

2. TRUST AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

Levels of trust in public institutions

Trust is an important outcome indicator of public governance. Institutional trust is a multidimensional concept and provides a measure of how people perceive the quality of, and their association with, government institutions in democratic countries (OECD, 2022; Brezzi et al., 2021; OECD, 2017). Government investment in reinforcing trust is particularly important during times of multiple crises.

Trust in public institutions varies across countries, due to cultural, socioeconomic and institutional factors. Yet the first OECD Trust Survey found similar drivers of public trust among the countries surveyed (OECD, 2022).

Across the OECD countries surveyed, on average 41.4% of respondents have high or moderately high trust in their national government. Levels vary widely across countries, reaching over 60% in Finland and Norway, but falling below 30% in about one-quarter of countries. Trust also varies across public institutions. Local governments generally inspire more trust than national ones (46.9% of people say they have high or moderately high trust in their local government on average) and civil servants fare better than the local and national governments (50.2% report high or moderately high trust in the civil service). The courts and legal system enjoy the highest levels of trust (56.9%) but only 4 out of 10 respondents have high or moderately high trust in their legislature (Figure 2.1).

Most OECD countries are performing satisfactorily in public perceptions of government reliability, service provision, access to information, and preparedness for future crisis. However, governments are faring considerably less well in perceptions of governments' responsiveness to citizens' needs and wants, and citizens' participation, representation, and public integrity (OECD, 2022). Across OECD countries, women and those with lower levels of education and income report less trust in government. Perceived vulnerabilities seem to matter even more than current conditions: people who perceive themselves as financially insecure and, having a low social status, or feel they do not have a voice in what the government does, are consistently less trusting. On average, trust in the government among people who feel they have a say in the political system is 43 percentage points higher than among those who feel they do not (Figure 2.2).

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, trust levels varied substantially but did not plummet as drastically as during the financial crisis in 2008. On average it took about a decade for public trust to recover from the 2008 crisis across OECD countries. Trust in the national government has followed different trends in OECD countries over the last 15 years. In Northern Europe for example, trust has been rising almost constantly since 2015; since 2019, countries in the region have recorded some of the highest levels of trust in national government among OECD countries. Other regions, such as Central and South America and Central and Eastern Europe, have been experiencing mixed trends over the last 15 years (Figure 2.3).

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>.

The Gallup World Poll is a cross-national and longitudinal survey based on a nationally representative and probability sample of about 1 000 individuals where possible and in most countries. The survey is conducted as a mix of face-to-face and telephone surveys depending on the phone coverage in the country. Data were extracted in January 2023. For more information on the survey methodology please consult: <https://www.gallup.com/178667/gallup-world-poll-work.aspx>.

Further reading

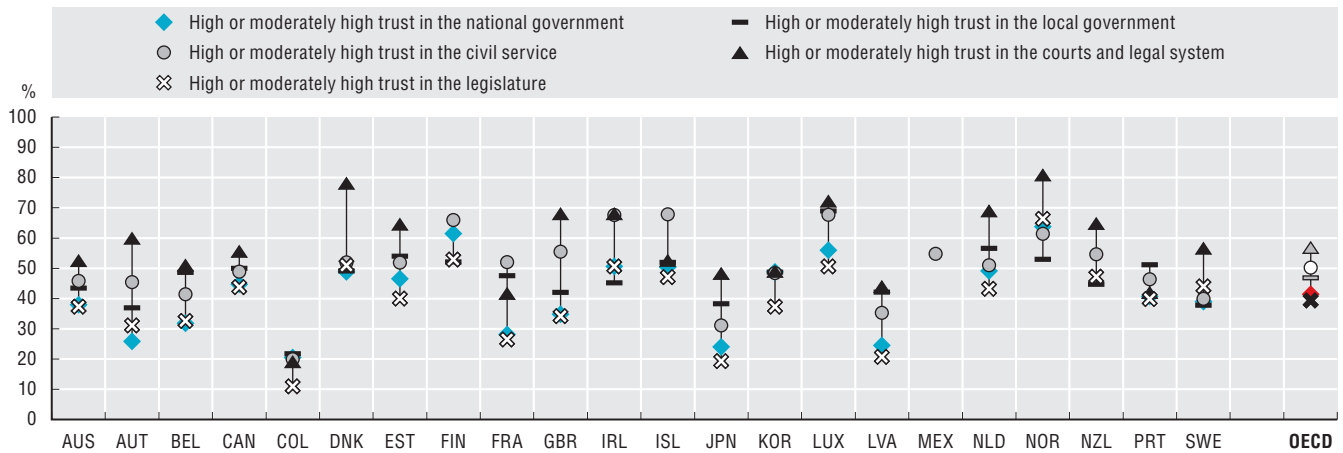
- OECD (2022), *Building Trust to Reinforce Democracy: Main Findings from the 2021 OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions*, Building Trust in Public Institutions, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/b407f99c-en>.
- Brezzi, M., et al. (2021), "An updated OECD framework on drivers of trust in public institutions to meet current and future challenges", *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance*, No. 48, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/b6c5478c-en>.
- OECD (2017), *OECD Guidelines on Measuring Trust*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264278219-en>.

