



South African municipal performance through the lens of Batho Pele Principles: A public perspective

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Abstract

This study analyses the performance of municipalities in South Africa from the public's viewpoint, using the lens of the Batho Pele principles. Batho Pele, meaning "People First" in Setswana, emphasises the importance of citizen-centred service delivery, characterised by accountability, transparency, responsiveness, and quality services in the public sector. This paper applied a quantitative research method, using data from the South African Social Attitude Survey (SASAS). The study used SPSS version 27 for statistical analysis in four stages. These included univariate analysis, constructing the Batho Pele Index, comparing means across provinces, and conducting multivariate analysis through multiple and logistic regressions. The Batho Pele Index (BPI) findings indicate a prolonged period of public discontent (2007-2020) regarding how municipalities engage with communities regarding basic services. There is a perception that municipalities are slow to address citizens' complaints regarding service delivery issues and to rectify reported problems. The mean BPI score supports these observations, showing a consistent trend of dissatisfaction (2007-2020), with a 40% decrease in satisfaction likelihood. This study proposes significant strategies that could enhance municipal performance excellence and provide valuable insights for policymakers.

Keywords: Batho Pele, Municipalities' performance, service delivery, public opinion, public satisfaction

1. Introduction

Work on municipal management in the last two decades has demonstrated that reputable municipal performance has several advantages, including

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transparency, quality service delivery, and increased access, all of which led to citizen satisfaction (Masiya & Lubinga, 2023; Rulashe & Ijeoma, 2022; Kgobe & Mamokhere, 2021; Maropo, 2018). Extant research reveals a positive relationship between citizen satisfaction and trust in government (Alkrajji & Ameen, 2022; Salim et al., 2017; Sindane, 2011). In principle, the perception of trust in municipalities is regarded as the consequence of municipal performance. In simpler terms, trust and distrust in municipalities are rational responses by residents to the performance of their municipalities (Liu, 2015). Distrust in municipalities is frequently attributed to subpar municipal performance (Yang & Holzer, 2006). According to Bouckaert and van de Walle (2003), at the local level, citizens' trust is primarily influenced by 'micro' performance issues about variations in service provision. Consequently, the performance of government services has become a subject of concern in both political and academic discussions, as it is viewed as a crucial factor in restoring trust. The underlying notion is that an enhanced quality of municipal services will heighten the satisfaction of residents, which ultimately results in an increased level of trust in municipalities (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003).

In this context, an efficient municipal administration earns the trust of its citizens, which is crucial for maintaining social cohesion. While numerous scholars have focused on internal and external challenges affecting municipal performance from a municipal official perspective (Masiya et al., 2021; Khunoethe, Reddy and Mthuli, 2021), past research has paid less attention to the examination of municipal performance through the lens of the Batho Pele principles and particularly from the perspective of the public as service recipients. Furthermore, although there have been evaluations of Batho Pele implementation, these have typically focused on compliance and procedural adherence within government structures rather than on public perceptions of actual service delivery outcomes. The study has also primarily focused on measured performance from the supply side rather than the demand side. To expand our understanding of this phenomenon, our study examines the performance of municipalities in South Africa from the public's viewpoint, using the lens of the Batho principles. In particular, it shifts the analytical lens from institutional self-assessment to public perception, providing an empirical, citizen-centred evaluation of municipal performance against the Batho Pele principles.

We adopt the definition of municipal performance by Kistik and Kocak (2016), who describe municipal performance as assessing whether predetermined targets are achieved, to ensure sustainability, direct resources, and increase satisfaction. Existing literature suggests that various factors contribute to poor municipal performance, including an unsupportive institutional environment, negative power struggles, over-regulation, and political interference (Masiya et al., 2021). Inadequate human resources

capacity, shortage of skills, unethical organisational culture, and ineffective performance management systems also play a role (Ramutsheli, 2015). The size of a municipality can impact its financial performance, with larger cities generally managing revenue and expenditure better (Gomes, 2013).

Democratic South Africa inherited a public service lacking a people-centred approach and the necessary skills and attitudes to address the nation's developmental challenges. To overhaul the public service, it became imperative to ensure that citizens receive proper service, that all employees operate at their maximum capacity while representing the people impartially, and that state resources are managed fairly, equitably, and objectively (Chapter 10, Section 195(1) of the Constitution of South Africa). In 1997, the South African government endorsed the Batho Pele Principles to enhance service delivery. The objective of the Batho Pele initiative was to gradually elevate service delivery standards, particularly for historically marginalised (Sebake & Sebola, 2014). The Batho Pele framework is based on eight principles aimed at improving public service delivery and ensuring that government officials and institutions prioritise the interests of the citizens as enshrined in Chapter 10 of the South African Constitution. Despite adopting the principles, there have been questions on municipal performance exemplified by increased service delivery protests across the country over the last few years (Masiya et al., 2019). Our central research objective is to examine the public perceptions of municipal performance in South Africa, using the lens of the Batho principles. The framework of the Batho Pele ("People First") principles is based on the ideals of the Constitution that seek to promote and maintain high standards in service delivery and all public affairs. These development-oriented standards aim to promote high professional ethics, ensure the public administration is accountable and transparent, and encourage citizens to participate in policy and public matters.

