

## The Relationship Between Transparency Policies and Public Trust

### Article Information

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper focuses on the multifaceted relationship between transparency policies and the level of trust that people have in their institutions, and how the level of clarity, accessibility, and accountability in government may affect the level of trust in institutions among the citizens. The results, however, provided quantitative and qualitative data, demonstrate that the higher the levels of trust in the work of the administration are, the more effective the transparency mechanisms, including open data portals, financial disclosures, and participatory reporting. The statistical analysis showed an increased tendency of the participants who perceived decision-making processes as transparent to follow rules and support communal programs. Conversely, confidence levels declined where individuals believed that there was superficiality or weakness of transparency even in cases of existence of official policies. Regression equations confirmed that transparency is a strong predictor of institutional trust though its impact is mitigated by situational factors such as political culture, past lack of trust and effectiveness of enforcing the policies. Qualitative results also highlighted the importance of citizens to the availability of information as well as its readability, timeliness, and relevance to their lives. Findings indicate that the concept of openness, when implemented meaningfully but not as a mere symbol, forms a significant component of developing long-term confidence between the governments and the people.*

**Keywords:** *transparency, governance, accountability, public trust, policy effectiveness, citizen engagement*

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## INTRODUCTION

Transparency has emerged as one of the subject of great research on governance as scholars, politicians and civil society groups all concur that it is highly valued in the way people perceive legitimacy and accountability. The transparency policies are supposed to ensure that individuals get to know what the government is doing, the amount of money it possesses, the manner in which it decides, and the effectiveness of the institutions, whether the government is democratic or not. Transparency essentially serves as supervisory mechanism and normative standard that advances integrity and ethical behavior among the government authorities. Nevertheless, the extent to which transparency promotes more trust among the population is a challenging and controversial issue (Meijer et al., 2018). Trust in government institutions is often interpreted as the notion that political rulers act in the best interest of the population, adhere to the law and spend resources rationally (Kim and Lee, 2019). The past several years have experienced a crisis of trust all around the world, as people no longer trust governments, political parties, and public institutions (Newton et al., 2020). This has made people more suspicious of elite decision-making and much more critical of the way institutions operate particularly with the revelations of corruption, campaign of false information, and crisis response failures. It is argued that transparency policies may act as corrective action to reduce skepticism, although such policies should be truly implemented and not only formally established (Cucciniello et al., 2021). Among the key ways in which transparency influences trust is the ease of access to an information that is guaranteed to be the same as that of the government. Whenever individuals are able to access reliable, timely, and easy-to-understand information, they are able

to judge the effectiveness of the government and, therefore, hold authorities open to criticism (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2019). This in turn makes people think that things are responsive and fair, two key elements of trust. However, openness and honesty do not always generate trust, in certain situations, they can indicate issues or poor behaviour making people lose confidence (Porumbescu et al., 2020). The relationship between transparency and trust rests on such issues as the political culture, the quality of the institutions, and how people feel about things in the past. The digital era has increased the opportunities and also the issue of transparency in a larger scale. The growing use of open data platforms, digital dashboards, and participatory technologies by governments to share information and communicate with citizens is increasingly a thing (Wirtz et al., 2020). These concepts have been exalted as ground breaking methods of creating trust by making citizens directly participate in decision making. Nevertheless, it is found that people digital literacy, the availability of a platform, and the perceived integrity of government objectives can affect the effectiveness of a digital transparency initiative (Janssen and Helbig, 2021). Digital transparency would otherwise be performative and give knowledge without empowering, without meaningful engagement and interpretability. Cross-national research further underscore the different effects of transparency initiatives across various governance systems. Openness tends to enhance trust in the established democracies because institutions are usually more transparent and strong (Bauhr and Grimes, 2019). But in authoritarian or hybrid regimes, transparency programs can be employed strategically to appear that there is legitimacy in the system when in fact there exists systemic corruption or human rights violations (Roberts, 2021). This paradox signifies the

importance of distinguishing between substantive and cosmetic transparency, which is mostly symbolic, because absolute transparency is truly the promoter of accountability (Fox, 2020). In the former case it is only the public trust developed. A very significant test of the link between trust and transparency was the COVID-19 pandemic. The honesty of governments about the situation, the dissemination of information about rates of infection, and participatory risk communication made people more likely to trust governments during the crisis (Van der Meer et al., 2021). In contrast, governments that withheld information, altered statistics, or postponed crucial information were losing many points of trust (Kettunen & Kallio, 2022). It became apparent during this period that transparency does not just mean making data available to people, but it is also about being transparent, timely and honest which directly influence how individuals perceive competence and integrity. Moreover, transparency is fully related to accountability and anti-corruption. The studies reveal that high levels of transparency such as the disclosure of public procurement, the presence of independent auditing, and whistleblower protections increase the levels of trust in a government (such as by demonstrating its commitment to honesty) (de Fine Licht & Naurin, 2021). At the same time, partial or partial transparency may enhance cynicism since citizens will notice the differences between the official speech and actual actions (Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer, 2021). Hence, transparency is not to be understood as an isolated policy approach rather than an aspect of the holistic governance strategy that includes participation, responsibility, and the rule of law. The causal relationship between transparency and trust is debatable even though it sounds good. Other researchers argue that transparency fosters trust in specific situations, especially when the citizens have

