

FREEDOM AND HAPPINESS IN NATIONS

A research synthesis

ABSTRACT

Freedom is highly valued, but there are limits to the amount of freedom a society can allow its members. This begs the question of how much freedom is too much. The answers to that question differ across political cultures and are typically based on ideological argumentation. In this paper we aim to provide a starting point in understanding the compatibility of freedom and happiness in nations. We take stock of the research findings on that matter gathered in the World Database of Happiness. We find that freedom and happiness tend to be positively correlated in contemporary nations. The pattern of correlation differs somewhat across cultures and aspects of freedom. We found no pattern of declining happiness returns, which suggests that freedom has not passed its maximum in the freest countries.

Keywords: *freedom; happiness; nations; synthesis; World Database of Happiness*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Freedom ranks high among political values, next to goals such national safety, economic development and justice. The term freedom is frequently used in national constitutions and international treaties and figures in the names of political parties all over the world.

Worth of freedom

This preference for freedom has been justified in two ways: by its own worth and by its consequences for other things we value. In that latter line of legitimation freedom has been linked to happiness; one of the reasons for the political pursuit of freedom is the belief that this will add to greater happiness for a greater number of citizens. The common-sense theory behind this belief is that life will be more satisfying if we can live the way we want. Scientific theories have proposed an innate need for freedom. Deci and Ryan (1991) see 'autonomy' as one of three primary psychological needs of people, alongside competence and relatedness. Likewise Welzel (2013) suggests that a preference for emancipative values are innate, but exhibit themselves differently in accordance with existential pressures. People have greater flexibility in directing their actions towards outcomes they desire after their basic needs have been met, and not before (Welzel 2013).

Limits to freedom

Still it is also widely acknowledged that there are limits to freedom; there are limits to the freedom that a society can allow to its members and there are limits to the freedom that individuals can handle. One of the reasons for social limits to freedom is in requirements for functioning of the system; our modern society requires that people pay tax and stop at traffic lights. Another reason is that the freedom of one person may go at the cost of the freedom of another; that is why it is forbidden to enter someone else's house without permission. Still another limit is in the side effects of freedom, too much freedom could create an individualistic society, where people feel isolated, anxious, and powerless (Fromm 1994). Individual limits to freedom are first of all in the ability to choose; that is why people who are deemed unable to make choices, such as children, are not allowed much freedom in their best interests. Another reason is in the 'paradox of choice'; the notion that availability of too many choices causes anxiety and stress, and reduces one's level of well-being (Schwartz 2009).

Research questions

This begs the question of how much freedom is optimal. In this paper we address that question by examining the effect of different grades of freedom in nations on the happiness of people who live there. If freedom is positively associated with happiness, it would imply that the gains from freedom exceed the costs of freedom. On the other hand, if freedom

is negatively associated with happiness, it means that the costs of freedom exceeds the gains from freedom. In that context, we seek an answer to the following questions:

1. Does greater freedom in nations go with higher happiness?
2. What kind of freedom is the most conducive for happiness?
3. Under what conditions does freedom contribute to happiness?
4. Can there be too much freedom? If so, how much freedom is too much?

Plan of this paper

Since 2000, there has been an increase in empirical research on freedom and happiness in nations, the findings of which are gathered in the ‘World Database of Happiness’.¹ In this paper we use these findings for answering the questions mentioned above. We start with a delineation of the concepts and a subsequent selection of measures. In Section 2 we consider the concept of freedom and its measurements. Next in Section 3 we discuss the concept of happiness and measurement of happiness. In Section 4, we present the available data on freedom and happiness in nations. On that basis we answer our research questions in Section 5. In Section 6 we conclude.

2.0 FREEDOM

2.1 Notions of freedom

Freedom can be defined as the *possibility to choose*. A person can be said to be free if his or her condition allows for choice, and if that choice is not inhibited by others. Since choice is always limited we deal in fact with the *degree* to which choice is possible. Most of the literature on freedom is about the factual possibility to choose, we call that ‘actual’ freedom. Next there is a research literature about the subjective stance to that phenomenon, which we call ‘attitudes to freedom’.

2.1.1 Actual freedom

The actual possibility to choose depends on: (1) the opportunity to choose, and (2) the capability to choose (Veenhoven 2000).

Opportunity to choose

The opportunity to choose is the extent to which one’s social environment enables or inhibits choice. More specifically, for the opportunity to choose to exist, there has to be an *availability of choices (options)*, and the *absence of inhibition to choose* by others.

¹ Website: <http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl>

The *availability of choice* is dependent on lifestyle alternatives that are present in society, which differs by current mode of existence. For example, simple hunter gatherer societies provide their members with a more limited assortment than highly differentiated industrial societies. Variety also depends on internal dynamics and contact with foreign cultures. The availability of choices in a society is affected by things like material affluence, division of work, and cultural variety (Veenhoven 2000). This aspect of freedom cannot be well quantified and will therefore not be considered in this paper.

When there is an availability of choices, *opportunity to choose* then depends on the absence of inhibition by others, in terms of restrictive laws or oppression from authority figures. This kind of freedom is considered in this paper. Specifically, we look at economic freedom, political freedom, and personal freedom.

