

Articles

Service Users' Confidence in Accessing Public Services in Nepal: What Makes Differences?

Anil Kumar Gupta^a, Anup Bhurtel^b, Prakash C. Bhattarai^c

Keywords: Confidence, service users, public service delivery, Nepal

<https://doi.org/10.52372/jps38103>

Vol. 38, Issue 1, 2023

This paper presents the factors associated with service users' confidence in receiving public services in Nepal. The factors were taken from National Governance Survey 2017/18 (N=7334). The survey respondents were randomly selected from 43 of 77 districts of Nepal by using four-stage multiple cluster sampling from the service users who received public services in a year duration. The result showed that service users' confidence in receiving public services differs by their locale, education level, caste/ethnicity, not having close contact (Afno Manchhe), and presence of intermediaries. Education, not having a person in close contact (Afno manchhe) and the presence of intermediaries have a negative effect, whereas locale (rural) and caste/ethnicity (Brahman/Chettri) have positive effects on service users' confidence in accessing public services. Consideration of these factors boosts the confidence of the service users, which, in turn, promotes effective service delivery.

Introduction

In recent years, citizens' confidence in public service delivery from government institutions has grabbed the research attention globally (Bhattarai, 2017; Miao et al., 2014; Morrell et al., 2020; Schario & Konisky, 2008). In particular, citizen confidence has been extensively studied in numerous fields, such as various levels of government (e.g. Li, 2004), local government concerning citizens' satisfaction (e.g. James & Moseley, 2014), public institutions (e.g. Clausen et al., 2011; Newton & Norris, 2000), as well as some particular areas of public service (e.g. Morrell et al., 2020; Roth et al., 1990). Delivery of quality public services remains central to government institutions since it fosters citizens' trust and confidence in public services (Cowell et al., 2012). Citizens' confidence in public institutions is also linked with the quality of public services. If citizens receive quality services from public institutions without any hassles, they feel confident and provide a higher rating for the respective public service providers. Meanwhile, low confidence in public institutions may explain skepticism towards the service providers rather than distrust or alienation (Cook & Gronke, 2005). The legitimacy of government institutions and social norms could be in peril if a substantial number of citizens have low confidence or trust in institutions towards them (Keiser & Haider-Markel, 2022). Additionally, such lack of public trust or confidence can also

impede the government's ability to govern effectively (Kang & Park, 2018).

Although confidence in public institutions is viewed positively (Llewellyn et al., 2013), the decline in citizens' trust or confidence has remained a widespread concern, as observed in World Values Survey (Haerpfer et al., 2020) and other researches (e.g. Cowell et al., 2012). Many scholars and policymakers have expressed concern over the decrease in trust towards governments globally since the 1990s (Kang & Park, 2018). The decline of citizens' trust or confidence in public service providers or the government has grabbed research attention from western democracies (Cook & Gronke, 2005; Cowell et al., 2012), and remains a crucial concern in Asian countries as well (Blind, 2010; Naseer, 2010). The United States Pew Research Center revealed a decline in trust in the government among American citizens, falling from 77% in the 1960s to 54% in 2001, and further to just 17% in 2019, and similar patterns can be seen in European and Asian countries (Nam & Lee, 2021). Citizen confidence in Asian countries shows varying results. It was 50% in Japan and Iraq, whereas in countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia, and South Korea it is above average, and consistently higher in Vietnam (P. S. Kim, 2010), China, and the Philippines (Haerpfer et al., 2020). Though Nepal was not a part of the World Values Survey Wave 7 (2017-2020), earlier studies showed that 59% of Nepali citizens placed trust in public

a Deputy Director of Studies, Nepal Administrative Staff College, Lalitpur, Nepal, cdps10gupta@gmail.com

b Training and Research Officer, Nepal Administrative Staff College, Lalitpur, Nepal, anupbhurtel@gmail.com

c Corresponding author, Associate Professor of Development Studies/ Associate Dean of Research and External Affairs, Kathmandu University-School of Education, Lalitpur, Nepal, prakash@kusoed.edu.np

services (Jamil & Askvik, 2013), which has gradually increased over time. The Nepal National Governance Survey 2017/18 indicated an increase in citizens' confidence in accessing public services, with 69% of respondents reporting either complete or partial confidence, reflecting a rise in confidence compared to previous studies (Nepal Administrative Staff College [NASC], 2018). However, public service delivery in Nepal continues to face challenges, as nearly two-thirds report difficulties in receiving some public services such as drinking water, electricity connection, and land ownership transfer. Moreover, more than one-third believe that public services are not provided on time with specified standards and without the use of intermediaries (NASC, 2018).

Citizen confidence in public services is complex and is associated with several factors. Even though Askvik et al. (2011) investigated the effect of citizens' demographics such as age, gender, location, and education on citizens' confidence or trust in public services in Nepal, the analysis was based on decade-old data, and much has changed in the public administration of Nepal in the present context. Also, factors such as the absence of a person in close contact or the presence of intermediaries in receiving public service with confidence remain largely understudied in the extant literature of Nepal. With this consideration, this study aimed to examine the effect of demographic variables such as locale, education, caste/ethnicity, as well as an absence of a person in close contact and the presence of intermediaries in receiving hassle-free public services with confidence. This paper generates empirical evidence, complements the existing literature and stimulates a discourse on the factors affecting service users' confidence in accessing public services in Nepal. This paper would be of interest to civil servants, policy makers, politicians, practitioners, citizens and academicians concerned with the quality of public services, particularly the confidence of service users in accessing public services in Nepal.

Literature Review

Confidence in Public Service

Confidence in public service delivery is the reflection of the strength of public service. It is the extent to which citizens feel confident that they receive public services as per the expected delivery standards. Hence, it is one of the major indicators of good governance (Van de Walle & Bouckaert, 2003). It is also the catalyst of tax morale in them (Hammar et al., 2009). Confidence in service users also indicates trust in them. Therefore, although studies have exhibited public confidence differently than public trust (e.g. Heintzman & Marson, 2005; Llewellyn et al., 2013), in some studies, they have been used interchangeably or identified closely (Greasley, 2013; Marlowe, 2004). Nevertheless, confidence and trust in public institutions are interwoven, meaning trust in public institutions also explains confidence in their services (Llewellyn et al., 2013), and is shaped directly or indirectly by institutional performance (Gupta, 2021). Citizens' confidence in public service is an outcome of institutional performance, and is affected

by various factors. Demographic factors such as age, gender, income level, education, and occupation affect levels of trust in government (Nam & Lee, 2021). The studies carried out in the past indicate that demographic variables such as gender, age, race, education, employment type, income, political orientation, and ideology play a role in trust in government (Brehm & Rahn, 1997; Christensen et al., 2020; Christensen & Læg Reid, 2005; Hetherington, 1998). In this regard, this study utilized the demographics of service users to examine their confidence in accessing such services in Nepal.

Rural/Urban Cores and Confidence in Public Service

Although the aspirations of service users in receiving public services across urban or rural areas are similar, the geographical differences are claimed to cause differences in the standard and quality of public service delivery. In general, the number of services is lesser and available services are weaker in rural areas than in urban areas (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2010). Dijkstra and Poelman (2008) explore more disparities in welfare measures between urban and rural areas, and the lowest productivity of services in rural areas. These issues of public service delivery in rural cores also persist in neighbouring countries of Nepal (Asian Development Bank, 2013), specifically India (Krishna & Schober, 2014), Bangladesh (Mridha et al., 2009), and both OECD and non-OECD countries (OECD, 2010), and various public services in Nepal itself (Sarwar & Mason, 2017; Srinivasan et al., 2013; World Bank, 2018).

