

# The Relationship between Political Attitudes and Life Satisfaction in Europe: An Econometric Analysis

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Avrupa'da Siyasi Tutum ve Yaşam Memnuniyeti Arasındaki İlişki: Ekonometrik Bir Analiz

The Relationship between Political Attitudes and Life Satisfaction in Europe: An Econometric Analysis

Öz

Bu çalışma bireylerin siyasi tutumları ile yaşam memnuniyetleri arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemektedir. Mutluluğun ekonomi politikası üzerine geniş bir literatür olmasına rağmen doğrudan siyasi bağlılık (siyasete ilgi) ve siyasi yönelime (ideoloji) odaklanan bir çalışma mevcut değildir. Literatürdeki bu boşluğu doldurmak amacıyla, bu çalışma Avrupa Sosyal Araştırması veri setini kullanarak regresyon analizi (OLS ve 2SLS yöntemleri) yoluyla siyasi ilgi ve yönelimin bireysel yaşam memnuniyeti üzerindeki etkisini araştırmaktadır. İlk bulgularımız (ve Durbin-Wu-Hausman testi sonucu) siyasi yönelim için içsellik sorununa işaret etmektedir. İçsellik sorununun üstesinden gelmek için ilk önce araç değişken tahmini, ardından Stock-Watson testi yapılmıştır. Sonuçlarımız, siyasi ilgi ve yönelimin kişisel yaşam memnuniyeti üzerinde istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bir etkiye sahip olduğunu göstermektedir. Buna göre, ilk olarak, bireylerin siyasete ilgileri arttıkça yaşam memnuniyetleri azalmaktadır. İkinci olarak, siyasi yelpazede soldan sağa doğru gidildikçe bireylerin yaşam memnuniyeti artmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Yaşam memnuniyeti, siyasi bağlılık, siyasi yönelim, ideoloji

Abstract

This study examines the relationship between political attitudes and individuals' life satisfaction. While there is a massive body of literature on the political economy of subjective well-being, no study has focused directly on political engagement (interest in politics) and political orientation (ideology). To fill this gap in the current literature, the present study investigates the impact of political engagement and orientation on individual life satisfaction through regression analysis (OLS and 2SLS methods) using the European Social Survey dataset. Our initial findings (as well as the results of the Durbin-Wu-Hausman test) point out the endogeneity problem for political orientation. In order to overcome the endogeneity problem, the instrumental variable estimation and the Stock-Watson test were conducted. Our results show that political engagement and orientation have a statistically significant influence on personal life satisfaction. Accordingly, as individuals' political engagement increases, life satisfaction decreases. In addition, life satisfaction increases as one moves from left to right on the political spectrum.

**Keywords:** Life satisfaction, political engagement, political orientation, ideology

**Makale Türü:** Araştırma Makalesi

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## 1. Introduction

How does politics influence individuals' life satisfaction? How does an individuals' interest in politics (i.e., political engagement) and ideological orientations affect their subjective well-being? Are political engagement and orientation good indicators of personal life satisfaction? These are some of the main questions that we seek to answer in this article. Although there is a massive of literature on the relationship between politics and subjective well-being (e.g., Radcliff, 2001; Choma et al., 2009; Curini et al., 2014; Jost, 2017; Szoba et al., 2017), the impact of political factors on individuals' life satisfaction has not been empirically proven. In estimating the influence of politics on life satisfaction, existing studies examine either the political regime at the aggregate level (Radcliff, 2001) or political participation at the individual level (Pacheco and Lange, 2010). There is yet no study that specifically addresses the relationship between political engagement, orientation and life satisfaction in the literature. To fill this gap, this study intends to examine the impact of political engagement and orientation on the life satisfaction of European citizens by using the European Social Survey (ESS) dataset (Round 10) in 2020.<sup>§</sup>

By following Dworkin's (2021) "politicization of unhappiness" conceptualization, one might assume that there is a negative association between individuals' interest in politics and life satisfaction. Departing from this argument, first, we estimate the impact of political engagement on life satisfaction through regression analysis. Second, based on "the paradox of unhappy liberals and happy conservatives" (Oxenham 2014, Okulicz-Kozaryn et al. 2014), we estimate the impact of political orientation –in considering the scale from extreme left to extreme right– on life satisfaction. The current literature generally shows that individuals who position themselves on the political right are more likely to report higher levels of life satisfaction than those who position themselves on the political left (Napier and Jost, 2008). In line with these arguments, our initial regression analysis show that both political engagement and political orientation have statistically significant impact on life satisfaction. An increase in individuals' political engagement decrease their life satisfaction, and leftist individuals are more likely to be dissatisfied compared to rightist individuals.

