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Citizen satisfaction with public service delivery in Punjab, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT
This study examines citizen satisfaction with public service delivery in Punjab, Pakistan, using a cross-sectional survey of 100 respondents recruited through convenience sampling between 21 and 24 May 2026. Respondents lived in 15 districts; six districts (Faisalabad, Sheikhupura, Lahore, Gujranwala, Sahiwal, and Hafizabad) accounted for 83 respondents and are the basis for district-level comparisons. Perceptions were predominantly unfavorable but not uniformly so: across 26 positively worded statements on service quality and responsiveness, accountability and transparency, accessibility, e-governance, fairness, and institutional trust, between 35% and 76% of respondents disagreed with each statement, 17% to 41% were neutral, and 2% to 37% agreed. Agreement was lowest for courteous treatment by government employees (2%), the sufficiency of public services (4%), and institutional transparency (5%). E-governance was rated somewhat less negatively (a dimension score of 44 on a 0–100 scale, against 34 to 43 for the other dimensions), although 46% agreed that digital government services are complicated. District-level differences were small and rest on small subsamples, so they are not interpreted. Because the sample is small and non-random, the findings describe the perceptions of the surveyed respondents and should not be generalized to all citizens of Punjab. They nonetheless point to transparency, complaint handling, equitable access, and inclusive digital services as areas for policy attention, and they add exploratory evidence to the limited empirical literature on citizen satisfaction in Punjab.

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1. Introduction

Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province, had approximately 127.7 million inhabitants at the 2023 census (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2023) and operates an extensive public service infrastructure spanning health, education, water and sanitation, transport, municipal services, land administration, and policing. Pakistan has pursued successive local-government and decentralization reforms, including the Devolution Plan of 2001 (Cheema et al., 2005), that bear on how public services reach citizens.

Governments increasingly treat citizen satisfaction as a measure of public-service performance and of the results of public-management reform (Grosso & Van Ryzin, 2012; Van Ryzin, 2004). Recent survey-based work in Pakistan points to persistent concerns about service delivery. Gill and Shabir (2026), for example, report low satisfaction with service delivery in a survey on local government, together with perceptions of political interference and weak anticorruption mechanisms, and Shahid and Khoso (2026) document long waiting times, heavy workloads, and limited emergency medicines in tehsil headquarters hospitals in Faisalabad despite the infrastructure and funding gains that followed devolution. Studies of individual services in Punjab have examined patient satisfaction in public hospitals (Hussain et al., 2019) and community pharmacies (Aziz et al., 2018) and the determinants of satisfaction with e-government services (Malik et al., 2016), but this evidence largely addresses single services rather than offering a cross-sectoral view of citizen experience.

This study addresses that gap by assessing citizen satisfaction across several governance dimensions simultaneously. Its objectives are to: (1) describe respondents' satisfaction with public service delivery in Punjab across service quality and responsiveness, accountability and transparency, accessibility, fairness, e-governance, and institutional trust; (2) describe their overall perceptions of public services; (3) examine observed differences in perceptions across the districts with enough respondents to compare; and (4) identify the policy directions suggested by the findings. Correspondingly,

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the study asks: How do respondents rate public services across these dimensions? How do ratings differ across the surveyed districts? And what policy directions do the findings suggest? The analysis is descriptive: it reports patterns in perceptions and does not test causal or inferential relationships among the dimensions.

2. Literature and Theoretical Framework

Citizen satisfaction with public services draws on marketing, public administration, and social-psychological traditions. A foundational tension concerns whether citizens should be understood as customers, whose preferences should guide service design under New Public Management (Hood, 1991), or as citizens with rights-based claims on the state under democratic governance theory (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000). Clarke and Newman (1997) trace the customer paradigm to the broader rise of "the managerial state", cautioning that market-derived management techniques were imported into public administration without adequate attention to citizens' democratic claims.

The customer-centered tradition treats satisfaction as a cognitive-affective evaluation of whether performance meets expectations (Oliver, 1980), underlying instruments such as the American Customer Satisfaction Index (Fornell et al., 1996), public-sector service-value-chain models linking service attributes to trust (Heintzman & Marson, 2005), and public-sector adaptations that link satisfaction, loyalty, and institutional reputation (Andreassen, 1994). In the citizen-satisfaction literature, Van Ryzin (2004) shows that satisfaction with urban services reflects citizens' expectations as well as perceived performance. Democratic-governance scholars counter that a purely customer-oriented view neglects the contribution of users and communities to outcomes and public value (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2012). Recent cross-national evidence also points to the importance of equity: Song et al. (2025), using education data from many countries, find that parents in less professional occupations express lower satisfaction with schools when their children underperform, compared with parents in more professional occupations, although no such pattern appeared for education- or income-based disparities.

