

Ethics, Parliament and the Elected Representative

Institute for African Alternatives (IFAA) workshop

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Agenda

- 1 Parliamentary ethics couldn't be more important
- 2 Public trust in parliaments is very low
- 3 Codes of Conduct are becoming more common, but...
- 4 Enforcement can be weak, especially in the absence of external scrutiny
- 5 Cost of politics or sense of entitlement can incentivise corruption
- 6 Political parties can subvert conduct

Parliamentary ethics couldn't be more important

“Independent and effective legislative institutions are the backbone of strong democracies.

Though no two parliaments are exactly the same, legislators globally share the common responsibility of conducting representation, lawmaking, and oversight to ensure national and citizen wellbeing.” (IPU, 2023)



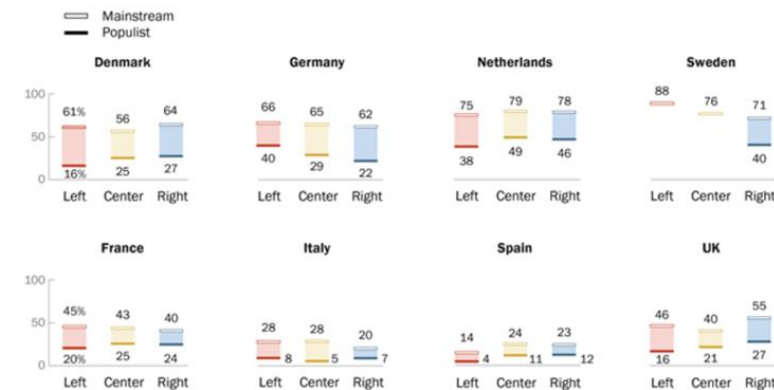
Globally, public trust in parliaments is very low

“In 1944, just one in three British people (35 per cent) saw politicians as merely ‘out for themselves’, while by 2014 that number was 48 per cent and in new IPPR polling conducted last weekend, 63 per cent said they share this view.” (IPPR Dec 2021)

“...three main trust challenges for public governance were heightened by the COVID-19 crisis: i) people’s views on the credibility and effectiveness of government action on intergenerational and often global challenges; ii) the changes in political participation and political attitudes; and iii) an increasing distrust of and disengagement from democratic processes.” (OECD Dec 2021)

People with populist views trust national parliament less than those in mainstream

Trust national parliament

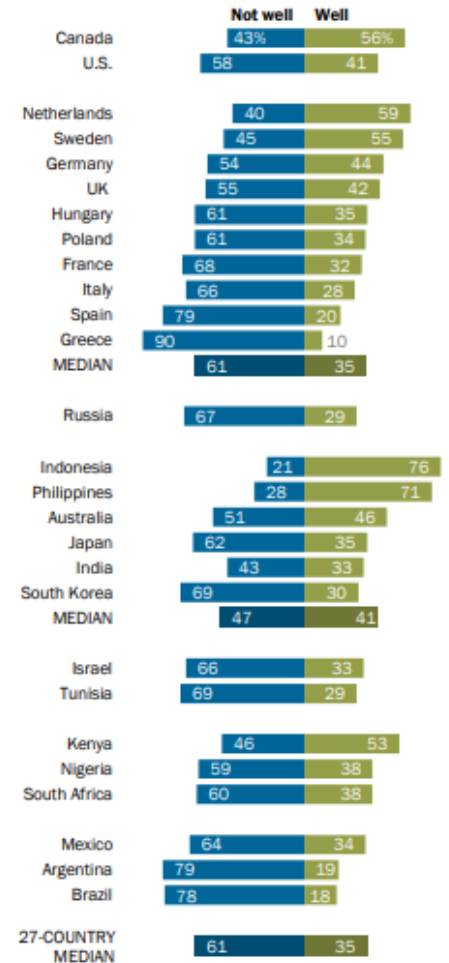


Note: Groups are based on respondents’ self-placement on a left-right ideological scale and support for populist views, defined as those who answered “Most elected officials don’t care what people like me think” and “Ordinary people would do a better job solving the country’s problems than elected officials.” See Appendix A for details. Sweden’s Center Populists and Left Populists not shown in the graphic because their sample sizes are too small to analyze.
Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.

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Skepticism over elected officials is widespread in most countries

% who say “elected officials care what ordinary people think” describes their country ...



Note: Don’t know responses not shown.

Source: Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey, Q34a.

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Enforcement can be weak, especially in the absence of external scrutiny

The enforcement mechanism matters:

- Independent Commission
- Parliamentary Committee
- Parliament
- Speaker of the Parliament
- Court

But so does the political culture:

“If there is no consensus among MPs about what constitutes improper behavior, about the nature of the ethics problems, and about what changes should be made to make the ethics regime work, any ethics reform is bound to fail.”
(World Bank Institute 2004)



Cost of politics or sense of entitlement can incentivise corruption

“The Senate seat [in Kenya] is the most expensive of all the posts to contest for. It cost an average of Kshs. 35.5 million (US\$ 350,000) to contest for this seat in 2017.”

“One impact of the high, and growing costs of politics, is the increased exclusion of ordinary citizens from the political space. Young and female aspirants are particularly constrained, especially where there are no quotas for women representatives. Another is the increased incentive for members of the legislature to engage in corrupt practices to continue to meet constituent demands when in office, and to recoup investments made to get elected.”

(WFD/NIMD Cost of Politics research, 2023)



Cost
of Politics

About West Africa Eastern Europe

The cost of politics is how much it costs to run for office and the funds you need to maintain that office. WFD and NIMD are investigating the cost of politics across different countries. Click on a region to find out more.

“...a shocking 85.2 per cent of the women MPs who took part said that they had suffered psychological violence in the course of their parliamentary term of office, and 67.9 per cent said they had been confronted with sexist or sexual remarks on multiple occasions over the course of their terms.” (IPU survey of parliamentarians in Europe 2018)

Political parties can subvert conduct

MPs have to manage both institutional and party commitments

Incentives are affected by political context, including the electoral system

“A system in which “Members of Parliament are accountable and beholden to their party bosses” is not well suited to securing Parliamentary oversight of the executive comprising, as it generally does, ‘party bosses’.”
(Zondo report vol 6 para 1010)



Party Lists are the most popular way to elect representatives in the world, with more than 80 countries using a variation of this system to elect their parliament.

Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) is the UK public body dedicated to supporting democracy around the world. Operating internationally, WFD works with parliaments, political parties, and civil society groups as well as on elections to help make countries' political systems fairer, more inclusive and accountable.

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