

# Happiness where it is not: a comparative study of well-being indexes and the Spanish electoral discourse

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## Abstract

*This article conducts a content analysis to shed light on how discourses on happiness as a social objective differ from other political discourses which pose different national goals. It first studies 13 happiness indexes and measures promoted by international bodies and governments. It then analyses 44 election advertisements from the Spanish political parties PP, PSOE and Unidas Podemos (UP). When comparing the two samples, we found that both discourses have a strong degree of similarity, which might indicate that far from being a political revolution, the discourse of happiness instead reflects the prevailing values of the societies from which it comes.*

## Keywords

*Happiness, well-being index, content analysis, political discourse, election advertisement.*

## Resum

*Amb l'objectiu d'aclarir en què es diferencien els discursos sobre la felicitat com a objectiu social d'altres discursos polítics en què es plantegen objectius nacionals diferents, en aquest article es fan dues anàlisis de contingut. En primer lloc, s'estudien 13 índexs i mesures de felicitat impulsats per organismes i governs internacionals. En segon lloc, s'analitzen 44 anuncis electorals de les formacions polítiques espanyoles PP, PSOE i Unides Podem. En comparar les dues mostres, s'observa que tots dos discursos tenen un grau elevat de similitud, la qual cosa apuntaria al fet que el discurs de la felicitat, lluny de ser una revolució política, és un discurs més que reflecteix els valors imperants de les societats des de les quals es pensa.*

## Paraules clau

*Felicitat, índex de benestar, anàlisi de contingut, discurs polític, espot electoral.*

## 1. Introduction

In 2011, the European Commission published *Beyond the GDP. Measuring Progress in a Changing World*, a report in which initiatives previously promoted by bodies like the European Parliament, the Club of Rome, the World Wildlife Fund and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development converge, which point to several reflections on the limits of economic growth as the main measure of progress in Western countries.

That same year, the United Nations General Assembly published the resolution called *Happiness: Towards a Holistic Approach to Development* (United Nations General Assembly 2011), which states that happiness is a fundamental human goal and that by its very nature gross domestic product (GDP) was not envisioned to reflect people's happiness and well-being.

Even though other reports and meetings of this type had been carried out previously, as compiled in the studies of Buendía Sánchez (2015) and Sánchez-Sánchez (2020), after that

point, some governments and intergovernmental institutions began to step up their meetings and commissions to create new measures and indicators that they claim to reflect the importance of citizens' happiness in the development of public policies (Ferrara & Nisticò 2015, Frawley 2015b, Hogan et al. 2015, Lorca Martín De Villodres 2013, Sánchez-Sánchez 2020).

However, ten years after all these initiatives that seek citizen happiness were launched, several researchers and thinkers question the establishment of happiness—and measures like Gross National Happiness—as the new benchmark for measuring national progress. They claim that it has ended up being just a reformulation of the same themes that were already accepted as socially desirable and politically supple in a given culture and historical time, more than being a true social and political revolution based on a study of human nature (Ahmed 2010, Frawley 2015b, Sánchez-Sánchez 2020).

To inquire into this claim, this article conducts a content analysis of the main measures and indicators of happiness in

recent years, following in the footsteps of studies like the one by Sánchez-Sánchez (2017), and relates it to the electoral discourse in Spain (in the form of TV spots or advertisements of the main political parties in the Spanish parliament elections in 2021). We have taken the electoral discourse in Spain because even though the country is a member of the intergovernmental organisations mentioned above (based on which we can assume that the member countries may share a certain political culture), Spain has not made citizen happiness a state objective, nor has it considered measures of national progress related to happiness.

Through this comparison, we elucidate the indicators or themes that the most popular well-being indexes and measures bear in mind when measuring citizen happiness and how these happiness indicators or themes are different from the themes that appear in other political discourses which advocate other ways of promoting national progress, as has happened in Spain.

The results showed that, in concurrence with the sectors that are more critical of happiness as a new and definitive measure of national progress, the happiness discourse contained in the measures and indexes analysed (that is, the indicators and themes from well-being indexes) have a high degree of similarity with the Spanish electoral discourse analysed (that is, with the themes referred to in the televised electoral advertisements). This may indicate that for the sample analysed, the happiness discourse implicit in the measures studied behaves just like other Western political discourses, but in this case, the themes are articulated around the signifier *happiness*.

In the conclusions section, we discuss these results and their effect on other studies related to this topic.

## 2. Happiness as a political objective: A new paradigm?

The majority of happiness measures promoted by governmental and intergovernmental organisations in the West tend to draw from a theoretical and methodological current called the Science of Happiness (Sánchez-Sánchez 2020).

According to Davies (2015), this science is the latest expression of the utilitarian idea that the relationship between the mind and the world can be mathematically examined, and that the fundamental political problems can be resolved with the science of feelings and human nature.

More specifically, the everyday activities and events that the Science of Happiness determines may influence on citizen happiness are related to the fields of economics, work, education, family and social relations, culture, the home country and its political system, as well as the age, gender and race of individuals, some of their personality features and personal values, their health and their level of religiosity. Studies like Sánchez-Sánchez (2020) summarise what the Science of Happiness has to say about how all these variables influence people's well-being.

