



PERITIA

Policy, Expertise and Trust

Trends in Trust

D8.6 Briefing Notes

Table of Contents

Summary: trends in trust	3
1 Trends in trust: source data	4
2 Trends in trust: findings	6
2.1 Politicians and political parties	7
2.2 Parliament and Government	9
2.3 European Parliament and European Union	10
Appendix: Inventory of questions	12

SUMMARY: TRENDS IN TRUST

Trust in institutions has been very stable in most European countries for the last 20 years. While longer trend series dating back to the 1980s suggest a decline in trust across most institutions until the end of the 1990s, there has been no notable attitudinal shift in trust since the turn of the millennium. What is evident, however, is that for some countries there has been an increase in expressed levels of confidence in national parliaments and expressed levels of trust in political parties. So while there is stability in levels of confidence/trust in institutions across Europe overall, breaking these trends down by country does reveal some divergent patterns.

Further exploration of these trends is possible via the PERITIA Trust Hub:

<https://peritia-trust.eu/trust-hub/>

1 TRENDS IN TRUST: SOURCE DATA

The importance of tracking and understanding trust in institutions and individuals is reflected in the number, range and longevity of trust measures in social survey series. Various trust measures are included in each of the major cross-national social survey studies, with trends lasting decades, and in several ad hoc studies dating back to the very earliest days of social surveying. More recently, commercial studies from private sector organisations, such as the Edelman Trust Barometer, have also emerged and grown in profile.

The questions contained in these surveys capture various forms of trust – from the trust we place in our family, our friends or society more generally to the trust we place in institutions such as the government, the police, universities and the media, or individuals within them, such as politicians, scientists and journalists. Many of these questions have been repeated over multiple survey waves, creating an important empirical record of how trust is evolving globally and its relationship to governance, democracy and political participation.

In PERITIA, we reviewed a wide range of literature on issues of trust to identify secondary data sources that provide trend data on trust and/or confidence in institutions. An added strength of these sources outlined here is that they are also comparative, allowing for a comparison of trends across a range of countries.

Five key surveys emerged:

- European Social Survey (ESS)
- International Social Survey Programme (ISSP)
- Eurobarometer (EB)
- European Values Survey (EVS)
- World Values Survey (WVS)

Each of these data sources, while covering trust and/or confidence in institutions across a multitude of countries, have significant differences in the way trust or confidence is measured, the types of institutions asked about and the response scales used, summarised in Appendix 1. Moreover, the range of survey data available on trust in experts and scientists – especially cross-country measures – are much more limited compared to those that measure trust in institutions. Our review therefore focused overwhelmingly on the latter.



From these five sources of data, we can track trust in a wide range of institutions. Here we focus, in particular, on three levels:

1. Groups of individuals, eg politicians and political parties;
2. National governance structures, eg Parliament or Government;
3. Supranational institutions, eg European Union and European Parliament.

By examining trends in these different institutions across different countries, we can get an idea of the degree to which trust in institutions is changing or staying the same as well as the degree to which these trends are common across Europe or indicative of country specific factors.

