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Contact: 91-231-2535706/07 Fax: 91-231-2535708 Website: [www.siberindia.co.in](http://www.siberindia.co.in)

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# Electoral Democracy and Citizen Life Satisfaction: The Mediating Role of Public Trust

DERIBE ASSEFA AGA

Department of Public Management

Ethiopian Civil Service University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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**Abstract :** Citizens' life satisfaction is generally considered as an ultimate goal of public administration. In line with this, prior studies indicate that public administration plays a significant role in influencing whether individuals are able to make a good living and should nurture the maximization of people's satisfaction. The supporters of this argument mention that genuine election is at the heart of creating governmental accountability to the citizenry which in turn enhances life satisfaction. There is, however, an ongoing debate about the role of democratic election in the creation of the outcome forms of democracy such as political legitimacy, public trust and life satisfaction (Rothstein, 2009). Particularly, in African context there is a scant empirical literature that provides explanations on how politics and public administration influence citizens' life satisfaction. To fill this gap, this study investigates the role of electoral democracy and public trust on life satisfaction. More specifically, this study addresses three basic research questions: (1) what is the status of democratic electoral quality? (2) What is the overall citizen life satisfaction? (3) To what extent does public trust play a mediating role in the relationship between democratic electoral quality and life-satisfaction? This study employs multiple regression and mediation models to analyse database of Wave 6 of the World Values Survey (WVS-6). This database comprises 89,565 respondents covering 60 countries of which 17,128 respondents were from 10 African countries. Thereby, the findings indicate that democratic election significantly enhances public trust in government. Chiefly, the study underlines that public trust mediates the positive relationship between electoral democracy and overall citizens' life satisfaction. Policy and practical implications for developing economies and directions for future research are discussed.

**Keywords:** Life-satisfaction, Electoral Democracy, Public-trust, WVS-6

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## 1.0 : Introduction

Life satisfaction refers to "the degree to which individuals evaluate positively the quality of their life in total" (Pacek & Radcliff, 2008:268). It is often used interchangeably with "happiness" and is one of researchable topics in public administration and political science (Curini, Jou, & Memoli, 2014; Pacek & Radcliff, 2008). This is mainly because it plays an indispensable role in enhancing social tolerance and people's participation in economic activities, which may in turn contribute to economic growth in a given country. Life satisfaction, or happiness, also helps to reduce the potential for revolutionary change of governments (Inglehart 1990 as cited in Curini et al. [2014])). From a development point of view, "sustainable development" captures human well-being, social inclusion, and environmental dimensions. This implies that the quest for happiness paves the way for the quest for sustainable development (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2012). Accordingly, scholars highlight that social science should discover what enhances and what hinders life satisfaction or happiness, which is the fundamental goal of every citizen (Curini et al., 2014).

Citizens' life satisfaction is generally considered as an ultimate goal of public administration. In line with this, prior studies indicate that public administration plays a significant role in influencing whether individuals are able to make a good living and should nurture the maximization of people's satisfaction. Supporters of this argument note that genuine election is at the heart of creating governmental accountability to the citizenry, which in turn enhances life satisfaction. There is, however, an ongoing debate about the role of democratic election in the creation of the outcome forms of democracy, such as political legitimacy, public trust, and life satisfaction (Rothstein, 2009). In African context in particular, there is scant empirical literature

providing explanations for how politics and public administration influence citizens' life satisfaction.

The scholarly literature has documented certain variables as predictors of life satisfaction, which may be mainly categorized into micro and macro factors. The micro factors relate to employment status, income, education, people's community ties and friendships, health, personal freedom, individual values, and demographic variables. The macro factors include the unemployment rate, inflation rate, gross domestic product per capita, and unemployment benefits (Frey & Stutzer, 2000c; Whiteley, Clarke, Sanders, & Stewart 2010). At the same time, debates over what contributes to life satisfaction receive more attention in the political culture literature. Past studies about determinants of life satisfaction that relate to government performance and political process, however, focused on macro-level factors, such as institutional conditions (Bjørnskov, Dreher, & Fischer, 2010), governance quality (Helliwell et al., 2012; Ott, 2010) and policy outputs (Pacek & Radcliff, 2008; Whiteley et al., 2010). These macro-level determinants in aggregate forms neglect the potential influence of individual-level attitudes toward government performance on life satisfaction (Curini et al., 2014).