That being said, we are aware of the fact that these initial results might be problematic as the relationship between life satisfaction and political orientation are potentially endogenous (Pacheco and Lange, 2010: 687). There is a problem of causality between political attitudes and life satisfaction at the individual level. Although we assume that the political attitude of individuals determines their life satisfaction, by pursuing reverse causality one might argue that individuals' life satisfaction shapes one's political attitude – such that one may argue that unsatisfied individuals are more likely to prefer leftist ideology and support leftist parties that articulate their discontent.

In order to address and overcome the potential endogeneity problem, we first run Durbin-Wu-Hausman test, which shows that endogeneity is present. There causality between life satisfaction and political orientation can be constructed in both ways. In order to overcome the endogeneity problem, we conduct instrumental variable (IV) regression. IV estimation confirm our previous results, which mean that higher political engagement and leftist orientation decrease the likelihood of life satisfaction at the individual level. Therefore, the IV estimation prove that the findings of this study can be trusted.

In the following sections, first, we will survey the available literature on the political economy of subjective well-being and strive to situate our study in accordance with the available scholarship. Second, we will present our data and models and then conduct regression analysis. Lastly, we will discuss and summarize our findings.

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<sup>§</sup> The ESS dataset is very suitable for this study as it contains detailed information about personal life satisfaction and happiness levels, individuals' political engagement and orientation, electoral preferences, socio-economic and demographic indicators.

## **2. Literature Review**

In the current literature, the terms subjective well-being, happiness and life satisfaction are mostly used interchangeably (Dolan et al., 2008). Scholars, philosophers and scientists have sought what makes us happy or satisfied with life, and how to achieve a greater level of satisfaction. There are countless sources on how human beings can lead happier lives. Life satisfaction is also studied intensively in academic literature. Based on the idea that life satisfaction is how positive life is perceived by the individual, it is expected that those who adapt better to their surroundings would report higher levels of satisfaction. The current literature show that life satisfaction of individuals is positively correlated with their health status, religiosity, employment status, and marital status (Pacheco and Lange, 2010: 686).

At this juncture, it is necessary to define at least broadly the above-mentioned concepts of the political right, political left and life satisfaction. Although the original meanings of the political right and left have changed over the years, and these concepts are perceived differently across countries and societies, there is still a general understanding of what they mean. The political right is associated with tradition, conservatism, religion, personal achievement, self-interest and conformity, whereas the political left carries the associations of openness, personal rights and freedoms, liberation, self-transcendence, socioeconomic equality and welfare (Piurko et al., 2011). The literature generally relates the rightist ideology with conservatism and the leftist ideology with liberalism. Departing from the personal liberties, conservatism and right versus liberalism and left are used mostly interchangeably in the American case, yet in European countries right- and left-wing ideologies are discussed in terms of socio-economic configurations (Napier and Jost, 2008). It is necessary to remind that the exclusive emphasis on individual rights and liberties in discussing rightist and leftist ideologies might overshadow the socio-economic issues, such as material inequalities, class conflicts and redistribution issues.

Life satisfaction can be defined as “in the widest sense, an umbrella term for all that is good” (Veenhoven, 2011). According to Veenhoven, happiness is a person’s overall satisfaction with their life, in other words, the extent of their perception of their own life as positive or favorable. It is a subjective well-being where the standard is determined by the individual, rather than the aggregate level. Radcliff (2001: 939) defines life satisfaction as “the degree to which individuals evaluate positively the quality of their life in total” and he adds that “[m]ost surveys ask respondents ‘how satisfied they feel with their lives in general.’”