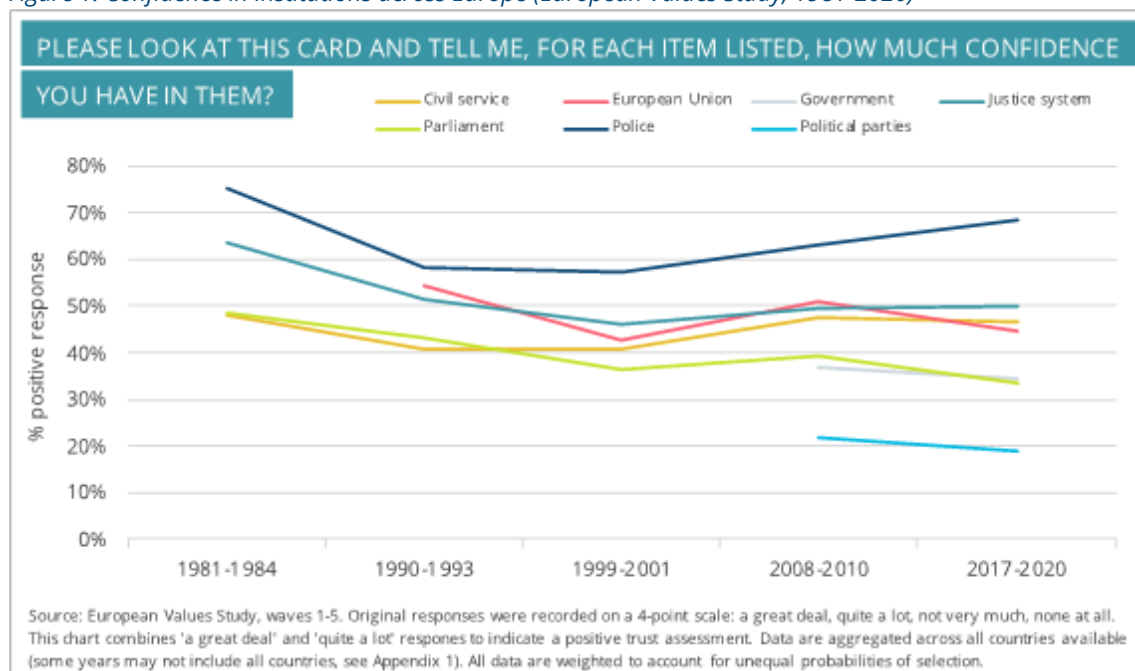


2 TRENDS IN TRUST: FINDINGS

Reviewing the trends from different measures of trust or confidence in institutions, we can identify one overwhelming finding from the results: there is widespread stability in trends in trust/confidence across nations when taken as an aggregated whole across all nations.

For example, since 1981 the European Values Study (EVS) has asked respondents to assess how much confidence they place in a range of institutions (see Figure 1). Among the institutions listed, the police have been among the most trusted in Europe, with those who say they have a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the police being in the majority across the last four decades, despite dipping to 57 per cent in 