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Public Trust in Government and Its Influence on Political Stability: A Qualitative Study Based on Badulla District in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on identifying the political stability in Badulla District in Sri Lanka in terms of public trust in government in the post-economic crisis context. The major institutions have also lost citizens' trust following the recent challenges in the governance of Sri Lanka, including the growing cost-of-living pressures, the perceived corruption, and unequal service provision. The citizens have also lost confidence in the major institutions because of the challenges in the governance of the country in recent times, which include the rising cost of living, the perception of corruption, and uneven service provision. The study looks at the gap in the body of empirical research that it addresses, which is the lack of empirical research at the district level on the construct of trust and how citizens construct trust in the course of their everyday interaction with the state, and how these perceptions of trust impact upon stability at the community level. The study follows the philosophy of interpretivism and has an inductive approach guided by the institutional theory and social capital theory with semi-structured in-depth interviews with about 20 adult residents who were chosen in a purposive manner to achieve social and geographical diversity. Thematic analysis is used to analyze data, which is based on the following aspects: governance practices (service effectiveness, accountability, fairness), institutional confidence, socio-economic livelihood security and social identity-based marginalization. The findings indicate that trust is more context and performance-dependent: low latency, perceived preferential treatment, lack of transparency negatively impact trust; responsive services, participation and benefit in a timely fashion builds trust. Respondents continuously associate trust with less social frustration, enhanced cooperation, and decreased tendencies to protest, which indicate that trust is a stabilizing factor to local political order. The paper provides context-sensitive recommendations on governance changes that make it stronger in terms of legitimacy, inclusion, and sustainable stability.

1. Introduction

1.1 Chapter Introduction

In this chapter, an introduction of this research is presented and introduces the context of this research which is the public trust on the government and its influence on political stability in Sri Lanka. It introduces the study background, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, significance of the research, scope of the research and justification that forms a foundation of the subsequent chapters.

1.2 Background of Study

The issue of public trust in government has become one of the most important in the post-crisis situation in Sri Lanka, where the lack of economic prosperity and institutional and political instability have undermined the legitimacy of the institutions and increased political instability (Deane, 2025). People have lost trust in major democratic institutions in the last ten years. According to national survey results, the level of trust in Parliament dropped significantly with 63 percent in 2011, drying up to 22.4 percent in 2024, and the trust in political parties diminished to 19.0 percent (Fernandopulle, 2024). Such loss of trust is attributed to the general feeling of corruption, low accountability, and weak political leadership among the citizens whose perception of representative forms of governance has been eroded.

It has been paired with severe socio-economic shocks, and institutional mistrust. In 2022, Sri Lanka faced an unprecedented economic crisis, in which the average inflation rate had reached 46.4, significantly raising the cost of living and putting a lot of pressure on household livelihoods (Khan et al., 2023). The problem was that citizens had a bad attitude towards the capacity and responsiveness of the state, which was exacerbated by the high rate of unemployment, the lack of basic commodities and access to government services. These have contributed to the formation of protests and political instability among the people, which, in turn, exacerbates the vicious cycle in which lost trust is linked to limited good governance.

The vulnerability of Sri Lanka can also be reflected on indicators of international governance, as Sri Lanka has been assessed at a percentile of 25.59 in the field of Political Stability in 2023. The study was conducted in Badulla District in a somewhat favorable environment where about 899,000 people live, there is ethnic and economic variety and geographical variation. The local perceptions in Badulla can be analyzed in order to get a detailed understanding of how the people in the community conceptualize fairness, service provision, legitimacy and how this understanding impacts on the political stability in the community.

1.3 Problem Statement

Although there is a growing recognition of the value of public trust in government as the ingredient of political stability, there has been a significant gap between the empirical evidence and contextual understanding of this issue in the Sri Lankan context particularly in sub-national settings (Mohamed et al., 2017). The literature available on trust and governance in Sri Lanka has dominated with macro-level, quantitative research design, and the studies have dedicated attention to macro-level indicators, including economic performance, perceptions of corruption, or ratings of institutional approval. Although such studies establish degrading trust, it lacks a lot of understanding on how trust is constructed, experienced and negotiated by citizens in their daily engagements with the state particularly in peripheral and rural districts (Ramasamy, 2020).

In theory, the literature makes many assumptions that are based on trust-stability frameworks that have been created in the Western democracies, which may not be entirely relevant in post-crisis, ethnically diverse, and unequal economic societies like Sri Lanka. Theories like institutional legitimacy, social contract and political trust have not been explored enough concerning realities of local governance, informal institutions and past marginalization in up-country areas.

Geographically and methodologically, there is an obvious gap in terms of the empirical. Other districts such as Badulla, where the plantation communities, rural livelihoods and low infiltration of the state services are the norms, are not adequately represented in the governance research literature. Furthermore, the prevalence of survey-based research critiques the research gap of qualitative, voice-based, studies on the narratives, sense and experiences of trust and distrust of citizens.

This paper fills these gaps by engaging in detailed qualitative research on the Badulla District to investigate the impacts of public trust in government on political stability, thus giving context-specific findings that can be used to inform theory, policy and locally responsive governance interventions.

1.4 Research Objectives

a) To explore how citizens in Badulla District perceive and experience trust in government institutions, with particular attention to governance practices such as service delivery, accountability, and fairness.

b) To examine the relationship between public trust in government and perceptions of political stability at the local level in Badulla District, based on citizens lived experiences and interpretations.

