JOINT RESEARCH PROJECT: Democracy in crisis? An analysis of various dimensions and sources of support for democracy

PAPER 07: **Subjective Well-Being and Quality of Government: Why Happy Citizens Are Good for Democracy**

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Abstract: We propose that citizens hold state authorities responsible for their subjective well-being: When things go well, citizens reward authorities with support. When life conditions fall below the expected level, citizens punish authorities by withholding support. As a consequence, peoples' well-being collectively affects the long-term conditions for high quality government by building or dismantling voluntary compliant behavior. Three types of empirical evidence support the argument: First, cross-sectional data from European Value Survey 2008 shows that life satisfaction predicts political support attitudes controlling for individual-level and country-level factors. Second, data from the Swiss Household Panel documents that political support attitudes are undermined by the termination of a close personal relationship. Third, data from an original panel of Swedish vacation travelers shows that support attitudes are undermined by the trivial experience of a failed vacation in the sun.

A growing literature demonstrates a close association between the quality of government and peoples' subjective well-being (e.g. Helliwell and Huang 2008; Ott 2010; Rode, Knoll and Pitlik 2013). Individuals who live in countries in which the government delivers high-quality services (worldwide), and in which electoral processes fulfil high-standards (in advanced industrialized democracies), report substantially higher levels of life-satisfaction than individuals who live in countries in which the government function less well also when economic development and individual-level factors are controlled for (Helliwell et al. 2014 reviews the literature).

A common assumption in this literature is that the quality of government (QoG) determines individuals' subjective well-being (SWB).[1] However, while it is plausible that well-functioning democratic institutions facilitate the conditions of life for citizens, it is also reasonable to believe that citizens are agents who at least partly shape their own destiny and, hence, that the causal relationship runs in both directions. To begin investigate more complex causal flows, this paper tests empirical support for a reversed causal order in which peoples' subjective well-being affect the conditions for high quality government. We already know that high quality democracy can make citizens happy, but is it also the case that happy citizens are good for democracy?

The theoretical foundation for reversing the causal order between SWB and QoG is provided by the literatures on attitudinal political support and legitimacy (Easton 1975:451; Powell 1982: 8-10; Levi 1997; Gilley 2006:500; Tyler 2006a). According to these lines of research,

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[1] In happiness research, SWB is the umbrella concept which is measured by cognitive life-evaluations and/or emotional reports (Helliwell, Layard and Sachs 2012). We follow the most common practice and rely on life evaluations for measurement (self-reported satisfaction with life).

attitudinal political support motivates people to voluntary comply with government decisions, which leads to better functioning government institutions as citizens are willing to follow laws, accept regulations, and pay their taxes. Granted that attitudinal support is conducive for the quality of government institutions, our goal here is to identify the individual level link between subjective well-being and political support attitudes.

The causal mechanism we propose is that citizens operate as if they are in a contractual relationship with state authorities. According to the implicit contract, individuals hold the state responsible for their well-being. When things go well citizens reward authorities with support. When things go wrong – when life conditions fall below the expected level – citizens punish authorities by withholding support.

The implicit contract model is similar to performance based models in political support research (van Ham and Thomassen 2015 reviews the literature), but differs in two respects. First, where performance models focuses on economic factors (e.g. Dalton 2004; Kotzian 2011; Bartels and Bermeo 2014), and the quality of welfare state institutions (Kumlin 2004; Rothstein 2009; Peffley and Rohrschneider 2014), the implicit contract model considers all types of conditions, experiences, and events that affects individuals' well-being, also personal ones. Second, performance models theorize a direct effect from performance evaluations to political support attitudes, whereas the contract model posits that performance evaluations impact support attitudes indirectly through individuals' satisfaction with life.

The argument that citizens' well-being mediates between personal experiences and political judgments has been made by Healy, Malhotra and Mo (2010) in the context of blind retrospective voting. We build on their research, but our implicit contract model differs from their model in some respects: the outcome of interest is general attitudinal support rather than voting for or against incumbents; subjective well-being mediates a wide array of experiences that people make, and not only non-political events; and peoples' emotions influence political judgment through a more conscious process than when incumbents are rewarded or punished according to the outcome of sporting events (which is their example). Furthermore, whereas Healy, Malhotra and Mo (2010) theorize that subjective well-being mediates between experiences and political support attitudes, our data allows us to model the mediation.

We evaluate support for the implicit contract model using two types of data. To investigate whether subjective well-being predicts political support attitudes at a given point in time controlling for individual-level and country-level factors, we use cross-sectional data from European Value Survey 2008. Employing multi-level modelling techniques, we find the expected relationship across a range of European countries.