1999. On the other end of the spectrum, confidence in political parties is considerably lower than other institution types. Just 20 per cent of respondents gave a positive view of confidence in political parties in the last wave – of which only 3 per cent said they place “a great deal” of confidence in them.

Figure 1: Confidence in institutions across Europe (European Values Study, 1981-2020)



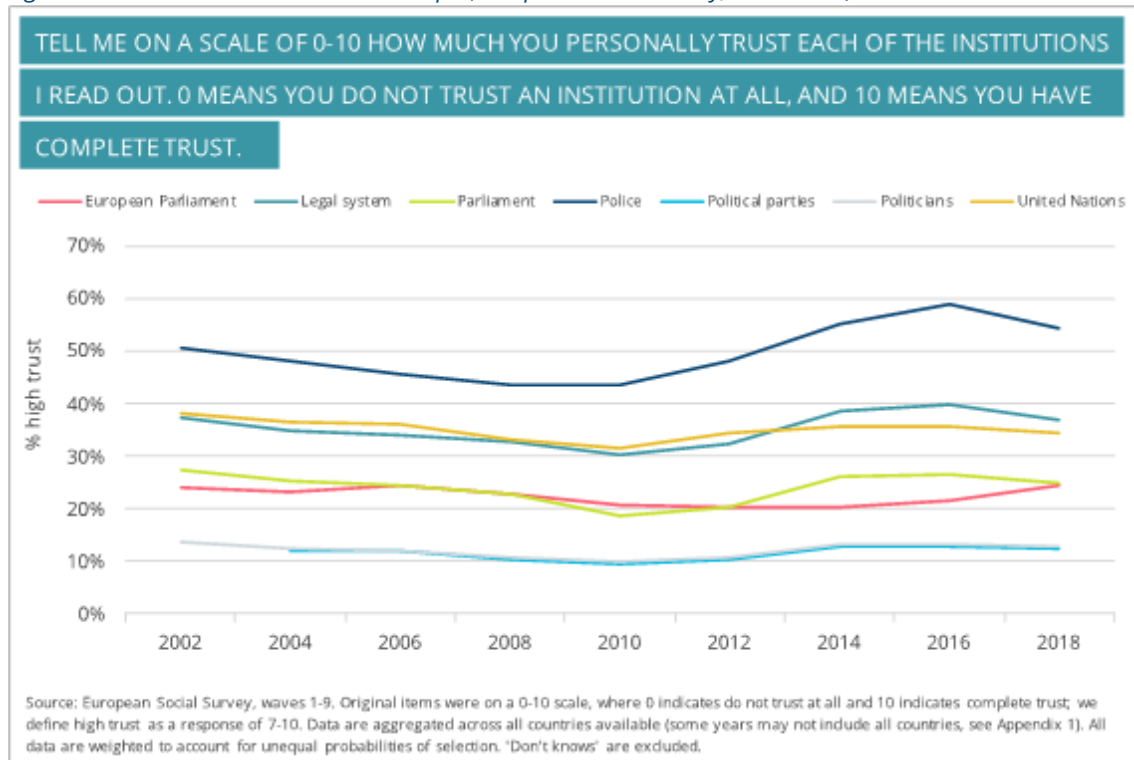
The dip in confidence in the police in the middle of this trend is part of a general decline in institutional trust between the early 1980s and the millennium. But while some institutions, such as the police, the justice system and the civil service, have since recovered, others have continued to fall or have remained at the low point



