

# **The Global Peace Index and Multi-National Attitude Research**

**A Review of the Relationship of Attitudes with the Global Peace Index**

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### **Overview**

The Global Peace Index (GPI) is a program that quantifies the peacefulness of nations around the world. The GPI research effort has identified what measures are available for a large number of countries, which measures are associated with peacefulness, and how these measures should be combined. The 2008 index, based upon 24 indicators, ranks 140 countries around the world on their peacefulness.

The index is designed to represent peacefulness, or the absence of conflict, in terms of both the internal peacefulness of a nation and external peacefulness. The data that the index is based upon are from objective open information sources compiled by a number of different organizations including the International Institute for Strategic Studies, the World Bank, the UN, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, and the Economist Intelligence Unit. The raw measures for each nation include such variables as:

- Number of external and internal conflicts
- Number of deaths from organized internal and external conflict
- Displaced people as percentage of the population
- Level of violent crime
- Jailed population per 100,000 people
- Military expenditures as a percentage of GDP
- Armed services personnel per 100,000 population

A detailed description of the concepts and methods behind the GPI can be found at [www.visionofhumanity.org/gpi/home.php](http://www.visionofhumanity.org/gpi/home.php). The rankings of 140 nations can be found at this site as well.

The goal of the Global Peace Index is to further the understanding of what nurtures and sustains peace. While these external measures of peace/conflict comprise the index, it is likely that there are aspects of the social and political culture, and possibly the economic culture, that may illuminate why nations are more or less peaceful. Attitude research that is conducted scientifically across nations can be a tool for understanding such cultural differences.

To examine how people's attitudes and beliefs in different nations may be related to their peacefulness, the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland has gathered multi-national attitude research and correlated it with the Global Peace Index. Attitudinal differences between peaceful and less peaceful nations can help

clarify the cultural mechanisms that may underpin the institutions and actions of nations that make them more or less peaceful.

UNESCO has a program to advance the “culture of peace” and a variety of peace organizations around the world use this concept as a centerpiece of their efforts. Understanding how national attitudes are related to the leading measure of a nation’s peacefulness can add scientific validity to the culture of peace concept.

Efforts to build a culture of peace, moreover, will benefit from a clearer understanding of the role of national attitudes that reflect this culture. Findings on national perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes can provide tools for guiding efforts to increase peace through communication, education, economic changes, or political changes.

### **Sources of Multi-National Public Opinion Research**

Until the last 10 years, there was relatively little multinational attitude research conducted on a worldwide basis. However, economic globalization has driven a need for market information, and market research or survey research organizations now can be found in nearly all of the 150 largest nations as measured by size of their economies. Public opinion and other attitude research have become a global phenomenon, with governments, academics, and policy centers interested in views of publics in their own countries as well as in other countries.

This circumstance created by economic and informational globalization provides an opportunity to link the “external measures” of GPI (e.g., measures of conflict, democracy scores, economic variables, and criminology statistics) with attitude research from many nations. To carry out such an analysis, PIPA identified a set of multi-national survey research programs, and the findings were correlated on a nation-by-nation basis to the 2008 GPI rankings. Our criteria for selection of the public opinion research were the following:

- The studies should cover multiple countries and continents (e.g., not simply Europe or East Asia).
- The studies should employ relatively high methodological standards (probability samples) with clear documentation of the questions and the quantitative findings.
- The studies should be available as open-source research. This eliminated some proprietary work by commercial research organizations as well as work done by the US State Department, and probably other foreign ministries, which is not currently open-source.

The following multi-national survey research programs met these criteria and were reviewed for items that might be related to peacefulness.

WorldPublicOpinion.org (WPO)

Pew Global Attitudes Program (PGAP)

World Values Survey (WVS)

BBC World Service Polls conducted by GlobeScan and PIPA (BBC)

The findings about what attitudes relate to peacefulness are coded as they are discussed below by abbreviations for each of the polling programs. Each program presents their findings in a website, and there are search functions to assist in locating the wording of specific items if desired. All of the BBC World Service global polls have been archived on the WorldPublicOpinion.org website. One item from Gallup International has also been included; this polling program is proprietary and the findings are not fully open source material.

### **Attitudinal Themes Related to a Nation's Peacefulness**

In the review of global survey research available in the open source literature, a variety of survey questions items were found to be related to country rankings on the Global Peace Index. Each of those reported below had statistically significant correlations between a nation's attitude score and its rank on the GPI. While it is possible that occasional "chance" findings can appear in such reviews, it is encouraging that the related items generally seem to fit into coherent themes. Such thematically related items that are replicated across different survey questions and different survey organizations build confidence that national public attitudes about these issues are in fact predictors of a nation's peacefulness.