More than two decades after its adoption, the Batho Pele framework provides a valid and practical lens for assessing public service performance. Its principles are embedded in the constitutional values of transparency, accountability, and responsiveness, which remain central to democratic governance. Although service delivery contexts have evolved, with greater citizen expectations, more complex socio-economic challenges, and rising demands for digital service channels, the core intent of Batho Pele to place citizens at the centre of service delivery is arguably even more urgent today. The framework's strength also lies in its universality and adaptability. The eight principles can be applied across sectors, levels of government, and service types, providing a standard benchmark against which citizens and policymakers alike can assess performance. Moreover, Batho Pele remains one of the few nationally endorsed frameworks that explicitly links service quality to citizen experience and trust in government. This makes it uniquely

positioned to capture the relational aspects of service delivery that purely technical performance metrics often overlook.

Following a quantitative approach, a Batho Pele Index (BPI) was created for analytical purposes, a sum of the responses over years (2007-2020) to the eight Batho Pele statements. We believe this study provides several contributions to the literature. First, we complement past studies examining challenges affecting South African municipalities (Kleynhans & Coetzee, 2019; Masiya et al, 2021; Khunoethe, Reddy and Mthuli, 2021). Drawing from the Batho Pele principle, we show a disconnect between municipal officials' performance and the trust reposed in them by the public, which affects citizen satisfaction. This introduction is followed by the background and context of the study, a theoretical framework, the methodology used, findings of the study and conclusion.

2. Theoretical Framework

In South Africa, the endeavour to enhance public service has been heavily influenced by the policy and philosophical framework of the Batho Pele ("PeopleFirst") ideas. Introduced in 1997, the policy and legislative framework aimed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of service provision. Some researchers believed that these principles would significantly transform the delivery of public services in the country (Nzimakwe & Mphehle, 2012).

The Batho Pele Principles are a collection of recommendations designed to enhance and improve the performance of municipalities. The principles underscore the significance of thorough monitoring and evaluation processes in local municipalities (Thaba & Kanjere, 2014). These procedures guarantee sufficient services and contribute to the general expansion, advancement, and efficient service delivery in the local government of South Africa. To effectively implement the Bathopele Principles in municipal performance, it is necessary to have thorough monitoring and assessment procedures (Munzhedzi, 2017). These techniques guarantee the proper implementation of performance management and development systems. Additionally, they emphasise the importance of adopting a strategic method for overseeing personnel, clearly expressing and advocating essential principles and values of human resource management, elevating standards for training and development as a crucial component of the strategic human resource management process, and incorporating the fundamental concept of performance appraisal. These principles establish a structure for harmonising the policies and procedures of human resource management with the broader objectives aimed at guaranteeing quality, effectiveness, and efficiency in local government. In addition, the Bathopele Principles

acknowledge the importance of conducting regular performance evaluations and establishing performance objectives to achieve ongoing enhancements in service provision and organisational efficiency (Mthembu & Indermun, 2015). The Bathopele Principles generally guide local municipalities to improve their performance by prioritising strategic personnel management, training and development, evaluation and enhancement, and performance measurement (Thaba & Kanjere, 2014). The Batho Pele principles, consisting of eight measures, are used to assess the performance of municipal entities in South Africa and to provide guidance for the conduct of municipal authorities. The eight principles encompass the following: soliciting input from service users, establishing service benchmarks, enhancing accessibility, assuring politeness, offering comprehensive and improved information, promoting transparency, rectifying errors and shortcomings, and delivering cost-effective services. The principles outlined by the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) in 2021 are as follows:

Consultation: This principle emphasises the importance of involving citizens in decision-making processes related to municipal services. It recognises that citizens have valuable insights and perspectives that can contribute to improving service delivery. Consultation can take various forms, including public hearings, surveys, focus groups, and community meetings. By engaging with the public, municipalities can better understand citizens' needs and preferences, leading to more informed and responsive decision-making (DPSA, 2021).

Service Standards: Service standards define the quality and timeliness citizens can expect from municipalities. These standards serve as benchmarks against which the performance of municipalities can be measured. Clear and measurable service standards help to manage expectations, hold municipal officials accountable, and identify areas for improvement. Examples of service standards include response times for inquiries, waiting times for services, and accuracy rates for processing applications (DPSA, 2021).

