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Subjective Well-Being and Political Participation

Master's Thesis

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I have written this master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources, and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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Abstract

Does the level of subjective well-being matter for political behavior? In the existing literature political participation was linked to subjective well-being as an explanatory variable. Little research has considered subjective well-being as a cause and political participation as an outcome. In this paper, I analyze whether subjective well-being affects various forms of political participation by employing data from European Social Survey and considering the endogeneity problem. The results suggest that people with a higher level of subjective well-being are more likely to vote. However, people with a lower level of subjective well-being participate more in other forms of political participation.

Keywords: subjective well-being, vote, political participation, endogeneity.

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1. Introduction

There is a declining trend in voter turnouts in democratic countries in Europe (Solijonov, 2016). As seen from Figure A1, this trend is more drastic in post-communist countries comparing to the established democracies in Europe. Along with its importance for democracy, voter turnout and political participation is crucial from the viewpoint of economics side. An empirical study by Mueller and Stratman (2002) finds that there is a negative relationship between political participation and income inequality, especially in strong democratic countries. The explanation to their finding is that a high level of political participation leads to a lower level of income inequality through increasing government size/transfers. Aidt and Eterovic (2011) find a positive relationship between political participation and government size. However, the high level of participation comes with some economic costs where greater government size or transfers could result by reducing the growth of GDP (Mueller & Stratman, 2002). Higher voter turnouts could bring more public goods and a higher share of government expenditure per capita (Aggeborn, 2016). Finally, political participation can increase subjective well-being (SWB) (Owen, Videras, & Willemsen, 2008).

Scholars from political science and economics have been studying factors affecting political participation. Alongside demographic factors, education and social capital have significant effect on people's political behaviors (Glaeser, Ponzetto & Shleifer, 2007). SWB became important in economics since it can be used to assess welfare by considering more dimensions than income (Graham, 2016). Numerous researches have been done to explore determinants of SWB, however, very few studies considered it as an explanatory variable to explain political participation (Sulemana & Agyapong, 2019). This raises the question, does SWB affect people's socioeconomic and political behaviors?

This research aims to identify the causality between SWB and political participation, the latter being a response variable. The motivation behind it stems from past studies which mostly modeled the opposite relationship i.e., political participation impacts SWB. However, from the point of behavioral economics, SWB could affect one's political action. And an increasing number of

researchers have been studying this relationship. But results of these studies, so far, are not conclusive depending on the type of political participation. By exploring the impact of SWB on various forms of political participation using a dataset from European countries the research will contribute to well-being studies and political economy.

Similar studies have been conducted for a particular country or city. Using cross-national data and controlling for endogeneity, I found that subjective well-being is significantly associated with various forms of political participation.

Section II provides a literature review on political participation and SWB. In section III the dataset and variables will be introduced along with empirical strategy. Section IV discusses the results of econometric models. The final section concludes the thesis and discusses on policy implications.

2. Literature Review

Political participation refers to the legal actions by private citizens that aim to influence government formation and behavior (Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978). Brady (1999) defines any action by ordinary citizens to influence political outcomes as political participation. As government responsibilities and activities enlarged comparing to a few decades ago, new forms of political participation have also been developed from simply voting to signing petitions, blocking traffic, donating money, etc. (Deth, 2001). Since the dimension of political participation has advanced, the typology of political participation has also been constructed by researchers over the years, and scholars have been using various forms of political participation in their studies. Teorell et al (2007) suggest a typology which consists of electoral participation, consumer participation, party activity, protest activity, and contact activity (Teorell, Torcal, & Montero, 2007; Ekman & Amna, 2012). Social media has also been an important tool to express the political voice of people. This type of political participation is called e-participation (Güler & Sezgin, 2020) and could be added to the previous typology.

Factors that affect political participation could be macro-national (e.g., design of state institutions), micro-level (e.g., education, wealth), and meso-level (e.g., social capital) (Krishna, 2002). Demographic characteristics such as education, age, and income have been stressed to affect the political engagement of people. Glaeser, Ponzetto, and Shleifer (2007) explain the correlation between education and democracy through the costs and benefits of political engagement. Education increases the benefits of civic engagement resulting in higher political participation to support democracy. An individual's level of income is not enough to judge political participation, however, the income level of other people also matters. Economic inequality, therefore, tends to depress political engagement (Solt, 2008). After increasing interest in the role of social capital in the last few decades, researchers have been linking it with political participation. Putnam(1993a) argues that well working democratic institutions are built on social capital where voluntary associations and social engagement are important factors for democracy (Putnam, 1993a; in Lee A-R, 2010). Following Putnam, studies conclude that social capital fosters democratic participation (e.g., Krishna, 2002; Lee, 2010; Teorell, 2003; Sarker & Islam, 2017). Moreover, Alesino and Giuliano (2009) show that strong family ties, i.e., when trust is strongly built on the family, interest and participation in political activities tend to be lower.

In the present paper, I study one of the micro-level determinants of political participation: subjective well-being (SWB). Subjective well-being can be defined as a person's own evaluation of his/her life. The degree of the overall assessment of one's whole life can be expressed by happiness and life-satisfaction (Veenhoven, 1988). Indeed, life satisfaction and happiness level have been used for measuring subjective well-being in economics (Easterlin 2004, in Conceição & Bandura, 2008). A positive state of mind and life satisfaction means high-level subjective well-being (Cummins, Lau & Strokes, 2004). It is also worth stressing that subjective well-being is used as a proxy for individual welfare (Stutzer & Frey, 2010). Scholars, especially economists, have studied subjective well-being as a dependent variable, however, more recent studies focus on the effects of it, meaning whether a high level of subjective well-being is desired by policymakers

(Diener & Ryan, 2009). The literature on the outcomes of subjective well-being reveals that it has impacts on health, productivity, income, social behavior etc. (Neve, Diener, Tay & Xuereb, 2013).

Does subjective well-being affect political participation? The direction of the relationship between subjective well-being and political participation, so far, was bidimensional and most studies model the relationship so that subjective well-being is a consequence rather than a cause. Being able to affect the policy choices for oneself or society through political participation could result in a higher SWB for citizens (Sen & Drèze, 2002). The channel comes from increasing one's "autonomy, competence, and sense of relatedness" through political participation (Weitz-Shapiro & Winters, 2008). The level of democratic system is crucial since democracy is positively correlated with SWB. The ability to participate in the political process in democratic states leads to a higher level of SWB (Owen, Videras, & Willemsen, 2008). A study of European countries using European Social Survey found that actual political participation results in a robust, positive, and strong effect on life satisfaction (Pacheco & Lange, 2010).

