

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LIFE
SATISFACTION: CAUSAL AND
CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

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Aos meus pais

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Abstract

Is there a relationship between political participation and individual life satisfaction? The idea that political participation makes people more satisfied with their lives has long been debated. However, the existing empirical research has not been very successful in demonstrating that such a relationship exists while some studies show that instead it is individual life satisfaction that impacts political participation. This dissertation focuses on the issue of causality between political participation and individual life satisfaction. The first three articles are dedicated to assert whether there is a causal relationship between political participation and life satisfaction. Using panel data, no evidence of such a relationship was found. Given these results, this dissertation then moves to question if the connection between political participation and life satisfaction is conditioned by the political context and type of political participation. Using cross-sectional data, it was shown that there is an effect of political participation on life satisfaction, contingent to the type of participation act and conditioned at the higher level by the openness of the political system.

Resumen

¿Hay relación entre la participación política y la satisfacción individual con la vida? La idea de que la participación política hace que la gente esté más satisfecha con su vida ha sido un tema debatido durante mucho tiempo. No obstante, la investigación empírica existente no ha sido muy exitosa en demostrar que dicha relación existe, mientras que algunos estudios muestran que en su lugar es la satisfacción individual con la vida la que tiene un impacto en la participación política. Esta tesis doctoral se centra en el tema de la causalidad entre participación política y satisfacción individual con la vida. Los tres primeros artículos están dedicados a afirmar la existencia de una relación causal entre participación política y satisfacción con la vida. Utilizando datos de panel, no se ha encontrado evidencia de dicha relación. Dados estos resultados, esta tesis pasa a preguntarse si la conexión entre participación política y satisfacción con la vida está condicionada por el contexto político y el tipo de participación política. Utilizando datos transversales, se demuestra que hay un efecto de la participación política en la satisfacción con la vida, contingente con el tipo de participación y condicionado en el nivel más alto por la apertura del sistema político.

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*Whatever the form or Constitution of Government may be, it ought
to have no other object than the general happiness.*
Thomas Payne

It is a vain hope to make people happy by politics.
Thomas Carlyle

1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a growing literature in the social sciences that focus on a myriad of different factors responsible for generating individual wellbeing. Even more recently, a number of studies started to pay closer attention to the importance that political factors have on the change of individual evaluations of the quality of life. Amongst these, the importance of political participation for individual wellbeing distinguishes itself for its long lasting theoretical debate. The idea that political participation can indeed benefit wellbeing is by no means new. The seminal study of Barnes and Kaase (1979, p. 381), “Political Action”, was perhaps one of the first ones to note that the interest in the relationship between politics and individual satisfaction is “at least as old as the serious study of politics”.

Historically, political participation has been thought to contribute to well-being in several different ways. Just to name a few, first by the realization of what one sets out to do, independently of policy outcomes (which are not the interest of this dissertation). Participation itself may be relevant by promoting social

connectedness and cultivating a sense of purpose, both of which have been connected with wellbeing (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Putnam, 2000; Frey & Stutzer, 2000; Seligman et al., 2005). Second, political participation may also increase an individual's sense of personal efficacy and control (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). The question these arguments prompt us to ask is: does engaging in political participation activities make people more satisfied with their lives?

This question implies that political participation has a causal effect on wellbeing. However, similarly several arguments have been put forward sustaining that it is indeed wellbeing that has an effect on political participation instead. For example, Veenhoven (1988) argued that more satisfied people were more involved in their community and were more concerned about social and political problems. This view is in line with the post-materialism literature, specifically in the point that once individuals get to the desired level of wellbeing, they may start to look beyond their satisfaction and seek to address broader societal concerns (Inglehart, 1977; 1990).

The main purpose of this dissertation is to study the relationship between political participation and wellbeing. More precisely, it focuses on the causal effects between the individual experience of engaging in political participation activities and life satisfaction. As briefly pointed out before, theoretically political participation can affect life satisfaction but also this effect can actually run from wellbeing to political participation. Therefore, the aim is to

explicitly question the direction of causality of the relationship between political participation and life satisfaction. The examination of these issues will take into account several important reflections further developed in each of the chapters. Besides the question of the direction of causality, it considers how this relationship develops across time, in the sense of multiple time points, and how Political Efficacy, as an individual level intervening factor, can affect this relationship. Furthermore, this dissertation also aims to see how the connection between political participation and life satisfaction is conditioned by the political context and type of political participation.

Regardless of the theoretical significance of this debate, few empirical studies have actually focused on the relationship between political participation and wellbeing. One of the main reasons for this might well be the difficulty in capturing individual subjective judgments about quality of life. However, recently we have witnessed the systematic development and refinement of tools that are able to measure, with notorious reliability and validity, how people subjectively evaluate their quality of life (Diener et al., 1999; Frey & Stutzer, 2002; Veenhoven, 2008). One of such instruments is wellbeing or life satisfaction, defined throughout this dissertation as the degree “to which an individual judges the overall quality of his life-as-a-whole favourably” (Veenhoven, 1991).

Studies about the relationship between political behavior and wellbeing are an interesting challenge for political scientists, who

face the need to integrate the vast and growing knowledge about what causes wellbeing, gathered in a wide array of scientific areas, with the standard political issues of interest. Research on the causal relationship between political participation and life satisfaction is more than an interesting academic exercise: it has important implications for research and practice both to political science and social indicators research. If participation affects wellbeing then it can mean that engaging in political participation activities is an active and meaningful way to achieve wellbeing and, therefore, it could also mean that societies where participation rights are more effective are also better suited for individuals to thrive. If the relationship plays out to be the other way around, then it can mean that wellbeing influences the likelihood of adopting certain political behaviors, making it necessary to consider wellbeing indicators in models of participation. There can also be the case that political participation and life satisfaction could possibly be both a cause and a consequence or that this relationship is partially or wholly spurious, which, as we explain further down in detail, would also significantly contribute to the literature. In any case, the fundamental interest in causal research comes from the fact that, as Henry Brady (2008) puts it, “causal statements explain events, allow predictions about the future, and make it possible to take actions to affect the future”. This dissertation will hopefully help to clarify the dynamics of the relationship between political participation and life satisfaction.

Hereafter, in this introduction, the two main variables of interest, wellbeing and political participation, are described, which will set the ground for the theoretical and measurement framework underlying the whole dissertation. Then, the third section will discuss why this is a relevant topic for political science, focusing on its implications in several fields of the social sciences. The fourth section briefly summarizes the academic debate, followed by another section where it is highlighted what remains unanswered. Finally, the last section discusses the contribution and presents the structure of this dissertation.

1.1 Wellbeing

Wellbeing, like quality of life, is an umbrella term frequently used to indicate how well people are doing (Veenhoven, 2000). In general, we can say that wellbeing stands for two meanings: the presence of conditions considered necessary for a good life and the actual experiencing of good living. If used at a societal level, then we are referring to the first of these meanings. When the quality of life of a given country or society is poor, it means that some essential conditions, such as sufficient food, housing and health care for example, are missing. If, on the other hand, we refer to the individual level, both meanings are possible and they can coincide or not. Poor quality of life can be originated by the lack of indispensable structural conditions or it can mean that a given individual does not thrive (Veenhoven, 1996). But even when it comes to this very simple conceptual distinction, the definition of wellbeing shows an impressive inconsistency across the literature

and is often used to describe completely different things, sometimes even in the same field of research. This is cause for some confusion that is worsened by the fact that very often researchers do not discuss definitions or explain their understanding of the construct but only how wellbeing will be measured. This implies that the umbrella terms are used to describe very different things which need to be defined before they can be measured. Therefore, Veenhoven's (2000) framework of the "Four-Qualities-of-Life" shall be considered. Rather than attempting to construct one single indicator that summarizes wellbeing, Veenhoven proposes a framework based on four categories that, even if just conceptually constructed, distinguishes the different aspects of wellbeing along two dimensions.

The first distinction Veenhoven discusses is between life chances and life results. Wellbeing assessments can be based on wellbeing results, where results refer to the good life itself and they are ultimate goals in the sense that they are pursued for their own sake and not as instruments for achieving other goals. There are two kinds of wellbeing outcomes assessments in Veenhoven's framework: first, an assessment of the outer quality of a person's life, which is based on the individual's contribution to other members in society. Second, an assessment of the inner quality of a person's life, which is based on satisfaction with life, and which is the quality of life as one experiences it.

Wellbeing assessments can also be based on the presence of conditions (chances), which are relevant for a person's wellbeing. Therefore, life chances refer to the opportunities a person has for a good life or, in other words, these chances are the possibilities that allow for having a good life. Chances for a good life are classified as outer or inner depending on whether they refer to environmental conditions to the person (economic development, political institutions, etc.) or to conditions of the person (health, education, etc.). However, according to the four-qualities-of-life framework, the appropriateness of chances cannot be defined independently of results because chances are appropriate as long as they contribute to wellbeing results. In other words, rather than normatively defining which the good or appropriate chances are, the four-qualities-of-life framework makes them contingent on their positive relationship to wellbeing results. This is an important difference to other wellbeing frameworks because it does not define the good chances on the basis of normative criteria but rather empirical criteria.

In consequence, the four-qualities-of-life framework distinguishes among four qualities of life: 1) the outer quality of life chances, which Veenhoven also calls the 'livability of the environment' for a person; 2) the inner quality of life chances, also called as the 'life-abilities of a person'; 3) the outer quality of life results or 'utility of a person's life'; and 4) the inner quality of life results or a 'person's satisfaction with life'. Table 1.1 presents the four categories.

Table 1.1: Qualities of Life

	Outer Qualities	Inner Qualities
Life Chances	Livability of Environment 1	Life-Ability of a Person 2
Life Results	Utility of life 3	Satisfaction with life 4

Source: Veenhoven (2000)

It is also important to highlight that each quadrant constitutes an assessment of a person's wellbeing. These assessments may be correlated and as already mentioned chances are expected to be highly correlated to results. This distinction is theoretical and empirical useful even if in most multi-purpose surveys wellbeing is measured by one or more general questions about a person's individual, subjective evaluation of their satisfaction with life or general level of happiness. In this matter, there are two main indicators traditionally used under the subjective well-being perspective: happiness and life satisfaction. While happiness is typically measured by the question "How happy would you say you are"; life satisfaction is normally operationalized through the following question: "How satisfied are you with your life?". They share two common implications: that the minimal conditions for humans thriving are apparently met and, second, the fit between opportunities and capacities must be sufficient (Veenhoven, 2000). This means that at least three of the four qualities of life can be meaningfully summarized by the above discussed indicators. But although they are closely related and normally used interchangeably in the dedicated literature, it is important to note that they are not

the same. The conceptual distinction lies in the notion that the absence of negative assessments does not necessarily lead to positive feelings in the case of life satisfaction, while happiness can only arise through positive experiences (Haller & Hadler, 2006).

Table 1.2: Wellbeing measures used throughout the chapters

Chapters	Wellbeing Measures
Chapter 2	- How satisfied are you with your life as whole??
Chapter 3	- How satisfied are you with your life, all things considered?
Chapter 4	- On the whole, how happy would you say you are? - How satisfied are you with the life you lead at the moment? - I am satisfied with my life
Chapter 5	- How satisfied are you with the life you lead at the moment?

Throughout this dissertation, even though the terms wellbeing, subjective wellbeing, happiness and life satisfaction are used interchangeably, it should be clear that life satisfaction is the chosen indicator¹. In Table 1.2, it is presented the measures of wellbeing used throughout this dissertation. The justification of this choice is founded on the idea that life satisfaction has enduring cognitive properties, which capture a global sense of wellbeing from the respondent's own perspective (Diener et al., 2003).

There is extensive research about the validity and reliability of life satisfaction measures and even though life satisfaction is not without its frailties, a majority of scholars considers that life satisfaction measures are generally reliable (Di Tella & MacCulloch, 2005, Diener, 1994, Diener et al., 1999, Frey &

¹ The only exception is in chapter 4 where wellbeing is measured by a latent variable consisting of two indicators of life satisfaction and one of happiness.

Stutzer, 2002, Kahneman & Krueger, 2006, Layard, 2005; Schimmack, 2009).

1.2 Political Participation

Even though political participation is a central topic in political science, under intensive study for at least the last fifty years, there is still some disagreement concerning its exact definition. In their seminal study, Verba and Nie (1972) discuss what has become the classical and largely used definition of political participation: “Political participation is the means by which the interests, desires and demands of the ordinary citizen are communicated (...) all those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personal and/or decisions they make”.

In its time, this definition was responsible for a significant broadening of the kind of activities suitable to be considered as political participation. Up until then, electoral participation was almost exclusively the only political activity considered to be of interest, leaving out any non-electoral actions. There are many alternative definitions of political participation, so here the aim is to highlight what is common amongst the majority of them. First of all, as argued by Verba and Nie (1972), political participation concerns the “ordinary citizen” and not people in any other role like, for example, politicians or any other type of elites. Second, in order to consider some action as political participation there must be some kind of activity and not just a predisposition or proclivity

without any form of action, which excludes attitudes such as interest in politics. Furthermore, there must be a purpose of influencing whatever is at stake or, in other words, assert demands (Teorell, Torcal & Montero, 2006). Related to this last point, the third common characteristic is that the actions must be voluntary and not imposed by law or any rule of the kind. Lastly, the actions taken voluntarily by ordinary citizens must be directed to the political domain in some way which is surely the most controversial point in any definition of political participation.

Although Verba and Nie did acknowledge the importance of extra-electoral activity, they also maintained that only efforts directed to influence “governmental personal and/or decisions” are to be included in the concept of political participation. This perspective is built upon the assumption that “political outcomes” are always determined by people in government, either elected or just working in civil service (Teorell, Torcal & Montero, 2006). But considering political only what has to do with government is a very narrow vision that fails to take into account the strong blurring of the boundaries between the political and the private spheres (van Deth, 2001; 2014). Not only have we witnessed a very large expansion of the traditional functions of the state and governments in the last decades, but we have also seen the growing public awareness to the influence of non-governmental institutions in the definition of political outcomes. Along with the “targets”, the modes of action (“repertoires”) and the agencies (“collective organizations”) that sustained political participation have also been transformed (Norris,

2002). And this is not trivial because if we fail to define clearly what makes participation “political”, we run the risk of making it a “theory of everything”, a concept so broad that any given action will fit (van Deth, 2001).

According to Easton (1953), what makes an act political is “the authoritative allocation of values for a society”. Teorell, Torcal and Montero (2006) build on this view and argue that what confers political nature to any act of participation is the recognition of this process of allocation of value, whether the targets are governments, multinational corporations or any other type of institutions. On the other hand, van Deth (2014) argues for an operational definition of political participation which can provide some guidance about how to recognize a mode of participation. Ultimately, van Deth distinguishes modes of participation on the basis of the aims and intentions of participants. The reason for this is that in contemporary democracies sometimes behavior that seems non-political at the surface can actually congregate the exact same characteristics that, in any other context, would be qualified as political. In any occasion, making the distinction between what is political from what is not is rather difficult and, therefore, we should always keep in mind the advice of Verba et al. (1995) and “proceed cautiously”.

Additionally, any definition of political participation should always be contextualized according to the democratic theory that justifies it (Teorell, 2006). If we think about political participation in the

context of participatory democracy theory, then we are also assuming that the act of participation is exercised directly, in such occasions as referendums. However, here the reference is representative democracy, the dominating political system, where only very seldom we see direct participation mechanisms. Therefore, the conception of political participation used in this dissertation refers to participation outside of these direct mechanisms.

Taking everything that was just discussed into account, in conclusion, political participation is defined in this dissertation as actions taken voluntarily by ordinary citizens directed to the political domain in the representative democracy context. Table 1.3 presents all the measures of participation used throughout this thesis, which satisfy the discussed requirements.

Table 1.3: Political participation measures used throughout the chapters

Chapters	Political Participation Measures
Chapter 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contacted politician or government - Wearing a badge or campaign sticker - Signed petition - Boycotted certain products - Worked in political party or action group - Worked in another organization or association - Taken part in lawful public demonstration
Chapter 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Involvement in a citizen's group, political party, local government
Chapter 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participated in a government-organized public hearing, discussion or citizens' participation meeting - Participated in an action group - Participated in a protest action, protest march or demonstration

Chapter 5	- Membership of voluntary organizations - Volunteering in voluntary organizations
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As we can see in Table 1.3, political participation is measured through diverse behaviors, which slightly change from chapter to chapter. This is partially explained by the diversity of possible political participation activities but also, and above all, the low level of conformity of the measurement instruments between surveys. Although this can have consequences in terms of the comparability of the results, on the other hand it also gives us the chance to see if the effects are the same even with slightly different indicators, but measuring the same general phenomenon.

1.3 Why is it important? Combining wellbeing and political participation studies

Saying that people desire what satisfies them is, at best, a self-evident fact even though, as affective forecasting has shown, sometimes rather useful in predicting future emotions (Wilson and Gilbert, 2003). The growing interest in subjective well-being research is built upon the expectation to understand what makes people happy (Kahneman et al., 1999; Lane, 1991, 2000; Diener, 2009). But, at the same time, it also aims to explore explanations for divergences between what we might think satisfies people and behavior that is not well oriented to address this goal. This is what Helliwell and Putnam (2004, p. 1435) refer to when they claim, “a prima facie case can be made that the ultimate ‘dependent variable’ in social science should be human well-being, and in particular,

well-being as defined by the individual herself, or subjective well-being”.

One reason to strengthen this argument is that individual life satisfaction comprises information about the quality of the social system in which people live. If people systematically show low subjective well-being, it can be a sign that the social system is not well suited to allow individuals to thrive. The study of why individuals are not satisfied provides clues for a more livable society (Veenhoven, 2008) through an inductive approach that goes over the usual speculative arguments about the “good society”. Another reason is that subjective well-being has been shown to be a determinant of social and political behavior. Previous research found that satisfied individuals, are for example, typically better citizens, more informed about political matters, involve themselves more in civil action and are less radical in their political views (Lyubomirsky, King & Diener, 2005). Clearly, some of the attributes mentioned are relevant for understanding the functioning of democratic systems and the case can be made that individual subjective well-being is both an outcome of social systems and a factor in their functioning (Veenhoven, 2008).

In spite of this, political scientists very rarely address life satisfaction, perhaps because it seems too subjective or psychological². However, a closer look will reveal that much of

² In fact, the same objection was debated in the economic sciences until very recently (see Helliwell & Barrington-Leigh, 2010).

political science research rests on arguments, implicit or explicit, that politics matters and has consequences in the lives of the general public (Radcliff, 2001). Democratic theorists, for example, are quite straightforward in considering that political structures and processes have a sizable and direct effect on individuals quality of life and, consequently, on their subjective well-being (Dahl, 1971; Lane, 2000; Pateman, 1970; Barber, 1984). Furthermore, the extensive work in political science about public policy is collectively based upon the presumption that policy outcomes have consequences for people's lives (Alvarez-Dias et al., 2010). If we assume that public policy should contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of citizens, then the subjective well-being approach can add some interesting insights, namely by helping to achieve two important purposes³. First, it can indicate to policy agents how individuals perceive their own well-being (Verlet & Devos, 2009). This can be a very valid contribution to the reconstruction of what Campbell, Converse and Rogers (1976) called the “cognitive and affective map of society”, which can assist policy makers to see what really matters on the social dimension. Secondly, it can also be a way to examine the effectiveness of the policies in practice according to the changes on subjective well-being (Yardley & Rice, 1991). Rather than considering how the political actions and conditions affect intermediary variables that may, in turn, affect subjective well-

³This is different from saying that public policy should aim at improving the individual subjective well-being of citizens. A large philosophical debate is currently occurring between opposing views about this issue. See, for example, Layard (2005) or Diener (2009).

being, the potentiality of the life satisfaction approach is to look directly to the final outcome variable, quality of life itself.

A growing literature on the political correlates of life satisfaction reflects the significance of addressing such questions. Drawing mostly on large cross-national surveys from Western Europe, researchers have convincingly established connections between life satisfaction and a range of political acts and conditions. There is evidence that individuals who live in countries that are well-governed or democratic or where political freedoms are widespread are happier than those who live elsewhere (Haller & Hadler 2006, Helliwell & Huang 2008, Veenhoven 1995; Diener et al., 1995; Diener & Suh, 1997; Inglehart & Klingemann, 2000; Inglehart, 1990, 2006). Veenhoven (1995) looks at the correlates of average happiness across countries and finds that political democracy and freedom of the press do correlate strongly with life satisfaction as well as the percentage of GDP spent on social security. Similarly, Schyns (1998) also finds that political rights, gender equality and individualism do correlate strongly with well-being, although these correlations become insignificant once it is controlled for economic development. In addition, average life satisfaction is lower under corrupt than under clean regimes (Tavits 2008). At the individual level, people are happier when the party they support ideologically or voted for in the previous election is in power or forms part of the government (Di Tella & MacCulloch 2006, Tavits 2008). However, the extensive research also suggests that the links might not be so clear. Inglehart and Klingemann (2000) demonstrate a powerful and

positive association for some time between the stability of democratic institutions and life satisfaction. But the sharp declines in subjective well-being in the Eastern European countries after the democratization process has called the association between living in a democracy and life satisfaction into the question. Furthermore, studies about this relationship in Latin America and South Africa showed mixed evidence that can even raise the doubt of whether this association exists at all (Graham & Pettinato, 2002; Moller, 2001). Therefore, the consensus in the scholarly debate is that living in a democracy does make some contribution to subjective well-being but “it does not seem to have nearly as much impact as other aspects of people experiences” (Inglehart & Klingemann, 2000, p.180). Nevertheless, this research effort mainly reports broad and general rankings of country’s status as functioning democracies. When it comes to consider the relationship between specific aspects of democratic processes with life satisfaction in democratic regimes, the literature remains nascent, particularly at the individual level.

Participation in political processes has been one of the core concerns of political scientists and as it is largely regarded as vital for democracy to function effectively, it has been extensively studied⁴. The main research efforts are concern with who participates, its antecedents and demographic characteristics which

⁴ Although some schools of thought do advise that citizens should play a very limited role in the political decision making processes (Schumpeter, 1942), the majority views political participation as desirable, going to the extent that a supposed downtrend in the engagement of citizens in politics was seen with much concern (Norris, 2002).

affect representation in democratic politics, features of social capital, and other elements of civic culture (Brady et al., 1995; Putnam, 2000). But curiously enough, the other side of the story, studies about the consequences of political participation, are much more seldom approached (Ikeda et al., 2008; Torcal & Maldonado, 2014). One possible individual effect of engaging in political activities, discussed ever since the classical writings of Aristotle and more recently discussed by authors such as Inglehart (1977; 1990), is that participating in politics generates satisfaction. Although the aggregate studies about the association between life satisfaction and democracy appear consistent with expectations of a positive link between political participation and life satisfaction, using them to make claims about effects at the individual level raises the well-known ecological inference problem. Greater average life satisfaction in contexts with ample opportunities for participation does not mean that, within a given country, individuals who participate are more satisfied with their lives than non-participants.

1.4 Political Participation and Wellbeing: The Academic Debate

It is important to note from the start that not all perspectives of political participation sustain a positive relationship with wellbeing. From a rational choice perspective, if any given individual does not collect the expected benefit from a participatory act, there is no reason to expect any positive link between participation and wellbeing. Furthermore, considering the social choice theory (Arrow, 1950), there is a very low chance that people see their

individual preferences realized in a collective context, under which political participation takes place most of the times. Given this scenario, why should we expect a positive link between political participation and individual wellbeing?

Participatory democracy advocates discuss some reasons. They argue that political participation is about more than just the outcomes individuals get out of it. For participatory democrats, engaging in political activities fosters desirable personal and social qualities in democratic citizens (Dahl, 1989; Warren, 1992), especially by contributing to the “development of the human powers of thought, feeling and action” (Teorell, 2006). This process is called “self-development” and the main idea is that by engaging in political activities, individuals get a chance to learn new skills, extend their knowledge and develop relationships with others. This way, it becomes an area of personal growth and fulfillment, which can have a positive impact on individual wellbeing. Even though it is reasonable to expect this connection to wellbeing, the truth is that there are no empirical investigations regarding the arguments discussed by participatory democracy theory.

On the other hand, one approach that has been gaining preponderance both in the theoretical and empirical literature is the so called “procedural utility”. This approach is based on the view of the “procedural goods of democracy”, introduced by Robert Lane (1988) amongst others, which highlights not only the outcome but also the fairness of the procedure that conduces to the respective

outcome. Lane argues that in politics people are at least as concerned with how they are treated as with what they get. This idea was further developed mainly by economists, under the “procedural utility” concept which distinguishes itself from the traditional outcome oriented notion of utility by quantifying the non-instrumental “pleasures and displeasures of processes” (Frey, Benz & Stutzer, 2004). In terms of political participation, this means that people can achieve higher wellbeing not only through the outcome of any participatory act, but merely by being given the chance to participate. This makes individuals feel they have a say on political matters and it is independent from whether they actually participate or not. Precisely by focusing on the process, the empirical validation of the relationship between political participation and wellbeing under this perspective is mainly directed to participation rights or possibilities. Frey and Stutzer (2006) study the differences in wellbeing between foreigners and Swiss citizens in terms of the right to vote on referendums, and they conclude that the possibilities to participate have greater influence on wellbeing than participation itself. Even though the implications of such findings should not be downplayed, in this dissertation the focus is on actual political participation. Following the “procedural utility” perspective but focusing on actual political participation, Pacheco and Lange (2010) found that, what they called “strong political engagement” - consisting of having worked in a political party or action group, - had a robust positive effect on life satisfaction.

