
3 *Wellbeing and happiness inequality in South Africa: The happiness gap*

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South Africa will celebrate three decades of democracy in 2024. This comes at a time when democracy is under threat globally. Since 2019 scholars have noted an increase in democratic erosion around the world, highlighting rising levels of distrust in electoral processes, the use of social media to weaken political trust through disinformation, and widespread corruption that undermines trust in politicians and governments (IDEA 2019). Political and social polarisation is on the increase in an age of rising misinformation (V-Dem Institute 2022). The V-Dem Institute describes the phenomenon of declining respect for legitimate opposition and pluralism, and the consequent reduction in sociopolitical participation in society, as ‘toxic polarisation’ (2022: 16). Global freedom is also backsliding amidst the rise of authoritarian and autocratic politics, where eight in every ten people live in a less free world (Repucci & Slipowitz 2022: 1). It seems that the world is becoming a place of increasing discontent.

Concomitantly, the 2019 *World Happiness Report* found an increase in negative affect occurring from around 2016 (Helliwell, Lanyard & Sachs 2019). This means that globally, people are experiencing greater levels of worry, sadness or anger, and doing so more frequently. There is increasing sentiment that democracy is not delivering, democratic commitment is weakening, sociopolitical cleavages and divisions are being magnified, and the demand for a public voice in politics and policy-making is growing (Wike & Fetterole 2021). Increasing levels of inequality and economic dissatisfaction, and high levels of distrust in political elites, are seen as key factors fuelling this global democratic backsliding (Wike, Silver & Castillo 2019).

South Africa has not been immune to this trend of democratic backsliding. Increasingly, scholars are questioning the country’s democratic quality and integrity.¹ We note concern around questions of declining political participation due to lack of political efficacy (Mahlangu & Schulz-Herzenberg 2022), and an increasing trust deficit that impacts negatively on democratic quality and sustainability in South Africa. Only 32% of South Africans are satisfied with democracy, compared to 59% in 2004 (Steyn Kotze 2022b). South Africa, it seems, is a discontented nation.

Conventional measures of democracy focus on elections, quality of government, civil and political liberties, and the extent of citizens’ political participation. Increasingly, however, studies demonstrate that central to the quality of democracy and democratic durability are perceptions of subjective wellbeing and happiness, which are seen as critical factors in building strong democracies. There is recognition that social and economic progress cannot be measured only through income indicators such as gross

national income or GDP. This is evident in the growing sociopolitical and socioeconomic discontent that finds expression in the rise of right-wing and conservative politics in the world's more established and wealthier states (Grindheim 2019; Sandrin 2021). Furthermore, the *Beyond GDP* agenda (Stiglitz, Fitoussi & Durant 2018) highlights that in measuring the health of a country, we need to pay increasing attention to 'the distribution of well-being and sustainability in all of its dimensions' (2018: 12). This includes what is seen as happiness inequality. A focus on income and economic indicators may not necessarily provide a complete picture of the quality of democracy and government. More importantly, it may not present an accurate picture of *human* development in a specific context and country (Stiglitz, Fitoussi & Durant 2018).

Given the rise of democratic discontent globally, citizen assessment of subjective wellbeing, happiness and quality of life becomes increasingly important. Democracy, and quality and efficacy of government, are important. This is because 'government institutions and policies set the stages on which lives are lived. These stages differ largely from country to country, and are among primary factors influencing how highly people rate the quality of their lives'; as such 'there should be growing policy interest in knowing how government institutions and actions influence happiness, and in whatever changes in policies might enable citizens to lead happier lives' (Helliwell, Huang & Wang 2019: 40).

In this context, this chapter engages the distribution of subjective wellbeing and happiness in South Africa. Rising discontent, political disengagement from electoral processes, and growing dissatisfaction with democracy, governance and development shape the scholarly narrative around the country's democratic backsliding. So, too, does a focus on questions of inequality, exclusion and poverty. These are important questions; a caveat, however, is that a critical gap remains in regard to consideration of subjective wellbeing and the distribution of happiness in South Africa. How satisfied are South Africans with their lives? More importantly, how happy are South Africans in a post-apartheid context? And how does (un)happiness shape democratic satisfaction and commitment?

The chapter first presents an overview of the relationship between happiness, subjective wellbeing and democracy. This is important, given that a political regime only enjoys legitimacy for as long as its citizens are happy or content within that system. While we note a deepening delegitimation of democracy in South Africa (Steyn Kotze 2022a), there is a need to determine the extent to which life satisfaction and subjective wellbeing underpin this delegitimation. Democratic legitimation can only be based on effective state capacity to deliver on the hopes and aspirations of citizens for a better life and a transformed social structure. This implies that through delivering on the promise of a better life, and improving the material conditions of citizens (most notably those who are politically excluded under an authoritarian regime), the state will facilitate intrinsic democratic support, as people evaluate the democratic regime in a positive light while their lives improve under democratic rule (Ethier 1990: 15–16).

The chapter then moves on to consider the measurement of subjective wellbeing. This measurement has two dimensions: measuring life satisfaction, which entails a cognitive dimension of evaluation of life; and measuring affective wellbeing, which entails how a person feels with respect to a variety of issues, and whether those feelings are negative or positive, thus reflecting an emotional state (Fors & Kulin 2016: 326–328). The chapter will engage questions of cognitive evaluations of wellbeing through the Personal Wellbeing Index included in the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC 2020) and its relationship to democratic durability and quality. It will then explore the distribution of happiness and subjective wellbeing in South Africa, so as to enable a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the happiness and wellness dynamics that shape sociopolitical citizenship in South Africa.

Happy democracies?

What makes for happy citizens in a democracy? Is it good governance? Free and fair elections? Increased political freedom and civil liberties? Quality of governance? Reduced income inequalities? Increasingly, scholarship focuses on the quality of democracy (Campbell 2008; Mauk 2021; Morlino & Diamond 2004). The quality of democracy assesses key institutional characteristics associated with a well-functioning democracy. These are freedom, the rule of law, vertical accountability, responsiveness, equality, participation, competition and horizontal accountability (Morlino & Diamond 2004: 20).

A high-quality democracy is often equated with a happy society (Baker & Martin 2011; Inglehart 2006; Inglehart & Klingemann 2000; Inglehart & Ponarin 2013). The basis for the democracy/happiness nexus finds expression in several democratic characteristics that advance subjective wellbeing or happiness. For some, because democracy facilitates participation in social and political life it increases subjective wellbeing, leading to happier nations (Baker & Martin 2011: 13). For others, institutionalised forms of agency facilitate positive views of subjective wellbeing and happiness (Frey & Stutzer 2010), and democracy allows for collective choice, recognising that

people have preferences for processes over outcomes and above outcomes. They gain wellbeing from living and acting within institutionalised processes, as they contribute to a positive sense of self, addressing innate needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence. (Frey & Stutzer 2010: 567)

Similarly, Ronald Inglehart and Eduard Ponarin (2013: 1098–1099) conclude that

the emergence of democratic institutions increases people's free choice in politics, freedom of expression, and freedom to travel. This, in the long run, tends to produce higher levels of subjective wellbeing. This relationship seems to be reciprocal: high subjective wellbeing is conducive to democracy, and democracy provides a wider range of free choice that is conducive to subjective wellbeing.

There is recognition, as Reinet Loubser and Cindy Steenekamp (2017: 3) note, that subjective wellbeing 'as an outcome of historical experience and culture' is an essential factor in building sustainable democracies, even when economic outcomes might be lacking. Similarly, Marcus Samanni and Sören Holmberg conclude that quality governance makes people happy in both rich and poor countries, noting that 'good government is an essential recipe for making citizens more content with their lives' (Samanni & Holmberg 2010: 2). This is because the higher the quality of governance, the happier citizens seem to be. This implies that good governance is essential for facilitating equality of opportunity that allows citizens to have choice, agency and space to pursue their life purposes and goals.

In essence, representational quality (the effectiveness and/or fairness of institutions in translating public preferences into public policy), quality of government and/or governance (whether or not state institutions function in an efficient, transparent and lawful manner), and the public policy regime and its effects (redistributive and distributive policies that impact society through social welfare and social spending) affect happiness and democracy (Altman, Flavin & Radcliff 2017: 688–689). Therefore, we take note of the fact that the literature that engages questions of subjective wellbeing, happiness and democracy is influenced by strong institutionalist traditions. These institutionalist precepts seemingly draw on the organised nature of human life, which occurs through political, economic and social institutions that shape subjective wellbeing as well as agency within these institutions. Therefore, human agency within these institutions seems to shape perceptions of subjective wellbeing and happiness.

It cannot be denied that there is a correlation between income, prosperity and development on the one hand, and happiness and democracy on the other (Paleologou 2022). There are several studies that tease out the relationship between economic development, income and subjective wellbeing (Altman, Flavin & Radcliff 2017; Helliwell 2002; Inglehart et al. 2008; Khalil 2022; Orviska, Caplanova & Hudson 2014). While the correlation between income, economic development and happiness is a contentious area in the literature, scholars identify two schools of thought on the correlation between income/prosperity (or money) and subjective wellbeing (or happiness). The first argues that for poorer countries, economic factors are important in generating wellbeing, whereas in richer countries, degrees of political freedom and civil liberties predict feelings of wellbeing (Orviska, Caplanova & Hudson 2014: 495). This may be because, as Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel (2002) argue, increased individual choice is a consequence of economic development and democratisation, thus expanding individual human agency and life satisfaction.

