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## @ISSUE: Is America still great?

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Donald Trump says he wants to make America great again — a backhanded way of stating that it isn't so today. American politicians' soaring rhetoric is an odd mixture of hyperbole that cuts both ways: On the one hand, they wax poetic about us being the greatest nation on earth. Then, in the next breath, they talk about all the ways in which the nation is broken. Perhaps, actor/comedian John Cleese sums up the paradox best: "The U.S. is an insane mixture of the very best and very worst."

Is America No. 1? Or is deeply flawed? We turned to a variety of comparative international rankings on key political, economic and quality of life measures to help put our global standing in perspective. It appears Cleese had it about right:

### **Military strength: U.S. rank: #1**

U.S. is far and away the leading military power. In 2015, \$581 billion was budgeted for the military, nearly four times that of second-place China, 10 times that of third-place Saudi Arabia and more than the next 10 countries combined, according to [Globalfirepower.com](http://Globalfirepower.com)

We are second only to China in our active military (just ahead of India). We have nearly four times more military aircraft than runner-up Russia. And we have nearly 800 military bases in more than 70 countries and territories abroad, according to [topolitico.com](http://topolitico.com). Britain, France and Russia have about 30 foreign bases combined.

### **Size of economy: U.S. rank: #1**

China has been closing the gap, but the U.S. still has a big edge, with a Gross Domestic Product of \$19 trillion, compared to China's \$12 trillion, according to the IMF's 2016 World Economic Outlook. (Japan is third, with GDP of \$4.3 trillion.)

The U.S. controls 41 percent of the world's personal wealth, and China is second with a 10.9 percent share, according to Allianz's 2015 Global Wealth Report. The U.S. also has more than 40 percent of the world's millionaires, more than four times runner-up Japan.

### **Innovation: U.S. rank: #6 (of 50)**

The Bloomberg Innovation Index takes six factors into account: research and development, patents, manufacturing, high-tech companies, postsecondary education and professionals working in research and development per 1 million population.

Putting all those measures into a blender, South Korea ended up on top, followed by Japan, Germany, Finland and Israel. The U.S. finished in the top five in just two of the six categories — first in the high-tech companies (largest capitalization of high-tech companies), and fourth in patents.

#### **Divorce rates: U.S. rank: #10 (lowest rate)**

The U.S. has a ratio of 53 divorces for every 100 marriages. Belgium has the highest divorce rate, with 71 divorces for every 100 marriages, according to the United Nations Statistics Division. Other nations with the highest divorce rates are Portugal, Hungary, Czech Republic and Spain.

The lowest divorce rates are in Libya, Georgia, Mongolia, Armenia and Chile.

In the U.S., the number of marriages per year is shrinking, and people are waiting longer to marry. There also has been an increase in the number of divorces in the U.S., with a divorce happening every six seconds, according to records.com.

#### **Economic prosperity: U.S. rank: #11**

The Legatum Prosperity Index considers eight factors: economy, entrepreneurship and opportunity, governance, education, health, safety and security, personal freedom and “social capital.” Norway was deemed most prosperous, followed by Switzerland, Denmark, New Zealand and Sweden.

#### **Happiness: U.S. rank: #13**

The 2016 World Happiness Report, released two weeks ago, considered six factors in ranking 156 countries: “GDP per capita, healthy years of life expectancy, social support (as measured by having someone to count on in times of trouble), trust (as measured by a perceived absence of corruption in government and business), perceived freedom to make life decisions, and generosity (as measured by recent donations).”

The top five “happiest” countries were Denmark, Switzerland, Iceland, Norway and Finland. Eight of the countries ahead of the U.S. were in Europe.

The countries showing the most improvement in their happiness scores from 2005-07 to 2013-2015 were Nicaragua, Sierra Leone and Ecuador. The U.S. showed a slight drop-off during that period.

#### **Upward mobility: U.S. rank: #13 (of 17)**

A study by the Economic Policy Institute had the U.S. ranked behind all of the Scandinavian countries and most other western European nations.

