

# DOES POLITICAL ACTIVISM INDUCE SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING: EVIDENCE FROM ESS DATA

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**Abstract. Background.** There are quite a few studies about the connection between political activism and subjective wellbeing. The main problem is that most of such research has been done using student samples but not all the population. **Purpose.** The purpose of this study was to analyse the connection between political activism and subjective wellbeing using representative sample of the European population. The main research question is whether political activism is positively related to subjective wellbeing. **Methods and data.** This article is based on European Social Survey data of the 6th round, mainly on the data of the rotating module “Personal and Social Wellbeing” and core modules “Media and Social Trust” and “Politics”. Interviews were carried out with 54 673 respondents aged 15 and over in 29 European countries. The method of statistical data analysis was the correlation analysis of measures of political activism and measures of subjective wellbeing (Pearson’s  $r$  coefficient). **Results.** Results indicated statistically significant correlations between the indicators of political activism and dimensions of subjective wellbeing. **Conclusions.** Political activism induces subjective wellbeing and is a prerequisite to feeling good. All the indicators of subjective wellbeing correlated with at least two indicators of political activism. These correlations were mainly positive, with a few exceptions of unconventional political activism. The strongest positive and statistically significant correlations between the indicators of political activism are with items of community wellbeing and supportive relationships.

**Keywords:** political participation, personal wellbeing, social wellbeing, happiness, Europe.

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## INTRODUCTION

Even Aristotle considered political participation as the *defining* feature of *citizenship*, referring to the human being as, first of all, 'a political animal'. Aristotle defined a citizen as a person who has the right (*exousia*) to participate in deliberative or judicial office – in Athens, citizens had the right to attend the assembly, the council, and other bodies, or to sit on juries (Miller, 2017, Summer). Furthermore, Aristotle's views on the connection between the well-being of the political community and that of the citizens who make it up presuppose that citizens must actively participate in politics if they are to be happy and virtuous (Clayton, 2004). This logic would further suggest that the scope of political engagement and activism might be positively related to their well-being (Duvall and Dotson, 1998). The idea of interrelatedness between political participation and the wellbeing of a community served as the stimulus to examine how the subjective wellbeing is related to political activism on an individual level.

Political participation and political activism were widely analysed by Milbrath (1965), Verba and Nie (1972), Verba, Nie and Kim (1978), Barnes et al. (1979), Putnam (1993), Brady (1998), van Deth (2014), Norris (2002; 2003; 2007; 2011). Recently the modes of participation in digital media (Norris, 2001; Bennett and Segerberg, 2013; Theocharis, 2015) and creative participation (van Deth, 2010) have been getting a lot of attention from researchers.

Subjective wellbeing is also a rather popular topic among scholars from the fields of psychology, sociology and economics both at theoretical (Diener, 1984; Diener, 1994; Andrews and Robinson, 1991; Chamberlain, 1988; Kahneman and Krueger, 2006; Schimmack, 2008) and empirical (Emmons, 1986; Andrews, 1991; Chamberlain and Zika, 1992; Vittersø et al., 2010) level. Studies are planned according to different philosophical approaches to wellbeing – the hedonic approach, which emphasizes positive feelings (Kahneman et al., 1999), the eudaimonic approach, which emphasizes positive functioning (Sen, 1996), or a combination of both (Ryan and Deci, 2001; Kashdan et al., 2008).

Still, there is a shortage of research about the connection between wellbeing and political activism. As Barker and Martin (2011, p. 9) have noticed, even though civic participation can have a positive impact on

happiness (which is one of the components of wellbeing) through the process of involvement, the evidence supporting these assumptions is quite limited and there have been few relevant studies conducted on this subject. Stutzer and Frey (2006) found a link between political participation and subjective wellbeing while studying the Swiss voting behaviour. According to their study, citizens in cantons with higher opportunities for participation report significantly greater levels of wellbeing. Blais and Gélinau (2007) found that voting in an election increases individual satisfaction levels – these results were based on the data collected from a survey of Canadian citizens. A study carried out by Weitz-Shapiro and Winters (2008) presents evidence that people who vote in South American presidential elections report greater life satisfaction than those who do not.

A more extensive analysis concentrating specifically on the connection between political activism and hedonic, eudaimonic and social well-being was carried out by Klar and Kasser (2009): two online surveys using a sample of college students and a national sample of activists demonstrated that several indicators of activism were positively associated with measures of subjective wellbeing. With the help of the sample of college students, Klar and Kasser (2009, p. 755) also explored the possible causal role of activism by measuring wellbeing after the subjects either engaged in a brief activist behaviour, a brief nonactivist behaviour, or no behaviour and found out that the subjects who did the brief activist behaviour reported significantly higher levels of subjective vitality than the subjects who engaged in the non-activist behaviour. Nevertheless, the aforementioned studies have two serious limitations reported by the authors themselves – none of the samples were truly representative and the possibility remains that the use of e-mail recruitment and online surveys biased the samples as well.

A sample of college students was also employed in a study by Wray-Lake et al. (2016) where the link between civic engagement and wellbeing was analysed from the perspective of the self-determination theory, separately examining helping, environmental behaviour, volunteering and charitable donations. According to this theory, intrinsic pursuits – including community-oriented behaviours – lead to higher wellbeing because they fulfil basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci and Ryan, 2000, cit. Wray-Lake et al., 2016). Using

daily diary design, Wray-Lake et al. (2016) demonstrated that volunteering, environmental behaviour and helping others positively predicted wellbeing both on daily level and on aggregated level across days, but charitable donations linked to wellbeing only at average aggregated level across days. Wray-Lake et al. (2016) also recommend that, in order to better understand the connection between wellbeing and civic engagement, the latter should be disaggregated into specific behaviours.

