

Public image survey of Statistics Denmark

Every second year Statistics Denmark conducts a survey among the Danish public to analyse its knowledge on and attitude towards the institution. This year a number of questions have been added and others adjusted to adapt to the formulations of the questionnaire developed in the OECD working group on measurement of trust in official statistics. The overall method of the survey has also changed, since this survey is partly based on online interviews, whereas the last survey in 2008 was based purely on phone interviews. This break in the data series entails that there are a number of significant changes in this year's results to which significance should not be attached. New questions in the survey concern trust in the institution Statistics Denmark, the unbiased nature of the figures and confidential treatment of personal information. They all display a high level of public trust in the institution. The interviews for this survey were conducted in October 2010. This paper sums up the most important findings.

New questions show that...

- 83 per cent of the Danes trust Statistics Denmark, and only 4 per cent distrust it. The level is higher among people who know the institution well and have been in contact with Statistics Denmark within the past two years. 94 per cent of the people who know the institution well trust it.
- The level of trust in Statistics Denmark is similar to trust in the police, the court system and the central bank (Nationalbanken)
- Internationally the Danish trust level peaks along with Australia, New Zealand and Sweden. The Danes have a similar high level of trust that the figures are free from political interference, in which 73 per cent have confidence.
- 91 per cent of the Danes believe that information given to Statistics Denmark is kept confidential.
- The public's trust in confidential treatment of information is very high in Denmark as well as in Sweden and New Zealand who have asked similar questions.

Questions repeated from earlier surveys furthermore show that...

- Three out of four Danes consider statistics on society *important* or *very important* as a basis for political decisions. This is 10 percentage points lower than in 2008.
- Nine out of ten Danes have as a minimum heard of Statistics Denmark. However, two of them only know the name.
- One out of four Danes has been in contact with Statistics Denmark within the past two years. Most of them have used the website/Statbank.dk or been interviewed. This is somewhat lower than the level found in 2008, whereas there has been a rise in the number of people who have been interviewed or reported data to Statistics Denmark.

Method

*New method:
One third
answered online*

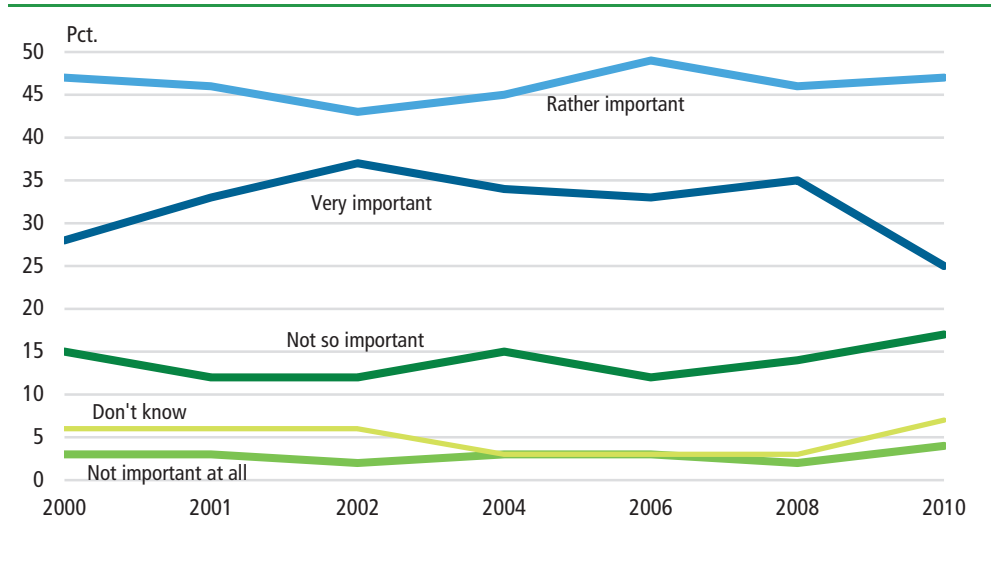
985 persons aged 16-74 were interviewed out of a sample of 1,536 persons. One out of three chose to answer online, whereas two thirds were interviewed over the phone. Afterwards the results have been calibrated to correspond to the full population. Answering online creates a larger distance to the interviewer and is therefore likely to make the respondents answer less positive than in direct contact with an interviewer. Statistics Denmark carries out the survey which entails a further bias. In 2001 Statistics Denmark asked another research institution to pose two of the questions simultaneously, and the result clearly indicated a bias toward more positive answers when the survey is carried out by the institution that is the subject of the survey. The results of this survey are presented in a report (in Danish) published on the website of Statistics Denmark (www.dst.dk/brugernesmening)

Question 1:

According to you, how important are statistics on society as a basis for political decisions, research and debate?

