

Life Satisfaction and Political Preferences: An International Analysis*

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Abstract

While there is a growing body of literature that examines the political causes of life satisfaction, little attention has been paid to its possible political consequences. Specifically, we know little about the relationship between subjective well-being and political attitudes and beliefs. Using data from the World Values Survey, we evaluate the linkage between life satisfaction and political preferences across a global sample of countries. We find that respondents with higher levels of subjective well-being are more likely to identify with conservative leaning political parties and to adopt conservative ideological and policy opinions, and that the substantive effect of life satisfaction rivals other common predictors of political preferences. We then investigate support for maintaining the status quo as a possible mechanism that explains the relationship and conclude with a discussion of the practical and theoretical implications of these findings.

From Aristotle's time, the extent to which politics affects human happiness has been the subject of much scholarly attention. The relatively recent advent of a large literature on the empirical study of human happiness has shifted the discussion from theoretical presumption to scientific inquiry aided by ever more sophisticated measurement tools for evaluating human happiness (Veenhoven 1996; Diener et al. 1999). With these methodological advances, scholars have begun to examine the political causes of subjective well-being (e.g., Radcliff 2001; Bjornskov, Dreher, and Fischer 2007; Helliwell and Huang 2008; Pacek and Radcliff 2008, Flavin, Pacek, and Radcliff 2011). However, to date virtually no attention has been paid to another side of this story – how life satisfaction impacts politics.

In this short paper, we examine the relationship between life satisfaction and political preferences. Specifically, we investigate whether people who are more satisfied with their lives are more likely to express political preferences on the liberal or conservative side of the political spectrum. Scholarly attention to the determinants of “political leanings” has been extensive, from general manifestations such as ideological self-placement (Converse 1964; Conover and Feldman 1984; Inglehart 1984; Fuchs and Klingemann 1990) to the more specific areas of policy preferences and party choice (Campbell et al., 1960; Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Budge, Robertson, and Hearl 1987; Franklin 1992; Van der Brug, Franklin, and Toka 2008). Unfortunately, scholars have neglected the possible influence of life satisfaction on political attitudes and behaviors. This is surprising given recent empirical studies suggesting that an individual's feelings of happiness can have important effects on a variety of attitudes and behaviors (Forgas 2000, 2001; Martin and Clore 2001; Forgas, Vargas, and Laham 2005). For example, Healy, Malhotra, and Mo (2009) review a collection of studies that show happiness makes people more likely to help strangers, become more creative in solving problems, provide larger donations to

charity, report fewer problems with consumer goods, and better recall positive memories. Other research has found that happier individuals experience higher incomes, more positive experiences at work, and more active involvement with friends, family, and community in general (Lyubomirsky, King, and Diener 2005; Lyubomirsky 2010). Happier people are even more likely to vote and participate in politics in other ways (Weitz-Shapiro and Winters 2011; Flavin and Keane 2012).

To advance the discussion about the possible political consequences of subjective well-being, we use individual-level data from the World Values Survey to evaluate the relationship between life satisfaction and political preferences. We find that citizens with higher levels of life satisfaction are more likely to identify with conservative leaning political parties and to adopt conservative ideological and policy preferences even after accounting for a series of possible confounding factors. This relationship holds across a diverse range of countries and the substantive effect of life satisfaction rivals other common predictors of political preferences. These findings suggest that attitudes about quality of life can have important implications for public opinion and political behavior and should be considered for inclusion in future empirical investigations.

