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

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3. Building a theoretical framework

THE literature review underscores the importance of trust and uncovers several of its determinants. It discusses the existing knowledge on the relationship between open government and trust, and several existing knowledge gaps are identified. For example, what is the role of different aspects of openness, and when does participation enhance public perceptions? Finding an answer to these questions helps gain a more sophisticated knowledge of openness as a determinant of trust. This chapter outlines the hypothesised answers to these questions. First, the different elements of public trust are specified. Then, per openness dimension, the expected effects are illustrated to finally lay out the theoretical framework.

3.1 Public trust: perceived competence, benevolence, and integrity

The literature defines the concept of public trust as a 'citizen's psychological state comprising positive expectations of the intentions and behaviour of government'. This section discusses the constructs behind this concept in further detail as part of the theoretical framework that will form the basis for further operationalization.

Reasonable consensus can be seen in the literature about what exactly the concept entails. Public trust is gauged by the trustor's (citizen) perception of the trustworthiness of the trustee (government). Being trustworthy means being dependable in doing what you are trusted to do, worthy of trust, and can be seen as the commitment to fulfil another person's trust in you (Sztompka, 1999, 27). Trust is the perception of attributes of the other party (Misztal, 1996, 16), such as its competence, concern, openness, or reliability. Trustworthiness refers to the characteristics of government, and public trust refers to how those characteristics are perceived by citizens (Grimmelikhuijsen, 2012, 37). Perceiving a party as trustworthy comprises more than one aspect of its dealings. When examining trust, Hardin (2002) argues that capacity needs to be distinguished from good intentions, since these are distinct dimensions of trustworthiness. Others refer to these elements as good intentions, competence, consistency, and honesty (Janssen, Rana, Slade, & Dwivedi, 2017, 649). Houston and Harding (2014, 57) include the trustworthiness of

agency officials in their analysis, encompassing the commitment to the public interest (benevolence) and not using the authority of public office for personal gain (integrity). They differentiate trustworthiness, or 'the more affective basis for trust', from competence. Generally, trustworthiness is considered to consist of three parts: ability, benevolence, and integrity (Mayer et al., 1995, 715) or in slightly different wording, competence, benevolence, and honesty (Grimmelikhuijsen, 2012; Hardin, 2002; Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2014). Although the literature mentions more possible elements of trustworthiness, for example predictability and loyalty (Gillespie, 2015, 226), the present study recognizes competence, benevolence and integrity as three complementary and requisite facets of trustworthiness in the context of public administration. Public trust is thus viewed as the trichotomy of perceived competence, benevolence and integrity. A principal component analysis of these three theoretical dimensions carried out by Grimmelikhuijsen (2012, 104) confirms these separate dimensions of perceived trustworthiness. Table 3.1 gives an overview of the three dimensions of trust.

Table 3.1 Dimensions of trust

Dimension	Description in the literature
Competence	– The capability to perform what one is trusted to do (Hardin, 2006, 36). – The expertise, skills, and ability to achieve a specific outcome (Mayer et al., 1995, 718). – The skills to execute the work in a conscientious fashion (Kramer, 2015, 29). – The skills and knowledge necessary for the government's effective operations (Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2014, 141).
Integrity	– A strong sense of justice; actions that are congruent with words (Mayer et al., 1995, 719). – The motivation to perform (Hardin, 2006, 36). – The trustee adheres to a set of principles that the trustor finds acceptable (Mayer et al., 1995, 719). – Honesty means that the government is perceived to keep commitments and tell the truth (Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2014, 141).

	Note: In the literature, *integrity* is also referred to as *honesty*. The term integrity will be used in the public context of this study.
Benevolence	– The willingness to help. – The 'extent to which a party is believed to want to do good for the trusting party and the perception of a positive orientation of the trustee towards the trustor' (Mayer et al., 1995, 719; Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 2007, 345). – The belief that the government cares about the welfare of citizens, and is therefore genuinely motivated to act in their interest and be helpful towards them (Grimmelikhuijsen, 2012, 40; Mayer et al., 1995, 718; Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2014, 141).

In line with the literature, this study gauges public trust as perceived government trustworthiness and more specifically, as its perceived competence, benevolence, and integrity. Yet, which element of trustworthiness is dominant may depend on the context. As Mayer et al. (1995, 717) put it, "Each contributes a unique perceptual perspective from which to consider the trustee, while the set provides a solid and parsimonious foundation for the empirical study of trust for another party." All three are needed to establish a trusting relationship. It could be that in a more dependent situation, people are comparatively more attentive to trust-related information on the trustee, such as its apparent knowledge and competence (Kramer, 2015, 32).

