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Decision-Making in Collaborative Governance Networks: Pathways to Input and Throughput Legitimacy

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Abstract

Participants may lose faith in collaborative governance processes if they do not perceive internal decision-making processes to be legitimate. Yet, understanding how to assess internal legitimacy and what network characteristics are associated with it has been an enduring challenge. In this article, we propose conceptualizing internal legitimacy as multi-vectored, contrasting *input* legitimacy—the degree of openness and access that participants experience in their attempt to offer voice—with *throughput* legitimacy—the quality of the decision-making process itself. Using data from a comparative case study of 18 different US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)-mandated Continuums of Care, we assess this framework with a mixed-methods approach, combining thematic analysis of interview data (n = 145) with Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) to show (1) differences in how participants experience input and throughput legitimacy, (2) the nature of the relationship between input and throughput legitimacy, and (3) what specific network characteristics are associated with positive assessments of each. Our findings indicate that input and throughput legitimacy are distinct but related—throughput legitimacy is harder to achieve and dependent on positive assessments of input legitimacy. Some network characteristics, particularly large size and commissioner-style network management, pose challenges, but a focus on in-person engagement can help ameliorate them. We conclude that distinguishing between input and throughput legitimacy can help managers identify where and how to intervene in order to improve the legitimacy of decision-making processes in collaborative governance networks.

Maintaining a legitimate decision-making process is a normative goal across public services, in order to advance democratic objectives of accountability and responsiveness (Bekkers 2007; Klijn and Koppenjan 2015). Collaborative governance is no different. Intended to bring "multiple stakeholders together in common forums with public agencies to engage in consensus-oriented decision-making" (Ansell and Gash 2008, 543), collaborative governance usually takes place in the form of an organizational network, "a group of three or more organizations connected in ways that facilitate achievement of a common goal" (Provan, Fish, and Sydow 2007, 482). While goal-directed networks do not have to be collaborative to achieve some desired outcomes (Provan and Lemaire 2012), in a collaborative governance context, the

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collaborative process is vital to the purpose of the network. This is because an important goal in collaborative governance is to increase stakeholder participation, accountability, and transparency in decision-making. Decision-making that is inclusive and integrative of multiple voices is thought to help solve wicked problems but is also important for the principles of the policy tool to be realized (Klijn and Edelenbos 2013). But how should we assess the degree to which collaborative governance networks have achieved "legitimate" decision-making?

In this article, we argue that the concept of internal legitimacy needs further theorizing in the collaborative governance literature. In the US literature, legitimacy, as a term, is often used reflexively (e.g., some procedures are "more legitimate" than others) or in the New Institutional sense—that positive *external* assessment of the network and its goals is important for its survival and stability (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Suchman 1995). The European literature on legitimacy in governance networks is more robust but focuses on their *democratic* legitimacy as a mode of governance (Sørensen and Torfing 2016). It is in a smaller set of papers that more specific theorizing has been done about what is often called *internal* legitimacy, which is *participants* assessments of the legitimacy of their network (Bryson, Crosby, and Stone 2015; Emerson and Nabatchi 2015; Human and Provan 2000; Provan and Kenis 2008).

Overall, internal legitimacy is thought to be crucial for sustaining networks over time and leveraging collaborative advantage (Human and Provan 2000; Vangen and Huxham 2010). Thus far, however, internal legitimacy has largely been conceptualized as distinct from external but has not been systematically broken down into component elements that might give managers more insight into how it can be built. Human and Provan (2000) discuss three dimensions of legitimacy generally, but only one—the interaction dimension—is closely tied to internal processes. Some scholars discuss procedural legitimacy, the belief that "processes are fair, transparent, rational, and intentional" (Ansell and Gash 2008; Page et al. 2015, 4), which aligns with arguments in the democratic legitimacy literature (Klijn and Koppenjan 2015), but it is not clear how procedural elements and the interaction dimension fit together in a unified way.

Given the different definitions in use, we argue that the concept of internal legitimacy is due for more specific theorizing. We further argue that a useful way of doing so is to interrogate participants' assessments of the legitimacy of *decision-making* in networks. While there may be other aspects of internal legitimacy as well, decisions guide collaborative action and are where inclusiveness, trustworthiness, and procedure—potential component parts of internal legitimacy—all play out. In many ways, for the internal processes of a collaborative governance network, decision-making is where interaction becomes meaningful (Vangen and Huxham 2010).

In order to assess how to achieve more internally legitimate decision-making in collaborative governance processes, we import the concepts of input legitimacy and throughput legitimacy (Papadopoulos and Warin 2007; Schmidt 2013). This distinction, often used to assess components of democratic decision-making, is highly applicable to collaborative governance networks, which have democratic goals, and aligns with previous attempts to assess democratic legitimacy in governance networks (Klijn and Edelenbos 2013). Input legitimacy is the degree of openness and access that participants experience in their attempt to offer voice. Throughput legitimacy captures the quality of the decision-making process itself, specifically elements of transparency and the perceived adequacy of deliberation and representation in decision-making processes.[1] Through this distinction, we see that legitimacy is not singular and that perceptions of the internal legitimacy of the network can vary, even among a single participant.

We empirically assess this framework of internal legitimacy in decision-making in collaborative governance networks with data from a multiple comparative case study of 18 different Continuums of Care (CoCs). CoCs are collaborative governance bodies that plan, oversee, and implement homeless services in every region across the United States (N = 412) and are mandated by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in order for local service providers to receive federal funding (HUD 2017). They typically include representatives from local government, nonprofit homeless service providers, and advocates, among others.

We use a mixed-methods approach, leveraging thematic analysis of qualitative interviews with participants and leaders in each of those networks, as well as Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) to show how participants in a diverse set of networks assess input and throughput legitimacy. Our research questions are:

1. How are input legitimacy (e.g., degree of openness and access in giving voice) and throughput legitimacy (e.g., transparency, quality of deliberation, perception of adequate representation) experienced in collaborative governance decision-making?
2. What is the relationship between input and throughput legitimacy?

1 Although we focus on input and throughput legitimacy because of their relevance to *decision-making processes*, there is a third type of legitimacy, output legitimacy, which is the degree to which the decisions made are seen as fair, responsive, and just. Because a decision can be seen as acceptable without the criteria for input or throughput legitimacy being met, output legitimacy tells us little about how participants experience the democratic principles underlying the process of collaborative governance. It is that experience that this paper attempts to shed light on.

3. What network characteristics are associated with participants having a stronger sense of input and/or throughput legitimacy?

We find that input legitimacy and throughput legitimacy are valued separately by network participants, but are not unrelated. High input legitimacy is necessary but not sufficient for high throughput legitimacy—in other words, procedure is not trusted without opportunities for direct input. Some network characteristics, particularly large size and network coordinators using a "commissioner" role, pose challenges, but a focus on in-person engagement helps mediate them.

The Concept of Internal Legitimacy in Collaborative Governance

Legitimacy has long been seen as an essential feature of effective collaborative governance networks and has often been discussed in ways consonant with its meaning in New Institutional Theory (Provan and Kenis 2008; Suárez 2011). This type of legitimacy is generally termed *external* legitimacy. In this formulation, legitimacy is acquired through the enactment of socially and normatively expected procedures and policies, shaped by the environment in which the legitimacy-acquiring organization is situated, and conferred by an audience who judges the extent to which said organization adheres to these cultural and normative expectations (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Suchman 1995).

The idea that legitimacy in networks has multiple components and that internal legitimacy should be assessed separately from external legitimacy was first made by Human and Provan in 2000, although the distinction has only recently been successfully adopted in the literature.[2] Importantly, Human and Provan found that "building internal legitimacy early on is critical for ultimate network success and sustainment" (p. 358) and propose that building a network "inside-out" (as opposed to "outside-in") is a promising approach. Our article builds on that work to show what the components of an inside-out approach are and how they can be manifest in the day-to-day practices of networks.

