Building Trust in Public Institutions

Building Trust to Reinforce Democracy

MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE 2021 OECD SURVEY ON DRIVERS OF TRUST IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

OECD
Reinforcing Democracy Initiative

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Foreword

The inaugural OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions (Trust Survey) offers a modern measurement tool for public governance. The Trust Survey is the first cross-national investigation dedicated to identifying the drivers of trust in government, across levels of government and across institutions. It is a nationally-representative survey, run in 22 countries, evaluating citizens' confidence in public institutions. The questions in the survey build on the OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions, developed over the past decade by the Public Governance Committee, as well as on a series of OECD country studies and research projects exploring how to build trust in government.

The 22 countries participating in the Trust Survey have opted into the process, voluntarily opening themselves up to constructive feedback. The OECD Secretariat has benefitted from strong engagement from the Public Governance Committee and Trust Survey Advisory Group throughout this work.

These findings will serve as an important input to the OECD Ministerial on Building Trust and Reinforcing Democracy to be held in November 2022. Public trust in government institutions underpins the key pillars of the Ministerial: improving public governance responses to misinformation and disinformation; improving representation and participation in public life and citizen-focused public services; and embracing the global responsibilities of public institutions. These governance challenges are overlaid by two horizontal themes: embedding and prioritising climate change, and harnessing digitalisation for better democratic governance.

This report was approved and declassified by the Public Governance Committee on 9 June 2022 and prepared for publication by the Secretariat.

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The report was written by Valerie Frey (Chapters 1, 2, 4, 6), David Nguyen (Chapter 3), and Sarah Hermanutz (Chapter 5). Statistical support was provided by David Nguyen, Injeong Hwang, Sina Smid and Alessandro Lupi. The report greatly benefitted from comments provided by Monica Brezzi, Santiago Gonzalez, Mariana Prats, and Barbara Baredes. Meral Gedik and Thibaut Gigou prepared the report for publication and dissemination, and Vanessa Berry-Chatelain, Gillian Dorner, Justin Kavanagh, Camila Saffirio and Andrea Uhrhammer supported communication.

The report benefitted from extensive feedback provided by Delegates to the OECD Public Governance Committee and members of the Advisory Group for the Trust Survey. The Advisory Group for the Trust Survey, comprised of public officials, national statistical offices, and academic researchers, also provided guidance and constructive feedback on questionnaire content, design and translation in local languages and on survey methodology. Delegates to the Committee of Statistics and Statistical Policy also provided useful comments on survey method.

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ISO country codes

AUS	Australia	**JPN**	Japan
AUT	Austria	**KOR**	Korea
BEL	Belgium	**LVA**	Latvia
CAN	Canada	**LTU**	Lithuania
CHL	Chile	**LUX**	Luxembourg
COL	Colombia	**MEX**	Mexico
CRI	Costa Rica	**NLD**	Netherlands
CZE	Czech Republic	**NZL**	New Zealand
DNK	Denmark	**NOR**	Norway
EST	Estonia	**POL**	Poland
FIN	Finland	**PRT**	Portugal
FRA	France	**SVK**	Slovak Republic
DEU	Germany	**SVN**	Slovenia
GRC	Greece	**ESP**	Spain
HUN	Hungary	**SWE**	Sweden
ISL	Iceland	**CHE**	Switzerland
IRL	Ireland	**TUR**	Republic of Türkiye
ISR	Israel	**GBR**	United Kingdom
ITA	Italy	**USA**	United States

For this first edition of the Survey, some of the graphics are formatted in a way that differs from usual OECD practice. It is expected that, in future editions, data will be presented in line with OECD graphics guidelines.

Executive summary

The inaugural OECD Survey on the Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions (Trust Survey) is a new measurement tool for democratic governments seeking to improve public confidence in government reliability, responsiveness, integrity, fairness and openness. Twenty-two OECD countries volunteered to participate in the first wave of the programme, taking a collective step forward to measure and better understand what drives people's trust in public institutions in order to build further the resilience of their democracies. Most countries were surveyed in November-December 2021, with a few surveys taking place in 2020 and January-March 2022.

Trust is an important indicator to measure how people perceive the quality of, and how they associate with, government institutions in democratic countries. At the same time, high trust in public institutions is of course not a *necessary* outcome of democratic governance. Indeed, low levels of trust measured in democracies are only possible because citizens in democratic systems – unlike in autocratic ones – are free to report that they do not trust their government. The resilience of our democratic systems comes from the open public debate they foster, enabling them to improve and meet increasing citizen expectations.

Results of the survey vary significantly across countries due to a range of cultural, social, institutional and economic factors. Cross-national comparisons should thus be considered carefully. Nonetheless, the results show clear overall tendencies affecting OECD members and reveal common focal points for the future that do not preclude other important areas that may be more country-specific.

Overall, the results show that OECD countries are performing reasonably well on average on many measures of governance, such as citizens' perceptions of government reliability, service provision, and data openness. A majority of people, in most countries, are satisfied with access to information about administrative procedures and with the provision of healthcare and education. More than half of respondents, on average cross-nationally, trust their government to use their personal data only for legitimate purposes, and about six in ten think they would be treated fairly if they applied for a benefit. Only a third are concerned that their government would not be prepared for a future pandemic.

OECD governments, in short, are governing. These are the outcomes we expect from economically developed and mature democracies with stable governance.

Yet despite these good outcomes, as countries fight to emerge from the largest health, economic and social crisis in decades, trust levels decreased in 2021 (though they remain slightly higher than in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis). Public confidence is now evenly split between people who say they trust their national government and those who do not. Historical data show that it takes a long time to rebuild trust when it is diminished; it took about a decade, for example, for public trust to recover from the 2008 crisis. This is why countries urgently need to invest in re-establishing trust to tackle the policy challenges ahead.

In many countries, there exists a paradox of lower levels of confidence in many government institutions than in satisfaction with public service provision. At the more granular level, the judiciary, police, civil service and local governments tend to inspire more confidence than national governments, elected officials, political parties and parliaments and congresses.

This raises an important question: How can governments better connect with citizens and strengthen trust?

A key factor distinguishing democracy from other forms of government is equal opportunities for representation in decision-making. Many people in OECD countries see equal access to policy-making processes as falling short of their expectations.

Results from the survey, for example, illustrate that governments could do better in responding to citizens' concerns. Just under four in ten respondents, on average across countries, say that their government would improve a poorly performing service, implement an innovative idea, or change a national policy in response to public demands. And when considering more overtly political processes, around a third of citizens say the political system in their country lets them have a say.

Public perceptions of government integrity are also an issue. Just under half of respondents, on average across countries, think a high-level political official would grant a political favour in exchange for the offer of a well-paid private sector job, and about one-third predict a civil servant would accept money in exchange for speeding up access to a service.

Disadvantaged groups with less (real or perceived) access to opportunity and voice have lower levels of trust in government. Younger people, women, people living on low income, people with low levels of education, and people who feel financially insecure consistently report lower levels of trust in government. Political polarisation is related to trust, as well; those who did not vote for the incumbent government are much less likely to trust it. Across countries, there is a sense that democratic government is working well for some, but not well enough for all.

Democratic governments face additional challenges today. A high correlation between partisanship and trust in government suggests that polarisation may affect governments' ability to deliver effectively. Scepticism towards the news media suggests that a key component of democracy, access to reliable information, is today a factor of distrust. Around half of citizens think governments should be doing more to reduce climate change, while just over one-third are confident that countries will actually succeed in reducing their country's contribution to climate change.

Notwithstanding differences across countries, this analysis also provides a shared agenda for OECD governments to strengthen trust, reinforce democracy, and recommit to reducing inequalities. This report suggests that these goals must be targeted together. Governments cannot focus solely on the *outcomes* of policies but also on *processes* – especially if governments want to keep democratic institutions and norms intact.

To meet their citizens' increasing expectations, OECD governments will have to invest in improving the mechanisms through which they give all people a voice and are responsive to those voices. They will have to enhance integrity and fight undue influence, credibly address long-term challenges such as climate change, evaluate and communicate the effects of reforms on different socioeconomic groups, develop better governance models for information ecosystems, and regularly monitor public trust in institutions as part of broader assessments of government performance.

1 Measuring trust in government to reinforce democracy

Trust is an important indicator to measure how people perceive the quality of, and how they associate with, government institutions in democratic countries. This chapter presents a summary overview of the report *Building Trust to Reinforce Democracy*. It includes a discussion of the motivation behind the inaugural OECD Survey on the Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions (Trust Survey), presents the OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions, and summarises the key findings of the report.

Trust in government matters.

Public trust helps governments govern on a daily basis and respond to the major challenges of today and tomorrow: the ongoing health and economic crises, the longstanding rise in inequalities, population ageing, technological advances, and the existential threat of climate change. Sufficiently high levels of institutional trust can help governments reduce transaction costs – in governance, in society, and in the economy – and help ensure compliance with public policies. Trust can help foster public investments in challenging reforms and programmes that produce better outcomes. In democratic countries, moderately high levels of trust – along with healthy levels of public scrutiny – can help reinforce important democratic institutions and norms.

Yet just as public trust serves as an *input* to governance – helping or hindering policy implementation – public trust is an equally important *outcome* of governance. Trust is an expression of how people perceive their public institutions and what they expect of their government.

High trust in public institutions is not a necessary outcome of democratic governance, of course. Indeed, low levels of trust measured in democracies are only possible because citizens in democratic systems – unlike in autocratic ones – have much greater freedom to report that they do not trust their government. Critical views and constructive feedback can even be a sign of a healthy democracy. Yet trust remains an important indicator to measure how people perceive the quality of, and how they associate with, government institutions in democratic countries.

From a policy-making perspective, then, it is important for democratic governments to think holistically about both these inputs and outputs: how trust influences policy outcomes, and how trust is influenced by policy processes.

This report explores the relationship between governance and trust by analysing original data from the inaugural OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions (hereafter "Trust Survey"). Covering twenty-two OECD countries, the Trust Survey is the most thorough cross-national stocktaking of the complex relationship between public trust and democratic governance to date. It offers actionable ways forward to reinforce institutions and democratic cultures.

This report finds that most OECD governments are performing satisfactorily in public perceptions of government reliability, service provision, and data openness, although governments should still strive for better results in these areas. Governments are faring considerably less well, however, in perceptions of key features of advanced *democratic* governance. Few people see their government as responsive to their wants and needs, and many see high-level political officials as easily corruptible. Disadvantaged groups – young people, women, people with lower incomes and those with less education – are less likely to trust their government and are often sceptical that their government listens to them.

Governments must take a more holistic approach to building trust, considering both processes and outcomes. This means focusing in particular on how to address these perceptions of low government responsiveness and integrity, in order to consolidate the functioning of democratic societies. This will help advance the pandemic recovery and help address the significant policy challenges countries face today.

1.1. SETTING THE SCENE: A UNIQUE POINT IN TIME, BUT WITH LONGSTANDING STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES

The Trust Survey took place at a challenging time in most of the surveyed countries: November and December 2021, nearly two years into the COVID-19 pandemic. While most OECD countries saw an uptick in trust in government in 2020 around the start of COVID-19 – the so-called "rally around the flag" effect – by mid-2021 this trust had declined in many countries (Brezzi et al., 2021[1]). The Survey interviewed respondents in 13 of the 22 participating countries at the start of the fifth

wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe, which corresponded with rising case counts and interventionist measures like the closures of public places and the start of vaccine passes. Indeed, in several European countries, the start of Trust Survey interviews corresponded with new national lockdown measures.

Perhaps related to this, many of the European countries are clustered together in the survey results exhibiting moderate to low levels of trust (Figure 1.2). And across countries, "pandemic fatigue" has set in, perhaps especially in Asia – where the pandemic has been going on the longest.[1] The Trust Survey therefore presents a point-in-time[2] estimate of perceptions of government that, for some questions, represents a particular challenging period for self-assessment. These perceptions may also be influenced, to different degrees across countries, by more "objective" economic or social outcomes of governance, as well as underlying cultural or societal differences across countries.

At the same time, the vast majority of questions asked in the Trust Survey investigate structural and persistent features of governance that predate (and are likely minimally impacted by) the pandemic. These include, for example, questions about the perceived integrity of public servants, the fairness of government programmes, governments' responsiveness to public feedback, and the reliability of public services. These are structural traits of OECD governments that long preceded – and will long outlast – the current crisis. These questions are based on foundational concepts in the OECD Trust Framework (Box 1.2), which has been developed over the past decade with OECD governments' feedback.

OECD member countries' participation in the Trust Survey was optional. The twenty-two countries who volunteered to be in the survey have placed themselves under this microscope to understand better what is driving trust in government in their country and other countries – and to make use of this evidence to explore what policies may contribute to building trust, preserving it or restoring it. Potential levers may include engaging better with diverse populations, responding more effectively to citizens' needs and growing expectations, improving the design and delivery of public programmes, addressing integrity issues, and adopting public sector reforms that foster stronger, long-term commitments to the people. Such efforts, in turn, should help improve public trust in government institutions. Given the depth of challenges facing democracies going into the third year of the pandemic, the OECD is strongly committed to helping countries rebuild trust.

Countries' participation in the Trust Survey – in and of itself – represents a high degree of transparency and democratic accountability. It is an impressive commitment to public engagement.

Box 1.1. The inaugural OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions

The OECD explores the relationship between trust and governance using an original and comprehensive dataset of representative survey data across twenty-two countries: the OECD Trust Survey. Reflecting a long history of OECD work on this topic, this project represents the first cross-national survey devoted solely and extensively to measuring institutional trust and its determinants. The questions in the Trust Survey are based on foundational concepts in the OECD Trust Framework (Box 1.2), which, under the guidance of the OECD Public Governance Committee, lays out key drivers of trust in government.

Given the importance of citizen perceptions for the viability and success of public policies, survey measurements of public trust should become regular, modern instruments of public governance in OECD countries, alongside traditional outcome measures like government expenditures, programme coverage, national income and poverty rates. Among the many mechanisms and initiatives to engage citizens, population surveys are an important tool for consulting people and allowing them to voice their opinion. Regular population surveys allow governments to gather input, hear people's voices and inform policies accordingly. The Trust Survey, in particular, enables a careful look at the drivers of trust and levels of trust in different public institutions.

A brief overview of the survey method and documentation

The OECD Trust Survey, carried out by the OECD Directorate for Public Governance, has significant country coverage (usually 2000 respondents per country) across twenty-two countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Colombia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Ireland, Iceland, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The large samples facilitate subgroup analysis and help ensure the reliability of the results.

These surveys were conducted online by YouGov, by national statistical offices (in the cases of Finland, Ireland, Mexico, and the United Kingdom), by national research institutes (Iceland) or by survey research firms (New Zealand and Norway). The YouGov online surveys use a non-probability sampling approach with quotas to ensure that samples are nationally representative by age, gender, large region and education. The majority of the surveys conducted by YouGov took place in November and December 2021; the other surveys went into the field within a year of (before or after) that date. Mexico conducted face-to-face interviews focused on urban areas. For a short discussion of how different survey questions adapted to different national contexts, see Box 2.1 in Chapter 2.

For a detailed discussion of the survey method and implementation, please find an extensive methodological background paper at https://oe.cd/trust.

The survey process and implementation has been guided by an Advisory Group comprised of public officials from OECD member countries, representatives of National Statistical Offices and international experts. The OECD intends to continue to improve and conduct the survey on a regular basis in the coming years to help governments improve the way they govern, monitor results over time, and better respond to public feedback.

1.2. FOSTERING TRUST IN GOVERNMENT AND REINFORCING DEMOCRACY

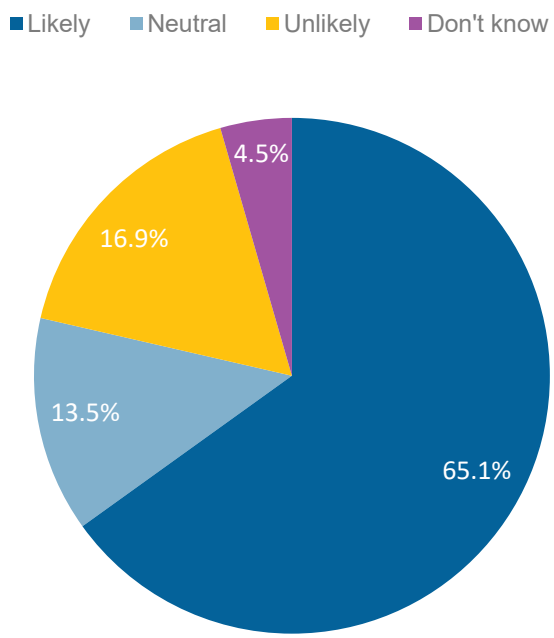
The underlying motivation of the OECD Trust Survey is to understand the *drivers of trust in government*. To what degree do a government's competence and values influence trust in public institutions? Survey questions measuring reliability, responsiveness, integrity, fairness and openness reflect the key components of the OECD Trust Framework (Box 1.2).

As the survey data were collated and analysed, however, it became apparent that the results not only illustrate strengths and weaknesses of governments through the rubric of the Framework. The data-driven results also tell an important story about the need to reinforce democracy in OECD countries.

OECD governments are doing satisfactorily on what might be considered baseline measures of effective governance in developed countries. 65.1% of respondents, on average, say they can find information about administrative processes easily (Figure 1.1). A slight majority (51.1%) trust government to use their personal data safely. A majority in most countries say they are satisfied with their national healthcare (61.7%, on average) and education systems (57.6%, on average). About half of respondents (49.4%), cross-nationally, predict that their government will be prepared for the next pandemic (Chapter 4).

Figure 1.1. A majority feels they can easily find information about administrative procedures

Share of respondents who indicate different levels of the likelihood that they could easily find information about administrative procedures (on a 0-10 scale), OECD unweighted average, 2021



Note: Figure presents the OECD unweighted average of responses to the question "If you need information about an administrative procedure (for example obtaining a passport, applying for benefits, etc.), how likely or unlikely do you think it is that the information would be easily available?" The "likely" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "unlikely" is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and "Don't know" was a separate answer choice. For more detailed information on the survey questionnaire and processes in specific countries, please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

StatLink https://stat.link/nrewua

There is still significant room for improvement in terms of service provision, information access, and future preparedness, and – importantly – some countries are doing much better than others. But in general, governments are doing reasonably well on these measures of reliability, service provision and access to information.

OECD governments, in short, are governing.

Yet a crucial factor distinguishing democracy from other forms of government is equal opportunities for representation in governance. Trust Survey data illustrate that people in OECD countries see these democratic aspects of governance, in particular, as falling short – both in more bureaucratic policy-making processes and in more explicitly political, democratic processes. This discontent is likely caused by a range of explanations, including socioeconomic outcomes that fall short of people's expectations for advanced democracies.

A basic signal of this discontent is the Trust Survey's topline finding on trust. Only about four in ten respondents (41.4%), on average across countries, trust their national government (Figure 1.2). Of course, this average conceals wide variation. The share of people who trust their government reaches over 60% of the population in places like Finland and Norway, but rates are below 30% in about a quarter of countries.[3]

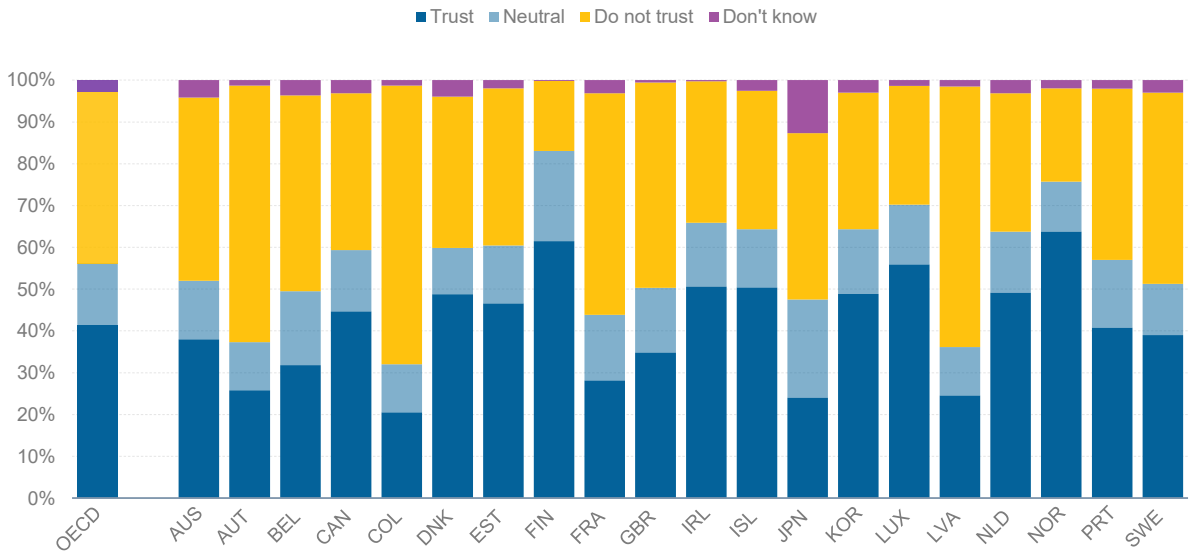
While fewer than half of respondents trust their national government, on average, it is worth noting that this does not mean a majority *distrusts* their government. In fact the share that trust and that do not trust are practically evenly split: 41.1%, on average, report that they do not trust their government.

Importantly, in some countries there is also a high degree of neutrality and uncertainty around this question of trust. 14.8% of respondents, on average, hold a neutral position – neither trusting nor distrusting their government – and about 3%, on average, report that they do not know. This group may be important, as they could perhaps be better engaged and persuaded by governments.

Cultural differences across countries may also explain the relative shares of neutral and uncertain responses to questions on trust in different institutions. Japan, for example, has high shares of respondents who either feel neutrally about trust in government or selected "Don't know," which is not associated with a number value on the scale. Taken together, a solid majority of respondents (60.2%) in Japan either trust government, hold a neutral view, or report they are unsure whether they trust government. Related to this, the share of respondents who do *not* trust government in Japan is below the OECD average of people who do not trust government. This suggests relatively high neutrality and an important flexibility in terms of trust in government in Japan. These midrange results for Japan are seen across several results in the survey (Box 2.1).

Figure 1.2. Just over four in ten people trust their national government

Share of respondents who indicate different levels of trust in their national government (on a 0-10 scale), 2021



Note: Figure presents the within-country distributions of responses 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?" Mexico and New Zealand are excluded from the figure as the question on trust in national government is not asked. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries. For more detailed information, please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

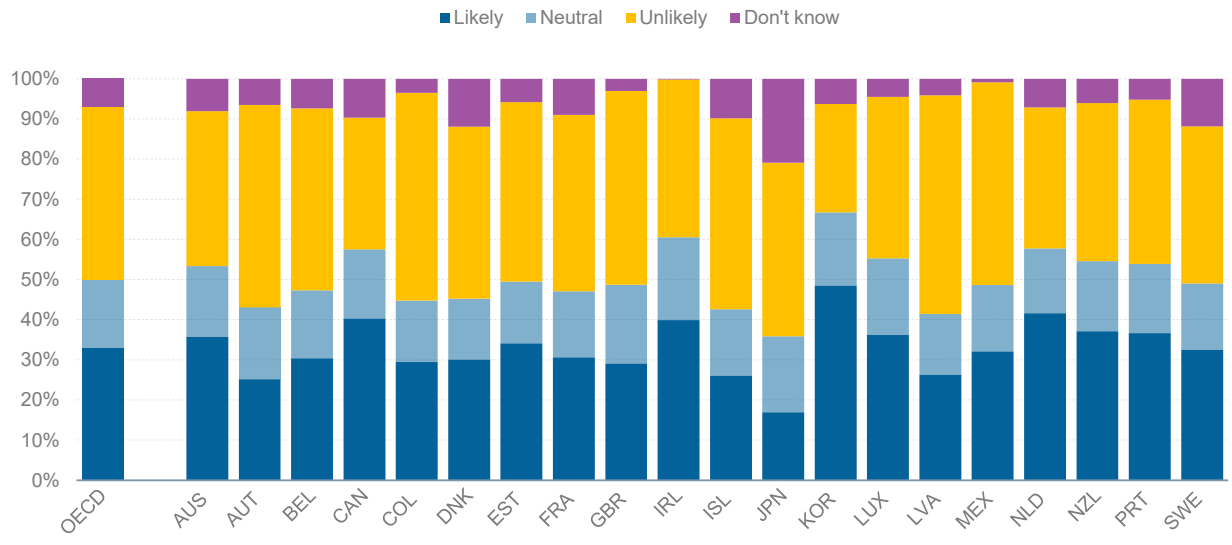
StatLink https://stat.link/jlkt6v

This finding on trust is driven, in large part, by a lack of confidence in government responsiveness, integrity, and equal opportunities. Results from multiple questions in the Trust Survey consistently illustrate that governments are seen as unresponsive to people's demands both in policy making and in more obviously democratic processes. Only one third of people (32.9%) think their government would adopt opinions expressed in a public consultation, for example (Figure 1.3). And only about four in ten respondents, on average across countries, say that their government would improve a poorly performing service, implement an innovative idea, or change a national policy in response to public demands (Chapter 5). When considering more overtly democratic political processes, only three in ten say the political system in their country lets them have a say.

Results on perceptions of government integrity are similarly concerning. There is widespread scepticism around the integrity of policy makers: almost half of respondents (47.8%), on average across countries, think a high-level political official would grant a political favour in exchange for the offer of a well-paid private sector job, and over one-third (35.7%) of respondents, on average across countries, consider it likely that a public employee would accept money by a citizen or a firm in exchange for speeding up access to a public service (Chapter 5).

Figure 1.3. Very few think that their government would adopt opinions expressed in a public consultation

Share of respondents who indicate different levels of perceived likelihood that a government would adopt opinions expressed in a public consultation (on a 0-10 scale), 2021



Note: Figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If you participate in a public consultation on reforming a major policy area (e.g. taxation, healthcare, environmental protection), how likely or unlikely do you think it is that the government would adopt the opinions expressed in the public consultation?" Finland and Norway are excluded from the figure as the data are not available. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries. For more detailed information, please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

StatLink https://stat.link/c7jpkt

These feelings of disempowerment – a lack of voice in policy making, and the sense that political officials are captive to undue influence – are compounded by persistent, underlying inequalities in society.

The most vulnerable in society – youths, people living on low incomes, those with lower levels of education, and those who feel financially insecure – consistently report lower levels of trust and satisfaction with government (Chapter 3). There is a widespread sense that democratic government is working for some, but certainly not for all.

Box 1.2. The OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions

The Trust Survey is the result of the OECD's long prioritisation of the issue of trust in government. After the 2008 global financial crisis eroded trust in governments, with profound implications for countries' democratic foundations, countries at the 2013 OECD Ministerial Council Meeting called for "strengthen[ed] efforts to understand trust in public institutions and its influence on economic performance and well-being". Following this call, the OECD built a conceptual framework – the OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions – and statistical guidelines for measuring the drivers of trust in public institutions. These were tested in few countries via the OECD TrustLab project (OECD, 2018[2]; OECD, 2017[3]; OECD, 2017[4]; González and Smith, 2017[5]).

Following country reviews in Korea (OECD/KDI, 2018[6]), Finland (OECD, 2021[7]), and Norway (OECD, 2022[8]), the OECD Public Governance Committee in 2021 endorsed a cross-national survey to take stock of trust in government institutions, apply the theoretical foundations of the Trust Framework, and better understand the drivers of trust – and the OECD Trust Survey was born.

Defining trust and its determinants

The OECD defines trust as "a person's belief that another person or institution will act consistently with their expectation of positive behaviour." Trust offers people confidence that others, individuals or institutions, will act as they might expect, either in a particular action or in a set of actions (OECD, 2017[4]). While trust is influenced by actual experience and facts, it is often a subjective phenomenon based on interpretations or perceptions (OECD, 2021[7]). The OECD definition is informed by over half a century of academic research across disciplines like economics, political science, psychology and sociology (Levi and Stoker, 2000[9]; Norris, 2022[10]).[1]

The framework identifies five main drivers of trust in government institutions. They capture the degree to which institutions are responsive and reliable in delivering policies and services, and act in line with the values of openness, integrity and fairness. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the Framework has been reviewed through a consultative process entitled "Building a New Paradigm for Public Trust," which engaged over 800 policy makers, civil servants, researchers, data providers and representatives from the private and non-profit sectors across six webinars between 2020 and 2021 (OECD, 2021[11]). This process led to a revision of the Framework intended to guide public efforts to recover trust in government during and after the crisis, with a particular focus on building back more inclusively, e.g. by taking into account socioeconomic, political and cultural differences, and by generating buy-in to address challenging, long-term, intergenerational issues like climate change. These drivers interact to influence people's trust in public institutions and are compounded by countries' economic, social and institutional situations.

Table 1.1. OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions

Levels of trust in different public institutions		
Trust in national government, local government, civil service, parliament, police, political parties, courts, legal systems and intergovernmental organisations		
Public Governance Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions		
Competencies	*Responsiveness*	• Provide efficient, quality, affordable, timely and citizen-centred public services that are co-ordinated across levels of government and satisfy users. • Develop an innovative and efficient civil service that responds to user needs.
	Reliability	• Anticipate needs and assess evolving challenges. • Minimise uncertainty in the economic, social and political environment.
Values	*Openness*	• Provide open and accessible information so the public better understands what government is doing. • Consult, listen, and respond to stakeholders, including through citizen participation and engagement opportunities that lead to tangible results. • Ensure there are equal opportunities to be part of and participate in the institutions of representative democracy.
	Integrity	• Align public institutions with ethical values, principles, and norms to safeguard the public interest. • Take decisions and use public resources ethically, promoting the public interest over private interests while combating corruption. • Ensure accountability mechanisms between public institutions at all levels of governance. • Promote a neutral civil service whose values and standards of conduct uphold and prioritise the public interest.
	Fairness	• Improve living conditions for all. • Provide consistent treatment of businesses and people regardless of their background and identify (e.g. gender, socio-economic status, racial/ethnic origin).
Cultural, Economic and Political Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions		
• Individual and group identities, traits, and preferences, including socio-economic status; interpersonal socialisation and networks. • Distrust of and disengagement from the political system.		
Perception of government action on intergenerational and global challenges		
• Perceptions of government commitment to and effectiveness in addressing long-term challenges.		

Source: (Brezzi et al., 2021[1])

1. Many academic definitions of trust include a component of vulnerability or uncertainty on the part of the principle in a principle-agent relationship (where the principle is the public and the agent is government institutions/actors). This is implicit rather than explicit in the OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions, which attempts to measure determinants of trust.

Key findings of the report and areas for attention

Strengthening public trust in government is key to reinforcing democracy in OECD countries and building an inclusive recovery coming out of the pandemic. This report suggests that these goals must be targeted together. Governments cannot focus solely on the outcomes of policies but also on processes.

As we emerge from the crisis, and as governments understandably focus on social, economic and environmental outcomes, it is more important than ever that governments work to strengthen the democratic values and institutions that are the backbone of OECD governments today. By making the strengthening of trust between the public and their government an explicit objective of public policy, countries can reinforce democratic processes in all aspects of governance, across policy areas, while responding to evolving public expectations. This must be a whole-of-government approach across all levels of government, from civil servants to high-level political officials.

