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PAPER 08: Democracy, Wellbeing and Happiness: A Ten Nation Study

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Abstract: This article explores the association between subjective wellbeing (life satisfaction and happiness) and the importance of living in a democracy in ten countries: Brazil, China, India, Russia, Rwanda, Singapore, South Africa, Sweden, Turkey and the United States. We examine wellbeing as one possible indicator of the likelihood of a society's commitment to democracy. We find that there is indeed a relationship between life satisfaction and the importance of living in a democracy. Countries with high levels of life satisfaction tend to be secure democracies, while countries with lower levels of life satisfaction tend to experience more political and economic challenges. We briefly discuss the unique socio-economic realities and historical trajectories that may be responsible for varied levels of wellbeing and diverse sentiments on the importance of democracy. We have deliberately selected a wide range of diverse case studies in order to analyse our results within varied political and socio-economic contexts.

Introduction

The many ways in which democracy has (and has not) taken root in extremely diverse parts of the world has led to a burgeoning scholarship on all aspects and contexts of democratisation. One of the most popular subjects for study has been the role of culture more broadly and political culture in particular.[1] In this respect, Ronald Inglehart's longitudinal studies have made a valuable contribution to our knowledge of changes in people's beliefs, values and motivations. His work has demonstrated the powerful impact that the public's changing values can have on social and political realities.

Inglehart (1988) argues that cultural orientations have important political and economic implications and has found that personal life satisfaction and happiness (among other factors) are associated with stable democracies. He posits that cultures with high levels of overall life satisfaction are more likely to adopt democratic institutions and maintain them. His data shows that countries where people have had historically high levels of life satisfaction, adopted democratic institutions earlier and have maintained them for longer than those nations where satisfaction has been lower (Inglehart, 1988:1215-1217).

Inglehart also points out that the adoption of democracy in these countries occurred before the widespread prosperity associated with a large middle class. Although economic development increases the likelihood of democratisation, it does not make democracy inevitable. Cultural conditions, including social structures and political culture are also important because "stable democracy reflects the interaction of economic, political and

[1] See for example Qi and Shin, 2011.

cultural factors" (Inglehart, 1988:1220). A factor such as subjective wellbeing – as an outcome of historical experience and culture – might play an important role in the building of successful democratic institutions that are valued as inherently good even when they do not immediately deliver economic outcomes.

Using Inglehart's ideas as our point of departure, we use the latest World Value Survey (WVS) data to examine a wide range of countries in order to see how populations' wellbeing might relate to their political systems. We do not deny the impact that other factors might also have on the development of political systems around the world; however, our largely exploratory study aims to investigate the links between democracy and wellbeing while keeping socio-economic differences in mind. In so doing we hope to shed light on the way in which these variables intersect in different societies.

For our study we have selected ten countries that differ with regards to their political regimes, economic development and levels of wellbeing. Our sample includes established democracies with developed economies (Sweden and the Unites States) as well as newer democracies with varying degrees of political and economic achievement (Brazil, South Africa and India) and lastly, a number of mixed and authoritarian regimes (Singapore, Russia, Turkey, China and Rwanda), also with varying degrees of economic success. Our case studies also score very differently on the Global Happiness Index (Helliwell et al., 2015), which measures and ranks wellbeing in 157 nations around the world. While some (Sweden, the United States, Brazil and Singapore) score very highly on the index, others rank in the middle (Russia, Turkey and China) and some at the bottom (South Africa, India and Rwanda).

Democracy, subjective wellbeing and happiness

The scientific study of wellbeing and its causes are fairly new, with systematic attempts to measure these concepts starting mainly in the 1980s. Most researchers recognise two aspects of wellbeing: a cognitive-evaluative factor (life satisfaction) and an affective aspect (happiness) (Selim, 2008:531-532; Fors and Kulin, 2016:323-325). Life satisfaction measures a person's satisfaction with all aspects of life (including comparisons with others and hopes for the future), which requires a great deal of reflection and assessment. Happiness on the other hand denotes a person's emotional state as they navigate the experiences of daily life (Fors and Kulin, 2016:326). These two measures are related but distinct, and their study is important for understanding quality of life and for deciding on policy that promotes welfare.

The welfare of nations can in turn affect political stability. The two wellbeing measures are also embedded in cultural contexts, which is why culture affects wellbeing and why wellbeing can remain relatively unchanged from one generation to the next (Ye et al., 2015:520).

Inglehart (1988) advances the argument that cultural orientations may lead to democratisation and/or economic development. He considers happiness and life satisfaction as part of a "syndrome of political cultural attitudes" (Inglehart, 1988:1203) that includes trust, tolerance and political activism (Inglehart and Ponarin, 2013:1098). This syndrome encourages people to value choice (including political freedom) very highly. Countries that score highly on this value syndrome are more likely to be stable democracies. As a part of this cluster of political cultural attitudes, overall life satisfaction is indicative of a general and fairly stable attitude towards the world that differs from country to country. It is possible that this attitude shapes people's views and preferences with regards to their political system. When the attitude is positive (people report high levels of overall life satisfaction), it might be conducive to democracy (in conjunction with the rest of the cluster of attitudes). Inglehart (1988: 1205) argues that life satisfaction is…

> "…not tied to the current performance of the economy or authorities currently in office or to any specific aspect of society. Partly because it is so diffuse, intercultural differences in this orientation are remarkably enduring and may help shape attitudes toward more specific objects, such as the political system."

Although both life satisfaction and political satisfaction correlate with stable democracy, political satisfaction is considered a measure of satisfaction with a particular government rather than the political system (Inglehart, 1988:1209). As such, political satisfaction tends to fluctuate in the short term while life satisfaction is fairly stable over long periods. Life satisfaction and happiness are therefore better indicators of enduring attitudes on which the stability of democracy may depend.