However, there is an increasing interest and research that investigates the effect of subjective well-being on political participation. In their empirical work, Weitz-Shapiro and Winters (2011) study the direction of this relationship in Latin American countries. The results show that voting does not raise individual happiness, however, happier people are more willing to vote. The theory behind SWB and political participation explained by Veenhoven (1988) could result in two outcomes. On the one hand, happy people are less engaged with politics, resulting in 'emptying the democracy'. On the other hand, people satisfied with their own lives start to take concern in public and social problems leading them to take part in political processes (Veenhoven, 1988). Concern about society could also result once a person reaches the own material well-being and is satisfied with life (Inglehart 1977, 1990; in Flavin & Keane, 2011). Empirical studies that have been done so far support both possibilities depending on the type of political participation (Lorenzini, 2015; Flavin & Keane, 2011).

A study from local Chinese village elections shows that people with a high level of life satisfaction tend to vote in elections (Zhong & Chen, 2002). A more recent empirical study by

Flavin and Keane (2011) using American National Election Study (ANES) finds a positive relationship between life satisfaction and political participation except for protest activity. In particular, the effect of life satisfaction on voting activities competes with education. For protest activities, it could be the reason that US citizens prefer more conventional ways of political participation when it comes to life satisfaction. However, Lorenzini (2015) finds contradicting results, that life satisfaction in youth increases the protest activities. Since employment status is an important determinant of SWB, she analyzes the role of SWB on voice-based political participation (i.e., contacting and protest) of youth with consideration of employment status. Her findings suggest that life dissatisfaction encourages contacting activities of employed youth but does not affect unemployed youth. For protest activities, it is life satisfaction that affects the participation of unemployed youth. Contrastingly, Lindholm (2020) shows that the causal mechanism between SWB and protest activities is reciprocal. She uses Swiss Household Panel (SHP) data and results suggest that a low level of SWB increases protest intentions, and this could to a certain extent result in lower SWB. However, the impact of SWB on protest is stronger than the reverse relationship.

Sulemana and Agyapong (2019) analyze the relationship between SWB and political participation in Ghana using World Values Survey (WVS) data. Unlike previous studies, their results do not show any impact of SWB on political participation types including voting, signing a petition, joining strikes, etc. Economic struggles and poverty among Ghanaians where their focus is on survival needs, and vote buying of poor people could obscure the effects of subjective well-being. Apart from traditional political participation, Güler (2020) in his work studies the effects of well-being on e-participation activities, namely behaviors performed on Twitter. The study uses original survey data from Turkish participants and employs the Structural Equation Modelling technique. The results show that life satisfaction negatively affects political expressions i.e., sharing, liking, and retweeting on Twitter (e.g., when they want to make their voices heard). Life satisfaction positively affects the habit to follow policy on Twitter, however, this could be particular to Turkish citizens. Finally, the study results that life satisfaction does not have an impact

on participation in local government align with Sulemana and Agyapong (2019). So far, studies on the influences of SWB on political participation are nothing but inconclusive, additionally, they focused on one specific country or town. In the present study, cross-sectional data from European countries will be used to explore this relationship for different types of political participation.

3. Data and Methods

3.1. Data

To test empirically the impact of SWB on political participation I use data from the recent round (Round 9) of the European Social Survey (ESS). The European Social Survey is a cross-national survey that has been conducted every two years across Europe since 2002 on political attitudes, well-being, social capital, citizen involvement and democracy, economic conditions, among others. The data for Round 9 were collected from 4th quarter of 2018 until 1st quarter of 2020. Twenty-nine countries participated in Round 9.

The following countries are included for analysis:

Austria(AT), Belgium(BE), Bulgaria(BG), Croatia(HR), Cyprus(CY), Czechia(CZ), Denmark(DK), Estonia(EE), Finland(FI), France(FR), Germany(DE), Hungary(HU), Iceland(IS), Ireland(IE), Italy(IT), Latvia(LV), Lithuania(LT), Montenegro(ME), Netherlands(NL), Norway(NO), Poland(PL), Portugal(PT), Serbia(RS), Slovakia(SK), Slovenia(SI), Spain(ES), Sweden(SE), Switzerland(CH), and United Kingdom(GB).

Dependent Variables

The dataset includes questions on voting behavior and other types of political participation regarding party activity, contact activity, consumer participation and protest activities. The first variable is voting behavior. Respondents were asked if they voted in the last elections: “Did you vote in the last national election?”, and the answers are “Yes” or “No”. The other variables were

chosen following the literature about various types of political participation. The questions asked about these variables demanded whether the respondent had done the action in the last 12 months:

“There are different ways of trying to improve things in [country] or help prevent things from going wrong. During the last 12 months, have you done any of the following? “Contacted politician, government or local government official”, “Worked in political party or action group”, “Signed a petition”, “Taken part in lawful demonstration”, “Boycotted certain products?”, and “Posted or shared anything about politics online, for example on blogs, via email or on social media such as Facebook or Twitter?”

The answer to these questions is simply “Yes” or “No”.

Independent Variables

The main independent variable is life satisfaction (i.e., subjective well-being) and respondents were asked to rank their life satisfaction based on the following question: “All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole nowadays?” Please answer using this card, where 0 means “extremely dissatisfied” and 10 means “extremely satisfied”. Happiness level and life satisfaction questions are widely used to measure subjective well-being, among others. Following the literature that studies the effects of SWB on political participation, the present study will consider life satisfaction as a proxy to SWB. However, the terms “life satisfaction”, “happiness”, and “subjective well-being” are used interchangeably throughout this study.

Table 1 presents the summary statistics of the variables used in the analysis. Outcome variables and explanatory variables are grouped separately to give a better understanding. Apart from subjective well-being, I use control variables including demographic characteristics and social capital. Demographic variables are age, gender, education, income, religion, and place of residence. Since many studies found a significant impact of social capital on political behavior, I

use the “social meeting” variable as a proxy to control social capital. “Political interest” and “trust in politicians” were selected to control the political feelings of the respondents.

Table 1: Summary statistics

<i>Variables</i>	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Dependent variables				
Voted (last national)	0.767	0.423	0	1
Contacted politician	0.167	0.373	0	1
Worked for a political party	0.045	0.208	0	1
Signed a petition	0.285	0.452	0	1
Participated in demonstration	0.085	0.28	0	1
Boycotted a product	0.203	0.402	0	1
Posted/shared online about politics	0.187	0.39	0	1
Independent variables				
Life satisfaction	7.134	2.128	0	10
Political interest	1.316	0.905	0	3
Trust in politicians	3.546	2.445	0	10
Meet with relatives, friends	4.924	1.525	1	7
Age	44.697	13.008	18	65
Years spent in education	13.742	3.876	0	60
Family income	5.768	2.738	1	10
Gender				
	Percentage			
<i>Male</i>	47.15 %			
<i>Female</i>	52.85 %			
Belong to religion				
<i>Yes</i>	55.60 %			
<i>No</i>	44.40 %			
Place of residence				
<i>A big city</i>	20.45 %			
<i>Suburbs or outskirts of big city</i>	11.44 %			
<i>Town or small city</i>	31.15 %			
<i>Country village</i>	31.60 %			
<i>Farm or home in countryside</i>	5.36 %			

Source: Author’s calculations

Since political participation includes voting and other types of participation such as participating in demonstrations, I included respondents aged between 18 and 65. For education, I

chose years of education completed. “Political interest” takes values from 0 to 3 in the following order: “Not at all interested”, “Hardly interested”, “Quite interested”, and “Very interested”.

