

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Does citizen participation make public servants more satisfied with their jobs? It depends on whether they are Spectators or Participants

Kazi Maruful Islam<sup>1</sup> | Jan-Hinrik Meyer-Sahling<sup>2</sup>  | Kim Sass Mikkelsen<sup>3</sup> | Taiabur Rahman<sup>1</sup> | Christian Schuster<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Dhaka, Dhaka, Bangladesh

<sup>2</sup>University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK

<sup>3</sup>Roskilde University, Roskilde, UK

<sup>4</sup>University College London, London, UK

## Correspondence

Jan-Hinrik Meyer-Sahling.

Email: [J.Meyer-sahling@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:J.Meyer-sahling@nottingham.ac.uk)

## Funding information

British Academy

[Correction made on 29 November 2023, after first online publication: In the first author affiliation, 'UK' was changed to 'Bangladesh'.]

## Abstract

Is citizen participation in policymaking and implementation desirable? Numerous studies have explored its effects on policy outcomes and citizen attitudes. We, instead, examine its effects on public servants. Citizen participation changes public sector job characteristics and thus potentially job attitudes. Looking at job satisfaction, we argue that citizen participation negatively affects public servants who observe, but do not participate in citizen participation initiatives in their institution's decisions ("Spectators"), yet not public servants who are "Participants." "Participants" learn to appreciate the benefits of citizen participation while minimizing its cost. Survey data from public servants in one developing country, Bangladesh, provides empirical support.

## KEYWORDS

Asia, civil service, job satisfaction, participatory governance

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

In the past decades, the literature on citizen participation in public policy and management decisions has mushroomed (for reviews, see McGuire, 2006; Garau, 2012; Ianniello et al., 2019). Citizen participation—or, as often used interchangeably, participatory governance—is understood as state-sanctioned institutional venues for citizens to discuss and/or decide matters of public concern (Fung & Wright, 2001). The interest in citizen participation need not surprise: citizen participation venues have proliferated in both developed and, often under a social accountability (Fung, 2015) and public service improvement labels (Knox & Sharipova, 2023), in developing countries.

Advocates of citizen participation point to a range of potential benefits of citizen participation, including more effective, just, and

legitimate administration and policy (Rowe & Frewer, 2004). A large set of studies, however, equally underscores that benefits from citizen participation are anything but a foregone conclusion. Instead, citizen participation may increase transaction costs, slow down decision-making, create unrealistic expectations among citizens, and open government processes to capture by special interests (Fung, 2006; Fung & Wright, 2001; Irvin & Stansbury, 2004).

This debate has pushed the knowledge frontier, including through high-profile field experiments, on the effects of citizen participation on public service delivery, citizen attitudes towards government and social cohesion in society (e.g. Olken, 2010). However, it has overlooked what should be a core area of scholarly interest: the effects of citizen participation on public servants inside government. This omission matters in two important ways. First, public servants play central roles in the machinery of government

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/) License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.

© 2023 The Authors. Public Administration and Development published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

implementation of citizen participation; their attitudes towards citizen participation thus arguably shape the quality of participation processes and outcomes. In light of this, a handful of papers have considered correlates of public servants' evaluation of citizen participation (e.g., Campbell & Im, 2016; Coursey et al., 2012; Huang & Feeney, 2016). Second, the desirability of citizen participation also hinges on the wider effects of citizen participation on the machinery of government itself. If public servants become more or less satisfied, motivated, or committed in their jobs when governance is participatory, participation will have unforeseen downstream costs and benefits on public sector performance and other desirable outcomes. Such downstream effects need consideration when evaluating the desirability of citizen participation initiatives.

In this paper, we assess relationships between citizen participation and public servants' attitudes. We focus on one attitude in particular: job satisfaction. Job satisfaction refers to "how an individual feels about his or her job [...] usually in the sense of how favorable - how positive or negative—those feelings are" and belongs to "the most intensively studied variables in organizational research, if not the most studied" (Raine, 2014, p. 320). Job satisfaction is, according to recent meta-analyses, associated with important organizational outcomes in the public sector, including greater organizational performance and lower public sector turnover in both developed and developing countries (Cantarelli et al., 2016; Vigan & Giauque, 2018). Satisfaction has also been assessed as a valuable outcome in the citizen participation literature (e.g., Fedele et al., 2016), but researchers have focussed on the satisfaction of citizens and other stakeholders rather than public servants. If job satisfaction promotes successful implementation (Moynihan, 2003), the satisfaction of public servants, as core implementation agents, is of great importance. Integrating theories of citizen participation and public management, as called for by Coursey et al. (2012, 479), should thus help build a more holistic understanding of the consequences of participatory government.

To understand the link between citizen participation and job satisfaction, we rely on job characteristics theory (cf. Hackman & Oldham, 1975, 1976). Our argument rests on the simple insight that citizen participation can change the characteristics and demands of public sector jobs. Consequently, it can shape the attitudes of public servants, including their job satisfaction. As, theoretically, citizen participation initiatives can shape perceived job characteristics and demands in different ways, we argue that citizen participation can either increase or decrease job satisfaction of public servants. We expect this effect to be negative for "Spectators" understood as public servants who observe citizen participation initiatives in their institution's decision-making without participating in them. By contrast, we hypothesize a positive citizen participation effect on the job satisfaction of "Participants", understood as public servants who actively participate in citizen participation initiatives. Contrary to "Spectators", "Participants" learn to appreciate the benefits of citizen input (for instance learning about which policies might fail in implementation due to citizen resistance) and experience fewer costs of

citizen participation to, for instance, their decision-making autonomy by having greater control over participation processes.

We provide evidence testing this argument from an original survey of 1077 public servants in 27 central government institutions in one developing country: Bangladesh. Our findings are consistent with the notion that the effect of citizen participation on job satisfaction is contingent upon whether public servants are "Spectators" or "Participants." For "Spectators," citizen participation is negatively associated with job satisfaction. By contrast, for "Participants," citizen participation is not significantly associated with job satisfaction. We also provide suggestive survey evidence for our theorized mechanisms. Our findings hence suggest that, when evaluating the desirability of citizen participation initiatives, their impact on public servants needs to be taken into consideration.

## 2 | THEORY: CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND JOB SATISFACTION

In conceptualizing citizen participation, we draw on Moynihan (2003, 166), who defines it as "citizens or citizen representatives (who are not elected officials) interacting with and providing feedback to government at some part of the policy process (either policy formulation or implementation)." Citizen participation is thus any involvement of citizens in the affairs of a public organization that provides citizens with *some* influence over decisions—at a minimum the opportunity to provide feedback (see Moynihan, 2003), but, at times, also co-decision or decision-making powers (cf. Fung, 2006).

