



Trust in UK Government at its lowest in over a decade, according to 2024 UK Edelman Trust Barometer

- *60% say institution of government is completely ineffective at pushing through positive change*
- *Two-thirds of us think government regulators lack understanding of new technologies well enough to regulate them effectively*

LONDON, January 23, 2024: The 2024 Edelman UK Trust Barometer today reveals that the British people's trust in the institution of government is at its lowest since 2012.

Trust in government in 2024 has fallen to just 30%, with the decline appearing to be a damning indictment on the behaviour, efficacy, and values of both national and local leaders as the country heads into a critical election year.

The measure of the British people's Trust Index, which is the average trust in NGOs, business, government, and media, remains low, leaving the country among the least trusting of all 28 countries surveyed, tied with Argentina and Japan at 39.

Since 2021, trust in government overall fell by 15 points while, trust in local government also plummeted, from 53% to 41% over the same period. The timeframe suggests the incumbent government led by Rishi Sunak hasn't been able to shake off the impact of either the Partygate scandal or the economic shock of Liz Truss's short-lived tenure as Prime Minister.

A record high 69% of people now believe that the government only serves the interests of certain groups - up 23 points since 2021; 63% of people believe the government is "corrupt and biased" – again up 23 points since 2021; while less than a quarter (24%) consider government "honest and fair"; and 3 in 5 (60%) deem the government "completely ineffective as an agent of positive change", another record change – up 19 points since 2021.

The Edelman Trust Barometer, in its 24th year, is one of the world's largest surveys of both institutional trust across government, media, business, and NGOs, and attitudes to trust around societal issues. The Barometer measures responses from over 32,000 people across 28 countries.

Are we prepared for AI?

2024 is also likely to be a year in which both business and government push to implement new technology and innovation in their operations, more than ever due to the advances in the field of generative AI.

Yet the Edelman Trust Barometer shows 66% of the British public think people in government "do not have an adequate understanding of emerging technologies to be able to regulate them effectively".

Of the 28 countries surveyed worldwide, no other country demonstrated a higher level of concern in their public officials' ability to regulate emerging technology effectively – a key element in protecting people against the risks, and helping them reap the rewards of tech like AI. The only other nation exhibiting Britain's level of concern in this area was Thailand.

The UK data was collected in the immediate aftermath of last November's inaugural AI Safety Summit, an event hailed at the time by the Prime Minister as a major breakthrough on AI regulation. Despite that, majorities in every age group said they believed government lacked the know-how to handle the emerging tech. This belief was particularly strong among older generations with over three-quarters (76%) taking this view among people aged 55-plus and two-thirds among 35-54s (65%).

The data also showed the UK is experiencing heightened concerns around the impact and pace of technological change in general. The majority of people (52%) are concerned that technological innovations are happening too quickly and are leading to changes that are not good for people like them, while 69% of people are worried about hackers, cyber-attacks and cyber-terrorism, and 83% of people are worried about job loss.

In addition, the British public overwhelmingly favour caution and care over speed and acceleration when it comes to new tech and innovation. 70% say CEOs should develop new tech and innovations slowly and with great care compared to just 30% who would prefer it to be brought forward as quickly as possible.

Although business is more trusted than other institutions when it comes to the introduction of new technologies and innovations into society, there is still significant apprehension with only 46% trusting that business can manage this well and in a way that is safe, understood, accessible and beneficial to society.

Disillusion and pessimism among all income groups

As the British public prepare to head to the polls later this year, political leaders have a job to do to convince them of a future they can see themselves in. 2 in 3 people (65%) worry about the future, while the same number feel society is changing too quickly and not in ways that benefit people like them. There's also been a 10-point jump in the last two years to 77%, in those who believe the system is biased against regular people in favour of the rich.

These concerns are reflected across all income groups, with those on higher incomes seemingly more vulnerable to issues and challenges that they were previously immune to. In a period characterised by inflationary pressures and rising interest rates, the average trust in institutions among those on higher incomes has tumbled thirteen points since 2022 to 48. Furthermore, only a third of those in the higher income group now say they'll be better off in five years' time compared 50% of that group two years ago.

This feeling of displacement, dissatisfaction and distrust has led Britons to look for more radical change with 72% saying that to bring about necessary change we need forceful reformers in positions of power. This desire is felt more acutely among high-income groups (75%) than those in the low-income group (68%).

A new challenge for Business in growing trust

Overall trust in business (48%) remains notably higher than trust in government (30%) and media (31%), and there is slightly more optimism that business can deliver a positive vision for the future (41%) than pessimism (31%). However, at a time when the cost-of-living crisis, and allegations of profiteering have been under the microscope, people do not seem to have faith in business's effectiveness as an agent of change, honesty and fairness, and intention to serve the interests of everyone equally.



To strengthen its level of trust, business will need to address apparent doubts in its efficacy given only 49% believe that business is an effective agent of positive change while only 43% deem business to be honest and fair (down 10 points) and just 27% believe it to be serving the interests of everyone equally and fairly (down 9 points). Clearly, business must act now if it is to address these areas and hold on to its 'most trusted institution' status.

Maintaining trust requires business to respond to calls for it to help to solve the most pressing challenges facing the world today. 71% of Britons believe the primary responsibility of a CEO is to work for the benefit of all their company's stakeholders, including its employees, customers, and the communities in which it operates, as opposed to solely its shareholders and owners.

Business also benefits from a trust uplift when thought of as working with government. Half of UK respondents say that they would have greater trust in business to implement technology-led changes if it partnered with government, up 16 points since 2015.

Ruth Warder, CEO of Edelman UK, said: "This year's Trust Barometer shows that people feel the world is moving too quickly, in ways they don't understand, and will leave them behind. People need leaders, ideas, and information that inspire hope and help them navigate our changing world, from technology to climate change. This has never been more critical in a year when more than half the world's population will go to the ballot box and we all start to see the transformative impact of artificial intelligence."

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About the Edelman Trust Barometer

The 2024 Edelman Trust Barometer is the firm's 24th annual trust and credibility survey. The research was produced by the Edelman Trust Institute and consisted of 30-minute online interviews conducted between November 3 and November 22, 2023. The 2024 Edelman Trust Barometer online survey sampled more than 32,000 respondents across 28 countries.

Published every January, the report covers a range of timely and important societal indicators of trust among business, media, government and NGOs, shaping conversation and setting the agenda for the year ahead. For more information, visit <https://www.edelman.com/trust-barometer>

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