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# Civic Engagement and Institutional Trust Among South Africans

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*The importance of institutional trust and its key determinants have been widely acknowledged in developed countries. However, in developing countries, where institutional trust has not been well established, its structural causes have not received adequate research emphasis. The aims of our study are: (1) to examine the direct effect of civic engagement on institutional trust; and (2) to examine the mediating effects of government dysfunction and government performance on the relationship between civic engagement and institutional trust. We conducted a structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis using data from the 2004 Afrobarometer Round 2.5 survey in South Africa (N = 2,400). We found a positive direct effect of civic engagement on institutional trust and indirect effects of civic engagement on institutional trust, mediated by government dysfunction and government performance, both individually and sequentially. Findings suggest that the development and implementation of policies enhancing civic engagement and good governance are needed to increase institutional trust. South Africa, a country with over 20 years of democracy, is on the path to enhancing civic engagement and building institutional trust. These goals can be achieved through building a society in which government is based on democratic values and civil society.*

*Key words: institutional trust, civic engagement, government dysfunction, government performance, South Africa, structural equation modeling*

The discussion of trust has gained increasing attention since the early 1990s and is still a topical issue, especially in developing countries (Cook & Cook, 2011; Llewellyn, Brookes, & Mahon, 2012). One of the reasons for this increasing interest in trust is its association with other important concepts at both the individual and societal levels, such as social capital, regime support, social stability, and socio-economic development. It is important to recognize that trust can be distinguished into two main dimensions: social trust and institutional trust (Cook & Cook, 2011; Zmerli & Newton, 2008). Social trust, also known as interpersonal trust, refers to trust in other people—this may include close friends, family, or people in general (Mishler & Rose, 2005; Taylor, Funk, & Clark, 2007). Institutional trust, interchangeable with political trust, refers to trust in public institutions consisting of multiple layers, from political actors to institutional personnel (Morris & Klesner, 2010). In this paper, we focus on institutional trust and conceptualize it as citizens' confidence in public institutions, including local or national government, politicians, political parties, parliament, police, judges, and the military.

Institutional trust is considered important in many ways, particularly in the context of developing countries, where institutional trust, in general, is low (Godefroidt, Langer, & Meuleman, 2015). Institutional trust enables a political system to establish legitimacy, especially as it relates to democracy (Boda & Medve-Bálint, 2014; Kuenzi, 2008; Sedláčková & Šafr, 2008). Democracy is principally constituted by its citizens, and requires their trust (Vlachova, 2001). In developing countries such as South Africa, where the concept of democracy is relatively new, the link between institutional trust and the legitimacy of democracy becomes particularly important (Boda & Medve-Bálint, 2014; Kuenzi, 2008). Also, the level of institutional trust is associated with the effective functioning of government institutions—specifically, citizens' adherence to the law (Marien & Hooghe, 2011). Low trust in institutions can lead to lower law compliance and vice versa (Marien & Hooghe, 2011). Thus, societies with higher levels of trust can govern and legitimize political systems at lower transaction cost or costs related to coercion and enforcement (Fukuyama, 1995; Murphy, 2004; OECD, 2013). Another important aspect of institutional trust lies

in its association with socio-economic development. High levels of trust in government institutions lead to increased cooperation among citizens and could attract long-term investment that increases socio-economic development (Algan & Cahuc, 2013; Putnam, 1993). Also, increased trust is negatively related to economic inequality, which is a major hindrance to economic development in many countries, including developing countries (Rothstein & Stolle, 2002). This association of institutional trust with socio-economic development is evident in several studies on developing countries (see Lekovic, 2012; Montalvo, 2010).

This study aims to examine the structural causes of institutional trust in South Africa. Specifically, we investigate the relationship between civic engagement and institutional trust and determine whether this relationship is mediated by government dysfunction and performance. This topic is important not only in terms of enhancing the theoretical understanding of factors that may be related to institutional trust, but also in providing insight and highlighting implications for policy and practice in South Africa. Two thousand fourteen marked the 20th anniversary of the end of Apartheid and the installation of democracy in South Africa (Amtaika, 2015). The road to democracy in South Africa was marked by centuries of racial and economic discrimination and oppression, as well as by sacrifice and unyielding resistance of the oppressed people (Seidman, 2001). Further, given this significant change, South Africa has shown a relatively low level of institutional trust (Daniel & De Vos, 2002).

## Theoretical Frameworks

This study is guided by two theoretical perspectives: social capital theory (Putnam, 1995) and institutional theory (Newton & Norris, 2000). First, the study draws upon social capital theory to explicate how civic engagement may be associated with institutional trust. A number of studies have conceptualized social capital as connections among individuals that facilitate collective actions to achieve shared goals, such as group membership and participation in associations (Putnam, 1995; Zhang, 2014). Civic engagement, involving people in public processes that affect them, is considered a critical part of social capital

(Malik & Waglé, 2002). One of the main arguments of social capital theory is that the greater the social capital, the greater the confidence in government (Putnam, 1995). Thus, civic engagement increases citizens' confidence in government institutions and representatives (Duvsjö, 2014).

