Public Perceptions of Regional Collaborations in Transportation Policy

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Abstract

Despite the widespread use of collaborative governance in the U.S., there is little evidence about whether the direct involvement of citizens and groups actually improves the public's assessments of governmental decision-making. We examine this question by conducting a series of survey experiments about the composition of collaborative transportation governance. Our experiments reveal that involving non-governmental actors in public decision-making only consistently enhances assessments of public decision-making when *private citizens* as opposed to individuals representing business groups and organized interests are included in the arrangement. The public prefers citizens with experience and expertise, but not with organizational affiliations. In spite of the populist appeal, without electoral accountability, respondents remain reluctant to delegate power particularly if the collaborative governance body has taxing or regulatory authority.

Keywords: Collaborative governance; transportation management; regionalism; representation; institutional design; citizen participation in governments.
Regional scale problems such as traffic congestion, poor air quality, rising sea levels, wildfires, drought and floods typically spill over many local, state and even federal land boundaries. Given the political difficulty of creating and funding new layers of general government to deal with region-wide problems, local jurisdictions in the U.S. have devised various ways to collaborate with one another, as well as with state and federal agencies, by signing MOUs, creating special districts, entering into joint powers authority and the like. In recent years, the concept of “collaborative governance” (CG) has broadened the scope of these intergovernmental collaborations to include community stakeholders and members of the public. As compared to the model of traditional government in which citizens primarily participate in politics by electing and then communicating with their representatives, CG broadens the opportunities of non-officials to observe and participate directly in policy formulation (Ansell and Gash 2008; Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh 2012; Newman et al. 2004).

CG has been deployed in various U.S. policy domains, including natural resource management (e.g. watershed, river), infrastructure permitting (e.g. dams, public transit) and land use planning processes (Emerson and Gerlak 2014; Hardy and Koontz 2010; Lubell et al. 2010; Luyet et al. 2012; Margerum and Robinson 2014; Newig and Fritsch 2009). The core logic of CG is to make decision-making processes more inclusive by allowing various community stakeholders and constituents to participate along with government officials. As a consequence, there are now more opportunities for citizens and groups to monitor and give input not just to elected bodies such as city councils and county boards, but also to
collaborative policy-making bodies dealing with specific, often technical issues such as transportation policy, the issue we focus on in this paper.

This movement from traditional government by public officials to more inclusive governance including stakeholders and private citizens is motivated by various considerations such as the desire to avoid potential litigation by securing stakeholder buy-in prior to implementing a decision, the quest for better grassroots information and localized expertise, and the expectation that broader inclusion will enhance public assessments of the policy-making process (Scott and Thomas 2016; Freeman 1997; Rogers and Weber 2010; Donahue and Zeckhauser 2012). As compared to traditional government, the move towards collaborative governance gives stakeholders and private citizens an opportunity to have input in and work with elected and unelected public officials to solve spillover problems. But collaborative governance arrangements that possess wide discretion and significant powers ironically run the risk of engendering a “democratic deficit”—a perception that unelected experts and stakeholder group representatives are imposing unpopular policies without adequate public consultation (Norris 2011) and lack accountability. This can lead to resentment and obstruction from local residents.

We address whether stakeholder and private citizen inclusion actually enhance the public’s assessment of collaborative governance processes and outcomes. Despite the laudatory aims and widespread use of collaborative governance in the U.S., few empirical studies have carefully tested whether directly involving citizens and groups in collaborative arrangements actually improves the public’s assessments of public policy-making. What specific forms of governance
composition would best promote these goals? And do these perceptions about collaborative governance versus traditional government vary across policy areas that a decision-making body of this sort might have to deal with? Do citizens trust the motives and input of organized groups as much as individual citizens? What are the preferred qualifications of the private citizens who might participate in CG?

We examine these questions by conducting a series of survey experiments comparing respondent perceptions of traditional forms of government versus collaborative governance and the types of stakeholders that could potentially serve on an appointed collaborative body. In this paper, we focus specifically on transportation policy-making, for several reasons. First, transportation is a highly salient policy area that accounts for billions of dollars of local investment of public dollars each year, and that directly affects individuals’ quality of life as well as the vibrancy of their communities. Second, CG is widely used in managing transportation problems that spill over political jurisdictions. Local traffic and roads in the US have historically been managed by city and county governments. But highways typically fall under state jurisdiction and mass transit is often handled by a regional body. Separate decisions by any of these entities can have consequences for neighboring communities. And regionwide choices, such as efforts to increase mass transit options, can require coordination among numerous localities. This interconnectedness of transportation systems across jurisdictions argues for regional approaches to public policy-making.

