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Public trust in local government in Somalia: effect of citizen participation and perceived local government performance

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ABSTRACT

Citizen participation is vital for enhancing trust in local government by ensuring citizens' voices are heard in decision-making processes. However, most studies focus on central government trust, with limited research in the African context. Therefore, this study aims to explore the impact of citizen participation on public trust in local government in Somalia through the mediating effect of perceived local government performance. A quantitative research design was employed using an online survey to collect data from 425 residents of Mogadishu. A covariance-based structural equation modelling (SEM) approach was used to analyse the data, testing the hypothesised relationships and mediation effects. Citizen participation positively influences both public trust in local government and perceptions of local government performance. Additionally, perceptions of local government performance significantly mediate the relationship between citizen participation and public trust in local government. This study fills a gap in the literature by providing empirical evidence from a post-war setting, demonstrating the crucial role of citizen participation in enhancing trust in local government through improved perceived local government performance. Local governments should promote active citizen engagement and ensure their performance meets public expectations to foster greater public trust, which is essential for effective governance and sustainable development in post-conflict regions like Mogadishu.

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KEYWORDS

Citizen participation; perceptions of local government performance; public trust; local government

SUBJECTS

Government; Public Administration & Management; Political Behavior and Participation

Introduction

Citizen participation is crucial for enhancing trust in government, giving citizens a voice in decision-making processes, and ensuring that their opinions are considered (He & Ma, 2021). Furthermore, Wang and Wan Wart (2007) argued that citizen participation is a fundamental principle of democratic theory, both in ancient and modern times. Moreover, a democratic government is considered to rely on frequent citizen participation in policy and governance processes as an essential component of its functioning (Xin et al., 2023). This participatory approach ensures that government actions are aligned with public needs and expectations, thereby enhancing the legitimacy and effectiveness of public policies. Furthermore, at the heart of participatory governance lies the concept that directly involves the public (participation proposition), which includes aspects such as villagers' self-management and engagement in social organisations, boosts citizens' trust and improves government performance (Song et al., 2021).

In addition, citizen participation is essential for enhancing trust and performance in local authorities (Han et al., 2024). They further stated that involving citizens in decision-making promotes transparency and responsiveness, aligning government actions with public expectations. This participation reduces scepticism and builds trust in local government institutions. When citizens see their input valued, trust in the effectiveness and integrity of local governance increases, resulting in better outcomes and more vital public trust. Also, With the global decentralisation trend, there is an increasing emphasis on

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fostering trust between citizens and their local government. The aim is to encourage greater citizen participation in governance and promote partnership, ultimately strengthening democratic values (Han et al., 2024; Liu, 2024).

Nevertheless, most studies on citizens' trust have primarily focused on the level of trust in the central government (Zhao & Hu, 2017). Local governments are closer to citizens than the national government. This proximity fosters more frequent interactions, leading to notable structural discrepancies (Han et al., 2024). Although recent research has illuminated the growth and progress of citizen involvement in decision-making processes in Western countries, limited knowledge is available on the impact of citizen participation in African countries (Li & He, 2024). In addition, Grimmelikhuijsen (2010) stated that many scholars have studied the extent of public trust in local governments. However, Voogd et al. (2021) argued that most of these studies have been restricted to Western countries. Bradford et al. (2015) argued that the level of trust citizens have can measure the legitimacy of government agencies. Public trust in government is crucial for maintaining democratic legitimacy, enhancing citizen satisfaction with government services, ensuring political stability, and improving governance efficiency (Christensen & Læg Reid, 2005). However, past studies consistently show a significant decline in public trust in government over the past four decades (Welch et al., 2004). This erosion of trust has far-reaching implications for political stability, social cohesion, and the effective functioning of democratic institutions. Therefore, maintaining public trust in local government organisations is crucial, particularly in countries like Somalia, which face political instability and conflict challenges (Abdi, 2023; Abdi & Hashi, 2024). Somalia's federal government, established by the constitution as a three-tier structure (Heritage Institute for Policy Studies [HIPS], 2021), has yet to successfully devolve authority to the municipal level. This lack of true decentralisation and limited citizen participation in post-conflict governance could erode public trust in local institutions.

Likewise, although public trust has proven critical, the question of how to regain it after civil conflict has been given little attention and remains unresolved (Abdi, 2023; Wong et al., 2016). Hence, this study examines the interplay between citizen participation, perceptions of local government performance, and public trust in Somali local government, specifically in Mogadishu.

Assessing citizens' perceptions of the local government's performance is straightforward and comprehensive (Yuan & Fan, 2021). It evaluates whether citizens' subjective views of government activities align with the government's services and goods in satisfying their expectations and needs, reflecting the public's mental recognition of their subjective impression of government operations and activities (Jun et al., 2014). Similarly, in political psychology, perceived government performance often encompasses citizens' perceptions, attitudes, feelings, and expectations regarding the government (Miller, 1974). Moreover, studies show that citizens with positive perceptions of government performance trust their local authorities more (Beshi & Kaur, 2020a; Li & He, 2024). Thus, citizens are the beneficiaries of public goods and services, and the assessment of government performance should consider their subjective perceptions (Yuan & Fan, 2021).

