

Wearing rose-coloured glasses

The long-term happiness effect of government support in Europe

Authors: Veronika PATKÓS PhD & Eszter FARKAS

Recent works on partisan motivated reasoning show that people's evaluation is strongly dependent upon which party is involved and what is the individual's position to that party. These results suggest that even if the links between voters and parties have changed in the last decades, partisan attachments are still important parts of people's identities. Our paper intends to contribute to this line of literature, investigating whether this partisan approach in opinion formation crosses the boundaries of politics, entering in the sphere of personal subjective well-being. We argue that if government supporters have systematically more optimistic overall expectations, perceptions and evaluations about what is going on and what will be going on in their countries, while opposition voters are more pessimistic in this regard, these feelings and evaluations may enter directly in the happiness function of people, resulting in higher and lower personal happiness scores respectively. Therefore, our hypothesis is that being an incumbent voter contributes to higher levels of happiness. Relying on European Social Survey data, we analyse a sample of 30 European democracies between 2002 and 2014, including 138 country-cases and more than 260 000 observations. As far as we know, this paper is the first attempt to investigate the long-term happiness impact of being a government voter on a large cross-national sample. Controlling for a range of individual-level predictors of happiness earlier tested in the literature our regression models show a moderate but robust positive effect for being a government supporter. The paper contributes to the literature on happiness in two ways. First, it tests and confirms the effect of the most widely used individual-level predictors of happiness (such as age, gender, education, health, religiousness, income, unemployment, marital status, being socially active, and trusting other people) on a large cross-national sample of European countries. Second, it shows that politics do enter in the happiness function of people and political macro events do affect voter's happiness levels on a long run. Lastly, the results contribute also to our understanding about the role of partisan attachments in how we perceive and process information.