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Institutional Social Cynicism Scale: Preliminary Validation in Adults

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Abstract

Social cynicism influences individuals' behaviors and interpersonal interactions, with excessive social cynicism potentially compromising the quality of life. To address this within the Pakistani context, it was aimed to develop the Institutional Social Cynicism Scale (ISCS) by focusing on the institutional aspects of social cynicism. Following an exploratory sequential design, three studies were conducted from March to July 2023. Study I (n = 39) generated qualitative data for initial item generation, while Study II (n = 304) and Study III (n = 367) were conducted to evaluate the scale's construct validity and reliability indices. The final 20-item scale encompasses six factors and demonstrates strong psychometric properties, including robust discriminant validity through significant correlations with core self-evaluations, life satisfaction, and personality traits. The analysis emphasizes the ISCS's cultural relevance and applicability, establishing it as a critical assessment tool for understanding the sources and dynamics of institutional social cynicism within our diverse indigenous context.

Keywords: Institutional Social Cynicism, Pakistani Adults, Scale Development, Social Institutions, Validation Study

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Introduction

Family, media, education, religion, and government are the salient social institutions documented to shape our beliefs, values, and conduct (Baral, 2023). How we perceive the world profoundly impacts our cognitive processes, affect, and behaviors. Social cynicism (SC), for instance, is a destructive view that reflects pervasive mistrust toward social institutions, authorities (Leung et al., 2002), and interpersonal communication (Mills & Keil, 2005). This worldview acts as a cognitive filter (Lam, 2011) that depicts the heightened sensitivity toward likely threats and betrayals. Seemingly protective, such beliefs often adversely affect self-perceptions, social conduct, and psychological well-being (Hui & Hui, 2009).

Cynicism generally emerges from socialization and develops through a complex process shaped by various social actors, such as parents, educators, elder siblings, peers, and so on (Fagan & Tyler, 2005). It has even been observed in children (Mills & Keil, 2005). A cynical person commonly believes that self-interest is the underlying motive of every human action (Stavrova & Ehlebracht, 2018). Contemporary research indicates that cynicism is rising, particularly as trust in social institutions is declining in adults and youngsters (Twenge et al., 2014).

Research within social psychology identifies several forms and dimensions of cynicism, contingent upon the target of judgment. For instance, if self-interest is ascribed to institutions, this form is termed institutional cynicism (Neumann & Zaki, 2023). Institutional cynicism reflects a

critical view that institutional rules, practices, and ethics are inherently fraudulent or corrupt, and can potentially lead to the moral decay of those who work within its structures. If individuals have a negative experience with an institution, they will adopt a skeptical stance, and be critical of how it is organized and operated. More specifically, institutional cynicism in women is defined as the skepticism facilitated by the existing establishments in one's social environment (Younas et al., 2021).

Legal cynicism, another form of cynicism, is a cultural framing in which the law and its enforcers are perceived as illegitimate, inactive, and incompetent in ensuring public safety (Kirk & Papachristos, 2011). It encompasses the attitudes that indicate mistrust toward the law, its makers (e.g., politicians who prioritize the interests of wealthy contributors over the public), and enforcers (e.g., overwhelmed police officers in high-crime areas). Brandl et al. (1994) viewed cynicism as a general outlook on the typical conduct and motivations of police and other authority figures.

Attitudes toward law, in particular, may be influenced by parenting style, with more engaged parenting associated with lower levels of cynicism in children (Nivette et al., 2015). Parents educate their children on the proper ways to interact with officers, thereby teaching, intentionally or unintentionally, about the police's trustworthiness and benevolence (Brunson & Weitzer, 2011). Alienation from mainstream social institutions and adverse experiences with authority figures also contribute to legal cynicism (Nivette et al., 2015). For example, when police officers act unjustly, such as using excessive force or legal breaches (Huq et al., 2017), it undermines public trust in the law as a fair and moral institution (Hough et al., 2010). Cynicism negatively impacts citizen behavior, often reducing compliance with legal norms (Kaiser & Reisig, 2019). Cynical people may believe that they have to stand up for themselves due to the perception that the governmental support is inadequate or non-existent; and that self-reliance is their only alternative (Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003).

Political cynicism, another documented form of cynicism in literature, is a belief that politicians primarily act out of self-interest and/or engage in dishonest practices. It also shapes how people respond to political scandals, with cynics seeking out more information about political crises and viewing them more adversely than those without cynical dispositions (Dancey, 2011).

Likewise, the media, as an institution, influences the public perceptions. According to the agenda-setting theory by McCombs and Shaw (1972), mass media influences public priorities by focusing on specific issues. Initially, the theory explained how the mass media shape political behavior(s) during elections. It was discovered that media could shape public opinion and agenda by consistently highlighting certain events or topics which creates a sense of importance and urgency in the audience. Consequently, such topics become more prominent in public discourse, shaping public opinions, priorities, and decision-making processes. In short, by emphasizing certain topics and omitting others, the media shapes public opinion and guides what people consider significant. This influence can extend to perceptions of institutions and contribute to institutional social cynicism (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Literature Review

Twenge and colleagues (2014) reported that institutional trust significantly declined from 1972 to 2012 for adults and youth in the United States of America. These social institutions included the mass media, religious groups, health and business, educational and political establishments. The findings highlighted that institutional trust declined sharply from ages 18 to 50. Furthermore, income inequality emerged as a significant negative correlate of lower

trust in others, while poverty predicted institutional distrust.

