

Authoritarianism and Its Impact on Well-Being

Europe

Abstract

In light of the global increase of authoritarian regimes and the human rights abuses they commit, we present 2 studies on how population-wide subjective well-being can be impacted by international organisations and the authoritarian manipulation of well-being research. In Study 1, based on representative data from the European Values Survey and the World Values Survey, we found that the subjective well-being of European countries showed sustainable improvements after joining the European Union, with no evidence of hedonic treadmill ($N = 120,865$). In Study 3, we describe the ways in which authoritarian regimes use well-being research, which grant them legitimacy and have allowed them to cause actual harm to vulnerable ethnic minorities. The talk will end with a reflection on the challenges and opportunities in the ethical use of subjective well-being in policymaking and recommendations to help prevent the abuse of well-being research.

Methods

Data Source:

Data come from the Integrated Values Survey 1981-2022, which merges the European Values Survey Trend File 1981-2017 (EVS, 2022) with the World Values Survey Trend File 1981-2022 (Haerpfer et al., 2022). For both surveys, data are collected from people over the age of 18 during face-to-face interviews with a structured questionnaire, though in some cases data may be collected over the phone or with those who are as young as 15. Data for each country are not collected yearly, but instead in waves with the following year ranges: 1981-1984, 1989-1993, 1994-1998, 1999-2004, 2005-2009, 2008-2010, 2010-2014, and 2017-2022. The European Values Survey and the World Values Survey have both incorporated an increasing number of countries with each wave, such that data collection has started at different years for each country. Each country-year typically has data from at least 1,000 respondents, though in rare cases there may be as few as 500 respondents. All data from the surveys are de-identified, and so our preregistered secondary data analysis did not require ethics approval from the University of Toronto, where the present study was completed.

Life Satisfaction survey question:

All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days? Please use this card to help with your answer. [Dissatisfied (1) - (10) Satisfied]

Countries included in study:

Non-Eastern Bloc countries:

- Austria
- Finland
- Malta
- Spain
- Sweden

Eastern Bloc countries:

- Bulgaria
- Croatia
- Czechia
- Estonia
- Hungary
- Latvia
- Lithuania
- Poland
- Romania
- Slovakia

- Slovenia

Analysis

Each multilevel interrupted time series analysis included three independent variables: an intervention variable, a linear pre- and post-intervention time trend variable, and a linear post-intervention time trend variable. Each model also included three control variables: the gender, age, and marital status of respondents. Additionally, country was included as a random intercept, with the linear post-intervention time trend variable included as a random slope. This random slope was selected due to it resulting in a lower Akaike information criterion when compared against models that either did not include a random slope or included the linear pre- and post-intervention time trend as a random slope. Each model was fitted with sampling weights (variable S017 in the Integrated Values Survey). Prior to fitting each model, the dependent variable was standardised (scaled and centred) as was the moderator variable (in the case of confidence in the European Union, national pride, and subjective perceptions of freedom).

Exploratory follow-up analyses were performed using joint hypothesis tests. To examine whether the long-term effect of joining the European Union was positive, we tested whether the linear combination of the linear pre- and post-intervention time trend coefficient and the linear post-intervention time trend coefficient is greater than 0. This linear combination was tested as the linear pre- and post-intervention time trend coefficient estimate is interpreted as the pre-intervention trend, and the linear post-intervention time trend coefficient estimate is interpreted as the difference between pre- and post-intervention trends. Consequently, their combination is interpreted as the linear post-intervention time trend coefficient.

To examine whether the short-term effect of joining the European Union was positive for each tested group, we specified the intervention coefficient as having a value of 1 and the interaction between the moderator and the intervention coefficient as 1 for analyses involving country alignment. We then tested whether the linear combination of these two coefficients was greater than 0 for each group. To examine whether any groups declined to a baseline after 10 years of being in the European Union, we specified the intervention coefficient as having a value of 1, the linear pre- and post-intervention time trend and the linear post-intervention time trend coefficients as having a value of 10, and the interaction between the moderator coefficient (in the case of country alignment this would be 1) and the respective independent variable coefficients (1 for the intervention variable and 10 for each of the two linear time trend variables). We then tested whether the linear combination of these six coefficients was greater than 0 for each group.