However, the income–happiness or Easterlin paradox argues that, according to the data, at a certain point in time happiness may vary directly in relation to income, but as time progresses, happiness does not increase as the country's income increases (Easterlin et al. 2010: 22463). For Richard Easterlin et al., the positive relationship between income and happiness is a short-term one, indicating that in the long term

there are other factors that shape subjective wellbeing and happiness in a country. Therefore, as Easterlin (2001: 465) highlights,

the relationship between happiness and income is puzzling. At a point in time, those with more income are, on average happier than those with less. Over the life cycle, however, the average happiness of a cohort remains consistent despite substantial income growth. Moreover, even though a cohort's experienced happiness remains constant throughout the life span, people typically think that they were worse off in the past and will be better off in future.

For Easterlin et al. (2010), economic growth is thus not necessarily the pathway to increased happiness. Rather, it seems that questions of decision utility (satisfaction with a choice among a range of competing alternatives) and experience utility (overall satisfaction realised from the actual outcome chosen) matter more (see also Easterlin 2001).

Increasingly, there is recognition that democracy impacts positively on the level of happiness in a society.² Indeed, Bruno Frey and Alois Stutzer (2000: 79) highlight that effective channels of democracy, specifically direct democracy, increase happiness in society. This, they argue, is due to the 'utility produced by the political process itself, and not only due to favourable political outcomes' (Frey & Stutzer 2000: 79). The value of democracy arguably does not lie in the outcomes produced, but rather in the extent to which it facilitates a sense of human empowerment and agency through the exercising of free will and choice. This may be why Frey and Stutzer (2000: 92) find that unemployment has a stronger influence on happiness than income, given that employment is a key aspect of empowerment and self-sufficiency. Unemployment, by default, generates dependency and undermines human agency in achieving life's purposes and goals.

A key concept in the relationship between democracy and happiness is building legitimisation. People's increasing happiness under a democratic regime should, in theory, generate a sense of legitimisation of democracy. The same, of course, would apply to authoritarian societies. However, as Inglehart and Ponarin (2013: 1098) observe, if the economic situation in a country is going well, political support for the incumbent regime increases; this applies to both authoritarian and democratic regimes. However, authoritarian regimes can draw on coercive measures to survive, whereas democratic regimes rely on public support, and by default on legitimisation. Thus, incumbent governments in democratic regimes must sustain mass support or they will be voted out. For this reason, Inglehart and Ponarin argue that 'societies with [a] happy public are relatively likely to remain democratic in the long term' (2013: 1098).

A key question, of course, is what it is about democracy that leads to happier citizens. A possible reason, as Inglehart and Ponarin (2013: 1098–1099) note, is that democracy may facilitate the development and strengthening of self-expression values that emphasise individual freedom and autonomy. Democracies, it seems, lead to happiness because of their contribution to human agency and freedom, including economic, personal and political freedom (Loubser & Steenekamp 2017). Therefore, the relationship between

democracy and happiness extends beyond delivering socioeconomic goods; it seemingly depends on freedom and human agency, as well as on choice in making decisions. Democratic legitimisation built on freedom is the ‘possibility to choose’, where a person’s ‘conditions allow for choice’ (Rahman & Veenhoven 2018: 437). Thus, happiness in a democracy is located in the extent to which individual choice is possible. And this implies equality of opportunity to make life choices.³

Happiness inequality: The importance of subjective wellbeing and happiness

How do we know if a country or a people are doing well? How do we measure happiness and wellbeing? Douglas Perkins et al. (2021: 1) note that in measuring happiness and human wellbeing, a broader conceptualisation of wellbeing is needed, one that includes non-economic indicators. Thus, while in measuring wellbeing income is a critical barometer to determine how well nations are doing, the major gap within the research and the literature relates to how income is translated into human and social development and advancement, and more importantly, into human agency.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2013) notes that in measuring subjective wellbeing, there is a tendency to restrict this to questions of happiness. For the OECD (2013: 21), subjective wellbeing is a broad construct that goes beyond happiness to encompass ‘good mental states, including various evaluations, positive and negative, that people make of their lives and the affective reaction of people to their experience’. A broad conceptualisation of subjective wellbeing allows one to look at how people evaluate their life as a whole, in addition to measuring citizens’ experience and evaluations in specific areas of life, such as political and economic satisfaction, or satisfaction with health. In delimiting subjective wellbeing, the OECD (2013: 21) distinguishes between life evaluation (reflective assessment of a person’s life or some part of it), affect (feelings and/or emotional states at a specific point in time) and eudaimonia (sense of meaning and/or purpose in life and good psychological functioning).

Ed Diener, Jeffrey Sapyta and Eunkook Suh (1998: 34) conceptualise subjective wellbeing as an individual’s evaluation of their life. This includes cognitive states such as satisfaction with work, life, marriage, health and family life, among others. A key concern, however, is determining what makes for happy lives, and how to measure it. The Easterlin paradox discussed earlier (which Lulu Li and Lei Shi refer to as the Easterlin hypothesis) demonstrates that while income and happiness are correlated in the short term, over time money does not lead to happiness (Li & Shi 2019). The question, then, is what factors influence the sustainability of subjective wellbeing? Diener, Sapyta and Suh note that with increasing democratisation and equality, people need to define wellbeing for themselves, since in a diverse world with different values, goals, strengths and weaknesses, ‘people [need to] decide whether their lives are satisfying based on their individual values, goals, and life circumstances’ (Diener, Sapyta & Suh 1998: 35).

Objective living conditions are an important factor when looking at how people evaluate their subjective wellbeing, given that how people evaluate ‘their own living conditions is strongly tied to their objective living conditions’ (Cronert & Hadenius 2021: 706). Noting that objective living conditions can impact the self-assessment of subjective wellbeing, it is important to consider how these conditions may impact the spread of happiness or wellbeing in a society. Racialised patterns of inequality and poverty breed persistent exclusion and marginalisation based on the proverbial ‘lottery of birth’, and inequality of opportunity where ‘characteristics like gender, economic circumstances, geography, and ethnicity can trap large groups of people in poverty, and specifically affect access to basic services among children’ (Khokhar 2014). The same applies to class dynamics that may undermine the building of a society where equality of opportunity is not dependent on this lottery of birth.

Happiness inequality, which focuses on the vast variance in self-reported wellbeing and happiness within a society, is seen as the psychological equivalent of income inequality (Newman 2016).⁴ If democracies have happier citizens than their authoritarian counterparts because of an enabling environment for human agency and individual choice, we need to look beyond questions of income inequality (Goff, Helliwell & Mayraz 2018: 2); happiness inequality becomes an important consideration when looking at sociopolitical dynamics that sustain democracy.

The link between distribution of happiness in a society and its democratic quality highlights the importance of psychological factors in an assessment of subjective wellbeing and its relationship to democracy. Distribution of happiness also holds important implications for political stability. Indeed, Carmen Sobczak (2011) highlights the fact that

people weren’t unhappy just because their income was lower ... Instead ... greater inequality was linked to reductions in trust and perceived fairness – and it was drops in those attitudes that made people less happy.⁵

Therefore, inequality has not only economic implications, but sociopolitical consequences too. As Dietrich Rueschemeyer (2004) notes, when the impact or effect of inequality is not adequately addressed, it hampers the right to political equality, thus creating inequality in power resources based on social and economic class. For Rueschemeyer, this form of inequality is important to consider as

social status shape[s] interaction patterns, offering entrance to, and imposing exclusion from, different social circles. Politically most important, it defines the chance to be heard and to be trusted; it increases or diminishes one’s political ‘voice’. (2004: 84)

This is linked to questions of public choice and happiness discussed by Frey and Stutzer (2010), and highlights the centrality of creating equality of opportunity in democracies to facilitate democratic legitimation. For Frey and Stutzer (2010: 560), subjective wellbeing and happiness include questions of non-material properties such as social relations, autonomy and self-determination, as well as social outcome indicators such as GDP, health and education.

There are many studies that detail the drivers and dynamics of inequality in South Africa (IMF 2020; South African Government 2014; World Bank 2022⁶). The country regularly claims the title of most unequal country in the world, with race remaining a key characteristic of inequality, given the legacy of colonialism and apartheid. A critical gap within the academic literature and scholarship, however, is consideration of happiness and subjective wellbeing, and of the distribution of happiness in South Africa, in the context of assessment of democracy and political stability. Does happiness inequality mirror patterns of income inequality in post-apartheid South Africa?

To date, there are a limited number of studies mapping the dynamics and distribution of happiness in South Africa. Umakrishnan Kollamparambil (2020: 201) analyses income and happiness dynamics in South Africa and finds that happiness increases, and happiness inequality decreases, against the backdrop of increasing income equality, highlighting that 'happiness inequality may be a useful supplementary measure of inequality in society'. The happiness gap becomes important if we consider rising democratic dissatisfaction and anger, most notably in Africa (Delapalme 2021; Møller et al. 2017), in the context of rising democratic backsliding. And South Africa has not been immune to growing anger and dissatisfaction, as expressed in the July 2021 unrest: several factors created conditions for the proverbial perfect storm that broke over Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal that month. These conditions included institutional weakness and the hollowing out of state institutions; high levels of unemployment; entrenched inequality and widespread poverty; urban overcrowding and poor spatial planning, as well as deficits in rural development; unbridled corruption as seen in the state capture phenomenon; and the impact of Covid-19 and the various lockdowns, which intensified 'feelings of despair among the population' (The Presidency 2021: 37).

