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Citizen Attitudes Toward Transparency in Local Government

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The proper balance between governmental secrecy and open government is at the forefront of contemporary public debate. Citizens have different degrees of interest in and demand for governmental transparency. Using data from a national online survey of more than 1,800 respondents, we develop several indices to measure citizens' *demand for transparency* at the local level and explore its correlates. We also examine the correlates of citizens' reported requests for information from local government. The data and analysis suggest that there are several dimensions to the public's demand for transparency, including fiscal, safety, and government concerns, and principled openness. Age, political ideology, confidence in government leaders, frequency of contacting government, and especially the perception that there is currently not enough access to government appear to drive the public's demand for transparency, although determinants differ for each dimension. Some, although not all, of these factors also predict citizens' actual requests for government information.

Keywords: *local government; political engagement; public opinion; trust in government*

The proper balance between governmental secrecy and open government is at the forefront of contemporary public debate. Intuitively, it seems individuals differ in their level of demand for governmental transparency. Some feel strongly about the need to access government information and to learn more about what government is doing, whereas others are less interested. Moreover, people differ in terms of the kinds of government information they seek to access. Using data from a national online survey, we develop several indices to measure citizens' demand for local governmental transparency and to identify its correlates. This article is an important first step in empirically examining the public's demand for transparency at the local level.

Governmental transparency is the ability to find out what is going on inside government. Although transparency is a popular subject matter, the field of public administration is just now beginning to look at transparency policy and administration systematically and empirically. Though political columnists, activists, and journalists have written extensively on the

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subject, very little work has been done from a public administration perspective. This research builds on this emerging public administration subfield and links it with the more established literatures of citizen engagement and trust in government.

Communication and journalism scholars have begun to analyze the public's support for the press to have access to government documents (Cullier, 2006). Little previously published work has attempted to identify the determinants of individual citizens' own demand for transparency. The lack of research in this area is likely because of two factors. First, the transparency subfield has just recently gained momentum; and second, the concept of demand for transparency is difficult to measure. Thus, the major contribution of our research lies in its attempt to operationalize these concepts. Although our research is descriptive and exploratory, it adds to the literature by systematically and empirically examining the factors associated with the public's demand for transparency in local government.

Background

In his 1969 book, *Democracy in the Administrative State*, Emmette Redford states that democratic morality centers on the individual's relationship with the administrative state. He posits that individual participation, in either making decisions or controlling leaders who make decisions, is a necessity. Redford goes on to state that participation requires "access to information, based on education, open government, free communication, and open discussion" (Redford, 1969, p. 8). Access to information is a central component of governmental transparency, and governmental transparency is one tool to achieve accountability.

There are many different dimensions of accountability (Behn, 2001; Gormley & Balla, 2003; Radin, 2002; Romzek & Dubnick, 1998). Accountability can focus on agency leaders, administrative performance, and professional relationships. Janet and Robert Denhardt address the issue of accountability in their book, *The New Public Service*:

The question of accountability in the public service is a complex one, involving balancing competing norms and responsibilities within a complicated web of external controls; professional standards; citizen preferences; moral issues; public law; and ultimately, the public interest. (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2003, p. 137)

Transparency crosscuts many of these dimensions of accountability, particularly the legal and political dimensions of accountability.

At the federal level there has been a series of legislative initiatives, including the 1946 Administrative Procedure Act, the Freedom of Information Act, and the 1989 Whistleblower Protection Act, intended to achieve greater governmental transparency. Overall, Paul Light identifies these initiatives and others as one of four major "tides of reform" in his 1997 book of the same name. The "watchful eye" initiatives, as Light defines them, make government more open through disclosure and open meetings. Transparency is a fundamental value of democratic accountability that at times is manifested in administrative reforms. In fact, Frances Rourke claimed, "Nothing could be more axiomatic for a democracy than the principle of exposing the process of government to relentless public criticism and scrutiny" (Rourke, 1960, p. 691).

There is a growing body of literature focusing on freedom of information, secrecy practices, and governmental transparency policies (Alt, Lassen, & Skilling, 2002; Cooper, 1986; Feinberg, 1997; Heald, 2003; Hoffman, 1981; Piotrowski & Rosenbloom, 2002; Relyea, 1979; Roberts, 2000). Within the United States, as well as in other countries, there has been renewed attention to transparency policies in practice (Banisar, 2004; Committee on Government Reform, 2004; Roberts, 2004). Key events in this country have historically helped shape governmental transparency and secrecy policies. Pivotal events such as Watergate, the release of the Pentagon papers, and a renewed threat of domestic terrorism have been the focus of the debate (Feinberg, 2004; Moynihan, 1998; Prados & Porter, 2004).