Although these elements of trustworthiness themselves are not the same as trust, they are the foundation for the development of trust (Mayer et al., 1995, 717). When considered separately, this could reveal a differentiated and even opposite effect on the different aspects, which, when taken together, could otherwise outweigh one another and for that reason show no overall effect. When measuring these three perceptions of the trustworthiness of the trustee, this leaves out a trustor's propensity to trust, which does have a place in the model of Mayer and colleagues (1995). The question of whether and why people differ in their propensity to trust government is beyond the scope of this study.

3.2 Open government: transparency, data insight, and participation

A summary of the elements of openness that where introduced in the literature review, are outlined in table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Open government

Types of openness	Elements of openness	Definitions
Open government	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.	
Institutional openness	Proactive transparency	Availability of information about the way government operates, provided proactively.
	Responsive transparency	Accessibility of information about the way government operates, provided responsively.
	Data insight	Enabling access to government-held data that is used in individual decision making.
	Participation	Opening up to the public's ideas and knowledge by enabling engagement in decision making.
Perceived openness	Perceived transparency	Perceived accessibility to information about the way government operates.
	Perceived data insight	Perceived access to government-held data that is used in individual decision making.
	Perceived participation	Perceived ability to engage in decision making.

3.3 Hypotheses

IN the literature, openness is often conceptualised and operationalized as either *institutional openness* or as *perceived openness*. This study includes both to see how they relate to each other and how they relate to public trust. Including a hypothesis on *perceived* openness in addition to the other hypotheses on *institutional* openness may shed light on the mixed results in the literature. This can help answer the question of whether government agencies with high levels of institutional openness are also perceived as open. First, citizens' perceptions of government are likely to correlate. This means that when a citizen views local government as open, transparent, and accessible, it is unlikely that their trust is very low. When local government is perceived to be closed and inaccessible, however, trust is probably low. *Perceived openness* (operationalized as perceived transparency, perceived data insight, and perceived accessibility to participate) is thus expected to positively correlate with *perceived trustworthiness*.

H1: Perceived openness is positively related to public trust.

3.3.1 Institutional transparency

Governments often have high expectations of their level of transparency, yet the empirical literature reveals its effect on public trust is differentiated (Cucciniello, Porumbescu, & Grimmelikhuijsen, 2017), and the nature of the relationship is still under debate (Grimmelikhuijsen, 2012, 69). Although the literature on the effect of institutional transparency on public trust is abound, the results show great ambivalence, for which no explanation is yet available. Although there are no indications that the context is decisive in the direction of the transparency-effect on trust, local issues are suggested to be more appealing than complex national or international issues (Gustavsen et al., 2017, 8). Yet, even within a local government context, the effect tends to differ. Such differences could be caused by the conceptualization of transparency, either as proactive or responsive transparency, or as institutional transparency versus perceptions.

Although the literature often gauges transparency as the amount of information disseminated proactively or provided passively through Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, relatively little attention is given to responsive transparency: the government's responsiveness to individual information needs. Although proactively disclosing information is an important part of transparency, it does not provide a complete picture. In practice, responsive transparency (being open to questions) is equally important in serving public information needs. Its potential to promote public trust merits more research. *Passive transparency*, as mentioned in the literature, differs from *responsive transparency*. The former tends to refer to formal FOI requests, by which the government is legally obliged to disclose documents to the wider public (Worthy, 2010). While *responsive transparency* means that the government responds to requests as well, it does not concern the disclosure of public documents, yet involves being responsive to the information needs of individual citizens when they directly seek contact with the government about their personal affairs. One type of transparency may be better able to affect trust than the other. The aim of this study is to provide more sophisticated knowledge on the effect of these different types of transparency on trust. This study includes both proactive and responsive transparency with their own distinct characteristics, in order to examine possibly differentiated effects.

