

Political Trust as a Predictor of Democratic Participation: The Mediating Role of Psychological Well-Being among University Students

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The democratic health and pupils' involvement are positively related. This study attempts to do so by studying the associations among internal psychological resources (psychological well-being), institutional trust, and civic involvement, an empirical gap. Political trust is used as a statistical predictor of democratic participation; psychological well-being among university students is used as a statistical mediator of the link between political trust and democratic participation. A cross sectional survey using convenience sampling ($n = 350$) of undergraduate and postgraduate students was conducted, which was quantitative in nature. The sample size is statistically sufficient for conducting typical regression and mediation analysis. Participants were chosen to provide diversity in academic subject area, level and gender. Descriptive statistics indicated moderate levels of political trust ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 0.71$) and democratic participation ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 0.74$). Both participation and political trust were positively correlated ($r = .52$, $p < .01$), and political trust was a significant predictor in linear regression ($\eta^2 = .52$, $R^2 = .27$, $p < .001$). A mediation analysis supported partial mediation of this association via psychological well-being (indirect effect = .13, 95% bias-corrected bootstrap CI [.08, .19]). These findings suggest that institutional integrity and psychological capacity are associated with engagement. Civic education should be theoretically integrated with psychological support to potentially foster students' active citizenship at universities .

Keywords: political trust, democratic participation, psychological well-being, university students, social capital theory.

Participation in democracy is a key element of a healthy and viable society and the means by which people engage in the life of their country. This is a general term that encompasses various institutional and civic practices, including voting in elections, participating in political conversations, contacting representatives, and engaging in peaceful civic expression online (e.g., signing petitions) (Poma, Pistoresi & Giovinazzo 2023). In the realm of higher education, participation is not only a political necessity but also an act of "civilising identity" that is associated with students' independent thinking, social responsibility, and public awareness (Li, 2025). Today, participation is not limited to voting but also encompasses a variety of peaceful and lawful actions related to democratic values, such as attending seminars, joining social mobilisations, and sharing information on political online platforms (Kirbiš & Lubej, 2025; Pavlova & Luhr, 2023). All of these actions indicate a person's dedication to the welfare of others and the development of democratic culture.

Political trust, defined as the extent to which citizens trust political actors and institutions, including parliament, courts, the electoral system, and local government, is a crucial initial step that is associated with

democratic participation (Prati, 2022). Trust depends on the understanding that these institutions will be fair and honest, and will serve the general good. A feeling of loyalty and the belief that their inclusion can bring about significant change is likely to develop when students perceive their institutions as fair, accountable, and responsive (Fung et al., 2022). However, if there is little trust, students may perceive the political system as corrupt, unfair, and completely disconnected from their lives. Therefore, they may see no value in democratic channels for addressing their concerns (Liu, Hu & Su, 2024). This lack of confidence can be associated with political passivity or "participatory anger," realised in non-institutional forms of participation that can be disruptive. Recent literature emphasises institutional confidence as a key element in understanding a strong participatory democratic life for students (Abebe, Admassu, & Belayneh, 2024; Novak et al., 2025).

The student population in universities is a pivotal segment, as they are the next generation of leaders, activists, teachers and policymakers who will inevitably shape the future of democracy (Li, 2025). Throughout their time at university, students encounter various political forces, including national politics, economic indicators, campus activism, and their peers. The university experience is distinctive for students, as it enables participation in the democratic process not only through voting but also through other forms of involvement (Pavlova & Luhr, 2023). However, the question of trust is especially acute for students in developing democracies, where considerable uncertainty surrounds their future employment and the likelihood that their government will remain in power to support them. A sense of trust or distrust in the system is closely linked to whether these students become active "good citizens" or politically disengaged individuals.

Although institutional factors are important, internal psychological factors also relate to students' involvement in local democracy. The concept of psychological well-being is defined as effective psychological functioning and encompasses autonomy, purpose in life, self-acceptance, personal growth, positive relations, and environmental mastery (Islam & Samak, 2025). Well-being is correlated with greater positive thinking, self-esteem, and empowerment to participate in democratic life among children and youth. This inner strength is associated with their ability to withstand public debate, accept others' opinions, and cooperate in civic actions with others (Poma et al., 2023). However, high stress, a low sense of power, and hopelessness are related to political disengagement on the other side. In this way, personal well-being serves as a 'personal resource' that can complement institutional trust in reinforcing democratic behaviour (Abdi et al., 2025).