Despite some concerns over the issue of reverse causality (Dolan et al., 2008), the literature on the determinants of life satisfaction so far allows us to make the following generalizations: First, it is shown that higher socioeconomic status (or relative income) and higher levels of education increase the likelihood of life satisfaction at the individual level (Oswald, 1997; Bjørnskov et al., 2008). Secondly, it is revealed that unemployment seriously decreases individuals’ life satisfaction (Radcliff 2001, Pacheco and Lange, 2010). Thirdly, some studies indicate that an increase in social capital leads to higher levels of life satisfaction (Dolan et al., 2008; Bjørnskov et al., 2008). Fourth, it is shown religiosity and spirituality positively influence individuals’ life satisfaction (Clark and Leskes, 2005). Fifth, marital status is reported to have a significant impact on individual life satisfaction (Bjørnskov et al., 2008). The economics of subjective well-being scholarship confirm these findings: Poor health status, separation, unemployment and lack of social capital decrease the life satisfaction of individuals (Dolan et al., 2008).

Some scholars hypothesize that leftist politics bring higher levels of life satisfaction to individuals. Radcliff argues that social democracy and welfare state would presumably increase individual life satisfaction (Radcliff, 2001: 941). He maintains that emancipation from market imperatives provides life satisfaction to individuals because capitalism leads to inequality at the social level and induces insecurity and psychological stress and anxiety at the individual level, while social democracy enables security by providing at least basic necessities to individuals through distributive politics (Radcliff, 2001:

941). Leftists aim to “marginalize the market as the principal agent of distribution and the chief determinant of peoples’ life chances” (Esping-Andersen, 1985: 245).

However, most of the literature point out to a contrary result. It seems that rightist and conservative individuals have higher life satisfaction than leftist and liberal individuals (Napier and Jost, 2008; Choma et al., 2009; Schlenker et al., 2017). It is argued that individuals with conservative beliefs and rightist ideology tend to have higher levels of life satisfaction because they are able to rationalize social inequalities without much trouble (Napier and Jost, 2008) or they have a more positive adjustment towards life (Szabo et al. 2017, 31). The higher life satisfaction levels of rightist individuals can be attributed to the personal agency, positive outlook, self-worth and moral commitment (Schlenker et al., 2017).

Conservatives appear to have qualities that are traditionally associated with positive adjustment and mental health. When we examined established measures of personal agency, positive outlook, and transcendent moral beliefs (i.e., religiosity, moral commitment, tolerance of transgressions), we found ideological differences that accounted for the happiness gap (Schlenker et al., 2017: 142).

Piurko et al. (2011: 555) have found that the right individuals are motivated by “avoiding change, controlling threats and overcoming anxiety,” whereas leftist individuals have strong “concern[s] for the welfare of all others, the environment and equality.” They also report that religiosity is an important component that determines the right orientation. Right ideology, conservatism and religiosity are social identities that are frequently observed together (Ozmen et al., 2017). Through the meta-analysis of more than 200 studies in the literature, Jost (2017) finds that the rightists/conservatives are more likely to have dogmatic thinking and cognitive rigidity than the leftists/liberals. Accordingly, rightists/conservatives are more inclined towards order/structure/closure and have lower tolerance towards ambiguity/uncertainty.

Scholars argue that three major factors explain higher life satisfaction of rightist individuals: Religion, income and socioeconomic status, and system justification (Napier and Jost, 2008; Curini et al., 2014). These factors overall increase the optimism and resilience of individuals by contributing a sense of safety and communal belonging. The existing literature shows that religiosity and/or spirituality are positively correlated with happiness (Ozmen et al., 2014; Napier & Jost, 2008). Piurko et al. (2011: 557) demonstrate that “religiosity was the most consistent sociodemographic predictor of political orientation, predicting right self-placement in 18 of the 20 countries.” Ozmen et al. (2014) state that one of the reasons behind religiosity’s positive impact on subjective well-being is social identity and belonging, which bring greater acceptance and support from the religious community. Religion may also contribute to happiness, endurance and adaptation since injustice or inequality could be explained through God’s will, destiny, divine justice and rewards in afterlife.

