



MINISTRY OF FINANCE

# The state of civil servants' ethics and morals in Finland – citizens' survey results

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Government as Employer



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<b>Abstract</b>	<p>The focus of the survey was to understand citizens' opinions of the importance of different values and how they are reflected in the work of civil servants. The research was carried out in TNS Gallup Forum panels and before the results of the research were reviewed, responses from those employed by the State were removed. A total of 981 people, representing people aged 15 - 79 in our country's population, responded to the survey.</p> <p>The respondents evaluated how important they thought the values related to the work of civil servants were, and how well they were reflected in government and in the work of civil servants. When the various values related to the work of civil servants are listed in order of importance, the leading values are trust, neutrality and independence, the principle of legality and accountability, expertise and the service principle.</p> <p>The respondents were asked to evaluate whether they thought that the situation regarding one or more values at present was such that there was cause for concern or were their values among those that required urgent action. Among the most frequent urgent actions that respondents considered were needed, was the inclusion of openness and trust in the work of civil servants.</p> <p>The research investigated citizens' trust in the Finnish government and in the work of its civil servants. A total of 61% of Finns considered that the government and the work of its civil servants could be trusted.</p> <p>This was the first citizens' survey commissioned by the Ministry of Finance relating to the values of government and civil service ethics. A similar survey was carried out among civil servants for the third time and its results can be found in the publication State of Civil Service Ethics in Finland – a Survey of the Ethical Values and Principles of Central Government Employees (Timo Moilanen, Ministry of Finance publications 30/2017).</p>	
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## FOREWORD

Following a recommendation by the Committee on the Ethics of State Civil Servants, this survey was commissioned by the Ministry of Finance. The Committee suggested in its report that the state of civil service ethics should be examined by conducting two surveys that cover both civil servants and citizens (MoF 3/2014, p. 50). The survey on civil servants was carried out in November 2015 and its findings were published in December 2016 (MoF 38/2016, in English MoF 30/2017).

The citizen survey was conducted by TNS Gallup in June 2016. Its findings were published in January 2017 (MoF 2/2017) and the present English version in October 2017.

The preliminary findings of both these surveys were presented in a joint seminar organised by the Ministry of Finance's Personnel and Governance Policy Department and the Advisory Board for Civil Service Ethics in November 2016. The results of both surveys have been employed to inform the activities of the Ministry of Finance and the Advisory Board for Civil Service Ethics.

I hope that this report will be of interest to anyone wishing to gain a better understanding of the state of civil service ethics in Finland.

**Juha Sarkio**  
Director General  
Ministry of Finance



# 1 Introduction

This report presents the key results of a survey on Finnish people's views of the state of civil service ethics and morals in the State administration in Finland.

The respondents were asked for their evaluations on which of the values are realised exceptionally well, which are at a worryingly poor level, and which of the values can be regarded as core values in the State administration. The aim of the survey, among others, was to ascertain citizens' opinions on the importance of administrative values and their realisation in the activities of central government employees. The set of values relating to the State administration explored in the survey was examined from various perspectives. The respondents were asked for their evaluations on which of the values are realised exceptionally well, which are at a worryingly poor level and which of the values can be regarded as core values in the State administration.

The survey also looked into the perceived occurrence of unethical practices, the anticipated trend of civil service ethics compared with the beginning of the 2000s as well as opinions towards different claims related to civil service ethics, such as citizens confidence in central government. The survey was executed in TNS Gallup's Forum panel, which has approximately 40,000 respondents available for different survey samples. Before the survey results were reviewed, respondents who work for the government were excluded from the analyses.

A total of 981 individuals responded to the survey. The sample represents the Finnish population aged between 15 and 79 years of age.

This report verbalizes and visualizes the main results of the survey. There are many graphic diagrams in this report because the matters studied are fairly concrete and the diagrams are largely self-explanatory.

All survey results based on samples include a certain degree of uncertainty due to possible random errors. The uncertainty is managed by calculating confidence intervals for samples of different sizes or parts thereof, on the basis of the probability of possible errors.

The confidence interval calculated for a certain survey results indicates the limit values between which a correct result concerning the entire fundamental set remains with a certain degree of certainty. For the survey, the confidence intervals of the results have been calculated for the percentage distribution.

**Table 1. Statistical margin of error in some example cases**

RESULT OBTAINED, %	SIZE OF THE GROUP N						
	100	200	300	500	1000	1500	2000
10% or 90%	+6.0	+4.3	+3.5	+2.7	+1.9	+1.6	+1.4
20% or 80%	+8.0	+5.7	+4.6	+3.6	+2.5	+2.1	+1.8
30% or 70%	+9.2	+6.5	+5.3	+4.1	+2.9	+2.4	+2.0
40% or 60%	+9.8	+7.0	+5.7	+4.4	+3.1	+2.6	+2.2
50%	+10.0	+7.1	+5.8	+4.5	+3.2	+2.7	+2.2

Table 1 shows the sizes of the confidence intervals, as percentages, for groups of different sizes. In it, the scope of the confidence interval is agreed to be at a level of 95%. This means that if the survey were repeated, the result shown by the sample would land outside of the confidence interval, due to coincidence, in only five cases out of 100. Hence, the criterion of statistical reliability is quite strict. In practice, the deviation is considerably narrower.

The confidence intervals are narrower at the ends of the percentage distribution, because random deviations there are probably smaller than in the middle of the distribution. For instance, a result of 50% obtained from a group with 500 interviews is, evaluated at a degree of certainty of 95%, between 45% and 55% and can land outside of these limits in only five cases out of 100. If the result is 10 or 90 per cent, the theoretical error is smaller.

