

Project Proposal:

Does the implementation of privatization affect levels of public satisfaction with,
and trust in, state and local government?

By Jeffrey R. Paine
Doctor of Public Administration Program

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University of Illinois at Springfield
Political Studies 512—State Politics
Dr. Christopher Z. Mooney

Abstract

Americans are (apparently) dissatisfied with and distrust their government. High levels of distrust and dissatisfaction are normatively considered to be a negative influence in our democracy. Most existing research on public attitudes about government focuses on the relationship between the citizens and the federal government. The existing literature is based primarily on national public opinion surveys, which lack enough resolution to give meaningful insight at the state and local levels. In almost all previous studies, satisfaction and trust are measured as aggregates. Because of the normative implications of dissatisfaction and distrust of government, some pundits and researchers suggest that efforts are needed to improve satisfaction and trust. One of the ways proposed to improve these measures is to privatize, that is, to shift by several different methods a variety of functions and responsibilities away from government to the private sector. This study proposes to investigate the question, "Does the implementation of privatization affect levels of public satisfaction with and trust in state and local government?" Specifically, I will delve into the little-explored state and local arena by attempting to build a sound causal theory and separate aggregate measures of satisfaction and trust into their components by looking at specific functions and responsibilities of specific governments or governmental units, and the knowledge and response of citizens when governments implement privatization related to these specific functions and responsibilities.

How do we know that Americans aren't satisfied with the performance of their government, and don't trust their government? It's simple: they've been asked, and they've said so (see, for example, Taylor, 2002; and Pew, 1998). In many of these studies, they've been asked directly about their feelings and attitudes related to satisfaction with and trust of government, and the reasons they are or aren't satisfied, and do or don't trust government. Study after study—many based on these national surveys—indicate that since the late 1950s, general support for government among the population of the United States has declined significantly, and despite some fluctuations (for example, a significant jump in approval occurred briefly following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks), remains low (Taylor, 2002, 2003; Langer and Merkel, 2002; Davis, 2004; Gross, Aday and Brewer, 2004). This generalization applies at the local, state and federal levels. That this decline has indeed happened is hardly a matter of scholarly debate. What continues to incite research and discussion, however, are the questions, “What caused the decline?” “What is the meaning of the decline?” and “What can or should we do about it?”

The decline was first noticed in national political surveys during the late 1960s and early 1970s, conducted by the print and broadcast media, often in conjunction with national polling firms, such as the Harris, Roper, and Gallup polls. It also turned up in the American National Election Survey. In fact, most of the change apparently occurred before polls regularly asked questions about satisfaction and trust related to politics and government in the early 1970s. As the 1970s became the 1980s, the downward trend fluctuated, but generally continued to decline in poll after poll. Sociologists and political

scientists began to delve deeper into this phenomenon. The result has been a growing literature building on the results of the earlier and continuing polls, as well as later research that tries to delve deeper and disentangle the complex influences that cause and change public opinion. Some focus on public opinion and the government at the national level (for example, Bok, 2001; Nye, Zelikow and King, 1997; Ladd and Bowman, 1998; Campbell, Converse and Rogers, 1976), some at the state level (Calista, 2002; Brudney and Wright, 2002; Bundt and Lutz, 1999), some at the local level (Lyons, Lowery and DeHoog, 1992; Kelly and Swindell, 2002; Miller and Miller 1991, 1992; Stipak 1977, 1979), and some at multiple levels (Cole and Kinkaid, 2000; Brooks and Cheng, 2001; Fowler, 1974; Weber and Brace, 1999, Farnsworth, 1999). The literature is marked by a variety of different methodologies, measures, levels of analysis, and the use of differing theoretical models. In short, the literature suffers from the same problem as virtually every other subfield in political science and public administration: researchers are faced with insufficient resources to conduct sufficiently detailed and controlled studies to resolve many questions. The studies they have conducted—many of which are enlightening—still have not resolved questions well enough to allow researchers to make great progress in linking the empirical evidence to theory. The theories that have been constructed and applied to date have not clearly contributed to a broader understanding of the field, at least to the extent that reliable predictions can be made (for similar arguments about diverse subfields, see Lyons, Lowery and DeHoog, 1992, on local studies; Jewel, 1982, on state institutions; and deLeon, 1999 on implementation studies).

These three questions about the cause, meaning and remedy for the observed decline in public confidence in government have been addressed in the above literature,

and elsewhere. For example, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2001) edited a volume in which contributors investigated four basic questions about public trust and government: when is it that Americans feel dissatisfied; which governmental institutions is it they feel dissatisfied about; is it the actions of politicians that cause dissatisfaction; and how is dissatisfaction measured and incorporated into political theory.

Of course, it isn't just government that has suffered declining trust and support from the public, however: almost all major institutions of public society have also experienced substantial declines in trust and satisfaction ratings. For example, Bok (2001) makes an expansive attempt to determine just what it is that needs explained about public opinion, government, and other societal institutions, and finds that there is a disjunction between many objective measures of the quality of life for Americans, the quality of their government, and public's assessment of their quality of life and their government. In his assessment, it appears that the people are systematically undervaluing their quality of life and their government. Other researchers, such as Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2001), Behn (2002), and Lyons, Lowery and DeHoog (1992), on the other hand, suggest that citizens may be overestimating what government can and should do, and are dissatisfied because government is not living up to their unrealistic expectations.

However, this decline is not a phenomenon limited to the United States, as similar patterns have occurred throughout the nations of Europe, Asia and elsewhere. Nye, Zelikow and King (1997), for example, edited a volume that looked into possible causes that could explain not only the decline in trust in government, but also all other major societal institutions, both in the United States and around the world. Still, despite more than 30 years of research, it remains unclear whether there is a common explanation for

the decline in public trust and satisfaction. Nor is there consensus about what it means, or what could or should be done about it.

At least in part, the reason for this could be that there are a number of shortcomings to social research, and public opinion surveys in particular, especially in attempting to link the actions of government directly to attitudes held by the public (for example Andrisani, Hakim and Leeds, 2000; Behn, 2002; Bouckaert and Van de Walle, 2003; Hero and Durand, 1985; Lovich and Taylor, 1976; Stipak, 1979; and Swindell and Kelly, 2000).

I argue here that part of the reason there is no consensus is that essentially all existing studies have failed to get to the level of simplest cases. Virtually every survey, every study, fails to take into account the effects of aggregation in our studies of what we are attempting to understand. Aggregation of data hides the key information we require to understand whether there is a linkage between government action and public opinion, and how that linkage might work. I see four ways in which aggregation of data clouds the clarity of our vision. First, we are presuming that an expression of satisfaction or trust (or sometimes both together) from an individual is a unitary emotion or opinion. As there is almost no discussion at all as to what constitutes satisfaction or trust, or how individuals reach these states, this assumption may be wrong. Trust may actually be a summation of several internal emotive or opinion states within an individual.

