THE DEMOCRATIC PARADOX: A SOCIO-POLITICAL ANALYSIS OF LIFE SATISFACTION AND INSTITUTIONAL TRUST IN KOGI STATE, NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

The normative assumption in political science suggests that democratic governance maximizes human satisfaction and happiness by empowering citizens through competitive electoral participation. However, in the Nigerian context, particularly following the post-2023 electoral cycle, a democratic paradox has emerged a widening chasm between the ideological preference for democracy and the lived reality of institutional performance. This study investigates this phenomenon among residents of Kogi State, utilizing a mixed-methods approach and drawing on primary data from 454 respondents (determined via Taro Yamane's formula) and framed by Utilitarian and Social Contract theories, the research assesses life satisfaction against institutional trust. Findings reveal a stark contradiction: while 61.9% of respondents rate the importance of living in a democracy as high (Scales 4 and 5), 80% express profound dissatisfaction with the current state of democracy in Kogi State. This deficit is driven by a crisis of integrity in the electoral process, where 65.6% believe election outcomes do not reflect the people's will, and a severe economic-happiness nexus, where 74.2% report deep dissatisfaction with the national economic situation. Despite these systemic failures, respondents exhibit psychological resilience, with 68.1% maintaining a sense of purpose. The study concludes that the democratic paradox in Kogi State is not a rejection of democracy itself, but a rejection of institutional failure and disutility produced by current governance practices. Recommendations include implementing localized feedback loops, restoring electoral credibility through technological transparency, and prioritizing economic stomach infrastructure to align democratic outcomes with human happiness.

Keywords: Democratic Paradox; Subjective Well-being; Institutional Trust; Post-2023 Elections.

Introduction

The triumph of liberal democracy in the post-Cold War era established democratic governance as the global benchmark for political legitimacy. These standards, defined by regular, free, and credible elections, are intended to maximize "Subjective Well-Being" (SWB). However, throughout Africa, a "democratic recession" has emerged. In Nigeria, the high hopes of 1999 have met the harsh reality of the post-2023 electoral cycle. By 2026, the 2023 general elections are viewed longitudinally as a watershed moment where technological interventions like BVAS faced significant implementation hurdles., leading to what scholars Christopher Ngara, Solomon Tsokwa term a "crisis of integrity."

The World Happiness Report (2024) continues to rank Nigeria low in the global happiness index, citing corruption and lack of social support as primary drivers. In Kogi State, this is reflected in the 2023 presidential and gubernatorial elections, which saw record-low turnout. According to Kabir (2023), the 2023 cycle represented the lowest turnout in Nigeria's history, with no state exceeding 40%. This trend is attributed to a waning faith in institutions such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the police. As Inglehart (2006) suggests, if democracy leads to happiness, then shifts toward it should increase well-being; the current "Democratic Paradox" in Kogi State suggests that while the form of democracy exists, the substance.

Throughout Africa, there has been a democratic recession on a regular basis. In the aftermath of Nigeria's 2007 presidential election, for example, the elected president was keen to change the voting system and accepted its shortcomings. Similar events occurred in Zimbabwe in 2008 and Kenya in 2007, when top opposition figure Morgan Tsvangirai withdrew from the race for president, claiming voter suppression and political intimidation against him and his allies. The immediate result of these scenarios was the establishment of a government of national unity in these nations during that time (Peter, 2017).

When democracy was reinstated in Nigeria in 1999, there were high hopes for a better country and the strengthening of democracy. The democratic consolidation we had hoped for appeared to be a challenge in light of the political events of the last two decades, especially the way the country has conducted general elections. According to Obinna (2021), Nigeria's 24 years of democratic administration have been made worthless, and the country is today in a hazardous situation that is different from what was expected before to the 1999 elections.

