

When Public Participation in Administration Leads to Trust: An Empirical Assessment of Managers' Perceptions

Essays on Citizen Participation and Governance

This study empirically assesses the argument that public participation enhances public trust. A model was constructed to include five intermediate factors that might link participation and trust: consensus building, ethical behaviors, accountability practices, service competence, and managerial competence. As expected, participation does explain a significant amount of public trust. However, using path analysis, only two intermediate factors—ethical behaviors and service competence—were found to significantly contribute to trust. Even successful consensus-building activities are not likely to enhance trust unless administrative performance improves. These results indicate that if increasing public trust is the primary goal, then the primary focus should be on administrative integrity and performance results.

The decline of trust in government since World War II is frequently considered one of the most important political problems of our time (Barber 1983; Carnevale 1995; King and Stivers 1998; Yankelovich 1991). Reasons for the decline vary. Some assert that there is simply an increased cynicism among the electorate and citizen-consumers, who are better educated and more knowledgeable of the shortcomings and scandals of government (Berman 1997). Others emphasize that the public is disaffected by the expansion of government that took place during the 20th century, which has caused citizens to become more distanced from policies even though government plays an ever-greater role in their lives (Yergin and Stanislaw 1998). Still others point to citizen disappointment in performance, regardless of whether that disappointment is caused by an absolute decline in legislative capability and service quality or by an expectations gap of excessive promises or unfounded demands (LaPorte and Metlay 1996; Misztal 2001).

Solutions to the problem of declining trust parallel the causes. Better information for and education of citizens about the demanding roles and positive accomplishments of government is one popular answer (e.g., Frost 2003; Goodsell 1994; Tyler 2003). Another prospect is to encourage greater citizen access to and active involvement in government-related activities, ranging from voting and running for local office to responding to government surveys and attending public hearings (e.g., Duram and Brown 1999; Halvorsen 2003; Walters, Aydelotte, and Miller 2000). Still another solution is to ensure better government performance in political and administrative functions—for example, by reducing ethical lapses (Burke and Black 1990) and increasing overall productivity and quality standards (Van Wart and Berman 1999). Ironically, although different schools of thought (e.g., classical democratic pluralism, communitarianism, and reinventing/managerial perspectives) tend to emphasize one solution over another, there is nonetheless remarkable convergence around the notion that public participation tends to enhance public trust. The general normative argument is that better informed citizens can actively and constructively

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contribute to decision making on policy issues, regulatory requirements, and even service levels in all but the most technical areas. This improved information and involvement, in turn, helps to achieve better results. As appealing as this normative argument is—that public participation leads to public trust—it is a complex relationship that is founded on a number of assumptions that may not be met in many situations. Logically, it is unlikely that all elements of participation contribute equally to trust building, and some may not contribute at all. Because the theoretical underpinnings of the argument are poorly defined and most studies rely on

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single-factor analyses, theoretical and empirical progress on this issue has been modest. Fortunately, recent research has been less euphoric but more focused and pragmatic about the realistic effects of public participation (Adams 2004; Irvin and Stansbury 2004).

Our specific interest in this study is to examine how public participation in administrative functions affects public trust in administration. To do so, we first locate the study in the broader context of democratic theory. What are the purposes of participation, among which the building of trust is only one? What are the assumptions about participation that must hold true for the overall argument to be sound? Second, a more sophisticated model of the relationship between public participation in government and public trust in government is needed. Public participation in administration is only a portion of participation in government. Furthermore, it is not only participation, even the very broad definition that we have chosen, that leads to trust or the lack of it. Next, we examine the theoretical underpinnings of the administrative case in detail. What actually causes participation, what causes trust, and which of the intermediate administrative behaviors of participation actually overlap? We explain our methodology in this section as well. Finally, what are our specific findings? Although we are able to identify five distinct conceptual factors that contribute to participation, only two of them contribute significantly to trust. In the conclusion, we identify the theoretical and practical implications.

The Role of Public Participation and Trust in Democratic Theory

One of the major foundations of democratic theory—ancient through modern—is public participation. Of course, voting—political participation—for legislative representatives is the archetypal example, but there are others as well. The peasant farmer Lucius Cincinnatus (518–438 BCE) twice assumed the dictatorship of Rome and presided as the general in the field against invading armies, twice defeated the enemy, and twice returned the mantle of power in order to harvest his crops. This ideal is one that George Washington consciously followed, setting an exemplary tone of citizen participation in both military and executive functions. Access to policy debates was established in ancient and modern times through many devices. For example, all Vikings in Iceland had access to the local and national assemblies, and the jury system—12 citizen peers determining guilt or innocence rather than an appointed judge—was a principal product of the Scandinavian cultures. Wherever possible, local governments kept participation direct or nearly so, especially in confederated and federal systems, whether it was in New England town halls, Swiss canton governments, or early Greek city-states.

A desired outcome of these types of public participation—involvement in the policies and operations of government—was public trust. Public trust is the general concept that the public trusts an agency (or government) to “do the right thing.” This trust does not refer to the public’s attitude toward a specific task in a specific agency, but rather, it is a broader sense of public belief that officials are bearing and sustaining their moral, societal, and fiduciary obligations. The betrayal of such obligations by public officials often leads to confused, apathetic, or angry citizens, and worse, the possible destruction of the fiduciary basis that forms the norm of human society (Shay 1994). More specifically in this study, public trust refers to the public’s confidence in the integrity of public officials to be fair *and* to uphold the public interest, as well as confidence in the competence of government to carry out its assigned duties (Barber 1983; Kass 1994; Thomas 1998). Both elements are critical to the maintenance of trust. An efficient government can systematically overrepresent the interests of a wealthy plutocracy or a bureaucratic elite. The obverse is a well-meaning and ethical government that is less than fully competent in carrying out its routine operations or special roles, such as national defense. The general intuitive argument, then, is as follows:

Public participation in government → Tends to lead to → Public trust in government

Before a more sophisticated argument can be proposed, this simple argument must be qualified. First, public trust is not the only important outcome of public participation (Conway 1991). Public participation also leads to legitimacy, a better-informed public, improved decision making, and altered patterns of political power. Because participation is integral to the concept of democracy, participation is imperative for legitimacy.¹ Elected leaders who assume dictatorial powers lose legitimacy; authoritarian leaders who institute fair elections gain democratic legitimacy. Participation is likely to enhance the public’s understanding of issues through attention and involvement. Participation is also likely to improve decision making by involving a wide variety of interests and seeking a more ecumenical solution. Additionally, participation is, at a minimum, likely to temper power by providing mechanisms for review and change, and in its more robust forms, it is likely to provide opportunities for shared governance of citizens with full-time politicians and administrators.

