RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Does democracy cause subjective well-being? (2003-2012 Albanian electorate case)

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**Abstract**
During the last years (especially 2010-12) in Albania, the Level of Democracy and Subjective Well Being have shown a reduction. It is interesting to analyze the relatioship and level of causation between them. In a democatic system it is most logical to expect that democracy causes SWI (Subjective Well Being Indicator), leading to the core question of this paper "does democracy make people (Albanian electorate) feel better". The analysis, based on field research surveys data and Freedom House Measures of democracy levels from 2003 to 2012, confirmed this linkage only partially, deriving to the most probable causes of SWI to be corruption, electoral and legislative process.
**Keywords**: *democracy, subjective well-being, electorate, correlation*

**Introduction**

"Most researches of political science have recognized that life satisfaction and happiness are different but both are analyzed as being representatives of subjective well-being. Thus, societies with happy and satisfied communities are far more likely to survive as democracies rather than those with unhappy/unsatisfied populaces. Moreover, high levels of subjective well-being are linked with trust, tolerance and emphasis on self-expression which is essential to the emergence and survival of democracies. Higher-quality institutions increase satisfaction and happiness with democracy. For this reason good governance can also impact on subjective wellbeing in a meaningful manner."[8] "It has also been suggested that participation in the democratic process yields utility to the citizen."[2] "For example, Fiorina (1976) argues that the utility from voting depends upon the act of expressing a preference similar to applauding a fine symphony performance (Aldrich, 1997)."[8]

On the other hand, relating to the Albanian background as a post-communist society, according to Inglehart and Welzel, although it has experienced an increase in democracy, "its citizens are as likely to express a favorable opinion of democracy as are the citizens of Sweden or Switzerland. However, these opinions are often superficial and unless they are accompanied by deeper-rooted orientations of tolerance, trust, and a participatory outlook, the chances are poor that effective democracy will be present at the societal level."[5]

Most literature in the field of political science has analyzed many indicators which affect the growth or reduction of democracy levels in getting stability in a society's political, economic etc. aspects. This paper makes use of Freedom House data for Albania in analyzing the relationship between Democracy and Subjective Well Being (*satisfaction/happiness*) to determine whether there is "democracy to SWI" causality. Rarely there have been taken empirical scientific research studying the subjective values and the possible influential relationship of levels of democracy on subjective welfare (satisfaction/happiness) of the electorate of Albania to see whether the relationship

between them is direct or there are other intermediate indicators or there is no relationship at all. In case it is confirmed a relationship between them, it will help construct political analyses and program application as one of the bases in solving society problems. Focus in pursuing the right path for growing the level of democracy, therefore rising SWI/happiness/satisfaction is of the public importance for each country, especially as in this case the of Albanian electorate.

"In democratic systems is logical to expect that high levels of happiness/satisfaction are linked to high level of democracy. One way to explain the linkage between happiness and democracy would be to assume that democracy makes people happy/satisfied. If democracy makes people happy, this is a powerful argument for democracy and can be interpreted as living under democratic institutions makes people happy;"[6] thus, resulting in causing people satisfaction and well-being. "Under such scenario, it can be suggested that we have a quick fix for most of the world's problems: adopt a democratic constitution and live happily ever after."[6] "The literature tends to support the validity of this assumption. Theoretically it seems plausible that there should be such a relationship."[3] In the below analyze we will see if the theory is practically confirmed for the Albanian case.

**Methodology**

Methodology of the analysis is based on analyzing the relationship between the independent variable "Level of Democracy" in 2003-12 obtained from Freedom House data [3], and the dependent variable "Subjective Well-being Indicator" (*happiness and satisfaction*)" measured in these years through field surveys[1]. Regression analysis is applied

[1]This is part of my PhD thesis project "Albanian Electoral Behavior 2002-12 Structure". Data are taken from 2002-2012 surveys,

to analyze the "probable cause" over the "effects". To support and confirm the above mentioned I have also used a correlation analysis separately for the key elements. Graphs of the changing dynamics of these indicators come in help to complete the results of this analyze and present a more complete view.

