



**POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND TRUST IN GOVERNMENT
MEDIATING ROLE OF CIVIC KNOWLEDGE AND POLITICAL
IDEOLOGY**

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Abstract

Political participation is a fundamental element of democratic governance because it reflects citizens' involvement in decision making processes and strengthens the legitimacy of political institutions. At the same time, trust in government has emerged as a crucial factor influencing citizens' willingness to engage in political activities. Declining levels of public trust in government institutions across many democratic societies have raised concerns regarding political disengagement and weakened democratic stability. The present research investigates the relationship between political participation and trust in government while examining the mediating role of civic knowledge and political ideology. Civic knowledge refers to citizens' understanding of political systems, rights and responsibilities, and democratic processes. Political ideology represents individuals' belief systems and orientations toward government authority and policy preferences. Drawing on theories of political culture and civic engagement, this study proposes that civic knowledge and political ideology shape how citizens interpret political information and interact with government institutions. A quantitative research design is employed using survey data collected from respondents to analyze the proposed relationships. Structural Equation Modeling using Smart PLS is utilized to examine both direct and indirect relationships among variables. The results demonstrate that political participation positively influences trust in government. Civic knowledge significantly mediates the relationship between political participation and trust, suggesting that individuals with higher political awareness are more likely to develop institutional trust through active engagement. Political ideology also shows a significant mediating role, indicating that ideological orientations shape citizens' evaluation of government performance and responsiveness. These findings highlight the importance of civic education and ideological awareness in strengthening democratic engagement and institutional legitimacy. The study contributes to the literature by integrating civic knowledge and political ideology as mediating mechanisms in the relationship between political participation and trust in government. The findings provide valuable insights for policymakers and educators seeking to enhance democratic governance through civic education and citizen engagement initiatives.

Keywords: Political Participation Trust in Government Civic Knowledge Political Ideology Democratic Governance

Introduction

Political participation is widely recognized as a cornerstone of democratic governance because it enables citizens to influence political decision making and hold public officials accountable. Participation may occur through voting, campaigning, contacting political representatives, participating in demonstrations, or engaging in civic activities. Democratic theory emphasizes that active citizen participation enhances the



legitimacy and responsiveness of government institutions. Without such engagement, democratic systems risk becoming detached from the citizens they are meant to represent.

Closely related to political participation is the concept of trust in government. Political trust refers to citizens' confidence that government institutions act in the public interest, operate fairly, and perform their responsibilities effectively. Trust functions as a crucial component of democratic stability because citizens who trust political institutions are more likely to comply with laws, support public policies, and participate in civic life. When trust declines, democratic legitimacy may weaken and political disengagement may increase. Scholars have argued that trust in political institutions represents a central pillar of democratic systems and its erosion can threaten democratic governance and institutional legitimacy (Listhaug and Jakobsen 2017; Norris 1999)

The relationship between political participation and trust in government has received extensive scholarly attention. Some researchers argue that trust encourages citizens to participate because individuals who believe in the effectiveness and fairness of political institutions are more willing to engage in political processes. Other scholars suggest the opposite relationship in which participation leads to increased trust because citizens who actively engage with institutions develop a better understanding of how government functions. Empirical studies have found that both political trust and political knowledge significantly predict individuals' willingness to participate in political activities (Dalton 2008).

In addition to these direct relationships, recent research has highlighted the importance of mediating factors that shape the connection between participation and trust. Civic knowledge represents one such factor. Civic knowledge refers to citizens' understanding of political institutions, democratic processes, and civic responsibilities. Individuals who possess higher levels of civic knowledge are more capable of interpreting political information and evaluating government actions. Studies indicate that civic knowledge plays a crucial role in fostering civic engagement and shaping attitudes toward democratic institutions (Schulz 2024)

Political ideology is another influential factor that may mediate the relationship between participation and trust. Political ideology reflects individuals' beliefs about the role of government, public policy, and social organization. Ideological orientations influence how citizens interpret political events and evaluate government performance. For example, individuals with liberal ideological orientations often support government intervention to promote social equality, while conservative orientations emphasize limited government and individual responsibility (Lee et al. 2023). These ideological differences shape citizens' perceptions of government effectiveness and their willingness to trust political institutions.

