



The Impact of Local Governance on Citizens' Institutional Trust: The Sequential Mediating Roles of Transparency and Municipal Service Quality in Algeria

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the relationship between local governance and institutional trust among citizens while testing the sequential mediating role of transparency and municipal service quality in explaining this relationship within the context of Algerian municipalities. The study adopted a quantitative approach using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), based on data collected from 319 citizens across 26 municipalities in Jijel Province. In the final model, local governance was represented as a second-order latent construct comprising responsive and procedural dimensions, while transparency, municipal service quality, and institutional trust were modeled as first-order latent constructs.

The structural model results revealed positive and statistically significant relationships between local governance and transparency, transparency and municipal service quality, and municipal service quality and institutional trust. Furthermore, the analysis of indirect effects using the Bootstrap technique supported the sequential mediation pathway linking local governance to institutional trust through transparency and municipal service quality. Within the limitations of the cross-sectional design, these findings suggest that the relationship between local governance and institutional trust can be understood through a gradual institutional and service pathway. In this pathway, local governance practices are linked to transparency and municipal service quality, which is consistent with the theoretical framework proposed by the study.

Keywords: Local Governance; Transparency; Municipal Service Quality; Institutional Trust; Sequential Mediation; Structural Equation Modeling; Algerian Municipalities.

1. Introduction

Local governance has become a central theme in public administration research due to its strong connection to the ability of local institutions to manage public affairs, respond to citizens' needs, and enhance institutional performance. This relationship is particularly critical at the local level, where municipalities are geographically and administratively close to citizens. Citizens interact directly with municipal services and procedures, which constitute a significant part of their daily experience with public institutions.



The literature suggests that good governance practices—particularly responsiveness, transparency, and accountability—are associated with the development of more positive attitudes toward public institutions and greater trust in them. Beshi and Kaur (2020) found that trust in local government is linked to good governance practices, including transparency, accountability, and responsiveness. Similarly, Yousaf et al. (2016) consider trust to be a key outcome of good governance.

Transparency emerges as one of the primary mechanisms through which governance practices influence citizens' relationships with local institutions. By providing clear information about decisions, procedures, and performance, transparency helps reduce the information gap between the institution and the citizen. However, the relationship between transparency and trust is not automatic or uniform across all contexts. Research indicates that the effect of transparency may depend on how citizens perceive the information provided and the institutional environment in which it is presented. Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer (2014) emphasize this conditionality, and more recent studies confirm that the transparency–trust relationship, while positive in some settings, remains contingent upon various institutional and contextual factors.

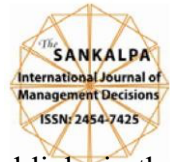
This dynamic is inseparable from the quality of municipal services, as services represent one of the most direct channels through which citizens evaluate the performance of local institutions. The literature demonstrates that public service performance can either build or erode trust. Better performance is associated with more positive perceptions of the institution, whereas poor performance may weaken trust (Christensen & Lægreid, 2005; Yang & Holzer, 2006). Recent evidence also highlights the interconnection between transparency, citizens' evaluations of services, and the broader relationship between transparency, trust, and satisfaction. This supports the need to examine these variables within an integrated framework rather than in isolation.

Nevertheless, previous studies have largely focused on binary relationships—governance and trust, transparency and trust, or service quality and citizen satisfaction. Some research has addressed the links among transparency, services, and trust, but testing a sequential pathway that combines local governance, transparency, service quality, and institutional trust within a single model remains uncommon, especially in the Algerian municipal context. This gap becomes more significant when local governance is understood as a multidimensional construct that encompasses institutional responsiveness to citizens' concerns, as well as the clarity and consistency of administrative procedures.

To address this gap, the present study proposes a sequential mediation model to examine whether the relationship between local governance and institutional trust can be transmitted through two interconnected stages: first, transparency, and then municipal service quality. This model moves beyond testing direct associations to explore a more complex explanatory mechanism represented by the following pathway:

Local Governance → Transparency → Municipal Service Quality → Institutional Trust

This issue is particularly relevant in the Algerian context, where municipalities represent a level of government that is both close to citizens and a space in which governance practices intersect with the disclosure of information and procedures, as well as with citizens' direct experiences of public services. Therefore, understanding the formation of institutional trust at the local level



requires viewing governance, transparency, and service quality as interconnected links in the citizen's overall experience with local institutions.

Accordingly, this study aims to test a sequential mediation model that explains the relationship between local governance and institutional trust among citizens through transparency and municipal service quality, using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in Algerian municipalities. The analysis is not limited to estimating direct pathways but extends to examining the sequential indirect effect of local governance on institutional trust via transparency and municipal service quality.

2. Theoretical Framework, Literature Review, and Hypotheses

2.1. Local Governance and Transparency

Transparency is regarded as one of the key institutional mechanisms associated with local governance, as it enhances the openness of public institutions and the availability of information concerning their decisions, procedures, and performance. Transparency goes beyond the mere dissemination of information; it also helps citizens understand how institutions function, monitor their performance, and form clearer judgments about them. The literature highlights transparency, accountability, and responsiveness as foundational practices in public governance and in the relationship between citizens and local institutions (Farazmand, 2004, 2012). Beshi and Kaur (2020) demonstrated the importance of these practices in shaping citizens' attitudes toward local government and their trust in it.

This relationship becomes particularly significant when local governance is understood as a multidimensional construct. In the final model of this study, local governance is represented by two dimensions: responsiveness governance and procedural governance. These dimensions reflect the capacity of local institutions to respond to citizens' concerns, as well as the clarity, consistency, regularity, and comprehensibility of their procedures. This conceptualization aligns with the literature that links good governance practices to citizens' evaluations of public institutions. Yousaf et al. (2016) confirmed that good governance is associated with trust in government and the legitimacy of the administrative and political system.

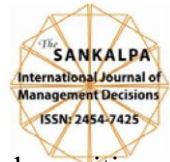
However, it would be premature to assume that the effect of transparency on citizens' evaluations of institutions is automatic or uniform across all contexts. Grimmellikhuijsen and Meijer (2014) showed that the effect of transparency on perceived trust in government institutions can be influenced by citizens' characteristics and the evaluation context. This evidence underscores the importance of viewing transparency as an institutional perception shaped by how citizens receive government information and procedures.

Accordingly, the study hypothesizes that more responsive and organized local governance practices are associated with higher levels of perceived transparency among citizens in municipalities.

H1: Local governance has a positive and statistically significant effect on transparency among citizens in Algerian municipalities.

2.2. Transparency and Municipal Service Quality

The importance of transparency in local administration extends beyond the provision of information; it also helps citizens understand procedures, service requirements, and how



services are delivered. This issue is particularly critical at the municipal level, where citizens interact directly and frequently with local administration through daily services and procedures. The literature indicates a clear interconnection between the transparency of public institutions and citizens' evaluations of their performance and services. Kaiser and Boadu (2026) found that transparency in local government is associated with citizen satisfaction. Similarly, the literature on municipal services indicates that citizens' evaluations of service quality represent an important indicator of local institutional performance.

From a theoretical perspective, perceived transparency can facilitate the evaluation of service quality by making information related to procedures, requirements, and standards clearer and more usable. When citizens have clearer information about the steps for obtaining a service, as well as the associated requirements and standards, they become better equipped to evaluate their service experience. This does not imply that transparency determines the actual quality of services; rather, the study examines whether higher perceived transparency is associated with higher service quality as perceived by citizens.

It should be noted that some recent evidence has tested the relationship in the opposite direction. Sadiq et al. (2026) found that the quality of electronic government services is positively associated with perceived transparency, and that transparency plays a mediating role in the relationship between service quality and trust. This study thus confirms the interconnection among the three concepts, but it does not provide direct evidence for the direction of the relationship assumed in the current study. This gap gives the testing of the transparency → municipal service quality pathway empirical significance in the Algerian municipal context.

Accordingly, the second hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Transparency has a positive and statistically significant effect on municipal service quality among citizens in Algerian municipalities.

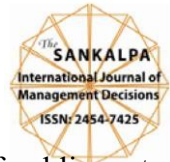
2.3. Municipal Service Quality and Institutional Trust

Municipal service quality represents one of the clearest manifestations of local institutional performance for citizens, as it is associated with a direct experience of service efficiency, responsiveness, and appropriateness to needs. Consequently, citizens' evaluation of service quality may extend to their evaluation of the institution providing it.

This finding is reinforced by the literature indicating that citizens' trust in government administrators is shaped by two main dimensions: competence and trustworthiness. The more citizens perceive that administrators possess the necessary skills to perform their duties and act with integrity and credibility, the greater their trust in the institution (Houston & Harding, 2014).