The defenders of this Science of Happiness applied to politics state that all the data collected on how happy citizens are and how much pleasure or pain they derive from different activities and everyday events can be useful for political leaders when designing public policies on matters related to economic growth, equality, retirement, unemployment, health, education or governance, among others (for example, see Bok 2010; Cummins et al. 2009; Layard 2005; Musikanski, Philips & Crowder 2019).

Therefore, through happiness indexes and measurements, governments and intergovernmental institutions can turn the study of citizens' subjective well-being into an affair of public and political concern.

However, as Bruno Frey states, happiness is an object of study that can be easily manipulated by both citizens and politicians (Frey & Gallus 2013a, 2013b; Frey, Gallus & Steiner 2014). It could be said that 'defining happiness is then propagating an ideology' (Veenhoven 1991: 8), and happiness indexes and measures would be no exception.

As Hyman (2011) found, happiness 'is shaped, interpreted and articulated via culturally specific ways of thinking, being and acting' (p. 2). Merely the act of choosing what everyday activities and events may affect human happiness or unhappiness is already reflecting the dominant values of a given culture, its concerns and its yearnings (Boreham, Povey & Tomaszewski 2013; Hyman 2011). Consequently, if happiness is a cultural construct, its reproduction in the guise of well-being indexes and measures is indirectly legitimating the social, political and economic status quo (Aronczyk 2014).

In turn, by choosing certain affairs and relating them to happiness, they are automatically associated with what is good, desirable and acceptable (Ahmed 2010; Frawley 2015b; Veenhoven 2009a, 2009b), and this implies that there is a series of social, cultural, economic and political practices that are better than others are.

Likewise, via the Science of Happiness and well-being indexes and measures, happiness is viewed as the outcome of the empirical study of human beings (that is, as something and universal), which safeguards the themes related to this concept from any moral, political, social, philosophical, historical or any other type of questioning (Cabanas 2013). In this case, science's authority may be used as a guarantor to ensure that certain proposals on how one should live are accepted (Davies 2015, Frawley 2015b).

In consequence, happiness may be used in politics as a rhetorical slogan to promote certain lifestyles that cannot be promoted by other legislative, executive or judicial policies or tax incentives (Offe 2012). Emotional signifiers tend to have a great deal of rhetorical power, as they seem to transcend ideological barriers (Ahmed 2004, Frawley 2015b, Illouz 2007, Offe 2012).

This article follows in the footsteps of critical studies on happiness as a social and political objective, which includes

studies like those by Ahmed (2010), Cabanas (2013), Cabanas and Illouz (2019), Frawley (2015a, 2015b), Hyman (2011), Rodríguez (2012) and Sánchez-Sánchez (2017, 2020), among others. Studies like Frawley (2015b) use different media discourses that talk about promoting happiness from political organisms in the United Kingdom to identify their conceptual characteristics and discuss their consequences.

This study follows an approach similar to Frawley (2015b). The sample includes several happiness indexes and measures, as well as some Spanish electoral discourses which explicitly mention this abstract concept, and it explores their conceptual features.

The reason behind deciding to conduct an analysis of two such different samples is because, following Ahmed's (2010) observation, happiness does not tend to be studied in places where it is not. By describing a world that is constructed via the signifier *happiness*, everything that transcends this horizon and may have the power to explain this concept in any other way is ignored.

By studying texts that do not speak explicitly about happiness and relating them to those that do, we hope to reveal more information on the nature of happiness as a cultural construct.

### 3. Methodology

Bearing in mind the above, this study sets out to conduct a comparative analysis between discourses from different sources (first, international happiness indexes and measures, and secondly, the Spanish electoral discourses) to explore to what extent contemporary discourses on happiness that draw from the Science of Happiness are thematically different than other discourses. Based on this, our general objective is:

- To determine the degree of similarity between the themes suggested as happiness indicators in the most popular international happiness indexes and measures and the themes suggested as socially desirable and politically suppliable in the electoral discourses from the main political parties in Spain.

Consequently, the specific objectives can be broken down as follows:

- To identify the themes suggested as happiness indicators in the most popular happiness indexes and measures.
- To study the presence of the themes suggested in the most popular happiness indexes and measures and the themes suggested in the electoral discourses from the main political parties in Spain.

Below we describe both samples, as well as the analysis technique used to meet these research objectives.

#### 3.1 Sample: Happiness indexes and measures

Of all the happiness discourses, our sample is a series of happiness indexes and measures promoted by intergovernmental

organisations, as they are one of the clearest expressions of the application of the Science of Happiness to politics (Frey & Gallus 2013a).

Because of the large number of happiness measures, in this analysis, our sample is those identified in the study by Sánchez-Sánchez (2017, 2020) using systematised search methods such as the Scoping Review (Arksey & O'Malley 2005).