The analyses of population well-being changes before and after countries join the European Union (life satisfaction $N = 120,865$; happiness $N = 119,455$) includes 16 countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden), and the analyses of subjective well-being changes before and after 10 countries joined the European Union in 2004 (life satisfaction $N = 46,556$; happiness $N = 45,102$) includes 8 countries (Finland, France, Sweden, Italy, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Spain, and Germany).

For our moderator analysis comparing non-Eastern Bloc countries with Eastern Bloc countries, we categorised countries based on whether they were a member of the Eastern Bloc during the Cold War. Former Eastern Bloc countries are those countries that were either part of the Soviet Union or within its sphere of influence during the Cold War, while non-Eastern Bloc countries are those that were either aligned with the West during the Cold War or were neutral (0 = former Eastern Bloc; 1 = non-Eastern Bloc). Former Eastern Bloc countries include Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Slovenia, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Romania, and Croatia. Non-Eastern Bloc countries include Spain, Austria, Finland, Sweden, and Malta.

Detailed Results

Main effect

- Short term of after joining the European Union:
 - $\beta = 0.247$, $SE = 0.011$, $p < 0.001$
- Difference between pre- and post-event slope:
 - $\beta = 0.018$, $SE = 0.001$, $p < 0.001$

Country Alignment Moderator

- Short term effect of joining the European Union:
 - Non-Eastern Bloc: $\beta = 0.247$, $SE = 0.011$, $p = 0.318$

- Eastern Bloc: $\beta = 0.321$, $SE = 0.014$, $p < 0.001$
- Sustained effect after 10 years:
 - Non-Eastern Bloc: $\beta = 0.009$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = 0.418$
 - Eastern Bloc: $\beta = 0.524$, $SE = 0.027$, $p < 0.001$

Table 5

Descriptive statistics for life satisfaction by country-year

Country	Year	EU Join Year	LS (Mean)	LS (SD)	Pre- and Post-EU Mean LS (Country)	Pre- and Post-EU Mean LS (Overall)	Former Eastern Bloc Country
Austria	1990	1995	6.8	1.9	6.8	5.26	No
Austria	1999	1995	7.02	1.91	6.81	6.2	No
Austria	2008	1995	6.55	2.13	6.81	6.2	No
Austria	2018	1995	6.87	1.81	6.81	6.2	No
Bulgaria	1991	2007	4.04	2.29	4.06	5.26	Yes
Bulgaria	1997	2007	3.66	2.4	4.06	5.26	Yes
Bulgaria	1999	2007	4.34	2.69	4.06	5.26	Yes
Bulgaria	2006	2007	4.22	2.28	4.06	5.26	Yes
Bulgaria	2008	2007	4.84	2.73	5.03	6.2	Yes
Bulgaria	2017	2007	5.21	2.56	5.03	6.2	Yes
Croatia	1996	2013	5.18	2.14	5.55	5.26	Yes
Croatia	1999	2013	5.44	2.32	5.55	5.26	Yes
Croatia	2008	2013	6.03	2.41	5.55	5.26	Yes
Croatia	2017	2013	6.46	2.17	6.46	6.2	Yes
Czechia	1991	2004	5.69	2.16	5.72	5.26	Yes
Czechia	1998	2004	5.4	2.05	5.72	5.26	Yes
Czechia	1999	2004	6.06	1.95	5.72	5.26	Yes
Czechia	2008	2004	6.22	2.1	6.26	6.2	Yes
Czechia	2017	2004	6.52	1.96	6.26	6.2	Yes
Czechia	2022	2004	6.03	1.87	6.26	6.2	Yes
Estonia	1990	2004	5	2.13	4.63	5.26	Yes
Estonia	1996	2004	4	2.27	4.63	5.26	Yes
Estonia	1999	2004	4.89	2.19	4.63	5.26	Yes
Estonia	2008	2004	5.68	2.15	5.72	6.2	Yes
Estonia	2011	2004	5.25	2.07	5.72	6.2	Yes
Estonia	2018	2004	6.23	1.89	5.72	6.2	Yes
Finland	1990	1995	6.68	1.88	6.68	5.26	No
Finland	1996	1995	6.78	1.55	6.83	6.2	No
Finland	2000	1995	6.89	1.66	6.83	6.2	No
Finland	2005	1995	6.84	1.75	6.83	6.2	No
Finland	2009	1995	6.72	1.78	6.83	6.2	No
Finland	2017	1995	6.91	1.65	6.83	6.2	No
Hungary	1991	2004	5.03	2.45	4.86	5.26	Yes
Hungary	1998	2004	4.86	2.28	4.86	5.26	Yes
Hungary	1999	2004	4.69	2.45	4.86	5.26	Yes
Hungary	2008	2004	5.29	2.3	5.45	6.2	Yes
Hungary	2009	2004	4.91	2.14	5.45	6.2	Yes
Hungary	2018	2004	6.15	2.13	5.45	6.2	Yes