Access means ensuring all citizens can access municipal services without discrimination or barriers, regardless of their background or circumstances. This principle recognises the importance of inclusivity and equity in service delivery. Enhancing access may include providing services in multiple languages, offering accommodations for people with disabilities, and establishing service points in geographically remote areas. Removing barriers to access promotes social inclusion and ensures that no one is left behind (DPSA, 2021).

Courtesy entails treating all citizens with respect, dignity, and politeness in every interaction. Municipal officials must demonstrate professionalism and empathy when serving the public, regardless of the circumstances. This

principle emphasises the importance of fostering positive relationships between citizens and the public service. Courtesy can enhance trust, satisfaction, and cooperation, contributing to a more harmonious and productive society (DPSA, 2021)..

Information: Information refers to providing citizens with clear, accurate, and timely information about public services, procedures, and their rights. Transparency and communication are essential for building trust and empowering citizens to make informed decisions. Municipalities should ensure that information is easily accessible, understandable, and available in multiple formats and languages. Effective communication helps to manage expectations, prevent misunderstandings, and promote civic engagement and participation (DPSA, 2021).

Openness and Transparency: Openness and transparency involve conducting municipal business in a manner open to public scrutiny and oversight. This principle emphasises accountability and integrity in decision-making and governance processes. Municipalities should proactively disclose information about their activities, policies, and expenditures to the public. Transparency promotes trust, accountability, and legitimacy, as citizens can hold public officials accountable for their actions and decisions (DPSA, 2021).

Redress: provides mechanisms for citizens to seek resolution and remedy if they are dissatisfied with the quality or delivery of municipal services. Citizens should have access to fair and effective grievance mechanisms to address their complaints and concerns. These mechanisms may include complaint hotlines, ombudsman offices, and formal appeals processes. Redress mechanisms demonstrate responsiveness and accountability on the part of the municipality, reinforcing citizens' rights and promoting trust in municipalities (DPSA, 2021).

Value for Money: Value for money emphasises the efficient and effective use of public resources to achieve desired outcomes. Municipalities should strive to maximise the impact of their expenditures and investments while minimising waste, fraud, and inefficiency. This principle underscores the importance of accountability, performance management, and continuous improvement in public service delivery. By delivering high-quality services at a reasonable cost, municipalities can enhance public trust, confidence, and satisfaction (DPSA, 2021).

However, implementing this framework and the results in actual service delivery are still concerning. As Khoza and Toit (2011) point out in their assessment of the application of the principles in health services in South Africa, they have had a very problematic implementation. Looking at newspaper articles reporting in detail about patients' complaints, they

argue that the success of the implementation, or lack thereof, has not been studied since introducing these principles in the health services. They highlight the need to better study implementation in this sector if the implementation of services in this field is to be improved (As Khoza and Toit, 2011). Specifically, Khoza et al. (2010) identified some specificities in implementing a public hospital. Their findings suggest that patients were unsatisfied with treatment in public hospitals and that only a few principles were implemented effectively. In their analysis, shortcomings are attributed to insufficient management skills and knowledge at different levels of the health care system and patients' lack of awareness about their health care rights and responsibilities.

Similarly, looking at applying the Batho Pele Principles through content analysis of literature and using the Department of Home Affairs as a case study, Carmen (2022) also highlights citizens' dissatisfaction with service delivery. This, as Carmen argues, seems to be heightened by public officials, who refuse to be accountable and responsive, or in other words, are failing to apply such principles in practice.

However, the hope for the potential of this framework remains. As some studies have noted, the poor performance across the service delivery spectrum, which has resulted in violent protests, could be improved through the proper and diligent application of these principles. In their article exploring how the principles could assist in improving service delivery at the municipal level, Mofolo and Smith even propose that the principles should be used and followed in municipalities as a broader strategic mechanism to enhance community participation and accountability (Mofolo & Smith, 2009). However, as other authors have noted in their evaluation of these principles as a public management tool and philosophy, they need to be adequately examined and applied to become a strategic mechanism for improvement.

Looking at the Batho Pele through a comparative lens and in contrast to similar philosophies, they align conceptually with several international initiatives to transform public service delivery through citizen-centred governance. For instance, Nigeria's SERVICOM (Service Compact with All Nigerians), launched in 2004 (Kuye & Ile, 2007), shares Batho Pele's emphasis on accountability, responsiveness, and performance monitoring. Both frameworks aim to bridge the trust gap between the state and its citizens through enforceable service charters. Similarly, the United Kingdom's Citizens Charter (1991) pioneered efforts to improve transparency, service standards, and customer satisfaction in public services, which served as a foundational model for many countries (Mulwa et al., 2024). India's Sevottam model, introduced in 2005, also adopts a citizen-focused approach, structured around service quality benchmarks, grievance redress

mechanisms, and public accountability (Singh, 2024). Even Canada's Service Standards Initiative echoes these principles through measurable service delivery commitments and transparent reporting (Sharma & Agarwal, 2013; Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2005). While differing in administrative context and institutional maturity, these initiatives reflect a global shift towards performance-driven public service underpinned by democratic values. Batho Pele thus represents not an isolated innovation, but part of a broader global movement towards responsive, ethical, and citizen-empowered governance.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

