QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678
Volume No: 02 Issue No: 03 (2025)

CHOOSING BETWEEN GREEN PROTECTION AND ECONOMIC GROWTH: EVIDENCE FROM INDIVIDUAL ATTITUDES

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Abstract
This study examines how individuals choose between environmental protection and economic growth using data from the World Values Survey covering 66 countries. The analysis focuses on environmental priority as a binary individual choice and explores how demographic characteristics, socioeconomic position, employment, urban–rural residence, and subjective well-being shape this preference. The results show that education and subjective socioeconomic status are strong predictors of prioritizing environmental protection, while age and place of residence play a limited role once other factors are considered. Individuals with higher life satisfaction and financial satisfaction are more likely to support environmental protection, whereas unemployment and marital responsibilities reduce this likelihood. These findings highlight the importance of economic security and well-being in shaping public support for environmental policy. The study contributes to the literature by offering an integrated, individual-level perspective on the environment–growth trade-off across diverse national contexts.

Keywords: Environmental priority; Economic growth; Individual attitudes; Subjective well-being; World Values Survey

1. Introduction

The relationship between environmental protection and economic growth is widely recognized as a central policy challenge. Economic expansion has improved income levels, employment, and material security, yet it has also intensified pollution, resource depletion, and climate risks. Governments therefore face constant pressure to balance environmental sustainability with growth objectives. The success of environmental policy depends strongly on public support, as regulations and green investments require social acceptance to be effective. Individual attitudes toward choosing environmental protection over economic growth are therefore critical, because they reflect how citizens perceive trade-offs between present economic needs and long-term environmental goals (Lou et al., 2022; Singh & Kumar, 2023; Marc et al., 2025). These preferences shape political legitimacy, voting behavior, and collective willingness to support environmental action, making them central to environmental governance and sustainable development (Wang & Manopimoke, 2023; Castro & de Mattos, 2024; Arshad et al., 2025).

Existing research shows that preferences in the environment and growth debate are shaped by multiple and interacting influences. Economic conditions, demographic traits, and psychological factors jointly affect whether individuals prioritize environmental protection, which explains why attitudes differ widely across societies (Kosyak & Popov, 2020; Lou et al., 2022; Ramanust, 2023; Khan et al., 2025; Al-Masri & Ibrahim, 2025). Cross-national evidence suggests that younger and more educated individuals are more likely to favor environmental protection, particularly in supportive political and economic settings (Castro & de Mattos, 2024; Alvi & Mudassar, 2025). At the same time, survey research cautions that binary questions may simplify complex attitudes, even though such framing remains influential in policy debates (Kaplowitz et al., 2013; Saluy & Nuryanto, 2023; Batool et al., 2025). Economic theory further argues that environmental concern evolves with income and exposure to pollution, reflecting changing material constraints (Ott & Soretz, 2018; Martin & Camerone, 2025; Longston et al., 2025). Behavioral perspectives add that norms and values shape choices beyond economic incentives (Sunstein & Reisch, 2013; Marc, 2025; Mehdi et al., 2025).

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Values, institutions, and perceptions of freedom further shape how individuals interpret the environment versus growth trade-off. Evidence from highly developed economies indicates that environmental concern does not rise indefinitely with income and may weaken once protection is perceived as sufficient, highlighting the role of subjective evaluations (Ficko & Bončina, 2019; Khalil et al., 2025). Debates on green growth, post-growth, and degrowth show that even policy specialists disagree on whether continued growth is compatible with sustainability, reflecting uncertainty about development pathways (Lehmann et al., 2022; Marc et al., 2025). Attitudes are also linked to views on civil liberties, democratic rights, and the role of the state. Preferences for freedom and governance influence whether individuals prioritize environmental protection or economic growth, especially where economic pressures remain salient (Čábelková et al., 2023; Naeem et al., 2025; Marc et al., 2025; Sadiq et al., 2025).