This study draws on several complementary theoretical strands. The SERVQUAL tradition conceptualizes perceived service quality as the gap between expectations and perceived performance (Parasuraman et al., 1985) and measures it through five dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles (Parasuraman et al., 1988). It was later applied to public services by Brysland and Curry (2001) and extended by Brady and Cronin (2001), who propose a hierarchical model of perceived service quality, and by Caruana (2002), who finds that customer satisfaction mediates the effect of service quality on service loyalty. Procedural justice theory holds that citizens evaluate institutions partly on the fairness of processes independent of outcomes (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler & Bies, 1990). Institutional and political trust theory links citizens' evaluations of government to their trust in institutions: Dalton (2005) documents declining public trust in government, and Citrin and Stoker (2018) review evidence that political trust erodes when institutions fail to meet citizens' normative expectations. Bouckaert and Van de Walle (2003), however, caution that trust and satisfaction indicators are difficult to link and are not straightforward proxies for good governance. Hirschman's (1970) exit-voice-loyalty framework, extended by Dowding and John (2008) and by Vigoda's (2002) argument for moving from mere responsiveness toward active citizen collaboration, characterizes citizen responses to dissatisfaction, exiting to private providers, voicing complaints, or remaining loyally tolerant, and is relevant to interpreting the accessibility findings reported below.

On digital governance specifically, Malik et al. (2016) examine the determinants of citizen e-satisfaction with e-government services in Punjab among university employees and report that accessibility, awareness of e-services, service quality, and expectations were significant predictors, whereas trust and security were not; their findings on accessibility and awareness bear directly on this study's e-governance results. Schiff (2025), analyzing requests from 100 cities on digital issue-reporting platforms, finds that citizens' comments and follows on requests increase the probability that a request is closed and shorten the time to resolution, illustrating how digital channels can make citizen input visible to administrators. Public value theory further suggests that service evaluation should be judged by contribution to collective welfare rather than narrow performance metrics alone (Moore, 1995), informing the study's decision to assess overall perceptions alongside specific indicators. Recent studies in Pakistan point in a similar direction to the concerns examined here: Gill and Shabir (2026) report low satisfaction with service delivery and perceived political interference in local government, and Shahid and Khoso (2026) find that persistent service-quality problems in Faisalabad's tehsil hospitals coexist with post-devolution gains in infrastructure and funding. Together, these frameworks suggest that responsiveness, accountability, transparency, accessibility, fairness, and e-governance effectiveness are all relevant to citizen satisfaction; this study describes respondents' perceptions of these dimensions but does not test the relationships among them.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Approach

The study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional, descriptive-analytical design appropriate for measuring public perceptions, satisfaction levels, and institutional performance at a single point in time. A deductive approach was used:

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existing theories of citizen satisfaction, governance, and service quality, SERVQUAL, expectation-disconfirmation theory, procedural justice theory, and institutional trust theory, informed the questionnaire design and the framing of research questions.

3.2 Population, Sample, and Sampling Technique

The target population comprised citizens residing in Punjab who use public services provided by government institutions, including healthcare, education, municipal services, transport, digital governance platforms, and administrative services, from both urban and rural areas. A sample of 100 respondents was selected using non-probability convenience sampling. Convenience sampling was adopted because of time, financial, and accessibility constraints and because the study is exploratory: it aims to describe perceptions among accessible service users rather than to estimate population parameters. Respondents resided in 15 districts of Punjab. Six districts accounted for 83 of the 100 respondents (Faisalabad 24, Sheikhupura 24, Lahore 19, Gujranwala 6, Sahiwal 5, and Hafizabad 5); these are the only districts with at least five respondents and are the basis for the district comparison in Section 4.6. The remaining 17 respondents, from nine other districts, are included in all overall analyses (Table 1). District subsamples, particularly those of five or six respondents, are too small for reliable comparison. Because the sample is non-random, the findings describe the perceptions of the surveyed respondents and cannot be generalized statistically to the wider population of Punjab, a limitation discussed in Section 7.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by district.

