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Trust in Local Government and Life Satisfaction

—An Empirical Study of the Philippines—

NISHIMURA, Kenichi*

Abstract

The argument that trust in government is closely related to people's happiness is widely shared, and the annual World Happiness Report uses trust in the state as one indicator of people's happiness. There are also numerous studies on the relationship between people's trust in government and their level of life satisfaction. In this paper, I examined the relationship between people's trust in government (especially local government) and their level of life satisfaction in the Philippines, keeping in mind previous studies. To do so, I used the results of the "2019 Public Opinion Survey on Local Government in the Philippines", conducted by the research team I participated in, and conducted a statistical analysis. Results varied by item of satisfaction, but for most items of satisfaction, the higher the level of trust in local government, especially barangay government, the more satisfied people were, regardless of the influence of the control variables.

[Key words] Philippines, trust in local government, life satisfaction, barangay, participation, public opinion survey

1 Introduction

There is widely shared argument that trust in government is closely related to people's well-being and life satisfaction. World Happiness Report that is published every year uses trust in the state as one indicator of people's well-being (Nishimura 2024: 23). And various studies have shown a positive relationship between trust in government and people's life satisfaction.

For example, a case study about one province in China shows the importance of residents' trust in government, in addition to government responsiveness and performance in public service delivery, as positive and significant contributing factors to residents' life satisfaction (Liu, Gao, and Huang 2020).

Another analysis exploring the interaction between trust in government and life satisfaction during a pandemic in China found that as public trust in government officials increased, individual life satisfaction increased significantly (Cai 2023). A study on ten South American countries found that those who have confidence in their governments, including the judicial branch, military and police, rate their current and future life satisfaction higher than those who do not have confidence in these institutions (Macchia and Plagnol 2019). There is also a study that reveals that perceptions of corruption indirectly affect life satisfaction through institutional trust (Ciziceno, Travaglino, and Giovanni 2019).

Keeping in mind previous studies, such as those presented above, I will explore what the relationship

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is between people's trust in government - especially local government - and their level of life satisfaction in the Philippines. For this purpose, I use the results of the "2019 Opinion Survey on Local Governance in the Philippines" conducted by a research team in which I participated and conduct statistical analyses.

Multiple regression analysis was conducted with trust in the city/municipal government and barangay (village) government as independent variables, satisfaction with residents' overall life, friends, personal income, household income, recreation and hobby, religious life, neighborhood, security, and Philippine society as dependent variables, and gender, age, marital status, education, home ownership, and degree of participation in local governance as control variables. Results varied by object of satisfaction, but for many objects of satisfaction, regardless of the effects of the control variables, I found that the higher the level of trust in the local government - especially the barangay government - the higher the level of satisfaction of the people.

2 Trust in Government and Life Satisfaction

Many literatures show a positive correlation between trust in government and life satisfaction. In addition to the studies presented in the Introduction, there are other studies that show that trust in government and life satisfaction serve a mediating function in a variety of ways among multiple variables, including government performance.

Li and He (2024), examining the determinants of life satisfaction in China from the perspective of perceived performance of local government, found that the perceived performance of local government had a direct positive relationship with people's life satisfaction, and that residents' trust in local government played a mediating role in this relationship. Zhi et al. (2022), who analyzed the relationship between social security fairness and trust in government at the central government and county and township levels of local government in China, found that both social security satisfaction and life satisfaction partially mediate the relationship between social

security fairness and trust in government. Ng et al. (2022), analyzing the relationship between life satisfaction and incumbent voting using Malaysian data from the seventh wave of the World Values Survey conducted around the time of the general elections that led to Malaysia's first peaceful transfer of power, found that trust plays a mediating role in the relationship between life satisfaction and incumbent voting.

Beside the studies mentioned above, there are other studies that suggest some positive correlation between trust in government and life satisfaction. Barrington-Leigh and Wollenberg (2018) examined the relationship between life satisfaction and local government performance in Connecticut, USA, and found that local government responsiveness to residents' needs also contributes significantly to life satisfaction. Clench-Aas et al. (2021), who examined the impact of the financial crisis on life satisfaction with respect to European countries, found that countries with higher levels of social and political trust had a milder impact of the financial crisis on life satisfaction than those with lower levels of these trusts.