Prior studies have examined how citizen participation enhances perceived government performance (Abdi, 2023; Campbell, 2023; Han et al., 2024). Additionally, previous research has explored how perceptions of government performance influence public trust in government (Ati et al., 2024; Gebrihet & Mwale, 2024; Li & He, 2024). One study by He and Ma (2021) on Hong Kong's health policy reform investigated the correlation between citizen participation, perceived public service performance, and trust in government. However, to the researcher's knowledge, a previous study has yet to explore a comprehensive model to examine how public perception of local government performance (PLGP) mediates the relationship between perceived citizen participation (PCP) and public trust in local government (PTLG) within the context of Somali local government.

This study contributes to understanding public trust in local government in post-conflict Somalia by investigating the complex relationships between citizen participation, perceptions of local government performance, and public trust. By filling a gap in existing literature, this research provides empirical evidence that citizen participation positively impacts public trust and perceived local government performance in Mogadishu. Furthermore, the study reveals that perceptions of local government performance mediate the relationship between citizen participation and public trust, offering a nuanced understanding of the causal mechanisms involved. The research highlights the unique challenges and opportunities

in post-conflict settings, providing practical insights for policymakers and practitioners seeking to enhance governance effectiveness, transparency, and accountability through active citizen engagement. By integrating theoretical concepts from democratic theory and public trust literature, the study presents a comprehensive model that can be tested and refined in different contexts. Additionally, it offers actionable recommendations for local governments to institutionalize participatory practices and improve perceived performance, which is essential for rebuilding trust and promoting stability, ultimately contributing to sustainable development.

Literature review

Citizen participation and public trust in local government

Citizen participation in the government is the public's direct or indirect engagement in the formulation or evaluation of administrative objectives, service standards, policies, and consequences (Wang & Wan Wart, 2007). According to the authors, citizen participation comprises stakeholder involvement in administrative and decision-making procedures. This engagement can be fostered through various participation techniques, administrative functions, and active involvement in the decision-making process. Langton (1978) defined citizen participation as engagement in the government's decision-making and service-delivery processes. Participation is commonly believed to serve as a mechanism through which the government can gain insight into the public's needs and preferences while enabling the public to monitor and scrutinize the government's actions (Creighton, 1981).

Citizen participation in government policymaking and implementation is a crucial aspect of democracy. There are various ways in which citizens can engage in this process, including public open hearings, surveys, focus groups, and digital media engagement. The importance of citizen participation is evident in its extensive coverage in public administration literature, which highlights its status as a critical objective (Holum, 2023).

According to Wang and Wan Wart (2007), the concept of public trust encompasses the belief held by the general public that government agencies act rightly. Trust is prevalent across multiple disciplines. It is a psychological state characterized by an individual's acceptance of vulnerability based on the hope of another person's positive intentions or behaviour (Rousseau et al., 1998). This study examines public trust in local government institutions in Mogadishu, Somalia. As per the definition, vulnerability refers to acknowledging the possibility of vulnerability when granting power to local government officials based on their positive intentions or conduct (Holum, 2023). Moreover, Thomas (1998) defined public trust as citizens' faith in the integrity of government officials to act justly and protect the public interest and their confidence in the ability of the public sector to perform assigned duties and responsibilities. The public's trust in the government depends on the integrity, competence, and protection of citizens' interests. Furthermore, trustworthiness is built on three key components: competence, benevolence, and integrity (Grimmelikhuijsen, 2010). A government agency is considered competent if its citizens trust its abilities, effectiveness, skills, and professionalism (Grimmelikhuijsen & Knies, 2017). Furthermore, benevolence is defined as the trustor believing that the trustee has the trustor's best interests at heart and prioritizing those interests over their own (Rosen & Jerdee, 1977). As a final component of trustworthiness, integrity refers to the trustor's confidence that the trustee upholds acceptable principles. The trustor and trustee may view this as a demonstration of mutually accepted values (Abdi, 2023).

Numerous previous studies have demonstrated the importance of citizen participation in building trust in government, both in developing and developed countries. For instance, Han et al. (2024) conducted a recent study on the local government in Nepal, which revealed that citizen participation predicts public trust in the local government. Similarly, a vignette-based experiment conducted by Campbell (2023) in South Korea showed that participation increases public trust in the government. Additionally, Song et al. (2021) found a positive and significant correlation between public participation and public trust in the government in rural China. Likewise, a recent study by Goldfinch et al. (2023) in Japan found a link between civic participation and trust in the mayor. Shifting our focus to Africa, Beshi and Kaur (2020b) examined the impact of citizen participation on public trust in local administration in Bahir Dar, a local government in Ethiopia, and discovered a positive and significant influence. Furthermore, Arkorful

et al. (2022) conducted a study on several local governments in Ghana and uncovered a positive and significant association between citizen participation and public trust in local governments. These studies demonstrate that citizen participation is crucial in establishing trust in local government. Citizen participation helps foster a sense of ownership among citizens and promotes inclusivity in decision-making processes. Despite the recognized significance of citizen participation in building trust in local governments in different settings, more research needs to be done on the Somali context, and the issue still needs to be explored. To address this gap in the literature, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Citizen participation positively and significantly influences public trust in local government.

