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CITIZEN SATISFACTION MEASUREMENT CHALLENGES IN STATE SERVICE

PROVISION IN AZERBAIJAN

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STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICITY

I have read ADA's policy on plagiarism and certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the content of this paper, entitled the Analysis of the Youth Unemployment in Azerbaijan: Challenges and Possible Solutions, is all my own work and does not contain any unacknowledged work.

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Abstract

Digitalization of public services is one of contemporary indicators of today's society, development and modernization. Citizen satisfaction measurement in online services is one of the main conditions and drivers of constant improvement of public services. This capstone project is focused on investigation of the challenges of citizen satisfaction measurement in public services provision in Azerbaijan. The paper examines that digital government experiences barriers because of the lack of supportive legal framework, lack of citizen engagement in evaluation mechanisms and insufficiencies in technological infrastructure. The authors propose policy alternatives for the challenges mentioned above in this direction such as establishing supportive legal and institutional framework, utilization of satisfaction and trust surveys as well as development of infrastructure and adoption of new technologies. All proposed policy alternatives are evaluated against five criteria which are effectiveness, efficiency, equity, feasibility, and flexibility. The research gathered primary data from the survey and expert interviews, as well as secondary sources regarding the existing problem. The results conclude that in order to solve citizen satisfaction measurement challenges in public services in Azerbaijan, the government should establish a proper supportive legal framework and utilize survey mechanisms.

Keywords: *citizen satisfaction, services, Azerbaijan, one-stop-shop, measurement, evaluation, e-governance, technology, digital government, e-government, survey, legal framework, infrastructure.*

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List of Abbreviations

ASAN- Azerbaijan Service and Assessment Network

DOST- Agency of Sustainable and Operative Social Provision

ICT- Information Communication Technologies

NAP- National Action Plan

OECD- Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

PPP- Public- Private Partnership

SAPSSI- State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations

UN- United Nations

Chapter 1. Introduction

One of the main conditions and drivers of constant improvement of public services is citizen satisfaction level. Not to forget that the main goal of the public sector is citizens' satisfaction and, as long as the government is focused on the civic-centric approach in its performance, citizen satisfaction is constantly analyzed, and its measurement tools need to be regularly improved. Through the evaluation, the organizations are able to clarify its strong and weak sides, gaps in implementation, accessibility and timeliness, success of reforms, policies and measures, as well as results of new tools on citizen satisfaction level. Generally, citizen satisfaction measurement helps the public sector to understand citizens' needs and requests, prioritize them, perform pre-surveys with citizens, implement and use relevant tools and policies to meet the needs as well as encourage citizens' participation (e-participation including) through constant communication. The success of public service provision is directly related to the quality of the services provided and their meeting of citizens' needs. As stated in the OECD report, citizen satisfaction can be an important outcome indicator of overall government performance (OECD, 2013, p. 166). Therefore, at present time, more and more governments are proactively paying close attention to citizens' satisfaction evaluation in order to improve quality of service provision through citizens' feedback.

Modern world demands its own rules and pushes to developments and innovations in public services as well. In order to make services accessible to citizens no matter their location and save their time, e-government is widely spread to ensure citizens' requests and needs. It is a combination of traditional government and ICT tools as a new way of government's functioning focused on the increase of efficient, smooth, and transparent procedures as well as certainty of

citizen participation and satisfaction. Since the early 90s of the 20th century, most of the leading industrialized countries in the world have implemented the program of building and developing e-government, in order to respond in the best way to the society's growing needs, improve capacity and adaptability, and reduce the operational costs of the government (Journal of Contemporary Issues in Business and Government, 2021, p. 2709).

Transformation in public administration of Azerbaijan to more civic-centric focused approach has been witnessed for the last 15 years and resulted in a number of positive changes in the country. The main aim and focus of the government are to provide smooth, transparent, effective, operative, and sustainable service provision to citizens within the whole territory of the country. For such a reason, for the last 10 years the One-Stop-Shop model has been actively implemented in the national system and gains citizens' sympathy and trust. The concept is focused on operative and transparent service provision with time efficiency for citizens. At present time, there are 24 ASAN Centers, 7 out of which are in Baku city and the rest are in the regions, providing more than 300 state services (Asan.gov.az, 2023) as well as 6 DOST Center operating in Baku and region and providing more than 134 social services for citizens (Dost.gov.az, 2023). By coming to these centers, visitors can get all necessary services in one place saving their time, rather than going to multiple entities within several days, having high-level service provision and possibility to evaluate the services provided in the centers. Citizen satisfaction measurement was firstly introduced in Azerbaijan exactly in these centers and citizens' feedback started to be evaluated accordingly. In general, the aim of such centers is to provide citizens with smooth and transparent services, and through this procedure increase citizens' satisfaction towards the government as well as trust. For example, according to the statistics provided by DOST Agency, citizens' satisfaction level for services provided by DOST Centers equals 97,02% from May 2019

(opening of the first DOST Center) till February 28, 2023 (Dost.gov.az, 2023).

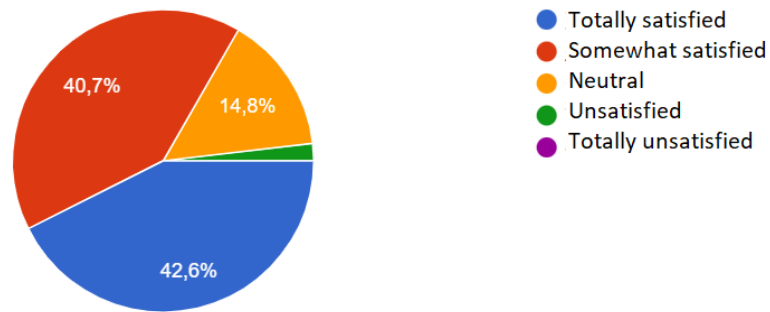
Another step for making the services more accessible and increasing citizen satisfaction, was the introduction of online service applications as well as mobile services. All these steps are introduced in order to get citizens feedback and increase their satisfaction level. As long as e-governance tools are implemented in the national system, the more opportunities are given for more transparent service delivery and citizen satisfaction measurements of the services. However, the recent Global Innovation Index put Azerbaijan on the 93rd place among 132 countries of the world in innovation potential (World Intellectual Property Organization, 2022). The weakest sub-area where Azerbaijan is behind of many countries is knowledge and technology output. Thus, high-tech export of Azerbaijan is less than 0.1% of its gross domestic product, while knowledge impact and knowledge creation are negligible. In total, Azerbaijan is listed in the upper middle-income group and its innovation performance is indicated below the expectation for level of development. Additionally, according to the Global Innovation Index Database (WIPO, 2022), Azerbaijan's innovation input to output performance in 2022 is evaluated as inefficient. Furthermore, according to the United Nations e-Government Development Index, comparing the Online Service Index, Azerbaijan is above the global average but some distance behind peers such as Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, and Turkey (ADB, 2019). As can be seen from the global reports, there is still a gap for improvement and e-governance is directly affecting the overall service delivery process and, as a result, on citizen satisfaction measurement. Not to mention that in order to evaluate citizen satisfaction level modern and innovative IT solutions are a must for detailed and correct results. According to **Figure 1** extracted from the survey results, 42,6% of respondents are totally satisfied and 40,7 % are somewhat satisfied with e-services provided in the country. However, 14,8% of respondents are neutral and only 1,9% indicated their dissatisfaction

towards e-services in Azerbaijan.

Figure 1

Rate your satisfaction level:

54 responses



One of the integral parts of e-governance is e-participation. Definitions of e-participation found in the academic and practitioner literature vary, but most of them revolve around the basic concept of using information and communication technologies (ICTs) to engage citizen in decision-making and public service delivery (Macintosh, 2004; Saebø et al., 2008, Medaglia, 2012). E-participation is more rarely defined as a branch of e-government with special focus on citizen engagement for deliberation and decision orientation (Welch, 2012). The definition used by the UN is “the process of engaging citizens through ICTs in policy, decision-making, and service design and delivery so as to make it participatory, inclusive and deliberative” (UN, 2014). Moreover, Saebø, Rose and Flak (2008) define e-participation as a social activity, mediated by ICT, involving interaction between citizens, public administration, and politicians. This definition highlights the key importance of the triangle citizens – public administration – politicians as actors in e-participation initiatives, and therefore as key stakeholders to consider when looking at the success and impact of such initiatives.

Considering above-mentioned aspects, two main developments were launched that potentially can support citizen participation and encouragement of e-participation in the country. For example, on March 28, 2022, President Aliyev launched a Center for Citizens' Reception in Baku with the aim for citizens to send their concerns directly or for all citizens across the country via email on the president's official website. The Center will also cover issues of pardon, assistance to war victims and veterans, complaints against the court system and law-enforcement bodies, problems in the health sector, land documentation, etc. Another initiative came with the launch of the Digital Service of ExComs portal (executive bodies in the regions) focused on a variety of services provided to citizens (Csomeer.info, 2022). According to the UN E-Government Knowledgebase, in 2022 Azerbaijan is ranked 98th out of 193 countries for E-Participation index compared to 73rd, 79th and 47th place back in 2020, 2018 and 2016 accordingly (Publicadministration.un.org, 2023).

