OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions – 2024 Results

BUILDING TRUST IN A COMPLEX POLICY ENVIRONMENT

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Please cite this publication as:
OECD (2024), *OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions – 2024 Results: Building Trust in a Complex Policy Environment*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9a20554b-en.

ISBN 978-92-64-33830-2 (print)
ISBN 978-92-64-33920-0 (PDF)
ISBN 978-92-64-52641-9 (HTML)
ISBN 978-92-64-55901-1 (epub)

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Foreword

This report provides a comprehensive perspective of what drives trust in public institutions in 2023 by asking people in 30 OECD countries about their experience with, and expectations of public institutions at all levels of government. The OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions (Trust Survey), which provides the original data for this report, was implemented in 30 OECD countries in October and November 2023, following the inaugural 2021 wave that included 22 OECD countries. 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. The 2023 Trust Survey asked the same set of questions as in 2021, allowing for comparisons in the evolution of results over time. A few new questions were introduced, allowing for a deeper understanding of the results.

The Trust Survey serves as a foundation for the OECD's Reinforcing Democracy Initiative. Launched at the 2022 OECD Global Forum and Ministerial on "Building Trust and Reinforcing Democracy", the Reinforcing Democracy Initiative provides evidence-based guidance and good international practices to help countries reinforce democratic values and institutions.

The countries which opt in to participate in the Trust Survey do so with the aim of better understanding people's expectations of their democracies and identifying ways in which they can deliver better for people through improved public governance. The OECD Secretariat has benefitted from strong engagement from the Public Governance Committee and Trust Survey Advisory Group throughout this work.

This report was approved and declassified by the Public Governance Committee on 4 June 2024 and prepared for publication by the Secretariat.

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Acknowledgements

This report is the work of the OECD Directorate for Public Governance, under the overall leadership of Elsa Pilichowski, Director. The publication was prepared by the OECD Governance Indicators and Performance Division, under the direction of Monica Brezzi, Head of the Division, and co-ordinated by Sarah Kups. The report was written by Sarah Kups (Chapters 1, 3 and 4), Emma Phillips (Chapter 5) and Sina Smid (Chapter 2). Carlotta Alfonsi undertook background research that contributed to Chapter 5. Statistical support was provided by Giuseppe Ciccolini, Ömer Faruk Metin, Veronica-Nicolle Hera and Sina Smid. Meral Gedik, Thibaut Gigou and Adem Kocaman prepared the report for publication and dissemination; and Pauline Barbet provided administrative support. Gillian Dorner and Mariana Prats provided valuable feedback to the report, and David Brackfield from the OECD Statistics and Data Directorate to the questionnaire.

The report benefitted from extensive feedback provided by Delegates to the OECD Public Governance Committee and members of the Trust Survey Advisory Group. The Trust Survey Advisory Group, 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.

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Executive summary

Democratic governments today stand at a critical juncture, steering environmental and digital transitions while having to face increased polarisation within their countries, heightened geopolitical tensions as well as the social consequences of various economic developments such as inflation. In this high-stakes environment, building and maintaining trust in public institutions has emerged as a priority for many governments around the world.

This report presents the results from the second OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions (Trust Survey), carried out in October and November 2023 in 30 OECD countries. It provides results of current trust levels and their drivers across countries and public institutions, and an analysis of their evolution over the past two years with a comparison with the results of the 2021 edition of the survey. The OECD will continue to monitor the results over time with future editions of the survey.

Results of the survey vary across countries, due to a range of cultural, institutional, social and economic factors. Nonetheless, like in the 2021 edition of the survey, the results show clear overall tendencies affecting OECD members and reveal common areas of action in the future that do not preclude other important areas that may be more specific to a country.

Key findings

Across the 30 countries, **the share of people with low or no trust in the national government (44%) outweighs the share of those with high or moderately high trust (39%).**

Trust in national government across the countries that participated in the two iterations of the survey has registered **a 2 percentage point drop since 2021 on average**, although trust levels increased in Australia, Belgium, Canada, Colombia, France, Latvia and Sweden. This average decrease can be partly attributed to **women and people with lower education, whose levels of trust in national government have decreased both by 5 percentage points**.

Trust in the police, the judicial system, the civil service and local government is higher than in national government, with respectively 63%, 54%, 45% and 45% of people having high or moderately high trust in these institutions, while national Parliament and political parties elicit lower levels of trust (37% and 24% respectively).

As per the previous iteration of the survey, a key finding of the 2024 Trust Survey is that **socio-economic conditions and demographic characteristics matter**. People who feel financially insecure, women and those with low levels of education, as well as those who report belonging to a group that is discriminated against, consistently report lower levels of trust in government. Related to this, the sense of political agency is crucial in explaining the different levels of trust in national government in all countries. The trust gap between those who report they have a say in what the government does and those who say they do not is 47 percentage points.

Overall, **there is a clear divide between trust levels in the day-to-day interactions with public institutions, which remain relatively robust on average and in many countries, and trust in the government's ability to make the important decisions on complex policy issues with trade-offs across different groups in society.**

Indeed, a majority of recent users of the relevant public services report relative satisfaction with national health (52%), education (57%) and administrative services (66%). Moreover, a majority of the population believe public institutions would use their personal data for legitimate purposes only (52%) and have confidence their application for a service or a benefit would be treated fairly (52%). These are important elements given these day-to-day interactions with government remain key drivers of trust.

In contrast, while a majority still believes their government is ready to protect people in case of emergency, only **37% believe that the government balances the interests of different generations fairly and around 40% believe the government will regulate new technologies appropriately or will succeed in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the next ten years.** These results are at least partly attributable to the lack of confidence in institutions and officials working in the public interest, being accountable to each other and the population, and allowing people to have a voice and influence on decision making. **Only about 30% think their political system lets them have a say**, would adopt the opinions express in a public consultation, or that their governments can resist corporate influence, and 38% believe in the effectiveness of parliamentary checks and balances. Data shows these are all important drivers of trust today for which results are unsatisfactory in many countries.

Finally, in today's complex information environment, with the rise of disinformation and polarising content, how information is created, shared and consumed has an important link with trust. While **trust in the media on average is relatively low** and mirrors that in national government (39%), people's trust is government is closely related to their media consumption habits: only 22% of those who prefer not to follow political news report high or moderate trust in government compared to 40% among those who follow the news in some ways. **When government is a source of information, people are satisfied with the information available on administrative services (67%), while only 39% think that communication about policy reforms, an important driver of trust, is adequate**. Additionally, while the use of statistics, data and evidence is also shown to be a strong driver a trust, **only about a third of people find government statistics trustworthy** and **easy to find and to understand**.

What can governments do?

Notwithstanding differences across countries, the results provide a shared agenda for OECD governments to meet their citizens' increasing expectations. This agenda for action differs slightly across public institutions and levels of government given the levers and room for improving trust differ across those institutions.

Overall, the 2024 Trust Survey confirms that it is **the processes underpinning democratic governance** that need strengthening to meet people's increasing expectations: ensuring all people's voices are heard, strengthening checks and balance among institutions, using better, transparent and verifiable evidence in decision-making, and balancing the interests of a diverse population are the best levers to **improve trust, especially in national governments**.

- **Engage better with citizens to enhance trust in both local and national government.** There is a significant need for more meaningful and inclusive opportunities for citizen participation and influence in decision-making processes. This requires setting clear expectations about the role of deliberative and direct democracy within representative democracies; improving the mechanisms through which governments give all people a voice and are responsive to these voices and supporting spaces and capacities for civic and political engagement. Policies designed to promote political inclusivity and engagement or mitigate economic vulnerability and discrimination could also be key to closing trust gaps and empower people to participate in public debate.
- **Strengthen capacity to address complex policy challenges especially at national government level.** Data shows that governments must continue to improve their reliability and preparedness for future crises,

including those with global implications; and consider whether questions of intra-national and inter-generational fairness are allocated sufficient space not only during the policy deliberation process, but also in public communication.

- Related to the above, **support a healthy information ecosystem and invest in evidence-based communication**. Governments would benefit from more actively communicating about the evidence, research, and statistics that inform their decisions to improve public perception of the decision-making process, and ensure the data are openly verifiable; ensuring they clearly and inclusively explain how policy reforms affect the public; promoting a healthy, diverse, and independent media environment that provides the necessary checks and balances in the information ecosystem, a requirement for trust; and strengthening media literacy in society.
- For all institutions, **invest in improving perceptions of integrity in daily interactions and complex decision making**. Trust in all institutions surveyed would benefit from clearer rules related to integrity and anti-corruption and their implementation. Strengthening checks and balances in the political system, in particular to prevent perceptions of undue influence and conflict of interests, is also likely to help build trust and help maintain support for representative democracy.
- **Invest in reliable, responsive and fair public services, especially to enhance trust in the civil service and local government.** While a majority expresses satisfaction with services, data shows that improving the speed and ease of administrative service delivery, as well as the responsiveness of public services to feedback from users or ideas from frontline public employees would contribute to even higher satisfaction levels. Fair treatment from public employees and legitimate use of personal data also hold potential for increased trust. The declining satisfaction with the healthcare and education systems over the past two years warrants further monitoring.

Introduction

Governments today stand at a critical juncture. They are tasked with navigating simultaneous transitions and overcoming significant challenges, from ensuring economic security and recovery to managing heightened geo-political tensions, mitigating and adapting to climate change and adjusting to technological changes. At the same time, rising polarisation and citizens disengaging from traditional democratic processes place governments under increased pressure. In this high stakes environment, building and maintaining trust in public institutions has emerged as a priority for governments around the world.

Trust in public institutions is the bedrock upon which public officials in democracies rely to govern on a daily basis and make policy choices to tackle pressing challenges. Trust reduce transaction costs – in governance, in society, and in the economy – and eases compliance with public policies. Trust can help foster adherence to challenging reforms and programmes with better outcomes. In democracies, robust levels of trust – along with healthy levels of public scrutiny – can help legitimise and protect democratic institutions and norms.

Trust is also an important indicator to measure how people perceive and assess their government institutions. High trust in public institutions is of course not a *necessary* outcome of democratic governance. Indeed, low levels of trust measured in democracies are possible because citizens in democratic systems – unlike in autocratic ones – are not only free to report that they do not trust their government, but they are also encouraged to scrutinise government behaviour and show 'sceptical trust'. The resilience of democratic systems comes from the open public debate they foster, enabling them to take into account a plurality of opinions to improve in the pursuit of trustworthiness and better outcomes; and from the ability of different institutions to hold each other accountable. Even low levels of trust in individual public institutions should not be viewed as an indication of a rejection of democratic values, but rather as a demonstration that citizens have high expectations for what institutions in democratic systems can deliver.

This report provides an encompassing stocktake of what drives trust in public institutions in 2023 by asking people in 30 OECD countries about their experience with, and expectations of, government reliability, responsiveness, capacity to tackle complex and global challenges, integrity, fairness, and openness. The OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions (Trust Survey), which provides the original data for this report, was implemented in 30 OECD countries in October and November 2023, following the inaugural 2021 wave that included 22 OECD countries (Box 1). The 2023 Trust Survey asked the same set of questions as in 2021, allowing for comparisons in the evolution of results over time. A few new questions were introduced, allowing for a deeper understanding of the results.

Box 1. The 2023 OECD Survey on the Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions (Trust Survey)

The second wave of the OECD Trust Survey provides extensive coverage across 30 OECD member countries, typically with 2000 respondents per country. Twenty countries covered in the first Trust Survey in 2021 also participated in 2023. These are: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Colombia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Korea, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. Additionally, ten new countries joined the Trust Survey in 2023: Chile, Costa Rica, Czechia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, and Switzerland. Countries volunteer to participate in the survey, which according to the 2022 Luxembourg Declaration on Building Trust and Reinforcing Democracy is set to be carried out every two years.

The Trust Survey questionnaire follows the structure of the OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions (see Annex 1.A in Chapter 1) which defines trust as "a person's belief that another person or institution will act consistently with their expectation of positive behaviour". The questionnaire includes questions regarding trust levels in different public institutions and the media, situational questions about public governance drivers of trust, and modules on satisfaction with public services, political participation, global and intergenerational challenges and the respondent's background. The questions related to trust levels and drivers use a 0-10 response scale and an option to answer 'don't know'.

Data collection for the 2023 OECD Trust Survey took place in October and November 2023 in most countries (see Annex B). In Ireland, Mexico and the United Kingdom, data collection already started in late September; and in Norway, it was finalized in early December. The national surveys were carried out online for most countries by Ipsos, by national statistical offices (in Finland, Ireland, Mexico and the United Kingdom), by a national research institute (Iceland), and a survey research firm (Norway). Apart from Norway, where some respondents filled out paper surveys, and Mexico, where respondents were interviewed in person, the data collection occurred through online surveys. Data are generally representative of the adult population at the national level; and the urban adult population in Mexico.

An Advisory Group consisting of public officials from OECD member countries, along with representatives from National Statistical Offices and international experts has led the development of the survey questionnaire and oversaw the survey implementation and analysis. The Advisory Group has helped ensuring that the questionnaire was adapted to different national contexts, while guaranteeing meaningful international comparison.

Since the publication of the 2021 results, the OECD has also been able to track how governments more broadly have used the results of the OECD 2021 Trust Survey to guide their public policies. This includes, for example, making trust an overarching policy objective for government action, embedding trust in the strategic framework for public services transformation and creating government coordination mechanisms dedicated to driving forward the trust agenda (Box 2).

Box 2. Countries initiatives following the 2021 Trust Survey

The OECD Trust Survey provides strong evidence that positive perceptions of public governance processes, namely government responsiveness, reliability, integrity, openness, and fairness are related to trust in various political institutions. However, evidence of how specific policy changes or interventions can affect levels of trust is sparser. This box thus aims to provide an overview of how governments have used the results of the OECD 2021 Trust Survey to guide their public policies, rather than evaluate the effects of these government interventions.

- **Prioritising trust as a policy objective** implies the government recognises trust as an indicator of government performance, and an input with significant impact on policy outcomes. It often involves a commitment to regular data collection, which allows governments to track trust evolution and identify areas requiring further investment. For instance, following the Study on Drivers of Trust in public institutions, New Zealand's government committed resources to monitor trust determinants and correlate them with socio-economic characteristics' data. Similarly, Colombia used the OECD 2021 Trust Survey data as a baseline and will use it as a monitoring indicator for its National Development Strategy. Estonia set concrete numeric targets for trust in the national and local government and the Riigikogu (Parliament), currently derived from Eurobarometer, as monitoring indicators in their "Estonia 2035" long-term development strategy. In Mexico, the Federal Cabinet for Public Safety and the security cabinet of Mexico City use trust data in decisions relating to improving performance and trust and reducing corruption; and the National Commission for Superior Courts of Justice refers to statistics on trust in the judicial system in policies for improving social trust in judges and local courts. And in Sweden, several results of the 2021 Trust Survey related to trust were reported in the governmental budget bill to Parliament.
- **Embedding trust in the strategic framework** can help mainstream the concept of trust across the public administration. For instance, Ireland used the OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust to shape its Public Service Transformation Strategy to 2030 (Government of Ireland, 2023[1]). This strategy explicitly commits to the public governance drivers of trust identified by the OECD and lists public trust as one of six top-level outcomes. Likewise, Norway initiated its Trust Reform in 2022, a public sector management reform which aims to boost public trust by improving government competence, focusing on responsiveness (Government of Norway, 2022[2]). By leveraging the unique knowledge and expertise of front-line staff, the reform seeks to transform the public sector into a more user-centric and citizen-responsive entity. Chile participated in the OECD Trust Survey for the first time in 2023, although the OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust already informed the 2022-2026 Modernisation of the State Agenda in Chile (Government of Chile, 2022[3]). The agenda's core objective is to regain trust in and legitimacy of government institutions, and it includes specific initiatives to strengthen government competence and promote government values during this period.
- **Putting in place dedicated coordination mechanisms** can help facilitate the implementation of agendas surrounding trust. Norway formed a committee of state secretaries and group involving all ministries to improve coordination around trust in the administrations (Government of Norway, 2022[2]). Along these lines, Finland created a cross-government working group to implement OECD Trust Survey recommendations and identify areas for further work. Beyond intragovernmental coordination, in Portugal, an institutional framework is being developed for decision-makers and the scientific system to enhance trust.
- **Enhancing openness and engagement opportunities.** Finland institutionalised national dialogues following the model of *Lockdown Dialogues* held during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, Latvia organized several trainings for "public dialogue's facilitators" and in August 2023 the State Chancellery launched a series of national discussions with citizens on the issue of trust, following the Finnish model. The main conclusions of these dialogues were presented to Members of Parliament. Ireland leveraged survey findings to tailor their initiatives to the specific needs and concerns of different population groups. Lower levels of trust among youth led the government to the establishment of youth assemblies to inform government policies on issues such as climate change and artificial intelligence. The Irish government also targeted young people in its public consultation to improve the development of digital public services by partnering with voluntary organisations.

Note: These examples were compiled in relation to the activities conducted by the OECD Trust Survey Advisory Group.

The year 2024 represents a significant milestone in global politics, with 83 elections scheduled across 76 countries, representing nearly four billion people (Hsu, Thompson and Myers, 2024[4]; The Economist, 2023[5]). This unprecedented wave of democratic activity is unlikely to be matched until 2048. Of the 30 countries surveyed in the 2023 OECD Trust survey, 9 are holding national elections in 2024, and this number rises to 23 with the elections to the European parliament.

While the OECD Trust Survey measures the structural drivers of trust in institutions, which may vary mildly around elections, the political cycle affects several elements of trust in government itself. Recent participation in elections can improve the perceived legitimacy of the system with people feeling that they have a voice if the electoral system is perceived as fair and neutral, and subsequently, heightened confidence that expectations will be met at the start of electoral mandates (Hooghe and Marien, 2014[6]; Kolpinskaya et al., 2020[7]). However, the effects are likely to be mediated by partisanship, especially in majority systems with clear "winners" and "losers (Hooghe and Stiers, 2016[8]). In addition, the increased media scrutiny and consumption of political news during elections can also result in more informed, yet potentially more sceptical, citizens (Lau, Sigelman and Rovner, 2007[9]).

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1 Overview: New trends, persistent patterns and necessary changes

Trust is an important measure of how people perceive government institutions. This chapter begins by describing the context in which the 2023 Trust Survey data collection took place. It then outlines levels of trust in public institutions at all levels of government across OECD countries, tracking changes since 2021. The chapter also offers an overview of people's perceptions of their day-to-day interactions with public institutions and government decision making on complex policy issues, identifying the main public governance drivers of trust. The chapter's annex details the OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions and traces the evolution of government reliability, responsiveness, openness, fairness and integrity perceptions in the twenty countries that participated in both the 2021 and 2023 Trust Surveys.

1.1. CONTEXT MATTERS: PEOPLE'S CONCERNS IN 2023

People living in OECD countries have experienced several important shocks since the start of the decade, including a pandemic, rising inflation, and war in close proximity or with major geopolitical consequences. These shocks are likely to affect what people consider as important issues for their countries and their personal lives and thus determine what aspects of government performance they pay particular attention to and, as a result, their trust levels (de Blok, 2023[1]).

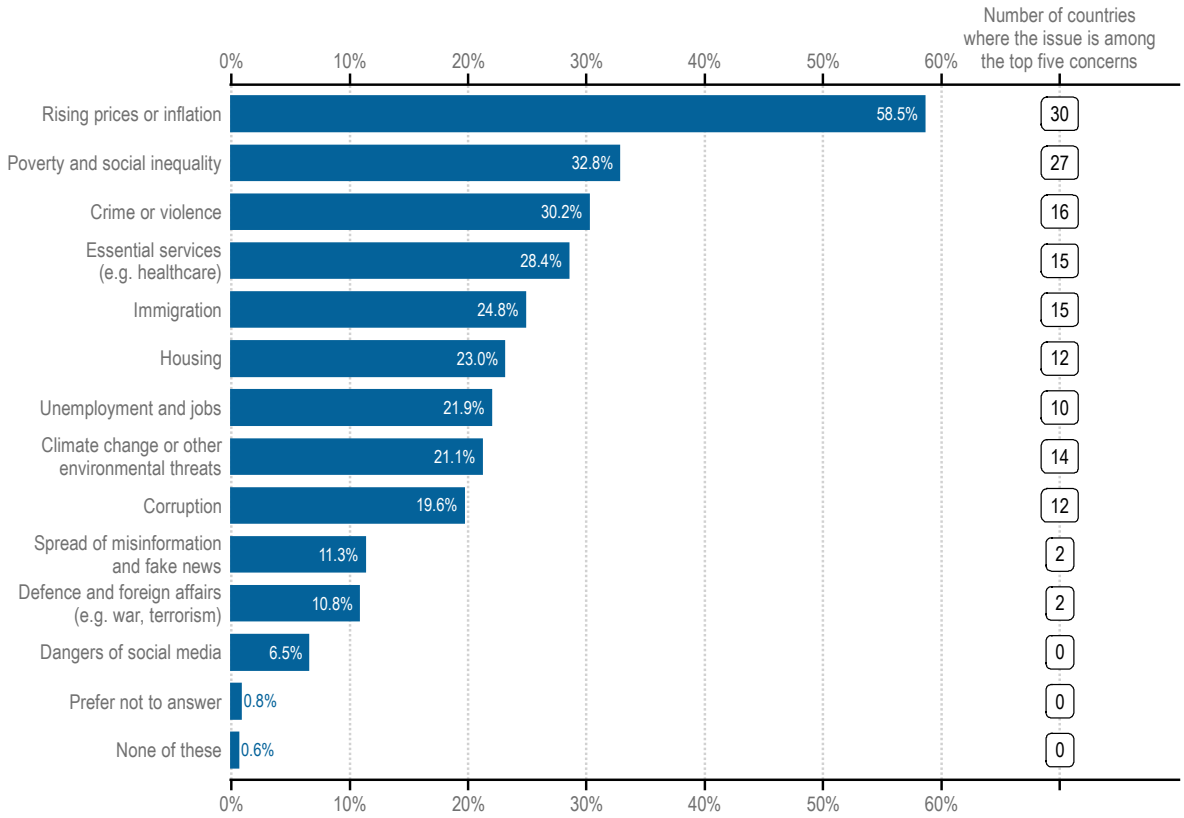
Data collection for the 2023 OECD Trust Survey took place in October and November 2023.[1] At this point, the landscape for global economic growth exhibited signs of both moderation and resilience (OECD, 2023[2]). While the global energy crisis initially drove up inflation, gradual moderation was observed as supply chains adjusted, though inflation levels remained above central bank targets and pre-pandemic levels (OECD, 2023[3]). At the same time, low unemployment persisted alongside pressing labour shortages, challenging various industries. Public services, including health services, were under strain amid increased demand and resource constraints. Geopolitically, the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and the Hamas terrorist attacks resulting in Israel's military intervention in Gaza added to economic and policy uncertainty.

In parallel, political polarisation, partially fuelled by mis- and disinformation, visibly increased, possibly exacerbating social tensions and political disengagement. It also likely hindered government's ability to address policy challenges, as extreme partisanship makes social and political consensus on reforms more difficult.

The uncertainty during this period is reflected in significant concerns about the economy, both at a macro and personal level, in surveyed countries. An average of 59% of people identify inflation as one of the three most important issues facing their country (Figure 1.1),[2] making it by far the most frequently cited concern. Poverty and social inequality are cited as top concerns by an average of 33% across the participating countries, and unemployment and jobs by 22%. At a personal level, an average of 71% indicate that they are somewhat or very concerned about their household's finances and economic well-being over the next one to two years.

Figure 1.1. Economic concerns are at the forefront of people's minds

Share of population who view policy issue as among the three most important ones facing their country, OECD, 2023



Note: The figure presents the unweighted OECD average of responses to the question "What do you think are the three most important issues facing [COUNTRY]?". Immigration was not a response option in Mexico and Norway. The listed number of countries where the issue is among the top five concerns relates to the number of countries where the issue has among the five highest proportions of mentions among the respondents.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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A second important area of concern in many countries is individual and national security. An average of 30% of people across participating countries name crime or violence among the top three issues facing their country, and 11% are concerned about defence and foreign affairs, including war and terrorism. On both concerns, however, the variation between countries is very large: While only 4% name violence among their top concerns in Estonia, the share exceeds 60% in Chile (62%), Costa Rica (63%), Mexico (70%) and Sweden (65%). In countries in closer proximity to the ongoing war of aggression in Ukraine, concern about defence and foreign affairs is far above average, ranging from 19% in Sweden, 22% in Latvia, 23% in Norway, 25% in Denmark to 33% in Estonia. Concerns in this area are also relatively high in Korea at 20% and France at 22%.

Access to and the quality of basic services is likewise an important area of concern. On average, 28% name health and other essential services among the top three concerns for their country, reaching 45% or more in Iceland (48%), Latvia (49%), Finland (56%) and Ireland (57%). Housing, which an average of 23% identify as a top-three issue, is a particularly problematic topic in several countries including Australia (39%), Canada (40%), Iceland (42%), Luxembourg (58%) and Ireland (71%). An average quarter of respondents name

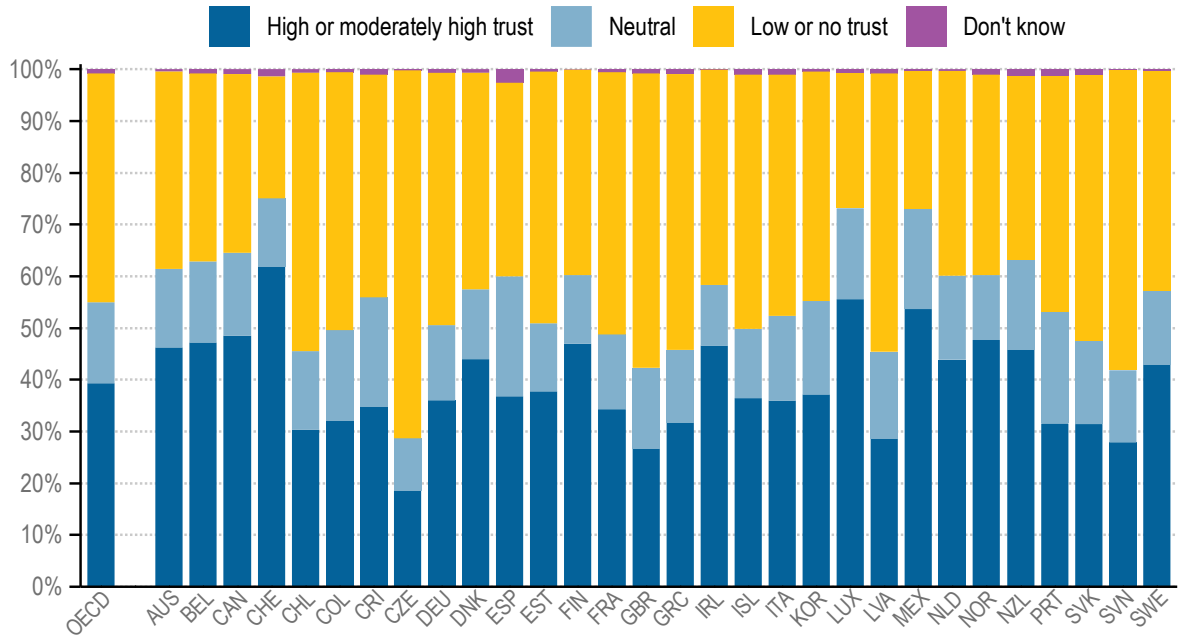
immigration among the top three issues at the country level, while around a fifth each cited climate change and other environmental threats (21%) and corruption (20%).

1.2. A GROWING SHARE OF THE POPULATION EXPRESSES LOW TRUST IN THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

Trust has slightly fallen since 2021, although levels are still higher than after the global financial crisis. In 2023, around four in ten people (39%) had high or moderately high trust in their country's national government (having selected responses 6 to 10 on a 0-10 scale). A higher share (44%) had no or low trust (Figure 1.2). 16% gave a neutral response to the question, indicating neither trust nor a lack of trust (having selected the response "5" on a 0-10 scale). Across countries, the share of people with high or moderately high trust in the national government varies strongly.[3] In a few countries (Luxembourg, Mexico and Switzerland), a majority of people have high or moderately high trust in the national government, while less than one in three people do in about a third of countries. More than one in five people provide a neutral response in Costa Rica, Portugal, and Spain.

Figure 1.2. A slightly larger share of the population has low or no trust in their national government compared to those with high or moderately high trust

Share of population who indicate different levels of trust in their national government (on a 0-10 scale), 2023



Note: The 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?". A 0-4 response corresponds to "low or no trust", a 5 to "neutral" and a 6-10 to " high or moderately high trust". "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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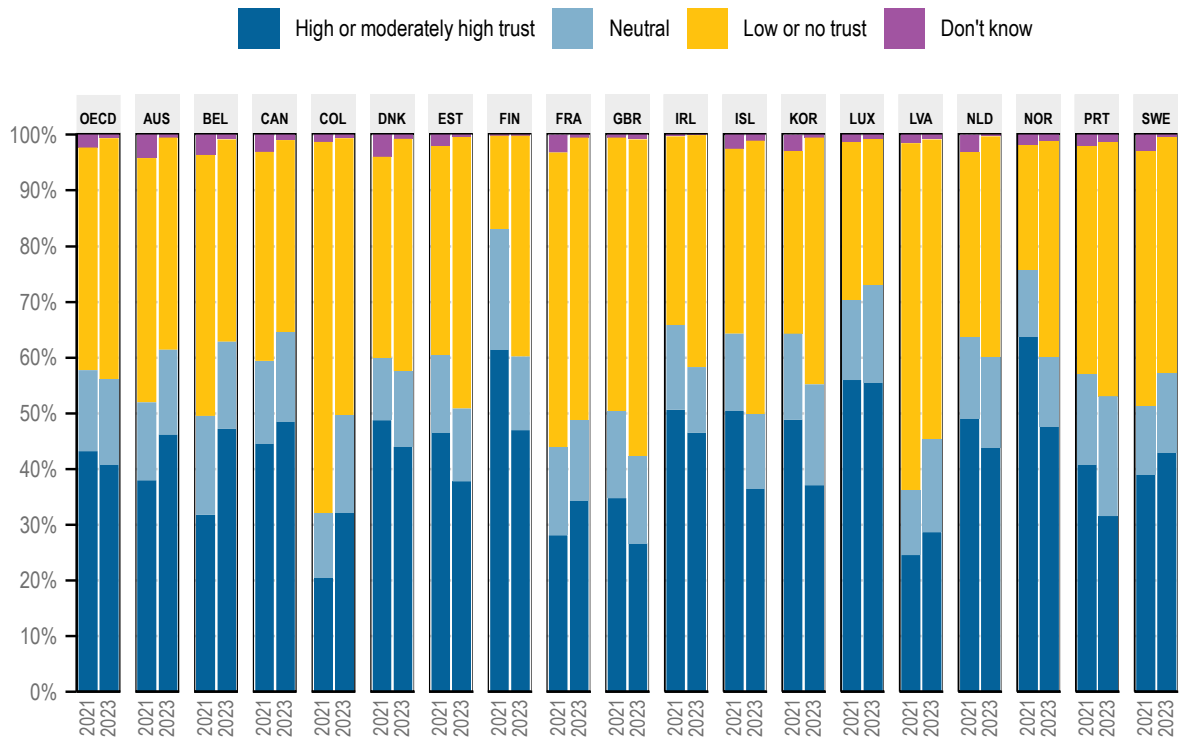
Compared to 2021, there is a modest increase in the share of people with low or no trust and a decrease in the share with high or moderately high trust in the national government. For the eighteen countries in which trust levels in the national government were measured in the 2021 and 2023 waves, the share with high or moderately high trust declined from 43 to 41% (Figure 1.3).[4] The increase in the share with low or no trust is almost equivalent, from 40 to 43%. These global figures

however hide important changes in trust levels in individual countries. In particular, the share with high or moderately high trust increased substantially in Belgium and Colombia, but also increased in Australia, Canada, France, Latvia and Sweden. The share declined substantially in Finland and Norway. In Finland, the timing of the 2021 survey wave, which was earlier than for other countries, may have contributed to the decline shown in the data, as the trust levels at the time may still have been boosted by the 'rally around the flag' effect of the Covid-19 pandemic whereby trust can increase during a national, or in this case global, crisis (OECD, 2022[4]).

Depending on each country's situation, changes in trust level between 2021 and 2023 may also partially be due to the political cycle in each country. At the start of a government's mandate, trust often increases due to people's hopes for change and their recent participation in elections, which can boost the perceived legitimacy of the system (Hooghe and Stiers, 2016[5]), and may then decline over time as people start to evaluate the government's performance against their expectations. Furthermore, the heightened media scrutiny and consumption of political news during elections can create more informed but potentially more sceptical citizens. However, an analysis based on eleven European countries finds the effect of general elections held 2021-2022 in some of the countries on trust is rather negligible (Gonzalez and Kyander, forthcoming[6]).

Figure 1.3. The modest shift in the average with high or moderately high trust across the OECD hides important differences across countries

Share of population who indicate different levels of trust in their national government (on a 0-10 scale), 2021 and 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions across two survey waves 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?". A 0-4 response corresponds to 'low or no trust', a 5 to 'neutral' and a 6-10 to 'high or moderately high trust'. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries, for the listed countries for which the variable was available in 2021 and 2023. Mexico and New Zealand participated in 2021, but the survey for this year did not include the question about trust in the national government for these countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023.

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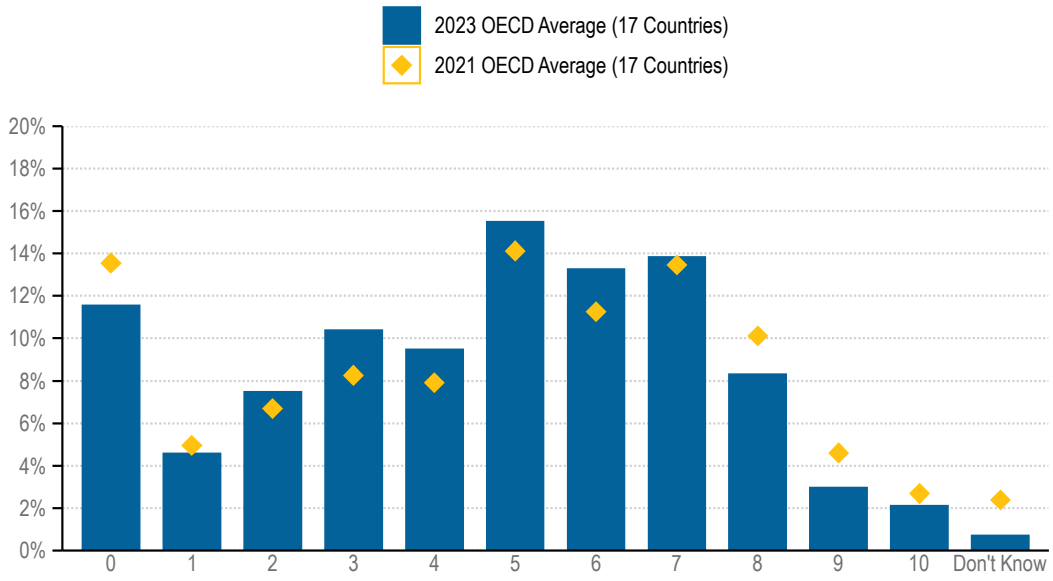
Nevertheless, interesting trends are emerging in this iteration of the Trust Survey. Globally, the decrease in trust between 2021 and 2023 can be partly attributed to women and people with lower education being less confident in the national government: On average among eighteen countries, the share of women who reported no or low trust increased from 39% in 2021 to 45% in 2023; while for men, the share remained the same at 41%. Additionally, the share of lower educated people who reported no or low trust also increased by 6 percentage points.

The slight decrease in trust between 2021 and 2023 is not a positive development, but it remains comparatively modest given the current context. In comparison with the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis,[5] the relative stability of public trust may reflect first a different nature of the crisis with the financial crisis being seen in part as a failure of financial regulation, while the Covid pandemic was an exogenous factor affecting the health and social outcomes of our societies. Second, it may also be a testament to the unprecedented efforts of OECD governments in upholding and strengthening the public health infrastructure and providing support to individuals and businesses affected by the pandemic.

On average across the countries with available information, fewer people in 2023 indicated that they had no trust at all in the national government or selected one of the higher trust levels (Figure 1.4). The share with no trust, i.e., those who assigned a 0 to their trust in the national government, dropped by two percentage points, from 13.6 to 11.5%; and the share who selected an 8 to 10 response, indicating a high trust level, likewise dropped by four percentage points. The decrease in the share with no trust or high trust in favour of the groups with low and moderately high trust may be seen as a positive sign that fewer people either place 'credulous trust' in public institutions that naively assumes complete trustworthiness or have a cynical believe that they are completely untrustworthy, no matter what information is available (Norris, 2022[7]).

Figure 1.4. The share of the population who either do not trust the government at all or who have high trust has declined

Share of population who indicate different levels of trust in their national government (on a 0-10 scale), 2021 and 2023



Note: The figure presents the unweighted OECD average 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?". The respective average refers to the unweighted average including Australia, Belgium, Canada, Colombia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Iceland, Ireland, Korea, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Finland is excluded because the response scale in 2021 deviated from the 0-10 scale.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023.

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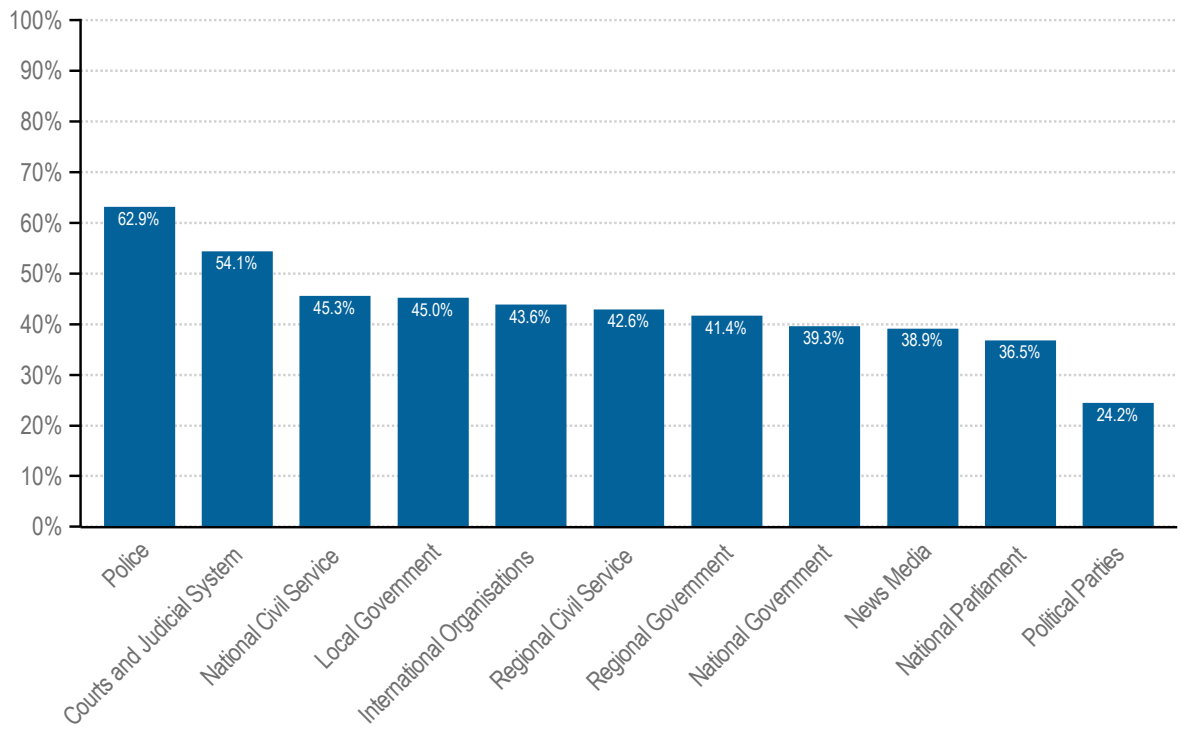
1.3. LAW AND ORDER INSTITUTIONS ELICIT MORE TRUST THAN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

Public trust varies significantly across different institutions. Generally, law, order and administrative institutions garner more trust than institutions perceived as more political, such as the executive government or political parties.

Across the OECD, the police and the judicial system are the most trusted public institutions, followed by the civil service. On average, over six out of ten people (63%) trust the police, a figure that even surpasses interpersonal trust (62%). More than half (54%) also have high or moderately high trust in the courts and judicial system. The national civil service is trusted by 45%, a level close to those of the regional or local civil service (43%). Levels of trust in the local government are equivalent to trust in the national civil service (45%). Among the twenty-one countries with regional governments participating in the Trust Survey, 41% of people had high or moderately high trust in the regional government. Finally, fewer than four in ten (39%) have high or moderately high trust in the national government, a share equal to trust in the news media (39%) and higher than in the national parliament (37%) or political parties (24%) (Figure 1.5). However, these average patterns can hide differences in individual countries.

Figure 1.5. The police and judicial system are the most trusted institutions

Share of population with high or moderately high trust in the public institution and media, OECD, 2023



Note: The figure presents the unweighted OECD average 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 [insert name of institution]?" Shown here is the share with high or moderately high trust corresponding to those who select an answer from 6 to 10 on the 0-10 response scale.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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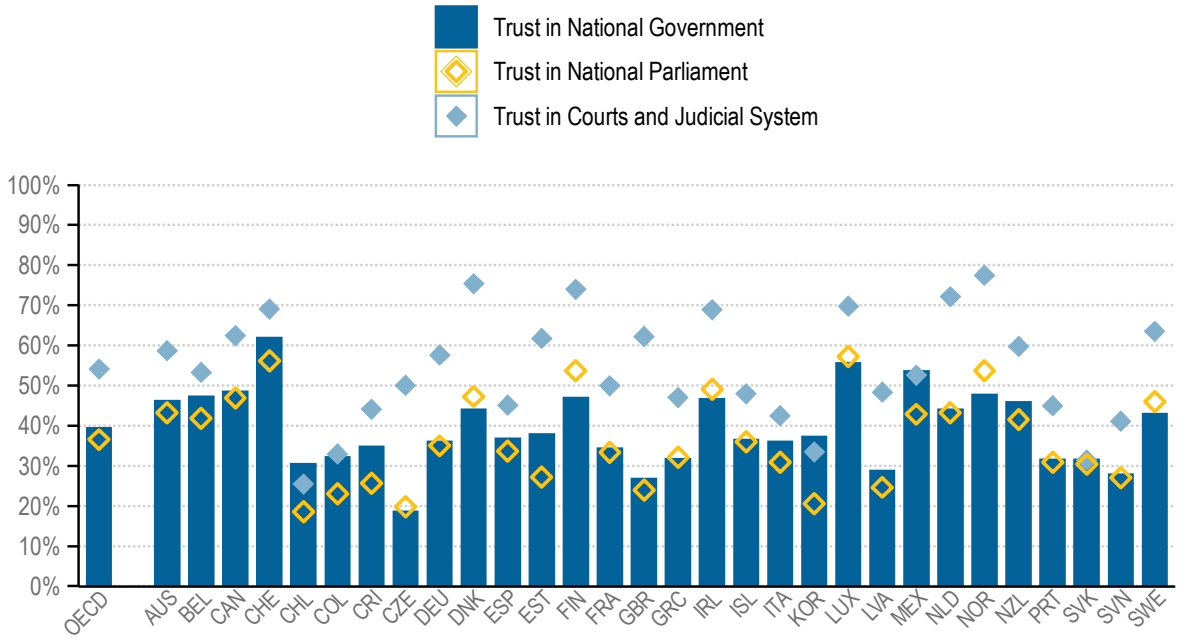
Among the different branches of national government, the (executive) government generally elicits less trust than the judicial system (which includes both lower and national-level courts), but more trust than the national parliament. This pattern holds true on average across the thirty OECD countries, as seen above, but also in the majority of participating countries (Figure 1.6). However, there are exceptions. In Czechia, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Norway and Sweden, the national parliament garners more trust than the national government. However, with the exception of Finland and Norway, the difference in the share that trust parliament over national government amounts to three percentage points or less. Meanwhile in Chile, Colombia, Korea, Mexico and the Slovak Republic, trust in the judicial system is equal to or even lower than trust in the national government. The gap between the proportion with high and moderately high trust in the judicial system versus the national government exceeds twenty-five percentage points in Czechia, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, and the United Kingdom.

Since parliament and government are inherently political institutions, the higher trust placed in the judicial system is in line with expectations within a healthy democratic system (Warren, 2017[8]). Prior research suggests that judicial performance positively affects confidence in the judiciary (Aydın Çakır and Şekercioğlu, 2015[9]), and that trust in the judiciary and the belief that the judiciary is independent are almost synonymous (van Dijk, 2020[10]). Findings from the 2021 OECD Trust Survey also showed that there was a positive correlation at the cross-country level between trust in the judicial system and the belief that courts were likely to make decisions free from political interference (OECD, 2022[4]).

Figure 1.6. In most countries the national parliament is less trusted than the national government

Share of population with high or moderately high trust in the national government, parliament and judicial system, 2023



Note: The 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 [insert name of institution]?" The share with high or moderately high trust correspond to those who select an answer from 6 to 10 on the 0-10 response scale.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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In the past two years, trust in Parliament has generally changed in the same direction and by a similar order of magnitude as trust in the national government. The exceptions are the Netherlands and Finland, where trust in the national government decreased, but trust in the national parliament has remained stable. Trust in the courts also tends to follow similar patterns as the other two branches. However, decreases in the share with high or moderately high trust in courts and the judicial system tend to be more attenuated.

1.4. PEOPLE TYPICALLY PERCEIVE THE CIVIL SERVICE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AS MORE TRUSTWORTHY THAN THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

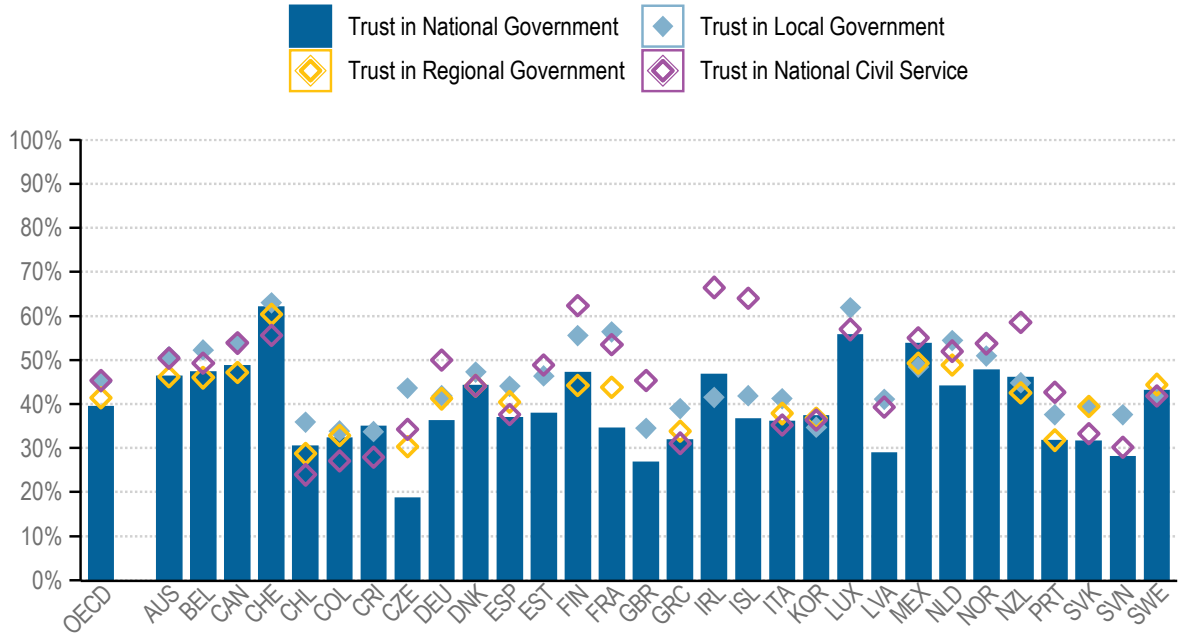
Turning to trust in different levels of government, trust in local government generally exceeds trust in the national and regional governments (Figure 1.7). This is expected, given that individuals are often more familiar with their local government and its actions. However, there are exceptions here as well. For instance, in Costa Rica, New Zealand, Sweden and Switzerland, trust in the two levels of government is very similar. Meanwhile in Ireland, Korea and Mexico, people are more likely to have high of moderately high trust in the national than in the local government. As regards trust in regional government, there is no clear pattern common to most countries, which could be related to the differing functions of regional governments in different OECD countries.

Across the OECD, people tend to trust the civil service more than the national government, but the pattern is far from universal. In fact, the share of the population with high or moderately high trust in the national government and the national civil service are close to identical – within two percentage point differences – in one third of the participating countries (Belgium, Denmark, Greece, Italy, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Slovak Republic, Spain, and Sweden). In Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica and Switzerland, trust in the national civil service is lower than in the national/federal government. Conversely, the difference between the proportions trusting the civil service compared to the government exceeds ten percentage points in Czechia, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

Levels of trust in the national and either regional or local civil service are nearly equal everywhere. This could be because people view them as equally trustworthy. Alternatively, many people may not know which functions are carried out by national, regional or local civil servants. Most likely, a combination of both factors contributes to this outcome.

Figure 1.7. Trust in the local government is usually higher than trust in the regional and national governments

Share of population with high or moderately high trust in the national/regional/local government and national civil service, 2023



Note: The 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 [insert name of institution]?" The share with high or moderately high trust correspond to those who select an answer from 6 to 10 on the 0-10 response scale. The question of 'regional government' refers to the intermediary level of government between the national and local level and can for example refer to states in federal systems, (autonomous communities) or regions. As this level does not exist in every country, it was not included in all countries. In the United Kingdom, respondents were asked to indicate their trust in the three devolved governments, regardless of where they live; the respective information is not shown in this figure. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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Between 2021 and 2023, trust in the civil service and trust in local government decreased by one and two percentage points on average across countries.[6] However, in some countries changes were relatively large. Over the past two years, the share of people that indicated high or moderately high trust in the civil service increased by seven percentage points in Belgium and Colombia and decreased the most in Korea, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom. Similarly, trust in the local government has increased by more than four percentage points in Australia, Canada, Colombia, France and Sweden. On the contrary, the share of people that indicated high or moderately high trust in the local government decreased by more than ten percentage points in Iceland, Korea and Portugal. In Portugal, this decrease might be linked to a generalised decrease of trust in the entire political system, due to the coincidence of the survey with the peak of a significant political crisis that led to the calling of national and regional elections.

1.5. THE DRIVERS OF TRUST IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS 2023: A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

The results of the 2023 Trust Survey provide a compelling picture both on perceptions by people of their day-to-day interactions with their governments and perceptions regarding societal, complex policy-making. While governments continuously need to improve on various areas in their relationship with citizens—from delivering quality services to addressing climate change--the survey suggests that today the most effective

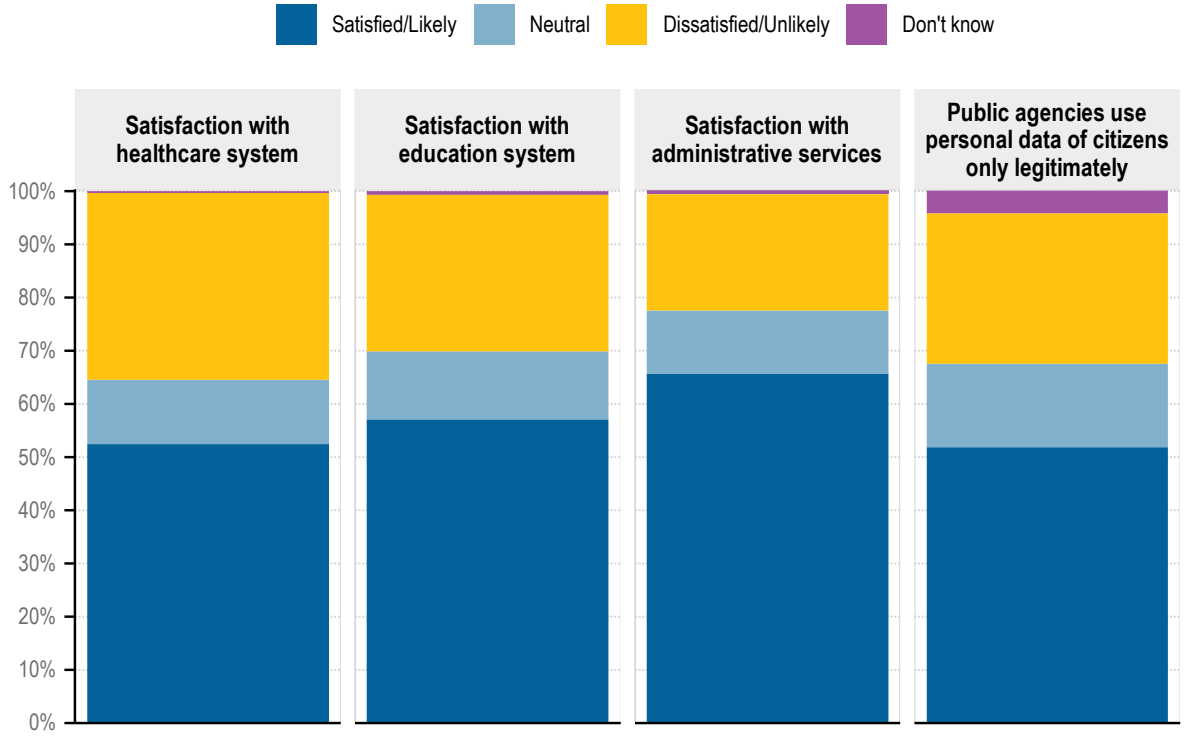
drivers for higher trust are related to complex, global and long-term policy issues where citizens feel they do not have a voice and policy decision are viewed to be taken more in the private interests rather than on the best available evidence.

