

Do We Really Care Who Opened the Door?
The Complex Relationship between Government
Transparency and Perceived Legitimacy

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Abstract

This study analyses how perceived legitimacy of government institutions and their decisions is affected by government transparency. Nowadays more and more often government information is disclosed by “outsiders” without the consent of the government institutions (e.g. government information leaks). Nevertheless, this aspect was usually not taken into account in the previous research projects that focused on the relationship between transparency and perceived legitimacy. Aiming to reflect modern reality of government information publicity this study examines how relationship between decision making transparency of the cities’ councils and perceived legitimacy of decisions is affected by the knowledge who revealed the information. Using two survey experiments (n=151 and n=240) the effects of government controlled transparency – situations when government information is voluntarily shared by government institutions – are compared to the non-government controlled transparency – situations when government information is disclosed by other actors. Results suggest that contrary to the dominant theoretical expectations, knowledge that information was shared voluntarily by the city council did not have any additional positive effect on citizens’ perceptions. However, non-government controlled acts of transparency affected perceived legitimacy of decisions negatively. Furthermore, knowing that information was leaked made people more likely to think that the decision making procedure was unfair and that the council was less trustworthy. These “thoughts” mediated citizens’ perceptions about the legitimacy of the decision.

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Introduction

Since the beginning of this century, many democratic countries have entered a “new era” of government transparency (Cameron, published in The Telegraph 2011). Government transparency can be defined as higher publicity and availability of government information. The general tendency is that more and more information that was previously hidden “behind the closed doors” of government institutions is now available to the public. The increase of government information availability is determined by a few interrelated factors. First of all, following the increased demand of citizens, many government institutions in democratic countries have voluntarily started sharing more information. Government transparency is one of the main trends of recent public institution reforms (de Fine Licht 2014). For instance, former U.S. President Barack Obama is often described as the most famous proponent of government transparency (Grimmelikhuijsen 2012). Secondly, because of increased internet accessibility, interested citizens can find information about government institutions much more effectively (Meijer 2009). Twenty years ago, nobody could have thought that most citizens could open their government institutions’ websites and read exactly how decisions of their cities’ councils were made while sitting on their sofas. Finally, digital developments have significantly increased the probability that information which is hidden by government institutions will be disclosed and published by other actors. For instance, the governments of many countries have been strongly affected by scandals determined by information released on the WikiLeaks webpage.

To sum up, during the last two decades government transparency has become a “buzzword” (Grimmelikhuijsen 2012). This higher publicity of government information is often described as one of the most effective ways for solving the majority of government related problems (Grimmelikhuijsen 2012). For a long time in public and academic discourse, optimistic

normative expectations about the effects of government transparency were perceived as an unquestionable truth and were not tested empirically (de Fine Licht 2014a). Questions about the particular consequences of an increased availability of government information gained more scholarly interest only about ten years ago when it was noticed that transparency reforms are not a “magic wand” solving the majority of government problems, as was usually claimed by transparency proponents (de Fine Licht 2014). Therefore, despite its current centrality in the public discourse and government reforms, still little is known about the real effects of increased government transparency.

Theoretical and public arguments about the expected advantages of government transparency can be divided into two large groups: the improved behavior of public institutions and transparency’s positive effects on citizens’ perceptions (Cucciniello et al. 2017). The first group of arguments has gained much more scientific attention and is explored relatively better. Most of the researchers who focused on transparency related topics (e.g., Fox 2007; Hale 2008; Bauhr and Nasiritousi 2012; Kosack and Fung 2014) investigated how government transparency affects the behavior of public institutions – their accountability, effectiveness, corruption level.

Empirical assessments of other widely expected consequences of government information availability – positive effects on citizens’ perceptions about government institutions – have been not “only scant but also contradictory” (see Grimmelikhuijsen 2012; de fine Licht 2014a). Based on the dominant theories and public discourse, a higher level of government transparency has been expected to increase citizens’ trust and a perceived legitimacy of government institutions and their decisions (Oliver 2004; Hood 2006; Curtin and Meijer 2006). This point is still often used as an argument which is expected to persuade government

institutions to “open their doors” more widely. Some of the previous research (e.g. Welch et al. 2004; de Fine Licht 2014a; Porumbescu 2017a) have found evidence in support of these “optimistic” normative expectations. On the other hand, a number of empirical research projects found that government transparency often has no effect on the perceived legitimacy of government and its decisions and may even have negative consequences (e.g., Worthy 2010; Chong et al. 2011; Grimmeliikhuijsen et al. 2013; Bauhr and Grimes 2014). This contradiction of normative expectations and empirical findings creates a complex picture and leaves many unanswered questions about the mechanisms behind the relationship between government transparency and the perceived legitimacy of government. For instance, why exactly in some cases does government transparency not lead to increased citizens’ trust and perceived legitimacy as is often expected by transparency proponents? Therefore, aiming to decrease this vagueness at least partially, the relationship between government transparency and the perceived legitimacy of government and its decisions was chosen as the main general topic of this thesis.

A comparison of previous research designs and the current context of government information availability exposes at least one limitation of the previous research. The absolute majority of research projects analyzed the effects of situations where government institutions themselves voluntarily shared information about their actions and decisions. Information “released by the agent proactively or reactively in response to freedom of information laws and other requirements” is defined as agent or government controlled transparency (Lindstedt and Naurin 2010; de Fine Licht and Naurin 2015). Information posted on the websites of government institutions, official press releases or information sent to citizens under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) are the most common examples of government controlled transparency. In previous research, government controlled acts of transparency

were usually contrasted only with “pure secrecy” – situations when the public is not informed about government actions at all. Nevertheless, the contrast of government controlled transparency and absolute secrecy only partially reflects the modern reality of government information publicity. Nowadays, government information often becomes available not only because of government controlled acts of transparency, but also because of interventions by “outside” actors. A situation when government information is disclosed and published by third actors without the formal consent of government institutions is defined as non-government controlled transparency. Information leaks, the fact-digging function of a free media or whistle-blower reports are the most common examples of non-government controlled transparency (Lindstedt and Naurin 2010). Further in this study government and non-government controlled transparency will be referred as different forms of transparency.

In most democratic countries, non-government controlled acts of transparency have almost become “a routine everyday practice” (Crowley 2012). For instance, in addition to shocking disclosures such as WikiLeaks or the Panama Papers, every few weeks journalists share information about the leaked emails of government officials proving corruption or some other information that was hidden by national or local government institutions. The probability that programmers will leak secret information has become higher than ever before. Therefore, it can be expected that government institutions and citizens will include this form of government transparency when considering government information publicity. Following this logic, government institutions trying to decide whether any particular information should be published can be expected to calculate and take into account the probability of disclosure of this information by “outsiders”. Furthermore, after some of the most infamous non-government controlled disclosures (e.g., Panama Papers, Hillary Clinton's email controversy) hypothetical questions were raised: what if the same information had been disclosed by the

transparent government itself, and what if information disclosed by government institutions would have been kept in secret and disclosed by third parties? It is a fact that both government and non-government controlled acts of transparency have become almost equally important parts of modern processes determining government information publicity and were usually ignored in previous research investigating the relationship between transparency and perceived legitimacy. This problem leads to the main question of my research: *how is the relationship between transparency and perceived legitimacy affected by the knowledge of who revealed the information?* Do people care who “opened the door” to let them see how government institutions actually work? Does it make a difference whether the information was disclosed by a transparent government itself or by third parties?

This research focuses on only one form of government transparency - decision making transparency, which refers to “information about political decisions and decision-making processes that is provided or available to the public” (de Fine Licht 2014, 20). This thesis investigates the effects of decision making transparency in the context of local government institutions – City Councils. In this study, perceived legitimacy is defined as “a public belief that authoritative decision making is rightful and worthy of consent and obedience” (de Fine Licht 2014, 19). My research focuses on the effects of transparency at a meso-level - perceived legitimacy of any particular decisions and procedures (instead of the macro level, which refers to the entire political system or government in general). Decision making transparency is sometimes described as one of the most effective ways to ensure that citizens accept government decisions (de Fine Licht 2014a). Thus, perceived legitimacy of decision was chosen as the main response variable in this study. It refers to the citizens’ acceptance of the decision – a perception that it is “right and fair” (de Fine Licht 2014). In order to understand causal mechanisms better, I will also look at the effects of transparency on the

perceived legitimacy of the decision making procedure and of the City Council that made the decision. It is especially important to emphasize that in my study legitimacy is a matter of perception and not of what is right in a normative sense.

In order to explore the effects of government and non-government controlled transparency on the perceived legitimacy of government institutions and their decisions, I use experimental design. The design of my experiment largely follows the logic and structure of experiments implemented in previous studies investigating the relationship between government transparency and citizens' perceptions, especially experiments conducted by Stephen Grimmelikhuijsen (see Grimmelikhuijsen 2012; Grimmelikhuijsen et. al 2013; Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer 2014) and Jenny de Fine Licht (see de Fine Licht 2014, 2014a, 2014b; de Fine Licht et al. 2014). However, I have added a new condition that was not included in previous research – the situation of non-government controlled transparency. Two online survey experiments of the same design were conducted. The first experiment, which could be interpreted as the trial, recruited a sample of U.S. citizens. The second experiment, which is the main focus of my study, recruited a sample of Lithuanians. The results of these experiments suggest that government controlled transparency does not affect the perceived legitimacy of the government institution and its decision. On the other hand, there is some evidence to suggest that non-government controlled acts of transparency carry some negative value.

To sum up, in line with efforts to increase our understanding of transparency's effects on citizens' perceptions and to better reflect the modern reality of government information publicity, this study makes the first attempt to compare the effects of government and non-government controlled acts of transparency on the perceived legitimacy of government

institutions and their decisions. This study suggests that citizens care about the fact of how information was disclosed – knowing that government information about decision making procedures was disclosed not by the government institution itself but by outside actors has a negative direct effect on the perceived legitimacy of the decision, the procedures leading up to it, and the City Council that made the decision.

Even though limited to the scope of this research, my thesis contributes to the research field investigating the effects of transparency on citizens' perceptions both theoretically and practically. The theoretical contribution is an increased understanding of how exactly government transparency might affect citizens' opinion about government and its decisions. In most of the previous research that compared government controlled acts of transparency to pure secrecy, it was problematic to conclude whether perceived legitimacy was affected (or not affected) only by the information that was disclosed, or whether government openness had some value in itself as it is expected to be based on some theories (e.g. Grimmelikhuijsen 2012). Moreover, this study suggests an explanation as to why scandals of non-government controlled information disclosures (e.g. leaks of government officials' e-mails) usually have such a strong negative effect on citizens' trust in government. The practical contribution is the insight on how the arguments of transparency proponents trying to persuade government institutions to open their doors more openly could be more adjusted to modern reality by including the probability of non-government controlled disclosures.

This thesis is structured as follows. A literature review is presented in Section 1. Section 2 discusses the theoretical expectations guiding this research. Section 3 describes the methodology of the research. The main findings and results are discussed in Section 4. Conclusions are drawn in the last section.

1. Literature review

For a really long time the positive effects of transparency on the perceived legitimacy and trust in government institutions were usually interpreted as an undeniable truth (de Fine Licht 2014a). Thus, until a couple of decades ago, there was almost no empirical research investigating this relationship. The beginning of the 2000's marks the point where the popularity of research related to this topic started to grow. Nevertheless, this growth was still relatively "cautious". Besides, much research published between 2000 and 2010 was more conceptual than empirical (e.g., Heald 2006; Hood 2006; Curtin and Meijer 2006; Roberts 2006). The critical turning point in the research field analysing the effects of government transparency on citizens' perceptions happened around 2010 (Cucciniello et al. 2017). However, they remain relatively scarce (compared to the research investigating effects of transparency on the behaviour of government institutions).

The majority of the previous research analyses the effects of transparency on perceived legitimacy and trust in the context of relatively well economically developed regions, such as OECD countries (Cucciniello et al. 2017). Thus, most of the known findings can be generalized only in the context where a general level of government transparency is relatively high. For instance, there are studies that investigate the effects of transparency in Sweden (e.g., de Fine Licht 2014; De Fine Licht et al. 2014), in the Netherlands (e.g., Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer 2012; Grimmelikhuijsen 2012) or in South Korea (e.g., Kim and Lee 2012; Porumbescu 2017a).

Based on the methods that were invoked for this analysis, previous studies can be divided into two large groups. Some of the researchers (e.g., Bauhr and Grimes 2014; Porumbescu 2017)

investigated observational data (analysis of survey results and case studies are the most frequently applied methods). To illustrate this, Worthy (2012) tested the impact of Britain's Freedom of Information Act 2000 (this particular case was also compared to other countries). Kim and Lee (2012) used data from the 2009 E-Participation Survey in the Seoul Metropolitan Government. Other researchers (e.g., de Fine Licht, J. 2014, 2014a, 2014b; Grimmelikhuijsen 2012; Grimmelikhuijsen et al. 2013; Hawkins et al. 2017) addressed questions about transparency and perceived legitimacy by conducting various experiments. Experimental methods were quite popular in the previous research because it is the only way that allows for the manipulation of transparency or its various features and secrecy while keeping other features constant. Moreover, experts (Cucciniello et al. 2017) notice a recent trend towards the more frequent use of experiments in transparency research.

