

Press release Germany | Edelman Trust Barometer 2022

Trust in decline: German institutions caught in a downward spiral of distrust and inaction

- **Trust bubble bursts:** Germans' trust in government, media, business and NGOs is back to pre-pandemic levels – Germans voice their mistrust.
- **Vote of no confidence in leadership:** well over a third of German respondents are convinced that leaders in business, the media and government are deliberately lying to people and misleading them. Alarmingly, at the same time, there is growing concern that fake news is being used as a weapon.
- **Need to catch up on discussion culture:** 64% of Germans say that people in this country lack the ability to have constructive and civil debates about issues they disagree on.

Frankfurt am Main, January 31, 2022. Almost two years after the global crisis was declared, the balance sheet is clear: the leap of faith that the government in particular received at the beginning of the pandemic, catapulting it to an all-time high, has been lost. But it is not only the government that finds itself in a vicious circle of mistrust, Germans' trust in the institutions of government, media, business and NGOs is back to pre-pandemic levels, putting them all in the distrust zone. This is shown by the latest data from the 2022 Edelman Trust Barometer, in which Edelman surveyed 36,000+ people in 28 markets about their trust.

For example, when looking at the general population, Germany has lost an amount of trust compared to the previous year (from 53 index points to 46 index points) and slips into the distrust range (trust score below 50). The top spot as the most trustworthy institution in Germany is no longer held by the government, which has suffered a significant loss of trust (47%, - 12%pts. compared with 2021; global: 52%; -1%pts.). Just ahead of government is business with 48% (- 6%pts. compared with 2021; global: 61%). The media (47 %, - 5 %pts; global: 50 %, - 1 %pts.) is on a par with the government, followed by NGOs (40 %, - 6 %pts. compared with 2021; global: 59 %, + 2 %pts.).

Discussion culture put to the test

The factors influencing the loss of trust are evident in the case of government and media: instead of being unifying forces (government: 34%; media: 36%; globally: 36%, 35%), both are seen as divisive forces (government: 46%; media: 41%; globally: 48%, 46%) in society.

Add to that another questionable trend: 64% of those surveyed in Germany say that people in this country lack the ability to have constructive and civil debate on issues they disagree on.

"The results clearly reflect a worrying development from a sociopolitical point of view and show the critical juncture we are now at. A lack of leadership, fake news and a desolate debate culture are increasingly fueling divergence among the population. To counteract this, we need more than ever the combined forces of institutions, trustworthy information and clear communication that provides orientation," says Christiane Schulz, CEO Edelman Germany.

Fake news remains a concern

The Edelman Trust Barometer 2022 also shows that the "infodemic" has not been contained, but has gained further momentum. This is because, despite the previous year's already poor scores, traditional media (58%, - 5%pts. from 2012; global: 57%, - 5%pts.) and social media (20%, - 11%pts. from 2012; global: 37%, - 8%pts.) continue to lose trust as a source of general news and information in this country. A trend that is also continuing in terms of concern about misinformation: a good two thirds of Germans (67%, +4 %pts. compared to 2021; globally: 76%, +4 %pts.) say they are worried about false information or fake news being used as a weapon – a figure at an all-time high globally.

Leadership crisis spreading

One issue that is also alarming in this context is that those surveyed in this country are increasingly concerned that society's leaders in business (45%; globally: 63%), media (45%; globally: 67%) and government (42%; globally: 66%) are purposely trying to mislead people by saying things they know are false or grossly exaggerated. Overall, the trust in these people, CEOs (36%; globally: 49%), government leaders (36%; globally: 42%) and journalists (41%; globally: 46%), as leaders is negative – all remain in the distrust range. Scientists, on the other hand, are trusted (69%; globally: 75%).

"In view of this, clear leadership is needed – but the results show that those surveyed in this country do not trust any of the institutions to play a leadership role in solving social problems," says Christiane Schulz. The government in particular does not convince the majority that it can take a leadership role (31%; business: 39%, NGOs: 33%, media: 25%) or successfully execute plans and strategies that yield results (27%, business: 54%, NGOs: 40%, media: 31%).

Businesses and employers hold out hope

Distrust in the government's performance and reliability leads to increased expectations of the business community and its corporate leaders. Thus, the business community is seen as more competent than the government and is given a clear role in the information mission. After all, in Germany, an employer's communication is perceived to be the most believable source of information. 49% need to see information from their employer only once or twice to believe it (globally: 52%). 25% automatically assume it is true, if they see the information (global: 13%).

CEOs are expected to help shape and influence conversations and policy debates on a range of issues. 70% or more in this country and globally believe CEOs should inform and help shape conversations on topics specifically related to the economy, such as jobs and wage inequality. But the majority also want CEOs to inform and shape conversations and policy debates on societal challenges such as technology and automation, and climate change. The fact is: the results clearly show that business is nowhere near the limit of doing too much when it comes to societal challenges.

"More than ever, eyes are on business to fill the gap that government is not filling. People are making more value-driven decisions about who to consider as an employer and what products to buy. In this regard, their own employer is the only source of information that has not yet squandered its trust advantage. The results of the Edelman Trust Barometer 2022 clearly show that the vicious circle of mistrust can only be broken by high-quality and reliable information. After all, being well informed is a powerful driver of trust, capable of overcoming even income-related trust gaps," says Christiane Schulz.

January update: government gets small trust credit in January 2022

The results of a 24 January, 2022 flash poll of the general population in Germany show that the government, compared to the 2022 Edelman Trust Barometer (in the field in November 2021), has gained a small amount of trust: 51% of respondents in this country accordingly place their trust in the government (+ 4%pts. compared to November). The views of business (50%, + 2%pts.), media (51%, + 4%pts.) and NGOs (46%, + 6%pts.) are also somewhat more positive.

A similar advance is evident among social leaders. CEOs (41%, + 5%pts.), government leaders (46%, + 10%pts.) and journalists (48%, + 7pts.) gained trust in January 2022 compared to November 2021.

"When the 2022 Edelman Trust Barometer figures were collected, Germany was in the midst of finding a new government and saw a large increase in new infections from a pandemic perspective. The results of our supplementary survey now show that respondents are taking a small leap of faith in the new government and other institutions, and that hope in them is not entirely lost. For government officials, but also for journalists and business leaders, it means to use this cooperatively now at the latest," says Christiane Schulz.

About 2022 Edelman Trust Barometer

The 2022 Edelman Trust Barometer is the firm's 22nd annual trust and credibility survey. The survey was powered by research firm Edelman Data & Intelligence (DxI) and consisted of 30-minute online interviews conducted between November 1 and November 24, 2021. The 2022 Edelman Trust Barometer online survey sampled more than 36,000 respondents, which includes 1,150 general population respondents across 28 markets. For more information, visit <https://www.edelman.com/trust-barometer>