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

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2. Literature review

THE aim of this chapter is to give an overview of the existing knowledge of the relationship between government openness and citizens' trust in government. First, the key concepts are specified. Section [2.1](#) describes what constitutes citizens' trust in government, further referred to as 'public trust', and why it is deemed important, and section [2.2](#) describes concept of open government. Section [2.3](#) outlines the effect of the separate elements of openness on trust. The review briefly discusses other determinants of public trust in section [2.4](#). The chapter concludes with the remaining puzzles regarding the relationship between openness and trust in section [2.5](#).

2.1 What is public trust?

2.1.1 The meaning and importance of trust

It is said that the ultimate success of public sector organisations can be gauged in terms of public trust (Mason et al., 2014, 324). An appropriate level of public trust is essential for optimal democratic governance (Yang & Holzer, 2006, 123) and for citizens' commitment to democratic values (Mishler & Rose, 2005, 1068). The level of trust may serve as a barometer of citizen satisfaction with government (Fitzgerald & Wolak, 2016, 142). Trust today is therefore politically relevant as well as normatively desirable (Gershtenson & Plane, 2012, 134). Although public perceptions are not always as negative as the media or the opposition proclaim (Weyers, 2007, 99; Van de Walle, 2004, 55; Goodsell, 1994, 179), even in a generally high trust society such as the Netherlands (OECD-report, 2013, 30), it remains important to keep working on public trust, as it has declined in recent years (SCP, 2021; SCP, 2022; SCP, 2023). In 2023, public trust in parliament and in politics is at its lowest level since ten years (CBS, 2023). The aim to increase trust in government is not applauded by all, and in some situations, liberal distrust of government would be 'the better way to go' (Hardin, 2006, 136). Unwarranted trust could lead to clientelism and abuse of power, whereas criticism could induce necessary reforms to improve democratic governance (Espinal, Hartlyn & Kelly, 2006, 217). On the other hand, public trust can be seen as a measure of the 'quality of the relationship' of government with its citizens (Porumbescu, 2017, 521).

Even though in some cases low trust can be regarded as an expression of a healthy democratic attitude (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003, 333), this section focuses on the benefits and desirability of public trust.

2.1.1.1 Acceptance and compliance (instrumental)

The interest in public trust rests largely on beliefs about its consequences for the effectiveness of government and democratic stability (Citrin & Stoker, 2018, 61). Public trust is expected to improve voluntary compliance with rules and regulations since their effectiveness depends on the extent to which people see them as fair and legitimate enough to outweigh the benefits of non-compliance, thereby reducing the costs of enforcement (OECD, 2013, 22). The absence of public trust results in less willingness to pay taxes, requiring more monitoring and enforcement systems (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003, 340). Trust is not only relevant for national governments. Other public institutions, such as the police or the judiciary, rely on public trust to smoothly execute their tasks. It is deemed a necessity for the functioning of these institutions (Schaap, 2021, 304; Mason, Hillenbrand & Money, 2014, 321). The same holds true for tax agencies. Public trust has a 'direct effect on the capability of government systems to fulfil their basic tasks towards the population' (Marien & Hooghe, 2011, 283). Through an empirical examination of the consequences of low political trust, they find that low trust citizens are significantly more likely to accept illegal behaviour, such as tax fraud. Citizens may avoid paying taxes that are deemed critical for the funding and functioning of the system. When citizens do not *voluntarily* pay their taxes, governments resort to coercive measures to enforce regulations, which are more difficult and costly (Marien & Hooghe, 2011, 282). They conclude that when trust increases, tax evasion decreases. Especially, a welfare state such as the Netherlands benefits from a well-functioning system of tax collection. Trust not only improves compliance with tax policies, but it turns out to be much more efficient than punitive policies (Goslinga et al., 2019, 22). Trusting citizens more willingly accept the obligations that the government imposes on them and more willingly comply with laws (Tyler, 1990, 172). In this way, trust is considered 'a resource enabling government action', as mistrust makes it harder for governments to get anything done that involves citizen cooperation (Citrin

& Stoker, 2018, 62). Trust is essential for a competitive and properly functioning financial and political system (Drakos, Kallandranis & Karidis, 2019, 2).

2.1.1.2 Legitimacy (fundamental)

On a more profound level, trust can be considered a democratic value. As part of the 'social contract' citizens partially transfer their sovereignty to governing institutions. For example, local governments have been assigned certain public tasks, and this delegation is based on trust that this mandate is handled appropriately (Christensen, Yamamoto, & Aoyagi, 2020, 1269). Rousseau's idea of the social contract is that free citizens voluntarily accept the authority of the state in their own interest, yet this contact is a two-sided coin and can only exist when citizens trust their government (Fleisher, 2018, 2). When risk is involved, people use trust in government as a heuristic to decide whether positive outcomes will materialise (Citrin & Stoker, 2018, 61). Even though there is an institutionalisation of distrust in the architecture of democracy: the trias politica (Sztompka, 1999, 140), in a liberal democracy, any government authority is ultimately derived from the people (Mulgan, 2014).

A lack of trust or legitimacy can result in apathy (Mazepus, 2016, 29). For example, experiencing corruption has a clear negative impact on citizens' trust and their assessments of regime legitimacy (Espinal et al., 2006, 207). Trust is an integral part of the democratic system as it enhances the legitimacy of the politico-administrative system (Beshi & Kaur, 2019, 340), whereas a lack of trust delegitimizes the actions of public authorities and makes it harder to take policy risks and innovate (Fitzgerald & Wolak, 2016, 141). A lack of trust lessens the legitimacy of governments and makes it complicated for citizens to agree with public policies (Bastida Albaladejo, 2019, 16). There is a reasonable consensus that trust is an essential part of a legitimate political system.

In sum, trust is a core requirement for attaining political as well as administrative legitimacy (Johansson & Montin, 2014, 213), and the cultivation of trust is deemed necessary (Beldad et al., 2012, 42). Citizens' attitudes influence the effectiveness of democratic governments and affect their durability, since mistrusting citizens are more likely to believe

new claims of misconduct (Citrin & Stoker, 2018, 60). As a legitimization of power, trust helps to create a sense of belonging to society (Misztal, 1996, 216). Citizens use trust as a heuristic, i.e. mental short cuts, when making up their minds on public issues (Charron & Rothstein, 2016, 61). Moreover, studies on the effect of public trust in times of COVID show that it can even save lives. As high trust citizens better adhered to stringent public health policies, high-trust regions were better able to reduce mobility and social interaction, thereby limiting contagion (Bargain & Aminjonov, 2020, 7). Trust is thus deemed indispensable to effective government operations as well as an indicator of the quality of democracy. Therefore, it is considered a desirable outcome to be pursued by government organisations.

2.1.2 Defining public trust

An often quoted definition of trust, is that of Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, and Camerer (1998, 395): “A psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another.” In an integrative model of organisational trust, Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995, 712) adopt a similar view on trust: “The willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party.” The commonalities in these definitions are 1. ‘positive expectations’, 2. ‘accepting vulnerability’, and 3. ‘another party’.