Difficulties in providing adequate public services to rural cores are attributed to a few key sources, including lack of skilled public service providers, the crunch of regulatory capacity and authority to perform standard performance, favour of central, subnational fiscal transfers on urban cores over rural cores, and possibly their inadequate support to rural areas (Brinkerhoff et al., 2018). Besides, providing services in rural areas is challenging due to their distance from service hubs and lower population level resulting in limited local demand (OECD, 2010). Poor public services in education and health in rural locations in Nepal impel both providers and users to compromise on quality. This is due to the frequent absenteeism of service providers, lack of suitable infrastructure, and scarcity of human and other resources (World Bank, 2018). Irrespective of numerous reasons discussed in the literature, differences are found in public service delivery among rural and urban continuums, which can influence service users' confidence.

Past studies have shown that service users from rural areas have lower confidence than those from urban areas (Brinkerhoff et al., 2018; Krishna & Schober, 2014; Taylor & Lawton, 2012). Providing public services in remote areas continues to be a significant challenge in Nepal (Regmi et al., 2010). Poor public service delivery is frequently cited as one of the primary causes of discrimination observed in service delivery by service users from geographically excluded locations (Bhattarai, 2009; Kharel, 2018). However,

the influence of urban/rural differences on service users' confidence in receiving public service in Nepal remains largely understudied. So based on the extant literature, we claim that confidence in public service users is influenced by their locale (rural and urban area) and present the below hypothesis.

H1: Public service users from urban cores exhibit higher confidence in accessing public services without hassle than those from rural cores.

Education and Confidence in Public Service

A few studies have tapped service users' confidence by their educational levels (Marlowe, 2004). Studies have shown that the education of service users has a positive association with their confidence level in public institutions or government (Christensen & Lægheid, 2005; Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006). These studies support that service users' confidence increases as their education level increases. Though education level is shown to be positively related with the confidence level of public, there are other studies (e.g. Aitalieva, 2014) which also show contrasting findings.

Educated service users possess the ability to look at public service dimensions critically (Khadka & Bhattarai, 2021). Thus, educated service users are more apt to demand enhanced services and respond to lack of transparency and inefficiency in service delivery as unacceptable. Many studies show that education level has a negative effect on trust in some public institutions or governments (e.g. Roth et al., 1990; Taylor & Lawton, 2012; Zhao & Hu, 2017). Meanwhile, other studies show that education does not affect confidence in public service providers. S. Kim (2010), for instance, discovered no significant relationship between citizens' education and confidence or trust in the government in Japan and South Korea. Furthermore, Vigoda-Gadot (2007) confirmed that there is no significant relationship between years of education and service satisfaction and trust in governance in Israel. In the study of citizens' trust in Nepal's public and political institutions, Gupta (2021) found that the effect of education on public trust is massive, but a significant result was only observed among illiterate citizens. Although higher education is associated with a decrease in public trust in public service providers, these findings are not statistically supported. This suggests a shortfall of studies on service users' confidence in receiving public services according to their education level in Nepal. With consideration of the extant theoretical foundation, we hypothesize the below statement.

H2: Service users with higher education feel more confident in accessing public service without hassles than those with lower or no education background.

Caste/Ethnicity and Confidence in Public Service

In Nepal, the first detailed record of the caste system existed during the reign of King Jayasthiti Malla (B.S. 1380-1394), where 64 different castes were assigned different duties and rank in the hierarchy (Bennett et al., 2008).

Subsequently, Ram Shah (1609-1636) introduced some rules and regulations on the relations between different groups of people outside the Kathmandu Valley, and in the 17th century, the rulers of the Shah dynasty used the concept of caste hierarchy as an organizing principle to consolidate the diverse people inhabiting Nepal into a nation-state (Bennett et al., 2008). When the Kingdom of Nepal was established in the mid-18th century, King Prithivi Narayan Shah adopted a policy that only a few castes, namely Panta, Bohora, Khanal, Aryal, Pandey and Rana, would have administrative jobs (Jamil & Baniamin, 2020), while other castes, such as Janajatis, Madhesis, and Dalits, were excluded (Bishwakarma, 2008, cited in Dong, 2016). During the Rana rule (1846-1951), the first National Code of 1854, also known as Muluki Ain-1854, was promulgated. This national code united all Nepali people under a single legal system and created a hierarchy based on Hindu social stratification, and organized in terms of relative ritual purity in the four broad varnas, namely Brahman (priests), Kshatriya (kings and warriors), Vaisya (Traders and businessmen), and Sudra (peasants and laborers). This national code created a caste-based system of exclusion, in which the Brahmans and the Chhetris were considered to be upper class, and were rewarded in a social, administrative and political system. This traditionally created caste-based exclusionary practices have a greater impact on the civil service of Nepal. In 1991, Brahmans, Chhetris and Newars represented 36% of the total population but secured 89.2% of civil service jobs (United States Agency for International Development, 2007). The government of Nepal has been following an inclusive policy since 1990 A.D. in general and 2006 in particular, because of the people's movements of 1990 and 2006 A.D., correspondingly (N. R. Paudel, 2016). The people's movement 2006 overthrew the monarchy and enacted the interim constitution of Nepal in 2007. This constitution envisioned an inclusive state. To create a representative public service and integrate excluded people, the government of Nepal formulated an inclusive policy in 2007, reserved 45% of seats for excluded people, as suggested by the Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007 via the second amendment of the civil service act 1993 (Gupta et al., 2020). Although the second amendment of the Civil Service Act 1993 increased the representation of excluded groups of people in the civil service, Jamil and Baniamin (2020), by referring to the data of the highest levels of civil service (secretary, joint secretary and undersecretary), indicated that the Brahmans were only 12.74% in the national population, but secured 66.33% of the civil service jobs. The Chhetris represented only 15.80% of the population, but secured 19% of the Nepali civil service jobs, while indigenous, Dalit, Muslim and other ethnicities represented 71.46% of the population, but secured only 5.19% of the civil service jobs. These statistics indicated that upper-class Brahmans and Chhetris dominated the public service sector in Nepal, which had a substitutional impact on public service delivery and service users' confidence.

Studies have shown that service users' confidence in receiving public services may differ across ethnic backgrounds, caste/ethnicity, and religions (Ramesh, 2017). The

decline in public trust is also associated with the increase in ethnic diversity among service users (Hooghe et al., 2009). Ethnic minorities have less trust in public institutions than the ethnic majority in Sri Lanka (Ramesh, 2017). Similarly, mistrust among ethnic minorities regarding land settlements has also been documented in Bangladesh (Siddiquee, 2017). Gupta (2021) also found that citizens' confidence and trust in public and political institutions in Nepal are both positively and negatively influenced by caste/ethnicity. Confidence is found to differ by caste/ethnicity in Nepal because traditionally, caste-based social systems were awarded the highest rank to the Brahmans, Chhetris and Thakuris (Kshatriya) (Bennett et al., 2008). Inequalities in opportunity and access to public services persist across ethnic differences in Nepal (World Bank, 2018). According to Nepal National Governance Survey 2017/18, 62% of citizens perceived that caste or ethnic background creates barriers to receiving public services (NASC, 2018). Further, Pokharel et al. (2018) found that the share of people who perceive that ethnic background creates a barrier in receiving public services is higher among Tarai Janajati (51%), Tarai caste (49%), Dalit (49%), and Muslim (45%) as compared to Brahman (30%) and Chhetris (31%). This indicates that the level of confidence may differ among various service users of various ethnic backgrounds. Thus, we set the below hypothesis from the studied context.

H3: Brahman/Chhetris feel more confident in accessing public services without hassles in Nepal than do service users of other ethnicities.

