

Measuring Public Trust

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Motivation

The Economist

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Graphic detail | Daily chart

Declining trust in government is denting democracy

According to a new index, America's democracy score deteriorated in 2016



Jan 25th 2017

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Motivation

Public trust is foundation for **legitimacy & stability** of democratic systems.

Essential for success of public policies, e.g. public health, tax system, compliance with the law

→ **“intra-generational”** respect, fairness and distribution of resources

Moreover, it matters for longer-term policies such, e.g. to adapt to climate, technological and demographic changes

→ **“inter-generational”** respect, fairness and distribution of resources

So, **what is driving public trust in institutions?** Let's measure it...

Overview

1. What is “public trust” & recent literature
2. Conceptual measurement framework
3. Empirical measurement via surveys
4. Some results
5. Conclusion and next steps

What is public or institutional trust ?

“A person’s belief that an institution will act consistently with their expectations of positive behaviour” (OECD, 2017)

Trust is **relational**. It involves vulnerability and expectation of caring for **moral values & good faith**. Trust is not unconditional but for specific domains. Related to **competence**. (Levi & Stoker, 2000)

Example of public service delivery: A new passport
Expectation – Experience – Evaluation

➤ Somewhere between these trust (or trustworthiness) can be built – or lost. Trust often described as **hard to earn, easy to lose**.

“Family” of trust: **trust** (compliance), **mistrust** (vigilance), **distrust** (withdrawal)
(Jennings et al, 2021)

Recent literature (brief)

1. Compliance with COVID-19 containment measures positively related to pre-pandemic levels of trust (Bargain and Aminjonov, JPE 2020).
2. “Without trust, politicians struggle to convince people to follow their advice and instructions”. Epidemics lead to **long-term decline in trust and participation** for people in their impressionable years (Eichengreen et al, JPE 2021).
3. **Divergence of public trust between urban and rural areas** in Europe since 2008 due to different economic experience, values, demography, perception of worse public services (Mitsch et al, 2021).
4. Public trust enhances **confidence in effectiveness and willingness to sacrifice** in future-oriented policies to reduce emissions or public debt (Fairbrother et al, 2021)

Conceptual framework: Trust is multidimensional



Source: OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions

Survey uses situational questions in line with definition of “expected behaviour”

1. Reliability

2. Responsiveness

3. Integrity

4. Openness

5. Fairness

If many people complained about a public service that is working badly, how likely or unlikely do you think it is that it would be improved?

If you share your personal data with a public agency, how likely or unlikely do you think it is that it would be exclusively used for legitimate purposes?

A public employee were offered money by a citizen or a firm for speeding up access to a public service, how likely or unlikely do you think it is that they would refuse it?

If you need information about an administrative procedure (for example obtaining a passport, applying for benefits, etc.), how likely or unlikely do you think it is that the information would be easily available?

If a government employee interacts with the public in your area, how likely or unlikely do you think it is that they would treat all people equally regardless of their gender, sexual identity, ethnicity or country of origin?

Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021

Existing surveys focus on levels of trust

- Typical question: “On a scale from 0-10, how much do you trust/have confidence in/are satisfied with...”
- Modules in European Social Survey, World Values Survey, Eurobarometer, Gallup World Poll, Edelman Trust Barometer
- Large variation in question formulation, question scales (0-10 or yes/no), country coverage, available years, representativeness
 - Clear need for harmonisation and “active” questions
 - Need to look beyond trust “levels” (5 drivers, satisfaction with services, political participation, news consumption)

The OECD “Trust Survey” (1/2)

- ✓ 30 questions, randomised
- ✓ 22 countries
- ✓ 20 languages
- ✓ 50,000+ respondents, most online
- ✓ 11-point numerical scale (+verbal anchors, +DK, +PNTA)
- ✓ Median length mostly around 12-17 minutes
- ✓ Dec 2021 – Mar 2022
- ✓ YouGov & some NSOs

- ✓ Quotas for gender, age, region, education (non-interlocking)
- ✓ Post-weighting (random iterative method/raking)
- ✓ Tested in Korea, Norway, Finland
- ✓ Based on OECD (2017) Guidelines on Measuring Trust
- ✓ Also included in 2021 ESS (12 countries)
- ✓ Expert Advisory Group