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c) To identify key social, economic, and institutional factors that influence the formation or erosion of public trust in government among diverse community groups within Badulla District.

1.5 Research Questions

a) How do citizens in Badulla District perceive public trust in government institutions?

b) In what ways does public trust in government influence perceptions of political stability in Badulla District?

c) What social, economic, and institutional factors contribute to building or eroding public trust in government among communities in Badulla District?

1.6 Significance of Study

The present research is significant from theoretical, empirical, policy, and practical perspectives. In theory, it also contributes to the existing literature on the topic of public trust and political stability, by introducing the theories of trust and legitimacy in a stage of a post-crisis, developing country. The study offers one approach to making the ideas of institutional trust and social contract theory more reflective of the experience of citizens in Badulla District, and to provide an avenue to improve the extent to which they are applicable to local governance. The study can also contribute to refining the available ideas of institutional trust and social contract theory on the basis of the lived experiences of citizens in Badulla District, so that they are more indicative of local governance realities (Bargsted et al., 2022).

Empirically, the research fills a key contextual and methodological gap in the research on Sri Lanka by providing district-level qualitative data on an area that has not been adequately researched. The results will offer some finer-grained details of the process of trust building or breaking, a process that is largely ignored by the big surveys (Sumathipala et al., 2010) because it is based on daily experiences of engaging with government institutes.

Policy and governance perspective, the study yields evidence-based information that can inform the central government, as well as local governments, on the perception of citizens towards the responsiveness, fairness and accountability of the state. They can be used in crafting trust-building governance reforms, enhancing the delivery of the public service, and the relations between citizens and the state.

The study gives the local communities the means to be heard in governance processes, particularly the marginalized and rural communities. The study creates more inclusive, responsive and sustainable democratic governance mechanisms in Sri Lanka while providing an idea on the link between trust and local political stability.

1.7 Scope of the Study

To guarantee depth and focus on this study, it has contextual, conceptual, and methodological limitations to ensure this. The study is geographically limited to the Badulla District in Sri Lanka which is an up-country area with the following features: socio-economic diversity, the rural as well as the plantation societies and varying access to the government services. The results are thus localized in perceptions, and they are not meant to be generalized statistically to the whole country.

In theory, the paper will be keen on governmental trust and how it affects political stability. Trust is discussed with reference to the perception of the citizens on the government institutions, service delivery, accountability, fairness, and legitimacy. Political stability is perceived through the attitudes of the citizens towards the government and the acceptance of the government, as well as their social and political order, not the electoral results or the indicators of macro-level stability.

In terms of research methodology, the study employs a qualitative research design that will employ strategies like in-depth interviews to reflect the lived experiences and perceptions of the citizens. The boundary is narrowed down to the views of adult residents in Badulla District without any quantitative measurement or a comparative district-level study.

In time, the study represents perceptions that were developed during the post-economic crisis era, as one can see how the recent socio-economic issues influenced trust and stability.

1.8 Rationale of the Study

Previous studies on the relationship between trust in government and political stability have focused more on national-level studies with much of the research depending on quantitative measures (governance indices, corruption perception score, and macro-economic performance). The findings from the various research organization and the local research institutions have always been the same Sri Lankan people are less trustful in each other since the economic crisis and the political instability of the country. Despite this, while some of these studies have been able to identify some patterns of reduced trust, they have some significant shortcomings. Most importantly, they do not give much explanation as to why citizens lose their trust, and how and how often they do so – and how it might manifest in real world lives and how this might translate into political instability at the community level.

In addition, a significant part of the works that are available in literature generally focus on the notion of institutional trust and political legitimacy as typically understood in the West. Their workers often ignore the local governance processes, and there are informal systems of power and historical

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marginalization particularly in the up-country and rural areas such as Badulla. Empirical studies that focus on Sri Lanka typically do not disaggregate results by district and do not analyse trust qualitatively or narratively, resulting in a lack of understanding of the differences in the areas.

The study is unique and valuable because it closes the existing gap in theory and empirical evidence, as the study gives comprehensive qualitative district level study on the impact of public trust in government on the political stability in Badulla District. These dimensions of trust (perceived fairness, voice, responsiveness) are foregrounded within the research, as the survey research has seldom identified them to date, in the lived experiences of citizens.

Otherwise, the policymakers run a risk of perpetuating and building their governance reforms based on abstract indicators that do not touch on the local realities, which can further disengage the populace and destabilize the situation. In its turn, closing this gap can offer context-specific information that may reinforce democratic legitimacy, educate trust-building governance approach strategies, and lead to more stable and inclusive political performance in Sri Lanka.

1.9 Chapter Outline

Chapter One: Introduction

In this chapter, the research is introduced by providing background, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, significance, scope and rationale. It puts the study into the post-crisis governance situation in Sri Lanka and reasons why the interest of the trust of the people and political stability is to be paid in the Badulla District.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter is a critical review of theoretical and empirical literature on political stability, institutional legitimacy, and public trust. It explores both international and domestic research, finds conceptual and methodological gaps, and forms a theoretical basis to inform the qualitative research.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter describes the qualitative research design, location of the study, sampling plan, data collection and the methods of data analysis. It also deals with the ethical aspects and limitations of the research and guarantees rigor and transparency of the methods.

Chapter Four: Discussion

In this chapter, I will analyze and discuss the qualitative results concerning the research questions and the available literature. It explains the perception of the participants about trust, governance, and political stability, and it highlights the main themes, trends, and contextual information in Badulla District.

