

Citizen Participation, Trust, and Literacy on Government Legitimacy: The Case of Environmental Governance

Myung Jin

Virginia Commonwealth University

This paper explores the role of direct citizen participation, trust, and environmental literacy and its impact on the legitimacy of government institutions in the context of environmental governance in the United States. The current knowledge regarding the dynamics of the institutional legitimacy at the policy level is significantly lacking. This paper addresses broadly the effects of direct citizen participation, citizen trust, and environmental literacy on government legitimacy. Findings indicate that citizens prefer government institutions to ordinary people on leading environmental governance; however, the preference was less clear when asked to choose between the government and businesses as to who should lead environmental governance. Implications for government leadership on the issues of environmental policy are discussed at the end of the paper.

Keywords: *civic engagement, environment, government, legitimacy*

Introduction

Research shows that the United States is struggling to deal with environmental problems (Guber, 2003). The recent public dialogue involving American independence from imported oil has also contributed to the image of governing institutions as incompetent and politically divided. While the news media focus has mostly been on cost savings, the seeming lack of political leadership in the context of environmental governance raises a question among both scholars and practitioners as to whether the legitimacy of government institutions is at stake. Understandably, these concerns are leading to a serious consideration of how the environment ought to be governed, as there seems to be “little consensus on either the scale at which decision-making processes must be taken or the wisdom of the actors that dominate the process at different levels” (Chhotray & Stoker, 2009, p. 191). Scholars, both domestic and international, generally agree that any implementation of public programs of a modern state is now impossible without trust (Tyler, 2003; Gilson, 2003; Tsang, Burnett, Hills, & Welford, 2009). The increasing divide between the public and political leaders on various aspects of environmental issues, however, suggests that the first and only environmental policy involving the National Environmental Policy Act—which was implemented more than 40 years ago—is in need of a major reform. This lack of domestic leadership on environmental governance in the United States was equally reflected internationally as the United States has been less than enthusiastic on international cooperation (DeSombre, 2005). Consequently, the ability of the U. S. government to solve environmental problems has been scrutinized for quite some time (Chhotray & Stoker, 2009).

Scholars define legitimacy as, “the judgment that legal authorities are competent and honest (personal legitimacy) and that their professional role entitles them to make decisions that ought to be deferred to and obeyed (institutional legitimacy)” (e.g., Tsang et al., 2009, p. 101). Scholars argue that despite the emergence of new actors (e.g., from individual citizens to interest groups) as

legitimate partners of the government businesses in the public decision-making process, collective decisions still have to be made by states and governments at all levels (Chhotray & Stoker, 2009). Considering the declining citizens' trust and confidence in government leadership (Dalton, 2008; Chanley, Rudolph, & Rahn, 2000), the challenges that the government faces in regard to its legitimacy and effectiveness can no longer be ignored as citizens are increasingly looking for alternative ways of making decisions (Chhotray & Stoker, 2009).

While there is a growing body of literature on the institutional legitimacy of public institutions, most viewpoints are discussed in the context of the legal justice system and policing (Lax & Phillips, 2009; Gibson & Caldeira, 2009; Staton, 2010; Wenzel, Bowler, & Lanoue, 2003; Benesh, 2006; Kelleher & Wolack, 2007). Considering the notion that institutional legitimacy is a central component to all democratic institutions, these limited views pose a problem (Leonard, 2011). Moreover, the public's view on the legitimacy of governing institutions can often vary significantly, not only by the degree of transparency but also by the various policy topics. Although not directly related, this argument is most noticeable in the citizen trust literature where the public's level of trust and confidence in the government varies significantly by not only its performance but also by the type of programs it functions (Kim, 2010).