As critical as realizing that trust is not the only important outcome of participation is understanding that the rather simplistic normative argument rests on two large assumptions. The first assumption is that public participation is done effectively (Creighton 1981; Lando 1999). This is not always true. In fact, history is littered with examples of public participation run

amok. The first flirtation of the French with democracy led to the bloody Reign of Terror, when citizens nominated other citizens to be guillotined, often only to become victims themselves. The incompetence of the democratically constituted Russian Duma after the first (March) revolution led quickly to the second (October) Bolshevik revolution, in which a more centralized (and dictatorial) form of government was instituted. At a more mundane level—but nonetheless a critical possibility even in well-performing democracies—public participation occasionally leads to confusion, frustration, or poor policies rather than to clarity, consensus, and good policies. This may occur with issues that have deep philosophical divides, such as abortion; with large special interests, such as national health care; with highly technical issues, such as banking deregulation; and when the public's focus tends to be one-dimensional although multidimensional perspectives are needed, such as in corrections policy. Even on simpler issues, the quality of leadership to facilitate public participation varies enormously at both the political and administrative levels. Enormous controversies over public art selected by committees composed entirely of citizens are common. Such controversies are largely a result of the aesthetic insularity of the committees with their more cosmopolitan tastes who ignore the more traditional preferences of the general community.²

The second assumption is that inviting public participation is done in good faith (King, Feltey, and Susel 1998; Plein, Green, and Williams 1998). Again and frequently, this is not always the case. At the policy level, a common occurrence is to invite public participation only after policy determination has really occurred, with the result that only superficial changes are made as a result of public input. Another common problem is to invite public participation by airing the policy debate but to use terms that essentially misrepresent the policy initiatives taken before the public; this is a frequent tactic in referenda in which public confusion is the goal of the less popular side. Another conscious misuse of public participation by legislatures and executives is to appoint blue-ribbon panels to avoid controversial policy decisions altogether. Yet another machination is to influence the selection of those participating so as to skew the public outcome.

Manipulation is nearly as common at the administrative level. An old device for minimizing the effect of public hearings is to provide minimum public notice and to schedule the hearings at inconvenient times or locations.

Cities have dozens of advisory boards but often provide them with little authority or constitute them so that special interests will be overrepresented. Adminis-

trators can easily construct self-serving surveys that exaggerate public support for additional expenditures by asking about the popularity of additional services without identifying the fiscal ramifications. Complaint resolution or ombudsman systems are sometimes set up more for public relations than for true mediation. Thus, the opportunities for manipulation of public participation are plentiful, and the payoff for government elites is substantial (from the control of outcomes to the avoidance of debate).

After adopting the qualification that participation has purposes other than public trust and the major assumptions that public participation is done relatively well and without substantial manipulation, we can now proceed to a more sophisticated model of the relationship between public participation and public trust.

A Comprehensive Model of the Relationship between Public Participation and Public Trust

Even with these qualifications and assumptions, many factors make the relationship complex. Only the two most substantial will be incorporated into our model. First, government is a complex spectrum of activities, from policy making to the production of tangible services (e.g., road construction and social security), and intangible services (regulatory oversight or public safety). We can broadly divide these activities into the political (policy level) arena and the administrative (operational) arena and thus define two public participation types.

Political participation is public involvement in expressing preferences for a broad spectrum of important national, regional, or local policies, mainly during the process of selecting political representatives, campaigning, and voting. Participation in administration is public involvement in administrative process and administrative decision making. One distinction between these two forms of participation is the time frame of involvement. Whereas participation in administration occurs on a continual basis, political participation peaks during election seasons. Another difference is their institutional focus. Whereas participation in administration is realized at the executive

level, political participation occurs mainly at the legislative and juridical levels, which is particularly true for the sample of city governments in this study, in which the council-manager form of government is heavily represented (53 percent).

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This distinction reflects the fact that it is possible to have greater public participation and trust in one area than in another. Political participation tends to be more

universal than participation in administration because voting and policy debates are more culturally emphasized. For some time, public trust in administration has been greater than in the policy arm, probably because of the perceived neutrality of administrative expertise and the necessity of politicians to craft different messages for different constituencies (thus seeming disingenuous). Furthermore, although the dynamics of the participation–trust relationship are likely to be similar, it is unlikely that they are identical at the policy and administrative levels.

Second, many personal factors affect citizens' desire to participate and tendency to trust. People may participate for both personal reasons (i.e., selfish or economic motivations) and public interest (i.e., the building of community or social capital). Both motivations are legitimate, but ultimately, selfish interests must be kept in check (Campbell and Marshall 2000). In addition, many citizens participate because, in general, they fundamentally do *not* trust government. The act of participation is more likely to provide concrete information about the foibles and inadequacies of government for the most cynical and demanding, leading them to confirm their belief that government is untrustworthy. Additionally, institutional arrangements for participation, such as the proximity to the policy-making nexus and the form of governance, may also affect participation and trust. Participation at the local level, often realized through the public's direct access to policy making, may account for the differing levels of public trust at the state or federal level, where participation is often replaced with political representation. Thus, there are many demographic, ideological,

personal, and institutional factors that affect citizens' likelihood to participate in and trust government, in addition to the impact of participation on public trust. Overall, a more sophisticated overarching view might look like the one presented in figure 1.

