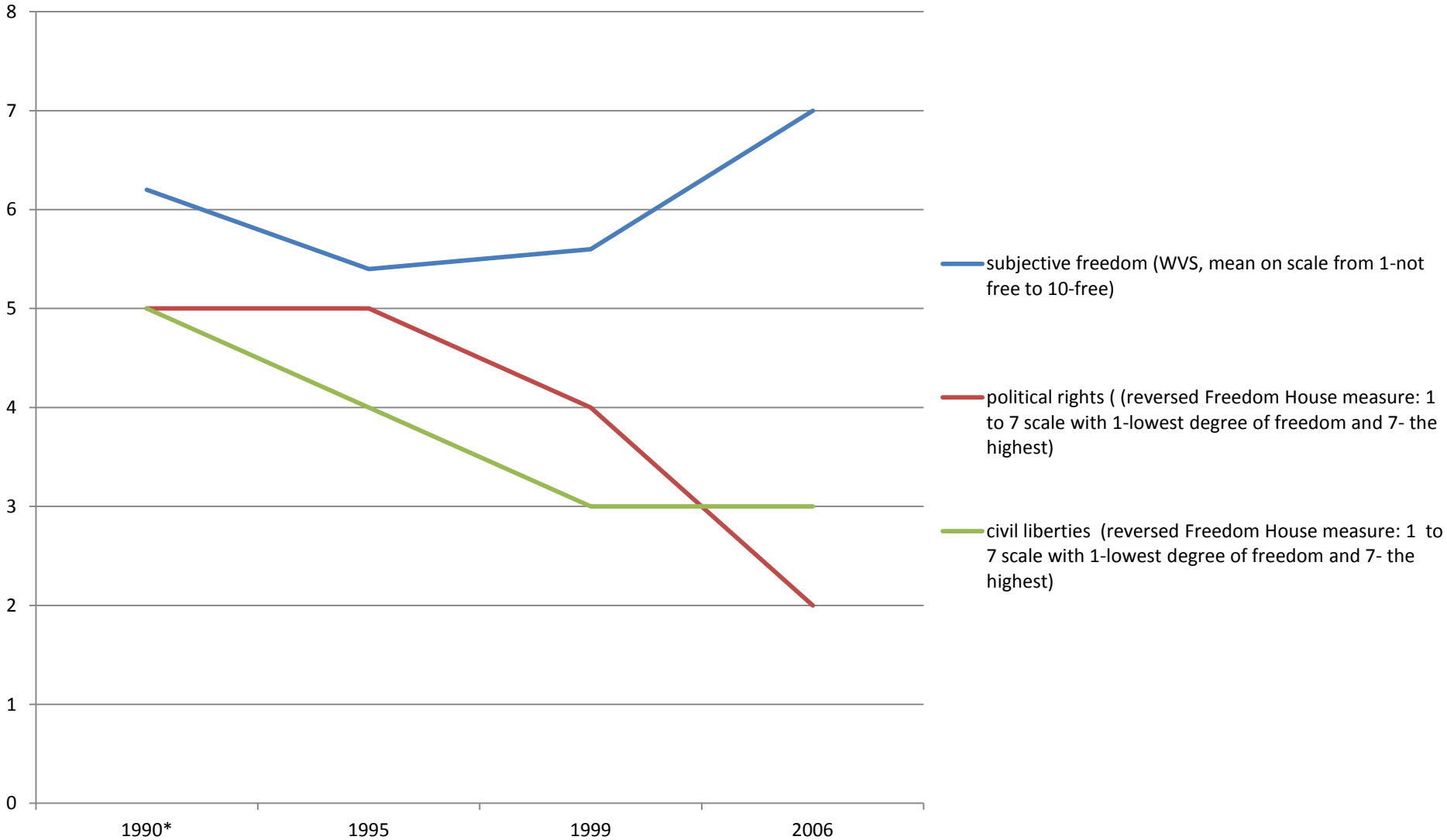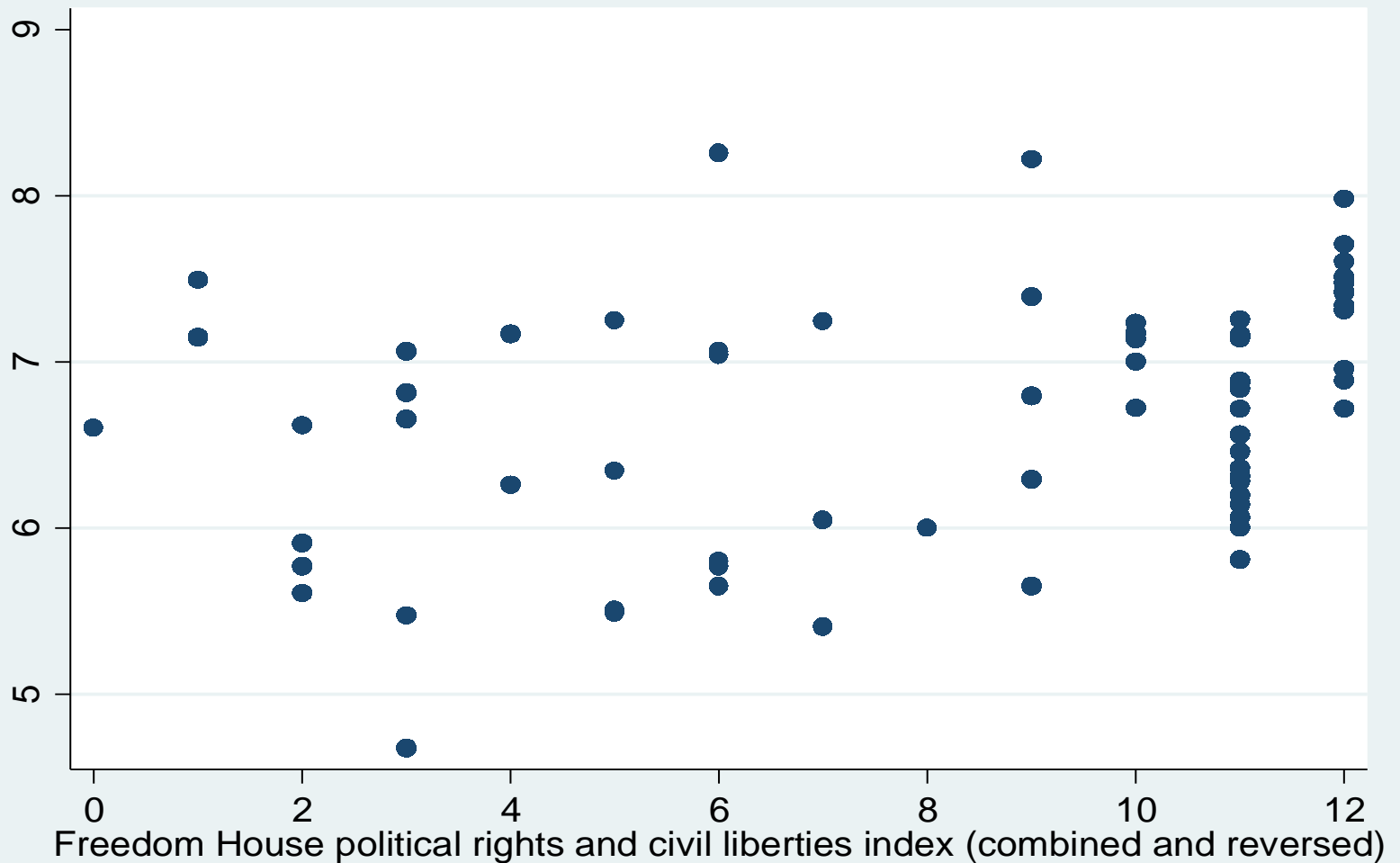# What makes people feel free: Subjective freedom in comparative perspective

