

Public Perceptions of Collaborative Governance in Transportation Policy

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Abstract

Despite the widespread use and extensive studies of collaborative governance in the United States, we still know too little about how the public at large evaluates the formal inclusion of private stakeholders in collaborative decision making. We examine this question by conducting a series of survey experiments about the function, composition, and power of a proposed regional transportation board. The survey results reveal that while our respondents generally favored *collaborative governance* (i.e., public officials with private stakeholders) over *collaborative government* (i.e., public officials only), it was largely due to the inclusion of private citizens, not the stakeholder group representatives. This finding is consistent with a populist framework that presumes that interest group influences tend to impede or distort the will of the electoral majority and that favors functionally delimited mandates and limited power for non-elected decision-making bodies. This has important implications for the design and public acceptance of future collaborative government arrangements.

Keywords

collaborative governance, transportation management, regionalism, representation, institutional design, citizen participation in governments

U.S. local governments increasingly find themselves on the front lines of public policy challenges that extend beyond their geographic boundaries and organizational capacities.¹ Problems such as traffic congestion, poor air quality, rising sea levels, wildfires, drought and floods, and public health emergencies require actions and policies that traverse both traditional jurisdictional lines and the domains of diverse private-sector stakeholders. In recent years, local governments have increasingly turned to *collaborative regional governance* as a means for formally including stakeholder groups and members of the public in governmental decision making around these challenging regional issues.² As compared with *collaborative regional government* (CGovt) in which public officials from different jurisdictions forge mutual agreements on behalf of their separate communities, *collaborative governance* (CGovn) 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).

CGovn has been deployed in various U.S. policy domains, including natural resource management (e.g., watersheds and forestry), infrastructure permitting (e.g., water systems and public transit), and land-use planning processes (Emerson and Gerlak 2014; Hardy and Koontz 2010; Lubell, Henry, and McCoy 2010; Luyet et al. 2012;

Margerum and Robinson 2015; Newig and Fritsch 2009). As a consequence, there are now more opportunities for citizens and groups not just to monitor and give input to elected bodies such as city councils and county boards but also to serve on 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 government by elected officials to more inclusive governance 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 (Donahue and Zeckhauser 2012; Freeman 1997; Rogers and Weber 2010; Scott and Thomas 2017).

The expansion of policy making across both jurisdictional boundaries and the public–private divide raises central questions of accountability, consent, and legitimacy.

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Public consent and accountability are attenuated when regional or other polycentric decisions are made in conjunction with public officials who are only directly accountable to their own jurisdiction's constituents (Skelcher 2005). Adding unelected citizens to a regional board then further attenuates direct accountability.³ When collaborative regional governance arrangements possess wide discretion and significant powers, they run the risk of engendering a "democratic deficit"—a perception that unelected, unaccountable experts and stakeholder group representatives are imposing unpopular policies without adequate public consultation (Norris 2011). This can lead to resentment and obstruction from local residents.

Despite the widespread use and study of collaborative governance in the United States, most of the scholarship is about the dynamics and effectiveness of them, not how the general public assesses them. This is particularly important in the United States where suspicion about the power of factions, groups, and corporations is so deeply embedded in its political culture and history. Hence, we ask in the context of collaboration over transportation issues: do U.S. citizens prefer collaborative regional governance to collaborative regional government? Do their perceptions about them vary with the board function and powers? Do citizens trust the motives and input of organized groups as much as individual citizens? How should public members be chosen?

We examine these questions by conducting a series of survey experiments comparing respondent perceptions of collaborative government versus collaborative governance, varying the types of stakeholders that could potentially serve on an appointed collaborative body. As we are interested in cross-jurisdictional problems, we restrict our comparison to collaborative regional government versus collaborative regional governance, and specifically on transportation policy making for several reasons. Transportation is a highly salient policy area that accounts for billions of dollars of local investment of public dollars each year, directly affecting personal quality of life as well as the vibrancy of local communities. Second, collaborative governance is widely used in formulating and administering transportation policy. Local traffic and roads in the United States 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 region-wide choices, such as efforts to increase mass transit options, require coordination among numerous localities. This interconnectedness and complexity of transportation systems argues for approaches to public policy making that include diverse perspectives.

We develop and test hypotheses about public perceptions of collaborative governance in transportation policy using data from an online public opinion survey. 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 CGovn either to distribute resources or to regulate a new technology, the *stakeholder composition* of the hypothetical board, and the *powers* it has. We test whether CGovn is perceived to provide higher levels of representation to various groups, to strike a better balance between regional versus local interests, to be responsive to public demands, and to be able to resolve gridlock. In addition, we test whether people are more willing to delegate authority to CGovn than CGovt.

These experiments revealed that while the respondents generally favored collaborative governance over collaborative government on several dimensions, they viewed the proposed regional board more through a liberal electoral lens than a deliberative or pluralist framework. They believed that *private citizen* members would be more responsive to regional concerns while businesses and other group members were more likely to represent their specific group interests. This is consistent with studies that emphasize the populist faith that Americans have in individual citizens and their skepticism about interest groups when it comes to institutional design and representation (Achen and Bartels 2017; Cain 2015; Pildes 2014). The results also underscore the importance of functionally delimited mandates and limited power in maintaining the legitimacy of U.S. collaborative governance arrangements.

Collaborative Governance

Collaborative arrangements have many manifestations and labels, including adaptive governance (Chaffin, Gosnell, and Cosens 2014), regional governance (Griffith 2005; Hamilton 2002), inter-local collaboration (Lee and Hannah-Spurlock 2015; Zeemering 2012), network governance (Lester and Reckhow 2013), and collaborative partnerships (Margerum and Robinson 2015). Ansell and Gash (2008, 544) 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." Stakeholders in collaborative governance can be either individual citizens or organized groups. Collaborative arrangements can be highly institutionalized, such as in a formal joint power authority (JPA) or they can be organized less formally through memorandums of understanding (MOUs) or ad hoc agreements. Collaborative arrangements, regional or otherwise, are not usually static and often evolve over time (Blair and Janousek 2013; Hui, Ulibarri, and Cain 2018).

