

A Validation of Voter's Political Trust in Mokokchung District (Nagaland)

E. Benrithung Patton

Ph. D Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Nagaland University: Lumami, Nagaland, India.

Abstract: Trust is an inevitable form which has become a pure significance towards the pillars of a democratic community. The nature and effects of trust in social and political institutions have been studied distinguishing between various levels of trust. Political trust is one of the key principle indicators that measure the depth of citizens' belief in the political system. Levels of trust relate to the stability of democracy for which political system needs to establish in order to foster political participation of the electorates. Perhaps democracies function more effectively when citizens support key institutions. The main purpose of this paper is to test different category of trust in the political institution/agents and examine voter's level of political trust to assess the overall health of democratic system. The present study is conducted in five assembly constituencies of Mokokchung District in Nagaland covering fifteen polling stations. The studies found out that majority of the respondents are highly confident with the performance of the non-governmental entities.

Keywords: institutions, level, Mokokchung, political trust, voters.

I. POLITICAL TRUST: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For a citizen to describe a particular institution or actor as worthy of trust is potentially a daunting task to judge. Trust is considered to be crucial for extensive cooperation, which is distinctly necessary for establishing civil society at the grass-roots level. In the political arena, the relations between society and the political system are usually expressed in the measure of political trust and its opposite or its lack thereof to political alienation or disenchantment from politics. Political scientists as such attach great significance to the existence of political trust among citizens and its relevance to the survival of a political state.

Political trust is most commonly conceptualized as an individual's confidence in government institutions based on perceptions of their performance^[1]. It is considered one of the primary indicators of state legitimacy within the political behaviour literature because it measures society's overall confidence in the political institutions that comprise the state^[2]. Similarly political trust is the ratio of people's evaluation of government performance relative to their normative expectations of how government ought to perform^[3]. Political trust is particularly a critical element for the survival of a democratic polity. In the words of John Coleman, "Political trust is the ratio of people's evaluation of government performance relative to their normative expectation of how government ought to perform"^[4]. Political trust is also defined as citizen's belief or confidence that the government or political system will work to produce outcomes consistent with their expectations^[5].

If there is no trust in state-society relations, government spends more money on enforcing laws, loses money through corruption and other crimes, and spends more time and money explaining their decisions to the public and assuring voters that their interests are being represented^[6]. Trust is especially important for democratic regimes since the government cannot rely on coercion to the same extent as in other regimes, and should rely on the legitimacy of the system and the voluntary compliance of the public^[7].

Democracies function more effectively when citizens support key institutions. This indicates a need to probe questions designed to measure voters' trust in political and other institutions. Thus, in this paper voter's level of political trust forms a part of the enquiry to assess the overall health of democratic system.

II. DETERMINANTS OF POLITICAL TRUST

Political trust –the trust that people place in political institutions is considered to be critical for democracy. It links citizens with governments and the institutions that represent them, thereby enhancing the legitimacy and stability of democratic government^[8]. Trust can be said to be both a resource for citizens as well as for governments. For citizens, trust reduces the complexity of choice and allows them to relax the need of constantly monitor governmental institutions. For governments, trust is beneficial by providing them with the certainty that they will be obeyed, relaxing the need for use of coercive force. Trust is, for governments, a source of power^[9].

Political trust happens when citizens appraise the government and its institutions, policy-making in general and/or the individual political leaders as promise-keeping, efficient, fair and honest^[10]. Political trust, in other words, is the “judgment of the citizenry that the system and the political incumbents are responsive, and will do what is right even in the absence of constant scrutiny”^[11]. As such, “political trust is a central indicator of public’s underlying feeling about its polity”^[12]. If citizens are satisfied with the policy decisions and the activities of public officials meet their demands and wants, specific trust increases.