The literature strongly supports this association. Hirani and Chandio (2024) found that the quality of municipal service delivery is associated with citizen satisfaction, and that poor service delivery or mismanagement represents an important source of dissatisfaction. The literature also indicates that citizens use municipal service performance to evaluate the performance of local institutions and their relationship with them.

Public service performance is also linked to trust in government institutions. Christensen and Læg Reid (2005) addressed the importance of service satisfaction in explaining trust in



government, while Yang and Holzer (2006) indicate that citizens' evaluations of public sector performance represent one of the important pathways for understanding their attitudes toward government. Thus, citizens' experience with institutional performance and services can contribute to shaping their evaluation of its competence and reliability.

The importance of this relationship intensifies in the municipal context due to the frequency of citizens' interactions with municipalities to obtain services that affect their daily lives. Accordingly, the study hypothesizes that higher perceived municipal service quality is associated with higher levels of institutional trust among citizens.

H3: Municipal service quality has a positive and statistically significant effect on institutional trust among citizens in Algerian municipalities.

2.4. Sequential Mediation of Transparency and Municipal Service Quality

The study posits that the relationship between local governance and institutional trust is not limited to a direct association. Rather, it can be better understood through interconnected institutional and service mechanisms. Accordingly, the model proposes that local governance is first associated with transparency, which in turn is associated with municipal service quality, before service quality is associated with institutional trust.

This logic is consistent with the literature that has addressed, separately or partially, the links between governance and transparency, and between service performance and citizens' attitudes toward institutions. Beshi and Kaur (2020) highlighted the importance of governance practices in citizens' relationship with local government, while the public service literature links evaluations of service performance to citizens' attitudes toward institutions (Christensen & Lægreid, 2005; Yang & Holzer, 2006). Sadiq et al. (2026) also provide evidence of the interconnection between service quality, transparency, and trust, although the direction of the pathway in their study differs from the current model.

Building on this, the study moves from testing binary relationships to examining a sequential explanatory pathway:

Local Governance → Transparency → Municipal Service Quality → Institutional Trust

The significance of this test lies in determining whether the relationship between local governance and institutional trust can be transmitted through two interconnected mediating stages: first transparency, followed by municipal service quality. This pathway does not imply definitive empirical proof of causality, particularly given the cross-sectional design of the study. Rather, it tests the extent to which the data are consistent with the proposed theoretical mechanism.

H4: Transparency and municipal service quality sequentially mediate the relationship between local governance and institutional trust among citizens in Algerian municipalities.

2.5. Conceptual Framework of the Study

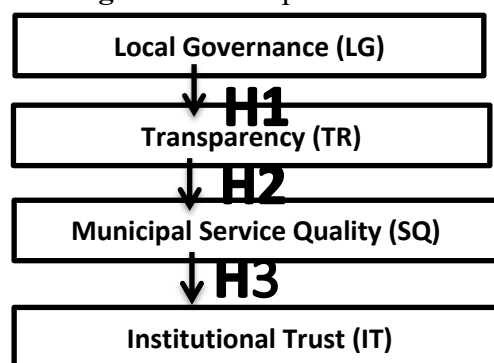
Building upon the theoretical framework and previous literature, the study proposes a conceptual model that explains the formation of institutional trust among citizens through an interconnected chain of institutional and service mechanisms. This chain begins with local governance, passes through transparency, then municipal service quality, and culminates in institutional trust.

In the adopted model, Local Governance is represented as a second-order latent construct comprising two first-order dimensions: Responsiveness Governance and Procedural Governance. Transparency, Municipal Service Quality, and Institutional Trust are represented as first-order latent constructs. Responsiveness Governance is represented by items LG6–LG9, while Procedural Governance is represented by items LG10 and LG12–LG15. Transparency is measured through TR1–TR5, Municipal Service Quality through SQ1–SQ6, and Institutional Trust through IT1–IT6. This representation is consistent with the final model that includes the latent variable of local governance and its responsiveness and procedural dimensions.

The model posits a positive effect of local governance on transparency, such that more responsive and organized governance practices are expected to enhance the openness of local institutions and the clarity of information and procedures available to citizens. It also posits a positive effect of transparency on municipal service quality, by enhancing the clarity of procedures and information and citizens' ability to evaluate the services provided. In the final stage, municipal service quality is hypothesized to have a positive effect on institutional trust, as citizens' direct experience with services provides a tangible basis for evaluating the competence and reliability of local institutions.

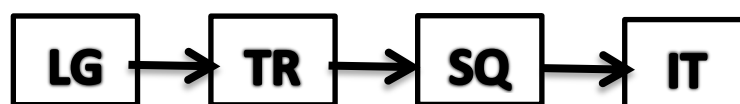
Based on the interconnection of these pathways, the model also tests the sequential indirect effect of local governance on institutional trust through transparency and municipal service quality. The structural model is represented by the following pathway:

Figure 1. Conceptual framework



The sequential indirect effect tested by hypothesis H4 is represented by the following pathway:

Figure 2. Sequential mediation model



3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Analytical Approach

The study adopted a quantitative design to test the hypothesized relationships among Local Governance, Transparency, Municipal Service Quality, and Institutional Trust. Building upon the conceptual model, the direct effects among these variables were tested, along with the sequential indirect effect of local governance on institutional trust through transparency and municipal service quality.



The study employed Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), which allows for the simultaneous testing of the measurement model and structural relationships within a single analytical framework. The analysis procedures included the use of IBM SPSS Statistics Version 21 for preliminary screenings, reliability tests, and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). This was followed by IBM SPSS AMOS Version 26 for Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), structural model testing, and the estimation of direct and indirect effects.

In the final model, Local Governance was treated as a second-order latent construct, reflected through two first-order dimensions: Responsiveness Governance and Procedural Governance. Meanwhile, Transparency, Municipal Service Quality, and Institutional Trust were treated as first-order latent constructs.

To examine indirect effects, the Bootstrap technique was employed with 5,000 resamples and a 95% confidence interval.

3.2. Population and Sample

The study population consisted of citizens residing in the municipalities of Jijel province. These citizens are direct users of municipal institutions and services and are therefore capable of evaluating local governance practices, transparency, service quality, and trust in local institutions.

Jijel province was selected as the study area due to the diversity of its municipalities and the varying local contexts within which citizens interact with municipal administration and services. Data were collected using an electronic questionnaire distributed to citizens. The questionnaire covered 26 out of 28 municipalities in the province, yielding 319 valid responses for statistical analysis.

3.3. Research Instrument

The study employed a structured questionnaire for data collection, developed based on the literature related to local governance, transparency, service quality, and trust in public institutions. The items were linguistically and conceptually adapted to fit the Algerian municipal context, while preserving the core meanings of the measured constructs.

The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section was dedicated to demographic data, while the second section measured the study variables using a Five-Point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

The initial measurement instrument included four latent variables: Local Governance (LG), Transparency (TR), Municipal Service Quality (SQ), and Institutional Trust (IT). Following the evaluation of the measurement model, Local Governance was established in the final model as a second-order construct comprising two first-order dimensions: Responsiveness Governance and Procedural Governance. The first dimension includes items LG6–LG9, while the second dimension includes items LG10 and LG12–LG15. AMOS model outputs confirm the presence of these indicators in the final model, including LG14 and LG15.

Thus, the number of local governance items retained in the final model was 9 items, while items LG1–LG5 and LG11 were excluded. For Transparency, Municipal Service Quality, and Institutional Trust, all items were retained: 5 items for Transparency (TR1–TR5), 6 items for Municipal Service Quality (SQ1–SQ6), and 6 items for Institutional Trust (IT1–IT6). This

structure is consistent with the reliability outputs, showing four items for Responsiveness Governance and five for Procedural Governance, alongside the three other measures. Accordingly, the total number of items included in the final measurement model was 26 items.

Table 1. Final Measurement Model Specification

Table 1 presents the specifications of the final measurement model. Local Governance is represented as a second-order latent construct comprising Responsiveness Governance and Procedural Governance, while Transparency, Municipal Service Quality, and Institutional Trust are represented as first-order latent constructs.

