

# America's Desperate Need for Wellbeing

Stephan A. Schwartz

It is a near universal article of faith amongst Americans that the United States is the best country in the world at nearly everything. It isn't true, and the reason it isn't can be clearly defined. We, as a culture, have made something other than fostering wellbeing our number one priority. Instead, everything is geared to profit and the power it bestows. Did that offend you? Let me be clear, I am not interested in partisan politics except anthropologically. Do not misread me. What I care about and have talked about for the 16 years I have been writing in *Explore* is wellbeing as measured by objectively verifiable data, social outcome data. Decades of social outcome research has proven to me that if you always choose the option that best fosters wellbeing at every level of earth's matrix of life, you will always get the best outcome. Every other option places something else first and ends up diminishing wellbeing; it does not foster it.

So, let's start with some social outcome data that defines us today. Although I could pick many more --incarceration, obesity, maternal mortality, infant mortality, life span, come immediately to mind -- since this is an essay and not a book, I'll just cite four categories of social outcome data to make my point: healthcare, happiness, justice and childcare. I have chosen these four because Benjamin Franklin, America's most enlightened Founder, made the point they are essential to a nation's wellbeing and its ability to maintain a healthy democracy.<sup>1</sup>

**Healthcare:** As the Covid pandemic has shown, there are in the United States many highly skilled and deeply dedicated men and women working in healthcare. It is not the individual, but the system that is failing. There are nuanced differences in the way various research entities rank the healthcare of each nation.

The World Population Review looked at all of them:

- Top 10 Countries with the Best Healthcare in the World - World Health Organization (2000);
- Top 10 Countries with the Best Healthcare in the World - CEOWORLD magazine (2021)
- Top 10 Countries with the Best Healthcare in the World - Legatum Institute (2020)
- Top 10 Countries with the Best Healthcare in the World - BAV Group/Wharton School (2020)

This is what they concluded:

“There are some trends that one can identify in comparing the various data sets. The northern European countries tend to fare well in the more recent reports. Whether it’s Norway, Denmark, Switzerland, or a neighbor, it’s clear that Northern Europe is working hard to keep its people healthy. East Asian countries also represent well, with South Korea, Japan, and Singapore all making appearances.












“Finally, it’s difficult to overlook the absence of the United States in every list. While the U.S. certainly has its share of first-class doctors and facilities, higher costs and lower availability of care continue to impact its ranking—especially when compared to countries with some form of universal health care.”<sup>2</sup>

Where does America rank, how does America compare with 10 other developed nations? We rank last.

**EXHIBIT ES-1. OVERALL RANKING**

**COUNTRY RANKINGS**

- Top 2\*
- Middle
- Bottom 2\*

											
	AUS	CAN	FRA	GER	NETH	NZ	NOR	SWE	SWIZ	UK	US
<b>OVERALL RANKING (2013)</b>	4	10	9	5	5	7	7	3	2	1	11
<b>Quality Care</b>	2	9	8	7	5	4	11	10	3	1	5
Effective Care	4	7	9	6	5	2	11	10	8	1	3
Safe Care	3	10	2	6	7	9	11	5	4	1	7
Coordinated Care	4	8	9	10	5	2	7	11	3	1	6
Patient-Centered Care	5	8	10	7	3	6	11	9	2	1	4
<b>Access</b>	8	9	11	2	4	7	6	4	2	1	9
Cost-Related Problem	9	5	10	4	8	6	3	1	7	1	11
Timeliness of Care	6	11	10	4	2	7	8	9	1	3	5
<b>Efficiency</b>	4	10	8	9	7	3	4	2	6	1	11
<b>Equity</b>	5	9	7	4	8	10	6	1	2	2	11
<b>Healthy Lives</b>	4	8	1	7	5	9	6	2	3	10	11
<b>Health Expenditures/Capita, 2011**</b>	\$3,800	\$4,522	\$4,118	\$4,495	\$5,099	\$3,182	\$5,669	\$3,925	\$5,643	\$3,405	\$8,508