The OECD “Trust Survey” (2/2)

Online surveys

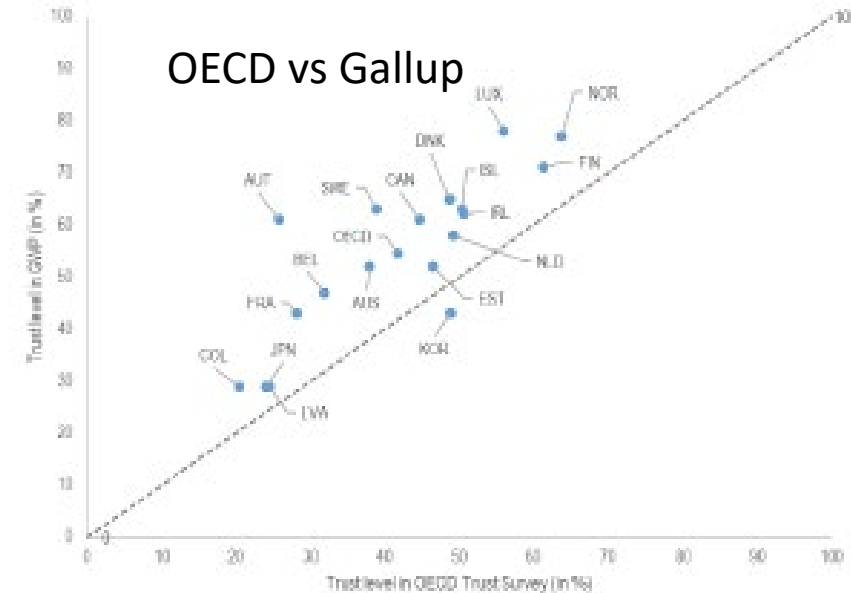
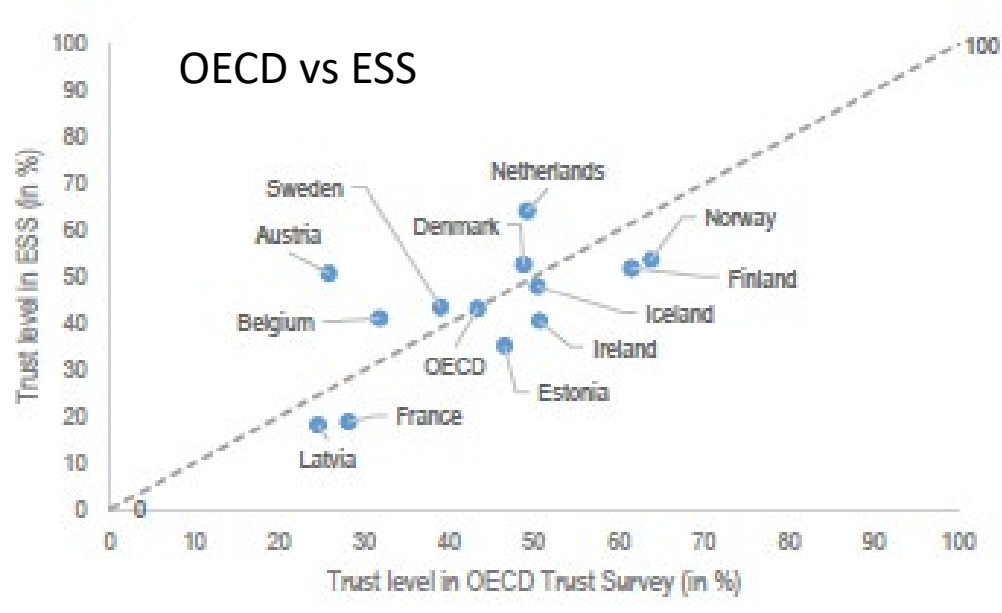
- ✓ Cheaper
- ✓ Faster
- ✓ Anonymity for sensitive questions
- ✓ Go-to during pandemic
- ✗ Need internet access (issue for older, rural, less educated)
- ✗ No opportunity to clarify questions

Non-probabilistic surveys

- ✓ Ex ante quotas more feasible due to costs and range of countries involved
- ✓ Much higher response rates, possibly more representative
- ✗ Not everyone has same probability to be contacted

Reliability of measures

Consistency over time and different measurement approaches. **High correlation with other surveys (0.6-0.9).** Probability sample test in Colombia.