Why would citizen participation shape how satisfied public servants are with their job? Our hypothesis development builds on the basic insight: that citizen participation can change the characteristics and demands of public sector jobs. The Job Characteristics Model, originally developed by Hackman and Oldham (1975, 1976), "remains the focal point of current discussions of work design" (DeVaro et al., 2007, p. 987). It argues that five core job characteristics shape how satisfying jobs are for employees. They are skill variety (extent to which a job requires the use of different skills and talents), task identity (extent to which a job involves a whole piece of work), task significance (extent to which a job affects the lives of others), autonomy (extent to which an employee has independence when carrying out her job) and feedback (extent to which the job itself provides information about the employee's performance).

Theoretically, perceived job characteristics influence "critical psychological states" of employees including their feeling of the job's meaningfulness, a feeling of responsibility towards work outcomes, and a sense of knowledge of the results about how they are performing (Renn & Vandenberg, 1995). Critical psychological states, in turn, shape employees' personal and work outcomes, including behavioural outcomes such as work performance, attitudinal outcomes such as job satisfaction, and well-being outcomes such as stress and burnout (Humphrey et al., 2007).

Building on these insights, we argue that citizen participation affects public servants' job characteristics and job demands which in

turn shapes their attitudes—including their job satisfaction—for better or worse. Four effects of citizen participation on job characteristics stand out: changes in skill variety, task significance and perceived autonomy, as suggested by job characteristics theory. In addition, we consider the impact of citizen participation on job demands, in particular, public servants' workload.

First, citizen participation can impose additional job demands on public servants. Public servants need to expend time and effort to organize participatory venues and engage with citizens, who may lack the prerequisite expert knowledge to understand public policy problems (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Yang & Pandey, 2011). Citizen participation thus raises individual workloads, may slow down decision-making and stretches organizational resources, since organizations need to reallocate public servants from other tasks to citizen participation tasks. Increasing workload, in turn, is associated negatively with job satisfaction in a range of studies (e.g. Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).

Second, citizen participation may change public servants' decision-making autonomy. For citizen participation to be effective, as Fedele et al. (2016, 319) conclude, it is necessary "that government gives up some discretion vis-à-vis stakeholders and social organizations". Yet, autonomy and decision latitude at the job are powerful predictors of job satisfaction according to both job characteristics theory (cf. DeVaro et al., 2007) and empirical research in public management (e.g. Noblet & Rodwell, 2009).

However, job characteristics theory also suggests that citizen participation may enhance job satisfaction by increasing skill variety in public sector jobs. Engaging with citizens in participatory venues enhances the variety of skills—for example, on communication, consultation and co-ordination with a variety of external stakeholders—public servants deploy on their jobs, thus making public sector jobs intrinsically more interesting and thus satisfying (cf. Taylor & Westover, 2011).

Lastly, citizen participation can change the perceived task significance of public sector jobs. Greater task significance influences the perceived meaningfulness of work and the perceived pro-social impact of one's work, which is an important predictor of job satisfaction (Cantarelli et al., 2016; Thomas et al., 2004). Theoretically, based on skill variety and task significance, we therefore expect citizen participation to promote—rather than curb—public servants' perceived task significance and pro-social impact.

To summarize: On the one hand, citizen participation may lead to an increase in workload for public servants and reduce their sense of autonomy, both of which can diminish public servants' job satisfaction. On the other hand, public officials may employ a greater variety of skills on the job and perceive enhanced task significance and pro-social impact where they regard citizen feedback as valuable (Fung, 2006; Fung & Wright, 2001; Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). Theoretically, the relationship between citizen participation and job satisfaction is thus indeterminate; it can have positive or negative effects on job characteristics and thus intermittently satisfaction. Our first two hypotheses reflect these diverging empirical predictions.

**H1a** Citizen participation is positively associated with job satisfaction of public servants

**H1b** Citizen participation is negatively associated with job satisfaction of public servants

That the central relationship is theoretically indeterminate puts a premium on empirical tests to identify conditions under which citizen participation enhances or diminishes public servants' job satisfaction. Intuitively, if citizen participation affects job satisfaction through job characteristics and demands, it will affect those actively participating in citizen participation differently from those whose offices' policies are subject to citizen participation, but who do not participate in citizen participation venues themselves. We term these two groups "Participants" and "Spectators." Participants are public servants who are actively engaged with citizens in participatory governance. Spectators, by contrast, work in government offices with citizen participation initiatives, but are not themselves engaged in them. They thus closely observe the on-the-job experience of Participants without themselves practicing it.

Changes in perceived task significance, skill variety, autonomy, and job demands are all distinct for "Participants" relative to "Spectators." First, Participants are more likely to perceive enhanced task significance and pro-social impact than Spectators. Due to their direct interaction with citizens and societal groups, Participants can learn about the benefits of local knowledge, for instance, by gaining better understanding of citizens' demands and anticipating dissent for decisions. Regular interaction with citizens also provides Participants direct evidence of the impact and benefits of policy decisions. By contrast, lacking this learning opportunity, Spectators lack these sources of experience and information and can therefore be expected to remain sceptical about the value of citizen input into the policy process.

Second, Participants also benefit from greater on-the-job skill variety due to citizen participation. Thinking about benefits primarily as emotional benefits in accordance with our definition of job satisfaction above, Participants, contrary to Spectators, organize citizen participation venues and they consult and communicate with citizens on-the-job. As such, we would expect that citizen participation makes the jobs of Participants, but not Spectators, more interesting and thus satisfying.

Contrary to the general discussion of the relation between citizen participation, job characteristics and job satisfaction above, the decision-making autonomy of Participants and Spectators is also differentially affected. By having (some) discretion over the organization of participatory venues, Participants are better placed to maintain relevant control over their job and its contents (Moynihan, 2003). By setting up and managing participation process, they might even feel that their job autonomy has been enhanced rather than diminished. Moreover, Participants have greater control over citizen inputs in participatory processes and can shape the way it is used in subsequent stages of the decision-making processes. By contrast, Spectators can become decision-takers with a diminished

influence over the policy contents and opportunities to shape decision-making processes.

Lastly, for the impact of citizen participation on public servants' job demands the differences between Participants and Spectators are less intuitive. While superior information is likely to keep Participants in greater control of the policy timetable, both Participants and Spectators face the same constraint that organizational resources are finite. Organizations need to reallocate staff resources towards organizing citizen participation venues to invite citizen participation. Unless more staff is recruited, this leaves the remaining staff with greater workloads. From a job demands perspective, Participants and Spectators could thus be expected to be equally affected in institutions inviting citizen participation.

In sum, we expect that Spectators are, relative to Participants, more concerned about a loss of their office's decision-making power (autonomy) and are more doubtful about the contributions of citizens to policy-making and implementation (task significance). Moreover, Spectators do not reap the benefits of more interesting jobs (skill variety) and are equally affected by the additional workload citizen participation implies for public sector organizations (job demands).