Governmental transparency can be defined as the ability to find out what is going on inside a public sector organization through avenues such as open meetings, access to records, the proactive posting of information on Web sites, whistle-blower protections, and even illegally leaked information. Without governmental transparency and freedom of information, it is much more difficult to hold elected and appointed officials accountable for their actions. The release of information promotes democratic accountability. One of the first systematic examinations of U.S. freedom of information practices was commissioned by the American Society for Newspaper Editors and published in 1953. The preface to that book, *The People's Right to Know*, begins with an eloquent call for open government:

Public business is the public's business. The people have the right to know. Freedom of information is their just heritage. Without that the citizens of a democracy have but changed their kings.

The people are citizens, taxpayers, inhabitants, electors, newsmen, authors, research workers, teachers, students, all persons, each of us. (Cross, 1953, p. xiii)

The People's Right to Know goes on to conclude that the public has a legal right to be able to "examine and investigate" government activity.

Economist Joseph Stiglitz (1999), makes a different and perhaps more tangible argument for the release of information from public organizations. He believes that governmental information belongs to the public:

The question is, given that the public has paid for the gathering of government information, who owns the information? Is it the private province of the government official, or does it belong to the public at large? I would argue that information gathered by public officials at public expense is owned by the public—just as the chairs and buildings and other physical assets used by government belong to the public. (p. 7)

Although these and other definitions of transparency can be critiqued, the debate about governmental transparency is not purely an academic one. Elected officials on both sides of the aisle have promoted transparency and criticized governmental secrecy. The late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY) concluded his book on governmental secrecy as regulation by stating that "A case can be made, . . . that secrecy is for losers" (Moynihan, 1998, p. 227). Moynihan argued that openness was advantageous for governments.

Senator John Cornyn, a Texas Republican and strong transparency advocate, in 2005, stated at the freedom of information day conference:

I believe that we have to recognize that achieving the true consent of the governed requires something more than just holding elections. What America needs is informed consent. And informed consent is impossible without both a free, responsible press, and an open and accessible government. (Cornyn, 2005, para. 8)

Senator Cornyn's comments reflect a trend toward a renewed interest in governmental transparency policies and practice. Although this movement is clearly related to macro-level political events, it is also, at least in part, motivated by the demands and preferences of individual citizens.

It is reasonable to believe that citizens have varying motivations for, and interest in, governmental transparency. For one thing, implementation of freedom of information policies is very expensive. The U.S. federal government alone processed approximately 4 million Freedom of Information Act requests in 2004 (GAO, 2005). As a University of Chicago Law Professor, Antonin Scalia, criticized the Freedom of Information Act as "the Taj Mahal of the Doctrine of Unanticipated Consequences, the Sistine Chapel of Cost-Benefit Analysis Ignored." After reviewing the act's provisions, Scalia found:

They are foolish extravagances only because we do not have an unlimited amount of federal money to spend, an unlimited number of agency employees to assign, and an unlimited number of judges to hear and decide cases. We must, alas, set some priorities, and unless the world is mad, the usual Freedom of Information Act request should not be high on the list. (Scalia quoted in Markman, 1988)

The high cost of open government in practice is not the only critique of governmental transparency. Commonly cited and well-established reasons for not releasing government information are national security, homeland security, law enforcement, proprietary information, and personal privacy. Indeed, concerns about privacy are growing in this age of intense information sharing and processing.

Thus, the level and type of governmental transparency that is appropriate remains a matter of contention, not only among experts but importantly among ordinary citizens. Yet little systematic effort has been devoted to measuring the demand for governmental transparency among the public. Also, little is known about what factors might influence this desire for governmental transparency. Thus, two initial questions are addressed in this study: (a) How can we measure citizens' desire or demand for governmental transparency, and specifically, are there different dimensions to such a demand? and (b) What personal and contextual factors are correlated with variation in the level of demand for governmental transparency? We focus on local government transparency because citizens have a more direct stake in local issues (like crime and land use) and because the data for our research, explained more fully below, come from a survey research project focused on local government affairs. Because this is exploratory research, a wide range of independent variables are examined to identify how they relate to the public's demand for transparency. These variables are discussed in the next section.

