



# The Relationship Between Social Satisfaction and Support for Increased Investment in Pro-Environmental Policies in the U.S.

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## Introduction

- Perceived group norms among communities and social networks seem to influence the frequency of participation in pro-environmental behaviors through social conformity (Bouman et al., 2020; Masson & Fritsche 2014; Zhu et al., 2021).
- Individuals with stronger social networks or higher levels of social trust may be more willing to support environmental policies (Harris & Howe, 2023). This association may differ based on type of social connections. For example, more weak-social ties may be positively correlated with environmental concern, while number of visits from close friends was negatively correlated (Macias and Nelson (2011).
- Pro-environmental values tend to strongly align with ecological concern, pro-environmental identity, and climate-policy support (Dono et al., 2010; Kaiser et al., 2023; Stoutenborough et al., 2014; Harris & Howe, 2023).
- While a growing body of research has focused on interactions between social trust, social capital, and pro-environmental behaviors, no existing research has specifically explored the association between social satisfaction and support for environmental policy.

## Research Questions

- Is there an association between social satisfaction and support for investment in pro-environmental policies in the U.S.?
- How might demographic factors and frequencies of individuals' interaction with different social ties (friends, relatives, and neighbors) influence this relationship?

## Methods

### Sample

- Respondents (n=64,814) were drawn from the General Social Survey (GSS), a nationally representative sample of non-institutionalized adults in the U.S. who speak either English or Spanish.

### Measures

- Support for investment in environmental protection was assessed with the question "are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on) improving and protecting the environment?"
- Social Satisfaction was measured with the question "in general, how would you rate your satisfaction with your social activities and relationships?"

- Strength of social ties with friends from outside the neighborhood, relatives, and neighbors were measured through collecting the frequency of social evenings spent with each group (with visits more than once a month ranked as having stronger ties).
- This study further measures gender, college education (college ranked as more than 17 years of education), party identification, and rural-urban status (with urban residents coded as living in a city of more than 5,000).

## Results

### Univariate

- Within this sample, 61.15% supported increased pro-environmental spending.

### Bivariate

- Chi-Square analysis demonstrated social satisfaction (all levels  $p > 0.05$ ) was not statistically associated with support for pro-environmental policies (Figure 1).

### Multivariate

- While not appearing to moderate the variable, gender is a predictor of support for pro-environmental policies, with males (Beta = -0.29551,  $p = 0.0232$ ) less likely to support than females (Figure 2).
- Urban-rural status had no significant interactions with social satisfaction's association with support for pro-environmental policy ( $p > 0.05$ ).
- Democratic party identification (Beta = 1.47312,  $p < 0.001$ ), some years of college education (Beta = 0.46473,  $p = 0.0229$ ), were positively and significantly associated with support for pro-environmental investment, but did not influence the relationship between social satisfaction and pro-environmental investment (Figure 4, Figure 3).
- Frequency of social visits with relatives ( $p > 0.05$ ) and social visits with neighbors within the community ( $p > 0.05$ ) both were positively associated with support for pro-environmental policy but demonstrated no significant associations when controlling for other factors.
- Controlling for age and college education, frequency of visits with friends from outside the neighborhood was positively associated with pro-environmental support (Figure 5).
- For those with poor social satisfaction, visiting friends from outside the community at least once a month is associated with a 2.23 times increase in likelihood to support for investments in pro-environmental policy (Beta = 0.8042,  $p < 0.01$ ).

