



Global
Flourishing
Study

COMPLETE WELL-BEING THROUGHOUT THE WORLD:

Lessons from the First Wave of the Global Flourishing Study



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THE INSTITUTE FOR GLOBAL HUMAN FLOURISHING

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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:



TABLE OF CONTENTS

PG. 4	PART ONE	What is Flourishing? How is It Conceptualized and Assessed in the GFS?
PG. 12	PART TWO	Key Findings
PG. 24	PART THREE	Beyond the Headline Findings
PG. 42	PART FOUR	Looking Ahead



What is Flourishing?

How is It Conceptualized and
Assessed in the GFS?

Happiness, wellness, well-being, and other aspects of the good life have long occupied a central place in popular debates and scholarly research. Flourishing is beginning to emerge as a way to integrate all of these discrete elements of a life well-lived.

Not everyone agrees on the meaning of this term, nor is there agreement that a single meaning would be desirable. In the spirit of dialogue, scholars co-leading the Global Flourishing Study (GFS) have joined conversations around the world in the hope that developing shared understandings of this ideal will improve the prospects for experiencing flourishing in daily life.¹

Some of these researchers have suggested that while well-being concerns the individual, flourishing is “the relative attainment of a state in which all aspects of a person’s life are good including the contexts in which that person lives.”² The phrase “relative attainment” suggests that we never fully flourish; instead, we are on a journey towards greater flourishing. We take this journey together in an ethical way: we cannot flourish at the expense of others. People flourish more in some areas of their lives and less in others, some contexts flourish more than others, and flourishing will vary across subjective and objective measures. For example, an individual might report that they feel healthy or have grown as a person despite receiving a very negative disease diagnosis from a doctor. In

other words, flourishing is comprised of multiple dimensions and domains—it is not reducible to a single factor, such as life satisfaction (see Table 1).³ In order to understand something as complicated as flourishing, it is necessary to employ diverse modes of inquiry in a process of inclusive dialogue, in order to begin to evaluate the complete well-being of “individuals, communities, and ecosystems.”⁴ Such a holistic appraisal is arguably more difficult to conduct, compared with happiness, well-being, and other more focused constructs that have offered policymakers a relatively simpler set of issues to debate and address.⁵ But some groups have begun to take steps in this direction, which is more difficult but also more rewarding.⁶ This entails measuring the subjective flourishing of individuals—including their sense of meaning, health, and goodness—as well as assessing aspects of communities and wider contexts, including ecological and spiritual ones. Inspired by such possibilities, the GFS seeks to map the topography of the human spirit, not unlike how science has cracked the DNA code.⁷

Well-Being Domain	Paradigmatic Examples	Definition
Physical Well-Being	Health	The relative attainment of a state in which all aspects of a person's physical life are good
Emotional Well-Being	Happiness	The relative attainment of a state in which all aspects of a person's emotional life are good
Cognitive Well-Being	Meaning	The relative attainment of a state in which all aspects of a person's cognitive life are good
Volitional Well-Being	Character	The relative attainment of a state in which all aspects of a person's volitional life are good
Social Well-Being	Relationships	The relative attainment of a state in which all aspects of a person's social life are good
Material Well-Being	Financial Security	The relative attainment of a state in which all aspects of a person's financial and material life are good
Spiritual Well-Being	(Various)	The relative attainment of a state in which all aspects of a person's spiritual life are good
Flourishing		The relative attainment of a state in which all aspects of a person's life are good, including the contexts in which that person lives

Table 1 Well-being Domains and Definitions⁸

¹ Lee, M. T., Johnson, B. R., T. J. VanderWeele. 2023. Understanding Flourishing: Developing a Global Community of Practice. Institute for Studies of Religion at Baylor University. <https://www.baylorisr.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/ISR-SpecialReport-TWCF-v3-2023.04.25-spread.pdf>. A recent example of “generative dialogue” was provided by the International Seminar on Human Flourishing in Latin America, funded by the Templeton World Charity Foundation, hosted by Tecnológico de Monterrey, in Monterrey, Mexico (December 5-7).

² VanderWeele, T. J., Case, B. W., Chen, Y., Cowden, R. G., Johnson, B. R., Lee, M. T., Lomas, T., Long, K. G. (2023). Flourishing in critical dialogue. *Social Science & Medicine: Mental Health*, 100172, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmmh.2022.100172>. VanderWeele, T. J. 2017. On the promotion of human flourishing. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 114(31), 8148–8156.

³ VanderWeele, T. J., and Johnson, B.R. 2025. Multidimensional versus unidimensional approaches to well-being. *Nature Human Behavior*.

⁴ Lee, M. T. and Mayor, I. 2023. Health and Flourishing: An Interdisciplinary Synthesis. In *Human Flourishing: A Multidisciplinary Perspective on Neuroscience, Health, Organizations and Arts*, edited by M. L. Heras, M. Grau, and Y. Rofcanin, pp. 49–68. Springer.

⁵ VanderWeele and Johnson (2025), *supra* note 3.

⁸ Ritchie-Dunham, J. L., Jones, S. C., Flett, J., Granville-Chapman, K., Pettey, A., Vossler, H., Lee, M. T. (2024). Love in Action: Agreements in a Large Microfinance Bank that Scale Ecosystem-Wide Flourishing, Organizational Impact, and Total Value Generated. *Humanistic Management Journal*, 9, (2), 231–246.

⁷ <https://globalflourishingstudy.com/>

⁸ This table is reprinted from VanderWeele, T. J., Johnson, B. R., Bialowolski, P. T., Bonhag, R., Bradshaw, M., Breedlove, T., Case, B., Chen, Y., Chen, Z. J., Counted, V., Cowden, R. G., de la Rosa, P. A., Felton, C., Fogleman, A., Gibson, C., Grigoropoulou, N., Gundersen, C., Jang, S. J., Johnson, K. A., Kent, B. V., Kim, E. S., Kim, Y. I., Koga, H. K., Lee, M. T., Le Pertel, N., Lomas, T., Long, K. N. G., Macchia, L., Makridis, C. A., Markham, L., Nakamura, J. S., Norman-Krause, N., Okafor, E. E., Okuzono, S. S., Ouyang, S., Padgett, R. N., Paltzer, J., Ritchie-Dunham, J. L., Ritter, Z., Shiba, K., Srinivasan, R., Ssozi, J., Weziak-Bialowolska, D., Wilkinson, R., Woodberry, R. D., Wortham, J., and Yancey, G. 2025. The Global Flourishing Study: Study profile and initial results on flourishing.

It is our hope that the findings from the first wave of GFS data that we report will enhance cross-cultural dialogues about flourishing and contribute to a better understanding of this important new interdisciplinary field of study.⁹ The Gallup World Poll and other global surveys, such as the World Happiness Report, provided a foundation for the development of the GFS. Launched in 2005, the Gallup World Poll (GWP) is the most comprehensive and farthest-reaching survey of the world. That survey connects with more than 99% of the world's adult population through annual, nationally representative surveys with comparable metrics across more than 140 countries, making it possible to understand the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of the world's 8+ billion people. Gallup also collects data for the World Happiness Report (WHR), which was first released in 2012 and has been updated annually since 2015. Despite their many merits, both the GWP and WHR are cross-sectional rather than longitudinal, which limits the ability to draw causal inferences about relationships among variables.

Drawing on Gallup's well-established data collection infrastructure, the GFS is able to gather longitudinal data for a majority of the world's population on the multidimensional construct of flourishing for the first time. No single organization or set of funders could have accomplished this goal. It required a partnership involving Baylor University, the Human Flourishing Program at Harvard, Gallup, the Center for Open Science, and a variety of funding sources.¹⁰ The first wave

of the GFS includes data on 207,920 adults aged 18 and older living in 22 geographically and culturally diverse countries and one territory, including Argentina, Australia, Brazil, China, Egypt, Germany, India, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, the Philippines, Poland, Turkey, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Tanzania, the United Kingdom, and the United States, as well as Hong Kong, a special administrative region of China. During 2022-2023, Gallup obtained nationally representative data within each country or territory, representing 64% of the world's population, with plans for collection on the same panel of individuals annually for at least five waves of data. Just as the GWP and WHR represented important innovations, the GFS is pioneering the collection of longitudinal data in an open science framework, which means that both the data and the computer code used to analyze the data are open to all researchers throughout the world for replication and refinement. Scholars are also invited to conduct their own original analyses without financial cost, provided that they practice open science principles. The GFS team has also facilitated the use of GFS data for researchers from around the world. Gallup and the GFS team are currently exploring another innovation: the use of Artificial Intelligence in recruiting and interviewing survey respondents. This has the potential to make ongoing data collection possible and to expand the number of countries included in the study.

Definitions:

Cross Sectional Studies: those that analyze data collected at only one point in time.

Longitudinal Studies: those that analyze data collected from the same individuals at multiple points over time.



Complete details about the GFS are available on the project's website.¹¹ The questionnaire, administered online, over the phone, or in person, consists of over 60 extensively evaluated and pretested questions, translated into 46 languages. Topics span general happiness and well-being, health and personal habits, relationships and community, personality and character, education and employment, financial well-being, religiosity or spirituality, demographic information, and more. The aim is to encourage global dialogues and cross-cultural collaborations informed by research findings that have the potential to benefit individuals and entire communities worldwide. This report introduces some of the key findings from the first wave of the GFS, including analyses of childhood predictors of the different domains of flourishing and related outcomes. Subsequent reports will more fully capitalize on the longitudinal design, and we plan to release a new report annually.

Complete details about the GFS are available on the project's website.

globalflourishingstudy.com



Fig. 1.1

**22 Countries and 1 Territory Included
in Wave 1 Research of GFS**

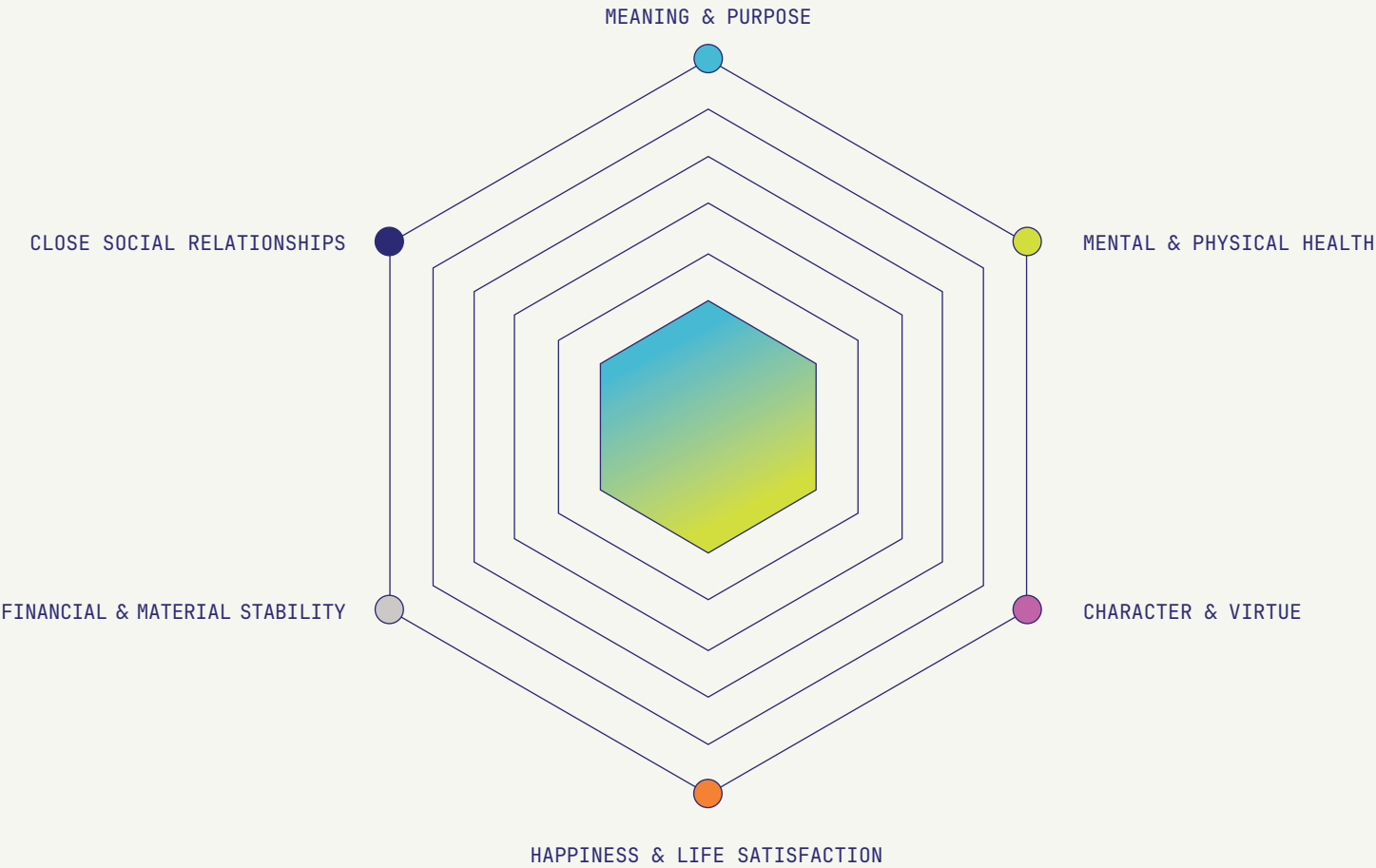
⁹For a more detailed review of core findings, see the Nature/Springer collection (www.nature.com/collections/global-flourishing-study-wave1) as well as VanderWeele et al., (2025), supra note 8.