Afno Manchhe/Person in Close Contact (Social Networking) and Confidence in Public Service

The term 'people in close contact' or Afno Manchhe (in Nepali) is used to describe the inner circle of associates, which means one's own people, and refers to those who can be approached if there is a need (Bista, 1991). Bista also argued that 'Afno Manchhe' is an intrinsic part of Nepali society, and is deeply ingrained in the history of Nepali bureaucracy. 'Afno Manchhe' is also referred to as a familiar person or personal contact and is thus linked with the notion of social networking which connects service users with service providers in public service. Service providers help to streamline the processes in receiving public services if the service users are connected/networked to them and they become more responsive to providing services in a simpler, more efficient, scalable, and prompt manner if service consumers have a previous relationship or network with them (Bhattarai & Gupta, 2022). Hence, service users' prior relationships or networks with service providers increase their confidence in receiving public services without any hassles. If citizens receive public services from public and political institutions without knowing the officials personally and without getting into any trouble, they show high confidence in public services (Gupta, 2021). In this regard, the impact of Afno Manchhe (social networking) is enormous on service users' confidence in public service. However, this theoretical standpoint has received little research attention,

and is yet to be studied in the context of Nepal. In this backdrop, we set the below hypothesis.

H4: Public service users, who believe that not having a person in close contact/Afno Manchhe (social networking) creates a barrier in accessing public services without hassles in Nepal, have less confidence.

Presence of Intermediaries and Confidence in Public Service

A citizen may obtain public services himself or with the help of a third party (Lamsal & Gupta, 2022), which is often known as an intermediary. An intermediary is a person, who usually stays around the public service institution's premises, and approaches and persuades service users to ask for their help to receive a problem-free public service. Sometimes the service provider intentionally creates the hassle of seeking the obligatory help of intermediaries. Service users may encounter complex administrative procedures if they wish to receive it alone. Service users, sometimes, also approach intermediaries themselves (Bussell, 2012). Service users who are unfamiliar with the required documents and administrative procedures seek the help of intermediaries to obtain services conveniently. Standing in line, managing all documents correctly, and following bureaucratic protocols are complicated for service users. Intermediaries capitalize this complexity to solicit their help. Service users follow the cost-benefit analysis and seek the help of intermediaries when the benefits outweigh the costs.

Earlier work of Bailey and Bakos (1997) has shed light on some critical roles of intermediaries including providing legal contacts between public service providers and users, providing authentication, facilitating information transfer, and enhancing trust between them by ensuring complete transactions and keeping them up-to-date with information, and reducing operational costs. Other studies also suggest more benefits of having intermediaries than costs incurred (Al-Sobhi et al., 2010; Löbel et al., 2016). Meanwhile, a few studies have focused on developing e-government that predicts direct interaction between service providers and users and minimizes transaction costs by evading intermediaries (Janssen & Klievink, 2009). With the dearth of sufficient literature to substantiate the role of intermediaries in effective public service delivery (Löbel et al., 2016) and debates prevailing on the extant literature on whether the presence of intermediaries builds service users' confidence or not, it would be inconclusive to argue favoring disintermediation based on the cost of intermediation only (Janssen & Verbraeck, 2005).

The presence of intermediaries is commonly found in public services in Nepal. In Pokharel et al. (2017), 30.3% of services reported to have used paid intermediaries. The study claimed an increase in both value and cost of transactions with the use of intermediaries but importantly highlighted that there is no regulation in such intermediation process and that they often promote bribery. Nepal National Governance Survey 2017/18 showed that 45% of citizens reported that they sought third-party assistance, in-

cluding family/friends, government employees, and paid intermediaries (NASC, 2018). Among the service users using intermediaries' assistance, 69% reported that they were technically required to access the service, 16% reported a lack of knowledge of office procedures, and 8% reported that they lacked self-confidence. Gupta and Shrestha (2021) found that one in every five (22%) service users receive public services by asking with the service provider, followed by friends/family (21.5%), asking other service users (17.5%), and intermediaries/agents (17.5%) which are all higher than Citizen Charter (15.8%). Such data delineate the need for having their people or intermediaries to some extent in receiving public services to build their confidence. Janssen and Klievink (2009) also opine that the use of intermediaries helps bridge the gap between services offered by public service providers and the hassle-free service the users desire and may add confidence in them. In this backdrop, we hypothesize the following:

H5: Public service users who perceive that the presence of intermediaries creates barriers in accessing public services in Nepal show higher degree of confidence.

Study Methods

Data

The study uses the data from Nepal National Governance Survey 2017/18 (NASC, 2018). It is a nationally representative survey conducted by NASC with technical support from the Central Bureau of Statistics, Nepal. A total of 12920 individual respondents aged 18 and older were selected using four-stage multiple cluster sampling designs covering districts, municipalities/rural municipalities, polling centers, and finally individuals to obtain a nationally representative sample. In the first phase of the sampling, 43 districts from 77 districts were selected, taking into account all seven provinces and three ecological zones. In the second stage, 164 urban and rural municipalities were randomly selected from 43 districts, and then in the third stage, 4 polling centers, developed by the Election Commission of Nepal for the 2017 local-level election, were randomly selected from each urban and rural municipality. In total, 646 polling centers (300 in urban and 346 in rural municipalities) were selected. In the final stage, 20 respondents were selected from each of the 646 polling centers using systematic random sampling. The registered voters' list of each polling center, prepared by the Nepal Election Commission, was adopted as a sampling frame to make the final selection of the respondents. Using a standardized questionnaire, trained and skilled research associates collected data by conducting face-to-face structured interviews between December 2017 and March 2018. Of the 12920 selected respondents, 12872 interviews were conducted successfully, totalling a response rate of 99.6%, but not all were from the original target respondents. The response rate was high because the survey allowed the replacement of unavailable respondents from a replacement list, which is a pre-selected additional respondent list. This survey assumed that not all pre-selected respondents would be available or interested in participating in the survey for various reasons, in-

cluding reluctance, death or absence. To address this issue and ensure a higher response rate, a replacement plan was prepared for each polling center adopting a process similar to stage 4, and 10 'reserve' respondents were selected to replace unavailable respondents. If a selected respondent didn't appear for the interview, a replacement was selected from the replacement list, preferably of the same gender and age group. Even if respondents from the replacement list were unable to participate, a secondary replacement was further drawn from the household of the original targeted respondents. A total of 68% of the original respondents were interviewed, and 32% were not interviewed. Of the 32% of original respondents who weren't interviewed, 22% were interviewed from the replacement list, and the remaining 10% were interviewed from secondary replacement list from the household of the original targeted respondents.

This survey collected information on three broad parameters of governance, namely the foundation of governance, the infrastructure of governance, and service delivery, among which this study is based on the service delivery section. This survey collected information about the public service that citizens received from various government organizations such as district administration offices, municipality/rural municipality offices, education offices, agriculture offices, land revenue offices, police offices, health institutions, transportation offices, forest offices, central ministries/agencies and so on (NASC, 2018). The analysis of this paper is based on citizens' confidence in accessing services from these institutions without any hassles with various factors such as location, education level, caste/ethnicity, presence of own people, and intermediaries.