Subjective Well-Being and its Political Consequences

Despite decades of empirical research into the causes of subjective well-being, there is a scarcity of rigorous empirical investigations of its possible consequences (Veenhoven 1984). Recent work, however, has started to shed light on this question, with a host of studies leaving little doubt that happy and unhappy people are “different.” For example, Boehm and Lyubomirsky (2009, 668) assert that “happy people are inclined to perceive and interpret their

environment differently from their less happy peers.” Happier people generally evaluate themselves and others in society in a more positive way compared to the unhappy (Lyubomirsky and Tucker 1998) and are more likely to satisfice – settle for options that are just “good enough” instead of seeking to make the absolutely best choice – when making important decisions (Schwartz et al. 2002). As Iyengar, Wells, and Schwarz (2006) note, these maximizing tendencies of unhappy individuals may serve to reinforce their unhappiness. Further, happier people are less likely to ruminate or excessively self-reflect and dwell upon themselves compared to unhappy people (Lyubomirsky, King, and Diener 2005). These studies tie into a broader line of research suggesting that happier and more satisfied people are in general more likely to be “successful” across a range of domains such as one’s job (including advancement, income, and overall job satisfaction), one’s marriage and family life (including lower rates of divorce), one’s social involvement (including number of close friends and overall engagement in social life), and one’s health (including lower rates of mental and physical pathologies).¹

Specifically in the realm of politics, recent studies find that varying degrees of life satisfaction affect individuals’ choices with respect to different modes of political behavior. For example, Weitz-Shapiro and Winters (2011) find that happier people are more likely to vote across a sample of eighteen Latin American countries. They also present evidence suggesting that the causal arrow flows from life satisfaction to voting rather than the reverse. Similar results in the American context were obtained by Flavin and Keane (2012) who assessed the relationship between self-reported life satisfaction and political participation and found that happier people are more likely to participate in politics in everything from voting to working for

¹ See Lyubomirsky, King, and Diener (2005) for an extensive review of this literature.

a political campaign to contacting an elected official.² Studies have even documented this positive correlation between life satisfaction and political participation in authoritarian systems such as China (Zhong and Chen 2002) and the former Soviet Union (Bahry and Silver 1990).

To date, however, there is a dearth of scholarly investigation into how varying levels of subjective well-being might lead one to adopt liberal or conservative political preferences. From a theoretical standpoint, one possible avenue for a linkage between the two is that subjective well-being may precipitate certain cognitive aspects which in turn affect political preferences. Specifically, economists have noted for some time that happier people are more risk averse, more reluctant to change, and exhibit stronger preferences for the “safe” and “familiar.”³ For example, happier people tend to save more and spend less (Güven 2012) and are more sensitive to loss (Isen, Nygren, and Ashby 1988). Translating these attitudes to politics, Veenhoven (1984) finds compelling evidence that happier people are averse to change and more likely to support maintaining the political status quo.

Using these limited previous studies for theoretical guidance, we adopt a similar theoretical perspective in this paper. Specifically, we expect that as levels of subjective well-being increase, desire to maintain the status quo will increase as well. In turn, happier individuals will gravitate toward the political organizations and policy positions most associated

² Interestingly, no relationship was observed between life satisfaction and unconventional forms of political participation like protest (also see Veenhoven 1984).

³ Previous studies have even found that happier people are less likely to aid other people in need if doing so would somehow negatively affect that individual’s positive affective state (Mischel, Ebbesen, and Zeiss 1976; Isen and Simmonds 1978).

with maintaining the current status quo in society.⁴ As these organizations and positions have historically been linked to right-of-center tendencies, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H₁: Across survey respondents, individuals will be more likely to report conservative political preferences and express support for conservative political parties as level of self-reported life satisfaction increases.

Additionally, we formulate a second hypothesis concerning one likely mechanism linking life satisfaction and political preferences:

H₂: Across survey respondents, individuals who report higher levels of life satisfaction will be more likely to support maintaining the status quo and, in turn, will be more likely to report conservative political preferences and express support for conservative political parties.

In what follows, we empirically investigate these two related hypotheses.