Citizen participation and perception of performance of local government

Perceptions of local government performance (PLGP) generally pertain to how residents subjectively evaluate their local government's performance regarding service provision and policy outcomes (Shingler et al., 2008). Moreover, residents' perceived government performance is an overall assessment of how effectively the public perceives their public sector agencies to perform (Porumbescu, 2015). Perceived government performance was assessed across multiple levels: micro-, meso-, and macro-levels (Bouckaert & Halligan, 2011). Residents' perceptions of government performance at the micro-level are often based on how they evaluate specific aspects of public services, such as specific bus roads (Porumbescu, 2013). Citizens' perception is influenced by direct contact with officials who provide local government services. Likewise, at the meso-stage, residents' perception of public sector performance is linked to the services provided by various public agency departments, such as the transportation department (Porumbescu, 2015). Finally, at the macro-level, perceptions of public sector performance focus on the overall functioning of the government. As a result, perceptions at this level are also relatively abstract. Therefore, the evaluation of the government's performance by residents serves as a comprehensive assessment of the overall effectiveness of the public sector. Four dimensions—residents' health, security, wealth, and overall happiness—have been used to operationalise the macro-level perceptions of public sector performance (Bouckaert et al., 2002). Previous studies have confirmed the validity of these four dimensions in measuring residents' perceived performance of government (Porumbescu, 2013).

Several studies have established a positive relationship between citizen participation and citizens' perceived performance of local government. Wu and Jung (2016) seminal work in the United States, focusing on the city and county of San Francisco, found a positive relationship between public participation and perceived government performance. Similarly, a recent study by Li and He (2024) in China's local governance context reported a positive and significant relationship between citizen participation and perceptions of local government performance. Further supporting this link, Hue and Tung-Wen Sun (2022) research on local government in Vietnam demonstrated that citizen participation positively and significantly influences perceived local government performance.

This research suggests a relationship between citizen participation and citizens' perceptions of government performance. The study argues that active citizen engagement promotes a sense of ownership and trust in local governance, which leads to improved perceptions of performance. While this relationship has been examined in many studies in developed and developing nations, more research must be done in post-conflict countries like Somalia. Therefore, this study explores how citizen participation enhances citizens' perceptions of local government performance in the context of Somali local government after the conflict. Thus, the study puts forward the following hypothesis.

H2: Citizen participation positively and significantly influences perceptions of the performance of local government institutions.

Perception of local government performance and public trust in local government

Multiple research studies have demonstrated the significance of citizens' perceptions of government performance in enhancing trust in local government. This holds true for both developed and developing countries. For instance, a recent significant study in China's local government reported that the perceived local government performance had a direct positive relationship with public trust in local government

(Li & He, 2024). Additionally, a recent study conducted in the Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation, India, found a significant and positive relationship between the perceived performance of the government and public trust in the government (Ati et al., 2024). Moreover, Xiao et al. (2024) surveyed 2,009 respondents in Hong Kong and explored the relationship between perceived institutional effectiveness (performance) and public trust. They find a positive and significant relationship between perceived institutional effectiveness and trust in the government. Similarly, a study in Ethiopia found that citizens' perceptions of government performance influence public trust in the government (Gebrihet & Mwale, 2024). Furthermore, public administration research extensively highlights how citizens' perceptions of government performance are crucial for building trust in governments worldwide (Wolak & Palus, 2010). Studies examining public trust in local authorities in the United States have indicated that trust is primarily influenced by residents' subjective assessments of the quality of services offered by local authorities (Rahn & Rudolph, 2002). Similarly, in the African context, scholars have found that citizens form their perception of local government based on instrumental attitudes regarding the government's capability to provide essential services efficiently (Bratton, 2012).

In their study, Yang and Holzer (2006) asserted that low government performance is often cited as a cause of public mistrust. Therefore, they asserted that improved performance of government institutions results in increased trust. Furthermore, they argue that the disparity between expectations and perceptions of government performance is more important than the actual level of performance. Miller and Borrelli (1991) argued that the public's subjective experiences or perceptions are the primary factors determining government trust. Moreover, related to public trust in government is the concept of citizen satisfaction with government services, which indicates that citizens evaluate the performance of a service relative to their expectations. Satisfaction occurs when perceptions of government performance satisfy or surpass these expectations (Zhang et al., 2022). This highlights the importance of the public's subjective evaluation of government service performance, which relies on matching the perceived performance and expectations. Citizens are more likely to be satisfied when service performance meets or exceeds expectations.