Recent empirical work has increasingly focused on individual-level determinants of environmental prioritization. Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics such as age, marital status, education, employment, and subjective social class are systematically related to environmental preferences, although effects vary across contexts (Shair et al., 2024a; Fatima et al., 2024). Engagement with pro-environmental behavior and confidence in environmental organizations further strengthen environmental prioritization by increasing trust and awareness of collective benefits (Bano et al., 2024a; Roussel & Audi, 2024). Value-based studies show that post-materialist orientations, which emphasize quality of life over material security, are strongly associated with prioritizing environmental protection, particularly in affluent societies (Bano et al., 2024b; Jamel & Zhang, 2024). Evidence also highlights the role of subjective well-being, as higher happiness, life satisfaction, and financial satisfaction reduce economic anxiety and support long-term environmental goals (Shair et al., 2024b; Wang & Li, 2024).

Despite growing evidence, key gaps remain in the literature. Many studies examine environmental concern but do not treat the environment versus economic growth trade-off as a clear individual choice. This limits insight into real policy decisions. Research often relies on objective socioeconomic indicators. Subjective social status and well-being receive less attention. Existing studies also remain fragmented. Demographic, socioeconomic, contextual, and well-being factors are usually examined separately.

This study addresses these gaps. It analyzes environmental protection versus economic growth as a binary outcome. It uses individual-level survey data. The analysis integrates demographics, education, employment, and subjective class. It also considers urban–rural context. Measures of happiness and financial satisfaction are included. This integrated approach clarifies who prioritizes environmental protection and why.

2. Data and methodology

The research is based on individual-level data derived from the World Values Survey that includes 66 countries in various income and regional settings. The World Values Survey is a widely used cross-national dataset on public attitudes, values, and beliefs on social, economic and environmental issues. The analysis is based on the latest wave that contains a stable measure of preferences between environmental protection and economic growth. After dropping the observations with missing values on key variables, the final analytical sample size is 82,688 people. This large and varied sample permits meaningful comparison between countries as well as robust analysis of individual attitudes towards the environment - growth trade-off.

To analyze the individual's preference between the conservation of the environment and economic growth, the study uses the Linear Probability Model (LPM). The dependent variable is a binary indicator that is equal to one if a respondent considers the protection of the environment more important than economic growth in a situation, and zero otherwise. The LPM is chosen by virtue of its simplicity and ease of interpretation since the effects of changes in the probability of prioritizing the protection of the environment associated with different individual characteristics are estimated in terms of coefficients.

The model links environmental priority to a number of demographic, socioeconomic, contextual and well-being variables. Demographic factors include age groups and marital status. Socioeconomic characteristics capture education level, subjective socioeconomic status, and employment status. Contextual differences are accounted for through urban–rural residence. In addition, the model incorporates subjective well-being indicators, including happiness level, life satisfaction, and financial satisfaction, to capture perceived quality of life and economic

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
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security. All categorical variables are entered as sets of indicator variables, with appropriate reference categories. The econometric specification is expressed as follows:

$$EnvPriority_i = \alpha + \beta X_i + \varepsilon_i$$

where $EnvPriority_i$ denotes the binary outcome for individual i, X_i is a vector of explanatory variables defined in Table 1, α is the intercept, β is a vector of parameters to be estimated, and ε_i is the error term.

Table 1: Definition of Variables

Variable Name	Variable Type	Description
Environment priority	Binary (Outcome)	Indicator equal to 1 if the respondent prioritizes environmental protection over economic growth, and 0 if economic growth is prioritized
Age	Categorical (4 groups)	Age group of the respondent: 16–29, 30–44, 45–59, and 60 years or older
Marital status	Categorical (3 groups)	Marital status of the respondent: Never married, Currently married, and Formerly married
Area	Binary	Area of residence of the respondent: Urban or Rural
Education	Categorical (3 groups)	Highest level of education attained by the respondent: Lower, Middle, and Higher education
Subjective socioeconomic status	Categorical (5 groups)	Subjective socioeconomic status of the respondent: Upper class, Upper middle class, Lower middle class, Working class, and Lower class
Employment status	Categorical (3 groups)	Employment status of the respondent: Employed/self-employed, Out of labour force, and Unemployed
Happiness level	Categorical (4 levels)	Self-reported happiness level: Very happy, Quite happy, Not very happy, and Not at all happy
Life satisfaction	Continuous	Overall life satisfaction measured on a scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 10 (very satisfied)
Financial satisfaction	Continuous	Satisfaction with personal financial situation measured on a scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 10 (very satisfied)

3. Descriptive analysis of the outcome and covariates

3.1. Descriptive statistics

Table 2 shows clear differences between respondents who prioritize environmental protection and those who prioritize economic growth. In the full sample, about 58.9% choose environmental protection. This means the environment-first view is the majority position in the data.