#### Nationalism/Chauvinism

Nationalism is often reported to be a factor in international conflicts by historians, journalists, and social psychologists. A group of attitudes reflecting issues associated with nationalism and chauvinism were found in the multi-country studies to be related to countries' rank on the Global Peace Index. Nations where the public holds attitudes which emphasize the special value of their own culture, their own country's morality, and a need to protect their values against outsiders tend to be classified as not being peaceful. To phrase the findings in terms of peacefulness, people in countries rated *more peaceful* on the GPI tended to be:

- less likely to see their culture as superior (PGAP)  $r = .497$
- more likely to see their country as having average morality in its foreign policy, rather than above or below average (WPO)  $-.472$

- less likely to think that their way of life needs to be protected against foreign influence (PGAP) .393

A set of items related to national identity vs. identity as a global citizen, openness to others, and trust in others also seem to be related to the theme of nationalism/chauvinism.

- more likely to think it is important to understand others' preferences in building good human relationships (WVS) -.469
- more likely to think of themselves as a citizen of the world or equally as a citizen of the world and their country, rather than simply a citizen of their own country (WPO) -.361
- more likely to think that most people can be trusted (WVS) .303.

### Democracy/Civil Society/Human Rights

One of the more practical theories related to peace and conflict in modern political science is the Democratic Peace theory which proposes that democracies do not fight wars with each other. While notions of democratic peace go back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century writings of Immanuel Kant, over the past few decades there has been considerable empirical work done by political scientists which generally supports this proposition.

Democratic institutions and civil society in theory ought to be an effective way to reduce or manage internal conflict as well as of preventing external conflict. Democratic institutions provide the opportunity for different voices to be heard and for the peaceful replacement of government leaders. However, there is some contrary literature suggesting that authoritarian regimes are more successful in limiting internal conflict. Moreover, ethnic fragmentation, a large source of internal conflict in recent years makes democracy more difficult. Safeguarding the rights of all citizens, including specifically the rights of ethnic or religious minorities, should be an important tool of a well-functioning democracy and this in turn should limit internal conflict.

A review of multi-national survey research shows that attitudes related to democracy, civil society, and human rights have been polled relatively often. A substantial number of public opinion questions are correlated with a nation's peacefulness. Some of the questions are normative, i.e., they assess what people think should be the case or what their preferences are in areas of democracy or human rights; others measure a public's perceptions of the status of democratic practices and human rights in their country. These are clearly different types of questions and understanding the interaction of these normative beliefs and perceptions of one's political system is an issue that merits further attention.

Nations tend to be scored as *more peaceful* when their publics are:

- more likely to reject any use of torture, including against terrorists (WPO) -.725
- more likely to support leaders who take a cooperative and compromising approach (WVS) -.676
- more likely to say that the media in their country have a lot of freedom (WPO) -.563
- less likely to believe that their government should be able to limit expression of ideas (WPO) -.424
- more likely to see their country as having a lot of respect for human rights (WVS) -.417
- more likely to feel that their country is characterized by allowing religion to be practiced freely (PGAP) -.378
- more likely to feel that the right of criticizing their government is important (PGAP) -.370
- more likely to think that the media should have complete freedom from government control (WPO) -.364
- more likely to think that having a strong man government is a bad way of governing (WVS) -.359
- more likely to favor democratic government over a strong leader (PGAP) -.295.

#### Support for Military Capacity and the Use of Force

Only a relatively small number of global polling items have been identified which we have placed under this rubric. This may seem surprising since there appears to be a very plausible relationship between conflict and attitudes about military capabilities or military actions. But global polling is still a young discipline and there have not yet been many questions polled in different regions of the world on issues related to the use of military force, the morality of force, the rationale for military budgets and military build-ups, and similar issues. On the following topics, people in countries ranked by the GPI as more peaceful were

- more likely to favor an agreement to eliminate all nuclear weapons (WPO) -.537
- more likely to have negative feelings about al Qaeda (BBC) .475

- were likely to support military action in Iraq only if sanctioned by UN (Gallup International) -.453
- more likely to disagree with the need to use military force to maintain order in the world (PGAP) .411

### Traditional Personal and Religious Values

Religious values are among the oldest human belief systems that can be documented. The relationship of religious values to peace and conflict is complex, however, despite the place of peacefulness as a virtue in most religious systems. Among a number of psychological thinkers, Erich Fromm recognized that religion can have differing impacts on dispositions to peace and conflict, and he proposed a religious typology distinguishing the authoritarian and the humanistic aspects of religion.