3 Research Questions

As mentioned in Introduction, this paper will explore the relationship between trust in local government and life satisfaction in the Philippines. In our survey, "2019 Opinion Survey on Local Governance in the Philippines," we examine satisfaction with "Life in General," as well as "Friends," "Marital Status," "Education," "Work," "Personal Income," "Household Income," "Recreation and Hobbies," "Religious Life," "Neighborhood," "Security," and "Philippine Society in General". For each of the above items of satisfaction, excluding those items that do not pertain to all survey respondents - "marital status" and "job" - I will see if there is a positive correlation between satisfaction and trust in the local government. In addition, since "education" is highly collinear with "educational background," which is one of the control variables, it will be

excluded from the analysis. The research question, therefore, is whether there is a positive correlation between trust in local government and satisfaction with each of the following: “life in general,” “friends,” “own income,” “household income,” “recreation/hobbies,” “religious life,” “neighborhood,” “security,” and “Philippine society in general”.

4 Data: 2019 Opinion Survey on Local Governance in the Philippines

First, I explain the sampling method that our research team adopted with reference to Nishimura et al. (2019). The population consists of individuals over the age of 20 in all 1,515 cities and municipalities, excluding the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao. The design sample is 2,400 by multistage random sampling. 80 municipalities were selected by random sampling (partially significant sampling) from among 300 municipalities surveyed in the Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research “Local Government Survey in Southeast Asia: Comparison among Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines” (Principal Investigator: Fumio Nagai) conducted from 2009 to 2013. Firstly, we extracted Baguio City, Cebu City, and Davao City by significant sampling. After that, we arranged the remaining 297 municipalities in a line from the north, and we extracted 77 municipalities systematically considering the population size. As a result, 55 cities and municipalities were selected from Luzon, 13 from the Visayas and 12 from Mindanao. Among them, 34 are cities and 46 are municipalities. In each municipality, all barangays were arranged in order of the barangay list of the Philippine Statistical Authority, and five barangays were systematically sampled considering population size. As a reserve, 3 barangays were sampled for each municipality.

We selected 6 households to sample 3 males and 3 females in each barangay. If the barangay had a household register, we selected households from the register using a simple random sampling method and if not, we did area sampling. Starting from the barangay hall, we randomly selected starting house-

hold (from between 1 and 25 in urban barangays and between 1 and 5 in rural barangays). From there, we selected households with equal intervals, with the interval being 6 in urban barangays and 2 in rural barangays. Of the sampled households, we extracted males from the first and odd-numbered households, and females from the second and even-numbered households. Within a household, a Kish grid was used to select one candidate (male or female) aged 20 or older. In this way, 5 barangays from each municipality, 6 households from each barangay, and 1 person from each household (in order of gender) were selected, resulting in a planned sample of 80 municipalities x 5 barangays x 6 people, for a total of 2,400 people.

The fieldwork interview was commissioned to Social Weather Stations, a Philippine polling company, and was conducted from February 24 to March 6 in 2019. If the survey could not be conducted due to refusal, absence, vacant house, etc., the next applicable person (if there is a household list) or the next interval household (if area sampling) was selected for interview. The number of effective responses and effective response rate were 2,400 and 100.0%, respectively.

The sample breakdown is as follows (N = 2,400). Male 50.0% / Female 50.0%, Average age 45.1, Unmarried 12.0% / Currently married 56.3% / Cohabitation 19.7% / Separated 3.1% / Widowed 9.0%, Average household size 4.7, average number of children 2.9, No formal education 1.4% / Elementary school graduate 24.7% / Junior high school graduate 10.6% / High school graduate 35.0% / Vocational school/junior college graduate 9.8% / University graduate 17.8% / Graduate school graduate 0.8%, Full-time worker 36.2% / Part-time worker 12.7% / Self-employed worker/family worker 11.2% / Housewife/househusband 21.1% Not working/student 18.8%.

5 Method of Analysis

For the analysis, I extract the dependent variables as well as independent variables from our survey, “2019 Opinion Survey on Local Governance in the Philippines”. Then I run Multiple regression analysis to examine whether there is a correlation between trust in local government and life satisfaction.

5-1 Dependent Variables

The dependent variables are the strength of satisfaction with “life in general,” “friends,” “own income,” “household income,” “recreation/hobbies,” “religious life,” “neighborhood,” “security,” and “Philippine society in general”. Our survey asked about the intensity of satisfaction with each item on an 11-point scale, with 10 being “strongly satisfied” and 0 being “strongly unsatisfied”. For all items, I standardized because the distribution of responses was skewed toward higher satisfaction. I created ordinal variables for all items with 0 “strongly unsatisfied” to 5 “neutral” as 1, 6 to 9 as 2, and 10 “strongly satisfied” as 3. The frequency distribution of each item is shown in Tables 1-1 through 1-3.