Institutional theory is one of the most commonly adopted theoretical perspectives for analyzing institutional trust. In this study, institutional theory is used to explain possible mediating effects of governance-related factors on the relationship between civic engagement and institutional trust. The core feature of institutional theory is that the structure and characteristics of institutions affect the behavioral outcomes of individuals (Amenta & Ramsey, 2010). According to Neale (1987), "motives lead people to engage in particular activities, but what they do and how they do it depend upon the structure of institutions" (p. 1188). Among different schools within institutional theory, the institutional performance theory focuses on the performance of governments as key to understanding citizens' confidence in government and hypothesizes that higher performance will lead to greater trust in institutions, while lower performance will result in lower levels of trust. Also, the theory assumes that "all citizens are exposed to government actions" (Newton & Norris, 2000, p. 7), and citizens evaluate government performance rationally (Newton & Norris, 2000).

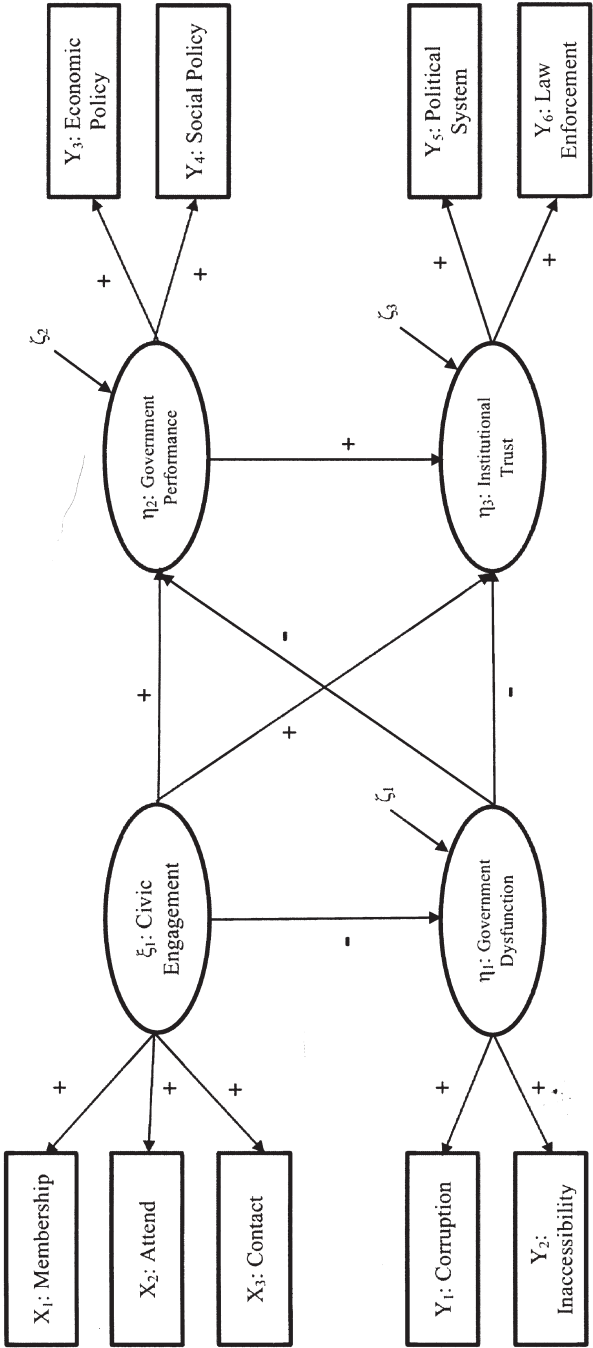
The Figure 1 shows a conceptual framework of the study.

## A Review of the Literature

### *Civic Engagement and Institutional Trust*

A number of studies have been conducted to investigate factors related to institutional trust. Civic engagement is identified as one of the most studied factors (e.g., Brehm & Rahn, 1997; Keele, 2007; Levi & Stoker, 2000; Putnam, 1993; Veenstra, 2002). However, there is controversy in the literature, particularly depending on whether the study is focused on developing or developed countries (Blind, 2007; Stoyan, Niedzwiecki, Morgan, Hartlyn, & Espinal, 2015). The dominant trend in studies of developed countries is that higher civic engagement is related to enhanced trust in government. Guided by social capital theory,

Figure 1. Theoretical Model



Putnam (1993) found that civic engagement leads to increased trust in government institutions in Italy. That is, higher civic engagement fosters citizens' belief that they are making changes or have control over government institutions. Keele (2007) found that U.S. citizens with lower levels of civic engagement do not develop favorable attitudes towards their government and are more likely to distrust it.

Several studies on the association between civic engagement and institutional trust for developing countries reported somewhat contradictory findings (Blind, 2007; Stoyan et al., 2015). Some scholars have found that there is no significant relationship between the factors. Using the dataset of the Dominican Republic, Espinal, Hartlyn, and Morgan (2006) found that civic engagement is not statistically associated with institutional trust. Stoyan and colleagues (2015) also reported similar findings in Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Conversely, Finkel, Sabatini, & Bevis (2000) have argued that more civic engagement and participation gives Dominican citizens increased awareness of the negative aspects of their government, which actually develops critical attitudes towards governments. These studies were mainly conducted in the specific population of the Dominican Republic, which limits the generalizability of the findings.