Logically is expected that SWI, happiness and satisfaction to be dependent on the democracy's level. "Moreover, high levels of subjective well-being are linked with trust, tolerance and emphasis on self-expression that is conducive to the emergence and survival of democracy."[6] As logically expected is that economic aspect (*especially at the macro level*) is linked to the two above variables, because "in long run, economic growth tends to bring cultural changes through which the public gradually places increasing importance on autonomy and self-expression which eventually gives rise to demands for a more liberal political order".[5]

However this paper will be focused to bring on surface only the relationship of Subjective Well-Being with Democracy, excluding from the analysis other possible factors, such as economic, social, etc.

**Data, results and analysis**

*Source*: Democracy data are taken from the Freedom House indicators for Albania[3], while data for Subjective Well-Being, Satisfaction, and Happiness are taken from surveys conducted by the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, Tirana, Albania.[2] Since in this case is examined the relationship between democracy and SWI (*happiness/satisfaction*), adjustments are made on both sides of the data in such a way that the analyses to be on the same evaluation level. Data from Freedom House Democracy are disposed from 1 (*maximum level of democracy*) to 7 (*minimum level of democracy*). In order to adapt the same level of measurement to subjective wellbeing indicator and its components (which are in an increasing form), they were converted in the form of 1 (*min*) to 7 (*max*). For SWI (*pleasure/happiness*) were disposed in percentage form, that is way to have the same unit of measurement with democracy, their percentage is converted ascending form order 1-7.

**1. Relationship between SWI and democracy level**

SWI presents the level of Subjective Well-being perceived by the interviewed sample selected from the Albanian electorate. This is one of the indicators that among others, shows the measure of legitimacy an electorate gives a government. The greater is the ratio (indicator) the more the government of a country is supported by the electorate. The higher the indicator, the less likely is that the electorate in future elections to punish the government, and vice versa, the lower this indicator (*especially when the level goes below 0, as is the case Albania tab. 1, in 2004, 2005, 2012*) then it is very likely that the current government to take a penalty by the electorate in not voting it in the next elections.

Table 1 show that the SWI till 2005 has followed a decreasing trend pattern, which means that the electorate most probably will penalize the governance, action confirmed in the 2005 elections with the government rotation from the left wing parties to the right wing parties. The following period 2005-09, this indicator has increased, confirming the electoral supporting behavior towards the government in place. This trend has changed during recent year's data in declining pattern from 2.866 value in 2010 to -1.2 value in 2012, which shows a trend of increased possibility of electorate outbreaks that can conclude even with the government rotation, or discounted number of votes received from the government in 2013 elections[3]. (*It should be taken into consideration that in the herein presented analysis, I did not take into account other influencing elements affecting voting behavior such as economic indicators or other event which might have occurred during the election campaigns of 2013*).

In the absence and inability (*due to large financial cost and limited time*) to realize a field study on this problem and also have the same measurement unit and common components of the level of democracy with most countries of the world, the Democracy level data (*electoral process, civil society, media independence, local and central government, the jurisdictional independence and the level of corruption*) is taken by Freedom House.