1.5.1. While day-to-day dealings with public institutions remain satisfactory, some further improvements could still boost trust levels

Both the 2021 and 2023 Trust Survey found the performance of OECD governments relatively satisfactory with regards to their day-to-day interactions with the public. For example, across participating countries, a majority continues to be satisfied with public services, such as health, education and administrative services, and trusts the government with the use of personal data (Figure 1.8). In their day-to-day interactions with individuals, public institutions therefore by and large fulfil the expectations of many people.

Figure 1.8. A majority sees public institutions as reliable providers of public services

Share of service users reporting different levels of satisfaction with the health and education system and administrative services and share of population report different likelihood that public agencies use personal data only legitimately, OECD, 2023



Note: The figure presents the unweighted OECD average of responses to the questions "On a scale of 0 to 10, how satisfied are you with the healthcare system/education system/administrative services in [COUNTRY]?". For each question, respondents with recent contact are those who reply in the affirmative to the questions "In the last 12 months, have you or somebody in your household personally made use of the healthcare system in [COUNTRY]?", "In the last 2 years, have you or somebody in your household been enrolled in an educational institution in [COUNTRY]?" and "In the last 12 months, have you personally made use of administrative service in [COUNTRY] (for example, applying for a passport, registering a birth, or applying for benefits etc.)?". The "satisfied/likely" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "dissatisfied/unlikely" is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and "don't know" was a separate answer choice. The last bar presents the unweighted OECD average of responses to the questions "On a scale of 0 to 10, how likely do you think it is that a public agency would use your personal data for legitimate purposes only?".
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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When dealing with the public, government institutions can, and should, foster a sense of dignity among their population. A basic pre-requisite for people to feel they are treated with dignity is to ensure fairness of treatment and processes. On this behavioural dimension, the Trust Survey finds that roughly one in two respondents think it likely that their own application for a government benefit or service would be treated fairly (52%). A lower proportion – that is nonetheless higher than for many other public governance drivers – believe that public employees treat people equally regardless of their income level, gender identity and other characteristics (45%). Across these two variables, perceptions in the countries that participated in both waves worsened slightly on average, though this hides important variations across countries. More vulnerable or marginalised individuals may also have lower expectations for fair treatment than these average estimates suggest. For example, the share who find it likely that civil servants will treat them fairly when they apply for a benefit or service is 15 percentage points lower among those who identify as belonging to a discriminated-against group than among those who do not identify as belonging to such a group. This can also affect their trust in public institutions (Chapter 3).

1.5.2. Opportunity areas for government action to improve trust in their day-to-day interactions with the public

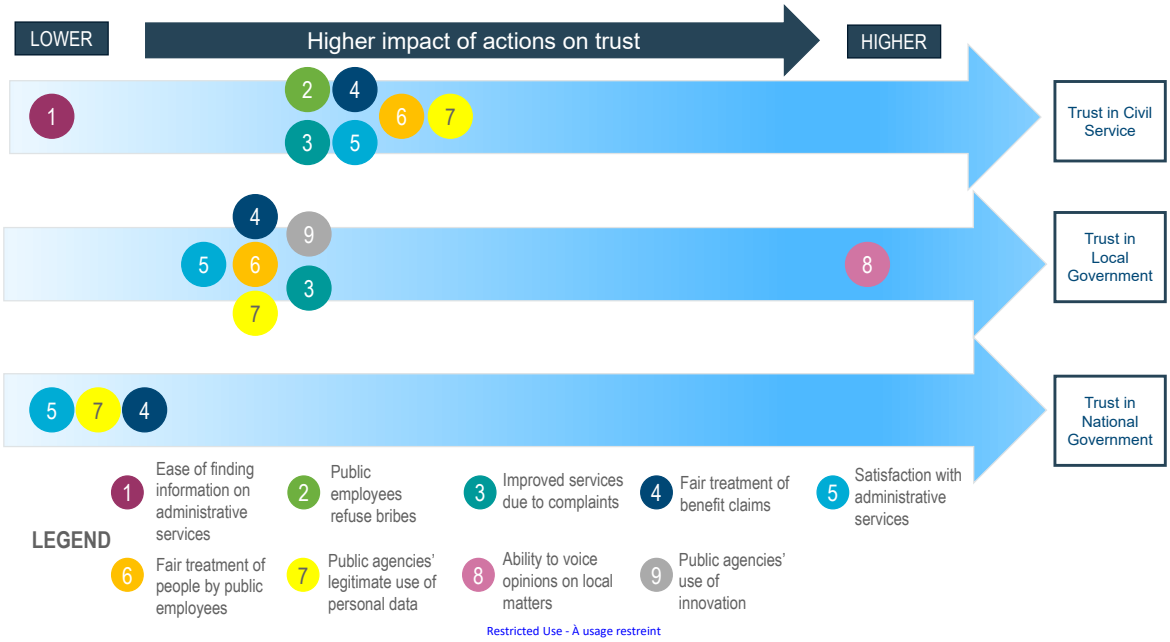
The following figure summarises the areas for actions regarding the day to day interactions between government and the public that, today, will yield the most benefits for trust in different parts of government, based on their relative importance as a driver of trust and on the lack of satisfaction or of a positive perception in this area. This represents an analysis for the 30 countries as a whole and hides important differences for individual countries that would need to be further analysed.

The positive perceptions of public services, including of fair treatment from public employees and legitimate use of personal data, are among the variables that are associated with higher trust not only in civil service and local government, but also in the national government. Therefore, governments should continue their actions in these areas. Further scope for improvement lies in the responsiveness of public institutions to adapt services to people's needs and expectations, in particular in improving the perception of public employees' integrity, making use of innovation and people's feedback, and allowing greater voice on local matters (Figure 1.9).

The potential impact on trust of actions in the day-to-day interactions are more pronounced for local government and the civil service than for the national government. Today, actions to improve people's perception that they have a voice on local matters would have the largest impact on trust in the local government. Similarly, actions to improve perception of legitimate use of data, fairness of civil servants and satisfaction with administrative services are associated with higher trust in the civil service; and the same drivers are associated with higher trust in national government, although with a smaller impact (Figure 1.9). Further details on the public governance drivers that influence trust in public institutions are in Annex A.

Figure 1.9. Drivers of trust in day-to-day interactions with public institutions: Need to focus on listening to citizens' feedback at the local level, and responsiveness and fairness of the civil service

Public governance drivers linked to day-to-day interactions that have a statistically significant impact on trust in the respective institution (national government, civil service and local government), 2023



How to read: The figure shows the combined information of the statistically significant drivers of trust in the respective institution (from the regression analysis) and the distance of the average perception of the respective driver to an 80% threshold (considered as an optimal ceiling). Drivers that are more positively associated with trust in the respective institution and for which only a low average share across the OECD have a positive perception can potentially have a higher impact on trust, as there is important scope for improvement and the improvement would likely be associated with increased levels of trust. On the other hand, drivers with a low positive association with trust and for which perceptions are already quite positive across OECD countries have a lower potential for contributing to positive improvements on trust. Nevertheless, all drivers listed in this figure are statistically significant and improvements in the respective areas can therefore all contribute to improving trust.

Note: The figure shows the statistically significant determinants of trust in the national government, civil service and local government, obtained through logistic regressions of trust in the respective institutions on the public governance drivers. The analyses control for individual characteristics, including whether people voted or would have voted for one of the current parties in power, self-reported levels of interpersonal trust, and country fixed effects. All variables depicted are statistically significant at the 1% significance level. For more details on the econometric analysis, including the average marginal effects associated with each variable, see Annex A.

Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

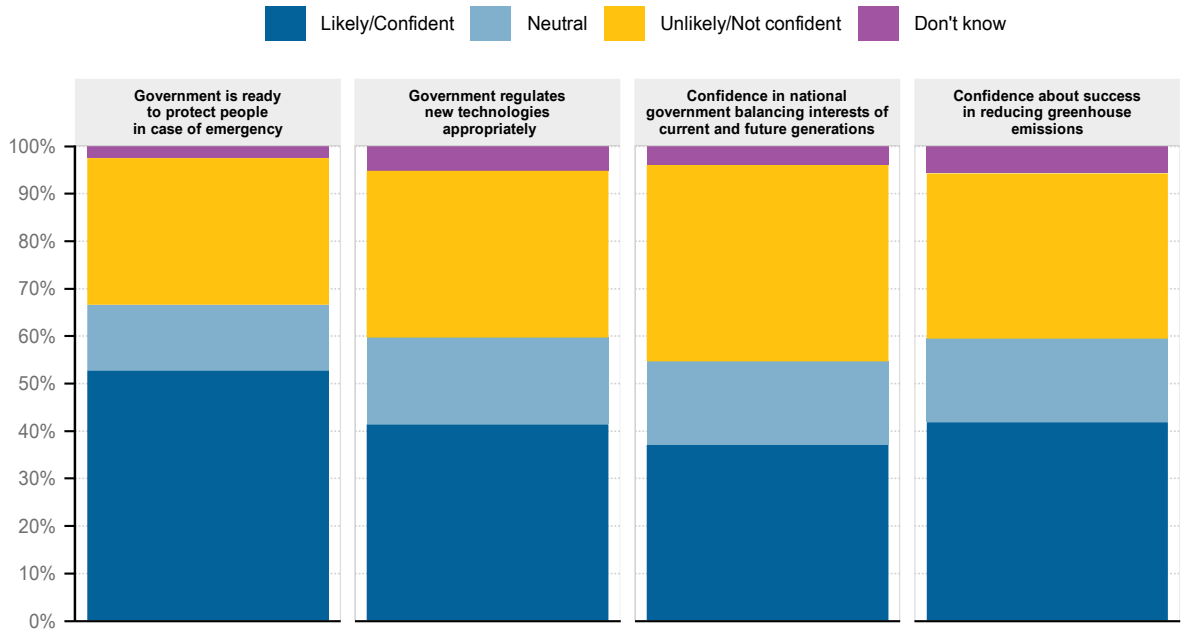
1.5.3. Upholding institutional accountability and listening to people's voice when it comes to complex policy issues are key mechanisms to reinforce trust in the national government

Beyond the day-to-day, government readiness to protect people's lives in a large-scale emergency also generates trust. People across the OECD are largely satisfied with this other essential aspect of reliability, with an average of 53% of the 2023 Trust Survey respondents being confident (Figure 1.10). The positive perception has even increased on average and in 12 out of 20 countries between 2021 and 2023. This result may reflect a positive legacy of the Covid-19 pandemic, with the experience of seeing governments and public institutions respond efficiently which may have contributed to positive perceptions of their reliability and increased people's sense of security.

In comparison to this relative satisfaction regarding the day to day interactions with government and ability to respond to a crisis, people are overall more sceptical about the ability of governments to reliably address societal challenges that require complex trade-offs or involve a high degree of uncertainty. For example, 42% think that their country will succeed in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, 41% find it likely that government can help businesses and people use new technologies, such as artificial intelligence, appropriately, and 37% are confident that government adequately balances the interests of current and future generations (Figure 1.10).

Figure 1.10. People are generally confident that their government is ready to protect lives in an emergency but are more doubtful about its ability to tackle challenges involving more unknowns

Share of population reporting different levels of confidence in the capabilities of government institutions to achieve policy objective, OECD, 2023



Note: The figure presents the unweighted OECD averages for responses to the following questions: (1) "If there was a large-scale emergency, how likely do you think it is that government institutions would be ready to protect people's lives?", (2) "If new technologies (for example artificial intelligence or digital applications) became available, how likely do you think it is that the national government will regulate them appropriately and help businesses and citizens use them responsibly?", (3) "On a scale of 0 to 10, how confident are you that the national government adequately balances the interests of current and future generations?", and (4) "On a scale of 0 to 10, how confident are you that [COUNTRY] will succeed in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the next ten years?". The "likely/confident" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "unlikely/not confident" is the aggregation of responses from 1-4; and "don't know" was a separate answer choice.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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Part of the reason why people may question their governments' ability to address challenges with long-term and global implications may relate to a perceived lack of responsiveness that extends to all levels of government and public institutions: across the board, fewer than four in ten people believe that a majority view against a national policy would sway government to change gears (Chapter 4).

This perceived lack of responsiveness is compounded by the scale and complexity of policy issues like climate change, immigration, or inflation. These challenges also require substantial and robust evidence, necessitating policymakers to seek insights from the scientific community beyond their constituency for the public to trust that decisions are made in pursuit of the public interest. More than a third (38%) on average across OECD countries find it *unlikely* that government draws on the best available evidence, research and statistical data when taking decisions (Figure 1.11). This dimension of responsiveness is the question in the 2023 Trust Survey with the highest correlation with trust in the national government when analysing all trust drivers simultaneously (Annex A).

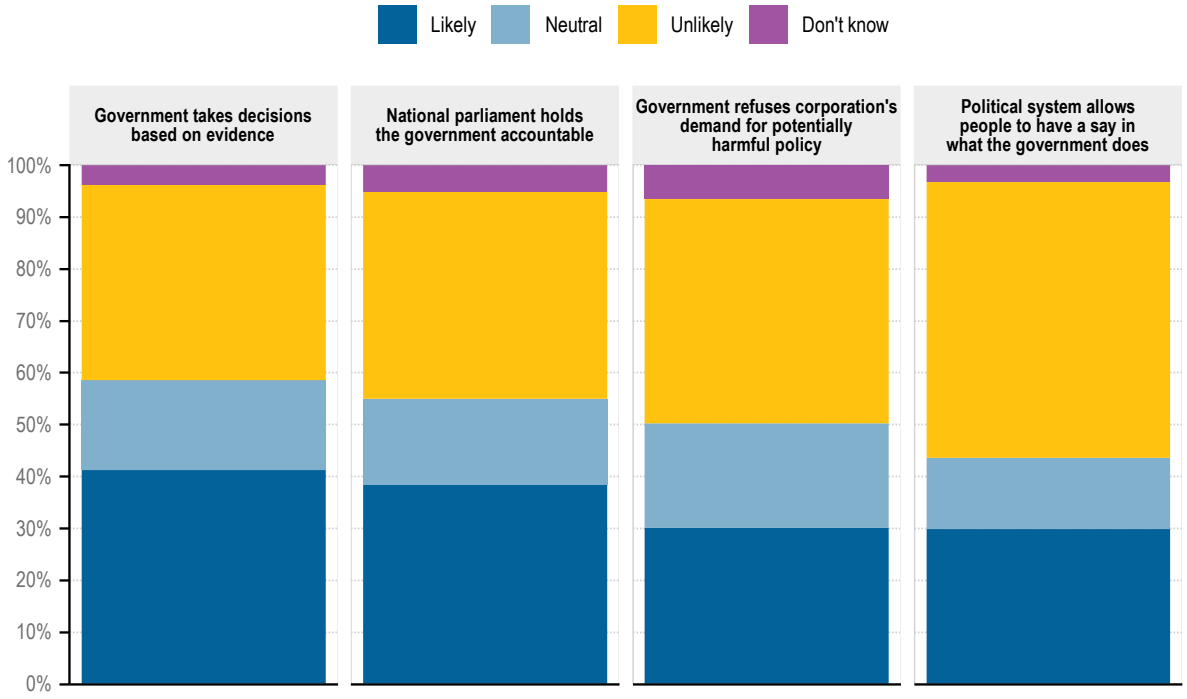
Aside from these difficulties inherent to complex decision-making, results indicate that this sense of insecurity about government's capabilities on issues with significant unknowns stems from unmet expectations that public institutions and officials act in the public interest, are accountable to each other and to the population, and allow people to have a voice and influence decision-making processes (Chapter 4). Results from the 2023 Trust Survey show that the public remains deeply sceptical about the integrity of civil servants and elected officials. Only 30% finds it likely that government would be able to withstand lobbying by a corporation for a policy that could benefit its industry but be harmful to society as a whole (Figure 1.11).

Institutional checks and balances in democracy prevent the concentration of power and help ensure decisions are not swayed by undue influence. Nearly four in ten (38%) think it is likely that parliament can hold the national government accountable for their policies and actions, showing that on average, people have slightly more faith in the oversight and accountability safeguards between branches of government, than they do in the system's ability to withstand pressure from private interests in the first place (Figure 1.11).

Finally, people need to feel they have equal opportunities to express opinions and preferences to steer government decision making, and to feel they are considered when the government makes decisions. Here as well, people in OECD countries have their doubts. Only 32% find it likely that government would adopt opinions expressed in a public consultation. This perceived lack of openness likely contributes to the low share of people (30%) who feel like the political system lets people like them have a say (Figure 1.11). This factor, along with the very important driver of confidence that government takes decisions based on the best available evidence, has a strong correlation with trust in the national government, parliament and civil service both at a country level and when analysing the relationship between trust and all public governance drivers and background characteristics simultaneously (Chapter 4 and Annex A).

Figure 1.11. Many people express concerns about the quality and integrity of democratic decision making

Share of population reporting different levels of perceived likelihood that government takes decisions based on evidence, that national parliament holds government accountable, that government would refuse undue influence, and that people have a say in what the government does, OECD, 2023



Note: The figure presents the unweighted OECD averages for responses to the following questions: 1) "If the national government takes a decision, how likely do you think it is that it will draw on the best available evidence, research, and statistical data?", 2) "How likely do you think it is that the national parliament would effectively hold the national government accountable for their policies and behaviour, for instance by questioning a minister or reviewing the budget?," 3) "If a corporation promoted a policy that benefited its industry but could be harmful to society as a whole, how likely do you think it is that the national government would refuse the corporation's demand?," and 4) ''How much would you say the political system in [COUNTRY] allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?''. 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.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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1.5.4. Opportunity areas for government action to improve trust in their decision making on complex policy issues

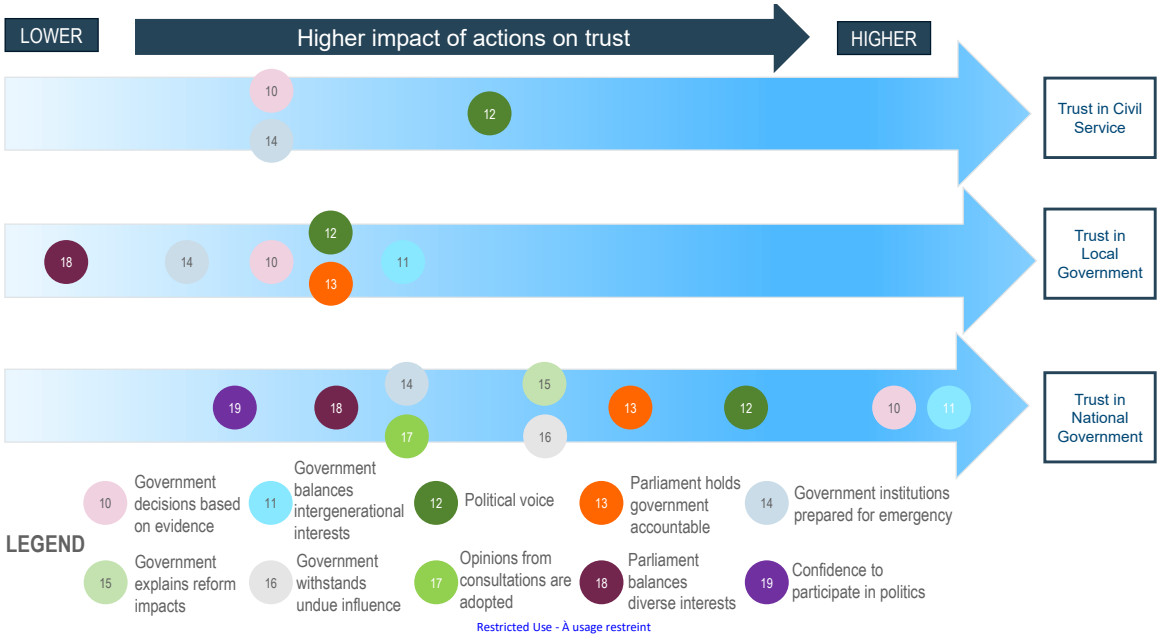
Similar to Figure 1.9, the following figure summarises the areas for actions regarding policy making that, today, will yield the most benefits for trust in different parts of government, based on their relative importance as a driver of trust and on the lack of trust or positive perception in this area. This represents an analysis for the 30 countries as a whole and may hide important differences for individual country that would need to be further analysed.

People's perceptions of the ability of government and the political system to ensure competent and values-based decision making on complex policy issues is associated with a higher potential for influencing trust in the national government than their perceptions of their day-to-day interactions with government (Figure 1.12, compared to Figure 1.9). Today, actions to improve people's perceptions that decision making is based on evidence, is fair towards different generations, listens to the people, and ensures institutions are accountable would yield the largest potential gains

for trust in the national government. These variables are also associated with trust in local government and the civil service, although with a smaller impact than for national government. These results indicate that people expect key democratic principles – accountability of institutions and people's voice - are anchored in practice to build trust in government. Other areas of action for government such as better withstanding undue influence and communicating on the impacts of reforms would also yield significant returns on trust for national government.

Figure 1.12. The drivers of trust on complex policy issues: Focus on ensuring people's voice and best evidence in decision-making, balancing intergenerational interests, and strengthening accountability

Public governance drivers linked to decision making on long-term and global issues with an impact on trust in the respective institution (national government, the civil service and local government), 2023



How to read: The figure shows the combined information from the regression analysis of trust in the respective institutions on the public governance drivers and control variables and the distance of the average perception of the respective driver to an 80% threshold. Drivers that are more positively associated with trust in the respective institution and for which only a low average share across the OECD have a positive perception can potentially have a higher impact on trust, as there is important scope for improvement and the improvement would likely be associated with increased levels of trust. On the other hand, drivers with a low positive association with trust and for which perceptions are already quite positive across OECD countries have a lower potential for contributing to positive improvements on trust. Nevertheless, all drivers listed in this figure are statistically significant and improvements in the respective areas can therefore all contribute to improving trust.

Note: The figure shows the statistically significant determinants of trust in the national government, civil service and parliament, obtained through logistic regressions that of trust in the respective institutions on the public governance drivers. The analyses control for individual characteristics, including whether they voted or would have voted for one of the current parties in power, self-reported levels of interpersonal trust, and country fixed effects. All variables depicted are statistically significant at the 1% significance level. For more details on the econometric analysis, including the average marginal effects associated with each variable, see Annex A.

Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

Finally, individuals' expectations for and perceptions of public institutions are shaped not only by their own experiences, but also by information they receive from conversations, from media and from public communication directly. Unfortunately, the evolution of the information ecosystem is having significant consequences on trust. On the one hand, a substantial minority of 2023 Trust Survey respondents simultaneously have low to no trust in media and feel that government statistics are rarely or never trustworthy. They probably view the information environment as unsuitable for them to form informed opinions about public institutions' actions and performance. On the other hand, only 39% of the surveyed population believe that governments clearly communicate about how they will be affected by a reform. In order to address these, support for a stronger pluralistic, diverse and independent media landscape, in addition to further media literacy education and public communication can all serve to empower citizens in their political agency and in holding public institutions accountable, which is needed in the current environment. Only information by government that can be checked independently and challenged will be trustworthy, which the survey reveals is a critical driver of trust.

Annex 1.A. The OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions

Trust in government and public institutions is driven by many interacting factors. The *OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions* distinguishes three categories of factors that influence levels of trust.

First, five main public governance drivers assess the degree to which people expect institutions to be reliable and responsive in formulating and implementing policies and services and to uphold the values of fairness, integrity and openness (Annex Table 1.A.1). Although the way these expectations are formed can differ whether related to daily policy and programme implementation or decision making on global and social issues, institutions aligning their behaviour with these expectations can foster feelings of security, dignity, and mutual respect in people in relation to these same institutions. Thus, governments can more directly influence these perceptions of public institutions' performance and leverage them to strengthen trust.

A second aspect that drives trust in public institutions is related to the perceived capacity of government to address complex and/or global challenges. To feel secure and empowered, people do not only need to be confident that public institutions are able to manage public services in a responsive manner and willing to step in if they fall on hard times. They also have to believe that their governments have the capacity and agency to tackle major complex policy issues, and that they can do so while protecting and promoting human dignity, by upholding the public interest, maintaining checks and balance to enhance accountability and fairness, and letting people have a say.

Finally, various individual and group based cultural, socio-economic factors, and political preferences influence trust. Building trust in public institutions therefore requires a holistic approach that addresses how people perceive public governance performance but that also acknowledges that people's demographic and socio-economic background as well as their perceptions of political agency are affecting their experiences with and perceptions of public institutions and therefore their trust in these institutions.

Annex Table 1.A.1. OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions and survey questions

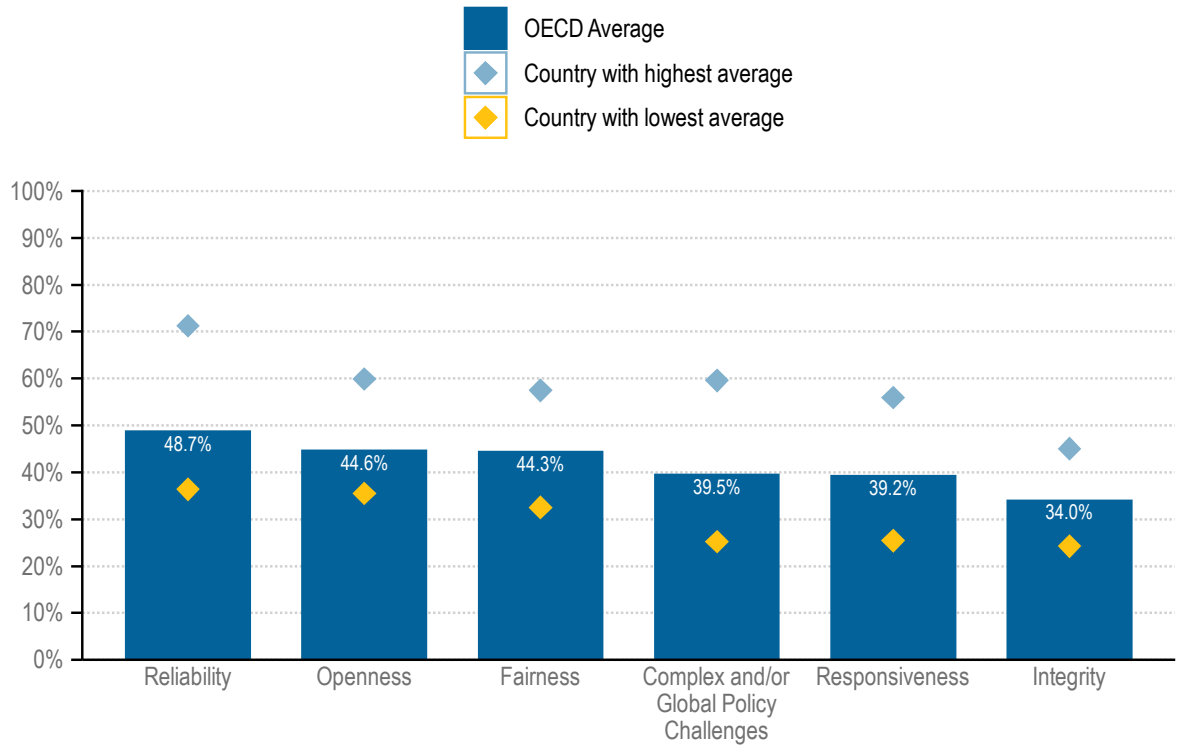
OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions		Covered by survey questions on perceptions on/evaluation of:
Levels of trust in different public institutions		Trust in national government, regional government, local government, national civil service, regional/local civil service, parliament, police, political parties, courts and judicial, international organisations
Public Governance Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions		
Competencies	*Reliability*	• Government ready to protect people's lives in the event of an emergency • Personal data shared with public offices are used for legitimate purposes only • Government regulate AI appropriately and help businesses and citizens use it responsibly • General satisfaction with administrative services and satisfaction with specific aspects
	Responsiveness	• Public services are improved following complaints • Public institutions adopt innovative ideas to improve public services • National policy is modified following public feedback • Government draws on the best available evidence for decision-making
Values	*Openness*	• Ease and availability of information about administrative services • Opportunity to voice opinions with local government • Citizen participation and engagement opportunities • Government clearly explains impact of reform
	Integrity	• Public employees' corruption • "Revolving doors" practices for high levels elected/politically appointed officials • Accountability between government branches (parliament, judiciary, executive) • Undue influence on government
	Fairness	• Public employees' consistent treatment of businesses and people regardless of their background and identity • Fair treatment in government services and benefits • Representation of needs of different regions and groups in society in Parliament
Perception of government action on intergenerational and global challenges		• Country's prioritisation of various policy goals • Country will succeed in reducing greenhouse gas in the next 10 years • National government adequately balances the interests of current and future generations
Cultural, Economic and Political Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions		• Trust in others • Own economic well-being • Belong to discriminated group • Demographic and socio-economic status • The political system allows people to have a say in what the government does • Own ability to participate in politics • Voting in national or local elections and carried out any political activities • Support for national referenda • News consumption • Trustworthiness of government statistics

GOVERNMENTS ARE SEEN AS MORE RELIABLE THAN RESPONSIVE OR ACTING WITH INTEGRITY

The 2023 Trust Survey finds that on average across OECD countries, almost one in two (49%) consider their government reliable, but only one-third (34%) are confident it upholds public integrity. Meanwhile, 39% have a positive perception of the responsiveness of public institutions (Annex Figure 1.A.1). Differences across countries are the largest on reliability, where in 13 of the 30 surveyed countries a majority view the government as reliable. However, as the 2023 Trust Survey includes multiple questions measuring different aspects for each of the public governance drivers, it needs to be noted that these perceptions can vary quite strongly across different aspects related to the same public governance driver in a country.

Annex Figure 1.A.1. People are more confident in their government's reliability than its integrity and responsiveness

Share of population expressing confidence in government reliability, responsiveness, openness, integrity, fairness and ability to address complex and/or global policy challenges (average across survey questions), OECD, 2023



Note: The figure presents the unweighted OECD average of "likely" responses across all survey questions related to "reliability" (3 questions), "responsiveness" (4 questions), "integrity" (4 questions), "openness" (4 questions), "fairness" (3 questions), and "complex and/or global challenges" (2 questions). The share of ''likely'' correspond to those who select an answer from 6 to 10 on the 0-10 response scale.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/3as8rw

Compared to 2021, on average, people have slightly more positive perceptions of the reliability and openness of public institutions and slightly less in their fairness, responsiveness and integrity. However, this hides important differences across countries. In several countries – Australia, Colombia and Mexico – average perceptions across all public governance drivers improved between the two years. Not surprisingly, these are countries where trust in the national government also increased. On the other hand, in countries such as Estonia, Korea, Portugal and the United Kingdom, perceptions of the public governance drivers became more negative, contributing to a decrease in the share with high or moderately high trust in the national government (Annex Table 1.A.2).

Annex Table 1.A.2. Perceptions across the different public governance drivers often move in tandem

Percentage point changes in the share of population expressing confidence in government reliability, responsiveness, openness, integrity, and fairness (average across survey questions), 2023 compared to 2021

	Reliability	Responsiveness	Openness	Integrity	Fairness
AUS	9	6	8	5	7
BEL	14	7	6	1	0
CAN	6	0	0	0	-2
COL	9	9	7	5	6
DNK	3	3	3	0	-1
EST	-6	-12	-5	-7	-10
FIN	27	9	20	5	-9
FRA	7	2	2	-1	-1
GBR	-7	-8	-5	-5	-9
ISL	-3	-5	4	-1	-5
IRL	1	-6	-5	1	1
KOR	-13	-14	-11	-14	-10
LUX	-4	-3	-2	-3	-6
LVA	6	0	-1	-4	-9
MEX	4	2	3	9	8
NLD	13	-2	-3	-1	0
NOR	2	1	0	-7	-5
NZL	1	0	-1	-6	0
PRT	-15	-6	-6	-4	-10
SWE	9	1	1	-2	-1
OECD	3	-1	1	-2	-3

Note: The figure presents the change in the share of the average of "likely" responses (6-10 on the 0-10 response scale) across questions related to "reliability", "responsiveness", "integrity", "openness" and "fairness". The average refers to the questions that have remained stable between 2021 and 2023, with the exception of using the pandemic and emergency preparedness variables, respectively, for the 2021 and 2023 average of reliability; and a change in wording for one of the fairness variables, which in 2023 also referred to equal treatment of people of different income levels in addition to other characteristics. Complex and/or global challenges is excluded because only one question is repeated between the 2021 and 2023 wave.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023.

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NOTES

[1] In Ireland, Mexico and the United Kingdom, the data collection instead took place in September and October 2023; and in Norway, it was finalised in early December.

[2] In this report, unless otherwise noted, '(unweighted) OECD average' refers to the unweighted average of the weighted country averages. The weighted country average represents the respective share within the adult population, while the unweighted OECD average represents the averages across the countries, giving equal weight to each country's experience no matter its population size.

[3] These values are broadly confirmed in other data sources, such as the 2023/2022 Gallup World Poll and the 2021 European Social Survey, both of which inquire about people's trust in their national government. At country-level, the various measures correlate strongly and moreover countries that tend to be highly ranked relative to other OECD countries in the other data sources, also tend to be relatively highly ranked in the OECD Trust Survey.

[4] Mexico and New Zealand participated in the 2021 survey but did not include the question on trust in the national government.

[5] Trends of trust in government from the Gallup World Poll, show that during the Global Financial Crisis, across the OECD, confidence in the national government decreased by 6 percentage points between 2007 and 2012. In contrast, during the Covid-19 pandemic, confidence initially even rose as part of a 'rally around the flag' effect, but by 2022 had stabilised at over one percentage point above the 2019 level. This stabilisation has continued in 2023, when the OECD average returned to the 2019 level.

[6] Averages among 20 and 19 countries, respectively, which participated in both rounds of the OECD Trust Survey. Trust in the local government was not surveyed in Mexico in 2021.

2 Socio-economic conditions, political agency and trust

People's demographic background, socio-economic characteristics and their political attitudes affect their perceptions of and trust in government. This chapter outlines the varying levels of, trust in government, and other public institutions among different population groups. These groups are defined by their socio-economic and demographic characteristics, such as age, degree of financial security, educational background and gender, and by their political attitudes comprising political partisanship, political voice and ability to participate in politics. It also demonstrates how the trust gaps between these groups have evolved in the countries with data available for 2021 and 2023; with a specific focus on the evolution of the gender trust gap.

A significant challenge in representative democracies is governing a pluralistic society made up of diverse socio-economic backgrounds and political attitudes. Governments often struggle to balance and engage with the varied needs, interests, and views of their population. For example, the most vulnerable groups are typically less engaged in the democratic system, indicating an area that needs improvement in OECD countries. Viewing trust in public institutions through the lens of these different population groups can help shed light on how effectively governments are managing the challenge of inclusive and fair policy making.

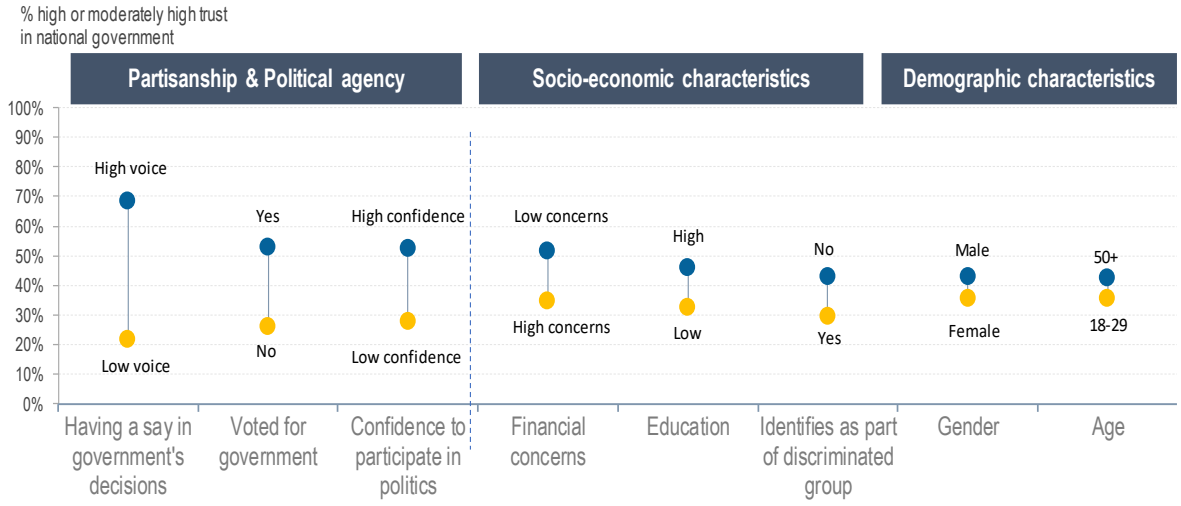
This chapter focuses on the differences in the share of people with high or moderately high trust across population groups, defined either by their socio-economic and demographic characteristics, their partisanship, or their political agency, including people's confidence in their political voice and their ability to participate in politics. We define these differences in trust levels by population groups as 'trust gaps'.

2.1. LEVELS OF PUBLIC TRUST VARY MORE BASED ON ONE'S SENSE OF POLITICAL AGENCY AND PARTISANSHIP THAN SOCIO-ECONOMIC OR DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Across OECD member countries, trust in public institutions varies more depending on individuals' sense of political agency and partisanship than on their socio-economic and demographic characteristics. This underscores the well-established link between political trust and the feeling of having a say in policy decision making (OECD, 2022[1]). The sense of having an influence on political processes and, to a lesser degree, the confidence to participate in politics, the combination of which constitutes "political agency", are crucial in explaining variations in trust towards the national government. Moreover, partisanship, measured by whether an individual voted for the incumbent government in the last election, also plays a significant role. Comparing the size of trust gaps shows that trust levels, on average, differ less among socio-economic groups and demographics, like education, gender, and age, compared to variations based on feelings of political agency and partisanship (Figure 2.1).[1] This trend, showing larger variations in trust levels by feelings of political agency and partisanship, holds true in all countries.

Figure 2.1. Political agency tends to play a more significant role in people's trust in the national government than their socio-economic status or demographic characteristics

Share of population with high or moderately high trust in the national government by level of respondents' socio-economic and demographic characteristics, partisanship and political agency, OECD, 2023



Note: The figure presents the unweighted averages across OECD countries 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?" by respondents' feelings of political agency, partisanship, socio-economic background and demographic characteristics. Shown here is the proportion that have "high or moderately high trust" based on the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the 0-10 response scale, grouped by respondents' feeling of political agency (feeling confident to have a say in what the government does, feeling confident to participate in politics) and partisanship (voted for government during last national elections), socio-economic background (financial concerns, education, identification as part of a discriminated group) and demographic characteristics (gender, age). Financial concerns are measured by asking ''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?'' and aggregating responses 3 (somewhat concerned) and 4 (very concerned). Low education is defined as below lower secondary educational attainment and high education as tertiary education, following the ISCED 2011 classification. People's identification of a discriminated group is measured by responses ''Yes'' to the question "Would you describe yourself as being a member of a group that is discriminated against in [Country]?".
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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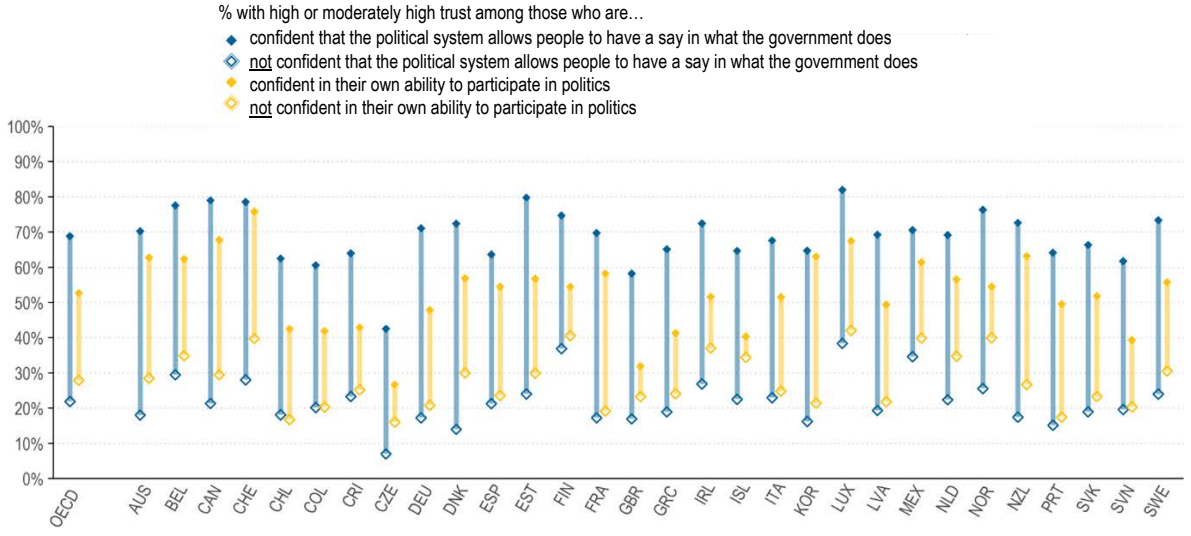
Equal opportunities for representation in policy processes and policy making is a crucial aspect of a functioning democracy. Feelings of lack of political voice are associated with low trust in national government. On average, among those who report they have a say in what the government does, 69% report high or moderately high trust in the national government, in contrast to only 22% among those who feel they do not have a say, representing the largest trust gap (Figure 2.1). This is a worrisome result considering that on average, 53% responded that they had no say in what government does (Figure 4.15 in Chapter 4).

Further, people's trust in national government is also positively related to confidence in one's ability to participate in politics. On average across countries, there is a 25-percentage point trust gap between those who are confident in their ability to participate in politics and those who are not. While in eight countries the gap is larger than 30 percentage points, in Czechia, Iceland and the United Kingdom, differences in trust levels based on people's confidence in their ability to participate are much smaller (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2. People who feel they have a say in what the government does or are confident to participate in politics also express higher trust in the national government

Share of population with high or moderately high trust in the national government by feeling they have a say in what the government does (*blue*) and confident to participate in politics (*yellow*), 2023



Note: The 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?" by respondents' feeling of having a say (blue) and confidence to participate in politics (yellow). Shown here is the proportion of respondents that have "high or moderately high trust'' based on the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the 0-10 response scale, grouped by whether people feel they have a say (blue): ''How much would you say the political system in [COUNTRY] allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?'' and feel confident to be able to participate in politics (yellow): ''How confident are you in your own ability to participate in politics?''. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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Aspects of political agency, such as political voice and confidence in one's ability to engage in politics, are partially linked to people's socio-economic and demographic backgrounds. For instance, people with higher education and financial security are more likely to believe they can participate in policy making than people with lower education and financial security. The gaps are 20 and 10 percentage points, respectively, indicating simultaneously a reason for and an outcome of unequal participation in political processes and decision making. However, while self-reported belonging to a discriminated group is an important factor for people's level of trust in the government, it does not significantly impact people's confidence in their own ability to participate in politics. A possible reason for this seemingly incongruous result can be found in prior research, which suggests that feelings of discrimination may increase political engagement (Reher, 2018[2]), thereby boosting individuals' confidence in their own ability to participate in political processes. Politically more aware individuals may also be more likely to self-identify as belonging to a group that is discriminated against.

Similarly, the Trust Survey finds that a large share of those who have no trust in the national government and that feel they lack a political voice still feel confident in being able to participate in politics and indeed have engaged in various political activities (Box 2.1).

Box 2.1. Distrusting but not disengaged

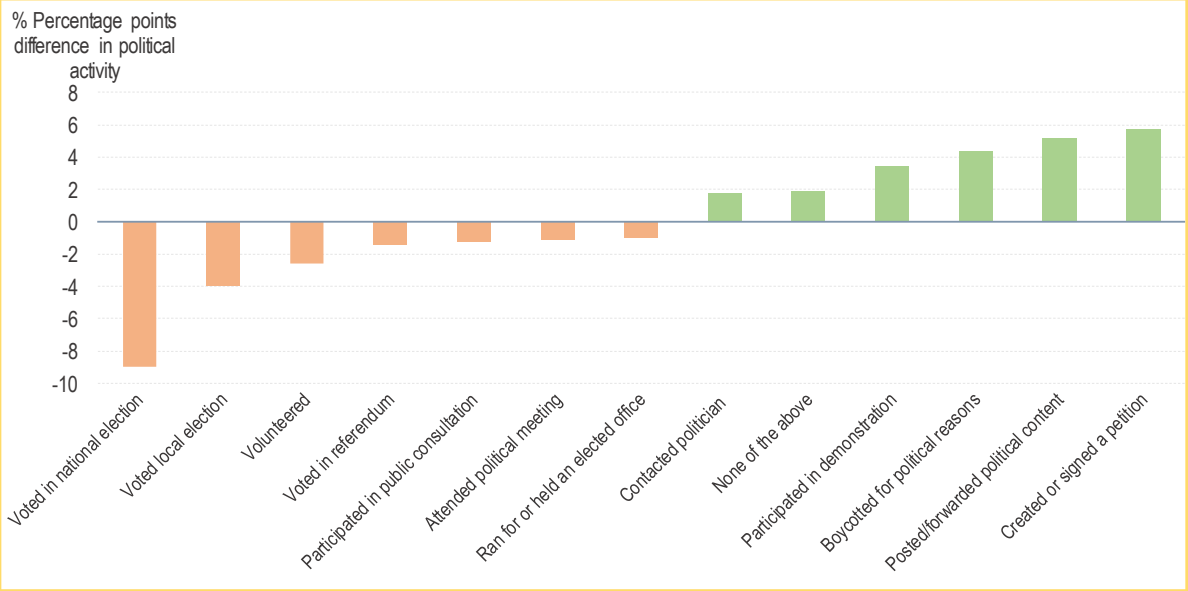
Individuals who report no trust in their government - or distrusting individuals - are often portrayed as politically disengaged or disenchanted with politics and democracy more generally. However, Trust Survey data from the 2021 wave suggested that while part of that group is indeed disengaged, a significant share engages politically in various ways, but feels they lack political voice (Prats, Smid and Ferrin, 2024, forthcoming[3]).

The 2023 Trust Survey finds that 15% of people express a lack of trust in their national government, by answering '0' on the 0-10 response scale. Despite this being a relevant share of respondents who lack trust, this share decreased since the 2021 Trust Survey (Figure 1.4). Regarding the feeling of political agency, among individuals lacking trust in the government, approximately one-third (31%) feel confident in their ability to participate in politics, whereas merely 7% feel they have a voice in what the government does.

In terms of people's political engagement, those who do not trust the national government reports to have voted less in the last national election than the rest of the population - 75% compared to 84%. At the same time, a large majority (86%) of those who reported a lack of trust in their national government were politically engaged in one form or the other and to a larger extent than people who reported higher levels of trust in government (Figure 2.3). On average, a significantly higher share of those who reported no trust in government, compared to the rest of the population, were engaged in unconventional political activities, such as posting or forwarding political content (5 percentage points higher) and boycotting products for political reasons (4 percentage points higher). They also more frequently signed a petition (6 percentage points higher) and participated in demonstrations (3 percentage points higher).

Figure 2.3. Distrusting respondents are politically engaged

Percentage points difference in participation in political activities in the previous year between people who stated a lack of trust (=0) compared to people exhibiting higher trust (1-10) in the national government, 2023



Note: The figure presents the OECD distributions of responses to the question ''Over the last 12 months, have you done any of the following activities?". Shown here is the difference in the proportion of people who have participated in any of the activities among those who report no trust in the national government (response ''0'') and those who reported higher trust in the national government (responses 1-10).

How to read: On the left end of the figure, a negative value indicates that this form of political participation is less prevalent among the distrusting group (who answered 0 on the response scale) across OECD countries, compared to those who indicated trust levels of 1-10. On the right end of the figure, a positive value indicates that this form of political participation is more prevalent among the distrusting group across OECD countries. For example, distrusting respondents were 5 percentage points more likely to state that they posted or forwarded political content during the last 12 months compared to the rest of the population.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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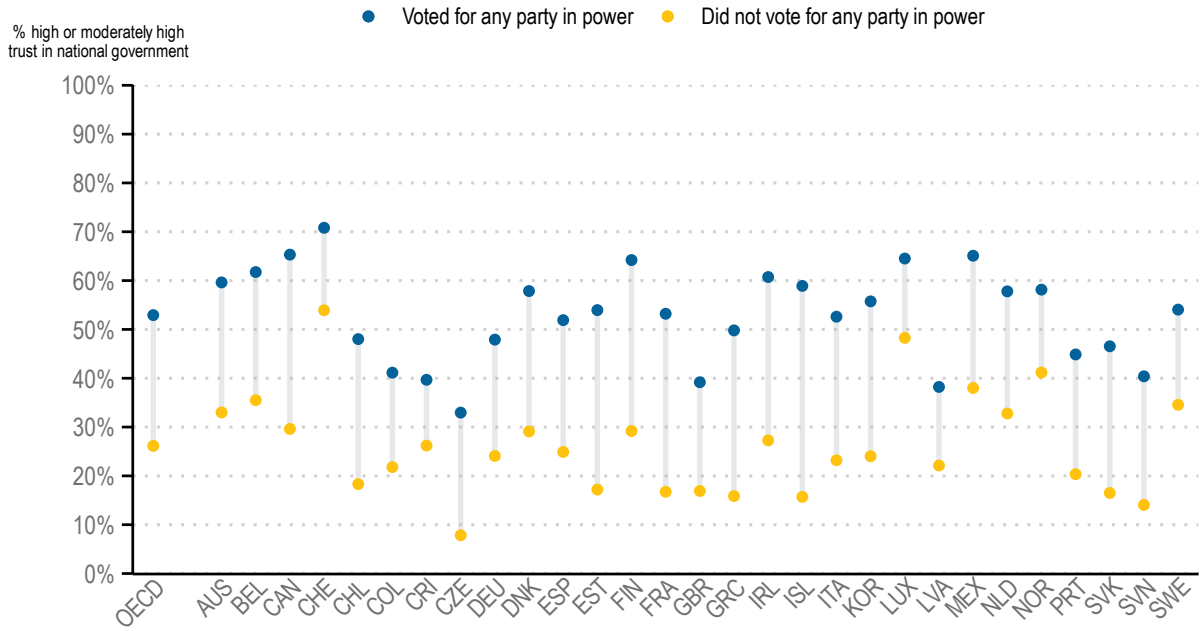
The effects of political polarisation on the functioning of democratic governments have been discussed at length in recent years. Political polarisation has been associated with higher levels of political disenchantment from democratic processes, resulting in diminished democratic resilience of political systems (Iyengar et al., 2019[4]). Additionally, when polarisation embeds itself in political structure, narrowing the number of "common ground" issues, this strongly hinders governments' ability to enact reforms and implement essential policies within democratic systems. Partisanship effects have been described as a ''political gridlock'' and barrier for passing structural reforms in OECD countries (Brock and Mallinson, 2023[5]). Additionally, in some contexts, partisanship has significantly affected people's adherence to COVID-19 policies and restrictions, including people's willingness to be vaccinated (Impact Canada, 2023[6]), demonstrating the influence of political alignment on policy compliance (Druckman et al., 2020[7]).

Other than asking about political support for the current government in the last national election, the Trust Survey does not include any questions on the political orientation and attitudes towards other political parties. The proxy used to measure the extent of polarisation is the gap in trust in the national civil service between individuals who (would) have voted for the current government or those who did not. The reason for using this gap as a measure of polarisation is that trust in administrative, as opposed to political, institutions should, in principle, depend on how well these perform on public governance dimensions, rather than on partisan support. The existence of a trust gap in administrative institutions between supporters and opponents of the current government suggests that partisanship is becoming political polarisation.

Unsurprisingly, in all OECD countries, trust in the national government is higher among individuals who voted for a party currently in power in the most recent national election: on average among those who voted for the government, a majority reports high or moderately high trust in the national government (53%), compared to only 26% among those who supported the opposition. The gap is notably large in Canada, Estonia, Finland, France and Iceland (Figure 2.4). This 27-percentage point "partisanship gap" in trust in national government cannot be considered as a sign of polarisation. However, levels of trust in other, more "administrative", facets of government such as the police, courts and the judicial system, and the national civil service, which should be shielded from partisanship, still have a partisan trust gap of 11-13 percentage points (Figure 2.5). For example, in Belgium, Canada, Estonia and Greece, the partisan trust gap in the national civil service exceeded 20 percentage points. Moreover, polarisation – measured by the trust gap in the (national) civil service between those who voted for the government and those who did not – has increased by 3 percentage points on average between 2021 and 2023.[2]

Figure 2.4. People who voted for a party in power are more trusting of the national government

Share of population with high or moderately high trust in the national government by whether they voted for a party in power or not, 2023



Note: The figure presents the 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'' by respondents' political alignment. Shown here is the proportion of respondents that have "high or moderately high trust'' based on the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the 0-10 response scale, grouped by whether people voted (or would have) voted for the government in power: ''Is the party you voted for in the last national election on [DATE] currently part of the government?''. New Zealand is excluded from the figure as the survey question on voting for the current government was not included there. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries.

Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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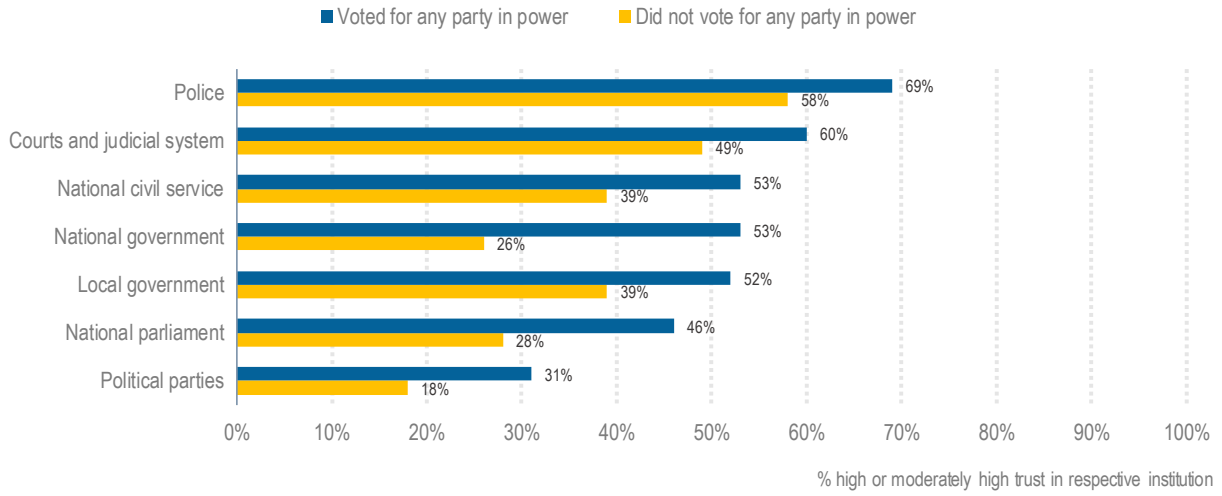
Figure 2.5. Trust in all public institutions is lower for people who did not vote for a party in power

Share of population with high or moderately high trust in different public institutions by whether people voted for the government or not, 2023



Note: The figure presents the unweighted averages across OECD countries 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 [institution]'' by respondents' political alignment. Shown here is the proportion of respondents that have "high or moderately high trust'' based on the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the 0-10 response scale, grouped by whether people voted (or would have) voted for the government in power: ''Is the party you voted for in the last national election on [DATE] currently part of the government?''. New Zealand is excluded from the OECD average as the survey question on voting for the current government was not included there.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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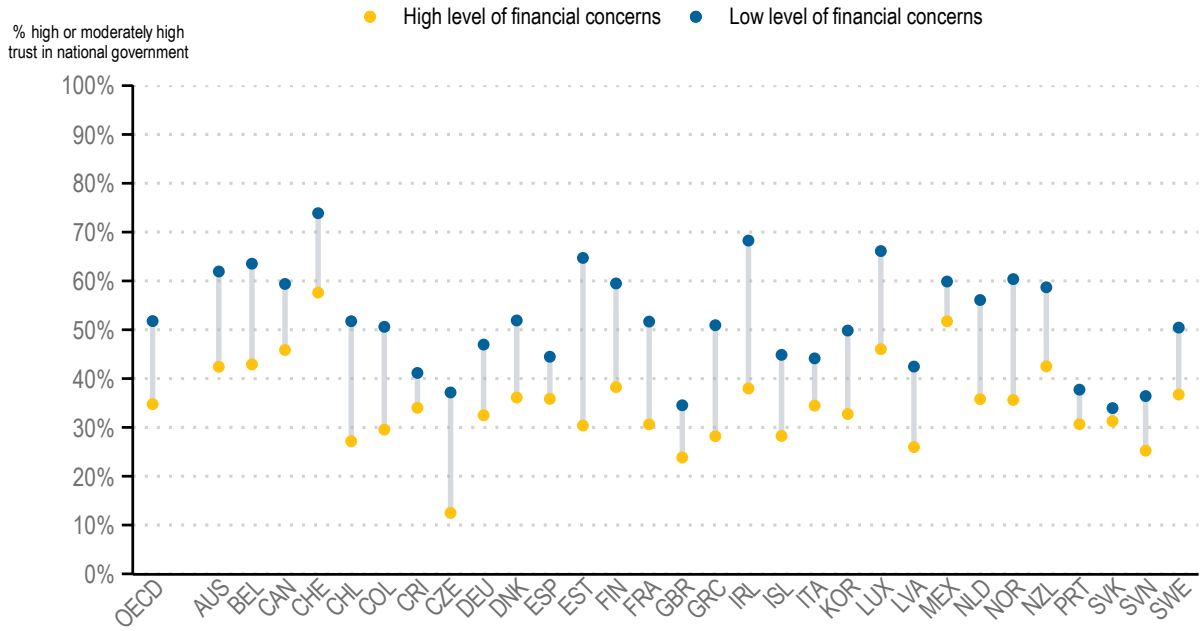
2.2. THE SOCIO-ECONOMICALLY VULNERABLE TEND TO HAVE LESS TRUST IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS, WITH A GROWING DIVIDE BASED ON EDUCATION LEVELS

Economic vulnerability is associated with low levels of trust in the national government. On average across the OECD, 46% of individuals in the high-income group have high or moderately high trust, compared to 41% in the middle and 31% in the low-income group.

In all countries, feelings of economic insecurity are associated with lower trust in the government, and in many countries, self-reported personal financial vulnerability has a greater association with lower trust in public institutions than people's actual income levels.[3] On average across OECD countries, just 35% of those concerned about their economic and financial future report having a high or moderately high level of trust in their national government (Figure 2.6). Conversely, among those with fewer economic worries, the share of respondents reporting high or moderately high trust level is 17 percentage points greater (52%).

Figure 2.6. In all countries, feelings of economic insecurity correspond to lower trust in the national government

Share of population with high or moderately high trust in the national government by financial concerns, 2023



Note: The 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?". Shown here is the proportion of respondents that have "high or moderately high trust" based on the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the 0-10 response scale, grouped by whether respondents mentioned 3 (somewhat concerned) and 4 (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 economic well-being?''. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

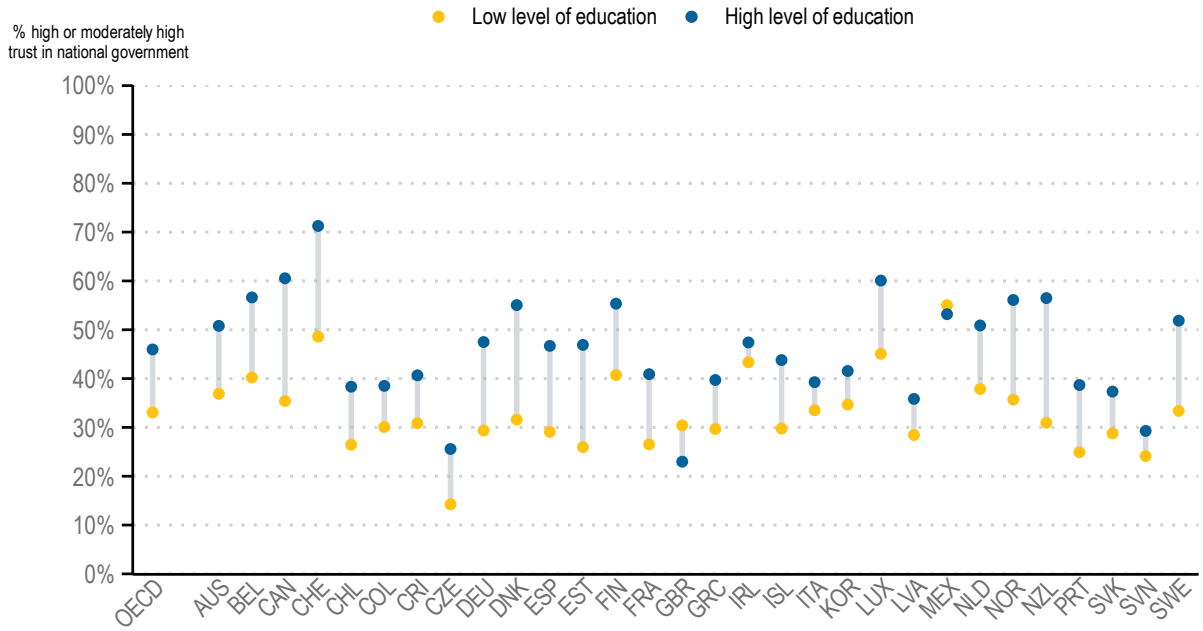
StatLink https://stat.link/v37jsc

Having a university degree is associated with 13 percentage points higher trust in government on average across countries compared to those who did not complete studies beyond lower secondary education. However, in the United Kingdom and to a lesser extent Mexico, people with higher levels of education tend to have lower levels of high or moderately high trust in their national government than people with lower levels of education (Figure 2.7).

On average across 18 countries with available data, the education gap in trust in government increased by 4 percentage points since the 2021 Trust Survey, which contrasts with a stagnating trust gap between people with different levels of economic and financial concerns. Lower educated people tend to trust the government less in 2023 than in 2021: the share of lower educated people with high or moderately high trust in the national government was 34% in 2023, down from 39% in 2021.[4] Among the highly educated, trust also declined, but only by two percentage points. Moreover, the gap between lower and higher educated people has increased in all perceptions of public governance drivers between 2021 and 2023, and particularly so for perceptions related to government openness, such as voicing views on local government decisions and adoption of views expressed in public consultations. While 39% of lower educated people felt it was likely that they could voice their views in local government decisions in 2021, compared to 47% of higher educated people, the respective shares have become 34% and 47% in 2023.

Figure 2.7. Individuals with higher levels of education tend to have more trust in the national government

Share of population with high or moderately high trust in the national government by respondents' education, 2023



Note: The 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?". Shown here is the proportion of respondents that have "high or moderately high trust" based on the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the 0-10 response scale, grouped by respondents' highest education level attained: higher education (tertiary education) or lower education (lower secondary education and below). The lower education group in Chile, Colombia and Greece combines lower and medium education attainment (upper secondary and post-secondary education) due to an underrepresentation of the lower education group in the survey sample in those countries. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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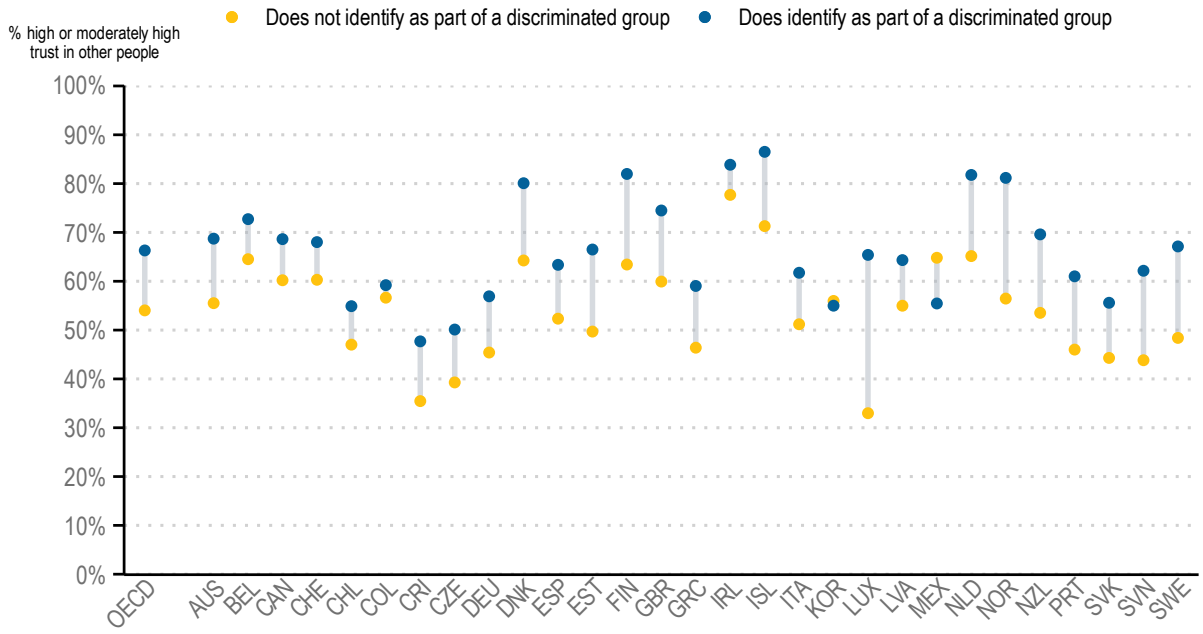
Feelings of discrimination reinforce the social and political vulnerability of certain groups in society. Identifying as belonging to a discriminated-against group is tied to both lower trust in public institutions and in other people. Indeed, the interpersonal trust gap is as large as the government trust gap. On average across the OECD, the interpersonal trust gap between those who self-identify as belonging to a discriminated group and those who do not is 12 percentage points, while the government trust gap is 14 percentage points (Figure 2.8). A similar gap is also visible for trust in other public institutions, especially trust in the police and trust in courts and the judicial system, as well as people's (dis)satisfaction with services. However, as previously noted, unlike for other socio-economic factors, self-identification of belonging to a discriminated against group is not related to a drastically different feeling of being able to participate in politics.

Figure 2.8. Trust in other people and feelings of discrimination appear to be intertwined

Share of respondents with high or moderately high trust in other people by feeling of belonging to a discriminated group, 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "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?" by respondents' perceptions of belonging to a discriminated group. Shown here is the proportion of respondents that have "high or moderately high trust" based on the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the 0-10 response scale, grouped by whether respondents stated whether they feel they belong to a discriminated group: ''Would you describe yourself as being a member of a group that is discriminated against in [COUNTRY]?''. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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Levels of trust in other people also show significant variations across various socio-economic and demographic groups. For example, people with a low level of education have 12 percentage points less trust in other people, compared to those with a high level of education. This interpersonal trust gap by levels of education is again nearly as large as the government trust gap of 13 percentage points. This disparity extends across economic status and age groups, though the relative sizes of the interpersonal and government trust gaps between groups defined by these characteristics are not nearly identical as they are for education and self-identified discrimination. The pattern of similar interpersonal and government trust gaps suggests reinforcing mechanisms might be at play in how socio-economic and demographic backgrounds affect trust in government and trust in other people. This underscores the often compounded and intersectional nature of vulnerability.

2.3. WOMEN AND YOUNGER PEOPLE CONTINUE TO PLACE LESS TRUST IN GOVERNMENT, BUT THE GENDER TRUST GAP HAS INCREASED WHILE THE AGE TRUST GAP HAS NARROWED

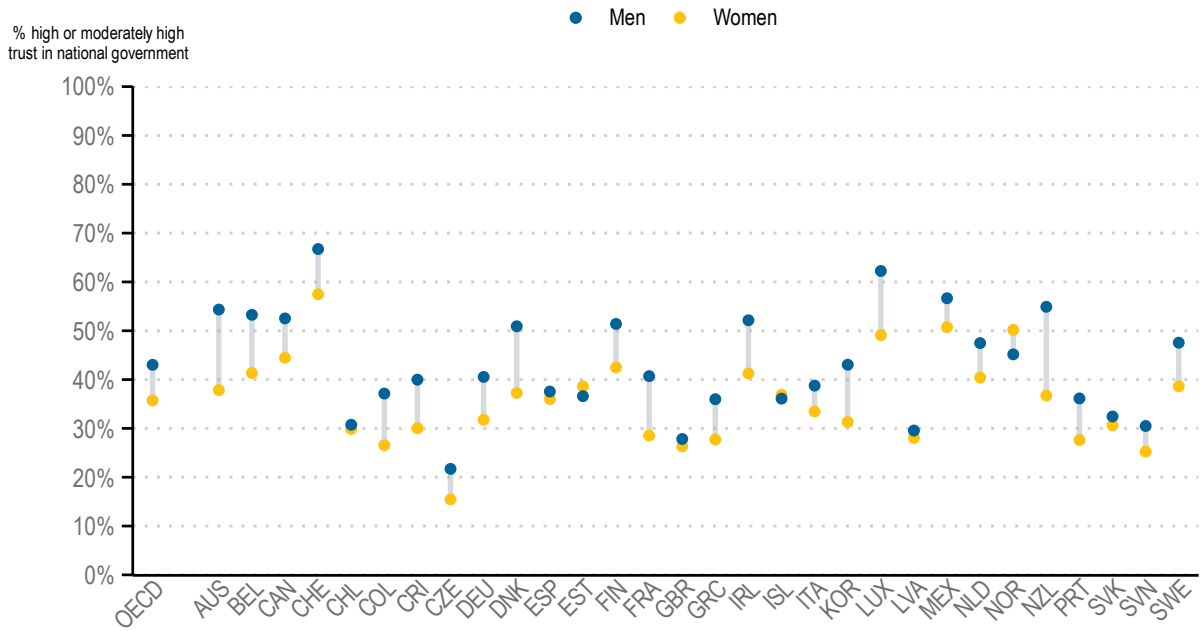
In most countries, women tend to trust the government less than men. In 2023, 36% of women have high or moderately high trust in the government, compared to 43% of men. The gap is larger in countries such as Australia,[5] Denmark, France, Luxembourg, and New Zealand, and smaller in Chile, Latvia, the Slovak Republic, Spain and the United Kingdom. Only in Estonia, Iceland and

Norway, women tend to trust the national government slightly more than men do (Figure 2.9).

On average, the gender trust gap (Box 2.2) has seen a fourfold increase since the 2021 Trust Survey, from 2 percentage points in 2021 to 8 percentage points in 2023, notably among youth; a trend worth monitoring going forward. This contrasts with decreasing trust gaps between the youngest (18-29) and oldest (50+) population group.

Figure 2.9. The gender trust gap varies significantly across countries

Share of population with high or moderately high trust in the national government by gender, 2023



Note: The 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?" by respondents' gender. Shown here is the proportion of respondents that have "high or moderately high trust" based on the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the 0-10 response scale, grouped by respondents' self-identified genders. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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Box 2.2. Gender gaps in trust

Since 2021, gender trust gaps in public institutions have become more pronounced together with the education trust gap in the national government. These gender and education based differences have increased more than age trust gaps, which have declined since 2021. For the eighteen countries that participated in the 2021 and 2023 waves, the share of women with high or moderately high trust in the national government in 2023 trails the share of men by eight percentage points, compared to a 2 percentage point gap in 2021. The growing difference between women's and men's level of trust in the national government is noteworthy in Finland and Sweden. Similar increases in gender gaps are observed for trust in the national civil service (5 percentage points), parliament and local government (4 percentage points respectively), whereas the gender trust gap in other public institutions has remained narrow over the past two years. Others are similarly discussing the increasingly divergent political attitudes between women and men (Financial Times, 2024[8]). Three aspects may help shed a light on the rapid increase of the gender trust gap in some countries.

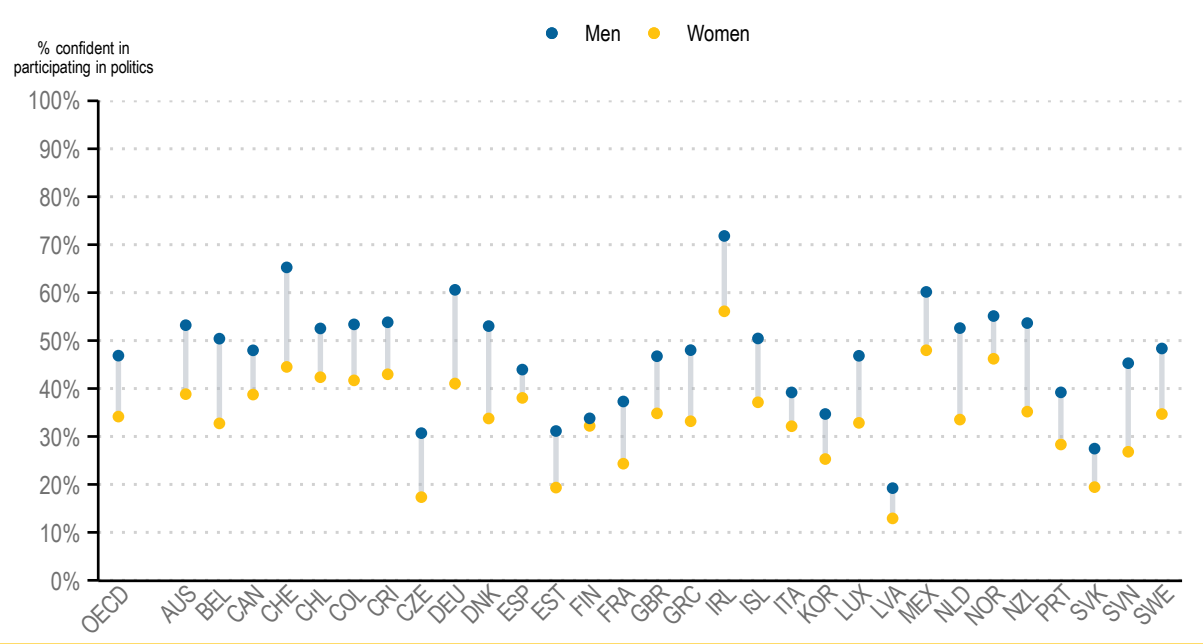
First, the growth of the gender trust gap between young women and men (those aged 18-29) is twice as large as between women and men aged 50 years and older. In the younger age group, the average gender trust gap has increased by 8 percentage points in the past two years, (from three to eleven percentage points) across the countries that participated in both survey rounds. In the case of Canada, Ireland and Korea, the gender trust gap among young men and women has increased more than in other countries and notably more than among the entire population[1].

Second, overall, at any age, male respondents were more likely to support a party in power, feel confident in their ability to participate in politics, and believe they have a political voice. These discrepancies contribute to the gender trust gap, as people with higher political agency tend to have higher trust in government. Across OECD countries, for example, men were 13 percentage point more likely than women to feel confident in their ability to participate in politics, a trend that holds across all countries (Figure 2.10).

Finally, on average the gender gap has increased for perceptions of all the public governance drivers between 2021 and 2023. In particular, women have become more sceptical about government's capacity to tackle complex issues and to ensure fairness in public services.

Figure 2.10. Men are more likely than women to feel confident in their own ability to participate in politics

Share of population who feel confident in their own ability to participate in politics by gender, 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "How confident are you in your own ability to participate in politics?" by respondents' gender. Shown here is the proportion of respondents that are "confident" in the 2023 Trust Survey based on the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the 0-10 response scale, grouped by respondents' self-identified genders. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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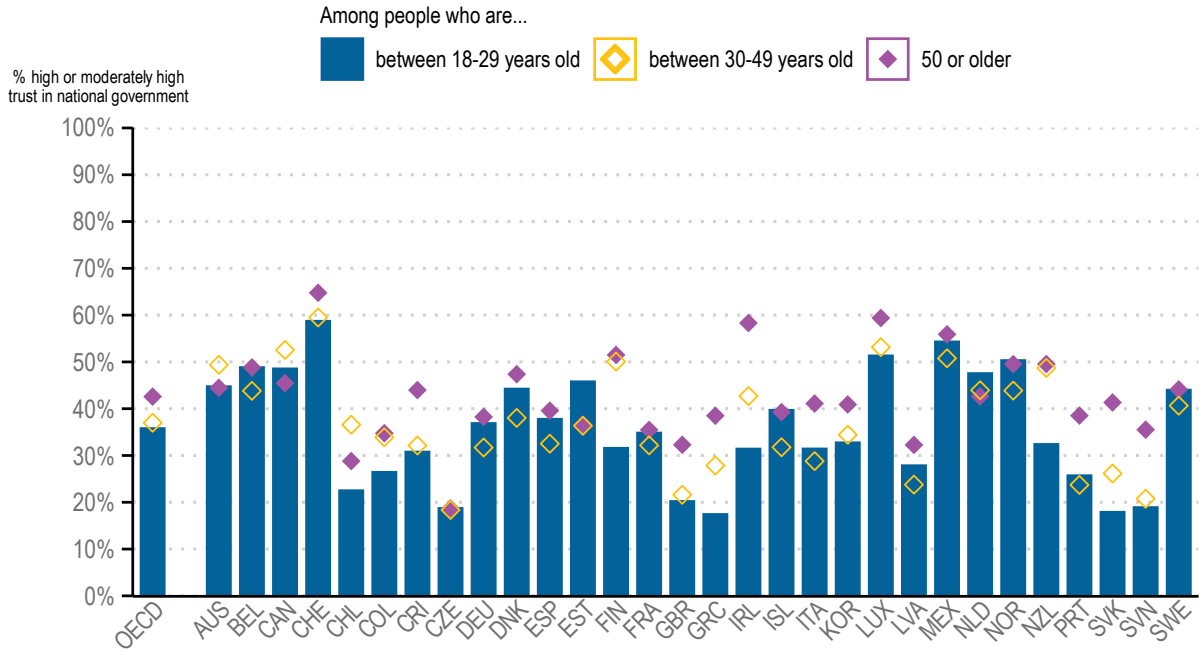
1. These findings should be interpreted with caution as the country data reflects the national distribution by age and by gender but not the intersection of these two characteristics. For example, the share of under-30 year old men (or women) included in the sample does not necessarily correspond to the share of under-30 year old men (or women) in the population.

Young people tend to trust the national government less compared to older generations. More specifically, 43% of people aged 50 and above report having high or moderately high trust in the national government, compared to 36% among people aged 18-29. Similar to the younger cohort, 37% of people aged 30-49 have high or moderately high trust (Figure 2.11). In a few countries, such as Canada, Estonia and the Netherlands, the younger age group is more trusting in the national government than the older age group; and in a few others, such as Australia, Belgium, Czechia, Norway and Sweden, there are no differences.

Figure 2.11. People over 50 find the government more trustworthy

Share of population with high or moderately high trust in the national government by age, 2023



Note: The 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?" by respondents' age. Shown here is the proportion of respondents that have "high or moderately high trust" based on the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the 0-10 response scale, grouped by three age groups: 1) 18-29;. 2) 30-49; 3) 50 and above. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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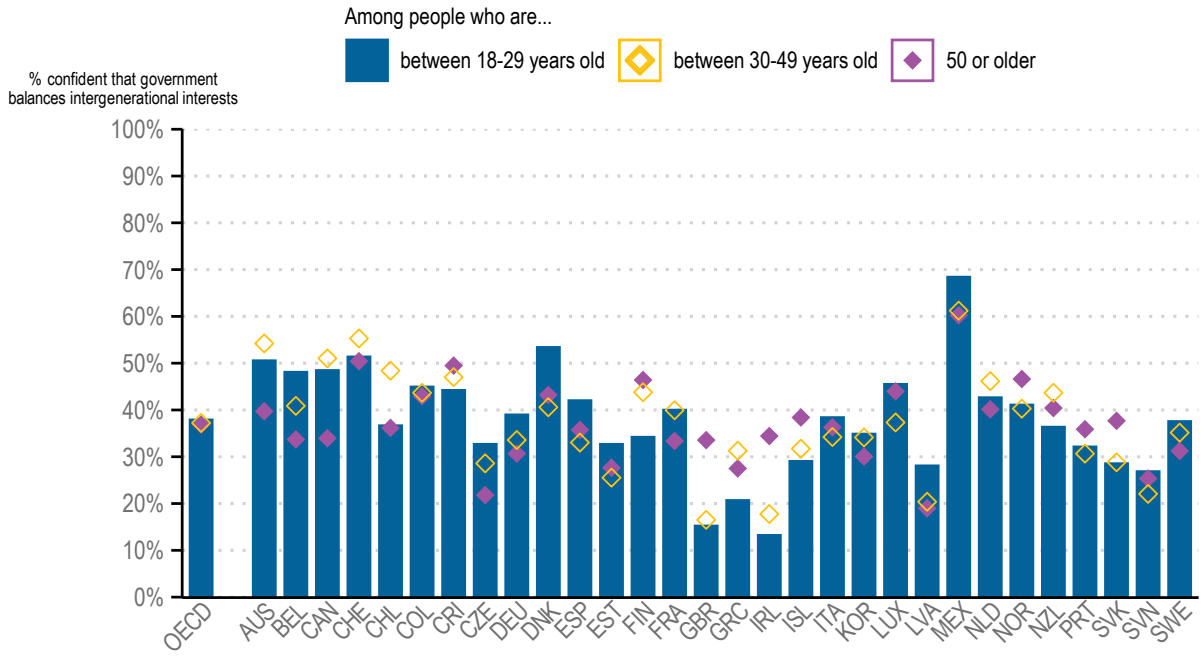
On average across 18 OECD countries where data are available, the age gap in trust in the national government halved between 2021 and 2023 (from 10 to 5 percentage points). This decline in the size of the trust gap was simultaneously due to a slight increase of trust among the younger population (39% of people aged 18-29 reported high or moderately high trust in the national government in 2023, compared to 37% in 2021), and a decrease of trust among people aged 50+ (which dropped from 47% to 43%). A rising share among young people who feel they have a say in the political system (from 33% to 35%) and a declining share among older people (from 29% to 26%) may contribute to this trend.

The fact that younger respondents are on average still slightly less trusting in the government raises the question whether certain public governance drivers may be more age sensitive than others. However, on average across countries, views that

government can adequately balance intergenerational interest, address adequately the green and digital transitions, or respond to emergencies do not differ significantly between younger and older populations. In the majority of surveyed countries, younger people on average display a higher degree of confidence in the government's ability to serve intergenerational interests, especially so in Belgium and Canada. On the contrary, in Ireland and the United Kingdom, younger people are significantly less confident than older people in the government's ability and willingness to balance interests across generations. Lastly, countries like Chile, Luxembourg, Slovenia, and Switzerland display little to no difference between age groups on this issue, indicating a more uniform belief in the government's handling of intergenerational interests across the population (Figure 2.12).

Figure 2.12. In some countries, young people are more confident than older people in government's ability to balance intergenerational interests, and in other countries the opposite is true

Share of population who feel confident that the government balances the interests of current and future generations by age, 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "On a scale of 0 to 10, how confident are you that the national government adequately balances the interests of current and future generations?" by respondents' age. Shown here is the proportion of respondents that are "confident'' based on the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the 0-10 response scale, grouped by three age groups: 1) 18-29;. 2) 30-49; 3) 50 and above. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/q8ofpt

2.4. CONCLUSION FOR POLICY ACTION TO ENHANCE TRUST

To reduce trust gaps between population groups, public institutions can take the following steps.

- Individuals' sense of political agency and partisanship matter more for trust in government than their socio-economic or demographic characteristics. People who feel they have a say in what the government does are, on average, more than three times as likely to say that they trust the government than people who feel they don't have a say. This highlights the significance of political agency and participation in shaping trust outcomes, suggesting a need for policies that promote political inclusivity and engagement to boost trust in public institutions.
- A sizeable minority of 15%, albeit lower than in 2021 in the countries with available information for both years, indicated that they had no trust at all in the national government. This group tends to vote less in national and local elections and feels more disempowered regarding what the government does. At the same time, a large majority of those who report a lack of trust in government were engaged in political activities, with an overrepresentation in unconventional forms, such as posting political content and boycotting products, but also signing petitions and participating in demonstrations.
- Policies designed to mitigate economic vulnerability and discrimination could be key to closing the trust gap and fostering widespread trust in public institutions, as these factors greatly influence individuals' trust levels. Trust is considerably lower among people worried about their personal financial circumstances: only 35% of the group reporting financial worries trust the government, compared to 52% among people with fewer financial worries.
- Women and younger people tend to have lower trust in government than men and older individuals (50+). Particular attention should be given to the rapidly widening gender trust gap, also among younger women. In 2023 the share of women reporting trust in the government trails the share of men by 8 percentage points, compared to a 2 percentage point gap in 2021, on average among 18 countries. Additionally, at any age, women were less likely to feel confident in their ability to participate in politics, and believed they have a political voice. This indicates that governments should enhance their efforts to engage these groups and address their unique concerns to ensure equal access and representation in policy making.

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NOTES

[1] These results generally hold true in regression analyses in which trust in the national government is the dependent variable (see Annex A), though trust differences are less stark by perceptions of political agency than in the descriptive analysis shown in this chapter. In a regression analysis of the 2023 data, having voted for the current government is associated with the highest average marginal effect on the likelihood of having high or moderately high trust in the national government, followed by having higher (compared to low) educational attainment, being aged 50 or above (compared to being aged 18 to 29), having an intermediate level of education and having a say in what government does.

[2] The 2021 survey question referred to 'trust in the civil service', while in 2023, it referred to 'trust in the national civil service'. A separate survey question referred to trust in the regional/local civil service, as appropriate in each surveyed country.

[3] Objective income levels are measured grouping respondents in the bottom 20%, middle 60% and top 20% of the country-level household income distribution.

[4] In the case of Chile, Colombia and Greece lower and medium education levels are combined due to the underrepresentation of lower-educated respondents in those countries.

[5] The *Trust and Satisfaction in Australian Democracy* survey found a trust gap between men and women of 11 percentage points for the June and 9 percentage points for the November wave. Methodological differences, including a different response scale and a sampling methodology relying on different quotas, can contribute to differences in the measured trust gap.

3 Trust in day-to-day interactions with public institutions

National, regional and local government policies frame the day-to-day interactions between the public and government institutions. This chapter analyses how people perceive the competence and values displayed by public institutions. First, it presents satisfaction rates with public services, including education, heath, and administrative services, among recent service users across OECD countries. It further explores how satisfaction with different aspects of service quality is related to overall satisfaction with administrative services. The chapter also provides insights into how people perceive the fairness and integrity of the civil service towards the public in their day-to-day interactions. Finally, it discusses people's perceptions of local governments' and civil servants' responsiveness to public feedback.

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National, regional and local government policies set the context for the day-to-day interactions between public institutions and the population. Implementing policies and programmes and delivering services that are reliable, responsive to people's needs and open to their inputs is an important ingredient for creating trust between the public and the institutions established to serve them. Civil servants and local policy makers, who are more likely to interact with citizens on a day-to-day basis, can significantly contribute to building trust by displaying values of fairness and integrity in these interactions.

A majority of people, in most countries, are satisfied with their national health and education systems, and with administrative services, based on positive perceptions of different dimensions of service quality. A slight majority across OECD countries believe that they will be treated fairly when seeking benefits or services. However, a sizeable minority are sceptical that government employees would always act fairly and with integrity. Further scope for improvement also lies in the responsiveness of public institutions in adapting services to people's needs and expectations, making use of innovation and people's feedback.

3.1. A MAJORITY IS SATISFIED WITH PROVISION OF HEALTH AND EDUCATION, ALTHOUGH LESS THAN TWO YEARS AGO

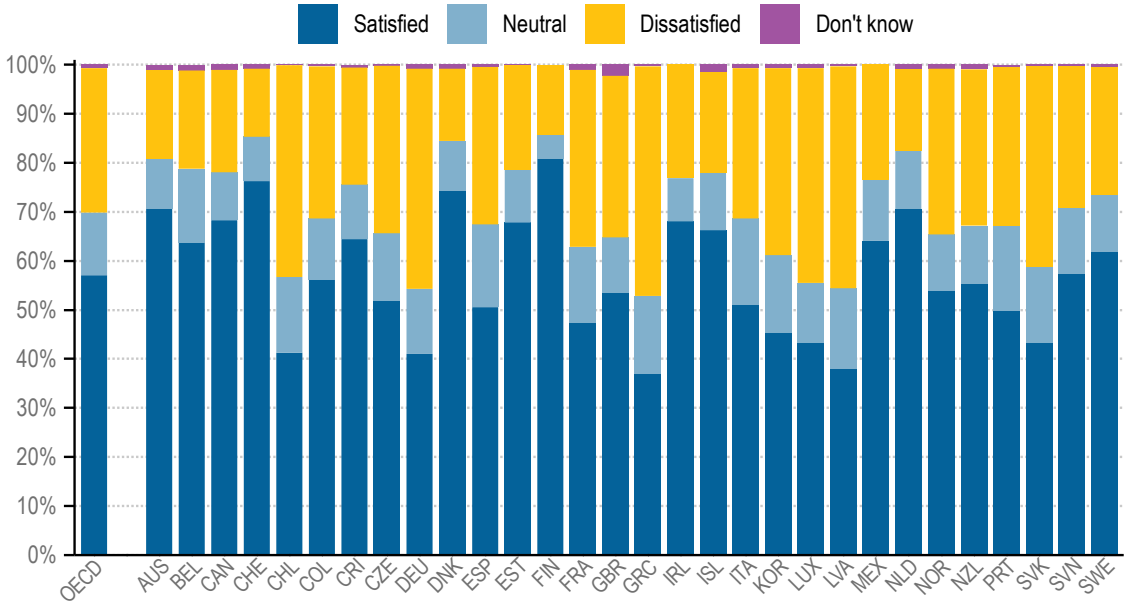
People in OECD countries generally perceive public institutions as reliable in providing public services. In 2023, as was the case in 2021, a majority of respondents to the OECD Trust Survey were satisfied with their country's education and health systems, and even more so with administrative services. In a context of rapid digital transformation and service modernisation, it is also noteworthy that a majority are confident that public institutions would use their data solely for legitimate purposes.

Across the OECD, nearly six out of ten (57%) are satisfied with their country's educational system, among those who were enrolled in an educational institution in the past two years, or had a family member enrolled (Figure 3.1).[1] Satisfaction with the healthcare system is somewhat lower, with an average of 52% of satisfied users, across the OECD. The OECD average for satisfaction with the healthcare system, however, hides a very large variation across countries. The span between countries for this question is larger than for the satisfaction with the education system or with administrative services.

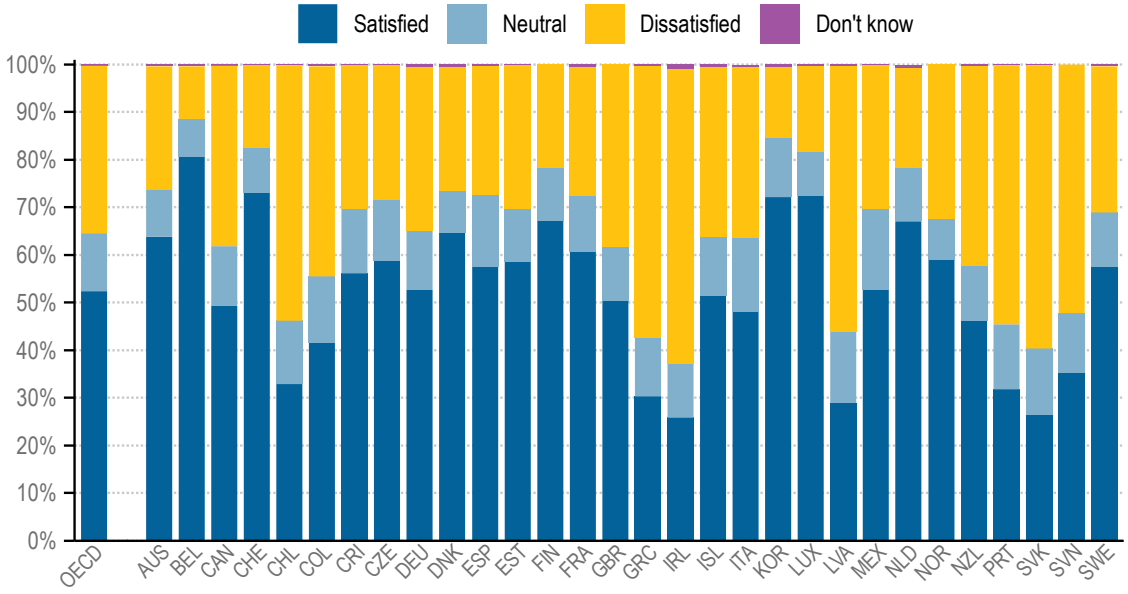
The availability, quality, and affordability of essential services, such as healthcare and education, are listed as one of the three most important issues in their country by 28% of adults on average across OECD countries (Figure 1.1. in Chapter 1), and more than 45% of individuals in Finland, Iceland, Ireland and Latvia.

Figure 3.1. More than one in two are satisfied with the education and healthcare systems

Panel A: Share of population with recent contact with the education system reporting different levels of satisfaction with the education system in their country, 2023



Panel B: Share of population with recent contact with the healthcare system reporting different levels of satisfaction with the healthcare system in their country, 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the questions "On a scale of 0 to 10, how satisfied are you with the education system in [COUNTRY]?" (Panel A) and "On a scale of 0 to 10, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the healthcare system in [COUNTRY]?" (Panel B). Respondents with recent contact are those who reply in the affirmative to the question "In the last 2 years, have you or somebody in your household been enrolled in an educational institution in [COUNTRY]?" (Panel A)/" In the last 12 months, have you or somebody in your household personally made use of the healthcare system in [COUNTRY]?" (Panel B). The "satisfaction" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "dissatisfaction" is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and "don't know" was a separate answer choice. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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User satisfaction with the education and health systems declined compared to 2021. Among the countries that participated in the OECD Trust Survey in 2021 and 2023, the share who were satisfied with the education system decreased by three percentage points, from 63% to 60% (Figure 3.2); and the share who were satisfied with the healthcare system decreased by eight percentage points, from 63% to 55% (Figure 3.3). These parallel trends, hide, however, that satisfaction with the education system has actually risen in seven out of nineteen countries, with a drastic increase in Colombia; but that these increases were counterbalanced by drastic drops in satisfaction in Korea, Norway and, to a lesser extent, Finland. Satisfaction in the healthcare system, in contrast, has decreased in all countries but Australia, Belgium and Colombia. The after-effects of the Covid-19 pandemic may have contributed to the decline in satisfaction with health and education systems observed between the two rounds of the Trust Survey.

For education, this decrease may be partially attributed to the learning losses experienced by students during the pandemic that have accumulated throughout the pandemic and thus appear more prominent in 2023 than in 2021 (Di Pietro, 2023[1]). However, data from Gallup World Poll shows that satisfaction with education in the overall adult population across the OECD has remained relatively constant since 2010 and on an upward trend between 2017 and 2022 (Gallup, 2024[2]).[2] Trust in the education system will have to be carefully monitored in the future iterations of the trust survey.

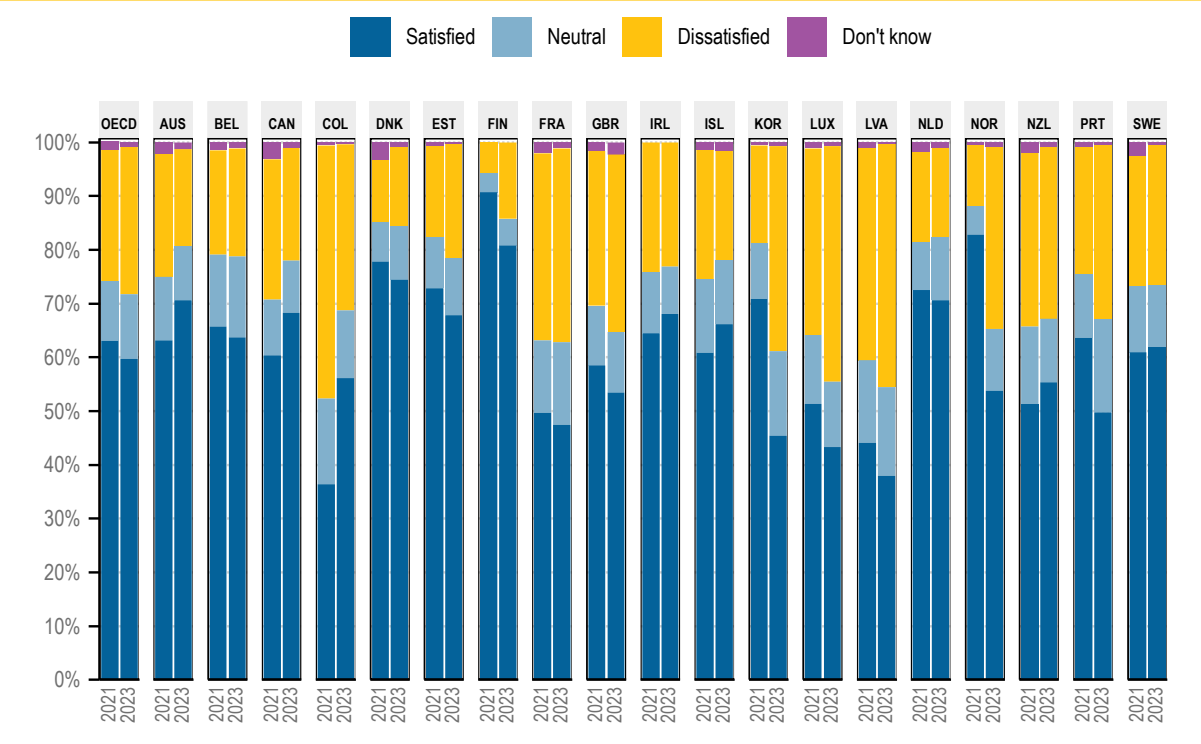
The stronger drop in satisfaction with the healthcare system, in contrast, is probably partially due to a temporary bump in satisfaction during the Covid-19 pandemic, but also part of a longer-term trend. Evidence from the Gallup World Poll finds that that average satisfaction with the availability of quality healthcare across OECD countries declined from 71% in 2010 to 68% in 2022, with a temporary rise in satisfaction between 2017 and 2020. To zoom in on the pandemic and post-pandemic period, the Ipsos Global Health Service Monitor (IPSOS, 2023[3]) shows that among the twelve countries with available data for 2018 and 2021-23,[3] the share of respondents that agreed with the statement "I trust the healthcare system in my country to provide me with the best treatment" rose quite strongly in 2021, from an average of 48% to 56%. The proportion remained relatively constant in 2022, but then fell to 52%. Therefore, while satisfaction with the healthcare system may indeed be declining over the longer term, the drop in satisfaction observed between 2021 and 2023 is likely to have been a result of the increase in reported satisfaction in 2021. Nevertheless, the concerns expressed by people about essential services; and the overall trend of a slight decline in satisfaction with the healthcare system point to the need to reinvest in the system, including in light of the strain it underwent during the pandemic.

Box 3.1. Spotlight on changes: Satisfaction with the education and healthcare system

On average across the OECD with available information, user satisfaction with the education and especially with the health systems was lower in 2023 than in 2021. But while satisfaction with the education system rose in some and dropped in other countries, the decline in satisfaction with the health system was much more uniform.

Figure 3.2. Satisfaction with education system remained relatively stable in many countries, but declined sharply in some

Share of population with recent contact with the education system reporting different levels of satisfaction with the education system in their country, 2021 and 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the questions "On a scale of 0 to 10, how satisfied are you with the education system in [COUNTRY]?" in 2021 and 2023 waves. The survey question in Norway followed a different wording in 2021: ''How good or poor do you find upper secondary schools?''. Individuals with recent contact are those who reply in the affirmative to the question "In the last 2 years, have you or somebody in your household been enrolled in an educational institution in [COUNTRY]?". The survey question in Norway followed a different wording in 2021: ''Did you or your child use upper secondary school in the last 12 months?''. The "satisfaction" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "dissatisfaction" is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and "don't know" was a separate answer choice. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries, for the listed countries for which the variable was available in 2021 and 2023.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023.

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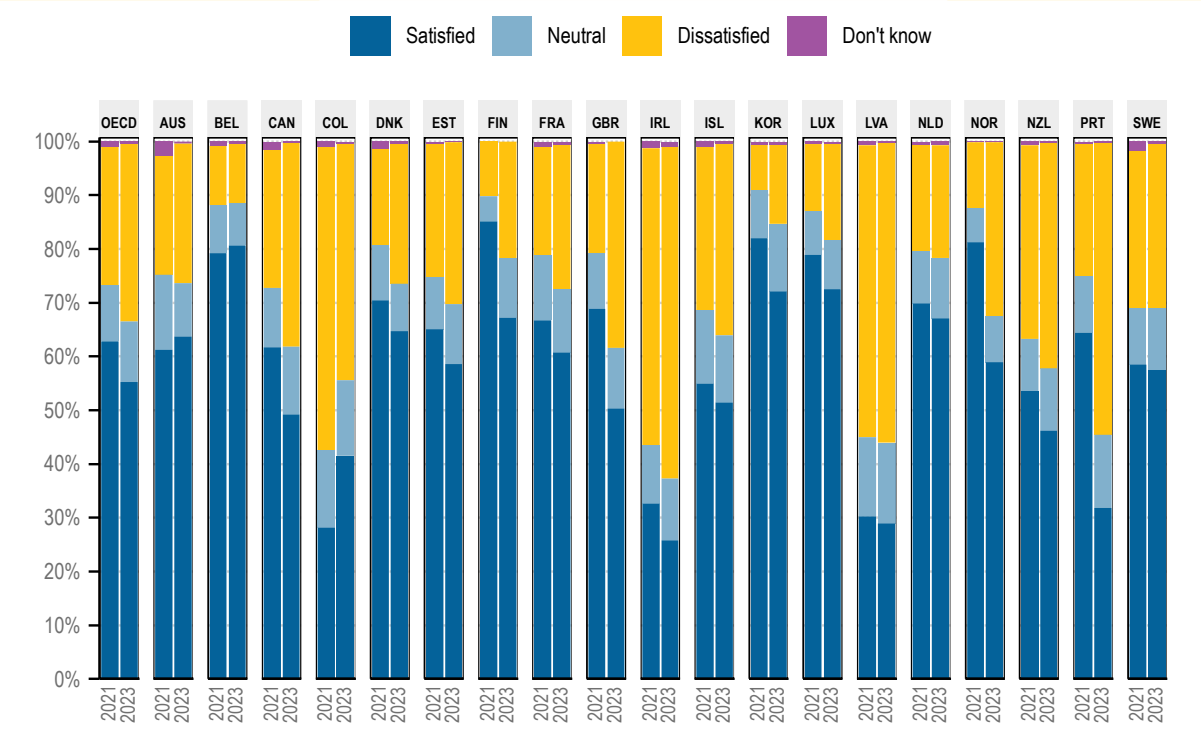
Figure 3.3. Satisfaction with the healthcare system has declined in 16 out of 19 OECD countries

Share of population with recent contact with the healthcare system reporting different levels of satisfaction with the healthcare system in their country, 2021 and 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the questions "On a scale of 0 to 10, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the healthcare system in [COUNTRY]?" in 2021 and 2023 waves. The survey question in Norway followed a different wording in 2021: ''How good or poor do you find primary care physician/doctor?''. Individuals with recent contact are those who reply in the affirmative to the question) "In the last 12 months, have you or somebody in your household personally made use of the healthcare system in [COUNTRY]?". The survey question in Norway followed a different wording in 2021: ''Did you see a primary care physician/doctor in the last 12 months?''. The "satisfaction" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "dissatisfaction" is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and "don't know" was a separate answer choice. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries, for the listed countries for which the variable was available in 2021 and 2023.

Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023.

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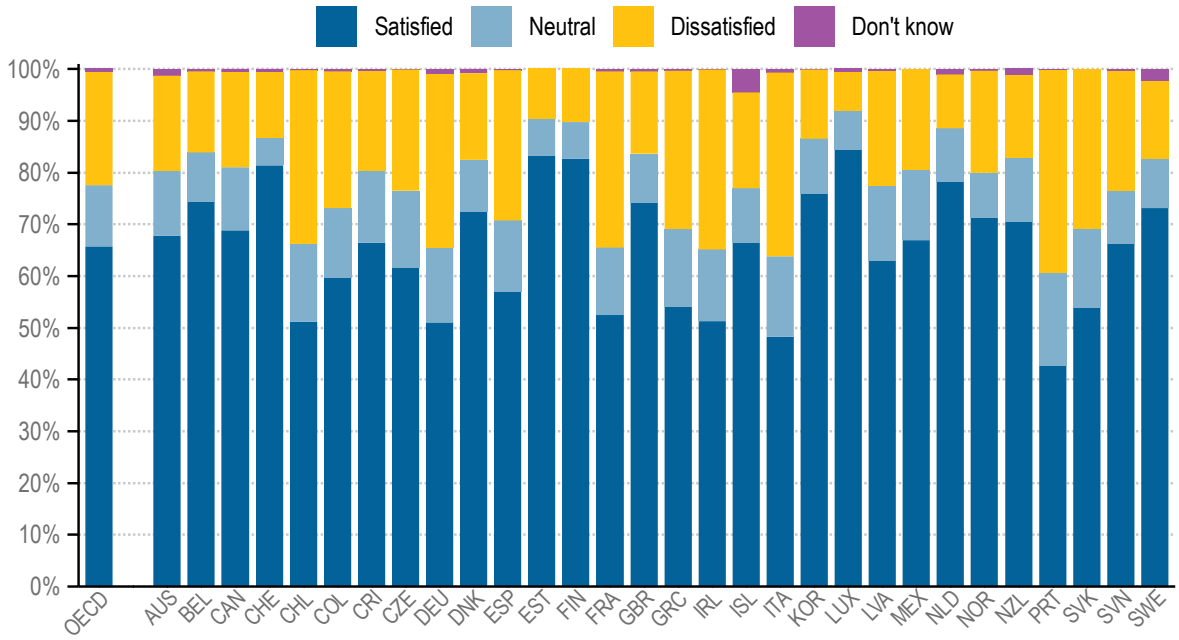
3.2. CONFIDENCE IN GOVERNMENT'S PERSONAL DATA HANDLING REMAINS POSITIVE, AND IMPROVING SPEED AND EASE OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES COULD FURTHER BOOST SATISFACTION

Daily interactions between public institutions and citizens occur for different reasons: people turn to public agencies because they need to apply for a benefit or a service, because they have a question about an upcoming infrastructure project in their community, because they want to register to vote or participate in a citizens' dialogue, because their business requires a permit, etc. Satisfaction with public services is a key performance indicator for government and included in the Sustainable Development Goals to measure national progress towards "effective, accountable and transparent institutions".

Two thirds (66%) of people who have used administrative services in the previous year are satisfied with the quality of such services (Figure 3.4).[4] It is also noteworthy that in 28 of the 30 participating countries, a majority of users are satisfied. In Luxembourg, 84% of recent users are satisfied, and the satisfaction rate is similar in Estonia, Finland, the Netherlands and Switzerland. Among all respondents,[5] satisfaction across the 18 countries with data for both years rose slightly from 64% to 65%, with the largest improvements observed in Australia, Colombia, Estonia, and Sweden (Figure 3.7). Satisfaction with administrative services is the most important public governance driver for trust in the national civil service and the second most important driver for trust in local government. It has also a positive impact on trust in the national government, albeit with smaller importance than other public governance drivers (see Chapter 1 and Annex A).