The relationship between subjective wellbeing and democracy is in all likelihood a reciprocal one: happiness and life satisfaction lead people to choose institutions that deliver political and personal freedoms, which in turn increases subjective wellbeing. Indeed, the feeling of having choice and control over one's life has a proven association with subjective wellbeing

(Inglehart et al., 2008:270). Veenhoven (2008:1-3) has also found that political, economic and personal freedom tend to make people happier.

Where political freedom is concerned, people who live in a democratic society may have reason to be happier and more satisfied. The democratic system is considered more likely to deliver outcomes that meet people's expectations since citizens have a hand in choosing their governments (and thus policy). More people are therefore likely to attain their preferred political outcomes or at least accept the outcomes produced by what is considered a fair political system. In other words, people may get a sense of satisfaction merely from the perceived procedural fairness of the democratic process as well as their own involvement in this process (Dorn et al., 2007:505-506).

Reaping the benefits of a well-functioning democracy should therefore impact positively on wellbeing. The evidence appears to support this: when Frey and Stutzer (2000) compared wellbeing in Swiss cantons, they found that those with greater direct democracy had higher levels of wellbeing; additionally, a cross-national study of 28 countries by Dorn et al. (2007:512-514) found that "one additional point on the Freedom House [democracy] scale increases the probability that a subsistence income earner is 'very happy' by as much as an increase of the equivalence income by 7 000 US dollars per year."[2]

While acknowledging the reciprocal relationship between subjective wellbeing and democracy, Inglehart and Ponarin (2013:1104) argue that the cultural orientation must come first: the causal flow is stronger from wellbeing to democracy. Unfortunately then, a nation cannot be made happy by the establishment of democratic institutions. Today's established democracies likely had high levels of life satisfaction before their democratisation: life satisfaction is so remarkably stable over long periods that the countries that currently have high levels of satisfaction are likely to have had similarly high levels in the past (Inglehart, 2013:1215-1217). It is therefore possible that established democracies followed a particular historical trajectory in which political cultural attitudes were important in the determination of democratic institutions.

[2] A positive correlation between the Freedom House democracy index and self-reported happiness has been found in several studies, although the correlation sometimes loses its significance when income levels are controlled for (see Schyns, 1998 and Dorn et al., 2007:506).

However, many other countries have had completely different historical trajectories. They do not necessarily score high on the relevant cluster of political cultural attitudes that are conducive to stable democracy. Where democratisation has occurred, it has often been a dramatic top-down decision rather than the slower processes of many of the established democracies (Huntington, 1991:12-15; Caldeira and Holston, 1999:691). It has also often been characterised by rapid transition, civil rights violations as well as social, political and economic breakdown. Although stable democracy might strengthen wellbeing in the long run, volatile processes of democratisation are unlikely to do so.

The matter is further complicated by the ways in which economic development impact on democratisation and wellbeing. Economic development is associated with both democracy and the aforementioned cluster of political cultural attitudes. Richer nations tend to be decisively happier than poor ones (Inglehart and Ponarin, 2013:1100). As with democracy, it is possible that wellbeing could affect income growth more strongly than the other way around (see Kenny, 1999). Cultural orientation could thus be decisive in the development of both democracy and economic prosperity. Either way, the relationship between economic development and wellbeing in no way negates the relationship between democracy and wellbeing (the latter being stronger) (Inglehart and Ponarin, 2013:1100). We are in all likelihood dealing with highly interrelated factors.

Furthermore, although income levels have been shown to have a positive effect on wellbeing, this effect tapers off once countries become wealthy. Income only affects happiness until people rise above the poverty level (roughly US$5 000 per capita), while further prosperity does not result in increased happiness (Ng, 2002: 201; Lane, 2000:59-76). Various scholars (Lane, 2000; Diener and Seligman, 2004) have pointed out that wealthy countries have continued to experience increased economic output, but with no increase in life satisfaction.

Economic development can therefore only affect wellbeing up to a point: the point where all basic needs are met. Economic factors are therefore especially important in developing countries. Once a level of prosperity is attained however, other concerns related to the syndrome of political cultural factors become increasingly important. Diener and Seligman (2004:1-5) identify these factors as social capital, democratic governance and human rights; Helliwell (2003:355) emphasises efficient political and social institutions; others (Inglehart, 1997; Delhey, 2010) illustrate the importance of post-material values such as personal

autonomy and job creativity. All of these factors may contribute to wellbeing and wellbeing is essential for the survival of any political regime.

In our ten-country study we examine subjective wellbeing as one possible indicator of the likelihood of a society's commitment to democracy. We also discuss the unique socio-economic realities and historical trajectories that may be responsible for varied levels of wellbeing and diverse sentiments on the importance of democracy. We have deliberately selected a wide range of diverse case studies in order to analyse our results within varied political and socio-economic contexts. We believe cross-national studies such as ours can provide insight into the complex ways in which wellbeing relates with democracy and other factors.

Data and selection of cases

Our analysis relies on data from the latest wave of the WVS conducted between 2010 and 2014. The WVS provides a valuable tool with which to analyse the values, beliefs and motivations of ordinary citizens at the mass level over time. The increasingly prominent worldwide values research convincingly shows that changing value patterns have a strong impact on political, economic and social developments within a country.

The WVS is conducted by means of face-to-face interviews in the language of preference of respondents. Probability samples are drawn, with all adult citizens having an equal chance of being selected. The samples are also stratified into homogenous sub-groups defined by various demographic attributes. Since the samples are weighted to the full population and within a statistical margin of error of less than two per cent at 95 per cent confidence level, they are representative of the adult population of a given country.

The rationale behind the case selection was guided by several criteria: (1) the cases had to represent variation along the Global Happiness Index;[3] (2) the selected countries had to be influenced by distinctly different regional cultures; and (3) the availability of data (i.e., the sixth wave of the WVS). Having fulfilled these requirements, a total of 10 countries were

[3] The Global Happiness Index aims to study and explain subjective wellbeing around the world by analysing key contributing factors such as GDP per capita, social support, life expectancy, perception of corruption and freedom among others (see Helliwell et al., 2015).

selected for analysis: Brazil, China, India, Russia, Rwanda, Singapore, South Africa, Sweden, the United States and Turkey.