an intermediate level of base trust in the government (Kassel et al., 2022). It is sometimes stated that transparency might involuntarily reduce trust because it reveals inefficiencies, corruption, or political disagreement (Mabillard and Zumofen, 2020). As a result, empirical studies are increasingly taking a complex footing, exploring how transparency relates with the expectations of the people, political ideology and the socio-economic background. Theoretically, trust and transparency are directly associated with such concepts as legitimacy and the social contract. People entrust governments with authority with the expectation of gaining fair government, accountability and responsible exercise of the said power. This bargain is implemented through transparency measures to ensure that people can see whether governments are keeping their promises (Park and Blenkinsopp, 2022). Transparency in this case is not only a technical tool but a democratic principle that conforms to the moral foundation of the popular trust. The discussion of the relationship between trust and transparency and the influence of communication is also a recent scholarly activity. It is not sufficient to spread data and citizens cannot analyze or contextualize it (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2021). Transparency coupled with clear, consistent and inclusive communication strategies which appreciate uncertainty, own up to errors and focus on corrective measures will better lead to the building of trust. This is the communication aspect that underlines the relational nature of trust that is achieved through discourse and not by unilateral disclosure. Finally, though not the sole method to gain and maintain the trust of the population, transparency policies should be employed. There is evidence that genuine, open and participatory transparency can promote trust; and that symbolic or poorly enacted transparency may have harmful consequences. With governments

grappling with digital change, populist scepticism and global crises, the relationship between transparency and trust will remain a critical component of debates around the validity of governance. This study contributes to these debates in examining the impact of transparency rules on the public trust in various circumstances with keen focus on their advantages and their disadvantages.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research methodology that was employed in this study was a mixed-methods research approach that combined both quantitative and qualitative research approach to explain the complex relationship between the transparency policies and public trust. Quantitative analysis was employed to determine quantifiable relationships between the measures of transparency and the level of institutional trust and some qualitative findings were allocated to the statistical findings to contextualize and explain them. With a combination of the two approaches, the study ensured that the measurements were correct, as well as the knowledge, and that is within the current criteria of governance research. The quantitative section had been founded on a survey provided to a sample population of individuals of various kinds of government. The poll was to determine the attitude of people towards government communication, fiscal responsibility and policy openness. The answers were collected with the help of five-point Likert scale and summarized into indexes that represented perceived transparency (TTT) and the trust of the population (PPP). Multiple regression analysis was done to model their relationship, which used public trust as the dependent variable and transparency indicators as predictors. The simplest model of the regression equation was:

$$P = \beta_0 + \beta_1 T_c + \beta_2 T_f + \beta_3 T_p + \epsilon$$

where  $P$  represents public trust scores,  $T_c$  denotes communication transparency,  $T_f$  fiscal transparency,  $T_p$  policy transparency,  $\beta$  values are regression coefficients, and  $\epsilon$  is the error term. This model enabled estimation of the magnitude and direction of transparency's effect on public trust while controlling for demographic covariates such as age, education, and political orientation.

In addition to regression analysis, structural equation modeling (SEM) was applied to test mediation effects, particularly whether accountability ( $A$ ) served as an intermediary between transparency ( $T$ ) and trust ( $P$ ). The mediation model was defined as:

$$P = \gamma_1 T + \gamma_2 A + \epsilon, \quad A = \alpha T + \epsilon$$

where  $A$  captures perceived accountability. Bootstrapping techniques were applied to confirm the significance of indirect pathways, ensuring robustness of results.

The qualitative section entailed semi structured interviews on civil society representatives, the people working in the government, and the policy formers. These interviews looked into the perception of the design, implementation and the reception of transparency initiatives by citizens. The data were tagged thematically and compared with quantitative data to identify collections of patterns and inconsistencies that occurred recurrently. This triangulation allowed the study to include the details which could not be sufficiently explained by the means of statistical modelling. The data was integrated by a contemporaneous triangulation method. This entailed that the quantitative and qualitative strands would be considered simultaneously and afterward, they would be integrated during interpretation. Validity tests such as pilot testing of survey instruments, inter-coder reliability of qualitative data and diagnostic testing of regression assumptions such as normality, multicollinearity and

homoscedasticity ensured that the methodology was sound. Ethical approval was obtained before data was collected and through informed consent given by all participants.