A comparison of the results of previous studies reveals an especially contradictory and inconsistent picture (Gregory 2018). Some of the studies provide evidence supporting dominant theoretical expectations and show the positive effect of transparency on perceived legitimacy and trust. For example, Porumbescu (2017a) claims that computer-mediated transparency had a positive effect on citizens' opinions about public sector performance. The Welch et al. (2004) study results suggest that citizens who are more familiar with the processes of government transparency (i.e., visit e-government webpages more frequently) are more likely to perceive the government as trustworthy. On the other hand, there are a number of research papers concluding that transparency had a negative or no effect on perceived legitimacy and trust. For instance, Worthy (2010) shows that the Freedom of Information Act in Britain did not affect citizens' trust in government. The results of three experiments conducted by Grimmelikhuijsen et al. (2013) in the Netherlands and South Korea suggest that government transparency had a negative effect on citizens' trust in government institutions.

Nevertheless, the absolute majority of the previous research does not report either positive or negative effects of government transparency (e.g., de Fine Licht et al. 2014; de Fine Licht 2014; Bauhr and Grimes 2014). It shows that the effects are mixed and depend on a variety of different factors.

Some of the authors found that the context of a region or country matters. For instance, the research of Bauhr and Grimes (2014) reveals that higher levels of government transparency are more likely to have negative effects in countries with a relatively high corruption level. Grimmelikhuijsen et al. (2013) show that transparency had a stronger negative effect in South Korea than in the Netherlands, which indicates that relation is moderated by national cultural values. Policy areas also seem to be an influential factor. If a policy area is related to more “sensitive” questions (e.g., the health sector which often involves trading human wellbeing against money) decision making transparency is more likely to have a negative effect compared to “less sensitive” policy areas (e.g., culture) (de Fine Licht 2014a). Other research projects suggest that the type and content of transparency is an influential factor. Experiments conducted by De Fine Licht et al (2014) suggest that transparency is the most likely to affect perceived legitimacy positively in cases where disclosed information clearly explains the reasons behind a particular decision, and in cases where decision making procedures reflect “a deliberative democratic ideal”. In her other study, de Fine Licht reveals an interesting insight: external cues of government transparency existence (the message that information is available somewhere) had an even stronger effect than full decision making transparency (de Fine Licht 2014b). Porumbescu (2017b) concludes that the tool of transparency also matters: the usage of public sector social media had a positive effect on citizens’ trustworthiness, while visiting E-government websites had no significant effect. One of Grimmelikhuijsen’s (2012) experiments shows that transparency is more likely to have negative effect if the usability of

the disclosed information is low. Finally, some authors showed that the effects of transparency are moderated by individual level variables. The study of Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer (2012) shows that transparency is most likely to increase perceived trustworthiness in the cases where citizens have high trust and little knowledge.

To sum up, an overview of the previous research shows that government transparency is as much likely to result in both: positive or negative effects on perceived legitimacy and trust. Thus, the mechanism linking transparency and perceived legitimacy “remains poorly understood” and further research is needed in order to notice some tendencies (Cucciniello et al. 2017). My study differs from previous research in that government controlled transparency will be compared not only to the secrecy factor, but also with non-government controlled acts of transparency.

2. Theoretical framework

Theoretical expectations about the relationship between government transparency and perceived legitimacy can be deconstructed starting from the most universal and generalized theories and moving to more specific and focused ones. First of all, the principal agent theory and the application of its logic in the context of government transparency is described. Secondly, general expectations linking transparency and perceived legitimacy based on Stephan Grimmelikhuijsen's theory are discussed. Finally, specific mechanisms that are expected to link transparency and the perceived legitimacy of government decisions are deconstructed.

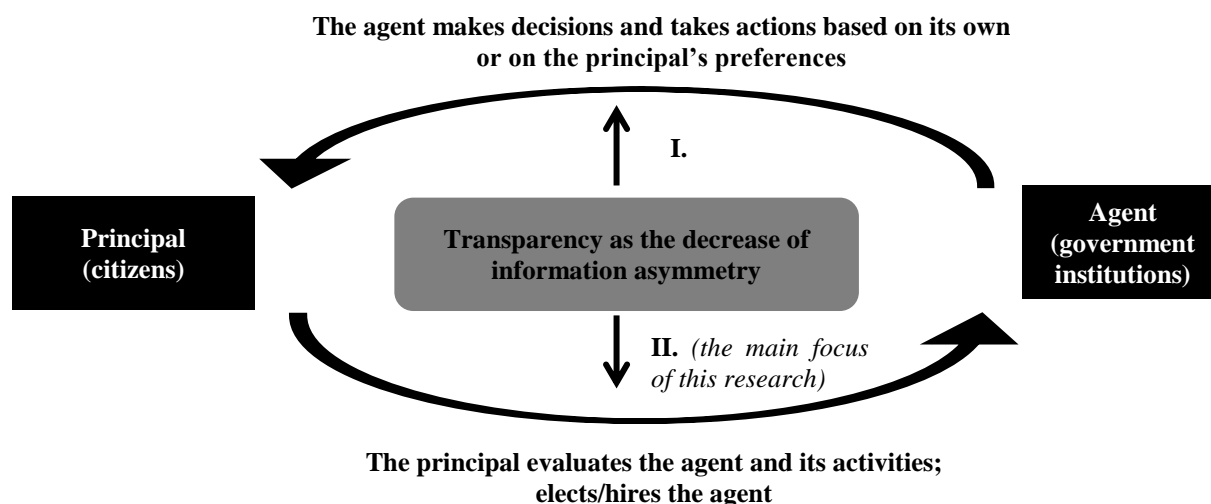
2.1.Principal agent theory

The logic of the principal-agent theory can be applied in situations when one actor - the agent (e.g., a government institution) is authorized to make decisions on behalf of another actor - the principal (e.g., citizens) (Eisenhardt, 1989; Ross, 1973; Jansen and Meckling, 1976). In the case of high information asymmetry, the probability that a principal will be able to identify the wrong-doing of its agent is low (Bendor et al 1985; Waterman and Meier, 1998, p. 174; Stiglitz, 1998, p. 241). Consequently, a loss of control over the actions of the agent becomes inevitable (Mitnick, 1975; Groenendijk, 1997, p. 210; Walsh, 1995).

Looking through the prism of the principal-agent theory, government transparency can be interpreted as a decrease of information asymmetry. Thus, transparency can be expected to affect both key 'activities' located at the core of the principal-agent theory: the actions and behavior of the agent (government institutions), as well as the principal's (citizens') opinion

about the government and its actions (see Figure 1). The main focus of my research is an analysis of how the act of transparency (a decrease of information asymmetry) influences the principals' (citizens') evaluation of their agent's behavior (relation II in the Figure 1). A deconstruction of the principal-agent theory logic is also relevant for an understanding of the key distinction between government and non-government controlled acts of transparency. In the case of government controlled transparency, information asymmetry is decreased voluntarily by the agent. In contrast to that, non-government controlled acts of information disclosure means that information asymmetry happened because of the other actors instead of the agent itself.

Figure 1: Government transparency in the context of principal-agent theory



2.2. Overall effect of transparency on perceived legitimacy: distinction between transparency as disclosed information and transparency as an act itself

In this section I will describe the general theoretical expectations of the effects of transparency on the perceived legitimacy of government and its decisions. Most of the relevant research compared acts of government or non-government controlled transparency to

a situation of secrecy. Thus, the logic of the most relevant theories will be combined and adjusted to a context where government and non-government controlled acts of transparency can be investigated together specifically for the purpose of this thesis.

Grimmelikhuijsen's (2012) theoretical framework, which systematises how government transparency might affect citizens' trust in government institutions, is especially useful for an understanding of the mechanisms relevant in the context of this thesis. Therefore, the logic of this theory was chosen as the main theoretical framework. The key idea of Grimmelikhuijsen's (2012) theory is that transparency consists of two main parts: transparency as the disclosed information and transparency as an act itself. These parts of the object are expected to affect the perceived trustworthiness or legitimacy of government through different mechanisms and to determine different effects.

I will also use the normative arguments of other scientists. Scientists who "participate" in the normative debate on the effects of transparency on citizens' perceptions about government institutions and their decisions can be divided into three large groups (Grimmelikhuijsen's 2012). Transparency "optimists" (e.g., Oliver 2004; Head 2006; Hood 2006; Curtin and Meijer 2006) whose arguments are the most often used in public discourse expect that government transparency will usually lead to an increased trust and perceived legitimacy of government. "Optimists'" ideas are questioned by transparency "pessimists" (e.g., Hibbing and Theiss-Moore 1997; O'Neill 2002; Margetts 2006; Worthy 2010) claiming that more transparency will decrease citizens' trust and transparency "skeptics" (e.g., Roberts 2006; Bovens and Wille 2008) claiming that no relation between transparency and the perceived legitimacy of government institutions and their decisions actually exist. In order to identify expectations related to different forms of transparency and to illustrate the logical

mechanisms of Grimmelikhuijsen's theory, the normative arguments of transparency "optimists", "pessimists" or "skeptics" will be grouped following the same logic – whether the arguments are related more to transparency as disclosed information, or transparency as an act itself.

2.2.1. Transparency as disclosed information

First of all, transparency can be interpreted as disclosed information. Grimmelikhuijsen describes one of the potential mechanisms as to how transparency might affect citizens' trust is an increased knowledge about government organization and its behavior (Grimmelikhuijsen 2012, 81). The logic behind expectations about the effects of transparency as disclosed information is based on classical psychological theory: if individuals become more familiar with a particular object or subject, this increased knowledge becomes the main determinant of individuals' perceptions about it (Bigley and Pearce 1998). This mechanism is driven by 'cognition-based' considerations (Grimmelikhuijsen 2012, 82). In other words, this part of the causal mechanism is based on the idea that citizens' perceptions are determined by what they see behind a closed door.

If transparency is compared to situations of secrecy, no universal expectations about the direction of the effects of the disclosed information on perceived legitimacy can be made. Transparency "optimists" (e.g., Nye et al. 1997; Campbell 2003, Head 2006; Hood 2006) claim that transparency as disclosed information will usually have a positive effect as citizens tend to be critical about government if they do not know much about it (Blendon et al. 1997; Grimmelikhuijsen 2012, 83). In contrast to them, "pessimists" (e.g., Hibbing and Theiss-Moore 1997) suggest that more information about government and its actions will usually

affect citizens' perceptions negatively (Grimmelikhuijsen 2012) as “laws are like sausages” – individuals might not like seeing how they are made (de Fine Licht et al. 2014, 17). Other “pessimists” claim that more transparency often goes together with an increase of misinformation (e.g., O'Neill 2002) or information overload (e.g., Bekkers 1993; Margetts 2006), which have negative effects on citizens' opinion. Some “skeptics” (e.g., Roberts 2006; Bovens and Wille 2008) claim that trust in government institutions or the perceived legitimacy of their decisions are determined by other factors. Thus, additional information is unlikely to have any effect at all (Grimmelikhuijsen 2012). Other “skeptics” emphasize that the effect will be different each time as it is determined by the specifics of the disclosed information (Grimmelikhuijsen 2012, 83).

In typical real life scenarios, it is more likely that non-agent controlled information disclosures will have a negative effect on perceived legitimacy compared to government controlled acts of transparency (de Jong and de Vries 2007). Firstly, different information is usually disclosed. Whistleblowers or leaks are usually activated when there are negative things to report. Free media prefers to report more negative news about government because this attracts more public attention. On the contrary, institutions, unsurprisingly, are expected to disclose more positive information about their work and to keep negative facts secret (de Fine Licht and Naurin 2015, 146). Secondly, information is framed differently. Even when government institutions are required to reveal negative or neutral information about themselves, they have an opportunity to engage in “window dressing” and emphasize the positive facts more while paying minimal attention to negative ones (de Fine Licht and Naurin 2015, 138).

However, if we apply the same logic to the hypothetical question which is often raised after the most significant information disclosures – what if the leaked information had been revealed by the government itself (or vice versa) – the theory suggests different expectations. If transparency affects perceived legitimacy mainly through the disclosed information, the source of the information should not be expected to have any influence. This means that, based on this part of the theoretical mechanism, government and non-government controlled acts of transparency can be expected to lead to the same results (or the lack of them, if “skeptics” are right) if the content of information is the same.

