

State Legitimacy and Public Trust: A Constitutional Perspective on Government–Society Relations in Transitional Political Systems

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Abstract

State legitimacy and public trust have emerged as central concerns in transitional political systems, where institutional instability and evolving constitutional frameworks often challenge the consolidation of democratic governance. While existing scholarship has extensively examined political legitimacy and citizen trust as separate constructs, limited attention has been given to their integration within a constitutional perspective. This study aims to analyze the relationship between state legitimacy and public trust by situating both within the framework of constitutional governance, with a particular focus on transitional political contexts. Employing a qualitative approach through a systematic literature review, this research synthesizes scholarly works indexed in Scopus and Web of Science over the past decade, focusing on key themes such as constitutionalism, institutional trust, and governance performance. The findings reveal that state legitimacy is not solely derived from formal constitutional arrangements but is significantly shaped by public perceptions of institutional performance, accountability, and the effective enforcement of the rule of law. Moreover, the study identifies a critical gap between normative constitutional design and empirical trust-building processes in transitional systems, often exacerbated by weak institutions and elite capture. This paper proposes a conceptual framework that links constitutional structures, institutional performance, public trust, and state legitimacy as an interconnected cycle. The study contributes to the literature by offering an integrative perspective that bridges constitutional theory and trust dynamics, providing both theoretical advancement and practical insights for strengthening governance in transitional democracies.

Keywords: *State Legitimacy, Public Trust, Constitutional Governance, Transitional Political Systems, Institutional Performance.*



A. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, scholars have increasingly recognized that state legitimacy constitutes a fundamental pillar for the stability and sustainability of democratic governance, particularly within transitional political systems characterized by institutional fragility and evolving constitutional arrangements (Gilley, 2006). Contemporary political discourse reveals a growing crisis of legitimacy, as citizens across diverse geopolitical contexts demonstrate declining levels of trust toward public institutions, thereby challenging the effectiveness of formal constitutional frameworks (Norris, 2011). Largescale comparative evidence indicates that institutional confidence is closely associated with perceptions of governance quality, accountability, and responsiveness, which collectively shape the credibility of state authority (OECD, 2021). Transitional political systems frequently exhibit a

discrepancy between formally established constitutional norms and their practical implementation, producing what scholars identify as a “legitimacy gap” between the state and society (Carothers, 2002). Constitutional governance functions not only as a legal foundation of state authority but also as a normative framework that structures citizen expectations regarding justice, equality, and participation (Elster, 1995). Empirical findings demonstrate that the existence of constitutional provisions does not automatically translate into perceived legitimacy, since citizens tend to evaluate the state based on institutional performance and lived experiences rather than abstract legal principles (Levi, Sacks, & Tyler, 2009). Legitimacy therefore emerges as a relational construct shaped by continuous interactions between state institutions and society, rather than as a static attribute derived solely from constitutional design (Beetham, 2013). Weak enforcement mechanisms and persistent political instability intensify this relational tension in transitional contexts, undermining public confidence in state institutions (Morlino & Quaranta, 2016).

Empirical studies confirm that trust in government significantly influences citizens’ willingness to comply with laws and support political institutions, thereby reinforcing or weakening the overall legitimacy of the state (Hetherington & Rudolph, 2015). Rapid developments in globalization and digital communication have expanded public scrutiny of government actions, increasing the complexity of legitimacy construction in contemporary governance systems (Castells, 2012). Governments operating in transitional environments face sustained pressure to align constitutional ideals with tangible governance outcomes in order to maintain public trust and political stability (Rothstein, 2011). Existing scholarship often treats constitutional legitimacy and public trust as analytically distinct domains, which limits a comprehensive understanding of their interdependence within state–society relations (Blind, 2007). Such fragmentation constrains theoretical development by overlooking how constitutional structures shape public perceptions of legitimacy in dynamic political environments. A reconceptualization of legitimacy as a multidimensional construct becomes necessary, integrating constitutional design, governance practices, and societal evaluation into a unified analytical framework (Gilley, 2009). Addressing this complexity remains particularly crucial in transitional political systems, where the consolidation of democracy depends on the alignment between normative constitutional frameworks and empirically grounded public trust.