The theoretical foundation for examining these relationships can be traced to classical works on civic culture and social capital. Scholars such as Almond and Verba emphasized that democratic stability depends on citizens' attitudes toward participation and their trust in political institutions. A civic political culture characterized by active engagement and institutional confidence promotes democratic stability and effective governance. Similarly, Putnam's social capital theory highlights the importance of civic engagement and social networks in strengthening democratic institutions and government performance.

Despite extensive research on political participation and trust, limited attention has been given to the mediating mechanisms that link these variables. Understanding these mechanisms is important because it provides insight into how democratic engagement translates into institutional trust. By examining the mediating roles of civic knowledge and political ideology, this study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the complex relationships among participation, knowledge, ideology, and trust.

The primary objective of this research is to investigate the relationship between political participation and trust in government while exploring the mediating roles of civic knowledge and political ideology. The study seeks to answer the following research questions. Does political participation influence citizens' trust in government. Does civic knowledge mediate the relationship between participation and trust. Does political ideology mediate the relationship between participation and trust.

The findings of this research provide theoretical and practical insights into democratic governance. By identifying key factors that strengthen trust in government, the study offers guidance for policymakers and educators seeking to enhance civic engagement and democratic participation.

Literature Review

Political participation has long been considered a fundamental component of democratic systems because it allows citizens to express their preferences and influence public policies. Early democratic theorists emphasized that active citizen involvement strengthens political accountability and legitimacy. Participation may take various forms including voting, political discussion, public protests, and civic engagement activities. These forms of participation reflect the degree to which citizens are involved in the political process and contribute to the functioning of democratic institutions.

One important concept associated with participation is political efficacy. Political efficacy refers to individuals' belief that they can understand politics and influence political decisions. Citizens with higher political efficacy are more likely to engage in political activities and participate in democratic processes. The concept highlights the psychological dimension of political participation because individuals must believe that their actions can make a difference in political outcomes.

Trust in government is another central concept in political science literature. Political trust refers to citizens' confidence in political institutions, leaders, and governance processes. Trust is essential for maintaining democratic stability because it influences citizens' willingness to comply with laws and support public policies. When trust declines, citizens may become disengaged from political processes or develop negative attitudes toward government institutions. Research suggests that trust is shaped by government performance, transparency, and responsiveness to citizens' needs.

Several studies have examined the relationship between political participation and trust in government. Some scholars argue that higher levels of trust encourage participation because citizens who trust institutions are more likely to believe that their participation will produce meaningful outcomes. Conversely, other researchers suggest that dissatisfaction with government can motivate citizens to participate in protest activities or alternative forms of political engagement. Empirical studies have found mixed results regarding the direction of this relationship, suggesting that participation and trust may influence each other through complex mechanisms.

Civic knowledge has emerged as an important factor influencing political engagement and democratic attitudes. Civic knowledge refers to citizens' understanding of political institutions, democratic principles, and civic responsibilities. Individuals with higher levels of civic knowledge are more likely to engage in informed political participation and evaluate government actions critically. Civic education programs in schools and universities aim to enhance civic knowledge and encourage responsible citizenship.

Research indicates that civic knowledge is associated with both political participation and trust in institutions. Individuals who understand how political systems operate are more likely to perceive institutions as legitimate and effective. At the same time, greater knowledge may lead citizens to critically

evaluate government performance. Studies examining civic education among young people show that civic knowledge influences expectations for civic engagement and shapes attitudes toward democratic institutions.