We develop and test hypotheses about public perceptions of regional collaboration in transportation policy using data from two online public opinion
surveys. In the first set of analyses, we use data from vignette-based survey experiments that vary - as the treatment - the characteristics of collaborative governance, including the *functioning* of CG -- either to distribute resources or to regulate a new technology, the *stakeholder composition* of the hypothetical CG, and the *powers* held by the decision-making authority. We test whether CG is perceived to provide higher levels of representation to various groups, to better balance of regional vs. local interests, to be responsive to public demands, and to able to be able to resolve gridlock. In addition, we test whether people are more willing to delegate authority to CG than traditional government.

These experiments reveal that the public perceives differences in the outcomes resulting from traditional government and collaborative governance, but these assessments are only consistently more favorable when *private citizens*, as opposed to representatives from business groups and organized interests are included in the collaboration. These findings underscore the populist faith that Americans have in individual citizens and their skepticism about groups and factions when it comes to institutional design and representation (Cain 2014; Pildes 2014; Achen and Bartels 2017). However, since these initial experiments do not reveal what specific qualifications those private citizens should have, we conducted a second survey that contains a conjoint experiment to measure the relative impact of various individual factors such as gender, race, education, previous public experience, partisanship, education, group membership and connection to campaign donors on support for their inclusion on a board. We find that the public prefers citizens with experience and expertise, but not with organizational affiliations.
Collaborative Governance

Authors use a variety of terms to describe CG, including adaptive governance (Chaffin et al. 2014); regional governance (Griffith 2005; Hamilton 2002); inter-local collaboration (Lee and Hannah-Spurlock 2015; Zeemering 2012); network governance (Lester and Reckhow 2012); collaborative partnerships (Margerum and Robinson 2014); etc. Ansell and Gash (2007) define collaborative governance as “a governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a formal, consensus-oriented, deliberative collective decision-making process that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets” (p. 544). Stakeholders in collaborative governance can be either individual citizens or organized groups. CG can be highly institutionalized through a formal joint power authority (JPA) or organized less formally through memorandums of understanding (MOUs) or ad hoc agreements. CG arrangements are not usually static and often evolve over time (Blair and Janousek 2013; Hui et al. in press).

Regardless of the terminology or exact structure, CG is thought to provide solutions to numerous collective action problems in varied ways. Voluntary agreements can emerge from a dynamic political contracting process when collective benefits exceed the transaction costs of bargaining over an agreement (Feiock 2007, 2009) or when shared information reduces the risk of being misled by wrong or irrelevant information (Feiock et al. 2010). Collaborative governance can play a key role in advancing public sector innovation (Damanpour and Schneider
It can also be used to convene multiple parties, mediate tensions and conflicts, and oversee the implementation of decisions and agreements (Emerson and Gerlak 2014; Emerson et al. 2012).

Researchers have identified numerous “toolkits” that can enhance the quality and fairness of collaborative decision-making processes (Reed 2008; Scott and Thomas 2016; Tan et al. 2012; Taylor and Loe 2012; Purdy 2012; Bingham et al. 2005). One key tool is transparency (i.e., the right to documents and information); another is inclusiveness and consensus-oriented decision making (Ansell and Gash 2007, Emerson et al. 2011). By identifying traditionally under-represented stakeholders and involving them early in the process, CG can produce outcomes that are viewed as fairer and more inclusive (Newman et al. 2004; Johnston et al. 2010). CG can also broaden the overall level of community civic engagement (Page 2010).

There are of course collaborative governance critics. Koontz and Thomas (2006) warn that the benefits of CG have been overhyped. It remains unclear whether CG improves actual environmental or social outcomes compared to more traditional planning and policymaking processes. CG often exacerbates fragmentation problems. Case studies of past CG efforts find that despite collaborative arrangements, agencies can remain compartmentalized and institutionally insular (Bollens 1997; Lubell and Lippert 2011). Localism and parochialism can impede CG from achieving broader regional goals (Griffin 2005). Citizens may participate in these new democratic opportunities too infrequently, too
unequally, and in too few venues to develop and sustain a robust democracy (Macedo ed. 2005; Verba et al. 1995; Bartels 2016).