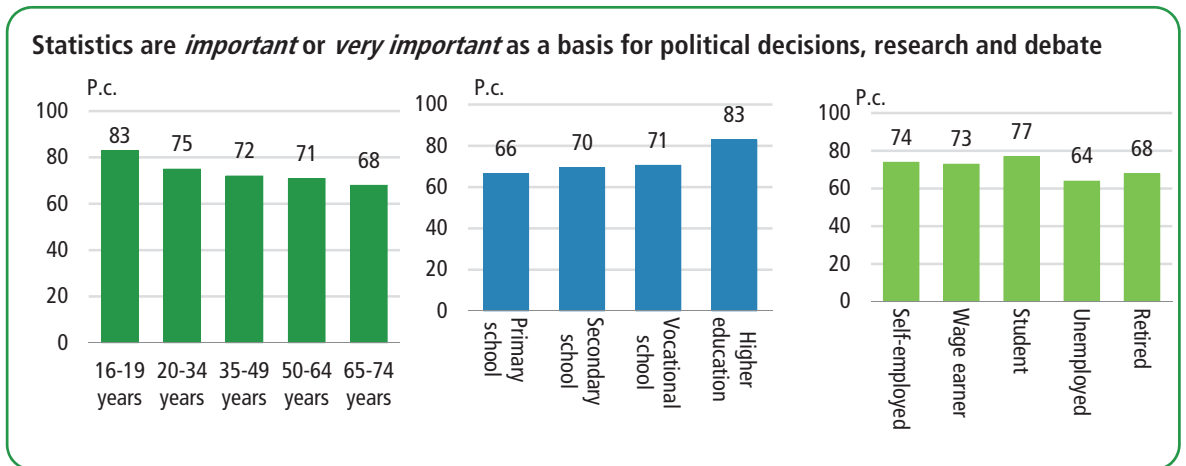
*One out of four:
Statistics are very
important for politics*

One out of four Danes finds that statistics on society are *very important* as a basis of political decisions, research and debate. That is 10 percentage points less than in 2008, most likely due to the change in method. Like in the last survey, every other Dane finds that it is *rather important*.



*Most young people regard
statistics as important*

Among young people a larger share believes that statistics are important. This share decreases with age from 83 per cent of the 16-19 year olds to 68 per cent of the 65-74 year olds. There is a higher share who finds statistics important among the more educated.



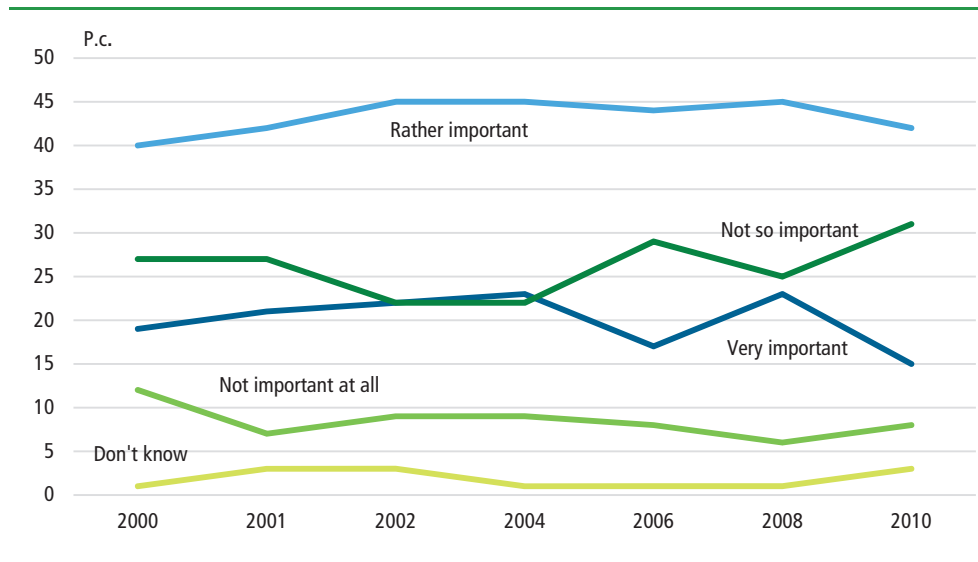
Most young people regard statistics as important for them personally

Question 2:

How important are statistics for you personally to understand how society works and develops?

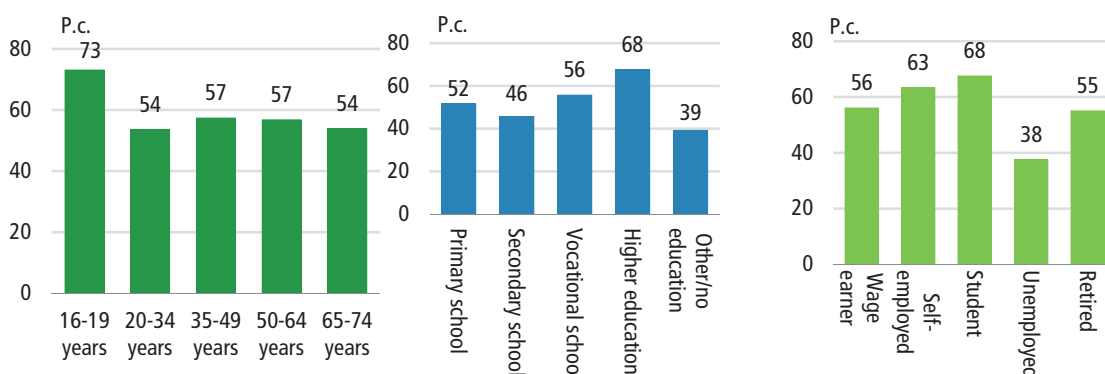
Statistics important for every second Dane

Also in this question the evaluation of the importance of statistics for the individual is considerably lower than in 2008. Still, more than every second Dane (56 per cent) considers it important or very important.