This literature suggests that enhancing public trust in local government hinges on improving its perceived performance. Effective governance, characterized by efficient service delivery and responsiveness to citizens' needs, is essential for fostering trust and legitimising the government in the public eye. In addition, citizens are the recipients of government services, and attention must be given to assessing local government performance based on their subjective experiences (Yuan & Fan, 2021). Despite the abundance of studies on this relationship, there needs to be more literature on citizens' perceptions of the public sector and their impact on trust in local administration in post-conflict countries such as Somalia. Hence, this study hypothesised that:

H3: Perceptions of local government performance positively and significantly influence public trust in local government.

Perception of local government performance as a mediator

Recent years have witnessed a surge in the popularity of mediation model analysis within the social sciences (Duxbury, 2024). This approach allows researchers to elucidate the causal mechanisms underlying relationships between variables. By incorporating a mediating variable, scholars can evaluate whether the impact of an exogenous construct (X) on an endogenous construct (Y) is direct or transmitted indirectly through the influence of the mediator (M) (Shaver, 2005). This technique is valuable for researchers, particularly in areas with limited prior research on such mediating processes.

This study investigates the influence of citizen participation on public trust in local government via the indirect effects of perceptions of local government performance in Mogadishu local government, Somalia. Building on prior research that establishes perceived performance as a mediating variable (He & Ma, 2021; Porumbescu, 2013), this study posits that citizen involvement in government decision-making processes, policy formulation, and project implementation fosters a sense among citizens that their government institutions function effectively. This perception, in turn, is hypothesised to increase public trust in government. Similarly, numerous previous studies have indicated that citizen participation is

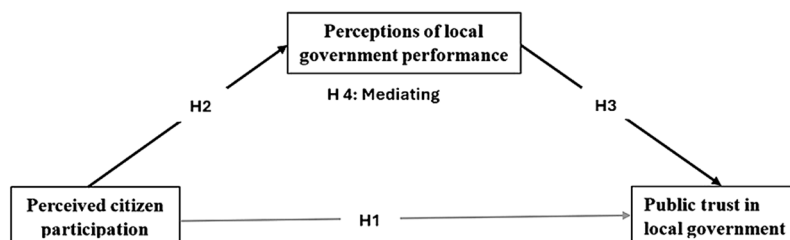


Figure 1. Conceptual model.

significantly and positively related to perceived government performance (Hue & Tung-Wen Sun, 2022; Li & He, 2024). Moreover, perceptions of government performance were found to be positively and significantly associated with public trust in government (Ati et al., 2024; Gebrihet & Mwale, 2024). This study proposes that perceived government performance acts as a mediating variable in the relationship between citizen participation and public trust in the government. The premise is that greater citizen participation improves perceived government performance, subsequently increasing public trust. More research is needed on the mediating role of perceived local government performance in conflict-affected countries. Therefore, this study proposes that:

H4: Perceptions of local government performance mediate the relationship between citizen participation and public trust in local government.

The study argues that citizen participation enhances public trust in local government by improving government performance. When citizens actively engage in local government processes, such as attending public meetings and contributing to decision-making, they provide valuable feedback that can lead to more responsive and effective governance. This active participation fosters a perception of increased transparency and accountability, as citizens see their input being valued and acted upon. The perceived improvement in government performance, driven by effective citizen participation, acts as a mediator that strengthens public trust. Essentially, when citizens observe tangible improvements and effective governance resulting from their involvement, their trust in local government is significantly enhanced. This model was developed to fill the gap in the existing knowledge of public administration literature in Somali settings (see Figure 1).

Method

Design, participants, and procedure

This study employed a quantitative research design, utilising an online survey to collect data from residents of Mogadishu City. Mogadishu is the largest city and capital of Somalia. It is divided into 17 administrative units known as districts, which are grouped into four main sections: Waliyow Adde, Western, Central and Eastern. Data collection was conducted via Google Forms. A cover letter accompanied the survey, outlining the study's purposes, seeking informed consent, informing participants of the voluntary nature of their participation, and assuring the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. To obtain informed consent, participants had to read the cover letter and confirm their understanding and agreement to participate by selecting the consent option before proceeding with the survey. This procedure ensured that consent was both informed and documented electronically. Online surveys aimed to maintain participant anonymity, reduce social desirability bias, and obtain honest and accurate responses.

The online survey data gathering was chosen due to its convenience in reaching a broader population, cost-effectiveness, and efficiency. According to Shawver et al. (2016), online survey data gathering has become increasingly popular among researchers, with many studies utilising this method as the primary data-gathering technique. Beling et al. (2011) argued that this approach reduces costs and allows faster and more accurate data collection. Moreover, the anonymity provided by online surveys can lead to more honest responses from participants. However, it is essential to admit the potential drawbacks,

such as the inability to regulate the survey setting, technological concerns, and issues regarding validity, reliability, and bias (Shawver et al., 2016). The researcher employed several techniques to mitigate potential common method bias (CMB) that may arise from using self-reported and online surveys. Adhering to the guidelines of Podsakoff et al. (2003), the study implemented both procedural and statistical techniques for CMB. Additionally, all measurement instruments were adopted from previously validated and reliable sources and used in their original English versions to avoid translation and retranslation problems.