It seems that rightist individuals score higher on both income and happiness levels than leftist individuals (Napier & Jost, 2008). In a cross-national analysis of economic development and life satisfaction, Easterlin (1995) finds that a significant difference does not exist between rich and poor countries in terms of life satisfaction. However, he also adds that those nations above the standard are happier than those below it. Even though the old adage “money cannot buy happiness” has some truth to it, research shows that the relationship between income and happiness resembles a bell curve where an increase in income, up to a certain point, is paired with higher scores of happiness; at 35,000 USD it reaches its peak and after this point more income corresponds to lower scores of happiness (Muresan et al., 2020).

Veenhoven (1995) argues that people are better off in developed countries as at least their basic material needs are fulfilled compared to those people living in developing countries. The latter argument is also called “the liveability theory” in the literature (Radcliff, 2001: 940) – i.e., the standard of living increases the life satisfaction of individuals. In the US and European countries, it is shown that

life satisfaction is strongly correlated with income levels at the individual level (Radcliff 2001, 940). Bjørnskov et al. (2007) show that greater income, higher socio-economic status and more time spent on education have a positive influence on well-being, and as expected, unemployment and lack of social security affect well-being negatively.

Another factor that explains the higher life satisfaction levels of rightist individuals is the system justification theory. This theory suggests that people who are content with the existing structures, systems and order, lean towards political views that aim to sustain them (Napier and Jost, 2008). System justification helps us understand how right-oriented individuals make sense of the inequalities around them. If a person tends to see inequality as a problem of meritocracy and achievement, they are more likely to accept it and let it linger instead of aiming to change it. The opposite is true for left-oriented individuals; as leftist ideology tends to favor reforms, equality and welfare, it is harder to justify and accept injustice or inequality for leftist people. Curini et al. (2014) find that even after controlling the income and religion variables, right-oriented individuals scored much higher in life satisfaction than left-oriented ones. This study attributes this variation to the system justification argument.

The current literature also highlights that political system, political regimes or regime transitions influence the life satisfaction of individuals. People living under democratic regimes are happier on average than those who do not have democratic liberties and rights (Frey and Stutzer, 2000). In a cross-national study, Radcliff (2001) finds that regime types (liberal, conservative, or socialist), left dominance and levels of de-commodification exert significant influence on individual life satisfaction. Using individual-level data gathered from World Values Survey data for 70 countries across the world, Bjørnskov et al. (2008) find that individuals with left-wing ideology in older democracies are happier than those with right-wing ideology. This study also underscores that the transition from communism to a liberal economy is a critical factor in terms of life satisfaction, as people living in post-communist countries have lower life satisfaction levels compared to established liberal democracies.

Some scholars suggest that there is a possibility that strong ideological beliefs and commitment might increase subjective well-being (Choma et al., 2009; Curini et al., 2013). These studies show that individuals' ideological commitment at both ends of the political spectrum (right/conservative or left/liberal) increases the levels of life satisfaction because radical commitment helps individuals to understand the world and give meaning to life. However, Alhasan and Almawajdeh (2016) find that radicalization and extremism bring lower life satisfaction among university students in Jordan. Similarly, a study conducted in Hong Kong supports this finding, showing how post-materialist values and low life satisfaction are linked with radical actions (Cheng et al., 2021). While radicalization has different connotations in Europe, North America, Asia and the Middle East, it is possible to say that radicalization is strongly linked with dissatisfaction and a sense of urgency in demanding social change. The earlier-mentioned values associated with leftist orientation point to social change as well.

A slightly contradictory study by Curini et al. (2014) that explores political orientation and life satisfaction focusing on both orientation and proximity lays out how radicals tend to score higher in happiness whether right or left oriented, however, centrists score significantly higher in happiness than radicals if ideologies they feel closer to are in power. This study indicates that radicals are less satisfied because of their demand for change, further supporting the idea that system justification has a positive effect on happiness. Parallel to this, in analyzing the relationship between political orientation and life satisfaction of older adults in Hungary, Szabo et al. (2017) find that there is no direct relationship between the two variables. However, they report that strong ideological orientation and extreme ideological commitment to either left or right increases the life satisfaction of older adult individuals.