As in the previous question statistics are primarily considered important among the young, students and persons with high education.

Statistics are very or rather important for me personally to understand how society develops



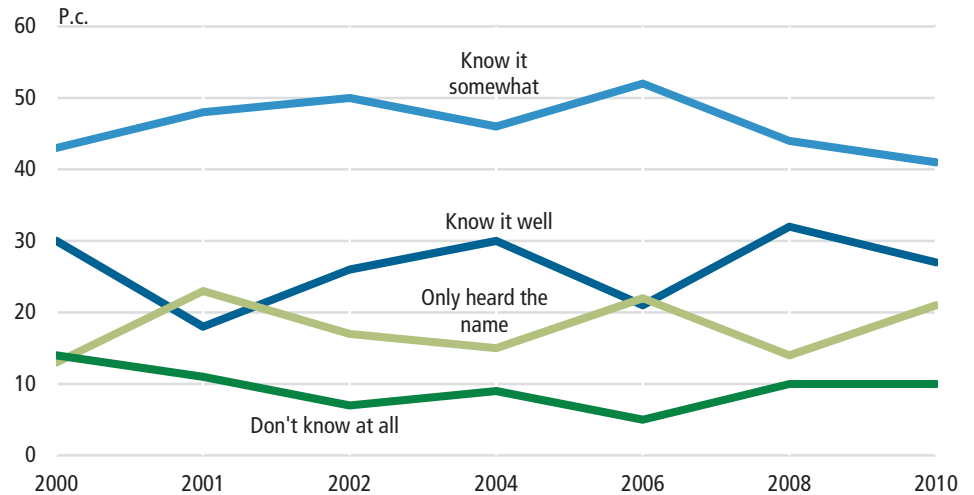
Nine out of ten Danes have heard of Statistics Denmark

Question 3:

Did you know Statistics Denmark before this survey?

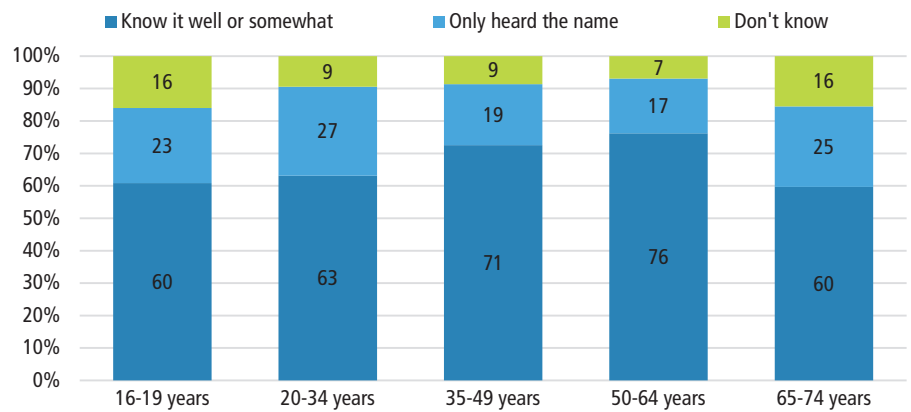
High level of knowledge of Statistics Denmark

Despite the fact that the answers to this question are lower than in the previous survey they show a high level of knowledge of Statistics Denmark. Seven out of ten (68 per cent) know the institution *well* or *somewhat*, while two out of ten have only heard the name.



Most people with higher education know Statistics Denmark

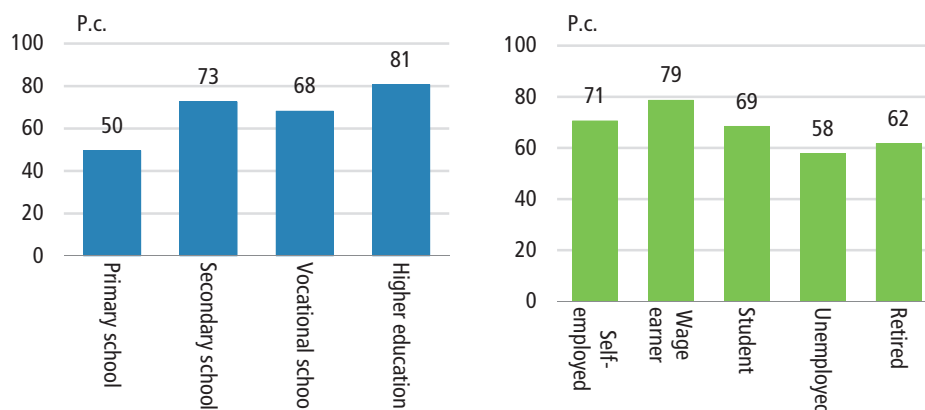
There is an increasing level of knowledge of Statistics Denmark with higher age, but for the 65-74 year olds the level falls again. The level of knowledge is highest among persons with a higher education, where eight out of ten know the institution compared to persons with a primary school background, where only every second person knows Statistics Denmark. Comparing occupation types the knowledge level is highest among self-employed and lowest for people outside the labour market.



Same level as Australia and New Zealand

89 per cent of the Danish population know the name of Statistics Denmark as a minimum. Internationally, this places the institution on the level of Australia where 93 per cent know the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the national statistics organization of New Zealand, which is known by 86 per cent of the population.