Before commencing data collection, the principal researcher wrote a formal letter to request ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee of Simad University. Subsequently, the committee at Simad University in Mogadishu, Somalia, granted ethical approval (Approval Number: EC000126).

Participants were residents of Mogadishu City, selected using a convenience sampling method. 950 online questionnaires were distributed through social media platforms (Facebook and WhatsApp) and email. Of the 950 distributed questionnaires, 425 responses were received, yielding a response rate of 44.74%. All returned responses were thoroughly examined, and no outliers or missing data were identified, allowing all 425 responses to be utilised in the final analysis. Among the sample of 425 participants, 77.6% were male, while 22.4% were female. The age of the participants varied from 18 to 62 years, with a mean age of 28.20 years. In terms of the distribution of residents across Mogadishu's four main sections, the Western section accounted for 38.6%, the Eastern section for 22.1%, the Central section for 8.1%, and Waliyo Adde for 21.2%. Regarding educational achievement, 1.2% of participants had a secondary education, 61.4% held a bachelor's degree, 35.1% had a master's degree, and 2.4% held a PhD.

Measures

This current study investigates one exogenous construct: perceived citizen participation in local government. The study model posits that perceptions of local government performance mediate the relationship between perceived citizen participation (the exogenous variable on the left) and public trust in local government (the endogenous construct on the right) (see Figure 1). All constructs were gauged using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Perceived citizen participation (PCP)

We measured perceived citizen participation with a four-item scale developed and validated by Wang and Wan Wart (2007). Sample items include 'The local authority in Mogadishu actively engages residents in creating alternative programs', 'The local authority in Mogadishu actively engages residents in assessing program results', and 'The local authority in Mogadishu actively engages residents in identifying the goals and objectives of the agency'.

Perceptions of local government performance (PLGP)

We gauged perceptions of local government performance using a six-item scale from Porumbescu (2017). The items assess citizens' perceptions of the four key dimensions, wealth, security, health, and overall happiness, relating to local government performance. The sample items include 'The work of the Mogadishu local authority benefits the city's residents', 'The work of the Mogadishu local authority allows residents to live in healthier environments', and 'The work of the Mogadishu local authority makes residents happier'.

Public trust in local government (PTLG)

We assessed public PTLG using a five-item indicator created by Grimmelikhuijsen (2012), with sample items including 'The local authority of Mogadishu is acting in the resident's best interest', 'The local authority in Mogadishu is competent', 'The local authority in Mogadishu operates with integrity' and 'The local authority in Mogadishu is sincere in its operations'.

Data analysis and results

The study employed SmartPLS version 4.1.0.5, utilising Covariance-based Structural Equation Modeling (CB-SEM) to analyze the proposed model (Ringle et al., 2022). Before examining the outer and inner

models, the researcher addressed common method bias (CMB) using SmartPLS version 4.1.0.5 and SPSS 27. The models were analysed after verifying that CMB was not a significant concern. First, the researcher assessed the presence of CMB using the comprehensive collinearity test described by Kock (2017). The analysis revealed that all constructs' variance inflation factor (VIF) values were below the established threshold of 3.3, indicating that CMB does not harm the model's validity. Subsequently, an unrotated exploratory factor analysis was conducted on all items associated with a specific latent factor. This analysis demonstrated that the average variance explained by this factor was 47.503%, slightly below the recommended threshold of 50%.

Measurement model assessment

The present study tested the measurement model in CB-SEM, following several steps such as model fit indices, factor loadings, reliability, and validity. The researcher utilised confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to examine the measurement model (Hair et al., 2020). The first step was to assess the model fit indices. The obtained chi-square p-value is 0.000, which is significant but does not necessarily imply poor model fit. Nevertheless, no model fits perfectly, so the p-value is inappropriate for model evaluation (Arbuckle & Wothke, 1999). Instead, we assessed the minimum discrepancy divided by the degrees of freedom (CMIN/df), with a value of 1.806, which falls within the recommended range of less than 5, as Dash and Paul (2021) suggested, indicating a good fit. The goodness-of-fit index (GFI) value of 0.955 exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.90 (Bentler, 1990), while the comparative fit index (CFI) value of 0.978 and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) value of 0.973 surpass the 0.90 benchmarks (Bentler, 1990) recommended, suggesting a good fit. Additionally, the standardised root mean square residual (SRMR) value of 0.029 is well below the recommended value of 0.05 (Shi & Maydeu-Olivares, 2020), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) value of 0.044 is also within the acceptable limit of less than 0.07 (Shi & Maydeu-Olivares, 2020). These indices collectively suggest that the model fits the data well (Table 1).