Focusing on Public Participation in Administration and Trust

Our interest is not to examine all of the relationships depicted in figure 1 but rather to focus on the role of public participation in administration and the effect on public trust of administration. Theoretically, we must describe why people participate, why they trust, and how the two concepts interact. To define the relationship between participation and trust empirically, we must hypothesize which intermediate administrative activities encourage public participation and test to determine their effect on trust.

We define public participation in administration as direct or indirect public involvement in articulation or evaluation of administrative objectives, service levels, administrative guidelines, and overall results. Of the

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major process motivation theories, expectancy theory (Vroom 1964) is most applicable to this situation. To participate, people must first think that they are capable of doing so (i.e., that effort is likely to lead to adequate performance). Can they understand the process and capably do what is required to participate?

For example, do people think they can understand the basic issue to be discussed, find the public hearing, and make comments that will be appropriate? Next, people must think they have a chance of success (i.e., that there is a possible reward for the effort). In other words, if they make comments

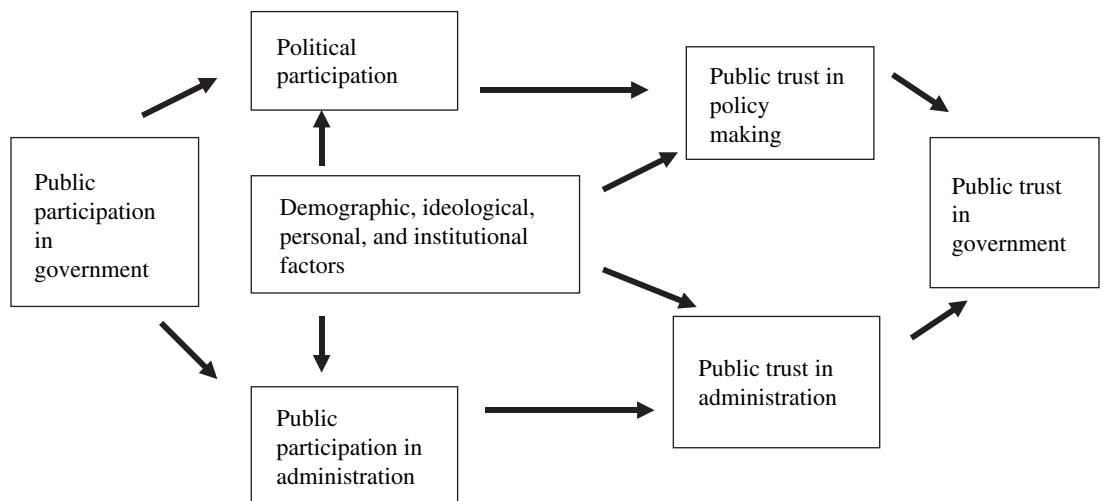


Figure 1 A Comprehensive Model of Public Participation and Its Relationship to Public Trust

at a public hearing, those comments are likely to be seriously taken into consideration. Taken together, these two factors can be summed up as a belief in the ability to influence the administrative process. Finally, people must value the reward. That is, people are unlikely to take the time to participate unless achieving success is an important value, perhaps because of the ramifications for the local community or because the issue is an impassioned cause.

The concrete administrative behaviors hypothesized to capture the ability to influence the process are accountability, consensus building, and ethical behaviors. Accountability involves the means of access to the administrative process, such as public hearings, citizen advisory boards, and citizen focus groups. Consensus building involves citizens in goal setting, service priorities, and service performance. Ethical behaviors reflect the emphasis on maintaining high levels of integrity through training, role models, and administrative standards. Taken together, why participate if there is not the mechanism to do so, if the administrators are not trying to acquire a better sense of the community's priorities, and if one does not have confidence that the administrative agents are scrupulous in their duties?

The second theoretical element is the value of participating. The general value is increased administrative competence, which we break into two factors. One hypothesized factor is increased service competence, as represented by actually meeting public needs and enhancing consumer satisfaction. Another value is the increased competence of management, measured by the use of standard, contemporary tools of the trade, such as cost-based accounting, management information systems, and forecasting tools.

Trust theory asserts that people must believe that their interests (in this case, the public's interests) are being treated fairly and that the other party (in this case, the administrative agent) is reliable and consistent in carrying out its authorized function (Lewis and Weigert 1985). Functionally, the ability to influence the process (participation) relates fairly well to the protection of the public interest (trust). The value of participating relates fairly well to reliability and consistency in carrying out one's role (trust). The theoretical model of intermediate administrative behaviors is shown in figure 2.

A brief discussion of these five factors relative to public participation and trust follows. The argument for a positive affect is hypothesized here and is tested in the study, in which some of the hypotheses are *not* empirically supported.

The inclusion of consensus building stresses the perspective that participation is an interactive process

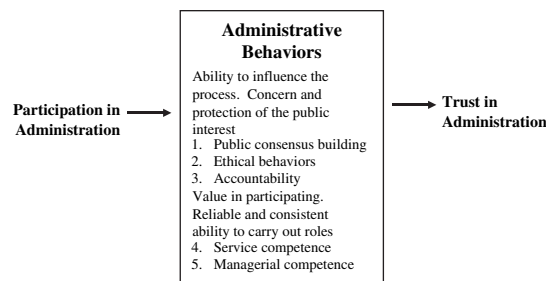


Figure 2 Intermediate Administrative Behaviors Hypothesized to Relate to Public Participation and Trust in Administration

between the public and the administrative agency in which the public's expectations about the agency's goals, service priorities, and performance standards can be better identified and attuned to guide the agency's practices. This is especially true when discrepancies seem to exist (Irvin and Stansbury 2004) and when the public has information that is critical for government officials (Carr and Halvorsen 2001; Glicken 1999). Participation is a "mediating institution" (Berger and Neuhaus 1996; Lando 1999) through which a synergistic climate contributes to problem solving (Lawrence and Deagen 2001). Consensus building shows the administration's concern for the public interest by demonstrating a willingness to consider public views and by not shutting out the public through an "expert process." Indeed, it seems likely that just the act of genuine listening can increase public trust (King and Stivers 1998).