3.3.1.1 Proactive transparency

Transparency is expected to have a differentiated effect on perceived competence, integrity, and benevolence. Houston and Harding (2014) argue that perceptions of *competence* correlate with whether the government is doing what citizens want, while perceptions of *integrity and benevolence* are influenced by experiences with bureaucrats and reflect how citizens perceive they are treated (Houston & Harding, 2014, 65). This suggests that the different elements of perceived trustworthiness are influenced in different ways; the former through outcome and the latter through process. Studies on the effect of transparency reveal such an effect variation as well (Grimmelikhuijsen, 2012; De Vries, Zijlstra, & Grimmelikhuijsen, 2017). Perceived *competence* is affected less positively than the other two elements of trustworthiness, benevolence, and integrity.

A possible explanation for the negative effect on competence is that transparency could lead to an information overload: 'a flood of unsorted information that provides little but confusion, adding uncertainty rather than trust' (O'Neill, 2002). 'For transparency to be effective, there must be recipients that are capable of processing and using the information' (Heald, 2006, 35). Information overload does not put citizens in an equal information position, but rather, they are forced to try and find the needle in the haystack. When people are given too much information, an overload of information can cause confusion. Long or complex information floods the individual with too much nonessential data and overloads the person with information that actually inhibits optimal decision making (Ripken, 2006, 160).

Even when information is found, the lack of context may decrease any 'outsiders' ability to decipher the information. When information is ineffective and does not reach its intended audience, it 'neither improves incentives for trustworthy performance nor provides the evidence for placing trust intelligently' (O'Neill, 2006, 82). Moreover, there are costs to producing information on the one side and deciphering and processing the disclosed information by the user on the other side (Etzioni, 2016, 394). The disclosure of information itself may lead to a less effective and efficient performance since the work can be time-consuming and demand the reallocation of resources. According to Grimmelikhuijsen (2012, 235), perceived competence may decrease because transparency reveals that government is not the well-oiled machine it was thought to be. Being completely transparent then causes people to regard the government as being honest yet not competent because all mistakes are open to scrutiny (Grimmelikhuijsen, 2012, 234). This negative effect may not be fully compensated by a possible positive effect of the 'act of being open'. Especially in the case of a government that comes to collect, mistakes may not be easily forgiven. For these reasons, it is hypothesized that:

H2a: Proactive transparency is negatively related to perceived competence.

Even though transparency inherently reveals mistakes, which may cause perceptions of government competence to decrease, the act of being transparent is still expected to have a positive effect on perceptions of benevolence and integrity in the eyes of the public. For example, even though publicly admitting mistakes can diminish the perceived competence of the authority, communicating instead of remaining silent has a *net positive* effect on public trust in government organisations (De Vries, Zijlstra, & Grimmelikhuijsen, 2017). Moreover, deliberative democracy theory assumes that openness brings parties closer together. A better understanding of government as a result of transparency can then enhance perceptions of it benevolence. According to procedural fairness theory, when the procedure is considered transparent, this increases understanding and acceptance of the end result (De Fine Licht et al., 2014). When the government is transparent and fair, its perceived benevolence is likely to increase. Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

H2b: Proactive transparency is positively related to perceived benevolence.

Another reason why increased transparency could lead to more trustworthiness is because it is an incentive for the watched government to behave in a trustworthy manner, while at the same time transparency may increase trust, by making evidence of trustworthiness available to the public (O'Neill, 2006, 76). The ability to monitor then creates a feedback-loop for assessing a party's trustworthiness (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995, 728). This would mean transparency affects the trustworthiness of government institutions in two ways. First of all, public officials that are being watched, may behave better. This supposed *supervision effect* may motivate public institutions to be more trustworthy, since transparency would bring poor performance to light. Publicity is taken to deter poor performance and to secure a basis for a more trustworthy performance' (O'Neill, 2006, 76). When you are watched, you behave better, and allowing yourself to be watched promotes the image that you have nothing to hide. Being transparent causes people to regard the government as honest (Grimmelikhuijsen, 2012). There may be downsides to transparency as well, where transparency is either circumvented or provides the wrong incentives to focus on claiming positive results (Prat,

2005). However, De Fine Licht et al. (2014, 114) indicate that there is fairly strong theoretical backing for the proposition that transparency generates positive perceptions as well. According to *agency theory,* government can reduce uncertainty amongst citizens by being transparent, giving them feelings of control, and providing insight into what the government is doing. It is hypothesised that:

H2c: Proactive transparency is positively related to perceived integrity.