First, public trust concerns citizens’ *positive expectations* of government acts. For example, according to Drakos et al. (2019, 7) public trust reflects ‘individuals’ attitudes towards their government based on perceptions of how well elected officials meet their personal expectations’. Trust is considered ‘a person’s belief that an institution will act consistently with their expectations of positive behaviour’ (OECD, 2018, 10). Beshi & Kaur (2019, 340) argue it is citizens’ confidence that government ‘does the right thing’, meaning to act appropriately and honestly on behalf of the public. Secondly, *accepting vulnerability* means that a certain amount of risk needs to be involved in order to speak of trust. Trust involves a trustor and a trustee that are somehow reliant, containing risks for the trustor as well as positive expectations regarding this risk (PytlikZillig & Kimbrough, 2016). Mayer et al. (1995, 712) clarify that trust does not always constitute taking

a risk, rather it is the willingness to take a risk. In an uneven relationship with the government, however, citizens inherently have no choice but to accept vulnerability. When vulnerability is willingly accepted based on the positive expectations of government, it is considered public trust.

Although many studies examine ‘generalised trust in government’, I concur with the view that the other party, i.e. the object of trust, must be specific in order to speak of *trust*. Instead of public trust as a general attitude, trust is seen as a three-part relation (Sztompka, 1999, 25; Hardin, 2006, 19), in which A trusts B to do X or A trust B in manner Y (Hardin, 2002, 9). For example, I trust this court to handle my claims justly and objectively (Jonkers, 2013), or I trust the municipality to assess my property fairly and correctly. This way, public trust always has an object –the government institution–, and a domain of action where trust is given or withheld (Citrin & Stoker, 2018, 50). Some distinguish diffuse support from specific support. With diffuse support, they refer to ‘long-term general and systematic trust and legitimacy of the system and its institutions or actors’, whereas specific support ‘focuses on specific experiences with government and its services’ (Christensen et al., 2020, 1269). This study upholds the proposed view of trust as a specific relationship. This is how public trust differs from positive attitudes towards government in general. Although in the literature trust encompasses a range of meanings in different settings and is considered a multifaceted concept (Lewicki & Brinsfield, 2015, 46), this study views public trust as citizens’ positive expectations of the government’s trustworthiness, comprising its perceived competence, integrity, and benevolence.

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| Public trust is a citizen’s psychological state comprising positive expectations of the intentions and behaviour of government. |
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2.2 What is open government?

IN the literature, open government is a broad concept that describes a wide range of principles, including press freedom, e-governance, trade openness, and even democracy itself (Navelski, 2018). Traditionally, open government focused on citizens' access to information, but the concept has evolved towards machine-readable and reusable data, and from transparency towards citizen interactivity, such as participation and co-production, with an emphasis on the ease and convenience of using public information (Moon, 2020, 542). It entails a wide range of principles and initiatives in a variety of government branches. From political openness, such as the publication of financial contributions to political campaigns and the publication of voting behaviour of city councillors, to administrative openness, such as online consultations, and the existence of Freedom of Information (FOI) legislation (Worthy, 2010), to open data platforms, co-productions, and networked collaborative governance (Moon, 2020, 538). Scholars emphasise different ways of coherence between the dimensions of open government. For example, Veljković, Bogdanović-Dinić & Stoimenov (2014, 280) propose a conceptual model of open government through participation and collaboration with an emphasis on data insight, whereas Wirtz and Birkmeyer (2015, 386) conceptualise three pillars of open government: transparency, participation, and collaboration, and add accountability as a cornerstone of open government that adds public value to better government (Harrison et al., 2012, 84).

Some open government definitions focus on e-government and open data. Open government in that sense entails 'leveraging information technologies to generate participatory, collaborative dialogue between policymakers and citizens' (Evans & Campos, 2013, 173) or 'the opening of the public administration to more transparency, participation, and collaboration, as well as to innovation and business development through the disclosure and access to data' (Geiger & Von Lucke, 2012, 265). Still, open government is more than providing information digitally. As Meijer, Curtin, & Hillebrandt (2012) argue, it includes both openness in informational terms (vision) and openness in interactive terms (voice).

“Openness of government is the extent to which citizens can monitor and influence government processes through access to government information and access to decision-making arenas” (Meijer, Curtin, & Hillebrandt, 2012, 13).

This definition entails both transparency and participation. In an open government, citizens who have an interest in engaging are enabled to do so. While scholars have different views about open government and focus on different dimensions, it is ‘a multidimensional phenomenon including information availability, transparency, participation, collaboration, and information technologies’ (Gil-Garcia, Gasco-Hernandez, & Pardo, 2020, 495). ‘New open government’ even considers transparency as a vehicle to stimulate more citizen participation and co-production, in which citizens take an active role as co-decision-makers or co-producers of public services (Moon, 2020, 543). In that view, citizens are an integral part of that open government. In this dissertation, however, open government is conceptualised somewhat more narrowly as a characteristic of government.

The Open Government Directive issued by Obama’s administration in 2009 mentions three goals: transparency, participation, and collaboration. The subsequent [Open Government Partnership](#) declares to adhere to open government principles: transparency, accountability, data insight, participation, and collaboration. Open government is seen as a culture of governance that promotes the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability, and stakeholder participation in support of democracy and inclusive growth (OECD, 2019).

Open government is thus a multifaceted and ever-evolving concept. Government organisations can choose from a palette of openness arrangements. However, not all elements of open government are suitable for the purpose of this research. For example, accountability involves the complex interplay of multiple parties. Both the actions of the trustee (government) and the trustor (citizens) need to be assessed. Each action would then need extensive operationalization itself (Bovens, 2007, 450). Trying to capture these multiple aspects of accountability as merely an openness variable on the part of government would lead to unwarranted

complexity reduction. Moreover, collaboration is not included because the special interest of this study goes out to citizen perceptions of government. Collaboration involves cooperation between multiple, often professional, parties. While citizens can collaborate, this requires a high skillset, for example, in the ICT's. This does not represent a wide group of citizens in its everyday dealings with the government. Although citizens are a valuable source of information, they cannot be considered equal autonomous partners that co-create output together with the government, which is at the heart of collaboration. Essentially, citizens have no decision-making power over the taxes they are obliged to pay. In line with the body of open government literature (Evans & Campos, 2013; Linders, 2012; Linders & Wilson, 2011; Obama, 2009; Wirtz & Birkmeyer, 2015), enabling individual citizens to give input as a form of co-production best falls under the category of participation.

Open government is a collective term that offers a diversity of initiatives, practices, and experiences that may influence trust. In line with the definition of Meijer, Curtin, & Hillebrandt (2012), this study views open government as a combination of participation and different forms of transparency. It is the institutional openness of local governments, i.e. the different instruments they deploy to be open towards their citizens. Four categories of institutional openness are included: the government's proactive provision of general information (proactive transparency), the government's responsiveness to citizens' specific information needs (responsive transparency), providing citizens with insight into government-held decision-making data (data insight), and facilitating citizen input in decision making (participation). These categories are complementary expressions of institutional openness. Citizens' perceptions of openness are included separately, to see how they relate to institutional openness.

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| Open government is the extent to which citizens are enabled to monitor and influence government processes through easy access to government information and to decision-making arenas. |
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2.3 Open government and public trust

AFTER defining trust and openness, the question is: which concrete administrative measures and instruments of openness have an effect on public trust? Open government in its broadest sense, including press freedom, e-governance, and trade openness, is found to be positively related to trust in several different types of public institutions (Navelski, 2018, 7). This literature review runs along specific dimensions of openness: transparency, data insight, and participation possibilities, since few studies combine different openness elements. Although much more has been written about fostering trust, this review is limited to what is known about the relationship between open government and public trust. Moreover, international studies on public trust are abundant. Although findings differ per national context and may therefore not be fully comparable, these studies do give an impression of the state of the art on the topic. To give a complete overview, both single-country studies as well as comparative research are included in this review, bearing in mind that the present study concerns a democratic example, which differs from public trust in autocracies. Previous studies are both empirical and normative, yet this review is limited to empirical studies.

