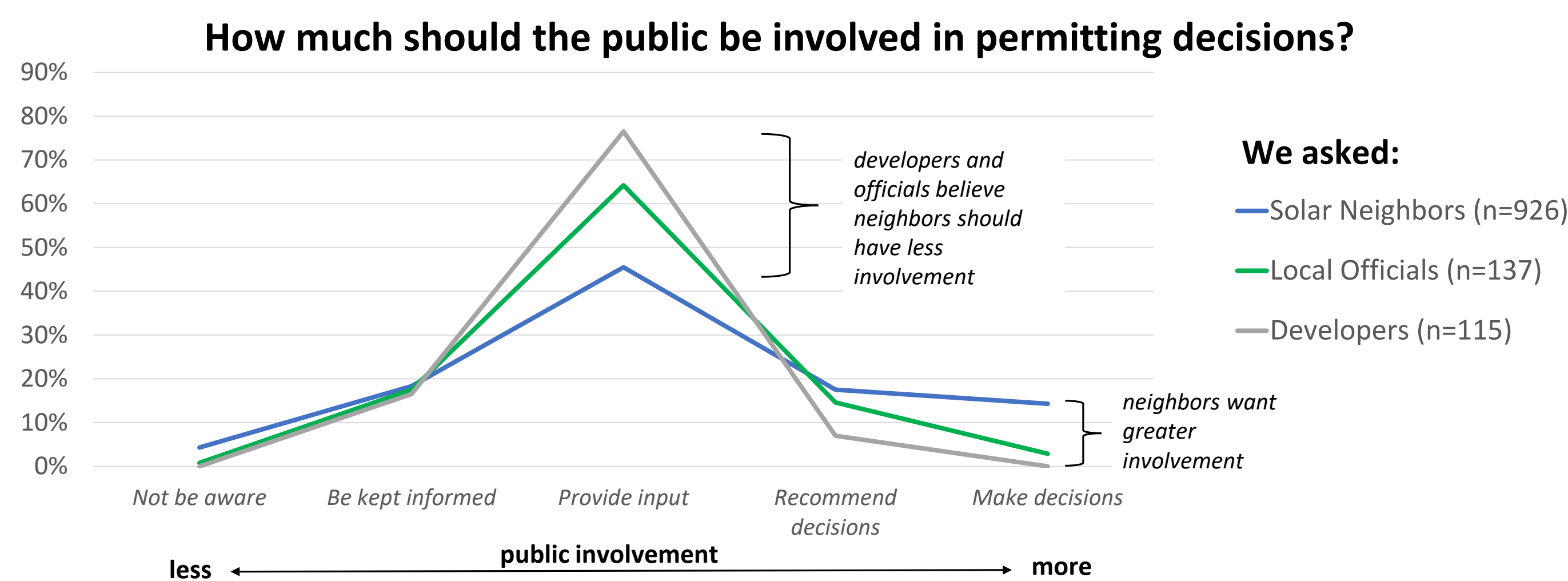


Developers and officials can be hesitant to involve the public. But some succeed by building trust before projects.

Voices from the Field: Insights on Large-scale Renewable Development from Industry, Residents, and Local Officials



Intro

The local social dynamics of wind and solar permitting are increasingly contentious. Community involvement can have a substantial impact on the success or failure of projects, but developers and officials often discourage public involvement in decision-making. This leads neighbors to trust them less. It also seems many officials distrust developers, only compounding the problem. Some developers have found ways to change this pattern, but often solutions need to be tailored to the each community.

Methods

- In 2023 & 2024, we surveyed three groups involved in large-scale (<1MW) wind & solar development:
 - Wind and solar developers
 - Local officials involved in planning and permitting in 8 'Wind Belt' states
 - Neighbors from residences within 3 miles of large-scale solar facilities
- We compared their experiences and perspectives on engagement practices, trust & permitting preferences

Results

- Project neighbors want more public involvement in decision-making than developers or even many local officials believe they should have.
- Neighbors are most likely to trust other neighbors, and officials are most likely to trust other officials.
- Neighbors are less likely to trust state officials compared to local officials or even developers.
- There is a lack of trusted intermediaries to navigate conflict or provide unbiased information.
- Developers know this is a problem, and shared examples of practices that have worked – many of these relate to building trust and responding to the specific community concerns.