Capability to choose

The opportunity to choose only translates into freedom if the opportunity is seized. Seizing an environmental opportunity requires inner capacity to choose, which involves an *awareness of alternatives*, as well as an *inclination to choose*.

An awareness of alternatives is dependent on what one knows; one can only make a choice if one is aware of the availability of choice options. The lack of awareness of available choices is akin to not having choices. What a person knows is then dependent on education, as well as the information that he or she is privy to.

Next to awareness of alternatives the capability to choose requires an inclination to act. This requires inner strengths; you may see the options, but lack the guts to choose. This proclivity to choose depends on many things, among which prevailing norms in society. In a society characterised by individualist, rather than collectivist norms, people are more likely to make choices that are consistent with their own desires, rather than conforming to group interests.

These different kinds of freedom can be illustrated using the example of a prisoner. When the door of the prison is locked, the prisoner has no *opportunity to choose* whether to flee or not. Yet suppose the guards are on leave and forgot to lock the door. In that case, there is an opportunity to choose, but that opportunity can be used only if the prisoner is *aware* of this alternative. Using the same example to describe the *inclination* to choose, prisoners who see the open door may let the opportunity pass, not having the courage to seize the opportunity, even if they would like to leave the prison. This inclination may also depend on moral conviction and reality beliefs. Choice, and making decisions, involves a degree of uncertainty and responsibility, which people may not be willing to undertake.

2.1.2 Attitudes to freedom

Next to the above variants of 'actual' freedom, there are various 'attitudes' to freedom. An 'attitude' to something is a combination of beliefs, evaluations and action tendencies. The following attitudinal phenomena figure in the research literature on freedom:

Perceived freedom

This is the degree to which one thinks to be in control of one's situation. Perceived freedom can differ from actual freedom; one may think one is free, while one is not, or have much opportunity to choose but think that one is being controlled by others. In psychology this matter is often referred to as 'control belief', or 'locus of control' (Rotter 1990).

Satisfaction with freedom

Perceptions of the degree of freedom in a nation tend to go together with evaluations of the situation. Satisfaction with freedom does not always concur with actual freedom; one can be fairly free, but want more, or be unfree and content.

Valuation of freedom

Another attitude towards freedom is how desirable freedom is deemed to be. Though freedom ranks high in the value hierarchy of most people, not everybody values freedom equally much. Next to individual differences in the appreciation of freedom within nations there are considerable differences in valuation of freedom across nations; freedom being valued higher in contemporary Western nations than in Eastern Asia (Welzel and Inglehart 2010). There is some conceptual overlap between these attitudes to freedom and the notions of 'capability to choose' discussed in Section 2.1.1. 'Perceived freedom' is close 'awareness of alternatives', though the global estimate of opportunity may differ from the awareness of particular alternatives. It is also possible that one thinks to be free, because one is unaware of restrictions, or that one thinks to be restricted while failing to see opportunities to choose.

Likewise there is overlap between 'valuation of freedom' and the 'inclination to choose'; if you despise freedom, you will be less inclined to go your own way. Yet it is also possible that you look down on freedom, but still do what you want, or that you praise freedom but conform.

An overview of these notions of freedom is presented on Figure 1. The conceptual overlap between capability to choose and attitudes to freedom is visualized by partly overlapping boxes. Note that for the opportunity to choose and capability to choose, the first condition is necessary before meeting the second, i.e. the availability of choices is necessary in determining the opportunity to choose, before the lack of inhibition affects the opportunity. Similarly, an awareness of alternatives is necessary before the inclination to choose affects the capability to choose. This has been described in full in Section 2.1.1 above.

(Figure 1 here)

2.2 Measures of freedom in nations

The answering of our research questions requires that we measure freedom in nations. Below we review the measures used for that purpose. We start with measures of 'actual' freedom and next review current measures of 'attitudes' to freedom in the nation. An overview of these measures is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Measures of freedom in nations

Concepts	Indicators
ACTUAL FREEDOM	
Opportunity to choose	
Economic freedom	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Economic Freedom of the World Index, Fraser Institute (Gwartney et al. 2015). (2) Index of Economic Freedom, Heritage Foundation (Miller and Kim 2016). (3) Openness (Wacziarg and Welch 2008). (4) Trade openness, Penn World Table 6.1 (Heston et al. 2002). (5) Delivery quality, World Governance Indicators (Kaufmann et al. 2010).
Political freedom	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Index of political rights and civil liberties, Freedom House (2016). (2) Democracy index, Polity IV. (3) Democracy stock indicator (Gerring et al. 2005) (4) Democratic quality, World Governance Indicators (Kaufmann et al. 2010). (5) Political constraints (Henisz 2000; Henisz 2002). (6) Post-communist dummy (Frijters et al. 2004; Bjørnskov et al. 2007; Bjørnskov et al. 2010; Bjørnskov 2014).
Personal freedom	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Index of freedom of marriage, religion, and travel (Humana 1992). (2) Reproductive rights, International Planned Parenthood Federation (Veenhoven 2000). (3) Public acceptance of divorce, abortion, homosexuality, prostitution, suicide, euthanasia and voluntary single parents, World Values Survey.
Capability to choose	
Awareness of alternatives	Level of education and information.
Inclination to choose	Level of individualism (as opposed to collectivism) and power distance in a society.
ATTITUDES TOWARDS FREEDOM	
Perceived freedom	Average self-rating of the freedom of choice and control over one's life, World Values Survey.
Satisfaction with freedom	Average self-rating of one's satisfaction with freedom, Gallup World Poll.
Valuation of freedom	Average rating of the level of freedom in one's society.