Know Statistics Denmark *well* or *somewhat*



One out of four Danes has been in contact with Statistics Denmark

Question 4:

Have you been in contact with Statistics Denmark within the past two years in one or more of the following ways

Most contacts have visited the website or been interviewed

Within the past two years more than a million Danes – or every fourth Dane between the ages of 16 and 74 – have had contact with Statistics Denmark. However, two years is a long period to recall. Respondents are therefore liable to post-rationalize from whether they consider it likely that they have had contact with the institution in one or more ways. 38 per cent of the respondents who claim to know Statistics Denmark *well* or *somewhat* have been in contact with us. Most of them have visited the website/StatBank or been interviewed. On average, each of the persons who have had contact with Statistics Denmark have had 1.4 different kinds of contact.

Fewer have visited the website

The level is considerably lower than in previous surveys, most likely due to the change in method. The fact that use of the internet becomes still more common furthermore means that people are more likely to forget the specific websites they have visited. Use of the website/StatBank has dropped most, but there is also a fall in the use of publications. 16 per cent of those who know Statistics Denmark *well* or *somewhat* state that they have used the website or StatBank as opposed to 21 per cent in 2008. The fall in the use of publications is not surprising since more and more figures are available – often free – on the internet, and the use of printed publications is generally dropping.

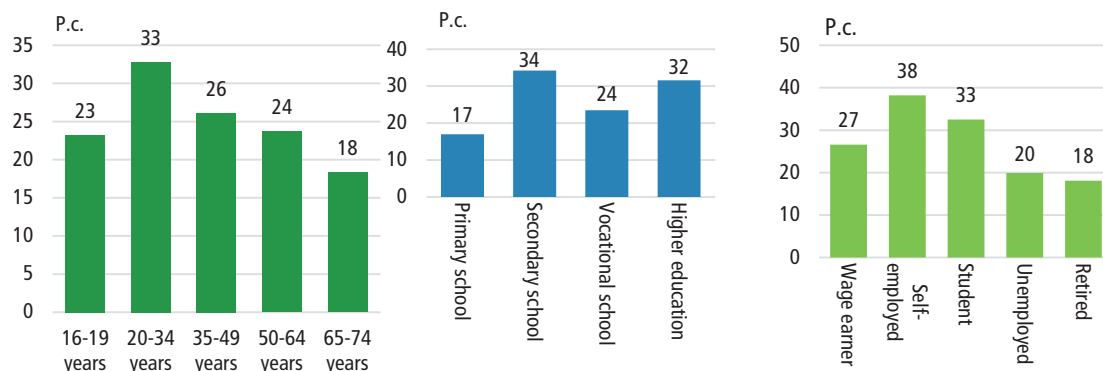
A rising number has been interviewed or reported

The survey shows an increase in the number of people who have been interviewed from 12 per cent to 17 per cent. Twice as many as in 2008 have reported data to Statistics Denmark, namely 8 per cent of those who know the institution *well* or *somewhat*. 63 per cent of those who state that they know more than the name have not had contact with the institution, and that is a rise of 10 percentage points.

Young people, students and self-employed have had most contact

Not surprisingly students and self-employed are the groups where the largest share has had some kind of contact with Statistics Denmark. 20-34 year olds is the age group with most contact.

Have been in contact with Statistics Denmark within the past two years in one of the following ways



Contact forms vary over time

There is a large difference between the frequency of different kinds of contact, both between different population groups and over time. The table below shows how large a share of the people having had contact with the institution who have had each kind of contact – possibly as one of several contact forms.

	2006	2008	2010
Used website or StatBank	45	49	43
Phoned or sent an e-mail ¹	•	9	7
Used books, pamphlets etc.	21	27	8
Used the library of Statistics Denmark	1	7	2
Been interviewed	32	35	49
Reported to Statistics Denmark	17	14	23
Other form of contact	6	4	5

¹The question is included from 2008

In half of the stated contacts, the user has contacted Statistics Denmark, whereas every other contact consists in interviews or reporting where the user has not chosen the contact. The users who have contacted Statistics Denmark have done it online in a majority of cases. The figures do not describe the *number* of contacts, since it is very likely that the respondents have used a contact form several times.

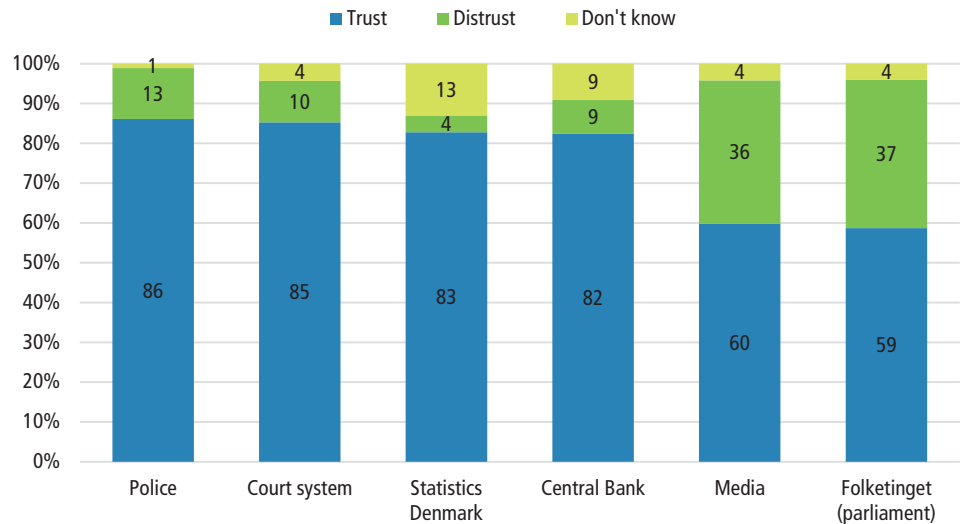
Statistics Denmark in third place after the police and court system