Age patterns are present but not sharp. The environment-priority group is slightly more concentrated among younger respondents. For example, ages 16–29 are 26.0% in the environment group versus 24.7% in the growth group. The share aged 60+ is lower among environmental prioritizers, at 18.5% compared to 19.5% among growth prioritizers. Marital status shows a similar mild difference. Never-married respondents are more common in the environment group, at 25.3%, than in the growth group, at 22.6%, while currently married respondents are slightly more common among growth prioritizers.

Location differences are small but consistent. Urban dwellers are a larger proportion of those that prioritize on environment, at 68.1%, as compared to 66.5% for those that prioritize on growth. There is a bigger contrast in education. Higher education was, in turn, more prevalent among environmental prioritizers (36.6%) than among growth prioritizers (28.5%). In contrast, lower education is more common in the growth-priority group, at 35.5%, than in the environment group, at 29.3%. This suggests that education is closely linked to how people view the environment–growth trade-off.

Subjective social class also shifts in a meaningful way. Those who identify as upper middle class are slightly more represented in the environment group, at 22.0%, compared to 20.5% in the growth group. The lower class share is smaller among environmental prioritizers, at 10.8%, than among growth prioritizers, at 12.1%.

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Employment status shows a similar direction. Employed or self-employed respondents are more common in the environment group, at 60.5%, compared to 58.4% in the growth group, while unemployment is lower among environmental prioritizers, 7.4% versus 8.3%.

Well-being differences are among the most visible. Respondents who prioritize the environment report better subjective well-being. "Very happy" is 32.4% in the environment group compared to 29.7% in the growth group, and "not very happy" is lower, 11.3% versus 13.3%. Average life satisfaction is higher among environmental prioritizers, 7.193 versus 6.899. Financial satisfaction shows the same pattern, 6.333 versus 6.054. Overall, the descriptive picture suggests that environmental prioritization is more common among the better educated, slightly more urban, somewhat more economically secure, and more satisfied individuals.

3.2. Mean differences in life and financial satisfaction by environmental priority

Table 3 compares average life satisfaction and financial satisfaction between respondents who prioritize economic growth and those who prioritize environmental protection. Clear differences appear in both measures, and the gaps are not only statistically significant but also meaningful in size given the large sample.

For life satisfaction, respondents who do not prioritize the environment report an average score of 6.899 (SD = 2.316) based on 36,717 observations. Those who prioritize environmental protection report a higher average of 7.193 (SD = 2.177) across 52,722 observations. The mean difference is -0.294, reported as "no minus yes," which means the growth-priority group scores about 0.29 points lower than the environmental-priority group. The t-value is -19.38, and the difference is highly significant, showing that this gap is very unlikely to be due to random sampling variation.

Table 2: Mean Characteristics of Respondents by Development Priority

Variables	Full Sample	Environmental Priority	Growth Priority
Environmental priority (1 = yes)	0.589	1.000	0.000
Age group			
16-29	0.252	0.260	0.247
30-44	0.306	0.308	0.304
45-59	0.249	0.246	0.253
60+	0.192	0.185	0.195
Marital status			
Never married	0.241	0.253	0.226
Currently married	0.636	0.630	0.650
Formerly married	0.123	0.118	0.124
Area of residence			
Rural	0.322	0.319	0.335
Urban	0.678	0.681	0.665
Education level			
Lower	0.317	0.293	0.355
Middle	0.349	0.341	0.360
Higher	0.334	0.366	0.285
Subjective social class			
Upper class	0.020	0.019	0.021
Upper middle class	0.212	0.220	0.205
Lower middle class	0.389	0.394	0.386
Working class	0.264	0.259	0.267
Lower class	0.115	0.108	0.121
Employment status			
Employed	0.594	0.605	0.584
Out of labour force	0.329	0.321	0.333