A strong cognitive element is seen in many subsequent definitions of internal legitimacy. Provan and Kenis (2008) conceptualize internal legitimacy as belief by participants that the collaboration is beneficial, and Emerson and Nabatchi (2015) define internal legitimacy as belief in the trustworthiness and credibility of the other participants. Other scholars discuss internal interaction and decision-making processes in largely procedural terms, including Klijn and Koppenjan (2015, 215), who note that legitimacy "does not result from the content of the decisions on public policies and services, but rather from the fact that the decision is achieved by certain procedures and processes." Ansell and Gash (2008) argue that "procedural legitimacy" can be achieved by making sure participation is sought, providing opportunities for deliberation, and having consensus on outcome. While this definition implicitly contains elements of input and throughput legitimacy, it does not conceptualize how those different elements may or may not operate in concert. For example, what happens if participation is sought without giving opportunity for deliberation? Page et al. (2015) argue that procedural legitimacy is a crucial part of how collaboration creates public value and suggest it has three crucial attributes: procedural rationality (decision-making process is justifiable and sound), procedural justice (fairness, transparency), and operational control (decision-making process is implemented as intended). In this conception, procedural legitimacy is explicitly about decision-making and process and does not explicitly include participation or voice. In our study, we address whether such decision-making processes can be perceived as legitimate by participants who do not also see a way to have their voices heard.

From the preceding discussion, it becomes clear that the concept of internal legitimacy in the collaborative governance literature is important yet unsystematically theorized. Internal legitimacy is seen as important because it reflects participants' beliefs in the value of the network *and* the network's normative commitment to both inclusion and deliberation. In our view, the procedural and cognitive definitions cannot be delinked. While internal legitimacy may be cognitively perceived as credibility, trustworthiness, and efficacy, procedural elements around voice and decision-making may be how those things develop (Klijn and Edelenbos 2013). Because these processes are multilayered, containing various qualities that may not always cohere—a collaborative governance network may be high in one aspect of internal legitimacy but low in another—we argue that internal legitimacy should not be treated as a single-vectored concept in the sense that a network either has it or does not.

Finally, networks are diverse. Networks whose goals focus on attainment of specific outcomes may not need as much participant involvement in decision-making to be internally viewed as credible. But collaborative governance networks are explicitly built around the notion that diverse voices are needed to address complex social and environmental problems (Doberstein 2016). If participants do not see those networks as places where they can use voice or if they do not trust the

2 For example, in their 2006 framework, Bryson, Crosby & Stone write about internal and external legitimacy largely in parallel. By 2015, they theorize about internal legitimacy more specifically.

decision-making processes, then those networks are not meeting that promise. This article aims to provide information about how collaborative governance networks can take better advantage of the diverse knowledge and perspective of their memberships.

Input and Throughput Legitimacy

The distinction we propose both synthesizes and clarifies the ways in which internal legitimacy has been used. In particular, we suggest that previous approaches to internal legitimacy conflate two distinct processes—input and throughput legitimacy. Our formulation of input and throughput legitimacy is inspired by the literature on democratic legitimacy, borne out of the work of Scharpf (1999) (Papadopoulos and Warin 2007; Schmidt 2013). Scharpf introduced the distinction between input and output legitimacy, describing input legitimacy as the direct participation of citizens in democratic policymaking through electoral representation and output legitimacy as the effectiveness, responsiveness, and acceptability of policies and laws as perceived by citizens. The concept of throughput legitimacy was later added to account for the "black box" of governance that takes place between input and output and to describe the process by which decisions are made (Schmidt 2013). Because our study pertains to legitimacy in collaborative governance networks—a governance form that bypasses electoral representation as a proxy for citizen participation—we amend those descriptions of input and throughput legitimacy to better complement this context (Bekkers 2007).

Interestingly, the European literature often assumes that legitimacy is a problem for network governance because of its lack of political accountability (Börzel and Panke 2007; Sørensen and Torfing 2016), but this mostly concerns its external legitimacy. The US literature often assumes the opposite—that collaborative governance is a potentially more democratic solution to political solutions due to greater participation opportunities (Ansell and Gash 2008). If this is to be the case, though, the decision-making processes of the network need to be democratically anchored in the processes of voice and deliberation that lead to high input and throughput legitimacy (Klijn and Koppenjan 2015).

Input legitimacy is the degree of openness and access that diverse participants experience in their attempts to offer voice. Following Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995), we define voice as any activity undertaken by individuals that has the intent or effect of influencing action by the network. We define openness as the extent to which people feel they can express their voice. Access refers to knowledge of and inclusion in the appropriate forum. An unequal input process would be one in which some voices are dampened, knowledge of how to give voice is inconsistent, or some voices have priority over others (Skelcher, Mathur, and Smith 2005).

Throughput legitimacy captures participants' assessment of the legitimacy of how decisions are actually made. It reflects participant's perceptions of the level of transparency, deliberative activity, and representation of voices in decision-making processes. Transparency refers to the extent to which participants have information on decision-making processes and structures (Schmidt 2013). Deliberative activity refers to the extent to which decision-making is characterized by balanced conversations that allow for involvement and learning (Dryzek 2007). Representation refers to the extent to which participants believe their perspective is adequately represented in the decision-making process, whether they were part of that process or not.

Opportunities to offer voice (input legitimacy) and participants' assessment of the actual decision-making process (throughput legitimacy) do not need to align. For example, participants may judge a throughput process as being legitimate—i.e., the process is transparent to them and they can see adequate levels of representation and deliberation—without believing that they themselves can give voice as part of the input process. Alternatively, participants may sense they have multiple opportunities to provide input without knowing how decisions are actually made or believe that there is adequate deliberation in the decision-making process.

The Relationship Between Network Characteristics, Input, and Throughput Legitimacy

Different characteristics of networks may be associated with higher or lower levels of input and throughput legitimacy. Recent research on network effectiveness breaks these characteristics down into four categories: structure, management/leadership, process/mechanisms, and context/environment (Cristofoli, Macciò, and Pedrazzi 2015; Smith 2020). Importantly, there may be more than one way to achieve desired outcomes in governance networks; for example, networks of different sizes may need to put in place different processes or managerial strategies to promote internal legitimacy. We investigate four characteristics, focusing on structural, managerial, and process mechanisms.

Structural Features

Structural components of networks have long been considered important characteristics that affect their functioning (Provan and Kenis 2008). We assess two structural characteristics of networks: stability and size. First, stability "concerns the number of changes in the network and the wider system and the prolonged activity of the network members" (Raab, Mannak, and Cambré 2015, p. 486). Changes in the network may

reflect the network's flexibility and responsiveness to participants' input. In fact, a network that does not change may be a stagnant one, which might lead to disengagement and apathy. However, network instability also can be a source of uncertainty that can damage trust, disrupt operational and procedural routines, and elicit feelings of anxiety, confusion, or cynicism (Provan and Kenis 2008; Raab, Mannak, and Cambré 2015). Because network instability may disrupt formal and informal leadership patterns as well as norms around decision-making, system instability may undermine throughput legitimacy in particular.

Network size often brings about greater complexity as it often requires higher levels of resources and skill to coordinate activities, facilitate communication, build trust, and achieve consensus on decisions (Provan and Kenis 2008). Smaller networks are also generally portrayed as better able to achieve the ideals of deliberative democracy because they offer greater opportunities for participation in decision-making (Börzel and Panke 2007) and consensus building may be easier due to less heterogeneity (Provan and Kenis 2008). On the other hand, small size can mean reduced representation if membership is limited. In our empirical cases, smaller networks simply represent smaller communities and are typically as representative as larger networks and, except in three cases, differentiation remains high.

Management

Network management characteristics are crucial for both network performance and democratic legitimacy by shaping the actions and dynamics of network participants (Koliba, Meek, and Zia 2010). In this analysis, we assess the relationship between management and internal legitimacy by attending to the role played by network coordinators: the person or small group of people who oversee the day-to-day activities in the network.