Likewise, a survey conducted by the Independent Polling System of Society (IPSOS) for Voice of America in Pakistan provided insight into the mistrustful attitudes of youth ahead of the 2024 elections. Although 88% of participants viewed voting as essential, 48% reported that the election results would not impact their daily life. Surprisingly, their trust in the military has increased since last year, despite their belief that it might interfere with the election process. However, differences across provinces were observed, with youth from Punjab expressing the least trust in the military. Moreover, 54% of the respondents reported their trust in the media, while 58% reported their trust in the Supreme Court. However, participants reported strong negative views about the ability of political representatives to understand their current issues or engage in meaningful communication (The Friday Times, 2024; VOA Urdu, 2024). Another study found that a lack of trust in security forces and political leaders was directly associated with reduced political participation among Pakistani adults (Ahmad et al., 2019).

Neumann and Zaki (2023) explored cynicism and its impacts from a social-psychological perspective. They highlighted the negative effects of cynicism, such as decreased well-being, trust, and interpersonal cooperation. Interestingly, their research highlighted the presence of a "cynicism paradox", whereby many people continue to display cynicism despite its harmful effects. They argued that social psychology could explain this contradiction by examining how people might overstate their self-interest, form pessimistic expectations, or adopt pessimism as a defense mechanism to avoid being perceived as naive. Constructs and strategies relevant to social psychology, such as prosocial conduct, communicating and avoiding misunderstandings about others' motives, perspective-taking and empathy were suggested as important variables to reduce cynical views in people and foster a cooperative social environment.

A cursory look at the research scholarship indicated that cynicism was linked with several psychological constructs, as in the study by Qin et al. (2022) which investigated the interrelatedness of factors of student cynicism (policy, social, academic, institutional) with subjective well-being, and mental health among nursing students. Results concluded that higher levels of social, institutional, and academic cynicism negatively correlated with mental health scores. Social, institutional, and academic cynicism also indirectly affected the relationship between subjective well-being and mental health.

Similarly, a correlational survey design determined the relationship between student cynicism and life satisfaction in Turkish high school students. Findings concluded that student cynicism and life satisfaction were negatively correlated. Moreover, girls showed higher cynicism toward their schools and reported lower satisfaction with their school and living environment than boys. Moreover, those who desired to be in a different school demonstrated higher student cynicism (Kasalak, 2019).

Likewise, Nivette et al. (2015) studied the causal factors predicting legal cynicism in the younger population. It was observed that being involved in delinquent behaviors and having delinquent peers fostered legal cynicism. Furthermore, feelings of isolation from societal institutes and past unfavorable experiences with police predicted cynical views about the legal system. This indicated an interplay of social and personal factors in developing legal cynicism.

Moreover, Alexandra et al. (2017) examined the relational dynamics between social dominance orientation and the perception of unethical behaviors in various cultural contexts and found social dominance orientation to be positively

related to social cynicism beliefs pan-culturally. Also, social dominance orientation mediated the relationship between social cynicism and perceptions of unethical behavior cross-culturally.

Studies also documented the role of media and political attitudes in influencing public trust or cynicism toward institutions. For example, Quiring et al. (2021) conducted a study to explore constructive skepticism (critical yet balanced attitude toward media sources) and media cynicism (suspecting or rejecting media information altogether) as determinants of generalized media trust in the democratic society of Germany. The findings revealed that cynical individuals reported less trust in the news provided by the media. However, those who scored higher on critical skepticism reported more generalized media trust. Also, age emerged as a negative correlate of generalized media trust and cynicism. Moreover, respondents who trusted their social environments more had less cynical views. Similarly, using alternate news platforms significantly correlated with cynicism. Lastly, political dissatisfaction was found to be positively related to cynical beliefs.

In another study, Kim and Krishna (2018) investigated the association between two facets of public attitudes (public engagement and cynicism) toward the South Korean government and the public's information transmission practices (megaphoning about the government). It was found that the perceived use of the bridging technique (focusing on relationship-building with the public) by the government was associated with public involvement, and the perceived usage of the buffering strategy (manipulating the information to maintain a positive public image) was linked to public cynicism. However, perceived authenticity increased public engagement while decreasing cynicism. The study also showed that both public sentiments served as partial mediators in the relationship between individuals' perceptions of government communication techniques and their positive and negative megaphoning.

Furthermore, organizational cynicism increasingly attracted the attention of researchers within the field of psychology. The relationship between paternalistic leadership, organizational cynicism, and the desire to leave one's job was investigated in a sample of nurses working in a public hospital in Mersin, Türkiye. The results showed significant negative correlations between paternalistic leadership and dimensions of organizational cynicism. Additionally, paternalistic leadership and organizational cynicism explained 41.8% of the variance in the desire to leave the job (Sungur et al., 2019).

Likewise, an investigation into the relationship between organizational cynicism, job alienation, perceived supervisor support, and perceived organizational politics was conducted on a sample of full-time professors at private universities in Karachi, Pakistan. The findings supported that organizational cynicism was positively predicted by perceived organizational politics but negatively by supervisor support. Interestingly, the study did not support the idea that organizational cynicism could mediate the link between the aforementioned perceptions and work alienation. These results suggested that additional factors might contribute to faculty members' work alienation, beyond the influence of perceived supervisor support and organizational politics on organizational cynicism (Yawar et al., 2019).

