

PUBLIC OPINION ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ANTI-CORRUPTION MEASURES: A MULTI-CITY SURVEY ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Local government corruption poses a major dilemma to local government governance, service delivery and public confidence to the developing democracies. Although there are the institutional structures of anti-corruption, its perceived efficacy by the citizens is still a critical but under researched factor of their effectiveness and legitimacy. This paper examines the perception of citizens regarding the effectiveness of local anti-corruption efforts in three large cities in Pakistan namely Karachi, Lahore and Peshawar. Using a quantitative survey design (N=900) we examine the awareness, experience and trust of the citizens about the institutional mechanism of the anti-corruption hotlines, transparency portal, ombudspersons and audit systems. This analysis shows that there is a major paradox: there is much awareness among the population about anti-corruption tools at their disposal, but perceived efficiency is low and there is a strong institutional mistrust. Regression analysis reveals that the most negative predictor of perceived effectiveness is direct experience of corruption and exposure to media coverage on cases of graft. On the other hand, personal efficacy in reporting corruption and satisfaction of the basic municipal services are found to be good moderators. The results indicate that best institutional interventions though needed cannot work without complementary bottom-up civic activities, a high-level enforcement presence, and better service delivery. The research finds that improving the transparency and legitimacy of enforcement measures is more essential to change the minds of the society than just the increase in the number of tools of anti-corruption.

Keywords: Public Opinion, Local Government, Anti-Corruption Measures, Institutional Trust, Governance, Pakistan, Multi-City Survey.

1. Introduction

Corruption within local government institutions represents a profound challenge to governance, service delivery, and public trust, particularly in developing democracies. At the sub-national level, where citizens interact most directly with the state, whether through utilities provision, land administration, or infrastructure development, corrupt practices not only divert resources but also

erode the social contract between the government and the governed (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015). While substantial policy and scholarly attention have been directed toward establishing national anti-corruption frameworks, such as independent commissions, legal reforms, and digital governance platforms, far less is known about how citizens perceive and experience local anti-corruption measures. This perceptual gap is

critical, as public opinion does not merely reflect institutional performance; it actively shapes the legitimacy and effectiveness of anti-corruption systems (Anderson & Tverdova, 2003). When citizens view these mechanisms as ineffective or complicit, a cycle of cynicism and disengagement ensues, undermining even well-designed interventions.

Pakistan presents a compelling context in which to examine this dynamic. Ranked 140 out of 180 countries in Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index, Pakistan continues to struggle with systemic corruption, particularly at sub-national levels where governance deficits are most acutely felt. Following devolution reforms in 2001 and 2013, local governments were granted enhanced administrative and financial authority, yet they have frequently been criticized for mismanagement and corruption (Asif, 2024; Cheema et al., 2006). In response, provincial authorities have introduced a range of anti-corruption instruments, including public hotlines, transparency portals, ombudsperson offices, and social audit mechanisms. Despite these efforts, public trust remains low, and corruption is persistently cited as a major impediment to local governance (Transparency International Pakistan, 2022). Yet empirical research on how citizens view these localized initiatives, whether they are aware of them, trust them, or deem them effective, remains scarce.

This study addresses that gap by investigating public perceptions of the effectiveness of local anti-corruption measures across three major Pakistani cities: Karachi, Lahore, and Peshawar. These urban centres differ significantly in their political economies, governance challenges, and post-conflict contexts, offering a comparative lens through which to assess institutional credibility. Moving beyond unidimensional measures of corruption perception, we disaggregate "effectiveness" into four key dimensions: awareness, accessibility, procedural fairness, and outcome credibility. Our central research question is: Why, despite the proliferation of anti-corruption tools, does public scepticism persist, and what factors explain the divergence between institutional provision and public trust?

In answering this question, the study makes a dual contribution: theoretically, it integrates Institutional Theory and the Theory of Planned Behaviour to explain how formal anti-corruption mechanisms interact with public trust and civic behaviour; and practically, it offers evidence-based insights for policymakers and civil society to design more credible, trusted, and effective local anti-corruption systems, shifting the focus from procedural proliferation to perceived legitimacy.