District	Respondents (n)	Share of sample (%)
Faisalabad	24	24.0
Sheikhupura	24	24.0
Lahore	19	19.0
Gujranwala	6	6.0
Sahiwal	5	5.0
Hafizabad	5	5.0
Nine other districts	17	17.0
Total	**100**	**100.0**

Note. Other districts: Rawalpindi (4), Jhang (3), Kasur (3), Nankana Sahib (2), and one each from Attock, Chakwal, Okara, Sargodha, and Toba Tek Singh. District names were standardized from free-text entries.

3.3 Data Sources and Instrument

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire comprising a demographic section (gender, age group, education, occupation, area of residence, marital status, household income and size, internet access, employment, disability status, and district), one comparative item asking respondents to rate Punjab's public services against those of other South Asian countries they know of, and 31 five-point Likert statements (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) on accessibility, service delivery and responsiveness, accountability and transparency, e-governance and digital services, fairness, and institutional trust, followed by four open-ended questions. The questionnaire was administered in English. For analysis, 26 positively worded statements were grouped by content into six dimensions: service quality and responsiveness (5 items), accountability and transparency (4), accessibility (5), e-governance (6), fairness (3), and institutional trust (3). Four negatively worded statements (on barriers to access, officials ignoring citizens' concerns, bureaucratic hurdles, and the complexity of digital services) and one statement on whether corruption harms service delivery were left out of the dimension scores and are reported separately. After reverse-coding, the four negatively worded items correlated negatively with the remaining items (item-rest correlations from −0.22 to −0.44), a pattern that suggests inconsistent or acquiescent responding to negatively worded statements, and the corruption statement does not rate an institution. Two statements on public transportation carry identical wording in the questionnaire and were both retained as administered. Secondary data were drawn from books, journal articles, government reports, and policy documents on public administration and governance in Pakistan and Punjab.

3.4 Data Collection, Reliability, and Ethics

Responses were recorded between 21 and 24 May 2026. Questionnaires were distributed in person across selected districts of Punjab, supplemented by an online survey to broaden participation. Respondents were informed of the study's purpose and their right to withdraw, participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was assured. Names and email addresses captured by the response form were excluded from the analysis and are not reported. Age was recorded in bands (15–25, 26–35, 36–45, and 46 and above), so respondents aged 15–17 cannot be distinguished from those aged 18–25 in the data; 51 respondents fell in the 15–25 band. Questionnaire items were informed by service-quality and procedural-justice constructs from the reviewed literature (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Tyler & Bies, 1990), and content validity was sought by aligning items with the study's objectives and theoretical framework. Internal

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consistency was assessed with Cronbach's alpha (Table 2). Alpha was .82 for the 26 positively worded items combined but ranged from .46 to .78 across the six dimensions, so dimension scores, particularly service quality and responsiveness (α = .46), should be interpreted cautiously and the item-level results in Section 4 treated as the primary evidence.

3.5 Data Analysis Technique

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) and Cronbach's alpha, computed from the raw response file. Percentages are based on valid responses to each item (99–100); one invalid free-text entry on a transport item and three blank answers were treated as missing. "Disagreed" refers to the combined percentage selecting Disagree or Strongly Disagree and "agreed" to the combined percentage selecting Agree or Strongly Agree; where a figure is given for "strongly disagreed," it is a subset of the combined percentage. A dimension score is a respondent's mean rating of the items in that dimension (1–5); it is also expressed on a 0–100 scale as (mean − 1) ÷ 4 × 100, so that 50 is the neutral midpoint. Results are presented through descriptive tables, charts, and narrative interpretation. No inferential tests were conducted.

4. Results

4.1 Demographic Profile

Male respondents formed the majority of the sample at 73.0% (n = 73), with female respondents at 27.0% (n = 27). Respondents aged 15–25 years constituted 51.0% of the sample and those aged 26–35 years 31.0%, together accounting for 82.0%, with 11.0% aged 36–45 and 7.0% aged 46 and above, indicating a predominantly young sample. Most respondents held a bachelor's degree (37.0%), followed by intermediate or O-level (24.0%), matric (22.0%), and MPhil (17.0%). Students (48.0%) and business persons or self-employed respondents (24.0%) were the largest occupational groups. Urban residents made up 56.0% of the sample and rural residents 44.0%; 68.0% reported regular internet access, 30.0% occasional access, and 2.0% none.