Including broader citizen participation in public decision-making can also unintentionally create new opportunities for locking in existing power structures. Stakeholders may be self-selected and unrepresentative of the population as a whole. Stakeholders may venue shop, choosing agencies that have a sympathetic orientation or with whom they have had a positive working relationship in the past (Gerber et al. 2013). Decisions from group deliberation often reinforce pre-existing power imbalances and structural hierarchies (Bollens 1997; Gerber et al. 2013).

Finally, there is the critical question of accountability. FOIA requirements and open meeting laws at all levels of government provide many opportunities for interested parties and members of the public to observe and obtain information about public decision-making (Cain, Egan and Fabbrini, 2003; Cain, 2015). While transparency is a valuable tool, citizens cannot directly hold decision-makers responsible for their policy choices unless they can remove them or overturn their decisions at the ballot box. With appointed boards, the accountability path is indirect though the elected officials who did the appointing. When the collaborative membership consists of elected officials exclusively, the body is accountable to many specific electorates, which can often lead to a strong parochial orientation (Gerber and Gibson 2009). And combinations of appointed and elected officials produce a mixture of accountability mechanisms. But as a collaborative governance authority’s powers strengthen and broaden, it is possible that the public’s concern
about indirectly accountable appointed experts or unaccountable private stakeholders and citizens could increase.

In short, while CG is frequently seen as a way of improving public acceptance of decision-making through stakeholder participation in policymaking, it is unclear and untested whether and when these positive benefits actually accrue. In fact, the literature suggests that there are reasons to question whether collaborative governance does in fact change assessments of public decision-making relative to traditional government, and whether these effects are conditioned by the specific design of a given collaborative governance arrangement.

The Elements of Collaborative Design

We seek to capture the effects of three main elements of collaborative design on the public’s perceptions of CG. The first is the function of the collaborative effort. In the area of transportation policy (and arguably many other areas in which CG is used), the CG body is empowered to allocate resources or grants across jurisdictions, and/or to develop a plan for implementing a federal or state program. In both cases, these are tasks delegated to the regional body by representative government. At the same time, both necessarily involve some discretion allocated to the appointed collaborative body.

The second element of collaborative design that our study considers is the composition of the collaborative governance body. Under traditional government (TG), only elected or other public officials serve on the decision-making body. By
comparison, a collaborative governance (CG) option also includes members from outside government such as academic experts, representatives from the business community or public utilities, members of relevant nonprofit organizations or private citizens. But should we assume that the public regards each in a similar, positive light?

The trend towards collaborative governance (i.e. the inclusion of non-governmental actors in formal policy processes) over traditional governmental decision-making (i.e. public policy made and implemented by public officials only) rests on the expectation that the inclusion of non-governmental actors will improve the diversity of perspectives considered and sense of trust by the community in the collaborative decision-making process. When an elected official takes office, the presumption is that he or she will protect the interests of his or her constituents or be voted out of office. But when nongovernmental actors or private citizens are appointed to a collaborative body, it is not as clear whether they are meant to represent the interests of their organizations, the public at large or simply act as free agents.

Accordingly, it is important to understand what expectations citizens have regarding the responsiveness of nongovernmental actors when they serve on collaborative governance bodies. Does the public assume that business representatives will primarily represent business interests, that environmental groups will primarily represent environmental interests, etc., or that one or both will represent the broader regional interests that the collaborative body was
intended to foster? And do citizens think it more or less likely that nongovernmental actors will be more able than public officials to abandon their parochial interests when required to break deadlocks and forge consensus?

The third design element is the power of the collaborative effort. If the collaborative body’s function is to implement a policy that was previously decided by a local or state government, then voters might feel less need for direct electoral accountability. But if collaborative bodies are tasked with the authority to levy taxes or over-ride the decisions made by their local representatives, this may cross a line of citizen trust and sense of accountability. A voter could be taxed or find out that their local laws were vetoed by a body that includes elected officials from other local jurisdictions and non-governmental actors. This would resemble the “democratic deficit” problem that plagues the European Union. Accordingly, we will test whether giving the collaborative body the right to impose taxes or over-ride the land use decisions of local governments increases citizen demands for electoral control.

