



The 2026 UK Wellbeing Report



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UK Wellbeing 2026: Happiness and Voting

Foreword

At the World Wellbeing Movement, we care about one thing above all else – how people feel about their life. Drawing on recent data, this report is our contribution to raising awareness and deepening understanding about wellbeing levels in the UK.

This is the third UK Wellbeing Report and, new for 2026, is presented in two parts. The first half provides an update on the state of wellbeing in the UK. National life satisfaction has increased only marginally since our last report, up from an average of 7.45 in 2023 to 7.51 in 2025. Crucially though, it remains substantially below pre-pandemic levels of 7.66. Since our last report 1% fewer people live below the Happiness Poverty Line, it remains deeply worrying that 1 in 8 adults remain in happiness poverty.

We are used to hearing about flatlining economic growth; flatlining wellbeing is now becoming the new normal too. Without a change in course, we may look back on the 2020s as a lost decade for wellbeing.

The second part of our report considers the political implications. Higher wellbeing relates to higher political participation and stronger support for the incumbent government. Over time, regions with higher average levels of wellbeing and fewer people living in happiness poverty are also more likely to vote for the government. This matters as much or in some circumstances more than traditional economic measures like household income or unemployment.

The famous quip by a Bill Clinton aide in the early 1990s that “it’s the economy, stupid” has become an accepted law of electoral politics. Our findings paint a more complicated picture.

Whilst we do not make specific policy recommendations in this report, we are clear that the government should give much greater priority to the wellbeing of people and communities. More media coverage of wellbeing would be a good start. Imagine if the amount of scrutiny applied to quarterly GDP figures, for instance, was applied to shifts in wellbeing. And, just as we have a Budget each year to assess the state of the economy and the public finances, what if we had an Annual Wellbeing Statement in Parliament to document how we are feeling?

A good society cannot tolerate millions of its citizens living with such low life satisfaction. Our key message to our politicians is that delivering wellbeing growth, particularly for those who are struggling the most, should be the government’s priority. Not only because of the damage it does to individuals and communities, but also because it may be a crucial factor in ensuring democratic participation and political stability.

We wish to warmly thank our main author Dr Maria Cotofan and our colleagues at the World Wellbeing Movement for once again shining a bright and forensic light on wellbeing.

Let’s put wellbeing first.

*Prof Lord Richard Layard
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Ben Wealthy*



Abstract

After nearly a decade of steady-increases in national wellbeing, since 2020 the UK has experienced the largest drop in life satisfaction since records began. In 2025, life satisfaction across the country continues to stagnate in England, Wales and Scotland, but Northern Ireland experiences a stronger recovery. Across the country, 1 in 8 adults still live below the Happiness Poverty Line and only 1 in 4 adults live above the Flourishing Line – the same number as in our previous report. For the first time, we also show that

these trends are also strongly related to whether people support the government, vote for the government, or participate in elections. When comparing UK regions over time, higher wellbeing relates to stronger support for the incumbent government, a higher vote share for the government, and higher election turnout. In a horse-race with household income and unemployment, wellbeing measures typically matter as much as – and in some cases more than – these key economic indicators.

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Context

Increasingly, policy makers across the world believe that subjective wellbeing matters – and thus should be measured regularly - because it tracks how people experience their life and captures aspects of life that move beyond and above the dimensions measured by conventional economic indicators. Income, employment, and growth are key to understanding how people and societies are faring but only capture some aspects of what makes for a good life. And, if the ultimate purpose of policy is to improve people's

lives, asking people directly about their self-assessed life satisfaction provides a powerful way of understanding whether societies are succeeding in doing so.

The World Happiness Report has been documenting changes in wellbeing across the world since 2012. In its first report, the United Kingdom was ranked 19 out of 157 countries and it reached its highest ever spot in 2020, when it was ranked 13th globally. But since, the UK has steadily slipped down the

rankings and now stands outside the world's top twenty, with the 2026 report putting the country in its lowest position on record - at 29 – six positions lower than in 2025.¹

And these trends are broadly reflected in internal data collected by the ONS², and analysed in our past two reports which systematically tracked wellbeing across the UK. Our first two UK Wellbeing Reports documented substantial inequalities in life satisfaction across places and population groups and highlighted the importance of looking not only at average wellbeing, but also at the share of people experiencing very low levels of life satisfaction—those living below the "Happiness Poverty Line"—and those experiencing very high levels of wellbeing – those living above the "Flourishing Line".³ The reports found that while average levels of life satisfaction increased in the pre-pandemic period – reaching a peak in 2019 – they have since broadly stagnated and many communities have experienced persistent pockets of low wellbeing. Stagnation has been identified as one of the defining challenges facing the UK in economic terms⁴ and our recent analysis using data on wellbeing points to persistent stagnation in happiness too. Understanding this stagnation, and why some places have fared better than others, is therefore essential.

But wellbeing is also a powerful predictor of human behaviour, as higher levels of life satisfaction are associated with better health, longer life expectancy, greater productivity, stronger labour market outcomes, and more stable family relationships.⁵ And increasingly, research also shows that subjective wellbeing may shape political behaviour. Some studies show that happier individuals are more likely to support incumbent governments while lower levels of wellbeing are associated with support for anti-establishment and protest movements. And differences in wellbeing

help explain support for populist candidates or for events such as Brexit and they are more frequently associated with demands for radical change.⁶

Understanding how persistently low levels of happiness relate to how people feel about the government is particularly important in Britain today. Across much of the country, dissatisfaction with institutions and feelings of disconnection have become increasingly prominent. Recent research by More in Common has identified a sizable group of "Dissenting Disruptors", characterised by low trust, frustration with the status quo and a desire for dramatic change.⁷

These findings show that when large numbers of people feel left behind or disconnected from society, political instability and polarisation may become more likely. As such, we believe it is crucial to not only track the state of wellbeing in the UK, but to also understand if and how these trends may shape voting behaviour across the country. In other words, if wellbeing influences political attitudes and behaviour, understanding where and why wellbeing is deteriorating is not simply a matter of public health or social policy but may also be central to the long-term resilience of British democracy.

In this report we contribute to that understanding across both dimensions. Building on previous editions, in the first part we examine how subjective wellbeing has evolved across the UK since our last report. And in the second part we explore how differences in wellbeing across areas relate to support for the government and voting. In doing so, we hope to provide policymakers, researchers, and citizens with a clearer picture of how people's happiness has changed over time and how this in turn may impact how citizens feel about their government.

¹ All past editions of the *World Happiness Report* can be found here: <https://www.worldhappiness.report/>

² See data here: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/ukmeasuresofnationalwellbeing/dashboard>

³ See past UK Wellbeing Reports here: <https://worldwellbeingmovement.org/uk-wellbeing-report/>

⁴ Bell, T., Clark, T., Fry, E., Kelly, G., & Thwaites, G. (2023). Ending stagnation: A new economic strategy for Britain.

⁵ Clark, A., Fle'che, S., Ward, G., Powdthavee, N., & Layard, R. (2019). The origins of happiness: the science of wellbeing over the life course. Princeton University Press.

⁶ For a recent review of this literature see Ward, G. (2019). Happiness and voting behaviour. *World Happiness Report 2019*, 46-65.

⁷ See report at <https://www.moreincommon.org.uk/seven-segments/dissenting-disruptors/>

Data and Methods

Data

In this year's report we blend together evidence from two key surveys: the Annual Population Survey (APS) and the UK's largest household panels, the British Household Panel Survey and Understanding Society (BHPS/UKHLS). These two sources of data are complementary to each other and help us answer distinct questions. Using the APS, we have a large and representative sample of UK respondents, helping us track changes in wellbeing across the nation since 2011. However, the APS contains no information on the political choices of respondents. We complement these data with the BHPS and UKHLS, which have a smaller yearly sample but rich data on demographics and political variables, as well as an observation period spanning back to 1996 (for our key measures). Below we describe each of these data sets in more detail.