A persistent challenge in contemporary governance lies in the misalignment between normative constitutional legitimacy and empirically grounded public trust, particularly within transitional political systems where institutional consolidation remains incomplete (Jackson & Bradford, 2010). Constitutional legitimacy is traditionally anchored in the formal validity of legal frameworks and adherence to rule of law principles, yet such normative foundations often fail to generate corresponding levels of societal trust when institutional performance is perceived as ineffective or unjust (Habermas, 1996). Public trust, in this regard, reflects citizens’ evaluative judgments of governmental actions, encompassing perceptions of fairness, transparency, and responsiveness rather than mere compliance with constitutional

provisions (van der Meer & Hakhverdian, 2017). Empirical evidence demonstrates that citizens tend to withdraw trust from institutions that exhibit governance deficits, even when those institutions operate within formally legitimate constitutional systems (Grimmelikhuijsen, Knies, & Tummers, 2019). Transitional political environments intensify this disconnect due to weak institutional capacity, inconsistent law enforcement, and the persistence of informal political practices that undermine constitutional norms (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004). Political actors in such systems frequently exploit constitutional ambiguities for strategic advantage, thereby eroding the credibility of formal institutions and diminishing public confidence in state authority (Levitsky & Way, 2010). The resulting legitimacy deficit manifests not only in declining institutional trust but also in reduced citizen compliance and weakened democratic engagement (Tyler, 2006). Research in governance studies indicates that trust is highly contingent upon procedural justice, where citizens prioritize fairness in decision making processes over substantive policy outcomes (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003).

Constitutional arrangements that fail to institutionalize accountability mechanisms and inclusive participation structures often exacerbate public skepticism toward state institutions (Schedler, 1999). Political instability and frequent constitutional changes further contribute to uncertainty, limiting the ability of citizens to develop stable trust in governance systems (Elkins, Ginsburg, & Melton, 2009). Public perceptions of corruption and elite dominance also play a critical role in shaping distrust, particularly in societies where democratic institutions remain vulnerable to capture by powerful interest groups (RoseAckerman & Palifka, 2016). The problem therefore extends beyond legal design to encompass the broader dynamics of governance practice and institutional behavior. A growing body of literature suggests that legitimacy must be understood as a dynamic outcome of continuous interaction between state institutions and societal expectations rather than as a fixed attribute derived from constitutional authority alone (Suchman, 1995). This perspective highlights the necessity of examining how constitutional structures operate in practice and how they influence citizens' trust perceptions over time. Addressing this problem requires a more integrated analytical approach that situates constitutional legitimacy within the broader context of governance performance and public trust formation in transitional political systems.

A substantial body of literature has examined state legitimacy and public trust as central components of democratic governance, yet these strands of research have largely evolved in parallel rather than in an integrated analytical framework (Bovens & Wille, 2008). Studies on political legitimacy have predominantly emphasized normative justifications of authority, focusing on legal validity, constitutional order, and the moral foundations of state power without sufficiently addressing how such legitimacy is perceived and evaluated by citizens in practice (Peter, 2017). Research on public trust, by contrast, has concentrated on institutional performance, service delivery, and governance outcomes, often treating trust as a function of efficiency and effectiveness rather than as a product of constitutional structures (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003). This separation has resulted in a fragmented understanding of state–

society relations, where legitimacy is conceptualized as a topdown construct while trust is framed as a bottom-up response, with limited theoretical linkage between the two domains (Mishler & Rose, 2001). Empirical investigations in transitional political systems further reveal that trust in government fluctuates significantly in response to short term political and economic conditions, suggesting that legitimacy cannot be sustained solely through constitutional formalism (Dahlberg, Linde, & Holmberg, 2015). Comparative governance studies also indicate that institutional reforms often fail to generate durable trust when they neglect deeper structural issues such as inequality, corruption, and weak accountability mechanisms (Rothstein & Teorell, 2008). Existing scholarship has made important contributions in identifying determinants of trust and legitimacy, yet it rarely situates these variables within a unified constitutional framework that explains their dynamic interaction over time (Mauk, 2020). Conceptual models that do attempt integration tend to remain limited in scope, focusing either on microlevel perceptions or macrolevel institutional design without bridging the two analytically (Zmerli & Van der Meer, 2017).