1.1 Research Objectives

The specific objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To assess the level of public awareness regarding specific local anti-corruption initiatives (e.g., hotlines, complaint portals, audit publications) in Karachi, Lahore, and Peshawar.
2. To evaluate the perceived effectiveness of these measures across four dimensions: deterrence, accessibility, procedural fairness, and result orientation.
3. To examine the influence of demographic variables (income, education), personal corruption experience, and media exposure on perceptions of effectiveness.
4. To analyse the relationship between general trust in local government institutions and specific trust in their anti-corruption instruments.
5. To identify key moderating factors, such as satisfaction with municipal services and sense of civic efficacy, that may mitigate negative perceptions of anti-corruption measures.
6. To propose evidence-based recommendations for local governments and civil society to enhance the credibility and impact of anti-corruption efforts through strategic communication and institutional redesign.

1.2 Revised Research Questions

1. To what extent are citizens in major Pakistani cities aware of local government anti-corruption mechanisms?
2. How satisfied are citizens with the ability of these mechanisms to prevent, detect, and punish corruption?

3. How does personal experience with petty corruption influence perceptions of institutional anti-corruption effectiveness?
4. What is the relationship between general trust in local government and specific trust in its anti-corruption measures?
5. Which factors most strongly predict perceived effectiveness: demographic characteristics, personal corruption experiences, or media exposure?
6. Does the proliferation of institutional anti-corruption measures enhance public trust, or does it contribute to reform fatigue?
7. How does the visibility of enforcement actions (e.g., prosecutions, recoveries) affect public opinion compared to the mere presence of reporting mechanisms?
8. How do perceptions of anti-corruption effectiveness vary across cities with differing political and administrative contexts?
9. Is perceived ineffectiveness driven by poorly designed measures, or by perceptions of active institutional sabotage?

1.3 Broader Overarching Research Question

How do citizens in major Pakistani cities perceive the effectiveness of local government anti-corruption measures, and what factors explain the significant gap between institutional provisions and public trust?

2. Literature Review

The efforts on corruption and anti-corruption literature are largely divided into institutional-design and the socio-cultural approaches. The institutional approach is based on the establishment of agencies, legislature and processes (whistleblower protections, independent anti-corruption commissions, e-governance platforms, procurement audits, etc.) to make the costs and risks of corruption harder (Usama et al., 2022; Klitgaard, 2015). Research in this tradition focuses on technical remedies, and this may be compared to international best practices. Nevertheless, it is repeatedly criticized that these islands of integrity do not always work in changing the larger sea of corruption, especially when they are implanted at foreign locations not adjusted to

local conditions or political determination (Persson et al., 2013).

The socio-cultural approach takes an alternative direction to the institutionalized norms, networks, and action problems at the collective level that perpetuate corruption. In this perspective, the anti-corruption is not effective in cases where it fails to change the social logic of patronage and rent-seeking (Asif & Asghar, 2025; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015). The focus of the central part is on public opinion which reflects and strengthens these norms. When people are convinced that corruption is a part and parcel and reporting is worthless then these people tend to rationalize being involved in or condoning corrupt behaviour, which is a vicious circle (Rothstein & Eek, 2009).

The studies concerning the perception of corruption by people have set several important findings. To begin with, the experience of petty bribery, however not common, has a over-proportionately high negative influence on institutional trust (Seligson, 2002). Second, media attention is two-sided: investigative journalism may be more informative and require more accountability, but oversaturated discussion of scandals with no justice delivered after may lead to cynicism (De Vreese & Elenbaas, 2008). Third, perceptions tend to be sticky and slow to mirror real institutional improvements and hence reform politics will be a challenge (Asif et al., 2025; Anderson & Tverdova, 2003).