Regardless of the terminology or exact structure, cross-jurisdictional collaboration 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). They can advance public-sector innovation (Damanpour and Schneider 2008). They also serve the purposes of convening multiple parties, mediating tensions and conflicts, and overseeing the implementation of decisions and agreements (Emerson and Gerlak 2014; Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh 2012). Above all, they are contemporary extensions of long-standing efforts to incentivize local officials to look beyond from their parochial jurisdictional interests to broader, collective good considerations by means of institutional design (Lineberry and Fowler 1967).

Researchers have identified numerous “toolkits” that can enhance the quality and fairness of collaborative decision-making processes (Bingham, Nabatchi, and O’Leary 2005; Purdy 2012; Reed 2008; Scott and Thomas 2017; Taylor and de Loe 2012). One key tool is transparency (i.e., the right to documents and information); another is inclusiveness and consensus-oriented decision making (Ansell and Gash 2008; Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh 2012). By identifying traditionally underrepresented stakeholders and involving them early in the process, CGovn can produce outcomes that are viewed as fairer and more inclusive (Johnston et al. 2010; Newman et al. 2004) and lifting the overall level of community civic engagement (Page 2010).

There are of course concerns about collaborative governance. Koontz and Thomas (2006) warn that the policy outcome benefits of CGovn are mixed. It remains unclear whether it improves actual environmental or social outcomes compared with more traditional planning and policy-making processes. Case studies of past CGovn efforts find that despite collaborative arrangements, agencies can remain compartmentalized and institutionally insular (Bollens 1997; Lubell and Lippert 2011). Localism and parochialism can impede it from achieving broader regional goals (Griffith 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 (Bartels 2016; Macedo et al. 2005; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995).

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 and choose

agencies that have a sympathetic orientation or with whom they have had a positive working relationship in the past (Gerber, Henry, and Lubell 2013). Decisions from group deliberation often reinforce preexisting power imbalances and structural hierarchies (Bollens 1997; Gerber, Henry, and Lubell 2013).

Finally, there is the critical question of accountability. Freedom of Information Act (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 2015; Cain, Egan, and Fabbrini 2003). 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 and raise questions about the role of elected officials in regional meta-governance (Sørensen 2006). 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 (Börzel and Panke 2007; Sørensen and Torfing 2007).

In short, while collaborative governance is frequently touted as a means of enhancing public acceptance of decision making through stakeholder participation in policy making, the evidence for this claim is sorely lacking. 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.

Hypotheses

A person’s expectations and evaluations concerning any democratic decision-making process will either consciously or subconsciously reflect their more general views about politics and democratic institutions. Some advocates for collaborative framework adhere to a deliberation perspective that emphasizes the importance of inclusive participation, rational dialogue, or interest group bargaining to achieve reasonable outcomes while others adopt a more populist stance that is suspicious of organized groups and places greater confidence in the

individual citizen and the electorate (Esmark 2007). This divergence in political perspectives can lead to different implicit assumptions about what makes collaborative regional governance seem both effective and responsive (Thomson and Perry 2006).

In the United States in particular, the prevalent political framework is a liberal democratic one that leans heavily on elections and equal individual voice for conferring consent, legitimacy, and accountability. Policies are considered legitimate if they are authorized by direct vote of the people (e.g., the popular initiative) or enacted by representatives whose tenure in office is determined by the vote of the people. The threat of removal by the voters helps to ensure responsiveness. Much of the political reform favored by this perspective seeks to limit the influence of interest groups and business in either political campaigns or in legislative policy making or agency rule making. Hence, those who adopt this perspective will likely be more suspicious of electorally unaccountable stakeholder groups on regional boards, including non-profit groups seeking funding streams (Gazley and Brudney 2007), and will be more concerned about various forms of elite collusion such as iron triangles and corporatism (Sørensen and Torfing 2007, 233–46). They will also place more faith in individual citizens, prefer to limit the functions of the board more strictly, and favor selection by election rather than appointment.

At the other end of the political theory spectrum, deliberation scholars and pluralists will value the input and participation of group representatives more highly. They would be more inclined to believe that group representatives are capable of negotiating and compromising among themselves. The deliberation scholar believes that the final outcome should reflect reason and general moral considerations. The pluralist assumes that the motives are likely to be a mix of self and other regarding concerns. Respondents from the pluralist and deliberation perspectives would favor including representatives from stakeholder groups and private individuals as board members, would more likely assume that the board could successfully avoid deadlock, would be more willing to delegate power and responsibility to the CGovn entity, and would accept appointment rather than election as an acceptable selection method.

To summarize, if light of the usual assumptions that American voters make about representatives and interest group politics, we predict the following:

If respondents view regional collaboration through a populist rather than a deliberation or pluralist lens, then:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): They will anticipate better outcomes when individual citizen members are added to a proposed regional board as compared to one with public officials only.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): They will anticipate that stakeholder group board members will primarily look out for their own interests and oppose groups they perceive as their adversaries.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): They will anticipate that a board with individual citizens will be more responsive to public objections and less likely to gridlock as compared to one with public officials only.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): They should prefer election to other modes of selecting the private members of the regional board as the best means of ensuring accountability to the people.

Hypothesis 5 (H5): They will favor restricting the powers and authority of regional collaboration to the implementation and administration of specific technical areas as opposed to general policy formulation or taxation powers.