Transitional political systems present a particularly underexplored context in this regard, as they combine evolving constitutional arrangements with unstable patterns of public trust that challenge conventional theories of legitimacy (Linz & Stepan, 1996). Recent studies highlight that hybrid regimes and incomplete democracies exhibit complex legitimacy dynamics, where formal constitutional compliance coexists with widespread societal distrust (Kriesi & Pappas, 2015). The persistence of this paradox suggests that current theoretical approaches remain insufficient to explain how constitutional governance translates into perceived legitimacy under conditions of institutional uncertainty. A critical limitation of the literature lies in its failure to account for the mediating role of institutional performance as a bridge between constitutional design and public trust formation (Van de Walle & Bouckaert, 2003). Analytical frameworks often overlook how citizens interpret and internalize constitutional principles through their interactions with public institutions, thereby neglecting the experiential dimension of legitimacy. This gap becomes more pronounced in transitional settings, where institutional practices frequently diverge from formal constitutional ideals, leading to inconsistent legitimacy outcomes. Addressing this gap requires the development of an integrative conceptual approach that systematically links constitutional structures, institutional performance, and public trust in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of state legitimacy in transitional political systems.

This study aims to systematically examine the relationship between state legitimacy and public trust within the framework of constitutional governance, with a particular focus on transitional political systems where institutional arrangements and societal expectations remain in flux (Easton, 1975). The primary objective is to develop an integrative analytical perspective that bridges the conceptual divide between normative constitutional legitimacy and empirically grounded trust dynamics, thereby advancing existing theoretical approaches to state–society relations (Weatherford, 1992). To achieve this objective, the study formulates several

interrelated research questions that guide the analytical trajectory of the literature review. The first question addresses how constitutional frameworks contribute to the construction and maintenance of state legitimacy in transitional political contexts. The second question explores the key determinants of public trust in government institutions, particularly in environments characterized by institutional uncertainty and governance challenges. The third question investigates how constitutional design and institutional performance interact to influence public perceptions of legitimacy over time. These questions reflect a multidimensional understanding of legitimacy that extends beyond legal formalism to incorporate societal evaluation and experiential governance outcomes (Hardin, 2002). The study also seeks to identify the mechanisms through which institutional practices mediate the relationship between constitutional principles and citizen trust.

Attention is given to how variations in accountability, transparency, and inclusiveness shape the degree to which citizens perceive state authority as legitimate (Fukuyama, 2015). The analytical focus therefore emphasizes the dynamic interaction between structural and behavioral dimensions of governance rather than treating them as isolated variables. In doing so, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how legitimacy is constructed and contested in transitional political systems. The formulation of these objectives and questions is grounded in the recognition that legitimacy and trust are coevolving processes that cannot be adequately explained through static institutional analysis alone. The study further aims to clarify the conditions under which constitutional arrangements succeed or fail in generating sustainable public trust. By situating the analysis within a comprehensive literature review, the research seeks to synthesize existing knowledge while identifying patterns, inconsistencies, and theoretical limitations in current scholarship. Ultimately, this approach enables the development of a coherent conceptual foundation for examining the interplay between constitutional governance, institutional performance, and public trust in shaping state legitimacy.

This study offers a significant contribution to the existing body of knowledge by advancing an integrative understanding of state legitimacy through the lens of constitutional governance and public trust, particularly within transitional political systems where institutional dynamics remain fluid and contested (Luhmann, 1979). Theoretically, the research bridges previously fragmented domains by synthesizing insights from constitutionalism, legitimacy theory, and trust scholarship into a unified analytical framework that captures the multidimensional nature of state–society relations (Offe, 1999). Such integration responds to longstanding calls in the literature for more holistic approaches that account for both normative institutional design and empirical societal evaluation in explaining legitimacy outcomes. The study introduces a conceptual model that positions institutional performance as a mediating mechanism linking constitutional structures to public trust, thereby addressing a critical gap in prior research that has often overlooked this relational pathway (Newton, Stolle, & Zmerli, 2018). This model contributes to theory development by reconceptualizing legitimacy as a dynamic and co constructed process shaped by

continuous interaction between state institutions and citizens rather than as a static attribute of legal authority. From a methodological perspective, the use of a systematic literature review enables the identification of recurring patterns, theoretical inconsistencies, and emerging trends across diverse scholarly traditions, thereby strengthening the robustness of the proposed framework (Snyder, 2019). The findings also provide practical implications for policymakers by highlighting the importance of aligning constitutional principles with effective governance practices in order to sustain public trust.

