



The Trust Deficit: concepts and causes of low public trust in governments

Meredith Edwards
Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis
University of Canberra
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Secretary General on Trust Deficit

The public discourse has underscored the call for the urgent need to recognize and address the trust deficit between governments, institutions and the people

UN The Road to Dignity by 2030 (2014:15)

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Aim and Themes

- *Aim:* to stimulate discussion in the context of moving to the SDGs
- *Main theme:*
 - distinction between *what* governments do and *how* they go about meeting citizen expectations

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What is public trust?

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What is public trust?

- Vague, slippery, subjective, multidimensional, complex
- In context of citizen trust in government:
 - ...it is an assessment by them of a government's entitlement to enforce its decisions, laws and regulations as well as the probability that it will deliver on its obligations* (World Bank 2010:52).

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Types of public trust

- Individual trust: e.g.
 - trusting politicians or a public servant
- Institutional trust: e.g.
 - different jurisdictional levels
 - government generally or specific agencies
 - various arms of government

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Types of public trust (cont.)

- Political trust
- Social Trust
- Economic Trust
- Moral Trust
- Technological Trust

(Blind 2007)



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Is public trust declining or just too low?



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What are the possible causes of the 'public trust' deficit?



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Causes of public trust deficit?

- A lot of uncertainty and ambiguity
 - many theoretical versus empirical explanations
- Distinguish between exogenous and endogenous causes
 - factors external to government affect short term trust e.g. financial crisis, ebola, elections
 - longer term factors e.g. cultural changes, globalisation changing state-society relations



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Trust drivers governments can influence

- Distinction between *what* governments achieve and *how* they go about meeting citizen needs.
- World Bank public management levers:
 - performance; and
 - accountability

(World Bank 2010)



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World Bank Empirics story

- (a) accountability matters more than performance for trust in OECD countries; in Latin America performance could have a bigger impact.
- (b) The contribution of performance to trust erodes over time (even if performance itself remains constant)
- (c) Improvement in performance in some services matters more than in others



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World Bank empirics story (cont.)

- (d) Performance expectations matter.
- (e) Trust benefits of both performance and accountability easily squandered.
- (f) Overstated rhetoric can discredit performance results.



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Citizen Expectations

- Role of *citizen expectations*
 - can change over time even if government performance does not
- Trust and *good governance*
 - distinct but complementary
 - missing link might be citizen expectations
- *Capacity* of governments can be out of line with citizen expectations



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Other possible causes

- Pace of change with new technologies
- Levels of corruption
- Role of public sector reform
- Rate of economic growth/ level of inequality
- Quality of leadership



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How to foster a trust culture?



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Suggested Future Actions

- (a) Confronting the measurement issues
 - DPADM advise member countries on methodology and data methods to measure trust cost-effectively e.g. collaboration with Praia Group



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Suggested Future Actions (cont.)

- (b) Better understanding of citizen expectations
 - Transformative change in quality of relationships with citizens
 - not doing things 'to' or 'for' but 'with' citizens
 - Giving more feedback, co-designing services, citizen collaboration in innovating to see what works



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Suggested Future Actions (cont.)

- (b) Better understanding of citizen expectations (cont.)
- Building a *relational state* for *relational trust*
- DPADM to create a knowledge exchange platform and broker contacts across member countries.



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UN Secretary General

Humankind has always been and will always be in need of trust. Trust in each other. And trust in our leaders and the institutions of State – to do right by the publics they serve. But trust is not easy. It implies commitment. It rests on relationships (2009)



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