Finally, those who focus on the post-materialist values hypothesis also consider that wellbeing can arise from political participation (Inglehart, 1977; 1990). The argument says that post-materialistic values emphasize self-actualization, which in its turn is fulfilled through social or political participation by such actions as having a say in government or attaining freedom of speech. This fulfillment or self-actualization is actually what has a positive effect on individual wellbeing. Pichler and Wallace (2009) build on the social participation argument and add that following particular enthusiasms or commitments, such as wanting to contribute to society or make the world better, can also contribute to self-actualization and, therefore, enhance individual wellbeing.

However, there are also reasons to consider that the causality is reversed and that in fact it is wellbeing that can have an effect on political participation. Barnes et al. (1979) found that personal dissatisfaction contributed to youth protest potential. The general argument can be succinctly summed up by arguing that satisfied people will give birth to a peaceful polity and unsatisfied people will be a source of unrest. Veenhoven (1988) acknowledges this possibility and speculates that the individuals who show higher satisfaction might not have any incentive to participate in politics. This argument considers that individuals see the political process merely as a path for securing individuals benefits, whether they come under a particular or global policy. As soon as individuals reach a desired level of wellbeing, political participation becomes less prominent because the goals sought in the political process

have been already achieved. Increased satisfaction would, therefore, generate complacency and hinder engagement in the political process.

In the same line of thought, post-materialist theory also elaborates some reasons why wellbeing should affect political participation. More concretely, this perspective claims that after getting the desired level of satisfaction, individuals start to look beyond their own personal well-being and look to address broader societal concerns through political participation (Inglehart, 1990). This proposition is generally consistent with some empirical findings that state that happier individuals are more concerned with general social and political problems (Veenhoven, 1988). This was explicitly addressed for voting by Weitz-Shapiro and Winters (2011) in a study of Latin America where they find that the actual act of voting has no relationship with wellbeing. Coming to these results, they argue that if any relationship exists, it runs from satisfaction to political participation. On the other hand, Flavin and Keane (2012) use data from the United States and their findings report a robust relationship between wellbeing and political participation. Even more recently, the works in political science that explore the link between the “Big Five” personality traits and various types of political participation have uncover a positive correlation between political engagement and some traits that can reasonably have a positive relation with wellbeing. Examples of such traits can be extroversion or openness to experience (Mondak et. al, 2010; Gerber et al. 2010; Gallego & Oberski, 2012).

According to this perspective, the expectation would be that those individuals who have greater life satisfaction are also more likely to participate and take part in political activities. Another argument that points in this direction is Fredrickson's (2004) "broaden-and-build" theory which argues that positive emotions are essential elements of optimal functioning and build consequential personal resources as well as seed human flourishing. The broadened mindsets caused by positive emotions promote the engagement in "creative actions, ideas and social bonds". Political participation can be thought as an example of such actions.

Finally, still focusing on the link from wellbeing to participation, the work of Klandermans (1989) states that wellbeing can have causal effects on political participation, especially in protest activities, although it is not by itself the only necessary condition for participation to take place. However, as the author stresses, there is little research available that focus in this question.

1.4.1 The limitations of the existing literature

Despite the academic interest, it is striking the dearth of empirical research dedicated to the relationship between wellbeing and political participation, as well as to more broad political factors. As Pacek (2009) notes, "across little more than 3000 empirical works on the subject of human happiness, scholars paid little attention to the political determinants of subjective well-being across and within nations, and even less attention to the political consequences". Taken as a whole, the literature on political participation and life

satisfaction is both sparse and inconclusive, rendering obvious the need of further research regarding this issue.

Besides this latter point, some shortcomings of the existing research findings should be highlighted. First, it is clear that there are very good motives to question the “directionality” of the causal relationship between political participation and wellbeing. It was shown that there are both theoretical arguments and empirical research arguing for each direction of causality, in a debate that, for the most part, remains open. There is an evident lack of causal research work regarding this particular matter. This issue cannot be dissociated from the heavy dependence of the discussed research findings on cross-sectional data. The main problem of using cross-sectional data to determine causal effects is that many other variables both measured or unmeasured, can intervene and cause a spurious relationship. To my knowledge, only one study testing the effect of political participation on life satisfaction using panel data was published. Winters and Rundlett (2014) analyzed data from the British Household Panel Survey and found a positive effect of being a member of a voluntary association on life satisfaction. This finding highlights the need to revisit the link between (other forms of) political participation and life satisfaction using longitudinal studies which provide more reliable alternatives regarding the disentangling of causal effects. But beyond the question of direction of causality, panel data will also allow to figure out how time affects this relationship. The literature offers no tenable clues about

how long it takes for participation to affect life satisfaction and vice-versa.

Second, even though most of the research on life satisfaction determinants is at the individual level, contextual influences are also important. Following Frey and Stutzer (2006), it is more about being given the chance to participate than participation itself. Accordingly, living in a context where participation opportunities are given, should have a significant impact on life satisfaction. Yet, previous studies have, for the most part, disregarded how contextual variables can affect this relationship. Most models of political participation focus on individual resources but these cannot account alone for the differences between countries. Even though contextual variation in political participation activities have not been yet subject to extended systematic study, there are some examples that show that these influences are important (Vráblíková, 2013; Dalton, van Sickle & Weldon, 2009; Torcal, Rodón & Hierro, 2015).

Finally, political participation consists of a wide array of actions. These include activities such as going to a demonstration, joining a political party or organization, signing a petition, amongst several others. But despite the clear differences of each of these participation acts, most research on the link between political participation and life satisfaction so far has consisted of aggregating all political participation activities in one item. But should we expect each political participation act to affect wellbeing exactly in the same way or vice versa? Bäck, Teorell and Westholm (2011)

found that each act of political participation was associated with different incentives. Their study showed that voting and related party activity were connected with the perceived benefit should the outcome be positive, while manifestations and contacting were related with incentives of the behavior independently of a positive outcome. Given that the motivations that explain the participation acts differ, we should also expect that each political participation activity affect wellbeing differently.

1.5 The argument and contribution of this dissertation

As it has been shown, there are fundamental questions still unresolved. The academic purpose of this thesis dissertation is to contribute to a better theoretical and empirical understanding of the relationship between political participation and wellbeing in a number of ways. First, responding to the ongoing call of more empirical based studies that investigate the possible effects between political participation and life satisfaction. One of the first contributions of this dissertation is indeed to offer four independent research essays dedicated to this topic. Second, address the clear lack of causal work dedicated to the potential relationships between political participation and life satisfaction. As we have seen, to a significant extent, the majority of empirical studies is based on cross-sectional data and very rarely adopts procedures addressing the issue of causality. A related contribution is to revisit the relationship between political participation and life satisfaction by focusing on panel data, an approach that so far has very seldom been adopted in the field, and providing new empirical evidence.

Third, it is also argued that even though usually disregarded in the literature, contextual differences between countries are an important factor to take into account. Even though different datasets from different countries are used, the focus of this dissertation is on the European context. Different methods of analysis are also used all with the common goal of studying the different conditions under which a political participation can be linked to life satisfaction. More concretely, Chapters 2 to 4 specifically test the causality between life satisfaction and political participation, specifying models for both causal directions, while Chapter 5 assumes that political participation affects life satisfaction in order to test the effect of contextual variables. Therefore, the unity of this dissertation is anchored on the substantial issue of interest: studying the relationship between political participation and wellbeing. Each chapter is an individual piece of research aimed to provide answers to this same underlying question with the purpose of contributing to the academic debate.

A reflection about the availability of data is due. Even though there are plenty of surveys related to political behavior and wellbeing, actually very few combine both the fields of interest and even less are of longitudinal nature, a fundamental condition to comply what this dissertation sets out to do. Therefore, an initial challenge was to find data to make this research possible. For this reason, besides the inherent limitations of any empirical study discussed in the final chapter of this dissertation, there were also limits imposed by data

availability, which for the most part determined the choice of Germany and the Netherlands as the case studies.

1.6 The structure of the dissertation

In the first paper of this dissertation, presented as Chapter 2, the German socio-economic Household panel (SOEP) is used. Two causal models are designed and tested with the aim of shedding light on the causality between political participation and life satisfaction. Besides the question of causality, possible misspecification of the lag structure is also explicitly controlled for. However, contrary to what other studies have shown, the results do not offer support for a link between political participation and individual wellbeing in any causal direction.

In Chapter 3, it is developed and tested a causal model of the relationship between political participation and wellbeing. They include the main argument sustained by participatory democrats that by engaging in political participation individuals go through a process of self-development. This self-development is supposed to consist in the learning of new skills and extended knowledge, which supposedly has a positive impact on individual wellbeing. The data used comes from the Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social sciences (LISS) panel from the Netherlands. The findings of this study re-confirm the finding of the previous analysis that there seems to be no causal effects between political participation and wellbeing in any direction.

In Chapter 4, the LISS panel data is analyzed again. However, in this study the aim is to exclude the possibility of omitted variables and rule out spurious relationships between political participation and life satisfaction. This chapter starts by showing that correlation does exist between the variables of interest. There is a significant correlation between participation and wellbeing. However, when subject to a more strict causality test, this effect is no longer present. The results offer little support for the idea that membership and volunteering in organizations and life satisfaction are causally related.

Chapter 5 is centered on whether and how life satisfaction and political participation are related at the aggregate level. The findings are extended by testing hypothesis about different political participation activities and testing the moderating macro-level effect of openness of the political system on the relationship between political participation and life satisfaction. The data employed is from the European Social Survey (ESS) Round 6. Using a multi-level model, it is shown that openness of the political system is not only directly associated with life satisfaction but, as hypothesized, also moderates the association between political participation and life satisfaction. When low values of democratic openness are present, political participation has a negative or not significant effect on life satisfaction; while with higher levels of the openness of the political system it was shown that political participation positively affects life satisfaction.

Finally, in the sixth and conclusive chapter the overall results of the present research endeavor are discussed. It is also assessed their contribution to the academic debate and some directions of future research. To sum up, this dissertation presents new evidence that contributes to the clarification of the link between political participation and life satisfaction, a new and understudied field, in which further empirical and theoretical research are both required and merited.

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2. THE LINK BETWEEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LIFE SATISFACTION: A THREE WAVE CAUSAL ANALYSIS OF THE GERMAN SOEP HOUSEHOLD PANEL

Abstract

Is there a relationship between political participation and individual life satisfaction? The idea that political participation makes people more satisfied with their lives has long been debated. However, the existing empirical research has not been very successful in demonstrating that such a relationship exists while some studies show that instead it is individual life satisfaction that impacts political participation. This paper aims to shed some light on the issue of causality between political participation and individual life satisfaction. Unlike former studies, this paper resorts to panel data and apply a three wave model which allows us great flexibility to test several hypotheses. Also unlike previous studies, after correcting for measurement error, the analysis shows no compelling evidence of a causal relationship between political participation and life satisfaction.

2.1 Introduction

The empirical research devoted to the field of political participation has brought into light a variety of findings that concern the different types, frequency and variations of taking part in political activities. Nevertheless, while it is true that there is a wealth of information about the causal determinants of individual-level political participation, the knowledge about the individual-level consequences of such activities is remarkably less developed. In other words, while political participation is one of the most studied topics under the political studies realm and much attention has been devoted to explain why and when individuals engage in political activities, the consequences of actually participating have seldom been approached. Even though we can find this debate in the contemporary democratic thought, very little empirical research has been done about the individual effects of political participation (Finkel, 1985; Ikeda et al, 2008).

One possible individual consequence of engaging in political participation is that of generating wellbeing or life satisfaction. In recent years, there is a growing literature in the social sciences that focus on the predictors responsible for generating life satisfaction. Amongst these, a number of studies started to look more carefully to the interactions between political factors and changes on people's evaluations of their own wellbeing (Pacek, 2009). Between these political factors, the importance of political participation for individual wellbeing stands out for its long lasting theoretical debate. But despite the theoretical significance of such an outcome,

only a very small amount of empirical work has actually focused on this relationship. Furthermore, the existing empirical studies are far from providing substantive evidence that political participation does affect life satisfaction or to rule out the possibility that the causal direction of this relationship actually runs in the other direction (Pacheco and Lange, 2010; Weitz- Shapiro and Winters, 2011; Barnes et al., 1979; Oishi et al., 2007; Flavin and Keane, 2012).

This paper, makes use of the German Socio Economic Panel (SOEP) data to explore the causal relationships between political participation and life satisfaction. Using a three-wave panel design, this paper estimates simultaneous structural equations models to test different hypothesis about the direction of causation. Thereby this paper aims to go beyond current research in a number of ways. First and foremost by employing panel data it is possible to use several waves of data which not only allows correcting for measurement error, but also testing the robustness of relationships running between the dependent variables, having specified lagged effects, cross-lagged effects and synchronous effects. This is by no means the first study to use this research design to estimate the type of effects just described (Finkel, 1985; Claassen, 2008; Quintelier and Hooghe, 2012). However, to the best of my knowledge, it is the first time such study design is applied to ascertain the causal relationships between political participation and life satisfaction. This paper unfolds as follows: to begin, a discussion of the theory and hypothesis concerning the relationship between political participation and life satisfaction. Next comes the description of the

research design, method and variables employed. Finally, the models presented are subject to several statistical tests and the results are debated.

2.2 Life Satisfaction and Political Participation

Political participation is an issue of central importance for political science. Even though there are some dissonant views (e. g. Shumpeter, 1942), political participation is seen as a fundamental element of the nature and quality of democracy in any given society (Verba and Nie, 1987). We know a lot about who engages in political activities, but comparatively very little about the individual outcomes of political participation (Finkel, 1985; Ikeda et al, 2008). Research so far has pointed that political participation can make people more trusting, more close to subscribe democratic values and take part in collective action (Putnam, 2000). More recently, one other potential consequence of political participation has been gaining attention in the literature and it concerns the idea that engaging in political activities can also impact individual wellbeing. Surely, the argument that political participation alone can influence the quality of life is not new. But new insights coming out the psychological and democratic theory literatures helped to re-launch the debate. Nevertheless, it should be noted that not all scholars of political participation agree with this argument. Under the rational choice perspective for example (see, e.g., Downs, 1957; Rider and Ordeshook, 1968; Aldrich, 1993), if the expected benefit from any given participatory act is not collected, why should we expect any positive link between participation and wellbeing? Following a

similar reasoning, the social choice theory (Arrow, 1950) calls attention to the fact that there is very little chance that individuals see their preferences realized in a collective decision context.

On the other hand, participatory democracy advocates discuss some reasons why political participation should have an effect on life satisfaction. They argue that political participation is about more than just the outcomes individuals get out of it. For participatory democrats, engaging in political activities fosters desirable personal and social qualities in democratic citizens (Dahl, 1989; Warren, 1992), especially by contributing to the “development of the human powers of thought, feeling and action” (Teorell, 2006). This process is called “self-development” and the main idea is that by engaging in political activities, individuals get a chance to learn new skills, extend their knowledge and develop relationships with others. This way, it becomes an area of personal growth and fulfillment, which can have a positive impact on individual wellbeing.

Those who focus on the post-materialist values hypothesis also consider that wellbeing can arise from political participation (Inglehart, 1977; 1990). The argument says that post-materialistic values emphasize self-actualization, which in its turn is fulfilled through social or political participation by such actions as having a say in government or attaining freedom of speech. This fulfillment or self-actualization is seen as potentially having a positive effect on individual wellbeing.

Differently, the “procedural utility” approach, based on the view of the “procedural goods of democracy” introduced by Robert Lane (1988) amongst others, highlights that the fairness of the procedure that conduces to the respective outcome is just as important. Lane argues that in what politics is concerned people are at least as concerned with how they are treated as with what they get. In political participation terms, this means that people can achieve higher wellbeing by being given the chance to participate, and not only through the outcome of any participatory act. Precisely by focusing on the process, the empirical validation of the relationship between political participation and wellbeing under this perspective is mainly directed to participation rights or possibilities.

Even though, so far, we have been discussing why political participation should affect wellbeing, there are also reasons to argue that this relationship can run on the other direction. Already Barnes et al. (1979) stated that the interest in the relationship between individual satisfaction and political behavior is “at least as old as the serious study of politics”. The basic argument can be very succinctly summed up by arguing that satisfied people will give birth to a peaceful polity and unsatisfied people will be a source of unrest. Veenhoven (1988) acknowledges this possibility and speculates that the individuals who show higher satisfaction might not have any incentive to participate in politics. This argument considers that individuals see the political process merely as a path for securing individuals benefits, whether they come under a particular or global policy. As soon as individuals reach a desired

level of wellbeing, political participation becomes less prominent because the goals set in the political process have been already achieved. Increased satisfaction would, therefore, generate complacency and hinder engagement in the political process.

Post-materialist theory, and particularly Inglehart (1990), also claims that wellbeing should affect political participation. However, differently to the arguments just discussed, this standpoint considers that after achieving a desired level of satisfaction with life, individuals look beyond their own personal wellbeing and start figuring out ways to address broader societal concerns through political participation (Inglehart, 1990). This is generally consistent with some empirical findings that state that happier individuals are more concerned with general social and political problems (Veenhoven, 1988).

2.2.1 Previous Research

While the debate between proponents of the different directions of causation has been going on, it is reasonable to say that researchers have also not reached a consensus in terms of empirical analysis. The main obstacle that justifies this is that most studies are based on cross-sectional observations and these hardly ever permit disentangling causal effects even though several identification strategies have been employed in the empirical literature. Stutzer and Frey (2006), for example, compare how happy people are in the Swiss cantons with different direct democracy participation opportunities. Their findings report that, on average, people living

in the regions where there are more chances to engage in direct democracy procedures, are happier. To strengthen this argument, they also show that the foreigners living in the same cantons but are not allowed to participate in the referendums are less satisfied. However, these results have been disputed in more than one occasion and the more recent works have been unable to confirm such relationships (Dorn et al., 2008; Stadelmann-Steffen and Vatter, 2011). Pacheco and Lange (2010) develop a two-step simultaneous treatment effect of 20 countries from the 2006 European Social Survey (ESS) round to deal with potential endogeneity issues. They find that participation measured as being a member or collaborating with a political party has a positive effect on life satisfaction whereas other participation activities, such as signing a petition or wearing an election badge, do not. Nonetheless, as the authors themselves recognize, the data is cross-sectional in nature, which severely limits any possible causal statements (Pacheco and Lange, 2010, pp. 693). Weitz-Shapiro and Winters (2011) in a study of Latin America use age as a threshold to separate voters from individuals that cannot vote only to find that the actual act of voting has no relationship with wellbeing. As they find no difference in levels of life satisfaction, they argue that if any relationship exists, it runs from wellbeing to political participation. As a result of the empirical evidence we have been reviewing so far, it should be clear that the studies dedicated to find out whether political participation has an effect on life satisfaction, have not been successful in providing a clear pattern of this relationship.

Considering the other possible causal direction, i.e. the possible impact of life satisfaction on political participation, Flavin and Keane (2012) use data from the United States and their findings report a robust relationship between life satisfaction and political participation after accounting for a number of possible confounding factors. In their paper, the authors uncover a positive relationship between voting, as well as other conventional acts of political participation, and life satisfaction.

2.3 Empirical Model

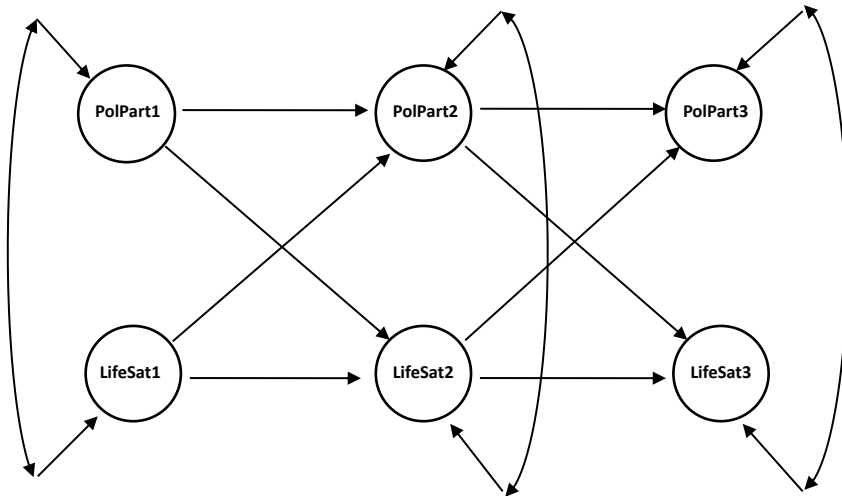
As we have seen, there is mixed evidence about the robustness and causal direction of the relationship between political participation and wellbeing. There are plausible theoretical arguments for either direction of causality and the empirical evidence does not offer a tenable lead as to what the direction of causality should be but rather suggests that: political participation has an effect on life satisfaction; as well as that life satisfaction has an effect on political participation.

This two-way causation problematic is not new to life satisfaction research. In fact, it has been widely recognized that usually reported causes of life satisfaction can also be consequences or both a cause and a consequence (Headey & Muffels, 2014; Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). This would be the case if changes over time in political participation could lead to changes in life satisfaction, and that changes in life satisfaction could also lead to changes in political participation. And there is also the possibility that the

relationship between political participation and life satisfaction could be spurious, caused by some omitted variable.

However, despite all these possibilities, most research discussed in the previous section is based on cross-sectional data. It is my belief that the use of panel data can bring some clarification into this field. By tracking individuals over time, panel data contains information about prior as well as current values of the variables of interest which, in this particular case, makes its use especially persuasive because it makes the specification of several causal effects possible. Still, not all the ills of causal inference in empirical research can be solved by panel data. There are several limitations discussed in the literature, which include design and data collection problems; distortions of measurement errors; self-selectivity; non-response and attrition, amongst others (Baltagi, 2005), which limit panel data's ability to deal with causation. Nevertheless, one common approach in longitudinal panel data analysis is to employ a cross-lagged model, as presented in Figure 2.1. This kind of models provide an estimate of the lagged effect of each variable of interest on the other, as well as the effects caused by the correlation of each variable with its lagged measurement, also called stability effects or autocorrelation.

Figure 2.1: Cross-lagged model



Assuming that there is a significant correlation or covariance between political participation and life satisfaction, four possibilities emerge out of the estimation of the model draw in Figure 2.1. First, the links from political participation to life satisfaction are statistically significant, but not the links from life satisfaction to political participation. A second possibility is the exact reverse possibility, that is, significant effects of life satisfaction on political participation. Following the model, the third possibility is two-way causation, meaning that both the links from political participation to life satisfaction and the other way around are statistically significant.

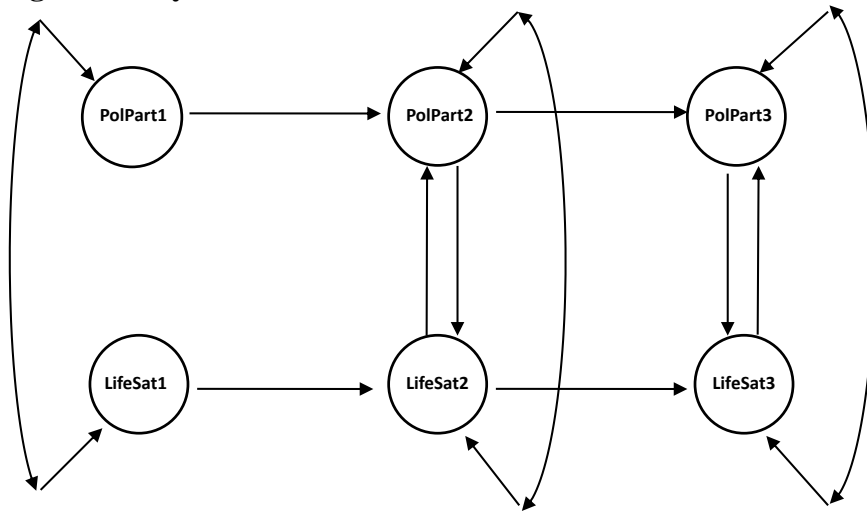
The fourth and last possibility is that the links between political participation and life satisfaction are completely or partially spurious. This would be the case if only the curved lines in Figure 2.1 would prove to be significant. These represent the correlation

between the disturbance terms of both the variables of interest. Evidently, to these four possibilities adds the null hypothesis, i.e. no significant relationships between political participation and life satisfaction.