Ethical behavior is broadly defined as operating when public officials transcend their own narrow self-interests or agency priorities to pursue the public interest (McGuire et al. 1994; Reich 1985). It is hypothesized that ethical behaviors on the part of administrators should encourage the public to participate because of the perception that the system is not a sham or rigged; they should encourage trust because of a belief that public interests are indeed central to the process. In this study, ethical behaviors are defined as frequent activities that stress integrity, loyalty to the values of public service, and ethical competence in administrative agencies. Integrity is defined as a reputation for honesty and truthfulness (Hosmer 1995). Integrity is critical for moral leadership, which actively encourages others to pursue ethical goals and establishes an ethical climate in the agency (Berman, West, and Cava 1994; Bruce 1994). Loyalty, in this article, refers to dedication to the common good, not personal loyalty. According to the ASPA Code of Ethics, this means respect for and support of the U.S. Constitution, the law, and the public interest (Van Wart 1996). Finally, ethical competence refers to administrators' ability to develop and implement ethical values and activities. Such activities often include ethics training,

special workshops to handle common lapses, and the availability of codes of ethics.

To be accountable is to provide information about one's performance (transparency), to take corrective action as necessary (responsiveness), and to be responsible for one's performance (Browder 1971). In administrative settings, accountability can be diminished by complex service-delivery systems and multi-layered decision-making structures. Administrators are directly accountable to elected officials; nonetheless, they are also indirectly accountable to the business community and the general public, an aspect that has been enhanced in recent decades by laws encouraging transparency, access, and public involvement. "Accountability tools" include political, legal, professional, and hierarchical modes (Romzek and Dubnick 1994) used by an agency, such as citizen advisory boards and public hearings. However, because public participation is the independent variable being studied and these tools are part of the operational definition for that concept, they are excluded as an intermediate variable. Instead, this study relies on "accountability contents," which involve the kinds of information made available to the public and public officials. Examples include an agency's finances, activities, and performance information.

In this study, an administration's service competence is defined as its *ultimate* ability to develop goods and services that the public needs and its ability to achieve sustained public satisfaction with those goods and services. It does not include the public's role in defining goals (captured in consensus building) or providing monitoring and feedback (captured by the concept of accountability). The value of service competence seems clear from the public's point of view, but how might participation enhance it if consensus building and accountability are measured separately? Participation might help service competence by simply reminding the administration of the importance of achieving overall goals. Goal theory specifies that concrete objectives improve performance, and hard but realistic goals improve it dramatically (Locke and Latham 1990). Furthermore, public participation might temper the public's appetite for services when citizens better understand an agency's capacity limitations and the financial implications of service demands (Pateman 1970; Langton 1978). A major challenge here is the specification of just which services are most desired in a plural society (Lowi 1979; Lawrence and Deagen 2001) and how to measure them. The effect of service competence on trust seems more compelling. Strong past performance should positively affect trust. Nonetheless, satisfaction and trust are not identical. A single interaction or a short event might result in satisfaction but not necessarily trust. Trust tends to be the result of a high predictability of doing the right thing, developed

over a longer time frame and with repeated interactions.

The traditional definition of competence indicates that an individual has the knowledge and skills needed to perform a job. This definition has been adapted here to cover managerial competence, which highlights the knowledge and skills needed to perform organizational functions through the use of rational decision-making and productivity tools, such as cost accounting, staffing review methods, forecasting techniques, and efficiency analysis. The value of managerial competence to elected officials and the public is clear, but the value that active participation has on managerial competency—once accountability mechanisms, performance levels (service competence), and consensus building are eliminated—is less clear. Nonetheless, many argue that the public brings valuable information, insights, or demands, even to the most technical of projects, if only experts would take the time to listen and learn (Brody, Godschalk, and Burby 2003). However, the relationship between managerial competence and trust would, hypothetically, seem to be more persuasive. To the degree that one interacts with public servants and discovers that they are highly skilled professionals, it could strengthen trust in terms of capability, even without concrete performance at hand.

Methods

A National Survey

The empirical data for this study were collected from a national survey of U.S. cities with populations of more than 50,000. The collection of the data was completed in 2000. City governments were chosen as the subject of the study because they provide a variety of services to the general public and because the public is geographically closer to local government than the national or state governments, so public participation and trust at the local level is more easily perceived and measured. The survey measures the extent of public participation and public trust in the subject cities.

The cities in the survey were identified through an address file from the National League of Cities. Chief administrative officers were surveyed. The names and addresses were verified using the International City/County Management Association's *Municipal Yearbook*. Among 541 surveyed cities, 249 returned the surveys with valid information, for a response rate of 46 percent. Among the respondents, 63.5 percent were city managers (chief administrators) or assistant city managers, and 15 percent were chief finance or budget officers (finance directors or budget directors). This should not be a surprise, as the public is likely to participate in the budgeting process in many jurisdictions.

Other respondents (21.5 percent) were senior management analysts, directors of administration, directors of planning, and other high-level city officials. The respondents' average time in government was 20.11 years.