Measuring happiness in South Africa

Income inequality – its dynamics as well as its socioeconomic and sociopolitical impact – is well documented in the scholarly narrative on poverty and inequality in South Africa. The distribution of subjective wellbeing and happiness, however, is largely overlooked in the academic and policy narratives, even though wellbeing and life satisfaction are critical to political stability and form a significant conceptual element of human development. They are also important for democratic legitimation through increasing equality of opportunity, especially for citizens who were excluded and marginalised under authoritarian rule. A sense of subjective wellbeing is critical for a cohesive and peaceful society; as Ed Diener and William Tov (2007: 422) note, attitudes towards subjective wellbeing are important in determining attitudes towards peace, because positive assessments of their wellbeing predispose people to trust and cooperate with each other.

South Africa generally ranks low on the scale of happiness measures in the World Happiness Index upon which the *World Happiness Report* is structured. This index draws on variables such as generosity, social support, freedom to make choices and perceptions of corruption, in addition to GDP and health (World Happiness

Report 2022). However, when reflecting on how one measures wellness and happiness in non-Western and African contexts, Valerie Møller et al. (2017: 93–94) note that cognisance of cross-cultural happiness and its expression is important. This was captured in what is constructed as the ‘Nigerian paradox’, where respondents who may have

indicated that they felt happy might not have meant they were truly happy with their situation, but rather they felt that reporting otherwise ‘could only aggravate the matter’. Saying you are happy might have been a way ‘of counter-acting everyday negative life experiences’, they speculated. (Møller et al. 2017: 93)

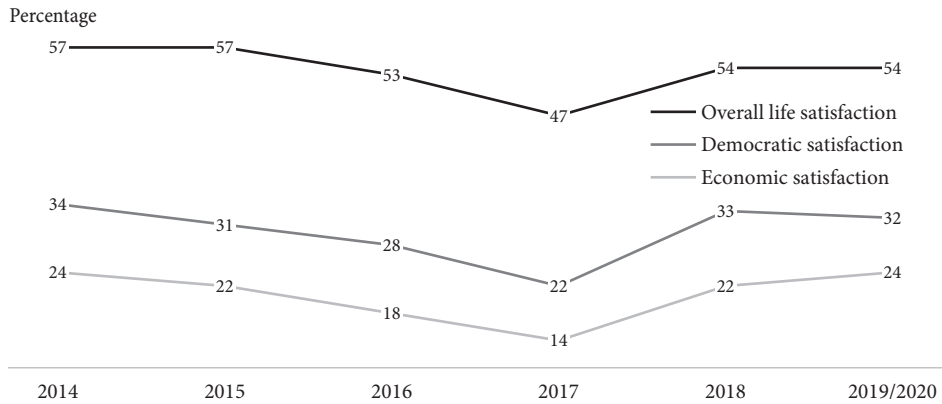
There is thus a need to engage more fully with questions of happiness and subjective wellbeing and the distribution thereof, and with questions of happiness inequality in South Africa, in order to design effective and targeted policy-making and interventions to enhance human development and transformation.

This chapter draws on the SASAS Personal Wellbeing Index (HSRC 2020) to explore the distribution of subjective wellbeing and happiness in South Africa.⁷ SASAS is a nationally representative and repeated cross-sectional survey of South Africans aged 16 years and older, conducted annually by the Human Sciences Research Council by means of face-to-face interviews to administer a questionnaire. Annually, between 2 500 and 3 200 interviews are conducted nationwide, and the data are weighted using Statistics South Africa’s most recent mid-year population estimates. The SASAS takes a holistic approach to measuring life satisfaction, with a focus on key factors that influence human wellbeing. These include health, belonging and associational life, and safety and security. The questions are explored with a focus on the distribution of subjective wellbeing and happiness, and on demographic variables such as gender, age and race.

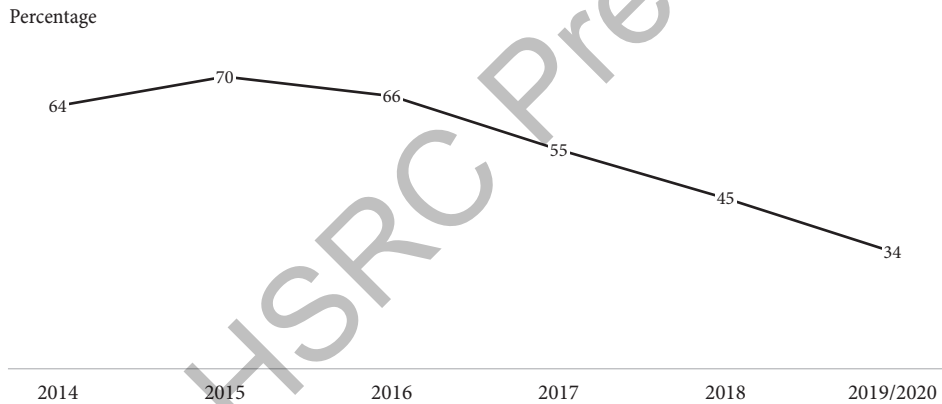
Subjective wellbeing and happiness in South Africa: A dissatisfied but happy nation?

As mentioned in the previous section, South Africa regularly ranks low in the *World Happiness Report*. In 2022, there was a slight improvement in its happiness ranking, with the country claiming the 91st position (out of 146 countries), improving its standing from 103rd in 2021 (World Happiness Report 2022).⁸

South Africans seem to experience relatively subdued levels of overall life satisfaction (Figure 3.1). Only 54% indicated that, considering all things, they were satisfied with their lives in 2019/2020. Life satisfaction levels have, however, remained relatively stable since 2014, with the highest level of overall life satisfaction being 57% in 2014 and 2015. This could be related to what was then the 20-year anniversary of the historic 1994 first democratic election. From 2017 to 2019/2020, in a pre-pandemic South Africa, we saw an almost 10% increase in life satisfaction. What is of interest, however, is that life satisfaction, when cursorily compared to democratic and economic satisfaction, was notably higher in each year between 2014 and 2020. Only 32% of South Africans were satisfied with how democracy was working in 2019/2020, and 24%

Figure 3.1 Overall life, democratic and economic satisfaction, 2014–20

Source: Constructed from SASAS 2019/2020 (HSRC 2020)

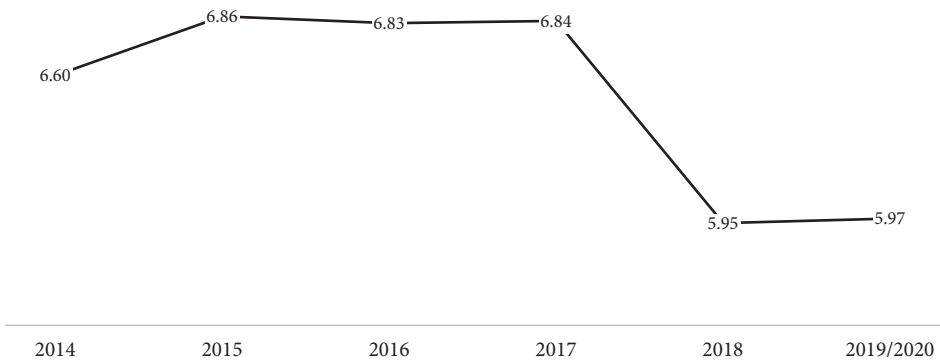
Figure 3.2 Life satisfaction when considering own life and personal circumstances, 2014–20

Source: Constructed from SASAS 2019/2020 (HSRC 2020)

demonstrated economic satisfaction. How does one explain this? This is an important question to address when considering the accepted narrative that democracy has not delivered, and the associated view that there has been democratic delegitimation and discontent with democracy. There is a need to dig a little more deeply to understand the construction of cognitive and affective life satisfaction and their relationship to democratic legitimation. Also of importance would be determining which factors shape interpretations of wellness and life evaluation in South Africa.