This paper analyzes how citizen participation, trust, and environmental literacy are associated with the legitimacy of government institutions in the United States in the context of environmental governance. Preference for government regulations as the desired method of best protecting and managing the environment is used as the proxy for the legitimacy of government in this study. In order to analyze the relationship between citizen participation and the legitimacy of government institutions, this study examines the direct ways through which citizens can participate in the environmental policy making at the individual level and the group level. This study further explores how two types of citizen trust (social and government) affect the legitimacy of government institutions in the United States. In addition, this study examines how the public's environmental literacy affects government's legitimacy. Perceived knowledge of the causes of and solutions to environmental issues in general are used as the proxy for environmental literacy. Taking into account the growing concerns and calls for effective government leadership to deal with environmental issues, this study contributes to the field of public administration and governance by testing the impact of diverse citizen perceptions on the legitimacy of public institutions in the context of environmental policy. The analysis is based on the International Social Survey Program of 2010 collected on the Environment (III) module in urban and rural areas in the United States.

Literature Review and Hypotheses

Scholars generally agree that public participation is an integral part of public decision making in general and, more specifically, in environmental policies both in the United States and throughout the world (Tsang et al., 2009). More broadly, Pimbert and Wakeford (2001) argue that democracy is a meaningless concept without the contribution of citizen deliberation; however, despite the popular belief that diverse involvement of multiple stakeholders in the public policy process represents the democratic way of dealing with public problems, determining how this new way of participation actually affects the legitimacy of the government institutions and how it ought to function is a complicated issue that requires empirical efforts.

Direct Citizen Participation

Despite the increasing popularity of direct citizen engagement, whether this growing emphasis on citizen participation leads to increasing the legitimacy of the government institutions is an empirical question that has not received much scholarly attention. Several scholars, however, posit that direct citizen participation contributes to legitimating governmental affairs and the regime that makes them (Pateman, 1970; Salisbury, 1975). This legitimacy is believed to produce stability within the system and for the regime that makes the rules (Roberts, 2008). This notion is shared by many scholars who argue that citizen participation facilitates the dialogue in enhancing compromise, cooperation, and consideration of various policy options, as well as in increasing the legitimacy of the decision-making process and deliberative democracy (Adrain & Smith, 2006; Kim, 2010; Nelson & Wright, 1995).

Despite the critics who argue against direct citizen participation (Dahl, 1989; Cleveland, 1975), numerous studies suggest that the merits that can be obtained by exercising direct citizen participation are too great to miss (Pateman, 1970; Hart, 1972; Cunningham, 1972; Salisbury, 1975; Barber, 1984; Krouse, 1982; Warner, 2001). First, several scholars suggest that direct citizen participation is developmental (Hart, 1972; Pateman, 1970; Krouse, 1982; Warner, 2001). For instance, Stivers (1990) and Hart (1972) posit that people are able to realize their potential through direct participation. It is the democratic processes through which good people are produced and self-development is promoted (Cunningham, 1972). Second, scholars suggest the educative side of direct citizen participation. For instance, Pateman (1970) notes that democracy can only be learned through practice and that the more one participates, the more one develops the attitudes and skills that are suited for the practice of citizenship.

These previous studies have led to the increasing efforts on exploring the many ways that citizens can participate directly in their government (Verba & Nie, 1972; Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995; Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, 1980). For instance, increasing numbers of studies now distinguish the categories of citizen participation studies at the level of analysis between individual and group (Roberts, 2008). In the political arena, individual and group actions are usually used interchangeably without clear distinction. For instance, making political contributions through donations, attending town hall meetings, and becoming a member of a political coalition are all considered a form of direct citizen participation (Weber & Khademian, 1997; Berry, 1981); however, one could argue that the motives behind how one decides to volunteer for a cause are diverse. For instance, it needs to be noted that recycling, buying fruit and vegetables grown without pesticides or chemicals, cutting back on driving a car for environmental reasons, reducing the energy or fuel one uses at home for environmental reasons, choosing to save or reuse water, and avoiding buying certain products for environmental reasons are all forms of direct individual participation by those who understand the collective benefits of environmental protection. These activities are voluntary and form a part of larger collective action independent of other people's values or agendas. These actions are considered both developmental and educative in that they involve self-experiencing the processes through which good governance can be both enhanced and promoted (Cunningham, 1972; Pateman, 1970).