Table 1-1 Strength of Satisfaction-1

	Life		Friends		Own Income	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	701	29.2	729	30.4	966	40.3
2	1050	43.8	1051	43.8	1018	42.4
3	644	26.8	619	25.8	415	17.3
Missing Value	5	0.2	1	0.0	1	0.0
Total	2400	100.0	2400	100.0	2400	100.0

Table 1-2 Strength of Satisfaction-2

	Household Income		Recreation Hobby		Religious Life	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	843	35.1	936	39.0	557	23.2
2	1117	46.5	998	41.6	1019	42.5
3	439	18.3	465	19.4	824	34.3
Missing Value	1	0.0	1	0.0	0	0.0
Total	2400	100.0	2400	100.0	2400	100.0

Table 1-3 Strength of Satisfaction-3

	Neighbor		Security		Philippine Society	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	780	32.5	555	23.1	921	38.4
2	1117	46.5	1186	49.4	1084	45.2
3	503	21.0	659	27.5	394	16.4
Missing Value	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.0
Total	2400	100.0	2400	100.0	2400	100.0

5-2 Independent Variables

The independent variables are variables related to the level of trust in the city/municipality and the level of trust in the barangay. “2019 Opinion Survey on Local Governance in the Philippines” asks about residents’ trust in the city/municipality and barangay on a five-point scale, with 1 indicating “not trust at all” and 5 indicating “trust completely”. The frequency distribution of trust in the city/municipality and trust in the barangay is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Trust in Local Government

	City/ municipality		Barangay	
	F	%	F	%
1. Not trust at all	50	2.1	53	2.2
2. Not trust very much	149	6.2	151	6.3
3. Neutral	631	26.3	533	22.2
4. Trust somewhat	920	38.3	905	37.7
5. Trust completely	645	26.9	754	31.4
Don't know, no answer	5	0.2	4	0.2
Total	2400	100.0	2400	100.0

5-3 Control Variables

Several studies have shown that citizens' political participation is positively correlated with participants' life satisfaction. Pacheco and Lange (2010), who analyzed the relationship between political participation and life satisfaction for 20 European countries based on a survey conducted in 2006-2007, found that political participation has a robust, statistically significant, and strongly positive impact on life satisfaction. For the United States, Flavin and Keane (2012), who analyzed the relationship between life satisfaction as an independent variable and political participation, found that those who were satisfied with their lives were more likely to vote or participate in the political process through other means. For Latin America, while the analysis did not always show a consistent relationship between voting and life satisfaction, the analysis for Costa Rica showed that higher levels of happiness were associated with greater willingness to vote (Weitz-Shapiro and Winters 2008). Shi et al. (2022) found that in China, where political participation by a larger number of people has been observed in recent years, political participation - especially institutionalized political participation - is closely related to life satisfaction. He et al. (2022), who analyzed the relationship between political participation and life satisfaction based on a survey of urban residents in China, found that political participation significantly increases the level of life satisfaction among urban

residents.

Given the large impact of political participation on life satisfaction as indicated in the literature mentioned above, in order to see whether trust in government is correlated with life satisfaction despite the impact of political participation, the frequency of participation in meetings at the barangay level and in city and municipality events are used as control variables (Table 3).

Gender also may affect life satisfaction. Although the relationship between gender and life satisfaction is complicated by differences in life dimensions, as the United Kingdom example shows (Giusta et al. 2011), according to Joshanloo and Jovanović (2019), gender differences in life satisfaction are small but significant, with women more satisfied with their lives than men across all income, education, and employment groups. Therefore, in this paper, gender is also employed as a control variable. The frequency distribution for gender is 1200 for males and 1200 for females.

Some literature finds a positive correlation between education and life satisfaction (Flavin and Keane 2012; Salinas-Jimenez et al. 2011). However, a study points out that highly educated people do not necessarily have more positive emotions in their daily lives (Möwisch et al. 2021). With the above discussion in mind, this paper employs education as a control variable.

As for marital status, it is said to positively affect

Table 3 Frequency of Attending the Meetings / Events of Local Government

Question: In the last six years, how often have you attended the meetings below

	Purok* level meeting		Barangay level meeting		Events of city / municipality	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Not at all	794	33.1	742	30.9	790	32.9
Once or twice in six years	295	12.3	279	11.6	239	10.0
Once every two years	132	5.5	121	5.0	119	5.0
Four or five times in six years	105	4.4	95	4.0	85	3.5
Every year	427	17.8	469	19.5	633	26.4
More than once a year	647	27.0	694	28.9	534	22.3
Total	2400	100.0	2400	100.0	2400	100.0

*Purok is the subdivision of barangay.

life satisfaction (e.g., Purol 2021). And with regard to the relationship between homeownership and life satisfaction, a study conducted in Korea indicated that homeownership is an important life event that enhances psychological well-being (Park 2023). Therefore, I also put marital status and home ownership into the model as control variables.

