

KRG and Rebuilding Public Trust Swiftly

02-02-2021

Authors

Rudaw RC

Abstract

Trust in public institutions, formal or informal, is so low that it should be a cause for concern. Although there is a difference in the degrees of trust in official institutions, they have declined significantly in recent years, whether we are talking about the government, the judiciary, or parliament. Perhaps the most prominent factors that affected the gradual decline in public trust is political division, corruption, unorganized media ... etc. Since the government is the embodied will of society, it has the responsibility to rebuild public trust. In this article, after analyzing Kurdistan's reality in regard to public trust deficit and determining the reasons, we will present two quick mechanisms that will assist the government in its tasks whenever it begins to work towards solving the problem swiftly.

Public Trust Doctrine

However, public trust doctrine refers to a common law doctrine creating the legal right of the public to use certain lands and waters.^[1] Having said it is the principle states that certain natural and cultural resources are preserved for public use, and that the government owns and must protect and maintain these resources for the public's use.^[2]

Even, the legal definition of public trust doctrine went more restricted; a doctrine asserting that the state holds land lying beneath navigable waters as trustee of public trust for the benefit of its citizens.^[3]

Nevertheless, public trust doctrine according to the above, is a De jury term, but it no harm to lean on it in De facto as well and use it to determine the meaning of the public trust. Of course, there are several sources should the government own, and resources should provide by it in order to grand the trust of an individual then the society. It is vital for any political entity to gain that trust which indicates the extent to which citizens believe that the political entity is operating in a manner that is consistent with their expectations. When the citizens do not see the government, its members and representatives who actually represent them, the trust will be disappeared then there will unrest. This results in acts of protest, demonstration, and strikes. Thus, public peace is the act of public trust; it is the faith that all are secure and will remain secure.

Hence, political trust became a dominant term where the conversation takes place about the government and its institutions. Political trust^[4] takes different forms; The first of which is trust in the political system as a whole, starting with the constitution and laws, passing through institutions and officials, and ending with everything related to the citizen in his country. The second is the trust of state institutions in each other, and the third is mutual trust between the various components of society. The United Nations defined "political trust" in the 2007 Vienna Declaration on Building Confidence in Government as expressing: The existence of consensus among community members about common values, priorities, and differences, and on the implicit acceptance of the society in which they live. It also indicates citizens' expectations of the type of government it should be, and how the government should operate and interact with social and economic institutions.^[5]

That trust is gained by governments as a result of their performance during a certain period and their ability to respond to the needs of their citizens, it also indicates the extent to which citizens believe that the government or political system is operating in a manner that is consistent with their expectations. From this perspective, governments are supposed to seek

to enhance the values of trust between them and their citizens, by working to meet their needs to enhance their legitimacy and to achieve stability within society. Because the retreat and slow in meeting the needs of citizens may lead to a loss of trust in the government and the political system as a whole. The loss of trust by citizens in political institutions would contribute to reinforcing many negative feelings, such as apathy, lack of affiliation, and a feeling of exclusion and marginalization. all of which threaten the stability of the political system, and indeed society as a whole.

This is, unfortunately, what we perceive from the current reality in Kurdistan. As the citizen not only has lost trust in political power (including political parties) and the political trial that has been going on for three decades but has also lost trust in all that was associated with him from the ideals, symbols and sacred believes that connected him with the flag, Peshmarga, and land.

Truth Decay and the Reasons

Through an occasional and quick reading of the hundred years that have passed, the first lessons that we have learned, we have always said that despite all the attempts of the successive regimes to rule in Iraq, they have not been able to shake the trust and confidence of the Kurdish citizen in his cause, its leaders, and the political power that emanates from the armed struggle. Despite all the war crimes, genocide, and the ugliest types of discrimination, the Kurdish's trust in Kurdish rule was steadfast.

But with the same approach and during the past thirty years, the accumulated political and economic crisis swept democratic strongholds around the Kurdistan society reflecting a deep loss of faith in government and its institutions. Citizens perceive their institutions to be captured by elites who are disconnected from the needs of society or complicit in schemes that benefit the powerful at the expense of ordinary citizens.

And nowadays, with ease, we diagnose the general lack of trust in society and not only towards the government, but towards the sources of belonging and national affiliation, and the beliefs that the Kurdistan citizen was ready to sacrifice for. Just easily we are in a process of truth decay. As its landmarks have been palpable.

According to the Rand there are four trends that characterize truth decay:[\[6\]](#)

1. Increasing disagreement about facts and analytical interpretations of facts and data.
2. A blurring of the line between opinion and fact.
3. The increasing relative volume and resulting influence of opinion and personal experience over fact.
4. Declining trust in formerly respected sources of facts.