Rethemeyer (2005) argues that there is a continuum of positions that network coordinators adopt in networks, from bottom-up roles to more top-down roles. We adopt a typology developed by Span et al. (2012) and advanced by Raeymaeckers et al. (2020) that builds on this insight. In this typology, network coordinators take on one of three roles as their primary approach to managing the network. Facilitators exist at the bottom-up end of the continuum, working to organize participants but conferring all decision-making authority to the participants themselves. Commissioners exist at the top-down end of the continuum, with the ability to make independent decisions on behalf of the network. Co-producers lie somewhere in the middle, serving as an equal in decision-making authority to participants, and working to bring all parties together for a unified decision. While any given network coordinator may take on different roles at different times, we assess their dominant approach to managing internal interactions.

The effects of the coordinator role on input and throughput legitimacy may be mixed and contingent on network characteristics. For example, while commissioners may welcome participants' input, participants may perceive throughput legitimacy as low if decision-making is not representative or transparent. Alternatively, coordinator role may interact with network size—commissioners may be seen as increasing throughput legitimacy in larger networks through systemization, whereas they may be seen as too dictatorial in smaller networks where more robust participation is possible. We expect that while commissioners may facilitate efficiency when it comes to internal legitimacy in the types of networks studied here, co-producers and facilitators will be more successful at generating input and throughput legitimacy because of their emphasis on engaging a diverse membership (Span et al. 2012).

Process

Process mechanisms are defined as "instruments and tools normally employed to sustain partner interaction" (Cristofoli, Macciò, and Pedrazzi 2015, 493) and likely to be strongly related to internal legitimacy. In fact, some process characteristics, such as trust and shared understanding, are tricky to operationalize in this case because they can create a virtuous circle; for example, higher shared motivation may increase input legitimacy, but having greater voice in the process (input) may also increase shared motivation (Emerson and Nabatchi 2015). We navigate this problem by attending to a less iterative aspect of process in collaborative governance networks: reliance on in-person, rather than remote, participation. An additional process mechanism—formal rules for participation—had an idiosyncratic relationship with internal legitimacy, and is discussed in Part 1 of the Supplementary Appendix.

The degree of in-person engagement typically asked of network participants is a feature of the network that network coordinators have some control over. In some networks, in-person engagement is rare—business is conducted over email, video conference, or surveys—while in others, demands for in-person engagement is high. Previous research indicates that in-person engagement—e.g., meetings—helps build personal relationships and eventually, trust (Ansell and Gash 2008; Johnston et al. 2011; Koschmann, Kuhn, and Pfarrer 2012) and dense interaction ties in networks are associated with trusting relationships and shared norms (McEvily, Perrone, and Zaheer 2003). In the same way, collaborative governance networks

with strong in-person engagement may have advantages for building input and throughput legitimacy. Previous research suggests one promising way of doing that is through workgroups and subcommittees, which help participants build trust and promote an inclusive process where voice can be exercised (Vermeiren, Raeymaeckers, and Beagles 2019).

Figure 1 visually depicts the proposed relationship between each of these network characteristics and internal legitimacy generally. We do not propose specific relationships with input or throughput legitimacy; a goal of this research is to help clarify how different configurations of these characteristics yield those constructs.

Legitimacy in CoC Networks: Research Setting

The type of collaborative governance network we use to explore these questions is the HUD's Continuum of Care (CoC) process. CoCs are collaborative governance bodies that plan, oversee, and implement homeless services in every region across the United States (N=412) and are mandated by HUD in order for local service providers to receive federal funding. They fit the definition of collaborative governance networks neatly as they are formal multi-stakeholder networks of organizations that aim to "make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets" (Ansell and Gash 2008, 544).

Homelessness in the United States is an enduring problem that has seen only halting progress over the last decade or so, with over half a million people homeless in 2019 (Henry et al. 2020). People who are homeless often have complex health and socio-emotional needs that are best served through system integration and coordination—efforts that have been mostly elusive. This makes it exactly the kind of wicked problem that highly differentiated networks like CoCs are intended to solve. Participants in CoCs include organizations and individuals who serve or are concerned with people who are homeless within a geographically defined area (CFR 578.3). Membership is typically comprised of representatives from local government bodies, nonprofit homeless service providers, other social service providers whose consumers often face difficulties with homelessness (e.g., domestic violence providers, veterans services), and members of the faith-based, philanthropic, and business communities. It is important to note that membership is expected to be as diverse as possible, so although small CoCs are somewhat less differentiated than large CoCs, most operate at a fairly high level of actor diversity. Research has shown that highly differentiated networks struggle to create feelings of unity or collaborativeness (Saz-Carranza and Ospina 2010), a challenge for internal legitimacy.

HUD formalized the CoC program in 1996, requiring funding applications to come from whole communities rather than individual homeless providers and asking that CoCs determine the distribution of funds within the CoC themselves. Though the form and content of the CoC is somewhat guided by HUD, each CoC has discretion on its internal governance and decision-making procedures. For example, CoCs decide on a process for selecting a board, determine the policies and procedures for how they will make decisions, and develop the ranking and scoring rubric for funding decisions. Due to this flexibility, decision-making processes across CoCs vary widely—some CoCs use a centralized decision-making process controlled by a small group whereas other CoCs practice shared decision-making. The fact that CoCs are numerous and under some federal control, yet have the flexibility to alter their procedures and processes to meet local conditions, makes CoCs an ideal setting to study the legitimacy of decision-making in collaborative governance networks. In addition, this kind of externally directed (rather than self-initiated or serendipitous) mandated network may start with higher external legitimacy, but there is a risk that internal legitimacy demands will be unrecognized (Provan and Lemaire 2012).

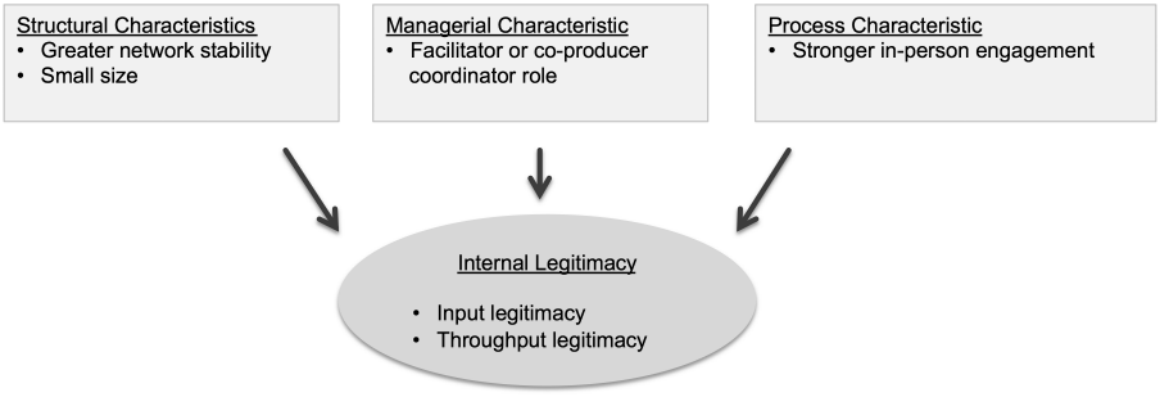

Figure 1. Proposed Relationship Between Network Characteristics and Internal Legitimacy.

Methods

We empirically assess this theory of internal legitimacy in collaborative governance networks with data from a multiple comparative case study of 18 different CoCs. We use thematic analysis of interview data to assess support for various conditions that may be associated with input and/or throughput legitimacy. We then assess those relationships using fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) (Ragin 2018).