There has been extensive research into “the authoritarian personality.” Conventionalism, intolerance, and rigid values are usually associated with authoritarianism and are often seen as elements of religious beliefs characterized as fundamentalist. It should not be surprising then that attitudes associated with fundamentalist religious and conventional values may be negatively related to nations’ peacefulness. Nations are more likely to be categorized as peaceful on the GPI when their citizens are:

- more likely to feel that politicians do not need to believe in God (WVS) -.707
- more likely to say homosexuality should be accepted (PGAP) -.534
- more likely to believe that good and evil are more contingent rather than absolute (WVS) -.491
- more likely to feel that it is not necessary to believe in God to be moral (PGAP) -.486
- more likely to believe that religious leaders should not influence voting (WVS) -.456
- more likely to believe that women and men make equally good political leaders (PGAP) -.442

### Economic Attitudes

A smaller number of items that correlated with nations’ GPI rankings that may form a cluster of issues related to economic attitudes and beliefs. Other researchers working on the GPI have shown that peacefulness is related to economic development and to the

World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index and the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business and Knowledge Economy Indices.

People in nations with higher peace rankings are

- more likely to say that anyone should be permitted to come to work in the country (WVS) .465
- less likely to say that globalization is growing too quickly ((BBC) -.459
- more likely to say they have free choice and control over their lives (WVS) -.312

This is a small number of attitude items and their characterization as reflecting economic attitudes will need further assessment. However, since other elements of the GPI research program have identified economic variables as having a role in peacefulness, these attitudes may reflect how some related economic factors are represented psychologically.

#### Evaluations by Other Nations

For several years, the BBC World Service has polled 20 or more nations on which countries are perceived to be having a "mostly positive influence" or "mostly negative influence" in the world. Note that this global polling question provides a different perspective from those above: the world public assesses other nations such as France, Britain, Japan, the US, Russia, China, Iran, and Israel in terms of their positive or negative influence in the world. These annual global evaluations are covered extensively by the international press and produce considerable discussion in the policy community.

A striking finding for peacefulness is that the rankings of countries by the GPI and by the global public in terms of positive-negative influence correlate very strongly, -.833, more strongly than any of the other items tested. It seems that peacefulness is an important part of the underlying concept that people around the world employ when they say that a country is having a positive or negative influence in the world.

#### **Some Attitudes Not Related to a Nation's Peacefulness**

Across the four multi-national polling efforts, the Program on International Policy Attitudes reviewed a large number of items. There were some items that we anticipated would be related to peacefulness, but proved not to be when evaluated by means of the correlation analysis. Inferences from such null findings are not always clear because the items may not have been measuring the "relevant" concepts that they seemed to us to be measuring, or because our theory may not have been correct. Nonetheless, documenting some of these non-findings may help fill in the picture of the attitudinal underpinnings of peacefulness. All of the measures below did not approach statistically significant correlations with the GPI.



## Attitudes toward the UN

The United Nations was developed in part to maintain international peace and to provide a forum where differences between nations could be resolved. As nations invest some authority in the UN, they yield a small portion of autonomy and ability to act solely in their self-interest. When a conflict occurs, nations often call on the UN to resolve it and a peacekeeping function is a familiar role for the UN. For such reasons, it seems plausible that more peaceful nations might favor investing more responsibility in the UN and strengthening it.

However, nations were not more peaceful when their public felt that:

- their country should be more willing to make decisions within the United Nations even when it means the country will need to accept a policy that isn't its first choice (WPO) -.125
- there should be a standing UN peacekeeping force (WPO) -.021
- the UN Security Council has a responsibility to protect people from severe human rights violations such as genocide (WPO) -.053
- the UN would better handle human rights problems, compared to national governments or governments with UN coordination (WVS) -.037
- the UN would better handle international peacekeeping compared to national governments, or national governments with UN coordination (WVS) .167

This cluster of attitudes unrelated to the peacefulness of a nation may simply mean that all nations, peaceful or not, share fairly similar attitudes toward the UN.

## Certain Attitudes Related to Democracy

Above we found that a substantial group of attitudes related to facets of democracy and civil society were clearly correlated with peacefulness – generally publics favoring human rights, civil society attributes, and democratic principles tended to live in more peaceful nations. It is interesting to note that certain attitudes related to democracy were not related to peacefulness, as for example when the public of a nation felt that:

- just about always or most of the time the national government could be trusted to do what is right (WPO) .095
- their country was governed according to the will of the people (WPO) -.028
- their government should be ruled by the will of the people more than it currently is (WPO) -.066
- that having a democratic political system is a very good way of their country (WVS) -.103

While these findings may appear initially contradictory to both the theory behind peacefulness and to positive attitudinal findings presented above, this outcome is likely to be due in part to the fact that publics don't evaluate their own government very

objectively in terms of the quality of its democracy. A number of studies have shown that the public in “more established” democracies do not necessarily give their own government high marks in serving the will of the people; those is countries which receive low ratings in democracy by human rights organizations often give their country higher grades in serving the will of the people.