Governments operating in transitional contexts may benefit from prioritizing accountability, transparency, and inclusive participation as key drivers of legitimacy formation. The study further underscores that constitutional reforms alone are insufficient to generate legitimacy without corresponding improvements in institutional behavior and service delivery. This insight challenges conventional reform strategies that focus predominantly on legal restructuring while neglecting the experiential dimensions of governance. By emphasizing the interplay between constitutional design and institutional performance, the research offers a more actionable perspective for strengthening democratic consolidation. The contribution of this study extends to the comparative analysis of transitional political systems, providing a conceptual basis for examining variations in legitimacy and trust across different contexts. It also opens new avenues for empirical research by proposing testable relationships between constitutional variables, governance performance, and public trust indicators. The study therefore not only enriches theoretical discourse but also provides a foundation for future quantitative and mixed method investigations. Overall, the research enhances scholarly understanding of how legitimacy is constructed, maintained, and contested in complex political environments, offering both conceptual clarity and practical relevance for advancing governance in transitional democracies.

B. METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design employing a systematic literature review to examine the relationship between state legitimacy and public trust within the framework of constitutional governance in transitional political systems (Snyder, 2019). The systematic literature review approach enables a structured and transparent synthesis of existing scholarly knowledge, ensuring methodological rigor and reproducibility in the analysis process (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003).

Data were collected from reputable academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant literature across disciplines such as political science, public administration, and constitutional law. The inclusion criteria were defined to select peer reviewed journal articles and academic books published primarily between 2000 and 2024, with particular emphasis on studies addressing legitimacy, public trust, and governance in transitional political contexts. Articles that lacked theoretical relevance or methodological clarity were excluded to maintain analytical consistency and quality.

The review process followed a multistage procedure consisting of identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion, adapted from established systematic review protocols in social science research (Moher et al., 2009). Keywords used in the search process included “state legitimacy,” “public trust,” “constitutional governance,” and “transitional political systems,” combined using Boolean operators to refine search results. The initial search yielded a broad set of publications, which were subsequently filtered based on relevance to the research objectives and conceptual focus. A total of selected studies were then subjected to in-depth analysis to identify recurring themes, theoretical perspectives, and empirical findings. The analytical approach employed thematic synthesis to categorize the literature into key dimensions, including constitutional design, institutional performance, and trust formation. This method facilitated the identification of patterns and relationships across studies, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between legitimacy and public trust.

The study also applied a conceptual synthesis approach to integrate diverse theoretical frameworks into a unified analytical model. Attention was given to ensuring the reliability of the synthesis by crosschecking interpretations across multiple sources and maintaining consistency in coding categories. The methodological approach prioritizes depth of analysis over statistical generalization, in line with qualitative research traditions in governance studies. Overall, this method provides a robust foundation for developing an integrative conceptual framework that explains the dynamic relationship between constitutional structures, institutional performance, and public trust in shaping state legitimacy.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Typology of State Legitimacy in Transitional Political Systems

Scholarly literature identifies multiple forms of state legitimacy that operate simultaneously within transitional political systems, reflecting the complex and often fragmented nature of authority in such contexts. Legal rational legitimacy derives from the formal validity of constitutional frameworks and adherence to established legal procedures, positioning the constitution as the primary source of state authority. This form of legitimacy emphasizes rule-based governance and institutional compliance, which are essential for maintaining order and predictability in political systems. Sociological legitimacy, by contrast, emerges from the degree to which citizens perceive state authority as appropriate, justified, and aligned with their expectations.

This dimension highlights the importance of public perception and collective acceptance in sustaining political authority beyond formal legality. Performance based legitimacy focuses on the ability of the state to deliver effective governance outcomes, including public services, economic stability, and social welfare. Governments that demonstrate high levels of performance tend to secure greater public approval, even in contexts where formal institutional structures remain weak. Transitional political systems often exhibit tensions among these three forms of

legitimacy, as constitutional arrangements may not align with societal expectations or governance outcomes. Legal frameworks may establish authority, yet public dissatisfaction can persist when institutional performance fails to meet citizen demands.