Addressing then the question of causality, we use panel data to see whether political support attitudes changes when people make personal experiences that will impact negatively upon their well-being and that are exogenous to politics. Specifically, we study how political support attitudes are affected by the termination of a close personal relationship, and by a trivial experience like a failed holiday trip to the sun. In support of the implicit contract model, results from both panel studies show that political support attitudes are undermined by negative life events, and that the effect is (partly) mediated by changes in life satisfaction.

In what follows we first develop our general theoretical framework and the rationale for the implicit contract model. Thereafter we turn to the logic of respective empirical study and the resulting findings. A final section concludes.

General Theoretical Propositions

Citizens' subjective well-being is causally linked to the overall quality of government institutions through the following causal pathway: (i) government institutions work better when citizens' are intrinsically motivated to pay their taxes, and to comply with laws and regulations; (ii) citizens' intrinsic motivation to pay their taxes and to comply with laws and regulations is a function of their attitudinal support of state authorities; and (iii) attitudinal support of state authorities is a function of citizens' subjective well-being. Causal paths (i) and (ii) are well-anchored in research on state legitimacy (e.g. Levi 1997), psychological legitimacy (Tyler 2006a reviews the literature), and political support theory (e.g. Easton 1975; Dalton 2004). Our research contributes by linking citizens' subjective well-being to attitudinal political support (causal path iii).

The Implicit Contract Model

Empirical investigations of citizens' relation to the state commonly assume a contractual relationship (Rubin 2012 reviews the literature).[2] The notion of an implicit contract is a conceptual tool that links individuals and their beliefs to the social structures in which they are situated. When defining the concept, organizational psychologists refer to "sets of individual beliefs regarding reciprocal obligations" (Rousseau 1989), and sociologists to "systematic patterns of shared, normative understandings that shape individuals' behavior across institutions" (Rubin 2012). Following common practice, we use the implicit contract concept heuristically.

Precisely, we propose that citizens hold state authorities responsible for their personal well-being so that individuals' current level of well-being affects their attitudinal political support. According to the implicit contract, the state earns it support by delivering life conditions that meet citizens' expectations. Correspondingly, deterioration of living conditions in excess of the expected is seen as a breach of contract to which reduced support is an appropriate response.

Emphasizing the heuristic character of the concept, individuals need not be fully cognizant about the contractual situation. The model also works when citizens have vague beliefs about the state's responsibility for their subjective well-being. For instance, when experiencing deteriorating life conditions people may affectively blame "those in power" and reciprocate by feeling less obliged to comply with the dictates of anonymous state authorities (Lodge and Taber 2013:149-51). A complementary mechanism is that life satisfaction affects political support through beliefs about other peoples' willingness to cooperate by paying taxes and complying with laws and regulations (Faillo, Ottone and Sacconi 2015).

Importantly, an individual's response to non-fulfilment (or fulfilment) of expectations may be proportional to the violation, but it may also be disproportional (Mayer and Sanklecha 2014). In fact, a large psychological literature on attribution errors and other cognitive biases in human information processing (effectively catalogued by Kahneman 2011) suggests that individuals' interpretation of the terms of the contract will be less than completely rational.

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[2] For an example in relation to tax compliance, see Riahi-Belkaoui (2004).

Although individuals may have radically different expectations about living conditions, it is clear from happiness research that people in general value a well-functioning everyday-life that ensures them a reasonable income, good personal health, and strong social relations (e.g. Helliwell, Layard and Sachs 2015). Accordingly, we expect variations in such factors to affect attitudinal political support through their impact on individuals' well-being. In addition, happiness research documents that individuals' well-being is affected by distinctly private conditions and experiences. An example in kind is marital status, with married people making the most positive evaluations of their lives (Grower and Helliwel 2014), which in the implicit contract model transfers to higher levels of political support.

While the factors affecting the fundamental aspects of life are most consequential for the link between well-being and support, they are also closely intertwined with the quality of governmental institutions (Holmberg, Rothstein and Nasiritousi 2009). Consider the importance for well-being of job providing policies, and of the functioning of fundamental state institutions like schools, hospitals, social insurance agencies, and the police (Kumlin 2004; Metler and Soss 2004; Rothstein 2009; Tyler 2006b). Since the performance of state authorities impact the conditions of life for citizens, it is difficult to establish that citizens' subjective well-being independently affects how the very same state authorities function.

To solve the identification problem we follow the example of Healy, Malhotra and Mo (2010) and focus on non-political personal experiences that (temporarily) affect individuals' well-being. If political support attitudes are affected by such experiences, and if the effect is mediated through assessments of life satisfaction, this will indicate that citizens well-being do contribute independently to the conditions for high-quality government.