3.3.1.2 Responsive transparency

Responsive transparency is expected to possess the potential to increase public trust. This type of transparency occurs when citizens have concrete questions and contact the government through a channel of their own choice, and encounter a government that responds to their specific information needs. Responsive transparency creates a moment of interaction in which government gets a concrete face or voice, in the form of a civil servant the citizen comes into contact with, as opposed to government being an abstract entity. Generally, feelings of familiarity and concrete experiences are positively related to citizens' perceptions (Goodsell, 1994, 139; Hardin, 2006, 3). They can create a sense of belonging. Contrary to proactive forms of transparency, in responsive transparency, information overload is unlikely to occur since the government responds to citizens' individual information needs. The information provided is deemed relevant by citizens, which could be a precondition for transparency to positively affect citizens' perceptions (Cucciniello, Bellè, Nasi, & Valotti, 2015, 573). Moreover, responsive transparency gives public organisations a chance to explain the rationale behind decisions, which is found to have a positive effect on perceptions of competence (De Vries et al., 2017, 17). It is hypothesized that:

H3a: Responsive transparency is positively related to perceived competence.

While being responsively transparent, the government is in a position to help the citizen during everyday public encounters and provide them with the information they seek. Foremost, it provides government with the opportunity to display its benevolence towards citizens. When more channels for asking questions are available and accessible to citizens, they

are expected to appreciate having a choice as well as being offered direct accessibility and thereby, the government's willingness to help.

H3b: Responsive transparency is positively related to perceived benevolence.

More responsive transparency, by making more channels for asking questions available, and being accessible, helps display openness towards citizens. The moment the government opens itself up to questions from citizens, this is expected to improve the image of an honest government. Exuding such openness and providing direct access to information about government is doing in a specific situation is expected to increase citizens' sense of being taken seriously. This is expected to contribute to perceptions of integrity in a positive way. It is hypothesized:

H3c: Responsive transparency is positively related to perceived integrity.

In sum, the overall effect of transparency is hypothesised to be positive. Scholars and public officials alike praise open government for its potential to enhance trust in public institutions. Transparency is seen as the most powerful solution against the increasing distrust towards government (Bastida Albaladejo, 2019, 16). Porumbescu (2015) gives an overview of prior research that attempts to conceptually describe the mechanism through which transparency can promote more responsive and trustworthy local government and the possible ways in which transparency can enhance positive perceptions of the public. For example, in the case that citizens lack objective information about what their government does for them (attribution errors) or may have any misperceptions of government performance (assessment errors), through transparency they can be informed. Citizens' evaluation errors of government services can then be contradicted by objective performance indicators (Porumbescu, 2015, 209). This way, transparency is 'a means of (re)connecting with a citizenry that has grown distant' (Porumbescu, 2015, 205). This argument does, however, presume that any negative perceptions of government result from a lack of information, which may not always be the case. In the case of malperformance, the cause of low public perceptions does not lie in a lack of information on the part of the public, and increasing transparency could have a negative effect instead.

3.3.2 Data insight by government

Government organisations hold a wide variety of data on their citizens, ranging from personal data, financial data, and geographical and proporty data, on which many government decisions are based. Data insight is the opening of public sector information and enabling citizens to access government-held data. It is the extent to which decision-making data is made available to the public, enabling citizens to understand the underlying basis for decisions. Government organisations tend to differ in the amount of decision-making data that they provide to citizens. For example, some municipalities give full disclosure on the variables in their valuation models and give upfront insight into all the data used in a specific decision. Other municipalities are more hesitant and provide only the minimum legally required data after the decision has been made, often only on request. Even though there is ample use of data in government decision-making, the literature on data insight is still scant. The hypotheses are mainly derived from the transparency literature, even though the type of data therein mainly concerns the outcome, while data insight concerns the underlying data in decision making.

More data insight increases the chance of revealing any mistakes. Perceptions of *competence* are expected to be affected most by the data itself, instead of the 'act of giving insight'. With regards to these data, the stakes for citizens are high, since these data affect their lives directly and often financially. Citizens often consider themselves owners of their data, and any errors may damage their trust. Low data quality may misinform or mislead the public and damage trust (Lee & Kwak, 2012, 496). The negative effect of errors in the data may have a stronger negative 69iffert than correct data, whichi is able to positively contribute to trust. Such grievance asymmetry (Yang & Holzer, 2006, 115) may cause mistakes to lead to low perceived competence, whereas correct data is taken for granted. Therefore, any negative effect of errors or disappointment is expected to become most apparent in the case of data insight. These data could be the main verifiable thing citizens see when they come into contact with the government. They may judge the public organisation as a whole based on the accuracy of their own data, since other factors, such as the underlying processes or even the handling of civil servants, remain out of their sight.