Measures: Dependent and Independent Variables

Citizen confidence in accessing the public service without any hassle (hereafter referred to as citizen confidence) from the government office was used as a dependent variable. The dependent variable used in this study seems to be the combination of two variables: confidence and access to public service. However, in many researches, trust/confidence and public service delivery are treated separately, and referred to as dependent and independent variables, respectively (See: Askvik et al., 2011; Cowell et al., 2012; Gupta, 2021; Jamil & Askvik, 2013; Ramesh, 2017). Although different studies have used trust/confidence and public service delivery separately, this study used confidence in accessing the public service as the dependent variable, as this survey assessed service users' confidence by asking, "At present, how confident do you feel that you can access services without any hassles from government offices?". This question was asked to individuals who received public services from government offices in the last two years. Of the 12872 respondents, only 7437 received public service in the last two years. This question had four answers: fully confident, partially confident, not confident, and don't know/can't say. This study excluded 103 respondents who reported can't say/don't know the answers, because it did not offer an articulated view. So the sample size for the study was 7334. This study only covered five inde-

Table 1. Collinearity Statistics

Variables	Tolerance	VIF
Urban/rural	.979	1.022
Education	.985	1.015
Caste/Ethnicity	.970	1.031
Not Having Afno Manchhe/ Person in close contact	.857	1.167
Presence of Intermediaries	.857	1.168

pendent variables: public service users' urban/rural cores, their education level, their caste/ethnicity, belief that not having Afno Manchhe/a person in close contact creates barriers in accessing public service, and the belief that the presence of intermediaries does not create barriers in accessing public service. These independent variables were used to examine the likelihood of feeling confident in accessing public services.

The influence of the dependent variable (citizen confidence) on the independent variables seems to be negligible due to the demographic nature of the independent variables. In the Nepali public services, the presence of intermediaries or having an Afno manchhe/person in close contact is not affected by citizen confidence in accessing public service. The presence of intermediaries in Nepali public services lies beyond the control of service users, and whether they have an Afno manchhe/person in close contact within public service institutions depends on their previous connections, which is largely unaffected by their confidence in accessing the services. In this study, both the independent and dependent variables were obtained from the same survey, which is very common in survey research-based articles. Using variables from the same survey allows us to counteract the effects of confounding variables that might skew the relationship between dependent and independent variables. It also helps us ensure consistency in the measurement, definition and quality of variables, which is important for obtaining accurate and meaningful results in the analysis. To test whether the response to the dependent variable influences the response to the independent variables, and to produce a reliable/unbiased model and obtain a good estimate of the effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable, multicollinearity was tested before performing binary logistic regression, as shown in [Table 1](#). The tolerances values are closer to 1, and VIF values are less than 2.5, signifying that there is no multicollinearity issue to fit the logistic regression model.

Logistic Regression Model

This study used binary logistic regression to examine the likelihood of feeling confident in accessing public service by urban/rural, education, caste/ethnicity, not having Afno Manchhe/person in close contact, and presence of intermediaries with or without statistical significance. This is because the dependent variable (feeling of confidence) is categorical, which is suitable for logistic regression. The dependent variable was coded as a '0' for not feeling confi-

dent and '1' for feeling confident in accessing public service as shown in [Table 2](#).

The Logistic Regression Equation Model:

$$\text{Logit}(p) = \log(P/1-P) = \beta x_1 + \beta x_2 + \beta x_3 + \beta x_n \dots \dots \varepsilon$$

where,

P = Probability of feeling the confidence to access public service

X = Independent variables (urban/rural, education, caste/ethnicity, not having Afno manchhe/person in close contact and presence of intermediaries)

β = Coefficient of corresponding independent variables

ε = Error

SPSS 26 was used for analysis and the odds ratio was stated. An odds ratio enables the effects to be captured in terms of a probability statement and the results to be interpreted intuitively (Berglund et al., 2008; Lee & Whitford, 2008). The odds ratio greater than 1 indicates a positive (event probable to occur) relationship, while odds ratio less than 1 indicates a negative relationship (event less likely to occur).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The study variables include demographics and variables related to having Afno Manchhe (person in close contact) and the presence of intermediaries as shown in [Table 3](#). [Table 3](#) shows a fairly equal distribution level of public service users from municipalities (56%) and rural municipalities (44%). It also shows their level of education and reveals that nearly half (48%) of service users do not even have up to the basic level of education. Further, more than one-third of the service users are Brahmin/Chhetri (38.1%) while the remaining share represents all the other castes/ethnicities. Similarly, 85.1% of them believe that the absence of Afno Manchhe (person in close contact/familiar person) creates barriers in accessing public services and 66.1% believe that the presence of intermediaries creates the same barriers. The distribution of confidence level among each group with the service users' locale, level of education, ethnicities and opinions regarding Afno Manchhe or intermediaries is fairly proportionate to the total demographic distribution. It is interesting to note that the share of service users exhibiting confidence was higher in all the groups compared to those with no confidence.

Logistic Regression Results

Results obtained using logistic regression highlighting confidence in service users differ across various variables, as shown in [Table 4](#). [Table 4](#) provides the beta (β) and odds ratio of logistic regression for each category of the variables. Place of residence which is classified as i) urban areas (represented by municipalities) and ii) rural areas (represented by rural municipalities) and education which is categorized under five levels ranging from no education to higher education were used as independent variables. Caste/ethnicity is broadly categorized into Brahman/

Table 2. Coding of Variables

Variable	Statements	Coding Scheme
Dependent		
Feeling of confidence in assessing public service	At present, how confident do you feel that you can access services without any hassles from the government offices?. (Options: 1= fully confident; 2= partially confident; 3= not confident; 99= don't know/can't say).	Fully confident and partially confident coded as "1"; Not confident coded as "0" and don't know/can't say was "omitted".
Independent		
Urban/Rural	Place of residence of respondents (1= municipality; 2= rural municipality)	Municipality coded as "0" and rural municipality coded as "1"
Education	Education Status (Options: 1=Illiterate; 2= Literate (can read and write but no formal education or primary level not completed); 3= Primary level (Completed class five); 4= Lower secondary level (Completed class 8); 5= Secondary level (Completed class 10); 6= Higher Secondary (Completed class 12) or Intermediate level; 7= Bachelor and above; 8= Vocational Education)	No education (illiterate) coded as "0"; no formal education (school education) coded as "1"; primary, secondary and vocational education merged as basic education and coded as "2"; secondary and higher secondary education merged as secondary education and coded as "3"; bachelor and above coded as higher education as "4")
Caste/Ethnicity	Caste/Ethnicity of respondents (Options: 1=Hill Brahman, Sanyasi; 2= Hill Chhetri, Thakuri; 3=Newar; 4= Hill Janajati; 5= Tarai Brahman, Bhoomihar, Rajput, Kayastha; 6= Other Tarai caste; 7= Tarai Janajati (except Tharu); 8=Hill Dalit; 9= Tarai Dalit; 10 Muslim; 11 Tharu; 12= Others)	Hill Brahman, Sanyasi and Hill Chhetri, Thakuri merged as Brahman/Chhetri and coded as "0" and other caste/ethnicity coded as "1"
Not Having Afno Manchhe/ Person in close contact	To what extent do you agree that the 'not having afno manchhe/familiar person' creates barriers or problems in accessing services for people like you?. (Options: 1= Strongly agree; 2=Agree to some extent; 3=Disagree to some extent; 4=Strongly disagree; 99=Don't know/Can't say)	Strongly agree and agree to some extent coded as "1" and disagree to some extent and strongly disagree coded as "0".
Presence of Intermediaries	To what extent do you agree that the 'presence of intermediaries' creates barriers or problems in accessing services for people like you?. (Options: 1= Strongly agree; 2=Agree to some extent; 3=Disagree to some extent; 4=Strongly disagree; 99=Don't know/Can't say)	Strongly agree and agree to some extent coded as "1" and disagree to some extent and strongly disagree coded as "0"

Chhetri and others as another independent variable. Likewise, two other independent variables are 'not having Afno Manchhe/person in close contact and presence of intermediaries'. As the dependent variable, confidence in accessing public service was used. Results have shown that confidence in accessing public services from government offices differs positively and negatively with different independent variables.

