WCRI Symposium

Implications of research integrity for public trust in academic research

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Trust in science

Consequences of irresponsible research

Breaches of sound and responsible research can compromise:

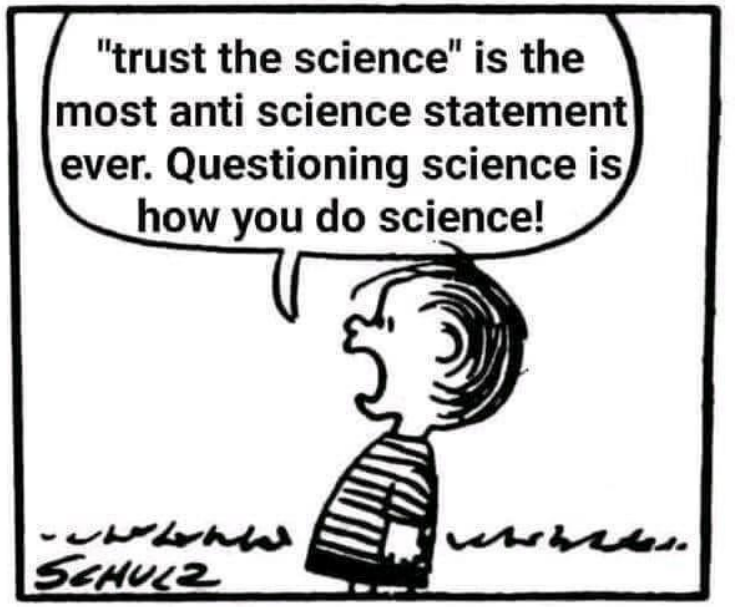
- The validity of knowledge (the question of truth)
- Trust in research (credibility, public trust – financial, political, and societal support for research)
- Trust between researchers (fairness)
- The ethical treatment of participants (broad harm to society, individuals/patients, nature)
- Use of resources (research waste)

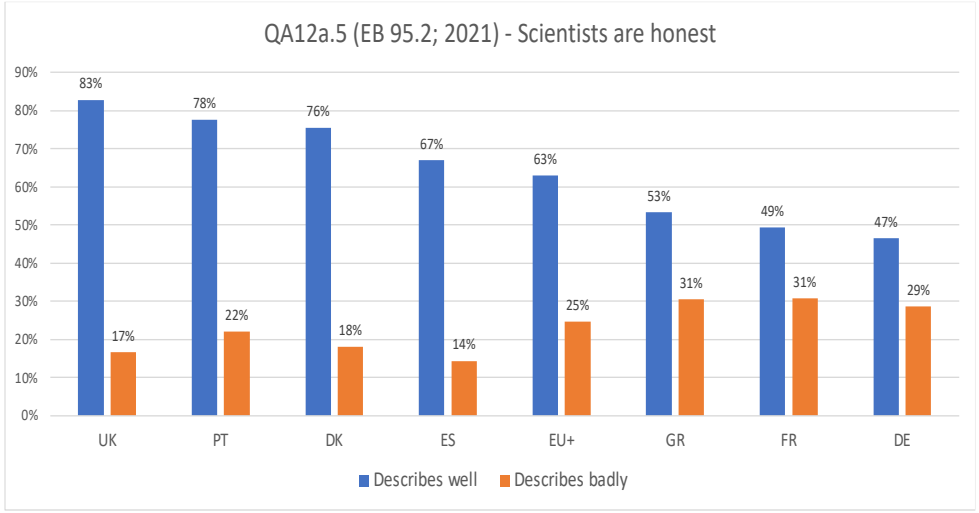
Crisis of trust?

Trust in research is central to our society.

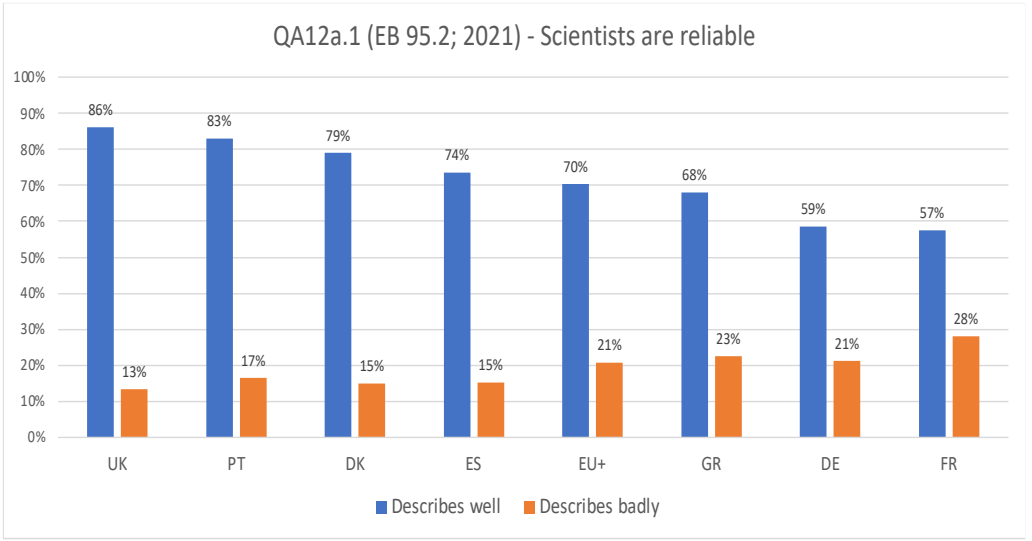
While trust is generally high, challenges regarding mistrust prevail