Potential Correlates

Based on the public participation and civic engagement literature (Putnam, 2000; Verba, Scholzman & Brady, 1995), as well as experience with transparency practices, we identified various characteristics of citizens that we hypothesized would be related to the demand for governmental transparency.

To begin with, because studies of political participation and trust of government have found an association with demographic characteristics of citizens, we included sex, race, education, and income as potential determinants of the demand for transparency. For example, men in Western democracies have been found to have higher levels of traditional political engagement than women (Jennings, 1983); thus, it was hypothesized that men may be more likely than women to have a high level of demand for transparency as well to have accessed government documents more often in the recent past. Race has also been shown to be related to political participation (Bobo & Gilliam, 1990) and trust of government (Howell & Fagan, 1988), and so race may be a factor in the demand for transparency as well. Socioeconomic status, as measured by level of education and income, has also been shown to be related to both participation and trust (Verba & Nie, 2004) and, thus, potentially related as well to the demand for transparency. For example, having a college degree may give individuals the necessary skills to navigate a bureaucracy and the confidence to request information from government. Finally, because there is much evidence of age differences in the level of political participation, civic engagement, and trust in the United States (Putnam, 2000), we hypothesized that older people would value and, thus, demand more transparency from government.

We also include in our analysis a number of key measures of general political attitudes and orientations. We expected *political engagement*, such as reading the newspaper and voting, to be positively correlated to the demand for transparency. *Political ideology* was hypothesized to be a determinant as well, although the direction of its influence may well depend on the nature of the local government information in question and the political party in power at the time of the survey. *Confidence in local government officials* was expected to be negatively related to the demand for transparency, because such confidence would mean less need for formal oversight and accountability. For similar reasons, we might expect generalized *trust of others* to be negatively associated with demand for transparency. And an individual's overall *rating of local government services* was hypothesized to have a negative relationship with demand for transparency because citizens who view government as already performing well may have less of a reason to hold government accountable.

We also included a number of measures that more directly assessed motivation for demanding government transparency. For example, *frequency of contacting government* indicates a higher level of engagement with government and, thus, more interest in government information and more opportunity to access government documents. We expected that *concern about government secrecy* as a problem would lead to a stronger demand for governmental transparency and access to government information. And finally, we also included the *perceived amount of existing access to government* as a possible correlate—in other words, the respondents' current perceptions of whether there is “too much,” “too little,” or “about the right amount” of access to government. If people view current access

to government as limited, then they may well demand more; if they feel that there is already plenty of access, then demand for access will diminish. Thus, this variable would be expected to be negatively associated with demand for transparency.

In addition to these individual-level factors, a series of potential contextual correlates of the demand for transparency were included in our analysis. Homeowners were expected to be more interested in transparency than renters because research suggests that they may be more engaged generally in their communities (Rossi & Weber, 1996). If a person owns property in a town, they would have an added incentive to seek information on actions taken by their local government. Similarly, those who have lived in their community for longer periods of time were expected to be more interested in access to government information. Alternately, it may be that individuals who have lived in an area for an extended period of time have developed personal relationships with elected officials and government workers and, thus, do not need to go through formal mechanisms to access government information. We also hypothesized differences in the demand for transparency among big city residents, suburbanites, and small town residents, both because of the different scale and complexity of local governments and because of how residents of these different types of communities may interact or communicate with their governments. The region of the country was included to account for regional differences in political culture and governance structure. However, the precise directional relationships between region and demand for transparency were not hypothesized.

Data and Method

The data for our analysis come from an online survey conducted in March 2005 of participants in the eTownPanel project, an opt-in e-mail panel of approximately 6,044 active participants (at the time of the study). The eTownPanel project is a university-affiliated, foundation-funded online research resource created to provide a general population of volunteers to participate in surveys about local community issues and government performance, in particular surveys sponsored by local nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and academic researchers. Volunteers are recruited from various online postings and e-mail lists and are not a random sample of the U.S. population. Invitations were sent via e-mail to the entire panel, and a total of 1,819 completed the questionnaire, for a panel response rate of 30%. (Because of missing data, the effective sample for many of the analyses is more in the range of 1,500-1,700 observations, especially in the multivariate analyses.) This response rate is typical for online panels, but given the voluntary nature of the panel to begin with, the more important question concerns the representativeness of the respondents compared to known characteristics of the population. Table 1 compares 2000 U.S. Census figures with both weighted and unweighted demographic results from the online study sample. Compared to the census, the unweighted study sample contains substantially more women, and fewer African Americans, Hispanics, and adults 65 years of age and older. The weighted results reflect simple poststratification weighting by census region, gender, race, and age. Because weighting brings the sample more in line with the basic demographic profile of the U.S. population, all analytical results are based on the