Presented by Natalia Firsova, PhD Student in Sociology, HSE
at the Reporting Conference of LCSR
Comparative Sociology in Quantitative Perspectives
on November, 25 2011 in Moscow

Freedom puzzle on Russian data

Subjective freedom and situational freedom, 1999-2004 WVS and EVS

Key research questions

What is it that makes people feel free?

- Which political, civil and economic freedoms predict subjective freedom?

- Do the same objective freedoms predict subjective freedom in more and less affluent countries?

- Do materialist and postmaterialist priorities predict subjective sense of freedom and how this influence is moderated by countries' overall prosperity?

Why is it important to study subjective freedom

- Human development theory: freedom is a component of the subjective well-being (Sen 2001; Welzel & Inglehart 2010)

- Psychological self-determination theory of human motivation and optimal functioning: autonomy relates to greater well-being across cultures (Chirkov 2010; Chirkov, Ryan, et al. 2010)

- Sociology of consumption: Zygmunt Bauman's theory that freedom in the contemporary society has transformed into consumer freedom of choice

Theoretical framework

- Freedom in the sense of individual *autonomy* is different from *situational freedom* (Levine 1981 on Weber's distinction) in the form of political rights, civil liberties and free markets

- "…the ethic of responsibility maximizes the freedom of actors to make their own decisions."

- Freedom is a universal notion, but its importance for individuals could differ from society to society and over time (Welzel forthcoming)

Data

- European Values Study and World Values Survey (VS) 1981-2004
- Freedom House indices of political rights, civil liberties, and overall status of freedom 1972-2009
- Heritage Foundation & WSJ index of economic freedom and its components 1995-2010

Business freedom	Investment freedom
Trade freedom	Financial freedom
Fiscal freedom	Property rights
Government spending	Freedom from corruption
Monetary freedom	Labor freedom

- World Bank GDP per capita, GDP growth, and Good governance indicator

Progress of the project

Comments and Suggestions	Done	Planned
Use hierarchical linear modeling with GDP for cross-level interactions.	V	
Exclude from analysis economic freedoms irrelevant to subjective freedom; use factor analysis to construct an index of economic freedoms.	V	
Rescale and normalize predictors.	V	
Add to predictors: social tolerance, Corruption Perception Index, Good Governance indicator and GDP growth on societal level; and income on individual level.	V	
Add to predictors: autonomy in performing daily activities, ideological correlates, health, and financial satisfaction on individual level.		V
Replace materialism/postmaterialism with survival/self-expression values.		V
Examine countries' empirical growth plots	V	

The dependent variable

- the subjective sense of freedom, operationalized by the VS score as an answer to the 'How much freedom of choice and control' question on a 1-10 scale.

A173. Some people feel they have a completely free choice and control over their lives, while other people feel that what they do has no real effect on what happens to them. Please use this scale where 1 means "none at all" and 10 means "a great deal" to indicate how much freedom of choice and control you feel you have over the way your life turns out.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: for the group of less affluent countries, economic freedom (or some of its components) will predict subjective sense of freedom

Hypothesis 2: for the group of affluent economies, political freedom (or some of its components) will predict subjective sense of freedom

Hypothesis 3: In more affluent countries people's sense of freedom increases with higher postmaterialist priorities, in contrast to less affluent countries

Materialist and post-materialist indices construction

At the individual level, people's sense of freedom is correlated with items indicating either materialist or postmaterialist priorities.

E003. If you had to choose, which one of the things on this card would you say is most important? And which would be the next most important? First choice 1 'Maintaining order in the nation'; 2 'Give people more say'; 3 'Fighting rising prices'; 4 'Protecting freedom of speech'

E001. People sometimes talk about what aims of this country should be in the next ten years. On this card are listed some of the goals which different people would give top priority.