The most upwardly mobile countries were Denmark, Norway, Finland, Canada and Australia. The U.S. finished ahead of only Chile, Slovenia, Italy and the United Kingdom.

### **Democracy: U.S. rank: #16**

The Global Democracy Ranking for 2015, prepared by the Democracy Ranking Association in Austria, considered the following: political and economic democracy, health, gender equality, knowledge and political freedom.

The most democratic nations were Norway, Switzerland, Sweden, Finland and Denmark.

### **Foreign travel: U.S. rank: #18**

Americans rank fifth in the world in travel, but most of it is domestic. Hong Kong is No. 1 in international travel, averaging 4.3 trips out of the country per year, according to business consulting firm Timetric. The rest of the top five includes Norway, Singapore, Switzerland and Sweden.

The U.S., according to Timetric, has the largest domestic travel market in the world, with the average person making 6.7 trips a year. But only one of five Americans went abroad in 2013. Fewer than half of Americans own a passport.

### **Out-of-wedlock births: U.S. rank #19 (of 36)**

In the U.S., 41 percent of births in 2013 were out of wedlock. That compares with 39 percent for European Union nations. The U.S. rate is lower than that of all the Scandinavian countries.

The lowest rates of the 36 advanced nations studied were in Turkey (3 percent), Greece and Macedonia. The highest rates were in Iceland (67 percent) and Estonia and Latvia (both 58 percent).

In the U.S. in 1960, about 5 percent of all births were to unmarried mothers. That number rose to 11 percent in 1970, 28 percent in 1990 and 33 percent in 2000. It has remained steady at 41 percent since 2008.

### **Freedom: U.S. rank: #20**

This ranking by the Cato Institute measures “rule of law, security and safety, movement, religion, association, assembly, expression, relationships, size of government, legal system and property rights, access to sound money, freedom to trade internationally, regulation of credit, labor and business.” The five nations deemed most free were Hong Kong, Switzerland, Finland, Denmark and New Zealand.

The Legatum Prosperity Index ranked the U.S. 15th in personal freedom. Its top five nations were Canada, New Zealand, Norway, Luxembourg and Ireland.

### **Voter participation: U.S. rank: #31 (of 34)**

Only three Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries had lower voter turnouts, measured as votes cast as a percentage of eligible voters, in the last national elections than the U.S. — Japan, Chile and Switzerland, according to the Pew Research Center.

U.S. turnout in 2012 was 53.6 percent, compared with 87.2 percent in Belgium, 86.4 percent in Turkey and 82.6 percent in Sweden. Belgium and Turkey are among 28 nations where voting is compulsory. Switzerland consistently has the lowest turnout, with just 40 percent of the voting-age population casting ballots in the 2011 federal legislative elections.

**Leisure time: U.S. rank: #32 (of 32)**

This ranking, which came from a 2009 study by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, was based on the minimum paid annual leave and paid public holidays in OECD member nations, which includes most of the world's advanced nations.

Austria and Portugal were tied for first, with 35 paid days. They were followed by Denmark, Finland and Spain. The U.S. was the only country that didn't mandate any minimum paid vacation days or paid holidays.

According to the World Economic Forum, U.S. workers averaged 1,770 hours of work in 2013 — similar to the OECD average, but second only to Ireland for the most among Western European democracies and 425 hours on average compared with German workers — the equivalent of 53 working days. Workers in Norway, Netherlands, Denmark and France all worked an average of fewer than 1,500 hours a year.

**Well-being of mothers: U.S. rank: #33**

Measures used in the rankings of Save Our Children's 2015 State of World Mothers Report include infant mortality rates, maternity leave policies and deaths in childbirth.

American women have a one in 1,800 lifetime risk of maternal death — the highest risk of any developed country. According to the report, an American woman is more than 10 times as likely to die in pregnancy and childbirth as a Polish, Austrian or Belarusian woman, and an American child under 5 is just as likely to die as a child in Serbia or Slovakia.

The U.S. is the only developed country in the world that doesn't guarantee paid working leave for mothers.

The nations ranked the highest overall were Norway, Iceland and Sweden.