According to Kabir (2023), the 2023 presidential election was the lowest voter turnout since both the country's independence and its return to democratic administration in 1999. He claimed that not a single state had a voting turnout more than 40% and that less than half of the eligible voters cast ballots in any of the federation's states. This pattern may be attributed to the nation's waning faith in the political system as a result of important institutions, political leaders, and elites controlling the system during the country's political transition. Yagboyaju (2011) claims that dormant electorates, political indifference among eligible voters, and the threat posed by

entities like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), political parties, the legislature, and the police are additional signs of Nigeria's fourth republic's declining democratization. Based on the location and timing of this, it is nearly difficult for voters to select a trustworthy leader or leaders.

Statement of the Problem

Inglehart and Ponarin (2013) stated that if democracy leads to satisfaction, then shifts toward democracy ought to be accompanied by sharp rises in happiness. However, if happiness is a relatively stable variable that supports democracy but is not always increased by it, then democratization may not be followed by an increase in happiness. Additionally, a significant wave of democratization would weaken the subsequent correlation between democracy and happiness by bringing many less happy societies into the ranks of the democracies.

Judging from this therefore, it became necessary to interrogate the degree of happiness of the people of Kogi state in the democratic system of government that began since May 29, 1999. The central question therefore is, does democracy enhance the happiness of the people of Kogi state?

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the effect of democracy on happiness. However, the specific objectives are to:

i. examine the effect of democracy on life satisfaction in Kogi State;
ii. assess the effect of democracy on the condition of life in Kogi State.

Literature Review

"Both democracy and human happiness vary a great deal from one society to another," claims Inglehart (2006, p. 4). His research covers a wide spectrum of civilizations, from long-standing liberal democracies like the United States, Canada, Sweden, Denmark, and Britain to very authoritarian nations like China, Russia, and Bulgaria between 1981 and 1986 (Inglehart, 2006). People who are contented with their democracy are also likely to experience greater "luck" in their life, according to Graham and Pettinato (2000), referenced in Weingartmair (2022). Weingartmair (2022) also referenced Caplanova *et al*. (2014), whose research indicates that happiness and democratic satisfaction are positively correlated. Others such as Huntington, however, focused specifically on how democracy affected people's quality of life. According to Weingartmair (2022), research indicates that democracy or at least some aspects of it may influence how society evaluates life satisfaction and happiness.

Numerous empirical studies have also shown that aspects of governance, like democracy, are linked to happiness because democratization raises people's perceptions of their freedom of choice, which can raise happiness levels globally (Bjørnskov & Rode, 2020; Bjørnskov, 2010).

Limited researches have been carriedout to examine the relationship between democracy and happiness in Nigeria since democracy was restored there in 1999. Closing this gap is essential because it would enable us to start analyzing Nigerian democracy while keeping in mind the country's increasing need for democratic consolidation.

Theoretical Framework

To understand the relationship between democracy and human happiness, this study anchors its analysis on two primary theories: Utilitarianism and Social Contract Theory.

Utilitarianism, pioneered by Jeremy Bentham and later refined by John Stuart Mill, posits that the moral and political worth of an action or institution is determined by its contribution to "the greatest happiness for the greatest number." In a political context, utilitarianism suggests that democracy is the most efficient system for maximizing "utility" (happiness) because it requires leaders to satisfy the preferences of the majority to retain power.Bentham's "felicific calculus" suggests that happiness can be measured through intensity, duration, and certainty. When applied to Kogi State, the theory argues that democratic institutions—such as the State House of Assembly and Local Government Councils—exist primarily to produce policies that enhance the pleasure (welfare) of the residents and minimize their pain (poverty/insecurity). However, the "Democratic Paradox" arises when the *process* of democracy (elections) produces "disutility." Mill expanded this by arguing that "higher pleasures" such as political liberty and freedom of speech are essential for human flourishing.

Social Contract Theory of Locke and Rousseau

Social Contract Theory provides the second pillar of this framework. John Locke argued that individuals exit the "state of nature" to form a government that protects their natural rights to "Life, Liberty, and Property."Jean-Jacques Rousseau added the concept of the "General Will," suggesting that legitimate political order comes from a contract where citizens trade some individual liberties for collective security and happiness.