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations

The main findings are summarized and implications to the theory, policy, and practice are highlighted. It provides practical recommendations to the governance actions on trust-building and provides directions for future research related to public trust and political stability in Sri Lanka.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Chapter Introduction

The chapter will delve into the empirical and theoretical context of the topic of trust people have on the government in the context of Badulla District. It is a elaboration of the existing research related to the governance practices, the performance of the institution and socio-economic factors which impact the perception of the citizens. The other two theories suggested by the chapter and which should lead us on the role of service delivery, accountability and social structures on the creation of trust and perception of political stability are the Institutional Theory and Social Capital Theory.

2.2 Empirical Overview

2.2.1. Governance Practices

The study of Clarke et al., (2017) shows that citizens' evaluations of government performance (in particular, their satisfaction with the daily services they receive) is strongly linked to satisfaction and could be translated to their general trust in the government, so that citizens' evaluations of daily services serve as evidence to assess the institution. It makes Service Delivery Effectiveness a key pathway through which trust is built or lost particularly when services are delivered in a timely fashion, and available and responsive. To compound that, the study done by Taufiqurokhman et al., (2024) suggests that satisfaction with services is vital, however, it is also affected by the general mood and expectations of the populace and trust must be assessed in conjunction with citizens' perception of good governance. Procedural justice literature suggests that people give legitimacy to power when the decision making is wholesome and respectful, as in the case of Accountability and Fairness. Perceptions of fair procedures (voice, neutrality, respectful treatment) matter a great deal in a person's willingness to comply and accept the outcome including the negative one as evidence of the institutional trustworthiness (Muzumdar, 2025).

2.2.2. Public Trust

According to the research of Roi et al., (2025) there are two major approaches to the explanation of political trust: Institutional theories (trust is greater when institutions are

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good) and Cultural theories (trust reflects more enduring socialization and values). Their facts support the idea of citizens' re-establishing trust through their personal experience with the institution, and hence, the concepts of competence, reliability and perceived integrity of public institutions are closely linked to the concept of Institutional Confidence. Confidence is also gauged based on the local experience, in places like the Badulla District, which is assessed based on the behavior of the officials, delivery of promises and the predictability of institutions. The more confident that institutions are legitimate and reliable, the more they will tend to believe that the political environment is organized and safe: trust is a stabilizing resource in the case of Perceived Political Stability. Trust is another factor that affects citizens to support the activities and services provided by local government as it is mentioned by Melkamu and Teshome (2023), trust also has a positive impact on citizens in respect of the local government's governance decisions and reduces citizens' perception of uncertainty, instability, and instability. Also, the research conducted by Kyprianides et al., (2021) indicates that the perceived legitimacy (based on fair treatment and trust) affects cooperation with authorities- a significant micro-underpinning of sentiments of stability in the day-to-day life.

2.2.3. Socio-Economic Factors

Economic circumstances also always have a 'political dimension' in that subjective judgments about the economic situation are consistently linked to political trust, so when people feel the economy is in decline or their family is in trouble, their trust in political institutions diminishes. This reflects Economic Conditions and Livelihood Security as one of the trust drivers in Badulla District which could either shape the image of the government as a protector or an ignored need; this cannot be neglected. Inequality also matters. The findings from the research by Garcacia-Sanchez et al., (2024) show that the rise in economic inequality is linked to less trust and less civic cooperation, suggesting that inequalities could lead to a lack of faith in institutions that benefit people like them. For Social Identity and Inequality, it is known that the perception of discrimination/exclusion by identity will directly reduce trust in government as it is a signal of unfairness and disbalancing. The studies carried out by Emmer et al., (2024) have confirmed that discriminatory experiences correlate with decreased trust, thus substantiating the perspective that threats on social identity and treatment imbalances diminish institutional legitimacy towards the marginalized people. The findings of all these studies suggest that further research is needed on the relationship between the patterns of trust within the different community groups and class, locality, ethnicity, and perceived marginalization.

2.3 Theoretical Overview

2.3.1 Institutional Theory

Institutional Theory is described as that which explains how the performance, structure, and legitimate of the formal institutions influence the development of public trust. Based on the research conducted by Jackson, (2018), institutions achieve legitimacy in case they adhere to the socially acceptable rules, norms, and procedures. The more transparent, accountable and procedurally fair the government institutions, the more they will enhance their legitimacy among the citizens.

Also, the rules of the game, which organize political and economic associations, are offered by institutions, as research conducted by Meyer et al., (2024) indicates. Citizens would create confidence in government systems when such rules are predictable and fairly implemented. According to the situation with Badulla District, the service delivery effectiveness and accountability mechanisms can be institutional signals of strengthening or undermining trust. Institutional legitimacy can be achieved through weak governance performance, corruption, or a perception of unfairness thus diminishing the level of trust and perceptions of political stability by the public.

2.3.2 Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory describes trust to be a result of social relationships, social norms and networks in communities. The study conducted by Du et al., (2022) also results in the fact that areas with elevated civic and social networks have better institutional performance and trust in government. The norms of reciprocity developed through social interactions increase the trust in the institutions of society.

Moreover, the research conducted by Nyamari, (2024) also states that social capital makes cooperation and collective action easier, as members of society would have mutually trusted each other. In socio-economically diverse societies like Badulla District, economic conditions, social identity, and inequality might have an effect on bonding and bridging social capital. In places where there is marginalization or exclusion, distrust in government institutions might be reduced. On the other hand, the trust and the sense of political stability in the institutions and the perception of the community could be reinforced by inclusive governance and community involvement.