Because there are very few studies about the connection between political activism and subjective wellbeing, their shortage justifies the relevance of this article. The main problem is that most similar research has been done using student samples but not all the population. Additionally, these studies were carried out mainly in national contexts and therefore without a comparative dimension. The main aim of this article is to analyse the connection between political activism and subjective wellbeing by utilising a representative sample of the European population. The fact that this kind of analysis, which uses a representative sample, has never been done before, contributes to the novelty of the article. Based on the presupposition that political participation might increase happiness via the establishment and development of relationships, and because forms of participation that involve continuous interaction on matters of mutual interest can increase individual satisfaction (Barker and Martin, 2011, p. 9), the main research question is whether political activism is positively related to subjective wellbeing. This question is further analysed using the data from the 6<sup>th</sup> round of the European Social Survey. This data is available without restrictions for non-profit purposes via <http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org>. In accordance with data protection regulations in the participating countries, only anonymous data is available to users.

### **Concept of political activism**

The definition of political activism should be derived from the concept of political participation – both of these terms are sometimes used as synonyms. However, political activism has wider meaning than political participation. According to Brady (1999, p. 737, cit. Thomassen, 2011, p. 194) almost all definitions of political participation include four basic concepts: activities or actions, ordinary citizens, politics and influence. A typical definition of political participation is proposed by Verba, Nie and Kim (1978, p. 46), who recognize it as the “activities by private citizens

that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take". Those actions refer to political actions, not to political attitudes. Furthermore, these actions should address political institutions or certain government policies and actions. Political participation always refers to actions of ordinary citizens and not of politicians or government officials. As for the element of influence, according to Brady (1999, p. 737–738), it does not include actions such as getting information about politics by reading a newspaper or watching television or being contacted by others with an appeal to get involved in political activity, because these actions are not attempts to influence politics. Political participation thus refers simply to activity that is intended to influence government actions – either directly, by affecting the making or implementation of public policy, or indirectly, by influencing the selection of people who make those policies (Kaase, 2012).

In "Political Action", Barnes et al. (1979) discuss different political actions available to citizens and introduce the terms of conventional and unconventional political participation. Conventional political participation refers to mainstream, everyday political participation and includes traditional and expected modes of political participation, such as voting, donating to a political campaign or volunteering for a campaign and similar political actions. Unconventional political participation refers to activities that are sometimes considered to be inappropriate but are not illegal – e.g. boycotts, demonstrations and protests. According to Barnes et al. (1979, cit. Matonyte, 2012), the level of participation can be seen as a continuum – at one extreme are people who have no interest in politics at all (who do not vote, petition, or protest, do not read newspapers and never volunteer) and at the other extreme are active citizens (who are interested in politics, vote, are involved in political parties, trade unions, nongovernmental organisations and similar associations). Between these two extremes, most citizens participate through conventional electoral events and more or less understand political issues and occasionally try to have an impact on them.

Returning to the definition of political activism, this article follows the concept developed by Norris (2002; 2003; 2007; 2011). Norris (2011) defines political activism as the ways in which citizens participate, the processes that lead them to do so, and the consequences of these acts. Political activism, according to Norris (2011), consists of voting in

elections, conventional activism and contentious politics. Conventional activism includes such non-electoral activities as contacting public officials, working in party or action group and being a member of a political party. Contentious politics means working in other organisations (not in political parties) and associations that mainly represent interests of different kinds, signing a petition, participating in lawful demonstrations, boycotting certain products or wearing campaign badges or stickers. The last component of political activism is similar to unconventional political participation. Voting in elections and actions of conventional political participation are conceived as citizen-oriented repertoires, and actions of unconventional political participation are seen as cause-oriented repertoires (Norris, 2003). In this article, the concept of political activism also includes interest in politics. The argument is that political interest is a prerequisite and motivational factor of political activism (Norris, 2007) and it also requires some effort. As noted by Thomassen (2011, p. 185), in order to reach their political goals, post-materialists are bound to be strongly interested in politics.

### **Concept of subjective wellbeing**

The concept of subjective wellbeing originates from the works of Diener (1984; 1994; 2000) and his colleagues (1985; 1992; 1995). In his highly influential *Psychological Bulletin* article "Subjective Well-Being", Diener (1984) describes subjective wellbeing as people's longer-term levels of pleasant affect, lack of unpleasant affect and life satisfaction. Affect includes facial, physiological, motivational, behavioural and cognitive components (Diener, 1994). People's subjective wellbeing has usually been conceptualised in terms of people's emotional responses (good or bad feelings) and their cognitive or evaluative responses such as satisfaction (Kahneman et al, 1999; Diener, 1984; Veenhoven, 2000, cit. European Social Survey, 2013, p. 2). It is also stated that measuring negative reactions such as depression or anxiety give an incomplete picture of people's wellbeing so it is necessary to measure life satisfaction and positive emotions as well (Diener, 1994).