Three additional measures were undertaken to detect bias and to probe response issues. First, a sample of 20 respondents was interviewed after the study to provide examples and in-depth discussion. All of these interviewees were able to provide proper examples to substantiate their survey responses, suggesting that the survey responses are reliable. Second, a statistical examination of nonresponse was conducted. Though the respondent cities were representative in the population distribution, this sample was more representative of council-manager governments. Third, telephone interviews were conducted with nonrespondents; no respondent bias was discovered in this process.³

Measurement

Measuring Public Participation. Public participation is defined as the involvement of stakeholders in administrative functions and decision making, which is achieved through the availability of participation modes, participation in functions, and participation in the decision-making process. Participation modes are organizational establishments that enable or facilitate participation. Examples include public hearings, citizen advisory boards, citizen focus groups, business community meetings, and chamber of commerce meetings. Participation in functions refers to managerial or service-delivery functions, such as public safety, transportation, zoning and planning, and budgeting. Finally, decision-making participation refers to public involvement in such decision-making processes as goal setting, strategy determination, and implementation and evaluation. Participation in decision making is often regarded as a measure of "genuine" participation, or participation depth (Sanoff 2000), whereas participation modes and participation-in-function measure how widespread the participation is in a government.

Table 1 lists the survey items used to measure these dimensions. In measuring participation modes, respondents were asked whether their administration uses the specified participation modes. These participation modes are recommended in the participation literature (Creighton 1981; Lindstrom and Nie 2000; Sanoff 2000). A Participation Mode Index was developed to include all of the survey items measuring participation modes. The index has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.78, indicating that the index is relatively reliable.

Participation in service and management functions was measured with nine survey items that included six measures of service functions (e.g., zoning, planning,

and parks and recreation) and three measures of managerial functions (budgeting, personnel, and procurement). These functions are typical in U.S. municipalities. A Function Participation Index was developed to include the function participation measures. The index has a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.79.

Survey items were developed to measure participation in the decision-making process, which consists of participation in goal setting, development of policy and program alternatives, policy and program monitoring, and evaluation. All related survey items were used to develop a Decision-Making Participation Index, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87.

Finally, the indices for Participation Mode, Function Participation, and Decision-Making Participation were aggregated to arrive at an Overall Participation Index. This index included all of the survey items used to construct the above indices. The index has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.90.

Measuring Public Trust. The measurement focus of public trust reflects the extent of the public's belief that an administration is "doing the right thing." Trust was measured through the perceptions of public managers regarding the trust of different stakeholders in their administration. The stakeholder groups included citizens, elected officials, and the business and nonprofit community. Table 2 lists the survey items measuring trust and response statistics. The findings on the level of citizen trust in this survey are highly consistent with other surveys using citizen respondents.⁴ Relevant items were used to create a Citizen Trust Index (four items), Elected Officials Trust Index (four items), and Business/Nonprofit Trust Index (three items). All eleven items were then used to create an Overall Trust Index, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.91.

Measuring Other Variables. To measure *consensus building*, respondents were asked to assess three dimensions of a consensus-building process that included consensus building in goal and mission, service priorities, and expected performance. For example, respondents were asked to assess the statements, "Our administration has reached public consensus on goals and objectives for service delivery" (consensus building in goals), "Our administration can achieve public consensus on service priorities" (consensus building in service priorities), and "Our administration can achieve public consensus on good service performance" (consensus building in service performance). All assessments were measured on a five-point scale (from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree"). A Consensus Building Index was created to aggregate all of the above items. A statistical test indicates that the index has a high level of reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.81).

Table 1 Public Participation

Public Participation	Agreement (percent)
Participation modes (use of the following in city administrations)	
Public hearing (<i>n</i> = 247)	96.9
Community or neighborhood meetings (<i>n</i> = 246)	87.4
Citizen advisory board (<i>n</i> = 245)	81.6
Internet (<i>n</i> = 244)	81.6
Chamber of commerce meetings (<i>n</i> = 249)	78.7
Business community meeting (<i>n</i> = 249)	75.5
Citizen focus group (<i>n</i> = 241)	56.5
Citizen telephone hotline (<i>n</i> = 241)	53.2
Citizen surveys (<i>n</i> = 238)	52.9
Legislative standing committees (<i>n</i> = 230)	51.5
Individual citizen representatives (<i>n</i> = 237)	51.4
Participation Mode Index	
(Average = 69.8%, Cronbach's alpha = 0.78)	
Participation in functions (public involvement in the following functions)	
Zoning and planning (<i>n</i> = 247)	93.9
Parks and recreation (<i>n</i> = 242)	87.1
Policing and public safety (<i>n</i> = 247)	72.5
Code enforcement (<i>n</i> = 245)	54.7
Budgeting (<i>n</i> = 247)	46.2
Transportation and street maintenance (<i>n</i> = 246)	37.4
Solid waste and garbage collection (<i>n</i> = 234)	30.0
Personnel (<i>n</i> = 247)	6.5
Procurement (<i>n</i> = 246)	1.6
Function Participation Index	
(Average = 47.8%, Cronbach's alpha = 0.79)	
Participation in decision making (public involvement in the following processes)	
Identifying agency or program goals/objective (<i>n</i> = 245)	33.9
Developing goal-achieving strategies (<i>n</i> = 245)	28.2
Developing policy or program alternatives (<i>n</i> = 244)	30.8
Assessing policy or program results (<i>n</i> = 245)	25.3
Monitoring service delivery process (<i>n</i> = 245)	22.8
Negotiating agency budget (<i>n</i> = 245)	7.3
Determining executive budget (<i>n</i> = 243)	4.9
Decision-Making Participation Index	
(Average = 21.9%, Cronbach's alpha = 0.87)	
Overall Participation Index	
Average	47.7
(Cronbach's alpha = 0.90)	

Notes: Survey items were measured on a five-point scale, where 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree. The agreement percentage aggregates response percentages of "strongly agree" and "agree."