Pervasive corruption and the lack of trust by the population have been widely recorded in studies within the Pakistani context (Transparency International Pakistan, 2022). It has been shown in research on local government that it can be susceptible to elite capture and bureaucratic obstructions and at the same time, can serve as a form of grassroots democracy (Javid, 2019). Nonetheless, not many studies have narrowed down to what the citizens consider to be the local anti-corruption tools. Other interesting exceptions are the work by Khan (2020) on the low utilization of right-to-information laws on a municipal level and by Asif (2024) on the difficulties related to institutional problems in governance. The research contributes to this gap by offering a

comparative, multi-city study of the population opinion on a set of local anti-corruption policies, which combines both institutional and perceptual concepts.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The integrated theory of Institutional Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is used to guide this study. According to the institutional theory (North, 1990), to be effective, the formal rules (anti-corruption laws, agencies) should be backed by the informal norms (public trust, ethical standards). The common inability of policy to be linked to practice results in lack of legitimacy. We conjecture that such a measure of this coupling or decoupling is the public opinion on effectiveness. It is possible to explain the involvement of citizens in anti-corruption mechanisms with the aid of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). The intention to report corruption (one of the behavioural outcomes) is determined according to

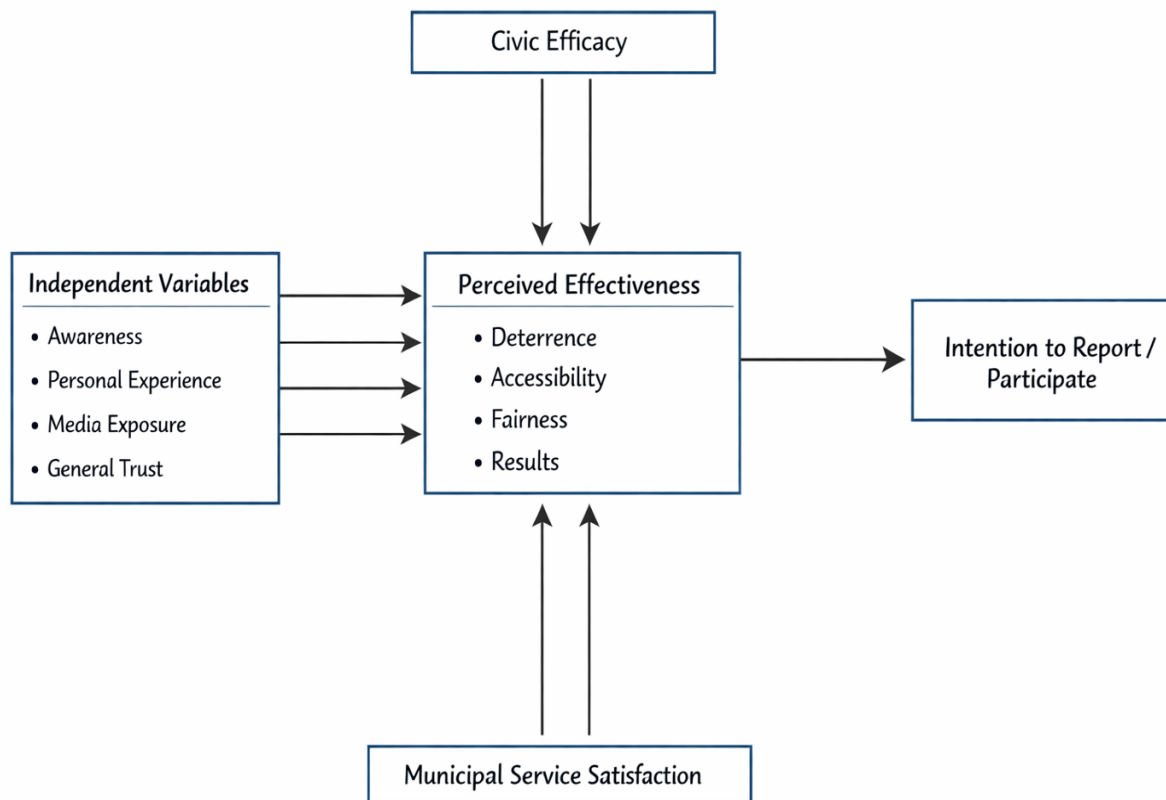
TPB: (1) Attitudes toward reporting (Is it effective? Risky?), (2) Subjective norms (Are other people okay? Is it common practice?), and (3) Perceived Behavioural Control (Do I know how? Do I feel safe?). The attitudes and subjective norms are directly based on perceptions of institutional effectiveness. When citizens believe that no action or retaliation will be taken against those who report, they will be reluctant to do so and this will completely take down the whole system.