Research on wellbeing can be divided into two general groups that are based on its type: hedonic wellbeing and eudaimonic wellbeing. The hedonic viewpoint mainly focuses on positive feelings and is frequently equated with happiness and greater life satisfaction (Ryan and Deci, 2001,

p. 161). Eudaimonic viewpoint is mostly concerned with psychological wellbeing, which can be described in terms of a fully functioning person and usually is operationalized as happiness and meaningfulness or as a set of wellness variables such as self-actualization and vitality (Ryan and Deci, 2001, p. 161). The eudaimonic approach typically includes concepts such as autonomy or self-determination, interest and engagement, positive relationships, and a sense of meaning, direction or purpose in life (European Social Survey, 2013, p. 2). The six widely used dimensions of wellbeing, derived from developmental psychology and psychodynamic theory, were proposed by Ryff (1989). These dimensions comprise autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life and self-acceptance. Deci and Ryan (2000, cit. European Social Survey, 2013, p. 2), whose findings were based on humanistic approach and the perspective of psychological 'needs', emphasised such dimensions of wellbeing as autonomy, competence and relatedness. Scheier and Carver (2003) demonstrated that optimism is also important for successful functioning and subjective wellbeing. Seligman's (2002, cit. European Social Survey, 2013, p. 2) core concepts of pleasure engagement and meaning combined hedonic wellbeing with key aspects of Aristotle's theory of *eudaimonia* ('happiness', 'flourishing') and Csikszentmihalyi's (1988, cit. European Social Survey, 2013, p. 2) work on 'flow'.

The level of subjective wellbeing is identified using the indicators of not only personal, but also social wellbeing as well. The corner-stone of social wellbeing is a theory of social capital suggested by Putnam (2000) which demonstrates the importance of social connections to subjective wellbeing. Researchers of social capital tend to usually employ objective measures of social connectedness, showing that average levels are linked to happiness and satisfaction. Halpern (2010) describes social capital as 'the hidden wealth of nations'. Putnam (2000) identified two types of social capital: bonding (meaning 'thick' ties to individuals you know well) and bridging (meaning 'thin' ties to individuals and organizations with whom you can come into contact and who are total strangers) social capital. The way an individual relates to others and to their society is a key aspect of their subjective wellbeing (European Social Survey, 2013, p. 5). But the centrality of social support for good interpersonal relationships is not the only aspect important to subjective wellbeing: supporting others is also essential (Brown et al., 1988, cit. European Social Survey, 2013, p. 5).

## **METHODS**

This article is based on the data from the 6<sup>th</sup> round of European Social Survey (ESS). ESS is an academically driven cross-national survey which has been conducted across Europe every two years since its establishment in 2001. The survey measures the attitudes, beliefs and behavior patterns of diverse populations in more than thirty nations (<http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/about/>). In this article, the data of the rotating module “Personal and social wellbeing” and the core modules “Media and social trust” and “Politics” is analysed.

### **Data collection method and procedure**

ESS is a multi-country survey based on face-to-face interviews which are conducted with newly selected, cross-sectional samples. In the 6th round, ESS covered 29 countries: Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kosovo, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine and United Kingdom. The survey involved strict random probability sampling and a minimum target response rate of 70 % (ESS Round 6: European Social Survey, 2016, p. 8). The average duration of the interviews was one hour. The field work period is August 2012 –December 2013.

### **Participants**

Interviews were carried out with 54 673 respondents. Respondents of the ESS were persons aged 15 and over, residents within private households, regardless of their nationality, citizenship, language or legal status, in the countries presented in the previous paragraph. The composition of the sample by gender: males – 45.6 %, females – 54.4 %. The composition of the sample by age: 15–29 years – 19.6 %; 30–39 years – 15.6 %; 40–49 years – 16.9 %; 50–59 years – 17.1 %; 60–69 years – 15.8 %; 70 years and over – 15.0 %.

### **Measures of political activism**

The concept of political activism was measured via the dimensions of political interest and political participation, which are a part of the



core modules of the ESS. The measurement of political interest is based on people’s self-rating of their political interest. According to Thomassen (2011, p. 193) it is a straightforward, well tested and economic way of assessing political interest (B1 in Table 1).

Political participation covers items of both conventional and unconventional participation. Conventional political participation includes electoral activity, e.g. voting in elections (B1 in Table 1), and non-electoral actions, such as contacting politicians or government officials (B11) and working in a political party or action group (B12). Unconventional political participation encompasses such actions as working in other organisations (not political parties) and associations (B13), signing a petition (B15) or boycotting certain products (B17), and such campaign activities as wearing or displaying campaign badge or sticker (B14) and taking part in lawful demonstrations (B16). Respondents of ESS were asked how often they have been involved in the aforementioned activities during the last twelve months and if they had voted in the last national election (see Table 1). Moreover, the index of political activism was computed according to the respondents’ answers to questions B1–B17.

**Table 1.** *Measures of political activism*

<b>Variables</b> (ESS question number in brackets)	<b>Values and categories</b>
How interested in politics (B1)	1=very interested, 2=quite interested, 3=hardly interested, 4=not at all interested
Voted in the last national election (B9)	1=yes, 2=no, 3=not eligible to vote
Contacted a politician or government official (B11); worked in a political party or action group (B12); worked in another organisation or association (B13); wore or displayed a campaign badge/sticker (B14); signed a petition (B15); took part in a lawful public demonstration (B16); boycotted certain products (B17): last 12 months	1=yes, 2=no
Index of political activism – computed from B1–B17: each item of political activism counted as 1 if present (min=0, max=9; how interested in politics (B1) was also recoded as follows: values 1 and 2 mean that interest in politics is present, values 3 and 4 mean that interest in politics is not present).	0 to 9

Source: ESS Round 6: European Social Survey (2016a).