Besides the question of direction of causality, there is another important aspect to be discussed regarding the relationship between political participation and life satisfaction. The model represented in Figure 2.1 assumes that changes in political participation affect life satisfaction after some discrete time lag. The same is true for the possible effect of life satisfaction on political participation. Therefore, the cross-lagged model implicitly assumes that these effects occur continuously and over time. In other words, if the effects are continuous, the time points at which the panel measures are taken are arbitrary (Headey & Muffels, 2014). However, this may not be the case. It can also be plausibly claimed that either one of the main variables has a “simultaneous” effect on the other. Simultaneous or synchronous refers to the causal lag for political participation to affect life satisfaction, and vice-versa, is short in relation to the time elapsed between the waves of measurement. Indeed, the problem of specifying the appropriate lag structure for the effects of variables over time is one of the most difficult issues in panel analyses (Finkel, 1995). As Finkel discusses, both theoretical and empirical arguments should be used in order to overcome this concern about the correct lag structure. But in this case, theory does not provide much guidance. After all, if a person engages in some political participation activity, how long will it take to affect life satisfaction? Will it take a day, a month, a year?

It was proven that if effects are continuous, cross-lagged models such as the one presented in Figure 2.1 provide unbiased estimates (Finkel, 1995). However, if that is not the case, then the cross-lagged model can potentially deliver biased estimates due to the misspecification of the causal lag. Therefore, this paper will explicitly deal with this possibility in the discussed models. Nevertheless, even though it might sound it is just the case of adding simultaneous causation links to Figure 2.1, it is not that simple. Models with both cross-lagged and synchronous causal relations are hard to be estimated often due to problems of both under-identification and multicollinearity (Finkel, 2007). A practical strategy also followed by other authors (Headey & Muffels, 2014) is to estimate a model with only cross-lagged effects and compare the results with another model with only synchronous links, as presented in Figure 2.2. The main difference in this model is that the effects between political participation and life satisfaction are not lagged in time but rather represent direct effects at the same time point. In this paper, both models will be estimated and the results compared.

Figure 2.2: Synchronous effects model



2.4 Data, Variables and Method

The data employed comes from the German Socio Economic Panel (SOEP), which is a representative annual longitudinal study of private households, located at the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW Berlin). It started in 1984. About 20,000 persons and nearly 11,000 households participate every year (for further details: Wagner, Frick & Schupp, 2007). Here three waves of the SOEP data from 2007 to 2009 (N=9165) are used. This period was chosen because the time difference between the waves that included the variables of interest was one year, while the prior waves had a time lag of two years in the political participation measurement.

To measure political participation in each wave, one item that asks the respondents whether they are actively involved in civic initiatives, political parties, or local politics in their leisure time was used. More concretely, the question is as follows: “Which of the

following activities do you take part in during your free time? Involvement in a citizen's group, political party, local government". The response options are: 1) at least once a week, 2) at least once a month, 3) less often, and 4) never.

As for life satisfaction, it is surveyed in the SOEP every year using the question "How satisfied are you with your life, all things considered?". Individuals rate their life satisfaction on an 11-point scale ranging from 0 "completely dissatisfied" to 10 "completely satisfied". All in all this scale is considered to be reliable and valid measurement instrument of life satisfaction (e. g. Schimmack, 2009).

Finally, additional variables were included as controls. The controls are for education, income, unemployment, living with a partner and social membership. The option to include these variables is justified by the literature in the sense that they are all considered important and significant predictors (covariates) of political participation and life satisfaction. Education is operationalized by using the 1997 ISCED classification (Unesco, 2011) six points education scale ranging from lower to higher level of education; income is the respondent's net household income, which is transform to a 10-point scale ranging from lower to higher income. Being unemployed and living with a partner are dichotomous variables coded 0 and 1. Finally, social membership is measured by a latent variable consisting of three indicators of membership in professional, environmental and other types of associations. The

descriptive statistics of all the variables included in the models can be consulted in Appendix 2.1.

Moreover, procedures for correction of measurement error are adopted. Measurement error is the difference between the observed response and the unobserved variable of interest. For cross-sectional data it was found that up to 50% of the variance of an observed variable is due to error (Alwin, 2007; Saris et al., 2007) and in addition, in panel data correction for measurement error is particularly important due to the probability of correlated errors (Finkel, 1995). Correction for measurement error is performed by introducing the loadings and the variance of the measurement errors for all variables in the model as fixed parameters. The fixed parameters are estimated using different procedures. For education, income, unemployment and partner the quality coefficients given by the literature (Alwin, 2007) are used. For the other variables the quality of the question is predicted using the program Survey Quality Predictor (SQP 2.0, Saris et al. 2011). SQP offers Authorized Predictions based on meta-analysis of the estimates of the reliability and validity of about 3,700 survey items, estimates from Multitrait Multimethod (MTMM) experiments, and allows coding a question if no quality prediction is offered yet. With the obtained quality, the error variance is calculated as $(1-q^2)$, where q^2 is the quality coefficient. The loading of each latent variable is set to be equal to the quality coefficient. The qualities and the error variances for the variables in the models are presented in Appendix 2.2.

The models are estimated and tested using the Maximum Likelihood estimator of LISREL 8.72 (Jöreskog and Sörbom 2005). For model evaluation and testing the Jrule software (Van der Veld, Saris et al. 2008) based on the procedure developed by Saris, Satorra and Van der Veld (2009) is adopted. Saris et al. (2009) showed that the commonly used evaluation procedures for structural equation models cannot be trusted as the test statistics and fit indices are unequally sensitive for different misspecifications and provide a new procedure which uses the modification index as test statistic for the detection of misspecifications (expressed as expected parameter change; EPC) in combination with the power of the test. Jrule allows detecting misspecifications at the parameter level rather than the model as a whole which is a big advantage in order to identify which of the various effects fixed in the model might be misspecified.

2.5 Results

Table 2.1 presents the results of the structural equations estimates corrected for measurement error of both the cross-lagged and the synchronous model represented in Figure 2.1 and Figure 2.2, with the addition of the discussed control variables. The control variables are only linked to political participation and life satisfaction at wave 1. These links are not extended to latter waves because it is not expected that the control variables influence the variables of interest in latter waves, net of their effects on wave 1 (Kessler and Greenberg, 1981). Nevertheless, this expectation was tested with

Jrule and no misspecifications of the exogenous variables were found.

Going into the results of the control variables estimates, we see that education has a negative effect on political participation and no significant effect on life satisfaction. As for income, there is a significant negative relationship with political participation, meaning that higher income affects negatively political participation. On the other hand, income has a positive significant relationship with life satisfaction. Being unemployed does not affect political participation but as other research also showed, it affects negatively life satisfaction. Finally, living with a partner has a positive effect on political participation and social membership, as expected, positively affects both variables of interest.

In both models, political participation and life satisfaction are extremely stable over time. The stability effects are equal for both the cross lagged and synchronous model and highly significant. In fact, the main difference between the two models is the significant cross-lagged effect found from life satisfaction at time point 1 to political participation at time point 2 and the synchronous effect of life satisfaction at time point 2 on political participation at the same time point. However, when compared to the stabilities, it is a small effect of 0.03 and just above the significance threshold. All other cross-lagged and synchronous effects are not significant. In terms of global fit of the models, they are exactly the same. The chi-square is 324.59 for 44 degrees of freedom and the RMSEA and CFI are respectively 0.026 and 0.99, indicating a poor fit. Because the

global fit measures are the same, it is not clear whether one model fits the data better than the other. Furthermore, model fit is not satisfactory.

Table 2.1: Estimates of the cross lagged and synchronous three waves model with correction for measurement error

	Cross Lagged Effects Model	Synchronous Effects Model
Stability Effects		
Polpart1 → Polpart2	.89 (.01)**	.89 (.01)**
Polpart2 → Polpart3	.91 (.01)**	.91 (.01)**
LifeSat1 → LifeSat2	.89 (.02)**	.89 (.01)**
LifeSat2 → LifeSat3	.86 (.02)**	.86 (.02)**
Cross Lagged Effects		
Polpart1 → Life Sat2	.01 (.02)	
Life Sat1 → Polpart2	.03 (.01)*	
Polpart2 → Life Sat3	.01 (.02)	
LifeSat2 → Polpart3	-.02 (.01)	
Synchronous Effects		
Polpart2 → Life Sat2		.01 (.02)
LifeSat2 → Polpar2		.03 (.02)*
Polpart3 → Life Sat3		.01 (.02)
LifeSat3 → Polpart3		-.02 (.02)
Controls		
Edu → PP1		-.07 (.02)**
Edu → LS1		-.01 (.02)
Inc → PP1		-.17 (.03)**
Inc → LS1		.11 (.02)**
Unemployed → PP1		.01 (.01)
Unemployed → LS1		-.07 (.01)**
Partner → PP1		.03 (.02)*
Partner → LS1		.01 (.01)
Social Member → PP1		1.58 (.14)**
Social Member → LS1		.47 (.02)**
Disturbance Terms		
Polpart1 → Life Sat1	-.05 (0.02)*	-.05 (0.02)*
Polpart2 → Life Sat2	.00 (0.01)	-.01 (0.02)
Polpart3 → Life Sat3	.00 (0.01)	.00 (0.02)

Chi-Square	324.59 (44)	324.59 (44)
R Squared	Life Sat1: .09 Life Sat2: .79 Life Sat3: .74 Polpart1: .28 Polpart2: .79 Polpart3: .82	Life Sat1: .09 Life Sat2: .79 Life Sat3: .74 Polpart1: .28 Polpart2: .79 Polpart3: .82
RMSEA	.026	.026
CFI	.99	.99
N	9,115	9,115

Note: * P value < 0.05 (two tailed test) ** P value < 0.01 (two tailed test).
Standard errors in parenthesis.

What is clear in this first step is that no proof of two way causation or of any effect of political participation on life satisfaction is found. And only very limited proof is found of a link from life satisfaction to political participation. However, the model fit can be improved by addressing the misspecifications indicated by Jrule and then check whether any of the main results have changed. All statistically insignificant links of the control variables on the endogenous variables were also removed. The results can be found in Table 2.2.

Following the suggestions of Jrule, the correlated error terms between the control variables of income and social membership are included, as well as education and social membership. The changes result in a much better fit of both models. In the cross-lagged model the fit measures are chi-square 89.99 for 49 degrees of freedom and an RMSEA and CFI of respectively 0.0096 and 1.00. As for the synchronous model, the chi-square is slightly bigger with 90.47 for 49 degrees of freedom and an RMSEA of 0.0096. It can be said that

the models show now a good fit to the data, with a very small difference in the cross-lagged model chi-square statistic.

Table 2.2: Estimates of the cross lagged and synchronous three waves model with correction for measurement error after dealing with misspecifications and not significant links

	Cross Lagged Effects Model	Synchronous Effects Model
Stability Effects		
Polpart1 → Polpart2	.89 (.01)**	.89 (.01)**
Polpart2 → Polpart3	.91 (.01)**	.91 (.01)**
LifeSat1 → LifeSat2	.89 (.02)**	.89 (.02)**
LifeSat2 → LifeSat3	.86 (.02)**	.86 (.02)**
Cross Lagged Effects		
Polpart1 → Life Sat2	.01 (.02)	
Life Sat1 → Polpart2	.03 (.01)*	
Polpart2 → Life Sat3	.01 (.02)	
LifeSat2 → Polpart3	-.02 (.01)	
Synchronous Effects		
Polpart2 → Life Sat2		.00 (.02)
LifeSat2 → Polpar2		.03 (.02)
Polpart3 → Life Sat3		.01 (.02)
LifeSat3 → Polpart3		-.02 (.01)
Chi-Square	89.99 (49)	9.47 (49)
RMSEA	.0096	.0096
CFI	1.00	1.00
N	9,115	9,115

Note: * P value < 0.05 (two tailed test) ** P value < 0.01 (two tailed test). Standard errors in parenthesis.

Looking now to the structural effects, the estimates are almost the same as the previous ones. The stability effects are exactly the same as before and remain highly significant both for political participation and life satisfaction. The most important change happens in the synchronous model where the before significant effect of life satisfaction on political participation at time point 2

has the same magnitude but is no longer significant. The significant effect of life satisfaction on political participation found before is still marginally significant and with the same size. All remaining effects change very little or not at all.

Given these results, in conclusion, it can be said that no evidence of two way causation was found between political participation and life satisfaction. In fact, no consistent causal effects between political participation and life satisfaction were found in both models. At best, the results indicate a very small, almost insignificant causal effect of life satisfaction on political participation which turns out not to last over time.

2.6 Conclusions

In this paper, the intention was to shed new light on the debate about the causal relationships between political participation and life satisfaction. We have seen that both directions of causality are plausibly argued in the literature and several empirical studies present contradictory evidence.

The aim was to take the discussion one step forward by conducting a 3 wave panel analysis. By resorting to panel data, it is possible to control for previous levels of both political participation and life satisfaction, while also trying to find out whether cross-lagged or synchronous effects existed between political participation and life satisfaction using the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) data.

Moreover, procedures to correct for measurement error were adopted.

In summary, the findings offer no support for the idea of a causal relationship between political participation and life satisfaction. Some evidence was found of a very small effect of life satisfaction on political participation but it turned out not to last. In fact, the most pronounced effects over time are between the same variables at different points in time. This means that both political participation and life satisfaction are extremely stable over time. Failure to control for this pronounced stability, as it is usually the case in cross-sectional research, can help to explain the mixed findings of the existing empirical research. Another possible explanation for why any support for a causal relationship was found is correction for measurement error.

But the analysis developed in this paper is not without its shortcomings. One fault can be the political participation operationalization. Even though it would be expected that different acts of participation have different effects on life satisfaction, the participation measurement used here did not allow to separate different participation acts. By putting together in the same survey question such different activities such as participating in civic initiatives, political parties and local politics, not only it is not possible to disentangle different impacts, but there is also the possibility that they have contrary effects between them. As a result, in that case, the effects of the different participation activities would

cancel each other out and no effects on life satisfaction would be found.

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Appendix 2.1: Summary/descriptives of variables

Wave	Variable	Mean	Std Dev	Min	Max
2007	Political Participation	.107	.382	0	3
	Life Satisfaction	6.933	1.782	0	10
	Education	3.671	1.434	1	6
	Income	2.898	2.198	1	10
	Unemployed	.680	.251	0	1
	Partner	.610	.487	0	1
	Professional Association	.077	.267	0	1
	Other Environment	.358	.479	0	1
2008	Political Participation	.138	.424	0	3
	Life Satisfaction	6.968	1.758	0	10
2009	Political Participation	.110	.384	0	3
	Life Satisfaction	6.966	1.785	0	10

Appendix 2.2: Correction for measurement error – quality coefficients and error variances

	Quality coeff.	Source	Error var.
<i>Endogenous Variables:</i>			
Life Satisfaction 2007	.736	SQP own coding	.338
Life Satisfaction 2008	.736	SQP own coding	.459
Life Satisfaction 2009	.736	SQP own coding	.338
Political Participation 2007	.814	SQP own coding	.459
Political Participation 2008	.814	SQP own coding	.338
Political Participation 2009	.814	SQP own coding	.459
<i>Control Variables:</i>			
Education	.898	Alwin (2007, p.328)	.102
Income	.777	Alwin (2007, p.328)	.223
Unemployed	.677	Alwin (2007, p.328)	.177
Partner	.966	Alwin (2007, p.328)	.017

Appendix 2.3: Loadings of the latent variable social membership

Social Membership	Loadings
Member of other types of Associations	1.00
Member of a Environmental Association	0.66** (0.04)
Member of a Professional Association	1.00** (0.05)

Appendix 2.4: Correlation between political participation and life satisfaction at 3 time points

	P1	P2	P3	LS3	LS2	LS1
P1	1.000					
P2	.5835	1.000				
P3	.5711	.6011	1.000			
LS3	.0298	.0462	.0302	1.000		
LS2	.0369	.0412	.0287	.5874	1.000	
LS1	.0379	.0442	.0339	.5504	.6041	1.000

3. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND WELLBEING IN THE NETHERLANDS: EXPLORING THE CAUSAL LINKS

Abstract

Does political participation make individuals more satisfied with their lives? Scholars of classical philosophy and participatory democracy suggest that participation in political activities is indeed a fundamental tenet of individual wellbeing. However, even though political participation is one of the most intensively studied topics in political science for decades, the relationship with individual wellbeing only recently started to gather some attention. So far, the existing empirical research has come to inconclusive results. In this study, first the theoretical relationships between political participation and wellbeing are re-examined. Secondly, using panel data from the Netherlands, the causal relations between taking part in political activities and individual life satisfaction are empirically assessed. Special attention is given to the role of political efficacy in this relationship. Employing structural equation modeling and correcting for measurement error, no evidence of a substantive effect of political participation on life satisfaction is found.

3.1 Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing literature in the social sciences that focus on a myriad of different factors responsible for generating individual wellbeing (Diener, 2009; Dutt and Radcliff, 2009). Even more recently, a number of studies started to pay closer attention to the interactions between political factors and changes on individual evaluations of the quality of life. Amongst these political factors, the importance of political participation for individual wellbeing distinguishes itself for its long lasting theoretical debate. Ever since Aristotle and other classical philosophers, participation on the matters of the polis is considered to be an essential part of individual fulfillment and, therefore, individual happiness or wellbeing. This view still finds support in contemporary literature (Inglehart, 2006; Pacek, 2009) and, as already Barnes et al. (1979) claimed in their seminal study, the interest in the relationship between individual satisfaction and political behavior is “at least as old as the serious study of politics”. The idea was that satisfied people will give birth to a peaceful polity and, on the other hand, unsatisfied people would be a source of unrest. But although political participation probably is one of the most studied topics under the political studies realm and much attention has been devoted to explain why and when individuals engage in political activities, the consequences of actually participating have seldom been approached (Ikeda et al., 2008). One of such consequences is that participating generates individual satisfaction. Despite the theoretical significance of such an outcome, few empirical studies have actually focused on this

relationship and the existing ones are far from providing substantive evidence that there is such a relationship (Pacheco and Lange, 2011; Weitz-Shapiro and Winters, 2011). In addition, the existing empirical work presents another problem: the possibility that the relationship actually flows in the other direction and it is indeed wellbeing that affects political participation (Barnes et al., 1979; Oishi et al., 2007; Flavin and Keane, 2012).

In this paper, the aim is to find whether political participation has an impact on wellbeing or, alternatively, whether there is an effect of wellbeing on political participation. Additionally, it is also argued that this effect can go through political efficacy, a potential intervening variable between political participation and wellbeing. This study goes beyond current research in three important ways. First, by using individual level panel data, tracking the same individuals over time, a more rigorous test of the causal relationships is possible than otherwise with cross-sectional data. Secondly, correction for measurement error is employed with the estimated relationships which should avoid any attenuation of the causal effects we find. And lastly, it is discussed and incorporated what is argued to be an important variable in these relationships: political efficacy. For this purpose, individual level panel data originated in the Dutch LISS Panel from 2008 and 2009 is used. A causal model design to empirically address the direction of causality between political participation and wellbeing is put forward and tested.

This paper proceeds as follows: in the next section, the arguments that account for a relationship between political participation and wellbeing are considered. The focus also goes on the particular role political efficacy plays in this relationship. Section 3 describes the methodology and data used to test the hypotheses. Afterwards, section 4 presents the findings which are discussed in the conclusions in section 5.

3.2 Political Participation and Wellbeing

Much of the debate about the quality of democracy revolves around the question of political participation. Even though there are some dissonant views (e. g. Shumpeter, 1942), the overwhelming majority will agree that the question of political participation, if democracy is to be understood as rule by the people, is a fundamental element of the nature and quality of democracy in a society (Verba and Nie, 1987). For this reason, scholars have long tried to understand who participates, when and why. However, a lot less attention has been dedicated to the outcomes of political participation at the individual level. Nevertheless, the research so far has been able to point out that taking part in political participation can make people more trusting, more inclined into subscribing democratic values and to take part in collective action (Putnam, 2000). But apart from these, and also discussed by Putnam, there is another potential consequence of individual's political participation that has been very little studied: the effects on individual wellbeing.

The idea that political participation can indeed affect wellbeing is by no means new. However it is important to note that not all viewpoints of political participation sustain this beneficial view. For example, Arrow (1950) argued in his social choice theory that the chances of seeing the individual preferences realized in a collective context is very low. Another example, under the rational choice perspective for any given individual that does not collect the expected benefit from a participatory act, there is no reason to expect any positive link between participation and wellbeing. Given these arguments, why should we expect political participation to increase individual wellbeing?

Participatory democracy theory challenges these latter views and argues that political participation is not just about the potential individual outcomes. The argument states that engaging in political activities fosters desirable personal and social qualities in democratic citizens (Dahl, 1989; Warren, 1992), particularly by contributing to the “development of the human powers of thought, feeling and action” (Teorell, 2006). Participatory democrats argue that by engaging in political activities, individuals get a chance to learn new skills, extend their knowledge and develop their relationships with others. They named this process as “self-development” as it becomes an area of personal growth and fulfillment, which would have a positive impact on individual wellbeing.

The post-materialist values hypothesis also supports the idea that wellbeing can arise from political participation (Inglehart, 1977; 1990). Inglehart argues that the post-materialist shift not only may lead to greater political participation, especially the participation that consists of unconventional activities, but that also higher priority will be placed on values such as belonging, self-expression and quality of life, instead of physical sustenance and safety (Inglehart, 1990; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). In accordance with participatory democracy “self-development” argument, self-expression and self-actualization can be achieved by political participation activities. Pichler and Wallace (2009) develop this argument and say that individuals by getting involved in personally meaningful causes, following particular enthusiasms or commitments, and by taking part in social or political participation activities fulfill self-actualization, and therefore can achieve higher levels of wellbeing. Pacheco and Lange (2010), using cross-sectional data, dealing with potential endogeneity, find a substantive effect of political participation on wellbeing. Taken together, these considerations suggest the first hypothesis: Political participation has a positive effect on wellbeing (H1).

It has been commonly regarded that political efficacy has a direct and positive effect on political participation (Abramson and Aldrich 1982; Finkel 1985; 1987; Parry 1972; Schutz 2005). Consequently, political efficacy is commonly employed as an important predictor of political participation even if some caution is necessary because as Finkel (1985) demonstrated using panel data, a significant part of

this relationship is endogenous, meaning that those who participate in politics show higher levels of efficacy to start with. It is also expected that political participation affects political efficacy as previous research has shown that voting and participating in campaign activities has a positive impact on political efficacy (Finkel 1985, 1987). The effect of political efficacy on wellbeing, on the other hand, has been very little studied so far.

Today, it is generally accepted that political efficacy consists of an internal dimension – the individuals' view of their own abilities to take part in politics, and the external dimension – individuals' perceptions of government responsiveness. It was also theoretically argued and empirically shown that the two components are indeed different and thus carry different relationships with other variables (Saris, 2008). In this paper it is argued that it is important to distinguish between external efficacy and internal efficacy because each of these components carries different interpretations into the relationship between political participation and wellbeing. There is a significant difference that comes from whether this effect is caused by the perception individuals' have of the openness of a given political system or either if this effect is caused by the individuals' perception of their competence.

Looking more closely to the self-development argument, participatory democracy scholars sustain that the causal mechanism that links political participation and life satisfaction is that by engaging in political participation, individuals go through a process

of self-development which has positive effects on satisfaction. This self-development is supposed to consist of the learning of new skills and extended knowledge, which has a positive impact on individual wellbeing. But how can we identify this inner process of self-development? Participatory democrats answer this question by considering that the development of a “deeper” inner notion of citizenship should be reflected in the sense of being capable to act effectively in the political realm (Finkel, 1985). Internal political efficacy is then seen as the key link between participation and more general feelings of self-development or self-realization (Finkel, 1987). By participating in political acts, people can develop or increase competences, and so internal political efficacy is expected to have a positive effect on wellbeing. Findings in psychology also support this expectation as they show that a sense of personal empowerment has significant effects on individual wellbeing (Peterson, 1999). Therefore, the expectation is for a significant relationship between internal political efficacy and life satisfaction: Internal political efficacy has a positive significant effect on individual wellbeing. (H2).

While internal efficacy is more connected with subjective competences, external efficacy is related to trust in the responsiveness of government to citizen’s demands and seems to be a precondition for people to get involved in political action (Niemi et al., 1991). So it is expected that external political efficacy affects political participation. But being granted the possibility of participating politically is also affecting people’s wellbeing.

Helliwell (2006) has shown that extensive opportunities for social and political involvement have significant effects on individual wellbeing. Stutzer and Frey (2006) further argue that in fact it is not actual participation that affects wellbeing, but instead the perception of the possibilities to participate in politics. They show this by finding higher levels of life satisfaction in areas of Switzerland where participation rights are more enforced. This leads us to advance the following hypothesis: External political efficacy has a positive significant effect on wellbeing (H3).