Taking municipal service users as the reference group, it is found that service users living in rural municipalities are more likely to feel confident ($OR = 1.224, p < .001$) in accessing public service from government offices. The result implies that service users living in municipalities feel less confident in accessing public services than those living in rural areas. Similarly, regarding service users having no education (Illiterate) as the reference group, it is found that the service users with no school education, basic education, secondary education and higher education have lower confidence than those without education ($OR = .920, p > .05$; $OR = .797, p < .001$; $OR = .702, p < .001$; $OR = .613, p < .001$ respectively). The result indicates a negative relationship between the level of education and confidence in accessing public service. The confidence of the service users sequentially declines with an increase in their level of education. Similarly, the results showed that compared

to Brahman/Chhetri service users, those from other ethnic backgrounds are less likely to feel confident in accessing public services ($OR = .821, p < .001$). Brahmans/Chhettris, in other words, feel more confident in accessing public service than other castes/ethnic groups.

The study also observed that service users who think that not having Afno Manchhe/person in close contact (social networking) creates a hassle in accessing public service are less likely to feel confident in accessing public services ($OR = .663, p < .001$). It suggests that having Afno Manchhe/a person in close contact (social networking) would lead to a feeling of more confidence in accessing public services. Likewise, service users who think that the presence of intermediaries creates barriers in accessing public service are less likely to feel confident in accessing public services ($OR = .514, p < .001$). This finding thus indicates that service users have a negative perception of the presence of intermediaries in the process of accessing public services with confidence.

Discussion

Constitutionally, citizens are entitled to receive quality public services on time without any inconvenience from the government offices as one of their primary responsibilities

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Study Variables	Confidence		Sampled
	%	N	%
Urban/rural			
Municipality	55	4109	56
Rural Municipality	45	3225	44
Education			
Illiterate	31	2152	29.3
No school education	17	1197	16.3
Basic education	23	1689	23
Secondary education	25	1927	26.3
Higher education	5	369	5
Caste/Ethnicity			
Brahmin/Chhetri	39	2796	38.1
Others	61	4538	61.9
Belief that 'not having afno manchhe'			
Doesn't create barriers in accessing public service	17	1090	14.9
Creates barriers in accessing public service	83	6227	85.1
Belief that presence of intermediaries			
Doesn't create barriers in accessing public service	39	2371	33.9
Creates barriers in accessing public service	61	4617	66.1

Table 4. Coefficients of Logistic Regression to feel Confident in Assessing Service without Hassles from Government Offices

Predictor Variables	B	S.E.	Odds Ratio
Urban/Rural			
Municipalities (Ref.)			
Rural Municipalities	.202	.054	1.224**
Education			
No education/illiterate (Ref.)			
No school education	-.083	.085	.920
Basic education	-.226	.075	.797**
Secondary education	-.353	.073	.702**
Higher education	-.489	.123	.613**
Caste/Ethnicity			
Brahman/Chhetri (Ref.)			
Others	-.197	.056	.821**
Barriers in Accessing Public Services			
Not Having Afno Manchhe/Person in close contact (social networking)	-.410	.090	.663**
Presence of Intermediaries	-.665	.064	.514**

Nagelkerke R Square = 0.050, ** $p < .001$

(Government of Nepal, 2015). The Government of Nepal periodically recruits highly competent service providers through a merit-based system to fulfil this responsibility (R. C. Paudel & Gupta, 2019). However, service users are not highly satisfied with the public services they receive and feel less confident in accessing public services. According to the Nepal National Governance Survey (2017/18), only 15% of citizens are fully satisfied with the services they re-

ceived, while 65% are partially satisfied. The survey also revealed that only 9% of citizens have full confidence in the services they received, while 60% have partial confidence (NASC, 2018). Although there are more partially satisfied and confident citizens, the proportion of fully satisfied and confident citizens is very low. A high-quality public service not only ensures satisfaction, but also fosters citizens' confidence (Lamsal & Gupta, 2022).

Service users' confidence in receiving public service depends on several factors such as residence (urban/rural), education level, caste/ethnicity, not having Afno Manchhe/person in close contact (social networking), and the presence of intermediaries. Out of the factors, there are remarkable urban-rural variations in public service (World Bank, 2018). Service delivery is relatively challenging in rural areas as compared to urban areas, particularly due to the lower population density, the greater distances to be travelled, and the limited number of people in every place that precludes economies of scale (OECD, 2010). Kosec and Wantchekon (2020) also argue that service delivery is particularly challenging in rural areas, confronted with unique logistical difficulties due to their remoteness. Public services available in rural areas are comparatively lower in quality, have fewer choices, and are available at higher costs (OECD, 2010). Despite this, our study confirmed that service users living in rural areas are more likely to feel confident in accessing public service than those living in urban areas. Compared to urban service users, rural service users have a much more favorable view of public service. This may be because rural service users have a greater feeling of self-reliance and social connectivity, and are more attached to government offices. On the other hand, urban service users are more likely to believe themselves as the right holders than rural service users. Urban service users are generally more educated than rural service users. Therefore, they assess the performance of public service providers more critically, and expect higher performance from them than the rural service users do. This indicates that even a minor performance gap would lead to a decline in their satisfaction level and consequently their confidence in accessing public services.

Educated service users appear to have a more practical view and they better understand the political-administrative system (Marlowe, 2004; Richardson et al., 2001; Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006). As a result, they may demand high-quality public services. The gradual drop in their confidence level with the escalation of their educational level aligns with the theoretical underpinning. This is because educated service users demand high quality public services, critically examine public service performance, and have a more critical attitude towards civil servants (Marlowe, 2004; Zhao & Hu, 2017). Educated service users assess all facets of public services, and if they find a gap between expectations and actual performance, their level of confidence declines. Users with higher education have varied demands and higher expectations, and as a result, they accept less administrative inefficiency and are less satisfied with public services (Roth et al., 1990). Thus, expectations and demands of the public service users grow as the level of education increases, and if expectations and demands are not met, both satisfaction and confidence decline.

Nepal is a multi-ethnic, multilingual and multi-religious country with diverse cultures and comprises approximately 126 caste/ethnic groups, speaking 123 languages and practicing 10 different religious beliefs (Central Bureau Statistics, 2012). People of different caste/ethnicity have different beliefs and experiences in public service, and have a

different levels of confidence in accessing public service. In Nepal, the effect of caste/ethnicity on service users' confidence in receiving public services is considered very high. It is because the caste/ethnicity hierarchy structure and system pose an obstacle for the smooth public service delivery in Nepal, and it is perceived as an obstacle to access services for at least 30 % of Nepali citizens with a higher proportion of Tarai Janajati (51%), Tarai caste (49%), Dalit (49%) and Muslim (45%) (Pokharel et al., 2018). Such data show that the government has been unable to fully guarantee fair access to public services to those lower in the caste/ethnic hierarchy, even though everyone legally has the same right to access public services. Brahman/Chettri service users are more likely to feel confident in accessing public services than the other caste/ethnicity group, which is also confirmed by this study. This is possibly due to the higher representation of Brahman/Chettris in government offices than other castes/ethnic groups. Seeing a service provider of the same caste or ethnicity in government offices can increase the feeling of belongingness in service users, which in turn, increases their confidence. Similarly, language affects many ethnolinguistic groups seeking access to public services in Nepal, either directly or indirectly (Dong, 2016; Lawoti, 2014). Bennett et al. (2006) argue that 52% of the population of Nepal does not speak Nepali as their mother tongue. Public services are usually provided in Nepali, even though the Central Bureau of Statistics (2012) reports numerous spoken languages and castes/ethnic groups. Service users from all caste/ethnic groups do not adequately speak and understand the Nepali language clearly and this language barrier makes them less confident in accessing public service. In this way, caste/ethnicity, directly and indirectly, influences service users' confidence in accessing public services.