Research Design and Data

In the fall of 2018, we conducted a nationally representative online public opinion survey through a commercial vendor, YouGov. A central theme of the survey was transportation governance and the sample consisted of 2,000 respondents. In the winter of 2019, we conducted a follow up study with a conjoint design to probe the preferred qualities of citizen representatives on CG boards. The follow-up survey was also fielded by the YouGov, and had a sample size of 1,000 respondents.
Both surveys have been reweighted to match a sampling frame on gender, age, race and education to mimic the U.S. adult population. The surveys each took about 15 minutes to complete.

Our initial survey included a set of experiments to explore how respondents view collaborative governance (defined in the survey instrument as including private citizens and/or representatives of outside groups) as compared to traditional government (defined as decision-making by public officials only). In our experiments, we initially told respondents about an effort to create a regional transportation board. Respondents in each survey were randomly assigned to one of two possible vignettes: half of the sample (N=1,000) was assigned to vignette 1 in which the policy challenge is around funding improvements in transportation infrastructure; the other half of the sample was assigned to vignette 2 in which the policy challenge is around regulating a new technology, namely autonomous vehicles. The two vignettes test whether the CG’s function (funding/distribution versus regulation) affects respondents’ perceptions. Each respondent read their assigned vignette on their screen:

**Vignette 1** on the transportation survey reads: “As transportation issues typically spill across multiple jurisdictions, suppose the [R’s STATE] state

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1 The frame was constructed by stratified sampling from the full 2016 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year sample with selection within strata by weighted sampling with replacements. The matched cases were weighted to the sampling frame using propensity scores. The matched cases and the frame were combined and a logistic regression was estimated for inclusion in the frame. The propensity score function included age, gender, race/ethnicity, years of education and region. The propensity scores were grouped into deciles of the estimated propensity score in the frame and post-stratified according to these deciles. The weights were then post-stratified on 2016 presidential vote choice, and a four-way stratification of gender, race, age, and education, to produce the final weight.
government proposes to form a regional board to formulate and fund improvements to your region's transportation and public transit infrastructure. The proposal includes improvements in your region's roads, highways, buses, subways / trains / rail, and non-motorized transportation. The regional board includes [R's CITY] and several neighboring jurisdictions.

**Vignette 2** on the transportation survey reads: “As transportation issues typically spill across multiple jurisdictions, suppose the [R's STATE] state government proposes to form a regional board to regulate the introduction of autonomous vehicles (a.k.a. driverless vehicles). The regional board covers [R's CITY] and several neighboring jurisdictions.”

Respondents were then told:

“There are many different ways to organize the regional board.

One option, Option A, is to have a board composed of local government officials only such as mayors or council members from the cities that are part of the region.

The other option, Option B, is to have a board composed of both local government officials and stakeholder groups, including [insert one].

- Private citizens
- Business groups
- Disadvantaged community advocates
- Neighborhood association representatives
- Environment advocates

Each respondent was offered one type of stakeholder from the list of five. Figure 1 illustrates our research design.

![Figure 1: Survey Experiment Design](image-url)
**Measuring Perceived Responsiveness**

Respondents received nine follow-up questions. On the first five, respondents were asked to rate, on a scale from 0 to 100, the responsiveness of option A (‘traditional government’ option) and option B (‘governance’ option) to each of the following types of interests. Question order was randomized so as to minimize order effects.

1. How responsive do you believe each board would be to environmental issues?

2. How responsive do you believe each board would be to business interests?

3. How responsive do you believe each board would be to disadvantaged communities?

4. How responsive do you believe each board would be to broader regional interests?

5. How responsive do you believe each board would be to local interests in your community?

Respondents were then asked to rate each option according to their overall responsiveness to public opinion and their ability to avoid gridlock:

6. If people like you disagreed with a decision made by the board, how likely do you believe the board would change that decision?

7. How often do you believe the board will find itself gridlocked?

**Delegation of Authority**
To measure respondents’ willingness to delegate responsibility to a regional board, we asked two questions:

8. Should the board be given authority to supersede local land use and planning decisions? [Response options: xx]

9. Should the board be given authority to raise local taxes? [Response options: xx]

**Results**

*General Perceptions of Traditional Government versus Collaborative Governance*

We begin by exploring how respondents evaluate traditional government (TG) versus collaborative governance (CG) on the nine responsiveness and authority questions above across the two functional areas captured in the vignettes. We first average the scores for all seven responsiveness items. In Figure 2, we plot the average score of responsiveness for traditional government on the x-axis and the average scores for the collaborative governance options on the y-axis for the two functional areas. Each dot represents the preference between TG and CG. If a dot falls on the 45 degree line, it suggests that the respondent is indifferent between the two arrangements. Dots above the 45-degree line indicate a preference for CG over TG. As one can see, there are more dots above the diagonal line in both vignettes and the distributions are similar in both instances as well. As we will show in latter analyses, we confirm that responses to the two vignettes are statistically
indistinguishable at the 0.05 level. That is, the function of the CG body does not affect the preference for collaborative governance over traditional government.