Data and Empirical Strategy

To examine relationship between life satisfaction and political preferences, we use the 2005 wave of the World Values Survey (WVS) that surveyed nationally representative samples

⁴ Empirical research from the system-justification perspective has argued that if people are motivated to justify the system in an effort to make their social world seem more predictable, then they should demonstrate more conservative attitudes given conservatism's association with a resistance to changing the existing social system (Jost et al. 2003; Jost and Hunyady 2005; Matthews, Levin, and Sidanius 2009).

of respondents in over sixty countries around the world.⁵ To measure a respondent's self-reported level of life satisfaction, we use an item where respondents are asked: "All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days? Using this card on which one means you are 'completely dissatisfied' and ten means you are 'completely satisfied' where would you put your satisfaction with your life as a whole?" A large and growing literature across the social sciences assesses the validity and reliability of self-reported measures of life satisfaction (e.g., Inglehart 1990; Myers and Diener 1995; Veenhoven 2002). For example, Myers and Diener (1995) find that self-reports are consistent with external evaluations, display stability over time, and are not particularly troubled by social desirability bias. In our data, respondents report assessments of life satisfaction along the entire range (1-10) of the scale, with a mean of 6.40 and a standard deviation of 2.56.

We measure respondents' political preferences in three different ways. First, we use respondents' partisan inclination. The WVS includes an item where respondents are asked which party would be their "first choice" in the nearest future election. Unfortunately, the WVS does not provide any information about the ideological positioning of each party. In light of this, we assign an ideological position to all parties in the countries that make up the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the post communist countries of Eastern Europe, and the countries of Latin America. Our coding schema for parties is a five category scale where 1 = Far left, 2 = Center/left, 3 = Centrist, 4 = Center/right, and 5 = Far right.⁶

⁵ We use data from the 2005 wave because it is the only wave that widely asked about respondents' preferences for maintaining the status quo, which we hypothesize is an important mechanism linking life satisfaction and political preferences (and investigate below).

⁶ Political party data are from Lansford (2012).

Second, we use an item that asks respondents: “In political matters, people talk of ‘the left’ and ‘the right.’ How would you place your views on this scale, generally speaking?” For this measure of general political ideology, respondents can place themselves on a scale from one (“left”) to ten (“right”). Third, because respondents’ self-reported ideology may not comport with their responses to specific policy items (Knight 1985; Jacoby 1995; Jennings 1992; Ellis and Stimson 2009), we create an additional measure of ideology using principal components analysis to create a score for each respondent based on responses to two questions that ask them to place themselves on a ten point scale: (1) Private ownership of business should be increased vs. government ownership of business should be increased and (2) People should take more responsibility to provide for themselves vs. the government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for. For all three measures of political preferences, more conservative responses are coded higher.

Table 1 reports the pair-wise correlation coefficients across the entire sample among our three variables that measure the conservatism of respondents’ political views. As expected, the measures are positively correlated with one another. However, none of the positive correlations exceeds 0.5, which suggests that each measure is tapping a slightly different conceptual measure of political opinion. Therefore, we proceed by separately modeling each of the three measures as the dependent variable and assessing whether the results are consistent across models.

[Table 1 about here]

We model each measure of political preference as a function of respondents’ level of life satisfaction and a set of covariates regularly included in the political behavior literature in an attempt to ensure that any relationship we find between life satisfaction and political preferences is not spurious. Specifically, we control for a respondent’s income (coded 1-10 and indicates

where their income falls in the national income distribution of their country), level of educational attainment, gender, age, marital status, union membership status, employment status (by creating dummy variables for unemployed, self employed, and retired), and frequency of church attendance using an item that asks respondents: “Apart from weddings, funerals and christenings, about how often do you attend religious services these days?” The variable ranges from one (“Never, or practically never) to eight (“More than once a week”).

We use ordinary least squares regression to model each of the three measures of political opinion.⁷ To account for idiosyncrasies across the countries in the WVS sample, we include country fixed effects (i.e. a dummy variable for each country leaving one as a reference category) in all models. These fixed effects allow us to account for all factors that are different across countries (culture, history, political institutions, etc.) and estimate the average effect of life satisfaction on political preferences within countries. Because respondents in the data are clustered within countries, we report robust standard errors that are clustered by country.⁸

Empirical Analysis

We begin by evaluating the relationship between life satisfaction and the three measures of political preferences. In Table 2, we report the results of regressing each measure of political

⁷ The measure of partisanship only has five categories, so it could be considered an ordinal variable. To account for this concern, we also ran all models with partisanship as the dependent variable using an ordered probit estimator instead of OLS and found substantively identical results.