2.3.1 Transparency and trust

In the literature on open government and public trust, transparency is the most prominently present openness dimension, making its review the most comprehensive. Although in the normative literature the positive effects of transparency predominate, empirical studies in various administrative settings, reveal a more ambiguous picture. In a previous review on various effects attributed to transparency, such as improving management, reducing corruption, and increasing participation, legitimacy, and trust, Cucciniello, Porumbescu, & Grimmelhuisen (2017, 41) conclude that transparency is not always effective at engendering trust in government. They reviewed fifteen empirical studies on the effect of transparency on trust. In seven studies, transparency had a positive effect on trust, three showed a negative effect, four showed mixed findings, and the last study showed no effect at all. The present literature review reveals a similar mixed picture.

A previous study on the effect of transparency on trust in Dutch local government shows that transparency on local air pollution policy and its outcomes does not always contribute to higher levels of public trust (Grimmelikhuijsen, 2012, 245). Grimmelikhuijsen's experimental design differentiates between objects of transparency (policy, policy decision-making process, and policy outcomes) and adds three content characteristics (completeness, colour, and usability). Each type of transparency reveals a differentiated effect on perceived competence, benevolence, and honesty. When a significant positive effect is found, openness has somewhat limited explanatory power for the level of public trust. Grimmelikhuijsen indicates that it is striking that almost none of his hypotheses of a positive relationship between transparency and trust could be accepted. As an explanation for a lack of a clear positive effect, he proposes that it is hard to meet citizens' expectations. Being completely transparent causes people to regard a government organisation as being honest, yet not very competent because mistakes are now open to scrutiny. Being transparent reveals that government is not the well-oiled machine it was thought to be, i.e. a 'clumsy yet honest government' (Grimmelikhuijsen, 2012, 235).

Moreover, Grimmelikhuijsen, Porumbescu, Hong, & Im (2013) find that the way transparency affects trust varies in different national cultures. Dutch citizens are found to perceive and appreciate government transparency differently from South-Koreans. There is a negative transparency effect in South Korea, whereas in the Netherlands, transparency has little effect on public trust. In a country such as the Netherlands, with a short-term oriented culture, low power distance, and communication that is already direct and participative, transparency may be less likely to have an effect since it 'essentially is a power-reducing mechanism' (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2013, 583). However, Grimmelikhuijsen & Klijn examine the effect of 'visual' transparency on trust in the judiciary and do find an overall positive effect of transparency on trust in judges (Grimmelikhuijsen & Klijn, 2015, 1006). Even though only 4.1% of the change in trust was caused by watching the series, participants who watch more episodes of a television series on the work of judges, tend to trust them more. This suggests that more familiarity can positively influence trust. The abovementioned

studies view transparency as the amount of available information, i.e. the proactive dissemination of information. This is in line with other attempts to index transparency-levels, with the goal of enabling comparison by counting the types of information disclosed (Da Cruz et al., 2016; Hollyer et al., 2014).

In two studies on the impact of Britain's Freedom of Information Act, Worthy (2010, 2013) examines whether British FOI legislation achieved its intended goals, such as increasing transparency, public understanding of decision making, public participation, and increasing public trust. No support was found for any of the abovementioned goals, except for the first one. FOI increases institutional transparency but not public trust. Worthy mentions two possible reasons for the lack of a positive effect on trust. The first is the *intermediary role of the media*, that particularly focuses on negative aspects of performance, such as failures and mistakes, and only a few prominent cases reach the wider public. The second reason is the requesters' prior low public trust. FOI requests are shaped by pre-existing low trust that is reaffirmed by the requester's use of FOI and the information obtained (Worthy, 2010, 576). Moreover, Worthy finds little evidence for increased public understanding of decisions either. The reason, Worthy argues, lies in the type of transparency. After FOI requests official documents are released, yet the process towards decisions, including policy visions, is often protected from disclosure and does not have the focus of the media either. Therefore, increased understanding of decisions is simply not a logical result of FOI and documents are not able to provide the rationale behind decisions.

Other studies combine proactive and passive forms of transparency. For example, Mabillard & Pasquier (2017) examine the interrelationship between transparency and public trust include passive transparency, such as the existence of FOI legislation and the number of information requests, as well as active transparency in the form of the rankings in the Global Open Data Index and in OECD-reports on government openness, in ten countries in the period between 2007 and 2014. Although trust levels vary per country, there is no global public trust decrease. However, no systematic positive effect of transparency on public trust is found either. In some countries, passive transparency generates more trust in

government. Other countries, such as Mexico and India, show a sharp increase in requests and score relatively high on open-data indices, yet public trust has dropped. The authors suggest that the effect of transparency on public trust should not be overestimated and argue that, in fact, transparency may be a result of low trust and works as an 'ex-post mechanism of control' when government trustworthiness is low (Mabillard & Pasquier, 2017, 71).

Although the main focus of this review is the effect of transparency on trust, most studies examine more than one trust determinant. For example, Kim & Lee (2012) examine the relationship between electronic participation and trust in local government and include the effect of transparency. They find a positive association between e-participants' assessment of government transparency and their trust in local government (Kim & Lee, 2012, 825). Similarly, Park & Blenkinsopp (2011) do not solely focus on the relationship between transparency and trust, but rather examine the role of transparency and trust in the relationship between corruption and citizen satisfaction. Trust is then not merely a dependent variable but is considered a possible mediator for satisfaction with government. The authors recognise this difference with other studies that examine transparency and point out that this is not a problem since many theorists propose a feedback loop between the two concepts: 'the interaction between trust and satisfaction is recursive: trust leads to satisfaction, and vice versa' (Park & Blenkinsopp, 2011, 258). A positive feedback loop can lead to the institutionalisation of trust, which is further strengthened by the continuation of data collaboration initiatives (Klievink, Van der Voort, & Veeneman, 2018, 383).

Another way of examining the transparency-trust relationship is through vignette experiments. Two vignette studies reveal a positive effect of transparency. The vignette experiment by De Vries, Zijlstra, & Grimmelikhuijsen (2017) examines the effect of transparency on trust in the Dutch Authority for the Financial Markets (AFM), distinguishing rationale transparency (*why* are decisions made) from process transparency (*how* are decisions made). They find that in most cases, communication has a positive effect on trust in the authority, regardless of the subject or form of transparency (rational or process transparency).

Communicating authorities are trusted more than the ones that remain silent, irrespective of the coverage in the media. This differs from Worthy (2013, 405), who argues that the impact of transparency on trust in local government is either positive or negative, depending on the tone of the media-coverage. Most potential lies in explaining *why* certain decisions were made, i.e. rationale transparency, more so than process transparency that focuses on *how* those decisions were made (De Vries et al., 2017, 17). The effect of transparency thus may differ per situation. Moreover, the trust differences between the vignette groups are still relatively.

The other vignette study, on the effect of transparency on legitimacy, i.e. procedure acceptance of representative decision making in schools, finds a positive association as well (De Fine Licht et al., 2014, 117). There, different manipulations were used, ranging from no transparency (the final decision only) to full transparency (the decision, its rationale, as well as the decision-making process such as negotiations and bargaining towards reaching it). Transparency leads to greater acceptance and legitimacy of decisions, with rational transparency having the most effect. It is not necessary to expose everything, but by simply carefully justifying the decisions afterwards, acceptance can be increased. Full 'fishbowl' transparency has little extra added value above reason-giving. Their results do suggest that Decision-makers can improve the acceptance of decisions by carefully explaining them (De Fine Licht et al., 2014, 127). They indicate that the positive effect is not solely based on intuition but has fairly strong theoretical support. First, in *agency theory*, the agent (government) through transparency lessens uncertainty among the principal (citizens), by giving the principal more control. *Deliberative democracy theory* assumes that, in addition to deliberation, transparency helps increase mutual understanding and this increases trust. Finally, according to *procedural fairness theory*, a transparent and fair procedure increases acceptance of the end result. (De Fine Licht et al., 2014, 115).