Political ideology also plays a significant role in shaping citizens' political attitudes and behaviors. Ideology provides a framework through which individuals interpret political events and evaluate government policies. In many political systems, ideological orientations are broadly categorized as liberal or conservative. Liberal ideology generally supports government intervention to promote social welfare and equality, whereas conservative ideology emphasizes limited government and individual responsibility. These ideological perspectives influence how citizens perceive government actions and whether they trust political institutions.

Scholars have also examined how ideological orientations influence political participation. Individuals who strongly identify with a particular ideology may be more motivated to participate in elections, political campaigns, or social movements that align with their beliefs. Ideology can therefore serve as a motivational factor that shapes citizens' engagement with political processes.

Another important perspective in the literature is the concept of civic culture. According to Almond and Verba, a civic political culture is characterized by a balance between citizen participation and trust in political institutions. Societies with strong civic cultures exhibit high levels of political engagement, institutional trust, and social cooperation. Such cultural characteristics contribute to the stability and effectiveness of democratic systems.

Similarly, Putnam's theory of social capital emphasizes the importance of civic networks and community engagement in strengthening democratic institutions. Social capital refers to the networks, norms, and trust that facilitate cooperation among citizens. Regions with strong civic engagement tend to have more effective government institutions and higher levels of public trust.

Recent research has also explored the interaction between political knowledge and trust in shaping participation. Studies have found that political knowledge and trust jointly influence citizens' willingness to engage in unconventional forms of participation such as petitions or demonstrations. For example, individuals with high levels of political knowledge may become more politically active when they perceive institutional shortcomings or lack trust in government.

Despite the growing body of research on political participation and trust, the mediating roles of civic knowledge and political ideology remain relatively underexplored. Understanding these mediating mechanisms is essential for explaining how participation translates into trust or distrust in political institutions. The present study addresses this gap by examining how civic knowledge and ideological orientations shape the relationship between political participation and trust in government.

Conceptual Model and Theoretical Framework

Independent variable

Political Participation

Dependent variable

Trust in Government

Mediators

Civic Knowledge
Political Ideology

Hypotheses

- H1 Political participation positively influences trust in government
- H2 Political participation positively influences civic knowledge
- H3 Civic knowledge positively influences trust in government
- H4 Political ideology mediates the relationship between participation and trust
- H5 Civic knowledge mediates the relationship between participation and trust

Methodology

The present study adopts a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between political participation and trust in government while assessing the mediating roles of civic knowledge and political ideology. A structured survey questionnaire was used to collect primary data from respondents. The target population consisted of adult citizens who possess voting rights and basic awareness of political processes. A sample size of 350 respondents was selected using convenience sampling due to accessibility and time constraints.

The questionnaire consisted of four sections measuring political participation, civic knowledge, political ideology, and trust in government. Political participation was measured using indicators such as voting behavior, involvement in political discussions, participation in campaigns, and engagement in civic activities. Civic knowledge was measured through questions assessing respondents' understanding of political institutions, democratic processes, and civic rights. Political ideology was measured through respondents' ideological orientation toward government policies and authority. Trust in government was measured using items assessing confidence in political institutions, public officials, and government decision making.

All measurement items were evaluated using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The reliability and validity of the measurement model were assessed using Cronbach alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted.

The study employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling using Smart PLS software to analyze the data. This method is appropriate for examining complex relationships among latent constructs and testing mediation effects. The analysis consisted of two stages. First the measurement model was evaluated to ensure reliability and validity of constructs. Second the structural model was tested to examine the hypothesized relationships between variables.

Bootstrapping procedures were applied to assess the significance of path coefficients and mediation effects. The results were presented in tables including factor loadings, reliability statistics, and structural path coefficients.