2.2.1 Measures of opportunity to choose

Opportunity to choose is typically measured by its reverse, that is, by presence of restrictions in a country. Limitations are easier to count than openings. Counts have been made for restrictions in three domains, the economic domain, the political domain and the private domain.

Economic freedom

According to the Fraser Institute, “economic freedom is present when individuals are permitted to choose for themselves and engage in voluntary transactions as long as they do not harm the person or property of others” (Gwartney et al. 2015: p. 1). Two indices are commonly used to measure this economic freedom; the Economic Freedom of the World Index (EFW) by the Fraser Institute (Gwartney et al. 2015), and the Index of Economic Freedom (IEF) by the Heritage Foundation (Miller and Kim 2016). These two indices are very similar in composition. Aside from the inclusion of ‘sound money’ as a component of economic freedom in the EFW, the other components of the two indices are almost identical. These components are illustrated in Table 2 below.

The ‘sound money’ component of the EFW takes into account money growth, the standard deviation of inflation, the inflation level of the most recent year, and the freedom to own foreign currency bank accounts (Gwartney et al. 2015). The rationale for sound money as a component of economic freedom is because an absence of sound money undermines gains from trade (Gwartney et al. 2015).

The EFW and the IEF are among the most comprehensive measures of economic freedom in the literature. Studies on economic freedom employ either the indices as a whole, the separate components of the indices, or both as measures of economic freedom. In cases where the indices are not directly used as measures of economic freedom, the measures employed are conceptually similar to that of the EFW and the IEF.

For instance, Tsai (2009) adopts a classification for ‘open’ and ‘closed’ economies designed by Wacziarg and Welch (2008). This classification is dependent on five characteristics: (1) average tariff rates of 40% or more, (2) non-tariff barriers covering 40% or more of trade, (3) a black-market exchange rate that is depreciated by 20% or more relative to the official exchange rate, (4) a state monopoly on major exports, and (5) a socialist economic system. If a country displays at least one of the characteristics, it is classified as closed. Evidently, this classification is reflective of one component of the EFW, that is, the freedom to trade internationally. Bjørnskov et al. (2007; 2010) also use a measure for the ‘openness’ of a country that is reflective of the freedom to trade internationally. Their measure, however, is methodologically simpler, being the sum of exports and imports as a percentage of GDP, obtained from the Penn World Table 6.1 (Heston et al. 2002).

Table 2: A comparison between Fraser Institute's Economic Freedom of the World Index (EFW) and the Heritage Foundation's Index of Economic Freedom

Economic Freedom of the World Index	Index of Economic Freedom
<p>Legal system and property rights:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Judicial independence Impartial courts Protection of property rights Military interference in rule of law and politics Integrity of the legal system Legal enforcement of contracts Regulatory restrictions on the sale of real property Reliability of police Business costs of crime. 	<p>Rule of law:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Property rights Freedom from corruption
<p>Size of government:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Government consumption Transfers and subsidies Government enterprises and investment Top marginal tax rate (top marginal income tax rate; top marginal income and payroll tax rate) 	<p>Government size:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Fiscal freedom Government spending
<p>Regulation:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Credit market regulations (ownership of banks; private sector credit; interest rate controls/negative real interest rates) Labor market regulations (hiring regulations and minimum wage; hiring and firing regulations; centralized collective bargaining; hours regulations; mandated cost of worker dismissal; conscription) Business regulations (administrative requirements; bureaucracy costs; starting a business; extra payments/bribes/favoritism; licensing restrictions; cost of tax compliance) 	<p>Regulatory efficiency:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Business freedom Labor freedom Monetary freedom
<p>Freedom to trade internationally:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Tariffs (revenue from trade taxes; mean tariff rate; standard deviation of tariff rates) Regulatory trade barriers (non-tariff trade barriers; compliance costs of importing and exporting) Black-market exchange rates Controls of the movement of capital and people (foreign ownership/investment restrictions; capital controls; freedom of foreigners to visit). 	<p>Market openness:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Trade freedom Investment freedom Financial freedom

Table 3: Measures of economic freedom

Name	Source	Description
Economic Freedom of the World Index	Fraser Institute (Gwartney et al. 2015)	Consists of five dimensions: (1) legal system and property rights, (2) size of government, (3) regulation, (4) freedom to trade internationally, and (5) sound money.
Index of Economic Freedom	Heritage Foundation (Miller and Kim 2016)	Consists of four dimensions: (1) rule of law, (2) government size, (3) regulatory efficiency, and (4) market openness.
Openness	(Wacziarg and Welch 2008)	A country is classified as 'closed' (as opposed to 'open') if it displays at least one of the following five characteristics: (1) average tariff rates of 40% or more, (2) non-tariff barriers covering 40% or more of trade, (3) a black-market exchange rate that is depreciated by 20% or more relative to the official exchange rate, (4) a state monopoly on major exports, and (5) a socialist economic system.
Trade openness	Penn World Table 6.1 ² (Heston et al. 2002)	The trade openness of a country is measured by the sum of exports and imports as a percentage of GDP.