Table 2. Sources and Adaptation of Measurement Scales

Latent Variable		Dimension / Code in Final Model		Number of Items
Local Governance		Responsiveness Governance: LG6–LG9		4
		Procedural Governance: LG10, LG12–LG15		5
Transparency		TR1–TR5		5
Municipal Service Quality		SQ1–SQ6		6
Institutional Trust		IT1–IT6		6
Total		—		26

Latent Variable	Dimensions / Codes in Final Model	Number of Items	Literature Sources	Basis of Adaptation
Local Governance	Responsiveness Governance: LG6–LG9; Procedural Governance: LG10, LG12–LG15	9	Yousaf et al. (2016); Beshi & Kaur (2020); OECD (2024)	Adaptation of responsiveness and procedural clarity indicators to fit the Algerian municipal context
Transparency	TR1–TR5	5	Grimmelikhuijsen (2010); Beshi & Kaur (2020); OECD (2024)	Adaptation of information availability and decision/procedure clarity indicators to fit the municipal context
Municipal Service Quality	SQ1–SQ6	6	Živković et al. (2019); Hirani & Chandio (2024); Shahzada et al. (2024)	Adaptation of service quality evaluation and citizen perception indicators for local service performance
Institutional Trust	IT1–IT6	6	OECD (2024); Grimmelikhuijsen et al. (2013); Beshi & Kaur (2020)	Adaptation of public institution trust indicators to measure citizen trust in local institutions

3.4. Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected using an electronic questionnaire designed via Google Forms and distributed through social media channels relevant to the local community. This approach aimed to reach citizens from various municipalities of Jijel province. The data collection process yielded 319 valid responses distributed across 26 out of 28 municipalities in the province.

In the first stage, data were transferred to IBM SPSS Statistics 21 for preliminary screenings, reliability tests, and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). In the second stage, IBM SPSS AMOS 26 was used to conduct Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), including the estimation of direct and indirect effects. The Bootstrap technique was also employed to test indirect effects, based on 5,000 resamples and 95% confidence intervals using the Percentile method.

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3.5. Data Screening and Measurement Quality

In the first stage, the dataset underwent a series of data screening procedures to verify the completeness and integrity of responses and their suitability for subsequent statistical analyses. The number of valid responses for analysis was 319, with no missing values recorded in the study items. This indicates a complete dataset with no need for missing data treatment procedures.

The distributional characteristics of the study items were also examined using Skewness and Kurtosis indices. Skewness values ranged from -1.149 to 0.590 , while Kurtosis values ranged from -1.231 to 0.719 . These values indicate no severe deviations from normality in the study items, supporting the suitability of the data for Maximum Likelihood (ML) estimation within the Structural Equation Modeling framework.

Table 3. Normality Assessment Results

Indicator	Minimum Item Value	Maximum Item Value	Result
Skewness	-1.149	0.590	Follows normal distribution
Kurtosis	-1.231	0.719	Follows normal distribution

In addition to distributional examination, the potential presence of Common Method Bias (CMB) was assessed using Harman's Single-Factor Test. The test was conducted through Principal Component Analysis (PCA) on all 26 items included in the model, without rotation (Unrotated Solution). The results showed that the first component had an Eigenvalue of 12.322, explaining 47.243% of the total variance. Since this percentage remained below the recommended threshold of 50%, this initially indicates the absence of a single dominant factor explaining the majority of the common variance. However, this result should be interpreted as an initial exploratory check, which prompted the study to subsequently adopt advanced confirmatory methods (such as the ULMF approach) to ensure accurate isolation of bias (Table 4).

Table 4. Harman's Single-Factor Test Results

Indicator	Value
Number of Items	26
Sample Size	319
Extraction Method	Principal Component Analysis (PCA)
Rotation	None (Unrotated)
First Component Eigenvalue	12.322
Variance Explained by First Component	47.243%
Judgment Criterion	< 50%
Result	No dominant single factor

Subsequently, the internal consistency of the study measures was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha and Corrected Item–Total Correlation coefficients. The results showed excellent levels of internal consistency exceeding the academic threshold (0.70). The overall Alpha value for the Local Governance scale was 0.874, with detailed values of 0.838 for the Responsiveness Governance dimension (RG) and 0.833 for the Procedural Governance dimension (PG). Reliability values for the other dimensions were 0.858 for Transparency, 0.864 for Municipal Service Quality, and 0.889 for Institutional Trust.

The Corrected Item–Total Correlation coefficients for Local Governance ranged between 0.288 and 0.671, between 0.600 and 0.750 for Transparency, between 0.572 and 0.733 for Municipal Service Quality, and between 0.616 and 0.774 for Institutional Trust. In the initial version of the Local Governance scale, item LG11 recorded the lowest Corrected Item–Total Correlation at 0.288. Based on these preliminary indicators, this item was referred to the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) stage using AMOS, where subsequent confirmatory analysis and theoretical considerations led to its final removal to improve model fit and ensure the stability of the study's factorial structure.

Table 5. Reliability Analysis Results

Variable	Initial Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Lowest Corrected Correlation	Highest Corrected Correlation
Local Governance	15	0.874	0.288	0.671
Transparency	5	0.858	0.600	0.750
Municipal Service Quality	6	0.864	0.572	0.733
Institutional Trust	6	0.889	0.616	0.774

To examine the initial factorial structure of the measurement instrument, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation. The data adequacy tests for factor analysis showed a high Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) value of 0.947, while Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 5593.865$, $df = 496$, $p < 0.001$). These results indicate sufficient intercorrelations among variables and the suitability of the correlation matrix for factor analysis.

The analysis also revealed the extraction of six factors, explaining 62.350% of the total variance. This result indicates a multidimensional factorial structure in the initial data. The EFA results were used as an initial exploratory stage, while the final structure of the latent constructs was identified and verified in the CFA stage according to the theoretical model adopted in the study.

Table 6. Exploratory Factor Analysis Results

Indicator	Value
KMO	0.947
Bartlett's χ^2	5593.865
Df	496
P	< 0.001
Number of Factors Extracted	6
Total Variance Explained	62.350%

Based on the results of data screening, reliability testing, common method bias assessment, and exploratory factor analysis, it was found that the dataset possesses an appropriate degree of completeness, internal consistency, and suitability for factor analysis. Accordingly, the analysis proceeded sequentially to Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) of the measurement model, followed by the evaluation of the structural model and testing of the hypothesized relationships among variables, consistent with the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) methodology adopted in the study.

3.6. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Following the completion of the Exploratory Factor Analysis, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted using IBM SPSS AMOS Version 26. The primary purpose of this stage was to assess the fit of the measurement model to the data and to evaluate the reliability and validity of the latent constructs prior to testing the structural model.

The results of the final measurement model indicated an acceptable to good level of fit after a limited modification based on Modification Indices. This modification was restricted to allowing correlated measurement errors between TR1 and TR2, based on the conceptual convergence between the two items. Importantly, this adjustment did not introduce any substantive change to the theoretical structure of the model.

3.6.1. Measurement Model Fit

The fit of the measurement model was evaluated using a set of absolute, incremental, and parsimony fit indices, along with the approximation error index. The final model yielded a χ^2 value of 518.686 with $df = 290$, and a χ^2/df ratio of 1.789, indicating a good level of fit. AMOS outputs confirm these values for the final model.

The incremental fit indices were IFI = 0.952, TLI = 0.946, and CFI = 0.952, while NFI = 0.898 and RFI = 0.886. These results indicate that the key incremental fit indices exceeded the 0.90 threshold, while NFI and RFI fell slightly below it. Considering the overall pattern of indices—particularly CFI, TLI, and IFI—the model provides an acceptable level of fit, with this

limitation explicitly noted. This is consistent with the methodological notes recorded in the reservations file.

The RMSEA value was 0.050, with a 90% confidence interval ranging from 0.043 to 0.057. The PCLOSE value was 0.510, supporting the low approximation error and the model's fit to the data.

Table 7. Measurement Model Fit Indices

Indicator	Value
χ^2	518.686
Df	290
χ^2/df	1.789
NFI	0.898
RFI	0.886
IFI	0.952
TLI	0.946
CFI	0.952
RMSEA	0.050
90% CI for RMSEA	0.043–0.057
PCLOSE	0.510

Accordingly, the fit indices collectively indicate that the final measurement model is acceptable to good, with strong performance on IFI, TLI, and CFI, and a low RMSEA. This is balanced against a limited reservation regarding NFI and RFI, which remained slightly below 0.90. Thus, the fit is described as acceptable and generally good, rather than perfect or excellent.

Based on these results, the study proceeded to evaluate the convergent validity, composite reliability, and discriminant validity of the latent constructs.

3.6.2. Convergent Validity and Composite Reliability

Convergent validity and composite reliability of the latent constructs were assessed using Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), along with Cronbach's Alpha calculated during the internal consistency examination stage. CR values of 0.70 or above, and AVE values of 0.50 or above, are considered supportive indicators of composite reliability and convergent validity.

The results showed that the latent constructs in the final measurement model achieved appropriate levels of reliability and convergent validity, as presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Convergent Validity and Composite Reliability Results

Latent Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Institutional Trust	0.889	0.891	0.578
Service Quality	0.864	0.860	0.506
Transparency	0.858	0.842	0.518
Responsiveness Governance	0.838	0.841	0.570
Procedural Governance	0.833	0.836	0.507

CR values ranged between 0.836 and 0.891, while AVE values ranged between 0.506 and 0.578. Thus, all CR and AVE values exceeded the established reference thresholds, supporting the composite reliability and convergent validity of the latent constructs. These results are consistent with the internal consistency levels of the final constructs, which showed relatively high Alpha coefficients: 0.838 for Responsiveness Governance, 0.833 for Procedural Governance, 0.858 for Transparency, 0.864 for Service Quality, and 0.889 for Institutional Trust. SPSS data confirm these values for the final constructs.