Figure 2: Average Scores for TG and CG by Functional Area.

Note: Points above the 45-degree line indicate higher average scores for CG.

Since responses to the two vignettes are statistically indistinguishable, we combine the two vignettes to produce Figure 3. We present our seven measures of responsiveness and contrast how the two institutional designs score on each of the measures. The red triangles represent the average scores for CG and black dots represent the average scores for TG. On all seven dimensions, CG is perceived to be more responsive, with the largest gaps concerning environmental interest representation and the capacity to change an unpopular decision. This underscores the skepticism that voters apparently have about public officials in the current era.
Figure 3: Average Responsiveness Scores for CG versus TG

Note: Scores range from 0 to 100 (most responsive). CG is seen as more responsive form of representation than TG in all domains.

*Compositional Preferences*

CG is deemed to produce more responsiveness than TG, on average, to a range of interests. But to what extent does the inclusion of any particular nongovernmental member affect views of CG responsiveness? Our experiments compare option A (i.e., a TG board that includes CG governance board that includes a particular non-governmental stakeholder). For each paired comparison, we can compare the mean of that particular CG option ($\mu_{cg}$) to the mean of the TG option ($\mu_{tg}$). A positive difference would indicate that a particular CG option is perceived to
be more responsive than the TG option. Likewise, a negative difference would indicate the CG option is perceived to be less responsive than the TG option. To test whether perceived responsiveness varies across our five treatment groups, we compute the difference-in-difference, that is, $(\mu_{cg1} - \mu_{tg1}) - (\mu_{cg2} - \mu_{tg2})$.

Figure 4 reports the regression coefficients from the difference-in-difference estimates for all five groups. Each panel in figure 4 reports the estimated difference in perceived responsiveness between TG and each CG configuration, with CG involving private citizens as the baseline. In other words, this framework allows us to see whether adding organizational stakeholders as opposed to unaffiliated private citizens increases the perceived board responsiveness relative to traditional government.

Comparing the intercepts in the three panels, a hypothetical regional board that includes private citizens has the highest level of perceived responsiveness in representing environmental issues (panel 3, where the net difference between CG and TG is about 20 points). We asked respondents to rate the responsiveness of government and governance in terms of serving business interests and interests of disadvantaged communities (panel 1 and 2). As expected, respondents think business groups are the best advocates for their own interests (with a positive coefficient in panel 1) and the worst advocates for disadvantaged communities (with a negative coefficient in panel 2). Intriguingly, respondents perceive that private citizens can advance the interests of disadvantaged communities about as well as disadvantaged community advocates can themselves.
According to Figure 4, respondents see little difference in perceived responsiveness to environmental interests between boards that include neighborhood representatives and private citizens (statistically insignificant at .05 level). But respondents believe that regional governance with private citizens is more responsive than governance that includes environmental advocates, disadvantaged community advocates or business associations, as indicated by the negative coefficients for the latter three variables. It is somewhat surprising that respondents believe private citizens will be better proponents of environmental interests than environmental advocates themselves, an observation we will return to when discussing public versus organized interests.

**Figure 4: Perceived Responsiveness to Different Societal Interests by CG Composition**

Note: OLS regression coefficients and 95% confidence intervals are shown. The baseline category is CG with private citizens. Positive coefficients indicate higher
level of perceived responsiveness. In panel 2, for example, business groups are believed to be the worst advocates for disadvantaged communities’ (DAC) interests. The difference between CG with neighborhood associations and the baseline is statistically insignificant, indicating CG with neighborhood associations are perceived to be as responsiveness as CG with private citizens.

Representing Regional versus Local Interests

Regional governance inherently creates a tension between local autonomy and region-wide cooperation. What might make sense for the region as a whole will all too often involve concessions and compromise by local communities in terms of how they share resources (e.g., federal funding for highways), or exercise autonomy over land use and economic growth decisions (e.g., curbing commercial or residential expansion to sustainable levels). Likewise, looking out for local interests may lead decision-making bodies to short-change shared regional concerns. How the public perceives these tradeoffs may have important implications for their overall support for collaborative governance.

