What makes people feel free: Subjective freedom in comparative perspective

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at the 2nd LCSR Regular Workshop
on April, 25 2012 in St. Petersburg

Key research questions

What is it that makes people feel free?

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

- Do the same institutionalized 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)

- Wealth may influence well-being only through its effect on personal autonomy (Fischer & Boer 2011)

Sociology of Freedom=Oxymoron?

- Sociology developed as a "science of unfreedom" (Bauman 1988)

- Sociology is also known as "the discipline of why people do not have any choice"

"Freedom" is not in the Dictionaries of Sociology

- "Mankind are greater gainers by suffering each other to live as seems good to themselves, than by compelling each to live as seems good to the rest." John Stuart Mill

- "The only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way." John Stuart Mill

- "Agency freedom is freedom to achieve whatever the person, as a responsible agent, decides he or she should achieve." Amartya K. Sen

Classics of Sociology on Subjective Freedom

- "If freedom means the development of individuality, the conviction to unfold the core of our being with all its individual desires and feelings, then this category implies not a mere absence of relationships but rather a very specific relation to others." Georg Simmel

- "…we associate the highest measure of an empirical "feeling of freedom" with those actions which we are conscious of performing rationally … in which we pursue a clearly perceived end by "means" which are the most adequate in accordance with the extent of our knowledge." Max Weber

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

- "Man's lack of freedom is characterized only superficially by the fact that he is dependent upon external powers." (Simmel 1907)

- "…the ethic of responsibility maximizes the freedom of actors to make their own decisions." (Levine 1981 on Weber's account of freedom)

Hypotheses, TBC

- H1.People who live in more affluent countries have higher perceptions of individual freedom.

- H2.The higher level of the ethic of responsibility is, the higher are perceptions of individual freedom.

- H3.The more political rights and civil liberties are in the country, the higher are perceptions of individual freedom.

- H4.People with higher education have higher perceptions of individual freedom.

Hypotheses, continued

- H5.In more affluent countries the level of subjective freedom increases with higher postmaterialist priorities.

- H6.In less affluent countries the level of subjective freedom decreases with higher postmaterialist priorities.

- H7.People with higher income have higher perceptions of individual freedom, but this relationship is less strong in more affluent countries.

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

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.

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

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Independent Variables

	N	Mean	SD	Range
Country:				
Political rights and civil liberties	62	0.67	0.31	0-1
Minimum GDP centered	62	2.81	1.53	0-5.36
Maximum GDP centered	62	2.54	1.53	-5.36-0
Log of GDP per capita	62	0.53	0.29	0-1
Freedom from government spending	62	0.57	0.29	0-1
Individual:				
Marital status*	89,413	0.58	0.49	0/1
Age*	89,251	0.30	0.19	0-1
Age squared*	89,251	0.13	0.14	0-1
Higher education*	89,413	0.12	0.33	0/1
Household income*	79,018	0.40	0.27	0-1
Post-materialist index*	70,550	0.23	0.23	0-1
Gender*	89,383	0.52	0.50	0/1