Our research is, to some extent, influenced by Pacheco and Lange's (2010) study on political participation and life satisfaction across European countries. Pacheco and Lange handle the panel data for 20 European countries derived from the 2006/2007 European Social Survey and conduct an ordered probit regression, a linear regression and a linear corrected regression model (two-step, simultaneous treatment effect model). They find that political participation turns out to be insignificant under probit

and linear regression models. However, after correcting the model for a potential endogeneity problem, political participation has a significant and positive impact on life satisfaction under the two-step simultaneous treatment regression model. In contrast, throughout this article, we focus on political engagement and orientation instead of political participation, and we analyze a recent dataset of European Social Survey Round 10 in 2020.

### 3. Data and Models

For the purposes of this study, we have conducted a regression analysis on the European Social Survey (ESS) dataset. By carrying out a cross-national biannual survey in almost all European countries, the ESS provides a well-respected dataset consisting of several social, economic, political and demographic indicators on European citizens. Although the ESS Round 10 in 2020 originally covers 32 countries, the variables that we use in this study are available for the 19 countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia, Switzerland. With the omission of missing data, the total sample size gathered from the ESS is 22,511.

In the models, our dependent variable is life satisfaction. The question for the life satisfaction variable in the ESS survey asks, “How satisfied with life as a whole?” Life satisfaction is an ordinal categorical variable with answers ranging on a scale from 0 to 10. The first explanatory independent variable is political engagement. The relevant question in the ESS survey is “How interested in politics?” This is also an ordinal categorical variable with 4 responses. The second explanatory independent variable is political ideology, which is formulated through the placement of individuals on the right-left scale from 0 to 10. The control variables are household income, subjective health status, education, religiosity, marital status, unemployment, age, gender. As we will discuss in the next section, the instrumental variable used in this study is the individuals’ trust in parliament.

**Table 1. Variable Definitions and Descriptive Statistics**

Variable	Description	Scale	Obs.	Mean
<b>Life satisfaction</b>	How satisfied with life as a whole	0: completely unsatisfied; 10: completely satisfied	33,008	7.04
<b>Political orientation</b>	Placement on left right scale	0: left; 10: right	28,445	5.23
<b>Political engagement</b>	How interested in politics	1: very interested; 4: not at all interested	33,269	2.77
<b>Income</b>	Household’s total net income	1: the first decile; 10: the tenth decile	26,003	5.36
<b>Health</b>	Subjective general health	1: very good; 5: very bad	33,309	2.16
<b>Education</b>	Years of full-time education completed		32,774	12.87
<b>Religiosity</b>	How religious are you	0: not at all religious; 10: very religious	32,967	4.80
<b>Married</b>	Legal marital status	0: others; 1: legally married	33,043	3.20
<b>Unemployment</b>	Ever unemployed for a period >3 months	0: no; 1: yes	33,020	1.73
<b>Age</b>	Age of respondent		33,087	50.62
<b>Gender</b>	Gender of respondent	0: female; 1: male	33,351	1.54
<b>Trust in parliament</b>	Trust in country’s parliament	0: no trust at all; 10: complete trust	32,766	4.47

### 3.1. The OLS Regression Estimation

Initially, we conduct regular OLS regression estimation in order to find out the impact of political engagement and orientation on individual life satisfaction. The results of the OLS regression are presented in the Table 2. All independent variables become statistically significant. There is a negative relation between the political engagement and life satisfaction, which means individuals who are more interested in politics are likely to have lower life satisfaction. In probabilistic terms, interest in politics tend to decrease happiness. Positive coefficient of political orientation means that individuals become more satisfied with their lives they move from left to right in the ideological spectrum. In other words, rightists tend to be happier than leftists. Considering the control variables, being male or unemployed decreases the life satisfaction. All other controls influence the life satisfaction positively.