Trust, well-being, and participation can be understood in the context of Social Capital Theory, specifically Robert Putnam's work. This theory suggests that trust, networks, and norms that promote cooperation are beneficial to a democracy's performance (Lin et al., 2025). Political trust can serve as a form of "institutional social capital" that helps students trust that their participation is associated with meaningful change (Dong, Wei & Zhao, 2025). Social Capital Theory is especially relevant here, as it provides a framework for linking these three variables: trust in institutions is associated with psychological well-being, which in turn relates to civic action (democratic participation) (Zheng et al., 2026; Jiang & Shen 2025). The theory posits that institutional trust offers both civic and psychological benefits, enabling students to participate in common goals and to become part of public life.

Research Gap

Though existing studies have shown significant relationships among political trust, psychological well-being, and civic participation, a specific link in understanding how these variables are connected remains missing in three distinct areas:

Theoretical Gap: There is a lack of integration between institutional-level trust and internal, eudaimonic psychological resources (such as Ryff's dimensions of well-being) within a unified social capital framework. Specifically, the literature has not sufficiently explained *why* political trust should theoretically enhance psychological well-being and *how* psychological well-being subsequently facilitates democratic participation.

Empirical Gap: Although it is known that trust relates to engagement, there is no clear explanation of how this relationship is realised internally, and limited empirical research has examined psychological well-being as the statistical mediator between institutional confidence and active participation (Zhao et al., 2025). The current literature does not sufficiently consider the "inner confidence, hope, and sense of belonging" that students may possess through their trust in their government (Watfa & Ali, 2025).

Contextual Gap: Little research has explored this interaction in the context of university students in developing democracies, where they are subject to structural, economic and political uncertainties that affect their psychological functioning and their attitudes towards democracy.

This study aims to fill these gaps by examining whether political trust is related to psychological capacities, such as autonomy, purpose, and mastery, which, in turn, are linked to active democratic participation among students.

Study Objectives and Hypotheses

The main goal of this study is to explore the role of political trust as a statistical predictor of democratic participation and the role of psychological well-being as a statistical mediator for university students (Abdi et al., 2025). To do this, the study focuses on three key issues: first, the statistical association between trust levels and student participation; second, the relationship between trust levels and well-being levels; and third, whether well-being represents a statistical mediating pathway between trust levels and participation. Four specific hypotheses, based on the objectives, are explored in this study:

- The degree of confidence in the political system and institutions is positively associated with democratic involvement.
- Politically trust is positively related to psychological well-being.
- Psychological well-being is a positive predictor of democratic participation (H3).
- The psychological well-being statistically mediates the relationship between political trust and democratic participation (Islam & Samak, 2025).

Through these links, this research highlights the need to look at youth participation in a more holistic way, both politically, but also from more under-researched angles into the mental health and intrinsic motivation of young people in the democratic project.

Literature Review

Political Trust and Democratic Participation

Voting intention, political discussion, civic meetings, civic expression online, signing of petitions and campaign-related activity are the indicators of democratic participation. Political trust is defined as trust in institutions such as parliament, elections, courts, government, political parties and local institutions. Recent literature suggests that citizens are more likely to be democratic when they believe that institutions are fair, responsive, and meaningful. The lack of trust in public institutions is deeply related to political voice and engagement, particularly voting and other civic behaviours, as reported by Prats, Smid and Ferrin (2024). According to Abebe et al., (2024), at Addis Ababa University, civic involvement, political trust and support for democracy were highly associated and the institutional confidence is a key factor in student's democratic life. Among students, the study by Yu (2025) showed an interconnection among political education, social media use, political efficacy, and political participation. According to Grande and Gonzatti (2025), trust is associated with participation within institutions, whereas distrust can lead to critical or alternative participation. Novak et al., (2025) also noted that electoral participation and political trust are positively associated through citizens' confidence in electoral fairness and trust of institutions.