Second, we collect and sum the responses of all individuals in a survey or study. Even though we are careful to use a standardized language within each survey, we cannot be certain that the terms we use indeed mean the same thing to every respondent. Even if they do mean the same thing to everyone, the degree or context may cause other variation

in how the respondents understand the term and answer our questions. Thus, the opinions reflected in the survey may be an incorrect amalgam of differing but (or so we hope) closely related opinions. In addition, this potential problem of aggregation is only partially addressed by structuring the study to identify demographic subgroups, in part because demographic categories, while convenient, may not be telling us anything of interest about the population being studied. Since we do not know how individuals arrive at their attitudes and opinions, we cannot say how being a woman, being African American, being rich, being educated, or having any other status measured by demographic characteristics impacts or relates to trust or satisfaction.

Third, we are asking people to bring together many pieces of information: facts and opinions of others they have heard and learned, plus their own impressions, experiences, and emotions, and are asking them to sum them up within their own minds and then tell us whether that sum is positive or negative, and to what degree. While we cannot get away from the subjective nature of human opinion, we should at least attempt to separate out the various threads that come together within a human mind to create that opinion. We could, for example, ask more probing questions; for example we could ask something to the effect of “think for the moment about experiences with government employees you have had. What was it about those experiences that contributed to your feeling of satisfaction or dissatisfaction? Were there other things happening that might have affected the way you felt? Did your impressions change after you talked to other people about your experience? What did they say?” And so on. Then, repeat the detailed questioning for elected officials, for appointed administrators, and so forth. From the literature reviewed, it does not appear that we have delved enough into the meaning of

satisfaction and trust that individuals hold in terms of their everyday experiences (Cukier and Thomlinson, 2005; Miller and Simmons, 1998; Stipak, 1977; Inglehart, 1997; Lin, 1998).

Finally, a fourth area where the literature aggregates disparate parts into a single concept comes when we ask respondents to express an opinion about “government.” Government is a large, multipart concept: the federal government alone is made up of three branches; the Executive branch consists of more than a dozen cabinet departments and hundreds of independent agencies. Each department or agency consists of numerous offices, divisions, bureaus, regions, and other functionally diverse units. So, when we ask “Do you have confidence that the federal government can do ‘x?’”, what is it we are asking? Do we mean to lump all the government together, even those parts that obviously have nothing to do with the task we’re interested in? Or, do we mean the elected officials, the President and Congress? Do we mean the individuals appointed by the president to head the agencies during his tenure in office? Do we mean the professional staff of each agency? How do we equate and compare the job of a U.S. Representative with the job of a local Social Security office clerk? Of the President with a staff sergeant at a small base in Alabama? Of a district court judge with a scientist working to understand the transmission of disease? Again, we could ask more focused, more probing questions that might illuminate and isolate different factors that impact public opinion, that would allow us to separate individual entities or institutions that could be the target of trust or satisfaction, as well as the opinions, experiences, emotions and impressions that contribute to an individual’s formation of opinion. This is important because various studies demonstrate that people do have different opinions about elected and appointed

officials, and the hired staff, and they demonstrate different levels of trust for different institutions and agencies of government (see Taylor 2003, Pew 1998, for example).

To address these concerns, this project will focus the attitudes of members of single, limited communities. Each of these communities, in order to be considered, must have one unit of government (for example, a local office of the federal or state agency, such as a local social security office or a state driver's license examining station, or any unit of local government) that is considering privatization, or has already implemented privatization, relating to a single program, office or function. From this tight focus, we will be able to delve deeper into the factors about privatization and local government that matter to the community's residents. The respondents will not be amalgamating observations and opinions about a number of programs and agencies, but will be focused on whether and how privatization of a single function affects their opinions and attitudes. That is, we won't be looking for final judgment of satisfied or dissatisfied, trustful or distrustful, but whether or not, how, and to what extent, the actions of government in implementing privatization in a particular situation *contribute* to feelings of satisfaction and trust.

There exists a considerable literature on urban government and community, its origins rooted in sociological concerns and good government municipal and state reforms of the late 1800s and early 20th Century. A significant volume of work was produced during the 1960s and 1970s, in conjunction with Johnson's Great Society and its expansive federal social programs (for example, Stipak, 1977; Willenborg, Sacco, and Clapper, 1976; Center for the Study, 1975; Frederickson and O'Leary, 1973; Wildavsky, 1964). To investigate the more current literature, I conducted a general search of the *ISI*

Web of Science, Social Science Citation Index for the period 1987 through mid-April 2005. The database included almost 2.5 million cited articles on all topics published over the last 17-plus years, a simple average of about 147,000 articles each year. The literature on public opinion appears to be sizable, with 3,615 (about 210 each year) articles in the database. However, the number of articles related to public opinion and government is much smaller, with only 452 cited articles (about 27 per year). When public opinion and government were combined with the term “trust,” only 40 articles were found, or just over two a year. For “satisfaction,” the number was 17, or about one a year. Given the international span of the subject matter, it is perhaps not surprising to find a limited supply of new research focusing on trust, satisfaction, and American state and local government.

It is this literature on local government and public attitudes regarding it that is of primary concern in this project, even though much of the literature is not on topic with this project. We can, however, look to the broader literature for inspiration and ideas, especially prior approaches to dealing with independent variables that might impact our dependent variables. I am not certain that in the present study we can sharpen the concepts of trust and satisfaction, but I do believe we can bring a better focus onto the various aspects of government and how the public reacts to each part, including changes to government. This of course takes for granted that there is a clear and direct connection between the action of government and public opinion, an assumption that we can also test.

Defining Terms and Variables

So, what has caused the observed change of public satisfaction with and trust in government? There are several competing explanations. From the broadest national perspective, for instance, Nye and Zelikow (1997), listed 17 possible explanations for the general decline in support for government and other institutions in society, most of which had been advanced by other researchers or commentators. These include: 1) scope of government has grown too fast; 2) scope of government grown too intrusive; 3) government performance has weakened; 4) end of the Cold War; 5) Vietnam and Watergate; 6) World War II effect (success in the war colored public perception about what government is capable of doing); 7) political realignment and polarization of political elites; 8) television effects on political parties; 9) changing role of the media; 10) increased government/political corruption and dishonesty; 11) general economic slowdown; 12) rising economic inequality; 13) globalization and loss of control; 14) the Third Industrial Revolution (transformation of the economy); 15) decline in social capital measured by voluntary group membership and activity; 16) decline in social capital measured by family cohesion; and 17) authority patterns and postmaterialist values. They assess these factors against five criteria—timing, effects on other institutions, the experience gap (between actual experience and attitudes held), cross-national variation, and anomalies (institutions that have not followed the pattern as completely, such as the U.S. military)—to assign a rating of how likely each factor was to be a significant cause of the observed decline. They found that numbers 6-9, 14, and 17 seem to fit strongly on all criteria, while the remaining 11 were assigned low or mixed ratings. They warned, however, that since interaction cannot be ruled out between any of the factors, all may be involved to some extent.