Our model of synthesis (Figure 1) suggests that the Independent Variables (Awareness of Measures, Personal Corruption Experience, Media Exposure and General Institutional Trust) affect the Mediating Variable (Perceived Effectiveness of Anti-Corruption Measures). The perception, in its turn, affects the Dependent Variable (Civic Anti-Corruption Behaviour Intention), and is moderated by such factors as Civic Efficacy and Service Satisfaction.



Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Factors Influencing Public Opinion on Local Anti-Corruption Measures:

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework institutional performance and the attitude of



describing the factors influencing the development of public opinion about the local anti-corruption measures. The framework demonstrates that awareness, personal experience, media exposure and general trust are the independent variables that determine the perceived effectiveness of anti-corruption initiatives among the citizens. Perceived effectiveness is addressed as a mediating variable and it is indicated by using four dimensions, deterrence, accessibility, fairness and results.

The model also indicates that the greater perceived effectiveness, the greater the intention to report corruption or engage in anti-corruption is. Also, civic efficacy and satisfaction with municipal services are used as moderating variables, which enhance or dilute the correlation between perceived effectiveness and behavioural intentions of citizens (Asif et al., 2025). On the whole, the framework emphasizes the interplay of the

citizens to the involvement in anti-corruption activities.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design to collect quantitative data on public perceptions of local anti-corruption measures in three major Pakistani cities: Karachi (Sindh), Lahore (Punjab), and Peshawar (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). These cities were selected due to their diverse socio-political environments, varying governance structures, and significance as provincial capitals, which collectively provide a representative urban sample for comparative analysis.

3.2 Sampling Procedure

A multi-stage stratified random sampling approach was adopted. In each city, three

administrative units (towns or union councils) were randomly selected. Within these units, households were identified using a systematic random walk method. From each selected household, one adult respondent aged 20–60 years was interviewed, determined through the last birthday method to ensure randomization and minimize selection bias. The total sample comprised 900 respondents (300 per city), yielding a margin of error of $\pm 3.2\%$ at a 95% confidence level.

3.3 Instrumentation

Data were collected through face-to-face interviews using a structured questionnaire administered by trained enumerators. The instrument was designed based on established scales from governance and public opinion literature and was pretested for clarity and reliability. The questionnaire included the following sections (see Table 1 for scale details):

Table 1: Measurement Scales Used in the Questionnaire

Scale / Measure	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Response Format
Perceived Effectiveness Scale	10	0.86	"To what extent do you believe that the anti-corruption hotline leads to actual investigations?" (1=Not at all, 5=Very much)
Behavioural Intention Scale	4	0.82	"How likely are you to report a corrupt act if you witness one?" (1=Very unlikely, 5=Very likely)
Civic Efficacy Scale	5	0.78	"I believe my actions can help reduce corruption in my locality." (1=Strongly disagree, 5=Strongly agree)
Municipal Service Satisfaction Scale	6	0.81	"How satisfied are you with the quality of water supply in your area?" (1=Very dissatisfied, 5=Very satisfied)
General Trust in Local Government	5	0.83	"I trust that my local government acts in the public interest." (1=Strongly disagree, 5=Strongly agree)
Media Exposure Scale	4	0.76	"How often do you encounter news about corruption cases in local media?" (1=Rarely, 5=Very often)

The demographic profile of the respondents is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N=900)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
City	Karachi	300	33.3%
	Lahore	300	33.3%
	Peshawar	300	33.3%
Gender	Male	475	52.8%
	Female	425	47.2%
Age Group	20–30 years	280	31.1%
	31–45 years	380	42.2%
	46–60 years	240	26.7%
Education	Up to Matric	290	32.2%
	Intermediate	270	30.0%
	Bachelor's & above	340	37.8%
Monthly Income	< 50,000 PKR	350	38.9%