4.2 Government Responsiveness

Responsiveness ratings were mostly unfavorable. Most respondents (62.0%) disagreed that public institutions respond quickly and effectively to complaints, 26.0% were neutral, and 12.0% agreed; 72.0% disagreed that government employees behave professionally and courteously, and only 2.0% agreed. Responses to a negatively worded item were more mixed: 19.0% agreed that public officials often ignore the concerns raised by citizens, 28.0% were neutral, and 53.0% disagreed, a pattern that is hard to reconcile with the other two items (see Section 3.3). Overall, respondents were more likely to disagree than to agree that institutions respond effectively, in line with procedural-justice arguments that citizens' evaluations of institutions depend partly on how they are treated (Tyler & Bies, 1990). Concerns about waiting times and staff services have also been examined in studies of Pakistani public hospitals (Hussain et al., 2019).

4.3 Accountability and Transparency

Accountability and transparency were rated unfavorably, with a large neutral group. A majority (55.0%) disagreed that public officials are held accountable for their actions (including 2.0% who strongly disagreed), 26.0% were neutral, and 19.0% agreed. Transparency was among the least favorably rated statements: 64.0% disagreed that government institutions are transparent, 31.0% were neutral, and 5.0% agreed. Views on complaint mechanisms and information provision were less negative: 37.0% disagreed that the current complaint mechanisms work (36.0% neutral, 27.0% agreed), and 35.0% disagreed that citizens receive information about services in a timely and accurate manner (41.0% neutral, 24.0% agreed). In addition, 66.0% agreed that corruption harms public service delivery and 23.0% disagreed. This pattern is in line with arguments that political trust weakens when institutions are seen to fall short of normative expectations (Citrin & Stoker, 2018), although the present data do not test that link.

4.4 Service Quality and Fairness

Respondents were also largely unfavorable about service delivery. Three-quarters (75.0%) disagreed that public services are delivered without unnecessary delays (4.0% strongly), 63.0% disagreed that services are completed within a reasonable and expected time, and 63.6% disagreed that administrative procedures are simple and easy to understand, while only 6.0%, 8.0%, and 5.1% respectively agreed. A negatively worded item on bureaucratic hurdles produced an even split (33.3% agreed, 33.3% neutral, and 33.3% disagreed; n = 99), again showing the inconsistency noted in Section 3.3. On fairness, 53.0% disagreed that women are treated equally and fairly in government service (18.0% agreed), 60.0% disagreed that rural people receive service of comparable quality to urban people (10.0% agreed), and 55.0% disagreed that citizens are treated with dignity regardless of social class (8.0% agreed); 29% to 37% were neutral on each. These findings are in line with SERVQUAL's emphasis on reliability and responsiveness

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(Parasuraman et al., 1988) and with the argument that service equity matters for citizen satisfaction (Song et al., 2025). The data describe perceptions; they do not show whether services are in fact delivered unfairly.

4.5 Accessibility of Public Services

Accessibility ratings were among the least favorable. Three-quarters (76.0%) disagreed that public services are easy to access in their area (6.0% strongly), and only 7.0% agreed. Smaller majorities disagreed that government offices are at an adequate distance (53.0%; 38.0% neutral, 9.0% agreed), that public transportation is satisfactory (61.6% and 64.0% on the two transport items; 5.1% and 9.0% agreed), and that enough public services are available for the number of people in the area (65.0%; 4.0% agreed). A negatively worded item on unnecessary barriers to access drew agreement from 12.0% and disagreement from 55.0%, which again runs against the direction of the other items. Respondents' reasons for these ratings were not measured, so explanations such as infrastructure gaps, long queues, and geographic distance remain to be tested. The result can be read through Hirschman's (1970) exit-voice-loyalty framework, which holds that citizens facing declining services may exit, voice complaints, or remain loyal, and that exit is difficult where alternatives are limited.

4.6 District-Level Variation in Service Quality, Fairness, and Accessibility

Figure 1 presents district scores for service quality and responsiveness, fairness, and accessibility for the six districts with at least five respondents, on the 0–100 scale described in Section 3.5, where 50 is the neutral midpoint and higher scores indicate more favorable ratings. Every score was below the midpoint, with Gujranwala's fairness score (48.6, n = 6) closest to it. Scores for service quality and responsiveness ranged from 29.0 (Hafizabad, n = 5) to 40.0 (Sahiwal, n = 5); for fairness, from 35.1 (Lahore, n = 19) to 48.6 (Gujranwala); and for accessibility, from 32.0 (Hafizabad) to 37.1 (Faisalabad, n = 24). The two largest subsamples, Faisalabad and Sheikhupura (n = 24 each), scored 37.9 and 32.8 on service quality and responsiveness, 39.9 and 37.8 on fairness, and 37.1 and 35.2 on accessibility, and Lahore (n = 19) scored 32.4, 35.1, and 32.6. No district was highest on all three dimensions; Hafizabad was lowest on two, but with only five respondents. These are observed differences among the respondents surveyed in each district. With 5 to 24 respondents per district, no significance tests, and a non-random sample, the differences are small and should be treated as descriptive. They cannot be attributed to urbanization, development, or administrative capacity, which would require district-level indicators and formal comparison.

