

Psychological Dimensions Of State Governance: Insights From Bulgaria

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This study addresses a significant gap in the understanding of political systems by highlighting the often-overlooked psychological factors and citizen perceptions that are vital to their functioning. While philosophical analyses of governance typically focus on structural elements, this research emphasizes the importance of individual perceptions, using Bulgarians as a case study. By employing a novel mathematical approach to analyze these perceptions, the study uncovers a four-component model of state governance that captures 53.15% of the total variance in citizen attitudes.

The first component, linked to patriotism, underscores its critical role in shaping national identity and civic engagement, accounting for 16.69% of the variance. The second component reflects the social functions of governance, emphasizing the public's expectations for state support and services, and accounts for 13.48% of the variance. The third component reveals insights into economic security, highlighting how citizens perceive the state's role in safeguarding their well-being, contributing 12.17% to the overall model. Finally, the fourth component measures trust in institutions, a crucial determinant of political stability, explaining 10.81% of the variation.

These findings not only enhance the understanding of state governance in Bulgaria but also demonstrate the efficacy of using psychological variables to analyze political perceptions. By distinguishing between low and high scores across these components, the research provides valuable insights for policymakers and political theorists, advocating for a more nuanced approach that integrates citizen perceptions into the analysis of political systems.

Keywords: State Governance; Political psychology; Psychology of management

INTRODUCTION

Government refers to the state's capacity to serve its citizens and is a system of values, policies, and institutions whereby society conducts its economic, political, and social affairs at international, national, and local levels. The term "polity", used by the ancient Greeks to describe the state, is also central to one of the classical philosopher Plato's most significant works, where he explores the

meanings of justice and fairness in the context of human happiness and well-being (Plato, 2023). In *The Republic*, Plato utopianly illustrates a perfect world, and if we were to equate our current time with the ideal of a perfect state that each of us would desire to inhabit, we would undoubtedly envision a state characterized by stable governance and equitable living conditions. The idea of the political community is embedded in Aristotle's concepts of the polis and civil governance, which address the role of humanity within an environment of partnership and social justice (Aristotle, 1995).

Governance, as a process, encompasses rules, processes, resources, and behaviors that contribute to the expression and satisfaction of interests, the management of resources, and the exercise and dissemination of power within society. Consequently, governance pertains to the knowledge, application, and manipulation of rules or norms that are present at each stage of the political process, which in turn regulates the social and solidarity economy as a whole. By adhering to formal or informal behavioral rules, governance addresses and resolves societal issues, in which the political system plays a critical role. Specifically, governance is defined as the formulation and administration of rules that regulate the public, economic, and social spheres—the space in which the state, citizens, and those in power interact to make decisions focused on specific goals related to the social and economic realization of society.

At the core of modern state governance is the electorate—a collective concept that describes the totality of voters. Legally, this concept is associated with the right to vote and electoral law. Elections form the foundation of governance and leadership in every country. The electoral mechanism is a complex process that involves voters, winners, and defeated candidates. Its course is contingent upon a conscious and deliberate choice, which can be exercised upon reaching the age of eighteen, commonly known as the age of majority. The existence of a democratic society is implausible without the right to vote, a right that is directly enshrined in Article 42 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria (Aleksiev, 2023). By exercising their right to vote, every Bulgarian actively participates in political life. The first elections in Bulgaria were held to elect the First Ordinary National Assembly, immediately after the country's liberation on September 30, 1879. Since then, for over 140 years, elections for the National Assembly, the Presidency, local government, and the European Parliament have been conducted in the country.

In addition to the conventional election of rulers, a democratic society fosters the development of civic engagement and an independent sphere of self-expression through the establishment of a vibrant civil society that safeguards a variety of fundamental human rights. Human rights are a valuable achievement of humanity and a guarantee for the utilization of the benefits of civilization (Kristeva, 2020). Citizens are those who enjoy all the advantages of the "whole life of the polis." The right to a nationality is closely tied to the "opportunity" to

actively participate in governance itself (Manov, 2019). Citizen participation in decision-making processes that affect their individual and collective rights, interests, and values is a fundamental tenet of citizenship. The most significant form of citizen participation in the political process is the exercise of suffrage – both active and passive – as enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Electoral Code (Popova, 2024).