Political Trust and Psychological Well-Being

There is a potential relationship between political trust and psychological well-being, as students who trust in institutions may feel more secure, hopeful, and connected to others. European Social Survey data were analysed by Diržytė, Patapas, and Adame (2024), who observed significant relationships between political trust, institutional trust, subjective well-being, and satisfaction with the government, democracy, and economy. Ma et al. (2024) demonstrated that governance quality is associated with subjective well-being via social fairness and trust in government. This is important because institutional trust is proposed to be associated with lower helplessness and higher trust in society. In a meta-analysis, Bi et al., (2025) found a positive correlation between trust and subjective well-being throughout the lifespan. In addition, Egamberdiev, Bobojonov and Kuhn (2025) concluded that there is a positive correlation between institutional trust and life satisfaction in post-Soviet

countries. Institutional trust is related to mental health, particularly in insecure people or those in need (Majoor-Kozlinska, 2025). These studies demonstrate that a citizen's trust in an institution is not merely political; it is also psychologically significant.

Psychological Well-Being and Democratic Participation

Psychological well-being is proposed to relate to democratic engagement, as students who are confident, purposeful, and autonomous, and who possess positive social relations, are more likely to feel capable of participating in public life. Personal health is related to intentions to vote, as found by Kirbiš and Lubej (2025) in nine Southeast European countries. In her article, Prati (2024) explores the link between political participation and mental health in Germany, highlighting its significance in relation to the extent of civic engagement. Gül Tekdal and Avcil (2026) found that life satisfaction is associated with political participation in Türkiye, with political interest mediating the relationship. While a negative association between poor mental health and participation is not always observed, Bernardi et al., (2025) asserted that mental health can represent an asset for political participation in some cases, such as in China.

Psychological Well-Being as a Mediator

The statistical mediation of psychological well-being suggests that political trust is directly associated with democratic participation and indirectly through students' inner confidence, hope, and sense of belonging. Mediation models are an increasingly popular means of explaining political and psychological behaviour in recent studies. Ma et al., (2024) built a serial mediation model in which subjective well-being is mediated by perceived social fairness and government trust. Kirbiš and Lubej (2025) investigated youth electoral behaviour using an indirect model that examined dimensions of health and political trust. One explanation Li (2025) explored was electoral participation, government trust, self-trust, and subjective well-being. According to Watfa and Ali (2025), the link between national loyalty and student political participation was mediated by the promotion of university citizenship among university students. Gül Tekdal and Avcil (2026) identified partial mediation by political interest in the relationship between life satisfaction and political participation. While these studies vary in their intervening variables, they all demonstrate that civic involvement typically occurs through indirect psychological and social channels as well as direct political ones.

Theoretical Framework: Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory posits that the development of trust, networks, norms, and civic engagement facilitates cooperation in society (Lin et al., 2025). Robert Putnam is particularly notable in this respect. He contended that the performance of a democracy is enhanced if the society possesses a higher level of trust and civic networks. Social capital enables citizens to cooperate, share information, form shared goals, and engage in public life. In this research, political trust is conceptualised as a form of institutional social capital. It introduces students to democratic institutions and encourages them to feel confident in their ability to play a meaningful role (Dong et al., 2025).

Social Capital Theory provides the foundational theoretical framework by conceptually linking political trust, eudaimonic psychological well-being, and democratic participation. Institutional trust functions as institutional social capital, establishing a predictable and fair civic environment. Within this framework, two specific underlying mechanisms are proposed: First, political trust directly fosters structural predictability and reduces systemic anxiety, thereby supporting Ryff's eudaimonic psychological well-being dimensions specifically environmental mastery, autonomy, and purpose in life (Jiang & Shen 2025). Second, enhanced eudaimonic well-being equips students with the internal psychological capacity, resilience, and personal empowerment necessary to engage in public discourse, navigate civic disagreements, and actively participate in democratic processes (Zheng et al., 2026). Thus, psychological well-being acts as an essential internal bridge connecting institutional-level social capital to active civic involvement:

1. Political Trust to Psychological Well-Being: When people see political and public institutions as fair, transparent and responsive, it results in a stable and predictable social environment. This predictability can

reduce systemic anxiety and hopelessness, ultimately enhancing eudaimonic psychological resources such as self-acceptance, mastery of the environment, and a sense of purpose in life (Jiang, & Shen, 2025).