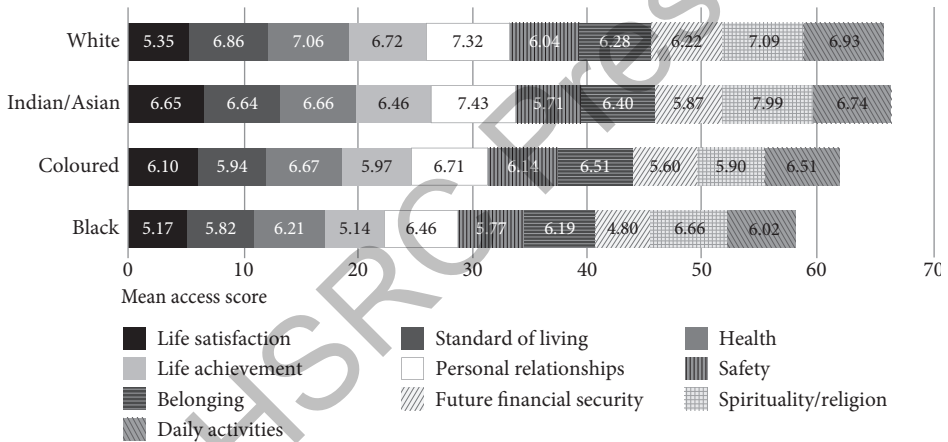
Concomitantly, when South Africans were asked to consider their personal circumstances and own life, a slightly different picture emerged (Figure 3.2). In 2019/2020, only 34% indicated that they were satisfied with their lives when reflecting on their personal situation. This means that almost two-thirds of the population were dissatisfied with

Figure 3.3 Mean subjective wellbeing scores, 2014–20



Source: Constructed from SASAS 2019/2020 (HSRC 2020)

Figure 3.4 Mean distribution of subjective wellbeing measures, by race, 2014–20



Source: Constructed from SASAS 2019/2020 (HSRC 2020)

their personal life circumstances. There was also a significant decline of 30% in personal life satisfaction between 2014 and 2020.

South Africans hold moderate views of cognitive life satisfaction. Figure 3.3 shows that between 2014 and 2020 subjective wellbeing scores declined from an average of 6.6 in 2014 to 5.97 in 2019/2020.⁹ South Africans therefore demonstrate stable, but modest, perceptions of subjective wellbeing.

Looking at the spread of subjective wellbeing across different racial groups in South Africa (Figure 3.4), it can be noted that the Indian/Asian population has higher levels of life satisfaction, satisfaction with personal relationships and satisfaction with spirituality and religion when compared to other racial groups. White South Africans enjoy a higher level of satisfaction with their standard of living, health, life

Table 3.1 Analysis of variance: Subjective wellbeing and race, 2014–20

Survey questions		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Thinking about your own life and personal circumstances, how satisfied are you with your life?	Between groups	8453.555	4	2113.389	3.845	.004
	Within groups	1629170.628	2964	549.653		
	Total	1637624.183	2968			
How satisfied are you with your standard of living?	Between groups	1052.026	4	263.007	41.058	<.001
	Within groups	19390.277	3027	6.406		
	Total	20442.303	3031			
How satisfied are you with your health?	Between groups	260.963	4	65.241	10.294	<.001
	Within groups	19184.636	3027	6.338		
	Total	19445.599	3031			
How satisfied are you with what you are achieving in life?	Between groups	1089.799	4	272.450	43.356	<.001
	Within groups	19021.751	3027	6.284		
	Total	20111.550	3031			
How satisfied are you with your personal relationships?	Between groups	396.982	4	99.246	16.694	<.001
	Within groups	17995.733	3027	5.945		
	Total	18392.715	3031			
How satisfied are you with how safe you feel?	Between groups	91.467	4	22.867	3.206	.012
	Within groups	21593.440	3027	7.134		
	Total	21684.907	3031			
How satisfied are you with feeling part of your community?	Between groups	61.479	4	15.370	2.737	.027
	Within groups	16997.212	3027	5.615		
	Total	17058.691	3031			
How satisfied are you with your future (financial) security?	Between groups	863.919	4	215.980	31.924	<.001
	Within groups	20478.959	3027	6.765		
	Total	21342.878	3031			
How satisfied are you with your spirituality or religion?	Between groups	522.257	4	130.564	21.589	<.001
	Within groups	18306.857	3027	6.048		
	Total	18829.113	3031			
How satisfied are you with your daily activities?	Between groups	366.898	4	91.725	16.871	<.001
	Within groups	16456.927	3027	5.437		
	Total	16823.826	3031			

Source: Constructed from SASAS 2019/2020 (HSRC 2020)

achievement, safety, future financial security and daily activities when compared to other racial groups. Concomitantly, black South Africans have comparatively low levels of satisfaction with life, standard of living, health, safety, personal relationships, future financial security and daily activities in relation to other race groups. Coloured South

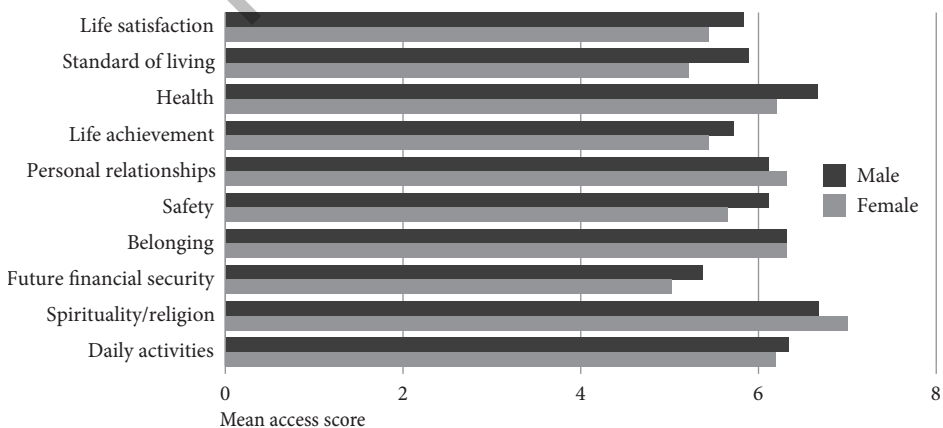
Africans also have lower levels of satisfaction across all measures except belonging, in comparison with white and Indian/Asian South Africans.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) test revealed statistically notable differences between perceptions of subjective wellbeing in different racial groups (Table 3.1). There was no significant difference in levels of satisfaction with belonging and safety. The intimate link between race and class, and its link to inequality of opportunity, could explain the difference in cognitive and eudaimonic life satisfaction in South Africa (see Steyn Kotze 2022a). The observed pattern of both cognitive and eudaimonic life satisfaction seems to follow a pattern of unequal distribution across racial groups. A racialised pattern of subjective wellbeing distribution emerges that characterises sociopolitical life in South Africa, as well as racialised patterns of poverty and inequality that shape socioeconomic experiences.

There is a notable gendered difference in subjective wellbeing in South Africa, albeit smaller in some areas. Women enjoy lower levels of subjective wellbeing. Figure 3.5 shows that except for satisfaction with spirituality/religion, women have observably lower levels of cognitive and eudaimonic life satisfaction. Notable areas of gendered difference are life satisfaction, standard of living, health, life achievement, safety, financial security and spirituality and/or religion (where women have more positive levels of satisfaction). Areas displaying statistically insignificant difference include satisfaction with personal relationships, belonging and daily activities. It is nonetheless noteworthy that women enjoy lower levels of satisfaction in these areas.

Therefore, when looking at the distribution of subjective wellbeing, it is evident that demographic factors such as race and gender have an influence on perceptions of subjective wellbeing (Table 3.2). Black South Africans and women report lower levels of subjective wellbeing overall. This, again, could mirror other patterns of resource distribution, such as income and access to basic services, that impact equality of

Figure 3.5 Mean distribution of subjective wellbeing measures, by gender, 2014–20

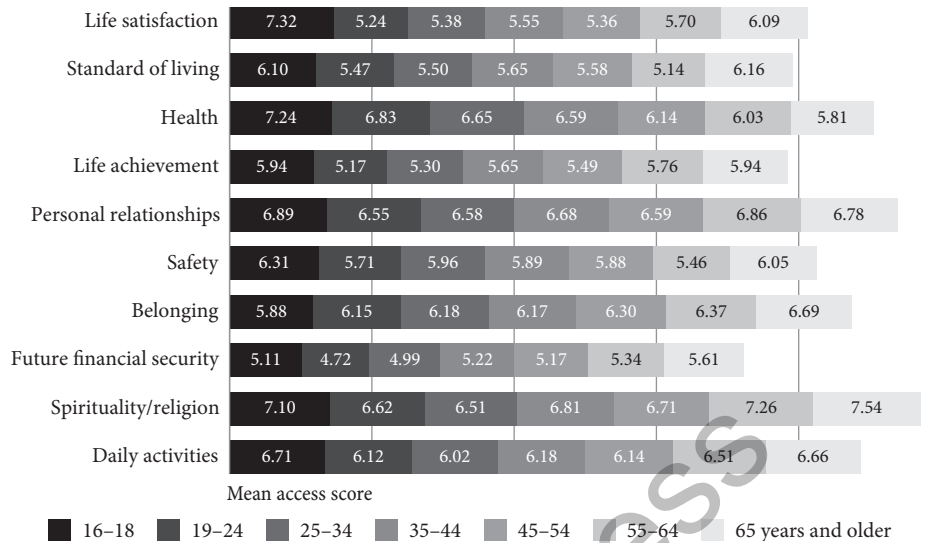


Source: Constructed from SASAS 2019/2020 (HSRC 2020)