There is strong evidence that political trust is an important agent for the growth political institutions. Several empirical studies indicate that where citizens demonstrate a greater sense of civic responsibility and trust in democratic processes more actively, governments perform better^[13]. Scepticism and distrust in political authorities may create an environment in which dishonest behaviour with respect to the state becomes tolerated among the society^[14]. In short, from the institutional perspective, confidence in political institutions is politically endogenous and based on rational evaluations of the performance of the contemporary political institutions^[15]. It is rather seen as an outcome of the relations and interactions, a certain indicator of the quality of institutions.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is empirical and intensive in nature. Data is collected through both primary and secondary sources. For the present study Mokokchung District has been selected as the sample unit due to its political significance in the democratic set up of Nagaland State. The primary source of data is collected from the field study conducted during the year 2016 which is specifically based on the last Nagaland Legislative Assembly Elections. The secondary source of data is collected from various academic books, journals, articles, seminar papers, etc. In addition to this, information is collected from various government institutions such as the Election Commission of India (ECI), Chief Electoral Office (CEC), Government of Nagaland and District Election Office (DEO), Mokokchung District, Nagaland.

Politically, Mokokchung district is one of the most important districts in Nagaland. It sends the largest ten representatives out of sixty MLA’s to the Nagaland Legislative Assembly. And it is also because with every general election it adds a new spectrum in the political history of the state politics. Out of the ten Assembly Constituency (AC), a sample size of five AC is selected based on systematic random sampling (SRS) to conduct the field study. From each of the selected five assembly constituencies, three polling stations (PS) were selected using the method of random sampling. Respondents were selected from the electoral rolls of the selected polling station. In every polling station, thirty voters were selected from the electoral roll.

For data analysis the quantitative data from the field study is classified and tabulated as per the requirement of the study. Appropriate statistical tools like ‘percentages’ and ‘scales’ is used to interpret the data for drawing meaningful inference and conclusions. The individual in-depth questionnaire is transcribed on completion, and the data drawn from the questionnaires was analyzed. The total number of completed interview is 407 (four hundred and seven) respondents.

IV. MEASUREMENT OF VOTER’S LEVEL OF POLITICAL TRUST

In order to measure the voter’s level of trust they were asked to grade the key institutions/agents of the state. The procedure is constructed following a five-point Likert response scale of measurement (5-1) probing the level of political trust.

A trust scale was devised in order to draw out the respondent’s confidence on the political institutions and agents in the state. Thus the respondents were placed in one of the five levels of political trust scale which is calculated by adding their options indicated in the political trust level. The trust scale ranges from great deal, some, not very much, none at all and don’t know. Based on the respondent’s grading, each answer was scored from 5-1 points. Accordingly 5 points given for ‘great deal’, 4 points for ‘some’, 3 points for ‘not very much’, 2 points for ‘none at all’ and 1 point for ‘don’t know’ respectively. Once the total points are tabulated, then it is divided by the total number of the sample respondents to get the accurate total points.

Table 1: Overall Classification of the Voter’s Level of Political Trust (Source: Field Survey, 2016)

Category	Great deal	Some	Not very much	None at all	Don’t know	Likert Scale (In Percentage)
State Government	13	76	226	72	20	2.97
Civil Service	29	225	123	8	22	3.56
Police	19	201	158	15	14	3.48
Courts	39	188	121	18	41	3.40
Political Parties	15	54	195	105	38	2.76
Election Commission	76	194	94	13	30	3.67
NGO’s	77	232	72	9	17	3.84

The most notable finding of the survey is that non-government organisations (NGO's) with 3.84 per cent emerged as the most trusted political institutions and agents by the respondents (Table 1). The second most trusted institution is Election Commission with 3.67 per cent. This is followed by the civil service with 3.56 per cent, police with 3.48 per cent, courts with 3.40 per cent respectively. Not very surprisingly, the respondent's trust on the state government was not very healthy, with only 2.97 per cent which ranked sixth among the seven political institutions and agents in the state. And the respondents' least trusted political institutions and agents in the state are the political parties with 2.76 per cent.

Trust for the regime's institutions which is a part and parcel of the present study is typically based on respondent's trust on the different political institutions and agents governing the state. In order to supplement and test the above description of political trust, therefore the respondents in this survey were asked the following questions:

- Are you satisfied with the performance of the MLA who represents your constituency?
- Are you satisfied with the performance of the present government in Nagaland?

