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Noah A. Albanese
Gettysburg College

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Are Happy Individuals Less Xenophobic Than Unhappy Individuals? Happiness & Income Versus Xenophobia

Abstract

The social science literature on xenophobia is immense. Researchers have found that individual levels of xenophobia have a strong correlation with economic indicators, education, and political affiliation. However, do they have any correlation with unconventional indicators like happiness? This paper uses data from the World Value Survey to study the correlation between individual happiness and xenophobia. I find that there is a significant correlation between individual levels of happiness and xenophobia, even when controlling for income around the world.

Keywords

Xenophobia, Happiness, Income, Immigration

Disciplines

Inequality and Stratification | Migration Studies | Politics and Social Change | Race and Ethnicity

Comments

Written for POL 215: Political Science Methods

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Gettysburg College

Are Happy Individuals Less Xenophobic than Unhappy Individuals?

Happiness & Income versus Xenophobia

Noah Albanese

Political Science 215, section C

Professor Douglas Page

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Part One: Research Proposal

Introduction

Immigration is one of the most contentious issues in world politics. To the native citizen, it is a hot button issue where they feel threatened by the potential economic and cultural effects of a lax immigration policy. To the immigrant, its significant stakes mean that having a lax or tight immigration policy can mean the difference between life and death.

As the Syrian Refugee crisis shows, countries always seem to grapple with the issue of immigration in their respective politics. Beginning in 2011, the Syrian refugee crisis has forced 6.6 million refugees to escape Syria and find a new home in the surrounding Middle Eastern and European countries (“The Syrian Refugee Crisis Explained”). The response by these countries were mixed depending on the country in question. Middle Eastern countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan had accepted millions of refugees, while Israel had accepted none citing the possible threat of terrorism. European countries such as France, Sweden, Germany, and Greece had also accepted several hundred thousand refugees (Stone 2016), but they later received cultural backlash from some of their constituents, which led to the rise of anti-immigrant, right-wing parties.

As the stakes involved in the immigration debates show, the public’s xenophobia influences how governments structure their immigration policies. The rise of right-wing parties in Europe is just another example of this phenomenon. Therefore, it is vitally important to at least attempt to answer the question: under what conditions do individuals exhibit the characteristics of xenophobia?

Some politicians already seem to know the variables which influence xenophobia among their constituents. President Trump of the United States has repeatedly cited economic concerns such as job scarcity as a proxy to implement tighter immigration policies, while Israel Prime Minister Netanyahu has cited the possibility of terrorism to deny taking in Syrian refugees (Stone 2016). Understanding the variables which influence an individual's level of xenophobia will allow us to understand whether these typical arguments for tighter immigration policies have any correlation with xenophobia, and whether additional variables exist.

This research will begin by navigating the immense political science literature on xenophobia. There will be a deep analysis on the multiple variables which are concluded to correlate with xenophobia. These include economic indicators such as perceptions on job scarcity and the perception on the usage of welfare programs by immigrants (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010).

Among these economic variables, it must be emphasized that we are observing whether individuals *perceive* these variables to be affecting another variable and not the reality of their relationship (Gang, Rivera-Batiz, and Yun 2013). For example, there is an intense disagreement among economists on whether low skilled immigrants drive down wages for native low skilled workers. However, that is not our focus. The focus is on whether respondents *perceive* immigrants to be driving down wages for other low skilled workers. We then want to compare these variables with an individual's level of xenophobia (Gang, Rivera-Batiz, and Yun 2013). We would also look at non-economic variables such as education and party preference.

The research will then zero-in on a few variables that have been rarely reviewed in the political-science literature. Then, a hypothesis with a plausible explanation will be formed between the mystery variable and the xenophobia variable.

In the second stage, a research plan will be formed to test the hypothesis. Statistics from the World Value Survey would be used to get a general understanding of the relationship. In the final stage, the results will be used to conclude whether this mystery variable has any form of correlation with the xenophobia variable.

