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# Gallup Global Emotions

2021





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**JON CLIFTON**

Global Managing Partner, Gallup

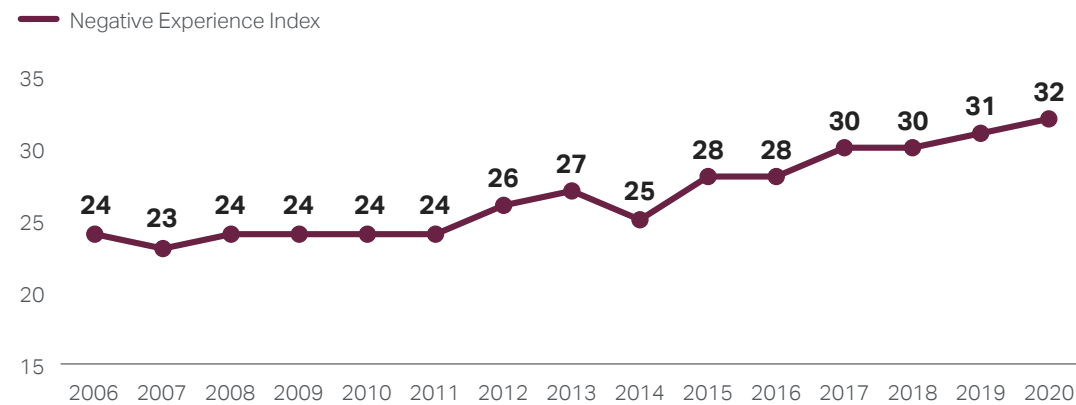
# From Gallup's Global Managing Partner

More people reported feeling stressed, sad, angry and worried in 2020 than at any point in Gallup's global tracking. You might expect that during the worst pandemic in more than a century.

But you can't blame it on the pandemic alone. While 2020 set a record for negative emotions, the trend actually started almost 10 years ago.

## Negative Experience Index in 2020

Worldwide



GALLUP WORLD POLL, 2020

The entire world had every right to feel awful last year, especially with so many falling sick or losing a loved one. The economic toll was devastating too. Half of those working at the time of the pandemic said they earned less money because of COVID-19, and 32% of people said they lost their job. In all, 80% of people said COVID-19 affected them in some way. But while COVID-19 likely contributed to negative experiences in 2020 — what explains the rising trend for the past decade?

Historically, political and economic turmoil are often the backdrop of rising negative emotions. Lebanon's political turmoil, which culminated in the explosion at the Port of Beirut, saw negative emotions skyrocket. Greece's long economic fallout following the 2008 global recession saw a similar historic rise in negative emotions.

In the absence of this turmoil, four other things may be contributing to this global rise in negative emotions: increasing global hunger, a lack of freedom, rising corruption and income inequality.

As with negative emotions, global hunger has been steadily increasing since 2014. According to the [Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations \(FAO\)](#), over 30% of the world is experiencing food insecurity, up from 22.6% in 2014.

According to the *World Happiness Report*, "... negative affect is significantly reduced by [...] freedom and the absence of corruption." But what kind of freedom?

It could mean freedom to access information. Negative experiences go down when literacy rates go up and when countries have more people using the internet.

Freedom is also suppressed by corruption. In 2020, about seven in 10 people worldwide believed that corruption was widespread in their government (67%) or their country's businesses (70%). In fact, majorities of people believe corruption is widespread in the governments of 79 out of 101 countries and areas in the world, and a majority in 85 out of 110 countries think this is true of businesses.

Lastly, negative emotions appear to be driven by income inequality. Many countries that report high income inequality also happen to be the countries that report a lot of negative emotions, such as anger.

Widespread negative emotions are devastating for societies. The book, *Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism*, written by Anne Case and Nobel Laureate Angus Deaton, highlights the startling finding that the combined deaths of suicide, alcohol poisoning and opioid overdoses have single-handedly contributed to the national decline in life expectancy in the U.S., especially among White males without college degrees. They found that the areas that were most affected by these deaths were the same places where people reported the most physical pain in America, which is one of the indicators featured in this report.

Widespread negative emotions are not good for any country, let alone the entire world. This year's *Global Emotions* report focuses on this concerning trend that has emerged over the past decade. It ranks countries around the world on stress, sadness, worry, anger and physical pain. It also looks at where people report the most positive experiences — such as enjoyment, laughing and smiling a lot, feeling well-rested, feeling respected, and learning or doing something interesting.