¹⁰ Crabtree, S., English, C., Johnson, B. R., Ritter, Z., & VanderWeele, T. J. (2021/2024). Global Flourishing Study: Questionnaire Development Report. Gallup Inc. <https://osf.io/y3t6m>. The Global Flourishing Study was supported by funding from the John Templeton Foundation (grant #61665), Templeton Religion Trust (#1308), Templeton World Charity Foundation (#0605), Well-Being for Planet Earth Foundation, Fetzer Institute (#4354), Well Being Trust, Paul L. Foster Family Foundation, and the David and Carol Myers Foundation. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of these organizations.

¹¹<https://globalflourishingstudy.com/>

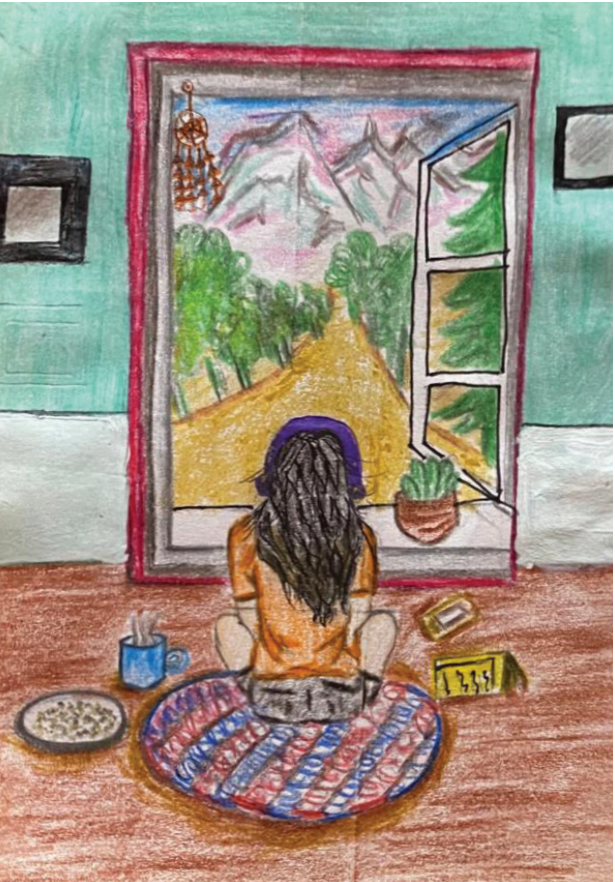
Fig. 1.2

Secure Flourishing Index



The Secure Flourishing Index (SFI) is an important set of six flourishing domains and related survey items in the GFS, supplemented by a range of related measures (see Figure 1.2 and also the appendix for the complete list of SFI items). These six domains are valued across countries and cultures and include: 1) happiness and life satisfaction, 2) mental and physical health, 3) meaning and purpose, 4) character and virtue, 5) close social relationships, and 6) financial and material stability.¹² The first five domains are pursued for their own sake, while the sixth is a generally a means to other ends. When the financial and material stability domain is omitted, the measure is referred to as the Flourishing Index (FI). Including the sixth domain helps to make the pursuit of flourishing more “secure” and sustainable over time. If one is constantly worried about physical safety or having adequate food and shelter, attaining the other domains is more difficult. Most other flourishing measures do not include the sixth domain, so for comparability the FI is sometimes used. Whatever else flourishing might entail, it is difficult to imagine a flourishing life without attention to these domains.

In order to better understand the contexts in which these six flourishing domains are pursued, the GFS also asks about respondents’ employment status, involvement in religious communities, whether they feel that they “belong” in their country, personal experience of various forms of discrimination, how much they approve of the job performance of their national government, and the extent to which they feel that people in their country trust each other, and other indicators. In a sense, these measures help us understand whether the contexts in which individuals are embedded are also perceived as ‘flourishing.’ Geographic information permits GFS data to be linked to a variety of other statistics—such as Gross Domestic Product and the Environmental Performance Index—collected by government and other groups at a variety of levels of analysis.¹³ Importantly, the GFS research team used the same analytical code across more than 30 articles already published in the Springer Nature GFS Special Collection in order to enhance the comparability of findings across a range of outcomes.¹⁴ Dozens more articles using this same analytical code are also in progress.



Dr. Meetu Khosla: Flourishing beyond the Survey Data

Dr. Meetu Khosla’s research focuses on subpopulations in India (and elsewhere) who do not speak one of the languages covered by the GFS or who were not invited to participate in the survey. As part of that research, she asks people draw pictures to capture aspects of flourishing that are difficult to express in words and even more difficult to quantify. Her qualitative research offers an important compliment to the GFS. In this drawing, for example, a young college student in Delhi from the Nyshi tribe in Arunachal Pradesh in northeast India has expressed her attempt to find a balance between traditional and modern values and ways of life. She sees that the road ahead uneven and rough, yet she intends to plunge into it. She explained the that plant next to her symbolizes a connection to simple, rural values that she brings with her to the complex environment of the large, urban university that she attends. The room itself expresses a feeling of safety, of being at home, even though the path ahead suggests a strenuous climb through the mountains.

Learn more about Meetu’s work on pg. 34-37

¹² VanderWeele, 2017, supra note 2.
¹³ Lima de Miranda, K., & Snower, D. J. (2020). Recoupling economic and social prosperity. *Global Perspectives*, 1(1) 11867. <https://doi.org/10.1525/001c.11867>
¹⁴ www.nature.com/collections/global-flourishing-study-wave1

Key Findings from the Global Flourishing Study

Although the GFS asked respondents about a great many aspects of their lives, the research team knew that not every aspect of flourishing could be included.

If we rely on the definition of flourishing from Part 1, then “flourishing consists of all aspects of life” and “the list of what to potentially measure is endless.”¹⁵ Some prioritization is necessary in a short report like this one. Therefore, we present the Secure Flourishing Index (SFI) average scores (means) along with some other markers of flourishing drawn from the GFS and other sources that are of interest to many people. Some of these were self-reported in other surveys and others were drawn from governmental or other data sources. We welcome the inclusion of other markers as well. We debated how to present the findings and eventually decided that a variety of “top-10” lists (out of 22 countries and one territory included in the GFS) were a good place to start. The point of this report is not to single out the countries that had relatively low means on the SFI or other measures, or to declare that a single measure of flourishing is able to replace all others. Instead, we were curious about the strengths of different countries across a number of outcome measures.

Let’s first consider three aspects of life about which many people are interested: the average subjective experience of flourishing in their country (e.g., the SFI, as measured in the first wave of the GFS, as displayed in Table 2.1), their country’s economic performance relative to other countries (e.g., Gross Domestic Product per capita [GDP], measured in comparable economic units [U.S. dollars] in a manner that reflects “purchasing power parity,” or real purchasing power per capita within each country, as displayed in Table 2.2),¹⁶ and their country’s contribution to the natural environment (e.g., the Environmental Performance Index [EPI], a summary measure of 58 different indicators across 11 categories, as displayed in Table 2.3).¹⁷ Starting with the SFI, we see that subjective flourishing is not concentrated on a single continent or in a particular region of the world, with such diverse countries as Indonesia, Israel, the Philippines, Mexico, and Poland filling the top five spots.

It is also interesting that a very different set of countries show up in the top-10 for GDP. In fact, only Israel and Poland appear on both. In other words, high-GDP countries such as the United States, Germany, or Sweden are not concentrated at the top of the SFI list, but they do show up in the EPI top-10. By looking at the maps associated with these tables (Figures 2.1 to 2.3), we see striking variations by region.

Tables 2.4 through 2.10 show additional outcomes of interest, including: an alternative measure of subjective flourishing based on Gallup World Poll data that aimed to approximate the Flourishing Index used in the GFS and that was published by some members of the GFS research team (see Table 2.4, and note the very different list of countries compared to Table 2.1);¹⁸ the life evaluation measure, also based on Gallup World Poll data and used as a key indicator in the World Happiness Report (Table 2.5);¹⁹ a measure of long-term orientation, or “the fostering of pragmatic virtues oriented toward future rewards, in particular perseverance, thrift, and adapting to changing circumstances” (Table 2.6);²⁰ a measure of showing love and care for others based on a GFS survey item (“How often do you show someone in your life that you love or care for them, from 0=never to 10=always, Table 2.7);²¹ the “motivation towards achievement and success” framed in terms of work goals rather than broad life goals (Table 2.8);²² the Human Freedom Index (HFI), a measure of 86 indicators across 12 categories (e.g., rule of law, security and safety, freedom of expression) co-published by the Cato Institute, the Fraser Institute, and the Liberales Institut at the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (Table 2.9);²³ and the Global Peace Index (GPI), a summary of 23 qualitative and quantitative indicators of peace across three domains (Societal Safety and Security; Ongoing Domestic and International Conflict; Militarization) published by the Institute for Economics & Peace in 2024 (Table 2.10).²⁴

¹⁵ VanderWeele, T. J. & Johnson, B. R. (2025). Why we need to measure flourishing – lessons from a global survey. *Nature*.

¹⁶ See <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/PPP@WEO/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEOWorld>

¹⁷ The EPI was compiled by the Yale University’s Center for Environmental Law & Policy in 2024. See <https://epi.yale.edu/measure/2024/EPI>

¹⁸ Shiba, K., Cowden, R. G., Gonzalez, N., Lee, M. T., Lomas, T., Lai, A. Y., & VanderWeele, T. J. (2022). Global trends of mean and inequality in multidimensional wellbeing: analysis of 1.2 million individuals from 162 countries, 2009–2019. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 10, 824960.

¹⁹ Based on the WHR 2024, using GWP data from 2021-2023. See <https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2024/>

²⁰⁻²⁴ See Appendix



Ulundanu Temple in Bali, Indonesia

KEY FINDINGS

We see a diversity of countries across the lists, with some appearing on several top-10 lists and others showing up less frequently. We have attempted to capture an overview of these variations in Figure 2.4, a summary “heat map” in which dark blue indicates that a country has been relatively highly ranked on several top-10 lists and is a “hot spot” for this set of outcomes relative to the other 21 countries and one territory.²⁵ The complete set of SFI scores are reported in the core research team’s summary article published in Nature Mental Health.²⁶

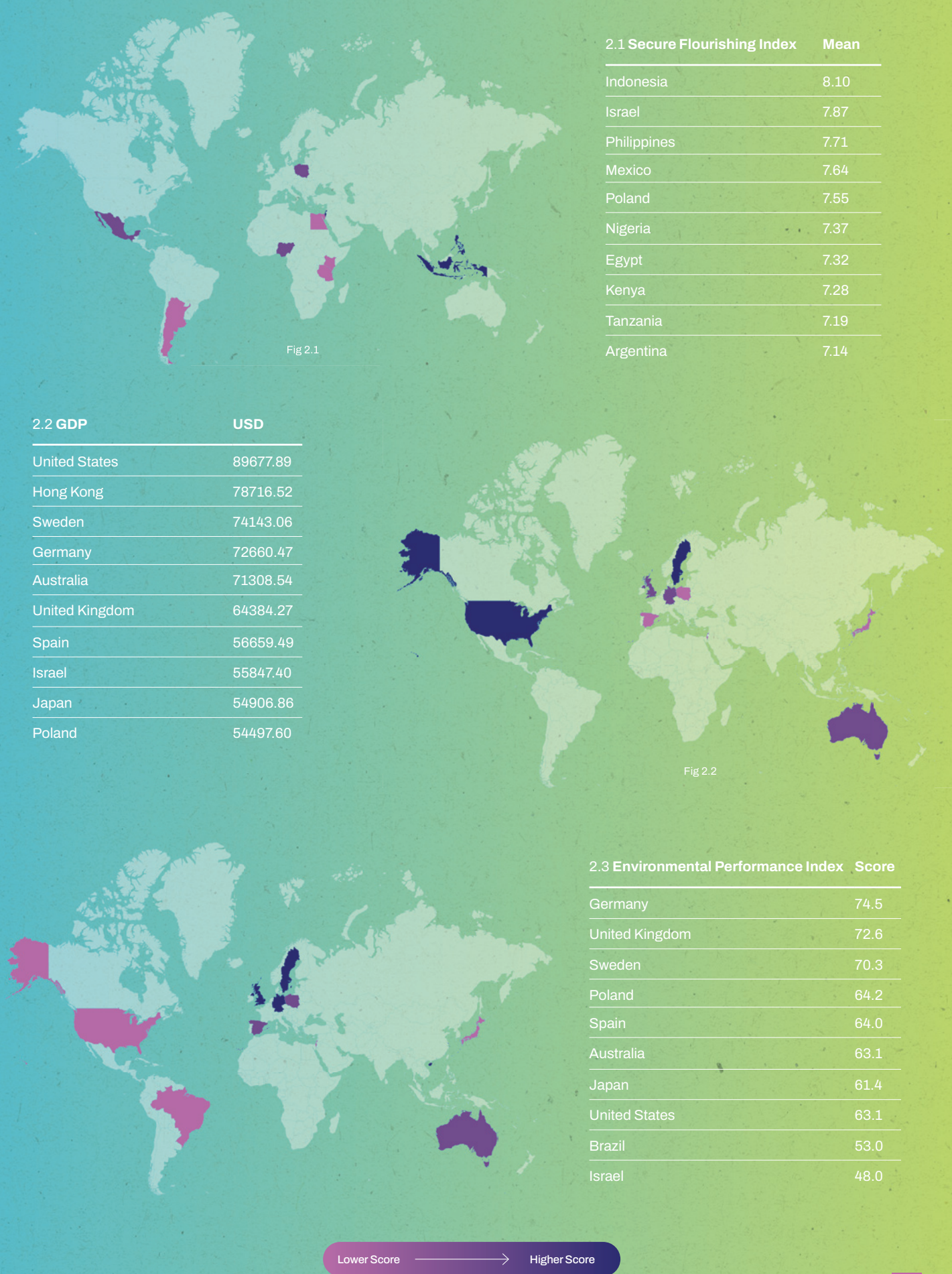
Let’s briefly highlight some key findings from Tables 2.1-2.10 and the heat map. The SFI is a core measure of the GFS and Indonesia has the highest mean in Table 2.1 and places third on the FI Proxy (Table 2.4). This country scores highly on two other outcomes (placing in the top three on showing love/care and long-term orientation), and places 9th on the GPI. Given its very high placement on four top-10 lists, and appearance on a fifth, this country appears quite warm on the summary heat map (Figure 2.4). But Indonesia does not appear in the top 10 in five other lists, including such important outcomes as HFI, EPI, and GPD. Curiously, Indonesia also does not appear on the top-10 list for life evaluation, the core measure of the World Happiness Report. This does not mean that the life evaluation is unimportant. After all, it is included in the SFI. But this illustrates that single item and multidimensional measures might generate different conclusions.²⁷ Philosophical and, for some, religious or spiritual values will shape the relative importance that people attach to the SFI, GDP, or any of these other outcomes. What the tables and the heat map show is that Indonesia seems to have particular strengths with regard to psychosocial outcomes (e.g., SFI, love/care), but not with regard to other outcomes such as the economic or freedom indicators.