Sampling

Networks were purposively sampled based on responses to a national survey of the population of CoCs to enable comparisons between CoCs that were higher or lower on participant involvement and to ensure variation on size and governance model. Most CoCs have a highly differentiated membership, so our sample does not vary much on that point—just three cases have a lower level of differentiation. The coordinator (listed as the collaborative applicant with HUD) for each sample network was contacted by email to solicit participation. In one case, the coordinator refused; two others did not respond to repeated contacts. Those CoCs were replaced with demographically similar CoCs.

Interview and Data Collection Protocol

For each network, we carried out qualitative interviews with network leadership as well as participants until saturation was reached. Each interview took about an hour and were held in-person (when possible) or over the phone. The total number of interviews conducted was 145, varying from a low of 3 (in a very small network) to a high of 12 interviews in a single network. Detailed descriptive statistics for each case, including how many individuals were interviewed, the organization type each interviewee represents, and when the first and last interview per case was conducted, can be located in Part 2 of the Supplementary Appendix. Most cases were completed in about 3 months. Questions focused on leadership choices and how member perceptions align with leadership, how network business is carried out, patterns of communication and influence, and advocacy involvement. All interviews were audio-recorded and professionally transcribed. For each CoC, we also did content analysis of meeting minutes over the last 5 years, assessed the documentation the network submitted to HUD, and carried out participant observation at meetings when possible.

Analysis

We treat each CoC as the unit of analysis with multiple respondents and data sources within each in order to create a comprehensive picture of their internal dynamics from various viewpoints. We rely on thematic analysis of the qualitative interviews as well as fsQCA to show how participants in networks with different characteristics assess different types of legitimacy. In most CoCs, the assessments of the participants largely converged, but in some CoCs, participants diverged in their assessment of quality of voice and decision-making processes or individuals expressed ambivalent beliefs. We address this tension in our analysis through the creation of a distinct category for these "mixed" CoCs.

Thematic analysis of qualitative interviews began while in the field, with memos written immediately after each interview and summaries written for each CoC when data collection was complete. Throughout the interviewing phase of the study (July 2016 to June 2018) the research team met weekly to discuss emerging findings and develop a shared coding strategy. Each interview transcript was independently coded by at least two different researchers in an iterative fashion. An initial codebook built around expected themes based on the questions asked, and expected variation based on the literature. As coding proceeded alongside new interviews, we deductively added new codes based on emerging findings that arose through discussion, comparison, and memoing. For example, the initial codebook had a code for "provider involvement in the network." As we discovered different aspects to that involvement we added additional codes for "provider wishes they were more involved" and "provider apathy" (among others). Once the codebook was finalized, all transcripts were read and coded a final time.

To further assess the conditions likely to bear on input and throughput legitimacy, we compared the 18 CoCs using fuzzy-set QCA (fsQCA). The fsQCA was completed after we conducted the thematic analysis in order to develop in-depth knowledge of each case and to ensure our concepts for measurement were well-defined, relevant, and operationalizable. fsQCA provides a way of showing *how* factors interact to yield outcomes. Given that many collaborative governance frameworks espouse, at least implicitly, a configurational approach, depicting outcomes as contingent on the interplay between various structure, process, management, and contextual features (Cristofoli, Macciò, and Pedrazzi 2015; Smith 2020), fsQCA is a useful step towards refining and extending theory in a way that is faithful to those descriptions.

Concept Measurement for fsQCA

While the fsQCA coding process is interpretive, we ensured the accuracy of our concept measurement by carefully defining the meaning of all concepts and applying clear criteria to locate membership or non-membership into a set. Based on the thematic analysis of our interviews, document analysis, and administrative data, we were able to sharply define

the boundaries of our structural conditions (network stability and small size), while the conditions reflecting managerial (coordinator role) and process characteristics (in-person engagement) exhibited some gradations of scale. We were most confident in the accuracy of our measures when the facilitative or co-producer coordinator roles were grouped together (=1) and distinguished from the commissioner role (=0) and the other conditions were defined as either *highly* present (=1) or not highly present (=0) than when they were graded (e.g., low, medium, high). For additional information on the operationalization of the outcomes and conditions, accompanying representative quotes, and case study information that substantiates our coding decisions, refer to Part 3 of the Supplementary Appendix.

Input and Throughput Legitimacy

Input legitimacy was operationalized as the degree of openness and access that participants experienced in their attempts to offer voice and throughput legitimacy was operationalized as the quality of deliberation, representation of voices, and transparency in decision-making processes. The degree of input and throughput legitimacy held by each network was determined through qualitative assessment of each case. The transformation of the outcome into a fuzzy set corresponds to how we categorized input and throughput legitimacy in that analysis. We have three anchors: 1 indicates full membership, 0 for full non-membership, and 0.5 for the cross-over point of maximum ambiguity, which map on to high, low, and mixed input/throughput legitimacy, respectively.

Network Stability

Network stability was operationalized as no change in the lead organization of the CoC and/or no new governance charter within 4 years prior to the time we initiated data collection. We selected a threshold of 4 years because cases were bimodally distributed at this point. The CoC was coded as stable (=1) if neither change occurred and unstable (=0) if one or both of indicators was present.

Small Size

Size was determined based on the level of funding awarded to each CoC by HUD. That number correlates strongly with number of providers and level of community need, but is more precise. Data from 2016 was used to make this determination because most of our interviews were conducted in 2017. Because size was used as a sampling criteria, a bimodal distribution already existed, making coding straightforward: CoCs in our sample that received an award size ranging from $133,000 to 3.4 million were coded as small (=1), whereas CoCs that received an award size ranging from $10.3 to 23.5 million were coded as large (=0).

Coordinator Roles

We operationalized coordinator roles based on Span et al.'s (2012) typology of network coordinators—commissioner, co-producer, and facilitator. If the network coordinator exercised independent decision-making power with participants largely advisory, the coordinator role was coded "commissioner" (=0). The network coordinator was coded as "facilitator" when final decision-making was conferred to network participants and "co-producer" when decision-making was shared between the coordinator and network participants. Our thematic analysis revealed that network participants viewed facilitators and co-producers in similar ways, and so we coded those coordinator roles as 1.

In-Person Engagement

CoCs with plentiful meeting opportunities and strong norms for attending those meetings were coded as having high in-person engagement (=1). Otherwise, the CoC was coded 0. "Plentiful meeting opportunities" was defined as holding general membership meetings at least once a month and having subcommittees and/or workgroups that people can join at minimal effort. "Strong norms" was defined as the CoC coordinator encouraging participation in meetings, and most respondents freely participating in them.

Results

Our first research question is: How are input legitimacy (e.g., degree of openness and access in giving voice) and throughput legitimacy (e.g., transparency, quality of deliberation, perception of adequate representation) experienced in collaborative governance decision-making? First, we categorized CoCs as high, mixed, or low on both input and throughput legitimacy based on the assessments of and level of consensus among participants within a given CoC. We found that participants belonging to CoCs with either high or low levels of input and/or throughput legitimacy typically expressed such a consensus assessment. In CoCs with "mixed" levels of input and/or throughput legitimacy, participants were either divided in their assessment or were ambivalent themselves. Table 1 presents a summary of how input and throughput legitimacy were experienced along with representative quotes. These quotes indicate how participants speak distinctly about input and throughput processes.