- **Respondents have reasonable levels of trust in their government's reliability**. Only a third (32.6%) of respondents, for example, say their government would not be prepared to respond to a future pandemic – a noteworthy outcome considering the ongoing human and economic costs of COVID-19 (Chapter 4).
- **Most people, in most countries,** report feeling satisfied with their national healthcare (61.7%) and education systems (57.6%), even in times of crisis (Chapter 4).
- **A majority are satisfied with administrative services** (63.0%). More than half of respondents (51.1%) trust their government to use their personal data safely (Chapter 4), and 65.1% of respondents, on average, say they can find information about administrative processes easily (Chapter 5). Those who perceive information to be open and transparent also have higher levels of trust in government.
- Despite these good outcomes, as countries fight to emerge from the largest health, economic and social crisis in decades, trust levels decreased in 2021 but remained slightly higher than in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis (OECD, 2021[12]). **The Trust Survey finds public confidence is evenly split between people who say they trust their national government and those who do not.** Data show that it takes a long time to rebuild trust when it is diminished; it took about a decade for trust to recover from the 2008 crisis. This is why countries urgently need to invest in re-establishing trust to tackle the policy challenges ahead.
- **Trust varies across institutions.** The police (67.1%), courts (56.9%), and civil service (50.2%) and local government (46.9%) garner higher levels of public trust than national governments (41.4%) and national legislatures like congresses and parliaments (39.4%)
- **Governments can do better in responding to people's concerns.** Less than half of respondents, on average across countries, expect that their government would improve a poorly performing service, implement an innovative idea, or change a national policy in response to public demands (Chapter 4). Fewer than one-third of respondents believe that the government would adopt opinions expressed in a public consultation (Chapter 5).
- **Public perceptions of government integrity is an issue.** Slightly less than half of respondents, on average across countries, think that a high-level political official would grant a political favour in exchange for the offer of a well-paid private sector job (Chapter 6). Around one-third say a public employee would accept money in exchange for speeding up access to a public service (Chapter 5).

- **Generational, educational, income, gender and regional gaps in trust illustrate that progress can be made in enhancing participation and representation for all.** Young people, respondents with low levels of education, and those living on low incomes report lower levels of trust in government than other groups. Perceptions are important, too – trust in government is noticeably lower for people feeling a sense of financial insecurity or a lack of political voice (Chapter 3). Perhaps related to this, trust in even apolitical government institutions is much lower among those who did not vote for the parties in power than those who did, suggesting deeply embedded polarisation.
- **Strengthening confidence in government's ability to address global challenges is a priority.** Governments face new threats in the form of disinformation/misinformation, unequal opportunities for representation and participation, and intergenerational, global, and existential crises like climate change. While half of the respondents, on average across countries, think the government should be doing more to reduce their country contribution to climate change, only 35.5% of respondents are confident that countries will actually succeed in reducing their contribution to climate change (Chapter 6).
- **OECD Trust Survey data can help governments to deliver better.** The Trust Survey provides for the first time a comprehensive view of people's expectations and assessments of government across 22 OECD countries. These data provide actionable evidence for countries to see what works and what does not as they make efforts to strengthen public trust.
- **These results serve as a call to action for OECD governments.** Governments must continue improving their reliability and preparedness for future crises, designing policies and public services with and for people, and enhancing transparency and communications to citizens around promises and results, as there is room for improvement and learning across and within countries in these areas.
- **Governments need to connect and engage better with citizens** in policy design, delivery and reform; safeguard and enhance people's ability to exercise effective political voice; ensure the integrity of elected officials; continuously measure and improve public service delivery; and ensure the inclusion of vulnerable and marginalised groups.

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NOTES

[1] Media articles on the extent of "pandemic fatigue" and protests against COVID-19 measures cover countries as varied as Austria (Gaigg, 2021[14]), Belgium, Japan (Kihara and Leussink, 2021[13]), the Netherlands (Henley, 2021[15]) and many other countries in which the survey was conducted.

[2] Other factors, too, can influence trust at a specific point in time, such as the timing of a survey within a political/electoral cycle (e.g. start or end of government mandate) or current events. Austria, for example, had two federal chancellors sworn in between October and December 2021. This likely affected Austria's results and complicates comparability. Portugal's survey ran in early 2022, right after a national parliamentary election.

[3] The results on trust in the national government roughly align with results found in other surveys, particularly in terms of country ordering. The OECD estimates of trust are slightly lower than in some other surveys because the OECD uses a "neutral" category in its continuous scale, rather than a dichotomous "trust"/"do not trust" response option.

2 How trustworthy is your government?

Public trust varies significantly across different institutions. The OECD Trust Survey asks respondents to indicate their level of trust in the national government, local government, civil service, the judiciary and legal system, political parties, parliaments and congresses, the media, intergovernmental organisations, and other people. This chapter presents cross-national levels of trust across these institutions and explores the degree to which different institutional traits – like reliability, responsiveness, integrity, openness and fairness – significantly correlate with levels of trust in OECD countries.

Key findings and areas for attention

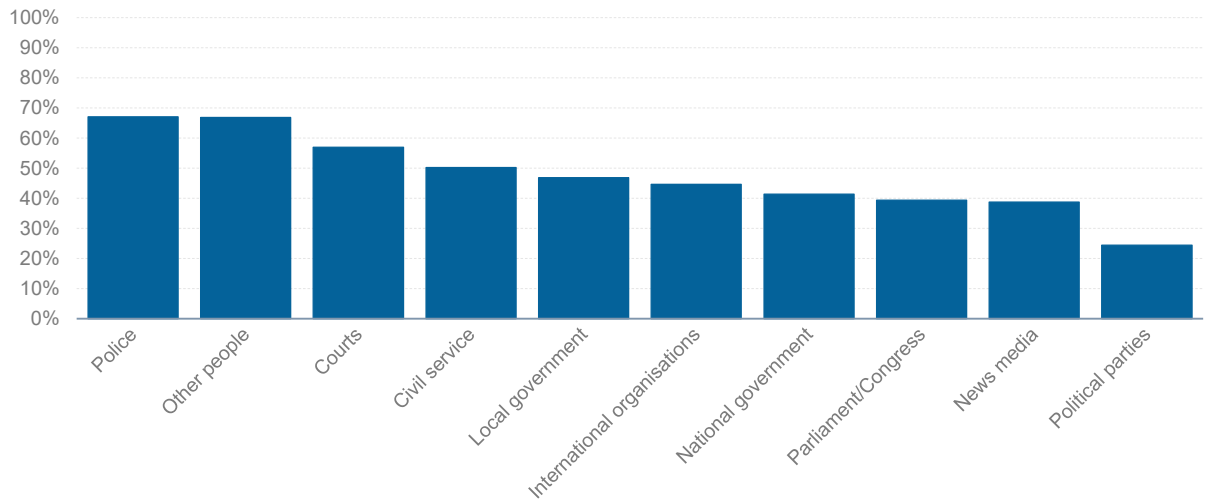
- The OECD Trust Survey asks respondents a series of straightforward questions exploring how much they trust different institutions of government. In response to these questions, only four out of ten people say that they trust their national government, on average across OECD countries. Local governments and civil servants fare slightly better: nearly half of respondents, cross-nationally, say they trust their local government, and a similar share trust civil servants. A majority of respondents trust the courts and the police in their country, while support is relatively low for political parties, legislative institutions like parliament and congress, and the media.
- Several measures of government reliability (e.g. future pandemic preparedness), perceptions of having a say in what the government does, government openness in accounting for views from a public consultation, and confidence in the government's capacity to enact future-oriented reforms have the most statistically significant relationships with trust in national government.
- Perceptions of government reliability, fairness and responsiveness have a statistically significant relationship with trust in the civil service. Satisfaction with administrative services, perception of fairness by public employees in treating different people or applications for public benefit, confidence in the government's use of data for legitimate purposes, feelings of having a say in what the government does, and responsiveness of government agencies to adopt innovative ideas have the most statistically significant relationships with trust in the civil service.
- Perceptions of government openness, reliability and responsiveness is strongly related to trust in local government. People's perceptions that they can voice views on local government decisions and have a say in what the government does, together with satisfaction with administrative services, perception of government preparedness for future crises and responsiveness of public agencies to adopt innovative ideas are the variables with the strongest statistical relationships with trust in the local government.

What do people in OECD countries say when asked how much they trust different government institutions? Different institutions and actors elicit different responses. On average across countries, people tend to have high trust in other people. When thinking about government specifically, respondents on average trust their local government more than they trust their national government, and they trust civil servants most of all. Respondents also have fairly high levels of trust in institutions of justice, like the police, courts and the legal system. In contrast, representative legislative institutions, the media and political parties tend to fare the worst – across countries, respondents are most sceptical of these institutions (Figure 2.1).

It is worth noting that awareness of different levels and Ministries in government, as well as their differing responsibilities, can also vary enormously across countries. For this (and other) reasons, Trust Survey questions were adapted to fit local contexts and needs in participating countries, and should be continuously evaluated for cross-national comparability (Box 2.1).

Figure 2.1. Trust in other people and the police is relatively high, while political parties are viewed with scepticism

Share of respondents who report that they trust a given group or institution, unweighted OECD average, 2021



Note: Figure presents the OECD average of share of countries who reported they trust a given group or institution. Respondents were asked, "On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely, how much do you trust [insert name of institution]?" In this report, results 0-4 are grouped as not trusting; a result equal to 5 is considered neutral; and results 6-10 are grouped as trusting. Respondents could also choose the answer choice "Don't know." For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

StatLink https://stat.link/qzi3nc

Box 2.1. Improving the OECD Trust Survey to adapt to different national contexts

The OECD Trust Survey attempts to harmonise the measurement of trust in government institutions across OECD countries. This implies making the questions and therefore results as comparable as possible. A detailed methodological document, which includes an overview of the national samples, survey methods and a table presenting the different questions asked in different countries, and identifies challenges in the interpretation of results in a cross-country setting, is available at http://oe.cd/trust.

The very nature of a cross-national survey implies trade-offs between country-specific and cross-nationally comparable information. Specific questions in one country may not be relevant in other countries, which complicates comparability. For example, the OECD's general Likert-scale question on "trust in the judiciary and the legal system" is in line with the grouping of these institutions in other cross-national surveys (for instance, the Gallup World Poll asks for a yes/no response to questions about "confidence in the judicial system and courts"), but it may be more relevant to further disaggregate these institutions in future iterations of the Trust Survey. The prosecution, the courts, the executive-level Ministry of Justice and other aspects of the legal system could be evaluated independently in survey questions. The results in Korea illustrate the possible benefit of better clarifying these institutions: while Korea's result for trust in the judiciary and the legal system (grouping) is in the lower half of the OECD's cross-national results, Korea performs well in the more focused question on perceptions of the political independence of the judiciary. Other institutions of government may merit a closer look, as well, such as tax agencies or national statistical offices, which play an important role as *providers* of information in a context where information sources are not always trusted (Chapter 6).

There is also likely some systematic, country-specific bias in responses even if careful steps are taken to prepare question wording and response choices. For example, the OECD Trust Survey uses a best practice 11-point scale for most questions in this survey (see Box 4.1 in Chapter 4). Yet survey-based research suggests, for example, a greater propensity for a "middle response" to Likert scale-type questions in Asian countries and a higher propensity for responses on more extreme ends of the scale in Latin American countries (Moss and Vijayendra, 2018[1]; Yoshino, 2015[2]). This aligns with some of the results in the OECD Trust Survey in, for example, Japan, where a relatively high share of respondents tend to report a mid-range (neutral) response or a "Do not know" response (see Figure 1.2 in Chapter 1). This seems to be of particular concern on the questions asking generally about trust in different institutions – perhaps related to the confounding factors point in the previous paragraph about trust in the judiciary. In a very few questions, the shares of "don't know" respondents are higher than the average also in Denmark, France and Sweden.

The 2021 Trust Survey was the inaugural survey wave, and the OECD is committed to continuously improving the survey questionnaire and analysis to improve cross-national comparability while also recognizing unique cultural, institutional, and socioeconomic contexts in different countries. Some areas worth investigating further in country-specific and cross-national research include: country-specific propensities to select "middle" or "neutral" categories or a "Don't know" responses; carrying out cognitive tests to assess clarity and interpretability of some questions in different cultural contexts; and testing alternative methods to increase accuracy of responses in certain population groups generally less represented in sample surveys.

A few national adaptations

In some cases, countries suggested an adaptation of the question wording in advance of the survey to fit better their national institutional and cultural contexts or to collect additional insights.

For example, in Mexico, as in many other federal countries, the configuration of different levels of government is complex. The three levels of government - federal government, state and municipal are each charged with some degree of public goods provision in some cases overlapping. It is therefore often difficult for respondents to know exactly which level of government, or which Ministry, delivers which services or programme. Asking people about "government" therefore, risks misinterpretation. Thus the Mexican National Statistical Office (INEGI) asked respondents about their level of trust in the President and Governors of states. While the trust estimates for the President match the results of national opinion polls collected around the same time, for the purposes of cross-national harmonisation, there is a risk that an individual person is mistaken for the institution of the executive. For this reason, estimates for "trust in the civil service" is sometimes used in lieu of "trust in the national government" for Mexico in this report.

Mexico's INEGI administered the new Trust Survey questions in collaboration with the administration of their regular, ongoing national survey on the quality and impact of government services and procedures at different levels of government, the Encuesta Nacional de Calidad e Impacto Gubernamental (ENCIG). ENCIG looks more closely at the specific outcomes for different actors, institutions and levels of government. This may be a fruitful approach for future iterations of the OECD Trust Survey.

Similarly, New Zealand excluded some questions that would have violated guidance on political neutrality of public agencies issued by the Public Service Commission. Specifically, the questions on "trust in national government" and "trust in political parties" were not asked. Questions on policy priorities, government use of data, perceived integrity of elected officials, and change of policies to public feedback were also excluded from the questionnaire in New Zealand.

Other countries sought to address additional topics or gathered information on diverse groups. Ireland, for example, included additional questions on interpersonal trust and social capital based on hypothetical situations involving a lost wallet. The United Kingdom asked about satisfaction with specific public services, while Portugal included exploratory questions to assess the perceived importance of science and citizen engagement in the policy-making process. New Zealand asked background questions on ethnicity as a demographic variable. The results of these country-specific investigations are being evaluated in OECD case studies or by national statistical offices.

2.1. THE CIVIL SERVICE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS ARE VIEWED AS MORE TRUSTWORTHY THAN NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

When asked about their degrees of trust in different levels of government, only about four in ten respondents (41.4%) trust their national government, on average across OECD countries, with rates over 50% in Norway,[4] Finland, Luxembourg, Ireland and Iceland. 14.8% hold a "neutral" position when evaluating whether they trust their government, and 41.1% tend not to trust their government (Chapter 1).

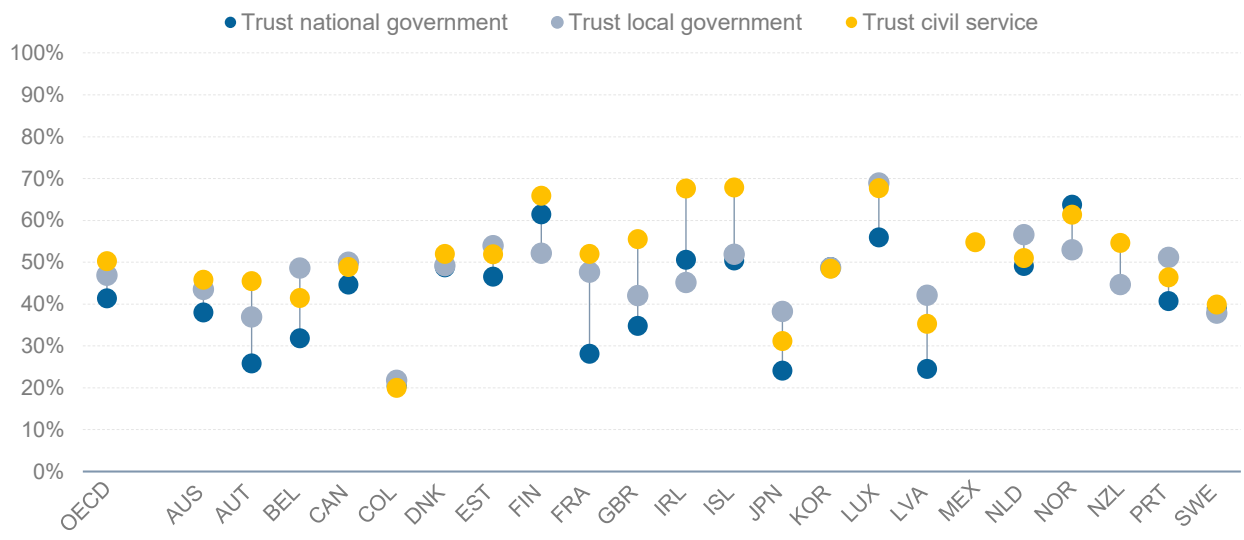
Local governments tend to inspire more confidence. On average across countries, 46.9% of people say they trust their local government and only 32.4% say they do *not* trust their local government. Civil servants fare better than the more general local and national governments: half (50.2%) of respondents, on average, say that they trust civil servants in their country. Importantly, fewer than one-third of respondents say that they do not trust civil servants.

However, differences in trust across institutions can also vary widely *within* countries. For example, 67.6% of respondents in Ireland trust the civil service, while only 50.6% the national government and fewer than half trust the local governments (Figure 2.2). The gap is similar in France.

It should be noted that Japan has high shares of respondents who either feel neutrally about trust in government and civil service or selected "Don't know," which is not associated with a number value on the scale. Taken together, a solid majority of respondents in Japan either trust, hold a neutral view, or report they are unsure whether they trust the national government, the local government and civil service. This may suggest an important flexibility in terms of trust in government in Japan and the interpretation of these responses should be explored further (Box 2.1).

Figure 2.2. People generally trust their civil service and local government more than their national government

Share of respondents who indicate trust in various government institutions (responses 6-10 on a 10-point scale), 2021



Note: Figure presents the share of response values 6-10 in three separate questions: "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]?" For New Zealand, data for trust in national government are not available; for Mexico data on trust in national and local government are not available. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

StatLink https://stat.link/akn5wb

The fact that the civil service is viewed as more trustworthy than the more abstract concepts of "national government" and "local government" may be cause for cautious optimism. Civil servants are, in many ways, the human face of government institutions; they work directly and professionally with citizens and users of government services (OECD, 2021[3]). Civil servants are important representatives of government processes and programmes and can be particularly effective and well-perceived when they are autonomous from political influence (Dahlström and Lapuente, 2021[4]). This relatively higher satisfaction with civil servants also aligns with relatively positive perceptions of government reliability (Chapter 4).

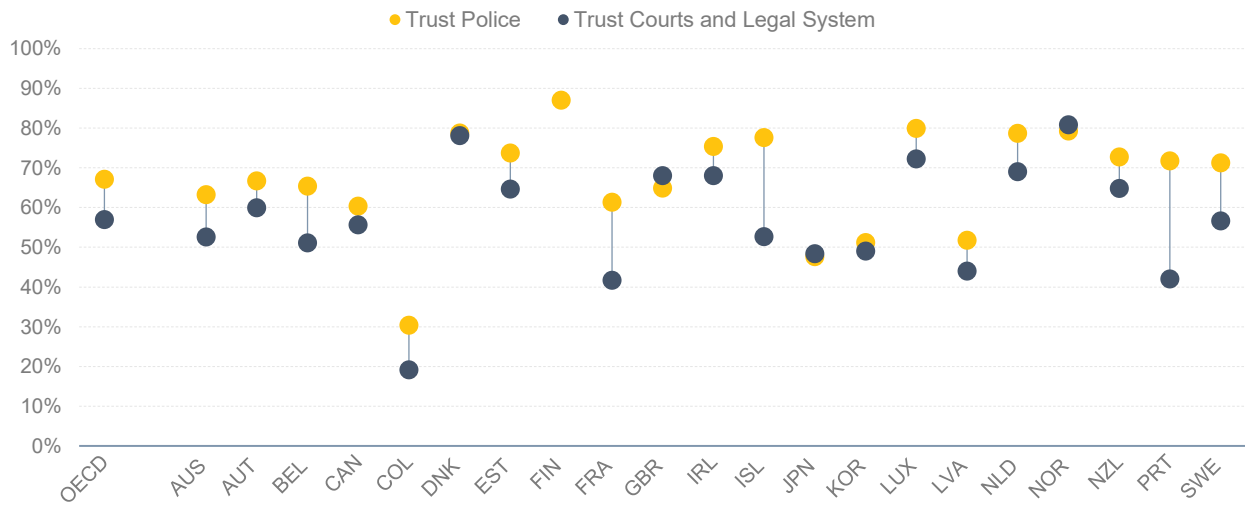
Even in countries where trust in the national government was low in cross-national comparison in November 2021, such as Austria – perhaps reflecting the start of the fifth wave of COVID-19 in that country – trust in the civil service remained higher. This suggests some longstanding, structural, underlying confidence in public sector workers.

2.2. THE POLICE AND THE COURTS FARE BETTER THAN ELECTED OFFICIALS

Public institutions tasked with security and justice also tend to be viewed positively. Over two-thirds (67.1%) of respondents, on average across countries, say that they trust the police. Just over half – 56.9%, on average – trust the courts and legal system (Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3. Public trust in the police, courts and legal system is generally high

Share of respondents who indicate trust in various institutions (responses 6-10 on a 10-point scale), 2021



Note: Figure presents the share of response values 6-10 in three separate questions: "On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely, how much do you trust the [police / courts and the legal system]?" Mexico is excluded from this figure as the data for trust in police and courts and legal system are not available. For Finland, data on trust in courts and legal system are not available. For more detailed information, please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

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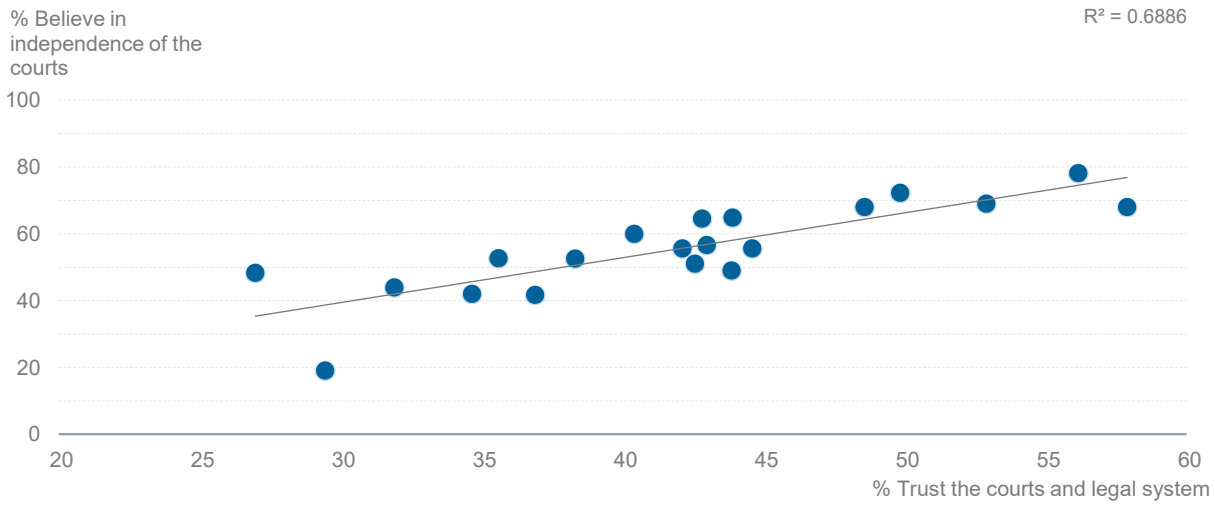
This result roughly aligns with the share of respondents on average who think that courts make decisions free of political influence plus the share who hold a "neutral" view of courts' independence (Chapter 5). The perceived independence of the courts is positively correlated cross-nationally with public trust in courts and the legal system (Figure 2.4).

It should be noted that the question on "trust in the judiciary and the legal system" may elicit different responses across countries depending on the national organisation of the various functions, and it may be more relevant to further disaggregate these institutions in future iterations of the Trust Survey. The results in Korea, for example, illustrate the possible benefit of better clarifying these institutions: while Korea's result for trust in the judiciary and the legal system (grouping) is in the lower half of the OECD's cross-national results, Korea performs well, and above the OECD average, in the more focused question on perceptions of the political independence of the judiciary.

Figure 2.4. Trust in the courts and legal system is positively associated with perceptions of independence of the courts

Share of respondents who believe a court in their country would make a decision free from political influence (y-axis) and share of respondents who trust the courts and legal system (x-axis), 2021



Note: This scatterplot presents the share of "trust" responses 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 courts and legal system?" on the x-axis. The y-axis presents the share of "likely" responses to the question "If a court were about to make a decision that could negatively impact the government's image, how likely or unlikely do you think it is that the court would make the decision free from political influence?" Finland, Mexico and Norway are excluded as the data on judicial independence are not available. For more detailed information, please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

StatLink https://stat.link/u05ioz

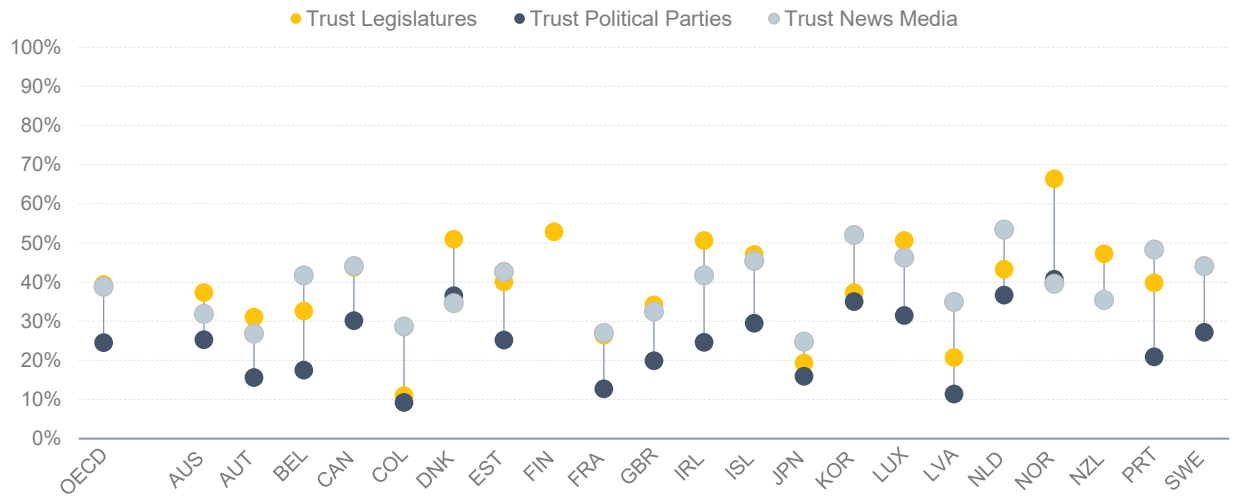
Across countries, one group consistently elicits strong feelings of *low* trust: political parties. On average only 24.5% of respondents trust political parties, while 55.5% do *not* trust political parties. Respondents also have relatively weak levels of trust in representative legislative institutions – parliaments and congresses. Only 39.4% of respondents, on average across countries, report trusting their country's legislative institution. In Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Norway and Luxembourg a small majority *do* trust their parliament. Indeed, in Norway trust is higher in the parliament than it is in the national government, local government and civil servants.

These results fit into a broader pattern of feelings of disempowerment. Respondents have relatively low levels of confidence in the integrity of elected officials and high shares of people feel their voices are not incorporated in government policy making (Chapter 6). Trust in the national legislature is also strongly influenced by political preferences; while even people who voted for the parties in power do not inherently trust their parliament or congress, people who hold opposing political views exhibit considerably lower levels of trust in their national legislature and in government in general (Chapter 3).

Other institutions do not fare much better in perceptions of trust. Only 38.8% of respondents, on average, say they trust the news media.

Figure 2.5. Trust in political parties, national legislatures and the media is low throughout the OECD

Share of respondents who indicate trust in various institutions (responses 6-10 on a 10-point scale), 2021



Note: Figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to two separate questions: "On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely, how much do you trust [Parliament or Congress (varied by country) / political parties]?" The "trust" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "Do not trust" is the aggregation of responses from 1-4; and "Don't know" was a separate answer choice. Mexico is excluded from the figure as data are not available; for Finland and New Zealand, data on trust in political parties are not available. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

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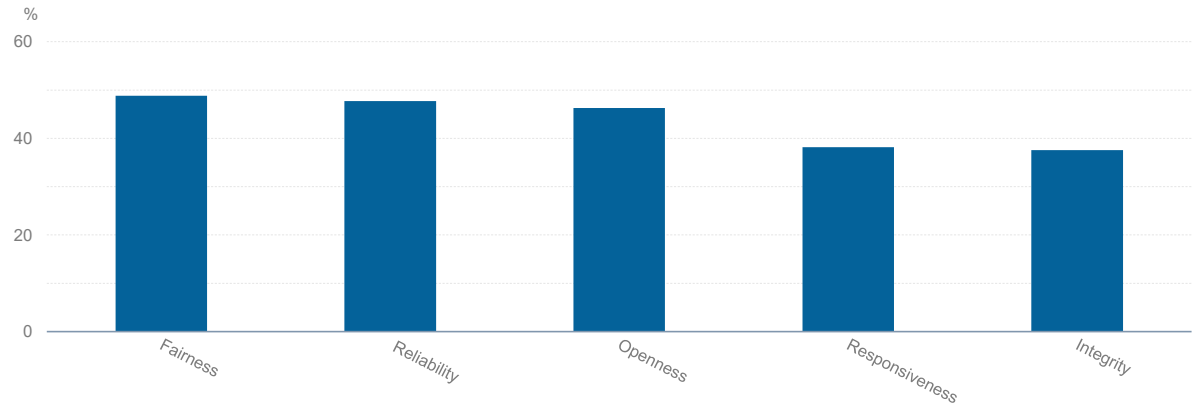
2.3. IN MOST COUNTRIES, RESPONDENTS ARE MORE CONFIDENT IN THEIR GOVERNMENT'S RELIABILITY THAN ITS RESPONSIVENESS

These levels of trust in different institutions are driven by governments' performance in different aspects of governance. The OECD Trust Framework sets out measurable guidelines to estimate where governments are viewed as performing well and where they may be falling short – with direct implications for trust (Chapter 1, Box 1.2).

In nearly every country, respondents are more confident in their government's reliability than its responsiveness. On average across countries, 47.7% of respondents consider their government reliable and 38.2% say their government is responsive (Figure 2.6). A majority of respondents in half of the surveyed countries (Luxembourg, Denmark, Ireland, Korea, New Zealand, Norway, the Netherlands, Estonia, Iceland, Canada and the United Kingdom) consider their government reliable, as measured by questions on future pandemic preparedness, government use of personal data, and the stability of business conditions. In contrast, in only one country – Korea – do a majority consider their government to be responsive, i.e. responding well to public feedback about policies and services and adopting innovative ideas to improve public services. Estimates of reliability and responsiveness also tend to have a statistically significant relationship with trust in regression analyses, as well (Section 2.4).

Figure 2.6. Governments fare better on measures of reliability than on responsiveness

Share of respondents expressing confidence in government reliability, responsiveness, openness, integrity, and fairness (average across survey questions), unweighted OECD average, 2021



Note: Figure presents the OECD average of "likely" responses across questions related to "reliability", "responsiveness", "integrity", "openness", and "fairness" (see OECD Trust Framework in Chapter 1). For more detailed information please find the survey method document at OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust).
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

StatLink https://stat.link/uzbywk

An analysis of government values – also defined in the Framework (Chapter 1) – tells a more complicated story. Governments fare best on respondents' feeling that their own application for a government benefit or service would be treated fairly, one of the dimensions of fairness in the OECD Trust Framework. In general, respondents are sceptical that government "openness" includes real opportunities to engage in the policy-making process – but most feel that they can find information about administrative procedures fairly easily. On average, across countries, 46.2% of respondents consider their government "open". Perceptions of government integrity are also relatively poor, as evidenced by the average values across questions about petty bribery, revolving doors arrangements for elected and appointed officials, and the political independence of the courts. Only 37.6% of respondents, on average across countries, are confident in the integrity of their government (Figure 2.6).

Interestingly, differences – or the range of results – across countries are relatively low for questions where governments on average scored poorly, such as changing unpopular policies in response to public opinion, using the results of a public consultation, and perception of the likelihood that a high-level political official would refuse a private sector job offer in exchange for a political favour. This means that there is relatively broad agreement, cross-nationally, that governments are not doing well in these areas. In contrast, there is more variation across countries on the questions where governments tended to fare better, on average – on the availability of information on administrative procedures, the legitimate use of personal data, preparedness for a new serious contagious disease, and the fair treatment of applications for public benefits.