Question 5:

I will name a list of institutions. For each, please indicate whether you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it.

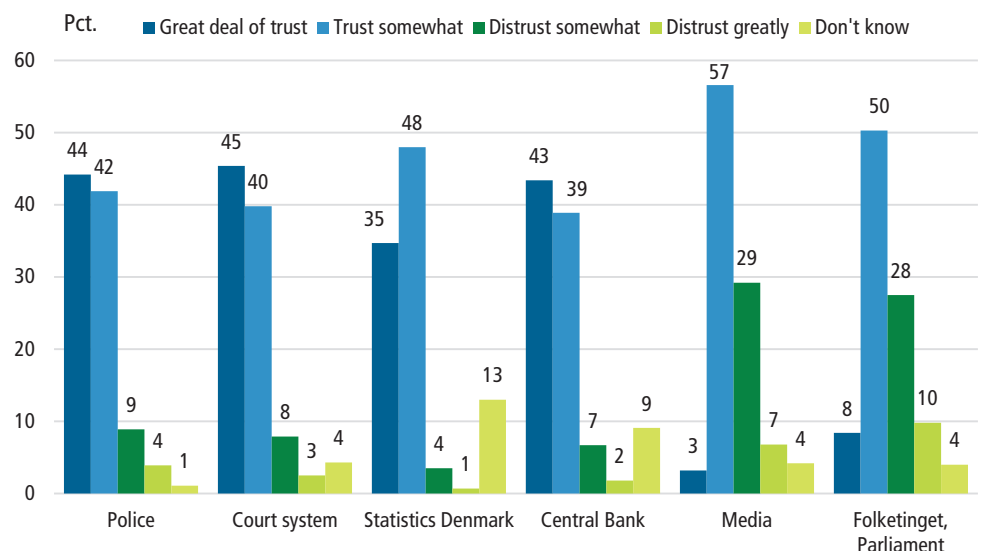
83 per cent trust Statistics Denmark

Eight out of ten Danes trust Statistics Denmark. One per cent distrust it greatly, while 4 per cent distrust it somewhat.



Similar high trust in four institutions

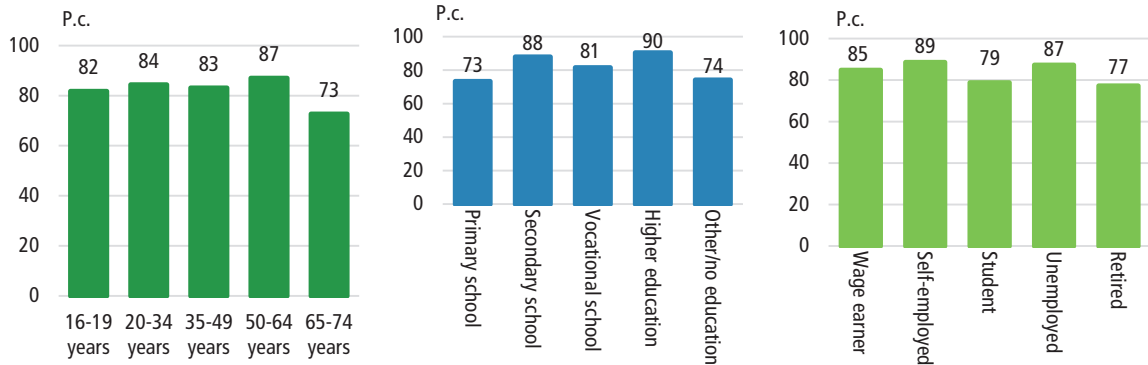
If one chooses the total of people who express different degrees of trust in Statistics Denmark as the point of reference, the institution comes in third just before the Central Bank which is normally regarded as a very trustworthy institution - and somewhat ahead of the media and Folketinget (the Danish parliament). The four institutions with the highest score, the police, the court system, Statistics Denmark and the Central Bank, share a high and similar level of trust. Statistics Denmark differs from the other institutions by having the smallest share who expresses distrust (4 per cent) and a relatively large share of “don’t know”, namely 13 per cent. After the four institutions there is a distance to the two last “institutions”, the media and the parliament, which a much smaller share expresses *a great deal of trust* in, whereas a larger share *trusts them somewhat*. One out of three Danes mistrusts them, and that is a much higher level of mistrust than the other institutions, particularly Statistics Denmark.



Small differences in trust

The eldest, retired and persons with a primary school background have the lowest level of trust. However, across background variables a minimum of 73 per cent have trust in Statistics Denmark, and the differences are small. Trust is highest among highly educated, self-employed and people aged 50-64 years.