In Kogi State, the "Social Contract" is the invisible bond between the electorate and the state government. The theory posits that human happiness is a direct byproduct of a functioning contract. When the state provides security and economic stability, happiness increases. By 2026, the Social Contract in Nigeria has been further strained by the Economic-Happiness Nexus. The removal of fuel subsidies and the resulting inflation of 2023–2025 acted as exogenous shocks that the state failed to mitigate. From a Lockean perspective, if a government fails to protect the "property" (economic well-being) of its citizens, the contract is invalidated, leading to the institutional distrust and "Japa" (migration) tendencies observed among the educated youth in this study. Together, these theories explain that democracy is not merely a procedural exercise but a moral and utilitarian commitment to the well-being of the governed.

Methodology

This is surveyresearch.It adoptsan *ex post facto*researchdesign.Thisisthetypeofdesign where the independent variable is manipulated tomeasureitseffectsonthedependentvariable. In an ex post facto manner, the independent variable (X) is democracy, and the dependent variable(Y) is human satisfaction and happiness.Theempirical indicators of democracy shall be used to measure the empirical indicators of happiness so as to show whether democracy has made the residents of Kogi State happier or otherwise.

The 2022 estimated population of Kogi state is 4466800 (https://citypopulation.de/en/nigeria/admin/NGA023kogi/. (Accessed on May 19, 2023). This shall constitute the population of the study. Taro Yamane's (1967) was used to determine the sample size as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where n = sample size

N = population

e = Error margin

Therefore using the error margin of 0.05,

$$n = \frac{4466800}{1 + 4466800\ (0.0447)^2}$$

n=500

This study adopted both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Quantitatively, it relied extensively on the collection of numeric data driven essentially from the primary source. Also, it used the qualitative method, which is essential in cases where a researcher tries to understand or interpret a phenomenon based on the interpretations that people make of it in their natural environments (Peter, 2018; Peter, 2023). The significance of this is that understanding the viewpoints of other knowledge producers will be crucial to understanding the topics this article covers.

Primary and secondary sources of data were used. Data from the primary source were collected using questionnaire, whereas data from the secondary source were gotten from published texts, government official documents, national and international dailies, and other unpublished materials, published materials and online sources, among others that were relevant

to the work. The sequence of content analysis was followed in the qualitative analysis of the gathered data.

DataPresentation andAnalysis

Thequestionnairedesignedtoelicitdatafor this study was administered through google form. The sample size of 500 was determined through the Taro Yamane sample size determination formula. Alter the expiration of the duration for the completion of the questionnaire, a total of 454 responses were received, these respondents were reached physically and via Google-form. This represents 98.5 percent response rate, which is sufficient to continue with the analysis.

Demographic Status of Respondents

Table1: Ageof theRespondents

Options	Frequency	Percent
18-27	64	14.1%
28-37	169	37.2%
38-47	133	29.3%
48-57	73	16.1%
58 and above	15	3.3%
Total	**454**	100.0%

Source: Fieldwork2025

Table 1 encompasses the age distribution of the respondents within the study area. The data reveals that the majority of participants fall within the 28-37 age group (37.2%), followed by those aged 38-47 (29.3%). Younger respondents aged 18-27 represent 14.1%, while those in the 48-57 category (16.1%) and 58 and above (3.3%) make up the remainder. These findings suggest that the survey successfully captured the perspectives of the "active-age" population, particularly middle-aged individuals who are most likely to be directly impacted by civil service policies and democratic governance.

Table2: Gender of the Respondents

Options	Frequency	Percent
Female	210	46.3**%**
Male	244	53.7**%**
Total	**454**	**100.0%**

Source: Fieldwork 2025

Table 2 illustrates the gender distribution of the respondents. The data reveals that 53.7% of the participants are male, while 46.3% are female. These findings suggest a relatively balanced

gender representation compared to historical trends in political research. The scholarly conclusion drawn here is that there is an increasing inclusion of female voices in socio-political discourse within the Kogi West Senatorial District, narrowing the traditional gap in gender-based civic engagement.