Of course, other researchers have come up with other variables, and other schemes for arranging and testing their variables, ranging from the broadest influences in global society (especially the economy and social globalization), down to psychological factors that might affect individual preferences and beliefs. At the other end of the spectrum from Nye and Zelikow, for example, stands the work of Lyons, Lowery and DeHoog (1992). Both sets of researchers are looking at the same general question—the causes of public opinions of trust and/or satisfaction—but because of the scale and methodology come up with very different potential influences. In their study of 10 communities in two urban areas of Kentucky, they identify three potential sources of citizen satisfaction: explanations arising from individual-level factors; those arising from jurisdiction-level factors, and those arising from circumstances specific to a particular community or neighborhood. At the individual level potential variables include gender, race, income, age, home ownership, efficacy of local political institutions, efficacy of the general political institutions, and the level of social and psychological attachment to the community. At the jurisdictional level, they initially suggest some individual factors may also have impacts at that level, for example, race and income. In addition, they add social context, which measures the “socioeconomic matrix” of a community; alternatives, which indicates whether a jurisdiction operates under a consolidated urban-county government or a fragmented system; the number of government services offered within a jurisdiction, and the quality of services provided. Finally, at the city and community level, there may exist unique historical events, past and current political and social leadership, and local management practices that impact the delivery and quality of services provided. Some of these variables are quite difficult to operationalize and model.

These examples of course are representative of the perspectives that exist in the literature, that is, the broad macro-scale of national and international studies, the meso-scale of states and communities, and the micro-scale of individual citizens and their communities. It might be difficult to directly bring these different classification systems and their variables together into a single model, but it is clear that there is a wide range of potential sources of influence on public opinion, any or all of which may interact with each other. It would be a great challenge to operationalize and then quantify all of these possible effects, even in one study, and I do not propose to do so here. For example, how would one measure the “World War II Effect?” Or quantify the assessment, “government is too intrusive?” Or operationalize “postmodernist values?”

At both ends of the spectrum, the same problem exists: trying to understand an aggregated opinion covering a number of services, provided either by different units of a single government, or by multiple units of multiple governments. These explanatory variables proposed by various authors, and the method of asking people about their opinions and feelings (as opposed to observing their behavior—in the social sciences an even more daunting task) will not resolve the question about the relations between government action and public opinion because the aggregation process removes the detailed focus we need to understand the individuals who formulate and hold opinions. To be able to see this detail, we must focus on the actions of a single unit of government undertaking a single instance of action, and monitor the response that the public has to that action.

As established above, the current study seeks to contribute to the literature by investigating the question, “Does the implementation of privatization affect levels of

public satisfaction with and trust in state and local government?” If the answer is ‘yes,’ then, we also wish to know 1) under what conditions and to what extent this is true, and, if we can, 2) by what causal means (that is, is the connection direct or indirect)?

I see four reasons why this is an important question. First, the government does respond to public opinion and support, determining which individuals from which political party get into and remain in office, and what sorts of policy initiatives they undertake (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2000). Understanding how and why people respond to government will in the long run mean, one hopes, better governance. Second, the existing research does not provide a clear empirical or theoretical relationship between the functioning of government and public opinion. That there could be, and perhaps should be—and even in many cases *appears to be*—a link is widely accepted. But the influences on public opinion appear to be many and complex, and despite a large number of studies, there is still no consensus. Several researchers have suggested that tighter tests of the concepts and relationships, such as suggested for this project, will begin to provide more insight. Third, testing the use of privatization to improve the relationship between government action and public opinion is important because privatization is offered as one of the tools of governance being implemented by American governments at the local, state and federal levels, as well as in other nations (see Salamon, 2001a, 2001b, and his contributors for development of this argument, including DeHoog and Salamon; Kettl; Kelman; Lourdan; Posner, Steuerle and Twombly; and Peters.). As such, it is argued by some that privatization will have a positive effect on public opinion about government, although the causal reasoning differs depending on the theoretical model used (that is, whether government is too big, too intrusive, or

inefficient, to use Nye and Zelikow's [1997] first three variables, above). Regardless, if there is no link, or only a weak link, between any government reform (and most reforms are primarily administrative in nature, that is, dependent on implementation by or under the aegis of a government agency or entity) and public opinion then we are engaging in a potentially dangerous experiment based on a flawed model of the world. Finally, clearly demonstrating the existence (or absence) of a link at the micro level (the individual citizen responding to the implementation of privatization in a particular local government location) would provide an important basis for re-evaluating the existing research and directing future research in the field.

Why do we need to get away from general surveys and become much more focused on the micro level rather than the meso or macro scales, both of government, our unit of investigation, and our measure, the individual citizens and their opinions? In surveys, we ask a number of individuals the same questions about their attitudes and opinions, usually limiting their responses to a predefined set. We then add all the responses to each question together to get a percentage of population expressing each response. Given the particulars of the population surveyed and the structure of the interview and responses, we have a certain degree of confidence regarding the opinions of the entire population, that is, the macro level.

A national survey can tell us that trust in the federal government is *X overall*, and for state government is *Y overall*, and in local government is *Z overall*, but this tells us nothing about opinions regarding the individual units of government. For example, we can learn that over all 50 states trust in state government has a given value, but we cannot learn from such a survey that trust of state government is lowest in State A, at value *Y-x*,

and highest in State B, at a value of $Y+z$; or that (hypothetically) two-thirds of the states have trust values above the mean. It is even worse at the local level, because while a general survey will likely include individuals from all 50 states (but unlikely to include representative samples from them), it is impossible that a survey will include individuals from all or even a significant fraction of the roughly 87,500 local governments. Indeed, it is unlikely that two or more individuals in such a survey would have more than one unit of local government in common (two individuals from the same county, for example, but from different municipalities and school districts). Thus, broad national surveys, statewide surveys, and even most local surveys, will not give us the level of resolution needed to determine the relationship between privatization and public attitudes of trust and satisfaction. What we need to know is how does a specific population respond to a particular instance of implementation of privatization, if it responds at all. And in order to be meaningful (that is, to control for errors of various kinds), we need to repeat this study a large number of times under a variety of conditions. In this way, we will be able build toward an answer the question, “Does the implementation of privatization affect levels of public satisfaction with and trust in state and local government?” And whether the question is answered in the affirmative or the negative, from that more reliable basis, we will be able to understand, interpret, and further expand both the practical use and testing of our findings, and the theoretical modeling of government action and public opinion.