	50,001–100,000 PKR	380	42.2%
	> 100,000 PKR	170	18.9%

3.4 Data Collection

Fieldwork was conducted over a three-month period between June and August 2023. Enumerators received training on ethical interviewing, questionnaire administration, and handling sensitive topics. Verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants, and anonymity was assured to encourage candid responses.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS 26 and AMOS 24. Analytical procedures included:

- Descriptive statistics and frequency distributions.
- Cross-tabulations with Chi-square tests for categorical variables.
- Pearson correlation analysis to examine bivariate relationships.
- Multiple linear regression to identify predictors of perceived effectiveness.
- Moderation analysis using Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 1) to test interaction effects.
- One-way ANOVA to compare mean scores across cities.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The study protocol was reviewed, and all participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time, and data were stored securely with identifiers removed to protect confidentiality.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Respondent demographics are summarized in Table 1. A total of 900 adults participated, with equal distribution across Karachi, Lahore, and Peshawar. The sample was balanced in terms of gender (52.8% male, 47.2% female), and a majority fell within the 31–45 age group (42.2%). Education levels varied, with 37.8% holding a bachelor's degree or higher. Income distribution showed that 42.2% of respondents earned between 50,001–100,000 PKR per month.

Awareness and perceived effectiveness scores for key anti-corruption measures are presented in Table 3. While awareness was relatively high for measures such as anti-corruption hotlines (78%) and transparency portals (65%), perceived effectiveness was consistently low across all tools, with mean scores ranging from 2.5 to 4.0 on a 10-point scale.

Table 3: Awareness and Perceived Effectiveness of Anti-Corruption Measures

Measure	Awareness (%)	Mean Effectiveness (1–10)	SD
Anti-Corruption Hotline	78%	2.8	1.5
Project Transparency Portal	65%	3.1	1.7
Social Audit Committees	45%	3.5	1.6
Local Ombudsperson Office	32%	4.0	1.8
Publicly Displayed Tenders	70%	2.5	1.4

Table 5 displays the descriptive statistics for key scale variables used in the analysis. The Perceived Effectiveness Scale had a mean of 3.2 (SD = 1.8), indicating overall low perceived efficacy. Civic

efficacy and service satisfaction showed moderate mean scores, while general institutional trust was relatively low.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for Key Scale Variables (N=900)

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Cronbach's α
Perceived Effectiveness Scale	3.2	1.8	1	10	0.86
Behavioural Intention Scale	2.9	1.5	1	5	0.82

Civic Efficacy Scale	3.1	1.2	1	5	0.78
Service Satisfaction Scale	3.4	1.3	1	5	0.81
General Institutional Trust	2.7	1.4	1	5	0.83
Media Exposure Scale	3.8	1.1	1	5	0.76

4.2 Inferential and Comparative Analysis

Bivariate correlations between main study variables are shown in Table 6. Perceived effectiveness was strongly positively correlated with general institutional trust ($r = 0.71, p < .001$)

and civic efficacy ($r = 0.65, p < .001$), and negatively correlated with personal corruption experience ($r = -0.63, p < .001$) and negative media exposure ($r = -0.52, p < .001$).

Table 6: Bivariate Correlations Among Key Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Perceived Effectiveness	1.00					
2. General Institutional Trust	0.71***	1.00				
3. Civic Efficacy	0.65***	0.58***	1.00			
4. Personal Corruption Exp.	-0.63***	-0.55***	-0.48***	1.00		
5. Media Exposure (Negative)	-0.52***	-0.49***	-0.41***	0.46***	1.00	
6. Service Satisfaction	0.44***	0.51***	0.39***	-0.35***	-0.32***	1.00