## Measures of subjective wellbeing

Following the existing studies (e.g. Vittersø, et al., 2010) which suggest that wellbeing is a multidimensional concept, this concept is accurately deconstructed in the ESS by asking far more questions than just one regarding how happy the respondents are. The concept of subjective wellbeing was measured via the dimensions of evaluative wellbeing, emotional wellbeing, functioning, vitality, community wellbeing and supportive relationships (Jeffrey et al., 2015), which are a part of the ESS rotating module “Personal and social wellbeing” questionnaire. Additionally, a few questions from the core modules are included in the measuring process.

Evaluative wellbeing is measured via the concepts of satisfaction with life (B20 in Table 2) and overall happiness (C1). Feeling satisfied and/or happy with one’s life overall are general evaluative measures of experienced wellbeing (European Social Survey, 2013, p. 25).

Emotional wellbeing is measured via the concept of emotions because positive and negative emotions are a core part of experienced wellbeing (European Social Survey, 2013, p. 23) and recent emotions are assessed (from the past week, see Table 2). The concept of emotions is operationalised using three sub-concepts of calmness, anxiety and depression. Calmness (D15 in Table 2) is a low arousal aspect of positive mood, characterised by the absence of agitation or excitement, anxiety (D14) is a negative mood condition distinct from depression and characterised by fear and concern, depression (D5, D8, D10, D11) is a well-established way of measuring wellbeing in terms of mental health (European Social Survey, 2013, p. 23–25). All these three sub-concepts of emotions are consistent with the CES-D scale – a short self-report scale designed to measure depressive symptomatology in the general population (Radloff, 1977).

Functioning is measured via the concepts of resilience, meaning and purpose, autonomy, engagement, competence, self-esteem and optimism. Resilience generally refers to positive adaptation in the context of risk or adversity and this concept is operationalised using two sub-concepts of stress resistance (D30 in Table 2) and bouncing back (D19). Stress resistance describes functioning well during a time of significant adversity and bouncing back refers to returning to, and the speed of

the return to, a previous level of good functioning following difficult times or severely disturbing experiences (European Social Survey, 2013, p. 11–12). Meaning and purpose refers to people’s concerns with the purpose, predictability, and comprehensibility of each of their own lives and this concept is operationalised using two sub-concepts of meaning and purpose in daily activities (D23) and orientation to the future (D35). The former sub-concept examines whether or not people find that what they do in their everyday lives is worthwhile and how they cope with the demands of their environments. The latter, orientation to the future, shows to what extent people have a sense of direction in their lives and are able to orient their daily activities and life plans to the future (European Social Survey, 2013, p. 12–13). Autonomy (D16) relates to shaping one’s life or activities and to the freedom from control of other people (European Social Survey, 2013, p. 14). Engagement is intended to capture trait emotions that facilitate active involvement and motivate individuals to pursue complex life goals and to develop their potential. Engagement is measured via items of engagement during everyday life (D31–33) such as interest, absorption and enthusiasm using the scales adapted from the Basic Emotions Trait Test (European Social Survey, 2013, p. 15). Competence refers to a sense of general capability, as well as cognitive capability, and this concept is operationalised using three sub-concepts of opportunity to demonstrate competence (D17), a sense of accomplishment (D18) and a sense of competence (D25). Opportunity to demonstrate competence focuses on the occasions to demonstrate personal strengths and abilities during daily activities, a sense of accomplishment focuses on experiencing a sense of accomplishment from daily activities and a sense of competence is a measure of ‘pure’ competence (European Social Survey, 2013, p. 16–18). Self-esteem refers to feelings and attitudes towards oneself; it encompasses liking or feeling good about oneself and being confident. The concept of self-esteem is measured via self-acceptance (D3, D4), which focuses on the internally oriented aspect of self-esteem, liking or feeling good about oneself (European Social Survey, 2013, p. 22). Optimism refers to positive feelings or evaluations about the future, both long and short term, and it has both an emotion element (hopefulness) and a cognitive element (positive expectation) (European Social Survey, 2013,

p. 21). The concept of optimism is measured via optimism about personal future (D2), which refers to positive evaluations about one's personal future.

Vitality dimension of wellbeing is measured via the concept of vitality, which refers to feeling alive and alert and also the lack of tiredness and chronic pain. This concept is operationalised using the sub-concept of feeling full of energy (D13 in Table 2) and a few items from the depression scale based on CES-D inventory (D6, D7, D12). A sub-concept of feeling full of energy focuses on the extent to which people feel like they have a lot of energy, and this is assessed in the recent period. Furthermore, the quality of sleep and the ability to get going and effortfulness are measured in order to identify the respondents' vitality.

Community wellbeing is measured via the concept of thin relationships as described by Putnam (2000). The measures of thin social relationships capture the quality of bridging social capital – the relationships with individuals beyond those closest to you, the ones who are from a wider circle of other friends and relatives, work colleagues, acquaintances and others (European Social Survey, 2013, p. 28). The concept of thin relationships is operationalised using three sub-concepts of perception of local support (D21 in Table 2), sense of local belonging (D27), and social trust (A3–A5). Perception of local support measures perceptions of how much the people in the respondent's local area help each other, including all types of support; sense of local belonging measures the sense of belonging to people in the local area in terms of attachment and identification; social trust measures the extent to which the respondents expect fairness from other people and how they trust others (European Social Survey, 2013, p. 28–30).