Japan, one of the darkest blue colored countries on the heat map, and therefore a high scorer on multiple outcomes, contrasts markedly with Indonesia. Japan does not appear on the top-10 of the SFI, FI proxy, or love/care, but scores first on long-term orientation, mo-

tivation to succeed, and GPI. Japan also appears on GDP, EPI, and HFI: six top-10 lists total. What are we to make of the fact that Japan appears to be one of the top performing countries on six of these ten measures, but scores the lowest on the SFI out of the full set of 22 countries and one territory? As our summary article in Nature Mental Health explains, “Japan reports strikingly low scores on most well-being indicators in the GFS” and it is more often the middle-income nations, such as Indonesia, Argentina, Mexico, Brazil, and the Philippines that “report higher on these other more humanistic aspects of flourishing. The more material and the more humanistic forms of well-being sometimes diverge.”²⁸ One conclusion is that different nations seem to have cultivated different strengths and no single nation appears to have a monopoly on flourishing.

As we can also see from Table 2.4, five high-income countries appear here, including Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Germany, that were not present in Table 2.1 (based on the SFI), even though the researchers—some of whom are on the GFS core research team—attempted to construct a proxy FI using data from the Gallup World Poll. The authors of this report believe that the FI and SFI in the GFS is superior to the proxy found in the GWP, and we noted in the published article that proxies should give way to the “development, evaluation, and refinement of psychometrically sound measures of multidimensional wellbeing that are validated for use within and across different cultural contexts.”²⁹ Readers are free to examine the wording of the questions in each survey and decide for themselves which index better captures the domains about which they care the most. And to be clear, we are not suggesting that the individual items in the GWP are in some way deficient; they all are useful for the constructs that they were created to measure. We are simply pointing out that they were not created to mirror the FI. We reprint the top 10 countries for this proxy measure in table 2.4 because there is value to exploring why some countries show up there and not in the first two tables.

²⁵ See Appendix.
²⁶ VanderWeele et al. (2025), supra note 8. <https://globalflourishingstudy.com/>
²⁷ VanderWeele and Johnson (2025), supra note 3.
²⁸ VanderWeele et al., (2025), supra note 8, pg.5
²⁹ Shiba et al. (2022), supra note 18.

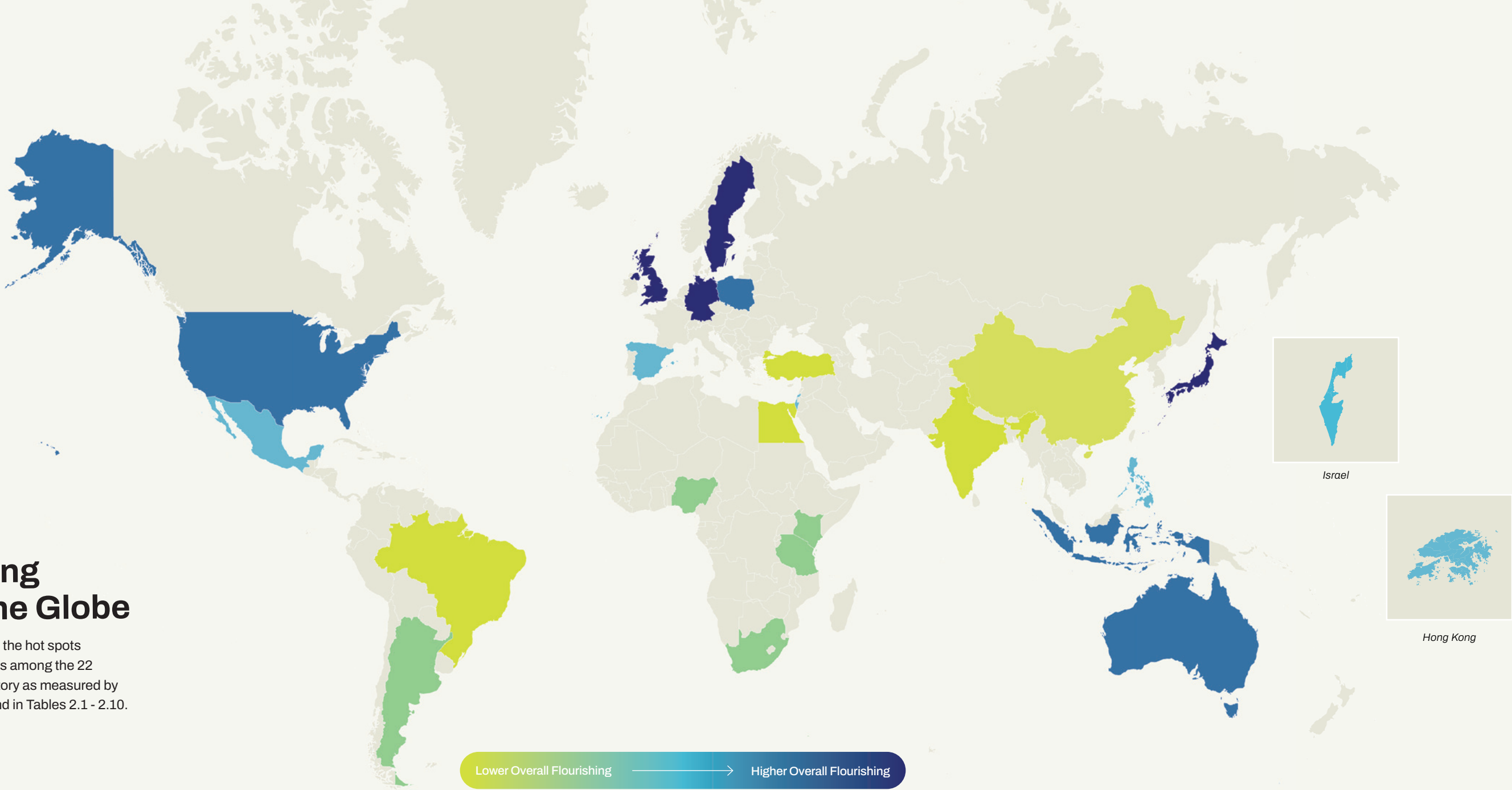


Lower Score → Higher Score

Fig. 2.4

Flourishing across the Globe

This “heat map” shows the hot spots for flourishing outcomes among the 22 countries and one territory as measured by the 10 top-10 lists. found in Tables 2.1 - 2.10.



Top 10 Countries Across the Following Categories:

2.4 “Flourishing” (FI Proxy)	Mean	2.5 Life Evaluations	Mean	2.6 Long Term Orientation	Mean	2.7 Showing Love/Care	Mean	2.8 Motivation to Succeed	Mean	2.9 Human Freedom Index	Score	2.10 Global Peace Index	Score
Australia	7.59	Sweden	7.34	Japan	88	Philippines	9.05	Japan	95	Sweden	8.75	Japan	1.53
United States	7.50	Israel	7.34	Germany	83	Indonesia	8.85	Mexico	69	Australia	8.52	Australia	1.54
Indonesia	7.50	Australia	7.05	Indonesia	62	Tanzania	8.72	United Kingdom	66	Japan	8.40	Germany	1.54
United Kingdom	7.38	United Kingdom	6.75	Hong Kong	61	Mexico	8.71	Germany	66	United States	8.39	Spain	1.60
Sweden	7.30	United States	6.73	Sweden	53	Israel	8.60	Poland	64	United Kingdom	8.39	Poland	1.68
Germany	7.21	Germany	6.72	United Kingdom	51	South Africa	8.59	Philippines	64	Germany	8.37	United Kingdom	1.70
Philippines	7.10	Mexico	6.68	India	51	Kenya	8.57	South Africa	63	Spain	8.03	Sweden	1.78
Mexico	6.84	Poland	6.44	Spain	48	United States	8.56	United States	62	Hong Kong	7.70	Argentina	1.86
Kenya	6.84	Spain	6.42	Turkey	46	Argentina	8.51	Australia	61	Poland	7.69	Indonesia	1.86
Israel	6.83	Brazil	6.27	Brazil	44	Brazil	8.47	Nigeria	60	Israel	7.43	Tanzania	1.99

We leave it to readers to explore the patterns shown in these ten tables and four figures and become curious about what might explain these rankings. Some readers might feel that showing love and care to another is especially important to the flourishing life. Others might prioritize a country's relationship to the natural environment (EPI) or economic development (GDP). In creating the composite heat map, we did not weight one variable more than any others. But you can do this on the GFS website (and use all 22 countries and the territory), as well as dropping some variables, and see how the resulting maps change. There are certainly more than 10 ways to measure flourishing. For example, many people would argue that participation in a religious or spiritual community is itself a form of flourishing. Regardless of how it is construed, flourishing involves an element of self-determination: individuals and groups are free to prioritize the domains that matter most to them and they will often resist definitions and measures of flourishing imposed by outsiders. But we also argue that flourishing differs from related constructs because it involves an ethical responsibility to other groups. For example, we might wonder about the overall flourishing of a group that scores highly on the SFI but very low on the EPI or Human Freedom Index. We suggest resisting the temptation to view groups of human beings as 'good' or 'bad' based on a handful of metrics and instead inquire about why certain patterns emerge and what else might be learned from the inclusion of other metrics, as well as different modes of inquiry beyond surveys. Given that the scientific field of flourishing is rather young, we feel that dialogue is important: our findings might serve as conversation starters.

The GFS data allow us to explore factors that are associated with measures like the SFI and FI. As a preliminary step, we can examine correlations between the FI and several other important measures. We have selected the FI because we wish to know about the five domains of flourishing that are "ends in themselves." The four scatterplots shown in Figure 2.5 reveal the correlations between the FI on the horizontal axis and life evaluation, GDP ad-

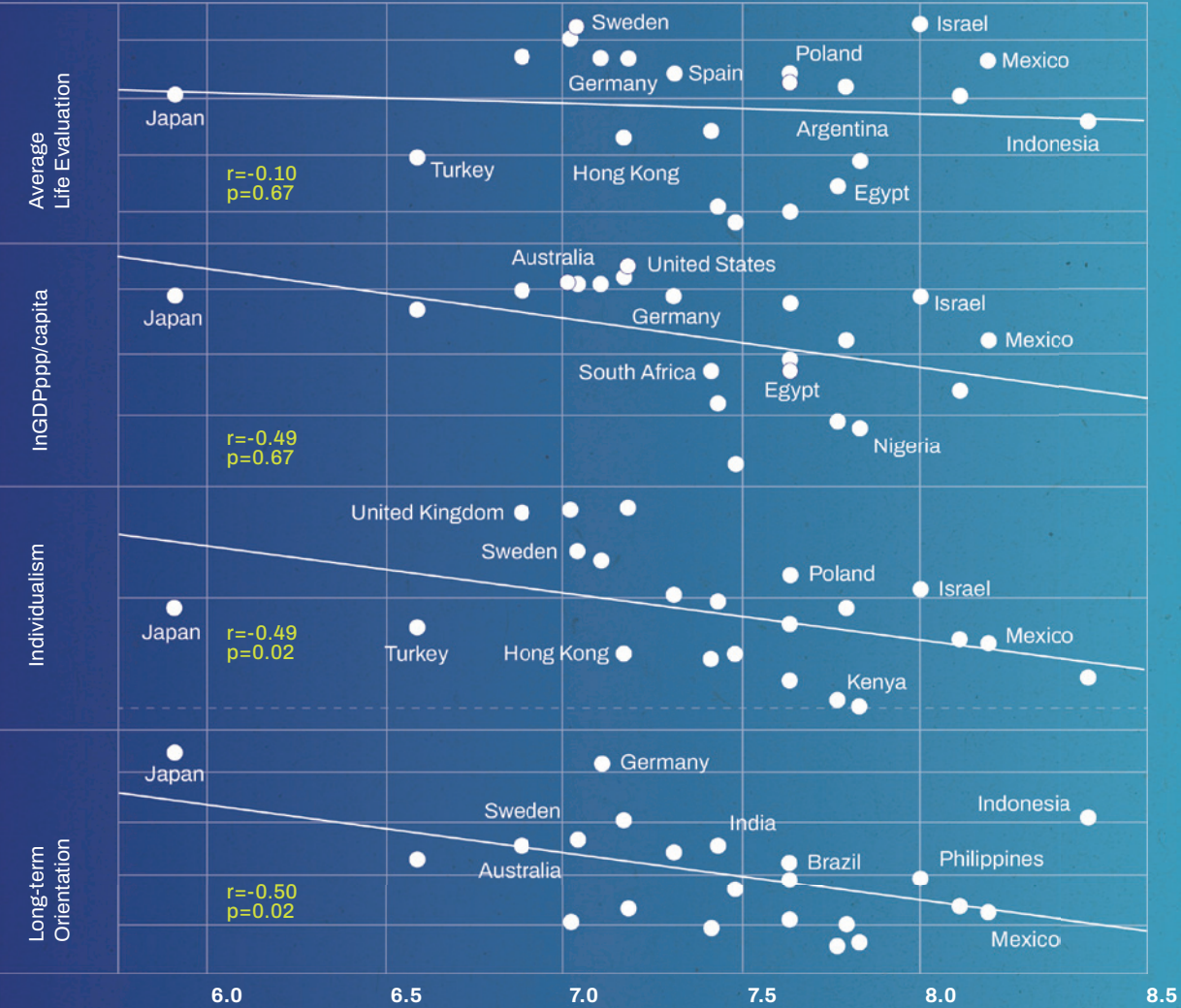
justed for purchasing power parity, individualism,³⁰ and long-term orientation on the vertical axis, for 21 countries and one territory,³¹ data on China was not available at the time of publication. It is remarkable that life evaluation (again, central to the WHR) is not 'significantly' correlated with the FI ($r=-0.10$, $p=0.67$) in a statistical sense. In plain language, these two variables are unrelated. Perhaps even more striking are the results for the other three outcomes: all are statistically and negatively correlated to the FI.