Table 1 shows that the level of democracy until 2009 has a growing trend, which has been more pronounced after 2005, from 3.96 to 5.11, a change which can be connected with the shift government power towards the Albanian Democratic Parties and change of governance form including respective various policies applied. The increased level of democracy gives positive support points to the government from the electorate. However, in the following years of the Democratic Party mandate although the level remains higher compared to prior the 2005 elections, by 2009 is ascertained a slight discount by 0.01 points. This change has no or less influenced on electorate behavior in the 2009 elections, thereby not influencing the government shift. In support, at a first glance we can bring the level of SWI analyzed above which indicate the possibility that the electorate will not shift the government, practically confirmed at the 2009 election. Following the 2009 until 2012 the trend in the level of democracy has declined significantly from 5.17 in 2010 to 3.86 in 2012. This downward tendency linked to the above analysis of the decline of SWI at the level 0, shows the deteriorating position of the current government. Logically, the analysis of these data cannot result in a positive electorate attitude towards the current government of the Albanian in the 2013 elections. Considering only these elements analyzed above, is likely to expect a rotation of the current government after the elections of June 2013 (*it should be noted that the analysis does not take into account other considerable elements of influencing weight as economic indicators affecting voting behavior or events which may occur during the election campaigns of 2013*).

conducted from my PhD supervisor at Political Science Department, Tirana University, Albania. I have been part of this field research in person from 2005 to 2012.

[2]Although the 2004 data are national level, but all the remaining years are local level data (Tirana's City). Since the capital city Tirana, has 1/3 in numbers of the Albanian population, the results of this paper can be representative of the total Albanian Republic voter's population.

[3]Confirmed in Jun 2013 parliamentary election, with the governance rotation.

The June 2013 central election confirmed the government rotation.

At first glance this level of democracy and SWI (*consisting of two components of its satisfaction and happiness*) seem to have the same tendency, directly linked with each other. As observed from Graph 1 with the exception of the years 2003-05 during which the trend of the two indicators is in the opposite direction, from 2005 until 2012 this tendency is changing in the same direction. Although the above analysis appears that these two variables have relationships with to each-other in the form of positive correlation, at this point cannot be said that the paper assumption is confirmed. It is necessary to stress the analysis of these two variables previously to pass in data processing of the form of regression and correlation not only of the two leading indicators (*Democracy and SWI*), but the constituent components of each of them and to their relationship to one another.

Table 1. Democracy and Subjective Well-Being, Satisfaction/Happiness 2003-2013 Indicators data

| Year | Satisfaction | Happiness | Subjective Well Being indicator | Electoral process | Civil society | Independent media | National democratic government | Local democratic government | Jurisdictional independence | Corruption | Level of Democracy |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2003 | 3.31 | 2.93 | 0.2415 | 4.25 | 4.25 | 4 | - | - | 3.75 | 2 | 3.83 |
| 2004 | 1.26 | 4.07 | -0.543 | 4.25 | 4.5 | 4.25 | - | - | 3.75 | 2.75 | 3.87 |
| 2005 | - | - | -1.19 | 4.25 | 4.75 | 4 | 3.75 | 4.75 | 3.5 | 2.75 | 3.96 |
| 2006 | - | - | - | 4.5 | 5 | 4.25 | 4 | 5.25 | 3.75 | 2.75 | 5.11 |
| 2007 | - | - | 1.33 | 4 | 5 | 4.25 | 3.75 | 5.25 | 4 | 2 | 5.18 |
| 2008 | 3.35 | 3.21 | 0.532 | 4 | 5 | 4.25 | 3.75 | 5.25 | 4 | 2 | 5.18 |
| 2009 | - | - | - | 4.25 | 5 | 4.25 | 3.75 | 5.25 | 3.75 | 2 | 5.18 |
| 2010 | 2.95 | 5.01 | 2.8665 | 4.25 | 5 | 4 | 3.5 | 5 | 3.75 | 2 | 5.17 |
| 2011 | 1.79 | 3.65 | 0.3556 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 3.25 | 4.75 | 3.75 | 2 | 3.96 |
| 2012 | 3.42 | 0.49 | -1.288 | 3.85 | - | 4 | 3.25 | 4.75 | 3.25 | 2 | 3.86 |

* Cell marked "–" mean that there are no data for those years.