Dependent Variables

The dependent variables are public trust in government and public satisfaction with government. These variables, and the associated decline in their values in relation to American government, are embedded in a broader public and scholarly discussion about

citizenship and the state of the American democracy, and in fact since the fall of the Iron Curtain, all of the nations of the world. However, it is not the purpose of this project to place the variables firmly within this larger literature.

We start with the definition of the terms: in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED; accessed through UIS Brookens Library, March 2005), *trust* in the sense we're interested in is a noun, meaning "1.a. Confidence in or reliance on some quality or attribute of a person or thing," or "2. Confident expectation of something, hope." As a verb, it is "1.a. intr[ansitive]. To have faith or confidence; to place reliance," or "2.a.trans[ative]. To have faith or confidence in; to rely or depend upon." These are likely the senses that most survey respondents are considering the term, although I have seen no evidence that this is what the researchers intend, nor that they have verified what sense the respondents are using. In the literature, trust is often poorly defined, if at all.

A potential problem is that while the dictionary construction is a positive assessment of confidence, it is also possible to have great confidence that is negative, that is, that instead of the desired situation, the opposite will occur. Behn (2002) sums up this argument in terms of trust in government as "at least four fundamental and different reasons," including that people in government abuse their authority, are corrupt, poorly exercise discretion, and generally make the wrong decisions, to which in an endnote he adds that those in government lie and "follow a depraved moral code." He arranges this in text as "representative" quotations, each starting, "You can't trust 'em; they'll [fill in the blank]." In other words, one CAN trust those in government to abuse authority, line their own pockets, make poor decisions, screw it up, lie, and behave in a generally poor and self-serving manner.

Despite these concerns, for the purposes of this study, as a dependent variable we can operationalize *Trust* as the expressed opinion related to the individual's perception about the reliability of past, current and future behavior of a particular unit of government providing a particular good or service to meet expectations, ranging from no trust at all to complete trust, as measured in a valid controlled survey using a five-point scale.

In the OED, satisfaction in the sense we're interested in is related to "desires or feelings," and is defined as "5.a. The action of gratifying (an appetite or desire) to the full, or of contenting (a person) by the complete fulfillment of desire or supply of a want; the fact of having been gratified to the full or of having one's desire fulfilled...b. Satisfied or contented state of mind; now usually, gratification or pleasure occasioned by some fact, event, or state of things." Again, this is likely the meaning respondents are applying when asked if they are satisfied with government. In the literature, however, the term is not often defined. In one of the few exceptions, Orren (1997) cited an earlier definition that compared expectations to actual performance, but he then modified that concept to an equation where perceptions of government divided by citizens' expectations equaled satisfaction. He then identified two long-term and four short-term factors contributing to perceptions of government performance, and two factors contributing to expectations.

However, it is clear that there is a difference between the general definition of satisfaction (fulfilling a desire completely), and meeting expectations. Expectations can be variable, and can be set at a realistic level (that is, a given entity has skills and reasonably could be expected to accomplish the given level of performance), or they can be set above or below that level. There is no necessary connection between desire and

expectation. Consider for a moment the following thought experiment: suppose that I am a supervisor and I assign a task to a person, that is, my desire under the general definition is to have that individual accomplish a specific task. If the person accomplishes the task, then my desire will be satisfied. This can be represented by a maximum value of 100 percent; and in fact it is not possible for them exceed 100 percent, and it is dichotomous: it is either complete or it isn't, 100 percent or 0 percent. However, if I know the task has seven components, and the quality of each component can be less than 100 percent and not interfere with task completion, then my desires and expectations don't have to match. I might suspect that the individual will perform four of the tasks well, two of them poorly, and the last not at all. That is, my expectation can be different than my desire: my *expectation* is that he will satisfy 75 percent of the assigned task, but not complete it; my *desire* is that he complete the task, even if the quality isn't perfect. Let us say that the individual in question attempts the task, completes five of the seven components well, one moderately well, and the seventh only adequately, but does complete the overall task. The individual has exceeded my expectations (of 75 percent, by scoring 93 percent of the task) and completed 100 percent of my desire. By expecting less, my expectation was exceeded. If, on the other hand, I had expected 100 percent performance (that is, my desire and expectations matched), then I would have been disappointed, dissatisfied because my desires had not been met. Close, perhaps, but not satisfied.

Despite this definitional problem, we can operationalize *Satisfaction* as the expressed opinion about the sufficiency of the particular good or service provided by a particular unit of government as perceived by the individual, ranging from no satisfaction

at all to complete satisfaction, as measured in a valid controlled survey using a five-point scale.

Independent Variables

The primary independent variable is privatization. *Privatization* is most commonly defined as some variation on this U.S. General Accounting Office definition:

“any process aimed at shifting functions and responsibilities, in whole or in part, from the government to the private sector. Privatization can take various forms. The most common form is contracting...another form...occurs when a government transfers ownership of assets, commercial type enterprises, or responsibilities to the private sector...another, more recent variation...is ‘managed competition.’” (USGAO, 1997a)

There is an extensive literature on privatization (for example, Handler, 1996; Donahue, 1989; Devroye, 2003; Dudek, 1988; Featherstun, Thornton and Correnti, 2001; Salamon, 2002 [and contributors]; Savas, 2000, U.S. GAO 1999b; U.S. GAO 1997b; Rathgeb and Lipsky, 1993), which itself is embedded within a larger literature concerning the quality of government service to citizens and the possible ways to improve that quality, that is, a discussion of government reform (for example, Brudney, Hebert and Wright, 1999; Clinton and Gore, 1992; Donahue and Nye, 2002; Thompson, 1993; Taylor, 2000; Osborne and Gaebler, 1992). This literature is related to the larger discussion about the purpose and operation of government (for example, Ross, 1988; Goodsell, 1994; Salamon, 2002a) and as mentioned for the dependent variables, citizenship and public participation in government (for example, Gimple, Lay and Schuknecht, 2003; Bok, 2001; Campbell, Converse and Rogers, 1976; Dionne, 1998). Salamon (2002a) suggests that privatization and reinvention are two broad approaches to addressing what are seen as a set of problems concerning the structure, function and

