

the
Singapore

WAY

**STUDENT
GUIDE**

Public Trust and Governance

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1. Welcome & Purpose of This Case

Welcome to a Case About Trust That's Earned—Not Assumed

In a world where trust in government is declining, where corruption feels like “just the way things work,” and where cynicism is often easier than hope—this case tells a different story.

Singapore's journey shows that **trust can be designed, measured, and nurtured**. Through strong institutions, consistent enforcement, and shared sacrifice, the nation built a system where **citizens believe in the rules—and those who enforce them**.

Why This Case Matters to You

Whether you live in a country with strong or weak public institutions, this case challenges you to think about:

- What trust feels like in daily civic life
- How public systems either reinforce or betray that trust
- What leadership looks like when it's rooted in service, not just control
- How **policy, performance, and shared duty** can create belonging and belief

You'll Explore:

- How Singapore built public trust through **CPIB, National Service, meritocracy**, and moral leadership
- What a “**social compact**” really is—and how it's designed
- How corruption isn't just criminal—it's cultural, emotional, and systemic
- Whether trust can be rebuilt once it's broken—and what it takes to do so
- What role you play in holding or healing your own public systems

A Thought to Begin With

**“Trust is not the absence of doubt.
It's the presence of shared values, proven by action.”**

This is your invitation to **see trust not as a feeling, but as a framework—and a future**.

2. Case Background

Singapore's Starting Point: Fragile Foundations

In the 1950s and 60s, Singapore faced:

- Ethnic riots and political unrest
- Rampant corruption and low faith in government
- A weak rule of law and fragile civic institutions

Public trust wasn't just low—it was almost non-existent. The nation's founders knew that without **legitimacy, order, and shared purpose**, Singapore could not survive.

The Turnaround: From Control to Credibility

Singapore didn't just crack down on corruption—it **built a governance system designed to earn and protect trust**.

Key moves included:

- Creating an **independent, powerful anti-corruption agency** (CPIB)
- Establishing **National Service** to instill duty and equality across classes and races
- Promoting **meritocracy** in public hiring and leadership
- Raising public sector salaries to reduce temptation—and attract talent
- Ensuring **visible, fast, and equal enforcement** of the law

Over time, these measures led to one of the world's **most trusted and least corrupt governments**.

Today's Landscape: A High-Trust Society

By 2024, Singapore reports:

- Over **90% citizen trust** in government institutions
- Top 5 ranking on Transparency International's **Corruption Perceptions Index**
- A public sector known for **speed, service, and integrity**
- Citizens who generally believe that **rules apply equally to all**

But this didn't happen overnight. It took **decades of consistent enforcement, cultural norm-shifting, and visible leadership**.

Not Without Its Trade-Offs

While Singapore's trust model is admired, it raises important questions:

- Can trust be engineered—or does it grow organically?
- How do enforcement and freedom balance?
- Does high trust reduce critical thinking or democratic dissent?
- Can other countries replicate this model—or is it uniquely Singaporean?

This case is about more than governance.

It's about the **social glue** that holds a nation together—and what happens when that glue is **earned rather than imposed**.

3. Learning Objectives

This case challenges you to look beyond headlines and politics and explore **what trust looks like when it's built by design**. You'll connect theory with systems, and governance with emotion.

By the end of this case, you will be able to:

Understand:

- How Singapore developed a **durable public trust model** over decades
- The **tools and symbols** used to align governance with legitimacy (e.g., CPIB, NS, meritocracy)
- Why **corruption prevention** requires more than punishment—it requires design
- The **cultural and institutional factors** that shape civic trust

Analyse:

- The **trade-offs** between enforcement, freedom, and trust
- How trust **interacts with systems of service delivery, justice, and participation**
- The risks of **blind trust**, and the role of transparency in healthy democracies
- The difference between **earned trust vs. enforced compliance**

Apply:

- Map public trust across sectors in your country or community
- Design a **mini social compact** with shared rights and duties
- Propose a set of **reforms to rebuild trust** after crisis or scandal
- Reflect on your own trust experiences and values in relation to public systems

You'll Be Ready to Discuss:

- Should national service (or any civic duty) be mandatory in all countries?
- Can trust be legislated—or only lived?
- What breaks trust faster: injustice, delay, or inequality?
- Would Singapore's model work in your context? What would need to change?