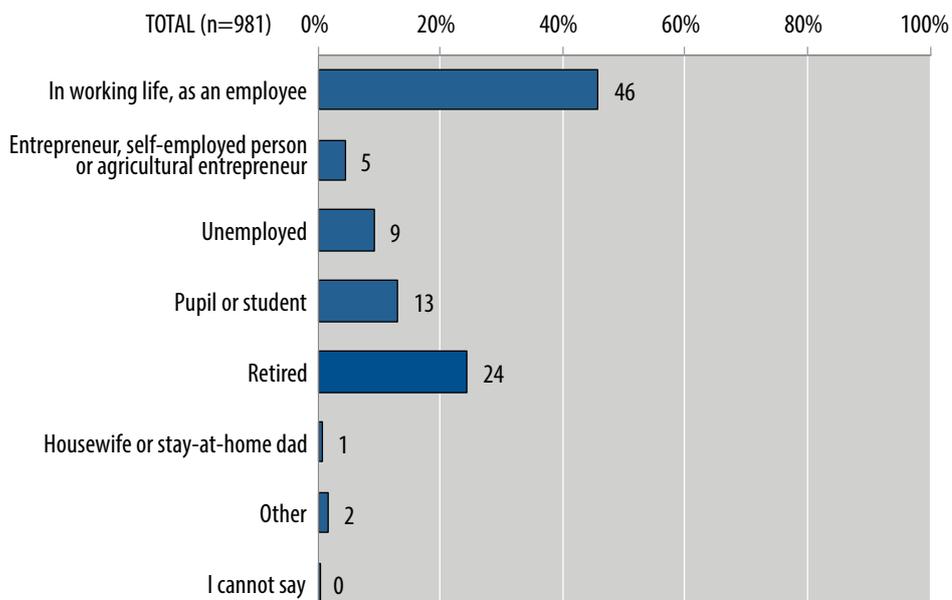
## 2 Background information on respondents

### 2.1 Employment status

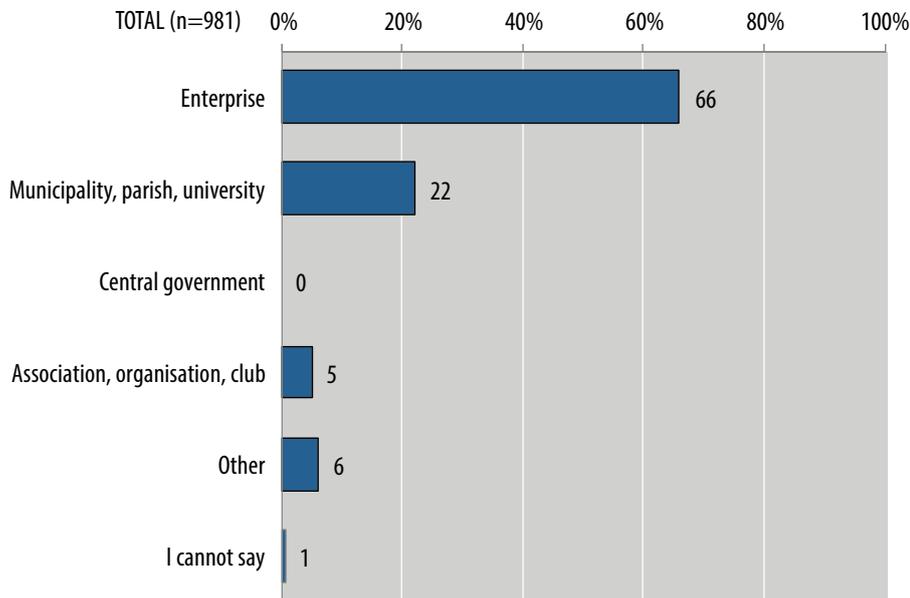
Survey questionnaire began with exploring respondents' employment status and their labour-market position.

Of all the respondents, 51% were working as an employee or entrepreneur, or as a self-employed person, 9% unemployed persons, while 13% comprised school children or students.

Retired people also accounted for a significant share, i.e. 24% of all respondents.



**Figure 1. Which of the following best describes your situation?**



**Figure 2. Is your employer...**

Most of the people in working life were employed by an enterprise, with one-fifth of them working for a municipality, parish, or university. 5% of the respondents, worked for an association or organisation, or a club. Central government employees were excluded from the analysis of the results.

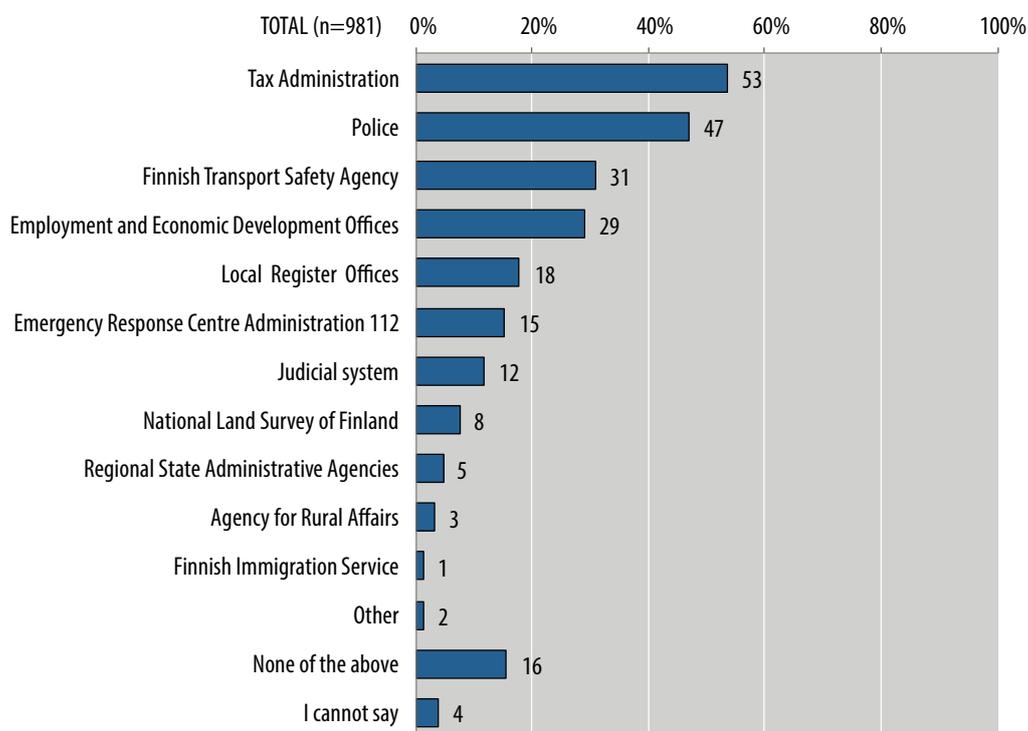
## 2.2 Contacts with State administration

In order to facilitate their answers, respondents were given definitions of the key concepts and their content at the start of the survey. The aim was to ensure that they had a clear idea and understanding of the questions asked in the survey.