- There are also reasons for **certain skepticism** or mistrust
- Trust in research is a complex and multifaceted issue
- Trust is **relational and contextual**



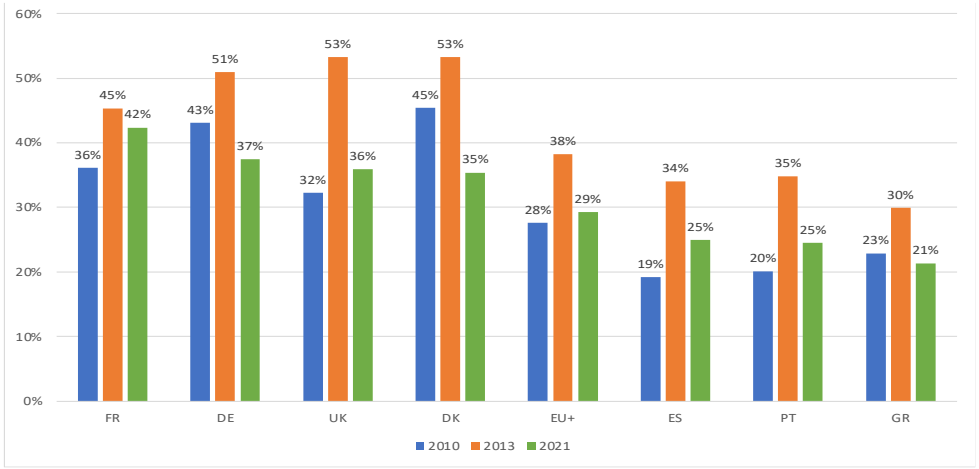


Eurobarometer Data - EB95.2



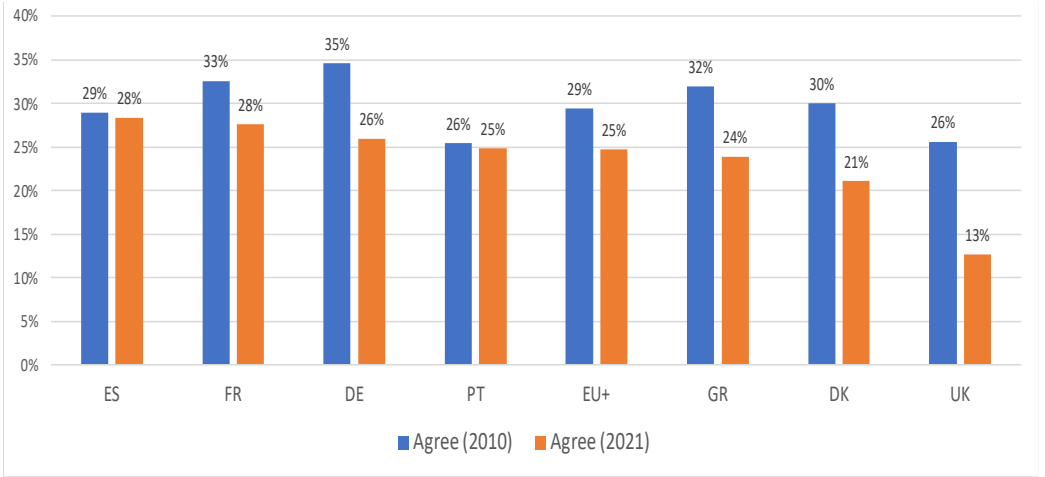
Eurobarometer Data - EB95.2

The public should be consulted and public opinion should be seriously considered when making decisions about science and technology.