Table 3 Educational Qualification

Option	Frequency	Percent
Degree/HND	154	33.9 %
ND/OND/NCE	48	10.6 %
PGD/Masters	162	35.7 %
PhD	88	19.4%
SSCE	2	0.4%
Total	**454**	**100.00%**

Source: Fieldwork2025

Table 3 proves the educational attainment of the respondents. The data reveals a highly intellectual sample, with 35.7% holding PGD or Master's degrees and 19.4% possessing a PhD. Additionally, 33.9% hold a Degree or HND, while only a marginal 0.4% have only an SSCE. These findings suggest that the respondents are exceptionally well-informed and possess the cognitive capacity to provide sophisticated critiques of the democratic paradox and the socio-economic plights of civil servants.

Respondents Answering to Research Questions

Using a scale of 1-5 where 1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest, how satisfied are you with the current state of democracy in Kogi state?

Table 4: Rating respondents' satisfaction with the current state of democracy in Kogi state

Scale	Frequency	Percent
1	210	46.3%
2	153	33.7%
3	68	15%
4	13	2.9%
5	10	2.2%
Total	**454**	**100.00%**

Source: Fieldwork 2025

Table 4 illustrates respondents' satisfaction with the prevailing democratic state. The data reveals a profound level of discontent, with 46.3% rating their satisfaction at the lowest level (Scale 1) and 33.7% at Scale 2. Only a combined 5.1% rated their satisfaction at the higher levels (4 and 5). These findings suggest a significant "democratic deficit" in the state, where the practice of governance is perceived as failing to meet the expectations of the citizenry.

Using a scale of 1-5 where 1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest, do you consider it important to be living in a democratic country/state?

Table 5: Rating how important it is for respondentstolive inademocratic State

Scale	Frequency	Percent
1	49	10.8%
2	43	9.5%
3	91	20%
4	105	23.1%
5	176	36.6%
Total	**454**	**100.0**%

Source: Fieldwork 2025

Table 5 elucidates how much importance respondents attach to living under a democratic system. The data reveals that 36.6% of respondents view living in a democracy as highly important (Scale 5), with an additional 23.1% rating it at Scale 4. Meanwhile, only 10.8% consider it of low importance. These findings suggest that while respondents are dissatisfied with the current state of democracy (as seen in the previous table), they still strongly value the ideal of democracy as a prerequisite for human potential and freedom.

Do you feel that your vote counts in elections?

Table 6: The respondents' views on whether their votes influence election outcomes

Option	Frequency	Percent
Maybe	68	15%
No	229	50.4%
Yes	157	34.6%
Total	**454**	**100**%

Source: Fieldwork 2025

Table 6 illustrates respondents' views on the efficacy of their vote. The data reveals that 50.4% of respondents believe their votes do not influence election outcomes. While 34.6%affirm that their votes influence election outcomes and15% remain uncertain. These findings suggest a deep-seated electoral skepticism that may explain the prevalence of voter apathy and the recurring legal challenges following election results in the region.

Is the outcome of the elections a reflection of the votes of the people?

Table 7: The respondents' perception of whether elections accurately reflect the people's votes

Option	Frequency	Percent
Maybe	84	18.5%
No	298	65.6%
Yes	72	15.9%
Total	**454**	**100**%

Source: Fieldwork2025

Table 7 shows whether respondents believe election outcomes accurately reflect the votes cast. The data reveals a stark lack of trust, with 65.6% asserting that outcomes do not reflect the people's will. Only 15.9% believe in the accuracy of election results, while 18.5% are unsure. These findings suggest that the electoral process is perceived as being disconnected from the actual choice of the voters, undermining the core principle of democratic legitimacy.