With regard to the role of democracy in satisfaction, studies indicate that the ability to participate in the political process influences individuals' subjective well-being (Owen, Videras, & Willemsen, 2008). In the same line of inquiry, the work by Dolan, Metcalfe, and Powdthavee (2008) reveals that electoral democracy can significantly influence citizens' life satisfaction. However, the findings from such studies are not conclusive (Potts, 2016). In addition, there is little empirical work that explicates about the mechanisms through which electoral democracy influences life satisfaction (Frey & Stutzer, 2000a, 2000b; Inglehart, 2009).

Thus, this study examines whether and to what extent democratic electoral affects life satisfaction. Using data from Wave 6 of the World Values Survey (WVS-6), the present study aims to investigate the mediating role of public trust in the relationship between democratic electoral quality (as a proxy measure of democracy) and citizen life satisfaction. More specifically, the study seeks to address three basic research questions, namely (1) What is the status of democratic electoral quality? (2) What is the overall citizen life satisfaction? (3) To what extent does public trust play a mediating role in the relationship between democratic electoral quality and life satisfaction?

## **2.0 : Theoretical Background**

This section explains conceptual definitions and the theoretical literature related to the core constructs of the study, namely electoral democracy, life satisfaction, and public trust.

### **2.1 : Democracy**

Democracy is defined as "a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections" (Potts, 2016:87). The popular definition of democracy is a system of government of the people, by the people, and for the people (Blind, 2007). Democratic electoral quality, which is one of the important constructs in this study, depends on the openness of nomination and selection of candidates, the degree of electoral contestation, and the inclusiveness of voting procedures. If political parties undertake the nomination and selection of candidates in a transparent manner by letting the community to participate, this enhances democratic electoral quality. Similarly, the extent to which there is choice and contestation among potential candidates for election is a good measure of democratic electoral quality. What is of interest in the inclusiveness of voting procedures is the extent to which citizens as individual voters take part in the voting process (Manion, 2006).

## 2.2 : Life Satisfaction

Veenhoven (1996) defines “life-satisfaction as the degree to which a person positively evaluates the overall quality of his/her life as-a-whole. In other words, how much the person likes the life he/she leads.”

The literature documents three theories that explain what factors drive life satisfaction (Veenhoven, 1996). The first theory is relativism, which assumes that life satisfaction varies over time because the standards against which the comparison is made simply change. This suggests that satisfaction is the result of a comparison between life-as-it-is to conceptions of how-life-should-be. In this approach, life satisfaction is the difference between people’s perceptions and expectations and the course of life events that cover political, economic, and social activities. In this view, it is not possible to create lasting satisfaction, neither at the individual level, nor the societal level (Veenhoven, 1996).

The second theory is dispositional, which suggests that innate personality characteristics determine life satisfaction. According to this theory, people are born either happy or unhappy, and policy interventions have little influence in determining the level of life satisfaction or happiness (Veenhoven, 2004). It assumes that life satisfaction is a fixed disposition, implying that an improvement in society does not make people more satisfied. At the individual level, life satisfaction is a general tendency to like or dislike things, which may emanate from innate temperament as well as past life experiences. The implication of this theory is that the evaluative reaction will remain the same whether the phenomenon is good thing or bad thing. This means that the discontented will always be pessimistic while the satisfied will always see the better side of things. At the societal level, some cultures may tend to have a gloomy outlook on life, whereas others are optimistic (Veenhoven, 1996).

The third theory of life satisfaction is pragmatism, which proposes that life satisfaction is mainly the outcome of citizens’ evaluation of public administration system and government efforts in enhancing economic affluence, social equality, political freedom, and access to knowledge (Veenhoven, 1996). The present study fits within the pragmatism of life satisfaction view, in which life satisfaction or happiness can be enhanced by facilitating some conditions for people (Veenhoven, 2004). Following this line of argument, the literature documents a number of empirical studies concerning factors determining life satisfaction.