operation of government. The discussion includes a number of terms, many of which overlap and appear in hierarchically different arrangements in the works of different researchers and commentators. In addition to privatization and reinvention, some of the terms include outsourcing, market-based government, federalism, devolution, load shedding, public-private partnerships and competitive sourcing. Although there are several different ideological and theoretical origins for the practices that are grouped together as “privatization,” from a practical standpoint, they share the definitional characteristics captured by the GAO definition above. There are three broad categories of privatization. The first is divestiture, or the selling off of government assets to the private sector, and government ceasing all (or almost all) involvement with those assets or their associated services. Second, is contracting out, or more recently, outsourcing. Governments in the United States have long used this function, just as the business sector has; however, more recently, the focus has been (both in government and the business sector) shifting “non-core” functions to private sector contractors, such as personnel and payroll services, information technology functions, janitorial services, and so on. Finally, the most recent innovation in contracting is called “competitive sourcing.” This process removes barriers to innovation that exist within government agencies, allowing government units to compete with the private sector directly (and often successfully) to provide services to the government itself and for the public. The U.S. military has more than two decades of experience with this concept, and other federal agencies have been expanding the use of this system for the last decade or more.

I conducted a survey of the SSCI to find out about the recent (1987 to present) literature regarding privatization. There were 3,312 articles on this topic, but when

combined with the term “government,” the number fell to 638. The majority of the literature has to do with case studies of privatization, often seeking to demonstrate that privatization can indeed produce the desired savings, improved service quality, and reduced costs compared to traditional government service provision. Very few articles or studies have to do with the effects of privatization on public satisfaction (24 articles) or trust (25 articles), and only a handful related to American local government. Despite this limitation against the focus of this study, the local government literature related to reform and privatization is by no means limited, with many dozens of scholarly books and articles published since 1990 (for example, Andrisani, Hakim and Leeds, 2000; Bowie, 2004; Edelman, Reynolds and Holler, 1997; Kearney, Feldman and Scavo, 2000; Johnson and Walzer, 1996, 2000, 2003; Muzzio and Van Ryzin, 2000; Positer and Henry, 1994; Thompson, 1993; Witte, 2004).

Privatization has always been a tool of American government in its attempts to carry out its policies, although it has not always been called that (Salamon, 2002a). Since World War II, it has been particularly important for state and local governments in attempting to provide various social services and public assistance programs (Salamon, 1989, 2001), especially those programs that have been mandated by the federal government. However, one study suggests that, despite rhetoric to the contrary, during the same period it has been a larger share of federal programs, on a percentage basis (and therefore on a dollar basis, as the federal budget exceeds total state and local budgets). Using a systematic analysis of governmental services costs, Minicucci and Donahue (2004), conclude that state and local spending on outsourcing (one of several privatization practices) has increased from about 15 percent in 1959 to more than 25

percent in 2000, an overall increase of about two-thirds. When Medicaid spending by states is included the rise is from about 15 to about 33 percent, more than doubling in the 41-year period. However, for the federal government, the non-Medicare share of contracting has grown from just more than 20 percent to close to 35 percent during the same period, an increase of about 75 percent. When Medicare costs are included, the increase is much sharper, to more than 55 percent, for an increase of about 175 percent. This is for just one kind of privatization practice, that of contracting out services.

Privatization in all of its forms, however, is offered up as one possible means of improving the services government provides, either by reducing the size and scope of government, the power of government, or by bringing private-sector competition to bear on government service to reduce costs, and increase efficiency and effectiveness. It is argued that this will thereby improve the satisfaction and trust the public feels about government. It is this linkage between the action of government (privatization) and public opinion that I seek to test in this study. I will operationalize *privatization* as any action by a government unit to place in private hands an operation or function formerly provided by government employees. The government's action will be given a value of 1 if it has the features of privatization, and 0 if it does not. Privatization is only one of a number of possible government actions, of course. There other actions some would classify as "reinvention" or reform, and other kinds of action that many would classify as simply continuing traditional government functioning and services. Although not the target of this study, we could include a second dummy variable for actions considered "reinvention/reform" and scored 1 in those cases. Therefore, if the government's action

scored a “0” on both, that would represent no action (continuation of the status quo) or selection and implementation of a more traditional governmental solution.

Of course, government action of any kind is only one of a number of factors that could conceivably have an impact on individual, and therefore public, opinion. There are also a large number of demographic factors, as well as local, state and national cultural and environmental factors, including economic factors. As discussed earlier, Nye and Zelikow (1997), list 17 possible explanations for the general decline in support for government at the broadest national and international levels. Lyons, Lowery and DeHoog (1992) in an investigation of citizen satisfaction in municipal and county-level settings, identify three potential sources of citizen satisfaction: 1) individual-level factors, 2) systemic or jurisdictional-level factors, and 3) local determinants of satisfaction at the city and neighborhood levels. Thus, we have at least four levels containing different variables, and more important, different kinds of variables. Each level has a large number of possible factors that could impact the dependent variables, but to my knowledge, none have to date been tested as tightly for their relation to trust and satisfaction, and certainly not in the presence of our primary independent variable, privatization.

For practical purposes, I ignore many of the possible variables presented in many sources, and construct a model using mostly common demographic and community-level factors. Factors were selected because of their common use or because they had (at least to me) intuitively obvious application to the question of whether there is a link between government action and public opinion. In all, there are 28 variables included in the model. I collapse the multiple levels of factors into just two: individual and environmental. I anticipate, based on prior research, that many of them will not be

significantly related to the dependent variables. Among the variables that do show a relationship, I anticipate that there will be little explanatory power for any given variable, and I expect to see substantial covariance between at least some of the factors (such as education and income). I also anticipate only moderate to small explanatory power overall, and a large error function. Further studies will have to pursue methods of separating or pooling the related factors, and identifying the other variables that could impact on trust and satisfaction.

The individual factors, include:

Gender entered as a 1 if female, 0 if male. Based on prior studies, I would expect men to be less satisfied and trustful of government, and more satisfied with privatization.

Race entered as a 1 if non-white, and 0 if white. Evidence on racial attitudes about government show mixed results. Race is likely a cofactor with other variables, including factors unique to individual communities. Generally, African-Americans are less trusting of government, and less satisfied with services of government, but also less supportive of privatization.

Ethnicity is measured as 1 if Hispanic and 0 if non-Hispanic. Although other ethnic minorities exist in the U.S., Hispanics are both the largest minority group and the fastest growing minority in the country. Some evidence suggests that Hispanic satisfaction and trust change significantly over time, especially for new immigrants (Michelson, 2003a, 2003b).

Age is often a continuous measure, however, we will group adults into age groups of 18-24, 25-39, 40-59, and 60-plus. Prior studies suggest that as age increases, satisfaction and trust decrease.