This case gives you a **lens, a language, and a leadership challenge**:

How do you build a society where people believe in something—because it proves itself every day?

4. Pre-Class Preparation

To engage fully with this case, come ready to connect **systems to your own experiences**—and governance to the emotions of trust, fear, fairness, and duty.

What to Read

Required:

- **Chapter 10 of *The Singapore Way*** by Maher Kaddoura
Focus on:
 - o The creation and independence of the **Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB)**
 - o The implementation and symbolism of **National Service (NS)**
 - o How **meritocracy, speed, and enforcement** sustain legitimacy
 - o The cultural signals of trust: dignity, discipline, and delivery

Title	Format	Why It's Useful
<i>Singapore's War on Corruption</i>	CNA / CPIB docu-short	Gives real-life examples of CPIB investigations and impact
<i>The Trust Deficit – Edelman Trust Barometer</i>	Global report	Compares trust in government, media, and business around the world
<i>Why Public Trust Matters – TEDx Talk</i>	10-min video	Connects civic trust with democracy, equity, and social fabric
<i>National Service – Beyond Uniforms</i>	Gov.sg series	Youth perspectives on civic duty and inclusion

Optional Resources for Enrichment

Reflection Questions to Bring to Class

Prepare written or mental notes on the following:

1. What does “public trust” mean to you personally?
2. Do you trust your local or national government? Why or why not?
3. Have you ever experienced a system that surprised you by how fair or unfair it was?
4. Should people be expected to **serve their country** in exchange for public rights?
5. What would it take for a broken public system in your country to **earn back your trust**?

Optional Activity: Trust Spectrum Exercise

Rate your home country on a scale of 1-5 (5 = very high) for the following:

Institution	Score (1-5)
Police & Law Enforcement	
Health Services	
Political Leaders	
Public Schools	
Civil Service / Bureaucracy	

Bring your scores to class. We'll compare them during small group activities or in a trust mapping lab.

What to Bring to Class:

	Item
	Case reading notes (highlighted terms and insights)
	Your reflections or scorecard responses
	1 example of public trust gained—or lost—in your own context
	Openness to share honestly and listen respectfully

When it comes to trust, **everyone has a story**. This session invites you to make sense of your own—and to learn how others are shaping theirs.

5. In-Class Participation

This case invites you to think like a **citizen, reformer, and systems designer**. In class, you'll unpack the complexity of trust—not as a feeling, but as a set of policies, signals, and shared expectations.

What You'll Be Doing

Activity	Purpose
Guided Case Discussion	Explore how Singapore built trust through action, symbols, and systems
Social Compact Design Lab	Define the rights, duties, and values that hold a nation together
Ethics Commission Simulation	Rebuild trust after a crisis or scandal with concrete policy changes
Trust Mapping Exercise	Visualize where trust exists—and where it's been broken—in your country
Debate: "Can Trust Be Engineered?"	Argue whether systems create trust, or whether it must emerge from culture

How to Participate Effectively

- Bring **real examples**—from your country, community, or life
- Reference key ideas from Singapore: CPIB, NS, equal accountability, visible enforcement
- Be curious about different experiences of trust—especially across cultures
- Push beyond cynicism—ask: **"What would work here, and how?"**

Questions You Might Be Asked

- What do citizens owe a state that they don't trust?
- Should trust be **earned, assumed, or enforced**?
- Would mandatory civic service work in your context? Why or why not?
- Can you truly fight corruption without creating fear?
- Is trust more about **results—or about values**?

You Might Be Assessed On:

	Criteria
	Relevance and clarity of your contributions
	Integration of the Singapore case into discussion
	Thoughtfulness in applying ideas to your own context
	Engagement in team-based design or simulation
	Willingness to reflect openly and respectfully

Trust is a **team effort**—and your voice is part of that. This session invites you to **imagine a nation where belief in systems is not blind—but built.**

6. Assignments

These assignments help you apply what you've learned to **real-world challenges** in leadership, policy, and civic experience. Whether through strategic analysis or personal reflection, you'll explore how trust is shaped—and reshaped.

Option 1: Policy Memo – “Trust Recovery Plan”

Length: 1,000–1,200 words

Scenario:

Your country has just experienced a major trust crisis—corruption in the health sector, police violence, or a political scandal. You are a trusted advisor to the President.