Using Switzerland as a case study, Frey and Stutzer (2000a) categorize the determinants of happiness as demographic, economic, and institutional factors. Demographic factors comprise personality attributes such as age, gender, citizenship (national/foreigner), extent of foreign education, family setting, and employment status. Economic factors include both micro- and macroeconomic conditions, such as income level and inflation. Institutional factors relate to the presence of constitutional conditions deemed necessary for democracy and federalism, as well as the extent of their implementation. In a similar manner, Stutzer and Frey (as cited in Dorn, Fischer, Kirchgässner, and Sousa-Poza (2008)) found that economic, socio-demographic, and institutional variables have a positive significant effect on general level life satisfaction. They operationalize the strength of democratic institutions as the extent of citizen empowerment through a specific institution of direct democracy. A study by Bjørnskov, Dreher, and Fischer (2008) indicates that levels of income and education tend to be positively associated with life satisfaction. In yet another individual level factor, an employed person has a higher level of satisfaction than an unemployed person.

## 2.3 : Public Trust

The literature on trust studies identifies two types of trust. One relates to interpersonal trust, which refers to trust between people. The second one is institutional trust, which refers to people’s trust

in the functioning of organizational, institutional, and social systems (Wittmann Zhang & Schenker-Wicki, 2012). The present study is confined to public trust as an aspect of institutional trust.

According to Camões and Mendes (2019:2), public trust refers to the “belief in ethical values and behavior, such as fairness, equity, and the defense of civic and human rights” that citizens lean on in making a judgment on the trustworthiness of government. The concept has affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions. Public trust encompasses citizens’ support for both process-related and outcome-related elements in the political system. The process aspects concern how decision-making processes are organized in terms of level of participation, the approach to problems and solutions, and the competence of government employees. In short, this implies “doing things the right way.” Output-related elements, one of the pillars of the New Public Management movement, concern “who gets what” in politics. This aspect argues that governments should be much more output-oriented and more effective, which can be explained as “do the right things” (Christensen & Lægreid, 2005).

Sako and Helper (1998) provide a broad definition for citizens’ trust in government by using three dimensions, namely (1) Competence (are public institutions capable of doing what they say they will do?); (2) Contractual (will public institutions carry out their contractual agreement?); and (3) Good-will (will public institutions make an open-ended commitment to take initiatives for mutual benefit while refraining from taking unfair advantage?).

As stated by Norris (2011), public trust reflects support for the political system, which may imply confidence in the political community, institutions, and political leaders. Similarly, Park and Blenkinsopp (2011) define public trust as citizens’ subjective assessment on the extent to which a government or its public service is competent, reliable, and honest, while also meeting their needs.

Public trust in this study’s context refers to citizens’ general level of trust in government and its key institutions. Thus, public trust is a subjective attitudinal indicator about the degree of confidence that citizens have in state authorities and administrative branches such as the police, the courts, federal government, federal parliament, and the civil service system (Beeri, Uster, & Vigoda-Gadot, 2019).

## **1. Research Model and Hypotheses of the Study :**

This section deals with the study’s conceptual framework and hypotheses. As depicted in figure 1, the study argues that public trust in government mediates the positive relationship between democratic electoral quality and life satisfaction.

### **1.1. Democratic Electoral Quality and Life Satisfaction**

The dependent variable of this study is respondents’ level of satisfaction with life, usually referred to as Satisfaction with Life (SWL), or happiness. In each WVS, respondents are asked the following question: “All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?” Response categories range from “dissatisfied” (with a value of 1) to “satisfied” (with a value of 10).

Democracy is the rule of the people by the people. This is realized through free and fair elections, resulting in a government that represents the majority of citizens. Thus, people will accept a political authority if they perceive that the election is fair and free. This would in turn enhance life satisfaction (Rothstein, 2009). However, flaws in electoral processes, such as lack of clear and electoral rules, registration problems or deficiencies, unequal access to the media/public resources, and vote buying would adversely affect democracy. For instance, when citizens observe these electoral malpractices, they judge the process as undemocratic, which in turn makes people less



happy (Carreras & İrepoğlu, 2013). Overall, electoral democracy may enhance high levels of political autonomy and extensive participatory opportunities, which in turn tends to increase life satisfaction. This means if people feel that they can influence political process, they should have high level of life satisfaction (Whiteley et al., 2010). In the same vein, Potts (2016) underlines that people value not only policy decisions made by the government but also the way the decisions are reached. This means that if people trust the procedure followed to reach a decision, they will be happier. Such euphoria emanates from procedural utility.