What are we to make of these results? They seem consistent with other research that distinguishes between material and psychosocial dimensions of flourishing.³² This might also be labeled as material and humanistic forms of flourishing.³³ As members of the GFS core research team put it: "If we look beyond "composite flourishing" to specific aspects of a good life, we find that economically developed countries have high average scores for self-rated financial well-being, access to education, and life evaluation. Poorer countries, by contrast, have higher scores for positive emotions, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, and social connection and relationships. In some middle-income countries, such as Indonesia, Mexico, or the Philippines, people even rate themselves as healthier than do Americans, Swedes, or the Japanese."³⁴

Turning back to Figure 2.4, it seems that some countries—such as those that tend to be more "individualistic," have higher GDP based on purchasing power parity (i.e., standard of living), and that foster a long-term orientation—report lower SFI and FI scores. Stated differently, the FI focuses on humanistic aspects of the good life, so it makes sense that we see a negative relationship with more materialistic concerns. This does not mean that people should be unconcerned with a decent standard of living. But as noted elsewhere, "the countries with higher degrees of 'humanistic' flourishing, such as Indonesia, Mexico, or Israel, also have higher than average rates of marriage and community participation, friendship, and religious belief and participation."³⁵



Fig 2.5 Flourishing 10



We suggested earlier that participation in religion and spirituality often constitutes a form of flourishing for those who practice. But religion/spirituality is also associated with measures of flourishing that are conceptually distinct from religious and spiritual content, such as the SFI. In multivariate models (those that statistically 'control' for the influence of other factors), people in the 21 countries and one territory covered by the GFS (data on China were not available at the time of publication) who identify as spiritual or religious (or both) reported a slightly

higher SFI, on average. But the relationship was even stronger for those who attend religious services (RSA). Compared with someone who never attends service, the average flourishing score is 0.41 points higher for someone who attends at least weekly. How strong of an effect is this? For comparison, the average SFI score (adjusted for controls) of someone who is "employed by an employer" is 0.22 points higher than someone who is "unemployed and looking for work."³⁶

From the Authors:
Table 2.7 is of special interest to report coauthor Dr. Matthew Lee. He has argued that love is the essence of flourishing and that it would be better to love well and experience declines in some domains of flourishing, than to have high scores on these domains without love. In fact, he suggests that it would be impossible to flourish on the 'humanistic' domains without love. What do you think?

³⁰⁻³² See Appendix
³³ Case, B., Long, K. N. G., Byron Johnson, B. R., VanderWeele, T. J. (2025). The Global Flourishing Study: A new way to understand our world today.
³⁴⁻³⁵ Case et al. (2025), supra note 33.
³⁶ Chen, Y., Johnson, B. R., Ritter, Z., VanderWeele, T. J. (2024). Global study aims to uncover how humans flourish. Gallup. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/642680/global-study-aims-uncover-humans-flourish.aspx>

KEY FINDINGS

The story gets even more interesting when we examine the pattern of associations for RSA and the SFI across countries (see Figure 2.6).³⁷ In two countries and one territory (Indonesia and Tanzania), the relationship is not significant. In other countries the effect is rather small (e.g., Egypt, 0.13). But countries like the Philippines and Turkey exhibit quite large effects (0.82, 0.73 respectively). Figure 2.7 shows a similar analysis, but this time looking at the association of financial status (living comfortably versus finding it very difficult) and the SFI. In this case, all of the relationships were statistically significant and the strongest effects were found in Hong Kong, Japan, and the United States (4.13, 3.05, and 2.77 respectively). Even the weakest relationship between financial status and the SFI (for the Philippines, 1.08) was stronger than the strongest relationship between RSA and the SFI (Hong Kong, 0.85). We await the availability of future waves of the GFS to test these and other relationships over time, but the initial findings suggest that outcomes like attending religious service, financial status (and being employed) are strong candidates for consideration in the story of social forces that shape human flourishing.

Green/blue shaded columns represent statistically significant relationships at $p < .05$ level. Statistical significance is obtained from country-level OLS models regressing the flourishing index score on religious service attendance, accounting for normalized sampling weights and adjusting for religion/spiritual self-identification, importance of religion in daily life, secular activity attendance, gender, age, education, urbanity, feelings about household income, employment status, and marital status. Observations with missing information for any variable in the model are omitted from the analysis.

Human Flourishing and Religious Service Attendance

Average difference in human flourishing score between those who attend religious services more than once per week and those who never attend.

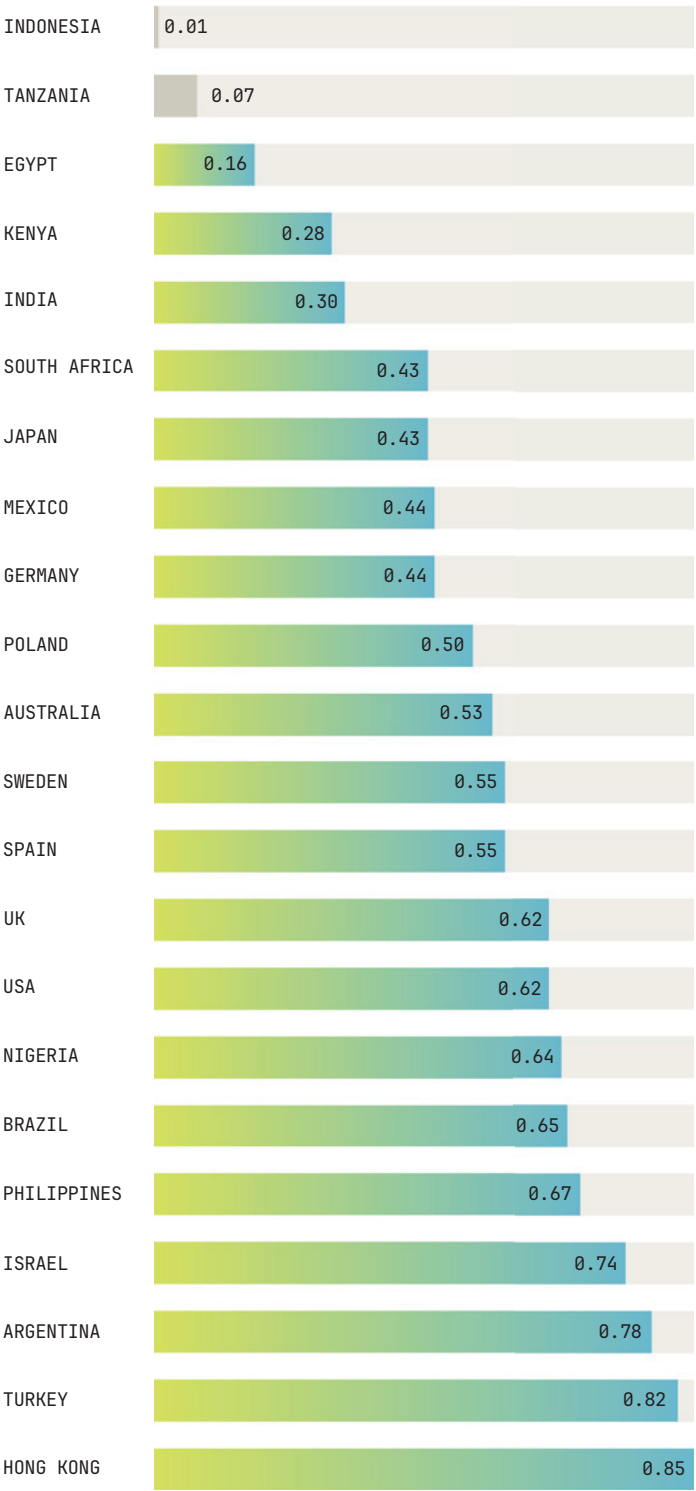


Figure 2.6
Adapted from figure from <https://news.gallup.com/poll/642680/global-study-aims-uncover-humans-flourish.aspx>³⁷

Human Flourishing and Financial Status

Average difference in SFI score between those who live comfortably and those who find it very difficult financially.

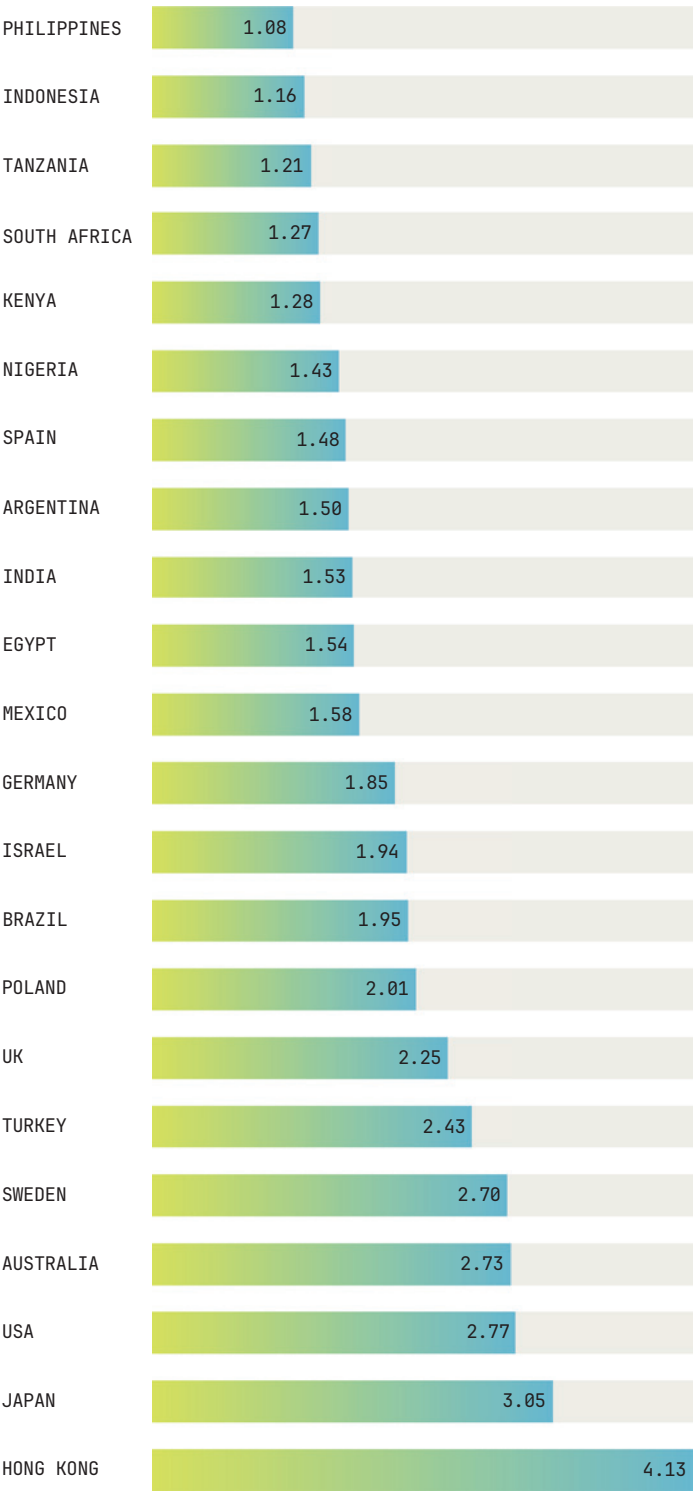


Figure 2.7

Other “headline” findings are reviewed in our summary article in *Nature Mental Health*,³⁸ including:

- Many middle-income developing countries appear to be doing better in terms of meaning, purpose, and close social relationships than countries in the richer developed world.
- Younger people appear to be flourishing less than the generations that came before them. In many countries, the youngest age-group (18-24 year olds) reported the lowest SFI.
- The positive relationship between the religious service attendance and the SFI holds even for the most secular nations.
- Readers interested in a deep dive into variations by country are welcome to explore this article and the more than 30 specific scientific articles in the Springer Nature GFS Special Collection.³⁹



³⁷ See Appendix.
³⁸ VanderWeele et al., (2025), supra note 8.
³⁹ www.nature.com/collections/global-flourishing-study-wave1

Beyond the Headline Findings

As informative as global and country-level findings might be, each of the 207,920 adults who participated in the first wave of GFS data collection also has an individual story that is unique, and that takes us beyond the average national scores and summary tables and into the complexities of lived experience.