The measurement of *ethical behaviors* was created by using the behavioral context provided by Butler and Cantrell (1984). Two dimensions of ethical behavior were measured in this study. First, ethical integrity focuses on moral leadership and the honesty of individual public employees. Five survey items were used to measure integrity. They include three items to measure moral leadership and two items to measure individual workers' honesty in behaviors. Examples include "managers are required to provide moral leadership" and "most employees are honest." Second, ethical competence is captured in the ability of a public organization to develop an organizational process to ensure ethical behaviors. Five survey items were used to measure this aspect of ethical behavior. Examples include "our administration requires ethics training for all managers," and "has a code of ethics." Finally, an Ethical Behaviors Index was created to

aggregate all of the above items. The index has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.80.⁵

The measurement of *accountability practices* focuses on the existence and extent of relevant administrative information furnished to the public. In measurement, respondents were asked to assess on a five-point scale ("strongly agree" to "strongly disagree") whether their administration informs its stakeholders about finances, performances, rules and regulations, and practices that should interest the public. Twenty-six survey items were used. An Accountability Index was created to include all of these items. The Cronbach's alpha of 0.93 indicates a high reliability of the index.

Service competency concerns an administration's ability to develop goods and services that the public needs

Table 2 Public Trust

Public Trust	Agreement (percent)
Citizen trust: "Most citizens believe that the local government...	
Can be trusted (<i>n</i> = 248)	57.3
Fulfills its promises (<i>n</i> = 248)	60.5
Treats citizens fairly (<i>n</i> = 249)	72.7
Is competent (<i>n</i> = 248)	72.6
Citizen Trust Index (average)	65.8
(Cronbach's alpha = 0.90)	
Elected officials trust: "Most elected officials..."	
Trust the administration (<i>n</i> = 249)	84.7
Believe that administration keeps promise to citizens (<i>n</i> = 249)	89.2
Believe that administration is efficient and effective (<i>n</i> = 248)	83.5
Believe that the administration is competent (<i>n</i> = 248)	91.1
Elected Officials Trust Index (average)	87.1
(Cronbach's alpha = 0.93)	
Business trust: "Most business and nonprofit organizations..."	
Trust the administration (<i>n</i> = 242)	78.9
Believe that the administration is efficient and effective (<i>n</i> = 242)	76.0
Believe that the administration is competent (<i>n</i> = 242)	81.0
Business Trust Index (average)	78.6
(Cronbach's alpha = 0.93)	
Overall Public Trust Index	
Overall average (Cronbach's alpha = 0.91)	77.1

Notes: Survey items were measured on a five-point scale, where 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree. The agreement percentage aggregates response percentages of "strongly agree" and "agree."

and its ability to achieve high public satisfaction. For this concept, survey respondents were asked to indicate, on the same five-point scale, whether their administrations "understand the needs of the public," "provide services the public needs," "satisfy public needs," and "achieve high citizen satisfaction." A Public Need Satisfaction Index was created to aggregate all of the above items, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.76.

Managerial competency is measured by the existence of technical and resource capability to perform organizational duties. The measurement included a list of six survey items on the availability of these capacities. Examples of the capabilities are availability or use of management information system, cost-based accounting, financial cost analysis, and task or staffing analysis. A Managerial Competency Index was created to aggregate all of the above items. The index has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.77.

Findings and Discussion

Participation and Trust

The results in table 1 indicate that cities make extensive use of traditional participation modes, such as public hearings (96.9 percent), community or neighborhood meetings (81.6 percent), and citizen advisory boards (81.6 percent). Many cities also use the Internet to reach out to the public (81.6 percent). Fewer cities use citizen telephone hotlines (53.2 percent) and citizen surveys (52.9 percent).

Strong public involvement is revealed in zoning and planning (93.9 percent), parks and recreation (87.1 percent), and policing and public safety (72.5 percent), which should not be surprising because these services directly concern the public. Public participation is much weaker in such administrative functions as personnel and procurement (6.5 percent and 1.6 percent respectively), which serve other administrative agencies but do not serve the public directly.

Compared with the level of participation across city functions (an average percentage of 47.8 percent), decision-making participation occurs at a much lower level (an average of 21.9 percent). About one-third of cities perceive significant public participation in "identifying agency or program goals and objectives." Participation in strategy or policy development, policy and program monitoring, and evaluation is about or less than 30 percent. In sum, participation has numerous well-used modes and is substantial across many functions, but it is more modest in robust decision-making characteristics in U.S. municipal administrations on average.

Table 2 shows the level of public trust in this sample. A Composite Trust Index was created to include multiple survey items in order to measure the trust of citizens, elected officials, and business and nonprofit organizations toward the administration. These items measured the trust perceived by respondents, mostly chief administrative officers, who work with these stakeholders and should provide a relatively accurate

estimation of trust. The Overall Public Trust Index reveals that 77.1 percent of respondents “agree or strongly agree” with these survey items. That breaks down into averages of 65.8 percent for citizens, 87.1 percent for elected officials, and 78.6 percent for business and nonprofit organizations. That is, despite the “bureaucrat bashing” by political candidates that has become more common in the last quarter century, administrators still feel that they are more positive in their specific assessments than either citizens or business people.

Analysis of the Participation–Trust Model

A Pearson analysis of association shows a positive relationship between participation and trust ($r = 0.197$, $n = 192$, $p < .01$), which suggests a need to further explore this relationship. Nevertheless, an analysis of partial correlation between participation and trust suggests that this relationship is indirect. Table 3 shows the participation–trust relationship when the variables for administrative behaviors and activities are controlled.

The results suggest that a relationship between participation and trust does not exist when the variables for consensus building, ethical behaviors, accountability practices, service competency, and managerial competency are controlled. This provides evidence to support the model used in this study to explore the role of these intermediate variables in the participation–trust relationship.