Research Design and Data

One research strategy for better understanding the dynamics of collaboration is to use a survey experiment (Matkin and Frederickson 2009). In the fall of 2018, we conducted a nationally representative online public opinion survey through a commercial vendor, YouGov. Previous study done by the Pew Foundation that benchmarked different online polling companies' performance finds that YouGov consistently outperformed other companies on a variety of metrics.⁴ A central theme of the survey was transportation governance and the sample consisted of two thousand respondents. The survey has been reweighted to match a sampling frame on gender, age, race, and education to mimic the U.S. adult population.⁵ The survey 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 with collaborative 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. Comparison of the two vignettes allows us to ensure that the regional board's specific administrative function (funding/distribution vs. regulation) does not affect respondents' preferences for CGovn versus CGovt. Each respondent read their assigned vignette on their screen (as shown in the appendix).

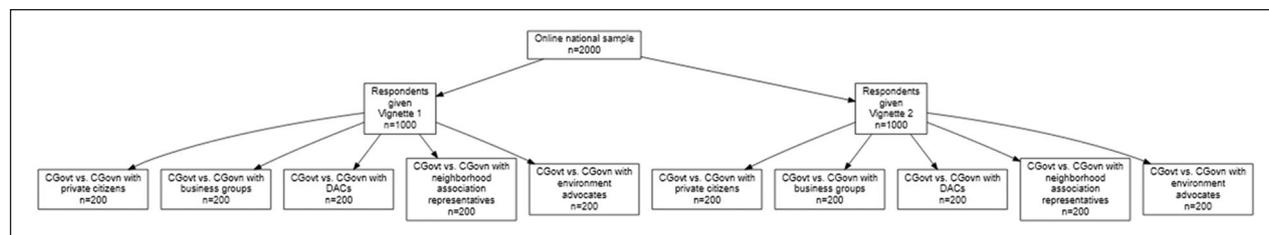


Figure 1. Survey experiment design.

DACs = disadvantaged communities. CGovt = Collaborative Government; CGovn = Collaborative Governance.

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

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 (“collaborative government” option) and option B (“collaborative governance” option) to each of the following types of interests. Question order was randomized so as to minimize order effects. These correspond to H1 and H2.

- How responsive do you believe each board would be to environmental issues?
- How responsive do you believe each board would be to business interests?
- How responsive do you believe each board would be to disadvantaged communities (DACs)?

- How responsive do you believe each board would be to broader regional interests?
- How responsive do you believe each board would be to local interests in your community?

To test H3, respondents were then asked to rate each option according to their overall responsiveness to public opinion and their ability to avoid gridlock:

- If people like you disagreed with a decision made by the board, how likely do you believe the board would change that decision?
- How often do you believe the board will find itself gridlocked?

Method of Selecting Private Individual Board Members

According to H4, if voters view this proposed board with a populist perspective, they should prefer election and lottery to appointment, as elections put control in the hands of the electorate and lottery severs the control of interest groups by random selection. We therefore asked the following:

- There are many ways to select private citizens into the regional board. Which of the following methods do you prefer?

Respondents were offered choices between electing, appointing, and lottery choice.

Expansion of Authority to More General Areas of Local Authority

Finally, to measure respondents’ willingness to expand the authority to the CGovn board (H5), we asked two questions:

- Should the board be given authority to supersede local land use and planning decisions? (Response options: yes, no, don’t know)