### *Civic Engagement and Governance*

Some studies have examined the effect of civic engagement on governance-related factors, namely government performance and dysfunction. Government performance is a well-established concept in literature, and many studies have measured it as the performance of economic, political, or social policies (e.g., Kestilä-Kekkonen & Söderlund, 2015). Several investigators have argued that citizens who are more engaged in civic activities are more likely to endorse their government's policies (Frey & Stutzer, 2005). This trend is mainly due to the fact that more civic engagement gives citizens opportunities to see the more desirable aspects of the government (Lam, 2012). In short, citizens who have experience with high levels of civic engagement are more likely to have high satisfaction with government performance.

In the literature, government dysfunction is less clearly defined and conceptualized than government performance. Instead, corruption has been used to show the failure of governance. In this study, corruption and inaccessibility of public services were used as one latent concept, government dysfunction, as many studies have found that corruption and low quality of public service delivery are closely related to each other (see Lavallée, Razafindrakoto, & Roubaud, 2008). Also, the perception of public service delivery has been identified as a predictor of institutional trust (Kampen, De Walle, & Bouckaert, 2006). More civic engagement could be associated with a higher perception of government dysfunction, because it provides opportunities for closer monitoring of government dysfunction (Treisman, 2000).

### *Governance and Institutional Trust*

Guided by institutional performance theory, governance has received much attention regarding its relationship with institutional trust at the societal level (Keele, 2007). Particularly, government performance has been considered a dominant factor in deciding citizens' trust in government (Campbell, 2004; Keele, 2007). Kestilä-Kekkonen and Söderlund (2016) confirmed that trust in institutions is shaped primarily by citizens' rational perceptions of institutional performance. Campbell (2004) also found that government performance, specifically economic performance, is strongly associated with institutional trust. Chang and Chu (2006) found that citizens' perceptions of government performance on the economy are positively associated with their level of trust in their government institutions.

In terms of government dysfunction, the importance of corruption to institutional trust has been confirmed in many studies conducted in various contexts. Based on the studies of 10 post-communist European countries, Mishler and Rose (2001) found that higher levels of corruption were related to lower levels of political trust. Chang and Chu (2006) found a strong eroding effect of political corruption on institutional trust in several Asian countries. Particularly related to the context of this study, Armah-Attoh, Gyimah-Boadi, and Chikwanha (2007) demonstrated that corruption negatively influences trust in democratic



institutions and concluded that “corruption is a major, perhaps the major, obstacle to building popular trust in state institutions and electoral processes in Africa” (p. iv). Using the Afrobarometer data (Bratton, Mattes, Chikwanha, & Magezi (2004), which is the same data set used in this paper, Lavallée et al. (2008) also confirmed the negative impact of corruption on citizens’ trust in political institutions.

Another component of government dysfunction is inaccessibility of public services. Inadequate public service delivery is often referred to as one of the largest challenges facing governments in Africa (Akinboade, Mokwena, & Kinfack, 2014). People who have the poorest access to government services have the lowest level of institutional trust (Meyer et al., 2013). We also assume that the level of government dysfunction affects citizens’ perception of government performance. Anderson and Tverdova (2003) reported that higher levels of corruption are linked to negative evaluations of government performance, which in turn lowers trust in both emerging and established democracies. That is, if citizens are not satisfied with the government services delivered, their perception of government performance is expected to be low.

### *The Current Study*

A plethora of studies have been conducted on institutional trust and several related factors. However, the conceptualization of institutional trust varies across the studies. For example, Espinal et al. (2006) only measured citizens’ trust in three institutions: the presidency, the congress, and the judiciary. This measurement does not sufficiently capture the concept of institutional trust. Moreover, Mishler and Rose (2005) included items only related to the Russian context, such as federal security service. These different measurements could lead to the aforementioned contradictory results among the studies. This study uses validated measurements for the key concepts discussed above from extant studies using the same Afrobarometer data set that was used for this study. Also, using a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of institutional trust, this study confirms the construct validity of institutional trust in South Africa. Addressing these measurement

issues, our study aims to examine the relationship between civic engagement and institutional trust in South Africa.

This study also examines the serial multiple mediating effect through both government dysfunction and performance sequentially, with dysfunction affecting performance. To our understanding, no such body of literature exists on the multiple mediating effects of governance-related factors. One of the benefits of this model is that it allows analysis of the sequential mediating effect of governance-related factors and provides a chance to compare effect sizes of indirect effects through different mediators.