Additionally, it is important to mention that one of the fundamental aspects for citizen satisfaction is the provision of transparent services which directly leads to prevention of corruption. The Azerbaijanian government has prioritized the fight against corruption and a new Anti-Corruption National Action Plan for 2022-2026 signed by President Aliyev is a clear example of that. The plan is aimed to further increase the transparency of state agencies, prevention of corruption, strengthening public oversight of government agencies, digitalization of services as well as insurance of sustainability of anti-corruption measures (Csomeer.info, 2022). Despite all the initiatives, according to Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index, Azerbaijan is ranked 157th among 180 countries to be perceived as the least corrupted ones compared to neighboring Georgia ranked 41st and Armenia ranked 63rd (Transparency.org, 2022).

To sum up, citizen satisfaction level measurement is a crucial thing to be considered in

order to provide services to citizens and during formulation of processes. Challenges of the citizen satisfaction measurement such as lack of survey practice in regions, lack of citizen engagement and e-participation, lack of awareness, absence of legal practices and policy mechanisms as well as legal challenges in regulatory framework should be properly analyzed and best solutions to overcome the problem needed to be proposed in the field.

Methodology

The methodology part clearly illustrates the data collection process for the capstone project and which primary and secondary sources were used for this purpose. To be noted that for this project, qualitative research was conducted, and relevant steps were undertaken in this direction. First, in order to gather detailed and deep understanding on the status of the citizen satisfaction measurements towards public services provision in Azerbaijan, its progress and development, as well as gaps and threats, four experts were interviewed both in-life and online format. The main goal of interviews was to collect primary data, and, for this purpose, semi-structured interviews were held. The below-provided questions were addressed to the experts focused on the current situation of the citizen satisfaction measurements, its challenges, and possible solutions:

1. To what extent are citizen satisfaction measurement tools towards public services developed in Azerbaijan?
2. What do you think are the problems and obstacles in citizen satisfaction measurement?
3. What measures/reforms/policies have been taken regarding those issues? Which ones among them are currently being implemented?
4. How successful are the implemented policies? What is the reason for the failure of some measures?

5. How well did the effective ones solve the issues? What is the progress?
6. Which problems still exist in this case?
7. What solutions would you suggest?
8. What measurement mechanisms exist in international practice that could be also applied in the local system?
9. Do you agree that the ultimate goal of service provision in the public sector of Azerbaijan is citizen satisfaction? Why?

The first interview was conducted with the representative from the Strategic Planning and Innovations division in the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population of Azerbaijan Republic. The face-to-face interview was conducted in March 2023 and the expert was informed regarding the topic and focus of the project as well as the questions to be asked. Therefore, the interviewee fully and smoothly answered the questions during the interview providing statistical and detailed information on the topic as well as the legislative framework of the issue in Azerbaijan. Another interview was taken from the representative of the Center for Analysis and Coordination of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The face-to-face interview was conducted in the middle of March and broad information on current trends in citizen satisfaction measurement and possible implementation options were mentioned during the meeting. The third face-to-face interview was taken from the expert in the Strategic analysis, innovation and digitalization department of the Ministry of Digital Development and Transport. The expert provided broad answers as well as discussed, the best possible practices for the implementation in Azerbaijan. The last interviewee was taken from the expert on Citizen Satisfaction measurement from the Ministry of Culture. The interviewee shared the information on which policies/measurements had been done previously and focused on the

challenges of the implementation process. Due to the expert's business trip and intensive schedule, the interview was conducted online, and no interruption occurred during the call.

Second, in order to analyze citizens' satisfaction with public service provision, evaluate citizen satisfaction measurements and their sustainability, reliability of survey results as well as accessibility of pre- and post-service surveys, the online survey was conducted. As a result, 54 responses were collected and ordinary citizens' perspective on the topic was collected. Furthermore, the secondary data on citizen satisfaction measurement and its challenges was collected from academic articles, official both local and international reports, open to public statistics, interviews as well as case studies.

Considering quite short experience of the government in citizen satisfaction measurement and reforms taken towards the issue, the main limitation of the project was the lack of data availability and its accessibility in open source. Another strong limitation for the team was the unwillingness of experts, especially governmental officials to speak about the problems and gaps in the national system and, as a result, their rejection to have an interview with the project team representatives. Moreover, the survey was limited to the citizens of the Greater Baku Area only. Therefore, the survey does not illustrate the situation and perception of citizen satisfaction measurements in the regions and least-developed parts of the country.

The paper consists of five parts with their sub-parts in each. The first part of the paper provides us with an introduction to the topic, its theoretical and conceptual understanding, identifies the problem, its definition and explains the methodology of the research in form of the data collection procedure, types of resources used, as well as a roadmap, the outline of the paper. The second chapter of the paper focuses on the problem identification, its reasons behind, urgency and need of its resolution, legislative background relevant to the topic of research, previous

policies implemented and their results, both success and failure cases. The third chapter illustrates the authors' possible recommendations to solve the current problem in the form of policy alternatives. The fourth part of the research is dedicated to the policy alternative analysis and based on analysis results selection of the best option proposed. The last chapter provides a synthesis of major findings, a set of policy recommendations, outlines the course of action towards problem solving as well as concluding remarks.

Chapter 2. Problem Description

In the modern world, significant advancement of information technologies, workplace automation and use of artificial intelligence has become a widespread phenomenon in the public sector. As a new era in public administration, integration of information systems into service provision and digitalization to improve quality of services turned into crucial attributes in citizen-government relations which led to the e-government and One-Stop-Shop approach. In terms of a citizen-centric approach, it is noteworthy to mention that public administration experienced a crucial transition period from traditional way of governance to digital government. In addition, this transition covers not only to expand scope of e-governance services for citizens and businesses, deliver online services operatively with just one click, but also involves e-participation by conducting surveys, e-feedbacks, and other data collection methods to get clear insights from citizens in order to improve quality of services and generate new online services for public demands (Aliyev, 2019). Since customer satisfaction is one of key parameters of "ASAN Service Index" in Azerbaijan, insufficiencies in measurement mechanisms creates significant barriers in e-government. To be more specific, when customer satisfaction is not measured under proper evaluation mechanisms, citizen's concerns will not be received by service providers accurately

and ignored in proposing proper solutions to overcome obstacles in the field due to absence of feedback tools. Overall, considering the significance of the existing problem in e-government, this chapter will investigate potential barriers in measuring customer satisfaction such as social, technical, and legal challenges. Also, which past and present policy alternatives have been implemented till now in Azerbaijan together with the consequences produced by offered policy options overcome the challenges mentioned above in e-government.

2.1. Lack of supportive legal framework in citizen satisfaction measurement

Acknowledging several problems in the provision of e-governance services, the most significantly, the challenges in measurement of citizen satisfaction and participation in the field, another obstacle regarding the policy problem is a lack of supportive legal framework towards improving the measurement mechanism of e-government from the government side. Barriers in the legislative framework are mainly associated with absence of supportive regulatory basis initiating reforms and insufficiencies in implementation of policy mechanisms in order to tackle down the existing problem in the particular field. To be more specific, inadequate policy options, absence of effective legal practices, reluctance to adopt effective laws exacerbate the obstacles in measuring citizen satisfaction from a One-Stop-Shop approach of e-services rather than improving the current extent of measurement tools in the e-government field. However, as a new phenomenon, e-government encountered an absence of supportive legal framework, specifically in the field of measurement of e-participation which lacks initiatives in measurement tools such as rating surveys, e-consultations, e-feedback mechanisms, and so on.

In this point, it is noteworthy to discuss reasons of why governmental agencies are not so eager to take significant steps in terms of legal mechanisms, and why there is so much reluctance

by government officials regarding measuring customer satisfaction and e-participation. To penetrate the discussion, absence of a supportive policy environment to address the challenges in the field was triggered by resistance of civil public servants for existence of a layer of e-government and weak cooperation between government agencies (Muradov, 2022). The main rationale behind resistance of government officials is that they are aware of the existing innovations and policy mechanisms supported by the legal framework in e-government to improve customer satisfaction and measurement mechanisms to gain clear insights regarding the provision of e-government. Consequently, they see these initiatives and policy reforms as a potential threat to their current position by being afraid of losing their duties (Muradov, 2022). However, in the modern period, it should be accepted that provision of e-services has become a priority for raising awareness towards switching to ICT requirements. Thus, it plays a huge role in effective implementation of e-government, efficient and flexible provision of online services, and ultimately keeping a transparency principle while measuring customer satisfaction.