Annual Population Survey

In the first part of the analysis we make use of all of the available waves from the Annual Population Survey which are freely available in the public domain. This data covers the period between April 2011 and March 2025. As such, our observation period in this report adds two more calendar year releases as compared to our previous release, the 2025 UK Wellbeing Report⁸ which relied on figures up to March 2023. In line with our previous report, we will look at three key indicators of wellbeing that capture both the level of life satisfaction in the country, as well as the ends of the distribution, namely those who fare particularly well or particularly poorly in terms of wellbeing. First, we look

at life satisfaction which is measured on an 11-point scale. Second, we look at the Happiness Poverty Line (HPL) and the Flourishing Line (FL). These are derived binary variables which take value one if the respondents pick a number between 0 and 5 on the 11-point life satisfaction scale or between 9 and 10, respectively.

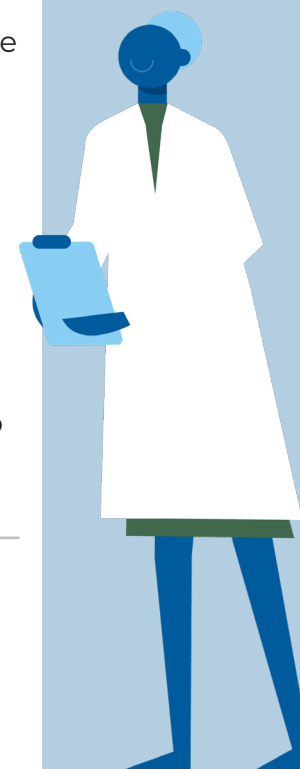
British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) and Understanding Society (UKHLS)

In the second part of the analysis we present results with data from the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) and Understanding Society (UKHLS). Combined, these data provide the UK's longest panel study which also collects data on life satisfaction. A representative survey of the UK population, the study follows the same families and individuals over time, with data on life satisfaction collected since 1996. And while the sample was substantially boosted in 2009, with the introduction of UKHLS, many of the original respondents and households can still be traced into the new study.

Using these data we focus on life satisfaction, measured on a 7-point scale, with one corresponding to "completely dissatisfied" with one's life overall, while 7 corresponds to "completely satisfied". This means that there is not a direct correspondence between the life satisfaction measure in the APS, which is measured on an 11-point scale, and that in the BHPS/UKHLS.

We also look at how those respondents in the tails of the distribution fare, by constructing a corresponding measure of the Happiness Poverty Line (1-3 on a 7-point scale) and the Flourishing Line (7 on a 7-point scale). These two

⁸The findings of the 2025 UK Wellbeing report can be found here: <https://worldwellbeingmovement.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/UK-Wellbeing-Report-2025.pdf>



do not correspond directly to the corresponding APS measures either, but broadly resemble the same shares of the population. More precisely, the HPL is roughly equivalent to 14% of the sample in BHPS/UKHLS which is similar to the distribution in the APS. For the FL, this corresponds to the top 13% of respondents, which is more restrictive than in the APS. However, we have opted for this as including the next category would capture more than half of respondents.

We are interested in how these three measures of wellbeing explain political preferences and behaviour. To do so we look at three different outcome variables: (1) participation in politics, measured as a binary variable which takes value one if a respondent reports to have voted in the last general election and zero otherwise; (2) support for the incumbent party which takes value one if the respondent reports to support the governing party at the time of the survey and zero otherwise, and (3) vote for the incumbent party which takes value one if the respondent reports to have voted for the governing party in the last General Election.⁹

Methods

Annual Population Survey

In all of the tables and figures presented in this report, the APS wellbeing weights are used to re-weight our estimates such that they are representative of the UK population. The wellbeing weights are meant to provide a representative picture across geographies, although more caution should be used when looking at figures computed on a relatively small number of responses. In this report we only present figures

at the nation, country, or region level, minimizing the risk that our figures are biased by very small sample sizes.

British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) and Understanding Society (UKHLS)

To ensure that our results are comparable to those in the first section, we analyse these relationships across UK regions and over time. In these specifications, we also make use of individual-level information on employment status and household income in order to construct year-region level shares on unemployment and average household income. In all of the specifications, we use the wave-specific cross-sectional weights provided by BHPS and UKHLS to ensure that the data is representative of the overall UK population, at the region and year level.

When collapsed at the region-year level, our key outcome variables can be interpreted as (1) the share that supports the government in a certain region and a certain year; (2) the share that voted for the incumbent government in the last General Election in a certain region and election year; and (3) the share that reports to have voted in the last general election in a certain region and election year. Our key explanatory variables are the (1) average Wellbeing aggregated at the region and year level; (2) the unemployment share aggregated from individual-level unemployment data, and (3) the average household income aggregated from the household level total gross income, the month before the interview. And average wellbeing is made up of three variables, namely average life satisfaction, the share living below the Happiness Poverty Line, and the share living above the

⁹This is the party in power at the time of the election, not the time of the survey.



Flourishing Line, in each region and year.

In terms of timing, we explain the share who support the incumbent by life satisfaction, income, and unemployment, at the time of the survey. Since these results cover 30 years across all UK nations and regions, we can construct 353 observations.¹⁰ And we explain the share who report to have voted for the incumbent and have participated in the last General Election by life satisfaction, income, and unemployment in the previous, most recently available, survey answer.¹¹ Our data allows us to cover eight General Elections between 1997 and 2024, as well as seven General Elections in Northern Ireland (between 2011 and 2024), resulting in 95 region-election year observations.

When estimating regression analyses, for each dependent variable we estimate the following equation:

$$Y_{rt} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 WB_{rt} + \beta_2 Unemp_{rt} + \beta_3 Income_{rt} + T_t + \epsilon_{rt}$$

where Y_{rt} is, in turn, a measure of the share voting for the incumbent, supporting the incumbent, or participating in the last general election in region r at time t , and WB_{rt} is, in turn, each of our three measures of wellbeing in region r at time t .

In some specifications, we will only control for WB_{rt} , while in others we will also add $Unemp_{rt}$ and $Income_{rt}$, to create a horse race between measures of subjective wellbeing and region-time level measures of income and unemployment.

Finally, in some specifications, we will also include year fixed effects T_t , to control for country-level common shocks over time. ϵ_{rt} is an error term, estimated with robust standard errors.

We will also standardise all variables within

regions, such that they all have a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. We do this by subtracting the region-specific average from each variable, and dividing each variable by the region-specific standard deviation. This allows us to interpret the coefficients of interest - β_1 , β_2 , and β_3 - in standard deviations. For example, with this transformation, a one standard deviation increase in the regional level life satisfaction would translate into a β_1 higher share that support the incumbent government at the regional level.

We will also use the standard errors - presented in brackets below the coefficients - to assess the statistical significance of these coefficients. We will here use the standard notation, where coefficients that are significant at the 10% confidence level will be followed by one star, those significant at the 5% level will be followed by two stars, and those significant at the 1% level will be followed by three stars. These significance levels tell us that, for example, at a 5% significance level there is less than a 5% chance that these results emerge purely by chance, and we can reject the hypothesis that the corresponding coefficient is zero with a 95% degree of confidence.



¹⁰This is less than the expected 360, because Northern Ireland respondents entered the sample later than the remaining 11 regions.

¹¹When life satisfaction in the previous wave is missing, we have imputed life satisfaction in the last wave in which the respondent was interviewed.

Happiness in the UK

Wellbeing Across Places

We begin our analysis by investigating how Life Satisfaction, Happiness Poverty, and Flourishing have changed over different periods of time. Table 1 shows the average life satisfaction, the share of people below the HPL, and the share who live above the FL each year, in the United Kingdom.

Half a decade after the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the average life satisfaction in the UK is 0.2 points below it's 2019 level. And 1% more people live below the HPL and 5% fewer above the FL. While all three measures have experienced some recovery since, life satisfaction has increased only marginally since our last report, ticking up from an average of 7.45 in 2023 to 7.51 in 2025. And since our last report 1% fewer people live below the HPL - a reduction of roughly 8% from the baseline - and 2% more people live above the FL - an increase of roughly 8% from the baseline. In both cases, these measures are still below 2019 levels, implying stagnation across the board over the past decade.