The personal income question does not exist in the survey; however, family income exists and is coded from 1 to 10 in ascending order. “Place of residence” is described by the respondent and the answers are in descending order as following; “A big city”, “Suburbs or outskirts of a big city”, “Town or small city”, “Country village”, “Farm or home in the countryside”. “Meeting with friends, relatives, and colleagues” has ascending order from 1 to 7 such that: “Never”, “Less than once a month”, “Once a month”, “Several times a month”, “Once a week”, “Several times a week”, and “Every day”. And lastly, the religion variable has been selected and it takes value 1 if the respondent belongs to a religion and 0 otherwise.

The mean of the “voted in the last election” is higher than other dependent variables. Respondents tend to show less participation for “working for a political party” and “participating in lawful demonstrations” with means of 0.045 and 0.085, respectively. The female proportion in the selected sample is higher than males with 52.85 % of total observations. 55.60 % of the respondents belong to a particular religion or denomination.

“Trust in politicians” ranges from 0 (No trust at all) to 10 (Complete trust), and mean value of 3.55 out of 10. The average age of respondents is 44.70 and years spent in education is 13.74. Age squared is also included in the analysis because of its curvilinear relationship (Flavin & Keane, 2011) meaning that after certain point age is negatively related to political participation.

To measure overall political participation, I constructed an additive index from different types of political participation except for voting¹. Other forms of political participation (e.g., signing a petition, contacting a politician etc.) are more demanding than voting and the motivation behind voting is different. The index will be ranged from 0 to 6 where higher value means the individual participates more in the political process. The index has Cronbach’s alpha of reliability coefficient of 0.63.

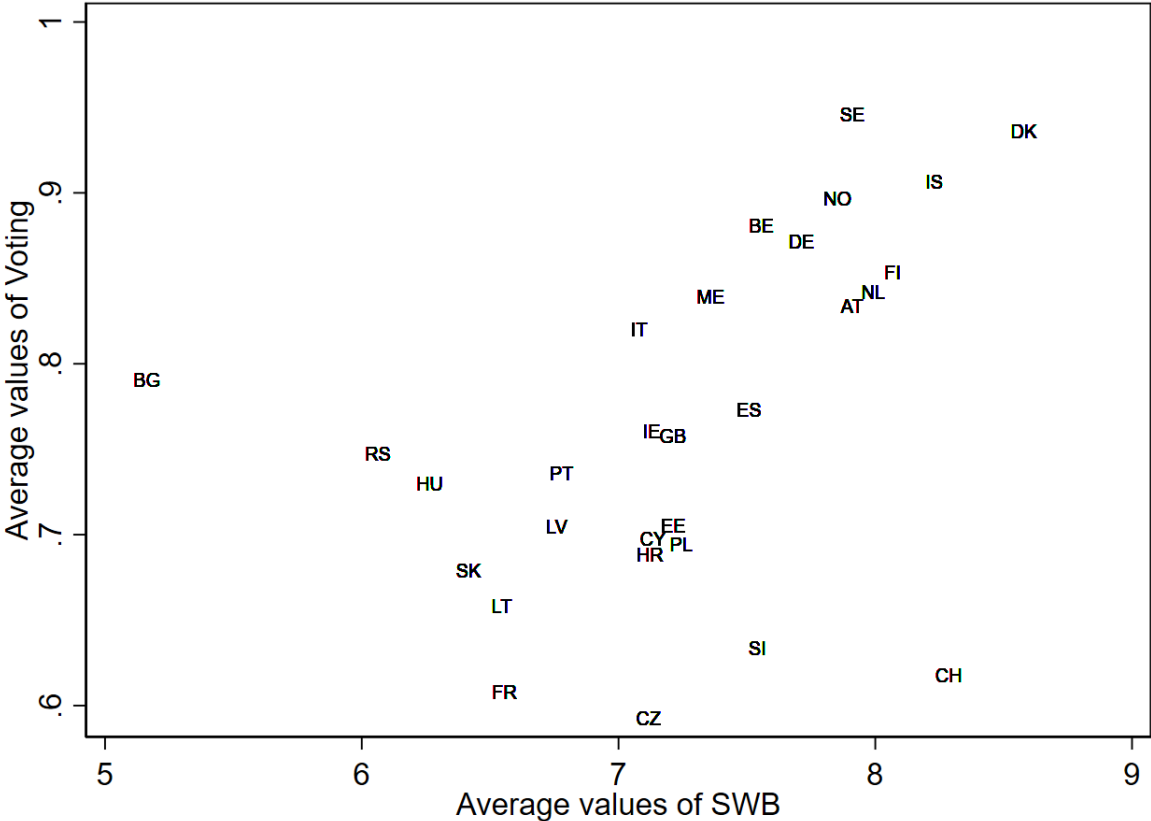
¹ I constructed an index using Principal Component Analysis and used it as a dependent variable, however, the results of regression do not change substantially than additive index.

Table A1 presents the correlation matrix of the variables used in regression analysis. Since the correlations between the variables are not high, multicollinearity is not expected. This is also tested by calculating variance inflation factor values.

Life satisfaction level across countries with number of observations is presented in Table A2. Northern and Western countries have the highest level of life satisfaction. Denmark, Switzerland, and Iceland are the countries with the highest subjective well-being, however, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Hungary being with lowest.

Figure 1 shows the average values of the variable “Voted in the last national elections” and SWB by countries. Post-communist countries such as Czechia, Slovenia, Lithuania, Slovakia have the lowest voter turnouts around 60%, and Nordic countries have the highest with around 85%.