These were as follows:

1. Central government means ministries and central government agencies and institutions.
2. Central government is responsible for maintaining and developing the constitutional state, for securing and evaluating fundamental rights, and for duties related to security. It is also in charge of many international and nationwide duties and for supervising people's equality and the public interest.

3. Central government employees, among others, refer to civil servants and public employees working for the central government, e.g. judges, police officers, revenue officials and soldiers.
4. Civil service ethics and morals mean that civil servants abide by the law and the principles of good administration. It was also specified that the survey did not deal with the local government or Ministers or Members of Parliament and their activities.



**Figure 3.** Have you or a person close to you been in any contact with the following government authorities in recent years?

Next, the survey determined the contacts of the respondents or persons close to them with central government authorities in recent years.

Results show that Finnish people or persons close to them have had interacted with the authorities frequently.

Approximately half of all Finns or people close to them have had contacts with the Tax Administration or the police authorities. About a third had interacted with the Finnish Transport Safety Agency or Employment and Economic Development Offices.

The fewest contacts had been with the Finnish Immigration Service, the Agency for Rural Affairs or Regional State Administrative Agencies. Of the respondents or persons close to them, 16% had had no contacts with government authorities.

## 3 Values

### 3.1 The importance and realisation of values

When the focus shifted to the actual aims of the survey, the respondents were asked to assess how important in their opinion are values related to the activity of different civil servants and public employees, and how well these values are realised in administrative practices.

First, the respondents were asked for the importance of the value, one at a time, and then an assessment of its realisation in the State administration and the activities of civil servants.

In order to minimise the effect of the order of evaluation, the values were asked with a detailed description and in a random order.

To save space, graphic presentations used abridged wordings of the values studied.

In the survey, the unabridged descriptions of the different values were as follows:

- **General acceptability:** central government employees act in line with public opinion, such that most people can accept their activities and practices
- **Expertise:** civil servants are competent and services are of a high quality; duties are managed well and matters are prepared and decided on carefully
- **Service principle:** civil servants act respectfully and assist citizens and other clients
- **Economic efficiency:** central government aims to reach the goals set for its activities with the lowest costs possible
- **Impartiality and independence:** decisions made by civil servants can be justified objectively and in terms of the subject matter, they act independently and in line with the public interest, without any inappropriate external influence

- **Openness:** civil servants act openly and transparently without concealing
- **Effectiveness:** civil servants' actions and work are effective, and attention is focused on results
- **Rule of law and responsibility:** civil servants act according to laws and statutes, and they are responsible for the lawfulness of their official actions
- **Equality:** civil servants treat all citizens fairly, provide services in both national languages and promote equality among sexes
- **Dedication:** civil servants perform their tasks with dedication and diligence
- **Trust:** people can trust that the authorities always promote the public interest and increase people's trust of one another
- **Innovativeness:** central government employees try new ways of working boldly

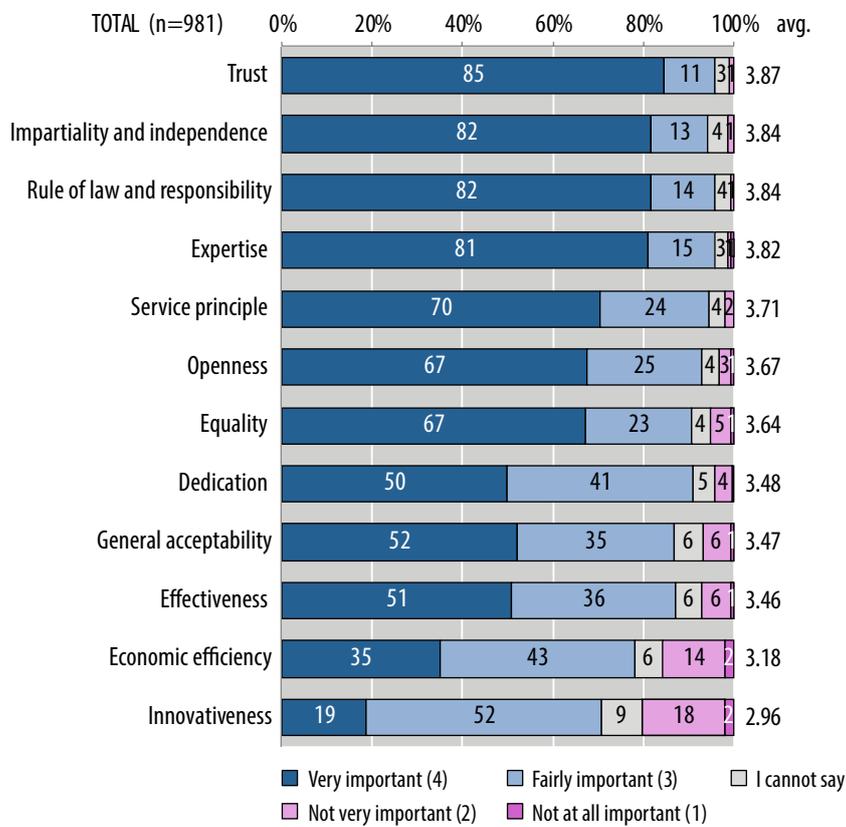
On a scale from 1 to 4, the average for all values is 3.58. This indicates that the values listed in the study are important for Finnish people.