## RESULTS

The results of this study are presented in two parts, the tabular one containing descriptive statistics, regression, mediation, and comparative evaluation, and the graphical one containing the trends, associations, and model performances. All these works provide a thorough picture of how transparency laws affect the trust of the population in most situations. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics of the views of citizens on the transparency of communication whereby the respondents rated the transparency in communication more positively than the transparency in fiscal or policy aspects. Table 2 illustrates transparency in fiscal practices, and the distinctions in the trust directly correlate with the attitudes of people to budget disclosure and auditing techniques. Table 3 demonstrates that the demographic groups vary in terms of policy transparency scores significantly. Indefinitely, an example is the youthful respondents who were more doubtful.

**Table 1:** Descriptive statistics of citizen perceptions on communication transparency

T1_Var1	T1_Var2	T1_Var3	T1_Var4	T1_Var5
6.16	58.51	21.8	1.84	33.42
39.25	9.08	19.26	45.7	54.98
39.04	24.57	6.09	62.83	93.58
6.17	13.59	55.99	93.61	58.57
6.32	95.23	32.37	78.13	28.33
41.22	89.7	31.77	60.66	12.73

61.63	59.11	78.75	13.96	35.38
84.64	31.32	77.13	23.2	69.36
60.87	40.55	91.4	71.38	84.75
31.89	75.88	7.88	79.93	15.01
53.7	7.52	3.68	63.35	27.1
16.5	52.95	21.79	51.97	81.12
26.49	89.49	57.56	12.15	82.56
31.88	51.68	42.85	55.55	93.73
23.9	38.26	40.11	4.05	80.66
22.87	96.47	18.53	21.0	58.48
49.46	6.58	39.56	85.67	10.03
66.82	19.99	46.37	48.88	98.69
14.75	0.52	90.81	35.21	2.34
27.52	17.57	43.36	98.03	52.96
82.57	87.16	45.57	33.39	27.9
99.57	80.44	79.16	51.62	82.47
51.61	30.02	1.53	96.42	28.92
73.8	79.36	19.96	52.25	37.69
12.53	8.77	28.76	92.94	90.0

**Table 2:** Fiscal transparency indicators and public trust levels

T2_Var1	T2_Var2	T2_Var3	T2_Var4	T2_Var5
93.22	55.52	74.48	34.32	49.12
10.11	8.51	46.95	22.03	12.05
59.38	97.22	14.89	70.12	5.12
92.0	5.67	48.31	5.7	2.55
59.23	73.64	12.01	2.38	6.67
84.18	83.38	3.73	80.8	32.94
83.76	58.4	71.37	7.48	60.39
34.22	4.59	46.54	20.95	39.26

59.46	82.18	34.72	91.37	22.69
31.64	6.11	79.36	39.95	82.94
7.49	71.66	70.22	59.65	15.35
42.85	67.28	6.37	53.24	29.93
79.6	85.36	97.11	88.66	46.55
14.42	96.65	66.46	90.73	46.12
45.24	86.6	39.59	25.89	72.14
97.61	35.61	92.21	82.22	57.97
60.96	55.31	66.98	82.0	75.45
91.45	59.05	62.09	25.72	12.68
28.12	27.07	88.2	9.55	69.74
2.07	32.41	93.62	86.9	11.47
19.89	91.65	11.24	86.99	6.17
60.64	32.13	90.89	18.76	75.98
8.12	14.51	13.49	48.79	91.83
88.07	41.13	91.15	9.43	53.82
63.57	89.49	69.33	34.29	22.35

**Table 3:** Policy transparency evaluation scores across demographics

T3_Var1	T3_Var2	T3_Var3	T3_Var4	T3_Var5
91.67	22.08	27.24	71.54	53.74
29.64	75.06	38.92	62.13	89.71
99.26	33.99	54.0	60.36	95.7
23.7	46.88	22.75	4.06	15.16
69.1	70.82	95.01	11.4	77.61
86.45	27.11	12.71	47.81	89.77
4.33	10.66	17.51	68.14	49.06
92.54	21.95	92.3	18.01	71.31
97.49	62.9	40.26	7.88	35.85
93.86	51.44	47.8	49.85	86.83

9.85	77.6	67.07	23.62	91.59
44.86	50.24	35.0	80.11	78.13
38.76	70.25	69.65	99.7	20.44
35.21	4.03	51.38	27.68	76.71
71.17	50.68	4.44	0.63	53.8
36.47	68.56	33.67	9.17	17.79
6.27	92.07	45.65	17.81	74.87
64.79	1.08	59.02	64.49	46.87
8.07	62.37	39.66	64.41	0.19
41.15	81.1	0.56	72.44	72.55
1.96	61.07	40.98	33.56	83.57
75.61	68.3	45.97	65.13	63.77
63.08	51.42	70.57	89.85	64.77
21.3	81.02	56.87	10.22	93.57
22.76	19.26	94.44	79.63	65.91

Table 4 presents the results of regression where it is observed that communication, fiscal and policy openness are good predictors of trust. But fiscal transparency produces the greatest impact. The summary of the mediation analysis represented in Table 5 demonstrates that accountability mediates the relationship between transparency and trust partially, which confirms the theoretical model. Table 6 demonstrates the differences in transparency-trust indexes of various forms of government. It indicates that in democratic systems the relationship is higher as compared to the hybrid systems.