Other ways through which citizens can directly participate in the public policy-making process include (1) becoming an active member of a group whose focus is to preserve or protect the environment, (2) signing a petition about an environmental issue, (3) donating money to an environmental group, or (4) taking part in a project or demonstration about an environmental issue. Although the process by which these actions are initiated lies at the individual level, it is assumed

that these individuals are more likely to put greater trust and confidence in the body of grouped organizations with shared goals. Literature recognizes these individuals as “critical citizens” (Kim, 2010). Although the definition may vary, critical citizens are described as those who desire for stronger self-expression values in the governance of public affairs (Norris, 1999; Kim, 2010). It is worth mentioning that previous research initially suggested that the postmodernist values of individual freedom and self-expression could undermine the public’s confidence in government performance (Inglehart, 1997; Hegtvedt, Clay-Warner, & Johnson, 2003). Recent international studies show, however, that these self-expression values have positive impacts on the quality of democratic governance (Wang & Tan, 2006; Kim, 2010). For instance, examining the self-expressed values at the institutional level, Kim’s findings (2010) showed that both the right to gather and demonstrate and the right to criticize government were positively associated with increased trust in government and its capacity to govern. Therefore, the following hypotheses are tested in the study:

H₁: Direct citizen participation at the individual level is positively associated with the perceived legitimacy of government.

H₂: Direct citizen participation at the group level is positively associated with the perceived legitimacy of government.

Citizen Trust

Previous research suggests that effective and trustful relationships between citizens and government institutions are an integral part of supporting and understanding the dynamics of public decision making (Kim, 2010; Tsang et al., 2009). Although the role of trust in the broader arena of environmental policy is underresearched (Alario, 2001; Beierle & Konisky, 2000), several studies posit that citizen trust in government facilitates collective action through which environmental performance can be enhanced and can also provide legitimacy to public institutions (Tsang et al., 2009; Tyler, 2003; Gilson, 2003). For instance, Gilson (2003) argues that trust “is a relational notion: it generally lies between people, people and organizations and people and events.” The government can be at a considerable disadvantage to try to implement its own agenda without trust over a population through the use of coercive resources (Tsang et al., 2009). Therefore, it is necessary to build trust in the state and its agencies to establish the legitimacy of state action (Gilson, 2003). Another scholar shares this notion in that trust is an important facilitator of democratic governance (Tyler, 2003). He also argues that voluntary compliance (deference) is a prerequisite for a functioning legal system (Tyler, 2003).

Scholars generally agree that trust is a complex concept whose causes and effects cannot easily be identified (Kramer, 1999; Mayer & Davis, 1995; Kim, 2010). Understandably, depending on the person’s viewpoints, different definitions can be sculpted. One definition of trust at the individual level is “to have confidence in somebody; to believe that somebody is good, sincere, and honest; and to believe that something is true or correct or that you can rely on it” (Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 1645). Scholars also theorize that trust in government encourages compliance with laws and regulations (Ayres & Braithwaite, 1992) and enhances the legitimacy and the effectiveness of democratic governance (Hetherington, 1999).

Previous literature distinguishes two types of citizen trust: social and government. Scholars generally regard social trust—which is based on shared values and group identification—as trust among stakeholders, while government trust is regarded as trust in government decision makers (Tsang et al., 2009). The promotion of social trust through deliberation helps potential stakeholders familiarize themselves with each other’s values. Literature suggests that there is a causal

mechanism between how social trust operates and the legitimacy of political institutions (Kornai, Rothstein, & Rose-Ackerman, 2004). Research shows that both social trust and government trust are relational as based on the shared values. While government trust is slightly more firmly rooted on such bases of trust as cognitive (attributes of trust worthiness) and behavioral (fiduciary responsibility) than social trust, which is mostly based on shared values and group identification, the process through which both government trust and social trust are formed involves deliberation and transparent public dialogue by all members of democratic governance (Anex & Focht, 2002; Tsang et al., 2009). Therefore, the study tests the following hypotheses:

H₃: Social trust is positively associated with the perceived legitimacy of government.

H₄: Government trust is positively associated with the perceived legitimacy of government.

