HAPPINESS IN PENANG INDEX 2020/2021
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INTRODUCTION

The Survey whose results Penang Institute is presenting to you today was conceived in simpler and happier times. Covid-19 hit us right in the middle of the process, but we have had to remain resilient, and after adapting to new circumstances, we have completed the inaugural survey of what we call the Happiness in Penang (HIP) Index, to provide us with data on the wellbeing of the people of Penang.

When this project was conceived within the Penang2030 Vision that Chief Minister YAB Chow Kon Yeow announced to the world in August 2018, Malaysian society as a whole was very optimistic, and Penang especially felt proud to have been a major player in trying to reform Malaysian politics.

Since then, Covid-19 has hit us, and the political terrain is now both confusing and in many ways toxic and divisive. But we must persevere.

Although we live in a democracy, we do know that many of our fellows suffer in silence; they also cheer silently. It is therefore useful that we reach out to them and provide them with a platform to tell us how they really feel.

Today, we would like to present to you how the people of Penang have been feeling over the last two years. The survey results, however, seek to be more than a mere description of the situation as it was when the questions were asked and answered. Since the HIP Index will be computed every 2–3 years, the first survey will act as a basis for comparisons with future surveys in this series.
In fact, data collection for the next survey will already start in the first half of 2022.

Now, the HIP Index comprises of four domains. What we seek to measure are how people feel when it comes to:

1. Freedom and Governance
2. Economic Wellbeing
3. Environmental Sustainability
4. Liveability and Social Wellbeing

For simplicity, we call these the FEEL domains.

Dato’ Dr Ooi Kee Beng
Executive Director
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Happiness in Penang (HIP) Index
The pace of economic development is often seen as the main measurement of a country's progress. The gross domestic product (GDP) and the gross national product (GNP) are certainly important and influential when it comes to policy making and decision-making processes, as they are reliable and important indicators of a country’s economic health. However, these metrics are limited when it comes to measuring the country’s well-being and social progress. The measurement of life satisfaction and happiness has steadily gained importance, with happiness economics being acknowledged as a branch of economics. Sustainable development should take a holistic approach towards notions of progress and give equal importance to non-economic aspects of wellbeing.

Using the framework of Bhutan’s Gross National Happiness Index (GNH), the Happiness in Penang (HIP) index takes a multidimensional approach in measuring the happiness and life satisfaction of the people in Penang. The four main themes for Penang2030 – liveability, economy, empowering the community, and environment – are the key components in developing Penang’s Happiness Index. In accordance to these themes, the domains for the index, as well as its corresponding indicators are:

**Figure 1: Domains and indicators for the HIP Index**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Freedom &amp; Governance</th>
<th>Economic Wellbeing</th>
<th>Environmental Sustainability</th>
<th>Liveability and Social Wellbeing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Political freedom</td>
<td>• Income and salaries</td>
<td>• Environmental conservation</td>
<td>• Housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Community and civic participation</td>
<td>• Household expenditure</td>
<td>• Environmental issues and awareness</td>
<td>• Family and community wellbeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Religious/cultural/spiritual freedom</td>
<td>• Financial security</td>
<td>• Environmental policies</td>
<td>• Culture and heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Freedom of speech</td>
<td>• Asset ownership</td>
<td>• Eco-friendly behaviours</td>
<td>• Safety and security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fundamentals human rights</td>
<td>• Employment opportunities</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Cleanliness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Governance</td>
<td>• Social and economic mobility</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Urban connectivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Digital connectivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Wellbeing and quality of life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A survey of 3,011 respondents was carried out between October 2020 and April 2021 to determine the sentiments and life satisfaction of Penangites as according to the four domains. The survey results form the base for the HIP Index measurement.