Service users can access public services by three means, namely through normal procedures, through direct bribing, and through intermediaries (Fredriksson, 2014). Principally, service users should receive public services through regular procedures. However, in many cases, service users cannot receive services through regular procedures. They tend to use intermediaries instead of offering bribes directly to officers because they cannot identify corrupt officers and how much should be offered (Bayar, 2005). In general, corrupt service providers deliberately create hassles for making extra money from service users. To escape from this hassle and avoid procedural complexity, service users take the help of intermediaries. Service users who are not fully informed about the needed documents and administrative procedures, and are unaware of the complicated bureaucratic protocols often face dilemmas (Neupane et al., 2022). Hence, they seek the assistance of intermediaries to receive services conveniently. Intermediaries use this complexity as an opportunity to offer them their services and reap financial benefits. The existence of intermediaries thus creates barriers in accessing public services with confidence which was confirmed by this study. This is because intermediaries impose an additional financial burden on service users. Similarly, in some cases, intermediaries with the assistance of service providers make it difficult to receive

public services without their assistance. Hence, the environment of seeking mandatory help from intermediaries reduces service users' confidence in public service.

The influence of Afno Manche/person in close contact (social networking) in Nepal's public service system seems to be strong. Nepali citizens believe that the presence of their people in the service-providing offices can ease to obtain services without any difficulties. Service users who do not have connections and networks with the service provider may feel less confident owing to various reasons such as complicated administrative processes, inadequate knowledge of documentation and service procedures, long queues, and uncooperative behavior from the service providers. The results of the study revealed that service users, who perceived they had no connections or network (Afno Manchhe) and saw it as a barrier, have lower confidence in accessing public services. This is because those having person/s in close contact or Afno Manchhe in public service receive the privileged treatment. Persons in close contact are inclined to personal relations that Putnam (2000) has termed as bonding social capital. Indeed, confidence in accessing public service depends on the social capital of the service users. Social capital relies on the principle of radius and network trust (Fukuyama, 1995), which is related to bonding and bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000). Bonding or bridging and narrow or more comprehensive radius impact service users' confidence in accessing public services. Service users who have a wider radius and bonding social capital are more confident in accessing public services, as service providers simplify the bureaucratic process, and show service-friendly behaviour. The problem is that all service users do not have the same wider radius and bonding social capital. In the Nepali public service sector, service users' confidence in accessing public services relies heavily on bonding and bridging social capital. This is because the culture of Afno Manchhe/person in close contact is deeply ingrained in Nepali public services. This culture violates the principle of justice, makes public service less effective and ethical (Khanal et al., 2022), and diminishes the confidence of service users.

Implications of the Study

The study used the data from Nepal National Governance Survey 2017/18 which is a single survey. Since this may lead to common method bias, further research can be carried out using dataset from multiple surveys. The study also offers policy implications since its results caution and compel the concerned stakeholders to pay close attention to factors such as location (urban/rural), education, caste/ethnicity, presence of people in close contact and intermediaries to ensure higher service user confidence in accessing public services. It also offers insightful evidence to public service providing institutions for quality public service, which not only leads to satisfaction, but also fosters citizen confidence and trust. This study proposes a list of potential suggestions, which can be useful not only for policy makers, but also for service providers, as below:

- The confidence of service users in accessing public services depends severely on their demographics. Therefore, when designing and delivering public services, particular attention should be paid to the demographic characteristics of service users.
- Service users believe that having a connection/network with a service provider can make it easier to get services without any difficulties. The preferential treatment of service users within their connection/network violates notions of justice and fairness, thereby reducing service users' confidence in accessing public services. Therefore, service providers must be fair in their work, particularly when dealing with service users, and never give undue favor to service users they know personally.
- It is the best notion to have a direct relationship between service users and public service providers, but sometimes there is a presence of intermediaries in public services, particularly in services with complex administrative procedures. Therefore, a help desk and digital citizen charter should be set up in the public service institutions, from which service users can easily get all the information about the administrative process and procedures of the services. Similarly, the service providers can also support service users by simplifying the bureaucratic process as needed. It somehow supports to minimize the presence of intermediaries in public services, which ultimately helps ensure service users' confidence in accessing public services.

Conclusion

Public service is a means of strengthening the relation between the state and citizens. Meeting the demands and expectations of service users with the quality of public services is the state's primary concern. While the Government of Nepal has implemented a range of interventions to provide quality public services according to their needs, it has not been able to meet their expectations since many service users still do not feel completely confident in accessing public services. Factors such as locale (urban/rural), education level, caste/ethnicity, and belief that not having Afno Manche/person in close contact creates barriers in accessing public services and belief that the presence of intermediaries creates a barrier in public services have direct or indirect and positive or adverse effect on accessing public services with confidence. Ensuring the service users' confidence in public services is challenging, but possible. It is therefore imperative that the public service providers bring a reform in public service design and delivery aligning with the demographic structure and its dynamics to improve public service performance, which would ultimately lead to maintaining, restoring, and sustaining service users' confidence.

.....

Authors' Contributions

The author/authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contributions to the work and have approved it for publication.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no potential conflict of interest.

Acknowledgement

The authors thank Nepal Administrative Staff College for the data of Nepal National Governance Survey 2017/18. Similarly, the authors would like to thank the anonymous referees for their insightful comments and feedbacks on the earlier drafts of this article.

Submitted: June 16, 2022 KST, Accepted: February 10, 2023 KST



This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CCBY-ND-4.0). View this license's legal deed at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0> and legal code at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/legalcode> for more information.