Supportive relationships are measured via the concept of thick relationships as proposed by Putnam (2000). The measures of thick social relationships capture the quality of bonding social capital – the relationships with individuals you know well and the people closest to you, i.e. close family and friends (European Social Survey, 2013, p. 26). The concept of thick relationships is operationalised using four sub-concepts of reciprocity in social exchange (D36 in Table 2), feeling appreciated (D29), sources of support (C3) and loneliness (D9). Reciprocity in social exchange is a balance between giving and taking in relevant

social relationships and is a universal principle guaranteeing stability and justice of social exchange; feeling appreciated measures the extent to which people feel they are valued, recognised, respected and acknowledged by others close to them; sources of support demonstrate the degree to which people feel they have others who support them emotionally; loneliness is identified using one item from the Basic Emotions Trait Test: the scale of depression measures feelings of loneliness and can therefore be seen as measuring a key element of negative affect related to thick relationships (European Social Survey, 2013, p. 26–27).

**Table 2.** *Measures of subjective wellbeing*

<b>Variables</b> (ESS question number in brackets)	<b>Values and categories</b>
<i>Evaluative wellbeing</i>	
How satisfied with life as a whole (B20)	0 to 10, where 0=extremely dissatisfied, 10=extremely satisfied
How happy you are (C1)	0 to 10, where 0=extremely unhappy, 10=extremely happy
<i>Emotional wellbeing</i>	
Felt sad (D11); felt depressed (D5); enjoyed life (D10); were happy (D8); felt anxious (D14); felt calm and peaceful (D15); how often in the past week	1=none or almost none of the time, 2=some of the time, 3=most of the time, 4=all or almost all of the time
<i>Functioning</i>	
Free to decide how to live my life (D16); little chance to show how capable I am (D17); feel accomplishment from what I do (D18); feel what I do in life is valuable and worthwhile (D23); always optimistic about my future (D2); there are lots of things I am good at (D25), in general feel very positive about myself (D3); at times feel as if I am a failure (D4); when things go wrong in my life it takes a long time to get back to normal (D19)	1=agree strongly, 2=agree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=disagree, 5=disagree strongly
Interested in what you are doing (D31); absorbed in what you are doing (D32); enthusiastic about what you are doing (D33); how much of the time	0 to 10, where 0=none of the time, 10=all of the time

**Table 2** *cont.*

Have a sense of direction in your life (D35)	0 to 10, where 0=not at all, 10=completely
Deal with important problems in life (D30)	0 to 10, where 0=extremely difficult, 10=extremely easy
<i>Vitality</i>	
Felt everything was done as an effort (D6); sleep was restless (D7); could not get going (D12); had a lot of energy (D13): how often in the past week	1=none or almost none of the time, 2=some of the time, 3=most of the time, 4=all or almost all of the time.
<i>Community wellbeing</i>	
Most people can be trusted or you can't be too careful (A3)	0 to 10, where 0=you can't be too careful, 10=can be trusted
Most people try to take advantage of you, or try to be fair (A4)	0 to 10, where 0= most people would try to take advantage, 10= most people would try to be fair
Most of the time people are helpful or mostly looking out for themselves (A5)	0 to 10, where 0= people mostly look out for themselves, 10= people mostly try to be helpful
Feel people in local area help one another (D21)	0 to 7, where 0= not at all, 7= a great deal
Feel close to the people in local area (D27)	1=agree strongly, 2=agree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=disagree, 5=disagree strongly
<i>Supportive relationships</i>	
How many people with whom you can discuss intimate and personal matters (C3)	0=0, 1=1, 2=2, 3=3, 4=4-6, 5=7-9, 6=10 or more
Feel appreciated by people you are close to (D29)	0 to 10, where 0=not at all, 10=completely
Receive help and support from people you are close to (D36)	0 to 6, where 0=not at all, 6=completely
Felt lonely, how often in the past week (D9)	1=none or almost none of the time, 2=some of the time., 3=most of the time, 4=all or almost all of the time

Source: ESS Round 6: European Social Survey (2016a).

Data analysed in this article includes aspects both of hedonic (D5–D8, D10–D15) and eudaimonic (personal level: D2–D4, D16–D19, D23,

D25, D30–D33, D35; social level: A3–A5, D9, D21, D27, D29, D36, C3) wellbeing and also overall evaluation of subjective wellbeing (B20, C1).

### **Methods of statistical analysis**

The data analysis method employed in the research is statistical analysis. Correlation analysis of the measures of political activism and the measures of subjective wellbeing was carried out, calculating Pearson correlation coefficient, also referred to as the Pearson's  $r$ .

### **RESULTS**

Data shows that almost all correlations between items of political activism and components of evaluative dimension of wellbeing are statistically significant (see Table 3). The one exception is voting in elections. Both the satisfaction with life and overall happiness are positively related<sup>2</sup> to dimensions of political activism. Though these correlations are statistically significant, they are still very weak. The strongest correlations are between both aspects of evaluative wellbeing and working in other organisations (not in political parties) or associations.

The vast majority of correlations between the sub-dimensions of emotional wellbeing and the indicators of political activism are statistically significant and, with one exception, positive (see Table 3). Voting in elections is not related to two items from the depression scale – enjoying life and being happy in the past week – and to anxiety. Working in political parties or action groups is not connected to being sad in the past week, anxiety and calmness. Calmness also has no relation to contacting politicians or government officials, wearing or displaying campaign badges or stickers and boycotting products. There are no correlations between being happy in the past week and wearing or displaying campaign badges or stickers and also participating in lawful demonstrations. The strongest correlation, which is negative, is between feeling sad and the interest in politics.