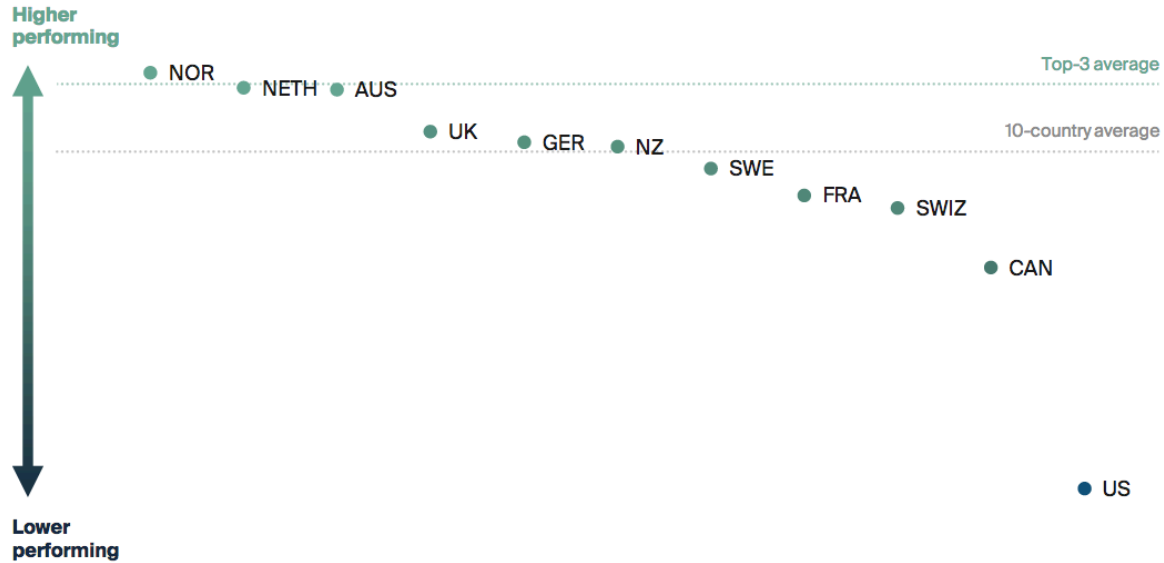
Notes: \* Includes ties. \*\* Expenditures shown in \$US PPP (purchasing power parity); Australian \$ data are from 2010.  
Source: Calculated by The Commonwealth Fund based on 2011 International Health Policy Survey of Sicker Adults; 2012 International Health Policy Survey of Primary Care Physicians; 2013 International Health Policy Survey; Commonwealth Fund National Scorecard 2011; World Health Organization; and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *OECD Health Data, 2013* (Paris: OECD, Nov. 2013).

*Figure 1*

According to a 2017 publication from the **Commonwealth Fund**, The USA is ranked last out of 11 Countries. (See figure 1)

In the 2021 rankings the U.S. is still 11<sup>th</sup> of the 11 developed nations. We are an outlier in the correct sense of the word. (See Figure 2)

## Comparative Health Care System Performance Scores



Note: To normalize performance scores across countries, each score is the calculated standard deviation from a 10-country average that excludes the US. See How We Conducted This Study for more detail.  
Data: Commonwealth Fund analysis.

Source: Eric C. Schneider et al., *Mirror, Mirror 2021 – Reflecting Poorly: Health Care in the U.S. Compared to Other High-Income Countries* (Commonwealth Fund, Aug. 2021).



Figure 2

They said, “Among the 11 nations studied in this report – Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, France, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States—the U.S. ranks last, as it did in 2010, 2007, 2006, and 2014”<sup>3</sup>

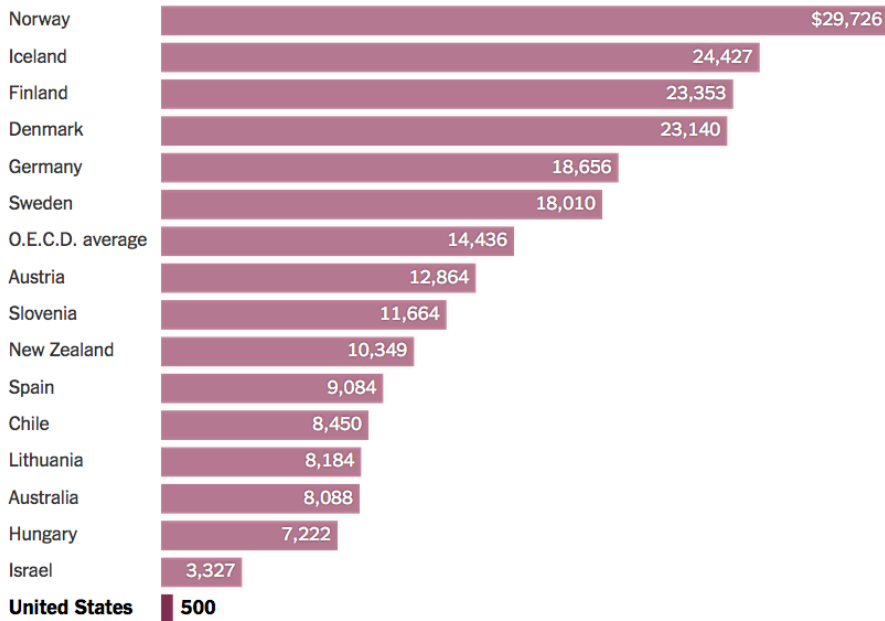
### Childcare:

There can be no question that children are a nation’s future. So, you would think it would follow that children would be a societal priority. That would be incorrect in the United States, as Figure 4 makes glaringly clear.