References

- Aitalieva, N. R. (2014). *Citizen confidence in the public service: An examination of established and emerging democracies in North America and Eurasia* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Tennessee]. <https://bit.ly/3fDeooy>
- Al-Sobhi, F., Weerakkody, V., & Kamal, M. M. (2010). An exploratory study on the role of intermediaries in delivering public services in Madinah City: Case of Saudi Arabia. *Transforming Government: People, Process and Policy*, 4(11), 14–36. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17506161011028786>
- Asian Development Bank. (2013). *Annual report 2013*. Author.
- Askvik, S., Jamil, I., & Dhakal, T. N. (2011). Citizens' trust in public and political institutions in Nepal. *International Political Science Review*, 32(4), 417–437. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512110377437>
- Bailey, J. P., & Bakos, Y. (1997). An exploratory study of the emerging role of electronic intermediaries. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 1(3), 7–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10864415.1997.11518287>
- Bayar, G. (2005). The role of intermediaries in corruption. *Public Choice*, 122(3–4), 277–298. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s11127-005-5916-8>
- Bennett, L., Dahal, D. R., & Govindasamy, P. (2008). *Caste, ethnic, and regional identity in Nepal: Further analysis of the 2006 Nepal demographic and health survey*. Population Division, Ministry of Health and Population, Government of Nepal. <https://bit.ly/3i89YLN>
- Bennett, L., Tamang, S., Onta, P., & Thapa, M. (2006). *Unequal citizens: Gender, caste and ethnic exclusion in Nepal*. Department for International Development and The World Bank, Kathmandu. <https://bit.ly/3UWk9aX>
- Berglund, F., Kleven, Ø., & Ringdal, K. (2008). Political activism. In H. Ervasti, T. Fridberg, M. Hjerm, & K. Ringdal (Eds.), *Nordic social attitudes in a European perspective* (pp. 110–130). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781848444997.00012>
- Bhattarai, P. C. (2009). Countering corruption: Globally or locally. *Nepalese Journal of Public Policy and Governance*, 24(1), 89–98.
- Bhattarai, P. C. (2017). *Reform in public service delivery in Nepal: Demand or supply driven*. OCED Global Anti-corruption and Integrity Forum.
- Bhattarai, P. C., & Gupta, A. K. (2022). Bribing for public service: What drives the service users? *International Journal of Public Administration*, 41(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2021.2018709>
- Bista, D. B. (1991). *Fatalism and development: Nepal's struggle for modernization*. Orient Blackswan. <https://bit.ly/3ihgW1i>
- Blind, P. R. (2010). Building trust in government: Linking theory with practice. In G. S. Cheema & V. Popovski (Eds.), *Building trust in government: Innovations in governance reform in Asia* (pp. 22–53). United Nations University Press.
- Brehm, J., & Rahn, W. (1997). Individual-level evidence for the causes and consequences of social capital. *American Journal of Political Science*, 41(3), 999–1023. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2111684>
- Brinkerhoff, D. W., Wetterberg, A., & Wibbels, E. (2018). Distance, services, and citizen perceptions of the state in rural Africa. *Governance*, 31(1), 103–124. <http://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12271>
- Bussell, J. (2012). *Corruption and reform in India: Public services in the digital age*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781139094023>
- Central Bureau Statistics. (2012). *Population monograph of Nepal*. Central Bureau Statistics. <https://bit.ly/2S6QYmg>
- Christensen, T., & Lægveid, P. (2005). Trust in government: The relative importance of service satisfaction, political factors, and demography. *Public Performance & Management Review*, 28(4), 487–511. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15309576.2005.11051848>
- Christensen, T., Yamamoto, K., & Aoyagi, S. (2020). Trust in local government: Service satisfaction, culture, and demography. *Administration & Society*, 52(8), 1268–1296. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095399719897392>
- Clausen, B., Kraay, A., & Nyiri, Z. (2011). Corruption and confidence in public institutions: Evidence from a global survey. *The World Bank Economic Review*, 25(2), 212–249. <https://doi.org/10.1093/wber/lhr018>
- Cook, T. E., & Gronke, P. (2005). The skeptical American: Revisiting the meanings of trust in government and confidence in institutions. *The Journal of Politics*, 67(3), 784–803. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2508.2005.00339.x>
- Cowell, R., Downe, J., Martin, S., & Chen, A. (2012). Public confidence and public services: It matters what you measure. *Policy & Politics*, 40(1), 120–140. <https://doi.org/10.1332/147084411x581862>
- Dijkstra, L., & Poelman, H. (2008). *Remote rural regions: How proximity to a city influences the performance of rural regions*. European Union.
- Dong, T. B. (2016). Social inequality in the civil service and a review of affirmative action in Nepal. *The South Asianist Journal*, 4(2), 119–142. <https://bit.ly/3dVqLPX>
- Fredriksson, A. (2014). Bureaucracy intermediaries, corruption and red tape. *Journal of Development Economics*, 108, 256–273. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2014.02.005>
- Fukuyama, F. (1995). *Trust: The social virtues and the creation of prosperity*. Free Press. <https://bit.ly/3arXPYX>
- Government of Nepal. (2015). *The constitution of Nepal 2015*. Nepal Law Commission.

- Greasley, S. (2013). Trust in government, performance information and democracy. In S. Llewellyn, S. Brookes, & A. Mahon (Eds.), *Trust and confidence in government and public Services* (pp. 65–79). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203548349>
- Gupta, A. K. (2021). *Trust in public and political institutions in Nepal*. Nepal Administrative Staff College. <https://bit.ly/3jQHn4v>
- Gupta, A. K., Bhandari, G., & Manandhar, S. (2020). Representative bureaucracy in Nepali civil service: Exploring the encounters of women. *Journal of Asian Review of Public Affairs and Policy*, 5(1), 43–59. <http://dx.doi.org/10.222.99/arpap/2020.64>
- Gupta, A. K., & Shrestha, G. L. (2021). Citizen charter in Nepali public sector organizations: Does it really work? *Policy & Governance Review*, 5(1), 18–32. <http://doi.org/10.30589/pgr.v5i1.368>
- Haerper, C., Inglehart, R., Moreno, A., Welzel, C., Kizilova, K., Diez-Medrano, J., Lagos, M., Norris, P., Ponarin, E., & Puranen, B. (2020). *World values survey: Round seven - country-pooled datafile*. JD Systems Institute & WWSA Secretariat.
- Hammar, H., Jagers, S. C., & Nordblom, K. (2009). Perceived tax evasion and the importance of trust. *The Journal of Socio-Economics*, 38(2), 238–245. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.socec.2008.07.003>
- Heintzman, R., & Marson, B. (2005). People, service and trust: Is there a public sector service value chain? *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 71(4), 549–575. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852305059599>
- Hetherington, M. J. (1998). The political relevance of political trust. *American Political Science Review*, 92(4), 791–808. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2586304>
- Hooghe, M., Reeskens, T., Stolle, D., & Trappers, A. (2009). Ethnic diversity and generalized trust in Europe: A cross-national multilevel study. *Comparative Political Studies*, 42(2), 198–223. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0010414008325286>
- James, O., & Moseley, A. (2014). Does performance information about public services affect citizens' perceptions, satisfaction, and voice behaviour? Field experiments with absolute and relative performance information. *Public Administration*, 92(2), 493–511. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12066>
- Jamil, I., & Askvik, S. (2013). Citizens' trust in public officials: Bangladesh and Nepal compared. In I. Jamil, S. Askvik, & T. N. Dhakal (Eds.), *In search of better governance in South Asia and beyond* (pp. 145–163). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-7372-5_9
- Jamil, Ishtiaq, & Baniamin, H. M. (2020). Representative and responsive bureaucracy in Nepal: A mismatch or a realistic assumption? *Public Administration and Policy*, 23(2), 141–156. <https://doi.org/10.1108/pap-03-2020-0016>
- Janssen, M., & Klievink, B. (2009). The role of intermediaries in multi-channel service delivery strategies. *International Journal of Electronic Government Research*, 5(3), 36–46. <https://doi.org/10.4018/jegr.2009070103>
- Janssen, M., & Verbraeck, A. (2005). Evaluating the information architecture of an electronic intermediary. *Journal of Organizational Computing and Electronic Commerce*, 15(1), 3. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327744joce1501_35-60
- Kang, H. J., & Park, E. H. (2018). Effects of expectation-disconfirmation regarding the role of government on trust in government and the moderating effect of citizen participation. *Journal of Policy Studies*, 33(3), 1–22.
- Keiser, L., & Haider-Markel, D. (2022). Symbolic representation in American schools: Race, gender, and intersectionality. *Journal of Policy Studies*, 4(37), 57–76. <https://doi.org/10.52372/jps37404>
- Khadka, B. B., & Bhattarai, P. C. (2021). Integrity triad as doubled edged sword for head-teachers' integrity: A case from Nepal. *International Journal for Educational Integrity*, 17(27). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40979-021-00092-8>
- Khanal, R., Gupta, A. K., & Bhattarai, P. C. (2022). Civil servants' integrity in public sector: The case of Nepal. *Heliyon*, 8(12), e12632. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e12632>
- Kharel, S. (2018). Public service delivery of local government in Nepal in 2015. *Research Nepal Journal of Development Studies*, 1(1), 83–93. <https://doi.org/10.3126/rnjds.v1i1.21277>
- Kim, P. S. (2010). Building trust in government in Northeast Asia. In G. S. Cheema & V. Popovski (Eds.), *Building trust in government: Innovations in governance reform in Asia* (pp. 54–84). United Nations University Press. <https://doi.org/10.18356/c3a14a3c-en>
- Kim, S. (2010). Public trust in government in Japan and South Korea: Does the rise of critical citizens matter? *Public Administration Review*, 70(5), 801–810. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2010.02207.x>
- Kosec, K., & Wantchekon, L. (2020). Can information improve rural governance and service delivery? *World Development*, 125, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2018.07.017>
- Krishna, A., & Schober, G. (2014). The gradient of governance: Distance and disengagement in Indian villages. *Journal of Development Studies*, 50(6), 820–838. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2014.887692>
- Lamsal, B. P., & Gupta, A. K. (2022). Citizen satisfaction with public Service: What factors drive? *Policy & Governance Review*, 6(1), 78–89. <https://doi.org/10.30589/pgr.v6i1.470>
- Lawoti, M. (2014). Reform and resistance in Nepal. *Journal of Democracy*, 25(2), 131–145. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2014.0021>
- Lee, S. Y., & Whitford, A. B. (2008). Exit, voice, loyalty, and pay: Evidence from the public workforce. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 18(4), 647–671. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mum029>
- Li, L. (2004). Political trust in rural China. *Modern China*, 30(2), 228–258. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0097700403261824>