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<sup>2</sup> The minus sign can mislead here, because the lower values of the items of political activism (except the overall index of political activism) mean higher engagement in political activities – for more information see Table 1. This comment also applies to Table 4 and Table 5.

**Table 3.** Correlation between evaluative and emotional dimensions of wellbeing and indicators of political activism (Pearson's *r*)

<i>Dimensions of wellbeing and ESS survey items</i>	<i>Indicators of political activism</i>									
	<i>Interested in politics</i>	<i>Voted in election</i>	<i>Contacted a politician or government official</i>	<i>Worked in a political party or action group</i>	<i>Worked in another organization or association</i>	<i>Wore or displayed a campaign badge/sticker</i>	<i>Signed a petition</i>	<i>Took part in a lawful demonstration</i>	<i>Boycotted products</i>	<i>Index of political activism</i>
<i>Evaluative dimension of wellbeing</i>										
How satisfied with life as a whole	-.080**	-.006	-.021**	-.014**	-.116**	-.037**	-.075**	-.015**	-.069**	.108**
How happy you are	-.069**	-.008	-.035**	-.021**	-.108**	-.035**	-.083**	-.031**	-.075**	.113**
<i>Emotional dimension of wellbeing</i>										
Felt sad, how often in the past week	.078**	.032**	.031**	.003	.075**	.012**	.065**	-.012*	.060**	-.090**
Felt depressed, how often in the past week	.079**	.036**	.027**	.012*	.067**	.019**	.060**	.012**	.044**	-.088**
Enjoyed life, how often in the past week	-.049**	.007	-.019**	-.022**	-.048**	-.019**	-.030**	-.013**	-.039**	.055**
Were happy, how often in the past week	-.012**	.003	-.012*	-.012**	-.043**	-.004	-.017**	-.002	-.012*	.029**
Felt anxious, how often in the past week	.054**	-.001	.016**	.007	.099**	.025**	.062**	.014**	.055**	-.079**
Felt calm and peaceful, how often in the past week	-.057**	-.019**	-.001	-.004	-.052**	.001	.013**	.015**	-.005	.030**

\**p* < .05; \*\* *p* < .01.

Source ESS Round 6: European Social Survey Round 6 Data (2012). Weighted data: design weight and population size weight are used.



There are only a few correlations between political activism and functioning dimension of wellbeing that are not statistically significant. Wearing campaign badges or stickers is not related to autonomy, engagement during everyday life, orientation to future and stress resistance (see Table 4). Signing a petition has no relation to optimism about personal future and both positive and negative aspects of self-acceptance. Correlations between boycotting products and autonomy, as well as optimism about personal future and the positive aspect of self-acceptance, are not statistically significant too. Participation in lawful demonstrations is not related to optimism about personal future and contacting politicians or government officials is not related to autonomy. The strongest correlations in the group of functioning items exist with interest in politics.

**Table 4.** Correlation between functioning dimension of wellbeing and indicators of political activism (Pearson's *r*)

Dimensions of wellbeing and ESS survey items	Indicators of political activism									
	Interested in politics	Voted in election	Contacted politician or government official	Worked in a political party or action group	Worked in another organization or association	Wore or displayed a campaign badge/sticker	Signed a petition	Took part in a lawful demonstration	Boycotted products	Index of political activism
Free to decide how to live my life	.056**	.034**	.003	.012*	.010*	.001	-.016**	-.020**	-.008	-.019**
Little chance to show how capable I am	-.124**	-.047**	-.058**	-.037**	-.118**	-.031**	-.093**	-.027**	-.080**	.143**
Feel accomplishment from what I do	.073**	.051**	.040**	.030**	.081**	.021**	.042**	.013**	.056**	-.094**
Interested in what you are doing, how much of the time	-.117**	-.058**	-.055**	-.036**	-.093**	-.022**	-.051**	-.023**	-.079**	.123**

**Table 4 cont.**

Absorbed in what you are doing, how much of the time	-.093**	-.063**	-.046**	-.037**	-.064**	-.004	-.023**	-.031**	-.038**	.091**
Enthusiastic about what you are doing, how much of the time	-.068**	-.045**	-.043**	-.034**	-.057**	-.015**	-.018**	-.018**	-.015**	.071**
Feel what I do in life is valuable and worthwhile	.091**	.089**	.068**	.049**	.078**	.032**	.058**	.039**	.061**	-.125**
Have a sense of direction in your life	-.108**	-.054**	-.036**	-.031**	-.089**	-.009	-.040**	-.009*	-.059**	.103**
Always optimistic about my future	.065**	-.028**	.024**	.031**	.062**	.018**	-.002	.003	-.005	-.038**
There are lots of things I am good at	.094**	.034**	.065**	.039**	.075**	.027**	.089**	.056**	.098**	-.131**
In general feel very positive about myself	.050**	-.013**	.043**	.042**	.049**	.018**	-.008	.018**	-.003	-.042**
At times feel as if I am a failure	-.052**	-.038**	-.014**	-.019**	-.021**	.010*	-.006	-.013**	-.016**	.044**
When things go wrong in my life it takes a long time to get back to normal	-.098**	-.018**	-.050**	-.021**	-.089**	-.029**	-.085**	-.032**	-.072**	.116**
Deal with important problems in life	-.105**	-.041**	-.034**	-.035**	-.045**	-.002	-.027**	.021**	-.025**	.076**

\*p &lt; .05; \*\* p &lt; .01.

Source ESS Round 6: European Social Survey Round 6 Data (2012). Weighted data: design weight and population size weight are used.