Finally, even though the post-materialist value theory argues that political participation affects wellbeing, it also discusses some arguments for the relationship to have the reverse causal direction. The claim is that after individuals get to the desired level of satisfaction, they start to look beyond their own personal wellbeing and address broader societal concerns through political participation (Inglehart, 1990). This argument is consistent with empirical findings that state that happier individuals are more concerned with general social and political problems (Veenhoven, 1988), and thus more likely to engage in political participation activities. Also Klandermans (1989) had noted before that subjective wellbeing can have causal effects on political participation, especially in protest activities, although it is not the only necessary condition for participation to take place. But this same argument was questioned also by Veenhoven (1988) by arguing that if people see the political process merely as a path for securing individual benefits, then there is the possibility that those individuals with higher satisfaction might have no incentive to take part in political activities. He then

proceeds to speculate that when individuals reach a desired level of wellbeing, political participation becomes less prominent because the goals potentially reachable in the political process have already been achieved. Increased satisfaction would, therefore, generate complacency and hinder engagement on the political process (Flavin and Keane, 2012). Several empirical studies have explored this direction of causality. Weitz-Shapiro and Winters (2011) studied the relationship between voting and wellbeing in South America and find no significant effect, concluding that the relationship probably runs from wellbeing to political participation. Flavin and Keane (2012) explored American data and found a positive effect of life satisfaction on political participation. From all this derives the final hypothesis: Individual wellbeing has a positive effect on political participation. (H4).

In sum, the relationship between political participation and wellbeing has been subject of theoretical analyses and some empirical examination but without any theoretical or empirical closure having been achieved. It is likely that the main reason that explains this outcome is that most studies are based on cross-sectional observations. Based on the literature, several possible links between political participation, wellbeing and internal and external political efficacy are identified. However, these relationships are reciprocal which introduces some added difficulties when it comes to empirical testing. A solution to this problem of reciprocity is controlling for time. Longitudinal panel data will allow take time into account and control for past values of

both life satisfaction and political participation. In the next section, empirical strategy followed in this paper is discussed in detail.

3.3 Empirical Strategy

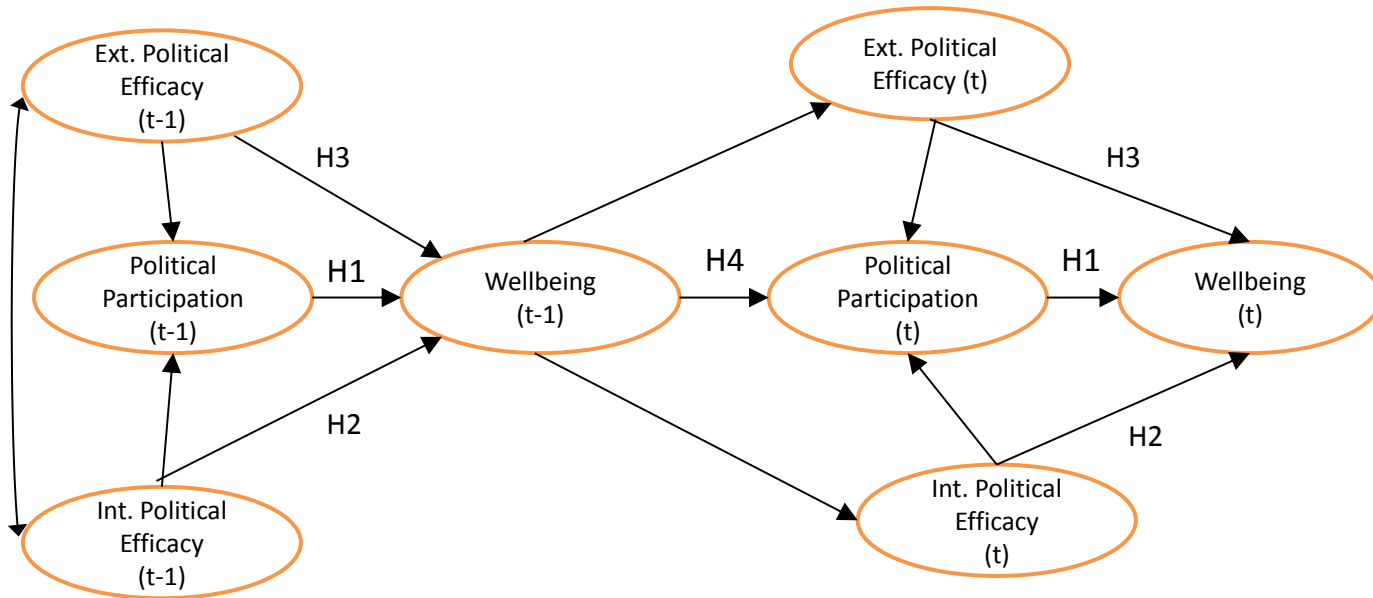
Following the just expressed concerns, for the present analysis observations of the same individuals over time are needed. That is to say that panel data is in need. For the current analysis, data from the Dutch LISS Panel is used. The choice for this dataset is justified by the lack of panel studies with the necessary information, namely information about political behavior and satisfaction items in the same survey, and also because this particular dataset was shown to be of very high quality (Revilla and Saris, 2012). The LISS panel (Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social sciences) consists of 5,000 households, comprising 8,000 individuals and currently is conducting the sixth wave (2007-2013). The panel is based on a probability sample of households drawn from the population register by Statistics Netherlands. The response rate varies between 50% and 80%, depending on the topic of the questionnaire and month⁵. About 18% of the initial households have left the sample since the beginning of the panel. Panel members complete online questionnaires of about 15 to 30 minutes in total and households that could not otherwise participate are provided with a computer and internet connection. The LISS Panel is an online survey and quality of the data has been established to be similar to other data

⁵ The LISS panel core study consists of 11 different topics, distributed monthly throughout the year. In wave 1 and wave 2, the modules about politics and personality, which are used here, were signed out the respondents respectively in December (2007, 2008) and May (2008, 2009).

collection modes (Revilla and Saris, 2012). Here the 2008 and 2009 waves are used.

The goal of the present analysis is to investigate the relationship between political participation and wellbeing rather than giving a full explanation of either political participation or wellbeing. The effects between these two concepts are expected to be direct as well as indirect through the intervening variable political efficacy. Therefore, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) is employed which gives the advantage to model direct and indirect effects. Furthermore, it also allows controlling for measurement error. Measurement error is understood as the distinction between the observed response and the variable of interest (Saris and Gallhofer, 2007). Correcting for measurement is often neglected in empirical research although it was found that up to 50% of the variance of a variable are due to measurement error (Alwin, 2007; Saris et al., 2007). By correcting for it, scholars make sure that the observed significant or not significant relationships are indeed due to substantive reasons rather than measurement artifacts. Measurement error is corrected by introducing multiple indicators for each of the (latent) concepts included in the model.

Figure 3.1: Structural Model



Note: For the sake of simplicity, the auto correlated effects are not represented.

In the first step, the relationship between the indicators and the latent variables is analyzed. This is referred to as measurement model. Then, the causal relationship between the latent constructs is examined. This is referred to as the structural model. Following the previously discussed hypotheses, Figure 3.1 represents the structural model which includes three types of variables measured at two points in time: wellbeing at time t-1 and time t; external and internal political efficacy at time t-1 and time t; and political participation at time t-1 and time t. One advantage of this approach compared to prior research is that it can test simultaneously all the presented hypothesis and the conclusions are not biased by measurement error.

The models are estimated and tested using the Maximum Likelihood estimator of LISREL 8.72 (Jöreskog and Sörbom, 2005). For model evaluation and testing, the Jrule software (Van der Veld et al., 2008) based on the procedure developed by Saris et al. (2009) is used. Saris et al. (2009) showed that the commonly used evaluation procedures for structural equation models cannot be trusted as the test statistics and fit indices are unequally sensitive for different misspecifications. They propose using the modification index (MI) as test statistic for the detection of misspecifications (expressed as expected parameter change; EPC) in combination with the power of the test. This means that Jrule tests the model on the parameter level rather than the model as a whole. In both steps of the analysis, when a misspecification was detected, step-by-step

the theoretically reasonable adjustments suggested by JRule were introduced.

3.3.1 Political Participation

Although political participation is a central topic in political science, under intensive study for at least the last fifty years, there is still some disagreement concerning its exact definition. In their seminal study, Verba and Nie (1972) discuss what has become the classical and largely used definition of political participation: “Political participation is the means by which the interests, desires and demands of the ordinary citizen are communicated (...) all those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personal and/or decisions they make”. In its time, this definition was responsible for a significant broaden of the kind of activities suitable to be considered as political participation. Up until then, electoral participation was almost exclusively the only political activity considered to be of interest, leaving out any non-electoral actions. There are many other definitions of political participation but here what is common amongst the majority of them (van Deth, 2001) is highlighted. First of all, as argued by Verba and Nie, political participation concerns the “ordinary citizen” and not people in any other role like, for example, politicians or any other type of elites. Second, in order to consider some action as political participation there must be some kind of activity and not just a predisposition or proclivity without any form of action, which excludes attitudes such as interest in politics. Furthermore, there must be a purpose of influencing

whatever is at stake or, in other words, assert demands (Teorell, Torcal and Montero, 2006). Related to this last point, the third common characteristic is that the actions must be voluntary and not imposed by law or any rule of the kind. Lastly, the actions taken voluntarily by ordinary citizens must be directed to the political domain in some way.

Political participation is measured through the following question: “There are different ways of raising a political issue or of influencing politicians or government. Can you indicate which of the following ways you have exercised over the past five years?”. The response options for this question were seven different political participation activities. Respondents could state to have participated in several. In order to keep model consistency, three indicators of political participation were selected. The selection of which activities to include in the model was taken not only based on the general characteristics of the given definition of political participation, but also in the explicit interest of including activities embedded in group based processes that imply interaction with other individuals (van Deth and Maloney 2011). Therefore, out of a scale of seven possible political participation activities⁶, the following are considered:

- “participated in a government-organized public hearing, discussion or citizens' participation meeting”;
- “participated in an action group”;

⁶ The other political participation activities are: by making use of radio, television or newspaper; contacted a politician or civil servant; and participated in a political discussion or campaign by Internet, e-mail or SMS

- “participated in a protest action, protest march or demonstration”.

3.3.2 Defining Wellbeing

Wellbeing, like quality of life, is an umbrella term frequently used to indicate how well people are doing (Veenhoven, 2000). In general, we can say that wellbeing stands for two meanings: the presence of conditions considered necessary for a good life; and the actual experiencing of good living. If used at a societal level, then we are referring to the first of these meanings. When the quality of life of a given country or society is poor, it means that some essential conditions, such as sufficient food, housing and health care for example, are missing. If, on the other hand, we refer to the individual level, both meanings are possible and they can coincide or not. Poor quality of life can be originated by the lack of indispensable structural conditions or it can mean that a given individual does not thrive (Veenhoven, 1996). In this paper, the term wellbeing is used as a synonym of quality of life, in the sense that it refers to individuals, defined by individual subjective evaluations of their own lives, also called as “subjective wellbeing” or life satisfaction. Wellbeing was measured by the following items:

- “On the whole, how happy would you say you are?” ;
- “How satisfied are you with the life you lead at the moment?”; .
- “I am satisfied with my life”.

Respondents were asked to answer the first two questions on a 11-point-scale where 0 means “not at all satisfied” and 10 “very

satisfied ”. The last item had a 7- point-scale where 1 means “strongly disagree” and 7 “strongly agree”.

3.3.3 Political Efficacy

Following the definition developed in section 2 about internal and external political efficacy, the operationalization of these concepts is based on the following battery of questions:

- “Parliamentarians do not care about the opinions of people like me”;
- “Political parties are only interested in my vote and not in my opinion.”;
- “People like me have no influence at all on government policy.”.

Respondents were asked to answer if they thought any of these sentences was true. Internal efficacy was measured by the answers to the following questions:

- “I am well capable of playing an active role in politics.”;
- “I have a clear picture of the most important political issues in our country.”;
- “Politics sometimes seems so complicated that people like me can hardly understand what is going on.”.

Respondents were also asked to answer if they thought any of these sentences was true. Table 3.1 presents all the variables included in this study, answers categories, as well as the corresponding means and standard deviations of each one of the waves.

Table 3.1: Description of the variables included in the model

	Variables	Resp. scale	Wave 1 (2008)		Wave 2 (2009)	
			Mean	Std Dev	Mean	Std Dev
Wellbeing	On the whole, how happy would you say you are?	0-10	7.633	1.332	7.581	1.302
	How satisfied are you with the life you lead at the moment?	0-10	7.568	1.398	7.514	1.384
	I am satisfied with my life	1-7	5.537	1.084	5.489	1.107
External Political Efficacy	Parliamentarians do not care about the opinions of people like me.	0-1	.608	.488	.573	.494
	Political parties are only interested in my vote and not in my opinion.	0-1	.719	.449	.683	.465
	People like me have no influence at all on government policy.	0-1	.653	.475	.626	.483
Internal Political Efficacy	I am well capable of playing an active role in politics.	1-2	1.7	.430	1.754	.430
	I have a clear picture of the most important political issues in our country.	1-2	1.454	.497	1.464	.498
	Politics sometimes seems so complicated that people like me can hardly understand what is going on.	0-1	.555	.496	.571	.494
Political Participation	participated in a protest action, protest march or demonstration	0-1	.060	.238	.056	.230
	participated in a government-organized public hearing, discussion or citizens' participation meeting	0-1	.078	.269	.093	.291
	participated in an action group	0-1	.038	.191	.041	.198

3.4 Results

Before testing the hypothesized relationships in the structural model, a confirmatory factor analysis is conducted to evaluate the measurement model. This is done by examining how the observed variables load onto the latent constructs wellbeing, internal political efficacy, external political efficacy and both political participation latent variables. This approach provides estimates of the relationships corrected for measurement error because it relies on the latent constructs rather than in the observed variables. For each latent variable there were three indicators. One observed indicator of each latent construct was set to value 1 in order to fix the scale of the latent variable and allow estimating the loadings of the remainder indicators. The Jrule suggestions were followed in order to modify the model and improve it. Appendix 3.1 presents the loadings of the observed variables on the latent variables and Appendix 3.2 the covariance matrix corrected for measurement error. The final measurement model contains only indicators that load significantly on the corresponding latent variables.

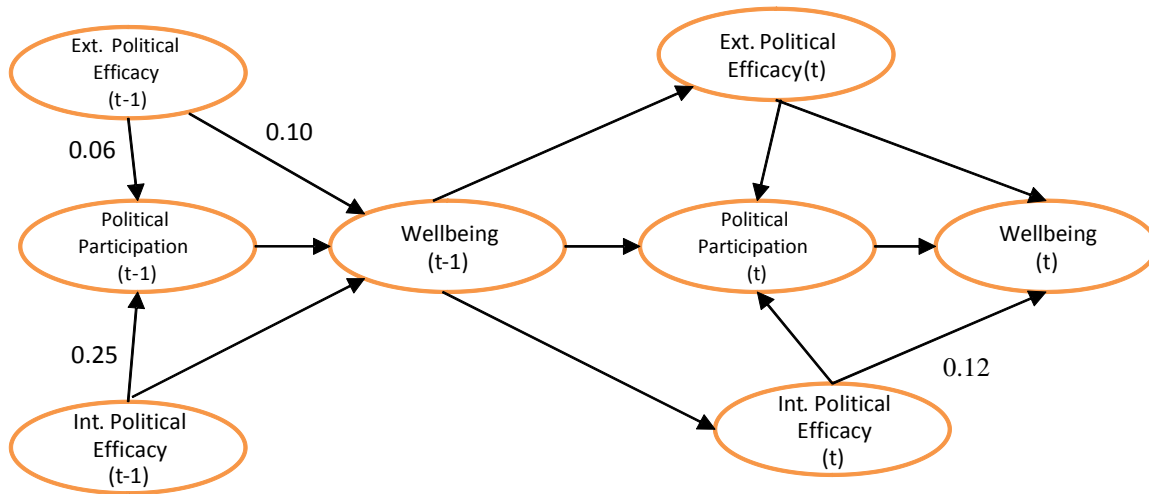
After this step, it is time to test the structural model, as depicted in Figure 3.1. Once again, the step-by-step theoretically reasonable adjustments suggested by Jrule were introduced, whenever a misspecification was detected. Having followed this procedure, the final model has 223 degrees of freedom, chi-square=989.85 and RMSEA=0.029. Table 3.2 presents the unstandardized and standardized coefficients (β), which are the effect size estimates, further illustrated in Figure 3.2.

Table 3.2: Unstandardized and Standardized Coefficients

	Ext. Pol. Eff. (t-1)	Int. Pol. Eff. (t-1)	Pol. Part. (t-1)	Well-being (t-1)	Pol. Part. (t)	Ext. Pol. Eff. (t)	Int. Pol. Eff. (t)
Ext. Pol. Eff.(t-1)							
Int. Pol. Eff.(t-1)							
Pol. Part. (t-1)	.03 (.03) .06	.17 (.03) .25					
Wellbeing (t-1)	.12 (.02) .10	.04 (.05) -.02	-.02 (.08) -.01				
Pol.Part. (t)			.93 (.07) .82	.00 (.01) -.01		.01 (.01) .01	.10 (.03) .12
Ext. Pol. Eff.(t)	.75 (.02) .73			.01 (.01) -.01			
Int. Pol. Eff.(t)		.79 (.05) .84		.00 (.01) .00			
Wellbeing (t)				.80 (.02) .77	-.04 (.05) -.02	.02 (.02) -.02	.03 (.04) .01
Explained Variance			.08	.01	.73	.54	.70

Note: Estimates in bold are significant; standard errors are in brackets.

Figure 3.2: Illustration of the findings (only significant effects are reported)



The first hypothesis (H1) stated that there would be a direct effect of participating in politics on individual wellbeing. However, as we can see in Table 3.2, the coefficient proved not to be significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. As to the second hypothesis (H2), there was the expectation of a significant effect of internal political efficacy on subjective wellbeing. The results show that such effect was not found at the first point in time but there is a significant positive effect at the second point in time. There is a positive relationship between internal political efficacy and wellbeing, meaning that high levels of internal efficacy positively affect wellbeing. Concerning the third hypothesis (H3), it was stated that an effect of external political efficacy on wellbeing was to be expected. Even though a significant effect of external political efficacy on wellbeing is not found at the second point in time, there is a significant positive effect on wellbeing ($\beta=0.10$) at the first point in time. These results seem to support the argument that the perception of the openness of the political system to participation has an impact on individual life satisfaction.

Even though there was no explicit hypothesis formulated, following the literature it is also expected that external and internal political efficacy have a significant effect on political participation. A positive effect ($\beta=0.25$) of internal efficacy on political participation and a smaller but equally positive relationship of external efficacy with participation ($\beta=0.06$). The positive sign means that the more political efficacious a person feels, the likelier it is to take part in the political participation activities included in the model.

Furthermore, the difference in size of the effects seems to indicate that believing that one has the ability to participate is a more important driver of the political participation activities included in the model, than the perceived openness of the system.

In the final hypothesis (H4) it was argued that an effect of wellbeing on political participation was expected. There is no proof of such an effect. However the most pronounced effects found are, not surprisingly, the autoregressive coefficients. This means that wellbeing, as well as internal and external political efficacy, are mostly explained by the same variables in the previous point in time. Even though this does not come as a surprise, the size of the effects shows a certain stability of the endogenous variables in the model which highlights the argumentation for using panel data. Not controlling for these autoregressive correlations can cause biased estimations.

3.5 Conclusions

The aim of this study was to examine the causal relationships between political participation and wellbeing, as well as the influence of internal and external political efficacy on wellbeing. For this purpose, the discussed hypotheses were put together in a model tested empirically on Dutch panel data by employing structural equation modeling. However, contrary to what other studies have shown, the results presented here do not offer support for a link between political participation and individual wellbeing. There are several possible explanations for these results. First,

because most previous research used cross-sectional data, there is the potential of endogeneity or reciprocal causation. Simply put, an individual that participates answers to have higher levels of wellbeing because an individual with higher wellbeing is more likely to take part in political activities. Furthermore, as we have seen, the autoregressive relationships are the strongest in the model which leads us to say that analyses that did not take into account the time factor might be biased.

Second, the fact that previous studies did not correct for measurement error might also have been a reason for biased estimates of the explanatory variables in other studies. Third, it can be the case that an a variable was omitted in the analysis and therefore the results are biased. An example of such a variable could be, for instance, a measure of the success of the political participation efforts. If individuals engage in an action group or demonstration and do not see their demands addressed, there can be a negative relationship with wellbeing that can be cancelled out by the positive effect of, for example, political efficacy.

Concerning the hypothesized effect of wellbeing on political participation, no significant effect of wellbeing on political participation is found. This contradicts the findings of Flavin and Keane (2012), who find a significant positive effect of wellbeing on conventional political participation but no relationship between subjective wellbeing and more conflictive forms of political participation. However, unlike Flavin and Keane's study, in this

paper the past values of both political participation and life satisfaction are controlled for. Furthermore, the mentioned paper is based on a post-electoral survey, after a disputed electoral campaign, a period where political participation is known to be at the highest in the US.

Finally, this paper also aimed to explore the role of political efficacy in the relationship between wellbeing and political participation. After arguing for the separation of the two dimensions of efficacy, internal and external, it was tested whether they have a significant effect on wellbeing and political participation. There is a significant coefficient of external efficacy on wellbeing in the first point in time and of internal political efficacy on wellbeing at the second point in time. Conversely, the self-development argument discussed by participatory theorists was not fully supported by the data. Although an effect of internal efficacy on wellbeing is found, this effect does not go through political participation.

In conclusion, having not found an effect of actual political participation on wellbeing but an effect of external political efficacy on wellbeing, the results come close to Frey and Stutzer (2006) argument that the opportunities to participate are more important for wellbeing than participation itself. That is, of course, if external political efficacy is accepted as a valid measure of the opportunities to participate politically in a given context. However, the goal of this paper was to assess the effect of actual political participation and future research should be dedicated to more detailed comparisons of different participation acts and participation groups.

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Appendix 3.1: Correction for measurement error - loadings of the observed variables on the latent variables

	Lsw 1	Extw 1 1.00	Intw 1	Pol Part w1	Extw 2	Intw 2	Pol Part w2	Lsw 2
Ext Eff1		1.00			1.00			
Ext Eff2		1.02 (.03)			1.01 (.02)			
ExtEff3		.77 (.02)			.76 (.02)			
Int Eff1			1.00			1.00		
Int Eff2			1.19 (.07)			1.36 (.09)		
Int Eff3			1.15 (.07)			1.20 (.08)		
Meeting				1.00			1.00	
Group				1.89 (.17)			1.70 (.14)	
Protest				1.59 (.13)			1.30 (.10)	
Life Sat1	1.00							1.00
Life Sat2	.95 (.01)							.98 (.01)
Life Sat3	.90 (.02)							.86 (.01)

Appendix 3.2: Covariance matrix with correction for measurement error

	Extw1	Intw1	Partw1	LifeSatw1	Extw2	Intw2	Partw2	LifeSatw2
Extw1	.58							
Intw1	.11	.20						
Partw1	-.03	-.04	.10					
LifeSatw1	-.07	-.02	.00	.77				
Extw2	.44	.08	-.03	-.06	.61			
Intw2	.08	.16	-.03	-.02	.09	.18		
Partw2	-.04	-.05	.09	.00	-.03	-.04	.12	
LifeSatw2	-.06	-.01	.00	.62	-.06	-.01	.00	.84

4. DOES POLITICAL PARTICIPATION ENHANCE LIFE SATISFACTION? A CAUSAL ANALYSIS USING LONGITUDINAL PANEL DATA

Abstract

Several studies have shown that taking part in political activities has a positive impact on individual life satisfaction. In this paper, we revisit this argument and test for causality using longitudinal data. First, the literature that argues for causal effects between political participation and life satisfaction is reviewed. Second, the relationship between different forms of political and social participation – manifest political participation, membership and volunteering – and life satisfaction is analyzed using longitudinal data from four waves of the Dutch LISS Panel study. The analysis finds that the respondents which are actively participating report higher levels of life satisfaction (cross-sectionally), but also that these effects do not hold when time is taken into consideration: no causal effects between participation and life satisfaction were found.

4.1 Introduction

Does engaging in political activities have a positive effect on individual life satisfaction? Recently, a growing literature in the social sciences is focusing in finding individual, psychological and societal determinants of citizens' wellbeing (Frey and Stutzer 2002; Diener, 2009; Diener, Helliwell, and Kahneman 2010). Wellbeing is generally understood as being reflected by an individual's response to diverse indicators of wellbeing such as happiness or life satisfaction. High life satisfaction has been shown to be positively related to such diverse factors as working out daily or living in less unequal societies (Hyde, Maher & Elavsky, 2013; Verme, 2011). Even more recently, attention started to be devoted to the potential impact of political factors on life satisfaction (Dutt and Radcliff, 2009). More concretely, it was found that factors such as the size of government or welfare state (Bjornskov, Dreher, and Fischer 2007; Flavin, Pacek, and Radcliff 2014), the ideological composition of the government (Alvarez-Diaz, Gonzalez, and Radcliff 2010) or political orientation (Okulicz-Kozaryn et al., 2014) have tangible effects on individual life satisfaction. Another political aspect that has been subject of research is political participation.