The most popular happiness indexes and measurements<sup>1</sup> that comprise the sample in this study are:

- *Gross National Happiness Index*. This is an index created to measure Bhutan's progress based on Bhutanese culture and Buddhist values. This measure was the inspiration behind the drafting of the report *Happiness: Towards a Holistic Approach to Development* by the United Nations General Assembly (2011).
- *Happy Planet Index*. This is an index created by the New Economics Foundation, a think tank in the United Kingdom whose mission is to promote social, economic and environmental justice (New Economics Foundation 2018).
- *Philippine Gross National Happiness Index*. This measure was created by Virola and Encarnacion (2007), two members of the National Statistical Coordination Board in the Philippines.
- *International Well-being Index*. This measure, which seeks to be universal, is proposed by the International Well-being Group, an initiative of the Australian Centre on Quality of Life, to which some benchmark figures in the Science of Happiness belong, such as Robert A. Cummins.
- *Gallup & Healthways Well-being Index*. This index was created by the organisations Gallup and Healthways, and it particularly focuses on promoting people's health, happiness and productivity, as well as on providing all its data to companies that want to apply well-being-related measures (Gallup & Healthways 2013).
- *Index of Economic Well-being*. This measure was created by Osberg and Sharpe (2002) as a proposed alternative to the GDP.
- *Measures of National Well-being in the United Kingdom*. This measure is part of a programme created in 2010 and promoted by the then Prime Minister of the British government, David Cameron, with the goal of studying the country's progress in terms that go beyond the economy and thus complement measures like the GDP (Office for National Statistics 2016).
- *Prescott-Allen Well-being Index*. This measure was created by Prescott-Allen in *The Wellbeing of Nations* (2001) to be applied by lawmakers in all countries.
- *European Social Survey on Well-being*. This is an academic survey created in 2001 and conducted by the European Research Infrastructure Consortium.
- *Well-being in 2030*. Eurobarometer, a body of the European Commission that regularly conducts public

opinion surveys in the Member States of the Union, carried out this study (Eurobarometer 2011).

- *European Quality of Life Survey*. The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) of the European Union (EU) created this measure with the goal of generating information to develop social and labour policies (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions 2012).
- *Quality of Life Survey*. This is a measure promoted by the Statistical Office of the European Union (Eurostat).
- *Quality of Life in European Cities*. This study is also conducted by the Eurobarometer. (Eurobarometer 2015).

These indexes and measures organise the different indicators that are correlated with individual happiness (or with its synonyms in this field, such as well-being or quality of life) in a multidimensional way, that is, through groups and/or categories of indicators. This enables us to quickly see the major thematic groups of indicators which will allow them to be compared with the socially desirable and politically supple themes identified in the analysis of the Spanish electoral discourse.

### 3.2 Sample: Spanish electoral discourses

Of all the political discourses, those from Spain were chosen as a sample, as this country is a member of some of the intergovernmental organisations that have promoted happiness measures in recent years, yet happiness has not been made a matter of interest for the government.

More specifically, of all the Spanish political discourses which could be explored, we chose electoral discourse for our sample, which is a 'fundamental phenomenon in democratic societies whose political system is based on the debate among different ideological options, as Spain's is' (A. Capdevila 2004a: 17).

Likewise, of all the electoral discourses, we chose the advertisements broadcast on TV during electoral campaigns, as they are extremely important within the communicative strategies of political parties during campaigns and are not mediated by other agents who could distort each party's political platform (A. Capdevila 1997; A. Capdevila & Pericot 2012; Moragas-Fernández & A. Capdevila 2015; Ruiz Collantes, Pérez-Latorre & P. Capdevila 2015; Sádaba 2003). In this way, in each election we can clearly see each party's proposals regarding what they consider socially important and politically supple.

Electoral advertising have been studied multiple times in the field of Spanish political communication (e.g., among many other references, see A. Capdevila, 1997, 2004a, 2004b, 2015; A. Capdevila & Gómez-Puertas 2011; A. Capdevila, Gómez-Puertas & De Higes 2007; A. Capdevila & Pericot 2012; Gómez-Puertas & A. Capdevila 2011, 2012; Hernández Olmedo 2015; Moragas-Fernández & A. Capdevila 2014, 2018; Pericot & Capdevila 2001; Pericot, Ruiz Collantes, Prat & A. Capdevila, 1998; Pujadas, Pérez-Latorre & Oliva 2012;

Pujadas & Xifra 2014; and Ruiz Collantes, Pérez-Latorre & P. Capdevila 2015), so this study is yet another contribution which seeks to further expand our knowledge in this field of study.

We studied electoral advertising for the Spanish parliamentary elections from the leading political parties and coalitions that have governed Spain on a national scale from 1993 to 2019: Partido Popular (PP), Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) and Unidos/as Podemos (UP)<sup>2</sup> (see Table I). With this selection, we seek to capture the programmatic promises of the Spanish governments both before and after happiness became politically prominent (2011).

### 3.3 Method of analysis

In order to meet the general and specific research objectives presented at the beginning of this methodological section, we had to compare the themes suggested as well-being indicators in the most popular international happiness indexes and measures and the themes suggested as socially desirable and politically supple in Spanish electoral discourse.

When identifying these themes in both samples, the technique used was content analysis, as it enables us to recognise the elements that comprise a document and classify them in order to later explain them (Ruiz Olabuénaga 2012, Sierra Bravo 1983). However, a different content analysis was designed for each sample depending on its characteristics.

In the case of the happiness indexes and measures, the themes suggested as happiness factors are all the major groups of indicators that share a certain theme. Specifically, within a happiness index there may be a group of indicators named Education, within which are indicators related to individuals' literacy level, the national school dropout rate, the national results on the PISA report or the quality of school infrastructures, among others.

In this case, the content analysis conducted consisted in identifying what these major groups of indicators are and combining these general trends among measures in the form of what have been called *happiness dimensions*. Within a happiness dimension there may also be other happiness subdimensions, which are simply subgroups of indicators within a major group that is more similar to one another. Continuing with the example of the major group of indicators Education, it has become one happiness dimension, which in turn may be comprised of one subdimension which encompasses themes related to statistics on the national educational system, and another subdimension which brings together themes related to individuals' intellectual aspirations and values. The names that these happiness dimensions and subdimensions are given are extracted directly from the terminologies used in the happiness measures to refer to the groups of indicators that share a given theme.