observed in 1999-2001, particularly the political establishment (ie government, parliament and political parties).

Trends from the European Social Survey (ESS) similarly reflect the relative stability of trust in institutions from the turn of the millennium, with the exception of the police, which between 2010-2016 saw a notable increase (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Trust in institutions across Europe (European Social Survey, 2002-2018)



2.1 Politicians and political parties

One area in which trends in trust have remained stable is in relation to political parties and politicians, which have consistently attracted low trust rankings across Europe.

As shown above in Figure 2, low levels of trust placed in politicians and political parties track each other closely and, at a European level, have been relatively stable over the last two decades. Overall, they rank among the least trusted of the institutions considered in this report – roughly 15 percentage points lower than the governments and parliaments in which they serve.

Most countries have shown little movement in those who place high trust in politicians specifically (see Figure 3): while few countries demonstrate an increase



Figure 3: Trends of high trust in politicians, by country



Figure 4: Trends of high trust in political parties, by country

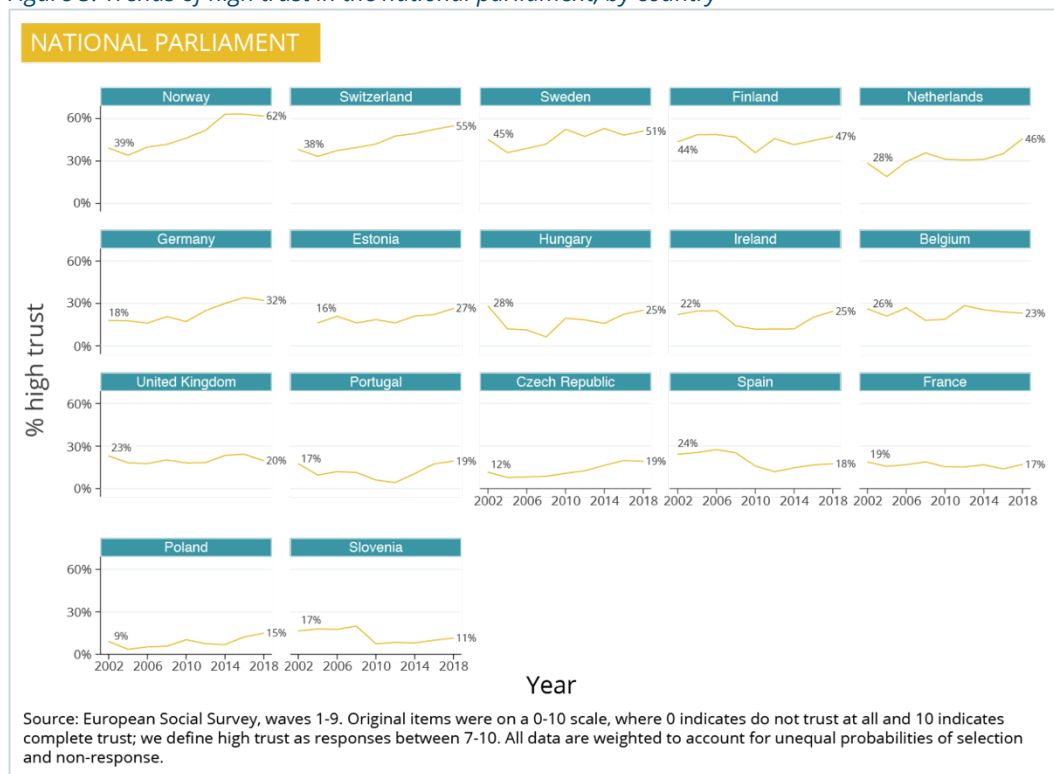


in trust, very few also demonstrate a decline. That said, the three most trusting countries are an exception, with increases of around 10 percentage points in the Netherlands, Switzerland and Norway in those who place high trust in politicians. Trust in political parties, however, has seen slightly more movement (see Figure 4), with an increase of 10-20 percentage points since 2004 in those who place high trust in political parties in Norway, Hungary, Switzerland and the Netherlands.

2.2 Parliament and Government

Where we see the most volatility in trust is in national parliaments, particularly when we break down the trends by country (see Figure 5). Countries that show a higher level of trust, such as Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Germany, have seen notable increases in trust in parliament; whereas others, such as Finland, Spain, Ireland, Hungary and Portugal have seen periods where trust in parliament dips but later recovers. However, Spain and Slovenia have seen an overall fall in high trust placed in their national parliament by at least 5 percentage points in the past 20 years.

Figure 5: Trends of high trust in the national parliament, by country



In surveys where both Parliament and Government are featured among the institution types, there is little distinction between them in the data, suggesting that respondents see the two types of institution as being analogous. For example, in recent waves of the EVS and WVS, there is, at most, a 4-percentage point gap between Parliament and Government on each point of the response scale. Similarly, in the Eurobarometer the difference in respondents saying that they “tend to trust” Parliament and Government has consistently been between 0-2 percentage points since 2003.

2.3 European Parliament and European Union

Trust in the European Parliament has been relatively stable since 2002 across various countries, such as Belgium, Switzerland, the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom. However, levels differ considerably between countries, with the UK consistently the least trusting of the European Parliament, with just 12 per cent placing high trust in this institution.

Some countries, such as Hungary and Slovenia, have also seen a sharp decline in respondents reporting high trust in the European Parliament between 2002-2010, which has remained low since. Whereas others, such as Ireland and Portugal, have seen a dip in trust which later recovered, suggesting there may be period effects at play in some countries. However, overall the picture is of relative stability.

By contrast, levels of trust in the European Union (EU) are more volatile. While trust in the EU is generally higher than national governments or parliaments, over the last two decades it has risen and fallen to a far greater degree than national, regional or local bodies – particularly around the time of the financial crisis (see Figure 7).

The relative volatility of trust in the EU is also confirmed in other surveys. As we saw in the EVS above, confidence in the European Union fell by 12 percentage points between 1990 and 1999, when just 42 per cent of respondents reported either a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the EU. Confidence began to bounce back in 2008-10, rising by 9 percentage points (broadly correlating with a peak in the Eurobarometer data in 2007). However, levels of confidence in the EU dropped again in the subsequent wave, falling to 45 per cent of respondents in 2017-20.