Participants, on the other hand, experience more benefits from citizen participation, in particular, thanks to the direct contact with citizens (task significance) and greater control over participation processes (autonomy). Moreover, their jobs become more interesting with citizen participation (skill variety). At the same time, Participants experience the cost that citizen participation raises their workloads unless new staff is employed (job demands). The theoretical effect of citizen participation on Participants' job satisfaction is thus mostly positive but the potentially negative effect of increased workload adds an element of ambiguity to our expectation.

This leads us to hypothesize:

**H2** Citizen participation is heterogeneously associated with job satisfaction for Participants and Spectators

**H2a** Among Spectators, citizen participation is negatively associated with job satisfaction

**H2b** Among Participants, citizen participation is positively associated with job satisfaction

### 3 | DATA AND METHODS

#### 3.1 | Case selection

To obtain leverage on our hypotheses, we need (1) variation in citizen participation initiatives across and within government institutions and (2) variation in the participation of public servants in citizen participation initiatives. In many Western government organizations, citizen participation is so widespread that studies distinguish between different forms of participation, rather than its existence (Yang & Callahan, 2007). This creates the challenge that most or all

public servants are either Participants or Spectators, whereas to test our hypotheses we also need numerous public servants who are neither. We thus focus on central government organizations in a developing country, in which citizen participation is both more incipient and only existing in some government institutions—thus providing us with variation to assess how the presence of citizen participation affects job satisfaction. With these case selection criteria in mind, we surveyed public servants across 27 central government institutions in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh and the institutions selected within provide an ideal setting for assessing the relationship between citizen participation and job satisfaction of public servants. Public administration in Bangladesh is strongly influenced by the legacy of British colonial rule (Huque, 2010; Khan, 2013). Policymaking is highly centralized in the executive with bureaucrats feeding into the cabinet led by a powerful Prime Minister. Parliament has limited influence on policymaking and oversight. Instead, the bureaucracy plays a dominant role, which is reinforced by the elitism of the Bangladesh Civil Service (Aminuzzaman, 2013).

In the post-independence period civil society organization and interest groups started to emerge as participants in the policy process to some extent, but their role has often remained symbolic rather than substantive: “the process of policy making is an internal affair. Government tries to show that it involves stakeholders however this is more lip service rather than genuine intent...” (Koehlmoos et al., 2009, p. 6). Given the stickiness of the post-colonial tradition of public administration, Bangladesh—like most of its neighbours in South Asia (Sabharwal & Berman, 2013)—has thus long had features of an extreme case with minimal scope for citizen participation.

In the last decade—in part due to pressure from donor agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)—citizen participation has gained in importance in select institutions and for select policies. To cite some examples from government institutions that participated in our survey: the Prime Minister's Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100—a century-long development plan for the Bangladesh Delta region—was prepared with a technical Advisory Committee comprising stakeholders from academia, civil society and professional organizations, among many. The draft plan was subsequently open for a 4-month public consultation on Bangladesh's Planning Commission website.

Similarly, the Ministry of Finance routinely conducts pre-budget consultations of stakeholders such as economists, think tanks and business associations. Consultations lead to recommendations for consideration by the Ministry of Finance (Rahman, 2018). The Ministry of Health, to provide another example, has adopted the practice of developing national health policy with the help of formulation committees that comprise public servants, technocrats from think tanks and academia and representatives of civil society organization.

Mechanisms of citizen participation have also been mandated by law. For instance, Government Commissions—such as the Telecommunication Regulatory Commission—are required to hold public

hearings to obtain citizen and expert input prior to policy decisions and to listen to citizen complaints (Islam et al., 2018).

Citizen participation in Bangladesh central government organizations has thus multiplied in recent years but remains incipient in that the extent to which it is pursued (Aminuzzaman, 2013). Concerns continue to be raised as to the effectiveness of citizen participation. While participation has been substantial in some policy areas, observers claim that policy-making remains dominated by the bureaucracy, while the influence of the general public is small (Zafarullah & Banik, 2015). The experience across government institutions in Bangladesh thus gives us likely variation in the extent to which bureaucrats are “Participants,” “Spectators” or neither of the two to assess the impact of citizen participation on their job satisfaction.

### 3.2 | Respondents

We conducted a survey in 27 central government organizations in Bangladesh. Most of the institutions included in the survey are central government ministries. Within the institutions, we surveyed face-to-face with a team of enumerators 1,077 public servants. As the Bangladeshi government did not disclose full lists of staff, we relied, similar to several prior studies surveying bureaucrats in developing countries (e.g. Oliveros & Schuster, 2018), on informal quota sampling. Our sampling focussed on selecting respondents from across central government institutions, job functions, ranks in hierarchy, ages, contract types, and education levels. We did so by contacting individual government institutions and requesting access, seeking thereby to stratify the sample in a general sense across surveyed institutions. Interviews were conducted by local enumerators in between September 2017 and April 2018.

As illustrated in Table 1, our sampling strategy yielded a diverse set of public servants. On average, our respondents have spent 11.5 years in the public sector. In line with the Bangladeshi civil service career system, most respondents are university-educated (83%) and on permanent contracts (97%). Given our informal quota sampling, we cannot claim that our sample is representative. The limited available demographic data, however, provides suggestive evidence that our sample comes, at least in descriptive terms, close to a representative sample. To illustrate, 22% of our respondents are women, relative to 18% of class staff in Bangladeshi ministries and divisions; and 22% of our respondents are at the managerial level, relative to 27% in Bangladeshi ministries and divisions (class I officers) (Government of Bangladesh, 2018). We thus have no prima facie reason to believe that our sampling strategy biases our findings.

### 3.3 | Measures

For our hypothesis testing, our core measures of interest are citizen participation (independent variable), job satisfaction (dependent variable), Spectators and Participants (to assess heterogeneous

TABLE 1 Summary statistics.

	N	Mean	Std. dev	Min	Max
Job satisfaction	1028	4.395	1.391	0	6
Citizen participation	1009	0.229	0.661	0	4
Citizen contact	1033	0.341	0.474	0	1
University education	1028	0.826	0.379	0	1
Gender: Female	1025	0.219	0.413	0	1
Gender: Male	1025	0.781	0.413	0	1
Income: Lower <sup>a</sup>	1021	0.779	0.415	0	1
Income: Middle <sup>b</sup>	1021	0.201	0.401	0	1
Income: Higher <sup>c</sup>	1021	0.021	0.142	0	1
Years of service	1035	11.534	9.601	0	40
Permanent contract	1035	0.971	0.168	0	1
Temporary contract	1035	0.029	0.168	0	1
Rank: Management	1019	0.223	0.416	0	1
Rank: Technical-professional	1019	0.111	0.314	0	1
Rank: Administrative support	1019	0.666	0.472	0	1

<sup>a</sup>Less than 15,000 Tk.

