



# The Association Between Life Satisfaction and Extreme Political Interest



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## Introduction

- Political participation is associated with improved development outcomes and the election of better leaders (Hope, 2022).
- Studies have shown that gender and aggression are associated with political interest (Prior, 2010; Larsen, 2022).
- It is unclear whether people with high levels of life satisfaction display political interest beyond what would be expected by the aggressiveness of their feelings or their gender.

## Methods

### Sample

- The sample included 8,131 participants aged 18 and older, drawn from the 2020 wave of the American National Election Studies database.
- ANES is a nationally representative sample of civilian, non-institutionalized adults in the United States who reside at residential addresses where mail is delivered.

## Methods (cont.)

### Measures

- Level of life satisfaction was measured with the question “All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?” Possible responses ranged from 1 (not satisfied at all) to 5 (extremely satisfied).
- Extreme Interest in Politics (EIIP) is a binary variable measured with the question “Would you say that you have been very much interested, somewhat interested or not much interested in the political campaigns so far this year?” where a 1 represents being “very much interested” in politics and 0 means either “not interested” or “somewhat interested.”
- Aggression Level is a binary variable created using combined measures where a 1 represents that a participant feels both “very” or “extremely” angered and outraged by how things are going in the country and a 0 otherwise.
- Gender is a binary variable where 1 represents “male” and 0 represents “female.”

## Research Questions

- Is there an association between a person’s level of life satisfaction and whether they have an extreme interest in politics?
- Does the association between a person’s level of life satisfaction and extreme political interest remain significant when controlling for aggression level and gender?

## Results

### Bivariate

- Logistic regression analysis showed that life satisfaction was significantly and positively associated with a high level of political interest (O.R. 1.13, CI 1.077-1.18,  $p=2.03e-07$ ). On average, with each increase in level of life satisfaction, the odds of a person being very interested in politics increases by 13%.

### Multivariate

- Life satisfaction (O.R. 1.21, CI 1.16-1.28) is significantly and positively associated with a high level of political interest after controlling for aggression level and gender.
- Aggression Level (O.R. 2.61, CI 2.38-2.87) is significantly associated with a high level of political interest after controlling for life satisfaction and gender.
- Gender (O.R. 1.35, CI 1.23-1.48) is significantly associated with a high level of political interest after controlling for aggression level and life satisfaction.