The second step involves assessing the reliability of the indicators using outer loadings. Table 2 and Figure 2 show that all outer loadings exceed the threshold of 0.60 (Chin, 1998). The reliability of all constructs has been confirmed, as both Cronbach's alpha (α) and composite reliability (CR) have exceeded the recommended threshold (Hair et al., 2020) (See Table 2). The analysis further supported the convergent validity of the model. The average variance extracted (AVE) for each latent variable surpassed the 0.50 threshold recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). To assess discriminant validity, the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) criterion was used. All HTMT values were below the recommended threshold of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015), thus confirming discriminant validity (see Table 3).

Structural model assessment

The structural model assessment used CB-SEM in SmartPLS 4 to test the proposed relationship. First, the researcher evaluated the model fit indices. A good model fit is indicated if the CMIN/df score is ≤ 5 , GFI > 0.90 (Miles & Shevlin, 2007), CFI > 0.90 (Bentler, 1990), TLI > 0.90 (Bentler, 1990), SRMR < 0.05 (Shi & Maydeu-Olivares, 2020), and RMSEA < 0.07 (Shi & Maydeu-Olivares, 2020). The model's fit indices in Table 1 meet the acceptable criteria: CMIN/df = 1.806, GFI = 0.955, CFI = 0.978, TLI = 0.973, SRMR = 0.029, and RMSEA = 0.044. Therefore, the results indicate that the model fits well with the hypothesised relationship.

Table 1. Model fit indices.

Fit index	Recommended value	Source	Obtained value
P	Insignificant	(Bagozzi & Yi, 1988)	0.000
CMIN/df	3–5	(Dash & Paul, 2021)	1.806
GFI	> 0.90	(Miles & Shevlin, 2007)	0.955
CFI	> 0.90	(Bentler, 1990)	0.978
TLI	> 0.90	(Bentler, 1990)	0.973
SRMR	< 0.05	(Shi & Maydeu-Olivares, 2020)	0.029
RMSEA	< 0.07	(Shi & Maydeu-Olivares, 2020)	0.044

Note. CFI=comparative fit index, GFI=goodness-of-fit index, TLI=Tucker-Lewis index, SRMR=standardised root mean square residual, RMSEA=root mean square error of approximation.

Table 2. Validity, reliability, and collinearity.

Construct	Item	Outer loadings	CR	α	AVE
Perceived citizen participation (PCP)	PCP1	0.771	0.869	0.870	0.626
	PCP2	0.790			
	PCP3	0.789			
	PCP4	0.814			
Perceptions of local government performance (PLGP)	PLGP1	0.630	0.868	0.869	0.531
	PLGP2	0.603			
	PLGP3	0.799			
	PLGP4	0.766			
	PLGP5	0.757			
	PLGP6	0.793			
Public trust in local government (PTLG)	PTLG1	0.686	0.835	0.836	0.505
	PTLG2	0.677			
	PTLG3	0.758			
	PTLG4	0.716			
	PTLG5	0.714			