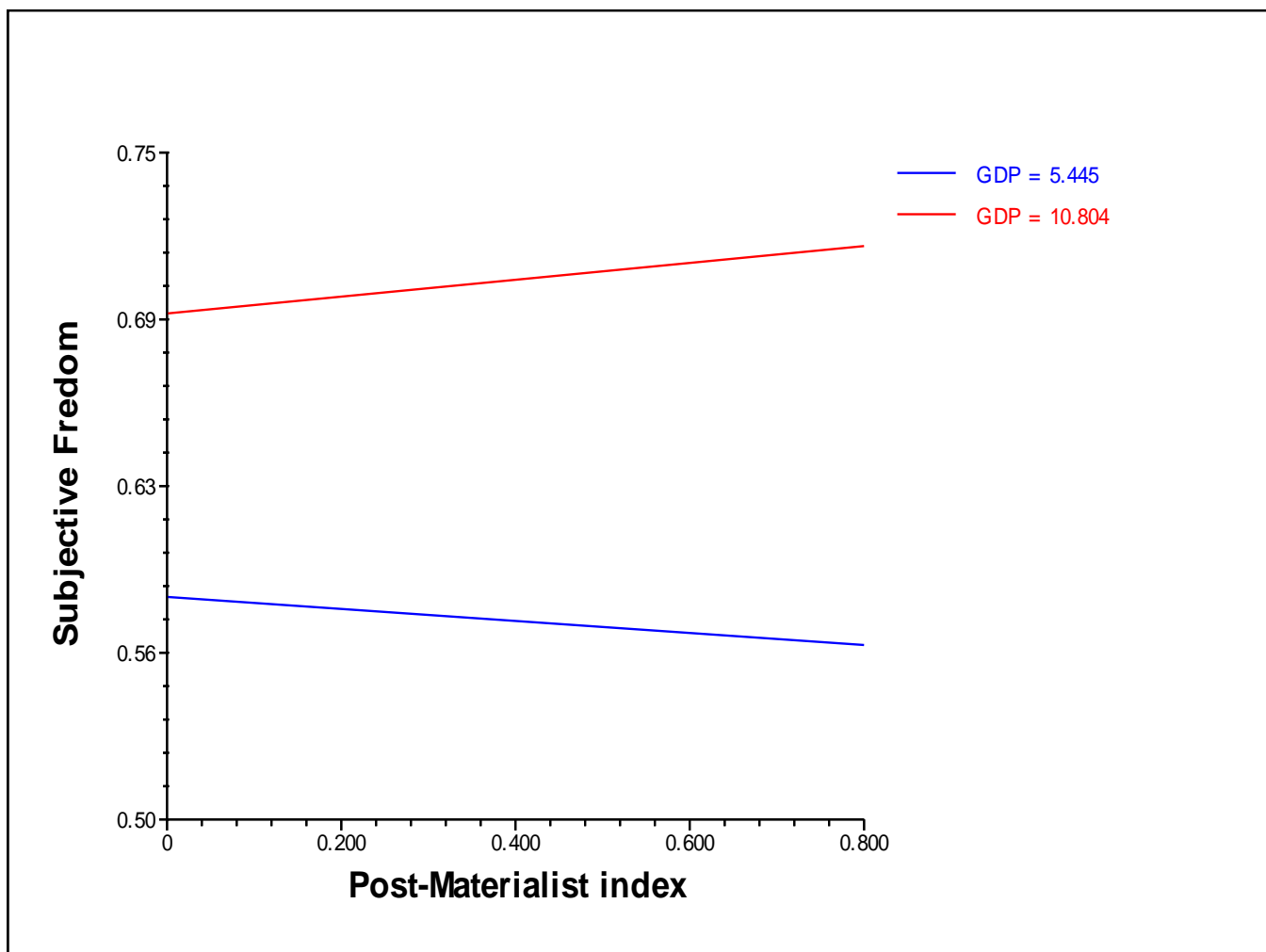* Variables mean-centered in the analysis

Table 2. Multi-Level Linear Regression: Subjective Freedom, 1999-2004 Values Survey

		Model 1 (0-1 GDP)		Model 2 (min GDP centred)		Model 3 (max GDP centred)	
Level 1 (60,740 Respondents)	R^2	3.51 %		3.51 %		3.51 %	
Level 2 (62 Countries)	R^2	21.19 %		21.19 %		21.19 %	
		b	t	b	t	b	t
Intercept		.473	12.168**	.473	12.168**	.637	18.098**
Political rights and civil liberties ***		.041	1.290	.041	1.290	.041	1.290
Log of GDP pc****		.164	4.038**	.031	4.038**	.031	4.038**
Freedom from government spending*****		.093	2.732**	.093	2.732**	.093	2.732**
Marital status (1 = Married)		.009	3.136**	.009	3.136**	.009	3.136**
Age		-.278	-8.112**	-.278	-8.112**	-.278	-8.112**
Freedom from government spending		.191	4.598**	.191	4.598**	.191	4.598**
Age squared		.172	4.031**	.172	4.031**	.172	4.031**
Higher education (1 = Higher education)		.024	5.181**	.024	5.181**	.024	5.181**
Household income		.184	7.411**	.184	7.411**	.059	4.101**
Log of GDP pc		-.126	-3.612**	-.023	-3.612**	-.023	-3.612**
Post-Materialist index		-.032	-2.020*	-.032	-2.020*	.040	3.741**
Log of GDP pc		.072	3.151*	.013	3.151*	.013	3.151**
Gender (1 = Female)		-.014	-3.685**	-.014	-3.685**	-.014	-3.685**

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

- Institutionalized ethics of individual responsibility operationalized as 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.

