

Definition and measurement

Trust in political institutions refers to the extent to which individuals have a high degree of confidence in the institutions (government and parliament) and public administration of the country where they live. Data on these variables are derived from the 1999-2004 wave of the *World Values Survey*, which ask individuals to rate their confidence in a number of organisations, with responses grouped in four categories (a great deal of confidence, quite a lot, not very much and no confidence at all). The indicators presented below refer to respondents that indicate either “a great deal” or “quite a lot of confidence” in government, parliament and civil service, as a percentage of all respondents. Data comparability across countries may be affected by the small sample size and other survey features.

This section also presents data on trends in the satisfaction of individuals about the way democracy works in their country. Data are derived from different surveys, as described in OECD (2005). The indicator used refers to the percentage of respondents that are either “very” or “fairly” satisfied with the democratic process.

Trust in political institutions is crucial for the stability of societies and for the functioning of democracy in each country; it also shapes people’s willingness to cooperate in achieving collective goals and financing of public goods (Meikle-Yaw, 2006). There are large differences across OECD countries in the extent of citizens’ trust in various public entities (Figure CO6.1). On average, 38% of individuals across 24 OECD countries, in the early 2000s, reported high trust in parliament, with higher shares in Iceland, Luxembourg, Norway, Netherlands, Spain and Sweden and lower ones in Korea, the Czech Republic, Japan, Mexico and Australia. A marginally lower share of respondents, across 17 OECD countries, reported high confidence in their government, with lower levels in New Zealand, Germany, Australia, the Czech Republic and Korea, and larger shares in Sweden, the Slovak Republic, Spain, Switzerland and Turkey.

Cross-country differences are also significant when considering individuals’ perceptions about the functioning of civil service – the government branch that is in closest contact to citizens in its day-to-day operations. Around 44% of OECD citizens report high confidence in the civil service, with lower levels in Greece, Japan, Mexico and the Czech Republic, and higher levels in Turkey, Korea, Luxembourg and Ireland. In a majority of OECD countries, people reported higher trust in the civil service than in government, the main exceptions being the Czech Republic, Mexico, Poland and New Zealand. The civil service plays a key role in society: when citizens have little confidence in it, this may lead to

dissatisfaction in collective action and in the entire political process. Badly designed reforms may also erode citizens’ trust in the civil service. Though no direct link between public sector performance and citizens’ subjective evaluation appears to exist, OECD (2005) suggests that higher trust in the civil service goes in hand with higher trust in parliament.

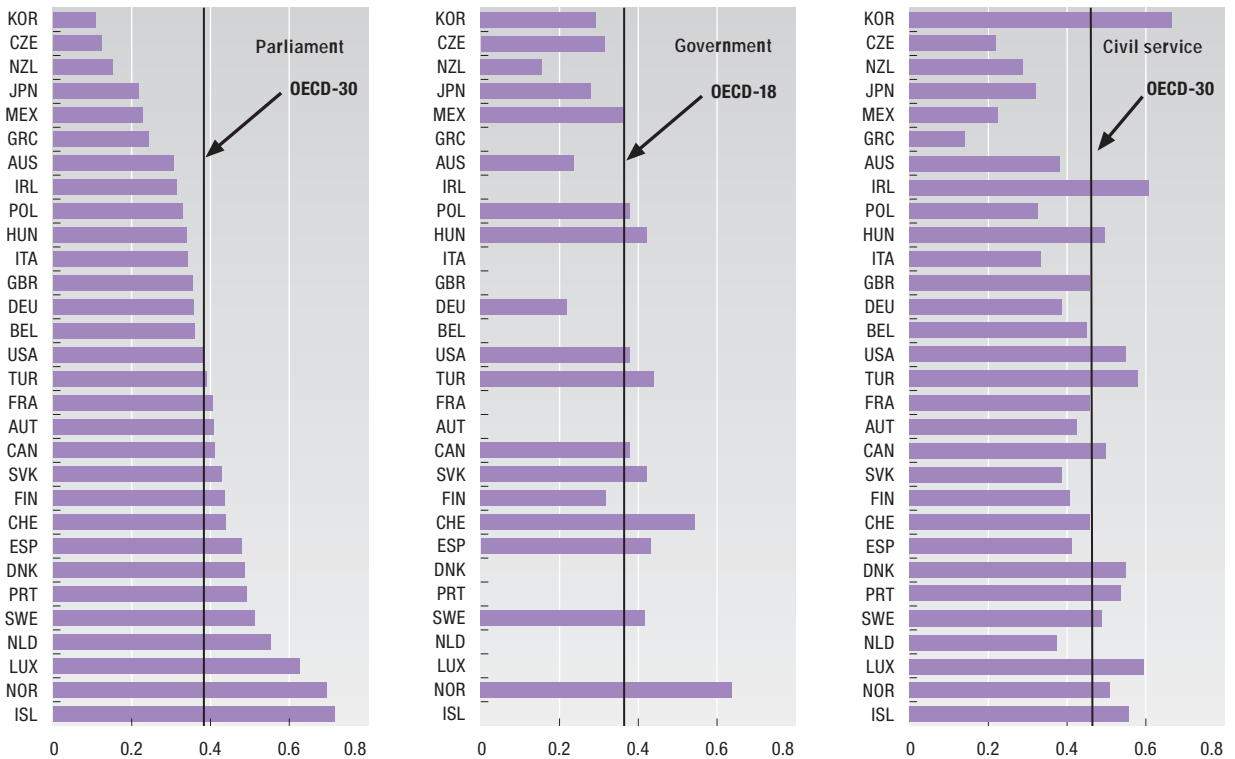
It is more difficult to assess how citizens’ trust in political institutions has changed over time. Much discussion has focused on the role of modernisation, with some authors suggesting that the diffusion of information and the higher education of citizens might have led to lower trust in governments. Trends in citizen’s satisfaction provide, however, little evidence of a general decline in satisfaction with democracy (Figure CO6.2). Cross-country differences are, however, important: lower satisfaction in the way democracy works is recorded in Japan and, more recently, in the Netherlands; satisfaction with democracy is low in Italy, but has been improving; higher levels of satisfaction in democracy have been recorded in Denmark and other Nordic countries. More generally, citizens often ask for more involvement and participation in public affairs. In response to these demands, governments in several OECD countries have introduced reforms to make public services more open, transparent and client-oriented.