Sociological legitimacy can fluctuate rapidly in response to political events, economic conditions, and perceived fairness in governance processes. Performance-based legitimacy frequently becomes the most decisive factor in shaping public evaluations of the state, particularly in environments where institutional trust is fragile. The coexistence of these legitimacy types creates a dynamic and sometimes unstable configuration of authority within transitional contexts. Fragmentation of legitimacy arises when one dimension compensates for deficiencies in another, such as when strong performance temporarily offsets weak constitutional credibility. Such configurations may produce short term stability but often lack the institutional depth required for long term democratic consolidation. Political actors may also strategically emphasize certain forms of legitimacy to reinforce their authority, further complicating the overall legitimacy structure. The interaction among legal, sociological, and performance-based legitimacy therefore reflects a multidimensional process that cannot be reduced to a single source of authority. Understanding this typology provides a critical foundation for analyzing how legitimacy evolves and is contested in transitional political systems.

The classification of state legitimacy into legal rational, sociological, and performance-based forms aligns with classical and contemporary theoretical foundations while offering a more contextualized understanding within transitional political systems. Weber's typology of authority provides the basis for distinguishing legal rational legitimacy as rooted in formal institutional structures and rule-based governance (Weber, 1978). Subsequent developments emphasize that legitimacy extends beyond formal legality to include societal acceptance, reinforcing the importance of sociological legitimacy as articulated in modern legitimacy theory (Beetham, 2013). Empirical research further demonstrates that performance-based legitimacy plays a decisive role in shaping citizen evaluations, particularly in contexts where institutional trust remains fragile (Gilley, 2006). Transitional systems often experience fragmentation across these dimensions, as constitutional arrangements fail to align with public expectations or governance outcomes. Comparative political studies confirm that legitimacy deficits frequently emerge when institutional performance does not meet societal demands, even in the presence of formally valid legal frameworks (Morlino & Quaranta, 2016).

This finding extends prior literature by highlighting the coexistence and tension among different legitimacy sources rather than treating them as mutually exclusive. The dynamic interaction among these forms reflects a multidimensional process that evolves over time in response to political and economic conditions. Such complexity supports the argument that legitimacy cannot be reduced to a single explanatory variable in transitional contexts. The typological approach developed in this study therefore contributes to a more nuanced understanding of legitimacy as a

layered and context-dependent construct. It also reinforces the need to examine how these dimensions interact rather than operate independently. The analysis confirms that sustainable legitimacy requires alignment across legal, social, and performance-based dimensions.

2. Determinants of Public Trust in Government Institutions

A substantial body of scholarship identifies public trust in government institutions as a multifaceted construct shaped by citizens' evaluations of governance processes, institutional behavior, and policy outcomes. Institutional performance emerges as a central determinant of trust, as citizens tend to form judgments based on the effectiveness, efficiency, and reliability of public service delivery. Perceptions of transparency also play a critical role, as open access to information and clear communication from public authorities reduce uncertainty and enhance institutional credibility. Accountability mechanisms further influence trust by ensuring that state actors remain answerable for their decisions and actions, thereby reinforcing perceptions of fairness and responsibility. The consistent enforcement of the rule of law constitutes another key factor, as unequal or selective application of legal norms undermines confidence in state authority. Procedural justice has been shown to significantly affect trust formation, as citizens prioritize fairness, impartiality, and respectful treatment in their interactions with public institutions. Inclusiveness in governance processes, particularly through participatory mechanisms, strengthens trust by allowing citizens to perceive themselves as active stakeholders rather than passive subjects. Political stability also contributes to trust by providing a predictable environment in which institutions operate consistently over time.

Economic performance influences trust indirectly by shaping citizens' perceptions of government competence and policy effectiveness. Corruption and perceived elite capture significantly erode trust, especially in transitional systems where institutional safeguards remain underdeveloped. Informal institutions and patronage networks often distort formal governance processes, creating inconsistencies that weaken public confidence. Media exposure and digital communication channels amplify public awareness of governmental actions, intensifying both trust and distrust depending on the information disseminated. Cultural and historical factors also shape baseline levels of trust, influencing how citizens interpret institutional behavior and governance outcomes. The interaction among these determinants suggests that public trust is not a static attribute but a dynamic and context dependent outcome of governance practices. Understanding these determinants provides a comprehensive basis for analyzing how trust is constructed, sustained, or eroded within transitional political systems.

