



## WIKI n°3: The Crisis of Confidence in Institutions

The 1960s and 1970s witnessed widespread social movements and political protests in many countries. Since the mid-2000s, growing mistrust of institutions and political elites has intensified, fueled by political scandals, corruption, economic and social crises, the influence of mass media, and the rise of social networks.

This widespread dissatisfaction with political elites has manifested in increasingly frequent demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience worldwide. In 2022, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reported that only 41% of citizens in its member states trusted public authorities. According to Edelman, an American public relations and marketing consulting firm, global trust in governments declined by 12 percentage points between 2021 and 2022.

During the 2018 General Assemblies, the United Nations Secretary-General deplored the "trust deficit syndrome," which affects both national institutions and relations between states, as well as the concept of a rules-based international order.

**The reasons for this mistrust are varied and complex:**

- Lack of transparency and accountability: Political scandals, conflicts of interest, and corruption erode citizens' trust in their leaders.
- Social and economic inequalities: The widening gap between rich and poor fuels feelings of injustice and exacerbates institutional distrust.
- Broken promises: Citizens often feel betrayed when policies fail to deliver the expected outcomes.
- Globalization and perceived loss of control: Globalization has led to a perceived loss of sovereignty for many states, reinforcing citizens' sense of powerlessness.
- Successive crises: Economic, health, or climate crises have repeatedly undermined institutions' ability to meet the population's needs.

**The behavior of actors can also undermine trust:**

- **Lack of independence of the judiciary from the executive**, as well as from other public/private powers (national or international), significantly undermines governance. As an institution tasked with upholding justice, correcting errors, and punishing abuses, the judiciary plays a central role in fostering fairness, social cohesion, and sustainable development. On the global stage, interference, threats, and unethical actions have frequently weakened certain judicial bodies, leading to controversial verdicts and widespread criticism.
- **Decline in political party membership**: Citizens no longer perceive a difference between ideological, political, and pragmatic programs of parties and unions, in a clear sign of these institutions'<sup>6</sup> decline. This disaffection, materialized in dropping participation and voter abstention, echoes criticisms of "formal democracy." In response, some groups strive to renew civic engagement through individual initiatives and coordinated activism.
- **Citizens have difficulty telling independent, serious and credible NGOs from those that are not**<sup>7</sup> : National associations and "international" NGOs, which value their independence, often face unwarranted restrictions on the exercise of their activities, including direct/indirect limitations; attempts at recovery, smear campaigns, etc., with a view to making their activity less critical, aligning them with government orientations...<sup>8</sup>.
- **Media polarization and disinformation**: The proliferation of information sources and the spread of fake news contribute to doubts and increased tensions. It is worth noting that:
  - ✓ Mainstream media, often controlled by powerful financial groups, governments, or both, function as influential "opinion makers."
  - ✓ Independent, investigative media, funded in particular by their subscribers, members and supporters, manage to make their voices heard and coalesce, like ACRIMED<sup>9</sup> in France, or the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists <sup>10</sup> on a multi-country scale.
  - ✓ Journalists leaving mainstream outlets due to editorial constraints often establish or join independent media, motivated by a commitment to fact-based reporting and constructive criticism as prerequisites for effective governance.
- **Fraudulent practices by certain multinational firms operating in the following sectors:**

---

<sup>6</sup> Les syndicats en France : poids, représentativité et déclin (theconversation.com)

<sup>7</sup> This ambiguity is compounded when it is discovered that a "humanitarian" NGO has engaged in child trafficking. Consequently, good governance is undermined.

<sup>8</sup> [Human Rights Council: Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders reports at least 281 defenders killed in 2019 in 35 countries | OHCHR](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Acrimed | Action Critique Médias - Observatoire des médias Action - Critique - Médias](#)

<sup>10</sup> [International Consortium of Investigative Journalists - ICIJ](#)

- ✓ Tobacco and pharmaceutical industries: These industries have been sanctioned for marketing harmful or ineffective products, often opting for out-of-court settlements involving fines or compensation to continue operations.
- ✓ Industries producing health-harming food products: Certain corporations manipulate research results—especially in African universities—to bypass stricter regulations in the Global North, enabling them to sell low-quality products predominantly in the Global South<sup>11</sup>.

---

<sup>11</sup> “Companies with products that are harmful to health fund research across Africa’s universities. One example is Nestle. Several academic institutions receive money from the multinational even though, by its own admission, its portfolio of foods includes a large percentage that don’t meet the definition of healthy products. Studies have found that researchers are biased towards those who hold the purse strings, either consciously or unconsciously.” *The Conversation* <[africa-editorial@theconversation.com](mailto:africa-editorial@theconversation.com)>