2.2.2. Transparency as the act itself

The other part of the theoretical mechanism is based on the idea that transparency might have a direct effect on perceived legitimacy or trust. This means that citizens’ judgments might be based not only on the content of the information that was disclosed but also on the act of disclosure as such (Grimmelikhuijsen 2012, 80). This relation is enabled less by detailed cognitive processes such as a precise analysis of disclosed information but more by general simple cues about the decision or the government organization (Grimmelikhuijsen 2012, 80). The act of transparency itself is expected to be an influential cue. The relationship between transparency as an act itself and the perceived legitimacy of the government and its decisions can be described as an “affection” or “faith” based mechanism (in contrast to a more “rationally” based mechanism linking perceived legitimacy and transparency as disclosed information) (Lewis and Weigert 1985, Grimmelikhuijsen 2012, 80). Based on this part of the mechanism, citizens are expected to care about the fact as to who “opened the door” and how it was done.

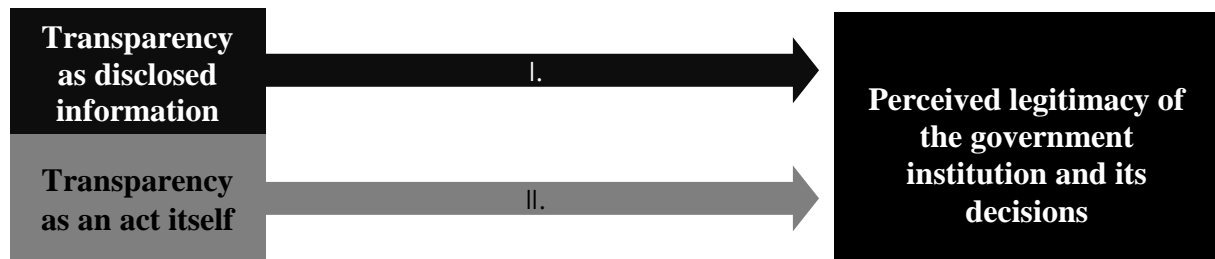
Following this logic, only a positive or no effect of government controlled transparency on the perceived legitimacy of government institutions and their decisions is expected. Transparency “optimists” (e.g., Oliver 2004) expect that the process where information was voluntarily disclosed by the government itself will be associated with openness – something that is perceived “as a political and cultural ideal” (Birchall 2012, 8). Thus, the knowledge that “the door was opened” by the government institution itself is expected to work as significant positive cue (Grimmelikhuijsen 2012). On the other hand, arguments of the “skeptics” claiming that government controlled transparency as an act will have no direct effect on perceived legitimacy are also valid. First of all, the act of voluntary information disclosure might be interpreted as something that should be there without any exceptions, instead of as something specific and commendable. This can be explained by the fact that nowadays the “right to know” is interpreted as a basic human right (Florini 2007; Baume 2011, 8). Secondly, according to some authors (e.g., Roberts 2006; Bovens and Wille 2008), perceived legitimacy will already have been determined by a variety of other factors and the fact that government is open will not have any additional significant effect.

On the contrary, based on similar arguments described above, an act of non-government controlled transparency can be expected to have a negative effect. Non-government controlled acts of transparency “remove” pure secrecy (Lindstedt and Naurin 2010). However, individuals include the knowledge that this information was hidden from them by government institution and associate it with secrecy, guilt or unfairness rather than transparency and openness (Birchall 2012, 17; de Fine Licht 2014, 26). Thus, a non-government controlled act of transparency is often expected to work as a cue for decreasing the perceived legitimacy of government and its decisions. However, based on the logic of transparency “skeptics”, the

knowledge that information was hidden might not have any significant additional effect – perceived legitimacy will be already determined by other factors.

In conclusion, government transparency is expected to affect the perceived legitimacy of government and its decisions through two general mechanisms: effects of the disclosed information (see Arrow “I.” in the Figure 2) and the effects of the transparency as an act itself (see Arrow “II.” in the Figure 2). These mechanisms can (and are often expected to) come into power at once, which complicates the identification of the direction and strength of each mechanism. In most of the previous research that compared government transparency to the situations of secrecy it was impossible to conclude whether noticed effect were determined by the specific content of the disclosed information or whether government controlled act of transparency have some direct effect. In order to prevent this challenge, my research will focus on the investigation of only one part of the mechanism – the relationship between transparency as an act and the perceived legitimacy of government decisions (see Arrow II. in the Figure 2). It can be justified by the fact that the main question of this thesis refers to transparency as an act (“opening of the door”). Another part of the mechanism – the effect of transparency as disclosed information – will be analyzed separately in order to define the context of a specific situation. This focus will be ensured by creating a situation where the same information is disclosed through different acts of transparency. It is expected that this strategy will contribute to the research field and test Grimmelikhuijsen’s theory. Comparison of different transparency forms will help to understand the mechanisms linking transparency and perceived legitimacy by identifying whether government controlled transparency has some value in and of itself or whether its effects are determined only by the content and context of the disclosed information.

Figure 2: Overall effects of government transparency as disclosed information and transparency as an act itself on perceived legitimacy



Theoretical expectations about the effects of transparency on perceived legitimacy described in this chapter lead to the key hypothesis of this research. If it is focused on transparency as an act itself, the government controlled acts of decision making transparency are expected to be associated with openness, which works as a positive cue in determining citizens' perceived legitimacy of that decision. On the other hand, non-government controlled acts of transparency are expected to be associated with secrecy, which might have the effect of a negative cue. This leads to the main hypothesis of my thesis:

H1a: Government controlled acts of transparency have a positive overall effect on the perceived legitimacy of the decision.

H1b: Non-government controlled acts of transparency have a negative overall effect on the perceived legitimacy of the decision.

2.3.Mechanisms between decision making transparency and the perceived legitimacy of decision

The aim of my research is not only to test overall expectations but also to find out what specific mechanisms relate the transparency of decision making and the perceived legitimacy of the decision. De Fine Licht in her dissertation (2014) applies the logic of classical decision making theories and shows exactly how transparency might affect the perceived legitimacy of

the decision. Grimmelikhuijsen (2012) also identifies mediating variables that might link transparency and perceived trustworthiness of government. Based on the work of these authors, I describe four inner mechanisms that are expected to link transparency and the perceived legitimacy of the decision.

2.3.1. Procedural fairness theory

According to the procedural fairness theory, citizens do not only care about the outcome of a decision, but also about the procedure as to how this decision was made (Esaiasson et al 2013, 11; de Fine Licht 2014, 26). Based on social psychology research, people are more likely to accept a decision if they perceive its making process as fair, even though they might not disagree with its outcome (Napier and Tyler 2008; Tyler 2010; de Fine Licht 2014a). Transparency becomes a part of this mechanism in two ways. First of all, transparency is a prerequisite for the effect of procedural fairness to happen (de Fine Licht 2014, 27). Citizens become familiar with the procedure through decision making transparency. Secondly, transparency is expected to have some procedural value in itself (de Fine Licht 2014, 27).

There are two different arguments as to how the form of transparency might affect the perceived fairness of the procedure. Firstly, if government controlled transparency actually has a value in itself, citizens will judge the process of decision making more positively, as it will be perceived through the lens of openness (Gutmann and Thompson 1996, 95; de Fine Licht 2014). Also, a description of the procedure is more likely to be interpreted as fair (Birkenshaw 2006). Citizens, knowing that the government itself was willing to share specific information, will assume that there is nothing worth hiding. Non-agent controlled acts of transparency can be expected to have the opposite effect. Secondly, government controlled

transparency as an act might also increase the fairness of the procedure. The action of information sharing becomes one of the components of the entire procedure (de Fine Licht 2014, 120). On the contrary, non-government controlled information disclosures indicate that this component of the decision making procedure is missing, which makes it less fair in general. The procedural fairness theory leads to the second hypothesis of this thesis:

H2a: A government controlled act of transparency is expected to increase perceived procedural fairness, which is expected to have a positive effect on the perceived legitimacy of the decision.

H2b: A non-government controlled act of transparency is expected to decrease perceived procedural fairness, which is expected to have a negative effect on the perceived legitimacy of the decision.

2.3.2. Agency theory

The relationship between the principal (citizens) and the agent (government institution) is also expected to affect the perceived legitimacy of any particular decisions of the government (de Fine Licht 2014). Based on the Agency theory, it is expected that citizens will be more likely to perceive a decision as legitimate if they believe that the government that made that decision is trustworthy. The transparency of decision making decreases information asymmetry by letting citizens “see for themselves” how government institutions actually operate (de Fine Licht et al. 2014). Disclosed information allows the principal to see and evaluate the agent’s competences, preferences, and honesty (Manin et al. 1999).

When comparing the potential effects of government and non-government controlled information disclosures on mechanisms related to the Agency theory, we see a similar

situation as described in the procedural fairness theory. Firstly, if government controlled transparency has a positive value in itself, knowing that a government institution is transparent might improve its perceived image and lead to a higher perceived legitimacy of its decisions (Grimmelikhuijsen 2012, 80). The second argument is related to citizens' beliefs that a particular government institution is accountable to its citizens. Some researchers (e.g., Meijer 2007, 166; Northrup and Thorson 2003) claim that increased accountability is the main reason why transparency is expected to increase perceived trustworthiness of government institutions. Government controlled information disclosures are usually part of a systematic process, while non-government controlled ones are one-time actions. Thus, logically, citizens are expected to feel less power in ensuring the continued accountability of their agent in the case of non-government controlled disclosures. This leads to another hypothesis about the inner mechanisms linking transparency and the perceived legitimacy of a decision:

H3a: A government controlled act of transparency is expected to increase the perceived trustworthiness of the government institution, which is expected to have a positive effect on the perceived legitimacy of the decision.

H3b: A non-government controlled act of transparency is expected to decrease the perceived trustworthiness of the government institution, which is expected to have a negative effect on the perceived legitimacy of the decision.

2.3.3. Deliberative democratic/increased knowledge theory

Based on deliberative democratic theory, the perceived legitimacy of a decision is determined not only by the outcome but also by knowing exactly why a decision was made. People are more likely to accept decisions if they are familiar with the main reasons behind a particular outcome (Gutmann and Thompson 1996; de Fine Licht 2014a, 28). The transparency of decision making is one of the sources of how citizens might hear about the reasoning behind

particular decisions. Furthermore, with better understanding, the public is expected to be more empathetic towards the difficult situation of decision makers (de Fine Licht 2014a, 28). This is expected to positively affect the perceived legitimacy of a decision. However, sometimes information disclosure might also have negative effect on understanding. This usually happens in cases of information overload (de Fine Licht 2014a, 29). What is more, citizens might be dissatisfied with the reasoning upon which it is based (for instance, when other values such as health are being commoditized).

The described mechanism is based on citizens' perceptions of the knowledge and understanding that they have about a decision (subjective measurement). Therefore, it can be expected that the form of transparency (government or non-government controlled) might affect citizens' opinion, whether they understand the real reasons behind the decision and whether they have enough knowledge about it. Non-agent controlled information disclosures are expected to pay less attention in explaining the public reasons behind the decisions as they usually focus only on the wrong-doing disclosure. What is more, non-government controlled disclosures are associated with secrecy. Therefore, citizens might have the perception that even more information is still hidden and they do not know the real reasons behind the decision. On the other hand, some authors (e.g., Pozen 2013) challenge these expectations about the negative effects of non-government controlled acts of transparency on trust. It is claimed that non-government controlled acts are not seen as "consciously intended". Thus, citizens are likely to believe that because of these leaks, they understand real reasons why a particular decision was made (Pozen 2013). Taking into account the contradictory expectations related to the different forms of transparency and perceived knowledge, the fourth hypothesis will not include the direction of the expected effect.

H4: The form of transparency (government or non-government controlled) affects perceived knowledge about the decision, which in turn has an effect on the perceived legitimacy of the decision.

2.3.4. Message credibility theory

Finally, citizens' perceptions about the credibility of disclosed information is described as one of the key elements in the relationship between transparency and perceived legitimacy (Grimmelikhuijsen 2012). There are two different mechanisms as to how message credibility might mediate the effect of transparency. Firstly, it can be expected that the message which is perceived as reliable, complete, and credible will have a stronger effect on the perception. If information is interpreted as unreliable, it is likely that its content will be ignored (Metzger and Flanagin 2013). Secondly, a perception that the message is not credible or incomplete might lead to a negative opinion about the source which shared this information and its other actions (Grimmelikhuijsen 2012).