Table 1: Life Satisfaction, Happiness Poverty, and Flourishing in the UK

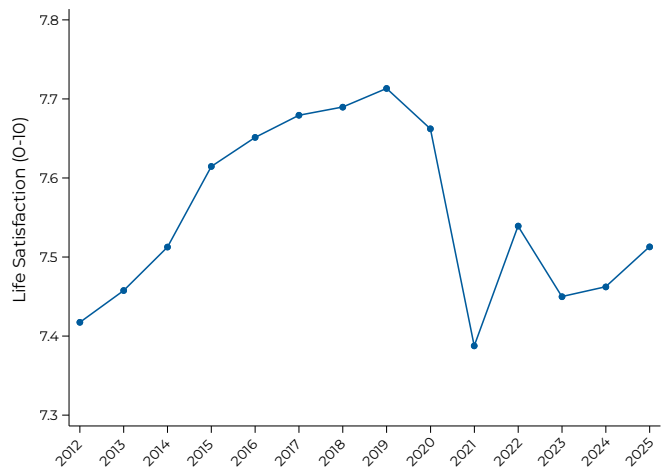
Year	Life Satisfaction	Happiness Poverty	Flourishing
2012	7.42	0.16	0.26
2013	7.46	0.14	0.26
2014	7.51	0.13	0.27
2015	7.61	0.12	0.29
2016	7.65	0.12	0.29
2017	7.68	0.11	0.30
2018	7.69	0.11	0.30
2019	7.71	0.11	0.31
2020	7.66	0.11	0.30
2021	7.39	0.15	0.24
2022	7.54	0.12	0.26
2023	7.45	0.13	0.24
2024	7.46	0.13	0.25
2025	7.51	0.12	0.26

Source: Annual Population Survey (2011-2025) <https://doi.org/10.57906/0qp1-6k77>

Figure 1 plots the numbers in Table 1, for each of the three measures.

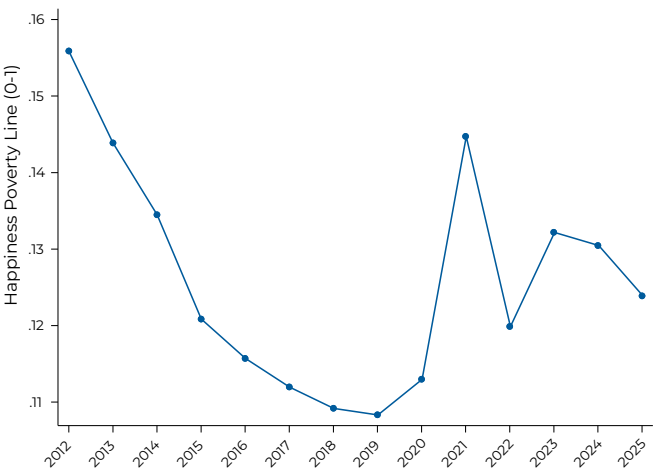
Figure 1A shows the 13-year trend for life satisfaction, which peaked in 2019 followed by a large drop in 2021 and a slow and moderate recovery thereafter. Figure 1B plots the trends for our measure of happiness poverty, which slowly declined until 2019, peaked in 2021 and moderately recovered since. Finally, Figure 1C shows the share of people who are flourishing across the UK, which also peaked in 2019 and partly recovered following the pandemic years collapse.

Figure 1A: Trends in Life Satisfaction in the UK



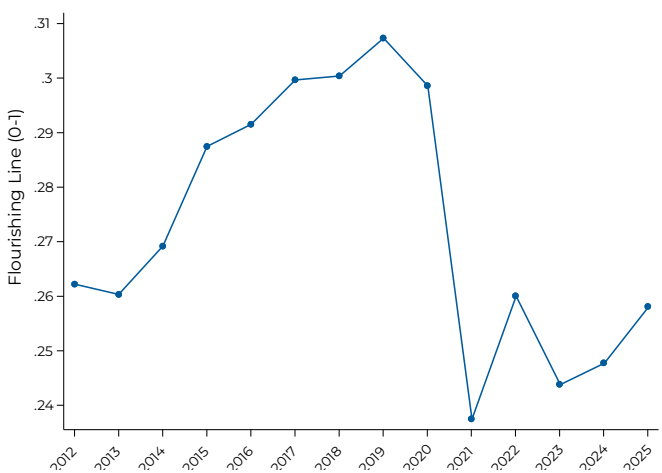
Source: Annual Population Survey (2011-2025)
<https://doi.org/10.57906/0qp1-6k77>

Figure 1B: Trends in Happiness Poverty in the UK



Source: Annual Population Survey (2011-2025)
<https://doi.org/10.57906/0qp1-6k77>

Figure 1C: Trends in Flourishing in the UK



Source: Annual Population Survey (2011-2025)
<https://doi.org/10.57906/0qp1-6k77>

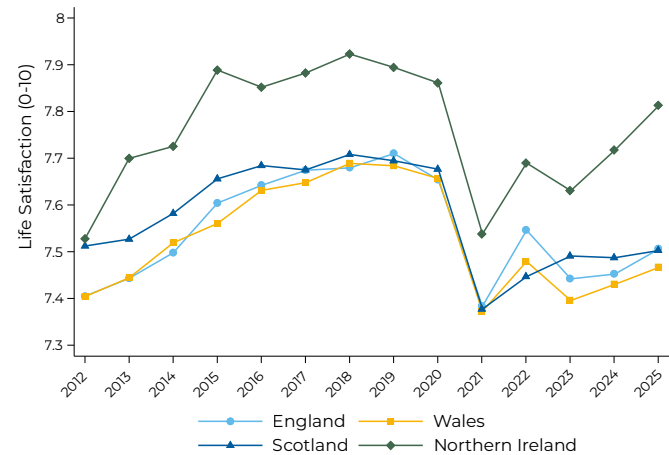


Wellbeing Across Countries

We next analyse how wellbeing has changed over time across the four UK nations: England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. Figure 2 plots these trends across the four countries, and Table 2 shows the numbers behind the plots.

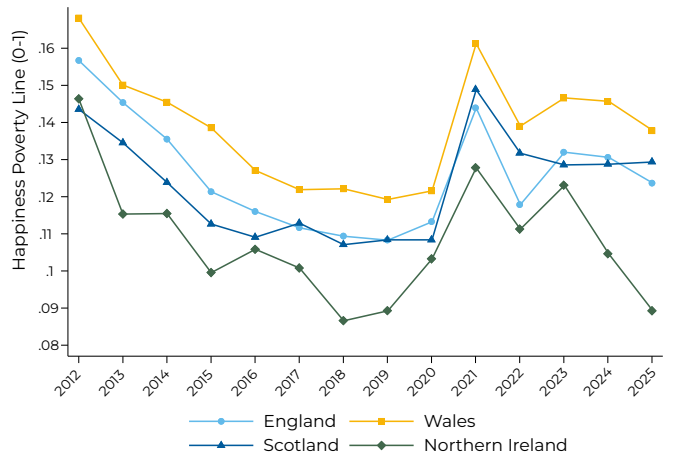
Northern Ireland has experienced the steepest recovery in terms of life satisfaction, being the only UK country to return to nearly pre-pandemic levels. England, Wales and Scotland have shown a much slower recovery, with relative stagnation in the past three years. Happiness poverty has also dropped substantially in Northern Ireland, but we document only minor improvements in England and Wales and a broadly stagnant trend in Scotland. As such, while only 9% of people in Northern Ireland live below the Happiness Poverty Line, 12-14% of the population in the rest of the UK do so. Finally, these trends are also replicated among those who are flourishing. Nearly one in three people in Northern Ireland do so, although this is still below the 2020 level of 36%. In the rest of the UK, only 1 in 4 adults are flourishing, and these numbers have been relatively stagnant since 2021.