Latvia	1990	2004	4.7	2.44	4.29	5.26	Yes
Latvia	1996	2004	3.9	2.22	4.29	5.26	Yes
Latvia	1999	2004	4.27	2.39	4.29	5.26	Yes
Latvia	2008	2004	5.36	2.1	5.64	6.2	Yes
Latvia	2021	2004	5.91	1.98	5.64	6.2	Yes
Lithuania	1990	2004	5.01	2.35	4.36	5.26	Yes
Lithuania	1997	2004	3.99	2.62	4.36	5.26	Yes
Lithuania	1999	2004	4.09	2.63	4.36	5.26	Yes
Lithuania	2008	2004	5.45	2.25	5.61	6.2	Yes
Lithuania	2018	2004	5.76	2.05	5.61	6.2	Yes
Malta	1983	2004	6.96	1.89	7.15	5.26	No
Malta	1991	2004	7.28	1.98	7.15	5.26	No
Malta	1999	2004	7.21	1.62	7.15	5.26	No
Malta	2008	2004	6.91	2	6.91	6.2	No
Poland	1989	2004	5.65	2.35	5.49	5.26	Yes
Poland	1990	2004	5.53	2.18	5.49	5.26	Yes
Poland	1997	2004	5.42	2.42	5.49	5.26	Yes
Poland	1999	2004	5.37	2.48	5.49	5.26	Yes
Poland	2005	2004	6.02	2.08	6.22	6.2	Yes
Poland	2008	2004	6.21	2.02	6.22	6.2	Yes
Poland	2012	2004	6.09	1.97	6.22	6.2	Yes
Poland	2017	2004	6.56	1.96	6.22	6.2	Yes
Romania	1993	2007	4.88	2.33	4.43	5.26	Yes
Romania	1998	2007	3.86	2.48	4.43	5.26	Yes
Romania	1999	2007	4.23	2.77	4.43	5.26	Yes
Romania	2005	2007	4.76	2.38	4.43	5.26	Yes
Romania	2008	2007	5.79	2.52	5.95	6.2	Yes
Romania	2012	2007	5.7	2.39	5.95	6.2	Yes
Romania	2018	2007	6.36	2.25	5.95	6.2	Yes
Slovakia	1990	2004	5.16	2.17	5.27	5.26	Yes
Slovakia	1991	2004	5.81	2.48	5.27	5.26	Yes
Slovakia	1998	2004	5.07	2.24	5.27	5.26	Yes
Slovakia	1999	2004	5.03	2.22	5.27	5.26	Yes
Slovakia	2008	2004	6.27	2.06	6.14	6.2	Yes
Slovakia	2017	2004	6.31	1.89	6.14	6.2	Yes
Slovakia	2022	2004	5.83	1.95	6.14	6.2	Yes
Slovenia	1992	2004	5.29	2.21	5.67	5.26	Yes
Slovenia	1995	2004	5.47	2.13	5.67	5.26	Yes
Slovenia	1999	2004	6.24	2.15	5.67	5.26	Yes
Slovenia	2005	2004	6.24	1.95	6.45	6.2	Yes
Slovenia	2008	2004	6.54	2.09	6.45	6.2	Yes
Slovenia	2011	2004	6.35	1.95	6.45	6.2	Yes
Slovenia	2017	2004	6.68	1.69	6.45	6.2	Yes
Spain	1981	1986	5.6	2	5.6	5.26	No
Spain	1990	1986	6.14	1.93	6.1	6.2	No
Spain	1995	1986	5.61	1.97	6.1	6.2	No
Spain	1999	1986	6.09	2.01	6.1	6.2	No
Spain	2000	1986	6	1.81	6.1	6.2	No

