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Perceived Responsiveness and Public Trust in Local Governance: A Case Study of Islamabad

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Abstract

The level of public trust is intricately linked with effectiveness of local governance. The good governance theory stresses that principles of accountability, transparency, and responsiveness impact the government performance. Responsiveness in particular is crucial in building people's trust in their respective government. The research aims to quantitatively investigate the association of the Perceived Responsiveness and Public Trust in government among the residents of Islamabad. A cross-sectional study design was employed using a structured survey questionnaire. It was distributed in online and physical formats among 373 participants using convenience-based sampling technique. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure the Perceived Responsiveness and Public Trust in government. The instruments for both variables were adapted and the reliability of the scale was checked in a pilot study. Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and Regression analysis was conducted to test the predictive power of Perceived Responsiveness on Trust in Government in the study. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation between Perceived Responsiveness and Public Trust in Local Government ($r = 0.709$, $p < 0.01$). The regression analysis indicate that perceived responsiveness is a strong predictor of Public Trust in Local Government institutions. ($\beta = 0.709$, $p < 0.001$). The results of the study support the theoretical assertions that perceived responsiveness is a significant determinant of public trust in local government. Authorities who respond timely and effectively to citizen's demands enjoy higher degree of public trust in them.

Keywords: Local Government, Perceived Responsiveness, Trust, good governance, Pakistan.

Introduction

In the three-tier government structure, Local government stands at the lowest level followed by federal and provincial governments. (Ibrahim et al., 2016). According to Article 10 A of the Constitution of Pakistan, each province shall establish a local government setup whereby it will devolve administrative, political and financial powers to the elected representatives of the people. Pakistan inherited its local government system from British and has experienced various stages of transformation starting from Basic Democracies till 18th Amendment. As far as Islamabad is

concerned, it is under the direct administrative control of federal government unlike other provinces. One of the major turning points was the Islamabad Capital Territory Local Government Act 2015 that established the first ever Local government system for the capital which covers the whole of Islamabad. The Act provides for LG elections of all urban and rural areas of Capital comes under the jurisdiction of Metropolitan Corporation of Islamabad (MCI). The first ever local government served from 2015-2020 and after that no local bodies elections were held. In the absence of proper local government structure comprising of Chairman, Vice Chairman, and councilors, the secretaries are appointed to facilitate the coordination mechanism between the general public and Islamabad Capital Administration. However, the continuous tug of war between the MCI and Capital Development Authority CDA has led to the limited implementation of the Act. (Farooq & Iqbal, 2017). Their overlapping jurisdictions create confusion in urban planning and effective service delivery and, thus, influence the trust level of citizens in local authorities. The local government structure in Islamabad is unique in the sense that it straddles both developmental and municipal functions which are distributed in bureaucratic and elected entities. In terms of service delivery, the local structure faces critical challenges especially in financial autonomy as most of the financial decisions in local administration of the capital still retained with federal government of Pakistan.

Citizens' confidence in local governance has been labelled as an important yet critical pillar in establishing democratic legitimacy and competent governance. Governments who enjoy greater public trust are more likely to do their work smoothly and effectively as compared to those who experience lower public trust. (Sawatsuk et al., 2018). The key competitive edge of the public institutions lies in increasing trust of public along with effective and efficient implementation of its strategies. (Houston and Harding, 2013). However, The degree of Netizens' trust owned by local management considered to be closely related to its efficacy because trust is essential for civic engagement, regulatory compliance, and institutional legitimacy in general (Saiani et al., 2021).

Particularly since the 1960s, there has been an increasing concern regarding the waning of people trust in their government, which could have a negative impact on the execution of policies and citizen participation (Vu, 2021). Perceived lack of responsiveness, accountability issues, and low levels of public involvement in decision-making processes are some of the reasons for this decline (Nyawo, 2017). Perceived government agency responsiveness to citizen wants and concerns is a key factor affecting public trust. It mainly covers the capability to provide public related services in an effective and efficient manner as well as the degree to which governmental entities actively consider and respond to public feedback (Msenge & Nzewi, 2021).