**Life expectancy: U.S. rank: #34 tie**

Japan has the longest life expectancy for people born in 2013 (84 overall, 87 for women, 80 for men), according to the World Health Organization. Other countries in the top five are San Marino, Singapore, Australia and Spain. The U.S. was tied for 34th (79 overall, 81 for women, 76 for men) with Nauru, Costa Rica and Qatar, and life expectancy in the U.S. was one year longer than in Cuba, Barbados, Kuwait and Croatia.

**Homeownership: U.S. rank: #34 (of 42)**

The top five countries, mostly OECD countries, in the percentage of homeownership? First is Romania, with 96.6 percent of its population living in owner-occupied residences. Second is Lithuania (92.3), followed by Croatia (92.1), Hungary (90.5) and Slovakia (90.2), according to the Pew Research Center.

The U.S. homeownership rate? Sixty-five percent. Mexico's is 71.1 percent.

Most developed countries use tax policies and other methods to encourage homeownership, according to a 2011 report from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

### **Overall health care: U.S. rank: #37**

France came out first in a World Health Organization report that measured the overall health system performance of 191 countries. Italy was the runner-up. Among the nations that finished ahead of the U.S. were Colombia, Saudi Arabia, Dominica and United Arab Emirates. The main factors considered in the rankings were health quality, health inequality, responsiveness level, responsiveness distribution and fair financing.

The U.S., which has the most expensive health care system in the world, finished last of 11 countries in a 2014 Commonwealth Fund health care study. The United Kingdom was first, followed by Switzerland and Sweden. The U.S. was ranked fifth in quality of care, ninth in access to care and last in efficiency and all three indicators of "healthy lives — mortality amenable to medical care, infant mortality and healthy life expectancy at age 60."

### **Income inequality: U.S. rank: #39 (most unequal of 46)**

In the U.S., the top 10 percent controls 74.6 percent of the nation's wealth, according to the 2015 Credit Suisse Global Wealth Report. That compares with 51.1 percent in Australia, 47.2 percent in Belgium, 48.5 percent in Japan, 51.1 percent in Australia, 51.15 percent in Italy and 54.1 percent in the United Kingdom.

The nations with the greatest income equality are Russia (84.8), Turkey (77.9), Hong Kong (77.5), Indonesia (77.2) and Philippines (76.0).

### **Infant mortality: U.S. rank: #57**

America's ranking by the CIA World Factbook (2015 estimates) is a major black mark on America's health care system. The U.S. has the highest infant mortality rate among advanced nations and ranks behind such countries as Cuba, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and New Caledonia. The U.S. mortality rate is 6.7 deaths for every 1,000 live births.

Afghanistan had the highest rate, with 115 deaths for every 1,000 live births, followed by Mali and Somalia. The lowest mortality rates were in Monaco, Iceland, Japan, Singapore and Norway.

### **Homicide rate: U.S. rank: #95 (lowest rate)**

The murder rate is much higher in the U.S. than in most other advanced countries, but much lower than in South and Central America and the Caribbean, according to a 2012 report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. The U.S. rate of 3.6 homicides per 100,000 — tied with Latvia and Niger — is lower than the international average of 6.2 homicides per 100,000 population.

The U.S. had the 11th-highest rate for gun homicides, and ranked 33rd in safety and security on the Legatum Prosperity Index.

The highest homicide rate is in Honduras (90.4 per 100,000), followed by Venezuela (53.7). The lowest homicide rates are in Monaco, Palau, Hong Kong, Iceland and Singapore.

**Obesity rate: U.S. rank: #173 (highest rate)**

Thirty-five percent of Americans are deemed obese, the highest percentage by far among the nation's advanced countries, according to the CIA World Factbook. "Only 17 of the 191 nations listed are more obese than the U.S. Most of them are in the Pacific Islands, led by American Samoa (74.6 percent of its population).

Obesity is defined as a body mass index (BMI) of greater than 30. A 6-foot male, for example, would be considered obese if he weighed more than 221 pounds. For a 5'6" woman, 187 pounds or more would be considered obese.

The least obese countries are Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Sudan.