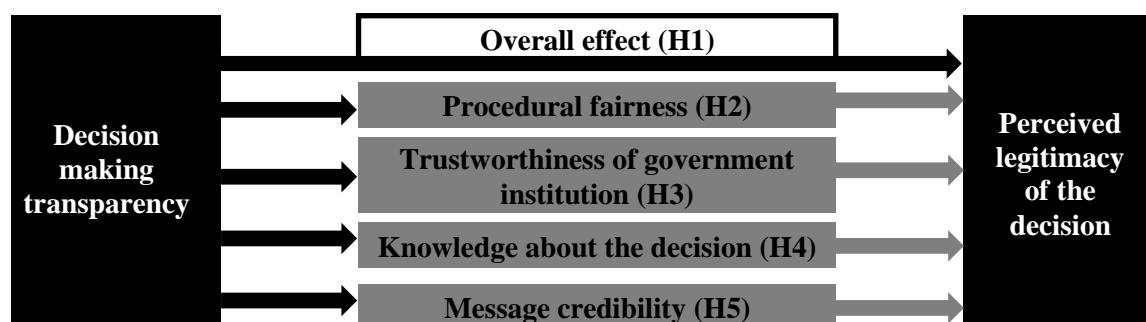
Knowing who shared the information is one of the main factors determining the perceived credibility of the message. Thus, it can be expected that the form of transparency (government or non-government controlled) will have some effect. However, arguments about the direction of this effect are underdeveloped. In the case of government controlled transparency, a message that seems "untrustworthy in the opinion of an individual is a reason to be critical about the organization that promotes this message" and its decisions (Grimmelikhuijsen 2012, based on Metaxas and DeStefano 2005). Following the same logic, if information is perceived as unreliable in a non-government controlled case of transparency, it should not have any effect on the perceived legitimacy of the government and its decisions. Moreover, it can be

expected that messages shared by other actors are more likely to be perceived as complete and credible as they are not consciously intended - government institutions do not have the power to choose what information is beneficial and should be shared (Pozen 2013). The message credibility theory leads to the last hypothesis of this thesis:

H5: The form of the transparency affects the message's credibility, which in turn has an effect on the perceived legitimacy of the decision

To sum up, based on various theories, decision making transparency might affect the perceived legitimacy of a decision not only directly, but also through various inner mechanisms. Thus, it can be expected that government and non-government controlled acts of transparency might have a different influence on perceived legitimacy as they affect these inner mechanisms (see Figure 3). Moreover, perceived procedural fairness and the perceived trustworthiness of a government institution can be interpreted not only as intervening variables but also as other “levels” of perceived legitimacy alongside of a perceived legitimacy of the decision. Thus, the investigation of the effect of transparency on these two variables is also important for the main question of this study (not only for an understanding of the inner mechanisms).

Figure 3: Mechanisms between transparency and perceived legitimacy of decisions



3. Methodology

In order to test whether government controlled and non-government controlled information disclosures have different effects on the perceived legitimacy of a decision and expected mediating variables, I implemented two online survey experiments. Participants were introduced to information about a particular City Council decision. The first experiment recruited citizens of the U.S.A. in April, 2017. The first experiment can be interpreted as a “practice run” where ideas and the design of the experiment were tested using a relatively less time consuming strategy – the Mechanical Turk (MTurk) platform. Based on the findings and “opacity” of some results of the first experiment, the design of the experiment was improved. In April of 2019, a second experiment was conducted using a sample of people in Lithuania – the main target population of this research.

3.1. Why experiment?

There are a few reasons why an experiment was chosen as the main method to test the hypotheses of this research. First of all, experiments are often described as a suitable method when there is a need to measure the attitudes and perceptions of individuals (Druckman et al. 2011). Experimental methods have also been chosen by many researchers who have investigated the effects of government transparency on citizens’ perceptions. Moreover, experimental methods can create the unique situation of an isolated environment and for this reason they are claimed to be especially beneficial in identifying causal mechanisms and for maximising the internal validity of their conclusions (McDermott 2011). Finally, the “dual nature” of the main object – government transparency – leads to a situation where theorized relationships can be properly investigated only in the designed environment. It is impossible to find cases where identical information was disclosed by a government and by other parties.

Therefore, an experimental manipulation of the information that has been provided is the only way to separately measure the effects of different parts of the theoretical mechanism – transparency as disclosed information and transparency as an act.

3.2. Limitations of the experiment

Despite the fact that an experiment is the most suitable method to test the hypotheses of this thesis, the potential limitations of this method cannot be ignored. First of all, experiments are often criticized because of the low representativeness of the sample (Siedler and Sonnenberg 2010). In order to lower this risk, individuals were invited to participate in a survey using different channels and online platforms. The first experiment was implemented with respondents recruited through the MTurk platform. Research shows that “MTurk samples tend to be more politically liberal, younger, less religious, and less racially diverse than the U.S. population” (Berinsky et al. 2012; Huff and Tingley, 2015; Clifford et al. 2015). However, others claim that these differences are not fundamental and, in general, MTurk samples mirror the population sufficiently well (e.g., Goodman et al. 2013; Weinberg et al. 2014). The second experiment was implemented recruiting participants through various social media platforms (online forums and Facebook groups) in order to ensure that participants with different demographics were represented in the sample. Secondly, one more common argument against experiments is the lack of “realism” (Druckman 2011). A few strategies were invoked in order to decrease the negative impact of this limitation. Descriptions of decisions and the decision-making process were presented in the form of newspaper articles as that is how most citizens become familiar with government decisions (de Fine Licht et al. 2014). The content, wording and structure of the information provided to the participants was created based on recent articles published in the analyzed countries. Thirdly, results of survey

experiments are usually limited to one particular situation. In the case of this research, it cannot be claimed that the effects would be the same if citizens were informed about different decisions and the decision-making process.

To sum up, the main limitation of survey experiments (this research is not an exception) is their low external validity. The key strategy used to mitigate this challenge is a clear emphasis on its existence. The scope of generalizations is taken into account and is limited to the specificity of the respondents' samples and situations described in the experiment. Also, because of the "context-bound" nature of transparency effects on perceived legitimacy, the external validity of other studies related to this topic is quite low as well (de Fine Licht et al. 2014). Thus, the advantages of experimental design in this case surpass their limitations.

One more limitation is specific to this particular research. Two online experiments, which were conducted to test the hypotheses of this research, targeted citizens of different countries – the U.S. and Lithuania. The government transparency related context of these countries has some general similarities. Most importantly, the government transparency level in Lithuania and the U.S. (as in most of the OECD countries) is relatively high (e.g., both countries are members of the Open Government Partnership). The citizens of both countries are expected to be used to both government and non-government controlled forms of transparency. Thus, experiments with Americans and Lithuanians can be presented in the same research. Nevertheless, differences regarding the context of these two countries are undoubtedly more frequent and fundamental as compared to their similarities. Thus, the results of these experiments cannot be analyzed and interpreted together. Ideas identified when comparing the results of these experiments will be interpreted only as "hypothetical presumptions" and not as scientific findings.

3.3. Experimental design

At the beginning of the experimental procedure, right after the introduction of the survey and presentation of their rights (based on the GDPR), respondents were asked questions measuring their general opinion about environmental issues, taxation and government. Answers to these questions were used as control variables. Furthermore, participants were asked to read a newspaper article while imagining that they lived in the mentioned city. Respondents were randomly divided into four groups: each group received a different version of the article. Participants in the “Control of the Control” group were only introduced with the outcome of that particular decision of the City Council. The Control group was introduced to the decision and its decision-making process, without any mention of who disclosed the information. The comparison of these two groups allowed for measuring the effect of the content of the disclosed information. The first treatment group, which was created to simulate the situation of a government controlled disclosure contained exactly the same information as the information provided to the control group but in this case participants were informed that the information was voluntarily provided by the City Council. This fact was mentioned a few times in different parts of the article. A comparison of the first treatment group and the control group allowed for the identification of the effect of government controlled transparency as an act. The second treatment group got a vignette which was created to reflect a situation of non-government controlled information disclosure. Respondents in this group were informed that the information was leaked and disclosed not by the government institution, but by other actors. A comparison of the second treatment group and the control group allowed for the identification of the effect of non-government controlled transparency as an act.

Table 1: Control and treatment groups in the experiment

“Control of the Control”	Control group	1st treatment group (government controlled information disclosure)	2nd treatment group (non-government controlled information disclosure)
Only the decision	Information about the decision making process + The decision	Information about the decision making process showing that all the information was shared by the Council + The decision	Information about the decision making process showing that information was disclosed not by the Council + The decision

After reading the newspaper article, participants were asked to think about the situation described in the news and answer some questions. The questions were used to operationalize the main dependent variable of the research – the perceived legitimacy of the decision - and variables that, based on a theoretical framework, were expected to affect (mediate) relationships between transparency and the perceived legitimacy of the decision: procedural fairness, trustworthiness of the government institution, knowledge about the decision, and message credibility. Questions were built and chosen after a comprehensive analysis of the questionnaires used in previous experiments related to the topic of government transparency or the perceived legitimacy of government decisions (Grimmelikhuijsen 2012; de Fine Licht 2014). A combination of at least two related questions was used to measure each one of the key variables. All answers were measured using a 7 point Likert scale. At the end of the survey participants were asked to answer demographic questions. A detailed list of questions is provided in the appendixes.

4. Results

This section discusses the results of both experiments separately. The content of the decisions provided to the participants and the specificity of the samples are also described here.

4.1. The first experiment

4.1.1. *Description of the first experiment and its participants*

The first experiment was conducted with a targeted population of U.S. citizens. Participants of the experiment were introduced to a City Council decision to impose a 9 cent tax on every retail plastic checkout bag in the city (see the Appendix 1). The questionnaire in the first experiment measured less variables compared to the second experiment. Thus, only the findings related to the first three hypotheses of this thesis are discussed in the results of the first experiment.

Individuals were invited to participate in the survey presenting it as a Human Intelligence Task on Amazon Turk. This experiment was implemented as part of larger survey. In total, 151 participants completed the survey section relevant for this research. More than 85% participating in the sample were 24-34 years old. Moreover, more than 60% identified themselves as male. Finally, almost three fourths of the sample were Caucasians. This means that young people, males and Caucasians were overrepresented in the sample when compared to the demographics of the U.S. Thus, the results of this experiment can be generalized only in the scope of this particular context. Answers of the participants who failed to answer questions that were included to test whether they had actually read the provided article and the answers of participants who spent less than four minutes to answer a section of the survey

(not enough time to read the provided information) were removed from the sample. Thus, the original sample was reduced to 136 respondents' answers that were included in this analysis.

4.1.2. Results of the first experiment

Values of key variables in different groups are presented in the table below.

Table 2: Differences between the groups (results of the first experiment)

	Control of the Control (only the decision) N=37	Control group N=32	1 st treatment group (government controlled transparency) N=34	2 nd treatment group (non- government controlled transparency) N=33
Variable	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Perceived legitimacy of the decision	4.2 (1.7)	3.8 (1.9)	3.9 (1.9)	4.3 (1.9)
Procedural fairness	-	3.8 (1.9)	3.9 (1.9)	4.3 (1.7)
Trustworthiness of the government institution	-	4.0 (1.7)	4.1 (1.8)	4.3 (1.5)

The analysis started with an investigation of the overall effect of transparency on the perceived legitimacy of the decision (testing of the H1). Welch's two sample t-test was used to test a null hypothesis of equal means. However, a relatively small size of the sample might have undermined the power of the analysis. First of all, the effect of the disclosed information was tested by comparing "Control of the Control"¹ and Control groups. The results of the t-test revealed that there was no significant evidence ($t(df = 63) = -0.88, p = 0.38$) that the content of the disclosed information about the decision making procedure had any effect on the perceived legitimacy of the decision.

¹ "Control of the Control" group did not get information about the decision making procedure, therefore they only got questions that measured the legitimacy of the decision.

After that, the effects of transparency as an act on the perceived legitimacy of the decision were tested. A comparison of means of the Control and the 1st treatment group (see table 3) revealed that, in this case, government controlled information disclosure as an act itself had no significant impact on the perceived legitimacy of the decision ($t(df = 63)=0.22, p=0.8$). Contrary to the expectations of Hypothesis 1a, the knowledge that information about the decision making procedure was voluntarily shared by the City Council itself did not make people think about the decision more positively. Thirdly, comparison of the 2nd treatment and the control group revealed that non-government controlled disclosure as an act also did not have any significant impact on the perceived legitimacy of the decision ($t(df = 62)=0.96, p=0.3$). Also, no significant results were noticed when the government and non-government controlled transparency groups were compared. This means that there is no significant evidence in support of Hypothesis 1. Nevertheless, insight on the data provides some quite startling and counterintuitive signals. The mean of the perceived legitimacy of the decision was higher in the group that was informed that the government information was leaked by others when compared to the control and the 1st treatment group.

Furthermore, the effects of transparency on two variables – procedural fairness and the trustworthiness of government institution – that theoretically were expected to mediate the relationship between transparency and perceived legitimacy of the decision were tested (H2 and H3). A comparison of the Control and 1st treatment groups revealed that neither perceived fairness of the procedure ($t(df = 63)=0.11, p=0.9$), nor the trustworthiness of the City Council ($t(df = 63)=0.06, p=0.95$) were significantly affected by the knowledge that the information was shared by the City Council. A comparison of the Control and 2nd treatment groups showed that non-government controlled disclosure as an act itself also did not have any significant impact on the perceived fairness of the procedure ($t(df = 62)=1.08, p=0.3$) or the

trustworthiness of the City Council ($t(df = 61) = 0.68, p = 0.5$). Based on the evidence that relationships between the independent variable and expected mediators are nonsignificant, it can be concluded that in this case the entire mediation mechanism is not likely to be significant (Baron and Kenny 1986). In other words, there is no evidence supporting hypotheses 2 and 3. The insignificance of all of the t-test results was quite unexpected and went against most intuitive and theoretical expectations. Therefore, the same hypotheses were tested using different statistical methods (ANOVA, Chi square tests with a different recoding of dependent variables). No significant differences in results were found.