Figure notes

- 2.1 and 2.2. Refer 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 the [national government / local government / civil service / courts and legal system / legislatures]?" High or moderately high trust corresponds to responses of 6-10. "OECD" is the unweighted average across countries. For Mexico, only data on trust in the civil service are available; for New Zealand, data for trust in national government are not available; for Finland, data on trust in courts and legal system and the legislature are not available.
- 2.2. Political voice refers to the question "How much would you say the political system in [country] allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?". High corresponds to responses of 6-10, low to 0-4. Neutral responses (corresponding to 5) are not included in the figure. Voted for incumbent party refers to responses to "Is the party you voted for in the last national election (or would have voted for if you didn't vote) currently part of the government?"
- 2.3. Refers to the share of respondents who answered yes to "In this country, do you have confidence in each of the following, or not? National government; Local government; Civil service; Courts and Legal System; Parliament/Congress". The only available answers were yes/no/don't know.

2.1. High and moderately high trust in national and local government, the civil service, the judiciary, and parliament, 2021

Share of respondents who indicate high or moderately high trust in various institutions

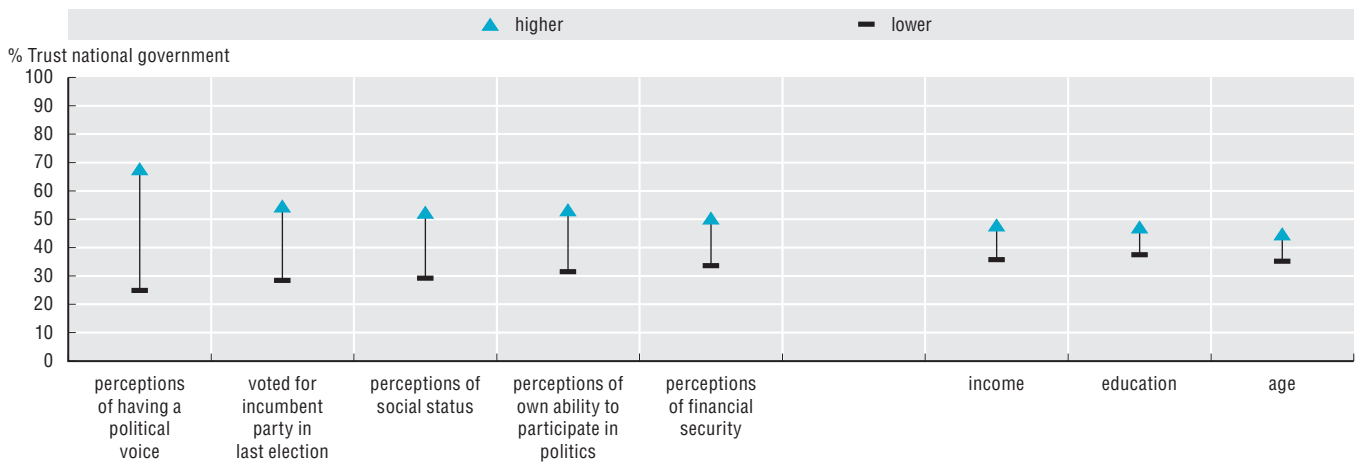


Source: OECD Trust Survey (<http://oe.cd/trust>).

StatLink <https://stat.link/vzho5u>

2.2. Trust in national government by subgroup, 2021

Share of respondents who indicate high or moderately high and low or no trust in national government by subgroups - OECD average

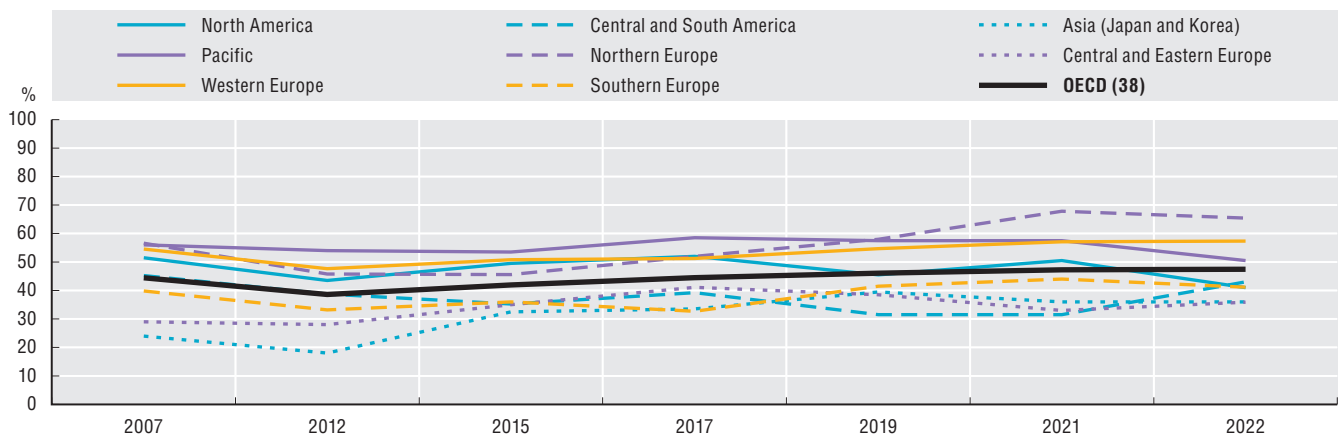


Source: OECD Trust Survey (<http://oe.cd/trust>).

StatLink <https://stat.link/8mkgqt>

2.3. Confidence in national government, 2007-22

Share of respondents who indicate confidence in national government



Source: Gallup World Poll, 2007-22.

StatLink <https://stat.link/gl8fi0>



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