It is worth noting that the AVE value for Municipal Service Quality was 0.506, which is close to the reference minimum but still slightly above it. This supports the retention of this construct, although this proximity should be taken into consideration when interpreting its results.

3.6.3. Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). The Fornell–Larcker criterion compares the square root of the AVE for each construct with its correlation coefficients with other constructs, while HTMT provides an additional, more sensitive test for empirical overlap between constructs.

Given the hierarchical structure of local governance in the final model, discriminant validity was evaluated at the level of the constructs that emerged as distinct factors in the measurement model. Responsiveness Governance and Procedural Governance were treated as first-order dimensions.

First: Fornell–Larcker Criterion

Table 9. Discriminant Validity Based on the Fornell–Larcker Criterion

Construct	Institutional Trust	Service Quality	Transparency	Responsiveness Governance	Procedural Governance
Institutional Trust	0.760	0.871***	0.813***	0.756***	0.843***
Service Quality	0.871***	0.711	0.807***	0.757***	0.796***
Transparency	0.813***	0.807***	0.720	0.719***	0.825***
Responsiveness Governance	0.756***	0.757***	0.719***	0.755	0.785***
Procedural Governance	0.843***	0.796***	0.825***	0.785***	0.712

Note: Values on the diagonal represent the square root of the AVE, while off-diagonal values represent correlation coefficients between constructs. *** indicates statistical significance at the 0.001 level.

The results of the Fornell–Larcker criterion reveal a partial reservation regarding discriminant validity, as some correlation coefficients exceed the square root of the AVE for certain constructs. This is most evident in the relationship between Institutional Trust and Service Quality, where the correlation reached 0.871, compared to 0.760 and 0.711 on the diagonal. High relationships are also observed between some other constructs, particularly Institutional Trust and Procedural Governance.

Accordingly, it is not advisable to describe discriminant validity as fully achieved based solely on the Fornell–Larcker criterion. Therefore, HTMT was used as an additional test.

Second: HTMT Test

Table 10. HTMT Ratios for Discriminant Validity

Relationship Between Constructs	HTMT
Institutional Trust – Service Quality	0.860
Institutional Trust – Transparency	0.793
Institutional Trust – Responsiveness Governance	0.768
Institutional Trust – Procedural Governance	0.846
Service Quality – Transparency	0.791
Service Quality – Responsiveness Governance	0.764
Service Quality – Procedural Governance	0.799
Transparency – Responsiveness Governance	0.697
Transparency – Procedural Governance	0.804
Responsiveness Governance – Procedural Governance	0.815

The HTMT results show that most values fall below the conservative threshold of 0.85. However, the HTMT value between Institutional Trust and Service Quality reached 0.860, slightly exceeding this threshold but remaining below 0.90. Diagnostic outputs confirm that this relationship represents the main reservation regarding discriminant validity, with no critical HTMT relationships exceeding 0.90.

The HTMT value between Institutional Trust and Procedural Governance was 0.846, which falls slightly below the 0.85 threshold and therefore is not considered an exceedance. Other values, such as Transparency–Procedural Governance (0.804) and Responsiveness Governance–Procedural Governance (0.815), indicate relative empirical overlap without reaching the more conservative level.

Based on these overall results, discriminant validity is partially supported but not perfectly achieved. The primary reservation concerns the overlap between Municipal Service Quality and Institutional Trust, which warrants caution when interpreting the relationships between these two constructs and the subsequent indirect effects. However, this result alone does not provide sufficient grounds for excluding either construct, particularly given the theoretical distinction between them and their achievement of appropriate levels of reliability and convergent validity.

Accordingly, the final measurement model is adopted as acceptable in terms of fit, reliability, and convergent validity, with a specific reservation regarding discriminant validity, particularly between Municipal Service Quality and Institutional Trust. This reservation will be taken into account when interpreting the results of the structural model and the subsequent mediation tests.

4. Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

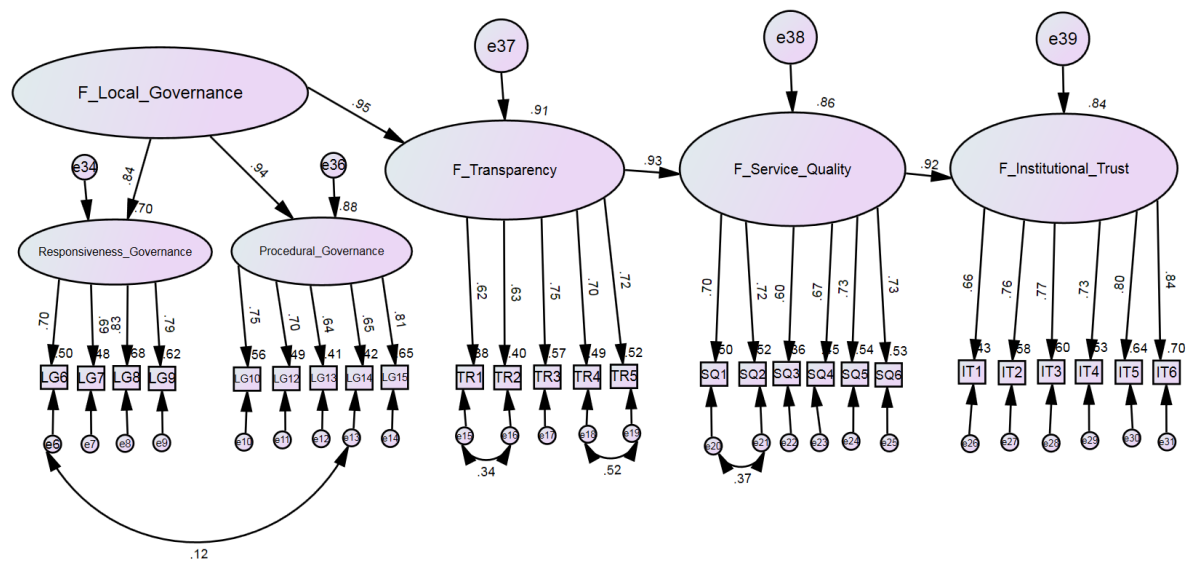
Following the verification of the measurement model properties, the study proceeded to test the structural model using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). This stage aimed to examine

the hypothesized pathways between local governance, transparency, municipal service quality, and institutional trust, along with testing the sequential indirect effect.

Model coefficients were estimated using the Maximum Likelihood (ML) method in IBM SPSS AMOS Version 26. Hypothesis testing was based on the direction, magnitude, and statistical significance of the path coefficients. The Bootstrap technique was also employed to evaluate indirect effects, based on 5,000 resamples and 95% confidence intervals. The AMOS output confirms that 5,000 usable Bootstrap samples were obtained.

4.1. Proposed Structural Model

Figure 3. Final Structural Model of the Study



Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the analysis results using AMOS software (Version 26).

Figure (3) presents the final structural model used to test the study's hypotheses, based on the sequential theoretical pathway:

Local Governance → Transparency → Municipal Service Quality → Institutional Trust

The model includes three main direct pathways:

- **LG → TR**
- **TR → SQ**
- **SQ → IT**

In addition to the sequential indirect effect:

LG → TR → SQ → IT

Thus, the model tests three hypotheses for direct effects (H1–H3) and one hypothesis for the sequential indirect effect (H4).

In the final structural model, Local Governance is represented as a second-order latent construct, while Transparency, Municipal Service Quality, and Institutional Trust are represented as first-order latent constructs. AMOS outputs show the pathway from F_Local_Governance to F_Transparency as the structural path corresponding to the first

hypothesis, as well as the relationship between F_Transparency and F_Service_Quality within the structural model.

The Fornell–Larcker and HTMT results presented in the previous section were used to evaluate the measurement model properties, particularly discriminant validity among latent constructs. These tests were not used for testing structural hypotheses. Accordingly, these tests do not represent an alternative structural model, nor do they alter the theoretically specified pathway. Therefore, hypothesis testing and the estimation of direct and indirect effects are limited to the structural model specified based on the theoretical framework. The results are interpreted in light of the cross-sectional nature of the data, and the estimated relationships are not treated as conclusive causal evidence.

4.2. Structural Model Fit

After specifying the structural model and testing the hypothesized relationships among latent constructs, the fit of the final model to the empirical data was evaluated using a set of Model Fit Indices. This aimed to verify the consistency of the hypothesized model with the observed data prior to interpreting path coefficients and testing hypotheses.