Research supports positive correlation of almost all good governance principles with people trust in their local governance bodies. However, this study will only incorporate perceived responsiveness as good governance principle and will investigate its effect on local people's trust in governance of Islamabad.

Literature Review

Trust in government

Trust is a complex and multifaceted concept and numerous academics considered the idea being tough to explain and explore. (Cheema 2010; Van der Meer 2010). Trust studied in a psychological state encompasses belief, anticipation and confidence experienced by an individual regarding a specific entity (the trustee). It can be considered as a barometer to measure how people feel about the government. (Lee Y.2021). The concept mainly relates to peoples' expectations of the kind and interaction of the authorities with the public. It also comprises the behavior of the political elite, public managers, and citizens. (Cheema 2010).

Based on the theoretical framework of Organizational level Trust and psychological trust, Grimmelhuijsen et al. (2013) regarded Competence, Integrity and benevolence as three dimensions of trustworthiness. Competence refers to the extent citizens believe public authority to be capable,

expert, and professional. Integrity is the degree of public perception about the honesty and fulfillment of promises by the administrative bodies. Benevolence is a belief that government institutions act in the greatest interest for citizens and are concerned with their well-being.

Perceived Responsiveness

According to Yang and Pandey, Responsiveness is the capacity of organizations to cater public preferences. Esaiasson et al. (2017) define perceived responsiveness as the perception that the decision-makers pay attention to, and consider the interests and opinions of ordinary citizens, let alone their adoption as a solution. Responsiveness being a core principle of good governance theory, denotes the capability of the public departments to retort promptly as well as aptly over the public demands and feedback. (Kpu-Journal, 2024)

Perceived Responsiveness and Trust in Government

Researchers reasoned that the responsive attitude of the administrative institutions is directly linked with masses trust in government (Yousaf et al. 2016). Being effectively Responsive, the governance can assist in rebuilding confidence along with locals' trust in it. Public distrust can occur if citizens' demands are not met by the administration. (Cheema 2010).

Under democratic theory, responsiveness is not merely a reactive behavior but it is a continuous interaction that aligns public preferences and authorities decisions. (Pitkin, 1967; Dahl, 1971) According to the theories of Procedural Justice, individuals focus is not solely on outcomes of the decisions made but also on the inclusivity of the processes. (Tyler 2006). From this perspective, perceived responsiveness is the psychological signal that cues whether the political system is functioning and open to public or not. When such public perceptions are positive, thus, it has multiplier effect on trust, political stability and public compliance (Levi & Stoker, 2000; Norris, 2011).

It has been supported by existing literature that the responsiveness and trust are intricately linked as responsiveness is often considered a key antecedent in framing political trust (Blind, 2006). Zahran et al. (2021) stressed that responsiveness of government ensures that institutions fulfill stakeholders' demands and needs. When ordinary citizens holds a perception that their voices are being heard and their viewpoints can influence policy outcomes, their level of trust in the system manifolds (Hetherington, 2005; Wlezien & Soroka, 2007).

Christensen and laegreid (2005) regarded responsiveness as an important yet critical pillar in building Trust in Government and if this falters then the masses lose confidence in administrative institutions. Perceived fairness along with openness experienced by the governing bodies are closely related to responsiveness and hence perform significant part in transforming citizens' faith in their governance. (OECD 2013).