Figure 2A: Trends in Life Satisfaction Across the UK



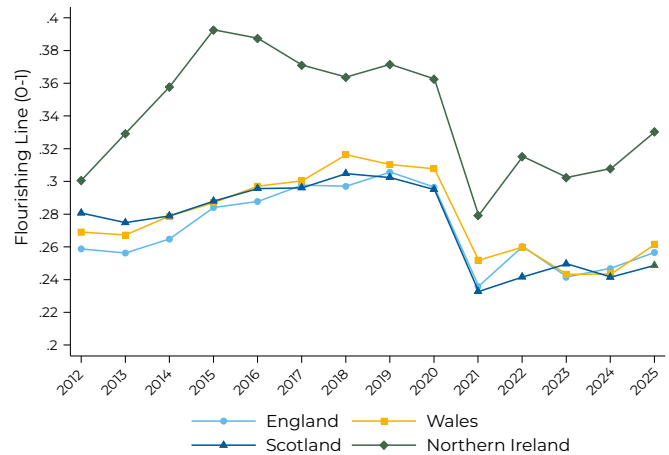
Source: Annual Population Survey (2011-2025)
<https://doi.org/10.57906/0qp1-6k77>

Figure 2B: Trends in Happiness Poverty Across the UK



Source: Annual Population Survey (2011-2025)
<https://doi.org/10.57906/0qp1-6k77>

Figure 2C: Trends in Flourishing Across the UK



Source: Annual Population Survey (2011-2025)
<https://doi.org/10.57906/0qp1-6k77>

Table 2: Life Satisfaction, Happiness Poverty, and Flourishing across the UK

Year	Country	Life Satisfaction	Happiness Poverty	Flourishing
2012	England	7.41	0.16	0.26
2013	England	7.44	0.15	0.26
2014	England	7.50	0.14	0.26
2015	England	7.60	0.12	0.28
2016	England	7.64	0.12	0.29
2017	England	7.67	0.11	0.30
2018	England	7.68	0.11	0.30
2019	England	7.71	0.11	0.31
2020	England	7.65	0.11	0.30
2021	England	7.38	0.14	0.24
2022	England	7.55	0.12	0.26
2023	England	7.44	0.13	0.24
2024	England	7.45	0.13	0.25
2025	England	7.51	0.12	0.26
2012	Northern Ireland	7.53	0.15	0.30
2013	Northern Ireland	7.70	0.12	0.33
2014	Northern Ireland	7.73	0.12	0.36
2015	Northern Ireland	7.89	0.10	0.39
2016	Northern Ireland	7.85	0.11	0.39
2017	Northern Ireland	7.88	0.10	0.37
2018	Northern Ireland	7.92	0.09	0.36
2019	Northern Ireland	7.89	0.09	0.37

2020	Northern Ireland	7.86	0.10	0.36
2021	Northern Ireland	7.54	0.13	0.28
2022	Northern Ireland	7.69	0.11	0.32
2023	Northern Ireland	7.63	0.12	0.30
2024	Northern Ireland	7.72	0.10	0.31
2025	Northern Ireland	7.81	0.09	0.33
2012	Scotland	7.51	0.14	0.28
2013	Scotland	7.53	0.13	0.27
2014	Scotland	7.58	0.12	0.28
2015	Scotland	7.66	0.11	0.29
2016	Scotland	7.68	0.11	0.30
2017	Scotland	7.68	0.11	0.30
2018	Scotland	7.71	0.11	0.30
2019	Scotland	7.69	0.11	0.30
2020	Scotland	7.68	0.11	0.30
2021	Scotland	7.38	0.15	0.23
2022	Scotland	7.45	0.13	0.24
2023	Scotland	7.49	0.13	0.25
2024	Scotland	7.49	0.13	0.24
2025	Scotland	7.50	0.13	0.25
2012	Wales	7.40	0.17	0.27
2013	Wales	7.44	0.15	0.27
2014	Wales	7.52	0.15	0.28
2015	Wales	7.56	0.14	0.29
2016	Wales	7.63	0.13	0.30

2017	Wales	7.65	0.12	0.30
2018	Wales	7.69	0.12	0.32
2019	Wales	7.68	0.12	0.31
2020	Wales	7.66	0.12	0.31
2021	Wales	7.37	0.16	0.25
2022	Wales	7.48	0.14	0.26
2023	Wales	7.40	0.15	0.24
2024	Wales	7.43	0.15	0.24
2025	Wales	7.47	0.14	0.26

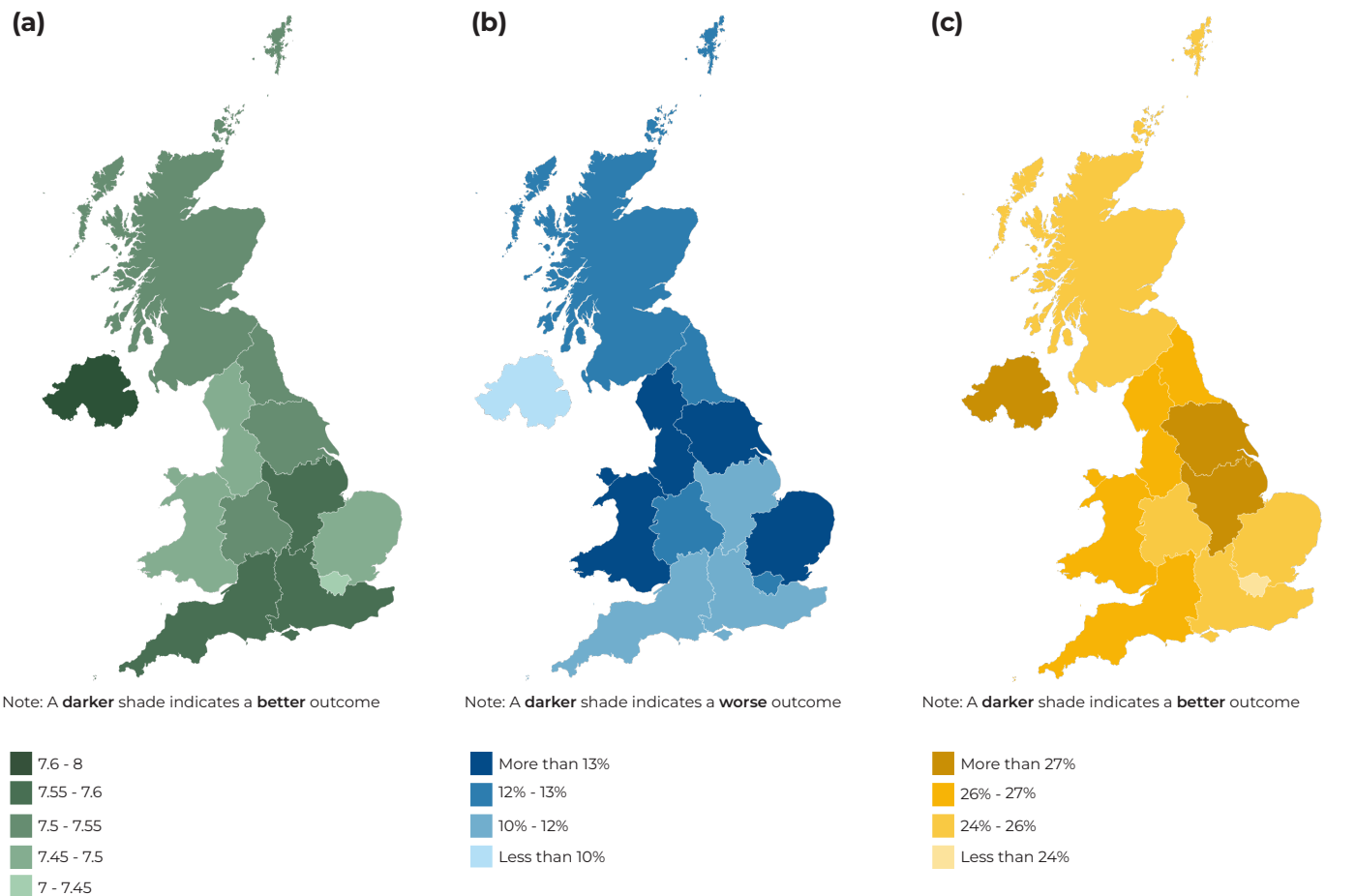
Source: Annual Population Survey (2011-2025) <https://doi.org/10.57906/0qp1-6k77>



Wellbeing Across Nations and Regions

In this section we document how these three measures of wellbeing have evolved across the 12 UK regions. Figure 3 plots the average life satisfaction, the HPL, and the FL in 2025, Figure 4 shows changes since the wellbeing peak of 2019, Figure 5 shows changes since our last report, and Figure 6 shows changes since the ONS records began, in April 2011. The numbers behind the figures are all shown in columns (1) to (4) of Tables 3, 4 and 5.