Source: Nguyen et al (2022)

Validity of measures

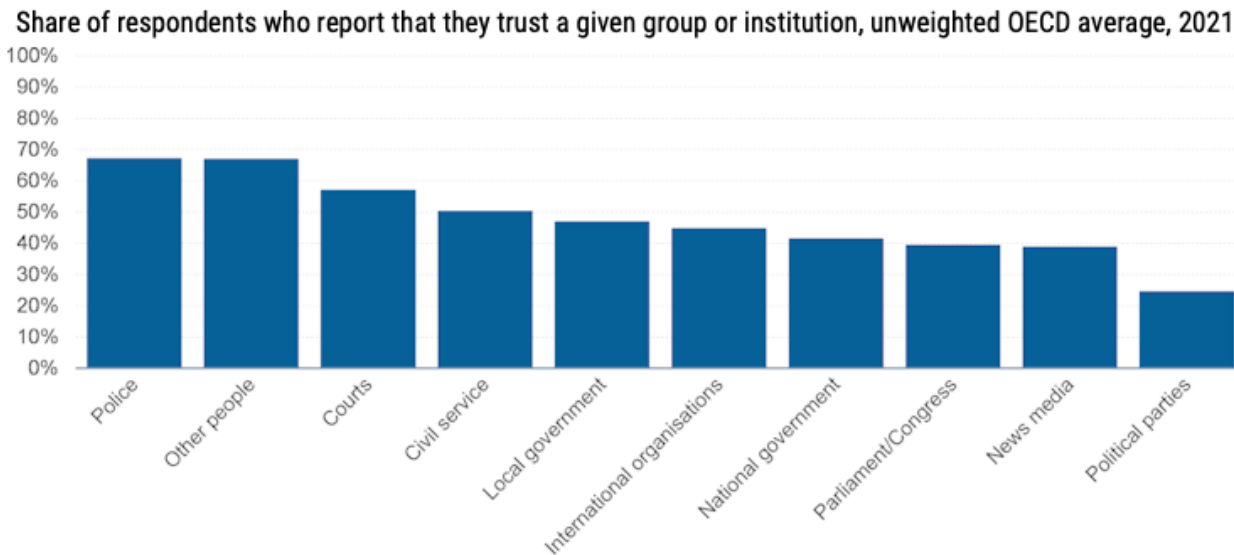
Measures plausibly and intuitively capture theoretical concepts they are supposed to (construct and face validity). Hard to test for.

- Use of situational questions seen as improvement
- All questionnaires reviewed by mother-tongue speakers and local experts, low “Don’t know” response rate (similar to other surveys)
- Internally-consistent, results for questions within modules (e.g. on fairness) highly correlated
 - e.g. trust in courts and judicial system most highly correlated with question of whether courts are free from political pressure
- Some cognitive testing undertaken by Australian Bureau of Statistics

Some results from the survey...