The importance of political participation for individual wellbeing distinguishes itself for its long lasting theoretical debate. Classical philosophy already acknowledged the importance of taking part in political matters as an essential part of individual fulfillment, a view that still finds support in more contemporary literature (Dreze and Sen 2002; Inglehart, 2006; Pacek, 2009). However, although

political participation probably is one of the most studied topics in political science, and much attention has been devoted to explain why and when individuals engage in political activities, the consequences of actually participating have seldom been approached (Ikeda et al., 2008). One of such consequences might be that taking part in political activities enhances individual life satisfaction, as some studies have shown (Frey and Stutzer, 2006; Pacheco and Lange, 2010; Weitz-Shapiro and Winters, 2011; Winters and Rundlett, 2014). At the same time, there is research sustaining that also the opposite causal direction is possible with higher life satisfaction actually affecting political participation (Oishi et al., 2007; Flavin and Keane, 2012; Weitz-Shapiro and Winters, 2011). Yet, whether people that participate politically are simply happier or more satisfied or whether taking part in political activities has a causal effect on citizen's QoL is something that should be subject to further discussion. There are still several unresolved issues concerning the relationship between political participation and life satisfaction, and the matter of whether there are causal effects is not the least of them. One of the main reasons standing in the way of a thorough examination of causality is that the vast majority of studies are based on cross-sectional data. As it will be further argued, there are good reasons to look at the relationship between political participation and life satisfaction from a longitudinal perspective. Hence, this paper is set out to examine whether political participation in fact enhances life satisfaction and, if so, what types of political activities are, in this regard, more influential. In order to achieve this main goal, Dutch

panel data is analyzed and several models are put together to test this relationship under different conditions.

This paper proceeds as follows: in the next section, the arguments that potentially account for a relationship between political participation and life satisfaction are summarized. Then, the data and the followed empirical strategy are presented. Finally, the results and conclusions are presented in the last part.

4.2 Theory

Much of the debate about the quality of democracy revolves around the question of political participation. Even though there are some dissonant views, the overwhelming majority of scholars agree that, if democracy is to be understood as rule by the people, political participation is a defining element of the nature and quality of democracy in a society (Verba and Nie, 1987). For this reason, scholars have long tried to understand who participates, when and why. A lot less attention has been dedicated to the outcomes of political participation at the individual level. Nevertheless, the research so far has been able to point out that participating in political activities can make people more trusting, more inclined into subscribing democratic values and to take part in collective action (Putnam, 2000; Jennings and Stoker, 2004; Finkel, 1985). In this study, the focus is on another potential consequence of individuals' political participation that has received very little attention so far: the effects on individual wellbeing. Thereafter the theoretical arguments that justify such expectation are summarized.

4.2.1 Political participation affects life satisfaction

The origin of the argument that political participation positively affects life satisfaction can be traced back to Aristotle “Politics” . In this work, he considered political participation as an essential tenant of the flourishing of a human being. Participatory democracy theorists agree with this view and further argue that political participation is in itself intrinsically beneficial for individuals. It is so because engaging in political activities fosters desirable personal and social qualities in democratic citizens (Dahl, 1989; Warren, 1992). This is what participatory democracy theorists call “self-development” and even though the exact definitions vary (Teorell, 2006) there seems to be evidence that these particular skills have significant effects on life satisfaction, both for social and political participation. Most of this evidence is found in the vast psychology literature where it is suggested that the goals of autonomy, competence, and relatedness with others are powerful ways to enhance individual wellbeing (Frey et al., 2004; Ryan and Deci, 2001; Weitz-Shapiro and Winters, 2008; Winters and Rundlett, 2014). The development of the democratic qualities can also facilitate trust and cooperation with others, which is considered an important part of maximizing wellbeing (Tov & Diener, 2009).

On the other hand, “procedural utility” argues that people in politics are at least as concerned with what they get as to how they are treated. In the words of Frey and Stutzer (2006, p. 394): “Citizens value the possibility of engaging themselves directly in politically relevant issues, irrespective of the outcome”. This means that

people can achieve higher wellbeing not only through the outcome of any participatory act but also through the process itself. Close to this argument comes the idea that participation can influence life satisfaction through this involvement in the process of participation, by promoting ongoing social interactions on issues of mutual interest, which can certainly create positive feelings and thoughts (Barker & Martin, 2011). This is not to say, however, that the outcome of any participatory effort is irrelevant. This is indeed one of the most obvious causal mechanisms that can explain the positive effect of participation on life satisfaction: getting what one wants. But while some forms of engagement are definitely self-interested in nature, in many other situations individuals have little or nothing to gain personally (Barker and Martin, 2011). In this case, the possibility of helping others through participation, in the context of a meaningful life (Seligman, 2002), is another viable connection to life satisfaction, even though this view is not without opposition in the literature (see Adreoni, 1990).

4.2.2 Political participation does not affect life satisfaction

The argument that political participation has an impact on life satisfaction has also been challenged. For example, rational choice scholars look at the problem of political participation by means of self-interest models (Downs, 1957). Under this perspective, the probability of an act of participation to significantly affect the outcome is very small. Assuming that political participation does not work for getting what one wants, why should we expect a positive link to life satisfaction?

Besides these theoretical considerations, there are also some methodological concerns. There is the possibility of selection effects, which would mean that more satisfied individuals select themselves into participation. In fact, Flavin and Keane (2012) do find that in the United States more satisfied individuals are more likely to vote. On the other hand, there can be some other variable which is driving both participation and wellbeing. One example of such variables might well be some personality traits which have been shown to explain to some extent why people are more satisfied with their lives and why they choose to engage in political participation (Schimmack et al., 2004; Gerber et al., 2010).

4.3 Previous research and contribution of this paper

Previous studies on the link between political participation and life satisfaction are mostly based on cross-sectional survey data and a large part found a positive relationship. However, a distinction between the effects of the right to participate and the effects of actual participation must be made. In relation to the former, Frey & Stutzer (2006) argue that the effects of the opportunity to participate were in fact more important than actual participation in the case of Switzerland. Dorn et al. (2007) follow this argument and - by taking into account the role of culture, - extended the previous findings to 28 countries. Even though the significance of these studies should not be downplayed, in the current work the interest is in the effect of actual participation. Regarding the studies that focus on actual political participation (past, self reported political participation),

using comparative data from the European Social Survey, Pacheco & Lange (2010) found that, what they called “strong political engagement” - consisting of having worked in a political party or action group, - had a robust positive effect on life satisfaction⁷. More recently, Flavin & Shufeldt (2014) found an association between being member of a union and reporting high levels of life satisfaction in the United States. In Pacheco and Lange’s (2010) study, however, participation measures that request less direct involvement such as voting were shown to have no effect. Also Dolan et al. (2008) and Weitz-Shapiro & Winters (2011), using data from the UK and Latin America, find no significant proof of a positive relationship between voting and life satisfaction.

Similar to the more frequent measures of political participation, participation in voluntary organizations can also have a positive effect on life satisfaction. Participation in associations, also called social participation, imply sharing common interests and interacting with other individuals and can contribute to higher life satisfaction through the development of feelings of relatedness with others and help to build personal connections in addition to the work, family and leisure ones (Barker and Martin, 2011). For example, Haller and Hadler (2006) find that interaction with other individuals is a major source of life satisfaction and social capital has been proved to be among its strongest individual correlates (Ateca-Amestoy, Aguilar and Moro-Egido, 2014). Wallace and Pichler (2009) have

⁷ Although the authors do not use panel data, they do look to establish a causal relationship by means of a two-step, simultaneous treatment regressions, in an effort to correct for endogeneity.

also given evidence for a positive association between the participation in organizations and average life satisfaction at the country level.

The main problem of using cross-sectional data to determine this causal effect is that many other variables both measured or unmeasured, can intervene and cause a spurious relationship. It is my belief that the use of panel data can bring some clarification into this field. By tracking individuals over time, panel data contains information about prior as well as current values of the variables of interest. To my knowledge, only one study testing the effect of political participation on life satisfaction using panel data was published. Winters and Rundlett (2014) analyzed data from the British Household Panel Survey and found a positive effect of being a member of a voluntary association on life satisfaction, but only limited proof of an effect of voting on life satisfaction. However, this study did not test any other forms of active political participation and measured only membership regarding social participation, disregarding other forms such as volunteering.

In this paper, therefore, the aim is to identify the causal effect of different participation activities on life satisfaction. Measures of manifest political participation and social participation are included. Regarding the latter, two different modes of social participation are examined: membership and volunteering. This article further contributes to the extant literature by conducting a strict test of the causal effects between political participation and life satisfaction.

4.4 Data

The case study is the Netherlands. The Netherlands is a good case study because it is a country with traditionally high levels of social capital and political participation (Gesthuizen, Scheepers, van der Veld & Volker, 2013; Linssen & Schmeets, 2010), therefore increasing the chances of finding different participatory behaviors.

In the current analysis four waves (2007 - 2010) of data from the Dutch LISS Panel (Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social sciences) are used. The LISS panel consists of 5,000 households, comprising 8,000 individuals and currently is composed of seven waves (2007-2014) of measurement. The panel is based on a true probability sample of households drawn from the population register by Statistics Netherlands. Households that could not otherwise participate are provided with a computer internet connection. The response rate varies between 50% and 80%, depending on the topic of the questionnaire and month⁸. About 18% of the initial households have left the sample since the beginning of the panel. Panel members repeatedly complete online questionnaires of about 15 to 30 minutes. The LISS Panel is an online survey and quality of the data has been established to be similar to other data collection modes such as face to face or telephone interviews (Revilla and Saris, 2012).

⁸ The LISS panel core study consists of 11 different topics, distributed monthly throughout the year. From wave 1 to wave 4, the modules about politics, social integration and leisure, and personality used here, were signed out by the respondents respectively in the months of December, February and May of 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011.

4.4.1 Measures

4.4.1.1 Life satisfaction

In all four waves, life satisfaction was measured with the following question: “How satisfied are you with the life you lead at the moment?”. Respondents were asked to answer on a 11-point-scale where 0 means “not at all satisfied” and 10 “very satisfied”.

Even though life satisfaction is measured by only one item, earlier work has indicated the reliability and validity of single item subjective wellbeing assessments (Lucas and Donnellan, 2011; Realo and Dobewall, 2011). Table 4.1 shows the descriptive statistics of the main dependent variable.

4.4.1.2 Political and Social Participation

As already mentioned, political participation is operationalized in different ways based on the expectation of different effects on life satisfaction. For manifest political participation, we used the following question: “There are different ways of raising a political issue or of influencing politicians or government. Can you indicate which of the following ways you have exercised over the past five years?”. The response options for this question were seven different political participation activities: (1) by making use of radio, television or newspaper; (2) by making use of a political party or organization; (3) participated in a government-organized public hearing, discussion or citizens' participation meeting; (4) contacted

a politician or civil servant; (5) participated in an action group; (6) participated in a protest action, protest march or demonstration; (7) participated in a political discussion or campaign by Internet, e-mail or SMS.

Respondents could state to have participated in several. However, because the text of the question refers to the past 5 years, we cannot be sure of whether the respondent took part in political activities last year or 4 years ago. Even though it is not the ideal measure, and somewhat weaker effects are expected due to this operationalization, it is argued that it is a valid measure to compare those individuals that never participate with those which do more or less regularly.

As argued before, participation in voluntary organizations can also have a positive effect on life satisfaction (Barker and Martin, 2011; Ateca-Amestoy, Aguilar & Moro-Egido, 2013). A distinction is made between being a member of an association and volunteering. Volunteering is often seen as a more demanding and productive kind of participation (Wilson, 2000). Therefore, the expectation is that volunteering, because it supposes a more intense participatory involvement, has stronger positive effects on life satisfaction than being a member. However, there is also the possibility that this more intense involvement, meaning more time dedication and responsibility, can also have the reverse effect and a cause a negative rather than a positive effect on life satisfaction. Either way, it is a matter of empirical analysis.

The question used to measure membership is if the respondent was a member in any of the following organizations: (1) a sports club or club for outdoor activities; (2) a cultural association or hobby club; (3) a trade union; (4) a business, professional or agrarian organization; (5) a consumers' organization or automobile club; (6) an organization for humanitarian aid, human rights, minorities or migrants; (7) an organization for environmental protection, peace organization or animal rights organization; (8) a religious or church organization; (9) a political party; (10) a science, education, teachers' or parents' association; (11) a social society; an association for youth, pensioners/senior citizens, women; or friends' clubs. The membership variable is a count of memberships in these organizations. Volunteering was measured using the same question but now asking if the respondents volunteer in any of the mentioned organizations. In Table 4.1 the descriptives of both variables are presented.

4.4.1.3 Control Variables

Of course, political participation is not the only factor affecting life satisfaction. There are several individual variables which are normally used in models of both political participation and life satisfaction. Even though they are not exhaustive, a number of possible confounding variables are added in order to control for these effects.

Education is consistently documented as a significant predictor of political participation (Berinsky and Lenz, 2011) and even though the relationship with life satisfaction is not completely clear, it has been found to significantly impact life satisfaction. Scitovsky (1976) emphasized the importance of education in allowing people to take advantage of activities that generate well-being, particularly appreciation of music, painting, literature and history. Education is measured with a scale of 1 to 6 where: (1) primary school; (2) intermediate secondary education, US: junior high school; (3) higher secondary education/preparatory university education, US: senior high school; (4) intermediate vocational education, US: junior college; (5) higher vocational education, US: college; (6) university. Unemployment, according to Dolan, Peasgood and White (2008) review of the literature, is one of the greatest depressors of individual life satisfaction. On the other hand, there is recent evidence that shows that unemployment does not have a very significant effect on political participation (Kroh, 2014). Marriage or living with a partner is another important determinant of individual happiness and being married is strongly associated with life satisfaction. Marital status may also impact upon happiness and life satisfaction. Frey and Stutzer (2006) put forward two reasons why this should be the case. Firstly, marriage provides support in dealing with problems and secondly, married people gain from company. As for the effect of marriage on political participation, the evidence is more modest. However, there is some proof that married people vote more and single people tend to engage more in other types of political participation (Kigston & Finkel, 1987), and that

these effects are mostly present in the transition period (Stoker & Jennings, 1995). A dummy variable is constructed where 1 means that the respondent is living with a partner and 0 when it is not. Finally, self assessed health status is also included as it has been shown to be a powerful predictor of life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1999). The indicator for this control variable is the answer to the question: “How would you describe your health, generally speaking?”, with the following answer scale – (1) poor; (2) moderate; (3) good; (4) very good; (5) excellent.

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std.Dev.	Scale
Life Satisfaction	7.52	1.35	0-10
Political Participation	.35	.81	0-6
Membership	1.21	1.22	0-9
Volunteering	.32	.68	0-9
Education	3.41	1.50	1-6
Health	3.14	.76	1-5
Partner	.82	.38	0-1
Unemployment	.02	.144	0-1

4.5 Empirical Strategy

First, the standard cross-sectional approach is followed through between-regressions analyzing the variation between individuals, based on the within-person average of the different measures of political participation and life satisfaction across waves. Second, a series of models taking advantage of the panel nature of the data are put together. As it is well known, one of the most notable advantages of using panel data is the ability to control for time-invariant unmeasured variables, whether these variables are known or unknown, that influence the dependent variable. Given that the presence of such omitted variables is very likely, applying models which offer ways to deal with this heterogeneity are usually seen as stricter tests of causality (Allison, 2009). Two of the most used techniques to perform this kind of analysis are random (REM) and fixed effects (FEM) analyses. However, despite the desirable features these models present, they are limited by the way they are normally used (Bollen & Brand, 2010). The restrictions imposed in the usual estimation of this kind of models might not be necessary and influence the latter interpretation. For example, in the standard models the latent time-invariant variables are either free to correlate with all time-varying covariates or they must be uncorrelated with all covariates. Indeed, this is the difference between REM and FEM models. But any incorrection of these assumptions will likely result in biased estimates (Bollen & Brand, 2010). On the other hand, unnecessarily estimating zero correlations as in FEM, besides using degrees of freedom can also increase asymptotic standard errors (Bollen & Brand, 2010). Furthermore, another implicit constraint in

the usual models is that the lagged dependent variables cannot be included in any of the models. Attempting to combine fixed effects models with cross-lagged panel models is thought to lead to serious estimation problems that are discussed in the econometric literature (Allison, 2012; Bollen & Brand, 2010; Wooldridge, 2010; Baltagi, 2013; Hsiao, 2014). Normally, these models are known as dynamic panel models because of the effect of the lagged dependent variable in itself. This introduces estimation difficulties which include error terms that are correlated with predictors which are not allowed on the standard FEM approach.

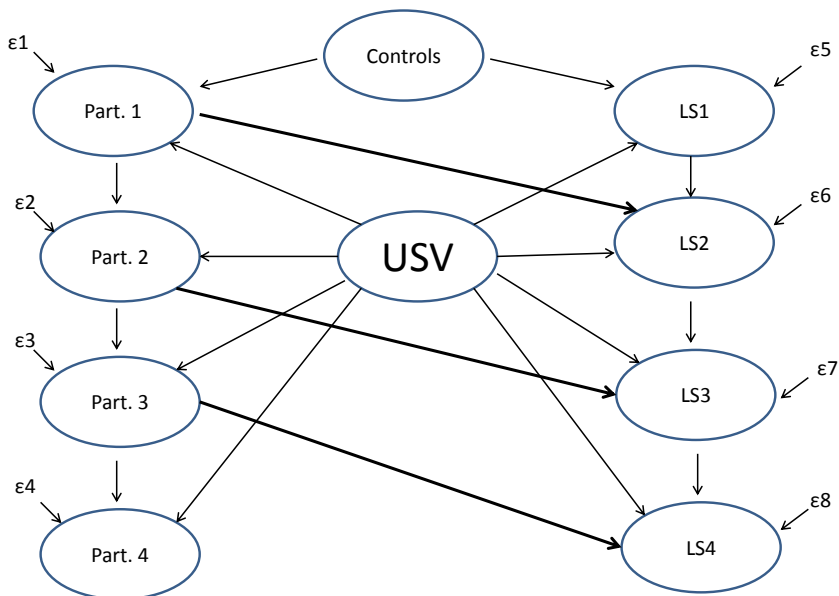
Finally, another limitation of the usual REM or FEM is the limited assessment of the fit of the model to the data (Bollen & Brand, 2010). Usually, researchers include a comparison between REM and FEM through means of the Hausman (1978) test. This is presented as the criteria to choose between a REM and FEM. However, while the Hausman test can present support for one of these alternative models, it tells nothing about the fit of the model to the data, leaving quite likely the possibility that the selected model is indeed presenting an inadequate description of the data.

On the left in Figure 4.1, there are the participation variables of four points in time. On the right, the latent variables representing life satisfaction at the same time points. The thicker arrows represents the cross lagged effects of participation at time point $t-1$ on life satisfaction at time point t . Autoregressive effects of both life

satisfaction and participation are included, meaning that both of these variables are affected by their values at time t-1.

The latent variable USV (Unobserved Stable Variables) represents the unobserved stable variables that affect both participation and life satisfaction and it is identified only if there is enough other excess information from the observed variances and covariances in the model (Finkel, 2008). If the variance of this variable is 0, then it means that there are no unobserved stable variables that cause any spurious correlation between the endogenous variables. In this model, the latent variable USV is related with all other endogenous variables, therefore assuming that both life satisfaction and political participation are affected by the unobserved variables.

Figure 4.1: General lagged variable panel model



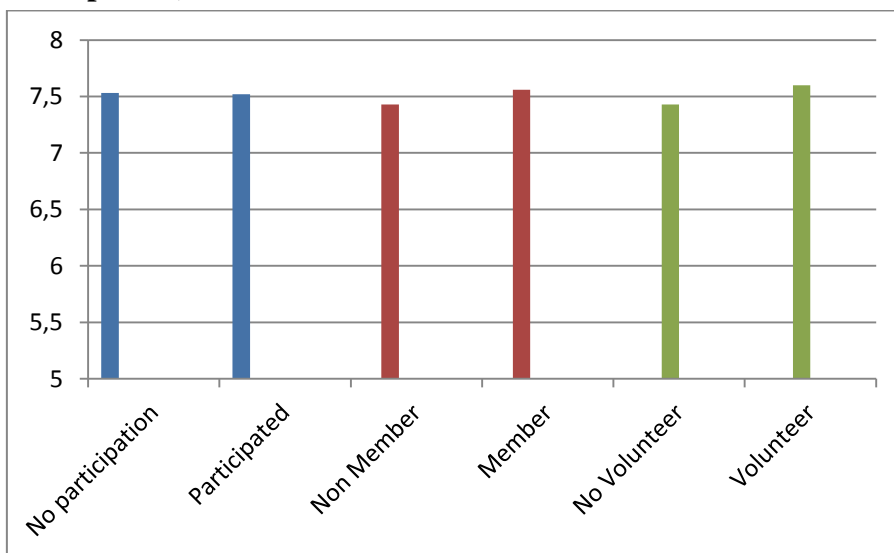
This model is an extension of the model proposed by Bollen and Brand (2010), allowing autoregressive correlations not only in the main dependent variable, life satisfaction, but also in the main predictor, participation. Furthermore, by allowing the USV latent variable to relate with participation, it is explicitly including the more than likely case that this variable is also affected by unobserved variables. Finally, by treating all the variables included in the model as latent variables, it is possible to estimate the error variance and correct for measurement error. The detailed information regarding correction for measurement error is presented in Appendix 4.1.

The models are estimate and tested using the Maximum Likelihood estimator of LISREL 8.72 (Jöreskog and Sörbom 2005). For model evaluation and testing, the Jrule software (Van der Veld, Saris et al. 2008) based on the procedure developed by Saris, Satorra and Van der Veld (2009) is used. Saris et al. showed that the commonly used evaluation procedures for structural equation models cannot be trusted as the test statistics and Fit indices are unequally sensitive for different misspecifications and follow an alternative procedure which uses the modification index (MI) as test statistic for the detection of misspecifications (expressed as expected parameter change; EPC) in combination with the power of the MI test.

4.6 Results

Figure 4.2 shows the average life satisfaction for different categories of participation of the respondents, based on the pooled data of four waves of the LISS panel. We can see that the life satisfaction scores between the respondents that participated in political activities and the ones that did not participated are very close⁹. However, both for membership and volunteering we see that the respondents that engaged in any of these activities score higher in the life satisfaction scale. The difference is slightly bigger in the case of volunteering. This shows some support for the idea that participants have higher life satisfaction than non participants, at least for the case of membership and volunteering.

Figure 4.2: Average Life satisfaction by participation (LISS Panel pooled)



⁹ These differences are not statistically significant.

The results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 4.2. A between regressions analysis is shown for each of the three main independent variables and the four control variables. This is similar to cross-sectional regression analysis. The regression coefficients on life satisfaction are significant for the case of membership and volunteering but not significant for manifest political participation. This latter result is not at all surprising since the problematic nature of the operationalization of this participation variable was already discussed.

Table 4.2: Between regression results of the participation variables on life satisfaction (LISS panel pooled data of 4 waves)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Political Participation	.035 (.019)		
Membership		.049*** (.013)	
Volunteering			.074** (.024)
Control variables			
Partner	.476*** (.037)	.469*** (.037)	.469*** (.037)
Unemployed	-1.01*** (.121)	-.998*** (.012)	-1.02*** (.121)
Education	-.022* (.01)	-.027** (.01)	-.022* (.009)
Health	.600*** (.021)	.609*** (.021)	.608*** (.021)
Intercept	5.35*** (.077)	5.299*** (.077)	5.31*** (.077)
N (obs/persons)	16,754/6,063	16,966/6,109	16,966/6,109

*p<.5 **p<.1 ***p<.01

By not being able to isolate the time difference in the measurement of this specific participation to one or five years, the possibility that the time lag is too large to find any significant results is very likely. Concerning the other participation variables, measured every year, volunteering is shown to have a stronger impact on life satisfaction. As for the control variables, they behave pretty much as expected. Having a partner has a positive impact on life satisfaction as well as a high self assess health status score. On the other hand, as much of the literature refers, being unemployed has a negative impact on life satisfaction. There is also a negative impact of education on life satisfaction for all the models.

So far, the data has shown support for the argument that participation, measured as membership and volunteering, has a positive impact on life satisfaction. But because panel data is used, stricter causality tests can be conducted. Given that political participation was not significant in the regression analysis and the time lag is too large, it will not be estimated.