Besides weak cooperation between civil servants hampering regulatory basis, legislative framework and policy environment was also characterized by insufficient government attempts towards evaluating use of e-government services and measuring citizen satisfaction. According to the representative from the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population, the whole responsibility to deal with evaluation criteria and mechanisms of e-government services should be on the shoulders of One-Stop-Shop centers, and government should be in charge of smooth implementation of online services and transparency of feedback mechanisms, not the citizens (from personal communication with the representative, 27 March, 2023). To be more specific, conducting measurement tools to evaluate the “one-window” principle about citizens’ insights and analyze the consequences about provision of online services is in the best interest of government

agencies because they will analyze the results extracted from the evaluation process and proceed further to develop citizen-oriented services. In terms of e-participation procedures, he mentioned there should be a fundamental and simple platform for all One-Stop-Shop centers that citizens can apply and express their opinions or complaints about quality of services in a short period of time. However, there is no single centralized state body carrying out legal responsibilities under the legal framework to deal with rating of customer satisfaction results gathered from all One-Stop-Shop centers. Since rating in service measurement will create a competitive environment in the field, and this would grab the attention of all centers providing online services, responsible agencies will do their best to be selected in terms of quality-of-service provision for citizen satisfaction. Moreover, another point by the expert was that since a competitive legislative environment brings innovations to the field, this has launched initiatives in state bodies as a motivating factor in order to raise their rating in the customer satisfaction index. During the interview, he brings evidence that there are obvious executive actions in state bodies referring to the evaluation process of citizen satisfaction through ASAN (Azerbaijan Service and Assessment Network) index because each responsible body intends to raise their percentage in rating and gain dominance over other agencies for quality-of-service provision. In terms of an expert's perspective, ASAN can also be considered as a centralized body under legal boundaries to implement the rating process by prioritizing measurement of customer satisfaction in the line of the strategic action plan. This is very reasonable because on February 7, 2023, the presentation on estimation consequences of 2022 was delivered in respect of “ASAN Service Index” in the event with participation of Mr. Ulvi Mehdiyev, Head of State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations (ASAN), Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population, State Migration Service, and other participants from state agencies (ASAN, 2023). This event is very crucial in terms of the existence of a supportive

legal environment by the government in the field because the event informed participants about essential purposes of State Register of Public Information Resources and Personal Data Information Systems established by decree of President Ilham Aliyev and actions implemented under supportive policy environment regarding measurement of electron services. Additionally, it was noted that quality of evaluation in e-participation through “ASAN Service Index” had been appreciated highly by the UN because agencies have gained higher results in this direction compared to previous years. Here, the main purpose in proceeding estimation of online services was to concentrate and systemize all data about e-governance services in a common source, to eliminate repetitions in service provision, to improve analysis and forecasting opportunities through services, and finally to provide efficient management in the field by generating new e-government services (ASAN, 2023).

Besides causes and insights regarding the extent of the problem, it is remarkable to analyze past and present policy mechanisms to address challenges in the legal framework regarding measurement of customer satisfaction in e-government, and whether those policy implementations have achieved their ultimate goal to tackle the problem in the field. Firstly, initiatives were launched in the legal framework by establishment of the State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan (ASAN) as central executive body according to the Decree of the President No.685 dated 13 July 2012. It aims mainly to coordinate activities of “ASAN” service centers as unified system, serve citizens by prioritizing customer satisfaction, provide assessment mechanisms in functioning, meet transparency, efficiency, effectiveness, gentleness, flexibility in service provisions between state and citizens, and so on (SAPSSI, 2023). To some extent, it is worthwhile mentioning that the foundation of this central executive body brought legislative acts and legal enactments to the field. In order to ensure

the implementation of Clause 2.6 of the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan No. 262 dated September 11, 2014 "On Measures Related to the Creation of the Electronic Register of State Services", and approved by the Decree No. 706 of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated September 5, 2012 according to clauses 5.8 and 5.9 of the "Regulation on the State Agency for Service to Citizens and Social Innovations under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan", the Board decides to confirm new provisions to the clauses of the decree (E-qanun, 2016). First, the Rules for evaluating public services on the "ASAN service index" should be approved. Second, the legal assurance department should ensure that this Decision is submitted to the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Azerbaijan for inclusion in the State Register of Legal Acts of the Republic of Azerbaijan within 3 days from the day of adoption. This decree aims to implement assessment mechanisms, data collection, verification, and evaluation of service users through "ASAN service under the criteria and sub-criteria based on parameters of "ASAN service index". To be more specific, this process includes several phases such as evaluation of questionnaires introduced to citizens by service providers, analysis of questionnaires and supporting documents, if necessary, on-site inspection, and opinion polls with service users (E-qanun, 2016). Finally, assessment results are systemized, and reports on the results are prepared according to the analysis of collected data and evaluation by the State Agency. Ultimately, the proposed policy targets speeding up the process related to the digitalization of public services, improving the efficiency and quality of public services, development of control and complaint mechanisms for public services for measuring customer satisfaction in e-government. This decree is very remarkable to emphasize because it is a very crucial improvement in terms of a supportive regulatory environment to eliminate legal challenges and to proceed further actions in the e-government field.

Moreover, another policy mechanism regarding legal framework to improve measurement mechanisms in e-governance services was launching new portals to develop e-participation, evaluation, and to prepare the action plan for anti-corruption. On March 28, 2022, President Aliyev initiated a Center for Citizens' Reception in Baku to give an opportunity to service users for expressing their concerns directly or through emails via the president.az website. It is assumed that the Center will serve the whole country and a wide range of online services including complaints and concerns about e-governance services as a measurement mechanism for customer satisfaction (CSO Meter, 2022). Additionally, as executive bodies, the policy framework founded a new online portal for ExComs services in the regions supported by the government. As a unified digital platform, the portal offers several online services such as registration of citizens, different appeals and permits. Also, its uniqueness is that it gives an opportunity for e-participation of customers to get involved in decision-making processes in ExComs. Consequently, new portal initiatives play a key role as executive bodies both in Baku and regions to strengthen e-participation and generate new measurement mechanisms for customer concerns by government support (CSO Meter, 2022). Besides these, on April 4, 2022, President Ilham Aliyev approved a new Anticorruption National Action Plan (NAP) 2022-2026 to improve transparency in governmental actions, decrease corruption cases, increase digitalization in service provision by including 6 priorities, one of which is regulations on developing online services and administrative evaluation mechanisms (President.az, 2022). As one of 6 priorities, NAP includes measures on conducting electronic satisfaction surveys regularly via social media accounts, involvement of public councils and civil society institutions into the procedures in order to evaluate the quality of e-governance services provided by state agencies from the eyes of citizens. Hence, SAPSSI has been assigned as a main executor of the plan in the period of 2022-2026 targeting transparency in e-governance services,

quality assessment of services for customer satisfaction, implementation of preventive measures against corruption cases in e-governance as an ultimate goal.

Regarding consequences of policy mechanisms to eliminate legal challenges in measuring customer satisfaction in e-governance services, firstly, the barriers are more organizational in nature (Muradov, 2022). To be more specific, when new policy options are launched in the field to tackle the problem, state bodies cannot handle the application of particular policy mechanisms to its management structure for several reasons. The expert mentioned the fact that since implementation of measurement mechanisms and feedback tools in e-government requires qualified personnel with high ITC skills, lack of specialized cadres in the field causes disorders in service provision (from personal communication with the expert, 27 March, 2023). In fact, according to survey results collected, some of the respondents complained about the inability of staff in charge of the e-services section of the governmental entities because of insufficient guidance of the citizens in service delivery. Furthermore, he said although previous project teams in One-Stop-Shop centers were capable of implementing work in line with the requirements, new project teams in the centers cannot catch up to the significance of customer satisfaction in service provision. From an expert's view, this occurred due to gaps in the communication vacuum inside the organization, and international experience has been fully learned to apply to local context. Lastly, the most common and essential reason to impede successful implementation of policy options in legal framework is that policy proposals are offered in the paper rather than being fully experienced in real life because of the unwillingness of government officials.