⁸ Because the data are hierarchical in nature (respondents nested within countries), we also ran a series of random intercept hierarchical linear models. The results from these models were substantively identical to those reported in the text below and are available from the authors upon request.

preference on life satisfaction and the set of covariates discussed above. Looking across the columns, we find that the coefficient for life satisfaction is positive and bounded above zero ($p < .05$) for all three measures of political preference, indicating that respondents who report being more satisfied with their lives are more likely to report conservative political opinions. We also find that respondents who are male, more affluent, and attend church more frequently are more likely to hold conservative political preferences, while those who are union members are less likely to hold conservative preferences.

[Table 2 about here]

Substantively, the magnitude of the relationship between life satisfaction and political preferences is quite large when compared to the other covariates in the models that previous political behavior studies have routinely used to predict party choice and political opinions. Figure 1 displays the predicted change for the three dependent variables we examine when varying life satisfaction from one standard deviation below its mean value to one standard deviation above and holding all other variables in the model constant. For comparison, we also report the predicted change in the three dependent variables when income is varied from one standard deviation below its mean value to one standard deviation above, and when male and union member are varied from zero (i.e. female, not a union member) to one.⁹ The vertical bars in the figure show that the substantive effect of life satisfaction on political preferences rivals the three other common predictors of political preferences. We interpret this as evidence that life

⁹ We selected income, gender, and union membership as our comparison variables because they are the only other explanatory variables that had statistically significant coefficients ($p < .05$) across all three regression models.

satisfaction is an important predictor of party choice and political preferences and should be considered for inclusion in future studies of public opinion and voting behavior.

[Figure 1 about here]

To investigate the generalizability of our central finding, we next ask: Is the link between life satisfaction and political conservatism confined only to advanced industrialized democracies with highly developed party systems or does the relationship apply to countries around the world more broadly? To answer this question, we use the same model specification as above and split up respondents based on whether they live in an OECD country or not. The results of these split sample estimations are reported in Table 3 and reveal that the link between greater self-reported life satisfaction and conservative political preferences is present regardless of whether the countries considered are advanced industrialized democracies or not. In unreported analyses, we also arrive at similar results when we exclude respondents in the most extreme (liberal or conservative) categories of the party choice and ideology measures and when we use an alternative measure of subjective well-being that asks respondents: “Taking all things together, would you say you are very happy, quite happy, not very happy, or not at all happy?”¹⁰ Regardless of how the sample is spliced up or the measure of subjective well-being used, we arrive at the same conclusion: more satisfied respondents are more likely to hold conservative political preferences.¹¹

[Table 3 about here]

¹⁰ Across respondents in the sample, our primary measure of life satisfaction and this alternative measure correlate at 0.47.

¹¹ Results from the unreported estimations are available from the authors upon request.

Given the fairly robust relationship between life satisfaction and political conservatism, what is the mechanism linking the two? Above, we theorize that one reason more satisfied people adopt conservative political opinions is that they prefer to maintain the status quo (and, by extension, maintain their present level of satisfaction). To empirically evaluate this possible mechanism, we use a three category item from the WVS that asks respondents: “On this card are three basic kinds of attitudes concerning the society we live in. Please choose the one which best describes your own opinion: (1) society must be radically changed, (2) society must be gradually improved by reforms, or (3) society must be valiantly defended.” Using an ordered probit estimator, we model responses to this item as a function of life satisfaction and the same set of covariates included in previous models. The results of this estimation are reported in Column 1 of Table 4. Looking at the coefficient for life satisfaction we find, as expected, that more satisfied respondents are more likely to prefer maintaining the status quo.

We then model our three measures of political preferences as a function of the status quo item and the same covariates as before and report the results in Columns 2-4. We find that for two of the three measures the status quo item is a statistically significant predictor of political preferences. Specifically, greater preference for maintaining the status quo predicts greater political conservatism. When considered together, the results reported in Table 4 suggest that desire for maintaining the status quo in society is an important psychological mechanism linking self-reported life satisfaction and conservative political preferences.¹²

¹² We also conducted a Sobel mediation test to evaluate if opinion about maintaining the status quo is a significant mediator between life satisfaction and the three measures of political preferences we examine. Maintaining the status quo is a statistically significant mediator between life satisfaction and conservative political preferences for political partisanship and for general ideology.