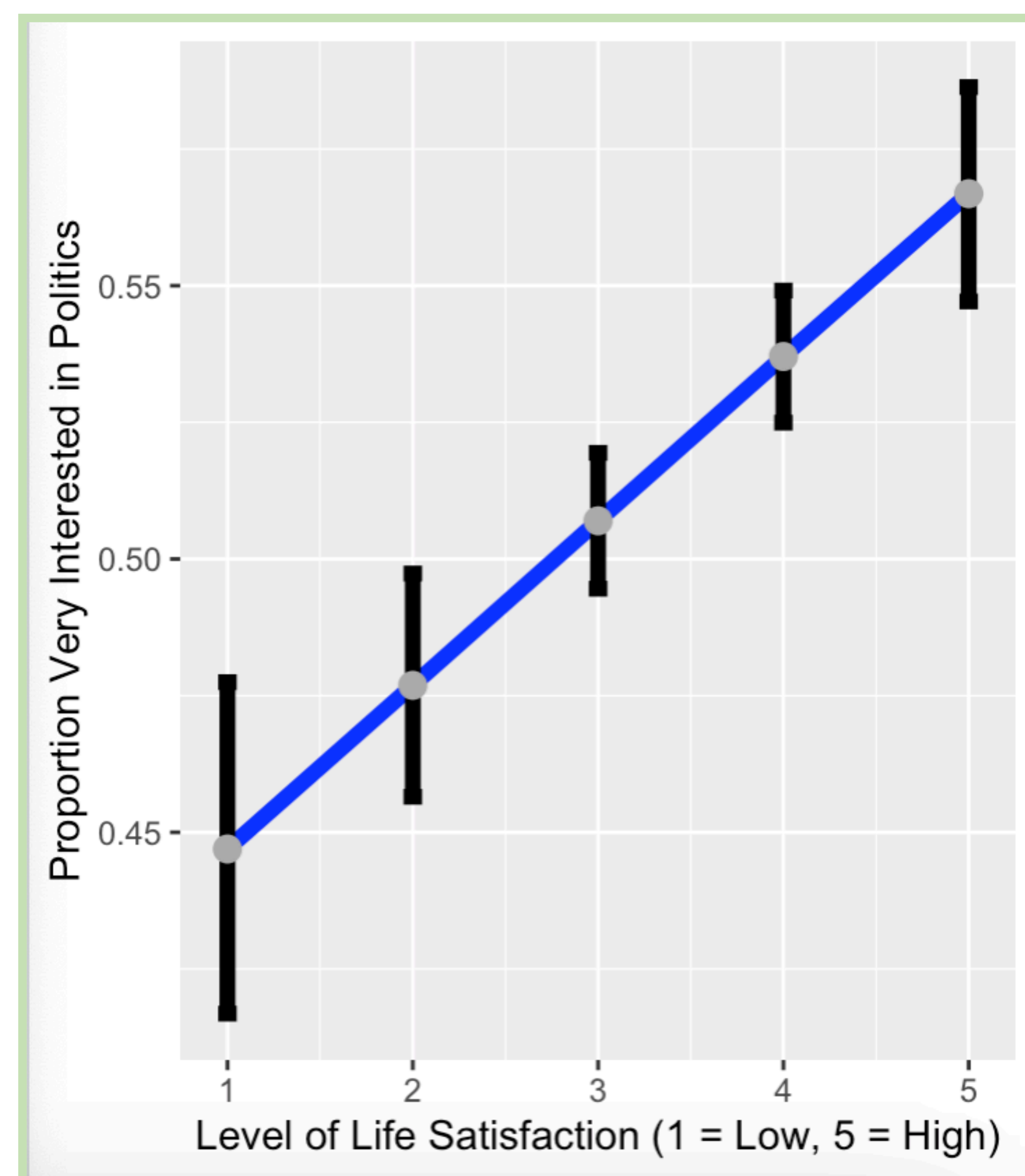


Figure 1. Extreme Interest in Politics by Level of Life Satisfaction among US Adults