When values related to the actions of civil servants are sorted in order of importance, the following take the lead and are deemed very important: trust, impartiality and independence, rule of law and responsibility, expertise, and service principle (see Figure 4).

Of the values studied, the least important is innovativeness of operation, but even this is deemed very important or fairly important by 71% of Finns. However, a fifth of respondents assessed that the innovativeness is not important in the activities of civil servants.

Economic efficiency of operation is also at the bottom end on the list of important values, being second to last. It is not deemed important by 16% of the respondents, but slightly over one-third of Finns find it very important and 43% fairly important. With good reason, even these values that came in last in the comparison can be regarded as fairly important matters, at least, in the actions of civil servants.

Values that rise to the top of the importance comparison are characterised by a high degree of unanimity on them and there are no significant differences specific to a group of respondents in their background. These matters are important for both women and men, respondents of different ages regardless of their place of residence, education, income level or political views. Instead, values that come at the bottom of the comparison and can be assessed as fairly important are the ones that divide the respondents' opinions.



**Figure 4. In your opinion, how important are the following values?**

Innovativeness of operation is equally important for men and women, and importance assessments among different age groups do not diverge significantly, either. The same applies to comparisons made in terms of education, occupational groups, place of residence, and income. On the other hand, supporters of the National Coalition Party of Finland ("KOK") and also of the Centre Party of Finland ("KESK") regard innovativeness as a much more important value in the actions of civil servant than supporters of the Left Alliance ("VAS") or of the Finns Party ("PS").

Although women and men find the economic efficiency of operation to be equally important, finding it important increases with the respondent's higher age. The youngest respondents deem economic efficiency as clearly less important than those over 65 years.

The situation is the same when the importance of economic efficiency is reviewed according to the gross income of the respondent's household. In the highest income bracket, those who earn more than EUR 85 000 per year find economic efficiency clearly more important than among those who earn the least (household's gross income of less than EUR 20 000 per year).

The differences are also large when looked at in terms of support for political parties. Economic efficiency is clearly the least important for supporters of the Left Alliance and also the Green League, and most important for supporters of the National Coalition, the Centre Party, and the Finns Party.

The importance of operational effectiveness also increases with the respondent's higher age. There is a large difference in the evaluations of the youngest and the oldest respondents. People in leading positions and senior salaried employees value effectiveness more than junior salaried employees or pupils and students.

Effectiveness is least important for Left Alliance supporters. It is clearly most important for supporters of the Centre Party, the National Coalition, and also the Social Democratic Party of Finland ("SDP").

As expected, assessments on the realisation of different values in the actions of state civil servants are at a lower level than the importance evaluations. By way of generalisation, one can say that the values studied are deemed important but, in practice, they are realised only fairly well.

In the survey, the average for the realisation of all the values was 2.54 on a scale of 1 to 4.

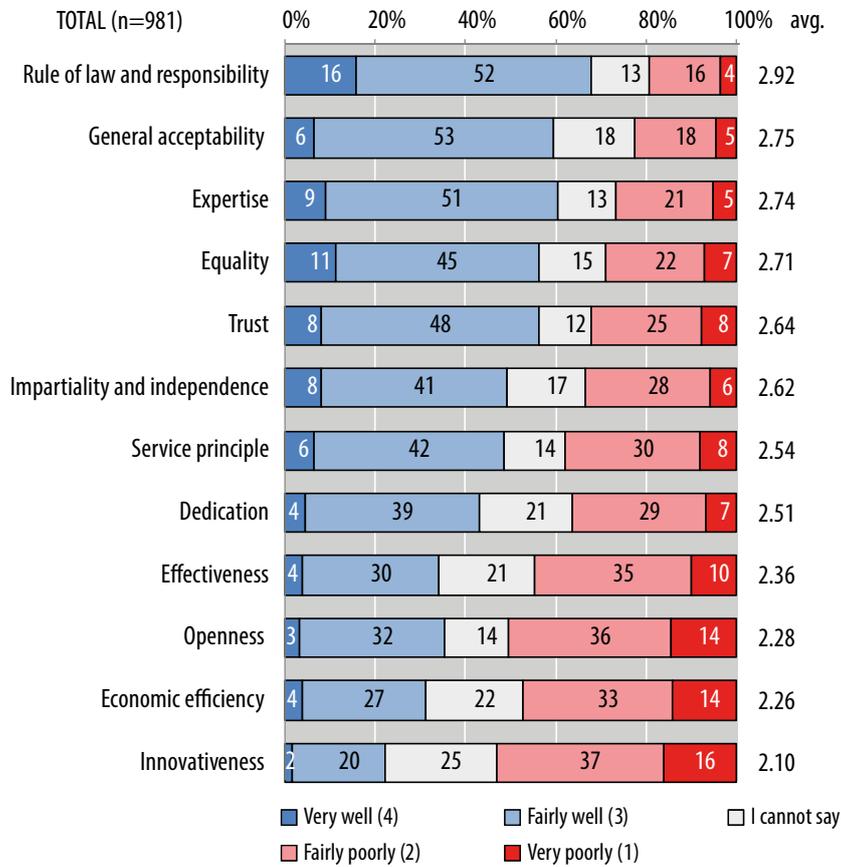
According to Figure 5, there are large differences in the levels of realisation of the various values.

The rule of law and responsibility is estimated to be realised best, either very well or fairly well among 68% of the respondents. A fifth of the citizens evaluate that the rule of law and responsibility has been realised fairly or very poorly.

General acceptability of activity and the expertise of civil servants also rise among the three best-realised values.

