



## Political Trust and Efficacy among Educated Youth in Pakistan

Vol. IV, No. II (Spring 2019) | Page: 386 – 391 | DOI: 10.31703/grr.2019(IV-II).41

p- ISSN: 2616-955X | e-ISSN: 2663-7030 | ISSN-L: 2616-955X

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### Abstract

*Political trust and efficacy are very popular among academics to foresee the legitimacy and the constancy of any political regime. The present research was endeavored to see political trust and efficacy among university students in Pakistan. A sample of 381 students was drawn from two public sector universities of the Islamabad city. The research included all the popular constructs of political trust including trust in army keeping in view its role in politics. The efficacy comprised its two components – the internal and external. Results indicate the positive, significant inter-correlations among most of the constructs of study variables except trust in the legal system and external efficacy. The results denote the significant level of trust and effectiveness of educated youth however, we assume that the populism approach prevails and enthusiasm of youth may also be measured from this approach.*

**Key Words:** Political Trust, Efficacy, Political Populism, Educated Youth, Pakistan

### Introduction

Political trust has attracted the growing interest of scholars around the world. Well established as well as establishing democracies are quite cognizant of the centrality of the trust. Governments see distrust as a serious threat to their legitimacy. Political trust not only influences the constancy and efficiency of political system but also develops the political behaviors (Bauer & Fatke, 2014). It is also taken as one of the most important predictors of political participation. It is a multidimensional construct. It denotes the evaluation of political institutions in particular. How an individual appraises a political party, political government and/or other political institutions (Thomassen et al., 2017; Van de Meer & Hakhverdian, 2017)? Political trust is central in overall assessment/ fulfillment of the political expectations of people in a democracy (Craig et al., 1990). Political trust points out the futuristic rightfulness of government efforts towards people concerns (Munno & Nabatchi, 2014; Pew Research Center, 2017). However, political trust is not uniform and differs from the levels and functional components of a government (Norris, 2011; Gallup, 2013; Hetherington & Husser, 2012).

Various established western democracies are experiencing a steady decline in political participation in terms of voter turnout (Blais, 2004; Norris, 2011). People are declining trust in their governments and are skeptical about performance (Citrin & Luke, 2001). The gravity of the political trust is pointing something very important. Because respect for the overall democratic system is increasing but an appreciation of authority within system is lower considerably (Inglehart, 1999). However, many scholars see political distrust as an important indicator to show concerns of people. Political distrust may encourage participation in many political activities (Parkins & McFarlane, 2015). Over trust may undermine the opportunity to check the government performance of its roles and duties (Warren, 2009). Mistrust can pressurize citizens to allocate time and energies to take care of activities of the government in certain areas.

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Many factors have been discussed and held responsible for the enhanced or lowered the level of political trust. The higher level of trust of citizens with the current political situation is enhancing the level of political trust (Choi & Woo, 2016). Ulbig (2008) highlighted the importance of generalized trust among citizens. Interpersonal trust is a key to develop a strong sense of connectedness and give rise to the higher level of trust in politics and political institutions. People having an interest in overall politics and political affairs can develop more trust in political institutions (Catterberg & Moreno, 2006). Media exposure is another factor fostering political trust (Ceron & Memoli, 2016).

Political efficacy is denoting people's ability to influence the government and its policy decisions about citizens. Generally, political efficacy has two dimensions. Internal efficacy signifies one's capacity to affect political decisions made while external efficacy points out towards opportunity to influence government. Scholars like Yeich and Levine (1994) have further worked on political efficacy and put forth a new dimension i.e. collective political efficacy. It denotes the peoples' belief that system is or will respond to the collective demand for change.

However, De Moor (2017) pointed out that external political efficacy has further two important aspects. These dimensions are, however overlooked. He referred to willingness of response and capability of response. He further made distinction between them both as input structure and output structure and called willingness of response as input external efficacy and capability of response as external output efficacy. Esaiasson et al. (2015) criticized the use of external use of political efficacy as perceived response of the state and state apparatuses. Political efficacy is a very strong indicator of political involvement and an effective predictor of participation in political activities (Smets & Van Ham, 2013).

Pakistan is a country with more than 63% of its population below 30 years. It is a democracy with a long history of dictatorships. Only one government (2008-2013) managed to complete its constitutional tenure of five years. A country with a youth bulge and fragile political structure needs more confidence in youth and shows a more responsible attitude towards their demands. Failing which can cause serious legitimacy and sustenance consequences. This research attempts to find out the level of political trust and efficacy among educated youth. This research included internal and external political efficacy measures to encapsulate the willingness and capability responsiveness of the government. This research also included trust in the army as an important measure to know if the trust in army is related with internal, external or overall political participation.

