

Drivers of trust in the civil service

The main drivers of public trust vary for different institutions and levels of government. Analysis based on the 2021 OECD Trust Survey finds that levels of trust in the civil service are most influenced by perceptions of government reliability, as well as the responsiveness and fairness of public services (OECD, 2022).

Reliability – the extent to which people are satisfied with administrative services, and are confident the government uses personal data legitimately and is prepared for a contagious disease – has the greatest potential impact on trust in the civil service. According to the OECD Trust Survey, 63.0% of respondents are satisfied with administrative services. A slight increase (one standard deviation) in satisfaction with such services, with all other conditions remaining the same, could lead to an increase in trust in the civil service of 6 percentage points (Figure 2.4). Other factors with a positive and statistically significant influence on trust in the civil service include the perception that both rich and poor are treated fairly when applying for public benefits, the perceived readiness of the civil service to adopt innovation, and feelings of having a say in what the government does. While these results show how important these governance factors are in promoting trust, the starting points vary: different factors have different existing levels of satisfaction. Across countries, only 30.2% of respondents on average feel they have a say in what the government does, while 58.5% believe their application for government benefits would be treated fairly – indicating that, although both would yield similar increases in trust in the civil service, governments have more room to improve in the former (Figure 2.4).

Informing the population about how their personal data are gathered, processed, stored and used is an important aspect of government efforts to improve perceived reliability and thereby increase trust in the civil service (Figure 2.4). On average across countries, 51.1% of people expect the government to use their personal data solely for legitimate purposes. Respondents in Denmark, Iceland, Ireland, the Netherlands and Norway have especially high levels of trust in the government's use of their data (Figure 2.5).

Agility in adopting new ideas is a key aspect of responsiveness and one of the drivers of trust in the civil service. The OECD Trust Survey finds that just 38% of people on average feel that a public agency would be likely to adopt innovative ideas to improve a public service, although there is variation across countries. People who expect such innovation are much more likely to trust civil servants (70%) than those who don't (33%). In all the countries surveyed, trust in the civil service is always higher among people who feel there is room for innovation in government, although the size of the trust gap varies widely (Figure 2.6).

Methodology and definitions

Trust is defined as a person's belief that another person or institution will act consistently with their expectations of positive behaviour (OECD, 2017). The OECD explores perceptions of public governance using nationally representative data from the OECD Trust Survey conducted across 22 countries. Most countries were surveyed in November-December 2021, with a few surveys taking place in 2020 and January-March 2022. The OECD Trust Survey aggregates 11-point response scales as follows: 0-4 = Low / unlikely; 5 = Neutral; 6-10 = High / likely. The OECD Trust Survey has significant country coverage (usually 2 000 respondents per country), which allows subgroup analysis and help ensure the reliability of results. For a detailed discussion of the survey method and implementation, please find an extensive methodological background paper at <https://oe.cd/trust>.

Further reading

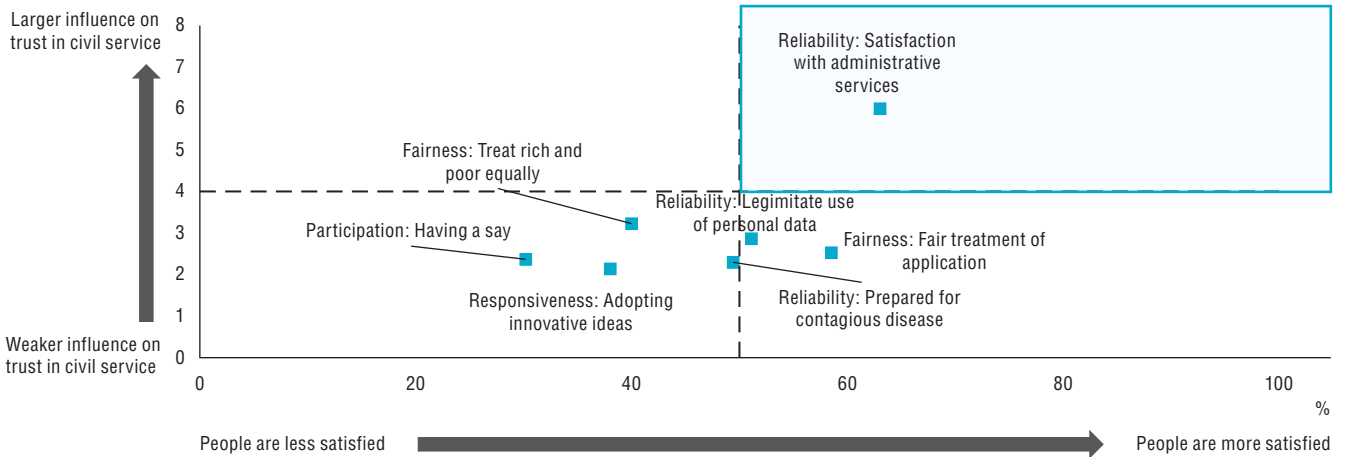
- OECD (2022), *Building Trust to Reinforce Democracy: Main Findings from the 2021 OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions*, Building Trust in Public Institutions, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/b407f99c-en>.
- OECD (2021), *Government at a Glance 2021*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/1c258f55-en>.
- OECD (2017), *OECD Guidelines on Measuring Trust*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264278219-en>.