Responsiveness is also linked to different elements of trust. It reinforces the public perception of competence if citizens observe a well-defined and targeted action in response to their demands. The public then considers the local authorities to be more capable, professional, and having expertise in handling their needs. (Christensen and Laegreid, 2005) Empirical Research conducted by Grimmelikhuijsen et al. 2013 stated that responsiveness, along with transparency increases perceptions of competence if the activities and performance of the government are visible and consistent. Integrity, as the second dimension of trust, is also closely related to perceived responsiveness. When ordinary citizens believe their governments are equally responsive to all segments of society, not only to powerful interest groups and elites, they consider their institutions to be fair, morally upright and proactive in the fulfillment of their demands. It has been observed in cross-sectional studies that integrity and responsiveness are closely tied, especially when authorities consult people on important decisions and by providing them with valid justifications for their actions (Esaiasson et al., 2017). However, if the government does not practice inclusiveness in decision making then it will eventually deteriorate public trust. (Mansbridge, 2003). Furthermore, perceived

fairness in response to complaints from marginalized groups is a litmus test for governments' integrity (Tyler & Huo 2002). Perceived responsiveness is considered to be the most direct contributor to benevolence. when citizens feel heard and observe their concerns are being translated to targeted actions, they are more likely to interpret government behavior as benevolent. (Hetherington, 2005; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002).

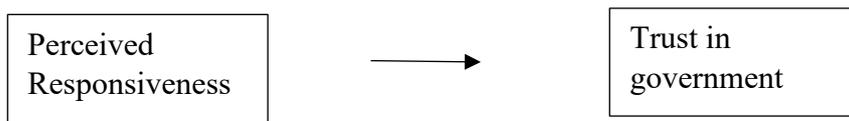
Being the core component of democratic legitimacy, when citizens perceive that public authorities respond to their demands, interests, and input, it tends to enhance their level of trust. (Miller and Listhaug, 1990). Norris (2011) argued that Government institutions that exhibit prompt response to public preferences secure citizens' trust by maintaining legitimacy; conversely however, unresponsive governments tends to encounter more civic disengagement.

When it is perceived by the masses that their claims are being acknowledged thus their opinions greatly impact policy outcomes, their trust in the system increases (Hetherington, 2005; Wlezien & Soroka, 2007). A survey study was carried out by Han et al in almost three different local governments in Nepal. The findings revealed as perceived local administration responsive behavior was significantly positively related to their residents strength of trust in their respective local administrations. The results further underscores how the degree of confidence and participation by public in local government decision making was impacted by the prompt response of city administration to the queries and demands of the citizens. Similarly, a research study was conducted in 11 cities of Vietnam with 529 respondents by Nguyen et al. the outcomes showed the inhabitants' confidence in their local bodies electronic services was meaningfully influenced through their perception as well as gradation of responsiveness. The author highlighted that the public trust digital governance more when the public authorities respond to their feedback and demands in a prompt manner without delay. It was also evident from a research study held in China that responsiveness shape people trust in their administrative authorities. (Huang et al.)

A surfeit of studies examined the role by perceived responsiveness of the local administration in improving public trust in government. After considering perceived responsiveness as an important element that affects levels of people's trust on governing authorities, the subsequent hypothesis has been framed.

Hypothesis

- **H1:** Perceived responsiveness has a positive impact on public trust in government.



Research Methodology

The research employed a quantitative approach having a cross-sectional study design. Quantitative methods are often used, as within a defined population, they have capacity in measuring variables and generalizing the research findings. (Suen et al., 2014). In order to check the hypothesis, a survey methodology was carried out with citizens living in Islamabad capital territory comprising of both urban and rural population. Convenience sampling technique has been used by the researcher primarily due to its cost-efficiency and practicality. Participants were chosen based upon their convenience for the scholar. (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim 2016). A sample size of 373 was selected for the research study (Adhikari 2021). Data collection was done using a structured Questionnaire that was designed to capture the independent and the dependent variables. Survey questionnaires were distributed simultaneously in Online and physical formats. Mixed mode data collection technique was utilized as it can increase response rates, thereby improving data quality with reduced non-bias response. Respondents' demographic information was gathered to have a background knowledge