The determinants of public trust identified in this study strongly correspond with established empirical and theoretical literature, particularly in emphasizing the centrality of institutional performance and governance quality. Studies in public administration consistently demonstrate that transparency and accountability significantly enhance trust by reducing information asymmetry and increasing

institutional credibility (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2019). The importance of procedural justice further supports the finding that fairness and impartiality in decision making processes are critical drivers of trust formation (Tyler, 2006). Cross national analyses indicate that citizens evaluate governments not only based on outcomes but also on the perceived integrity of governance processes (van der Meer & Hakhverdian, 2017).

The role of corruption as a major trust destroying factor aligns with extensive research highlighting its negative impact on institutional credibility and public confidence (RoseAckerman & Palifka, 2016). Transitional political systems amplify these dynamics due to weaker institutional safeguards and inconsistent enforcement mechanisms. Informal practices such as patronage networks often distort governance processes, further undermining trust. This study extends existing literature by integrating these determinants into a cohesive framework that emphasizes their interdependence rather than treating them as isolated variables. The findings also highlight the contextual variability of trust, which fluctuates in response to political, economic, and social conditions. Such variability supports the view that trust is a dynamic outcome shaped by ongoing interactions between citizens and institutions. The analysis confirms that trust cannot be sustained through formal structures alone without consistent institutional performance. Understanding these determinants is therefore essential for explaining variations in legitimacy across transitional systems.

3. Constitutional Design and Its Influence on Public Trust

Constitutional design plays a foundational role in structuring the relationship between state authority and public trust, yet its influence remains contingent upon how institutional arrangements are translated into practice within transitional political systems. Formal constitutional provisions establish the architecture of governance by defining the distribution of power, the scope of rights, and the mechanisms of accountability. These provisions are intended to create a predictable and legitimate framework within which political actors operate and citizens evaluate state authority. The presence of checks and balances within constitutional systems aims to prevent the concentration of power and to enhance institutional credibility. Judicial independence further contributes to trust by ensuring that legal disputes are resolved impartially and in accordance with established norms. Electoral systems embedded in constitutional frameworks are designed to facilitate representation and strengthen the perceived responsiveness of government institutions. However, the effectiveness of these mechanisms depends heavily on their implementation and enforcement in real political contexts.

Transitional political systems often experience a gap between constitutional ideals and institutional realities, where formal rules coexist with informal practices that undermine governance integrity. Weak enforcement of constitutional provisions can erode public confidence, particularly when citizens perceive inconsistency or bias in institutional behavior. Political interference in ostensibly independent institutions further diminishes the credibility of constitutional arrangements. Citizens tend to evaluate constitutional systems not only based on their design but also on their

tangible outcomes in everyday governance. Perceived fairness, accessibility, and responsiveness of institutions influence whether constitutional structures are regarded as legitimate. In many transitional contexts, constitutional reforms alone fail to generate trust when they are not accompanied by improvements in governance performance. Institutional credibility therefore emerges from the alignment between formal design and practical execution rather than from legal structures alone. The interaction between constitutional design and public trust reveals that legitimacy is constructed through lived institutional experiences rather than solely through normative frameworks. Understanding this dynamic underscores the necessity of examining constitutional governance as an operational system rather than a purely formal arrangement.

The analysis of constitutional design reveals that formal institutional arrangements play a foundational but insufficient role in generating public trust, corroborating existing research on constitutional endurance and effectiveness. Constitutional frameworks establish the rules of governance, yet their legitimacy depends on consistent implementation and enforcement in practice (Elkins et al., 2009). Studies on democratic institutions indicate that checks and balances and judicial independence contribute to institutional credibility by limiting the concentration of power and ensuring accountability (Fukuyama, 2015). However, empirical evidence from transitional regimes shows that formal constitutional provisions often coexist with informal practices that undermine governance integrity (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004). This discrepancy between formal rules and actual practices creates a legitimacy gap that weakens public trust. Comparative analyses further demonstrate that citizens evaluate constitutional systems based on their effectiveness in delivering fair and responsive governance rather than their formal design alone (Linz & Stepan, 1996). Political interference in independent institutions reduces confidence in constitutional arrangements and diminishes perceived legitimacy.