Simply put, there is much more agreement among respondents on areas in which governments need to improve, while opinions are more divided on higher-performance areas. This suggests, possibly, a common agenda for OECD countries to address those areas where perception of government performance is widespread low, and benchmark policies and results among countries to continue improve those areas where perceptions are more varied.

2.4. DIGGING DEEPER: EXPLORING POSSIBLE CAUSAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN INSTITUTIONS AND TRUST

Most of the figures in this report present *descriptive* indicators of public perceptions of different institutions and trust in government. The Trust Survey data are a useful tool for understanding, for example, what share of a national population has confidence in different institutions, services and processes – and for understanding characteristics and perceptions of people who trust (or do not trust) government. This descriptive evidence helps to give a global understanding of the relationship between institutions and trust.

Understanding the *causal* relationship between institutions and trust – in other words, how public governance *causally affects* trust – is a much more complicated task, especially with observational data. Even with the most sophisticated econometrics, the causal relationship between institutions and trust likely moves in two directions. Effective institutions and policies drive trust in government, and trust in government can make institutions and policies more effective. There is also collinearity and interactive effects across different aspects of governance that make it difficult to establish the causal effect of one particular variable. For example, the Trust Survey finds that respondents distrust politicians and are also sceptical of their ability to use their political voice; it is likely that these kinds of variables have an interactive relationship and jointly affect trust.

With these caveats in mind, a simple logit regression analysis of the Trust Survey data presents some evidence of the statistically significant relationship between different institutions and trust in the national government, local government and civil service. Using the pooled cross-national Trust Survey dataset and country fixed effects, we find that different factors are associated with trust in the national

government, the civil service or the local government (Box 2.2).

2.4.1. Selection of factors most significantly related to trust in national government

Most of the questions in the Trust Survey can be categorised into the different public governance components of the OECD Trust Framework: reliability, responsiveness, integrity, fairness and openness. Within these, the results on reliability seem to matter most in supporting trust in government.

The use of a regression in the Trust Survey microdata helps us understand the strength and nature (e.g. positive, negative) of the relationship between the *dependent* variable – trust – and a series of *independent* variables from the Trust Framework (Box 2.2).

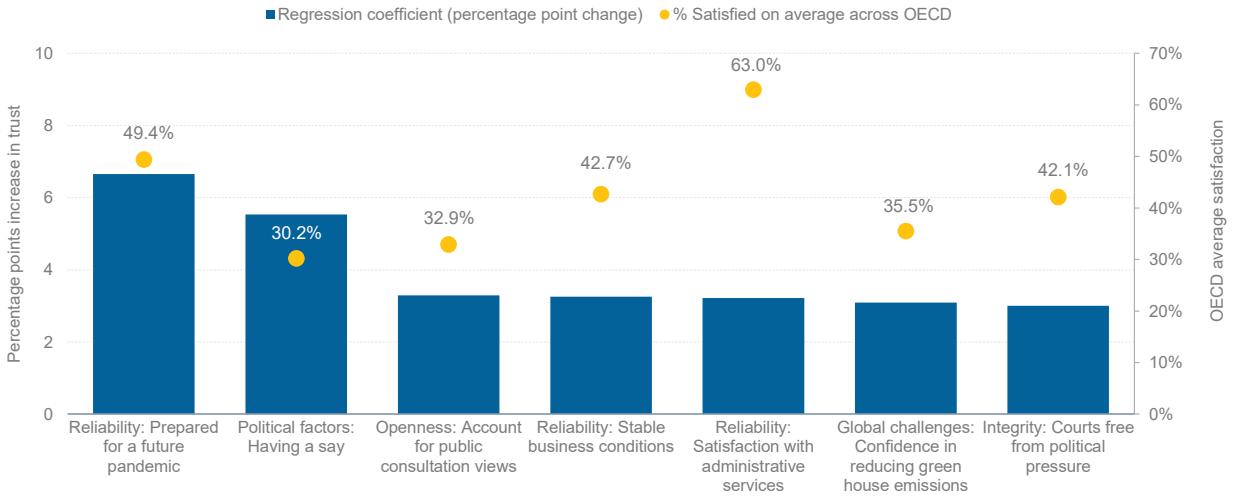
When analysed in a logit regression, all survey questions on reliability have a significant and positive relationship with trust in the national government. For example, holding all other conditions equal, moving from the typical citizen to one with a slightly higher level of confidence in the preparedness to future disease[5] is associated with an increase of 6.7 percentage points in the level of trust in the national government. This coefficient, in percentage points, is represented by the blue bar in Figure 2.7 (scale on left y-axis). An increase in people's confidence on two other "reliability" questions is associated with an increase of around 3 percentage points in trust in the national government (Figure 2.7).

Political drivers, such as the perception of having a say in what the government does, government openness in accounting for views from a public consultation, confidence in the capacity of government to support reforms for the future, and perception of independence of courts, are the other variables with the strongest statistical relationship with trust in the national government.

While these results show how important these factors are vis-à-vis promoting trust, governments face different starting points in how satisfied people are with these different governance factors now. Only 30.2% of respondents, on average cross-nationally, say they feel they have a say in what the government does (right axis in Figure 2.7) – yet this is a fairly important variable related to trust in the national government, as indicated by its relationship with a 5.5 percentage point increase in trust.

Figure 2.7. Reliability and feelings of political voice are significantly related to trust in national government

Percentage point change in trust in national government in response to improvements in selected variables (left Y-axis, represented by bar) and OECD unweighted average respondents' satisfaction in the noted variables (right Y-axis, represented by dot), 2021



Note: The figure shows the most robust determinants of self-reported trust in national government in a logistic estimation that controls for individual characteristics, self-reported levels of interpersonal trust, and country fixed effects. The model includes 18 countries; Finland, Mexico, New Zealand and the United Kingdom are not included, mainly due to missing variables. All variables depicted are statistically significant at 99%. Only questions derived from the OECD Trust Framework (Chapter 1) are depicted on the x-axis, while individual characteristics such as age, gender, education, political orientation, which also may be statistically significant, are not shown.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

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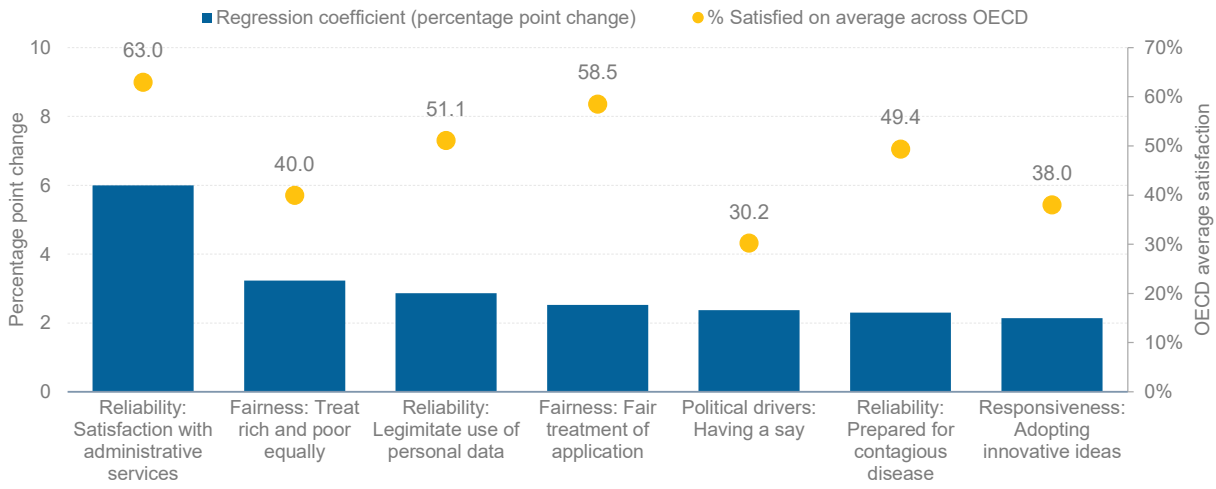
2.4.2. Selection of factors most significantly related to trust in the civil service

Reliability, fairness and responsiveness have the strongest statistically significant relationship with trust in the civil service. Holding all else constant, moving from the typical citizen to one slightly more satisfied with administrative services is associated with an increase of 6 percentage points in the level of trust in the civil service (Figure 2.8, measured by blue bar related to left y-axis). The perception that rich and poor people are treated fairly in applications for public benefits, confidence that the government uses data for legitimate purposes, and confidence in government preparedness for a contagious disease are the other variables most strongly related to trust in the civil service (Figure 2.8).

At the same time, the cross-national average level of satisfaction with the variables shown in yellow vary quite a bit (Figure 2.8). Average values vary from 30.2% of people (cross-nationally) reporting that they can have a say in what the government does to 63% satisfied with administrative services (Figure 2.8, illustrated with the yellow dot related to the right axis). In other words, the starting point in people assessments of government varies across policy dimensions – some policy areas may have a positive and statistically significant relationship with trust, and already benefit from high level of satisfaction (e.g. satisfaction with administrative services). Others are areas that need more improvement.

Figure 2.8. Reliability and fairness have a significant relationship with trust in the civil service

Percentage point change in *trust in civil service* in response to improvements in selected variables (left Y-axis, represented by bar) and OECD unweighted average respondents' satisfaction in the noted variables (right Y-axis, represented by dot)



Note: The figure shows the most robust determinants of self-reported trust in civil service in a logistic estimation that controls for individual characteristics, self-reported levels of interpersonal trust, and country fixed effects. The model includes 18 countries; Finland, Mexico, New Zealand and the United Kingdom are not included, mainly due to missing variables. All variables depicted are statistically significant at 99%. Only questions derived from the OECD Trust Framework (Chapter 1) are depicted on the x-axis, while individual characteristics such as age, gender, education, political orientation which also may be statistically significant are not shown.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

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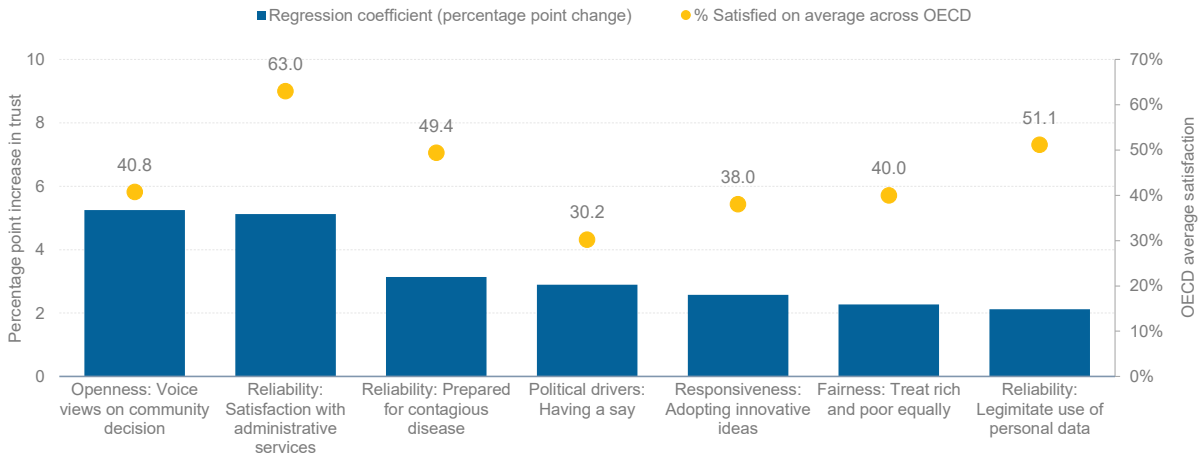
2.4.3. Selection of factors most significantly related to trust in local government

What influences trust at the local government level? People's views of government openness and reliability have a statistically significant relationship with trust in the local government. Holding all else constant, moving from the typical citizen to one slightly more confident[6] about voicing views on local government decisions or slightly more satisfied with administrative services is associated with an increase of five percentage points in the level of trust in the local government, respectively (Figure 2.9, blue bars associated with the left Y-axis). The other survey questions on reliability (preparedness for future disease, and legitimate use of private data), together with feelings of having a say in what the government does, perceptions that public agencies adopt innovative ideas, and perceptions of equal treatment by public officials, are the other variables with the strongest relationships with trust in local government. At the same time, the *starting point* in people's assessment of government varies across policy areas. While a majority of respondents, on average across OECD countries, are satisfied with administrative services (63%) and the use of personal data (51%), only 41% of respondents feel they would be able to voice their views and 30.2% to have a say in what the government does (Figure 2.9 yellow dots, right axis).

Figure 2.9. Openness and reliability are significantly associated with trust in local government

Percentage point change in trust in local government in response to improvements in selected variables (left Y-axis, represented by bar) and OECD unweighted average respondents' confidence in the noted variables (right Y-axis, represented by dot)



Note: The figure shows the most robust determinants of self-reported trust in local government in a logistic estimation that controls for individual characteristics, self-reported levels of interpersonal trust, and country fixed effects. The model includes 18 countries; Finland, Mexico, New Zealand and the United Kingdom are not included, mainly due to missing variables. All variables depicted are statistically significant at 99%. Only questions derived from the OECD Framework (Chapter 1) are depicted on the x-axis, while individual characteristics such as age, gender, education, political orientation which also may be statistically significant are not shown.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

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These results provide a first exploration of the main factors associated with trust in national government, local government and civil service and show that, on average across countries, these factors vary across institutions. Analysis for specific countries would highlight significant difference within this aggregate picture.

Box 2.2. Logit regression assessing the significance of different factors related to trust

The regression results in Section 2.4 present the statistical significance of the relationship between trust in national and local government and civil service, vis-à-vis independent variables – potential "drivers of trust" – in the Trust Survey dataset. These regressions covers 18 countries with the most fully available and comparable data on institutional trust and its determinants: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Colombia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Iceland, Ireland, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, and Sweden.

The empirical analysis of the drivers of trust is based on logistic regressions. The logit explores the degree to which trust has a significant relationship with respondents' perceptions of responsiveness, reliability, openness, integrity, and fairness of government and public institutions – the core components of the OECD Trust Framework (Chapter 1). These five dimensions are operationalised utilizing 14 variables, originally measured on a 0-10 scale.

Institutional trust, here the dependent variable, is separately measured using three different variables: trust in the national government, trust in the local government, and trust in civil service. The survey question is phrased as follows: "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?". For the logit regression the dependent variable is recoded as a dummy. It takes value 0 for responses 0-4 on the original 11-points scale, and value 1 for responses 6-10. Response 5, "Don't know" and "Prefer not to say" are excluded.

In addition to these core components, the predictors include 5 variables measuring: internal and external efficacy (both on an 11-points scale), satisfaction with administrative services (same scale), confidence in one's country's ability to respond to the ecological challenge (5-points scale), and affiliation with national government (i.e. whether the respondent voted for the incumbent). Overall, the final set of predictors consists of 19 variables. All of them (but the last one) are standardised.

For each dependent variable, a sub-set of predictors is selected based on stepwise regression. All models include the following control variables: socio-demographics (age, gender, education), interpersonal trust, and country dummies. Variable weights are included in the regression. Each country weighs equally. Missing data are excluded using listwise deletion.

In Figures 2.7, 2.8, and 2.9, the coefficients (blue bars, with percentage point change scale in the left y-axis) are average marginal effects. They read as the percentage points change in trust associated with a one-standard-deviation change in the predictor.

Only the most significant public governance drivers are presented, but it is worth noting that socioeconomic or other individual-level traits (not shown) are often statistically significant. Having voted for the incumbent government, for example, is the independent variable with the largest (and significant) relationship with trust in national government. Having voted for the incumbent is also statistically significantly related with trust in the local government, though the size of the coefficient is smaller. The results are largely robust to the choice of model; the direction and significance of coefficients are similar when an ordinary least squares model is applied.

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NOTES

[4] The OECD Trust Survey finds that trust in national government is slightly higher – by about 2 percentage points – than trust in local government in Norway. While it is a very small difference, this stands in contrast to the order of trusted institutions in other countries and in contrast to the results of a Norwegian elections study that measured trust. In this 2019 Norwegian elections study, trust in the municipal council is 5.7 on average – in line with the OECD average result, but higher than trust in the national parliament (5.5) and the national government (5.4) (Saglie et al., 2021[5]). These differences demonstrate that trust levels fluctuate. One potential source of these discrepancies is the timing of the surveys. Trust tends to be higher following elections, which could have influenced the trust averages in the local election study, while the OECD trust survey was fielded during the COVID-19 pandemic.

[5] In the model this is measured as an increase in one standard deviation.

[6] In the model this is measured as an increase in one standard deviation.

3 Socioeconomic conditions and political attitudes: Microfoundations of trust

People's trust in government depends on demographic and socioeconomic traits like age, gender, educational background, and income, as well as on their perceptions of their social status and their political attitudes. The relative importance of these factors, in addition to broader economic, cultural and institutional conditions in a country, has been shown in in-depth OECD country studies in Korea, Finland and Norway. This chapter presents a stocktaking of the relationship between different traits, socioeconomic conditions and institutional trust across countries.

Key findings and areas for attention

- People with lower levels of education and income report consistently lower trust in government than other groups. On average across countries, having a university degree is associated with a difference of around 8 percentage points higher trust in government. Similarly, the gap in trust in government when comparing those with the highest and lowest incomes in society is twelve percentage points.
- Young people trust government less. On average 36.9% of people aged 18 to 29 tend to trust their government, while the rate is 45.9% for those aged 50 and over. There is also a gender gap in trust with women trusting the government 2.7 percentage points less than men, on average, across countries. Governments should focus on the long-term economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 crisis on young people, including on opportunities for young people to shape responses and enhance public participation.
- There are considerable differences in trust in institutions across regions within countries. Governments must pay attention to territorial divides to better understand the role of socio-economic factors and dissatisfaction with regional access to public services.
- Perceived vulnerabilities seem to matter even more than reported socioeconomic vulnerability measured by income and education. Trust is considerably lower among people worried about their personal financial circumstances: only 34.6% of the financially precarious group trust the government, compared to 51.2% among people with fewer financial worries. The gap in trust between those who consider themselves to have a relatively higher social status and those with a low social status is around 22.9 percentage points.
- Partisanship and feelings of political efficacy matter, too. People who voted for the government in power are, on average almost twice as likely to say that they trust the government than people who did not vote for the current government. Perhaps related to that, feelings of political disempowerment diminishes trust. Only 24.9% of people who feel they do not have a say in what government does trust the government, on average across countries. Governments must recommit to inclusive governance that incorporates diverse and disadvantaged perspectives in policy design, implementation and reform and increase representation of different views.
- These results show that governments face different starting points when attempting to foster trust in public institutions. Understanding key differences and drivers across population groups can help governments to better target and inform public policies.

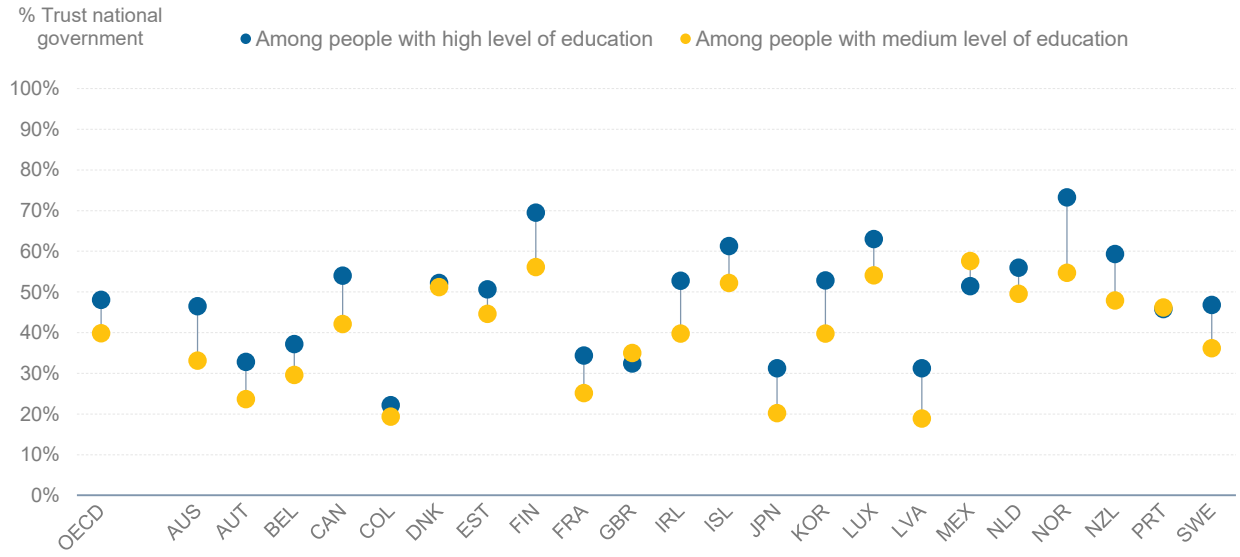
3.1. PEOPLE WITH LOW INCOME AND LOW LEVELS OF EDUCATION ARE LESS TRUSTING OF GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

Consistent with previous results (Brezzi et al., 2021[1]), the OECD Trust Survey finds that people with higher levels of education or higher income tend to have higher trust in their national government than people with lower levels of education or lower income. On average in OECD countries, having a university degree, relative to only a high school degree, is associated with 8 percentage points higher trust in government. (For more on the scale used for these questions, see Box 4.1).

The average level of trust for those with the highest levels of education (university-level/tertiary) is 48.0%, as compared to 39.9% for those with medium levels of education (those who completed upper secondary education, i.e. high school) (Figure 3.1). The largest trust gap between these two groups can be found in Norway (18.6 percentage points) followed by Australia, Finland, Ireland and Korea (more than 13 percentage points). In Colombia, Denmark, Estonia, Portugal, Mexico, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, the trust gaps by education are considerably smaller.

Figure 3.1. People with tertiary education tend to have higher trust in government

Share of respondents who indicate trust in the national government (responses 6-10 on an 11-point scale) by highest level of education, 2021



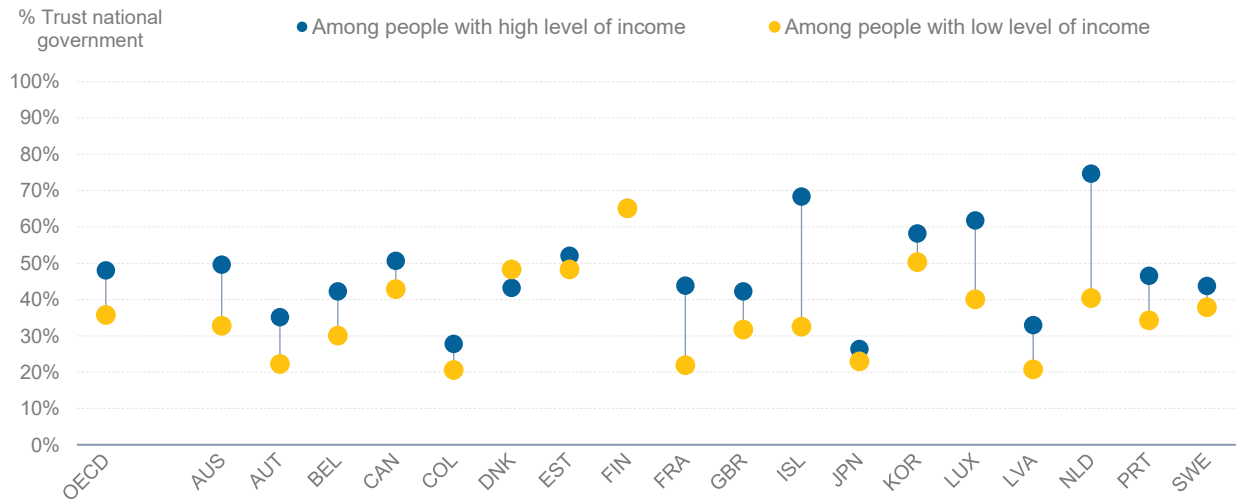
Note: Figure presents the national distribution of responses to the question "On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely, how much do you trust the national government?". Shown here is the proportion of respondents that "trust" the national government (i.e. response values 6-10), grouped by highest level of education. "Higher" education refers to ISCED 2011 levels 5-8, which refers to university-level degrees such as Bachelors, Masters or PhD, while "Medium" education refers to levels 3-4, or upper and post-secondary, non-tertiary education. "Low education" – which refers to less than a completed upper secondary degree – is excluded from this chart due to a lower share of the population in this group in most OECD countries. The trust estimates for the low education group tend to be lower than that of the medium education group. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries. Mexico and New Zealand here show trust in civil service as respondents were not asked about trust in the national government (note that trust in civil service on average tends to be higher than trust in national government). In case of the Netherlands, a translation error could have led to some people reporting medium rather than high level of education. For more detailed information, please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

StatLink https://stat.link/yvq60i

Trust Survey data show that in most surveyed OECD countries people with higher incomes have also greater trust in the national government. 48% of people with earnings in the top 20% of the national income distribution trust the government, as opposed to 35.7% in the bottom 20% of the income distribution (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2. In most countries, people with low income tend to trust the government less

Share of respondents who indicate trust in the national government (responses 6-10 on an 11-point scale), by net disposable household income, 2021



Note: Figure presents the national distribution of responses 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 national government". Shown here is the proportion of respondents that "trust" the national government (i.e. response values 6-10), grouped by income group. "High" and "Low" income refers to top and bottom 20% in national income distribution. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries. Ireland and Mexico are excluded from this figure as the data were not available. New Zealand and Norway are also excluded as data are only available on gross income, which complicates comparisons. Difference between high and low income groups in Finland are very small (0.1 percentage points). For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

StatLink https://stat.link/pt9s2n

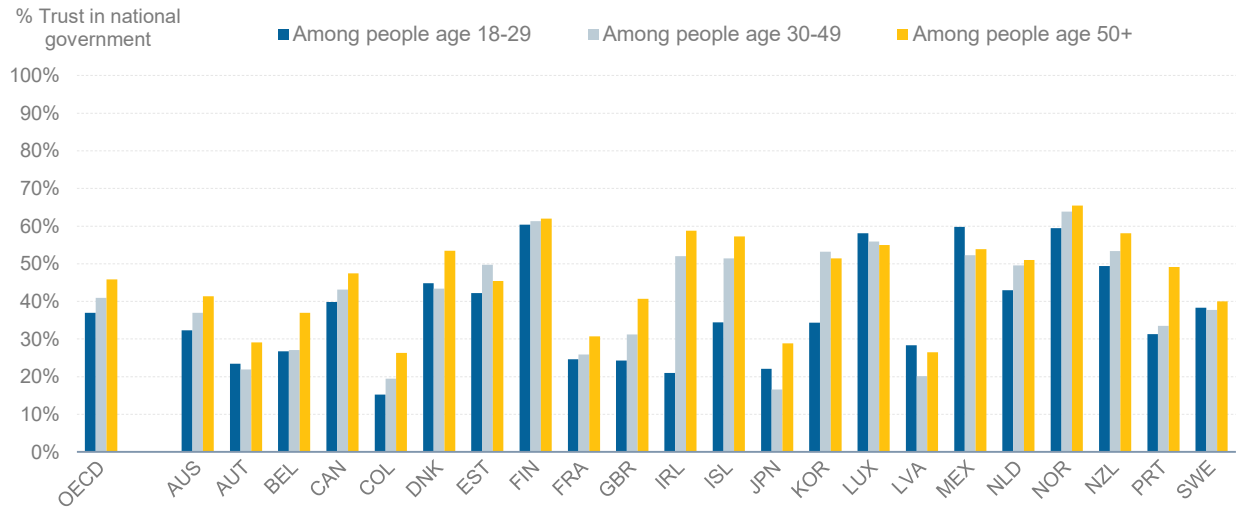
3.2. YOUNGER PEOPLE AND WOMEN TEND TO HAVE LOWER TRUST IN GOVERNMENT

In all surveyed OECD countries, with the exception of Latvia, Luxembourg and Mexico, younger people tend to trust the government less than older people. On average 36.9% of people aged 18 to 29 tend to trust the government, 40.9% of those aged between 30 and 49 trust the government, and 45.9% aged 50 and over do (Figure 3.3). However, there are notable differences across countries. For instance, differences in trust between older and younger people are minimal in Latvia, Estonia, Sweden, Luxembourg and Finland, while they seem comparatively large in Ireland, Iceland, Portugal and Korea.

The economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 crisis have fallen particularly hard on young people, raising growing concerns about the long-term implications it may have on their material conditions and well-being, but also on opportunities for young people to shape responses and enhance public participation (OECD, 2022[2]). Governments can take specific actions to develop capacity for young people to participate, eliminate barriers for meaningful representation, and enhance democratic dialogue with young people on policies to address climate change, rising inequality, and threats to democratic institutions (OECD, 2022[2]).

Figure 3.3. Younger people tend to have lower trust in government

Share of respondents who indicate trust the national government (responses 6-10 on an 11-point scale) by age group, 2021



Note: Figure presents the within-country distributions of responses by age group 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 national government". Shown here is the proportion of respondents that "trust" based on the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale, grouped by age group. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries. Finland's scale ranges from 1-10 and the higher trust / neutral / lower trust groupings are 1-4 / 5-6 / 7-10. Mexico and New Zealand present trust in civil service as respondents were not asked about trust in the national government (note that trust in civil service on average tends to be higher than trust in national government). Younger age group in Ireland is defined as 18-34 due to statistical disclosure measures. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: http://oe.cd/trust

StatLink https://stat.link/ciylf9

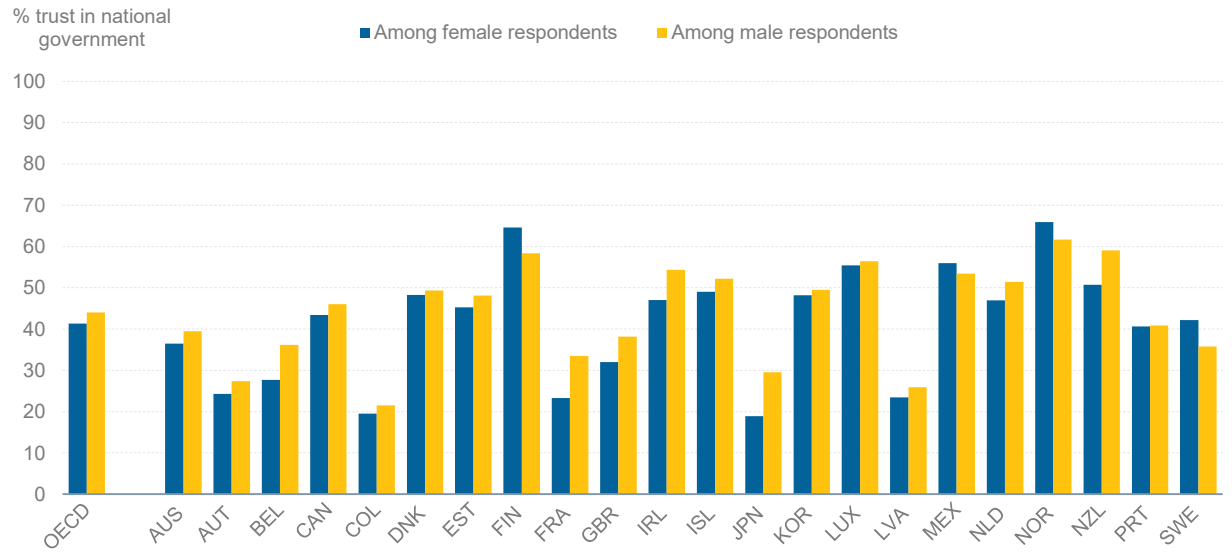
Trust in government also differs by gender, and in almost all surveyed OECD countries women have lower trust in government than men. The gender gap on average across countries is 2.7 percentage points (Figure 3.4).

