

### Trust in government

Trust in government represents the confidence of citizens and businesses in the actions of government to do what is right and perceived as fair. It is one of the most important foundations upon which the legitimacy and sustainability of political systems are built. Trust in government is essential for social cohesion and well-being as it affects the government's ability to govern and enables government to act without coercion. Consequently, it is necessary for the fair and effective functioning of public institutions.

Trust in government and its institutions also depends on the congruence between citizens' and businesses' preferences, their interpretation of what is right and fair and what is unfair, and the perceived performance of government. As a result, trust in government is very much culturally defined and context dependent. There are high-trust countries, such as Switzerland, Luxembourg, Norway and Sweden and low-trust countries, such as the eastern European countries (Figure 2.1), and the level of trust in government could be affected by many contextual factors, such as the economic environment, natural disasters or the extent of corruption.

Trust in government is measured primarily by perception surveys. Due to the impact of cultural and other contextual factors, comparison across countries needs to be interpreted with great care. Instead of focusing on absolute levels of trust in government, changes in trust levels over time can provide better insight. From 2007 to 2012, confidence in national governments on average across OECD member countries has declined by 5 percentage points from 45% to 40%. The largest decline was experienced in Slovenia, Portugal, Greece and Ireland – countries severely affected by the financial, economic and fiscal crisis. At the same time in the Slovak Republic, Switzerland, Israel, the United Kingdom and France, trust in government increased during this period. Further analysis indicates that when people are asked about their confidence in the national government, they are evaluating political leadership.

Government is also the provider of key public services such education, health care, public safety and judicial services. The provision of these services in most OECD member countries is the main responsibility of local government, except the judiciary, which is independent. Citizens have higher confidence in – or satisfaction with – these public services than in the abstract notion of the national

government (Figure 2.2). In 2012 on average across OECD member countries, confidence/satisfaction was highest with police (72% of respondents expressing confidence in the police) followed very closely by health care (71%), education (66%) and, finally, the judicial system (50%).

#### Methodology and definitions

Data was collected by Gallup World Poll. The World Poll uses proportional stratified probability sampling and has a sample size of 1000 citizens in each country. There is more information at [www.gallup.com/strategic-consulting/en-us/worldpoll.aspx](http://www.gallup.com/strategic-consulting/en-us/worldpoll.aspx).

#### Further reading

OECD (forthcoming), *Trust in government, assessing the evidence, understanding the policies*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