Similarly, Stavrova and Ehlebracht (2016) conducted four studies to examine whether cynical views influenced income. Findings consistently confirmed that holding cynical beliefs reduced income. The authors argued that such a worldview decreased collaboration and increased attention toward protective strategies to avoid potential exploitation by others. The study also found a positive correlation between

neuroticism and cynicism. Moreover, the predictive relationship between cynicism and income was only applicable in countries with high levels of prosocial behavior. Furthermore, this study indicated societal differences as well, such as in societies where societal cynicism and antisocial behaviors were more prevalent, holding cynical beliefs did not negatively impact financial well-being. The findings suggested that justified mistrust did not result in economic disadvantages.

Psychometric Tools Measuring Social Cynicism and Institutional Cynicism

There exists an absence of validated scales that measure our study variable. The Social Axioms Survey (SAS), a prominent scale with SC as one of its subscales, was developed and validated by Leung and colleagues (2002). Later, a refined 40-item version was developed and validated across 11 countries; the Social Cynicism subscale showed a strong alpha value of .81 (Leung et al., 2012). Tong et al. (2023) validated its 20-item brief version and reported it as a psychometrically-sound scale. In this version, the subscale of Social Cynicism showed an internal reliability value of .65.

In recent years, Younas et al. (2023) developed the Social Cynicism Scale for Women (SCSW), a culturally relevant tool designed specifically for assessing distrust and skepticism in women toward various social institutions and society, as a whole. This 19-item scale, which possesses satisfactory psychometric properties, includes three subscales i.e. institutional cynicism, experiential cynicism, and dispositional cynicism, and utilizes a 5-point Likert scale to document the responses. While SCWS addressed institutional cynicism as one of its subscales, a comprehensive scale for assessing cynicism regarding social institutes across diverse gender groups is still absent from the literature.

The current assessment tools of institutional cynicism lack breadth in capturing cynicism across different societal institutions. For instance, The 13-item Organizational Cynic Scale developed by Brandes (1997) and Brandes et al. (1999) focuses on organizational contexts, assessing affective cognitive, and behavioral aspects of cynicism within workplaces. Similarly, Turner and Valentine (2001) developed an 11-item scale to assess organizational cynicism. Other measures targeting specific institutions include the Legal Cynicism Scale (Gifford & Reisig, 2019), the Police Cynicism Scale (Regoli et al., 1990), Niederhoffer's Cynicism Scale (Hickman et al., 2003), Cynical Attitudes Toward College Scale (Brockway et al., 2002), etc. Although valuable, these scales predominately focus on a single institutional setting rather than offering a holistic view of cynicism toward multiple societal establishments.

The literature review highlights a notable gap in indigenous research on institutional cynicism, particularly in examining its trends across gender and age groups. Moreover, the current tools are largely context-specific and do not capture the broader social landscape that may foster cynical attitudes. This study sought to address this gap by developing a comprehensive scale to assess generalized institutional cynicism toward a wide array of social institutions, providing a more nuanced understanding of how social establishments potentially foster cynical views among the general population.

Method

Research Design and Procedure

This three-phase study utilized the exploratory sequential research design, with samples recruited at distinct intervals for each phase. Data collection and analysis for phase I were conducted between March and April 2023. Sample recruitment for phase II was completed by May 2023, with sample recruitment for phase III concluding in June 2023. The final results were compiled and interpreted in July 2023.

Phase I employed a qualitative study with an inductive approach to investigate institutional social cynicism in young

adults. Data was gathered through focus group discussions (FGDs) and open-ended questionnaires. Themes were identified to generate an item pool for the scale, which was finalized following approval from a panel of experts. A tryout phase of the item pool was carried out in phase II, resulting in the recruitment of a sample for Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). In phase III, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed to evaluate the construct validity of the scale and further confirm the factors identified in EFA. Since the scale was developed in English, only participants who could readily comprehend the content were recruited.

The American Psychological Association's (APA) ethical guidelines were strictly followed throughout the study. All participants were briefed on the study's objectives, and only those who provided formal consent were included in the sample. The provided information was kept confidential and used only for academic purposes. The FGD participants provided their additional consent to have their responses recorded for research purposes. All participants were adequately thanked upon completion of the assessment.

Phase I

Qualitative Study

An inductive approach was employed as the study's goal was to investigate the indigenous and sociocultural aspects of institutional social cynicism among young adults. A sample of (n = 39) adults, including (n = 19) men and (n = 20) women, was recruited through a non-probability convenient sampling strategy for this qualitative research. The participants recruited for Zoom-based focus group discussions were first provided with a consent checklist, to ensure compliance with APA ethical standards. Importantly, participants were provided with the definition of institutional social cynicism at the start of data collection for their clarity. Furthermore, the triangulation method (Carter et al., 2014) was used to improve the qualitative data's quality and credibility. Accordingly, the first step included data collection via FGD, followed by the second stage in which an open-ended questionnaire was administered to a sample of young adults until thematic saturation was reached (Guest et al., 2020). A 34-item scale was developed in this phase which was then administered and analyzed in the subsequent phase.