*** $p < .001$

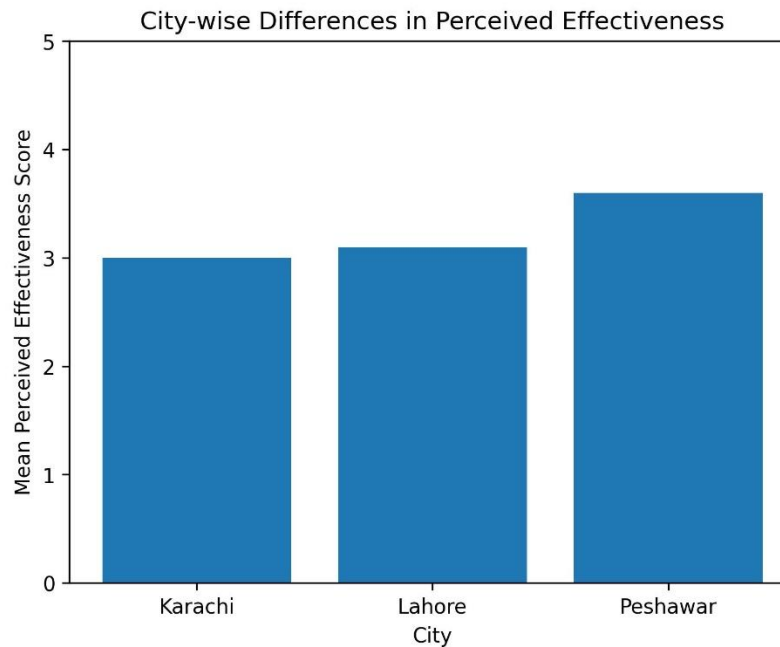
A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare perceived effectiveness across the three cities (Table 7). The results indicated significant differences ($F(2, 897) = 12.45, p < .001$). Post-hoc

Tukey tests revealed that Peshawar ($M = 3.6$) had slightly but significantly higher perceived effectiveness compared to Karachi ($M = 3.0$) and Lahore ($M = 3.1$).

Table 7: One-Way ANOVA for Perceived Effectiveness by City

City	N	Mean	SD	F	p	Post-hoc (Tukey)
Karachi	300	3.0	1.8	12.45	< .001	Peshawar > Karachi, Lahore
Lahore	300	3.1	1.9			
Peshawar	300	3.6	1.7			

Figure 2: Mean Perceived Effectiveness of Anti-Corruption Measures by City



Note: Bars represent ± 1 standard error. Peshawar shows a statistically higher perceived effectiveness compared to Karachi and Lahore ($p < .001$).

4.3 Regression Analysis

A hierarchical multiple regression was performed to predict perceived effectiveness (Table 8). The final model accounted for 59% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.59$, $F(7, 892) = 48.32$, $p < .001$). Personal

corruption experience ($\beta = -0.38$) and negative media exposure ($\beta = -0.25$) were the strongest negative predictors. General institutional trust ($\beta = 0.31$) and civic efficacy ($\beta = 0.22$) were significant positive predictors. Awareness of measures was not a significant predictor ($\beta = 0.07$, $p = .112$).

Table 8: Multiple Regression Predicting Perceived Effectiveness

Predictor	B	SE	Beta (β)	t	p
(Constant)	1.24	0.24	–	5.12	< .001
Personal Corruption Experience	-0.89	0.10	-0.38	-8.91	< .001
General Institutional Trust	0.40	0.05	0.31	7.45	< .001
Media Exposure (Negative)	-0.41	0.07	-0.25	-5.98	< .001
Civic Efficacy	0.33	0.06	0.22	5.12	< .001
Service Satisfaction	0.26	0.06	0.19	4.56	< .001
Awareness of Measures	0.09	0.06	0.07	1.59	.112
Education Level	0.16	0.08	0.09	2.10	.036

Model Summary: $R^2 = 0.59$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.58$, $F(7, 892) = 48.32$, $p < .001$

4.4 Moderation Analysis

A moderation analysis was conducted to examine whether service satisfaction moderated the relationship between personal corruption experience and perceived effectiveness (Table 9).

The interaction term was significant ($\beta = 0.18$, $p = .003$), indicating that higher service satisfaction buffered the negative effect of corruption experience on perceived effectiveness.