AMOS outputs showed a chi-square value of $\chi^2 = 518.686$ with $df = 290$, and a χ^2/df ratio of 1.789. The incremental fit indices were IFI = 0.952, TLI = 0.946, and CFI = 0.952, while NFI = 0.898 and RFI = 0.886, falling slightly below the common reference value of 0.90.

Regarding the approximation error index, the RMSEA value was 0.050, with a 90% confidence interval ranging from 0.043 to 0.057, indicating a low approximation error. The PCLOSE value was 0.510.

Table 11. Structural Model Fit Indices

Indicator	Value
χ^2	518.686
df	290
χ^2/df	1.789
NFI	0.898
RFI	0.886
IFI	0.952
TLI	0.946
CFI	0.952
RMSEA	0.050
90% CI for RMSEA	0.043–0.057
PCLOSE	0.510

Based on the overall fit indices, the final structural model can be described as having acceptable to good fit to the data. This evaluation is particularly supported by the low χ^2/df ratio of 1.789, the high levels of IFI, TLI, and CFI, along with the RMSEA value of 0.050 and its confidence interval ranging from 0.043 to 0.057. Conversely, a limited reservation should be maintained when describing the fit, given that NFI and RFI fell slightly below 0.90. Therefore, describing the model as "acceptable to good" is more accurate than describing it as having "excellent fit."

Fit indices are not used by themselves to determine the acceptance or rejection of hypotheses. Rather, the testing of direct hypotheses is based on path coefficients and their statistical significance, while the sequential indirect effect is evaluated using Bootstrap results and bias-corrected confidence intervals.

4.3. Direct Hypotheses Testing

Following the verification of the structural model fit, the direct hypotheses were tested through the estimated structural path coefficients using Maximum Likelihood Estimation (ML). Path evaluation was based on the Estimate, Standard Error (S.E.), Critical Ratio (C.R.), and statistical significance level.

Table 12. Structural Regression Weights

Hypothesis	Path	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	p-value	Result
H1	Local Governance → Transparency	0.863	0.096	9.002	***	Supported
H2	Transparency → Municipal Service Quality	1.207	0.121	9.980	***	Supported
H3	Municipal Service Quality → Institutional Trust	0.846	0.080	10.576	***	Supported

*The (***) notation in AMOS outputs indicates statistical significance at the $p < 0.001$ level.*

The results showed that all three direct paths in the structural model were positive and statistically significant. The estimate for the path from Local Governance to Transparency was Estimate = 0.863, with a standard error of 0.096 and a critical ratio of 9.002, supporting hypothesis H1.

The path from Transparency to Municipal Service Quality also showed a positive and statistically significant effect, with Estimate = 1.207, S.E. = 0.121, and C.R. = 9.980, supporting hypothesis H2.

Similarly, the path from Municipal Service Quality to Institutional Trust showed a positive and statistically significant effect, with Estimate = 0.846, S.E. = 0.080, and C.R. = 10.576, supporting hypothesis H3.

These results indicate that the three direct paths are consistent with the theoretical sequence proposed in the study, whereby Local Governance is associated with Transparency, Transparency is associated with Municipal Service Quality, and Municipal Service Quality is associated with Institutional Trust.

4.4. Sequential Mediation Analysis

To test the sequential indirect effect, the study employed the Bootstrap technique in IBM SPSS AMOS Version 26, based on 5,000 usable resamples. AMOS outputs also show that the confidence intervals used in this section are 95% intervals according to the Bias-Corrected Percentile method.

Given that hypothesis H4 tests a pre-specified sequential indirect pathway, the test focuses on the path:

Local Governance → Transparency → Municipal Service Quality → Institutional Trust

The indirect effect is considered statistically significant when the Bootstrap confidence interval does not include zero.

Table 13. Bootstrap Indirect Effects and 95% Bias-Corrected Confidence Intervals

Indirect Path	Indirect Effect	95% CI Lower (BC)	95% CI Upper (BC)	Result
Local Governance → Transparency → Municipal Service Quality	1.041	0.853	1.279	Statistically Significant
Transparency → Municipal Service Quality → Institutional Trust	1.022	0.814	1.308	Statistically Significant
Local Governance → Transparency → Municipal Service Quality → Institutional Trust	0.881	0.691	1.115	Statistically Significant; H4 Supported

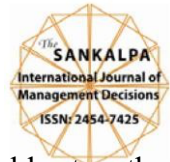
The results shown in the table indicate that the unstandardized indirect effect from Local Governance to Municipal Service Quality through Transparency was 1.041, with a 95% bias-corrected confidence interval ranging from 0.853 to 1.279 (not including zero). The indirect effect from Transparency to Institutional Trust through Service Quality was 1.022, with a confidence interval from 0.814 to 1.308.

The full sequential indirect effect (H4) was 0.881, with a confidence interval from 0.691 to 1.115. Since the interval does not include zero, the effect is considered statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level, providing empirical support for the fourth hypothesis.

Accordingly, the Bootstrap results indicate that the data are consistent with the theoretical pathway suggesting that enhanced local governance is associated with higher levels of transparency. This, in turn, is associated with improved municipal service quality, ultimately reflecting positively on the enhancement of institutional trust among citizens in an integrated sequential framework.

5. Discussion

This study aimed to deconstruct and interpret the nature of the relationship between local governance and institutional trust among citizens by testing the sequential mediating role of both transparency and municipal service quality in the context of Algerian municipal councils. Building upon the proposed theoretical model, the study focused on examining three direct pathways. The first links local governance to transparency, the second traces the effect of transparency on municipal service quality, and the third measures the pathway from municipal service quality toward building institutional trust. The analysis culminated in the most



important test: the integrated sequential indirect pathway that links all four variables together as a chain of sequential influence.

The overall results provided strong empirical support for this theoretical conceptualization. The three structural path coefficients emerged as positive and statistically significant, leading to the acceptance of the first, second, and third direct hypotheses (H1, H2, H3). The Bootstrap analysis also provided robust statistical evidence supporting the validity of the sequential mediation pathway hypothesized in the fourth hypothesis (H4).

These findings acquire particular interpretive significance in the context of local administration. Local governance was not treated in the final model as a simplistic unidimensional construct; rather, it was constructed as a second-order latent construct materialized through two first-order dimensions: Responsiveness Governance and Procedural Governance. Meanwhile, Transparency, Municipal Service Quality, and Institutional Trust were represented as independent first-order latent constructs. AMOS structural modeling outputs confirm this strategic sequence through the measured close association between the general governance variable and its two executive dimensions, along with the direct and indirect pathways emanating from it toward transparency, quality, and ultimately toward the final destination of institutional trust.

This advanced statistical structure was fully consistent with the descriptive indicators extracted from the study sample of 319 valid cases. The arithmetic means of the study variables recorded convergent and logical levels: 3.083 for Transparency, 3.126 for Institutional Trust, and 3.098 for Municipal Service Quality. The local governance dimensions recorded 2.680 for Responsiveness Governance and 2.739 for Procedural Governance. The reliability of these conclusions is further reinforced by the sound distributional properties of the data, as the skewness and kurtosis values for all items fell within the safe standard ranges for normal distribution. This lends the discussion findings a solid scientific foundation and generalizability within the targeted administrative environment.

5.1. The Effect of Local Governance on Transparency

The results supported hypothesis H1, indicating a positive and statistically significant relationship between local governance and transparency. In the structural regression model, the unstandardized estimate for the path from local governance to transparency was 0.863, with a standard error of 0.096 and a critical ratio of 9.002, with statistical significance at $p < 0.001$. The standardized path coefficient was 0.954, indicating a very strong relationship between the two latent constructs in the final model.

This finding acquires particular interpretive significance given that local governance in the final model represents a second-order construct combining Responsiveness Governance and Procedural Governance. The standardized loading for Responsiveness Governance on the higher-order construct was 0.839, compared to 0.936 for Procedural Governance. This indicates a strong contribution from both dimensions in representing local governance, with a notable superiority for Procedural Governance.

The positive relationship between local governance and transparency can be explained in light of the nature of governance as an institutional environment that organizes the municipality-citizen relationship. The more the local institution is characterized by higher levels of



responsiveness and procedural clarity, the more its operations, decisions, and procedures become understandable and monitorable by citizens. Transparency in this context does not merely mean increasing the volume of available information; it is also associated with the clarity of procedures, ease of understanding requirements, and the ability to track transactions and decisions relevant to citizens.

