

# Trust in Government Survey QMI

Quality and Methodology Information (QMI) for the Trust in Government Survey, detailing strengths and limitations of the data, methods used, and data uses and users.

Contact:  
Public Services Analysis Team  
publicservicesanalysis@ons.gov.  
uk  
+44 1633 456921

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# 1 . Output information

- Survey name: Trust in Government Survey
- Data collection: Cross-sectional sample survey
- Frequency: Every two years
- How compiled: Survey data
- Geographic coverage: United Kingdom
- Related publications: [Trust in Government, UK: 2023](#)

## 2 . About this Quality and Methodology Information report

This Quality and Methodology Information report contains information on the quality characteristics of the data (including the European Statistical System's five dimensions of quality), as well as the methods used to create them.

The information in this report will help you to:

- understand the strengths and limitations of the data
- learn about existing uses and users of the data
- understand the methods used to create the data
- help you to decide suitable uses for the data
- reduce the risk of misusing data

## 3 . Important points

- The Trust in Government Survey provides estimates of people's trust in government and institutions, opinions about public services, and attitudes towards political issues.
- The estimates are produced using data collected from a sample of the population; a sample of approximately 4,000 individuals aged 18 years and over and living in the UK are invited to complete the survey.
- In 2023, the achieved sample size was 1,919, which is a response rate of 46%.
- The data were mainly collected through an online self-completion survey, but a small percentage of participants completed the survey over the telephone.
- The survey will be administered every two years by member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); 2023 is the second year the survey has been conducted.

## 4 . Quality summary

## Overview

The Trust in Government Survey is part of a wider international study coordinated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The OECD will conduct its Trust Survey every two years across its member countries; this edition (2023) is the second time that it has been conducted. More information about the OECD study is available on the [OECD Trust in Government](#) webpage.

## Uses and users

The purpose of the Trust in Government Survey is to measure people's trust in government, public services, and other institutions. It estimates people's political participation, satisfaction with public services, and evaluation of government action on important long-term challenges, including climate change, automation, and digitalisation.

The statistics based on the survey data are used by those who want to understand current levels of trust and identify what factors might affect trust. These individuals and groups include:

- policymakers
- members of parliament (MPs)
- public sector organisations, such as the NHS and police
- political parties
- journalists
- charities
- researchers, students, and academics
- members of the general public

The data from all countries involved in the wider OECD study are collated by the OECD to provide international benchmarks. The results inform the OECD's work on how governments can build trust and maintain political participation and social cohesion.

## Strengths and limitations

The main strengths of the statistics based on the Trust in Government Survey data are that:

- the statistics provide users with a unique insight into levels of trust and satisfaction among the UK population
- the statistics allow international comparisons with the OECD as a whole and with individual member countries
- the administration of the survey every two years allows for comparisons over time
- the sample process and weighting are designed to limit bias and produce estimates representative of the UK population
- the survey questionnaire is designed by an expert group from OECD member countries, including input from Office for National Statistics (ONS) researchers
- the survey is thoroughly tested, and the data quality assured, to minimise risk of error

The main limitations of the statistics based on the Trust in Government Survey data are that:

- the statistics are based on data from a sample survey, so the estimates presented contain some [uncertainty](#) ; confidence intervals are included to provide estimates of the uncertainty
- analysis of sub-groups within the sample is not possible because of the small sample size; for example, estimates cannot be produced for individual UK countries
- there is a possibility of some cohorts being underrepresented, such as people without access to the internet (although a telephone option was available)
- there may be a sampling bias, because the sampling frame comes from those who have already responded to a government survey; these people may differ to the general population in how much they trust the government and other public institutions
- the sampling frame is not fully representative of the UK population, since it omits communal establishments except for people in NHS housing, students in boarding schools, and students in halls of residence

## 5 . Quality characteristics of the Trust in Government Survey data

This section provides a range of information that describes the quality and characteristics of the Trust in Government Survey data and identifies issues that should be noted when using the output.

### Relevance

(The degree to which the survey meets users' needs.)

The purpose of the Trust in Government Survey is to measure people's trust in government, public services, and other institutions. It estimates people's political participation, satisfaction with public services and evaluation of government action on important long-term challenges, such as climate change and automation. The survey measures the public's trust in government through measurement of five drivers of trust: responsiveness, reliability, integrity, openness, and fairness.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Trust in Government Survey questions are designed by a group of experts from OECD member countries. They are based on research, by the OECD and others, on strategies for measuring trust in institutions.