Mason, Hillenbrand, & Money (2014) examine the effect of transparency on trust through real performance data of a district from the British police force. Their temporal research design enables the measurement of the change in trust as a result of the transparency of the performance data. They find that perceived performance and public trust interact. Citizens

that have low trust in the organisation react stronger to evidence of both good and bad performance – indicating that their trust is easier to gain but also easier to lose– than high-trust citizens. Citizens with initial high trust perceive performance to be high, without supporting data or information. Citizens with the highest initial perceptions of performance exhibit the greatest stability in trust. They ‘effectively give the organisation the benefit of the doubt and are least likely to disengage from their trusting perceptions’ (Mason, Hillenbrand, & Money, 2014, 337). The volatility of citizens’ trust is more related to initial perceptions than to transparency. With regards to the effect of transparency, they suggest that making performance data transparent, implicates that it can either help or hinder in developing public trust depending on the content of the data. Similar to Mason, Hillenbrand, & Money (2014), in a normative article, Mabillard & Pasquier (2015, 23) suggest that besides an effect, trust could also be a cause of perceived transparency. In 2017 they substantiated this mechanism in an empirical study in which they include active and passive forms of transparency. They find that transparency and trust in government are not systematically positively associated. Their key explanation is the interaction between the two concepts. Initial low trust in public authorities triggers requests to access official documents, causing transparency to increase. More passive transparency is thus not expected to be positively associated with trust. It is not low transparency that causes low trust, yet low trust increases requests. The idea that mistrust calls for more transparency involves reverse thinking (Mabillard & Pasquier, 2017, 87). They explain that the benefits to opening government information are better appreciated among citizens who have high trust to begin with (Mabillard & Pasquier, 2017, 85).

Another study on the effect of institutional transparency on public participation and trust, splits transparency into two variables: transparency *perception* (i.e. its perceived importance) and transparency *use* (Seavers, 2018). The results reveal a discrepancy between perception and the use of transparency. He finds that the actual use of government data causes no statistically significant increase or decrease in trust in government (Seavers, 2018, 202). Moreover, he finds a light negative relationship between transparency perception (its importance) and trust

in government, and he concludes that this contradicts the ‘public administrative narrative that increased transparency increases public trust’ (Seavers, 2018, 202). However, another conclusion that can be drawn is that strong supporters of transparency are more likely to not perceive the government as transparent and therefore may have lower trust levels. This remains speculation, since the survey used did not include a question on perceived government transparency. Similar to Seavers, Porumbescu (2017) focuses on the effect of ‘transparency use’ on trust. He examines the effect of transparency through governmental *websites* and *social media* on trust, including exercising voice. He distinguishes these two types of computer-mediated transparency because of the premise that they possess different relationships with respondents’ perceptions of government. The way these mediums present information to citizens differs, and on the basis of the *theory of psychological distance*, less detailed general information through social media is expected to resonate more positively with citizens than detailed information on municipal websites. Distance makes citizens less aware of potential issues, and in the absence of detailed information, they will focus on the desirable traits, often resulting in more positive evaluations (Porumbescu, 2017, 523). Information on social media is found to positively affect trust, yet the information on the website showed no effect, and the distance theory is only partially confirmed. This last study of the literature review corroborates transparency’s mixed effect on trust.

2.3.2 Data insight and trust

Even though governments are the largest data processors in the world, in comparison to the concept of transparency, much less research is conducted on the effect of giving insight into all this government-held data on public trust. The difference between transparency and data insight is that transparency concerns *openness about the ways governments operate*, whereas data insight specifically concerns *the data that governments use in decision making*. The empirical literature on the effect of this type of data insight on trust is scant, thus theoretical reflections are included. This section first narrows down the type of data and then presents the central arguments for how giving data insight can contribute to public trust.

Data insight is seen as the opening of public sector information and enabling citizens to access government-held data. In practice, there are two discernible objects of data insight: *open data* and *decision-making data*. Government data can be made publicly available without any limitation to anyone that is interested (open data) or can be maintained and used by the government in decisions (decision-making data). In open data collaboratives, which centre around processing government data and sharing data between parties, trust and collaboration are found to be mutually reinforcing as they feed each other in the process of interaction (Klievink, Van der Voort, & Veeneman, 2018, 383). Decision-making data, however, is not available as open data and is sometimes not even available to the citizen it concerns. Certainly, not all government-held data is openly available. To perform their assigned tasks, governments hold a wide variety of data on their citizens, ranging from personal data to financial data and property data. This data is used to decide whether a citizen is allowed to vote, receives certain benefits or whether a building permit is issued. Contrary to open data, the use of this data is restricted. For example, legislation postulates that personal and fiscal data is not publicised to anyone other than the data subject and designated (government) institutions.

In research, the amount of open data available is used to assess the level of openness (Veljković et al., 2014, 281). This way, governments can be compared by looking at the online availability of certain datasets, and the presence or absence of these datasets also enables tracking progress over time. Contrary to some other forms of open government, open datasets can relatively easily be quantified, enabling an openness comparison. However, this study excludes open data and narrows down to decision-making data for two reasons. First, open datasets are not expected to have a direct influence on the perceptions of citizens, since they are not the direct target group of these datasets. Without any intermediary visualisation tools, it is hard to analyse or draw meaningful conclusions about their content. Although open data may be available, it might not be useful to citizens due to a lack of capacity to access or analyse it (Murillo, 2015, 49). Moreover, open data are not able to show differences in the openness of local governments as national legislation determines the

publicity of open data and the same rules apply to all municipalities. Municipalities do tend to differ in the extent to which they give access to decision-making data to their citizens. Data insight is thus defined as '*enabling citizens access to government-held decision-making data*'. It is the extent to which decision-making data is rendered, enabling citizens to understand why decisions regarding them were made.

After having narrowed down data insight to decision-making data, this subsection presents the central arguments regarding the contribution of giving data insight to public trust. Few studies have examined the effect of data insight on public trust. Nevertheless, the literature is able to provide some pointers to how giving data insight and public trust are related. The promises of data insight are oriented towards an efficient and effective government, innovation and economic growth, accountability, inclusion, and empowerment (Hartog et al., 2014, 53). Ferry, Hardy and Midgley (2021) examine a parliamentary investigation by the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee's (PACAC) on data insight during the COVID-19-pandemic in the UK. Data connects government to the governed in two ways: it enables democratic accountability, but it also persuades citizens to act in the ways that the government wishes them to (Ferry et al., 2021, 678). As the PACAC describes, the latter is closely related to public trust, since low trust citizens are less likely to follow the rules and guidelines. Sharing data honestly and openly, complete with its uncertainties, helps to improve trust and thereby supports effective policy implementation (Ferry et al., 2021, 677). More data insight is thus expected to have a positive effect on trust. However, Meijer, Conradie & Choenni (2014) emphasise conflicting values that occur when opening up data, such as *transparency* versus *privacy*. It is from this public value perspective that they also examine the possible effects of data on trust. Their model proposes two opposing effects on trust that could occur. Opening up data can enhance transparency, that in turn enhances public trust. The reliability and validity of the data, as well as its ability to replicate, could increase trust in what the government is doing. On the other hand, too much data could also decrease transparency because of an information overload or as a result of misinterpretation (Meijer et al., 2014, 40).