<sup>b</sup>Between 15,000 and 30,000 Tk.

<sup>c</sup>More than 30,000 Tk.

treatment effects) and public officials' attitudes towards citizen participation (to provide evidence on mechanisms).

We measure citizen participation using a simple, factual question. Respondents were asked the following, on a five-point scale from “never” to “all the time”: “Do citizens participate in the decision-making process in your office?” Other survey studies of citizen involvement have used more differentiated, factual measures of citizen participation, distinguishing between different forms of participation (Yang & Callahan, 2007). However, to estimate the relationship between citizen participation and job satisfaction, since we are not substantively interested in participation format, we opted for a simpler, less cognitively demanding item.

Moreover, since we are interested in distinguishing Participants from Spectators, we ask respondents not about their personal participation in citizen participation processes but about such processes in their working environment. The purpose of this measure is not to provide representative descriptions of organizational processes. Instead, the measure targets respondents' *experiences*. An implication is that we do not expect respondents working in the same organization to agree in their answers since differential individual experiences can have sources other than organizational practices (e.g., management practices, past projects, team engagement in participation).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Indeed, respondents do not agree on the frequency of citizen participation within organizations. The lion's share of differences in reported frequency are within organizations.



In keeping with other studies of the topic (e.g. Campbell & Im, 2016), job satisfaction was measured with: “On a scale of 1–7, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your job”? The response scale was numbered from 1 to 7 with verbal anchors—“completely dissatisfied” and “completely satisfied”—at the extremes. Single-item measures of job satisfaction are common in public management research (Rainey, 2014). Even if different aspects of job satisfaction such as satisfaction with work, supervision or pay can be measured, our focus of inquiry is specifically on “work” satisfaction, further justifying reliance on a single-item measure (cf. Cantarelli et al., 2016).

To distinguish Participants from Spectators, we use a simple question from the survey asking respondents to indicate whether they are in contact with citizens in the context of their work. Public servants may, of course, be in contact with citizens but not involved in citizen participation efforts. We consider Participants those public servants who are in contact with citizens *and* indicate that citizen participation in decision-making occurs in their office. We consider Spectators those public servants who are not in contact with citizens but indicate that citizen participation in decision-making occurs in their office. Strictly speaking, Spectators do therefore not directly experience citizen participation but therefore in a position to form an opinion that is based on observing colleagues in their office from very close proximity. Finally, public servants who do not indicate that citizen participation in decision-making occurs in their office are considered neither Participants nor Spectators.

This measure requires some interpretation. As public servants may be in contact with citizens in offices with citizen participation initiatives yet nonetheless not participate in citizen participation initiatives, our measure may count as Participants public servants who are, in fact, Spectators. If this is true, however, then the bias this would introduce would make it harder for us to find evidence for heterogeneous treatment effects (and thus H2, H2a and H2b), by making the observed groups of Participants and Spectators artificially homogenous. From this perspective, while our models will underestimate the difference between the groups and hence be biased against H2, finding support for H2 (as we do) lessens the measurement concern from the contact measure.

Our job satisfaction measure is vulnerable to social desirability bias (SDB), in that respondents may wish to avoid embarrassment in front of the interviewer by responding that they are dissatisfied (Tourangeau et al., 2000). However, SDB is most likely to bias our estimates if desirable responding to the job satisfaction question is correlated with desirable responding to core independent variables. Our core independent variables, asking essentially factual questions about respondents' jobs and offices, are likely not prone to desirable responding. For this reason, though we cannot entirely reject SDB influence on our estimates, we do not believe it is the most pertinent threat to our results.

In addition to our core variables, our models include, as controls, gender, education, years of service (measured in years), rank (dividing respondents into administrative support, technical-professional staff,

and management), income bands, and contract type (temporary vs. permanent contracts). We also apply fixed effects for ministries, thus holding constant all unobservable differences between state institutions in our sample.<sup>2</sup>

We test our hypotheses using ordinary least square regressions. For H1a and H1b, we estimate the association between citizen participation and job satisfaction. For H2, we test the interaction of citizen participation with whether public servants interact with citizens on their jobs. To examine H2a and H2b, we calculate marginal effects of that same interaction for Participants and Spectators.

## 4 | RESULTS

### 4.1 | Descriptive findings

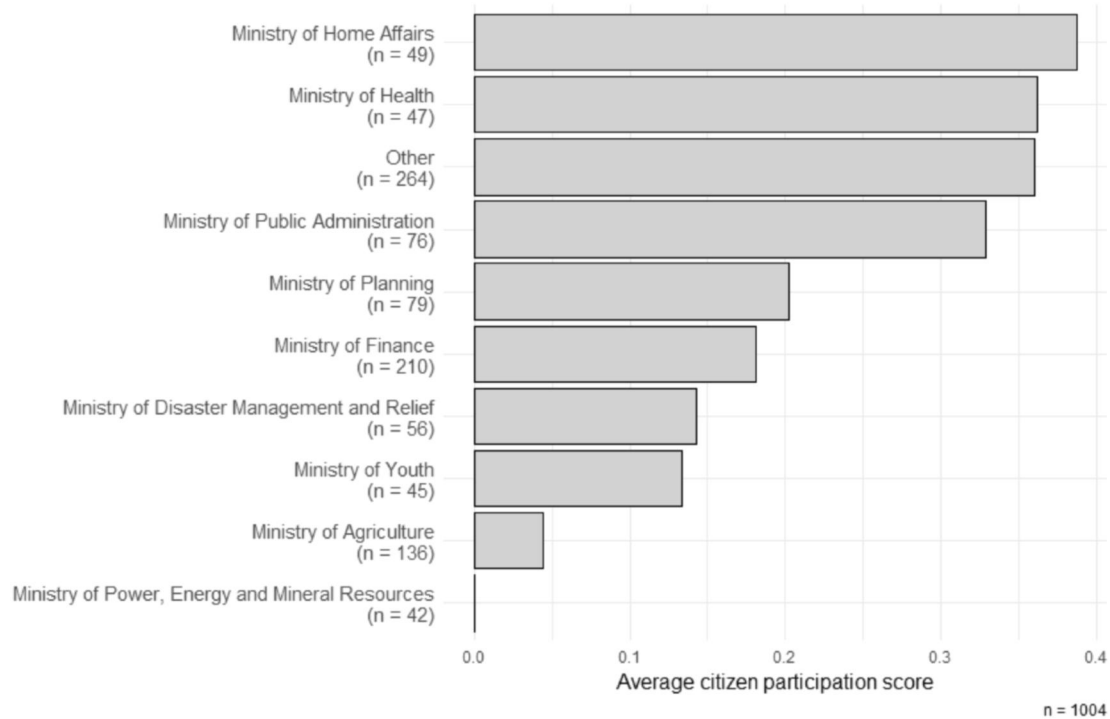
Before turning to our regression results, we briefly show descriptively how our core measures vary within the Bangladeshi central government. Citizen participation only impacts a minority of our public servants. Roughly 12% of our sample report that their office involves citizens in decision-making. The 12% are nearly evenly split between Participants and Spectators. While the data shows that citizen participation is not that common in Bangladesh, it provides us with variation in the extent of citizen participation. As discussed above, it is this variation that permits us to obtain a reasonable estimate of the relationship between citizen participation and job satisfaction, as opposed to specific formats or the importance of participation (e.g. Coursey et al., 2012; Yang & Callahan, 2007).