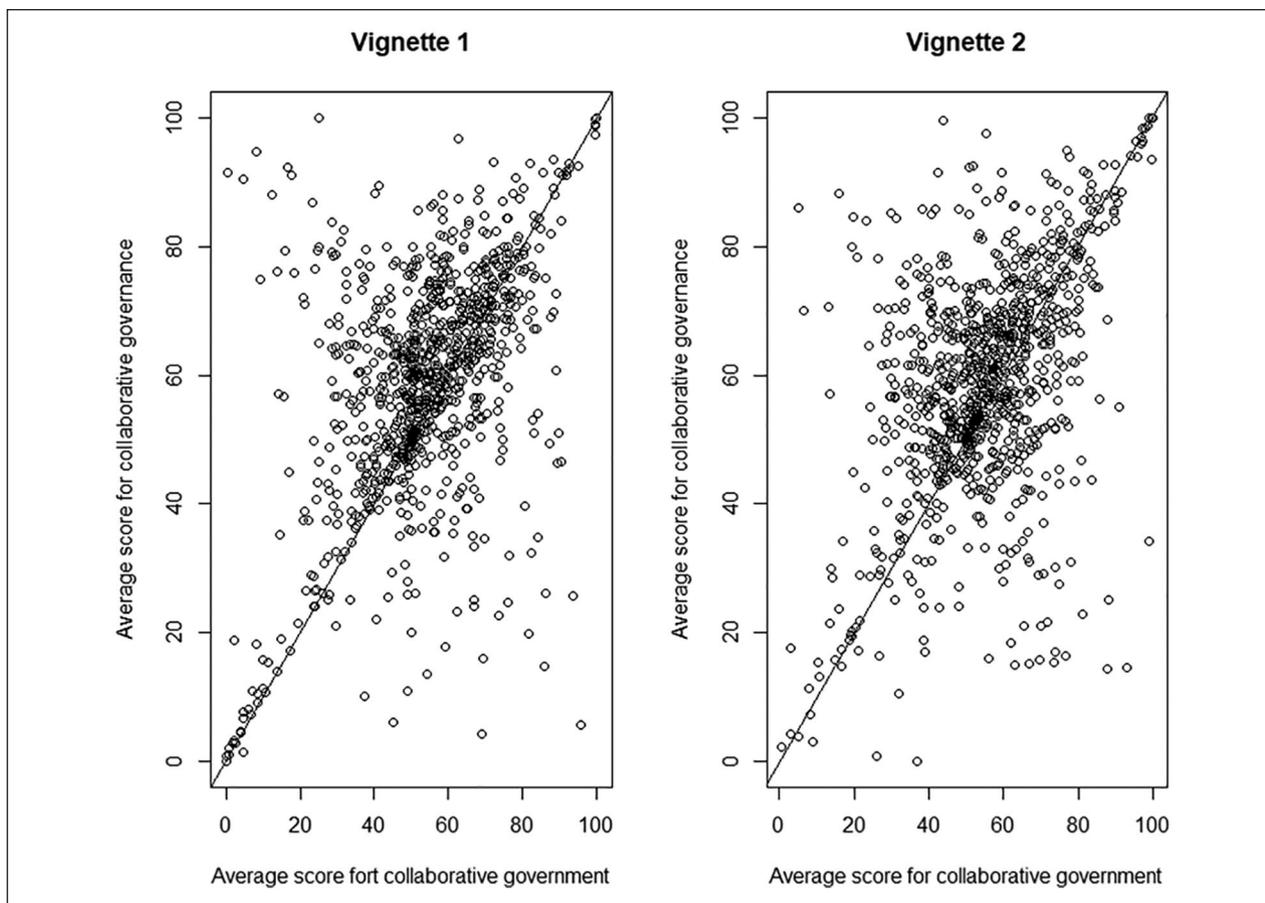


Figure 2. Average scores for CGovt and CGovn by functional area.

Points above the forty-five-degree line indicate higher average scores for CGovn. CGovt = Collaborative Government; CGovn = Collaborative Governance.

- Should the board be given authority to raise local taxes? (Response options: yes, no, don't know)

Results

Functional Area

We begin by ensuring that respondent evaluations of the collaborative regional government (CGovt) versus collaborative regional governance (CGovn) options do not vary across the two administrative functional areas captured in the vignettes. For each survey respondent, we first compute their average score across the seven responsiveness items for option A (CGovt) and separately for option B (CGovn). In Figure 2, we plot each respondent's average score for the collaborative regional government option (CGovt) on the x -axis and her or his average score for the collaborative regional governance option (CGovn) on the y -axis. The figure on the left reports the scores for respondents who received vignette 1 (resource allocation), while the figure on the right is for vignette 2 (regulation) respondents.

Each dot represents the relative preference between CGovt and CGovn. If a dot falls on the forty-five-degree line, it suggests that the respondent is indifferent between the two arrangements. Dots above the forty-five-degree line indicate a preference for CGovn over CGovt. Visual inspection reveals that there are more dots above the diagonal line in both vignettes, and the distributions are similar in both instances as well. We also show in later regression analyses that responses from the two vignettes across the full range of responsiveness questions are statistically indistinguishable at the .05 level. As responses to the two vignettes are statistically indistinguishable, we combine responses from the two subsamples in subsequent analyses, but we include a term in the equations that will pick up any differences if they appear.

Preferred Board Composition

Next, we investigate whether the public views CGovn differently depending on the stakeholder composition. We begin by establishing a baseline that compares the average scores across all respondents for option A

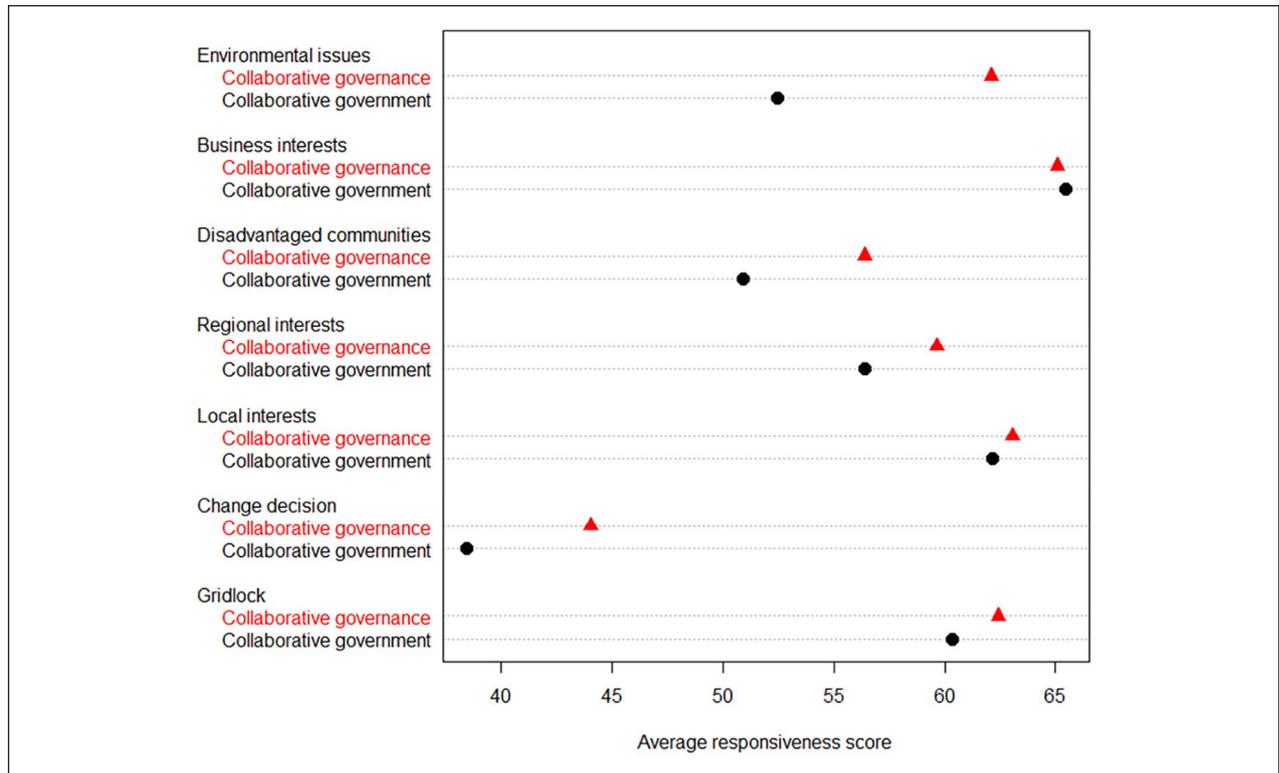


Figure 3. Average responsiveness scores for CGovt versus CGovn.