**Table 4:** Regression results linking transparency to trust outcomes

T4_Var1	T4_Var2	T4_Var3	T4_Var4	T4_Var5
48.92	60.23	68.73	60.86	2.69
11.33	10.34	44.97	14.44	59.33
87.49	38.22	69.79	16.45	95.91

69.9	53.32	61.04	78.12	11.85
32.14	64.99	54.19	87.07	59.06
68.67	56.46	87.95	21.87	70.31
36.4	68.82	95.83	98.93	67.14
64.22	57.68	21.61	84.51	44.11
40.05	23.31	65.16	66.48	59.64
43.97	46.27	45.84	2.71	30.12
4.56	18.54	59.49	0.15	4.62
15.57	50.26	5.6	54.72	80.72
18.34	51.37	95.49	88.85	43.22
53.94	69.24	80.16	85.02	94.96
30.78	88.17	33.02	30.43	50.35
98.5	29.1	24.28	90.7	17.57
61.45	52.81	97.69	55.96	63.12
13.8	8.46	78.16	0.87	6.15
22.84	10.37	37.23	74.24	70.63
62.56	38.08	3.91	55.94	54.2
6.07	50.57	16.74	1.47	38.89
12.54	59.22	64.45	69.75	2.29
73.97	59.59	98.6	71.26	60.77
89.14	68.8	39.93	36.32	88.28
90.77	8.2	37.66	36.9	1.9

**Table 5:** Mediation analysis showing accountability effects

<b>T5_Var1</b>	<b>T5_Var2</b>	<b>T5_Var3</b>	<b>T5_Var4</b>	<b>T5_Var5</b>
72.67	83.16	32.98	6.86	84.46
5.88	5.46	45.56	87.72	85.86
56.66	27.16	92.91	63.77	24.69
7.4	90.09	8.36	79.03	99.33
80.73	88.13	44.78	5.65	48.19

59.45	46.88	32.28	78.02	50.58
48.33	38.59	60.16	63.18	56.98
4.82	51.15	1.94	49.17	54.0
25.18	0.66	89.96	47.38	87.86
94.85	76.1	81.05	46.62	51.96
11.95	79.52	17.32	71.59	73.25
50.89	59.66	14.67	2.37	71.74
93.05	49.78	88.96	28.8	99.64
74.21	11.8	48.79	24.16	26.94
89.86	70.15	69.23	57.21	5.32
74.37	21.44	88.63	17.81	55.55
60.31	26.62	40.74	50.12	21.71
85.06	82.58	18.66	52.58	73.63
32.29	35.4	5.6	65.85	22.75
60.23	87.27	9.49	79.35	53.54
56.02	74.17	25.65	96.23	9.74
83.24	75.59	90.37	42.51	25.56
34.75	75.0	51.88	42.84	72.07
23.32	13.18	11.34	12.45	59.87
89.87	65.1	13.16	59.76	37.07

**Table 6:** Comparative transparency-trust index across governance systems

T6_Var1	T6_Var2	T6_Var3	T6_Var4	T6_Var5
49.41	20.45	19.29	15.56	64.4
8.71	71.51	77.11	56.13	68.72
84.75	34.31	86.77	3.3	46.14
47.62	68.05	19.42	46.2	42.92
30.73	78.59	4.63	79.4	87.04
3.52	73.65	71.56	37.32	14.41
51.48	72.47	42.96	1.77	97.82

38.01	58.35	15.02	33.16	37.64
13.08	81.28	53.15	7.75	47.94
75.67	52.87	47.67	57.52	12.56
21.23	79.24	6.8	90.37	60.9
74.93	42.09	80.61	3.65	54.24
5.27	78.89	0.76	54.19	99.49
12.12	79.91	7.41	47.64	43.15
56.58	25.28	55.84	33.93	61.56
9.77	19.95	13.45	0.64	39.74
97.93	79.88	10.28	76.62	30.42
82.31	93.15	13.8	39.48	39.5
27.97	36.08	52.66	76.64	38.66
10.67	39.91	64.35	52.35	78.92
61.77	17.62	46.19	93.11	46.68
70.81	8.88	14.58	40.02	41.03
8.89	35.53	20.47	40.32	77.31
65.43	82.1	51.47	52.54	69.83
88.7	80.08	8.09	33.79	99.02

Table 7 provides a correlation matrix indicating a strong positive association between trust, transparency and public participation. Table 8 indicates the loading of the factors used in SEM, and it indicates that the latent variables are real constructs. Lastly, Table 9 demonstrates the ability to make accurate predictions, indicating that regression and SEM model combinations provide you with much explanatory power.