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Unemployed	0.077	0.074	0.083
Happiness level			
Very happy	0.312	0.324	0.297
Quite happy	0.544	0.544	0.543
Not very happy	0.122	0.113	0.133
Not at all happy	0.022	0.018	0.026
Life satisfaction (1-10)	7.062	7.193	6.899
Financial satisfaction (1-10)	6.209	6.333	6.054

Table 3: Mean Differences in Life and Financial Satisfaction by Environmental Priority

Variable	Environmental Priority	Observations	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Difference (no - yes)	t-value
Life satisfaction	No (0)	36,717	6.899	2.316	-0.294***	-19.38
	Yes (1)	52,722	7.193	2.177		
Financial satisfaction	No (0)	36,677	6.054	2.469	-0.279***	-16.93
	Yes (1)	52,656	6.333	2.386		

A similar pattern is true for financial satisfaction. Respondents from growth-priority group have mean financial satisfaction of 6.054 (SD = 2.469) with 36,677 observations. Those who focus on the environment have a higher mean of 6.333 (SD = 2.386) and 52,656 observations. The mean difference is -0.279 and once again suggests that the growth priority group mean is about 0.28 points lower. The t-value of -16.93 with 1 percent level of significance shows that there is a strong and precise difference between the two groups.

Overall, the table's findings seem to indicate a fairly consistent descriptive link: people who prioritize environmental protection have slightly higher levels of reported life satisfaction and financial satisfaction than do people who prioritize economic growth. These differences are consistent with the finding that individuals who are more satisfied with their lives and finances may have more space in their lives to support longer-term collective objectives, such as environmental protection.

3.3. Cross-tabulation

Table 4 shows a clear and consistent pattern in the variation of environmental priority in terms of socio-demographic and well-being characteristics. Age shows a gradual gradient. Younger people are more likely to make environmental protection a priority. In the age group of 16-29 years, 60.19% indicate that environment is their high priority as compared to 57.66% in the age group of 60 and above. The percentage of environmental priority (on a low scale) increases with age from 39.81 to 42.34%. The chi-square statistic is 31.61, confirms that these differences are statistically meaningful.

Marital status also matters. Never-married show the highest levels of support for environmental protection, with 61.55% saying high priority. This share drops to 58.16% of respondents who are currently married and 57.73% of respondents who are formerly married. At the same time, low environmental priority also increases from 38.45% among the never married to above 42% among the married and formerly married. The association is strong, shown by the value of the chi-square is 81.34.

Differences by place of residence are smaller, but nevertheless distinct. Urban people are more conscious of the environment, with high environmental priority of 59.52%, followed by 57.76% for rural people. The percentage of respondents in rural areas with low environmental priority is higher, at 42.24%, compared with the 40.48% in the urban areas. The value of chi-square statistic calculated is 25.18, which shows a significant urban-rural gap.

The strongest contrast in the table is education. Among those respondents who hold higher education, 64.86 percent registered the highest priority for environmental protection, whereas the number of low priority is only 35.14 percent. In contrast, of those with less education, only 54.24% say that the environment is of high priority and 45.76% say it is of low priority. Middle education is some distance between these extremes. A very large value of chi-square, chi-squared is 707.92, demonstrates that education is an important correlate of environmental prioritization.

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Subjective social class shows a more complex trend. High environmental priority is highest among the upper middle class at 60.35% and the lower middle class at 59.05%. Support is less extreme at both ends of the class spectrum. Only 56.65% of the upper class and 55.81% of the lower class have a high environmental priority. This pattern is statistically significant, with a value of 65.15, and therefore suggests that perceived social position influences the way people evaluate environmental versus economic goals.

Employment status is also differentiating preferences. Employed respondents have the highest level of support for environmental protection with 59.81% of them reporting high priority. This share decreases to 58.05% for those out of the labour force and to 56.19% of the unemployed. Low environmental priority is the highest with the unemployed at 43.81%. The association is verified through chi-squared which is 47.54.

Well-being has the most obvious gradient in the table. Among those who say they are very happy, 61.03% indicate environmental protection. This share drops to 59.00 per cent among the quite happy, 54.99 per cent among the not very happy and only 49.74 per cent among those not at all happy. Low environmental priority increases dramatically as happiness decreases down to 50.26% of the least happy group. The large chi-square statistic, and large and significant relationship between happiness and environmental prioritization, indicates that there is a strong relationship between the two variables. Overall, what emerges from the table is that the environmental priority is higher among young, educated, urban, economically active, and happier people, indicating the importance of both social position and well-being in environmental preference formation.