Scores range from 0 to 100 (most responsive). CGovn is seen as more responsive form of representation than CGovt in all domains. CGovt = Collaborative Government; CGovn = Collaborative Governance.

(CGovt) and option B (CGovn) on the seven survey questions that are used to test H1 through H3 without differentiating the hypothetical board composition. The red triangles in Figure 3 represent the average scores for CGovn, and black dots represent the average scores for CGovt. On all seven dimensions, CGovn is perceived to be more responsive, on average, with the largest gaps concerning environmental interest representation and the capacity to change an unpopular decision.

To what extent does the inclusion of any particular non-governmental member affect views of CGovn responsiveness? Our experiments allow us to compare CGovt with a CGovn board that includes a particular non-governmental stakeholder. For each paired comparison, we can compare the mean of that particular CGovn option (μ_{CGovn}) with the mean of the CGovt option (μ_{CGovt}). A *positive* difference, that is, ($\mu_{CGovn} > \mu_{CGovt}$), would indicate that a particular CGovn option is perceived to be *more* responsive than the CGovt option, while a *negative* difference would indicate the CGovn option is perceived to be less responsive than the CGovt option.

To test whether perceived responsiveness varies across our five treatment groups, we compute the difference-in-difference estimates. If, for example, neighborhood associations are seen as good representatives as private citizens, we would expect the difference to be statistically

insignificant. A *positive* difference would mean CGovn with neighborhood associations would be a better choice than one with private citizens. A negative difference would mean CGovn with private citizens is seen as the better option.

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 CGovt and each CGovn configuration, with CGovn involving private citizens as the baseline (i.e., intercept). In other words, this framework allows us to use the intercept to test H2, that is, whether CGovn with private citizens is seen by the public as more or less responsive to various groups as compared with CGovn with each of the various stakeholder groups.

The positive significant coefficients on the intercepts in each panel of Figure 4 indicate that CGovn with private citizens is viewed consistently as more responsive to all three types of interests (business, DACs, and environmental, respectively) than collaborations that only include public officials. This is clear evidence of the American populist faith in the citizens. Moreover, comparing the intercept magnitudes in the three panels, a hypothetical board with private citizens is perceived as most responsive to environmental interests (panel 3), and apparently

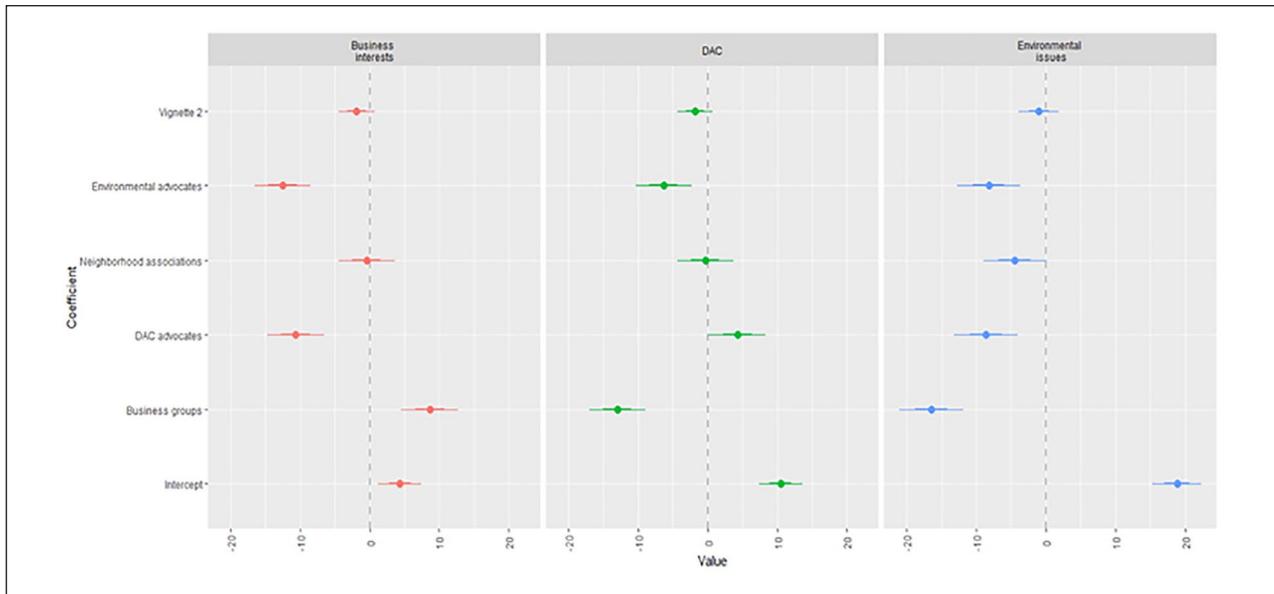


Figure 4. Perceived responsiveness to different societal interests by Collaborative Governance (CGovN) composition.

OLS regression coefficients and 95% confidence intervals are shown. The baseline category is CGovN 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 DACs' interests. The difference between CGovN with neighborhood associations and the baseline is statistically insignificant in each panel, indicating CGovN with neighborhood associations are perceived to be about equally responsive to all three interests as CGovN with private citizens. OLS = ordinary least squares; DAC = disadvantaged community.

more responsive than CGovN with environmentalists added to the proposed board (e.g., the negative sign on environmental advocates). In the case of responsiveness to DACs, the coefficient on DAC advocates is marginally insignificant while the intercept is clearly significant and positive. It is possible that these findings are influenced by using the term "advocates" for both DAC and environmental representatives.