On basis of the above arguments, I propose the following research hypothesis:  
*Democratic electoral quality has a positive and significant effect on citizen life satisfaction.*

## 1.2 : Electoral Democracy and Public Trust

There is an ongoing debate about whether electoral democracy is an indispensable source for the creation of public trust. One argument suggests that electoral democracy enhances public trust. In electoral democracy, free and fair elections result in a government representing the majority of the citizens. It upholds the essence of democracy, which is “rule of the people by the people” (Lindberg & Lindberg, 2006; Manion, 2006). From a contrasting point of view, Rothstein (2009) argues that there is little evidence showing the positive contribution of electoral democracy in creating public trust. In this study, we argue that electoral democracy helps to create public trust in government. This leads to the next hypothesis of the study:

*Democratic electoral quality has a positive and significant effect on public trust.*

## 1.3 : The Mediating Effect of Public Trust

Electoral democracy influences life satisfaction because democracy implies that government adopts policies that are closer to citizens’ preferences. This should increase people’s happiness (Dorn, Fischer, Kirchgässner, & Sousa-Poza, 2007). Therefore, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

*Public trust plays a mediating role in the relationship between democratic electoral quality and citizen life satisfaction.*

## 1.4 : Conceptual Framework of the Study

This section presents the study’s conceptual framework, comprising its independent, mediating, and dependent variables.

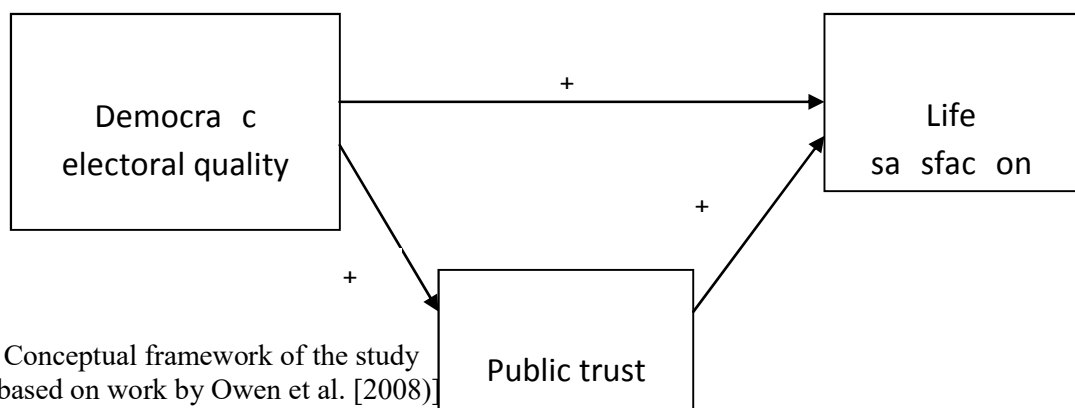


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study  
 (Source: based on work by Owen et al. [2008])

## 2. Research Methods

This section comprises subsections on research design, population, sample size and sampling technique, data sources, and data collection instruments. It also deals with data collection procedures, methods of data analysis, model specifications, a description of study variables, and ethical considerations.

### 2.1 Research Design

This research project is both descriptive and explanatory in nature. It is a descriptive study in the sense that it seeks to describe citizens' perceptions about electoral democracy as well as levels of public trust in government and life satisfaction. The study is explanatory in the sense that it investigates the effect of electoral democracy on life satisfaction. In addition, it elucidates the mediation effect of public trust in the relationship between electoral democracy and public trust.

### 2.2 Data Sources

This study used secondary data from the World Values Survey (WVS). The WVS provides data on sociocultural and political change worldwide. It consists of national sample surveys in over ninety countries, using a common questionnaire with variables on beliefs, values, economic development, democratization, religion, gender equality, social capital, and subjective well-being. The survey has been coordinated by the World Values Survey Association since 1981. So far, the WVS comprises six waves. Its first wave was from 1981-1984 and covered twenty-three countries, mostly developed nations. The second was undertaken from 1990-1994. A third wave of surveys was carried out in 1995-1998, this time in fifty-five nations and with increased attention being given to analyzing the cultural conditions for democracy. A fourth wave of surveys was carried out in 1999–2004 in sixty-five countries and included better coverage of African and Islamic societies, which had been under-represented in previous surveys. A fifth wave was carried out in 2005-2009 and a sixth wave, which was carried out in 2010–2014 in sixty countries (see WVS website at [www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org)).