**2. Analysis of swi - level democracy correlation**

As it can be noticed in Table 1, it is clear that during the years 2003-13, there is a strong correlation relationship (0.812) between SWI variables and Level of Democracy, which comes accompanied with a high level of statistical significance (0.008). This can be interpreted as the two variables have major influence to each other. Thus, the change of one, positively affects the other, high levels of democracy results in high levels of subjective well-being of individuals of the Republic of Albania (voters) as well as the high levels of SWI results in high levels of Democracy (*at this point are given the two types of relation effects between them because as it is known from the correlation analysis cannot be determined the direction of action, therefore cannot be determined which influences which*). However at this point of the analysis is confirmed the similar tendency of the two variables mentioned above.

If democracy's changes affect SWI, we can confirm it by the regression analysis of the two variables taken into consideration (Table 2). It clearly shows the influential relationship of democracy to SWI is in very high levels in the measure of .765, with a statistical significance of .038. In this case is confirmed the fact that democracy affects greatly the level of Albanian electorate SWI. It can be said that the level of democracy is in a positive relationship with SWI in considerable high level. The relationship between these two variables has a tendency to change only for 2003-05, with changes that likely would be billed to other factors (components) of the two indicators in question, explanation most of which are going to be explained below.

Table 2. Correlation between Democracy and Social Welfare Indicator in 2003-12

| | | SWI | Democracy |
|---|---|---|---|
| SWI | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .812** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .008 |
| | N | 9 | 9 |
| Democracy | Pearson Correlation | .812** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .008 | |
| | N | 9 | 10 |
| ** Correlation is significant at the level of 0.01 (2-tailed). | | | |

Table. 3 Regression coefficients between IMS and Democracy

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | T | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | -7.252 | 2.129 | | -3.406 | .011 |
| | DemSc | 1.739 | .472 | .812 | 3.684 | .008 |
| a. Dependent Variable: SWI | | | | | | |

Graph 1 confirms the regression analysis between SWI and Democracy Level. The changing dynamics of two indicators seem obvious that goes in the same direction. Most notably in the years 2005-07 (both increasing), while the level of democracy remains almost constant until 2010, SWI has a several number of oscillations beginning with a drop and then increased until 2010 (the year in which the two curves start to have a substantial discount), which, based on the correlation data analysis of variables is billed to the corruption and civil society components (at SWI level).

If we analyze deeper, including the SWI components (happiness and satisfaction), the variation can be attributed also to the level of corruption, the level of local and national democracy, the electoral process, and legislative independence. From the Regression data Table 4, where SWI is analyzed as dependent and all of the democracy indicators components as independent variables, it is clear that variables which are influential and need to be taken into consideration are "civil society" and "level of corruption", both in a high level of impact of 0.744 with a significance level of .045 (*considered significant*). The difference between them is that civil society on SWI change affects it positively, while corruption affects it negatively. It means that the more the electorate perceives protection, support or engagement from civil society and the less pressure or issues from corruption, the more the electorate (Albanian society in our case) would feel (perceive) better. In this case, most likely the effect will result in government support from the electorate and vice versa. From the data results in the Table 4, it can be seen that the other components of democracy cannot be considered as significant or influential in the level of SWI.

In addition to the main question of this section, it is possible to state that if the government or parties competing with them intent to increase the support of the electorate, one main way is through the growth of electorate Subjective Wellbeing during election campaigns but also during other political periods (*increase the perception of the electorate in feeling better*). In order to increase the number of supporters, they will have to apply policies in favor to the spirit of country democratization, including in their programs and platforms elements of lowering the level of corruption and higher level of civil society support. In this context, one way for parties to increase the number of votes should be involvement of the electorate in civil society activities. Through this action the electorate will feel like they are part of the politic choices, parties, political movements, actions and programs, defending their interests. Thus can be increased the support of parties.