We encourage world leaders to ask, benchmark and understand how their citizens are experiencing their lives these days.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Clifton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

# About This Report

Gallup's Positive and Negative Experience Indexes measure life's intangibles — feelings and emotions — that traditional economic indicators, such as GDP, were never intended to capture. Each index provides a real-time snapshot of people's daily experiences, offering leaders insights into the health of their societies that they cannot gather from economic measures alone.

The *2021 Global Emotions* report offers a snapshot of Gallup's latest measurements of people's positive and negative daily experiences amid a year like no other — the first full year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings are based on nearly 160,000 interviews with adults in 116 countries and areas in 2020 and early 2021.



## POSITIVE EXPERIENCE INDEX QUESTIONS

- Did you feel **well-rested** yesterday?
- Were you **treated with respect all day** yesterday?
- Did you **smile or laugh a lot** yesterday?
- Did you **learn or do something interesting** yesterday?
- Did you experience the following feelings during a lot of the day yesterday? How about **enjoyment**?

### The Positive Experience Index score

is the mean of all valid affirmative responses to these items, multiplied by 100. Country-level index scores range from zero to 100. Higher scores indicate that positive emotions are more pervasive in a country. These scores strongly relate to people's perceptions about their living standards, personal freedoms and the presence of social networks.



## NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE INDEX QUESTIONS

- Did you experience the following feelings during a lot of the day yesterday? How about **physical pain**?
- 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**?
- Did you experience the following feelings during a lot of the day yesterday? How about **stress**?
- Did you experience the following feelings during a lot of the day yesterday? How about **anger**?

**The Negative Experience Index score** is the mean of all valid affirmative responses to the above items, multiplied by 100. Country-level index scores range from zero to 100. The higher the score, the more pervasive negative emotions are in a country. People's experiences with health problems and their ability to afford food are predictive of higher negative scores.

# Positive Experience Index Remained Stable Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

2020 may eventually go down in history as one of the worst years ever, but the results on Gallup’s Positive Experience Index suggest many people remained resilient through the planet’s dark days.

In 2020, Gallup asked adults around the world — as it has every year for the past 15 years — if they had five specific, positive experiences during a lot of the day preceding the survey. Last year, at least seven in 10 people worldwide said they felt well-rested (72%), experienced enjoyment (72%), and smiled or laughed a lot (70%), with nearly nine in 10 feeling treated with respect (86%). People were far less likely, as they typically are, to say they learned or did something interesting the day before the interview; in 2020, less than half of the world (49%) experienced this.

Providing evidence of people’s resiliency, the results on most of these items changed very little from the previous year. People were just as likely to say that, during a lot of the preceding day, they experienced enjoyment, felt treated with respect and learned something interesting, with the percentage who said they felt well-rested even increasing one point. However, the 70% who said they smiled or laughed a lot represented a drop of five points within the span of a year and is the lowest measure for this question in Gallup’s 15-year trend.

Gallup compiles the “yes” responses from these five questions into a Positive Experience Index score for each country and area. Given the stability of nearly all the questions globally, the worldwide index score in 2020 — 71 — also remained unchanged from the previous year.

