Author's Note

Most discussions about regulation and trust focus on a familiar problem: the public's declining trust in government institutions. This book takes a different approach by examining a crucial but overlooked challenge: democratic governments' struggle to understand when, why, and to what extent citizens willingly cooperate with policies. At its heart, this book explores a paradox: While voluntary compliance – where people follow rules because they want to rather than because they're forced to – produces better results, regulators rarely truly rely on it.

Current research in psychology and related fields suggests that when people comply voluntarily, the results are better across multiple dimensions: compliance lasts longer, spreads to other areas of behavior, and produces higher quality outcomes than when people comply out of fear of punishment or desire for rewards. However, it remains unclear which regulatory tools and methods are likely to foster this sense of voluntariness and even less clear how to determine whether softer regulatory approaches genuinely lead to more voluntary responses. In the last decade, we've seen a significant shift toward "softer" regulatory approaches that try to build on trust and cooperation rather than force. These include self-regulation, nudges, public pledges, voluntary compliance programs by corporations, and new types of regulatory bodies that work alongside traditional enforcement agencies. Yet despite these changes and the clear benefits of voluntary compliance, most regulators remain reluctant to trust the public's willingness to cooperate.

Drawing on diverse fields – including regulation theory, behavioral ethics, public policy, and research on social cooperation – this book examines both the promise and challenges of voluntary compliance in modern governance. It asks fundamental questions: How can we identify which regulatory approaches best encourage lasting, high-quality compliance? Why do regulators keep falling back on traditional tools like monitoring, incentives, and punishments, even when these methods often undermine people's natural motivation to comply and can lead to worse outcomes over time? As the book develops, it becomes clear that regulators' hesitation is not without merit, given the limits of current empirical evidence on voluntary compliance and the challenges of government attempting to achieve compliance without coercion.

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The book's first three chapters build a new framework for understanding three interconnected concepts: voluntary compliance, intrinsic motivation, and crowding out (how external pressures can weaken internal motivation). They examine how softer regulatory approaches, which are based on trust, legitimacy, and reasoning, can work together to create effective voluntary compliance across different personal, situational, regulatory, and cultural settings. Currently, two major gaps limit our understanding: We don't fully grasp how intrinsic motivation works or how exactly crowding out affects compliance behavior. These gaps make it difficult to see how different regulatory approaches might complement rather than conflict with each other.

Chapters 4–7 work to precisely define "effective voluntary compliance" and distinguish it from similar concepts. The book brings together diverse research to evaluate trust-based regulatory approaches through specific measurable indicators: compliance duration, positive societal ripple effects, rule internalization, and impacts on trust and social connections. This analysis helps identify which regulatory tools best encourage willing cooperation while protecting people's internal motivation to do the right thing.

The book then tackles several critical challenges to voluntary compliance's effectiveness. One major concern is distributive fairness: What happens when some people cooperate while others take advantage of regulators' trust? Another challenge emerges when governments try to influence people's internal motivations rather than just their behavior – potentially crossing into problematic territory from a liberal perspective. Chapter 7 explores how modern technology might help protect cooperation and enable regulators to treat cooperators and noncooperators differently, while Chapter 6 examines how cultural differences affect voluntary compliance outcomes.

To ground these theoretical insights, the book examines voluntary compliance in three regulatory areas: tax collection, healthcare policy (primarily COVID-related), and environmental protection. These case studies compare approaches based on legitimacy, moral appeal, and reputation. The research reveals important limitations in our current understanding, including inconsistent findings and relatively small effects of intrinsic motivation on compliance.

The concluding chapters of this book wrestle with the complex implications of voluntary compliance for democratic societies while offering practical guidance for regulatory implementation. While the research strongly advocates for trust-based regulation and procedural justice as long-term drivers of societal improvement and social capital development, it also acknowledges significant limitations. A key constraint emerges from the book's emphasis on ensuring rather than merely enhancing compliance – the persistent reality of substantial noncompliance challenges widespread implementation of purely trust-based approaches. Though research consistently demonstrates that procedural justice and legitimacy reliably predict compliance, they cannot guarantee universal adherence and, in some contexts, the cost of misplaced trust may prove too high. Nevertheless, the book maintains its

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fundamental commitment to public trust as a long-term regulatory strategy, even while recognizing the short-term risks this approach may entail.

Chapter 11 provides a practical taxonomy for navigating this tension, offering regulators a framework to assess when trust-based approaches are most appropriate based on factors such as required compliance quality, necessary proportion of adherence, and potential costs of excessive trust. The conclusion presents actionable recommendations for governments seeking to foster citizen cooperation across varied cultural and regulatory contexts, advocating for a balanced approach that builds trust with proven reliable actors while maintaining appropriate oversight where needed. Throughout, the book argues that while voluntary compliance holds tremendous potential, its successful implementation requires sophisticated understanding of the interplay between rules, incentives, and human motivation. This understanding becomes crucial in avoiding the paradox where attempts to create a more trusting regulatory environment inadvertently result in more intrusive and discriminatory practices. Only by comprehending these nuanced dynamics can regulators design approaches that enhance rather than suppress people's natural cooperative tendencies.

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