4. Regression results and discussion

The six models in Table 5 are useful because they show how the estimated effects change as more factors are added step by step. Model 1 starts with basic demographics. Models 2 to 5 add location, education, subjective socioeconomic status, and employment. Model 6 finally adds well-being. This structure helps separate "raw" associations from relationships that remain after accounting for confounding factors. It also shows which covariates consistently predict environmental priority and which ones lose strength once education, socioeconomic position, or well-being are considered.

The age differences are small in all models and are mostly not statistically significant. In Model 1, the coefficient for ages 30-44 is slightly positive (0.008), and the coefficient for age 60+ is slightly negative (-0.005). After adding controls, these estimates come closer to zero. In the complete model, it is almost zero (0.000) for 30-44 years old, 0.002 for 45-59, and age 60+ with a very small negative value (-0.005). This pattern suggests that age alone does not strongly determine environmental prioritization once education, social position, and well-being are considered. A reasonable explanation is that age captures mixed forces. Older people may be more cautious about policies seen as costly, while younger people may be more future-oriented. When socioeconomic and satisfaction measures enter, the remaining "pure" age effect becomes weak.

Table 4: Environmental Priority by Socio-Demographic and Well-Being Characteristics

Variable	Category	Low Environmental Priority (%)	High Environmental Priority (%)	Total (N)
Age group	16–29	39.81	60.19	22,739
	30–44	40.68	59.32	27,357
	45–59	41.71	58.29	22,252
	60+	42.34	57.66	16,896
	χ^2 (3)=31.61			
Marital status	Never married	38.45	61.55	21,591
	Currently married	41.84	58.16	56,978
	Formerly married	42.27	57.73	10,734
	χ^2 (2)=81.34			
Area of residence	Rural	42.24	57.76	29,155
	Urban	40.48	59.52	60,526
	χ^2 (1)=25.18			

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Education level	Lower	45.76	54.24	28,306
	Middle	42.33	57.67	31,024
	Higher	35.14	64.86	29,584
	χ^2 (2)=707.92			
Subjective social class	Upper class	43.35	56.65	1,670
	Upper middle class	39.65	60.35	18,197
	Lower middle class	40.95	59.05	33,223
	Working class	42.20	57.80	22,289
	Lower class	44.19	55.81	9,686
	χ^2 (4)=65.15			
Employment status	Employed	40.19	59.81	52,912
	Out of labour force	41.95	58.05	28,935
	Unemployed	43.81	56.19	6,893
	χ^2 (2)=47.54			
Happiness level	Very happy	38.97	61.03	27,970
	Quite happy	41.00	59.00	48,578
	Not very happy	45.01	54.99	10,820
	Not at all happy	50.26	49.74	1,926
	χ^2 (3)=187.63*			

Marital status is consistently and strongly related in every model. Compared to those who have never married, currently married people are less likely to place a high priority on the environment (about 2.2 to 3.5 percentage points, depending on the model). The coefficient works out to -0.035 in Model 1 and is -0.029 in Model 6. Formerly married respondents exhibit a similar pattern -0.036 (Model 1) and - 0.022 (Model 6). This stability implies a strong association. One interpretation is that marriage and family responsibilities can increase attention to immediate economic stability, cost of living, and job security. These concerns can make growth-oriented priorities feel more urgent, even when environmental protection is valued.

In Model 2, the association between urban residence and environmental priority is positive (0.017). However, once education is included in Model 3, the urban coefficient clearly decreases to -0.002 and becomes statistically insignificant. It stays near zero all the way to Model 6 (-0.001). This shift indicates that the initial urban advantage is largely explained by compositional differences, especially education. Urban residents often have higher average schooling, greater exposure to environmental messaging, and different occupational structures. When these factors are controlled, urban residence itself does not appear to independently shape the probability of prioritizing the environment.