## Positive Experience Index in 2020

Worldwide

Positive Experience Index

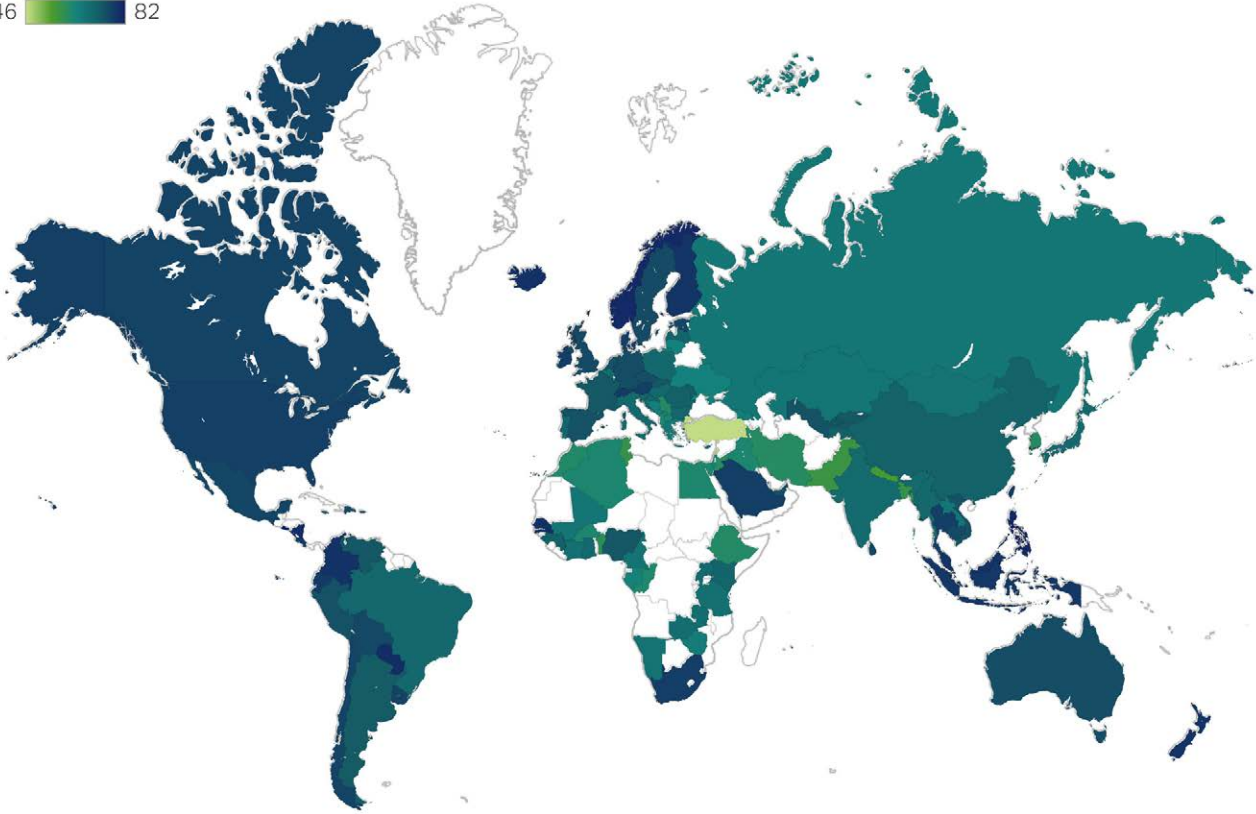


GALLUP WORLD POLL, 2020

Scores ranged from a high of 82 in El Salvador — which also had one of the highest scores in 2019 — to lows of 46 in Lebanon and Turkey. Lebanon and Turkey both ranked near the bottom for positive experiences in 2019. Only Afghanistan, which was not surveyed in 2020, scored worse than Lebanon in 2019.

## Positive Experience Index in 2020

46  82



# A Mix of Countries Lead Positive Experiences

Latin American countries typically dominate the list of those where adults report a lot of positive experiences each day. While several of the countries that usually top the list every year, including Panama, Honduras and Guatemala, were not surveyed in 2020, the region is still well represented on the Positive Experience Index. El Salvador leads the world with an index score of 82, and Nicaragua, Paraguay and Colombia are not far behind.











A trio of Nordic countries, including Iceland, Norway and Finland also posted high index scores. Notably, all three ranked in the top 10 on the *World Happiness* rankings in 2020, with Finland earning the top spot for the third consecutive year.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> <https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2021/>

## Highest Positive Experiences Worldwide

### + Positive Experience Index

 El Salvador	82
 Philippines	81
 Norway	81
 Nicaragua	81
 Paraguay	80
 Senegal	80
 Iceland	80
 Colombia	80
 New Zealand	79
 Finland	79

GALLUP WORLD POLL, 2020



# Lebanon, Turkey Are the Least Positive

Lebanon first made its appearance near the bottom of the Positive Experience Index — where it sits today, along with Turkey — in 2019, after being embroiled in political and economic turmoil that drew hundreds of thousands of protesters to the streets.











At that time, Lebanon’s score on the Positive Experience Index had dropped 12 points in a year, to 45 — the largest decline for any country between 2018 and 2019. Its score failed to rebound in 2020, as the political and economic situation in Lebanon only deepened during the pandemic and after a devastating explosion in Beirut in August 2020. Lebanon was the only country in 2020 where the majority of people (54%) said they did not feel well-rested a lot of the previous day.

Turkey’s journey to the bottom, on the other hand, has been more gradual, as people have been riding an economic roller coaster since 2018. Although the country was on the brink of economic collapse throughout most of 2020, it was one of a few that was able to avoid a recession during the pandemic.