Table 3.2 Independent samples test, 2014–20

Survey questions	Levene's test for equality of variances		t-test for equality of means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Significance Two-sided p	Mean difference	Std. error difference	95% Confidence interval of the difference	
								Lower	Upper
Thinking about your life and your personal circumstance, how satisfied are you with your life?	2.188	.139	3.197	2699	.001	.3998	.1251	.1546	.6451
How satisfied are you with your standard of living?	.845	.358	3.888	3030	<.001	.3711	.0954	.1840	.5583
How satisfied are you with your health?	5.483	.019	4.947	3030	<.001	.4598	.0929	.2775	.6420
How satisfied are you with what you are achieving in life?	.199	.655	2.969	3030	.003	.2814	.0948	.0956	.4672
How satisfied are you with your personal relationships?	2.068	.151	2.427	3030	.015	.2200	.0907	.0423	.3978
How satisfied are you with how safe you feel?	5.083	.024	4.839	3030	<.001	.4750	.0982	.2825	.6675
How satisfied are you with feeling part of your community?	.119	.730	.994	3030	.320	.0869	.0874	-.0845	.2582
How satisfied are you with your future (financial) security?	.083	.774	3.577	3030	<.001	.3490	.0976	.1577	.5403
How satisfied are you with your spirituality or religion?	2.142	.143	-3.623	3030	<.001	-.3320	.0916	-.5116	-.1523
How satisfied are you with your daily activities?	2.578	.108	1.668	3030	.095	.1448	.0868	-.0254	.3149

Source: Constructed from SASAS 2019/2020 (HSRC 2020)

Figure 3.6 Mean distribution of subjective wellbeing measures, by age, 2014–20

Source: Constructed from SASAS 2019/2020 (HSRC 2020)

opportunity and the achievement of life purpose. Subjective wellbeing is key for attaining democratic quality, and it is likely that lower assessments of subjective wellbeing also influence levels of democratic satisfaction. This is further discussed in Chapter 11 in this volume by Benjamin Roberts, Yul Derek Davids, Jarè Struwig, Zitha Mokomane and Valerie Møller, ‘Quality of life and political support in South Africa: A resilient nation?’.

Age affects the distribution of subjective wellbeing in South Africa, with this being comparatively lower for the age groups 19–24 and 25–45 years (Figure 3.6). Satisfaction with standard of living, life achievement and future financial security was also lowest for the age group 19–24.

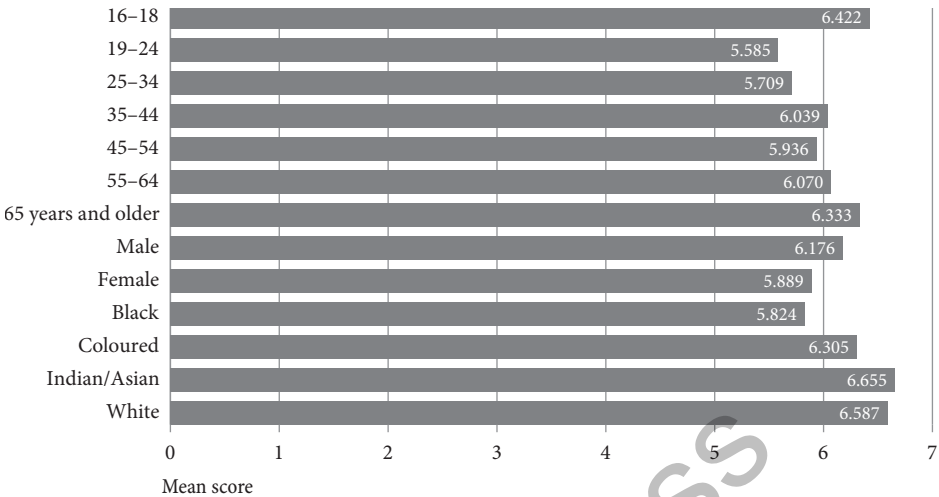
The ANOVA test demonstrates notable differences in various measures of subjective wellbeing based on age (Table 3.3). Specific areas of difference related to age include life satisfaction and satisfaction with standard of living, health, life achievement, future financial security, and spirituality and/or religion.

Table 3.3 Analysis of variance for age and subjective wellbeing, 2014–20

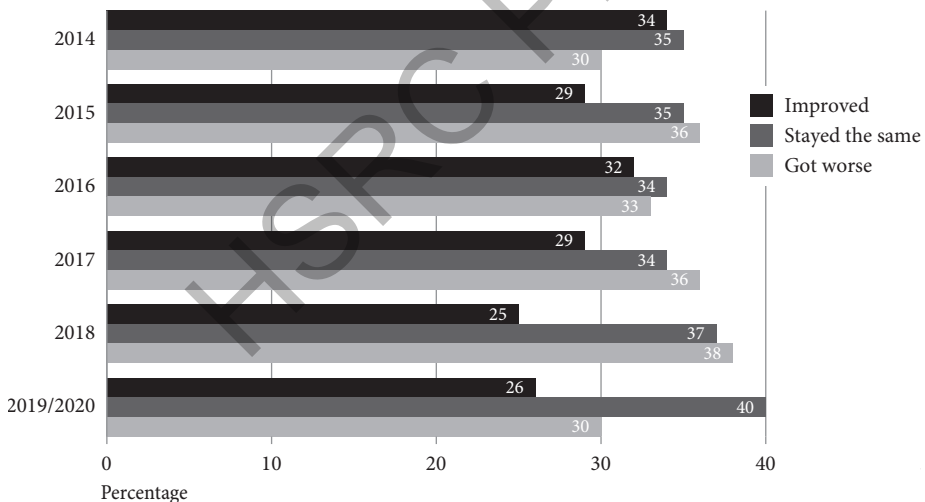
Survey questions		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Thinking about your life and your personal circumstance, how satisfied are you with your life?	Between groups	417.343	6	69.557	6.803	<.001
	Within groups	17835.538	2915	6.119		
	Total	26989.360	2605			
How satisfied are you with your standard of living?	Between groups	148.784	6	24.797	3.688	.001
	Within groups	19598.492	2915	6.723		
	Total	19747.276	2921			
How satisfied are you with your health?	Between groups	391.471	6	65.245	10.356	<.001
	Within groups	18365.356	2915	6.300		
	Total	18756.827	2921			
How satisfied are you with what you are achieving in life?	Between groups	176.336	6	29.389	4.453	<.001
	Within groups	19239.921	2915	6.600		
	Total	19416.257	2921			
How satisfied are you with your personal relationships?	Between groups	36.258	6	6.043	.996	.426
	Within groups	17687.555	2915	6.068		
	Total	17723.813	2921			
How satisfied are you with how safe you feel?	Between groups	100.991	6	16.832	2.352	.029
	Within groups	20864.193	2915	7.158		
	Total	20965.184	2921			
How satisfied are you with feeling part of your community?	Between groups	93.047	6	15.508	2.753	.011
	Within groups	16421.986	2915	5.634		
	Total	16515.033	2921			
How satisfied are you with your future (financial) security?	Between groups	162.825	6	27.138	3.861	<.001
	Within groups	20490.333	2915	7.029		
	Total	20653.158	2921			
How satisfied are you with your spirituality or religion?	Between groups	324.821	6	54.137	8.848	<.001
	Within groups	17835.538	2915	6.119		
	Total	18160.359	2921			
How satisfied are you with your daily activities?	Between groups	151.505	6	25.251	4.565	<.001
	Within groups	16122.476	2915	5.531		
	Total	16273.981	2921			

Source: Constructed from SASAS 2019/2020 (HSRC 2020)

Figure 3.7 shows the demographic distribution of subjective wellbeing across age, race and gender groups. Indian/Asian males aged 16–18 years have the highest levels of subjective wellbeing. Black females aged 19–24 years have the lowest levels of subjective wellbeing. Levels of subjective wellbeing are also comparatively lower in the 25–34-year age group than in older age groups.

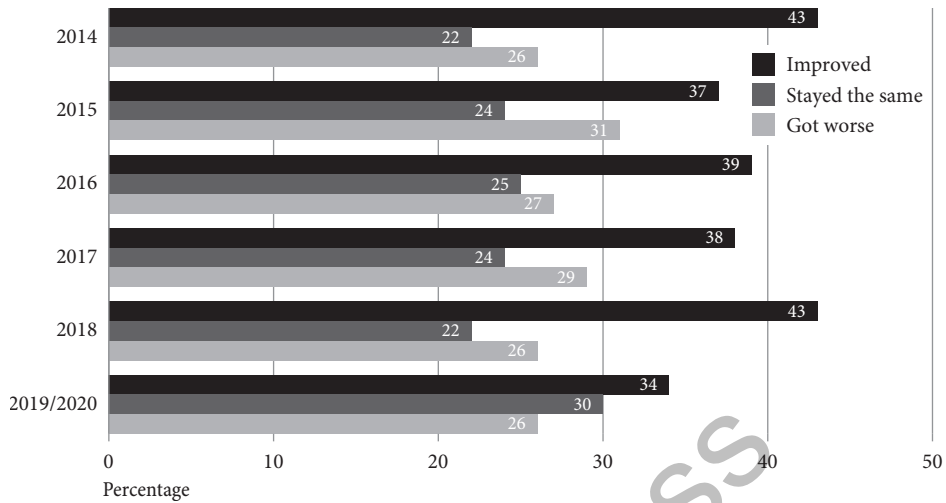
Figure 3.7 Mean distribution of subjective wellbeing measures, by age, gender and race, 2014–20

Source: Constructed from SASAS 2019/2020 (HSRC 2020)

Figure 3.8 Outlook of South Africans on past life improvement, 2014–20

Source: Constructed from SASAS 2019/2020 (HSRC 2020)