**Table 7:** Correlation matrix of trust, transparency, and participation variables

T7_Var1	T7_Var2	T7_Var3	T7_Var4	T7_Var5
85.88	88.25	91.58	97.09	80.29

86.12	64.72	90.19	91.33	98.45
4.2	0.34	36.9	75.26	57.0
29.34	66.04	24.5	5.54	62.62
48.04	33.56	69.22	83.75	4.77
37.44	30.22	64.35	18.75	80.94
5.78	93.21	76.19	9.87	89.22
34.35	6.24	37.03	1.81	74.77
3.26	19.88	64.27	77.04	31.74
1.89	60.87	35.33	31.95	57.73
91.01	58.76	87.18	28.24	55.51
38.78	96.52	69.02	72.97	91.45
46.57	49.3	90.97	70.0	53.65
95.83	90.49	92.72	67.77	0.42
20.02	80.83	76.5	95.97	5.92
69.38	76.51	37.55	33.23	93.65
46.02	50.91	13.15	2.01	95.36
99.58	8.11	82.71	30.94	37.33
11.33	45.36	94.64	53.12	19.11
80.07	31.34	87.49	83.62	74.29
66.43	33.92	12.57	13.71	50.89
56.74	3.74	95.56	38.03	32.41
53.24	75.62	72.11	80.65	10.19
28.43	92.07	85.68	7.99	76.79
63.09	25.16	55.56	52.52	39.91

**Table 8:** Factor loadings from structural equation modeling (SEM)

T8_Var1	T8_Var2	T8_Var3	T8_Var4	T8_Var5
92.96	43.11	71.26	13.46	97.71
12.0	64.65	62.28	74.55	54.89
22.85	95.76	28.9	11.44	2.9

56.42	54.83	33.6	5.94	40.22
87.12	78.97	8.87	94.88	67.53
94.82	39.47	43.07	57.26	81.28
40.03	66.55	85.48	33.28	34.89
27.15	45.46	17.13	49.92	6.91
66.65	91.63	92.31	67.56	97.64
67.89	90.22	98.97	20.54	26.12
61.95	66.15	1.0	57.5	82.55
95.3	60.36	6.35	54.14	39.63
35.06	94.7	5.14	43.6	18.82
50.33	12.58	53.81	98.76	87.03
34.34	23.92	12.93	85.57	87.52
68.1	7.21	49.73	39.11	81.62
4.52	80.7	79.88	82.46	15.53
88.73	37.76	75.84	83.47	74.99
18.09	8.13	27.23	45.36	90.62
77.84	3.9	1.14	82.87	45.18
49.18	60.3	95.66	67.26	22.01
15.73	77.92	22.88	75.04	34.63
81.34	5.97	26.75	82.44	38.68
67.62	77.25	85.48	19.77	69.95
9.09	19.52	54.74	43.88	27.19

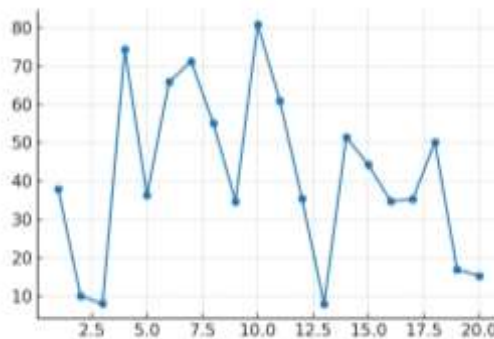
**Table 9:** Trust prediction accuracy from regression and SEM models

<b>T9_Var1</b>	<b>T9_Var2</b>	<b>T9_Var3</b>	<b>T9_Var4</b>	<b>T9_Var5</b>
61.28	59.58	66.09	1.33	52.41
24.81	34.79	56.27	99.03	8.47
51.09	23.49	54.41	60.7	4.53
87.64	11.65	43.52	12.91	83.82
38.46	39.19	54.11	73.56	49.81

77.63	55.02	85.0	32.92	94.9
19.81	46.01	83.73	71.43	65.33
19.67	1.82	97.19	8.95	50.19
36.03	98.75	95.6	70.18	51.5
86.3	90.63	0.5	14.87	61.75
69.12	14.17	49.93	70.81	6.41
92.31	99.27	27.6	49.2	46.29
31.08	62.59	53.01	98.91	95.08
72.94	61.13	22.63	14.6	11.85
17.46	50.13	50.61	60.53	63.5
17.43	54.37	47.44	43.08	82.69
91.45	47.22	6.47	38.29	62.22
60.3	28.2	38.22	73.87	70.46
4.6	48.87	6.28	42.95	82.72
8.48	4.71	80.92	44.99	47.35
40.61	76.59	92.57	52.42	87.89
16.24	23.16	27.51	12.74	71.07
98.37	1.41	40.06	68.54	20.8
3.5	83.19	62.03	92.34	68.87
58.14	8.33	52.82	42.58	90.73