Regardless, the economic and political turmoil has carried a hefty price tag for both countries: The majority of Lebanese people have not experienced enjoyment in their daily lives since 2018, and for Turks, this has been true since 2017.

## Lowest Positive Experiences Worldwide

**+ Positive Experience Index**

 Iran	61
 South Korea	61
 Jordan	61
 Benin	60
 Tunisia	58
 Bangladesh	58
 Pakistan	58
 Nepal	56
 Lebanon	46
 Turkey	46



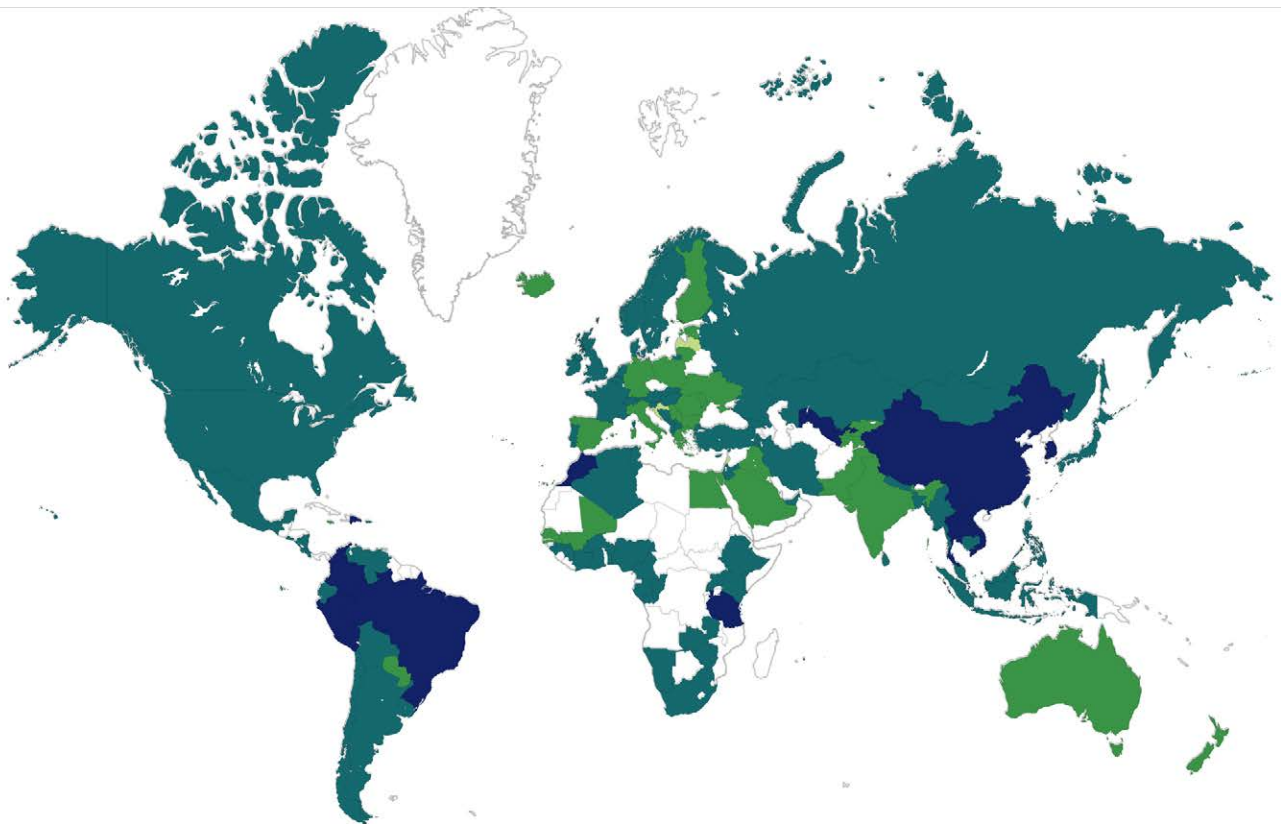
# The World Smiled Less, Laughed Less in 2020

Although most people around the world still managed to smile and laugh a lot in 2020, fewer people did.

In the span of a year, the percentage of people who said they smiled or laughed a lot the previous day dropped from 75% to 70%, which is also the lowest measure Gallup has ever recorded for this question. In 12 countries and areas that span multiple continents and income groups, there were double-digit declines in the percentage of people who reported smiling or laughing a lot the previous day, and scores moved in a negative direction in most of the countries.



