



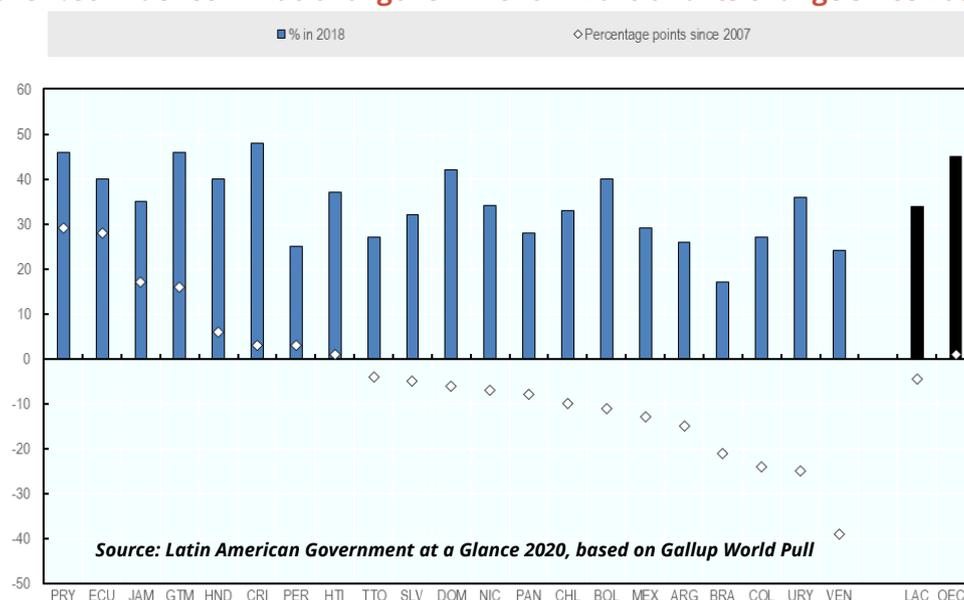
Policy Brief

Rebuilding trust: the role of private sector, civil society and international cooperation¹

A trustworthy, transparent and open government is the cornerstone of the recovery

The COVID-19 pandemic is a stark reminder of the importance of trust in institutions, especially for Latin America and the Caribbean. Since the global financial crisis, the region's public trust numbers have fallen steadily. In 2018, only 34% of Latin-Americans trusted their government, and there is a noticeable gap between the region and OECD countries - 11.1 percentage points. The erosion of people's trust in institutions is a cause of concern. It risks undermining the legitimacy of public institutions, nurturing political polarisation, and favouring populist movements.

Figure 1. Confidence in national government in 2018 and its change since 2007



Against this backdrop, trust must be a cornerstone of the recovery as it will be central to reinforcing democracy and underpinning a culture of transparency and integrity that ensures that institutions are equipped to face 21st century challenges and meet the demands of citizens.

Strengthening trust does not only involve government actions, but also the private sector and civil society. Engaging with citizens, civil society organisations (CSOs), international cooperation agencies and the private sector among other stakeholders is key to ensuring that public policies are inclusive and making more resilient democracies.

Opening remarks

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¹Based on the [preparatory webinar](#) held on 12/10/2021

The OECD has been taking actions in this sense. The Public Governance Committee launched its initiative on Reinforcing Democracy built around three key pillars for action: 1. addressing the threats of mis- and dis-information; 2. promoting citizen participation and representation – bringing people back to democracy; and 3. building democratic governments’ capacity to address global challenges at the national and global level. This initiative will be reinforced through the OECD Trust Survey, which will provide comparable data on drivers of public trust for 20 OECD member countries (including Colombia and Mexico). As part of the first study on drivers of trust in public institutions in Latin America, data will be gathered and analysed for Brazil.

Trustworthy and transparent institutions promote access to public information, engage with stakeholders in the design and delivery of policies and services, and enable people to hold policymakers to account. Restoring trust does not only lead to “competent” institutions – responsive and reliable in providing services- but also to institutions that operate under the values of openness, integrity and fairness. The OECD Recommendations on Public Integrity and Open Government, and the work associated to them, including the Public Integrity Handbook and the Open Government Dashboards are key instruments to help countries move forward on this.