Therefore, these happiness dimensions are the outcome of studying the absolute frequencies and conglomerates of indicators, which enabled us to group similar indicators together

**Table I. Electoral advertisements sample**

<i>Spanish Parliamentary elections</i>	<i>Political party</i>	<i>Campaign</i>	<i>Number of ads analysed</i>
1993	Partit Popular	Ahora gobierno para todos	1
	Partit Socialista Obrer Espanyol	España, en progreso	1
1996	Partit Popular	Con la nueva mayoría	1
	Partit Socialista Obrer Espanyol	España, en positivo	3
2000	Partit Popular	Vamos a más	4
	Partit Socialista Obrer Espanyol – Progressistes	Lo próximo	2
2004	Partit Popular	Juntos vamos a más	1
	Partit Socialista Obrer Espanyol	Soluciones ahora	2
2008	Partit Popular	Con cabeza y corazón	2
	Partit Socialista Obrer Espanyol	Vota con todas tus fuerzas	4
2011	Partit Popular	Súmate al cambio	1
	Partit Socialista Obrer Espanyol	Pelea por lo que quieres	1
2015	Partit Popular	España en serio	1
	Partit Socialista Obrer Espanyol	Un futuro para la mayoría	4
2016	Partit Popular	Unidos podemos	2
	Partit Socialista Obrer Espanyol	Ahora más que nunca, a favor	3
	Units Podem	Un sí por el cambio	5
2019 (April)	Partit Popular	Valor seguro	1
	Partit Socialista Obrer Espanyol	La España que quieres	1
	Unides Podem	La historia la escribes tú	1
2019 (Nov.)	Partit Popular	Por todo lo que nos une	1
	Partit Socialista Obrer Espanyol	Ahora sí	1
	Unides Podem	Un gobierno contigo	1
<b>Total:</b>			<b>44</b>

Source: Author.

without losing nuances (for more information see Krippendorff 1990).

Because the indicators of happiness indexes and measures were sometimes presented in an unstructured way (that is, that the indicators are not always grouped in the same fashion), this analysis was also based on Grounded Theory, which is a methodology for constructing theories based on data (Charmaz 2006).

Given the comparative nature of this study, the content analysis of the Spanish electoral advertisement was designed based on the happiness dimensions identified in the happiness indexes and measures, which in this case worked as categories of analysis.

Thus, the themes suggested as socially desirable and politically suppliant in the electoral advertisements in the sample were classified as based on the happiness dimensions and subdimensions. Consequently, in this same analysis, we were able to identify what themes developed in the electoral

discourse were associated with happiness, as well as the differences and similarities between the two samples.

Continuing with the example of Education, in the analysis of the electoral discourses, we studied what topics were developed in this regard to see whether they or not they matched those suggested as happiness indicators in the well-being indexes and measures. As an illustration, the political parties studied may mention Education themes such as the quality of school infrastructures, but they may not mention matters like individuals' literacy level, the national school dropout rate or the national results on the PISA report.

This analysis was conducted by first studying the electoral campaign of each political party in the sample, and then comparing it with the sample of happiness indexes and measures; when doing so, we took all the analyses of all the parties over time as a single homogeneous sample, that is, without distinguishing among the political parties.

#### 4. Results

The discourse in this Results section is organised around the research objectives. First, we will meet the specific objectives, and secondly, we will fulfil the general objective.

Beginning with the first specific objective, the themes suggested as happiness indicators in the most popular happiness indexes and measures, which are called *happiness dimensions* in this research, are: Subjective well-being (12 of the 13 measures in the sample mention this category), Community (it appears in 8 of the 13 measures), Politics (it appears in 7 of the 13 measures), Environment (it appears in 12 of the 13 measures), Work and Personal Finances (it appears in 12 of the 13 measures), Education (it appears in 7 of the 13 measures), Health (it appears in 10 of the 13 measures) and National Capital (it appears in 3 of the 13 measures).

Because these are categories that encapsulate a large number of indicators, these happiness dimensions and their subdimensions can be seen in their entirety in the Annex to this article (Tables II-IX). They will also be partially shown in this section once the results for the general objective of this research has been presented.

With regard to the second specific objective, based on the analysis conducted, we can conclude that the themes (happiness dimensions) suggested in the most popular happiness indexes and measures have a notable presence in the electoral discourses of the leading political parties in Spain.

As shown in Table X, the happiness dimensions appeared regularly in the electoral discourses of the PP, PSOE and UP throughout the entire period analysed.

More specifically, and extracting the percentages from Table X, the Politics dimension appeared in 60% of the PP campaigns, 80% of the PSOE campaigns and 100% of the UP campaigns, and there was only one election cycle (in 2011) when the political parties in the sample did not refer to themes related to this category.

In turn, the Education dimension appeared in 20% of the PP campaigns, 80% of the PSOE campaigns and 0% of the UP campaigns. There were only two Spanish Parliamentary elections in which this theme was not mentioned: the 2008 and the second 2019 elections.