**Table 2. Life satisfaction- Linear regression**

Variables	Life satisfaction
Political engagement	-0.183*** (0.015)
Political orientation	0.097*** (0.005)
Income	0.116*** (0.006)
Health	0.640*** (0.016)
Education	0.021*** (0.004)
Religiosity	0.018*** (0.004)
Married	0.164*** (0.028)
Unemployment	-0.240*** (0.029)
Age	0.007*** (0.001)
Male	-0.093*** (0.026)
Observations	22,511
R-squared	0.155

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Prior to discussing on the findings of regular OLS regression, it is necessary to test whether there is a reverse causality between political orientation and life satisfaction, and hence an endogeneity problem, as pointed out in the literature. Endogeneity refers to a problem in which the dependent variable in a regression analysis is correlated with the error term or one or more of the independent variables. This correlation can lead to biased or inconsistent estimates of the regression coefficients, which can make it difficult to draw reliable conclusions from the analysis.

When we conduct the Durbin-Wu-Hausman test of endogeneity, we see that null hypothesis of “all the variables are exogenous” is rejected. This means that there is a problem of endogeneity. To overcome this problem and correct the OLS regression results, we employ two-stage least squares (2SLS) regression estimation method. This methodology requires finding an instrumental variable that influence political orientation while not directly affecting life satisfaction. Pacheco and Lange offer (2010: 690) that individuals’ trust in parliament provides an appropriate instrument for such an analysis

because based on the available literature they argue that “horizontal [social] trust has been found to have a direct and statistically significant impact on life satisfaction, vertical trust [i.e., trust in intuitions] appears to have only an indirect impact on life satisfaction.”

### 3.2. The IV Estimation

An instrumental variable (IV) is a variable that is correlated with the endogenous independent variable but not directly related to the dependent variable. The IV is used to predict the endogenous variable, and this prediction is then used in the regression analysis in place of the actual endogenous variable. By using the IV to predict the endogenous variable, we can obtain an estimate of the effect of the endogenous variable on the dependent variable that is free from the bias caused by endogeneity.

The use of an instrumental variable requires some assumptions to hold in order to ensure that the estimates are valid. First, the IV must be correlated with the endogenous variable. Second, the IV must be unrelated to the error term in the regression equation. Finally, the IV must not be directly related to the dependent variable, except through its effect on the endogenous variable (Antonakis, et al., 2010). The endogenous variable equation is as follows:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X + \beta_2 C + \varepsilon_1 \quad (1)$$

In this first equation,  $Y$  is the dependent variable,  $X$  is the endogenous explanatory variable,  $C$  is the exogenous control variables. Then we need to state the instrumental variable equation:

$$X = \gamma_0 + \gamma_1 Z + \gamma_2 C + \varepsilon_2 \quad (2)$$

In this second equation,  $Z$  is the instrumental variable that is correlated with  $X$  but uncorrelated with the error term. The instrumental variable approach involves first estimating the first-stage regression equation (3) to obtain the predicted values of  $X$ . These predicted values are then used as the instrumental variable in the second-stage regression equation (4), where the dependent variable  $Y$  is regressed on the predicted values of  $X$  obtained from the first stage (3). The first-stage and second-stage regression equations are respectively stated in the equations 3 and 4:

$$X = \delta_0 + \delta_1 Z + \delta_2 C + v \quad (3)$$

$$Y = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 \hat{X} + \alpha_2 C + u \quad (4)$$

Adopting these equations, the first- and second-stage regression models in our study are as follows:

$$\textit{Political orientation} = \delta_0 + \delta_1 * \textit{Trust in Parliament} + \delta_2 \textit{ Control Variables} + v$$

$$\textit{Life Satisfaction} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 * \textit{Political orientation\_hat} + \alpha_2 \textit{ Control Variables} + u$$

In these models, *political orientation* is the endogenous variable, *trust in parliament* is the instrumental variable and *life satisfaction* is the dependent variable. Control variables are *political interest, income, health, education, religiosity, marriage, unemployment, age, and gender*.

In the first stage, we regress the endogenous variable (*political orientation*) on the instrumental variable (*trust in parliament*) to obtain the predicted values of the endogenous variable (*political orientation\\_hat*). The coefficient  $\delta_1$  represents the effect of *trust in parliament* on *political orientation*. In the second stage, we regress the dependent variable (*life satisfaction*) on the predicted values of the endogenous variable (*political orientation\\_hat*) obtained from the first stage. The coefficient  $\alpha_1$  represents the effect of *political orientation\\_hat*, which is a function of *trust in parliament*, on *life satisfaction*, while controlling for other variables that may affect *life satisfaction*.