The respondents were given three options in each of these questions to indicate their answer: satisfied, dissatisfied and can't say/don't know. The analyses for these queries are tabulated in the following Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 respectively.

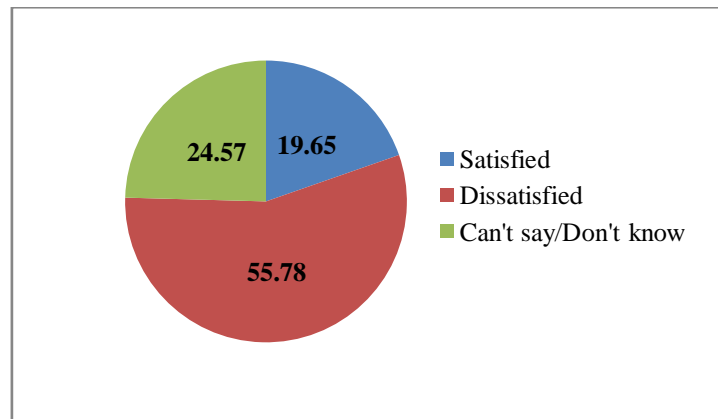


Fig 1: Respondent's Assessment on the Performance of their Constituency MLA: In Percentage
(Source: Field Survey, 2016)

The above Fig. 1 indicates that 55.78 per cent of the respondents were dissatisfied with the performance of the MLA representing their constituency. Another 24.57 per cent of the respondents did not express any opinion regarding the question. And only 19.65 per cent of the respondents were somehow satisfied with the performance of the MLA.

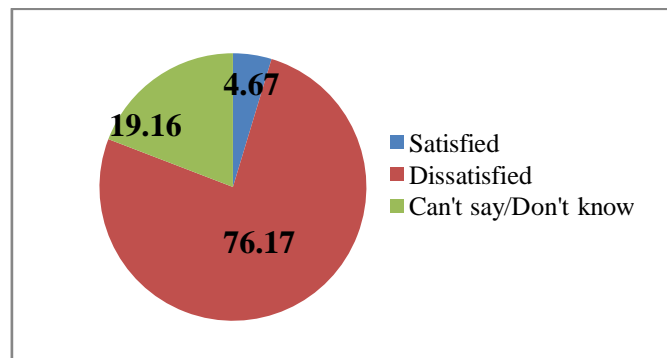


Fig 2: Respondent's Assessment on the Performance of the Present State Government: In Percentage
(Source: Field Survey, 2016)

As per the data shown in Fig. 2 an overwhelming majority 76.17 per cent of the respondents were totally dissatisfied with the performance of the present state government. Interestingly, only 4.67 per cent respondents seem to be satisfied with the same. And another 19.16 per cent of the respondents did not express any opinion regarding the question.

Further, the respondents were asked to give reasons to supplement their assessment with regard to the performance of the present state government. Some of the prominent responds are tabulated in the given Fig. 3.