This research investigates public sentiment regarding the performance of municipalities, assessed through adherence to the Batho Pele principles, which emphasise courtesy, openness, transparency, and efficient service delivery. Following a quantitative approach, we utilised data from the South African Social Attitude Survey (SASAS), an extensive, annual survey conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) among adults aged 16 and above. Each SASAS survey aims for a representative sample of adult South Africans, with approximately 3500 addresses sampled annually, achieving a realisation rate of 70% to 80% (Kilivu, Roberts and Davids, 2010).

3.2 Statistical analysis

The study's analysis is grounded on the fundamental inquiries on the eight Batho Pele ("People First") principles, which serve as a metric for evaluating municipal performance. What is your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements?

- 1) Municipalities do not consult communities enough on basic services;
- 2) Government is delivering on its promises in terms of providing basic services that are of good quality.
- 3) Government is making progress in giving all South Africans equal access to services;
- 4) My municipality treats people with respect;
- 5) My municipality provides people with good information about basic services;
- 6) My municipality provides regular information on its performance in delivering services;
- 7a) My municipality responds quickly to complaints about problems with services (Redress: rapid response);

- 7b) My municipality does a good job of following through and fixing problems (Redress: fixing problems), and
- 8) People are getting good value for the money they are charged for basic services" (*South African Social Attitude Survey, 2007 to 2020*).

Based on the above questions, the data was analysed in three stages. The study employed SPSS version 27 to conduct statistical analysis across the three stages. *Stage 1* involved the fundamental univariate statistical analysis, which was conducted to illustrate the frequency distribution of responses for each Batho Pele principle. Stage 2 involved the construction of the Batho Pele Index (BPI) using the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) method to extract the components. A varimax (orthogonal) rotation followed this. Furthermore, the Cronbach Alpha and Pearson's correlation statistics helped to determine the reliability and validity of the Batho Pele Index.

PCA was chosen because the eight Batho Pele principles are conceptually distinct yet empirically correlated. Using PCA allowed us to reduce this interrelated set of variables into a single composite index while retaining the maximum variance across the dataset. This method is particularly appropriate for index construction as it:

- Captures the shared variance among related principles.
- Avoids redundancy from highly correlated measures.
- Enhances interpretability by providing a parsimonious measure of municipal performance.

The reliability and validity of the PCA-derived index were assessed using Cronbach's alpha and Pearson's correlation coefficients, confirming strong internal consistency and coherence across items.

Index Scaling: The original survey responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). To improve interpretability and enable meaningful comparisons over time, the aggregated PCA scores were transformed into a 0–100 scale using a linear transformation:

$$BPI\ score = \frac{Observed\ score - Minimum\ possible\ score}{Maximum\ possible\ score - Minimum\ possible\ score} \times 100$$

On this scale, 0 represents the lowest perceived municipal performance and 100 represents the highest. This standardisation ensures that the index is intuitive for policymakers, researchers, and the public, and allows for straightforward year-to-year and principle-by-principle comparison. The resulting BPI was analysed as an overall performance score over time (2007–2020) and as separate scores for each Batho Pele principle, providing insights into long-term trends in public perceptions of municipal service delivery.

Stage 3 involved the multivariate analysis, which included a series of ordinary least squares multiple regressions and three multiple logistic regressions. Model 1 of the ordinary least square multiple regression explained the BPI in terms of the socio-demographic variables (age, race, gender, education, and subjective poverty type), in Model 2 the BPI is predicted by the type of access to basic services, in Model 3 the BPI is explained by satisfaction with basic services provision and in Model 4 all the previous predictor variables are included in the regression to explain the BPI. The three multiple logistic regressions examined the relationship between the BPI Index principles and trust in local government.

4. Presentation of results

As indicated previously, this study assessed the performance of municipalities in South Africa from the public's perspective, using the Batho Pele principles. Utilising public opinion survey data, we conduct statistical analysis across three stages. This section presents the study findings according to these stages. Firstly, the univariate analysis depicts the frequency distribution for each Batho Pele principle. Secondly, the construction of the Batho Pele Index is explained. Thirdly, Linear Regression Analysis was conducted and presented as shown below.

4.1 Frequency distribution of responses for each of the Batho Pele principles

An analysis of South African Social Attitude Survey (SASAS) data from 2007 to 2020 reveals persistent concerns over municipal performance across multiple Batho Pele principles, as shown in Figure 1 below.