Environmental Literacy

Previous studies suggest that environmental illiteracy by the public leads to dysfunctional environmental governance at higher levels of public institutions (Colfer, 2011). Scholars also believe that citizens are more likely to justify their lack of power in the public arena by the illiteracy of the relevant policy issues, which further fragments the trust and confidence that lies between the public and government institutions (Jayal, 2003; Lachapelle, Smith, & McCool, 2004). This sentiment on the issue of environmental illiteracy has been even more vocal in other parts of the world (Ojha, 2008; Lachapelle et al., 2004; Kabeer, 2000). For instance, in one Nepal study, results showed that those who were illiterate of the policy issues surrounding them were more likely to disenfranchise from group decision-making processes (Lachapelle et al., 2004). The same study also showed that people's perceptions of their own power in their communities were affected by literacy (or lack thereof) and transparency (Lachapelle et al., 2004).

Scholars generally agree that the main issue with current environmental governance is that it relies heavily on government institutions whose goals and the processes to achieve them do not always create consensus. Research suggests that in order to balance the capacity to govern the environment in the most efficient and effective way possible, public institutions must recognize the need to build the capacity for public participation, which means committing to building environmental literacy among the public (Chepesiuk, 2007). Similarly, public acceptance of environmental management decisions will emerge when the public makes the equally contributing efforts beyond just taking interest in these environmental issues. As the connections between human health and the environment are increasingly evident, building an up-to-date understanding of the environmental issues as well as the impacts of human behaviors for decision making at various levels follows. Rather than being a spectator of the environmental policy making by governing institutions, increasing the environmentally literate segment of social capital will help promote the dialogue between the public and government institutions that should result in increased transparency of the process and thus, the legitimacy of the governing body (Tsang et al., 2009). Like any form of education, environmental literacy should continue to be promoted and encouraged at all levels to promote and sustain a level playing field between the public and the government institutions (Chepesiuk, 2007). This argument is fitting considering the literature that suggests that better informed citizens can actively and constructively contribute to decision making on policy issues, regulatory requirements, and various service levels (Wang & Wan Wart, 2007). The following hypothesis is also tested in the study:

H₅: Environmental literacy is positively associated with the perceived legitimacy of government.

Data and Methodology

Data

This study uses a U. S. subset of the 2010 International Social Survey Program data collected on Environment (III). The Survey's sampling procedure is known for its stratified multistage, random-sampling method to ensure representative samples. This study focuses on the U. S. context, and the mode of data collection included face-to-face interviews with CAPI (computer assisted personal interviewing) and phone interviews (GESIS, 2012). The data included a total of 1,430 respondents.

Measurements

The dependent variable of government legitimacy was measured by asking the respondents to choose one that most closely matches their views:

- “Government should pass laws to make ordinary people protect the environment, even if it interferes with people's rights to make their own decisions” (coded 1) or
- “Government should let ordinary people decide for themselves how to protect the environment, even if it means they don't always do the right thing” (coded 0).

The author recognizes that using survey indicators that ask citizens about their view of government passing laws to make people protect the environment as a proxy for government legitimacy may not be the best measure. Considering the fact that most of the previous studies use citizens' trust and confidence, mostly in the case of court systems, to measure legitimacy (i.e. see, Leonard, 2011; Gibson & Caldeira, 2007), coupled with the notion that the measurement of legitimacy by policy is significantly lacking, the author argues that asking whether citizens prefer the government regulations in the context of environmental protection, rather than relying on ordinary people to make the decisions themselves, is a worthy effort that expands the utility of legitimacy research at the policy level. Furthermore, to examine whether people's view of the legitimacy of government institutions varies when compared against businesses, a second dependent variable is measured by choosing a statement that most closely matches their view between the following:

- “Government should pass laws to make businesses protect the environment, even if it interferes with businesses' rights to make their own decisions” (coded 1) and
- “Government should let businesses decide for themselves how to protect the environment, even if it means they don't always do the right thing” (coded 0).

Regarding direct citizen participation, two constructs for individual- and group-level variables were formed. The direct citizen participation variable at the individual level (Cronbach's alpha = 0.77) consists of six items. To measure the construct, the respondents were asked to rate how often they do the following activities on a scale of 1 (*never*) to 4 (*always*):

- (1) How often do you make a special effort to sort glass or tins or plastic or newspapers and so on for recycling?
- (2) How often do you make a special effort to buy fruit and vegetables grown without pesticides or chemicals?
- (3) How often do you cut back on driving a car for environmental reasons?