It is also the case that the general concept of a democratic political system is widely supported around the world even if a particular country does not have a government that most outsiders describe as democratic. Highly general concepts such as the perception of one’s government serving the will of the people may not be a good indicator of a nation’s democratic practices and values.

### Civilian Control of the Military

A topic that was anticipated to be related to peacefulness was civilian control of the military. It seems interesting and surprising that two items examining this concept were not statistically correlated with a nation’s peacefulness. There was not a significant relationship to national peacefulness when a public felt that:

- it is very or somewhat important for the military to be under control of civilian leaders (PGAP) -.01
- the military being under control of civilian leaders described their country very or somewhat well (PGAP) - .177

Each of these groups of attitudes seems plausibly related to peacefulness, but was not found to be so empirically. The challenge of such null findings is that our concepts and theory need to be sharpened. With further work, we may find a more nuanced theory or we may that the measures of these attitudes must be framed more effectively.

### **Using Public Opinion Research to Understand and Advance Peacefulness**

Does international public opinion research increase our understanding of contributors to nations’ peacefulness and what strategies might be used to advance peace? This review of the relationship of global poll findings to rankings of nations by the Global Peace Index provides an encouraging start. Multiple items related to Nationalism/Chauvinism, Democracy and Human Rights, Military Capabilities and Actions, and Traditional Personal and Religious Values are correlated with a nation’s GPI ranking; these questions were drawn from different research programs and fielded at different times between years 2000 and 2008. Thus the findings seem robust across this range of time and research programs.

A few items related to Economic Attitudes were also found to be related to the GPI. Empirical support for the relationship of this attitudinal factor to peacefulness is thinner, but suggestive.

Education and communication are likely to be tools that will be put in the service of promoting peace by NGO's or by academics. Understanding how national attitudes and perceptions relate to peacefulness should provide guidance on curriculum or message development.

For example, democratic values and respect for human rights are widely endorsed around the world, yet attitudes about media freedom, the right to criticize government, and preferences for a cooperative leader rather than a "strong leader" show variation that is related to peacefulness across nations. Educational content, or message points, could underline those values associated with peacefulness and link them to the widely-shared values about democracy and basic freedom of speech.

### **Potential Agenda for Future Attitudinal Research**

Drawing upon research conducted in the recent past to understand whether and how national attitudes are related to peacefulness has laid some initial groundwork. Many questions asked around the globe have been examined. This approach has the limits of any review effort: questions have not been designed with the specific purpose of understanding what attitudes distinguish peaceful nations from those less peaceful, and the post-hoc method runs the risk of capitalizing on chance like other data mining techniques.

Studies designed specifically to investigate national attitudes and peacefulness may be able to advance knowledge further. Some of the questions of interest that have emerged from this research are the following.

- What is the role of religiosity in peacefulness? In most or all religious traditions, peacefulness is a value, yet religious views in this study were related to non-peacefulness. Both the World Values Survey and the Pew Global Attitudes Program have included a substantial number of items related to religion in their cross-national studies.

Majority Muslim countries are heavily represented in the nations receiving the least peaceful scores on GPI, and more secular Western nations dominate the most peaceful scores. This pattern of Islamic and Western nations is very likely a factor in the relationship between traditional religious values and peacefulness.

Is this link between religiousness and non-peacefulness mediated by differences in development across countries? Are there some explicitly religious values that are associated with peacefulness? Which religious values, or shared religious and secular values, could be invoked to foster peacefulness? Addressing such questions could add strength and detail to the concept of peacefulness and suggest tactics that could be employed to further it.

- Only a few economic attitudes proved to be related to peacefulness. Economic issues have not received a great deal of attention in global attitude research, however. Attitudes towards free markets did not show a strong relationship to the GPI, but more favorable attitudes toward globalization did show a relationship. The political science literature suggests that countries that are well-integrated with their neighbors and the world are less likely to be engaged in conflict. The role of attitudes toward economic justice, economic egalitarianism, economic freedom, property rights, immigration, and other concepts that are part of the global economic discourse would be useful to examine.
- A small number of survey items related to militarization and military actions were related to peacefulness, e.g., attitudes favoring the elimination of nuclear weapons and opposition to the idea that military force is necessary to maintain order. However, only a few questions on military issues were located for evaluation in the global polling literature. There is potentially a large set of questions that might prove fruitful on these topics: support for military spending, perceptions that one's country is under military threat, appraisal of "just" wars, feeling of historic national grievances, and others.
- Do attitudes that predict peacefulness of nations as measured by the Global Peace Index also predict peacefulness within individual nations? This question would require developing measures of peacefulness at the level of the individual, but it could markedly strengthen the idea that attitudes are important for understanding peacefulness both across nations and among individuals. It would also support efforts to use education or communications or other programs designed to increase peacefulness.