Figure 1: Average values of Voting and SWB across countries

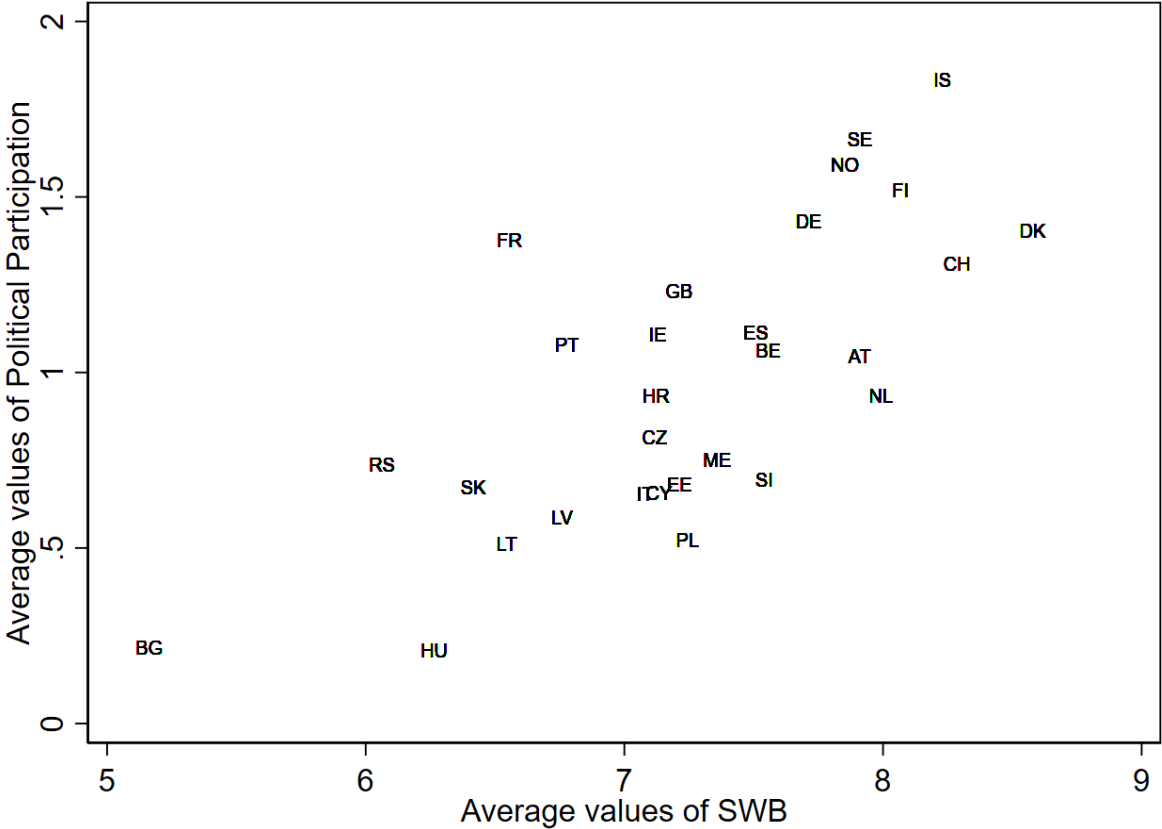


Source: Author's calculations

These results align with the “Voter turnout trends around the World” by Solijonov (2016) shown in Figure A1. His findings portray that decline and low level in voter turnouts is sharper in post-communist countries rather than established European democracies.

Figure 2 presents the Political Participation Index and SWB across countries. Nordic countries have the highest political participation while countries such as Hungary, Bulgaria, and Lithuania have the lowest values. The difference in political participation index between countries is severe rather than the difference in voting. Specifically, young democratic countries have a very low level of political participation, e.g., the average of Bulgaria is approximately one-tenth of Iceland. In particular, Iceland, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Germany, and Denmark have the highest level of electoral participation and other forms of political participation. Since these countries have the

Figure 2: Average values of Political participation and SWB across countries



Source: Author's calculations

oldest age of democracy, political participation is higher comparing to new democratic countries. Nevertheless, the standard deviation of life satisfaction is smaller than the electoral participation and political participation index.

Countries with a high level of life satisfaction, in general, seem to have a higher level of electoral participation except for Switzerland. Furthermore, countries with a lower level of life satisfaction, except for France and Portugal, have a lower level of political participation. However, the relationship between SWB and political participation forms need more statistical analysis. Although the relationship seems positive from figures above, the actual relationship could turn to be negative considering that countries are grouped. Therefore, instead of relying on simple correlations between variables, I employ extensive econometric analysis. The next section will introduce econometric models and discuss the results.

3.2. Empirical Model

All the dependent variables have a binary response. Since the research aims to identify the effect of subjective well-being on various forms of political participation, I model every dependent variable as a function of subjective well-being and control variables. However, there is a possibility of inverse causality which means an endogeneity problem. To control causal relationship, I employ the instrumental variable (IV) technique. The IV technique requires an instrument that is not correlated with the outcome variable but affects the endogenous variable. Literature on Subjective well-being found education, marital status, current employment status, previous unemployment experience, and subjective health to be strongly associated with one's subjective well-being. Since the variables that affect subjective well-being also have an impact on political participation it is crucial to choose the right instrument for the analysis. Lorenzini (2015) studies the political participation of employed and unemployed youth in Geneva. Employment status is an important predictor of SWB, and it affects political participation through SWB. ESS asks respondents whether they were unemployed in the last 7 days and the answer is "Yes" or "No". This variable is valid since it reflects current employment status and does not have any impact on chosen political

participation forms. Next, subjective health is another predictor of subjective well-being. This variable is also valid since it can only influence political participation through subjective well-being. Lastly, marital status has been chosen to explain subjective well-being. Previous studies controlled for marital status while exploring the determinants of political participation, however, their findings, in general, do not show a significant impact. Therefore, I argue that marital status could affect political participation through subjective well-being.

For the empirical model, I use 2SLS. This method was suggested by Angrist and Pischke (2009) since IV captures local average treatment effects even though the dependent variable is binary. Therefore, using 2SLS would still give consistent results. The IV 2SLS model is as following:

$$SWB_{ic} = \alpha + \beta Z_{ic} + \theta \text{CONTROLS}_{ic} + \gamma_c + u \quad (1)$$

$$\text{PolPar}_{ic} = \sigma + \lambda \text{SWBhat}_{ic} + \delta \text{CONTROLS}_{ic} + \gamma_c + v \quad (2)$$

where in equation (1), “SWB” stands for life satisfaction, “Z” for instruments (i.e., unemployed in the last 7 days, subjective health, and marital status), “CONTROLS” for control variables, and “u” for the error term. “ α ”, “ β ” and “ θ ” are parameters to be estimated. “ic” depicts individual “i” in country “c”. In equation (2) “PolPar” is political participation, “SWBhat” is predicted life satisfaction variable from equation (1), “CONTROLS” are control variables, and “v” is the error term. “ σ ”, “ λ ” and “ δ ” are parameters to be estimated. Country dummies (γ_c) are included in both equations to control country fixed effects.

I run the first series of regression for every dependent variable. Next, following the previous studies (Flavin & Keane, 2011; Sulemana & Agyapong, 2019) I construct an additive index from the various political participation forms, except for voting, simply summing them up (cross country differences are shown in the previous section for this index). Since these variables have binary responses, the index will be ranged from 0 to 6. To see the impact of SWB on general political participation, I run the second series of regression while controlling endogeneity.