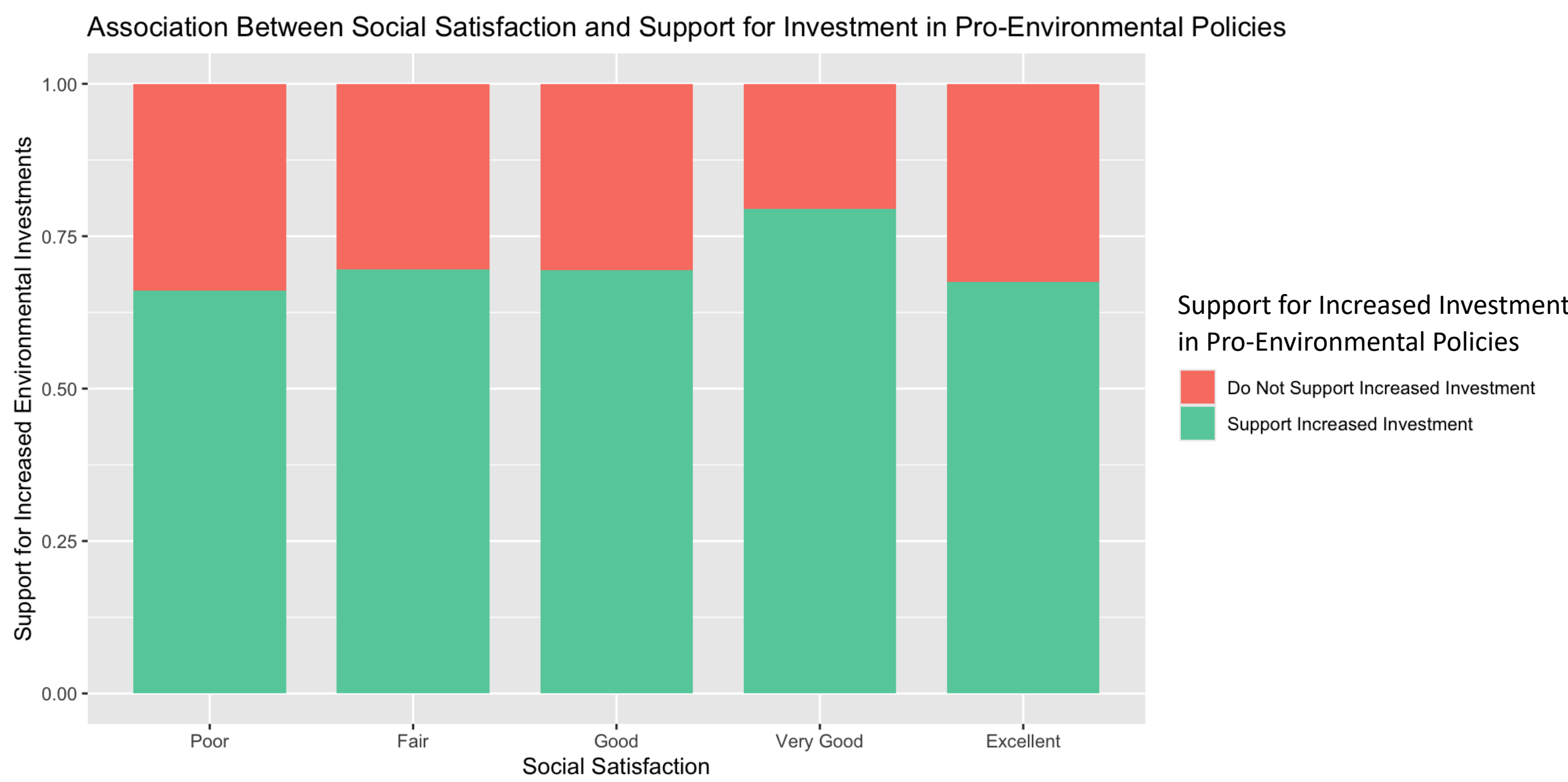


Figure 1: The Proportion of Support for Increased Pro-Environmental Investments by Social Satisfaction