Respondents assess that innovativeness of operation, economic efficiency and openness are realised the poorest in the actions of civil servants. With all these subjects, the result has a negative tone: there are less positive responses (very good or fairly good) than critical responses (very poor or fairly poor). The estimate on operational effectiveness is also low. Even there, negative assessments (45%) outnumber positive ones (34%).

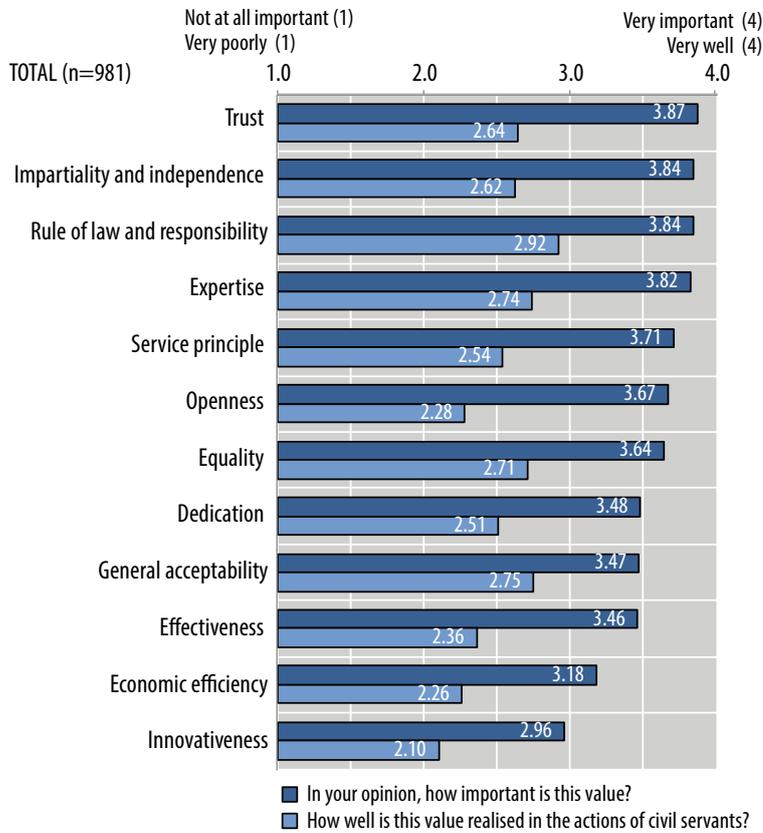
The general acceptability of activity is deemed by pupils and students to be best realised, that is by the youngest respondents aged 15–29 years, and those with an academic education. Its realisation is doubted most by entrepreneurs and supporters of the Finns Party.



**Figure 5. In your opinion, how well are the following values realised in the actions of civil servants?**

For the most part, the same respondent groups believe or do not believe in the realisation of the rule of law or expertise in the civil servants' activity.

Evaluations on the realisation of equality in State administration activity are lowest in the oldest age groups and among those living in rural areas. Pupils and students, and supporters of the National Coalition and the Centre Party have the most faith in the realisation of equality, whilst SDP supporters are more doubtful of this than supporters of other parties.



**Figure 6. The importance and realisation of values in State administration**

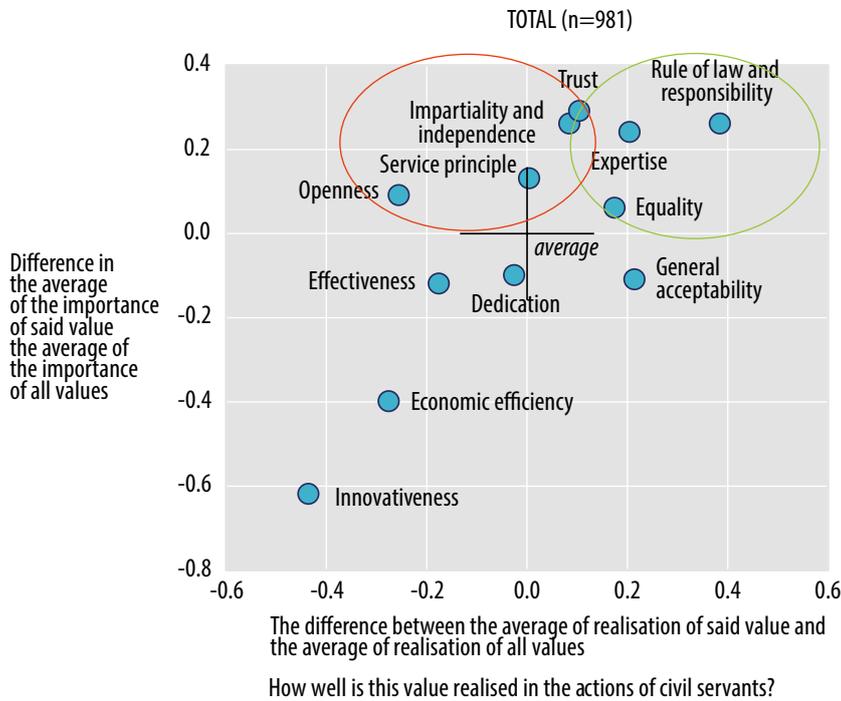
When the averages of importance and realisation assessments of the different values are placed side by side (Figure 6), one can see that the proportional difference between importance and realisation is highest in the realisation of openness, trust, impartiality and independence, and the service principle.

The difference between expectations and their realisation is also visible in the four-fold diagram (Figure 7). From it, one can also deduce which values are such that particular attention should be paid to their realisation from the citizens' perspective.

Openness of activity, on the left, is the factor where the relationship between importance and realisation is the most crucial. It is also joined by impartiality and independence, and trust.

Based on data, the strongest value is the rule of law and responsibility. It is followed by expertise and equality with slightly weaker results.

Secondary areas of development include effectiveness, dedication, innovativeness and economic efficiency.