Table 1
Comparison of Unweighted and Weighted Profile of Respondents

	Census	Weighted	Unweighted
Northeast	19.0	20.5	26.8
South	35.6	36.2	29.7
Midwest	22.9	20.4	24.5
West	21.9	22.9	19.0
White, non-Hispanic	69.1	72.2	85.0
Black or African American	12.3	11.6	5.4
Asian or Pacific Islander	12.5	9.4	2.8
Hispanic or Latino	3.7	4.1	4.0
Other	2.4	2.6	2.8
Male	49.0	50.8	27.8
Female	51.0	49.2	72.2
18-24 years	13.4	12.9	7.5
25-44 years	40.7	39.8	53.9
45-64 years	29.6	31.3	34.8
65 years and over	16.7	16.0	3.8
Less than \$25,000	28.7	19.8	16.6
\$25,000-\$49,999	29.3	35.9	36.0
\$50,000-\$74,999	19.5	22.3	26.0
\$75,000 or more	22.5	21.9	21.4

Source: American FactFinder (2000)

Note: Weighted results reflect poststratification adjustments for region, race, age, and gender.

weighted data (with the sum of the weights set equal to the sample size for purposes of statistical significance testing). Of course, weighting does not eliminate other sources of bias that may be present in a voluntary sample and are unrelated to these basic demographic variables. Still, this study involves a large sample of respondents from a broad cross section of the United States. Although not a statistically projectable sample, it is still a useful sample for purposes of examining the psychometric properties of attitude questions and for exploring the correlates of these attitudes.

Dependent Variables

The survey asked a large number of questions about transparency in government, as well as questions about other attitudes and behaviors that were hypothesized to be potential correlates or determinants of the demand for transparency, as discussed earlier. The transparency items were chosen by the authors based on the literature and a review of two earlier surveys conducted for the First Amendment Center (Paulson, 2002; Ipsos-Public Affairs, 2005), the two published surveys on similar topics.

We conducted an exploratory factor analysis to reduce the transparency items and to create scales. As Table 2 shows, respondents were asked 12 questions about whether the public should have access to various kinds of government records or information, with responses ranging from 1 = *definitely should not have access* to 5 = *definitely should have access*.

Table 2
Key Transparency Questions and Factor Analysis Results

	Min	Max	M	SD	Factor Analysis			
					Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	
Do you think ordinary citizens should, or should not, have access to . . .								
Records of government contracts, including the amount and who got the contracts	1 = <i>definitely should not</i>	5 = <i>definitely should</i>	4.28	0.98	0.831			
Records of local government officials' expense accounts	1 = <i>definitely should not</i>	5 = <i>definitely should</i>	4.29	0.97	0.782			
City or town budgets or financial statements	1 = <i>definitely should not</i>	5 = <i>definitely should</i>	4.46	0.85	0.769			
City or town land use or planning documents	1 = <i>definitely should not</i>	5 = <i>definitely should</i>	4.36	0.88	0.757			
Transcripts of city or town council meetings	1 = <i>definitely should not</i>	5 = <i>definitely should</i>	4.47	0.83	0.732			
Local campaign finance records, including who gave how much to particular candidates	1 = <i>definitely should not</i>	5 = <i>definitely should</i>	4.14	1.11	0.729			
Employment records, including salary and benefits, of local school officials	1 = <i>definitely should not</i>	5 = <i>definitely should</i>	3.68	1.28	0.620			
Local real estate records, including the sale price, assessed value and taxes paid on all residential homes	1 = <i>definitely should not</i>	5 = <i>definitely should</i>	3.87	1.19	0.508			
The names of persons arrested for committing crimes in the local community, and the crimes for which they are being charged	1 = <i>definitely should not</i>	5 = <i>definitely should</i>	4.02	1.17		0.814		
Police reports of crimes committed in the local community	1 = <i>definitely should not</i>	5 = <i>definitely should</i>	4.34	0.96		0.756		
The names of sex offenders that are registered with the local sheriff's office or police department	1 = <i>definitely should not</i>	5 = <i>definitely should</i>	4.60	0.88		0.746		
The records of health inspections conducted at local restaurants	1 = <i>definitely should not</i>	5 = <i>definitely should</i>	4.55	0.82		0.530		