Income, another continuous measure, will be divided into less than \$15,000 per year; \$15 to \$30,000; \$30 to \$45,000; \$45 to \$60,000; \$60-75,000; and above \$75,000.

Education, measured as less than high school, high school, some college, bachelor's degree, master's degree, or a doctorate or professional degree. Generally, distrust and dissatisfaction is higher with higher education. Privatization tends to be supported by individuals with higher education.

Political party preference, measured with two dummy variables, one for Democratic and the other for Republican. Thus, if an individual does not prefer either party, that constructs a third category, Independent, which in this case simply means not preferring either party. Generally, Democrats are more satisfied with and trusting of government than are Republicans.

Political ideology, self-reported and measured on a five-point scale from 0 (very conservative) to 4 (very liberal). Liberals tend to be more trusting of and satisfied with government, compared to conservatives.

Employment, based on whether the respondent is employed full-time, part-time, not at all, or is self-employed.

Public Sector Employment, measured as a 1 if employed by government or a not-for-profit, and 0 if otherwise. I would expect people employed in the public sector to be more satisfied with and trusting of government, and less supportive of privatization.

Union membership, measured as a 1 if member, and 0 if otherwise. Unions are often against privatization and have traditionally been more trusting and supportive of government.

Civic membership, measured as the self-reported number of civic, social and other voluntary groups active in on a regular basis, limited to 0, 1, 2, 3 or 4 or more. Evidence suggests that people who are more engaged in community are more trusting and accepting of government.

Use of government service, measured on a 5-point scale from 0 (never use) to 4 (frequent use, at least once a week), limited to the service provided by government that is or may be privatized. I would expect that individuals who regularly interact with the government will be familiar with it, and if satisfied with the performance be against privatization, but if dissatisfied be for privatization. Those less familiar with the program (that is, who don't interact regularly) will be less trusting and likely be less satisfied, and thus more supportive of privatization.

Length of residence in the community can be important because new immigrants to the community may bring with them different ideological views, and may not have the depth of knowledge and experience about the community that long-time residents likely have. While it is a continuous measure, I will categorize this as 0-9 years, 10-19 years, 20-29 years, 30-39 years, 40-49 years, 50-59 years, and 60+ years.

Loyalty to community, based on respondents assertion of whether they have no, little, some or a great deal of loyalty to the community.

In addition to the individual factors, there are a number of Environmental Factors that have been shown to have an impact on local opinions.

Political culture and ideology can measured using any of a number of different, competing methods. For example, we could use Elazar's (1984) state political culture scheme; Wright, Erikson and McIver (1985, 1993) citizen ideology and partisanship

index; Norrander (2001) with citizen ideology and issue preference; or Brace, Butler, Arceneaux and Johnson (2001) on citizen ideology and partisanship. Each has its own strengths and weaknesses, although some might question both the validity and reliability of each (Davis, 2004).

The method I will use to estimate political culture and ideology is the Berry, Ringquist, Fording and Hanson (1998) model of citizen and government ideology. The authors use a variety of factors related to political representation to come up with a score on a left-to-right ideological spectrum. An updated version of this method is available to researchers online, and the model is clearly elucidated in the literature, allowing one to replicate the original system, or make modifications to address theoretical concerns.

Size of community, derived from Census Bureau data for the municipality, county or other unit of local government, as appropriate, and converted into a categorical measure.

Racial makeup, derived from Census Bureau data for the municipality, county or other unit of local government

Government complexity, the number of local government units operating within the target county, as determined from Census Bureau data. We can assume that the number of state and federal offices of various agencies will be similar in each county within a state.

Community affluence is the aggregate income of the county or municipality, as appropriate, based on Census Bureau information.

Institutional structure of community identifies whether it is incorporated or unincorporated, and the type of government (e.g., school board, township, county, mayor-aldermen, mayor-city-manager).

General economic conditions at the national, state and local levels. Two measures are commonly used, unemployment rates and personal income. For unemployment, I will use the annual unemployment rate, as reported by the Census Bureau and/or the U.S. Department of Labor. For personal income, I will use the per capita personal income as reported by the Census Bureau. For each, I will use the municipal level if available, or the county level.

Local growth, based on county-level data reported by the Census Bureau in the most recent decennial census, or other sources if available.

State Taxes and *Local Taxes* measured as a percentage of income. Across the nation, federal tax rates are the same, and so are not a variable. Within a state, state tax rates are the same, but differing states have different tax rates and structures, so this is a valid separate variable if doing interstate comparisons. Within a state, local tax rates and structures vary, and so can be measured and compared between communities. Organizations such as the Tax Foundation will be the source for this information.

Government redistributions, measured as the ratio of benefits received from government to total taxes paid. This is the amount of money the local community receives in grants and payments from the federal, state and local government. I would suspect that communities that receive more from government than they pay in taxes would be more satisfied with government, and less accepting of privatization.

Size of government, measured by the number of federal, state and local employees (each measured separately) per 10,000 residents, employed within the municipality or county, as reported by the Department of Labor or the Census Bureau.

Services provided by government is the number of distinct services provided by the city, including such items as police and fire protection, water and sewerage, street repairs, and so on.

Theory and Hypotheses

While the manner in which an individual may come to have an opinion is important to understanding the relationship between government action and public opinion, for the purposes of this study, I will ignore the causal mechanism (despite it being a very interesting topic) and I will hypothesize that there is a clear and direct link between the action and performance of government (not only what it does, but how well it does it) and the formation of public opinion (satisfaction and trust) about that government. These opinions are based on perceptions of what government does and how well it does it.

Because we are looking to see whether there is a connection between the implementation of a particular kind of policy tool (see Salamon, 2002a, 2002b) and public opinion, we need a framework that will adequately allow us to separate how and when the tool interacts with public opinion. It may be that early discussions about the choice of policy tools will lead to one response by the public, while selection will lead to a different response, and implementation yet another. Once the new tool is not only implemented but well established, public opinion may shift yet again. This is important, because if public opinion about government changes at the stage when alternatives are

being discussed, then it may be the symbology or the actors involved at that point in the process that has an effect on opinion, rather than any actual change in government behavior. For comparison, consider the Hawthorne experiments, where production of factory workers increased no matter how difficult the experimenters made the working conditions. It may be that it is not the implementation that matters at all, but the gesture of the *intention to change* that will have an effect on public opinion.

The Policy Stages Framework from the policy analysis field provides a good initial base for structuring this interaction from initiation of privatization to its full and continued implementation (deLeon, 1999; Brewer and deLeon, 1983). The stages framework is generally a descriptive model and not predictive. Its value is in clarifying the various phases (and the actors and processes they utilize) that a policy may go through during its life cycle. The generally accepted stages are: Initiation, Estimation, Selection, Implementation, Evaluation, and Termination (deLeon, 1999).