The data source for this study was WVS- 6, which covered 2010-2014. From a total of 89,565 participants covering sixty countries, 51.1 percent were female and the remaining 48.9 percent were male. In this survey, 19.1 percent of the participants ( $n= 17127$ ) were from ten African countries.

### 2.3 Measures

For electoral democracy, nine question items ranging from V228A to V228I in WVS-6 were considered. All these items reflect the quality of election in a democratic system and respondents assessed each of the items on a Likert scale of 1-4, ranging from “very often” to “not at all often.” Some items, which were stated in a positive direction, were recoded before running descriptive and inferential analyses. This was to ensure that higher values indicate better electoral democracy ratings.

In the WVS-6 questionnaire, public trust was measured by a 4-point scale from 1, for “a great deal,” to 4, for “none at all.” In this survey, public trust question items cover question items that range from V113 to V118, excluding V116. But, this scale was recoded in such a way that higher values express higher levels of trust in government and its key institutions. Particular to this study, the institutions that were considered in the analysis include the police, the courts, federal government, federal parliament, and the civil service system. For the purpose of inferential statistics, a public trust index was created by computing the mean trust score from the public trust in each of the institutions measured on a 4-point scale (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .851$ ). Such an approach is in line with the works of Beeri et al. (2019), Chevalier (2019), and Martinez-Martin (2010).

Life satisfaction, the dependent variable in this study, is coded on a 10-point scale. In each WVS, respondents are asked the following one item question: “All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?” Response categories range from “completely dissatisfied” (which is assigned a value of 1) to “completely satisfied” (with a value of 10). On this scale, high scores indicate high level of life satisfaction or happiness. In the WVS-6 questionnaire, question number V23 represents life satisfaction. For analysis purposes, life satisfaction was considered as a continuous variable (Beeri et al., 2019; Chevalier, 2019; Martinez-Martin, 2010).

## 2.4 Reliability and Validity Test

A reliability test shows the internal consistency of items that make up a given construct, whereas a validity test confirms the accuracy of measurements. The reliability of the study’s constructs was tested by using Cronbach’s alpha. Following the recommendations by Field (2013), the analyses of internal homogeneity showed acceptable results, as presented in table 1.

**Table 1: Number of items and Cronbach’s alpha**

Construct	Number of items	Cronbach’s alpha
• Electoral Democracy Quality	9	.737
• Public trust	5	.851
• Life-satisfaction	One-item	-

Source: Computed from WVS- 6 dataset

## 2.5 Methods of Data Analysis

This study employed mainly quantitative data analysis, whereby both descriptive and inferential data analysis methods were used. Descriptive analysis provides the realities as they exist using a frequency table, mean, and standard deviations (SD). Using the means or percentages of a certain response is very simple and useful for comparison purposes. For Likert scale data, analysis must take into account the distribution of responses to the question (Gundelach & Kreiner, 2004).

For Likert scale type of data with a 4-point scale, the responses for each item of the main constructs of the study were transformed from a 4 points Likert scale to a 2-point scale, in order to make the analysis process very simple and understandable. For example, response options comprising [1. a great deal, 2. quite a lot, 3. not very much, 4. none at all] were transformed to “a great deal, /quite a lot” and “not very much/none at all.” Subsequently, a frequency table was used to present this type of data.

In addition to using frequency percentages (%), the composite mean was computed for each of the main constructs to show the overall findings. Though there is a debate whether to consider a Likert-scale measure as ordinal or interval, it is acceptable to assume Likert-scale as an interval scale of measurement (Martinez-Martin, 2010). In this line of methodology, Chevalier (2019) indicated that it is meaningful to produce a scale of attitudes from a Likert-scale measure when Cronbach’s Alpha is greater than 0.7. Accordingly, this study considered all the three main constructs (i.e., electoral democracy quality, public trust, and life satisfaction) as continuous variables.

For all the proposed hypotheses, the study employed mediation analysis, which assumes four classical conditions as requirements (Baron & Kenny, 1986). First, the independent variable, a composite of democratic electoral quality in this case, must be associated with the outcome, life satisfaction. Second, the independent variable must be significantly related with the mediator, public trust in government. Third, there must be a significant relationship between the mediator and the outcome. Finally, the effect of the independent variable on the outcome must be significantly reduced for partial mediation, or to zero for full mediation when the mediator is entered.