Levels and drivers of public trust

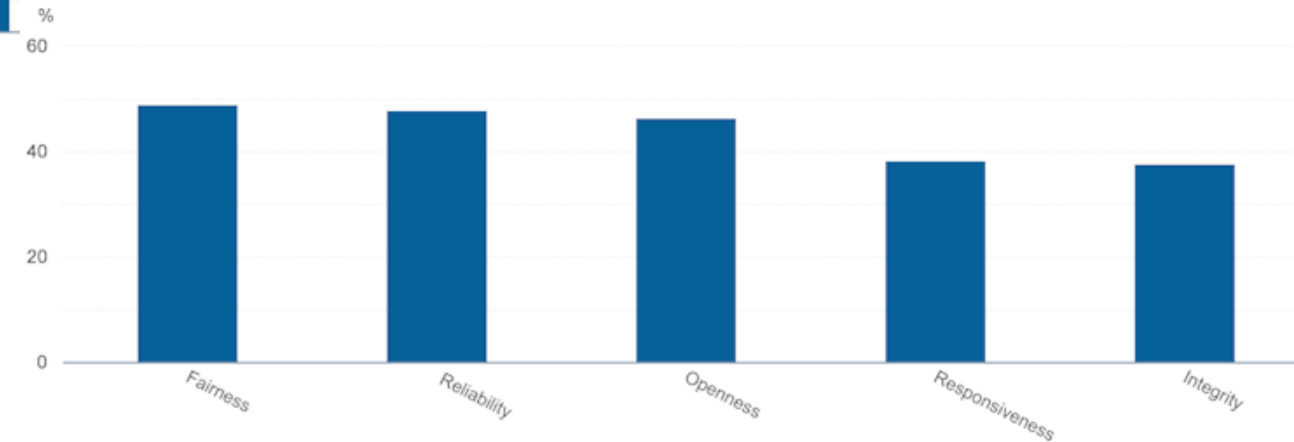
Figure 2.1. **Trust in other people and the police is relatively high, while political parties are viewed with scepticism**



Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021

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

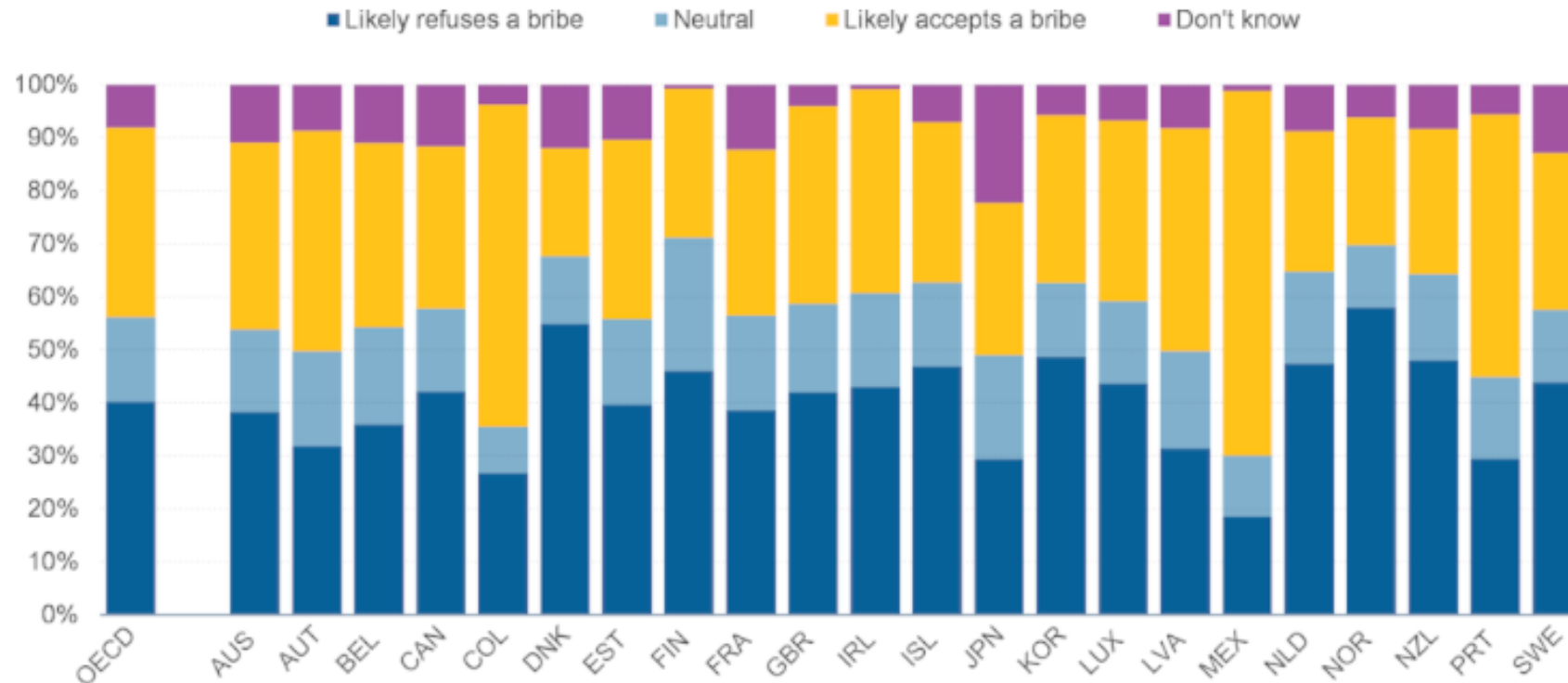
Share of respondents expressing confidence in government reliability, responsiveness, openness, integrity, and fairness (average across survey questions), unweighted OECD average, 2021