Figure notes

- 2.4. Shows the most robust determinants of trust in civil service in a logistic estimation that controls for individual characteristics, levels of interpersonal trust, and country fixed effects. The model covers 18 countries; Finland, Mexico, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom are excluded due to missing variables. Only questions derived from the OECD Trust Framework, and those with highest coefficients, are depicted while individual characteristics such as age, gender, and education, which also may be statistically significant, are not shown.
- 2.5. Refers to question "If you share your personal data with a public agency/office, how likely or unlikely do you think it is that it would be exclusively used for legitimate purposes?". Likely corresponds to responses of 6-10 on 0-10 scale, neutral to 5 and unlikely to 0-4. Finland and New Zealand are excluded as data are not available.
- 2.6. Refers to the question "If there is an innovative idea that could improve a public service, how likely or unlikely do you think it is that it would be adopted by the responsible public agency/office?". Likely corresponds to responses of 6-10 on a 0-10 scale. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries. Mexico is excluded as data are not available. High or moderately high trust corresponds to responses of 6-10 to the question "On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely, how much do you trust each of the following? The civil service (non-elected government employees at central or local levels of government)."

2.4. Determinants of trust in the civil service, 2021

Percentage point change in trust in the civil service in response to improvements in selected variables (Y-axis), and share of the population who are satisfied with the variable (X-axis)

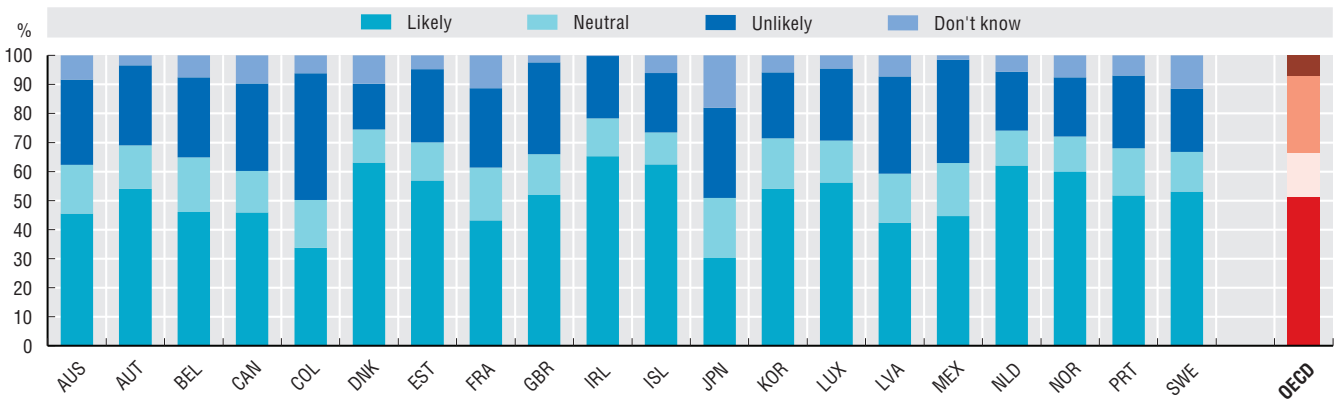


Source: OECD Trust Survey (<http://oe.cd/trust>).

StatLink <https://stat.link/xrk5d9>

2.5. Trust in government use of personal data, 2021

Share of respondents reporting different levels of perceived likelihood that their government would use personal data exclusively for legitimate purposes

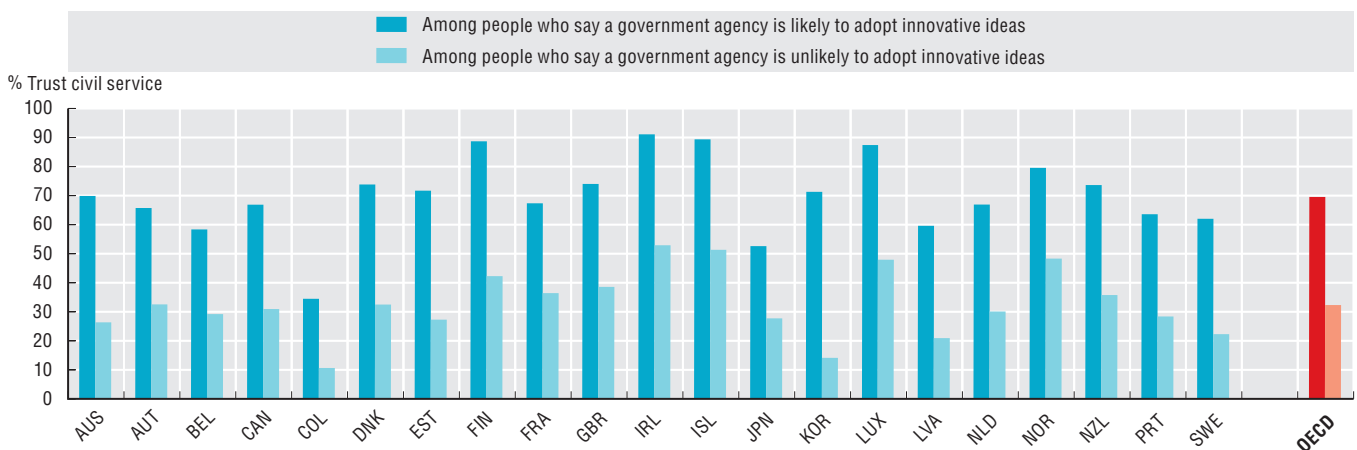


Source: OECD Trust Survey (<http://oe.cd/trust>).

StatLink <https://stat.link/3pfwyg>

2.6. Trust in the civil service and perceptions of government innovativeness, 2021

Share of respondents who indicate high or moderately high trust in the civil service, sorted by their perception that a government agency would or would not adopt an innovative idea



Source: OECD Trust Survey (<http://oe.cd/trust>).

StatLink <https://stat.link/afrdj0>



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