The Literature Review

Much of the political science literature on immigration and xenophobia is fixated on its relationship with an individual's economic concerns, so it would be fitting to start there. Many researchers hypothesize that native citizens blame immigrants for their economic stress due to two variables: whether native citizens feel they are competing for jobs with immigrants and whether native citizens feel they are competing for access to government welfare with immigrants (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010). The fear of labor market competition has been used to create a prominent model called the labor market competition model. This model predicts that native citizens will be most opposed to immigrants in their own skill level because they fear being competed out of their jobs. The fiscal burden model has been used to predict that high-income natives would oppose the immigration of low-income individuals more than high-income individuals, due to the fiscal burden it places on their respective governments. Researchers believe this difference will be more pronounced in states with comparatively generous welfare programs (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010).

Several studies which have implemented the labor market competition model have found a correlation (Burns and Gimpel 2000; Citrin et al. 1997; Dustmann and Preston 2006; Fetzer 2000; Gang, Rivera-Batiz, and Yun 2002; Harwood 1986). Two studies have found a strong correlation. The study by Scheve and Slaughter in 2001 found a strong positive correlation between the respondent's years of education and their support for immigration using the National Election Survey data. Mayda in 2006 conducted a similar study using the National Identity Module of the International Social Survey Programme by the World Value Survey.

Two studies which have implemented the fiscal burden model have also found a correlation. A study by Hanson, Scheve and Slaughter in 2007 used the National Election Survey data to compare attitudes towards immigration in different states in the United States. They found that individuals with higher incomes were less willing to support immigration if they lived in states with generous welfare benefits. Another study by Facchini and Mayda in 2009 used data from the International Social Survey Programme. They found that a respondents' income has a negative correlation with support for immigration in countries where a large portion of their immigrants were made up of high-skilled workers.

These studies are intriguing, but they are insufficient in their methods to be cited as definitive conclusions. For one thing, the two models used to construct these studies: the labor market competition model and the fiscal burden model make several assumptions. In the labor market competition model, it assumes that native citizens are knowledgeable enough to recognize that immigrants in their own skill level may outcompete with them on jobs. On the fiscal burden model, it assumes that high income individuals are knowledgeable enough to recognize that immigrants may take advantage of the welfare in their state. Putting aside the truthfulness of these statements, these models are built on these assumptions, and it is unclear

whether respondents take these ideas into account when they comprehend their approval of immigrants. Hainmueller and Hiscox in their 2010 study also argue that there may be alternative variables to explain these correlations. For example, the strong correlation between an individual's income and their support for immigration may not be the result of the fear concerning labor market competition, but by non-economic variables such as education, racial prejudice, and party preference. In other words, the validity of the labor competition model and the fiscal burden model is somewhat questionable.

Education is one non-economic variable that has been compared with attitudes towards immigration by many researchers. Most researchers have found a positive correlation between years of education and pro-immigrant attitudes. Many have used this positive correlation to theorize that higher levels of education lead to racial tolerance, preference for cultural diversity, and a higher understanding of economics (Chandler and Tsai 2001; Citrin et al. 1997; Dustmann and Preston 2007; Fetzer 2000; Gang, Rivera-Batiz, and Yun 2002; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007). Some papers have focused on countries which have implemented new educational programs to observe their effects on an individual's level of xenophobia. In one example, a paper by Gang, Rivera-Batiz, and Yun in 2013 used data from the Eurobarometer to find that: "increased schooling between 1988 and 2003 [was] associated with a decline in anti-foreign attitudes by 3.4 percent."

The political science literature on education versus xenophobia shows a strong reliable correlation with a high validity method used to measure the extent to which education affects xenophobia. Unlike the economic variables discussed previously, which was based on a hypothetical fiscal burden and labor competition model, it is easier to create a model to measure

how education affects xenophobia. This is because an individual's level of education is a very valid measure, which can be represented by their years of education.