As far as satisfaction goes, it was found that satisfaction was higher in the domain of liveability and social wellbeing, where most indicators achieved a strong level of satisfaction, among them housing, family relationships, and culture and heritage. Although some respondents indicated that their state of life was better before the pandemic, more than half professed themselves to be in at least a good stage of life. On the other hand, a neutral attitude was prevalent in the domain of Freedom and Governance, with Governance achieving the lowest level of satisfaction, while a high percentage of Penangites were satisfied with their religious/cultural/spiritual freedom.

Where Economic wellbeing is concerned, considerably high satisfaction levels are seen for social and economic mobility and household expenditure. Conversely, satisfaction over financial security are at considerably lower levels.

Government policies to protect the environment are well-received, as illustrated in the domain for Environmental sustainability. Awareness of environmental issues is also prevalent, with river pollution and air pollution being the main areas of concern.
The HIP Index is calculated using the Alkire-Foster methodology. It measures each person’s satisfaction/happiness achievements in each indicator. A person does not need to be sufficient in all indicators within each domain to be determined as “happy”; three cut-off points are therefore applied to identify degrees of happiness. Those who have achieved sufficiency in less than 50% of the weighted indicators are identified as “unhappy”. Those who are “narrowly happy” are those who recorded sufficiency in 50% to 65% of the indicators, while those who are considered “happy” register sufficiency in 66% or more.
The HIP Index value for 2020-2021 is estimated at 0.881 (0 = Unhappy; 1 = Happy). It indicates that about 76.5% of Penangites are identified as happy, and the remaining 23.5% are not-yet-happy. Results show that not-yet-happy people still enjoy sufficiency in 49.6% of the weighted indicators on average. Among not-yet-happy people, 13.7% are narrowly happy and nearly 10% are unhappy (Table 1).

**Table 1: Categories of HIP, headcount and sufficiency**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Happiness threshold</th>
<th>Headcounts</th>
<th>Average sufficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>≥66%</td>
<td>76.5%</td>
<td>85.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not-Yet-Happy</td>
<td>&lt;66%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>49.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrowly Happy</td>
<td>50%-65%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>54.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhappy</td>
<td>&lt;50%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The percentage of happy and satisfied people was also calculated for each domain (Figure 2). For the domain of Freedom and Governance, about 78.2% of people in Penang have achieved happiness, while 8.6% are considered narrowly happy. Approximately 13.2% of

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1 Definition of Happy: Achieving sufficiency (how much is “enough” to be identified as happy as per survey and our own calculations) in 66% of weighted indicators.
The percentage of happy people is slightly higher for the domain of Economic wellbeing, with 79.1% respondents identifying as happy, and 11.5% as narrowly happy. The percentage of unhappy people is lower compared to the previous domain, at 9.4%.

The percentage of happy people is at comparable levels for the Environmental sustainability domain, with 76.1% of respondents considered happy. Subsequently, 14.5% are narrowly happy, while 9.3% are seen to be unhappy. Last but not least, the domain of Liveability and social wellbeing has the highest percentage of happy people at 79.3%. As for the narrowly happy people, these stand for 7.7% of total respondents, while unhappy people total 13% overall.

**Figure 2: The composition of happiness by domain**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Happy (%)</th>
<th>Narrowly happy (%)</th>
<th>Unhappy (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freedom and governance</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>78.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic wellbeing</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>79.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental sustainability</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>76.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liveability and social wellbeing</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>79.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents are identified as unhappy in this domain. The percentage of happy people is at comparable levels for the Environmental sustainability domain, with 76.1% of respondents considered happy. Subsequently, 14.5% are narrowly happy, while 9.3% are seen to be unhappy. Last but not least, the domain of Liveability and social wellbeing has the highest percentage of happy people at 79.3%. As for the narrowly happy people, these stand for 7.7% of total respondents, while unhappy people total 13% overall.
In examining the sufficiency levels for each individual indicator across the domains, it is found that sufficiency levels can be markedly different (Figure 3). For the domain of Freedom and Governance, the indicators of community and civic participation and religious/cultural/spiritual freedom see high percentages of sufficiency, at 87.9% and 89.9% respectively, which are among the top five highest percentages of sufficiency. On the other hand, Governance (56.9%) is identified as the indicator with the lowest percentage of sufficiency attained within the domain. In fact, it also represents the indicator with the second lowest level of achieved sufficiency across all indicators in four domains.