Consistent with H3, respondents think business group members will be most responsive to their own interests (as indicated by the positive coefficient in panel 1) and the least responsive of all stakeholders to DACs and environmental interests (e.g., largest negative coefficients in panels 2 and 3). At the same time, environmental and DAC advocates are perceived as the least responsive to business interests, which is also consistent with H3.

CGovN bodies with regional jurisdiction must necessarily grapple with tensions 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 trade-offs

may have important implications for their overall support for collaborative regional governance.

To investigate these perceptions, respondents were asked to contrast the responsiveness of the various board composition options in terms of serving regional and local interests, respectively. Figure 5 reports the regression coefficients from the difference-in-difference estimates. As in Figure 4, the panels show differences between CGovN and CGovN under different types of board composition, with the CGovN option involving private citizens only as the baseline intercept. In both panels, the intercept coefficient is positive and significant, indicating that CGovN with citizens is seen as better for advancing *both* regional and local interests. In other words, the public does not view these concepts as inherently irreconcilable and believes that private citizens can make a regional board responsive to both, perhaps as changing circumstances require. CGovN boards with environmental advocates, DAC advocates, and business group representatives are all seen as being less responsive to both regional and local interests than CGovN with private citizens. This again consistent with the populist thesis that private citizen members are more likely to do what they think is best rather than what is expected of them by an organization to which they belong.

The same preference for private citizens over representatives of organizations on CGovN boards is seen in other aspects of representation as well (H3). When we asked whether the inclusion of various kinds of stakeholders

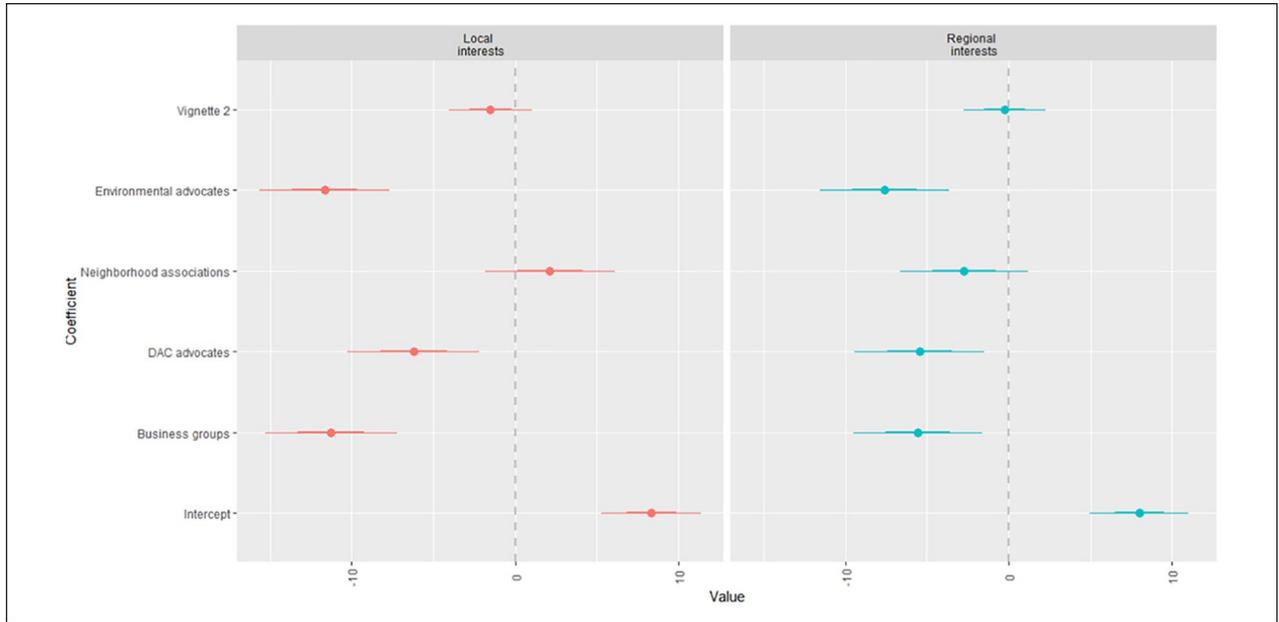


Figure 5. Perceived responsiveness to local versus regional interests by type of member. OLS regression coefficients and 95% confidence intervals are shown. The baseline category is CGovn with private citizens. Positive coefficients indicate higher level of perceived responsiveness. Among different forms of CGovn, CGovn with private citizens is seen as the best form of representation for local and regional interests. DAC = disadvantaged community; OLS = ordinary least squares. CGovn = Collaborative Governance.