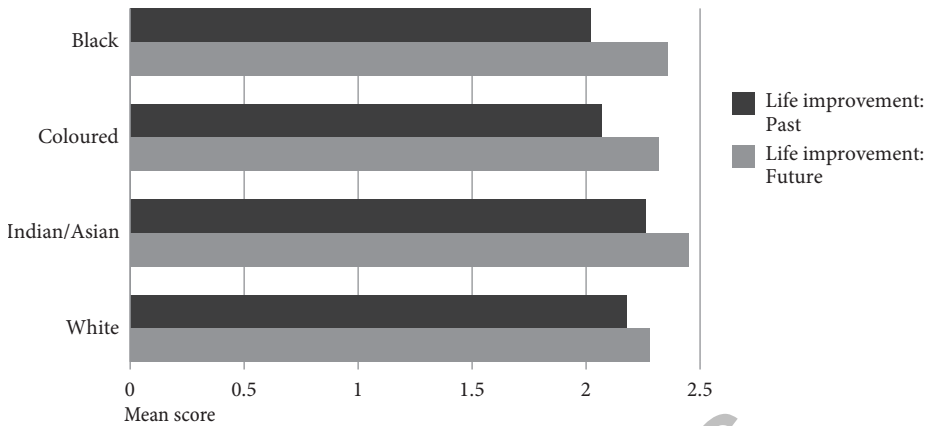
We need to consider, too, a sense of hope for the future. When South Africans were asked whether life had improved over the past five years and whether it would improve in the next five years, a sense of despondency emerged. In 2014, 34% of South Africans felt their lives had improved, compared to 26% in 2019/2020 (Figure 3.8). Concomitantly, in 2018, 38% of South Africans felt that their lives had worsened over a five-year period, compared to 30% in 2019/2020. Therefore, fewer South Africans in 2019/2020 than in 2018 thought that their lives had got worse.

Figure 3.9 Outlook of South Africans on future life satisfaction, 2014–20

Source: Constructed from SASAS 2019/2020 (HSRC 2020)

Future life outlook also demonstrates a sense of bleakness and despondency over future life happiness. Between 2014 and 2019/2020, Figure 3.9 shows a decline in future life optimism, with 43% of the population feeling that their lives will improve over 5 years in 2014, compared to 34% in 2019/2020. The number of South Africans who feel that their lives will get worse over the next five years has fluctuated between 2014 and 2019/2020. While 26% felt their lives will get worse in 2014, this number increased to 31% in 2015, before returning to the 2014 baseline of 26% in 2019/2020. Yet, the portion of the population that feels life will stay the same increased from 22% in 2014 to 30% in 2019/2020. This indicates an increased outlook of apparent stagnation in future life circumstances, as people feel that their lives will neither improve nor get worse. It also points to what can be seen as a possible sense of lack of agency in regard to people's personal futures. This will require further in-depth research to determine what factors shape perceptions of future life outlook, most notably how the perception that life will still be the same shapes people's democratic satisfaction. Critical future research is required to establish how future outlook and questions of equality of opportunity will have an impact on democratic satisfaction and legitimization.

South Africans hold varied views on their past and future life satisfaction and life improvement (Figures 3.8 and 3.9), with some feeling that their lives will neither improve nor get worse. Figure 3.10 shows that across racial groups, there is a sense that life has not improved, and will not do so, over a five-year period.¹⁰ This indicates a sense of hopelessness or despondency about future life improvement across all racial groups. However, it must be noted that perceptions that the future will not be better (Figure 3.10) are slightly higher than views that life had improved over a five-year period. Indian/Asian South Africans ($n = 315$, $m = 2.45$, $SD = .82$) hold slightly more negative views on their future life improvement, while white South Africans

Figure 3.10 Mean distribution of outlook on past and future life improvement, by race, 2014–20

Source: Constructed from SASAS 2019/2020 (HSRC 2020)

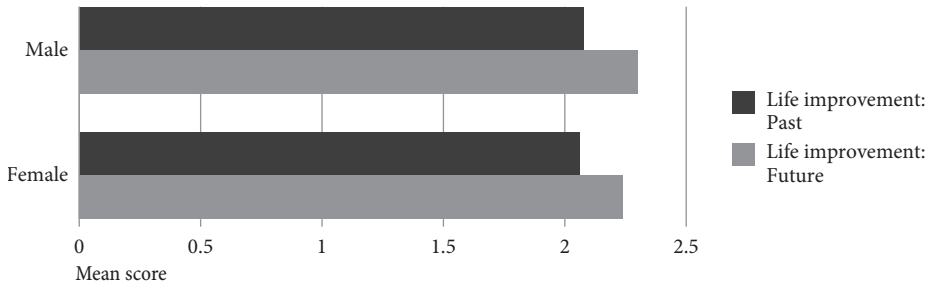
Table 3.4 One-way analysis of variance on past and future life improvement and race, 2014–20

Survey questions		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
In the past five years, has life improved, stayed the same or become worse for people like me?	Between groups	20.704	4	5.176	7.224	<.001
	Within groups	2168.971	3027	0.717		
	Total	2189.675	3031			
Do you think that life will improve, stay the same or get worse in the next five years for someone like you?	Between groups	7.197	4	1.799	0.604	.660
	Within groups	9016.966	3027	2.979		
	Total	9024.163	3031			

Source: Constructed from SASAS 2019/2020 (HSRC 2020)

($n = 289$, $m = 2.18$, $SD = .89$) have slightly more positive views on whether their lives will improve in the next five years. The one-way analysis of variance demonstrates that there is no significant difference in perception of future life improvement based on racial identity. There are, however, notable differences in views that life had indeed improved during the last five years, while hopefulness about the future is somewhat subdued across all race groups (Table 3.4). South Africans hold a negative outlook on future life improvement relative to their stance on whether life has improved over the past five years. This despondency about improved future life quality may also facilitate a deepening sense of democratic delegitimation and discontent.

As shown in Figure 3.11 and Table 3.5, women ($n = 1\,769$, $m = 2.40$, $SD = 1.79$) hold slightly more negative views about life improving in the future than men ($n = 1\,263$, $m = 2.30$, $SD = 1.69$). And women ($n = 1\,769$, $m = 2.06$, $SD = .86$) hold marginally more negative views of whether life has improved over the past five years than men ($n = 1\,263$, $m = 2.08$, $SD = .83$). Overall, however, there is a consistent sense across gender that life has neither improved nor become worse.

Figure 3.11 Mean distribution of outlook on past and future life improvement, by gender, 2014–20

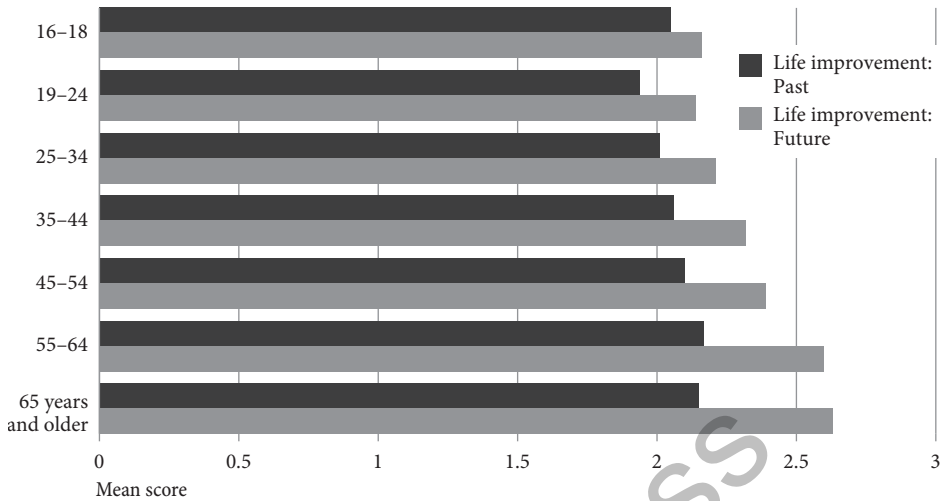
Source: Constructed from SASAS 2019/2020 (HSRC 2020)

Table 3.5 Independent *t*-test: Gender and past and future life improvement, 2014–20

		Independent samples test								
		Levene's test for equality of variances		t-test for equality of means						
Survey questions		F	Sig.	t	df	Significance Two-sided p	Mean difference	Std. error difference	95% Confidence interval of the difference	
									Lower	Upper
In the past five years has life improved, stayed the same or become worse for people like me?	Equal variances assumed	3.593	.058	.488	3030	.625	.015	.031	-.046	.077
How satisfied are you with your standard of living?	Equal variances assumed	3.702	.054	-1.519	3030	.129	-.097	.064	-.221	.028

Source: Constructed from SASAS 2019/2020 (HSRC 2020)

The distribution of future hopefulness is also consistent across age groups. Figure 3.12 and Table 3.6 demonstrate that older South Africans show higher levels of negativity in their views that life has improved in the past and will improve in the future. The age cohorts 55–64 ($n = 412$, $m = 2.17$, $SD = .87$) and 65 years and older ($n = 360$, $m = 2.15$, $SD = .88$) demonstrate higher levels of dissatisfaction with life improvement over the past five years than the age cohorts 35–44 ($n = 662$, $m = 2.06$, $SD = .84$), 25–34 ($n = 685$, $m = 2.01$, $SD = .79$) and 19–24 years ($n = 330$, $m = 1.94$, $SD = .87$). The age cohort 19–24 ($n = 330$, $m = 2.14$, $SD = 1.5$) holds comparatively more positive, albeit