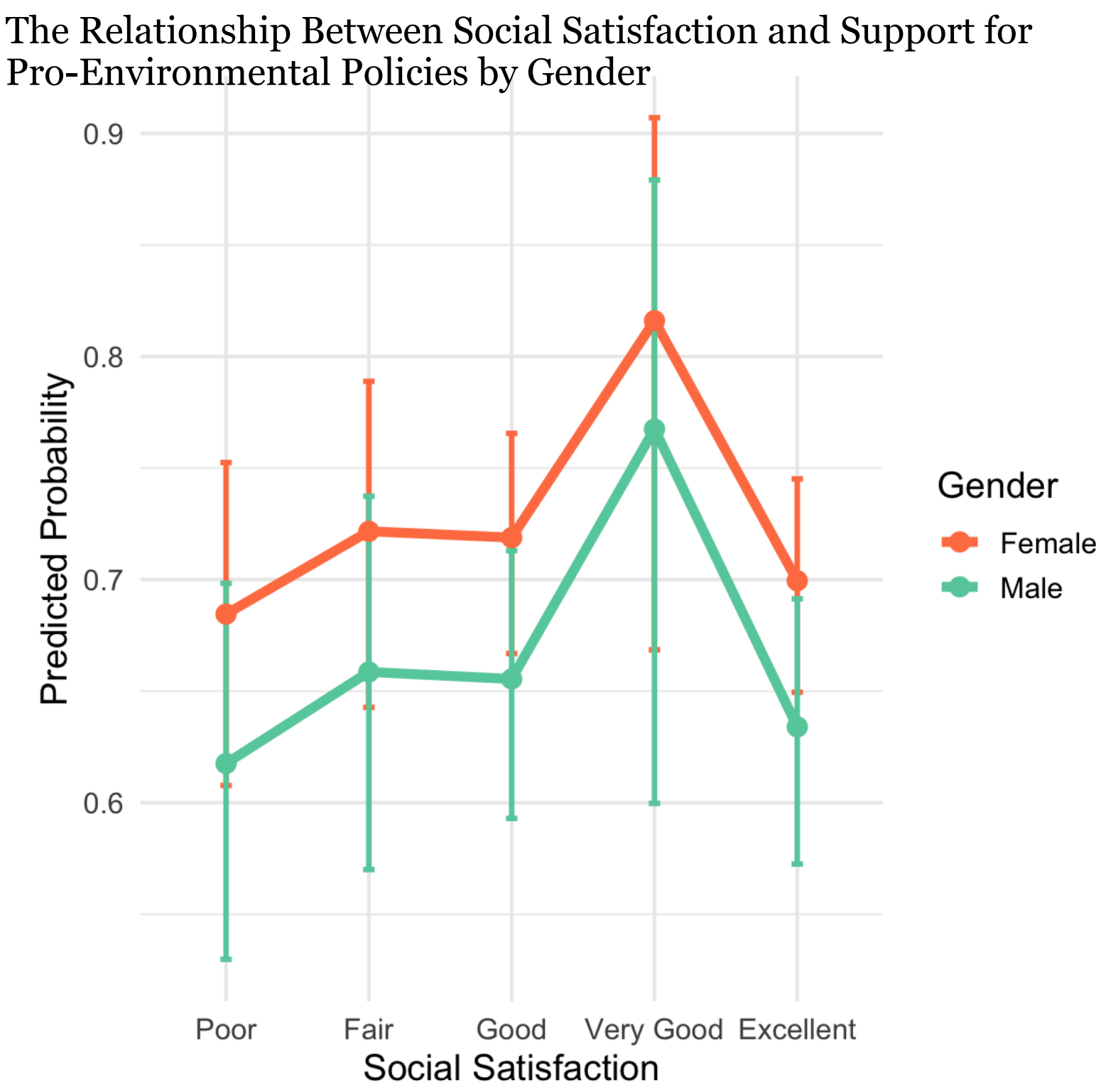


Figure 2: The Relationship Between Social Satisfaction and Support for Pro-Environmental Policies by Gender