Moreover, our data suggest that citizen participation varies across central government institutions. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of reported citizen participation by ministry. As is evident, no ministry averages high on the five-point participation scale, but at least some respondents in all but one ministry—the Ministry of Power, Energy, and Mineral Resources—report some citizen participation.

### 4.2 | Regression results

As noted, the relationship between citizen participation and job satisfaction is theoretically ambiguous. H1a and H1b reflected these diverging empirical predictions. Which of them are supported in our data? As shown in Table 2 (Model 1), our data do not clearly adjudicate between H1a and H1b. Although citizen participation has a negative sign, it is not statistically significant at conventional levels. In other words, neither H1a nor H1b are clearly supported. This may be because the theorized effects on job characteristics and job demands do not obtain in our data, or because effects obtain in both positive and negative directions depending on whether respondents are Participants and Spectators, and cancel each other out.

<sup>2</sup>We collapse ministries from which we have less than 30 responses into an “Other” category. Fixed effects are implemented using the `fixest` package for the R environment (Berge et al., 2021).



**FIGURE 1** Citizen participation by ministry. The figure shows the average response to our citizen participation item (measured on a 0–4 scale) by ministry. *n* indicates observations for the indicated ministry. Data from organizations other than ministries and organizations from which we got less than 30 responses are omitted.

**TABLE 2** Results from ordinary least squares regression on job satisfaction.

	Model 1	Model 2
Citizen participation	−0.057 (0.081)	−0.249* (0.125)
Citizen contact	−0.319*** (0.098)	−0.405*** (0.103)
Citizen participation × citizen contact		0.344* (0.157)
Gender (Male)	−0.177 <sup>‡</sup> (0.107)	−0.183 <sup>‡</sup> (0.107)
University education	−0.212 <sup>‡</sup> (0.120)	−0.212 <sup>‡</sup> (0.120)
Low income	−0.002 (0.380)	−0.073 (0.364)
Middle income	0.086 (0.367)	0.049 (0.348)
Years of service	0.023*** (0.006)	0.022*** (0.006)
Temporary contract	−0.716* (0.290)	−0.703* (0.291)
Management	0.090 (0.135)	0.082 (0.135)
Technical-professional	−0.027 (0.135)	−0.062 (0.134)
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.092	0.099
<i>n</i>	968	968

Note: Results from ordinary least squares models with robust standard errors in parentheses. Fixed effects for institutions (*N* = 25) are implemented. Consequently, a global intercept is not meaningful. <sup>‡</sup>*p* < 0.100, \**p* < 0.050, \*\**p* < 0.010, \*\*\**p* < 0.001.

If the latter is true—and H2 is correct—Model 1 in Table 2 is not specified correctly since it does not adequately deal with heterogeneous effects between Participants and Spectators. To test H2, we thus fit an interaction model to our data. In this model, a positive and significant interaction term indicates support for the notion that the

association between citizen participation and job satisfaction differs according to whether respondents themselves have contacts with citizens—that is, are “Participants” or “Spectators”. As shown in Table 2 (Model 2), we find evidence that the relationship between citizen participation and job satisfaction is strongly contingent upon

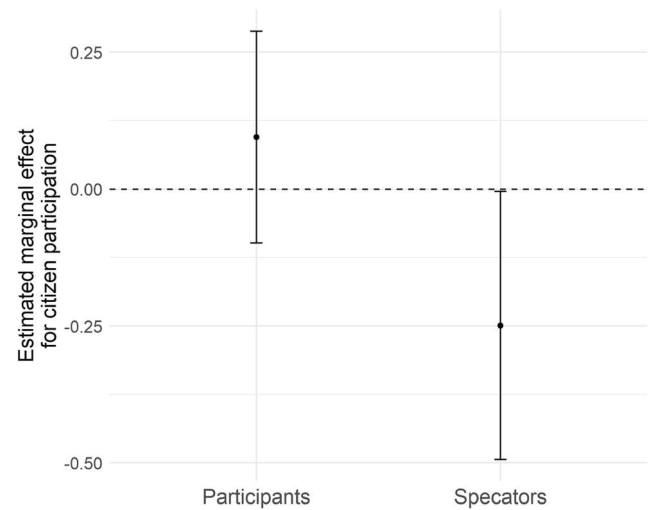
on whether public servants are “Participants” or “Spectators” (for additional robustness checks, please see the Appendix). For instance, a respondent reporting that citizens participate all the time in decision-making in their office but does not directly engage with citizens is, on average, about a point lower on the seven-point job satisfaction scale than an otherwise similar colleague reporting that citizens do not ever participate in decision-making.

This finding, however, does not—in and of itself—suggest that citizen participation is negatively or positively associated with job satisfaction for either Spectators or Participants. This depends on the compound of the base variable estimate for Citizen Participant and the interaction term (which is zero for Spectators). To aide interpretation, Figure 2 shows a marginal effects plot where this compound is calculated. The marginal effects plot underscores that citizen participation is associated with significantly lower job satisfaction of “Spectators,” providing support for H2a. By contrast, the estimated marginal effect on Participants, while positive, is not significant at conventional levels. Thus, we do not find clear support for H2b. There are a few plausible reasons for this. First, our prediction for “Participants” was more ambiguous since participation is associated with a higher workload also for Participants. Second, as noted citizen participation efforts in Bangladesh (and elsewhere) have been criticized for not permitting real participation. In such “empty” participation processes, some beneficial job characteristics—including task variety and significance—may not be promoted, leading to a weaker relationship.

### 4.3 | Mechanisms

Our hypotheses were based on a simple intuition: citizen participation affects public sector job characteristics, including autonomy, skill variety and perceptions. Hence, the job satisfaction of Participants and Spectators should be differentially associated with citizen participation. In addition to our hypothesis tests above, our data provide some suggestive evidence, presented in Figure 3, for our theorized mechanisms.