4. Results and Robustness Checks

4.1. Empirical Results

Table 2 reports the first series of IV 2SLS regression results with country fixed effects for different forms of political participation. The variable of interest, SWB, has significant effects on all forms of political participation. However, the results are mixed and confirm both theoretical outcomes by Veenhoven (1988). Unlike the results of Sulemana and Agyapong (2019) and Lindholm (2020), SWB positively influences voting behavior which is aligned with Flavin and Keane (2012). This confirms the view that when people are satisfied with their own life they start thinking more about public concerns and engage more in political process.

SWB has a negative influence on other forms of political participation. The highest impact is on posting/sharing online about politics whereas the lowest on working for a political party. When people are dissatisfied with their lives they tend to get involved in various forms of political actions except for voting. As discussed by Veenhoven(1988), higher level of well-being decreases political involvement where “contented idleness” could empty democracy. In particular, he stresses that happy people are less motivated to engage in boycotts, demonstrations, and strikes. The results of the research align with this view except for voting.

Flavin and Keane (2012) and Sulemana and Agyapong (2019) found that SWB has no significant impact on protest activities. However, my results show that protest activities (i.e., taking part in a lawful demonstration) are decreasing when one’s subjective well-being is increasing.

The results for contacting and protest activities are quite contrary to Lorenzini’s (2015) findings as well. My results show that life dissatisfaction increases contacting and protest activities, however, her study reports that life satisfaction of unemployed youth increases protest activities. But life dissatisfaction of employed youth increases contacting activities. Since her study is more about a comparison of employed and unemployed youth, comparison could be irrelevant.

Table 2: IV 2SLS regression results with country fixed effects for various forms of political participation

	(1) Voting	(2) Contacting a politician	(3) Working for a political party	(4) Signing a petition	(5) Taking part in a demonstration	(6) Boycotting a certain product	(7) Posting/ sharing online about politics
SWB (Life satisfaction)	.031*** (.005)	-.015*** (.004)	-.005** (.003)	-.021*** (.005)	-.006* (.003)	-.018*** (.005)	-.029*** (.005)
Political interest	.106*** (.003)	.078*** (.003)	.047*** (.002)	.1*** (.003)	.055*** (.002)	.078*** (.003)	.114*** (.003)
Trust in politicians	.005*** (.001)	.002 (.001)	.003*** (.001)	-.009*** (.001)	-.003*** (.001)	-.01*** (.001)	-.011*** (.001)
Meet with relatives, friends	.004* (.002)	.018*** (.002)	.008*** (.001)	.016*** (.002)	.011*** (.001)	.011*** (.002)	.014*** (.002)
Belong to a religion	.033*** (.005)	.014*** (.005)	.003 (.003)	-.032*** (.006)	-.03*** (.004)	-.036*** (.006)	-.019*** (.005)
Gender	-.028*** (.005)	.017*** (.005)	.006** (.003)	-.066*** (.005)	-.016*** (.004)	-.039*** (.005)	-.023*** (.005)
Age	.013*** (.001)	.011*** (.001)	0 (.001)	.003 (.002)	-.002* (.001)	.003** (.001)	0 (.001)
Age squared	0*** (0)	0*** (0)	0 (0)	0*** (0)	0 (0)	0** (0)	0*** (0)
Place of residence	.01*** (.002)	.023*** (.002)	.004*** (.001)	-.015*** (.002)	-.016*** (.002)	-.012*** (.002)	-.01*** (.002)
Education	.006*** (.001)	.008*** (.001)	.003*** (0)	.013*** (.001)	.005*** (.001)	.012*** (.001)	.007*** (.001)
Family income	.006*** (.001)	.006*** (.001)	.001 (.001)	.007*** (.001)	-.002** (.001)	.005*** (.001)	.004*** (.001)
_cons	-.116*** (.045)	-.381*** (.04)	-.083*** (.023)	.199*** (.048)	.079** (.031)	.088** (.043)	.246*** (.043)
Observations	25591	25758	25762	25704	25754	25713	25729
R-squared	.16	.08	.06	.138	.074	.17	.115

Robust standard errors are in parentheses

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$

Note: Country dummies have been excluded to keep the table short.

Source: Author's calculations

Posting/sharing online about politics is a novel way of engaging in politics and it has not been studied widely. A recent paper by Güler (2020) investigates the e-participation of citizens on Twitter. My results support his findings that life satisfaction decreases online political expression.

The control variables are also important determinants of voting behavior. Alongside political interest and trust in politicians, social capital (i.e., meeting with friends, relatives) has a positive effect on voting. Age and family income are also positively related to voting whereas gender has no significant impact. Education affects voting behavior positively which supports the results of Brade and Piopiunik (2016) and Bozogáňová (2019). However, the effect of SWB is higher than the effect of education on voting. The effect of education on other forms of political participation is also positive which means educated people are more involved in politics.

Political interest is positively related to other types of political participation in addition to voting. This is an important predictor for political participation where people interested in politics are more likely to take part in all forms of political processes. Trust in politicians is also an important predictor since it decreases protest activities and posting/sharing online about politics. Social capital is positively related to all types of political participation. People with a high level of social network and trust are more engaged in politics.

Table 3 presents comparative results of regression analyses for voting behavior and political participation index by controlling country fixed effects. Alongside IV 2SLS results, this table compares various regression results for voting and political participation where SWB treated as exogenous variable. Similar additive indices were used by Flavin and Keane (2012) and Sulemana and Agyapong (2019). However, the variables used in those studies to construct the index are not identical. In the present paper, only voting was excluded from the index. Results of the IV 2SLS regression show that SWB, in general, has a negative impact on the political participation index. People with a high level of well-being tend to engage less in political processes. The sign and significance level has not changed when alternative models are used to predict the impact of SWB without controlling for endogeneity.

Table 3: IV 2SLS, Ordered logit and OLS results with country fixed effects for voting and political participation index.