Initiation refers to the time when actors are attempting to get a policy on the agenda for consideration. Estimation occurs when various interested parties engage in building arguments in support of their own preferred policy options. Selection takes place when decision makers debate, negotiate and finally decide upon which policy option to pursue. Implementation is when, in the case of governments, agency staff see that the policy is carried out. Evaluation refers to the function when government—the implementing agency, the executives with responsibility, the legislative with its oversight and budget authority, even independent auditing agencies—as well as outside interest groups all monitor the implemented policy to ensure that the implementers are executing the policy correctly, and that the policy is having the desired effect. Termination refers to

the stage when someone in government—executive, legislative, or administrative—decides that the policy has achieved (or has failed and has no chance to achieve) its intended effects, and the government ceases to perform that function.

To model this, we add an initial stage, the pre-existing situation. If considered in a looping cycle, then the evaluative stage can represent the initial stage, as this is when problems with existing policy (or non-policy) become apparent, and leading actors or stakeholders propose solutions for the perceived shortcomings of the immediate situation (that is, the initiation stage). Often in policy theory, it is assumed that at the initiation stage, a situation exists wherein government is not active, and that the process of moving through the stages of the framework results in the establishment of a new government function or program. However, from a theoretical perspective, there is no reason that the initiation stage cannot be an existing government service or function, and that flow through the stages leads to the shifting of responsibility away from government, rather than toward government. Certainly, since the era of federal devolution began in the 1980s, followed by the reinventing government and privatization movements of the later 1980s and 1990s, more policy situations will resemble this latter structure. Table 1 represents a conceptual model of the stages.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Earlier studies have not established how public attitudes might vary over the various stages of the policy process, although it is clear that public opinion does change over fairly short time frames during debate about public issues. One only has to look at pre-election polling in presidential and gubernatorial races to see how quickly and widely opinion can vary. If we consider the initial situation at T_0 , at that time we have a local

unit of government providing a service to the community. As an illustration, let's use a municipal electric utility. At this point, we cannot say with confidence what public opinion about this government enterprise would be. At the very least, we would expect some if not all of the independent variables listed above to have some effect on the local public's satisfaction with the utility's service, and trust in its ability to provide that service. But satisfaction and/or trust could be high, could be low, or anywhere in between, and the two factors could have similar ratings, or very different ratings.

Certain ideological and theoretical models—such as privatization theory—argue that certain government traits impact public opinion immediately and directly. For example, if government has grown larger than its proper size, citizens will (apparently naturally and without outside input) notice and become dissatisfied. In such a case, we would expect trust and satisfaction to be low at T_0 . However, the various models offer many different estimates, contingent on a variety of conditions in the particular situation. For example, the government efficiency model suggests that highly effective and efficient government units will have high levels of trust and satisfaction, while less efficient and effective units would have lower ratings by the public. These arguments could be tested, but are beyond the scope of this project. I would argue that it would be difficult to establish some of the variables necessary to estimate the starting conditions: how does one know if a particular program is “too big” or “too intrusive?” But this is a discussion for another project.

At T_1 , then, for whatever reason, one or more stakeholders initiate the policy process. At this initiation stage, the stakeholders identify a problem with the city providing this service, and propose the privatization of the utility as being in the

residents' best interest. There could be many reasons for this proposal. Perhaps service has been poor and costs high. Or, some members of the community could strongly believe that government shouldn't be in the business of producing and distributing goods that frequently are the venue of private enterprise. Or, a private firm has been formed to buy up small private and public utilities and has made a proposal to the city council to acquire the operation. Regardless of the source, the citizens of the community are likely to respond to the proposal: either they will see it as a good thing (especially if satisfaction has been low), or a bad thing (especially if satisfaction has been high). Even if performance has been good, those residents with an ideological bent in favor of private enterprise might welcome the call to privatize.

At T_2 , the various stakeholders, the city council, the utility managers and other interest groups would engage in estimation, literally making estimates about the costs, benefits and other impacts the proposal would have. They would also likely be introducing alternative proposals for consideration, requiring even more effort to estimate costs and impacts of the other alternatives. There would likely be hearings, media campaigns and general community discussion. Again, we cannot say exactly how public opinion would respond. The various independent variables would undoubtedly have impacts, but the particulars of the situation within the community and the details of the proposal would likely have a more immediate effect on ratings of satisfaction and trust.

At T_3 , the municipality's elected (mayor, city council) and/or appointed (city manager) officials must select which option to approve, and the methods to achieve that policy. They consider the various proposals, compare the costs and benefits and other arguments for and against, and come to a consensus. Again, the numerous variables

affecting public opinion will come into play, and the public will either be satisfied or not, and the decision will either add to trust, or subtract from it.

At T₄, the government must implement its decision to privatize. This will likely involve not only conducting administrative steps leading up to privatization, but will also mean that the government-owned utility will have to start making changes in the way things are done, in preparation for privatization. Again, the details of the policy will have a great effect on public opinion, because the exact kind of privatization approved will mean very different things about what the government will be doing in relation to the utility, and what the utility itself will be doing. The city could decide to divest itself entirely of its utility, selling it off to a private owner (which could be a publicly owned company, a newly formed employee-owned company, a not-for-profit operating company, or a privately owned corporation). Alternatively, the city could choose to retain ownership and control: possibilities include contracting out services, such as hiring a company to handle the management and operation of the utility, or just certain functions, such as personnel and bill collections, or in the extreme, the city would retain ownership of all infrastructure and equipment, but the contractor would provide all labor and expertise covering the use and operation of the utility. How these differing kinds of privatization interact with expectations and the other variables will lead to further changes in public opinion.

At T₅, the privatization is complete and the new arrangement is in operation: the mayor, city council, city administrator and other portions of the government (for example, the city treasurer's office) will monitor the arrangement, as necessary or required by the terms of the selection. The stakeholders will also be monitoring the

situation, to ensure that the privatization option selected continues to bring the value expected. This evaluation stage may continue for some time. Depending on how the factors interact, the public may or may not be satisfied, and may or may not trust the privatized utility to continue to provide services well.

Finally, at T_6 , the city decides to terminate this policy. In the case of total divestiture, this would be to no longer give any oversight or exercise any authority over the utility, beyond what it does for any other privately owned utility. In the case of partial divestiture, or of contracting out, the city will decide whether or not the arrangement is working out, and what to do if it is not. Public opinion will undoubtedly enter into the government's considerations at this point, as it will have throughout the process. But the level of satisfaction and trust will still be dependent upon various factors, including the quality, cost and reliability of the service, and the various independent variables identified earlier.