#### Figure notes

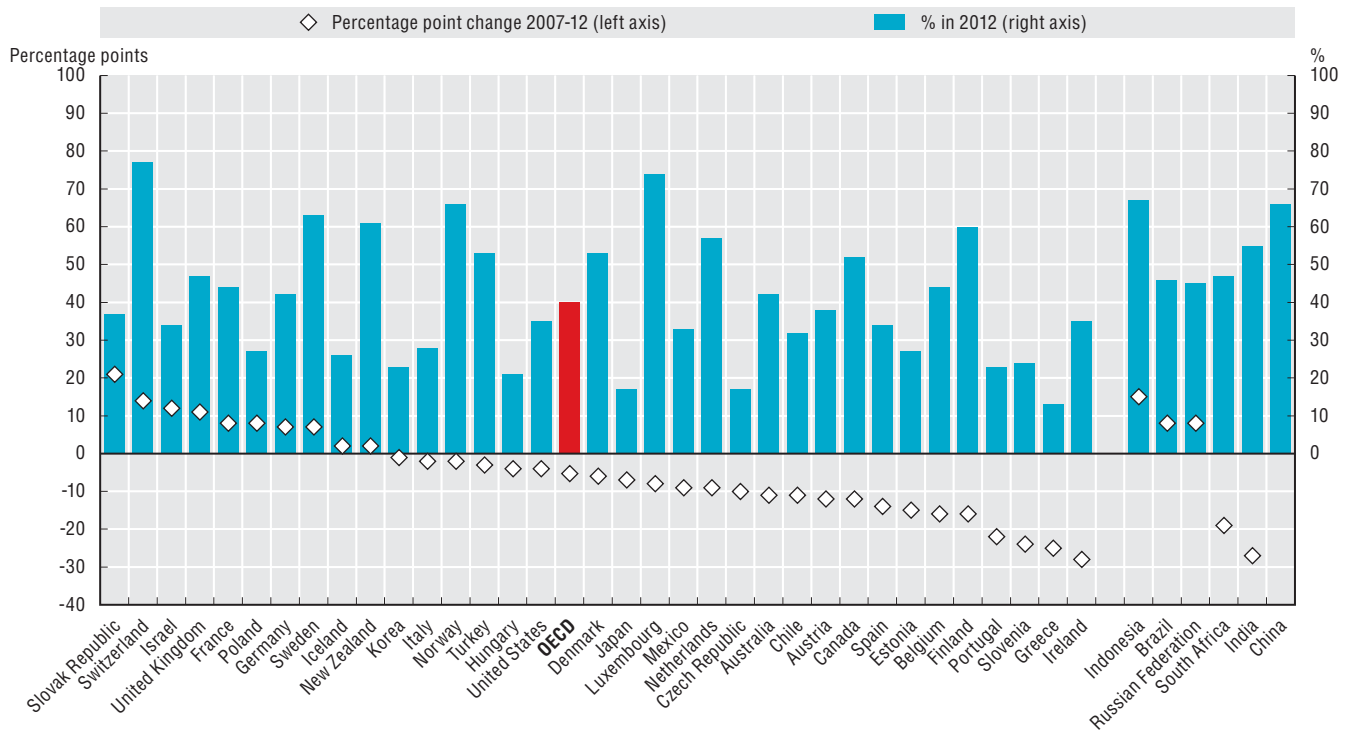
Data for Chile, Germany and the United Kingdom are for 2011 rather than 2012. Data for Iceland and Luxembourg are for 2008 rather than 2007. Data for Austria, Finland, Ireland, Norway, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Switzerland are for 2006 rather than 2007.

2.1: Data refer to the percentage who answered “yes” to the question: “Do you have confidence in national government?”

2.2: Data for Japan, Korea and Mexico are for 2011 rather than 2012. Judicial system data refer to the percentage who answered “yes” to the question: “In this country, do you have confidence in each of the following, or not? How about Judicial system and courts?” Local police data refer to the percentage of “yes” to the question: “In the city or area where you live, do you have confidence in the local police force, or not?” Education system data refer to the percentage who answered “satisfied” to the question: “In the city or area where you live, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the educational system or the schools?” Health care data refer to the percentage who answered “satisfied” to the question: “In the city or area where you live, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the availability of quality health care?”

Information on data for Israel: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932315602>.

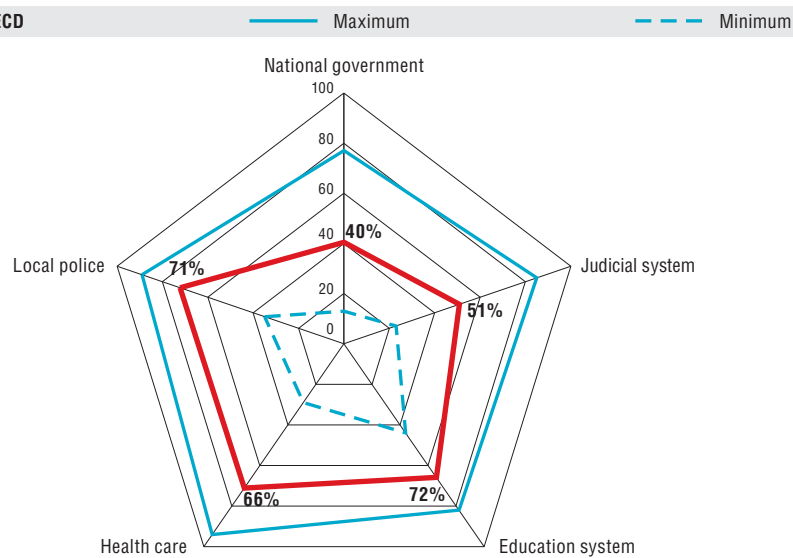
2.1. Confidence in national government in 2012 and its change since 2007



Source: Gallup World Poll.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932940740>

2.2. Confidence and satisfaction across government institutions (2012)



Source: Gallup World Poll.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932940930>



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