Data insight helps citizens learn more about their own community and gain more confidence in their day-to-day dealings (O'Hara, 2012, 4). O'Hara analyses how data can positively affect public trust using several theories, such as rational choice theory and deliberative democracy theory. In *rational choice theory*, trust exists only when interests are aligned, meaning that the 'trustee acts in the trustor's interests for reasons grounded in the trustor's interests' (O'Hara, 2012, 3). Being able to know what the government is doing and how it is doing it through data, helps citizens to correctly place their judgement, and public trust can be strengthened where it is appropriate. He suggests that the possibility of holding a government to account is enough, and no 'actual army of citizen auditors' is necessary (O'Hara, 2012, 4). In *deliberative democracy theory*, the resolution of conflict is done through engaged deliberation, causing parties to understand each other better. Conflict can be partly neutralised through discussion and debate. Trust can then be enhanced through dialogue. O'Hara argues that data insight damages unwarranted trust (based on a hunch), but will make room for warranted trust to increase (solidly and accurately placed on the basis of relevant knowledge). He therefore deliberately speaks of *enhancing* instead of improving trust (O'Hara, 2012, 4).

In line with the role of data in deliberative democracy theory as proposed by O'Hara (2012, 8), Lee & Kwak (2012) examine how public engagement can be achieved by proposing a five step 'Open Government Maturity Model'. Although making data available is viewed as a step towards the goal of engagement and not so much as a tool to enhance trust, their model does present several opportunities, challenges, and outcomes. Both the government and the public can change through data insight. Government agencies change through increased visibility and agency accountability and shift their organisational culture towards openness. Data insight increases public knowledge and understanding of government processes. It makes the public better educated about what the government organisation does and how the work gets done (Lee & Kwak, 2012, 494). Moreover, providing data enables the public to correct mistakes. Feedback can cause continuous improvement that may enhance trust. It increases outside pressure to improve performance (Lee & Kwak,

2012, 494). These outcomes suggest data insight has trust enhancing potential. However, they also identify several challenges in enhancing perceptions through data, such as timely and convenient data retrieval (Lee & Kwak, 2012, 494). Nevertheless, government agencies' vast amounts of data are an important resource that can be utilised to help the public understand what the government agency does and how well they do it. Increased understanding may lead to more trust. This fits well into rational choice theory (Hardin, 2002, 13), which assumes that being able to know what and how well the government is doing, is needed for citizens to correctly place their trust judgement. However, low data quality may misinform and mislead and damage the trust of the public in the agency (Lee & Kwak, 2012, 496). When not done properly or when the outcome is negative, data insight can cause dissatisfaction and negatively affect trust (Grimmelikhuijsen, 2012, 242). Public trust can be rapidly undermined by data on poor performance (Mason, Hillenbrand, & Money, 2014, 334).

2.3.3 Participation and trust

The literature reveals that the effect of participation on trust is context-dependent. The type of participation is therefore important to keep in mind when deducing any expected effects from the literature and applying them to the present study. First, this section briefly reviews the effect of a broad range of participation types on public trust. The review then narrows down to individuals' direct participation in government: the extent to which government is open to citizen input and enables them to have a say in decisions during public encounters. In addition to the opportunities for voice and the openness of participation possibilities, this review includes the role of actual participation experiences, public encounters, and their effect on trust. The review concludes with studies on e-participation as a specific form of institutional participation and the possible inter-relationship between participation and trust.

Participation comes in many different forms. From participation in the traditional sense: 'all instrumental activities by private citizens aimed at influencing governmental actions and decisions' (Verba & Nie, 1972, 2), to different objects of participation, such as religious engagement, civic engagement or even political activism (Stoyan, Niedzwiecki, Morgan,

Hartlyn, & Espinal, 2016, 25). Different forms of participation have different effects on public trust. For example, civic engagement, and trust tend to be self-reinforcing and cumulative in the creation of social capital (Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1993, 177), whereas protest or activism is expected to be negatively related to trust. Partisan participation is related to trust in governments only when the party they belong to is in power, whereas it may undermine trust when the party is not the incumbent (Citrin & Stoker, 2018, 61; Stoyan et al., 2016, 25). A comparative study on the effect of performance and participation in the Dominican Republic and Haiti elucidates how contextual features condition the effect of different types of citizen engagement on institutional trust (Stoyan et al., 2016, 31). Thus, this determinant of public trust differs and even evolves over time.

Nevertheless, there are indications that participation is positively related to trust. Fitzgerald & Wolak (2016) examine participation as one of the roots of public trust in Western European local governments. They find that when opportunities for voice are high because of the existence of 'proportional representation systems', citizens have more trust in local government, and when people feel they have a say in the process, they are more satisfied with government. Public trust may partly rest on the ability to affect government decisions and the belief that the government is responsive to its citizens (Fitzgerald & Wolak, 2016, 133). Both citizen satisfaction with the quality of public services and perceived participation are positively associated with public trust in different layers of government (Zhao & Hu, 2015, 366).

Mizrahi, Vigoda-Gadot and Cohen (2010) examine citizens' and workers' trust in a national insurance institute and find that participation in decision making is positively related to trust, although both perceived performance and satisfaction with services are more strongly related to public trust (Mizrahi et al., 2010, 117). When citizens do not feel that they have a real say in decision-making processes, institutional participation is not a good mechanism for increasing trust. Note that this study operationalizes participation as the 'subjective feelings of the respondents about their opportunity to participate', so *perceived* participation instead of *actual* participation possibilities or experiences. Moreover, employees score higher on trust than citizen customers (Mizrahi et al., 2010, 114). As

suggested by Gustavsen et al. (2017, 10) people who work in the public sector have a vested interest and are therefore more likely to evaluate public sector institutions more positively.

Several studies on participation at the local level confirm a positive effect. Being able to influence the decisions of the local British council is positively related to public trust (Downe, Cowell, Chen, & Morgan, 2013, 608). When citizens feel they have an influence on decisions, they are more likely to trust the local council. Interestingly, raising citizens' awareness or knowledge about the work of the local council did not show the same positive effect. Moreover, Gustavsen, Pierre, & Røiseland (2017) examine the effect of consumer satisfaction with local services as well as the effect of participation on trust in local Norwegian politicians. They find that participation has a significant positive effect on trust in local politicians, through contacting a local politician, suggesting direct contact has trust-enhancing potential (Gustavsen et al., 2017, 11). They, however, do not measure actual participation but people's *perceived* ability to exercise voice. Moreover, satisfaction with local services is the strongest trust predictor. When evaluating trust in local politicians, citizens tend to apply customer-oriented factors (what the system can do for them, the system output) to a greater extent than citizen-oriented factors (what they can do for the system, the system input). Still, 'these two considerations are complimentary rather than mutually exclusive' (Gustavsen et al., 2017, 2).