Would you please say which ones of these you, yourself, consider the most important? First choice 1 'A high level of economic growth'; 2 'Strong defence forces'; 3 'People have more say about how things are done'; 4 'Trying to make our cities and countryside more beautiful'.

Materialist index:

Mati=(e001=1)*1+(e001=2)*1+(e003=1)*1+(e003=3)*1+(e002=1)*0.5+(e002=2)*0.5+(e004=1)*0.5+(e004=3)*0.5

Post-materialist index:

Postmati=(e001=3)*1+(e001=4)*1+(e003=2)*1+(e003=4)*1+(e002=3)*0.5+(e002=4)*0.5+(e004=2)*0.5+(e004=4)*0.5

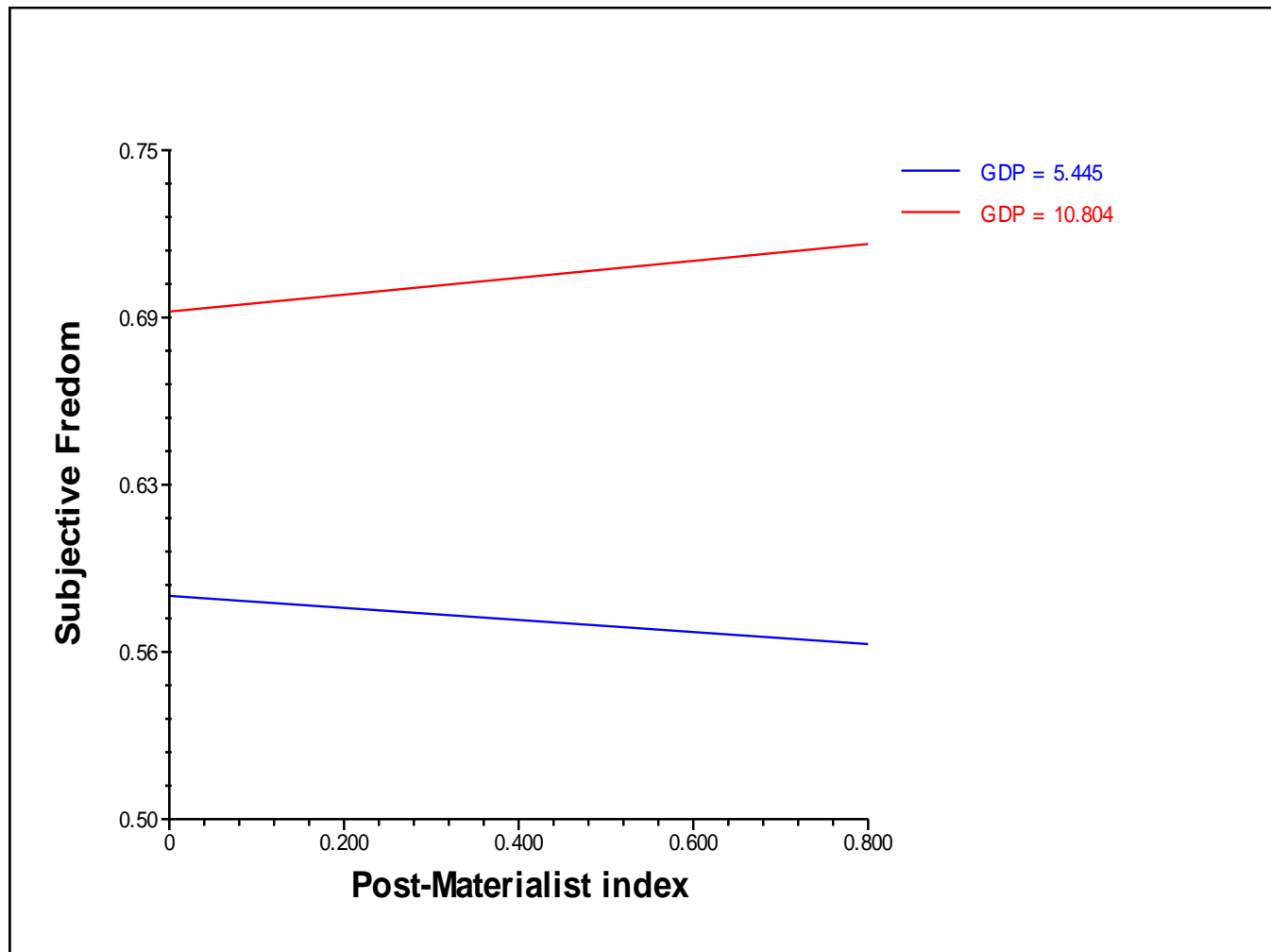## Multi-Level Linear Regression: Subjective Freedom, 1999-2004 Values Survey