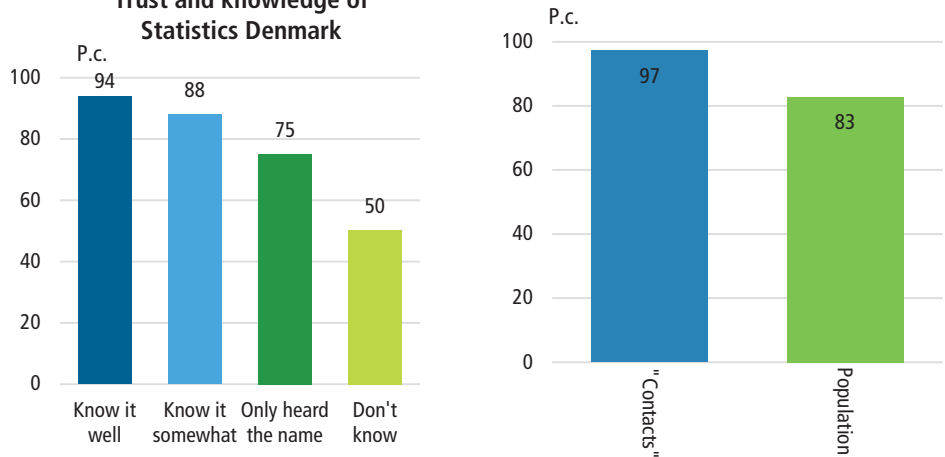
Have a great deal of or somewhat trust in Statistics Denmark



Higher trust among people who have had contact

Knowledge of the institution and contact with it makes a difference. 94 per cent of those who state that they know Statistics Denmark well express trust in the institution, whereas this only goes for every second of the persons who don't know the institution at all. Persons who have had contact with the institution have a higher level of trust than the general public. Almost everyone who has had contact within the past two years state that they trust the institution greatly or somewhat as opposed to 83 per cent of the general public.

Trust and knowledge of Statistics Denmark



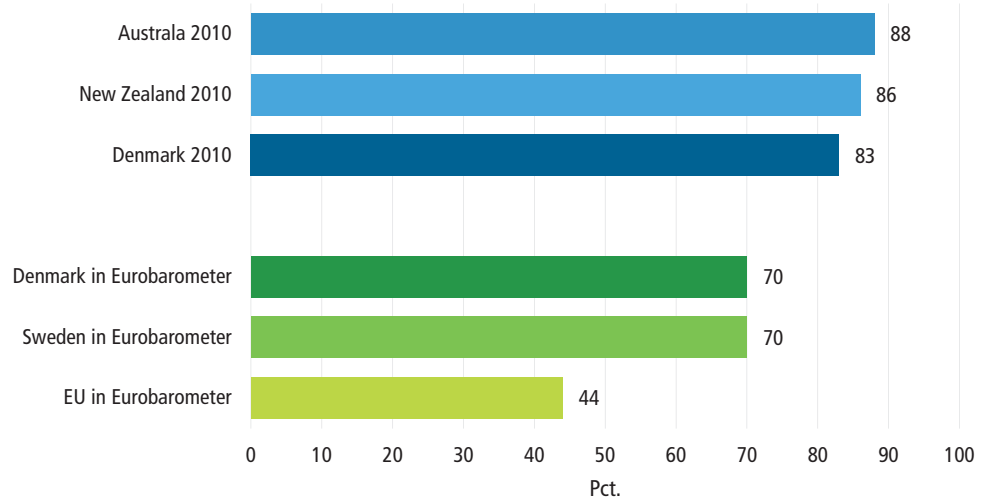
High Danish trust in international perspective

In an international perspective, the Danish level of trust in Statistics Denmark as well as public institutions is generally quite high. Denmark has traditionally been one of the countries in the world with the highest confidence in society's institutions. However, a number of studies claim that this confidence has decreased since year 2000.

70 per cent of Danes trust statistics against 44 per cent in EU

A Eurobarometer survey (323) shows that 70 per cent of the Danes trust official statistics and thereby places Denmark on a European first place along with Sweden. The average level in the EU is trust from 44 per cent of the population. However, the Danish level is surpassed by Australia and New Zealand in their national surveys on trust in statistics.

Trust in national statistics



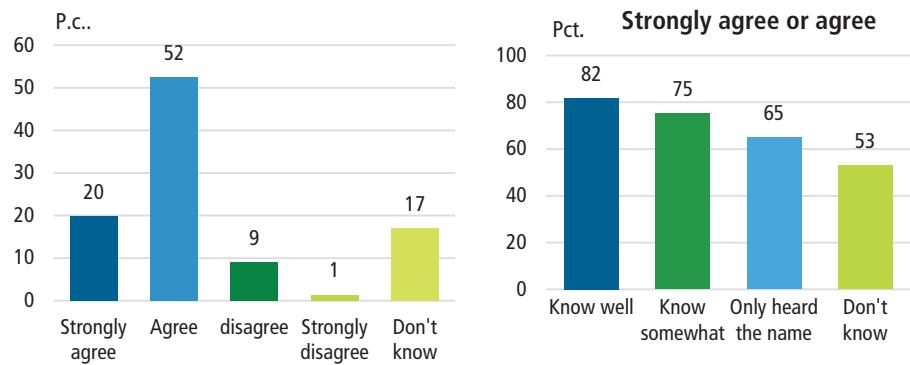
Seven out of ten believe that Danish statistics are unbiased

Question 6:

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Statistics provided by Statistics Denmark are produced without political interference?