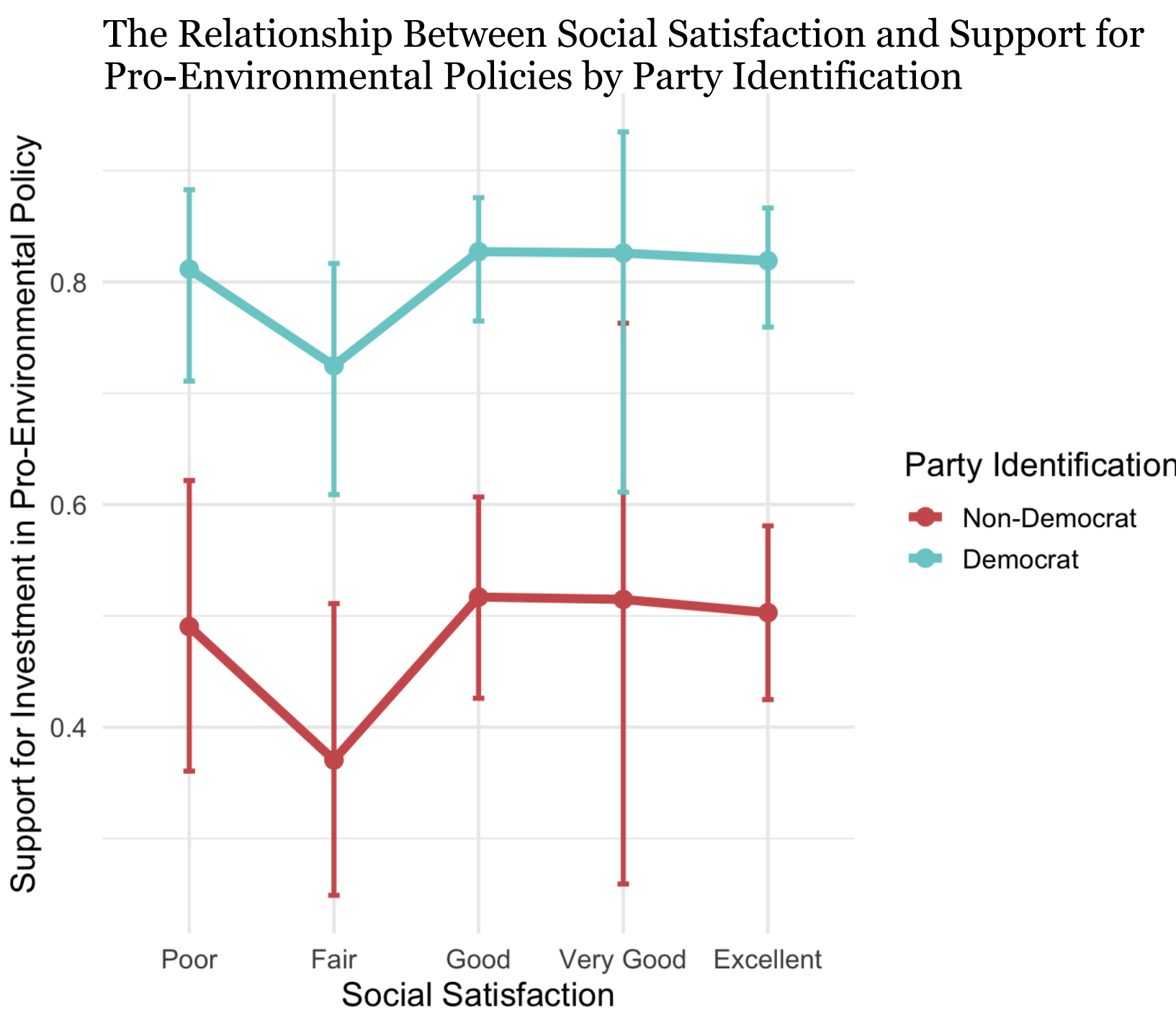


Figure 4: The Relationship Between Social Satisfaction and Support for Pro-Environmental Policies by Party Identification