Figure 3.4. A large majority is satisfied with administrative services

Share of recent users reporting different levels of satisfaction with administrative services in their country, 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses among recent users to the question "On a scale of 0 to 10, how satisfied are you with the quality of administrative services in [COUNTRY] (for example applying for an ID, registering a birth or applying for benefits)?" Recent users replied in the affirmative to the question "In the last 12 months, have you personally made use of an administrative in [COUNTRY] (for example, applying for a passport, registering a birth, or applying for benefits etc.)?". The "satisfaction" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "dissatisfaction" is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and "Don't know" was a separate answer choice. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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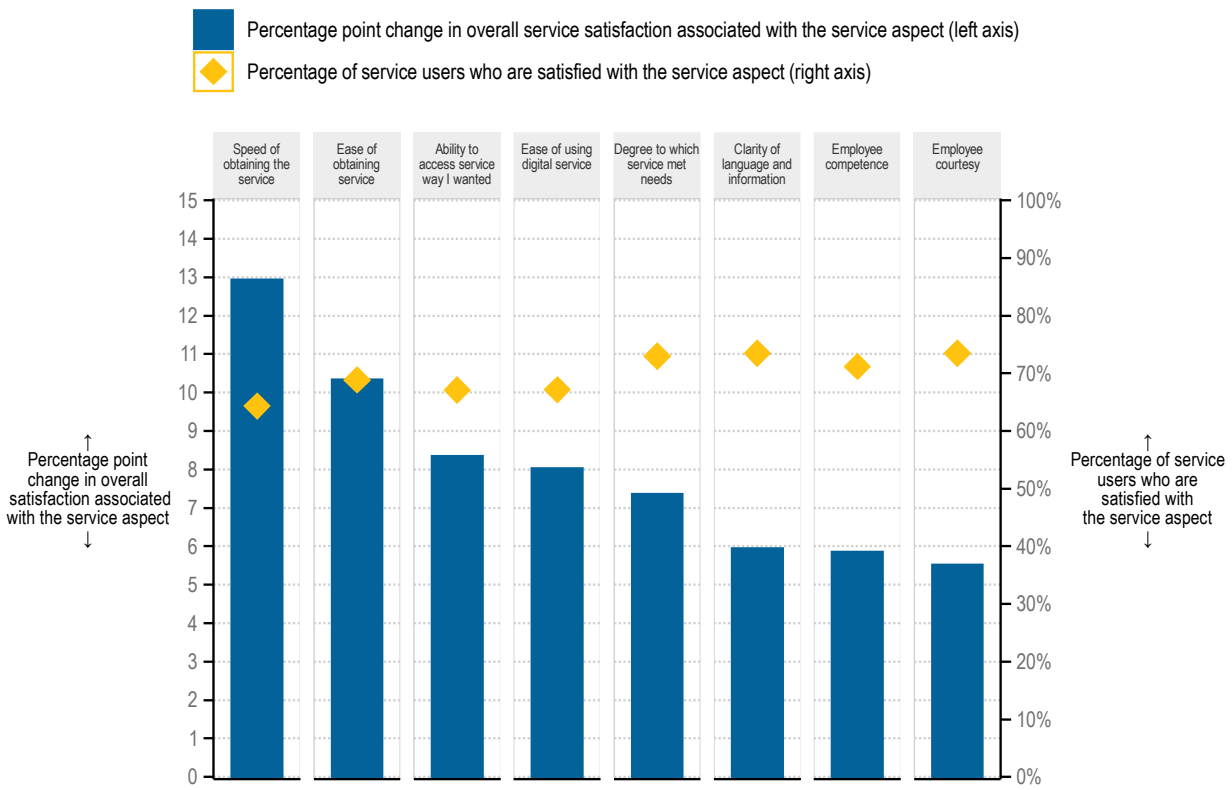
A large majority of administrative service users are satisfied with different features of their most recently obtained service, but improvements in the speed and ease of obtaining the service could boost satisfaction even further. When asked to rate different features of their most recent experience with an administrative service, over seven out of ten indicate that they were satisfied with the employees' courtesy and competence, the clarity of language and information, and the degree to which the service met their needs (Figure 3.5). Increasing satisfaction with the ease and speed of obtaining the service are likely to be the most impactful levers for increasing satisfaction with the overall quality of administrative services: individuals who are satisfied with these service components are ten and thirteen percentage points more likely, respectively, to rate overall administrative service quality

positively compared to otherwise similar individuals who were not satisfied with these aspects of their experience.

Service digitalisation can be a means to improve service satisfaction, but the link is not automatic. For example, it is noteworthy that in Estonia and Finland, two of the countries with the highest overall satisfaction with administrative services, eight out of ten more recent users were satisfied both with the ability to access the service the way they wanted and the ease of using digital services. However, in other countries that invested heavily in the digital transformation of their public sector (OECD, 2024[4]), this is not always instantly rewarded by extremely high satisfaction with administrative services overall and with these service aspects in particular.

Figure 3.5. Increasing the speed and ease of obtaining the service could boost satisfaction with both in-person and remote administrative services

Percentage point change in likelihood of being satisfied with administrative services following an increase in satisfaction with any of the service aspects (left Y-axis, represented by bar) and share of users satisfied with service aspect (right Y-axis, represented by dots), OECD average, 2023



How to read: For example, on average across the OECD, 64% are satisfied with the speed of obtaining the service, and this is associated with a 13 percentage point increase in the likelihood of being satisfied with administrative services.
Note: On the right Y-axis and represented by dots, the figure presents the OECD unweighted average of the share who indicated satisfaction with the respective aspect when answering the question: "Thinking about the most recent administrative service that you personally made use of, how satisfied were you with each of the following? Please give your answer on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means you are not at all satisfied, and 10 means you are completely satisfied". The satisfied proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale. 'Don't know' and 'not applicable' were separate answer options. The percentage point change in satisfaction with administrative services, on the Y-left axis represented by bars, corresponds to the average marginal effect of a being satisfied as compared to not being satisfied with any of the eight service aspects, when all the other service aspects, age, gender, and education levels are kept constant. The average marginal effects are statistically significant at $p<0.01$.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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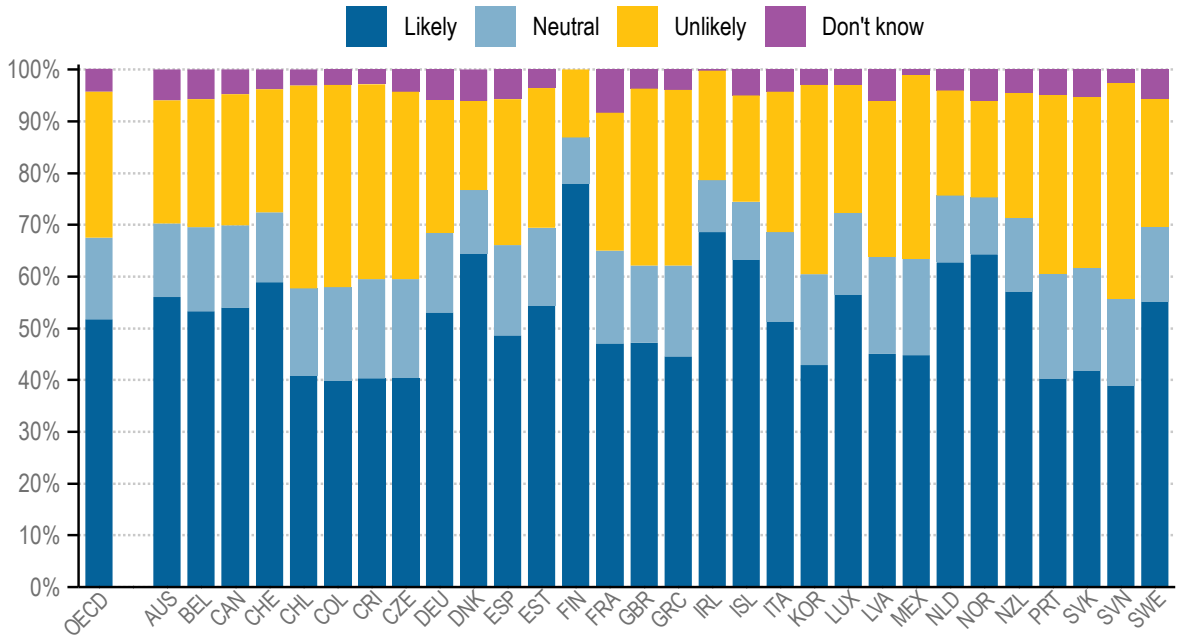
The increased prevalence of remote service delivery and digital interactions with the public, make the responsible use of personal data by public agencies even more relevant. On this criterion as well, a majority (52%) are confident that their data will only be used for legitimate purposes (Figure 3.6). The share of those that are confident has increased from 52% to 53% among the 18 countries with data available for both 2021 and 2023 (Figure 3.8). People satisfied with administrative services and confident that the government would use data for legitimate purposes tend to have higher levels of trust not only in the civil service but also in others. This suggests that confidence in the legitimate use of data is associated with the belief that most fellow citizens, including civil servants, can generally be trusted (Chapter 1 and Annex A).

Figure 3.6. One in two people think that public agencies use their personal data only for legitimate purposes

Share of population who find it likely or unlikely that a public agency would use their personal data for legitimate purposes only, 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If you shared your personal data with a public agency/office/department, how likely do you think it is that it would be used for legitimate purposes only?". 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 of responses across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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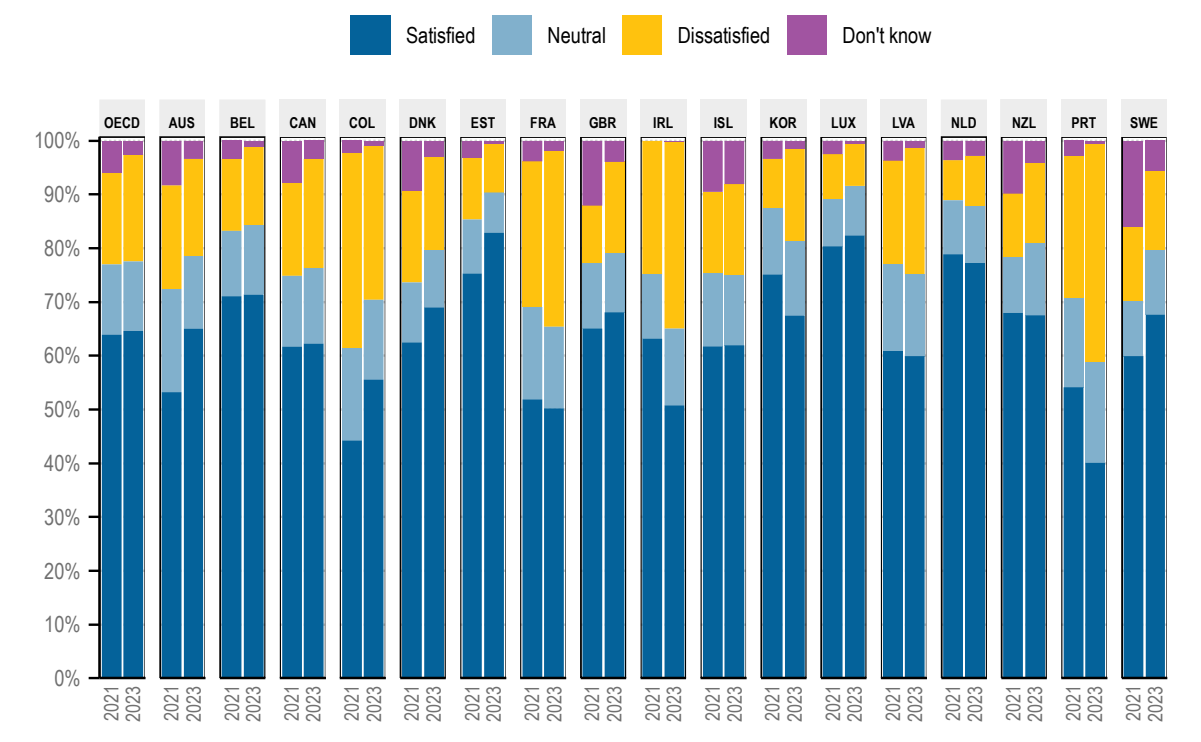
Box 3.2. Spotlight on changes: Satisfaction with administrative services and legitimate data handling

Satisfaction with administrative services and confidence that public agencies use personal data only for legitimate aims have remained stable between 2021 and 2023.

Figure 3.7. From 2021 to 2023, there was no significant change in the OECD average satisfaction with the administrative system

Share of population reporting different levels of satisfaction with administrative services in their country, 2021 and 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "On a scale of 0 to 10, how satisfied are you with the quality of administrative services in [COUNTRY] (for example applying for an ID, registering a birth or applying for benefits)?" in 2021 and 2023 waves. The "satisfaction" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "dissatisfaction" is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and "Don't know" was a separate answer choice. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries, for the listed countries for which the variable was available in 2021 and 2023. Unlike the data presented in Figures 3.4 and 3.5, the sample is not restricted to individuals who had recent contact with administrative services.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023.

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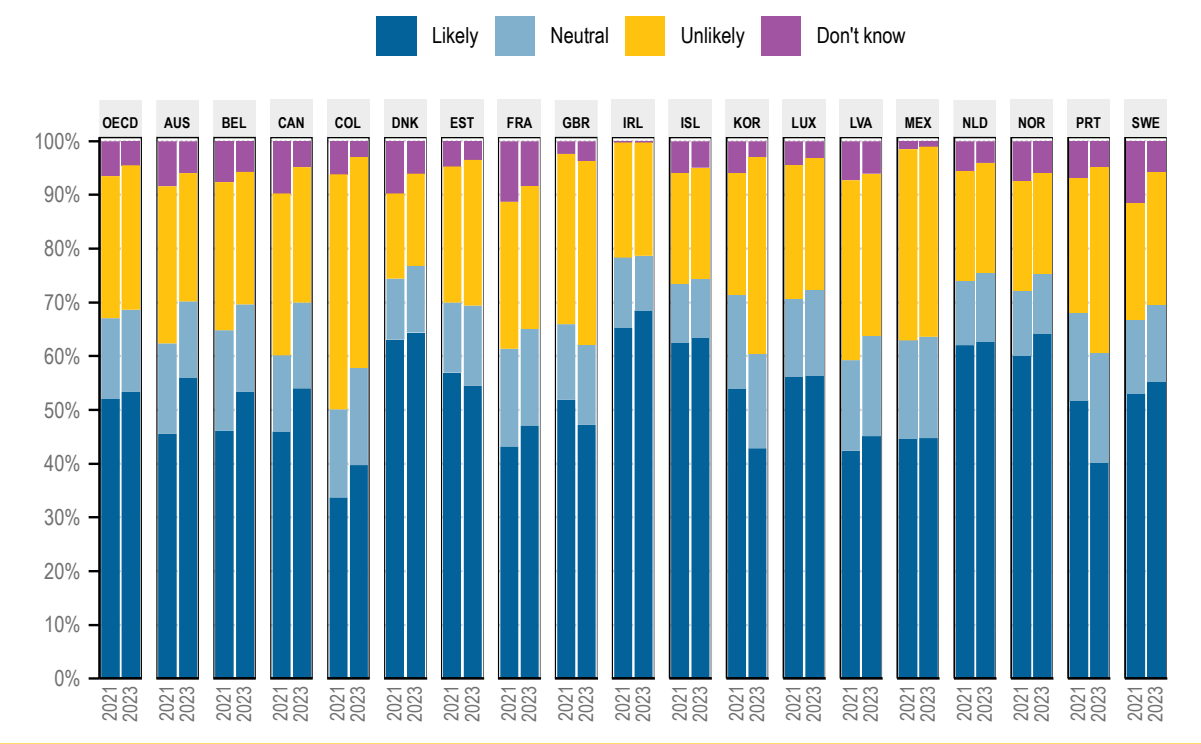
Figure 3.8. A majority continues to express trust in their government's use of personal data for legitimate purposes

Share of population who find it likely or unlikely that a public agency would use their personal data for legitimate purposes only, 2021 and 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If you shared your personal data with a public agency/office/department, how likely do you think it is that it would be used for legitimate purposes only?" in 2021 and 2023 waves. The survey question followed a slightly different wording in 2021 in Norway: ''If you share your personal details with a public authority, how likely is it that said information will be used only for the purposes for which it was collected?'' and in Mexico: ''If you were to share your personal data (name, telephone, address, etc.) with a public institution in Mexico, how likely is it that this information would be used exclusively for the reason for which it was requested?''. 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, for the listed countries for which the variable was available in 2021 and 2023.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023.

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3.3. PEOPLE HAVE MORE CONFIDENCE IN THE FAIRNESS OF CIVIL SERVANTS THAN IN THEIR INTEGRITY DURING DAY-TO-DAY INTERACTIONS WITH THE PUBLIC

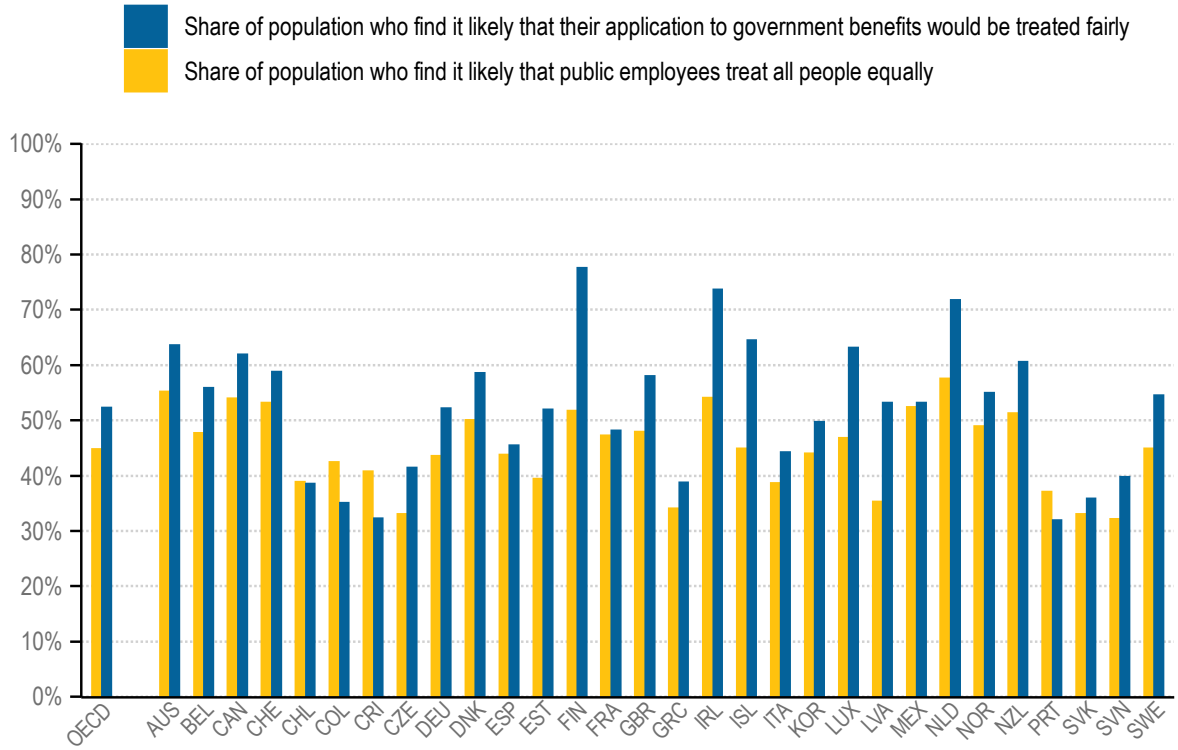
In daily interactions with public institutions, people expect public officials or employees they encounter to treat them fairly, regardless of their background, and to act with integrity. However, perceptions of fairness and integrity in particular are somewhat less positive.

As in 2021, the 2023 OECD Trust Survey contained two questions concerning the fairness of civil servants when interacting with the public. One question asked respondents to assess the likelihood of a public employee in their area treating everyone equally, regardless of income level, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or country of origin. The second, more personal question, asked respondents to share how likely it would be that an application for a service or benefit by them or a household member would be treated fairly.

People generally express more confidence that their own application would be treated fairly than in the likelihood that all people would be treated equally, regardless of their background. While 52% express confidence that their application would be treated fairly, only 45% believe that this will be true for all people (Figure 3.9). A possible explanation is that people may think back to their personal experiences with regards to the fair treatment of the own application question, and rather than expressing distrust of public employees, express empathy towards those they see as disadvantaged. Responses to the two questions often align, but an average of one in five people who believe that it is likely or unlikely that public employees will act fairly according to one question, have the opposite opinion for the other question. The less positive assessment of the general as compared to the personal fairness question holds in most countries, apart from the participating Latin American countries. There, the share who view fair treatment as likely is either roughly equal for both questions (Chile and Mexico) or the likelihood of fair treatment at the personal level is perceived as less likely than equal treatment of people with different backgrounds (Colombia and Costa Rica).

Figure 3.9. More people find it likely that their own application for government benefits would be treated fairly than public employees would treat all people equally regardless of background

Share of population who find it likely that they would be treated fairly and that all people would be treated equally, 2023



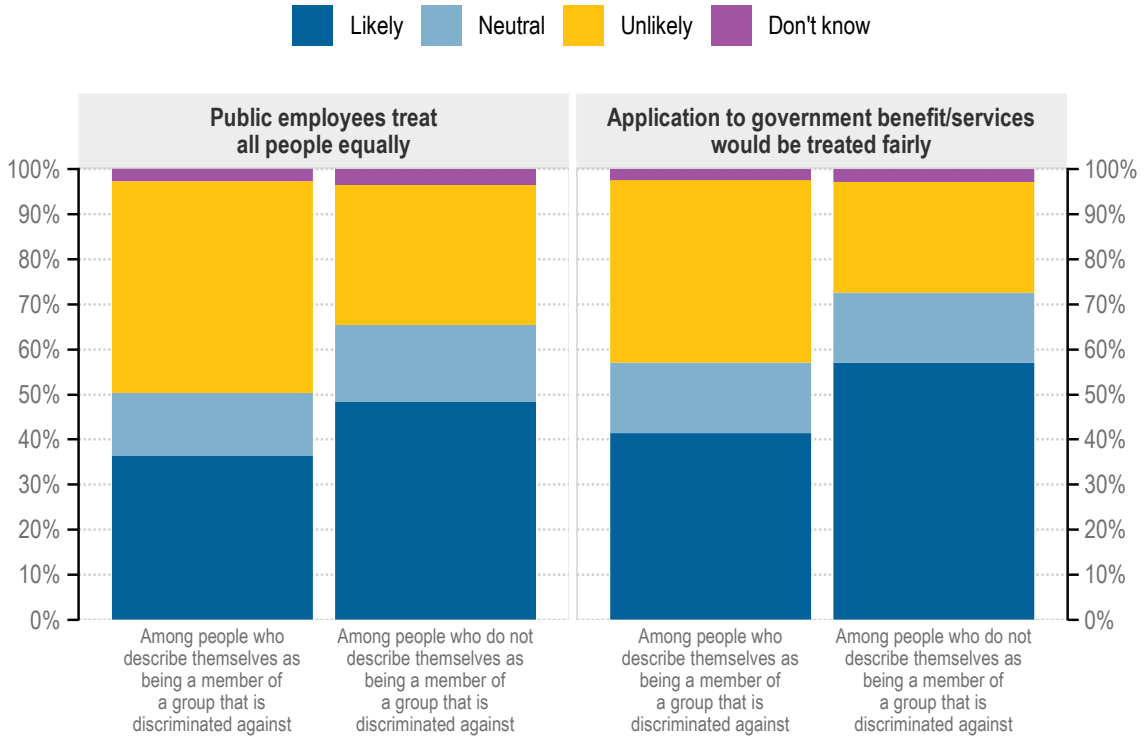
Note: The figure shows the within-country distributions of the share who respond that it is 'likely' (responses 6-10 on a 0-10 scale) to the questions "If a public employee interacted with the public in the area where you live, how likely do you think it is that they would treat all people equally regardless of their income level, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity or country of origin?" (blue) and "If you or a member of your household applied for a government benefit or service, how likely do you think it is that your application would be treated fairly?" (yellow).
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/bzocji

Individuals who identify as belonging to a group that is discriminated against in the country assess the likelihood of fair treatment more negatively. For both the personal and the general question, the share who find it unlikely that civil servants will behave fairly is approximately fifteen percentage points higher for this group than for those who do not identify as belonging to a discriminated-against group (Figure 3.10). Both personal experience with discriminatory treatment and a higher awareness of potential unfair treatment could be behind this discrepancy. Even in countries where the perceived fairness of treatment is very high, such as in Finland, where three quarters (77%) believe that their application for a benefit or service would be treated fairly, this share decreases to 56% among those identifying as belonging to a discriminated-against group. Nevertheless, Finland is still among the five countries where perceptions of fairness among people who identify as belonging to a discriminated-against group are highest. Ensuring that individuals regardless of their background can be confident they will receive fair treatment for themselves and others can contribute to trust, as these variables are positively associated with high or moderately high trust in the national civil service and local government when analysing the public governance drivers and background variables jointly (see Chapter 1 and Annex A).

Figure 3.10. People who identify as belonging to a group that is discriminated against in the country have lower expectations of fair treatment

Expectations of fair treatment by whether people self-identify themselves as belonging to a group they believe is discriminated against in the country, OECD average, 2023



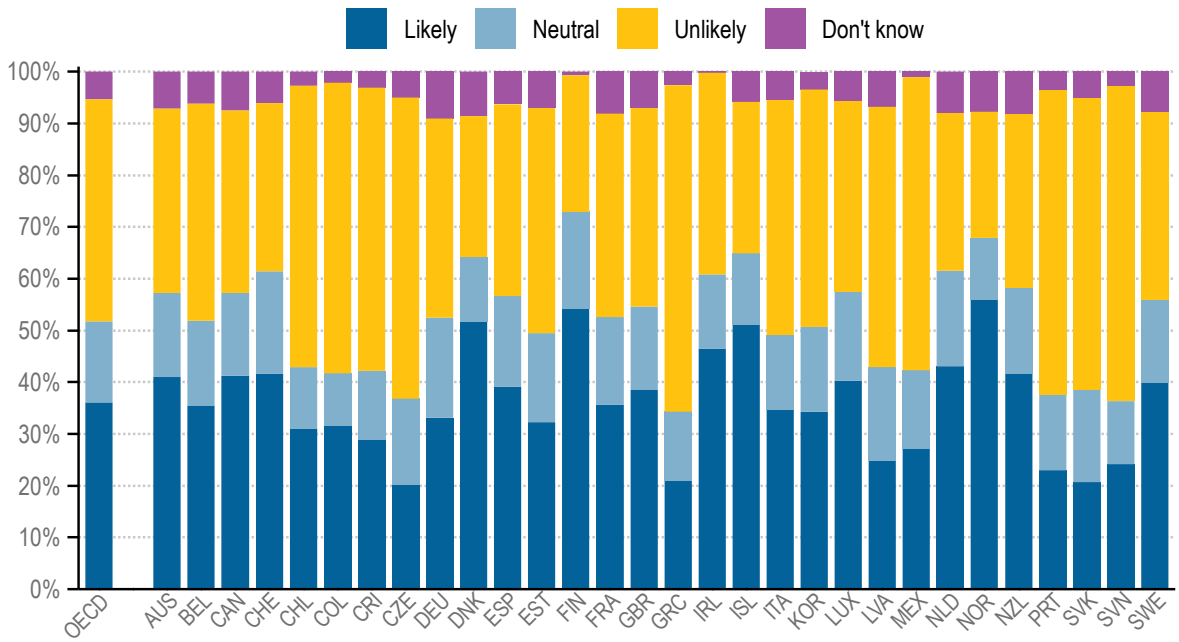
Note: The figure shows the OECD unweighted country averages for the distribution of responses to the questions "If a public employee interacted with the public in the area where you live, how likely do you think it is that they would treat all people equally regardless of their income level, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity or country of origin?" (left) and "If you or a member of your household applied for a government benefit or service, how likely do you think it is that your application would be treated fairly?" (right), by whether the respondent replied yes or no to the question "Would you describe yourself as being a member of a group that is discriminated against in [COUNTRY]?". For France, the overall average responses to the two questions were included under the statistic for each group.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/yz68rf

Perceptions about public sector integrity are a concern in most countries. When asked about the likelihood that a public employee would accept or refuse a bribe to speed up a service, more than 43% on average think that a civil servant would engage in such petty corruption, and only 36% think they would not (Figure 3.11). Even in Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Norway, where a majority expect a civil servant would turn down the offer of a bribe, about a quarter of adults find it unlikely; and in some countries in particular in Central and Southern Europe and Latin America, their share exceeds 50%. Prior research has found that these perceptions can be highly detrimental to trust (Espinal, Hartlyn and Kelly, 2006[5]; Van de Walle and Migchelbrink, 2020[6]); and findings from the 2023 OECD Trust Survey likewise suggest a high positive correlation between the share that find it likely that a civil servant will turn down a bribe and trust in the national civil service (Figure 3.12). Regression analyses (that consider several factors at the same time) likewise confirm that people who find it more likely that this form of petty corruption does not take place are more apt to trust their local government and civil service. There is also a positive association with trust in the national government, but it is less pronounced (see Chapter 1 and Annex A).

Figure 3.11. Only slightly more than one third believe that a public employee would turn down money offered for speeding up access to a public service

Share of population who find it likely or unlikely that a public employee would refuse a bribe, 2023

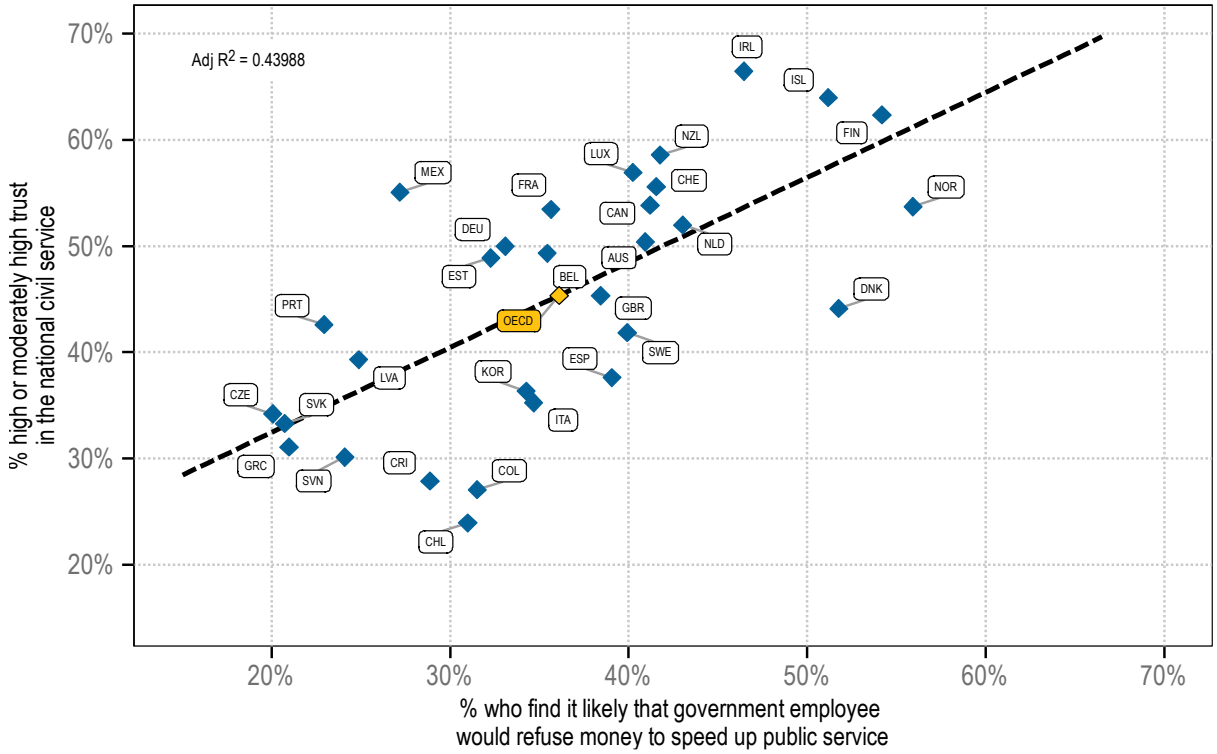


Note: The figure shows the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If a public employee was offered money by a citizen or a firm for speeding up access to a public service, how likely do you think it is that they would refuse it?". The "likely" proportion is the aggregation of responses 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. "OECD" presents the unweighted average of responses across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/hgyxas

Figure 3.12. Trust in the civil service is higher in countries where more people believe that public employees would refuse money to speed up access to a public service

Share with high or moderately high trust in the national civil service (y-axis) and share who find it likely that a government employee would refuse money to speed up access to a public service (x-axis), 2023



Note: The figure shows the average for the respective country of the share of population with high or moderately high trust in the civil service (y-axis) and who find it likely that a government employee would refuse money for speeding up access to a public service. Shown on the y-axis is the proportion of the population that have "high or moderately high trust'' based on the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the 0-10 response scale. The survey question shown on the x-axis is "If a public employee was offered money by a citizen or a firm for speeding up access to a public service, how likely do you think it is that they would refuse it?". The share who find it likely correspond to the responses 6-10 on the 0-10 scale. "OECD" presents the unweighted average of responses across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

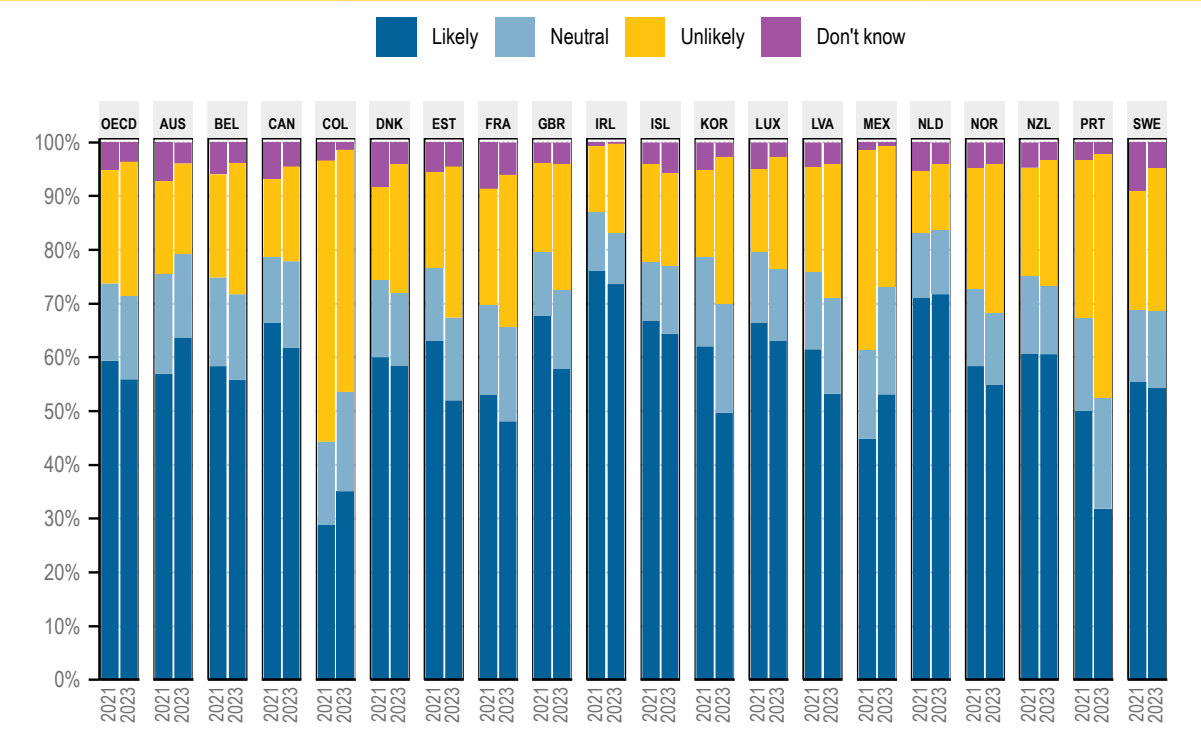
StatLink https://stat.link/uknbsa

Box 3.3. Spotlight on changes: Fair treatment and integrity of civil servants

Between 2021 and 2023, the share who find it likely that their own application for a government would be treated fairly, decreased in thirteen countries and on average from 59% to 56% (Figure 3.13). During the same period, the perception of the integrity of public servants has slightly deteriorated on average, but improved in one third of the participating countries (Figure 3.14).

Figure 3.13. A slightly declining share believe that their own application for a government benefit would be treated fairly

Share of population who find it likely or unlikely that their application for government benefits/services would be treated fairly, 2021 and 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If you or a member of your household applied for government benefit or service, how likely do you think it is that your application would be treated fairly?" in the 2021 and 2023 waves. The survey questions followed a slightly different wording in 2021 in Norway (''If you were to apply to the public authorities for help or support, how likely is it that your application will be processed fairly?'') and in Mexico (''If you were to submit an application for government support, how likely is it 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, for the listed countries for which the variable was available in 2021 and 2023.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023.

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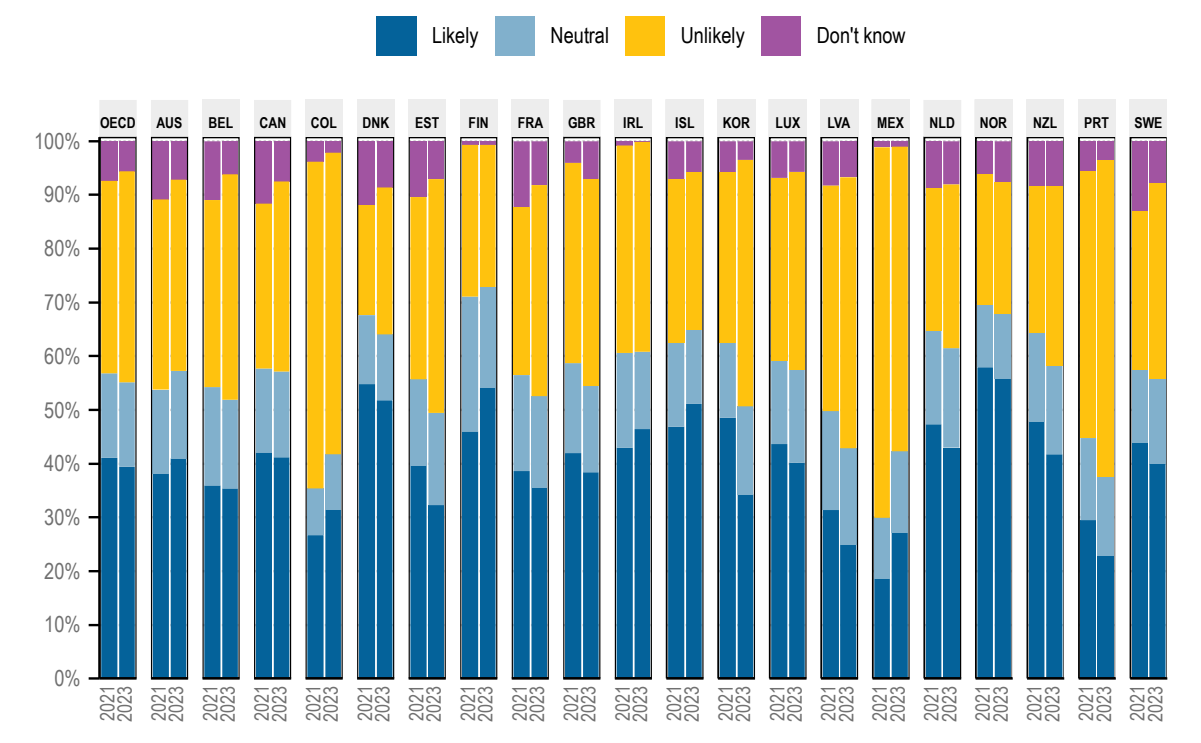
Figure 3.14. Perceptions of the integrity of civil servants have marginally deteriorated

Share of population who find it likely or unlikely that a government employee would refuse a bribe, 2021 and 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If a government employee was offered money by a citizen or a firm for speeding up access to a public service, how likely do you think it is that they would refuse it?" in the 2021 and 2023 waves. The 2021 question was worded slightly differently in Norway (''If a member of the Storting were to be offered a bribe or other benefit in return for exercising their influence on a parliamentary matter, how likely are they to accept it?''), in Mexico (''If a public servant were offered money to speed up the processing of a public service in the area where you live, how likely would they be to accept it?'') and in Finland: (''If a parliamentarian were offered a bribe to influence the awarding of a public procurement contract, do you think that he/she would refuse the bribe?''). 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, for the listed countries for which the variable was available in 2021 and 2023.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/o6w4yj

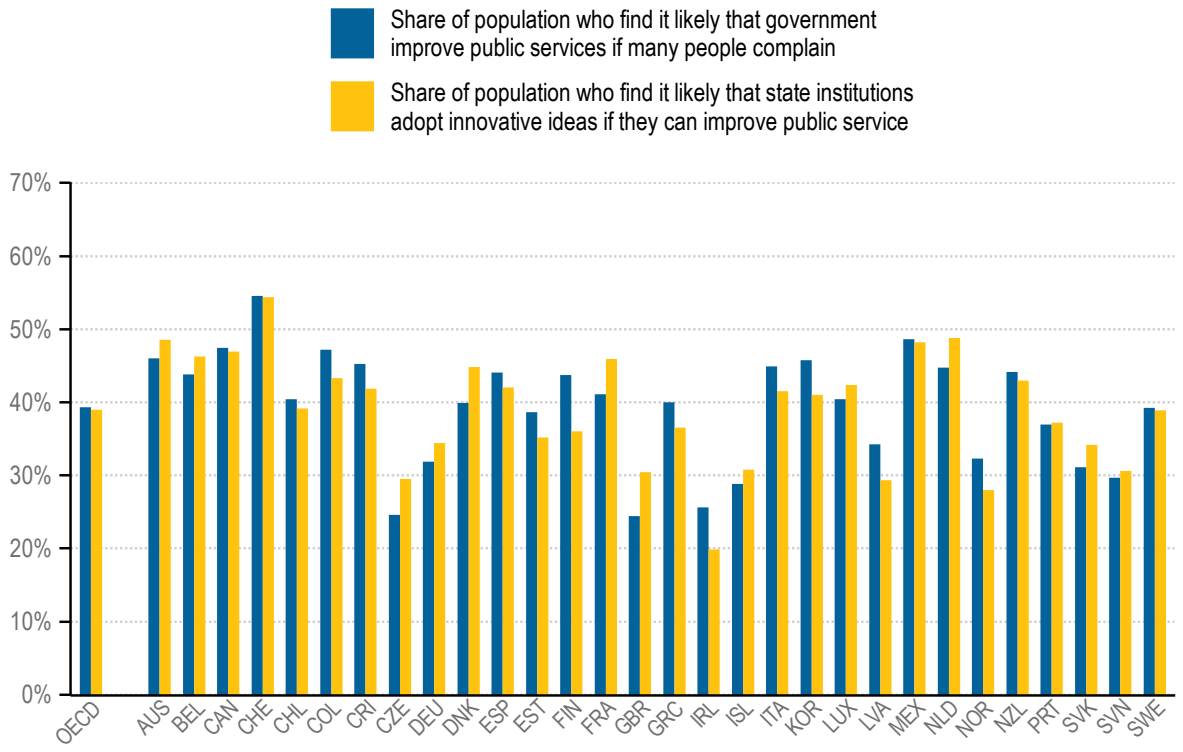
3.4. DOUBTS PERSIST REGARDING THE RESPONSIVENESS OF PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS TO CONCERNS AND FEEDBACK ON THE PROVISION OF SERVICES AND PROGRAMMES

Public institutions that seek to implement policies, programmes, and services that correspond to the everyday needs of people are much more likely to succeed in doing so when they are open to receiving and responding to public feedback. Echoing findings from the 2021 OECD Trust Survey, the 2023 Trust Survey finds that public institutions in OECD countries could be more successful at conveying their openness and responsiveness to citizens. This includes local matters and public services, for which their input is informed by their own experiences.

People are pessimistic when it comes to public institutions being responsive to improving the effectiveness and quality of public services responding to user needs. Fewer than four in ten people (39%) believe that a public service would be improved if many people complained that it was working badly, and an equal share believe that an innovative idea would be adopted by the responsible institution if it could improve a service (Figure 3.15).

Figure 3.15. An average of four in ten people believe that a public service would be improved if people complained and if an innovative idea was proposed

Share of population who find it likely (a) that government improve services if many people complain, or (b) that state institutions adopt innovative ideas if these ideas can improve public services, 2023



Note: The figure shows the average share of the population who respond that it is 'likely' (responses 6-10 on a 0-10 scale) to the questions "If many people complained about a public service that is working badly, how likely do you think it is that it would be improved?" and "If there was an innovative idea that could improve a public service, how likely do you think it is that it would be adopted by the responsible public institution?". "OECD" presents the unweighted average of ''likely'' responses across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

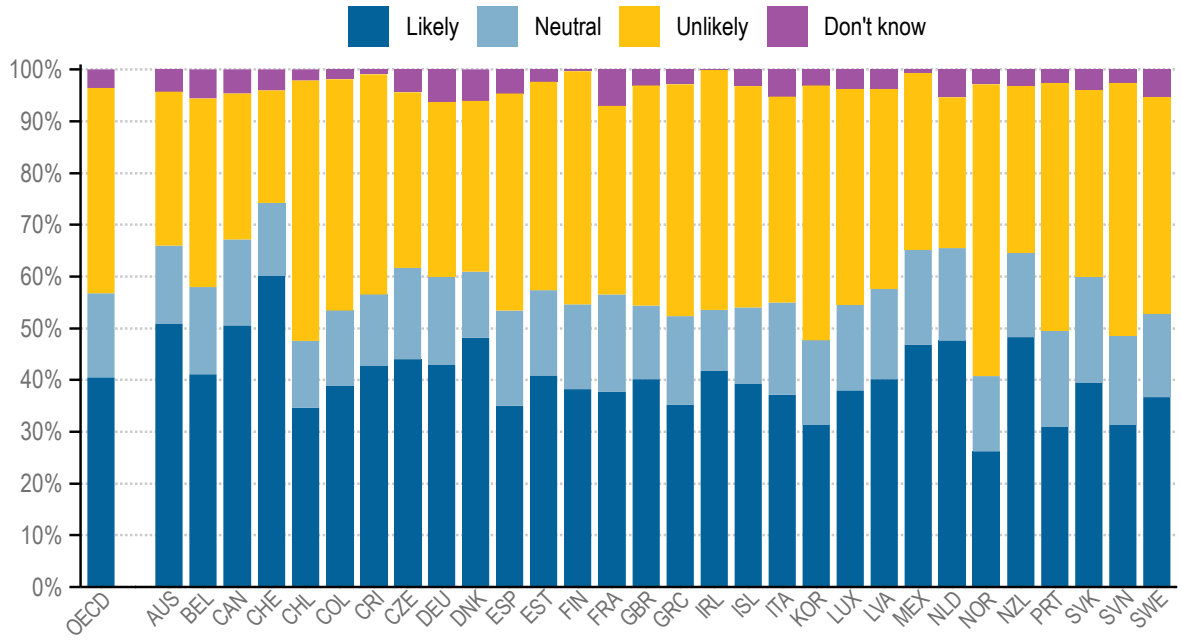
StatLink https://stat.link/ugbom6

An average of four in ten people think it is likely and think it is unlikely, respectively, that they will have the opportunity to voice their opinion when the local government takes a decision that affects their local community (Figure 3.16). This share has remained relatively stable across the countries with data for 2021 and 2023, dropping from 42% to 41% (Figure 3.17). In some countries, the share is as low as a quarter, while in Australia, Canada and Switzerland, the majority think that they would likely be able to voice their opinion in this scenario.

Positive perception to be able to voice opinions on a local matter has the largest positive influence on trust in local government than any other public governance driver. More positive perceptions of public institutions' responsiveness to complaints about a public service are likewise associated with higher trust in local government and in the civil service (Chapter 1 and Annex A).

Figure 3.16. An average of 41% believe they would be able to voice their opinion before local government takes a decision affecting their community

Share of population who find it likely or unlikely that they would be able to voice their opinion on a decision affecting their local community, 2023



Note: The question is "If a decision affecting your local community is to be made by the local government, how likely do you think it is that you would have an opportunity to voice your opinion?". 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. "OECD" presents the unweighted average of responses across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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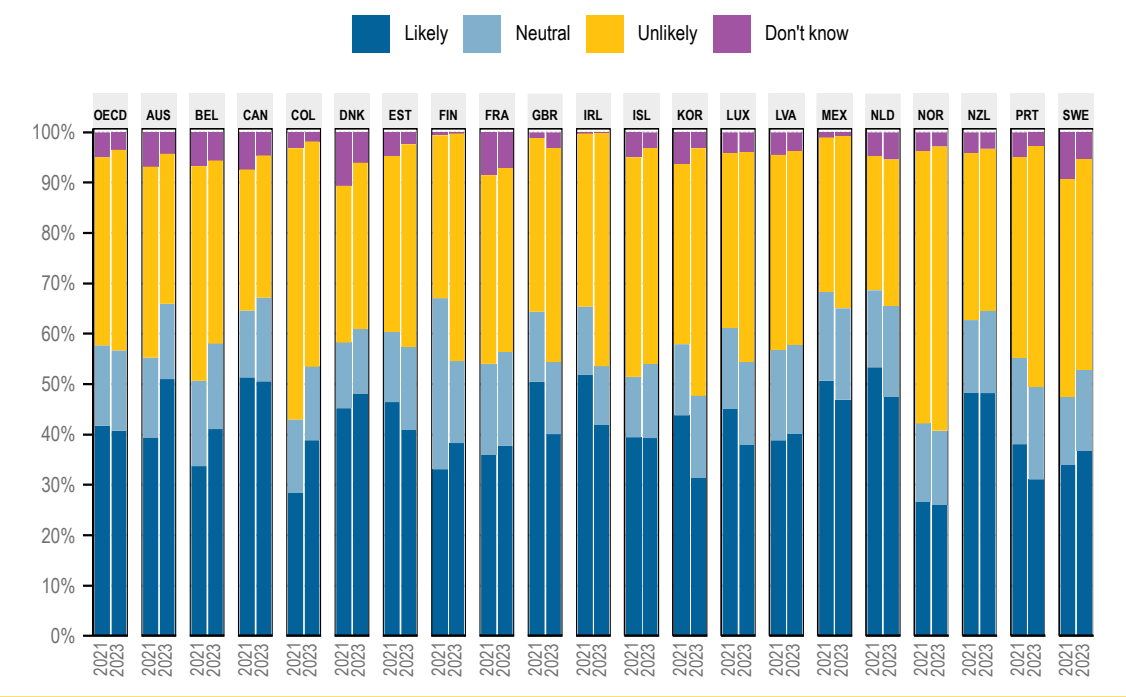
The responsiveness to inputs, from citizens, outside experts or civil servants themselves, requires that decision makers, be they policy makers or high-level civil servants, are both open to receiving and listening to the feedback and have the agency to enact change. As will be seen in the next chapter, doubts about this willingness and ability apply not only to more straightforward matters such as public services and local policy changes, but even more so to policy making on complex issues. Yet, investing in the capacity of public institutions at all levels to be responsive to evidence and feedback can pay important trust dividends.

Box 3.4. Spotlight on changes: Openness and responsiveness on day-to-day interactions

On average, the perceptions of openness and responsiveness in day-to-day interactions have remained almost equal. In 2023 as in 2021, an average of around four in ten people across the OECD found it likely that they would be able to voice their opinion on local government decisions (Figure 3.17), that public services would be improved after complaints (Figure 3.18), and that innovative ideas to improve public services would be adopted (Figure 3.19). Perceptions on these three aspects of openness and responsiveness tend to move in tandem, meaning that in countries with a significantly improved perception for example of the adoption of innovative ideas, perceptions of the other two also improved. The exception is Sweden, where an increasing share find it likely that they can voice their opinion on local governments' decisions and that innovative ideas would be adopted, but a decreasing share find it likely public services would be improved following complaints.