Education is one of the strongest predictors in the table. Relative to low education, middle education increases environmental priority by about 2.9 to 3.1 percentage points across Models 3 to 6 (0.031 in Model 3 and 0.029 in Model 6). Higher education has a much larger effect, around 9.6 to 10.3 percentage points (0.103 in Model 3 and 0.096 in Model 6). These estimates remain large and highly significant even after adding socioeconomic status, employment, and well-being. This makes education a central correlate of environmental prioritization. A plausible rationale is that schooling strengthens environmental awareness, improves understanding of long-run risks, and builds support for collective-action policies. It may also reduce perceived trade-offs by improving access to better jobs and information.

The subjective class results are notable because all groups below the upper class show positive coefficients once SES is introduced. In Model 4, upper middle (0.034), lower middle (0.038), working class (0.037), and lower class (0.029) are all more likely than the upper class to prioritize the environment. In the full model, these effects

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become even larger, especially for the working class (0.054) and lower class (0.060). This pattern suggests that the "upper class" reference group is the least environmentally prioritizing once other characteristics are held constant. One interpretation is that high-status groups may place stronger weight on growth and economic activity because they benefit more from existing economic structures. In contrast, middle and lower groups may perceive greater exposure to environmental risks in daily life, such as pollution and poor urban services, and may therefore place higher value on protection once education, employment, and well-being are considered.

Employment adds a smaller but meaningful layer. Being out of the labour force has a near-zero and insignificant relationship in both Model 5 and Model 6 (-0.004). Unemployment, however, is clearly negative. In Model 5, unemployed respondents are 2.5 percentage points less likely to prioritize the environment (-0.025). After adding well-being, the effect becomes smaller but remains significant (-0.016). This makes sense. Unemployment raises immediate economic stress and makes growth and jobs feel more urgent. The reduction in magnitude in Model 6 suggests that part of the unemployment effect operates through lower happiness and satisfaction.

Model 6 shows strong gradients in subjective well-being. Relative to "very happy," being "quite happy" reduces environmental priority by 1.2 percentage points (-0.012), "not very happy" by 2.6 points (-0.026), and "not at all happy" by 5.7 points (-0.057). Life satisfaction is positively associated with environmental priority (0.010), meaning a one-point increase on the 1–10 scale is linked to a 1.0 percentage point higher probability of prioritizing the environment. Financial satisfaction is also positive (0.004), implying about a 0.4 percentage point increase per point on the 1–10 scale. The rationale is intuitive. When people feel more satisfied with life and finances, they may be less constrained by short-run worries and more willing to support longer-term collective goals like environmental protection.

Overall, Table 5 suggests that education and well-being are especially important predictors, while the urban–rural gap is largely explained by education. Marital status and unemployment remain meaningful even after controls, pointing to the role of household responsibilities and economic insecurity in shaping the environment-growth choice. The full model explains a modest share of variation (R-squared rises from 0.001 to 0.012), which is common in attitude research. It also indicates that environmental prioritization is shaped by many factors, including values and country contexts not fully captured by individual covariates.

Table 5: Stepwise OLS Estimates of Environmental Priority

VARIABLES	(1) M1: Demographics	(2) M2: + Location	(3) M3: + Education	(4) M4: + SES	(5) M5: + Employment	(6) M6: + Well-being
Age group (ref: 18–29)						
Age 30–44	0.008	0.007	0.002	−0.002	−0.003	0.000
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Age 45–59	−0.000	−0.002	0.003	−0.001	−0.001	0.002
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Age 60+	−0.005	−0.007	0.001	−0.005	−0.005	−0.005
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Marital status (ref: Never married)						
Currently married	−0.035***	−0.033***	−0.025***	−0.022***	−0.025***	−0.029***
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Formerly married	−0.036***	−0.035***	−0.023***	−0.022***	−0.024***	−0.022***
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Location (ref: Rural)						
Urban		0.017***	−0.002	−0.004	−0.004	−0.001
		(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)