From the reasoning above, we derive the following empirical hypotheses:
H1: At a given time, individuals' subjective well-being predicts political support attitudes controlling for contextual and individual level factors.
H2: Individuals who make personal experiences that impact upon their subjective well-being and that are exogenous to politics will react by adjusting their support for state authorities.
H3: Experiences and support attitudes are linked by changes in subjective well-being.

Measurements of Attitudinal Political Support

The implicit contract model assumes that political support measures are indicative of voluntary behavioral compliance with state dictates. To achieve this, we rely on attitudes towards illegal behaviors such as tax evasion, claiming social benefits on false grounds, and dodging fares on public transports. The underlying idea of the measure, which has been developed in connection to the World Value Survey and the European Social Survey, is that an individuals' attitude towards social and legal norms will predict behavior towards these norms (Marien and Hooghe 2011).

In addition to law abiding attitudes, we will employ measures of individuals' satisfaction with the way democracy works in his/her country (SWD). The SWD-indicator is critiqued for lacking a clear reference object (Canache, Mondak and Seligson, 2001; Linde and Ekman 2003), but is frequently used by political support scholars. For our purposes it is essential that it correlates closely with a behavioral compliance index at the country level controlling for economic and societal development (Esaiasson and Ottervik 2014).[3]

Study 1: Does SWB Predict Political Support?

Our initial study tests the overall proposition that variations in individuals' subjective well-being predict variations in political support attitudes (H1). Since we examine the relationship at one point in time we expect to observe a robust correlation across national contexts and controlling for confounding individual level factors. In this and subsequent analyses, we focus on the main effect of subjective well-being, leaving theoretically interesting interactions aside.

We use data from the 2008 European Value Survey with representative samples of more than 55,000 citizens from 47 European countries (EVS 2011). This high-quality data set contains a rich set of relevant variables. We study the European context because countries share basic cultural values, and still differ considerably with regard to the quality of governmental institutions (Northern Europe and parts of the former Soviet Union represents the extreme values). With this country sample, a robust main effect implies that the contractual relationship between citizens and state authorities holds whether or not the state is capable of making a difference in peoples' everyday life.

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[3] The zero-order correlation between SWD and the behavioral compliance index is even higher than the corresponding correlation for law abiding attitudes, both among OECD-countries and in a world-wide sample of countries (Esaiasson and Ottervik 2014).

As we focus attention on the individual relationship between life satisfaction and political support attitudes, we use a fixed effects approach to control for country level variation in support attitudes. Thus, the remaining variation in our models can be ascribed to the within-country differences between individuals.

At the individual level we control for three social characteristics of known importance for subjective well-being and political support: age; education; and gender.[4] We also control for several attitudinal variables: trust in specific democratic institutions (political trust); generalized trust; subjective political interest; intention to vote; and religious beliefs.[5] These are strong controls – perhaps even too strong – as political trust, intention to vote and also generalized trust are potentially influenced by subjective well-being.

Technically, we run fixed effects multilevel linear models using the fe option in Stata 13's xreg command. We have also run OLS models with country dummies, which yield similar results.

Table 1 reports a robust positive effect of life satisfaction on four law abiding attitudes and a summary index: People who are satisfied with their life are less willing to accept cheating with social benefits, tax evasion, free riding on public transports, and bribe taking (model 1-5). Personally satisfied individuals are also less dissatisfied with the way democracy works in their country (model 6). Overall, results strongly support H1.

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[4] It makes no substantial difference if age is modelled in a non-linear form.
[5] Question wordings for these and all subsequent analyses are reported in the Appendix.

Table 1. Life satisfaction and attitudinal political support (multi-level linear models)