Figure 3.17. Around 40% of individuals across the OECD remained confident that they have a voice in local governance

Share of population who find it likely or unlikely that they have an opportunity to voice their opinion on local government's decision, 2021 and 2023

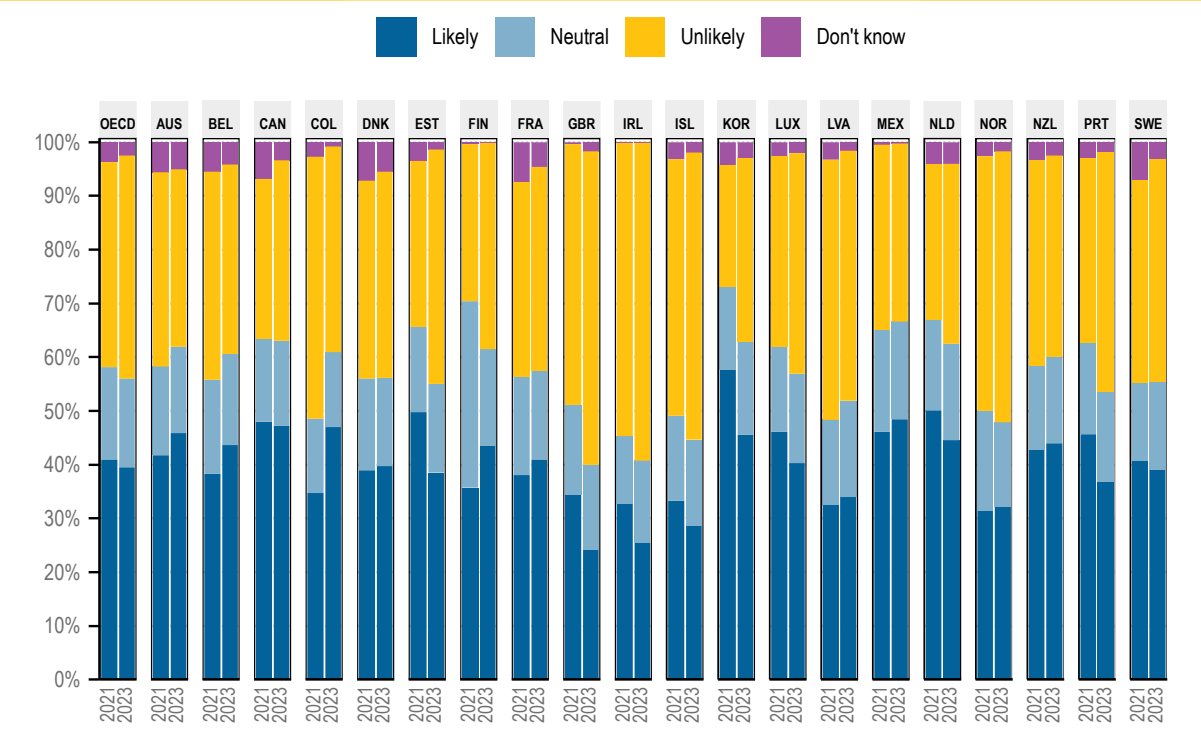


Note: The figures present the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If a decision affecting your local community is to be made by the local government, how likely do you think it is that you would have an opportunity to voice your opinion?" in 2021 and 2023. The 2021 survey question was worded slightly differently in Norway (''If a decision is to be made which will impact on the area where you live, how likely is it that you and other local residents will be given the opportunity to influence the decision?''), in Mexico (''If the authorities were to make a decision that would affect the area where you live, how likely is it that the people who live there would have the opportunity to influence that decision?'') and in Finland (''If a decision affecting your community were to be taken by the local or regional government, how likely is it that you and others in the community would have an opportunity to voice your concerns?''). 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, for the listed countries for which the variable was available in 2021 and 2023.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/3hkwn5

Figure 3.18. Perceptions of service responsiveness to complaints about public services remained almost the same on average between 2021 and 2023

Share of population who find it likely or unlikely that governments improve public services if many people complain, 2021 and 2023

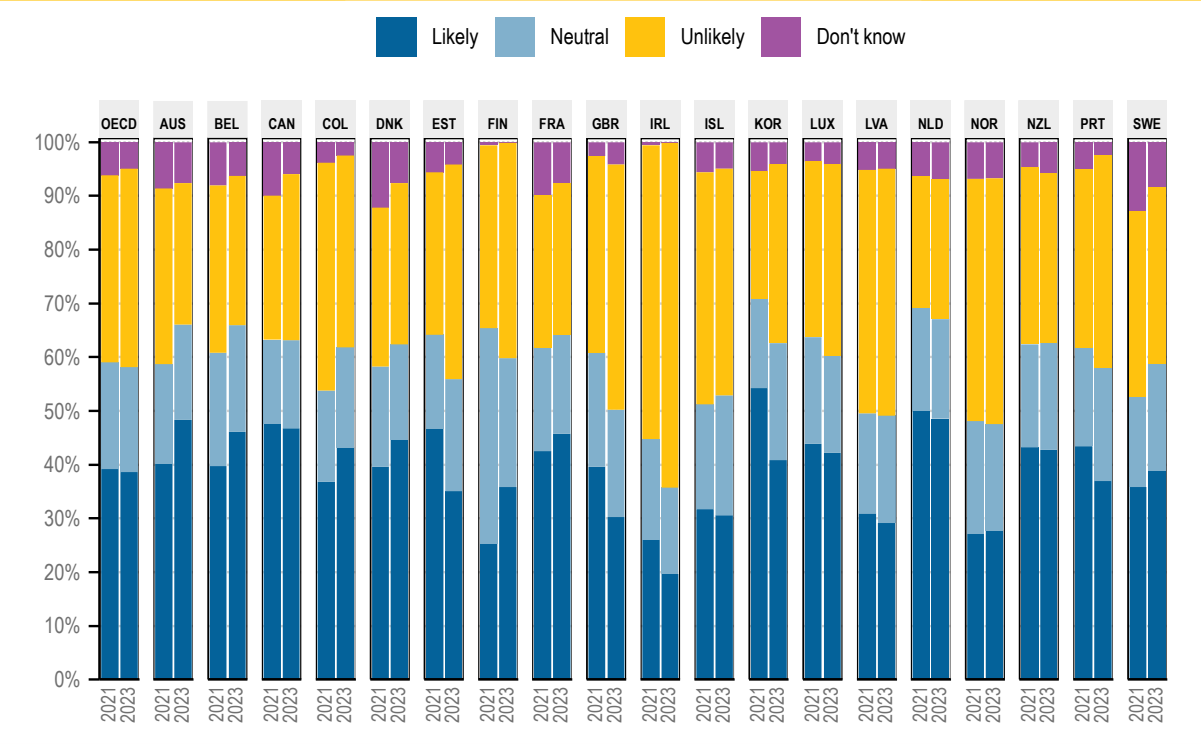


Note: The figures present the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If many people complained about a public service that is working badly, how likely do you think it is that it would be improved?" in 2021 and 2023. The 2021 survey question was worded slightly differently in Norway (''If you complain about the quality of a public service, how likely is it that it will be improved?''), in Mexico (''If many people complained about the quality of a public service, how likely would the government be to improve it?'') and in Finland (''If a large group of citizens expresses dissatisfaction with the functioning of a public service (e.g. the education, health or justice system) do you think that corrective actions will be taken?''). 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, for the listed countries for which the variable was available in 2021 and 2023.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/jxca4l

Figure 3.19. In many countries, perceptions about the responsiveness of public institutions to innovative ideas have remained relatively stable

Share of population who find it likely or unlikely that public institutions adopt innovative ideas if they can improve public service, 2021 and 2023



Note: The figures present the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If there was an innovative idea that could improve a public service, how likely do you think it is that it would be adopted by the responsible institution?" in 2021 and 2023. The 2021 survey question was worded slightly differently in Norway (''If a public employee has a suggestion on how to improve a service, how likely is it that the suggestion will be taken into account?'') and in Finland (''If a government employee has an idea that could lead to better provision of a public service, do you think that it would be adopted?). 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, for the listed countries for which the variable was available in 2021 and 2023.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/jnfux9

3.5. CONCLUSION FOR POLICY ACTION TO ENHANCE TRUST

While on the day-to-day interactions with citizens, the levels of satisfaction are relatively good, they remain very important for trust and areas of focus for the future include the following:

- While the majority is satisfied with the daily provision of public services, decreasing satisfaction levels among users of healthcare and education systems in the past 2 years call for close monitoring in the future.
- A majority expresses satisfaction with administrative services, highlighting their quality, the courtesy and competence of employees, and the clarity of information. However, improving the speed and ease of service delivery would contribute to even higher satisfaction levels.
- While enhancing service speed and ease, it is critical to ensure and communicate around responsible data use, as this is closely linked with trust in the civil service. Importantly in the digital environment, a majority is confident in the government's responsible handling of personal data, with increased satisfaction since 2021. The relatively positive confidence in this aspect gives a solid basis for further investments in digital public infrastructure and digital government that continue to be crucial.
- Most people believe their personal applications for benefits or services will be handled fairly, however, fewer are confident that all individuals, regardless of background, will receive similar treatment. Moreover, perceptions of fairness are lower among individuals who identify as belonging to a group that is discriminated against. Ensuring that individuals regardless of their background can be confident they will receive fair treatment can contribute to trust, as these variables are positively associated with high or moderately high trust in the national civil service and local government.
- On average, over 43% of people in surveyed OECD countries believe that a civil servant might engage in petty corruption, while only 36% think otherwise. Countries would need to ensure that public integrity frameworks are in place and fully implemented (OECD, 2024[7]).
- Only 39% of people believe that public services would improve following complaints or that public agencies would adopt innovative ideas to improve services. This indicates that governments should be more open to modifying their processes based on feedback from users or ideas from frontline public employees. Efforts to increase responsiveness must balance innovation and increased use of citizen feedback with ethical considerations.

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NOTES

[1] An average of 39% of Trust Survey respondents had contact with the education system in the past two years, either directly or through a family member; and an average of 83% of respondents either used the healthcare system personally within the last twelve months, or had a household member who used it. Overall satisfaction with the education and healthcare system among the entire adult population, including those who were not in contact with the systems in the respective time frames, are similarly high to satisfaction among users: An average of 53% of all individuals are satisfied with the education and 51% with the healthcare system.

[2] In the Gallup World Poll, satisfaction with the educational system is based on the proportion of respondents who answered "satisfied" to "In the city or area where you live, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the educational system or the schools?". The OECD average for 2010 was 67%, for 2017 65% and for 2022 67%. Compared to the proportion of respondents who give an answer of six to ten on the scale of how satisfied they are with the educational system in their country, satisfaction levels measured this way through the Gallup World Poll are generally higher. For example, for the 2022 Gallup World Poll, the cross-country average for satisfaction was 70% for the 30 countries that participated in the 2023 OECD Trust Survey, compared to the 53% with moderate to high satisfaction as measured by the OECD Trust Survey.

However, when adding the group of 'neutral' respondents (5 on the 0-10 scale) to the proportion of 'satisfied' respondents, the OECD Trust Survey result is considerably closer to the level of satisfaction measured by Gallup: 66%, just slightly below the value measured by Gallup a year prior. It therefore appears that the binary choice of forcing respondents into clear statement whether they are satisfied or dissatisfied induces relatively neutral respondents to declare that they are satisfied with the system. However, differences in the geographic scale of the question (city or area where you live versus country) and in the reference year (2022 versus 2023) can clearly also contribute to differences in the values measured by the two surveys.

[3] The countries are Australia, Belgium, Canada, Chile, France, Germany, Italy, Korea, Mexico, Spain, Sweden and United Kingdom (excluding Northern Ireland). The trend is comparable when including Hungary, Japan, Poland and the United States in the averages.

[4] In 2023, an average of 53% of Trust Survey respondents used an administrative service in the past twelve months. Average satisfaction among all individuals, including those who did not obtain an administrative service in the past year, is equal to 63%.

[5] The 2021 OECD Trust Survey did not include a question on whether the respondent used an administrative service in the prior year.

4 Trust in Government on complex policy issues

The relationship between government and the public is also shaped by government decision-making processes and outcomes on complex policy issues. This chapter explores public perception of government competencies and values in relation to complex decision-making. Specifically, it explores how people rate government reliability in emergency preparedness, in balancing the interests of current and future generations, in mitigating greenhouse gas emissions, and regulating artificial intelligence. The chapter also discusses the extent to which people perceive that decision-making is carried out with integrity for the public good rather than for private interests and that people can influence decision-making. Institutional safeguards, such as parliament's ability to hold the government accountable, are also considered. Finally, the chapter shows the ways in which people in OECD countries participate in political activities, as well as their expectations of government's openness and responsiveness to public input.

The relationship between government and citizens is defined not only through the day-to-day interactions with the public, but also through the planning, design and decision-making process of policies that address major challenges. In a context of multiple crises, people expect public institutions in general and governments in particular to respond at scale and speed, but also to strengthen democratic resilience, by enhancing competences to deliver long-term sustainable gains in well-being and by maintaining high-quality institutions ensuring representative government and meaningful engagement, respect for fundamental rights and checks on government.

Findings from the OECD Trust Survey suggest that a majority believe that government institutions can reliably manage large scale emergencies to protect people's lives. Together with the high satisfaction in public services, this suggests that there exists a relatively high store of faith in the government's ability to fulfil this part of its core functions. This stock of faith shrinks when it comes to assessing the ability of government to adequately address policy issues with long-term implications, difficult trade-offs, interconnected domestic and global governance, and large unknowns, such as climate change and the emergence of artificial intelligence. While some of the less positive results are related to the inherent uncertainty and complexity associated with these policy areas, concerns about a lack of integrity and fairness both of high-level political officials and government policy overall can contribute to citizens' unease with government's ability to take policy decisions both competently and ethically.

In democratic systems, people rightly expect that their political system fosters checks and balances within and between government branches and through elections. While a higher share of people believe that parliament can hold the executive government accountable than have positive assessments for other integrity measures, the share that does so remains below 40%. Trust Survey respondents express low confidence in their own capacity to participate in politics and in the political system giving people like them a say in what government does. Many are also sceptical of the ability or willingness of government to not only listen to them, but act upon what they have to say. Maintaining the well-perceived performance with regards to emergency readiness, ensuring that parliament can exercise its function as a check on the executive, investing in integrity measures against undue influence and ensuring that citizens deliberative and consultative processes, where they exist, are well-integrated into the broader decision-making system of representative democracy could all serve to strengthen confidence that policy making is competent and values-based and ultimately improve trust in the national government and parliament.

4.1. A MAJORITY OF PEOPLE SEE PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS AS RELIABLE IN CASE OF EMERGENCIES

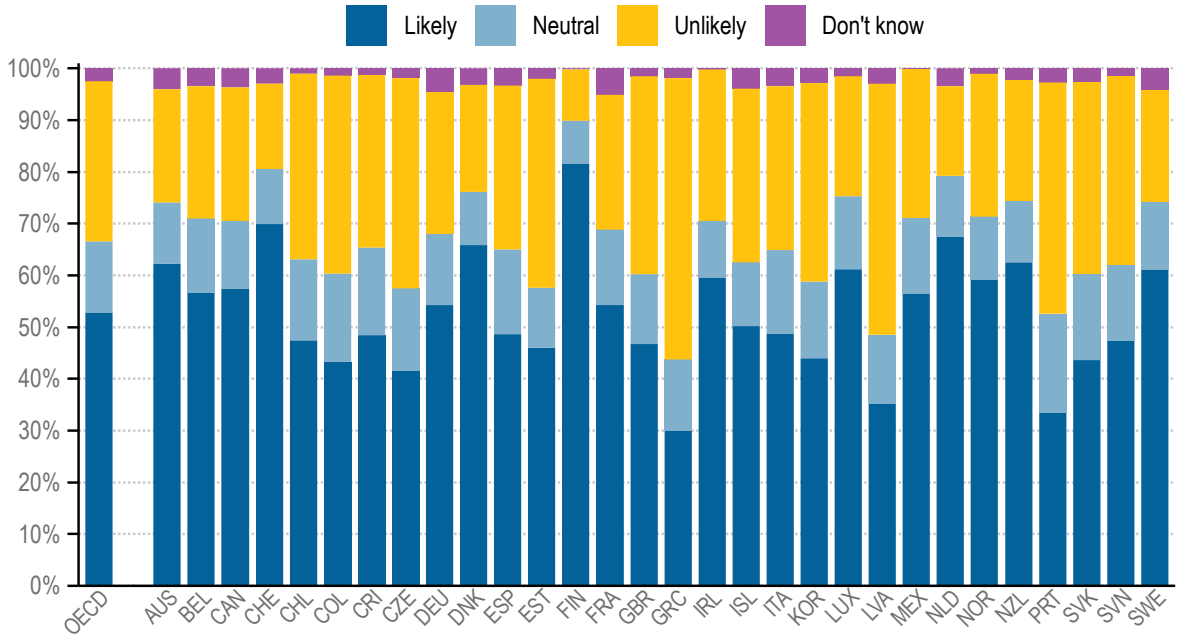
In recent years, several crises have threatened the wellbeing of people worldwide, but investments in emergency preparedness appear to bear some fruit. In many instances, governments in OECD countries have responded at speed and scale to economic, public health and security shocks, and seemed to have contained their impact on trust levels. In part, this may be due to the advances that OECD countries have made in recent years in assessing, preventing, and responding to crises or disaster which entail large socio-economic impacts (OECD, 2023[1]).

Many people express a favourable view of governments' ability to respond to crises. On average across countries, 53% express confidence that their government would be prepared to protect people's lives in the event of a large-scale emergency, while 31% think it would not be prepared (Figure 4.1).

Unlike in 2021, where the question referred to the preparation of governments to protect lives in the event of a new serious contagious disease, the 2023 question does not specify the type of emergency. Evidence from cognitive testing carried out by the Australian Bureau of Statistics prior to the implementation of the survey suggests that respondents think of different types of emergencies when answering this question (OECD, Forthcoming[2]), including pandemics and natural disasters. Despite the more open-ended nature of the question, the share of people who are confident in government preparedness increased across the countries that participated in both waves, rising from 51% in 2021 to 55% in 2023 (Figure 4.7).

Figure 4.1. A majority says government institutions would be ready to protect lives in a large-scale emergency

Share of population who find it likely or unlikely that government institutions are ready to protect people's lives in a large-scale emergency, 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If there was a large-scale emergency, how likely do you think it is that government institutions would be ready to protect people's lives?". 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 of responses across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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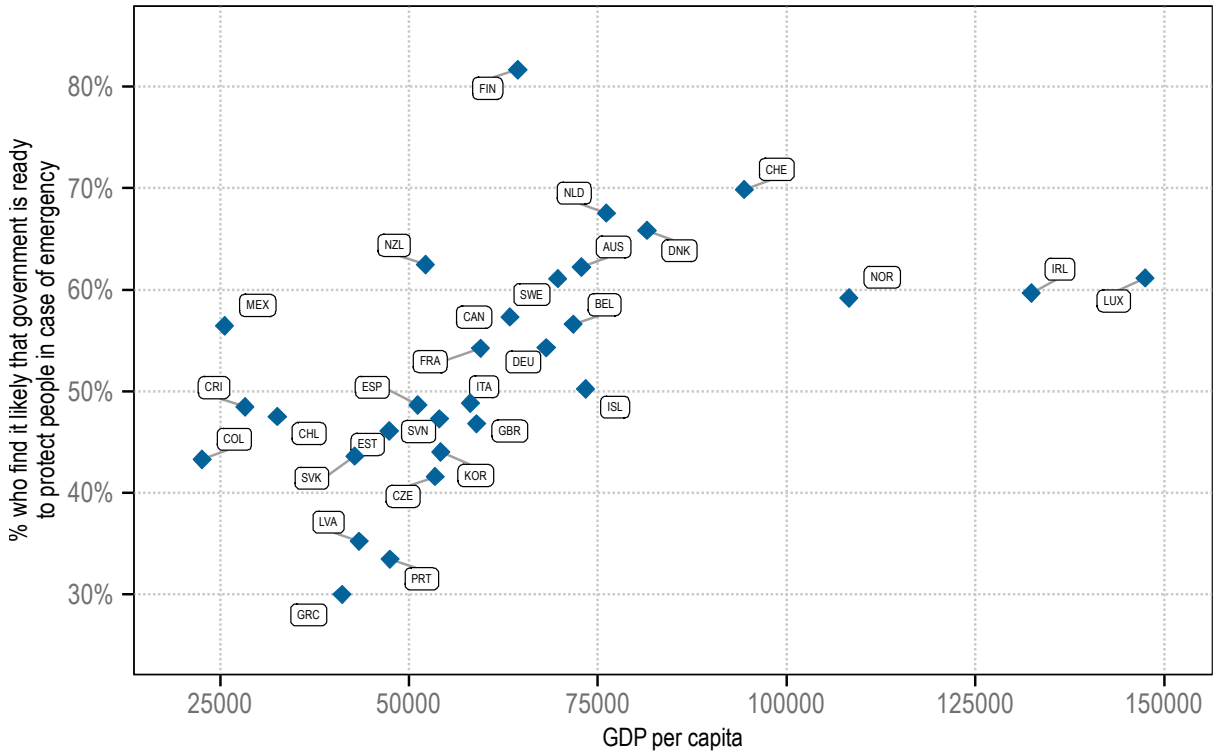
In a multi-crisis environment with a rising sense of insecurity globally (UNDP, 2022[3])), the fact that a majority of people have faith in the emergency preparedness and reliability of their public institutions indicates that the actions of OECD governments during recent crises have reassured the majority of their populations. However, differences across countries are relatively high compared to other questions. In Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, more than two thirds find it likely that institutions would be ready to protect people's lives, while in Greece, Latvia, and Portugal, the share is at or below 35%.

Perceptions in this regard may be due to a combination of reasons, including perceived vulnerability of the country in the current context, evaluation of previous experiences, and different assessments of the resources and capacity of a country. Indeed, an earlier analysis showed that over the 1995-2010 period, OECD countries with lower per-capita income experienced a larger loss of life from disasters than higher-income countries (OECD/The World Bank, 2019[4])). In general, there does appear to be a linear relationship between improving perceptions of emergency readiness and rising levels of GDP per capita (Figure 4.2). However, the relationship is not perfect as Latin American countries and Finland perform better than their GDP per capita would suggest.

Figure 4.2. On average, a higher share of people in higher-income countries compared to lower-income countries believe government institutions are prepared for emergencies

Share of population in country who find it likely that government institutions are ready to protect lives in case of a large-scale emergency (y-axis) and purchasing power adjusted GDP per capita (x-axis), 2023



Note: The figure shows the country average of the share of respondents who selected likely (responses 6-10 on the 0-10 scale) to the question "If there was a large-scale emergency, how likely do you think it is that government institutions would be ready to protect people's lives?".
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023 and OECD (2024), "GDP – Expenditure Approach: Per Head, US $, current prices, current PPPs, seasonally adjusted", *Quarterly National Accounts*.

StatLink https://stat.link/o7rbu3

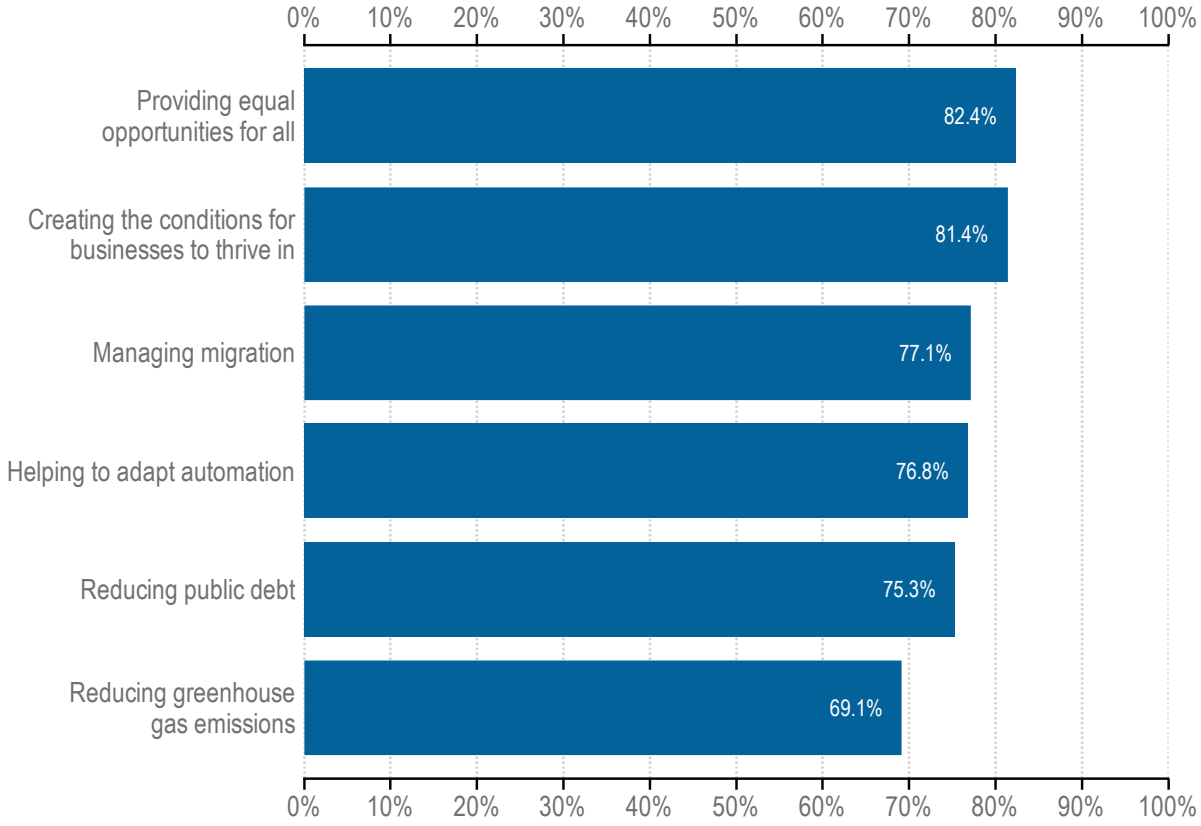
4.2. GOVERNMENT IS SEEN AS LESS RELIABLE IN ADDRESSING COMPLEX POLICY CHALLENGES INVOLVING MANY UNKNOWNS OR TRADE-OFFS

Crisis management and preparation require public institutions to make decisions amidst uncertainty. This complexity and uncertainty are compounded when dealing with complex policy issues which have long-term and global ramifications, as their potential impacts are even more difficult to assess. These inherent difficulties likely contribute to lower levels of confidence in the government's ability to handle complex policy challenges such as new technologies, balancing the needs of current and future generations, or tackling climate change.

Public expectations regarding the governance and application of new technologies are high; on average across OECD countries, 77% of people think that helping workers to adapt to automation, digitalisation and new technologies should be highly prioritised in their country (Figure 4.3). Yet only four in ten people (41%) find it likely that the national government would adequately regulate new technologies, such as artificial intelligence and digital applications, and help businesses and citizens use them responsibly, while more than one third (35%) think it unlikely (Figure 4.4). Differences among countries on this question are relatively small.

Figure 4.3. Providing equal opportunities for all and creating the conditions for businesses to thrive are seen as policy areas that countries should prioritise

Share of population who think it is important that their country prioritises the respective goal, OECD, 2023



Note: The figure shows the unweighted OECD average of the share of population who indicate the goal is important (responses 6-10 on a 0-10 scale) when answering the question "How important do you think it is that each of the following goals are prioritised in [COUNTRY]?".
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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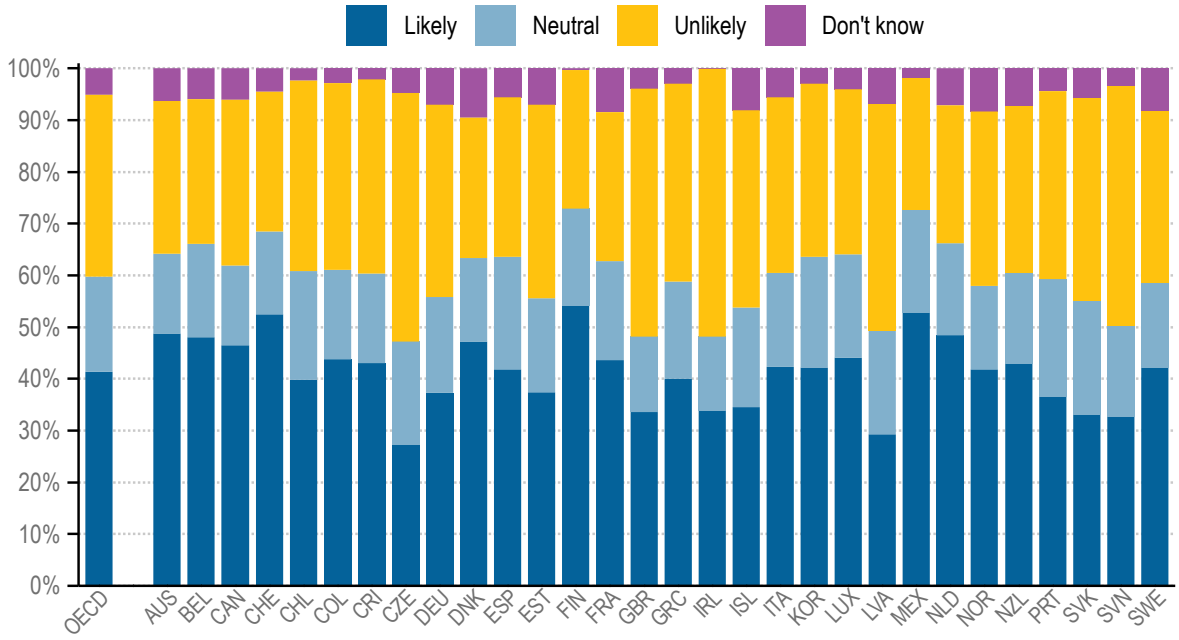
Figure 4.4. More than one third think it unlikely that government can regulate new technologies appropriately and help businesses and citizens use them responsibly

Share of population who find it likely or unlikely that government will regulate new technologies appropriately and help businesses and individuals use them responsibly, 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If new technologies (for example artificial intelligence or digital applications) became available, how likely do you think it is that the federal/central/national government will regulate them appropriately and help businesses and citizens use them responsibly?". 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 of responses across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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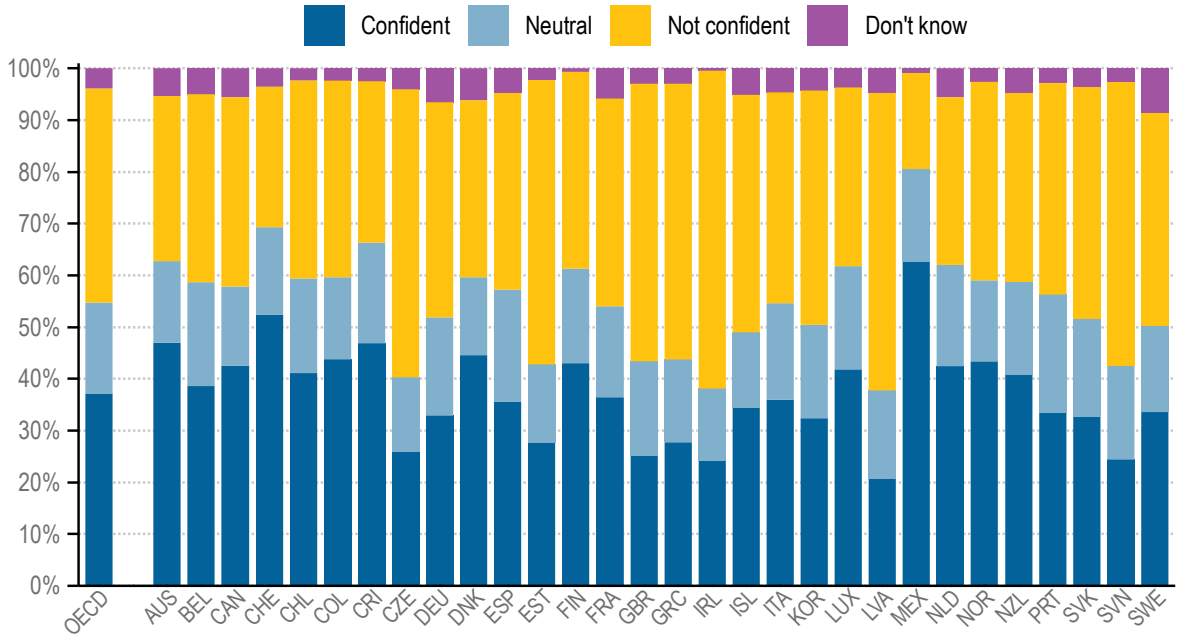
In addition, slightly more than one third of people (37%) believe that government can adequately balance the needs of different generations, while 41% do not believe so (Figure 4.5). Results vary among countries, and Mexico and Switzerland are the only countries in which more than half of the adult population are confident that the government adequately balances the interest of current and future generations.

Perceptions of government capacity to respond to emergencies and promote intergenerational fairness in their policy making closely tie in with trust in public institutions. When analysing a diverse set of drivers of trust, public confidence that the government can balance the interests of current and future generations emerges as having the second-highest association with trust in the national government, and is likewise a significant driver of trust in the national parliament. The belief that the government is ready to protect lives is also associated with an increased likelihood of having high or moderately high trust in the national government (see Chapter 1 and Annex A).

Figure 4.5. There are more people who find it unlikely than who find it likely that government can balance the interests of current and future generations

Share of population reporting different levels confidence that the national government can adequately balance the interests of current and future generations, 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "On a scale of 0 to 10, how confident are you that the national government adequately balances the interests of current and future generations?". 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.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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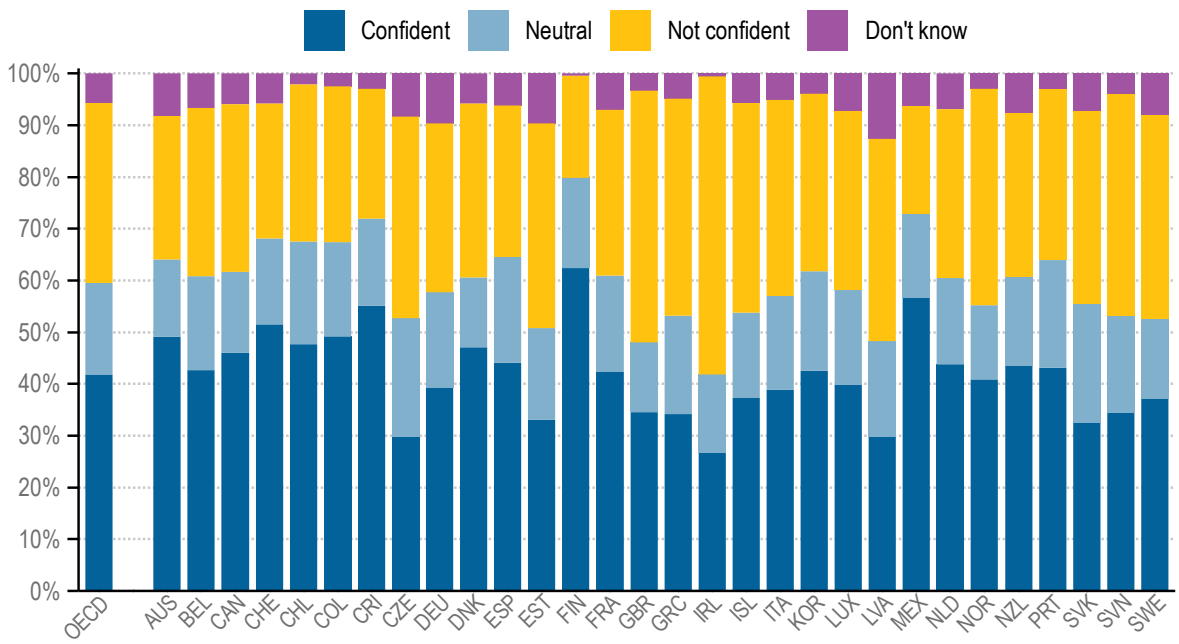
On average across countries, 21% of individuals indicate that climate change and other environmental issues constitute one of the top three concerns in their country (Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1). With regards to public perception that their country will be able to reduce greenhouse gas emissions over the coming ten years, 42% are confident that the country will succeed, compared to 35% who lack confidence (Figure 4.6). These results suggest people appear to be more optimistic than the evidence should allow as current predictions indicate that greenhouse gas emissions will not reduce to limit global warming to 1.5C (UNEP, 2022[5]).[1] This discrepancy is likely explained by several factors: People may respond on whether they expect that overall emissions can be reduced rather than that international agreements or carbon neutrality are met. In addition, other factors such as the technical nature of the topic, the effect of political communications that proclaim to make carbon neutrality a strategic compass (Green Deal, Paris Agreement...), and limited deciphering by the media on the implementation of these measures and their effectiveness could also have contributed to this result.

Figure 4.6. An average of four in ten are confident their country will reduce greenhouse gas emissions

Share of population reporting different levels confidence that their country will succeed in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the next ten years, 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "On a scale of 0 to 10, how confident are you that [COUNTRY] will succeed in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the next ten years?". 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.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

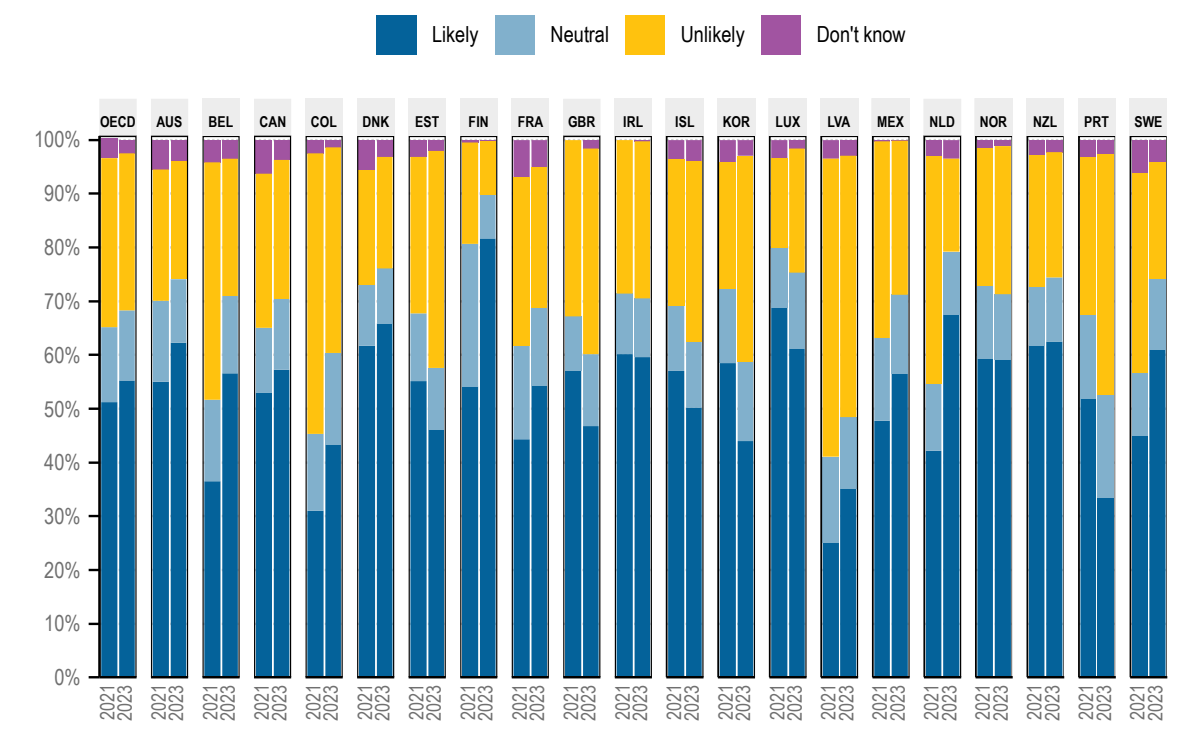
StatLink https://stat.link/deybtk

Box 4.1. Spotlight on changes: Confidence in government's emergency preparedness and in reducing country's greenhouse gas emissions

Despite a more open-ended question on emergency preparedness in 2023, the average share of the adult population who believe government institutions would be ready to protect people's lives has risen, both on average across the OECD and in the majority of countries, with particular high gains in Finland (Figure 4.7). Compared to the 2021 survey, confidence in the achievement of emission reductions also appears to have slightly increased, rising from 36% to 40% in the countries with available information for both years (Figure 4.8).

Figure 4.7. Confidence in governments' emergency preparedness increased in a majority of OECD countries

Share of population who find it likely or unlikely that their government is ready to protect people's lives in case of emergency (2023) or a new serious contagious disease (2021)



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question concerning the emergency preparedness of their government. In the 2021 wave, the question asked, "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 life?". In the 2023 wave, the question wording changed to, "If there was a large-scale emergency, how likely do you think it is that government institutions would be ready to protect people's lives?". The survey question in 2021 followed a slightly different wording in Norway: ''If a new and serious infectious disease were to start spreading in Norway, how likely is it that the authorities would be sufficiently prepared to be able to protect the citizens' lives and health?'' and in Finland ''If an alert due to the appearance of a new disease is raised, do you think that existing public health plans would be effective?''. In both waves, the "likely" proportion represents 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, for the listed countries for which the variable was available in 2021 and 2023.

Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023.

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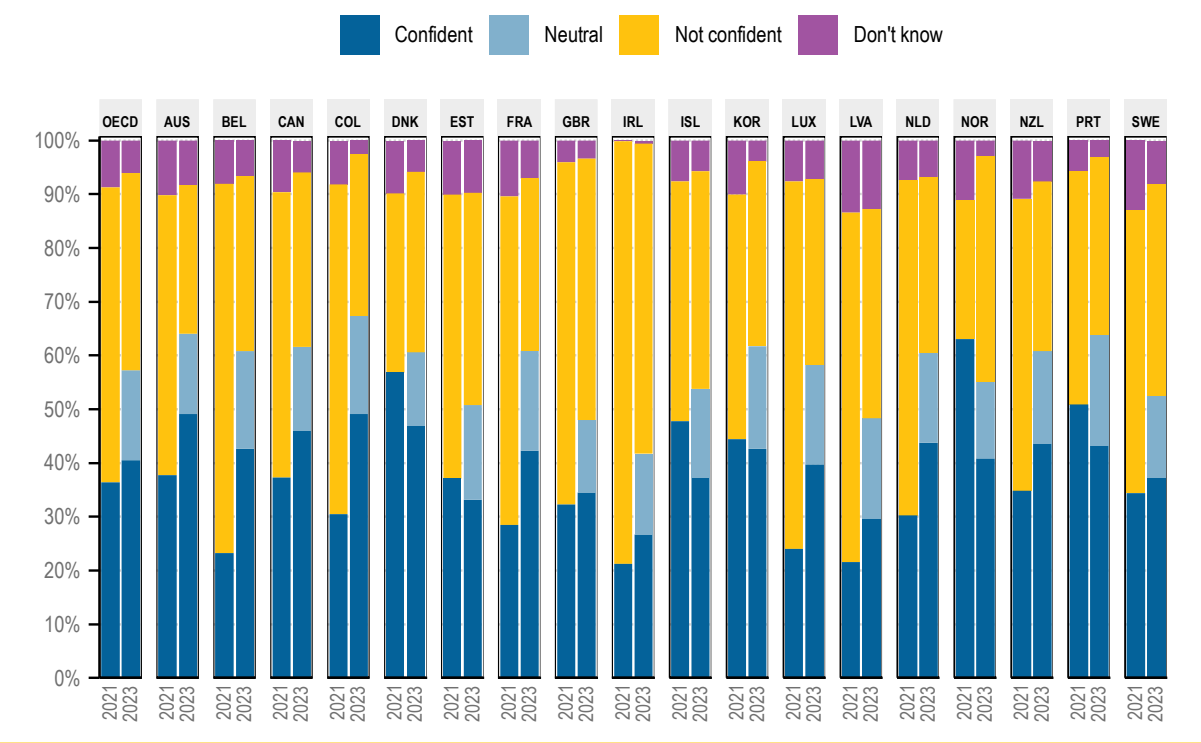
Figure 4.8. Confidence in their country's ability to reduce greenhouse gas emissions slightly increased in many countries

Share of population reporting different levels of confidence in government's ability to succeed in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the next ten years



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses among all respondents to the question "How confident are you that [COUNTRY] will succeed in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the next 10 years?". The survey question in 2021 followed a slightly different wording in Norway: ''To what extent do you agree or disagree that public authorities do enough to protect the environment?''. The answer scale differed between 2023 and 2021. In 2023, the "confident" proportion aggregates responses from 6 to 10 on the scale; "neutral" corresponds to a response of 5; "not confident" aggregates responses from 0 to 4; and "don't know" was a separate answer choice. In 2021, the scale comprised four answer options. In Ireland the response scale included five options instead of only four in 2021, which were rescaled to match the cross-country data with four options (''quite confident'' and ''very confident'' became ''somewhat confident'). Consequently, in 2021, the "confident" proportion aggregates responses for "somewhat" and "completely"; "not confident" aggregates responses for "not at all" and "a little". "OECD" presents the unweighted average of responses across countries, for the listed countries where the variable is available in both 2021 and 2023. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries, for the listed countries for which the variable was available in 2021 and 2023.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/8sr4ou

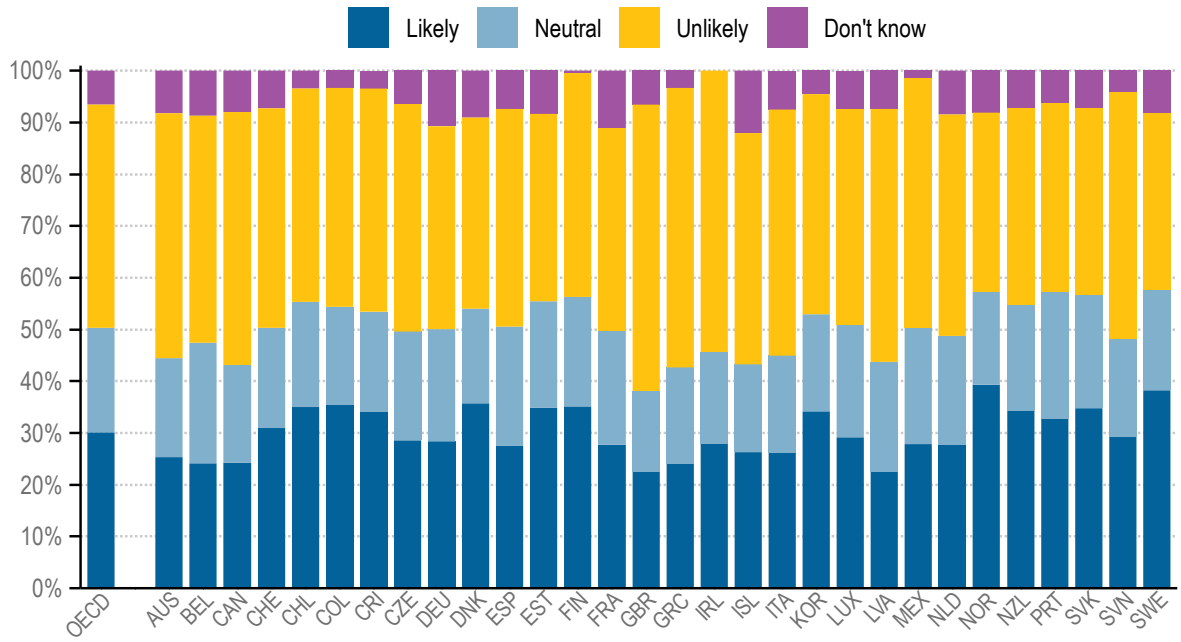
4.3. MOST PEOPLE FEEL DECISION-MAKING FAVOURS PRIVATE SECTOR INTERESTS OVER THE PUBLIC INTEREST

Policy preferences and conceptions of fairness can vary from person to person. Despite these varying perspectives and preferences, citizens universally value decision makers who are guided by considerations of what is best for society. Findings from the Trust Survey, however, reveal concerns that private interests exert an oversized influence on the government. There is a general perception that public decisions over policies may be repeatedly diverted away from the public interest towards special interests and interests of the "powerful", undermining democratic values and exacerbating a sense of exclusion and inequalities from the democratic political system.

On average across countries, 43% of respondents say it is likely that the national government would accept the demands of a corporation promoting a policy beneficial to their industry but harmful to the society as a whole, and only three in ten respondents (30%) believe that the government would refuse a corporation's demands, with small difference among countries. However, it also needs to be noted that the share of respondents who give a neutral response (20%) or who do not know (7%) is unusually high for this question (Figure 4.9).

Figure 4.9. Fewer than one in three people find it likely that the government would refuse a corporation's demand if it went against the public interest

Share of population who find it likely or unlikely that the government would refuse the corporation's demand, 2023



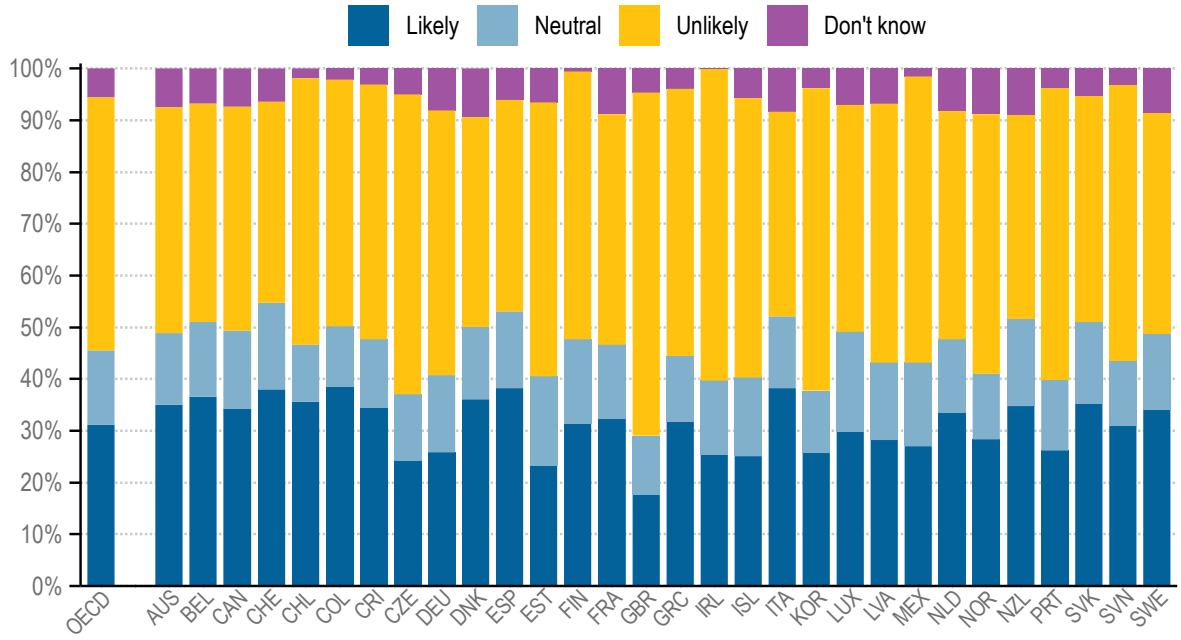
Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If a corporation promoted a policy that benefited its industry but could be harmful to society as a whole, how likely do you think it is that the national government would agree to the corporation's demand?". For ease of analysis, the direction of the answers were turned around, to match a share of likely with a positive meaning. In detail, the share of 'likely the government agree to' of the original question corresponds to 'unlikely government refuses' above. The "likely" proportion is therefore the aggregation of responses from 0-4 on the scale of the original question; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "unlikely" is the aggregation of responses from 6-10; and "Don't know" was a separate answer choice. "OECD" presents the unweighted average of responses across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/arckbi

Across OECD countries, there is also a widespread scepticism about the integrity of high-level political officials and concerns over undue influence. On average, almost half of respondents (49%) predict that a high-level political official would grant a political favour in exchange for the offer of a well-paid private sector job; while close to a third (31%) find it likely he or she would refuse to grant the favour (Figure 4.10). For both integrity questions, the variation in perceptions between countries is smaller than for most other public governance drivers. In particular, there is no country where at least four in ten respondents find it likely that the political official or national government would refuse to grant a political favour or enact a policy that might be against the public interest. Moreover, in the 18 countries with available information in both years, the share of people who believe that a high-level political official would refuse to grant a favour decreased from an average of 32% in 2021 to 30% in 2023 (Figure 4.11).

Figure 4.10. Nearly one in two doubt that a high-level political official would refuse to grant a political favour in return for a well-paid private sector job

Share of population who find it likely or unlikely that a high-level political official would refuse to grant a political favour, 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If a politician was offered a well-paid job in the private sector in exchange for a political favour, how likely do you think it is that they would refuse it?". 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 of responses across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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While lobbying and other influence practices are a natural part of the democratic process, the manner in which these practices take place is critical to democratic resilience. Lobbying by business and other interest groups can serve to bring diverse perspectives to the attention of policy makers. However, if special interest groups disproportionately influence decision-making or use misleading evidence to advance their own interests or manipulate public opinion, public policies and democracy itself suffer. The same is true if political decision makers breach political integrity standards and use their position to further the commercial or political interests of particular groups (OECD, 2023[6]). Yet many OECD countries lack the full safeguards to prevent corruption in

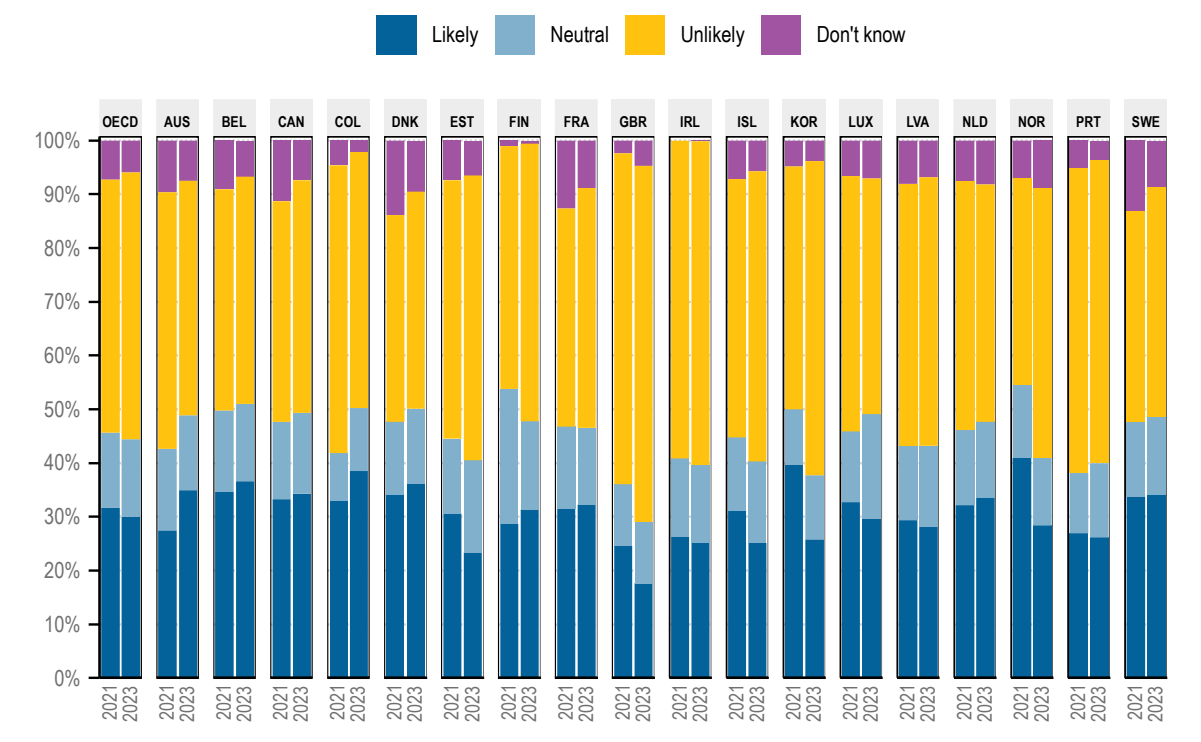
lobbying and conflict-of-interest situations; and where they exist, these safeguards are not always applied: On average across 28 OECD countries, only 38% of standard regulatory safeguards on lobbying are in place, and only 35% are implemented in practice. Likewise, as measured against OECD standards, regulations in OECD countries to safeguard against conflicts of interest meet 76% of criteria on average, but their actual implementation only meet 40%. Despite strong regulatory requirements, many countries often fail to track whether interest and asset declarations have been submitted, or have weak procedures to verify their content (OECD, 2024[7]).