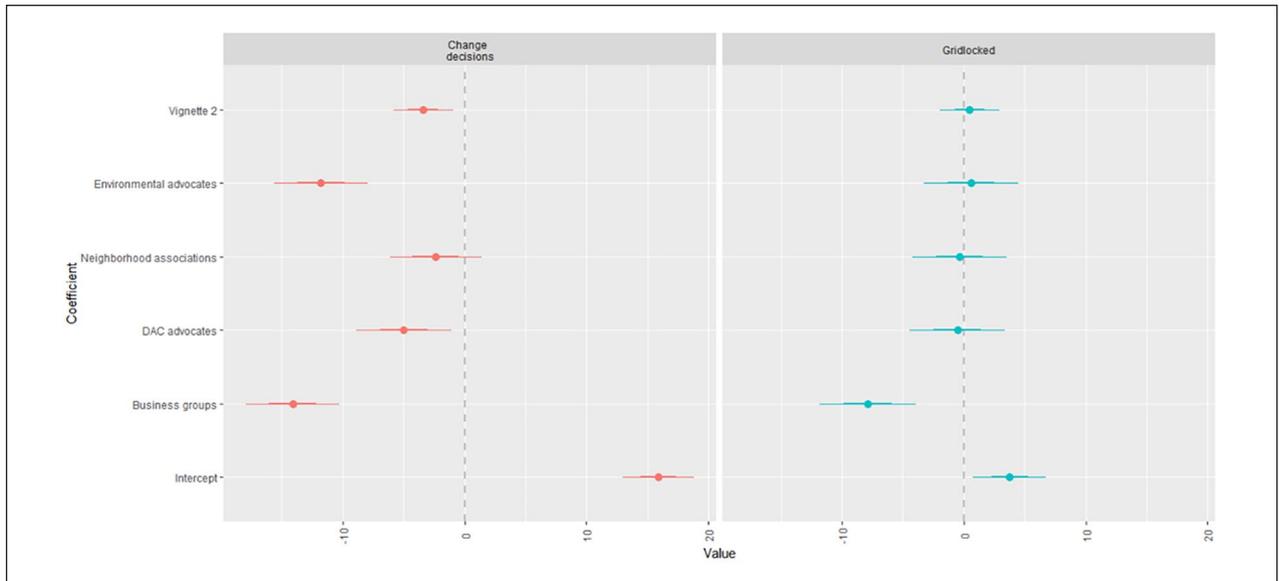


Figure 6. Perceived likelihood to change decision and gridlock by Collaborative Governance (CGovn) composition. OLS regression coefficients and 95% confidence intervals are shown. The baseline category is CGovn with private citizens. Positive coefficients indicate higher level of perceived responsiveness. In panel 1, among different forms of CGovn, CGovn with private citizens is seen as the most likely to change unpopular decisions. However, in panel 2, nearly all forms of CGovn are seen as unlikely to break gridlocks. DAC = disadvantaged community; OLS = ordinary least squares.

makes it more or less likely that the collaborative body would change a decision they made if it 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 be responsive. Similarly, CGovn with private citizens is seen as less likely to experience gridlock, although the effect is much weaker. These results are reported in Figure 6.

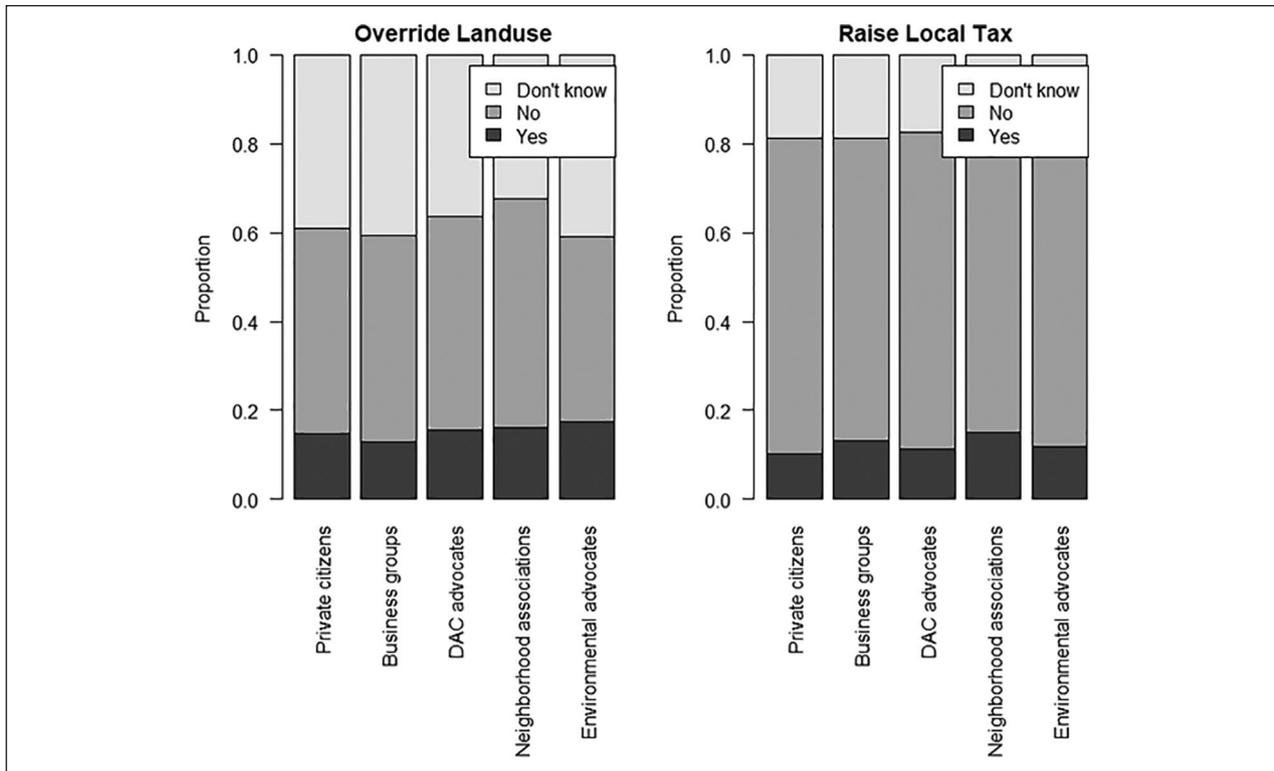


Figure 7. Reaction to delegating authority to the board to override local land use and to raise taxation.

Graphs show the proportion of respondents who supported delegating authority by forms of CGovn. While CGovn with private citizens is often perceived to be more responsive, respondents remain reluctant to delegate substantial authority. DAC = disadvantaged community. CGovn = Collaborative Governance.