2.2. Lack of Citizen Engagement in Service Design and Feedback Provision

The issue entailed in the title covers social aspects of measuring citizen satisfaction and obstacles that emerge because of it. It entails in itself the citizen side of the problem and how the issue under consideration can be improved by engaging citizens. Because they are the direct receivers or users of the services, their experiences say a lot about the service quality, shortcomings in service provision, and even recommendations to improve. Essentially, if citizen satisfaction levels are not properly measured, analyzed, and used in decision-making, services will be provided just for the sake of provision and will not give the public the desired results that they expect from the government. In their academic paper “E-services evaluation criteria: the case of Azerbaijan”, Farhad Yusifov and Aynur Gurbanli validate this argument by mentioning that “Citizen satisfaction plays a crucial and decisive role for the systematic use of e-government services and influences the rates of failure or success of e-government projects. This is done for e-services to be regularly evaluated by citizens and governments and that the provided services can be continuously improved. This process results in the generation of new e-government models” (p.21). One might reasonably question how the service providers are going to be informed about citizens’ experiences; the answer is by receiving their feedback through different mechanisms, the most commonly applied one being user satisfaction surveys (Kelly, 2003, p.857). Reference to these tools is linking the point of discussion to how Azerbaijan is having it as a problem. What it means is that it is a simple but effective tool to measure how satisfied the citizens are with the government services, however, apparently it is not sufficiently done in the country. During the interview done with the expert from the Strategic analysis, innovation and digitalization department at the Ministry of Digital Development and Transport, this perception was also confirmed. The expert noted that measuring citizen satisfaction in Azerbaijan is, in general, not sufficiently developed and has a lot to improve. The interviewee mentioned that this problem

originates from the fact that awareness raising among the citizens is not adequately done. Especially in regions, awareness raising campaigns are not frequently organized as in the main cities. It can be inferred that as a result, the actual users or potential users of the government services stay uninformed about important details; what services are provided, how they are provided, if they are electronic yet or are provided in traditional face-to-face and paper-based ways and mechanisms. The question that naturally arises with it is, “if the users are so uninformed about these details, how are they ever going to be satisfied with them?” (from personal communication with the expert, March 23, 2023). Thus, the expert drew attention to the issue that we cannot measure citizen satisfaction properly if we are not giving them the opportunity to know that those services exist in the first place. For example, there are citizens who are receiving a service by traditional means and are unaware of the fact that the same service is provided electronically as well. It shows the gap that exists in awareness raising and reduces the level of satisfaction of the users if they later on discover that they have wasted their time by going to service provision sites while they could have easily done it at home. Therefore, surveys have proved to be not adequately utilized in this regard. Especially when the users go to those places and benefit from the services, they should be informed before they leave that the same service is available in an electronic format. They should be questioned if they are aware of this fact at all, and if yes, what their reasons are for still not using the e-services and coming to the actual sites instead. Their answers will not only contribute to satisfaction measurement but also pave the way for further improvements in service provision, and this claim is corroborated by research: “The importance of citizens’ opinions in the process of the evaluation of e-government services cannot be denied, as citizens are the main interested party in using e- services. In this regard, the development of feedback mechanisms between citizens and state institutions bears great importance, and the use of feedback indicators

during the evaluation of the efficiency of e-services has greater potential for facilitating more effective decision-making and the development of effective solutions” (Yusifov & Gurbanli, p.25). The expert pointed out that because we are not doing the awareness raising and feedback receiving as largely as it needs to be, our measurement mechanisms do not improve as fast as they could (from personal communication with the expert, March 23, 2023). It directly affects the position of the country in international indexes in a negative way. For example, the fact that Azerbaijan ranked 98th among 193 countries in the E-Participation Index of the United Nations shows that active citizen participation and involvement are the areas to be improved (UN E-Government Knowledgebase, 2022). The expert highlighted that to improve the relevant scores, users need to be kept informed about and engaged with the services, and they should be surveyed after each service is being provided to them. This point is also compatible with the suggestion that those surveys should be conducted regularly (Akgul, 2012). It is worth mentioning that conducting surveys are not the only tools that can be used for measurement. There are also alternative tools such as focus group discussions, interviews, and systematic studies that directly and closely engage the citizens. It can be as easy as asking their opinions via sending emails or making phone calls (Kelly, 2003, p.860). However, lack of their application in Azerbaijan makes it harder to improve in the area of concern. Since feedback is the key driver of making improvements, The expert mentioned that it is important to gather as much information and feedback as possible; indeed, it involves measuring every important aspect: measuring awareness levels, satisfaction levels, and the trust levels of the public service users (from personal communication with the expert, March 23, 2023).

In terms of measuring satisfaction, points of weaknesses and improvements have been touched upon. Now that the significance of measuring awareness and satisfaction has been

discussed, the role of trust and measurement thereof can be elaborated on. During the interview, the interviewee mentioned a few times the undeniable importance of trust of citizens in the governmental entities in service provision (from personal communication with the expert, March 23, 2023). Trust is linked to satisfaction because when the users trust the entities, their expectations and satisfaction will be higher, and it will affect the measured levels of satisfaction. It is a serious challenge, observed both in Azerbaijan and neighboring countries, because “the level of trust towards civil society organizations has been on the decline” (Satisfaction with Public Services in Georgia Study Report, 2021, p.19). To achieve trust, again, it is important to promote the services in a transparent and honest way. In both traditional and online services, citizen satisfaction stems from the way those services were promoted. Basically, what you promise to people should not differ from what they will experience in a real context. For example, if the entity assures the users that they will save time and will experience higher quality by using the online services but fails to provide it, then the trust of the citizens will be negatively affected. At later stages, no matter how well-promoted the services get to be, negative experiences will influence the way the users see you as an organization. According to the expert’s view, “ASAN service” centers are among the notable examples of government entities that have managed to maintain that trust. Today, people go to those centers with confidence that their issues will be resolved, and their service needs will be met. As a result, they also give positive feedback to ASAN volunteers before they leave. The lesson to be learned consists of three consecutive stages: first, promoting the services and keeping people informed about them, secondly, showing the quality of those services as promised, and thirdly, receiving favorable feedback as deserved. Moreover, there is also the challenge of people’s perceptions about feedback mechanisms; what it means is that citizens do not necessarily believe that their feedback would matter in terms of organizational decision-making. People may think

that those satisfaction surveys are done just for the sake of formality and procedures. However, ASAN prioritizes receiving users' feedback because their experiences help ASAN improve further. It is one of the organizations that is intentional about showing people that their voices matter and have impact on the public service design and implementation. Besides, engaging citizens in government activities improves governance, making it more effective (Tri & Thuy, 2021).

Another tool that is already applied in foreign practice is the use of social media through which people's feedback is received, online consultations are held, and complaints are listened to (United Nations E-Government Survey, 2022, p.106). The problem is that it is not as widely utilized in Azerbaijan for the purposes mentioned. However, in global practice, social media and the Internet are considered as the "main service provider channel for citizens" (Thao *et al.*, 2021, p.2721). Lastly, in terms of the social challenges, the role of partnerships and collaboration should be considered. The problem lies in the fact that the government may not necessarily cooperate with the private sector in public service provision. However, there could be and in fact are valuable experiences of the private sector that can be applied by the government too. Even a better approach, from the expert's point of view, would be to apply the Public- Private Partnership (PPP) model while designing or redesigning certain services. The interviewee gave the example of "Azercell" company that serves with "My Cabinet" system that combines the user wallet, internet balance, and even offers a "gift wheel" to keep the users satisfied and motivated. The expert supposes that these kinds of private sector initiatives offer a lot to the public sector to apply (from personal communication with the expert, March 23, 2023). Building partnerships and integration of successful practices to government services would bring benefits to users and increase their satisfaction levels that are accordingly measured. Overall, it becomes clear that there are

challenges that arise from the lack of mechanisms of receiving and measuring citizen feedback while there is a pool of alternatives to choose from.

2.3. Lack of technical tools applied in citizen satisfaction measurement

Another challenge to be discussed is the lack of utilization of factors such as technical opportunities, infrastructure, and technological tools. This point looks at the problem more from the technical design and implementation perspectives and the existence of evaluation criteria. Thao *et al.* states that “the quality of service delivery is good when the services meet or exceed the expectations of the organizations and citizens. However, in order to be able to compare and determine that distance, it is necessary to have specific evaluation criteria, such as how to collect information and measure the results in a scientific and reasonable way” (p.2710). The first challenge, however, is still related to awareness raising, this time being explained from technical aspects of measuring citizen satisfaction. According to the interviewee’s opinion, citizens are not technically trained enough to use online services and submit their feedback online. One of the expert’s main points was:

“It is indeed important that we are training the staff for service provision, however, are we training the actual service users too? Technical challenge is that those users may not necessarily know how to access the relevant portals, log in, properly use electronic signature and others similar to these. They are not able to send their feedback online, simply because they do not know how to do so. The electronic signature, for example, can be considered as the basis of online service provision. However, people do not know about it enough, nor do they know how to use it,

and what its role is in getting services online” (from personal communication with the expert, March 23, 2023).

Expert’s view has previously been corroborated by research as well: Thao *et al.* affirms that “Perception is an important factor in getting customers to accept and use electronic services. Customers need to feel and realize the benefits of any electronic application, otherwise they will be reluctant and skeptical to use it. Pikkarainen *et al.* (2004) reported that the amount of information a customer has about any internet application and its benefits can have a significant impact on application adoption” (p. 2715). Although it is an actual challenge, the expert also drew attention to the fact that important steps and measures have been taken too: “To deal with this problem, one of the most effective solutions put forward was the introduction of “SIMA” digital signature which made it significantly easier for users to access the services. SIMA, which is functioning based on biometric face recognition systems and cloud technology, was introduced to the public in 2022. With the user-friendly interface of its mobile application, SIMA made it easiest for people to use electronic signatures and express their opinions on how well it is functioning. It enables them to use more than one hundred services. However, what makes SIMA even more successful is the fact that its operating company, which is “AzInTelecom LLC”, is constantly promoting it, informing the public about it, and welcoming phone calls and emails for feedback” (from personal communication with the expert, March 23, 2023). Another effective measurement example, according to the expert’s view, is set by ASAN; in addition to surveying people who are coming to ASAN service centers, giving feedback through the official website of the State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan has also been enabled. This is a successful technical step that has been taken to show the importance of measuring citizen satisfaction. People are asked to submit opinions (if they agree or disagree)

about the service quality in terms of five factors: polite behavior, service transparency, service operability, convenience, and provision of detailed information. After submitting the feedback, the system automatically demonstrates the statistics based on the reviews submitted. Percentages of responses that have agreed or disagreed with the statements are represented. It is an indicator of the existence of transparency and monitoring mechanisms. The fact that it is applied for every service that is provided in ASAN service centers proves that it is possible to apply it to every other service that is provided by different government entities.