The theories formed by researchers to explain this positive correlation are relatively convincing. The theory that higher levels of education lead individuals to have racial, ethnic tolerance, preference for cultural diversity, and a higher understanding of economics (Chandler and Tsai 2001; Citrin et al. 1997; Dustmann and Preston 2007; Fetzer 2000; Gang, Rivera-Batiz, and Yun 2002; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007) is very conventional and is easy for readers to imagine. Education allows individuals to have contact with different kinds of people and ideas which may change their perspective on immigration. This theory is related to another theory in political science called contact theory. Contact theory is the idea that increasing interaction between native citizens and immigrants lead to increasing tolerance of immigrants by native citizens (Bose 2020). A 2018 paper by Young, Loebach, and Korienk found that a one percent increase in the immigrant population decreased support for stricter immigration laws by fifteen percent and decreased support for entirely prohibitive immigration laws by twenty-five percent. This specific body of research gives credibility to contact theory, but it also gives weight to the theory used to explain the correlation between years of education and attitudes towards immigrants. Of course, being in contact with another immigrant is not the same as being exposed to different kinds of viewpoints in education, but it represents the same idea. In both cases, individuals are being exposed to different kinds of people and ideas, which may have the same effect on individuals. Therefore, because of these variables, individuals may become more tolerant towards immigration.

The final variables that will be discussed here is ideology and party affiliation. The vast literature which discusses the relationship of ideology with attitudes towards immigration tend to

focus on two aspects: whether conservative parties in power practice more restrictive immigration policies than others and whether individuals who identify themselves as a conservative tend to be less tolerant of immigrants than liberal individuals.

Concerning parties in power, much of the literature suggests a correlation between the ruling party's ideology and their immigration policies (Fitzgerald, Leblang and Teets 2014; Anderson 1996; Arzheimer 2009). As an example, a 2018 paper by Marcelo de Almeida Medeiros, Dalson Britto Figueiredo Filho etcetera, who did a comparative study of European states, show a link between party ideology and their immigration policies. One of their models showed that, "a one-point increase in ideology is associated with a thirteen percent average reduction in the number of refugees entering the country."

The literature also seems to show that individuals who are conservative tend to support more restrictive immigration policies than individuals who are liberal. Studies have focused on specific states to see whether individual party affiliation correlates with attitudes towards immigration. A study by Peter Hays Gries from 2016 asked liberal and conservative Americans whether they supported tougher border policies out of a scale of seven. The results showed that, on average, conservatives agreed that the United States needed to implement tougher Mexican border policies by 6.6 out of 7 points. On average, liberals called for tougher Mexican border policies by 4.2 out of 7 points. A 2017 study by Hartevelde, Kokkonen and Dahlberg looked at the individual effects of party affiliation on immigrant attitudes from Netherlands and Sweden. Their results showed a correlation between party affiliation and immigrant attitudes. It also showed that voters would adjust their views in line with the party they identify with, including attitudes towards immigrants. This shift was especially prevalent in far-right parties.

The relationship between individual ideology and xenophobia is intriguing, but it should be perceived with caution. Specifically for party affiliation, every conservative party has a different ideology depending on the state, which makes it difficult to draw a pattern. The Republican party in the United States is not the same as the Center-Right party in Germany, and we should not attempt to draw broad conclusions that individuals in any conservative party would tend to have anti-immigrant views. However, this conclusion becomes more appropriate when we focus on specific states, thus making this relationship stronger.

Ultimately, the vast literature on individual levels of xenophobia boil down to its relationship with three variables: economic indicators, education, and party affiliation. The literature concerning economic indicators is numerous and they all show a strong positive correlation between the variables. However, occasionally, the methods used to measure these relationships have questionable validity, which must be further investigated. The literature which focuses on education is more reliable and shows a strong positive correlation between years of education and tolerance towards immigrants. Most of the literature concerning education also has a strong conventional theory to explain this relationship. Finally, ideology and party affiliation also seem to have a correlation with xenophobia, but the degree of the relationship differs depending on the state in question.

Causal Argument

After an extensive review of the political science literature on xenophobia, there were several variables that were found to be rarely discussed. Two of these variables were wellbeing and happiness.