This way, that data could serve as an important cue for the government's competence.

Moreover, only when the data is deemed relevant, usable, and easily accessible can it positively affect perceptions of government. Similarly to proactive transparency, data insight could cause an information overload. When people are given too much information in a limited amount of time, this can result in confusion and cognitive strain (Ripken, 2006, 160). An abundance of data may be difficult for citizens to decipher. Then it cannot provide any evidence for placing trust (O'Neill, 2006, 87). In the long run, opening up data to public scrutiny could increase the quality of the data, which in turn may have a positive effect on public trust. The effect of data insight in the long run is beyond the scope of this study. The immediate effect on perceived competence is not expected to be positive. Therefore it is hypothesized that:

H4a: Data insight is negatively related to perceived competence.

Similar to proactive transparency, data insight is expected to promote perceived *benevolence* and *integrity*. In itself, the 'act of giving insight' is expected to have a positive effect on these two aspects of public trust. At the time of conducting the present study, municipalities are not yet legally obliged to provide easy upfront accessibility of these data. By voluntarily doing so, they open up their data to public scrutiny, exuding integrity as well as the willingness to improve the data and enhance the quality of decision making for citizens, showing benevolence. O'Hara (2012) mentions several theories that describe how data can positively affect public trust: social capital theory, rational choice theory, and deliberative democracy theory. Since this study focuses on the relationship between citizens and government, excluding civil associations, social capital theory is not examined further. According to deliberative democracy theory, engaged deliberation, discussion, and debate cause parties to understand each other better.

Data insight is considered an important step towards citizen engagement. Data insight may be able to improve citizens' confidence in their day-to-day dealings with government, by increasing their understanding and sense of connection. Citizens are expected to appreciate the insight,

influence, and control over their own data. The right to access and rectification could improve their sense of ownership. Providing meaningful insight into decision-making data, as well as accessibility of all relevant documents containing that data, is expected to increase both perceived benevolence and perceptions of integrity. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H4b: Data insight is positively related to perceived benevolence.

Hardin (2002) does not believe any citizen could ever obtain enough information about the government to say that they trust it. Even when having knowledge of the inner workings of government, it could only go as far as having confidence in the integrity and competence of government (Hardin, 2002, 151). Yet, nowadays, information technologies allow for unprecedented levels of open data that could have the potential to enhance perceptions. Moreover, according to rational choice theory, data insight increases citizen understanding of what the government is doing and how it is doing it (O'Hara, 2012, 4). When the data is made easily accessible, it brings citizens into a more equal information-position and enables them to check the quality of the decision, which is expected to contribute to public perceptions of government integrity. Through authentic, non-anecdotal, and detailed data, citizens can gain more confidence about their day-to-day dealings with government (O'Hara, 2012, 4). Sharing data honestly and openly, complete with its uncertainties, helps to improve trust (Ferry, Hardy, and Midgley, 2021, 677). Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

H4c: Data insight is positively related to perceived integrity.

3.3.3 Participation possibilities

The approach to this element of openness is slightly different from the previous openness elements. First of all, it is assumed that accessible participation has a positive effect on competence, integrity, and benevolence, and one general hypothesis is formulated for the positive effect on trust (H5a). This approach allows for examining the effect of open participation from various angles to gain more insight into its effect on different groups of citizens. A comparison is made between citizens that

did participate and the non-participants, but also whether certain forms of participation show a positive effect, such as informal participation. This study excludes forms of participation in which citizens try to influence the collective, such as voting, consultation on legislation, or attending council meetings to influence policies. The focus is on the realm of individual decision making, in which citizens participate out of a direct self-interest, to examine when participation enhances trust.

Open participation means enabling individuals to give input and welcoming the public's ideas and knowledge. Although not all empirical studies find a systematically positive effect of participation on trust (Mizrahi et al., 2010; Siebers et al., 2019; Liu & Raine, 2016), rarely a negative relationship is found. Several empirical studies do find a positive association between participation and trust (Lee & Schachter, 2019; Gustavsen et al., 2017; Stoyan et al., 2016; Zhao & Hu, 2015). Wei et al. (2017) find a positive effect on competence and benevolence only. New information technologies have broadened the participation possibilities to meet the needs of a wider audience. In open municipalities that facilitate accessible participation, citizens are expected to feel included. This is expected to enhance perceptions of benevolence, integrity, and competence.