	Voting			Political participation index		
	(1) IV	(2) Logit	(3) OLS	(4) IV	(5) Ordered Logit	(6) OLS
SWB (Life satisfaction)	.031*** (.005)	.08*** (.009)	.013*** (.001)	-.098*** (.014)	-.015** (.007)	-.016*** (.004)
Political interest	.106*** (.003)	.749*** (.024)	.106*** (.003)	.473*** (.01)	.784*** (.017)	.476*** (.01)
Trust in politicians	.005*** (.001)	.061*** (.008)	.008*** (.001)	-.029*** (.004)	-.074*** (.006)	-.041*** (.003)
Meet with relatives, friends	.004* (.002)	.063*** (.012)	.008*** (.002)	.078*** (.006)	.101*** (.009)	.059*** (.005)
Belong to a religion	.033*** (.005)	.272*** (.038)	.036*** (.005)	-.104*** (.017)	-.153*** (.027)	-.11*** (.016)
Gender	-.028*** (.005)	-.206*** (.034)	-.031*** (.005)	-.123*** (.015)	-.194*** (.025)	-.111*** (.014)
Age	.013*** (.001)	.057*** (.009)	.011*** (.001)	.014*** (.004)	.027*** (.007)	.017*** (.004)
Age squared	0*** (0)	0** (0)	0*** (0)	0*** (0)	0*** (0)	0*** (0)
Place of residence	.01*** (.002)	.08*** (.014)	.011*** (.002)	-.026*** (.006)	-.046*** (.011)	-.031*** (.006)
Education	.006*** (.001)	.053*** (.006)	.006*** (.001)	.047*** (.002)	.076*** (.004)	.045*** (.002)
Family income	.006*** (.001)	.07*** (.007)	.009*** (.001)	.021*** (.004)	.023*** (.005)	.008*** (.003)
_cons	-.116*** (.045)	-3.719*** (.239)	-.009 (.036)	.172 (.129)		-.28*** (.103)
/cut1					2.144*** (.18)	
/cut2					3.362*** (.18)	
/cut3					4.399*** (.181)	
/cut4					5.482*** (.183)	
/cut5					6.71*** (.186)	
/cut6					8.307*** (.205)	
Observations	25591	25940	25940	25534	25885	25885
R-squared	.16	.z	.166	.225	.z	.239

Robust standard errors are in parentheses

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$

Note: Country dummies have been excluded to keep the table short.

Source: Author's calculations

Unlike Sulemana and Agyapong (2019) my findings report that life satisfaction is significantly related to wider political participation. For voting, Logistic regression and OLS methods are conducted along with IV 2SLS. From the results, the sign and significance level of subjective well-being is the same for all three models. Logit estimation gives a higher coefficient when SWB is treated as exogenous. However, after controlling for endogeneity the value of the coefficient decreases but still significant. After performing the Durbin-Wu-Hausman test for endogeneity, the null hypothesis is rejected that the variables are exogenous. Therefore, I treat SWB as an endogenous variable and consider IV 2SLS results to be consistent for the analysis.

4.2. Robustness Checks

Political participation varies among countries depending on the democracy level. Post-communist countries have a lower level of voter turnout and other forms of political engagement. Country fixed effects are included in regression analyses by simply adding country dummies. However, to check the robustness of the results I introduce the democracy age for selected countries in the study. Table A3 reports the democracy age of the countries in 2015. Switzerland is the oldest democratic country whereas Montenegro and Serbia are the youngest, among others.

However, Switzerland is an outlier with a lower voter turnout rate when considering its democracy level and life satisfaction. Nordic countries such as Sweden, Norway, and Denmark are countries with high democracy ages and high overall political participation. Countries such as Bulgaria, Hungary, Serbia, and Latvia are young democratic countries with a lower level of overall political participation.

I added the democracy age to the empirical model for robustness checks. Table A4 and Table A5 present the results for political participation by considering democracy age as country fixed effects instead of country dummies. The first series of regression results for every dependent variable shows that subjective well-being is significantly related to all forms of political participation except for working for a political party. The significance levels and signs of the coefficients have not changed. From Table A5, subjective well-being has a significant influence

on the overall political participation index. Adding democracy age to the model does not change much the signs and significance levels of the results for both regression analyses.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

Although a considerable number of studies modeled the link between subjective well-being and political participation, very few of them considered the former being a cause and the latter as an effect. Moreover, these studies focused on a specific country or city in their studies. The results of previous studies are inconclusive. However, the argument that subjective well-being influences political engagement is attracting more interest from scholars.

By employing cross-national and cross-sectional data from European countries, this study investigates the role of subjective well-being on different forms of political participation. Furthermore, the present paper introduces the endogeneity problem of reverse causality, unlike previous studies. After controlling for endogeneity, the results suggest that subjective well-being positively related to voting behavior and negatively related to other forms of political participation. The results are significant after including the democracy age of the countries for robustness checks to control country effects. From the results of the paper, the idea that “contented idleness” could empty democracy is valid for all forms of political participation except for voting. Happy people are more “inclined to maintain the political status quo” (Veenhoven, 1988), therefore, they tend to engage less in political activities such as boycotting, attending demonstrations, and strikes. On the other hand, the idea that people satisfied with their own lives are generally more concerned about public problems and more likely to engage in politics is true only for voting. Thus, the paper suggests both outcomes discussed by Veenhoven(1988) to be true for different forms of political participation.

The current paper has several limitations. First, the answers to the questions on the survey sometimes cannot give accurate results depending on the mood of the respondent and the order of the questions. Second, some forms of political participation (e.g., participating in lawful demonstrations and signing a petition) could be specific to a country depending on the ongoing

political discussions. Lastly, the survey does not have enough questions on demographic characteristics that could be used as an instrument and control variable to get more significant results.

The study contributes to the sparse but developing literature on subjective well-being and political participation; and implies policy recommendations. Some macro-policy arrangements could be used to alter the well-being. For instance, factors such as inflation and unemployment are negatively correlated with well-being, especially, impact of unemployment is higher than inflation (Graham, 2016). From the short-run Philips curve, one can imply that policymakers should consider the possible effect of unemployment and inflation on well-being that could result in a change in political participation in return. Nevertheless, the use of subjective well-being in economic analysis with its effect on political behavior should be studied further, in order to discern its policy implications.

In addition to policy analysis, study fosters some new questions in this field. Some studies documented that younger generations are less involved in politics than older generations. Further research could be done for specific age groups on whether their subjective well-being has a significant influence on political involvement. One could also study this relationship on different homogenous country groups.