Respondents who indicated that citizens participate in decision-making in their office (i.e. who did not answer “never” when asked our citizen participation question) were asked a series of follow-up questions about their views on citizen participation. To assess whether public servants believe that citizen participation threatens their and their office’s decision-making autonomy, we asked them about the extent (on a 5-point scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree) they agree with the statement “Citizen participation in decision-making in the work of my office reduces the office’s influence.” (*Reduces Influence* in Figure 3). To assess whether public servants believe citizen participation enhances or diminishes their perceived task significance and influences their societal impact, we asked about their extent of agreement with the statements “Citizen participation in my office’s work slows down decisions by creating excessive delays” (*Slows Decisions*) and “Most citizens who participate in decision-making in my office have the skills and knowledge to



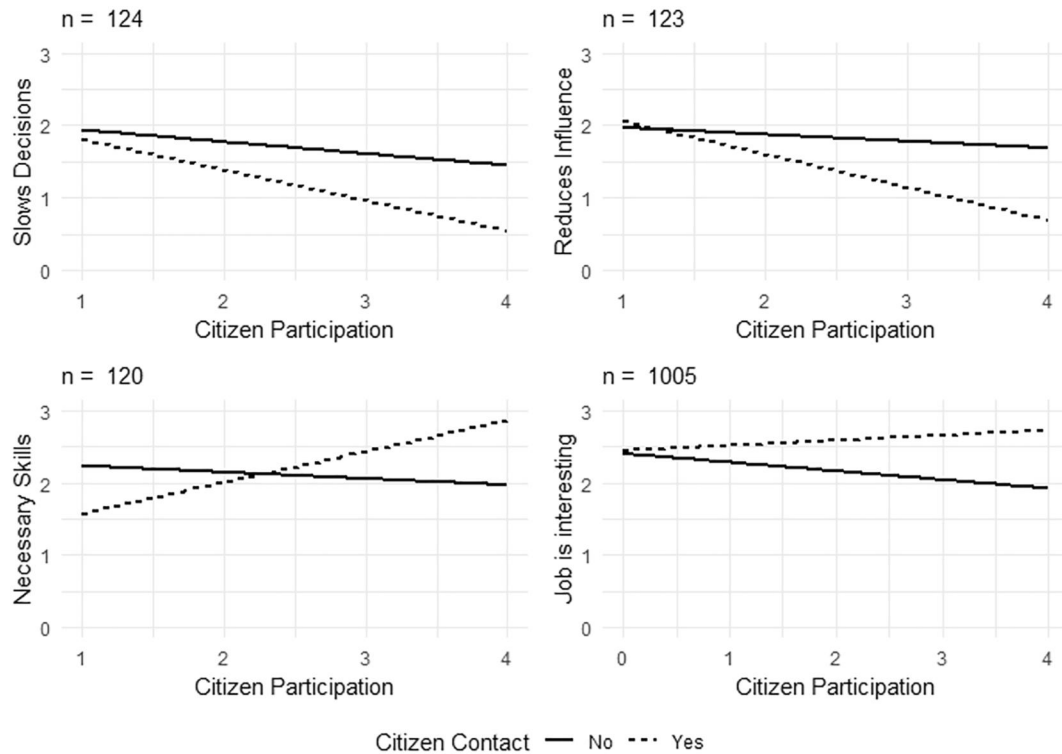
**FIGURE 2** Marginal effects of citizen participation for Participants and Spectators. The figure shows the marginal effect of citizen participation on Participants and Spectators with 95% confidence intervals based on robust standard errors. Estimates show the marginal coefficient regressing job satisfaction on citizen participation for respondents directly engaged with citizens (Participants) and respondents not directly engaged with citizens (Spectators).

make a valuable contribution.” (*Necessary Skills*). Lastly, to assess whether citizen participation makes their work more varied, we asked all respondents about the extent of agreement with the question “My job is very interesting” (*Job is Interesting*).

Figure 3 shows simple, bivariate relationships between citizen participation and these variables conditional on whether respondents engage citizens in their daily job. Dashed lines concern Participants; solid lines Spectators. Note that for three of the figure’s facets, we are only able to show data from respondents scoring at least a one on our 0–4 citizen participation measure since, as discussed above, respondents scoring zero were not asked the relevant question.

The relationships displayed in Figure 3 are consistent with our theorizing. The Figure shows, as we would expect, that Participants are less inclined to see participation as a reduction in their autonomy (the top right panel of Figure 3) presumably because they remain in control of organizing citizen participation events, venues, agendas and following up on the results of citizen input in subsequent stages of decision making. Participants are also less inclined to see citizens as slowing down processes (the top left panel), even if the speed of decision making resonates with the notion of increased job demands resulting from citizen participation. The finding suggests that the inclusion of citizens, NGOs and other societal organizations in policymaking and consultation might change the nature of Participants’ work rather than necessarily increase their workload. Figure 3 furthermore provides suggestive evidence that Participants are more inclined to believe that citizens have the necessary skills to participate in public decision-making processes (the bottom left panel) and, finally, that Participants are more inclined to view their jobs as interesting (the bottom right panel).





**FIGURE 3** Bivariate associations between citizen participation and respondent attitudes by citizen contact. The figure shows estimated linear relationships between citizen participation (the horizontal axes) and mechanism related variables noted in the main text (vertical axes). In each panel of the figure, dashed (solid) lines show the relevant relationship for respondents who do (not) directly engage citizens as part of their work. Note the number of respondents is significantly lower for 'Slows Decisions', 'Reduces Influence', and 'Necessary Skills' since these questions were only asked of respondents who indicated score one or above on our citizen participation measure.

These bivariate associations, of course, only provide tentative, suggestive evidence for our mechanisms: The small number of observations precludes us from constructing more reliable inferential models.<sup>3</sup> After all, we only gathered attitudes about citizen participation from respondents who indicate that their offices engage in citizen participation. This restriction is sensible: respondents who have no contact or experience with citizen participation in their office cannot draw on their experience to answer questions about it.

## 5 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the last decades, citizen participation in policy-making and implementation has mushroomed across the world. Is citizen participation in policy-making and implementation desirable? Numerous studies have assessed this question by looking to its effects on policy outcomes and citizen attitudes. How citizen participation affects the attitudes of public servants, however, has not been empirically assessed.

In this paper, we argued that citizen participation can change the characteristics and demands of public sector jobs. Consequently, it can shape the attitudes of public servants—and, with that, public sector performance. We built on this insight to assess the effect of citizen participation on job satisfaction. We found that citizen participation curbs the job satisfaction of "Spectators," but not "Participants." We thus uncover one hidden cost of citizen participation, which is possibly representative of a whole class of hidden costs to public servants' efforts, commitment, motivation, and well-being. Our findings thus take the existing literature on citizen participation a step further into the domain of public personnel management.