Moreover, on the basis of procedural justice theory, it can be expected that when citizens have the opportunity to voice their opinion, participation enhances their judgement of the fairness of the procedure (Van den Bos, Vermunt, & Wilke, 1996, 412), and thereby their satisfaction and trust. Fitzgerald & Wolak (2016, 137) find that feeling excluded affects trust in both local and national government. This suggests that trust can be enhanced by making citizens feel part of the decision-making process and gain control over it. Procedural fairness increases 'tax morale', supportiveness, acceptance of advice by tax officers, and tax compliance (Goslinga et al., 2019, 23). Accessible and open participation possibilities offered by the government, facilitating citizen input, are expected to increase satisfaction and trust. Therefore, it is presumed that:

H5a: Open participation is positively related to public trust.

Even when accessible participation is expected to increase trust, most citizens choose not to engage with the government. Does this group of citizens, also referred to as 'the silent middle', or as non-vocal citizens, show different trust levels than citizens that do participate? Hardin's (2002, 170) argument that 'silence cannot unambiguously prove the case for or against government' appears appropriate here. Silent citizens might hold a range of different attitudes, from being aware but content to not interested, or even to more negative forms of self-exclusion, such as aversion and disaffection (Gray, 2015, 475). This study offers the opportunity to compare the attitudes of participants with those of non-participants. Does actually actively providing input to government decisions ensure that their trust increases? On the basis of deliberative democracy theory, which depicts that direct interactions help build public trust, it is hypothesised that:

H5b: Citizens that participate have higher trust levels than non-participants.

In the Netherlands, informal ways of participation have greatly advanced in the last decade. In this form of participation, citizens are facilitated to contribute and give input through conversational contact. It is considered fast and customer-friendly. Many local government organisations place great effort into avoiding the perception of an impermeable ivory tower. Providing citizens with easy access to fast decision making and thus being open to citizen input outside of formal procedures and apart from any legal obligations, is likely to positively influence perceived benevolence, as well as its integrity, whether citizens use this option or not. Such a consumer-oriented approach exudes openness to citizen input. When citizens do use this option, having a say in the decision could enhance their sense of ownership as well as their trust in the outcome. In domains outside of the public administration, such as healthcare, *shared decision making* gains more scientific interest (for example, Barry & Edgman-Levitan, 2012). Patients may be happier with the outcome of an intervention when they are given the options, including the possible consequences for each option beforehand. Getting one's most important needs on the table impacts someone's willingness to accept the treatment. Ownership in public encounters may not be very different.

However, in public decision making not all citizens can be met in their demands. So what happens to public trust when engaged citizens are not able to influence the outcome? This specific form of open participation, in which government opens itself up for public input beforehand, is expected to still have a positive effect on public trust, even though not all demands are met. Deliberative democracy theory depicts that contact causes better mutual understanding and has the potential to bring parties closer together. 'Having the conversation' helps build trust, even when not all demands are met. Consequently, even though not all citizens choose to participate or achieve their desired outcome, this particular form of participation has the potential to enhance perceptions of the competence of government. This leads to the hypothesis that:

H5c: Informal participation is positively related to public trust.

Direct personal contact decreases the image of 'the harsh faceless agent of the state' (Hupe, 2022, 289). Government is no longer an abstract institution but is now represented by a civil servant. Personal interactions offer the possibility to make claims, influence decisions, and understand each other better (Bartels, 2013, 476). In these encounters, nuances of oral communication are not always possible in writing (Samanta & Hand, 2022, 142), possibly making conversational encounters more suitable for enhancing trust. The familiarity created by concrete encounters is expected to positively influence citizens' perceptions (Goodsell, 1994, 139; Hardin, 2006, 3). The possibility of informal participation is first examined quantitatively. Subsequently, a qualitative approach examines actual public encounters.

3.3.4 Open government

In addition to open government's own substantial values, such as the right to information access or the democratic right of participation, instrumental values can be obtained by implementing open government practices (Meijer et al., 2012, 20), such as better government decisions and a more trusting citizenry. When citizens have a better understanding of complex and difficult decisions, they may be more understanding and willing to accept undesirable policy outcomes (Meijer et al., 2012, 21). The

elements of government openness often overlap, but they can also diverge when a government organisation invests more in one aspect of openness and less in another. A positive effect is already expected from most individual elements of institutional openness. The combination of these different elements could provide additional added value by ensuring that different citizen needs are all met. Their combination may better be able to exude openness to the wider public. Especially when it comes to the combination of different elements of institutional openness, open government is expected to have a positive effect on citizens' perceptions.