Political freedom

Veenhoven (2000) defines political freedom as a lack of restrictions to participation in political decision making. In the literature, political freedom is usually measured by indices consisting of different dimensions of political rights, or with a dummy variable differentiating between politically free and unfree countries.

One measure of political freedom is the index of political rights and civil liberties by Freedom House (2016). The index covers the electoral process, political pluralism and participation, the functioning of the government, freedom of expression and belief, associational and organizational rights, the rule of law, and personal autonomy and individual rights.

Another measure of political freedom is the Polity IV dataset, which provides a 'regime score' for countries, ranging from a full autocracy to a full democracy (Marshall and Cole 2014). Using this dataset, Gerring et al. (2005) created a 'democracy stock' indicator as of 1995. They use the sum of the democracy scores a society has accumulated over time on the Polity IV democracy score, but depreciates scores from past years by 1% for each year that the year precedes 1995. As such, democracy scores from the more distant past are given lower weights, and the index reflects a society's accumulated experience with democracy, with a premium on recent experience (Welzel and Inglehart 2010). Welzel and Inglehart (2010) utilize the democracy stock indicator by Gerring et al. (2005), and analyses its relation to subjective well-being.

² The Penn World Table 6.1 was used by (Bjørnskov et al. 2007; Bjørnskov et al. 2010).

Cheibub et al. (2009) created a binary variable for political regimes that takes the value of one if a country's legislative and executive offices are chosen by contested and popular elections, and zero otherwise. They argue that this dichotomous variable overcome the problems of the 'overly subjective evaluations' and 'inadequate operational rules' of the Freedom House and Polity IV variables (Rode 2012). They also argue that the middle categories of the Freedom House and Polity IV variables provide little information by way of distinguishing political regimes (Rode 2012). Rode (2012) uses this variable and analyses it in relation to life satisfaction.

Table 4: Measures of political freedom

Name	Source	Description
Index of political rights and civil liberties	Freedom House (2016)	Overall consists of seven sub-components. Political rights: (1) the electoral process, (2) political pluralism and participation, (3) the functioning of the government. Civil liberties: (4) freedom of expression and belief, (5) associational and organizational rights, (6) the rule of law, and (7) personal autonomy and individual rights.
Democracy index	Polity IV	Each country is given a democracy score, ranging from -10 for a full autocracy to +10 for a full democracy.
Democracy stock indicator	Gerring, Bond, Barndt, and Moreno (2005)	The sum of the Polity IV democracy score, with a depreciation for scores from past years by 1% for each year that the year precedes 1995.
Democratic quality	World Bank (Kaufmann et al. 2010)	The simple average of two out of six dimensions of the World Governance Indicators (WGI), which are: (1) voice and accountability, and (2) political stability and absence of violence.
Political constraints	(Henisz 2000; Henisz 2002)	The index measures the degree to which a change in the preferences of one or more political actors is permitted to affect government policy by measuring the number and strength of political veto points. This initial index is also modified to take into account judiciary and sub-federal entities.
Political regime dummy	(Cheibub et al. 2009)	The dummy variable takes the value of one if a country's legislative and executive offices are chosen by contested and popular elections, and zero otherwise.

Bjørnskov et al. (2010) analyze the relationship between a variable referred to as 'political constraints', which they obtained from Henisz (2000; 2002) and subjective well-being. The political constraints variable is an index which captures constraints on the feasibility of policy change, measured by the degree to which a change in the preferences of one or more political actors is permitted to affect government policy. In sum, the index measures the number and strength of political veto points (Bjørnskov et al. 2010). This initial measure of political constraints is then modified to take into account judiciary and sub-federal entities (Bjørnskov et al. 2010). Overall, the two political constraints indices measure the ease of changing government policy in a country.

Personal freedom

Personal freedom can be measured by the presence of formal or informal restrictions in one's private life. Formal restrictions are in the form of laws, while informal restrictions are in the form of social control, as a function of the predominant norms in a society. An example of formal restrictions on personal freedom includes laws against abortion and euthanasia, an example of informal restraint is widespread disapproval of homo-sexuality in a country.

Veenhoven (2000) devised an index of restrictions to choice in private life. He used data from Humana (1992) to measure formal restrictions, including the freedom of religion, freedom of marriage, and freedom of travel. He also used data from the International Planned Parenthood Federation on reproductive rights. To measure informal restrictions, he used data from the World Values Survey, obtained from a set of questions which ask, "Please tell me for each of the following actions whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between, using this card." Responses are on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means 'never justifiable' and 10 means 'always justifiable'. The items that are related to personal freedom are: divorce, abortion, homosexuality, prostitution, suicide, and euthanasia. Veenhoven also utilized another question from the World Values Survey which asks, "If a woman wants to have a child as a single parent but she doesn't want to have a stable relationship with a man, do you approve or disapprove?" Responses are coded as 'approve', 'disapprove', and 'depends'. By using the average responses to these questions, we are able to measure the level of tolerance in a society towards these items, giving an indication of the social norm in the country.