In line with the theoretical and empirical evidence, we aim: (1) To examine the direct effect of civic engagement on institutional trust; (2) To examine the mediating effect of government dysfunction on the effect of civic engagement on institutional trust (civic engagement → government dysfunction → institutional trust); (3) To examine the mediating effect of government performance on the effect of civic engagement on institutional trust (civic engagement → government performance → institutional trust); and (4) To examine the effects of serial multiple mediators on civic engagement on institutional trust, through both government dysfunction and performance sequentially, with dysfunction affecting performance (civic engagement → government dysfunction → government performance → institutional trust).

## Data and Methods

### *Data*

This paper uses data from the Afrobarometer: Round 2.5 Survey of South Africa, 2004. The Afrobarometer measures African citizens' attitudes towards democracy, governance, and society in 36 African countries since 1999. This 2004 Afrobarometer, Round 2.5 in particular, measured the attitudes and opinions of South Africans. The individual face-to-face interviews based on questionnaires were conducted with a randomly selected sample of 2,400 respondents aged 18 years or older. More specifically, the data set uses multi-stage random sam-

pling with probability proportionate to population size (PPPS) in order to reflect the population density across South Africa. The data used in this study were obtained from the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR). To handle missing data, we used multiple imputation to create five imputed data sets. Thus, the entire sample (N = 2,400) was used for this study. See Table 1 for demographic information on the participants.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 2,400)

Characteristic	N	%
Sex: male	1,202	50.08
Age: years, mean (SD)	40.86 (42.58)	
Race		
Black/African	1,719	71.63
White/European	277	11.54
Colored/Mixed Race	269	11.21
South Asian	131	5.46
Other	4	0.16
Education Level		
No Formal Schooling	146	6.08
Informal schooling only	26	1.08
Some Primary	366	15.25
Complete Primary	199	8.29
Some Secondary	855	35.63
Complete Secondary	564	23.50
Post-secondary	244	10.17
Employment Status		
Not working	1684	70.17
Part-time	235	9.79
Full-time	480	2.00
Don't know	1	0.04
Area		
Urban	1,576	65.67
Rural	824	34.33

*Measurement*

Our structural equation models include four latent factors: civic engagement, government dysfunction, government performance, and institutional trust. A detailed explanation of each of the latent factors and observed indicators follows.

*Institutional trust.* The outcome variable, institutional trust, is composed of two indicators: (1) trust in political system, and (2) trust in law enforcement. This is measured by eight items: the president, parliament/national assembly, electoral commission, ruling party, opposition political parties, military, police, and courts of law. As mentioned above, due to the multidimensionality of the concept, CFA for a two-factor model (Rothstein & Stolle, 2002) was first conducted to assess the dimensionality of the items. Several fit indices confirmed that the model fit the data acceptably ( $\chi^2(25) = 308.19$ ; GFI = .962; RMSEA = .081, SRMR=.047). The results suggest that the trust in political system included five items: president, parliament/national assembly, electoral commission, ruling party, and opposition political parties; and the second indicator, trust in law enforcement, included three items: military, police, and courts of law. The responses to these indicators ranged from (0) not at all to (3) a lot with a higher score reflecting more trust, and responses were calculated by averaging the scores of each item. The trust in political system indicator shows good internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .84$ ). The trust in law enforcement scale demonstrated also shows good reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .75$ ).

*Civic engagement.* Civic engagement consists of three indicators: (1) membership in the civic organizations, (2) attendance at civic activities, and (3) contact with influential people, and responses were calculated by calculating the mean for the following items.

First, membership in the civic organizations was measured as follows: "Could you tell me whether you are an official leader, an active member, an inactive member, or not a member?" The civic organizations include the following: religious groups, trade unions or farmers associations, professional or business associations, and community development associations. Each item had four response categories, ranging from (0) *not a member*, (1) *inactive member*, (2) *active member*, and (3) *official leader*. We

logged the variables to improve the normality of the data. Although the operationalization of the four items on the membership variable is based on the literature, we measured the internal consistency among transformed items and found that Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .77, signifying satisfactory internal consistency.

Second, the respondents' attendance at civic activities was composed of three items: attendance at a community meeting, a get together with others to raise an issue, and attending a demonstration or protest march. Respondents were asked whether they had ever been at any of the above meetings or would do this if they had the chance. Items were presented with five response categories: (0) *No, would never do this*, (1) *No, but would do if I had the chance*, (2) *Yes, once or twice*, (3) *Yes, several times*, and (4) *Yes, often*. The items were slightly positively skewed; therefore a log transformation was applied to improve the normality. Log-transformed items revealed good evidence of internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .76).

Last, civic engagement was also measured by whether the respondents contact influential persons for help solving a problem or to give them their views. The influential persons included local government council, national assembly representatives, officials of a government ministry, political party officials, religious leaders, traditional rulers, or other influential people. Each item was presented on a four-point scale with response options ranging from (0) *never* to (3) *often*. A log transformation was applied to improve the normality of the distribution. The Cronbach's alpha for the seven items was .88, which indicates that the transformed scale is highly reliable.

*Government dysfunction.* Two indicators were used to measure citizens' perception towards government dysfunction: (1) corruption and (2) inaccessibility of public services. We created the indicators by averaging the scores of each item.