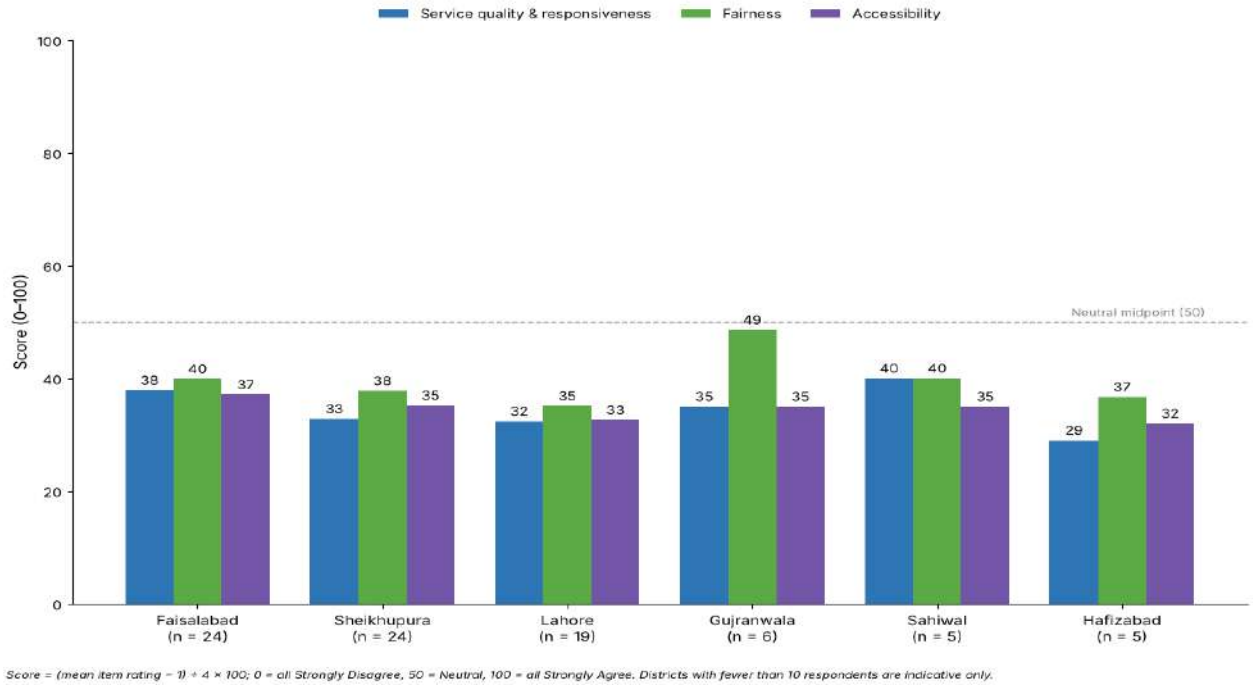

Figure 1. District-level scores (0–100) for service quality and responsiveness, fairness, and accessibility in the six districts with at least five respondents.

4.7 E-Governance and Digital Platforms

E-governance ratings were less unfavorable than those for other dimensions but still predominantly negative. Most respondents disagreed that online government services are easy to use and navigate (56.0%; 15.0% agreed) and that electronic delivery platforms increase the quality of service delivery (57.0%; 19.0% agreed), and 53.5% disagreed that electronic channels will lessen corruption (19.2% agreed; n = 99). Views were more divided on speed and effort: 43.0% disagreed and 28.0% agreed that electronic means make service delivery quicker, and 41.0% disagreed and 32.0%

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agreed that using government services over the internet saves time and effort for all citizens. Respondents were evenly split on appreciating the quality of the digital government services offered to them (37.0% agreed, 37.0% disagreed, 26.0% neutral), and 46.0% agreed that digital government services are complicated for most people (36.0% disagreed, 18.0% neutral). The reasons for these views were not measured; limited internet access (2.0% reported none and 30.0% only occasional access), technical errors, low digital literacy, and inadequate online support are plausible explanations that future work should test. These results are in line with Malik et al. (2016), who identified accessibility and awareness among the significant determinants of citizen e-satisfaction with e-government services in Punjab. E-governance had the highest dimension score (44.1 on the 0–100 scale, against 34.4 to 42.7 for the other dimensions), which suggests somewhat more favorable perceptions of digital channels, although the comparison involves different items.