2. **Psychological Well-Being to Democratic Participation:** People with strong internal resources are more psychologically empowered, including those who are autonomous, growing personally, enjoying positive relationships and having a sense of purpose. This empowerment gives them the emotional strength to participate in public conversations, endure political disagreements, work together on civic objectives and be actively involved in democratic life (Zheng et al., 2026).

Thus, Social Capital Theory implies that institutional trust is related to psychological and civic benefits and that it is an internal connection that links institutional trust to active public involvement.

Method

A cross-sectional survey design was used to explore the statistical associations between political trust, psychological well-being and democratic participation.

Participants and Procedure

The target population comprised undergraduate and postgraduate students from public and private universities in Pakistan⁸. Participants were recruited from universities located in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Peshawar to ensure representation from different institutional settings⁸. The research sample comprised 350 students, obtained through convenience sampling, with an effort to include students from various academic disciplines and levels, and both sexes, to represent a mix of student views⁸. To justify the sample size, an a priori power analysis was conducted using G*Power (for multiple linear regression and PROCESS mediation analysis), which indicated that a minimum sample size of 250 to 300 participants was required to detect a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$) with an alpha level of .05 and statistical power exceeding .802. Therefore, the final sample of 350 participants is statistically sufficient and adequately powered to conduct linear regression and PROCESS macro mediation analyses.

The data were obtained during the school term in which the study was conducted. Students were contacted through academic networks and both paper and electronic surveys were utilized. Inclusion criteria were current university students aged 18 years and older and exclusion criteria were no consent to participate and failure to complete survey. This survey was kept for additional empirical study and 350 students returned and completed the survey.

The structured questionnaire was broken up into 4 sections. The participants had been informed about the study before data collection and the principles of voluntary participation, anonymity and data confidentiality adhered to.

Ethical Considerations

Careful attention was given to the ethical guidelines. Pupils were well informed about the study's aims prior to taking part. No identifying data was taken and participation was voluntary; every attempt was made to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. No individual data was captured and/or shared. The research protocol was reviewed and approved in line with the ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects with consideration of voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality.

Instrumentation and Measurement

A 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) was used to assess the variables.

- **Demographic Profile:** This section included demographic information such as gender, age, degree level, type of university, academic discipline and prior voting experience.
- **Political Trust:** This was measured using 6 items related to respondents' level of trust in main democratic institutions, including the Parliament, the electoral system, the courts, the government, political parties and local government. This is in line with trust indicators taken and validated in other research projects (OECD Trust Survey (Prats et al., 2024). A mean score was computed from the items, with a higher score indicating greater trust in democratic institutions.

- Psychological Well-Being (PWB) was measured using 12 items from the shortened version of Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scales (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995), encompassing six core dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Dimensional Structure & Scoring Justification: The 12 items across the six dimensions were aggregated into an overall composite score representing eudaimonic psychological well-being. Conceptually, Ryff's framework is strictly operationalized as eudaimonic functioning (self-realization and positive psychological growth) and is not treated as equivalent to general subjective well-being, life satisfaction, or affective happiness. Although the six dimensions represent distinct facets of eudaimonic growth, they demonstrate strong inter-correlations and reflect an underlying overall factor of positive psychological functioning, supporting the use of a combined composite score in accordance with established validation studies for shortened scales (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).
- Democratic Participation: This was measured by eight items measuring participation in both institutional and civic forms, including voting intention, political discussion, attendance at meetings, signing of petitions, civic expression online, political campaigning and participation in student groups.
- *Conceptual & Empirical Justification*: Combining diverse activities (e.g., voting, online expression, discussions) into a single construct is conceptually justified because they represent a continuous spectrum of civic and political engagement that collectively reflect a student's overall democratic involvement (Poma et al., 2023; Pavlova et al., 2023). In today's student cohorts, traditional institutional actions (such as voting) and non-institutional actions (such as online civic expression and petition signing) are highly integrated forms of citizenship (Kirbiš & Lubej, 2025), and there exists a continuum of civic action among students (as evidenced by civic engagement research).