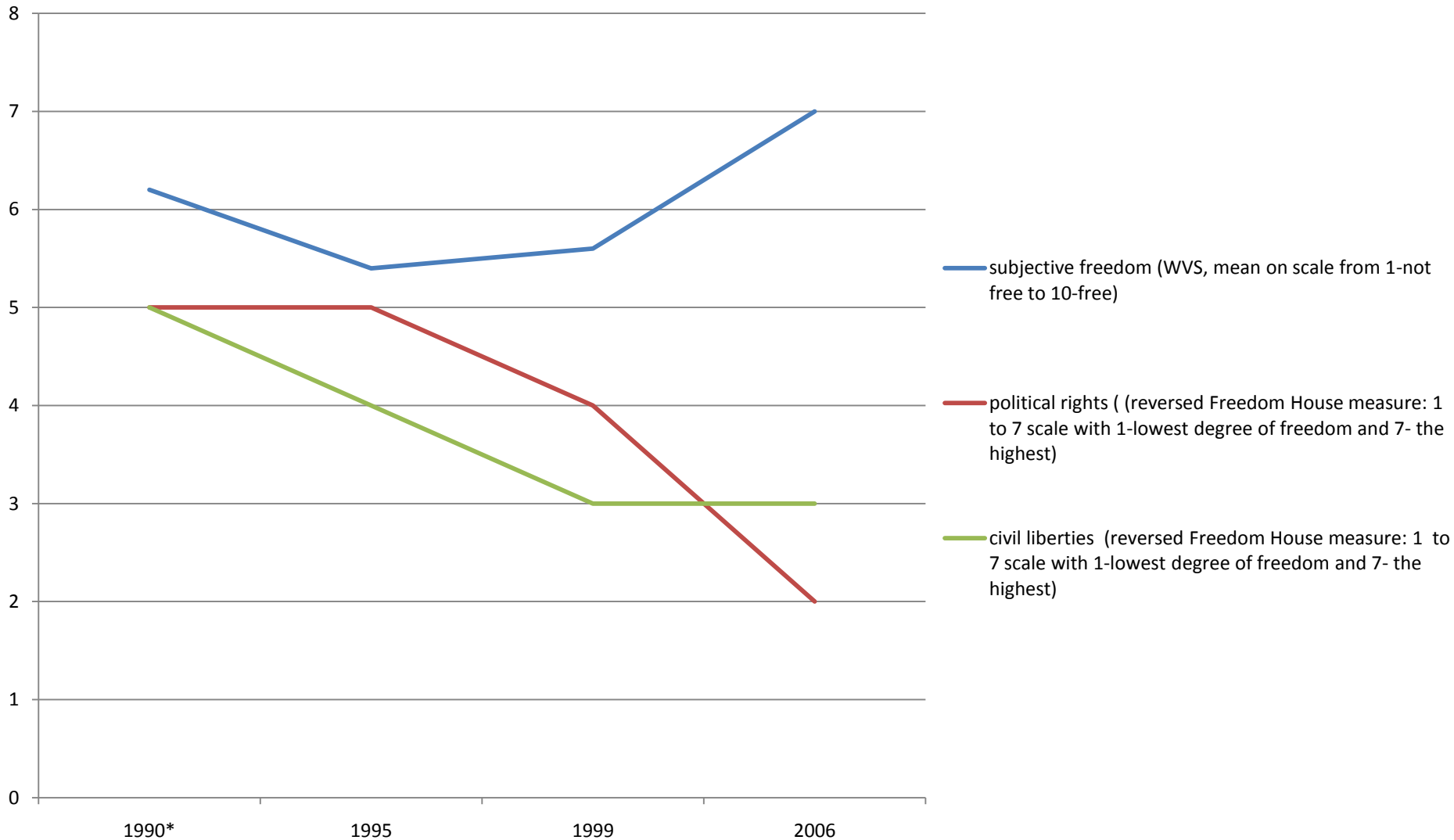- People with higher education have higher perceptions of individual freedom.