Figure 6: Trends of high trust in the European Parliament, by country

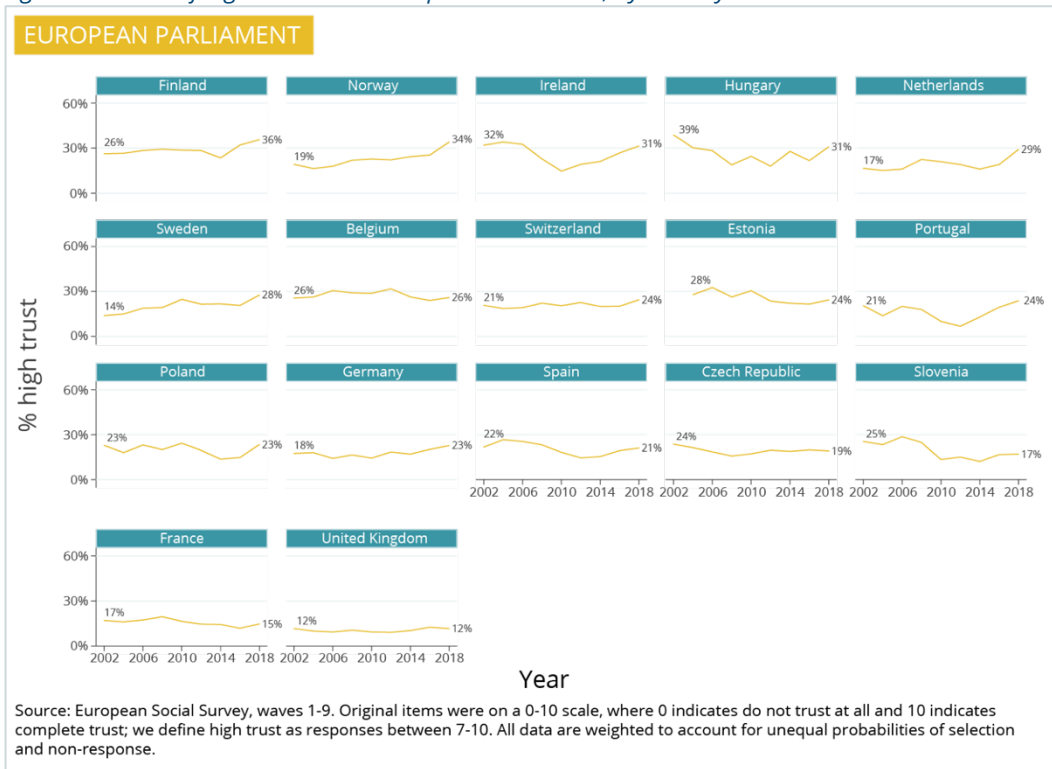
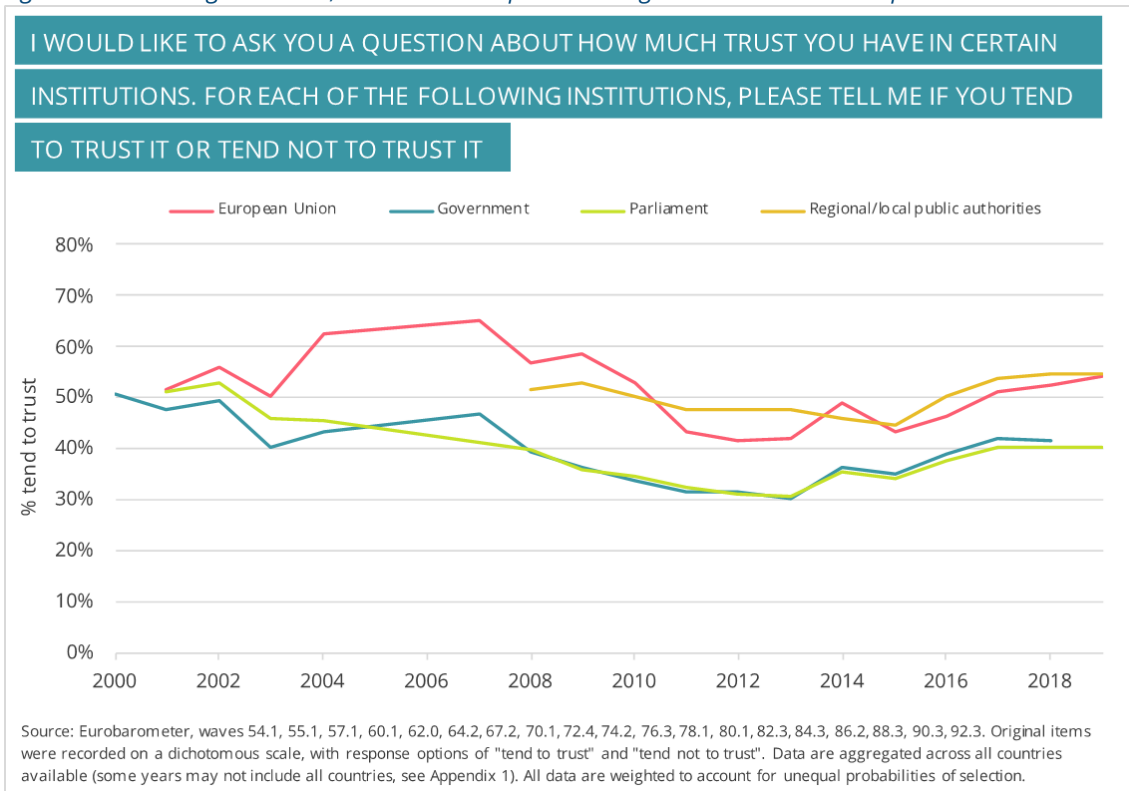