According to the World Happiness Report, young people tend to be happier than older people, but the relationship varies by region (World Happiness Report 2024). Therefore, age is also used as a control variable.

The frequency distributions of “education”, “marital status”, “homeownership”, and “age” are shown in Tables 4 through 7.

Table 4 Educational Background

	F	%
No formal education	33	1.4
Elementary/Primary school	593	24.7
Junior high school	254	10.6
High school	839	35.0
Vocational course/Junior college	235	9.8
University/College	428	17.8
Master/PhD program	18	0.8
Total	2400	100.0

Table 5 Marital Status

	F	%
Never Married	287	12.0
Married	1351	56.3
Separation / Bereavement	289	12.0
With partner / Cohabitation	473	19.7
Total	2400	100.0

Table 6 Homeownership

	F	%
Renting a house	421	17.5
Own house	1979	82.5
Total	2400	100.0

Table 7 Ten-Year Age Group

	F	%
20~29	447	18.6
30~39	550	22.9
40~49	477	19.9
50~59	449	18.7
60~69	297	12.4
70~	180	7.5
Total	2400	100.0

6 Results of Analysis

The analysis revealed that trust in local government is generally positively correlated with life satisfaction. In particular, trust in the barangay was found to positively affect satisfaction in all categories except recreation/hobbies and religious life.

Among the items that were put in as control variables, it was found that education also generally led to higher life satisfaction. Especially, a strong positive correlation was found for income satisfaction, which is thought to be directly influenced by educational attainment. It is noteworthy that for “participation,” which is said to have a positive impact on life satisfaction, no positive correlation with satisfaction can be observed, with the exception of “Purok level meeting” for religious life. Rather, “barangay-level meetings” show a negative correlation with income and recreation/hobbies. In addition to this, it can be seen that control variables such as gender and age affected satisfaction with a few items.

Tables 8-1 and 8-2 present the results of the multiple regression analysis.

Table 8-1 Results of the Multiple Regression Analysis (N=2400)

	Dependent Variables				
	Life	Friends	Own Income	Household Income	Recreation/ Hobby
Independent Variables	β	β	β	β	β
Trust in City/Municipality	0.060 *	0.036	0.064 *	0.053 *	0.032
Trust in Barangay	0.077 **	0.092 ***	0.063 *	0.082 **	0.047
Control Variables					
Frequency of attendance					
Purok level meeting	0.000	0.020	0.041	0.021	0.048
Barangay level meeting	-0.047	-0.004	-0.142 ***	-0.120 ***	-0.074 *
City/Municipality events	-0.024	0.029	0.010	0.018	-0.006
Gender (Male=1 dummy)	-0.010	0.001	0.003	-0.030	0.005
Educational Background	0.059 **	0.052 *	0.106 ***	0.100 ***	0.078 ***
Marital Status	0.040	-0.033	0.015	0.004	0.004
Homeownership (Owner=1 dummy)	-0.008	0.020	-0.025	-0.020	-0.009
Age	-0.005	-0.027	0.028	-0.004	-0.049 *
R^2	0.018	0.017	0.030	0.029	0.013

(Note: *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001)

Table 8-2 Results of the Multiple Regression Analysis (N=2400)

	Dependent Variables			
	Religious Life	Neighbor	Security	Philippine Society
Independent Variables	β	β	β	β
Trust in City/Municipality	0.019	0.044	0.015	0.099 ***
Trust in Barangay	0.024	0.104 ***	0.155 ***	0.102 ***
Control Variables				
Frequency of attendance				
Purok level meeting	0.063 *	0.024	-0.038	0.035
Barangay level meeting	-0.039	0.034	0.037	-0.010
City/Municipality events	0.048	0.049	0.046	0.027
Gender (Male=1 dummy)	-0.095 ***	0.012	0.011	0.040 *
Educational Background	0.030	-0.039	0.042 *	-0.046 *
Marital Status	-0.018	-0.032	-0.019	0.007
Homeownership (Owner=1 dummy)	-0.039	-0.020	0.016	0.018
Age	0.029	0.039	0.078 ***	0.014
R^2	0.014	0.035	0.037	0.041

(Note: *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001)

7 Discussion

7-1 Life Satisfaction and Trust in Local Government

I found that trust in local government, such as city/municipal and barangay, has a positive effect on people's life satisfaction in various dimensions, regardless of their participation in local politics and administration and their personal attributes. In particular, trust in the barangays, which provide public services directly related to residents' lives as a basic municipality, has increased the level of satisfaction in many items related to residents' lives. Furthermore, satisfaction with friends, neighborhood and security (as well as satisfaction with Philippine society) was shown to be strongly positively correlated with trust in barangay.