■ Decline of 10 or more points   ■ Decline of 1-9 points   ■ Increase of 1-9 points   ■ Increase of 10 or more points



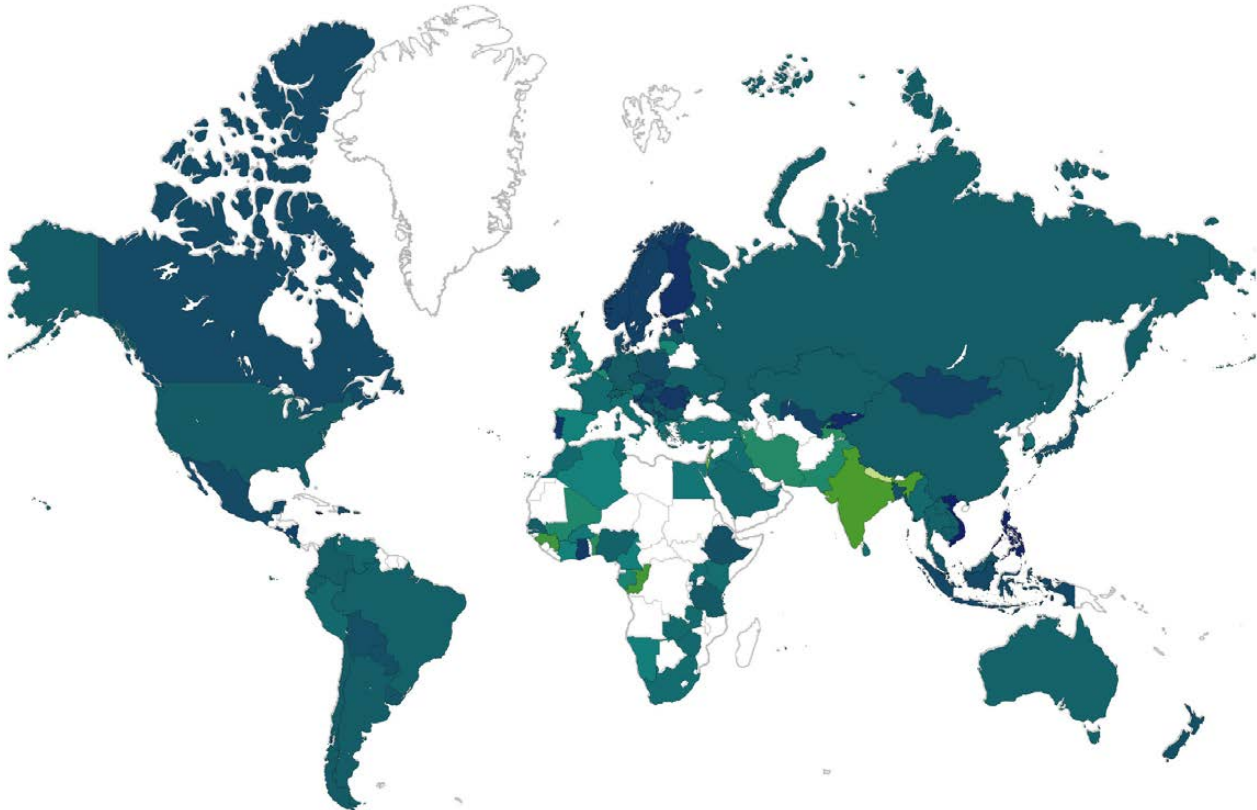
# Keeping Calm and Carrying On

In 2020, in partnership with the Wellbeing for Planet Earth (WPE) Foundation, Gallup began testing ways to incorporate more globally inclusive concepts into studies of wellbeing around the world. For example, many cultures, particularly Eastern ones, value emotions like calmness and contentment, but until now, these emotions have rarely been asked about in wellbeing studies.

Gallup added “calmness” to the list of daily experiences it asked about in its 2020 World Poll survey. This initial test revealed that 72% of the world’s adults reported feeling a lot of calmness the previous day. However, experiences of calmness varied extensively across the world, ranging from a low of 34% in Nepal to a high of 93% in Vietnam.



34%  93%



# Negative Experience Index Score Continues to Rise

As positive as people were in 2020, the Negative Experience Index shows the world was a sadder, angrier, more worried and more stressed-out place than it has been at any time in the past 15 years.