First, we used the Perceived Corruption Index, which has been validated in a number of studies that also used the Afrobarometer data set (see Konold, 2007). The Perceived Corruption Index has 10 items: the corruption of the office of the presidency, members of parliament, local government councilors, national government officials, local government officials, police, tax officials, judges and magistrates, health workers, and teachers and

school administrators. The items were on a four-point Likert scale ranging from (0) *none* to (3) *all of them*. Higher scores imply a greater level of government dysfunction. The Cronbach's alpha value was .92, an excellent level of internal consistency of the scale. Other studies that used the same Afrobarometer data set reported a similar level of internal consistency (Konold, 2007).

Second, the inaccessibility of public services has been validated in studies using the Afrobarometer data set (see Armah-Attoh et al., 2007). It measures the degree of access to government services in five items: getting ID documents, school admission, household services, help from the police, and medical treatment. The items were on a four-point Likert scale ranging from (1) *very difficult* to (4) *very easy*. To facilitate comparisons with other items, we reversed the direction of the coding so that high scores imply more inaccessibility of public services. The Cronbach's alpha was equal to .75, which is satisfactory and higher than the value of .67 reported by Armah-Attoh et al. (2007).

*Government performance.* Government performance was represented by two indicators: (1) satisfaction with government handling of economic policy and (2) satisfaction with government handling of social policy. These indicators were created by calculating the mean for the items. Higher scores imply a greater level of satisfaction with government performance.

First, economic issues include the following items: managing the economy, creating jobs, keeping prices stable, and narrowing income gaps. This indicator has been used in several Afrobarometer studies under the name of Approval of Government Performance Index (see Armah-Attoh et al., 2007). The items were on a four-point Likert scale ranging from (1) *very badly* to (4) *very well*. The internal consistency of the indicator is fair (Cronbach's alpha = .70) and similar with the value of .73 reported by Armah-Attoh et al. (2007).

The respondents' satisfaction with government handling of social issues includes the following items: reducing crime, improving basic health services, addressing educational needs, delivering household water, ensuring enough to eat, fighting corruption, combating HIV/AIDS, promoting affirmative action, uniting all South Africans, and distributing welfare payments. The items were coded in the same way as satisfaction with the indicator of economic policy. The social policy indicator

produced a high level of internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .85$ ).

*Covariates.* A range of important socio-demographic characteristics were included in the analysis as controls. Age is a continuous variable, ranging from 18 to 91. Gender is binary (Male = 1 and Female = 2). Race includes Black/African, White/European, Mixed, South Asian, and others. Education ranges from 'no formal schooling' to 'postgraduate.' The respondents' employment status and whether they live in urban or rural areas were also controlled.

### *Analytic Strategy*

Structural equation modeling is a useful technique when the goal is to assess a theoretical model that hypothesizes how sets of variables define latent constructs and how these constructs are related to one another (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996). As listed in Figure 1, we will investigate the direct effect of civic engagement on institutional trust. Also, by using the Sobel test, we test the mediating effects of government dysfunction and performance on the relationship between civic engagement and institutional trust both individually and sequentially. LISREL 9.2 was used to perform the SEM analysis using Maximum Likelihood Estimation. Preliminary data management, including data examination, transformation, and multiple imputation, was conducted using Stata 14.0 prior to the SEM analysis.

## Results

Prior to testing our main hypotheses, the model with covariates was tested to ascertain whether possible control variables (age, gender, race, level of education, employment, and areas) have impact on the institutional trust in this model. None of the demographic variables were statistically significant. For the purpose of parsimony, covariates that were non-significant were removed from the further analysis. Therefore, below we will focus on the model without covariates.

Correlation Matrix

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, and Pearson's correlation matrix of the nine observed variables. The levels of correlation were generally low to moderate. Among civic engagement items, memberships and contact were positively correlated with government dysfunction. Also, membership and attendance were positively correlated with government performance. Similarly, attendance and contact showed a positive correlation with institutional trust. Government dysfunction items correlated negatively with government performance and institutional trust. Government performance showed a positive correlation with institutional trust.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Correlations for Study Variables (N=2,400)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. (X1) Membership	1.00								
2. (X2) Attendance	.21*	1.00							
3. (X3) Contact	.40*	.39*	1.00						
4. (Y1) Corruption	.12*	.01	.13*	1.00					
5. (Y2) Inaccessibility	.03	-.04*	.06*	.28*	1.00				
6. (Y3) Economic Policy	.04	.16*	.03	-.23*	-.24*	1.00			
7. (Y4) Social Policy	.01	.19*	.06*	-.25*	-.26*	.70*	1.00		
8. (Y5) Political System	-.04	.19*	.06*	-.21*	-.21*	.43*	.51*	1.00	
9. (Y6) Law Enforcement	.02	.17*	.09*	-.22*	-.18*	.31*	.38*	.63*	1.00
M	.28	.68	.14	1.02	2.19	2.23	2.57	1.60	1.47
SD	.27	.51	.23	.61	.67	.74	.73	.73	.80

Notes: \* p <.05 (two-tailed tests).  
Membership, Attend, and Contact: Logged scores.