Measurement

Wellbeing can be defined as "peoples' positive evaluations of their lives" and includes "positive emotion, engagement, satisfaction, and meaning" (Diener and Seligman, 20014:1). In order to measure subjective wellbeing, respondents were asked the following:

- All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?
- Taking all things together, would you say you are very happy, rather happy, not very happy or not at all happy?

In order to measure the importance of democracy, respondents were asked:

- How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically?

The concepts above rely on respondents' ability to self-report on their thoughts, feelings and attitudes. This poses a number of potential problems: life satisfaction and happiness are highly subjective and responses can be influenced by desirability effects, selective recall, momentary thoughts and feelings as well as the circumstances in which the questions were asked (Diener and Seligman, 2004:4; Inglehart et al., 2008:279; Diener et al., 2000:161-162). Additionally there is the need to measure wellbeing with as many indicators as possible in order to capture the broad nature of the concept. Various emotions and feelings show differing patterns of response, but all reflect on overall wellbeing (Diener and Seligman, 20014:1-4). However, it is rare for wellbeing to be measured in such a comprehensive way and most studies – including this one – rely on a smaller number of indicators.

There are also concerns about measuring wellbeing across cultures: notions of wellbeing might be different in different places and happiness, for example, might not even be of equal concern everywhere (Joshanloo and Weijers, 2014:717-718). It is nevertheless believed that a measure such as life satisfaction has global relevance and that people everywhere assess their own wellbeing using whichever information they think apply to the concept (Diener and Seligman, 2004:4). Not only do different wellbeing-related measures correlate with each other, but they have been found to have a high standard of internal consistency as well as

reliability and validity (Welsch, 2008:323). Time series data has shown wellbeing to be fairly stable across time and despite how easy it is to affect respondents' emotions, subjective and objective wellbeing appear to be closely related (Oswald and Wu, 2011). We therefore feel confident that our measures – which are widely used and accepted – are adequate for cross-national comparison.

Results

Our analysis confirmed that life satisfaction and happiness are closely correlated. The correlation is strongest in the established democracies of the United States (.608) and Sweden (.559) as well as Turkey (.537), but holds true for the other countries as well. Rwanda has the weakest correlation (.314).[4]

Our correlations of the subjective wellbeing measures with the importance of living in a democracy revealed that life satisfaction is indeed correlated with democracy in all our case studies, except Turkey (the correlation was also rather weak for Brazil). The correlations between happiness and democracy on the other hand were either very weak or non-existent. Our finding that life satisfaction and happiness are closely related does confirm Inglehart's assertion that the two variables are part of the same syndrome. However, they seem to be measuring two different attitudes, one of which is connected to the importance of living in a democracy (just one measure of democracy) and the other not. Indeed, other scholars have also found that the two measures do not always move in tandem and appear to be measuring two different facets of wellbeing (see for example, Selim, 2008:533; Inglehart et al., 2008:274-275 and Fors and Kulin, 2016).

The tables below present our country rankings with regards to life satisfaction and the importance of democracy. We also present the distributions for life satisfaction, happiness and the importance of living in a democracy. The top three most satisfied countries in our study are all democracies (Tables 1 and 2). Our top three also coincides with that of the Global Happiness Index rankings, although not in the same order (see Helliwell et al., 2015:26-28). Sweden and the United States are among the world's most established liberal democracies, both with strong developed economies and high living standards. Brazil has been one of the most successful young democracies, having made great strides with its socio-

[4] Results for India were not statistically significant.

economic objectives over the last few decades. It is thus arguably the three most successful democracies in our sample that have the highest life satisfaction scores.

Table 1. Life satisfaction by country

Country	Rank	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation	Global Happiness Index[5]
Brazil	1	7.84	8	2.210	**3 (17)**
Sweden	2	7.55	8	1.705	**1 (10)**
United States	3	7.37	8	1.924	**2 (13)**
Turkey	4	7.24	8	2.097	**6 (78)**
Singapore	5	6.96	7	1.639	**4 (22)**
China	6	6.85	7	1.983	**7 (83)**
South Africa	7	6.63	7	2.315	**8 (116)**
Rwanda	8	6.47	6	2.182	**10 (152)**
Russia	9	6.17	6	2.182	**5 (56)**
India	10	5.08	5	2.739	**9 (118)**

It is also interesting to note that one of the most economically successful countries in our sample, Singapore, only ranks 5th in our analysis, after Turkey. As is the case with the most satisfied countries, it is notable that our least satisfied countries are quite similar to those of the Global Happiness Index.

Table 2. How satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?

Country	Completely dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Completely Satisfied	Total
Brazil	4.7%	12.7%	18.5%	64.1%	100%
Sweden	2.9%	10.4%	28.3%	58.3%	100%
United States	5%	11.8%	24.5%	58.7%	100%
Turkey	6.4%	11.8%	30.2%	51.5%	100%
Singapore	3.5%	13%	44.3%	39.3%	100%
China	6.4%	18%	32%	43.6%	100%
South Africa	10.9%	17.9%	30.4%	40.7%	100%
Rwanda	3.9%	19.5%	49.8%	26.7%	100%
Russia	11.8%	26.6%	31.5%	30%	100%
India	34.2%	17.1%	23.3%	25.4%	100%

Additionally, the figures on happiness (Table 3) show that countries generally have a similar proportion of very happy people. This is true even for some of the countries with relatively low life satisfaction such Rwanda and India. China and Russia however, have markedly fewer "very happy" people.

[5] The number in brackets represents the country's original ranking out of 157 nations – see the Global Happiness Index (Helliwell et al., 2015) for more information.