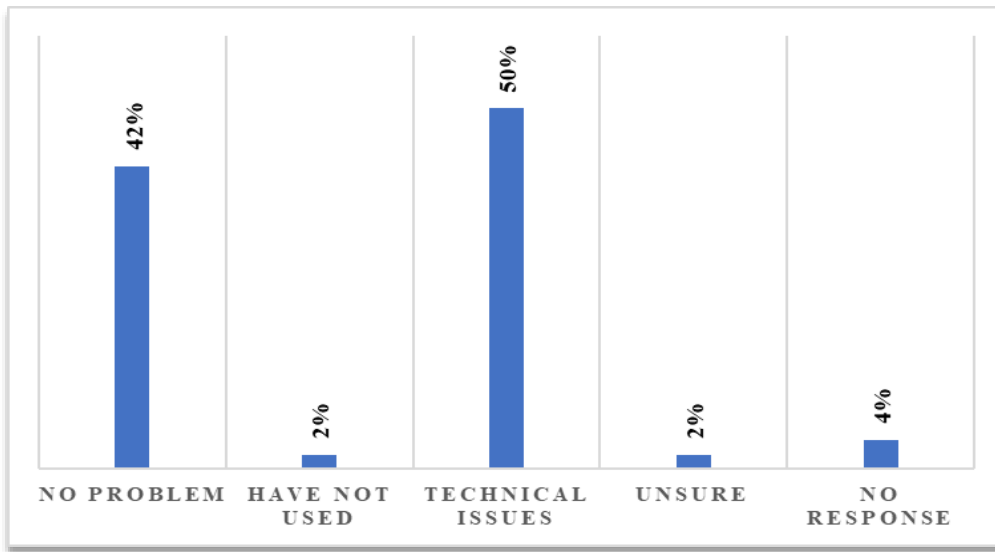
The problem is that, however, it is still not widely applied either in the administrative buildings of the organizations in which service provision is happening, or in the websites at which online services are possible to acquire. It is limited to certain organizations such as the one mentioned and also “Social Research Center” public legal entity. Therefore, it is one of the existing challenges in terms of the technical side of measuring citizen satisfaction. Another obstacle, according to the expert’s view, is the fact that international indices such as “E-Participation Index” have not been carefully analyzed. The expert assumes that if we do not fully understand such indices’ components and do not meet their requirements, our results will be low:

“The key is to involve the citizens in service design and ask their initial feedback because feedback does not mean that you should only ask their opinions after the service is provided. You can ask them in advance, asking their opinions on how they would like to see the service, what features they would like to see in it, and what other suggestions they might have. This is called “design thinking”, which is applied in Singapore too. Webinars and workshops are organized for people to participate and deliver their ideas for potential services. It is a human-centric or user-centric approach that should be applied in Azerbaijan too. My suggestion is

to carefully analyze the current situation in the services and compare them to the case in which they are provided online. Calculate the time advantage and add it to the e-service portals and note how much time the users save by using the service online instead of going to service provision centers” (from personal communication with the expert, March 23, 2023).

In addition to the time saved, citizens should also be informed about other benefits of using electronic services. For example, they might be told that they do not have to gather documents or papers anymore. Also, the service is coming to them with one click, rather than them going to receive the service. Without the need to collect materials from other organizations and entities, the system collects them automatically from the relevant databases. In addition, gathering feedback via online means seems much easier and convenient because when the service is provided with the physical participation of the citizen, it might be difficult to ask each and every user that comes. However, when they are receiving it online, no physical contact is required from the side of the service provider to ask for feedback. The citizens can easily do it themselves after the service window is closed and feedback submission window is activated. Moreover, it is important to design the feedback mechanisms in a user-friendly way; what that means is that if the user finds the survey too complicated to fill in or questions written in too technical language, they are unlikely to attempt to submit it. According to survey results gathered, displayed in the **Figure 2** below, although 42% of the respondents have not faced any problems while using electronic services, 50% of them have experienced complicated language of the system, insufficient instructions on how to fill the application forms for their own purposes, and non-user-friendly portal interface, which is referred to as “Technical Issues”.

Figure 2



Therefore, maximum clarity of questions and simplicity of submitting the answers should be provided. The expert also mentioned the importance of adding a “frequently asked questions” section to every website via which public services are provided. It is one of the proactive ways of solving citizens’ problems, making them more satisfied and more eager to appreciate the entity by leaving a comment. The last point in the technical challenges of measuring citizen satisfaction is the fact that surveys are not widely done in regions. Because the main service centers are located in Baku, considering the services in ASAN, for example, people in Baku are surveyed for their feedback. However, there are citizens in regions that are using public services in one way or another, but since measurement mechanisms are not widely applied in regions, they do not have the opportunity to participate in it. Indeed, internet access problems and lack of internet infrastructure in regions may also have an impact on those users’ awareness about the services and not enable them to give online feedback. There is also the fact that not every region has one-stop shops, and it prevents them from giving physical face-to-face feedback as well. Thus, the expert highlighted the necessity that we need to pay closer attention to how regions are going to be

integrated into these processes. In terms of providing the regions with quality internet access, “Aztelekom” LLC is active and takes the necessary steps. However, this challenge, together with the ones mentioned previously, is still prevalent and requires further regular measures to be taken.

To sum up, this chapter examined crucial challenges including social challenges experienced by citizens, technical challenges concerned with technical opportunities, and legal challenges in the regulatory framework in measuring customer satisfaction in the e-government field of Azerbaijan. Meanwhile, the chapter gave clear problem description within context, analyzed target groups affected and impacts on them produced by each challenge. Finally, the chapter also covered past and present policy alternatives implemented till now in Azerbaijan to overcome obstacles in measuring customer satisfaction together with results of those policies.

Chapter 3. Policy Alternatives

To penetrate the discussion, as discussed in previous chapters, absence of proper evaluation mechanisms in the e-governance sphere has become a crucial problem to learn citizens’ insights and measure satisfaction level in Azerbaijan. Also, the previous chapter touched on certain obstacles hampering development of effective mechanisms to measure citizen satisfaction in e-government. Thus, the chapter highlighted how it is necessary to improve e-participation to reach more citizen voices and thoughts in implementation of online services provided by one-stop-shop centers with proper measurement tools. Consequently, how the elimination of particular barriers in the field and proposing effective policies should be an ultimate goal of e-government in order to improve quality of service provision in digital government. Taking the current extent of the problem into consideration, this chapter will discuss policy alternatives for each of obstacles mentioned previously referring to international practice that would be helpful to apply to tackle

down citizen satisfaction measurement in e-governance services of the Republic of Azerbaijan. To sum up, the chapter will discuss that the obstacles in citizen satisfaction measurement in online services can be addressed by establishing supportive legal and institutional framework, utilization of citizen satisfaction and trust survey, and creating a “digital-ready” environment and introducing new technologies.

