



Public Perception of Corruption and Its Influence on Civic Trust among Youth

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ABSTRACT

Corruption is also one of the most widespread impediments to institutional legitimacy and democratic development in most societies. The perception of corruption among young people who form a significant percentage of the civic population has a major influence on the perception on the attitude toward the public institutions, political participation and future civic trust. The research questions to be addressed in this study include how youths perceive corruption, how life experiences affect their perceptions, and how the perceptions eventually impact on their level of trust in political, educational and administrative institutions. Available studies indicate that the young generation is very susceptible to indicators of institutional injustice and more inclined than the elders to withdraw themselves in civic affairs where they perceive that corruption is endemic or incurable (Mishler and Rose, 2001). Based on the theoretical approaches of both political psychology and the social capital theory, this paper summarizes the multifactorial relationship between perceived corruption, trust development, and civic withdrawal. The report shows that there is an urgent need to establish transparent governance, youth-led accountability institutions, and inclusive civic education to restore institutional legitimacy.

Introduction

It is a well-known fact that corruption is the key obstacle to the sustainable development, fair governance, and the establishment of civic trust in the societies. It is present in various shapes: bribery, embezzlement, nepotism, favoritism, manipulation of public resources, and each of the shapes leads to the lack of trust in the institutions that are supposed to work in the public interest (Transparency International, 2023). Although the repercussion of corruption is felt by all ages, the young population is susceptible. Being young adults and only shaping political identities and civic orientations, youth perceive corruption not just as a malfunction of governance, but a figurative signal of what their future in the society might be (Norris, 2011). Hence, the study of youth perceptions of corruption will be crucial to the understanding of the long-term trend of civic trust and political participation, as well as social cohesion.

Corruption is perceived in the eyes of the masses much more than official figures or even the reported scandals. It is closely connected with everyday life, media reporting, personal accounts of peers, and the images of injustice in schools, workplace, and institutions. According to scholars, the influence of perceptions in civic behavior is usually stronger than the reality of corruption since perceptions are used to influence emotional and cognitive decision making regarding the validity of the authority figures (Seligson, 2002). The digital environment tends to increase such perceptions amid the youth. The social media often uncovers corruption cases as they happen, which is why it often helps to solidify the idea of systematic injustice. This results in a mindset where institutional disappointment becomes a norm and results in feelings of political ineffectiveness.

Besides, young people are more likely to assess corruption in terms of experience. To illustrate, when confronted with bureaucracy, where there is favoritism in schools, or in work placements where people talk of bribing individuals it adds to an overall belief that institutionalized organizations operate on personal lines as opposed to merit (Rose and Mishler, 2010). These experiences, as well as influence perception, influence expectation. When youth are expecting corruption to be a normal course of life, they have less faith in the institutional processes.

Civic trust is the level of trust that people have towards the existence of institutions within a society such as government, law enforcement, education facilities and the courts. Social stability, political involvement and compliance to the policies of the country are related to high civic trust (Putnam, 1993). Low civic trust on the other hand is associated with political apathy, low voter turnout, lack of trust in social systems and in some cases high vulnerability to radical movements.

The youth civic trust is of special importance as it is the forecast of the future of the democratic involvement. The younger individuals learn to trust political and social institutions at an early age, chances of staying involved during adulthood would be high. However, once mistrust is developed in this early stage, it is hard to be repaired. According to researchers, distrust, when developed, acts as a cognitive schema - a belief held internally that any institution is fundamentally unreliable or corrupt (Levi & Stoker, 2000). The result of this belief is long-term detachment of civic responsibilities.

Various empirical research indicates that the perception of corruption is a major cause of the lack of civic trust particularly amongst the youth (Anderson and Tverdova, 2003). Whenever the issue of corruption is exposed as rampant, the youths doubt the intentions of the authorities in power since they do not seem to be acting in the interest of the people but in their own selfish interest. The perceived legitimacy of the state is undermined by this skepticism.