[Table 4 about here]

Finally, one possible concern about the results reported above is that both life satisfaction and political preferences may be affected by some unobserved variable(s) that we have not accounted for in our statistical models. In other words, it may be that the relationship between the two is spurious such that certain types of people are simply more likely to be both happy and politically conservative. To investigate this concern about omitted variable bias, we require panel data that would allow us to account for all time invariant differences across individuals and instead examine the relationship between life satisfaction and political preferences “within” individuals over time. Few political surveys ask about life satisfaction and, among those that do, even fewer query respondents at multiple points in time. Fortunately, the 2004 and 2005 waves of the Continuous Monitoring Survey (CMS) survey in Great Britain did just that. Specifically, in April of both years, a panel of the same respondents was asked: “Thinking about your life as a whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, a little dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with your life as a whole?” Respondents were also asked about which political party they most closely identify with. For our analysis, we retained only respondents who identified with the Liberal Democratic Party (coded as 1), the Labour Party (coded as 2), or the Conservative Party (coded as 3). Similar to above, higher levels of life satisfaction and more conservative partisanship are coded higher.

[Table 5 about here]

We then examine change in respondents over time. To create a measure of change in partisanship and change in life satisfaction, we take the value for 2005 and subtract the value for 2004 such that a positive value indicates a respondent became more satisfied/conservative and a

negative value indicates a respondent became less satisfied/conservative.¹³ We regress change in partisanship on change in life satisfaction and report the results in Table 5. The coefficient for change in life satisfaction is positive and hovers around conventional levels of statistical significance ($p=.08$ using a two-tailed test), indicating that over time as respondents become more satisfied with their lives they also tend to align with a more conservative political party.¹⁴ This longitudinal analysis is consistent with our cross-sectional analyses presented above and suggests that the relationship between life satisfaction and political preferences is not simply an artifact of an omitted individual-level variable in our statistical models.

Discussion and Implications

We find that citizens with higher levels of life satisfaction are more likely to report conservative political opinions and that the substantive effect of life satisfaction rivals other common predictors of political preferences. These findings have important implications for the study of subjective well-being and political attitudes more generally. A widely publicized 2006 Pew Research Center survey that reported happier people tend to be more politically conservative provided only a single snapshot of the American public (Taylor, Funk, and Craighill 2006). In contrast, our analysis extends to a much larger sample of countries and finds that the positive relationship between life satisfaction and political conservatism is more

¹³ In our data, 35% of respondents reported a change in life satisfaction and 6% reported a change in partisan identification between the two survey waves. The life satisfaction variable has four categories, so the change in life satisfaction measure ranges from -3 to +3. The partisan identification variable has three categories, so the change in partisan identification measure ranges from -2 to +2.

¹⁴ We uncover substantively identical results when we instead use panel data analysis with fixed effects.

universal than previously thought. Moreover, we uncover evidence of one possible mechanism linking the two: happier people around the world are more inclined to maintaining the status quo and in turn support (and manifest) political tendencies they view as most appropriately associated with that position. Given this finding, we recommend that future studies of party choice and voting behavior consider incorporating some measure of subjective well-being into the analysis.

The findings we uncover also raise additional questions. In previous studies where life satisfaction is the dependent variable and various measures of state intervention or public policy are the main explanatory variables, several findings suggest that more liberal policy programs (greater government share of the economy, a more expansive welfare state, more seats in government controlled by left-of-center political parties, etc.) lead to higher aggregate levels of subjective well-being (Radcliff 2001; Pacek and Radcliff 2008; Flavin, Pacek, and Radcliff 2011; but see Bjornskov, Dreher, and Fischer 2007). If this is the case, then the partisan/ideological opponents of liberal governments (i.e. political conservatives) may, rather unexpectedly, be the principal beneficiaries of government's broad policy impact on subjective well-being. Future studies should attempt to clarify this possibility.