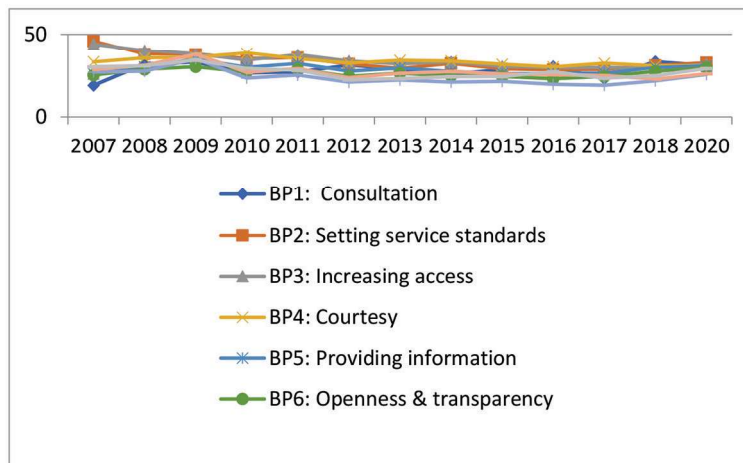


Figure 1: Attitudes towards the Batho Pele principles (2007 to 2020)

Consultation

Public perceptions of municipal consultation remain notably low. In 2018, the proportion of respondents who felt that municipalities do not adequately consult communities on basic services reached 34%, the highest recorded during the study period, compared to just 19% in 2007. This suggests that citizens have become increasingly sceptical over time about the extent to which municipalities actively involve them in decision-making processes.

Service Standards and Quality

Confidence in the government's ability to deliver on its promises of high-quality basic services has declined. Only 33% of respondents agreed that the government is meeting its service delivery commitments, down from 46% in 2007. This indicates a steady erosion of public trust in service standards.

Access to Services

Perceptions of progress towards equitable access to services have also weakened. In 2007, 44% of respondents believed that the government was making strides towards providing equal access to services, but this dropped to 31% in 2015. The most recent data shows only 34% holding this view, pointing to a growing sense of inequality in service provision.

Courtesy

About courtesy as a principle, across the 14 years, only one-third (33%) of respondents agreed that their municipality treats people with respect. The highest level recorded was 39% in 2010, while the lowest was 30% in 2016.

Information Provision

Municipal communication on basic services and performance is perceived as inadequate. On average, just 29% of South Africans agreed that municipalities provide accurate information about essential services. Transparency regarding performance was also viewed poorly, with only 27% believing municipalities consistently report on their service delivery achievements. The lowest level of agreement was in 2016 (23%), and the highest was in 2009 (31%).

Redress

Municipal responsiveness to service-related complaints is a consistent point of dissatisfaction. Between 2007 and 2020, only 24% of respondents felt their municipality addressed concerns promptly, with the highest approval in 2009 (35%). Likewise, 27% considered their municipality effective in resolving service issues, peaking at 38% in 2009 but dropping to 23% in 2018.

Value for Money

Public perceptions of receiving value for money for municipal services are similarly low. Across the period, 27% of respondents felt they were getting satisfactory value for the fees. The highest proportion agreeing was in 2009 (35%), while the lowest ratings were recorded in 2012 and 2013 (23%).

The above findings indicate a sustained decline in public confidence in municipal consultation, service quality, equitable access, respect for residents, transparency, responsiveness, and value for money. The consistently low approval rates across multiple Batho Pele principles suggest a widening gap between the expectations of citizens and their lived experiences of local government service delivery.

4.2 Construction of the Batho Pele Index using Principal Component Analysis

The Batho Pele Index (BPI) was constructed using the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) method to extract the components. A varimax (orthogonal) rotation followed this. Standard reliability testing using a Cronbach alpha computation found that the scale's reliability coefficient was 0.8883 on average using a pooled 2007-2020 file (individual year alpha values ranged between 0.8668 and 0.9006), indicating a high level of reliability. It should be noted that the response options for each Batho Pele question range from 1, strongly agree, to 5, strongly disagree. These scores were used to construct an index that ranged on a scale from 0 to 100, with the higher value reflecting a greater level of perceived agreement that municipalities are performing well across all eight principles. The construction of the index allowed us to summarise the results from the eight questions into a single measure. The index's mean score (M) was 41.7% and the standard error (SE) was 0.101. The mean score is the total sum of all the scores divided by the number of values in the sample. The standard error is *the standard deviation of a sample population*. It measures the accuracy with which a sample represents a population.

4.3 STAGE 3: Ordinary Least Square Regression Analysis

In stage 3, the multivariate analysis included a series of ordinary least squares multiple regressions and three multiple logistic regressions depicted in Table 1.