Combined measures

There are also papers that measure freedom using a composite, taking into account political, economic, and personal freedom (Veenhoven 1999; 2000). Elliott and Hayward (2009) take a similar approach by creating an index they refer to as the 'regulation index', which combines Freedom House's index of political rights and civil liberties, and a measure of religious freedom by the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) (2006).

2.2.2 Measures of capability to choose

While opportunity to choose is measured using environmental conditions, capability to choose is typically measured using individual characteristics.

Awareness of alternatives

As previously mentioned, freedom is dependent on an awareness of alternatives; people who are not aware of the existence of alternatives cannot make an alternative choice. Awareness as such can hardly be measured and for that reason we rely on proxies.

One such proxy is 'education', assuming that educated people are more informed about what is possible in their country. At the individual level, education is typically measured by the number of years of education one has had, or the highest level of education one has attained. At the country level, education is measured by the average

number of years of education of the citizens in the country, its literacy rate, and the school-enrolment ratio.

Another proxy is the information provision in a country. This can be measured using the newspaper circulation and the number of television receivers in a country (Veenhoven 2000). This data is obtained from various population surveys, and world statistics databases such as the Human Development Report by the United Nations (2015).

Further, Welsch (2003) introduces a concept termed 'rationality', which he defines as 'the prevalence of a science-based cognitive attitude' and likens it to Veenhoven (1999; 2000) construct of access to education and information. He uses the number of scientists and engineers per capita in order to measure rationality. This data is obtained from the Environmental Sustainability Index by the Yale Centre for Environmental Law and Policy (YCELP) and the Centre for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN) (2001).

Inclination to choose

Veenhoven (2000) suggests that the likelihood of people acting on existing opportunities is partly dependent on their values and beliefs. An individualistic (as opposed to collectivistic) value system, which involves greater respect for individual preference (as opposed to the collective preference of society) and an individualist identity is more conducive for individual freedom.

A commonly used measure of individualist values was developed by Hofstede (2001) on the basis of a study on work attitudes among IBM employees worldwide. In individualistic societies an 'I mentality' prevails as opposed to collectivistic societies where 'We mentality' dominates. (Hofstede and Bond 1988). A related value dimension is power distance, which reflects the degree of hierarchical order in a society. A society with a large degree of power distance places more emphasis on hierarchy (as opposed to equality), and thus less respect is given for individual preference, especially if the individual is not in a position of authority. Hofstede identified a very high correlation between power distance and collectivism, which is an indication that the two constructs are related.

Schwartz (1994) also developed measures of cultural value orientations in nations based on his survey of school teachers. One of the orientations is autonomy-conservatism³, which is conceptually similar to Hofstede's (2001) individualism construct. However, Schwartz makes a distinction between two types of autonomy: intellectual autonomy and affective autonomy. Intellectual autonomy reflects independence of ideas and intellectual independence, while affective autonomy reflects the degree to which individuals pursue experiences which give rise to positive affect.

Similar cultural dimensions were identified using data from the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) study, conducted by House et al. (2004). Their data is collected from about 17,300 middle managers from 951 organizations in the food processing, financial services, and telecommunications services industries.

Other than that, Harry Triandis, a cross-cultural psychology scholar and an expert in the area of individualism and collectivism (Triandis 1990), estimated of the degree of individualism in 55 nations (Diener et al. 1995). His rating

³ In later publications, Schwartz refers to this value orientation as autonomy-embeddedness (Schwartz 2006).

is on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the most collectivistic and 10 being the most individualistic.

2.3 Measures of attitudes to freedom

Attitudes to freedom are a common topic in cross-national surveys. The following questions have been used.

Perceived freedom

Perceived freedom refers to the extent to which people feel they have freedom in their lives. In the World Values Survey this is measured with the questions, “Some people feel they have 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 ‘no choice at all’ and 10 means ‘a great deal of choice’ to indicate how much freedom of choice and control you feel you have over the way your life turns out.”⁴

Satisfaction with freedom

Satisfaction with freedom is measured by a question in the Gallup World Poll that asks, “Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your freedom to choose what you do with your life?” Respondents are given a binary choice response, either ‘yes’ or ‘no’.

Valuation of freedom

The indicators of individualist values discussed under ‘Inclination to choose’ can also be used as a proxy for valuation of freedom.

3.0 HAPPINESS

3.1 Concept of happiness

The word ‘happiness’ has been used for different meanings; sometimes for denoting the objective quality of life and sometimes for the subjective appreciation of it. In present day Happiness Economics, the word is used in the latter sense and defined as the ‘subjective enjoyment of one’s life as a whole, that is, as ‘life satisfaction’. This concept is delineated in more detail in (Veenhoven 1984: Ch. 2).

3.2 Measures of happiness

⁴ Verme (2009) provides a comprehensive explanation of this construct, including answering the questions of whether perceived freedom and life satisfaction are proxies (no) and whether perceived freedom is a variable that relates only to freedom of choice, or only to locus of control, or both (both).

the world, the share of respondents who tick the ‘don’t know’ option is typically less than 1% (Veenhoven 2010).

A related objection is that happiness is a unique experience that cannot be communicated on an equivalent scale. Yet from an evolutionary point of view, it is unlikely that we differ very much. As in the case of pain, there will be a common human spectrum of experience. If happiness were a wholly idiosyncratic phenomenon, survey research would not find the correlations it does find.