Table 4.3: SEM Coefficients for membership

	Model 1 General Model (REM)	Model 2 Final Model (REM)	Model 3 FEM
Autoregressive			
LS1 → LS2	.94 (.01)	.94 (.01)	.09 (.03)
LS2 → LS3	.94 (.01)	.94 (.01)	.09 (.03)
LS3 → LS4	.94 (.01)	.94 (.01)	.09 (.03)
Member1→Member2	.94 (.01)	.94 (.01)	.94 (.01)
Member 2 → Member 3	.94 (.01)	.94 (.01)	.94 (.01)
Member 3 → Member 4	.94 (.01)	.94 (.01)	.94 (.01)
Cross Lagged			
Member 1 → LS2	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.14 (.08)
Member 2 → LS3	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.14 (.08)
Member 3 →LS4	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.14 (.08)
Controls			
Education → LS1	.14 (.01)	.15 (.02)	--
Education → Member 1	.02 (.01)	--	--
Partner → LS1	-.19 (.07)	-.20 (.07)	--
Partner → Member 1	.65 (.06)	.65 (.06)	--
Health → LS1	.85 (.06)	.86 (.06)	--
Health → Member 1	.18 (.05)	.21 (.05)	--
Unemployed→ LS1	-.51 (.22)	-.48 (.22)	--
Unemployed → Member 1	-.37 (.20)	--	--
Unobserved (USV)			
Member 1	1	1	-.06 (.08)
Member 2	1	1	.03 (.02)
Member 3	1	1	-.02 (.02)
Member 4	1	1	.01 (.02)
LS1	1	1	1
LS2	1	1	1
LS3	1	1	1
LS4	1	1	1
df	49	55	63
X ²	169.54	176.91	5396.98
CFI	.99	.99	.00046
RMSEA	.031	.029	.18
N	2,686	2,686	2,686

Note: Estimates in bold are significant; standard errors are in brackets.

Table 4.3 presents the estimates of the general panel model presented before for membership. Starting from the general panel model (model 1) illustrated in Figure 4.1, only the specifications that improved model fit (model 2) are presented, and finish with the FEM model (model 3). Taken together, we see that the autoregressive effects are very large throughout the models. This appears to sustain that both life satisfaction and membership are extremely stable characteristics which also reinforces the need to control for past measures of both these variables. As for the control variables, they behave mostly as expected. A relevant difference though is the fact that education has no longer a negative impact on life satisfaction, as before in the regression analysis.

No proof that membership has a positive impact on life satisfaction is found for any of the models. Indeed, the estimates for the cross-lagged effects are 0 and not significant, except on the case of the FEM. However, because all these models are nested, their fit can be compared. It is clear that model 2 presents the best fit, with a chi-square of 176.91 and RMSEA of .029 for 55 degrees of freedom. The FEM model, with a chi-square of 5396.98 and RMSEA of .18 does not present an acceptable fit.

Table 4.4: Cross-lagged SEM estimates for volunteering

	Volunteering
Autoregressive	
LS1 → LS2	.86 (.01)
LS2 → LS3	.94 (.01)
LS3 → LS4	.94 (.01)
Voluntary 1 → Voluntary 2	.86 (.02)
Voluntary 2 → Voluntary 3	.86 (.02)
Voluntary 3 → Voluntary 4	.86 (.02)
Cross Lagged	
Voluntary 1 → LS2	.00 (.02)
Voluntary 2 → LS3	.00 (.02)
Voluntary 3 → LS4	.00 (.02)
Controls	
Education → LS1	-.01 (.02)
Education → Voluntary 1	.04 (.01)
Partner → LS1	.58 (.06)
Partner → Voluntary 1	.04 (.03)
Health → LS1	2.58 (.18)
Health → Voluntary 1	.19 (.09)
Unemployed → LS1	-.10 (.03)
Unemployed → Voluntary 1	-.01 (.02)
df	49
X ²	169.54
CFI	.99
RMSEA	.031
N	2,686

Note: Estimates in bold are significant; standard errors are in brackets.

The same exercise is repeated with volunteering as the main independent variable. However, the latent variable representing the unobserved stable variables had a variance of 0, indicating that no spurious effects due to unmeasured variables were present. Therefore, it was not possible to reproduce the same models for volunteering. Given this case, a classic cross lagged model can be estimated which is essentially the same as the model presented in

Figure 4.1, with the exclusion of the USV latent variable. The results are presented on Table 4.4. Also here the cross-lagged effects are 0 and the auto-regressive coefficients are very strong. Even though these estimates cannot be compared with the ones of membership, the conclusions from both the models seem to be that there are no causal effects of membership or volunteering on life satisfaction¹⁰.

4.7 Conclusions

In this paper, the intention was to disentangle the potential causal relationships between political and social participation and life satisfaction. It started by regressing different participation variables – political participation, membership and volunteering, on life satisfaction. We have seen that both membership and volunteering were significant when regressed on life satisfaction. However, the stronger test using all the potential of panel data shown that these effects do not hold. Using structural equation modeling, similar models to the REM and FEM usually discussed in the literature were estimated and corrected for measurement error. The findings offer little support for the idea that political and social participation have an impact on life satisfaction in the Netherlands. It was also shown that the SEM approach to models which deal with unobserved variables offer valuable options otherwise not available. One clear example was the conclusion that there are no spurious relationships between volunteering and life satisfaction. It also

¹⁰ REM and FEM models for both membership and volunteering as it is usually done in literature were also estimated, to find the same general results of no effects between the participation variables and life satisfaction.

allowed including lagged endogenous variables and correct for measurement error.

However, this study is not without limitations. First, the controls of life satisfaction determinants were not exhaustive. Many others could have been used. Secondly, the problematic operationalization of the political participation variable. By not being able to determine the time lag between measures of political participation acts, conclusions about the effects of activities such as demonstrating or participating in an action group on life satisfaction cannot be drawn. Therefore, this question remains open for debate and future research. Thirdly, the data used is from the Netherlands, a long and stable democratic country with historically high levels of participation and social capital. Would newer democratic regimes show the same pattern of no causal effects between participation and life satisfaction at the individual level? One possibility could be that individuals that engage in political activities in countries with less participative political cultures might derive more satisfaction from the fact that their participatory efforts are less expected. Either way, these are questions for further research.

Finally, it should also be pointed out that these findings do not exclude the possibility that participation has an effect on the life satisfaction of some specific segments of the population. One obvious case might be political and social activists whose dedication to participation activities might change the nature of the relationship with life satisfaction.

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Appendix 4.1: Correction for measurement error

Measurement error is corrected using different procedures. For the exogenous variables, the error variance was introduced as fixed parameter. For education, unemployment and partner the quality coefficients given by the literature (Alwin, 2007) are used. For health, the quality of the question is predicted using the program Survey Quality Predictor (SQP 2.0, Saris et al. 2011). SQP offers Authorized Predictions based on meta-analysis of the estimates of the reliability and validity of about 3,700 survey items, estimates from Multitrait Multimethod (MTMM) experiments, and allows coding a question if no quality prediction is offered yet. With the obtained quality, the error variance is calculated as $(1-q^2)*\text{variance}$, where q^2 is the quality coefficient. Therefore, the error variance is then introduced as a fixed parameter. The qualities and the error variances for the variables in the models are presented in the tables below.

As for the endogenous variables of life satisfaction, membership and volunteering, the error variance at the first time point was estimated and then constrained to be equal over time. The estimation of the error variance can be found in the table below.

Endogenous Variables	Error variance
Life Satisfaction	.60 (.02)
Membership	.51 (.02)
Life Satisfaction	.59 (.02)
Volunteering	.21 (.01)

Control variables	Quality coeff.	Source	Error variance
Education	.898	Alwin (2007, p.328)	.436
Partner	.966	Alwin (2007, p.328)	.009
Health	.728	SQP own coding	.270
Unemployed	.677	Alwin (2007, p.328)	.011

Appendix 4.2: Correlations matrixes of life satisfaction and political participation

Correlations between Membership (M) and Life Satisfaction (LS) at 4 points in time

	M1	M2	M3	M4	LS1	LS2	LS3	LS4
M1	1.000							
M2	.6236	1.000						
M3	.5579	.6209	1.000					
M4	.5470	.6320	.6286	1.000				
LS1	.0488	.0690	.0522	.0409	1.000			
LS2	.0507	.0737	.0440	.0494	.5853	1.000		
LS3	.0469	.0783	.0617	.0610	.5734	.6667	1.000	
LS4	.0443	.0655	.0675	.0775	.5602	.6319	.6751	1.000

Correlations between Volunteering (V) and Life Satisfaction (LS) at 4 points in time

	V1	V2	V3	V4	LS1	LS2	LS3	LS4
V1	1.000							
V2	.4870	1.000						
V3	.4240	.4751	1.000					
V4	.4152	.4364	.5170	1.000				
LS1	.0518	.0754	.0400	.0821	1.000			
LS2	.0556	.0515	.0441	.0519	.5853	1.000		
LS3	.0464	.0536	.0586	.0599	.5734	.6667	1.000	
LS4	.0547	.0468	.0577	.0674	.5602	.6319	.6751	1.000

5. THE RELATIONSHIP OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LIFE SATISFACTION: A MULTI-LEVEL ANALYSIS OF THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

Abstract

Political participation has long been recognized as having the potential to contribute to individual life satisfaction. There is a long-standing debate about the mechanisms that can account for the link between individual political participation and life satisfaction but the empirical analyses have been few. With data from the European Social Survey, in this paper it is demonstrated that besides individual characteristics, the macro level context also significantly influences the relationship between political participation and life satisfaction. A multi-level model that examines how the national context interacts with political participation and positively affects life satisfaction is developed. The findings show that countries with more open political systems also allow citizens to derive more life satisfaction from political participation.

5.1 Introduction

The interest in the relationship between politics and individual satisfaction is “at least as old as the serious study of politics” (Barnes & Kaase, 1979, p. 381). However, only recently a growing empirical literature on the study of happiness and life satisfaction has budged the debate from theoretical statements to empirical tests of hypothesis. In the last years, there has been a fluorescing development of a scientific field dedicated to understand how and why individual life satisfaction varies (Diener, 2009). The methodological advances from this field have allowed scholars to measure and understand how individual characteristics, institutions or attitudes affect the individual assessments of their own wellbeing. However, even though there is a lot we have come to understand about the dynamics of individual wellbeing, the potential effects of political causes on individual satisfaction have only recently started to come under the spotlight. For example, Stutzer and Frey (2006) have shown that people who have more opportunities to engage in political decision-making processes are more satisfied with their lives than people that do not have the chance to do so. In a similar fashion, Weitz-Shapiro and Winters (2008) present research suggesting that people that vote report higher satisfaction with life.

In this paper, the relationship between political participation and life satisfaction is examined. More concretely, it is studied whether individual political participation has an effect on life satisfaction. However, unlike previous studies, it is explicitly include the

possibility that this relationship is moderated by the national context. The interest is in studying if countries with more open political systems - i.e. where political participation activities are more tolerated and even incentivized, taking part in political activities have stronger effects on life satisfaction? Along with this, it also aims to explore the potentially different impacts that different political participation activities have on life satisfaction. Namely, it is argued that collective political participation acts have stronger effects on life satisfaction. To this purpose, data from European countries of the European Social Survey (ESS) is used, originated from its sixth round (2012).

This paper proceeds as follows: first, a review of the debate concerning the relationship between political participation and life satisfaction is presented; then, a discussion about the importance of differentiating political participation activities; after that follows the section where the importance of national context to the relationship between political participation and life satisfaction is argued; the following sections describe the operationalization of the variables and the analysis; and finally the results are discussed in the conclusion.

5.2 Theory linking political participation and life satisfaction

Despite the wealth of knowledge about what causes individual wellbeing from a large body of research (Diener, 2009), there is not much we know about the impact of political causes (Pacek, 2009).

Amongst the political factors that can potentially impact life satisfaction, political participation distinguishes itself because it has been regarded as a fundamental part of human wellbeing ever since Greek classical philosophy. However, rather surprisingly, there are not many empirical studies regarding the relationship between political participation and life satisfaction. Furthermore, the empirical investigations that do exist show sparse and inconsistent results (Pacheco & Lange, 2010; Weitz-Shapiro & Winter, 2008, 2011; Flavin & Keane, 2012). In fact, even though we do know a lot about who participates, when and why, there is not much information about the individual consequences of participating in political activities (Ikeda, Kobayashi & Hoshimoto, 2008).

The idea that political participation can indeed benefit wellbeing has long been debated and there are a number of reasons for why we should expect so. The first reason would logically be that political participation increases life satisfaction through political outcomes. For rational choice scholars, political participation works entirely on a self-interest basis (Downs, 1957; Palfrey & Rosenthal, 1985). People take part in political activities for the individual benefits they can take out of it. However, this perspective faced some well-known problems mainly through the understanding that political participation is not without its costs. Specifically, the fact that even though an individual can take personal benefits from a given outcome, most acts of political participation have actually a very small probability of affecting the final political outcome, in particular when large populations are involved such as in the case of

voting. This gave way to famous participation paradox or the “free-rider” idea, meaning the low probability of affecting the political outcome actually is an incentive for people to avoid the costs of participation and take advantage of the participation of others. Given the practical impossibility of such a scenario, because all in all people still choose to participate in politics, other benefits besides self-interest started to be considered.

The “procedural utility” concept, based on the view of the “procedural goods of democracy” introduced by Robert Lane (1988), claims that the focus should not be on the instrumental outcome of political activity, but rather on the procedure that conduces to the respective outcome. The argument is that, in politics, people are at least as concerned with what they get as how they are treated. This means that, in terms of political participation, people can achieve higher wellbeing not only through the outcome of any participatory act, but also through the process itself. The feeling of having a say on political matters is what affects life satisfaction, independently of whether they actually participate or not. Frey and Stutzer (2006) further develop this argument and study the differences in wellbeing between foreigners and Swiss citizens in terms of the right to vote on referendums. They conclude that in fact the possibilities to participate in the political process have greater influence on wellbeing than actual participation itself.

While the former “procedural utility” perspective focuses on the chances to engage in political activities, participatory democracy

theory argues that political participation is in itself intrinsically beneficial for individuals. It is so because engaging in political activities fosters desirable personal and social qualities in democratic citizens (Dahl, 1989; Warren, 1992), especially by contributing to the “development of the human powers of thought, feeling and action” (Teorell, 2006, p.794). The development of these democratic qualities can also facilitate trust and cooperation with others, which is considered an important part of maximizing wellbeing (Tov & Diener, 2009). Also independently of the outcomes, by participating individuals get the chance to learn new skills, extend their knowledge and develop their relationships with others. This is what participatory democracy theorists call “self-development” and even though the exact definitions vary (Teorell, 2006), there seems to be evidence that these particular skills have significant effects on life satisfaction, both for social and political participation. Most of this evidence is found in the vast psychology literature about “self-determination”, a very similar concept to “self-development”, where it is suggested that autonomy, competence and relatedness with others are powerful ways to enhance individual wellbeing (Frey et al., 2004; Ryan and Deci, 2001; Weitz-Shapiro and Winters, 2008; Winters and Rundlett, 2014). Autonomy is fostered through political participation by means of a voluntary expression of some political values which the individual shares. Wallace and Pichler (2009) add that by getting involved in personally meaningful causes, following particular enthusiasms or commitments by taking part in social or political participation activities fulfill self-actualization, in a “Maslowian”

sense, and can thus contribute to higher levels of wellbeing. In this context, the possibility of helping others through political participation is another plausible way it can affect wellbeing. Helliwell (2011), after an extensive literature review, considers that research has shown that people are inherently altruistic and therefore doing things for others has an enhanced power to improve wellbeing. On this note, several studies, mainly dwelling on experimental data, focus on concepts such as social interest, generativity or volunteering which emphasize this perspective of helping others through active political participation (Klar & Kasser, 2009; Fowler & Kam, 2007). In another example, Edlin, Gelman and Kaplan (2007) have shown that people also vote to improve the wellbeing of others.

The feeling of competence derives from gathering knowledge and learning new skills through political participation and as already argued, the sense of improving can also cause life satisfaction to improve. And finally civic and political involvement can help to build personal connections in addition to the work, family and leisure ones (Barker and Martin, 2011). Participation activities that imply sharing common interests and interacting with other individuals can contribute to higher life satisfaction through the development of feelings of relatedness with others. For example, Haller and Hadler (2006) find that interaction with other individuals is a major source of life satisfaction and social capital has been proved to be among its strongest individual correlates (Ateca-Amestoy, Aguilar & Moro-Egido, 2013).

Although the different theories discussed argue for different mechanisms and explanations, they all expect political participation to have a positive effect on wellbeing. Nevertheless, it has to be mentioned that the direction of causality was never clearly established. However, the evidence presented so far allows us to think of a positive cycle where participation promotes life satisfaction that in turn furthers more political participation (Barker and Martin, 2011). That said, it can be reasonably argue that political participation has the potential to positively affect life satisfaction, and therefore formulate the following hypothesis: Controlling for possible confounding variables, political participation has a positive effect on wellbeing (H1).

On the other hand, most of the mentioned studies consider political participation as a univocal concept while indeed this is far from being true. Furthermore, there is also no reason to assume that different political participation activities will not have different effects on life satisfaction. This is what will be address in the next section.

5.3 Differentiating political participation

Political participation can be defined, according to Teorell, Torcal and Montero (2007), as every action by ordinary citizens directed towards influencing some political outcomes, namely, the distribution of social goods and norms. Even if most research on political participation has conventionally centered on electoral

participation, this is not the only means citizens have to express preferences. Indeed, there are several acts of participation that fall far out of an electoral context. These include widespread activities such as going to a demonstration, joining a political party or organization, signing a petition, amongst several others. But despite the clear differences in nature of each of these participation acts, most research on the link between political participation and life satisfaction so far has insisted in aggregating all political participation acts under the general concept of political participation. However, this prompts us to ask one question: should we expect each political participation act to affect wellbeing exactly in the same way? Bäck, Teorell, and Westholm (2011) found that each act of political participation was associated with different incentives. Their study show that voting and related party activity were connected with the perceived benefit should the outcome be positive, while manifestations and contacting were related with incentives of the behavior independently of a positive outcome. This tells us that each political participation mode differs in relation to the characteristics that predict them. Given that the motivations that explain the participation acts differ, we should also expect that each political participation activity affect wellbeing differently. Furthermore, the use of all political participation activities in a single participation scale can, to some extent, help to explain the somewhat mixed findings of previous research. If different political participation activities affect life satisfaction differently, we should consider the theoretical possibility that the positive effect of one participation act is canceled out by the negative effect of a different

participation act. Therefore, we should consider the general characteristics that are common and different between political participation acts.

For this purpose, the distinction between individual and collective forms of political participation seems particularly relevant. There is vast research focusing on the importance of social contacts and interactions for wellbeing (Farrell, Aubry & Coulombe, 2004; Helliwell & Putnam, 2004; Cramm, Møller & Nieboer, 2012; Klein, 2011). If we extend this idea for political participation, we come to the conclusion that taking part in political activities that imply interactions with other actors add a potential link between political participation and life satisfaction. Through engagement in collective political participation acts individuals are given an opportunity to potentially interact with other individuals and deepen social contacts and networks. This will be much more likely in a setting such as a political party or a demonstration than simply signing a petition. Through this indirect relationship, via social contacts, it is expected that collective political participation activities have more pronounced effects on life satisfaction and therefore derive the second hypothesis: Collective political participation activities have a stronger effect on life satisfaction than individual political participation activities, because they imply more frequent social interactions (H2).

5.4 The importance of context

Even though most of the research on life satisfaction determinants is individual in nature, this is not to say that contextual influences are not important to take into account. According to Frey and Stutzer (2006), it is more about being given the chance to participate than participation itself. Consequently, living in a context where participation opportunities are given, should have a significant impact on life satisfaction¹¹. However, previous studies about the relationship between political participation and life satisfaction, for the most part, disregard how contextual variables can affect political behavior. By and large, most models of political participation focus on individual resources but these cannot account alone for the differences between countries. Even though contextual variation in political participation activities have not been yet subject to extended systematic study, there are some examples that show that these influences are important (Vráblíková, 2013; Dalton & van Sickle, 2005; Dalton, van Sickle & Weldon, 2009).

One aspect where these contextual differences are important concerns the openness of a political system. Scholars stated that open institutional structures that accommodate citizen's demands facilitate political activity (Kitchelt, 1986; Dalton et al., 2009). Political openness can be said to exist when citizens are free to speak up and make political demands without the perception of the possibility of receiving reprisals; where there are possible means of

¹¹ This was confirmed by the investigation of Dorn et al. (2006) where they compare the effect of exposure to democracy on wellbeing in 28 countries.

political access; and, finally, where decision makers are disposed to listen to the demands of political groups and organizations (Dalton et al., 2009). On the other hand, a closed system is identifiable when there are few channels for individuals to take part in the political process and/or where there is an effective restriction to citizens' association and participation, such as in the case of non-democratic regimes.

The result is that when political regimes allow or even incentivize political participation, more organizations and citizens are likely to engage because the barriers to act are lower and the acceptance of these kinds of political activities is high (Dalton et al., 2009). Therefore, as political systems become more open and democratic, their citizens will engage in more political participation activities. On the contrary, if political systems are more closed, the costs of engaging in political participation will be higher. These political factors influence the extent to which the current allocation of goods and resources is in line with people's preferences. They equally determine whether and to what extent politicians are responsive to their citizens, which societal groups are favored or disfavored, and whether conflicting interests are integrated (Dalton et al., 2009). Therefore, stronger democratic institutions should lead to more participation as well as an allocation of goods and resources closer to citizens' preferences, which is likely to lead to higher individual well-being.

However, the openness of the political context does not affect only political participation directly. In this paper, the contention is also that the degree of openness of the political system also plays a moderating role in the relationship between political participation and life satisfaction. The theoretical expectation is that more open political systems are not only conducive of political participation, but also allow individuals to: 1) derive more “procedural utility” for being given more chances to participate; 2) are more likely to represent contexts where policy decisions are closer to individual preferences; 3) and lower the costs of engaging in political activities. On the contrary, less open political systems are less favorable to political participation, raise the costs of political participation and people feel less liberty to “have a say” and thus the allocation of goods will probably be farther away from people’s preferences. In a nutshell, the relationship between political participation and life satisfaction is conditioned by how open the political system is to political participation. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is drafted: The interaction between political participation and the openness of the political system has a positive effect on life satisfaction (H3). Next we discuss how the empirical analysis will be conducted.

5.5 Data and Methods

The theoretical model just described is composed by more than one level of analysis. Therefore, a multi-level design is necessary. The multilevel approach expects that there are hierarchical effects influencing at the first level (Hox 2002; Kreft & Leeuw1998).

Specifically in this study, all control and individual variables, which are measured at the individual level of the respondents, are included in the first level of analysis. At the same time, these individuals are nested in countries that are characterized by contextual variables, i.e. the second level of analysis, that are expected to cause the hypothesized effects. The individual data comes from the European Social Survey round 6 (2012) and is combined with contextual data measuring the openness of the political system, as it is further explained in detail, in the contextual variable section. The ESS is a high quality European comparative survey and therefore only European countries will be considered, in a total of 29 countries¹². The total sample size is 54,673 and all models have been weighted to control for sample design and population size.

5.5.1 Individual Measures

The dependent variable, life satisfaction, is measure by the question: How satisfied are you with your life as whole? The outcome variable is an 11-point scale treated as continuous, where 0 means completely dissatisfied and 10 completely satisfied, with a mean of 6.72 and standard deviation of 2,405 (N=54,351). Most countries national average of life satisfaction ranges from 5 to 8, with Bulgaria being the country where the mean is the lowest (5), and Denmark the highest (8).

¹² Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Switzerland, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Spain, Finland, France, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Israel, Iceland, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Sweden, Slovenia, Slovakia, Ukraine and Kosovo.

The main independent variable is political participation. This variable is operationalized by creating an additive index with seven participation dummy indicators (0 no participation, 1 participation took place):

- a) Worked in political party or action group last 12 months
- b) Worked in another organization or association last 12 months
- c) Wore a badge or campaign sticker last 12 months
- d) Signed petition last 12 months
- e) Taken part in lawful public demonstration
- f) Boycotted certain products
- g) Contacted politician or government

This index ranges therefore from 0 to 7. The greater the number of activities in which an individual participate, the higher is the index value. However, as discussed before, also depending on whether the political activities are individual or collective in nature, different effects can be expected on life satisfaction. As individual activities those forms of political participation that can be performed individually are included, in contrast with collective forms that are the product of group-based process (van Deth & Maloney, 2012; Quintilier & Hooghe, 2011). Activities such as wearing a badge, signing a petition, contacting public officials and boycotts all fit in the individual political activities category because they do not imply the physical presence of other actors. Other forms of political participation, such as participating in a demonstration or being a member of a political party or organization are located in the category of collective political participation forms. The justification to find political party membership on this side comes from Scarrow and Gezgor (2010) who argue that this kind of participation activity

should not be seen as an individualized act but as a form of interaction in a politicized micro-mobilization context (Quintilier & Hooghe, 2011).