Every single person has inherent dignity, and also the potential to make an important contribution to our collective understanding of the universal and personal aspects of the good life. We can get a sense of the “shape” of an individual’s personal experience of flourishing by creating a spider-web plot of their scores on the 12 survey items that comprise the Secure Flourishing Index (SFI) and related outcomes.⁴⁰ Consider these seven extremely grateful individuals from three countries, Indonesia, South Africa, and the United States (Figures 3.1 to 3.7). They all responded that they agreed at the strongest possible level (a 10 out of 10) that if they “had to list everything” that they “felt grateful for, it would be a very long list.” Research has shown that gratitude is associated with a variety of flourishing domains and even a statistically significant reduction in all-cause mortality.⁴¹ Gratitude is literally a matter of life and death. But how is gratitude related to other flourishing outcomes in the lives of individuals, rather than aggregations of individuals like nations? The spider-web plots illustrate some of the many variations that exist in the GFS data.

Figure 3.1 shows the spider-web for a 92-year old man from Indonesia who reports this maximally grateful score. He also had a perfect 10 on all the SFI items, as well as showing love and care to another person and feeling hopeful about the future. Over nine decades, he seems to have learned a lot about how to be grateful, hopeful, caring, and flourishing! Figure 3.2 shows the plot for a 53-year-old from South Africa who reported that they “didn’t know” their gender. This person, also extremely grateful, has a score of 10 on all items except mental health (9). We wonder, if your relationships, sense of meaning, hope, gratitude, and so forth are all at 10, why a 9 for mental health? This of course reveals one limitation of survey methods; we simply cannot know the answer from our data set. Other modes of

inquiry, such as qualitative interviews, are required to get such answers.

The rest of the figures in this spider-web plot series show the kinds of variations in outcomes that extremely grateful people reported. One person scores highly on all outcomes except for two extremely low scores “financial and material stability” items of the SFI (Figure 3.3, a 50-year-old female from Indonesia). Again, an interview would be helpful to understand how someone could be so grateful and ‘flourishing’ and yet so extremely worried about finances and personal safety. Should we describe this as a sense of wholeness amidst adversity? Ideally, flourishing would entail a state in which all aspects of a person’s life are going well, including their contexts. But we can flourish to some degree and on some domains but not others. The question is which domains do we most deeply value, how should we make trade-offs across domains, and ultimately what does it really mean to flourish in difficult circumstances?⁴² Again, we see the GFS findings as an invitation to dialogue within and across cultures.

Other figures show a great deal of variation across all items except gratitude (e.g., Figure 3.5, an 18-year-old from Indonesia who selected “other” for gender). One 35-year-old male from the U.S. reported a 10 out of 10 for the SFI item indicating that he “always acts to promote good in all circumstances,” but his score on how often he shows love and care for another person in his life was only a 2 out of 10 (Figure 3.6). We can only wonder about the lived experiences of these individuals. Our hope is that our findings will encourage other researchers to conduct additional studies to explore the reasons “behind the numbers.” What is clear from the GFS data, is that people are experiencing very positive levels on some domains of flourishing simultaneously with quite low levels on others.



In Mami Yanai’s language (Japanese), flourishing would be roughly translated as the “flavorful” or “delicious” life, not the life free from suffering. In the Japanese tea ceremony, for example, one tastes something bitter prior to experiencing a sweet taste, and the experience is all the sweeter due to the mixing of flavors. This is a holistic way of understanding flourishing that integrates ‘good’ and ‘bad’ experiences.⁴³

“Flourishing is the delicious life”

MAMI YANAI
FOUNDER OF ‘A HOME FOR FLOURISHING LIVES’

⁴⁰ For a list of the SFI items and domains, see the Appendix.

⁴¹ Chen, Ying, Okereke, O. I., Kim, Eric S., Tiemeier, Henning, Kubzansky, Laura D., & VanderWeele, Tyler J. (2024). Gratitude and mortality among older US female nurses. *JAMA Psychiatry*, 81(10), 1030-1038.

⁴² See, for example Lee, Matthew T. (2021). “New pandemic research explains how to flourish in difficult times.” *Education Week* (March 17), <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-new-pandemic-research-explains-how-to-flourish-in-difficult-times/2021/03>. See also Su, Francis. (2020). *Mathematics for human flourishing*. Yale University Press.

⁴³ This content is adapted from Lee et al., (2023), supra note 1.

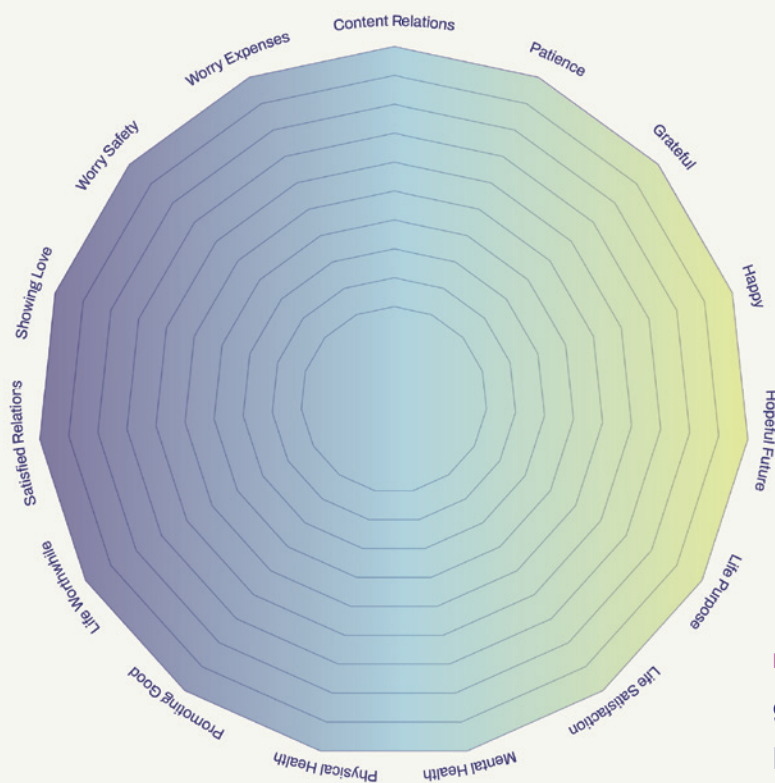


Figure 3.1
92 Year Old
Indonesian Man

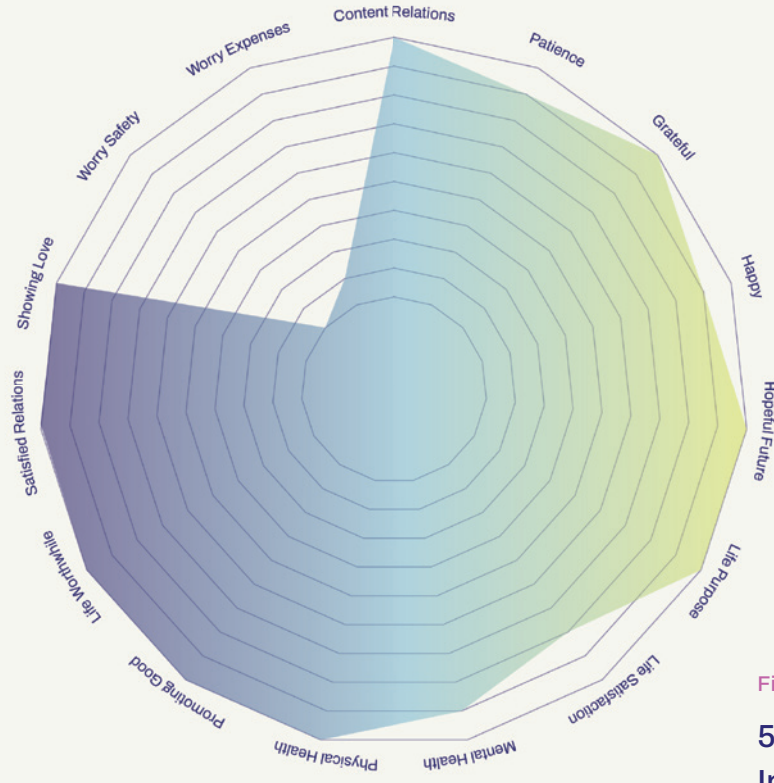


Figure 3.3
50 Year Old
Indonesian Woman

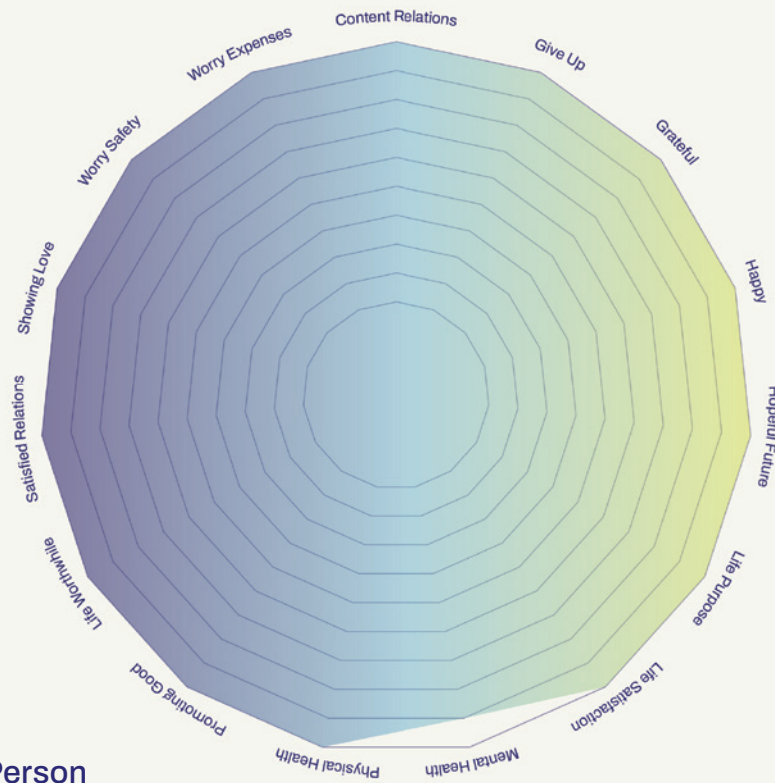


Figure 3.2
53 Year Old
South African Person

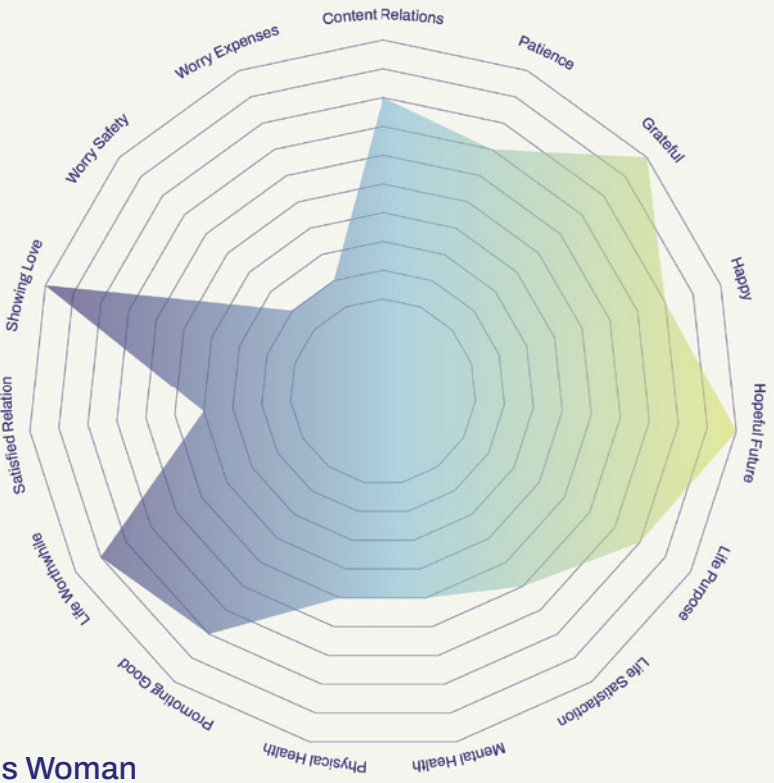


Figure 3.4
79 Year Old
United States Woman

From the Authors:
Report coauthor Dr. Alexander Moreira-Almeida shared this perspective about flourishing even in difficult circumstances: “As a clinical psychiatrist, it is inspiring and moving to witness and foster my patients’ flourishing during treatment, including terminal patients. They often report they are, after all the therapeutic journey, a much better person (a better version of themselves).”

