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**Correlations between life satisfaction and respect to authoritarian figures in the United States?**

**Abstract**

This research involves analyzing life satisfaction and respect to authority in The United States. The goal is to compare and contrast trends in the way people feel towards authoritarian figures when they are dissatisfied with their lives and vise verse, when they are satisfied with their lives and the effects is had on the individual’s likelihood to follow authoritarian-like figures. Current literature of political trends of authoritarian figures will serve to support or not support my hypothesis. Studies have shown that citizens who have low life satisfaction are more prone to following extremist authoritarian figures. I will be using statistics from the World Values Survey to examine life satisfaction and financial stability while comparing those results with the probability of respect to authority, nationalism and political trust. I will discover weather or not Americans have a strong support for authoritarian leaders and values.

1. **Introduction**

The United States is a country that was born from the rebellion against the authoritarian British rule in 1776. The American colonial society rejected the authority of the British Parliament to tax them without colonial representatives in the governments. The Declaration of Independence was adopted by the thirteen American colonies, which declared their sovereignty from the British Empire. It is not surprising to understand why such events took place. A group of a few elite people who use their superiority to exploit the poor working class. This has happened time and time again throughout history and time and time again the results have been revolutionary.

1. **Literature Review**

There are cases where when a nation as a whole is suffering from low life satisfaction, the masses will turn towards a radical leader to help steer the nation on the right track. This was the case in 1933 Germany with the election of the Nazi Party. What I am focusing on is when working and lower class people who work for an unjust government, are generally not happy with their life and usually do not continue to follow and support an unjust leader. The poor quality of life and abuse of authoritarian rule directly correlate with one another.

Generally, when people are dissatisfied in life, they rebel or leave to create a nation with liberty and justice for all. The U.S has come a long way since its creation but there are still challenges in place. Authoritarian figures are finding their way into positions or power and beginning to gain traction with the well-off. Meanwhile, the poor, mistreated lower class is being pushed aside. In conclusion, citizens who have low life satisfaction are less likely to follow authoritarian figures whereas citizens who have high life satisfaction are more likely to support the ideas of a strong government and greater respect to authority.

This study examines the correlation between life satisfaction and respect to authority. Do people with a “good life” feel more inclined to follow a radical authoritarian because they are free from any negative affects? If so then what constitutes a “good life”? Which countries have good life satisfaction and which don’t? How are those variables measured? What it authoritarianism, how do authoritarian figures come about and how do they exercise control? These are all questions that will be answered throughout this study, and analyzed with data from the 2015 World Values Survey to determine if U.S citizens feel more inclined to follow an authoritarian leader if they have a high life satisfaction, and vise versa, weather a person is less likely to follow authoritarian rule if they have a low life satisfaction.

**A Good Life**

What is a good life? According to Willem E. Saris, the term ‘quality of life’ was developed after the Enlightenment and was initially used polemically, serving to denote that there is more to human existence than material welfare. Currently the term ‘quality of life’ has two meanings: 1) the presents of conditions deemed necessary for a good life, and 2) the practice of good living as such. These two terms are used at a societal level and an individual level. When used at a societal level only the second term applies. When we say that the quality of life in a developing country is poor that means that the first term of essential conditions are lacking, such as adequate food, housing, and healthcare, therefore it is impossible to practice good living. At the individual level quality of life can have both meanings. When we say that someone does not have a “good” life, it means that he/she lacks the things necessary to live and/or the person does not thrive. It may be the case that a person is rich, powerful, and popular, but they still can be troubled and unable to thrive.

On the other hand, an individual may be poor, powerless and isolated, yet thriving both mentally and physically. These two variants are referred to as, ‘presumed’ quality of life and ‘apparent’ quality of life. Life-satisfaction is one of the indication of ‘apparent’ quality of life. Together along side, mental and physical health these indicators are valuable for collecting data about how well people thrive (Saris, 1996).

**How to Determine Quality of Life**

To be able to understand what a good life is we must see how different world players add up to one another. Although it is impossible to truly know what life is like in every country there are think tanks such as the Better Life Index that look at the indicators of current well-being across 11 domains, from how much money people earn and the cost of living, to mortality rate and even to how much time people get off from work. Most of the data in the Bette Life Index is pulled from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) but also from public opinion survey—all of which could be combined to formulate scores on a ‘well-being” continuum. Overall, a Pew Research Center analysis found that life is good in most of the countries selected, keep in mind that the countries selected are for the most part wealthy. Almost all fall within the organizations average range, with the exception of Turkey and Mexico.