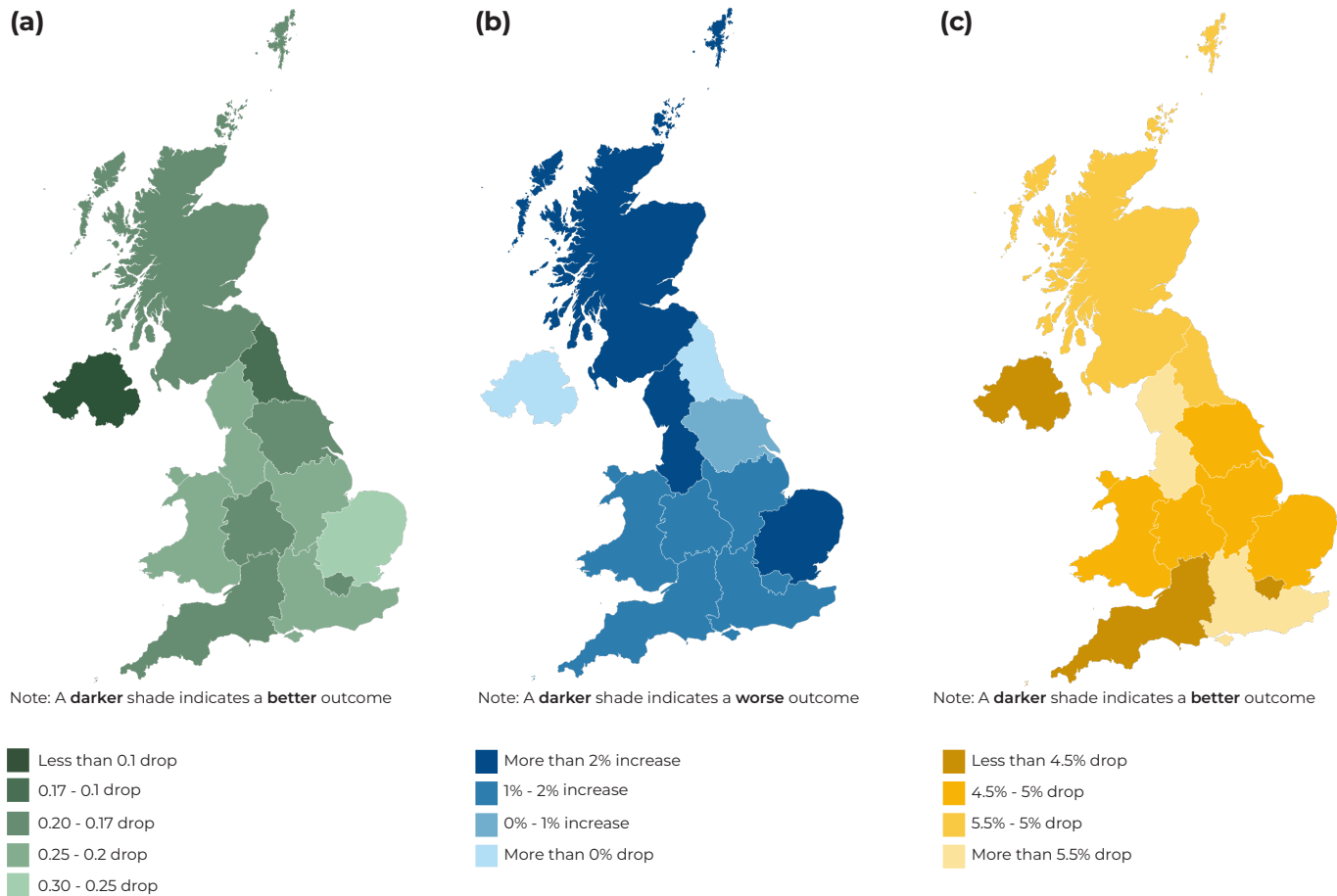
Figure 3: (a) Life Satisfaction, (b) Happiness Poverty and (c) Flourishing across UK nations and regions in 2025.



Source: Annual Population Survey (2011-2025) <https://doi.org/10.57906/0qp1-6k77>

In Figure 3, we show that London continues to be the worst performing region, with an average life satisfaction of 7.41, followed by Wales, the North West, and the East of England. Life satisfaction in Northern Ireland is the highest, roughly 0.25 life satisfaction points ahead the South East and the South West, the next happiest regions. Wales and the North West have the highest levels of happiness poverty, with 14% (or one in 7 people) in those regions living below our threshold. On the other hand, only 9% of people in Northern Ireland and 11% in the South West and the South East do – closer to one in 10 people. Finally, 33% of respondents in Northern Ireland - or one in three people - are reportedly flourishing, compared to only 22% – one in five – in London, a sizable gap.

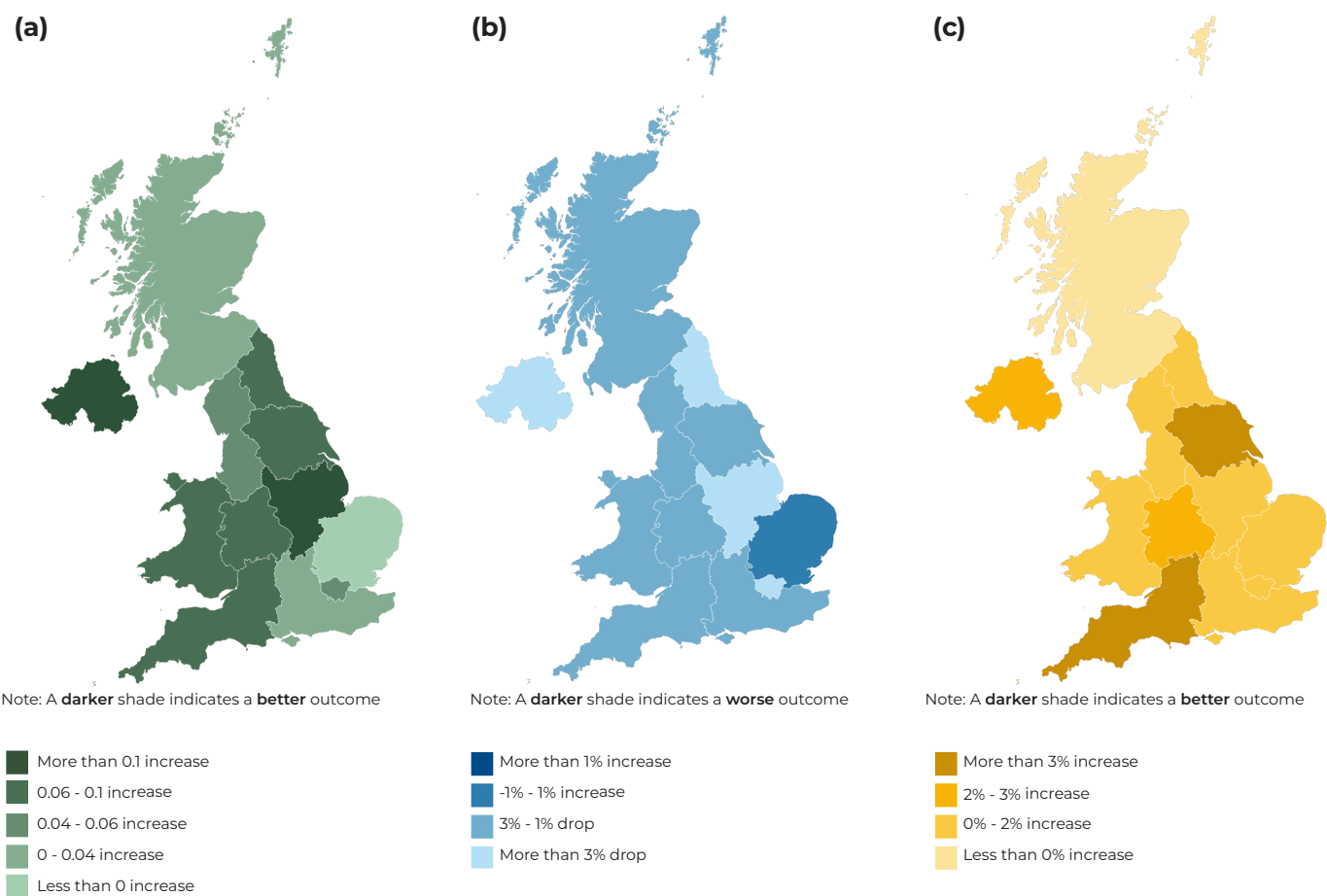
Figure 4: Changes in (a) Life Satisfaction, (b) Happiness Poverty and (c) Flourishing across UK nations and regions since 2019.