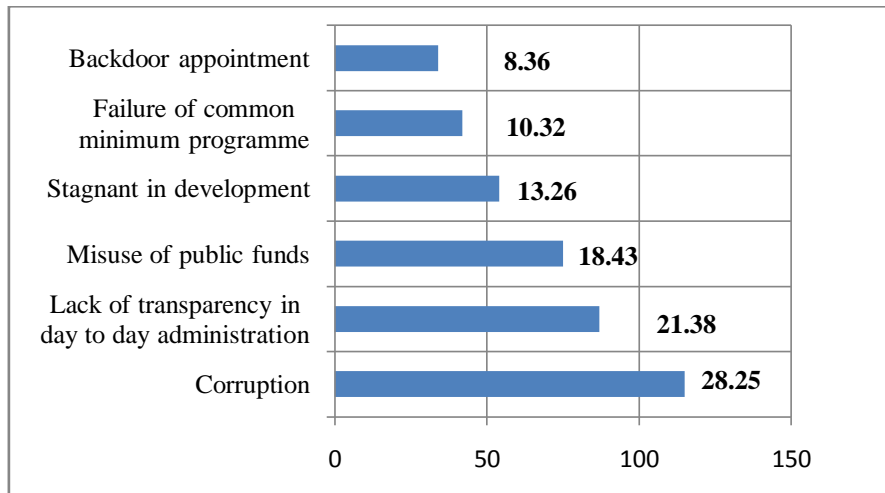


Fig 3: Classification of Respondent's Assessment on the Performance of the Present State Government: In Percentage (Source: Field Survey, 2016)

The survey study reveals that majority 28.25 per cent of the respondents cited that corruption is totally rampant with the present state government. 21.38 per cent of the respondents narrated that the present state government performs with lack of transparency in day to day administration. Another 18.43 per cent of the respondents firmly believe that there is a total misuse of public funds by the present state government.

Fig. 3 indicates another 13.26 per cent of the respondents assert that the present state government has not done enough work but there is stagnation in developmental activities. This is followed by 10.32 per cent of the respondents with the feelings that the present state government has failed to address the common minimum programme. This has led to their inability to reach the common aspirations of the citizen as promised during the electioneering period in the state. Lastly another 8.36 per cent of the respondents strongly voiced out that backdoor appointment are being done in the present state government.

There is no hidden contest as to why majority of the respondents choose corruption to be the overall performance of the present state government. Political trust is higher when government is not viewed as corrupt and when officials are seen as placing citizens' interests ahead of their own^[16]. While making a reference to corruption, it is most befitting to bring light the startling revelation of the post-election 2013 survey conducted under the aegis of YouthNet^[17] in the state. The survey found out that "a staggering amount of Rs. 937,82,67,500/- (Rupees nine hundred and thirty seven crores, eighty two lakhs, sixty seven thousand and five hundred) was approximately spent in the 23 February, 2013 elections. The amount spent in 2013 was almost twice the amount spent in 2008. The Team observes that the present system of election creates a vicious circle—wealth drainage during election—rampant corruption of cut/share system from funds meant for development—no development/no productivity—stagnation of job both in the public and private sector—unemployment and poverty—resulting in the same system of election"^[18]. It is very true as the Team reiterates that their research was made out of an exhaustive effort to bring to the notice of the people of Nagaland on how the wrong election system is affecting the alarming level of corruption in the State today.

V. CONCLUSION

Political trust does not emerge, nor does it operate, in a vacuum. It refers to citizens' confidence in each other as members of a social community, is inseparable from the notion of political trust^[19]. From the above analyses clearly indicates that non-political entities are the most trusted institution in the state by the citizens. Some of the respondents revealed that it is better for such bodies to function properly without much interference from the state government's control. And such is the level of confidence they can give more and assist those institutions in the long run. NGO's are more vibrant having much value of themselves and are aware of the people's needs and aspirations^[20]. Political trust requires therefore on how the demands of the common people are being fulfilled by the government.

Overall the present state of affairs remains to lean towards an unhealthy shape which is far more expected from the general population of the state. It is evident from the perceptions of the sample study that well beyond one half of the respondents were totally dissatisfied with the workings of the present state regime. Commenting with the regime performance, one of the respondent narrated that the overall system in the state

machinery is “going downhill and leading towards looses in many ways”. This signifies not only the present helm of the state affairs but “genuinely it also incorporates the role of the common citizens at large”. Another respondent highlighted in a finer note that the present system is becoming from “bad to worse in Nagaland”. And thus strongly advocates that the entire system in the state should be controlled by the constituted “higher ups with dedicated government functionaries”.