As shown in table 2, of the 18 CoCs in our sample, 10 were coded as "high" on input legitimacy, 5 were

Table 1. Ground-Level Experiences of Input and Throughput Legitimacy

	Input Legitimacy	Throughput Legitimacy
High	High consensus that there are many opportunities to provide input and those input opportunities are meaningful. *Regarding opportunities to provide input: I think having the providers involved is very important because our committees—we probably had close to ten different committees that largely are run and attended by the providers in the region as well as local governments, and so it was a very inclusive culture that I was real focused on because I said you know we've got to do coordinated entry so now let's all start meeting and figuring out how this looks for us as a region and pulling people in a way that allows them to help us shape how we're doing the work.*	High consensus that the decision-making process is transparent and fairly deliberated; participants felt well-represented. *Regarding transparency: It's like weekly newsletters…it's actually getting involved in social media, it's putting all of our minutes for all of our committees in a place where people can find them, doing surveys, having an actual communication plan, and a strategic plan… And if someone doesn't come to a meeting, but they're in the committee or they're in the membership or whatever, how do we make sure that they at least get access to that information? We can't force people to read it, but we've told our stories in every way that we can. At least we're trying.*
Mixed	Low consensus regarding inclusion and ability to provide voice, or participants reported ambivalent assessments. *Difficulties communicating how to provide voice: I felt like the Continuum of Care had always kind of been inside baseball. You really had to know how things worked and who did what to be able to get involved. So…we actually took some time to define the difference between a committee, a subcommittee, and an ad hoc committee, who could chair it, who could be a member…I think it was marginally successful. It certainly added a lot of clarity around who could participate in what structure and when. But we have not done a great job of getting the mechanics of "okay, now that we kind of have this ideal structure how does somebody actually get on the committee, how do they get their name on the mailing list?"*	Low consensus regarding the quality of the decision-making process or participants reported ambivalent assessments. *In-group / out-group dynamic: I think the biggest level of conflict is from agencies that haven't been involved in those processes or haven't been involved in those subcommittees. And so, the people who haven't been involved in the process who don't go to the board meetings, who aren't part of a subcommittee, when the COC says, ok this is our change in priorities. This is how we're going to be doing things from now on. They tend to have a really negative reaction, but a lot of times it's really kind of through their own fault of their own, because they're not engaged.*
Low	High consensus on asymmetries of voice - some groups have more access to input than others, whose voices are dampened. *Voice is not meaningful: Input is often viewed as helpful recommendations that are pretty easy to ignore [laughs] when people don't like them.*	High consensus that the decision-making process unfolded in an unprincipled manner; decision-making was viewed as asymmetric and unfair. *Decision-making is unfair/corrupt: I think that our CoC has meetings to go through the form. Meetings so we can pull funding. Too often we get in those meetings and we hear comments like we had meetings outside of the meeting. And decisions made in closed-door meetings.*

Table 2. Number of CoCs, by Legitimacy Type

	High *Throughput Legitimacy*	**Mixed** *Throughput Legitimacy*	**Low** *Throughput Legitimacy*	**Total**
High *Input Legitimacy*	7	3	0	**10**
Mixed *Input Legitimacy*	0	3	2	**5**
Low *Input Legitimacy*	0	0	3	**3**
Total	**7**	**6**	**5**	18

coded as "mixed," and 3 were coded as "low." This contrasts with throughput legitimacy, in which 7 CoCs were coded high, 6 were coded as mixed, and 5 were coded as low. We make two observations based on this table. First, it appears that achieving input legitimacy may be an easier task for CoCs than achieving throughput legitimacy. More networks were assessed as high on input than throughput, although the differences are not large. In addition, when a CoC's level of input and throughput legitimacy are different, input legitimacy is always higher than throughput legitimacy (5 out of 5 divergent CoCs). Second, although input and throughput legitimacy are correlated, they are still distinct: about one-third of the sample have different levels of input and throughput legitimacy.

Experiences of Input Legitimacy

The 10 CoCs with high input legitimacy frequently invoked a communitarian ethos of "we are all in this together." People reported enjoying working with one another, thought meetings were beneficial, and could give examples where their input was sought. Notably, participants mentioned not only that they had the ability to speak but also that the group as a whole worked hard to listen and learn from one another. A respondent from a CoC with high input legitimacy (that was also quite high-performing) noted that, "Inviting everybody at the table to be a *part* of the solution, rather than a *result* of the solution, I think is really important. I think a unique aspect of this group is that everybody has equal amount of voice and it's very inclusive." In high input legitimacy CoCs, there was awareness that multiple viewpoints were inevitable and participants generally saw diversity in opinions as a strength rather than as a weakness. A respondent from a different CoC noted, "I have a hard time believing there are any of the major players in the group that feel like they're not being heard. You know, do we always agree with them? No, but I always think they feel like they're heard and we seriously thought about issues and things they brought up."

On the other hand, CoCs with mixed assessments of input legitimacy (n = 5) frequently had an "in-group/out-group" dynamic at play. Representatives of organizations that were already large, powerful, or connected to CoC leadership felt that their voice was heard, but those who were smaller or more on the fringes of the group felt ignored or excluded. The other reason some CoCs experienced mixed assessments of input legitimacy is that, ironically, strong leadership combined with a large network sometimes left participants feeling as though "things were taken care of" or they didn't "know where to start." These two dynamics sometimes combined so that some providers felt disrespected and disengaged, but also not sure how to work to change that. Participants who did feel engaged sometimes recognized this dynamic, but often chalked it up to those other providers just not wanting to be involved or being uncollaborative in their approach. An example quote from a CoC that had grown quickly and undergone a structural change is, "I think a lot of nonprofits feel their voice isn't as loud anymore, is my guess. …We don't feel like our voice is needed at all. So, it might be, you know, if you talk to a smaller provider, they might not feel like the CoC is a platform anymore for their input to be shared."

Those CoCs with low input legitimacy (n = 3) all had a coordinator that adopted a commissioner role. These CoCs contained many participants who felt disengaged or shut down, but for different reasons. In a large county-run CoC, the participants believed the county was systematically trying to disenfranchise nonprofit participants through rules and procedures that limited voice. As one respondent noted, "They only give you 3 minutes and after 3 minutes then you're shut down whether you got your point across or not. You're shut down. We really don't have a voice." In another large CoC providers reported that they had little access to power because the commissioner allowed their voices to be replaced by those of business interests. The third CoC was very small and the issue was that the coordinator did all the work, held few meetings, and only seriously engaged with two providers. When asked if they had a voice, one participant reported that "Well, no because… I don't think it's a real dynamic, I don't think [the CoC] does a lot. I think [leaders] do what they're going to do."

Experiences of Throughput Legitimacy

Members of CoCs with high throughput legitimacy (n = 7) reported having opportunities to present and challenge ideas and time to amend personal opinions and influence decisions. As one participant notes: "I think what we've tried to do is foster an environment where we can all say well, let's take a look at the big picture, and okay, let's get your idea on the table, let's

hear it out, and let's get all the other ideas on the table, and let's weigh them… And then let's all come together and talk about that and vote on it." Participants rarely thought one group unfairly possessed more decision-making power than others. Instead, they perceived decision-making as transparent and fair: "everybody in town is on subcommittees, everybody's at the general committee meetings. I mean, there's a lot of involvement so I would say we're all pretty equal."

CoCs with mixed throughput legitimacy (n = 5) were often divided in their assessments of throughput. This was largely driven by two dynamics. The first is an in-group/out-group dynamic—similar to what happens with input legitimacy—where those belonging to the in-group perceive decision-making as collaborative while others view the concentration of power with anger or simply cease caring. Second, all the mixed throughput CoCs were undergoing or adjusting to structural and/or personnel changes, and so decision-making processes may be in flux. For example, in one CoC, several participants agreed that power increasingly resided with providers who garnered large grants, leaving smaller providers under-represented in decision-making processes. At the same time, the CoC was undergoing structural changes in the composition of the governance board in an attempt to attenuate this imbalance of power.

In CoCs with low throughput legitimacy (n = 6), either a single group or the network coordinator possessed disproportionate influence in setting the vision, goals, and operational procedure for the network, or the CoC had weak processes with formal rules either not followed through on or unclearly specified. In both cases, decision-making was mostly top-down, resulting in few opportunities for communication and collaboration. For example, often participants believed the items presented for deliberation were pre-determined by people with more decision-making authority in a separate meeting: "We talk about making motions and having a discussion. We're talking about what the needs are. And we do go through the brown book of rules. We do go through that so it appears that we're actually voting for what's going on. But too often like I said the decisions have already been made. And if somebody starts kicking against the grain the discussion is shut down." There, practices thought to promote throughput legitimacy, such as casting votes and complying with the rules, were seen as tokenistic.