Measurement Model

In this study, the measurement model specifies how the four latent variables—civic engagement, government dysfunction, government performance, and institutional trust—are indicated by the observed variables. As shown at the top of Table 3,



all factor loadings of the indicators were statistically significant and in the expected direction. For model identification, the first item of each latent factor is fixed to 1. The R<sup>2</sup> values, the explained variance by the latent factor, were satisfactory, ranging from .23 to .82.

### *Structural Equation Model*

The results of the structural model are presented graphically in Figure 2 and Table 3, which present the direct, indirect, and total unstandardized and standardized effects of each variable in the model. Our mediation model follows the suggestion of Hayes, Preacher, and Myers (2011). A *direct effect* is a path between two variables without mediating variables. An *indirect effect* is the product of the direct effects involved in the mediating relationship. In a model with multiple mediators, like our model, each path through a given mediator is referred to as a *specific indirect effect*, and the sum of all the specific indirect effects in a model is called a *total indirect effect*. The sum of the direct and all the indirect effects in the model is called a *total effect*.

The fit statistics of the model estimation indicate a good fit to the data ( $\chi^2 = 183.70$  with 21 df,  $p < .001$ , RMSEA = .057, GFI = .983, and SRMR = .049).

First, Aim 1 examines the direct effect of civic engagement on institutional trust. The result showed that increased civic engagement is associated with higher institutional trust when other variables are constant in the model. The results showed that with each standard deviation increase in civic engagement, institutional trust increases by .11 standard deviations.

Second, Aim 2 examines the mediating effect of government dysfunction on the relationship between civic engagement and institutional trust. Our study found that increased civic engagement is associated with increased perception of government dysfunction ( $p < .05$ ), and this increased perception of government dysfunction is associated with decreased institutional trust ( $\beta = -.23, p < .05$ ). In sum, increased civic engagement is associated with declined institutional trust through government dysfunction ( $-.05 = .20 \times -.23, p < .05$ ).

Aim 3 examines the mediating effect of government performance on the relationship between civic engagement and

Figure 2. Structural equation model showing standardized path coefficients.

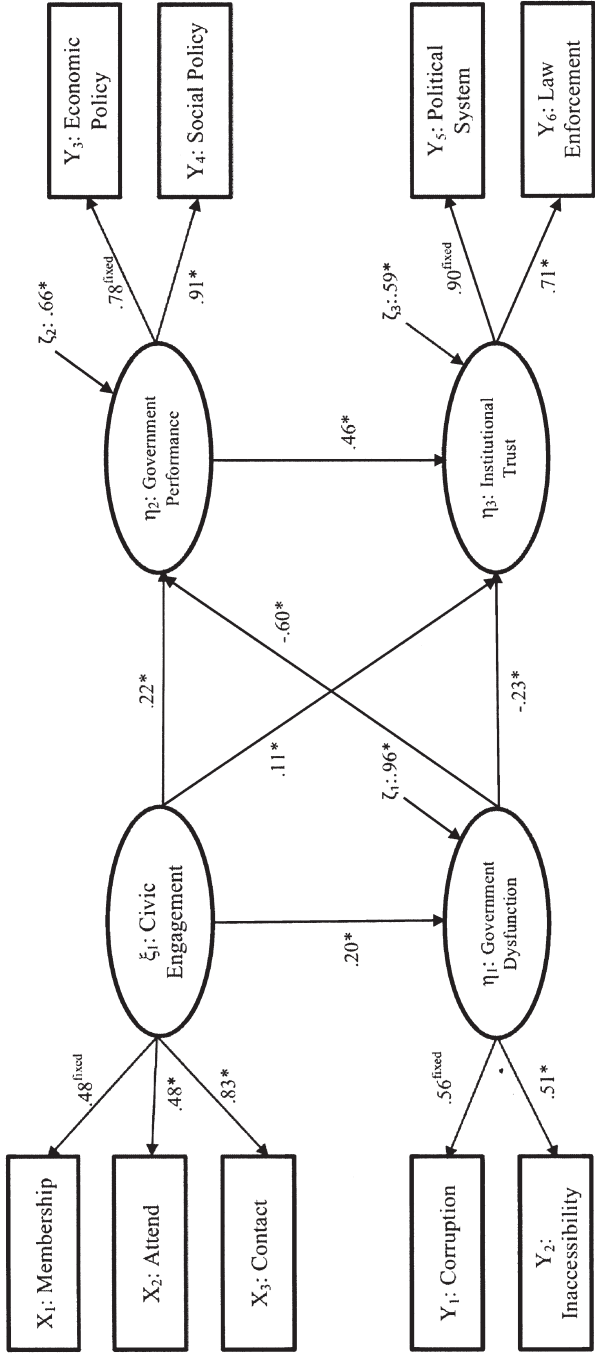


Table 3. Unstandardized and Standardized Estimates for the Model: Direct and Indirect Effects of Exogenous and Mediating Variables on Institutional Trust (N=2,400)