4.1.3. Discussion on the results of the first experiment

It stands to reason that the theories of transparency “skeptics” who claim that transparency will not affect perceived legitimacy can be expected to explain this case. Respondents’ answers about perceived legitimacy were widely spread in all four groups (SD 1.5-1.9) and it may be the main reason for the insignificant results. It may be presumed that individuals had strong personal opinions about that particular decision to tax plastic bags. Therefore, their opinions were not affected by additional information on how the decision was made and by the knowledge as to whether an institution acted transparently or not.

Moreover, despite the fact that they were insignificant, the counterintuitive insights should not be ignored. Participants in the 2nd treatment group who were informed that information was leaked by other actors seemed to be more positive about the perceived legitimacy of the decision, procedural fairness and the trustworthiness of the government institution when compared to the respondents of the Control and 1st treatment group. The only logical explanation of this pattern might be based on the innovative Pozen’s (2013) theory which

claims that leaks might actually be beneficial for government when compared to government controlled disclosures because individuals do not see leaks as consciously intended. Consequently, people will feel that they are provided with real information and knowledge about a government institution. And, if that information does not show something especially negative, it might increase trust and perceived legitimacy. However, it should be mentioned again that this is only one insight, as in this case differences were statistically insignificant.

Besides, non-surprisingly, it was found that the perceived legitimacy of the decision, the procedure and the City Council were highly related to each other ($F(df = 2; 93) = 190, p < .01, R^2 = 0.8$). Procedural fairness and agency theories of decision making presume that individuals will perceive a decision as more legitimate if it is made through a fair procedure by a legitimate institution (de Fine Licht 2014). However, it may be possible that adjustment heuristics came into effect this time i.e. individuals who liked the decision perceived the procedure and the City Council that made that decision as more legitimate.

4.2. The second experiment

4.2.1. Description of the second experiment and its participants

The experiment design was improved taking into account its potential weaknesses that were noticed during the implementation and analysis of the first experiment. Firstly, there was some evidence to believe that too much information was presented, and respondents were not able to notice some of the important details. In order to mitigate this challenge, a shorter version of the articles was provided to the participants of the second experiment and more emphasis was put on the “treatment” sentences (e.g., on the fact that information was voluntarily shared by the City Council). Secondly, questions designed to measure perceived

knowledge (H4) and message credibility (H5) were added to the questionnaire of the second experiment. Finally, the content of the described decision and procedure was adjusted to the context of the second experiment (population of Lithuania). Participants of the second experiment were introduced to a City Council decision to build a new park in the city (see Appendix 2). This situation was chosen after an analysis of recent news articles about the decisions of various City and Town Councils in Lithuania.

There are a number of reasons why Lithuanians were chosen as the main target population for this research. Recent political events in Lithuania have provided an impulse and inspiration for the general topic of this research where government controlled acts of transparency are compared to information disclosures by third actors. For instance, a year ago, informal correspondence between the president of Lithuania and the leader of an influential political party at the time (referred to as the “Tulip Scandal”) was leaked. These leaked emails had a negative effect on the perceived trustworthiness of the president, even though some political analysts claimed that the content of the emails did not reveal any fundamental wrongdoing. Thus, a question arose as to whether the negative reaction of Lithuanians was determined by the disclosed information or simply because of the fact that something had been done “behind closed doors”. Furthermore, an inner knowledge of the political context in Lithuania allowed for a deeper analysis and interpretation of the experiment’s results and was one more reason why the population of Lithuania was chosen.

Invitations to participate in the survey were distributed to citizens of Lithuania by posting them on various online platforms. In total, 240 participants partially completed the survey and answered questions that measured their perceived legitimacy of the decision (226 of these participants fully completed the survey). However, in order to ensure the reliability of the

data, respondents who failed to answer the question about the provided information, as well as those who spent less than three and a half minutes to complete the survey, were removed from the sample. Thus, there remained a sample of 211 individuals (199 complete answers).

The sample from the experiment does not completely reflect the Lithuanian population. Relatively young people were overrepresented in the sample. 20.4% of the respondents were 18-24 years old; 50.2% were 25-34 years old, and the rest were older than 34 years old. Females were slightly overrepresented in the sample (62% of the sample identifies as female). Three fourths of the participants claimed that they had completed a higher university education. The education completed by the participants of the experiment is the most significant deviation of the sample when compared to the population of Lithuania. 58% of individuals claimed that they currently live in a city. An analysis of the respondents' demographic data shows that no generalizations about the entire population of Lithuania can be drawn. During the analysis and interpretation of the results, it should be taken into account that relatively young (18-34 years old), and well educated individuals were strongly over-represented in the sample.

4.2.2. Specifics of the data

The data analysis started with a randomization check. The results of a Pearson chi-square test showed no evidence of an unequal distribution of age, gender, education, and place of residence among the groups. The differences in the values of control variables "General trust in government" and "Attitude towards green zones" were also not large enough to be statistically significant. Therefore, neither demographic variables, nor answers to the control questions were integrated in the further analysis.

In this research, all of the key variables were measured by the indexes consisting of two questions (answers were measured using a Scale from 1 to 7) (for a details about variables operationalization see Appendix 3). Thus, the value of Cronbach's alpha (a measure of internal consistency) was checked. The Cronbach's alpha value for four indexes measuring key variables was sufficiently high (0.8-0.9) (DeVellis 2012). However, the Cronbach's alpha of the index measuring "Knowledge about the decision" was only 0.6. Therefore, instead of the single index, answers to the question Q7: "I believe that I understand the main reasons behind the decision to build the new park" and question Q8: "I believe that I have enough knowledge about the decision to build the new park" were be included in the analysis (more particularly, testing of H4) separately.

Furthermore, a check was made for the normality of the data. The skewness of most variables is between -0.5 and 0.5, which indicates that the distribution is approximately symmetric. However, the responses for the perceived legitimacy of the decision are moderately skewed, and responses to the Q8 are highly skewed. Hair et al. (2017) suggest that excess kurtosis (defined as kurtosis minus 3) values between -1 and 1 are considered acceptable in order to prove normal distribution. Following this rule, only kurtosis values for Q7 and Q8 indicate distribution that is far from normal.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of the key variables

Variable	Cronbach's alpha	Skew	(Excess) kurtosis
Perceived legitimacy of the decision	0.85	-0.97*	0.59
Procedural fairness	0.89	-0.47	-0.79
Trustworthiness of government institution	0.9	-0.5	-0.73
Knowledge about the decision	0.6	-1.15 (Q7)** -0.18 (Q8)	1.26 (Q7) -1.18 (Q8)
Message credibility	0.8	-0.02	-0.97

* - moderately skewed distribution, ** - strongly skewed distribution.

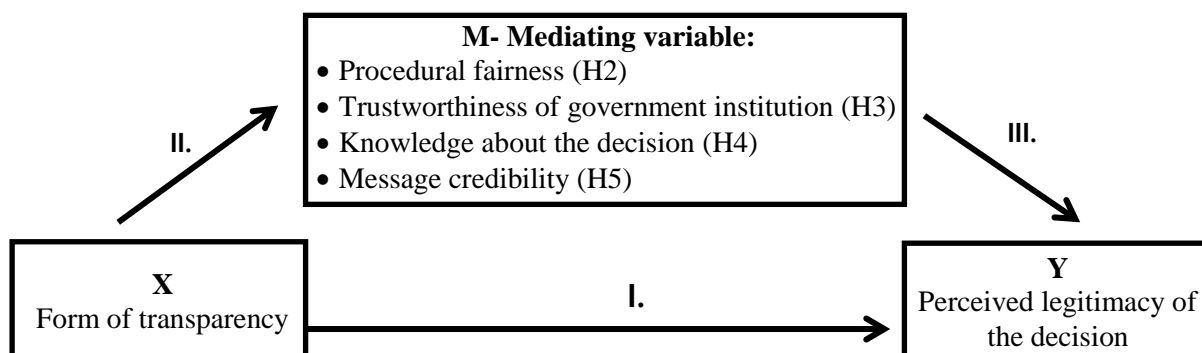
The analysis revealed that the values of some variables are not normally distributed. This fact has been taken into account. Nevertheless, parametric tests have been applied for an analysis of the data. There are a few reasons why this is possible. First of all, the sample size is relatively large (n=199 in total, and n=85 for the smallest category). According to some experts (e.g., Tabachnick and Fidell 2013), deviations from normality do not make a substantial difference for an analysis when the sample is large enough. Moreover, key methods that will be applied for the analysis (e.g., One-way ANOVA) are considered to be robust for the assumption of normality (Khan and Rayner 2003). Finally, based on the skew and kurtosis values, noticed deviations from normality are not fundamental (see Kline 2011). In order to ensure that the non-normality of some variables does not significantly influence the results of applied parametric tests, the same relations were also tested using non-parametric tests (more particularly, logistic regression and chi-square tests with grouped values of variables). No fundamental differences in the results of the parametric and non-parametric tests were noticed. Thus, only the results of parametric tests are reported further.

4.2.3. Data analysis strategy

The data will be analysed in two separate stages. During the first stage, I will apply a one-way between subjects ANOVA to compare the effect of transparency on the main dependent variable - perceived legitimacy of the decision in different experimental conditions (testing of H1). If the results of ANOVA indicate that there is a significant difference between some of the groups, I will compute the Tukey's honestly significant difference (HSD) post hoc test, which is designed to compare each of the experimental groups to every other group. According to experts (e.g., Abdi, and Williams 2010) Tukey's HSD test provides more reliable results compared to the number of t-tests, as Tukey's test procedure adjusts the p-values for multiple testing, and corrects for a family-wise error rate.

Based on these theories, it is expected that transparency might affect the perceived legitimacy of the decision not only directly but also through various mediating variables: procedural fairness (H2), trustworthiness of government institution (H3), knowledge about decision (H4), and message credibility (H5). Therefore, during the second stage of the analysis, an investigation will be made as to whether the relationship between government transparency and the perceived legitimacy of the decision is mediated by other variables, as it might be expected to be, based on theory. Figure 4 illustrates the mediation model.

Figure 4: Mediation model



The “role” of each mediating variable will be investigated one by one (H2-H5 tested separately). The conduction of ANOVA and Tukey HSD test will provide the opportunity to see whether some of the mediating variables are significantly affected by the transparency and its form (relation II. in the figure 4). If some significant effects are noticed, an investigation will be made to further determine the significance and strength of the causal mechanisms by conducting Causal mediation analysis – an approach and method that was created specifically for this purpose (Imai et al., 2011; Tingley et al., 2014). This innovative method has many advantages compared to the more traditional practice where mediating mechanisms have usually been “formulated, understood, and implemented within the framework of linear structural equation models” (Imai et al. 2010). Causal mediation analysis takes into account and provides four outputs. Firstly, it shows Total effect, which is a total effect of X on Y (without M) – relation I. in the figure 4. Secondly, it shows Average direct effect (ADE) - a direct effect of X on Y after taking into account a mediation effect of M. Thirdly, Average causal mediation effect (ACME) is the Total effect minus the ADE – the indirect effect. If ACME is significant, it means that the relationship between X and Y is mediated by the intervening variable (M). Finally, Prop. Mediated “provides an estimate of the extent to which the total effect is accounted for by the pathway through the mediating variable” (Ananth 2019).

4.2.4. Results of the second experiment

Overall effect of transparency on the perceived legitimacy of decision

First is the investigation of the overall effect of transparency on the perceived legitimacy of the decision (H1). Table 4 shows key descriptive statistics of the variable “Perceived legitimacy of the decision” in all experimental groups.

Table 4: Differences between groups: perceived legitimacy of the decision (results of the second experiment)

	Control of the control (only the decision) N=67	Control group N=43	1 st treatment group (government controlled transparency) N=54	2 nd treatment group (non- government controlled transparency) N=47
Variable	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Perceived legitimacy of the decision	5.35 (1.22)	5.41 (1.07)	5.26 (1.0)	4.9 (1.32)

Results of a one-way between subjects ANOVA indicates that there is no significant effect of transparency and its form on the perceived legitimacy of the decision for all four experimental conditions [$F(3, 207) = 1.81, p = 0.15$]. The fact that the “Control of control” condition, where respondents were presented only with the final decision, did not significantly differ from the control condition reveals that, in this case, transparency as disclosed information did not have any effect on the perceived legitimacy of the decision. Control ($M=5.41, SD=1.07$) and the 1st treatment group (government controlled act of transparency) ($M=5.26, SD=1.0$) also did not differ significantly. This means that there is no significant evidence supporting hypothesis 1a, stating that a “Government controlled act of transparency has a positive overall effect on the perceived legitimacy of the decision”.