To investigate these perceptions, respondents were asked to contrast the responsiveness of the various board composition options in term of serving regional vs. local interests, respectively. Figure 5 reports the regression coefficients from the difference-in-difference estimates. As in figure 4, the panels show differences between TG and CG under each CG board composition, with CG involving private citizens as the baseline. Figure 5 shows that neighborhood representatives are seen to be as good as private citizens in balancing regional and parochial interests. While governance with private citizens is seen as slightly better with respect to regional
interests, they are also seen as more disposed than traditional government to look out for local interests (as are neighborhood associations). This suggests that respondents are distinguishing between interest advocacy and fair responsiveness, and believe that not being affiliated with an organization frees the citizen member to do what they think is the best rather than what is expected of them by an organization they belong to.

![Graph](image)

**Figure 5: Perceived Responsiveness to Local vs. Regional Interests by Type of Member**

Note: OLS regression coefficients and 95% confidence intervals are shown. The baseline category is CG with private citizens. Positive coefficients indicate higher level of perceived responsiveness. Among different forms of CG, CG with private citizens is seen as the best form of representation for local and regional interests.

The same preference for private citizens over representatives of organization is manifested in other aspects of representation as well. When asked whether the inclusion of various kinds of stakeholders makes it more or less likely that the
collaborative body would experience gridlock as opposed to enact change if a decision they make proves to be unpopular, once again respondents appear to believe that involvement of private citizens as opposed to members representing organizations would be more likely to work matters out rather than deadlock. These results are reported in Figure 6.

In short what we learn from these comparisons is that while in theory it might seem like including various members of nongovernmental groups should result in more face-to-face bargaining and compromise, the respondents in our survey seem to believe the opposite, that these representatives would primarily advocate for their own organizations and create a drag on any efforts to compromise. They would do no better, and in some instances worse, than elected officials in achieving a regional perspective. Private citizens are viewed as having less of a rigid stake in outcomes and are more trusted to balance between local and regional interests.

That said, there is some evidence in our data that citizens would trust private citizens even more if they could be held electorally accountable. In our survey, we also investigated whether respondents have preferences over the methods used to select private citizens to a regional board. We asked: “There are many ways to select private citizens into the regional board. Which of the following methods do you prefer?” The plurality (42%) chose direct election, 26% chose selection by lottery of citizens who reside in the region, 21% chose selection by lottery from a qualified pool, and only 12% preferred appointments by mayors or city councils.
Figure 6: Perceived Likelihood to Change Decision and Gridlock by CG Composition

Note: OLS regression coefficients and 95% confidence intervals are shown. The baseline category is CG with private citizens. Positive coefficients indicate higher level of perceived responsiveness. In panel 1, among different forms of CG, CG with private citizens is seen as the most likely to change unpopular decisions. However, in panel 2, nearly all forms of CG are seen as unlikely to break gridlocks.

Preferences over Authority and Power

There is of course a difference between consulting with elected officials from other local jurisdictions and nongovernmental actors, versus giving them the power to levy taxes or legislate. In general, the literature suggests that the public is wary of both, and want to retain the ability to punish or remove officials if/when they make decisions that voters oppose (Healy and Malhotra 2010; Eggers 2014; Gasper and Reeves 2011; Boyne et al. 2009). So, does support for collaborative governance extend from influence to power or do voters draw the line at some point on that continuum? Are they willing to delegate significant legislative and taxing authority
to a collaborative governance entity? We asked respondents about two types of authority, namely, the authority to override local land use decisions and to raise local taxes.

On the first question, respondents showed high levels of uncertainty. Among the 2,000 respondents in the survey, only 15% reported that they supported extending the ability to override local land use decisions to the authority. 47% said they opposed granting land use authority, while another 38% said “don’t know.” On the second question, respondents were overwhelmingly negative. Only 12% supported giving the regional authority the ability to raise local taxes while 69% opposed and 18% said “don’t know.” Figure 7 shows how consistent responses are across different ways of composing the CG body.

Moving beyond these descriptive statistics, we tested for differences in CG composition in two ways. First, excluding the “don’t know” cases, we recoded responses to the support for extending authority variables to binary (1=yes; 0=no) and ran logistic regressions. Second, we incorporated the “don’t knows” into the multinominal logit. In sum, regardless of model specification, despite the strong desire for input from individual citizens on these matters (as shown in the analyses reported above), respondents were reluctant to delegate taxing and regulatory authority to a body containing any of the additional stakeholder groups. We interpret these results as indicating that citizens prefer the ability to hold decision-makers accountable at the ballot box if they have to power to tax or dictate land
uses, and adding a new regional board with unelected members apparently raises concerns.