One sub-dimension of the vitality dimension of wellbeing is exceptional: the quality of sleep in the past week (see Table 5). This item, which is one of the components of the stress measuring scale, has only two statistically significant correlations, which are negative, with indicators of political activism. These indicators are interest in politics and working in other organisations (not in political parties) and associations. Another two statistically insignificant correlations are between effortlessness and contacting politicians or government officials and between feeling full of energy and signing a petition. The strongest correlation, which is negative, is between one item from the depression measuring scale – could not get going – and interest in politics.

In the dimension of community wellbeing, only a few correlations with indicators of political activism are statistically insignificant (see Table 5). One item from the group of social trust variables – trust in people’s helpfulness – is not related to wearing campaign badges or stickers and participating in lawful demonstrations. There also are no statistically significant correlations between the sense of local belonging and signing a petition or boycotting products. The strongest correlation, which is positive, is between the trust in other people and the interest in politics, working in other organisations (not in political parties) and associations, signing a petition.

The vast majority of correlations between the sub-dimensions of supportive relationships’ dimension of wellbeing and the indicators of political activism are statistically significant (see Table 5). Only reciprocity in social exchange is not related to contacting politicians or government officials, wearing campaign badges or stickers and participating in lawful demonstrations. The last item is also not related to loneliness. The strongest statistically significant correlations, which are positive ones, exist mainly between sources of support (number of persons with whom you can discuss intimate and personal matters) and almost all items of political activism.

The strongest positive statistically significant correlations within the index of political activism, which is an aggregated measure of all items of political activism, are with sub-dimensions of social wellbeing – both the community wellbeing and supportive relationships. These sub-dimensions are trust in other people and sources of support.

**Table 5.** Correlation between vitality, community wellbeing and supportive relationships' dimensions of wellbeing and indicators of political activism (Pearson's r)

Dimensions of wellbeing and ESS survey items	Indicators of political activism									
	Interested in politics	Voted in an election	Contacted a politician or government official	Worked in a political party or action group	Worked in another organization or association	Wore or displayed a campaign badge/sticker	Signed a petition	Took part in a lawful demonstration	Boycotted products	Index of political activism
	<i>Vitality dimension of wellbeing</i>									
Felt everything did as effort, how often in the past week	.048**	.039**	.006	.015**	.044**	.024**	.035**	.017**	.030**	-.063**
Sleep was restless, how often in the past week	.019**	-.009	-.009	-.001	.030**	-.001	-.007	-.005	-.005	-.009
Could not get going, how often in the past week	.108**	.051**	.044**	.027**	.082**	.012**	.071**	.018**	.080**	-.117**
Had a lot of energy, how often in the past week	-.041**	.020**	-.025**	-.029**	-.047**	-.010*	.004	.015**	-.019**	.031**
	<i>Community wellbeing dimension of wellbeing</i>									
Most people can be trusted or you can't be too careful	-.132**	-.057**	-.070**	-.051**	-.126**	-.064**	-.128**	-.060**	-.090**	.177**
Most people try to take advantage of you, or try to be fair	-.104**	-.027**	-.028**	-.018**	-.096**	-.016**	-.094**	-.022**	-.073**	.119**

**Table 5** *cont.*

Most of the time people are helpful or mostly looking out for themselves	-.059**	-.022**	-.021**	-.011*	-.066**	-.002	-.060**	.004	-.035**	.071**
Feel people in local area help one another	-.025**	-.040**	-.006	-.015**	-.069**	.004	-.032**	-.009**	-.027**	.057**
Feel close to the people in local area	.018**	.094**	.027**	.048**	.063**	.011*	.006	.026**	-.001	-.065**
<i>Supportive relationships dimension of wellbeing</i>										
How many people with whom you can discuss intimate and personal matters	-.136**	.006**	-.060**	-.053**	-.161**	-.062**	-.157**	-.083**	-.147**	.193**
Feel appreciated by people you are close to	-.088**	-.051**	-.029**	-.026**	-.077**	-.013**	-.059**	-.019**	-.082**	.108**
Receive help and support from people you are close to	-.033**	-.041**	.005	.011*	-.044**	.002	-.043**	.001	-.051**	.054**
Felt lonely, how often in the past week	.084**	.054**	.030**	.014**	.067**	.010*	.063**	.008	.059**	-.097**

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Source ESS Round 6: European Social Survey Round 6 Data (2012). Weighted data: design weight and population size weight are used.

## DISCUSSION

As mentioned in the introduction, almost none of the previous studies on the connection between happiness and political activism (e. g. Klar and Kasser, 2009; Wray-Lake's et al., 2016) were based on truly representative samples and some of them were biased by online surveying. Certain studies concentrated only on one or a few indicators of political activism (e. g. Stutzer and Frey, 2006; Blais and Gélinau, 2007; Weitz-Shapiro and Winters, 2008). Analysis of the data of the European Social Survey, based on a truly representative sample of the European population, supported the findings by Klar and Kasser (2009), who identified that several indicators of activism were positively associated with measures of subjective wellbeing, and Wray-Lake's et al. (2016) study results, which showed the link between civic engagement and wellbeing. Thus, it can be claimed that political activism is positively related to subjective wellbeing.