How often do you participate in political activities (e.g., voting, protesting, volunteering)?

Table 8: Respondents' views on their involvement in political activities

Options	Frequency	Percent
Ido not participate	23	6.5%
Most Often	156	29.9%
Neutral	43	12.1%
Often	156	29.9%
Rarely	76	21.5%
Total	**454**	**100**%

Source: Fieldwork 2025

On this table the frequency of respondents' participation in political activities. The data reveals a high level of civic engagement, with 34.3% participating "most often" and an equal 34.3% participating "often." Only 6.5% report no participation at all. These findings suggest that despite their skepticism regarding election outcomes, the respondents remain politically active, perhaps seeking alternative avenues such as volunteering or protesting to express their interests.

Under democratic governance do you feel a sense of purpose and meaning in your life?

Table 9: Respondents' perspectives on experiencing a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives as relate to democratic paradox.

Options	Frequency	Percent
Maybe	69	15.2%
No	76	16.7%
Yes	309	68.1%
Total	**454**	**100%**

Source: Fieldwork 2025

Table 9 clarifies respondents' perspectives on their internal sense of purpose. The data reveals that a substantial majority (68.1%) feel a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives despite the "democratic paradox." Meanwhile, 16.7% do not, and 15.2% are uncertain. These findings suggest that the respondents possess significant psychological resilience, deriving meaning from their roles as civil servants and citizens even when the political system is perceived as flawed.

Do you believe that living in a democratic country/state has a positive impact on your life satisfaction and happiness?

T**able 10: Respondents perspective on whether living in a democratic country/state has a positive impact on their satisfaction orhappiness**.

Options	Frequency	Percent
Maybe	92	20.3%
No	123	27.1%
Yes	239	52.6%
Total	**454**	**100%**

Source: Fieldwork 2025

Table 9 illustrates the perceived link between democratic living and personal satisfaction or happiness. The data reveals that 52.6% of respondents believe living in a democratic state positively impacts their life satisfaction. However, 27.1% disagree, and 20.3% remain ambivalent. These findings suggest that democracy is still viewed by the majority as the most viable framework for achieving happiness, even when its implementation is currently unsatisfactory.

Do you agree that democratic institutions andpracticescontribute to your sense of well-being?

Table 11 Respondents' views on the role of democratic institutions and practices in enhancing their sense of well-being.

Options	Frequency	Percent
Maybe	90	19.8 %
No	115	25.3%
Yes	249	54.9%
Total	**454**	**100**%

Source: Fieldwork 2025

Table 11indicates the role of institutions in fostering well-being. The data reveals that 54.9% of respondents agree that democratic institutions contribute to their well-being, while 25.3% disagree. These findings suggest a recognition that strong institutions (such as the judiciary or free media) are essential components of personal quality of life, emphasizing the need for institutional strengthening rather than a change in the system of government itself.

Have you experiencedanynegative impactsonyourlife satisfaction dueto democratic institutions or practices?

Table12: Respondents' perspectives on whether democratic institutions or practices have negatively affected their satisfaction**.**

Options	Frequency	Percent
Maybe	49	10.8%
No	81	17.8%
Yes	324	71.4%
Total	**454**	**100**%

Source: Fieldwork 2025

The data on table Table 12 illustrates respondents' negative experiences within the democratic framework. The data reveals a concerning trend, with 71.4% stating they have experienced negative impacts on their life satisfaction due to certain democratic practices. Only 17.8% reported no negative impact. These findings suggest that the democratic paradox where the system's flaws directly infringe upon personal happinessis a lived reality for the vast majority of respondents.

Do you think that democracy has improved your life aspiration in any way?

Table 13: Respondents' perspectives on whether democracy has positively impacted their lives pursuit.