Task:

Propose a 4-part plan to **rebuild public trust** over the next 18 months.

Include:

- Diagnosis of the root problem
- 1 short-term signal (e.g. public apology, independent inquiry)
- 2 long-term reforms (e.g. transparency platform, merit-based hiring reform)
- A principle for regaining emotional legitimacy (e.g. “justice first,” “no sacred cows”)

Option 2: Trust Audit – “How I See My Country’s Integrity”

Format: 5-category scorecard + 600-word reflection

Score the following:

Trust Factor	Score (1–5)	Why?
Equal enforcement of law		
Civic engagement		
Transparency of decisions		
Fair hiring and promotion		
Handling of wrongdoing		

Then Reflect On:

- What shocked or saddened you?
- What’s one bold reform your country could implement?
- What part of Singapore’s approach feels transferable?

Option 3: Personal Essay – “A Time I Trusted (or Couldn’t)”

Length: 700–900 words

Prompt:

Tell a story about a time when:

- You placed trust in a public system—and it delivered
- Or, you saw trust break—and what that meant for you

Explore:

- The emotions tied to that moment
- What the system did (or failed to do) to earn trust
- How that shaped your views on fairness, service, or civic responsibility
- What you’d change, as a citizen or leader, based on that memory

Tips for All Assignments

- Use insights from **Singapore’s case**: CPIB, NS, shared duty, meritocracy
- Show **systems thinking**—don’t just blame people; look at structure
- Think **emotionally and logically**: What policies restore faith? What symbols matter?
- Draw from your own context—and make your recommendations actionable

These assignments are about more than analysis. They’re about **what kind of leader, citizen, or reformer you hope to be**.

7. Reflective Practice

Public trust is deeply personal. It shapes how we **feel about our countries, leaders, communities, and future**. This section gives you space to connect the case to your own experience—and consider what kind of civic culture you want to build or belong to.

Reflection Prompts

Choose one or more of these for journaling, voice recording, discussion, or art:

1. **What's one public system or leader you trust—and why?**
Is it about results, consistency, honesty, or something else?
2. **Have you ever felt like your voice didn't matter to a system?**
What caused that feeling? What could have changed it?
3. **Would you serve your country if asked to—through National Service or something similar?**
What would make that feel meaningful—or unfair?
4. **Can you remember a time when trust was rebuilt after it was broken?**
What were the key actions or decisions that helped?
5. **What kind of leader would you be in a trust crisis?**
Would you admit wrongdoing? Fire corrupt allies? Apologize publicly? Change policy?

Quick Self-Assessment: My Civic Trust Compass

Rate yourself from 1 (disagree) to 5 (strongly agree):

Statement	Score (1–5)
I believe most people in my country care about fairness	
I feel safe interacting with government officials or services	
I think our leaders are held accountable like everyone else	
I would join efforts to reform or improve a broken system	
I trust that change is possible—even when it's hard	

Final Thought

**“Trust isn't built when things go well.
It's built by what we do when things go wrong.”**

This case is not just about how Singapore got it right—
It's about how any society can **choose integrity, build belonging, and lead with courage**.

8. Glossary of Key Terms

This glossary helps you understand the essential concepts used in the case—and prepares you to speak confidently about **governance, integrity, and public systems**.

Term	Definition
Public Trust	The belief that public institutions are fair, reliable, and act in the best interest of citizens. Built over time through performance, ethics, and transparency.
CPIB (Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau)	Singapore's independent anti-corruption agency with the authority to investigate and prosecute corruption at all levels of government.
Meritocracy	A system in which individuals are rewarded or promoted based on ability and performance, not connections or privilege.
National Service (NS)	Mandatory military or civic duty in Singapore for all male citizens, seen as a symbol of unity, equality, and national sacrifice.
Social Compact / Social Contract	An agreement between the state and its people: citizens agree to duties (like taxes or laws) in exchange for rights and services (like safety, justice, opportunity).
Legitimacy	The recognized right of a government to rule, usually earned through fair elections, good governance, and public trust.
Enforcement vs. Trust	A key distinction—enforcement ensures compliance through rules and punishment; trust enables willing cooperation based on belief in the system.
Transparency	Openness in decision-making, data, and governance—making it easier for citizens to understand and monitor what government does.
Accountability	Holding individuals or institutions responsible for their actions—especially when they misuse power or break rules.
Symbolic Policy	A law, action, or program that has emotional or cultural meaning (like National Service), beyond its practical function.

