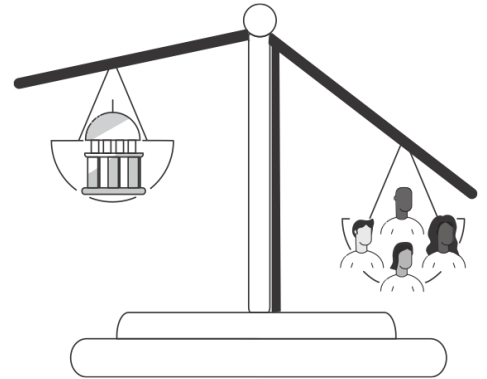


BUILDING TRUST: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN CITIZENS AND GOVERNMENT

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MIT Governance Lab

MIT GOV/LAB is an applied **research group** and **ideas incubator** that aims to improve **democracy and governance** by changing practice around **government accountability and citizen voice**.



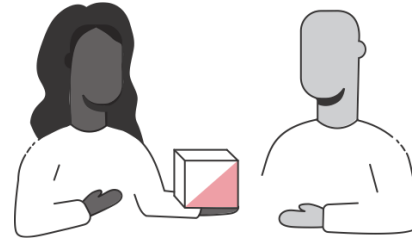
Our model

- Combines methods from **behavioral political science, experimental social science, design thinking, & evaluation**
- We partner with practitioners worldwide (e.g., **governments, civil society, social enterprises, technologists and donors**) to provide policy advice and research findings to support data-driven decision-making

Focus for today

1. Why does citizen trust in government matter for environmental management?
2. What is trust and how do we measure it?
3. How does trust intersect with technology and data for environmental monitoring?
4. How do we build trust in low-trust settings?

1. Why should we care about trust?



“When people trust the government, they are more likely to trust each other, because they know the government has got their back. And this general interpersonal trust also deeply matters. Those who are more trusting tend to be more willing to engage with civil society. They are often healthier. They are richer. They are happier.”

- <https://mitgovlab.org/resources/trust-mini-guide/>

Why does citizen trust in government matter?

- Trust in government allows governments to do hard things (via legitimacy)
- More trust in government increases citizen cooperation and compliance
- More trust in government improves public goods and services because citizens are willing to contribute

Trust for environmental data & management

- Trust makes it more likely that citizens will believe EPA data and respond to EPA recommendations
- Trust makes it more likely that citizens will help co-produce air and water quality monitoring
- Trust makes it more likely that citizens will value EPA's provision of public services



At least 20 U.S. states were under air quality alerts on the morning of June 30, 2023, due to smoke from wildfires in neighboring Canada.

ABC News

Trust for climate policies & governing for our descendants

- What makes us care more about the needs of future generations?
- Trust in government can make it easier to consider the needs of future generations when determining who deserves what resources – policies reducing consumption of nonrenewable resources, lowering the discount rate

2. What is trust?

How do we measure it?

A trustor (the citizen) believes/judges the trustworthiness of a trustee (the government) to do an expected behavior in a specific context at a specific time.

(Bauer 2014; Bauer & Freitag 2017)

- **Characteristics of trust** (Levi & Stoker, 2000; Levi, 1988):
 - Trust is relational.
 - Trust is given to a specific person/entity over a specific issue.
 - Those who garner trust have the quality of trustworthiness.
 - Trustworthiness (Levi & Stoker, 2000; Levi, 1988):
- **Attribute with two dimensions:**
 - Intention/Morality - Commitment to act in the interests of the trustor
 - Competence/Capacity - Ability to deliver in the domain over which trust is given

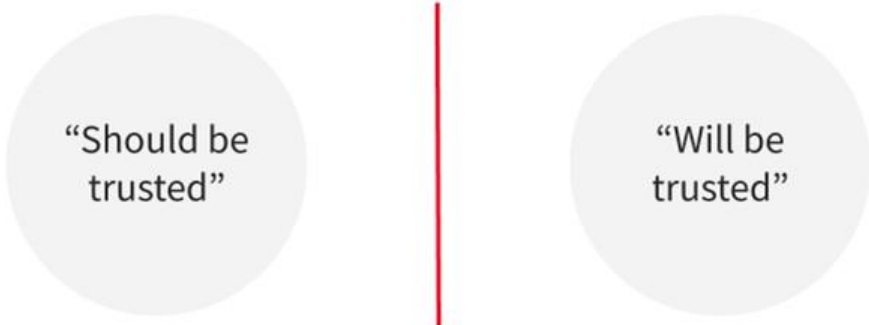
3. Trust & technology for environmental management

- Advancements in environmental monitoring technology on both the government and citizen sides
- How does citizen trust in government impact how new data and technologies are used, perceived, and ultimately influence behavior?