Takeaways

Many neighbors have either no trust, or only a little trust in state officials

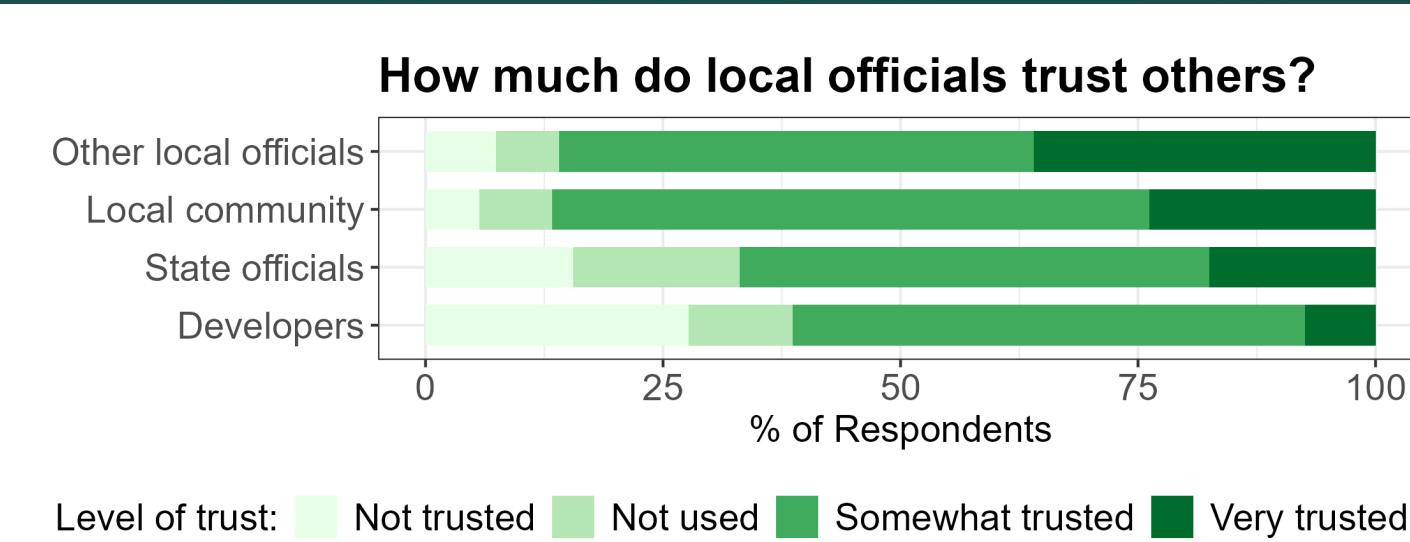
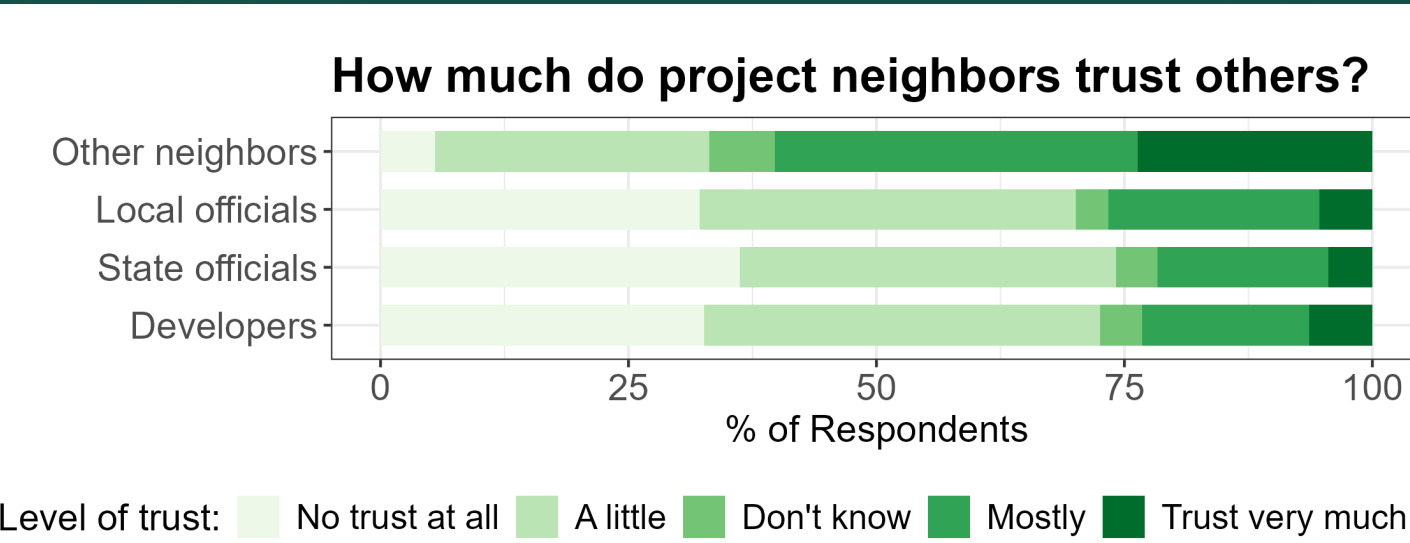
- Lesson: promoting state-level permitting authority is unlikely to improve trust with neighbors

Neighbors most likely to trust others who have similar experience

- Lesson: consider touring nearby existing projects

Local officials trust other local officials

- Lesson: encouraging them to network might be valuable



"Developers are not trusted (or unbiased) authorities on these issues nor are the third-party experts we bring into communities."

- Solar Developer

"All of the available information is all biased. Either it comes from the wind industry or it comes from people who are anti-wind."

-Local official in Kansas

- Actions that have facilitated project success**
- The county held a community visioning session to consider all industries currently in the area as well as wind power.
 - Landowners formed their own co-op for lease negotiations
 - Local site office and employed people from the area
 - Supported local events (e.g. county fairs) and charitable donations to local organizations
 - Tree-planting program for wind breaks and dust concerns
 - Preparing a meal and sitting down to eat together at the start of an open information session
 - Demonstrating success in nearby counties
 - Upfront active participation from the local utility (e.g. utility commitment to step in to help with decommissioning if needed)
- *The competitive nature of development means not all strategies are shared, as one solar developer told us: "This is asking me to give away secrets of my job."

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