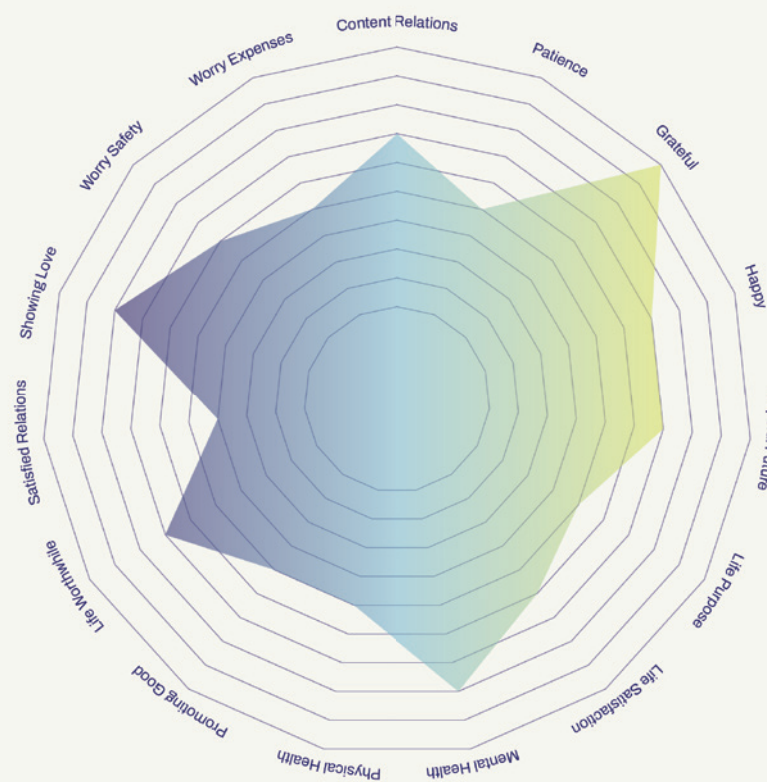


Figure 3.5
18 Year Old
Indonesia Other

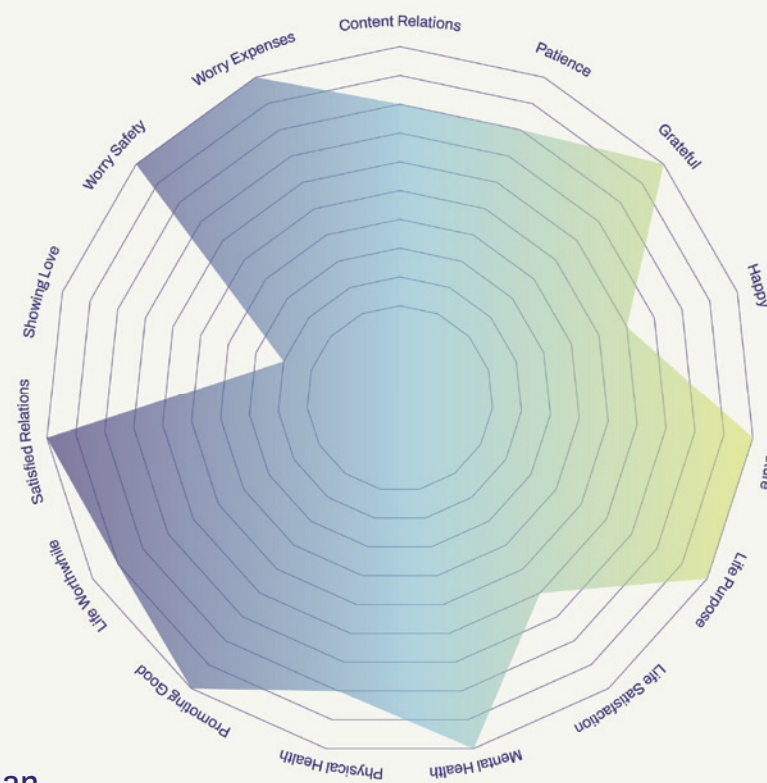


Figure 3.6
35 Year Old
United States Man

From the Co-Authors:

James L. Ritchie-Dunham's fascination with how people express their unique creativity starts with curiosity. In 2004 as a panelist for CARE's Knowledge Fair, he met a Bolivian farmer who was showcasing his innovation in fattening cows. When James asked the farmer about his innovation, the farmer explained how he figured it out. Year after year he would show up at the market with fatter cows than everyone else. When the other cattle farmers asked him how he did it, he said, "I don't know." They asked if he was trying to keep the secret to himself. He said, "I cannot tell you what I do that is different than what you do. I don't

know what you know. I don't know what you don't know. And, you can come to my farm and see for yourself." They did, and they saw that he had the same breed of cattle, in the same high-plain conditions, with the same feed, and those were fatter cows. So, there had to be something different. They figured out what was different, and from that the farmer learned as well. This curiosity and respect for the other's creativity has guided James' work since then. Where have people figured out how to flourish, in their own way, and what can we learn with them that might help them and us as well?

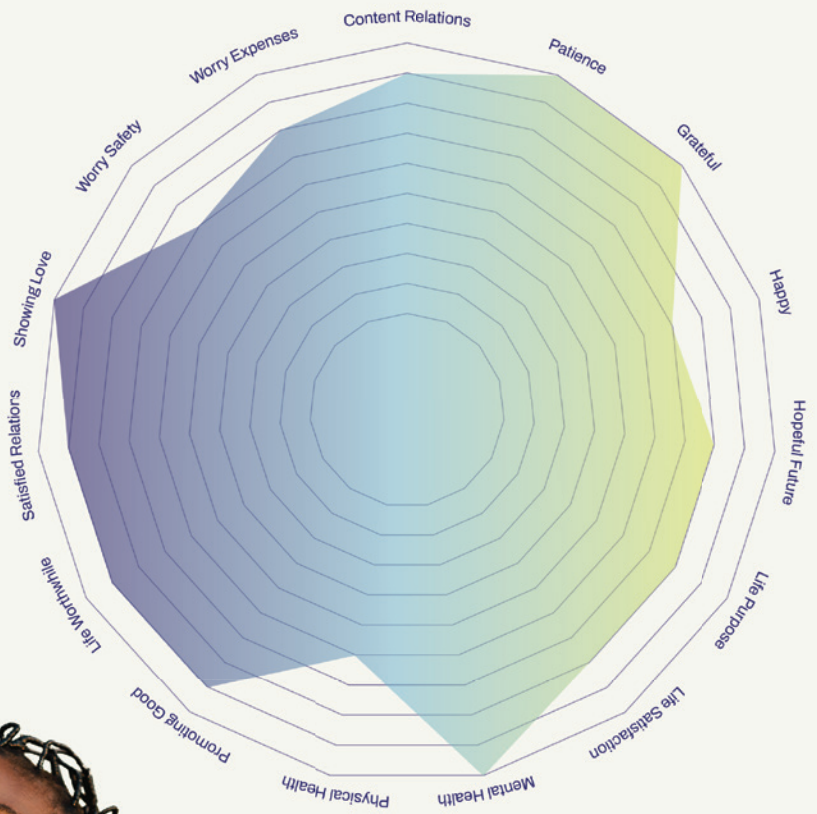


Figure 3.7
27 Year Old
South African Woman



Just as there are many important variations in how individuals experience flourishing, so too are there important country-level exceptions to the “headline” patterns that we reported in the previous section, including Figures 2.4 and 2.5. These variations are explored in the summary article in *Nature Mental Health* and other articles in the Nature Springer Special Collection⁴⁴, including:

Many significant relationships among variables for the complete set of countries and one territory (Hong Kong) combined are not present at the level of individual countries. In other cases, the magnitudes of the country-level relationships are diminished (or increased) compared with the combined results. For example, SFI scores tend to increase with age for the combined group of nations and the territory, and this is also true in individual countries such as Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Sweden, and the United States. But in Poland and Tanzania the opposite is true: SFI declines with age.

The GFS revealed complex relationships between adversity during childhood (e.g., experiencing difficult financial circumstances, physical or sexual abuse, or feeling like a “outsider” in the family) and subsequent flourishing in adulthood. For example, in Argentina and the United States, difficult childhood financial circumstances were associated with higher levels of meaning in life in adulthood. Curiously, the combined results for all countries and territory indicated that childhood abuse and feeling like an outsider were associated with higher levels of volunteering, giving to charity, and helping others, in adulthood, but they also predicted lower levels of

showing love/care for others.

To more fully appreciate the diversity of findings, interested readers can explore thousands of such variations across hundreds of tables in the Nature Springer Special Collection of journal articles and supplemental materials.⁴⁵

In order to go further “beyond the headlines” from Part 2 of this report, we now turn to the GFS findings related to respondents’ memories of their childhood experiences. As Figure 3.8 shows, several aspects of what respondents lived through at age 12 continue to shape their pursuit of the domains of flourishing later in life. For example, self-rated “excellent” health growing up (compared to merely “good” health) emerged as the strongest predictor of subsequent flourishing as measured by the SFI.⁴⁶ Likewise, attending religious services at least weekly as a child is strongly associated with a higher SFI, on average, as an adult compared to those who never attend, again independent of controls. On the other hand, having “poor” health as a child (compared to “good”) showed a strong negative association. It is not surprising that experiencing abuse as a child or “feeling like an outsider” are both negatively associated with SFI in adulthood. This does not mean that one cannot flourish in adulthood if such adversities were present in childhood, but they clearly present a disadvantage for the set of countries under study. This suggests that social policies around the world might be more effective at enhancing flourishing if they address the positive and negative experiences of children.



From the Authors:

We can learn a great deal about flourishing from children. Even the very young understand that we might not be fully flourishing now, but they have an idea about what it might take to get on that path. For example, in this drawing from Meetu Khosla’s research project, a 5-year-old girl in Poland acknowledges that she currently lives in a loveless foster home, but she aspires to flourish in a love-filled home. This home is empty and the heart is outside and out of her reach, but she knows what is needed for her to flourish.

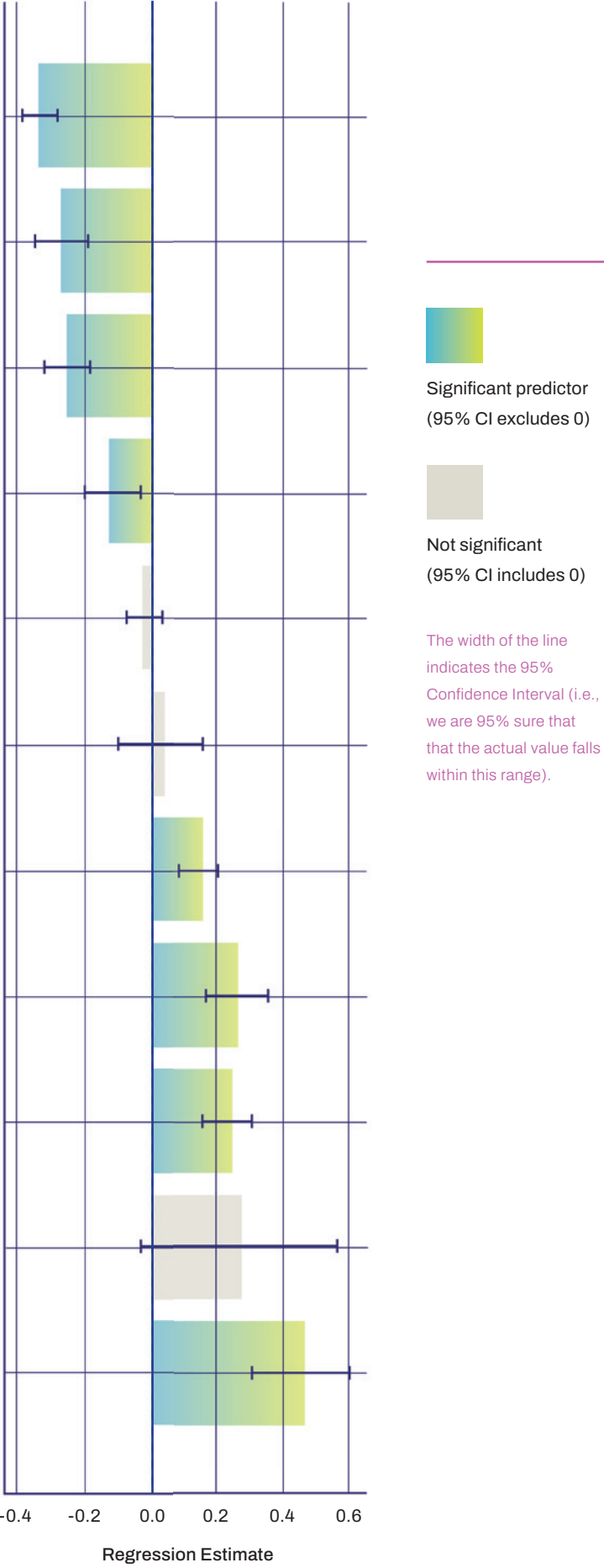
⁴⁴ VanderWeele et al., 2025, supra note 8; Nature/Springer Special Collection, supra note 9.

⁴⁵ Nature/Springer Special Collection, supra note 9.

⁴⁶ To obtain these results, a weighted linear regression model with complex survey adjusted standard errors was fit within each country of composite flourishing on a variety of childhood predictor variables simultaneously. Additional details about this analysis can be found in VanderWeele et al., 2025, supra note 8.

Figure 3.8
Childhood Predictors of SFI

Physically or sexually abused growing up (relative to not abused)	
Subjective financial status of family growing up ‘found it very difficult’ (relative to ‘got by’)	
Felt like an outsider in the family (relative to ‘did not’)	
Parent marital status ‘one or both parents died’ (relative to ‘married’)	
‘Female’ (relative to ‘male’)	
Immigration status ‘born in another country’ (relative to ‘born in this country’)	
‘Very good/somewhat good’ relationship with father growing up (relative to ‘verybad/somewhat bad’)	
Age 12 religious service attendance ‘at least 1/week’ (relative to ‘never’)	
‘Very good/somewhat good’ relationship with mother growing up (relative to ‘verybad/somewhat bad’)	
Year of birth ‘1943-1953; age 70-79’ (relative to ‘1998-2005; age 18-24’)	
Self-rated ‘excellent’ health growing up (relative to ‘good’ health)	



Describing human flourishing without words.

The GFS findings offer a wealth of insights into human flourishing. As a compliment to these findings, we will examine a few artworks collected by Dr. Meetu Khosla which express multi-faceted narratives that are difficult to capture with survey items. Dr. Khosla’s research includes subpopulations in India who do not speak one of the languages covered by the GFS or who were not invited to participate in the survey. She invites people to paint or draw pictures that capture aspects of flourishing that are difficult to express in words and even more difficult to quantify. These works reveal

flourishing as non-dualistic, dynamic integration of conventionally ‘desirable’ and ‘undesirable’ aspects of life, perhaps pointing towards a wholeness amidst adversity. Mami Yanai, a member of our Flourishing Network, suggests that “flourishing as a delicious life,” indicates that the bitter and sweet aspects of human experience come together any more “flavorful” taste than might be implied by the use of a single term, such as either “well-being” or “suffering,” that appear in many languages as opposites (see page 27).