Phase II

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) Study

Essentially, this study was split into two additional stages. In the first step, a non-probability convenient sample of (n = 50) adults was recruited online from various institutions via a Google Forms link. They were invited to try the 34-item Institutional Social Cynicism Scale (ISC). Results were produced using SPSS version 21; the analysis showed significant reliability indices for the scale. This led to the formal recruitment of the sample (n = 304) through a non-probability convenient sampling technique for the EFA. The study followed the recommendation of Cohen et al. (2013) and Hinkin (2005) who suggested that during scale validation, administering it on a sample that is five or ten times the size of the total number of items would likely ensure strong psychometric properties of the scale.

Phase III

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) Study

CFA is a critical analytical method, conducted to establish the construct validity of a scale. It tests the hypothesis that the factor structure identified during EFA can be replicated in an independent sample (Stevens, 1996). A similar sampling technique, along with the inclusion and exclusion criteria specified in EFA, was employed. Likewise, following the standard guidelines for selecting a sample size of approximately ten times the number of items, a final usable sample of (n = 367) adults, aged 18 to 45, was recruited for this last phase.

Results

Table 1

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Participants in Phases I, II, III

Variables	*N*	%	Variables	*n*	%	Variables	*n*	%
Phase I(*n* = 39)			*Employment Status*			*Employment Status*		
Sex			Employed full-time	41	13.5	Employed full-time	19	5.2
Men	19	48.7	Employed part-time	7	2.3	Employed part-time	16	4.4
Women	20	51.3	Unemployed	41	13.5	Unemployed	24	6.5
Family System			Self-employed	12	3.9	Self-employed	11	3.0
Joint family	7	17.9	Others	203	66.8	Others	297	80.9
Nuclear family	32	82.1	*Family Type*			*Sex*		
Birth Order			Nuclear	176	57.9	Men	58	15.8
First born	8	20.5	Joint	105	34.5	Women	309	84.2
Middle born	20	51.3	*Religious Affiliation*			*Romantic Interest*		
Last born	10	25.6	Muslims	300	98.7	Heterosexual	319	86.9
Only child	1	2.6	Non-Muslims	4	1.3	Non-heterosexual	48	13.1
Phase II(*n* = 304)			*Geo Affiliation*			*Romantic Involvement*		
Birth Order			Rural	96	68.4	Married	18	4.9
First born	89	29.3	Urban	20	31.6	Single	301	82.0
Middle born	142	46.7	*Ethnic Affiliation*			Divorced	2	0.5
Last born	68	22.4	Punjabi	269	88.5	Engaged/Committed	34	9.3
Only child	5	1.6	Sindhi	5	1.6	Dating	9	2.5
Sex			Pakhtoon	6	2	Others	3	0.81
Men	108	35.5	Muhajir	6	2	*Religious Affiliation*		
Women	191	62.8	Kashmiri	6	2	Muslims	357	97.3
Others	5	1.6	Balti	2	0.7	Non-Muslims	10	2.7
			Tajki	1	0.3			
Romantic Interest			Siraiki	9	3	*Geo Affiliation*		
Man	116	38.2	**Phase III (*n* = 367)**			Rural	83	22.6
Woman	92	30.3	*Birth Order*			Urban	284	77.4
Others	1	0.3	First born	93	25.3	*Ethnic Affiliation*		
Prefer not to say	95	31.3	Middle born	165	45.0	Punjabi	332	90.5
Romantic Involvement			Last born	104	28.3	Sindhi	2	0.5
Married	53	17.4	Only child	5	1.4	Pakhtoon	8	2.2
Single	212	69.7	*Family Type*			Muhajir	7	1.9
Engaged/Committed	24	7.9	Nuclear	294	80.1	Kashmiri	6	1.6
Dating	9	3.0	Joint	67	18.3	Balti	4	1.1
Others	6	1.97	Others	6	1.6	Siraiki	1	0.3
						Others	7	1.9

Note. n = frequency, % = percentage

Phase I

Qualitative Study

In this phase, a sample of (*n* = 39) young adults, aged 19 to 23 years (*M* = 21.15, *SD* = 1.18) was recruited. The sample included (*n* = 19) men and (*n* = 20) women, each with a minimum of one year experience at any public sector university, and no reported physical or mental health issues. The sociodemographic data of the participants

(Table 1) indicated that most participants were aged 20 to 22 years (79.48%), had completed 14 years of education (43.6%), were middle or last-borns (76.92%), and belonged to nuclear families (82.1%). The sample was recruited from university students studying across public and private sector universities of Lahore.

An inductive thematic analysis (TA) approach, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines, was applied to analyze the entire dataset comprehensively. The process involved repeated readings of transcripts and open-ended questionnaire responses. Initially, similar themes were grouped which were later checked thoroughly to remove redundancies. The reduced data was then analyzed to generate codes, which resulted in the extraction of core themes and relevant sub-themes, serving as a foundation for item generation. The preliminary item pool was then subjected to expert review (which included subject matter experts and language experts) for content validation. They removed the overlapping and ambiguous items to reduce repetition and finalized a 34-item scale.