Figure 7: Reaction to Delegating Authority to the Board to Override Local Land Use and to Raise Taxation.

Note: Graphs show the proportion of respondents who supported delegating authority by forms of CG. While CG with private citizens is often perceived to be more responsive, respondents remain reluctant to delegate authority to CG.

Preferences for Private Citizen Attributes

In our previous set of experiments, we established that private citizens are the most preferred CG members. However, these experiments do not reveal much about whether or not those private citizens should have specific qualifications. To
further probe the preferred qualifications of private citizens, we devised a conjoint experiment in our second survey to measure the relative impact of various individual factors such as gender, race, education, previous public experience, partisanship, education, group membership and connection to campaign donors on support for their inclusion on a board.

Respondents in second survey were asked to choose between two hypothetical candidates running for a board member position. This question was repeated three times for each respondent to ensure we have sufficient power to estimate all parameters. That is, each respondent was given three pairs of candidates. Each time they were asked to choose which one of the two candidates they preferred to be on the board based on the candidates’ attributes. Each candidate was said to have a value on each of the eight attributes, with values randomly assigned, as shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male/Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>White/Black/Hispanic/Asian/Native American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Graduate degree in Civil Engineering/ MBA/ JD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Public Service Experience</td>
<td>10 years/5 years/None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisanship</td>
<td>Republican/Democrat/Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Home-maker/ Owner of a small business/ Executive of a big corporation/ Law enforcement officer/ Teacher/ Environmental advocate/ Lawyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Membership</td>
<td>Member of the Sierra Club/ Member of the Regional Chamber of Commerce/ Member of the American Public Transportation Association/ Member of the AFL-CIO/ Member of a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1. Attributes and Randomized Values in Conjoint Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campaign Funding</th>
<th>disadvantaged neighborhood association/ Non affiliated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-funded</td>
<td>Campaign self-funded by the candidate/ Receives public campaign funding/ Receives campaign funding from a political party/ Receives campaign funding from lobbyists</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of the conjoint experiment are reported in Figure 8. The results show the utility of each factor in contributing to the respondent reporting a preference for a citizen representative. The full results are reported in the Online Appendix Table A1.

The graphs in the top row of Figure 8 indicate that respondents are indifferent between females and males, and between candidates of different racial/ethnic backgrounds. The graphs in the second row reveal the effects of education and previous public experience. Here we observe strong effects of technical knowledge and experience. Respondents are more favorable towards candidates with engineering degrees and are less favorable toward candidates with graduate business and law degrees. They also prefer candidates with public service experience. Among these qualities, having no previous public service experience is seen as the biggest disadvantage; having 10-years of service is seen as the biggest asset.

When it comes to occupation and group membership, we observe in row three an unusual dichotomy. Holding high-prestige jobs like lawyer or executive of a
big corporation both reduce the probability of being the favored candidate; so, however, does being a home-maker. In terms of group membership, we observe a similar dichotomy as with occupation. Being a member of an organization with a clear interest - in this case, especially an environmental (i.e. Sierra Club) or labor interest (i.e. AFL-CIO) - reduces the likelihood of being supported, but so does having no affiliation at all. By contrast, membership in the American Public Transportation Association - which implies technical knowledge of transportation issues - increases support.

In row 4, we see skepticism against partisans, in particular against Democrats. The dislike for political connection is also revealed in responses regarding campaign funding. Receiving campaign funding from lobbyists or a political party are seen as major liabilities. While Independents are much preferred to Democrats, party identification on average does not occupy a central role in evaluating the favorability of representatives. Descriptive representation based on race and gender is considered the least important in determining preferences for representation in collaborative governance.
Figure 8: Results of Conjoint Experiment

Note: OLS regression coefficients are shown, indicating the relative importance of each factor. Overall, not having any public service experience and receiving
Campaign funding from interest groups or political parties are seen as the worst qualities.