Nevertheless, a few exceptions exist which should be discussed further. In the case of the emotional dimension of subjective wellbeing, there are also three cases against the conclusion that political activism is positively related to subjective well-being: positive correlation between participating in lawful demonstrations and feeling sad and negative correlation with calmness. Calmness is also negatively related to signing petitions. Analysis of the functioning dimension of subjective wellbeing revealed existing negative correlations of voting in an election with optimism about personal future and the positive aspect of self-acceptance. Another case is negative correlation between taking part in lawful demonstrations and autonomy, as well as between the former and stress resistance. Furthermore, negative correlations exist between signing a petition and autonomy, and a positive correlation emerged between wearing campaign badges or stickers and the negative aspect of self-acceptance. In the vitality dimension of wellbeing, negative correlations exist between feeling full of energy and voting in elections and participating in lawful demonstrations. Analysis of the dimension of supportive relationships unveiled a negative correlation between sources of support and voting in elections, as well as a negative correlation between reciprocity in social exchange and working in political parties or action groups.

The above findings confirm that unconventional political participation (or contentious politics), mainly connected to protesting against an existing policy course or actions, is related to lower values of different indicators of subjective wellbeing. Becoming involved in protest actions like participation in lawful demonstrations, boycotting products and signing a petition, is positively related to negative emotions or negative aspects of functioning. These findings confirm Klar and Kasser's (2009, p. 773) statement that people engaged in unconventional political actions feel a greater sense of injustice and hopelessness, which not only makes them less satisfied with their life, but also impels them to more extreme activist behaviours. So it can be presumed that those whose subjective wellbeing is lower tend to protest in order to change the situation.

Another aspect which requires more thorough research is the correlation between the component of subjective wellbeing and voting in elections. This indicator in many cases had no significant correlations with sub-dimensions of subjective wellbeing (this was especially the case with the evaluative and emotional dimension of wellbeing).

Since political activity is primarily a social phenomenon, the finding that the strongest positive statistically significant correlations within the aggregated index of political activism were with sub-dimensions of social wellbeing – both the community wellbeing and supportive relationships. These sub-dimensions are trust in other people and sources of support and correspond to thin and thick societal ties accordingly. Thus, data shows that both bridging and bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000) are crucial in order to be politically active. Possibly, this is the reason why voting has a weaker relation to political activism because it is the least social behavior by nature.

### **Study limitations**

The main study limitation is related to the chosen method of statistical analysis, which did not show the causation. It remains unknown whether political activism is the cause or the outcome of subjective wellbeing. Consequently, further research should follow in this direction. Additionally, it should be mentioned that even though the majority of the correlations between different aspects of wellbeing and political activism are statistically significant they are still very weak.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. Political activism induces subjective wellbeing and is a prerequisite to feeling good. Each of the indicators of subjective wellbeing correlated with at least two out of nine indicators of political activism, and these correlations were mainly the positive ones. The exception is unconventional political activism, which in certain cases was related to lower values of different indicators of subjective wellbeing. One possible explanation is that unconventional political activism is connected to protesting against an existing policy and people engaged in such activities feel a greater sense of injustice and hopelessness. Nevertheless, all the statistically significant correlations were quite weak.
2. Political activism is positively correlated with all the dimensions of wellbeing: evaluative wellbeing, emotional wellbeing, functioning, vitality, community wellbeing and supportive relationships. However, the strongest positive statistically significant correlations are between indicators of political activism and items of community wellbeing and supportive relationships. A possible reason may be the fact that political activity is a social phenomenon by its nature.

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## AR POLITINIS AKTYVUMAS SKATINA SUBJEKTYVIĄ GEROVĘ: KĄ RODO EUROPOS SOCIALINIO TYRIMO DUOMENYS

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**Santrauka. Įvadas.** Yra tik keletas studijų apie politinio aktyvumo ir subjektyvios gerovės ryšį. Pagrindinė problema ta, kad dauguma panašių tyrimų atlikta naudojant studentų, bet ne visos populiacijos imtis. **Tikslas.** Tyrimo tikslas – išanalizuoti ryšį tarp politinio aktyvumo ir subjektyvios gerovės remiantis reprezentatyvia europiečių populiacijos imtimi. Pagrindinis tyrimo klausimas – ar politinis aktyvumas yra teigiamai susijęs su subjektyvia gerove. **Metodai ir duomenys.** Šis straipsnis grindžiamas Europos socialinio tyrimo 6-osios bangos duomenimis, konkrečiai – kintančių klausimų modulio „Asmeninė ir socialinė gerovė“ ir nuolatinių klausimų modulių „Žiniasklaida ir socialinis pasitikėjimas“ bei „Politika“ duomenimis. 29-iose Europos valstybėse buvo atlikta interviu su 54 673 respondentais, vyresniais nei 15 metų. Statistinės duomenų analizės metodas – koreliacinė politinio aktyvumo indikatorių ir subjektyvios gerovės indikatorių analizė (Pearsono  $r$  koeficientas). **Rezultatai.** Buvo rastos statistiškai reikšmingos koreliacijos tarp politinio aktyvumo indikatorių ir subjektyvios gerovės dimensijų. **Išvados.** Politinis aktyvumas skatina subjektyvią gerovę ir yra geros savijautos sąlyga. Visi subjektyvios gerovės indikatoriai yra susiję bent su dviem politinio aktyvumo indikatoriais. Šios koreliacijos dažniausiai yra teigiamosios, tačiau rasta keletas išimčių nekonvencinio politinio aktyvumo atvejais. Stipriausios teigiamosios statistiškai reikšmingos koreliacijos užfiksuotos tarp politinio aktyvumo indikatorių ir bendruomeniškumo bei tarpasmeninių santykių kintamųjų.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** politinis aktyvumas, subjektyvi gerovė, socialinė gerovė, laimė, Europa.

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