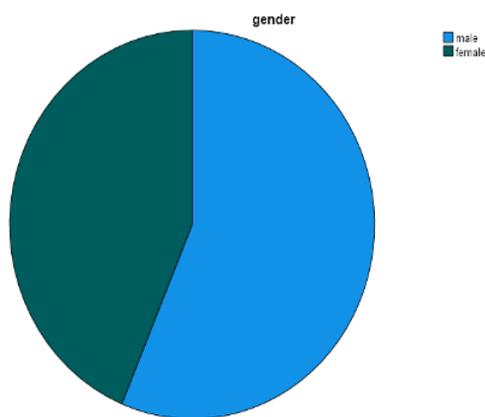
about the participants. The age of the respondents was categorized in six categories (20 years or below to the age 60 years and above), marital status of respondent was characterized as single, or married, or divorced/widowed. The level of Education of the participants was ranged from matric to PhD (5 categories). Lastly, the employment status of the participant of the study was examined using 5 categories starting from self-employed then goes beyond till retired.

Perceived responsiveness was measured using a five-item scale adapted from (Vigoda-Gadot and Yuval, 2003). Perceived public trust was measured with a five-item scale adapted from (Grimmelikhuijsen, S. (2012). (Kumagai and Ilorio, 2020). Both the independent and dependent variables for the research question was measured on five-items Lickert scale. In the scale 1 was labelled as Strongly Disagree, 2 is characterized as Disagree, neutral stands on 3, agree termed as 4 f, and finally 5 labelled as Strongly agree. Pilot testing was carried out on the research instruments to check the reliability of the used scale. The Cronbach's Alpha for Public Trust on Government is 0.891. The Cronbach's Alpha value for the variable perceived responsiveness stands at 0.891.

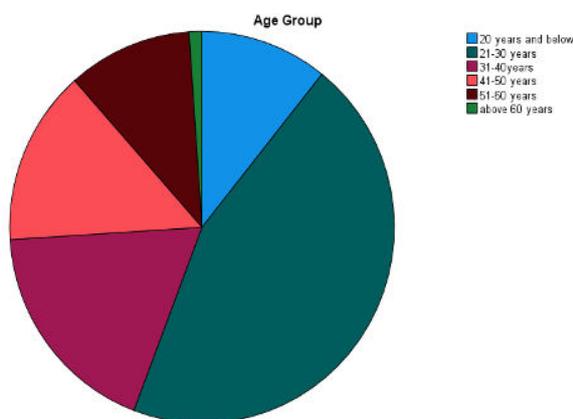
The data was analyzed via Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Results and Discussion

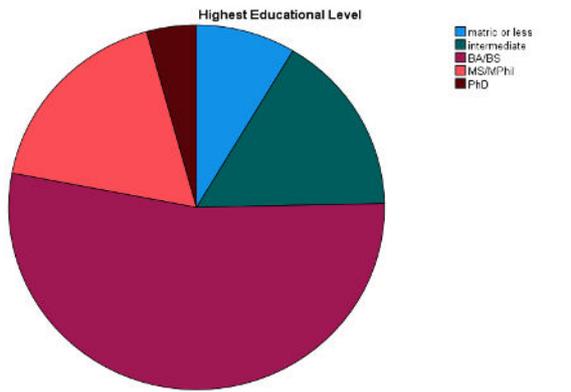
Descriptive Statistics



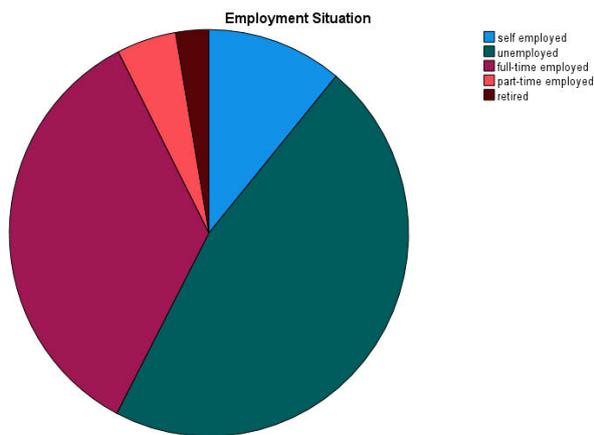
Out of 373 respondents, majority (56%) of them were male participants.