Let someone tell me that one of the aforementioned points does not exist in our Kurdistan society or that it cannot be applied to the current Kurdistan situation. The continuous political disagreement has decimated people and institutions. The fact became absent and no one listened to its voice, and the politician's voice became dominant over the voice of the truth of the dose, People began to lose trust gradually until it came to that the commission of treason became a normal, but justified matter by political parties, as well as the case for rampant corruption. Of course, having said that most of these trends are not unprecedented in Kurdish history. But today's level of disagreement over objective facts is a new phenomenon. So how did we get here?

RAND research has investigated what's causing and compounding this problem. The main drivers of truth decay include:[\[7\]](#)

- Cognitive biases.
 - The rise of social media and other changes to the information environment.
 - Demands on the educational system that limit its ability to keep up with changes in the information ecosystem
-

- Political and social polarization.

This time, the threat is the diminishing role of facts and analysis in Kurdistan public life. It comes internally. It is manifesting citizen unfaithful in political will and government. This phenomenon, led to political paralysis, the erosion of civil discourse, and widespread uncertainty. If Kurdistanian can't even agree about basic facts, then they will be hamstrung in efforts to address today's most severe challenges. For example, KRG says cannot provide salaries...And despite an overwhelming body of evidence that shows KRG cannot provide it, there is an increasing number of individuals who do not believe at all in KRG's justifications due to the continuation of corruption.

Plummeting public trust is sweeping KRG. It is infecting relations among people, between people and their government, we sense this erosion of trust in social media and domestic politics, in our community, and even at the Kurdish diaspora. Lack of public trust infuses public rhetoric and political debates, obstructing action in the public interest. Together, this cumulative distrust is undermining the ability of religious, social, civil, and cultural institutions to function and serve the people they are intended to benefit. And if the experience shows that is easier to destroy than construct, the consequences of today's public trust deficit would haunt Kurdistan society for many years to come.

It should be noted that this phenomenon, trust deficit, is sweeping countries around the world. Governments worldwide are facing several recent events – i.e. the current economic situation, corruption cases, and so on – which are diminishing citizen trust in public administration to a great extent ([Yildiz & Saylam, 2013](#)). Recent reports suggest that trust in governments and public institutions are experiencing the greatest decline of the century. In sum, less than half of the population all over the world relies on public institutions ([Corporate Excellence, 2012](#)).^[8]

Studies suggest that an overall decline of trust among people in many countries especially, where income inequality, educational achievement levels, gross domestic product, and civic engagement are low. The [Gallup World Poll](#) shows that in 26 out of 38 countries polled between 2007 and 2016, trust in national government dropped in the aggregate, and many countries have seen a decline of more than 20 percentage points. Sametime, [a 2017 Pew Research Center study](#) of 38 countries suggests that trust in government is alarmingly low, with a global median of only 14 percent of people saying they trust their national government "a lot" to do what is right for the country.^[9]

However, there is not a consensus about the crucial factors increasing or decreasing trust. Indeed, diverse elements such as political conflicts, economic instability, mass-media information, governmental performance, corruption have been mentioned as possible determinants of governments' trustworthiness.

In 2019, when Edelman released its annual Trust Barometer, it found that Americans' trust in their government had plummeted 14 points in a single year, to 33% percent. Meanwhile, a decades-long campaign backed by deep-pocketed special interest groups has convinced many that government not only can't solve their problems, it is the problem.^[10]

This loss of public trust matters, if the research shows that trust in government is necessary to spur economic growth and business investment elsewhere. For KRG it should be considered more than that it influences individual and collective behavior in public. it is essential for restoring sacred beliefs and to secure the country.

Rebuilding Public Trust

Thus, we find that the availability of political trust means the generally positive view of citizens towards the government, and this outlook arises whenever the gap is bridged between what the citizen expects from the government and what it achieves on one side, and what the government plans and implements on the other side, The citizen evaluates the government through two angels: The first: the government's ability to fulfill the citizen's desires, by improving his economic and social reality, and achieving social justice and equity. The second: the extent to which the actual policies

and procedures are able to achieve the stated goals of the government and the extent of their compatibility with official government statements.

To understand some of the possible solutions it's important to understand why Kurdistanian are expressing such unprecedented frustration with the government. Many of these factors that led us to this point are intertwined—it's hard to separate out the fast-changing KRG outlets from the larger societal changes taking place. But fortunately, the time length and reign are not that long to be complicated and incurable. Three decades reign is helpful to refresh our memory and find ways to restore public trust. To achieve greater equity, we first need to build trust between people and institutions. Growing inequity contributes to the lack of trust, shifting that requires new mechanisms to communicate, collaborate and make structural change.