Options	Frequency	Percent
Maybe	103	22.7%
No	179	39.4%
Yes	172	37.9%
Total	**454**	**100%**

Source: Fieldwork 2025

Table 13 illustrates whether democracy has facilitated the pursuit of personal goals. The data reveals a polarized view: 39.4% believe democracy has not improved their life aspirations, while 37.9% believe it has. A significant 22.7% are uncertain. These findings suggest that the "dividend of democracy" is not being felt uniformly, with nearly 40% of the population feeling stagnant in their career and life goals.

On a scale of 1-5, how important is freedom of speech to you?

Table 14: Respondents' views on the importance of freedom of speech

Scale	Frequency	Percent
1	29	6.5%
2	37	8.3%
3	56	12.6%
4	84	18.9%
5	238	53.7%
Total	**354**	**100%**

Source: Field work 2025

Table 14 demonstrates the value placed on freedom of expression. The data reveals that a combined 72.6% of respondents rate freedom of speech as high to very high in importance (Scale 4 and 5). Only 6.5% view it as unimportant. These findings suggest that freedom of speech is regarded as the most critical pillar of democracy by the respondents, likely because it is seen as the primary tool for holding the government accountable for their plights.

On a scale of 1-10, how satisfied are you with your life in general?

Table 15: Respondents' perspectives on their overall satisfaction in life.

Scale	Frequency	Percent
1	37	8.1%
2	28	6.2%
3	27	6%
4	37	8.1%
5	91	20%
6	33	7.3%
7	47	10.4%
8	62	13.7%
9	37	8.1%
10	55	12.1%
Total	**454**	**100**%

Source: Fieldwork 2025

Table 15 illustrates the broad distribution of life satisfaction among the sample. The data reveals a "middle-heavy" distribution, with the largest single group (20%) scoring their satisfaction at a 5/10, and a notable 13.7% scoring it at 8/10. Interestingly, 12.1% claim the highest level of satisfaction (10/10). These findings suggest a population that is generally resilient, though the largest segment remains only "moderately satisfied" with their current life conditions.

On a scale of 1-5, how satisfied are you with your current economic situation in the country?

Table 16 Respondents' satisfaction with the current economic situation of the country.

Scale	Frequency	Percent
1	202	44.5%
2	135	29.7%
3	71	15.6%
4	23	5.1%
5	23	5.1%
Total	**454**	**100**%

Source: Fieldwork 2025

Table 16presents the economic sentiment and satisfaction with the current economic situation of the country of the respondents. The data reveals a state of economic crisis, with 44.5% being very dissatisfied (Scale 1) and 29.7% reporting low satisfaction (Scale 2). Only 10.2% reported satisfaction at Scales 4 or 5. These findings suggest that the economic plight of

civil servants is the primary driver of their overall dissatisfaction, as the vast majority find the current fiscal environment untenable.

On a scale of 1-5, how often do you experience positive emotions (e.g., joy, gratitude, contentment)?

Table 17: Respondents' experiences of positive emotions.

Scale	Frequency	Percent
1	34	7.5%
2	53	11.7%
3	140	30.8%
4	160	35.2%
5	67	14.8%
Total	**454**	**100**%

Source: Fieldwork 2025

Table 17 explains the emotional well-being of the respondents. The data reveals that 35.2% often experience positive emotions (Scale 4), while 30.8% experience them moderately (Scale 3). Only 7.5% rarely feel positive emotions. These findings suggest that despite the severe economic and political challenges, respondents maintain a high level of emotional health, likely supported by communal ties and religious or personal philosophies.

On a scale of 1-5, how satisfied are you with your social relationships (e.g., family, friends)?

Table 18: Respondents'satisfactionwith their social relationships

Scale	Frequency	Percent
1	31	6.8%
2	41	9%
3	98	21.6%
4	181	39.9%
5	103	22.7%
Total	**454**	**100**%

Source: Field work2025

Table 18 shows the quality of respondents' social networks. The data reveals high social fulfillment, with 39.9% reporting high satisfaction (Scale 4) and 22.7% very high satisfaction (Scale 5). These findings suggest that the social fabriccomprising family, friends, and communityacts as a critical "shock absorber" for the financial and political stress faced by civil servants in Kogi West.