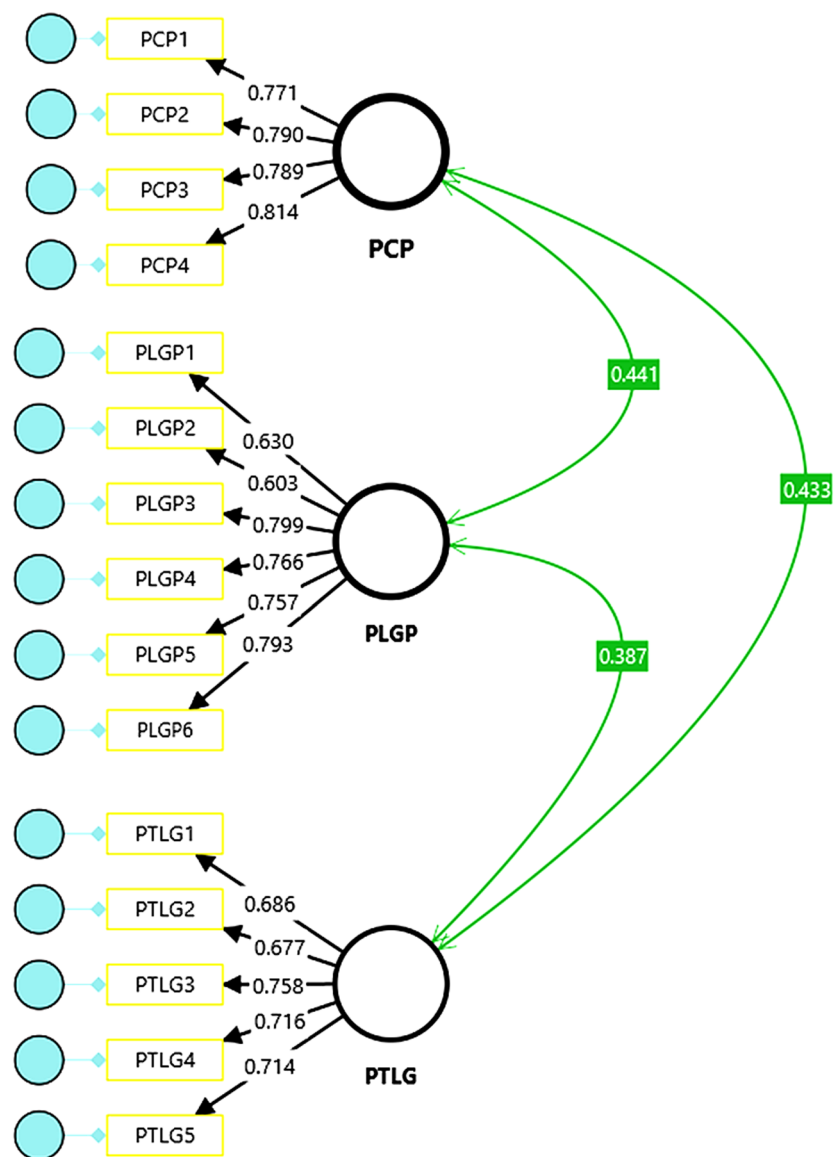
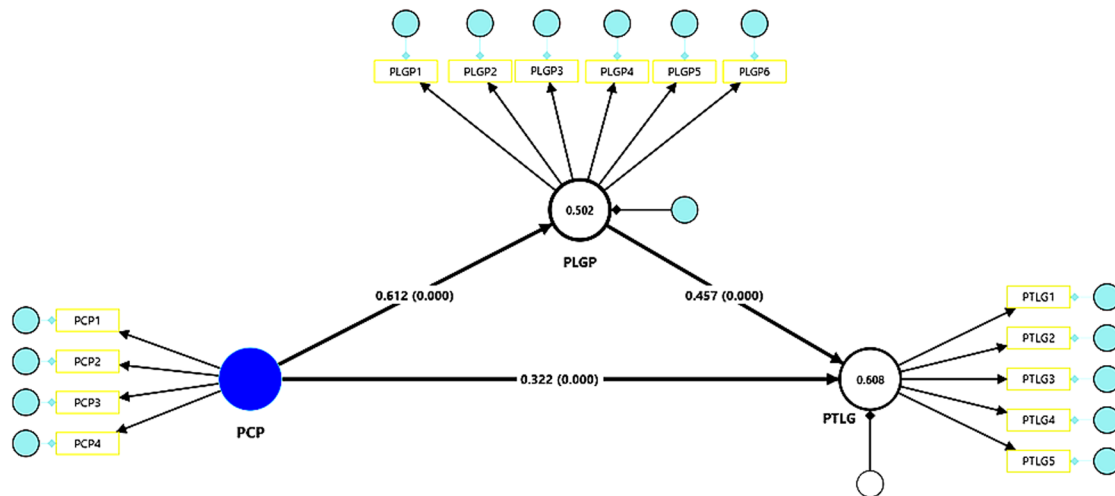
**Figure 2.** Measurement model.

Table 3. Discriminant validity: HTMT criterion.

Construct	PCP	PLGP	PTLG
PCP	–		
PLGP	0.706	–	
PTLG	0.707	0.739	–

**Figure 3.** Structural model.**Table 4.** Direct and mediating effects (indirect).

Hypothesis	Standardized β	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1: PCP \rightarrow PTLG	0.322	4.254	0.000	Supported
H2: PCP \rightarrow PLGP	0.612	10.179	0.000	Supported
H3: PLGP \rightarrow PTLG	0.457	5.323	0.000	Supported
H4: PCP \rightarrow PLGP \rightarrow PTLG	0.280	4.938	0.000	Supported

The model accounted for 60.8% of the total variation in public trust in local government and 50.2% in perceptions of local government performance (See Figure 3).

Hypotheses testing (direct and indirect)

The findings in Table 4 showed a significant and positive direct effect of perceived citizen participation on public trust in local government ($\beta=0.322$, $t=4.254$, $p<0.001$). Thus, H1 was supported. Additionally, perceived citizen participation significantly and positively affects perceptions of local government performance ($\beta=0.612$, $t=10.179$, $p<0.001$), which in turn has a significant and positive effect on public trust in local government ($\beta=0.457$, $t=5.323$, $p<0.001$). Hence, H2 and H3 were empirically supported (See Table 4 and Figure 3).

The researcher performed a mediation analysis, and the indirect effect of perceived citizen participation on public trust in local government through perceptions of local government performance is also significant and positive ($\beta=0.280$, $t=4.938$, $p<0.001$). This shows that there is a partial mediation. Therefore, H4 was supported. These results indicate that both direct and indirect pathways from perceived citizen participation to public trust in local government are significant and positive via the underlying mechanism of perceptions of local government performance (see Table 4). Baron and Kenny (1986) posited that evidence of mediation exists when both the indirect and direct effects are statistically significant. They termed this phenomenon as partial mediation, which indicates that a portion of the effect of the independent variable (perceived citizen participation) is transmitted through mediating (perceptions of local government performance). By contrast, another portion of the effect directly influences the dependent variable (public trust in the local government).