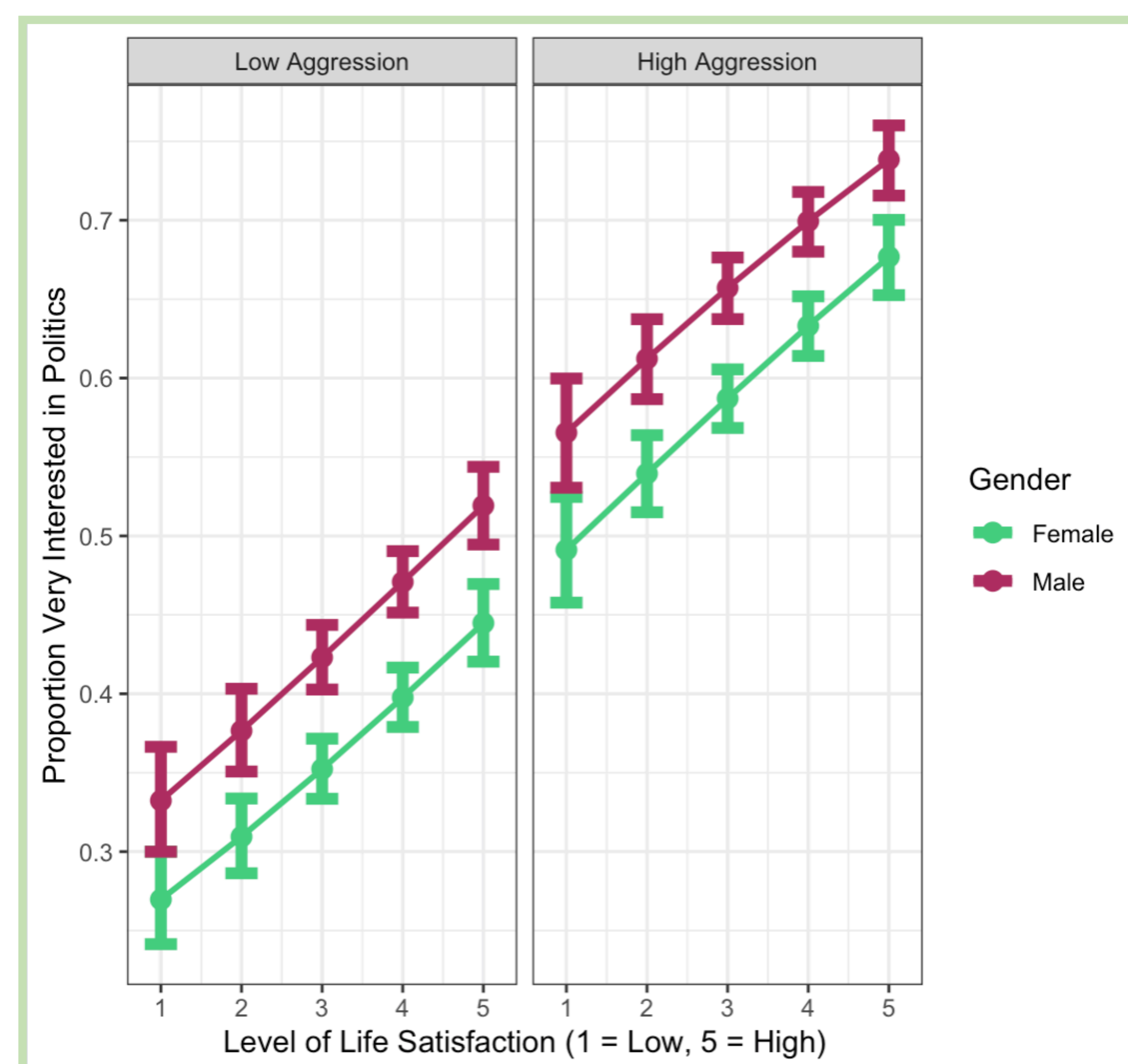


Figure 2: Extreme Interest in Politics by Life Satisfaction Level, Aggression Level, and Gender among US Adults

## Discussion

- It was hypothesized that, the more satisfied a person is with their life, the less they would be to engage in political processes. However, the reverse was found.
- For aggression level and gender, the association aligns with the findings in past studies. However, the association between gender and political interest is much stronger than expected (Bennett & Bennett, 1989; Verba et al., 1997).
- Notably, the present findings are based on cross-sectional data, and the population sampled does not include Americans who were younger than 18 in 2020, Americans who are institutionalized, or non-Americans.
- It would be important for future research to consider whether life satisfaction, aggression level, and gender are associated with political interest in countries other than the United States of America.

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Hope, E. (2022, February 16). *Rethinking civic engagement*. Brennan Center for Justice. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/rethinking-civic-engagement>

Larsen, E. G. (2022). Dynamic political interest: How personality differences and the political environment shape political interest. *British Journal of Political Science*, 52(1), 467–474. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123419000784>

Prior, M. (2010). You’ve either got it or you don’t? The stability of political interest over the life cycle. *The Journal of Politics*, 72(3), 747–766. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022381610000149>

Verba, S., Burns, N., & Schlozman, K. L. (1997). Knowing and caring about politics: Gender and political engagement. *The Journal of Politics*, 59(4), 1051–1072. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2998592>