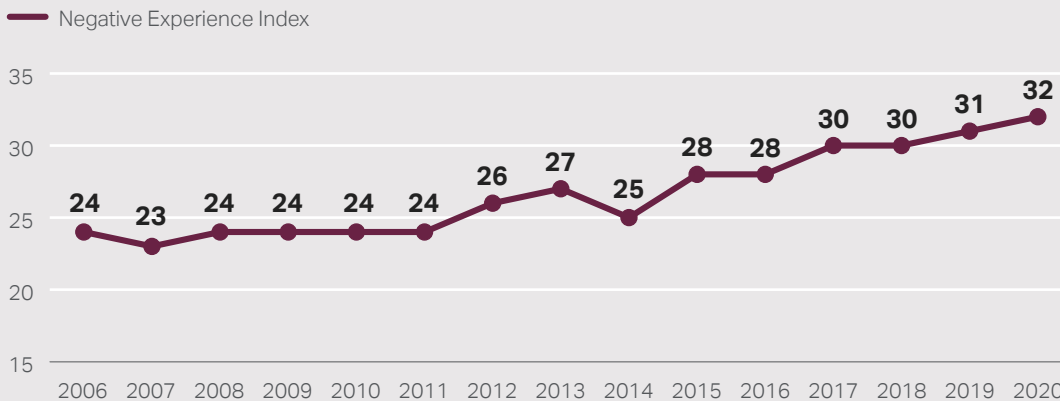
Gallup asked adults in 115 countries and areas if they had five specific, negative experiences on the day preceding the survey. Four in 10 adults said they had experienced worry (40%) or stress (40%), and just under three in 10 had experienced physical pain (29%) during a lot of the day before. About one in four or more experienced sadness (27%) or anger (24%).

Already at or near record highs in 2019, experiences of worry, stress, sadness and anger continued to gain steam and set new records in 2020. Worry and sadness each rose one percentage point, anger rose two, and stress rocketed up five. The percentage of adults worldwide who experienced pain was the only index item that declined — dropping two points to 29% after holding steady for several years at 31%.

Gallup compiles the “yes” responses from the five negative-experience questions into a Negative Experience Index score for each country. The higher percentages on most of the index items elevated the world’s overall score to a new high of 32.