This finding aligns with the literature that views good governance as associated with institutional characteristics such as responsiveness, reliability, integrity, and clarity. The literature reviewed in this study shows that governance characteristics—particularly responsiveness, reliability, respect for justice, and integrity—can be associated with citizens' evaluations of public institutions and trust in them. The local governance literature also points to the importance of institutional performance and responsiveness to citizens' needs in shaping the relationship between citizens and local authority. In this context, Kim and Lee (2012) emphasize that strengthening e-participation mechanisms and transparency in local governments can contribute to raising levels of institutional trust, especially when these mechanisms provide citizens with the opportunity for direct interaction with their local institutions.

In the municipal context, this finding can be understood as indicating that transparency does not necessarily operate as a separate procedure from governance, but rather can be part of the institutional environment produced by governance practices. When procedures are clear and organized, and when the municipality responds to citizens' concerns, information related to services and decisions becomes more understandable and usable.

Nevertheless, this relationship should be interpreted with methodological caution. The statistical significance of the H1 pathway supports the theoretically hypothesized relationship between local governance and transparency, but it does not allow for conclusive causal inference, particularly given the study's reliance on cross-sectional data. Accordingly, the results provide strong empirical support for the hypothesized structural pathway in the model, while causal inference remains in need of longitudinal studies or experimental designs.

5.2. The Effect of Transparency on Municipal Service Quality

The results supported hypothesis H2, indicating a positive and statistically significant relationship between transparency and municipal service quality. In the structural regression model, the unstandardized estimate for the path from transparency to municipal service quality was 1.207, with a standard error of 0.121 and a critical ratio of 9.980, with statistical significance at $p < 0.001$. The standardized path coefficient was 0.927, indicating a very strong relationship between the two latent constructs in the final model.

This relationship can be explained through the role that transparency plays in reducing the ambiguity associated with obtaining public services. When information related to procedures, conditions, requirements, and the pathway for obtaining a service is clearer, citizens become more capable of understanding what is required of them and what they can expect from the local institution. Consequently, the clarity of information and procedures can make the service experience more understandable and evaluable.

This result is consistent with the literature on government service quality, particularly studies that emphasize that information accuracy, procedural clarity, system reliability, and



responsiveness represent important elements in shaping citizens' perceptions of service quality. The municipal services literature also indicates that citizens evaluate municipal performance through the services they directly experience.

In the municipal context, this finding can be understood as indicating that transparency does not necessarily operate as a separate procedure from services, but rather can be part of the environment in which service quality perceptions are formed. When procedures are clear and service information is available, citizens become more capable of evaluating the quality of the service they receive.

Nevertheless, this relationship should be interpreted with methodological caution. The statistical significance of the H2 pathway supports the theoretically hypothesized relationship between transparency and municipal service quality, but it does not allow for conclusive causal inference, particularly given the study's reliance on cross-sectional data. Accordingly, the results provide strong empirical support for the hypothesized structural pathway in the model, while causal inference remains in need of longitudinal studies or experimental designs.

5.3. The Effect of Municipal Service Quality on Institutional Trust

The results supported hypothesis H3, indicating a positive and statistically significant relationship between municipal service quality and institutional trust. The unstandardized estimate for the path from Service Quality to Institutional Trust was 0.846, with a standard error of 0.080 and a critical ratio of 10.576, with statistical significance at $p < 0.001$. The standardized path coefficient was 0.918, indicating the strength of the relationship between municipal service quality and institutional trust in the final model.

This finding demonstrates that citizens' evaluation of the local institution is not determined solely by rules and procedures, but is also influenced by the outcomes they directly experience through municipal services. Services represent one of the clearest points of contact between citizens and local institutions, and therefore service quality can become a practical signal of the municipality's ability to fulfill its commitments to citizens.

The municipal literature supports this interpretation. Studies have shown that citizens use their experience with local services to evaluate the performance of local institutions, and that municipal performance can be associated with citizens' attitudes toward councils and local institutions. Hirani and Chandio (2024) indicated that citizens' evaluations of service delivery quality represent an indicator of local council performance, and that poor service delivery or mismanagement is associated with more negative attitudes among citizens.

The literature on trust in government also highlights the importance of government performance and service quality in shaping citizens' evaluations of institutions. Sadiq et al. (2026), in the context of e-government, support the existence of a positive relationship between service quality and trust in government institutions. They demonstrate that service characteristics such as accuracy, reliability, and responsiveness can contribute to forming more positive perceptions toward the institution.

However, this finding requires particular caution due to the empirical overlap between municipal service quality and institutional trust. The Fornell–Larcker test showed that the correlation between the two constructs reached 0.871, while the square root of the AVE was 0.760 for institutional trust and 0.711 for municipal service quality. The HTMT value between



the two constructs was 0.860, slightly above the conservative threshold of 0.85, but remained below the more lenient threshold of 0.90.

This overlap does not mean that the two constructs are theoretically identical. Municipal service quality refers to citizens' evaluation of service characteristics and outcomes, while institutional trust represents a broader judgment about the local institution. However, the high empirical overlap suggests that citizens' experience with services may be one of the important channels through which they build their general judgment about the institution.

Accordingly, the support for H3 should be understood as evidence of the importance of service performance in forming institutional evaluation, while maintaining the theoretical distinction between service evaluation and trust in the institution.

5.4. Indirect Effects and Sequential Mediation

Sequential mediation represents the central explanatory contribution of the proposed model, as it moves the analysis from testing binary relationships to examining an interconnected institutional and service pathway. The analysis employed the Bootstrap technique in IBM SPSS AMOS, and the model outputs confirmed the availability of 5,000 usable Bootstrap samples, with no samples excluded due to a singular covariance matrix or failure to reach a solution.

The hypothesized sequential mediation pathway is based on:

Local Governance → Transparency → Municipal Service Quality → Institutional Trust

The model results indicate that all pathways comprising this sequence are positive and statistically significant: local governance is associated with transparency with a standardized coefficient $\beta = 0.954$, transparency is associated with municipal service quality with $\beta = 0.927$, and municipal service quality is associated with institutional trust with $\beta = 0.918$.

This structure indicates that the sequential indirect relationship is not merely a statistical association between the independent and dependent variables, but rather an interconnected outcome of a pathway consisting of multiple links. Local governance, as represented in the model, is associated with transparency; transparency is in turn associated with service quality; and service quality is associated with institutional trust.

From an interpretive perspective, this means that the effect of local governance on trust should not be understood as a direct and unexplained transmission, but rather as a pathway passing through two mediating mechanisms. Responsiveness and procedural clarity in governance can be associated with higher perceptions of transparency. Transparency can then contribute to making the citizen's service experience clearer and more evaluable. The quality of this experience is then associated with the general judgment about the local institution.

This result is consistent with the literature that views transparency as a mechanism that reduces uncertainty and helps citizens interpret the behavior of public institutions. Recent evidence also indicates that service quality can be associated with trust both directly and indirectly through transparency perceptions. Sadiq et al. (2026) found that e-government service quality positively affects trust, and that perceived transparency plays a mediating role in this relationship.

The current study differs from that model in the ordering of variables and the breadth of the pathway. It does not place service quality as the starting point, but rather begins with local governance, then moves to transparency, then to municipal service quality, and finally to institutional trust. Thus, the study presents a conceptualization more consistent with the



municipal level, where the process begins with the characteristics of the local institution and its management approach. Its effects then appear in the clarity of the relationship with citizens and the service experience, and finally in the general judgment about the institution.

The municipal service quality literature supports this interpretation from another angle. Studies indicate that citizens evaluate service quality through tangible characteristics such as reliability and responsiveness, and that the gap between expectations and perceived performance affects service evaluation and satisfaction. This makes service quality one of the most important interaction points through which citizens' daily experience can translate into a broader evaluation of the institution.

At the same time, the sequential mediation result should be interpreted with caution. The existence of a statistically significant indirect pathway does not, in itself, prove the existence of a temporal sequence or conclusive causal relationship between governance, transparency, service quality, and trust. The cross-sectional nature of the study makes the most appropriate interpretation that the data are consistent with the theoretically proposed sequential mediation pathway, not that they prove this sequence necessarily occurs in this order over time. This reservation is consistent with the methodological literature emphasizing that cross-sectional design allows for testing correlations and hypothesized statistical mechanisms, but does not provide a sufficient basis for establishing temporal causality definitively.

5.5. Theoretical and Practical Implications of the Findings

The results collectively offer a number of important theoretical and practical implications.

First, Theoretical Implications: The study confirms that local governance can be more analytically useful when viewed as a multidimensional institutional construct. The final model showed that Local Governance consists of Responsiveness Governance and Procedural Governance, with high standardized coefficients for both dimensions reaching 0.839 and 0.936 respectively. This reinforces the understanding that links the quality of local governance not only to what the municipality does, but also to how it responds to citizens and how it organizes its procedures.

The results also demonstrate that transparency does not merely represent a final output of governance, but rather performs an explanatory function in linking governance to citizens' service experience. The pathway from local governance to transparency, with a standardized coefficient of 0.954, confirms the strength of the relationship between transparency and the institutional structure of local governance in the final model.