Table 1: The predictors of municipal Batho Pele performance

	Model I				Model II				Model III				Model IV			
	Socio-demographics				Service levels				Service perceptions				Full model			
BPI	Std	Std.	Beta	P>t	Std	Std.	Beta	P>t	Std	Std.	Beta	P>t	Std	Std.	Beta	P>t
Age	0.038	0.011	0.000	0.444	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	0.030	0.013	0.006	0.910
Age squared	-0.003	0.000	0.000	0.444	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.910
<i>Race (ref=Black African)</i>																
Coloured	-0.011	0.512	0.124	0.124	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	-0.029	0.616	0.001	0.001
Indian/Asian	-0.011	0.661	0.042	0.042	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	-0.029	0.891	0.000	0.000
White	-0.028	0.518	0.000	0.000	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	-0.028	0.613	0.002	0.002
Other	0.005	6.339	0.254	0.254	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	0.005	4.995	0.219	0.219
<i>Gender (ref=male)</i>																
Female	-0.002	0.305	0.822	0.822	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	-0.001	0.348	0.907	0.907
<i>Education (ref=primary / no education)</i>																
Grades 8-11 or equivalent	0.028	0.450	0.007	0.007	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	0.017	0.513	0.160	0.160
Matric or equivalent	0.043	0.490	0.000	0.000	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	0.020	0.581	0.137	0.137
Tertiary	0.059	0.617	0.000	0.000	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	0.012	0.731	0.263	0.263
<i>Subjective poverty (ref=wealthy)</i>																
Very comfortable	-0.020	1.220	0.217	0.217	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	-0.038	1.396	0.045	0.045
Reasonably comfortable	-0.127	1.171	0.000	0.000	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	-0.155	1.350	0.000	0.000
Just getting along	-0.233	1.170	0.000	0.000	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	-0.229	1.353	0.000	0.000
Poor	-0.245	1.193	0.000	0.000	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	-0.213	1.388	0.000	0.000
Very poor	-0.214	1.305	0.000	0.000	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	-0.168	1.541	0.000	0.000
<i>Type of toilet (ref=flush toilet)</i>																
Pit latrine with a ventilation pipe	...	...	...	...	-0.024	0.629	0.018	0.018	...	...	...	...	0.015	0.711	0.197	0.197
Pit latrine without a ventilation pipe	...	...	...	...	-0.064	0.587	0.000	0.000	...	...	...	...	-0.005	0.672	0.676	0.676
Unimproved toilet/none	...	...	...	...	-0.041	0.719	0.000	0.000	...	...	...	...	-0.002	0.773	0.859	0.859
<i>Electricity access (ref=in-house grid connection)</i>																
In-house pre-paid meter	...	...	...	...	-0.019	0.380	0.031	0.031	...	...	...	...	-0.004	0.458	0.696	0.696
Other forms of access	...	...	...	...	-0.048	0.943	0.000	0.000	...	...	...	...	-0.023	1.084	0.008	0.008
No access to electricity	...	...	...	...	-0.103	0.669	0.000	0.000	...	...	...	...	-0.025	0.844	0.014	0.014

Other forms of access	...	...	...	...	-0.048	0.943	0.000	...	...	...	-0.023	1.084	0.008
No access to electricity	...	...	...	...	-0.103	0.669	0.000	...	...	...	-0.025	0.844	0.014
<i>Water for drinking (ref=Piped tap in house)</i>													
Piped tap water on site or yard	...	...	...	...	-0.028	0.531	0.000	...	...	...	-0.024	0.593	0.009
Public or communal tap	...	...	...	...	-0.092	0.574	0.000	...	...	...	-0.049	0.676	0.000
Below RDP standards	...	...	...	...	-0.120	0.644	0.000	...	...	...	-0.062	0.720	0.000
<i>Satisfaction with water and sanitation (ref=satisfied)</i>													
Neutral	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	-0.027	0.700	0.003	-0.023	0.705	0.013
Dissatisfied	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	-0.164	0.458	0.000	-0.144	0.472	0.000
(Do not know)	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	-0.022	3.871	0.041	-0.017	4.570	0.158
<i>Satisfaction electricity (ref=satisfied)</i>													
Neutral	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	-0.011	0.600	0.202	-0.012	0.610	0.181
Dissatisfied	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	-0.100	0.446	0.000	-0.089	0.475	0.000
(Do not know)	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	-0.013	3.445	0.157	-0.008	3.604	0.437
<i>Satisfaction refuse removal (ref=satisfied)</i>													
Neutral	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	-0.028	0.536	0.001	-0.022	0.548	0.012
Dissatisfied	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	-0.120	0.447	0.000	-0.095	0.476	0.000
(Do not know)	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	-0.049	1.353	0.000	-0.035	1.399	0.001
<i>Satisfaction with affordable housing (ref=satisfied)</i>													
Neutral	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	-0.048	0.529	0.000	-0.045	0.531	0.000
Dissatisfied	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	-0.146	0.446	0.000	-0.126	0.453	0.000
(Do not know)	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	-0.071	1.513	0.000	-0.067	1.439	0.000
Constant	54.374	1.472	0.000	...	51.911	0.673	0.000	55.542	0.704	0.000	62.999	1.745	0.000
N	40,444				40,794			29,191			28,184		
F	50.950				72.160			95.670			65.940		
R-squared	0.078				0.088			0.160			0.190		