Box 4.2. Spotlight on changes: Integrity of high-level political officials

On average across countries, the share of those who find unlikely that a high-level political official would refuse to grant a political favour has increased by three percentage points between 2021 and 2023, particularly in Korea and Norway.

Figure 4.11. The share who find it likely that policy makers act with integrity is slightly declining

Share of population who find it likely or unlikely that a politician would refuse to grant a political favour, 2021 and 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If a politician was offered a well-paid job in the private sector in exchange for a political favour, how likely do you think it is that they would refuse it?". The survey question in 2021 followed a slightly different wording in Finland ''If a large business offered a well-paid job to a high level politician in exchange for political favours during their time in office, do you think that he/she would refuse this proposal?''. 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, for the listed countries for which the variable was available in 2021 and 2023.

Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023.

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4.4. INSTITUTIONAL CHECKS AND BALANCES, WHICH ARE INTENDED TO ENSURE FAIR DECISION-MAKING, ARE PERCEIVED AS INADEQUATE

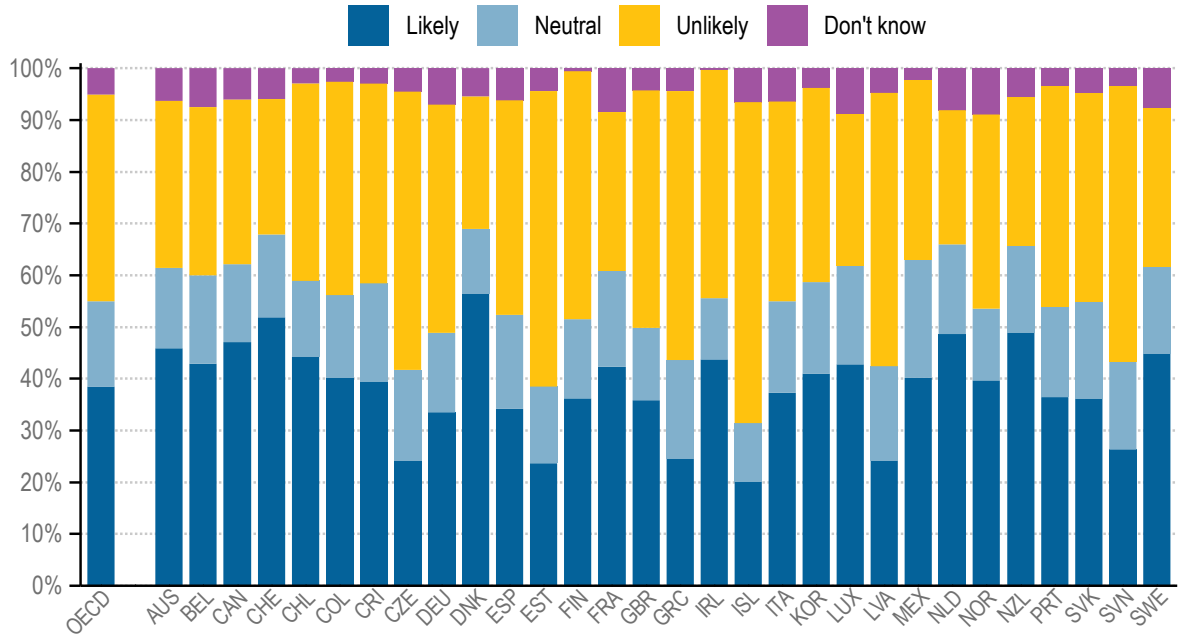
In democracies, the political system is meant to safeguard public interest in policy decision making through checks and balances between the branches of government, and through elections.

Checks and balances, along with constitutional safeguards, ensure that no single branch of government, including the executive national government, can take decisions without the oversight of the other branches of power. The Trust Survey finds that 38% of people believe that the parliament can effectively hold the government accountable, for instance by questioning a minister or reviewing the budget, and a slightly higher share (40%) is sceptical (Figure 4.12). Only in Denmark, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and Switzerland around half of the adult population are confident in the oversight function of parliament. Similarly regarding checks and balances and the relationship between branches of government, the 2021 Trust Survey found that about four in ten (42%) believed that that a court in their country would always make decisions free of political influence (OECD, 2022[8]).

The average share of respondents who find it likely that the national parliament holds the national government accountable in this way (38%) aligns closely with the average share of those with high or moderately high trust in the national parliament (37%). However, while this applies on average, at the individual country level, the share who trust the national parliament and who believe in its ability to hold the national government accountable is not as closely related.

Figure 4.12. On average, close to 40% find it likely that the national parliament holds the national government accountable

Share of population who find it likely or unlikely that the national parliament holds the national government accountable, 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "How likely do you think it is that the national parliament would effectively hold the national government accountable for their policies and behaviour, for instance by questioning a minister or reviewing the budget?". 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 of responses across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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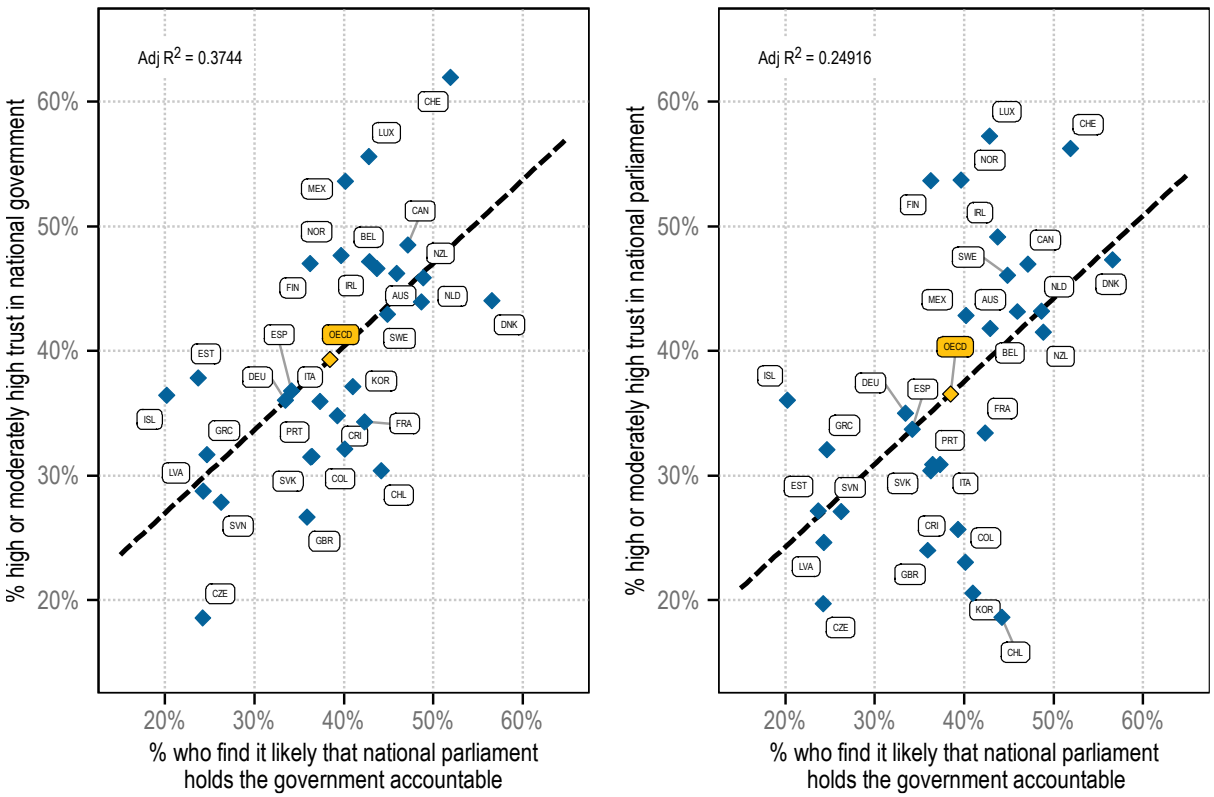
Confidence in the oversight function of parliament is correlated with trust in the national government at the country level, meaning that in countries where more people believe in the checks and balances between different branches of government, trust in the national government is higher. The same relation holds, albeit less strongly, between confidence in the parliament oversight function and trust in parliament (Figure 4.13).

Figure 4.13. Having a higher share of people who believe in the ability of the national parliament to exercise checks on the national government is associated with higher levels of trust in the national government and parliament

Share of population in country who find it likely that the national parliament holds the government accountable (x-axis) and high or moderately high trust in the national government (left-hand axis, left chart) and in the national parliament (left-hand axis, right chart)



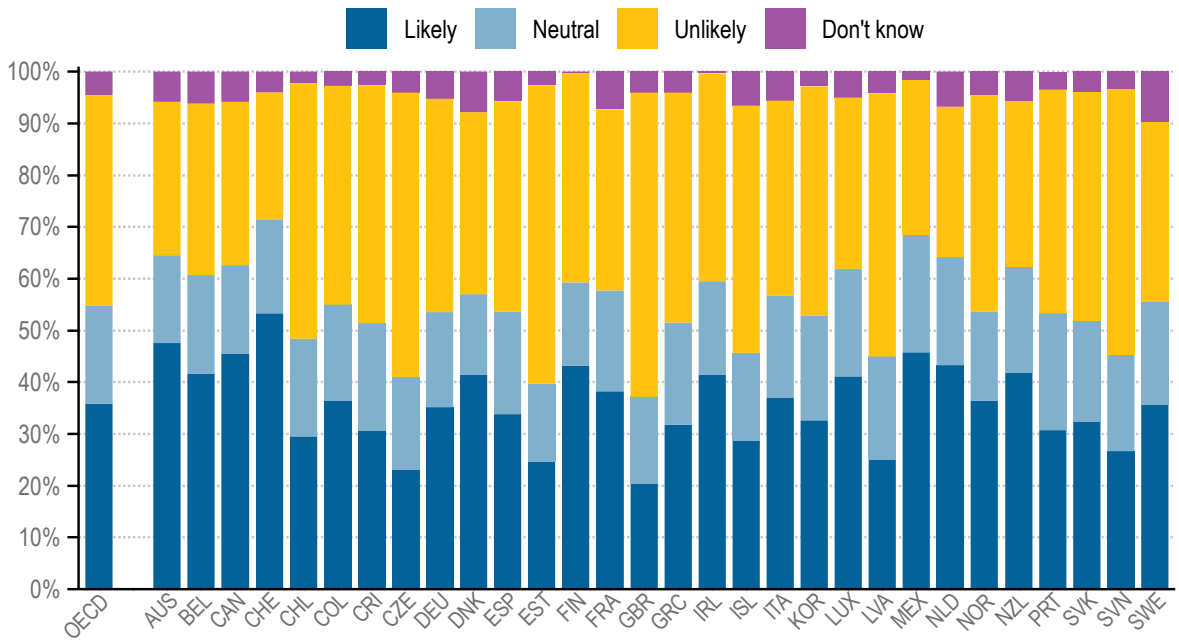
Note: The scatterplot presents the share of "high to moderately high trust" responses to the question "On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely, how much do you trust the national government/national parliament?" on the y-axis of the left and right chart, respectively. The y-axis presents the share of "likely" responses to the question How likely do you think it is that the federal/national parliament would effectively hold the federal/central/national government accountable for their policies and behaviour, for instance by questioning a minister or reviewing the budget?".
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/wvbak0

Of course, one of the biggest challenges in democracies is to define and pursue "public interest" in diverse societies with people of varying needs and preferences. People generally expect the parliament to fairly balances the interests of different regions or groups in society. Here, 36% find it likely that it would adequately do so when debating a new policy, while 41% find it unlikely (Figure 4.14). Among all the variables measuring people's public governance perceptions, this is the single most important one for trust in the national parliament.

Figure 4.14. Slightly more than one third believe that parliament fairly balances the interests of different groups when debating a policy

Share of population who find it likely or unlikely that national parliament fairly balances interests of different groups, 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If the national parliament debated a new policy, how likely do you think it is that it would adequately balance the needs of different regions and groups in society?. 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 of responses across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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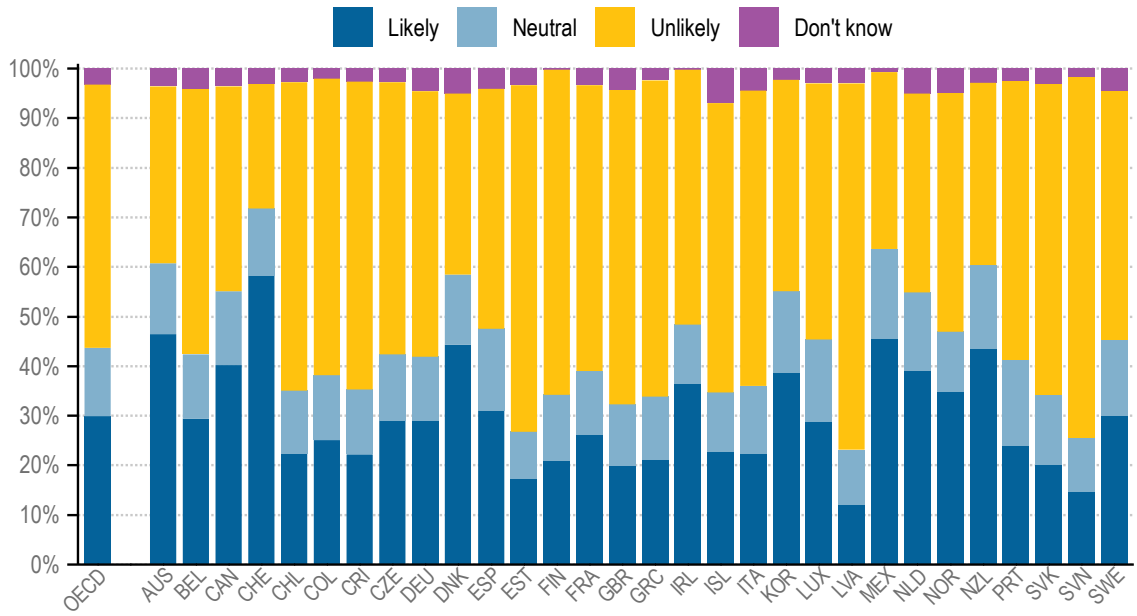
4.5. GOVERNMENT DECISION-MAKING IS SEEN AS UNRESPONSIVE TO THE PUBLIC, WEAKENING THE MEANING OF REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

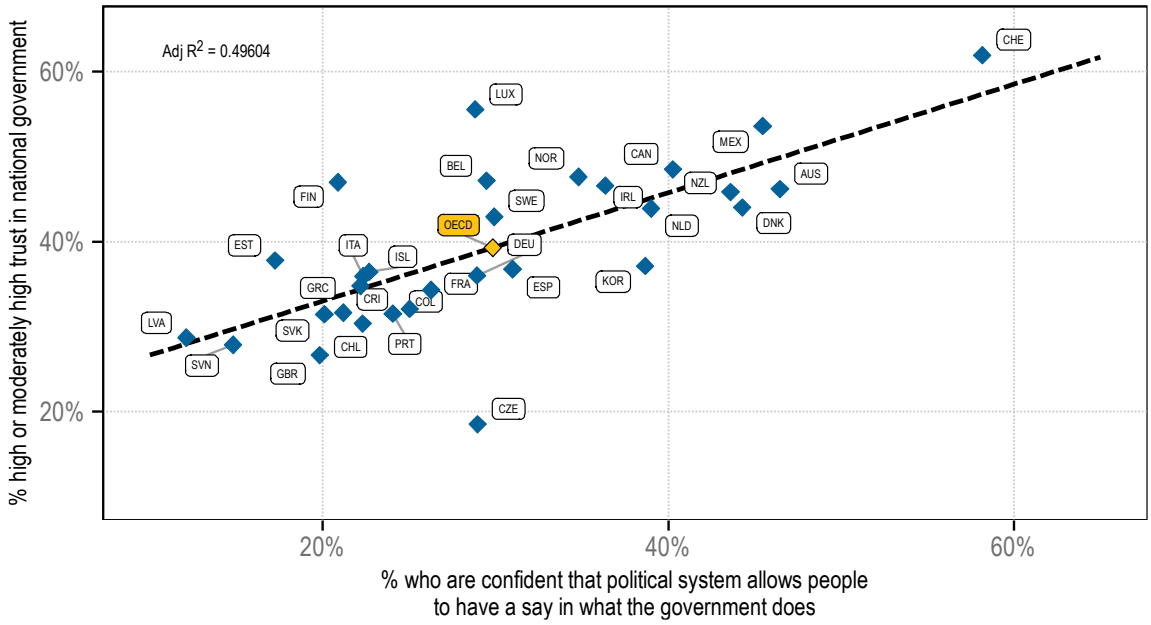
In democracies, the main instrument for the public to hold government and parliament accountable are free and fair elections, but not all individuals feel equipped to participate in the political system. On average, 82% indicated that they had voted in the last national elections. High participation rates, nonetheless, do not mean that people necessarily believe that they are able to influence politics through the electoral system. In fact, only 40% are confident in their own ability to participate in politics, and an even lower share (30%) believe that the political system in their country allows people like them to have a say in what government does (Figure 4.15, A). On the opposite side, 53% believe that the political system does not allow them to have a say. Out of the approximately 600 million adults across the 30 participating OECD countries, this therefore corresponds to nearly 320 million people who feel that they lack political agency and who will be much less likely to have high or moderately high trust in the national government. Having a say is highly correlated with trust in the national government at the country level (Figure 4.15).

Figure 4.15. Higher confidence in having a say is correlated with higher trust in the national government

Panel A: Share of population reporting different levels of perceived likelihood that the political system allows people to have a say in what the government does, 2023



Panel B: Share of population in country with high or moderately high trust in the national government (y-axis) and who find it likely that political system allows people to have a say in what the government does (x-axis), 2023



Note: Panel A: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question ''How much would you say the political system in [COUNTRY] allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?''. Panel B: The chart illustrates the percentage of respondents reporting "likely" 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?" or answering "high or moderately high trust" 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 national government?". The "likely" or "high or moderately high trust" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale. "OECD" presents the unweighted average of responses across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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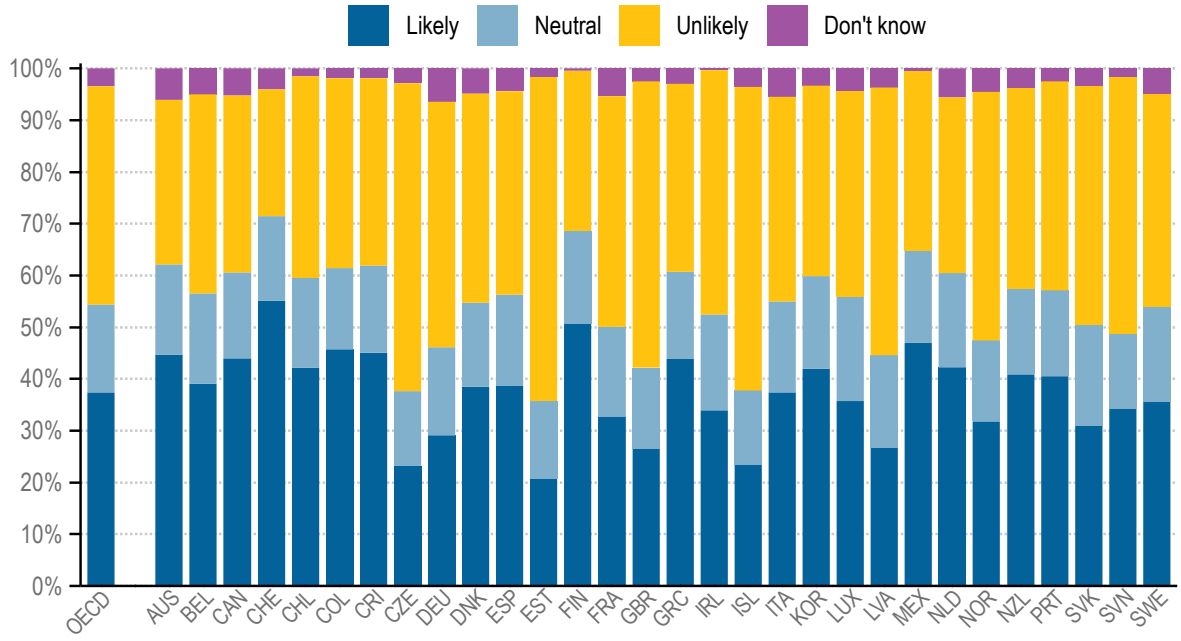
Many see governments as unresponsive to public feedback on policies. Even when feedback is solicited, people do not always feel that opinions are consequently taken into account in decision-making. Slightly more than one third (37%) think that if over half of the people expressed a view against a national policy, it would be changed (Figure 4.16). This share ranges from one fifth in Estonia to over half in Switzerland. Slightly below one third, in turn, think that the government would adopt the opinions expressed in a public consultation on reforming a policy area (Figure 4.17). Moreover, perceptions on both variables have worsened on average since 2021 (Figure 4.20 and Figure 4.21). At the cross-country level, the share who find it likely that government is open to the feedback according to one measure is highly correlated with the other. Perceptions that opinions expressed in a public consultation influence policies and in particular the perception of having a say in government policies are positively associated with increased trust in the national government (see Chapter 1 and Annex A). Both variables also have a positive relationship with trust in the national civil service, as does having a political voice for trust in the national parliament.

Figure 4.16. Slightly more than one in three think that government would change a policy in response to a majority public opinion

Share of population who find it likely or unlikely that government would change a national policy if over half of the people expressed a view against it, 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If over half of the people in [COUNTRY] clearly expressed a view against a national policy, how likely do you think it is that it 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 0-4; and "Don't know" was a separate answer choice. "OECD" presents the unweighted average of responses across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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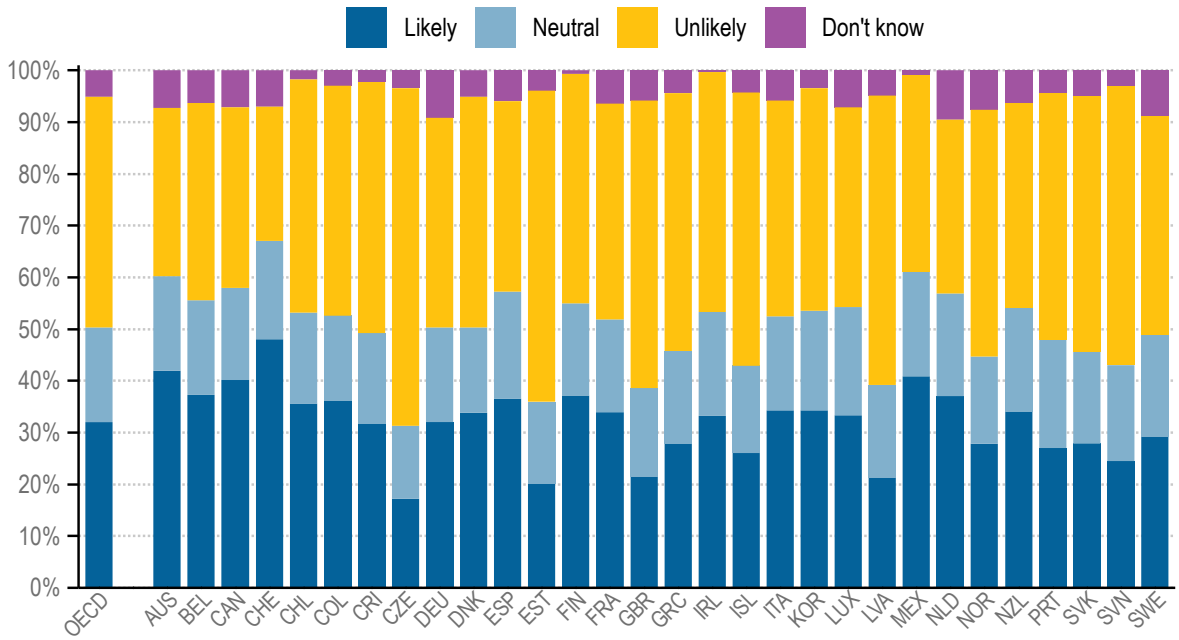
Figure 4.17. Slightly fewer than one in three think that government would adopt the opinions expressed in a public consultation

Share of population who find it likely or unlikely that government would adopt opinions gathered in public consultation, 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If you participated in a public consultation on reforming a policy area, how likely do you think it is that the government would adopt the opinions expressed in the 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 of responses across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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Support for more consultative and deliberative processes with citizens seems to be a prevalent response to this sense of exclusion, lack of political agency, and unresponsiveness of government. There are many ways of involving citizens in decision making, but where governments need to focus is on how meaningful these consultations are. Consulting citizens is not equivalent to consulting stakeholders. In stakeholder consultations, people are heard as representatives of a particular segment of society (private sector, public service users, civil society, academia etc.). It is well known in research that they may have different views as a stakeholder than as a citizen (OECD, 2022[9]): for example, a public service user may well say that the public service should receive more funds, but as a citizen, they may prioritise a different sector of the economy. While stakeholder consultation aims at improving the quality of a policy measure, citizens' engagement is a democracy-enhancing process and involves more responsibility of government to follow up on the results of the consultation.

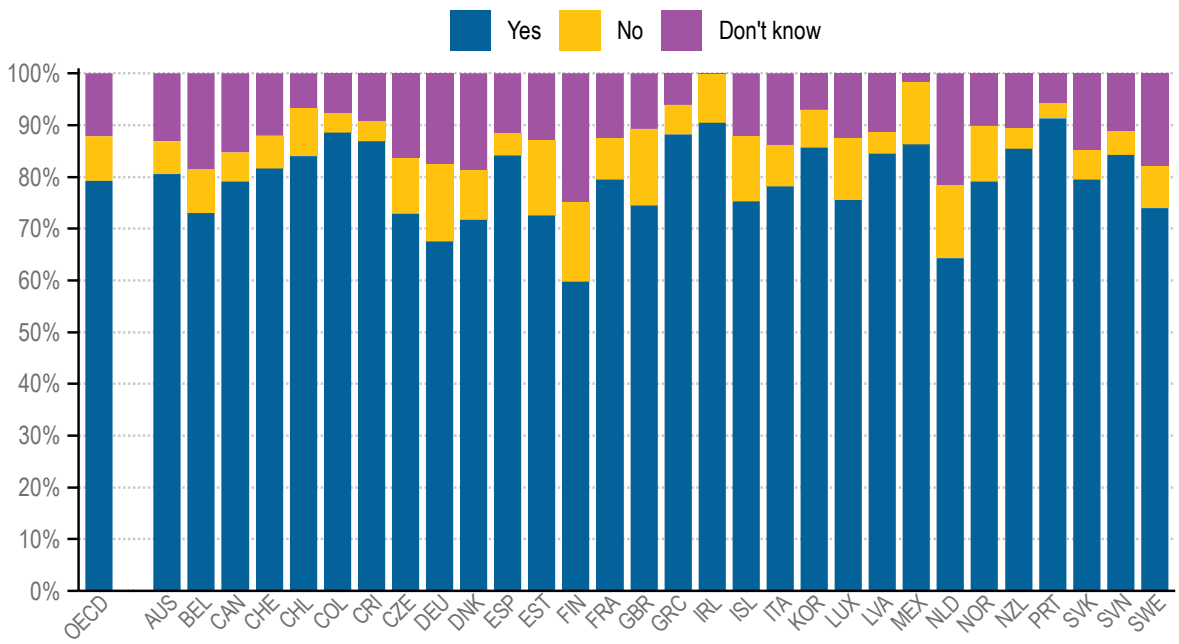
The most extensive consultation mechanism is of course the referendum, as it is open to all citizens or residents with the right to vote. As of now, the availability and use of the referendum at the national, rather than regional or local level, differs quite strongly from country to country. The OECD country with the most widespread use of referendums is Switzerland, where laws on referendums for different situations were introduced throughout the 19th and early 20th century (Schiller, 2024[10]). At the other extreme, in selected OECD countries such as Germany, Japan, Korea or the United States, national-level

referendums either are not foreseen at all within the legal framework or only in very specific circumstances that have so far not yet been invoked. Most OECD countries are to be found in the middle, however, with direct democracy being possible at the national level under wider circumstances and a limited number of referendums having taken place at the national level. This for example includes Australia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, France, Ireland, New Zealand, Slovenia and the United Kingdom (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2008[11]). In many cases, these referendums are large political endeavors and not more routine citizens' involvement mechanisms in decision making, although there are exceptions to this such as the well-known example of Switzerland.

Despite these large differences in the availability and use of direct democratic instruments, people across the OECD almost uniformly agree that they would like to be able to vote on issues of national importance. On average, nearly eight out of ten (79%) of people indicated that they would like to be able to vote on issues of national importance; and fewer than one in ten (9%) would not like to be able to do so (Figure 4.18). Even in the countries with the lowest support for direct democracy, namely Finland, the Netherlands and Germany, at least 60% would like to have this option; and the share exceeds 90% in Portugal.

Figure 4.18. A majority is in favour of referendums on issues of national importance

Share of population who favour or do not favour the availability of a national referendum, 2023



Note: The figure shows the distribution of responses to the question "Do you think people in [COUNTRY] should be able to vote directly on specific issues of national importance in a referendum?". ''OECD" presents the unweighted average of responses across countries.
Source: 2023 OECD Trust Survey.

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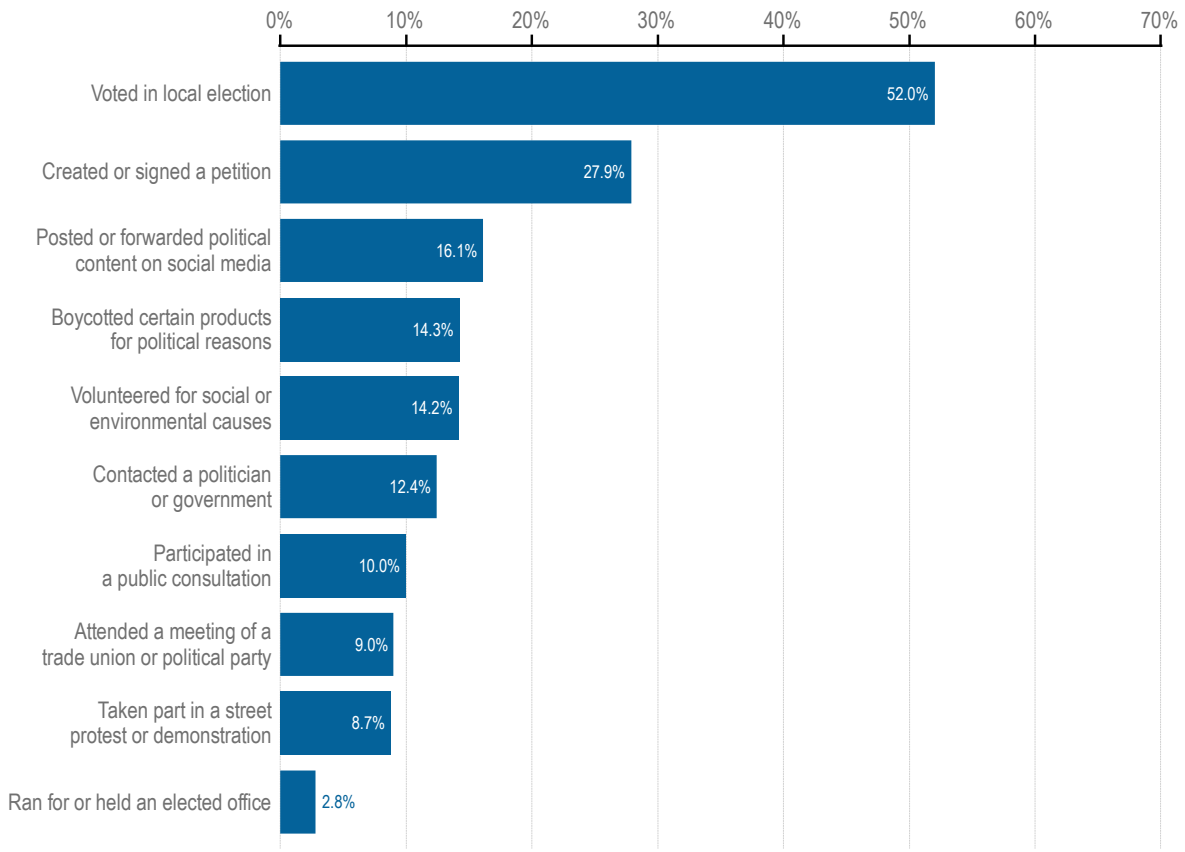
These results in part reflect an inherent challenge of policymaking in representative democracies, made more acute in more digital societies where many more citizens have gotten used to expressing their views publicly and widely. Gathering people's views can often yield contradictory results, making it particularly difficult for governments to then be responsive to all segments of the population (Fishkin and Laslett, 2008[12]). Indeed, "the people" are not a monolith who speak with one unified

voice. Rather, they voice their perspectives at certain times, on distinct matters, through different means including elections, public discussions, various consultations, referendums, and engagements such as demonstrations. The task for governments lies in collecting, condensing, and interpreting these viewpoints, then addressing them in a clear and understandable way that acknowledges citizens' views.

Trust Survey results provide some crucial insights into the patterns of political participation among the population in surveyed countries (Figure 4.19). The most common form of participation remains voting in national elections, with 82%. This is followed by voting in local or municipal elections (52%) and signing petitions (28%). Other forms of participation include posting political content on social media (16%), boycotting products (14%) and volunteering (14%). Fewer individuals have contacted a politician (12%), participated in a public consultation (10%), taken part in a demonstration (9%), or attended a meeting of a trade union or political party (9%). The least common form of participation is running for or holding elected office, with just 3%. Additionally, 23% of people reported not participating in any of the listed forms of political participation.

Figure 4.19. Less time consuming and confrontational modes of participation are more widespread

Share of population who participated the respective political activity over the last 12 months, OECD, 2023



Note: The figure shows the unweighted OECD average of the share of population who answered "yes" to one of the given activity in the question "Over the last 12 months, have you done any of the following activities?"
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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Of course, these general trends at the OECD level obscure some interesting patterns within countries. For instance in Belgium, Canada and Korea, over 35% of people did not participate using any of the aforementioned channels (excluding voting in national elections). In Finland, Iceland and Ireland, more than 30% express their voice by boycotting products. In Ireland and Greece, around 18% took part in a protest, while this share sits between 13 to 15% in Chile, Spain, France and Iceland, significantly higher than the OECD average. These differing patterns of participation are important for governments to consider. Indeed, while offering individuals more opportunities to voice their opinions through formal mechanisms is important, listening to the voices expressed through people's different modes of participation, even if they are informal, is necessary to ensure people feel heard.

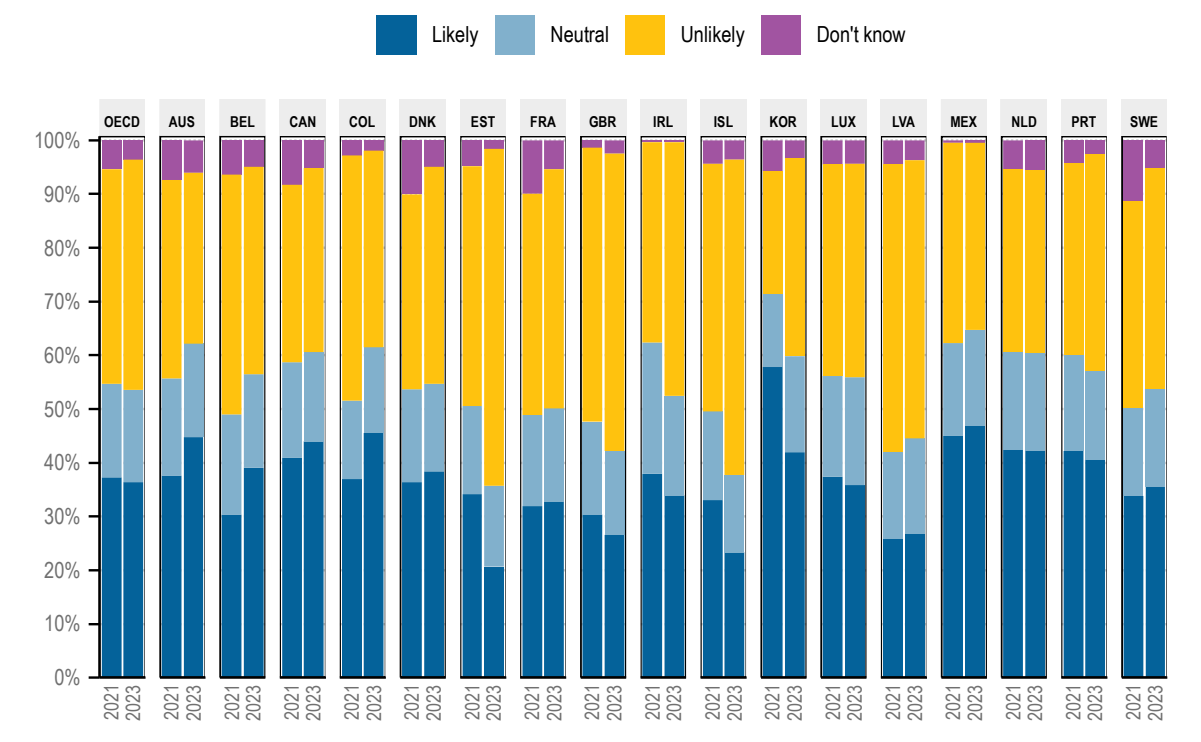
Age also plays a role in choice of participation mechanisms. On average across countries, young people (18-29) tend to vote less in national (68%), and local (41%) elections. Political activities such as taking part in a demonstration and posting or forwarding political content on social media are more frequent among the youth than the rest of the population. In some countries, there are some marked differences between the forms of political participation taken up by the younger cohorts. For example, in Ireland 51% of those under 30 said they shared political content on social media in the last year, compared to 28% of those 30 and older. Similarly in Germany, the share of people who volunteered for social or environmental causes is twice as high among the young than among those who are older, at 20 and 10%, respectively.

Box 4.3. Spotlight on changes: Openness, responsiveness in decision making and voice

On average, the share of people who think it likely that a national policy would be changed if a majority expressed a view against it slightly decreased, by one percentage point, since 2021. At the same time, the share increased in Australia, Belgium and Colombia by more than seven percentage points (Figure 4.20). Also, the share of people who are confident that the government would use inputs from a public consultation decreased since 2021, by 2 percentage points on average, particularly in Estonia, Korea, Portugal and the United Kingdom (Figure 4.21). Finally, the share of people who are sceptical the political system lets people like them have a say in what government does increased on average by three percentage points in the past two years, and more so in Estonia, Iceland and Korea (Figure 4.22).

Figure 4.20. Slightly fewer people think the government would change a national policy if people are against it in 2023 compared to 2021

Share of population who find it likely or unlikely that government would change a national policy if over half of the people expressed a view against it, 2021 and 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If over half of the people in [COUNTRY] clearly expressed a view against a national policy, how likely do you think it is that it would be changed?". The survey question in 2021 followed a slightly different wording in Mexico: ''If more than half of the people in the country complained about a national policy (education, taxes, security, etc.), how likely is it that the authorities would change it?''. 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, for the listed countries for which the variable was available in 2021 and 2023.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023.

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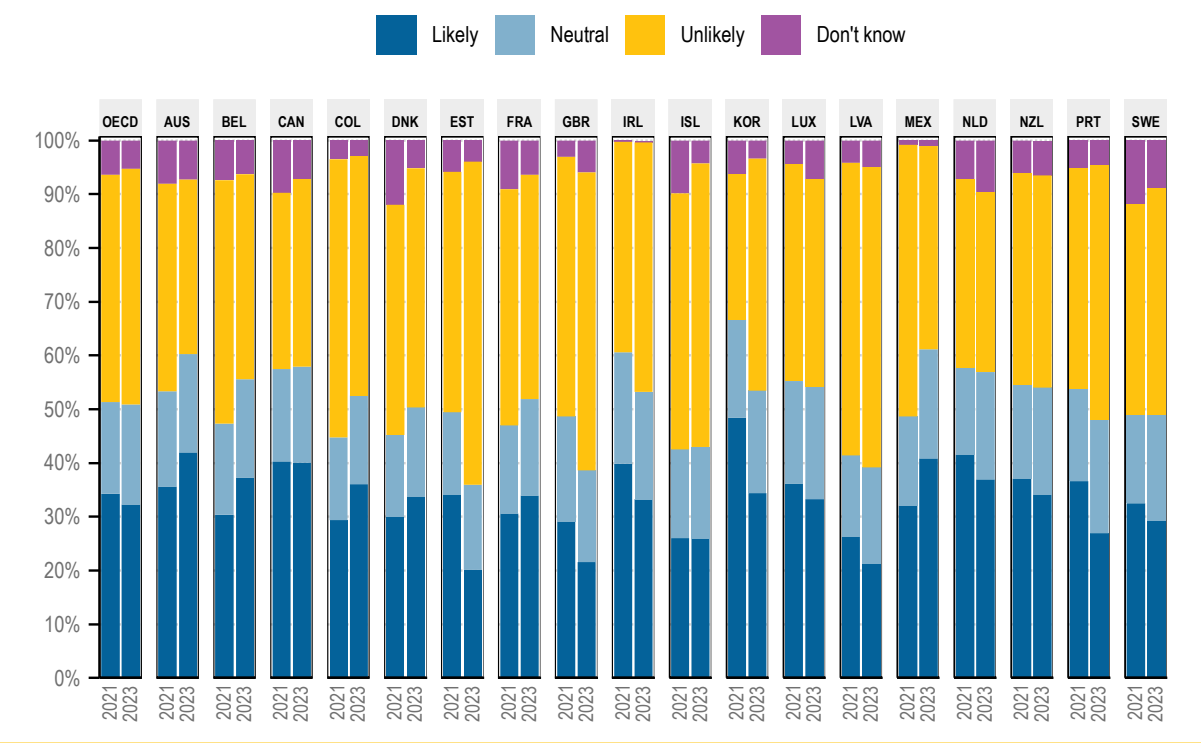
Figure 4.21. On average, people's confidence that government would adopt opinions gathered in public consultation slightly decreased between 2021 and 2023

Share of population who find it likely or unlikely that government would adopt opinions gathered in public consultation, 2021 and 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If you participated in a public consultation on reforming a policy area, how likely do you think it is that the government would adopt the opinions expressed in the consultation?". The survey question in 2021 followed a slightly different wording in Mexico: ''If a public consultation were to be held to lower or raise taxes, how likely is it that your opinion would be taken into account?''. 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, for the listed countries for which the variable was available in 2021 and 2023.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023.

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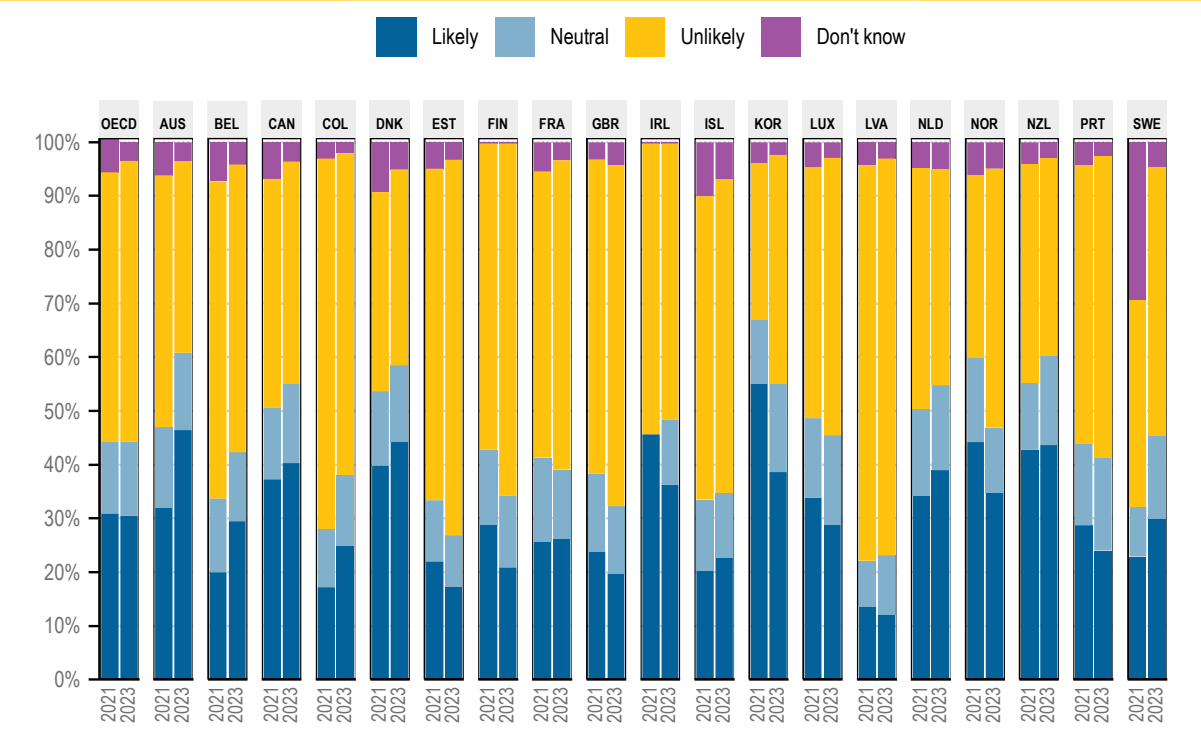
Figure 4.22. On average, the share of people who are sceptical the political system lets people like them have a say in what government does increased between 2021 and 2023

Share of population reporting different levels of perceived likelihood that the political system allows people to have a say in what the government does, 2021 and 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "How much would you say the political system in [COUNTRY] allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?". The survey question in 2021 followed a slightly different wording in Norway: ''To what extent would you say that the Norwegian political system allows people such as yourself to exercise 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, for the listed countries for which the variable was available in 2021 and 2023.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023.

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4.6. CONCLUSION FOR POLICY ACTION TO ENHANCE TRUST

On complex policy issues, the results of the Trust Survey show different steps that can be taken to enhance trust in public institutions.

- Emergency readiness, while less impactful on trust levels than during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, remains an important driver of trust in national and local governments and civil service. Governments must continue improving their reliability and preparedness for future crises.
- Strengthening confidence in government's ability to address complex policy challenges, including those with global ramifications, is a priority. On average 41% are confident that the government would regulate AI appropriately and 42% that the country would succeed in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. In terms of challenges that require long-term thinking and the fair balancing of different interests, both national governments and national parliaments can consider whether questions of intra-national and inter-generational fairness are allocated sufficient space not only during the policy deliberation process, but also in terms of how government and members of parliament communicate.
- The ability of parliament to hold government accountable is an important driver of trust in parliament and in government. Strengthening the oversight function of parliament along with other inherent checks and balances in the political system in general is likely to be a key ingredient to help maintain support for representative democracy. While not included in the 2023 survey, results from the 2021 survey showed that judicial independence was likewise a driver of trust in the national government and in the judicial system.
- A majority doubts that decision-making is carried out in the public interest. On average only three out of ten find it likely that the government would withstand undue influence from corporations. In a democracy, engaging diverse interest groups when designing policies, should only be viewed as a means to enhance the quality of a policy measure, and not as democratic engagement. In parallel, citizens' consultations, which is democratic engagement, needs to be enhanced and made more meaningful in terms of its consequences on decisions. Along with stronger integrity and transparency standards (OECD, 2024[7]), this is a very important development to ensure policies are seen as designed for the public's benefit, rather than private interests.
- In representative democracies, elections remain the primary method for incorporating different views into decision-making. However, the public's keen interest in direct democracy, along with perceived limited ability to participate in political processes, suggests a desire for more impactful ways to interact with and influence policy-making processes. Governments are now urged to improve civic participation, focusing on institutionalising direct and deliberative participation mechanisms. However, the challenges of collecting input from the population through a wider variety of channels, and the fact that fewer than one in three believe the government would adopt opinions expressed in public consultations, underline the need for clear expectations about the role of deliberative and direct democracy within the representative democracy system.
- In addition to promoting these additional "points of engagement" between governments and the public, governments can empower people to participate in public debate and impact political processes by fostering a legal, political, and social environment that enables a vibrant civic space.

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NOTE

[1] Estimates suggest that in order to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, global greenhouse gas emissions must be reduced to 33 gigatons of CO2 equivalent by 2030, and to 8 gigatons by 2050. But global emissions are projected to reach 58 gigatons by 2030.

5 Trust and information integrity

The information people are exposed to can affect their perceptions of, and trust in, public institutions. This chapter examines the relation between people's trust in news media, their news consumption habits, their criteria for judging the credibility of a news story and their trust in the government. It then examines how people view public communication, both with regard to administrative services and major policy reforms. Finally, it explores people's expectations of government use of evidence in public decision making, and how these views contribute to trust.

The information people are exposed to can participate in shaping their perceptions of, and trust in, public institutions. This is done through conversations with other people, traditional and social media, information available through research and academic institutions, as well as direct communication from public institutions themselves. This mediated information makes up a significant part of people's understanding of how institutions operate and what they do (Marcinkowski and Starke, 2018[1]). This holds particularly true for government actions related to policy design and implementation which few people directly observe or experience, but that nevertheless influence people's perceptions of public institutions.

A solid information ecosystem providing quality information is vital for people to make informed judgements about government actions and hold public institutions accountable. Along with an education system that equips people with the cognitive and critical skills and knowledge to process the information, this ecosystem helps individuals form "sceptical trust" in public institutions. Such sceptical trust is crucial in protecting democracy from the threats of disinformation (Norris, 2022[2]). However, disruptive trends such as the proliferation of mis and dis information, polarising speech on mass communication channels, informational echo chambers and decline in media pluralism and diversity can weaken the information environment. In this context, OECD work defines a framework to reinforce and protect information integrity, defined *as "*information environments that are conducive to the availability of accurate, evidence-based, and plural information sources and that enable individuals to be exposed to a variety of ideas, make informed choices, and better exercise their rights" (OECD, 2024[3]).

In a first for the Trust Survey, this new chapter explores how people consume news about current affairs and government action, perceive media and governmental communication, and how these consumption habits and perceptions relate to people's trust in public institutions. It relies on additional questions in the 2023 Trust Survey that concern people's media usage patterns on the one hand and their perceptions of public communication on the other. These questions were added to provide additional evidence on how information from public and media sources impact perceptions of public institutions' actions and how this affects trust in these institutions.

5.1. THE MEDIA ENVIRONMENT AND MEDIA CONSUMPTION PATTERNS AFFECT TRUST IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

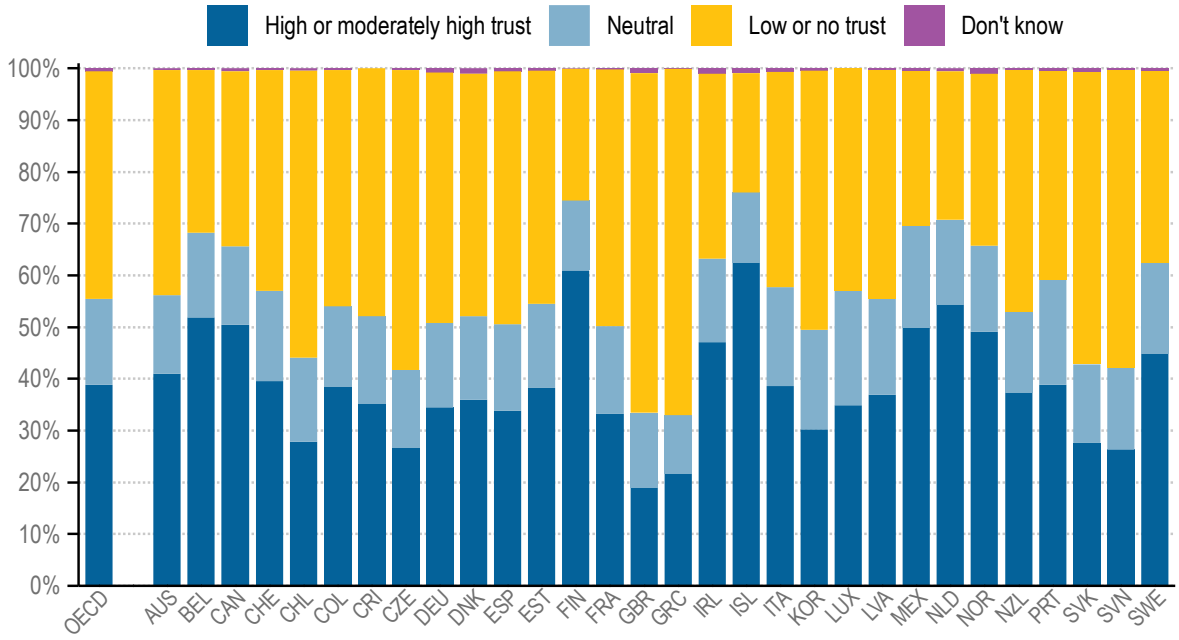
In recent years, concerns over the reliability and integrity of information have grown, with significant implications for democracy (OECD, 2024[3]). The undermining of a common reality based on factual evidence deepens societal divisions and makes it more difficult to build the consensus necessary to address policy challenges. It can also be exploited by malign actors in disinformation campaigns, whether domestically or internationally orchestrated, impacting various policy areas, from public health to national security, and even the climate crisis (OECD, 2022[4]).

Worries about telling apart accurate and false content are more widespread. In the Trust Survey, an average of 11% identified mis- and dis-information as one of the main three issues facing their country (Figure 5.1); and in Czechia, Korea and the Slovak Republic, the share exceeded 20%.