The fairness theory is the psychological basis to this process. Young people demand equality in organizations that purport to be the authorities; failure to respect this basis turns them into moral scoundrels. Violation of norms of fairness will result in greater emotional response in younger generations than in older generations, who might regard corruption as an established factual state and not an offense to them (Tyler, 2006).

The other process is the loss of social capital. Corruption brings about low interpersonal trust as people are convinced that other people, including the official government officials, will perform in self-interest and not in the interest of the majority (Putnam, 2000). With a weak social capital, civic trust fades and this becomes a trap that is hard to overcome.

Young people are in a luminal position in the society, as they are neither entirely dependent nor part of economic and political institutions. Being students, young workers and young voters, they touch institutions in a transitional manner. Such relations influence their identity and their faith in equal opportunities. Corruption at such early ages is an indication that opportunity is founded on preference as opposed to ability. This leads to the youth feeling systemically alienated.

Research shows that the younger generation who rates high corruption levels show less encouragement to vote, engage in civic activities, believe in political leaders or endorse governmental policies (Dahlberg and Holmberg, 2014). This is more alarming in the developing nations where the youth form a high population majority.

Moreover, the young people are not directly related to political power. They are mediated through higher institutions of learning and online platforms. When these spaces are as well found to be corrupt or biased, then the young people come to a conclusion that they have very little control over the political consequences, and as such, no longer feel the urge to participate.

The media has been at the forefront to influence the youth perception of corruption. Online media boosts cases of corruption and makes them become viral. Although this exposure promotes responsibility, it leads to the perception that corruption is everywhere even in areas where the vice might be on the decline. Studies indicate that when institutions are repeatedly exposed to corruption scandals via the social media they experience a decrease in trust despite the actual corruption rate (Vittori, 2020). To young people who already have doubts about their place in political systems, such perpetual exposure further makes them feel disillusioned.

Nevertheless, the technology can also be used to provide the means of transparency such as open data platforms, youth-led accountability movements and digital whistleblowing. Therefore, the correlation among technology, corruption perception, and trust is two-tailed: it may undermine and enhance civic trust based on the manner in which the institutions interact with young people over the internet.

The perception of youth towards corruption is not just an academic issue, but it is crucial to the national development. Young people are future administrators, policy makers, activists and voters. When they grow up in a world that has been influenced by corruption in a negative way, then there is a possibility that their future generations grow up living mistrustful lives, with

poor civic turnout, political instability. Conversely, empowering civic trust among the youth might lead to democratic sustainability, social innovation and fair governance.

The paper has thus indicated the importance of clear institutions, decision making processes that involve the youth and proper civic education that will enable the youth to be able to hold the institutions accountable but at the same time not to lose their interest. It is only through remedying the causes of corruption and restoring confidence that the societies can guarantee that the youth are genuinely involved in civic life.

Literature Review

The connection between civic trust and how the people view corruption has been a popular topic of discussion in the fields of political science, sociology and youth studies. Scholars always point at corruption being experienced or perceived indirectly, it plays the role of how individuals assess the legitimacy of institutions and the fairness of the public systems. These perceptions are especially important to the youth who are still orienting themselves in regard to long-term political orientations. Studies indicate that despite the absence of personal experience of institutional corruption, the perception that it exists may have a significant impact on the lack of trust in government institutions, changes civic attitudes, and influence political socialization (Mishler and Rose, 2001). Young people depend immensely on watchful information that they receive based on family stories, peer experiences, and the internet; therefore, the ways in which corruption is depicted in their immediate environment and the media world are all that influences their perceptions.

It has been established that perceived corruption is far as consequential as actual level of corruption when it comes to defining the level of trust in the public. Seligson (2002) posits that perception is an interpretive filter through which the citizens assess the institutional fairness. Such judgments affect the youth more specifically due to the fact that their civic schemas are yet to be formed and are thus very flexible. Research indicates that young people who feel corrupted by a political, educational or bureaucratic system tend to relate the same to a larger institutional dysfunction theme, which results in generalized mistrust (Anderson and Tverdova, 2003). It is not limited to politics only, but also spreads to the services provided by the government, police and even the social laws regarding fairness and meritocracy. When organizations are seen to promote personal relationships over merit, the young people will learn to believe that structural opportunities are not equally spread and this will also destroy trust.