More broadly, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on subjective well-being that argues "politics matters." However, unlike previous studies that focused on life satisfaction as a dependent variable, we show that it can also have important political implications by shaping the political attitudes of citizens around the world. Therefore, we hope that this study helps to focus scholarly attention on not just the political determinants of life satisfaction, but also its possible political consequences.

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Table 1: Correlations for Three Different Measures of Political Preferences

	Conservative Partisanship	Conservative General Ideology	Conservative Ideology on Specific Issues
Conservative Partisanship	1.00		
Conservative General Ideology	0.44*	1.00	
Conservative Ideology on Specific Issues	0.18*	0.08*	1.00

Cell entries are pair-wise correlation coefficients. * denotes $p < .05$.

Table 2: More Satisfied Citizens Hold More Conservative Political Opinions

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Conservative Partisanship	Conservative General Ideology	Conservative Ideology on Specific Issues
Life Satisfaction	0.024* [0.005]	0.075* [0.009]	0.023* [0.005]
Income	0.031* [0.005]	0.024* [0.012]	0.046* [0.006]
Education	-0.002 [0.007]	-0.046* [0.013]	0.044* [0.006]
Male	0.046* [0.018]	0.079* [0.035]	0.127* [0.013]
Age	-0.003* [0.001]	-0.000 [0.002]	0.000 [0.001]
Married	0.034* [0.013]	0.047 [0.034]	0.000 [0.012]
Union Member	-0.130* [0.040]	-0.213* [0.061]	-0.056* [0.019]
Unemployed	0.009 [0.029]	0.044 [0.052]	-0.056* [0.024]
Self-employed	0.051 [0.039]	0.080 [0.052]	0.068* [0.027]
Retired	0.012 [0.031]	-0.092 [0.055]	-0.066* [0.025]
Church Attendance	0.068* [0.008]	0.122* [0.016]	0.005 [0.004]
Constant	2.353* [0.056]	4.431* [0.121]	-0.448* [0.060]
R ²	.11	.11	.15
N (countries)	37	63	56
N (individuals)	26,638	59,757	66,114

Dependent variable listed above each column. Cell entries are OLS regression coefficients with standard errors clustered by country reported beneath in brackets. A fixed effects dummy variable for each country (minus one as a reference category) is included in each model but not reported. * denotes $p < .05$ using a two-tailed test.

Table 3: Life Satisfaction-Political Conservatism Link is Present for OECD and Non-OECD Countries

	(1) Conservative Partisanship		(3) Conservative General Ideology		(5) Conservative Ideology on Specific Issues	
	OECD?		OECD?		OECD?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Life Satisfaction	0.020* [0.005]	0.026* [0.009]	0.067* [0.014]	0.078* [0.010]	0.037* [0.010]	0.019* [0.005]
Income	0.028* [0.006]	0.039* [0.010]	0.041* [0.012]	0.011 [0.019]	0.035* [0.004]	0.053* [0.008]
Education	-0.012 [0.009]	0.016 [0.011]	-0.045* [0.013]	-0.049* [0.019]	0.029* [0.010]	0.047* [0.008]
Male	0.067* [0.021]	-0.019 [0.033]	0.098* [0.035]	0.082 [0.051]	0.150* [0.019]	0.121* [0.016]
Age	-0.002 [0.001]	-0.006* [0.002]	0.003 [0.003]	-0.003 [0.002]	0.002* [0.001]	-0.001 [0.001]
Married	0.036* [0.015]	0.015 [0.028]	0.048 [0.037]	0.033 [0.054]	0.003 [0.020]	0.001 [0.016]
Union Member	-0.176* [0.044]	-0.001 [0.031]	-0.389* [0.061]	-0.012 [0.088]	-0.110* [0.019]	-0.021 [0.030]
Unemployed	-0.014 [0.041]	0.015 [0.043]	-0.014 [0.067]	0.044 [0.062]	-0.122 [0.066]	-0.049 [0.025]
Self-employed	0.113* [0.047]	-0.047 [0.049]	0.226* [0.068]	0.018 [0.062]	0.166* [0.033]	0.040 [0.034]
Retired	0.040 [0.031]	-0.066 [0.062]	-0.056 [0.064]	-0.163* [0.079]	-0.047 [0.037]	-0.110* [0.031]
Church Attendance	0.081* [0.010]	0.033* [0.012]	0.150* [0.019]	0.102* [0.028]	0.007 [0.006]	0.004 [0.005]
Constant	2.466* [0.069]	2.567* [0.077]	4.118* [0.145]	4.707* [0.172]	-0.416* [0.097]	-0.422* [0.083]
R ²	.09	.17	.08	.13	.18	.11
N (countries)	24	13	25	38	17	39
N (individuals)	18,256	8,382	24,167	35,590	18,184	47,930