Moreover, many people have concerns over the trustworthiness of media. As part of the growing difficulties with the evolution of the information environment, trust in traditional media is also suffering. On average, 39% of individuals in OECD countries have high or moderately high trust in news media, mirroring levels of trust in the national government, while 44% report low to no trust in the media (Figure 5.1). Only in Belgium, Canada, Finland, Iceland and the Netherlands does the majority of the adult population have high or moderately high trust in the news media. The average level of trust in news media across OECD countries has nevertheless remained steady between the 2021 and 2023 waves of the OECD Trust Survey, although with large variation in some countries (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.1. More people distrust rather than trust the news media

Share of population who indicate different levels of trust in news media, 2023



Note: The figure shows 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 news media?". A 0-4 response corresponds to 'low or no trust', a 5 to 'neutral' and a 6-10 to 'high or moderately high trust'.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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An independent and pluralistic media environment is a fundamental principle of democracy as it facilitates the public's ability to scrutinise the actions of high-level political officials and policy-makers and to make informed choices. For instance, Guriev and Treisman (2019) raise the spectre of "informational autocrats" coercing citizens into compliance through information manipulation (Guriev and Treisman, 2019[5]). While trust in the national government and trust in the media system are not necessarily related – and may at times even be at odds – in the long run, persistent distrust in the media ecosystem and the information it provides leaves individuals with only the choice of trusting government institutions blindly or to distrust both the media and government. As such, information integrity in society is pivotal for trust in public institutions, and more broadly, democracy.

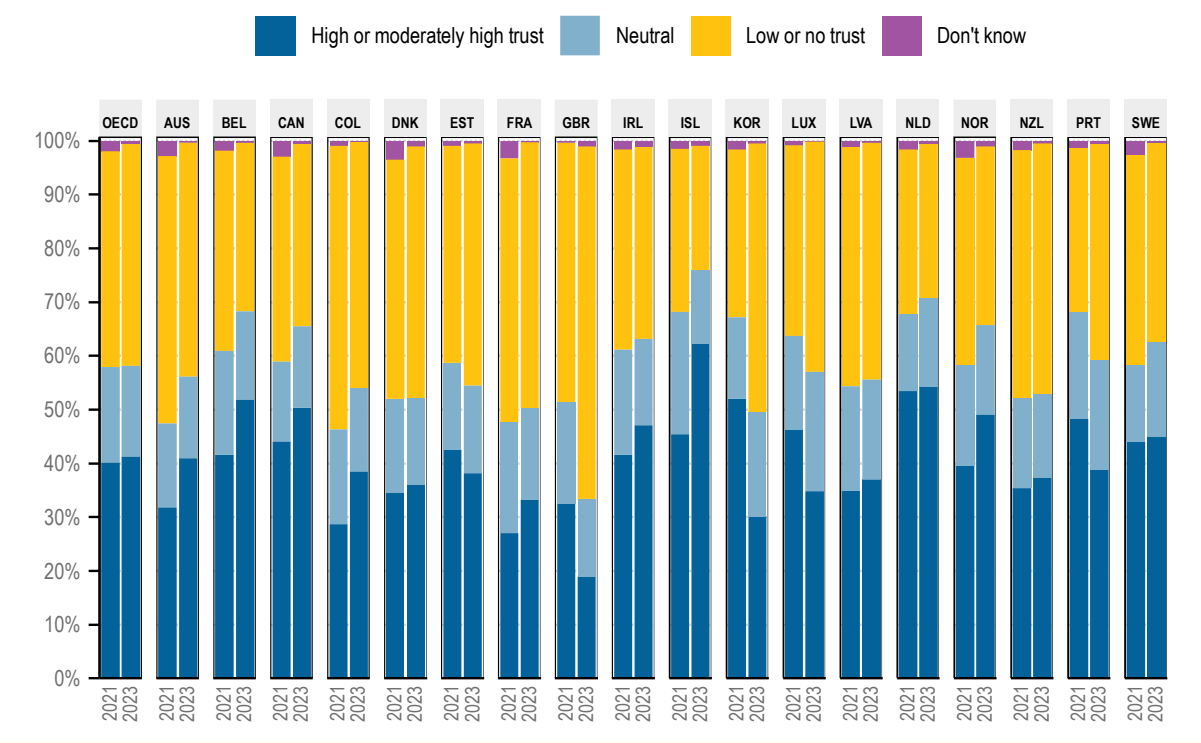
Trust in the media and trust in the national government are moderately correlated at the cross-country level. Moreover, at the individual level, people who trust the media are more than twice as likely to trust the government compared to those who do not. Considering the relatively low levels of trust in the media and its recent decline in many countries, this is concerning for democracies worldwide. This situation highlights the importance of promoting and preserving information integrity to enhance trust in institutions and prevent unscrupulous actors from exploiting the lack of trust for the wrong purposes. Nonetheless, there are a fair number of OECD countries where people are far more trusting of the national government than of media (Denmark, Greece, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Switzerland, United Kingdom). The opposite is also true in some countries (Czechia, Finland, Latvia, Iceland, Netherlands).

Box 5.1. Spotlight on change: Trust in news media

On average levels of trust in news media has not changed between 2021 and 2023 (Figure 5.2). However, large improvements in trust are observed in Belgium, Colombia and Iceland, while trust in news media decreased significantly in Korea, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom.

Figure 5.2. Average trust in news media did not change between 2021 and 2023

Share of population who indicate different levels of trust in the news media, 2021 and 2023



Note: The 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 news media?". A 0-4 response corresponds to 'low or no trust', a 5 to 'neutral' and a 6-10 to 'high or moderately high trust'. "OECD" presents the unweighted average of responses across countries, for the listed countries with available data for 2021 and 2023.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023.

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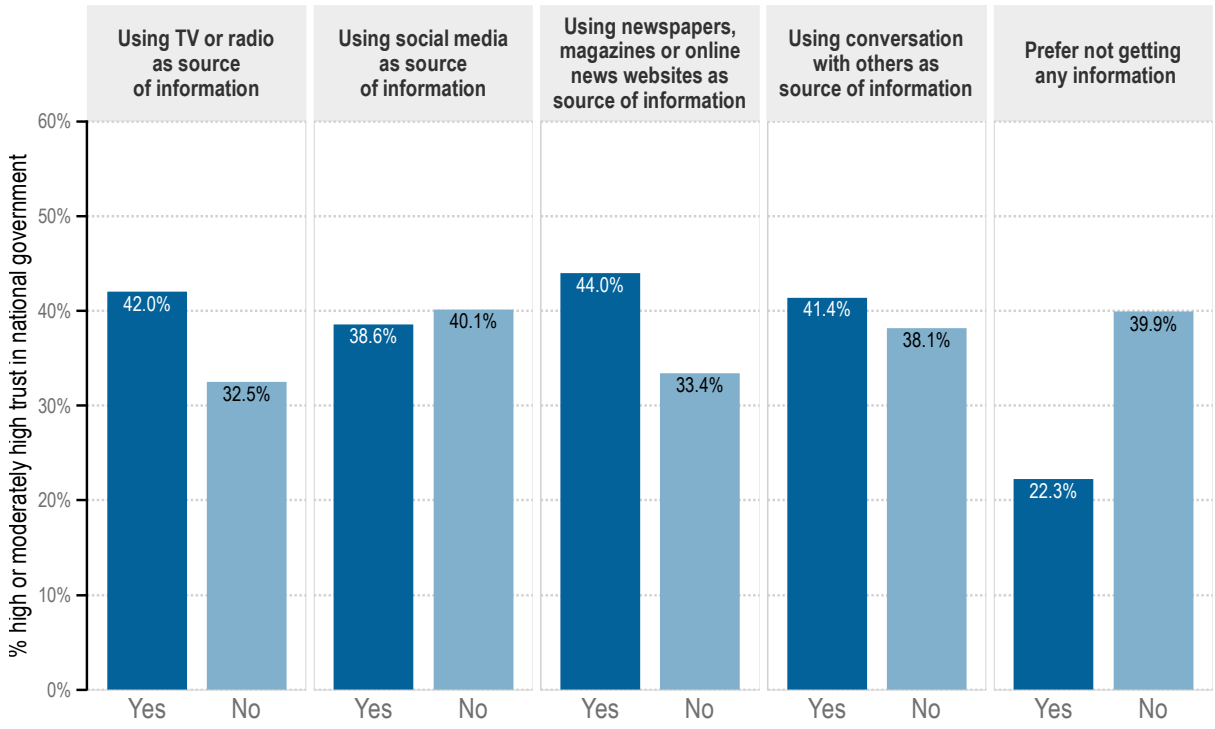
People's trust in government is found to be closely related to their news consumption habits. Only 22% of those who prefer not to follow political news report high or moderately trust in the government, while the share is 40% among those who follow the news in some way (Figure 5.3). Additionally, individuals who keep up with politics or current affairs through TV, Radio, or written press tend to trust the national government more than those who do not use these media. However, trust levels are virtually the same among those who use social media for news (39%) and those who do not (40%). This may be because news consumption via social media, in turn, is not conducive to high political knowledge (Castro et al., 2022[6]). Similarly, there is little difference in trust between those who discuss news with friends or family (41%) and those who don't engage in such conversations (38%). Of course, these associations may also owe to socio-economic factors that influence people's choices of media or interest in news (Strömbäck, Djerf-Pierre and Shehata, 2016[7]; Norris, 2000[8]).

Figure 5.3. Readers of the written press are more likely to trust the government

Share with high or moderately high trust in the national government by whether they obtain information about politics or current affairs from the named source, OECD, 2023



Note: The figure shows the share with high or moderately high trust in the national government, depending on whether they use the media or information source about politics and current affairs on a typical day. The share with high or moderately high trust corresponds to respondents who select an answer from 6 to 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?". Whether or not the respondent uses the selected source of information is derived from their answer(s) to the question "On a typical day, from which of the following sources, if any, do you get information about politics and current affairs?", for which they can select all options that apply. The figure shows the unweighted OECD averages.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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5.2. THE CURRENT INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM HAS MADE IT HARDER FOR INDIVIDUALS TO UNDERSTAND AND ASSESS THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF INFORMATION

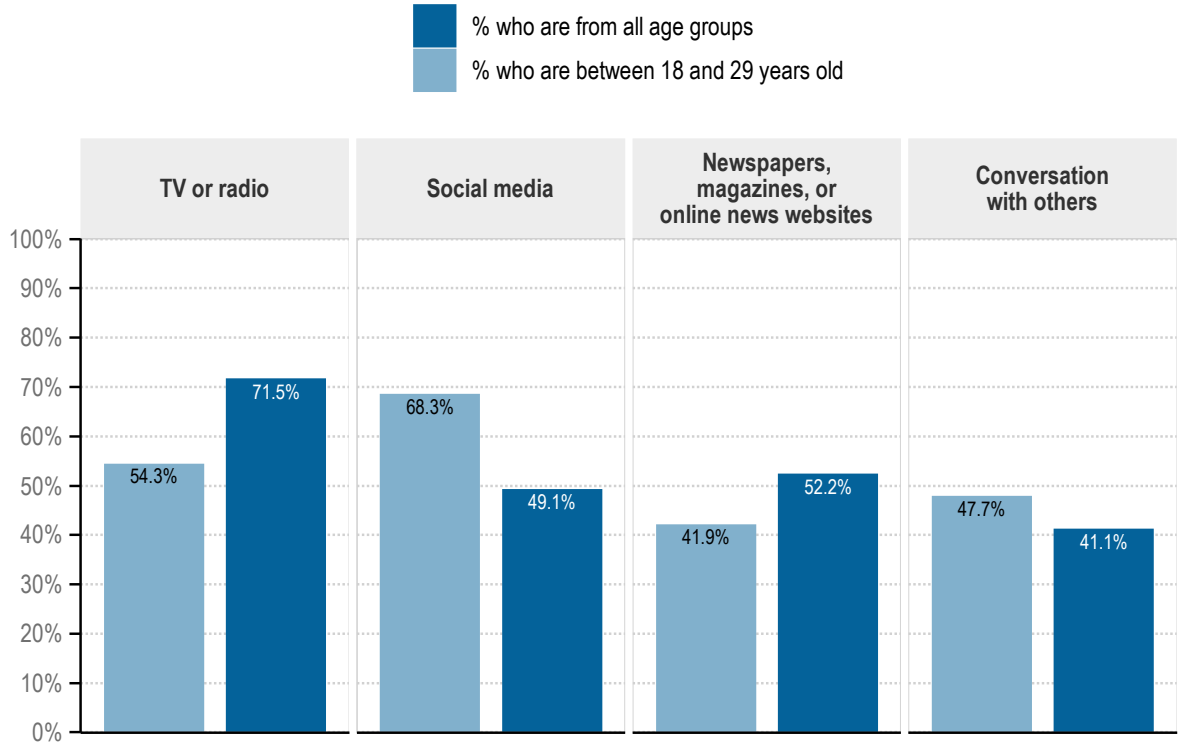
The pluralism of media markets and supply of quality journalism have declined in recent years. This is simultaneously a result of shifting news consumption trends triggered by technological changes and resulting market disruptions, and a potential contributor to and effect of low trust in media. According to Reporters without Borders' World Press Freedom Index, the proportion of OECD countries in which the quality of journalism was ranked as 'good' was 49% in 2015, falling to 26% by 2021 (OECD (2022[9]) based on(Reporters without Borders (2022[10])).

In most OECD countries, economic rather than legislative or political constraints exert the most negative influence on quality of the news media. In the written press, competition from digital platforms that reap the bulk of advertising revenues has led to reductions in newsroom staff, consolidation in the industry, and the shutdowns of newspapers particularly at the local level (OECD, 2021[11]; Matasick, Alfonsi and Bellantoni, 2020[12]). Few big news brands are growing their subscriptions base on a "winner-takes-most" dynamic while others struggle for revenues (Newman et al., 2023[13]). Commercial incentives contribute to a trend for sensationalist content that performs well with algorithms and time-poor audiences (Matasick, Alfonsi and Bellantoni, 2020[12]). In parallel to these shifts in the written press, the last three decades have seen significant liberalisation in media and television sectors globally, leading to the rise of satellite and cable television. Consequently, the number of private channels has increased dramatically, changing the relationship between private and public broadcasting sectors. For instance, the number of channels in Europe grew from less than 100 in 1989 to more than 11 000 by 2019 (Papathanassopoulos et al., 2023[14]). The television environment has therefore changed from low choice to high choice, leading to fragmentation of audience attention (Kleis Nielsen, 2012[15]). These changes have in part facilitated the creation of larger and fewer dominant groups in the media sector, resulting in an industry that's more concentrated and populated by multimedia conglomerates (Papathanassopoulos et al., 2023[14]).

In this context, most people across the OECD still obtain their news about politics and current affairs from "traditional" sources (TV, radio, written press), although this is changing among younger generations. On a typical day, seven out of ten (72%) respondents receive their news from television or the radio, while half (52%) use newspapers, magazines, or online news websites (Figure 5.4). Social media is a news source for almost half (49%) of people; and individuals estimate that about a third of their information comes from social media. However, for younger people, social media has become the primary news source, with 68% obtaining news this way, surpassing the 54% who watch television or listen to the radio for news; and the 42% who read newspapers or magazines. However, a small share obtains their news exclusively from social media: 14% of under-30-year-olds estimate that they obtain 80% or more of their news on social media.

Figure 5.4. Younger people rely more on social than traditional media

Share of population who indicate that they get information about politics and current affairs from respective source, unweighted OECD average, 2023



Note: The percentages show the unweighted OECD average. The shares are derived from the response to the question "On a typical day, from which of the following sources, if any, do you get information about politics and current affairs?". Respondents were able to select all responses that applied.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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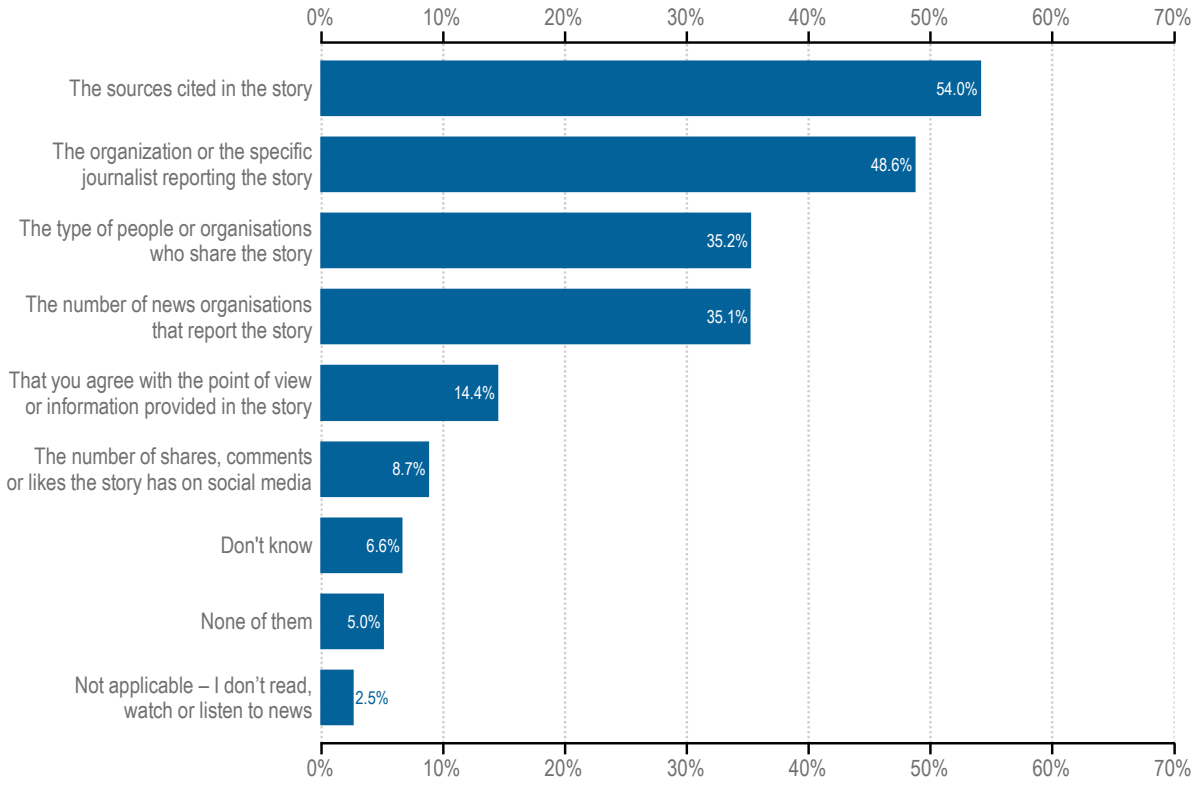
The fragmentation of the media landscape can make it more difficult for individuals to judge whether a given news story is trustworthy. People tend to use a variety of criteria to assess whether they deem a story credible. Across the OECD, the most commonly cited criterion are the sources cited (54%), followed by the organisation or journalist reporting the story (49%). The number of organisations reporting on the story is likewise an important criterion, cited by 35% of respondents (Figure 5.5). In addition to these criteria that can equally well apply to traditional and new types of media, two social-media related criteria likewise play a role: 35% consider the type of people or organisations who share the story on social media as among the three most important factors when assessing news trustworthiness, while 9% rely on the number of shares, comments or likes the story has on social media. 14% also take into consideration whether they agree with the point of view or information provided in the story; and 5% do not rely on any of the suggested criteria.

A higher share of people aged 50 and above rely on the journalist or organisation reporting on the story, and the number of organisations reporting as a determining factor in assessing trustworthiness. They rely less on the number of shares and likes. However, different age groups otherwise tend to use similar criteria. These broad categories may however be hiding differences within each media category: For example, findings from the Reuters survey suggest that on video- and image-based platforms such as TikTok, users pay more attention to influencers than journalists, while the opposite is true for more text-based platforms such as Facebook and X (Newman et al., 2023[13]).

Figure 5.5. A majority state that they rely on a news item's cited sources as a determining factor in its trustworthiness

Share that selected the named factor as mattering the most in deciding whether the news is trustworthy, OECD, 2023



Note: Each share corresponds to the unweighted OECD average of the response to the question "When you read, watch or hear news, which of the following factors matter the most to you in deciding whether the news is trustworthy?". Respondents were able to choose up to three response options.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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In addition to assessing the trustworthiness of information, individuals also need to comprehend the information provided to them to form accurate judgments. However, news media does not always communicate in a way that benefits people with different levels of background knowledge. A cross-country study based on focus groups in Brazil, India, the United Kingdom and the United States and a review of BBC economics coverage in the UK highlighted that many find news content unrelatable and unrepresentative of their realities (Arguedas et al., 2023[16]; Blastland and Dilnot, 2022[17]). In a 46-country population survey by the Reuters Institute, 30% of respondents, concentrated among those with lower educational attainment, found it difficult to understand economic and financial news (Newman et al., 2023[13]). People who find it difficult to understand or relate to the information are at a disadvantage when trying to form an opinion on government actions and policies. This can result in weaker democratic accountability, increased susceptibility to disinformation and simplistic content, and it may also influence political agency.

5.3. EFFECTIVE AND INCLUSIVE GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION CAN ENHANCE TRUST IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

In addition to journalists, social media influencers and peers, public institutions can also serve as

sources of information. These entities can disseminate information directly via public websites, informational campaigns, and press conferences, or indirectly, through the information passed on to journalists by high-level political officials and civil servants. This provision of information is one aspect of public communication, which encompasses the "exchange of information between government and citizens, and the dialogue that ensues from it" (OECD, 2021[18]).

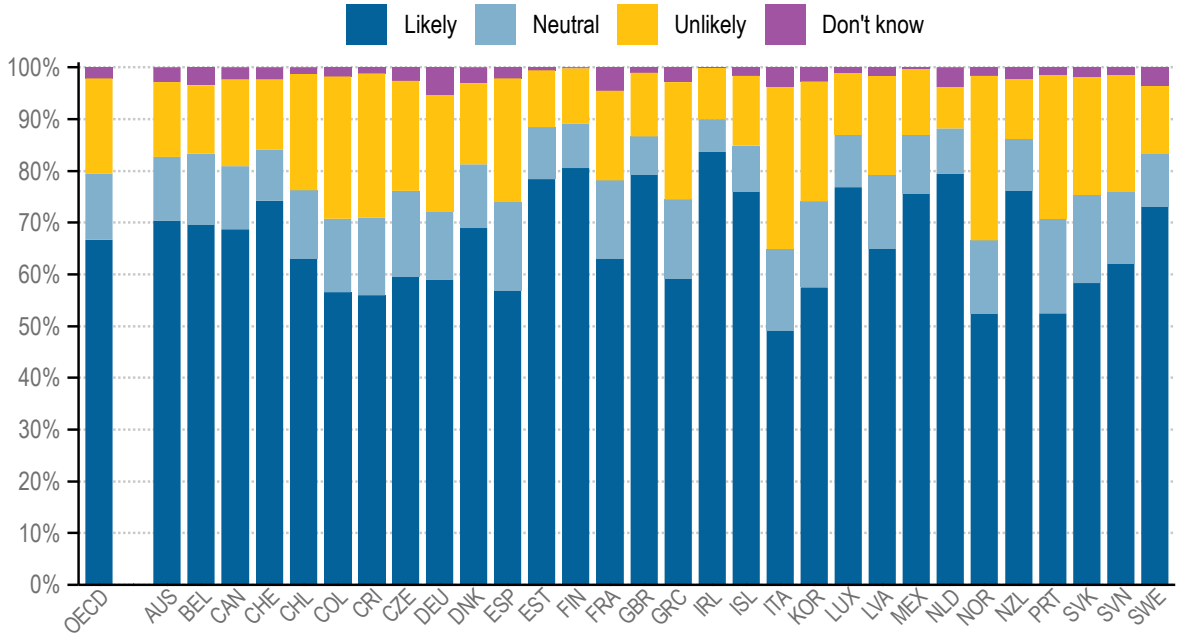
Similar to the connection between media and trust, public communication—defined separately from political communication and with a solid governance ensuring it is used as a public good—can both build and damage trust in institutions. On the one hand, public communication can raise awareness of government actions or positions on policy issues, which can increase perceptions that the government is delivering for citizens. It can also be understood as a service and, via the exchange of information, can substantially improve outcomes for users and in turn increase their satisfaction with institutions. Public communication can also help institutions demonstrate and reinforce their commitment to values associated with higher levels of trust (openness, integrity, fairness), but also show responsiveness by listening and responding to the population's concerns and preferences. On the other hand, communication that is perceived as inaccurate, inaccessible, politically biased or irrelevant can lead the public to perceive institutions as unreliable or untrustworthy.

The current media landscape has significantly enhanced the need for solid public communication with a robust governance framework. Digital channels allow anyone to potentially reach and influence a broad audience (Matasick, Alfonsi and Bellantoni, 2020[12]), enabling a larger number of actors to participate in the information space but creating large challenges for the information ecosystem and trust in institutions (OECD, 2024[3]). Concurrently, digital channels offer public institutions new methods to engage with the public and gather insights to better tailor communication strategies to various audiences, and help the population be better informed about government actions.

In the Trust Survey results, we find similar patterns of satisfaction with public communication as those found between day-to-day interactions and complex policy challenges. Indeed, when it comes to information about administrative services, a large majority of people in most countries – and 67% on average across countries- think that clear information would be easily available (Figure 5.6). The share of people confident that government information would be easily accessible has also increased between 2021 and 2023 (Figure 5.7), but it appears to have only a small positive association with trust in the national civil service and no significant relationship with trust in the national government (Chapter 1 and Annex A).

Figure 5.6. Two thirds of people judge information about administrative services to be easily available

Share of population who find it likely or unlikely that information on an administrative service would be easily available if needed, 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If you needed information about an administrative service (for example obtaining a passport, registering a birth, applying for benefits, etc.), how likely do you think it is that clear 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 1-4; and "don't know" was a separate answer choice. "OECD" presents the unweighted average of responses across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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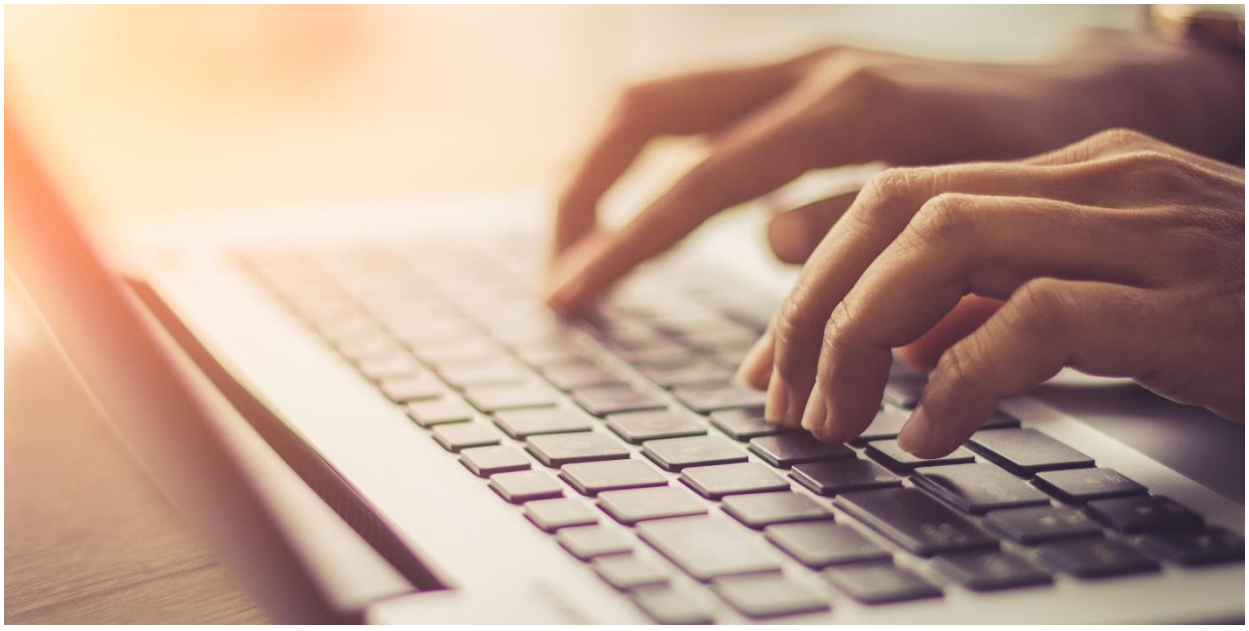
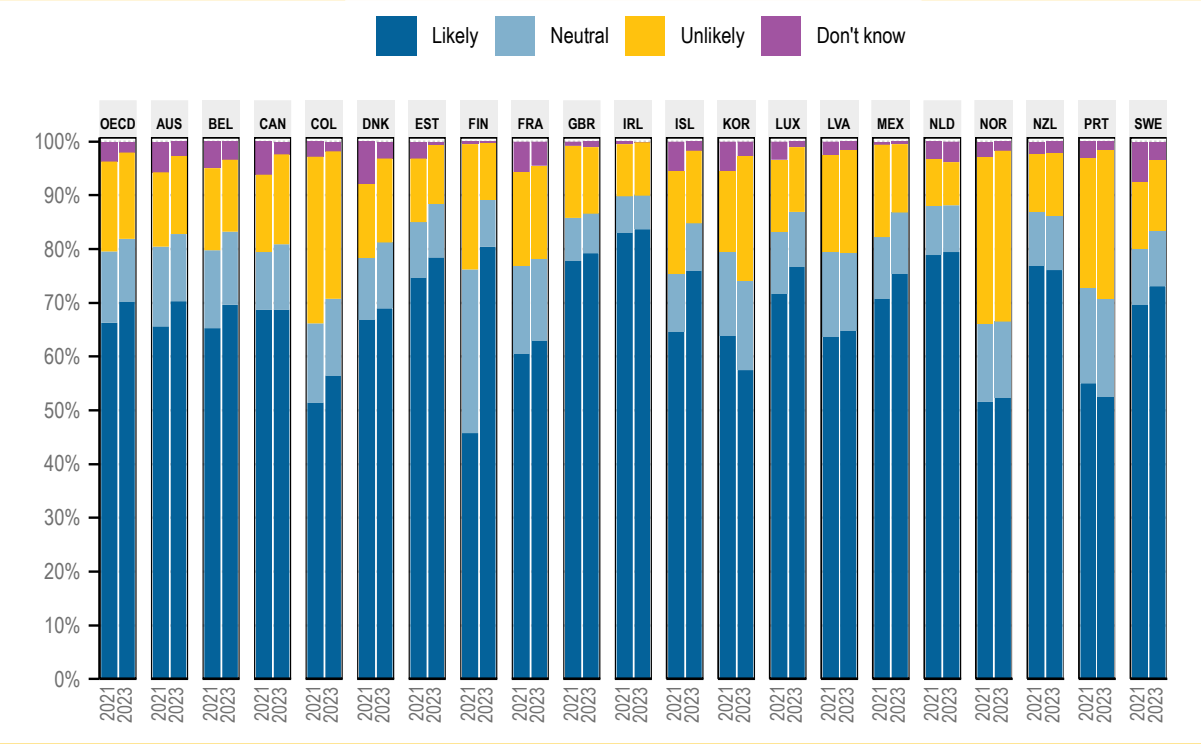


Box 5.2. Spotlight on changes: Perception of the ease of finding administrative information

On average, the share of people who find likely that information would be easily available about administrative services increased by 4 percentage points between 2021 and 2023 (Figure 5.7). The largest increase was observed in Finland and Iceland.

Figure 5.7. On average across countries, the share of people who think they can easily find information about an administrative service has risen by four percentage points compared to 2021

Share of population who find it likely or unlikely that clear information would be easily available about administrative services, 2021 and 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If you needed information about an administrative service (for example obtaining a passport, registering a birth, applying for benefits, etc.), how likely do you think it is that clear information would be easily available?" in 2021 and 2023 waves. 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 of responses across countries, for the listed countries with available information for 2021 and 2023.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023.

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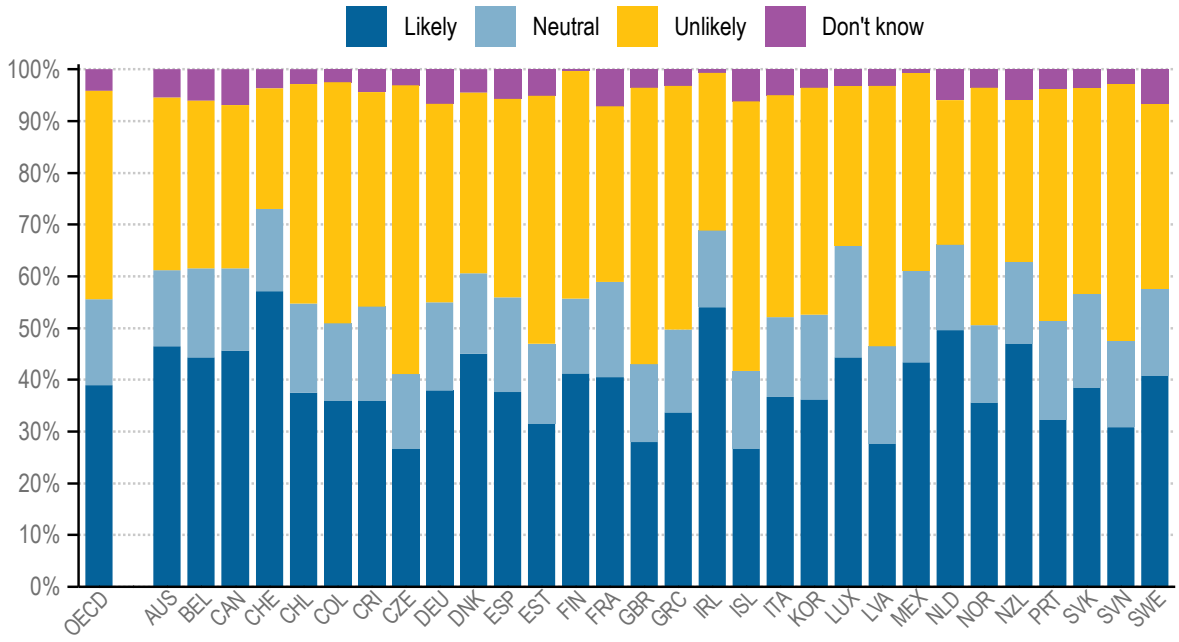
When communicating about policy reforms, the results are different and show interesting results for action to enhance trust. Indeed, there is an even split between people who say the government would likely explain the impact of reforms (39%) and those who are sceptical (40%) (Figure 5.8). Despite its challenges, effective communication about policy reforms can yield significant gains for trust in the national government. This type of communication may also be perceived as being closer to political communication, and therefore appears important for people in assessing whether government is trustworthy.

Figure 5.8. Four in ten believe that government clearly communicates about reforms

Share of population who find it likely or unlikely that the national government would clearly explain how the respondent would be affected by a reform, 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If the national government was carrying out a reform, how likely do you think it is that it would clearly explain how you will be affected by the reform?" 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.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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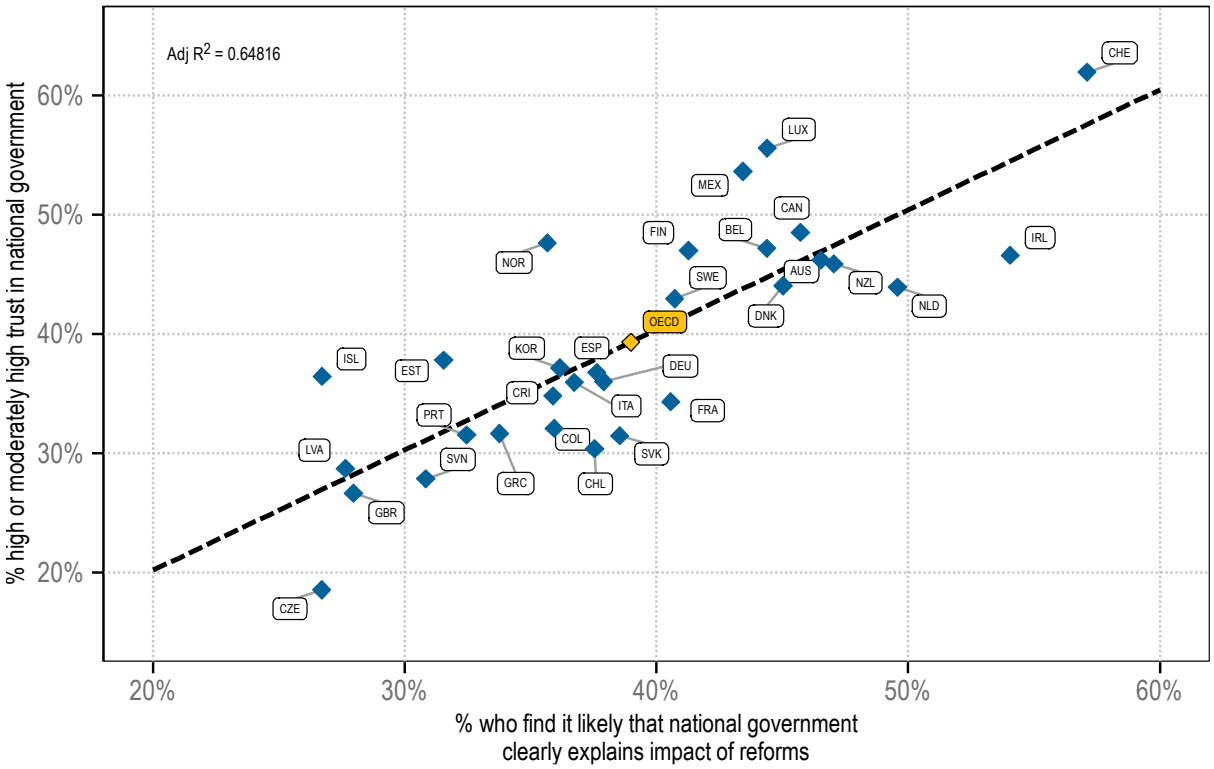
Perceptions of the government's communication regarding the impact of reforms are strongly associated with trust in the national government (Figure 5.9). When examining a variety of public governance drivers of trust in national government at the same time, people's confidence in the government's ability to explain how they would be impacted by a certain reform is among the variables that have a positive association with trust in the national government (Chapter 1 and Annex A).

Figure 5.9. Countries in which people think government communicates well about reforms tend to have higher trust in the national government

Share of population with high or moderately high trust in the national government (y-axis) by share of people that think it is likely government will clearly explain how they will be affected by a reform (x-axis), 2023



Note: The figure presents the relationship between the proportion of people that have high or moderately high trust in the national government, based on the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale to the questions: 1) "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 2) "If the national government was carrying out a reform, how likely do you think it is that it would clearly explain how you will be affected by the reform?", on the proportion who think it is likely, based on the aggregation of the responses from 6-10, that the national government clearly communicated how the respondent would be affected by a reform. Both high or moderately high trust and 'likely' correspond to the 6-10 responses on the 0-10 scale.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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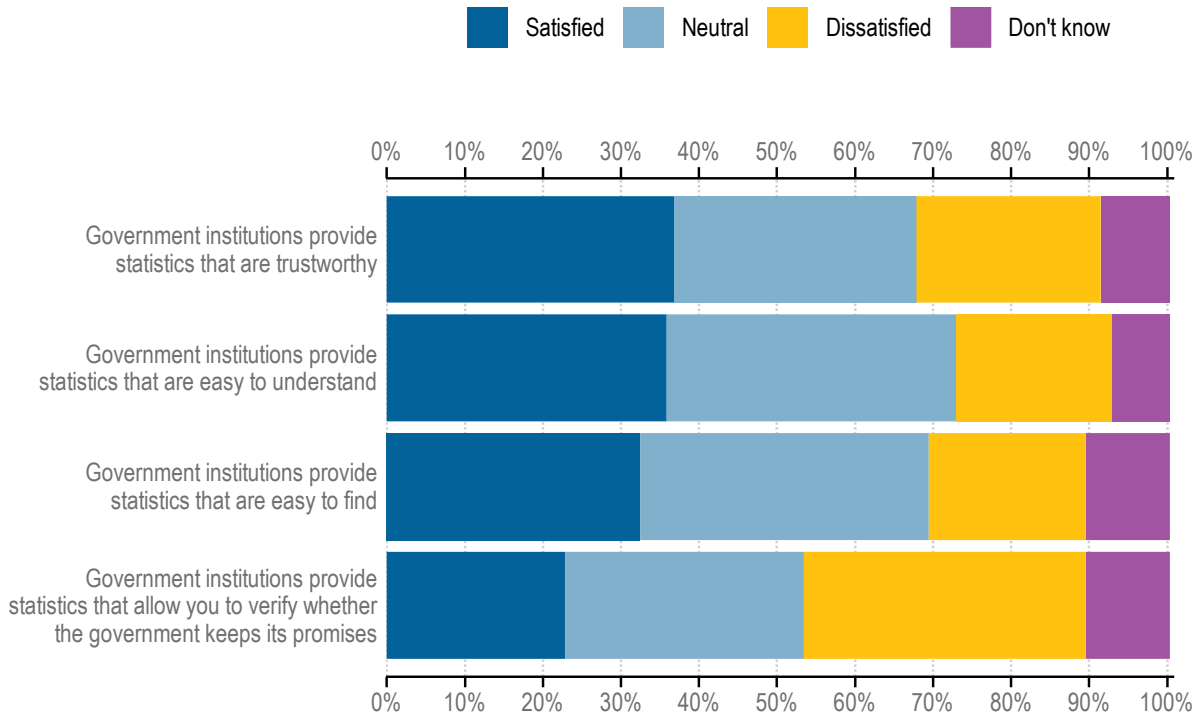
Statistics presented by government institutions are part of transparency efforts that can help citizens, businesses and organisations develop a common knowledge base and assess developments of the economic, social and government environment to make informed choices. Official statistics should provide relevant, impartial, and accessible data to help inform people, and allow them to assess government performance (UNSTATS, 2014[19]; UNSTATS, 2023[20]). However, the Trust Survey finds that only about a third believe statistics are often or always trustworthy, easy to find and understand (Figure 5.10). About one in five report these statistics are rarely or never easy to understand or find, and one in four find them rarely or never trustworthy. More than a third do not think these statistics help them verify government promises.

Figure 5.10. More than a third of people do not believe that government-provided statistics allow them to assess whether government keeps its promises

Share of population reporting different assessments of the characteristics of statistics provided by government institutions, OECD, 2023



Note: The figure presents the unweighted OECD averages for the distribution of responses to the four sub-questions of the question "In general, would you say that government institutions (such as ministries and the national statistical office) provide statistics that...trustworthy/easy to understand/easy to find/allow you to verify whether the government keeps its promises." The 'satisfied' category includes respondents who stated that this was always or often the case, the 'neutral' those who stated this was sometimes the case and the 'dissatisfied' category those who said that it was rarely or never the case.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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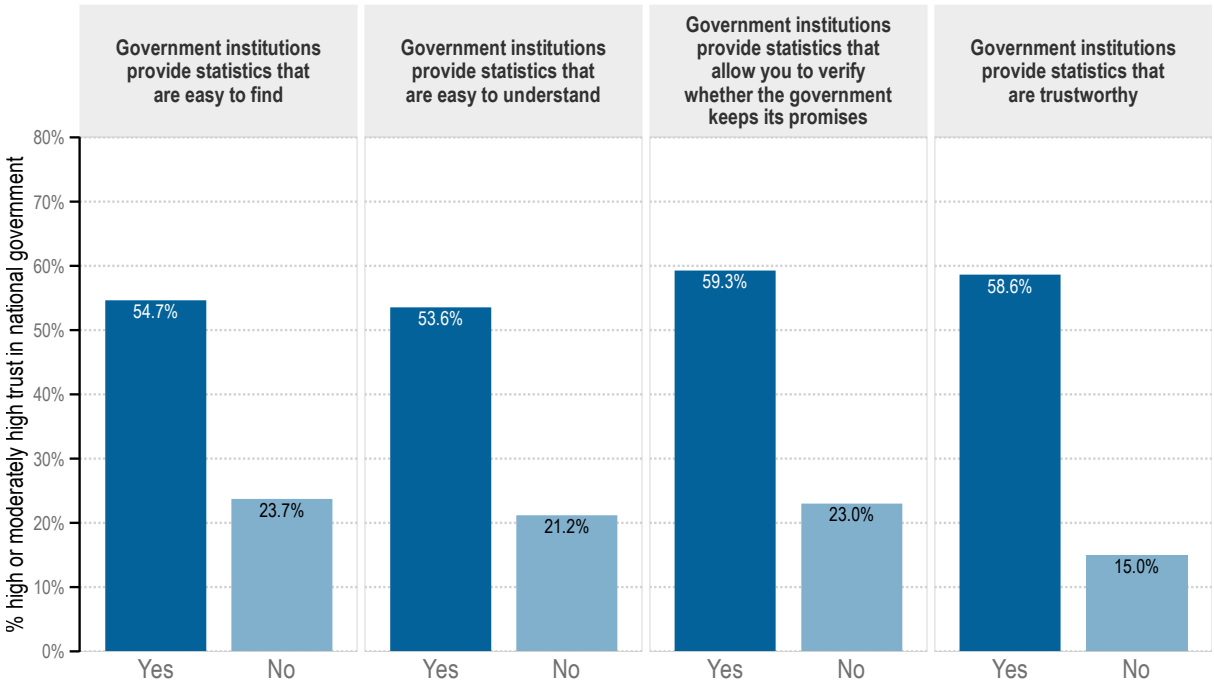
People's trust in government statistics is closely tied to their overall trust in the national government. Predictably, those who find government statistics to be often or always trustworthy are nearly four times more likely to have high or moderately high trust in the national government (59%) compared to those who rarely or never find them trustworthy (15%) (Figure 5.11). Similarly, people who believe that government statistics always or often allow them to verify government promises are more than twice as likely to trust the government compared to those who rarely or never believe they do.

Figure 5.11. Trust in government statistics is closely tied to trust in government

Share of population with different levels of trust in national government according to their perceptions of government statistics, OECD, 2023



Note: The figure illustrates the average percentage of the population expressing high or moderately high trust in the national government, based on their response to given questions displayed at the top of the chart. The share with high or moderately high trust corresponds to respondents who select an answer from 6 to 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?". Whether or not the respondent answered Yes or No to the selected questions is derived from the answers in 0-10 scale. The "Yes" option is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale, and "No" is the aggregation of responses from 1-4. The figure shows the unweighted OECD averages. Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.Finally, in the current context, some individuals find neither the government nor the media to be credible. About one in six people (16%) have no or low trust in the media and think that government statistics are rarely or never trustworthy. This can result in them having overly cynical views. It may also make them more prone to conspiratorial beliefs (Jackob et al., 2019[21]).

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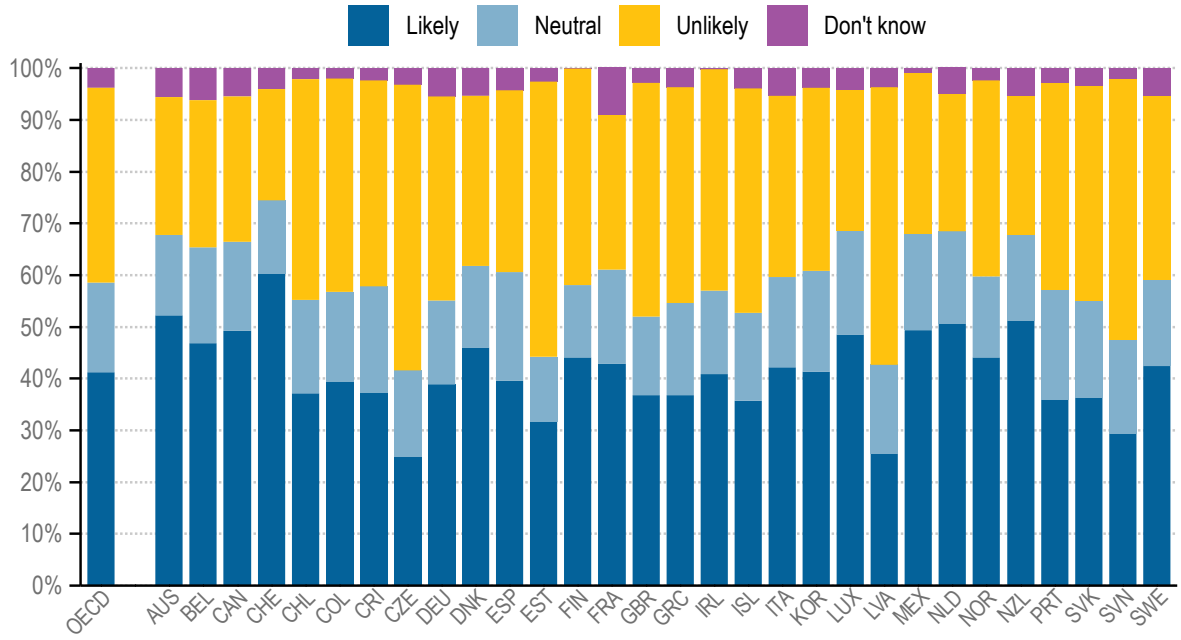
5.4. TRANSPARENCY ABOUT THE EVIDENCE THAT UNDERLIES GOVERNMENT DECISION MAKING CAN BUILD TRUST

Results from the 2023 OECD Trust Survey provide some guidance on public communication aspects which could be improved to better inform the population and increase the perceived trustworthiness of public institutions.

First, government decision-making is largely perceived as opaque, with limited information on the decision-making process. On average, only four out of ten people across OECD countries believe that the government utilises the best available evidence, research, and statistics when making decisions (Figure 5.12). Governments need to improve this perception, for example through establishing transparency standards in the process of assembling, analysing and applying evidence in the policy making process (Argyrous, 2012[22]). There is a high positive correlation between the share with high or moderately high trust in the national government and the share who find it likely that government decision making is evidence-informed (Figure 5.13). And while examining a diverse set of drivers of trust in national government, people's confidence that the government uses evidence and facts in taking decisions has the highest positive association with trust in the national government (Chapter 1 and Annex A). Increased communication on the evidence used to reach a decision could therefore improve perceptions and trustworthiness of the government.

Figure 5.12. Four in ten find it likely that the government takes decisions based on the best available evidence, research and data

Share of population who find it likely or unlikely that government takes decisions based on evidence, 2023



Note: The figure shows the within-country distributions of responses to the question: "If the national government takes a decision, how likely do you think it is that it will draw on the best available evidence, research, and statistical data?" 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.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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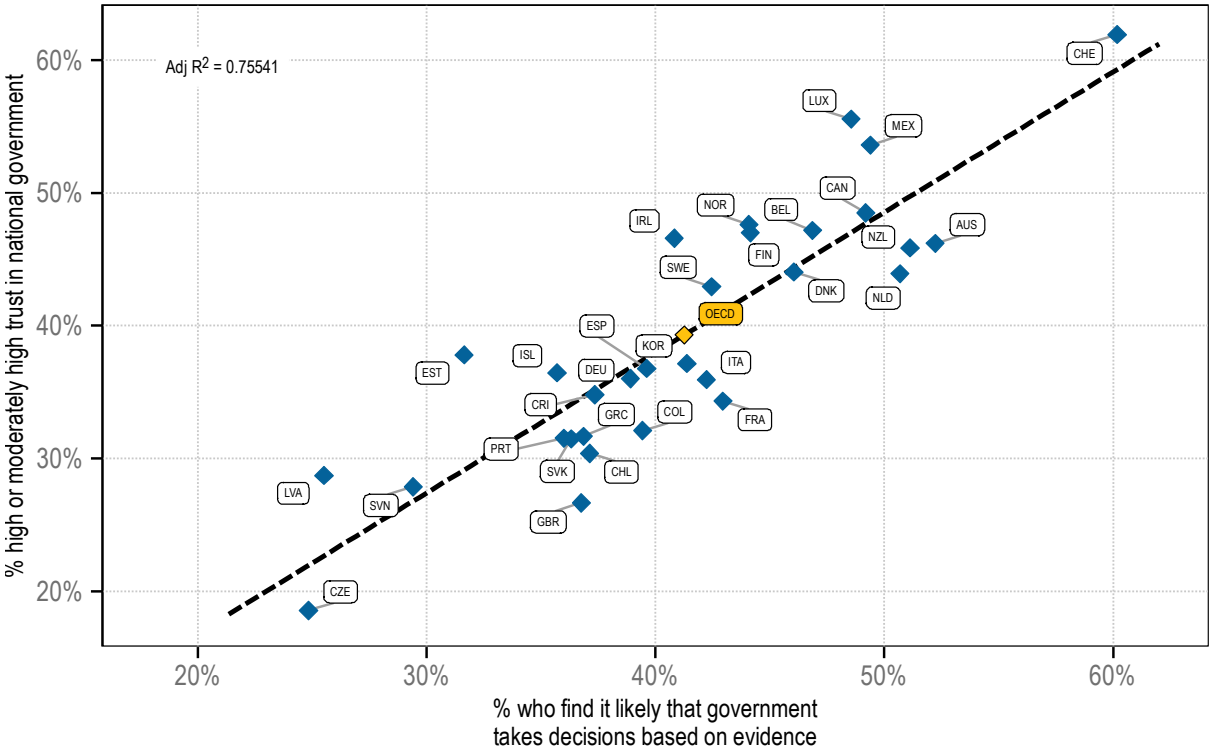
Figure 5.13. Confidence in the ability of government to make policies based on the best available evidence is closely related to trust in the national government

Share of population with high or moderately high trust in the national government (y-axis) by share of people that think it is likely government takes decisions based on best available evidence (x-axis), 2023



Note: The scatterplot presents the share of "high to moderately high 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 national government?" on the y-axis. The y-axis presents the share of "likely" responses to the question "If the national government takes a decision, how likely do you think it is that it will draw on the best available evidence, research, and statistical data?". Both high or moderately high trust and 'likely' correspond to the 6-10 responses on the 0-10 scale.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

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Moreover, as noted in this chapter, many feel underserved by public communication. Most notably, 40% think it is unlikely the government would clearly explain how a policy reform would affect them, suggesting room for improvement in this area. Individuals who are financially vulnerable or have a lower education level tend to have significantly less confidence in the availability of public service information and the government's ability to clearly communicate the impacts of reform. Those concerned about their household's financial well-being are 11 to 12 percentage points more likely to not anticipate receiving clear information on both fronts.[1] Similarly, even when all other factors are equal, those who have not completed upper secondary education are somewhat more likely (by four percentage points) to feel "underserved' with regard to information about services. More accessible and inclusive public communication would therefore be important to help ensure the population as a whole is well informed and therefore equipped to assess government performance and engage in political life. The 2021 OECD Report on Public Communication provides some guidance on how countries may achieve this (see Box 5.3).