Model 1

The present study implemented a series of ordinary least square multiple regressions to assess the relationship of each independent variable on the dependent variable. Table 1 presents the results of four regression models. Our dependent variable in all four models is the Batho Pele Index. In *Model 1*, the Batho Pele Index is explained by the socio-demographic variables (Age, race, gender, education, and subjective poverty type). The model is significant at the 0.05 level. The model predicts 7.8% of the variance (R^2 is 0.078). The results show that age (0.038) significantly predicts the Batho Pele Index. Model 1 also shows that controlling for Black African respondents, being White (-0.028) and Indian (-0.011) is associated with lower levels of agreement with the Batho Pele Index. In other words, White and Indian respondents disagree significantly more than Blacks that municipalities are performing well. Those respondents in grades 8 to 11 or equivalent (0.028), matric or equivalent (0.043) and tertiary education (0.059), compared to those in primary school or with no education, are more likely to approve of the performance of municipalities. Specifically, the findings show that the higher the level of education, the more likely respondents are to agree that municipalities are performing well. Those respondents who indicated that they are reasonably comfortable (-0.127), just getting along (-0.233), poor (-0.245), and impoverished (-0.214), when compared to those who are wealthy, are more likely to disagree that municipalities are performing well. In other words, those respondents who described themselves as poor were more likely to disagree that municipalities are performing well.

Model 2

In Model 2, the Batho Pele Index is explained by the type of access to basic services (such as type of toilet, type of electricity access, and type of water access for drinking). The model is significant at the 0.05 level. The model predicts 8.8% of the variance (R^2 is 0.088). Compared to a flush toilet, those respondents with a pit latrine with a ventilation pipe (-0.024), pit latrine without a ventilation pipe (-0.064), and with an unimproved toilet/none (-0.041) disagree more that municipalities are not performing well. Table 1 shows that those respondents with access to an in-house grid are significantly different from those with an in-house pre-paid meter (-0.019), other forms of access (-0.048) and no access to electricity (-0.103). In other words, those who get direct access from the electricity grid are more positive about municipal performance than those who have no electricity or get it from a pre-paid meter in-house. The regression analysis revealed that respondents who have piped tap water in their yard or on-site (-0.028), access public or communal taps (-0.092), or have water quality below RDP standards (-0.120) are significantly more likely to disagree with the statement that municipalities are performing well, compared to those who have piped tap water inside their homes.

Model 3

In *Model 3*, the Batho Pele Index is explained by satisfaction with basic services (water and sanitation provision, electricity provision, refuse removal, and affordable housing). The model is significant at the 0.05 level. The model predicts 16% of the variance (R^2 is 0.160). In terms of satisfaction with water and sanitation provision, the results show that those who selected neutral (-0.027), dissatisfied (-0.164) and do not know (-0.022), compared to those who are satisfied, are less likely to agree that municipalities are doing a good job. Similarly, those who selected neutral (-0.028), dissatisfied (-0.120) and do not know (-0.049) are less in agreement that municipalities are performing well in terms of refuse removal. Those respondents who selected that they were dissatisfied (-0.100) with the provision of electricity were also less likely to agree that municipalities are performing well. Those who indicated neutral (-0.048), dissatisfied (-0.146) and do not know (-0.071) are less likely to agree that municipalities are performing well.

Model 4

In *Model 4* (which included all predictor variables), the Batho Pele Index is explained by the socio-demographic variables (age, race, gender, education, subjective poverty) as well as type of toilet, electricity access, water for drinking, satisfaction with water and sanitation provision, satisfaction with electricity provision, satisfaction with refuse removal, and satisfaction with affordable housing. The model is significant at the 0.05 level. The model predicts 19% of the variance (R^2 is 0.190). The results of Model 4 show that age (0.030) significantly predicted the Batho Pele Index. Compared to Black Africans, Coloured (-0.029), Indian (-0.029) and White (-0.028) respondents were less in agreement with the performance of municipalities. Gender and education were not significant. However, those respondents who were very comfortable (-0.038), reasonably comfortable (-0.155), just getting along (-0.229), poor (-0.213), and very poor (-0.168) were significant. Model 4 also showed that respondents who described themselves as poor were more likely to disagree that municipalities are performing well. The type of toilet access was not significant. On the other hand, those with no electricity access (-0.025) and other forms (-0.023) of electricity access agreed that municipalities are performing poorly compared to those with access to an in-house electricity grid and access to a pre-paid meter.