- (4) How often do you reduce the energy or fuel you use at home for environmental reasons?
- (5) How often do you choose to save or reuse water for environmental reasons?
- (6) How often do you avoid buying certain products for environmental reasons?

Direct citizen participation at the group level (Cronbach's alpha = 0.62) consists of four items. The respondents are asked to respond in a dichotomous fashion (*yes* or *no*) to the following questions:

- (1) Are you a member of any group whose main aim is to preserve or protect the environment?
- (2) In the last 5 years, have you signed a petition about an environmental issue?
- (3) In the last 5 years, have you given money to an environmental group?
- (4) In the last 5 years, have you taken part in a protest or demonstration about an environmental issue?

Regarding citizen trust, a distinction was made between social and government trust. To measure social trust (Cronbach's alpha = 0.73), the respondents were asked the following questions:

- (1) Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people? (on a scale of 1 [*you can't be too careful*] to 5 [*most people can be trusted*]).
- (2) Generally speaking, do you think most people would try to take advantage of you if they got the chance, or would they try to be fair? (on a scale of 1 [*most people would try to take advantage*] to 5 [*most people would try to be fair*]).

The two scores were standardized to create the social trust construct. Unlike the other study variables, government trust and government trust (politicians) are measured by single-itemed measures. Scholars suggest that constructs formulated from multiple items are generally preferred, particularly in meeting validity and reliability standards (Westover & Taylor, 2010); therefore, these two constructs should be noted as a limitation of this study. To measure government trust, the respondents were asked to what degree they agreed with the following statement on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*): "Most of the time, we can trust people in government to do what is right." To measure government trust (politicians), the respondents were given the same scale with the following statement: "Most politicians are in politics only for what they can get out of it personally." To measure the perceived level of environmental literacy (Cronbach's alpha = 0.77), the respondents were asked the following questions on a scale of 1 (*know nothing at all*) to 5 (*know a great deal*):

- (1) How much do you feel you know about the causes of these sorts of environmental problems?
- (2) How much do you feel you know about solutions to these sorts of environmental issues?

Gender, age, employment sector, and education were also included as control variables. Previous research on institutional legitimacy suggests that education, age, and gender in particular are important individual level predictors. In fact, numerous studies now relate the variations in the way that the citizens view and interact with the government institutions to various demographic factors (Leonard, 2011; Christensen & Laegreid, 2005; Laegreid, 1993; Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2001).

Findings

Descriptive Statistics

Regarding demographics for the survey respondents, 57% of the respondents were female. Approximately, 28% had bachelor's degree or beyond, and 19% of the respondents were involved in public sector employment. Geographically, 55% of the respondents were from a big city, compared to 26% in suburbs or outskirts of a big city and 18% from a small town. The mean age of the respondents was 48, while the mean income of the sample was \$54,811. The majority of the zero-order correlations was statistically significant at $p < .05$. Collinearity diagnostics showed no major issues as both tolerance values and variance-inflated factor values were significantly greater than 0.1 and less than 10, respectively. As for the main study variables, the scores for social trust ($M = 2.91$) were relatively higher compared to both government trust ($M = 2.54$) and government trust (politicians; $M = 2.59$). The mean scores for individual participation and group participation were 2.20 and .10, respectively. The mean score of environmental literacy was 2.73.

Regression Analyses

As previously discussed, this study uses a logistic regression model to identify the public's association with government legitimacy. This paper argues that direct citizen participation, citizen trust, and environmental literacy should all have a significant effect on the legitimacy of government institutions regarding environmental governance. Two different logistic regression models are analyzed to compare the influence of citizen participation, trust, and environmental literacy on government's legitimacy against ordinary people and against businesses. The results of the logistic regression analysis in model 1 show that as hypothesized, direct citizen participation was positively associated with the legitimacy of government on both the individual ($p < .01$) and group ($p < .01$) levels (Table 1). Environmental literacy ($p < .05$) was also positively associated with the legitimacy of government; however, the relationship between citizen trust and government legitimacy varied between social and government trust. For example, while both government trust ($p < .01$) and government trust (politicians; $p < .01$) were positively associated with the legitimacy of government, trust of fellow citizens (social trust) was not significantly associated with government legitimacy. Interestingly, the study found that group-level participation was positively and significantly associated with government legitimacy, while trusting of fellow citizens was negatively and insignificantly associated with government legitimacy. The results also showed that control variables were not effective predictors of the public's identification with government legitimacy.

