



# Does Service Delivery Contribute to Legitimacy? Findings from Water Services in Iraq

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## Introduction

**Does improved service delivery  
enhance state legitimacy in fragile and conflict-  
affected states?**

- An article of faith in stabilization and reconstruction
- Improved state performance is presumed to enhance legitimacy, but relationship remains unclear

# Legitimacy

## **Cognitive dimension:**

- Citizens' beliefs about correctness and rightfulness of state institutions, actors, practices, and processes
- Sense of obligation or willingness to comply with authorities

## **Behavioral dimension:**

- Citizens' actual compliance with regulations and laws

## **Types of legitimacy:**

- Output legitimacy: what states do/provide
- Process/procedural legitimacy: how states do what they do

# Legitimation progression (Levi et al. 2009)



## State building and legitimacy (Brinkerhoff 2007)

- State building emerges through fulfillment of core governance functions
- Effective fulfillment contributes positively to trust in the state, and to state legitimation



## Services and legitimacy in Iraq

- History of centralized services used for reward & repression
- Some progress on decentralizing service provision
- Restoring and improving services is a priority
  - With relative stability, citizens report services as biggest problem
  - Slow pace of improvements
  - Perceived inadequacy of services could cause instability

# Water services survey

**Time frame:** Conducted in June-July 2010

**Purpose:** Help sub-national government understand citizen's perceptions & priorities for water service

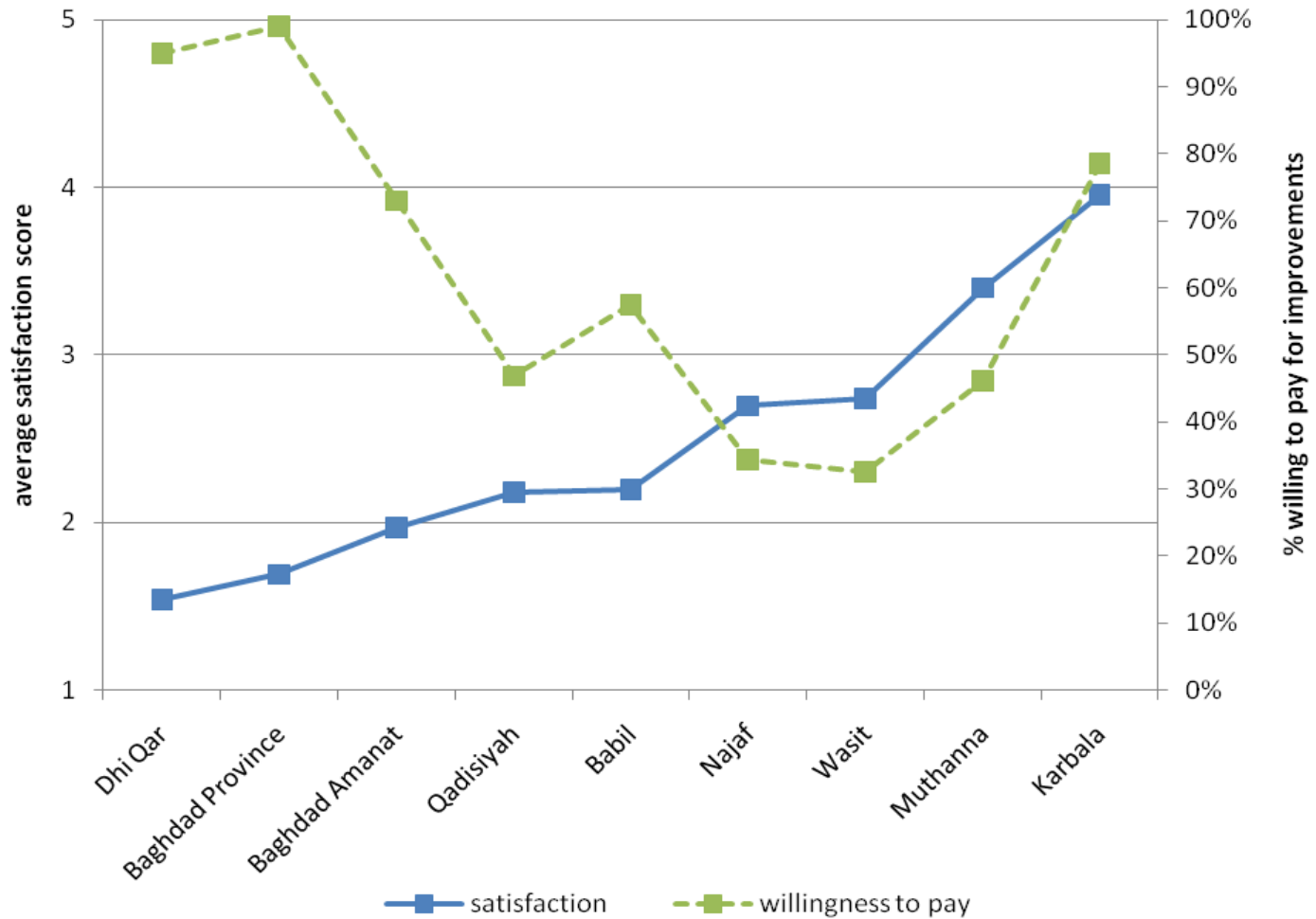
**Areas:** 9 locations (Baghdad + Southern provinces)

**Sample:** >2,300 respondents

## Questions used:

1. *Satisfaction* with service continuity
2. *Willingness to pay (WTP)* for improvements used as proxy for trust in the state as expressed in behavioral legitimacy

# Satisfaction & WTP



Note: 1=very unsatisfied, 2=unsatisfied, 3=somewhat satisfied, 4=satisfied, 5=very satisfied



## Findings

- Relationship between satisfaction and trust is not straightforward
- Improvements in quality contribute to trust only at established levels of service
- At low/no service provision, trust is not a consideration
- Trust may be undermined by inequitable distribution of services or improvements
- Basket of services may influence citizens' expectations

## Interpreting the findings

- Role of citizens' expectations in affecting trust and value-based legitimacy is under-recognized
- Gap between met and unmet expectations contributes to variation in satisfaction levels with a particular service
- Societal groups' past experience with the state differs, so trust in government, and increased attributions of state legitimacy are not uniform

## Conclusions

State-citizen relations are continually negotiated, dynamic interaction based on empirics, expectations, perceptions

- Iterative & non-linear
- Sensitive to starting points
- Sensitive to power distributions and political dynamics

Iraq data provide tentative evidence of relationship between citizen satisfaction with service delivery and their trust in the state

- S&R investments in services may not mitigate conflict or build legitimacy in nascent state
- Sociopolitical legacies color perceptions of the state and contribution of services to enhancing legitimacy

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