Section 384 of the Local Government Code of the Philippines stipulates that the role of the barangay is to formulate and implement community policies, plans, programs, projects, and activities, to provide residents with opportunities for input and suggestions, and to settle disputes amicably. As this article indicates, one of the most important roles of the barangay is to maintain the security of the community. In Nishimura (2023), the author analyzed how the frequency of contact between residents and various barangay government officials - barangay captain, barangay councilors, and barangay police - affects trust in the barangay, and found that the higher the frequency of contact with the barangay police, the lower the trust in barangay. Since the barangay police, whose main duty is to maintain peace and order in barangay, are often present at the scene of conflicts, the more often residents see the barangay police in conflict situations, the worse they perceive the security situation in barangay. This perception, in turn, leads to a decline in trust in barangay that fails to properly maintain security (Nishimura 2023). With this mechanism of perception in mind, we can assume that a high level of satisfaction with security translates into a high level of trust in the barangay, which is seen as highly capable of maintaining security.

The high level of satisfaction regarding the neighborhood and friends is probably a reflection of the good relationship that is maintained with the neighborhood and friends. In order to maintain good relations with neighbors and friends, it is necessary for each resident's life to be more stable and less stressful. In order for residents' lives to be more stable and less stressful, it is important for barangay to appropriately provide basic public services such as health care. And it can be assumed that residents have a high level of trust in barangays that can adequately provide basic public services.

Clench-Aas and Holte (2021) analyzed the relationship between levels of well-being and personal, social, and political trust as well as personal, community, and national income in 19 European countries, and found that high level of well-being is associated with all layers of trust and income. And they found that all three forms of trust - including political trust - act as a buffer against the effect of personal income on life satisfaction. In addition, they point out that achieving high political trust is important because low trust diminishes the effect of income on satisfaction. If we use this argument as a reference point, it can be inferred that respondents' satisfaction with their own and household income is associated with higher levels of trust in local government - city/municipality and barangay.

And it is possible that higher levels of satisfaction with security, neighborhood, friends, and personal and household income are reflected in higher levels of satisfaction with life in general and with Philippine society.

7-2 Complex Relationship between Participation and Life Satisfaction

What is noteworthy about the results of my analysis is that they reveal results that differ from the conventional finding of a positive correlation between political participation and life satisfaction. Many items of satisfaction did not show any correlation with frequency of participation. And, with respect to respondents' own and household income as well as recreation/hobby, the more participation in

barangay-level meetings, the less satisfied they were with these items.

The fact that satisfaction with income does not correlate with the frequency of participation in local government meetings and events is consistent with the argument of Jungkunz and Marx (2022), who showed that changes in income have no effect on political participation.

It is difficult to interpret the fact that those who participate more in barangay-level meetings have lower levels of satisfaction with their income and recreation/hobbies, but we may think that people with low incomes who feel they cannot afford to spend on recreation and hobbies are intend to participate more in barangay-level meetings in order to seek more support from public services for their livelihoods.

8 Conclusion

This paper attempted to clarify the relationship between life satisfaction and trust in local government in the Philippines. The analysis revealed that trust in the city/municipality and trust in the barangay are generally positively correlated with life satisfaction. In particular, trust in the barangay has a positive correlation with satisfaction with many life dimensions except for recreation/hobby and religious life. This fact is not surprising considering that the local government that is most closely involved in everyday lives of residents is barangay. Thus, the policy implication of this result is the need for further capacity building of barangay, so that residents' trust in barangay will be higher, which will have a positive impact on their life satisfaction.

This paper only analyzed the direct relationship between trust in local government and life satisfaction. However, as many previous studies have shown, the relationship between trust in government and life satisfaction may have mediating effects each other. This paper also independently analyzes satisfaction in various dimensions of life. Future tasks include a more multi-layered analysis of the relationship between trust in local government and life

satisfaction, while also carefully examining the relationship between satisfaction levels in various dimensions of life.

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