In order to separate the political activities according to collective and individual participation acts, a separated index for each is created. The individual participation index is an additive index (0-4) made up of the four binary indicators of individual type activities:

- a) Contacted politician or government
- b) Wore a badge or campaign sticker last 12 months
- c) Signed petition last 12 months
- d) Boycotted certain products

The collective participation index is an additive index (0-3) made up of the remaining three binary indicators for the collective activities:

- a) Worked in political party or action group last 12 months
- b) Worked in another organization or association last 12 months
- c) Taken part in lawful public demonstration

Of course political participation is not the only factor affecting life satisfaction. In fact, there are several individual variables which are normally used in both individual models of political participation and life satisfaction. A number of possible confounding variables is added in order to control for these effects, all of which presented in Table 5.1 along with their descriptive statistics. Age is included because it has been found to have an impact upon political participation and life satisfaction. In particular, a U-shaped relationship between age and life satisfaction has been found in

many countries (Clark, Oswald & Warr, 1996). Gender is also controlled for because men and women might assign distinctive importance to different dimensions of satisfaction with life. The evidence on gender differences is somewhat inconclusive and although Di Tella, MacCulloch and Oswald (2001) conclude that females are more satisfied with their life than males, Frey and Stutzer (2000) using Swiss data find no significant differences. On the other hand, there is extensive evidence that shows that men are more likely to engage in politics (Burns, 2007; Norris, 2002).

Education is consistently documented as a significant predictor of political participation (Berinsky & Lenz, 2011) and even though the relationship with wellbeing is not completely clear, it has been found to significantly impact life satisfaction. Scitovsky (1976) emphasized the importance of education in allowing people to take advantage of activities that generate well-being, particularly appreciation of music, painting, literature and history. Unemployment, according to Dolan, Peasgood and White (2008) review of the literature, is one of the greatest depressors of individual life satisfaction and it mainly affects the person that lost the job. On the other hand, there is recent evidence that shows that unemployment does not have a very significant effect on political participation (Kroh, 2014).

Generally, the relation between income and life satisfaction is regarded as very complex even though a great deal of research has been dedicated to clarify contradicting theoretical assumptions

(Easterlin, 1995; Clark, Frijters & Shields, 2006). However, income has been shown to have a weak but significant impact on life satisfaction¹³ and therefore, it will be included in the model. Marriage or living with a partner is another important determinant of individual happiness and being married is strongly associated with life satisfaction. Marital status may also impact upon happiness and life satisfaction. Frey and Stutzer (2006) put forward two reasons why this should be the case. Firstly, marriage provides support in dealing with problems and secondly, married people gain from company. This control is operationalized by coding 1 the respondents that live with the partner, and 0 the ones that do not.

Finally, there are controls for political trust and satisfaction with democracy. Hudson (2006) concludes that institutional trust, and hence the quality of institutions, impact satisfaction. Trust tends to increase happiness, and this therefore provides strong evidence that institutions do affect well-being. Political trust is operationalized by an additive index of the level of trust in a 0 to 10 scale of the following institutions: National Parliament, Politicians, and political parties.

¹³ Some research suggests that the relationship between income and life satisfaction is conditioned by the bottom up/ top down debate. For more information, see Saris, 2001; Scherpenzeel and Saris, 1996.

Table 5.1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
<i>Level 1 Variables</i>			
Life Satisfaction	54,351	6.764	2.405
General Index of Political Participation	53,843	.776	1.246
Individual Participation	53,954	.542	.882
Collective Participation	54,338	.235	.540
Age	54,540	47.873	18.591
Gender	54,656	.456	.498
Education	54,309	3.866	1.853
Unemployment	54,673	.087	.282
Married/Living with partner	54,460	.585	.492
Political Trust	52,411	1.380	7.005
Household Income	43,981	5.113	2.824
Satisfaction with Democracy	52,602	5.163	2.573
<i>Level 2 Variables</i>			
Rule of Law	29	.984	.843
Voice&Accountability	29	.959	.661
GDP	29	31.283	21.253

Regarding satisfaction with democracy, as former studies have shown, individual happiness is strongly related to other aspects of contentment in general, and satisfaction with democracy in particular (Graham & Pettinato 2001). If political participation augments satisfaction with democracy, and given a (strong) correlation between the two facets of individual satisfaction, then omitting satisfaction with democracy could very well produce a spurious relation between political participation and life satisfaction. Consequently, individual satisfaction with democracy is explicitly controlled.

5.5.2 Contextual Variable

To operationalize the contextual variable, the World Bank's "Rule of Law" (RL) and "Voice & Accountability" (VA) index (2012) is used. Based on a long-standing research program of the World Bank, these indicators are part of the six dimensions of governance reproduced by the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI). The RL indicator is used because it taps an institutional context that facilitates non electoral political participation and restricts the repression of opposition groups (Dalton et al., 2009). The RL measure distinguishes whether a nation systematically and equitably enforces civil liberties and political rights, characteristics that are often vital in allowing people to participate politically without any fear of reprisals. However, there are some other aspects related to political participation which arguably fall out of the more formal institutional environment that the RL indicator translates. These aspects are better captured by the VA indicator which includes measures of civil rights and liberties, opportunities to participate in the political process and interfere with the policy agenda setting and policy-making, through political parties or any other kind of organization, as well as the extent of the freedom of expression and association, and free media. Different models will be estimated for each of these contextual variables because there is no theoretical reason to assume that either one is more important. Furthermore, given that both indexes are highly correlated and the limited number of cases on the second level of analysis, it is not advisable to include both contextual variables in the same model.

Both measures are standardized continuous variables with a theoretical mean of zero that range from -2.5 to 2.5 and in the dataset go from -.82 (Russia) to 1.95 (Norway), concerning the rule of law, and -.96 (Russia) to 1.75 (Norway) concerning “Voice & Accountability”. Values of both these indicators closer to -2.5 represent closed political systems while the symmetrical value represents open political regimes where the rule of law and VA is prevalent.

5.6 Multilevel model of political participation and life satisfaction

Before considering the controls and moderating effects we hypothesized, first we estimate an empty ANOVA model with a random intercept to assess the extent of variation in life satisfaction at the individual and country levels, ahead of adding the explanatory variables. This is called the “null” model, where i represents individuals ($N=54351$) and j represents countries ($N=29$).

The variance of life satisfaction is divided into within-country variance (σ^2_{e0}) and between country variance ($\sigma^2_{\mu0}$). The estimates for the null model are given in Table 5.2. The intra-class correlation (ICC) is .16376 which indicates that before introducing any explanatory variables, 16.376 percent of the total variance is accounted by country differences. After estimating the “null” model, we move now to our main explanatory variables for each mode of political participation.

Table 5.2: Results

	Null Model	General Political participation Index				
		(1)	(2a)	(2b)	(3a)	(3b)
Political Participation		0.005 (0.016)	0.004 (0.016)	0.004 (0.016)	-0.039** (0.015)	-0.042*** (0.011)
Satisfaction with democracy		0.224*** (0.014)	0.224*** (0.014)	0.224*** (0.014)	0.222*** (0.014)	0.223*** (0.014)
Political Trust		0.031*** (0.005)	0.031*** (0.005)	0.031*** (0.005)	0.031*** (0.005)	0.031*** (0.005)
Age		-0.009* (0.004)	-0.009* (0.004)	-0.009* (0.004)	-0.009* (0.004)	-0.009* (0.004)
Sex		0.011 (0.040)	0.011 (0.040)	0.011 (0.040)	0.011 (0.041)	0.010 (0.040)
Education		0.011 (0.017)	0.011 (0.017)	0.011 (0.017)	0.011 (0.017)	0.011 (0.017)
Married		0.314*** (0.067)	0.314*** (0.067)	0.314*** (0.067)	0.314*** (0.067)	0.313*** (0.068)
Unemployed		-0.943*** (0.095)	-0.942*** (0.095)	-0.942*** (0.094)	-0.942*** (0.095)	-0.941*** (0.095)
Household Income		0.081*** (0.023)	0.081*** (0.023)	0.081*** (0.023)	0.081*** (0.023)	0.081*** (0.023)
RL/VA			0.548*** (0.098)	0.698*** (0.140)	0.516*** (0.102)	0.663*** (0.144)
Pol. Part. * RL/VA					0.043*** (0.010)	0.048*** (0.008)
Intercept	6.856*** (0.188)	5.168*** (0.199)	4.639*** (0.248)	4.491*** (0.288)	4.667*** (0.250)	4.522*** (0.288)
$\sigma^2_{\mu 0}$	-0.017 (0.122)	-0.399** (0.138)	-0.726*** (0.128)	-0.709*** (0.154)	-0.722*** (0.128)	-0.710*** (0.154)
σ^2_{e0}	0.799 (0.025)	0.717*** (0.027)	0.717*** (0.027)	0.717*** (0.027)	0.717*** (0.027)	0.717*** (0.027)
ICC	0.16376	0.09698	0.05291	0.05465	0.05334	0.05453
N	54,351	40,456	40,456	40,456	40,456	40,456
Log Likelihood	-125,212	-86,444	-86,435	-86,436	-86,425	-86,426

Note: Number of groups = 29, Robust standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Individual Political Participation					Collective Political Participation				
(4)	(5a)	(5b)	(6a)	(6b)	(7)	(8a)	(8b)	(9a)	(9b)
-0.029 (0.021)	-0.029 (0.021)	-0.029 (0.021)	-0.088** (0.032)	-0.098*** (0.022)	0.079* (0.039)	0.079* (0.039)	0.079* (0.039)	-0.009 (0.023)	-0.001 (0.021)
0.221*** (0.014)	0.221*** (0.014)	0.221*** (0.014)	0.220*** (0.014)	0.220*** (0.014)	0.224*** (0.014)	0.224*** (0.014)	0.224*** (0.014)	0.223*** (0.014)	0.224*** (0.014)
0.031*** (0.005)	0.031*** (0.005)	0.031*** (0.005)	0.032*** (0.005)	0.032*** (0.005)	0.030*** (0.005)	0.030*** (0.005)	0.030*** (0.005)	0.030*** (0.005)	0.030*** (0.005)
-0.009* (0.004)	-0.009* (0.004)	-0.009* (0.004)	-0.009* (0.004)	-0.009* (0.004)	-0.009* (0.004)	-0.009* (0.004)	-0.009* (0.004)	-0.009* (0.004)	-0.009* (0.004)
0.008 (0.039)	0.008 (0.039)	0.008 (0.039)	0.010 (0.040)	0.010 (0.039)	0.008 (0.042)	0.008 (0.042)	0.008 (0.042)	0.005 (0.042)	0.004 (0.042)
0.014 (0.017)	0.014 (0.017)	0.014 (0.017)	0.013 (0.017)	0.013 (0.017)	0.008 (0.016)	0.008 (0.016)	0.008 (0.016)	0.008 (0.016)	0.008 (0.016)
0.321*** (0.068)	0.321*** (0.068)	0.321*** (0.068)	0.322*** (0.068)	0.321*** (0.068)	0.317*** (0.068)	0.318*** (0.068)	0.318*** (0.068)	0.317*** (0.068)	0.316*** (0.068)
- 0.944*** (0.094)	- 0.943*** (0.094)	-0.943*** (0.094)	- 0.943*** (0.094)	-0.944*** (0.094)	- 0.944*** (0.092)	- 0.943*** (0.092)	- 0.943*** (0.092)	- 0.942*** (0.093)	- 0.941*** (0.093)
0.082*** (0.023)	0.082*** (0.023)	0.082*** (0.023)	0.082*** (0.023)	0.082*** (0.023)	0.079*** (0.023)	0.079*** (0.023)	0.079*** (0.023)	0.079*** (0.022)	0.079*** (0.022)
	0.559*** (0.098)	0.712*** (0.140)	0.531*** (0.103)	0.677*** (0.146)		0.540*** (0.098)	0.688*** (0.140)	0.518*** (0.099)	0.668*** (0.140)
			0.055* (0.021)	0.055* (0.021)				0.093*** (0.015)	0.089*** (0.013)
5.176*** (0.201)	4.637*** (0.252)	4.486*** (0.292)	4.662*** (0.255)	4.517*** (0.255)	5.171*** (0.194)	4.650*** (0.244)	4.504*** (0.284)	4.667*** (0.244)	4.520*** (0.281)
-0.385** (0.137)	- 0.717*** (0.129)	-0.700*** (0.154)	- 0.712*** (0.129)	-0.701*** (0.154)	-0.409** (0.138)	- 0.732*** (0.129)	- 0.715*** (0.154)	- 0.730*** (0.128)	- 0.717*** (0.154)
0.717*** (0.027)	0.717*** (0.027)	0.717*** (0.027)	0.717*** (0.027)	0.717*** (0.027)	0.716*** (0.027)	0.716*** (0.027)	0.716*** (0.027)	0.716*** (0.027)	0.716*** (0.027)
0.09948	0.05381	0.05556	0.05426	0.05548	0.09535	0.05238	0.05403	0.05257	0.05389
40,527	40,527	40,527	40,527	40,527	40,781	40,781	40,781	40,781	40,781
-86,712	-86,703	-86,703	-86,695	-86,693	-87,186	-87,178	-87,178	-87,167	-87,170

In order to see the distinction between the different modes of political participation, Table 5.2 presents all the models estimated for each of the independent variables of interest: the general index of political participation, individual participation and collective participation. Model 1, 4 and 7 presented in the table are the base model, containing all the discussed control variables and differing only in respect to the main independent variable, i.e. general, individual and collective political participation respectively.

Overall, the intercept of life satisfaction (having controlled for all the control variables and country differences, i.e. all variables are equal to 0) is very similar across all the baseline models. For model 1 it is 5.168 and only slightly higher for model 4 (5.176) and 7 (5.171). The intra-class correlation also drops in very similar proportions from the null to the base model. It drops of 16.4% to 9.7% in the case of model 1; 9.94% for model 4 and 9.95 in model 7. This means that controlling for individual variables explains between 6.5% and 6.7% of the variance between countries across all the base models.

Regarding the control variables, in Table 5.2 we can see that they do not show any significant differences throughout the models and behave to a great extent as expected. The exceptions are education and gender that seem not to have any significant effect on life satisfaction. It should also be noted that the effect of satisfaction with democracy is significant and moderate, given that this relationship is not usually controlled for in individual models of life

satisfaction. But more importantly, it is clear that the general index of political participation as well as individual participation do not have a significant effect on life satisfaction in the base line models. On the contrary, collective political participation does have a significant effect on life satisfaction in model 7. With a significance level of 5 percent, there is an effect (.079) of collective participation on life satisfaction. These results only partly support the first hypothesis (H1) which argued that political participation has a positive effect on life satisfaction. This is only true for collective political participation, partially confirming the second hypothesis (H2), which stated that collective political participation activities have stronger effects on life satisfaction than individual participation acts.

Going on with the discussion of the results, now attention turns to the contextual variables. In Table 5.2 models 2, 5 and 8 are the replication of the base model with the addition of the contextual variables RL (marked with a) and VA (marked with b), for each of the political participation variables. The first note is that there are no differences regarding the control variables between the models estimated for RL and VA. On the other hand, we do see that both contextual variables consistently show a positive and significant effect on life satisfaction for every mode of political participation. However, there is a difference in terms of size of the effect with VA consistently showing a stronger effect on life satisfaction than RL. Nevertheless, these results are consistent with the literature and the theoretical expectations that more open political systems have a

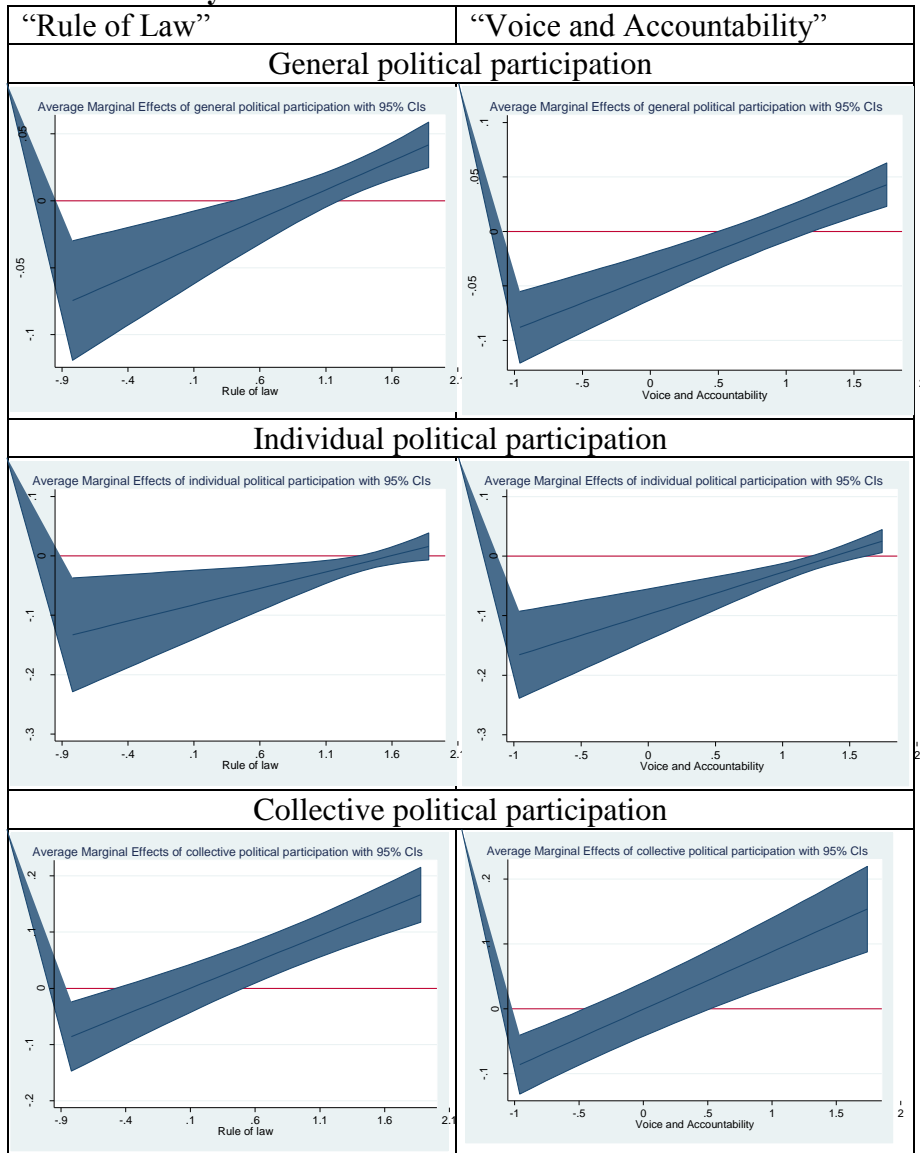
positive effect on individual life satisfaction. Broadly speaking, living in a country with a more open political system is associated with higher levels of life satisfaction.

Finally, we take a look at models 3, 6 and 9 which include the hypothesized cross-level interaction of the contextual measures of the openness of the political system and political participation¹⁴. Hypothesis 3 (H3) argued for a positive relationship between political participation and life satisfaction conditioned by the openness of the political system.

The results of the control variables in these models remained practically unchanged for all the measures of political participation. As for the cross-level interaction term between rule of law and political participation, we see that they are significant for the general index of political participation, as well as for individual and collective participation activities. However, the effect appears to be stronger for collective political participation activities. This scenario also holds for the interaction terms between political participation and VA. The effect is significant for all the political participation measures but stronger for collective activities. To better illustrate this relationship in Figure 5.1, the marginal effects of the interaction terms of models 3, 6 and 9 are plotted.

¹⁴ Random slope models were also estimated for all three political participation modes. The random slope model assumes that not just the intercept differs between countries, but the slope as well. However, after performing a Likelihood Ratio test comparing the random intercept and random slopes models (Steenberg, 2012), it was concluded that the random slopes model was not significantly better than the random intercept. Therefore, these results will not be presented.

Figure 5.1: Marginal effects of political participation on life satisfaction conditioned by “Rule of Law” and “Voice and Accountability”



The lines display the change in the probability of political participation affecting life satisfaction for a change in the contextual variable (RL/VA), holding all other independent variables constant.

The 95 percent confidence intervals around the line allow seeing when the higher order variables have a statistically significant effect. The figure shows that for the general index of political participation, with values under .5 of RL and VA, political participation has a negative effect on life satisfaction. On the other hand, when the contextual variables are higher than 1, we see a positive effect. However, the positive effects are only marginal, as the confidence interval is very close to 0.

As for individual participation, we see that the line is very close to 0 both for RL and VA, which probably justifies the lower significance of the cross-level interaction term for this measure of political participation. Nonetheless, we see a more pronounced conditioning effect of VA on the relationship between political participation and life satisfaction, especially for values under .5 of the contextual variable. Low values of VA seem to negatively affect the relationship of individual political participation with life satisfaction. Finally, regarding the last participation measure, collective political participation, we are able to draw a different picture. Here it is clear that for values over .5/.6 of both contextual measures of the openness of the political system, there is a positive effect of collective participation on life satisfaction.

5.7 Controlling for social interactions

One of the reasons it was argued that collective political participation activities have stronger effects on life satisfaction is the more frequent social interactions it implies. It is possible to

model a more direct test of this hypothesis if an indicator for frequency of social contacts is included. The ESS offers this possibility through means of the following question: “Using this card, how often do you meet socially with friends, relatives or work colleagues?”. The respondents are given the following options: Never; Less than once a month; Once a month; Several times a month; Once a week; Several times a week, Every day. It should be added that “Meet socially” implies meet by choice rather than for reasons of either work or pure duty.

The same models are estimated with the inclusion of this control question for frequency of social contacts, and the results can be found on Table 5.3.