Of course, our findings do not imply that citizen participation should be brought to a halt. However, they raise questions for both researchers and managers. On the research side, our findings suggest that we need to assemble more systematic knowledge on how citizen participation affects employee outcomes. Opportunities for research in this area are manifold, ranging from studying the effect of citizen participation on public service motivation to studying its effect on organizational performance. For managers and organizational leaders, our results highlight the need to communicate any benefits from citizen participation efforts to employees who are not directly engaged with citizens. If our suggestive evidence regarding mechanisms is to be believed, a core of this management task is to ensure that the perceived job

<sup>3</sup>Unsurprisingly given the low number of respondents, the patterns are not generally statistically significant at conventional levels—the exception being the effects on perceptions of citizen skills, where a simple interaction model with no other covariates does return a significant interaction term (est = 0.862,  $p < 0.01$ ).

characteristics of Spectators are not harmed by citizen participation and to relocate interesting tasks among employees (cf. Yang & Pandey, 2011). Leadership practices might thus play an important role in mediating the relationship between citizen participation and job satisfaction.

While our study thus advances a research agenda on the effects of citizen participation on employee attitudes and outcomes, it is not without limitations.

First, our data face limitations. They only enable us to provide suggestive evidence for our theorized mechanisms. Moreover, for our independent and dependent variables, we rely on single survey items measuring relatively generic conceptions of citizen participation and job satisfaction. These measures do not allow distinguishing formats of involvement, goals of the efforts, or other details that may be important to the impact of citizen participation on employee outcomes (Campbell & Im, 2016). To inform public managers, empirical evidence on heterogeneous consequences of different types of participation efforts would be valuable. We thus encourage further empirical investigation, using quantitative and qualitative designs to further our understanding of citizen participation and employee outcomes.

Second, the nature of our data—cross-sectional, observational data—presents challenges to causal identification in our analyses. Though we include a series of controls in our statistical models, our design does leave itself open to threats from omitted variables. This threat includes reverse causation. It is possible that public servants who are more satisfied with their jobs self-select into citizen engagement and participation. However, since this would require more capacity for shaping tasks than ordinarily afforded to ministerial officials in Bangladesh, we believe engagement impacting satisfaction is the claim more consistent with our data.

Finally, our data was derived from 27 central government institutions in a single country in South Asia, Bangladesh. While Bangladesh provided an ideal setting for the assessment of our theory and hypotheses, we recognize that the context has specific features that naturally limit the generalizability of argument. The tradition of public administration in Bangladesh is characterized by bureaucratic dominance and very little room for citizen participation. During the last couple of decades initiatives to promote the participation of citizens, civil society and interest groups have grown in importance. However, their impact on the workings of policymaking and implementation have so far been limited. Resource constraints, capacity limitations, bureaucratic indifference, and a lack of willingness to comply with the law are among the main constraints on making participatory initiatives work (c.g. Zafarullah & Siddiquee, 2021).

As a result, governance in Bangladesh has evolved into a “hybrid form” (Masud & Hossain, 2021) that has “layered-on” new elements from recent reforms without transforming the traditional institutions and practices of public administration. While public administration in South Asia shares many of these features (Jamil

et al., 2013), the Bangladeshi context has its own particularities that shapes citizen participation practices (see Ongaro et al., 2021 on the role of context in understanding innovation trajectories in public administration) and public servants' experience with it. As such, it remains an empirical question whether our findings are generalizable to other developing countries, or to European and North American contexts that still fill the pages of public management journals. A plea from our side, therefore, is for future research in these contexts to take up our argument that citizen participation may have hidden costs for important employee outcomes.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

## IMPACT STATEMENT

The findings of this paper have important implications for public sector managers whose organizations employ participatory approaches to governance and seek to actively involve citizens, civil society and interest groups in policymaking and implementation. It focuses on the consequences of citizen participation for the job satisfaction of public servants. Based on survey evidence from Bangladesh, it finds that citizen participation negatively affects the job satisfaction of public servants whom we label “Spectators”, but not public servants we describe as “Participants”. “Spectators” are public servants who do not actively engage in participatory activities but observe colleagues in their offices who routinely do so (so-called “Participants”). For public sector managers, this means that they need to carefully design jobs in their organization and manage the allocation—and potential rotation—of their staff to jobs that involve citizen participation. Moreover, they need to communicate to staff, especially those affected negatively, the benefits and relevance of citizen participation for the goals and mission of their organization to prevent and preempt potentially negative side-effects for the morale and performance of their workforce.

## ORCID

Jan-Hinrik Meyer-Sahling  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8981-8201>

## REFERENCES

- Aminuzzaman, S. M. (2013). Public policy process and citizen participation in Bangladesh. In M. Sabharwal & E. M. Berman (Eds.), *Public administration in South Asia: India, Bangladesh and Pakistan* (pp. 213–236). CRC Press.
- Berge, L., Krantz, S., & McDermott, G. (2021). *fixest: Fast fixed-effects estimations*. R Package. URL: Retrieved from <https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=fixest>
- Campbell, J. W., & Im, T. (2016). Perceived public participation efficacy: The differential influence of public service motivation across organizational strata. *Public Personnel Management*, 45(3), 308–330. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0091026016664899>
- Cantarelli, P., Belardinelli, P., & Belle, N. (2016). A meta-analysis of job satisfaction correlates in the public administration literature. *Review*