		Model 1 (min GDP centred)		Model 2 (max GDP centred)	
Level 1 (60,740 Respondents)	R^2	3.51 %		3.51 %	
Level 2 (62 Countries)	R^2	21.19 %		21.19 %	
		b	t	b	t
Intercept		.473	12.168**	0.637	18.098**
Political rights and civil liberties index***		.041	1.290	.040	1.290
Log of GDP pc****		.031	4.038**	.031	4.038**
Freedom from government spending*****		.093	2.732**	.093	2.732**
Marital status (1 = Married)		.009	3.136**	.008	3.136**
Age		-.278	-8.112**	-.278	-8.112**
Freedom from government spending		.191	4.598**	.191	4.598**
Age squared		.172	4.031**	.172	4.031**
Higher education (1 = Higher education)		.024	5.181**	.024	5.181**
Household income		.184	7.411**	.059	4.101**
Log of GDP pc		-.023	-3.612**	-.023	-3.612**
Post-Materialist index		-.032	-2.020*	.040	3.741**
Log of GDP pc		.013	3.151*	.013	3.151**
Gender (1 = Female)		-.014	-3.685**	-.014	-3.685**

Variance Components (Random Effects) Level 2	Variance Component	χ^2	d.f.	Variance Component	χ^2	d.f.
Intercept	.005	4594.5**	58	.005	4594.5**	58
Marital status (1 = Married)	-.-	-.-		-.-	-.-	
Age	.030	105.48**	60	.030	105.48**	60
Age squared	.061	111.76**	61	.061	111.76**	61
Higher education (1 = Higher education)	-.-	-.-		-.-	-.-	
Household income	.005	351.06**	60	.005	351.06**	60
Post-Material index	.001	140.50**	60	.001	140.50**	60
Gender (1 = Female)	.001	233.63**	61	.001	233.63**	61
Level 1	0.068			0.068		

Note: * p ≤ 0.05; ** p ≤ 0.01; Restricted Maximum Likelihood; Convergence: Main-Effect Model: 3 iterations; Cross-Level-Interaction Model: 31 iterations; the pseudo R^2 for the multilevel regression models is calculated according to the simplified formula of Snijders & Bosker (1999: 105)
as measured by Freedom House * as measured by the World Bank ***** as measured by the Heritage Foundation and the WSJ

Between-level interaction of subjective freedom determinants, VS 1999-2004

Summary of findings

- In more affluent countries people's postmaterialism is positively associated with their subjective sense of freedom. While in the group of less affluent countries, people with stronger postmaterialist priorities tend to feel less free, other things being equal.

- From the economic freedoms under investigation, only freedom from government spending has statistically significant association with subjective freedom; and this association is positive.

- Country's prosperity is positively associated with the subjective freedom, and this relationship is statistically significant.

- The association between household income and subjective freedom is positive and statistically significant both in countries with relatively larger and smaller GDP pc, but is stronger in less affluent countries.

Questions? Comments? Suggestions?

Thank you!

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