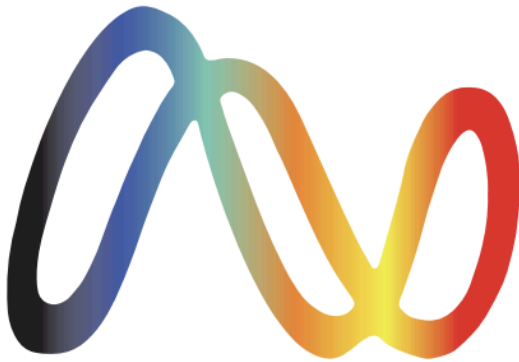




Measuring Hope: Civic Trust and Mental Well-Being in Post-Pandemic Democracies (2025)

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Abstract

This paper introduces the *Hope Index*, a participatory measurement framework that redefines mental well-being and civic trust as structural pillars of democratic sustainability. Developed within the **Humanity Pact Think Tank's Well-Being Cluster**, it positions *hope* not as a sentiment, but as a measurable governance indicator rooted in three interdependent dimensions — **Belonging, Meaning, and Agency**.

The framework emerges as part of the **Humanity Pact 2.0 – The Decade of Equitable Futures (2025–2035)** and provides an analytical tool for aligning the UN SDGs, Agenda 2063, and the **Humanity Index (PWE Model)** under the People–Well-Being–Environment triad.

1. Context

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed deep fractures in civic trust and institutional legitimacy. As social disconnection, economic anxiety, and information disorder expanded, traditional governance indicators — GDP, fiscal stability, or education rates — proved insufficient to capture the emotional infrastructure that sustains democracy.

In post-pandemic societies, *hope* has emerged as a decisive form of capital. Nations capable of cultivating collective meaning and trust demonstrate greater resilience, innovation, and civic participation. This paper argues that *hope is a form of governance*, measurable through relational well-being, institutional integrity, and community belonging.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. The Hope Index: Core Dimensions

Dimension	Definition	Indicative Metrics
Belonging	The degree to which individuals feel part of a shared community and trust social institutions.	Perceived fairness, social inclusion, institutional trust, sense of safety.
Meaning	The extent to which people see purpose in civic participation, work, and collective progress.	Participation in civic life, intergenerational purpose, perceived social mobility, access to culture.
Agency	The capacity of individuals and communities to act upon their environment and shape outcomes.	Voter engagement, volunteerism, innovation capacity, access to digital tools.

Together, these three dimensions form the *Hope Triangle*, a heuristic model integrating psychological, social, and governance variables into one composite score.

2.2. Theoretical Anchors

- **Amartya Sen’s Capability Approach** — expands freedom and agency as measures of well-being.
- **UNDP Human Development Reports (1990–2022)** — call for new social resilience metrics.
- **OECD Better Life Index (2020)** — introduces subjective well-being but lacks civic trust integration.
- **Ubuntu Philosophy** — emphasises relational identity and shared humanity as the foundation of flourishing societies.

The *Hope Index* merges these traditions, bridging quantitative and cultural approaches to measuring well-being.

3. Methodology

The Humanity Pact Think Tank’s proposed model combines **quantitative and qualitative data** across the *People–Well-Being–Environment (PWE)* spectrum:

1. **People (Social Inclusion):** Measures belonging and equality using survey data, community indicators, and social protection coverage.
2. **Well-Being (Psychological Health & Purpose):** Captures emotional and cultural dimensions of collective meaning.
3. **Environment (Context of Opportunity):** Links ecological and digital environments to perceptions of agency.

The Index can be piloted through:

- **Participatory Data Platforms:** Local observatories collecting community well-being data.
- **Policy Integration:** Embedding Hope metrics in SDG dashboards.
- **Civic Trust Surveys:** Annual evaluation cycles co-developed with academic partners.

Initial methodological discussions are underway with **Imperial College London** (School of Public Health), **UCOP**, and **Cosmolab – Chinese Knowledge Network**.

4. Key Findings (Pre-Pilot Simulations)

Based on initial cross-regional analysis (Europe, Latin America, Africa), four findings emerge:

1. **Civic Trust correlates strongly with mental well-being.**
Countries with higher trust in public institutions report lower rates of anxiety and social withdrawal.
2. **Inequality erodes hope faster than poverty.**
Perceived injustice undermines meaning and agency more than absolute deprivation.
3. **Digital exclusion amplifies despair.**
Lack of access to digital infrastructure reduces agency and participation in collective decision-making.
4. **Intergenerational purpose predicts resilience.**
Communities investing in youth leadership show higher recovery rates post-crisis.

These findings support integrating *Hope Indicators* within broader development frameworks.

5. Policy Implications

1. **Embed “Hope Metrics” in SDG and Agenda 2063 evaluations** to track the social legitimacy of governance systems.
2. **Adopt mental well-being and civic trust indicators** as part of the *Humanity Index* under the PWE framework.
3. **Promote inclusive data collection** using participatory surveys led by civil society and local observatories.
4. **Strengthen digital and cultural infrastructures** that enable agency, belonging, and meaning.
5. **Institutionalise the Hope Index** as a new social contract metric within the G20 Social and Finance Tracks.

6. Conclusion

Hope is not optimism — it is the governance of imagination.

This paper argues that governments capable of measuring and cultivating hope can rebuild civic trust, strengthen democracy, and achieve sustainable progress.

By embedding the *Hope Index* in global measurement systems, the **Humanity Pact Think Tank** offers a pragmatic yet visionary step towards transforming well-being into a democratic asset.

“Where hope is measurable, democracy becomes repairable.” — Humanity Pact, 2025

7. Next Steps

- **2026:** Pilot phase design in partnership with academic institutions and observatories in Africa, Europe, and Latin America.
- **2027:** Release of the *Hope Index Prototype Report* and integration into the **Humanity Index (PWE Model)**.
- **2028–2030:** Expansion through the Humanity Pact Observatory Network and alignment with the UN SDGs and **Agenda 2063** dashboards.

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