2.4 Research Gap

Despite the important contribution from the existing literature on the subject of public trust, there are also several missing elements in the existing body of knowledge, particularly on the issue of local governance and developing countries. The studies of Clarke et al. (2017) and Taufiqurokhman et al. (2024) are based mainly on service completeness and the quality of governance within the larger administrative context,

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but there is a lack of attention regarding the interpretation of the governance practices by the citizens of the rural or semi-urban territories based on the lived experience. In the same way, Roi et al. (2025) and Melkamu and Teshome (2023) also discuss the concept of institutional trust and political stability, but their perspectives are mostly at the national, but not regional, level of community analysis.

In addition, the study by Blok and Haugsgjerd (2025) and Garcia-Sanchez et al. (2024) find connections between economics, inequality, and trust, but there is a lack of established studies regarding the interaction of socio-economic pressures, combined with the governance practice and institutional legitimacy in a particular district like Badulla. Furthermore, though the theories of networks and civic engagement made by Social Capital Theory are important, few studies include social capital with institutional performance to explain the erosion or formation of trust (Du et al., 2022; Nyamari, 2024).

In this view it is clear that the existing research falls short in the empirical dimension and at the same time in the context of the research conducted in Badulla District, which is why it is suggested that the existing research has an empirical gap and a contextual gap that needed to be addressed in the research.

2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the empirical studies that have been conducted to show a relationship between governance quality, institutional confidence and socio-economic conditions and public trust. It also pointed out the effect of service effectiveness, accountability, economic security, social inequality on trust perception. Institutional Theory and Social Capital Theory were also formulated as the theoretical pillars of studying trust dynamics in Badulla District in the chapter. Collectively, these views offer an extensive explanation of how political trust can be influenced by institutional performance and social structures.

3. Methodology

3.1 Chapter Introduction

The chapter describes the methodology that was used to test the level of public trust in government and how it played out in political stability in Badulla District. It describes the research design, data collection methods, sampling plan, data analysis methods, ethical, and thematic organization that will be used to conduct the qualitative research.

3.2 Research Design

3.2.1 Research Philosophy

This research will follow the interpretivist philosophy that presupposes that social reality is created through personal experiences and meanings (Pervin and Mokhtar, 2022). Political stability and public trust are subjective phenomena that are influenced by experience. Consequently, to comprehend the perception of citizens in Badulla District, it is important to decipher their stories, social settings and experiences with the government institutions.

3.2.2 Research Approach

The research tends to use an inductive method since it seeks to provide context-specific information using qualitative data instead of testing the pre-determined assumptions. Themes on trust, governance practices and political stability will be brought out based on the experiences of the participants and theory can be refined based on the realities of Badulla District (Korstjens and Moser, 2018).

3.2.3 Research Strategy

The research is based on a qualitative case study approach whereby the Badulla District is discussed as a limited contextual domain. This approach enables the discussion of experiences of governance, socio-economic factors and perceptions of political stability in more depth in a real-life context and provides rich, detailed and context-sensitive information.

3.2.4 Methodological Choice

The literature is based on a mono-method qualitative research design, which implies the use of qualitative interviews only. This approach will enable one to explore perceptions, meanings, and as well as the experiences of the citizens in terms of trust and governance. It emphasizes that individual stories, instead of statistics, reveal meaning, and therefore fall in the interpretivist and inductive orientation.

3.2.5 Time Horizon

Cross sectional time horizon will be used in the study as it will reflect the perception of the participants at the time of post economic crisis in Sri Lanka. The data will be collected at one time to gain insights on the impact of the recent socio-economic shocks and governance challenges on the trust and political stability of the Badulla District.

3.3 Data Collection Method

This research uses in-depth interviews which are semi-structured as the main tool of data collection (DeJonckheere and Vaughn, 2019). Because qualitative research provides an opportunity to capture the perceived lived experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of the participants in their own words, and it allows the researcher to facilitate a discussion on the main themes that include trust, governance practices, service delivery, accountability, and political stability, semi-structured interviews are suitable to conduct the qualitative

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research.

The interview guide will be formulated on research objectives and theory (Institutional Theory and Social Capital Theory). The open-ended questions will involve investigating the experiences of the participants toward the government institutions, their perception of fairness and responsiveness, and their opinion about political stability in Badulla District. To acquire more clarification and detailed context, probing questions will be employed.

The interviews will be face-to-face where necessary and in few incidences through telephone where geographical and technical barriers prevail. The duration of the interviews would be around 30 minutes. Interviews will be audio-taped with the consent of the participants in order to have accuracy and transcription as verbatim to be analyzed.

3.4 Population and Sample Size

This study is target-population based as it involves adult residents (18 years and above) in Badulla District, Sri Lanka. The district comprises rural communities, plantation, semi-urban and ethnically diverse communities and thus it is an appropriate place to investigate the diversely related perceptions of trust in society and stability in politics.

Participants will be selected using a purposive sampling method since they will be able to give deep and meaningful data about the experiences of governance. The participants will be chosen in a way that they will be diverse about gender, age, occupation, socio-economic background, and locality (rural, plantation, and semi-urban areas). In this way, various realities of life in the district will be represented.

The expected number of participants is about 20 participants, and this is good enough to achieve data saturation of qualitative research. The data collection will be carried out to the point of saturation in the themes, in other words, when the interviews produce no new important themes.