4.8 Overall Perceptions and Institutional Trust

Overall, 89.0% of respondents rated Punjab's public services worse than those of other South Asian countries they knew of (53.0% "much worse / don't know" and 36.0% "somewhat worse"), while 8.0% rated them better and 3.0% about the same; because the first response category combines "much worse" with "don't know," this figure may overstate negative views. Trust in institutions was low but with substantial neutrality: 49.0% disagreed that they trust public institutions to act in the citizens' best interest (35.0% neutral, 16.0% agreed), 51.0% disagreed that government institutions take citizen feedback into consideration (30.0% neutral, 19.0% agreed), and 40.0% disagreed that government policies accurately reflect the needs of ordinary citizens (36.0% neutral, 24.0% agreed). Across the 26 positively worded statements, item-level disagreement ranged from 35.0% to 76.0%, neutral responses from 17.0% to 41.0%, and agreement from 2.0% to 37.0%. The mean of respondents' ratings across these statements was 2.58 (SD = 0.34), equivalent to 39.4 on the 0–100 scale, and 93.0% of respondents had an average rating below the neutral midpoint of 3.0. Among the surveyed respondents this indicates a broad pattern of unfavorable perceptions rather than concern confined to a single dimension, but it is a pattern of net disagreement with substantial neutrality rather than near-unanimous rejection. Whether it reflects systemic governance deficiencies cannot be established from a small convenience sample of perceptions, and the study collected no objective performance data.

4.9 Statistical Summary of Governance Indicators

Table 2 reports the means, standard deviations, and reliability of the six dimension scores and of the overall score, and Figure 2 summarizes responses to nine selected indicators. Agreement was highest for faster service delivery through electronic means (28%), working complaint mechanisms (27%), and timely service information (24%), and lowest for institutional transparency (5%), quick complaint response (12%), and ease of use of online services (15%). Accountability of officials, improved e-service quality, and reduced corruption through e-channels each drew about 19% agreement. The unweighted mean of the nine agreement percentages was approximately 19%. The indicators in Figure 2 are the same items reported in Sections 4.2 to 4.7; for example, the 19% who agreed that officials are held accountable are the same respondents counted in Section 4.3, where 55.0% disagreed and 26.0% were neutral.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and reliability of the dimension scores.

Dimension	Items (n)	Mean (1–5)	SD	Score (0–100)	Cronbach's α
Service quality and responsiveness	5	2.38	0.36	34.4	0.46
Accountability and transparency	4	2.71	0.53	42.7	0.58
Accessibility	5	2.40	0.47	35.0	0.62
E-governance	6	2.76	0.60	44.1	0.78
Fairness	3	2.53	0.59	38.2	0.57
Institutional trust	3	2.71	0.60	42.7	0.55
Overall (26 positively worded items)	26	2.58	0.34	39.4	0.82

Note. $N = 100$. Dimension score = respondent's mean rating of the items in the dimension; 0–100 score = (mean − 1) ÷ 4 × 100, with 50 as the neutral midpoint. Alpha was computed for respondents with complete data on the dimension's items (n = 97 to 100). Negatively worded items and the corruption item are excluded (Section 3.3).