- of *Public Personnel Administration*, 36(2), 115–144. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371x15578534>
- Coursey, D., Yang, K., & Pandey, S. K. (2012). Public service motivation (PSM) and support for citizen participation: A test of Perry and Vandenberg's reformulation of PSM theory. *Public Administration Review*, 72(4), 572–582. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2011.02581.x>
- DeVaro, J., Li, R., & Brookshire, D. (2007). Analysing the job characteristics model: New support from a cross-section of establishments. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 18(6), 986–1003. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585190701321211>
- Fedele, P., Brusati, L., & Ianniello, M. (2016). Organizational underpinnings of interactive decision making: An empirical inquiry. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 29(4), 310–326. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijpsm-08-2015-0155>
- Fung, A. (2006). Varieties of participation in complex governance. *Public Administration Review, Special Issue*, 66(s1), 66–74. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2006.00667.x>
- Fung, A. (2015). Putting the public back into governance: The challenges of citizen participation and its future. *Public Administration Review*, 75(4), 513–522. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12361>
- Fung, A., & Wright, E. (2001). Deepening democracy: Innovations in empowered participatory governance. *Politics & Society*, 29(1), 5–38. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329201029001002>
- Garau, C. (2012). Citizen participation in public planning: A literature review. *International Journal of Sciences*, 1(12), 21–44.
- Government of Bangladesh. (2018). Statistics of civil officers and staff. Retrieved on June 28, 2019 [http://old.mopa.gov.bd/uploads/2018/archive/manual/6582\\_\(1-96\)\\_part-2.pdf](http://old.mopa.gov.bd/uploads/2018/archive/manual/6582_(1-96)_part-2.pdf)
- Hackman, J. R., & Oldham, G. R. (1975). Development of the job diagnostic survey. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 60(2), 159–170. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0076546>
- Hackman, J. R., & Oldham, G. R. (1976). Motivation through the design of work: Test of a theory. *Organizational Behavior & Human Performance*, 16(2), 250–279. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0030-5073\(76\)90016-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0030-5073(76)90016-7)
- Huang, W. L., & Feeney, M. K. (2016). Citizen participation in local government decision making: The role of manager motivation. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 36(2), 188–209. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371x15576410>
- Humphrey, S. E., Nahrgang, J. D., & Morgeson, F. P. (2007). Integrating motivational, social, and contextual work design features: A meta-analytic summary and theoretical extension of the work design literature. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 92(5), 1332–1356. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.92.5.1332>
- Huque, A. S. (2010). Traditions and bureaucracy in Bangladesh. In M. Painter & B. G. Peters (Eds.), *Tradition and public administration* (pp. 57–68). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ianniello, M., Iacuzzi, S., Fedele, P., & Brusati, L. (2019). Obstacles and solutions on the ladder of citizen participation: A systematic review. *Public Management Review*, 21(1), 21–46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2018.1438499>
- Irvin, R. A., & Stansbury, J. (2004). Citizen participation in decision making: Is it worth the effort? *Public Administration Review*, 64(1), 55–65. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2004.00346.x>
- Islam, K. M., Nasrullah, A. M., & Haq, S. T. (2018). Public hearings for social accountability: Examining the rationale and realities in Bangladesh. In N. Ahmed (Ed.), *Inclusive governance in South Asia: Parliament, judiciary and civil service* (pp. 193–214). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jamil, I., Askvik, S., & Dhakal, T. N. (2013). Understanding governance in South Asia. In I. Jamil, S. Askvik, & T. N. Dhakal (Eds.), *In search of better governance in South Asia and beyond* (pp. 13–35). Springer.
- Khan, M. M. (2013). History and context of public administration in Bangladesh. In M. Sabharwal & E. M. Berman (Eds.), *Public administration in South Asia: India, Bangladesh and Pakistan* (pp. 195–212). CRC Press.
- Knox, C., & Sharipova, D. (2023). *Public sector reforms in developing countries: A preliminary review*. Public Administration and Development. Early online view.
- Koehlmoos, T., Rashid, M., Rahman, Z., Cravioto, A., & Hanney, S. (2009). *Understanding the role of evidence in policy making in Bangladesh. Report 1: An analysis of interviews with health sector decision makers*. ICCDR.B Publications.
- Kristof-Brown, A. L., Zimmerman, R. D., & Johnson, E. C. (2005). Consequences of individuals' fit at work: A meta-analysis of person–job, person–organization, person–group, and person–supervisor fit. *Personnel Psychology*, 58(2), 281–342. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2005.00672.x>
- Masud, M., & Hossain, M. R. (2021). Interpreting lived experiences: The dilemmas of public sector leaders. *Public Administration and Development*, 41(4), 180–190. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.1957>
- McGuire, M. (2006). Collaborative public management: Assessing what we know and how we know it. *Public Administration Review*, 66(S1), 33–43. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2006.00664.x>
- Moynihan, D. P. (2003). Normative and instrumental perspectives on public participation: Citizen summits in Washington, D.C. *The American Review of Public Administration*, 33(2), 164–188. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074003251379>
- Noblet, A. J. & Rodwell, J. J. (2009). Identifying the predictors of employee health and satisfaction in an NPM environment: Testing a comprehensive and non-linear demand-control-support model. *Public Management Review*, 11(2), 663–683.
- Oliveros, V., & Schuster, C. (2018). Merit, tenure, and bureaucratic behavior: Evidence from a conjoint experiment in the Dominican republic. *Comparative Political Studies*, 51(6): 759–792. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414017710268>
- Olken, K. (2010). Direct democracy and local public goods: Evidence from a field experiment in Indonesia. *American Political Science Review*, 104(2), 243–266. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055410000079>
- Ongaro, E., Gong, T., & Jing, Y. (2021). Public administration, context and innovation: A framework of analysis. *Public Administration and Development*, 41(1), 4–11.
- Rahman, T. (2018). From marginal to minimal parliament: Role of parliament in the public policy making process in Bangladesh. In *Paper presented at the 7th AMEPPA conference on public policy and governance in the Middle East*, pp. 26–28.
- Rainey, H. G. (2014). *Understanding and managing public organizations*. 5th ed.: John Wiley.
- Renn, R. W., & Vandenberg, R. J. (1995). The critical psychological states: An underrepresented component in job characteristics research. *Journal of Management*, 21(2), 279–303. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0149-2063\(95\)90059-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/0149-2063(95)90059-4)
- Rowe, G. & Frewer, L. R. (2004). Evaluating public-participation exercises: A research agenda. *Science, Technology & Human Values*. 29(4), 512–556. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0162243903259197>
- Sabharwal, M., & Berman, E. M. (eds.). (2013) *Public administration in South Asia: India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan*. CRC Press.
- Taylor, J., & Westover, J. H. (2011). Job satisfaction in the public service: The effects of public service motivation, workplace attributes and work relations. *Public Management Review*, 13(5), 731–751. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2010.532959>
- Thomas, A., Buboltz, W. C., & Winkelspecht, C. S. (2004). Job characteristics and personality as predictors of job satisfaction. *Organizational Analysis*, 12(2), 205–219. <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb028993>
- Tourangeau, R., Rips, L. J., & Rasinski, K. A. (2000). *The psychology of survey response*. Cambridge University Press.
- Vigan, F. A. & Giaque, D. (2018). Job satisfaction in African public administrations: A systematic review. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 84(3), 596–610. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852316651693>

- Yang, K., & Callahan, K. (2007). Citizen involvement efforts and bureaucratic responsiveness: Participatory values, stakeholder pressures, and administrative practicality. *Public Administration Review*, 67(2), 249–264. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2007.00711.x>
- Yang, K., & Pandey, S. K. (2011). Further dissecting the black box of citizen participation: When does citizen involvement lead to good outcomes? *Public Administration Review*, 71 (6), 880–892. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2011.02417.x>
- Zafarullah, H. & Banik, B. K. (2015). Muddling through: Limitations and challenges of the health policy process in Bangladesh. *Journal of Asian Public Policy*, 9(3), 211–226, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17516234.2015.1082690>
- Zafarullah, H., & Siddiquee, N. A. (2021). Open government and the right to information: Implications for transparency and accountability in Asia. *Public Administration and Development*, 41(4), 157–168. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.1944>

## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

**How to cite this article:** Islam, K. M., Meyer-Sahling, J.-H., Mikkelsen, K. S., Rahman, T., & Schuster, C. (2023). Does citizen participation make public servants more satisfied with their jobs? It depends on whether they are Spectators or Participants. *Public Administration and Development*, 43(5), 381–392. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.2031>