Table 4. Correlation between Subjective Wellbeing Indicator and Democracy Indicators 2003-12

| | Independent indicators | Subjective well-being indicator |
|---|---|---|
| Pearson correlation (sig.) | electoral process | .220 (.337) |
| | civil society | .744 (.045) |
| | indipendent media | .267 (.305) |
| | central democratic governance | -.078 (.442) |
| | local democratic governance | .552 (.128) |
| | legislative and it's indipendence | .366 (.238) |
| | corruption level | .-744 (.045) |
| | democracy level | .765 (.038) |

Correlation based on data regression analyze, the dependent variable position is the "Subjective Welfare Indicator" and Democracy Indicators in Independent Variables position. Level of significance: $p \leq .05$

### 3. Life satisfaction and democracy level relationship

Satisfaction as a component of SWI, in this case, is seen as dependent variable, affected by the change of ingredient's variable of democracy during the years 2003-13. The regression analysis presented in Table 5 between the dependent and independent variables, clearly notices that only the corruption component is within the margin as influential level in determining the level of satisfaction of individuals, with a significantly high influence - .753. The relationship is negative since the higher the level of corruption, the less will be satisfied the Albanian electorate. The dependency relationship is confirmed by a significant of .042 ratio. So, in conducting successful policy or government stakeholders in Albania to increase the satisfaction of the electorate, should be taken into consideration and included in the policy element "level of corruption" and reducing such level. This analysis confirms part of the above analysis SWI-Democracy for the corruption level variable.

If we look back to the Table 5, we can conclude that the indicators of Local Government and the National Democratic Governance have a high ratio of impact to the electorate Satisfaction at the extent of 0.962 (very high), but not significant because it is.38. Being in a high influential rate, this relationship should not be overlooked as such. It can be reasonably said that there are likely in this relationship other intermediate influencing variables, such as economic, etc

Finally, between the level of democracy and level of satisfaction, as per the Regression data table is confirmed the very high relationship between .971, but in this case not too significant because the rate is .27, greater level than the classification of this relationship as significant. For the same reasons as above, this relationship should be taken into consideration in increasing the satisfaction of the electorate and thus their backing from the stakeholders to support their growth, while expounding on aspects that are influential in increase the satisfaction, which are reducing the level of corruption, increased local and national good governance.

Correlation is based on regression data from the dependent variable "Pleasure of Life" with Democracy Indicators in Independent Variables position. Level of significance: $p \leq .05$

Table. 5: Correlation between satisfaction from life and Democracy Indicators 2003-12

| | *Independet indicators* | *Satisfaction from life* |
|---|---|---|
| Pearson correlation (sig.) | Electoral process | .272 (.412) |
| | Civil society | -.299 (.282) |
| | Indipendent media | .698 (.254) |
| | Central democratic governance | .962 (088) |
| | Local democratic governance | .962 (.088) |
| | Legislative and it's indipendence | .698 (.254) |
| | Corruption level | -.753 (.042) |
| | Democracy level | .971 (.077) |

Referring to Table 1 the level of satisfaction and democracy almost from 2003 to 2013 does not confirm changing dynamic tendencies. It means that not all the variables that make Democracy level change, also affect the satisfaction level. Although data from Table 1 shows that the two variables have an increase in 2008-09 and then start both have their discount in the level that beside confirming the fact of their having e level of correlation in some points, it is a positive correlation.

**4. Relationship between democracy and happiness level**

Happiness is a subjective sensation which is taken as "how happy are individuals in 2003-13 with the life they have". Based on the correlation Table 6 data, the variable which confirms the relationship between democracy and Happiness in a high level .973 is electoral process. This is a very strong relationship but not so significant .043. Meaning that they do not have a direct influenced correlation, but between them there are intermediate variables. In support of this relationship, the happiness of the electorate with democracy is the level of independence of the legislature .072, slightly lower than the electoral process, but remains strong as relationships from the significance level .050 which can be considerate significant although it is low.