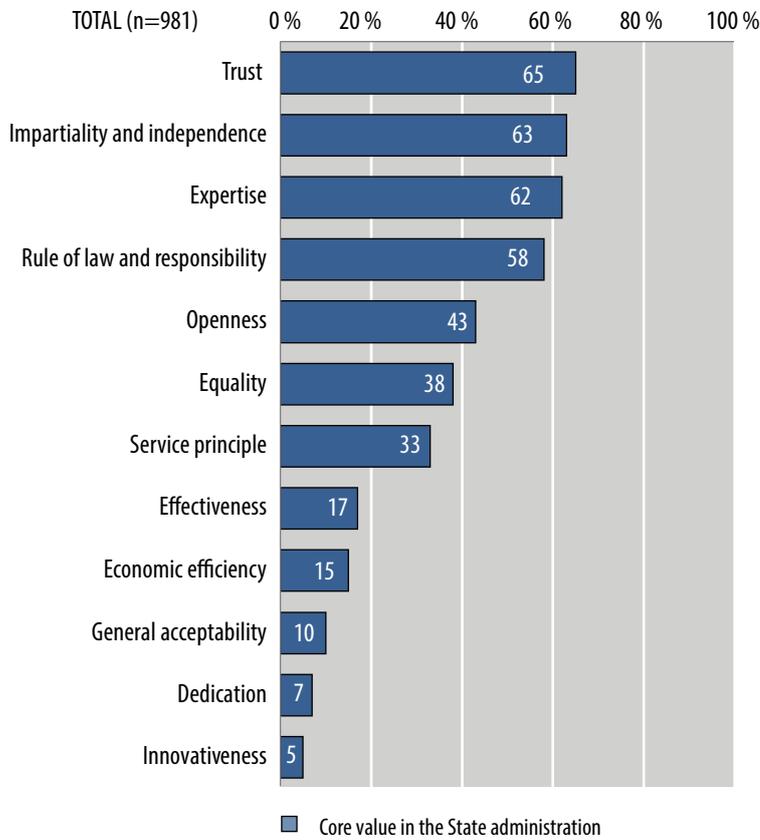
**Figure 7.** Evaluate the importance of the following values and their realisation in the State administration. In your opinion, how important is this value?

### 3.2 Core values in State administration

Next, the respondents were able to assess the values they recently reviewed from the perspective of which they would like to elevate as the core values of the State administration. Each respondent was asked to choose, in random order, no more than five values they deemed most essential.

The assessments distinguish a clear top group of four values. The most important values for citizens are trust, impartiality and independence, expertise, and the rule of law and responsibility.

When core values were selected, innovativeness of operation, dedication, general acceptability of activity, economic efficiency, and operational effectiveness came in last.



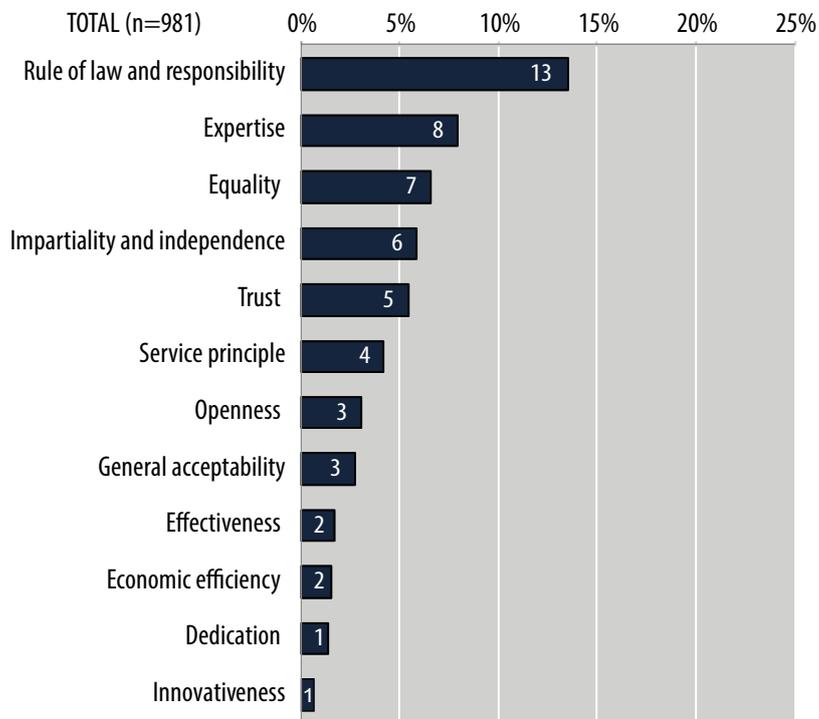
**Figure 8.** Which of the aforementioned values would you elevate as the core values of the State administration? Please select no more than five values that you find most essential.

### 3.3 Values that are realised very well

Respondents were also asked to assess whether one or several of the matters reviewed were realised so well that the state of affairs could even be slightly applauded.

The assessments received are fairly low in terms of the percentages. The highest place is taken by the rule of law and responsibility, only applauded by 13% of Finns. It is followed by expertise, equality, impartiality and independence, and trust, which are positively emphasised by 8–5% of the respondents.

Indeed, one can note that Finns are quite reserved or even critical when evaluating whether matters worth praising or applauding can be found in the State administration.