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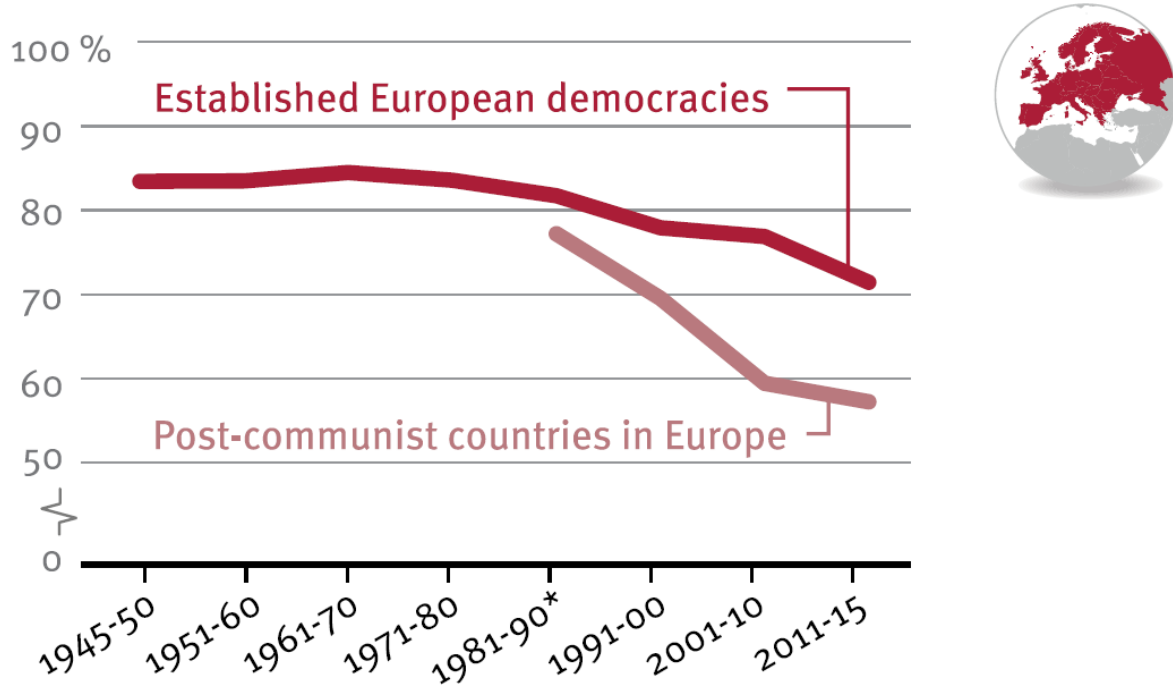
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Appendix

Figure A1: Voter Turnout in Europe



Source: "Voter Turnout Trends around the World." International IDEA, Solijonov, 2016.

Table A1: Pearson correlation coefficients of the variables

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)
(1) Voted	1.000																
(2) Contacted	0.117	1.000															
(3) Worked	0.086	0.284	1.000														
(4) Signed a pet.	0.135	0.206	0.162	1.000													
(5) Demonstr.	0.071	0.131	0.188	0.274	1.000												
(6) Boycott	0.108	0.166	0.109	0.343	0.202	1.000											
(7) Posted online	0.091	0.194	0.199	0.322	0.235	0.258	1.000										
(8) Life satis.	0.136	0.066	0.035	0.092	0.012	0.075	0.035	1.000									
(9) Political int.	0.296	0.228	0.199	0.248	0.165	0.252	0.262	0.133	1.000								
(10) Trust in pol.	0.153	0.078	0.065	0.051	0.002	0.065	0.018	0.263	0.269	1.000							
(11) Social meet.	0.062	0.073	0.072	0.110	0.086	0.087	0.093	0.214	0.078	0.065	1.000						
(12) Religious	0.058	-0.006	0.012	-0.067	-0.049	-0.090	-0.070	-0.027	-0.027	-0.033	-0.001	1.000					
(13) Gender	0.005	0.055	0.045	-0.030	0.002	-0.004	0.018	0.001	0.150	0.015	0.022	-0.073	1.000				
(14) Age	0.156	0.050	0.031	-0.056	-0.038	-0.014	-0.118	-0.095	0.115	-0.016	-0.175	0.122	-0.006	1.000			
(15) Place of res.	0.018	0.056	-0.002	-0.068	-0.087	-0.063	-0.066	0.032	-0.048	-0.011	-0.022	0.045	0.016	0.085	1.000		
(16) Education	0.135	0.135	0.079	0.198	0.113	0.199	0.160	0.171	0.253	0.146	0.073	-0.082	-0.028	-0.133	-0.145	1.000	
(17) Family income	0.140	0.095	0.046	0.098	0.013	0.098	0.067	0.284	0.185	0.140	0.061	-0.060	0.079	-0.066	-0.038	0.291	1.000

Source: Author's calculations

Table A2: Summary statistics of Life satisfaction (SWB) with number of observations per country

Country	Number of observations	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
DK	1.031	8.477	1.373	1	10
CH	876	8.183	1.549	0	10
IS	601	8.145	1.451	0	10
FI	1.143	7.984	1.545	0	10
NL	1.168	7.895	1.357	0	10
AT	1.696	7.815	1.856	0	10
SE	1.000	7.812	1.617	0	10
NO	987	7.748	1.640	0	10
DE	1.573	7.612	1.933	0	10
BE	1.168	7.458	1.695	0	10
SI	947	7.456	1.879	0	10
ES	1.178	7.409	1.861	0	10
ME	924	7.253	2.163	0	10
PL	1.040	7.149	1.937	0	10
EE	1.187	7.115	1.900	0	10
GB	1.457	7.108	2.143	0	10
IE	1.386	7.044	1.970	0	10
CY	458	7.033	2.143	0	10
HR	1.254	7.019	2.380	0	10
CZ	1.787	7.018	1.797	0	10
IT	1.757	6.997	1.995	0	10
PT	681	6.681	2.190	0	10
LV	547	6.667	2.202	0	10
FR	1.236	6.456	2.283	0	10
LT	1.182	6.455	2.297	0	10
SK	692	6.316	2.171	0	10
HU	1.129	6.161	2.310	0	10
RS	1.334	5.962	2.737	0	10
BG	1.375	5.060	2.456	0	10

Source: Author's calculations from ESS data

Table A3: Democracy age of selected countries

Country	Code	Year	Age of democracies at the end of 2015
Austria	AUT	2015	70
Belgium	BEL	2015	122
Bulgaria	BGR	2015	26
Croatia	HRV	2015	16
Cyprus	CYP	2015	39
Czechia	CZE	2015	23
Denmark	DNK	2015	115
Estonia	EST	2015	25
Finland	FIN	2015	99
France	FRA	2015	70
Germany	DEU	2015	26
Hungary	HUN	2015	26
Iceland	ISL	2015	98
Ireland	IRL	2015	94
Italy	ITA	2015	70
Latvia	LVA	2015	23
Lithuania	LTU	2015	24
Montenegro	MNE	2015	10
Netherlands	NLD	2015	119
Norway	NOR	2015	116
Poland	POL	2015	27
Portugal	PRT	2015	40
Serbia	SRB	2015	10
Slovakia	SVK	2015	23
Slovenia	SVN	2015	25
Spain	ESP	2015	39
Sweden	SWE	2015	105
Switzerland	CHE	2015	168
United Kingdom	GBR	2015	131

Source: Our World in Data : <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/age-of-democracies>