- Llewellyn, S., Brookes, S., & Mahon, A. (2013). Introduction: Trust and confidence in government and public services. In S. Llewellyn, S. Brookes, & A. Mahon (Eds.), *Trust and confidence in government and public Services* (pp. 1–16). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203548349>
- Löbel, S., Paulowitsch, B., & Schuppan, T. (2016). Intermediaries in the public sector and the role of information technology. *Information Polity*, 21(4), 335–346. <https://doi.org/10.3233/ip-160387>
- Marlowe, J. (2004). Part of the solution or cogs in the system?: The origins and consequences of trust in public administrators. *Public Integrity*, 6(2), 93–113. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10999922.2004.11051251>
- Miao, Q., Newman, A., Schwarz, G., & Xu, L. (2014). Servant leadership, trust, and the organizational commitment of public sector employees in China. *Public Administration*, 92(3), 727–743. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12091>
- Morrell, K., Bradford, B., & Javid, B. (2020). What does it mean when we ask the public if they are 'confident' in policing? The trust, fairness, presence model of public confidence. *International Journal of Police Science & Management*, 22(2), 111–122. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461355719891197>
- Mridha, M. K., Anwar, I., & Koblinsky, M. (2009). Public-sector maternal health programmes and services for rural Bangladesh. *Journal of Health, Population and Nutrition*, 27(2), 124–138. <https://doi.org/10.3329/jhpn.v27i2.3326>
- Nam, K., & Lee, S. Y. (2021). Presidential leadership qualities and their influence on trust in government. *Journal of Policy Studies*, 36(3), 37–54.
- Naseer, S. (2010). Building trust in government in South Asia. In G. S. Cheema & V. Popovski (Eds.), *Building trust in government: Innovations in governance reform in Asia* (pp. 113–133). United Nations University Press.
- Nepal Administrative Staff College. (2018). *Nepal national governance survey 2017/18*. Author.
- Neupane, Y. C., Bhattarai, P. C., & Lowery, C. L. (2022). Prospect of ethical decision-making practices in community schools. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/013603124.2022.2120632>
- Newton, K., & Norris, P. (2000). Confidence in public institutions: Faith, culture, or performance? In S. J. Pharr & R. D. Putnam (Eds.), *Disaffected democracies: What's troubling the trilateral countries?* (pp. 53–73). Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691186849-007>
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2010). *OECD rural policy reviews: Strategies to improve rural service delivery*. Author. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264083967-en>
- Paudel, N. R. (2016). Inclusive governance: A case study of civil service in Nepal. *Journal of Governance and Innovation*, 2(1), 19–40.
- Paudel, R. C., & Gupta, A. K. (2019). Performance in Nepali bureaucracy: What does matter? *Research Journal of Economics*, 3(1), 1–6. <https://bit.ly/3XGnJq1>
- Pokharel, T., Dahal, A., & Adhikari, R. (2017). *Public services in Nepal: Citizen's experiences*. Nepal Administrative Staff College.
- Pokharel, T., Subedi, B. P., Adhikari, S. H., Adhikari, R., & Gupta, A. K. (2018). *Quality of public service in Nepal: Nepal national governance survey 2017/18* [Thematic paper]. Nepal Administrative Staff College. <https://bit.ly/2Y08YSz>
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon and Schuster. <https://doi.org/10.1145/358916.361990>
- Ramesh, R. (2017). Does trust matter? An inquiry on citizens' trust in public institutions of Sri Lanka. *Millennial Asia*, 8(2), 123–145. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0976399617715820>
- Regmi, K., Naidoo, J., Greer, A., & Pilkington, P. (2010). Understanding the effect of decentralization on health services: The Nepalese experience. *Journal of Health Organization and Management*, 24(4), 361–382. <https://doi.org/10.1108/14777261011064986>
- Richardson, L., Houston, D., & Hadjiharalambous, C. S. (2001). Public confidence in the leaders of American governmental institutions. In J. R. Hibbing & E. Theiss-Morse (Eds.), *What is it about Government that Americans Dislike* (pp. 83–97). Cambridge University Press.
- Roth, V. J., Bozinoff, L., & MacIntosh, P. (1990). Public opinion and the measurement of consumer satisfaction with government services. *Canadian Public Administration*, 33(4), 571–583. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-7121.1990.tb01418.x>
- Sarwar, M. B., & Mason, N. (2017). How to reduce inequalities in access to WASH: Rural water and sanitation in Nepal. *Overseas Development Institute*. <https://bit.ly/3SMZuUU>
- Schario, T., & Konisky, D. M. (2008). *Public confidence in government: Trust and responsiveness*. University of Missouri, Institute of Public Policy.
- Siddiquee, N. A. (2017). E-government in Bangladesh: The dawn of citizen-centric public administration? In M. Sabharwal & E. M. Berman (Eds.), *Public Administration in South Asia: India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan* (pp. 317–336). CRC Press. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315089294-16>
- Srinivasan, C. S., Zanello, G., & Shankar, B. (2013). Rural-urban disparities in child nutrition in Bangladesh and Nepal. *BMC Public Health*, 13(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-13-581>
- Taylor, R. B., & Lawton, B. A. (2012). An integrated contextual model of confidence in local police. *Police Quarterly*, 15(4), 414–445. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098611112453718>
- Tolbert, C. J., & Mossberger, K. (2006). The effects of e-government on trust and confidence in government. *Public Administration Review*, 66(3), 354–369. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2006.00594.x>
- United States Agency for International Development (USAID). (2007). *Issues of Madhesh: Political, social, economic and cultural issues of Madhesh*. USAID, Nepal. <https://bit.ly/3e2wLg8>

- Van de Walle, S., & Bouckaert, G. (2003). Public service performance and trust in government: The problem of causality. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 26(8–9), 891–913. <https://doi.org/10.1081/pad-120019352>
- Vigoda-Gadot, E. (2007). Citizens' perceptions of politics and ethics in public administration: A five-year national study of their relationship to satisfaction with services, trust in governance, and voice orientations. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 17(2), 285–305. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muj018>
- World Bank. (2018). *Nepal systematic country diagnostic: A new approach to a federal Nepal*. Author.
- Zhao, D., & Hu, W. (2017). Determinants of public trust in government: Empirical evidence from urban China. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 83(2), 358–377. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852315582136>