Many potential causal mechanisms could be driving these results. For example, women's lower trust in government could be related to lower economic or educational opportunities for women or other forms of structural gender inequality in society. Moreover, women remain underrepresented in politics and public institutions, including in terms of seats in national legislatures and ministerial posts (OECD, 2021[3]).

It is noteworthy that the handful of countries in which women have more trust in government than men are some of the Nordic countries: Sweden, Finland and Norway.[7] While even these countries have not yet achieved gender parity, they are often considered champions of gender equality within the OECD in terms of women's economic empowerment, legal rights, and political representation (OECD, 2018[4]; OECD Gender Data Portal, 2021[5]). Women's relatively higher trust in government in these Nordic countries may reflect women's more equal opportunities there, at least relative to other countries.

Figure 3.4. In most OECD countries women have lower trust in the national government than men

Difference in trust in government by gender, expressed as the share of men trusting government minus the share of women trusting government, in percentage points, 2021



Note: Figure presents the within country distribution of responses by gender 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 national government". Shown is the proportion of respondents that "trust" based on the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the 11-point scale, grouped by gender. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries. Mexico and New Zealand show trust in civil service as respondents were not asked about trust in the national government (note that trust in civil service on average tends to be higher than trust in national government). For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

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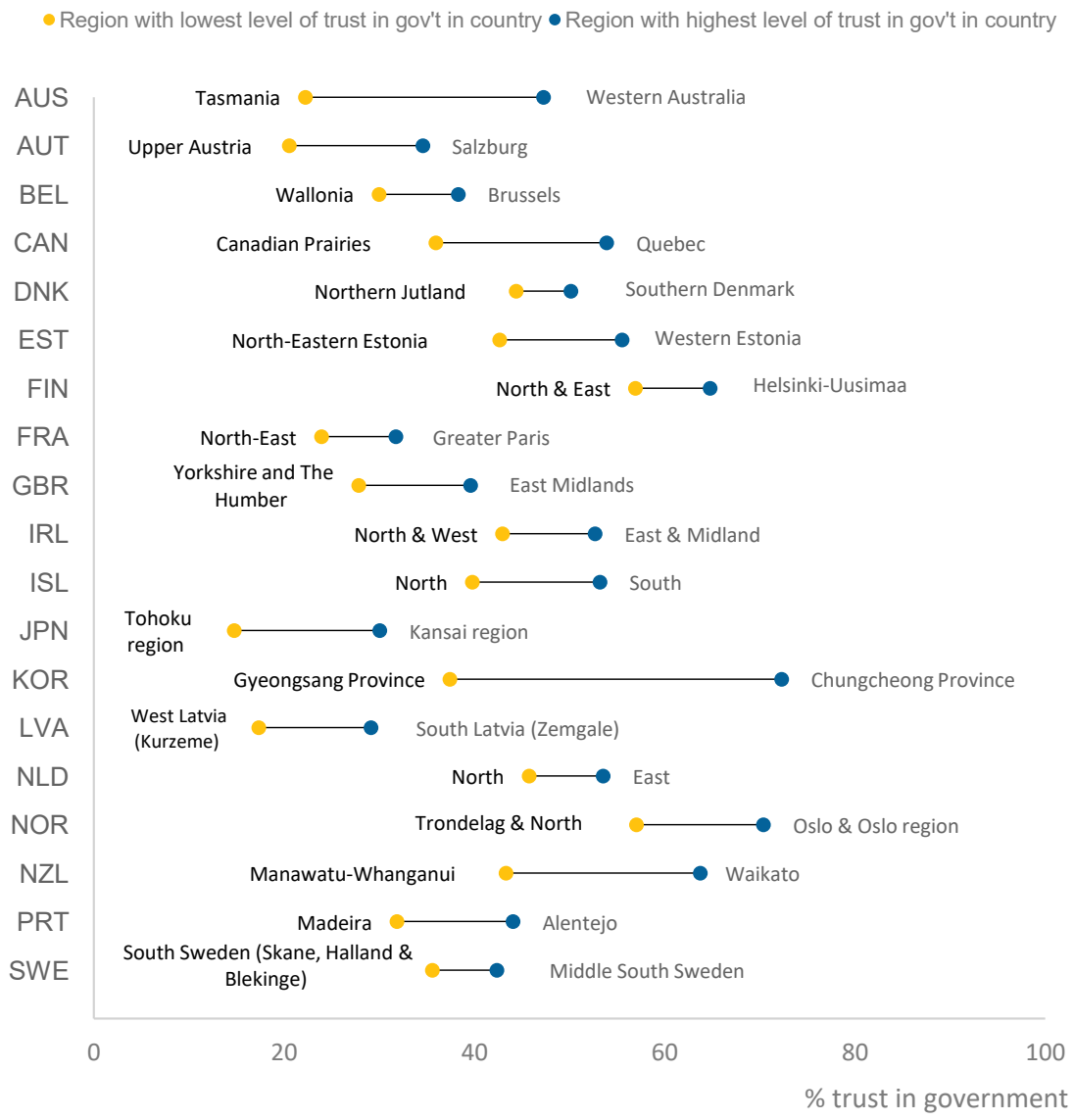
3.3. REGIONAL VARIATION IN LEVELS OF TRUST

Trust in institutions also displays some clear geographical patterns and divisions across different places within countries. For example, differences in trust in institutions between regions can be very large in some countries, such as Korea (34.9 percentage points) and Australia (25 percentage points) for trust in national government or New Zealand (20.4 percentage points) for trust in the civil service (Figure 3.5). Differences between regions are generally smaller in Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands, and France, although cross-country comparison may be limited by the different population size and administrative geography of the available regions; further analysis by typology of regions, whether urban, predominantly rural, or in between, may provide more accurate insights.

There is a need for policy makers to pay attention to these gaps, as territorial disparities in trust could reflect people's dissatisfaction with regional access to public services, as well as with local socio-economic opportunities and well-being outcomes. These elements can fuel feelings of being "left behind", as well as disengagement or dissatisfaction with the political system, which can undermine democracy (Dijkstra, Poelman and Rodríguez-Pose, 2019[6]). Increasing the focus on places in decline by developing place-based strategies for regional economic development, and improving public services delivery in rural areas and deprived urban areas, can help address these territorial divides (OECD, 2019[7]).

Figure 3.5. Trust in government shows large regional disparities within OECD countries

Share of respondents who indicate trust in the national government (responses 6-10 on an 11-point scale) in regions with highest and lowest level of trust by country, 2021



Note: Shown here is the proportion of respondents that "trusts" the national government based on aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale, based on responses 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 national government". "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries. Finland's scale ranges from 1-10 and the higher trust / neutral / lower trust groupings are 1-4 / 5-6 / 7-10. New Zealand shows trust in civil service as respondents were not asked about trust in the national government (note that trust in civil service on average tends to be higher than trust in national government). Colombia, Luxembourg and Mexico are not shown due to data unavailability. Regions within countries are sub-national geographical areas and do not always correspond to administrative regions according to the OECD-EC classification (for more details the Trust Survey methodological note (http://oe.cd/trust) and the OECD Territorial Grid (https://www.oecd.org/regional/regional-statistics/territorial-grid.pdf).
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

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3.4. FEELINGS OF INSECURITY CORRESPOND WITH LOWER TRUST IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

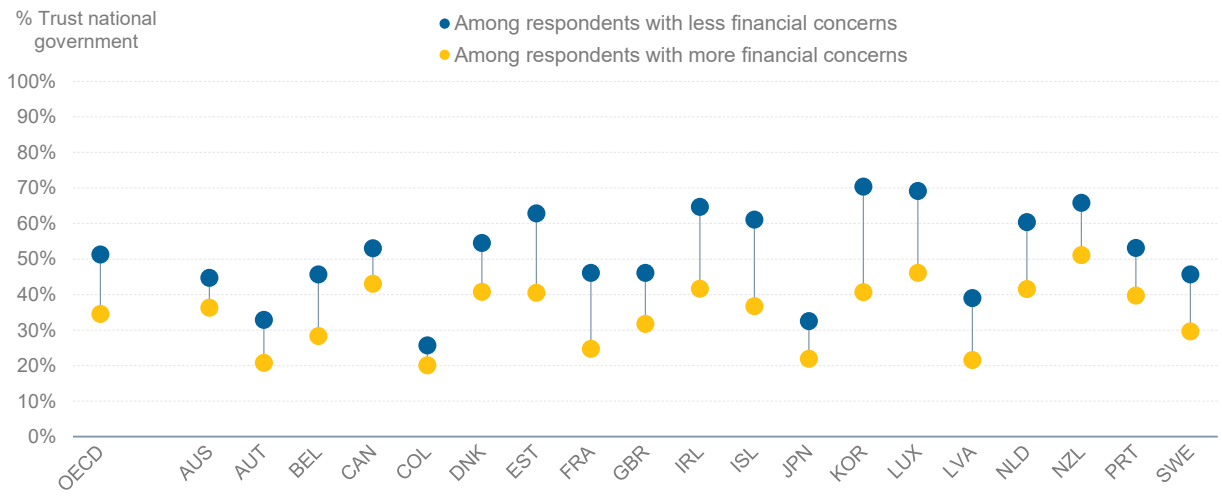
Low levels of trust in government and public institutions are also related to perceptions of vulnerability and being left behind economically, socially and politically. The results of the Trust Survey consistently illustrate that people's personal financial concerns (Figure 3.6), perceptions of relatively lower status in society (Figure 3.7), and feeling excluded from government decision making (Figure 3.8) all negatively influence trust in government.

Economic insecurity or vulnerability can be measured in many different ways, such as unemployment or underemployment, low or irregular income, job insecurity, or high debt, among others. It is also a subjective measure, reflecting one's perception of their economic status. The Trust Survey shows that a remarkable 63.5% of respondents report that they are "somewhat" or "very" concerned about their household's finances when looking ahead to 2022 and 2023.

This is important. Economic vulnerability likely affects people's attitudes towards public institutions, and indeed the survey finds that people with financial worries are much less trusting of the national government than those with few or no financial worries: only 34.6% of the financially precarious group trusts the government, compared to 51.2% among people with fewer financial worries (Figure 3.6). The gap between groups is largest in Korea (30 percentage point gap), followed by Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg and Estonia.

Figure 3.6. People with personal financial concerns are less likely to trust the government

Share of respondents who indicate trust in the national government (responses 6-10 on an 11-point scale) by level of respondents' personal financial concerns, 2021



Note: Figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the questions "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 national government". Shown here is the proportion of respondents that reported to trust the government (response categories 6-10) by their level of financial concern. The marker for higher levels of financial concern represent the aggregation of response choices "Somewhat concerned" and "Very concerned" in response to the question "In general, thinking about the next year or two, how concerned are you about your household's finances and overall social and economic well-being?". The marker for lower levels of financial concern represent the aggregation of response choices "Not at all concerned" and "Not so concerned". New Zealand shows trust in civil service as the question on trust in government was not asked (note that trust in civil service on average tends to be higher than trust in national government). "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries. Finland, Mexico, and Norway are excluded from this figure as the data were not available. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

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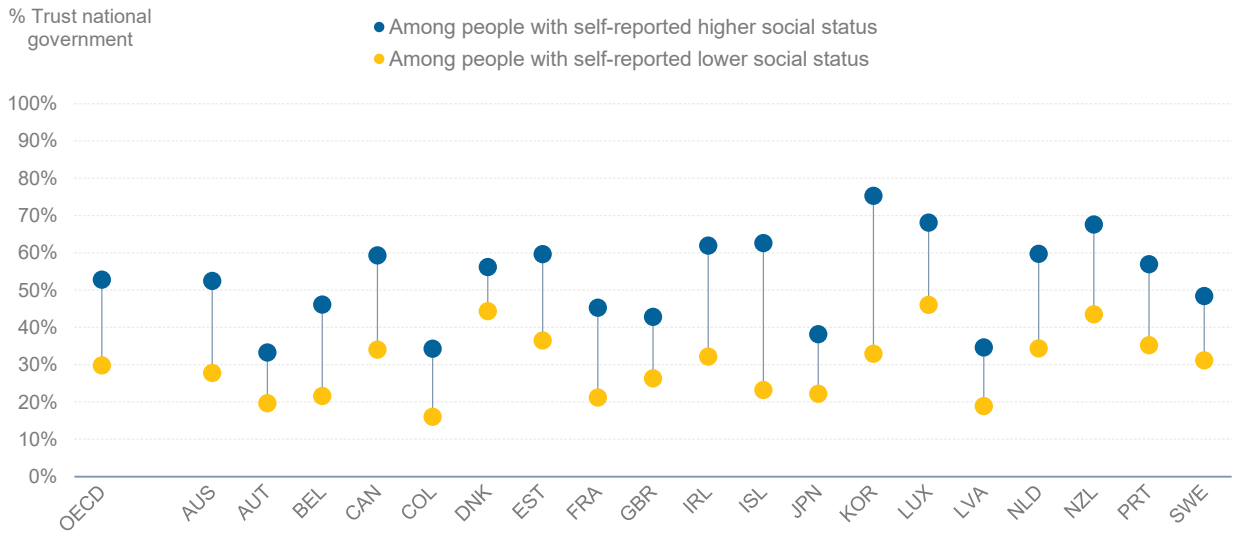
Beyond economic or material risks, a sense of one's own social status appears to be strongly related to people's level of trust in government. In all surveyed countries, people who report a lower perceived social status (measured as one's own reported position in society, relative to others) also report a lower level of trust in the national government (Figure 3.7). On average across OECD countries, the trust gap between those who consider themselves to have a relatively higher social status and those with a low social status is around 22.9 percentage points, a value much higher than the difference between actual reported income or education. Differences between groups are particularly pronounced in Korea, Iceland, and Ireland and differences are less pronounced in Austria, Denmark, Japan and Latvia. This provides some early evidence on the importance of social inclusion as a factor related to people's trust in government.

However, it is important to highlight that survey respondents were reporting their perceptions of their own social status, which was not explicitly defined and could include a number of individual material and non-material factors. As with other characteristics presented in this chapter there could be other underlying factors driving both perceptions of status and trust, such as access to public services, individual preference on state intervention, or opportunities in life related to work and education.

Figure 3.7. People with a low self-reported social status have also lower trust in government

Share of respondents who indicate trust in the national government (responses 6-10 on an 11-point scale) among people with higher and lower perceived social status, 2021



Note: Figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the questions "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 national government", and "If you imagine status in society as a ladder, some groups could be described as being closer to the top and others closer to the bottom. Thinking about yourself, where would you place yourself in this scale? (1-10 scale)". Shown here is the proportion of respondents that reported to trust the government by level of self-reported social status. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries. . New Zealand shows trust in civil service as respondents were not asked about trust in the national government (note that trust in civil service on average tends to be higher than trust in national government). Finland, Mexico and Norway are excluded from this figure as the data were not available. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: http://oe.cd/trust

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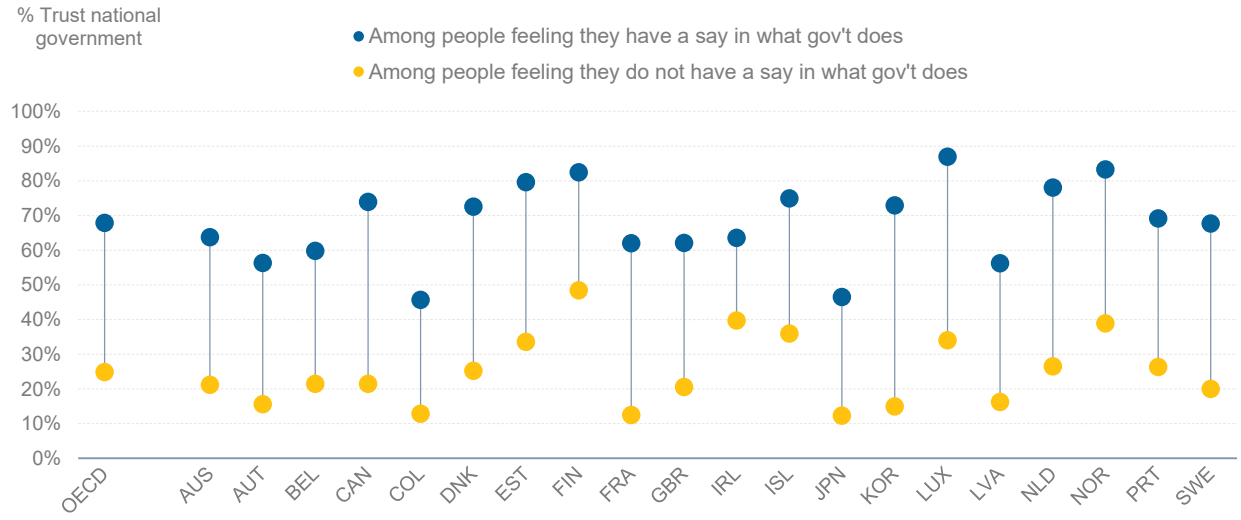
Finally, people who feel excluded from government decision making have lower levels of trust in government. Feelings of a lack of political voice not only are associated with low (or lack of) political participation,[8] but also with low trust in public institutions (Prats and Meunier, 2021[8]).

On average, among those who report they have a say in what the government does, 67.9% of people trust their national government, while only 24.9% report trust in national government among those who feel they do not have a say in what the government does (Figure 3.8). Further, people's trust in government is also positively related to confidence in their ability to participate in politics. On average for surveyed OECD countries, 53.4% of people that are confident in their own ability to participate in politics have trust in their national government. Yet the figure for those with low confidence in their ability to participate is only 31.5%. In this regard, trust in government is associated with feeling politically included, both at the system, as well as at individual level.

Figure 3.8. People who feel they have a say in what the government does have also higher trust in government

Share of respondents reporting they trust the national government (responses 6-10 on an 1-point scale) by whether they feel they have a say in what the government does, 2021



Note: Figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the questions "On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely, in general how much do you trust the national government", and "How much would you say the political system in [country] allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?". Shown here is the proportion of respondents that report to trust the national government (response categories 6-10) by whether they feel they have a say in what the government does. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries. Mexico and New Zealand are excluded from this figure as respondents were not asked about trust in the national government. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

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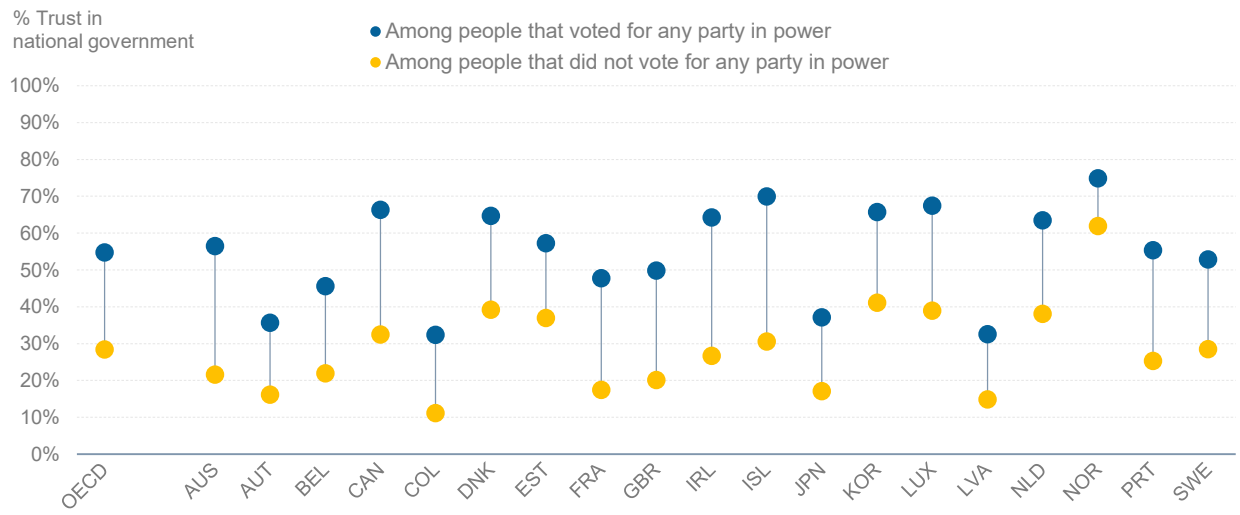
In addition to feelings of having a say in political issues, people's trust in public institutions is also highly influenced by individual political preferences. Trust in government institutions is generally higher among people who voted for the party or parties currently in power. People who did not vote for incumbents tend to trust all public institutions less, even apolitical ones such as civil service or the police. This may be a signal of people feeling excluded or outside of the democratic system, if they position themselves politically as opposition. This may also indicate a scenario of increasing political polarisation and thus the need to further strengthen the inclusivity of public institutions. On average, trust in the national government is 54.7% among people who voted for the parties in power, while only 28.4% for those who do not vote for the ruling parties (Figure 3.9). Similar results hold across other public institutions, even ostensibly apolitical ones, but the gap tends to be smaller. For instance, 55.6% of those who voted for the incumbent government trust the civil service while the share is only 46% for those who did not vote for party/parties in power.

Figure 3.9. Trust in government is lower for people that did not vote for parties in power

Share of respondents reporting they trust the national government (responses 6-10 on an 11-point scale) by whether they voted for the party/parties in power in the previous national election, 2021



Note: Figure presents the share of people that report they trust the civil service, by whether the party they voted for in the last national election (or would have voted for if they didn't vote) is currently part of the government. Trust in national government based on aggregation of response categories 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 national government". Vote for current government based on question "Is the party you voted for in the last federal (national) election (or would have voted for if you didn't vote) currently part of the government?". "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries. Finland, Mexico and New Zealand are excluded from this figure as the data were not available. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

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3.5. CULTURE AND SOCIALISATION PLAY A PART

This chapter has illustrated the role that individual-level factors play in mediating trust in government institutions. Yet it is important to note that people's attitudes towards government do not develop in a vacuum. An individual's broader cultural, family, political and social environment plays an enormous role in influencing preferences and attitudes towards government throughout a lifetime. This socialisation is a long process spanning from early childhood to old age. It affects many aspects of social life, from interpersonal relationships to political participation (Neundorf and Smets, 2017[9]) (Sapiro, 2004[10]).

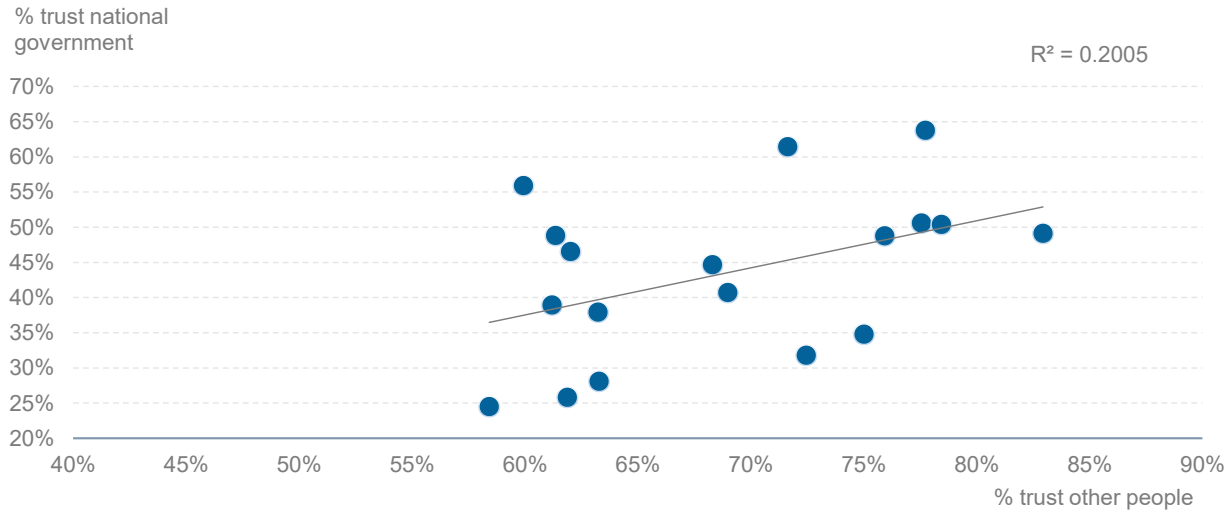
One very simple illustration of the role of culture and socialisation is the relationship between interpersonal trust and trust in government institutions (Figure 3.10). Cross-nationally, there is a positive correlation between reported levels of trust in other people, in general, and reported levels of trust in government.[9] While this measure does not fully capture the effects of "culture" or "society", it helps to illuminate the degree to which other underlying, group-level conditions influence trust in institutions. These less tangible factors could be culture, norms, level of inequality, level of poverty, level of economic development, and/or degree of racial/ethnic heterogeneity, among many other possible determinants. Many of these factors are unobservable – and the factors that can be measured quantitatively likely interact with each other.

The degree of trust in others can also help situate country-specific responses towards trust in general and government specifically; survey responses on trust may reflect diverse cultural or social variation across countries. This should be considered in comparisons on the levels of trust in government.

High levels of interpersonal trust can help citizens to act together, demand policies that benefit them collectively, and hold the government accountable. Given the interplay between interpersonal and institutional trust, governments should consider strengthening the representation of collective interests including of disadvantaged groups, for example by fostering civic space and strengthening collective interest organisations.

Figure 3.10. Trust in government correlates with trust in other people

Share of people in OECD countries that trust the national government (y-axis) by share that trust other people (x-axis) (both responses 6-10 on an 11-point scale), 2021



Note: Figure presents the relationship between the proportion of people that "trust" other people and the share that "trust" in national government, based on the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale to the questions "On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely, in general how much do you trust most people?", and "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?". "OECD" represents the unweighted average across countries. Mexico and New Zealand are excluded from this figure as respondents were not asked about trust in the national government. Japan is excluded from this figure as an outlier on interpersonal trust. For more detailed information find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

StatLink https://stat.link/lysqo7

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NOTES

[7] This figure shows women in Mexico trusting government more than men, but note that these estimates for Mexico refer to trust in the civil service, as data on trust in the national government are not available in the Trust Survey in Mexico. While Mexico has well known and persistent barriers to gender equality (see for example (OECD, 2017[11]), this result on the civil service might be related to the relatively extensive reach of the state in many Mexican women's lives, for example through the build-up of educational and healthcare institutions related to previous conditional cash transfer systems.

[8] Political participation is broadly understood as those activities undertaken by the public to influence political decisions, either directly or by affecting the selection of persons who make policies (Prats and Meunier, 2021[8]).

[9] The correlation coefficient at the country level is 0.45. The multivariate regressions at the level of individual respondents confirm a highly significant relationship between trust in the national government and trust in other people.

4 Reliable and responsive: Government competence and trust

How reliable and responsive do people view their governments' policies and public services? These concepts of reliability and responsiveness – key components of government competence – are important drivers of people's trust in public institutions. This chapter presents results from the Trust Survey on perceptions of government preparedness for a future pandemic; satisfaction with healthcare systems, educational systems, government use of personal data; and the stability of business conditions. It also presents perceptions of governments' and civil servants' responsiveness to public feedback in policy design, reform and delivery.

Key findings and areas for attention

The delivery of public services is a critical, tangible function of governments. The consistency and quality of services varies across OECD countries, reflecting different levels of public investments, government commitments and institutional capacity in different policy areas.

The Trust Survey finds that while citizens view governments as relatively reliable in providing public services, there is considerable room for improvement in how they provide such services, incorporate user feedback, and respond to people's needs.

- People in OECD countries have reasonable levels of confidence in their government's reliability. About half (49.4%) of respondents, on average, say their government is prepared to respond to a future contagious illness. Public confidence in pandemic preparedness, in turn, closely corresponds with trust in the national government.
- A majority of people in most countries are satisfied with their health (61.7%) and educational systems (57.6%), and about half (51.1%) trust their government to use their personal data safely – but only about four in ten trust their government to ensure stable business conditions.
- People are far more sceptical that their government will adapt innovative policies and services in response to public feedback. About four in ten (or fewer) respondents, on average across countries, say that their government would improve a poorly performing service, implement an innovative idea to improve a public service, or change a national policy in response to popular demands.
- Governments should continue investing to improve preparedness for future crises and to minimise uncertainty for people and business. Public confidence in these areas is strongly correlated with trust in the national government.
- Governments are operating in an increasingly complex and fast-paced environment, with growing expectations from citizens for an efficient and seamless interaction with their governments. Public satisfaction with administrative and social services, as well perceptions of fairness and equal treatment, are strongly associated with trust in civil service.
- Governments should recommit to incorporating user feedback and a variety of views when design and reform public programmes, better encourage the testing of innovative ideas in the public sector, improve access and explanations of digital processes and the use of personal data in governance, and evaluate the performance of public services using a combination of objective outcomes and user satisfaction measures.

4.1. ABOUT HALF OF RESPONDENTS ARE CONFIDENT IN PUBLIC HEALTH PREPAREDNESS

The OECD Trust Survey went into the field in most countries in November 2021, nearly two years into the global COVID-19 pandemic. Governments' responses to this health crisis have influenced public trust in government; after an initial "rally around the flag" effect in the early months of COVID-19, trust declined in most countries and has yet to recover (Brezzi et al., 2021[1]). Trust in government in November 2021 likely corresponds with the intensity of the pandemic at that time.

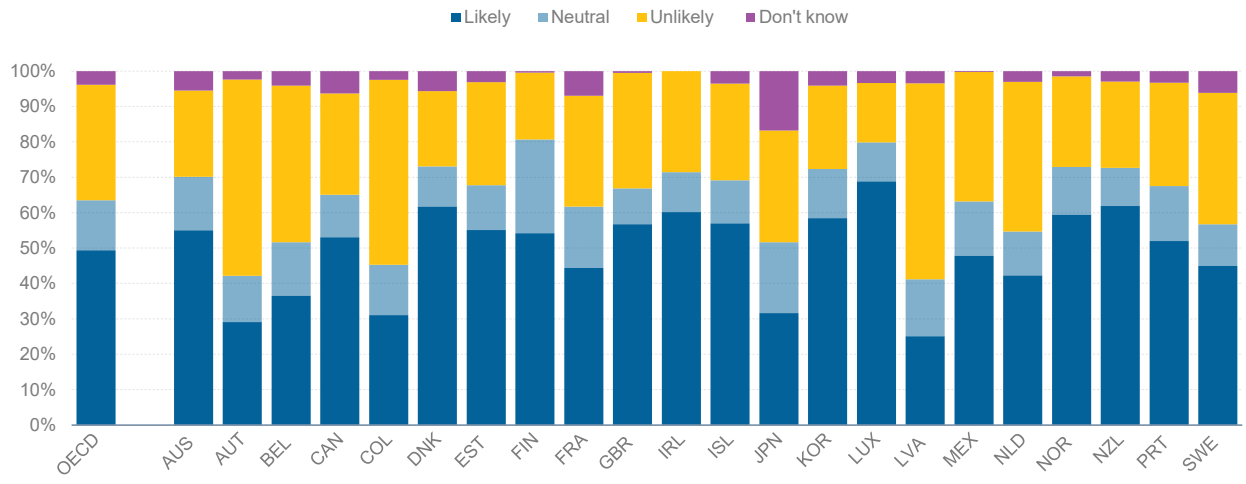
Respondents were therefore asked a timely question: "If a new serious contagious disease spreads, how likely or unlikely do you think it is that government institutions will be prepared to protect people's lives?"

On average across countries, 49.4% of respondents express confidence that their government *would* be prepared to protect people's lives in the event of a new pandemic (Figure 4.1). This share expressing a "likely" response, i.e. confidence in government, is a majority of respondents in thirteen of the surveyed countries. Combining those respondents with a positive view on government preparedness with those respondents who report a "neutral" view on government preparedness is equal to a majority of respondents in almost all countries. Almost one third (32.6%) of respondents, on average across countries, say their government is *unlikely* to be prepared for the next pandemic.