At 97%, the sufficiency level for asset ownership is found to be in the highest percentage in the Economic wellbeing domain, in addition to being the indicator that enjoys the highest percentage of sufficiency across all 25 indicators. 77% of the respondents experienced sufficiency in the indicator of employment opportunities, but sufficiency is lower when it comes to income and salaries (68.9%). At 61.1%, financial security emerges as the indicator with the lowest percentage of sufficiency domain-wise, in addition to being among the overall indicators with the least percentage of respondents seeing sufficiency.

In the domain of Environmental sustainability, eco-friendly behaviours see the highest percentage of respondents attaining sufficiency at 96.4%. On the other hand, only 41.5% of respondents see sufficiency in the indicator of environmental issues and awareness, marking it the indicator with the lowest percentage of achieved sufficiency, within the domain as well as amongst all indicators.

Most indicators in the Liveability and social wellbeing domain record percentages of sufficiency above 80%, with cultural heritage and conservation (90.6%) and wellbeing and quality of life (86.6%) being the top two indicators with the highest percentage of sufficiency. Digital connectivity is seen to be on the lower spectrum, with 72.9% of the respondents signifying sufficiency. Conversely, cleanliness and urban connectivity report the lowest percentages of achieved sufficiency, at 63.2% and 61.6% respectively.
The percentage of happy and satisfied people was also calculated for each domain (Figure 3). The lowest percentage of achieved sufficiency, within the domain as well as amongst all indicators, was recorded in the Environmental issues and awareness indicator, with 41.5% of respondents attaining sufficiency. On the other hand, only 41.5% of respondents see sufficiency in the indicator of asset ownership.*

In examining the sufficiency levels for each individual indicator across the domains, it is found that Economic wellbeing domain has the highest percentage of sufficiency across all 25 indicators. 77% of the respondents experienced sufficiency in the indicator of asset ownership.* 83.9% of respondents saw sufficiency in the indicator of environmental issues and awareness, marking it the indicator with the lowest percentage of sufficiency in the domain of environmental sustainability. Digital connectivity is seen to enjoy the highest percentage of sufficiency, with 89.0% of respondents attaining sufficiency in this domain. The domain of governance (56.9%) is identified as the indicator with the lowest percentage of sufficiency, as this is the domain with the lowest percentage of achieved sufficiency, within the domain as well as amongst all indicators. In the Penang2030 Vision, Chief Minister YAB Lim Guan Eng completed the inaugural survey of what we call the Happiness in Penang (HIP) Index.

Since the HIP Index will be computed every 2-3 years, the first survey will act as a basis for understanding the situation as it was when the questions were asked and answered. The HIP Index measurement is a base for the HIP Index. It indicates that about 76.5% of Penangites are identified as happy, and the percentage of happy people is at comparable levels for the Environmental issues and awareness domain. In fact, data collection for the next survey will already start in the first half of 2022.

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Overall, the calculation of the HIP index shows that each domain and its indicators contribute differently to the overall happiness of the people in Penang, as the perception of happiness and sufficiency is subjective for each individual. As such, the HIP index provides a nuanced and balanced picture of experienced happiness and life satisfaction in Penang.
Appendix 1: Survey Results

Perception towards present quality of life
(N = 3,011)

- Very satisfied: 54.8%
- Satisfied: 28.4%
- Neutral: 5.6%
- Dissatisfied: 9.9%
- Very dissatisfied: 1.3%
The percentage of happy and satisfied people was also calculated for each domain (Figure 2). The Liveability and social wellbeing domain report the lowest percentages of achieved sufficiency, at 63.2% and 61.1%, financial security emerges as the indicator with the lowest percentage of sufficiency in the indicator of environmental issues and awareness, marking it the indicator with the lowest percentage of sufficiency attained within the domain. In fact, it also represents the indicator with the lowest percentage of sufficiency in the domain as well as amongst all indicators.