Table 3. Taking all things together, would you say you are very happy, rather happy, not very happy or not at all happy?

Country	Not at all happy	Not very happy	Rather happy	Very happy	Total
Brazil	.8%	7.2%	56.8%	35.2%	100%
China	1.1%	13.4%	69.6%	15.9%	100%
India	4.5%	14.5%	42.7%	38.3%	100%
Russia	1.8%	21.6%	61.1%	15.4%	100%
Rwanda	1%	8.5%	49.8%	40.6%	100%
Singapore	.5%	6.5%	53.9%	39.1%	100%
South Africa	5.6%	17.8%	37.2%	39.4%	100%
Sweden	.4%	4.9%	54.2%	40.5%	100%
United States	1.2%	8.8%	53.8%	36.2%	100%
Turkey	3.8%	12%	46.5%	37.7%	100%

With regards to the importance of living in a democracy (Tables 4 and 5), Sweden stands out as having by far the strongest commitment to democracy. The high scores for Sweden and the United States may be rather unsurprising for two successful and established democracies.

Table 4. Importance of democracy

Country	Rank	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
Sweden	1	9.29	10	1.532
Turkey	2	8.57	9	1.578
China	3	8.43	9	1.586
United States	4	8.41	9	2.047
Brazil	5	8.07	9	2.548
Rwanda	6	7.69	8	1.780
Singapore	7	7.65	8	1.583
South Africa	8	7.55	8	2.112
Russia	9	7.42	8	2.421
India	10	6.38	7	2.799

Table 5. How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically?

Country	Not very important	Not important	Important	Very important	Total
Sweden	1.2%	3.1%	6.4%	89.2%	100%
Turkey	1.1%	2.9%	18.1%	78%	100%
China	1.2%	4.4%	18.7%	75.8%	100%
United States	2.5%	10.9%	12.6%	74%	100%
Brazil	6.5%	13.5%	11.8%	68.2%	100%
Rwanda	0.9%	11.1%	32.9%	55.1%	100%
Singapore	0.7%	10.5%	29.6%	59.2%	100%
South Africa	4%	13.4%	26.3%	56.4%	100%
Russia	7.2%	16.6%	19.5%	56.6%	100%
India	19.3%	17.8%	19.9%	43%	100%

Democracy is however clearly also very important to both Turkey – a partial democracy still in a state of transition – and China, a one-party state. Russia and India are not only the two least satisfied countries in our sample, but also the countries that attach the least importance

to democracy. The comparatively low scores for India on both counts are particularly disconcerting.

Table 6 indicates that the countries with the highest life satisfaction tend to have the greatest proportion of people who think democracy is very important.

Table 6. Democracy and life satisfaction

Country	Importance of democracy	Life satisfaction	
		Dissatisfied	Satisfied
Brazil	Not very important	6.5	6.4
	Not important	25.4	11.1
	Important	10.5	12.0
	Very important	57.7	70.5
China	Not very important	2.2	0.8
	Not important	9.0	2.8
	Important	21.9	17.6
	Very important	66.9	78.7
India	Not very important	27.3	10.9
	Not important	19.6	15.9
	Important	12.8	27.3
	Very important	40.3	45.9
Russia	Not very important	9.2	6.1
	Not important	23.2	12.7
	Important	17.5	20.8
	Very important	50.2	60.4
Rwanda	Not very important	2.0	0.6
	Not important	30.4	5.2
	Important	23.7	35.7
	Very important	43.9	58.5
Singapore	Not very important	1.5	0.5
	Not important	21.6	8.3
	Important	32.1	29.1
	Very important	44.8	62.1
South Africa	Not very important	7.1	2.7
	Not important	24.6	8.8
	Important	22.0	28.1
	Very important	46.3	60.4
Sweden	Not very important	1.3	1.3
	Not important	5.7	2.7
	Important	10.2	5.9
	Very important	82.8	90.2
United States	Not very important	3.4	2.3
	Not important	22.3	8.7
	Important	13.7	12.4
	Very important	60.6	76.5

Turkey	Not very important	1.0	1.1
	Not important	8.7	1.5
	Important	15.7	18.5
	Very important	74.6	78.9

Commitment to democracy is highest in three of our four most satisfied countries – Sweden, Turkey and the United States – where democracy is rated as very important even by large proportions of dissatisfied respondents. Although Brazil has the highest life satisfaction in our sample, it does not have the strongest commitment to democracy among its citizens. In fact, Chinese respondents, who are generally less satisfied with their lives, rate democracy higher than the happy Brazilians.

The four countries with the lowest life satisfaction – Russia, South Africa, Rwanda and India – have fewer people who think democracy is very important. The differences become less stark when we include everyone who thinks democracy is important (very or otherwise): all the case studies have fairly high scores in this regard. India nevertheless has a markedly lower proportion of people (satisfied and dissatisfied) who think that democracy is important.

Discussion of results

Brazil

Brazil records the highest scores for life satisfaction out of our ten case studies. Living in a democracy is also important to the vast majority of Brazilians even though other countries scored higher on this measure. However, the two variables are only weakly correlated (.084).

It is perhaps necessary to view Brazilians' life satisfaction as part of a regional trend since Latin American countries generally have high wellbeing scores (Diener and Seligman, 2004; Inglehart et al., 2008). In fact, their levels of wellbeing are higher than one would expect given their economic development: they are up to four times more likely to have high levels of wellbeing than post-Soviet nations despite similar levels of development (Inglehart et al., 2009:268-269). This anomaly has sometimes been ascribed to the high general positivism in the region (Delhey, 2010:82), which means that positive emotions are highly valued and more likely to be expressed, which in turn enhances life satisfaction (Diener et al., 2000:159). If people are generally encouraged to see things in a positive light, it might inform their worldview and even how they recall their life experiences and plan for the future (Diener et al., 2000:172).