Happiness is a very subjective variable, making it a difficult variable to nail with a general conceptual and operational definition. The founder of the World Value Survey, Ronald Inglehart, has conducted numerous studies on national and individual levels of happiness. A famous paper by Inglehart, Roberto Foa, Christopher Peterson, and Christian Welzel from 2008 has explained that national levels of happiness has risen since 1981 due to economic development and democratization around the world. Inglehart, in a study encompassing 24 countries, has also demonstrated that a country's Gross National Product has a 0.67 correlation with life-satisfaction (Inglehart 1999).

From these studies, we define the conceptual definition of happiness as encompassing two parts: whether an individual has their human needs adequately fulfilled (material needs, health needs, social needs etc.) and how an individual *perceives* their quality of life. I emphasize *perceive* so this definition can encompass the subjective nature of happiness. As an example, there are wealthy individuals who have their needs adequately fulfilled yet perceive their quality of life to be poor. Therefore, this two-part definition becomes necessary.

I argue that individual levels of happiness would correlate with xenophobia. Individuals who are happy would feel that their lives are fulfilling and would likely have little to no social and economic anxiety. Therefore, they would have nothing to fear, and thus would have little to no fear of immigrants, especially compared to those who are unhappy.

Hypothesis: *In a comparison of individuals, those who are happy will be more likely to be less xenophobic than those who are unhappy.*

Another thing to consider in this experiment are variables that may influence happiness and wellbeing. Conventionally, most people would argue that people who are rich and receive

higher incomes tend to be happier than those who are poor and receive low incomes. Putting aside the truthfulness of this statement, it is a plausible antecedent independent variable.

Therefore, in this study, we would also focus on controlling for income.

Part II: Research Design Section

Introduction

In order to test the hypotheses, the experiment was conducted using data from the World Value Survey Wave seven. The World Value Survey is conducted every five years with this specific questionnaire taking place from 2011 to 2014. These surveys are based on responses from 1200 individuals which are represented as a national body. Countries with populations below two million were based on 1,000 individuals and countries with high populations were based on 1500 respondents. The World Value Survey is conducted in 120 countries representing 94.5 percent of the world population (Inglehart 2014).

For this experiment, the World Value Survey was chosen for two main reasons. First, any kind of question concerning happiness and xenophobia is not bound to any culture and is universal in scale. Therefore, the World Value Survey's macro level analysis allows us to find the correlation between these variables without being bound to a certain country. Second, unlike most datasets, the World Value Survey has a happiness variable which allows us to measure how individuals around the world would rate their happiness.

Variable Measurements

In order to operationalize this definition of happiness, I used the Q46 variable from the World Value Survey. Q46 is an ordinal level variable which asks an individual's "Feeling of Happiness" from a one to four scale. This scale is made up of "1. Very happy," "2. Quite happy," "3. Not very happy," and "4. Not at all happy." The mode was used as the descriptive statistic of this variable.