Leveraging participation of the private sector, civil society and international cooperation to rebuild trust, enhance transparency and foster integrity

People’s trust in government is essential for the proper functioning of democracy and a key outcome of government performance. However, since the global financial crisis of 2008, trust in government has eroded in many countries and recovered only in some. Evidence on what determines people’s trust in governments will be an essential input for LAC countries’ long-term recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.

Maintaining integrity, trust and transparency in times of crisis is a great challenge. Any crisis demands urgent and rapid measures together with access to large and extraordinary funds, generating avenues for abuses, fraud and corruption. In addition, control and accountability mechanisms may need to be reduced to allow for the necessary flexibility that the situation demands. All this puts pressure on integrity, transparency and trust. To be prepared for future crises, governments need to be proactive and implement their long-term integrity policies, strengthening reporting channels, implementing transparency and public purchasing portals, conducting a constant integrity risk assessment, and strengthening social control.

Civil society organisations in Latin America is prepared and was ready to have a rapid response to the pandemic. Civil society organisations have raised issues related to risks of corruption in public procurement during emergencies some time before the pandemic, and actually in many cases the right to information has been respected while preserving the confidentiality of contractual negotiations on vaccines. However, one lesson learned from the crisis is that governments should not focus only on the integrity and transparency of public procurement processes but must look at other elements such as incentives, tax exemptions and other benefits that can also open the door to undue influence and corruption.

Panellists

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Creating a shared vision is essential to rebuild trust. To face the challenges that economic recovery entails and others such as climate change, efforts must be coordinated not only between countries but also with the participation of different stakeholders, including international cooperation. Broad cooperation allows for reaching agreements, consensus and dialogues and leads to the creation of more inclusive public policies while ensuring more resilient institutions. Instead of dividing tasks, projects must build on the intersection between the private and the public, and create new cultural norms to work together, and co-create.

Public policies based on evidence regarding citizens' perceptions, experiences and evaluations are key to further trust. Knowing citizen's opinions about their governments and their institutions allows to better understand how public governance can be improved, what policies can be reinforced, which should be changed, which should be put in place, as well as to better identify citizens' needs and to ultimately respond to these needs.

In conclusion

Before the pandemic, LAC was carrying out very important efforts on transparency, anti-corruption, and public procurement; however, citizens' trust in public institutions was decreasing, which together with institutional traps resulted in the inability to pass structural reforms.

Today, the crisis can be read as an opportunity to reach a more inclusive recovery, based on consensus between key actors: the private sector, CSOs, international cooperation and citizens. The social contract must be rethought to restore trust, and to this end certain elements need to be taken into account, such as compensation, effective communication with citizens, the socioeconomic context and the digital transformation.

Closing remarks

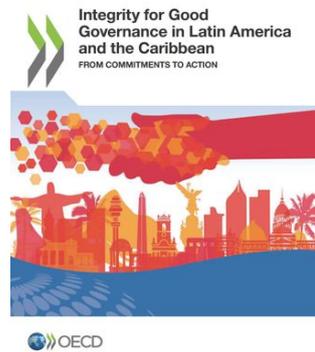
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Further reading



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Other documents

Enhancing public trust in COVID-19 vaccination: The role of governments:

<https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/enhancing-public-trust-in-covid-19-vaccination-the-role-of-governments-eae0ec5a/>

Recommendation of the Council on Open Government:

<https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0438>

The Toolkit and Case Navigator for Open Government:

<https://www.oecd.org/gov/open-government/open-government-toolkit-navigator.htm>

All you need is trust Informing the role of government in the COVID-19 context:

<https://www.oecd.org/gov/all-you-need-is-trust-statistics-newsletter-12-2020.pdf>

OECD Recommendation on Public Integrity

<https://www.oecd.org/gov/ethics/recommendation-public-integrity>

Integrity for Good Governance in Latin America and the Caribbean An Action Plan

<https://www.oecd.org/latin-america/regional-programme/Integrity-for-Good-Governance-in-Latin-America-and-the-Caribbean-Action-Plan.pdf>