Last, there is methodological reservation about possible cultural-bias in the measurement of happiness, due to problems with translation of keywords and cultural variation in response tendencies. Though there is evidence for some of these distortions the net effects seems to be small. Veenhoven (2012) estimates that only some 5% of the observed cross-national differences in happiness is due to cultural measurement bias.

3.3 Collection of acceptable measures

Though happiness appears to be well measurable, not all measures ever used measure the concept equally well. Some questionnaires that claim to measure happiness actually tap slightly different things, for example the often used General Wellbeing Questionnaire measures mental health and not happiness. This appears from close reading of the questions used. All measures that fit the concept of happiness as defined above are gathered in the collection of Happiness Measures, which is part of the World Database of Happiness (Veenhoven 2016)

4.0 FREEDOM AND HAPPINESS IN NATIONS

Based on our definitions of freedom and happiness in Sections 2 and 3, we set out to answer our three research questions by utilizing existing research findings on the association between the phenomena at the macro level of nations. These findings are presented in Table 5.

4.1 Data source

We draw on research findings gathered in the World Database of Happiness (Veenhoven 2016). This is an archive of research findings on subjective enjoyment of one’s life as a whole. Findings are described on electronic ‘findings pages’, using a standard format and terminology. An example of such a page is presented in Figure 2 in the Appendix.

These findings are sorted by subject. In this review, we consider the observed correlations between freedom and happiness in nations, gathered in subject section [N15 Freedom in nations](#) of the collection Correlational Findings of the World Database of Happiness. We assessed that collection January 2016. At that time the collection involved 101 findings on this subject.

4.2 Presentation of the findings

This review follows a format introduced by (Veenhoven 2015). Instead of providing lengthy discussions of the research findings in the subject area, we take advantage of the online availability of standardized description in the World Database of Happiness, by providing links to the findings pages.

All the relationships between freedom and happiness are reported in this review, irrespective of their magnitude. Positive associations are indicated with a plus sign (+), while negative associations are indicated with a minus sign (-). Statistically significant associations at the 5% level are indicated by bolded plus and minus signs (+ and - respectively). Several signs in a string, such as -/+/+ indicate different findings obtained in the same study, typically due to variations in analysis. These signs are presented in the tables 5, 6 and 7. The signs involve links to the World Database of Happiness. Using 'Control+Click' brings the reader to 'findings pages' where the research findings are described in detail.

This format allows us to make statements about main trends in the data without burdening the reader with all the detail, while also making our analysis controllable. Among other advantages of this format is the possibility of making our review comprehensive, containing all known research findings, instead of being selective. Further, our review enables the interested reader to easily access more complete descriptions of the findings on the World Database of Happiness. Another advantage of using the World Database of Happiness as the source for this review is its conceptual specificity. As previously mentioned, the Database limits its scope to studies that define happiness as the subjective enjoyment of life as a whole, thus making our review more precise. This format also enables us to easily identify areas in which there is still room for research, based on the lack of research findings.

4.3 Results

To reiterate, by synthesizing research findings from past studies documented in the World Database of Happiness, we first consider whether freedom is associated with greater happiness. We then try to identify whether certain types of freedom are more important than others, and subsequently, the type of freedom that is most conducive for happiness. We also try to determine the conditions under which freedom contributes to happiness. Finally, we attempt to identify whether there is diminishing utility of freedom in the countries that have high levels of freedom, indicating that there is too much freedom.

Is freedom associated with greater happiness?

Table 5 shows that there is evidence in the research literature of a positive association between freedom and happiness. This is especially true if we only consider findings that are statistically significant at the 5% level. When there exists

statistically significant relationship between each type of freedom and happiness, the relationship is a lot more likely to be positive rather than negative. This positive relationship is also illustrated in Figure 3.⁵

(Figure 3 here)

Which kinds of freedom are most conducive to happiness?

Table 5 also provides us with the opportunity to identify exactly which types of freedom are more conducive for happiness than others. We find that of all the types of freedom, economic freedom is the most consistent in establishing a significant positive relationship with freedom. This is also true, for the most part, for political freedom.

In general, the other types of freedom that have been studied in the literature, have also been found to have positive relationships with happiness, as described in Section 4.3.1 above. However, the low number of studies that explored these relationships presses for caution. There is need for more research in this area.

Under what conditions does freedom contribute to happiness?

In Table 6, we tabulate the findings on the relationship between freedom and happiness by the wealth of nations. It should be noted that the distinction between wealthy and poor nations is arbitrary, dependent on the discretion of the author(s) of each publication.⁶

Overall, we find that the positive relationship between economic freedom and happiness is more evident for poor nations relative to wealthy nations. This may indicate that economic freedom only substantially improves subjective well-being for developing nations; developed nations, which are usually characterized by high levels of economic freedom, have little to benefit from subsequent improvements. For political freedom, and the lack of inhibition in general, there is evidence of a positive relationship between freedom and happiness in wealthy nations, which is not fully reflected in poor nations. However, it should be noted that only a limited number of studies has separate poor and wealthy nations in their analyses, restraining our ability to ascertain stylized facts on the moderating effect of wealth on the association between freedom and happiness.