Furthermore, the results indicate that municipal service quality represents an important channel in the formation of institutional trust among citizens. The standardized coefficient for the pathway from municipal service quality to institutional trust reached 0.918, reflecting the strength of the relationship between citizens' service experience and their overall evaluation of the institution. This result is consistent with the literature that views citizens as using local service performance as one of the practical indicators of local institutional performance.

Second, Practical Implications: The study offers an important applied contribution to Algerian municipalities. The results indicate that enhancing institutional trust should not be addressed through institutional communication or information disclosure alone, but rather through an interconnected chain of institutional practices. This begins with enhancing



municipal responsiveness to citizens and improving procedural clarity, then providing clearer, more accessible, and more usable information, and ultimately improving the quality of citizens' experience with municipal services.

In this regard, the literature on municipal service quality supports the importance of viewing services from the citizen's perspective, not merely from the institution's perspective. Živković et al. (2019) showed that the evaluation of municipal service quality can be based on citizens' perceptions, and that reliability and responsiveness represent important dimensions in service quality evaluation. Hirani and Chandio (2024) also demonstrated that poor service delivery or mismanagement is associated with lower citizen satisfaction, confirming the importance of service performance in shaping citizens' evaluations of local institutions.

Ochoa-Rico et al. (2024) indicate that there are substantial differences in the level of citizen satisfaction with public services between urban and rural areas, with satisfaction levels tending to be higher in rural areas when basic services are available. This reflects the importance of tailoring public policies according to the specificities of each spatial context.

This implication is consistent with the current study's results showing that service quality is not a marginal variable in the process of building institutional trust, but rather represents a fundamental link in the proposed structural pathway. Therefore, municipal policies most consistent with the current results are those that link local governance reform, transparency enhancement, and service quality improvement, rather than implementing these reforms in separate pathways.

Third, Methodological Reservations: Nevertheless, these implications should be interpreted within the limits of the data used. The study relied on citizens' evaluations at a single point in time, and the discriminant validity results indicate a relatively high overlap between some constructs, particularly institutional trust and municipal service quality. The HTMT value between them was 0.860, while the correlation coefficient according to the Fornell–Larcker criterion was 0.871. This warrants caution when interpreting the boundaries between service quality perceptions and the overall evaluation of the institution.

Accordingly, the fundamental value of the study lies not in establishing a conclusive causal relationship between local governance and institutional trust, but rather in presenting an integrated explanatory model that clarifies the hypothesized structural pathways linking local governance to transparency, transparency to municipal service quality, and service quality to institutional trust. The empirical results provide strong support for this theoretical model, while causal inference remains in need of longitudinal studies and cross-municipal comparisons to more robustly verify the stability of these relationships and their temporal ordering.

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to explain the relationship between local governance and institutional trust among citizens by testing the sequential mediating role of transparency and municipal service quality in the context of Algerian municipalities. Based on the final structural model, the results revealed positive and statistically significant relationships between local governance and transparency, between transparency and municipal service quality, and between municipal service quality and institutional trust. The model also showed that local governance represents a second-order latent construct comprising two dimensions: Responsiveness Governance and



Procedural Governance. Meanwhile, Transparency, Municipal Service Quality, and Institutional Trust were represented as first-order latent constructs.

The structural path coefficients confirm this direction. The unstandardized estimate for the path from local governance to transparency was 0.863, for the path from transparency to municipal service quality was 1.207, and for the path from municipal service quality to institutional trust was 0.846. All were statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. At the standardized level, the path coefficients were $\beta = 0.954$, $\beta = 0.927$, and $\beta = 0.918$ respectively, supporting the three direct hypotheses H1, H2, and H3.

The indirect effects analysis also showed that the sequential indirect effect of local governance on institutional trust through transparency and municipal service quality was 0.881 in its unstandardized form. Bootstrap analysis was conducted using 5,000 valid resamples, and AMOS outputs show Bias-Corrected Percentile Bootstrap confidence intervals for the indirect effects. For the sequential pathway, the 95% confidence interval ranged from 0.691 to 1.115, which does not include zero. Thus, the result provides support for hypothesis H4.

These combined results indicate that the relationship between local governance and institutional trust is not limited to a direct association between the two constructs. Rather, it can be understood through a sequential institutional and service pathway that begins with the characteristics of local governance, passes through transparency, then municipal service quality, and ends with institutional trust. Thus, the study provides an explanatory framework that links the characteristics of the local institution as perceived by citizens, with the clarity of information and procedures, then with their actual experience with municipal services, and the broader judgment they form about the local institution.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to bridging the local governance perspective and the public value perspective in explaining the formation of institutional trust at the local level. The results highlight that the importance of governance lies not only in the existence of administrative arrangements and practices, but also in how these arrangements are reflected in responsiveness to citizens and procedural clarity. Governance also matters for the environment in which transparency is formed, and subsequently for citizens' experience with public services. This approach aligns with the literature that views transparency, service performance, and trust as interconnected elements in citizens' evaluation of local governance and public institutions.

The findings also carry important practical implications for municipal governance. Since local governance in the final model consists of Responsiveness Governance and Procedural Governance, enhancing responsiveness to citizens' concerns and improving the clarity and consistency of procedures can form part of a broader approach to improving perceived transparency. Similarly, improving municipal service quality represents an important link in the pathway connecting the institutional environment to the overall evaluation of the institution and trust in it. Therefore, the results indicate the importance of treating governance, transparency, and service quality as interconnected domains, rather than as separate reforms.

At the same time, the results warrant a degree of caution in interpreting discriminant validity among some latent constructs. The Fornell–Larcker criterion showed a particularly high convergence between institutional trust and municipal service quality, with a correlation of 0.871 between them. The HTMT value between the two constructs was 0.860. This value



remains below the more lenient threshold of 0.90, but slightly exceeds the conservative threshold of 0.85. This makes the relationship between service quality and institutional trust the main reservation point in distinguishing between the constructs. Therefore, the relationship between them should be interpreted as a strong relationship between two theoretically distinct constructs, while acknowledging the relatively high empirical overlap between them.

The results should also be interpreted in light of the nature of the data and study design. The study relies on cross-sectional data, and therefore the estimated relationships and indirect effects support and are statistically consistent with the proposed theoretical pathway. However, they do not alone provide conclusive causal evidence or proof of actual temporal ordering among the variables. Accordingly, the more accurate conclusion is that the data provide empirical support for the theoretical model and the proposed sequential mediation pathway, while avoiding transforming these results into conclusive causal claims.

The primary contribution of the study lies in presenting and testing a unified model that links local governance, transparency, municipal service quality, and institutional trust within a single explanatory pathway. This contribution gains importance because the model does not merely test direct relationships. Rather, it demonstrates how the institutional relationship can be transmitted through two successive mechanisms: an institutional mechanism represented by transparency, and a service mechanism represented by municipal service quality, before reaching the level of institutional trust. The model results showed that this pathway receives statistical support through the sequential indirect effect.

Overall, the study results indicate that enhancing institutional trust at the local level should not be understood as the outcome of a single institutional dimension. Rather, it is associated with the interaction between governance practices, transparency, and the quality of citizens' experience with municipal services. Accordingly, improving local governance can benefit from an interconnected approach that combines enhancing responsiveness, improving procedural clarity, supporting transparency, and elevating service quality. In turn, these conclusions should remain constrained by the limits of the cross-sectional design and the reservations regarding empirical discrimination between some constructs. This makes future longitudinal studies and comparisons across different Algerian municipalities and provinces necessary to verify the stability of this pathway and its generalizability across broader local contexts.

7. Theoretical and Practical Contributions

7.1. Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the development of the literature on local governance and institutional trust by moving beyond a focus on the direct relationship between governance and trust. Instead, it tests a sequential explanatory pathway linking local governance, transparency, municipal service quality, and institutional trust among citizens:

Local Governance → Transparency → Municipal Service Quality → Institutional Trust

The main theoretical contribution of the study lies in presenting a model that explains the relationship between local governance and institutional trust through two interconnected mediating mechanisms: transparency and municipal service quality. Thus, institutional trust is not understood merely as a direct outcome of governance practices. Rather, it is situated within a pathway where the relationship is transmitted through the institutional environment



represented by transparency, then through citizens' experience with municipal services, ultimately reaching their evaluation of the local institution.

The study adds to this framework by representing Local Governance in the final model as a second-order latent construct, consisting of two first-order dimensions: Responsiveness Governance and Procedural Governance. This representation reflects the structure adopted by the final AMOS model, where Responsiveness Governance is represented by indicators LG6–LG9, while Procedural Governance is represented by indicators LG10, LG12, LG13, LG14, and LG15. The AMOS model confirms that Local Governance was used as a second-order latent construct within the structural model.