Given the enduring human and economic costs of the pandemic, and the amount of information a typical person acquired about public health over the past two years, this fairly positive expectation is a noteworthy outcome. It is also worth noting that – in spite of the many challenges governments faced in effectively responding to the economic and health exigencies of the pandemic – this finding suggests that people see governments as having learned from the information gained during this experience. The relatively weaker results in some countries may also reflect a degree of pandemic fatigue (Chapter 1), as the survey went into the field around the time of the introduction of some new lockdown measures, e.g. in Western Europe.

Figure 4.1. About half say their government would be prepared for the next pandemic

Share of respondents reporting different levels of perceived likelihood that their government would be prepared to protect people's lives in the event of a new serious contagious illness (on a 0-10 scale), 2021



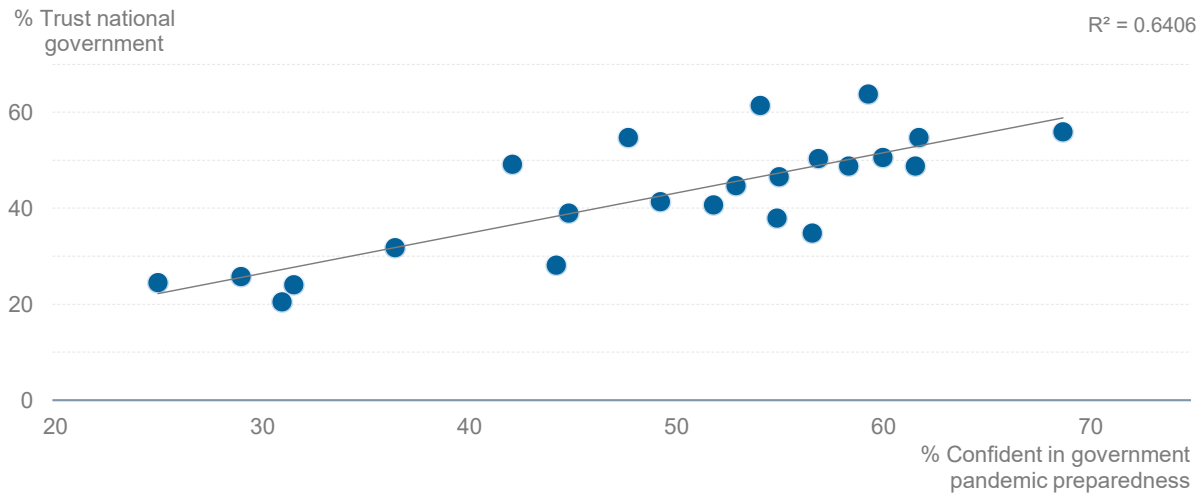
Note: Figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If a new serious contagious disease spreads, how likely or unlikely do you think is it that government institutions will be prepared to protect people's life?" The "likely" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "unlikely" is the aggregation of responses from 1-4; and "Don't know" was a separate answer choice. "OECD" presents the unweighted average of responses across countries. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

StatLink https://stat.link/35zolc

Trust in the national government closely corresponds with perceptions of preparedness for a future pandemic (Figure 4.2). Countries in which most people think their government learned from the pandemic are also the countries in which more people are likely to trust that government.

Figure 4.2. Positive perceptions of preparedness for a future pandemic are associated with higher trust in the national government – and vice versa

Share of respondents reporting trust in national government and share of respondents who consider it likely that government institutions will be prepared to protect people's lives in the event of a future pandemic, 2021



Note: This scatterplot presents the share of "trust" responses 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 your national government?", equal to the values of responses 6-10 on the response scale, on the y axis. For Mexico and New Zealand, trust in civil servants is used in lieu of trust in the national government as respondents were not asked about trust in the national government. The x axis presents the share of "likely" responses to the question "If a new serious contagious disease spreads, how likely or unlikely do you think is it that government institutions will be prepared to protect people's lives?", equal to the values of 6-10 on the response scale. "OECD" presents the unweighted average of responses across countries. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

StatLink https://stat.link/64zans

Box 4.1. Response scale in the OECD Trust Survey

The OECD Trust Survey offers an eleven-point scale for the response choices on questions about levels of trust and drivers of trust, following reviewed best practices and applications in country studies in Finland and Norway (OECD, 2017[2]) (OECD, 2021[3]) (OECD, 2021[3]). A numerical 0-10 scale with verbal scale anchors is recommended and used here for survey questions on trust, as it allows for variance in responses, increases overall data quality and complexity, and facilitates translatability across languages. The response order was presented consistently from negative to positive outcomes (i.e. 0-10) (OECD, 2017[2]).

In this report the positive (likely/high confidence) results are the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; and the negative (unlikely/low confidence) results are the aggregation of responses from 1-4. "Do not know" was a separate answer choice.

The exception to these aggregations is Finland, where the response scale ranged from 1-10. Positive responses are therefore coded as 7-10; neutral as 5 and 6; negative as 1-4; and "Do not know" was a separate answer choice. This sorting tends to give Finland a slightly larger "neutral" response rate than other countries.

The inclusion of "Do not know" and "neutral" responses in figures in this report naturally results in lower percentages of respondents who report they trust or do not trust different institutions. The inclusion of these "do not know" and "neutral" responses stands in contrast to some other cross-national surveys measuring trust, but it is arguably a benefit of the OECD Trust Survey – it gives respondents a wider range of response choices and it enables a more nuanced interpretation of results. It is important to note that country-specific cultural, institutional and socioeconomic contexts may also systematically bias trust conclusions and the proportion of neutral and "Do not know" responses in certain countries (Box 2.1 in Chapter 2).

The full questionnaire is available in the detailed survey method document accompanying this report, available at http://oe.cd/trust.

4.2. IN MOST COUNTRIES, A MAJORITY ARE SATISFIED WITH THEIR HEALTHCARE AND EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

A tangible indicator of government reliability lies in the provision of social protection and educational opportunities. OECD governments devote a massive amount of resources to providing health and education: pre-pandemic, countries spent around 5.6% and 3.4% of GDP, respectively, on average in the OECD (OECD, 2022[4]; OECD, 2021[5]). These public services, correspondingly, reach and affect the lives of large shares of national populations.

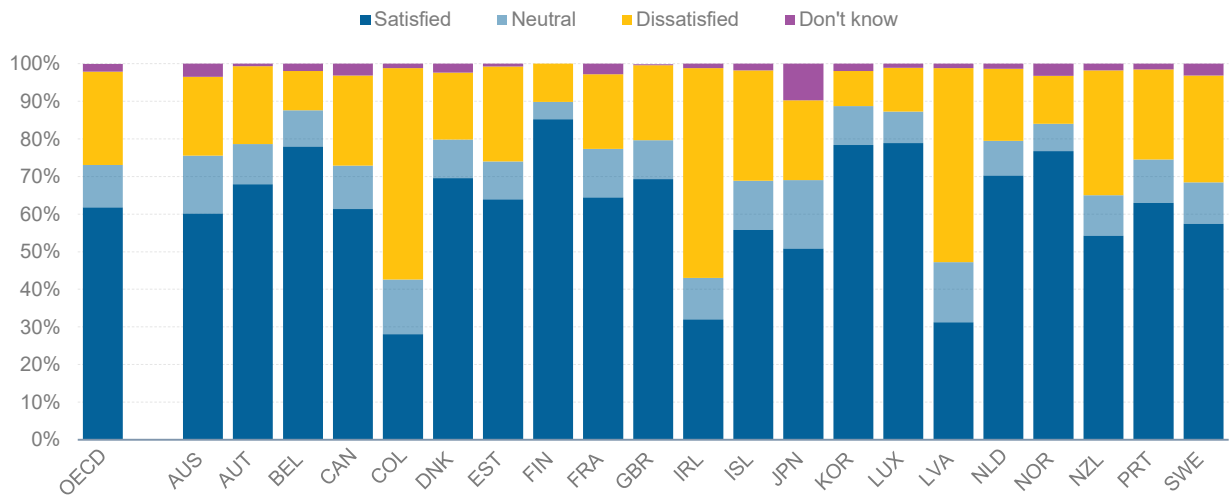
How are these everyday public services perceived, and how do these perceptions align with actual expenditures and other measurable outcomes? The OECD Trust Survey finds that a majority of respondents, on average across countries, are satisfied with their country's educational system and healthcare system. Although reported satisfaction with public services may conceal many different aspects of services – such as access, affordability, courtesy, timeliness, and so on – it can provide a general, aggregate account of objective indicators of service performance (Baredes, 2022[6]).

4.2.1. Healthcare

Looking at healthcare, 61.7% of respondents, on average, say they are satisfied with their country's healthcare system (Figure 4.3). Indeed, in all but three countries a majority of respondents feel satisfied with the healthcare system. This is a noteworthy result in a global pandemic. Satisfaction is slightly higher among users of healthcare, defined here as those who had direct interaction with a health provider in the past year.[10]

Figure 4.3. A majority of respondents, across countries, are satisfied with the provision of healthcare

Share of respondents reporting different levels of satisfaction with the healthcare system in their country (on a 0-10 scale), 2021



Note: Figure presents the within-country distribution of responses to the question "On a scale of 0 to 10 [where 0 is 'not at all satisfied' and 10 is 'completely satisfied'], how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the healthcare system in [country] as a whole?" The "satisfied" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "unlikely" is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and "Don't know" was a separate answer choice. In Norway the question referred to satisfaction with primary care doctors, public healthcare centres, nursing homes, and health & care services in the home. Mexico is excluded from the figure as data are not available. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

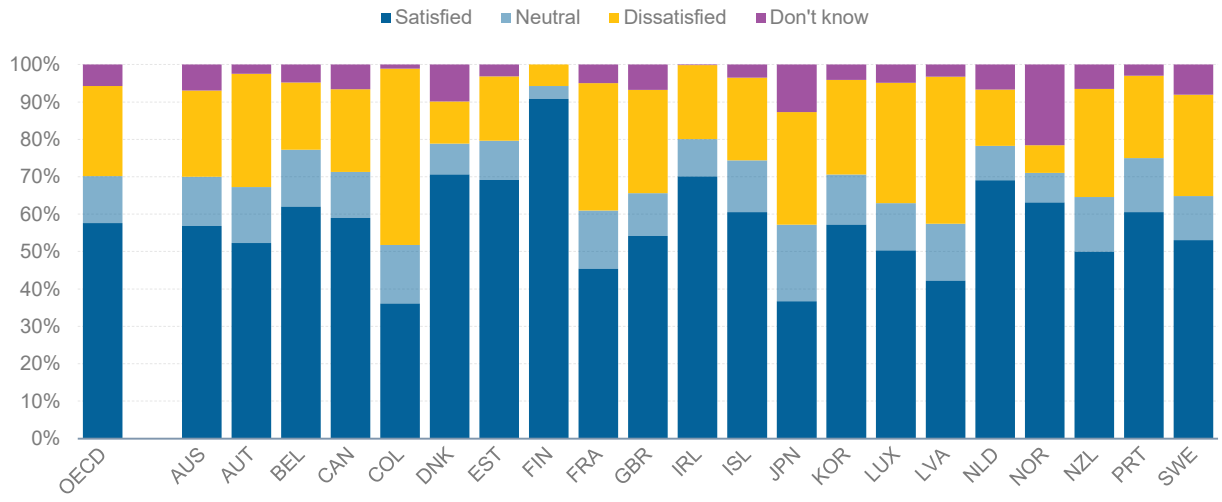
StatLink https://stat.link/qcbu6a

4.2.2. Education

Respondents are similarly positive about education: 57.6% of respondents say they are satisfied with their country's educational system (Figure 4.4). And in spite of the challenges the pandemic presented for schooling, people whose immediate family had a direct experience with the education system in 2021 are actually slightly more likely to say that they are satisfied with the education system than people without a direct experience.

Figure 4.4. Nearly six out of ten, across countries, are satisfied with the educational system in their country

Within-country distribution of levels of satisfaction with the educational system, 2021



Note: Figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "On a scale of 0 to 10, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the education system in your country as a whole?" The "likely" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "unlikely" is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and "Don't know" was a separate answer choice. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries. In Finland, only respondents with experience in the education system were asked about their level of satisfaction; in Norway respondents were asked specifically about satisfaction with upper secondary education/schools and primary schools. Mexico is excluded from the figure as data are not available. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

StatLink https://stat.link/l2zg4f

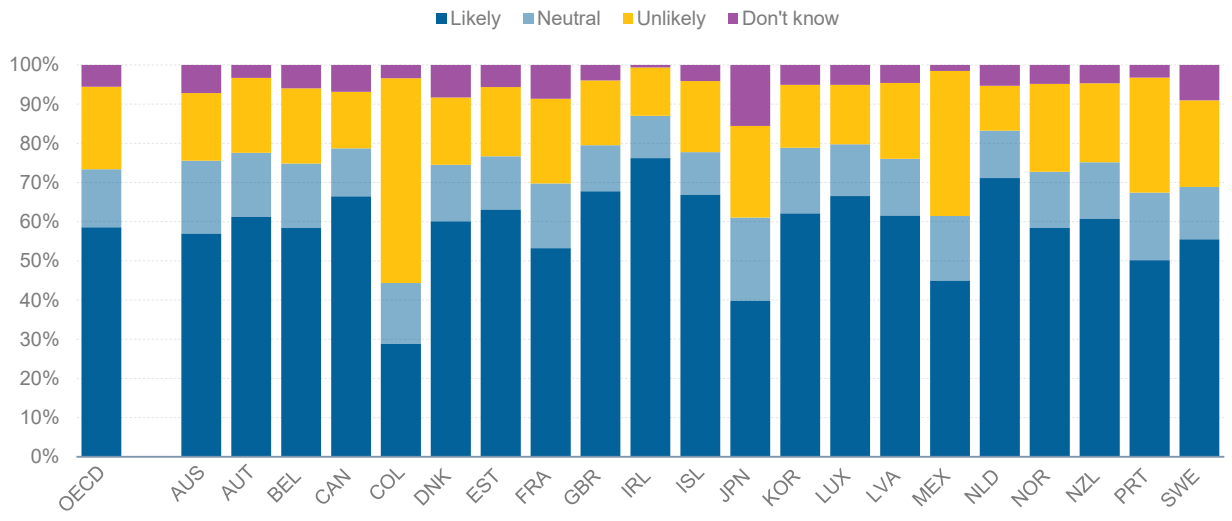
These results on satisfaction with healthcare and education should be interpreted with caution. While a majority of respondents in most countries report that they are satisfied with these services, these are not large majorities in most countries. The Trust Survey does not ask about the affordability, accessibility and quality of healthcare and education, which has led to considerably lower levels of satisfaction in the OECD Risks that Matter survey focused on social protection (OECD, 2021[7]) (OECD, 2019[8]). People in OECD countries also consistently rank the risks of poor health/disability and the future social mobility of their children as their top worries, both across countries and over time (OECD, 2021[7]) (OECD, 2019[8]). In short, there is still much room for improvement in social service delivery.

4.2.3. Applications to public benefits or services

When being asked about their own potential application for a generic government benefit or service, a high share of respondents – 58.5% – feel that their application would be treated fairly (Figure 4.5). The share of respondents who expect to be treated fairly is above 50% in 18 of the surveyed OECD countries, with above 70% in Ireland and the Netherlands. Across countries, being confident about a fair treatment in government benefits or services is highly and significantly correlated with trust in the civil servants (Chapter 2).

Figure 4.5. The majority of respondents expect that their application for a government benefit or service would be treated fairly

Share of respondents who indicate different levels of perceived likelihood that a government would treat their application for a government benefit or service fairly (on a 0-10 scale), 2021



Note: Figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If you or a member of your family would apply for a government benefit or service (e.g. unemployment benefits or other forms of income support), how likely or unlikely do you think it is that your application would be treated fairly?" The "likely" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "unlikely" is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and "Don't know" was a separate answer choice. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries. In Mexico and Norway, the question was formulated in a slightly different way. Finland is excluded from the figure as the data are not available. For more detailed information, please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

StatLink https://stat.link/fpomqy

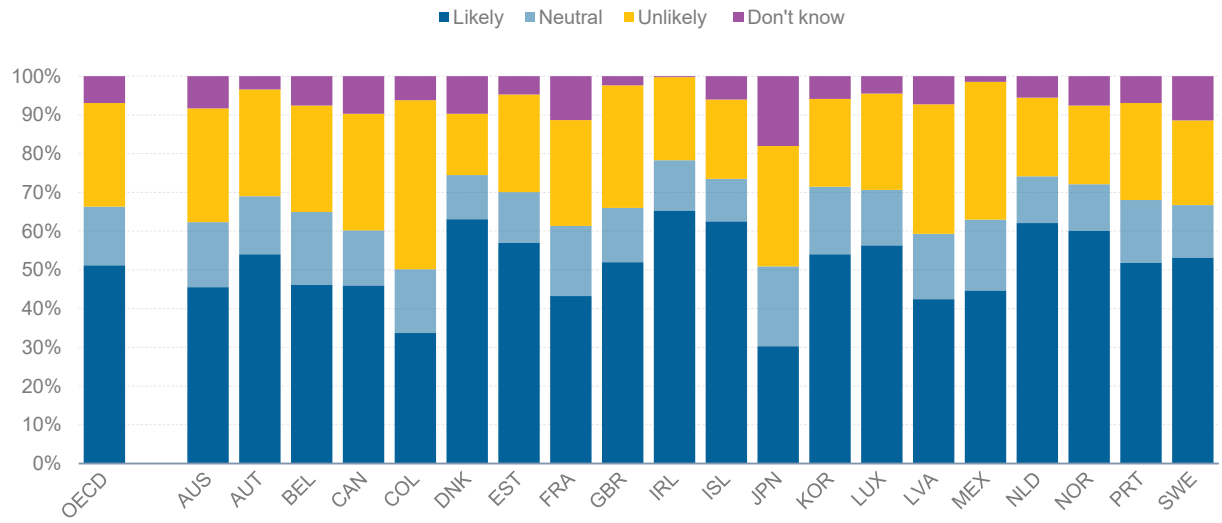
4.3. PEOPLE TRUST GOVERNMENT WITH THEIR DATA, BUT ARE LESS CERTAIN ABOUT THE STABILITY OF BUSINESS CONDITIONS

Governments' efforts to inform the population about how their personal data are processed, stored and used is another important aspect of government reliability. The COVID-19 pandemic has further spurred remote service delivery and digital interactions of the population with the public sector, making the responsible use of personal data by public agencies even more relevant. The Trust Survey finds that governments are doing fairly well on this.

On average across countries, 51.1% of respondents say that, if they were to share their personal data with a public agency/office, it is likely that the data would be exclusively used for "legitimate purposes" (Figure 4.6). Respondents in Denmark, Iceland, Ireland, the Netherlands and Norway have especially high levels of trust in their government's use of their data. Yet even in the countries with the lowest levels of trust in the government's use of data, typically fewer than one-third of respondents feel their government is not likely to use personal data responsibly. This suggests that government misuse of personal data is not a widespread concern.

Figure 4.6. Half of respondents, on average, trust their government to use their personal data for legitimate purposes

Share of respondents reporting different levels of perceived likelihood that their government would use personal data exclusively for "legitimate purposes" (on a 0-10 scale), 2021



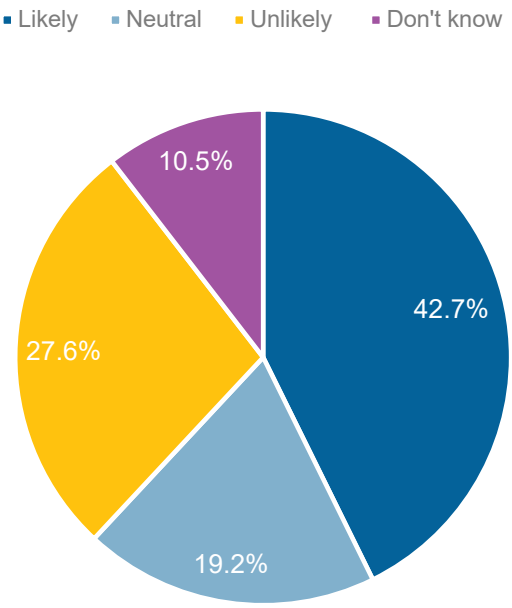
Note: Figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If you share your personal data with a [public agency/office], how likely or unlikely do you think it is that it would be exclusively used for legitimate purposes?". The "likely" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "unlikely" is the aggregation of responses from 1-4; and "Don't know" was a separate answer choice. Finland and New Zealand are excluded from this figure as data were not available. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

StatLink https://stat.link/8zev60

People are less optimistic, across countries, about the capacity of governments to minimise instability and unpredictability of business conditions (Figure 4.7). Just over four in ten respondents (42.7%), on average across countries, say it is likely that business conditions (e.g. laws and regulations) will be stable and predictable, with the most positive feedback in Korea, where 54.3% report anticipating stable business conditions. At the same time, respondents are not overly pessimistic. Only 27.6% say it is *unlikely* that business conditions will remain stable, and there are large shares of neutral responses across countries. The relatively high average share of "Don't know" responses to this question, relative to the other policy questions in the survey, also suggests that knowledge of business conditions – and perhaps knowledge of policy tools to influence business conditions – may be limited in the general population.

Figure 4.7. Four in ten say they trust business conditions that government can influence to remain stable

Share of respondents reporting different levels of perceived likelihood that business conditions that government can influence will be stable and predictable (on a 0-10 scale), unweighted OECD average, 2021



Note: Figure presents the OECD unweighted average distribution of responses to the question "How likely or unlikely do you think it is that the business conditions that the government can influence (e.g. laws and regulations businesses need to comply with) will be stable and predictable?". The "likely" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "unlikely" is the aggregation of responses from 1-4; and "Don't know" was a separate answer choice. Mexico is excluded from this figure as the data were not available. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

StatLink https://stat.link/7b2oi1

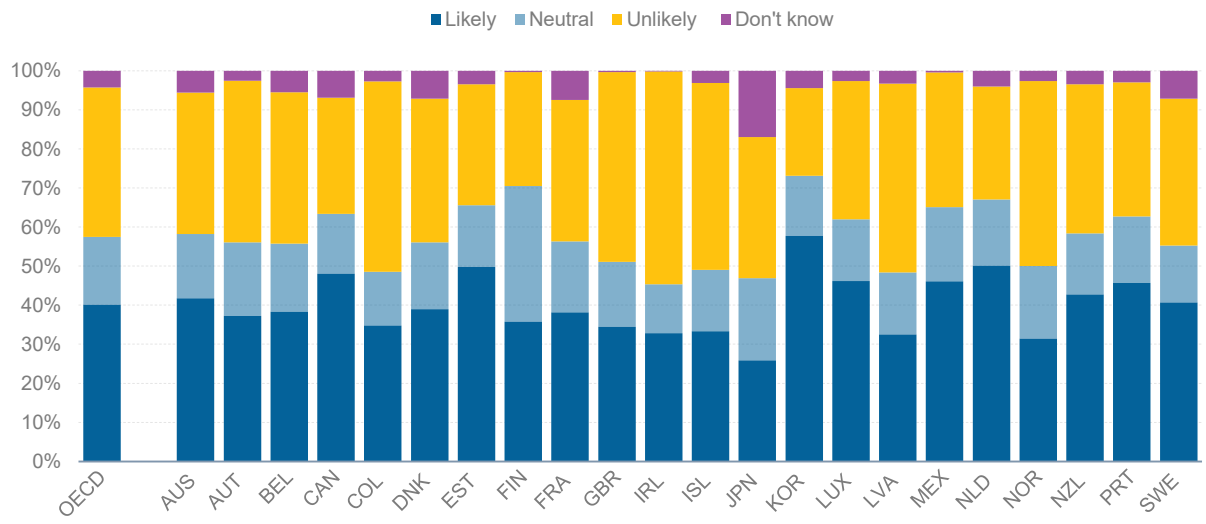
4.4. THERE IS SCEPTICISM ABOUT THE RESPONSIVENESS OF GOVERNMENTS

While the Trust Survey finds moderate levels of confidence in government reliability, governments fare less well in people's evaluations of their *responsiveness*. The Trust Survey attempts to estimate to what degree OECD governments are perceived as 1) providing efficient, quality, affordable, timely and citizen-centred public services and 2) employing an innovative and efficient civil service that responds to user needs (for more on this, see the Trust Framework in Chapter 1). These questions on the capacity of governments to adapt and innovate are particularly relevant given that OECD governments are operating in an increasingly complex and fast-paced environment, with growing expectations from citizens for an efficient and seamless interaction with their governments.

The Trust Survey asks people, across a range of questions, to consider how well institutions adapt policies and public services to citizens' views. Only 40.2% of respondents say a public service would be likely to be improved if many people complained about the service working poorly (Figure 4.8). Estonia, Korea and the Netherlands are the only countries in which a majority of respondents say a public service would be improved in response to complaints.

Figure 4.8. A minority of respondents say a public service would be improved if people complained

Share of respondents reporting different levels of perceived likelihood that a poorly-performing public service would be improved if many people complained about it (on a 0-10 scale), 2021



Note: Figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If many people complained about a public service that is working badly, how likely or unlikely do you think it is that it would be improved?" The "likely" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "unlikely" is the aggregation of responses from 1-4; and "Don't know" was a separate answer choice. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

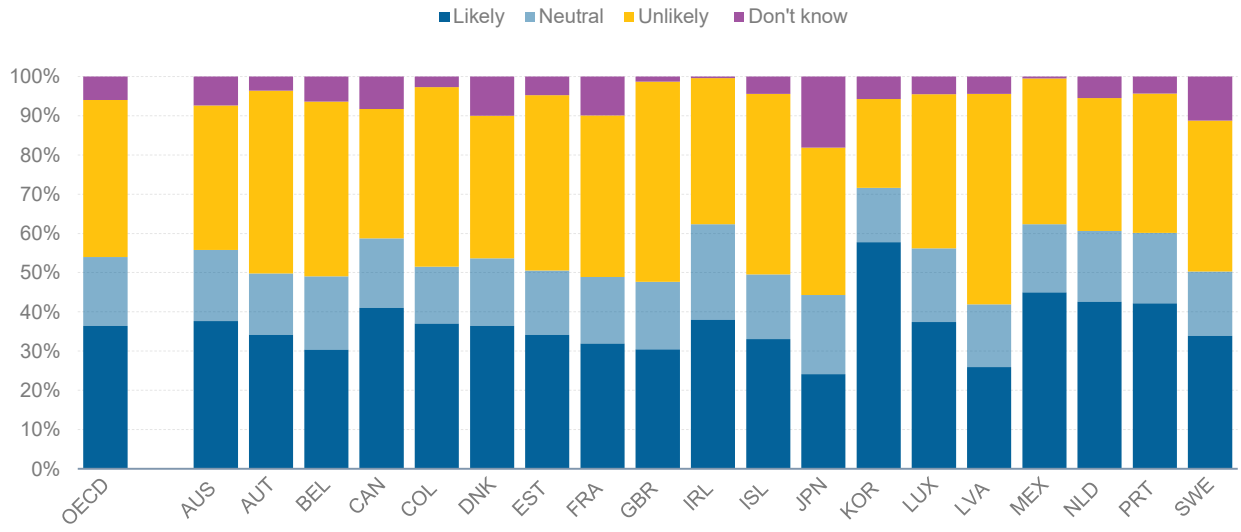
StatLink https://stat.link/cp72lv

When looking at a higher level of governance, e.g. a national policy, people are similarly sceptical of their government's responsiveness (Figure 4.9). Only 36.5% of respondents say a national policy would be changed if a majority of the population opposed the policy. In only one country – Korea – are a majority (57.8%) of respondents optimistic that the government would change a policy.

Of course, not every national policy *should* reflect majority opinions – indeed, the protection of minority rights against the tyranny of the majority is a keystone of modern democracy (Tocqueville, 1838[9]). But these estimates suggest that governments in general are not viewed as being very adaptive to public attitudes.

Figure 4.9. Most people do not think national policies adapt to public views

Share of respondents reporting different levels of perceived likelihood that a national policy would be changed if a majority of people expressed a view against it (on a 0-10 scale), 2021



Note: Figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If over half of the people clearly express a view against a national policy, how likely or unlikely do you think it is that would be changed?" The "likely" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "unlikely" is the aggregation of responses from 1-4; and "Don't know" was a separate answer choice. Finland, New Zealand and Norway are excluded from this figure as question was not asked. "OECD" presents the unweighted cross-national average. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

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Governments' weaker scores on the responsiveness component of the Trust Framework align with similar findings on government openness: people are highly sceptical of their ability to influence government decision making at the local level, and they do not feel their views would be incorporated even if they participate in, for example, a public consultation on policy reform (Chapter 5). These findings also correspond with respondents' widely held views that they lack political voice (Chapter 6).

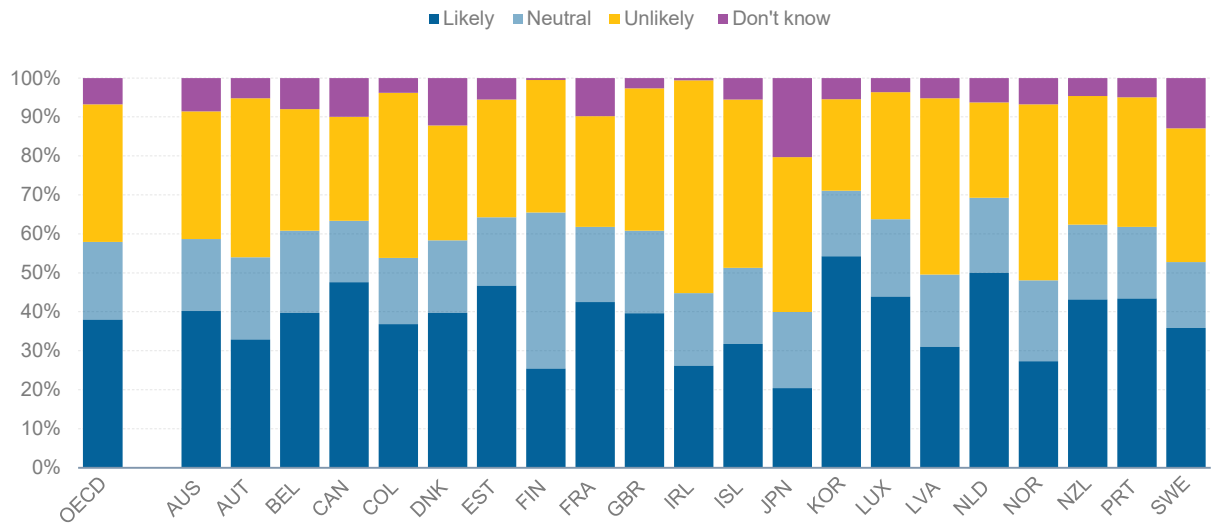
The results from the OECD Trust Survey suggest that more can be done to ensure that policies and services – even if reasonably well-delivered – are aligned with people's expectations and adapt as needed. This sense of a lack of voice in governance has important implications for trust and for the strength of democracy in general.

4.5. FEW PEOPLE SEE PUBLIC AGENCIES ADOPTING INNOVATIVE IDEAS

Related to public scepticism over government responsiveness, just fewer than one in four (38.0%, on average across OECD countries), feel that a public agency would be likely to adopt an innovative idea to improve a public service. Korea, the Netherlands, Canada and Estonia score most highly on this measure, perhaps reflecting dedicated, people-centred policy engagement efforts in these countries (OECD/KDI, 2018[10]).