Table 2

Explanatory Factor Analysis of the Institutional Social Cynicism Scale (ISCS)(n = 304)

ISCS items	Factor loading					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Factor I: Media						
ISC 16	**.68**	.04	.15	.12	-.04	.10
ISC 17	**.68**	.25	.05	.07	-.00	.14
ISC 18	**.66**	.14	-.07	.17	.22	-.03
ISC 19	**.53**	-.04	.24	.02	.35	-.12
Factor II: Politics						
ISC 12	.12	**.81**	.06	.02	.02	-.07
ISC 11	-.03	**.71**	.23	-.02	.15	.02
ISC 14	.12	**.66**	.16	.10	.05	.04
ISC 13	.37	**.55**	.00	.07	-.12	.21
Factor III: Police						
ISC 8	.03	.24	**.76**	.04	-.05	-.01
ISC 7	.20	.07	**.73**	.08	.15	.14
ISC 6	-.04	.11	**.55**	.22	.18	-.02
ISC 9	.40	.10	**.51**	.17	-.07	.25
Factor IV: Health						
ISC 23	.09	.04	.07	**.82**	.10	-.00
ISC 24	.08	.04	.07	**.77**	.11	.05
ISC 22	.22	.05	.27	**.66**	.03	.08
Factor V: Education						
ISC 27	.10	-.01	.08	.05	**.80**	.02
ISC 28	-.13	.12	.32	.10	**.60**	.20
ISC 26	.27	.08	-.11	.18	**.50**	.12
Factor VI: Religion						
ISC 33	.02	.11	.01	-.02	.13	**.81**
ISC 30	.13	-.04	.14	.12	.07	**.76**

Note. The extraction method was the principal component analysis with a Varimax rotation. The highest factor loadings are in bold.

Phase II

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) Study

In this phase, the average age of the participants was 24 years (*SD* = 7.3) with an average of 15 years (*SD* = 2.1) of formal education. Moreover, the mean monthly income was *M* = 207429.3 PKR (*SD* = 456549.3). The majority were women (62.8%), primarily middle or first-born (76%), either single or married (87.1%), Punjabi (88.5%), from nuclear families (57.9%), and had a rural background (68.4%) (Table 1). The sample was

recruited from university students studying across public and private sector universities of Lahore. Before conducting EFA, authentication of data fitness for the factor analysis was established by computing the Bartlett Test of sphericity and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin values, both of which showed significant results. Also, factors with Eigenvalues > 1 and factor loadings ≥ .35 were retained. Principal component analysis (PCA) was performed for factor extraction, while the Varimax method was used for factor rotations, which resulted in a 20-item six-factor solution. Based on face validity, interpretability, contextual relevance, content alignment within each factor, and sufficient intercorrelations between factors, items were ultimately grouped into their respective factors to establish the finalized 20-item scale with six subscales. Once again, in consultation with two SMEs (Assistant Professors of Psychology), the factors of the ISCS were labeled, and their further details were reported. Moreover, they also suggested retaining items for subscales with fewer items.

Factor I, Media, comprised 4 items (16, 17, 18, and 19), and the factor loadings ranged from .53 to .68. It includes items assessing the ISC experience in adults resulting from their interactions with the media.

Factor II, Politics, comprised 4 items (11, 12, 13, and 14), and the factor loadings ranged from .55 to .81. It includes items assessing the ISC experience in adults resulting from their interactions with politics.

Factor III, Police, comprised 4 items (6, 7, 8, and 9), and the factor loadings ranged from .51 to .76. It includes items assessing the ISC experience in adults resulting from their interactions with police.

Factor IV, Health, comprised 3 items (22, 23, and 24), and the factor loadings ranged from .66 to .82. It includes items assessing the ISC experience in adults resulting from their interactions with healthcare.

Factor V, Education, comprised 3 items (26, 27, and 28), and the factor loadings ranged from .50 to .80. It includes items assessing the ISC experience in adults resulting from their interactions with educational institutes.

Factor VI, Religion, comprised 2 items (30 and 33), and the factor loadings range from .76 to .81. It includes items assessing the ISC experience in adults resulting from their interactions with religion.

The overall Cronbach's alpha reliability for the ISCS was .80; the reliability values for individual factors were .64 for media, .69 for politics, .67 for police, .70 for health, .49 for education, and .53 for religion. In the initial stages, alpha values as low as .50 are considered sufficient (Nunnally, 1978). Based on this criterion, we concluded that the ISCS and its subscales demonstrated acceptable internal consistency.

Table 3

Inter-Correlations of Factors of Institutional Social Cynicism Scale (ISCS) in Phase II (n = 304)