Based on the model specified in figure 2, a path analysis was conducted to examine the participation–trust relationship while controlling for the impact of variables for administrative behaviors. First, simple regression models were used to examine the relationship between participation and each of the five factors (consensus building, ethical behaviors, accountability practices, service competency, and managerial competency). Then, these variables were regressed against the trust index (adjusted $r^2 = 0.44$) in a multiple regression model. Tests were conducted to evaluate the validity of assumptions for the multiple regression model. No problems with multicollinearity, heteroskedasticity, linearity, or outliers were found. Figure 3 presents the results of the analysis. Direct effects of paths are represented by standardized regression coefficients (or path coefficients) in the top part of the figure, and the indirect effects of participation on trust are calculated below the figure.

The results suggest that participation does affect trust through two paths: administrative ethical behaviors and service competence. The indirect impact of participation on trust through ethical behaviors is 0.085, indicating a change in the trust index caused by one standard deviation in the participation index. As the standard deviation in the participation index is 0.53,

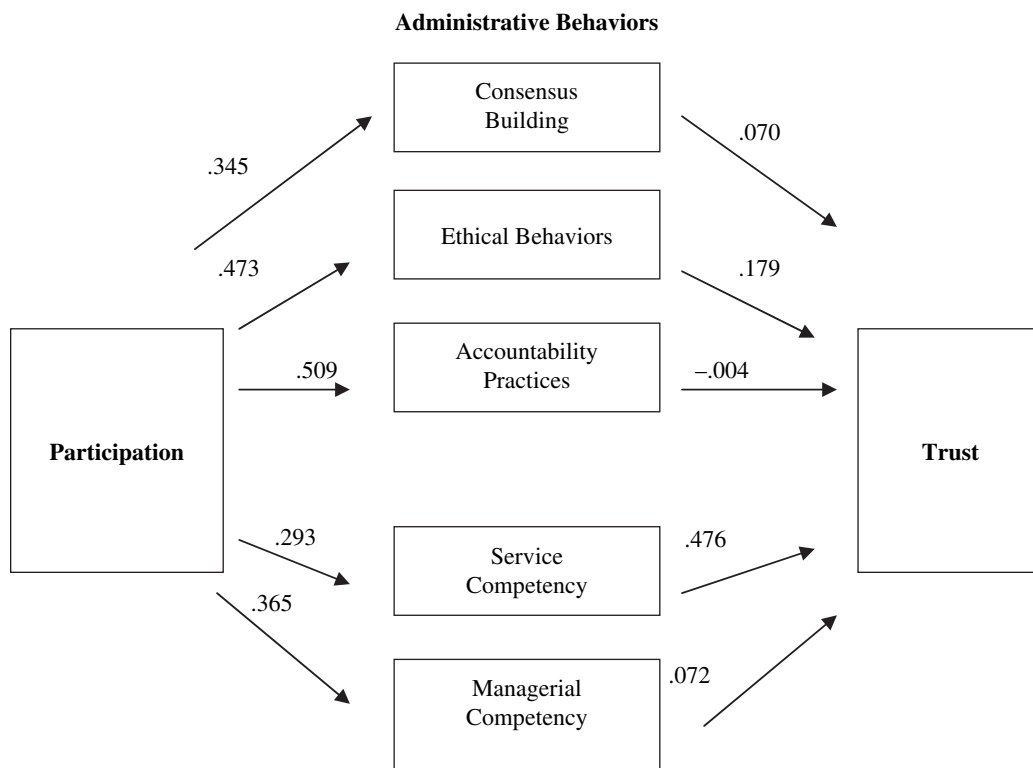
Table 3 Partial Correlations between Participation and Trust

Partial correlation coefficients between participation and trust, while controlled by	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Consensus building	.041	.580
Ethical behaviors	.007	.931
Accountability practices	−.017	.822
Service competency	.052	.483
Managerial competency	.054	.479

this result indicates that one standard deviation in the participation index could result in a change in the trust index by 0.085 through the enhancement of administrative ethical behaviors. Because the participation index is measured on a five-point scale (from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”), an increase of participation by two standard deviations ($2 \times 0.53 =$ about 1), or one scale, say from “neutral” to “agree,” could improve the trust index by 0.170 (0.085×2) through the improvement of administrative ethical behaviors. This result supports the argument that participation improves public trust by enhancing administrative ethical behaviors in integrity and honesty.

The results in figure 3 also support the proposition that members of the public gain trust when they perceive that participation results in enhanced service competence. The indirect impact of participation on trust is 0.140 through enhanced service competency, the highest among all participation impact statistics on public trust. This statistic indicates that an increase in one scale level on the participation index (about two standard deviations) could improve the public trust index by 0.280 ($= 2 \times 0.140$) through the improvement of service competency. In this study, because service competence is measured by survey items concerning whether high-quality services are provided in a city to meet public needs and achieve public satisfaction with services, this finding suggests that the public trusts an administration more when demand and response for services is well met in the participation process, and the public perceives a high level of satisfaction with the services provided by the government. This result is consistent with the observation that participation provides a process that allows the public to voice their needs and expectations, which, in turn, provides a legitimate basis for the government to develop public-supported goals, missions, and service priorities (Langton 1978). Furthermore, participation results in a public that is more accepting of organizational goals, performance standards, and decisions (Pateman 1970).

Although the possible impact of consensus building on the participation–trust relationship is positive, this impact is not statistically significant. In other words, it is probable that such an impact does not exist. More specifically, the public may not gain trust even if a



(Note: Statistics are standardized regression coefficients.)

Participation Impact on Trust

Consensus building	$.345 \times .070 = .024$
<i>Ethical behaviors</i>	<i>$.473 \times .179 = .085$ **</i>
Accountability practices	$.509 \times -.004 = -.002$
<i>Service competency</i>	<i>$.293 \times .476 = .140$ ***</i>
Managerial competency	$.365 \times .072 = .0263$

** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$. Statistically significant relationships are given in italic and bold

Figure 3 The Impact of Participation on Trust: A Path Analysis

consensus on service goals, expected performance, and service priorities is built between the public and the administration through participation. This finding suggests that the public may see consensus as an agreement, a contract, or a promise. A promise does not guarantee fulfillment. Combined with the finding that the public gains trust through enhanced service competency, this finding suggests that the public wants to see the realization of a promise before placing trust in the administration.