On the other hand, a neutral attitude was prevalent in the domain of employment opportunities, but sufficiency is lower when it comes to income and salaries (68.9%). At 97%, the sufficiency level for asset ownership is found to be in the highest percentage in the domain of community and civic participation and religious/cultural/spiritual freedom see high sufficiency in 49.6% of the weighted indicators on average. Among those who have achieved sufficiency in less than 50% of the weighted indicators are identified as "unhappy". Those who are "narrowly happy" are those who recorded sufficiency in 50% to 65% of the indicators, while those who are considered "happy" need to be sufficient in all indicators within each domain to be determined as such.

The Survey whose results Penang Institute is presenting to you today was conceived in 2015 by the Penang Institute, a non-governmental research institution. The survey, the People’s Happiness Index (PHI), is inspired by the United Nations – World Happiness Report and was conceptualized to provide a nuanced and balanced picture of experienced happiness and life satisfaction in the state of Penang. This is a crucial exercise as it helps us identify what are the areas that need to be improved, what are the areas that we are doing well, and what are the areas that we can further improve. The PHI is a useful tool to evaluate the performance of government policies and initiatives, and to inform future planning and decision-making.

The PHI has been updated over the years to reflect the changing needs and priorities of the people of Penang. The current version of the PHI comprises of four domains: Economic Wellbeing, Environmental Sustainability, Freedom and Governance, and Social Wellness. Each domain consists of weighted indicators to allow for a comprehensive assessment of wellbeing. The indicators are divided into four levels of satisfaction: very dissatisfaction, dissatisfaction, neutrality, satisfaction, and very satisfaction. The results of the PHI are presented in a range of tables and graphs to provide a clear and easy-to-understand overview of the wellbeing of the people of Penang.

The survey results, however, seek to be more than a mere snapshot of the wellbeing of the people of Penang. They aim to provide a comprehensive view of the state of wellbeing in the state, and to inform future planning and decision-making.

The People's Happiness Index (PHI) is a useful tool to evaluate the performance of government policies and initiatives, and to inform future planning and decision-making. The PHI is a useful tool to evaluate the performance of government policies and initiatives, and to inform future planning and decision-making.
Satisfaction levels towards digital connectivity  
(N = 2,911)

Access and stability
- Very dissatisfied: 19.06%
- Dissatisfied: 37.1%
- Neutral: 34.0%
- Satisfied: 17.95%
- Very satisfied: 17.95%

Speed
- Very dissatisfied: 20.10%
- Dissatisfied: 33.5%
- Neutral: 34.0%
- Satisfied: 17.95%
- Very satisfied: 17.95%

Affordability
- Very dissatisfied: 17.95%
- Dissatisfied: 34.0%
- Neutral: 34.0%
- Satisfied: 17.95%
- Very satisfied: 17.95%
Satisfaction levels towards employment and opportunities

Availability of job opportunities

Current employment

Security of current employment

Training and development opportunities

Relationship with supervisor

Relationship with colleagues

Legend:
- Very dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Neutral
- Satisfied
- Very satisfied

Figure 1: Domains and indicators for the HIP Index

Figure 2: The composition of happiness by domain
Satisfaction levels towards government policies for environmental protection

Cleaning up Penang rivers and seas

No Plastic Bag Campaign

No Single Use Plastics (eg straws, plastic bottles)

Free CAT bus services

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Rethink and Reinvent (5R)

0% 50% 100%

Very dissatisfied Dissatisfied Neutral Satisfied Very satisfied
Satisfaction levels towards religious/cultural/spiritual freedom (N = 3,011)