Deniers of these facts may delude themselves all they want, but the social outcome data tells the real story, the real truth. Americans do not like children except their own progeny, and anti-choice people particularly do not care for children.<sup>4</sup> You may not believe or like that truth but the facts are what they are. And here is a chart that defines the whole. (See Figure 3)

## How Much Governments Spend on Child Care for Toddlers

Annual public spending per child on early childhood care.



*In the United States, most of the spending is on families living in poverty. Some O.E.C.D. countries are not included because data on their spending was unavailable. to The New York Times | Source: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and Elizabeth Davis and Aaron Sojourner for the Hamilton Project.*

Figure 3

The *New York Times* examined child care policies and expenditures nation by nation and concluded, “In the developed world, the United States is an outlier in its [low levels of financial support](#) for young children’s care — something Democrats, with their safety net spending bill, are trying to change. The U.S. spends [0.2 percent](#) of its G.D.P. on child care for children 2 and under — which amounts to about \$200 a year for most families, in the form of a once-a-year tax credit for parents who pay for care.

“The other wealthy countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development spend an average of [0.7 percent](#) of G.D.P. on toddlers, mainly through [heavily subsidized child care](#). Denmark, for example, spends \$23,140 annually per child on care for children 2 and under.”<sup>25</sup> And if that is not definitive enough, consider this: according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, “among children, food insecurity and very low food security increased significantly from 2019. Children and adults were food insecure in 7.6 percent of U.S. households with children in 2020 (up from 6.5 percent in 2019); very low food security among children was 0.8 percent (up from 0.6 percent in 2019). In 2020, the typical food-secure household spent 18 percent more on food than the typical food-insecure household of the same size and household composition in 2019. About 55 percent of food-insecure households participated in one or more of the three

largest Federal nutrition assistance programs: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps); Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); and the National School Lunch Program during the month prior to the 2020 survey.”<sup>6</sup> That means in a nation so rich that competing private individuals could finance their own space programs, more than 38 million Americans faced food insecurity in 2020, a nearly 9% increase over 2019. Close to one in five U.S. residents received some kind of charitable food assistance and one in seven children could not be sure where their next meals was coming from.










According to Joel Berg, CEO of Hunger Free America, “The new federal data tells us two things. First, while hunger was already a massive, systemic problem in all 50 states before Covid-19 hit the U.S., domestic hunger surged during the pandemic. Second, while tens of million of Americans suffered mightily from food hardship in 2020—and are still suffering mightily—the nation avoided mass starvation mostly because the federal government stepped in to dramatically increase food and cash aid. This safety net was a giant food life preserver.”<sup>7</sup>

**Justice:**

The World Justice Project is considered the leading source “for original, independent data on the rule of law. Covering 128 countries and jurisdictions, the Index relies on national surveys of more than 130,000 households and 4,000 legal practitioners and experts to measure how the rule of law is experienced and perceived worldwide.”<sup>8</sup>

As with healthcare, the nations that top the list are the Nordic countries, Denmark, Norway, and Finland. They reported further that, “This year (2020), for the first time, the United States fell out of the top 20 countries, replaced by Spain.”<sup>9</sup> (See *Figure 3*)

**Top Performers**

Country/Jurisdiction	Overall Score	Score Change	% Score Change	Global Rank	Global Rank Change
 Denmark	0.90	0.00	0.0%	1	0
 Norway	0.89	0.00	0.1%	2	0
 Finland	0.87	0.00	-0.1%	3	0
 Sweden	0.86	0.00	0.2%	4	0
 Netherlands	0.84	0.00	-0.5%	5	0
 Germany	0.84	0.00	0.1%	6	0
 New Zealand	0.83	0.00	0.3%	7	1 ▲
 Austria	0.82	-0.01	-0.6%	8	1 ▼
 Canada	0.81	0.00	-0.2%	9	0