Table A4: IV 2SLS regression results with democracy age as a country fixed effect (Robustness checks)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	Voting	Contacting a politician	Working for a political party	Signing a petition	Taking part in a demonstration	Boycotting a certain product	Posting/sharing online about politics
SWB (Life satisfaction)	.036*** (.005)	-.015*** (.004)	-.004 (.003)	-.029*** (.005)	-.008** (.003)	-.027*** (.005)	-.033*** (.005)
Political interest	.103*** (.003)	.079*** (.003)	.046*** (.002)	.109*** (.003)	.055*** (.002)	.088*** (.003)	.116*** (.003)
Trust in politicians	.005*** (.001)	.003** (.001)	.003*** (.001)	-.006*** (.001)	-.003*** (.001)	-.007*** (.001)	-.01*** (.001)
Meet with relatives, friends	.002 (.002)	.017*** (.002)	.007*** (.001)	.021*** (.002)	.013*** (.001)	.016*** (.002)	.016*** (.002)
Belong to a religion	.041*** (.005)	.01** (.005)	.002 (.003)	-.041*** (.006)	-.033*** (.004)	-.052*** (.005)	-.029*** (.005)
Gender	-.027*** (.005)	.017*** (.005)	.006** (.003)	-.068*** (.006)	-.016*** (.004)	-.041*** (.005)	-.023*** (.005)
Age	.013*** (.001)	.011*** (.001)	0 (.001)	.001 (.002)	-.002* (.001)	.002 (.001)	0 (.001)
Age squared	0*** (0)	0*** (0)	0 (0)	0* (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0*** (0)
Place of residence	.008*** (.002)	.024*** (.002)	.003*** (.001)	-.011*** (.002)	-.015*** (.002)	-.009*** (.002)	-.008*** (.002)
Education	.005*** (.001)	.008*** (.001)	.003*** (0)	.014*** (.001)	.005*** (.001)	.014*** (.001)	.008*** (.001)
Family income	.005*** (.001)	.006*** (.001)	0 (.001)	.009*** (.001)	-.002 (.001)	.007*** (.001)	.005*** (.001)
_cons	-.072* (.042)	-.39*** (.036)	-.026 (.022)	.109** (.044)	.101*** (.029)	-.003 (.039)	.225*** (.039)
Observations	25591	25758	25762	25704	25754	25713	25729
R-squared	.146	.077	.059	.116	.069	.133	.105

Robust standard errors are in parentheses

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$

Note: Country dummies have been excluded to keep the table short

Source: Author's calculations

Table A5: IV 2SLS, Ordered logit and OLS results for voting and political participation index with democracy age as a country fixed effect (Robustness checks)

	Voting			Political participation index		
	(1) IV	(2) Logit	(3) OLS	(4) IV	(5) Ordered Logit	(6) OLS
SWB (Life satisfaction)	.036*** (.005)	.087*** (.008)	.014*** (.001)	-.119*** (.014)	.005 (.007)	-.007* (.004)
Political interest	.103*** (.003)	.731*** (.024)	.104*** (.003)	.495*** (.01)	.814*** (.017)	.494*** (.01)
Trust in politicians	.005*** (.001)	.059*** (.008)	.008*** (.001)	-.021*** (.004)	-.066*** (.006)	-.038*** (.003)
Meet with relatives, friends	.002 (.002)	.061*** (.012)	.007*** (.002)	.09*** (.006)	.108*** (.009)	.064*** (.005)
Belong to a religion	.041*** (.005)	.318*** (.037)	.044*** (.005)	-.146*** (.016)	-.232*** (.026)	-.152*** (.016)
Gender	-.027*** (.005)	-.198*** (.034)	-.03*** (.005)	-.127*** (.015)	-.19*** (.025)	-.11*** (.015)
Age	.013*** (.001)	.058*** (.009)	.012*** (.001)	.011** (.004)	.021*** (.007)	.015*** (.004)
Age squared	0*** (0)	0*** (0)	0*** (0)	0*** (0)	0*** (0)	0*** (0)
Place of residence	.008*** (.002)	.076*** (.014)	.01*** (.002)	-.016** (.006)	-.031*** (.01)	-.025*** (.006)
Education	.005*** (.001)	.047*** (.006)	.005*** (.001)	.052*** (.002)	.082*** (.004)	.048*** (.002)
Family income	.005*** (.001)	.068*** (.007)	.009*** (.001)	.027*** (.004)	.024*** (.005)	.008*** (.003)
_cons	-.072* (.042)	-3.476*** (.233)	.033 (.036)	.044 (.119)		-.436*** (.1)
/cut1					2.522*** (.176)	
/cut2					3.713*** (.176)	
/cut3					4.738*** (.177)	
/cut4					5.819*** (.179)	
/cut5					7.049*** (.182)	
/cut6					8.647*** (.201)	
Observations	25591	25940	25940	25534	25885	25885
R-squared	.146	.z	.156	.2	.z	.226

Robust standard errors are in parentheses

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$

Note: Country dummies have been excluded to keep the table short

Source: Author's calculations

Subjektiivne heaolu ja poliitiline osalus

Kokkuvõte

Kas subjektiivse heaolu tase mõjutab poliitilist käitumist? Varasemas kirjanduses on poliitilist osalust kasutatud subjektiivse heaolu suhtes selgitava muutujana. Vähe uurimusi on aga vaadeldud subjektiivset heaolu kui põhjust ja poliitilist osalust kui tagajärge. Käesoleva uurimuse eesmärk on empiirilisel analüüsida Veenhooveni tõstatatud küsimust, kas inimesed, kes tunnetavad kõrget subjektiivset heaolu, osalevad poliitikas vähem, või tunnevad hoopis suuremat muret sotsiaalsete probleemide üle ning osalevad seetõttu poliitikas rohkem. Eelnevad uurimused on keskendunud teatud riigile või linnale. Siinses uurimuses kasutati Euroopa sotsiaaluuringu riikidevahelisi ristanimeid, et uurida subjektiivse heaolu mõju erinevatele poliitilise osaluse vormidele Euroopa riikides. Erinevalt eelnevatest toob käesolev uurimus sisse ka vastupidise põhjuslikkuse endogeensuse probleemi. Lisaks muudele traditsioonilistele sõltuvatele muutujatele konstrueeriti neist muutujatest ka aditiivne indeks, mida kasutati samuti sõltuva muutujana, et mõõta üleüldist poliitilist osalemist. Empiiriliseks analüüsiks kasutati instrumentmuutujatega kaheastmelist vähimruutude mudelit; tulemuste võrdlemiseks viidi hindamised läbi ka teiste mudelite põhjal. Tulemuste stabiilsuse kontrolliks kasutati täiendavalt riikide fiktiivsete muutujate asemel demokraatia vanust. Tulemused näitavad, et kõrgema subjektiivse heaoluga inimesed hääletavad suurema tõenäosusega, samas kui madalama subjektiivse heaoluga inimesed on aktiivsemad teistes poliitilise osaluse vormides. Seega, erinevate poliitilise osaluse vormide lõikes on õiged mõlemad Veenhooveni pakutud tagajärjed.

Võtmesõnad: subjektiivne heaolu, hääletamine, poliitiline osalus, endogeensus.

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