Table 9: Moderation Analysis: Service Satisfaction as a Moderator

Predictor	B	SE	t	p
Constant	2.95	0.22	13.41	< .001
Personal Corruption Experience (PCE)	-0.92	0.11	-8.36	< .001
Service Satisfaction (SS)	0.28	0.07	4.00	< .001
PCE × SS Interaction	0.18	0.06	3.00	.003

R^2 change for interaction = .02, $F(1, 896) = 9.00$, $p = .003$

4.5 Summary of Key Findings

The key findings of this study highlight a complex landscape regarding public perceptions of anti-corruption measures. Despite a high level of public awareness about the various tools and mechanisms designed to combat corruption, this awareness does not translate into a strong belief in their actual effectiveness. In fact, individuals who have personally experienced corruption, such as being asked for bribes to access basic services, are particularly sceptical about the efficacy of anti-corruption initiatives. This disillusionment is further intensified by negative media coverage, especially when high-profile scandals are widely reported but rarely lead to visible consequences or successful prosecutions. These factors serve as the most significant detractors, undermining confidence in the system and reinforcing the perception of a credibility gap within local anti-corruption efforts.

On the other hand, the study identifies general institutional trust and a sense of civic efficacy as crucial positive influences. When people have a favourable view of their local government and believe that their actions can make a difference, they are more likely to trust and support anti-corruption tools. Moreover, satisfaction with everyday public services, such as reliable water supply, clean streets, and efficient licensing, plays a significant role. It not only boosts overall trust in local administration but also helps mitigate the negative impact of personal corruption experiences; people who are satisfied with public services are more inclined to give anti-corruption efforts the benefit of the doubt. However, simply making the public aware of available anti-corruption tools is not enough to foster trust or change perceptions. The findings underscore that deep-seated scepticism about how these systems operate and who they truly serve cannot be

overcome by awareness campaigns alone. Instead, a more comprehensive approach that combines visible enforcement, improved service delivery, and enhanced procedural justice is necessary to build genuine public trust in anti-corruption systems.

5. Discussion

The findings of this multi-city survey reveal a pronounced credibility gap in Pakistan's local anti-corruption framework: high public awareness of formal mechanisms does not translate into perceived effectiveness. This disjuncture aligns with institutional isomorphism theory, wherein organizations adopt structures symbolically to secure legitimacy rather than to enhance operational functionality (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). While government campaigns and media coverage have successfully disseminated information about anti-corruption tools, such as hotlines, transparency portals, and ombudsperson offices, this visibility has not fostered public confidence in their utility. Instead, these measures are often perceived as “window dressing,” implemented to satisfy external expectations rather than to engender genuine accountability.

The regression analysis underscores that personal corruption experience is the strongest negative predictor of perceived effectiveness. Each direct encounter with bribery, whether for securing a water connection, obtaining a construction permit, or accessing municipal services, serves not as an isolated incident but as tangible evidence of systemic failure (Aslam & Asif, 2025). These experiences erode trust more profoundly than abstract awareness of reporting mechanisms, reinforcing a narrative of institutional incapacity. Similarly, negative media exposure to unresolved high-profile scandals cultivates a culture of perceived impunity, wherein corruption is widely

reported but rarely punished. This media dynamic amplifies public cynicism, suggesting that anti-corruption measures are performative rather than substantive.

Conversely, general institutional trust and civic efficacy emerge as critical buffers against scepticism. Trust functions as a heuristic: citizens who hold favourable views of their local government are more likely to extend the benefit of the doubt to its anti-corruption instruments. Civic efficacy, the belief that individual action can influence outcomes, mediates the transition from passive awareness to active engagement. This aligns with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), wherein perceived behavioural control and subjective norms shape intentions to report corruption. The moderating role of service satisfaction further illustrates that trust is holistic: satisfaction with basic municipal services (e.g., water supply, sanitation, licensing) fosters a broader sense of governmental competence, which in turn legitimizes anti-corruption efforts as part of a functional administration rather than as isolated, legalistic interventions.

Notably, awareness alone was not a significant predictor of perceived effectiveness. This finding carries important policy implications: merely expanding public knowledge of anti-corruption tools—through awareness campaigns or informational portals—is insufficient to alter deep-seated distrust. The problem lies not in a lack of information but in a deficit of credibility. Public scepticism is rooted in perceptions of how these tools operate, who they serve, and whether they deliver tangible outcomes. This suggests that anti-corruption strategies must shift from a dissemination-oriented approach to a credibility-building one, emphasizing transparency, accountability, and visible enforcement.