Eurobarometer Data - EB73.1, EB79.2 and EB95.2

We can no longer trust scientists to tell the truth about controversial scientific and technological issues because they depend increasingly on money from industry



Eurobarometer Data - EB73.1 and EB95.2

Source: Bauer, Behn-Bahtat and Bunt (2023): D1.2: Dataset on core trust items, climate science, and COVID-19

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Building trust through research integrity and societal integration - Findings from the POIESIS project

Tine Ravn, Senior researcher, CFA, AU

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Outline

1. Presentation of the POIESIS project – ‘’Probing the impact of integrity and integration on societal trust in science
2. Public deliberation study across 7 European countries – key cross-country findings on RI and trust
3. Focus group study on institutional RI – snapshot of key findings

POIESIS research project

The three basic assumptions

1.

Trust depends on scientists' capacity to demonstrate **high standards of research integrity**

2.

Citizen and civil society's involvement in co-creating research agendas and contents strengthens trust

3.

Institutions can foster integrity and societal integration by enabling and supporting researchers to act responsibly

Objectives

- The POIESIS project broadly investigates the **relationship** between research integrity, public engagement in research, and trust in research.
- It also examines how **scientific misconduct**, questionable research practices, poor or absent communication, and/or misinformation affect public trust.
- Additionally, it looks at the **role various institutions** related to research, communication, and funding, among others, play in promoting a research climate that is conducive to society's trust in science

Output

Recommendations on how to address societal mistrust

Recommendations on how to strengthen public engagement and responsible research practices

Recommendations on how to communicate science responsible

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Empirical studies

7 Public Workshops in 7 countries, 160 people

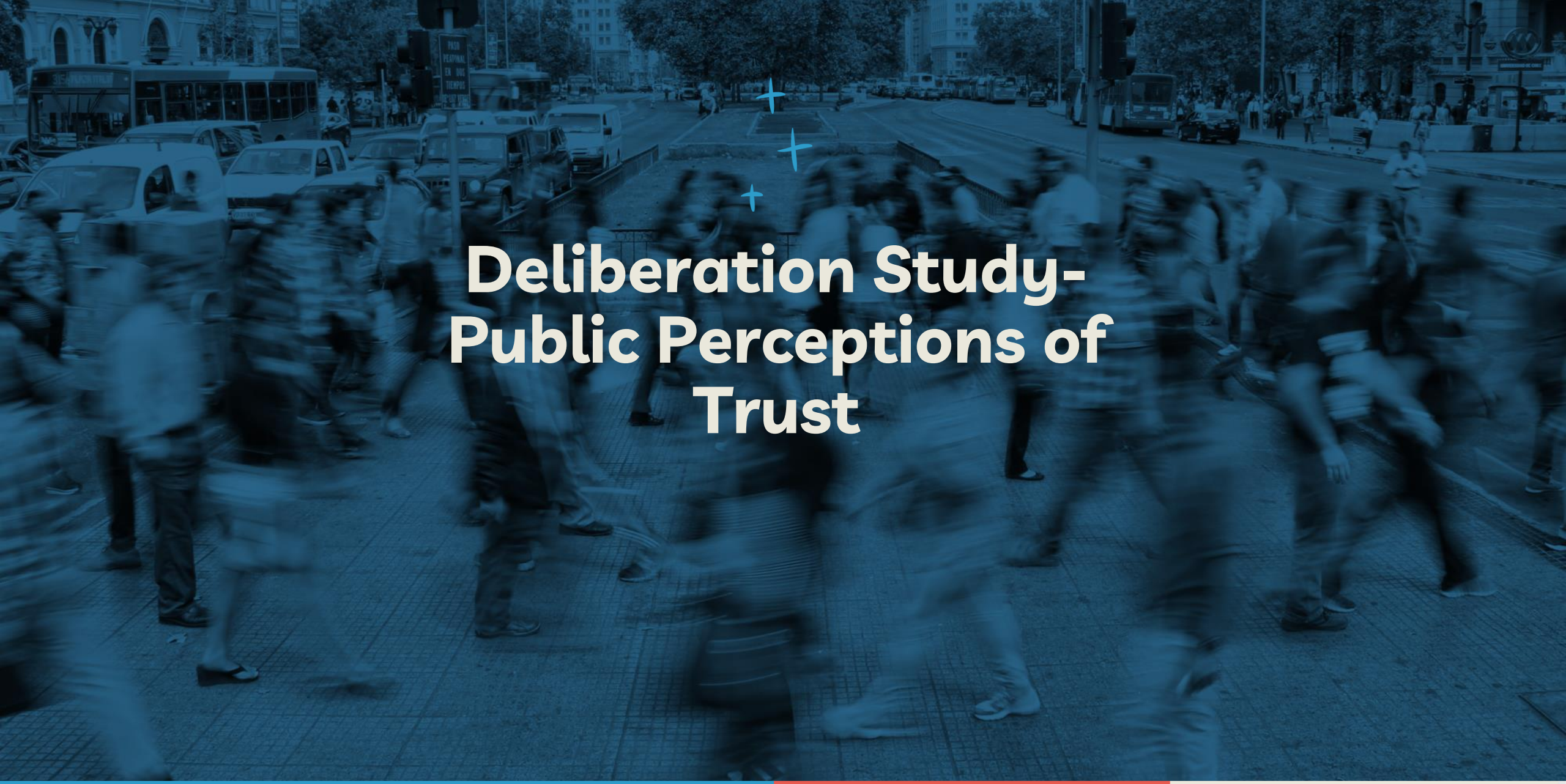
3 Focus Groups per country, more than 120 researchers and mediators