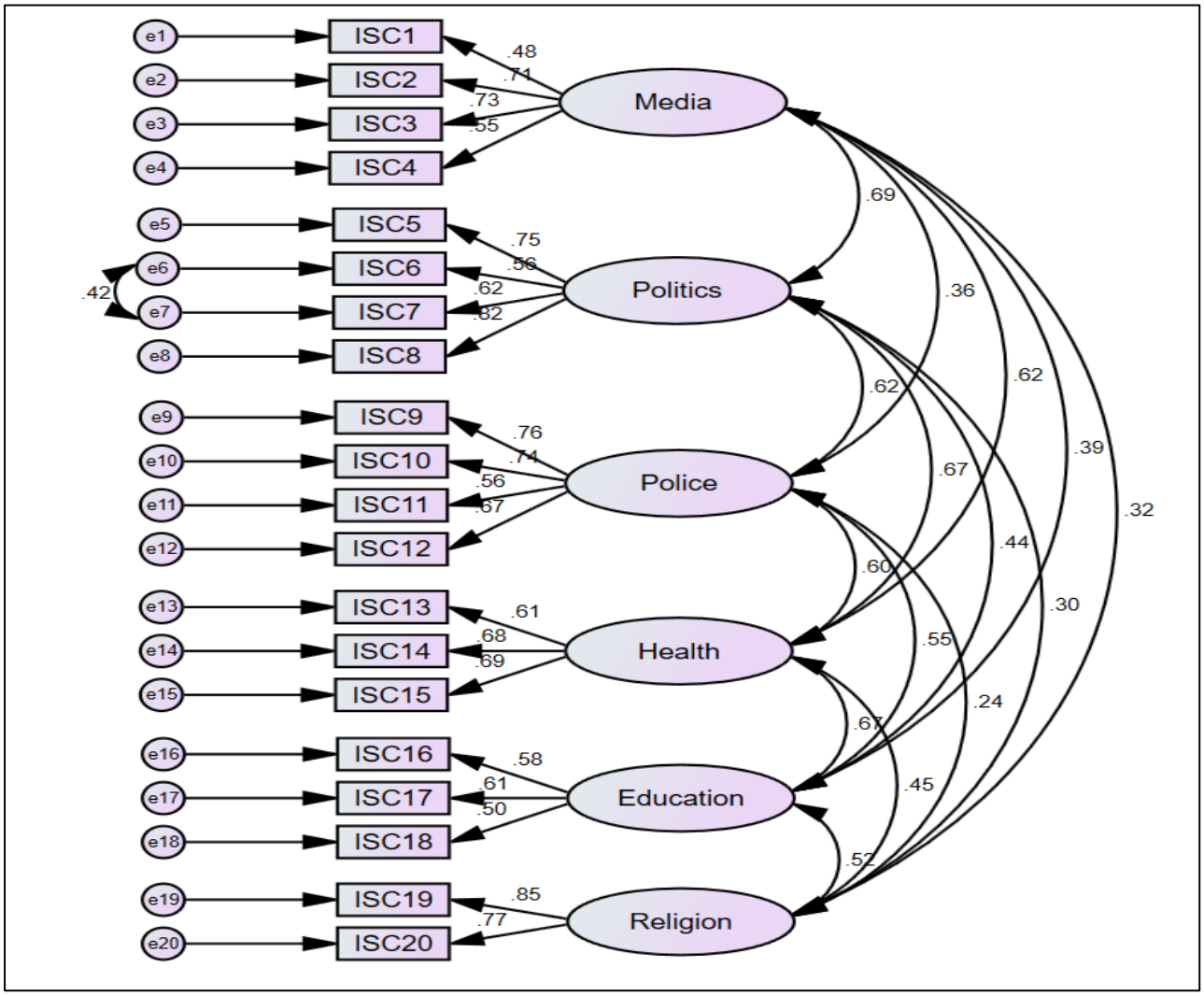
Variables	*M(SD)*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. ISCS	104.5(13.9)	---	.67***	.62***	.73***	.60***	.60***	.50***
2. Media	22.63(3.65)		---	.35***	.35***	.33***	.28***	.20**
3. Politics	22.42(4.1)			---	.37***	.18**	.18**	.15*
4. Police	20.42(4.28)				---	.36***	.30***	.24***
5. Health	16.26(3.41)					---	.28***	.16**
6. Education	14.14(3.60)						---	.23***
7. Religion	8.61(3.24)							---

Note: *p<.05;**p<.01;***p<.001, ISCS = Institutional Social Cynicism Scale

Next, correlation analysis was performed to assess the intercorrelations between factors of ISCS. Significant inter-correlations among all factors of the Institutional Social Cynicism Scale are illustrated in Table 3, justifying the use of the Varimax rotation method.

Figure 1

Path Diagram Showing a Good Model Fit with the Data



Phase III

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) Study

The age range of participants for phase III was 18 to 45 years (M = 21.57, SD = 3.13). Moreover, the average monthly income was 155951.9 PKR (SD = 181593.7). On average, the participants had completed 15 years (SD = 1.53) of formal education. The majority of the participants were women (84.2%), from nuclear families (80.1%), and were either single or committed (91.28%). A substantial portion of our sample consisted of students (80.4%), individuals belonging to Punjabi ethnicity (90.5%) and practicing Muslims (97.3%) (Table 1). The sample was recruited from university students studying across public and private sector universities of Lahore.

The overall Cronbach's alpha reliability value for the scale was .87, while the reliability estimates for individual factors were .71 for media, .80 for politics, .78 for police, .69 for health, .57 for education, and

.80 for religion. The reliability analysis showed a very good reliability for the overall ISCS. Since the education subscale demonstrated an alpha value closer to .60, it was accepted (Hulin et al., 2001).

Next, CFA was conducted using AMOS 2 on the collected data, which confirmed the six-factor solution of the ISCS identified in the EFA, as illustrated in Figure 1. Initially, the default model had slightly lower Normed Fit Index (NFI =.84) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI= .89) values with .069 as the root-mean-square of approximation value (RMSEA) and χ^2 = 422.69 (155), p < .001. However, after drawing one covariance between e7-e6, all the indices reached the acceptable range (Montoya & Edwards, 2021), such as CMIN/df < 3 (i.e. 2.86); CFI = .91; GFI = .91; NFI = .86; RMSEA = .062 with χ^2 = 367.98 (154), p< .001.

The range of factor loadings for media was between .48-.74, .56-.75 for politics, .56 -.76 for police, .61-.69 for health, .58-.60 for education, and, estimated between .77–.85 for religion (Figure 1). The entire factor loadings were above the cut-off of .30 which guided our decision to retain all the items at this stage.