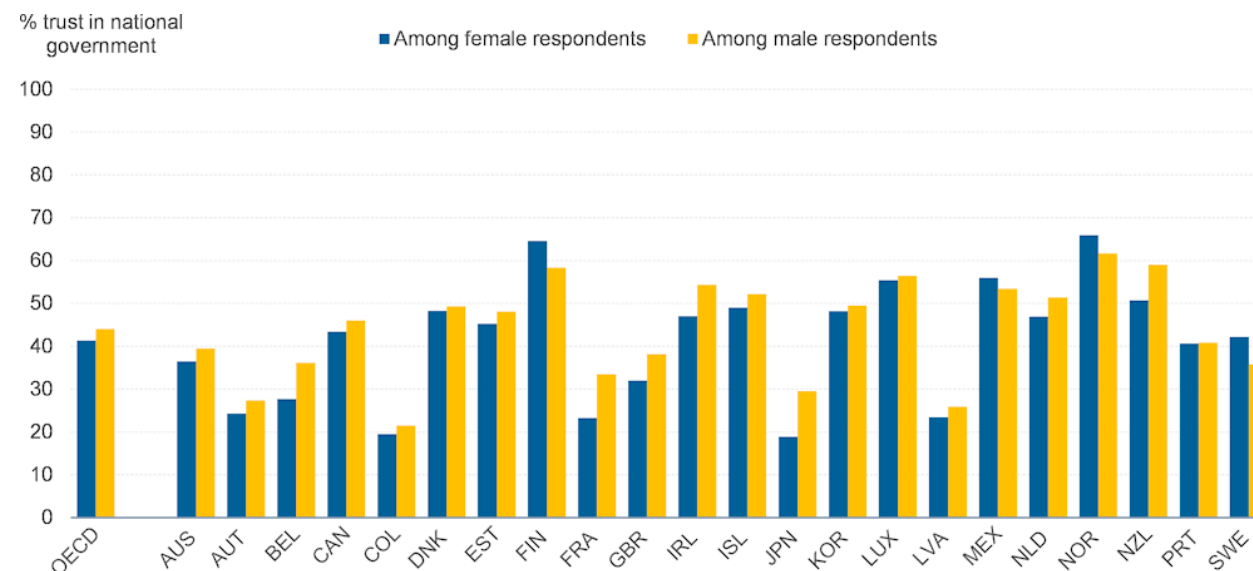
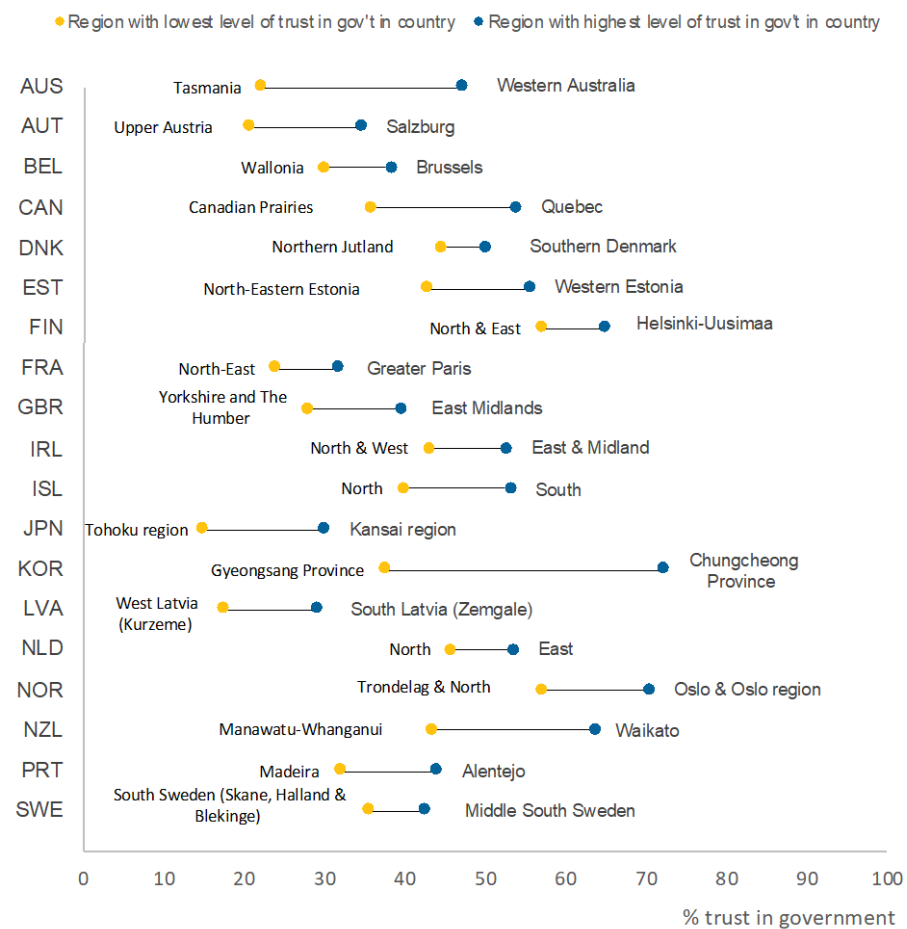
Integrity is an issue