Two out of ten *agree strongly* that figures from Statistics Denmark are produced without political interference, while five *agree*. Altogether, 72 per cent of the Danes believe that the figures are unbiased. Only one out of ten disagrees, while a relatively large share of 17 per cent doesn't know.

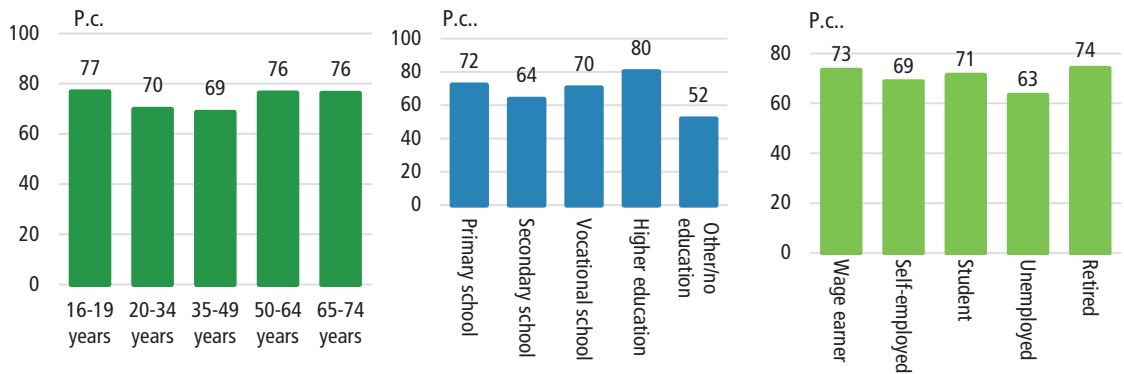
Statistics from Statistics Denmark are produced without political interference



Knowledge enhances trust in political neutrality

Knowledge of the institution enhances trust in the neutrality of the figures. 82 per cent of those who know Statistics Denmark well agree that the figures are produced without political interference, whereas this is only the case for every second of those who don't know the institution. There is a gender difference, since every fourth man (24 per cent) agrees strongly that the figures are unbiased, while only every sixth woman (16 per cent) shares this view.

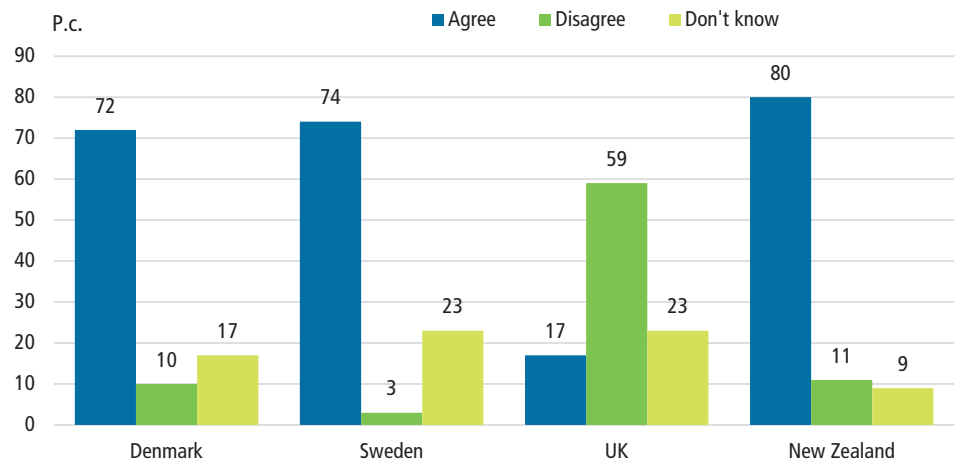
Agree or strongly agree that statistics from Statistics Denmark are made without political interference



Trust in unbiased statistics high in international perspective

In an international perspective, the Danes have a high level of trust in unbiased figures, and the same is the case in Sweden and New Zealand. However, the figures from New Zealand are based on those who already know the institution, which is probably the reason for the very high level. The corresponding figure for Denmark is 78 per cent. The Swedish question concerns trust that the *institution SCB itself* is objective and apolitical. The British population is considerably more sceptical towards the neutrality of official figures, which only 17 per cent believe are produced without political interference.