(continued)

Table 2 (Continued)

	Min	Max	M	SD	Factor Analysis			
					Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements . . .								
It's important to be able to get any document you want from government	1 = disagree completely	5 = agree completely	3.63	1.19	0.848			
Citizens have a right to know about everything government does	1 = disagree completely	5 = agree completely	3.86	1.18	0.844			
Every citizen should have complete access to information about their government	1 = disagree completely	5 = agree completely	4.04	1.07	0.785			
Government records belong to the people, not to the government	1 = disagree completely	5 = agree completely	4.00	1.01	0.652			
Transparency is the key to fighting government corruption	1 = disagree completely	5 = agree completely	3.94	1.00		0.769		
Public hearings are essential for good government	1 = disagree completely	5 = agree completely	4.40	0.78		0.737		
Public access to records is crucial to the functioning of good government	1 = disagree completely	5 = agree completely	4.14	0.94		0.553		
Governments naturally like to keep secrets from citizens	1 = disagree completely	5 = agree completely	3.96	1.08		0.419		
Citizen requests for government documents are just a big distraction for government workers	1 = disagree completely	5 = agree completely	2.28	1.20			0.792	
It is nobody's business who gives what to a campaign	1 = disagree completely	5 = agree completely	2.11	1.27			0.775	
Sometimes it is better not to know too much about what is going in government	1 = disagree completely	5 = agree completely	2.51	1.33			0.724	

Note: Factor analyses used principal components extraction, varimax rotation, and the eigenvalue > 1 criterion for the number of factors. The 2-factor solution above explains 59% of total variance; the 3-factor solution explains 63% of total variance.

The types of government documents included in the scale development were specifically identified in an attempt to elicit a range of responses. Items asking about salary information of school officials and local real estate records were expected to receive lower support for access. Conversely, items related to town budgets and health inspection records were expected to receive greater support. The expected pattern was found. See Table 2 for the mean level of access demanded for each type of document. (The order of the items was randomized for each respondent to avoid question-order bias.) A factor analysis of these items (also shown in Table 2) extracted two factors: the first comprising eight items that relate largely to the desire for access to financial or budgetary records, and the second comprised four items that focus on access to crime and safety information. We created summated rating scales for both factors, a Fiscal Transparency scale (Cronbach's alpha = .87) and a Safety Transparency scale (Cronbach's alpha = .76).

As Table 2 shows, the survey also presented 11 statements regarding transparency in government about which respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement, ranging from 1 = *disagree completely* to 5 = *agree completely*. A factor analysis of these statements (Table 2) extracted three factors: four broad statements affirming the principle of transparency, four statements linking transparency to good government, and three negatively worded statements about transparency. Summated scales were created for the first two of these factors: a Principled Transparency scale (Cronbach's alpha = .86); and a Good Government Transparency scale (Cronbach's alpha = .65). It should be noted that one of the items in Factor 2 (good government transparency), specifically "Governments naturally like to keep secrets from citizens," was weakly correlated with the other items (as the factor loadings in Table 2 suggest) and was, therefore, dropped from that scale.

Finally, the survey asked about nine different types of documents the respondent may have requested from government in the last few years, with the document types being the same as those listed in the top part of Table 2. The sum of documents requested serves as a measure of the respondent's actual reported behavior with respect to accessing government and is another dependent variable of interest. Descriptive statistics on all dependent and independent variables are presented in Table 3.

Independent Variables

As noted earlier, a key objective of our analysis is to examine the potential correlates or determinants of attitudes toward local governmental transparency. Thus, the survey gathered basic demographic variables of interest, including sex, race (White vs. non-White), age, education (college graduate vs. no college degree), income, and home ownership. Various geographic variables were collected as well, including region (Northeast, Midwest, South, and West) and type of community (big city, suburb, and small town, or rural area). Years of residence in the community and feelings of closeness to the community (1 = *not at all close* to 4 = *very close*) were also measured. The survey included various established measures of sociopolitical characteristics (Robinson, Shaver, & Wrightsman, 1999): a 3-item Political Engagement scale (*reading the newspaper*, *following public affairs*, and *voting*, Cronbach's alpha = .58); political ideology (1 = *very liberal* to 5 = *very conservative*); confidence in local government leaders (1 = *none at all* to 5 = *a great deal*); frequency of direct contact with local government in the last few years (1 = *never* to 4 = *more than a few times*); perceived quality

