

People's Report Card Frequently Asked Questions

General

How many countries have People's Report Cards?

All 133 countries ranked by the Social Progress Index will have complete People's Report Cards (i.e. grades for all 12 components and an overall grade), covering 94% of the world's population. An additional 27 countries will have grades for at least nine of the twelve components, bringing coverage up to 99%. Since the People's Report Card does not have the minimum data requirements of the Social Progress Index, it provides grades for any country or territory that has any data, even if there is not sufficient data to calculate a component score. This not only provides at least limited information to small island nations and other countries and territories often excluded from global data sets, but it shows where more data is most needed. All 193 UN-member states have at least 17 data points. Forty-five non-UN-member countries and territories are included though 36 have fewer than 10 data points.

Are the grades a prediction of which countries will achieve the associated SDG target?

The grades given to countries now are not a prediction of if or when a country will achieve an SDG target. Grades represent the distance a country is from achieving the SDG target. A country receiving an "A" grade has already achieved the target value. A country receiving a "B" is close enough to the target that it is reasonable to expect that it could achieve the target by 2030 given sufficient capacity and political will. All countries are treated equally with regard to the future. If actual improvement does not keep pace with what is possible, a country's grade may worsen. Similarly, a country making large improvements may see its grade improve in future years.

What are sources used?

The grades for People's Report Cards are driven from the data used in the Social Progress Index, which relies exclusively on secondary data. About half of the indicators use data provided by the United Nations or World Bank. The remaining indicators are data provided by non-governmental organizations such as the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, Institute for Economics and Peace, Pew Research Center, Transparency International, and Gallup World Bank. The full list of indicators and sources is presented in the accompanying document, "People's Report Card Indicator Details."

How recent is the data that you use?

The most recent value for each indicator is used. Data based on surveys and expert assessments tend to be more recent since they can be published faster than data that needs to be aggregated from household surveys. Data points within five years of the most recent value are considered for grading.

What do you do about missing data?

No grade is given for an indicator with missing data, however, an estimated value is needed to calculate a component grade. When there is data that is too old to be graded (i.e. more than five years old), but still within 10 years, that is used. Otherwise, Social Progress Index country sample data is used to regress each indicator on the other indicators within a component to predict missing values.

What is the difference between the People's Report Card and the SDG Index?

The SDG Index, produced by Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, is not an official measure of the SDGs, but is a first attempt at measuring countries' performance relative to the Sustainable Development Goals. The SDG Index uses 77 indicators to measure the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Many are the same or similar to proposed official indicators, though many are not. The People's Report Card, on the other hand, does not aim to be a direct measure of the SDGs. There is considerable overlap between the concepts measured by the SDGs and the People's Report Card so it is a good proxy at a conceptual level. But there are many SDG indicators that are not in the People's Report Card. These include measures of government spending, official development assistance, and input measures such as the number of doctors per 1,000 people.

The SDG Index scores each country's performance on a 0-100 scale and ranks them. The People's Report Card classifies countries into six categories based on whether they have already achieved the goal or how close they are to achieving it. The People's Report Card does not, for example, rank countries based on which has achieved the goal by a wider margin compared to other countries that have already achieved the goal.

The SDG Index also uses a dashboard, rating each country's performance as "green" (already achieved the goal), "yellow" (caution lane), or "red" (is seriously far from achievement as of 2015). In this presentation, there is more similarity between the SDG Index and the People's Report Card. It is expected that these results will be highly aligned at the indicator level. Though since there is no official quantification of targets by the UN, interpretation of what it means to "achieve" an SDG sometimes differs slightly between the SDG Index and the People's Report Card. The SDG Index aggregates to the goal level by taking the lowest classification among that goal's indicators while People's Report Card uses PCA-determined weights to aggregate indicators.

The main difference between the SDG Index and the People's Report Card is the intended audience. The SDG Index will be more useful for users interested in direct measurement of the SDG framework. The People's Report Card intends to be a resource for practitioners and the general public, interested in country performance relative to the intentions behind the SDGs.

Why did you choose the A-B-C-D-E-F grading scale?

Grading systems vary throughout the world. Some countries use letters, others use numbers. While the "E" grade is not commonly used in the United States, it is used in many European countries. We felt the six-leveled continuous scale would be the one most likely to be understood throughout the world.

Method 1

What are the details of the calculation to project performance?

All available data for one indicator is saved to a spreadsheet tab with countries in the rows and years in the columns. Countries are sorted from best performance to worst performance in the most recent year for which data are available.

The following calculation inputs are retrieved: a) Maximum value since 2000; b) Minimum value in the years since the year of the maximum value (This applies to cases when a lower number is better, such as Infectious Disease Deaths. In the cases where a larger number is better, such as Access to Piped Water, the minimum value is retrieved first and the maximum value is selected from the years following the year of the minimum value); c) Year corresponding to the maximum value; and d) Year corresponding to the minimum value. These inputs are used to calculate a compound annual growth rate (CAGR). No growth rate is calculated for countries with performance that has consistently worsened since 2000. Outliers (i.e. growth rates above or below two standard deviations from the mean) are removed.

For countries that have not yet achieved the anchor value, the average CAGR for countries with a maximum (or minimum) value $\pm 20\%$ of the country's most recent data point is projected out 15 years. No calculation is made for countries that have already achieved the goal. For countries that are not projected to achieve the anchor value in 15 years, the projected value is used to repeat this calculation.

Preliminary grades are calculated by comparing the value of a countries' most current data point and the values for each of the four periods calculated using the CAGR average. A country receives an "A" if the most recent value is better than the anchor value, a "B" if the Period 1 value is better than the anchor value, a "C" if the Period 2 value is better than the anchor value, a "D" if the Period 3 value is better than the anchor value, an "E" if the Period 4 value is better than the anchor value, or an "F" if the Period 4 value is not better than the anchor value.

Preliminary grades are then checked for consistency. Since countries are sorted from best to worst current performance, there should be a block of "A"s followed by a block of "B"s, etc. Most indicators have no anomalies, but due to the method of determining the CAGR, occasionally a "C" will occur within a block of "B"s, for example. In the case of an anomaly, there is an override of the calculated grade in order to maintain consistency. This override is rarely used in practice. Only 24 out of 9851 grades have been revised.

What do you do if there are no or very few countries to use for the average growth rate?

In theory, this methodology could result in some grades being calculated using very few comparator countries. In practice, however, this is not a significant issue. On average, each calculation averages the growth rate of 40 countries. Less than 4% of the calculations are based on fewer than 10 comparator countries.

What did you do about outliers?

Compound annual growth rates that are more than two standard deviations from the mean were removed. Using rolling averages to smooth the data and therefore reduce outliers in the best and worst values was explored but the effect was minimal and deemed not worth the added complication.

Why did you choose this method?

Numerous alternative scenarios were considered and evaluated based on robustness and consistency of results. Among the scenarios considered are using a country's own growth trajectory, using 2000 as the start year and the most recent value as the end year, using a growth rate based on an exponential curve, and smoothing data using rolling averages. Suggestions for alternative methods to evaluate for future years' calculations are welcome.

Method 2

What do you do if the indicator is on a discrete scale that does not align to the six grades?

Whenever possible, logical breaks were used to convert an indicator's range of values to the letter grade scale.