“The Healing Touch”

Dr. Khosla painted this 25 years ago to signify the healing, comfort, and peace that can be provided by Divine intervention, by parents, or by other caregivers who provide support throughout the life course just by their mere presence, even when we are perplexed.

“The Resilient Flower”

A 65-year-old woman from Ladakh in far northern India who does not speak Hindi or English was asked by Dr. Khosla’s student “Can you paint what flourishing means to you?” This painting signifies the theme of hope, expressed by the emergence of a single flower in a very cold place. This is not just a metaphor, the community waits for the annual reappearance of the first blossom of this plant in harsh conditions of perpetual cold. According to the artist, this can serve as an inspiration for all people to try to make the world better, even when we are alone and the environment does not seem supportive.



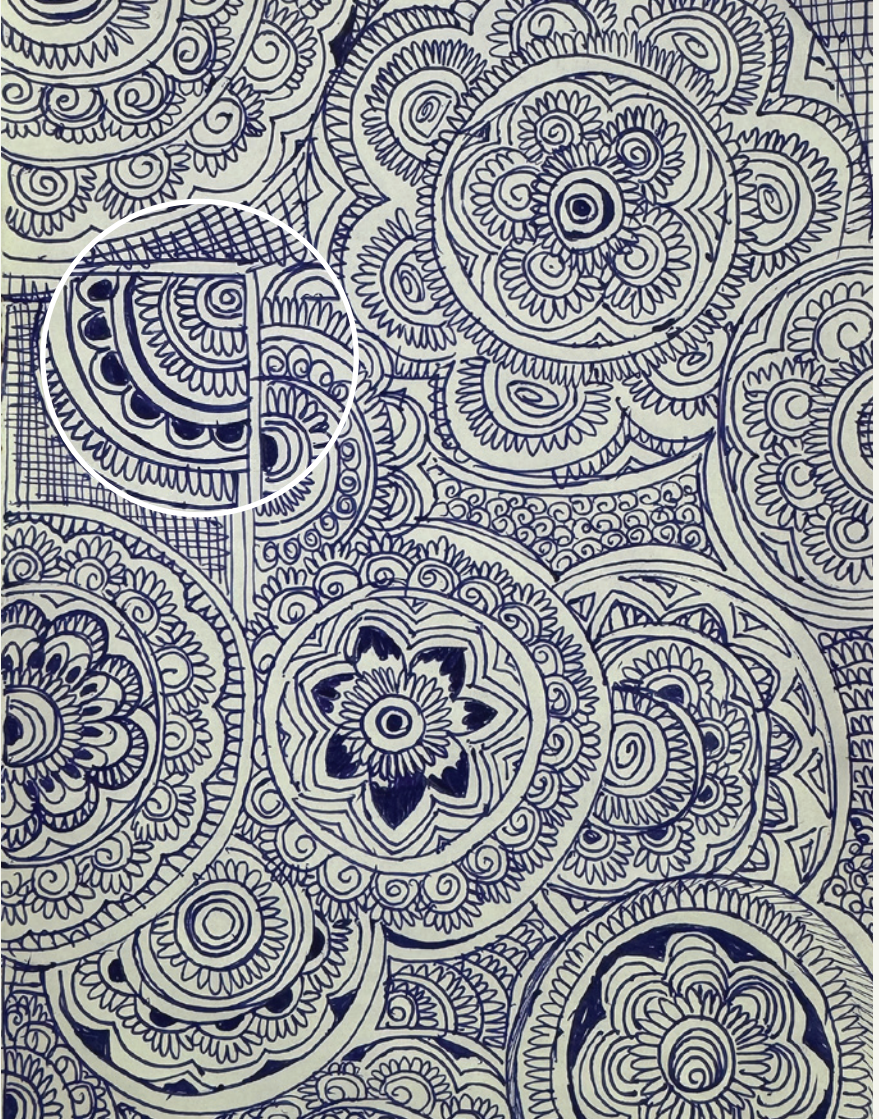
“The Flight to Freedom”

A 60-year-old man residing in Delhi from the Orrisa Adivasi Tribe speaks Hindi and has had only primary school education. He was asked to draw in response to the cue, “What do you think is the essence of life?” He explained that the kite signifies a life that he wants for his family, but the rope is detached from the spindle that controls the kite, indicating the uncertainty of what his life will be after his retirement that is fast-approaching and the prospect of a dramatically reduced income. The Lotus is his family in his hometown over 1,000 miles from Delhi and he wishes to join his family there after retirement and be free of all the work problems. He has been the provider for their needs, but they remain in dire straits. The drawing signifies the joy of re-uniting with the family and that makes him happy, despite the many economic challenges.

“My Brother”

A 29-year-old woman with no formal education in Uttarakhand, on the border with Tibet, who does not speak Hindi or English, was asked to draw something that brings happiness using colored pencils and paper. Instead, she cleaned the area with a tree branch and used a dry twig to draw in the mud. She drew this image of her brother who was deceased. She was very fond of him, but he died in an accident. She remembered him and loved him more than anyone else. He supported her in whatever she wanted to do, played with her, sang with her, went to the hills and helped in

cutting wood and grass for the cows. She was smiling when she was drawing. She was married but lived separately from her husband who was 15 years older and abusive. After drawing the picture she started crying and expressed her wish that her brother would still be alive. Then a leaf fell on the drawing, landing on his hand, and she explained that this leaf was a manifestation of her brother's ongoing and active presence in her life, not merely a symbol. This made her very happy and she smiled with tears still flowing and said, “He still takes care of me.”



“Life is a Blossom”

This drawing was presented to Dr. Khosla by one of her 18-year-old female students from a tribal community from northeast India who is studying in Delhi. The purpose was to cheer up Dr. Khosla after the death of her parents. The student explained that the drawing signified that Dr. Khosla is nurturing students into beautiful blossoms. The spirals indicate the turmoils of life, the intricate designs symbolize resilience, and the blossoms in the middle point to the essence of life: that we are all beautiful flowers. There is a break or obstruction that we have circled on the drawing indicating the limitations and challenges in our lives. But such obstacles do not stop the flowers from blossoming.

“A Myriad of Emotions”

A 37-year-old woman from Nagaland, a mountainous part of northeast India on the border of Myanmar, who also does not speak Hindi or English responded to the same question. This picture shows her paints and brushes, along with her painting of “home” as a place that is not merely a shelter for the family, but a confluence of various emotions that are contributed by the people living together. The colors depict the different people who come together with their good and bad behaviors, small and big people, all living together to make the building a home. Flourishing involves integration and harmony of opposites in a particular setting.



In addition to exploring factors that shape flourishing across all countries, we also used the domains of the SFI to categorize a range of outcomes to display the relative “strengths” and possible areas for improvement for each country, not in relation to other countries but only based on an internal country-specific comparison. Figures 3.9 to 3.11 show different sized circles for each country based on the relative highest and lowest flourishing domains.⁴⁷ The point here is that different countries seem to emphasize certain domains more than others. In other words, there are many ways to flourish, and we might benefit from learning why people in specific nations have emphasized specific domains over others. Put differently, all countries have something to offer the cross-national dialogue on flourishing.

In these figures, we classified outcomes such as charitable giving and helping others in the Character and Virtue domain. Employment status and financial worry were grouped in Financial Stability. Having a voice in the workings of government and a sense of subjective social connectedness were organized into the Close Social Relationships domain, and so forth.⁴⁸ The circles for each domain represent a summary of the outcomes in that domain. When the domain represented a strength, the circle is larger. When the domain represents a relatively low set of scores (compared with the other domains in the country, not compared with other countries), the circle is smaller. When a domain is neither a strength nor an area for improvement, we show a medium-sized circle. When some outcomes in a domain

are strengths and others are areas for improvement, we have displayed a half circle.

Figure 3.9 covers Asia and the South Pacific. We highlight just a few findings here. The Philippines seems to have a special strength with regard to the domain of Close Social Relationships, relative to other domains in that specific country. Hong Kong has two strengths: Financial Stability as well as Happiness and Life Satisfaction. Indonesia has at least partial strengths in all domains except Mental and Physical Health, keeping in mind that this refers to Indonesia’s own domains, not in comparison with the domains of other nations. Figure 3.10 shows Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. Kenya has a number of strengths, including Meaning and Purpose (MP), and it is one of only three countries with this distinction. Germany’s outcomes seem more diffusely distributed across the domains, with no single domain standing out. Finally, Figure 3.11 shows North and South America. Mexico seems to emphasize MP, as well as HLS, while in Brazil HLS and Character and Virtue emerge as focal concerns.

This section reviewed just a small number of findings drawn from the rich set of results presented in the Nature Springer Special Collection and on the GFS website. Additional articles will be added to the Special Collection and the website will continue to expand as the GFS research team continues to excavate treasures from the extensive data set. In the next section, we consider what the longitudinal findings might reveal about the pursuit of flourishing around the world.



Figure 3.9
Asia & South Pacific

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Meaning & Purpose | Happiness & Life Satisfaction |
| Mental & Physical Health | Financial & Material Stability |
| Character & Virtue | Close Social Relationships |



⁴⁷ For the full list of outcomes by country, see Table 9 in VanderWeele et al., (2025), supra note 8.

⁴⁸ The full list of classifications can be found at www.globalflourishingstudy.com