### 3.0 Results

This section presents the study's findings using descriptive and inferential analysis techniques.

#### 3.1 Profile of the Respondents

This study used secondary data from WVS- 6, which covered 2010-2012. From a total of 89,565 participants in the survey, 51.1 percent were females and the remaining 48.9 percent were male. In this survey, 19.1 percent of the participants (n= 17127) were from ten African countries.<sup>1</sup>

#### 3.2 Descriptive Statistics for the Main Constructs of the Study

Table 2 reveals descriptive statistics for the main constructs of the study, namely life satisfaction, public trust, and democratic electoral quality.

**Table 2: Descriptive statistics for all respondents**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Satisfaction with your life	88987	1	10	6.82	2.284
Public trust	88342	1	4	2.4535	0.74745
Democratic electoral quality	56443	1	4	2.7062	0.59317
Valid N (listwise)	56018				

As indicated in table 2, the mean life satisfaction level in our sample is around 6.82 (which represents 68.2 percent), with a standard deviation of 2.3. This suggests considerable variation in average level of life satisfaction. Computed from a 4-point Likert scale, the public trust in government and democratic electoral quality are 61 percent and 68 percent respectively.

Table 3 provides information about the descriptive statistics on the main constructs between African and other countries. Specific to African countries covered by the WVS-6 survey, the level of citizen life satisfaction is about 62 percent, which is lower than the satisfaction level of other countries (70 percent). Similarly, the performance of African countries in electoral democracy (26 percent) is below that of other countries (27 percent). Though the study did not have prior hypotheses about the level of life satisfaction and electoral democracy between African and other countries, both findings show that the differences are statistically significant ( $t = -37.295$ ,  $P < 0.05$  for life satisfaction, and  $t = -20.101$ ,  $P < 0.05$  for democratic electoral quality; please see appendix 3 and appendix 4). These findings indicate that the better the quality of electoral democracy in a given country, the more satisfied its citizens are with their life (Beeri et al., 2019).

**Table 3: Descriptive statistics by continent: African and other countries**

By Continent		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
African	Satisfaction with your life	17033	1	10	6.23	2.473
	Democratic electoral quality	13961	1	4	2.6190	.58984
	Public trust	16820	1	4	2.4425	.75956
	Valid N (listwise)	13,859				
Other Countries	Satisfaction with your life	71954	1	10	6.95	2.215
	Democratic electoral quality	42483	1	4	2.7349	.59147
	Public trust	71523	1	4	2.4560	.74455
	Valid N (listwise)	42,158				

<sup>1</sup> These countries are Algeria, Ghana, Libya, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Tunisia, and Egypt

### 2.3 Qualities of Electoral Democracy

According to Manion (2006), the qualities of electoral democracy inter alia include the openness of nomination and selection of candidates, the degree of electoral contestation, and the inclusiveness of voting procedures. This subsection examines whether elections across the world fulfill democracy characteristics as presented in table 4.

**Table 4: Qualities of electoral democracy**

	<b>Not often/ Not at all often (%)</b>	<b>Fairly often/ Very often (%)</b>
Votes are counted fairly	35.2%	64.8%
Opposition candidates are prevented from running	38.3%	61.7%
TV news favors the governing party	56.9%	43.1%
Voters are bribed	51.0%	49.0%
Journalists provide fair coverage of elections	38.9%	61.1%
Election officials are fair	42.2%	57.8%
Rich people buy elections	53.2%	46.8%
Voters are threatened with violence at the polls	30.9%	69.1%
Voters are offered a genuine choice in the elections	33.0%	67.0%

N= valid response rates ranges from 49,826 to 53,300

Composite mean: 2.7062 (on the basis of a 4-point Likert scale from the original questionnaire)

Source: Computed from 2014 *WVS dataset*

The findings in table 4 show that the majority of the respondents (more than 60 percent) had good perceptions about the counting of votes, fairness of election officials, coverage of elections by the media, and availability of a genuine choice in the elections. Contrary to this, they replied that opposition candidates lack freedom to participate and voters are threatened with violence at the polls.

### 2.4 Public Trust in Government

Public trust refers to the degree to which citizens evaluate how well the political system is performing (Kim, 2005). Table 5 shows public trust in government.