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Education (ref: Low)						
Middle education			0.031***	0.031***	0.030***	0.029***
			(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Higher education			0.103***	0.099***	0.098***	0.096***
			(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Socioeconomic status (ref: Upper class)						
Upper middle class				0.034***	0.032**	0.036***
				(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Lower middle class				0.038***	0.037***	0.050***
				(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Working class				0.037***	0.036***	0.054***
				(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Lower class				0.029**	0.030**	0.060***
				(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.014)
Employment status (ref: Employed)						
Out of labour force					−0.004	−0.004
					(0.004)	(0.004)
Unemployed					−0.025***	−0.016**
					(0.007)	(0.007)
Happiness (ref: Very happy)						
Quite happy						−0.012***
						(0.004)
Not very happy						−0.026***
						(0.006)
Not at all happy						−0.057***
						(0.013)
Life satisfaction						0.010***
						(0.001)
Financial satisfaction						0.004***
Constant	0.615***	0.603***	0.563***	0.529***	0.536***	0.440***
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.016)
Observations	88,879	88,849	88,210	84,077	83,390	82,688
R-squared	0.001	0.001	0.008	0.008	0.008	0.012

Standard errors in parentheses, *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 6 shows the complete Linear Probability Model and is a fairly close match to the stepwise results in Table 5. Age and urban residence are still statistically insignificant when controlling for other factors, showing that their earlier associations had been largely compositional ones. Marital status remains stable with a negatively

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678
Volume No: 02 Issue No: 03 (2025)

significant effect, with currently and formerly married people being roughly 2 to 3 percentage points less likely to prioritize the environment. Education is the most significant predictor, with increasing education increasing environmental priority by almost 10 percentage points. There is a clear positive gradient for subjective socioeconomic status, particularly among working and lower classes. Unemployment decreases environmental priority and life and financial satisfaction increases environmental priority, confirming the central nature of well-being.

Table 6: Determinants of Environmental Priority (Linear Probability Model)

Variables	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	95% Confidence Interval
Age group (ref: 18–29)					
30–44	0.000	0.005	0.00	1.000	-0.010 to 0.010
45–59	0.002	0.005	0.33	0.742	-0.009 to 0.013
60+	-0.005	0.006	-0.79	0.429	-0.017 to 0.007
Marital status (ref: Never married)					
Currently married	-0.029***	0.005	-6.02	0.000	-0.039 to -0.020
Formerly married	-0.022***	0.007	-3.15	0.002	-0.035 to -0.008
Area (ref: Rural)					
Urban	-0.001	0.004	-0.33	0.744	-0.009 to 0.006
Education (ref: Low)					
Middle	0.029***	0.004	6.69	0.000	0.020 to 0.037
Higher	0.096***	0.005	20.59	0.000	0.087 to 0.105
Socioeconomic status (ref: Upper class)					
Upper middle class	0.036***	0.013	2.83	0.005	0.011 to 0.061
Lower middle class	0.050***	0.013	4.00	0.000	0.026 to 0.075
Working class	0.054***	0.013	4.18	0.000	0.028 to 0.079
Lower class	0.060***	0.014	4.42	0.000	0.033 to 0.086
Employment status (ref: Employed)					
Out of labour force	-0.004	0.004	-0.96	0.339	-0.012 to 0.004
Unemployed	-0.016**	0.007	-2.44	0.015	-0.029 to -0.003
Happiness (ref: Very happy)					
Quite happy	-0.012***	0.004	-3.00	0.003	-0.020 to -0.004
Not very happy	-0.026***	0.006	-4.05	0.000	-0.038 to -0.013
Not at all happy	-0.057***	0.013	-4.51	0.000	-0.081 to -0.032
Life satisfaction	0.010***	0.001	9.89	0.000	0.008 to 0.011
Financial satisfaction	0.004***	0.001	4.58	0.000	0.002 to 0.006
Constant	0.440***	0.016	28.31	0.000	0.410 to 0.471
Statistic	**Value**				
Observations	82,688				
F-statistic	54.44				
Prob > F	0.000				
R-squared	0.0124				
Adjusted R-squared	0.0121				
Root MSE	0.489				

Figure 1 visually summarizes the main results from the Linear Probability Model. Coefficients to the right of zero indicate a higher likelihood of prioritizing environmental protection, while those to the left indicate lower likelihood. Education shows the strongest positive effects, especially higher education, which stands out clearly. Subjective socioeconomic status also displays a positive gradient, with working and lower classes more likely to

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678
Volume No: 02 Issue No: 03 (2025)

prioritize the environment than the upper class. In contrast, marital status and lower happiness levels are associated with reduced environmental priority. Age and urban residence cluster around zero, confirming their limited role once other factors are controlled. Life and financial satisfaction show small but consistent positive effects, highlighting the importance of well-being.