On a scale 1-5, how important is political freedom to your overall happiness?

Table 19: Respondents' perspectives on the importance of political freedom to their overall happiness.

Scale	Frequency	Percent
1	48	10.6%
2	50	11%
3	102	22.5%
4	97	21.4%
5	157	34.5%
Total	**454**	**100**%

Source: Fieldwork 2025

Table 19 illustrates the significance of political freedom in shaping happiness. The data reveals that a considerable proportion (34.5%) view political freedom as highly important (Scale 5), while 21.4% also rate it as a significant factor (Scale 4). Meanwhile, 22.5% maintain a neutral stance. These findings suggest that political freedom is intrinsically linked to personal happiness for the majority of respondents, reinforcing the idea that socio-economic relief must be accompanied by political liberty to achieve true well-being.

Discussion of Findings

The Effect of Democracy on Life Satisfaction in Kogi State

The findings reveal a profound democratic paradox regarding life satisfaction. While a significant majority of respondents (59.7%) believe it is highly important to live in a democratic state, an overwhelming 80% rated their actual satisfaction with the current state of democracy at the lowest levels (1 and 2). This indicates that the dissatisfaction is not with the *concept* of democracy, but with its *practice* in Kogi State.

The analysis suggests therefore that the disconnect stems from the failure of democratic institutions to translate political rights into tangible well-being. According to Utilitarian theory, democracy should maximize the "greatest happiness for the greatest number," yet 71.4% of respondents reported that current democratic practices have actually had a negative impact on their life satisfaction. The data suggests that for Kogi residents, democracy has become a procedural exercise rather than a substantive tool for improving their quality of life. The "freedom of choice" that authors like Bjørnskov (2010) link to happiness is perceived as illusory when 50.4% feel their votes do not influence outcomes. Thus, life satisfaction is suppressed not by a lack of democracy, but by a perceived lack of democratic integrity.

The Effect of Democracy on the Condition of Life in Kogi State

The relationship between democracy and the physical condition of life is heavily mediated by the Economic-Happiness Nexus. A staggering 75.4% of respondents expressed extreme

dissatisfaction with their current economic situation, with 42.9% giving the lowest possible rating. This economic despair has "decoupled" democratic rights from human happiness. In Kogi State, the 2023–2025 period was marked by hyper-inflation and the removal of fuel subsidies, which acted as exogenous shocks to the social contract.

From a scholarly perspective, this suggests that in developing democracies, economic utility is a prerequisite for political appreciation. When 42.1% of citizens believe democracy has not improved their life aspirations, it signals that the "stomach infrastructure" is failing to keep pace with political liberalization. The data indicates that while residents value "higher pleasures" like freedom of speech (53.1% rating it as high importance), these are overshadowed by the "pain" of poverty and insecurity. Consequently, the "condition of life" under democracy in Kogi State is currently defined more by economic struggle than by the flourishing predicted by traditional democratic theory.

Democratic Institutions and Citizen Trust in Kogi State

Trust in democratic institutions acts as the "glue" of the social contract, yet in Kogi State, this glue is rapidly dissolving. The study finds a severe trust deficit following the 2023 general elections, with 65.6% of respondents believing that election outcomes do not reflect the actual will of the people. This skepticism extends to the core institutions of the state, including the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and security agencies, which are perceived as vulnerable to elite capture.

This lack of trust is a direct breach of the Lockean social contract, where citizens trade certain liberties for the protection of their rights and property. When 53.4% of the electorate feels their primary tool of political participation through vote is ineffective, it leads to institutional alienation. This is reflected in the record-low voter turnouts observed in the 2023 election. Thus, this "crisis of integrity" transforms the government from a reflection of the "General Will" into a source of subjective unhappiness. Without institutional reform to restore trust, the democratic system in Kogi State remains a "hollowed-out" structure that facilitates political succession without fostering genuine human happiness.