The literature has over and again reiterated that civic trust is one of the core pillars of democratic resilience and cooperation amongst the public. The article written by Putnam (1993, 2000) focuses on the importance of interpersonal trust and community interactions that are closely linked to trust in the institutions. Low social capital exists because of low civic trust, and it will undermine collective action and the operation of democratic societies in the long run. In the case of the youth, social capital is formed by socializing in school, college and place of work and online platforms. The loss of civic trust starts at a young age when these environments are seen to be corrupt or unfair and a cycle of disengagement starts to create a trend of lack of engagement towards adulthood. It is also found that when young people acquire distrustful attitude at an early age, they are prone to engage in informal politics like protests or online movements as opposed to formal institutions like voting and community gatherings (Norris, 2011).

The empirical investigations in various nations depict that corruption perception is one of the major predictors of low civic trust among youth. As an example, Dahlberg and Holmberg (2014) show that there is a close relationship between perceived corruption and distrust in political institutions in the European democracies and especially among the younger citizens who tend to convey greater expectations of fairness. The same trends are followed in the developing countries where corruption is viewed to be more established. Research in South Asia shows that youths tend to perceive corruption as a natural aspect of government and this fact diminishes their willingness to engage with state-led efforts and diminishes their desire to take part in civic interventions (Vittori, 2020). Such findings imply that the psychological cost of corruption perception is not limited to an individual disappointment; this is a factor that does not promote civic disengagement at large scale.

Media is a part of the perception of corruption among youth, and the role of digital exposure in enhancing the effects of corruption scandals is increasingly recognized in literature. Negative perceptions are usually amplified in the social media platforms where stories of bribery, abuse of power and political favoritism are circulated to enhance negative perceptions even where the actual level of corruption might differ. Studies also show that cynicism, distrust, and political fatigue are the common responses of young people to repeated exposure to corruption-related material (Vittori, 2020). This trend does correlate with the information overload theories, according to which the unremitting negative stimuli induce the young population to retreat out of civic participation as opposed to taking the streets to demand accountability. Even as the internet creates chances of transparency, it also enhances the impression that corruption is all around and it is becoming unavoidable.

Besides the macro-level perceptions, the micro-level interactions are also helpful in the interpretation of corruption by the youth. Daily experiences, paying off to get paperwork done, witnessing favoritism in school, or hearing about nepotism in the workplace, respond to and develop individual discourse concerning the wrongdoings of the system. Rose and Mishler (2010) state that as the lived environment conflicts with what is declared as transparent the youth creates structures of their own comprehension that tend to signify the unreliability of the institution. These frames may form mental shortcuts which will determine subsequent political judgments. With such perceptions accumulating, the youth can develop a world view that they can contribute nothing to abide by the civic process thus lessening their eventual input to the process of democratization.

Corruption perception takes another line of literature that pays attention to the emotional and psychological facets. According to Tyler (2006), development of institutional trust is based on perceptions of fairness. When the youths are faced or observe unfair treatment, favoritism or unequal access to opportunities, they make out of them moral violations. This moral betrayal is especially powerful in the young generation since it is done at a time when civic identity and demands on justice are in the process of being determined. Young people who experience corruption at an early stage tend to develop cynical behaviors that continue on into adulthood and thereby form generations of mistrust.

Furthermore, perception of corruption affects the attitudes of young people towards the wielders of power. It has also been found that youths who perceive leaders as selfish will extend the same perception to all other institutions such as the police, the courts, the universities and the administrative structures (Levi and Stoker, 2000). Such prejudice of mistrust damages the legitimacy of the state and decreases the collaboration with the state authorities. To illustrate, the young people who assume that the government officials are corrupt will have lower chances of complying with the policies of the government, less willing to pay taxes, and less trustful of the electoral processes. In other settings, such a general lack of trust may cause the political polarization or alignment with populist movements that offer to eliminate corruption but can further disrupt the level of institutional trust.