H6: Open government is positively related to public trust.

3.3.5 The role of performance

In performance theory, the origins and formation of trust in public institutions involve the performance of those institutions (Mishler & Rose, 2001, 34; Stoyan et al., 2016, 19). Its premiss is that governments can maintain or restore public trust by improving performance, for example, by increasing citizen satisfaction with public services (Van de Walle, 2018, 229). Public trust results from public services that are provided with justice, honesty, equality, and efficiency (Wei, Gong, Jiao, & Duan, 2017, 100). Just doing your job well would then be enough to build trust. As municipalities are seen as 'service-producers' (Gustavsen et al., 2017, 5), satisfaction with their quality becomes an important trust driver. Several studies indicate a positive association between perceived performance and trust. For example, Houston & Harding (2014, 55) conclude that alongside the important role of benevolence and integrity, public trust based on competence requires evidence of previous performance and information on service quality. It is judgement of the government's ability to accomplish its goals and act consistently. The most important factor in explaining public trust in local government may be 'how it runs things'. Although cases of ethical misconduct have a detrimental effect on trust, the question is whether trustworthy behaviour is also able to 'reach the consciousness of the public', or whether 'good conduct may not be an especially influential positive factor' (Downe et al., 2013, 599). Moreover, not being able to meet the rising and contradictory demands of citizens could decrease trust (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003, 335).

As in other studies, performance is conceptualized as *perceived* performance. The reason to include perceived performance is that no other unambiguous or specific institutional performance indicator is available. Yang & Holzer (2006, 115) suggest there could be a discrepancy between perceived performance and actual performance, and trust in government could be formed by subjective measures of citizen perceptions. Adversaries of performance theory argue that other factors come into play as perceived performance differs from actual performance (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003, 336). The question remains whether improving performance levels is a fruitful strategy for enhancing public trust. After examining the role of perceived performance, more insight is sought into the indicators that influence those perceptions. Moreover, it seems counterintuitive to assume the public is not able to recognise performance at all, at least at the micro-level. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H7: Perceived performance is positively related to public trust.

3.4 Research model

OPEN government is conceptualised as proactive transparency, responsive transparency, data insight, and participation possibilities by the government. In participation, the openness of the process, participants versus non-participating citizens, and the role of informal public encounters are examined. Although differentiated effects may occur, the overall expected effect of each type of transparency is positive. The accumulated effect of the combination of all openness elements is expected to be positive as well. Table 3.3 gives an overview of the hypotheses.

Table 3.3 Hypotheses overview

H1	Perceived openness is positively related to public trust.
H2a	Proactive transparency is *negatively* related to perceived competence.
H2b	Proactive transparency is positively related to perceived benevolence.
H2c	Proactive transparency is positively related to perceived integrity.
H3a	Responsive transparency is positively related to perceived competence.
H3b	Responsive transparency is positively related to perceived benevolence.
H3c	Responsive transparency is positively related to perceived integrity.
H4a	Data insight is *negatively* related to perceived competence.
H4b	Data insight is positively related to perceived benevolence.
H4c	Data insight is positively related to perceived integrity.
H5a	Open participation is positively related to public trust.
H5b	Citizens that participate have higher trust levels than non-participants.
H5c	Informal participation is positively related to public trust.
H6	Open government is positively related to public trust.
H7	Perceived performance is positively related to public trust.

Although not all elements of openness are hypothesised to be positively related to all dimensions of perceived trustworthiness, the hopes for open government are high, and the overall effect of openness on trust is expected to be positive. The literature, even if not entirely unambiguous, offers various indications for a positive effect. In figure 3.1, the formulated expectations per dimension of openness are combined in the research model, to be tested in this study, and to help answer the research question:

How does open government affect the level of public trust?

All the hypotheses formulated are tested quantitatively. The results of the quantitative analysis give rise to new questions, for example, about the underlying mechanisms that can help explain the quantitative results. Those new questions require a different methodological approach.

Qualitative approaches are needed to gain a better understanding of the experiences, attitudes, and perspectives of citizens. Those new questions are discussed in the corresponding chapters.

Figure 3.1 Research model: open government and public trust