3.1. Establishing supportive legal and institutional framework

Considering the obstacles in improving proper evaluation mechanisms to achieve citizen satisfaction in e-government, one of obstacles was associated with lack of supportive regulatory framework by the government side in order to stimulate policy reforms to increase institutional strength in organizations for effective service provision and to fill gaps in legislative basis to establish supportive legal environment for institutions. Therefore, emergence of a supportive regulatory environment not only can eliminate the challenges in implementation of legal practices, but also encourage policymakers and reluctant government officials to prepare effective policy mechanisms for the obstacles impeding a proper function of citizen satisfaction measurement in e-government. As a result, having an administrative legal framework would be an ultimate goal to address financial funding problems, technical aspects, institutional weakness, uncertainties in organizational procedures in online services, and to adjust international benchmarking practices to local context towards improving feedback mechanisms in digital government. Referring to world practices, the study report also supports the point that although it is difficult to tackle this problem in e-government without allocation of sufficient funds, this is not about all. Financial resource management in digital government needs to be tailored to public needs under government patronage to simplify administrative procedures in feedback mechanisms (UNDP, 2021). To some

extent, even efficient allocation of resources needs a robust, legal advice, regulatory and fiscal framework so that funding will be spent properly for an ultimate goal rather than the interests of public servants towards improving quality of online services by effective evaluation tools in citizen satisfaction. In respect to establishing a supportive policy climate to tackle the aforementioned barriers, international practices of several countries in South America can be a good model. To take their significant progress in E-Government Development Index (EDGI) values into consideration in Azerbaijani context, these countries aimed to create national e-government policies, provide evolution of supportive regulatory frameworks, and collaborate with international actors (UN E-Government Survey, 2020). For example, the Digital Agenda of Argentina is concentrated on establishing a technology-oriented institutional and governance framework supported by the Government targeting acceleration of digital transformation. This transformation embraces implementing the Electronic Document Management ecosystem, so the Argentine government intensifies digital delivery of public services. Hence, the powerful presence of the government in social media promotes a wide use of e-governance services and attracts citizen engagement to receive direct feedback from the public to measure their satisfaction level regarding the services provided (UN E-Government Survey, 2020). Another example from the global sphere to benefit from a supportive legal framework is Brazil prioritizing digitalization of both government and economy. The Digital Governance Strategy of Brazil also has taken significant initiatives in policy frameworks for e-inclusion and e-participation through regular consultations with citizens to evaluate satisfaction level on online services. Activating a supportive policy climate in Brazil provided an access to public information and data for citizens to encourage use of online-services and measurement mechanisms. For this reason, Brazil has become one of active members of the International Digital Cooperation project with the E-Governance Academy in

Estonia targeting right-based use from online services and e-participation in measurement process (UN E-Government Survey, 2020). Besides, Costa Rica focuses on developing professionalized cadre aspects in its supportive policy framework because the country was experiencing the inability of project staff when a new policy mechanism was introduced at the instructional level. The National Digital Strategy of Costa Rica in legal context dealt with creating cooperation initiatives to collaborate with government agencies for policy integration in citizen satisfaction measurement in order to share best benchmarking practices of state agencies (UN E-Government Survey, 2020). Consequently, based on international practice, aforementioned countries benefited from policy mechanisms by establishing a supportive legal framework to drive e-government strategies in citizen satisfaction measurement that can be implemented in Azerbaijani context.

3.2. Utilization of citizen satisfaction and trust surveys

Since it is vital that governments take account of the feedback of citizens in service design and implementation, international benchmarking practices may be analyzed to identify the most effective tools in realizing that goal. To make the point more specific, countries that are among the world leaders in terms of e-governance and e-participation are indeed more relevant to look at. For example, according to the United Nations E-Government Knowledgebase, Denmark has the highest score in the E-Government Development Index, the score being 0.97, and a quite high score in E-Participation Index, which is 0.89 (2022). It shows that the government of Denmark prioritizes considering citizen perspectives and preferences and uses their inputs to design citizen-centered services. This claim is backed up by even a private Danish company called “Queue it” inside the article “How Denmark became a global leader in digital government” in their own website (Public Sector, 2023). It is shown in the article that Denmark government effectively

educates the citizens about the benefits of digitization of services. It encourages the public to trust the online service delivery and pushes for citizen-centricity. It is as a result of this kind of effort that 91% of citizens in Denmark are satisfied with the governmental services and thus trust their government (Public Sector, 2023). In Denmark as well as in other OECD countries, surveys are done to measure how satisfied the citizens are (OECD iLibrary, 2023). The government of Denmark is not the only party actively engaged in this matter; there is also the engagement platform called “WeSolve” that has also conducted surveys to measure the citizens’ attitudes about the Danish municipalities (Citizen satisfaction report, 2021). Another example is the Swedish government, which is also one of the leading countries in terms of e-governance and conducts citizen satisfaction surveys (Bernhard *et al.*, 2018). In the official statistics website of Sweden, called “Statistics Sweden”, citizens can not only submit their responses on their satisfaction levels with the services but also view the results of previous surveys that were done. Moreover, Swedish National Data Service (SND) also conducts citizen satisfaction surveys in social services use and availability and publishes the results in their website “snd.gu.se”. Measuring public service effectiveness by engaging the users and improving the services based on the comments given, Sweden maintains a high position among other countries in the UN E-Participation Index, having scored 0.73 in 2022 (UN E-Government Knowledgebase, 2022). It shows that when the governments utilize available tools to engage the citizens, it improves their scores in international indices. Trust surveys can also be considered as an effective way of measuring in that sense. In the report “Building Trust in Government through Citizen Engagement” prepared by the World Bank Group, perception surveys have been mentioned to be the most popular method of measuring how much people trust the government (2020). It is mentioned that those surveys not only measure the existing trust levels of citizens in their governments but also directly help increase their trust for

the future. Also, they help increase service effectiveness for citizens' next experiences (2020). Clifton *et al.* too has referred to this correlation and mentioned that if the responses of those surveys are analyzed and interpreted in a proper way, then the chance of increasing public service effectiveness and citizen satisfaction also increases (2020). It is also worth mentioning that these types of surveys are not done only at the local or national levels. The UN E-Government Development Index, which has been highlighted throughout this paper, is also conducting a survey every two years and expects the countries to submit their responses. The survey is called the "Member State Questionnaire" and asks questions about the available electronic services, providers of those services, contact persons responsible for the digitalization of the member countries, and national strategies designed specifically to move the countries forward in terms of improving their e-governance. Countries are free to choose if they want their responses to be publicly disclosed in the UN E-Government Knowledgebase. However, regardless of their decision of disclosure, this survey is an important component of the Index and has an impact on the list in which the countries are ranked in terms of their e-governance development. Based on the examples given above, it is understood that surveys are seen as a reliable measurement mechanism of citizen satisfaction and trust. In fact, to improve a service, one has to know what the users think about it and if they have any suggestions, comments, or complaints. Therefore, they should be asked about their perspectives on the condition that they are going to be considered. Indeed, survey conduction is not the only available method to realize that goal. However, it is still an effective way to find out what the users want, what they would like to see improved, and how much they trust the government.

3.3. Creating a “digital-ready” environment and introducing new technologies

One of the keys to succeeding in achieving citizen satisfaction in digitalization and improved e-governance is indeed the installation and maintenance of necessary infrastructure. When analyzing the international benchmarking practices in that respect, leaders in e-governance are again the most reliable examples. These countries prioritize, among other things, infrastructure development in order to create a “digital-ready” environment. Estonia, for example, is reported to have built a robust digital ecosystem with online public services, e-voting, e-identity, and digital bureaucracy in the article “Lessons from a digital society to develop a digital industry” (e-Estonia, 2021). Application of new technologies is also noted in the same article to be the key not only to development but even to survival. This kind of an approach has led the citizens and business owners in Estonia to be satisfied with the digitalization in the country and the opportunities that come with it. It has been done through receiving their feedback, and they have mentioned how easy it is to pay their taxes, to do business, to vote, and to pay bills (PBS, 2018). Finland is also one of the active countries trying to achieve a digital society by investing in infrastructure. The report called “Digital Government Fact Sheet 2019- Finland” prepared by the European Commission draws attention to several e-governance infrastructure, specifically the portals, that helps engage citizens and measure their satisfaction. For example, the portal “demokratia.fi” has been mentioned to show that citizens are given the opportunity to make their contributions to governance through this portal (2019, p.21). This kind of a portal allows them to have an impact in the decision-making process in government and is an important step in fostering e-participation. As a part of the infrastructure, other portals are also mentioned in the Fact Sheet; portal for citizens to access open data, portal for ministries to exchange information, eID for people, and databases to keep citizens’ and foreign citizens’ information. What is clear from the Fact Sheet is that proper

infrastructure and technology are important for citizen satisfaction, as was also mentioned in the “Problem Description” section of this paper. Especially the eID has been so satisfying for the users that they have reduced their use of traditional ID to just 1% of use while for eID it was 95% in using public services (p.22). Once again it becomes clear that proper infrastructure may be considered as the cornerstone of fostering digitalization, making citizens’ lives much easier, and increasing their satisfaction by this. Moreover, “Finland Toolbox” reports that artificial intelligence (AI) is also applied in Finland in order to improve public services (2021). By being open to the adoption of new technologies and their application by the government, Finland paves the way for continuing success in e-governance and citizen trust in the government. The Ministry of Finance of Finland also draws attention to the efforts put in for digital transformation: “Fast, high-quality and reliably operating communication networks and the digital data that flows seamlessly through them lay the foundation for the services and innovations of the current technological transformation” (Ministry of Finance Finland, 2022). The last but not least example of a country that is known for its leading position both in e-governance and in e-participation is the Republic of Korea. In terms of technologies, this country is essentially known for its production and selling of microchips, mobile phones, and other technological tools that are new to today’s world. It is a notable step in investing in infrastructure. However, it does not stop there for Korea: application of AI and focusing on increasing digital trust of citizens are among the priorities of this country in the journey of digitalization (Khoury & Lesnichaya, 2021). Overall, these plans of Korea seem to aim to not only keep the citizens satisfied by providing them with access to services but also eliminate the digital divide, provide job opportunities, and maintain an innovative ecosystem. Lastly, as a part of building infrastructure and using new technologies, this country has set out to achieve building a Digital Platform Government with cloud computing and AI

technologies (World Economic Forum, 2023). Indeed, it is derived from all these examples that the bigger picture behind what the governments actually want to achieve is to meet the citizens' expectations; the goal is to establish a “government that reaches out to citizens and companies, not a government that lets them come” (World Economic Forum, 2023).