**Happiness:**

When you put aside all the politics and ideological arguments and get down to the quality of life and happiness of the individuals of each country, something very revealing emerges: The Nordic Exceptionalism. “The World Happiness Report is a publication of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, powered by data from the Gallup World Poll and Lloyd’s Register Foundation, who provided access to the World Risk Poll.”<sup>10</sup> For the last 8 years the Report has ranked the nations of the world on the basis of the happiness of their people. The results, like all the other topics I am covering in this essay are incredibly revealing and also instructive. They tell us what works. Finland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Iceland have consistently been in the top ten, and slightly different combinations of them have been ranked as the top three in 2017, 2018, and 2019. And close to them the Netherlands and Switzerland. A ranking calculated on a range of criteria. The United States is ranked 10<sup>th</sup>.(See *Figure 5*)<sup>11</sup>

**Table 7.1: The factors influencing happiness in Nordic and richest countries**

Country	Life evaluation		Log GDP per capita		Social support		Healthy life expectancy		Freedom		Generosity		Corruption	
	Average	Ranking	Average	Ranking	Average	Ranking	Average	Ranking	Average	Ranking	Average	Ranking	Average	Ranking
Finland	7.77	1	10.61	21	0.96	2	71.80	27	0.95	5	-0.06	91	0.21	4
Denmark	7.60	2	10.75	13	0.95	4	72.10	24	0.95	6	0.10	34	0.18	3
Norway	7.54	3	11.08	6	0.96	3	73.10	13	0.96	3	0.14	23	0.31	8
Iceland	7.49	4	10.72	16	0.98	1	73.00	14	0.94	7	0.27	6	0.69	36
Netherlands	7.49	5	10.79	11	0.93	15	72.20	20	0.92	18	0.21	11	0.39	12
Switzerland	7.48	6	10.96	7	0.94	12	73.80	3	0.93	11	0.12	27	0.31	7
Sweden	7.34	7	10.76	12	0.92	25	72.50	18	0.93	10	0.12	26	0.25	6
Luxembourg	7.09	14	11.46	1	0.92	28	72.60	17	0.89	27	0.01	62	0.36	9
Ireland	7.02	17	11.11	5	0.95	6	72.20	19	0.88	32	0.17	15	0.37	10
United States	6.89	19	10.90	9	0.91	35	68.40	40	0.82	64	0.14	20	0.71	39
United Arab Emirates	6.82	21	11.12	3	0.85	69	66.90	57	0.95	4	0.12	29		–
Saudi Arabia	6.37	28	10.81	10	0.87	61	66.00	74	0.81	65	-0.17	127		–
Singapore	6.26	34	11.34	2	0.91	34	76.50	1	0.92	19	0.13	24	0.10	1
Kuwait	6.06	49	11.12	4	0.84	71	66.30	71	0.85	47	-0.03	78		–
Hong Kong	5.44	75	10.90	8	0.83	75	75.86	2	0.82	57	0.14	21	0.41	14
<b>Nordic average</b>	<b>7.55</b>		<b>10.78</b>		<b>0.95</b>		<b>72.50</b>		<b>0.95</b>		<b>0.12</b>		<b>0.33</b>	
<b>Richest average</b>	<b>6.69</b>		<b>11.05</b>		<b>0.89</b>		<b>71.08</b>		<b>0.88</b>		<b>0.08</b>		<b>0.38</b>	
<b>World average</b>	<b>5.45</b>		<b>9.26</b>		<b>0.81</b>		<b>64.20</b>		<b>0.77</b>		<b>-0.01</b>		<b>0.74</b>	

Source: Calculations based upon data from WHP, 2019

And what makes the people of the Nordic countries so happy? The Report concludes, “...reviewing the existing studies, theories, and data behind the World Happiness Report, we find that the most prominent explanations include factors related to the quality of institutions, such as reliable and extensive welfare benefits, low corruption, and well-functioning democracy and state

institutions. Furthermore, Nordic citizens experience a high sense of autonomy and freedom, as well as high levels of social trust towards each other, which play an important role in determining life satisfaction. On the other hand, we show that a few popular explanations for Nordic happiness such as the small population and homogeneity of the Nordic countries, and a few counterarguments against Nordic happiness such as the cold weather and the suicide rates, actually don't seem to have much to do with Nordic happiness.”<sup>12</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

Just a few more facts to close. The media tells us constantly that America is the richest nation in the world, and that is true although China is about to surpass us; but that is not really a very meaningful statistic. What matters to most people is not how rich their country is, but how rich they are. So let's look at that. The average income in Norway is 78,250 US, while in the U.S. it is 65,910 US\$. The reality is that when one deals with data and not ideology, or nationalism based on objectively verifiable data, it is very clear that the best managed nations in the world are Norway, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, the Netherlands, Finland, Switzerland and New Zealand. Why? Because they explicitly design their national policies to foster wellbeing. The question one has to ask is why doesn't the United States do that? I think it is because of an existential sense of isolated individuality, a gross distortion of what the Founders intended. We are no longer a “We” culture, it is every person for themselves, and our culture's first priority as a society is profit and the power it bestows.