3.5 Data Analysis

In this study, thematic analysis will be applied to the analysis of the data obtained from the qualitative interview. After conducting and transcribing the interviews verbatim, the researcher will read and re-read the transcripts to have a thorough understanding of the participants' narratives (Christou, 2022). Primary codes will then be developed to be able to capture important parts of information on the topic of public trust, governance practices, socio-economic conditions and views on political stability. The codes will be categorized into larger themes, which will be checked, revised and well defined. The method of analysis will be inductive and has an informed view based on Institutional Theory and Social Capital Theory. Themes will be substantiated with the direct quotations of the participants and will lend credibility to the analysis.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The research process will be conducted using ethical standards because it is in the best interests of its participants to avoid violating their rights and wellbeing. Each interview will be informed, and the participants will clearly explain the purpose of the study, procedures, and their right to leave at any time with no repercussions. I will provide confidentiality and anonymity using pseudonyms and elimination of identifying information in transcripts. The security of audio recording and research data will be ensured; only the researcher will access them. The fact that the topics of political trust and governance are sensitive will necessitate that interviews are done in a respectful manner where the participants feel safe, comfortable, and free of pressure and harm.

3.7. Critical Commentary of Interview Questions

Table 1: Critical Commentary of Interview Questions

Question	Critical Commentary	Open / Closed	Key Literature Influencing the Question
How would you describe your experiences with government services in Badulla District, particularly in terms of accessibility, timeliness, and responsiveness?	This question investigates the influence of daily service experience on the perception of quality of governance. It is consistent with the theory of institutional performance that implies that direct service experiences have a potent impact on the formation of trust. It records pragmatic forms of governance that influence legitimacy.	Open-ended	Clarke et al. (2017); Taufiqurokhman et al. (2024); Ramasamy (2020); Meyer et al. (2024)

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Question	Critical Commentary	Open / Closed	Key Literature Influencing the Question
Do you feel that government officials and institutions treat people fairly and transparently? Can you share any experiences that shaped this perception?	This question examines procedural justice, fairness and transparency, which are fundamental elements of institutional legitimacy. It gives the participants the opportunity to tell stories of both responsibility and corruption, and to connect the perception of fairness with trust and compliance.	Open-ended	Jackson (2018); Muzumdar (2025); Melkamu and Teshome (2023); Deane (2025)
How much confidence do you have in government institutions such as local authorities or Parliament, and what factors influence your level of trust?	The question directly evaluates institutional confidence, and it determines trust or distrust drivers. It is consistent with the political trust theory, and it describes local definition of the falling national levels of trust.	Open-ended	Bargsted et al. (2022); la Roi et al. (2025); Mohamed et al. (2017); Fernandopulle (2024)
In your view, how does trust in government affect political stability and social order within your community?	This question links the concept of trust to the views of stability, legitimacy, and cooperation. It discusses the possibility of trust being a stabilizing resource or the distrust to cause instability at the community level.	Open-ended	Kyprianides et al. (2021); Thapa (2024); Clarke et al. (2017); de Blok and Haugsgjerd (2025)
How have economic conditions, such as employment opportunities or cost of living, influenced your trust in the government?	This question generates a connection between macro-level shocks (e.g. the crisis in Sri Lanka) and micro-level trust perceptions. It studies economic vulnerability as a factor of political confidence and coping strategies.	Open-ended	Khan et al. (2023); de Blok and Haugsgjerd (2025); Efraín García-Sánchez et al. (2024)
Do you believe that certain social or ethnic groups in Badulla are treated differently by government institutions? How does this influence trust?	This inquiry investigates subjectivity, disparity and exclusion of trust building. It displays the social capital and legitimacy attitudes in that the perceived discrimination weakens institutional confidence.	Open-ended	Emmer et al. (2024); Du et al. (2022); Nyamari (2024); Jackson (2018)

Source: Author construct, 2026

3.8 Thematic Analysis

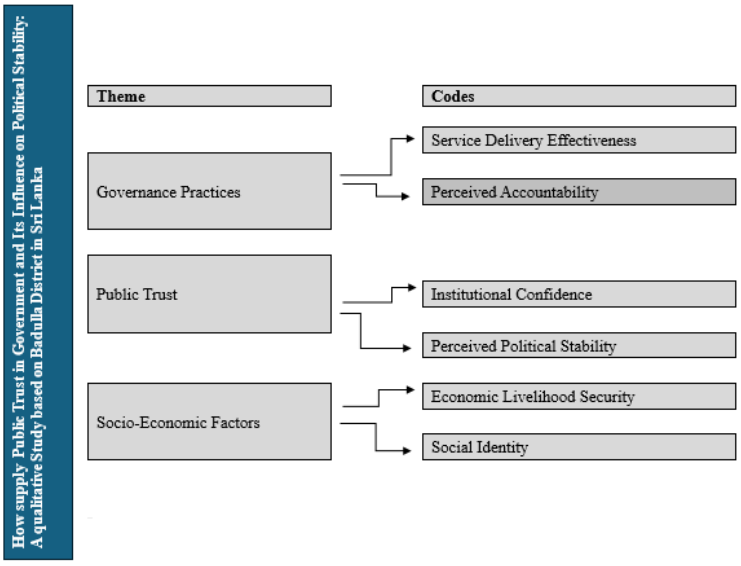


Figure 1: Thematic Synthesis (Source: Author construct , 2026)

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3.9 Chapter Summary

The chapter explained the qualitative interpretivist design, inductive approach and the case study strategy that was used in the study. It outlined the choice of participants, semi-structured interviews, thematic analysis, and the protection of ethics. The combination of these methodological options is guaranteed to provide rigorous, credible and context-sensitive investigation of trust and political stability in Badulla District.