The health dimension appeared in 20% of the PP campaigns, 30% of the PSOE campaigns and 0% of the UP campaigns, and this time their appearance in the different elections was more irregular than the other dimensions presented so far.

The Work and Personal Finances dimension appeared in 90% of the PP campaigns, 60% of the PSOE campaigns and 67% of the UP campaigns, and it was mentioned in all the Parliamentary elections between 1993 and 2019.

Just like the Health dimension, the Community dimension appeared irregularly in the different elections; specifically, it appeared in 20% of the PP campaigns, 50% of the PSOE campaigns and 33% of the UP campaigns.

The Environment dimension appeared in 30% of the PP and PSOE campaigns and 67% of the UP campaigns, and its appearance was also irregular, although there seem to be more references in the Spanish electoral discourse in the sample since 2016.

The Subjective well-being dimension appeared in 20% of the PP campaigns, 10% of the PSOE campaigns and 33% of the UP campaigns. Its appearance in the different elections was constant over time.

Finally, the National Capital dimension appeared in 30% of the PP campaigns, 40% of the PSOE campaigns and 33% of the UP campaigns, and it seems to encompass themes that over time the PP and PSOE have stopped addressing in their electoral communications, as references to it have been scant since 2004.

Therefore, as an overall trend, we can conclude that the political parties analysed all refer to the happiness dimensions in some of the Parliamentary elections, except for the Education and Health dimensions for Unidas Podemos. However, the sample for this party is so small (just three electoral campaigns) that we cannot conclude whether this is truly a characteristic of this party's discourse.

Likewise, even though the electoral discourse analysed refers generally to all the happiness dimensions, we found that each party has certain dimensions that appear more regularly than others (that is, in more than half the electoral campaigns analysed).

For example, themes related to the Politics and Work and Personal Finances dimensions tended to particularly appear in the PP's electoral discourses; the PSOE tended to mention themes related to the Politics, Education and Work and Personal Finances dimensions; and the UP's discourse revolved around matter related to the Politics, Work and Personal Finances and Environment dimensions.

Therefore, it follows that the topics related to the Politics and Work and Personal Finances dimensions were the ones that appear the most in the Spanish electoral discourse analysed, and that aspects related to Education were characteristic of the PSOE, while aspects related to the Environment were characteristic of the UP.

For the general objective of determining the degree of similarity between the themes suggested as well-being indicators by the happiness indexes and measures and the themes suggested as socially desirable and political suppleable by the electoral discourses of the leading political parties in Spain, all the analyses of all three parties are taken as a single sample.

Below is a series of tables which show the themes or subdimensions that the Spanish political parties develop in each happiness dimension, which more clearly show the degree of match between the samples. The themes which match in both samples are coloured green.

Table IX shows how a wide variety of themes covering all the thematic subcategories (or subdimensions) included in the

**Table X. Presence of the *dimensions of happiness* in the electoral advertisements of PP, PSOE and UP**

Dimension	Political party	1993	1996	2000	2004	2008	2011	2015	2016	2019 (April)	2019 (Nov.)
Politics	PP		■	■	■	■			■		■
	PSOE	■	■	■	■	■		■	■		■
	Unides Podem								■	■	■
Education	PP			■						■	
	PSOE	■	■	■	■		■	■	■	■	
	Unides Podem										
Health	PP			■						■	
	PSOE		■		■			■			
	Unides Podem										
Work and Personal Finances	PP	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
	PSOE		■	■	■			■		■	■
	Unides Podem									■	■
Community	PP									■	■
	PSOE	■			■				■	■	■
	Unides Podem									■	
Environment	PP			■	■					■	
	PSOE				■				■		■
	Unides Podem									■	■
Subjective well-being	PP				■					■	
	PSOE								■		
	Unides Podem									■	
national Capital	PP	■		■	■						
	PSOE	■		■	■			■			
	Unides Podem									■	

Source: Author.

happiness indexes and measures and summarised through the Politics dimensions appeared in all the Spanish electoral discourses.

This does not mean that reference is made to all the indicators related to Politics included in the happiness indexes and measures in the electoral discourses studied, but it does mean that reference is made to at least one indicator from each thematic subdimension or subgroup within this dimension.

Thus, in the Spanish electoral discourse, government intervention in matters related to protecting certain civil rights, social organisation, the quality of electoral processes and the separation between the state and the media (Characteristics of the country's political system subdimension) is suggested as desirable.

The government taking part in affairs related to stimulating citizen political participation and preserving the trust in institutions is also suggested as desirable, as is ensuring that

citizens are satisfied with the situation of the country and the policies made by public institutions (Governance subdimension).

In turn, Table XII shows that for the Education dimension, only matters related to the national educational system were mentioned in the Spanish electoral discourse, while themes related to individuals' intellectual aspirations (Personal education subdimension) and value systems (Personal values subdimension) were ignored.

Table XIII shows that for the Work and Personal Finances dimension, the difference between the samples lies in the fact that the electoral discourses do not address aspects related to the relationships among the employees of a company (Interpersonal relations), workplace risks (Physical/Health), individuals' capacity to purchase nonessential goods (Nonessential consumption) and their belongings and properties (Assets).

**Table XI. Subdimensions of the *Politics* dimension developed in Spanish election advertisements**

Politics								
Characteristics of the country's political system				Citizen political participation		Governance		
Civil rights	Social organisation	Electoral processes	Media	Personal interest in politics	Personal politic actions	Assessment of the general situation of the country	Trust in institutions	Assessment of policies

Source: Author.