Source: Annual Population Survey (2011-2025) <https://doi.org/10.57906/0qp1-6k77>

In Figure 4, we show that all nations and regions are still below 2019 levels, with only Northern Ireland exhibiting a stronger recovery, with only 0.08 life satisfaction points below 2019 levels and a full recovery in terms of the share living below the Happiness Poverty Line. But four regions (the North West, the East of England, the South East and Wales) are still more than 0.2 points below these levels, putting them above the national average. Nationally, 2% more people still live below the Happiness Poverty Line – an increase of 18% from the pre-pandemic baseline – and 5% fewer live above the Flourishing Line – an increase of 16% from the pre-pandemic baseline.

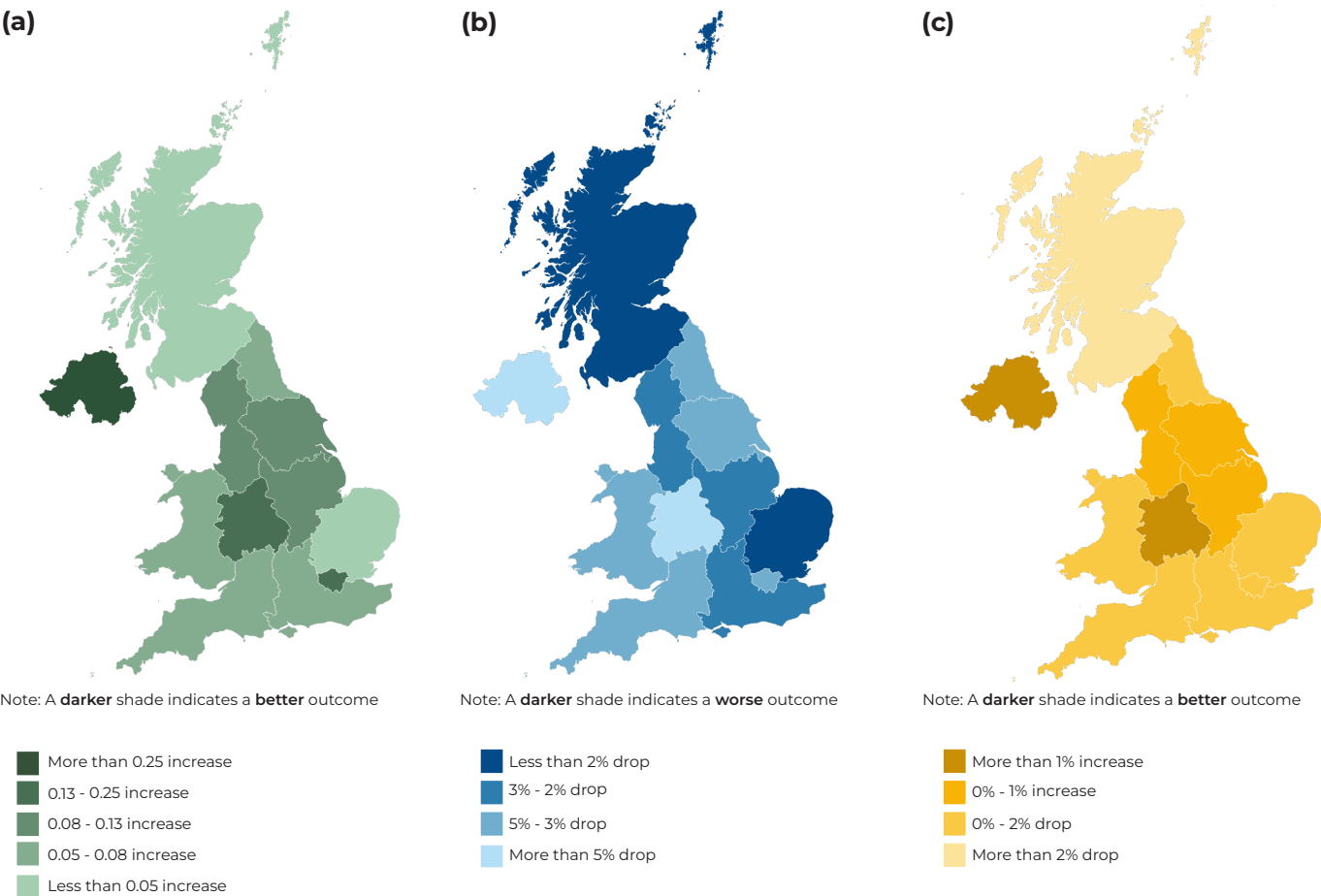
Figure 5: Changes in (a) Life Satisfaction, (b) Happiness Poverty and (c) Flourishing across UK nations and regions since the last UK Wellbeing Report.



Source: Annual Population Survey (2011-2025) <https://doi.org/10.57906/0qp1-6k77>

Figure 5 shows that since our last report, Northern Ireland observed the largest increase in life satisfaction at nearly 0.2 life satisfaction points, followed by the East Midlands with an increase of 0.13 and Yorkshire and Humber at 0.10. The East of England and Scotland performed the worst, with virtually no improvement since our last report. We see a similar pattern for happiness poverty, with larger drops in Northern Ireland and the East Midlands, but overall stagnation in the East of England, Scotland and the North West. The largest increase in respondents who are flourishing is in the South West, with London, Scotland and the South East faring the worst, with no improvements since our previous report.

Figure 6: Changes in (a) Life Satisfaction, (b) Happiness Poverty and (c) Flourishing across UK nations and regions since 2011.



Source: Annual Population Survey (2011-2025) <https://doi.org/10.57906/0qp1-6k77>

Finally, Figure 6 shows that since records began, Northern Ireland is the clear winner in terms of life satisfaction with an increase of 0.29 points, followed by 0.23 points in the West Midlands and 0.15 in London. These three regions also saw the largest improvements in happiness poverty, although the picture is much more stagnant when it comes to flourishing. On the other hand, Scotland has performed the worst, with no improvement since records began. And the East of England, the South East, the South West, and Wales have seen only modest improvements, with these trends also being replicated for our measures of happiness poverty and flourishing.

Table 3: Life Satisfaction change across UK nations and regions

Region	Life Satisfaction 2025	Δ 2025 - 2023	Δ 2025 - 2019	Δ 2025 - 2011
North East	7.51	0.07	-0.16	0.08
North West	7.48	0.05	-0.24	0.09
Yorkshire & Humber	7.51	0.10	-0.19	0.12
East Midlands	7.56	0.13	-0.20	0.09
West Midlands	7.50	0.07	-0.20	0.23
Eastern	7.49	-0.01	-0.26	0.03
London	7.41	0.05	-0.17	0.15
South East	7.57	0.04	-0.22	0.06
South West	7.58	0.08	-0.19	0.05
Wales	7.47	0.07	-0.22	0.06
Scotland	7.50	0.01	-0.19	-0.01
Northern Ireland	7.81	0.18	-0.08	0.29
National average	7.51	0.06	-0.20	0.10

Source: Annual Population Survey (2011-2025) <https://doi.org/10.57906/0qp1-6k77>

Table 4: Happiness Poverty change across UK nations and regions

Region	Happiness Poverty 2025	Δ 2025 - 2023	Δ 2025 - 2019	Δ 2025 - 2011
North East	0.13	-0.02	0.00	-0.04
North West	0.14	0.00	0.02	-0.03
Yorkshire & Humber	0.13	-0.01	0.01	-0.03
East Midlands	0.12	-0.03	0.01	-0.03
West Midlands	0.13	-0.01	0.02	-0.06
Eastern	0.13	0.01	0.03	-0.01
London	0.12	-0.01	0.01	-0.05
South East	0.11	-0.01	0.02	-0.02
South West	0.11	-0.01	0.01	-0.03
Wales	0.14	-0.01	0.02	-0.03
Scotland	0.13	0.00	0.02	-0.01
Northern Ireland	0.09	-0.03	0.00	-0.06
National average	0.12	-0.01	0.02	-0.03