Statistical Analysis and Assumptions

Data were analysed using SPSS. The following procedures and criteria were used:

- Descriptive and Reliability Analysis: Mean scores and standard deviations were used to summarise descriptive data on levels of trust, well-being, and participation. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, and all scales demonstrated acceptable reliability with values above the 0.70 cut-off, ranging from 0.81 to 0.88 (not 1.00 as previously reported, which was a typographical error). Cronbach's alpha is interpreted strictly as a measure of internal consistency (how closely related a set of items are as a group) at a single point in time. It does not provide evidence of temporal stability or reliability.
- *Construct Validity*: Construct validity and measurement model fit were evaluated using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to verify the distinctiveness of the operationalized scales. The proposed three-factor model comprising political trust, psychological well-being, and democratic participation demonstrated acceptable model fit indices ($X^2/df = 2.34$, CFI = .93, TLI = .91, RMSEA = .062, SRMR = .051). These statistical indices confirm the empirical distinctiveness and structural validity of the three constructs, establishing adequate psychometric properties prior to hypothesis testing.
- Correlation and Regression: Pearson correlation was computed to assess the statistical relationships between variables. Linear regression analysis was used to test the statistical prediction of democratic participation by political trust, with a significance threshold of $p < .05$.
- Control Variables/Covariates: The main regression model emphasised the direct predictive link of political trust, as theorised in the main conceptual framework, and has been referred to as a control model.
- Mediation Analysis: To test the direct, indirect and total links between political trust, psychological well-being and democratic participation, the mediation analysis was conducted using Model 4 of the PROCESS macro in SPSS. The statistical indirect effect (H4) was determined by using bootstrapping with 5,000 bootstrap samples to obtain 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals (CIs). Unstandardized (B) and standardised (eta) coefficients are presented. If the 95% bootstrap confidence interval of the indirect association did not contain zero, this association was considered statistically significant. This is a cross-sectional design; therefore, we differentiate between statistical and causal mediation and present here the analysis of statistical indirect associations, which does not imply causality or order of occurrence.

Results

The following results are presented to detail the findings of the investigation:

Table 1
Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	168	48.0%
	Female	182	52.0%
Age	18-20 years	96	27.4%
	21-23 years	174	49.7%
	24 years and above	80	22.9%
Degree Level	Undergraduate	242	69.1%
	Postgraduate	108	30.9%
University Type	Public	214	61.1%
	Private	136	38.9%
Previous Voting Experience	Yes	196	56.0%
	No	154	44.0%

The demographic profile shows that male and female students, undergraduate and postgraduate students, and public and private university students were included in this sample. This diversity is useful, as political trust and participation can differ between women and men, between low and high levels, and between universities of the same type. The sample also included students who had previously voted and those who had not, as prior voting may be correlated with future voting.

Table 2
Reliability and Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Political Trust	6	0.84	3.28	0.71
Psychological Well-Being	12	0.88	3.54	0.66
Democratic Participation	8	0.81	3.19	0.74

All three scales showed acceptable internal consistency based on the reliabilities (Cronbach's alphas > 0.70, from 0.81 to 0.88). This shows that the items within each scale have good internal consistency in measuring their respective constructs. Descriptively, the best results were for psychological well-being, political trust and democratic participation.

Table 3
Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variable	Political Trust	Psychological Well-Being	Democratic Participation
Political Trust	1.00		
Psychological Well-Being	0.46	1.00	
Democratic Participation	0.52	0.49	1.00

Note: $p < 0.01$.

All the main variables had significant positive relationships in the correlation analysis. Political trust was related to psychological well-being ($r = 0.46, p < .01$) and to democratic participation ($r = 0.52, p < .01$). There was also a positive relationship between psychological well-being and democratic participation ($r = 0.49, p < .01$). These results support the conceptual argument that institutional confidence, personal well-being, and civic behaviour are interconnected among university students.

Table 4*Regression Analysis Predicting Democratic Participation*

Predictor	B	SE	Eta	t	p
Constant	1.41	0.18	-	7.83	0.000
Political Trust	0.54	0.05	0.52	11.32	0.000

Note: Model summary: $R = 0.52$, $R^2 = 0.27$, $F = 128.14$, $p < 0.001$.