Box 5.3. Five Key principles for Public Communication

The first OECD Report on Public Communication: The Global Context and the Way Forward examines the public communication structures, mandates and practices of centres of governments and ministries of health from 46 countries. The report outlines five key principles for public communication:

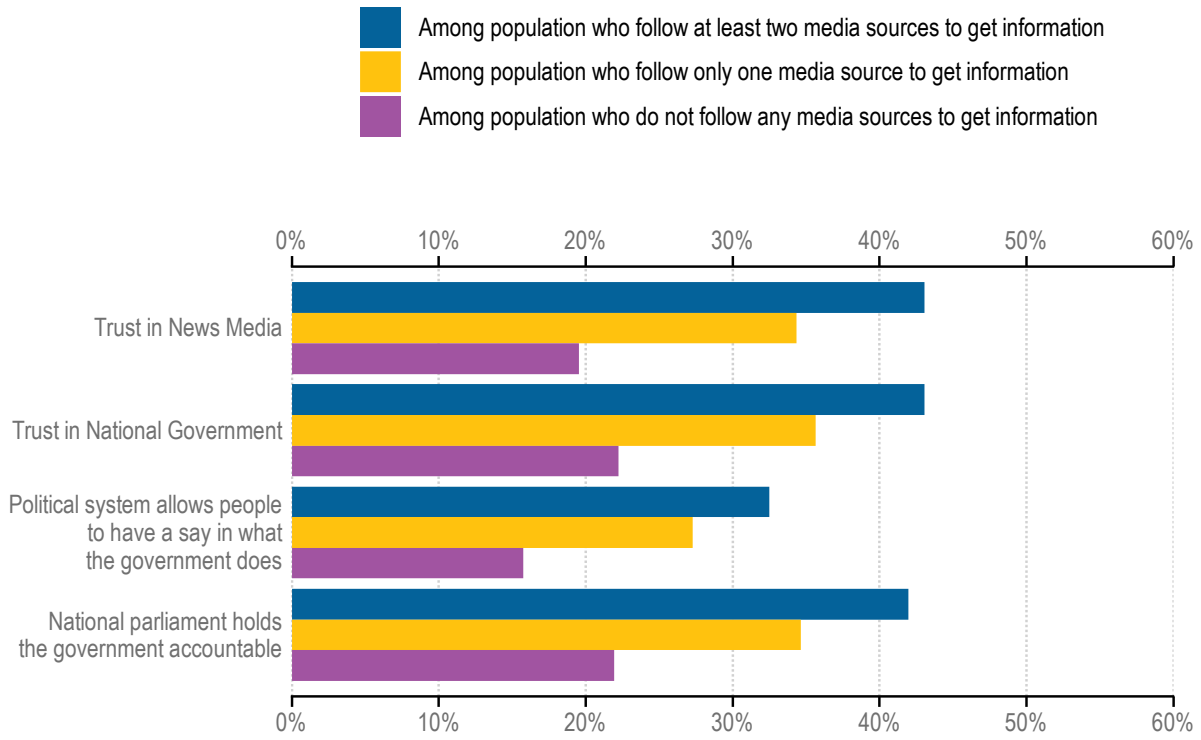
- Empower the public communication function by setting appropriate mandates and developing strategies to guide the delivery of communication in the service of policy objectives and of the open government principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation; and separating it, to the extent possible, from political communication.
- Institutionalise and professionalise communications units to have sufficient capacity, including by embedding the necessary skills and specialisations that are leading the transformation of the field, and ensuring adequate human and financial resources.
- Transition towards a more informed communication, built around measurable policy objectives and grounded in evidence, through the acquisition of insights in the behaviours, perceptions, and preferences of diverse publics, and the evaluation of its activities against impact metrics.
- Seize the potential of digital tech but responsibly: Digital tools, data, and AI can facilitate greater engagement and inclusion if used ethically and with respect for privacy.
- Fight mis and disinformation. Government must be equipped to pre-empt and debunk mis and disinformation through clear practice and guidelines.

Source: (OECD, 2021[23]).

Moving beyond public communication to the wider information ecosystem, governments supporting media ecosystem that allows independent and plurality of information is essential. Indeed, evidence for the Trust Survey shows that people who obtain their information from multiple sources are substantially more trusting of the media, the national government, and have a better perception of how well the system lets people like them have a say (Figure 5.14). Of course, this data point does not enable us to ascertain the extent to which these media sources are politically aligned, or reflect similar world views, and as such are not a measure of media pluralism per se. However, these results do suggest that governments have an interest in ensuring the public is able and encouraged to access news in a plural and diverse media landscape.

Figure 5.14. People who gather their information from multiple sources tend to be more trusting

Share of population reporting high or moderately high level of trust in selected questions, OECD, 2023



Note: For the first two trust questions on the y-axis, respondents were asked: "On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely, in general how much do you trust: [OPTION]?". The remaining two questions reflect respondents' preferences as expressed in their answers to the questions: "How much would you say the political system in [COUNTRY] allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?" and "How likely do you think it is that the national parliament would effectively hold the national government accountable for their policies and behaviour, for instance by questioning a minister or reviewing the budget?". The x-axis shows the unweighted OECD averages for the population share who reported 'high or moderately high trust' or 'likely,' which is an aggregation of responses ranging from 6 to 10 on the scale. The coloured bars are categorized according to the number of media sources participants reported following to get information, using the following question: "On a typical day, from which of the following sources, if any, do you get information about politics and current affairs? [OPTION]". They could select 'TV or radio,' 'Social media,' 'Newspapers, magazines, or online media,' or 'Don't know'."
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/bztcyd

Additionally, media and information literacy education could help individuals recognise biased or misleading information. In 2018, 54% of 15-year-old students across the OECD reported that their school taught them how to identify subjective or biased information (OECD, n.d.[24]). However, existing evidence on the effectiveness of media literacy programs is not yet robust (OECD, 2024[3]).

In its report *Facts not Fakes*, the OECD has elaborated a framework that addresses this matter in depth, aiming at strengthening information integrity while protecting fundamental freedoms and addressing the global challenge of disinformation (Box 5.4).

Box 5.4. Facts not fakes: Tackling disinformation, strengthening information Integrity

The OECD report *Facts not Fakes: Tackling Disinformation, Strengthening Information Integrity* outlines a policy framework encompassing a range of policy options to counter disinformation and strengthen information integrity. The report emphasises that efforts to build information integrity should not only address sector or technology-specific concerns, but also respond to the challenges facing the media and information ecosystems at all.

Based on early learnings based on OECD Member Countries emerging initiative in this space, the suggested policy framework to help guide government actions focuses on:

- *Implementing policies to enhance the transparency, accountability, and plurality of information sources:*

  This includes promoting policies that support a diverse, plural, and independent media sector, with a needed emphasis on local journalism. It also comprises policies that may be utilised to increase the degree of accountability and transparency of online platforms, so that their market power and commercial interests do not contribute to disproportionately vehicle disinformation.
- *Fostering societal resilience to disinformation:*

  This involves empowering individuals to develop critical thinking skills, recognise and combat disinformation, as well as mobilising all sectors of society to develop comprehensive and evidence- based policies in support of information integrity.
- *Upgrading governance measures and public institutions to uphold the integrity of the information space:*

  This involves the development and implementation of, as appropriate, regulatory capacities, co-ordination mechanisms, strategic frameworks, and capacity building programmes that support a coherent vision and approach to strengthening information integrity within the public administration, while ensuring clear mandates and respect for fundamental freedoms. It also involves promoting peer-learning and international co-operation between democracies facing similar disinformation threats.

Source: (OECD, 2024[3]).

5.5. CONCLUSION FOR POLICY ACTION TO ENHANCE TRUST

The information landscape significantly influences public perceptions and trust in public institutions. A trusted information ecosystem is essential for verifying government action and performance. However, disruptive trends like media market concentration, audience fragmentation, misinformation, and polarising speech can degrade journalism quality and information availability, impacting trust in media and public institutions.

In this context, decision-makers can take several steps to enhance trust.

- A high positive correlation exists between those who trust the national government and those who perceive government decision-making as evidence informed. Governments would benefit from more actively communicating about the evidence, research, and statistics that inform their decisions to improve public perception of the decision-making process.
- Confidence in the government's ability to explain the potential impact of reforms positively correlates with trust in the national government. However, 40% believe it's unlikely the government would clearly explain how a policy reform would affect them, indicating room for improvement. Public institutions need to enhance public communication strategies, ensuring they clearly explain how policy reforms affect the public to build confidence and trust.
- Inclusive public communication should be a priority, specifically targeting financially vulnerable individuals or those with lower education levels, to ensure everyone has access to public service information and understands the impact reforms will have on them.
- Governments have a responsibility and interest in promoting a healthy, diverse, and independent media environment. This allows public scrutiny and informed decision-making, fostering sceptical trust, which is a key element of a democracy.
- The current information ecosystem has made it challenging for individuals to understand and assess the trustworthiness of news. Therefore, investing in evidence-informed approaches to media literacy is essential to foster societal resilience.

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NOTE

[1] The results discussed in this paragraph are from an econometric analyses. They are obtained from logit regressions of whether the person thinks it is likely that information on administrative services are easily obtainable/that government will clearly explain how they will be affected by a reform on the person's gender, age group, educational attainment and financial concerns and country fixed effects. The discussed effects of financial concerns and educational levels correspond to their average marginal effects.

Annex A. The public governance drivers and personal characteristics shaping trust in public institutions

Given that multiple factors influence public trust in government, it is interesting to explore their relationship with trust levels simultaneously. This is achieved through econometric analysis, which examines the links between the outcome of interest – trust in a public institution – with the public governance drivers of trust and individual background characteristics. This chapter takes a holistic perspective: The public governance drivers are seen from a birds-eye view, stripped of their details, but in turn considered jointly with others. This allows to consider how positive perceptions of a given driver are related to the probability of placing high or moderately high trust in a public institution when holding other perceptions as well as background characteristics constant. Findings from the econometric analysis can be particularly useful for identifying areas in which improvements could lead to boosts of trust levels.

UNDERSTANDING HOW MULTIPLE PUBLIC GOVERNANCE DRIVERS AFFECT TRUST

The results of the econometric analysis show how much more likely an individual is to have high or moderately high trust in a given public institution if they have a positive perception of the respective public governance driver, holding their assessment of the other drivers and their socio-economic and political background constant. The analysis therefore provides insights into how changed perceptions of a given driver can affect trust levels. Box A.1 provides more details on the analytical method.

Nevertheless, the analysis has limits in terms of being able to assess whether the driver *causes* trust to rise. First, trust in an institution can make the institution function more effectively, indicating the possibility of reverse causality. Second, people's perceptions of different public governance drivers may not only move in parallel, leading to collinearity, but may also have a joint impact on trust. Third, factors that are not measured by the Trust Survey can also have an influence of trust, contributing to omitted variable bias.

Despite these and other methodological difficulties, the econometric analysis is a useful tool to understanding which public governance drivers have the strongest association with trust, even when accounting for other variables that are known to affect trust. Results from this analysis provide governments with a compass to guide them on which dimensions to leverage or improve upon to enhance trust.

The following sub-sections show the results of logistic regression analysis of trust in the national government, national civil service, national parliament and local government on the explanatory and control variables. Each figure shows all the variables that a have statistically significant relationship with trust in the respective institutions, with a higher relevance (moving from left to right along the x-axis) indicating a larger estimated association with trust. The position along the y-axis shows the unweighted average share of respondents who rated the respective variable positively (percentage of "6-10" responses on a 0-10 scale).

Responsiveness to evidence, balancing intergenerational needs and ensuring political voice are highly associated with trust in the national government

Increasing positive perception of government's capacity to use the best available evidence in decision-making and to adequately balance the interests of current and future generations are likely to have the highest influence on trust in the national government. Individuals who are confident on these two aspects are 6.8 and 6.4 percentage points, respectively, more likely to have high or moderately high trust in national government. Ensuring that people feel they have a say in what government does is associated with an increase in trust of 3.1 percentage points (Figure A.1).

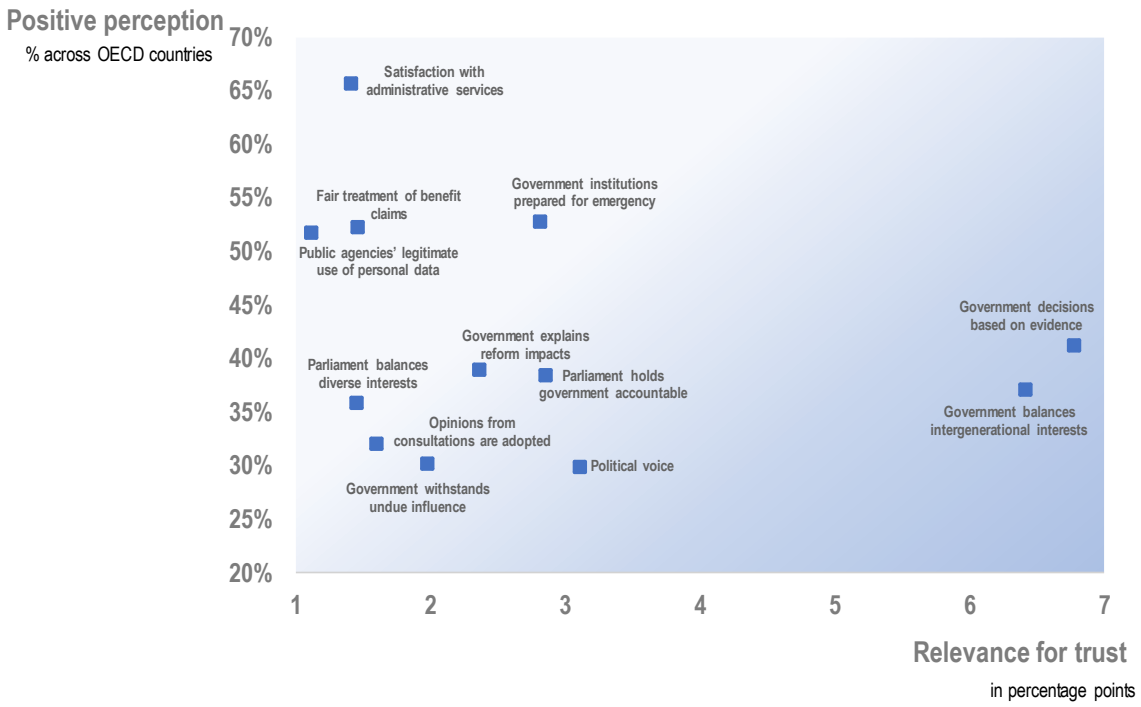
The average positive perception of these three main drivers of trust in the national government is quite different: while 41% believe that the government would use best available evidence in decision-making, 37% expect a fair balancing of intergenerational interests, and only 30% feel they have political voice (Figure A.1).

It is also important to note that even among those who have not voted for the current government, evidence-based decision making, balancing the interests of current and future generations and ensuring that people feel they have a political voice remain the most important drivers of trust in the national government.

Along with the very strong association of these two variables with trust, other governance variables also have a meaningful relationship with trust. Among these are the already positively perceived reliability dimension of being ready for future emergencies, which is associated with an increased likelihood of trust of 2.8 percentage points and the integrity-enhancing ability of the national parliament to hold the national government accountable, a positive perception of which can raise trust by 2.8 percentage points. Several other public governance drivers mostly related to complex policy issues, such as government withstanding undue influence, adopting opinions raised in public consultations, balancing interests of different groups in society, and explaining the impact of reform also have a significant relationship with trust in the national government; alongside with few public governance drivers related to the day-to-day interaction between citizens and government, such as treating service application fairly, using personal data only for legitimate purposes and ensuring satisfaction with administrative services.

Figure A.1. People who perceive government to use the best available evidence and balance intergenerational interests are more likely to have high or moderately high trust in the national government

Percentage point change in high or moderately high trust in national government in response to a more positive perception of the public governance variables (X-axis) and the unweighted OECD average share of the population with a positive perception of the noted variables (Y-axis)



Note: The figure shows the statistically significant determinants of trust in the national government in a logistic estimation that controls for individual characteristics, including whether they voted or would have voted for one of the current parties in power, self-reported levels of interpersonal trust, and country fixed effects. All variables depicted are statistically significant at the $p<0.01$ level.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

Perceived reliability, fairness and openness are associated with higher trust in the national civil service

Several of the public governance drivers for which people already have a positive perception are also most associated with high or moderately high trust in the national civil service, providing public institutions with leverage to further enhance trust levels (Figure A.2). Chief among them are three measures of reliability: First, higher satisfaction with administrative services, which two thirds across the participating countries are already satisfied with, is associated with a 4.7 percentage point increased likelihood of having high or moderately high trust in the national civil service. Believing that institutions use personal data for legitimate purposes only, which an average of around one in two do, is associated with an increase of 3.1 percentage points. Finally, being ready to protect people's lives in a large-scale emergency, which half of individuals are confident in, is associated with a 2.7 percentage point increase in the likelihood of having high or moderately high trust in the national civil service. Fairness in dealing with people's applications for services and benefits is associated with a 2.6 percentage points higher likelihood of trust.

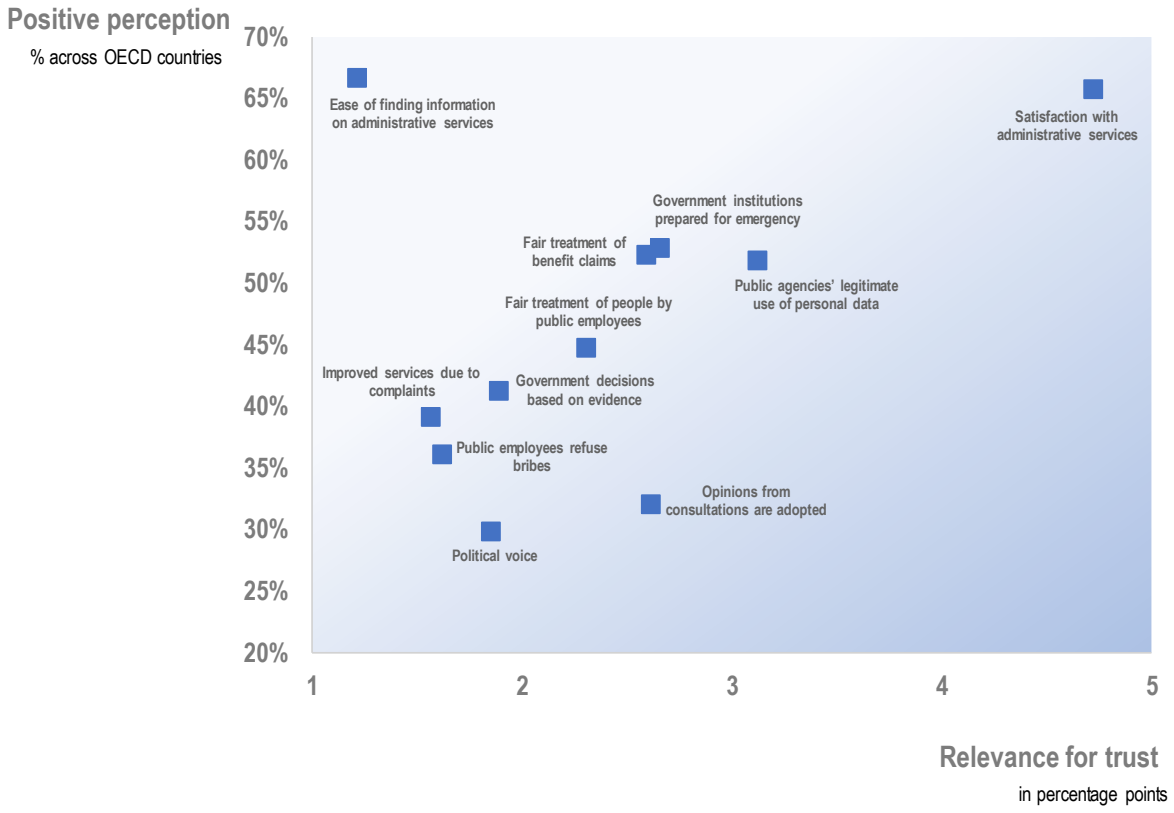
While the majority of public governance drivers for trust in the national civil service refer to day-to-day interactions between citizens and government,

some refer to complex policy issues. The most impactful variable on trust in the national civil service, for which many respondents have a more negative perception, is the likelihood that government would adopt the opinions expressed in a public consultation on reforming a policy area. A positive perception of this dimension of openness, currently displayed by only one third of respondents, is associated with a 2.6 percentage points increase in the likelihood of high or moderately high trust in the national civil service (Figure A.2). Focusing on improving perceptions in this area could thus have a moderately positive impact on raising trust in the national civil service.

In addition to these variables, other public governance drivers of trust also have a positive and significant association with trust in the national civil service. These include ensuring that people feel they have a say in what government does, that civil servants are seen as having integrity, that decisions are based on the best available evidence, and among the day-to-day interactions, that complaints about public services lead to changes, that people are treated equally and that clear information about public services are available.

Figure A.2. Ensuring that public services are perceived as reliable can maintain high levels of trust in the civil service

Percentage point change in high or moderately high trust in the national civil service in response to a more positive perception of the public governance variables (X-axis) and the unweighted OECD average share of the population with a positive perception of the noted variables (Y-axis)



Note: The figure shows the statistically significant determinants of self-reported trust in the national civil service in a logistic estimation that controls for individual characteristics, including whether they voted or would have voted for one of the current parties in power, self-reported levels of interpersonal trust, and country fixed effects. All variables depicted are statistically significant at the $p<0.01$ level.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

Trust in parliament is higher if it is perceived to balance the interests of different groups and to hold government accountable

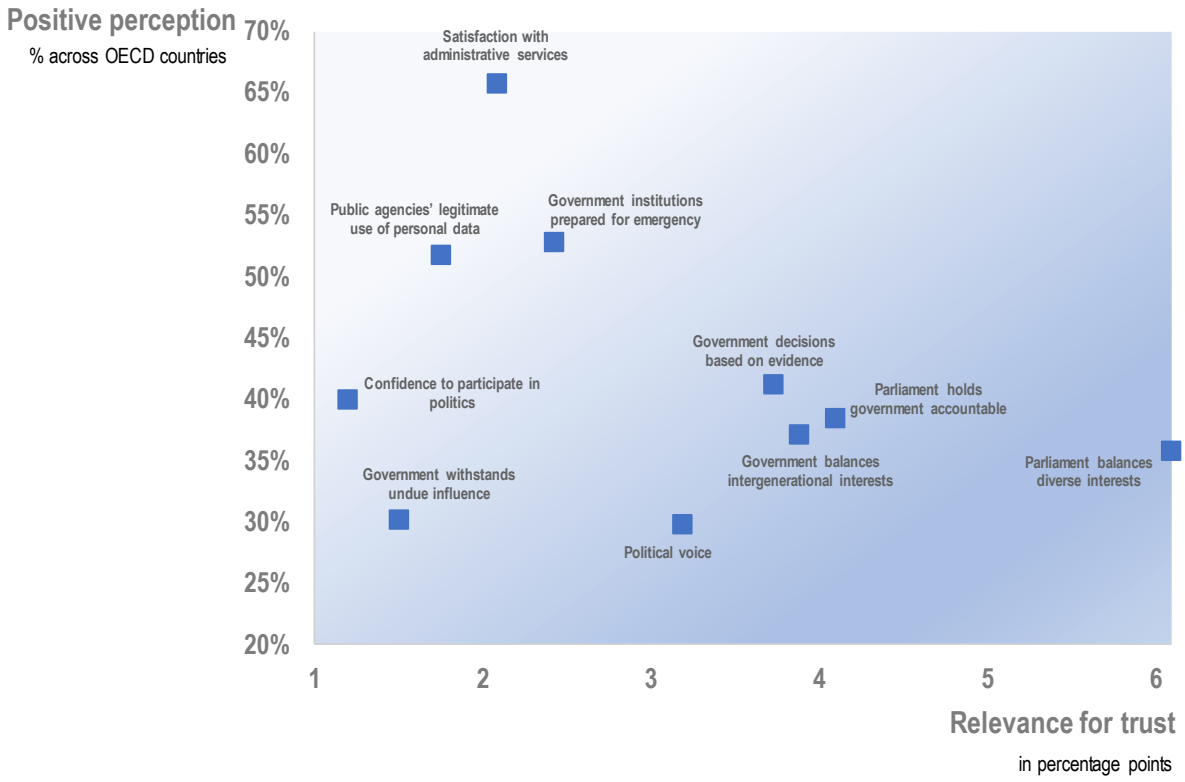
In the face of a generalised disaffection for parliaments – with fewer than four in ten reporting high or moderately high trust in it – having a higher confidence in the ability of public institutions to balance intra-country and inter-generational needs and interests are highly correlated with trust in the national parliament.

An effectively perceived oversight function also has a large positive association with trust in parliament. Indeed, this accountability dimension of integrity turns out to have the second-highest association with trust in the national parliament (Figure A.3). And the dimensions of evidence-based decision making and of ensuring political voice, which are important drivers of trust in the national government, are also important drivers of trust in parliament.

The other public governance drivers related to a higher likelihood of trust in parliament also for the most part relate to complex decision making, but a few also relate to day-to-day interactions with the public. In the former category are drivers related to political agency (believing that people like oneself have a say in what government does and being confident to participate in politics); integrity (finding it likely that the national government refuses to take a decision in favour of a corporation that could be harmful to society); and reliability (emergency preparedness). In the latter category are satisfaction with administrative services and finding it likely that government institutions use personal data only for legitimate purposes.

Figure A.3. Confidence in parliament's role in holding government to account and legislating fairly can boost trust

Percentage point change in high or moderately high trust in the national parliament in response to a more positive perception of the public governance variables (X-axis) and the unweighted OECD average share of the population with a positive perception of the noted variables (Y-axis)



Note: The figure shows the most robust determinants of self-reported trust in the parliament in a logistic estimation that controls for individual characteristics, including whether they voted or would have voted for one of the current parties in power, self-reported levels of interpersonal trust, and country fixed effects. All variables depicted are statistically significant at $p<0.01$.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

Being open to feedback from the public is the single most important driver of trust in the local government

For trust in local government, one variable stands out as a focus for increasing trust: Individuals who find it more likely that local government would give them an opportunity to voice their opinion when taking a decision affecting their community are 6.1 percentage points more likely to have high or moderately high trust in the local government (Figure A.4). An average of 41% of respondents find it likely that local government would indeed be open this way.

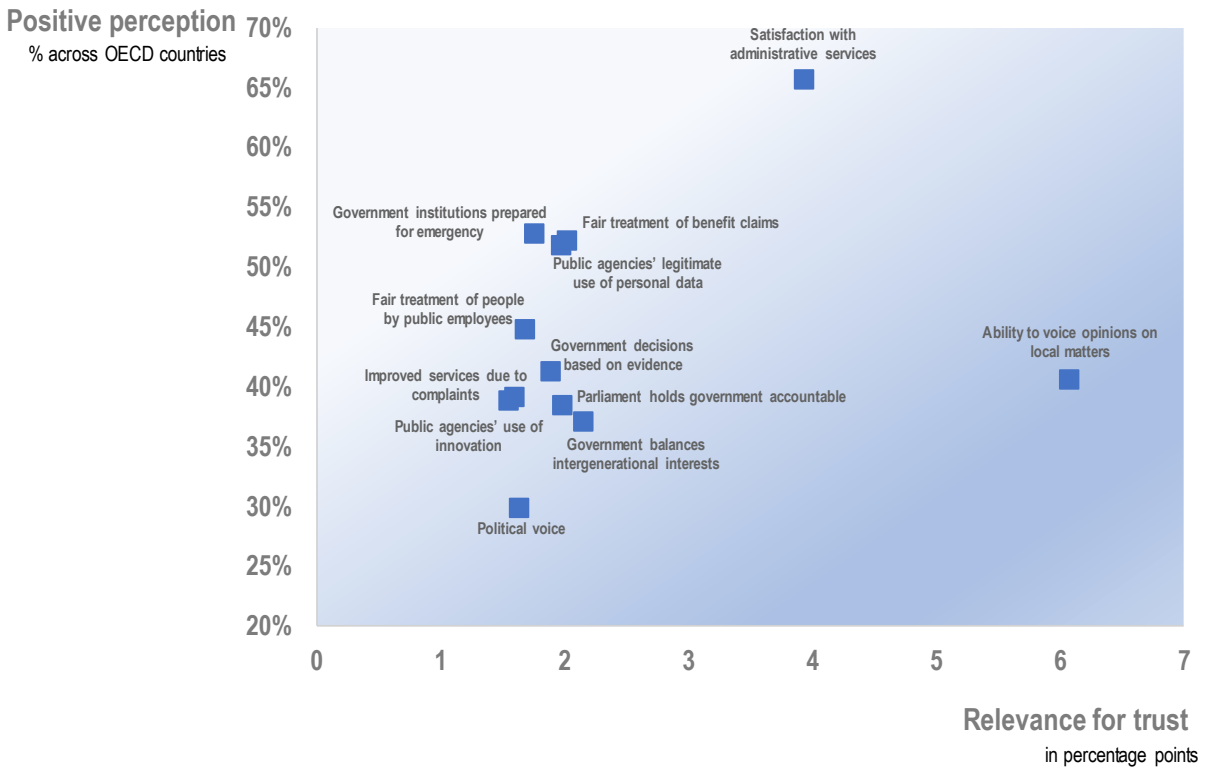
The reliability and fairness drivers of satisfaction with administrative services and treating service applications fairly also impact trust in the local government. Being satisfied with administrative services is associated with a 3.9 percentage points higher likelihood of high or moderately high trust in local government, while believing that their application would be treated fairly raises is associated with a 2 percentage points increase (Figure A.4).

Finally, and perhaps counterintuitively, the ability of the *national* government to balance intergenerational interests, which only 37% think is likely, is also associated with a higher likelihood of

2.2 percentage points of having high to moderately high trust in the local government (Figure A.4). A potential interpretation is that people care about the long-term planning capacities of all public institutions, and that the perceived capacity of the national government to balance intergenerational interests, which the survey measures, is highly correlated with the perceived capacity of local government to think strategically about issues with long-terms implications, which the survey does not measure. The included variable can then be interpreted as an imperfect proxy measure of the long-term planning capacity of local governments.

Figure A.4. Willingness to let people voice opinions about decisions that affect their community has the highest potential for increasing trust in local government

Percentage point change in high or moderately high trust in local government in response to a more positive perception of the public governance variables (X-axis) and the unweighted OECD average share of the population with a positive perception of the noted variables (Y-axis)



Note: The figure shows the statistically significant determinants of self-reported trust in the local government in a logistic estimation that controls for individual characteristics, including whether they voted or would have voted for one of the current parties in power, self-reported levels of interpersonal trust, and country fixed effects. All variables depicted are statistically significant at the $p<0.01$ level.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND AND PARTISANSHIP AS INFLUENCERS OF TRUST

People's demographic and socio-economic background as well as their alignment with the current government in power affects their perception of public institutions. This can be seen in a simple analysis in the share of people with high or moderately high trust across groups with different characteristics. But to a lesser extent, it also holds true when analysing multiple trust drivers and background characteristics jointly.

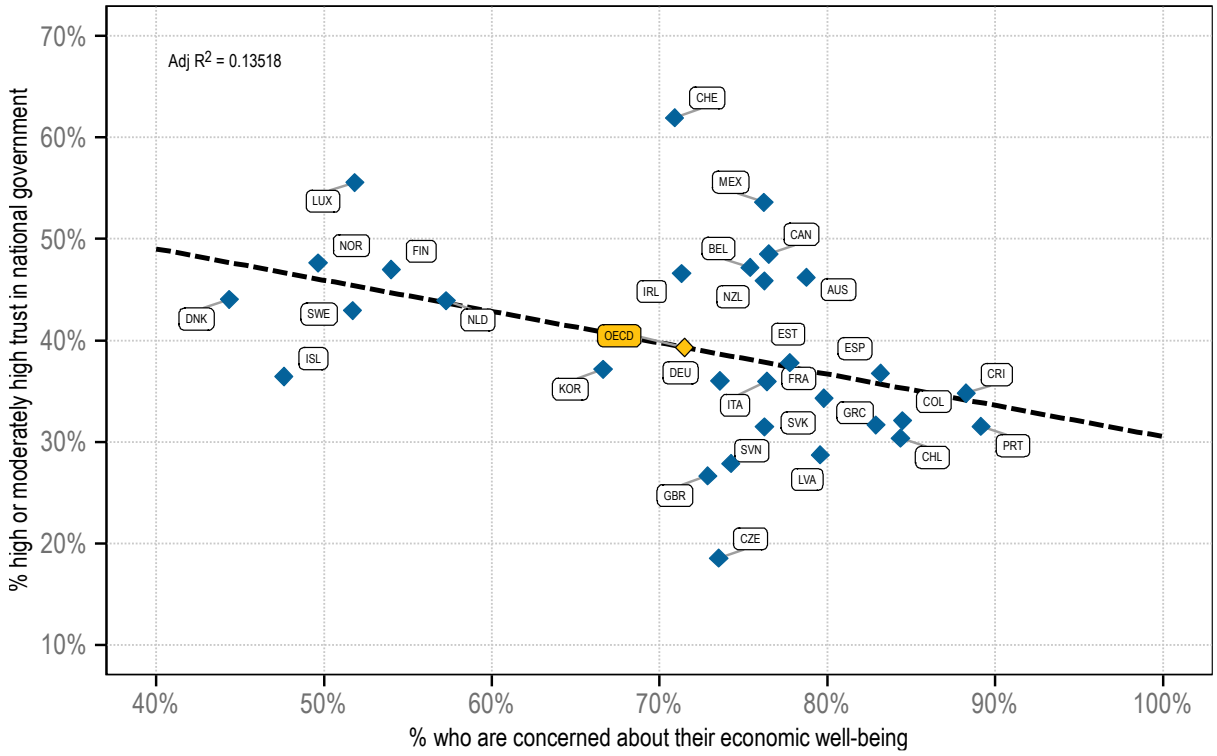
At the individual level, the OECD Trust Survey finds that on average, women, young, and less educated people tend to have lower trust in the national government (Chapter 2). However, these relationships do not always hold in the regression analyses that control for multiple drivers at the same time. In particular, the difference between the likelihood of having high or moderately high trust in local government, the national civil service and national parliament does not exist when comparing men and women with otherwise similar backgrounds and public governance perceptions; and is very small for the national government (an average marginal effect of -1 percentage point). An explanation for this finding is that different perceptions of the public governance drivers, perceptions of political agency and partisanship between men and women (almost, in the case of the national government) entirely account for their differences in trust levels.

At the macro level, an important pathway through which economic, environmental, public health and security trends are likely to affect trust levels is through their impact on how stable and secure individuals feel. Findings from the OECD Trust Survey suggest that worries about the economic and financial well-being of one's own household are negatively correlated with trust in the national government. However, this correlation is not very strong at the country level (Figure A.5). Evidence from the survey in Chile suggests that people who are more afraid of becoming the victim of a crime likewise have lower trust levels; echoing a finding of a 2023 study on the drivers of trust in public institutions in Brazil (OECD, 2023[1]).

The relationship between micro-perceptions and macro-trends, for example when it comes to the economic well-being of one's household and the health of the economy, are complex. They not only relate to trends in main economic indicators such as GDP growth and the unemployment rate, but also to individual experiences within their immediate environment, their socio-economic background and the perceived social net provided by the tax-benefit system. For example, people with unstable employment appear to judge the performance of the economy based on poverty rather than the unemployment or growth rates (Hellwig and Marinova, 2022[2]); while more economically secure individuals appear to pay more attention to GDP, unemployment and inflation factors when determining how satisfied they are with economic conditions (Fraile and Pardos-Prado, 2013[3]). Rising job insecurity and the outpacing of costs of essential goods and services such as education and housing compared to overall inflation (OECD, 2019[4]) can have a higher impact on perceived economic insecurity of one's own family than the economic growth rate by itself. Perceived financial vulnerability lowers the likelihood of having high or moderately high trust in the national government and parliament by two percentage points, but has no statistically significant impact at the 0.01 significance level on trust in local government and the national civil service.

Figure A.5. In countries where concerns about the economic well-being of one's household are more widespread, trust in the national government tends to be lower

Share of respondents reporting high or moderately high trust in national government and share of respondents who have concerns about their household's finances or overall well-being in the near future, 2023



Note: This scatterplot presents the share of high or moderately high 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. The x axis presents the share of share of respondents who answered 'somewhat' or '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 economic well-being?".
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

At the individual level, the Trust Survey finds that those who feel politically empowered and aligned with the current government tend to have more trust in both the government and administrative institutions. However, in the regression analyses, we can clearly see that much of the raw difference in trust between those who voted for and did not vote for the current government are related to other characteristics and their perceptions of public governance drivers. In particular, while individuals who voted for or would have voted for one of the parties in power are ten percentage points more likely to have high or moderately high trust in the national government, this difference is much smaller than the unadjusted partisan trust gap of 27 percentage points (see Chapter 2). Moreover, this marginal effect already drops to three percentage points when it comes to trust in the national parliament. For the local government and national civil service, in turn, there is no statistically significant (at the 0.01 level) relationship.

Of course, people's support for the current government in the last election can also colour how they perceive the public governance drivers, but reassuringly, it has little impact on what people self-report as significant in determining their trust levels. Moreover, it also does not affect the statistical relationship between the trust drivers and trust outcomes.

In addition to responding to hypothetical situations related to the different aspects of public

governance, 2023 Trust Survey respondents were also asked to indicate which factor contributed most to their trust in the national government among six options that intended to capture government competencies, integrity, openness, adherence to electoral promises, and intergenerational fairness, as well as political preferences ("Government policies match my preferences"). Responses to this question show that, on average, only 26% of respondents cite government policies matching their preferences, the least frequently mentioned factor. In contrast, 59% selected "government officials abide of the same rules as everybody" as the main factor shaping their trust levels. Our analysis finds that respondents think similarly about which factors have the highest impact on whether they trust the government, regardless of whether they have voted for the current government. People who did not vote for one of the parties currently in power put slightly more emphasis on integrity; and people who (would have) voted for one of the governing parties put slightly more emphasis on the match between their policy preferences and government policies. But otherwise, patterns are very similar between the two groups. This finding suggests that while support or opposition to the current government in power can affect how people judge the performance of public institutions and how much they trust them, the *criteria* that shape their trust in the national government do not systematically vary.[1]

ASSESSING THE EXTENT TO WHICH CHANGES IN TRUST LEVELS ARE RELATED TO CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF PUBLIC GOVERNANCE DRIVERS

Trust levels in some of the countries participating in the 2021 and 2023 Trust Survey changed quite strongly, calling for an explanation of how they came about. Trust in public institutions are affected by a multitude of factors. Many of these factors are measured by the Trust Survey and included in the econometric analysis above. However, other factors, related for example to the political cycle, can also lead to fluctuations in trust levels. A natural question is therefore to what extent changes in the perception of public governance drivers and of background characteristics are behind these changes in trust levels.

The simple comparison in Chapter 1 between changes in the average perceptions in the public governance drivers of trust and in the share with high or moderately high trust in the national government provided first insights into this question. In particular, countries in which public perception across all public governance drivers improved over the two years also saw increases in the share of people with high or moderately high trust in the national government; and the opposite was true in countries where average perceptions across all public governance drivers deteriorated (Annex Table 1.A.2 in Chapter 1). However, for the 'in-between' cases of countries where perceptions of some public governance drivers improved and others stayed constant or became worse, this simple comparison is insufficient to determine to what an extent changes in trust levels can be attributed to changes in trust drivers.

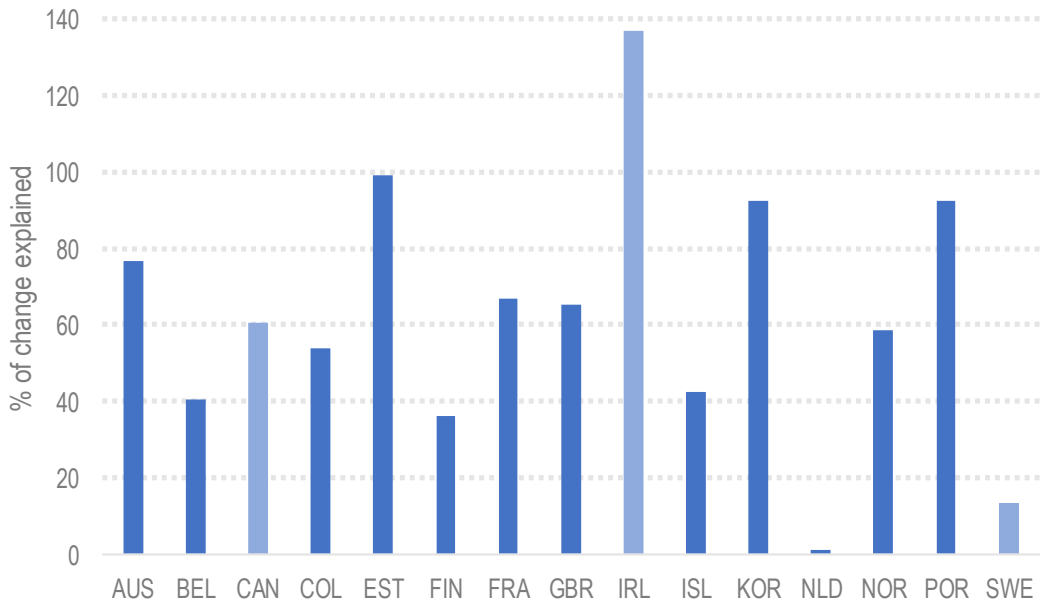
An econometric analysis is therefore needed to address this question more precisely. Decomposition analysis has traditionally been used to analyse to the extent to which differences in outcomes between two groups, such as in the earnings of men and women, can and cannot be attributed to differences in their characteristics. We apply a common decomposition method, a two-fold Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition, to understand what share of the change in trust levels in each of the individual countries that participated in the 2021 and 2023 OECD Trust Survey can be explained by changes in the public governance drivers and background characteristics, and what share cannot be.

Findings from the decomposition analysis show that for the majority of countries with available information on the trust levels and drivers in the 2021 and 2023 survey, at least thirty percent of the change in trust levels between 2021 and 2023 can be explained by the econometric model we apply in this chapter. In some countries, including Australia, Colombia, Estonia, France, Korea, Portugal and the United Kingdom, the explained share is substantially higher. This means that for example in Estonia and Korea, changes in the perceptions of the drivers can explain almost all of

the change in trust levels observed between 2021 and 2023. However, in other countries, the explained difference is not statistically significant; and in Denmark and the Netherlands, the explained difference goes in the opposite direction from the change in trust levels that is actually observed.

Figure A.6. In half of the countries with available information, a large part of the change in trust levels between 2021 and 2023 can be attributed to changes in the public governance drivers

Percentage of difference in share with high or moderately high trust in the national government between 2021 and 2023 explained by the public governance drivers and background variables



Note: The figure shows the share of the difference in the proportion of people with high or moderately high trust in the national government between 2021 and 2023 that can be explained through changes in the public governance drivers and background variables. The results are obtained through a two-fold Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition. The explained difference are not statistically significant (at $p<0.01$) for the countries shown in light blue (Canada, Ireland, Netherlands, Sweden). For Denmark and Luxembourg, the difference is likewise not statistically significant, but changes in the public governance drivers suggest that the change in trust levels would be in the opposite direction from the observed change. The decomposition includes the variables on public governance drivers that are stable between 2021 and 2023 as well as the respondents' age group, education group, gender, financial concerns and whether they voted or would have voted for the current government.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023.

Different factors may contribute to the quite different outcomes in terms of the share of the trust gap which can be explained by the model. A first difference may be that public governance drivers that are particularly relevant in a given country are or are not included in the survey. For example, the high significance of some of the new variables in the 2023 Trust Survey suggests that they cover aspects of public governance that matter to individuals and that were not previously covered by the other public governance variables. Since they were not included in the 2021 Survey, they can however not be accounted for in this decomposition analysis. Second, it is also possible that factors related neither to the measured background characteristics nor to perceptions of public governance drivers could have an impact on trust levels. For instance, the political cycle may have an impact on trust levels that is not fully captured by the public governance drivers. For example, increased optimism after a recent election may not translate to more positive assessments of

the competencies and values of public institutions. Instead, it may lead to more people reporting high or moderately high trust in the national government. The exclusion of these factors means that the model can only ever explain part but not all of the variation in trust levels. Third, a changed pertinence of specific public governance drivers, for example due to a different media environment, can also contribute to changes in how public governance drivers relate to trust. For example, in 2021, people may have given more importance to pandemic or emergency preparedness than they did in 2023.

Box A.1. Logit regression assessing the significance of different factors related to trust

The econometric results presented in this annex are logistic regression analyses for establishing the main drivers of trust in the national government, the local government, the civil service and national parliament in 30 OECD countries. Detailed regression results will be presented in (Ciccolini and Kups, forthcoming[5]).

Based on the OECD Framework on the Drivers of Trust, respondents' perceptions of the responsiveness, reliability, openness, integrity and fairness of public institutions as well as their feelings of political agency are expected to be the main drivers of trust in the three institutions. The survey question measuring trust in each institution separately 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?". In the regression analyses, trust is recoded as a binary variable (low or no trust: 0-4 and high or moderately high trust: 6-10). Neutral responses (5) and "don't know" are excluded.

The analysis operationalizes government competencies (including satisfaction with administrative services) and values through 19 variables, measured on a 0-10 response scale and standardized for the analysis. Political agency is operationalized through the variables on internal and external political efficacy, meaning an individual's confidence of participating in politics and their perception that people like them have a say in what government does; and perceptions of government actions on global and long-term challenges through variables on confidence in the country's success in reducing greenhouse emissions, and confidence that the government balances the interests of current and future generations.

The following explains the technical details about the econometric analysis.

- Model specification: All models control for individuals' socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, education, education, self-identified belonging to a discriminated-against group), interpersonal trust and experiencing financial concerns. It also controls for whether they voted (or would have voted) for one of the parties currently in power. They include country fixed effects in the cross-country analyses and year fixed effects in the analyses pooling data from both survey rounds. All models include survey weights. Missing data are excluded using listwise deletion.
- Technical interpretation: The statistically significant drivers are shown as average marginal effects. Statistically significant refers to those independent public governance variables included in the logistic regression model that resulted in $p<0.01$. The technical interpretation of the effect of government's reliability in taking evidence-based decisions on trust, for example, is that a one-standard-deviation increase in perceived reliability is associated with a 6.8 percentage point increase in trust in the national government. Or – taking into consideration all other variables in the model – all else being constant, moving from the average citizen to one with a typically higher level of confidence in government's reliability is associated with in a 6.8 percentage point increase in trust in the national government.

The regression results require a cautious interpretation, refraining from implying that these significant variables causally increase trust. All variables included in the regression models are correlated and the direction of the relationship between trust and perceptions of public governance may be reciprocal. However, the results are largely robust to the choice of the model. For example, the direction and significance of the results are similar when an ordinary least squares model or a logit model in which the explanatory variables (public governance drivers) are likewise recoded as 0-1 indicator variables (where the '1' corresponds to 6-10 on the response scale and '0' to responses 0-5 and 'don't know') are applied.

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NOTE

[1] This finding that the self-reported criteria do not differ between (would be) voters and non-voters for the current government are backed up by results from econometric analyses. In particular, when separate regressions of trust in the national government on the public governance drivers and background characteristics that are otherwise identical to those described in the "Responsiveness to evidence, balancing intergenerational needs and ensuring political voice are highly associated with trust in the national government" section are run for individuals who voted for (or would have voted for) and did not vote (or would not have voted) for the current government, the most important drivers of trust for example in the national government and in the national civil service remain the same.

Annex B. Overview of the 2023 OECD Trust Survey Methodology

The 2023 OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions is the second survey wave after the 2021 inaugural Trust Survey. This annex provides a short overview of the 2023 OECD Trust Survey data collection. More details can be found in the report's online annex.

Countries could choose between participating in a centralized data collection coordinated by the OECD Secretariat or managing their own data collection through the National Statistical Office or another survey provider. Most countries, except of six, opted for the first option.

Following the methodology from the 2021 survey wave, in most countries, the 2023 survey relied on a non-probability sampling approach. It consisted of ex ante country-level quotas on the distribution of age, gender, education and regions (hard quotas) and income (soft quota). The country-specific quotas on the distribution of age, gender, education and region, together with the ex-post weighting, ensure national representativeness of the survey data for these characteristics. The quotas were derived from different national and OECD sources (Table B.1). In 24 countries, the online surveys were conducted by the survey provider Ipsos and the sample was based on Ipsos' and partners' online panels, comprised of individuals in each country who willingly signed up to be engaged in market research surveys. In some of the countries where the data collection was managed by National Statistical Offices or by other survey providers, the sampling deviated from non-probability sampling. For example, in Finland, the sampling frame was the census database; in Ireland, the sample frame was drawn from the Central Statistics Office's census and matched to a non-probability-based sample based on gender, age group, education level, household size, principal economic status, and housing status; and in Mexico, urban households were selected for face-to-face survey interviews based on a three-stage sampling procedure.

Table B.1. Overview on hard and soft sampling quotas

	Categories	Source
Age	**Six groups:** 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65+	Latest population census
Gender	**Two groups:** female and male (non-binary group as response option)	Latest population census
Education	**Three groups:** low (<upper secondary), medium (upper & post-secondary), high (tertiary)	Latest population census: Group classification based on ISCED-2011 definition
Large Region	**Varying by country:** 3-21 regions	OECD.Stat: Regional Demography – Population, Large regions
Income	**Three groups:** bottom 20%, middle 60%, top 20%.	OECD Income Distribution Database/ ESS/Household Income Surveys

Note: The table shows the groups used in the four hard quotas (age, gender, education and large region) and the soft quota (income) to ensure national representative survey data based on these characteristics.

The survey was fielded between the 20th of September and the 12th of December 2023 and yielded a total number of 58 230 valid responses among the adult population (18+) across 30 OECD countries (Table B.2).

Table B.2. Data collection overview

Country	Sample Size	Languages	Fieldwork dates (2023)	Survey Provider	Survey mode
Australia	2,020	English	25 Oct – 26 Nov	Ipsos	Online
Belgium	2,000	French, Flemish	25 Oct – 20 Nov	Ipsos	Online
Canada	2,002	English, French	14 Oct – 25 Nov	Ipsos	Online
Chile	2,008	Spanish	25 Oct – 27 Nov	Ipsos	Online
Colombia	2,067	Spanish	16 Oct – 25 Nov	Ipsos	Online
Costa Rica	2,019	Spanish	25 Oct – 28 Nov	Ipsos	Online
Czechia	2,002	Czech	25 Oct – 24 Nov	Ipsos	Online
Denmark	2,016	Danish	25 Oct – 27 Nov	Ipsos	Online
Estonia	2,016	Estonian, Russian	26 Oct – 26 Nov	Ipsos	Online
Finland	1,035	Finnish, Swedish, English	1 Oct – 19 Oct	Statistics Finland	Online, telephone
France	2,000	French	25 Oct – 20 Nov	Ipsos	Online
Germany	2,000	German	25 Oct – 18 Nov	Ipsos	Online
Greece	2,116	Greek	25 Oct – 23 Nov	Ipsos	Online
Iceland	1,253	Icelandic	3 Oct – 4 Nov	Social Science Research Institute	Online
Ireland	1,969	English	20 Sep – 23 Oct	Central Statistics Office	Online
Italy	2,000	Italian	25 Oct – 20 Nov	Ipsos	Online
Latvia	2,027	Latvian, Russian	26 Oct – 26 Nov	Ipsos	Online
Luxembourg	1,009	German, French, English, Luxembourgish	26 Oct – 24 Nov	Ipsos	Online
Mexico	1,965	Spanish	25 Sep – 4 Oct	INEGI	Face-to-face
Netherlands	2,011	Dutch	25 Oct – 27 Nov	Ipsos	Online
New Zealand	2,004	English	25 Oct – 27 Nov	Ipsos	Online
Norway	2,671	Nynorsk, Bokmål, Sami, English, Polish	3 Oct - 12 Dec	Verian/Kantar	Online, paper-based
Portugal	2,021	Portuguese	25 Oct – 27 Nov	Ipsos	Online
Slovak Republic	2,016	Slovak	25 Oct – 17 Nov	Ipsos	Online
Slovenia	2,019	Slovenian	26 Oct – 28 Nov	Ipsos	Online
South Korea	2,016	Korean	16 Oct – 26 Nov	Ipsos	Online
Spain	2,024	Spanish	25 Oct – 22 Nov	Ipsos	Online
Sweden	2,001	Swedish	25 Oct – 19 Nov	Ipsos	Online
Switzerland	2,004	German, French, Italian	25 Oct – 27 Nov	Ipsos	Online
United Kingdom	1,919	English, Welsh	27 Sep - 23 Oct	Office for National Statistics	Online, telephone

OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions – 2024 Results

BUILDING TRUST IN A COMPLEX POLICY ENVIRONMENT

This report presents the main findings of the second OECD cross-national Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions, carried out in late 2023. With nearly 60 000 responses, representative of the adult population in 30 OECD countries, the survey investigated how people's expectations and experiences with government influence their trust in public institutions. These experiences and expectations range from day-to-day interactions with public institutions to government decision making on complex policy issues. The report identifies some of the main drivers of trust in government and other public institutions and discusses opportunities for policy action. For the first time, the report also analyses how trust levels and drivers have evolved in the 20 OECD countries that participated in the 2021 survey and how an information environment marked by an increasing amount of polarising content and disinformation affects people's trust in public institutions.

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PRINT ISBN 978-92-64-33830-2
PDF ISBN 978-92-64-33920-0