## Negative Experience Index in 2020

Worldwide

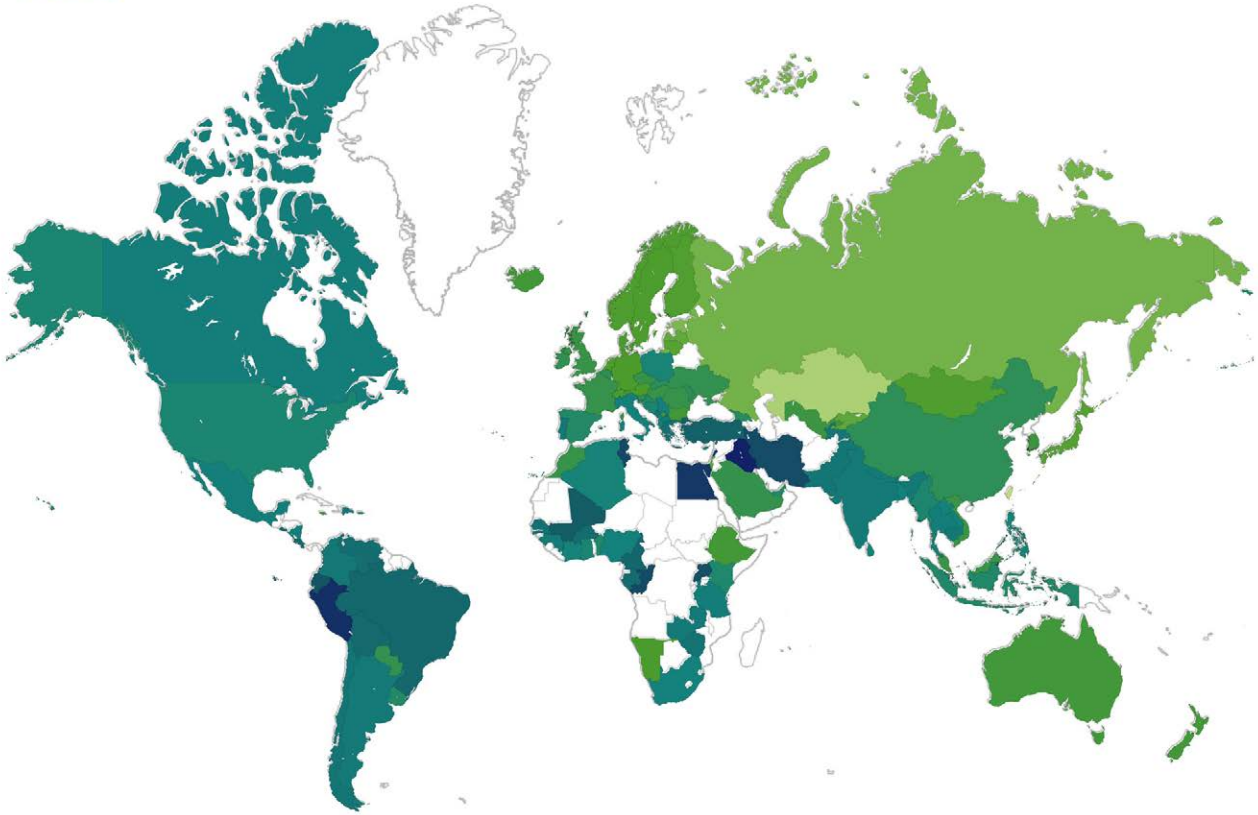


GALLUP WORLD POLL, 2020

Scores worldwide ranged from a high of 53 in Iraq, which led the world on the Negative Experience Index in 2019, to a low of 13 in Taiwan, which also scored lowest on the index in 2019.

## Negative Experience Index in 2020

13  53



# Iraq Again Leads the World in Negative Experiences

For the second consecutive year, Iraq posted the highest score on the Negative Experience Index with a score of 53. This figure represents a slight increase from its score of 51 in 2019.










Negative experiences remained common for most of the population in 2020, with at least half of Iraqis experiencing each of the five experiences in the survey. Notably, Iraqis led the world in experiencing pain (56%), anger (51%) and sadness (50%).

No other country posted a Negative Experience Index score higher than Iraq's, but, as in past years, people in countries and areas with high negative scores in 2020 were contending with economic and political turmoil — likely only made worse by the pandemic. Lebanon, which scores a close second on the index and has been at the top of the Negative Experiences Index list for the past two years, is a prime example.



## Highest Negative Experiences Worldwide

**■ Negative Experience Index**

 Iraq	53
 Lebanon	51
 Peru	51
 Egypt	50
 Tunisia	47
 Congo	46
 Iran	46
 Uganda	45
 Ecuador	45
 Mali	43

# Countries/Areas With the Lowest Negative Experiences

Countries and areas with the lowest Negative Experience Index scores do not necessarily have the highest Positive Experience Index scores. Many of the countries and areas with the lowest scores on the Negative Experience Index in 2020 have appeared at the bottom of this list for years — including Taiwan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Estonia, which were also among the lowest negative scores in 2019.



## Lowest Negative Experiences Worldwide

 Negative Experience Index

 Japan	23
 Lithuania	22
 Israel	22
 Kyrgyzstan	22
 Latvia	21
 Russia	20
 Estonia	19
 Mauritius	17
 Kazakhstan	15
 Taiwan, Province of China	13