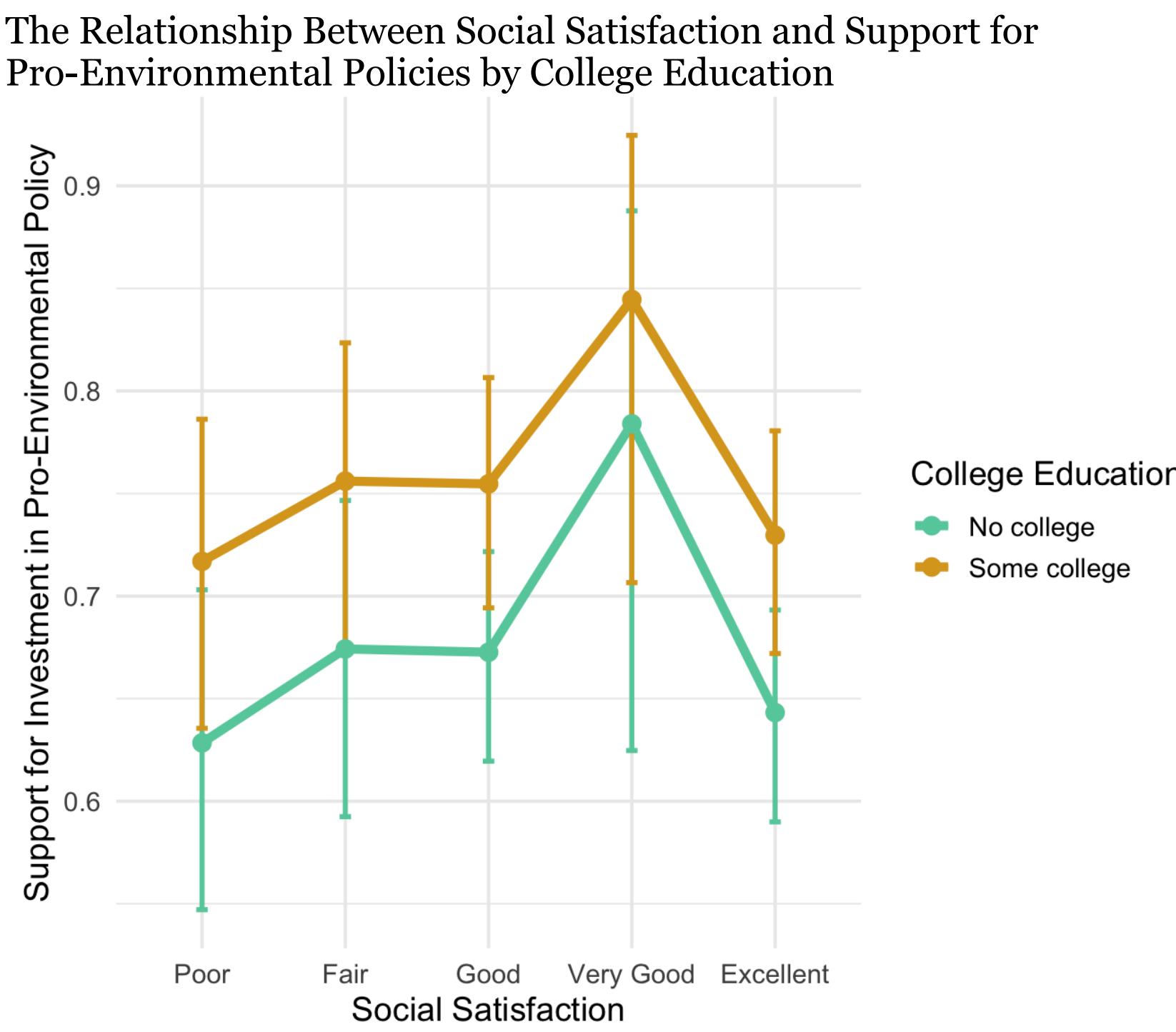


Figure 3: The Relationship Between Social Satisfaction and Support for Pro-Environmental Policies by College Education