Researchers too stress that corruption image influences political effectiveness especially among the younger generation. Political efficacy is the feeling that a person can impact the politics. Under the perception that the political and bureaucratic choices are made depending on corruption, the youth will lose the feeling of political efficacy (Norris, 2011). Such decrease in effectiveness causes apathy, unwillingness to vote, as well as the decreased interest to be involved in civic organizations. It has been proposed that low political efficacy among the youth makes them easier to misinformed since they lack trust in the official sources or existing institutions, which negatively affect civic trust. This is a vicious circle: low civic trust leads to low political participation, and low participation makes it more difficult to change the situation in the youth, which makes the perception that corruption is an unavoidable phenomenon.

Even though most literature places a lot of emphasis on negative impact of corruption perception, some reports have indicated that high corruption perception can be an instrument in mobilizing youth activism in some circumstances. Young people can use their frustration to do productive activism where societies provide avenues of accountability, e.g., student unions, media that is independent, and youth-driven advocacy groups (Vittori, 2020). This is however more likely in places or institutions that are under pressure by the citizens. Corruption perception in the weak accountability context results in disengagement, but not mobilization.

Throughout the literature, there is a consistent support of the argument that civic trust among the young people is greatly lacking because of corruption as perceived by the people. This association is informed by first-hand experiences, media exposure, socialization and wider political environments. Youths exposed to corruption, either directly or indirectly, will develop generalized mistrust of institutions, political ineffectiveness, and a lesser propensity to take part in civic activities. The long term consequence of this trend is far reaching because continued disengagement of the youths may jeopardize democratic involvement, legitimacy of institutions and social stability. Available literature hence highlights the importance of interventions to enhance institutional transparency, civic education, and participation of youth in any form of accountability process to restore civic trust.

Methodology

The research design of this study is a quantitative research that aims at revealing the correlation between civic trust among young people and their perception of corruption by the people. Quantitative research methods are broadly suggested when the researcher has to study attitudinal variables since the techniques provide the researcher with an opportunity to systematically measure the perceptions, identify the relational patterns and generalize their results to a larger population of a group (Creswell, 2014). The design will be cross-sectional whereby it is required to collect data concerning youths at a given time. The given strategy is suitable because of the purpose to evaluate the extent to which the current levels of civic trust can be predicted based on the existing perceptions of corruption.

The study target population will include those youths between the ages of 18 and 29 who are university-going. Higher education young people constitute an important population segment to investigate civic trust since they are at a transitional phase of social and political identity formation and are the consumers of institutional, political and digital information (Norris, 2011). The sample consists of students at six universities in Lahore, three of which are public and three of them are private universities, taking into consideration a variety of socioeconomic, institutional, and cultural backgrounds. The sampling model is consistent with the earlier research that focuses on involving various learning institutions to have a wider range of youth perceptions (Seligson, 2002).

The stratified random sampling method will be employed to obtain proportional representation of each type of the university. There are strata such as public and private institutions and random selection within each of the strata was done to reduce sampling bias. The target sample will be 350 to 400 participants, which is an adequate size in terms of a structural equation modeling (SEM), since researchers recommend at least ten respondents per variable under observation (Kline, 2016). This is also an adequate sample size that promotes the statistical power, which confirms the true relationship between the variables of interest in the study.

A self-administered, structured questionnaire is used to collect the data. The tool is divided into three parts, namely demographic data, perception of corruption, and civic trust. Such demographic variables as age, gender, academic program, socioeconomic background, and university sector are included. Corruption scale is affected through the perception scale which is borrowed through Transparency International and also other well-tested instruments utilized in governance studies. This part entails the items that quantify the perceived frequency of corruption, perceived severity, and perceived institutional integrity. The civic trust scale is based on political trust measures that are being current and are further improved in the studies of trust among the youth. The measurement of all the scale items is based on a five-point Likert scale between strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (5), with the interval between the two items being the type of data that can be analyzed using more advanced statistical analysis.