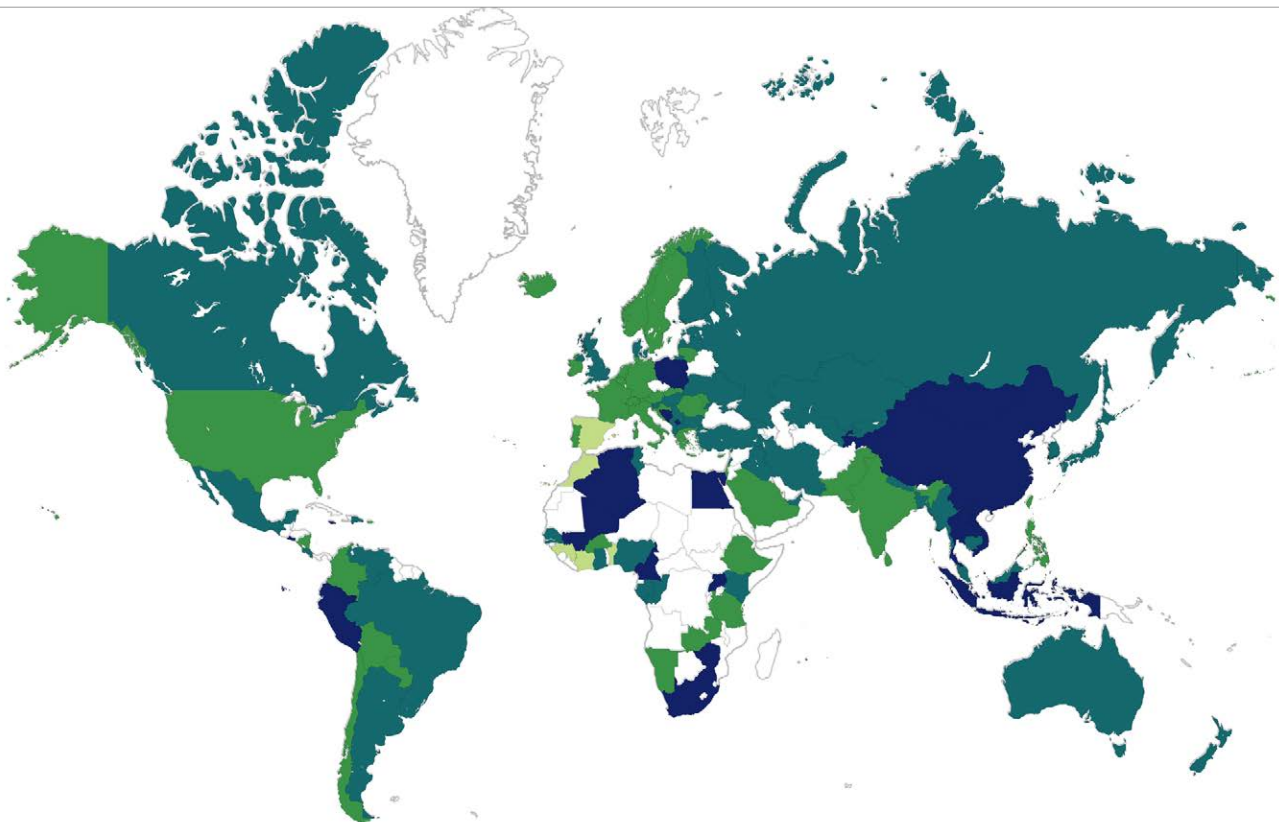
# The Worst and Most Stressful Year

2020 was officially the most stressful year in recent history, with a record-high 40% of adults worldwide saying they experienced stress during a lot of the previous day. This five-percentage-point jump from 35% in 2019 represents nearly 190 million more people globally who experienced stress this often. Overall, there were double-digit increases in stress in 21 countries and areas and more than half of countries saw some sort of increase.

Worldwide, not everyone was feeling this stress to the same degree. Reported stress ranged from a high of 66% in Peru — which represents a new high for the country — to a low of 13% in Kyrgyzstan, where stress levels have historically been low and stayed low in 2020.



■ Decline of 10 or more points   
 ■ Decline of 1-9 points   
 ■ Increase of 1-9 points   
 ■ Increase of 10 or more points





# A Special Note About the Data in This Report

Last year, the COVID-19 pandemic forced Gallup to rethink how it surveys the world. Since 2005, Gallup has conducted the majority of its World Poll surveys through face-to-face interviews, which certainly wasn't safe or even possible to do in most places in 2020 — and still isn't as of this writing.

Gallup concluded that we could safely switch from face-to-face interviews to computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI) while maintaining data quality that meets our standards. In close partnership with our regional teams worldwide, we carried out surveys in 116 countries and areas throughout 2020 and into the early part of 2021.

We encountered a fair number of challenges along the way — some expected and some not. However, our teams were extremely resourceful and always found solutions that did not compromise data quality or put people in harm's way during the pandemic.

Although Gallup surveyed fewer countries and areas in 2020 than it typically does as part of its World Poll, the trends presented in this report still hold year over year.

## Survey Methods

The results in this report are based on nationally representative, probability-based samples among the adult population, ages 15 and older. The Positive Experience Index is based on surveys in 116 countries and areas in 2020 and early 2021 and the Negative Experience Index is based on surveys in 115 countries and areas in 2020 and early 2021.

Multiple administrations were collected in each country or area, with a sample size of 1,000 or more respondents per country or area. In most countries/areas, surveys were conducted over mobile and landline telephones; some in-person interviews were conducted in Republic of the Congo, India, Mali, Pakistan and Senegal.

For results based on the total sample of national adults, the margin of sampling error ranges between  $\pm 1.1$  and  $\pm 5.5$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level. The margin of error 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.

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