- Freedom to choose religion and beliefs: 42.0%
- Freedom to practice religion of choice: 43.7%
- Freedom to dress in accordance to my religious and/or cultural beliefs: 42.1%
- Freedom to hold religious and/or cultural festivals: 42.9%
Satisfaction levels towards urban connectivity
(N = 3,011)

Road network and connectivity
- Very dissatisfied: 42.5%
- Dissatisfied: 31.5%
- Neutral: 38.2%
- Satisfied: 41.6%
- Very satisfied: 32.1%

Road conditions (potholes, uneven roads etc)
- Very dissatisfied: 33.4%
- Dissatisfied: 31.5%
- Neutral: 38.2%
- Satisfied: 41.6%
- Very satisfied: 32.1%

Traffic conditions (traffic jams etc)
- Very dissatisfied: 33.4%
- Dissatisfied: 31.5%
- Neutral: 38.2%
- Satisfied: 41.6%
- Very satisfied: 32.1%

Walkability and pedestrian crossings
- Very dissatisfied: 33.4%
- Dissatisfied: 31.5%
- Neutral: 38.2%
- Satisfied: 41.6%
- Very satisfied: 32.1%

Cycling lanes
- Very dissatisfied: 33.4%
- Dissatisfied: 31.5%
- Neutral: 38.2%
- Satisfied: 41.6%
- Very satisfied: 32.1%

Availability of parking spaces
- Very dissatisfied: 33.4%
- Dissatisfied: 31.5%
- Neutral: 38.2%
- Satisfied: 41.6%
- Very satisfied: 32.1%
Satisfaction levels towards family interactions
(N = 3,011)

Support from family members

Time spent with family members

Trust levels between family members

0% 50% 100%

Very dissatisfied Dissatisfied Neutral Satisfied Very satisfied

41.6% 44.9% 42.5%
Appendix 2: Propensity for Happiness

**Figure 1: Propensity for happiness by gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrowly happy</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhappy</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>76.8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrowly happy</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhappy</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2: Propensity for happiness by district

Timur Laut

- Unhappy: 11%
- Narrowly happy: 13.9%
- Happy: 75.1%

Barat Daya

- Unhappy: 8.3%
- Narrowly happy: 15.1%
- Happy: 76.6%

Seberang Perai Utara

- Unhappy: 3.4%
- Narrowly happy: 8.8%
- Happy: 87.8%

Seberang Perai Tengah

- Unhappy: 6.4%
- Narrowly happy: 9.6%
- Happy: 84.0%

Seberang Perai Selatan

- Unhappy: 20.8%
- Narrowly happy: 21.7%
- Happy: 57.5%

Legend:
- Red: Unhappy
- Yellow: Narrowly happy
- Green: Happy
Figure 3: Propensity for happiness by age

- **>=60**: 9% Unhappy, 8.1% Narrowly happy, 82.9% Happy
- **31-59**: 12.2% Unhappy, 15.9% Narrowly happy, 71.9% Happy
- **15-30**: 7.6% Unhappy, 12.3% Narrowly happy, 80.1% Happy

Figure 4: Propensity for happiness by education

- **Bachelor and above**: 9.7% Unhappy, 14.4% Narrowly happy, 75.9% Happy
- **Vocational and diploma**: 8.9% Unhappy, 12.8% Narrowly happy, 78.3% Happy
- **Upper secondary and lower**: 11% Unhappy, 13.6% Narrowly happy, 75.4% Happy
Figure 5: Propensity for happiness by employment status

Not employed and not looking for employment

- Unhappy: 4.8%
- Narrowly happy: 8.3%
- Happy: 87%

Not employed and looking for employment

- Unhappy: 14.6%
- Narrowly happy: 21.5%
- Happy: 63.8%

Employed

- Unhappy: 11.5%
- Narrowly happy: 15.3%
- Happy: 73.2%
HAPPINESS IN PENANG INDEX 2020–2021