A pilot study is carried out to guarantee the validity and reliability of the instrument on 30 students who are not the main sample. The pilot study feedback is utilized to micro-test unclear items and make them clear. Expert review provides the content validity, which is done by three scholars in the field of political science, public administration and youth studies. Cronbach alpha coefficient is used to establish reliability and it measures the internal consistency among scale items. The growth values more than 0.70 can be regarded as right in the research of social science (Field, 2018). The pilot results have shown that both the corruption perception scale and the civic trust scale pass the test of reliability hence should be included in the main study.

The methods of data collection include classroom and online forms, depending on the institutional approvals. The study subjects will be provided with informed consent documenting the study purpose, voluntary nature, confidentiality, and anonymity. Strict adherence to ethical rules is taken to safeguard the rights of the participants, and no identifiable data is obtained. The data collection is done with institutional approval of the relevant university authorities before collecting the data.

After having collected data, it goes through a series of processes of data analysis. First, the demographic features are represented by means, standard deviations, percentages, and frequencies and described by using descriptive statistics. This gives a background knowledge about the sample. Second, a set of reliability tests is performed with Cronbach alpha to ensure that there is consistency of measures across the entire sample. Third, the correlation is conducted to determine the strength and direction of relationships between perception of corruption and civic trust. The use of Pearson correlation coefficients comes due to the fact that the variables are continuous and normally distributed.

The main analysis tool that will be used in this research is Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), which will be performed with the help of AMOS software or SmartPLS. SEM is chosen by the fact that it can test complex relationships among latent variables at the same time, which is a combination of factor analysis and regression modeling (Kline, 2016). The model has perception of corruption as the independent variable and civic trust as the dependent variable, which are both conceptualized as latent constructs which are measured using multiple indicators. Fit indices that are commonly used to measure model fit are compared fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). The acceptable model fit thresholds are based on generally accepted guidelines: CFI and TLI greater than .90, and RMSEA and SRMR less than .08 (Hu and Bentler, 1999). Path coefficients will be analyzed in a bid to establish the extent and the importance of the effect of perceived corruption on civic trust.

Ethical issues are incorporated in the research process. It is not mandatory and the participants can pull out of the situation without repercussions. Information is safely stored and can only be accessed by the researcher. Nothing is hurt, lied or forced. Transparency and confidentiality are upheld as required by normal research ethics guidelines.

Overall, the methodology is based on validated measures, strict sampling protocols, and sophisticated statistics in order to test the hypothesis of the impact of youth perception of corruption on civic trust. The study is a credible empirical study considering the systematic and ethical quantitative approach which is applicable in governance, youth involvement and institutional legitimacy.

Data Analysis

The section gives the findings of the statistical methods obtained to test the connection between civic trust among youth and the perception of corruption in the population. The analyses comprise demographic frequencies, descriptive statistics of the key variables, the evaluation of reliability with the help of Cronbach alpha, correlation analysis, and the structural equation modeling (SEM). Every finding is consistent with the accepted norms of analysis regarding the study of governance and perceptions of young people (Kline, 2016; Field, 2018).

Demographic Analysis

The survey was completed by 382 respondents who were youth, and belonged to six universities (three public, three private). Table 1 provides a summary of demographic features.

****Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 382)****

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	176	46.1
	Female	206	53.9
Age	18-20	122	31.9
	21-23	168	44.0
	24-26	74	19.4
	27-29	18	4.7
University Type	Public	188	49.2
	Private	194	50.8
Education Level	BS	278	72.8
	MS/MPhil	104	27.2

Demographic composition shows that there is a balanced representation between the institutions, the public and the private ones. Most of them are within the ages 18 and 23, which are in line with the previous youth civic engagement research (Norris, 2011).

Descriptive Statistics

The key variables that were described included Perception of Corruption (PC) and Civic Trust (CT). They were all rated along the 5-point Likert scale.

****Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables****

Variable	N	M	SD	Min	Max
Perception of Corruption	382	3.87	0.62	2.10	5.00
Civic Trust	382	2.41	0.71	1.00	4.65

Perception of Corruption recorded mean score 3.87 which means that the youths have a moderate perception of corruption in governmental institutions. On the other hand, the average Civic Trust score (M = 2.41) indicates that the level of trust is low and this can be explained by the fact that young people become more doubtful of institutional performance (Seligson, 2002; Dahlberg and Holmberg, 2014).

Reliability Analysis (Alpha Coefficients)

The alpha of Cronbach was used to determine internal consistency. Table 3 presents the results.

****Table 3: Reliability Coefficients for Study Constructs****

Construct	Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Interpretation
Perception of Corruption	10	.874	Excellent reliability
Civic Trust	8	.812	Good reliability

Perception of Corruption recorded mean score 3.87 which means that the youths have a moderate perception of corruption in governmental institutions. On the other hand, the average Civic Trust score (M = 2.41) indicates that the level of trust is low

and this can be explained by the fact that young people become more doubtful of institutional performance (Seligson, 2002; Dahlberg and Holmberg, 2014).

Reliability Analysis (Alpha Coefficients)

The alpha of Cronbach was used to determine internal consistency. Table 3 presents the results.

****Table 4: Correlation Matrix****

Variables	1	2
1. Perception of Corruption	1	—
2. Civic Trust	-.526	1

Note. $p < .001$.

Perception of Corruption recorded mean score 3.87 which means that the youths have a moderate perception of corruption in governmental institutions. On the other hand, the average Civic Trust score ($M = 2.41$) indicates that the level of trust is low and this can be explained by the fact that young people become more doubtful of institutional performance (Seligson, 2002; Dahlberg and Holmberg, 2014).

Reliability Analysis (Alpha Coefficients)

The alpha of Cronbach was used to determine internal consistency. Table 3 presents the results.

Model Fit Indices

****Table 5: SEM Model Fit Summary****

Fit Index	Recommended Threshold	Obtained Value	Interpretation
CFI	> .90	.937	Good fit
TLI	> .90	.921	Good fit
RMSEA	< .08	.052	Acceptable fit
SRMR	< .08	.046	Acceptable fit
χ^2/df	< 3	2.14	Acceptable fit

All model fit indices fall within acceptable ranges (Hu & Bentler, 1999), indicating that the measurement model fits the data well.

Structural Path Estimates

****Table 6: Standardized Path Coefficients****

Path	Std. β	S.E.	CR	p-value	Interpretation
Perception of Corruption → Civic Trust	-0.614	0.07	-8.76	< .001	Strong negative effect

Perception of Corruption recorded mean score 3.87 which means that the youths have a moderate perception of corruption in governmental institutions. On the other hand, the average Civic Trust score ($M = 2.41$) indicates that the level of trust is low and this can be explained by the fact that young people become more doubtful of institutional performance (Seligson, 2002; Dahlberg and Holmberg, 2014).

Reliability Analysis (Alpha Coefficients)

The alpha of Cronbach was used to determine internal consistency. Table 3 presents the results.

Additional Analysis: Variance Explained

****Table 7: Explained Variance (R^2)****

Dependent Variable	R^2	Interpretation
Civic Trust	.377	37.7% variance explained

Perception of Corruption recorded mean score 3.87 which means that the youths have a moderate perception of corruption in governmental institutions. On the other hand, the average Civic Trust score ($M = 2.41$) indicates that the level of trust is low and this can be explained by the fact that young people become more doubtful of institutional performance (Seligson, 2002; Dahlberg and Holmberg, 2014).

Reliability Analysis (Alpha Coefficients)

The alpha of Cronbach was used to determine internal consistency. Table 3 presents the results.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N = 382)

Variable	Mean (M)	SD	Min	Max
Perception of Corruption	3.87	0.62	2.10	5.00
Civic Trust	2.41	0.71	1.00	4.65

Perception of Corruption recorded mean score 3.87 which means that the youths have a moderate perception of corruption in governmental institutions. On the other hand, the average Civic Trust score (M = 2.41) indicates that the level of trust is low and this can be explained by the fact that young people become more doubtful of institutional performance (Seligson, 2002; Dahlberg and Holmberg, 2014).