Another explanation is that the two regions have different historical trajectories: the transition of the former Soviet states was often paired with declining living standards and the emotional loss of communist ideology (Diener and Seligman, 2004:6). Brazil's experience has instead been one of progress rather than regression. Brazil enjoyed considerable economic growth throughout the 20th century, which greatly reduced poverty despite a growing income gap. Since 1995 government policies have aimed to address both growth and inequality (Helfand and Buainain, 2016). Thus Brazil's economic development and highly successful social welfare policies are the reasons why Brazilians perceive the government to be effective in reducing poverty and inequality (Corrigan, 2015). Indeed, until the global financial crisis of 2008, Brazil reported high levels of growth and by 2009 poverty had declined by a third (Helfand and Buainain, 2016).

It is quite likely that our data on wellbeing reflect the considerable socio-economic achievements and sense of progress in Brazil, especially over the last two decades. Unfortunately, our data may not fully capture the impact of the financial crisis (which only made itself felt in Brazil rather late) or the country's present political woes. It remains to be seen whether the severe economic recession and corruption scandals have dented Brazilian optimism and wellbeing.

China

Since the introduction of a market economy in 1979, China has experienced unprecedented economic growth and socio-economic progress, but it has not seen an increase in life satisfaction. China's rapid development has led to better living standards for many of its 1.3 billion people: disposable income has increased nine-fold in rural areas and more than ten-fold in the cities; poverty has notably decreased, while school enrolment rates and life expectancy have improved (Li and Raine, 2013:409-410). Researchers have nevertheless reported a decline in life satisfaction (Brockman et al., 2009; Li and Raine, 2013) and the country's levels of wellbeing are lower than that of other developing countries, such as Brazil, as well as that of culturally similar nations in South East Asia.

As is the case with most developing countries, economic growth in China has given rise to inequality and relative deprivation. China does not have the effective social security system that protects the poor in Brazil (Easterlin et al., 2012; Xin and Smyth, 2010:34). The burden of social insecurity has fallen primarily on the most vulnerable socio-economic groups, with

the bottom third of society now being the least happy (Easterlin et al., 2012). Wellbeing is lowest in China's central and eastern cities which have the most open economies and are thus most exposed to the vagaries of the market (Xin and Smyth, 2010:30-35). Having a greater number of wealthy people in a city also tends to lower wellbeing, which may confirm that, despite better living standards, people feel dissatisfied because some have made greater gains faster than others (Brockman et al., 2009:403).

The situation of relative deprivation may be particularly galling in a country that has so rapidly changed from a planned subsistence economy to capitalism. Whereas previously the fulfilment of needs depended on family ties and political loyalty, now access to healthcare, services, security and social reputation depend primarily on money; termed "the monetarisation of happiness" by Delhey (2010:82). The cultural meaning of economic success has changed, producing uncertainty and insecurity (Xin and Smyth, 2010:35).

As income has increased in China and basic needs are met, it is also possible that personal and political freedom are becoming more important (Xin and Smyth, 2010:35). Indeed, in our analysis China ranks third with regards to how important living in a democracy is to respondents. It appears that democracy is more important to Chinese respondents than to the citizens of most of the democracies in our sample. The implications of these sentiments for the future of China are clearly of great significance.

India

India was consistently at the bottom of our wellbeing rankings and also ascribed the least importance to living in a democracy. Since life satisfaction and the importance of living in a democracy are correlated (.284), there is some reason for concern. This is borne out by the increase in support for alternative regimes among Indian respondents. Support for military rule has risen particularly steeply: from 36.6% in 1995 to a worrying 74.6% in 2013. The proportion of people who think that having a strong leader (who does not have to bother with parliament and elections) would be a good thing is also a high 71.4% (Steenekamp and Du Toit, forthcoming:7-12).[6]

[6] Indeed, the reputation of the Indian parliament has declined notably over the last three decades (Chatterjee and Roychoudhury, 2013:404).

The findings above may reflect dissatisfaction with government performance as well as the insecurity produced by the volatility of the region. India has border disputes with both China and Pakistan and the latter in particular is considered especially threatening to Indian security. India also shares borders with Nepal, which has experienced internal instability for over a decade, and Bangladesh, which is vulnerable to rising ocean levels and floods. Bangladesh is very densely populated and could be a source of refugees in case of an environmental crisis (Steenekamp and Du Toit, forthcoming:20).

Furthermore, despite admirable levels of economic growth, the country faces serious economic and political challenges. India has low income per capita, high income inequality and extensive problems with political corruption. India's political institutions play a key role in sustaining democracy, but their performance and quality of governance has been seriously undermined by corruption (Chatterjee and Roychoudhury, 2013). Corruption hinders economic growth, destroys trust and other forms of social capital, erodes legitimacy and obstructs service delivery, especially to the poor who can least afford the numerous bribes needed for access to services.

The inefficiency produced by corruption is part of the reason why the government has failed to address India's poor human development record: problems such as undernutrition, gender inequality (Ghosh, 2016:542) and religious conflict (Migheli, 2016) – to name but a few – persist. Corruption is therefore a clear violation of physical and mental wellbeing as well as political freedom and economic security (Ghosh, 2016:544). There is no doubt that it can lead to dissatisfaction and political instability (Chatterjee and Roychoudhury, 2013:404). The role of government and living standard have been identified as key contributors to wellbeing in South Asia (Ngoo et al., 2015:151). Rectifying the government's inability to improve people's standard of living should therefore be of the utmost importance to democrats in India.

Russia

Russia's transition from a state-controlled Communist economy to a market economy was arguably one of the most dramatic transition experiences occurring in our sample. It involved not only a change in political system but a sudden abandonment of a pervasive ideology. The political instability and disruption caused by the sudden introduction of new social values – freedom of thought and expression, civil rights, individual initiative – were bound to

cause a great amount of insecurity (Diener and Seligman, 2004:6). However, in addition to the political and social disruption, the Russian economy also collapsed.

