

# Happiness in Mexico: An analysis of key factors

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HAPPINESS, COMMONLY REFERRED TO AS PERSONAL WELL-BEING, is the feeling of being comfortable or satisfied with life in general or with particular moments. In Mexico, which is our focus here, the World Happiness Report showed that happiness decreased from 7.088 to 6.678 between 2013 and 2024. Despite this, INEGI revealed that 65% of Mexicans reported feeling quite happy, giving an average rating of 8.45.<sup>1</sup> Starting in 2022, a continuous improvement in well-being placed Mexico in 25th place in the World Happiness Report.<sup>2</sup> Still, it remains unclear what is driving this improvement, which makes this analysis important. Consequently, this study aims to identify the factors that most influence the happiness of adults in Mexico.

Although this analysis does not delve deeply into the philosophical concept of happiness, it is crucial to note that its meaning varies from person to person. Research by Martínez-Martínez *et al.*<sup>3</sup> revealed that, for certain Mexicans, happiness is related to joy, drive and support, influence and personal development, personal fulfillment, family and friends, faith as a source of well-being, and emotional support and reciprocity. These different perspectives highlight the problem that there is no universal definition



<sup>1</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, *Encuesta Nacional de Bienestar Autorreportado (ENBIARE) 2021*. INEGI, 2021. At: [https://en.www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/programas/enbiare/2021/doc/enbiare\\_2021\\_presentacion\\_resultados.pdf](https://en.www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/programas/enbiare/2021/doc/enbiare_2021_presentacion_resultados.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> John. F. Helliwell *et al.* (eds.), *World Happiness Report 2024*. Oxford, Wellbeing Research Centre/ University of Oxford, 2024, p. 15. At: <https://files.worldhappiness.report/WHR24.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Oscar. A. Martínez-Martínez, Javier Reyes and Eder Noda, "Stratification of happiness in an urban area in Mexico: A qualitative examination by level of marginalization", in *The Qualitative Report*, vol. 26, no. 11, 2021, pp. 3575-3595. At: <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2021.5045>.

of happiness. However, broadly speaking, happiness can be interpreted as a sense of well-being that people experience in their daily lives.

During 2022, the Mexican economy showed an upturn, with a GDP growth of 3.06%. By 2023, GDP soared to a record 1,788.89 billion USD, and in the third quarter of 2024, growth continued with an additional 1.60% expansion. According to available data, Mexico has managed to maintain a fairly stable GDP growth rate, averaging 2.07% since 1987, and if trends continue, GDP could reach 2,543.96 billion USD by 2029. Moreover, the average annual salary has been gradually rising since the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing from 19,638 USD in 2021 to 20,090 USD in 2023. Considering these economic trends, it would not be surprising if Mexico's economic growth contributed to the increase in happiness levels reflected in recent *world happiness reports* and in the *World Happiness Index*. Studies also indicate that economic growth significantly impacts how Mexicans perceive their own well-being.<sup>4</sup>

From a more human-centered perspective, people commonly feel more motivated and content in their daily lives when their basic needs are met and when they feel secure. The steady rise in Mexicans' purchasing power suggests that more individuals are able to access essential goods and services, which in turn fosters a stronger sense of well-being. Although economic pro-

gress, pleasure, and self-satisfaction are often linked to happiness in Mexico, research suggests that the connection between income and subjective well-being is actually rather weak. Instead, having one's basic needs covered has a greater influence on happiness than the amount of money earned.<sup>5</sup>

Experiencing happiness is complex, influenced by mental, environmental, and financial aspects. In Mexico, this personal sense of joy is associated with having a united family, a stable economy, urban living, belonging to a group, and the degree of social marginalization one feels. Understanding how these elements interact provides insight into the population's well-being.

Analyses among Latinos in the United States reveal that family cohesion reduces mental distress by buffering cultural shocks. Similarly, in Mexico, isolation influences happiness in unique ways. A study by Martínez-Martínez *et al.*<sup>6</sup> found that people living in cities with little isolation —those with access to electricity, clean water, and security—associate happiness with family support, work, financial stability, and personal growth. Conversely, those in highly isolated areas with limited access to essentials often find joy in faith rather than in economic success. This indicates that while money contributes to well-being, other sources of meaning —such as faith— can compensate for economic shortcomings.

<sup>4</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>5</sup> Nicole Fuentes and Mariano Rojas, "Economic theory and subjective happiness: Mexico", in *Social Indicators Research*, no. 53, 2001, pp. 289-314. At: <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1007189429153>.