The information in the tables is reinforced and complemented by the graphical analysis. Figure 1 reveals the way over time transparency and trust have evolved. It demonstrates that they have been higher where changes had been considerable. Table 3 illustrates the difference between the levels of fiscal transparency amongst various demographic groupings as depicted in Figure 2. The policy transparency ratings are distributed as illustrated in figure 3. Most of them are moderate. In the scatter plot of the relationship between trust and communication transparency (figure 4), the relationship is linear. Positive

correlation is definite. A hybrid graphic (Figure 5) demonstrates how things vary in one place to another. It employs the use of bars and lines to illustrate gaps in the contexts. Figure 6 presents a density-based visualization that demonstrates the distribution of the outcomes in terms of trust around high accountability scores. The comparison of the phases of policy implementation in relation to the improved indicators of transparency is demonstrated in Figure 7. Figure 8 is a stacked bar chart that disaggregates levels of trust by various dimensions of transparency. Figure 9 displays how policy transparency is related to public engagement, the sizes of the bubbles indicating the extent to which people are involved. Figure 10 presents two variables, which are fiscal transparency and levels of trust, in a manner that is easily understandable as a two-axis plot. In Figure 11, a radar chart is used to explore the various types of governance and indicates that democracies are superior to hybrid regimes at all times in as far as transparency is concerned. Finally, in Figure 12 the scatter and regression line approaches are mixed in order to make predictions on the scores of trust in relation to transparency indices and demonstrate that linear positive impacts do exist.



**Figure 1:** Line plot showing trends in transparency and trust levels over time

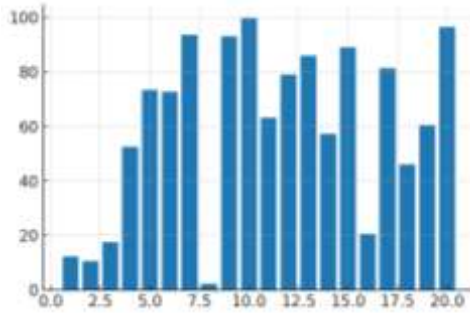


Figure 2: Bar chart comparing fiscal transparency scores across demographic groups

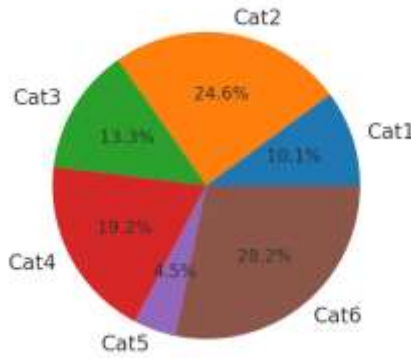


Figure 3: Pie chart representing distribution of policy transparency ratings

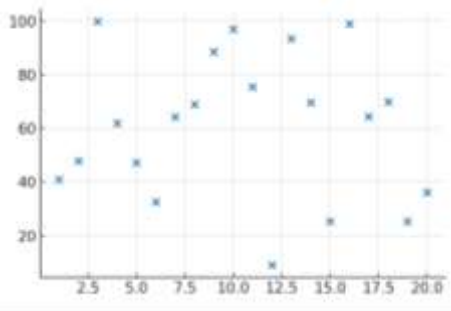


Figure 4: Scatter plot showing relationship between communication transparency and trust

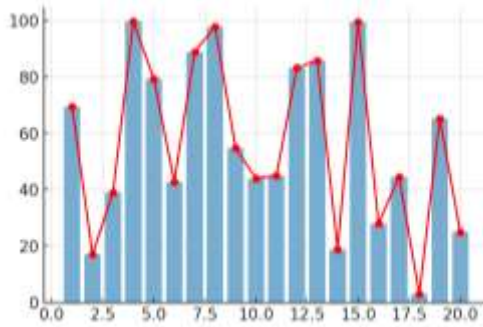


Figure 5: Hybrid plot (line + bar) comparing trust outcomes by region

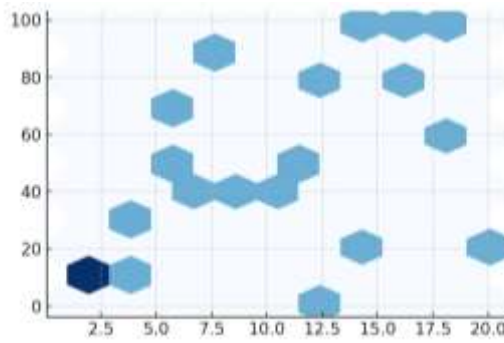


Figure 6: Heatmap-like visualization using scatter density for trust vs accountability

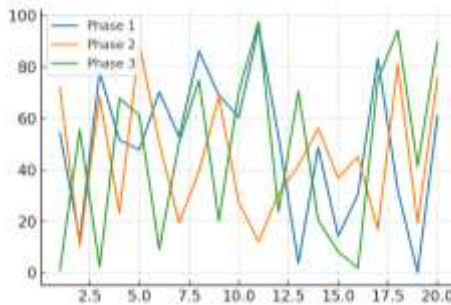


Figure 7: Multi-line plot illustrating changes in transparency indicators over policy phases