Table 5.3: Results controlling for frequency of social contacts

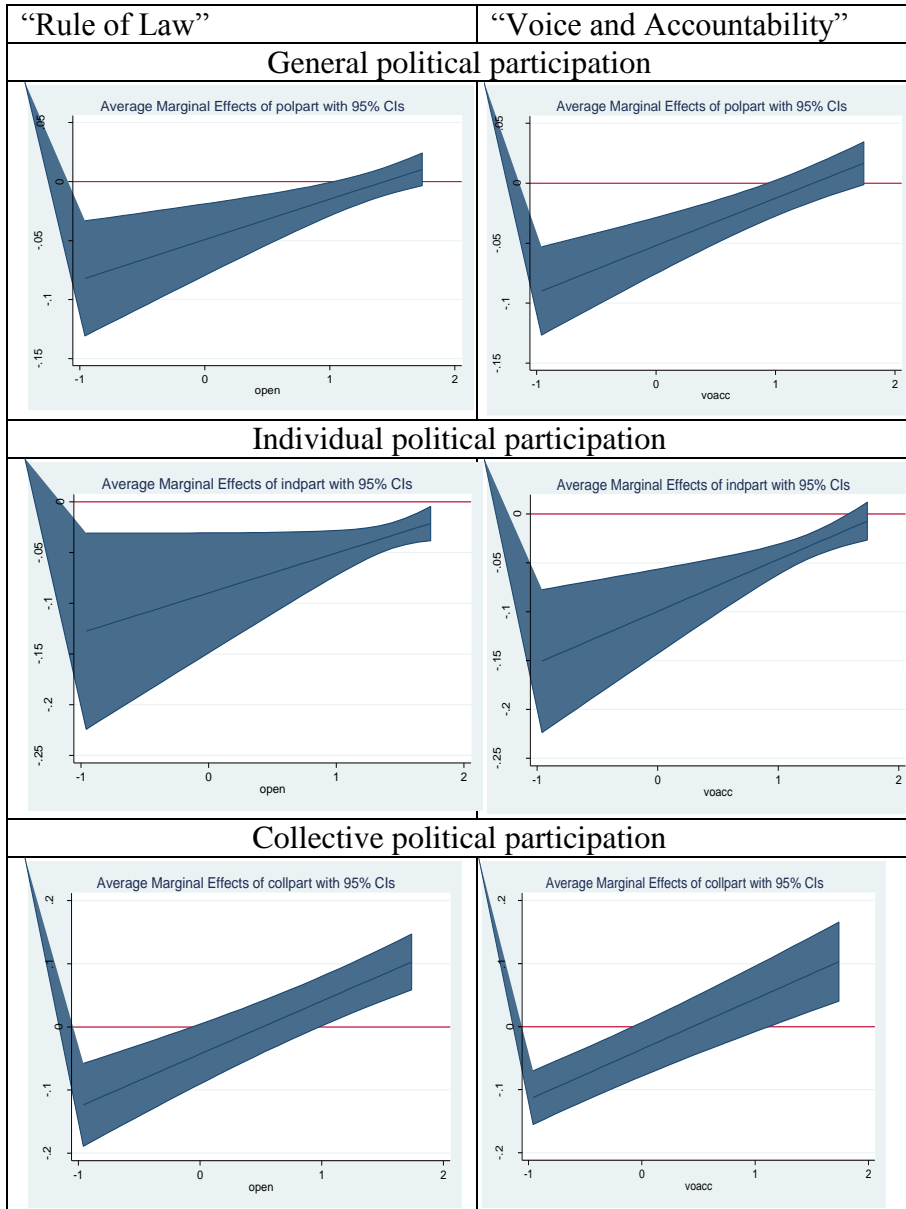
	General Political participation Index				
	(1)	(2a)	(2b)	(3a)	(3b)
Political Participation	-0.014 (0.014)	-0.015 (0.014)	-0.015 (0.014)	-0.049** (0.015)	-0.052*** (0.012)
Satisfaction with democracy	0.216*** (0.015)	0.216*** (0.015)	0.216*** (0.015)	0.215*** (0.015)	0.215*** (0.015)
Political Trust	0.031*** (0.005)	0.031*** (0.005)	0.031*** (0.005)	0.031*** (0.005)	0.031*** (0.005)
Age	-0.006 (0.003)	-0.006 (0.003)	-0.006 (0.003)	-0.006 (0.003)	-0.006 (0.003)
Sex	-0.000 (0.036)	-0.000 (0.036)	-0.000 (0.036)	0.000 (0.037)	-0.001 (0.037)
Education	0.014 (0.018)	0.014 (0.018)	0.014 (0.018)	0.013 (0.018)	0.013 (0.018)
Married	0.399*** (0.073)	0.399*** (0.073)	0.399*** (0.073)	0.399*** (0.073)	0.398*** (0.073)
Unemployed	-0.946*** (0.088)	-0.945*** (0.088)	-0.945*** (0.088)	-0.945*** (0.088)	-0.945*** (0.088)
Household Income	0.078*** (0.024)	0.078*** (0.024)	0.078*** (0.024)	0.078*** (0.023)	0.078*** (0.023)
Social Contacts	0.193*** (0.012)	0.193*** (0.012)	0.193*** (0.012)	0.192*** (0.012)	0.192*** (0.012)
RL/VA		0.507*** (0.096)	0.644*** (0.135)	0.482*** (0.100)	0.616*** (0.140)
Pol. Part. * RL/VA				0.034*** (0.010)	0.039*** (0.008)
Intercept	4.297*** (0.175)	3.808*** (0.231)	3.673*** (0.274)	3.834*** (0.234)	3.701*** (0.276)
$\sigma^2_{\mu 0}$	-0.464** (0.150)	-0.779*** (0.136)	-0.761*** (0.163)	-0.774*** (0.135)	-0.761*** (0.163)
σ^2_{e0}	0.707*** (0.028)	0.707*** (0.028)	0.707*** (0.028)	0.707*** (0.028)	0.707*** (0.028)
ICC	0.08762	0.04873	0.05036	0.04915	0.05036
N	40,320	40,320	40,320	40,320	40,320
Log Likelihood	-85,646	-85,637	-85,638	-85,631	-85,631

Note: Number of groups = 29, Robust standard errors in parentheses;
 *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1

Individual Political Participation					Collective Political Participation				
(4)	(5a)	(5b)	(6a)	(6b)	(7)	(8a)	(8b)	(9a)	(9b)
-0.047** (0.016)	-0.048** (0.016)	-0.048** (0.016)	-0.090** (0.030)	-0.100*** (0.022)	0.036 (0.037)	0.036 (0.037)	0.036 (0.037)	-0.043+ (0.024)	-0.036+ (0.022)
0.214*** (0.015)	0.214*** (0.015)	0.214*** (0.015)	0.213*** (0.015)	0.213*** (0.015)	0.217*** (0.015)	0.217*** (0.015)	0.217*** (0.015)	0.217*** (0.015)	0.217*** (0.015)
0.032*** (0.005)	0.031*** (0.005)	0.031*** (0.005)	0.032*** (0.005)	0.032*** (0.005)	0.031*** (0.005)	0.031*** (0.005)	0.031*** (0.005)	0.031*** (0.005)	0.031*** (0.005)
-0.006 (0.003)	-0.006 (0.003)	-0.006 (0.003)	-0.006 (0.003)	-0.006* (0.003)	-0.006+ (0.003)	-0.006+ (0.003)	-0.006+ (0.003)	-0.006+ (0.003)	-0.006+ (0.003)
-0.005 (0.035)	-0.005 (0.035)	-0.005 (0.035)	-0.003 (0.035)	-0.003 (0.035)	-0.001 (0.037)	-0.001 (0.037)	0.001 (0.037)	-0.004 (0.038)	-0.004 (0.038)
0.016 (0.018)	0.016 (0.018)	0.016 (0.018)	0.016 (0.018)	0.015 (0.018)	0.011 (0.017)	0.011 (0.017)	0.011 (0.017)	0.010 (0.016)	0.011 (0.016)
0.407*** (0.074)	0.407*** (0.074)	0.407*** (0.074)	0.407*** (0.074)	0.407*** (0.074)	0.403*** (0.072)	0.404*** (0.072)	0.404*** (0.072)	0.403*** (0.072)	0.402*** (0.073)
- 0.947*** (0.087)	- 0.946*** (0.087)	-0.946*** (0.087)	- 0.946*** (0.087)	-0.947*** (0.087)	- 0.947*** (0.086)	- 0.946*** (0.086)	- 0.946*** (0.086)	- 0.945*** (0.086)	- 0.944*** (0.087)
0.079*** (0.023)	0.079*** (0.023)	0.079*** (0.023)	0.079*** (0.023)	0.079*** (0.023)	0.076*** (0.023)	0.076*** (0.023)	0.076*** (0.023)	0.076*** (0.023)	0.076*** (0.023)
0.194*** (0.011)	0.194*** (0.011)	0.194*** (0.011)	0.193*** (0.011)	0.193*** (0.011)	0.192*** (0.013)	0.192*** (0.013)	0.192*** (0.013)	0.191*** (0.013)	0.191*** (0.013)
	0.516*** (0.096)	0.655*** (0.135)	0.496*** (0.101)	0.630*** (0.142)		0.497*** (0.096)	0.632*** (0.135)	0.477*** (0.098)	0.613*** (0.136)
			0.039+ (0.020)	0.053** (0.016)				0.084*** (0.014)	0.080*** (0.011)
4.300*** (0.178)	3.802*** (0.235)	3.664*** (0.278)	3.823*** (0.239)	3.692*** (0.283)	4.300*** (0.169)	3.821*** (0.223)	3.688*** (0.265)	3.839*** (0.223)	3.704*** (0.263)
-0.453** (0.150)	- 0.773*** (0.136)	-0.755*** (0.163)	- 0.769*** (0.136)	-0.755*** (0.163)	-0.478** (0.150)	- 0.786*** (0.136)	- 0.769*** (0.163)	- 0.783*** (0.136)	- 0.770*** (0.163)
0.707*** (0.028)	0.707*** (0.028)	0.707*** (0.028)	0.707*** (0.028)	0.707*** (0.028)	0.707*** (0.028)	0.707*** (0.028)	0.707*** (0.028)	0.706*** (0.028)	0.706*** (0.028)
0.08941	0.04929	0.05093	0.04966	0.05096	0.08561	0.04814	0.04963	0.04838	0.04959
40,390	40,390	40,390	40,390	40,390	40,642	40,642	40,642	40,642	40,642
-85,906	-85,897	-85,898	-85,893	-85,892	-86,367	-86,358	-86,359	-86,350	-86,353

It is clear that social contacts have a significant and moderate effect on life satisfaction throughout all models. However, the first salient difference between the two former tables is that with the inclusion of the control for frequency of social contacts, collective political participation has no longer a significant effect on life satisfaction and, on the other hand, individual activities do show a significant but negative effect on life satisfaction. As for the contextual variables, the inclusion of the variable social contacts reduces the size of both the effects of the contextual variables and the cross level interaction. The only major difference in this regard is that the cross level interaction of model 6a decreases in significance and model 6b increases. Repeating the same procedure of before, plotted on Figure 5.2 is the marginal effects of political participation on life satisfaction conditioned by both contextual indicators, this time controlling for frequency of social contacts. Also here, we do not find any major differences.

Figure 5.2: Marginal effects of political participation on life satisfaction conditioned by “Rule of Law” and “Voice and Accountability”, controlling for social contacts



In sum, in the case of the first hypothesis (H1) which contended that political participation has a positive effect on life satisfaction, controlling for possible confounding variables, no proof was found and therefore the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. A positive effect of collective political participation activities on life satisfaction was indeed found, just as predicted by the second hypothesis (H2). However, after controlling for the frequency of social contacts, this effect is no longer significant and there is instead a negative effect of individual political participation activities on life satisfaction. As for hypothesis 3 (H3), which argues that the interaction between political participation and openness of the political system has a positive effect on life satisfaction, finds support in the data and this effect is stronger for collective participation activities. The interaction of collective political participation both with RL and VA has stronger positive effects on life satisfaction than with any other mode of political participation, even when controlling for social contacts.

It should be added that in order to discard the possibility that the differences found are the result of economic differences, another separate model is estimated with GDP as the contextual variable. The results showed only insignificant correlations.

5.8 Conclusion

Even though empirical research is only now focusing on this issue, previous studies have shown that political participation has the potential to positively impact individual life satisfaction. The aim of

this paper was to study if and how life satisfaction and political participation are related, and to extend these findings by testing hypothesis about different political participation activities and testing the moderating macro-level effect of openness of the political system on the relationship between political participation and life satisfaction.

Using a multi-level model, it was shown that openness of the political system, indicated by RL and VA, is not only directly associated with life satisfaction but, as hypothesized, also moderates the association between political participation and life satisfaction. When low values of democratic openness are present, political participation has a negative or not significant effect on life satisfaction; while with higher levels of the openness of the political system it was shown that political participation positively affects life satisfaction. It was further demonstrated that collective political participation activities have stronger effects on life satisfaction than individual activities. However, this effect is no longer significant when the control for frequency of social contacts is added to the models. Even though it was suggested that social contacts and the deepening of social networks might be the causal mechanism that account for this relationship, these results are not enough to be completely sure. The fact that this study is based on cross-sectional data and, therefore, describing associations between the variables of interest at a fixed point in time, leaves open the question of how these relationships develop through time. To further study the validity of these findings, the discussed hypotheses should be tested

using longitudinal data and tease out the exact causal mechanisms that explain the association between political participation and life satisfaction. Future research should then focus on more concrete examinations of the causal relationships between individual political participation and life satisfaction as well as explicitly study the role that social contacts have. A valid study that could serve as an example at the starting point of such an enterprise would be the article of Lim and Putnam (2010) where the association between religiosity and life satisfaction is found to be contingent to strong social networks in the congregations and not directly attributed to religiosity. A somewhat similar phenomenon can help to explain the causal link between political participation and life satisfaction.

Another limitation that should be mentioned is related with both the RL and VA indicators as part of the WGI of the World Bank. There are some questions being raised regarding the construct validity of these indicators (Thomas, 2010). It is important to recognize that any kind of governance indicator is a hypothesis about the measurement and the nature of governance in question. Therefore, the conclusions are only valid under the assumption that both RL and VA are valid measures of respectively “rule of law” and “voice and accountability”. This has not been completely established (Thomas, 2010) and in addition these aggregate measures correlate very highly and can, therefore, explained the same phenomena. Given all this, it is reasonable to consider that openness of the political system can also be explained by other variables not included in the analysis.

However, the findings reported here do have important implications. First, it shows the importance of distinguishing the different modes of political participation because they affect life satisfaction differently. This is particularly visible in the present analysis when comparing individual and collective participation activities. After controlling for frequency of social contacts, it can be seen that individual activities have a negative effect on life satisfaction. This result might be related to, as Bäck, Teorell and Westholm (2011) argued, to the different motivations behind this kind of political activities, more connected to the perceived benefits. Second, this study also shows the importance of context and its effects both on political participation and life satisfaction. In conclusion, the present study shows that the setting where citizens participate in politics has an effect on life satisfaction. In particular, more open political systems are more prone to allow citizens to thrive whether they take part in political participation or not. To conclude, the institutional context does play an important role in the relationship between political participation and life satisfaction which should not be disregarded.

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6. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this dissertation was to study the relationship between political participation and wellbeing. More concretely, it set out to study the causal effects between the experience of engaging in political participation activities and life satisfaction, taking in consideration how this relationship develops over time and how political efficacy affects it. This study has also sought to understand how this relationship is conditioned by the political context and type of political participation. The question of direction of causality between political participation and life satisfaction divides the general literature and the related empirical analysis in two main theoretical arguments. The first consists of the model of causality running from political participation to life satisfaction. That is, taking part in political participation activities leads to greater satisfaction with one's life. The second prominent direction of research considers that this relationship actually runs in the opposite direction of causality. This means that being more satisfied with life leads to increased political participation.

Taken as a whole, research on this topic is scarce and the existing empirical evidence is mixed, presenting contradictory results and rather inconclusive. This is, nevertheless surprising as it is an important topic with important implications both for political science and social indicators research. Research on this issue contributes to the knowledge about the individual factors that impact wellbeing and to the general understanding of the

consequences of engaging in political participation activities. The results of this dissertation are relevant because they contribute to both these areas. In the first paper, presented as chapter 2, it is explicitly acknowledge the possible bidirectional relationship between political participation and life satisfaction discussed in the literature. Therefore, this paper resorts to panel data from Germany to develop a causal model that predicts causal effects in both directions. Moreover, the literature review pointed out that some possible intervening variables in the link between wellbeing and participation should be included. One is included, political efficacy, in the second paper, chapter 3, resorting to panel data originated in the Netherlands. In chapter 4 a more advanced model is used, allowing for unobserved stable effects. In order to deal with this potential caveat and to provide a stricter test of causality, the same Dutch data is analyzed, this time developing models that accounted for unobserved latent variables. Finally, in the fifth chapter, cross-sectional data is used to explore differences in the effect of political participation on life satisfaction at the national level in the European context. Here the results showed how political openness conditions the relationship between political participation and life satisfaction. Except for chapter 5, all the presented results are corrected for measurement error.

Throughout this dissertation, the relationship between political participation and wellbeing was introduced within the distinct theoretical arguments discussed in the literature. Besides the theoretical argumentation, it is also considered how differences in

the type of data and research design might have played a role in the empirical inconsistencies found in the literature. This approach has been rigorously followed in the course of the present dissertation with these four papers at its core. Each research piece can, nevertheless, be taken as part of a common research goal: the study of the relationship between political participation and life satisfaction. Before reflecting about the shortcomings of this dissertation and future lines of research, a summary of the main contributions of each paper is presented in the following sections.

6.1 Accounting for time

In Chapter 2 a familiar problem in life satisfaction research is introduced: two-way causation. This means that instead of thinking of the main variables as only a cause or a consequence, it explicitly includes the possibility that either life satisfaction or political participation can actually be both. But beyond the question of direction of causality, the inclusion of time in the analysis also led us to consider another significant aspect of the relationship between political participation and life satisfaction. The argument is about the causal lag that should be expected. The literature offers no tenable clues about how long it takes for participation to affect life satisfaction and vice-versa. Therefore, model is put together to explicitly include two different causal lags. One possibility was that these effects occur continuously and over time, modeled through a cross-lagged causal model; and the other possibility was that the effect is synchronous and occurs in a smaller time lag than the distance of one year between the waves of measurement.

No evidence of two way causation between political participation and life satisfaction was found. Furthermore, in fact no consistent evidence of causal effects between these two variables was found in neither of the two causal lags tested. Indeed, what was found was the pronounced stability that both political participation and life satisfaction seem to hold. The validity of these findings was increased by the fact that two different lag specifications were included in the research design, and procedures are followed to correct for measurement error.

6.2 The role of political efficacy

One of the main arguments of participatory democracy scholars is that engaging in political participation activities drives individuals through a self-development process, which has positive effects on satisfaction. According to the theory, this process is characterized by the learning of new skills and extended knowledge, which should be reflected in the sense of being capable to act effectively in the political realm. This argument was tested by hypothesizing that self-development can be represented by internal political efficacy and therefore it should have a positive effect on life satisfaction and political participation. Moreover as it was found that it is not actual political participation but also the perception of being given the opportunity to participate (Frey & Stutzer, 2006), external political efficacy is also included.

Therefore, Chapter 3 develops a causal model of the possible effects between political participation and life satisfaction, but explicitly accounts for two potential intervening variables: internal and external efficacy. However, again using panel data and correcting for measurement error, no significant effects of political participation on life satisfaction were found. The same holds for the other causal direction, no effects from life satisfaction to participation. On the other hand, as previous research has pointed out, the results indicated that political efficacy does impact political participation.

6.3 An alternative model

The third paper, Chapter 4, presents some significant differences in relation to the other papers of the dissertation. The first is the measures of participation, which in this article are membership and volunteering in associations. The second is the method of analysis, which is specifically orientated to address the unobserved variables which might cause biased estimates. It starts by demonstrating that there is indeed correlation between political participation and wellbeing in the LISS panel data, as there is a significant association between membership and volunteering with life satisfaction. However, this only happens when the data is treated as cross-sectional because when all the potential of panel data, these effects no longer hold. More concretely, a SEM variation of the models commonly referred to in the literature as fixed and random effects is employed in order to determine if political participation and life satisfaction were causally related. The argument is that this

procedure presents significant advantages that can also be applied in other substantial research topics. Furthermore, it allowed correcting for measurement error, a factor known to be ubiquitous in survey research. The results showed no proof of a causal relationship between being a member or a volunteer in an association and wellbeing in any causal direction.

6.4 The importance of context and differentiating participation activities

Finally, the last paper of this dissertation is centered on the model of causality predicting that political participation affects life satisfaction. However, it was further contended that contextual influences at country level should be taken into account. The central idea of this article was that the degree of openness of the political system plays a moderating role in the relationship between political participation and life satisfaction. It was argued that more open political systems are not only conducive of political participation but the interaction between openness and participation has a positive effect on life satisfaction. The importance of context has been demonstrated by showing that the openness of the political system is not only directly associated with life satisfaction but that it also moderates the association between political participation and wellbeing. When low values of democratic openness are present, political participation has a negative effect on life satisfaction. On the other hand, with high levels of openness of the political system it was shown that political participation positively affects life satisfaction.

Furthermore, it was also discussed the need for a distinction between different forms of participation, namely between collective and individual forms of engagement. The expectation was that the added opportunities that collective political participation activities offer to interact with other individuals represented another possible link to life satisfaction. Indeed, it has been shown that the effects of political participation on life satisfaction in the European context are contingent to the participation mode. Collective political participation activities do have a significant effect on life satisfaction, while individual political participation and the index combining both modes of participation have no significant effects on wellbeing. However, it was also seen that once frequency of social contacts is added to the model, this effect is no longer significant.

To conclude, this paper presents evidence of an effect of political participation on life satisfaction contingent to the type of participation act, conditioned at the higher level by the openness of the political system.

6.5 What we have learned and where to go from here: limitations and future directions of research

Overall, after performing several strict empirical tests of the proposed causal effects, the findings offer very little support for the argument that political participation affects life satisfaction, and the same is true for the idea that life satisfaction has an effect on

political participation. Although each of the used empirical methods has its limitations, the consistent result across all of them increases the confidence in the findings: while there is correlation between political participation and life satisfaction, there is no evidence of a causal relationship in either direction of causality at the individual level in both Germany and the Netherlands. This conclusion does not coincide with the results of Winters and Rundlett (2014) where, using panel data from the UK, the authors found a positive effect of participating in associations on life satisfaction. However, the main conclusion here agrees with other causal work mainly dedicated to the relationship between electoral participation and life satisfaction, where also no causal effects were found (Weitz-Shapiro & Winters, 2011; Dolan et al. 2008).

On the other hand, the finding that political openness does impact wellbeing and conditions the effect of political participation on life satisfaction does reflect the general pattern discussed in the literature stating that living in countries that are well-governed or democratic or where political freedoms are widespread, contributes to higher levels of life satisfaction (Haller & Hadler 2006, Helliwell & Huang 2008, Veenhoven 1995; Diener et al., 1995; Diener & Suh, 1997; Inglehart & Klingemann, 2000; Inglehart, 1990, 2006; Tavits 2008). However, unlike most of these previous studies, which focus on the aggregate level, the findings indicate that the relationship between political participation and life satisfaction at the individual level is conditioned by the openness of the political system. This raises a contradiction in the results that should be

discussed. How can it be explain that it was not possible to identify any effect at the individual level of political participation on wellbeing in the German and Dutch cases, even though they seem ideal candidates to fill the political openness condition? One possible explanation can be related with a conditional relationship that generates opposing sign effects between political participation and life satisfaction, thereby cancelling any effect of political participation on wellbeing. An example of such a condition can be external efficacy. Individuals that perceive the political system as highly responsive might have their political participation positively affecting their levels of satisfaction while, on the other hand, individuals that have the perception that the political system is not responsive to their demands might see their efforts of participating negatively affecting their wellbeing. In this case, the positive effect versus the negative would result in the cancelling of a possible relationship of political participation on life satisfaction. In this dissertation the focus was not at within country differences, where an explanation of the exposed contradiction might lie. However, the finding of no causal effects between political participation and wellbeing may not be always the case for the whole of the population of a given country. On the contrary, a viable direction of future research is to study the relationship between political participation and life satisfaction comparing different groups of the population. For example, in a recent article, Lorenzini (2014) uncovered a positive relationship between life satisfaction and political participation for young long term unemployed people in Switzerland. Another possibility can be comparing people who do

not participate with those that are frequently engaged in political participation activities, sometimes also called “activists”, because it is possible that this specific group might assign more importance for their general satisfaction with life to political participation. These examples are only two possibilities but future research should focus on identifying further differences between individuals within countries and revisit the relationship of political participation and life satisfaction specifically for those groups.

During the development of this work, one of the first challenges that emerged was related with data. Even though several surveys investigate political behavior as well as wellbeing, actually very few include both. This is even more problematic when it comes to longitudinal surveys, which are less frequent and therefore less likely to contain relevant data for the present research purposes. This shortage of available longitudinal data determined the impossibility to include more cases in the analysis or more political participation forms. It would have been an interesting exercise to be able to compare other countries with specific political participation profiles with the ones included in this dissertation. For example, it would have been appealing to include a case such as the United States, not only because Flavin and Keane (2012) find there a positive relationship between life satisfaction and political participation, but also because of the different patterns of political participation in this country. Furthermore, it would have also been of interest to study specific periods of time, in particular election campaigns, because during these events citizens become more

interested in politics, more engaged and more concern about what is at stake. But given that the case studies are limited to Germany and the Netherlands, it should be question whether these results are generalizable beyond these countries. If, on the one side, except for chapter 5 where the importance of context is considered, the hypotheses proposed in the remaining chapters are independent of the specific circumstances of a given country; on the other side, the similarity of the case studies, in the sense that they are both stable developed democracies with a high degree of openness of the political system and high levels of social capital, advices to be cautious. Therefore, this remains an open question that only future research can make clear, particularly by focusing on countries with less stable institutions and different participation patterns.

Another alternative that should be discussed is related with the exclusion in this dissertation of the impact on the content of government or policies of the political participation act. In other words, the individuals engaged in participation activities are likely to hope that their participatory efforts can drive them somewhat closer to their demands. Even though it was repeatedly argued that, beyond the outcomes, there are reasons to expect a relationship between political participation and life satisfaction, the fact that the “success” of the participation act was not controlled for should still be thought of as a limitation of the present research. The relationship between political participation and life satisfaction can be contingent to the actual outcome of the participation act, meaning that it is reasonable to expect a positive effect if the

participation act is successful, while a negative effect would be expected in case it is not. This should also be approached in the studies to come about this topic.

Finally, although most processes in the Social and Behavioral Sciences develop in continuous time, the modeling of these processes is almost always done in discrete time. This means that we assume that the relationship between political participation and wellbeing occurs in discrete time points, due to the discrete-time nature of panel data measurements, even if this is very likely not the case. One more viable direction of future research is to model the influence of political participation on wellbeing and vice-versa as occurring more or less continuously through time, independently of data collection time points. It was shown that failing to properly account for the continuous time intervals between measurements might lead to “paradoxical and contradictory conclusions” (Voelkle & Oud, 2013). A better way to address this dynamics is to model this relationship with continuous time models that take into account the more realist assumption of variation across time points.

Taken together, the four papers presented have sought to better specify the relationship between political participation and life satisfaction. The fact that little proof of a causal relationship between political participation and life satisfaction is found should not lead us to the thought that political participation is unimportant for satisfaction and that satisfaction with life is of no importance for participation in the political processes. Instead, it should lead us to

think about this relationship in a different way. The literature has shown that societies and individuals benefit in a variety of ways from openness to political participation as well as from providing and being provided with the necessary conditions to thrive. In this sense, there is at least one policy implication coming out of this study which provides warning against considering political participation as direct and simple answer to low levels of satisfaction with life; just as much as to consider that satisfaction by itself will influence levels of political participation.

As it is usually the case in a new research topic, many questions still remain unanswered. But from my perspective, what is certain is that this dissertation offers a variety of empirical analysis not applied to this topic before and makes several efforts to identify possible links between political participation and life satisfaction. In this sense, this thesis has been a first attempt to fill the research gap regarding this specific literature, which still has a long way to go, with the hope that the work present here proves to be fertile ground for further research.

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