Status indicators: Voting (CO1), Life satisfaction (CO7).

CO6. TRUST IN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

CO6.1. Less than half of OECD citizens report high trust in different public institutions

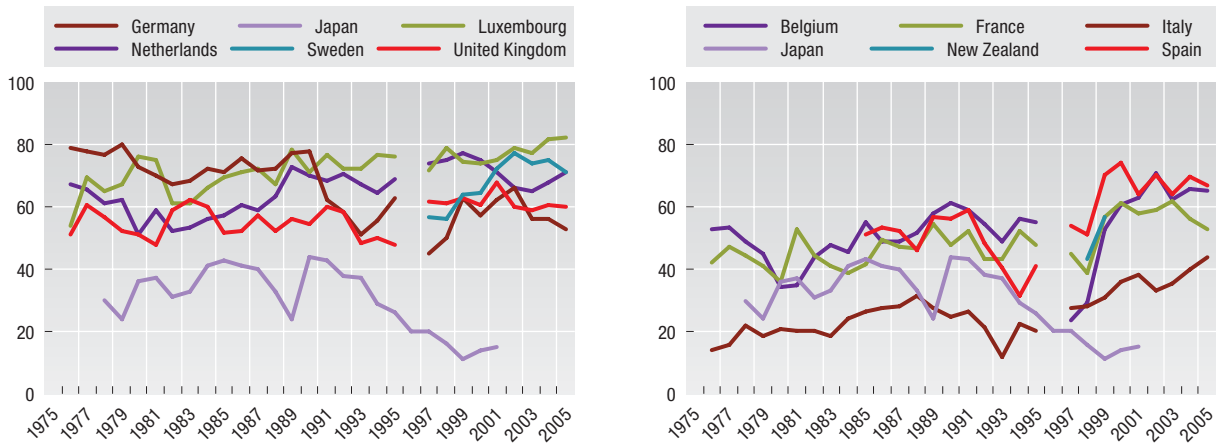
Share of respondents reporting high levels of trust in different entities in the early 2000s



Source: Data extracted from the World Values Survey, wave 1999-2004. For Australia, Norway, New Zealand and Switzerland data refer to the wave 1994-1999.

CO6.2. No generalised decline in satisfaction with democracy

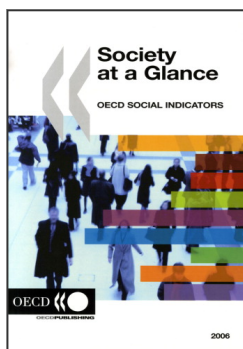
Percentage of respondents that are either "very" or "fairly" satisfied with the democratic process, 1975-2005



Source: Data for European countries are from Eurobarometer surveys; data for Japan, from national sources, refer to the percentage of respondents satisfied with politicians. For details, see OECD (2005), "Data on Trust in the Public Sector", Meeting of the Public Governance Committee at Ministerial Level, Paris, 27-28 November, Paris.

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Further reading ■ Meikle-Yaw, P.A. (2006). "Democracy Satisfaction: The Role of Social Capital and Civic Engagement in Local Communities", Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work, Mississippi State University.



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