Regression analysis showed that political trust was a significant statistical predictor of democratic participation ($\eta = 0.52$, $p < .001$). Students with higher trust in political institutions were statistically more likely to report democratic participation. The model explained 27% of the variance in democratic participation, indicating that political trust is a significant statistical predictor, though other unmeasured factors also contribute.

Table 5*Mediation Analysis (Statistical Direct, Indirect, and Total Associations)*

Path	Effect	SE	t	p
Political Trust -> Psychological Well-Being	0.43	0.04	9.67	0.000
Psychological Well-Being -> Democratic Participation	0.31	0.05	6.20	0.000
Political Trust -> Democratic Participation direct effect	0.41	0.05	8.13	0.000
Political Trust -> Democratic Participation total effect	0.54	0.05	11.32	0.000
Indirect effect through Psychological Well-Being	0.13	0.03	-	Significant
Bootstrap 95% confidence interval	0.08 to 0.19	-	-	Significant

Note: Bootstrap 95% bias-corrected bootstrap 95% confidence interval for the indirect association: 0.08 to 0.19 (Significant).

As shown in Table 5, political trust was significantly and positively associated with psychological well-being ($B = 0.43$, $SE = 0.04$, $t = 9.67$, $p < 0.001$), and psychological well-being was significantly and positively associated with democratic participation ($B = 0.31$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = 6.20$, $p < 0.001$). Political trust also exhibited a significant direct association ($B = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$) and a significant total association ($B = 0.54$, $p < 0.001$) with democratic participation. The statistical indirect association through psychological well-being was 0.13, with a 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval of 0.08 to 0.19. Because this interval does not include zero, the statistical indirect effect is significant, supporting H4 (partial mediation). This indicates that psychological well-being statistically mediates a portion of the association between political trust and democratic participation.

Discussion

This study examined the statistical association between trust in government and democratic participation among university students, and evaluated psychological well-being as a statistical mediator of this relationship. The results indicate positive statistical associations among political trust, psychological well-being, and democratic participation, with psychological well-being partially mediating the association between political trust and participation.

The descriptive results revealed a moderate level of political trust among students ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 0.71$). This moderate level points to complex and mixed attitudes among students towards democratic institutions such as parliament, courts, the electoral system, and local government. These mixed feelings could stem from a paradox between the value of democratic institutions and the issues faced within the system, such as a lack of direct representation, perceived corruption, or institutional non-responsiveness (2024). This discovery points to the fragility of institutional trust among youth and its strong relationship to perceptions of institutional fairness, transparency and accountability.

Even though there were academic, financial and career pressures, students' psychological well-being ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 0.66$) was reported to be fairly high, indicating overall positive eudaimonic functioning. Democratic participation was moderate ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 0.74$), suggesting that students engage in civic activities (e.g., voting intention, discussion, petition signing, online expression) to some degree but perhaps may not be more involved due to factors such as political apathy, influence by family members, or lack of political efficacy (Jiang & Shen, 2025; Venkatesan & Prabakar, 2024).

Correlation results indicated a strong positive relationship between political trust and psychological well-being ($r = 0.46$, $p < 0.01$). This implies that a sense of fairness and trust in institutions is linked to increased security and a sense of belonging to society, which in turn correlates with improved psychological well-being among learners (Lin et al., 2025). According to Social Capital Theory, institutional trust can diminish the sense of helplessness and alienation, thereby creating a safe external structure that helps individuals feel better (Zheng et al., 2026). On the other hand, negative feelings of distrust and unfairness could be connected to frustration and stress, which can adversely impact mental health.

There was also a positive relationship between political trust and democratic participation ($r = 0.52$, $p < .01$). This confirms the hypothesis that the trust in institutions is related to civic motivation. Students who believe that the electoral processes, courts and parliament are sincere and fair can believe that they can make a difference by actively participating (voting or petitioning). This corroborates previous studies which found that the trust in the political system is significant to the prediction of civic involvement.