Dependent variable listed above each column. Cell entries are OLS regression coefficients with standard errors clustered by country reported beneath in brackets. A fixed effects dummy variable for each country (minus one as a reference category) is included in each model but not reported. * denotes p<.05 using a two-tailed test.

Table 4: Preference for Maintaining the Status Quo as a Mechanism Linking Life Satisfaction and Political Conservatism

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Support for Status Quo	Conservative Partisanship	Conservative General Ideology	Conservative Ideology on Specific Issues
Life Satisfaction	0.018* [0.004]	--	--	--
Support for Status Quo	--	0.158* [0.035]	0.290* [0.089]	-0.003 [0.027]
Income	0.002 [0.003]	0.030* [0.007]	0.027 [0.016]	0.045* [0.008]
Education	-0.021* [0.007]	0.008 [0.008]	-0.038* [0.015]	0.050* [0.007]
Male	-0.058* [0.015]	0.036 [0.036]	0.088* [0.043]	0.121* [0.016]
Age	0.002* [0.001]	-0.004* [0.002]	-0.001 [0.002]	-0.000 [0.001]
Married	-0.004 [0.012]	0.046* [0.014]	0.050 [0.044]	0.016 [0.015]
Union Member	-0.057 [0.044]	-0.172* [0.061]	-0.098 [0.083]	-0.051* [0.024]
Unemployed	-0.029 [0.020]	0.007 [0.034]	0.054 [0.055]	-0.038 [0.031]
Self-employed	-0.030 [0.031]	0.029 [0.053]	0.038 [0.065]	0.065 [0.034]
Retired	0.058* [0.024]	-0.046 [0.048]	-0.133 [0.070]	-0.054 [0.029]
Church Attendance	-0.000 [0.007]	0.048* [0.011]	0.108* [0.020]	0.009* [0.004]
Constant	--	2.245* [0.095]	4.293* [0.281]	-0.362* [0.087]
Cut Point #1	-1.180* [0.064]	--	--	--
Cut Point #2	0.904* [0.073]	--	--	--
Pseudo-R/R ²	.03	.11	.12	.13
N (countries)	42	17	40	40
N (individuals)	50,786	12,817	37,463	45,813