The difficult part about determining quality of life in each country is that there is lots of room for error due to the amount of nuances in between. For example, one could say that they are well-being because they are financially wealthy and have a high household income; this would be the case if you lived in the United States. But, if you value time off from work than France would be the place where you would feel the more well-being. The OECD average is represented by a z score of 0; scored closer to 1 and above represent higher well-being and the closer to -1 and below indicated lower well-being. Rich countries like Australia (0.59), the United States (0.54) and Canada (0.53), do well on account of high perceived health and larger homes (rooms per person). At the bottom of the list are poorer countries with emerging economies, such as Turkey (-1.27) and Mexico (-1.48). Turkeys score is hurt by a variety of factors, such high percentages of people working more that 50 hours per week (41%) and basic sanitation. However, it is important to remember that Turkey is an emerging economy and that means that the people reported on average being happier than most people in rich nations. Mexico is ranked even lower, mainly because of high crime rates, with 12.8% of people in Mexico saying that they have been assaulted of mugged in the past year. Other factors include poor education and low social support are what’s keeping Mexico at the bottom of the index (Poushter, 2015; The Human Development Reports 2015-UN). With these facts in mind it is clear that life satisfaction varies from country to country and that in order to understand the reasons behind why a person would be likely or unlikely to follow authoritarian command is heavily individualized in nature.

**Authoritarian Personalities**

Authoritarian personalities are dictated by a state of mind or attitude characterized by belief in absolute obedience or submission to one’s own authority as well as the administration of that belief through the oppression of one’s subordinates. It usually applies to individuals who are known or viewed as having an authoritative, strict, of oppressive personality towards subordinates. The personality type became commonly known in 1930s when WWII, the Holocaust arose and figures with “authoritarian personalities” became prevalent. The main ingredients for an authoritarian, which was theorized by [Theodor W. Adorno](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodor_W._Adorno), [Else Frenkel-Brunswik](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Else_Frenkel-Brunswik), [Daniel Levinson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_Levinson), and [Nevitt Sanford](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nevitt_Sanford), is susceptibility to anti-Semitism ideology and anti-democratic political beliefs. All of these men collected a large body of research known as The Berkley Studies, which focused mainly on prejudice within a psychoanalytic/psychosocial theoretical framework (Adorno, et al.). After *The Authoritarian Personality* was published, the theories became subject to mass criticism. Some people claimed there were theoretical or methodological problems involved and others criticized that the Berkley group insinuates that authoritarianism can only exist on the right wing. Nevertheless, *The Authoritarian Personality* still continues to be a highly referenced source.

Naturally, authoritarian personalities found their way into politics where they could be able to exercise their need for obedience easily. The political system of Authoritarianism is characterized by strong central power and limited political freedoms. Juan Linz an influential authoritarian of 1964 and others distinguished that there are two subtypes of authoritarian governments, 1) traditional authoritarian regimes, 2) bureaucratic-military authoritarian regimes. The former is generally headed by one person and maintains power through appeal to legitimacy, patron-client ties, and repression (carried out by personal loyalists). The former is governed by a coalition of military officers who pragmatically, rather then ideologically, act coercively to maintain respect (Gasiorowski). It is common for authoritarian governments to be non-democratic, in fact in most cases they completely contradict one another, but there are a few cases where strong authoritarian elements and forms of submission to authority are present. These are illiberal democracies which lack the more liberal democratic features such as rule of law and independent judiciary. These countries tend to have more militarized interstate disputes and more civil war. For example, look at North Korea under the rule of the Kim dynasty and Korean Worker’s Party. Or look at Russia, even their President Vladimir Putin described his government as “a mixture of authoritarianism and managed democracy”.

**Right-Wing Authoritarianism**

Throughout history authoritarianism has been heavily present on the right-wing of politics. Right-wing authoritarians are people who have a high degree of willingness to submit to authorities they perceive as established and legitimate, who adhere to societal conventions and norms, and who are hostile and punitive in their attitudes towards people who don’t adhere to them. The term was introduced in 1981, by Canadian-American psychologist Bob Altemeyer. He conducted extensive questionnaire research and statistical analysis and found that only three of the original nine hypothesis components of the model correlated together: authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, and conventionalism (Altermeyer, 1981). In his survey used a Likert scale response and questioned items such as, “Our country desperately needs a mighty leader who will do what has to be done to destroy the radical new ways and sinfulness that are ruining us.” People who responded with highly agree are displaying tendency towards all three of Altemeyer’s hypothetical components. Many Right-Wing authoritarians are characterized by obedience to authority, moral absolutism, racial and ethnic prejudice, and intolerance and punitiveness towards dissents and deviants. If the majority of the government in which one lives under is right-wing authoritarian in nature, then if one is a person of color, nonconforming, or plainly does not agree with the norm, then they will have a lower life satisfaction simply due to the amount of oppression and coercion they would receive on a day to day basis.