Furthermore, a very high correlation was found between psychological well-being and democratic involvement ($r = 0.49$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that more high levels of psychological resources (autonomy, purpose in life, positive social relations) may be linked to higher levels of students feeling free to participate in civic life (Poma et al., 2023). Emotional stability and self-efficacy give the internal capacity to express political opinions and cooperate with others in public areas.

The regression model indicated that political trust statistically predicted 27% of the variance in democratic participation ($\eta^2 = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$). Although this confirms that trust is a significant correlate of engagement, the remaining 73% of the variance points to other unmeasured factors (Fung et al., 2022). In student populations, participation is also likely shaped by political efficacy, peer groups, civic education, family environment, socioeconomic background, and digital media use (Pavlova et al., 2023).

Finally, the mediation analysis supported that psychological well-being played a statistically significant mediating role between political trust and democratic participation (indirect association = 0.13, 95% bootstrap CI [0.08, 0.19]). This partial statistical mediation indicates two interrelated pathways:

1. **Direct Political Pathway:** Confidence in institutional fairness directly enhances students' motivation to engage in democratic activities.
2. **Indirect Psychological Pathway:** Institutional trust fosters a predictable social structure. Although unmeasured specific constructs such as 'hope', 'stability', and 'sense of belonging' were not evaluated as

direct survey scales, theoretically they represent underlying psychological manifestations that align with Ryff's eudaimonic dimensions (such as environmental mastery, purpose in life, and positive relations). Thus, political trust provides an environment of perceived security that indirectly supports eudaimonic well-being, which in turn nurtures the psychological capacity required for active democratic participation (Zhao et al., 2025)

The results of this study should be interpreted with care. As this study is cross-sectional, the pathways examine statistical indirect relationships rather than necessarily causal relationships over time. There may also be a reverse effect in which the activities make people feel better and thus more likely to trust political institutions, or naturally better people may be more likely to trust political institutions and get involved in the activities. Such temporal dynamics need to be addressed by longitudinal studies.

Implications

The current survey is cross-sectional and does not directly examine policy interventions. However, the observed statistical relationships among political trust, psychological well-being, and democratic participation suggest several avenues for exploration when seeking to enhance student civic engagement. Based on this research, the following are broad conceptual suggestions, and not necessarily empirically evaluated interventions:

1. Public and political institutions need to work towards building institutional trust by being fair, transparent and accountable. Young people are more likely to engage if they believe institutions hear their feedback and reflect it.
2. Civic Education should be integrated: Universities should offer opportunities for civic learning that are practical and engaging. That can include seminars, debates, student elections and model parliaments, demystifying the democratic process and cultivating civic efficacy.
3. Improving Psychosocial Support: Campus Counselling and student services need to be considered as indirect means of support to civic life. Students' psychological well-being (e.g. stress management, resilience training, peer support) could be addressed and create inner resources for active public engagement.
4. Building Inclusive Discussion Spaces: Universities can facilitate discussion groups among students that provide respectful and inclusive political discussion spaces. Dialogue is important in safe settings because students might not participate for fear of polarisation or social judgment.
5. Fostering Digital Citizenship: Online civic engagement is a key tool of youth expression and engagement, so it's important to teach media literacy, critical fact-checking, and the responsible use of the internet for constructive civic engagement.

Conclusion

Political trust, psychological well-being, and democratic participation were analysed in this study, with the latter examined as a potential statistical mediator. Results reveal positive, statistically significant relationships between political trust, psychological well-being and democratic participation, and psychological well-being partially mediated the relationship between political trust and democratic participation.

In conclusion, these findings imply that institutional and psychological factors are associated with students' democratic engagement. Positive psychological states – confidence, purpose, and social bonds – and trustworthy institutions increase students' motivation to participate in democratic activities. Thus, rather than seeing psychological health as a causal mechanism that "translates" trust into action, it is better to consider it an important personal resource associated with increased civic involvement in supportive institutional settings.

This study builds on this literature by examining these relationships using an integrated mediation model and by adding to the literature on the role of institutional trust and its connection to eudaimonic well-being and active civic involvement through the lens of Social Capital Theory. Future studies will need to be longitudinal in design to determine temporal ordering, sample from a variety of universities to ensure representativeness, and examine whether demographic covariates (e.g., gender, age, voting experience) moderate these relationships.

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