The only way to change this, again based on data, particularly in a democracy, is to change the culture's consciousness. And the consciousness of a culture is the aggregate of individual consciousnesses. This is not a theory, there is objectively measurable data confirming this process.

Princeton researcher Roger Nelson, Director and founder of the Global Consciousness Project, an international collaboration of researchers has been working for decades to collect and analyze objectively measurable effects of events that stimulate us to integrate around an event as a world-wide consciousness focused on that event. The GCP monitors changes in collective consciousness 24/7, and the work has shown that when individual consciousness around an event like Princess Diana's death, or a tsunami in Japan occurs and receives international attention there is a measurable effect in the informational architecture that makes up a culture, be it for wellbeing or disaster. If something changes how individuals think and react to an event or a worldview, the culture changes for good or ill.

What the Nordic nations and the few others I have listed have discovered is that positive, life-affirming beingness is the core of a social transformation strategy based on nonviolence, and that it can be invoked by creating social policies that foster wellbeing.

Let me quote myself, “No one else in modern history has understood and articulated this approach better than Mahatma Gandhi. Just before Gandhi was -assassinated, a young reporter had the opportunity to interview him at the Sabarmati Ashram in Gujarat. His editors had told him to ask this question: How did you force the British to leave India?”

Britain had dominated the subcontinent for centuries. Gandhi had no army, no money to speak of, no official position, none of the trappings that normally confer authority and power. Yet he had made the most powerful nation of his day leave its most valuable colonial possession, without a war.

Gandhi answered the young reporter’s question in this way. It perfectly articulates the power of beingness.

“It was not what we did that mattered,” he told the reporter, “although that mattered.

“It was not what we said that mattered,” he added, “although that mattered.

“It was the nature of our character that caused the British to *choose* to leave India.”<sup>13</sup>

In 2021 the United States is a nation on the verge of losing its democracy, deeply unhappy, and desperately in need of a change in culture. Where can we start? With the truth. If we won’t tell ourselves the truth about ourselves how can we ever hope to make things better? I think the question every American faces in 2022, with an election just in front of us, is how can I change my personal consciousness and the choices it leads me to make so that everything I do or say, my beingness, supports and fosters wellbeing. The Nordic nations and a few others have figured this out. Can Americans do the same?

## References

---

<sup>1</sup> Schwartz S. Dr. Franklin’s Plan. Smithsonian Magazine. 2001 pp. 112-123.

<sup>2</sup> Best Healthcare in the World 2021. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/best-healthcare-in-the-world>. Accessed: 3 October 2021,

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Why Doesn’t America Like Its Children? Explore. Volume 14, Issue 5, September 2018, Pages 324-328.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.explore.2018.06.006>

<sup>5</sup> Miller C. How Other Nations Pay for Child Care. The U.S. is an Outlier. The New York Times.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/06/upshot/child-care-biden.html>. Accessed: 8 October 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Coleman-Jensen A, Rabbitt M et al. Household Food Security in the United States in 2020, ERR-298, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/102076/err-298.pdf?v=4552.4>. Accessed: 9 October 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Stancil K. With 38 Million Facing Food Insecurity, Hunger in US Soared by Nearly 9% in 2020. Common Dreams 8 September 2021. <https://www.commondreams.org/news/2021/09/08/38-million-facing-food-insecurity-hunger-us-soared-nearly-9-2020>. Accessed: 9 October 2021.

<sup>8</sup> WJP Rule of Law Index 2020. World Justice Project. <https://worldjusticeproject.org/our-work/research-and-data/wjp-rule-law-index-2020>. Accessed: 3 October 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Martela F, Greve B, Rothstein B, Saarl J, The Nordic Exceptionalism: What Explains Why the Nordic Countries Are Constantly Among the Happiest in the World. World Happiness Report, 2020.



<https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2020/the-nordic-exceptionalism-what-explains-why-the-nordic-countries-are-constantly-among-the-happiest-in-the-world/>. Accessed 9 October 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Schwartz S. *The 8 Laws of Change*. Greenwood Press: Langley, WA, 2021