Mean of the perceived legitimacy of the decision in the 2nd treatment group, which was presented with non-government controlled transparency ($M=4.9, SD=1.32$) is more than 0.5 point lower compared to the control group ($M=5.41, SD=1.07$). When the effects of all four experimental conditions are compared, the results of ANOVA indicate that the difference between the control and the 2nd treatment group is not large enough to be statistically significant. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that if these two groups are compared separately (not taking into account the results of the “Control of control” and the “1st treatment” groups) some effects of the non-government controlled act of transparency on the

perceived legitimacy of the decision can be noticed. For instance, the results of ANOVA comparing only control and non-government controlled transparency conditions indicate that there is a significant ($p < 0.1$) effect of non-government controlled transparency on the perceived legitimacy of the decision [$F(1, 88) = 3.9, p = 0.051$]. Based on the results of an independent-samples t-test, there was a significant difference in the scores for perceived legitimacy of decision in control and non-government controlled transparency conditions [$t(87) = -1.99, p = 0.05$]. It shows that there is some evidence in support of H1b, where it is expected that a non-government controlled act of transparency has a negative overall effect on the perceived legitimacy of the decision.

Investigation of the mechanisms linking transparency and perceived legitimacy of the decision

Further investigation explores whether the relationship between government transparency and perceived legitimacy of the decision is mediated (affected) by other variables, as might be theoretically expected. Descriptive statistics of all “potentially mediating” variables are presented in Table 5. The “Control of control” group did not receive any questions measuring mediating variables. Thus, only the results of the control group and both treatment groups are further compared.

Table 5: Differences between groups: mediating variables (results of the second experiment)

	Control group N=41	1 st treatment group (government controlled transparency) N=46	2 nd treatment group (non- government controlled transparency) N=47
Variable	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Procedural fairness	4.97 (1.17)	4.74 (1.2)	4.01 (1.45)
Trustworthiness of government institution	4.66 (1.13)	4.43 (1.21)	3.96 (1.38)
Knowledge I: Q7: I understand the main reasons behind the decision	5.12 (1.19)	5.22 (1.09)	5.09 (1.21)
Knowledge II: Q8: I have enough knowledge about the decision	3.73 (1.5)	4.22 (1.54)	3.98 (1.44)
Message credibility	3.84 (1.32)	4.16 (1.15)	3.6 (1.25)

Hypothesis 2 is the first to be tested, which states that the relation between transparency and the perceived legitimacy of the decision is mediated by the perceived fairness of the decision-making process. Based on the results of a one-way between the subjects of ANOVA, there was a significant effect of transparency on perceived procedural fairness at the $p < .05$ level for the three conditions [$F(2, 139) = 6.99, p = 0.0012$]. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the government controlled transparency condition ($M = 4.74, SD = 1.2$) did not significantly differ from the control condition ($M = 4.97, SD = 1.17$). This means that there is no evidence supporting H2a. However, the Tukey HSD test shows that the mean score for the non-government controlled transparency condition ($M = 4.01, SD = 1.45$) was significantly lower than the control and government controlled transparency conditions. Knowing that government information was disclosed by other actors had a negative effect on the perceived fairness of the decision making procedure, as was expected based on hypothesis 2b. In order to test whether this relationship has had some effect on the perceived legitimacy of the decision, a causal mediation analysis was conducted comparing control and non-government controlled transparency conditions. The results are presented in the table 6.

Table 6: Causal mediation analysis. Control and non-government controlled transparency conditions compared; perceived procedural fairness as the mediating variable

	Estimate	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	p-value
ACME	0.50249	0.20241	0.84	0.006 **
ADE	0.00689	-0.42576	0.45	0.978
Total effect	0.50939	0.02419	1.01	0.046 *
Prop. Mediated	0.96579	-0.02363	4.31	0.052 ·

*** p <0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, · p<0.1

The results of the causal mediation analysis reveal that the total effect of non-government controlled transparency on the perceived legitimacy of the decision is significantly mediated by perceived procedural fairness ($p=0.006$). The direct effect of non-government controlled transparency on the perceived legitimacy does not exist ($p=0.978$) if the effects of perceived procedural fairness are taken into account. It shows that, at least in the case of this particular experiment, there is strong evidence in support of hypothesis 2b.

Furthermore, hypothesis 3 was tested, which states that the relationship between transparency and the perceived legitimacy of the decision is mediated by the perceived trustworthiness of the government institution. The results of a one-way ANOVA indicates the significant effect of transparency on the perceived trustworthiness of a government institution for the three conditions [$F(2, 133) = 3,62, p = 0.029$]. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that a government controlled transparency condition ($M= 4.43, SD=1.21$) did not significantly differ from the control condition ($M= 4.66, SD=1.31$). This means that there is no evidence supporting H3a. Based on the Tukey HSD, the mean of perceived trustworthiness of a government institution in the non-government controlled transparency condition was significantly lower compared to the control group ($p=0.03$). The results of the Causal

mediation analysis of the mediating effect of trustworthiness of a government institution when non-government controlled transparency and control conditions are compared are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Causal mediation analysis. Control and non-government controlled transparency conditions compared; perceived trustworthiness of government institution as the mediating variable

	Estimate	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	p-value
ACME	0.3890	0.1040	0.73	0.010 **
ADE	0.1284	-0.2905	0.56	0.542
Total effect	0.5174	0.0146	1.05	0.046 *
Prop. Mediated	0.7358	-0.0663	2.71	0.052 ·

*** p <0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, p<0.1

Based on the results of this mediation analysis, non-government controlled transparency as an act affects the perceived legitimacy of a decision through the trustworthiness of the government institution – ACME is significant at the $p<.01$ level. When the indirect effect of a mediating variable – trustworthiness of a government institution – is taken into account, the direct effect of non-government controlled transparency on the perceived legitimacy of the decision is insignificant ($p=0.542$). On average, individuals who knew that the government information was leaked were more skeptical about the trustworthiness of the City Council and that in turn made them more likely to perceive the decision made by the Council as less legitimate (compared to the Control condition). This means that there is some evidence in support of Hypothesis 3b.

Furthermore, an investigation was made as to whether government or non-government controlled transparency acts affected the participants' perceived knowledge about the

decision. Based on the results of a one-way ANOVA, there was no significant effect of transparency on the participants' belief that they understood the main reasons behind the decision to build a new park (Q7) [$F(2, 133) = 0.18, p = 0.84$]. The differences between experimental conditions were also insignificant on the participants' belief that they had enough knowledge about the decision to build a new park (Q8) [$F(2, 133) = 0.22, p = 0.3$]. A variable that is not affected by the treatment cannot mediate a relationship between government transparency and the perceived legitimacy of a decision, so there is no need to investigate this mechanism any further. It can be clearly concluded in the case of this experiment that there was no evidence in support of H4, as government and non-government controlled forms of transparency did not have any significant effect on perceived knowledge.

ANOVA also did not indicate any significant effect of transparency on perceived message credibility for the three conditions [$F(2, 133) = 2.49, p = 0.1$]. And so, there was no significant evidence in support of Hypothesis 5, as well. Nevertheless, insight on the data provides some interesting signals that are worth mentioning. The mean of the perceived message credibility in the government controlled transparency group (Mean=4,16) was noticeably higher compared to the control (Mean=3,84) and non-government controlled transparency group (Mean=3,6). This suggests that there is some possibility that people are more likely to perceive the information as trustworthy and credible if they know that it was shared by the government institution itself. This might be one of the advantages of government controlled transparency.

4.2.5. Discussion on the results of the second experiment

Transparency as disclosed information did not have any significant effect on the perceived legitimacy of the decision to build a new park in the case of this experiment. Based on the logic of the “skeptics” (Roberts 2006; Bovens and Wille 2008) there are two potential explanations for this. First of all, it might be that in this case the disclosed information did not reveal any facts that would be interpreted as especially positive or negative. It can be expected that if the information had disclosed something undoubtedly bad (e.g., cases of corruption) or good, this stronger “trigger” would have had some effect on the perception of the decision. Secondly, it is also likely that the participants’ opinion about the decision was determined by a variety of other factors. For instance, if an individual believed that a new park is needed, he or she did not care significantly about the fact whether the idea about a new park was proposed by representatives of business or by a member of the City Council.

Government controlled transparency as an act also did not have a significant effect when was compared to a situation of secrecy or a situation when respondents were not informed about the source of transparency. This means that despite the dominant practical or theoretical expectations of transparency “optimists”, knowing that the Council was open and transparent was not perceived as something positive by the participants of this experiment. At least not to the level that it would have affected the perceived legitimacy of the decision or its decision-making procedure. There are two related potential explanations for this. Firstly, individuals in the control group who did not know how the disclosed information was revealed, might have assumed that it was done by the City Council, as is most often the case in Lithuania. Secondly, government openness might not have had any additional positive value as it is already seen as something that should exist “by default”. Government institutions in Lithuania

(the same as many other EU countries) are relatively open (WJP Open Government Index 2015). Thus, it is highly likely that government controlled transparency is already perceived not as an advantage or something commendable, but as the government's obligation and a basic citizens' right (Florini 2007).

On the other hand, there is some evidence to believe that non-government controlled transparency as an act worked as a negative cue (as was expected in the theoretical framework). Knowledge that information about the decision making procedure was leaked had a negative effect on the perceived legitimacy of the decision (the effect was noticed only when less "strict" statistical methods were applied). Moreover, knowing that information was disclosed not by the City Council, but by others made people more likely to think that the procedure was unfair and the Council was less trustworthy. These "thoughts" seemed to mediate citizens' perceptions about the decision itself.

Based on the theoretical logic, non-government controlled transparency could have affected citizens' perceptions in two different ways. Firstly, knowing that some information was hidden might have encouraged participants to interpret the specific content of the information more negatively. However, there is some evidence to believe that in the case of this experiment, the interpretation of specific facts was not significantly affected by knowing that these facts were leaked. At the end of the survey, participants were asked to express their opinion about the fact that the decision to build a brand new park was initiated by a real estate company and about the fact that the real estate company proposed investing an additional 1 mln Eur of their own funds into the new park. Based on the results of ANOVA participants in the non-government controlled transparency condition were not more likely to evaluate these specific details about the decision making process negatively compared to the control or

government controlled transparency conditions [$F(2, 131) = 0.94, p = 0.39$ (opinion about the decision initiation) and $F(2, 131) = 0.36, p = 0.7$ (opinion about the proposed additional 1 mln Eur)].

Secondly, theoretically it is expected that the lack of government openness will have some negative value in itself. Following this, it is likely that participants of this experiment perceived the procedure, which lacked transparency, and the government, which was not, open more negatively in general, not thinking about the specific details that had been disclosed. In other words, the thought that, “I do not know what exactly, but something is suspicious here” might have come into the minds of participants in the non-government controlled transparency situation. This explanation can be supported by theories claiming that the majority of citizens are not experts in policy making and do not spend much time on understanding political information. Their opinions are more often determined by general simple cues such as knowing that information was leaked rather than by detailed cognitive processes such as a precise analysis of disclosed information (Lewis and Weigert, 1985; Grimmelikhuijsen 2012, 80).

4.3. Comparison of the findings of the first and second experiment

A comparison of the results of both experiments may be useful for understanding the broader picture. However, it should be emphasized again that the populations and designs of both experiments conducted for this research were different. Thus, ideas reported further in this section should be interpreted more as hypothetical considerations rather than scientifically justified findings. Transparency as disclosed information and government controlled transparency did not have any significant effect on the perceived legitimacy of decisions neither in the first, nor in the second experiment. It supports the ideas of transparency

“skeptics”. The main difference is that non-government controlled transparency as an act had a negative effect on the perceived legitimacy in the case of the second experiment. These differences might have been determined by the context and samples of both experiments. For instance, it might be that the sample of Americans on the Mturk platform had a higher knowledge of politics in general and based their opinions more on the detailed cognitive process of the analysis of disclosed facts rather than on the cue that the information was leaked.

On the other hand, there is some evidence to believe that noticeable differences might have been determined by the specificity of the experimental design. Statements that government information was leaked were more strongly emphasized in the articles that were presented in the second experiment. Moreover, based on the values of standard deviations, it seems that the Mturk sample of Americans had a strong personal opinion about the particular decision ($SD=1.9$), while opinions of the surveyed Lithuanians in the case of the second experiment did not differ as significantly ($SD=1.2$). These insights suggest that the negative effect of non-government controlled transparency on the perceived legitimacy of the decision, procedure or government institution might be stronger in cases where citizens do not have a strong prejudice about the decision itself, where more emphasis is put on the fact that information was leaked, or in the context where leaks are more strongly associated with some type of perceived wrongdoing.