Spain	2007	1986	6.32	1.5	6.1	6.2	No
Spain	2008	1986	6.32	1.79	6.1	6.2	No
Spain	2011	1986	5.79	1.75	6.1	6.2	No
Spain	2017	1986	6.49	1.67	6.1	6.2	No
Sweden	1982	1995	7.01	1.73	7	5.26	No
Sweden	1990	1995	6.98	1.73	7	5.26	No
Sweden	1996	1995	6.77	1.81	6.66	6.2	No
Sweden	1999	1995	6.65	1.85	6.66	6.2	No
Sweden	2006	1995	6.74	1.61	6.66	6.2	No
Sweden	2009	1995	6.6	2.15	6.66	6.2	No
Sweden	2011	1995	6.55	1.71	6.66	6.2	No
Sweden	2017	1995	6.64	1.76	6.66	6.2	No

Note. LS = Life satisfaction.

Summary results of base model (fixed effects only, without controls)

Fixed effects:

	Estimate	Std. Error	df	t value	Pr(> t)
(Intercept)	-0.1060892	0.1003637	15.3890152	-1.057	0.3068
years_before_after_eu	0.0045587	0.0009927	119819.9278679	4.592	0.0000043845736 ***
years_after_eu	0.0076086	0.0075091	14.6582140	1.013	0.3274
post_eu_status1	0.2214188	0.0115827	113862.9462223	19.116	< 0.0000000000000002 ***

Summary results of country alignment model (fixed effects only, without controls)

Fixed effects:

	Estimate	Std. Error	df	t value	Pr(> t)
(Intercept)	-0.331244	0.079399	14.704850	-4.172	0.000851 ***
years_before_after_eu	0.003087	0.001083	118163.145706	2.852	0.004349 **
years_after_eu	0.015926	0.004213	16.514339	3.780	0.001561 **
post_eu_status1	0.313108	0.013766	99691.683862	22.745	< 0.0000000000000002 ***
moderator1	0.706505	0.142073	14.720521	4.973	0.000176 ***
years_before_after_eu:moderator1	-0.004250	0.002796	21529.380538	-1.520	0.128543
years_after_eu:moderator1	-0.017986	0.007893	19.121948	-2.279	0.034341 *
post_eu_status1:moderator1	-0.249876	0.026311	117787.418203	-9.497	< 0.0000000000000002 ***

- Non-Eastern Bloc: $\beta = 0.247$, $SE = 0.011$, $p = 0.318$
- Eastern Bloc: $\beta = 0.321$, $SE = 0.014$, $p < 0.001$

Bhutan

Lhotshampa

The Lhotshampa are a Nepali-speaking ethnic group that has historically resided in the southern regions of Bhutan. The term "Lhotshampa" literally means "southerners" in Dzongkha, the national language of Bhutan. This community is comprised of people of Nepalese origin who began migrating to Bhutan in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They were attracted to Bhutan by the availability of arable land and the encouragement of the Bhutanese government, which sought to increase agricultural production. The Lhotshampa brought with them their own culture, language (Nepali), and Hindu religion, which distinguished them from the predominantly Buddhist Bhutanese population. Over time, they became a significant part of Bhutan's demographic makeup, particularly in the southern districts.