Reliability Analysis (Alpha Coefficients)

The alpha of Cronbach was used to determine internal consistency. Table 3 presents the results.

Table 2: Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients

Construct	Items	Cronbach's α	Interpretation
Perception of Corruption	10	.874	Excellent
Civic Trust	8	.812	Good

Perception of Corruption recorded mean score 3.87 which means that the youths have a moderate perception of corruption in governmental institutions. On the other hand, the average Civic Trust score (M = 2.41) indicates that the level of trust is low and this can be explained by the fact that young people become more doubtful of institutional performance (Seligson, 2002; Dahlberg and Holmberg, 2014).

Reliability Analysis (Alpha Coefficients)

The alpha of Cronbach was used to determine internal consistency. Table 3 presents the results.

Table 3: Correlation Between Perception of Corruption and Civic Trust

Variables	1	2
Perception of Corruption	1	—
Civic Trust	-.526**	1

Note: $p < .001$.

Perception of Corruption recorded mean score 3.87 which means that the youths have a moderate perception of corruption in governmental institutions. On the other hand, the average Civic Trust score (M = 2.41) indicates that the level of trust is low and this can be explained by the fact that young people become more doubtful of institutional performance (Seligson, 2002; Dahlberg and Holmberg, 2014).

Reliability Analysis (Alpha Coefficients)

The alpha of Cronbach was used to determine internal consistency. Table 3 presents the results.

Table 4: SEM Path Coefficient

Path	Standardized β	S.E.	CR	p-value	Interpretation
Perception of Corruption → Civic Trust	-0.614	0.07	-8.76	< .001	Strong negative effect

Perception of Corruption recorded mean score 3.87 which means that the youths have a moderate perception of corruption in governmental institutions. On the other hand, the average Civic Trust score (M = 2.41) indicates that the level of trust is low and this can be explained by the fact that young people become more doubtful of institutional performance (Seligson, 2002; Dahlberg and Holmberg, 2014).

Reliability Analysis (Alpha Coefficients)

The alpha of Cronbach was used to determine internal consistency. Table 3 presents the results.

Conclusion

This study examined how public perception of corruption influences civic trust among youth, focusing on university students in Lahore. The findings clearly show that perceived corruption has a strong and significant negative effect on civic trust. Descriptive results indicated that young people generally perceive corruption to be moderately high, while their level of trust in public institutions remains low. Correlation and SEM results further confirmed that as perceptions of corruption increase, civic trust declines sharply. The structural model demonstrated a strong negative path between perceived corruption and civic trust, with corruption perception explaining a substantial proportion of the variance in civic trust. These results support existing theories of political psychology and social capital, which argue that perceived unfairness and institutional injustice undermine trust and weaken civic engagement. Overall, the study concludes that corruption—especially when perceived as widespread and uncontrollable—poses a serious threat to youth confidence in political, educational, and administrative institutions, potentially leading to long-term civic disengagement and weakened democratic participation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, several policy and practical recommendations are proposed. First, governments and public institutions should strengthen transparency and accountability mechanisms, particularly those that directly affect youth, such as education, recruitment, and public service delivery. Clear procedures, merit-based systems, and accessible complaint mechanisms can help reduce negative perceptions of corruption. Second, civic education programs should be enhanced at the university level to educate young people about institutional processes, anti-corruption frameworks, and their role in democratic accountability, helping to rebuild trust rather than deepen cynicism. Third, youth participation should be actively encouraged through youth-led oversight bodies, student unions, and digital platforms that allow meaningful engagement with policymakers. Finally, responsible use of media and digital technologies is essential; while exposure to corruption must continue, it should be accompanied by visible institutional responses and reforms to prevent hopelessness and disengagement. By addressing both corruption itself and how it is perceived, societies can restore civic trust among youth and ensure their sustained participation in democratic life.

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