Also interesting is the finding that there is no evidence that an administration's accountability practices enhanced public trust through public participation. A closer examination on two phases of this path indicates a strong positive association between participation and accountability (the first phase); however, the association between accountability and trust does not exist. The positive participation-to-accountability connection is

expected, because participation can be seen as a mode of accountability. It is the insignificant accountability-to-trust relationship that is counterintuitive and inconsistent with the hypothesis initially developed in this study for this factor. An accountable organization does *not* necessarily win public trust. Because accountability is measured as the extent of relevant information that is exposed to the public, this result indicates that the public is apathetic (perhaps data-saturated), or perhaps even a little suspicious (the negative sign of the association), when they are given more information about administration. Exposure to information may not change the public's attitude toward an administration. As the Chinese say, news doesn't change anything. The public needs to see benefits gained through their participation in order to believe in government.

Finally, the results show no apparent impact of participation on trust through the improvement of

managerial competence. Although the results show that public participation may result in enhanced managerial competence, the improved managerial competence may not affect public trust. More specifically, the improvement in an administration's capabilities to provide services (managerial competence) does not seem to change public's view toward the administration. Again, it seems performance, not promise, affects public trust most.

Conclusion

This study has examined the argument that public participation enhances public trust. The results suggest that participation affects trust through two factors of administrative behavior. First, participation affects trust when it produces high-quality services that the public wants. Second, enhanced ethical behavior on the part of administration is another reason that participation leads to trust. Public trust increases when public officials demonstrate integrity, honesty, and moral leadership and when ethics are institutionalized in government through the process of participation.

The results also indicate that, although participation builds public consensus, consensus building alone does not lead to public trust. Consensus building is a process in which the public and government reach an agreement as to what needs to be done. Signing the agreement does not win public trust; fulfillment of the agreement does. A similar conclusion applies to the finding on accountability practices. Although participation enhances accountability of an organization, public exposure to information does not necessarily lead to public trust. The administration needs to do more than reveal information to gain public trust. In addition, the improvement in managerial competence has little influence on public trust, which indicates that such improvement is considered an internal administrative issue that is not in the domain of the public's concern.

These results suggest an effective strategy for administrators who attempt to use public participation as a tool to improve their credibility among the public. First, the strategy should emphasize that participation efforts must ultimately be results oriented. The administration should demonstrate to the public that the participation process eventually leads to the improvement of public services. Also important to the administration is the realization that the process of consensus building and information exposure should

be viewed by the public as a part of administrative effort to produce results desired by the public. Yet even successful consensus building and accountability alone do not gain public trust.

Second, the strategy should stress the improvement of administrative ethical behaviors. The public should strongly perceive the integrity of administrative behaviors during participation. Public trust is further enhanced when ethical competencies are institutionalized through training sessions, workshops, codes of ethics, and the like.

This research provides empirical evidence to support the theoretical argument that the stakeholders who are involved in governments *can* develop a better sense of trust toward them. This is specifically achieved by linking participation to improvements in service competence and changes in administrative ethical behavior.

Public trust increases when public officials demonstrate integrity, honesty, and moral leadership and when ethics are institutionalized in government through the process of participation.

A limitation of this study is that it examines public participation and trust through the perceptions of administrative experts. Although the *overall* levels of trust in this study are consistent with other studies, the weight and importance of specific administrative behaviors may or may not vary with these findings when citizens' perceptions are compared to those of experts. Thus, the next step would be to directly examine the public's perceptions. Additionally, this model can serve as part of a larger framework to evaluate governmental participation efforts that are designed to improve participation outcomes to foster not only improved administrative trust but also enhanced legitimacy, a well-informed public, improved decision making, and altered forms of power. Finally, replication of this study might validate its results, but—more interestingly—provide important trend data that demonstrate the possible change of public participation, public trust, and other variables over time.

The administration should demonstrate to the public that the participation process eventually leads to the improvement of public services.

Notes

1. Of course, legitimacy can come from different sources, such as tradition, religion, or military might, depending on a society's preference.
2. For example, in Lubbock, Texas, a citizen group selected a local artist's relief of a mythological-style "windy man" to depict the strong breezes typical of West Texas. These sculptures were to adorn all of the new freeway entrances. A significant number of citizens shrilly complained that the works

inappropriately espoused a pagan god or negatively portrayed the city as too blustery. An impassioned critic destroyed the first relief at night with a sledge hammer.

3. A pool of approximately 40 nonrespondents was surveyed by telephone until a sample of 20 completed interviews was completed.
4. Our survey of managers shows an average 65.8 percent citizen trust rate toward local governments, similar to the results from a Pew Research Center survey (1998) that showed a 68.0 percent “very favorable or mostly favorable” rate to local governments, a 70.0 percent “very favorable or mostly favorable” rating toward state and local officials, and a 78.0 percent “great deal or fair amount” trust rate for local governments handling local problems. The Pew survey, titled “Trust in Government,” was released in March 1998 with a sample size of 1,762. A Gallup survey conducted in May 1997 showed a 69.0 percent “great deal or fair amount” trust rate for local governments handling local problems (Pew Research Center 1998). Both the Pew and Gallup survey results can be viewed on the Pew Web sites at <http://people-press.org/reports/print.php3?PageID=593> and <http://people-press.org/reports/print.php3?PageID=594>.
5. There are two dimensions in measuring “ethical behaviors,” and these dimensions may respond differently to participation efforts. Because “ethical integrity” is more concerned with the personal attributes of ethics, such as moral leadership and individual honesty, it is perhaps more difficult to change by participation. “Ethical competency” refers to organizational processes (ethical training, workshops, codes of ethics) to ensure ethical behavior. These elements are more likely to be enhanced by participation efforts.

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