However, there are also studies at the local level that do not support the positive effect of participation. Involving citizens in the creation of public services does not always create more positive perceptions of those services, nor does it enhance trust in the outcome of the co-production (Fledderus, 2015, 649). In a study among citizen panel members in three Dutch municipalities, Siebers, Gradus and Grotens (2019) examine the effect on public trust of several direct forms of citizen engagement, including attending a council information meeting, having a conversation with a public official, and engagement through social media or written letters. They do not find a positive relationship between engagement and public trust either (Siebers et al., 2019, 551). Certain forms of engagement, such as attending a council meeting and speaking to an official, even negatively affect trust. Attending council meetings may already be

negatively motivated, and taking part may only reaffirm their role as protesters, complaining about decisions that were made without their input (Leighninger, 2014, 305). In addition, the number of times citizens engage is negatively related to the amount of trust citizens have in their municipality (Siebers et al., 2019, 551). The more times someone engages, the lower their trust. Citizens may only gain trust when they think that they are capable and when they believe the government will use their input (Siebers et al., 2019, 552).

In addition to the effect of perceived possibilities to exercise voice, the effect of actually engaging in public encounters needs discussion, as public encounters can impact the daily lives of citizens and public professionals. Public encounters are increasingly seen as valuable phenomena in participatory democracy (Bartels, 2013, 475). A public encounter is 'any occasion where citizens and the state meet and interact' (Hupe, 2022). It is the process of communication among citizens and public officials (Bartels, 2015, 7). Public encounters are able to enhance public service delivery by nurturing stable personal relationships and constructive communication (Bartels, 2013, 473). They can be understood as the communicative capacity of both citizens and public professionals (Bartels, 2015, 15). Especially face-to-face encounters between public officials and citizens may have the potential to enhance the quality of services, decisions, and outcomes (Bartels, 2013, 469). Such interactions create the ability of public professionals and citizens to make claims, influence decisions, and understand each other better (Bartels, 2013, 476). Personal interactions may help flatten the traditional asymmetrical relationship between bureaucrats and participants (Samantha & Hand, 2022, 145). What happens during personal encounters with the government determines the view citizens have of the government as well as their trust in government (Raaphorst & Van de Walle, 2020).

Certainly not all interactions result in an increase in satisfaction or public trust in officials (MacQueen & Bradford, 2015). It is still disputed whether potential benefits such as better responsiveness to citizens' problems, greater legitimacy, or trust, outweigh structural problems such as lack of representativeness, time and resource intensiveness, and the difficulty of producing the desired concrete outcomes (Bartels, 2013, 475). Moreover,

when the system in which interactions take place is characterised by a substantial distrust in citizens, this can be mirrored by a substantial distrust in government (Hupe, 2022, 307). Different aspects of public encounters, such as the ease of contact, procedural factors, or the outcome, can contribute differentially to the assessment of satisfaction, legitimacy, and trust (MacQueen & Bradford, 2015). In addition to outcomes that centre around government, such as discretionary decision making by street-level bureaucrats (Raaphorst & Van de Walle, 2018), the effect of public encounters on citizens' perceptions merits more research. More insight is needed into how trust is created at the interface between citizens and public services (Raaphorst & Van de Walle, 2020, 68).

In studies done in the e-government context, the effect of participation on trust is not straightforward either. Using data from an e-participation survey in Seoul, Kim & Lee (2012) explore whether input into government decision making is a good strategy for improving trust. They find that satisfaction with e-participation applications does affect perceived transparency, yet shows no direct link to public trust. An indirect positive effect of e-participation is that it causes participants to develop knowledge and self-confidence and enhances perceived transparency. The latter is positively associated with e-participants' trust (Kim & Lee, 2012, 825). Wei, Gong, Jiao, & Duan (2017) examine how internet political participation after incidents is related to trust in government, and find that information acquisition, information interaction (expressing opinions), and behaviour expression (protesting, giving suggestions) have differentiated effects on the dimensions of government trust (Wei et al., 2017, 106). After an emergency, information acquisition through the mobile internet is positively related to competence and benevolence, yet negatively related to integrity. Political expression is negatively related to competence, but information interaction is not.

Other studies on e-participation (exercising voice on social media and e-government websites) identify a negative relation between e-government website use and perceptions of trustworthiness as the respondents' frequency of voice increased (Porumbescu, 2017, 527). Voice increase is negatively correlated to trust, and when citizens exercise voice more often, an inverse relationship emerges between frequency of government

website use and trust in government. Considering ‘exercising voice’ is operationalized as how frequently respondents complain, it is not surprising these complainants have lower trust levels than others.

The level of trust may affect participation as well. Lee & Schachter (2019, 409) find that people who trust government are more likely to vote, both locally and nationally, and are more likely to sign a petition. Public trust does not contribute to the explanation of attending a demonstration. Motivational reasons to participate tend to differ per task, per type of participation project, and even from the reasons *not* to participate (Wijnhoven, Ehrenhard & Kuhn, 2015, 38). Citizens that do not participate often find it too complicated, do not believe they have the knowledge to contribute in a meaningful way, or doubt their ideas will be put into practice correctly. Reasons for participating are fun, enjoyment, and giving meaningful input (Wijnhoven et al., 2015, 37). In the context of local open government Schmidhuber et al. (2017, 466) find that proactive, interactive, and passive users have different personal motivations for engaging. Main reasons to participate are enjoyment, attractiveness of the platform, perceived benefit of using the platform, and engagement in city improvement. These reasons all lean towards the positive. They do not find any digital divide among the participants. Citizens who are active offline are also likely to engage online (Schmidhuber et al., 2017, 465). An interest in public issues appears more important than the medium.

In sum, the effect of perceived and actual participation openness on public trust is not straightforward. Negative types of participation, such as protesting or (online) complaints, are not positively related to trust. Yet, it does have trust-building potential, as several studies do find support for a positive effect. High opportunities for exercising voice, the ability to influence decisions, and accessible participation possibilities are positively associated with public trust. Moreover, engaging in public encounters may have the potential to enhance trust. The literature shows that satisfaction with services and participation is positively associated with trust, and satisfaction may be an important factor when it comes to the effect of public encounters.

2.4 Other determinants of public trust

2.4.1 Performance

In many studies on the effect of openness on trust, performance emerges as an important determinant of public trust. It is a possible button governments can twist to influence trust. In performance theory, the origins and formation of trust in public institutions lie in the acts of those institutions (Mishler & Rose, 2001, 34; Stoyan et al., 2016, 19). Its main premiss is that the government can maintain or restore public trust by improving citizen satisfaction with public services (Van de Walle, 2018, 227). As citizens grow more satisfied with public sector performance, their trust in administrative agencies increases (Mizrahi et al., 2010, 106). Performance can entail political and economic performance evaluations (Citrin & Stoker, 2018, 58) such as the evaluation of the provision of basic services in education, health, and transportation (Espinal et al., 2006, 206; Stoyan et al., 2016, 30). Good governance of local government can restore public trust (Beshi & Kaur, 2019, 348). Distrust is linked to poor performance of public institutions, although performance is also not the only criterion that citizens use to evaluate government. A 'grievance asymmetry may cause bad performance to lead to distrust, whereas good performance tends to go unnoticed' (Yang & Holzer, 2006, 115). Performance can also entail the quality of public services. Downe et al. (2013) argue that the most important factor in explaining public trust in the local council, is how it performs. People have a predominantly 'contractual' relationship with their municipality, in which the services they receive and the tax they pay determine perceptions (Downe et al., 2013, 610). Satisfaction with public services is strongly positively associated with trust in local government (Christensen et al., 2020, 1284).