Figure 4.10. The public has a lack of confidence in public agencies adopting innovative ideas

Share of respondents reporting different levels of perceived likelihood that a public agency/office would adopt an innovative idea that could improve a public service (on a 0-10 scale), 2021



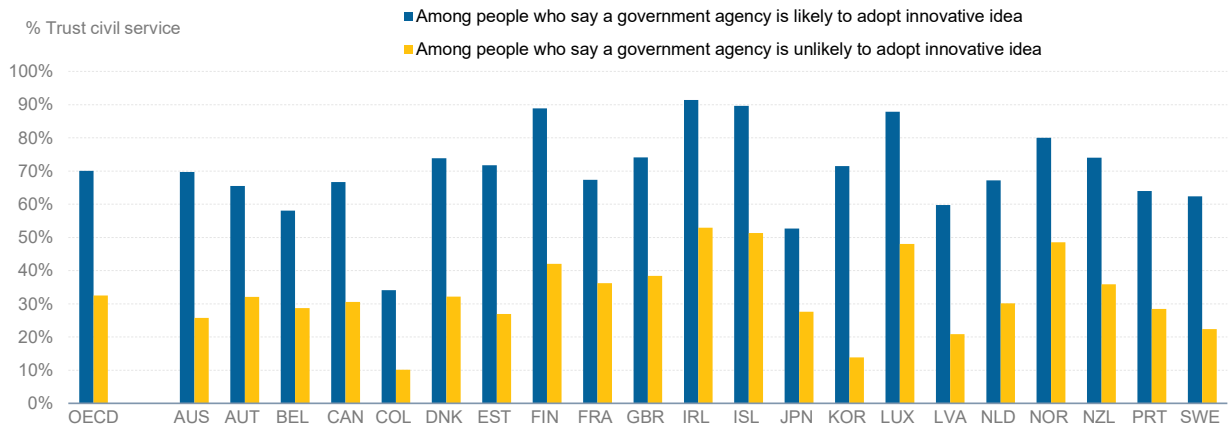
Note: Figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If there is an innovative idea that could improve a public service, how likely or unlikely do you think it is that it would be adopted by the responsible public agency/office?" The "likely" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "unlikely" is the aggregation of responses from 1-4; and "Don't know" was a separate answer choice. The scale ranges from 0-10. "OECD" presents the unweighted cross-national average. Mexico is excluded from this figure as data are not available. The question is phrased slightly differently in Norway. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

StatLink https://stat.link/9t20sg

Confidence in government agencies' agility in adopting new ideas is directly related to trust in civil service. In every country, people who say they are confident about innovation in a public office are much more likely to trust civil servants: on average across OECD countries, the share of people that trust the civil service is equal to 70% among those who are confident about public sector innovation, a value more than two times larger than among those who say that the public sector would not adopt innovative ideas (Figure 4.11).

Figure 4.11. Higher confidence that a government agency would adopt innovative ideas is associated with higher trust in civil servants

Share of respondents who report they trust the civil service, sorted by their perception that a government agency would or would not adopt an innovative idea, 2021



Note: Figure presents the average share of respondents who trust their civil service, sorted by whether or not they think a government agency would adopt innovative ideas. The share of respondents who think government agency would adopt innovative idea is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 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]?"; The group of people with high trust in civil service consists of responses from 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)." Mexico is excluded from this figure as data on confidence in public agencies adopting innovative ideas are not available. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

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Box 4.2. Improving responsiveness in practice: The case of Korea

There are applied and practical ways to improve the responsiveness of government. The case of Korea offers a good example. Concerned with a relatively low level of trust in government, in contrast with the good performance in many public governance areas, Korea implemented a pilot version of the OECD Trust Survey in 2017 to better understand drivers of public trust (OECD/KDI, 2018[10]). The study found that only about 40% of the population considered the government to be responsive and reliable (estimated as the aggregation of values of 6-10 on the eleven-point scale used in the Trust Survey). By the time of the 2021 OECD Trust Survey data collection, however, around 55% of Koreans viewed their government as responsive and reliable (Figure 2.6 in Chapter 2).

The 2018 trust case study provided a number of recommendations to Korea to strengthen government's competence and institutional trust. Following the 2018 study, Korea has implemented actions geared towards enhancing public sector innovation and upgrading skills, adjusting risk management frameworks to improve disaster and safety management, and engaging with citizens more actively on service design and delivery, among others. Moreover, "achieving a trustworthy government" has become an explicit public policy goal in the Government Innovation Strategy of the Ministry of Interior and Safety (MOIS).

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NOTE

[10] Results across users/non-users are not shown here because a majority of respondents in all countries had interacted with a healthcare provider in the year prior to the survey.

5 Openness, integrity and equal treatment: Critical for trust and for democracy

The values of a government – its propensity to do what is right, and its underlying intentions and principles – are a major driver of trust in government. People expect to be informed about government actions and have opportunities to influence policies, and they expect integrity and fairness. This chapter presents results from the Trust Survey on perceptions of government openness, the fairness of public processes and the integrity of public officials.

Key findings and areas for attention

- People in OECD countries see access to government information positively: almost two-thirds (65.1%) feel that information about administrative procedures is easily accessible. Governments should strengthen and consolidate information-sharing, making information and data publicly available and encouraging re-use and feedback.
- Yet people are far less satisfied with opportunities to engage in the policy-making process and with government's accountability to public feedback and demands. Around 40% of respondents believe they could voice their views about a local government's decision concerning their community. And fewer than one-third (32.9%) of respondents believe that the government would adopt opinions expressed in a public consultation.
- Many respondents perceive some public officials as furthering their own interests. Only four out of ten respondents, on average across countries, expect public employees would refuse a bribe, and a similar share expect the courts to make decisions free of political influence. This parallels findings that most people think a high-level political official would grant a political favour in exchange for the offer of a well-paid private sector job (Chapter 6).
- This perception that the system is not working for everyone – and often works better for the privileged – is also demonstrated by only four in ten respondents feeling confident that a public employee would treat rich and poor people equally. This drops to one-third among economically-vulnerable respondents.
- Openness and integrity matter for trust in government. Governments must recommit to engaging with the public and incorporating public feedback when such consultations occur. Government's actions to strengthen individuals' ability to participate in politics, and improve perception of meaningful opportunities to participate among those who are sceptical, will help to improve trust in government.
- Poor public perception of the independence of the judiciary from political influence is strongly correlated with low trust in the national government and perception of fairness is strongly associated with trust in both civil service and local government, as are efforts to fight corruption, ensure integrity, and promote equal treatment by civil servants.

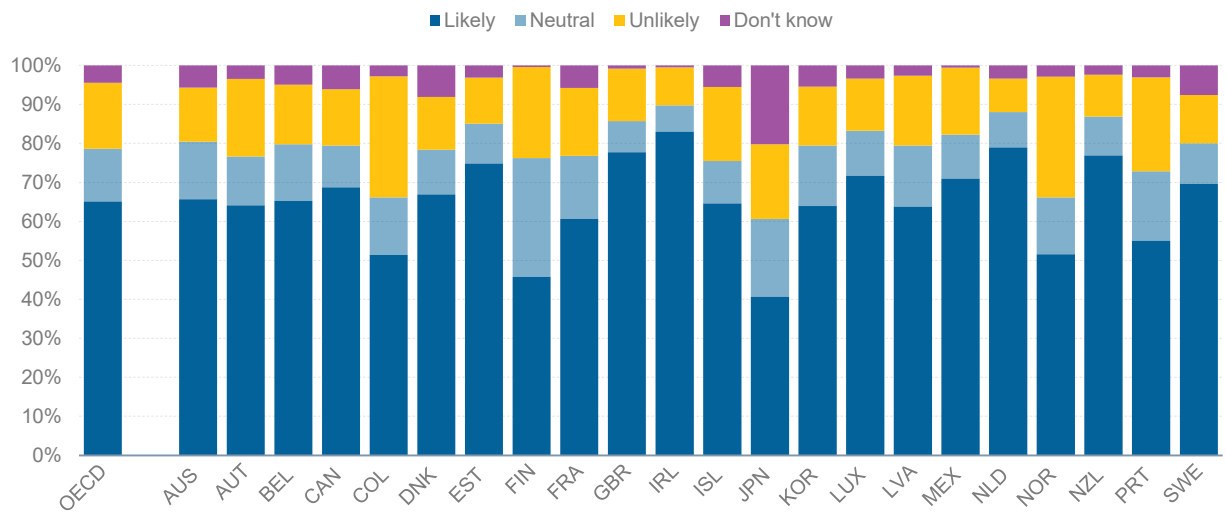
5.1. MANY FIND GOVERNMENT INFORMATION ACCESSIBLE

Governments' efforts to make public information easily available and make public processes more transparent help people understand what the government does. Information-sharing can help strengthen satisfaction with public services and trust between citizens and their governments.

The Trust Survey finds that, on average, almost two-thirds (65.1%) of respondents think that information about an administrative procedure would be easily available if they needed it (Figure 5.1). In Ireland, over 80% of respondents report that such information would be easily available. These results suggest that OECD governments are doing a reasonably good job in making information available about public services and administrative processes. This finding is corroborated by results in the 2020 OECD Risks that Matter Survey, where "uncertainty about how to apply" was the least-frequently cited explanation for why some people think public benefits would be hard to access (OECD, 2021[5]). Good practice examples on governments' efforts to provide citizens with clear and regular information during the COVID-19 crisis are outlined in Box 5.1.

Figure 5.1. In most countries, a majority feels they can easily find information about administrative procedures

Share of respondents who indicate different levels of perception of the ease of finding information about administrative procedures (on a 0-10 scale), 2021



Note: Figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If you need information about an administrative procedure (for example obtaining a passport, applying for benefits, etc.), how likely or unlikely do you think it is that the information would be easily available?". The "likely" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "unlikely" is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and "Don't know" was a separate answer choice. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries. In Mexico, Norway and Finland, the question was formulated in a slightly different way. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

StatLink https://stat.link/l0gmwe

Box 5.1. Providing access to information during periods of crisis

The following examples illustrate governments' efforts to provide citizens with access to clear and regular information during the COVID-19 crisis, an important element to maintain citizens' trust in government as the OECD Trust Survey finds that access to information and trust in government are strongly associated (Figure 5.3).

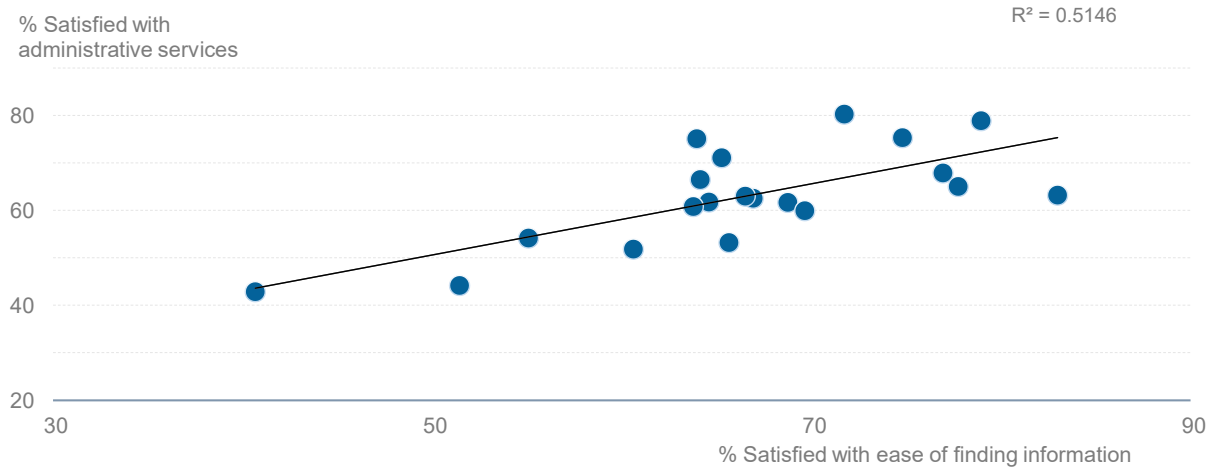
- *Engaging citizens in consultations and focus groups* – In Finland, the government engaged in what were called "lockdown dialogues" to gather citizens' feelings and views on the challenges they were experiencing during lockdowns and stay-at-home orders. These continued after restrictions were eased and were converted into the "Finnish National Dialogues". In total the government engaged in over 100 dialogues.
- *Bringing the scientific community into the communication process* – Many political leaders have chosen to involve experts from the scientific community or senior civil servants in press conferences and statements. For instance, the Prime Minister of Canada (among others such as the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom) appeared along with the country's chief health officer in all his speeches in order to validate the underlying scientific evidence and thus bolster the public credibility of the messaging. In some cases experts also led their own communication interventions without policy makers.
- *Delivering communication that is frequent, transparent and inclusive* – Some governments have tried to remain transparent and acknowledge the unknown. There have also been efforts to better reach groups that have traditionally been excluded or have reason to doubt what the government tells them. For example, in Canada focus groups with diverse segments of society, including Indigenous groups and migrants, helped to understand specifically how messages could be communicated more effectively. As part of this effort government messages have been translated into 30 languages.

Source: (OECD, 2020[6]) (OECD, 2021[7]) (OECD, 2021[8])

The Trust Survey confirms also that the ease of access to information is positively linked with satisfaction with administrative services. Countries in which respondents consider that information about administrative procedures is easily available also have higher levels of public satisfaction with the quality of administrative services (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2. Perception that information is easily available is positively linked with satisfaction with administrative services cross-nationally

Share of respondents who consider it likely that information about administrative procedures would be easily available and share of respondents who are satisfied with the quality of administrative services, 2021



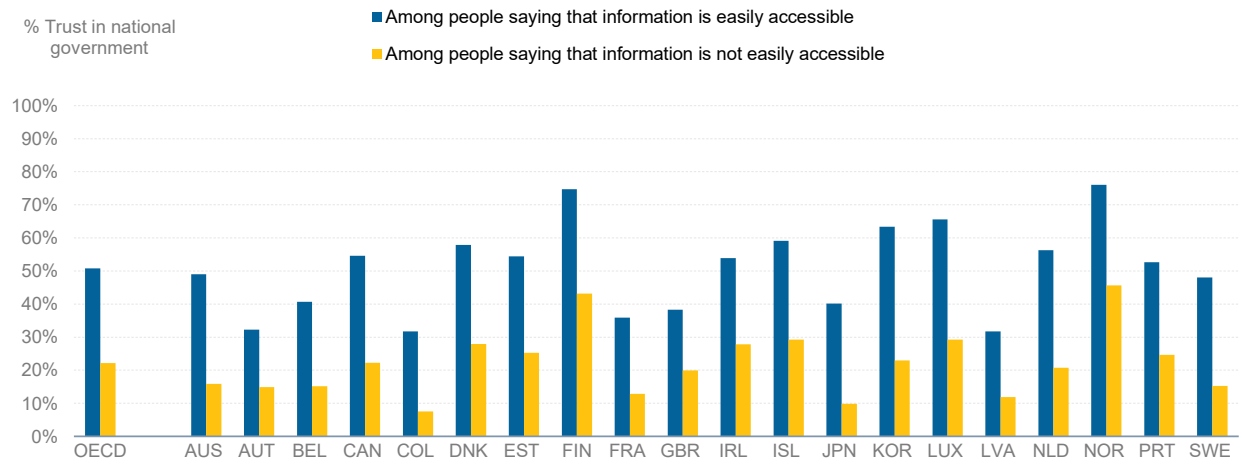
Note: This scatterplot presents the share of "satisfied" responses to the question "On a scale of 0 to 10, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the quality of administrative services (e.g. applying for an ID or a certificate of birth, death, marriage or divorce)", equal to the values of responses 6-10 on the response scale, on the y axis. The x axis presents the share of "likely" responses to the question "If you need information about an administrative procedure (for example obtaining a passport, applying for benefits, etc.), how likely or unlikely do you think it is that the information would be easily available?" equal to the values of 6-10 on the response scale. "OECD" presents the unweighted average of responses across countries. Finland, Mexico and Norway are excluded from this figure as data on satisfaction with administrative services was not available or compatible. For more detailed information, please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

StatLink https://stat.link/8o3yil

People who perceive governmental information to be open and transparent also have higher levels of trust in government. Indeed, on average across countries, among those who find information about administrative processes easily available, 50.8% have trust in national government. Among those who find that information is not easily available, trust in national government is only 22.1% -- a difference of almost 30 percentage points (Figure 5.3).

Figure 5.3. Trust in government is strongly associated with whether people can easily access information

Share of respondents who trust the national government by whether they think it is likely or not that information on administrative processes is easily available (on a 0-10 scale), 2021



Note: Figure presents the average share of respondents who trust their national government, sorted by respondents' level of confidence that information on administrative processes is easily accessible. The share of respondents who trust their national government is the aggregation of responses from 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 the national government?"; The group of people saying that information about administrative procedures is easily accessible consists of responses from 6-10 to the question "If you need information about an administrative procedure (for example obtaining a passport, applying for benefits, etc.), how likely or unlikely do you think it is that the information would be easily available?". "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries. Mexico and New Zealand are excluded from this figure as respondents were not asked about trust in the national government. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

StatLink https://stat.link/5opdrz

Of course it is worth noting that openness principles are necessary but may not be sufficient when it comes to trust. For instance, increased transparency will not necessarily immediately lead to increased trust if it exposes controversial information or incidences of corruption (OECD, 2017[1]).

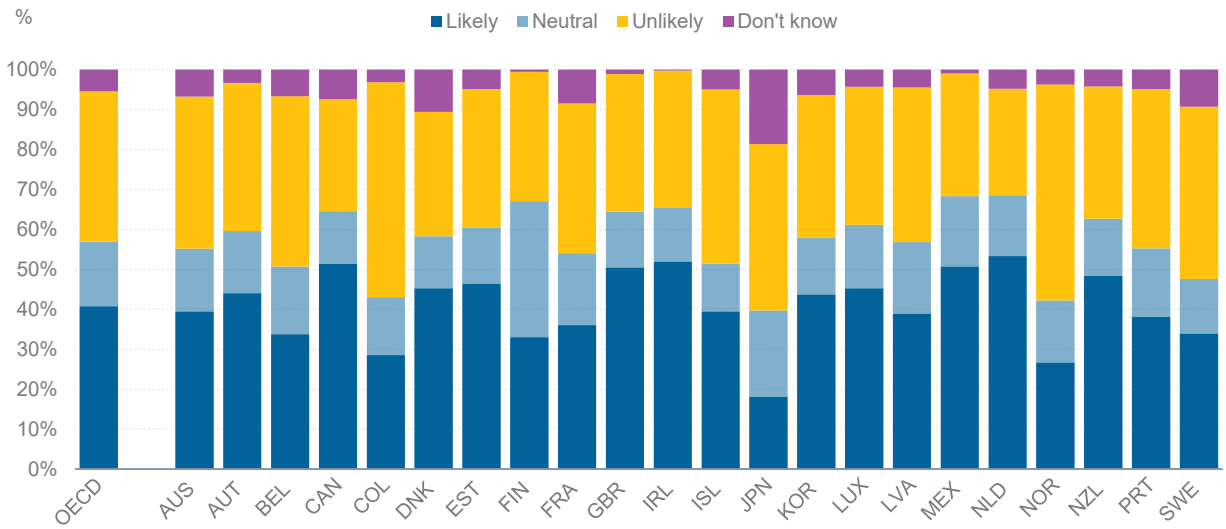
5.2. FEW SEE OPPORTUNITIES TO INFLUENCE POLICY MAKING

Trust in public institutions is derived from factors beyond the conventional measures of service quality, suggesting that attention should be paid not only to performance, but also to processes (OECD, 2017[1]; Schmidthuber, Ingrams and Hilgers, 2020[2]). People's feelings of inclusive governance depend not only on the ends of public service provision (to achieve good results and outcomes of services) but also the means (how governments design and provide these services, for example through consulting with citizens and if they were achieved with integrity, fairness and including everyone).

How are governments perceived when it comes to giving people opportunities to provide inputs to the policy-making process? On average across countries, only four out of ten respondents think that they would have the opportunity to voice their views if the local government makes a decision affecting their community (Figure 5.4). In Canada, Ireland, Mexico, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom a majority of the respondents think they would be consulted for such a decision.

Figure 5.4. Few people feel they would be able to voice their views about a local government decision affecting their community

Share of respondents who indicate different levels of perceived likelihood that they would have the opportunity to voice their views if a local government decision affects their community (on a 0-10 scale), 2021



Note: Figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If a decision affecting your community is to be made by the local government, how likely or unlikely do you think it is that you would have an opportunity to voice your views?" The "likely" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "unlikely" is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and "Don't know" was a separate answer choice. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries. In Mexico, Norway and Finland, the question was formulated in a slightly different way. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

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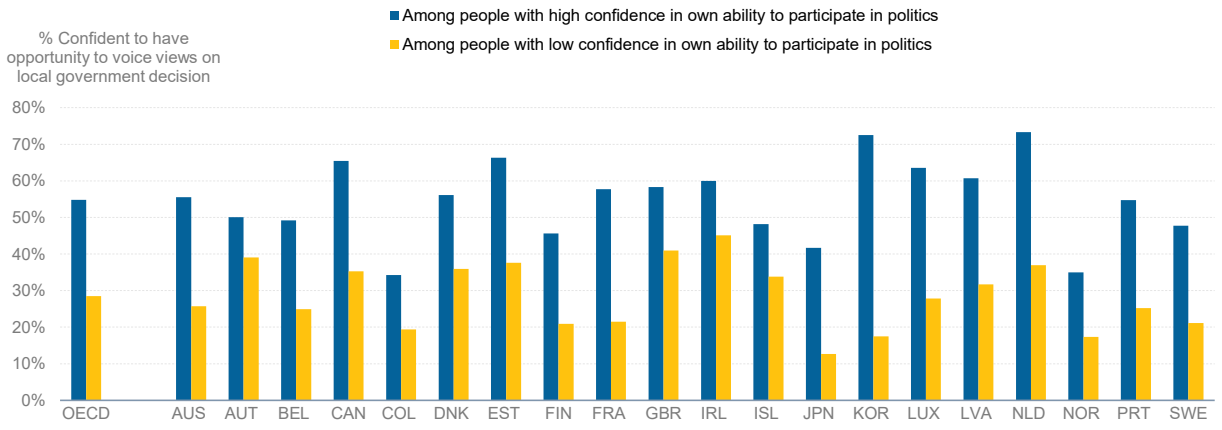
Trust Survey data also show that an individual's feeling that they have the opportunity to voice views on local governance issues is strongly associated with one's confidence in their own ability to participate in politics. Among respondents who are confident in their ability to participate in politics, 54.8% are confident that they would have the opportunity to voice their views about a local government decision affecting their community, while in the group with low confidence in their ability to participate in politics, this share is only 28.5%, a difference of 26.3 percentage points (Figure 5.5).

Figure 5.5. Confidence in own ability to participate in politics matters for whether people feel like they can voice views on local government decisions

Share of people who feel they would be able to voice their views about a local government decision by level of confidence in own ability to participate in politics



Note: Figure presents the average share of respondents who are confident to have the opportunity to voice their views on local governance issues, sorted by respondents' level of confidence in their own ability to participate in politics. The share of respondents who are confident to have the opportunity to voice their views is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 to the question "If a decision affecting your community is to be made by the local government, how likely or unlikely do you think it is that you would have an opportunity to voice your views?"; The group of people with high confidence in their ability to participate in politics consists of responses from 6-10 to the question "On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all confident and 10 is completely confident, how confident are you in your own ability to participate in politics?"; the group with low confidence consists of responses from 0-4. In Finland and Norway the question was phrased slightly differently. Mexico is excluded from this figure as data on confidence in own ability to participate in politics are not available. New Zealand is excluded from this figure as the question was phrased substantially differently. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at (http://oe.cd/trust).
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

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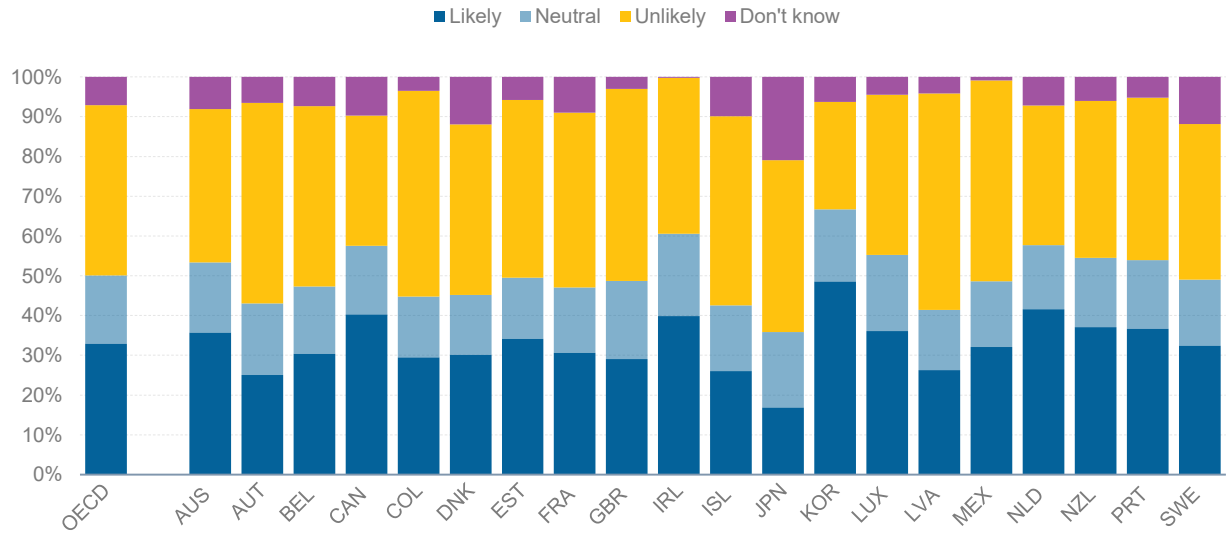
Asking for the public's views is an important first step in engaging stakeholders in the policy-making process. But do people feel that these views will be taken into consideration in the decision-making process?

When asked whether their government would adopt the opinions expressed in a public consultation, the share of confident respondents drops to almost three out of ten (Figure 5.6). On average across countries, 42.8% of respondents say it is *unlikely* that the views shared in a public consultation would influence policy making. This aligns with other results in the Trust Survey, for example on responsiveness, where only 36.5% say a national policy would be changed if a majority of the population opposed the policy (Chapter 4). These findings also align with other OECD survey results on stakeholder engagement in policy making. For example, the OECD indicators on Regulatory Policy and Governance find that 33 out of 38 OECD member countries publish participants' views from consultation processes, but less than one-third of countries systematically require a public response to consultation comments, explaining how comments were taken into account and, when relevant, reasons for their exclusion (OECD, 2021[9]). These findings suggest that governments should step up their efforts to engage with people in the policy-making process.

Figure 5.6. Very few think that the government would adopt views expressed in a public consultation

Share of respondents who indicate different levels of perceived likelihood that a government would adopt opinions expressed in a public consultation (on a 0-10 scale), 2021



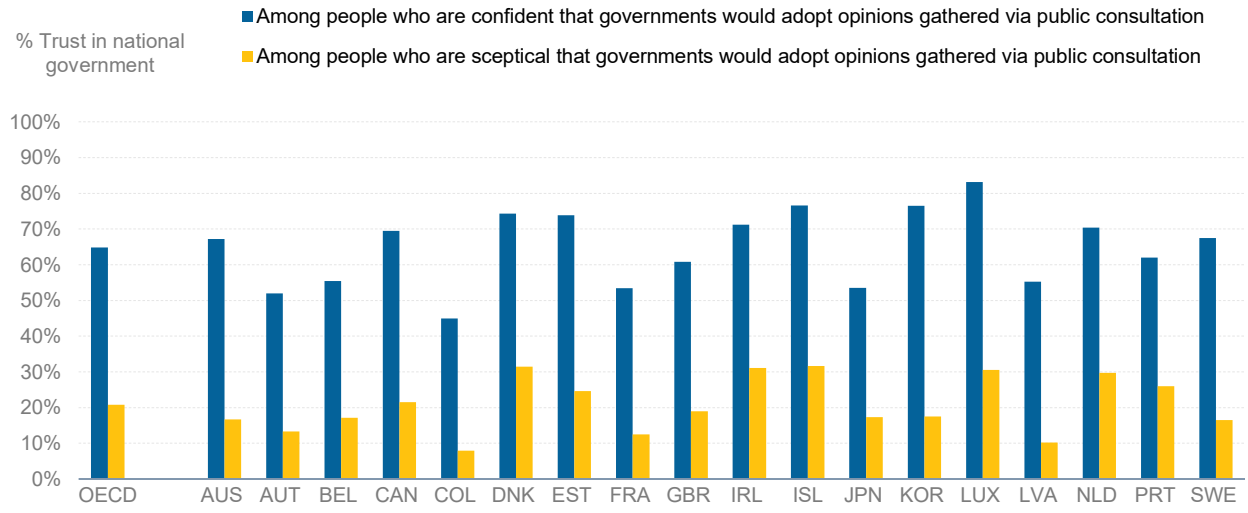
Note: Figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If you participate in a public consultation on reforming a major policy area (e.g. taxation, healthcare, environmental protection), how likely or unlikely do you think it is that the government would adopt the opinions expressed in the public consultation?" The "likely" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "unlikely" is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and "Don't know" was a separate answer choice. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries. In Mexico, the question was formulated in a slightly different way. Finland and Norway are excluded from the figure as the data are not available. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

StatLink https://stat.link/6ihn02

The Trust Survey results confirm that citizens who are satisfied with their opportunities to provide inputs into the policy-making process have in general higher levels of trust in government. Indeed, trust in national government is 64.9% among those who consider that government would adopt opinions expressed in a public consultation and down to 20.8% among those who consider it unlikely that government would take these options into account, a difference of over 40 percentage points (Figure 5.7). This confirms previous results with data from European countries which found that government openness is, in general, positively associated with higher trust but is affected by an individual's perception that they have meaningful opportunities for participation and influence on governmental systems (Schmidthuber, Ingrams and Hilgers, 2020[2]).

Figure 5.7. Trust in government is strongly associated with perceptions whether the government would adopt opinions expressed in a public consultation

Share of respondents who trust the national government by whether they are confident or sceptical that governments would adopt opinions gathered via public consultations, 2021



Note: Figure presents the level of trust in the national government, sorted by respondents' confidence that governments would adopt opinions gathered via public consultation. The share of respondents who trust their national government is the aggregation of responses from 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 the national government?" The group that is confident that government would adopt opinions gathered via public consultation consists of responses from 6-10 to the question "If you participate in a public consultation on reforming a major policy area (e.g. taxation, healthcare, environmental protection), how likely or unlikely do you think it is that the government would adopt the opinions expressed in the public consultation?". The group of sceptical people consists of responses from 0-4. Finland and Norway are excluded from the figure as the question on likelihood that government adopts opinions gathered via a public consultation was not available. Mexico and New Zealand are excluded from the figure as respondents were not asked about trust in the national government. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

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5.3. FEW OECD GOVERNMENTS INSPIRE CONFIDENCE IN PUBLIC SECTOR INTEGRITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Public sector integrity is a key element of democratic governance and fundamental for a system that has the ambition to work in the same way for everyone. Public sector integrity and trust in government are closely linked; corruption and mismanagement in the public sector are cited among the most important sources of distrust (Nolan-Flecha, 2017[10]; Rothstein, 2018[11]), while ethical behaviour and the absence of corruption is associated with greater trust (Norris, 2022[12]; Van de Walle and Migchelbrink, 2020[13]). Corruption can take many different forms, such as bribes at the individual level, more subtle ways of undue influence or the abuse of high-level power that benefits some powerful groups at the expense of the public interest. Different forms of corruption have different policy implications and require different policy responses. The Trust Survey looks at several hypothetical scenarios, including petty corruption of public employees and revolving door practices among high-level political officials.

