

### Trust in government

Trust is defined as a person's belief that another person or institution will act consistently with their expectations of positive behaviour (OECD 2017a). Institutional trust is the basis upon which the legitimacy of governments is built and is key for ensuring compliance with regulations and the tax system; it is of essence for implementing reforms and ensuring governments' capacity to govern without resorting to force. There is consensus in the academic literature that trust influences the relationship between citizens and governments, and has an impact on the outcomes of public policy (OECD 2017b).

The most comprehensive source for internationally comparable trust data currently available is the Gallup World Poll covering all OECD countries and strategic partners. Trust levels vary widely across countries, spanning from above 70% in Luxembourg and Switzerland to 20% or less in Greece and Latvia. Yet, on average in 2018, trust levels in OECD countries are at 45%, a similar value to 2007 (pre-crisis) levels. Still, in a group of countries – primarily those severely affected by the last financial crisis – trust levels remain substantially below pre-crisis levels, as evidenced by sustained reductions from 2007 to 2018 in Slovenia (24 p.p.), Greece (22 p.p.), Finland (20 p.p.) and Spain (19 p.p.). At the other end of the spectrum, countries with sustained and better economic performance in comparative terms such as Germany (24 p.p.), Poland (24 p.p.), Switzerland (22 p.p.) and Israel (20 p.p.) have experienced increases in levels of trust in government during the same period.

Trust along generational lines shows statistically significant differences within countries. In 2018, young people (aged 15-29) trusted government more than those 50 years and older in the Netherlands (by 15p.p.), Finland (by 8 p.p.), Lithuania (by 8 p.p.), Italy (by 8 p.p.) and Belgium (by 6 p.p.) While the explanation for these differences could be manifold and country specific, a plausible reason is that younger cohorts report higher trust as students who are benefiting, or have recently benefited, from public education. On the contrary, those aged 50 and over report higher trust levels than their younger cohorts in countries such as Hungary (by 26 p.p.), Turkey (by 15 p.p.), Chile (by 13 p.p.), France (by 14 p.p.) and Poland (by 13 p.p.). Similarly, explanations for these differences are diverse but could be related to youth perceptions regarding lack of opportunity and/or perceptions of not being able to reach a life standard similar to that of older generations.

Trust in government remains a key measure of government performance, yet it is a multidimensional concept influenced by factors beyond economic performance, or generational divides such as public governance elements, among which public sector integrity, most profoundly. The perception of government corruption in OECD countries has a strong negative relationship with levels of trust in government. Further evidence and analysis on institutional

trust and its drivers could contribute to tailoring policies to restore or sustain trust levels in OECD countries and beyond.

#### Methodology and definitions

Data are derived from the Gallup World Poll (GWP), which uses a statistically representative sample, generally of about 1 000 citizens in each country. However, in some countries samples may be smaller and/or refer exclusively to the capital or largest cities. The GWP includes questions on confidence in financial institutions, the judicial system, local police, the military and national government as well as a question on the approval of political leadership. The question on confidence in the national government does not differentiate between politicians and the bureaucracy nor does it specify which parts of national government are assessed. More information on the Gallup World Poll can be found at: [www.gallup.com/services/170945/world-poll.aspx](http://www.gallup.com/services/170945/world-poll.aspx).

#### Further reading

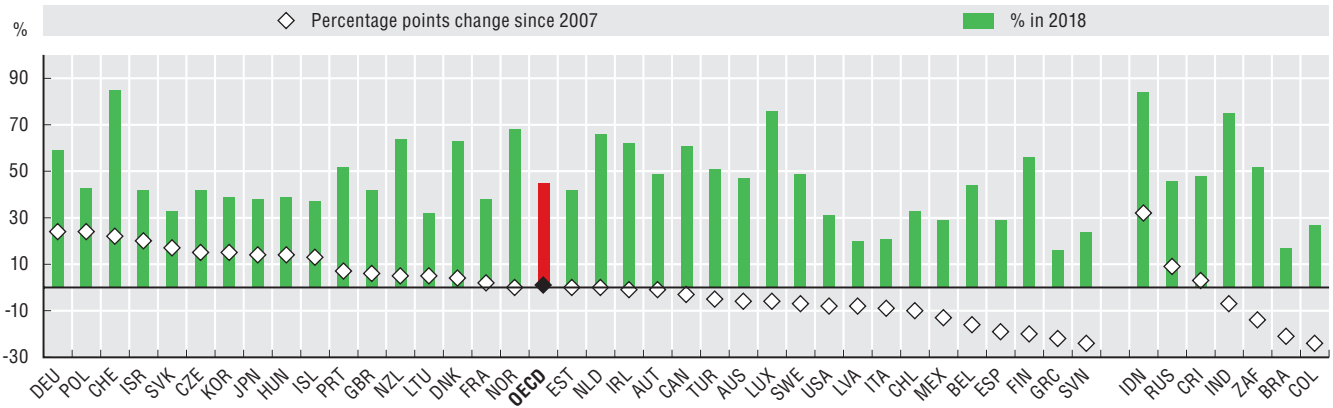
- OECD/KDI (2018), *Understanding the Drivers of Trust in Government Institutions in Korea*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264308992-en>
- OECD (2017a), *OECD Guidelines on Measuring Trust*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264278219-en>.
- OECD (2017b), *Trust and Public Policy: How Better Governance Can Help Rebuild Public Trust*, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264268920-en>.