Discussion and conclusion

This study examines the effect of citizen participation on public trust in local government through perceptions of local government performance in Mogadishu, Somalia. As expected, all four hypotheses were supported. Corroborating the findings of the past study, the current study's findings revealed that perceived citizen participation has a direct positive and significant relationship with public trust in local government (Abdi, 2023; Campbell, 2023; Han et al., 2024; He & Ma, 2021; Song et al., 2021). The study confirms that citizen participation significantly affects the fostering of public trust in the local government of Mogadishu. By recognising and incorporating citizens' perspectives, local authorities can enhance governance effectiveness, improve service delivery, and create a more resilient and inclusive city. It is essential to continuously work towards institutionalising participatory practices to move forward, as this is crucial for promoting democratic values and achieving sustainable development goals in Mogadishu, Somalia.

Similarly, citizen participation has a direct positive and significant relationship with the perceived local government performance. This result aligns with the previous studies' findings, which found that citizen participation has a significant positive relationship with government performance (Abdi, 2023; Hue & Tung-Wen Sun, 2022; Li & He, 2024; Mizrahi et al., 2009). This finding suggests that citizens actively participating in their local government's decision-making processes and activities are more likely to have a favourable view of the government's performance. Increased participation fosters a sense of citizen ownership and trust, leading to higher satisfaction with the local government's services and functions. Consequently, local governments that effectively engage citizens can enhance their perceived performance and legitimacy, ultimately contributing to better governance and more robust community relations.

Moreover, the study found that perceptions of local government performance have a direct positive and significant association with the public trust in local government. This result corroborates the findings of previous studies, which showed that perceptions of government performance were positive and significantly related to public trust in government (Abdi, 2023; Ati et al., 2024; Gebrihet & Mwale, 2024; Kim, 2016; Li & He, 2024; Xiao et al., 2024). Scholars asserted that the primary predictor of public trust in government institutions is the people's subjective evaluation of and perception of government performance (Miller & Borrelli, 1991). Furthermore, past studies have shown that perceptions of a government's performance heavily influence the public's trust. Trust among the public generally increases when they perceive the government to be functioning effectively. However, perceived inadequate performance may lead to less trust (Van Ryzin, 2007). Nevertheless, this connection is intricate: perceptions may not consistently align with actual performance results, and other external elements can impact these perspectives. Moreover, trust might be influenced by wider views and past experiences rather than by present performance evaluations. The finding suggests that when citizens perceive their local government as performing well, their trust in these institutions increases. This result emphasises the importance of citizen perceptions and attitudes towards local government and its institutions. In Mogadishu, where public institutions have long struggled with challenges such as corruption and inefficiency, improving the perceived performance of the local government can have a crucial impact on rebuilding public trust, promoting civic engagement, and fostering stability and city development.

Finally, the current study uncovered that perceived local government performance partially mediates the relationship between citizen participation and public trust in Somali local government. Prior research results support this study's result (He & Ma, 2021). These findings suggest that citizen participation is crucial in establishing public trust in local authorities in Mogadishu. However, it is equally essential for citizens to have a favourable perception of their local government's performance to enhance public trust further. Therefore, to foster greater public trust, local governments must promote active citizen engagement and ensure that their performance aligns with public expectations. This highlights the significance of public perception regarding local government performance in strengthening the relationship between citizens and local government institutions. Ultimately, this contributes to more effective governance.

In conclusion, the study confirms that citizen participation significantly improves public trust in the local government in Mogadishu by enhancing perceptions of local government performance. The findings support all four hypotheses, showing that citizen participation has a direct and positive impact on

both public trust and perceived local government performance. Additionally, the perception of local government performance mediates the relationship between citizen participation and public trust in local government, underscoring the importance of both direct and indirect pathways. These results emphasise the need for local authorities to establish participatory practices and enhance governance effectiveness, service delivery, and inclusivity to foster public trust and promote sustainable development in Mogadishu.

Limitations and future research directions

Despite the significant findings of this study, some limitations should be considered for future research. First, using a convenience sampling method and an online survey may limit the generalisability of the results to the broader population of Mogadishu, as it may not fully capture the views of less technologically connected residents. Additionally, the study's cross-sectional design restricts the ability to establish causality between the variables. Future research could address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs to explore causal relationships over time and using more representative sampling techniques. Furthermore, while this study focused on Mogadishu, comparative studies across different regions of Somalia or other post-conflict countries could provide a deeper understanding of the interplay between citizen participation, perceived government performance, and public trust in various contexts. Finally, qualitative research could complement the quantitative findings by offering richer insights into the nuanced experiences and perceptions of citizens regarding their local government's performance and participatory processes.

Authors contributions

Ahmed-Nor Mohamed Abdi was responsible for conceptualizing the research idea and objectives, designing the research methodology and data collection procedures, drafting the initial manuscript, and conducting data collection and analysis.

Nurulhasanah Abdul Rahman contributed by performing data analysis and interpretation, providing critical feedback and revisions during the review and editing phases, and supervising the overall research process while offering guidance. All authors have read and approved the final work.

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Data availability statement

The data supporting this study's findings are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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