Over the past two decades, there has been a decline in Bulgarians' willingness to vote. Electoral attitudes are subject to change and evolve dynamically. In 2022, the Center for Empirical Social Research at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 2022) published data directly related to the formation of electoral attitudes among Bulgarians, detailing the significance of politicians' media appearances, such as television and radio broadcasts, news websites, social networks. The opinions of close acquaintances also play a significant role, as does the direct observation of electoral surveys prior to voting. The attitude toward the right to vote, as a means of actively determining and participating in governance, can be attributed to several groups of factors: 1) perceptions of the state of the country; 2) love for the homeland; 3) setting standards for governance through social responsibility; 4) accountability for enhancing quality of life and finding congruence between personal desires and opportunities offered in the political and economic marketplace; 5) fostering mutual trust; 6) a sense of justice; and a sense of belonging to the community.

Limited studies have comprehensively explored the various channels and mechanisms through which governance influences state development. However, substantial research has demonstrated a causal relationship between subjective indicators and state development outcomes, likely supported by actual data indicating higher per capita income. Fewer studies have examined the underlying mechanisms of prosperity, both at the state and community levels. For instance, indicators such as the rule of law, corruption, and political instability have been linked to health, nutrition, and educational outcomes related to state development, yet there is limited evidence regarding how such outcomes are generated. It is widely understood that countries with better governance also tend to have superior social outcomes.

PROCEDURE AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This study aims to identify the primary structural components characterizing Bulgarians' perceptions of governance. The research hypothesis is based on the assumption that employing the statistical procedure of factor analysis will reveal specific components of governance perceptions, which will be substantiated within the applied model that encompasses the main principles of global discourse

on governance while being contextualized within the Bulgarian paradigm. Factor analysis is a method for modeling observed variables and their covariance structure in terms of a smaller number of underlying unobservable (latent) "factors." Factors are typically regarded as broad concepts or ideas that can characterize an observed phenomenon. This analysis is a commonly utilized tool due to the descriptive nature of the models and their capacity for flexible psychological interpretation (Ganeva, 2016). Thus, factor analysis serves as an exploratory method requiring a multitude of individual judgments. It is essential to note that a specific variable may significantly contribute to one of the components, ideally with each variable contributing substantially to only one component. To achieve this, a technique called factor rotation is employed, wherein new variables are created in the principal components that are linear combinations of the observed variables.

Factor analysis was chosen for studying the psychological dimensions of state governance in Bulgaria for several reasons. It simplifies complex relationships among multiple psychological variables, making data interpretation easier. It uncovers abstract factors that influence governance. Factor analysis reveals how psychological variables interact, providing a nuanced understanding of their impact on governance. Additionally, it addresses correlations among variables by summarizing them into fewer factors, enhancing statistical analysis. It also validates existing theories on psychological dimensions of governance within Bulgaria's specific context. Furthermore, factor analysis allows for the discovery of new dimensions or testing of existing theories.

In the current psychological model, factor analysis is utilized to elucidate complex variables or data using the association matrix, which examines the interdependencies of data and posits that complex variables can be distilled into a few essential dimensions. This is feasible due to persistent associations between variables and their dimensions. The attribute of one variable may sometimes result from the dimension of another. Varimax rotation decomposes the initial estimates through statistical algorithms for the different components and utilizes these partial results to extract and differentiate various factors. Specifically, in this study, this method measures the individual representations and associations of citizens, thereby revealing the structural components of governance.

The procedure for establishing the structural components involves testing and verifying 34 statements specifically constructed to investigate Bulgarians' perceptions and expectations regarding the primary components of public administration. The proposed statements are evaluated by respondents on a seven-point scale (-3, -2, -1, 0, +1, +2, +3). Respondents provide an assessment for each statement by selecting a value that corresponds to their opinion: -3 (strongly disagree), -2 (disagree), -1 (somewhat disagree), 0 (neutral), +1 (somewhat agree), +2 (agree), +3 (strongly agree). The data collected from all participants undergo factor analysis, through which the principal factors are extracted. A total score is

not calculated; instead, the higher or lower values for the individual components are considered, reflecting the sample's assessments. The extracted factors indicate the relative importance of the individual components and can be employed as a tool for measuring individual evaluations of public administration.

The final determination of the psychometric characteristics of the instrument we used involved the reduction of 11 items from the initial list of statements due to low reliability coefficients. Consequently, the final version of the instrument comprises 23 statements distributed across four factors. Detailed information regarding the measurement efficacy of the instrument is provided in the results section.