6. Conclusion

The analysis of this multi-city survey findings shows informed cynicism in the opinion of the

public towards local anti-corruption measures in Pakistan. The citizens know of the institutional arsenal but feel that it is mostly a show with no teeth and integrity to make a difference. Direct experiences of corruption and accounts of impunity are what damage the perceived effectiveness the most and institutional trust among the populace, as well as individual civic efficacy, are the strongest supporters of the perceived effectiveness. Thus, the way forward in legitimizing the institutions of anti-corruption is not in developing additional measures, but in proving its working credibility through routine and salient application and by integrating it within a wider context of responsive and effective local governance. It is not an institutional design problem, but rather a political will and communicative action problem.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

This study integrates Institutional Theory and the Theory of Planned Behaviour to elucidate the interplay between formal anti-corruption structures and public perceptions. The findings highlight that formal rule (e.g., anti-corruption laws, reporting mechanisms) must be coupled with informal norms (e.g., public trust, ethical standards) to achieve legitimacy (North, 1990). The decoupling observed in this context—where institutional provisions exist but public trust is absent—reflects a failure to align technical design with social legitimacy. Furthermore, the strong influence of personal experience and media exposure underscores the role of lived and mediated realities in shaping perceptions, challenging purely institutionalist approaches that prioritize structural reforms over perceptual and cultural factors.

6.2 Practical and Policy Implications

To bridge the credibility gap, local governments and civil society must adopt an integrated, trust-centric strategy:

Recommendation	Specific Action	Expected Outcome
1. Prioritize Visible Enforcement	Publicly report on investigations, prosecutions, recoveries, and disciplinary actions at regular intervals.	Enhances transparency and demonstrates accountability, reducing perceptions of impunity.

2. Integrate Anti-Corruption with Service Delivery	Link anti-corruption reforms to tangible improvements in municipal services (e.g., streamlined licensing, fair utility provision).	Builds trust through demonstrated competence and responsiveness.
3. Strengthen Procedural Justice	Ensure complaint mechanisms are safe, accessible, and responsive; provide whistleblower protections and feedback to complainants.	Increases perceived fairness and encourages citizen reporting.
4. Leverage Civic Efficacy	Partner with civil society to conduct social audits, citizen oversight committees, and participatory monitoring.	Fosters constructive public engagement and reinforces collective accountability.
5. Reframe Communication Strategies	Shift messaging from “tools available” to “results delivered,” emphasizing outcomes over procedures.	Aligns public perception with institutional performance.

6.3 Comparative Reflections

The variation in perceived effectiveness across cities; with Peshawar reporting slightly higher scores than Karachi and Lahore, suggests that local political-administrative contexts mediate public trust. Peshawar's post-conflict environment and recent governance reforms may have fostered marginally greater confidence in anti-corruption efforts. This underscores the need for context-sensitive interventions rather than one-size-fits-all approaches. Comparative studies in other developing democracies (e.g., India, Nigeria) similarly indicate that anti-corruption measures are often perceived as ineffective where enforcement is weak and impunity prevails (Klitgaard, 2015).

6.4 Limitations and Future Directions

While this study provides robust cross-sectional insights, it is limited by its urban focus, reliance on self-reported data, and inability to establish causality. Future research should:

- Employ longitudinal designs to track changes in perceptions following specific interventions.
- Incorporate rural populations to capture diverse governance dynamics.
- Use experimental methods to test the impact of different communication and enforcement strategies on public trust.
- Explore the intersection of anti-corruption measures with other governance innovations, such as participatory budgeting or digital governance platforms.

In conclusion, the path to legitimizing local anti-corruption systems in Pakistan lies not in creating more tools, but in demonstrating their credible use. This requires a shift from symbolic compliance to substantive accountability, underpinned by visible enforcement, integrated service delivery, and meaningful civic engagement. Ultimately, anti-corruption is not merely an institutional design challenge, it is a problem of political will, public trust, and communicative action.

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