Figure 3.12 Mean distribution of outlook on past and future life improvement by age, 2014–20

Source: Constructed from SASAS 2019/2020 (HSRC 2020)

Table 3.6 One-way analysis of variance: Age and life improvement in the past and future, 2014–20

Survey questions		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
In the past five years, has life improved, stayed the same or got worse for people?	Between groups	15.139	6	2.523	3.508	.002
	Within groups	2167.620	3014	0.719		
	Total	2182.759	3020			
Do you think that life will improve, stay the same or get worse in the next five years?	Between groups	85.448	6	14.241	4.805	<.001
	Within groups	8933.023	3014	2.964		
	Total	9018.471	3020			

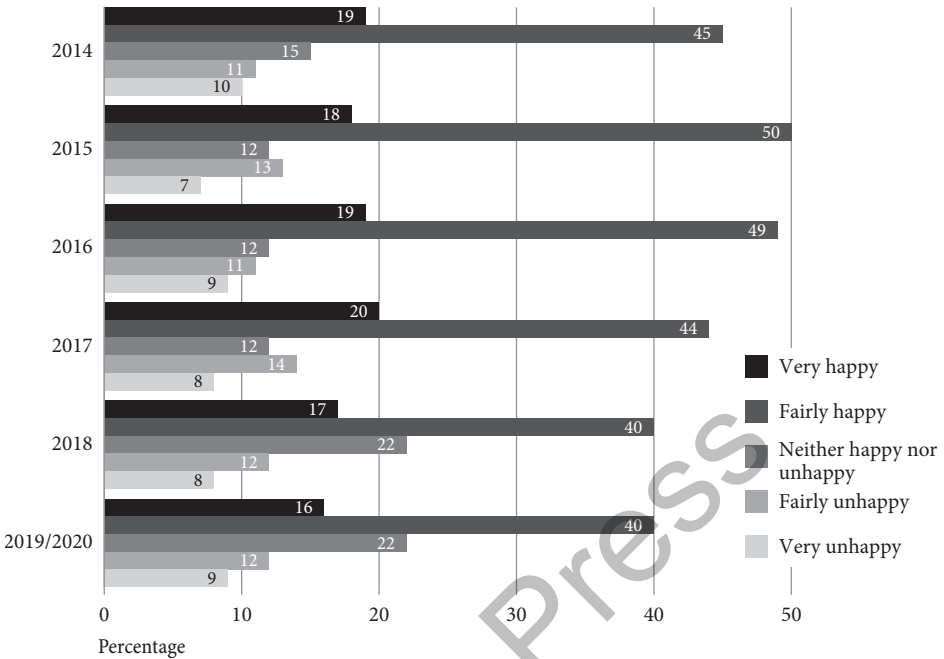
Source: Constructed from SASAS 2019/2020 (HSRC 2020)

understated, views of the future. There is a notable difference in perceptions of future life improvement based on age, with older South Africans having a more negative outlook on the future.

Consideration of declining levels of subjective wellbeing amidst hopelessness and despondency also necessitates consideration of the distribution of happiness. South Africans have restrained views of their future hopefulness as well as tepid levels of subjective wellbeing. This requires an exploration of the distribution of happiness in South Africa.

Self-reported happiness in South Africa declined between 2014 and 2020 (Figure 3.13).¹¹ Just under one-fifth of the population indicated that they were very happy in 2014. Most South Africans are fairly happy, but there was a 3% decline in this measure

Figure 3.13 Self-reported happiness in South Africa, 2014–20



Source: Constructed from SASAS 2019/2020 (HSRC 2020)

Figure 3.14 Mean distribution of self-reported levels of happiness, by race, 2014–20



Source: Constructed from SASAS 2019/2020 (HSRC 2020)

between 2014 and 2020. Concomitantly, there are slight fluctuations in the number of South Africans who indicate that they are very unhappy. A similar pattern is observed for those who indicate that they are fairly unhappy. Levels of self-reported happiness are substantially higher than levels of subjective wellbeing and future hopefulness (Figure 3.2). This again points to a need for deeper engagement with and research into what factors South Africans consider when reflecting on their level of happiness. In future it will also be necessary to determine to what extent a possible Nigerian paradox could be at play when constructing factors that shape cognition of subjective

wellbeing vis-à-vis happiness. Cognitively, however, there is relative dissatisfaction with life, while affectively there are relatively stable levels of happiness. This creates a contradictory picture of subjective wellbeing and happiness, most notably with regard to cognitive and affective measures of subjective wellbeing (see Figures 3.6 and 3.15).

Figure 3.14 shows that on average, black South Africans ($n = 1\,942$, $m = 2.78$, $SD = 1.28$) report lower levels of happiness, indicative of happiness despondency.¹² Indian/Asian South Africans ($n = 315$, $m = 2.21$, $SD = 1.09$) and white South Africans ($n = 289$, $m = 2.25$, $SD = 1.23$) have comparably higher self-reported levels of happiness. This racialised pattern of happiness inequality is potentially linked to entrenched socioeconomic inequalities that continue to characterise post-apartheid South Africa, most notably relating to inequality of opportunity.

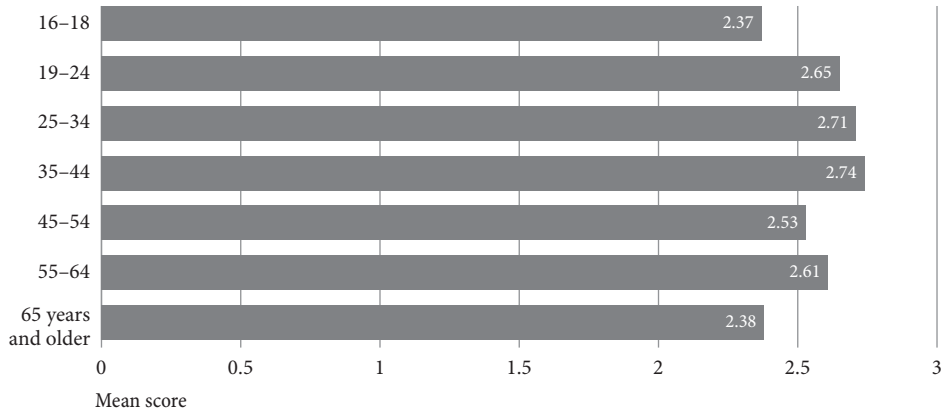
Women ($n = 1\,768$, $m = 2.67$, $SD = 1.26$) have marginally higher levels of self-reported happiness when compared to men ($n = 1\,263$, $m = 2.55$, $SD = 1.23$). Women report marginally lower levels of subjective wellbeing (Figure 3.5). It will be worthwhile in future to determine the gendered construction of happiness, and what factors shape individual self-assessment of happiness based on gender (see Table 3.7).

Similarly, when one considers age, the age cohorts 65 years and older ($n = 3.60$, $m = 2.38$, $SD = 1.23$) and 16–18 ($n = 94$, $m = 2.37$, $SD = 1.18$) have higher levels of self-reported happiness compared to other age groups (Figure 3.15). Concomitantly, the

Table 3.7 *Independent t-test: Gender and happiness, 2014–20*

Survey questions	Independent samples test									
	Levene's test for equality of variances		t-test for equality of means							
	F	Sig.	t	df	Significance Two-sided p	Mean difference	Std. error difference	95% Confidence interval of the difference		
								Lower	Upper	
Taking all things together, how would you say things are these days? Would you say you are very happy, fairly happy, neither happy nor unhappy, fairly unhappy or very unhappy?	Equal variances assumed	3.175	.075	-2.533	3029	.011	-.117	.046	-.208	-.026

Source: Constructed from SASAS 2019/2020 (HSRC 2020)

Figure 3.15 Mean distribution of self-reported happiness, by age, 2014–2020

Source: Constructed from SASAS 2019/2020 (HSRC 2020)

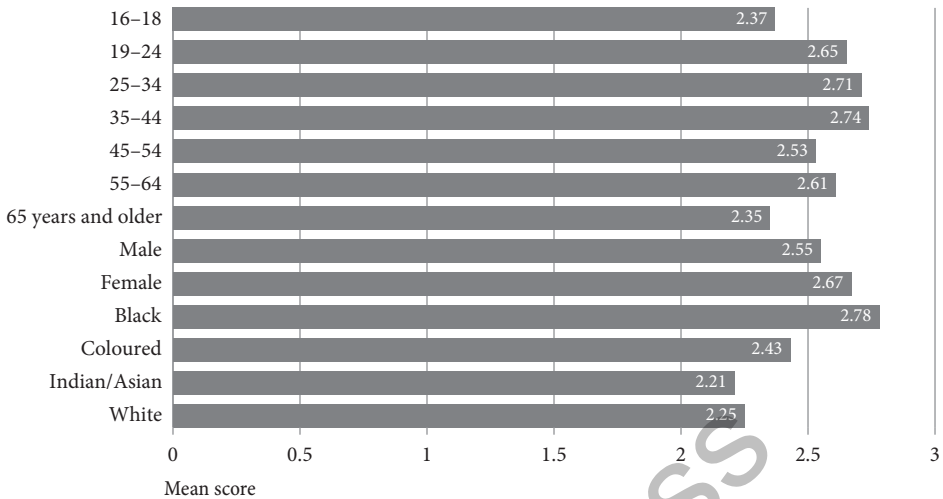
Table 3.8 Analysis of variance: Age and happiness, 2014–20