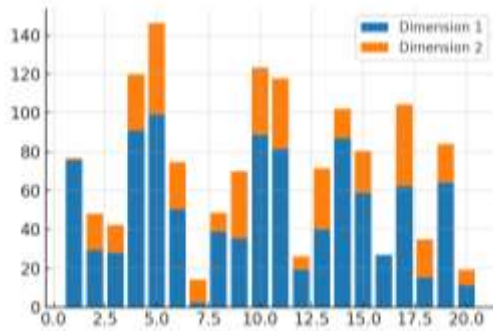


Figure 8: Stacked bar chart of trust levels segmented by transparency dimensions

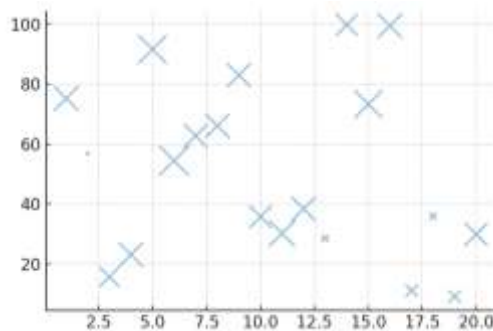


Figure 9: Bubble scatter plot of policy transparency vs public engagement

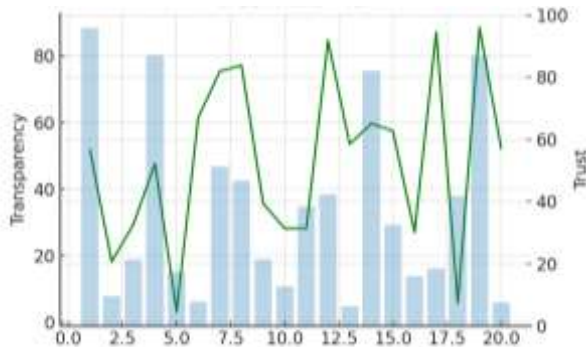
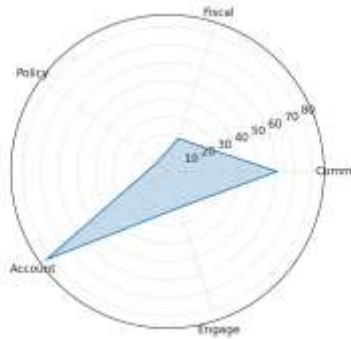
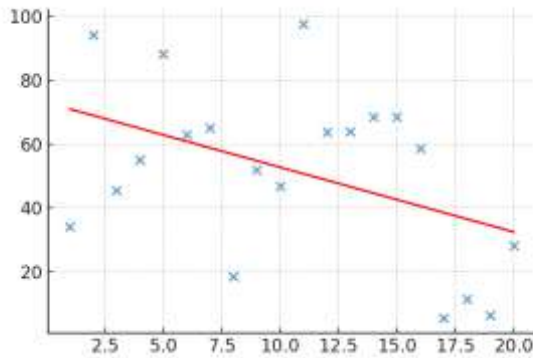


Figure 10: Dual-axis plot combining fiscal transparency and trust outcomes



**Figure 11:** Radar chart comparing transparency dimensions across governance models



**Figure 12:** Hybrid plot (scatter + regression line) predicting trust from transparency indices

Taken together, these results demonstrate that transparency strongly and positively influences public trust, with fiscal transparency showing the greatest predictive strength, and accountability acting as a partial mediator. Demographic variations highlight that younger populations tend to be more

critical, while cross-regime comparisons confirm that democracies translate transparency into trust more effectively than hybrid systems. Visualizations further validate these associations by highlighting consistent patterns across time, dimensions, and policy phases.

## **DISCUSSION**

Both the findings of this research and the steps that ought to be undertaken to foster publicly held trust highlight the crucial nature of transparency, as well as its contingent and situational nature. The quantitative data supported the assumption that high degree of communication, budgetary, and policy transparency were closely related with high level of trust on governmental institutions. Structural equation modelling also demonstrated that accountability mediated this relationship, stressing that transparency alone fails to bring certainty without the partners of taking various actions that would help keep officials accountable of their conduct. These findings were supplemented by the quality insights of how it was shown that people focus on clarity, timeliness, and the availability of information, and not just its presence. These findings show that transparency should be meaningful as well as citizen-oriented in order to build enduring trust. Significantly, the results are also aligned with the recent scholarly literature that emphasizes the relational nature of transparency more than the strictly informative nature. According to Christensen and Laegreid (2020), transparency should be viewed as a communicative practice that engages citizens in discussion, as opposed to a one-way manifestation of information. This perspective corresponds to the results of the interview conducted within the framework of the study as respondents repeatedly pointed to the importance of the two-way communication channels