### Accuracy and reliability

(The degree of closeness between an estimate and the true value.)

The Trust in Government Survey is a sample survey, so estimates are subject to sampling variability. This is because the sample selected is only one of many possible samples that could have been drawn from the population. The total error in a survey estimate is made up of two types: sampling error and non-sampling error.

The main sources of sampling error are:

- the size of the sample
- the effects of the sampling method
- the effects of weighting

The main sources of non-sampling error are:

- frame under-coverage
- non-response
- response errors (for example, because of misleading questions)
- errors when imputing or processing data

To minimise the effects of non-sampling errors, the questionnaire is carefully designed and tested, several attempts are made to contact respondents, and quality control procedures are used throughout. Weighting is used to compensate for non-response and frame under-coverage.

## **Coherence and comparability**

(Coherence is the degree to which data that are derived from different sources or methods, but refer to the same topic, are similar. Comparability is the degree to which data can be compared over time and domain, for example, geographic level.)

There are other data sources that provide estimates of trust in and satisfaction with government, public services, and other institutions.

The UK statistics estimated from this survey are directly comparable with the other OECD member countries who participated in the [OECD Survey on the Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions](#). The survey questions are the same, or very similar, for all countries, and sample parameters were set by the OECD. Any differences in demographic concepts (for example, income bands and education levels) are harmonised between different countries. The OECD presents comparisons between the UK and other OECD countries in an international report, published each summer following data collection. The OECD Trust in Government Survey is run every two years.

The Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) is a fortnightly Office for National Statistics (ONS) survey of adults in Great Britain. The question topics vary over time and according to user needs. Some editions of the survey include questions covering similar topics to the Trust in Government Survey, for example:

- trust in government
- having a say in what the government does
- important issues facing the UK

OPN survey results are published in our [Public opinions and social trends headline bulletins](#) and in our [UK Measures of National Well-being dashboard](#). Differences in question design and response scales limits direct comparability of some questions. The OPN only surveys adults in Great Britain, while the Trust in Government Survey is UK-wide. See our [OPN Quality and Methodology Information report](#) for more information.

[Public Confidence in Official Statistics \(PCOS\)](#) is an online survey administered by NatCen Social Research. The survey asks about the population's trust in the ONS, the government, and other organisations. It is not possible to make a direct comparison with the results, since the PCOS survey uses a four-point labelled scale, while the Trust in Government Survey uses an eleven-point numerical scale as defined by the OECD. Additionally, the PCOS survey is limited to Great Britain, while the Trust in Government Survey covers the whole UK. The PCOS survey is run every two to three years, so the reference period of the data does not consistently align with the Trust in Government Survey.

The [British Social Attitudes \(BSA\) Survey](#) is an annual online survey by NatCen Social Research. The survey covers a range of topics similar to the Trust in Government Survey and is published in reports on the BSA webpages. The 2021 [Democracy publication](#) includes estimates of whether people trust the government to place the needs of the nation above their party. The 2023 [Role and responsibilities of government publication](#) includes data about people's perceptions of the responsibility of government. Making a direct comparison between the BSA Survey and the Trust in Government Survey is limited, because of the differences in questions and responses scales. Additionally, the sample only covers Great Britain rather than the whole of the UK.

The [European Social Survey](#) is carried out across multiple European countries including the UK every two years. It asks several similar questions to the Trust in Government Survey, including about trust in government and institutions. The trust questions are answered on an identical eleven-point numerical scale. The most recent European Social Survey data was collected between 2020 and 2022 and was published in 2023. This data is less timely than the Trust in Government Survey.

## Accessibility and clarity

(Accessibility is the ease with which users can access the data, also reflecting the format in which the data are available and the availability of supporting information. Clarity refers to the quality and sufficiency of the release details, illustrations and accompanying advice.)

Analysis and interpretation of the data are presented in a statistical bulletin, which includes narrative and data visualisation and is published as an HTML webpage. Data tables are published in accessible Excel files. We also offer users the option to download the bulletin in PDF format. All outputs are freely available on our website.

## Timeliness and punctuality

(Timeliness refers to the lapse of time between data collection and data delivery. Punctuality refers to the gap between planned and actual data delivery dates.)

The gap between data collection and data delivery in the 2023 iteration of the Trust in Government Survey was just under five months. This time allows for data to be cleaned, weighted, and analysed and statistical commentary to be drafted and presented in a bulletin.