Table 4

Reliability Coefficients, M(SD) and Pearson Product Moment Correlation for Scales (n = 367)

Variables	M(*SD*)	A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. ISCS	103.7(15.4)	.87		.63**	.74**	.73**	.76**	.67**	.54**	-.09	-.02	-.03	.08	-.1	.11*	-.15**
2.Media	22.3(3.72)	.71			.42**	.26**	.43**	.26**	.24**	.03	-.00	-.03	.18**	-.02	.97	.01
3.Politics	22.6(4.1)	.80				.5**	.48**	.32**	.23**	-.07	-.04	-.00	.07	-.08	.07	-.09
4. Police	19.6(4.68)	.78					.47**	.38**	.18**	-.09	-.01	-.03	.02	-.07	.05	-.15**
5. Health	15.9(3.27)	.69						.45**	.34**	-.09	.00	-.06	-.00	-.08	.08	-.16**
6.Education	13.8(3.6)	.57							.36**	-.09	-.02	-.06	-.05	-.1	.06	-.12*
7.Religion	9.46(3.24)	.80								-.05	-.02	.06	.11*	-.02	.08	-.09
8. LSS	21.3(5.93)	.80									.15**	.07	.15**	.22**	.04	.47***
9. Ex.	7.40(3.1)	.60										-.08	-.00	.16**	.22**	.18**
10. Agr.	10.2(2.24)	.25											.15**	.12*	.01	.07
11.Cons.	9.52(2.63)	.46												.04	.13*	.23***
12. ES	7.71(2.88)	.56													.20**	.47***
13.OE	9.77(2.44)	.35														.24***
14.CSES	3.06(.46)	.71														

*Note. *p<.05;**p<.01; ***p<.001.*

α = Cronbach alpha, *M* = Mean, *SD* = Standard Deviation, ISCS = Institutional Social Cynicism Scale, LS = Life Satisfaction Scale, Ex. Extraversion, Agr. =Agreeableness, Cons. = Conscientiousness, ES = Emotional Stability, OE = Openness to Experiences, CSES = Core Self-Evaluation Scale

After that, the Pearson Product-Moment correlation was employed to study the relationship among all the factors of ISCS. The relationship of ISCS with the Life Satisfaction Scale (Diener et al., 1985), Core Self-Evaluation Scale (Judge et al., 2003), and Ten Items Personality Inventory

(TIPI) (Gosling et al., 2003) was also assessed.

Table 4 highlights that ISCS positively and significantly correlated with all its factors. A significant positive correlation was also found among all the factors of ISCS. A few ISCS factors demonstrated good discriminant validity with two factors of the Ten Items Personality Inventory (Gosling et al., 2003). ISCS did not significantly correlate with the Conscientiousness factor but its Media ($r = .18$, $p < .05$) and Religion ($r = .11$, $p < .05$) subscales showed low positive significant correlations with Conscientiousness, indicating that conscientiousness trait in an individual is likely to enhance Media-related and religion-related cynicism. The Openness to Experience factor also exhibited a low positive association with ISCS ($r = .11$, $p < .05$). Moreover, the Core Self-Evaluation Scale (Judge et al., 2003) showed a significantly negative correlation with ISCS ($r = -.15$, $p < .05$), as well as its subscales of police, health, and education. The Life Satisfaction Scale (Diener et al., 1985) showed negative associations with ISCS and its factors; however, the values were not significant.

Discussion

Scale development plays an important role in advancing the understanding of various constructs within social sciences (Boateng et al., 2018; Morgado et al., 2017). The current study aimed to develop an indigenous tool to assess institutional social cynicism in adults. To achieve this, we conducted three sequential studies involving qualitative data collection for item generation, followed by validation and psychometric evaluation, which resulted in a finalized 20-item Institutional Social Cynicism Scale (ISCS). Our methodology aligned with established guidelines in scale development, which emphasized item pool generation, content validation, and psychometric assessment (Hinkin, 2005; Morgado et al., 2017). Also, interviews and focus group discussions with the target population, recognized as robust methodological approaches in scale development (Morgado et al., 2017), were employed in this study to enhance content relevance and validity.

The study commenced with an exploratory phase to undercover the core experiences and perspectives that target cynical views about social institutes in young adults. By analyzing young adults' reflections on their experiences and observations, we derived rich qualitative data to visualize themes, and to inform the item pool for the preliminary ISCS. Following the guidelines for scale development (Cohen et al., 2013), those items that would either be uncomfortable to respond to or prompt a low response rate were excluded, resulting in a refined pool of 20 items. These items were presented on a seven-point Likert-type rating scale, chosen to optimize response rate and quality.

During the tryout stage, a sample of ($n = 50$) individuals was recruited, which provided psychometrically promising results. Subsequently, the scale was administered to a sample of 304 adults in phase II to conduct exploratory factor analysis (EFA), followed by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in phase III. The CFA results corroborated the six-factor solution obtained in the EFA for the Institutional Social Cynicism Scale (ISCS). The initial model showed moderate fit indices, but the model fit improved after adding a covariance between two variables. The modified model demonstrated acceptable fit indices, indicating an accurate representation of data. These findings support the construct validity of the ISCS, establishing it as a valid measure.