**Table XII. Subdimensions of the *Education* dimension developed in Spanish election advertisements**

Education		
Personal education	Personal values	National education system

Source: Author.

**Table XIII. Subdimensions of the *Work and personal finances* developed in Spanish election advertisements**

Work and personal finances							
Work				Personal finances			
Work conditions			Contribution of employment to self-realisation	Balance between work and personal life	Financial situation	Household consumption structure / Living standards	Financial safety
Contractual characteristics	Interpersonal relations	Safety Work Physical /Health				Essential consumption	

Source: Author.

However, thanks to the green-coloured cells we can see that there are more convergences than divergences between the two samples, as the Spanish electoral discourse suggests that it is desirable for the government to intervene in matters related to job contracts and stability, the balance between work and personal life and individuals' self-realisation through work (Work subdimension). Likewise, the electoral advertisements in the sample also expressed the desire for the government to take part in matters like citizens' financial stability and their ability to purchase essential goods (Personal finances subdimension).

In terms of the Community dimension, Table XIV shows that there is also a high degree of match between samples, as a Spanish electoral discourse suggests that the next government should guarantee, to the extent possible, aspects related to social cohesion (Social cohesion and interpersonal relationships), satisfactory interpersonal relationships among citizens (Feelings stemming from social interaction) and their social and cultural participation, and that it should promote national traditions.

The only matter within the Community dimension that is not mentioned in the Spanish electoral discourse is the importance of relationships among neighbours in a community (Neighbours).

In the Spanish electoral discourse, the Environment dimension (Table XV) appears less completely, in that only matters related to violence and vandalism (Residential area subdimension),

housing and related accessibility problems (Residential area subdimension) are mentioned in the sample chosen, along with the concern for caring for the environment. In this case, there seems to be less convergence among the samples.

In the case of the Subjective Well-being dimension, Table XVI shows that there is a high degree of similarity between samples, as the Spanish electoral discourse only fails to mention matters related to individuals' religiosity and spirituality (Meaning of life subdimension).

Finally, in relation to the National Capital dimension, Table XVII shows that matters related to the national economy (Economic capital) primarily appear in the Spanish national discourse, although so do matters related to Other kinds of capital, such as human. In this way, we can conclude that all of the themes associated with this dimension on the happiness indexes and measures appear in the electoral discourse studied.

If we take Tables XI-XVII and extract a percentage by dividing the number of subdimensions mentioned in the electoral discourse between the total subdimensions for each dimension, we can see that there is a 100% thematic match between the two samples in the Politics and National Capital dimensions; 33% match between samples for the Education dimension; 64% for the Work and Personal Finances dimension; 88% for the Community dimension; 38% of similarities in the Environment dimension; and 80% match in the Subjective Well-being dimension.



**Table XIV. Subdimensions of *Community* developed in Spanish election advertisements**

Community							
Social cohesion and interpersonal relationships				Feelings stemming from social interaction		Social and cultural participation	
Social cohesion	Interpersonal relationships					Social participation	Cultural
	Family	Friends	Neighbours	Others			

Source: Author.

**Table XV. Subdimensions of the *Environment* dimension developed in Spanish election advertisements**

Environment							
Residential area				Environment			
Characteristics	Infrastructures and services	Natural spaces and phenomena	Security	Housing	Characteristics of the natural environment	Impact of human activity on the environment	Environmental care

Source: Author.

**Table XVI. Subdimensions of the *Subjective Well-being* dimension developed in Spanish election advertisements**

Subjective Well-being					
Emotional assessments			Cognitive assessments		
Positive emotions and feelings	Negative emotions and feelings	Meaning of life		Satisfaction of life	
		Religiosity and spirituality	Assessment of the meaning of one's own life		

Source: Author.

**Table XVII. Subdimensions related to the *National Capital* dimension developed in Spanish election advertisements**

National capital	
Economic capital	Other capitals

Source: Author.

Consequently, after examining these tables, the results indicate that the matters that the happiness indexes and measures consider the driving forces behind well-being (happiness dimensions) are also elements that comprise the Spanish electoral discourse analysed, as the samples match much more than they differ.

#### 4. Conclusions

The results of these analyses indicate that a thematic similarity can be established between the groups of well-being indicators from the happiness indexes and measures (which formulate an explicit proposal on how the Science of Happiness should be applied to the exercise of politics) and Spanish electoral advertising, which construct a discourse on what is socially desirable and politically suppliant in a country in which citizen happiness has not yet been stated as a governmental objective.

This conclusion is due to the fact that, generally speaking, we have identified the majority of themes mentioned in the happiness indexes and measures (called *happiness dimensions*

and *subdimensions*) in the spots for the Spanish parliamentary elections, thus showing that both discourses are similar.

However, despite this overall parallelism between the samples, we should also bear in mind that in the electoral advertising studied, each of these happiness themes or dimensions may play a more or less central role in the narrative that each party creates and those that are constructed in the Spanish electoral discourse in general.

For example, job creation acts as an axis around which the PP's narratives are constructed, which state that this is a fundamental factor for achieving national progress and citizen well-being, while for the PSOE jobs tend to be discursively subordinated to the struggle to achieve equality among citizens, and for the UP it may be part of the diagnosis of the situation and used to criticise the previous governing parties' handling of the matter.