Variables	Model 1 Falsely claim state Benefits	Model 2 Law-Abiding Attitudes Tax Evasion	Model 3 Accept bribes	Model 4 Dodging Fares	Model 5 Summary Index	Model 6 SWD Not satisfied
Satisfaction with life	-0.037*** (-9.91)	-0.040*** (-10.08)	-0.032*** (-10.55)	-0.038*** (-9.00)	-0.036*** (-13.51)	-0.031*** (-22.36)
Generalized trust	0.008 (0.43)	-0.027 (-1.31)	0.005 (0.29)	-0.114*** (-5.24)	-0.031* (-2.24)	0.061*** (8.89)
Importance of God	-0.026*** (-8.48)	-0.043*** (-13.47)	-0.029*** (-11.91)	-0.062*** (-18.35)	-0.040*** (-18.45)	-0.008*** (-7.51)
Woman	-0.064*** (-3.88)	-0.269*** (-15.40)	-0.146*** (-10.92)	-0.161*** (-8.63)	-0.158*** (-13.25)	0.027*** (4.53)
Primary education	-0.058 (-1.08)	-0.045 (-0.80)	0.012 (0.27)	-0.057 (-0.95)	-0.039 (-1.01)	-0.002 (-0.09)
Lower secondary education	-0.107* (-1.99)	-0.075 (-1.32)	-0.036 (-0.84)	-0.113 (-1.88)	-0.084* (-2.18)	0.056** (2.88)
Upper secondary education	-0.169** (-3.23)	-0.079 (-1.44)	-0.054 (-1.29)	-0.066 (-1.12)	-0.095* (-2.53)	0.028 (1.48)
Post secondary education	-0.183** (-2.94)	-0.028 (-0.43)	-0.016 (-0.31)	-0.008 (-0.12)	-0.066 (-1.47)	0.026 (1.16)
First stage tertiary	-0.302*** (-5.63)	-0.117* (-2.07)	-0.103* (-2.39)	0.0130 (0.22)	-0.131*** (-3.41)	0.024 (1.24)
Second stage tertiary	-0.388*** (-3.50)	-0.109 (-0.93)	-0.148 (-1.66)	0.004 (0.03)	-0.164* (-2.05)	-0.018 (-0.47)
Trust in politics (index)	-0.003 (-0.28)	0.147*** (11.44)	-0.004 (-0.43)	0.105*** (7.66)	0.062*** (7.07)	0.445*** (102.49)
Age	-0.015*** (-29.53)	-0.016*** (-28.58)	-0.012*** (-27.84)	-0.026*** (-44.48)	-0.017*** (-45.81)	0.002*** (8.37)
No vote intention	0.225*** (10.59)	0.222*** (9.91)	0.124*** (7.26)	0.173*** (7.25)	0.186*** (12.15)	0.096*** (12.56)
Constant	3.361*** -0.0373***	3.397*** -0.0399***	2.832*** -0.0319***	4.402*** -0.0380***	3.498*** -0.0365***	1.238*** -0.0298***
Model information						
Country fixed effects	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Countries	47	47	47	47	47	47
Individuals	55,248	55,417	55,638	55,517	56,010	53,759

t statistics in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$
Source: European Value Survey 2008

Study 2: Does A Personal Life Event Affect Political Support?

Turning to questions of causality, we examine whether political support changes when people make a personal experience that impacts their well-being and that is unrelated to public affairs (H2). While effects of single experiences are small and, likely, temporary, their realization is theoretically important for the validity of the implicit contract model.

The political support literature has not recognized the relevance of non-political personal experiences, presumably because the link is seen as improbable. In our initial study we therefore focus experiences that are similar to the ones recognized in the political support literature. As a general guideline, the strong evidence for a negativity bias in peoples' political judgment (Soroka 2014: 2-19) motivated us to search for experiences that are negative rather than positive.

Research on the political consequences of life events has documented that divorced or widowed individuals are "forced to make substantial adjustments in their personal lives" (Kern 2010). However, many of the forced adjustments are made in the economic domain, and happiness research finds that divorce has unclear effects on individuals' more general well-being. In fact, there is evidence that women are more satisfied with their life after the breakup than before (Clark and Georgellis 2013). Although the divorce-experience in itself is less useful for our purpose, life event research and happiness research agree that personal relations are important for individuals' life conditions. Drawing on this, we set out to estimate the support undermining consequences of experiencing the breakup of, not a formal marriage, but of a close personal relationship.

The Swiss Household Panel (SHP) provides relevant data. In SHP a randomly selected sample of Swiss household members are interviewed once a year, mainly by telephone. The data collection started in 1999 (5,074 households containing 12,931 household members), and supplementary samples were drawn in 2004 (2,538 households with a total of 6,569 household members), and 2013 (4,093 households and 9,945 household members).[6]

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[6] For detailed study-information and access to data, visit http://forscenter.ch/en/our-surveys/swiss-household-panel.

Wave 2 to 15 of SHP probed respondents about the following: Since [month and year defining a period of six months prior to the interview], has a close and important relationship ended – by break-up, separation or divorce?" (a straightforward yes or no was the requested response). Since wave 1-11 and wave 13 asks about SWD, we are positioned to estimate the impact of ending a close relationship on an individual's political support (H2). Moreover, wave 2 to 14 included a measure of life satisfaction, which allows us to test that the termination-effect is mediated through individuals' subjective well-being (H3).