Driglam Namzha

Driglam Namzha is the traditional code of social etiquette in Bhutan. It encompasses a wide range of protocols and customs that dictate various aspects of daily life and behaviour for Bhutanese people, including dress, speech, and the proper way to conduct oneself in public and in the presence of others, especially elders and those in positions of authority. This code of conduct is deeply intertwined with Bhutan's efforts to preserve and promote its cultural identity and values, particularly in the face of globalization. Bhutanese are expected to wear traditional dress in public places and on formal occasions. For men, this means the "gho," a knee-length robe tied at the waist, and for women, the "kira," an ankle-length dress accompanied by a light outer jacket known as a "tego".

Gross National Happiness

Gross National Happiness is a comprehensive well-being measure that ranges between 0 and 1. Originally having four pillars, there are now nine primary indicators, with each one having a number of sub-indicators:

- Psychological wellbeing
 - Life satisfaction
 - Positive affect
 - Negative affect
 - Spirituality
- Health
 - Self-reported health status
 - Number of healthy days
 - Disability
 - Mental health
- Time use
 - Work
 - Sleep
- Education
 - Literacy
 - Schooling
 - Knowledge
 - Value
- Cultural diversity and resilience
 - Zorig chusum skills (artisan skills)
 - Cultural participation
 - Speak native language
 - Dirglam namzha
- Good governance
 - Political participation
 - Services
 - Governance performance
 - Fundamental rights
- Community vitality
 - Donation (time and money)
 - Safety
 - Community relationship
 - Family
- Ecological diversity and resilience
 - Wildlife damage
 - Urban issues
 - Responsibility to environment
 - Ecological issues
- Living standards
 - Income
 - Assets
 - Housing

Bhutan Timeline

•1980: The 1980 Marriage act is introduced, making it more difficult to marry, and more inconvenient to be married to, someone who lacks Bhutanese citizenship.

•1985: The 1985 Citizenship Act restricted who counts as a citizen, as only those who are born to two people with Bhutanese citizenship are granted citizenship at birth.

•1988: A census is conducted in Southern Bhutan where the majority of Lhotshampa live, which removed the citizenship of many after they were unable to produce documents proving their citizenship.

•1989: The king decrees that all Bhutanese people must adhere to a code of etiquette, called "dirglam namzha", even though not all Bhutanese people traditionally follow this etiquette.

•1989: The government removes the Nepali language from school curriculums, which is the language of the Lhotshampa.

•1990: Some Lhotshampa begin to protest and are subsequently detained, interrogated, and tortured. Some are raped and even murdered.

•1990: Bhutan forces the initial group of ethnic Nepalis to exit Bhutan by releasing some from prison under the condition of leaving the country. They offer others labelled as non-nationals in the 1988 census the ultimatum of departure or imprisonment, and compelled still others to flee to evade arbitrary arrest and detention. The majority of those that leave settle in refugee camps along the Bhutan-Nepali border.

•2007: The UNHCR finally reaches an agreement with other countries, beginning the process of resettling refugees who had been living in refugee camps since the early 1990s.

•2008: Gross National Happiness is enshrined in the Constitution of Bhutan.

•2008: Bhutan's first Gross National Happiness survey is conducted in the country.

•2008: Bhutan holds its first democratic election, featuring political parties hand-picked by the king. Jigme Thinley, who previously served in the king's administration as Prime Minister, becomes the first democratically Prime Minister, defeating the king's uncle, Sangay Ngedup.

Further reading on Bhutan, the UAE, authoritarianism, and well-being measures:

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