In summary, we see from these comparisons in Figure 6 that contrary to deliberation assumptions about the capacity of stakeholder representatives to engage in more reasoned bargaining and compromise, the respondents in our survey seem to believe the opposite, that these group representatives would primarily advocate for their own organizations and create a drag on any efforts to compromise. Adding them into the board mix 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 (H4). In our survey, we asked whether respondents had preferences over the methods used to select private citizens to a regional board: “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 percent chose selection by lottery of citizens who reside in the region, 21 percent chose selection by lottery from a qualified pool, and only 12 percent preferred appointments by mayors or city councils.

Authority and Power

There is of course a difference between allowing non-governmental actors to consult and advise, versus giving them the power to levy taxes or legislate. In general, the literature suggests that the public is wary of both and wants to retain the ability to punish or remove officials if/when they make decisions that voters oppose (Boyne et al. 2009; Eggers 2014; Gasper and Reeves 2011; Healy and Malhotra 2010). 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. Our expectations are captured in H5: the public is less willing to give taxation and land-use authority to CGovn.

On the first question, respondents showed high levels of uncertainty. Among the two thousand respondents in the survey, only 15 percent reported that they supported extending the ability to override local land-use decisions to the authority; 47 percent said they opposed granting land-use authority, while another 38 percent said “don’t

know.” On the second question, however, respondents were overwhelmingly negative. Only 12 percent supported giving the regional authority the ability to raise local taxes, while 69 percent opposed and 18 percent said “don’t know.” Figure 7 shows how consistent responses are across different ways of composing the CGovn body.

Moving beyond these descriptive statistics, we tested for differences in CGovn 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 regression. Second, we retained the “don’t knows” and ran multinomial logit analyses. The results are reported in the online appendix. 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 the power to tax or dictate land uses. Thus adding a new regional board with unelected members apparently raises concerns.

Discussion and Conclusion

As communities across the United States 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, involving 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 arrive at but also by the legitimacy and responsiveness of the institutions that produce them. Given the political dysfunction that comes with dramatically declining confidence and trust in any political institution, decision makers will need to approach these challenges with an eye toward securing the public’s support.

While many academics and practitioners believe that more stakeholder participation can improve regional decision making, American voters seem to believe this is only true when the collaboration includes private citizens. They view the inclusion of organized groups more warily, concerned that organized group representatives are more likely to favor their own group’s interests and to oppose other stakeholders’ interests in predictable ways (e.g., business vs. environmental groups). The public still wants to retain some measure of direct control and accountability through electing members and restricting their powers to tax or override local

decisions. All of this confirms that U.S. voters will view collaborative efforts through essentially the same populist normative, liberal democratic frame that they apply to American politics generally, that is, faith in individual voters and suspicion of organized groups as they interact with politicians.

What then does this imply for regional collaborative design? Does it, for instance, mean that only unaffiliated citizens should be placed on collaborative boards? Perhaps, but not necessarily, because it is possible that Americans believe that a regional board could succeed if counterbalancing groups pursue individual agendas but are willing to compromise at least some of the time. They might even believe that it is better to confront different perspectives openly and earlier in the process than later, especially if there is the potential for costly litigation. These are topics for future research.

But more fundamentally, our findings raise a set of design questions that relate to the perceived legitimacy and responsiveness of inclusive collaborations. The role that regional board members see themselves playing will be shaped by what the public expects them to do. If the board members from stakeholder groups believe that their role is to advocate for their own group, and if the voters see their local elected officials as narrowly constrained delegates, it will promote a parochialism that will undermine genuine regional collaboration. This might imply corrective measures such as grant competitions and award formulae that more explicitly require and incentivize regionally collaborative perspectives rather than assuming that membership and meetings by themselves will get the job done.

In terms of enhancing the public’s confidence in regional governance, our findings suggest some specific steps. First, private citizen board members should either be selected by lottery from a qualified pool or elected on a non-partisan ballot to weaken their ties to organized interests and political parties. Second, regional collaborations may need to be narrowly construed to a level of policy discretion appropriate to a government administrative agency carrying out policy rather than a legislative body making it. Broader mandates related to overriding local jurisdiction prerogatives or imposing taxes, as we demonstrated, raise serious accountability questions.

Finally, we may have to accept that there is a serious trade-off between the legitimacy and effectiveness of a collaborative body, and abandon hope for the happy coincidence of these goals that some have suggested (Börzel and Panke 2007). Strict transparency requirements and open meeting laws enable organizational activists to monitor their board representatives so closely that there is often little or no room to make concessions and deals. Trust in expertise may be weaker than the felt need for more direct accountability.

Achieving regional cooperation without forfeiting the autonomy of the separate jurisdictional units is difficult. There is a built-in mismatch between the scale of a regional authority and the scale of local consent, that is, consent is fractured and attenuated while authority is consolidated across the region. The deliberation scholar's aspiration is that building trust, demonstrating effectiveness, and selecting the right stakeholders can substitute for the traditional options of either creating regional governments from scratch or subjecting policy decisions to referendums at regional scale. But the reality of public opinion may not support this hope. If the public does not buy the civic republican assumptions of collaborative regional governance, they may ultimately not buy into its policies either.

Appendix

Vignette 1 read: "As transportation issues typically spill across multiple jurisdictions, suppose the [R's STATE] state 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 read: "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."

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Notes

1. Data used for this article can be found on <https://irishui-polsci.weebly.com/research.html>
2. We used "collaborative regional governance/government" and "collaborative governance/government" interchangeably in this paper.

3. We say "attenuate" and not "eliminate" because there is still the accountability of the local official from one's community for the decision of the whole.
4. See <https://today.yougov.com/topics/finance/articles-reports/2016/05/13/pew-research-yougov>
5. The frame was constructed by stratified sampling from the full 2016 American Community Survey (ACS) one-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. For recruitment of panelists, see <https://today.yougov.com/about/about-the-yougov-panel/>. We also included a table in the online appendix to compare our YouGov sample with the general population.

Supplemental Material

Supplemental materials for this article are available with the manuscript on the *Political Research Quarterly* (PRQ) website.

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