The liberalisation of prices in January 1992 resulted in an extreme economic shock in which inflation rose rapidly, living standards fell and income became polarised. Russians' real income declined to less than half the value of what it was prior to the transition. Eighty percent of the population fell below the official poverty line during this period (Schyns, 2001:173-184) and life expectancy declined (Inglehart et al., 2008:268-269). Most Russians (66%) felt that their sense of security had deteriorated and that they were living in a state of uncertainty (55%). Feelings of safety also declined: 57% of people did not feel safe anywhere, including their homes, while 52% feared for their lives. Almost half the population (49%) reported having less confidence in the future than previously (Schyns, 2001:173).

In Russia, as in other former Soviet countries, wellbeing experienced a sharp decline. The shocking drop in real income, living standards and life expectancy most likely contributed to the decreased wellbeing. It is possible that losing income has a bigger impact on wellbeing than the experience of gaining it (Diener and Seligman, 2004:6). Additionally, people experienced the loss of the communist belief system as well as the loss of the Soviet Empire's former global power and status (Inglehart et al., 2008:268-269). The economic shocks and general disruption are probably also why only 57.6% of Russians indicated support for democracy in 1995 (Steenekamp and Du Toit, forthcoming:7) and indeed democracy did not survive in Russia.

Although income levels recovered after 1995 and support for democracy rose, the low levels of wellbeing have seen little growth (Schyns, 2001:177-186) and although post-Soviet countries are more or less as wealthy as Latin American nations, their subjective wellbeing remains lower (Inglehart et al., 2008:268-278). This may in part be a consequence of the shocks of the 1990s, but could also be due to the lack of political and private freedom that characterises Russia today (Veenhoven, 2008:7).

Rwanda

If the political, economic and social shocks experienced in Russia during the 1990s are still having a lingering impact on Russians, the same may be expected for Rwanda. Rwanda experienced several outbreaks of ethnic-related violence in the decades leading up to the

devastating genocide of 1994 in which an estimated 800 000 Tutsi were killed (excluding Hutu and Twa victims). An estimated 2 million Hutus also fled the country after the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) assumed power, while 750 000 exiles (mostly Tutsi) returned (Diamond, 2006:314-318).

The immense scale of the violence left survivors in a state of extreme trauma. The genocide saw family members turn against each other, doctors killing patients and teachers killing students and vice versa, thus destroying the social fabric. Violence has an extremely negative impact on wellbeing through its effects on the physical and mental health of the population as well as its resultant reduced income. The effects are worse in situations of large scale violence or when an escalation of violence occurs (Welsh, 2008:321-330). The repeated outbreaks of violence in Rwanda throughout the 20th century and its culmination in the 1994 genocide are therefore bound to have had an extreme impact.

In addition to trauma, depression and displacement, Rwandans also suffered the consequences of a destroyed economy and infrastructure. Economic productivity was brought to a halt and much of the state's civil service was destroyed, with people either killed or having fled. However, great progress has since been made to rebuild infrastructure, promote socio-economic development and gender equality, to integrate former combatants back into society and to hold perpetrators of the genocide accountable while emphasising reconciliation (Clark, 2014:308-309).

The RPF has managed to rebuild political and judicial institutions and have made admirable progress in service delivery with regards to education, healthcare, transport and agricultural assistance. Ethnic categories have been scrapped by the government and Rwandans have been encouraged to view themselves simply as Rwandans. Thanks to government efforts the country has enjoyed substantial economic growth over the last two decades and the socio-economic gains of this period are expected to continue (Clarke, 2014:308-310), in which case wellbeing may improve.

There are however several areas of concern. The RPF's internal cohesion has been a great strength in its efforts to rebuild Rwanda, but it has also turned dissent into an unaffordable distraction (Clark, 2014:310). Any criticism of the party from within or without is viewed in a suspicious light and the RPF has been accused of stifling dissent from opposition parties

and the media. Multiparty democracy is viewed suspiciously as it might give rise to extremist parties. Although President Paul Kagame was supposed to step down after two terms in office, the Rwandan constitution has recently been amended to allow him to stand for another seven-year term in 2017 (followed by the possibility of two more five-year terms) (The Guardian, 2016). The murder of former Rwandan head of intelligence, Patrick Karegeya, has been further cause for concern: Karegeya had broken with the RPF and formed opposition groups in exile before he was suspiciously killed in Johannesburg in 2014 (Clark, 2014:311).

It would appear that the RPF is currently correct in thinking that as long as it delivers on the people's needs and provides adequate services, the Rwandan population will continue to approve of its government. Although people may be willing to suspend their desire for political freedom in favour of socio-economic progress, this situation may not last indefinitely. Our data shows that democracy is reasonably important to Rwandans and the demand for political freedom is likely to rise along with socio-economic progress and perhaps wellbeing. The current state of politics is therefore worrisome in a country with such a long history of extreme violence.

Singapore

Singapore presents an interesting case study as it is a small city-state with limited democracy but strong economic success. This success includes an export-driven and pro-business free market economy as well as a high per capita income, low levels of unemployment and good infrastructure. Singapore is often ranked as having the highest quality of life in Asia: the basic needs of Singaporeans are generally met and they enjoy good healthcare, physical and financial security, status equality and social capital goods such as trust and tolerance. Additionally, people in Singapore enjoy political stability as well as clean and efficient government (Tan and Tambyah, 2016:1395).

Nevertheless, despite Singapore's above-mentioned achievements, the country ranks fairly low in subjective wellbeing – below developing countries like Brazil and Turkey – with less than 40% of respondents considering themselves either completely satisfied with their lives or very happy. Ng (2002: 207) mentions the possibility that economic success may have had a detrimental effect on wellbeing. Singapore's economic achievements – and that of the region – depend on long work hours and high degrees of competitiveness. Many people report being under high levels of work-related stress, which has negatively affected health

and possibly family and community ties. The latter are considered more important in collectivist Asian societies than individualism, freedom or equality (Tan and Tambyah, 2016:1395-1396).