3 Workshops more than 40 research and mediators

16 Interviews in each country on 112 research and mediation experts

A large Survey Experiment with 100s of people from 7 countries

7 Roundtable Workshops with 20 researchers and mediators



Deliberation Study- Public Perceptions of Trust

Public Deliberation study
Research design

D2.2: Public Deliberative Workshops – Findings

Download

- **Main focus**: Explore attitudes of the public towards science, including public trust in science and whether and how it is affected by research integrity values and societal integration in science
- Citizens' attitudes towards research integrity, involvement, trust in research and research institutions, as well as research communication.
- Special focus on the themes of COVID-19 and climate research.
- **Seven deliberative workshops** held between May-July 2023 across the seven partner countries (representing various religious, cultural, and science in society contexts).
- A total of **169 citizens** participated (27 in Denmark).
- Study leader: ISCTE, Marta Entradas. Results reported to the Commission (333 pages).

How do participants perceive science in general?

- Participants generally expressed **positive attitudes** toward science
- Nonetheless, also concerns about the **instrumentalization of science by political power**, for purposes of manipulating the public opinion
- Concern about the **real impact of science** in the Greek deliberation (poor living conditions and lack of access to basic needs). In Spain and the UK, concerns about impact related to the **uncertain consequences of science**
- "*The use of the atomic bomb ended the Second World War, but you know, it's become a dangerous thing in the world, I think that could potentially end life on this planet*"(UK participant)
- Different views about the **ambiguity of science**. Contradictions seen as a negative aspect in the German and Greek deliberation, whereas it was discussed to be the scientific rationale in the Spanish deliberation

Findings:
General attitudes towards science

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What manifestations of research integrity affect public trust in science?

- Research integrity was regarded as a **determining factor** for participants' trust in science.

- Conversely, lack of integrity such as data falsification and conflicts of interest is a generator of **distrust in science**.

"*Secretive scientific experiments that includes splitting up twins or infecting a whole community with syphilis… that we found out 60 years later.. that continues, particularly in poor communities*" (UK participant)

- Promoting **openness and transparency** in science by making research protocols, data, and dissemination available to any member of society are considered key to scientific integrity.

Findings:
Attitudes towards research integrity and trust

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How do citizens respond to irresponsible research practices and research communication?

- Special focus on how breaches of responsible research practices are handled and influence decision-making processes outside academia rather than focusing on the violation itself (in Denmark and Portugal).
- Scientific misconduct and questionable research processes are most often associated with **individual researcher behavior** – to a lesser extent affecting general trust.
- **Tipping points?** In-group/outgroup positioning in some deliberations.
- **Research communication** is of crucial importance for trust in research – even more so than research integrity.
- Clear and understandable language, the accessibility of sources, and the reputation and **credibility** of media and communication are crucial for trust in research.

Findings:
Attitudes towards research integrity and trust

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Focus group study -Institutional Roles in Fostering Public Trust in Science

Focus group study
Research design

- The focus group study has conducted **22 focus group interviews** (a total of 131 participants) across all seven project countries with institutional actors, who in various ways are engaged with research integrity and/or public involvement in research, research support, open science, communication, and research funding

- Study leader: Michel Dubois, CNRS. Conducted in collaboration with **external co-investigators**

- The purpose is to investigate how and to what extent different **institutions can provide policies and procedures** that enable researchers to act in ways that promote public trust in research.

- Additionally, the study examines how research integrity and public involvement are perceived

How do institutional actors view the relationship between society and science in terms of integrity and trust?

- There is **no general crisis in trust** in science; however, increasing and complex challenges related to trust between science and society were identified
- Questionable or detrimental research practices, irresponsible science communication, “disruptors”, and the influence of private and political interests are some of the main factors contributing to these challenges
- “Cracks in trust” influence **increased politicization** and ideological instrumentalization of science
- The **global nature of research** offers both opportunities and barriers → promote standards for research integrity across institutions and countries.
- Responsible research can increase trust in research
- Country differences but **15 shared priorities and recommendations** for promoting institutional RI

Key Findings: Research integrity and Trust

Thank you!

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