The results of model 2 were starkly different (Table 1). Neither citizen trust nor environmental literacy was a significant predictor of the perceived legitimacy of government institutions. Regarding direct citizen participation on the individual level, participation ($p < .05$) was positively associated with the legitimacy. Two control variables, public sector employment ($p < .05$) and education ($p < .05$), were also positively associated with the government legitimacy in model 2.

Table 1: Logistic Regression Analyses of the Legitimacy of Government

Independent Variables	Model 1: Government vs. People		Model 2: Government vs. Businesses	
	<i>B</i>	Exp(<i>B</i>)	<i>B</i>	Exp(<i>B</i>)
<i>Direct citizen participation</i>				
Individual level	0.414** (0.131)	1.513	0.39* (0.174)	1.477
Group level	1.26** (0.435)	3.526	0.825 (0.66)	2.281
<i>Citizen trust</i>				
Social trust	-0.095 (0.074)	0.909	0.059 (0.097)	1.06
Government trust	0.261** (0.082)	1.298	0.098 (0.11)	1.103
Government trust (politicians)	0.252** (0.085)	1.287	0.15 (0.115)	1.162
<i>Environmental literacy</i>				
Environmental literacy	0.184* (0.094)	1.202	0.196 (0.123)	1.217
<i>Control variables</i>				
Gender	0.043 (0.163)	1.044	0.118 (0.217)	1.125
Public sector employment	0.243 (0.204)	1.275	0.874* (0.353)	2.396
Education	0.102 (0.076)	1.107	0.214* (0.099)	1.239
Age	0.001 (0.005)	1.001	0.001 (0.007)	1.001
Constant	-2.515 (0.532)	0.081	-1.209 (0.675)	0.298
N		816		948
χ^2		86.883		42.777
Cox & Snell R^2		.101		.044
Nagelkerke R^2		0.139		0.086

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Implications

This study has shown that citizens' view of the legitimacy of government can vary significantly depending on its leadership alternatives. The results indicate that while citizen participation, government trust, and environmental literacy were positively associated with the choice of government leadership (versus ordinary people) for environmental governance, citizens were less clear on whom the leadership should come from when government institutions were matched up against businesses. Only the individual-level citizen participation was positively and significantly associated with the choice of government leadership against both people and businesses. In addition, while no control variables were significant predictors of legitimacy, public sector employment and education were significantly and positively associated with government legitimacy when compared to that of businesses. The results regarding public sector employment and education, however, are not surprising given the findings from related literature. Overall, the findings show that the public puts more trust and confidence in the public institutions.

These results encourage readers of public administration to revisit the merits of three largely popular theories of democratic governance—public participation and trust, public–private partnership, and new public management. Regarding public participation, while both individual- and group-level participation were positive modes of direct citizen participation associate with the legitimacy of government institutions, the influence of group-level participation was less clear when matched up against choosing between government and businesses for a leadership role in the context of environmental governance. Are citizens who are active in their self-expression values more likely to view government institutions as less competent or less trustworthy for managing national agendas such as environmental policy? Considering the notion that trust in government influences public policy making (Chanley et al., 2000), the results on the relationship (or the lack thereof) between government trust and government legitimacy, as shown in model 2, suggest that increasing the trust level in government is not a panacea to advancing democratic governance. This accentuates a rather contrasting argument to the popular literature that generally posits that building a trustful relationship between citizens and the government contributes to the role of democratic governance (Wang and Wan Wart 2007).