By using an instrumental variable approach, we address the endogeneity problem that would arise when the endogenous variable (*political orientation*) is correlated with the error term in the equation for *life satisfaction*. The instrumental variable (*trust in parliament*) estimation helps us to identify the causal effect of the endogenous variable on the dependent variable, by removing the correlation between the endogenous variable and the error term.

The results of the second-stage regression analysis are shown in Table 3. *Political orientation* is still positively related to *life satisfaction* at the significance level of 1% even after controlling the endogeneity through the instrumental variable. While *income*, *religiosity*, and *unemployment* changed their signs from positive to negative, other control variables continue to have similar impact in line with the previous OLS estimations. Only *age* variable became insignificant.

**Table 3. Life satisfaction- Corrected linear regression**

Variables	Life satisfaction
Political orientation	2.702*** (0.228)
Political engagement	-0.175*** (0.052)
Income	-0.086*** (0.026)
Health	0.346*** (0.061)
Education	0.094*** (0.014)
Religiosity	-0.193*** (0.023)
Married	0.239** (0.094)
Unemployment	0.195* (0.106)
Age	0.003 (0.003)
Male	-0.882*** (0.113)
Observations	22,344

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

After implementing 2SLS, it is necessary to check the strength or weakness of our instrument. Stock & Watson (2003) proposes that if the first-stage F-statistic is smaller than 10, this indicates the presence of a weak instrument. We calculated the F statistics as 123,109, which is far greater than the critical value. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis that our instrument is weak. The results of 2SLS estimation, which are further confirmed by the Stock-Watson test, show that political orientation significantly influence life satisfaction of individuals.

#### 4. Discussion

The OLS regression estimation shows that political engagement has a significant impact on life satisfaction of individuals in European countries. As the individuals' interest in politics increase, their life satisfaction decreases. This means that higher interest in politics brings unhappiness to individuals in European context. In terms of control variables, it is shown that higher income, education and religiosity levels as well as better health status and older age increase the likelihood of life satisfaction, whereas unemployment status seriously decreases life satisfaction of individuals. In addition, comparatively speaking, women seem to be happier than men in Europe.

When we use a regular OLS regression, we see that political orientation has a significant and positive impact on life satisfaction. This result means that, a move from left to right in political spectrum increases the likelihood of life-satisfaction of individuals. However, there might be an issue of reverse causality, in which life satisfaction shapes individuals' political ideology, as discussed in the literature. To address and overcome this problem, we used 2SLS estimation with "trust in parliament" being the

instrumental variable. After assuring the selected instrumental variable is not weak, we conclude that the impact of political orientation on life satisfaction persists. In other words, considering the political spectrum, those individuals situated on the left are more likely to unhappy than those individuals situated on the right.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study addressed a previously unexplored subject by using a recent dataset. Although many studies exist in the literature on the political economy of subjective well-being in recent years, there is a lack of attention on the relationship between political engagement, orientation and life satisfaction at the individual level. This study investigated the influence of both political engagement and orientation on personal life satisfaction of European citizens through the ESS dataset (Round 10) in 2020.

The OLS regression and 2SLS regression results show that both political engagement and political orientation have statistically significant impact on life satisfaction. The more interested individuals are in politics, more dissatisfied they are. This may be explained by the fact that politics increases people's stress and anxiety levels. In addition, it is found that as individuals' position moves from left to right on the political spectrum, their life satisfaction increase. The available literature explains this result through the system justification theory. It seems that the rightist individuals' preference for the status quo make them satisfied. The results obtained from the control variables are to large extent consistent with the existing literature. While religiosity and marital status increase the subjective well-being, unemployment decreases the likelihood of life satisfaction.

Last but not least, it is necessary to remind that these results are limited to Europe. Our findings cannot be stretched to other regions, as the meaning of the concepts of right and left differ significantly in other parts of the world. We suggest future researchers to empirically investigate the impact of political engagement and orientation on life satisfaction for other geographies.

## **Ethical Approval**

The authors state that there is no need for an ethics committee report in this study.

## **Contributions of the Authors**

The authors contributed equally to this study.

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## **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

## 6. Bibliography

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