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics

	Cronbach's Alpha	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Dependent variables					
Fiscal Transparency scale	0.87	8.00	40.00	33.56	6.01
Safety Transparency scale	0.76	4.00	20.00	17.51	2.93
Principled Transparency scale	0.86	4.00	20.00	15.54	3.74
Good Government Transparency scale	0.65	3.00	15.00	12.47	2.15
Documents obtained last few years	—	0.00	12.00	1.23	1.76
Independent variables					
Female	—	0.00	1.00	0.49	0.50
Non-White	—	0.00	1.00	0.28	0.45
Age in years	—	18.00	80.00	45.27	15.90
College graduate	—	0.00	1.00	0.34	0.47
Income in thousands	—	7.00	200.00	55.79	37.86
Home owner	—	0.00	1.00	0.67	0.47
Northeast	—	0.00	1.00	0.18	0.38
Midwest	—	0.00	1.00	0.18	0.38
South	—	0.00	1.00	0.32	0.47
West	—	0.00	1.00	0.20	0.40
Years of residence in community	—	0.00	23.00	12.12	8.99
Big city resident	—	0.00	1.00	0.24	0.43
Suburb resident	—	0.00	1.00	0.25	0.43
Small town or rural resident	—	0.00	1.00	0.39	0.49
Feel close to the community	—	1.00	4.00	2.63	0.85
Political engagement	0.58	3.00	14.00	11.12	2.45
Political ideology (conservative)	—	1.00	5.00	3.16	1.05
Confidence in local leaders	—	1.00	5.00	2.87	0.90
Frequency of contact with government	—	1.00	4.00	2.12	1.10
Quality of local government services	—	1.00	6.00	3.35	1.08
General trust of others	—	1.00	2.00	1.66	0.47
Concerned about government secrecy	—	1.00	4.00	1.87	0.81
Perceived level of access to government	0.77	2.00	6.00	3.04	1.18

of local government services (1 = *poor* to 5 = *excellent*); and general trust of other people (1 = *most people can be trusted*, 0 = *you can't be too careful in dealing with people*).

We created a scale based on the sum of two related items asked in the opening of the questionnaire: the first question asked about the extent to which there is 1 = *too much*, 2 = *about the right amount*, or 3 = *too little access* to government records; the second asked about the extent to which there is 1 = *too much*, 2 = *about the right amount*, or 3 = *too little access* to government meetings or hearings. These items are statistically related (Cronbach's alpha = .77), and they both refer to the perceived level of current access to government. The scoring was reversed on these items so that a high score means "too much" access and a low score means "too little." Finally, the survey asked a few specific questions related to government transparency, including concern about government secrecy (1 = *not at all concerned* to 4 = *very concerned*), extent to which respondents read or hear much lately about freedom of information or sunshine laws (1 = *nothing at all* to 4 = *a lot*).

Again, Table 3 includes summary statistics for all the analytical variables.

Results

Table 4 presents the results of a stepwise regression analysis of our five dependent variables. We use a stepwise procedure for selecting the best subset of predictors because of the large number of variables and because of the exploratory nature of this analysis. The results of these regression analyses are discussed below.

Fiscal Transparency Scale

The two variables most associated with the Fiscal Transparency scale were an individual's perceived level of access to government and age. The higher the perceived level of access to government, the lower the demand for fiscal transparency. With regard to demographic variables, older persons appear to be more likely to want greater fiscal transparency than younger people. Individuals with higher income, greater political engagement, and those who feel closer to their community are also more likely to express high levels of demand for fiscal transparency.

As expected, the more confidence individuals have in their local government officials, the lower their demand for fiscal transparency. We also found that the more contact individuals have with their local government, the stronger their demand for fiscal transparency.

Safety Transparency Scale

In the model of desire for safety transparency, women were more likely to be concerned about access to such information than men. Indeed, being female was the strongest determinant of the desire for health and safety information. Age and income also had significant positive effects on the desire for safety transparency. Individuals in the South were more likely to be concerned about access to safety information and people in the West were less likely to be concerned about the same information.

Self-identified political conservatives were more likely to desire access to public safety information, as were those more politically engaged. Finally, the perceived level of current access to government is negatively related to demand for crime and safety information.

Principled Transparency Scale

With the Principled Transparency scale, none of the demographic variables proved to be statistically significant. The extent to which respondents were concerned with government secrecy and, especially, the perceived level of current access to government were among the most important predictors of demand for government information based on principle. This suggests that demand for transparency based on principle is motivated largely by general concerns, if not suspicions, about the current practices of government with respect to disclosing information and operating in the open.