Relationship Between Input and Throughput Legitimacy

In regards to our second research question, "*What is the relationship between input and throughput legitimacy?*" three types of relationships between input and throughput legitimacy emerge from our qualitative data. Overall, we find the two concepts are related but are not the same. Although most of the cases in our sample have similar levels of input and throughput legitimacy, we find that respondents discuss input and throughput elements separately when assessing the legitimacy of decision-making. This was true even when their assessments of input and throughput were both high or both low, suggesting that they care about both aspects.

First, in cases where input and throughput legitimacy were both high, participants viewed throughput processes as legitimate in part because they had opportunities to provide input in decision-making. They knew when, how, and where to provide input and trusted that their input would be taken into consideration in throughput processes. A representative quote from one of these CoCs distinguishes between the two but conveys that both are important, "When we have to make decisions—on funding recommendations for example. It's very much a conversation and very much a back and forth of "well I think the outcome should be this because of this person's presentation on this issue." "Well, I think it should be that." It's very much a conversation is the best way I would describe it. And that's how decisions generally are made."

Second, and conversely, in CoCs with low levels of both input and throughput, participants questioned throughput processes in part because their expectations and experiences relating to input were negative. In the majority of low-low cases, although CoC leadership could point to opportunities for input in decision-making forums, reality rarely lived up to the rhetoric. Perhaps not surprisingly, low levels of input and throughput legitimacy were most evident in cases where decisions were usually made behind closed doors. In one large, government-run CoC, for example, input legitimacy was low partly because participants felt excluded from meaningful participation in throughput. One respondent remarked, "I [thought that] being at that table, I would be a voice to help make sure what the community needs is actually being put on the agenda. But what I found out, once I got there, is that it's basically another county department because you can't ever make a difference… Even with the best argument, even with the best data, the best fact, there's nothing you're gonna be able to say because you're silenced at the moment you need to make a decision."

Third, the five cases where input legitimacy was seen more positively than throughput were, by and large, CoCs with strong centralized power and a strong in-group/out-group dynamic. In particular, while participants felt like they could have input, they often could not see how their input fed into decision-making. As such, throughput legitimacy—having a fairly

deliberated decision-making process—seemed to be lacking. This dynamic was salient in a large, multijurisdictional CoC with a complex governance system. Although most participants were part of subcommittees, even personally asked to be involved, they were still perplexed as to how decisions were made. For example, the chair of the coordinating committee could not articulate his role despite the fact that the coordinating committee acts as an advisory committee to the executive committee. One participant of the executive committee, which is responsible for the strategic direction of the CoC, noted "Most people I think have involved themselves in the process where they felt like they had a voice in the outcome and then the final product did not reflect their participation. I think that's a really silencing process." In this CoC, voice was readily available, but it was completely unclear what happened once it was given.

Relationship Between Network Characteristics, Input, and Throughput Legitimacy

To answer our third research question regarding what aspects of network design and leadership are associated with participants having a stronger sense of input and/or throughput legitimacy, we assessed four characteristics: network stability, size, coordinator role, and in-person engagement opportunities. These characteristics are qualitatively described below and then assessed in a QCA. We find that many interact with each other as well as with the outcomes of interest, underlining the importance of a configurational approach.

Network Stability

Over half the CoCs (11 out of 18) in our sample experienced a change in governance structure and/or leadership in the prior 4 years. Overall, however, we found that network instability was not consistently associated with low input and/or throughput legitimacy because dense communication flows were at times able to assuage the uncertainties that accompanied such changes. In several networks, participants saw changes in leadership or procedures as necessary steps towards improving the culture and transparency of the CoC and believed that a concerted effort to seek feedback from network participants took place during the change process. In other cases, however, respondents were leery of changes because they were neither well-informed nor involved in them and worried about the impact of the changes.

Small Size

Many interviewees referenced network size when they spoke about the decision-making process in their CoC. Participants from small CoCs often talked about long-standing professional and informal relationships with each other and the resulting high degree of trust. On the other hand, participants from larger CoCs often expressed difficulty in meaningfully participating in discussions: "[it's] difficult to have so many discussions with so many people at the table… they try to bring up everybody together, and I think a lot of it just gets stuck there. In the end, I think the [coordinator] or the board will often just have to make the decision."

Smaller networks did not systematically have greater input and throughput legitimacy than larger networks, though. Our smallest network also had the lowest assessments of both input and throughput legitimacy of any network, largely because the network had such low capacity that there were few points of involvement and participants did not know how to get involved in what activities there were. On the other hand, some larger CoCs had numerous workgroups and committees, where communication flowed transparently, facilitating involvement and trust. In this way, they could capture some of the advantages of small network size, such as in-person engagement and greater involvement in decision-making processes, while also benefiting from greater diversity of opinions and resources.

Coordinator Roles

Participants in networks where coordinators take on a commissioner role often noted what they saw as an unequal distribution of decision-making authority. Many pointed to the commissioner approach as why they felt excluded from giving voice (input) and questioned the way decisions were made (throughput). A participant from one CoC with a coordinator who embraced a commissioner role noted, "Oh no, we don't have access to it [decision-making]. It's the people that are from the county and usually the county controls the whole [CoC] meeting." An interviewee from a different CoC expressed similar sentiments: "It seems like a lot of [decisions] are staff-driven decisions… And then they are brought to the board for a decision, but all the work's been done." On the other hand, in one CoC with mixed input and throughput legitimacy, where the executive director was described as "a bit of a dictator," most network participants felt like they could speak up if they wanted to but preferred not to as they did not want to do more work than necessary.

In-Person Engagement

Almost all interviewees cited in-person meetings as the crucial medium through which they could communicate with, learn from, and share ideas with other network participants. Interviewees from CoCs that rarely met articulated the drawbacks of having few meetings: "it's difficult I think when you only meet quarterly. It's

hard to keep some of that momentum going and the engagement going."

High in-person engagement was more common in smaller networks than in larger ones, but also happened in large networks that had a strong subcommittee structures. Well-functioning subcommittees, where participants felt empowered to inform decisions on topics that align with their interests and expertise led to comments like "we understand that nobody can do everything so we just break it down as much as we can, and just have reports come back to us. And it really works well." By allowing participants to meet in-person more regularly—and in smaller groups—subcommittees allow for greater relationship-building: "It feels like close friends. Like not quite like family [laughs], which is good because some families are dysfunctional, but it's definitely like a close friendship." In this way, a strong subcommittee structure appeared to allow large networks to mimic the participatory advantages of small networks.

QCA: Relationship Between Network Characteristics, Input, and Throughput Legitimacy

Following recent calls to promote the use of QCA in public administration research, we use fsQCA to analyze our data configurationally (Cristofoli, Macciò, and Pedrazzi 2015; Raab, Mannak, and Cambré 2015). Our aim is to identify the various paths to the outcomes of interest—high input and high throughput legitimacy—and to formalize how and to what extent those paths differ. We used fsQCA 3.0 to perform the analysis (Ragin 2018). Table 3 presents the distribution of the conditions and outcomes. More than half the CoCs were governed by a facilitator or co-producer, were small in size, and had plentiful in-person engagement opportunities. These are all features we expect to lead to the presence of either high input and throughput legitimacy. However, most were also unstable, which we expected would lead to the opposite outcome. Table 4 summarizes the notations that we employ to present the results.

We began our analysis with a test of necessity (Schneider and Wagemann 2010). If the scores of a condition are consistently equal to or higher than the fuzzy-set scores for the outcome, a relationship of necessity exists. Based on findings from our thematic analysis, we included high input in our test of necessity for high throughput. As shown in table 5, high input has a consistency value of 1; when high throughput is present, high input is also present (i.e., I ← T). With a coverage value of 0.8, which reflects the extent to which the size of the condition exceeds that of the outcome, high input is highly relevant to high throughput.

