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# The good old days: Researchers reveal when Britons were happiest

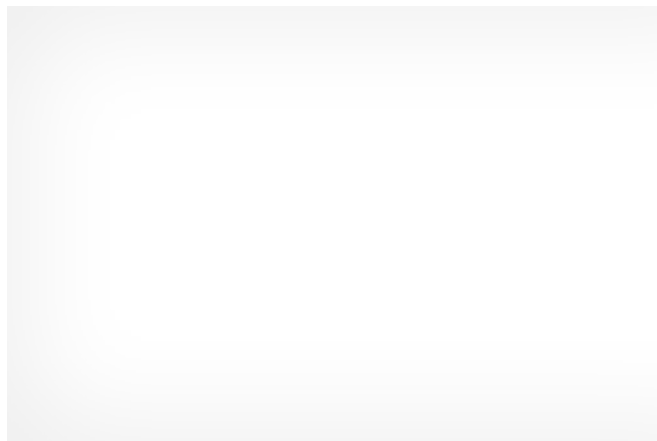
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## Britons were happiest when the British empire was at its height and Queen Victoria was on the throne, according to research.

After analysing millions of books and newspapers from the last 200 years, British academics concluded the UK was most content during the 1880s.

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Our collective mood was at its bleakest in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

That period included the Winter of Discontent (78-79), when widespread public sector strikes led to rubbish piling up in the streets, and the Falklands War (1982).

There were also big dips during the two world wars, from 1914-18 and between 1939-1945.

The international study noticed that in the United States, the main post-war dip coincided with the Vietnam War.

One year less of war had a positive effect on happiness equivalent to a 30% rise in gross domestic product.

Report authors said their method was valid because what people say or write reveals a lot about underlying levels of happiness.

They also noted that newspaper editors like to reflect the mood of their readers.

Their main source was the Google Books corpus - which records the frequency with which words appear across eight million

books, comprising more than 6% of all books ever published.

They had to be careful, however, to reflect the change in meaning over time.

"For example, the word 'gay' had a completely different meaning in the 1800s than it does today," said Dr Chanuki Seresinhe, from the Alan Turing Institute.

Professor Thomas Hills, from the University of Warwick, said major events including wars had less effect on mood - internationally - than might have been expected.

"We can see the American Civil War in our data, the revolutions of 1848 across Europe, the roaring 20s and the Great Depression," he said.

"But people quickly returned to their previous levels of subjective well-being after these events were over. Our national happiness is like an adjustable spanner that we open and close to calibrate our experiences against our recent past, with little lasting memory for the triumphs and tragedies of our age."

Professor Daniel Sgroi, also from Warwick, said aspiration appeared to be a key factor.

"After the end of rationing in the 1950s national happiness was very high as were expectations for the future," he said.

"But unfortunately things did not pan out as people might have hoped and national happiness fell for many years until the low-point of the Winter of Discontent."

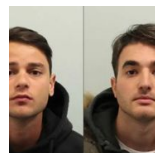
The research is published in the journal Nature Human Behaviour.

(c) Sky News 2019: [The good old days: Researchers reveal when Britons were happiest](#)



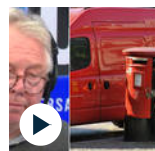
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