Table 4
Stepwise Regression Analyses (Standardized)

Independent variables	Dependent Variables				
	Fiscal Transparency Scale	Safety Transparency Scale	Principled Transparency Scale	Good Government Transparency Scale	Documents Obtained Last Few Years
Female	—	0.130**	—	—	—
Non-White	—	—	—	—	0.063*
Age in years	0.228**	0.096**	—	0.129**	-0.107**
College graduate	—	—	—	0.122**	—
Income in thousands	0.113**	0.067**	—	—	—
Home owner	—	—	—	—	0.094**
Northeast	—	—	—	—	-0.051*
Midwest	—	—	—	—	—
South	—	0.076**	—	—	—
West	—	-0.076**	—	—	—
Years of residence in community	—	—	-0.057**	—	-0.071**
Big city resident	—	—	—	—	—
Suburb resident	—	—	—	—	—
Small town or rural resident	—	—	—	—	—
Feel close to the community	0.079**	—	—	—	—
Political engagement	0.115**	0.109**	—	0.144**	0.124**
Political ideology (conservative)	—	0.089**	-0.052*	-0.054**	—
Confidence in local leaders	-0.108**	—	-0.053*	-0.101**	—
Frequency of contacting government	0.089**	—	0.105**	0.065*	0.296**
Rating of local government services	—	—	—	0.124**	—
Trust of others	—	-0.079**	0.063**	—	—
Concern about government secrecy	—	—	0.109**	0.135**	—
Perceived level of access to government	-0.270**	-0.107**	-0.419**	-0.286**	—
Explained variance(<i>R</i> -square)	22.8%	7.8%	25.9%	23.3%	13.0%
<i>df</i>	7/1,460	9/1,487	7/1,482	9/1,482	7/1,518

p* < .05. *p* < .01 (two-tailed test).

Again, there is a positive relationship between the amount of contact with local officials and the Principled Transparency scale, and there is a negative relationship between confidence in local officials and the demand for principled transparency. There is a negative relationship between being politically conservative and scoring high on the Principled Transparency scale. Individuals in the West were less likely to score high on the scale.

Good Government Transparency Scale

In many ways, the results of the Good Government Transparency scale mirror the three previously discussed transparency scales. Again, the perceived level of current access to government is negatively related to demand for transparency for good government reasons. Also, those who are concerned about government secrecy generally demand more transparency for good government reasons. Age, a college education, and political engagement are all positively related to demand for good government transparency. Self-identified liberals are more concerned about good government transparency than are conservatives. Individuals who rated their local government services highly were more concerned about good government transparency than those who gave lower ratings to their local government services. It should be noted that this is the only scale for which the rating of local government services was relevant and significant.

Documents Obtained From Government

This model describes self-reported behavior, as opposed to attitudes toward governmental transparency. It is important to note that the significant determinants in this case are somewhat different from those that best predict transparency attitudes. Non-Whites are more likely to have obtained government documents, whereas, interestingly, older persons are less likely to have done so, despite their generally more supportive views of governmental transparency. This finding with respect to age may be a function of older individuals being less likely to use the Internet regularly, an increasingly important source for government documents and other information. Homeowners also are more likely than renters to obtain government documents, perhaps because some of the document types asked about refer to property appraisals and land-use planning. And those who are more politically engaged reported receiving more documents. Finally, those who report having more frequent contacts with local government also report having obtained more government documents. Concern about government secrecy and perceived level of access to government do not relate to the behavior of actually obtaining government documents, despite the fact that these two determinants do seem to play an important role in explaining attitudes toward governmental transparency.

Discussion

Our analysis reveals some insights on the structure and possible determinants of public demand for governmental transparency at the local level. We found that there appear to be potentially different dimensions to the public's demand for governmental transparency,

dimensions related to public finances, safety, the principle of open government, and the notion of good or honest government. In addition, our analysis suggests several key determinants of these various forms of public demand for transparency.

Perhaps, somewhat expectedly, the public's perception of how much openness currently exists in government emerges as a significant factor across the various measures of demand for transparency. Those who view government as already adequately open demand less transparency, whereas those who see government as closed seek more. People who are politically engaged and who frequently contact government also tend to demand more transparency.