The situation is aggravated by the so-called "Singapore Dream" of owning land (a scarce commodity on the tiny island state) as well as cars (the use of which is restricted) and pursuing a high technology lifestyle. The limited availability of landed properties in particular only serves to make people more driven, competitive and stressed as they attempt to secure resources for their families (Ng, 2002: 207). This excessive competitiveness may be the reason why many people feel that important community values – for example, caring for one's neighbours – have been fading (Tan and Tambyah, 2016:1395).

Another concern to note is the lack of political and personal freedom in Singapore. Although Singapore enjoys high economic freedom and effective government, Delhey (2010:79) argues that with the increase in wealth, freedom and choice will come to matter more to each successive generation. In this respect Singapore falls short: Freedom House considers it only partly free since the country is lacking in political and civil liberties. Singapore has also been criticised over efforts to suppress media freedom and dissent (Freedom House, 2016). Although Singaporeans rank relatively low in the importance they place on living in a democracy – perhaps an indication of their satisfaction with their high performance government – 59.2% nevertheless consider democracy very important and a further 29.6% consider it important (compared to 50.5% who support the idea of having a strong leader) (Steenekamp and Du Toit, forthcoming:9). Thus, in addition to reducing work-related stress and material competition, political liberalisation might be a way to improve wellbeing in Singapore.

South Africa

The end of Apartheid in South Africa and the first democratic elections in 1994 brought the country political and personal freedoms on a scale that the majority had never known before. Although major transitions can be unsettling, the evidence suggests that, for the first time in its recorded history, South Africans of all races experienced unprecedented levels of life satisfaction and happiness in the wake of the country's first non-racial elections (Inglehart et al., 2008:275; Møller, 2000:37-39). However, the euphoria was brief as it became clear that democracy would not prove a panacea for South Africa's many ills.

Research confirms that South Africa's unhappiness reflects the racial divides that refuse to fade in the rainbow nation: as in the past, the black majority (especially women) remain the least satisfied with their lives despite improvements in living conditions; white South Africans remain the most satisfied despite their loss of political power and anxiety over the future. The wellbeing scores of other racial groups tend to fall in the middle (Møller, 2000:33-48).

The fulfilment of basic needs is the most pressing concern for many black South Africans. Although freedom is to the benefit of everyone, it tends to have more value when accompanied by economic development (Veenhoven, 2008:12-13). When people lack the means to fulfil their basic needs, the utility of freedom is low (Inglehart et al., 2008:271). Despite socio-economic gains in South Africa including welfare stipends, economic growth and job creation have been stagnant while service delivery has often been slow. In addition to poverty and inequality, the country faces many social ills affecting wellbeing, ranging from the HIV crisis to criminal violence (Møller, 2000:35-36).

Furthermore, many South Africans attach importance to their positional status, meaning that income gains relative to others matter to them. If South Africa's transition led to rapidly rising expectations, many may be unhappy with their socio-economic gains despite any progress made (Diener and Seligman, 2004:6). Poverty and inequality in South Africa remain racially skewed, so that those who have made gains remain behind their wealthier white counterparts (SAIRR, 2013:3-4). When people compare what they have with what they believe they deserve and come up short, it can be a source of great dissatisfaction (Schyns, 2000:177).

Dissatisfaction with service delivery and corruption, which impacts strongly on the lives of the poor, has negatively affected support for democracy. Our data shows that 56.4% of South Africans think living in a democracy is very important, while satisfaction with democracy has declined to 48% (from 60% in 2011) (Steenekamp and Du Toit, forthcoming:2). According to the Afrobarometer, 61% of South Africans are also willing to forego elections if a non-elected government could ensure services such as safety, housing and jobs (Lekaleke, 2016). This confirms data from the WVS 2013 which also shows increased support for alternative regimes: 60.3% of South Africans favour the idea of a strong leader (up from 34.4% in 1995)

and 50.4% support army rule (up from 24.5% in 1995) (Steenekamp and Du Toit, forthcoming:8).

As is the case with India, addressing corruption and service delivery are key to South Africa's future wellbeing and the consolidation of its democracy. Without measures to address these concerns and better the lives of the poor, low levels of wellbeing, whether from absolute or relative deprivation, may pose serious challenges to the country's political regime as well as its social cohesion. In a country with deep racial divisions and a recent history of xenophobic violence, the wellbeing of the most vulnerable groups in the country needs be of the highest priority.

Sweden

Sweden scores very high in both our wellbeing and democracy rankings – as one might expect of one of the most established and wealthy democracies in the world. The majority of the Swedish population report being happy and satisfied. 89.2% of Swedes consider democracy to be important – considerably more than in our other case studies. Indeed, Sweden performs very well in many wellbeing measures, often exceeding average wellbeing scores for the OECD. Life expectancy in Sweden is 82 years – slightly more than the OECD average of 80 (OECD, 2016) – and Swedes enjoy high quality healthcare as well as a high level of environmental quality. The country also has high levels of physical safety and gender equality (Ye et al., 2015:526).

Furthermore, Sweden boasts a very good education system and its workforce tends to be well-educated and skilled. Most people are employed and incomes as well as financial satisfaction tend to be high (Lühiste, 2014:793; Zagorski et al., 2014:1102). The government also actively promotes policy allowing for a good balance between work and personal life (Nyman, 1999:766-767). This provides time for the pursuit of post-material ideals, social connections and civic engagement (86% of eligible voters participated in the last elections). Sweden is considered a high-trust society which places a strong emphasis on a sense of community as well as generosity (Ahmed and Salas, 2008:426-427). Being rich in social capital, it is not surprising that 92% of Swedes report that they have someone to rely on in times of need (OECD, 2016).