The complete panel data-set contains 23,561 unique respondents. Almost one in ten respondents (7.5 percent) has experienced a termination of a close relationship, which corresponds to 1,767 terminations. Furthermore, several respondents have experienced two or more terminations. When combining individual respondents and panel waves (i*t), we record 97,618 N-observations and 7,306 terminations.

In table 2 we are conducting three tests of the impact of termination of close relationships on political support. We employ three different estimation techniques: panel corrected standard errors, random effects, and a simple pooled OLS as a benchmark. All models include the lagged version of the dependent variable (satisfaction with the way democracy works). By this approach we control for "everything else" that is affecting the dependent variable until t-1. Hence we are using the lagged dependent variable as a proxy for omitted independent variables, which means that the coefficients should be interpreted accordingly (Finkel 1995). In order to obtain reliable estimates of the R^2 measures we are modelling change in the dependent variable rather than absolute levels, which is the standard practice in cross-sectional analyses (e.g. Allison 1990).

First and most importantly, we find a negative impact of termination of a personal relationship on political support from all equations (-.118*** in the PCSE and the pooled OLS, and -.100*** in the random effect model). The random effect model and the benchmark pooled OLS-model are quite similar in their estimates due to the rather high within-unit effects.[7]

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[7] An even harsher test than ours is to run a fixed effect model with a lagged dependent variable which allows each respondent to have their own unique intercept (Allison 2009; Clark and Linzer 2014). However, fixed effect models with a lagged dependent variable will provide biased estimates when used with short panels. A standard recommendation is to have a T>15 (Lindgren, 2006). The data in this particular case is quite unbalanced and the number of waves varies from 1 to 10, with an average of 4.7. If we violate assumptions and run a fixed effect model, the termination coefficient decreases

Table 2. A panel based estimation of the impact of terminations of relationships on satisfaction with democracy (fixed effects, random effect and pooled OLS).

	Model 7 Δ SWD PCSE	Model 8 Δ SWD RE	Model 9 Δ SWD Pooled OLS
Termination of Personal Relationship	-0.118***	-0.100***	-0.118***
	(0.027)	(0.026)	(0.027)
SWD (t-1)	-0.434***	-0.648***	-0.434***
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Intercept (grand mean)	2.658***	3.937***	2.658***
	(0.022)	(0.026)	(0.022)
R^2-within	-	.545	-
R^2-between	-	.113	-
R^2-overall	.224	.224	.224
Std.dev of unit effects	-	.636	-
Std.dev of random error	-	1.247	-
Rho	-	.206	-
Observations	52 799	52 799	52 799
Groups	11 344	11 344	-
Waves (avg)	4.7	4.7	-

* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001. Panel participation varies from a minimum of two waves to a maximum of ten.

Given that political support (SWD) is measured on an eleven point scale, the size of the termination coefficient (ranging from -.100 to -.118) is modest. However, since we are studying the consequence that follows from a single non-political experience the crucial finding is that the effect is statistically significant and robust across estimation methods. Thus, in accordance with H2, having experienced a termination of a close relationship during the past six month impacts negatively on individual's willingness to comply with state dictates under control for everything else affecting system support up until t-1.

Mediation

To test for the expected mediation effect (H3), we run two random effect regressions looking for evidence that a) the termination variable predicts changes in satisfaction with life, and b) that the termination effect on political support variables reduces completely or partially when

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from -.100*** (the random model) to -.047*, which is what we would expect with so few time-points. If we use multiple imputation to increase the number of time-points to 14 (one is lost due to the lagged dependent variable), the fixed effect model gives roughly the same results as the random and pooled OLS models (-.102***) (model differences are not significant in a Hausman test).

satisfaction with life is included in the model. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first empirical examination of the mediation effect.

Table 3 shows the expected results. Model 10 reports a statistically significant and substantially strong effect of termination of personal relationship on change in life satisfaction controlling for life satisfaction at t-1. And when we introduce change in life satisfaction in Model 12, the termination effect on support is half its original size and no longer statistically significant at the .05-level (compare Model 11 and 12). Hence, confirming H3, the termination effect on support appears to be mediated by life satisfaction.