As a whole the study finds that the multi-dimensional approach of the government is yet to touch the far flung minds and reach the territorial pocket of the state. The common hope and enthusiasm of the citizens' societal targets hangs unpredictable at the hands of the “chosen” political servants. Rather the desire of each and every citizen seems to grow far and wide in terms of straining out the best capable leaders in the days to come. Perhaps at the same time, prosperity and a balanced society lies at the humble straight hands and minds of the general populace too. It is also very important as to how truthful and healthy the citizens participate during the initial stages in formation of their “own political representatives”. Yet, this suggests that both the leaders in the government as well as the entire community to cement one another and join heads together for a better prospective democratic state.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Marc J. Hetherington, *Why Trust Matters: Declining Political Trust and the Demise of American Liberalism* (Princeton University Press, NJ, 2005).
- [2]. Kenneth Newton, *Social and political trust in Russell J Dalton & Hans-Dieter Klingemann (Ed.), Oxford handbook of political behavior*, (Oxford University Press, New York, 2007) 342-361.
- [3]. A. Miller, *Political issues and trust in government: 1964–1970*, *American Political Science Review*, 68, 1974, 951–972.
- [4]. John Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory* (Cambridge., Harvard University Press: MA, 1990).
- [5]. Marc J. Hetherington, *The Political relevance of political trust*, *American Political Science Review*, 92(4), 1998, 791-808.
- [6]. Inta Mierina, *Political participation and development of political attitudes in post-communist countries*, doctoral diss., University of Latvia, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Sociology, 2011.
- [7]. G. Catterberg and A. Moreno, *The individual bases of political trust: trends in new and established democracies*, *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 18(1), 2006, 31-48; K. Newton, *Social capital and democracy in modern Europe in J. van Deth et al (Ed.), Social capital and European democracy*, (Routledge, NY, 1999) 3-24.
- [8]. Margaret Levi and Laura Stoker, *Political trust and trustworthiness*, *Annual Review of Political Science*, 3, 2000, 475-507.
- [9]. Jack Citrin and Christopher Muste, *Trust in government in J. P. Robinson (Ed.) Measures of political attitudes* (Academic Press, San Diego, 1999) 465-532.
- [10]. Peri K. Blind, *Building trust in government in the twenty-first century: Review of literature and emerging issues*, 7th Global Forum on Reinventing Government Building Trust in Government, Vienna, Austria, 26-29 June 2007, 1-34.
- [11]. A. Miller and O. Listaugh, *Political performance and institutional trust in P. Norris (Ed.), Critical citizens: Global support for democratic government* (Oxford University Press, 1999) 358.
- [12]. K. Newton and P. Norris, *Confidence in public institutions: Faith, culture, or performance?” in S. Pharr and R. Putnam (Eds.), Disaffected democracies* (Princeton University Press, 2000) 53.
- [13]. G. Almond and S. Verba, *The civic culture revisited: An analytical study* (Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, 1989); S. Knack, *Social capital and the quality of government: Evidence from the states*, *American Journal of Political Science*, 46 (4), 2002, 772-785.
- [14]. S. Knack (2002), Opt cit.
- [15]. B. Rothstein and D. Stolle (2003), *Social capital, impartiality and the welfare state: An institutional approach in M. Hooghe & D. Stolle (Eds.), Generating social capital: Civil society and institutions in comparative perspective*, (Palgrave Macmillan, NY, 2003) 191-210.
- [16]. J. Anderson Christopher and Yuliya V. Tverdova, *Corruption, political allegiance and attitudes towards government in contemporary democracies*, *American Journal of Political Science*, 47(1), 2003, 91-109.
- [17]. YouthNet was launched on the 1st of February 2006 by a group of young Naga professionals which is registered under the Registration of Societies Act 1895.. The main objective was to create a platform where young people can address any issue that affects them. YouthNet is a non-profit organization with a mission to help youth acquire knowledge, develop life skills and form attitudes to enable them to become self directing, positive, productive, responsible and contributing members of society through active participation and involvement.

- [18]. YouthNet's Studies show almost 1000 Crores spent in 2013 Assembly Elections accessed at <http://www.youthnet.org.in/campaigns/youthnets-studies-show-almost-1000-crores-spent-in-2013-assembly-elections/> (accessed on 25th May, 2017).
- [19]. Peri K. Blind (2007), Opt cit.
- [20]. Respondent