Figure 7: Trust in regional/local, national and supranational governance across Europe



APPENDIX: INVENTORY OF QUESTIONS

Survey	Question wording	Years/Waves Covered	Country Coverage
Eurobarometer	<p>Have you ever heard of (European institutions)? And for each of them, please tell me if you tend to trust it or not to trust it? (Response options: Tend to trust; Tend not to trust; Don't know)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The justice/legal system • The police • Political parties • The civil service • The (national) government • The national Parliament • The European Union • The United Nations <p>Regional and local public authorities</p>	1997-2019	100 countries in full time series.
	<p>I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain institutions. For each of the following institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The (national) government • The national Parliament • The European Parliament • The European Commission • The Council (of Ministers) of the European Union • The (European) Court of Justice (of the European Communities) • The Committee of the Regions of the European Union • The Social and Economic Committee of the European Union • The Convention on the future of the European Union • The European Council 	1994-2019	
European Social Survey (ESS)	<p>Tell me on a score of 0-10 how much you personally trust each of the institutions I read out. 0 means you do not trust an institution at all, and 10 means you have complete trust.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The legal system • The police 	2002-20	38 European countries



Survey	Question wording	Years/Waves Covered	Country Coverage
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politicians • Political parties (excl. wave 1) • Parliament • The European Parliament • The UN 		
European Values Study (EVS)	<p>Please look at this card and tell me, for each item listed, how much confidence you have in them, is it a great deal, quite a lot, not very much or none at all?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The police • Parliament • Civil service • European Union (excl. wave 1) • The United Nations (waves 3-5) • The justice system/courts • Universities • Political parties (waves 4-5) • Government (waves 4-5) • Environmental organizations (waves 4-5) 	1981-2020	46 European countries overall.
International Social Survey Programme (ISSP)	<p>To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most of the time we can trust people in government to do what is right • Most politicians are in politics only for what they can get out of it personally <p>Response options: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree, can't choose</p>	1992-2016	Up to 43 countries covered globally.
	<p>Please consider the following statements and tell me whether you agree or disagree.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We trust too much in science and not enough in religious faith <p>Response options: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree, can't choose</p>	1991-2020	Up to 50 countries covered globally.
	<p>Please tick one box on each line to show how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.</p>	1993-2018	Up to 35 countries covered globally



Survey	Question wording	Years/Waves Covered	Country Coverage
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People we elect as MPs try to keep the promises they have made during the election • Most civil servants can be trusted to do what is best for the country <p>Response options: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree, can't choose.</p>		
World Values Survey (WVS)	<p>I am going to name a number of organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence or none at all?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Churches • Armed Forces • The Press • Labour Unions • The Police • Parliament • The Civil Services • The Government • The Political Parties • Major Companies • The Environmental Protection Movement • Justice System/Courts • The European Union • NATO • The United Nations 	1981-2022	In excess of 100 countries globally.





PERITIA

Policy, Expertise and Trust