Table 3 A Mediation analysis of the effects of termination of a personal relationship on Satisfaction with democracy through Life Satisfaction

	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
	Δ Life satisfaction	Δ SWD	Δ SWD
	RE	RE	RE
Termination	-.253***	-0.100***	-0.053
	(.016)	(0.026)	(0.028)
SWD (t-1)	-	-0.648***	-0.643***
		(0.004)	(0.004)
Life satisfaction	-		0.132***
			(0.006)
Life satisfaction (t-1)	-.929***		0.013***
	(.002)		(0.003)
Intercept (grand mean)	7.486***	3.937***	2.734***
	(.019)	(0.026)	(0.052)
R^2-within	.753	.545	.542
R^2-between	.481	.113	.101
R^2-overall	.545	.224	.221
Std.dev of unit effects	.843	.636	.624
Std.dev of random error	.966	1.247	1.231
Rho	.432	.206	.201
Observations	75113	52799	46818
Groups	12487	11344	10690
Waves (avg)	6.0	4.7	4.4
* $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$. Panel participation varies from a minimum of two waves to a maximum of eleven.			

Study 3: Does A Trivial Experience Affect Political Support?

The implicit contract model stands out from performance models of political support by allowing for that distinctly personal experiences matter as well. The third study explores the boundary conditions for relevant personal experiences as well as the underlying psychological

mechanism. Healy, Malhotra and Mo (2010) notably find, in the US context, that sporting events affects voting (local college football games), and assessment of a political leader (the final rounds of college basketball tournaments). Building on this research, we look into the support undermining consequences of another politically trivial experience – a holiday trip to the sun.

For most people, a holiday trip represents a considerable investment in time, money and emotions. If the experience falls short of expectations, people will likely be temporarily less happy about their life. Moreover, the implicit contract model predicts that disappointed citizens will hold anonymous power holders to account for the negative experience.

Our data for analysis derives from an original three wave panel survey with a non-random sample of vacation travelers from the metropolitan area of Gothenburg, Sweden. Between May and June 2011, a member of our research team contacted travelers who waited to check in for a charter trip at the main local airport and invited them to a scientific study on their vacation experience (we offered no incentives for participation). Those who agreed to participate – a substantial portion of those contacted did, not the least to fill their time while waiting in line – filled in a written questionnaire at the location, and upon returning home they responded to a follow-up web survey. In December 2011, about five months later, they were web-surveyed a second time.[8]

Of the 465 participants who took the first survey and who gave a working e-mail address, 264 responded to the initial web-survey (a response rate of 57 percent), and of these 120 participants took the second web-survey as well (generating an overall response rate of 26 percent). Identical indicators of law abiding attitudes, satisfaction with life, and political trust were included in all three waves. Satisfaction with the vacation, our main independent variable, was measured in wave 2 and 3, using a 1-7 response scale. Most participants were very satisfied with the vacation upon returning home (the mean level of satisfaction was 5.96), but 25 percent of the participants scored 5 or lower on the satisfaction scale. Thus, the

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[8] The study was implemented using the facilities of the Laboratory of Opinion Research (LORE) at University of Gothenburg.

effect estimates in the following analyses are based on a limited but meaningful variation in the independent variable.

Focusing first on the short term effect of the vacation experience, Table 4 shows results from a series of lagged dependent variable models. Once more corroborating H2, we observe a statistically significant and also substantial detrimental effect on support attitudes stemming from satisfaction with the vacation (Model 13, 15 and 17). Results hold for additional controls for education and gender (Model 14, 16 and 18). Thus, as with sporting events and retrospective voting, people seems to be holding those in power responsible for an experience that is politically irrelevant.

Table 4. Dissatisfaction with a vacation in the sun and changes in attitudinal political support (lagged dependent variables, OLS-estimates)

	Model 13	Model 14	Model 15	Model 16	Model 17	Model 18
	Law-Abiding Attitudes post-vacation (0-10)					
	Never evade taxes		Always obey laws and regulations		Never cheat on social insurance benefits	
Dissatisfaction	-.506***	-.500***	-.374***	-.379***	-.215**	-.208**
with the vacation (1-7)	(.139)	(.140)	(.107)	(.108)	(.099)	(.010)
Law Abiding Attitudes	.471***	.467***	.456***	.458***	.286***	.283***
pre-vacation (0-10)	(.055)	(.057)	(.051)	(.052)	(.056)	(.057)
Education		-.107		.031		-.017
		(.080)		(.063)		(.058)
Gender		-.161		.001		-.149
		(.291)		(.224)		(.204)
Constant	5.49***	6.30***	5.53***	5.356455	7.18***	7.48***
	(.562)	(.844)	(.506)	.7301344	(.568)	(.697)
Adjusted R-square	.32	.33	.35	.34	.14	.13
Number of observations	190	189	190	189	189	188
*** p ≤ .01; ** p≤ .05; * p ≤ .10 two-tailed						

One might object that the failed vacation effect is artificially inflated by asking respondents in the same survey about their satisfaction with the experience and their support attitudes. To rule out this possibility, we re-estimate the basic lagged dependent variable model in Table 4 using data from the panel wave that was collected in December, several months after the vacation. If a pure survey effect is driving the results, a reminder of the negative experience will trigger the same judgment process as right after the vacation.