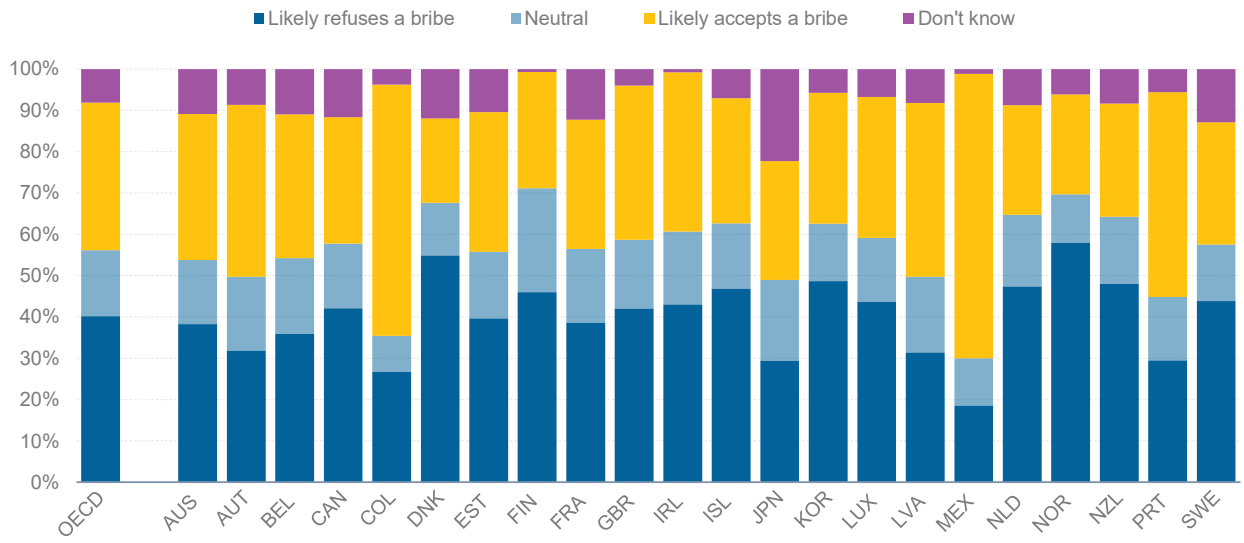
When asked about the likelihood that a generic public employee would accept or refuse a bribe, about 40% of respondents say that a civil servant

in their country would refuse a bribe, on average across countries (Figure 5.8).

Yet a sizeable share predict the opposite: 35.7% of respondents, on average across countries, consider it likely that a public employee would accept money by a citizen or a firm in exchange for speeding up access to a public service. This average conceals considerable variation between countries: in Colombia and Mexico, in particular, over six out of ten respondents say that a public employee in that country would accept a bribe, and relatively few people hold a neutral opinion or report "don't know". In Denmark and Norway, fewer than one-quarter of respondents say that a public employee would accept a bribe. Of course, perceptions of possible bribery do not necessarily reflect actual bribery or the reality of levels of integrity, and may be related to expectations rather than actual experience.

Figure 5.8. Over one-third find it likely that a public employee would accept a bribe

Share of respondents who indicate that a public employee would accept or refuse a bribe (on a 0-10 scale), 2021



Note: Figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If a public employee were offered money by a citizen or a firm for speeding up access to a public service, how likely or unlikely do you think it is that they would refuse it?". The "Likely accepts a bribe" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "Likely refuses a bribe" is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and "Don't know" was a separate answer choice. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries. In Mexico, Norway and Finland, the question was asked in a slightly different way. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

StatLink https://stat.link/h8fcne

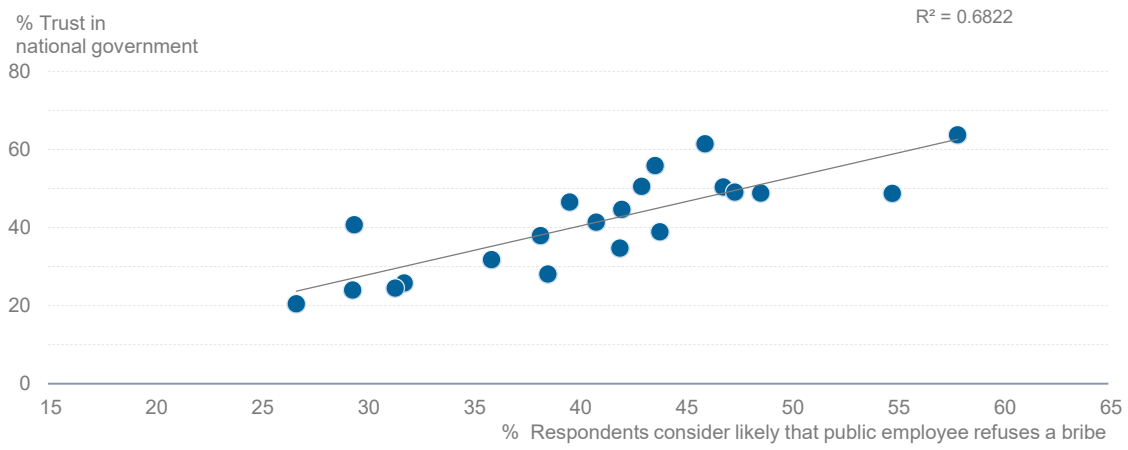
How are elected officials perceived? A lack of integrity in leadership – demonstrated by misuse of public resources or poor behaviour – can affect public opinion on the overall trustworthiness of the government (OECD, 2017[1]). Confronted with different forms of unethical behaviour for public employees and politicians, people surveyed in the OECD Trust Survey anticipate less virtuous behaviour from elected leaders than they do from civil servants.

On average across countries, 47.7% of respondents say it is likely that a high-level political official would grant a political favour in exchange for the offer of the prospect of a well-paid job in the private sector (Chapter 6). This suggests that while petty corruption of public employees seems to be prevalent only in a few countries, perception of the abuse of high-level power is widespread in a much larger range of countries. This aligns with findings that many people feel they do not have a say in what government does and that their interests are not considered, while the "powerful" may use unethical or even unlawful means to influence policies and make their interests heard.

The Trust Survey results also confirm that countries with lower levels of perceived corruption among public employees have in general higher levels of trust in national government (Figure 5.9). Likewise, although to a less extent, countries with lower levels of perceived corruption among high-level political officials have higher levels of trust in local government.

Figure 5.9. Lower levels of perceived corruption among public employees are associated with higher levels of trust in national government cross-nationally

Share of respondents reporting trust in national government (on a 0-10 scale), and share of respondents who consider it likely that a public employee would refuse a bribe (on a 0-10 scale), 2021



Note: This scatterplot presents the share of "trust" responses 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 national government", equal to the values of responses 6-10 on the response scale, on the y axis. The x axis presents the share of "likely" responses to the question "If a public employee were offered money by a citizen or a firm for speeding up access to a public service, how likely or unlikely do you think it is that they would refuse?", equal to the values of 6-10 on the response scale. "OECD" presents the unweighted average of responses across countries. In Finland and Norway the question was phrased slightly differently. Mexico and New Zealand are excluded from the figure as respondents were not asked about trust in the national government. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

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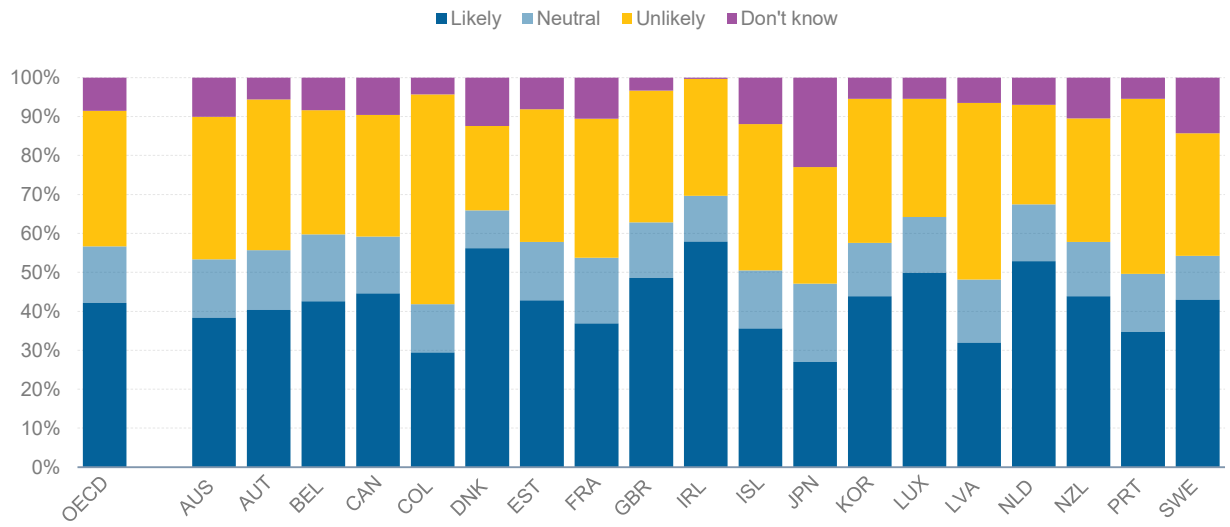
The rule of law is one of the cornerstones of the democratic governance model and trust in legal and justice services matters for trust in government, too, by providing citizens with recourse mechanisms to protect their rights. These protection mechanisms create safeguards against possible misbehaviour by different actors in society, and integrity in the justice sector is thus essential for trust in fellow citizens, businesses and other public institutions (OECD, 2017[1]).

The Trust Survey shows that citizens' overall trust in the judiciary is relatively high: on average, across countries, a solid majority (56.9%) of respondents say they trust the courts and legal system (Chapter 2). Yet this confidence is bounded. Only about four out of ten (42.1%) respondents, on average, believe that a court in their country would make a decision free from political influence that could negatively influence the government's image (Figure 5.10). Perceptions are most positive in Denmark, Ireland, and the Netherlands, where more than half of respondents expect the judiciary to make decisions free from political influence. Related to this, 34.8% on average across countries say that a court in their country would not make a decision free from political influence that could negatively influence the government's image.

Figure 5.10. Only four out of ten respondents believe judiciaries make decisions free of political influence

Share of respondents who indicate different levels of perceived likelihood that a court would make a decision that could negatively affect the government's image (on a 0-10 scale), 2021



Note: Figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If a court is about to make a decision that could negatively impact on the government's image, how likely or unlikely do you think it is that the court would make the decision free from political influence?" The "likely" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "unlikely" is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and "Don't know" was a separate answer choice. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries. Finland, Mexico, and Norway are excluded from the figure as the data were not available. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

StatLink https://stat.link/snq9ru

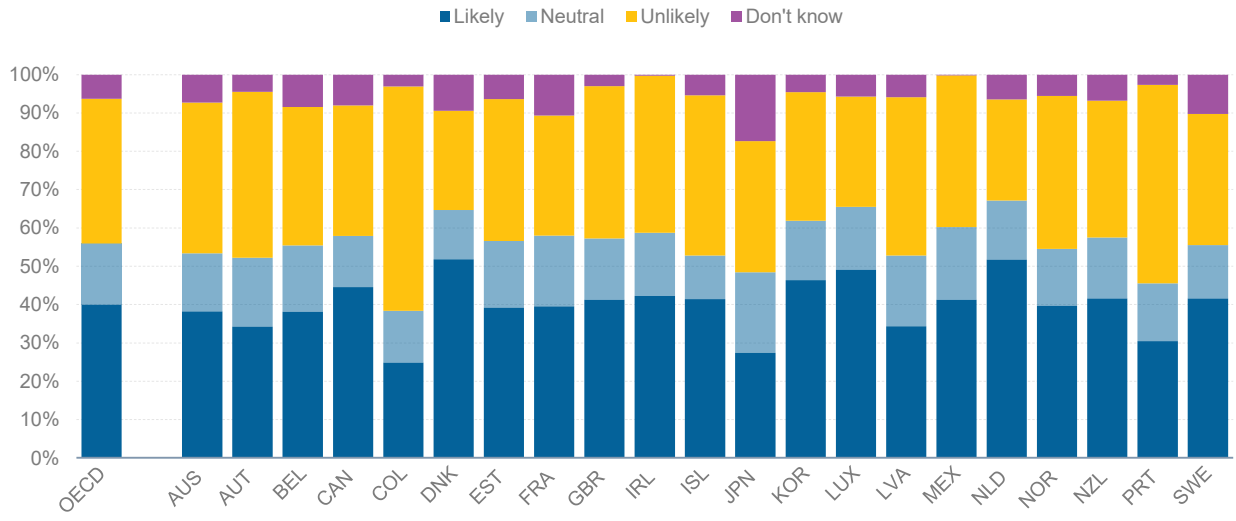
5.4. UNFAIR TREATMENT? THE EQUAL TREATMENT OF THE RICH AND POOR REMAINS ELUSIVE

Perceptions of fairness and equality – both in policy processes and in socioeconomic outcomes – are important components of trust. In recent decades, the gap between the rich and poor has widened and social mobility has stagnated, often with negative implications for trust (OECD, 2021[14]; OECD, 2018[15]). Yet apart from lived socioeconomic outcomes, such as placement in the income distribution, fairness in people's treatment by government institutions also matters (Lind and Arndt, 2016[3]; Frey, Benz and Stutzer, 2004[4]). The perceived fairness and competence of government may also influence preferences for redistribution of income and wealth – thereby affecting income inequality outcomes (OECD, 2021[14]).

To what degree, then, do people anticipate and experience equal and fair treatment in their access to public benefits and their treatment by public employees? Respondents are largely sceptical that rich and poor people would be treated equally by a public employee. On average, only four out of ten respondents (39.9%) across OECD countries think that rich and poor people would be treated equally by a public employee (Figure 5.11). An almost equally high share of respondents (37.8%) find it unlikely that rich and poor people would be treated equally. In only two countries, Denmark and the Netherlands, more than half of respondents are confident that people would be treated the same way, independent of their economic status.

Figure 5.11. Only four in ten think that a public employee would treat rich and poor people equally

Share of respondents who indicate different levels of perceived likelihood that a public employee would treat both rich and poor people equally (on a 0-10 scale), 2021



Note: Figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If a public employee has contact with the public in the area where you live, how likely or unlikely is it that they would treat both rich and poor people equally?". The "likely" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "unlikely" is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and "Don't know" was a separate answer choice. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries. In Mexico and Norway, the question was formulated in a slightly different way. Finland is excluded from the figure as the data were not available. For more detailed information on the survey questionnaire and processes in specific countries, please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

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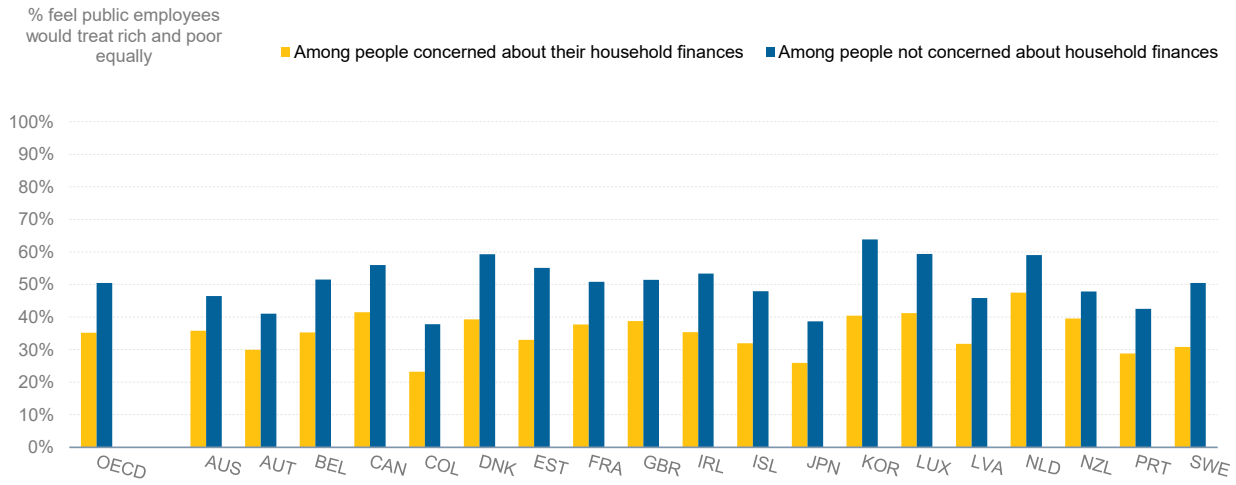
When looking separately at respondents that indicated economic vulnerability, expectations that rich and poor people would be treated equally are even lower. While a slight majority (50.5%) of respondents who are not worried about their household's finances expect that a public employee would treat rich and poor people equally, the share drops to only about one-third of respondents among those who are concerned about their household's finances (Figure 5.12). An individual's economic vulnerability thus seems to be associated with the perception of unfair treatment by government. This finding aligns with the findings of the previous section, pointing to a perception that the system does not work in the same way for everyone and often leaves disadvantaged people behind.

Figure 5.12. Perceptions of economic vulnerability influence expectations of (un)equal treatment by government employees

Share of respondents who indicate different levels of perceived likelihood that a government employee would treat rich and poor equally, presented separately for those who are concerned and not concerned about their household's finances (on a 0-10 scale), 2021



Note: Figure presents the share of "likely" responses to the question "If a public employee has contact with the public in the area where you live, how likely or unlikely is it that they would treat both rich and poor people equally?" (aggregation of responses from 6-10 on a 0-10 scale). This share is presented separately for those who are "concerned" and "not concerned" about their household's finances and overall social and economic well-being. The "concerned" group is the aggregation of responses "somewhat concerned" and "very concerned" to the question "In general, thinking about the next year or two, how concerned are you about your household's finances and overall social and economic well-being?"; the "not concerned" group is the aggregation of responses "not at all concerned" and "not so concerned". "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries. Finland, Norway and Mexico are excluded from this figure as the data were not available. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

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6 The way forward: Reinforcing democracy and trust in democratic governance

The governance challenges found in the Trust Survey are compounded by newer threats facing democracies today, such as mis-information and disinformation, inequalities in political voice and participation, and uncertainty about governments' abilities to address long-term and global challenges in a rapidly changing world. These threats to democracy affect governments' abilities to confront the major issues of today and tomorrow. This chapter presents results on people's perceptions of their ability to participate meaningfully in democratic political processes, their perceptions of special interests' influence on policy makers, and their beliefs in governments' ability to commit to difficult, intergenerational reforms that require upfront investments today. The chapter also presents an overview of news media sources used across countries.

Key findings and areas for attention

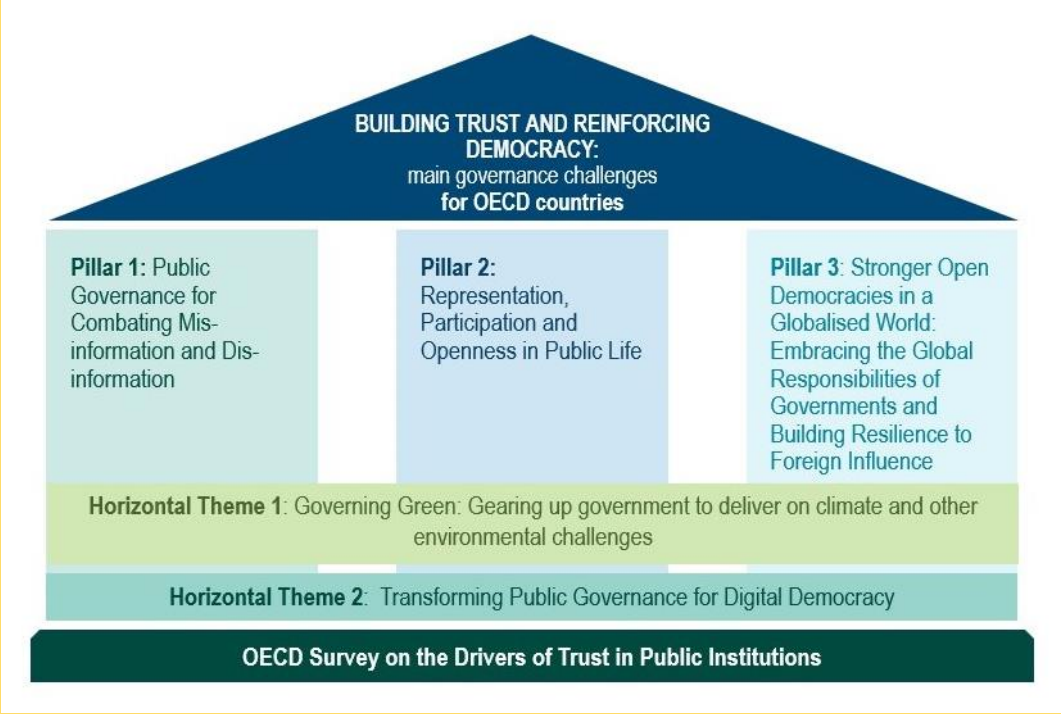
The strength of democratic institutions and norms in OECD democracies depends on continuous efforts to reinforce the link between citizens and their public institutions. Although the OECD Trust Survey illustrates that citizens have reasonable confidence in governments' reliability, it also shows that governments face scepticism about their responsiveness and openness to citizen needs and the integrity of policy processes, and that vulnerable groups have – often understandably – low levels of confidence in their government. Democratic processes, in short, need some further investments if we are to reap the increasingly important gains of democratic government, including higher levels of social and economic well-being, more inclusive growth, personal liberties, access to justice, and peace.

- Few people feel they can participate meaningfully in democratic political processes, and almost half (47.8%), on average across countries, perceive that elected and appointed officials may be captured by special interests. This is a call to action for governments to address higher expectations from citizens on democratic processes. Governments may want to consider, for example, enhanced initiatives to further public integrity and ethical behaviour, upgrading systems to fight undue influence in policy making, promoting transparency in lobbying, and reforms to strengthen the representation of collective interests and remove barriers to collective action.
- Related to this, misinformation and disinformation present growing risks of fuelling mistrust and disengagement. Around four out of ten (41.4%) respondents say they do not trust the news media, and more and more people turn to social media for their news. New governance models are needed to ensure healthy information ecosystems that can support democratic debate.
- OECD countries face difficulties in securing confidence that government can address global and intergenerational challenges. While on average in the OECD about half of respondents think that governments should prioritise climate change, only 35.5% of people are confident that countries will succeed in reducing their country's contribution to climate change. Those who feel their government can capably address long-term, global, and often intergenerational issues like climate change are more likely to trust their government, and those who trust government are more likely to believe such policy solutions are possible. The virtuous cycle between trust and democratic governance is even more important when designing policies for the future. Governments must constantly improve the effectiveness and reliability of programmes and policies – to build confidence in future-oriented reforms – but also develop better ways of *communicating* the importance of global and intergenerational co-operation for better policy outcomes.

Box 6.1. Building Trust and Reinforcing Democracy in OECD countries

The upcoming 2022 Global Forum and Ministerial meeting on Building Trust and Reinforcing Democracy is organised under the guidance of the OECD Public Governance Committee and the Chairmanship of Luxembourg, with Colombia, France, Lithuania and the United States as vice-chairs. The Ministerial will focus on three core pillars representing challenges for OECD democracies: improving public governance responses to mis- and disinformation; improving representation and participation in public life and citizen-focused public services; and embracing the global responsibilities of public institutions.

These governance challenges are overlaid by two horizontal themes: embedding and prioritising climate change, and harnessing digitalisation for better democratic governance.



Source: 2022 OECD Global Forum and Ministerial Meeting on Reinforcing Democracy

6.1. FEW FEEL THEY HAVE POLITICAL VOICE, AND MANY DOUBT ELECTED OFFICIALS' INTEGRITY

A fundamental feature of democracy is the concept of political voice – the idea that people have equal opportunities to express opinions and preferences in such a way as to be represented in government decision making. Yet very few people feel that the political system in their country lets them have a say in what the government does, and many feel that their elected leaders may be captured by special interests in lieu of representing the people.

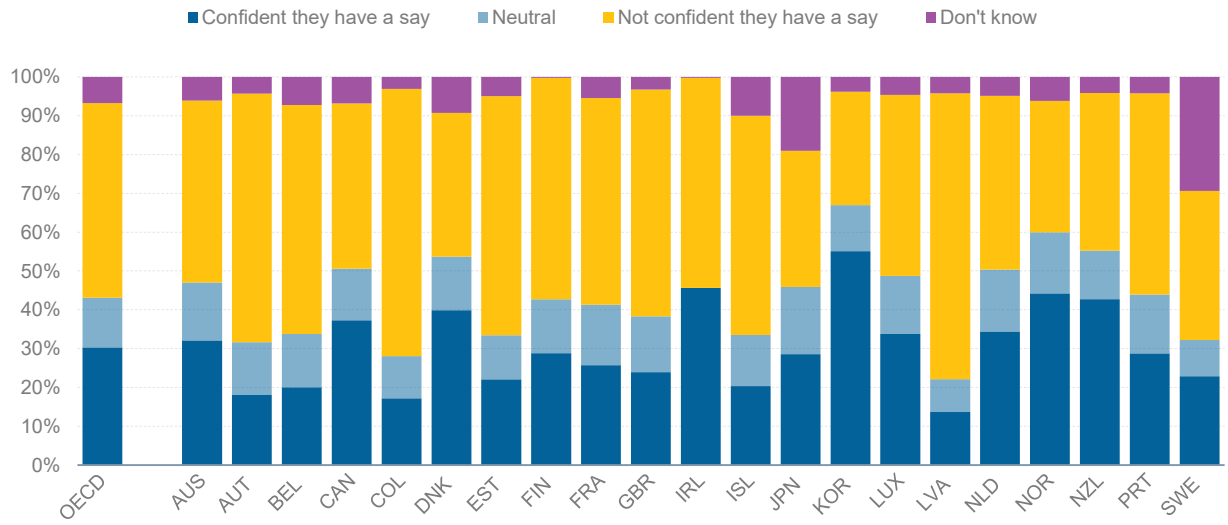
6.1.1. Just one quarter of respondents report that their political system gives them a say

On average across countries, only 30.2% of people say the political system in their country allows people like them to have a say in what government does. Indeed, in eleven countries a majority of respondents say they are *not* confident that they have a say in government decisions (Figure 6.1).

These findings on political voice aligns with the negative perceptions of public service responsiveness to people's feedback (Chapter 4) and views of few opportunities to influence policy making (Chapter 5), and it corresponds with results found elsewhere on perceptions of weak political voice (OECD, 2021[1]; OECD, 2021[2]). This lack of political voice is also related to low levels of confidence in one's own ability to engage politically: on average across countries, only 42% of respondents say they feel confident in their own ability to participate in politics.

Figure 6.1. Half of respondents say the political system does not let them have a say in government decision making

Share of respondents reporting different levels of confidence that the political system lets them have a say in government decision making (0-10 scale), 2021



Note: Figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "How much would you say the political system in your country allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?". The "Confident" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "Not confident" is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and "Don't know" was a separate answer choice. "OECD" presents the unweighted average of responses across countries. In Norway and Finland, the question was formulated in a slightly different way. Mexico is excluded from the figure as the data are not available. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

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These levels of political efficacy have important implications for the strength of representative democracy. People who feel they can influence political processes are more likely to be engaged in pro-democratic political activities like voting, contacting a politician, working for a political party, or posting political content online. In contrast, people who are disengaged and feel they lack political voice are more likely to "exit" the democratic process, behave cynically and engage in forms of participation that are outside of the system, e.g. boycotts (Prats and Meunier, 2021[3]) or violence.

These perceptions are important, as participation is a cornerstone of a well-functioning democracy. Political participation strengthens democracies both at the individual and systemic levels: when people actively engage, they develop stronger democratic values and civic skills, and at the same time provide legitimacy to the system. In turn, participation and trust are mutually reinforcing (Putnam, 2000[4]). Civic-minded citizens are found to participate more and have higher levels of trust than passive people (Almond and Verba, 1963[5]; Brehm and Rahn, 1997[6]) Conversely, as participation encourages the sense of having a stake in collective endeavours and builds trust, lack of participation is associated with lower levels of trust (Parvin, 2018[7]). In fact, trust can be considered as a prerequisite of political action, and is related to higher levels of different forms of participation, such as being part of elections (Grönlund and Setälä, 2007[8]), signing a petition (Lee and Schachter, 2018[9]), contacting government officials or being part of political parties (Hooghe and Marien, 2013[10]).

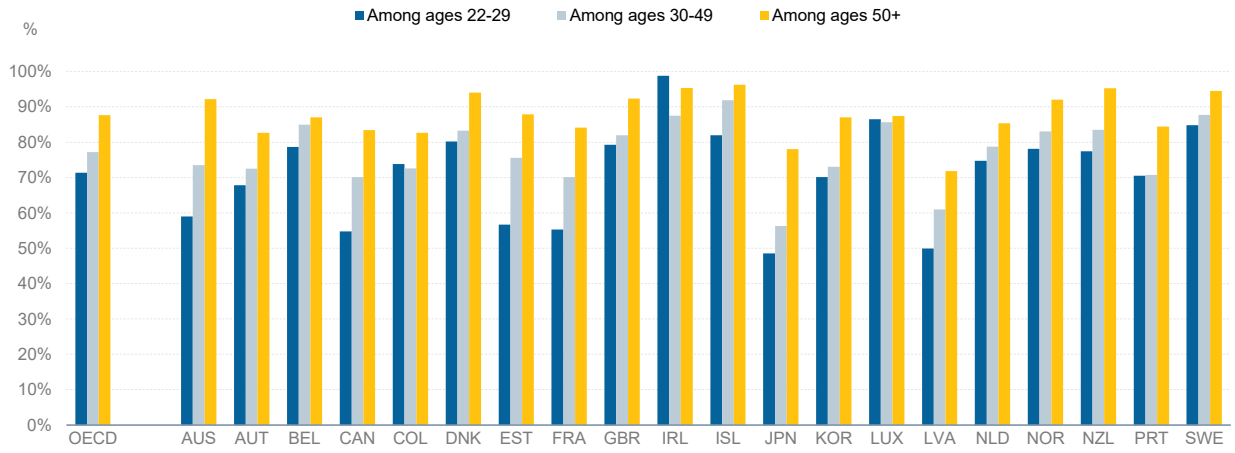
On average, almost 80% of respondents to the OECD Trust Survey say[11] that they voted in their country's last national election and 51.3% for local elections. Other forms of political participation, such as signing petitions also online (35.8%), posting or forwarding political content on social media (17.4%), contacting a politician (14%) are less frequent. Of interest, 28% of respondents declare not having taken part in any form of political participation. Cross-nationally, trust in the national legislature is positively associated with voting rates (OECD, 2021[1]).

Further reflecting inequalities in political voice and representation, there is also tremendous variation within countries in political activity. In representative democracies, the primary form of representation in public decision making is derived from elections and voting – yet certain demographics and population groups tend to participate less in elections and remain significantly underrepresented in elected bodies and, consequently, policy making. Lack of representation and low levels of trust in national legislatures usually go together with lower levels of accountability, corroding the basis of democracy and resulting in policies which are less responsive to the interests of a broad public.

Results from the Trust Survey find, for example, that older people are far more likely to vote than younger people. This result holds across all countries, and in many cases the difference is striking (Figure 6.2). Related to this, young people also have considerably lower levels of trust in government – though the direction of causality surely runs in both directions (Chapter 3). Given that young people show a particularly strong motivation to address global challenges such as climate change and rising inequality, there is a need to strengthen their political participation and representation in public institutions (OECD, 2022[11]).

Figure 6.2. Older people are much more likely to vote in national elections

Share of respondents who reported having voted in the last national election, by age group, 2021



Note: Figure presents the share of respondents who reported that they voted in the last national election, by age group. Age is grouped in 3 categories: 22-29 years old, 30-49 years old, and 50 and over. "OECD" presents the unweighted average of responses across countries. Mexico and Finland are excluded from this figure as the data are not available. This figure diverges from the traditional OECD definition of youths, used elsewhere in this report (18 to 29), as the youngest ages in this grouping may not have been legally eligible to vote in their last national election. Setting a minimum age of 22 therefore presents a higher share of people who had voting eligibility and enhances comparability. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

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6.1.2. There is a widespread scepticism of the integrity of high-level political officials

In addition to feeling like they do not have opportunities to influence policies and be heard, many respondents question the integrity of elected and appointed officials and whether they fairly represent the will of the people.

The widespread lack of political voice, and feelings of vulnerability and exclusion, go together with a general perception that special interests exert oversized influence in government. This perception of low integrity in the public sector can influence perceptions of the overall trustworthiness of the government (OECD, 2017[12]).