Likewise, each party may suggest each of these happiness dimensions in a different way not only narratively but also thematically. For example, the three parties may refer to the Work and Personal Finances dimension, but while the PP suggests themes related to job creation, the PSOE focuses on

highlighting the inequalities between men and women at work, and the UP talks about how some retirement pensions are insufficient to cover basic living needs.

The study of the thematic and narrative differences among the parties goes beyond the scope of this research, as the overarching objective in this article was to explore to what extent the happiness measures take into account variables or themes other than those that appear in other discourses which do not explicitly talk about happiness, such as the Spanish electoral discourse. However, in future studies, it would be worthwhile to bear these nuances in mind within the same sample and to examine how the discourse on what is socially desirable and politically suppliable behaves according to variables like the ideology or parliamentary position of each political party.

In any case, getting back to the discussion of the results of this analysis, the fact that two political discourses that have different approaches and objectives match on what is socially desirable and politically suppliable is a revealing result that raises questions related to the very nature of these two discourses analysed. One possible explanation on why these themes match would be that both samples share a common culture, the outcome of a globalised political mindset.

This is a possibility because, as observed above, the happiness indexes and measures analysed are the outcome of a series of initiatives promoted by intergovernmental institutions like the United Nations, the OECD and the European Commission, after which a series of member countries began to create well-being indexes or similar studies.

In this sense, Spain is also a member country of these organisations, so certain social and political alarms or concerns are likely shared, even if they are not articulated around the signifier *happiness*.

Therefore, for the sample analysed, we could conclude that the happiness discourses implicit in the well-being indexes and measures do not entail a substantial change in the discourse about what is socially and politically suppliable but instead act as a reflection of the dominant values in a common, globalised political culture. Consequently, in this case, as Ahmed (2010) says, apparently all the matters that were already categorised as good for society are simply reinscribed through the language of happiness.

This observation aligns with the critiques of happiness as a social and political objective contained in the theoretical framework of this article and studies like Cabanas 2009, 2016; Cabanas and Illouz 2019; Frawley 2015a, 2015b; and Rose 1999.

However, in order for this conclusion to gain ground, analyses similar to those in this study should be conducted with samples from other countries, as this time we have only studied Spanish electoral discourses. Likewise, the sample should be expanded to other happiness indexes, more political parties and other types of political discourses.

In any case, in this research it is clear that continuing to study happiness in places where it is not present contributes

to a better understanding of the phenomenon of the Science of Happiness and of our societies, what concerns us, what we value, what we have and what we wish for.

## Notes

1. The sample is comprised of measures that measure happiness, well-being or quality of life. In studies like Sánchez-Sánchez (2017, 2020), we find that the use of any of these nouns in the title does not significantly change the variables considered in these measures.
2. We consulted the electoral results on the website of the Ministry of the Interior of the government of Spain. <http://www.infoelectoral.mir.es/min/>

## Final note

The research on which this article is based was awarded with the first prize in the 32nd CAC Awards for Research on Audiovisual Communication.

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**Annex**

**Dimensions of happiness**

Listed below are the different dimensions of happiness that represent the groups of indicators that share a particular theme in the happiness indices and measures analysed: *Gross National Happiness Index, Happy Planet Index, Philippine Gross National Happiness Index, Internacional Well-being Index, Gallup & Healthways Well-being Index, Index of Economic Well-being, Measures of National Well-being in the United Kingdom, Well-being in 2030, Prescottt-Allen Well-being Index, European Quality of Life Survey, Quality of Life Survey and Quality of life in European Cities.*

Each dimension is represented by a table, in which the different sub-dimensions of happiness (groupings of indicators that share a theme within a larger group of indicators) are broken down from the most general to the most specific, i.e. down to the indicators. For reasons of space, it is not necessary to list all the indicators, but rather to summarise them in general terms. [To consult the indicators list, see Sanchez-Sanchez (2020)]:

- **Subjective Well-being Dimension (Table II)**

This dimension is referenced in 12 of the 13 measures in the sample.

- **Community dimension (Table III)**

This dimension is referenced in 8 of the 13 measures.

- **Politics dimension (Tables IV.1. and IV.2.)**

This dimension is referenced in 7 of the 13 measures in the sample.

- **Environment dimension (Tables V.1. and V.2.)**

This dimension is referenced in 12 of the 13 measures.

- **Work and personal finances dimension (Tables VI.1. and VI.2.)**

This dimension is referenced in 12 of the 13 measures.

- **Education dimension (Table VII)**

This dimension is referenced in 7 of the 13 measures.

- **Health dimension (Table VIII)**

This dimension is referenced in 10 of the 13 measures in the sample.

- **National capital dimension (Table IX)**

This dimension is referenced in 3 of the 13 measures in the sample.

**Table II. Subjective Well-being Dimension**

Subjective Well-being				
Emotional assessments		Cognitive assessments		
Positive emotions and feelings	Negative emotions and feelings	Meaning of life		Satisfaction of life
		Religiosity and spirituality	Assessment of the meaning of one's own life	
Frequency and companionship in feeling different emotions and positive feelings	Frequency and companionship in feeling different emotions and negative feelings	Religious beliefs, level of religiosity, participation in religious or spiritual practices	Views on the meaning of life and place in the world. Personal values and expectations	Satisfaction with present and future life. Levels of happiness and well-being

Source: Author.