**Table 5: Public trust in government and its institutions**

	<b>Not very much/ None at all</b>	<b>Quite a lot/ A great deal</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Trust: The police	44.0%	56.0%
Trust: The courts	45.4%	54.6%
Trust: The government	53.7%	46.3%
Trust: Parliament	60.3%	39.7%
Trust: The Civil service	52.5%	47.5%

As reported in table 5, a large number of citizens had low trust in parliament, the federal government, and the civil service system. In relative terms, they had a moderate trust in the police and the courts.

### 2.5 Correlations between the Main Constructs

Correlation analysis shows the association between variables. In this regard, table 6 presents the findings from the correlation analysis for the main constructs of the study, namely electoral democracy, public trust, and life satisfaction.

**Table 6: Correlations**

	Electoral Democracy	Public trust	Life Satisfaction
Electoral Democracy	1		
Public trust	0.308**	1	
Life Satisfaction	0.102**	0.133**	1

Notes: \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). N is greater than 56,000

The results of correlation analysis (table 6) indicate that both electoral democracy and public trust have a positive and significant correlation with life satisfaction. This shows that life satisfaction (happiness) can be advanced by further democratization (Veenhoven, 2008).

## 2.6 Towards Explaining Life Satisfaction

The central issues of this study are to examine the effect of electoral democracy on life satisfaction and to investigate whether public trust plays a mediating role between electoral democracy and life satisfaction. Accordingly, table 7 displays results from the mediation analysis, which entailed performing a series of regression analyses that capture all the three hypotheses of the study.

**Table 7: Regression statistics for the effect of public trust as a mediator between electoral democracy and life-satisfaction**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	Life satisfaction	Public trust	Life satisfaction
Electoral Democracy	0.415*** (0.0163)	0.375*** (0.00488)	0.310*** (0.0171)
Public trust			0.280*** (0.0140)
_cons	5.726*** (0.0452)	1.367*** (0.0135)	5.344*** (0.0490)
adj. R-sq	0.011	0.095	0.018

Notes: N= 56090, Standard errors in parentheses, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001

In model 1 of table 7, the result indicates that democratic electoral quality has a positive significant effect on the dependent variable, life satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.415$ ,  $P < .001$ ). Thereby, hypothesis 1 is confirmed and step 1 of the mediation analysis is fulfilled. The result of model 2 in table 7 shows that the composite of democratic electoral quality has a significant positive effect on public trust ( $\beta = 0.375$ ,  $P < .001$ ), showing that step 2 of the mediation analysis is also satisfied.

Model 3 in table 7 entails performing step 3 and step 4 of the mediation analysis at the same time. Step 3 confirms that public trust in government, the mediator variable, is significantly related to life satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.280$ ,  $P < .001$ ). Once public trust (the mediator variable) is entered into the regression model, the effect of democratic electoral quality on life satisfaction is reduced from  $\beta = 0.415$  to  $\beta = .310$ , which is step 4 of the mediation analysis. This represents a 25.3 percent reduction. This confirms the significance of the indirect effect of democratic electoral on life satisfaction through its positive relationship with public trust. Thereby, public trust partially mediates the relationship between democratic electoral and life satisfaction.

## 3. Discussion

This study has shown that electoral democracy contributes to life satisfaction. In other words, citizens' assessment on electoral democracy influences their level of life satisfaction.

It also explicates that public trust partially mediates the positive relationship between electoral democracy and life satisfaction. These findings have both theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical point of view, the study contributes to the existing literature focusing on the

unsolved issue of what explains life satisfaction. More specifically, the finding that electoral democracy has a significant positive effect on life satisfaction is in line with democratic theory, which states political structures and processes have significant effects on citizens' quality of life and their sense of subjective well-being (Whiteley et al., 2010).

Contrary to the prior proposition that government has less effect on happiness (Headey and Wearing, 1992 as cited in Ott [2011]), the current study confirms that political factors and government are the sources of happiness. This shows that collective conditions in a nation (in this case, electoral democracy) explain happiness beyond the effect of individual differences in terms of employment, income, personality, education, gender, social relations, and age.