<sup>6</sup> Martínez-Martínez *et al.*, *op. cit.*



Family bonds, understood as the unique affection shared among family members, are vital for easing stress and promoting well-being. Mexican-American families, particularly fathers, have shown stronger family bonds during financial hardship, providing emotional support that increases happiness even in the absence of wealth.<sup>7</sup> This aligns with the idea that happiness does not depend solely on wealth but also on appreciating and making the most of what one has to live well.

Studies compiling large datasets suggest that happiness and success go hand in hand.<sup>8</sup> While success does not always guarantee happiness, people who perform well in important areas of life often report higher levels of well-being. This bidirectional connection means that happiness can increase motivation and focus, raising the chances of success, which in turn can further enhance happiness.

Nevertheless, unexpected life setbacks can complicate this dynamic. For instance, a student facing a romantic breakup before a crucial exam may struggle to remain motivated. This illustrates the intricate interplay between emotions and achievements. Furthermore, althou-

gh happiness levels in Mexico have risen since the COVID-19 crisis, it remains uncertain whether this increase reflects greater national success or other contributing factors.

Happiness levels do not differ significantly between men and women, according to data. In 2021, Mexican men reported happiness at 8.53, while women reported 8.37—nearly the same.<sup>9</sup> Among female university leaders in Mexico, happiness was linked to perceiving their work as important and fulfilling, as well as to their age. Although success appears to bring happiness to both men and women, further research is needed to determine whether male leaders experience well-being in the same way.

The way people connect socially—their relationship with their city, region, country, continent, and the planet—has been linked to happiness in 74 countries, including Mexico.<sup>10</sup> Greater social connectedness correlates with higher happiness, although its impact on migration remains unclear. Evidence suggests that happier Mexicans prefer to stay in the country, whereas less happy individuals are more inclined to migrate.<sup>11</sup>

Regional differences also shape happiness in Mexico. Analyses indica-

<sup>7</sup> Flavia Izzo, Roberto Baiocco and Jessica Pistella, "Children's and adolescents' happiness and family functioning: A systematic literature review", in *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 19, no. 24, 2022. At: <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph192416593>.

<sup>8</sup> Sonja Lyubomirsky, Laura King and Ed Diener, "The benefits of frequent positive affect: Does happiness lead to success?", in *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 131, no. 6, 2005, pp. 803-855. At: <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2959.131.6.803>; S. Kaplan, J. C. Bradley, J. N. Luchman and D. Haynes, "On the role of positive and negative affectivity in job performance: A meta-analytic investigation", in *Journal of Applied Psychology*, vol. 94, no. 1, 2009, pp. 162-176. At: <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0013115>.

<sup>9</sup> INEGI, *op. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> Helliwell *et al.*, *op. cit.*

<sup>11</sup> Patricia Mercado-Salgado and Rosa María Nava-Rogel, "Quality of life and migration expectations of young people of rural in the State of Mexico", in *Población y salud en Mesoamérica*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2013. At: <https://doi.org/10.15517/psm.v10i2.8513>.



te that Mexicans in the north generally feel happier than those in other areas.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, the happiest populations are found in states like Puebla, Guerrero, and Oaxaca. Since happiness often correlates with economic development, questions arise regarding how evenly economic progress is distributed across the country.

In Ciudad Juarez, for example, happiness is strongly tied to financial security. People who earn enough to both spend and save report feeling happier than those struggling with financial problems. Additionally, individuals who feel financially secure are less likely to consider migrating elsewhere. Although perceptions of happiness in Mexico vary according to levels of marginalization, it remains unclear which regions are the most marginalized.

Meaningful employment is crucial for internal well-being. Some argue that better jobs would make Mexicans happier. However, studies suggest that happiness is not deter-

mined solely by having formal employment, but also by social factors, living conditions, and income. If someone has stable, well-paid, and safe working conditions, they are more likely to feel satisfied with their life, regardless of whether they work for a large company or independently.

This study highlights that multiple factors influence Mexicans' happiness. Strong family bonds, economic growth, urban living, social connectedness, and lower levels of marginalization serve as indicators of well-being. However, gender differences have little impact on overall happiness.

To foster greater happiness and reduce migration, strengthening social connections is essential. Expanding cities and improving living conditions would also contribute to higher levels of well-being. Moreover, if citizens had more financial resources, accessing basic needs would become easier, ultimately increasing happiness and quality of life for all.

<sup>12</sup> Martínez-Martínez *et al.*, *op. cit.*