4. Data Analysis And Presentation

4.1 Chapter Introduction

This is where the author has presented the data analysis and statistics based on the qualitative interviews conducted in the Badulla District. It examines the practice of governance, social trust, and social-economic problems in influencing the perceptions of the citizens. Thematically, the analysis will be done based on the objectives of the research whereby the opinions of the participants concerning service delivery, accountability, institutional confidence, political stability and social inclusion will be addressed.

4.2 Findings

4.2.1. Governance Practices

- **Service Delivery Effectiveness**

The results indicate that service delivery performance has a substantial impact on the perception of the citizens on the quality of governance in Badulla District. The respondents were ambivalent about accessibility, timeliness and responsiveness. Although there were those who realized gradual improvement in the digitization of things, others cited bureaucratic slowness and administration slackness.

For example, P1 stated, “Government services are available, but you often have to visit offices multiple times to complete one task.” Similarly, P4 noted, “Online systems help, but internet connectivity is weak in our village.” These responses reflect structural limitations in rural service accessibility.

Timeliness emerged as a recurring concern. P2 shared, “Documents take weeks to process,” while P8 highlighted, “Land matters take months to resolve.” However, some participants such as P12 acknowledged responsiveness in urgent cases, stating, “Emergency services are reasonably responsive.”

Interestingly, P3 and P18 emphasized relational governance dynamics, explaining that service quality often depends on personal networks: “If you know someone inside, it becomes faster” (P3). This suggests perceived informality within institutional processes, potentially weakening perceptions of fairness.

In general, the effectiveness in service delivery seems to be lopsided, where improvements have been observed, but structural inefficiencies still exist. These results show that institutional credibility can be increased with administrative transparency and the simplification of the procedure.

4.2.2. Perceived Accountability and Fairness

The trust perceptions of citizens were closely related to accountability and fairness. Some of the respondents felt favoritism and political interference in the administrative practices. P9 remarked, “Politically connected individuals receive faster approvals,” while P5 stated, “Corruption is not open, but favoritism exists.”

Participants also highlighted limited transparency. P7 shared, “We don’t receive explanations for rejected applications,” and P8 observed, “There is no clear accountability when mistakes happen.” These narratives suggest a perceived lack of procedural justice.

However, not all views were negative. P10 commented, “In some departments, officers act responsibly and fairly.” P11 added, “Public meetings allow us to voice concerns.” These good records suggest that there are participation mechanisms which are not necessarily institutionalized.

There was also fear of retaliation which affected reporting behavior. P18 stated, “People hesitate to complain due to fear.” This shows imbalances in institutional powers which can demoralize civic participation.

Collectively, the concept of accountability and equitableness appears to be situational. Greater perceived legitimacy might be associated with enhancing grievances redress mechanisms and free communication.

4.2.3. Public Trust

- **Institutional Confidence**

There was a high variance in institutional confidence among the participants. With moderate or conditional trust there were quite a number. P1 noted, “I have moderate confidence in local authorities.” Conversely, P2 stated, “Parliament feels distant from rural communities.”

Trust levels were highly affected by economic and political events. P7 explained, “The economic crisis reduced my confidence,” while P6 shared, “When policies benefit farmers, trust increases.”

The respondents differentiated local and national governance. P4 remarked, “Local officers are more approachable than national leaders.” This suggests trust is relational and proximity based.

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Perceptions were also affected by media publicity on corruption. P10 observed, "When corruption is exposed, trust declines." Meanwhile, P12 emphasized performance legitimacy: "If promises are fulfilled, trust grows."

These findings show institutional trust to be performance based and dynamic. Enacting policies regularly and communicating them well is needed to ensure that the population has trust.

- **Perceived Political Stability**

The perception of trust was the basis of political stability. The participants always associated governance credibility to social harmony. P1 stated, "When people trust the government, protests reduce." Similarly, P7 explained, "Trust prevents conflict between communities."

On the other hand, tension was related to low trust. P2 remarked, "Low trust leads to social frustration." P3 added, "Frequent policy changes create uncertainty."

Political stability was directly related to economic stability. P5 noted, "During stable periods, business confidence improves." P16 highlighted migration patterns: "People migrate when instability rises."

These findings point to the fact that trust is a stabilizing social system. When the communities believe that the governance can be predicted and fair, the communities are more unified and well-organized.

4.2.4. Socio-Economic Factors

- **Economic Livelihood Security**

Economic conditions proved to be a strong form of determinant of trust. The high rate of inflation, unemployment, and cost-of-living pressures had a strong impact on the governance perceptions.

P1 stated, "High cost of living reduces trust." P5 emphasized youth concerns: "Unemployment creates frustration." Similarly, P11 explained, "Lack of job security reduces political trust."

Nonetheless, government support initiative had a positive effect on perceptions. P3 shared, "When farmers receive subsidies, trust improves." P6 added, "Government assistance during crises builds confidence."

The respondents are always associated with economic reliefs and legitimacy. P18 noted, "Trust increases when economic relief is timely." This is in line with the theory of performance-based trust where legitimacy is reinforced by institutional support in times of difficulty.

Based on this, the political trust and perceived good governance are based on economic livelihood security.

4.2.5. Social Identity and Marginalization

There were also social identity-based and perceived marginalization-based trust dynamics. According to some of the participants, there were communities that were disadvantaged.