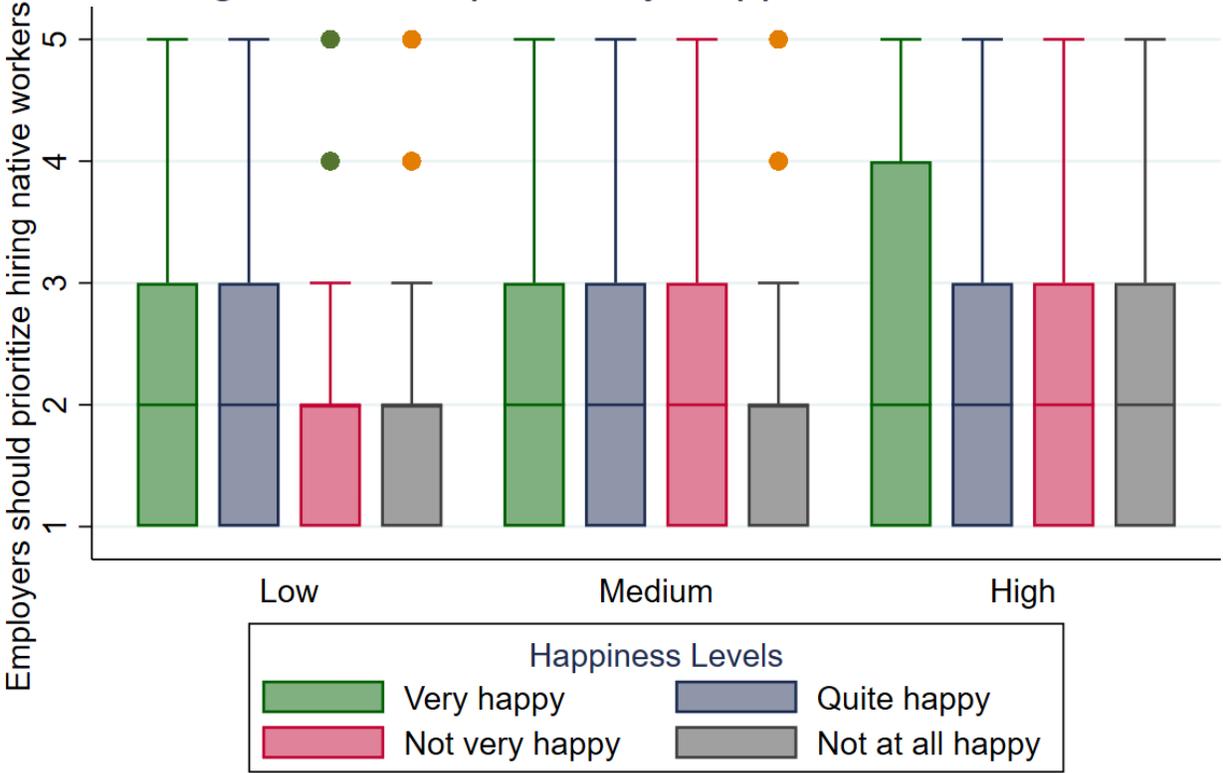
Xenophobia is defined in the Merriam-Webster dictionary as “fear and hatred of strangers or foreigners or of anything that is strange or foreign” (“Xenophobia”). In the World Value Survey, likely because xenophobia is taboo to be publicly expressed, it is not a variable that is directly operationalized by asking individuals their levels of xenophobia. However, the World Value Survey *does* have variable Q34 which asks individuals to respond to the statement, “Employers should give priority to (nation) people than immigrants.” This question creates an operational definition of xenophobia, where it can be measured without being directly asked. In this hypothetical scenario described by Q34, the only difference between these potential workers is whether they are native workers or foreign workers. Therefore, we can assume that the respondents who agree or strongly agree with this statement have higher levels of xenophobia than other respondents. Q34 is an ordinal level variable with a five-point scale. This scale is made up of “1. Agree strongly,” “2. Agree,” “3. Neither agree nor disagree,” “4. Disagree,” and “5. Disagree strongly.” The mode and the mean were used as the descriptive statistic for this variable.

The literature has indicated that there is a strong correlation between income and xenophobia. Therefore, this experiment will control for income in the regression analysis. Q288R is a recoded ordinal level variable with a three-point scale. The variable measures individual income levels. This scale is made up of “Low,” “Middle,” and “High.” The mode was the used as the descriptive statistic for this variable.

The means of the xenophobia variables are shown in table 1, which compares xenophobia with happiness and income. Figure 1 graphs this relationship in a box plot using mode. The spread of the data is depicted.

| Table 1: Happiness and Income Versus Xenophobia by Mean | | | | |
|---|--------------|--------|------|-------|
| | Income level | | | |
| Feeling of happiness | Low | Medium | High | Total |
| Very happy | 2.20 | 2.24 | 2.55 | 2.30 |
| Quite happy | 2.15 | 2.19 | 2.34 | 2.21 |
| Not very happy | 1.98 | 2.05 | 2.19 | 2.03 |
| Not at all | 1.86 | 1.95 | 2.15 | 1.92 |
| Total | 2.12 | 2.18 | 2.43 | 2.21 |

Figure 1: Xenophobia by Happiness and Income



Source: World Value Survey

Model Estimation

In this experiment, I used logistic regression to model the correlation between the variables. I treated Q 34, the variable for xenophobia, as an interval level variable which is why logistic regression was chosen over the other models of experimentation.

