

# Social trust research trends

Social trust entails having confidence that the people, social structures and institutions around us will act in predictable and socially acceptable ways. Research in social trust focuses on how trust is built, maintained, enhanced, eroded and repaired. Since 2017, research interest in social trust has been increasing. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to an even greater interest in research on societal trust.



## Enabling Science and Technology

### Technology adoption and trust

Trust is a necessary precursor to the adoption of new technologies. Research on technology adoption in government focuses on building trust in e-government systems by using encryption technologies to enhance trust. Public trust in a given technology is used by business as a predictor of technology adoption and can be beneficial in timing launches of new technologies or deciding to invest in trust-building prior to a launch.

### Disinformation

The deliberate spread of false, misleading and inaccurate information can undermine social trust and is a threat to democracies and international governance institutions. Disinformation can be both spread and countered via social and traditional media. It will take concerted, collective efforts to stop the spread of disinformation.

### Mapping trust using social media

The proliferation of trust is being mapped across social networks to help mitigate cascading trust failures (technological and social), foster collective decision making, and provide targeted recommendations for products, media and new trustworthy contacts.

### Trust repair

Social trust can be both broken and repaired. Trust repair strategies must be tailored to the culture in question and may include: apologies, explanations, policy changes, governance reforms, financial compensation, trust facilitating technologies or enhanced transparency. Ultimately, the best trust strategy is to avoid damaging trust by being honest, accountable and holding true to the values of the culture in question.

### Blockchain

Blockchain is increasingly employed as a trust building mechanism. By embedding the values of privacy, security and transparency into online interactions, blockchain helps to build trust in new sectors and can help to rebuild trust after data security breaches in traditional sectors of the economy. Blockchain is not a panacea. It can be slow, costly to implement, difficult to correct and used to facilitate criminal activity.

**“Trust is the glue of life. It’s the most essential ingredient in effective communication. It’s the foundational principle that holds all relationships.”**

Stephen R. Covey, A. Roger Merrill, Rebecca R. Merrill. *First Things First*, p.203, Simon and Schuster, 1995.

## Signals

### Academic



Research on social trust is conducted in every country. As of 2022, the USA

is the leader in research on social trust, with nearly double the publications of China.

### Government



While the numbers vary, according to international surveys, worldwide trust in

governments in 2021/22 remained well within the ranges seen since the early 2000's.

### Collaboration



Most academic social trust research is conducted at the national level. The

World Values Survey is the largest collaborative research program studying the social, political, economic, religious and cultural values (including trust) of societies, involving 120 countries.

### Defence



Social trust is not a prominent academic research topic for militaries. Publicly

accessible military research on trust tends to focus more on trust in automation rather than social trust.

### Corporate



While corporate players aren't publishing much on the topic of social

trust, consumer trust is well studied by social scientists and provides a rich source of well-tested trust repair strategies.

**“Compared with people at low-trust companies, people at high-trust companies report: 74% less stress, 106% more energy at work, 50% higher productivity, 13% fewer sick days, 76% more engagement, 29% more satisfaction with their lives, [and] 40% less burnout.”**

Zak, P.J. [The Neuroscience of Trust](#). Harvard Business Review, 2017.

## Impact



### Social

Safer, more open and inclusive communities engender more trust within the community. More trusting people build safer, more open and inclusive communities.



### Policy

Measurements of social trust vary, and there remain questions about their validity. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's 2017 guidelines for measuring trust are intended to enhance reliability and enable international comparison.



### Economic

There is a strong correlation between social trust and Gross Domestic Product (GDP). High social trust may lead to increased GDP by creating environments more conducive to entrepreneurship and business growth.



### Environmental

Trust is required to tackle climate change: trust that success is possible, trust between nations to develop global strategies and trust that meaningful targets will be consistently met.



### Defence

Disinformation is being weaponized by foreign agents to erode trust in public institutions – including defence – and is a potential security threat.

**“Trust is one of the most precious and powerful human capacities. Without it all efforts fail, with it we can build the future.”**

Figueres, C. [Solving Climate Change Requires a New Social Contract](#). Time, 2022.

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Produced in partnership by the National Research Council and Defence Research and Development Canada.

#### Derived from:

Lethiecq-Normand, M & McLaughlin, T. *Scientometric Study on Social Trust*. February, 2023.

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PDF: catalogue number NR16-422/2023E-PDF, ISBN 978-0-660-48454-9

Également disponible en français  
March 2023