However, the results tell a different story. Although evaluation of the vacation is relatively stable (wave 2 and wave 3 satisfaction correlates .58), the failed vacation effect has faded

completely in wave 3 (detailed results available upon request). Thus, with time respondents have decoupled the negative vacation experience from their political support attitudes.

Based on the research presented here, we see no clear boundary conditions for the type of experiences that matter for how citizens' relate to state authorities. Rather, we expect that all types of experiences that impact peoples' well-being also matters for political support attitudes. As evidenced by our follow up survey, effects of single non-political experiences are likely short-lasting. However, since people continuously make significant experiences (many of which are politically relevant), effects will cumulate with time. In particular, series of misfortunes that are shared by many individuals will inflict negatively upon citizens' collective willingness to comply with state dictates.

The Underlying Psychological Mechanism

Healy, Malhotra and Mo (2010) explain their surprise finding by referring to a mood effect in that people subconsciously transfer their emotions from sports to politics. This explanation accords with the notion of affective contagion (Bookwala 2014). Importantly, the affect literature differ between feelings that are incidental to the political object, and those that are an intrinsic part of ones' political thoughts (e.g. Lodge and Taber 2013: 146-51). Drawing on this distinction, we posit that the implicit contract model differ from models of blind retrospective voting in a subtle but meaningful way.

Precisely, whereas the feelings associated with college games are extrinsic to voting and assessments of political leaders (citizens subconsciously transfer emotions in the sporting domain to the political domain), the feeling that state authorities are somehow responsible for ones' personal well-being is assumed to be an integrated part of peoples' political thoughts. Hence, while affect certainly is central for the way people hold state authorities responsible for their well-being, we posit that experiences influence support attitudes through a more conscious processing of information than in blind retrospective voting: When things go wrong, people are motivated to punish those in power by feeling less willing to comply with their dictates.

For an empirical test, we argue that an incidental mood effect of the kind suggested by Healy, Malhotra and Mo (2010) will be manifested in a failure on the part of respondents to differentiate between political objects. That is, if respondents unconsciously transfer their

negative emotion from the private domain to the political domain, they will use the same evaluative criteria for an array of political objects.

However, this is not what we find in the data (detailed results available upon request). Using the same lagged dependents variable model as in the previous analysis, dissatisfaction with the vacation undermines trust in national political institutions such as the parliament, the government, and politicians in general. But trust in other political institutions that are less powerful, such as local government, and state level and local level administrative agencies, are not affected by satisfaction with the vacation. This is evidence that respondents differentiate between political objects that are "in power" and those who are not, as they will do if the idea of a powerful but anonymous state apparatus is an integrated part of their political beliefs.

Mediation

We turn finally to the mediation analysis. As before, we look for evidence that a) satisfaction with the vacation predicts changes in satisfaction with life, and b) that the vacation effect on political support reduces when satisfaction with life is included in the model. Results reported in Table 5 confirm the first expectation: Satisfaction with the vacation affects life satisfaction controlling for prior level of life satisfaction (Model 19). However, this time there is no backing for that the vacation effect takes the route through individuals' satisfaction with their life. We have no clear idea as of why vacation satisfaction influences political support directly. At this point, we must content ourselves with the finding that the H3 is only partly supported in the holiday data.

Table 5. A Mediation analysis of the effects of dissatisfaction with a vacation in the sun on political support attitudes through Life Satisfaction (OLS-estimates)

	Model 19 Satisfaction with life post-vacation (1-4)	Model 20	Model 21	Model 22
		Law-Abiding Attitudes post-vacation (0-10)		
		Never evade taxes	Always obey laws and regulations	Never cheat on social insurance benefits
Dissatisfaction with the vacation (1-7)	-.064** (.031)	-.421*** (.135)	.275*** (.099)	-.093 (.087)
Satisfaction with life pre-vacation (1-4)	.600*** (.056)	.394 (.305)	.038 (.227)	-.041 (.202)
Satisfaction with life post-vacation (1-4)		-.324 (.313)	-.073 (.230)	.178 (.205)
Law Abiding Attitudes pre-vacation (0-10)		.495*** (.053)	.482*** (.047)	.306*** (.049)
Constant	1.460*** (.212)	4.921*** (1.103)	5.292*** (.829)	6.345*** (.775)
Adjusted R-square	.38	.36	.40	.18
Number of observations	193	187	187	186