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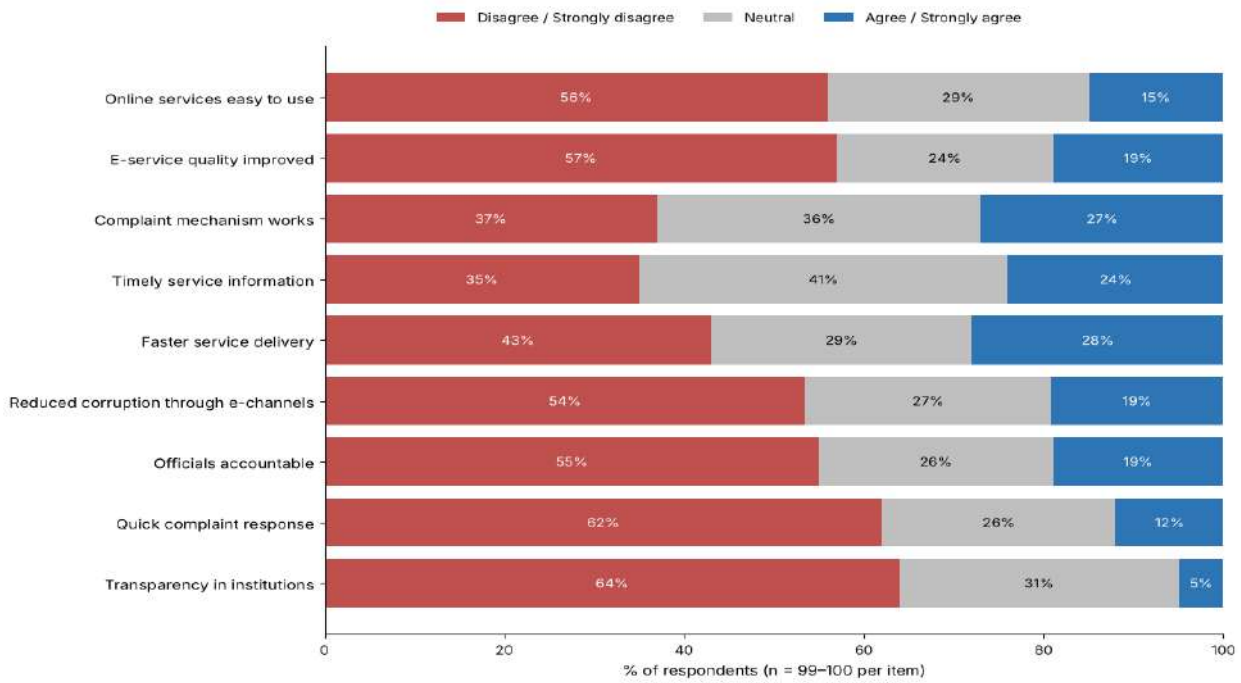

Figure 2. Responses to nine selected indicators (percentage of respondents).

5. Discussion

The results show that the surveyed respondents were far more likely to disagree than to agree with positive statements about public services: disagreement exceeded one half on 19 of the 26 positively worded statements, while agreement exceeded one third on only one (appreciation of the quality of digital government services, 37.0%). The disagreement was spread across dimensions rather than concentrated in one or two areas, but it was accompanied by substantial neutral responses (17% to 41%), so the data indicate widespread reservation more than uniform rejection. Ease of access, courteous treatment, speed of delivery, and transparency drew the strongest disagreement or the lowest agreement. These are descriptive findings from a small convenience sample; they should not be read as estimates for all citizens of Punjab, nor as evidence of the causes of dissatisfaction.

Respondents' ratings of service delivery and fairness suggest services are perceived as slow, procedurally complex, and unevenly delivered, a combination that theory suggests may erode institutional trust (Citrin & Stoker, 2018). Trust was itself low but not uniformly so: 40% to 51% disagreed on the three trust statements, with 30% to 36% neutral. Accessibility ratings add to this picture: where citizens struggle to obtain services, engagement with governance processes may suffer. E-governance was evaluated less negatively on average, but 46.0% agreed that digital services are complicated and 56% to 57% disagreed that they are easy to use or improve service quality, so digital channels are likely to improve perceptions only if barriers around connectivity, digital literacy, and technical reliability are addressed. The overall pattern is in line with the broader literature on declining trust in government (Dalton, 2005; Citrin & Stoker, 2018), although satisfaction and trust indicators are difficult to link (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003). Under expectation-disconfirmation models (Oliver, 1980; Van Ryzin, 2004), low ratings may reflect a gap between expectations and perceived performance, but expectations were not measured in this study.