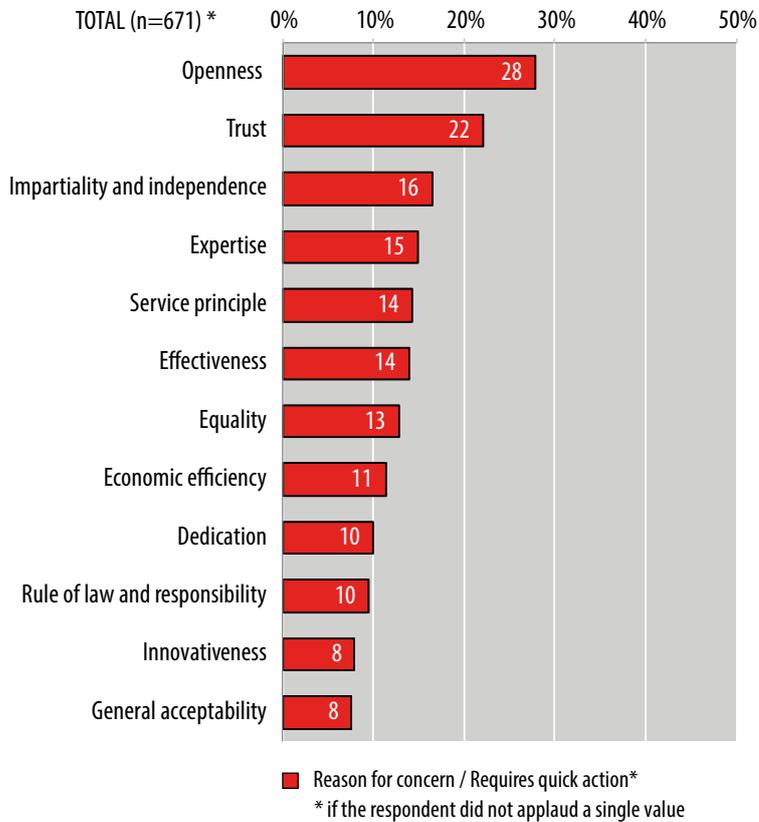
**Figure 9.** Is one or several values realised so well that the matter could even be slightly applauded?

### 3.4 Values that are at a worrisome level

After the respondents had assessed values that were realised well, they were further asked to evaluate if the present state of some value(s) was such that there was reason for concern, or that required quick action.

When the direction of the questions is changed and the position becomes a search for negative aspects, the level of the evaluations rises. Thus, it appears that respondents are more sensitive to seeing negative things in the State administration than those that should be applauded.

According to the respondents, the realisation of openness (28%) and trust (22%) in the activities of civil servants would require quick action most often. The next most frequent matter raising concern is the state of impartiality and independence (16%), expertise (15%), the service principle (14%), and effectiveness in the State administration (14%).



**Figure 10.** In your opinion, is the present state of some value(s) such that there is reason for concern or that it requires quick action?

### 3.5 Overall review of values

When the results are combined according to how often each of the values was selected as a core value, a value worth applauding, or as a value whose realisation gives reason for concern, the following overall result is obtained.

Figure 11 combines three different ‘extreme evaluations’ and supports the previous four-fold analysis that used a direct cross-review of the importance and realisation of the values, on the basis of their averages. The present result highlights three values where the combination of importance (core value), excellent level (a value worth applauding) and a critical level (requires quick action) is more sensitive than the others. These include trust, openness and impartiality and independence. The next most sensitive value is expertise. From this perspective, strengths include the rule of law and responsibility, as well as equality.

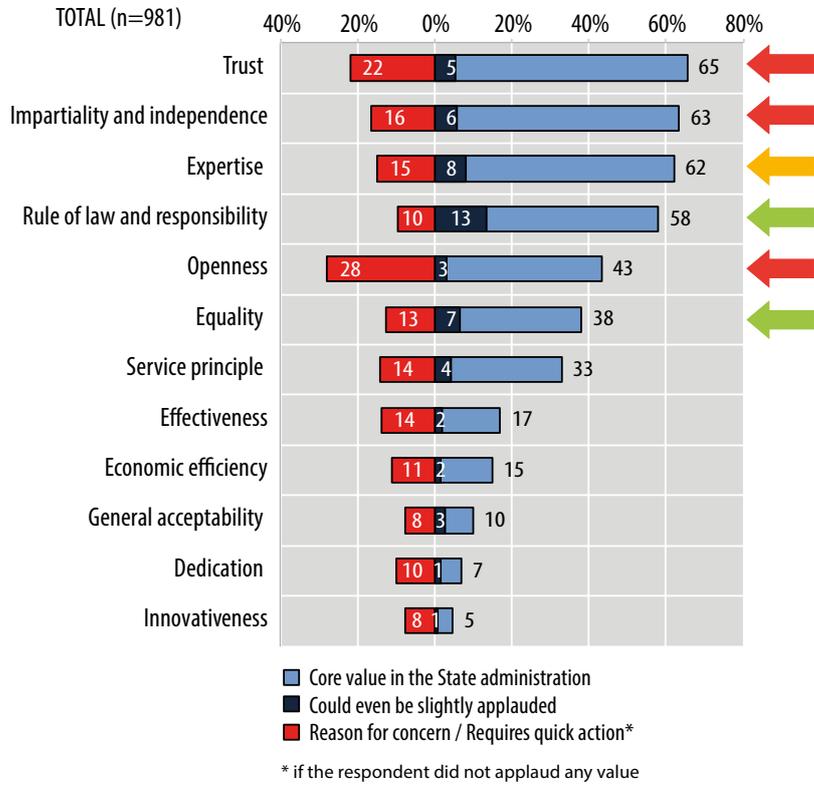


Figure 11. Overall review of values in State administration

## 4 State of civil service ethics and morals

### 4.1 Overall assessment of the state of civil service ethics and morals

According to a fairly thorough evaluation of the various values from different perspectives, the respondents were asked for an overall assessment of the state of Finnish civil service ethics and morals in the State administration.

On the whole, the situation is deemed to be fairly good. More than half of the respondents (54%) found the state of civil service ethics and morals to be very good or fairly good. The situation was deemed very poor by 3% of the respondents, and one in ten thinks it is fairly poor.

Respondents with neither a positive nor negative opinion account for slightly more than a quarter (27%) of respondents.

Although the overall tone of the result is a positive one, it includes a trace of dissatisfaction, too.

There is no significant difference between women's and men's assessments on the overall state of civil service ethics and morals. In terms of age cohorts, the best assessment is submitted by respondents 15–29 years and over 65 years of age. The rating is worst among 30–45 year olds.