To summarize, in chapter 3, three policy alternatives are introduced to tackle down the insufficiencies in the legal framework, lack of citizen engagement in feedback mechanism as well as technical barriers in infrastructure development towards the citizen satisfaction measurement challenges in state service provision in Azerbaijan. The policies discussed in this chapter were as follows: establishing supportive legal and institutional framework, utilization of citizen satisfaction and trust surveys and creating a “digital-ready” environment and introducing new technologies.

Chapter 4. Evaluation of Policy Alternatives

This chapter aims to evaluate the policy alternatives proposed in the previous chapter against five criteria: Effectiveness, Efficiency, Equity, Feasibility/Implementability, and Flexibility/Improvability. After evaluating each of the policy options one by one considering five criteria, the most preferred and suitable policy alternatives will be determined, and the rationale behind this choice will be discussed.

Establishing supportive legal and institutional framework

In terms of effectiveness criteria, activating a supportive regulatory and legal framework can be an effective tool to overcome the barriers in e-government towards improving measurement mechanisms in customer satisfaction. Since reluctance of government officials towards tackling

the problem in the field was discussed in the second chapter, absence of a legal climate can exacerbate the current extent of the problem in the field. Therefore, emergence of a supportive policy environment initiating realization of policy alternatives will be an effective tool to overcome unwillingness of public officials in e-government of Azerbaijan. Additionally, since insufficiencies in the legal context of the problem are driven by weak cooperation between government agencies, a supportive regulatory policy environment can be very effective to bring government actors together in Azerbaijani context. As in the case of the National Digital Strategy in Costa Rica, government agencies can collaborate for policy integration to exchange best practices to tackle down the barriers in measurement of citizen satisfaction. Consequently, establishing a supportive legal framework can be effective to address the existing problem in application of world practice to local cases. In terms of efficiency, the existence of a supportive regulatory framework can be explained in terms of cost-benefit analysis. In fact, the government should allocate a certain number of resources and monitor a proper function of funds to improve the current situation in customer satisfaction measurement. Surely, allocation of new specialized cadres, training programs for them to handle new institutional reforms, regulatory innovations adopted by the government requires sufficient time and funding. However, implementation of policy reforms and new policy alternatives under the framework of supportive legal climate would deliver desired outcomes despite the cost side. Since new policy options in legal context aim to heal situations in feedback mechanisms, innovations in customer satisfaction measurement will improve e-governance services and achieve desired results. Consequently, learning citizens' insights and increasing the quality of online services will compensate for the costs of resource allocation. Thirdly, equity criterion is mainly related to social allocation of burdens and benefits, and also asks the questions "who pays" and "who benefits". In this situation, the government pays

and makes attempts to develop service provision and evaluation mechanisms so that citizens can benefit from service provision and express their feedback regarding delivery of services for future upgrading in digital government. As a result, the burden on the shoulders of the government is for the best interests of society. Fourth, activating a supportive policy climate for implementation of policy alternatives more successfully would be feasible in the local context because of filling gaps in the digital government of Azerbaijan. To some extent, one of significant barriers hampering successful implementation of policies to tackle down customer satisfaction measurement is not to be fully realized in terms of practical side. To be more specific, since the existing problem needs a full realization of policy options in real life rather than staying in the paper, creating a legal environment will allow the implementation of proposed policy options successfully in Azerbaijan. Moreover, considering an institutional capacity in organizations, it would be very feasible to create such a supportive legal framework because even if policy mechanisms are introduced, they cannot be fulfilled comprehensively because of the inability of new cadres. It is also clear that the expert from the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the People had pointed out in a previous chapter that new cadres in organizations were not as capable as past project teams to catch up to the significance of citizen satisfaction in service provision. For example, Costa Rica was successful in improving the organizational capacity of staff to prevent institutional weakness in policy in its policy framework towards evaluation mechanisms for customer satisfaction. Considering all aspects, this strategy is very suitable to apply to the legal framework of Azerbaijan. Finally, in terms of flexibility, world practice is enriched with experience and international policy mechanisms, and each country has different policy applications in their local frameworks and feedback mechanisms in digital government. To be more specific, Azerbaijan policymaking looks at the international arena, takes lessons from the international sphere for the existing problem, but

adjusts global practice to its own legislative framework. Indeed, Azerbaijani government would implement the best international benchmarking practices in respect to country rules, fiscal policy framework, institutional capacity, and distribution of resources towards existing problems in e-government. Consequently, the existence of a supportive regulatory framework can be improvised under the legal policy framework of Azerbaijan.

Utilization of citizen satisfaction and trust surveys

From the effectiveness criteria, utilization of satisfaction and trust surveys will both involve and stimulate citizen participation (including e-participation by filling in e-surveys, etc.) and provide necessary primary data for the state agencies to be analyzed. By including the “Recommendations and Comments” option, the citizens will be able to provide their opinions and perspectives on service provision which will be an immense so-called “idea bank” for analysts and decision-makers. Moreover, considering the official UN report on E-participation stating Azerbaijan be #98 in 2022 and #73 in 2020 (Publicadministration.un.org, 2023), this policy implementation will positively affect citizens' participation and involvement. By initiating the satisfaction and trust surveys, citizens will be motivated and willing to share their feedback, comments as well as recommendations. Through this policy citizens will also increase their trust and sense of commitment to the overall process which will ensure the effectiveness of the policy. The efficiency principle is strongly supported in this policy as surveys, especially e-surveys, will save time, money, and quality, in terms of transparency, accessibility and openness. Utilization of satisfaction and trust surveys will remove manual collection of data which requested a particular amount of time and energy. From the equity perspective, this policy will not be properly followed as in Azerbaijan there is still a gap in the internet accessibility across the country. In Baku the situation is comparatively good but when we look at the situation in the regions and, especially, in

remote villages it is obvious that people lack internet accessibility and will not be able to fill in e-surveys. The burden of society is due to unfair distribution of internet accessibility. The only option could be to get the on-site surveys from visitors in the centers by volunteers and operators, ignoring the e-participation principle. The feasibility of the utilization of satisfaction and trust surveys is possible and requires little time for preparation as well as some cost. The annual budget of organizations needs to consider and add the cost of the purchase of the tablets for surveys and month-based fee of the special data visualization tools such as Tableau, etc. However, the purchased equipment and programs will be used in the long run and provide necessary data for the institutions. Flexibility criteria towards the utilization of satisfaction and trust surveys are possible and even already to some extent is existing in the national system. As an example, ASAN Index measurement system which was accepted back in 2016 (E-qanun.az, 2016) is a good example of a local public services' measurement mechanism. This innovation was a revolutionary step towards services measurement in the country providing transparent and detailed analysis of the quality of service provision. However, this measurement system is one out of many functions of the State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and, as a result, not the one and sole direction of the Agency's activity. Unlike "Queue it" private company and "WeSolve" platform in Denmark as well as Swedish National Data Service (SND) in Sweden, there is no centralized and one single state entity responsible for the citizen satisfaction evaluation in Azerbaijan. However, the flexibility of this option is possible as an identical system such as ASAN Index already exists and is implemented in practice. Therefore, the only need is to create a centralized process where all relevant data will be collected, evaluated and shared with the government and public, which is quite potential in the current situation. By implementing some additional approaches to the already existing system or creating the new

identical but purely focused on one direction entity, this policy ensures the improvability of utilization of satisfaction and trust surveys.