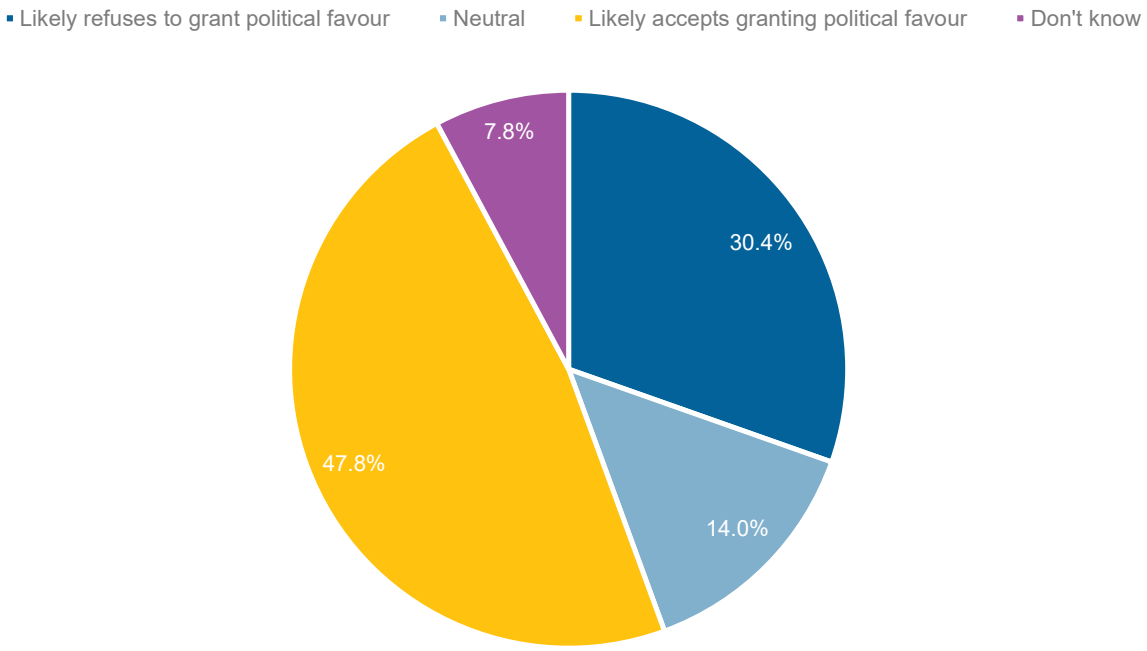
On average across countries, 47.8% of respondents say it is likely that a high-level political official would grant a political favour in exchange for the offer of the prospect of a well-paid job in the private sector. This, in turn, may bias officials' decision making away from most people's interests and lead to inefficient policy outcomes.

Indeed, less than one-third of respondents (30.4%) are confident that a high-level political official would refuse such an offer. Norway is the only country in which the share of respondents believing in the ethical behaviour of high-level officials is higher than the share of sceptical respondents.

These findings align with the monitoring of the implementation of OECD Recommendation on Principles for Transparency and Integrity in Lobbying. 39% of legislators in OECD countries declared that they had no concrete guidelines, for instance on how to behave when they are offered gifts and benefits, and there is a need to develop and strengthen integrity standards to guide interactions between public officials and different stakeholders (OECD, 2021[13]).

Figure 6.3. Almost half of respondents predict that a high-level political official would grant a political favour in exchange for the offer of a well-paid private sector job

Share of respondents who indicate that an elected or appointed official would accept or refuse the offer of a well-paid private sector job in exchange for a political favour (on a 0-10 scale), unweighted OECD average, 2021



Note: Figure presents the unweighted OECD average of responses to the question "If a high-level politician were offered the prospect of a well-paid job in the private sector in exchange for a political favour, how likely or unlikely do you think it is that they would refuse it?". The "Likely accepts undue influence" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "Likely refuses undue influence" is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and "Don't know" was a separate answer choice. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries. Mexico and New Zealand are excluded from this figure as respondents were not asked about trust in the national government. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

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People who feel their political and government institutions do not treat them fairly may become cynical and distrust their government. Institutions can lessen this distrust. Countries' efforts to give people effective voice and strengthen the representation of collective interests, and reforms aimed at reducing undue influence and removing barriers to collective action, can help.

6.2. RELIABLE INFORMATION IS CRUCIAL FOR TRUST – BUT THE RELIABILITY OF NEWS SOURCES IS CHANGING

Access to accurate information is a key component of democracy and a foundation of trust. This information may be provided by government, by a free and protected press, and/or by other stakeholders. The occurrence of misinformation and disinformation fuel distrust, threatening the functioning of democracies and making effective governance harder (OECD, 2021[14]). People are increasingly worried that false or fake information is being used as a weapon (Edelman, 2022[15]).

While the OECD Trust Survey cannot estimate the prevalence of mis/disinformation, it can identify the prevalence of different news sources and how they may relate to people's trust in public institutions. Across countries, on average, television is the most common source from which people receive information about politics and

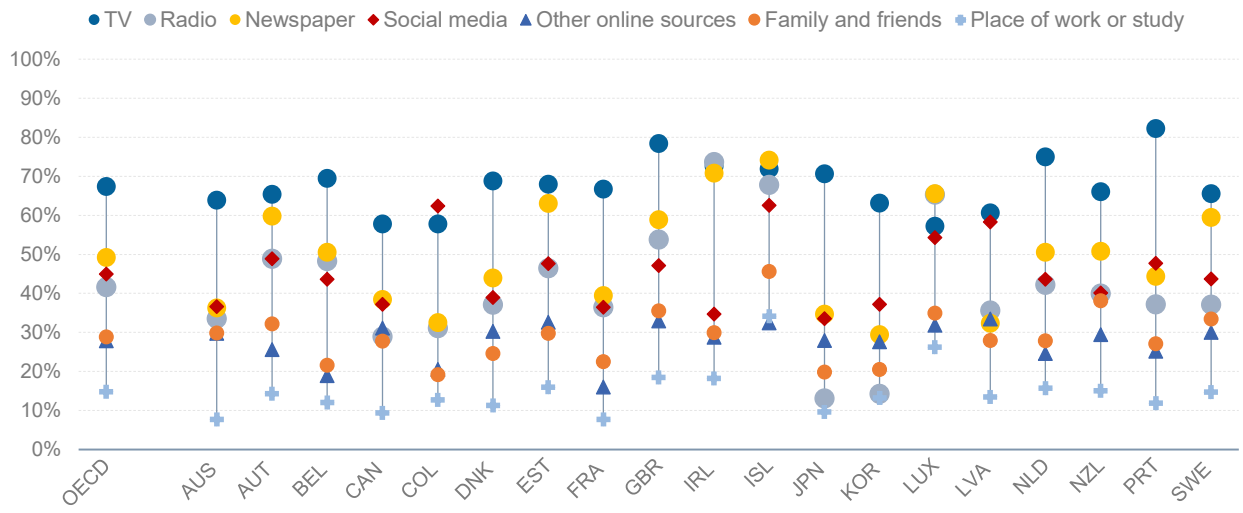
current events, followed by newspapers (including online ones). News consumption is fairly high, with two-thirds of respondents on average saying they watch television news at least once a week.

Yet it is important to note that these news sources are operating in an environment of high scepticism towards the media. Only 38.8% of respondents, on average across countries, say that they trust the news media. This is the second-lowest level of trust found across the nine institutions measured in the Trust Survey (Chapter 2).

After television and newspaper, the third most common news source, on average, is social media. 45% of respondents reporting that they get news from social media at least once a week and this percentage is up to 57.8% among young people. This average conceals considerable cross-national variation. Social media is a regular news source for about 60% of respondents in Colombia, Iceland and Latvia (Figure 6.4).

Figure 6.4. Television, newspapers and social media are the most common news sources

Share of respondents selecting each of the following medium as a weekly source of information about politics and current events, 2021



Note: Figure presents the share of responses to the following question: "From which of the following sources do you get information about politics and current affairs at least once per week?", among television, radio, newspaper/magazines (including online), online social media, other online sources, family/friends, place of work or study, none of the above, prefer not to say. Respondents could select more than one answer choice. "OECD" presents the unweighted average of responses across countries. Finland, Mexico and Norway are excluded from this figure as the data are not available. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

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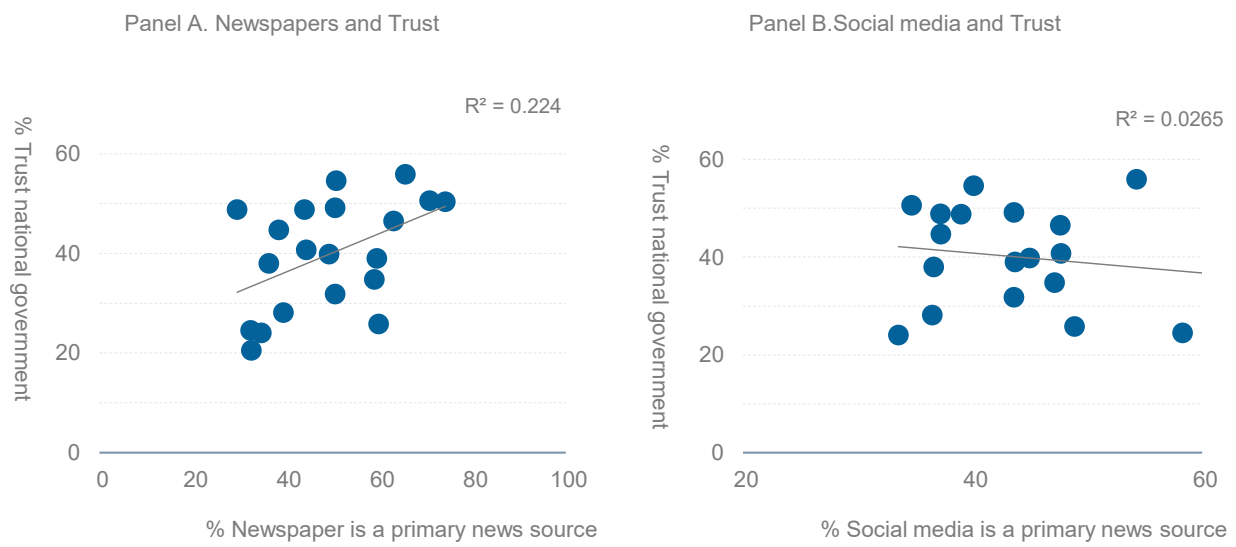
The relationship between news source and trust in government is not clear cut, and it is not well-estimated cross-nationally. Nevertheless, Trust Survey data suggest that countries with relatively higher levels of newspaper consumption have higher levels of trust in government institutions. Conversely, countries with relatively higher levels of news obtained via social media tend do less well on levels of trust in government. (Television has a slightly positive correlation with institutional trust, but the relationship is less strong than newspapers.)

There are many potential causal mechanisms at play in the relationship between social media and distrust, such as age or education, but the quality of information shared on social media is a likely factor. Social media platforms may facilitate the spread of emotional and polarising content (Smith, 2019[16]; Allcott, 2020[17]) and have a tendency to bias information, build and strengthen echo chambers (Cinelli, 2021[18]), limit exposure to diversity and reinforce polarisation (Klein and Robinson, 2019[19]) – all of which can lead to disengagement, more radical feelings and distrust.

Figure 6.5. Newspaper readership is slightly more positively correlated with trust in government than news from social media

Share of respondents trusting the national government vis-à-vis the share obtaining news at least once a week from newspapers (including online newspapers) (Panel A) and the share obtaining news at least once a week from social media (Panel B), 2021



Note: Scatterplots present the share of respondents who read newspapers as a weekly news sources (Panel A) and the share of respondents who use social media as a weekly news source (Panel B), versus the share of respondents who report that they trust the national government. Finland, Mexico and Norway are excluded from this figure as the data on news sources consumption are not available. New Zealand here shows trust in civil service as respondents were not asked about trust in the national government (note that trust in civil service on average tends to be higher than trust in national government). For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

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Within countries, too, partisanship plays a role in the degree to which people trust the news media, suggesting polarisation in where people get their information. In all but three countries (Norway, Denmark and United Kingdom), people who voted for the party/parties controlling parliament or congress are more likely to trust the news media. On average across countries, the partisan gap in trust in media is about 10 percentage points. This corresponds with findings in other surveys that people are more likely to consider media to be a "dividing" force in society than a unifying one (Edelman, 2022[15]).

6.3. LOOKING AHEAD: IMPROVING GOVERNMENT CAPACITY TO SUPPORT REFORMS FOR THE FUTURE, INCLUDING CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION

To tackle major, long-run societal challenges like climate change, inequalities, fiscal sustainability and digitalisation, governments will need to build trust and support for intergenerational redistribution – i.e., investing "upfront" in policies with long-term payoffs. This requires credible policy commitments and public confidence in the effectiveness of policy choices, since the main beneficiaries of such policies will be future generations. Such a commitment is a challenge for all governments, even those perceived as the most trustworthy.

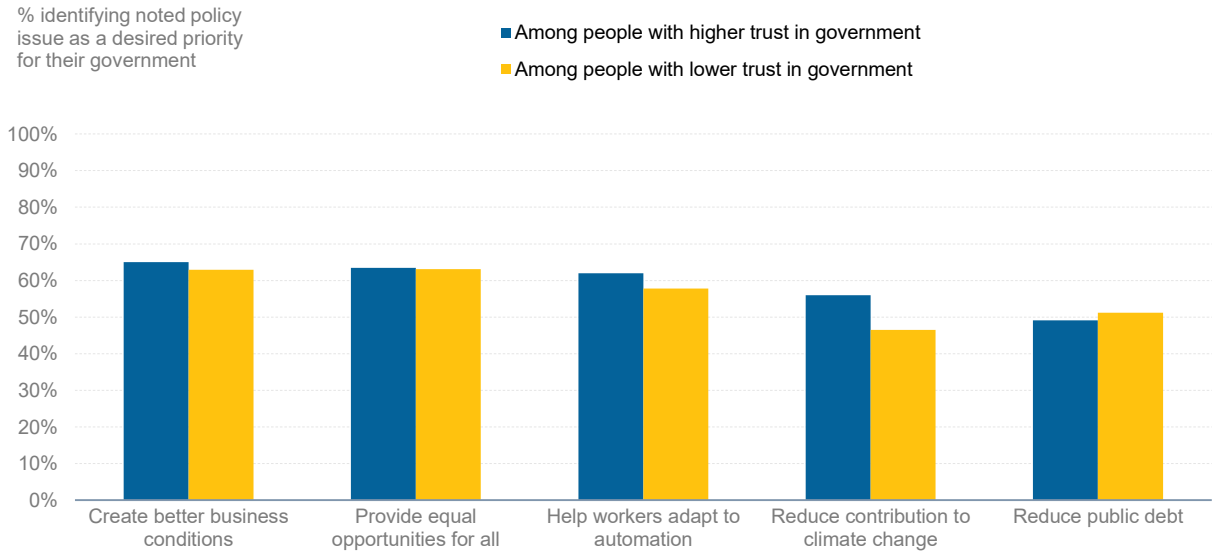
6.3.1. Policy priorities for the future

Trust Survey respondents were asked the degree to which their governments should prioritise different policies from a list of five policy areas: ensuring equal opportunities for all, helping workers adapt to automation, reducing the country's contribution to climate change, reducing public debt, and creating better business conditions. Across countries, the top priorities are improving business conditions and creating equal opportunities. Over 60% of respondents, on average across countries, say governments should prioritise these issues. Another 49.8% want their government to prioritise reducing their country's contribution to climate change.

There are slight differences in desires for government to commit when looking at people with low trust versus high trust in government. In all but one policy area (reducing public debt), people who trust their national government are more likely to call for the government to prioritise these forward-looking issues than people who do not (Figure 6.6). This suggests that respondents might be incorporating perceptions of government capacity when thinking ahead about what governments can do to target long-term challenges.

Figure 6.6. Higher trust in government may influence preferences for governments to do more

Percent of respondents that want their government to prioritise specific policy issues more (as opposed to "About the same" or "Less"), by their level of trust in national government, unweighted OECD average, 2021



Note: Figure presents the unweighted OECD average of the share of respondents reporting "more" or "a lot more" in response to the following question: "On the following issues, do you think the government should be prioritising them a lot less / less / about the same / more / a lot more?" in reference to the policy priorities of providing equal opportunities for all, helping workers to adapt to automation and new technologies, reducing contribution to climate change, reducing public debt, and creating the conditions for businesses to thrive. Trust levels present the aggregations of people who trust/don't trust the national government, equal to the values of responses 6-10 and 0-4 respectively on the response scale of 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 national government". Finland, New Zealand and Norway are excluded from this figure as the data are not available. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

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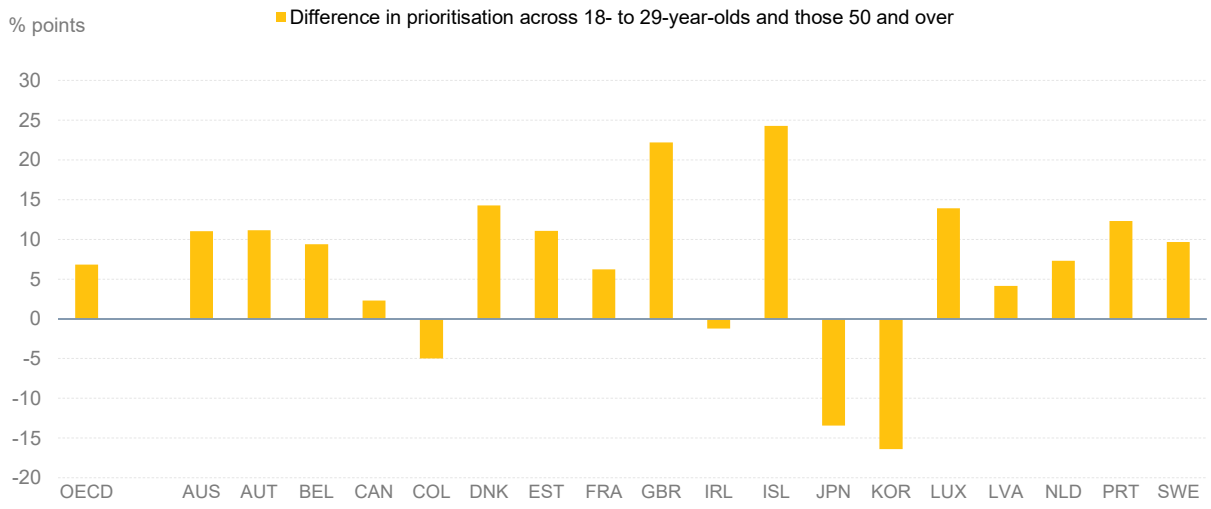
In addition to differences driven by levels of trust, the Trust Survey reveals important age-related differences in issues that have intergenerational consequences. Younger people in almost all countries are more likely to prioritise action on climate change than older people (Figure 6.7). At the same time, young people have consistently lower levels of trust in government (Chapter 3), suggesting a lack of confidence among youths that governments will invest in policies that benefit them.

Figure 6.7. Younger people are more likely to want action on climate change as a policy priority

Difference between the percentage of young (18- to 29-year-olds) respondents who want their government to "do more" to reduce their country's contribution to climate change minus the percentage of older (age 50 and over) respondents who want more action to reduce climate change, expressed in percentage points, 2021



Note: Figure presents the difference in the within-country distributions of young respondents' minus older respondents' responses to the question "On the following issues, do you think the government should be prioritising them more, about the same, or less? Reducing [country's] contribution to climate change", grouped by age group. The Figure shows aggregation of responses "A lot more" and "More", for people aged 18-29 minus people aged 50 and above. Other response choices not shown here were "About the same", "Less" and "A lot less". "OECD" presents the unweighted average of responses across countries. Finland, Mexico, Norway and New Zealand are excluded from this figure as the data are not available. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

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6.3.2. Can governments competently commit to future-oriented reforms, including those addressing climate change?

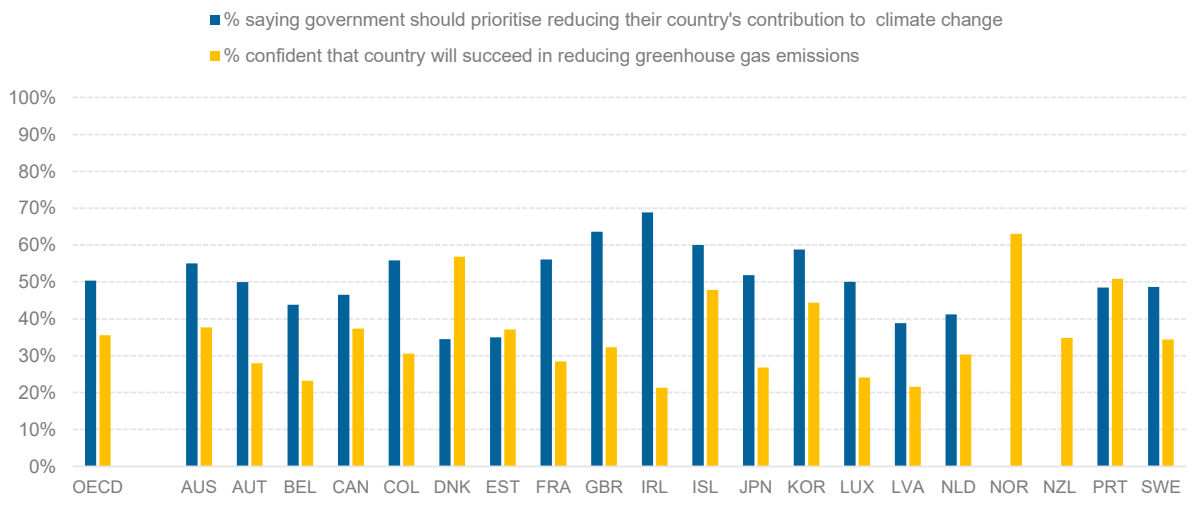
Trust in government is both a driver and an outcome of beliefs about whether a government will commit and capably respond to global and intergenerational challenges. The way policies are designed and implemented – in other words, governance – can influence the trustworthiness of public institutions and thus expectations of future behaviour (Ben-Ner and Halldorsson, 2010[20]; Johnson and Mislin, 2011[21]).

While improving business conditions and reducing inequality are commonly-cited preferences, addressing climate change is a less commonly-cited policy priority. Perhaps related to this, people are fairly sceptical that governments actually can address climate change. On average in the OECD, about half (50.4%) of respondents think that governments should prioritise climate change. Part of the issue may be that people are unwilling to accept the costs; addressing climate change requires both immediate and long-lasting sacrifices in exchange for a crucially important but diffuse long-run payoff.

But another likely factor is a government's perceived competence. People may not be confident that public institutions are competent and reliable enough to deliver policies effectively, and for long enough, to generate benefits. Indeed, on average only 35.5% of people are confident that countries will succeed in reducing their country's contribution to climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. In other words, while half of people think that climate change is a serious issue for governments, just over a third believe that countries will actually meet the targets (Figure 6.8).

Figure 6.8. Half of respondents think their government should prioritise actions to reduce climate change, but only about one-third have confidence in their country's ability to reduce greenhouse gas emissions

Share of respondents who say government should prioritise reducing country's contribution to climate change and share of respondents who have confidence in their country's ability to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, 2021



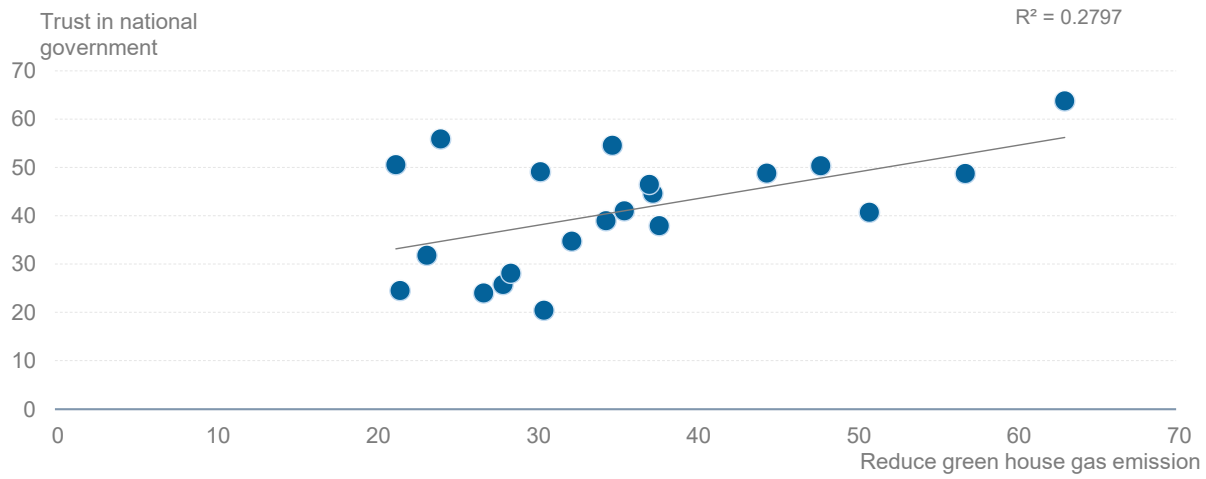
Note: Figure presents the average share of respondents to the questions "On reducing your country contribution to climate change, do you think the government should be prioritising a lot more, more, about the same, less, or a lot less?". The "more" share in the figure is the aggregation of the responses choices "a lot more" and "more". Respondents were asked "How confident are you that your country will succeed in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the next 10 years?" The "confident" share is the aggregation of response choices "somewhat confident" and "very confident". "OECD" presents the unweighted average of responses across countries. Finland, Mexico, New Zealand and Norway are excluded (or partially excluded) from this figure as comparable data were not available. For more detailed information on the survey questionnaire and processes in specific countries, please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

StatLink https://stat.link/j0cb7i

Cross-nationally, high levels of confidence in a government's ability to commit to addressing climate change are positively correlated with trust in government (Figure 6.9). Analysis from the OECD Trust Survey finds that people's confidence that the country will reduce greenhouse gas emissions has a statistically significant, positive relationship with trust in national government and, to a less extent, local government and civil service (Chapter 2). In other words, investing in public governance to deliver more effective policies to fight climate change may pay off in securing more credibility and trust in government. This relationship holds within countries, too; those who are confident that their government can credibly commit to reducing greenhouse gas emissions are more likely to trust their government.

Figure 6.9. Countries that are seen as more competent in the fight against climate change also benefit from higher levels of trust in government

Share of respondents that are confident that their country will succeed in reducing greenhouse gas emissions over the next 10 years (x-axis) and the share who trust their national government (y-axis), 2021



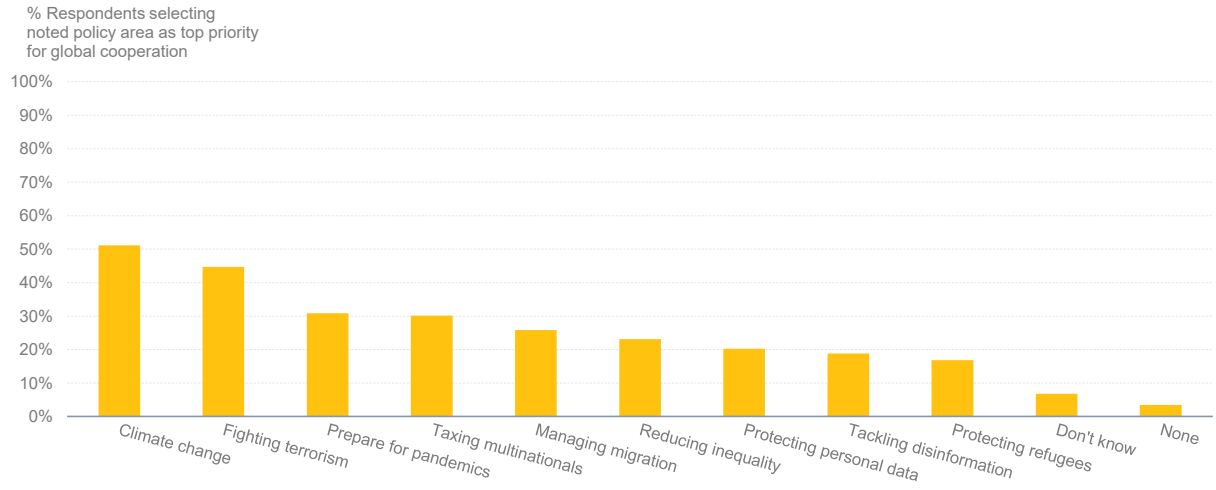
Note: This scatterplot presents the share of "trust" responses to the question "On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely, how much do you trust each of the following? The national government", equal to the values of responses 6-10 on the response scale, on the y-axis. The x-axis presents the share of "confident" responses to the question "How confident are you that [country] will succeed in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the next 10 years?". The "confident" response is the aggregation of responses "somewhat confident" and "completely confident". "OECD" presents the unweighted average of responses across countries. Finland is excluded as the results on confidence were not available, and Mexico is excluded due to lack of data on both questions. New Zealand here shows trust in civil service as respondents were not asked about trust in the national government (note that trust in civil service on average tends to be higher than trust in national government). For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

StatLink https://stat.link/ykw5lp

Some challenges require more than a reliable and responsive national government – they require the involvement of other actors and partners. On average across countries, people are most likely to express interest in global co-operation to address issues like climate change, terrorism, and pandemic preparation (Figure 6.10). Yet there is still relatively low public support for global co-operation to target these issues; around half of respondents call on governments to work together to address climate change. This is similar to the relatively low levels of public support for *national* governments to address climate change (Figure 6.6).

Figure 6.10. Respondents most likely to support global co-operation to resolve challenges like climate change, terrorism and pandemic preparation

Share of respondents picking each of the following options as one of their top priorities for global co-operation, unweighted OECD average, 2021



Note: Figure presents the unweighted OECD average share of responses to the question "Which of the following issues do you think are best addressed by working with other countries than by your country alone? Please choose your top three issues for global co-operation." Response choices options are indicated in the x-axis. Finland, Mexico and Norway are excluded from this figure as data are not available. For more detailed information please find the survey method document at http://oe.cd/trust.
Source: OECD Trust Survey (http://oe.cd/trust)

StatLink https://stat.link/ng5fzv

When asked about how to co-operate globally, the most popular response – "joining forces with other governments internationally" – was selected by 43.4% of respondents, on average cross-nationally. The next three most commonly selected answer choices – engaging citizens on global issues, strengthening co-ordination across government offices, and strengthening the country's role in international institutions – were selected by fewer than one in three respondents.

As the risks associated with climate change become ever more urgent – and as costs increase for diffuse, long-term payoffs – governments must do better in communicating to the public the benefits of co-operation to tackle these challenges. These kinds of issues can only be resolved through global co-operation.

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NOTE

[11] Respondents to surveys often overreport their voting behaviour. Overreporting one's voting history has long been a problem in survey research and is often explained by memory failure or social desirability (i.e. a respondent recalls that they did not vote, but claims to have voted to align with some perceived social good) (Belli et al., 1999[24]) (McAllister and Quinlan, 2021[22]). A cursory comparison of voting rates in the OECD Trust Survey versus a database of national administrative data (IDEA, 2022[23]) suggest that overreporting in the Trust Survey was more prevalent in some countries (e.g. Canada, Iceland and Ireland) than others. The results presented here therefore focus on within-country variation, which may be less likely to suffer from systematic bias, though both within-country and across-country variation merit additional analysis.

Building Trust in Public Institutions

Building Trust to Reinforce Democracy

MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE 2021 OECD SURVEY ON DRIVERS OF TRUST IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

What drives trust in government? This report presents the main findings of the first OECD cross-national survey on trust in government and public institutions, representing over 50 000 responses across 22 OECD countries. The survey measures government performance across five drivers of trust – reliability, responsiveness, integrity, openness, and fairness – and provides insights for future policy reforms. This investigation marks an important initiative by OECD countries to measure and better understand what drives people's trust in public institutions – a crucial part of reinforcing democracy.

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