There are models of mechanisms that have been tested locally and globally. By enlarging we can determine three main ways that KRG can approach affordably to rebuild public trust swiftly:

Anticorruption and an open government approach;

Group capture and grand corruption fuel citizen distrust and apathy, reinforcing the corrosive perception that government doesn't work for the people. Beyond feeling heard, citizens need to feel that government is responsive to their voice. Lack of responsiveness may in fact exacerbate citizens' skepticism and distrust in government. [\[11\]](#) Therefore, Transparency is a critical first step in rebuilding public trust. Enabling laypersons to monitor government spending and report the misuse of public funds helps build trust in public institutions by demonstrating that oil and other internal income is being spent wisely. citizens need to feel that KRG is responsive to their voice. To build trust between institutions and people, we need new models, new approaches and a commitment and real will to combat corruption. It will be important to engage multiple sectors and designate responsible anchor institutions to bring together stakeholders and reduce the impact of corruption. [\[12\]](#)

What Coronavirus brought as a crisis which forced governments to world wild to take unprecedented and unusual measures to curb the spreading and to cur the consequences. the crisis was and still an opportunity for the KRG to prove its ability and attendance at all levels. In the light of what suited shows that this crisis has shrunk the role of the private sector and boosted the role of the public sector which is a government domain. [Research conducted by US consultancy Edelman](#) across 11 countries in April 2020, shows that the public thinks the business could be doing a better job of responding to the crisis. Just 38% of those surveyed believe that businesses are doing a good job of putting people before profits, and only 39% believe that employers are effectively protecting employees' financial wellbeing. "For the last six or seven years, the business has generally been more trusted than the government. In recent weeks this has changed dramatically, with the government now the most trusted institution," said Andrew Wilson, London-based executive director, purpose at Edelman. [\[13\]](#)

Media and Public Perception;

An Oxford University [study](#) showed that Twitter users in Michigan, received as much fake or untrustworthy news between Nov. 1-11 during 2016 presidential elections, as they did professional news content. [\[14\]](#)

information made transparent must be genuinely useful to and usable by citizens. It should be flood from an accredited source supported by the government and far from mess. Brazil's transparency portal is proactively publishing public spending data, allowing citizens to track how their government is spending taxpayer money, report cases of official misconduct and request specific information on spending. [\[15\]](#)

Citizens wanted to know that a news outlet explicitly shares the community's values and that everyone is working

together toward a shared goal. Media must approach its work as a more direct service to community members, and devote time and energy to building deep, reciprocal relationships with their audience.

But unfortunately, what we see in regard to Kurdistan media is a mess and chaos. One of the most common complaints we heard was that the news is too negative. And though stories about the political split, alliance with the enemy (Dgashayaty) and corruption may earn an audience's attention, they don't appear to do much to earn long-term trust. Because a vital part of maintaining public trust depends on public perceptions, true or false, the role of the media in creating these perceptions has greatly increased with the information revolution.

Thus, KRG must neat that mess and want the news to be more closely reflect the general positive sense that citizens experience in their day-to-day lives. But that doesn't mean they're interested solely in feel-good coverage. If news organizations want to participate in rebuilding public trust, a compelling place to start would be to mirror the characteristics of trusted interpersonal relationships.^[16] For that, we have a lot of samples that can be relied on.

I wanted to take you through my thoughts on how we got into this situation. I did look at some of the most immediate challenges we face, and what some news organizations are already doing to address the problem. And I did end with some ideas for how to rebuild public trust. Because I am fundamentally hopeful that we can come out stronger on the other side of this journey.

[1] <https://definitions.uslegal.com/p/public-trust-doctrine/>

[2] https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/public_trust_doctrine

[3] <https://www.merriam-webster.com/legal/public%20trust%20doctrine>

[4] The use of the term political trust sometimes and public trust at other times does not change the matter as long as the government (political authority) is the will embodied by the public in society. So we see them as synonymous.

[5] https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjL9YapjLruAhW_EVkfHcrgBmoQFjAFegQICRAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Funpog.org%2Fpage%2Fdownload.asp%3Ftn%3DBoard_TypeA%26sn%3D202%26folder%3Dboard%26field%3DImageName2&usq=AOvVaw0ZljuxiG4XlvR-DNSVAlS1

[6] <https://www.rand.org/research/projects/truth-decay.html>

[7] Ibid.

[8] <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1138144214000072>

[9] https://ssir.org/articles/entry/six_ways_to_repair_declining_social_trust#

[10] <https://www.usnews.com/news/cities/articles/2019-08-05/commentary-rebuild-trust-in-city-government>

[11] <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/trust/an-open-government-approach-to-rebuilding-citizen-trust/>

[12] <https://beeckcenter.medium.com/we-need-new-models-to-rebuild-trust-in-institutions-2e67c69cffdd>

[13] <https://www.fm-magazine.com/news/2020/jun/rebuild-public-trust-after-coronavirus.html>

[14]

<https://www.npr.org/sections/publiceditor/2017/05/15/528158488/looking-to-the-future-restoring-public-trust-in-the-media>

[15] <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/trust/an-open-government-approach-to-rebuilding-citizen-trust/>

[16] <https://theconversation.com/4-things-journalists-can-do-to-rebuild-trust-with-the-public-100445>