The findings of this study extend prior literature by emphasizing the conditional nature of constitutional influence on trust, highlighting the importance of operational effectiveness. Constitutional reforms that fail to address institutional performance limitations often produce limited improvements in public trust. The analysis also underscores that constitutional design must be understood as an evolving system shaped by political practice rather than a static legal framework. This perspective aligns with contemporary scholarship that emphasizes the interaction between formal institutions and informal dynamics. Overall, the findings confirm that constitutional design contributes to trust only when supported by credible and consistent institutional behavior.

4. Institutional Performance as a Mediating Variable

Institutional performance functions as a critical mediating variable that links constitutional design to public trust, shaping how citizens interpret and evaluate state authority within transitional political systems. Constitutional frameworks establish formal rules and structures, yet citizens rarely assess legitimacy based on abstract

legal provisions alone, instead relying on observable outcomes produced by public institutions. The effectiveness of policy implementation, the consistency of service delivery, and the responsiveness of administrative systems collectively influence perceptions of institutional competence. Citizens tend to associate high-performing institutions with reliability and fairness, which strengthens their willingness to trust and support governmental authority. Conversely, persistent inefficiencies, bureaucratic delays, and policy failures can undermine confidence even when constitutional arrangements appear robust. Institutional performance therefore translates normative constitutional principles into tangible experiences that directly affect public evaluation.

The quality of governance practices, including transparency, accountability, and impartial decision making, further reinforces this mediating role by shaping perceptions of procedural justice. Variations in institutional capacity across sectors can produce uneven trust outcomes, where certain agencies gain credibility while others remain distrusted. In transitional systems, limited administrative capacity and resource constraints often hinder consistent performance, weakening the linkage between constitutional ideals and public trust. Informal practices such as patronage and selective enforcement may distort institutional outputs, creating discrepancies between formal rules and actual governance behavior.

Citizens interpret these discrepancies as signals of institutional weakness or bias, which negatively affects trust formation. Sustained improvements in institutional performance can gradually rebuild trust, even in contexts where legitimacy has previously been contested. This dynamic underscores the importance of performance as an intermediary mechanism that operationalizes constitutional governance. Political leadership also influences institutional effectiveness by setting priorities, allocating resources, and shaping administrative culture. The mediating role of institutional performance highlights that legitimacy emerges not directly from constitutional design, but from the capacity of institutions to deliver outcomes that align with societal expectations.

The identification of institutional performance as a mediating variable between constitutional design and public trust provides a significant extension to existing governance literature. Prior studies have emphasized the importance of governance quality in shaping legitimacy, particularly through the delivery of effective and impartial public services (Rothstein, 2011). This study builds on such perspectives by explicitly positioning institutional performance as the mechanism through which constitutional principles are translated into citizen experiences. Empirical research confirms that citizens form trust judgments based on observable outcomes rather than formal institutional arrangements alone (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003).

Variations in institutional capacity and administrative effectiveness directly influence how governance is perceived across different sectors. Transitional political systems often face constraints in administrative resources and policy implementation, which weaken institutional performance and undermine trust. Informal practices and selective enforcement further distort institutional outputs, creating inconsistencies

that reduce credibility. The mediating role of performance highlights the importance of aligning governance practices with constitutional expectations.

This finding addresses a key limitation in earlier models that treated constitutional design and trust as separate constructs. The analysis also demonstrates that improvements in institutional performance can gradually restore trust even in contexts where legitimacy has been eroded. Political leadership and administrative reforms play a critical role in enhancing institutional effectiveness. The study therefore reinforces the view that legitimacy emerges from the interaction between formal structures and practical governance outcomes. Institutional performance serves as the operational link that connects constitutional authority with societal evaluation.

5. Integrative Conceptual Framework of State Legitimacy Formation

This study proposes an integrative conceptual framework that captures the dynamic relationship between constitutional structures, institutional performance, public trust, and state legitimacy within transitional political systems. The framework positions constitutional design as the foundational layer that defines the formal distribution of authority, governance principles, and accountability mechanisms. These constitutional arrangements provide the normative basis upon which institutional operations are expected to function. Institutional performance operates as a critical intermediary that translates constitutional provisions into observable governance outcomes experienced by citizens.