P2 stated, "Ethnic minorities sometimes face subtle discrimination." P4 noted, "Rural villagers feel ignored compared to urban residents." P14 added, "Religious minorities sometimes feel disadvantaged."

Gender and youth inclusion were also concerns. P5 observed, "Women face challenges in leadership roles." P13 stated, "Youth voices are often overlooked."

Respondents pointed out that they gain trust by being treated equally. P16 explained, "When everyone is treated equally, trust increases." Conversely, P17 noted, "Discrimination creates resentment."

These outcomes show that there is a necessity to embrace a participatory approach to governance to establish sustainable goodwill among the population. Institutional legitimacy and the social cohesion are compromised by the perceived marginalization.

4.3 Chapter Summary

The results indicate that the effectiveness of governance, accountability, economic security, and social inclusion play a major role in determining the level of trust in Badulla District. Although positive changes have been noticed, there are still structural inefficiencies and the perceived marginalization. The performance is based and the situational nature of institutional confidence is very high. In general, open, participatory, and accountable governance practices are needed to build trust and maintain political stability among the populace.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter gives discussion, conclusion and recommendations of the study. It also discusses the implications of the findings concerning literature and theoretical constructs and how governance practices, socio-economic realities, and institutional legitimacy influence the establishment of trust and political stability among the people in Badulla District.

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5.2 Discussion

5.2.1. Theme: Governance Practices

- **Code: Service Delivery Effectiveness Service**

This study's findings are consistent with Clarke et al., (2017) who suggest that citizens could assess government performance in many ways, through their day-to-day experiences of public service delivery. In Badulla District, there was a common tendency to evaluate institutional trust based on service availability, timeliness, responsiveness, and efficiency. Weaknesses in routine delivery of services were evident in repeated office visits and long periods of document processing. The findings are in line with the model of performance-based trust formation, which was proposed by Clarke et al. (2017) citizens gain concrete experiences of institutional competence from day-to-day contacts with public services.

The results also showed that there was a lack of uniformity in responses to the public services. Some services were seen as more responsive than others, especially with regard to emergency services, but participants also felt that administrative processes could be streamlined by means of personal contact. This can erode trust in the neutrality of procedures and exacerbate the sense of unfair or special treatment in public institutions.

In line with Taufiqurokhman et al. (2024) service satisfaction is not only the result of the quality of the services provided but also the result of the overall expectation of services and general social conditions. Political confusion and economic difficulties could lead to increased discontent with administrative delays and complex procedures in Badulla. Thus, public service delivery cannot only be seen as a management process, citizens' service experiences need to be seen as a complex socio-political process.

In terms of Institutional Theory (Jackson, 2018; Meyer et al., 2024), legitimacy comes from clearly defined and predictable institutional rules, which are consistently applied. Inconsistency in procedures and relying on relationships weakened institutional legitimacy. The effectiveness, fairness and consistency of public service delivery thus serve as important institutional cues which citizens use as signals to form or change their trust in public institutions.

- **Code: Accountability and Fairness**

Two perceptions, accountability and fairness, became key factors in the development of institutional trust. As found in procedural justice literature and Muzumdar (2025), participants highlighted respectful treatment, neutrality, transparency and opportunities to voice their opinions as key factors of the legitimacy of institutions. The results showed that perceptions of political connection may affect the time to administrative approvals, and lack of explanation for applications that were rejected may lead to perceptions of unfair procedures. These experiences show deficiencies in citizens' voice and procedural transparency, which are two key aspects of citizens' perceptions of fairness.

Not all institutional practices were negatively perceived, however. Certain government departments were behaving in a responsible manner whilst public meetings were seen as giving citizens a forum on which they could voice their concerns. These mixed experiences indicate that there are accountability mechanisms in place in public institutions, which are sometimes not properly used.

When the processes leading to the outcomes are seen as fair, people may agree to less desirable outcomes as Muzumdar (2025) suggests. However, in Badulla it seemed that dissatisfaction was not only with the service but with the way it was delivered, that is, if it was not delivered at all, or delivered in some other way. In the Institutional Theory viewpoint, fairness enhances legitimacy by exhibiting transparency, neutrality, consistency and respect in governance processes. Lack of transparency on the other hand, and the perception of favoritism, can indicate institutional weakness, which in turn leads to less public confidence, institutional trust, and citizens' willingness to comply with the procedures.

5.2.2. Theme 02: Public Trust

- **Code: Institutional Confidence**

The results corroborate those of Roi et al. (2025) who claim that institutional performance and the context are important determinants of political trust. The main areas of assessment for participants were their perceptions of the competence, reliability and ability of institutions to provide beneficial outcomes. This mixed picture of the positive policy results (especially positive results for farmers and local communities) and the negative economic uncertainty led to a growth in economic confidence and a loss of institutional trust. This is consistent with the Institutional Theory which proposes that the performance of the institution contributes to strengthening its legitimacy and the public confidence in its performance.

At the local level, interactions also were highlighted as significant influences on shaping trust. The participants felt that local leaders were more accessible than national political leaders, aligning with the idea of Roi et al. (2025) that direct institutional experiences can strengthen trust. Moreover, the factors of predictability and delivery of institutional commitments influenced confidence. This aligns with Meyer et al. (2024) who stress that the regular application of rules contributes to institutional legitimacy. Thus, the level of institutional trust seems to be dynamic and performance dependent, gained through experiences as opposed to political

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ideology.