Trustworthy vs. trusted

There's a difference between technology that:



“Should be
trusted”

“Will be
trusted”



“Trustworthy” science and technology

- Reliability of the technology or data
- Precision of the technology or data
- Resilience and relevance to changing conditions
- Clarity of understanding about what the technology can and can't do

Trustworthiness may not lead to trust

- Providing facts to resolve information deficits in people's knowledge does not always lead people to form beliefs in line with the evidence
- "Motivated numeracy": Those with higher levels of science literacy, numeracy, and education are not less polarized about issues on which there is scientific consensus
- "Science curiosity" versus "science comprehension": People who like being surprised update with new evidence, regardless of political affiliation.

4. “Trusted tech”: How do we build trust in low-trust settings?

- Trust requires a trustee – a person or representative of the technology or data that we want people to trust
- Building trust requires us to believe the trustee has good intentions as well as sufficient capability
- Strategies: Borrowing trust, priming the pump, costly signaling, focusing on responsiveness

Borrowing trust

- Community influencers in Liberia limited damage from Ebola by vouching for the government.
- Public libraries and librarians in the United States among the most trusted civic institutions

Article

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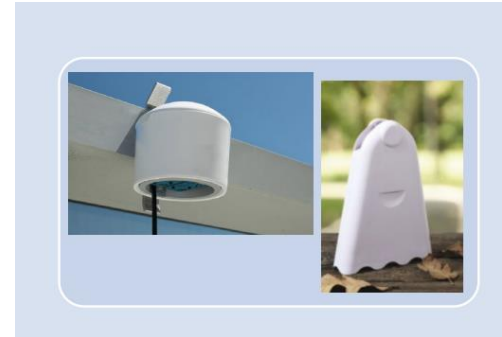
Building Credibility and Cooperation in Low-Trust Settings: Persuasion and Source Accountability in Liberia During the 2014–2015 Ebola Crisis

Lily L. Tsai¹, Benjamin S. Morse¹,
and Robert A. Blair²



Priming the pump

- Government can prime the pump for a virtuous cycle by being the first mover and entrusting the citizens with something valuable first



Jump-starting a virtuous cycle

Principle of “costly signaling”



Tech developers who makes technology **open source** and **public domain**.



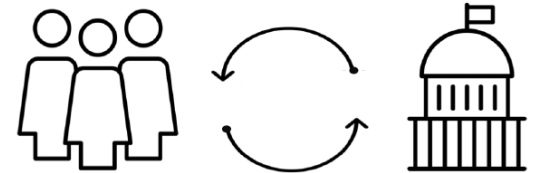
A politician who **says something** or **takes a position** **contrary to the party platform**.



During Ebola, community health workers gave people their home addresses and said they could harass their families or burn down their houses **if people found they were lying**.

Focusing on responsiveness

- Keep a virtuous cycle of trust going with responsiveness
- Only start a new initiative if responsiveness is possible
- Manage expectations for responsiveness from the outset
- Every touchpoint matters – trust is easy to lose, hard to rebuild



“Informed disengagement”

- Low government responsiveness can lead to citizens who rationally conclude there is little benefit to engagement
- Research on citizen participation in China’s 2018 environmental inspection campaigns



Local official and polluter accountability in China’s
environmental inspections

by
Mengying Wu

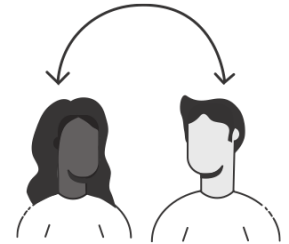
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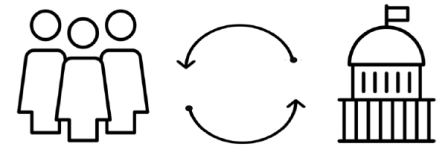
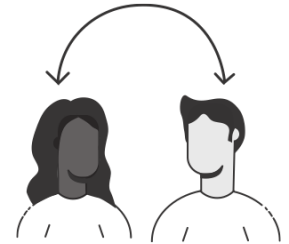
Building trust is not easy, but there is reason for optimism



- “Borrow” trust from other trusted sources
- Many interactions to show that you mean what you say you mean and will do what you say you will do
- Make smaller promises and continually deliver on them
- Show restraint, morality, and good intent

Building trust is not easy, but there is reason for optimism

- It means a lot to citizens to have support from government agencies in the community
- It comes down to interactions between people



Questions & comments

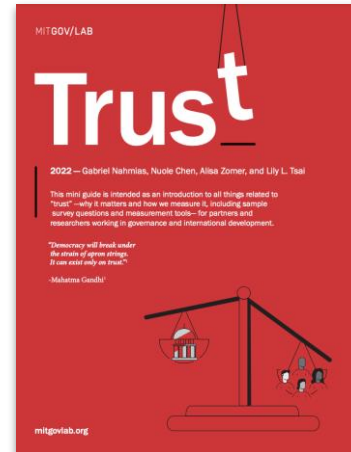
Check out our Trust Mini Guide:

<https://mitgovlab.org/resources/trust-mini-guide/>

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<https://mitgovlab.org/>



References & further reading

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