From the correlation results that these are the two variables that stakeholders especially the government and opposition parties need to consider most inincreasing their support from the electorate, should be very careful in increasing the level of the democratic electoral process in theirparty programsor their political activities, unlike what happened in practice in Albania in these years as the table shows that the level of democracy and happiness have a significant decrease in their level, especially in the recent years. This affects negatively in dealing with problems relating to democratization and electorate support. Actually, the government lost the parliamentary election of June 2013.

Interesting to analyze in the Happiness case is the media independence, because the regression table shows that although is not significant .259, the media independence level has a significant influencing relationship to the level of happiness of the Albanian electorate of -.687. The type of correlation is inverse order; the more independent media the less happy would the electorate. One possibility of explanationis that in Albanian reality which remains problematic and at low levels in many areas (which is also confirmed from the decreasing level of democracy level), the more independent media, the more the electorate gets more realistic information about the problems that accompany the country, which affect to the reduce of their happiness and therefore in not obtaining the support of their voters, "which more probably turn to abstain voters in some cases or even pragmatic voters, providing support to the parties that fulfill their interests of the moment, or even "brings the increased level of clientelistic interests voters."[1] This argument also supports the fact that in recent years the absent voting behavior of Albanian electorate tendency has been in decreasing[9] and most probably in this situation the increasing of behavioral tendencies or clientelistic voting, pragmatic, cost-benefit voters.

Albania is a country with many unsolved problems,
economic and political crisis and the more Albanians confirms this aspect by independent information from the media (for example by not providing manipulate or hidden information of not being in crisis or having high level of democracy level), the more they will be unhappy by watching the reality of a situation, translated in terms of not increasing their welfare. From this relationship implies that if actors interested in increasing their voters support, need to reduce the level of transparency of information disclosure through the media of the country's problems. Correlation is based on regression data from the dependent variable "Happiness "with Democracy Indicators in Independent Variables position. Level of significance: $p \leq .05$

The graph confirms the above analysis which shows no correlation relationship between almost all variables in analysis between democracy and happiness level. It can be seen that the curves move in the same direction only in the years 2003-04 (in growth) and after 2010 in decreasing level.

Table.6. Correlation between Happiness and Democracy Indicators
2003-12

| | *Independent variables* | *Happiness* |
|---|---|---|
| Pearson correlation (sig.) | Electoral process | **.973 (.043)** |
| | Civil society | .423 (.239) |
| | Indipendent media | -.687 (.259) |
| | Central democratic governance | -.232 (.425) |
| | Local democratic governance | -.232 (.425) |
| | Legislative and it's indipendence | **.728 (.050)** |
| | Corruption level | .271 (.302) |
| | Democracy level | .278 (.410) |

| Relationship | % of confirmation | Correlation strength and the most significant indicators in the relationships |
|---|---|---|
| *Level of democracy-Satisfaction* | 12.5 % of the cases<br><br>50 % of the cases (if taken into account the indicators that are below the .1 significance of confirmation) | ➢ High and significant correlation:<br><br>a. Level of corruption (twice confirmed)<br>B .electoral process<br>c. Legislature and its independence<br>d. Civil society<br>➢ high correlation but not very significant:<br><br>a. The level of local and national democracy |
| *Level of democracy- happiness* | 25 % of the cases | |
| *Level of democracy-subjective well-being indicator* | 37.5 % of the cases | |

**Conclusions**

As data show in the analysis between Level of Democracy and Subjective Well-Being of Albanian electorate and their components I can conclude:

Democracy does contribute to human Subjective Well Being to an appreciable level, but it is clear that democratization does not necessarily bring happiness. I suspect that this linkage works much more strongly in the opposite direction, the high level of human happiness, satisfaction and Subjective Well Being climate to cause high level of democratic institutions. Probably there may be also other intermediate factors in this relationship, because democratization is not the only one that shapes Subjective Well Being.

Although the assumption is only partially confirmed those elements that affect the level of democracy in Albania should not be overlooked, especially from interest

stakeholders who what to enhance their support from the electorate through the growth of democracy.

**Leterature**


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