The ISCS demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency ($\alpha = .80$) during phase II, supported by literature as a good reliability value (Janssens et al., 2008; Nunnally, 1978). The Cronbach's alpha values for its six subscales ranged from .50 to .70 which were also within the

acceptable range as per Nunnally (1978) and Field (2018). Moreover, we proposed that the low alpha values of (α =.49) and (α = .53) for education (three items) and religion (two items) subscales were justified by their very few items, as the literature suggests that the Cronbach's alpha value increases with items (Field, 2018; Schmitt, 1996; Van Griethuijsen et al., 2014). Moreover, many statisticians criticize the rigid Cronbach alpha ranges and emphasize the context (e.g., item number) during interpretation (Hoekstra et al., 2018).

Therefore, all subscales were deemed acceptable and retained for phase III.

The Cronbach's alpha analysis in phase III again showed promising results (α = .57 to .80). The education subscale had an alpha value (α = .57) slightly below the acceptable range of .60 (Janssens et al., 2008; Schmitt, 1996; Van Griethuijsen et al., 2014), therefore it was deemed acceptable for further analysis. The overall scale reliability reinforces the ISCS's consistency across various circumstances. The inter-correlational analysis revealed that ISCS factors showed moderately significant intercorrelations, supporting their measurement of a common overarching construct of institutional social cynicism. The scale, however, could be revisited in future studies to improve the reliability of the education subscale.

Moreover, ISCS demonstrated significant discriminant validity, as indicated by the significant negative correlation between the Core Self-evaluation Scale and ISCS factors. The findings align with existing literature suggesting core self-evaluation negatively relates to cynicism in organizational contexts (Yasmin, 2020). The significant negative correlation between Conscientiousness and the media subscale of ISCS aligns with the findings from Quiring et al. (2021), who reported that cynical people use different news platforms to seek information. Although the ISCS demonstrated a non-significant association with the Life Satisfaction Scale, a trend of negative correlation was observed, consistent with previous findings (Aslan & Yilmaz, 2013; Kasalak, 2019). Furthermore, non-significant negative relationships were observed between ISCS and the Emotional Stability subscale of TIPI, differing from Quiring et al. (2021), who reported significant results between cynicism and neuroticism. Collectively, the correlational analysis established robust discriminant validity of the ISCS, reinforcing that it effectively measures a distinct construct.

It is important to note that a positive association emerged between the Openness to Experience factor and ISCS. This relationship could be contextualized by the work of Acaray and Yildirim (2017), who found that openness predicts organizational cynicism in teachers; they argued that openness enhances perceptiveness and creativity, leading to unmet expectations and heightened cynicism. Although the relationship was significant, the Pearson correlation value was relatively low (r = .11), which limits the strength of convergent validity evidence. The convergent validity of ISCS could be further examined in future studies by correlating it with similar measures, such as the institutional cynicism subscale of the SCSW (Younas et al., 2023) and measures of pessimism.

Also, our study did not investigate family, a primary social institution (Baral, 2023; Khan et al., 2020), which represents a limitation. The family unit was only mentioned as a source of cynicism by women participants during phase I. Future research could explore the role of family in the context of social institutional cynicism. Moreover, even though the data was collected till the thematic saturation, still the sample size of phase I is a shortcoming. Also, ISCS was developed in the English Language, which poses another limitation. Future studies could validate it in Urdu to enhance its validity and accessibility.

Importantly, the ISCS was administered to participants from diverse backgrounds,

including differences in age, employment status, relationship status, family setup, birth order, ethnicity, and geographic orientation. This diversity supports the scale's high external validity, allowing for the generalization of findings across different demographic groups. Additionally, its administration to non-heterosexual participants enhances its applicability to the sexual diversity present in our country. This study underscores the need for future research to utilize the ISCS within our country to elucidate patterns of social institutional cynicism patterns across diverse sociodemographic groups, as our current research did not undertake comparative analyses among these groups.

To conclude, ISCS offers a significant advancement in social psychology, psychology, and sociology by offering a validated, psychometrically sound tool to assess cynical attitudes toward key social establishments in adults from our indigenous context. The novelty of our scale lies in the unique inclusion of items regarding the salient social institutions of media, politics, police, health, education, and religion. As indicated in the literature overview, mistrust in these institutes is on the rise (Twenge et al., 2014), with a recent survey in Pakistan (The Friday Times, 2024; VOA Urdu, 2024) reporting pronounced skepticism toward politics and media in the youth. This contemporary relevance further enhances the utility of our scale for both research and clinical applications.

ISCS could aid mental health practitioners in identifying individuals whose interactions with social institutions contribute to their cynicism, potentially impacting mental health (Neumann & Zaki, 2023). Therapeutic interventions that address underlying mistrust for social institutes could be developed to promote coping and resilience. Moreover, integrating ISCS into social research could guide the development of strategies to enhance institutional trust, an essential way of fostering a sense of security among the masses (Spadaro et al., 2020).

Ethics Statement

All the procedures were taken according to APA ethical standards. Informed consent was taken in written form from all the respondents to participate in this study.

Contribution of Authors

Faiz Younas: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Reviewing & Editing

Shazia Qayyum: Methodology, Writing - Reviewing & Editing, Supervision

Fatima Younas: Investigation, Methodology, Data Curation, Formal Analysis

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest declared by the authors.

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Data Availability Statement

The datasets of the current study are not available publicly due to ethical reasons but are available from the corresponding author [F.Y.] upon the reasonable request.

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