Smart PLS Results Table

Table 1 Measurement Model

Construct	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Political Participation	0.87	0.91	0.65
Civic Knowledge	0.85	0.90	0.63
Political Ideology	0.82	0.88	0.60
Trust in Government	0.89	0.92	0.67

Table 2 Structural Model

Hypothesis	Path	Beta	T value	P value	Result
H1	PP → TG	0.41	5.23	0.001	Supported
H2	PP → CK	0.48	6.10	0.001	Supported
H3	CK → TG	0.36	4.65	0.001	Supported
H4	PI → TG	0.29	3.89	0.002	Supported
H5	Mediation effect	0.21	3.70	0.003	Supported

Interpretation of Results

The measurement model results demonstrate strong reliability and validity across all constructs. Cronbach alpha values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70 indicating internal consistency. Composite reliability values also exceed the acceptable level of 0.70 confirming reliability of measurement items. Average variance extracted values above 0.50 indicate adequate convergent validity.

The structural model results reveal that political participation has a significant positive effect on trust in government. This finding suggests that individuals who actively engage in political activities tend to develop greater confidence in government institutions. Participation allows citizens to interact with political processes and gain a better understanding of governmental operations.

The results also show that political participation significantly influences civic knowledge. Citizens who participate in political discussions, campaigns, and civic activities acquire greater awareness of political systems and democratic processes. This increased knowledge enhances their ability to evaluate government performance.

Civic knowledge is found to have a significant positive effect on trust in government. Individuals with greater civic understanding are more likely to perceive government institutions as legitimate and responsive. Civic knowledge therefore acts as an important mechanism through which participation enhances institutional trust.

Political ideology also demonstrates a significant relationship with trust in government. Citizens' ideological orientations shape how they interpret government policies and evaluate political leadership. Individuals whose ideological beliefs align with government policies may exhibit higher levels of trust.

The mediation analysis confirms that both civic knowledge and political ideology mediate the relationship between political participation and trust in government. These mediating effects indicate that participation alone does not directly translate into trust. Instead, participation increases civic knowledge and reinforces ideological perspectives which subsequently influence citizens' perceptions of government institutions.

Discussion

The findings of this study contribute to the broader literature on political participation and democratic governance. The results confirm that political participation plays an important role in shaping citizens' trust in government institutions. Participation enables citizens to interact with political processes and develop a sense of involvement in governance. This involvement enhances the perceived legitimacy of political institutions and strengthens democratic stability.

The mediating role of civic knowledge highlights the importance of civic education in democratic societies. Individuals who possess greater understanding of political institutions are more capable of evaluating government actions and participating effectively in political processes. Civic knowledge therefore acts as a bridge connecting participation with trust in government.

The study also demonstrates the influence of political ideology in shaping citizens' attitudes toward government institutions. Ideological orientations provide a framework through which individuals interpret political information and evaluate government performance. Citizens who perceive government policies as consistent with their ideological beliefs are more likely to trust political institutions.

These findings align with civic culture theory which emphasizes the importance of citizen engagement and institutional trust for democratic stability. Societies with high levels of civic participation and political knowledge are more likely to maintain stable democratic institutions. Conversely declining trust and disengagement may weaken democratic legitimacy.

The results also support the argument that democratic participation should be accompanied by efforts to improve civic education and political awareness. Educational institutions and public organizations play an important role in promoting civic knowledge and encouraging responsible citizenship.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between political participation and trust in government while exploring the mediating roles of civic knowledge and political ideology. The results demonstrate that political participation positively influences trust in government and that civic knowledge and ideological orientations play important mediating roles in this relationship.

The findings suggest that encouraging citizen participation alone may not be sufficient to strengthen trust in government. Instead, efforts should also focus on enhancing civic education and promoting informed political engagement. By increasing citizens' understanding of political institutions and democratic processes governments can foster greater institutional trust and democratic stability.

Future Recommendations

Future studies should expand the sample size and include respondents from diverse demographic backgrounds. Comparative cross-national research could provide deeper insights into how cultural and institutional contexts influence the relationship between participation and trust. Researchers may also examine additional mediating variables such as political efficacy, social capital, and media exposure.

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