Source: Annual Population Survey (2011-2025) <https://doi.org/10.57906/0qp1-6k77>

Table 5: Flourishing change across UK nations and regions

Region	Flourishing 2025	Δ 2025 - 2023	Δ 2025 - 2019	Δ 2025 - 2011
North East	0.27	0.02	-0.05	-0.01
North West	0.26	0.01	-0.06	0.00
Yorkshire & Humber	0.27	0.03	-0.05	0.01
East Midlands	0.27	0.02	-0.05	0.00
West Midlands	0.26	0.02	-0.05	0.01
Eastern	0.26	0.00	-0.05	0.00
London	0.22	0.00	-0.04	0.00
South East	0.26	0.00	-0.06	-0.01
South West	0.27	0.04	-0.04	-0.02
Wales	0.26	0.02	-0.05	-0.01
Scotland	0.25	0.00	-0.05	-0.03
Northern Ireland	0.33	0.03	-0.04	0.03
National average	0.26	0.01	-0.05	≤ -0.01

Source: Annual Population Survey (2011-2025) <https://doi.org/10.57906/0qp1-6k77>

Wellbeing, Economics, and Politics

Having documented general trends in wellbeing across the UK, in the second part of this report we move to an analysis of their potential consequences. In this edition of the report we investigate how the stagnating levels of wellbeing across the country have mapped into support for the government, into voting for the government in general elections, and in the electoral turnout.

Descriptive Statistics and Time Trends

Using yearly data between 1996 and 2025 across 12 UK regions we investigate how our three measures of wellbeing at the region-year level - average life satisfaction, the share living below the Happiness Poverty Line, and the share living above the Flourishing Line - correlate with three key political measures, namely the share who voted for the incumbent government in the last General Election, the share who support the incumbent government at the time of the survey, and the share who participated in the last General Election. And we also analyse the extent to which variation in these political measures can still be explained by variation in wellbeing when in a horse race with two key economic indicators - the region unemployment rate and the average household income in each region.

Table 6 below presents some descriptive statistics at the region level, using the BHPS and UKHLS datasets.

Table 6: Descriptive statistics at regional level

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Size
Support incumbent (0-1)	0.327	0.153	351
Voted incumbent (0-1)	0.325	0.150	95
Participated election (0-1)	0.751	0.062	95
Life Satisfaction (1-7)	5.174	0.146	353
Happiness poverty line (0-1)	0.131	0.044	353
Flourishing line (0-1)	0.126	0.036	353
Household income (log)	7.863	0.281	353
Unemployment (0-1)	0.044	0.021	353

Source: British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) and Understanding Society (UKHLS) (1996-2025) <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-6614-22>



The average life satisfaction is 5.17 on a 7-point scale, while 13% of respondents live below the Happiness Poverty Line and roughly the same share live above the Flourishing Line. Over the past three decades, on average 33% voted for the incumbent government, 33% support the incumbent government at the time of the survey, and roughly 75% of respondents report to have voted in the last election. Overall, the unemployment rate over this period was 4.4% and the logarithm of household gross income was 7.9, roughly equivalent to 2,700 GBP in the month before the survey.

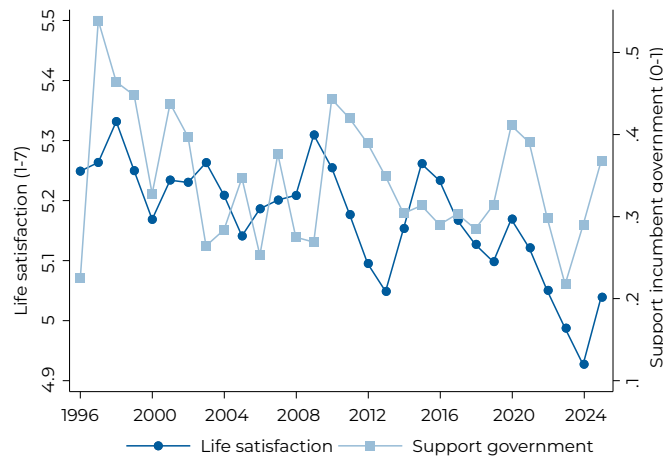
Figure 7 plots yearly trends for our three measures of subjective wellbeing and support for the incumbent government, each year between 1996 and 2025. Figure 7A shows this relationship between average life satisfaction in the UK, Figure 7B shows this correlation for the share of people living below the Happiness Poverty Line, and Figure 7C shows this trend for the share of people living below the Flourishing Line. In each figure, the dark blue trend line with circular markers tracks each of our three measures of wellbeing, while the light blue line with square markers tracks support for the incumbent government at the time of the survey.

Life satisfaction and support or voting for the incumbent government are positively correlated and generally move together over time: when life satisfaction at the UK level is higher on average, there is usually a higher associated share of respondents who support the current government, and vice-versa. And when many people are flourishing, the relationship also shows a positive correlation. On the other hand, higher shares of people living in happiness poverty in any year appear to be inversely related to the share of people who support the government: when happiness poverty is high, fewer people report to plan to vote for the government in the next General Election.

These trends are very simple correlations and do not control for anything. In the following section we will estimate a series of equations to more formally analyse the relationship between subjective wellbeing and political preferences.

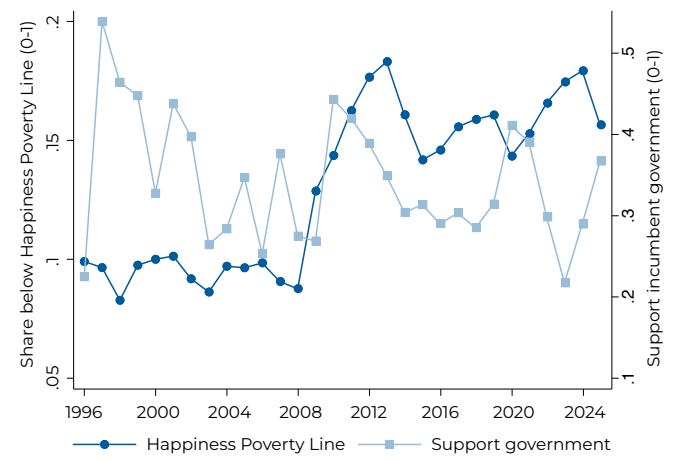


Figure 7A: Life Satisfaction and support for the incumbent government, over time.



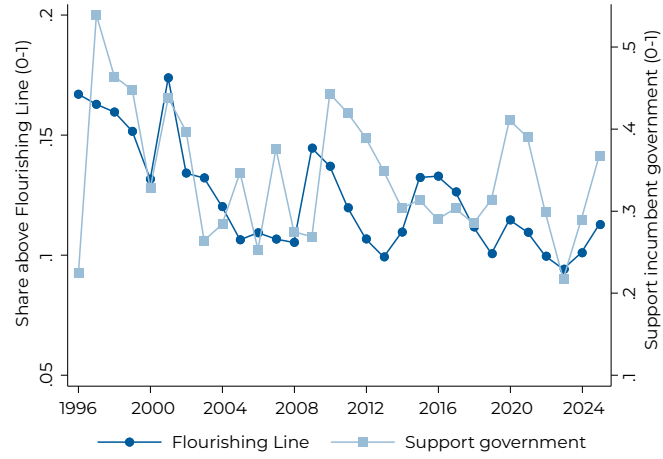
Source: British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) and Understanding Society (UKHLS) (1996-2025)
<http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-6614-22>

Figure 7B: Happiness Poverty and support for the incumbent government, over time.



Source: British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) and Understanding Society (UKHLS) (1996-2025)
<http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-6614-22>

Figure 7C: Flourishing and support for the incumbent government, over time.



Source: British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) and Understanding Society (UKHLS) (1996-2025)
<http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-6614-22>

Regression Analysis

We more formally analyse these relationships in Tables 7 to 9 below where we regress, in turn, each political variable on each of our three wellbeing measures. In column (1) of each table we only include our measure of wellbeing, and in column (2) we include measure of unemployment and of household income at the region level. Finally, in column (3) of each table we also add year fixed effects¹²

Table 7 shows how wellbeing relates to support for the incumbent government. A one standard deviation increase in average life satisfaction increases support for the government by 0.34 standard deviations. And life satisfaction is the only measure that survives in a horse race with unemployment and income. We find a similar pattern when it comes to happiness poverty. If the share of people living below the Happiness Poverty Line at the region level increases by one standard deviation, the share supporting the government at the region level drops by over 0.4 standard deviations in the most complete specification. Finally, a one standard deviation increase in the share of people living above the Flourishing Line at the region level results into 0.46 higher share who support the government at the region level. Economic variables almost never contribute to predicting support for the government in our most complete horse race specifications.