Agree/disagree that official figures are produced without political interference



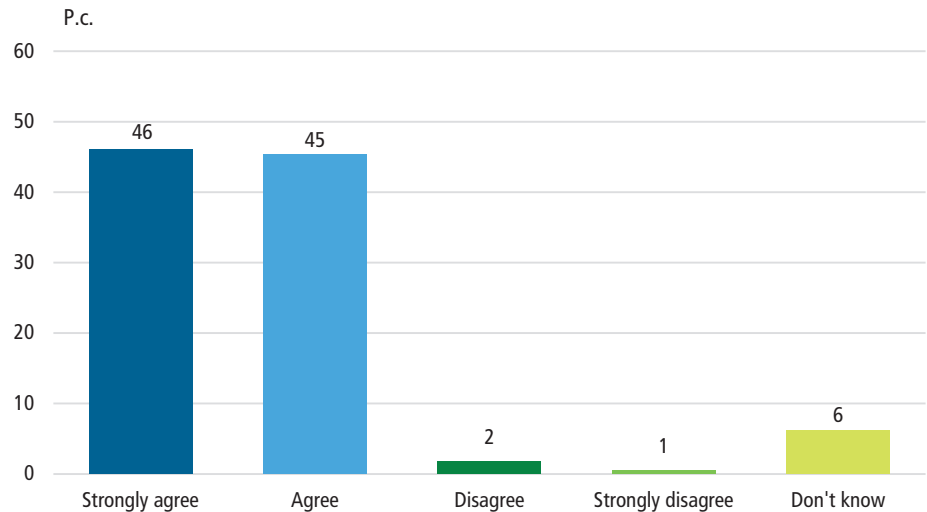
Nine out of ten believe that information is kept confidential

Question 7:

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I believe that the information I provide to Statistics Denmark will be kept confidential?

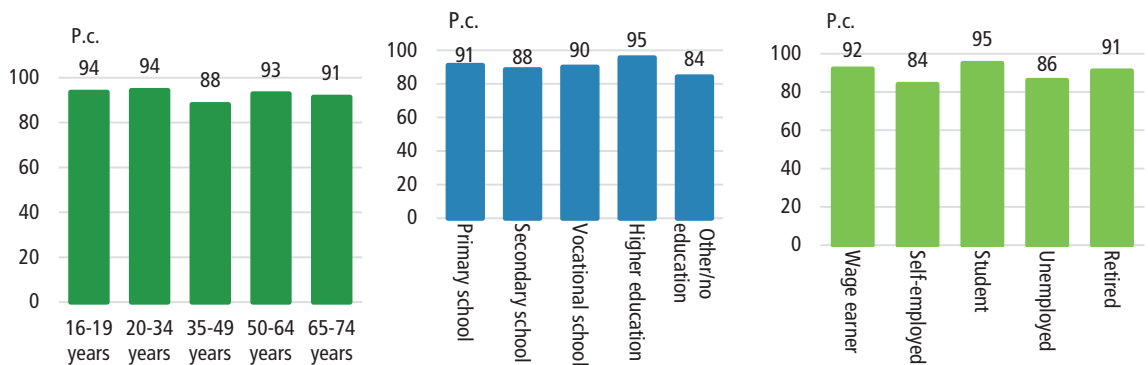
Only 3 per cent of the Danes disagree that Statistics Denmark keeps their information confidential. Of the 91 per cent who have confidence that information is kept confidential, every second *agrees strongly* and every second simply *agrees*.

Believe that information provided to Statistics Denmark is kept confidential



There is not much variation in the level of trust in confidential treatment of information across background variables like age, education and employment.

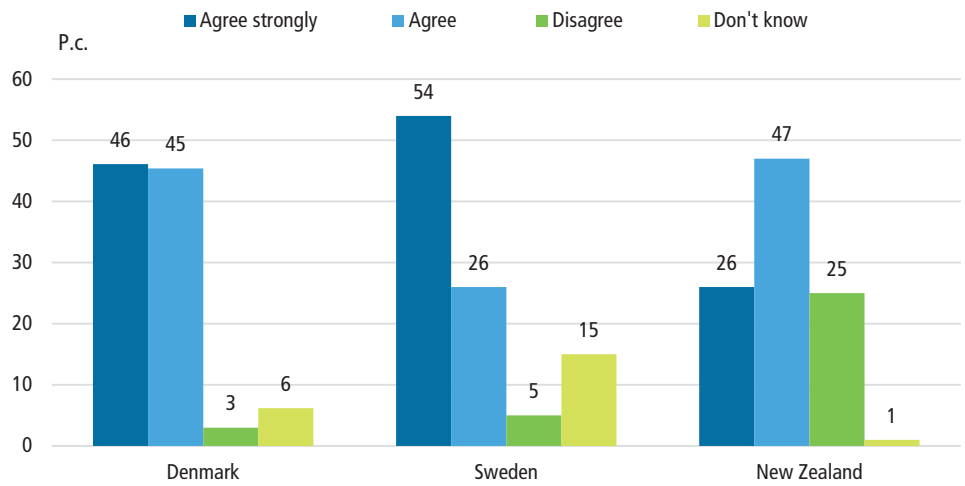
Agree or strongly agree that Statistics Denmark keeps information confidential



Sweden and New Zealand share high trust in confidentiality

The Danish trust in confidential treatment of information is high in international comparison – also measured by the share who does *not* agree. A larger share of the Swedes expresses *strong agreement* that information is kept confidential, but the total percentage that agree is higher in Denmark. New Zealand also has a high level of trust in confidentiality, but a larger share of sceptics, namely 25 per cent who don't agree. The questions posed vary somewhat.

Agree that information is kept confidential



Surveys from national statistics institutions:

Australia: "Trust in ABS and ABS Statistics", Australian Bureau of Statistics Oct. 2010

New Zealand: Use and Trust in Official Statistics Survey 2010

UK: Public Confidence in Official Statistics 2009

Sweden: Bilden av verket – SCB's image 2008

Eurobarometer survey 323