Survey questions		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Taking all things in your life, how would you say things are these days? Would you say you are very happy, fairly happy, neither happy nor unhappy, fairly unhappy or very unhappy?	Between groups	45.414	6	7.569	4.837	<.001
	Within groups	4715.254	3013	1.565		
	Total	4760.669	3019			

Source: Constructed from SASAS 2019/2020 (HSRC 2020)

age cohorts 35–44 ($n = 662$, $m = 2.74$, $SD = 1.24$), 25–34 ($n = 685$, $m = 2.71$, $SD = 1.28$) and 19–24 ($n = 329$, $m = 2.65$, $SD = 1.20$) have notably lower levels of self-reported happiness. The variance in levels of happiness based on age could be correlated with the challenges younger people in South Africa face. These challenges include high rates of youth unemployment that impact pursuit of life opportunity and meeting key milestones of adulthood, such as full-time employment and being an independent individual with agency over life choices and goals. This may also explain why younger people in South Africa have higher levels of dissatisfaction than older South Africans with what they are achieving in life.

Figure 3.16 shows that individuals with lower levels of happiness are generally between the ages of 35 and 44, female and Indian South African. Individuals with higher levels of self-reported happiness are generally between the ages of 16 and 18, male and white South African. Table 3.8 demonstrates that age does play a role in perceptions of happiness (see also Table 3.3). One therefore finds happiness inequality distributed according to age and race, with marginal differences based on gender.

Figure 3.16 Mean distribution of happiness, by age, gender and race, 2014–20

Source: Constructed from SASAS 2019/2020 (HSRC 2020)

The most notable expression of inequality in South Africa is found in inequality of opportunity, the lottery of birth mentioned earlier in this chapter. States play an essential role in facilitating greater equality of opportunity through the provision of basic services such as healthcare, education and essential infrastructure to facilitate clean water, sanitation and travel (World Bank 2018: 45). When looking at patterns of poverty and inequality in South Africa, the World Bank (2018: 22) found a positive correlation between access to basic services and income level. Poor South Africans tended to have limited access to proper water and sanitation, were generally food-insecure, lived in overcrowded homes, and had lower rates of completion of primary school (World Bank 2018: 22–27). Similarly, access to healthcare and educational outcomes remained unequal across income groups, and given the racialised nature of poverty in South Africa, black and coloured households suffered higher levels of inequality of opportunity compared to other demographic groups (World Bank 2018: 38). It is this inequality of opportunity that may inadvertently shape subdued levels of subjective wellbeing and happiness, given that inequalities in life opportunity impact a person's ability to achieve their life's purpose and goals. The inability to achieve a sense of wellbeing and happiness in a democracy may lay the foundation for a deeper sense of democracy's inability to deliver, leading to a delegitimation of democracy and democratic rule.

Conclusion

Subjective wellbeing and happiness are critical factors in considering democratic quality, democratic legitimation and human development. Given persistent levels of inequality coupled with racialised patterns of poverty and equality of opportunity, there is a need to move *beyond GDP* in assessing democratic quality and health in

South Africa. Happiness inequality may be a driving force for increasing democratic and economic discontent as well as the political disengagement that is evident in the declining numbers of citizens participating in elections. Subdued levels of subjective wellbeing and happiness do not bode well for democratic legitimation and durability in South Africa, which remains a highly unequal country where racialised patterns of poverty and inequality persist, despite almost three decades of democracy and African National Congress (ANC) rule. With the advent of political liberation and its associated euphoria, many expected the material benefits of democracy to follow, through the promise of 'a better life for all', a life in which poverty would decline and societal transformation would reflect racial inclusivity in the new post-apartheid order.¹³ Yet, for the majority of South Africans a sense of wellbeing and happiness remains elusive.

Subjective wellbeing is a critical indicator of both democratic quality and human development. From a policy perspective, unpacking patterns of wellness perceptions and happiness assists in the development of targeted and relevant policies that will deal holistically with crucial societal issues such as poverty and inequality. With a move towards a *beyond GDP* agenda for human development, patterns of subjective wellbeing and happiness become important measures of key variations between different groups in society. Objective measures such as GDP may provide critical data on objective living conditions. However, perceptions of human realities, and how different societal groups experience wellbeing and a lack of their needs being met, provide important information about democratic quality and political stability. If people perceive that their needs cannot be met or their desires fulfilled under a specific regime, increasing levels of discontent may lead to political destabilisation. Unwellness and unhappiness breed discontent, which ultimately negates democratic legitimation since it is premised on the view that democracy cannot deliver opportunities for people to pursue their life's purpose.

As South Africa sets its policy and political agenda for the next three decades, it will be critical to consider subjective wellbeing and happiness, most notably relating to human development, and the transformative sociopolitical agenda. *Human* development necessitates a focus on human needs, including the need for self-actualisation and happiness. As such, in meeting societal needs, it is necessary to keep track of the distribution of wellness and happiness to determine what public goods may facilitate subjective wellbeing and happiness through equality of opportunity. Determining the factors that shape perceptions of subjective wellbeing and happiness is therefore a critical research area that will need significant investment in the future. Understanding how different societal groups construct wellness and happiness will effectively enable policy initiatives that can facilitate the provision of services and other interventions to allow for more equally distributed human development and empowerment. More importantly, the promise of a better tomorrow and how to achieve it relies on people increasingly feeling that they are well and happy in a democratic society. The ability to achieve a happy and fulfilled life is, after all, a central element of the human experience.

Notes

- 1 Teichmann C, The state of democracy in South Africa a cause for concern, *Mail & Guardian*, 16 September 2022. Accessed September 2022, <https://mg.co.za/opinion/2022-09-16-the-state-of-democracy-in-south-africa-is-cause-for-concern/>.
- 2 Wills M, Happiness is a warm democracy, *JSTOR Daily*, 2 August 2022. Accessed August 2022, <https://daily.jstor.org/happiness-is-a-warm-democracy/>.
- 3 A similar argument applies in non-Western societies like China. Yukun Zhao et al. (2021), in analysing collective and individual agency, find that Chinese perceptions of wellbeing are also shaped by a sense of individual autonomy and agency. They conclude that high collective agency with low individual agency results in low quality of life for ordinary citizens. They also conclude that in conditions of coerced collectivism (where the state may push a particular ideological programme), individual agency is crushed. For Zhao et al., it is thus important to consider coerced collectivism in authoritarian regimes versus individual autonomy in democratic regimes. They observe that ‘when individuals choose to pursue collective goals together, we suggest there will be progress. If collective goals are forced to the extent of crushing individual agency, there will be eventual collapse’ (Zhao et al. 2021: 358).
- 4 Why does happiness inequality matter? *Greater Good Magazine*, 24 March. Accessed October 2023, https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why_does_happiness_inequality_matter.
- 5 World Bank (2022) *New World Bank report assesses sources of inequality in five major countries in southern Africa*, press release, 9 March. Accessed October 2022, <https://rebrand.ly/vq6j49w>.
- 6 Sobczak C (2011) Does inequality make us unhappy? *Greater Good Magazine*. Accessed October 2022, https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/does_inequality_make_us_unhappy.
- 7 The Personal Wellbeing Index draws on a five-point scale ranging from (1) very satisfied to (5) very dissatisfied. Specific questions relate to current and future evaluations of life situation. Respondents are asked the following questions: (a) Thinking about your own life and personal circumstances, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole? (b) How satisfied are you with your standard of living? (c) How satisfied are you with what you are achieving in life? (d) How satisfied are you with your health? (e) How satisfied are you with your personal relationships? (f) How satisfied are you with how safe you feel? (g) How satisfied are you with feeling part of your community? (h) How satisfied are you with your future financial security? (i) How satisfied are you with your daily activities?
- 8 Nefdt A, How happy is South Africa actually? World Happiness Index weighs in, *Cape{town} etc*, 4 June 2022. Accessed October 2022, <https://www.capetownetc.com/news/how-happy-is-south-africa-actually-world-happiness-index-weighs-in/>.
- 9 The Subjective Wellness Index is a 10-point Lickert scale where 0 indicates complete dissatisfaction, 5 indicates neutral, and 10 indicates complete satisfaction. The average was created through an index variable measure of key items of cognitive and eudaimonic wellbeing within the SASAS.
- 10 The data are constructed on a 3-point scale, where 1 indicates improved, 2 indicates stayed the same, and 3 indicates became worse.

- 11 The measure is a 5-point Likert scale with 1 indicating very happy, 2 fairly happy, 3 neither happy nor unhappy, 4 fairly unhappy, and 5 very unhappy.
- 12 With a mean of 2.78, black South Africans are closer to a measure of 3, which indicates neither happy nor unhappy.
- 13 The ANC created the catchphrase 'a better life for all' for its 2004, 2009 and 2014 electoral campaigns.

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