Our sample consists of 167 participants, including 70 men and 97 women, aged between 18 and 69 years, categorized into three age groups: 18 to 28 ($N = 88$, $M = 24.6$, $SD = 3.58$), 29 to 48 ($N = 54$, $M = 36.12$, $SD = 4.49$), and 49 to 69 ($N = 25$, $M = 54.31$, $SD = 3.29$). In terms of education, respondents were divided into two groups: those with higher education ($N = 90$) and those with secondary education ($N = 77$). Regarding income, respondents were classified into three groups: minimum ($N = 35$), medium ($N = 92$), and high ($N = 40$).

RESULTS

The key challenges we faced were the unlimited and highly subjective nature of Bulgarians' perceptions regarding the primary elements of state governance and their personal significance. To ensure accurate assessment of individual perceptions of civil governance, the items were selected and evaluated based on socially generalized statements and significant topics defining the main functions of state governance.

Table 1. Psychometric characteristics of the model

Factor	1	2
Scale of Patriotism	0.791	16.69 %
Scale of Social Responsibility	0.788	13.48 %
Scale of Economic Responsibility	0.764	12.17 %
Scale of Trust in Institutions	0.729	10.81 %
Total variation		53.15%
KMO	0.768	0.768
Bartlett' Test	0.001	0.001
Sig t	<0.005	<0.005

Table 1 clearly shows that the model has satisfactory psychometric properties and is a suitable instrument for measuring individual perceptions of state governance.

Table 2. Factor loads of variables on the Patriotism scale

Items	1	2	3	4
The national flag of Bulgaria means a lot to me.	0.752	0.046	0.212	0.105
I love Bulgaria; it is my homeland.	0.746	0.126	0.117	0.218
Bulgaria should be proud of its achievements.	0.737	0.021	0.115	0.194
I would prefer to live permanently in another country.	0.712	0.163	-0.031	0.117
To protect jobs in Bulgaria, we should buy domestically produced products.	0.703	0.146	0.087	0.221
We should guard against attempts by other countries to influence political decisions in Bulgaria.	0.641	-0.047	0.242	0.179
We must remain vigilant and counter threats from other countries to Bulgaria's political independence.	0.535	0.013	0.181	-0.234
We should prevent outsiders from influencing Bulgaria's traditions and culture.	0.426	0.239	0.178	0.276

The statements in the Patriotism scale encompass concepts related to our emotional attachment to our homeland and the presence of patriotic elements in our understanding of the essence of the state and its governance. These ideas pertain to our deeply subjective feelings about the state, including notions of homeland, a glorious history, the protection of consumer interests, the defense of political independence, the preservation of cultural heritage, and the transmission of traditions and folk customs. The scale also includes a statement regarding citizens' choices to remain in Bulgaria or to prefer another country. Positive preferences expressed in this statement reflect favorable views of other countries, while negative associations indicate a strong preference among citizens for living in Bulgaria.

Table 3. Factor loads of variables on the Social Responsibility scale

Items	1	2	3	4
The government should provide basic healthcare for everyone.	0.057	0.756	0.106	0.214
The government should ensure an adequate standard of living for the elderly.	0.009	0.732	-0.103	0.189
The government should provide free primary education for all children.	0.183	0.708	0.209	0.243
The government should guarantee equal political opportunities for both men and women.	0.176	0.637	0.108	0.268
The government should control environmental pollution.	0.129	0.618	0.175	0.131
The government should ensure peace and order in the country.	-0.098	0.606	0.102	0.253

The statements in the Social Responsibility scale encompass perceptions related to ensuring adequate healthcare, providing a quality standard of living for

pensioners, and ensuring access to free public education at Level 3 of the National Qualifications Framework. They also include beliefs regarding the regulation of equal gender opportunities for political expression, the protection of the environment, and the maintenance of peace and tranquility for the country's population.

Table 4. Factor loads of variables on the Economic Responsibility scale

Items	1	2	3	4
The government should guarantee a job for everyone who wants one.	0.103	0.232	0.772	0.054
The government should control prices effectively.	0.204	0.142	0.738	0.029
The government should support industries to help them grow.	0.128	-0.091	0.726	0.146
The government should ensure an adequate standard of living for the unemployed.	0.198	-0.085	0.612	0.146
The government should work to reduce income and wealth disparities among people.	0.083	0.239	0.601	0.029

The statements in the Economic Responsibility scale encompass concepts related to ensuring employment, regulating price monopolies, supporting producers, providing adequate care and assistance to socially disadvantaged individuals, and reducing socioeconomic inequality.