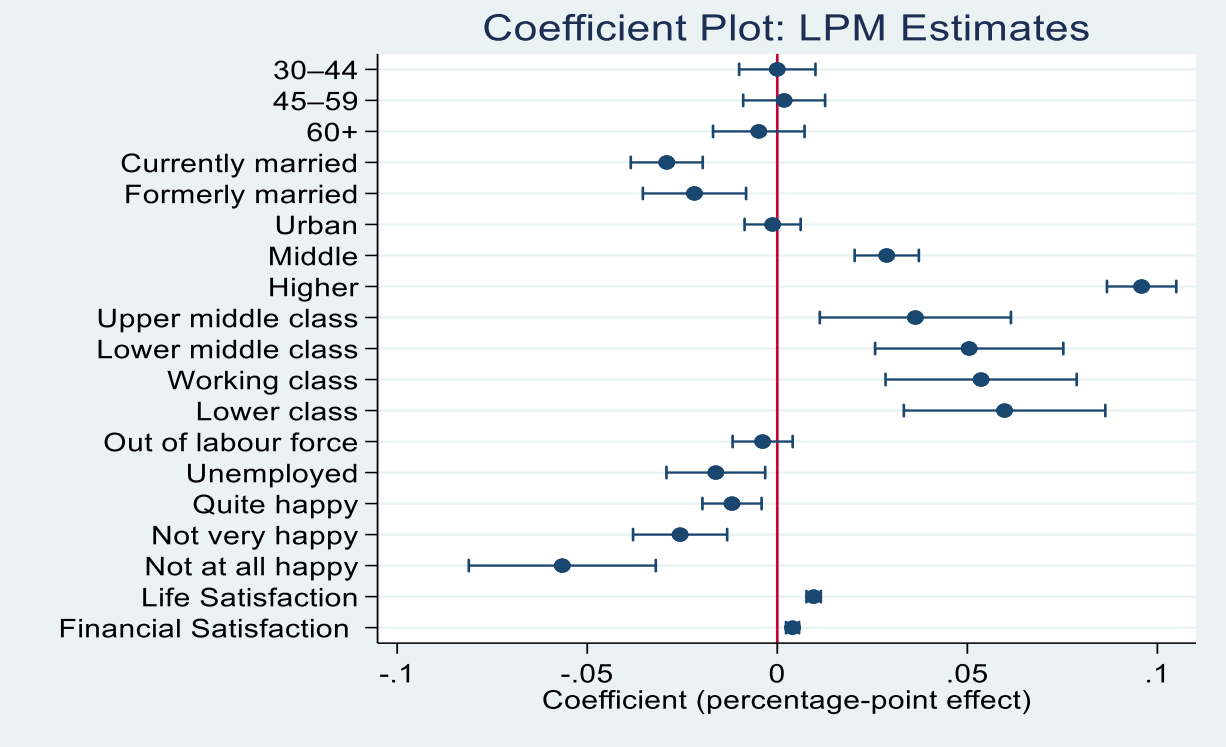

Figure 1. Coefficient plot of the estimates

5. Conclusion

This study examined individual attitudes toward choosing environmental protection versus economic growth using a large, cross-national dataset. The findings show that environmental priority is shaped less by age or place of residence and more by education, subjective socioeconomic status, employment security, and well-being. Individuals with higher education and greater life and financial satisfaction are consistently more likely to prioritize environmental protection. In contrast, marriage and unemployment are associated with lower environmental priority, suggesting that immediate economic and household responsibilities influence how people evaluate this trade-off. Overall, the results highlight that environmental preferences reflect lived experiences and perceived economic security rather than simple demographic differences.

These findings carry important implications for environmental and development policy. Public support for environmental protection is stronger among individuals who feel socially secure, educated, and satisfied with their lives. Policies that ignore these social foundations may face resistance, even when environmental risks are widely recognized. Strengthening education, reducing economic insecurity, and improving well-being can indirectly support environmental goals by easing perceived trade-offs with growth. By focusing on individual-level attitudes, this study underscores that sustainable development is not only a technical or economic challenge but also a social one rooted in how people experience their everyday lives.

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