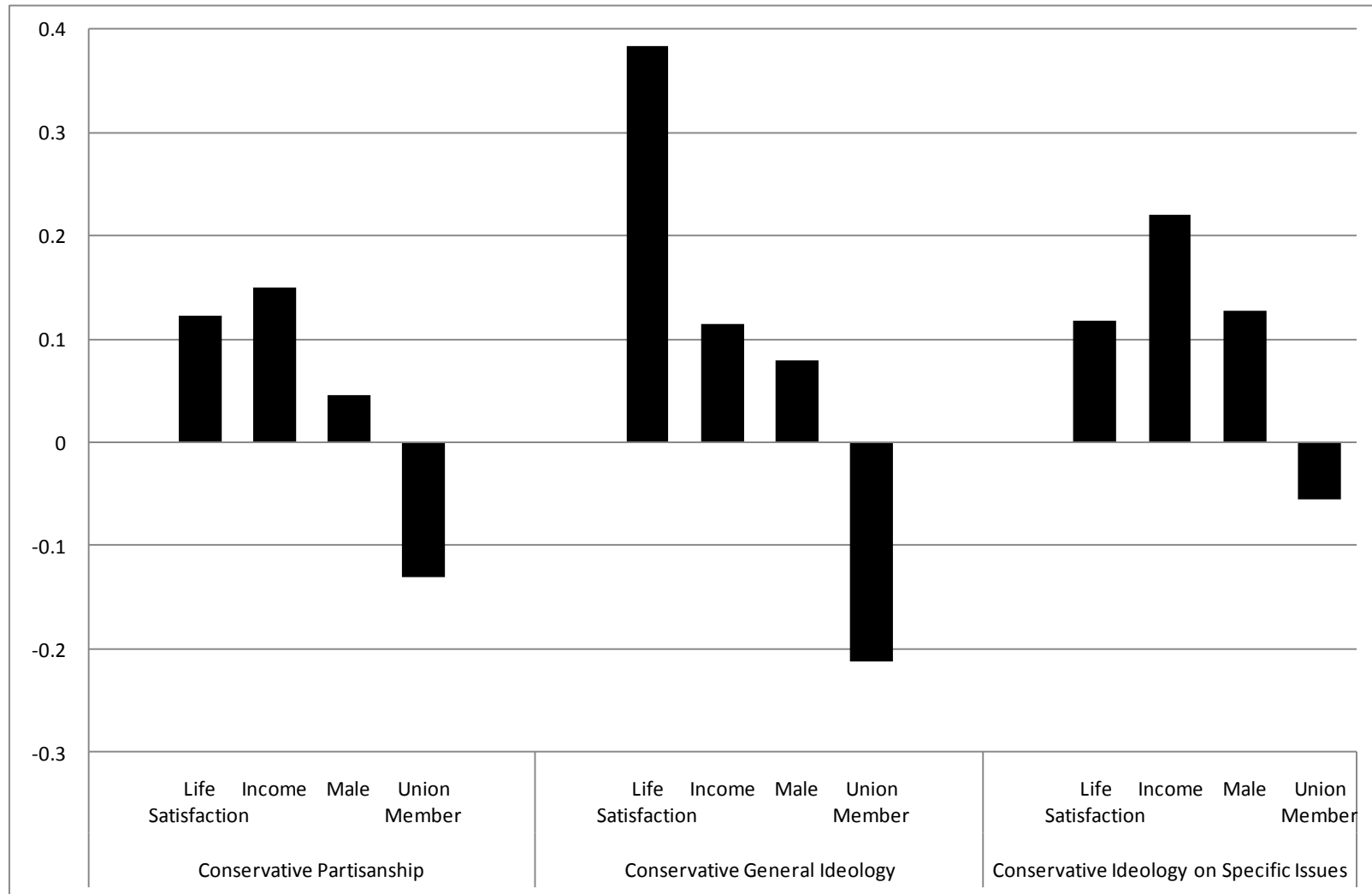
Dependent variable listed above each column. Cell entries are ordered probit/OLS regression coefficients with standard errors clustered by country reported beneath in brackets. A fixed effects dummy variable for each country (minus one as a reference category) is included in each model but not reported. * denotes p<.05 using a two-tailed test.

Table 5: Change in Life Satisfaction and Party Preference Over Time

Δ Life Satisfaction	0.013 [†] [0.007]
Constant	-0.005 [0.005]
R ²	.01
N	4,505

Dependent variable: Change in partisan identification (-2 to +2, conservative change coded higher). Cell entries are OLS regression coefficients with standard errors reported beneath in brackets. [†] denotes $p < .10$, * $p < .05$ using a two-tailed test.

Figure 1: Comparing Substantive Effects on Political Preferences



Vertical bars report the predicted change in the dependent variable (listed at the bottom) when varying that independent variable and holding all other independent variables in the model constant. Life satisfaction and income are varied from one standard deviation below their mean value to one standard deviation above. Male and union member are varied from zero (i.e. female, not a union member) to one.