

# As happiness researchers, we urge President Putin to end this war

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Wednesday 30 March 2022 14:24 • [Comments](#)



We expect a strong decline of happiness for the Russian population if the war in Ukraine continues (AFP via Getty)

**P**resident Biden calls his fellow leader from Russia a “war criminal” and a “butcher”, but any psychologist would advise finding common ground instead. The east and west have common interest in the subjective wellbeing of the Russian population. As happiness researchers, we urge President Putin to consider the following.

We expect a strong decline of happiness for the Russian population if the war in Ukraine continues, for the following reasons. Russian happiness will decline when the material standard of living falls as a result of international sanctions and the cost of war. It will also decline when the war results in further restrictions on freedom in the country.

A military victory will not offer a remedy, since national pride does not increase happiness very much, while the likely continuation in the form of a civil war, with guerrilla tactics and terrorism, will certainly decrease Russian happiness.

A restoration of the Russian empire will not add to happiness either because people live more happily in smaller countries. On the ranking of average happiness in nations, the US ranks 46th, below most western nations, while China (60th) and Russia (101th) rank below the world average. Enlarging Russia will not result in happier Russians.

The decline in Russian happiness will also have indirect consequences. Economic recovery will be delayed, as unhappiness lowers performance at work. Russians will also live shorter lives, as unhappy people die earlier.

The current political order will be contested since **unhappy people are less supportive** and more often **break rules**. Decline of happiness in the population sets the scene for political protest, as was the case in the Arab Spring.

We expect no decline in average happiness in the European Union, but foresee a pause in the rising trend. Happiness-wise, war is a losing game; even if you are on the side with the best arms.

Happiness may not be everything, but should not be ignored.

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