Table 8 shows that a one standard deviation increase in life satisfaction increases the voting share for the incumbent by 0.32 standard deviations in the simplest model, and by 0.23 standard deviations in the most complete one. The coefficient is similar in magnitude to that on income and about half as large than that on unemployment, although the latter two become much smaller and statistically insignificant in column (3), indicating that once national-level time trends have been accounted for, only life satisfaction significantly predicts the region-level vote for the government. Equally, a one

standard deviation increase in the share of people living below the Happiness Poverty Line makes it 0.43 standard deviations less likely that one would vote for the incumbent in our most complete specification and a similar increase in the share who are living above the Flourishing Line translates into a 0.24 standard deviations increase. In both specifications, the coefficients on wellbeing measures are sizable and larger than those on the unemployment rate and income.

And in Table 9, when it comes to electoral participation, a one standard deviation increase in life satisfaction at the region level translates into 0.55 standard deviations increase in turnout, a coefficient that is much larger than those on either unemployment or income. However, when it comes to those living below the Happiness Poverty Line, only unemployment predicts turnout, implying that the unemployment rate is better at predicting voter participation than high levels of wellbeing poverty in a region. However, an increase in the share of people flourishing in a region returns twice as large coefficients as those on unemployment. Overall, these patterns indicate that measures of wellbeing are strongly predictive of both political support and of political participation, and they compare to - and sometimes perform better than - economic measures when it comes to explaining variation in UK regions over time.



¹²Adding region-level shares of age, sex, and ethnicity explains almost none of the variation in the dependent variable. As such, we did not include equations with these basic demographics.

Table 7: A regression analysis of support for the incumbent government on wellbeing measures and economic variables

% Support Government			
Panel A: Life Satisfaction	0.339*** (0.056)	0.288*** (0.074)	0.414*** (0.067)
Unemployment		0.088 (0.081)	0.007 (0.059)
Household income (log)		-0.137 (0.085)	0.352 (0.215)
R-squared	0.106	0.122	0.474
N	328	328	328
Panel B: Happiness Poverty	-0.273*** (0.064)	-0.197*** (0.092)	-0.427*** (0.080)
Unemployment		0.079 (0.079)	-0.062 (0.064)
Household income (log)		-0.148 (0.097)	0.336 (0.218)
R-squared	0.073	0.087	0.459
N	328	328	328
Panel C: Flourishing	0.342*** (0.082)	0.287*** (0.104)	0.428*** (0.066)
Unemployment		0.042 (0.082)	0.023 (0.059)
Household income (log)		-0.102 (0.094)	0.734*** (0.220)
R-square	0.109	0.115	0.481
	328	328	328
Election years			✓

Source: British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) and Understanding Society (UKHLS) (1996-2025)
<http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-6614-22>

Table 8: A regression analysis of voting on wellbeing measures and economic variables

% Voted for the current government			
Panel A: Life Satisfaction	0.319*** (0.100)	0.211* (0.113)	0.233* (0.136)
Unemployment		-0.518*** (0.125)	-0.014 (0.139)
Household income (log)		0.313*** (0.110)	0.133 (0.377)
R-squared	0.101	0.276	0.578
N	95	95	95
Panel B: Happiness Poverty	-0.307*** (0.100)	-0.618*** (0.231)	-0.430* (0.252)
Unemployment		-0.399*** (0.146)	-0.076 (0.133)
Household income (log)		0.677*** (0.181)	0.278 (0.385)
R-squared	0.093	0.317	0.578
N	95	95	95
Panel C: Flourishing	-0.006 (0.110)	0.040 (0.115)	0.239* (0.129)
Unemployment		-0.586*** (0.119)	-0.041 (0.134)
Household income (log)		0.217* (0.123)	0.228 (0.379)
R-square	0.001	0.248	0.581
	95	95	95
Election years			✓

Source: British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) and Understanding Society (UKHLS) (1996-2025)
<http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-6614-22>

Table 9: A regression analysis of participation in elections on wellbeing measures and economic variables

% participated in the last general election			
Panel A: Life Satisfaction	0.425*** (0.078)	0.591*** (0.101)	0.554*** (0.097)
Unemployment		-0.062 (0.113)	-0.179* (0.099)
Household income (log)		0.389*** (0.134)	-0.084 (0.269)
R-squared	0.179	0.279	0.787
N	95	95	95
Panel B: Happiness Poverty	0.068 (0.127)	0.419* (0.235)	-0.202 (0.211)
Unemployment		-0.391*** (0.149)	-0.347*** (0.111)
Household income (log)		-0.094 (0.215)	0.012 (0.322)
R-squared	0.005	0.083	0.706
N	95	95	95
Panel C: Flourishing	0.397*** (0.087)	0.807*** (0.090)	0.473*** (0.095)
Unemployment		-0.328*** (0.096)	-0.260*** (0.099)
Household income (log)		0.769*** (0.111)	0.111 (0.280)
R-square	0.156	0.409	0.770
	95	95	95
Election years			✓

Source: British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) and Understanding Society (UKHLS) (1996-2025)
<http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-6614-22>

Conclusion

This report has investigated how wellbeing has evolved across the UK over the past 14 years, and how changes in wellbeing across UK areas and over time relate to people's political engagement and to their support for the government.

We find that wellbeing in the UK has been broadly constant since our last report and that life satisfaction is still 0.2 points below its pre-pandemic peak. Equally, there has been only a small 1% reduction in the share of people living below the Happiness Poverty Line, and a 2% increase in the share that is living above the Flourishing Line. These trends risk putting the country on a path of long-term stagnation in term of wellbeing. However, there is also variation across UK regions, with some areas such as Northern Ireland witnessing a stronger recovery. And some regions with relatively low levels of wellbeing, such as the East Midlands and Yorkshire and The Humber have also experienced above average increases in life satisfaction since our last report. However, some areas such as Scotland and the East of England have seen virtually no improvement since our last report and have instead broadly stagnated since records began.

We have also shown that these trends may have important implications for political outcomes across the UK. Regions with higher levels of wellbeing have higher rates of electoral turnout in General Elections, a higher share of people who support the incumbent government, and also a higher share who report to have voted for the government in the last General Election. And these patterns broadly hold for areas with higher average levels of life satisfaction, lower shares of people living in happiness poverty, and higher shares of people who are flourishing.

Finally, we have also investigated the extent to which wellbeing can explain these political outcomes once we also control for income and unemployment. In other words, we asked whether wellbeing still matters in a horse

race with economic variables, or whether instead, higher wellbeing predicts political outcomes only because economic prosperity increases both wellbeing and support for the incumbent. We find that wellbeing matters in and of itself, and independently of income and unemployment. In almost all specifications, wellbeing variables survive in a horse race with economic variables. In fact, they are as predictive as – and in many specification more predictive than – these two key economic indicators.

This report has shown that the state of wellbeing in the UK is on a concerning path of stagnation, with persistently high numbers of people living in happiness poverty, and average life satisfaction still lagging behind pre-pandemic levels in every single nation and region in the UK. And these numbers may have important implications for political outcomes too. Our analysis shows that regional levels of wellbeing are the best and largest predictor of support for incumbent governments (when compared to income and unemployment) and of political engagement more broadly. And while economic indicators do matter - and governments should continue to focus on them - wellbeing metrics are far less used when making policy decisions and when assessing the state of the nation. Our report shows that wellbeing may be more than a public good worth investing in, but also one of the clearest pathways to boosting the popularity of governments.

Notes and Disclosure

This work contains statistical data from ONS which is Crown Copyright. The use of the ONS statistical data in this work does not imply the endorsement of the ONS in relation to the interpretation or analysis of the statistical data. This work uses research datasets which may not exactly reproduce National Statistics aggregates. This analysis is based on the Annual Population Survey - UK.