- **Code: Perceived Political Stability**

When asked about the relationship between political trust and social and political stability, respondents felt this was strongly linked. The higher the level of trust, the less the public felt frustrated or that there was more tension in society, while the lower the level of trust, the more frustrated the public felt and the more there was potential for instability. These results are in line with Melkamu and Teshome (2023) who find political trust to be a stabilising mechanism that can improve citizens' acceptance of governance decisions. Citizens might be more inclined to cooperate with public institutions and abide by their decisions if they view institutions as legitimate.

Similarly, Kyprianides et al. (2021) emphasize that perceived legitimacy can encourage cooperation with authorities. Both the participants' experiences indicated that trust could help to mitigate tensions and conflict between communities. Trust can then serve as a micro-level basis for the larger political stability. According to Institutional Theory, legitimacy encourages social order by fostering citizens' confidence, cooperation and acceptance of institutional practices that are predictable, transparent, and fair.

5.2.3. Theme: Socio-Economic Factors

- **Code: Economic Livelihood Security**

The results are aligned with those of Blok and Haugsgjerd (2025), who conclude that people's subjective views on economic conditions have a strong impact on their trust in the political sphere. Participants repeatedly linked the increase in living expenses and higher unemployment with lower levels of trust in the government institutions, showing that financial difficulties can undermine trust in the legitimacy of government. On the other hand, the ability of institutions was seen to be reinforced by government welfare, especially financial support and subsidies for farmers. This shows performance-based legitimacy, in which the citizens' trust in the institutions grows when they can respond well to their citizens' economic problems. Thus, in Badulla District it seems that economic concerns shape people's general assessments of government performance. As Blok and Haugsgjerd (2025) suggest, a decline in personal economic conditions can lead to a decrease in satisfaction with the political system. According to a Social Capital Theory interpretation, continued economic insecurity can also have a negative impact on the collective trust networks, which, in turn, can diminish civic cooperation, social cohesion, and trust in public institutions.

- **Code: Social Identity and Marginalization**

Results show that social identity processes have had significant effects on perceptions of institutional trust. Participants noted that rural disadvantages, ethnic discrimination and gender inequality were important issues that influenced their perceptions on the functioning of public institutions. Lower institutional confidence was due to perceived inequality of treatment of ethnic minorities and to the marginalization of rural communities. This is consistent with Emmer et al. (2024) who show that the relationship between perceived discrimination and institutional trust is negative.

Accordingly, Efrainand Sanchez et al. (2024) argue that inequality may have a negative effect on perceptions of institutional fairness and legitimacy. According to Social Capital Theory, the marginalized group can have adverse effects on bridging social capital, which is reflected in reduced trust and cooperation between the different groups (Du et al., 2022; Nyamari, 2024). Contrary, inclusive practices and equal treatment were linked to higher institutional confidence. Thus, institutional legitimacy can be undermined by inequalities based on identity, and trust, social cohesion and social confidence in public institutions can be built by increasing their inclusivity, equitable treatment and social integration.

5.3 Conclusion

This study attempted to examine the effect on the same based on the effects of governance practices, socio-economic status, and institutional legitimacy in relation to its contribution to the perceptions and trust of the people of political stability in Badulla District. The results illustrate that trust is more a performance-driven and based approach that is rooted in the life experiences of the citizens. Effectiveness of service delivery, specifically, accessibility, timeliness, and responsiveness were also found to be a key predictor of institutional confidence as per Clarke et al. (2017). In cases where the processes were seen as honest and considerate, legitimacy was high, but where favoritism and lack of accountability were perceived, trust was low, which fits the procedural justice model proposed by Muzumdar (2025).

Security in economic livelihood was also a major factor. In line with Blok and Haugsgjerd (2025), interviewees associated the pressure of living costs and job insecurity with losing trust to the government. Moreover, the perceived social marginalization and inequality impacted the trust of some groups which supports the arguments of Emmer et al. (2024).

The paper proves the relevance of Institutional Theory and Social Capital Theory as explanatory theories. Legitimacy is indicated by institutional performance, and social cohesion and inclusion either strengthen or undermine the trust process. Overall, the level of public trust in Badulla District is conditional and context-specific, and it is directly related to the quality of governance and socio-economic facts.

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5.4 Recommendation

Based on the results of the study, some recommendations are made to enhance the trust between individuals in the Badulla District, both practically and politically.

The system of service delivery should be digitally integrated, streamlined in terms of processing and available to the rural population. More transparency, more regular work schedules, more accountability, more predictability.

Second, the institutions of governance are to reinforce procedural fairness by promoting neutrality, treatment due respect and involvement of the populace in the decision-making. Perceptions of legitimacy can be enhanced by regularly holding community forums and having open grievance redress systems.

Third, certain economic interventions are also required. More jobs, more small business promotion and ensuring welfare payments would be made on time would reduce economic insecurity and raise the level of performance-based trust.

Fourthly, the issue of marginalization needs to be addressed through the use of inclusion governance plans. The policies are to be fair in accessing services for the ethnic, rural, gender and social-economic groups. Bridging social capital and civic cooperation may be enhanced through community engagement programs.

Finally, trust needs to be made a governance objective over the long term. To ensure long term political stability and enhance institutional legitimacy in Badulla District, the local authorities can consider including accountability, economic support and social inclusion.

5.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter evaluated the results using empirical literature and theory as concluded that service performance, procedural fairness, economic security, and social inclusion greatly affect the trust of the people. Practical suggestions have been given to enhance institutional legitimacy and sustainable political stability in Badulla District.

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