History.com Editors. (2017, June 30). Israel. Retrieved from

https://www.history.com/topics/middle-east/history-of-israel.

Toledano, M., & McKie, D. (2013). *Public relations and nation building: Influencing Israel*.

Routledge.