

PUBLIC TRUST IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS IN SARAWAK

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1. INTRODUCTION

Concerns for restoring citizens' trust in government are at the core of public sector modernization. Public distrust is often blamed on the bad functioning of public services, and in political discourse well-functioning, public services are said to create trust in government. Concern with low levels of trust in government and the negative image of government and the public administration has stimulated Western governments to engage in a modernization strategy for their public service. Public trust refers to the situation where public organizations are competent, open, and honest, characterized by concern for stakeholders and response to them, and identified with public goals, norms, and values (Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2003). In other words, from the organizational perspective, public trust can be defined as a relationship reflecting the degree to which all stakeholders trust the organization's competencies, organizational goals, shared standards and values, organizational principles, processes, procedures, codes of conduct, and care for internal and external stakeholders. Intra-organizational trust relates to individuals employed in an organization or to a system that is that organization. Trust in the organization includes positive expectations for other members of the organization, groups, and the organization. It is more than cumulative trust in each number of relationships. It also includes relationships between people and structures, as well as mechanisms for shaping organizational behaviors (Adams et al., 2008).

Trust refers to the public trust that public service providers can provide good service and always strive to meet the needs of the community in the long term (Martinez & Bosque, 2013). Several studies confirm that there is a positive correlation between citizens' satisfaction with city services and citizens' trust in public institutions (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003; Salminen & Ikola-Norrbacka, 2010; Zhao & Hu, 2015). Better performance by public institutions attracts higher trust (Van de Walle, Van Roosbroek, & Bouckaert, 2008). This connection, however, is not automatic because the improved performance of public institutions does not necessarily result in the institutions receiving a higher level of trust from citizens. Despite improvements in socio-economic conditions in more societies than ever before, there is no indication of a long-term increase in institutional trust; rather, trust in public institutions in many countries is declining (Van Ryzin, 2011; Wong, Wan, & Hsiao, 2011; Zhao & Hu, 2015). Therefore, Van de Walle and Bouckaert (2003) question the possible causal link between trust in government and satisfaction with the quality of services provided by civil services.

The nature of public organizations is clearly explained in the definition of organizational publicness, which refers only to public organizations by their interrelated five attributes, as follows (Kozuch et al., 2016):

- i. A public organization pursues the public interest, which refers to the common values relevant to a given society. In practice, this interest is shared by the majority of citizens.
- ii. A public organization functions in complex and politically, economically, and socially unstable environments. The recipients of public goods and services are different classes of stakeholders. Traditionally, public organizations have focused solely on their own organizational goals. Current practice shows that public organizations increasingly operate through organizational networks.
- iii. A distinctive nature of the aims of public organizations ensures the simultaneous satisfaction of various stakeholder groups, without the support of which contemporary public organizations cannot exist.
- iv. Public organization use formalized decision-making processes to ensure their legitimacy, transparency, and accountability to citizens, what affects the shape of the organizational structure.
- v. Public managers have steward roles that focus on empowerment, collaboration, and participation.

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To determine the level of public trust in public institutions
2. To examine the relationship between public trust and demographic variables (gender, age, income, level of education, registered voter, voting history)

2. METHODOLOGY

This study takes a descriptive and cross-sectional design. We use questionnaire surveys as our main sources of data collection method for our research. Convenience sampling was used to select the 1000 respondents for the study. The questionnaire for this research is developed from a literature review of previous studies on public trust in government. (OECD, 2013). The scale used was the Likert scale 1 to 5. The questionnaire was distributed through google forms to a sample of 1000 respondents who are our target population for the study. The duration of the study was from December 2020 until June 2021. This study covers four major cities and towns in Sarawak. The cities and towns are as follows:

1. Kuching
2. Sibul
3. Miri
4. Bintulu
5. Other smaller towns like Lawas, Limbang etc

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Of 685 respondents, 61% were male and 39% were female. Most respondents were in the age range of 30 – 49 years old (51.7%). Most respondents are Malay (39.3%) followed by Iban (31.4%). Category of employment showed 53.1% in the public sector and 21.5 % in the Private sector. The income category showed most of the respondents earned between RM3,001 to RM6,000 (35.5%) and below RM3,000 (33.1 %). The highest education reported by respondents showed 40.7% had a Degree, Diploma (25.0%), SPM (13.9%) and 11.4% have Masters. Most of the respondents are residents of Kuching (47.2%) and Samarahan (14.6%).

Most of the respondents are registered voters (86%) and have voted in the 14th General election (72.8%). This is summarized in Table 1.