In a practical sense, the study highlighted the importance of making elections free, fair, and inclusive, as this would enhance both public trust and citizens' life satisfaction. This would require a concerted action by politicians, policy makers, public managers, and the public at large. Democratic electoral quality, which is one of the important constructs in this study, reflects the openness of nomination and selection of candidates, the degree of electoral contestation, and the inclusiveness of voting procedures. When political parties undertake the nomination and selection of candidates in a transparent manner by letting the community participate, this enhances democratic electoral quality. Similarly, greater degrees of choice and contestation among potential candidates for election improve democratic electoral quality. Furthermore, the extent to which citizens as individual voters actively take part in the election process would promote the inclusiveness of voting procedures.

### **3.1 Limitations of the Study**

The study has some limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, this study used a cross-sectional data set, not a longitudinal one. As a result, the study does not reveal the changes in the relationship between electoral democracy, public trust, and life satisfaction over a period of time. In addition, a cross-sectional research design could not establish a cause and effect relationship. Second, the findings are based on subjective ratings instead of objective data with regard to the main constructs of the study. However, multiple scale items were used to measure each construct except life satisfaction, in order to consider all possible information on the constructs.

The third limitation concerns the use of parametric inferential analyses for the Likert scale of measurement. This study, however, employed multiple items to capture important aspects of the constructs, just as applied by the prior studies (Beerli et al., 2019; Chevalier, 2019; Martinez-Martin, 2010). The fourth limitation relates to the small value of coefficient of determination (i.e., adj. R-sq is lower than 10 percent), which poses a question on the explanatory capacity of the model. In this regard, future research could attempt to identify other potential mediators and moderators that influence the relationship between electoral democracy and life satisfaction.

### **4.0 Conclusions**

The study of life satisfaction is of great importance, as it influences people's personal life as well as their level of participation in political and economic affairs. This study aimed to examine whether and how electoral democracy influences citizens' life satisfaction. Accordingly, this study demonstrated that electoral democracy has both direct and indirect effect on life satisfaction. In other words, the findings indicated that democratic election significantly enhances public trust in government. Chiefly, the study underlines that public trust mediates the positive relationship between electoral democracy and overall citizens' life satisfaction.

The study showed that political factors in terms of electoral democracy and public trust have significant effect on life satisfaction. This shows that not only demographic factors (age, gender, citizenship [national/foreigner], level of education, family setting, and employment status) and

economic factors (such as income level and inflation) but also political factors significantly explain citizen life satisfaction or happiness.

Thus, politicians and election officials need to uphold democracy principles and electoral qualities so as to improve life satisfaction. This can be achieved by government policy that requires making election process (pre-election period, the election period, and post-election period) free, fair, and inclusive.

In addition to electoral democracy, public trust is of importance in influencing life satisfaction. As clearly suggested by Welch, Hinnant, and Moon (2005), government and its institutions can enjoy a high level of public trust by adopting ICT-based public service delivery, improving their administrative rules, making its process more transparent, and reducing public officials' discretionary power. Building public trust would in turn have a positive effect on life satisfaction.

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## Appendixes

### Appendix 1: Sex of the respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	43782	48.9	48.9	48.9
	Female	45691	51.0	51.1	100.0
	Total	89473	99.9	100.0	
Missing	Missing; Unknown	40	.0		
	No answer	51	.1		
	Total	91	.1		
<b>Total</b>		<b>89565</b>	<b>100.0</b>		

### Appendix 2: No. of respondents by continent

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Other countries	72438	80.9	80.9	80.9
	African	17127	19.1	19.1	100.0
	Total	89565	100.0	100.0	

### Appendix 3: Independent Samples Test for mean life satisfaction by continent

Group Statistics							
	By Continent		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	
Satisfaction with your life	African		17033	6.23	2.473	.019	
	Other Countries		71954	6.95	2.215	.008	
Independent Samples Test							
	t-test for Equality of Means						
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Satisfaction with your life	-37.295	88985	.000	-.720	.019	-.758	-.682

### Appendix 4: Independent Samples Test for democratic electoral quality by continent

Group statistics							
	By Continent		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	
Democratic electoral quality	African		13961	2.6190	.58984	.00499	
	Other Countries		42483	2.7349	.59147	.00287	
Independent Samples Test							
	t-test for Equality of Means						
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Democratic electoral quality	-20.101	56441	.000	-.11590	.00577	-.12720	-.10460