The Economic-Happiness Nexus: Inflation and Subsidy Removal

A critical finding in this study (Table 15) is that 42.9% of respondents are highly dissatisfied with their economic situation. For a 2026 publication, this must be analyzed through the lens of the 2023–2025 economic reforms. The removal of the fuel subsidy in May 2023 and the subsequent floating of the Naira led to a period of hyper-inflation that "decoupled" democratic rights from human happiness. While residents in Kogi State enjoyed the "right" to vote, the resulting economic hardship created a "misery index" that overshadowed political gains. This suggests that in developing economies, "stomach infrastructure" (economic utility) is a prerequisite for democratic appreciation.

Conclusion

The findings of this paper culminate in the identification of a profound democratic paradox within the Kogi state. This paradox is characterized by a stark divergence between the ideological embrace of democracy as a superior political system and the visceral dissatisfaction with its current institutional outputs. While the normative assumption in political science supported by utilitarian and social contract theories posits that democracy is the optimal framework for maximizing human happiness, the lived reality in Kogi State post-2023 suggests a decoupling of democratic procedures from substantive well-being.

At the heart of this study is the revelation that democracy in Nigeria has remained largely procedural rather than substantive. The data reveals that while 61.9% of respondents attach high importance to living in a democratic state, an overwhelming 80% are dissatisfied with the current practice of governance. This indicates that the residents are not disillusioned with democracy as a concept, but rather with the democratic disutility produced by failing institutions. The post-2023 electoral cycle has significantly exacerbated this, creating a crisis of integrity where 65.6% of the population believes that election outcomes are detached from the popular will. From a Lockean perspective, this represents a fundamental breach of the Social Contract; when the state fails to protect the "General Will" and the integrity of the ballot, the moral and psychological bond between the citizen and the state is severed, leading to the institutional trust deficit recorded in this research.

Furthermore, the study establishes a critical economic-satisfaction and happiness nexus. The findings illustrate that the misery index-driven by hyper-inflation, the removal of fuel subsidies, and the subsequent devaluation of the Naira between 2023 and 2025 has overshadowed the perceived benefits of political freedom. With 74.2% of respondents expressing deep dissatisfaction with their economic situation, it is evident that in a developing economy, stomach infrastructure is a prerequisite for democratic appreciation. When democracy fails to provide the utilitarian "greatest happiness for the greatest number" in material terms, the psychological satisfaction derived from political rights like freedom of speech though highly valued at 72.6% is insufficient to sustain overall life satisfaction.

In conclusion, this research affirms that while democracy remains the most acceptable system of government for the people of Kogi State, it is currently operating in a state of recession. The high levels of psychological resilience and social satisfaction (Table 17) found among respondents suggest that the citizenry is seeking happiness through communal and personal avenues because the state has failed to provide a conducive environment for human flourishing. To resolve this paradox, Nigeria must move beyond the mere conduct of elections and focus on institutional reforms that restore electoral trust and align economic policies with the welfare of the people. Without a tangible democracy dividend that translates into economic security and institutional transparency, the gap between democratic preference and lived satisfaction will continue to widen, threatening the long-term stability of the Fourth Republic.

Recommendations

Electoral Integrity: for democracy to give Nigerians satisfaction from the dividend of democratic governance, there is the need to bridge the trust gap, INEC and state electoral bodies should move beyond procedural democracy to "substantive democracy" where technological interventions (like BVAS) are shielded from human manipulation.

Economic Mitigation: The government should recognize that stomach infrastructure is a democratic prerequisite. Social investment programmes must be depoliticized to ensure they reach the civil servants and youth captured in this study.

Institutional Strengthening: There is a need to move from strong men to strong Institutions. The high value placed on Freedom of Speech (Table 14) suggests that the citizenry is ready for a more deliberative form of democracy, such as regular town hall feedback loops.

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