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

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



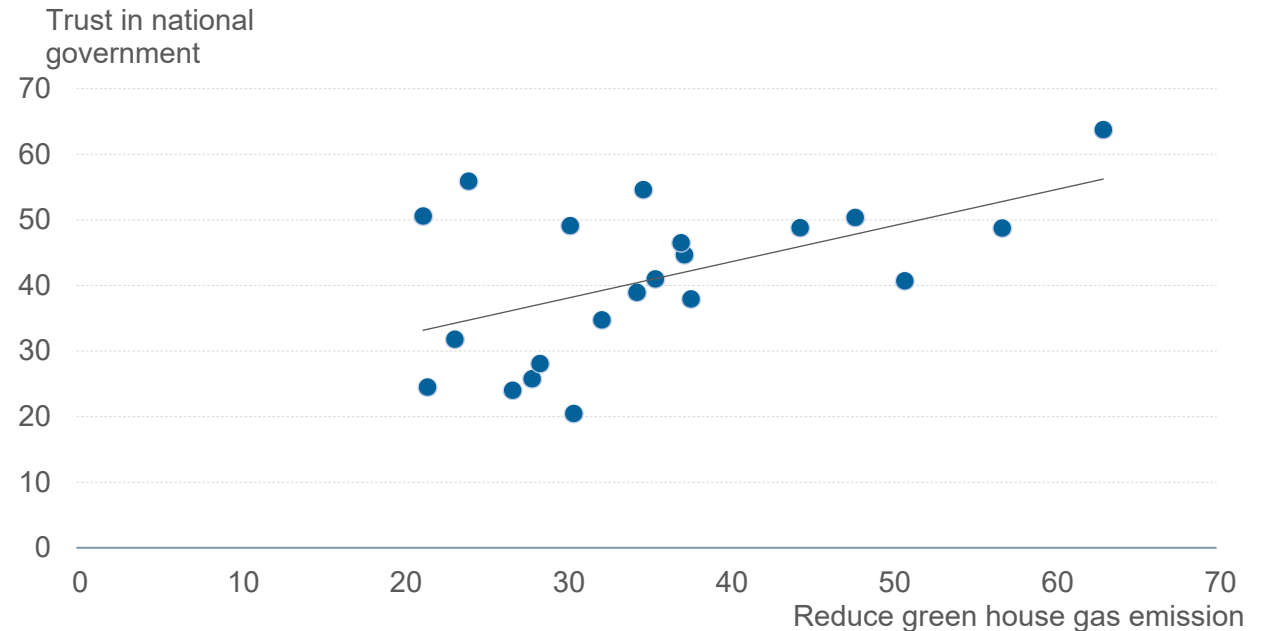
The trust divide



Trust is lower for people with **lower levels of education** and **income**, **lower perceived social status**, **lower political efficacy**, and for **younger people** (descriptively, among OECD countries).

Long-term challenges

- Survey shows that perceived competence in reducing emissions is related to trust in government
- Related to willingness to sacrifice
- People with higher **trust in government** and in the **effectiveness** of proposed climate policies are more willing to support them (Dechezleprêtre et al, 2022)



Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021

Conclusion

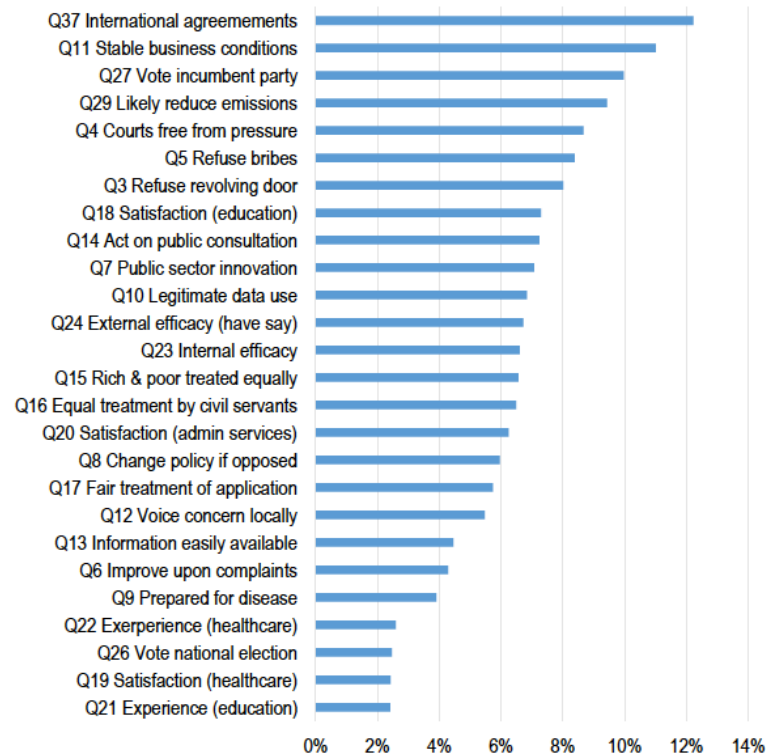
- People's trust in institutions could become key **outcome indicator** of public governance and improve evidence base for policy
- Measurement is feasible and statistics appear reliable and valid, but they can certainly be improved further over time
- Consistent measurement across countries is particularly difficult due to cultural differences and political cycles
- The issue of trust is not going away, need to get measurement in order and this initiative is big step forward that we can build on.

Further resources

- OECD report “Building Trust to Reinforce Democracy”: <https://doi.org/10.1787/b407f99c-en>
- Technical documentation for survey available here: <https://doi.org/10.1787/6f6093c5-en>
- Conceptual framework and literature review for survey here: <https://doi.org/10.1787/b6c5478c-en>
- OECD (2017) Guidelines on Measuring Trust: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264278219-en>
- OECD (2017) Trust and Public Policy: How Better Governance Can Help Rebuild Public Trust: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264268920-en>
- Trust in government data for the UK, collected via the OECD and published by the ONS: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/bulletins/trustinggovernmentuk/2022>

Appendix

Figure 2. Share of “Don’t know” responses by question, full sample



Note: Figure shows average share of respondents that choose answer option “Don’t know”. See Annex for questions associated with labels.

Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021