⁵ The happiness measure used is the average response to the Cantril ladder question, which asks respondents to rate their quality of life on a scale of 0 to 10, with higher values meaning higher levels of happiness. It is the average response for the years 2013-2015, obtained from the World Happiness Report 2016 (Helliwell et al. 2016). The measure of economic freedom is on a scale from 1 to 10, where higher values indicate higher levels of economic freedom, obtained from the Economic Freedom of the World Report 2015 (Gwartney et al. 2015). The measure of perceived freedom is on a scale of 1 to 10, with higher values meaning higher levels of perceived freedom. It is obtained from the sixth wave of the World Values Survey, conducted in the years 2012-2014, and is described in detail in Section 2.3 above.

⁶ This distinction is stated in the page that lists the research findings on the World Database of Happiness, accessible from the table by Control+Click on the symbols representing each association.

Aside from the wealth of nations, in his macro study of 79 countries, Gehring (2013) analyses the relationship between economic freedom and happiness for different socio-economic groups. Specifically, he conducts separate analyses for people who are younger and people who are older than the median age in their respective countries, men and women, people from low and high social classes, as well as people with left and right political orientations. He finds that these socio-economic categories do not seem to affect the significant positive relationship between economic freedom and happiness found in the overall sample, yielding coefficients and standards errors that are highly similar.⁷ However, Elliott and Hayward (2009), who find that an index of civil, religious, and political freedom is negatively associated with happiness, also find that an increase in religiosity, based on religious attendance and declaration of oneself as a religious person, increases the negative effect of freedom on happiness.

Table 5: Associations between freedom and happiness in nations

Type of freedom	Zero-order	Partial
ACTUAL FREEDOM		
Opportunity to choose		
Economic freedom	+/+ + + + +	+/+ - + + +/+ +/+ + +
Political freedom	-/+/+ + + - + + +	-/+/+ + - +/+ +/+ + -/+/+ -/+/+ +
Personal freedom	-/+/+ +	-/+
Combined measurements	+/+ -/+/+	+ -/+
Capability to choose		
Awareness of alternatives	-/+/+ + + + + -/+/+ +	-/+ + -/+/+
Inclination to choose	- - -/+/+ - - + + + + +/+	+ + +
Combined measurements (capability to choose)	-/+/+	-/+
Combined measurements (opportunity + capability to choose)	+/+	+
ATTITUDES TOWARDS FREEDOM		
Perceived freedom	+	
Satisfaction with freedom		+/+
Valuation of freedom		

⁷ Findings in the World Database of Happiness: http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/hap_cor/desc_cor.php?ssid=24018

Note: Positive associations are indicated with a plus sign (+), while negative associations are indicated with a minus sign (-). Statistically significant associations at the 5% level are indicated by bolded plus and minus signs. Several signs in a string, such as -/+/* indicate different findings from the same publication.

Table 6: Associations between freedom and happiness by wealth of nations

Type of freedom	Poor nations	Wealthy nations
ACTUAL FREEDOM		
Opportunity to choose		
Economic freedom	+/* + +	- + + +
Political freedom	+ +	+ + + +
Personal freedom	-	+
Combined measurements (lack of inhibition)	- +	+ +
Capability to choose		
Awareness of alternatives	+ -	+ +
Inclination to choose	- +	+ +
Combined measurements (capability to choose)	+	+
Combined measurements (opportunity + capability to choose)	+	+
Combined measurements		
ATTITUDES TOWARDS FREEDOM		
Perceived freedom		
Satisfaction with freedom		
Valuation of freedom		

Note: Positive associations are indicated with a plus sign (+), while negative associations are indicated with a minus sign (-). Statistically significant associations at the 5% level are indicated by bolded plus and minus signs. Several signs in a string, such as -/+/* indicate different findings from the same publication.

Is there too much freedom?

In order to determine whether there exist diminishing returns to freedom, we look at the moderating effect of freedom on the relationship between freedom and happiness. If freedom is positively associated with happiness at high levels of freedom, it would imply that there are no diminishing returns to freedom. The relationships between the different types of freedom and happiness, categorized by the existing level of freedom in the country is illustrated in Table 7.

In his publications, Veenhoven (1999; 2000) conducted analyses on the relationship between freedom and happiness for countries with different levels of opportunity and capability to choose. The level of opportunity to choose is based on an index of political, economic freedom, and personal freedom (as described in this paper), while capability to choose is measured by a factor score composed of education and media attendance (Veenhoven 1999).

Table 7: Associations between freedom and happiness by the level of freedom in the country

Type of freedom	Low freedom	High freedom
ACTUAL FREEDOM		
Opportunity to choose		
Economic freedom	+ +	+ +
Political freedom	- +	+ +
Personal freedom	-	+/+
Combined measurements (lack of inhibition)	- +	+ +/+
Capability to choose		
Awareness of alternatives		
Inclination to choose	-	+
Combined measurements (capability to choose)	-	+/+
ATTITUDES TOWARDS FREEDOM		
Perceived freedom		
Satisfaction with freedom	+	+
Valuation of freedom		

Note: Positive associations are indicated with a plus sign (+), while negative associations are indicated with a minus sign (-). Statistically significant associations at the 5% level are indicated by bolded plus and minus signs. Several signs in a string, such as -/+/+ indicate different findings from the same publication.