The findings are also consistent with recent evidence from Pakistan. Gill and Shabir (2026) report low satisfaction with service delivery and perceived political interference and weak anti-corruption mechanisms in local government, which parallels the low accountability and transparency ratings observed here. Shahid and Khoso (2026) show that, even where devolution improved infrastructure and funding, long waiting times, heavy workloads, and limited emergency medicines persisted in Faisalabad's tehsil hospitals, a reminder that institutional responsiveness depends on capacity as well as structure. The fairness ratings resonate with Song et al. (2025), whose cross-national results indicate that outcome disparities can be associated with lower satisfaction among disadvantaged groups, although the present study did not compare socioeconomic groups. On the digital side, Schiff (2025) finds that visible citizen comments and follows are associated with faster resolution of service requests in 100 cities, which suggests that complaint and feedback platforms may strengthen responsiveness when administrators can observe citizen input; the low agreement that complaint mechanisms work (27%) and that institutions respond quickly to complaints (12%) indicates this is an area for attention. Finally, Salik et al. (2021) study the role of radio communication in farmers' adoption of modern agricultural technology in district Jhang, Punjab, which suggests that non-digital channels can carry public information

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to rural audiences where digital access is limited; this is an indirect parallel, as that study concerned agricultural technology rather than public services.

Taken together, the consistently unfavorable perceptions across dimensions suggest that reforms addressing accountability, responsiveness, transparency, accessibility, and digital-service usability together may be more promising than department-specific interventions, although this study cannot compare the two approaches. This reading is consistent with the exit-voice-loyalty framework, which anticipates that when exit and effective voice are both constrained, citizens may remain dissatisfied but tolerant rather than providing the engaged feedback that drives incremental service improvement (Hirschman, 1970; Dowding & John, 2008).

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study finds a predominantly unfavorable pattern of perceptions of public service delivery among 100 respondents from 15 districts of Punjab, six of which supplied 83 respondents. The pattern spans service quality and responsiveness, accountability and transparency, accessibility, fairness, and institutional trust, with e-governance rated somewhat less negatively. Disagreement with positive statements was frequent (35% to 76% by item), but a substantial share of respondents were neutral. District-level differences were small and rest on small subsamples, so no district can be described as better or worse performing on the present evidence. Given the small convenience sample, the findings should not be generalized to all citizens of Punjab. Based on these findings, the following policy directions are suggested for consideration:

1. Strengthen government responsiveness by establishing and enforcing clear timelines for service completion and complaint resolution.
2. Improve institutional accountability by holding public servants answerable for delays and misconduct, with complaints processes leading to corrective action.
3. Enhance transparency through clear, publicly accessible information on required documents, timelines, costs, and responsible offices.
4. Expand accessibility for rural and low-income citizens through additional local offices, mobile service delivery, and one-window administrative systems.
5. Invest in service-quality improvements through training of public servants in technical competence, communication, and citizen-oriented professionalism.
6. Promote inclusive e-governance with simple, reliable digital platforms and adequate technical support, while retaining face-to-face service channels and non-digital information channels such as radio (Salik et al., 2021) for citizens without digital access.
7. Institutionalize equity as a policy principle to ensure services are delivered without bias by gender, socio-economic status, or location.
8. Establish robust citizen-engagement channels, including satisfaction surveys, public consultations, structured feedback mechanisms, and digital issue-reporting tools that make citizen input visible to administrators (Schiff, 2025), to inform ongoing service-delivery reform.

7. Limitations

This study has several limitations. The use of non-probability convenience sampling limits the generalizability of findings to the broader population of Punjab. The cross-sectional design captures perceptions at a single point in time and cannot establish causal relationships or track change following specific reforms. The sample size (n = 100) and reliance on self-reported perceptions, which may involve personal bias, further constrain the strength of the conclusions that can be drawn. District-level comparisons rest on subsamples of 5 to 24 respondents and were not tested for statistical significance, and the study did not collect data on respondents' reasons for their ratings. Response quality is a further concern: the four negatively worded items behaved inconsistently with the rest of the questionnaire (Section 3.3), the two identically worded transport items correlated only weakly (r = .20), six respondents gave at most two distinct answers across all 31 statements, and five of the six dimension scores had alpha below .65. Time and resource constraints also limited the geographical coverage of the study. Future research would benefit from probability-based sampling, pilot-tested instruments that avoid negatively worded and duplicated items, longitudinal designs capable of tracking satisfaction across reform cycles, inferential analysis of the relationships among governance dimensions, gender-disaggregated analysis, and triangulation of subjective satisfaction against objective, independently measured service-quality indicators.

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Declarations

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Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest**.**
Ethical Approval: Informed consent was obtained from all respondents.
Data Availability: The data is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.
Author Contributions: Muhammad Sufyan: Conceptualization, methodology, questionnaire design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of results, literature review, and manuscript preparation. Author 2: Literature review, data validation, and critical revision of the manuscript. Author 3: Methodological review, interpretation of findings, and critical revision of the manuscript. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.
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