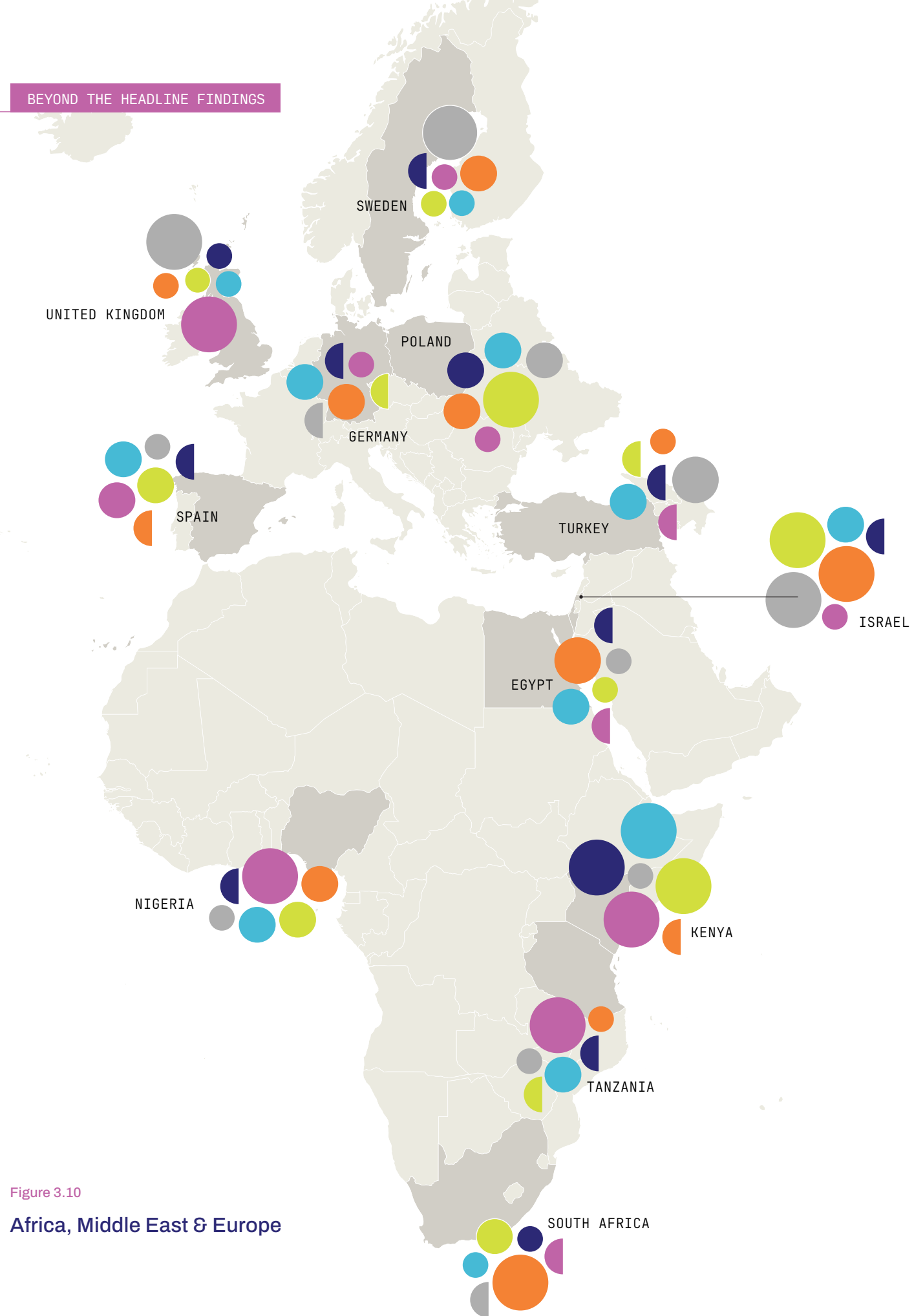


Figure 3.10
Africa, Middle East & Europe

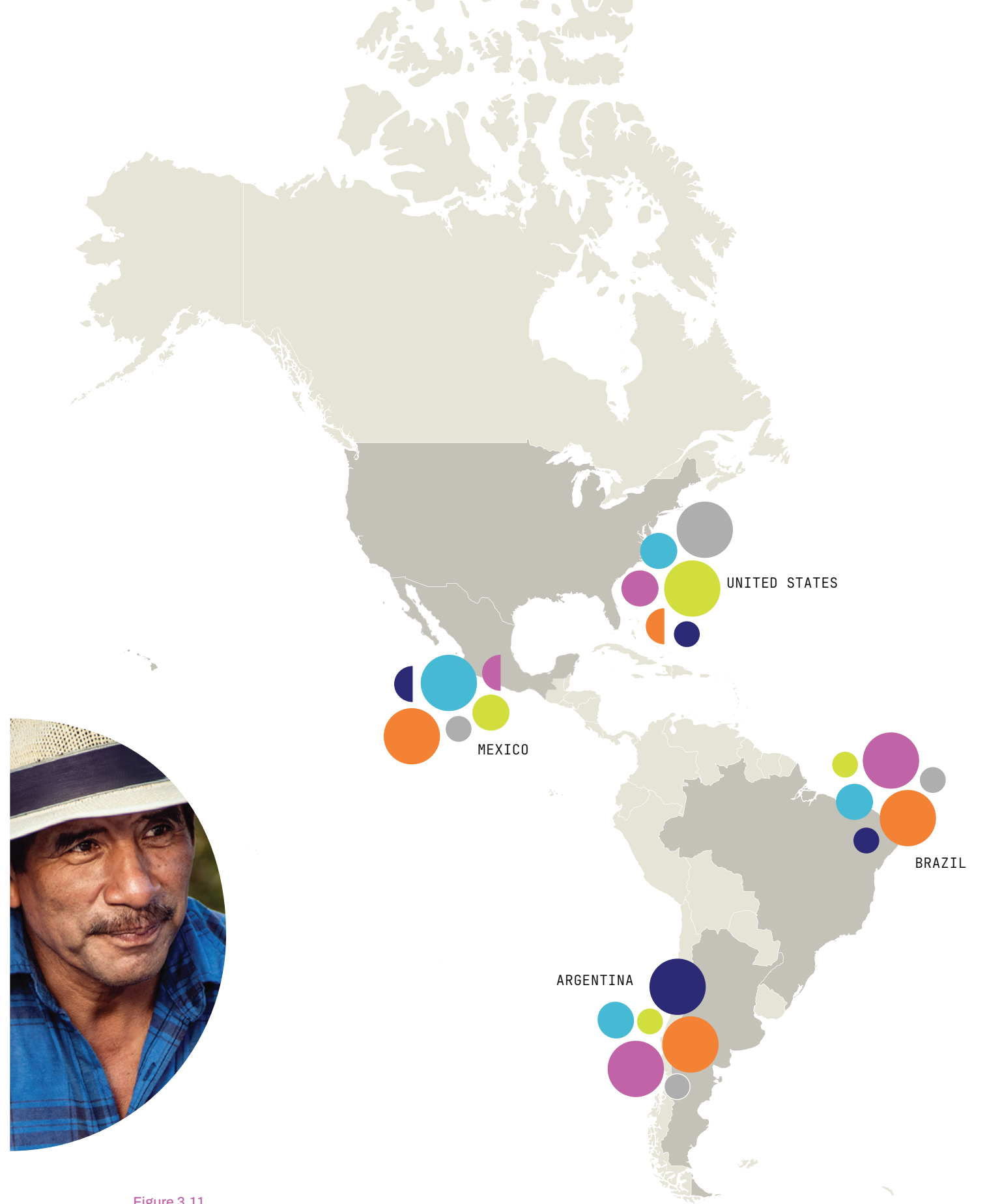


Figure 3.11
North & South America

A young woman wearing a patterned beige hijab and a dark blue garment with intricate white embroidery is looking off to the side with a thoughtful expression. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with green foliage and warm sunlight filtering through the trees, creating a bokeh effect. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent teal and yellow-green gradient. On the right side, there are large, stylized, overlapping geometric shapes in shades of yellow and orange.

Looking
Ahead...

The first wave of the Global Flourishing Study has produced a wealth of insights into flourishing in diverse nations around the world.⁴⁹ But the real contribution of the GFS will emerge as additional waves of data enable longitudinal analyses.

With multiple waves of data, researchers will be able to understand how changes in factors such as financial circumstances, health behaviors, religious participation, political voice, and social connections are associated with variations in flourishing domains over time. This will allow us to see how some changes precede others and to determine the effects of different drivers of flourishing beyond baseline levels. This is important because terms such as purpose, love, religion, challenges, worry, and satisfaction may have distinct meanings in different cultures. The most informative comparisons we might make concern changes over time within particular cultural groups. As of this writing, the second wave of GFS data has just been released and the third wave is being collected.

If we take flourishing to mean the relative attainment of a state in which all aspects of a person's life are good, including the contexts in which that person lives, it is clear that connecting longitudinal findings from the GFS to other valued metrics of the good life will provide a more complete picture of this fascinating area of study. We have explored several of these, including Gross Domestic Product, the Environmental Performance Index, and the Global Peace Index, but we have also emphasized the value of dialogue: this report is an invitation to all people to contribute their preferred constructs, measures, and modes of inquiry to the global conversation about flourishing.

After a few waves of data are analyzed, we might begin to see trends emerge that help us predict the future of flourishing, and to understand how flourishing trends might be connected to other patterns over time. For example, according to the latest Human Freedom Index report, since 2000, “a high point for freedom occurred in 2005–2007, followed by a steady decline through 2019, a period during which 77.5 percent of the world's population experienced a fall in freedom,” and freedom further experienced a “subsequent precipitous descent in 2020 through 2021” that “affected every region of the world.”⁵⁰ It is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on freedom. How will flourish-

ing track with freedom? How will global shocks like the COVID-19 pandemic affect the domains of flourishing? If the GFS continues to be fielded annually, we will be able to offer some answers.

One rising challenge that is already affecting some of the countries included in the GFS is the global fertility crisis. In the absence of high infant and child mortality, research suggests that 2.1 births per female would be sufficient for a population to replace itself across generations.⁵¹ In other words, such a group would neither grow nor decline. The global fertility rate has been declining, from 4.9 per female in the 1950s to 2.3 today.⁵² Some countries are well-below replacement levels. Several GFS countries were singled out in an article on the nations that are “shrinking fast” due to “The Great Baby Bust,” including: China (1.2), Japan (1.3), Spain (1.3), Germany (1.4), and the United States (1.7).⁵³ The population in some of these countries, such as Germany, has not declined as fast as others because of factors like immigration, but if current trends continue this country will have a net loss of 10 million people by 2100. Japan stands to lose 20% of its population by 2050 and one of its rural villages (Ichinono) recently made global headlines when residents began replacing young people with mannequins, as “a creative way to combat loneliness amid rural depopulation and declining birth rates,” to such an extent that residents are now “outnumbered by puppets.”⁵⁴ The social and economic consequences of the fertility crisis are significant, including an aging workforce that is less productive, a declining tax base unable to support social programs, and the potential collapse of some real estate markets. How might these trends affect the Secure Flourishing Index in these countries, which are currently at 5.89 (Japan), 6.90 (Spain), 7.01 (Germany), 7.11 (US), and 7.12 (China)? None of these five countries appeared in our Top-10 list for the Secure Flourishing Index (Table 2.1). How might a variety of population shifts, including the potential replacement of people in some sectors of the economy by Artificial Intelligence, converge with other factors to impact flourishing in the future?

The first wave of GFS data revealed that:

- 1. Many middle-income developing countries appear to be doing better in terms of meaning, purpose, and close social relationships than countries in the richer developed world.
- 2. Younger generations appear to be lagging behind older generations with regard to many subjective aspects of flourishing.
- 3. Religious service attendance stands out for its strong association with flourishing, even in the most secular societies.⁵⁵

Will these patterns hold across subsequent waves of the GFS? To what extent is it possible for people to pursue economic development without compromising critical flourishing domains such as meaning and purpose, as well as relationships and morality?⁵⁶ How might every nation and culture contribute to our understanding of flourishing? **We will seek to answer these questions, and many others, in our next report.**

⁴⁹ See also the Nature/Springer Special Collection, supra note 9.

⁵⁰ Vásquez, I., Mitchell, M. D., Murphy, R., & Scheider, G. S., 2024. The Human Freedom Index, 2024. Cato Institute and Fraser Institute, pp. 21–22. <https://www.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/2024-12/2024-human-freedom-index.pdf>

⁵¹ Craig, J. 1994. Replacement level fertility and future population growth. Population Trends, Winter, 20–22.

⁵² <https://ourworldindata.org/fertility-rate>

⁵³ <https://wpr-newsletter.beehiiv.com/p/the-great-baby-bust-which-nations-are-shrinking-fast>; see also: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN>

⁵⁴ McCartney, M. 2024. “Japan Village Tackles Population Crisis with Mannequins.” Newsweek (October 31). <https://www.newsweek.com/japan-news-village-tackles-population-crisis-mannequins-1977438>

⁵⁵ These three findings were highlighted in this press release titled, “Harvard, Baylor, Gallup, Release Wave 1 findings of historic Global Flourishing Study, issued by the Human Flourishing Program at Harvard on April 30, 2025.

⁵⁶ This question was posed in VanderWeele et al., 2025, supra note 8.



SFI Question	Scale
Overall, how satisfied are you with life as a whole these days?	0 = Not Satisfied at All 10 = Completely Satisfied
In general, how happy or unhappy do you usually feel?	0 = Extremely Unhappy 10 = Extremely Happy
In general, how would you rate your physical health?	0 = Poor 10 = Excellent
How would you rate your overall mental health?	0 = Poor 10 = Excellent
Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?	0 = Not at All Worthwhile 10 = Completely Worthwhile
I understand my purpose in life	0 = Strongly Disagree 10 = Strongly Agree
I always act to promote good in all circumstances, even in difficult and challenging situations.	0 = Not True of Me 10 = Completely True of Me
I am always able to give up some happiness now for greater happiness later.	0 = Not True of Me 10 = Completely True of Me
I am content with my friendships and relationships.	0 = Strongly Disagree 10 = Strongly Agree
My relationships are as satisfying as I would want them to be.	0 = Strongly Disagree 10 = Strongly Agree
How often do you worry about being able to meet normal monthly living expenses?	0 = Worry All of the Time 10 = Do Not Ever Worry
How often do you worry about safety, food, or housing?	0 = Worry All of the Time 10 = Do Not Ever Worry

FOOTNOTES :

²⁰ Hofstede, G., Hosted, G. J., & Minkov, M. (2010). Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind (3r ed). McGraw-Hill. P. 519.

²¹ Lee, M. T., Wilkinson, R., Long, K. N. G., Case, B. W., Ritchie-Dunham, J. L., Bradshaw, M., Padgett, R. N., Johnson, B. R. & VanderWeele, T. J. (2025). Demographic variation and childhood predictors of showing love and care for others across 22 countries: A cross-national analysis. Preprint at https://osf.io/preprints/osf/9z36v_v1

²² Hofstede et al., (2010), supra note 20, pp. 138-140. The SFI focuses on flourishing in life, while this measure is more specifically focused on work goals. By assessing achievement, it connects with a domain of the PERMA measure of flourishing that is not directly assessed by the SFI (just as character and virtue is not directly assessed in the PERMA). Seligman, M. (2018). PERMA and the building blocks of well-being. The Journal of Positive Psychology, 13(4), 333-335.

²³ See <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/freedom-index-by-country>

²⁴ See <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/GPI-2024-web.pdf>

²⁵ Only the 22 countries and one territory in the GFS were included in the map. All outcomes were weighted equally. Countries received more “points” for placing highly on a top-10 list compared with a lower score (e.g., 10 points for a first-place ranking, 1 point for 10th place), and zero points for not placing at all, in order to assess both the appearance on multiple lists and the relative placement on each one. For example, Japan appeared on six lists but received most of its “points” for placing highly on the GPI, HFS, motivation to succeed, and long-term orientation, with fewer points from GDP and EPI. Tanzania appeared on three lists (SFI, GPI, and showing love/care), but received 8 of its 11 points from its 3rd-place finish on showing love/care. There are many other ways to reconfigure this heat map, including giving more weight to some outcomes (e.g., the multi-item indexes rather than single item measures; or based on the highest values of a particular group [e.g., showing love/care might outweigh motivation to succeed for some groups). We invite researchers to explore these possibilities, add new outcomes, and contribute to the dialogue about multidimensional flourishing.

³⁰ Individualism is contrasted with collectivism, where the former “stands for a society in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after him- or herself and his or her immediate family only” and the latter “stands for a society in which people from birth onward are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people’s lives continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.” See Hofstede et al., (2010), supra note 19, p. 519. The measure we used for individualism was focused specifically on the workplace and comprised of 14 work-related questions about the importance of aspects of an ideal job. The other measures in the scatterplots are explained above.

³¹ GFS data collection for China was delayed compared to the other countries. By the time this report went to the printer, we were able to include China in Tables and Figures 2.1 to 2.10, but not in subsequent analyses. We intend to update these additional analyses on our the project’s website: <https://globalflourishingstudy.com/>

³² Lee, M. T., Bialowolski, P., Weziak-Bialowolska, D., Mooney, K. D., Lerner, P. J., McNeely, E., & VanderWeele, T. J. (2021). Self-assessed importance of domains of flourishing: Demographics and correlations with well-being. The Journal of Positive Psychology, 16(1), 137-144.

³⁷ “Blue shaded bars represent statistically significant relationships at p<.05 level; grey bars represent non-significant relationships. Statistical significance is obtained from country-level OLS models regressing the Secure Flourishing Index score on religious service attendance, accounting for normalized sampling weights, primary sampling units, and strata, and adjusting for religion/ spiritual self-identification, importance of religion in daily life, secular activity attendance, gender, age, education, urbanity, feelings about household income, employment status, and marital status. Observations with missing information for any variable in the model are omitted from the analysis. This analysis replicates results first reported here: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/642680/global-study-aims-uncover-humans-flourish.aspx>. Small differences in a few countries compared to the original results are due to slightly refined sample weights and changing the reference category from ‘at least once a week’ to ‘more than once a week.’ We thank Dr. Matt Bradshaw for the analysis.”

