

Quantifying the state of peace

Global Peace Index

With a new Global Peace Index countries can be ranked according to their ‘state of peace’.

By **Joris Voorhoeve**

What can be counted does not count, and what counts cannot be counted’. Does this bon mot, attributed to Albert Einstein, also apply to what counts above all – peace?

In May 2007 a group of committed individuals launched a new website, Vision of Humanity, as the reference point for the Global Peace Index (GPI), which is intended to highlight the relationship between global peace and sustainability. The GPI was developed by an international team of experts brought together at the initiative of Australian entrepreneur and philanthropist Steve Killelea, and drawn up by analysts from the Economist Intelligence Unit.

The GPI attempts to measure the ‘state of peace’ within and among 121 nations, based on 24 indicators in three areas: aspects of violent conflict, elements of societal security, and measures of militarization (see box). From these, two weighted indices are calculated to provide measures of the extent to which each country is at peace internally and with other countries.

In the overall index, some 60% of the measures relate to internal peace and 40% to external peace. This reflects an assumption that internal peace is rather more important for the peacefulness rating than external peace or the absence of external conflicts. A different assumption, e.g. 50–50, or 25–75, would attribute more peacefulness to states that are not so much at peace *within*, but are not engaged in international conflicts. This assumption of 60–40 is defensible; it is not a weakness of the index, but its effect on the ranking should be noted.

The index encompasses 121 countries and 95% of the world’s population. A number of least developed countries had to be excluded due to lack of data, but it is likely that most of these would be at the bottom of the list.

Ranking

Small, stable and democratic countries are relatively most peaceful. According to the index, 15 out of the top 20 are

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Indicators of peace

Violent conflict

- 1 Number of external and internal violent conflicts in 2000–05
- 2 Number of deaths from organized external conflict
- 3 Number of deaths from organized internal conflict
- 4 Level of organized internal conflict
- 5 Relations with neighbouring countries.

Societal security

- 6 Level of distrust in other citizens
- 7 Displaced persons as percentage of the population
- 8 Political instability
- 9 Level of respect for human rights (political terror scale)
- 10 Potential for terrorist acts
- 11 Homicides per 100,000 people
- 12 Other violent crime statistics
- 13 Violent demonstrations
- 14 Prisoners per 100,000 people
- 15 Internal security officers and police per 100,000 people

Militarization

- 16 Military expenditure as a percentage of GDP
- 17 Armed services personnel per 100,000 inhabitants
- 18 Imports of major conventional weapons per 100,000 inhabitants
- 19 Exports of major conventional weapons per 100,000
- 20 UN deployments 2006–07 (percentage of total forces)
- 21 Non-UN deployments 2006–07 (percentage of total forces)
- 22 Heavy weapons per 100,000 inhabitants
- 23 Access to small arms
- 24 Other indicators of military capabilities

In addition to these 24 main indicators, the authors took into account 33 other indicators in areas such as the competence and quality of governments, the strength of institutions, political processes, international openness, demography, regional integration, religion, culture, education and well-being. Source: www.visionofhumanity.com.

European democracies, most of them members of the European Union. Island nations also tend to be more at peace, probably because there are fewer external sources of tension.

Norway, at the top of the list, has no notable internal conflicts and is engaged externally only in UN peacekeeping operations. The Netherlands is ranked only 20, due to two political murders in the period considered, its high crime statistics, indications of social tensions, and the country's involvement in Iraq.

Beyond Western Europe, countries in most other regions show wide variations in rankings. Asia is the next most peaceful region but with significant variations. Most sub-Saharan African states are in the bottom half of the list.

Three of the world's major states score badly, with China ranked 60, the United States 96 and Russia 118. The relatively low ranking of the United States is due to its high levels of military expenditure and involvement outside its borders as self-appointed (and not always successful) 'global policeman'. It is also because of internal factors – the United States has the highest proportion of the population in jail, and a high level of homicide. Large states that score much better include Japan (ranked 5), Germany (12) and France (33).

Of special interest are countries at the bottom of the list. Those that are most under stress due to violence, according to GPI, are Iraq and Sudan. Russia's low ranking may seem surprising, but is the result of extensive internal violence and its high military expenditures. Israel is a special case. Based on its small size and democratic government it would have ranked higher, were it not for high internal violence and tensions with its neighbours.

The first and the last: the GPI ranking of 121 countries

The top ten

(most at peace):

- 1 Norway
- 2 New Zealand
- 3 Denmark
- 4 Ireland
- 5 Japan
- 6 Finland
- 7 Sweden
- 8 Canada
- 9 Portugal
- 10 Austria

The bottom ten

(least at peace):

- 112 Angola
- 113 Ivory Coast
- 114 Lebanon
- 115 Pakistan
- 116 Colombia
- 117 Nigeria
- 118 Russia
- 119 Sudan
- 120 Israel
- 121 Iraq

Source: www.visionofhumanity.com.

Statistics

For most countries the rankings are not surprising, and give some common sense confidence in the index. Of course, the rankings are based on statistical data compiled largely between 2000 and 2006, and may not necessarily reflect the actual state of peacefulness at the time of reading. Of particular interest is that most developing countries are in the middle and lower ranks.

Readers may find differences between apparently similar countries, or at unexpectedly high or low rankings, suggesting that the resulting scores are somewhat arbitrary. Many features of being at peace internally and externally cannot be measured statistically. For some countries with weak statistical offices the data are not entirely reliable. Not all the important qualities of a social system can be measured well.

The value of this new index may be proven in the coming years. For the moment, one way is to check how well it correlates with other indices. The compilers of the GPI show that there is a significant correlation between democracy and internal peace, but not between democracy and external peace. Corruption and the GPI show a strong inverse correlation. It may be expected that GPI rankings correlate well with those of the Failed States Index compiled by the Fund for Peace. Indeed, the two countries at the top of the Failed States Index 2007, Iraq and Sudan, are also at the bottom of the GPI.

In conclusion, the GPI may be a useful step forward in the measurement, categorization and analysis of the state of peace of various countries. It is a first attempt, and clearly not as refined as, for example, the sophisticated ratings of political rights and civil liberties published by Freedom House, which are the result of a long process of scholarly research. As long as there are no longitudinal GPI figures, and as long as it includes some debatable measures that are not always precise, the index should be regarded as providing a useful indication only, rather than immutable fact.

As the economist John Maynard Keynes, when questioned about the precision of the figures in his general theory of employment, dryly responded: 'Do you have better ones?' ■

- Global Peace Index, Vision of Humanity: www.visionofhumanity.com
- Failed States Index, Fund for Peace: www.fundforpeace.org
- *Freedom in the World 2007*, a survey of worldwide political rights and civil liberties, Freedom House: www.freedomhouse.org



Photo: HH/Vision Touring