



# Creating an Ethical Culture

The Importance of Norms

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## Why Ethics?

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- “The basis of effective government is public confidence, and that confidence is endangered when ethical standards falter, or appear to falter.”

# Public Trust in Government

- Historically low (18% in 2018)
- Dependent on partisanship
- Modest differences in generational groups
- Racial/ethnic differences persist

## Public trust in government near historic lows

*% who trust the govt in Washington always or most of the time*



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And yet...not a pressing issue for officials



## The American Municipal Officials Survey

Washington University in St. Louis



UC San Diego



- Economic Development: 33.5%
- Deteriorating Infrastructure: 13%
- Fragile Fiscal Health: 8.7%
- Affordable Housing: 8.7%
- State Legislature Preemption: 8%
- Lack of Public Trust: 5.4%

Trust is  
predicated on  
ethical  
behaviors



- **Ethics:** rules of behavior based on ideas about what is right and wrong
- Individual-based assessment
- Systematic approach used in making behavioral decisions (i.e. a behavior pre/proscription!)

# Ethics as “Formal Institutions”



Formal institutions =  
enumerated standards of  
behavior



What about  
“exceptions?”



If ethics is an individual-  
level assessment, is there  
a degree of subjectivity?



How to cope?

Ethical ambiguities = difficult choices...?



**Norms:** standards of proper or acceptable behavior, often informal and enforced unofficially by society

Examples?

Norms: Ethical Safeguards

**Moral**: a principle used in determining right and wrong behavior

Usually deals with a value

Values are used to determine formal and informal institutions!


Morals: Building Blocks of Norms & Ethics





# Practice!

Define and identify examples of norms, morals, and ethics in your local jurisdiction



## Why Norms?

- Norms help navigate ethical ambiguities
- Levitsky & Ziblatt (2018): norms prevent governmental institutions from being “weaponized”
- Smith & Azari (2012): Norms emerge when there’s agreement for a rule (ethic) but deep disagreement exists on particulars
- Examples?

# Two Kinds of Norms

## *“Cosmetic”*

- Re: tradition and convention
- Violation may lead to minimal outcry or chiding
- Examples?

## *“Democratic Values”*

- Re: ethical breaches that negatively impact democratic process & principles
- Triggers public backlash
- Examples?

# Discussion

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What kind of norm violations should we be most concerned with? Why?

# Activity: Norms & Violations

- Identify a local norm that you've seen (or you have!) violated
- What kind was it?
- Ramifications?
- Resolution(s)?

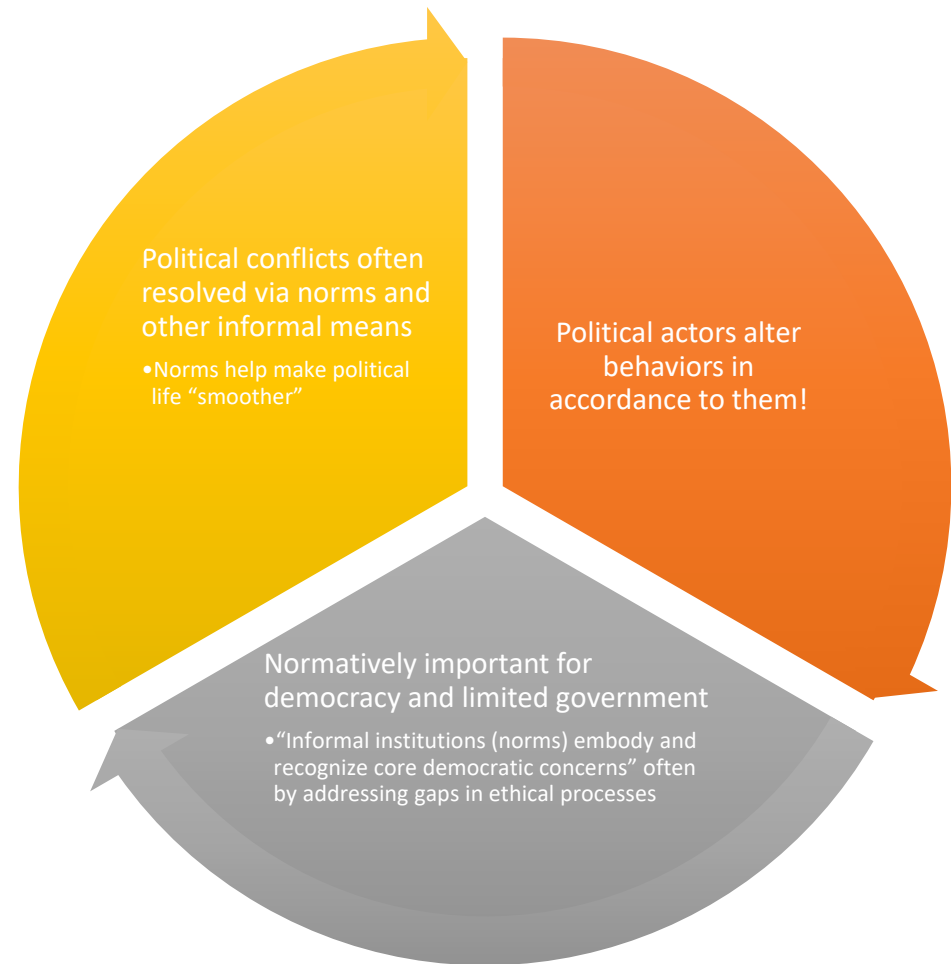
# Case Studies

Identify: (1) any ethical violations; (2) any norm violations; (3) impacts; and (4) outcomes

How could the situation have been avoided?

What is the interplay between the formal (ethics) and informal (norms) rules?

# The Importance of Norms



When any of us meet someone  
who rejects dominant norms and  
values, we feel a little less crazy for  
doing the same.

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Charles Eisenstein



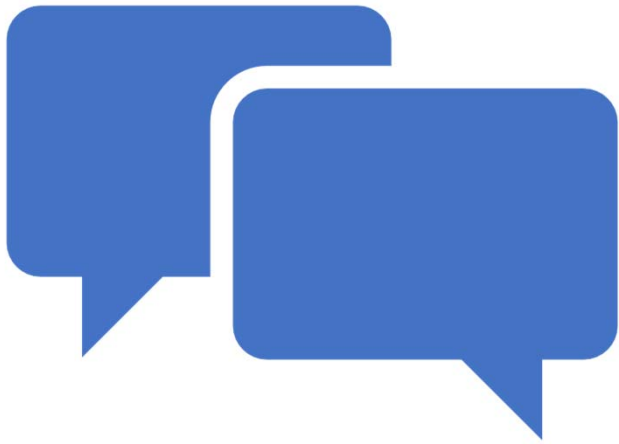
## Discussion: Safeguarding Norms

- How may norms be protected?
- Should norms become formal rules (ethics)?  
Why or why not?
- Other suggestions/observations...?



Questions?

Please be sure to complete the evaluation! All feedback is welcomed and appreciated!



# Thank you!

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