Compared to those with access to piped tap water in their house, those with access to piped tap water on site or yard (-0.024), public or communal tap (-0.0490) and below RDP standards (-0.062) were more likely to disagree that municipalities are performing well. Model 4 showed that those who were dissatisfied (-0.144) and neutral (-0.023) with satisfaction with water and sanitation provision were more in disagreement that municipalities are

performing well. Those respondents who were dissatisfied with electricity provision (-0.089) were also more likely to disagree that municipalities are performing well. Model 4 shows that those who were neutral (-0.022), dissatisfied (-0.095), and did not know (-0.035) were also less favourable of the performance of municipalities. Similarly, the results of Model 4 show that those neutral (-0.045), dissatisfied (-0.126), and do not know (-0.067) about satisfaction with affordable housing were also less optimistic about the performance of municipalities.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the disconnect between the normative intent of the Batho Pele Principles and their practical realisation within South African municipalities. The evidence reveals that many municipalities fall short in engaging meaningfully with their communities on matters of basic service delivery. Citizens perceive the government as failing to fulfil its commitment to quality services and equitable access. This perception reflects a deeper erosion of trust in municipal officials, whose performance is increasingly viewed as misaligned with the constitutional imperatives of public administration.

Specifically, Chapter 10, Section 195(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) establishes binding values and principles governing public administration, including accountability, transparency, and responsiveness. These constitutional values are directly echoed in the Batho Pele Principles, which this study investigated as key performance expectations for municipal officials. As the primary custodians of these principles, municipal officials are constitutionally and ethically obligated to uphold them. However, the study's findings reveal a consistent downward trend in public confidence in the ability of these officials to fulfil their constitutional mandate.

This conclusion is corroborated by existing scholarly literature. For example, although Munzhedzi (2021) acknowledges the strategic role of municipal officials in implementing the Batho Pele Principles, he identifies significant obstacles, including a lack of political will, corruption, and skills deficits, as impediments to effective execution. Similarly, other studies highlight persistent governance and institutional weaknesses across municipalities: financial mismanagement, corruption, and weak accountability frameworks (Laubscher, 2012); inconsistent application and inadequate implementation of performance management systems (Mokoko & Manyaka, 2015); institutional fragility, political interference, and planning deficiencies (Kanyane, 2014; Masiya et al., 2021); as well as ongoing human resource and capacity challenges (Zindi & Ndhlovu, 2023; Munzhedzi, 2020). Collectively, these studies confirm the structural and operational barriers

that continue to undermine the implementation of the Batho Pele Principles and the realisation of a responsive, citizen-centred municipal administration.

In order to improve performance, municipalities should draw from selected elements of the New Public Management agenda, alongside collaborative governance approaches, to enhance service delivery. Selective elements, such as improved performance measurement systems, citizen feedback loops, and service-level benchmarking, could be integrated into existing Batho Pele and developmental governance frameworks. This hybrid approach may benefit from focusing on accountability and results, while safeguarding developmental priorities and ensuring alignment with South Africa's socio-political realities. However, while this study recommends adopting selected NPM strategies to enhance municipal service delivery, it is important to acknowledge that implementing NPM in developing-country contexts is not without challenges. Critics of NPM in developing contexts argue that market-oriented reforms and performance contracting can sometimes lead to an overemphasis on efficiency at the expense of equity, accessibility, and social justice (Arif, 2023). Therefore, any move towards adopting selected NPM strategies into the Batho Pele principles should be context-sensitive and incremental, focusing on adapting, rather than wholesale importing its principles.

This research, in particular, adds to the understanding that citizens' perception and welfare should be taken seriously. The citizens are the critical reasons why the government exist. A representative bureaucracy demonstrated by the capacity of the municipal officials to deliver effective and efficient public services is crucial in dispelling the rampant service delivery protest (Masiya et al, 2019), thereby increasing trust in government.

However, this study is subject to some limitations that warrant acknowledgement. First, the analysis relies primarily on perception-based data derived from secondary sources, which, while valuable for capturing citizen sentiments and institutional trust, may not always reflect objective service delivery outcomes or policy implementation fidelity. Second, the findings do not account for the heterogeneity of municipal contexts across South Africa. The absence of municipal-level granularity limits the ability to identify context-specific dynamics, such as variations in administrative capacity, political leadership, or socio-economic profiles. These constraints suggest the need for future research to incorporate mixed-methods approaches, including municipal-level case studies and performance audits, to provide a more nuanced and empirically grounded understanding of public sector responsiveness and the implementation of the Batho Pele Principles.

The study concluded that public dissatisfaction concerns municipalities' interaction with communities on basic services. Municipalities were

perceived as not responding quickly to citizens' complaints about service delivery problems and fixing the reported problems. The BPI mean score corroborated these findings with a dissatisfaction trend (2007-2020) of 40% less likely satisfaction. This study suggests that government scaling up NPM agendas, strengthening institutions, and building capacities are the salient strategies that should be adopted to ensure excellence in municipal performance.

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