Creating a “digital-ready” environment and introducing new technologies

In terms of effectiveness criteria, creating a digital environment allowing citizens to express their insights, use their voices in service provision would be a very effective strategy because according to the best international benchmarking practices, as the government invests more in infrastructure development, citizens will have more quality services and will be more satisfied. To be more specific, according to implemented survey policies in benchmarking countries such as Estonia and Finland, open portals of digital infrastructure can enable citizens to take initiatives to access and use their feedback in evaluation mechanisms in Azerbaijan too. Consequently, if open portals for surveys and feedback are implemented in the local context, it will attract the people’s attention to access and participate in evaluation mechanisms which can increase citizens’ literacy and awareness towards significance of e-government services. Secondly, implementation of policies in respect to infrastructure development and adoption of new technologies can be efficient in the local context because of less resource allocation but more desired outcomes. Even if adoption of new AI technologies and digital infrastructure for online services require a certain amount of funding and resource allocation in the short run, the consequences of increased quality in service provision will offset the costs spent on installation of new technologies in the long run. Moreover, besides the cost-benefit analysis, application of new technologies will simplify the facilitation of services and eliminate the deficiencies in existing infrastructure. In terms of equity, it will discuss the burden on the shoulders of the government and the benefits enjoyed by society. Firstly, the government will have to bear the costs of implemented technologies and established digital climate, then the citizens will benefit in the

maximum of those technologies while evaluating online services for service satisfaction. In addition, the government should try to ensure equal access to the digital environment for everyone so that people can enter easily and express their insights in the feedback mechanisms under the digital environment. From the feasibility perspective, improving existing infrastructure and adoption of new technologies is realistic because the government is focused and prioritizes digitalization of the services as well as evaluation of the service provision. Although there is a need for time and money in order to achieve the desired goal, it is possible in the long term. However, a more important aspect is e-readiness and digital literacy of citizens towards innovative infrastructure and new technologies. This point questions the feasibility aspect and makes the policy not properly fit in the local context. In terms of flexibility criteria, Azerbaijan is considering the Estonian model of digital governance as a benchmark and implements its experiences in a number of directions in the public sector which are quite successful and broadly used by the public entities and citizens. Still, there is a space for improvement and development, for example, such as Finnish practice of “demokratia.fi” portal, and considering till today success, further development and adoption is possible in case of feasibility of the policy. Until the policy is properly feasible to the Azerbaijanian system, it is doubtful to analyze the flexibility of the proposed policy.

Policy Options/ Criteria	Effectiveness	Efficiency	Equity	Feasibility	Flexibility
Establishing supportive legal and institutional framework	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Utilization of Satisfaction and Trust Surveys	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Improving Existing Infrastructure and Adoption of New Technologies	✓	✓	✓	-	-

Later, in chapter 4, all proposed policies are evaluated based on five criteria which are effectiveness, efficiency, equity, feasibility, and flexibility. Overall, two policy options, which are (1) establishing supportive legal and institutional framework and (2) utilization of satisfaction and trust surveys are considered as the most preferred alternatives to be implemented in the national system. The rationale behind the selected alternatives is that the legal climate is a significant factor to create a regulatory environment for full implementation of policy alternatives in all spheres of digital government in the respect to citizen satisfaction measurement. In addition, the supportive legal environment sets a foundation for translating policies to real actions. Also,

under the relevant legal framework both government and citizens will benefit from proper utilization of satisfaction and trust surveys. Furthermore, both mentioned policy alternatives support all required evaluation criteria.

Chapter 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Aim of study

The purpose of this capstone project was to identify the main challenges of measuring the satisfaction levels of public service users in Azerbaijan and how they affect the way citizens trust the government. In the light of this point, existing challenges, and the methods to tackle them have been studied, international benchmarking practices have been analyzed, and policy options have been given and evaluated based on their levels of effectiveness, efficiency, equity, feasibility, and flexibility. First, it was identified that one of the main challenges observed in measuring citizen satisfaction was the lack of respective legislative framework. It was identified that government officials may find e-governance threatening to their position, leaving them with the risk of losing their jobs. Thus, they may show resistance towards the adoption of new laws and rules about the subject matter. The importance of creating a proper legal environment for the measures to be taken was noted along with the successful practices realized so far, despite the challenges, one of the most notable examples being the “ASAN Index evaluation. Indeed, the role of having anti-corruption laws in this field was another important point of discussion. Secondly, lack of citizen engagement in service design and feedback provision was shown to be another problem in the field; citizens’ lack of knowledge about and engagement in evaluating public services that are provided online prevents them from participating in the process. Lack of awareness, in general, causes them to not know enough about the advantages of e-services and leaves them with no choice

but to go to service provision centers. However, if they are properly informed and, also, asked for their opinions, it will not only foster democracy and e-participation but also help the government design the services in a citizen-centric manner. Thirdly, lack of technical and technological opportunities is another barrier that further complicates the process of causing citizens to be more satisfied and trust their government more. Indeed, the more they are equipped with the necessary tools to use online services and provide their feedback, the more they are likely to be engaged and satisfied citizens. Those tools include but are not limited to electronic signature, computers, e-service portals, and quality internet access not only in urbanized parts of the country but also in regions.

To tackle the challenges mentioned above, three policy alternatives have been introduced based on the international benchmarking practices. For the first challenge, the relevant policy option is the establishment of a proper legal and institutional framework. To realize this goal, it is clear that legislation would need to be passed, and relevant rules to be prepared and introduced for application. However, the study finds based on the global practices that it takes more than legislative steps; funds and allocation of other needed resources are also required for a successful implementation of the mentioned alternative. It therefore needs to be considered that if this alternative is going to be implemented, resource allocation should be taken into account. For the second challenge, namely the lack of citizen engagement, the most optimal choice in the world practice is known to be citizen satisfaction and trust surveys. World leaders in e-governance are applying this tool to engage the citizens in service design and implementation, and the study found out that it is also helpful in causing the citizens to trust their governments more. It is also associated with increased efficiency in public service provision. Therefore, it is a policy alternative that is promising in terms of improving e-governance. The last challenge has been remedied by new

technologies and improved infrastructure by foreign countries. Again, the leaders in e-governance are paying special attention to infrastructure development and consider it as the cornerstone of digitalization. Designing electronic service portals and even application of artificial intelligence tools are integral parts of this process. Overall, if the governments want to deal with the challenge of lack of improved infrastructure, they need to start from the utilization of basic infrastructure such as electronic signature, internet, computers, and tools similar to these.

The given alternatives have been analyzed based on the criteria that were previously mentioned in order to identify which alternative is the most optimum one for Azerbaijan to implement. As a result of the analysis, the first alternative, which was the establishment of a supportive legal and institutional framework was shown to have met all the criteria because the policy alternative will be applicable to all people, easily applicable, adapted to local conditions, and efficient in application. When it comes to the second alternative, the same trend is observed. Satisfaction and trust surveys mechanism is such an alternative that will cover every user, both online and via traditional means, and will be easy to implement in all regions. However, the third alternative, which is about the application of new technologies and infrastructure, is evaluated negatively in terms of two criteria, feasibility, and flexibility. The reason is shown to be the fact that it is not easy to bring in infrastructure that meets the needs of citizens and responds to their expectations. Therefore, its feasibility also becomes questionable. Therefore, the first two alternatives can be considered as the best options to implement in Azerbaijan regarding this policy problem.

To conclude, the main goal of this research was to find out which problems exist in citizen satisfaction measurement mechanisms, what measures have already been taken, how those challenges are dealt with in foreign practice, come up with policy alternatives for Azerbaijan,

evaluate them based on the given criteria, and select the most feasible and promising alternative among them.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis and evaluation of the alternatives and the research of international practices, the following recommendations are listed for their future study, analysis, and application:

1. Establishment of “E-government” working group by the Ministry of Digital Development and Transport, engaging representatives from the Innovation and Digital Development agency, the State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, other relevant ministries and agencies, and experts from abroad;
2. Organizing a workshop series on the topic of “Why use online services while traditional means are available?” in the regions and inform citizens about how online services save time, money, and energy for them;
3. Training people in regions to use internet, computers, and access online services by using electronic signature;
4. Based on the interview conducted with the representative of the Center for Analysis and Coordination of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, asking the volunteers to go to service provision centers, such as ASAN Service Centers, receive a certain service and submit their views on how satisfied they were;
5. Based on the interview the expert on Citizen Satisfaction measurement from the Ministry of Culture, regularly conducting citizen satisfaction survey results, visualizing them, and

distributing them to the relevant government entities to help in decision-making;

6. Drafting and proposing legislations regulating areas such as “Ensuring inclusivity in e-governance”;
7. Formulating, via legislation, clear rules of measuring citizen satisfaction in services that are provided online, in administrative buildings of public entities, and any other type that is made available;
8. Developing the websites of the government entities to have a direct feedback system where they can send their responses by selecting a particular service that he or she used.

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Appendix A

Survey questions:

1. Please indicate your age?
2. Are you an active e-services user?
3. Rate your satisfaction level:

Totally unsatisfied, unsatisfied, neutral, somewhat satisfied, totally satisfied

4. What challenges have you faced while using e-services?
5. Are you regularly surveyed after service provision?
6. Do you give an honest review about your satisfaction level (if no, what is the reason)?
7. Rate accessibility of the satisfaction surveys:

Totally unsatisfied, unsatisfied, neutral, somewhat satisfied, totally satisfied

Appendix B

Interview questions:

1. To what extent are citizen satisfaction measurement tools towards public services developed in Azerbaijan?
2. What do you think are the problems and obstacles in citizen satisfaction measurement?
3. What measures/reforms/policies have been taken regarding those issues? Which ones among them are currently being implemented?
4. How successful are the implemented policies? What is the reason for the failure of some measures?
5. How well did the effective ones solve the issues? What is the progress?

6. Which problems are still existing in this case?
7. What solutions would you suggest?
8. What measurement mechanisms exist in international practice that could be also applied in the local system?
9. Do you agree that the ultimate goal of service provision in the public sector of Azerbaijan is citizen satisfaction? Why?