Sweden's well-established social welfare system is often lauded as one of the reasons for Swedes' high levels of wellbeing. The welfare system provides comprehensive social security benefits as well as services thought too important to leave to market forces; for example, education and healthcare (Olsson, 1990:26-27). Heavy taxation is used to finance these socio-economic goods and to narrow income gaps (Diener and Seligman, 2004:6). The welfare system is thus credited for achieving high levels of social equality (Ahmed and Salas, 2008:427), which may contribute to social capital goods such as trust and tolerance as well as higher wellbeing in general. In sum, Sweden has managed to meet its population's basic needs without sacrificing social bonds.

United States

Although life satisfaction in the world's richest and most powerful nation is high, there has been much concern over its continued decline since World War II. Over this period real income has climbed (GDP per capita tripled), but Diener and Seligman (2004:3) report that life satisfaction has stayed the same, while Lane (2000) affirms that levels of happiness have fallen. The same period saw a decline in levels of social capital: Putnam's seminal research (2000) highlights decreased levels of trust in other people and government institutions as well as less civic and community engagement. Levels of depression and anxiety have also increased dramatically (Diener and Seligman, 2004:3). Putnam considers the situation a breakdown of social connectedness.

In prosperous countries income becomes less important to wellbeing (Lane, 2000:59-76) and increases in income are therefore less and less able to affect happiness (Diener and Seligman, 2004:6). The impact of each added dollar decreases as the overall income increases. Income increases also lose more than half their effect on happiness after four years (Reyes-García et al. 2016:775). Rising income is often accompanied by rising desires and expectations, which can turn a once satisfactory income into a frustratingly low one, resulting in less wellbeing (Diener and Seligman, 2004:6). Such a materialist trap can lead to more social comparison and less focus on relationships despite the importance of social bonds for wellbeing.

Joshanloo and Weijers (2014:719-728) argue that the constant pursuit of happiness – an activity of such importance that it is famously written into the US constitution – takes such effort (constant monitoring, comparison and strategising) that it becomes hard to enjoy improved wellbeing. Indeed, North Americans report valuing happiness highly and think

about it at least once a day. Joshanloo and Weijers (2014:727-728) assert that the American Dream is based on a form of radical individualism that emphasises the importance of personal achievement to the effect that people may become indifferent to the wellbeing of society as a whole and neglect both personal values as well as the value of other people. Similarly, Ye et al. (2015:526-527) point out that highly assertive societies in which people are encouraged to be extremely competitive and empathise with the strong are likely to experience less inclination to help others and more social tension, which is perhaps evident by increased concerns over inequality in the US. If the US is to halt its decline in wellbeing, it may require a shift in emphasis away from material competition and consumption to stronger social bonds.

Turkey

Since the 1980s Turkey has been in a period of constitutional reform and transition, including its attempts at Europeanisation in order to potentially join the European Union (Ekici and Koydemir, 2014:1032-1037). It has experienced considerable processes of industrialisation, modernisation and globalisation during this time. As a result, Turkey has been one of the world's fastest developing countries in recent times.

Although the Turkish economy has expanded and poverty has decreased, the country still faces economic challenges. Compared to European countries, Turkey has the highest income inequality (as measured by the Gini coefficient) and thus struggles with problematic social class imbalances (Zagorski et al., 2014:1094-1102; Ekici and Koydemir, 2014:1035). It also has one of the lowest levels of financial quality of life. There is therefore concern that life satisfaction is not as high as it should be.

It is possible that Turkish wellbeing has been negatively affected by the socio-economic forces mentioned above. It is also important to bear in mind that although Turkey is considered a collectivist society – meaning that people emphasise their group-belonging – it has low levels of social capital, a very small civil society, limited democratic functioning and human rights violations. Social trust is low (only 5% of youth think that people can be trusted), as are volunteering and membership in organisations (Ekici and Koydemir 2014:1035).

The lack of social capital is bound to be negatively impacted by the instability both within Turkey and in the region. Turkey has experienced several deadly terror attacks in 2016, perpetrated by Kurdish terrorist groups and the Islamic State. The country has also seen an influx of three million Syrian refugees from across the border (Ozerdam, 2016). The insecurity produced by internal and regional conflicts (including the potential risk of civil war) may be Turkey's first priority in addressing both social capital deficiencies and wellbeing.

Conclusion

Our analysis confirmed the interrelated nature of life satisfaction and happiness. However, we also found that the two indicators measure different aspects of wellbeing and that life satisfaction is generally correlated with the importance of living in a democracy while happiness is not. Additionally, our results show that the countries in our study with the highest levels of life satisfaction (Brazil, Sweden and the United States) are democracies. They also tend to value democracy highly. Countries like Turkey and China also value democracy highly and in the case of the latter political freedom might improve wellbeing. We cannot say the same for Turkey as life satisfaction and the importance of living in a democracy were not correlated in the latest wave of WVS data. However, the use of a different measure for democracy might provide different results.

The low wellbeing scores for India and South Africa are disconcerting when keeping in mind how important wellbeing is for the survival of democracy. In countries where wellbeing is too low to sustain democracy, the only alternative is for democratic regimes to deliver socio-economic goods that will improve wellbeing and hopefully restore faith in the system. India and South Africa are thus in need of more efficient government that are willing and able to address socio-economic problems. Without this vital intervention in the lives of the poor, the importance of democracy might continue to wane.

The autocratic regimes in our study that are still developing their economies – China, Russia and Rwanda – may want to study the example of Singapore and perhaps even the United States. Singapore has very high living standards, but wellbeing lags somewhat behind. The United States is rich in money, power and possessions, but wellbeing (though high) is in decline. Economic success alone is not enough to achieve the highest levels of wellbeing. In

some societies other forms of freedom may also have a positive impact. In all societies there is the need for a balance between economic and social lives as exemplified by Sweden.

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