Results

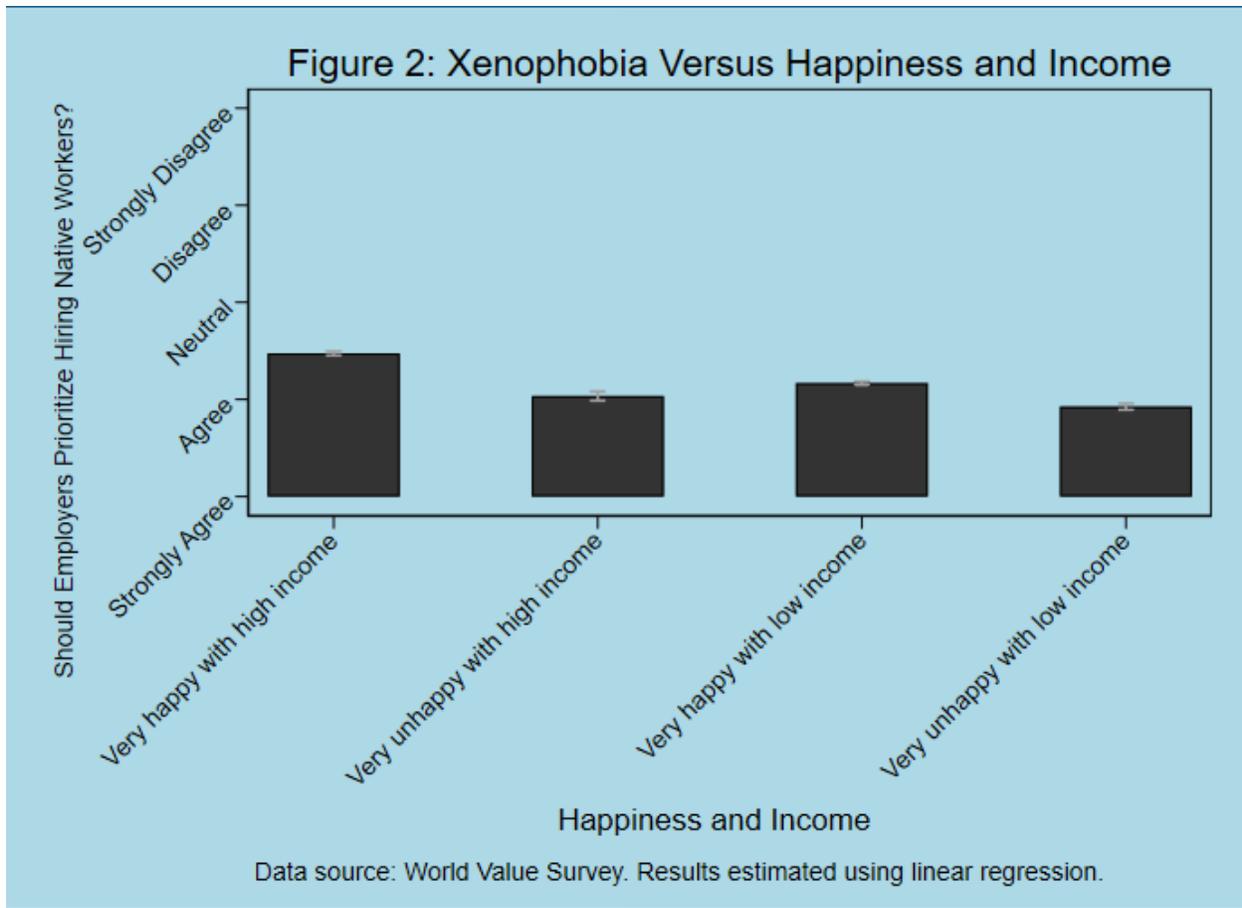
Table 2: Coefficients and other Descriptive Values

| Variables | Q34 (Xenophobia) |
|------------------|-------------------------|
| Q46 (Happiness) | -0.0477*** (0.0144) |
| Q288R (Income) | 0.187*** (0.0148) |
| Happiness-income | -0.0330*** (0.00751) |
| Constant | 2.061*** (0.0296) |
| Observations | 114,096 |
| R-squared | 0.010 |

