The OECD Guidelines on Measuring Trust

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Modern societies are increasingly complex, and ill-informed policy choices may incur high costs and be difficult to reverse. Fundamental to high quality decision-making is a sound evidence base on whether, where, and when conditions in society are improving, on what conditions matter most to people’s welfare, and on the most important drivers of well-being outcomes. The measurement of outcomes relating to governance is a crucial gap in the existing body of official statistics. Although there is strong evidence that aspects of governance – such as trust – matter crucially to people's well-being, there is little consensus on how to best measure trust and governance in official statistics. The *OECD Guidelines on Measuring Trust* the OECD aim to improve international comparability of trust and governance measures by establishing common standards for the measurement of trust that can be used by national statistical agencies and other data producers and which are grounded in best practice in question design. The conceptual framework underlying the *OECD Guidelines* distinguishes generalized trust from trust in institutions and goes beyond measures of trust, narrowly conceived, to cover survey questions relevant to measuring the underlying concepts even if they do not refer explicitly to trust. While generalized trust is relatively well supported by empirical evidence on its validity and importance as a driver of other outcomes, the same is no true for measures of institutional trust. In fact, it is not currently clear whether institutional trust questions relating to trust in government perform sufficiently well as measures of the underling concept (people's confidence in public institutions) to be valid as indicators. For these reasons, the Guidelines have an extensive empirical focus assessing the validity of measures of institutional trust.

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