Table 2 shows that the level of public trust in public institutions is high ($M=3.53$, $SD=1.27$). This indicates that the public still trusts the government agencies and departments in Sarawak. The results in Table 3 indicate respondents have a higher level of trust in the armed forces ($M=3.93$) and the lowest mean for public trust was for the House of Representatives ($M=3.14$). Table 4 shows the results of the chi-square for the association between public trust and demographic variables. The results show that there is an association between public trust and demographic variables such as gender, age, and level of education. No association was found between public trust and demographic variables such as income, registered voters, and voting in the 14th GE.

Table 1: Respondent Profile

| Demographic | Frequency | Percentage % |
|------------------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 418 | 61 |
| Female | 267 | 39 |
| Age | | |
| 18-29 years old | 159 | 23.2 |
| 30-49 years old | 354 | 51.7 |
| Above 50 years old | 172 | 25.1 |
| Race | | |
| Malay | 269 | 39.3 |
| Iban | 215 | 31.4 |
| Bidayuh | 84 | 12.3 |
| Melanau | 51 | 7.4 |
| Chinese | 28 | 4.1 |
| Others | 38 | 5.5 |
| Occupation | | |
| Public sector | 364 | 53.1 |
| Private sector | 147 | 21.5 |
| Self-employed | 56 | 8.2 |
| Retirees | 44 | 6.4 |
| Students | 47 | 6.9 |
| Not employed | 20 | 2.9 |
| Others | 7 | 1.0 |
| Income category | | |
| Below RM3,000 | 227 | 33.1 |
| RM3,001- RM6,000 | 243 | 35.1 |
| RM6,001-RM9,000 | 68 | 9.9 |
| RM9,001-RM12,000 | 36 | 5.0 |
| Above RM12,001 | 34 | 4.3 |
| No income | 77 | 11.2 |
| Highest qualification | | |
| SPM | 42 | 6.1 |
| STPM | 171 | 25.0 |
| Diploma | 279 | 40.7 |
| Degree | 78 | 11.4 |
| Master | 16 | 2.3 |
| PHD | 3 | 0.4 |
| No formal education | | |
| Place of residence | | |
| Kuching | 323 | 47.2 |
| Samarahan | 100 | 14.6 |

| | | |
|----------|----|------|
| Sibu | 52 | 7.6 |
| Miri | 58 | 8.5 |
| Bintulu | 34 | 5.0 |
| Serian | 24 | 3.5 |
| Sri Aman | 25 | 3.6 |
| Kapit | 22 | 3.2 |
| Others | 47 | 14.5 |

Are you a registered voter?

| | | |
|-----|-----|------|
| Yes | 589 | 86.0 |
| No | 96 | 14.0 |

Did you vote for 14th General Election?

| | | |
|-----|-----|------|
| Yes | 499 | 72.8 |
| No | 186 | 27 |

Table 2: Public Trust & Demographic Variables

| Variables | N | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|--------------|-----|------|--------------------|
| Public trust | 685 | 3.53 | 1.27 |

Table 3: Mean & Standard Deviations for Public Trust in Public Institutions

| Statements | Mean | SD |
|-------------------------------------|------|------|
| Government Agencies and Departments | 3.45 | 1.03 |
| Armed Forces | 3.93 | .98 |
| PDRM | 3.52 | 1.08 |
| House of Representatives | 3.14 | 1.20 |
| Courts | 3.40 | 1.12 |
| Mass media | 3.21 | 1.06 |
| Local councils | 3.29 | 1.11 |

Table 4: Chi-square test Public Trust & Demographic Variables

| Variables | p-value |
|------------------------------|---------|
| Gender | 0.00** |
| Age | 0.00** |
| Level of education | 0.02** |
| Income | .148 |
| Registered Voter | .449 |
| Voted in 14 th GE | .327 |

4. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to investigate public trust in public institutions in Sarawak. The study found a high level of public trust in public institutions. This study adds to the growing body of knowledge on public trust in government institutions. Overall, the study demonstrates the importance of public trust in maintaining citizenship participation in public administration. Public trust in public organizations can be enhanced using a model that consists of four components, through which positive characteristics and interdependence create or enhance the public trust within organizations and between them:

- i. The ability of public organizations, including public managers and officials, to effectively provide public services
- ii. Positive attitudes toward citizens as stakeholders and responding to the collective needs of citizens
- iii. Consistency of proclaimed public values and organizational practices
- iv. Stakeholders' knowledge of public service delivery and the public organization's responsibility, particularly when it is acquired through prior experience in dealing with a given public organization.

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