## **Materials and Methods**

### **Participants**

For this study, 381 male and female students enrolled in different academic programs from selected universities of Islamabad city were recruited. Age of the respondents ranged from 18 to 41 years. Majority of the participants were 21 to 30 years of age i.e. 66% ( $n = 254$ ). Ethnic orientation of the participants ranges from 16% ( $n = 61$ ) Punjabi, 29% ( $n = 110$ ) Pashtun, 15% ( $n = 53$ ) Sindhi, 14% ( $n = 53$ ) Baloch, 13% ( $n = 49$ ) Kashmiri and 14% ( $n = 53$ ) Gilgit & Baltit. Majority of the students were enrolled in different BS programs i.e. 73% ( $n = 276$ ). Majority of the students 73% ( $n = 278$ ) belonged to rural areas.

Most of the students 84% ( $n = 321$ ) casted their votes in the election held in 2018, however 60% ( $n = 229$ ) of the participants were not affiliated with any political party.

### **Procedure**

Questionnaires were distributed to and collected from students at campus and all the students participated voluntarily. Written informed consent was obtained from each student. The students were assured of the confidentiality and academic utilization of their data.

### **Measures**

*Trust in the parliament, Trust in the legal system, Trust in the police, Trust in the politicians, Trust in the political parties, Trust in the army and Internal political efficacy, External political efficacy and political participation* were the measures

used for this study. All the measures have five normative statements each. The measure used four-point Likert scale. These range from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Overall, alpha reliability the measures was .786.

## Results and Discussion

**Table 1.** Pearson R correlational analysis of Study Variables (n =381)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
TnP	1								
TnL	.16**	1							
TnPolc	.29**	.13*	1						
TnPolt	.19**	.14**	.71**	1					
TnParty	.21**	.04	.76**	.82**	1				
TnArmy	.31**	.06	.61**	.65**	.76**	1			
Eff.int	.13**	.06	.70**	.70**	.82**	.73**	1		
Eff.ext	.30**	-.01	.15**	.02	-.03	-.07	.12*	1	
Pol.part	.20**	-.01	-.17**	-.35**	-.30**	-.36**	.27**	.30**	1

Note. TnP = Trust in Parliament; TnL = Trust in legal System; TnPolc = Trust in Police; TnPolt = Trust in Politicians; TnParty = Trust in Party; TnArmy = Trust in Army; Eff.int = Efficacy (Internal); Eff.ext = Efficacy (External); Pol.Part = Political participation \*p<.05; \*\*p<.001

The table shows the statistical relationship among study variables. The findings indicate that trust in parliament is significantly and positively associated with all study variables. Trust in the legal system shows significant association with trust in politicians only. Trust in police is strongly associated with all the other variables. Trust in politicians is significantly associated with all variables except efficacy (external). Trust in party is indicating a significant correlation with all other variables except for efficacy (external). Trust in army is positively associated with other variables except efficacy (external) and shows a negative association with overall political participation. Efficacy (Internal) positively associated with all variables except trust in legal system. Efficacy (External) is significantly associated with trust in parliament and trust in police only. Political participation shows a positive association with trust in parliament, efficacy (internal & external) and negatively associated with trust in police, trust in politicians, trust in party and trust in army, however, it is not associated with trust in the legal system.

The present research was formulated to find out political trust along with its relevant elements like trust in Parliament, the legal system, police, politicians, political parties, and army and both dimensions of political efficacy (internal and external). This research suggests some significant contribution to the existing body of theory and research regarding political trust and efficacy.

This study finds out that inter-correlation of trust in parliament, the legal system, police, politicians, political parties and the army is significant and positive except trust in legal system which shows no significance or weak relationship with other study variables. This also signifies that educated youth is showing its trust in government and its various institutions. Findings also point out an interesting fact that youth is very much entrusted with army as one of the important components of government in Pakistan. We can relate these findings with the recent approach i.e. the populist attitude (Van Hauwaert & Van Kessel, 2018; Hawkins et. al., 2019; Van Hauwaert et al., 2019). This approach highlights three aspects that are people centrist, anti-elitism and

people will. We can corroborate the findings with the core assumptions of populist attitude approach. The present government promised the change and came into power with the slogan of kicking out the corrupt elite in the political system. We also need to clarify that we used different items of political trust and relate these with political participation. We did not evaluate the voting behavior that is one of the important components of populism. We can assume that populism with its current constructs is hovering upon the Pakistani political system. However, many scholars are even skeptical regarding the very postulates of populism and consider it just political external efficacy (Van der Kolk, 2018; Rooduijn, 2019).

We found a strong association of internal political efficacy which shows that youth believe that they can influence the government and its decisions except for the legal system. However, external political efficacy is not showing strong association. Youth believe that system is not providing them opportunities to assert the government and its apparatus. Scholars like Rooduijn et.al. (2016) and Passarelli and Tuorto (2018) do not consider political efficacy as one of the important indicators of political engagement. And simply consider its lack of interest of political institutions. Political participation is strongly associated with all variables which point out that political trust with its all constituting components and internal and external political efficacy is pushing youth to participate in politics and political activities. Political participation is correlated with external political efficacy (Gastel & Xenos, 2010; Smets & VanHam, 2013). However, Fourneir et al. (2011) are skeptical regarding the causality of direction of the relationship between efficacy and political participation.

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