A summary of the results of both experiments is presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Summary of the hypotheses and results of both experiments

Hypothesis		First experiment	Second experiment
Hypothesis about the overall effect of transparency on the perceived legitimacy of the decision.			
H1	H1a: Government controlled acts of transparency have a positive overall effect on the perceived legitimacy of the decision.	Not supported No statistically significant effect of the transparency and its form on the perceived legitimacy of the decision was found.	Not supported No effect of government controlled act of transparency on the perceived legitimacy of the decision was found.
	H1b: Non-government controlled acts of transparency have a negative overall effect on the perceived legitimacy of the decision.		Partly supported Some negative effect of the non-government controlled act of transparency on the perceived legitimacy of the decision was found. However, significance and strength of the effect strongly depends on the applied statistical methods.
Hypotheses about mediating mechanisms between transparency and perceived legitimacy of the decision.			
H2	H2a: Government controlled act of transparency is expected to increase perceived procedural fairness, which is expected to have a positive effect on the perceived legitimacy of the decision.	Not supported Perceived procedural fairness (expected mediating variable) was not affected by the form of government transparency.	Not supported No effect of government controlled act of transparency on the perceived procedural fairness (expected mediating variable) was found.
	H2b: Non-government controlled act of transparency is expected to decrease perceived procedural fairness, which is expected to have a negative effect on the perceived legitimacy of the decision.		Supported Mediation effect was found: perceived procedural fairness was negatively affected by non-government controlled act of transparency, and lower perceived procedural fairness was associated with lower perceived legitimacy of the decision.
H3	H3a: Government controlled act of transparency is expected to increase the perceived trustworthiness of the government institution, which is expected to have a positive effect on the perceived legitimacy of the decision.	Not supported Perceived trustworthiness of the government institution (expected mediating variable) was not affected by the form of government transparency.	Not supported No effect of government controlled act of transparency on the perceived trustworthiness of government institution (expected mediating variable) was found.
	H3b: Non-government controlled act of transparency is expected to decrease the perceived trustworthiness of the government institution, which is expected to have a negative effect on the perceived legitimacy of the decision.		Supported Mediation effect was found: perceived trustworthiness of government institutions was negatively affected by non-government controlled act of transparency, and lower trustworthiness of government institution was associated with lower perceived legitimacy of the decision.
H4	H4: The form of the transparency (government or non-government controlled) affects perceived knowledge about a decision, which in turn has an effect on the perceived legitimacy of the decision.	Not tested	Not supported Perceived knowledge about the decision (expected mediating variable) was not affected by the form of government transparency.
H5	H5: The form of the transparency affects message credibility, which in turn has an effect on the perceived legitimacy of the decision	Not tested	Not supported Perceived message credibility (expected mediating variable) was not affected by the form of government transparency.

Conclusions

In this study I have examined how the relation between transparency and perceived legitimacy of the government and its decisions is affected by the knowledge of who revealed the information. I have compared the effects of government controlled transparency – situations when government information is voluntarily shared by government institutions to non-government controlled of transparency – situations when government information is disclosed by other actors. I have focused on the effects of City Councils' decision making transparency on the perceived legitimacy of their decisions. I invoked theoretical logic suggested by Grimmelikhuijsen (2012), which is based on the idea that government transparency is expected to affect citizens perceived legitimacy in two different ways: by transparency as disclosed information and directly by transparency as an act itself. Besides, procedural fairness theory, agency theory, and theories emphasizing importance of the perceived knowledge and message credibility were used in order to understand potential inner mechanisms linking transparency and perceived legitimacy of the decision.

The results of both survey experiments presented in this thesis suggest that the content of the disclosed information did not affect the participants' perceived legitimacy of the decisions that had been made. Moreover, contrary to many hypotheses, respondents who were informed that information was shared voluntarily by the open City Council itself evaluated the perceived legitimacy of the decision, the fairness of the procedure, and the trustworthiness of the Council similarly to the participants in the control condition, who were not informed how the information was disclosed (no statistically significant differences were identified). On the other hand, participants who were informed that government information was leaked and disclosed by third parties typically evaluated the perceived legitimacy of the decision more

negatively compared to other conditions (this effect was relatively weak). Non-government controlled transparency also had a negative effect on the perceived fairness of the decision making process and the trustworthiness of the City Council. Furthermore, causal mediation analysis has revealed that the relationship between transparency and the perceived legitimacy of a decision is strongly mediated by citizens' perceptions of the procedure and the City Council. However, it should be emphasized that the external validity and generalizability of this study is low. Samples do not mirror general populations perfectly. For instance, well educated individuals are over-represented in the case of the second experiment. Findings are limited to the particular descriptions of the decisions and their decision-making processes. Finally, the hypotheses were tested in simulated situations and not real life scenarios.

Nevertheless, despite its low external validity, this study has some theoretical and practical contributions. First of all, the design of this study allowed for measuring the effects of the content of disclosed information and the effects of the knowledge on how information was disclosed separately. Findings support theoretical expectations which have been rarely tested in previous research by showing that the process of how information is shared matters. It suggests that future research should take into account this aspect and be more cautious in the interpretation of its results: whether the effects that are seen are determined by the content of the disclosed information or by the specificities of the disclosure's process and whether these effects do not neutralize each other.

Secondly, the results of this study suggest that citizens' expectations about the publicity of government information have adjusted to a more modern context. It seems that in the case of these experiments, participants perceived government controlled acts of transparency as usual and by default expected them as part of everyday practice, rather than some praiseworthy

activity as was previously expected by transparency “optimists”. On the other hand, participants were likely to be dissatisfied if this “usual and by default expected everyday practice” – government controlled transparency – was missing in a specific situation and this dissatisfaction had a negative effect on the perceived legitimacy of the City Council and its decisions. This finding, combined with the knowledge that the probability of government information disclosure by outsiders has significantly increased over the last decade, suggests that arguments of transparency proponents trying to persuade government institutions to share more information might be reformulated. The most common argument that, “Government should be open and citizens will appreciate that”, seems to be less relevant in the modern context. “Government should share its information voluntarily, as otherwise it will probably be disclosed by third parties, and citizens will be disappointed with that”, seems to reflect modern reality more precisely.

Thirdly, the results of this study suggest some potential explanations about the effects of the most infamous scandals of government information disclosures. Based on the results of this study, government information leaks usually lead to the strong disappointment of citizens not only because they reveal some negative information, but also because citizens might get angry that this information was hidden from them. Does this mean that the negative consequences of the most infamous scandals of governments’ information disclosures (e.g., all WikiLeaks scandals) might have been mitigated if at least part of the information had been disclosed by the government institutions themselves?

This study also raises some important questions relevant for policy implications. Knowing that non-government controlled acts of transparency have some additional negative value and that their probability has grown significantly, rationally thinking government institutions that

want to ensure their perceived legitimacy in the eyes of citizens have two options. They might keep an eye open for potential disclosures and become more transparent (“open the door” themselves before it is done by others) or to decrease the risk of non-government controlled information disclosures by investing into the better protection of potentially harmful information or punishing the disclosers (to “put more locks” on hidden information). It seems that some governments have decided to apply the second strategy more and more actively. For instance, in the USA, the prosecution of leaks have become routine and harsher only during the last decade (e.g., see Rottman 2018). Non-government controlled acts of transparency are under threat. This leads to further questions: How should citizens react in these situations? How should non-government controlled transparency be interpreted in the law and public discourse? On the one hand, the results of this study suggest that information leaks have an additional negative impact on citizens’ trust in government, which might be harmful for the entire political system. On the other hand, non-government controlled information leaks can be interpreted as an indispensable part of the democratic process – citizens have the right to know how their elected governments operate, and if some relevant information is not revealed voluntarily by government institutions, outside intervention might be justified. Because of the lack of agreement on legal and policy level about non-government controlled acts of transparency, there are still dilemmas and different interpretations every time. This can be vividly illustrated by the especially complicated trial process of Julian Assange. Thus, additional laws describing general perceptions about non-government controlled acts of transparency should be created.

Finally, the findings of this study raise some interesting questions and ideas for future research. Might the noticed negative effects of non-government controlled acts of transparency be strong enough in real life situations where citizens are likely to have

preconceptions about a particular government institution and its decisions? How are the effects of non-government controlled acts of transparency moderated by the political context, for instance, do the negative effects of non-government controlled acts of transparency become stronger after scandalous information disclosures? In order to analyse the consistency of the effects noticed (or the lack of them), it might be worth repeating similar experiments in the same context altering the content of the disclosed information (what decision and how it was made). Qualitative research or discourse analysis might be useful to understand citizens' reactions to important government information disclosures. For instance, what arguments are used: the ones referring to the content of the disclosed information or the ones mentioning the lack of the government's openness?

To sum up, this study suggests that citizens might care about the fact of “who opened the door”. Nowadays “the door is often opened” not only voluntarily by transparent government institutions themselves, but also by outsiders. Therefore, rationally thinking governments, lawmakers, and researchers investigating the effects of government transparency should take this insight into their consideration.

Appendix 1: Design of the first experiment

PART I: Introduction to this part of the survey

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this survey that measures citizens' approach to government institutions. Be assured that all answers you provide will be treated with strictest confidentiality. Also keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers. We kindly ask you to turn to the next page only after reading the information and answering questions on the previous one.

Comment: all the general information about the survey was presented in the beginning of the survey. Experiment used for this thesis was only one part of the bigger survey in the MTurk platform.

PART II: Newspaper articles about the decision of the City council

On this page you see the passage of a newspaper article about a particular decision of the City Council. Imagine that you are the citizen of this city. Please, read the information very carefully.

Comment: participants were randomly divided into four groups and got one of the following articles. Information about the form of transparency (government or non-government controlled) – “treatment” sentences – are marked in grey. However, they were not marked in the survey.

Group A: “Control of the control”

The decision: a 9 cent tax per plastic bag

On March 1, 2017, the City Council approved the “Checkout Bag Tax Ordinance.” Under the new ordinance a nine cent (\$0.09) per bag tax is imposed on the every retail of plastic checkout bag in the City. From the collected 9 cents, 6 cents will go to the City, the remainder will go to retailers.

Group B: Control group

The decision: a 9 cent tax per plastic bag

On March 16, 2017 the City Council voted to impose a 9 cent tax on the every retail of plastic checkout bag in the City.

The initiation of the proposal

The decision to tax plastic bags was initiated by the Local Environmental Organization. On February 1, 2017, in a meeting with the Mayor, the Organization pushed for the tax of 9 cents a bag justifying it by stating that the fee will get people to use reusable bags.

The Council meeting of February 15th

In the Council meeting on February 15th the Mayor announced his proposal of the 9 cent tax justifying it by stating that the change could help the environment and the fee could raise \$10 million per year which would contribute to solving the City's pension crisis. The leader of a Retail Merchants association made a statement and declared that retailers are strongly against this proposal as all profit gained from the 9 cent tax will go to the City.

An email was sent by the leader of Retail Merchants association to the Mayor on February 17th. The email revealed that the association would agree to support the proposed tax if at least 3 cents of the collected 9 cents would go to retailers. This condition was included in the Mayor's proposal.

The Council meeting of March 1st

Before the final vote on the plastic bag tax, a Councilman from district 12 made a statement that this decision will probably be ineffective. Members of the Council from districts 6 and 8 made statements in support of the Mayors proposal. At the end of this meeting, the City Council approved the new ordinance of a nine cent (\$0.09) per bag tax, by a lopsided vote of 40 to 10. From the collected 9 cents, 6 cents will go to the City, the remainder will go to retailers.

Group C: 1st treatment group (government controlled information disclosure)**The decision: a 9 cent tax per plastic bag**

On March 16, 2017 the City Council voted to impose a 9 cent tax on the every retail of plastic checkout bag in the City. Detailed information about this decision-making process was shared by the City Council.

The initiation of the proposal

Based on the officially shared information, the decision to tax plastic bags was initiated by the Local Environmental Organization. On February 1, 2017, in a meeting with the Mayor, the Organization pushed for the tax of 9 cents a bag justifying it by stating that the fee will get people to use reusable bags.

The Council meeting of February 15th

In the Council meeting on February 15th the Mayor announced his proposal of the 9 cent tax justifying it by stating that the change could help the environment and the fee could raise \$10 million per year which would contribute to solving the City's pension crisis. The leader of a Retail Merchants association made a statement and declared that retailers are strongly against this proposal as all profit gained from the 9 cent tax will go to the City.

An email sent by the leader of the Retail Merchants association to the Mayor on February 17th was officially published by the City Council. The email revealed that the association would agree to support the proposed tax if at least 3 cents of the collected 9 cents would go to retailers. This condition was included in the Mayors proposal.

The Council meeting of March 1st

Before the final vote on the plastic bag tax, a Councilman from district 12 made a statement that this decision will probably be ineffective. Members of the Council from districts 6 and 8 made statements in support of the Mayors proposal. At the end of this meeting, the City Council approved the new ordinance of a nine cent (\$0.09) per bag tax, by a lopsided vote of 40 to 10. From the collected 9 cents, 6 cents will go to the City, the remainder will go to retailers.

Group D: 2nd treatment group (non-government controlled information disclosure)**The decision: a 9 cent tax per plastic bag**

On March 16, 2017 the City Council voted to impose a 9 cent tax on the every retail of plastic checkout bag in the City. The detailed information about this decision-making process was leaked by several sources with direct knowledge of it.