**References**

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1. **Hypothesis**

My hypothesizes are both relating to the effect at which life satisfaction impacts individuals lives, particularly in the United States and how that impact can sway ones likelihood of following or paying respect towards an authoritarian figure. My hypothesizes are as follows:

1. People with low life satisfaction are less likely to show respect towards authority.
2. People who have high life satisfaction are more likely to have a greater respect for authority.
3. People who have a high life satisfaction will also think that having a strong leader that does not have to deal with parliament or elections is a good thing.
4. **Data and Methods**

The dependent and independent variables analyzed in this study are each described in the frequency tables below. All the variable used were taken from the most recent 2016 World Values Survey specifically from the United States.

**Frequency Table**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Satisfaction with your life** | | | | | |
|  | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | Completely dissatisfied | 20 | .9 | .9 | .9 |
| 2 | 26 | 1.2 | 1.2 | 2.1 |
| 3 | 60 | 2.7 | 2.7 | 4.8 |
| 4 | 85 | 3.8 | 3.8 | 8.6 |
| 5 | 148 | 6.6 | 6.7 | 15.3 |
| 6 | 157 | 7.0 | 7.1 | 22.4 |
| 7 | 390 | 17.5 | 17.6 | 40.0 |
| **8** | **683** | **30.6** | **30.8** | **70.8** |
| 9 | 448 | 20.1 | 20.2 | 91.0 |
| Completely satisfied | 199 | 8.9 | 9.0 | 100.0 |
| Total | 2216 | 99.3 | 100.0 |  |
| Missing | No answer; BH: Refused | 16 | .7 |  |  |
| Total | | 2232 | 100.0 |  |  |

“Life satisfaction” is considered as how satisfied one is with their life as a whole on the day they answered the survey. 1=completely dissatisfied and 10=completely satisfied. Over all the highest response was an 8/10 on over all life satisfaction for the average American. The next highest response was 9/10 with 20.1%. American are generally happy with their life over all.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Future changes: Greater respect for authority** | | | | | |
|  | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | **Good thing** | **1229** | **55.1** | **56.2** | **56.2** |
| Don´t mind | 798 | 35.8 | 36.5 | 92.6 |
| Bad thing | 161 | 7.2 | 7.4 | 100.0 |
| Total | 2188 | 98.0 | 100.0 |  |
| Missing | No answer | 44 | 2.0 |  |  |
| Total | | 2232 | 100.0 |  |  |

In this question on the World Values Survey we are examining a persons opinion on the importance of respect to authority. The question reads, “which of the following do you think would be a good thing, a bad thing, or you don’t know. 55.1% of respondents answered that they think a greater respect for authority would be a good thing. A high second was “don’t know”, which is interesting to me because it means that a large chunk of citizen don’t understand the implication of having a society that has a great respect for authority.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Confidence: The government (in your nation’s capital)** | | | | | |
|  | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | A great deal | 86 | 3.9 | 3.9 | 3.9 |
| Quite a lot | 619 | 27.7 | 28.3 | 32.2 |
| **Not very much** | **1167** | **52.3** | **53.4** | **85.6** |
| None at all | 315 | 14.1 | 14.4 | 100.0 |
| Total | 2187 | 98.0 | 100.0 |  |
| Missing | No answer | 45 | 2.0 |  |  |
| Total | | 2232 | 100.0 |  |  |

In the United States there is a great deal of national pride, however it appears that the general consensus is that the government cannot be trusted. 52.3% of respondents answered that their confidents in the nations capital was “not very much”. The second highest response was “quite a lot” with 27.7% answered.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Political system: Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections** | | | | | |
|  | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | Very good | 129 | 5.8 | 5.9 | 5.9 |
| Fairly good | 561 | 25.1 | 25.8 | 31.7 |
| Bad | 589 | 26.4 | 27.0 | 58.7 |
| **Very bad** | **899** | **40.3** | **41.3** | **100.0** |
| Total | 2178 | 97.6 | 100.0 |  |
| Missing | No answer | 54 | 2.4 |  |  |
| Total | | 2232 | 100.0 |  |  |

This section of the survey addresses the different types of political systems and asks the respondents what they think about for each as a way of governing their particular country, in this case the United States. The scale goes from very good to very bad, with the highest response rate choosing very bad. This means that 40.3% of Americans on average think that the having a strong leader that does not have to bother with parliament and elections is a very bad thing for the government. This is interesting because in the frequency above regarding the confidence in the government, most respondents answered that they did not have very confidence in their government. If this is so, then wouldn’t a stronger leader be a good thing for making executive decisions without delay from congress?