*** p ≤ .01; ** p≤ .05; * p ≤ .10 two-tailed

Conclusion

Recent research establishes that the quality of government (QoG) matters greatly for peoples' well-being (SWB) (Helliwell et al. 2014). In this paper we have reversed the causal order and evaluated whether peoples' subjective well-being affect the conditions for well-functioning government institutions through the following causal pathway:

SWB ➔Political support ➔Voluntary compliance with state dictates➔Conditions for QoG

We have focused attention on the least researched causal path, the one linking SWB and political support attitudes. The core idea of the implicit contract model we propose is that citizens reward and punish state authorities with support in line with ebb and flow in their subjective well-being. According to the model, thus, individual citizens are agents who help to shape the conditions for government institutions, and when pursuing agency they consider all types of factors that impact upon their well-being, political as well as personal.

This way of understanding the relationship between citizens and state authorities has implications for the rapidly expanding literature on the quality of government and citizen well-being. It is true that a well-functioning democratic government can make citizens happy, but it is also the case that happy citizens are good for democracy. Causality in the relationship

17

does not exclusively run from government quality to citizen well-being. It is not even the case that citizen well-being is exclusively conditioned upon government quality. Rather, the relationship between citizen happiness and governmental quality can best be thought of as continuous influences.

We have offered the following empirical evidence in favor of the implicit contract model: at a given time, peoples' satisfaction with life predicts their political support attitudes across European countries controlling for confounding factors at the level of countries and individuals; people become less politically supportive when they make negative personal experiences that are unrelated to politics (the termination of a close personal relationship, and having a failed vacation in the sun); and the support undermining effect of negative experiences tend to be mediated by changes in life satisfaction.

Clearly, this evidence needs to be replicated, validated and extended. We end by suggesting questions that we think are particularly worthy of further examination: Do the findings only apply in certain country contexts? What other personal experiences than the ones examined here matters for political support? What is peoples' ratio of reward and punishment of the state following positive and negative experiences? How can citizens be motivated to better distinguish between reasonable and unreasonable terms for the implicit social contract? What is the precise role of affect for citizens' political support attitudes? To what extent does subjective well-being mediate between more political experiences and support attitudes?

Obviously, the simple move to invert the causal order between citizens' well-being and the democratic state opens up an agenda for future research.

Appendix (Question wordings)

<u>Independent variables</u>

Life-Satisfaction (EVS): All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?

(1=dissatisfied, 10=satisfied)

Life Satisfaction (SHP): In general, how satisfied are you with your life?

(0=not at all satisfied, 10=completely satisfied)

Life Satisfaction (Vacation Survey): In general, how satisfied are you with the life you are living

(1=very satisfied, 2=rather satisfied, 3=not very satisfied, 4=not at all satisfied)

Satisfaction with vacation (Vacation Survey): Generally speaking, how satisfied are you with your vacation trip?

(1=very dissatisfied, 7=very satisfied)

<u>Dependent variables</u>

Law Abiding Attitudes (EVS) Please tell me for each of the following whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between (1=never, 10=always).

Claiming state benefits which you are not entitled to

Cheating on tax if you have the chance

Someone accepting a bribe in the course of their duties

Avoiding a fare on public transport

Law Abiding Attitudes (Vacation Survey) People differ about the meaning of being a good citizen. In your view, how important would you say it is for a person to..?

(0=not important at all, 10=very important)

Never try to evade taxes

Always obey laws and regulations

Never cheat on social insurance benefits

SWD (EVS): On the whole are you very satisfied, rather satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy is developing in our country?

(1=very satisfied, 2=rather satisfied, 3=not very satisfied, 4=not at all satisfied)

SWD (SHP): Overall, how satisfied are you with the way in which democracy works in our country?

(0 = not at all satisfied, 10=completely satisfied)

<u>Control variables</u>

Social trust (EVS): Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can.'t be too careful in dealing with people?

(1=most people can be trusted, 2=can't be too careful)

Intention to vote (EVS) If there was a general election tomorrow, can you tell me if you would vote?

(1=Yes, I would vote, 2=No, I would not vote)

Trust in politics (EVS) Please look at this card and tell me, for each item listed, how much confidence you have in them, is it a great deal (1), quite a lot (2), not very much (3) or none at all (4)?

v211 Parliament

v221 Political parties

v222 Government

Political interest (EVS): How interested would you say you are in politics?

1 . very interested

2 . somewhat interested

3 . not very interested

4 . not at all interested

Importance of God (EVS) And how important is God in your life?

(1=not at all important, 10= very important).

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