Discussion and Conclusions

As communities across the U.S. grapple with the pressing public policy challenges of our time - climate change, aging infrastructure, social inequality, environmental degradation, and so many others - they will need big solutions that mobilize vast resources and that inevitably involve multiple governmental actors and a wide array of diverse stakeholders. How communities address these challenges has important implications for our democracy. Citizens will judge these efforts not just in terms of the solutions they produce but by the very processes themselves. And as we witness the political dysfunction that comes with dramatically declining confidence, trust and views of legitimacy of our political institutions, decision-makers will need to approach these challenges with an eye towards securing the public's support.

Collaborative governance is seen by many academics and practitioners as a way to increase the public's assessment of public decision-making - and to achieve numerous positive benefits such as avoiding litigation and buying off political opposition, and others. But as our survey experiments indicate, not all CG efforts are created equally. We find that respondents consistently prefer governance to government if the CG effort includes private citizens, but they perceive representatives from organized groups with more suspicion: those with group affiliations are viewed as more likely to favor their own interests and to be opposed
in predictable ways to the interests of other stakeholder interests (e.g., business versus environmental groups). It also appears that even within a more inclusive decision-making body such as CG, the public still wants some measure of control and accountability over powers to tax or over-ride local powers. And as we strengthen the powers of the collaborative governance body in our survey experiments from distributing project money and overseeing the implementation of programs to the authority to tax and make land use decisions, the advantages our respondents saw to collaborative governance over traditional government faded.

Finally, when we probe respondents about their views on what kinds of voices they seek to represent them in CG decision-making, we see that they value experience and educational background as opposed to political and organization connections. As policy-makers seek to design approaches to our challenging regional public policy problems, we encourage them to bear in mind these perceived limitations of CG.
References


Cain, Bruce E. *Democracy more or less*. Cambridge University Press, 2015.


Online Appendix

Figure A1: Average Importance of Eight Factors in Conjoint Experiment
Table A1: Results from Conjoint Experiment Showing the Relative Importance of Traits and Individual Qualities

|                          | Estimate | Clusted Std. Error | t value | Pr(>|t|) |
|--------------------------|----------|--------------------|---------|----------|
| Intercept                | 0.499    | 0.001              | 336.958 | 0.000    |
| Female                   | -0.009   | 0.006              | -1.465  | 0.143    |
| White                    | 0.010    | 0.013              | 0.807   | 0.420    |
| Black                    | 0.012    | 0.013              | 0.932   | 0.351    |
| Hispanic                 | -0.011   | 0.013              | -0.884  | 0.377    |
| Asian American           | -0.002   | 0.013              | -0.124  | 0.901    |
| Grad degree in civil engineering | 0.047 | 0.009              | 5.020   | 0.000    |
| Business degree          | -0.022   | 0.009              | -2.503  | 0.012    |
| 10 years                 | 0.058    | 0.009              | 6.161   | 0.000    |
| 5 years                  | 0.008    | 0.009              | 0.836   | 0.403    |
| Home-maker               | -0.023   | 0.016              | -1.501  | 0.133    |
| Owner of small business  | 0.037    | 0.015              | 2.419   | 0.016    |
| Executive of a big corporation | -0.062 | 0.016              | -3.810  | 0.000    |
| Law enforcement officer  | 0.032    | 0.015              | 2.052   | 0.040    |
| Teacher                  | 0.030    | 0.015              | 1.996   | 0.046    |
| Environmental advocate   | 0.032    | 0.015              | 2.069   | 0.039    |
| Member of the Sierra Club| -0.032   | 0.014              | -2.306  | 0.021    |
| Member of the regional Chamber of Commerce | 0.006 | 0.014              | 0.443   | 0.658    |
| Member of American Public Transportation Association | 0.055 | 0.015              | 3.798   | 0.000    |
| Member of AFL-CIO        | -0.013   | 0.015              | -0.887  | 0.375    |
| Member of a disadvantaged neighborhood association | 0.009 | 0.014              | 0.631   | 0.528    |
| Campaign self-funded by candidate | 0.087 | 0.011              | 7.573   | 0.000    |
| Receives public campaign funding | 0.058 | 0.011              | 5.069   | 0.000    |
| Receives campaign funding from a political party | -0.066 | 0.011              | -5.982  | 0.000    |
| Democrat                 | -0.023   | 0.010              | -2.350  | 0.019    |
| Republican               | -0.010   | 0.010              | -1.061  | 0.289    |

Note: Results from our conjoint experiment were presented. Each respondent chose between a pair of hypothetical candidates in three randomly assigned scenarios. The relative importance of items was estimated with ordinary least squares with correction for clustered errors.