**Correlations**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Correlations** | | | | | | |
|  | | Satisfaction with your life | Future changes: Greater respect for authority | Confidence: The government (in your nation’s capital) | Political system: Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections |
| Satisfaction with your life | Pearson Correlation | 1 | -.119\*\* | -.135\*\* | .012 |
| Sig. (2-tailed) |  | .000 | .000 | .565 |
| N | 2216 | 2182 | 2181 | 2173 |
| Future changes: Greater respect for authority | Pearson Correlation | -.119\*\* | 1 | .097\*\* | .078\*\* |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |  | .000 | .000 |
| N | 2182 | 2188 | 2165 | 2158 |
| Confidence: The government (in your nation’s capital) | Pearson Correlation | -.135\*\* | .097\*\* | 1 | .113\*\* |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 |  | .000 |
| N | 2181 | 2165 | 2187 | 2161 |
| Political system: Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections | Pearson Correlation | .012 | .078\*\* | .113\*\* | 1 |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | .565 | .000 | .000 |  |
| N | 2173 | 2158 | 2161 | 2178 |
| \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). | | | | | | |

In this correlation table we have some interesting findings that do not exactly match my original hypothesize. Life satisfaction negatively correlates with greater respect to authority and confidence in the government. However, life satisfaction does correlate with having a strong leader. Unfortunately, this statistic is not significant because the total number count is not large enough to be an accurate representation with the real community. When people’s greater respect for authority rises there is a positive correlation with the confidence they have in their government and having a strong leader. This makes sense because someone who values respect to authority also has to have confidence in a government who makes authoritative decisions, even a single person (president, prime minister) who can make executive decisions. Finally, when one’s confidence in the government rises, having a strong leader makes a positive correlation.

1. **Empirical Findings**

The data I found was not what I thought it would be. There were some supporting evidence and some contradiction evidences. For starters the most interesting finding from my hypothesizes was the fact that the greater one’s life satisfaction becomes the less respect for authority one acquires. This is the opposite of what my original hypothesis stated, which was that people with low life satisfaction are less likely to respect authoritarian figures (reversed= people with high life satisfaction are likely to have more respect for authority). These finding nullify my first hypothesis. The second hypothesis that was nullified was that people who have high life satisfaction are more likely to have confidence in the government. The data suggests the opposite, that the higher one’s life satisfaction is the less confidence in the government one has. These were the only two finding that didn’t support my hypothesizes. The data did support my hypothesis that people with high life satisfaction will think that having a strong leader who does not have to deal with parliament and elections is a good thing. The problem with this data is that it was not significant enough to be legitimate. The range of significance is .01 level, and the level of significance for this data was .565 level. This means that the group of respondents was not large enough to be representative of the entire population to be useful.

In the literature Altemeyer, B. wrote his interpretation of right-winged authoritarianism, and the data suggests that people who have a high life satisfaction are less likely to respect authority. This would mean that right-winged authoritarians (who value respect to authority), generally do not have a high life satisfaction. To follow that finding it could be said that right-winged authoritarians with low life satisfaction are less likely to hold confidence in their government. This leads to their ideology that a strong leader without checks and balances is a good thing for the government. Right-winged authoritarians are even more likely to believe that a strong leader without checks and balances is a good thing by .066%.

Depending on weather one has a high or low life satisfaction their confidence in the government can be strong or weak. Either way those who have some degree of confidence in their government also believe that having a strong leader without checks and balances is a good thing.

1. **Conclusion**

In this research I found that the high life satisfaction negatively correlates with a strong respect to authority and strong confidence in the government. I also found that people who have a high life satisfaction think that having a strong leader without boundaries is a positive thing for the government. Even though my hypothesizes were not supported I was still able to learn about the opposite hypothesis. This enables me to look forward to future opportunities for more research that look into the affect life satisfaction has on people’s attitudes towards authoritarian beliefs.