## Geography

Estimates are for the United Kingdom.

## Why you can trust our data

We are the UK's largest independent producer of official statistics and its recognised National Statistical Institute. [Our Data Policies](#), available on our website, detail how data are collected, secured, and used in the publication of statistics at the ONS. We treat the data that we hold with respect, keeping the data secure and confidential, and we use statistical methods that are professional, ethical, and transparent.

The Trust in Government Survey is carefully designed and tested, and extensive quality control procedures are used throughout.

## 6 . Methods used to produce the Trust in Government data

### How we collect the data, main data sources, and accuracy

Data collection for the Trust in Government Survey is primarily collected through a self-completed online questionnaire. If requested, the interview is conducted by telephone. In 2023, 1.7% of responses were collected with the help of telephone interviewers. The population of interest is residents in the UK aged 18 years and over.

The sampling frame for the Trust in Government Survey is individuals who have participated in a previous Office for National Statistics (ONS) survey; however, in 2023, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) provided a randomly selected sample of addresses for those living in Northern Ireland.

The sampling frames used for ONS surveys are the Royal Mail's Postcode Address File of small users for addresses in Great Britain and POINTER central register of domestic properties for addresses in Northern Ireland.

A sample of approximately 4,000 adults aged 18 years and over are asked to participate in the Trust in Government Survey. Only one person per household was eligible to participate in the survey. Proxy interviews or responses were not permitted.

Some questions were answered on a scale. Responses to questions have been condensed into categories for the purpose of reporting. For example, on a 0 to 10 scale of levels of trust, 0 to 4 is reported as "low or no trust", 5 as neutral, and 6 to 10 as "high or moderately high trust". The full results can be seen in the reference tables.

### How we process the data

The data are validated and cleaned, variables are derived, and weights are applied. As the Trust in Government Survey collects information on a sample of the population, the data are weighted to enable us to make inferences from this sample to the entire population.

Weighting includes calibrating by the following factors:

- sex
- age
- educational attainment
- region

Estimates from the Trust in Government Survey together with confidence intervals, for questions with sample base sizes greater than 10 cases, are published in the reference tables.

## How we analyse and interpret the data

The data are analysed to address identified policy questions and to provide all users with a comprehensive overview of the survey results.

Weighted estimates are produced using statistical software. Estimates are produced for every question based on all respondents who answered the question.

To support interpretation of the results, upper and lower 95% confidence limits are produced for all estimates. The statistical significance of differences between data points is determined based on non-overlapping 95% confidence intervals.

## How we quality assure and validate the data

There are quality assurance processes included at all stages, from the drawing of the sample and the development of the questionnaire to publication of the data and estimates. These processes include:

- validating the accuracy of contact information in the sample
- the research team and other researchers at the ONS thoroughly testing the questionnaire
- conducting a series of checks on the data post-collection to identify inconsistencies and invalid responses
- making sure estimates are dual run and checked at multiple stages between analysis and final publication
- applying statistical disclosure control (suppressing estimates to avoid any disclosure of personal information)

## How we disseminate the data

The [Trust in Government Survey](#) data are published on our website as accessible Excel datasets. An HTML bulletin [Trust in government, UK: 2023](#), is also published, which includes interpretation of the data presented as narrative, charts, and tables.

Anonymised data are provided to the Cabinet Office and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as part of quality assurance and data processing procedures.

# 7 . Other information

## Useful links and references

Our [Trust in government, UK: 2023](#) bulletin is available, as well as the [accompanying data tables](#).

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) [Trust methodology note and Trust report](#) provide further information about the OECD Trust in Government Survey and its findings.

Our [Opinions and Lifestyle Survey \(OPN\) bulletins](#) and [National Measures of Well-being dashboard](#) are available on our website.

NatCen Social Research's [Public Confidence in Official Statistics report](#) and the [British Social Attitudes Survey](#) have explored trust in government for Great Britain in the past and provide wider context to the area.

The [European Social Survey](#) provides international comparisons of trust in government from 2002 onwards.

## User feedback

We welcome feedback on the content, format and relevance of our releases, and encourage users to send feedback through email to [publicservicesanalysis@ons.gov.uk](mailto:publicservicesanalysis@ons.gov.uk)

## 8 . Cite this methodology

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 1 March 2024, ONS website, methodology, [Trust in Government Survey QMI](#)