	Unstandard ized (B)	Standard ized ( $\beta$ )	$R^2$
<i>Measurement Model Estimates</i>			
Civic Engagement $\rightarrow$ X1	1.00 <sup>fixed</sup>	.48	.23
Civic Engagement $\rightarrow$ X2	1.92*	.48*	.23
Civic Engagement $\rightarrow$ X3	1.52*	.83*	.69
Government Dysfunction $\rightarrow$ Y1	1.00 <sup>fixed</sup>	.56	.31
Government Dysfunction $\rightarrow$ Y2	1.00*	.51*	.26
Government Performance $\rightarrow$ Y3	1.00 <sup>fixed</sup>	.78	.60
Government Performance $\rightarrow$ Y4	1.16*	.91*	.82
Institutional Trust $\rightarrow$ Y5	1.00 <sup>fixed</sup>	.90	.80
Institutional Trust $\rightarrow$ Y6	.85*	.71*	.50
<i>Structural Model</i>			
<i>Direct Effects</i>			
Civic Engagement $\rightarrow$ Government Dysfunction	.53*	.20*	.04
Civic Engagement $\rightarrow$ Government Performance	1.01*	.22*	.34
Government Dysfunction $\rightarrow$ Government Performance	-.99*	-.60*	
Civic Engagement $\rightarrow$ Institutional Trust	.57*	.11*	.41
Government Dysfunction $\rightarrow$ Institutional Trust	-.45*	-.23*	
Government Performance $\rightarrow$ Institutional Trust	.55*	.48*	
<i>Indirect Effects of Civic Engagement <math>\rightarrow</math> Institutional Trust</i>			
Via Government Dysfunction	-.24*	-.05*	.01 <sup>n.s.</sup>
Via Government Performance	.55*	.11*	
Via Government Dysfunction and Government Performance	-.29*	-.06*	
Total Indirect Effect	.03 <sup>n.s.</sup>	.01 <sup>n.s.</sup>	
Total Effect	.60*	.12*	
<i>Indirect Effects of Civic Engagement <math>\rightarrow</math> Government Performance</i>			
Via Government Dysfunction	-.53*	-.15*	.11*
Total Effect	.48*	.11*	
<i>Indirect Effects of Government Dysfunction <math>\rightarrow</math> Institutional Trust</i>			
Via Government Performance	-.54*	-.28*	.51*
Total Effect	-.99*	-.51*	

Notes: Model fit statistics: full information maximum likelihood  $\chi^2(21) = 183.70$ ,  $p < .001$ ; CFI = .983; RMSEA = .057; Standardized RMR = 0.049. Statistically significant coefficients are indicated as follows: \* $p < .05$  (two-tailed tests). n.s.: not statistically significant.

institutional trust. Our results found that increased civic engagement is associated with increased perception of government performance ( $\beta = .22$ ,  $p < .05$ ). And, increased perception of government performance is associated with increased institutional trust ( $\beta = .48$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Summing up, the results showed that increased civic engagement is associated with increased institutional trust via government performance ( $.11 = .22 \times .48$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

Finally, Aim 4 sequentially examines the relationship between civic engagement and institutional trust via the serial

multiple mediators of government dysfunction and performance. In short, it is expressed as follows: civic engagement  $\rightarrow$  government dysfunction  $\rightarrow$  government performance  $\rightarrow$  institutional trust. This model is called a serial multiple mediator model, or multiple-step multiple mediator model (Hayes et al., 2011; Hayes, 2013). This serial multiple mediating model derives from the assumption that increased government dysfunction is associated with decreased government performance, which is supported by the results ( $\beta = -.60, p < .05$ ). Moreover, the indirect effect of civic engagement on institutional trust via both government dysfunction and performance is supported ( $\beta = -.06, p < .05$ ).

In the relationship between civic engagement and institutional trust, there are three indirect effects (Aims 2, 3, and 4). As showed above, all three of these specific indirect effects were statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ). However, the total indirect effect, the sum of three specific indirect effects, was not statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ). According to methodological researchers (Hayes, 2009; Preacher & Hayes, 2008), in the model with two or more mediators, it is possible that the specific indirect effects appear to be significant, but the total indirect effect is insignificant, which is the case in our model. One possible explanation is that the signs of the indirect effects differ and the magnitudes are similar, which leads to an insignificant overall relationship (Hayes, 2013; MacKinnon, Krull, & Lockwood, 2000). This result is also aligned with the fact that government dysfunction and performance measure contradictory concepts with different signs. Moreover, when interpreting this inconsistency, Hayes (2013) pointed out that the theoretical value of the total indirect effect should be considered, and stated, "inference and interpretation of a multiple mediator model usually focus more on the direct and specific indirect effects, not the total indirect effect" (p. 159). In line with this logic, in our model, the important finding is that each individual specific indirect effect is significant, rather than examining the aggregate of all three specific indirect effects simultaneously.