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 3: Point Estimates of Xenophobia with Upper and Lower Bounds

| | Happy and high income | Unhappy and high income | Happy and low income | Unhappy and low income |
|-----------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Upper Bound | 2.49 | 2.08 | 2.19 | 1.96 |
| Point Estimates | 2.47 | 2.03 | 2.17 | 1.93 |
| Lower Bound | 2.45 | 1.99 | 2.15 | 1.89 |



The values, expressed in table 2, show that the p-values for the variables are below 0.05 and the standard error is below five percent. The confidence intervals, expressed in table 3, show a significant difference between the lower bound and the upper bound of the y-values. Therefore, we can reject the null hypothesis for this relationship. In this logistic regression, the difference between the x-values were displayed by two extremes: low income versus high income and happy versus unhappy. Therefore, it would be difficult to interpret the coefficients of these values. Instead, I displayed the values as bar graphs on figure 2 to interpret their relationship.

In political science, the conventional view is that income has a negative relationship with xenophobia: Figure 2 supports this conclusion. When comparing unhappy low income and unhappy high-income individuals, unhappy high-income individuals are less xenophobic than

unhappy low-income individuals. In vice-versa, when comparing the xenophobia between happy low-income individuals and happy high-income individuals, happy high-income individuals are less xenophobic than happy low-income individuals.

In this experiment, we find a significant relationship between happiness and xenophobia even when income is held constant. In other words, as happiness levels decrease individuals become more xenophobic. When we compare low-income happy individuals versus low-income unhappy individuals, low-income happy individuals are less xenophobic. On the other hand, when we compare high income happy individuals and high-income unhappy individuals, high-income happy individuals are less xenophobic.

Discussion and Conclusion

The data shows a significant correlation between individual levels of happiness and individual levels of xenophobia. This is especially significant since individual income was held constant in this experiment. Therefore, we can reject the claim that correlation between happiness and xenophobia was only visible due to income being an antecedent variable. The model shows that the three variables have an additive relationship.

The results support the theory that individuals who are happy would likely have little to no social, economic, and cultural anxiety. Therefore, they would have nothing to fear, and thus would have little to no fear of immigrants compared to those who are unhappy. Unhappy individuals may also be more likely to scapegoat their problems onto immigrants, making them more xenophobic than happy individuals.

As mentioned above, most of the political science literature encompassing xenophobia focuses on its relationship to economic indicators, education, and ideology. In contrast,

xenophobia's relationship with happiness is a largely unexplored concept. The findings of this experiment only highlight the further research that should be made into this relationship. Future experiments should control for other variables such as education and ideology to see if this relationship between happiness and xenophobia still holds. Another experiment should use a different operational definition to measure xenophobia, possibly by measuring individual support for a country having lax immigration policies. Xenophobic levels may also differ depending on who is seen as the outsider: questions concerning Syrian refugees may cause higher xenophobic levels than questions concerning Latin-American migrants.

Studies on happiness largely focus on its correlation with freedom, social tolerance, and economic indicators. The literature seems to indicate that happiness is commonly studied as a dependent variable instead of an independent variable (Inglehart 2008; Welsh 2003; Schyns 1998; Ott 2001; Norris and Inglehart 2004). Our study largely diverged from the literature in that we treated happiness as an independent variable. The literature's focus on treating happiness as a dependent variable is understandable, since researchers have always been debating the factors which influence individual levels of happiness. However, it is also important to understand the variables which are *affected by* individual happiness.

Our research has shown that xenophobia is a variable which correlates with individual happiness. A skeptic may argue that since the literature shows how freedom and economic development have a positive correlation with happiness, freedom and economic development are the real antecedent variable which influence individual levels of xenophobia. Although our study focused on individual level variables which influence xenophobia, this skeptical view presents a plausible hypothesis. Further studies could be made by replicating our experiment but keep macro level variables such as economic development and freedom constant. One thing to take

from this experiment is the need for governments to provide their citizens with the opportunities to seek happiness. This can provide a remedy against conflict driven feelings such as xenophobia.

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