#### Figure notes

On data for Israel, see <http://doi.org/10.1787/88893231560210.1>:

- 10.1. Data refer to the percentage who answered “yes” to the question: “Do you have confidence in national government?” Data for Iceland are for 2017 rather than 2018. Data for Austria, Finland, Ireland, Norway, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Switzerland are for 2006; data for Iceland and Luxembourg are for 2008 rather than 2007.
- 10.2. Data for the 15-29 age group are not available for Australia, Iceland, Japan and Slovenia. For the 15-29 age group data for Finland and New Zealand are for 2017 rather than 2018. Also, 95% confidence intervals represented by H.
- 10.3. Data refer to the percentage who answered “yes” to: “Is corruption widespread throughout the government in this country, or not?” Data for Iceland are 2017 for rather than 2018.

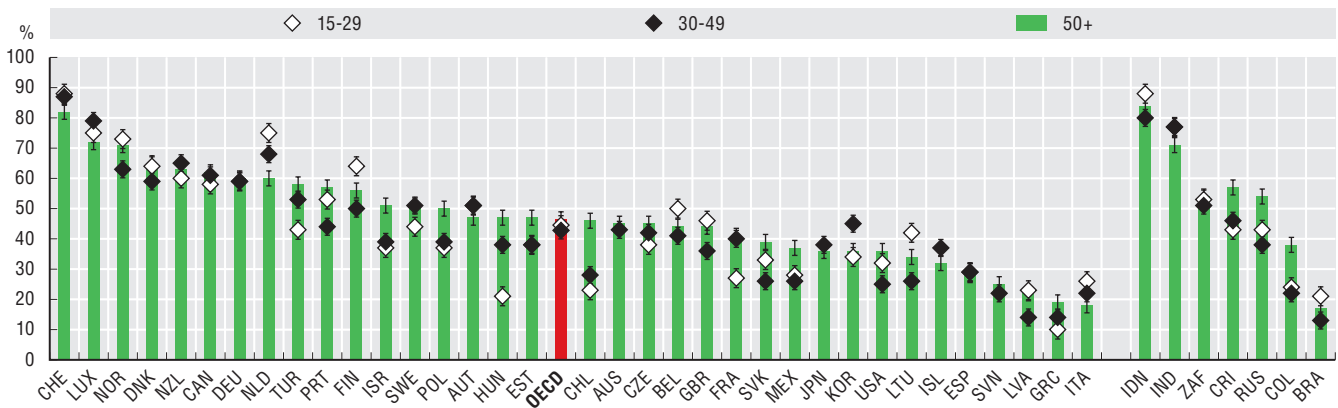
10.1. Confidence in national government in 2018 and its change since 2007



Source: Gallup World Poll, 2018

StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934033137>

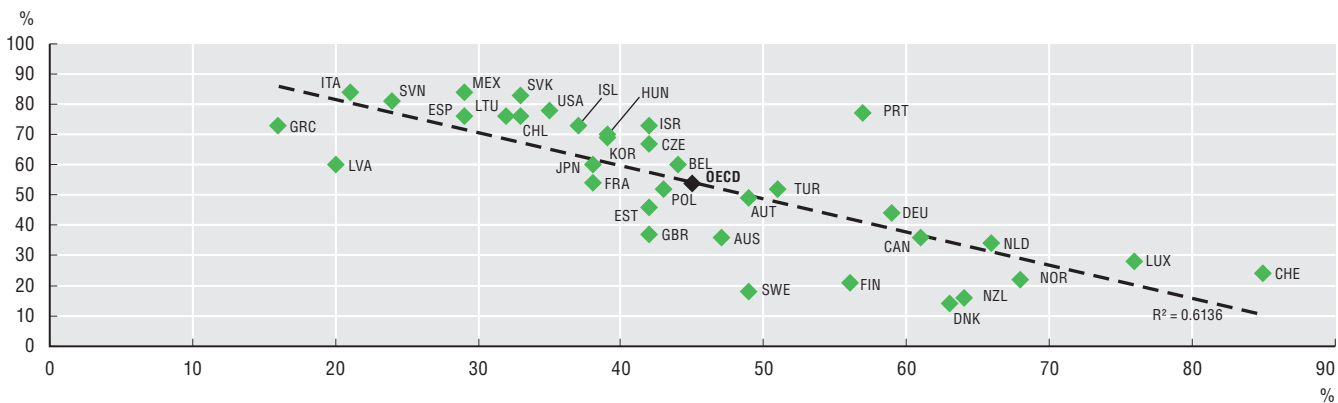
10.2. Confidence in national government by age group, 2018



Source: Gallup World Poll, 2018

StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934033156>

10.3. Correlation between confidence in national government and perception of government corruption in OECD countries, 2018



Source: Gallup World Poll, 2018

StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934033175>



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