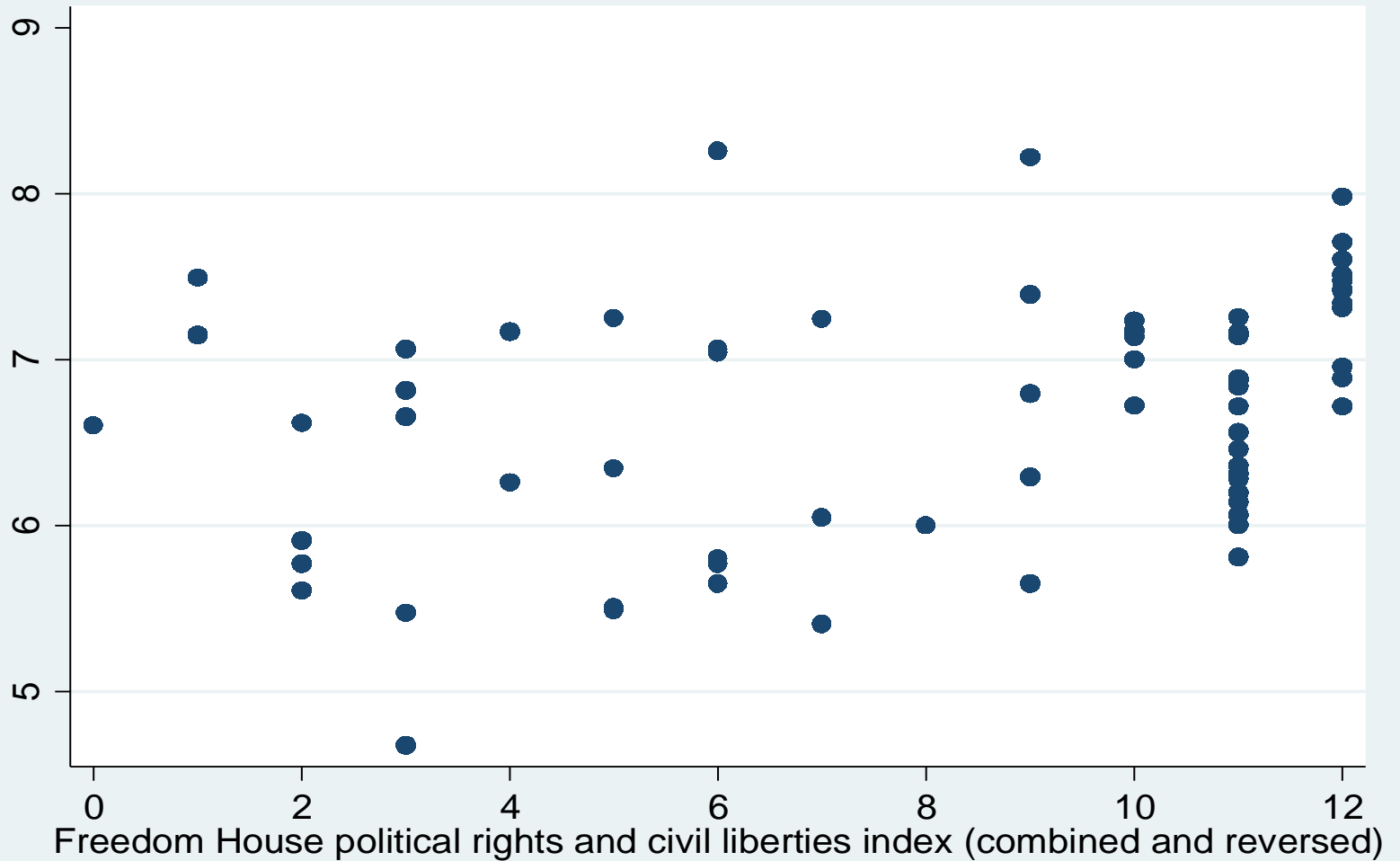# Questions? Comments? Suggestions?

Thank you for your attention!

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Freedom puzzle on Russian data

subjective freedom (WVS, mean on scale from 1-not free to 10-free)

political rights ((reversed Freedom House measure: 1 to 7 scale with 1-lowest degree of freedom and 7- the highest)

civil liberties (reversed Freedom House measure: 1 to 7 scale with 1-lowest degree of freedom and 7- the highest)

Subjective Freedom and Situational Freedom, 1999-2004 WVS and EVS

Freedom House political rights and civil liberties index (combined and reversed)

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	