The trust in government literature has found that there is a relationship between trust in government and the perception that democracy is "working well" (Marlowe, 2004). In three of the five scales, confidence in local officials had a statistically significant, negative relationship to demand for transparency. The more confidence the public has in their local officials, the less they are interested in fiscal, principled, and good government transparency.

Senator Cornyn stated that "open government is fundamentally an American issue, not a Republican or Democrat issue" (Cornyn, 2005, para. 22). Using party affiliation as a proxy for ideology, Cornyn is half right. Self-identified conservatives and liberals were both interested in transparency, just different types of transparency. Although conservatives questioned the need for transparency more than liberals, they also were more concerned than liberals about accessing safety-related information. Self-identified liberals, on the other hand, were more concerned with accessing government information on principle and for good governance concerns.

Finally, a number of potential predictors we expected to be related to the demand for transparency failed to enter significantly into our models. Although past literature identifies race as related to trust of government (Howell & Fagan, 1988) and satisfaction with government services (Van Ryzin, Muzzio, & Immerwahr, 2004), race was not related to attitudes toward transparency. Race was, however, related to the behavior of obtaining government documents. Also, none of the models showed that the type of community (big city, suburb, or small town) where a person lives predicts their demand for transparency. This was surprising because the literature finds, at least with respect to metropolitan areas, that "civic participation is higher in smaller places than in larger ones" (Oliver, 2001, p. 65). Also, none of the models shows that homeownership or years of residence in a community matters with regard to a person's desire for open government at the local level, although homeownership and years of residence are related to the behavior of obtaining government documents.

Implications for Future Research

The somewhat low *R*-squares in our model (between 8% and 23%) suggest that we may not have identified some of the relevant independent variables to account for the variance in demand for various kinds of governmental transparency. The Safety Transparency scale model explained the least amount of variance, in part because of the high levels of support for access to crime and safety information (and hence a reduced level of variance). Still, we can begin to speculate on potential additional determinants, such as an explicit measure of

an individual's views on national and domestic security, which may help explain some of the unexplained variance in the Safety Transparency scale. Also, the respondents' own sense of safety in their community and fear of crime may be important factors to consider.

The finding that trust, both in the form of confidence in local officials and also generalized trust of others, predicts demand for transparency suggests some potentially interesting avenues of future research. Is the demand for transparency in government in part a reaction to the declining trust in government that has been recorded during the past decades (Nye, Zelikow, & King 1997)? In particular, it might be useful to explore a model of the demand for transparency that treats trust of government as a key mediator or mechanism through which other variables exert their influence. Generally, it would be useful to take the important correlates from our study and begin to hypothesize and test a more structural model of the demand for transparency.

A number of additional variables emerged for possible inclusion on a follow-up survey or for future research more generally. In the questionnaire, individuals were asked about a list of types of documents they may have accessed in recent years. Expanding the list to include GIS documents and maps would make the questionnaire more inclusive of actual documents requested by individuals. An "other" category was not included but could be helpful to capture access behavior not explicitly listed.

Including occupation as an independent variable may lead to findings related to sector of employment. It could be hypothesized that those who work for government, or a government contractor, may be less interested in transparency, because they are the ones that either have to fill the freedom of information requests or are subject to scrutiny. Conversely, journalists who frequently use freedom of information requests for their jobs may well be more likely to want greater access. A person's immigrant status may affect their history of access to government documents. Immigrants less familiar with navigating American bureaucracies could be expected to have accessed government documents less often.

Although we did include a question on how often the respondent read the newspapers, we did not ask questions about trust or confidence in local media. Individuals who perceive their local media as ineffectual or untrustworthy may desire higher levels of transparency and may have personally accessed government documents more frequently.

Our questionnaire focused almost exclusively on the municipal government level. This is appropriate because individuals have so much of their government contact at the local level. Even with this in mind, it is possible that national-level issues affect individuals' demand for transparency of local-level documents. The most obvious of which are national defense and homeland security. A question, or series of questions, ascertaining respondents' views on these topics could be included in future research.

The perceived high cost of governmental transparency and the desire for personal privacy are two possible reasons why individuals may want less transparency. Future research should include questions that address these issues to either confirm or disprove the expected relationships.

This article begins to develop a way of measuring dimensions of the public's demand for transparency, and some of the determinants of these dimensions. Because no previous research has attempted to measure these concepts, this article should be seen as providing an exploratory, empirical foundation for future work on the topic. The results presented

provide both some predicted and surprising results. More thought and attention need to be turned to this topic to better understand the link between demand for transparency and its potential correlates.

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