



Universiteit
Leiden

The Netherlands

Open government and public trust: a new revaluation of the citizen perspective

Witkam, M.

Citation

Witkam, M. (2024, October 8). *Open government and public trust: a new revaluation of the citizen perspective*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4094590>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4094590>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

OPEN GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC TRUST

A new revaluation of the citizen perspective

Mathilde Witkam

OPEN GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC TRUST

A new revaluation of the citizen perspective

© Mathilde Witkam, the Netherlands, 2024

Cover design: Mathilde in association with ziggyzazoe.com

Photo: Paula Strijbis

Layout: Mathilde Witkam

Printing: druk-24h.com.pl

OPEN GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC TRUST

A new revaluation of the citizen perspective

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van
de graad van doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden
op gezag van rector magnificus prof.dr.ir. H. Bijl,
volgens besluit van het college voor promoties
te verdedigen op dinsdag 8 oktober 2024
klokke 11.30 uur

door

Mathilde Witkam
geboren te Leiden in 1982

Promotor: Prof. dr. A. Kutsal Yesilkagit

Co-promotor: Dr. Carola J.A. van Eijk

Promotiecommissie

Voorzitter: Prof. mr. dr. Erwin R. Muller

Leden: Dr. Koen P.R. Bartels (University of Birmingham)

Dr. Petra E.A. van den Bekerom

Prof. dr. Caelesta H.J.M. Braun

Prof. dr. ing. Bram J. Klievink

Prof. dr. Albert Meijer (Universiteit Utrecht)

*To my children Zoey, Zara-Lily, Floris and Philip,
that you may always stay curious*

Preface: curiosity

While writing a dissertation, one searches for a balance between aligning with what already exists and bringing something new to the table. A balance between scientific jargon and understandable language – that is, if you want the message to come across in and outside of academia. I have made an effort to do so, broadening not only my own view but hopefully yours as well. Any dissertation is a baby step in the advancement of science. But as any parent knows, baby steps can feel huge. As my father always says, “*Curiosity is the beginning of science.*” This is the beginning of my exploration of public trust. Are you curious?

Table of contents

1. Introduction	12
1.1 The problem of trust	15
1.2 Open government and trust: knowledge gaps	16
1.3 Problem statement and research question	18
1.4 Research design and context	19
1.5 Practical relevance	22
1.6 Structure of the study	24
 2. Literature review	 25
2.1 What is public trust?	25
2.1.1 The meaning and importance of trust	25
2.1.2 Defining public trust	28
2.2 What is open government?	30
2.3 Open government and public trust	33
2.3.1 Transparency and trust	33
2.3.2 Data insight and trust	39
2.3.3 Participation and trust	43
2.4 Other determinants of public trust	49
2.4.1 Performance	49
2.4.2 Exogenous determinants of public trust	50
2.5 Remaining puzzles	52
2.5.1 Why is the effect of transparency on trust ambiguous?	52
2.5.2 When does participation enhance public trust?	55
2.5.3 Does combined institutional openness enhance trust?	57
2.6 Conclusion	58

3. Building a theoretical framework	59
3.1 Public trust: perceived competence, benevolence, and integrity	59
3.2 Open government: transparency, data insight, and participation	62
3.3 Hypotheses	63
3.3.1 Institutional transparency	63
3.3.2 Data insight by government	69
3.3.3 Participation possibilities	71
3.3.4 Open government	74
3.3.5 The role of performance	75
3.4 Research model	76
4. Methodology	79
4.1 Introduction: mixed method design	79
4.2 Research context	81
4.2.1 Local government	81
4.2.2 Introducing the empirical domain	82
4.2.3 The population: homeowners	82
4.3 Designing the survey study	83
4.3.1 Why (two) surveys?	83
4.3.2 Survey administration	84
4.4 Measuring public trust	88
4.4.1 From definitions to survey items	88
4.4.2 Control variables	92
4.5 Measuring open government	95
4.5.1 Survey administration	95
4.5.2 Open government indicators	96
4.6 Focus groups	98
4.6.1 Topic list and coding	99

4.6.2 Facilitating the focus groups	100
4.6.3 Sample selection	101
4.7 Interviews	102
4.7.1 Topic list and coding	103
4.7.2 Examining different modes of participation	105
4.7.3 Sample selection	106
5. A survey study on the relationship between openness and trust	108
5.1 Descriptive statistics and correlations	108
5.1.1 Descriptives	108
5.1.2 Are openness and public trust correlated?	112
5.2 Is openness an adequate trust predictor?	114
5.2.1 Does institutional openness affect public trust?	114
5.2.2 Does perceived openness affect public trust?	119
5.3 Auxiliary findings	122
5.4 Reflecting on the results: new puzzles	125
5.4.1 Ambiguous effects of institutional transparency	125
5.4.2 Discrepancy between practices and perceptions	127
5.4.3 Interrelationship between participation and trust	129
5.4.4 Exchange of public values?	131
6. The formation of public perceptions of local government	133
6.1 Which mechanisms influence the effect of transparency on trust?	133
6.1.1 Transparency disuse	134
6.1.2 Disappointment with transparency	141
6.1.3 Concluding remarks on the transparency-trust relationship	146
6.2 Tax payers' perspectives on openness and trustworthiness	147
6.2.1 Openness perceptions	147

6.2.2 Perceptions of trustworthiness	154
6.2.3 Trust antecedents: to what do people attribute their trust?	158
6.3 Which new insights and puzzles do the focus groups bring?	166
7. Public encounters and public trust	170
7.1 Getting to know the participants: self-efficacy and expectations	171
7.1.1 Ease and self-efficacy	171
7.1.2 External efficacy	172
7.2 Trust: differences between formal and informal participants	174
7.2.1 Trust prior to participation	174
7.2.2 Trust change	175
7.3 Satisfaction: a matter of distributive or procedural justice?	178
7.3.1 Procedural aspects	179
7.3.2 The effect of terms	180
7.3.3 Perceived fairness	181
7.3.4 Distributive aspects	184
7.4 Why does trust change after an encounter with government?	186
7.5 Concluding remarks on public encounters and trust	189
8. Conclusions and discussion	192
8.1 Answering the research questions	192
8.2 Contributions to the research field	197
8.2.1 Discrepancy between practices and perceptions	197
8.2.2 Understanding transparency and its ambiguous effects	200
8.2.3 So what is public trust and how does it originate?	202
8.3 Limitations	207
8.3.1 Generalizability	207
8.3.2 Research design choices	210

8.4 Suggestions for further research	211
8.4.1 Discrepancy between conceptualisations	211
8.4.2 Valorisation and the citizen perspective	212
8.5 Implications of new insights for practice	213
8.5.1 Continuous attention to citizens' perceptions	213
8.5.2 Realistic expectations of institutional transparency	216
8.5.3 The potential of going informal	217
Bibliography	219
Appendix 4.1 Example Trust Survey Flyer	248
Appendix 4.2 Trust Survey (English & Dutch)	249
Appendix 4.3 Open Government Survey (English & Dutch)	259
Appendix 4.4 Open Government Scorecard and its rationale	267
Appendix 4.5 Interview questions objectors (English & Dutch)	275
Appendix 5.1 PCA perceived trustworthiness	279
Appendix 5.2 Complete analysis institutional openness	280
Appendix 5.3 Full ANOVA results on public trust	297
Appendix 5.4 Regression renters	301
Appendix 5.5 Regression participants	304
Nederlandse samenvatting (Dutch Summary)	307
Acknowledgements	328
About the Author	331