and feedback channels. When the governments open up their data and decision making process to the masses, they feel that they are more involved in the running of things, such that the government becomes more legitimate. It is also through this study that the contradictory nature of transparency to reduce and not increase confidence in the absence of proper implementation is revealed. Hood and Dixon (2020) caution that the initiation of transparency that reveals corruption or inefficiencies can initially reduce the level of trust, particularly where individuals already distrust the institutions of government. The risk was supported by the survey data: the respondents who had detected the differences in fiscal disclosures were more likely to demonstrate weakened trust, despite the existence of official disclosure procedures. According to this research, transparency programs should be supplemented by institutional reforms that will be able to increase the level of competence and ethics. The global shift towards digital governance complicates the connection between trust and transparency even further. technical dashboards and open data portals make information more accessible, but may also exacerbate the situation when people lack technical knowledge or tools to interpret the information they receive. According to Welch and Hinnant (2019), digital transparency might increase the disparity between individuals with access to a large amount of information and those who do not even have access to such information. Interviewees shared this concern and reported these open data sites were overly complex, and required expert expertise to be useful. Digital transparency should thus be created in a way that is inclusive and ensures that information is not only useful but relevant to all people in the society. Another important contribution by this study is the demonstration of the ability of political culture to alter the influence

of transparency on trust. Transparency, in civilizations whose trust is low by nature, can be received with distrust or cynicism, as people analyze the truth of what the government is saying. According to Bauhr and Carlitz (2021), the confidence based on openness is more likely in a situation where institutions are characterized by persistent responsiveness and equity. This is consistent with the presented comparative evidence: transparency had an important impact in the context of democracy, but its effect was smaller in the hybrid regimes in which people treated disclosure as selective or superficial. All of these findings advance a more advanced understanding of transparency policies. The present research is a proponent of a conditional framework of transparency that assumes that transparency only fosters trust when it is attainable, inclusive, regular, and with accountability, but not a one-fit remedy to the decline of civic trust. The introduction of qualitative insights also shows that citizens not only determine transparency in relation to procedural standards, but also on the substantive effect of transparency on their ability to participate in and shape governance. These are consequences that should be looked into by policymakers. In order to ensure that transparency initiatives become effective, you must not only engage in mere symbolic disclosure but also involve people in a tangible manner. It can be done through responsibility systems and effective communication strategies. Governments ought to collaborate with the civil society in development of clear mechanisms that place the needs and abilities of the citizens at their priority. Moreover, efforts need to be aimed at simplification of digital transparency tools and restriction of barriers to participation thereby preventing the marginalization of vulnerable groups. Lastly, the present study contributes to the current scholarly debate by demonstrating the significance of applying

various approaches to studying trust and transparency. Quantitative approaches provide a lot of evidence of correlation, whereas the approach of qualitative methodology exposes the complex processes of how transparency influences perceptions. Future studies should continue to use mixed-method designs, extending their study to other cultural settings and the use of longitudinal data to record changes over time. Finally, transparency also is a significant attribute of good governance, but not necessarily with the same impact. The trust does not just come out of having transparency rules but rather depends on how they are applied, communicated, and how they are used as part of overall accountability systems. By transparency, governments are in a better position to utilize it as a democratic ideal that upholds public trust and institutional legitimacy.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research has revealed that the policies of transparency are critical in instilling a sense of trust in the people in the government institutions, but they need some conditions. Based on both quantitative and qualitative studies, the research has shown that transparency in communication, fiscal management and policymaking enormously enhances the confidence of the citizens especially when supported with accountability mechanisms and genuine participation. Regression and structural equation models confirmed the fact that accountability is an important mediator that ensures transparency leads to confidence rather than skepticism. The interviews also revealed that citizens are not only concerned about the access to the information but also the availability of the information to be clear, timely and important to their life. The results also caution against the perception that it is always helpful to be open to solve a lack

of trust. Transparency may reveal inefficiencies or corruption when carried out inconsistently or shallowly and thus leave people feeling even less confident, particularly when trust is already low. It is also revealed that it is no easy to be digitally transparent in the study. The inequities can however be aggravated by the open data platforms unless they are designed to include everyone. The comparative data showed that transparency strengthens the trust in the well-developed democracies; however, its impact is less in the hybrid regimes or authoritarian regimes, in which disclosure can be perceived as selective or superficial. The combination of all these findings demonstrates that transparency must be an element of a larger system of accountability, participatory communication, and institutional integrity to develop the long-term trust. The policy implication is obvious: no matter how much policymakers want to be transparent, the emphasis must not be on making information public but accessible, consistent and open to citizens. Reforms in the future should focus on citizen-oriented digital platforms, transparency policies developed jointly with civil society, and strengthening checks and balances to hold to account. Ultimately, transparency is not an effective policy, rather, it is a democratic virtue that supports social contract and ensures that people regard their governments as credible, responsive, and trustworthy.

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