When the emergence of an alternative to government institutions also competes to gain the public's trust for a leadership role, however, turf battles among the multiple stakeholders can also lead to a lack of accountability. For this very reason, establishing the legitimacy of government institutions and holding them accountable for their responsibilities should be made a priority. This argument is shared by several scholars (e.g., Pierre & Peters, 2000; Kettle, 2002; Kjaer, 2004) who contend that governance involves not only networks that are self-governing, but rather networks of organizations that are guided and steered by government (Chhotray & Stoker, 2009). It is important to note both conceptually and empirically that sound governance does not occur without government (Chhotray & Stoker, 2009). In addition, as the results imply, due to the growing popularity of public–private partnerships both in the United States and elsewhere, it is increasingly more difficult to identify the role of government institutions. Any nations that promote the idea of liberty and democratic governance must also ensure accountability for both processes and outcomes. Chhotry and Stoker (2009) suggest that accountability involves “justification and being held responsible” (p. 50). If government institutions continue to struggle to take a leadership role in both functions, the public's infatuation with the public–private partnership movements may go astray.

Another perspective on the lack of significance in both citizen participation (group level) and citizen trust in model 2 derives from the initiatives for public–private partnerships and the past and

ongoing reform efforts for new public management (NPM) in the public sector. For example, while the trend for forming public–private partnerships in the previous several decades has contributed to increasing the public sector efficiency (Forrer, Kee, Newcomer, & Boyer, 2010), these formations have in many cases eradicated the differences between public and private organizations (Boyne, 2002; Rainey, Traut, & Blunt, 1986; Rainey, Backoff, & Levine, 1976). In addition, as the NPM reforms driven by the quest for more efficient delivery of public services spread at a global level, the motto “citizens as customers” has given government institutions the image of private sector businesses. This is due, in part, to neglecting the tenets of NPM, most of which rely heavily on practice in the private sector and emphasize the role of competition, resulting in confusion and mismanagement (Kettle, 1995; Ferlie, Ashburner, Fitzgerald, & Pettigrew, 1996). Although it may sound logical to expect that greater trust in government will lead to greater perceived legitimacy of governing institutions, firm empirical findings in support of this argument are lacking. As Kim (2010) argues, government leaders must build leadership competency as well as institutional capacity and demonstrate their commitment to facilitate participatory governance, which can lead to greater recognition for the government institutions and their legitimacy.

Conclusion

This study is not without limitations. First, some of the study variables could use more rigorous measurement as they were constrained by the limited items used in the preexisting survey dataset. Scholars suggest that data collected from self-completed surveys such as this can suffer from common method variance, as the respondents may distort perception of their socioeconomic conditions. Another issue is that as a cross-sectional approach was used in this study, findings are not as easily generalizable as studies using longitudinal data, and causality must be cautiously applied. In addition, as literature shows that the public’s trust level in government and degree of engagement in public policy-making process varies by region and policy type, more efforts to examine at a global level are warranted.

Despite these limitations, this research makes several main contributions to the existing literature. First, it examines largely two types of direct citizen participation—individual and group level—and their association with the perceived legitimacy of government. Although literature recognizes these different levels of analysis in direct citizen participation as relevant predictors of legitimacy, this is one of the first studies to empirically link citizen participation to the legitimacy construct. Second, by applying the various trust factors to determine the legitimacy of government institutions, it expands on previous research that mostly viewed government legitimacy as synonymous to trust and confidence in government. Third, this study uses the level of perceived understanding about the causes of and solutions to the environmental problems as a proxy for environmental literacy. This is an important contribution as future studies in different policy issues can use this type of policy-specific literacy construct. Finally, this study showed that citizens’ view of government leadership can change, or become less clear, when the alternative choices are institutionalized.

In conclusion, more studies on the legitimacy of government need to be conducted using a comparative perspective on multiple countries to take into account cultural as well as sociopolitical factors, because these factors will improve our understanding of the role of the public and of the government institutions and the dynamics of both. Before accepting a direct form of citizen participation with open arms, more systematic analyses are required to understand whether these new ways of governance utilizing a direct form of citizen participation are compromising the legitimacy of our government. If they are, the next step involves not the degree of citizen engagement in the public arena, as some would argue that we already have enough of it; rather, it should focus

on mutual understanding between each governing institution's limitations as well as strengths from which democratic governance can continue.

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