The data shows that 45% of the contributors were from the age group 21-30.



It is evident from the data that the maximum participants were graduates having BA or BS degrees.



It has been revealed through the data, 46% of all the contributors of the study were unemployed with 34.9% having full-time jobs.

Reliability Statistics

| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
|------------------|------------|
| .891 | 5 |

The first test is reliability of Perceived Responsiveness. It was a five-item scale that shows the value of Cronbach’s Alpha at 0.891.

Reliability Statistics

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Descriptive Statistics

| | Mean | Std. Deviation | N |
|----|--------|----------------|-----|
| TG | 2.4231 | .71075 | 373 |
| PR | 2.4139 | .67459 | 373 |

The above statistics shows mean values of Independent and dependent variables. Participants in the research demonstrates trust in local governance of Islamabad hence shown a mean of 2.42 that predicts their agreeableness on the prevalence of trust in government. As far as the Perceived Responsiveness is concerned, the data observed a mean of 2.41 It states that the respondents have shown a satisfactory response on the independent variable.

Validity Assessment through Correlational Analysis

Correlations

| | | TG | PR |
|----|---------------------|--------|--------|
| TG | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .709** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | <.001 |
| | N | 373 | 373 |
| PR | Pearson Correlation | .709** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | <.001 | |
| | N | 373 | 373 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

For the assessment of the construct validity of the measurement model, a Pearson correlational analysis (Bivariate parametric) has been conducted to check the linear association of both dependent and independent variable. It was directed to know whether there exists some kind of relationship among variables or not. It was also helpful to check the dimension of relationship (positive or negative). The table shows the correlation between Perceived Responsiveness and Trust in government. N shows the sample size of 373 respondents with data on these variables.

The findings in the correlational investigation were statistically significant. Perceived Responsiveness exhibited strong and significantly positive correlation with trust on Government, $r = .709$ and $p < 0.01$, suggesting that is Public Trust on Local Government is strongly associated with perceived responsiveness of the government authorities. The correlation results validate the use of perceived responsiveness as an independent variable in the upcoming regression model to explore its effect on strength of resident's Trust in Governance.

Regression Analysis for Hypothesis testing

Linear regression was conducted to inspect the effect of independent variable over Trust on Government. The objective was to determine how public perception about the government responsiveness contribute to their trust on local governance set up of Islamabad.

Model Summary^b

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Durbin-Watson |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| 1 | .709 ^a | .503 | .501 | .50197 | 1.670 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), PR

b. Dependent Variable: TG

As Model summary shows that the correlation coefficient is $R=0.709$. Adjusted R square is 0.503 that indicates that 50% of the variance in public trust in government authorities can be predicted from people perception about the responsiveness of the authorities. According to Cohen (1988), this is a large effect. The Durbin Watson for this data depicts the value stands at 1.670 thus closer to 2 fulfilling the supposition of independent errors to be plausible.

ANOVA^a

| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|-------|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|---------|--------------------|
| 1 | Regression | 94.438 | 1 | 94.438 | 374.784 | <.001 ^b |
| | Residual | 93.484 | 371 | .252 | | |
| | Total | 187.922 | 372 | | | |

a. Dependent Variable: TG

b. Predictors: (Constant), PR

The ANOVA shows value at $F=374.78$ and is statistically significant. This indicates that the predictor (PR) significantly predict public trust in government. The significance level is 0.000 indicates that our alternate hypothesis is accepted.