## Discussion

The results of this study showed that increased civic engagement is associated with increased institutional trust, which

is consistent with existing literature conducted in the context of developed countries (see Putnam, 1993). This finding highlights that policy developers and decision-makers should strengthen mechanisms for active civic engagement, such as civic education and participatory public policy making. Despite the importance of civic engagement, citizens in many societies have little chance of learning about their rights and the public policy environment. For example, as suggested in our study, contacting influential people to express citizens' opinions appeared to be an important part of civic engagement. However, research showed that advocates are less likely to use the most effective way to reach policy makers, such as in-person communications (Englin & Hankin, 2012). Through civic education, citizens can be informed about their rights and how to effectively communicate with policy environments. Policy makers should include civic education as an important policy agenda and should also encourage curricula for the younger generation. Additionally, policy makers should ensure that citizens' voices are heard. For instance, public hearings or community advisory boards should be guaranteed by law.

Citizens' active engagement is even more important in the context of developing countries. Civil societies in developing countries are usually characterized as fragmented, which limits their role in the policy making process (Haladjian-Henriksen, 2006). Also, many developing countries have limited experience in developing democracy and building trust for it, which takes a long time (Shen & Williamson, 2005). In particular, in South Africa, which has a relative short history of civil society, citizens' engagement and strong civil societies are essential. However, civic engagement in South Africa is still challenging, even after the end of apartheid era (Lehman, 2008). According to Mattes, Denemark, and Niemi (2012), there is no substantial difference in 'Demand for Democracy' between South Africa's first post-Apartheid generation and the older generation.

Another important finding of this study is that citizens who actively participate in civic activities are more aware of their government's corruption or failure of service delivery (Treisman, 2000), which ultimately decreases institutional trust. This finding highlighted that citizens' active engagement is not a choice but serves a mandatory 'watchdog' function of

government activities, which ensures public accountability (Sharma, 2008). South Africa is not an exception in its failure of governance, as this is found in many developing countries, even the most successful ones (Khan, 2006). Despite the establishment of democracy, South Africa has dropped in rank in the global corruption perception index from 33rd in 1997 to 61st in 2015, indicating a growth in corruption (Transparency International, 1997, 2015). Also, the serious inequalities in accessing basic services in South Africa still remain (Nnadozie, 2013). Thus, the role of civil societies and citizens in modern South Africa should have increased emphasis.

Furthermore, this study shows that when controlling government dysfunction, citizens' active engagement increases their positive evaluation of government performance, which in turn increases their institutional trust. This result is consistent with the findings of existing literature (Campbell, 2004; Sedláčková & Šafr, 2008) and also aligns with the institutional performance theory that guides this paper. In other words, improving public perception of government performance would help to promote citizens' institutional trust. However, citizens' perception of government performance can often be biased due to dependency on incorrect information (Rainey, 1997). Our study highlighted that active engagement in public matters can provide opportunities for acquiring more information on policies that can lead to more solid observations. This requires efforts of not only citizens but also decision makers and policy developers. Policy makers should make the information transparent in each step of policy-making and ensure this information is easily accessible by citizens.

This study is a unique contribution to a relatively scarce body of literature, examining both government dysfunction and performance in one model. This allows us to examine the relationship between government dysfunction and performance, as well as the serial mechanism between civic engagement and institutional trust via government dysfunction and performance. First, our study found that increased government dysfunction is strongly related to high amounts of decreased perception of government performance. Next, the serial mechanism suggests a similar implication. Although increased civic engagement is directly related to increased institutional trust, through

government dysfunction and performance, the relationship became negative. In short, the negative effect of government dysfunction is stronger than the positive effect of government performance on institutional trust. Thus, this suggests that more efforts and strategies to deter corruption and to increase service delivery would be necessary to increase institutional trust.

### *Limitations*

Several limitations of this study are recognized. One limitation is the use of a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to establish a causal relationship between civic engagement and institutional trust. In other words, there may be an endogeneity issue; the relationship between civic engagement and institutional trust can be reciprocal or reverse. For example, it may be that people with higher levels of institutional trust are more likely to participate in civic activities, or that people who are not satisfied with government performance are less likely to attend civic activities (see Uslaner & Brown, 2005). Thus, further research should examine whether these findings hold true in panel data. Second, for future research, the applicability of this study should be cross-validated in other developing countries using the same data sets. Although this study contributes to the knowledge of the relationship between civic engagement and institutional trust in South Africa, it has limited generalizability to other developing countries of similar socio-economic development level and political background. Finally, due to the limitation of data availability, the specific government context of South Africa, such as African National Congress and political regime change, was not addressed.

### *Conclusion*

Our results highlight the importance of civic engagement for institutional trust in South Africa. Additionally, civic engagement provides opportunities for citizens to be aware of government corruption and failure of service delivery. On the one hand, civic engagement also gives citizens increased perception of government performance, which ultimately increases trust towards institutions. Increased perception of government dysfunction is



strongly related to negative attitudes towards government performance. These findings are valuable for understanding the mechanisms between civic engagement and institutional trust. Based on our findings, different approaches to increasing civic engagement, such as civic education, participatory policy-making, and transparent policy making, are suggested.

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