**Table III. Community dimension**

Community							
Social cohesion and interpersonal relationships					Feelings stemming from social interaction	Social and cultural participation	
Social cohesion	Interpersonal relationships					Social participation	Culture
	Family	Friends	Neighbours	Others			
Social interactions, belonging, relationships and tensions between social groups	Family situation and relationship, satisfaction, perceptions and feelings of support in the family	Importance of friends, type of contact and support	Contact with neighbours, trust and support	Love relationships and sex life	Satisfaction with present relationships, feelings of belonging and recognition	Volunteering and donation activities, participation in social, cultural, artistic and sporting activities, membership of associations, leisure activities, etc..	Importance of culture, language and traditions and their preservation, perception of cultural change

Source: Author.

<b>Politics</b>					
Characteristics of the country's political system				Citizen political participation	
Civil rights	Social organisation	Electoral processes	Media	Personal interest in politics	Personal politic actions
Protection of fundamental rights, right to vote, right to political participation	Characteristics of the democratic system, government-citizen relationship and behaviour of the judicial system	Reliability of the electoral system, possibility of political discussion, possibility of referendums, existence of opposition parties, and government formation	Existence of media, media consumption by citizens, media behaviour during election periods	Ideology, interest in politics and perception of its importance, and voting intentions	Voting behaviour, participation in political parties, action groups, signing of petitions, demonstrations, boycotts and trade unions, and contact with politicians and civil servants

Source: Author.

<b>Politics</b>		
Governance		
Assessment of the general situation of the country	Trust in institutions	Assessment of policies
Political and social situation, satisfaction with government, satisfaction with public and administrative services, influence of other governments on the national government, national security, health of the population, and peace and order	Trust in the government, parliament, political class, European bodies, legal and judicial system, police, and local authorities	Evaluation of policies related to the reduction of economic inequalities, the fight against corruption, political transparency, immigration, the LGBT community, gender equality, and the existence of policies adapted to the demands of the majority

Source: Author.

<b>Environment</b>				
Residential area				
Characteristics	Infrastructures and services	Natural spaces and phenomena	Security	Housing
Level of importance of the environment for happiness, satisfaction with the area of residence, water quality and access to and affordability of certain foods	Assessment of the quality of services and public spaces and administrative services, assessment of access to certain services, travel time and traffic, assessment of certain infrastructures, presence of shops and shelters	Access to natural environments, natural disasters typical of the area and public concern about them, relationship of humans to native flora and fauna	Level of crime, violence and vandalism in the area of residence, sense of physical security, road mortality	Satisfaction with housing, home ownership and associated problems

Source: Author.

Table V.2. Environment dimension		
Environment		
Environment		
Characteristics of the natural environment	Impact of human activity on the environment	Environmental care
Climate, diversity and quality of terrain, indigenous species, available natural resources	Environmental problems, pollution, damage to wildlife, number of global hectares per capita	Concern for waste disposal and pollution, a sense of responsibility for environmental care, protected areas, use of natural resources and renewable energies, recycling and combating climate change
Source: Author.		

Table VI.1. Work and personal finances					
Work and personal finances					
Work					
Work conditions				Contribution of employment to self-realisation	Balance between work and personal life
Contractual characteristics	Interpersonal relations	Security			
		Work	Physical / Health		
Employment status, type of organisation worked for, contractual conditions, working hours, union membership	Relationship between employees and employers	Possibility of job loss, job opportunities in the place of residence, opportunities to start a new business	Accidents and occupational diseases, feeling of safety at work	Job duties and obligations, job satisfaction and the importance of the job in one's life	Work and life balance
Source: Author.					

Table VI.2. Work and personal finances				
Work and personal finances				
Personal finances				
Financial situation	Balance between work and personal life			Financial security
	Essential consumption	Nonessential consumption	Goods	
Income and payments, satisfaction with the family's financial situation	Capacity to meet basic needs (housing and food)	Ability to consume non-essential goods, purchasing power to afford leisure and holidays	Ownership of technological goods, household appliances, and other assets. Level of deprivation of material goods	Presence of financial risk factors (unemployment, illness, single parent, ageing, difficulty making ends meet, debt, amount of savings), arrears and financial pressures (rent or mortgage, utility bills, loan)
Source: Author.				



<b>Table VII. Education dimension</b>		
<b>Education</b>		
Personal education	Personal values	National education system
Educational level, literacy level, intellectual aspirations	Valuing education, technological knowledge, murder, theft, discord, sexual behaviour	Access to education, public expenditure on education, enrolment and graduation data, number of individuals neither studying nor working, number of individuals with no academic qualifications, satisfaction with the national public education system and its facilities
Source: Author.		

<b>Table VIII. Health dimension</b>			
<b>Health</b>			
Individual		National	
Subjective	Objective	National data	Health system
Self-assessment of health status	Rest, illness, eating habits and drug use	Life expectancy, mortality rates	Possibility of receiving medical consultations and treatment through the national health system, satisfaction with the health system, services offered by the health system
Source: Author.			

<b>Table IX. National capital dimension</b>	
<b>National capital</b>	
Economic capital	Other capitals
Growth rate of the country and in comparison with neighbouring countries, perceived importance of the economy for happiness, income per capita before and after taxes, public debt, inflation, capital stock, external debt, consumption, public spending and poverty level	Human capital
Source: Author.	