

TRUST IN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

Trust in political institutions refers to the extent to which individuals have a high degree of confidence in the institutions (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 in the Figure refer to respondents that indicate either “a great deal” or “quite a lot of confidence” in parliament and civil service, as a percentage of all respondents.

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 public goods. There are large differences across countries in the extent of citizens’ trust in various public entities (Figure). In 12 out of 28 countries more than 40 percent of individuals, in the early 2000s, reported high trust in parliament, with higher shares in Luxembourg, Netherlands, Malta and Sweden and lower ones in Lithuania, Czech Republic and Japan.

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. In 18 out of 28 countries citizens report high confidence in the civil service, with higher levels in Ireland, Luxembourg, Denmark and the United States and lower ones in Greece, Lithuania and the Czech Republic. 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, higher trust in the civil service seems to go hand in hand with higher trust in parliament.

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Reference

World Values Survey and DICE database.