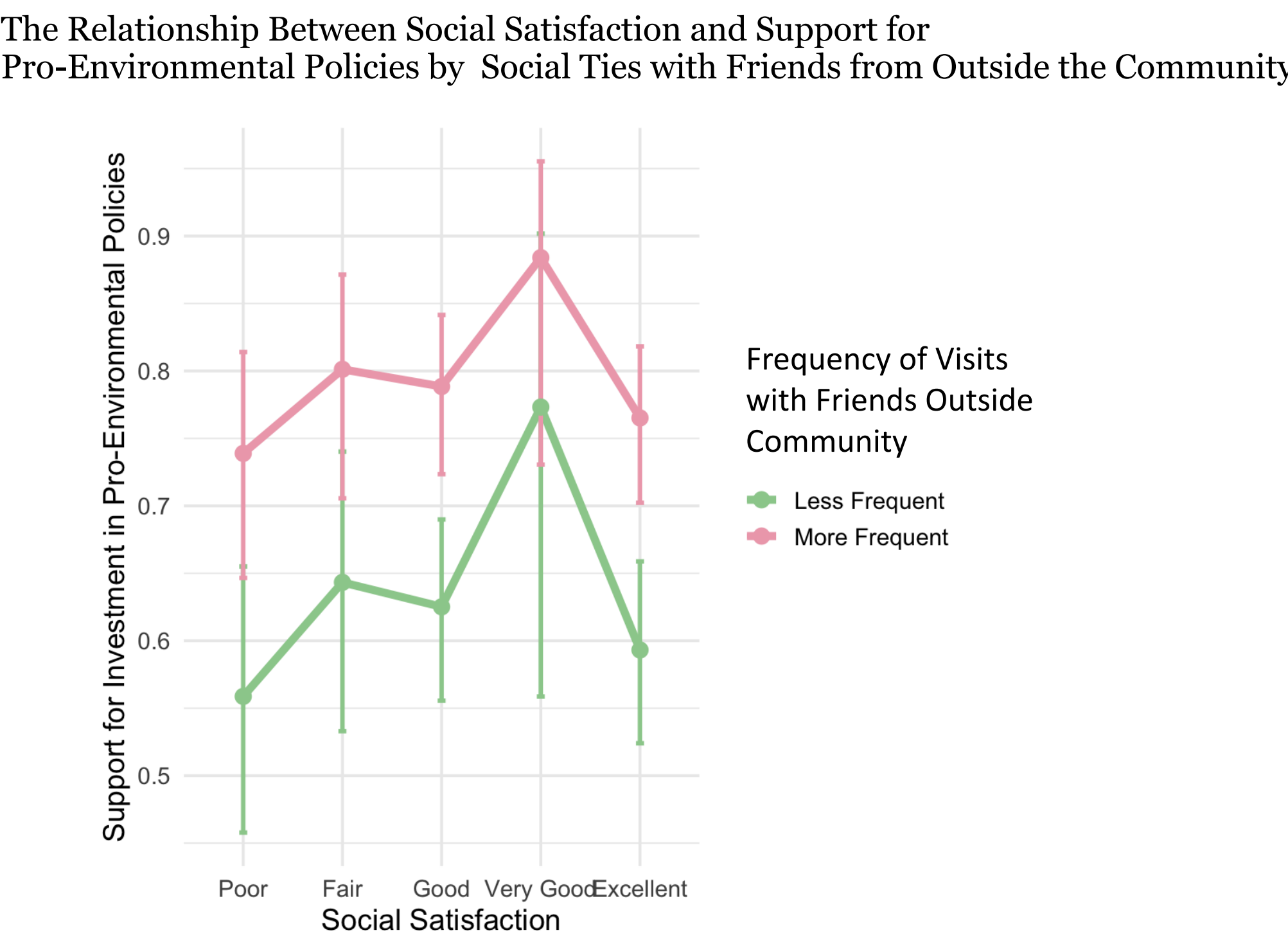


Figure 5: The Relationship Between Social Satisfaction and Support for Pro-Environmental Policies by Social Ties with Friends from Outside the Community

## Discussion

- The present analysis fails to find an association between social satisfaction and increased support for investment in pro-environmental policy.
- This work supports existing literature that presence of college education, Democratic party identification, and female gender are predictors of support for pro-environmental policies in the U.S..
- More specific measures of types of social ties may better quantify the association between support for pro-environmental policy and social networks on a national scale. This specificity could better build upon environmentally-focused social capital research, building on environmentally focused social-capital research by Macias and Nelson.
- Furthermore, as the present study utilizes cross-sectional data, additional research is needed to examine the directionality of these relationships.

## References

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