Pro Tip: Use 3–5 of these terms in your next discussion, essay, or group design task to show fluency with the case language and logic.

9. Additional Resources

Use these tools, readings, and case studies to deepen your understanding of **how trust is built, protected, or broken**—and how different countries try to earn it back.

Recommended Readings

Title	Source	Why It's Useful
<i>The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)</i>	Transparency International	Ranks countries by public sector corruption and integrity perception
<i>The Trust Crisis: Global 2024 Report</i>	Edelman Trust Barometer	Breaks down trust in government, media, and business by sector and region
<i>Building Trust in Government</i>	OECD / World Bank	Case studies and frameworks for post-crisis trust recovery
<i>Singapore's Approach to Governance</i>	Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy	Local insights on enforcement, equity, and performance
<i>Trust as Infrastructure</i>	Stanford Social Innovation Review	Explains how trust is designed through systems—not just sentiment

Videos & Documentaries

Title	Platform	Focus
<i>How Singapore Beats Corruption</i>	CNA / Gov.sg	Stories of CPIB in action—real cases, high stakes
<i>National Service Stories</i>	Youth Voices SG	Short clips from those who served—what they learned, what it meant
<i>Trust in the Age of Disruption</i>	TEDx / WEF	Thought leaders explain how societies recover from trust breakdowns
<i>The Cost of Corruption</i>	DW Documentary	Shows how corruption impacts daily life in low-trust countries
<i>The Psychology of Trust</i>	Vox Explains	Why trust feels so fragile—and what makes it resilient

Useful Tools & Data Sources

- <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi> – Corruption Perceptions Index
- <https://www.edelman.com/trust> – Global Trust Barometer
- <https://data.worldbank.org/topic/public-sector> – Governance data
- <https://www.cpi.gov.sg> – Singapore's Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau
- <https://integritywatch.eu> – EU tool to monitor conflicts of interest and public disclosures

Other Countries to Compare with Singapore

Country	Why It's Relevant
Rwanda	Post-genocide trust rebuild through performance and strong justice systems
New Zealand	Highly trusted democracy with open data and citizen engagement
Estonia	Tech-forward country using e-governance to build transparency
Georgia	Radical anti-corruption reform in police and public service
Sweden	Culture of high civic trust and transparent budgeting

10. FAQs & Support

This section addresses your common questions—whether you're writing, debating, reflecting, or just trying to make sense of how trust works in real life.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q1: What if I don't relate to Singapore's system at all?

A: That's okay—and expected. You're not expected to agree with or adopt it. The goal is to **analyse what worked, why it worked**, and whether any elements can be **adapted to your own context**.

Q2: Is this case just about government?

A: No. It's about **how systems shape belief**—in fairness, accountability, and shared purpose. This affects schools, hospitals, courts, elections... and even your local street lighting.

Q3: How can I make my writing or speech more powerful?

A:

- Use **specific case insights** (e.g., CPIB, NS, transparency systems)
- Make your arguments **contextual, not theoretical**
- Highlight **tension and trade-offs**—not everything is perfect
- Show your values: What do you believe trust should look like?

Q4: What if I feel cynical—like trust can't be rebuilt?

A: That's a valid feeling. Many people do. This case helps show that **rebuilding is hard—but possible**. Trust is not an ideal—it's an outcome of choices, consistency, and courage.

Q5: Can I compare this to countries beyond Singapore?

A: Absolutely. That's highly encouraged. Use examples from:

- Your own country
- Global scandals and reform efforts
- High-trust societies like New Zealand or Estonia
- Post-conflict nations like Rwanda or Georgia

Where to Go for Help

Need Help With...	Go To...
Clarifying the Singapore case	Revisit Chapter 10 + classroom discussion
Finding trust-related data	Use Transparency International or Edelman reports
Structuring your assignments	Review the assignment rubrics in Section 6 or ask your instructor
Exploring global case studies	See Section 9: Additional Resources
Peer brainstorming or feedback	Join group chats, peer reviews, or office hours with your facilitator

Final Encouragement

**“Public trust isn’t abstract.
It’s how we know our voices matter—and our systems care.”**

This case is not the end of your learning.
It’s the beginning of your **leadership in shaping a future that’s worthy of trust.**