The effectiveness, consistency, and fairness of institutional actions determine how constitutional norms are perceived in practice. Public trust emerges as a direct response to these institutional experiences, reflecting citizens' evaluative judgments regarding the credibility and reliability of state authority. Trust functions not only as an outcome but also as a reinforcing mechanism that sustains or weakens the legitimacy of the state over time. State legitimacy is conceptualized as the cumulative result of this interaction, representing the degree to which citizens accept and support political authority. The framework emphasizes the cyclical nature of these relationships, where legitimacy influences future levels of trust and shapes expectations toward institutional performance. Positive feedback loops occur when effective governance strengthens trust, which in turn reinforces legitimacy and stabilizes political systems.

Negative feedback loops arise when poor institutional performance erodes trust, leading to declining legitimacy and increased instability. Transitional political systems are particularly sensitive to these dynamics due to their evolving institutional structures and fluctuating trust levels. The framework also acknowledges the role of contextual factors, such as political culture, economic conditions, and historical legacies, in moderating these relationships. By integrating these dimensions into a single analytical model, the study provides a comprehensive perspective on how legitimacy is constructed and contested in complex governance environments. This conceptualization moves beyond linear explanations by highlighting the interdependent and evolving nature of state–society relations. The proposed

framework therefore offers both theoretical clarity and practical relevance for understanding and strengthening legitimacy in transitional political systems.

The proposed integrative conceptual framework synthesizes insights from legitimacy theory, constitutionalism, and trust literature to provide a comprehensive model of state–society relations in transitional political systems. Relational theories of legitimacy emphasize that legitimacy emerges from continuous interaction between institutions and citizens rather than from formal authority alone (Suchman, 1995). This study advances that perspective by introducing a cyclical model in which constitutional structures, institutional performance, and public trust interact dynamically to shape legitimacy outcomes. The framework aligns with theoretical arguments that highlight the importance of feedback mechanisms in sustaining governance stability (Easton, 1975). Positive feedback loops occur when effective institutional performance strengthens trust and reinforces legitimacy, while negative loops emerge when governance failures erode confidence. Comparative research on political systems supports the existence of such cyclical dynamics, particularly in environments characterized by institutional volatility. The framework also incorporates contextual factors such as political culture and economic conditions, which influence how legitimacy is constructed and perceived.

This integrative approach addresses the fragmentation observed in previous studies by linking macrolevel institutional design with microlevel citizen evaluation. The model provides a more comprehensive explanation of legitimacy formation than linear or static approaches. It also offers a foundation for empirical testing in future research, particularly through quantitative or mixed-method designs. The findings contribute to theoretical advancement by reconceptualizing legitimacy as a dynamic and interdependent process. The framework further provides practical insights for policymakers seeking to strengthen governance and public trust. Overall, this study enhances understanding of how legitimacy evolves within complex and transitional political environments.

D. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that state legitimacy in transitional political systems cannot be adequately explained through a singular focus on constitutional design, as legitimacy emerges from the dynamic interaction between institutional structures, governance performance, and public trust. The findings demonstrate that legal rational legitimacy, while foundational, remains insufficient when it is not supported by sociological acceptance and effective institutional outcomes. Public trust operates as a critical evaluative mechanism through which citizens interpret and validate state authority, reinforcing the argument that legitimacy is deeply rooted in lived governance experiences rather than abstract legal norms. Institutional performance serves as the key mediating factor that translates constitutional principles into tangible outcomes, thereby shaping the trajectory of trust formation and legitimacy consolidation.

The study further highlights that transitional political systems are particularly vulnerable to legitimacy fragmentation due to inconsistencies between formal constitutional arrangements and actual governance practices. The proposed integrative framework confirms that legitimacy is a cyclical and relational process, characterized by feedback loops in which trust and performance continuously reinforce or undermine state authority. This perspective advances existing theoretical approaches by bridging the gap between normative constitutionalism and empirical governance analysis. The research also provides practical implications, emphasizing that sustainable legitimacy requires not only constitutional reform but also consistent improvements in institutional accountability, transparency, and effectiveness. Policymakers in transitional contexts should therefore prioritize strengthening governance performance as a strategic pathway to rebuilding public trust and stabilizing political systems.

The study acknowledges its limitation as a literature-based analysis that does not incorporate primary empirical data, which may constrain the generalizability of its conclusions. Future research should test the proposed conceptual framework through quantitative or mixed method approaches across different national contexts. Comparative studies may also provide deeper insights into how cultural, economic, and historical factors influence the legitimacy–trust relationship. Overall, this study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of state legitimacy by integrating constitutional, institutional, and societal dimensions into a unified analytical perspective.

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