Table 5. Factor loads of variables on the Trust in Institutions scale

Items	1	2	3	4
I trust the legislative, executive, and judicial branches.	0.082	0.115	0.143	0.732
I trust the political parties and the representatives of the people.	0.056	0.213	0.112	0.718
I trust the local authorities.	0.202	0.084	0.038	0.689
I trust the state administration.	0.186	0.004	0.201	0.546

The statements in the Trust in Institutions scale encompass representations related to the subjective assessment of trust in state authorities at the legislative (National Assembly), executive (ministries), and judicial (courts and prosecutor's offices) levels, as well as trust in the political elite, municipal government, and state administration.

Table 6. Pearson Correlation between the items for each factor determining perceptions of government and the total score on the "Social Desirability" scale

<i>1st</i> factor <i>r</i> =	<i>2nd</i> factor <i>r</i> =	<i>3rd</i> factor <i>r</i> =	<i>4th</i> factor <i>r</i> =
-0.196	0.092	0.002	0.186
0.081	-0.019	-0.075	0.175
0.047	0.053	-0.149	0.063
-0.162	0.144	-0.028	0.008
-0.133	-0.086	0.104	0.167
-0.178	0.028	-0.082	–
0.009	0.067	–	–
0.014	–	–	–
0.109	–	–	–

The correlation analysis conducted using the Pearson Correlation method reveals the existence of weak and insignificant correlations between the items on the scales and the total score on the test measuring the social desirability of the surveyed individuals. This provides compelling evidence of the strong psychometric characteristics of the instrument used to assess perceptions of government.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the analysis and discussion of the results obtained from the research confirm the hypothesis presented in this study. It has been established that there is a clear hierarchical structure among the main components of the model of state governance, depending on their significance for Bulgarian society and their proximity to the essential elements of democracy and social justice. The level of support for state governance relies not only on the effectiveness of the regime but also on the extent to which the underlying moral orientations are shared by the populace—in other words, on how deeply democratic values are ingrained in the political culture. This support is influenced not merely by the effectiveness of the political regime but also by the moral beliefs of the electorate that backs it.

Consequently, state governance pertains to the role that society plays in the governance process and the resource potential of civil society organizations to fulfill their expected roles. The mass media, which significantly influence the formation of public opinion, also serve as responsible participants in the governance process, while fulfilling their traditional role as instruments for social change and empowerment. Like civil society, this aspect of governance is closely linked to the administrative process and the media's ability to act as the voice of the people. Through social channels of information exchange, the study of public perceptions and attitudes regarding the characteristics of government will be enriched with additional content, thereby facilitating subsequent comparative analyses aimed at enhancing the diagnostic value of a psychological model.

Practical applications and recommendations for policymakers include creating programs that promote national pride and civic participation through community service, educational campaigns, and cultural events in collaboration with local organizations. Utilizing media campaigns to celebrate national achievements and shared values can help strengthen patriotism and foster public engagement. Conducting regular surveys is essential to align state services with public expectations. Maintaining open communication channels will clarify available services and eligibility, fostering transparency and trust.

Enhancing programs that address economic security, including unemployment benefits and healthcare access, is crucial. Offering resources to improve citizens' financial literacy will help them better understand economic policies. Implementing regular audits and public reporting can foster accountability and rebuild trust in government institutions.

Creating avenues for citizen input in policymaking, such as town hall meetings and online forums, allows for greater community engagement. Utilizing behavioral economics to design effective policies based on citizen perceptions can lead to more targeted and successful initiatives. Educating policymakers on the importance of psychological factors in governance is also vital. Establishing longitudinal studies will enable tracking changes in citizen perceptions and attitudes over time, providing valuable insights for future policymaking. Finally, partnering with universities for research on citizen perceptions ensures that policies are evidence-based and responsive to the needs of the populace.

By prioritizing the psychological dimensions of governance as revealed in this study, policymakers can better align their strategies with the perceptions and expectations of citizens. This approach not only enhances the effectiveness of governance in Bulgaria but also serves as a model for other nations seeking to understand and improve their political systems. Integrating these recommendations into policy frameworks can foster greater civic engagement, improve service delivery, and ultimately enhance the stability and trustworthiness of political institutions.

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