

# Liberal countries have more satisfied citizens while conservatives are happier individuals

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People living in more liberal countries are happier on average than those in less liberal countries, but individually, conservatives are happier than liberals no matter where they live, according to a study of people in 16 Western European countries.

"Liberal governments tend to do more to shield [citizens](#) against certain hardships, such as unemployment and poverty, which can make people feel happier overall," said the study's lead author, Adam Okulicz-Kozaryn, PhD, of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. "On the other hand, conservatives rate their well-being higher than liberals because conservatives more readily support and rationalize the status quo, thus, believing that socioeconomic hardships are a result of individual shortcomings." The study appears online in the American Psychological Association's *Journal of Applied Psychology*.

Overall, people living in [countries](#) with more liberal policies reported higher [life satisfaction](#) than those in countries with less liberal policies, irrespective of their own [political views](#), according to the study. The more conservative citizens reported higher life satisfaction than their liberal counterparts, regardless of their government's political leanings. "These findings lead us to believe that conservatives living in liberal countries are most likely to report the highest well-being," said Okulicz-Kozaryn.

The differences in happiness ratings between individuals and countries were evident when researchers compared how people rated their own life

satisfaction with each country's welfare policies. For example, when researchers looked at what a country does for its citizens, greater liberalism corresponded with higher well-being, but when researchers looked at citizens' political beliefs, greater liberalism corresponded with poorer life satisfaction, said Okulicz-Kozaryn.

The researchers analyzed surveys collected from 1,134,384 people between 1970 and 2002 in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Denmark, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Finland, Sweden, Austria and Norway. The surveys were representative samples of each country's population. This data set is part of a series of public opinion surveys conducted on behalf of the European Commission.

To determine if a country was politically liberal or conservative, the researchers looked at ease of access to services such as pensions, sickness benefits and unemployment compensation. They also examined each country's level of spending on welfare, which is found in a report produced by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Sweden was often cited as being the most liberal country, with more public welfare services, while countries such as Ireland, France and Portugal were found to be more conservative. In general Scandinavian countries were the happiest countries and were also the most liberal. Denmark was consistently the happiest country in the study.

The surveys also had each person rate his or her level of personal life satisfaction on a scale from "not at all satisfied" to "very satisfied." To determine individual political orientation, each participant rated his or her political views as being somewhere from very liberal to very conservative.

"Our findings are important to governments and organizations because they underscore the impact that these two entities have on one another,"

said Okulicz-Kozaryn. "Politics is everywhere, and our findings suggest that citizens are best served when governments and organizations work together by instituting policies that have been shown to increase citizens' well-being. For example, if governments do not enact sufficient policies that protect citizens from underemployment, the expected decreases in well-being can have an effect on employees' productivity within organizations."

**More information:** "The Subjective Well-Being Political Paradox: Happy Welfare States and Unhappy Liberals," Adam Okulicz-Kozaryn, PhD, and Oscar Holmes IV, PhD, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey; Derek R. Avery, PhD, Temple University, online Aug. 25, 2014, *Journal of Applied Psychology*.

Provided by American Psychological Association

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