Throughout the process, the utility has continued to operate, providing electricity and repair services for the municipality. The pressure of the policy process may have affected the staff and their performance in either a positive, neutral, or negative manner, and this will have provided a feedback loop into the decision making process. Likewise, the public and the various stakeholders will also have been providing feedback, to each other, to the government, and to the community as a whole.

It is important at this point to note that at each stage, a different part of "the government" was involved in taking action. At T_0 , the administration and staff of the utility were the primary focus of public opinion about the utility. However, at T_1 , T_2 and T_3 , it is primarily the city's overall administration, the utility administration, and the

elected/appointed officials (the council, mayor, manager) that are the focus of public opinion. The utility can continue to perform at the same level, but it may be how the discussion, argumentation and negotiation of the proposed change are carried out that will affect public opinion about the utility and the proposed privatization. Keeping these two measures separated is key because we are now talking about different functions of government (estimation and development of alternatives; debate and decision) carried out by different players (administrators and staff; elected officials and administrators) than what we started to measure public opinion about—the performance of the electric utility.

At T₄, T₅ and T₆, we are now talking about public opinion in relation to how the city will carry out and oversee the privatization. This work will likely not be done by employees of the utility: it will be overseen by senior administrators and staff from the city's fiscal offices, such as the treasurer. The utility, whether now owned by an outside interest, or simply being managed to some degree by an outside contractor, will continue to function. The quality and quantity of service provided may or may not change, but measuring public satisfaction and trust regarding the utility is different than measuring the trust and satisfaction in the elected officials, administration and fiscal staff who oversee the privatization.

Only by separating the stages of the policy process, and the various actors within the unit of analysis, is it possible to fully identify the sources, or perhaps a more appropriate term would be, the *objects* of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, of trust and distrust, on the part of the public. It is entirely possible that public satisfaction and trust in the utility was high prior to the policy process, remained high throughout, and remains high long after the process ended. Depending on how the details of the process

proceeded, trust in the rest of the government (elected officials, senior administrators, etc.) could have plunged from high levels at the beginning to abysmally low ratings by the end, without affecting the way the public assesses the utility. We cannot predict beforehand, and unless we are careful to keep the different actors and stages separated, we cannot clearly see what change has which effect about each actor in the process.

Methodology

Under ideal conditions, I would build a cross-sectional as well as longitudinal study, with a diverse, large-n population of governments and government agencies from which to sample at the key points in space and time. First, we would need to be able to assess public opinion about specific programs or governmental activities *prior* to the identification of a “problem.” Obviously, this would require the use of prescient abilities to divine which communities are about to have a problem in a specific program or service area, and for which privatization will or may be a solution. We would then be able to collect data at each stage of the process as the problem was identified, estimation takes place, alternatives are considered and one (preferably privatization in some manner) is selected, that alternative is implemented, and finally evaluated at two or more future times, to see how satisfaction and trust change over time. We would be able to measure the level of public knowledge of and involvement in the debate over the problem and its possible alternative solutions, as this might have an impact as well, while controlling for various institutional and cultural factors. At the shortest, this might be a period of several months. More realistically, it might take several years—especially to determine if during the evaluation stage, public satisfaction is any different.

Study after study shows that context matters in assessing public opinion, so great care will have to be taken in construction of the survey instrument. Indeed, once potential units of government have been identified, it may be necessary to conduct more detailed case studies, possibly even including the use of focus groups and preliminary surveys of the community.

In order to get a large enough variety of governmental sizes and types, and kinds of privatization, we would need a sizable number of locations. I would suggest using five to ten diverse states, with between two and five each of small, medium and large units of local government (distributed over municipal, county, town or township, school district and special district types). In order to avoid the aggregation of attitudes over differing programs within a given unit of government, the ideal study would include individual programs in local or federal agencies; local offices of state agencies; and the offices of one or more local government units. The emphasis should be on local offices at all levels because that is where most individuals interact with the government. At this level, the focus should be on one particular act of privatization: the outsourcing of human relations services, for example, or the formation of an independent community utility company, or the selling off of a municipal gas or electric service to a private company.

The kinds of privatization taking place may or may not be of importance: at the very least, we would expect to see examples of complete and partial divestiture; complete and partial contracting out, and competitive contracting (in which the targeted government unit is allowed to competitively bid for the work). Some governments might choose to spin off a government enterprise (a municipal electric or water utility, for example) to become a government-owned company, such as has been done with the U.S.

Postal Service. We would expect a natural control in that some governments would opt against privatization and seek more traditional “in-house” solutions. However, the study could include several government in which privatization is not considered.

Of course, this is the ideal situation. Given the scope of the project—30 to 150 local governments across 5 to 10 states; polling samples of between dozens for the smallest units and about a thousand for the largest; a survey tool consisting of dozens of questions; applied at least seven times over an extended period of between several months to several years; with a potential for perhaps tens of millions of data points—we cannot reasonably expect to engage in such an undertaking. Lacking the time and resources, not to mention the prescience to know which specific places to carry out this massive work, we must look to a much simpler and limited initial investigation.

In this case, we might select within a single state up to a dozen local government units of various sizes where privatization has already taken place or is in the process of taking place. These can be identified through media reports (through such resources as Lexis-Nexis), or by contacting one of the various organizations that represent local governments and government officials (such as the National Council of State and Local Governments). By carefully screening the communities in which the local programs are located, we can attempt to control for some of the contextual and institutional factors that might confound the study. We must then settle for asking people not only what their opinions are now, but what they were before the privatization issue came up, and at each stage of the process.

Even this could be a substantial undertaking: surveying several hundred people at least two or three times each in up to a dozen communities, with an instrument of several

dozen questions, all of which could easily total several million datapoints. And, the research necessary to identify the specific factors within each community, especially as the policy process moves through its stages and the unique developments of each process unfold, means perhaps hundreds of researcher hours on-site, making detailed qualitative studies of the process.

Once the data is collected and organized in a database, analysis will begin with simple ANOVA and multivariate analysis to determine any immediate relationships between factors and whether any subpopulation variations exist or other systemic problems or findings need to be addressed. Analysis will then proceed to regression. However, because I have not yet taken a quantitative methods coursework, I cannot at this point be more specific about which procedures will be most appropriate for this project.

Obviously, such an undertaking will require considerable resources. But it is only through careful application of considerable resources that we can achieve the resolution necessary to “split the atom” of a government that is not unitary, and a public that is not unified, and individual attitudes that will differ in relation to different actors and specific conditions at different points in the stages of the policy process. It is the only way to begin to answer the question, “Does the implementation of privatization affect public satisfaction with, and trust in, local and state government?”