The initiation of the proposal

Based on the leaked information, the decision to tax plastic bags was initiated by the Local Environmental Organization. On February 1, 2017, in a meeting with the Mayor, the Organisation pushed for the tax of 9 cents a bag justifying it by stating that the fee will get people to use reusable bags.

The Council meeting of February 15th

In the Council meeting on February 15th the Mayor announced his proposal of the 9 cent tax justifying it by stating that the change could help the environment and the fee could raise \$10 million per year which would contribute to solving the City's pension crisis. The leader of a Retail Merchants association made a statement and declared that retailers are strongly against this proposal as all profit gained from the 9 cent tax will go to the City.

An email sent by the leader of the Retail Merchants association to the Mayor on February 17th was leaked and published. The email revealed that the association would agree to support the proposed tax if at least 3 cents of the collected 9 cents would go to retailers. This condition was included in the Mayor's proposal.

The Council meeting of March 1st

Before the final vote on the plastic bag tax, a Councilman from district 12 made a statement that this decision will probably be ineffective. Members of the Council from districts 6 and 8 made statements in support of the Mayor's proposal. At the end of this meeting, the City Council approved the new ordinance of a nine cent (\$0.09) per bag tax, by a lopsided vote of 40 to 10. From the collected 9 cents, 6 cents will go to the City, the remainder will go to retailers.

PART III: Questions testing whether participants have read the article.

Please, answer a couple of questions about the described decision and its process.

Q01: What is the size of the tax that was imposed on every retail plastic checkout bag in the City?

- a) 6 cent
- b) 7 cent
- c) 8 cent
- d) 9 cent

Q02: Who made the statement to propose this new tax in the Council meeting on February 15th?

- a) The leader of the Retail Merchants association
- b) The Mayor
- c) The Councilman of district 12

PART IV: Questions measuring key variables

Think about the decision described in the passage. If you were a citizen of this City what would you think about it?

Comment: Questions those answers were used to measure perceived legitimacy of the decision:

Q1: What is your opinion about the decision to impose the nine cent (\$0.09) per bag tax?

very negative	negative	somewhat negative	neutral	somewhat positive	positive	very positive
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Q2: How fair do you think the decision is?

very unfair	unfair	somewhat unfair	neutral	somewhat fair	fair	very fair
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Q3: How willing are you to accept the decision?

not at all willing	not willing	somewhat not willing	neutral	somewhat willing	willing	very willing
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Comment: Questions those answers were used to measure perceived procedural fairness:

Q4: How fairly do you think the decision was made?

very unfairly	unfairly	somewhat unfairly	neutral	somewhat fairly	fairly	very fairly
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Q5: How fair do you think the citizens were treated when the decision was made?

very unfair	unfair	somewhat unfair	neutral	somewhat fair	fair	very fair
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Comment: Questions those answers were used to measure perceived trustworthiness of the City Council:

Q6: How much do you agree with the following statement: After the reading of the newspaper article it seems that when it concerns environmental policies this City Council carries out its duty very well.

Totally disagree	disagree	somewhat disagree	neither agree nor disagree	somewhat agree	agree	Totally agree
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Q7: How much do you agree with the following statement: This City Council seems to be sincere.

Totally disagree	disagree	somewhat disagree	neither agree nor disagree	somewhat agree	agree	Totally agree
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Appendix 2: Design of the second experiment

Comment: The original text of the survey was in Lithuanian. Here I provide the translated version.

PART I: Introduction to the survey, rights of the participants (based on the GDPR) and request for the consent to participate in the survey.

PART II: General (control) questions

Qa1: How much you personally trust in your country's government?

Do not trust at all	Do not trust	partly do not trust	neither trust nor do not trust	partly trust	Do trust	Totally trust
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Qa2: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I believe that the "green" zones are one of the most important aspects determining whether a city is an attractive place to live.

strongly disagree	disagree	somewhat disagree	neither agree nor disagree	somewhat agree	agree	strongly agree
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PART III: Newspaper articles about the decision of the City council

On this page you see the passage of a newspaper article about a particular decision of the City Council. Imagine that you are the citizen of this city. Please, read the information very carefully.

Comment: participants were randomly divided into four groups and got one of the following articles. Information about the form of transparency (government or non-government controlled) – "treatment" sentences – are marked in grey. However, they were not marked in the survey.

GROUP A: Control of the Control (this group got only first two questions Q1-Q2)

A brand new park will be built in the City

The City Council announced that by the end of 2020 brand new recreation park will be built in one of the residential neighborhoods. 2 mln Eur of the City budget will be allocated for the creation of the park.

GROUP B: Control group

A brand new park will be built in the City

The City Council announced that by the end of 2020 brand new recreation park will be built in one of the residential neighborhoods. 2 mln Eur of the City budget will be allocated for the creation of the park.

The initiation

The decision to build the brand new park was initiated by the real estate company that has just started building five new apartment buildings in the neighborhood. The initial idea was proposed during the private meeting with the Mayor.

The open meeting with the citizens to discuss the proposal

Two weeks before the final voting, the Council discussed the construction of the new park in the open public meeting. Residents of the neighborhood where the park was planned to be built strongly supported the proposal, claiming that the new modern park would make the City more attractive place to live. However, some other citizens spoke against the park, emphasizing that the same share of the budget could be spent on the reconstruction of the roads or other issues.

The proposal of the real estate company

The email was sent by the leader of the real estate company to the Members of the Council right after the public meeting. The company proposed to invest additional 1 mln Eur of their private funds into the new park if the Council decides to build it.

The voting

The City Council approved the building of the new park, by the vote of 63 % to 37%.

GROUP C: 1st treatment group (government controlled information disclosure)**A brand new park will be built in the City**

The City Council announced that by the end of 2020 brand new recreation park will be built in one of the residential neighborhoods. 2 mln Eur of the City budget will be allocated for the creation of the park. All the detailed information about this decision-making process was officially shared by the Council.

The initiation

The City Council on its website published the information and the detailed minutes of the important Mayor's meeting with the owners of one real estate company.

Based on the published information, the decision to build the brand new park was initiated by the real estate company that has just started building five new apartment buildings in the neighborhood. The initial idea was proposed during this private meeting with the Mayor.

The open meeting with the citizens to discuss the proposal

Two weeks before the final voting, the Council discussed the construction of the new park in the open public meeting. Based on the officially published minutes of the meeting, residents of the neighborhood where the park was planned to be built strongly supported the proposal, claiming that the new modern park would make the City more attractive place to live. However, some other citizens spoke against the park, emphasizing that the same share of the budget could be spent on the reconstruction of the roads or other issues.

The proposal of the real estate company

The City Council on their website has also published information about the email that was sent by the leader of the real estate company to the Members of the Council right after the public meeting. Based on the content of the published e-mail, the company proposed to invest additional 1 mln Eur of their private funds into the new park if the Council decides to build it.

The voting

The City Council approved the building of the new park, by the vote of 63 % to 37%.

GROUP D: 2nd treatment group (non-government controlled information disclosure)**A brand new park will be built in the City**

The City Council announced that by the end of 2020 brand new recreation park will be built in one of the residential neighborhoods. 2 mln Eur of the City budget will be allocated for the creation of the park. The information about this decision-making process was leaked and forwarded to the journalists.

The initiation

The "source" revealed the information about the important Mayor's meeting with the owners of one real estate company.

Based on the leaked information, the decision to build the brand new park was initiated by the real estate company that has just started building five new apartment buildings in the neighborhood. The initial idea was proposed during this private meeting with the Mayor.

The open meeting with the citizens to discuss the proposal

Two weeks before the final voting, the Council discussed the construction of the new park in the open public meeting. According to the "sources", residents of the neighborhood where the park was planned to be built strongly supported the proposal, claiming that the new modern park would make the City more attractive place to live. However, some other citizens spoke against the park, emphasizing that the same share of the budget could be spent on the reconstruction of the roads or other issues.

The proposal of the real estate company

The email that was sent by the leader of the real estate company to the Members of the Council right after the public meeting was leaked and published. Based on the content of the leaked e-mail, the company proposed to invest additional 1 mln Eur of their private funds into the new park if the Council decides to build it.

The voting

The City Council approved the building of the new park, by the vote of 63 % to 37%.

PART IV: Question testing whether participants have read the article.

Qt1: What was the final decision of the City Council about the building of the new park?

- ☐ The City Council by the voting approved the building of the new park
- ☐ The City Council by the voting did not approve the building of the new park
- ☐ It was decided to delay the final decision

PART V: Questions measuring key variables.

Think about the decision described in the passage. If you were a citizen of this City what would you think about it?

Comment: Questions those answers were used to measure perceived legitimacy of the decision:

Q1: What is your opinion about the final decision to build the brand new park in the city?

very negative	negative	somewhat negative	neutral	somewhat positive	positive	very positive
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Q2: How fair do you think the decision is?

very unfair	unfair	somewhat unfair	neutral	somewhat fair	fair	very fair
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Comment: Questions that answers were used to measure perceived procedural fairness

Q3: What is your opinion about this decision making process?

very negative	negative	somewhat negative	neutral	somewhat positive	positive	very positive
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Q4: How fair do you think the process of this decision making is?

very unfair	unfair	somewhat unfair	neutral	somewhat fair	fair	very fair
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Comment: Questions those answers were used to measure perceived trustworthiness of the Council:

Q5: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I have an impression that this City Council carries out its duty very well.

strongly disagree	disagree	somewhat disagree	neither agree nor disagree	somewhat agree	agree	strongly agree
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Q6: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: This City Council seems to be sincere

strongly disagree	disagree	somewhat disagree	neither agree nor disagree	somewhat agree	agree	strongly agree
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Comment: Questions those answers were used to measure perceived knowledge about the decision.

Q7: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I believe that I understand the main reasons behind the decision to build the new park.

strongly disagree	disagree	somewhat disagree	neither agree nor disagree	somewhat agree	agree	strongly agree
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Q8: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I believe that I have enough knowledge about the decision to build the new park.

strongly disagree	disagree	somewhat disagree	neither agree nor disagree	somewhat agree	agree	strongly agree
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Comment: Questions those answers were used to measure perceived message credibility

Q9: I believe that the information about the decision making process, which was shared in the newspaper's passage that I've read, is complete.

strongly disagree	disagree	somewhat disagree	neither agree nor disagree	somewhat agree	agree	strongly agree
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Q10: I believe that the information about the decision making process, which was shared in the newspaper's passage that I've read, is credible.

strongly disagree	disagree	somewhat disagree	neither agree nor disagree	somewhat agree	agree	strongly agree
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PART VI: Additional questions for the understanding of the rationale.

Q11: What is your opinion about the fact that the decision to build the brand new park was initiated by the real estate company?

very negative	negative	somewhat negative	neutral	somewhat positive	positive	very positive
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Q12: What is your opinion about the fact that the real estate company proposed to invest additional 1 mln Eur of their private funds into the new park if the Council decides to build it?

very negative	negative	somewhat negative	neutral	somewhat positive	positive	very positive
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Q13: The City Council, which is not open, cannot be trusted, even though the results of its work are really good.

strongly disagree	disagree	somewhat disagree	neither agree nor disagree	somewhat agree	agree	strongly agree
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Q14: People who 'leak' and reveal government information, which was not shared by the institution itself, do more harm than good.

strongly disagree	disagree	somewhat disagree	neither agree nor disagree	somewhat agree	agree	strongly agree
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Q15: I have visited the webpage of my City Council to find out information about the Councils' decisions or their making processes at least once.

☐ Yes ☐ No

PART VII: Demographic questions

Appendix 3: Operationalization of variables

Variables		Operationalization
Form of transparency	Main explanatory variable	Control of control (no transparency)
		Control (transparency with no statement who shared the information)
		1 st treatment group (government controlled act of transparency)
		2 nd treatment group (non-government controlled act of transparency)
Perceived legitimacy of the decision	Dependent variable	Qa1. What is your opinion about the final decision to build the brand new park in the city? Qa2 How fair do you think the decision is?
Perceived legitimacy of the procedure	Mediating variable	Qa3: What is your opinion about this decision making process? Qa4: How fair do you think the process of this decision making is?
Perceived legitimacy of the council	Mediating variable	Qa5: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I have an impression that this City Council carries out its duty very well. Qa6: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: This City Council seems to be sincere
Knowledge about the decision	Mediating variable	Qa7: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I believe that I understand the main reasons behind the decision to build the new park. Qa8: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I believe that I have enough knowledge about the decision to build the new park.
Message credibility	Mediating variable	Qa9: I believe that the information about the decision making process, which was shared in the newspaper's passage that I've read, is complete. Qa10: I believe that the information about the decision making process, which was shared in the newspaper's passage that I've read, is credible.
Trust in government in general	Control variable	Q1: how much you personally trust in your country's government? (asked before the introduction of the vignettes)
Attitude towards the "green zones"	Control variable	Q2: I believe that the "green" zones are one of the most important aspects determining whether a city is an attractive place to live. (asked before the introduction of the vignettes)
Age	Control variable	
Education	Control variable	
Gender	Control variable	

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