



## GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS (GNH) AND THE ELECTION

**This is the third note in our series about South Africa's happiness.**

### Introduction

By now you know that the “happiness index” is based on what people say about life, which is closely related to what they experience. The index is constructed by monitoring the Tweets of South Africans and analysing the sentiment of these Tweets, which is then used in a sentiment balance algorithm to derive the Gross National Happiness (GNH). The GNH is measured on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being very unhappy and 10 being very happy.

### South Africa is unhappy — why, and what can be done to improve the happiness of the country?

Since 2013, the United Nations publishes the World Happiness Index on an annual basis. The index measures the happiness of countries and is based on a scale of between 0 (being very unhappy) and 10 (being very happy), with 5 indicating a neutral point (being neither unhappy nor happy). Since the launch of this index, the happiness of South Africa has consistently been below the neutral point, indicating a state of unhappiness instead of happiness. In 2013 the level of happiness (or unhappiness) stood at 4.963, which decreased to 4.722 by 2018. A total of 156 countries are ranked and South Africa's happiness dropped 10 places from number 96 (2013) to number 106 (2018) during that time.

But why are we so unhappy and what can we do to become happier?

Research has found that the most important factors that determine the happiness in a country are: i) the income level of people, which is closely related to employment levels and opportunities; ii) access to basic services, such as water, electricity and housing; iii) people's health; iv) available social support (the support system within families and communities); v) the degree of freedom a person has in making decisions about their own life; vi) the generosity of the society; viii) a feeling of safety from bodily harm; vii) the absence of corruption; and viii) the existence of a democratic regime.

At first glance it is very clear that most of these variables form part of South Africa's daily vocabulary! Income, unemployment and opportunities are all very closely related to economic performance, and we all know that the South African economy is hardly growing.

Protests in South Africa are a daily occurrence because of the absence or deterioration of various services, like transport, electricity, water, sanitation and housing. The protection of various personal rights, feeling unsafe, crime generally, corruption, are all part of our daily discourse. We may have other words for some of these ills, like state capture, cadre deployment, nepotism and so on; the words may differ, but the tune remains the same. From this it is obvious why South Africa is such an unhappy place.

One may, therefore, expect that an election that promises some political change that will include less of the negative factors mentioned above, should impact positively on South Africa's happiness score. That is why it is so important to follow the happiness score, just before and during the elections. Will changes in our levels of happiness coincide with political changes? We will see...



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### What does the GNH index of South Africa say about the happiness levels of South Africa in the last few days, leading up to the election?

The index has been running for three days now and some interesting observations are already apparent. The past two days, South Africa's happiness has varied somewhat with 30 April initially being somewhat happier than 1 May. This was a surprise. One would think that a public holiday would be good for happiness — braai, leisure and sleeping in... However, the index showed that as more people Tweeted from after 17:00 on 1 May, the mood started to swing, and Workers' Day ended slightly less unhappy than the day before. So, a holiday does seem to lift the spirits!

Additionally, the total number of original Tweets increased markedly to almost 60 000 on Workers' Day. This clearly shows that when South Africans have some spare time on their hands, they think about life and Tweet about life.

Similar trends were observed on 30 April. The happiest moods were early in the morning. Thereafter came a dip with the lowest levels around noon, followed by a steady increase in happiness to peak at approximately 17:00 in the afternoon. It seems that 17:00 is indeed happy hour, in more than one way!

Some of the hot topics Tweeted about on Workers' Day were, as expected, the upcoming elections — supporting our decision to follow the happiness score during the next few days. But being Workers' Day, there were plenty Tweets wishing everybody a happy Workers' Day.

The negative finding against Caster Semenya was, as expected, hotly Tweeted about. Most Tweets were supportive and sympathetic towards Semenya, showing that South Africans are indeed (sometimes) a caring and supportive society (which is a good thing, and which supports happiness).

As the happiness index builds up more information, the data will become a little more useful. We will be able to measure other variables against happiness. Over the next few days we plan to see if the GNH index mirrors movements on the stock market, the capital market and the forex markets.

We suspect that a happier country will also reflect a more optimistic financial market and as the country's mood changes, we should be able to see a similar pattern on our financial markets. If it becomes clear that our political landscape could be changing over the next few days, will it reflect in the GNH index and will the markets follow suit?

Until our next note, "stay tuned" as we discover the happiness levels of South Africa during this exciting period.

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Important to note that all opinions given in the above-mentioned note is that of the author.

On any technical queries related to the GNH, please contact Prof Talita Greyling (talitag@uj.ac.za)

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