Especially for local government, performance is an important trust predictor. Citizens' perceptions of the quality of governmental social services have a stronger effect on local government than on central government. Probably because local government is the principal body responsible for the provision of social services that directly affect citizens in their everyday lives (Liu & Raine, 2016, 265). Satisfaction with the quality of public services has a substantial impact on both public trust in local government and in central government (Zhao & Hu, 2015, 366). Even for

local e-government, the quality of the user experience of information and communications technologies is an important determinant of public trust (Beldad et al., 2012, 46). Improving the quality of the experience with web-based technologies can enhance trust. Moreover, Fitzgerald & Wolak (2016) find performance is a determinant of public trust in both layers of government, although the evaluation of the quality of local life is more strongly correlated to trust in local government. They argue that trust can be rebuilt by improving the performance of government (Fitzgerald & Wolak, 2016, 142). It confirms the importance of 'establishing a well-functioning administrative system' (Marien & Hooghe, 2011, 282). 'Although government organisations have a monopoly regarding their assigned tasks, they still compete with themselves in terms of their service delivery mode' (Beldad et al., 2012, 48). However, improving service delivery does not automatically mean that perceptions increase as well. There may be a discrepancy between actual performance and perceived performance. Trust in government could be influenced mainly by subjective measures or citizen perceptions (Yang & Holzer, 2006, 115). The tone of the 'media coverage and the visibility and performance of the authority' determine the positive or negative impact on trust in local government (Worthy, 2013, 405). Moreover, the word performance can be somewhat misleading because it evokes the association of key performance indicators (KPIs). However, performance theory generally assumes that government actions influence perceptions, while its opponents –due to a lack of positive effects in studies on institutional openness–, maintain that perceptions are formed independently of what government does. The basic question whether government organizations are able to affect trust, therefore lingers in the background of this study on institutional openness and trust. Although there is strong evidence that perceived performance affects trust, the question remains whether these perceptions can be influenced by institutional openness.

2.4.2 Exogenous determinants of public trust

A review of the public trust literature shows that trust is influenced by a wide variety of factors, which for the sake of completeness, are briefly discussed. While some factors have their foundation in government acts, others point to exogenous factors that are unrelated to any government-

citizen interaction (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003, 341). Exogenous factors include the socio-political atmosphere, such as national culture or public expectations (Im et al., 2014), economic circumstances (Drakos et al., 2019; Fitzgerald & Wolak, 2016, 140), or the so-called 'social mood' (Van de Walle, 2004, 207), societal developments, the economy, or scandals (Siebers et al., 2019, 546), national crises, such as the 9/11 attacks in the United States (Citrin & Stoker, 2018, 51), or the escape of an infamous Belgian paedophile (Van de Walle, 2004, 70). Media coverage affects trust (Worthy, 2013) and there is the general personal disposition of citizens, i.e. one's 'propensity to trust' (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995, 715). Such factors, however, mainly lie beyond the sphere of influence of government and are difficult for public institutions to steer (Downe et al., 2013, 611).

In addition, much has been written about the effect of characteristics of the trustee other than openness. For example, which part of government is the object of trust? Trust may depend on sympathy for the institution's mission (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003, 332). Fire fighters are generally rated higher than road repair services, merely because they are fire fighters. A shift in the domain of trust influences the outcome (Citrin & Stoker, 2018, 52). Kettl (2019, 763) finds that trust amongst U.S. citizens varies per institution and is highest for the military and the lowest for Congress. A similar picture emerges among Dutch institutions, where authoritative institutions, such as the judiciary, the police, and the army gain the highest trust, and trust in politicians, public officials and the press is the lowest (Smeets, 2018; CBS, 2023). Public trust towards different institutions and actors varies, for example, between politicians and bureaucrats (Christensen et al., 2020, 1284). Fitzgerald and Wolak (2016) find that people trust local government for different reasons than national government. The Eurobarometer data shows that 'trust in local government is not simply a reflection of citizens' thoughts on national government' (Fitzgerald & Wolak, 2016, 140). They maintain that the level of trust depends on the type of political institution. In China, the greater the level of government authority, the more trust it is likely to enjoy. Economic welfare is mostly attributed to the central government while local government has the most visible services, causing greater awareness

of any shortcomings (Liu & Raine, 2016, 266). Visibility is related to institutional openness, and following this line of reasoning, this means that the more open and visible a government is, the less trust it receives. Contrarily, the United States Gallup poll shows higher public trust in government closer to the people and that this is relatively stable over time (McCarthy, 2016). This implies that building trust begins with governments closest to the people (Kettl, 2019, 763) and that the directness of contact can enhance trust (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003, 332). Gustavsen et al. (2017, 10) find that inhabitants of smaller municipalities tend to be more trusting, while Christensen et al. (2020, 1284) find that citizens smaller municipalities in Norway are more trusting, yet in Japan it is the other way around. The effect of proximity of government could cause mistakes to be more evident, eroding trust, or adversely, citizens may trust politicians closer to them more (Christensen et al., 2020, 1286). This suggests that the part of government that is being assessed is related to the trust it receives and may affect the relationship between openness and trust as well.

Considering the main interest of this study is the effect of government-related determinants, in this study, citizen-related determinants act as control variables. Factors such as citizens' socio-demographic traits or political ideology, are further discussed in the methodology chapter. Although it needs to be recognised that there may be a wide range of trust determinants within and outside of government, this study is limited to the effect of open government on public trust.

2.5 Remaining puzzles

2.5.1 Why is the effect of transparency on trust ambiguous?

The aim of this literature review was to find out what the most important insights are that previous research has yielded regarding the research question and to detect directions that have not yet been explored. As the ample transparency literature reveals, this element of openness has opposing effects on public trust. There are still many contradictions and studies are inconclusive. The lack of consistent evidence in the empirical literature casts doubts over the way transparency achieves objectives such as enhancing trust. From the mixed findings, the question arises what causes these mixed results. Possible explanations for the mixed

transparency effect that are examined are: the administrative context, its conceptualization, and the content of transparency. The impact of transparency is diffuse and complex (Pozen, 2019, 329), and the applicability and strength of the transparency-effect inevitably vary depending on its context (De Fine Licht et al., 2014, 126). As information on local issues is more appealing than complex national or international issues (Gustavsen et al., 2017, 8), a positive effect is more likely to occur in a local government context. The results of studies in local government contexts are nevertheless mixed. Some reveal positive results (De Fine Licht et al., 2014; Kim & Lee, 2012; Park & Blenkinsopp, 2011), while others reveal a negative (Grimmelikhuijsen, Porumbescu, Hong, & Im, 2013) or a differentiated effect on trust (Porumbescu, 2017, 530). Comparing local to national government contexts cannot explain the mixed findings either. No positive effect is found on either trust in local or national government in the Netherlands and South Korea, and public officials or political leaders should expect no wonders from transparency (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2013, 584). Other government organisations, such as law enforcement agencies, reveal mixed results as well. Visual judicial transparency reveals a positive effect on trust in the judges (Grimmelikhuijsen & Klijn, 2015, 1006), whereas the effect of transparency on trust in the police depends on the level of initial trust and on the relatively good or bad performance it reveals (Mason et al., 2013, 334). The type of government organisation does not seem decisive in how transparency affects trust, and the empirical context cannot explain the mixed results.