Tables 6 and 7 contain the combinations of conditions sufficient for high input and throughput legitimacy.[3] We address logical remainders with the most conservative solution (Schneider and Wagemann 2012), excluding all logical remainders from our analysis, as our solutions are sufficiently parsimonious without making additional assumptions about them. The minimum acceptable consistency (i.e., cutoff) for the solutions was set at 0.75, which means that 75%

Table 3. Summary Statistics of the Conditions and Outcomes of fsQCA Analysis

Network Condition and Outcomes	#	%
Input legitimacy		
High	10	56
Mixed	5	28
Low	3	17
Throughput legitimacy		
High	7	39
Mixed	6	33
Low	5	28
Network Stability		
Stable	7	39
Unstable	11	62
Size		
Small	10	56
Large	8	44
Coordinator Role		
Facilitator	3	17
Co-producer	9	50
Commissioner	6	33
In-person engagement		
High	9	50
Low	9	50

Table 4. Notation for fsQCA

Condition or Outcome	Presence	Absence
High Network Stability	ST	st
Small Network Size	SZ	sz
Facilitator/Co-producer Coordinator role	C	c
High In-Person Engagement	E	e
High Input Legitimacy	I	i
High Throughput Legitimacy	T	t
Symbol		
Logical Operator "and"	*	
Logical Operator "or"	+	
Necessity Condition	←	
Sufficiency Condition	→	

3 Part 4 of the Supplementary Appendix contains the truth table containing the empirically present configurations for each outcome, tests of necessity and sufficiency for the absence (i.e., negation) of high input and throughput legitimacy, and the most complex, most parsimonious, and intermediate solutions for the presence and absence of input and throughput legitimacy (Schneider and Wagemann 2012).

Table 5. Analysis of Necessary Conditions

Network Condition and Outcomes	High Input Legitimacy		High Throughput Legitimacy	
	Consistency	Coverage	Consistency	Coverage
I			1.00	0.80
ST	0.44	0.69	0.45	0.56
SZ	0.68	0.85	0.75	0.75
C	0.88	0.92	0.95	0.79
E	0.76	0.95	0.85	0.85

Table 6. Solution Formula for Input Legitimacy

	st ∗ sz ∗ C + ST ∗ SZ ∗ C + SZ ∗ C ∗ E → I		
	Path 1	Path 2	Path 3
	st*sz*C	ST*SZ*C	SZ*C*E
Cases	22, 23, 28	11, 18, 21, 24	11, 14, 16, 18, 20, 24, 27
Raw Coverage	0.2	0.32	0.56
Unique Coverage	0.2	0.08	0.32
Consistency	0.83	1	1

or more of the cases sharing a combination of conditions have the same outcome.[4]

Table 6 shows three paths yielding the presence of high input legitimacy. The first path, st*sz*C, which covers 20% of cases, combines an unstable network with the facilitator or co-producer coordinator role and large network size. Investigation of these cases reveals that two had recently experienced a change in leadership or developed a new governance charter, but leaders actively solicited feedback from participants throughout the transition. The second path, ST*SZ*C, combines a stable, small network with a facilitator or co-producer role and covers 32% of cases. The third path, SZ*C*E, covers 56% of cases and combines small size, the facilitator or co-producer coordinator role, and high in-person engagement. These paths both point to the strengths of small networks that also have coordinators that embrace facilitator or co-producer roles. In such cases, input legitimacy can be achieved through process mechanisms (high in-person engagement) or structural characteristics (network stability).

Table 7 contains the two paths that yield the presence of high throughput legitimacy. Unlike the analysis for necessary conditions, we do not include high input as a condition for high throughput for the test of *sufficiency*. This is because the mixed cases (=0.5), which represent maximum ambiguity, "cannot be attributed to any of the 2^k logically possible ideal types that involve this set or its complement," which "prevents attribution of such a case to any of the truth table rows" (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 101). In other words, cases where input legitimacy is mixed cannot be included in a sufficiency test because it is neither in nor out of the set.

Table 7. Solution Formula for Throughput Legitimacy

	SZ ∗ C ∗ E + st ∗ C ∗ E → T	
	Path 1	Path 2
	SZ*C*E	st*C*E
Cases	11, 14, 16, 18, 20, 24, 27	14, 16, 20, 27, 28
Raw Coverage	65%	0.45
Unique Coverage	30%	0.10
Consistency	0.93	0.90

The first path, SZ*C*E, combines small size, the co-producer or facilitator coordinator role, and high in-person engagement, and covers 65% of all cases. Note that SZ*C*E is a solution path for both high input and high throughput legitimacy, which aligns with our thematic analysis that high input and high throughput legitimacy are often related to each other. The second path, st*C*E, combines an unstable network with the co-producer or facilitator coordinator role and high in-person engagement, and covers 45% of all cases. This path is distinct from the causal paths that yield the presence of high input legitimacy, demonstrating that high input and throughput legitimacy are operationally different.

These results suggest that the co-producer or facilitator coordinator role and high in-person engagement are important conditions that, in combination, are likely to yield the presence of high throughput legitimacy. Therefore, we tested whether C*E is necessary for high throughput. We found that C*E has a consistency value of 1 and a coverage value of 0.77 for high throughput. We subsequently conducted a test of necessity for C*E*I for high throughput, and found that it also has a consistency value of 1 and a coverage value of 0.71. Thus, the combination of a co-producer or facilitator coordinator role with high in-person engagement and the presence of high input legitimacy is necessary for high throughput legitimacy and retains high relevance (i.e., I*C*E ← T). Based on the fsQCA, the conditions for yielding high throughput legitimacy seem to be more stringent than that of high input, which supports the notion that high input legitimacy may be easier to achieve than high throughput legitimacy.

4 Following standards of good practice, we established this cutoff based on case knowledge – when we conducted further analysis for high input with a cutoff of 1, we agreed that the solution with a cutoff of 0.75 more comprehensively aligns with our findings from the thematic analysis (Rihoux and Ragin 2008). Part 5 of the Supplementary Appendix has more information on this process.

Discussion

While some goal-directed networks may be able to achieve specific performance outcomes with low internal legitimacy, research indicates that internal legitimacy is important for network sustainability (Human and Provan 2000). In collaborative governance networks, internal legitimacy may be even more important because of their unique mandate to bring multiple voices to the table in pursuit of innovative, consensus driven, and democratically legitimate solutions to wicked problems (Klijn and Edelenbos 2013). In this study, we unpack how participants experience the internal legitimacy of decision-making processes in collaborative governance networks and what conditions are associated with their positive assessments. To do so, we introduce a new framework for understanding internal legitimacy that distinguishes between input legitimacy (the degree of openness and access that diverse participants experience in their attempt to offer voice) and throughput legitimacy (elements of transparency and the perceived adequacy of deliberation and representation in decision-making processes).

We provide empirical support for this framework by answering three research questions: (1) how are input legitimacy (e.g., degree of openness and access in giving voice) and throughput legitimacy (e.g., transparency, quality of deliberation, perception of adequate representation) experienced in collaborative decision-making, (2) what is the relationship between input and throughput legitimacy, and (3) what network characteristics lead to high input and throughput legitimacy? We address these questions through thematic analysis and fsQCA using data from an in-depth comparative case study of 18 purposively sampled CoCs—a nationwide model of collaborative governance mandated by HUD in the implementation of homeless services.

We find that participants experience input legitimacy and throughput legitimacy as distinct but related elements of decision-making. For example, in about one-third of the 18 networks studied, participants felt more satisfied with their ability to provide input than with throughput processes (e.g., transparency, representation). Overall, high input legitimacy seems easier to achieve than high throughput legitimacy. A greater number of CoCs in our sample had high levels of input legitimacy than throughput (10 versus 7) and when a given CoC had different levels of input and throughput legitimacy, input was always higher than throughput. Finally, the QCA pathways to input and throughput legitimacy were mostly dissimilar, sharing only one causal path (i.e., path SZ*C*E) while the remaining paths were distinct.