Table 7 shows that at low levels of freedom, the relationship between freedom and happiness is mixed; some measures are negatively associated with happiness, while other measures have positive associations. However, only some of the positive associations are statistically significant. The negative associations, and two of the positive associations are not statistically significant. On the other hand, at high levels of freedom, there is evidence of a positive relationship between freedom and happiness. In the relevant studies, almost every type of freedom has been found to have a significant positive association with happiness at high levels of freedom, with the exception of the inclination to choose, which is also found to have a positive association with happiness, although the effect is not significant.

Overall, these findings show that even among the countries with the highest levels of freedom, the level of freedom is still not too high, as freedom still has a positive association with happiness. This indicates that , the freest countries are not (yet) too free from a happiness perspective. This point is further illustrated in Figure 3, where the scatterplots between economic freedom and perceived freedom with happiness reflect upward trends.

5.0 DISCUSSION

In this study, we seek to understand the relationship between freedom and happiness in nations, mainly by utilizing *existing* findings on this subject, recorded on the World Database of Happiness. Given the nature of our methodology, we are limited by the approaches and measures that have been used by other researchers. Nevertheless, this paper is a good starting point in understanding the relationship between freedom and happiness across countries, and provides the reader with insight on existing studies on the subject matter. It also highlights the potential of the World Database of Happiness in advancing research. While these results provide much insight on the relationship between freedom and happiness in nations, they also raise a few important questions, especially about the methodological rigor of the studies included in this synthesis.

Reversed causality?

The first question is to what extent the positive relationship between freedom and happiness is driven by an effect of happiness on freedom, that is, is by reverse causality. In the case of actual freedom, the possibility of reverse causality is not self-evident, but still possible. Happy electorates can be more open for freedom. In their model of human development, Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel of the World Values Survey argue that as economies become more affluent and existential pressures recede, people are likely to desire higher levels of self-expression and emancipation, and will therefore demand for institutional reforms parallel to these desires (Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Welzel 2013). In the case of attitudes towards freedom, reverse causality is also possible. People who are happier may have a generally positive outlook, which may be reflected by higher levels of perceived freedom and satisfaction with freedom.

Spurious correlation?

A second question is to what extent the observed correlations between freedom and happiness in nations are driven by effect of other variables on both, such as economic prosperity which adds both to happiness and freedom. Several of the studies in our analysis have dealt with that problem using regression analysis with various control variables, (.....). Such analyses typically reduce the effect size, but still leave a positive correlation. Whatever the results, this approach has important limitations and is for that reason not pursued in this paper. One limitation is that one cannot control all possible intervening variables, both because of data shortage and because of the limited number of cases in this nation level analysis. A second limitation is that this medicine is typically worse than the

Commented [RV1]: Mention some

disease when applied on highly interrelated variables, such as in this case of country characteristics. For instance, control for economic prosperity wipes away probable indirect effects of freedom on happiness through wealth. The available cross-sectional data do not allow a good answer to this question. Analysis of long-term trends that become available in the future may shed more light on this issue

Why not yet too much freedom?

As noted in the introduction there are claims that freedom has passed its maximum in developed societies. Yet we did not find any evidence for that view. Why not? One possibility is that in the freest nations, the capability to choose has also increased in tandem. There is evidence that people have become more educated, and cultures have also become more individualistic (Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Welzel 2013), giving them the ability to cope with increasing freedom. As a result, the high levels of freedom have not adversely affected people's subjective well-being.

Research agenda

Next, given the available research, what do we not yet know about the relationship between freedom and happiness in nations? One of the advantages of the technique that we have used in this research synthesis is that we can easily identify the current gaps in the literature based on the empty sections in Table 5. Table 5 shows that there is an obvious gap in research on the relationship between attitudes towards freedom and happiness, with no current research available on the relationship between the valuation of freedom and happiness. Further, we also find that there is limited empirical evidence on the relationship between personal freedom and happiness, as well as the relationship between combined measurements of freedom and happiness. These gaps provide avenues for further research.

Policy implications

Finally, what do our findings mean for policy? Does the positive relationship between freedom and happiness imply that governments should seek to increase freedom? Aside from considering issues of causality, it should also be noted that the difference in the effect on happiness of economic and political freedom for poor and wealthy nations may imply that there is a sequence, from an economic development perspective, in which freedom is valued. This also relates to the aforementioned notion that there is no evidence of diminishing utility to freedom because in the freest nations, it is likely that capability to choose has increased in parallel to freedom. Therefore, in determining whether freedom should be increased in order to increase subjective well-being, governments should consider the readiness of their nations, from socioeconomic and cultural perspectives in order to be able to gain from the increase.

Commented [RV2]: This is like saying "research has shown that smoking kills, but governments should not discourage smoking if people want to".
Better leave out

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

We find that the relationship between freedom and happiness in nations is predominantly positive. We find some evidence that poor nations benefit more from an increase in economic freedom, compared to wealthy nations. The

positive relationship between freedom and happiness appear to persist even in nations with high levels of existing freedom, indicating freedom has not reached its maximum, from a happiness perspective.

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List of Figures

Figure 1: Notions of freedom

Figure 2 (in Appendix): Example of a findings page

Figure 3: Relationship between freedom and happiness