Another explanation Cucciniello et al. (2017, 41) offer for the mixed findings in their review of transparency and trust is the methodological approach of the studies. Survey data generally show a more positive effect than case studies or experiments. Related to methodology, is the operationalization of transparency. Transparency is often gauged by the number of information available (Da Cruz et al., 2016; Hollyer et al., 2014; Grimmelikhuijsen, 2009, 178) or the existence of FOI-legislation and the amount of information requests (Kaufmann & Bellver, 2005; Mabillard & Pasquier, 2016). This approach implies that the more information and documents are published online, the more transparent the government is. However, this way, high transparency can induce an information overload,

creating confusion instead of trust (O'Neill, 2002). Moreover, there may be a discrepancy between FOI-legislation and its implementation in practice, in which citizens may encounter resistance and secrecy (Worthy, 2010, 576). Furthermore, different effects may result from conceptualising transparency as institutional transparency, transparency perceptions, or transparency use. Perceptions of transparency are likely to correlate with public trust. For example, e-participants' assessments of transparency and public trust in local government are positively associated (Kim & Lee, 2012, 825). Still, this does not tell us how transparent the government is. The other way around, the amount of transparency efforts may not be fully appreciated by the public. The usability of the information can cause transparency to have a negative effect (Grimmelikhuijsen, 2012, 185). Studies that examine institutional transparency, show mixed effects (Mason, Hillenbrand, & Money, 2014; Mabillard & Pasquier, 2016; Porumbescu, 2017; Grimmelikhuijsen, 2012; Grimmelikhuijsen, Porumbescu, Hong, & Im, 2013; Grimmelikhuijsen & Klijn, 2015). Although the conceptualization of transparency offers some indications, it cannot fully answer the question of why the literature shows no consistent results.

A third possible explanation for the contradictory results lies in the various types of transparency content. Not every message is expected to have a positive effect and the direction of the effect may depend on whether good or bad performance is revealed by transparency. Publicly admitting one's own mistakes can diminish the perceived competence of a public authority, although being transparent about why mistakes were made generally does enhance trust (De Vries et al., 2017, 20). Moreover, not all information may be relevant. In strategically deploying transparency to promote trust, the type of information is important (Cucciniello et al., 2015, 580). Knowledge of potential users and their information needs help create user-friendly transparency programs (Kim & Lee, 2012, 825). Lastly, when it comes to promoting public trust explaining the decisions carefully afterwards (De Fine Licht et al., 2014, 115). Explaining why decisions were made is found to have a greater positive effect than transparency on how they were made (Vries et al., 2017, 17).

The administrative context, the conceptualization, and the content of transparency cannot fully explain the mixed picture. The common normative assumption that trust is a beneficial effect of institutional transparency is challenged (Mabillard & Pasquier, 2016, 87). Despite the growing sense of the ambiguities in the relation between increases in transparency and different desirable outcomes (Kosack & Fung, 2014, 66) and the realisation that it does not always have the intended effect (Cucciniello et al., 2017, 40), as a basic notion, transparency remains attractive to many because of its positive connotations (Kosack & Fung, 2014, 67). Both in the normative literature and within public administration, there are still high hopes for transparency. Moreover, studies that do not find the sought-after effect hardly suggest that transparency should be banned and most still address its possible benefits. After all, the alternative is secrecy. Transparency is a public value and is not just a means to an end. Worries of ‘a short honeymoon between the public administration and transparency as the political costs are felt’ (Worthy, 2010, 579), to this day, have not yet come true. On the contrary, transparency has become an integral part of government in the Netherlands and beyond. Therefore, it is extra important to obtain a better understanding of its possibilities and its limitations. The aim of this study is to explore when and which type of transparency, can live up to its potential. Since transparency is here to stay, a better understanding of how transparency affects trust is valuable knowledge when pursuing this objective through transparency programs.

2.5.2 When does participation enhance public trust?

Although there are indications that participation openness has a positive effect on public trust, the empirical findings show that this is not always the case. There is no general effect of participation since its ‘distinct dimensions are likely to influence institutional trust in different and context-contingent ways’ (Stoyan et al., 2016, 30), and different empirical research objects may exert different effects on the results (Wei et al., 2017, 109). This makes any general statements about the effect of participation impossible. Yet, even within the scope of citizens’ individual participation towards local government, there is no consensus on the direction or the impact of participation on trust, and the conditions under

which participation enhances trust are unclear. This study aims to gain a more sophisticated insight into the effect of open participation possibilities as well as actual public encounters on trust.

Moreover, although participation in itself has been examined as a determinant of trust, studies rarely include the facility and accessibility of participation possibilities. Offering a low threshold through high levels of openness may not only appeal to a wider audience, it may also emanate extra appreciation among participants, thereby positively affecting public perceptions of government. Participation possibilities as an expression of institutional openness have received less attention than perceptions of participation possibilities. In this study, institutional participation is narrowed down to the accessibility of local government to citizens to exercise their voice (in Dutch: *inspraak*). Still, there is more than one way to be accessible, and each way may have its own effect. For example, Leighninger (2014) argues a legal framework is needed to promote participation beyond conventional opportunities, which may only reaffirm the citizen's role as protesters (Leighninger, 2014, 305). It is still unknown whether traditional forms of participation differ from e-participation or whether formal ways differ from informal ways of participation. Another possible reason for the mixed findings is the role of previous dispositions. The motivation to participate may influence the effect of participation on trust as well. Citizens do not engage with a blank sheet but are either positively or negatively motivated to try and influence government decisions. There may be an interaction between trust and participation (Wirtz & Birkmeyer, 2015, 392). Lastly, the way in which the participation procedure is conducted can also determine its effect on trust. Citizen satisfaction with participation and the quality of the experience are positively associated with trust (Zhao & Hu, 2015, 366; Beldad et al., 2012, 46), suggesting that trust is enhanced only when citizens are satisfied with the participation procedure. This study aims to gain insight into the relationship between participation and trust and the possible mechanisms underlying that relationship.

2.5.3 Does the combination of institutional openness elements enhance trust?

Open government has many facets. The studies in the literature usually focus on a specific element of openness, while in reality, various openness elements often coexist. The question is whether a combination of open government dimensions can provide a more complete picture of their effect on trust. The literature on the combination of openness elements is still scant, as is the literature on data insight. The latter specifically concerns insight into the data that the government uses in decision making regarding individual citizens. Its effect on public trust, to the best of my knowledge, has not yet been examined empirically. Due to the increasing use of digital decision making through algorithms and the importance of data-input in this type of decision making, more knowledge of the relationship between data insight and trust is desirable. Can trust be created with more insight into and, thereby, more control over the data used by the government?

One of the remaining puzzles is whether the combination of proactive and responsive information provision, giving insight into decision-making data and enabling low-threshold and accessible participation, affect the overall perception citizens have of government differently or more strongly than the separate openness elements. Can the combination of a complete set of open government instruments provide citizens with a sense of openness, control and oversight in such a way that it is able to enhance their trust? What is the role of perceived openness. Does the combination of openness elements cause citizens to experience more openness? And what mechanisms underlie the relationship between open government and trust?

2.6 Conclusion

PUBLIC trust is politically relevant as well as normatively desirable. It is deemed essential for optimal democratic governance. Public trust is a broad concept with many determinants. To gain in-depth insight, this study is limited to openness as a possible explanation, and more specifically, the effect of proactive and responsive transparency, data insight, and participation on public trust. The literature review leaves several puzzles unanswered regarding these facets of openness. First, it is still unclear why the effect of transparency on public trust is ambiguous.

Second, although participation has the potential to influence public perceptions, it is not systematically positively associated with trust. It remains unclear when participation enhances public trust. Participation as an expression of institutional openness merits more research. In addition, the crucial role of data in government decision making raises curiosity about the effect of data insight on public trust in those decisions. Moreover, the mechanisms that underlie the effects of these distinct forms of openness, merit a better understanding. Lastly, the combination of more than one element of openness may exert a different effect on public trust than any separate elements can, yet most studies focus on a specific aspect of open government. To examine their accumulated effect, several elements of openness are combined within this study.