Although they contain different elements, input and throughput legitimacy are not completely independent. In cases were input and throughput legitimacy were both high, opportunities to provide input was often cited as a crucial reason why throughput processes could be trusted. This finding is supported by the fsQCA in that high input legitimacy was necessary for high throughput legitimacy. Even if decision-making is transparent and formal procedure is followed, if opportunities for voice are not available, participants do not trust the process.

In regard to what network characteristics are likely to yield high input and throughput legitimacy, we make five primary claims. First, having a network coordinator take on a co-producer or facilitator role is beneficial for both input and throughput legitimacy, whereas a commissioner role poses difficulties. In fact, all QCA solutions for input and throughput legitimacy required having a co-producer or facilitator coordinator role. This is notable because a commissioner role is not necessarily incompatible with either input or throughput legitimacy. Commissioners can easily ask for input to inform their decisions, and the attributes of throughput legitimacy—decision-making that is transparent, representative, and adequately deliberated—are quite possible even without direct involvement. While top-down management may get external results, attention should be paid to ensure that it does not adversely affect internal legitimacy, putting sustainability, innovation, and democratic legitimacy at risk.

Second, perhaps because CoCs typically have high participant diversity, there seems to be an advantage for small size in strengthening both input and throughput legitimacy. That said, large networks can overcome challenges through developing in-person engagement. One good solution for large CoCs may be using subcommittees, as they seem to help build trust and allow participants to replicate the relationship building that happens more ad hoc in smaller CoCs. Notably, all three cases that were lower on participant diversity were small and had either mixed or low input legitimacy and all had low throughput legitimacy. They also were all managed by a coordinator using a commissioner role and had low in-person engagement, conditions that are necessary for high throughput legitimacy. This reinforces our findings that how the network is managed and the degree of in-person engagement are crucial in fostering internal legitimacy.

Third, given that input legitimacy is an important component of throughput legitimacy, it appears that once participants perceive they have little voice, they do not trust the rest of the process. It could be otherwise—having voice is not an essential part of transparency and is in some ways the opposite of representation (where someone else is speaking on your behalf)—but our results show that in networks where voice is not

prioritized, participants do not have faith in the legitimacy of the decision-making process generally.

Next, although throughput legitimacy is primarily procedural in definition, achieving it seems to not only require voice (e.g., input legitimacy) but also high in-person engagement and network coordinators taking on a co-producer or facilitator coordinator role. We speculate that both in-person engagement and co-producer / facilitator roles might allow participants more insights into the decision-making process, thus increasing their knowledge about deliberation and representation or their trust that those things are done adequately. In regards to in-person engagement, perhaps participants are comfortable giving input in a variety of formats, but when it comes to throughput legitimacy, people need to see it with their own eyes. This finding has taken on increasing importance as since data was collected for this article the global COVID-19 pandemic has made remote engagement more common. Our findings indicate that in-person engagement is helpful for input legitimacy and necessary for throughput legitimacy, and network coordinators should proceed with caution before fully embracing remote engagement for the long-term. Future research should investigate ways in which internal legitimacy can be maintained through remote engagement options.

Finally, in contrast to prior literature, we find that network stability is not crucial for attaining high input and throughput legitimacy. Rather, our analysis suggests that internal legitimacy is maintained or, in some cases, strengthened when change occurs yet is well-managed—meaning that the process and rationale for change are clearly explained, and members feel involved in the change process. Collaborative governance networks undergoing changes should be attentive to making sure that processes are clear and uniformly upheld throughout the transition process, and participants perceive changes as responsive to their concerns. We therefore suggest a slight shift in scholarly interest from stability to instability, and an appreciation that instability that is well-managed rather than stability that is maintained is perhaps what can strengthen the internal dynamics of the network.

These findings have practical as well as theoretical significance. First, managers of collaborative governance networks may benefit from knowing that input legitimacy appears easier to achieve than throughput legitimacy. Depending on the goal of the network, managers may want to emphasize the components of input legitimacy: voice, access, and participation. Input legitimacy can be achieved, particularly through intervening in managerial characteristics of the network. Even in large networks, input legitimacy can be achieved with network managers taking on a co-producer or facilitator coordinator role. The initiation of the CoC collaborative governance process came from the recognition that a wicked problem like homelessness cannot be solved in a top-down fashion—that supporting the voices of those on the front-line of the problem and getting them to talk to each other is an important step in coming up with new solutions to system integration. These findings support the notion that participants want and expect management to be carried out in a way that aligns with those principles.

These findings also provide concrete guidance to network managers concerned with throughput legitimacy: they should seek to promote in-person engagement in combination with a co-producer or facilitator coordinator role, provide plentiful meeting opportunities and encourage participation in subcommittees. While in-person meetings may be associated with opportunities for input, they also contribute to participants viewing throughput processes as legitimate. Network managers should also know it is possible to increase or at least maintain levels of internal legitimacy amid network instability if leaders are responsive to members' concerns and communicative throughout the change process. Future research should focus more on what concrete activities managers undertake in pursuit of these strategies.

While this article has focused on the internal legitimacy process in collaborative governance networks generally, there are also implications specific to homeless services. Homelessness is a complex problem that spans policy fields—in many ways, a prime example of the type of problem collaborative governance is intended to help solve. Unfortunately, these findings indicate that in many CoCs, participants see the process more as a bureaucratic burden—a meeting that cannot be avoided but is unlikely to result in responsive solutions. Homeless service providers are typically strained and under-resourced and while they may feel compelled to participate in CoCs due to their high external legitimacy, without internal legitimacy, CoCs lose buy in and commitment from members. If CoCs hope to meet their promise of engaging providers in local communities to develop innovative, on-the-ground solutions, they must engage them in ways that communicate that their input is valued and throughput decision-making is responsive (Mosley and Jarpe 2019).

Despite a high number of cases in comparison to many comparative case studies, the generalizability of these findings remains unknown. To test this framework, further research should explore whether these findings hold in other policy fields (e.g., environmental, planning, other social services). This study opens up other new avenues for research, as well. For example, how can internal legitimacy be maintained in networks utilizing a commissioner coordinator role? Because commissioners are common in larger networks, related

to centralization, and can facilitate external legitimacy, research should continue to explore how internal and external legitimacy can be balanced and consider whether external legitimacy can be broken down in a similar manner to what we have proposed for internal legitimacy. A limitation of this study is that although we demonstrate how input and throughput legitimacy are related to each other, their relationship to output legitimacy (the degree to which the decision that is made is seen as fair, responsive, and just) is outside our scope. Knowing more about how perceptions of the decision-making process are related to judgments about the decision itself (output) is an important next step. For example, are there conditions under which participants would be willing to substitute input and throughput legitimacy for output legitimacy?

In conclusion, internal legitimacy has long been considered an important factor in the sustainability and functioning of collaborative governance networks but has been vaguely conceptualized, leaving network managers with little guidance regarding how to build and maintain it. This article provides both a conceptual framework that depicts how different aspects of internal legitimacy—input and throughput—work together, as well as empirical support for that framework. Importantly, internal legitimacy is shown to be multi-vectored with each component part working both independently and synergistically. Looking at our findings holistically, it appears that participants have a strong need to feel heard and engaged in collaborative governance processes, and procedural rationality cannot substitute for this desire. Our findings indicate that participants lived experience of collaborative processes can vary from feelings of intimacy and enjoyment to feelings of exclusion and mistrust. Attending the building-blocks of internal legitimacy may help network managers build commitment to the network and potentially improve network outcomes.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary data is available at the *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* online.

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Data Availability

The data underlying this article cannot be shared publicly in order to protect the privacy of individuals that participated in the study. The data will be shared on reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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