The study also provides an integrative framework combining Governance Theory and Public Value Theory. From the governance perspective, the quality of the relationship between the local institution and citizens is associated with characteristics such as responsiveness and procedural clarity. From the public value perspective, the focus is on the outcomes experienced by citizens and the value they perceive from institutional performance and public services. The combination of both perspectives helps explain the relationship between institutional practices, citizens' service experience, and trust in the local institution within a single framework.

Another contribution lies in providing empirical evidence from the Algerian municipal context on the integrated relationship between local governance, transparency, municipal service quality, and institutional trust using Structural Equation Modeling. This framework acquires particular importance because it tests the relationships among these constructs within a single model, rather than analyzing them as separate binary relationships.

From a methodological standpoint, the study combines measurement model evaluation, structural model testing, and the use of Bootstrap to examine indirect effects. The final model is also based on data from 319 cases, which is the sample size evident in the final AMOS model outputs.

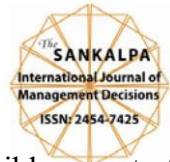
However, these contributions should be interpreted within the limits of the data nature and study design. The model provides empirical support for the relationships and the proposed theoretical pathway, but it does not transform the cross-sectional design into a causal design. Furthermore, the discriminant validity results warrant caution when interpreting the empirical independence among some constructs.

7.2. Practical Contributions

The study offers a number of practical implications for municipalities and actors in local administration.

First, the results indicate the importance of viewing local governance as an interconnected system, with particular attention to responsiveness to citizens and the clarity and organization of procedures. Accordingly, reform efforts can include developing clear mechanisms for receiving and following up on citizens' concerns, alongside improving the clarity and consistency of administrative procedures.

Second, transparency emerges as an institutional link connecting governance to citizens' service experience. Therefore, improving transparency should not be limited to increasing the volume of published information. It should also include the clarity of information related to procedures and services, as well as the ease of access and understanding.



Third, the results confirm the importance of municipal service quality as a tangible aspect of citizens' experience with the local institution. Therefore, improving service reliability, responsiveness, and accessibility represents an important area for improving citizens' evaluation of the institution.

Fourth, the sequential structure of the model indicates the importance of treating governance, transparency, and service quality within an interconnected framework. The final model outputs do not present these elements as entirely separate domains, but rather as parts of a single explanatory pathway that ends with institutional trust.

Finally, the study provides a framework for understanding institutional trust from the citizen's perspective. Trust is linked not only to the internal practices of the local institution, but also to what citizens experience in terms of responsiveness, clarity, transparency, and service quality.

8. Recommendations

In light of the study findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

First, Enhancing Responsiveness Governance and Procedural Governance

Municipalities should develop clear and organized mechanisms for receiving, following up, and responding to citizens' concerns and requests. This should be accompanied by improvements in the clarity, consistency, and comprehensibility of administrative procedures and their applicability.

Second, Enhancing Municipal Transparency

It is recommended to improve the availability of information related to procedures, services, decisions, and local programs. Particular attention should be given to the clarity of information, ease of access, and understanding, rather than merely increasing the volume of available information.

Third, Improving Municipal Service Quality

Municipalities should continuously work on improving the quality of services provided to citizens. This is particularly important in terms of reliability, responsiveness, ease of access, and appropriateness to beneficiaries' needs.

Fourth, Linking Governance Reform to Citizen Experience

Governance reforms should not be limited to internal administrative aspects. Rather, they should be clearly reflected in the citizen experience through improvements in responsiveness, procedural clarity, information availability, and service quality.

Fifth, Adopting an Integrated Approach to Local Reform

The theoretical structure of the model indicates the importance of treating governance, transparency, and service quality as interconnected elements. Accordingly, municipalities can design reform programs that combine improving institutional practices and enhancing citizen experience with public services.

Sixth, Developing Institutional and Human Capacities

It is recommended to enhance the capacities of municipal employees in the areas of citizen responsiveness, procedure management, transparency, service quality improvement, and institutional communication. This will help translate organizational reforms into actual practices.



Seventh, Adopting Periodic Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

Regular mechanisms should be developed to measure citizens' perceptions of governance, transparency, service quality, and institutional trust. The results of these measurements should be used to identify improvement areas and track the development of local performance.

Overall, these recommendations should be viewed as practical implications derived from the pathway tested by the model, rather than as conclusive causal conclusions.

9. Limitations of the Study

Despite the importance of the study findings, they should be interpreted in light of a number of methodological and contextual limitations.

First, Geographic Scope

The study was limited to the municipal context of Jijel province. Therefore, caution should be exercised when generalizing the results directly to all Algerian municipalities, given the potential differences among provinces and municipalities in resources, administrative capacities, and social and institutional conditions.

Second, Cross-Sectional Design

The study relied on cross-sectional data, which allows for testing the consistency of observed relationships with the theoretical model. However, it does not allow for establishing the temporal sequence of relationships or causality in its strict empirical sense. Therefore, the direct and indirect pathways should be interpreted as relationships consistent with the proposed model.

Third, Explanatory Model Limitations

The model focused on four main constructs: local governance, transparency, municipal service quality, and institutional trust. Institutional trust may be influenced by other factors not included in the model, leaving room for model expansion in future studies.

Fourth, Reliance on Citizen Perceptions

The study relied on citizen responses. Therefore, the results essentially reflect their perceptions and experiences regarding governance, transparency, service quality, and institutional trust. They do not necessarily represent independent objective indicators of administrative or service performance.

Fifth, Discriminant Validity Concern

The discriminant validity assessment results showed high empirical overlap between some constructs. This is particularly evident in the relationship between Service Quality and Institutional Trust, where the HTMT value reached 0.860. This is slightly above the conservative threshold of 0.85, while remaining below the more lenient threshold of 0.90.

The Fornell–Larcker criterion also showed high convergence among some constructs, particularly between service quality and institutional trust, where the correlation reached 0.871. This compares to the square roots of AVE of 0.711 for service quality and 0.760 for institutional trust.

Accordingly, discriminant validity should not be described as fully achieved without reservation. Conceptual separation between some constructs should not be overstated when interpreting the results.



Sixth, Causal Inference Limitations

Despite the use of SEM and Bootstrap, these statistical procedures do not transform cross-sectional data into causal evidence. Therefore, the results should be interpreted as support for the relationships and the proposed theoretical pathway, rather than as conclusive proof of causality or temporal sequencing among variables.

These limitations do not diminish the scientific value of the study. Rather, they define the scope of conclusions that can be drawn from the data and the model used.

10. Future Research Directions

Based on the study results and its limitations, the following future research directions are proposed:

First, Expanding the Geographic Scope

The model should be tested in municipalities from different Algerian provinces. This would allow researchers to examine the stability of relationships and their generalizability across different local contexts.

Second, Adopting Longitudinal Designs

Future studies can adopt longitudinal designs or panel studies to track the development of governance, transparency, service quality, and trust over time. This would provide a stronger basis for examining the temporal sequence of relationships.

Third, Diversifying Data Sources

It is advisable to combine citizen perceptions with objective data on municipal performance, along with perspectives from employees and local officials. This would help reduce reliance on a single data source.

Fourth, Expanding the Explanatory Model

Future studies can incorporate additional variables that may help explain institutional trust. Researchers could also test their potential roles as mediating or moderating variables.

Fifth, Conducting Comparative Studies

Algerian municipalities can be compared with each other or with other municipal contexts. This would help determine the extent to which the relationship between governance, transparency, service quality, and trust is influenced by institutional and social context.

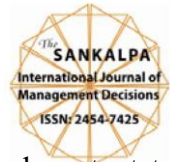
Sixth, Employing Mixed Research Methods

Quantitative analysis can be combined with interviews or focus groups with citizens, employees, and local officials. This would allow for a deeper understanding of the mechanisms shaping citizens' perceptions of governance, transparency, service quality, and trust.

Seventh, Re-testing the Final Structure of Local Governance

This point acquires particular importance in light of the study results. The final AMOS model showed that Local Governance remained a second-order construct, represented through Responsiveness Governance and Procedural Governance. The remaining constructs were used as first-order components. The final model also shows the pathway from local governance to transparency, then transparency to service quality, then service quality to institutional trust.

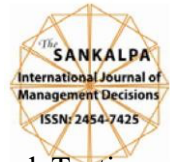
Accordingly, future studies can test whether this dual structure of local governance maintains its stability across different municipal samples and environments, rather than assuming its stability a priori.



Thus, future research can move from testing the model in a specific municipal context to examining it across more diverse geographical, institutional, and methodological contexts. This would contribute to the development of a more precise understanding of the institutional and service factors associated with trust in local institutions.

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