Coefficients^a

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|-------|------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|-------|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | .620 | .097 | | 6.413 | <.001 |
| | PR | .747 | .039 | .709 | 19.359 | <.001 |

a. Dependent Variable: TG

The beta value tells us about the relationship between dependent variable and predictors. If the value is positive, we can say that there is a positive relationship between the two. In the table beta value is positive depicting that positive significant association exists amid Perceived Responsiveness and Trust in Government. 0.747 presents regression coefficient, considered as regression line. The fact to notice here is that 0.747 is not same as correlation coefficient (0.709). Significance value is <0.001 so H1 is accepted.

Residuals Statistics^a

| | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation | N |
|----------------------|----------|---------|--------|----------------|-----|
| Predicted Value | 1.3670 | 4.3546 | 2.4231 | .50385 | 373 |
| Residual | -1.70892 | 1.84046 | .00000 | .50130 | 373 |
| Std. Predicted Value | -2.096 | 3.834 | .000 | 1.000 | 373 |
| Std. Residual | -3.404 | 3.666 | .000 | .999 | 373 |

a. Dependent Variable: TG

The research findings prove the hypothesis of the study that stated as *Perceived responsiveness has a positive impact on citizen's trust in their government*. The dependent variable is directly influenced through the degree responsiveness of the local authorities. If the local government promptly addresses the concerns and feedback of the general public then it enhances trust and confidence of the masses. It is evident from the studies that as the local administration exhibits timely response to public demands, the level of public trust increases by fostering community confidence. (Arianti & Deviani, 2024) residents' confidence in their administration is highly determined through the performance of government institutions via handling public issues and concerns and the degree of responsiveness is an integral element in it. (Han et al., 2024). Porumbescu (2015) in his study argued that if government performance in terms of responsive is aligned with the citizens' preferences and needs, it aids in nurturing their trust in public institutions.

Empirical studies reveals that people experiencing higher levels of trust on their respective administrations depicts more inclination towards following the guidelines and regulations of the governing bodies. However, literature also supports that citizen trusted governments enjoy more autonomy as well as democratic power. (Hickmann et al., 2017). The research outcomes illustrates that perception of responsive attitude enhances the degree by which locals' trust in their administration. A study conducted by Mansoor 2021 also highlights the significant positive role of independent variable in enhancing trust of local people in the activities as well as departments of the government.

Krol and Zdonek, 2021 considered administrative authorities' preparedness to entertain people's demands and grievances as a barometer for perceived responsiveness. Moreover, failure to comply with the needs and concerns of the public in a timely manner can lead to uncertain situation and public distrust that may result in riots and agitation movements against government authorities. (Miller, 2015).

It is evident from the findings that the strength of local people's trust was directly proportional upon the responsive behavior of governing authorities. Challenges in effective service delivery may escalate because of the duality of responsibilities among different institutions present in local government of Islamabad. Therefore, once this air of ambiguity among institutions clears, then they will be more responsive towards public concerns and feedback, leading to greater citizen trust and confidence in local administration.

Conclusion

The strength of association in responsiveness and local people's trust in Islamabad grassroot level administrative settings ascertained that the degree of trust is closely linked to the responsive attitude of government. There is no denying the fact that local administration is performing its duties in providing quality services to the masses; however, the response time and its effectiveness can affect public confidence in institutions. The role duality among local government institutions can further slowdown the process. Therefore, the structural framework for service delivery mechanisms has to be looked into to enhance public trust by improving the responsiveness of the local authorities. In the arena of local governance, the existing body of knowledge has been enriched through the outcome of

this study. However, there were certain limitations faced by the study that may impact the interpretation of the findings. Firstly, the chosen sample could not fully denote the wider populace and can limit the generalizations of the outcomes. Potential biases in the form of social desirability can be introduced by using self reported data and it may influence the reliability of results. The research has not incorporated other indicators of governance that can influence public trust, thus future studies may check the impression of other critical indicators effecting the dependent variable at grassroots. A comparative analysis of urban and rural areas of the Islamabad can be conducted to evaluate influence of responsiveness on trust.

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