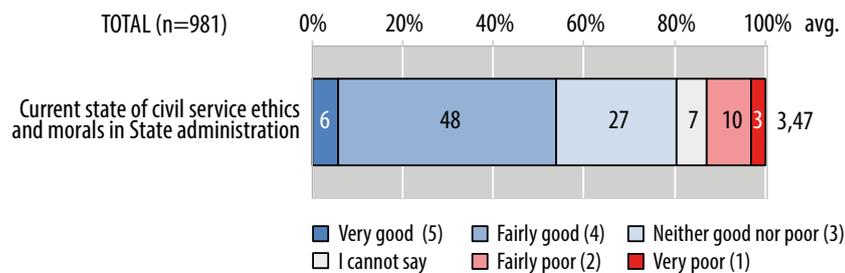


Figure 12. The present state of civil service ethics and morals in State administration

The higher the education that a respondent has, the better the assessment of the overall state of ethics; the evaluation is clearly best among those with an academic education and worst among those with a basic-level education.

Of the different occupational groups, workers and entrepreneurs give the lowest score while pupils and students and junior salaried employees give the highest score.

With regard to the various parties, supporters of the Social Democratic Party, the Green League and the Left Alliance gave an assessment on a par with the assessment of the overall state of civil service ethics and morals. The best rating is given by supporters of the National Coalition and the Centre Party.

The result is clearly the lowest among supporters of the Finns Party.

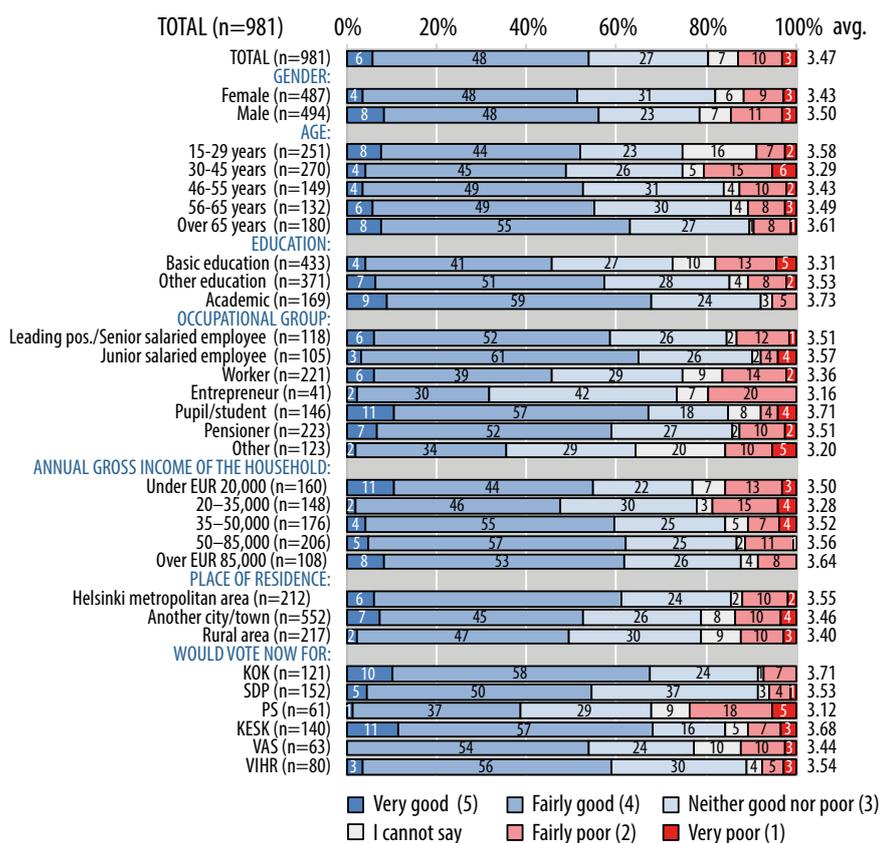


Figure 13. The present state of civil service ethics and morals in State administration, by background factors

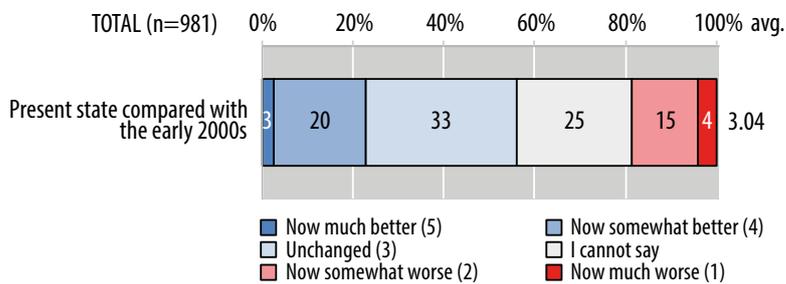
## 4.2 State of civil service ethics compared with the situation in the early 2000s

Respondents were also asked to express their opinion on the present state of civil service ethics in the State administration, in comparison to the situation in the early 2000s. They were asked whether the situation now is better or worse than approximately 15 years ago.

According to Figure 14, a third of the respondents found the situation to be the same as in the early 2000s. The state of ethics was deemed to have improved by a 23% of respondents while 19% thought that the situation has deteriorated.

This question was considered fairly difficult, as 25% of the respondents could not provide an assessment.

All in all, citizens found that the situation has remained unchanged, or perhaps it has improved a little bit.



**Figure 14. Present state of civil service ethics in State administration compared with the early 2000s**

The most positive evaluation on the trend of the situation came from the youngest and oldest age groups, people with an academic education, pupils and students, retired persons and supporters of the SDP, the National Coalition and the Centre Party.

The trend was seen as negative by respondents aged 30–55 years, while the other groups remained in between these extremes.

THE STATE OF CIVIL SERVANTS' ETHICS AND MORALS – CITIZENS' SURVEY RESULTS

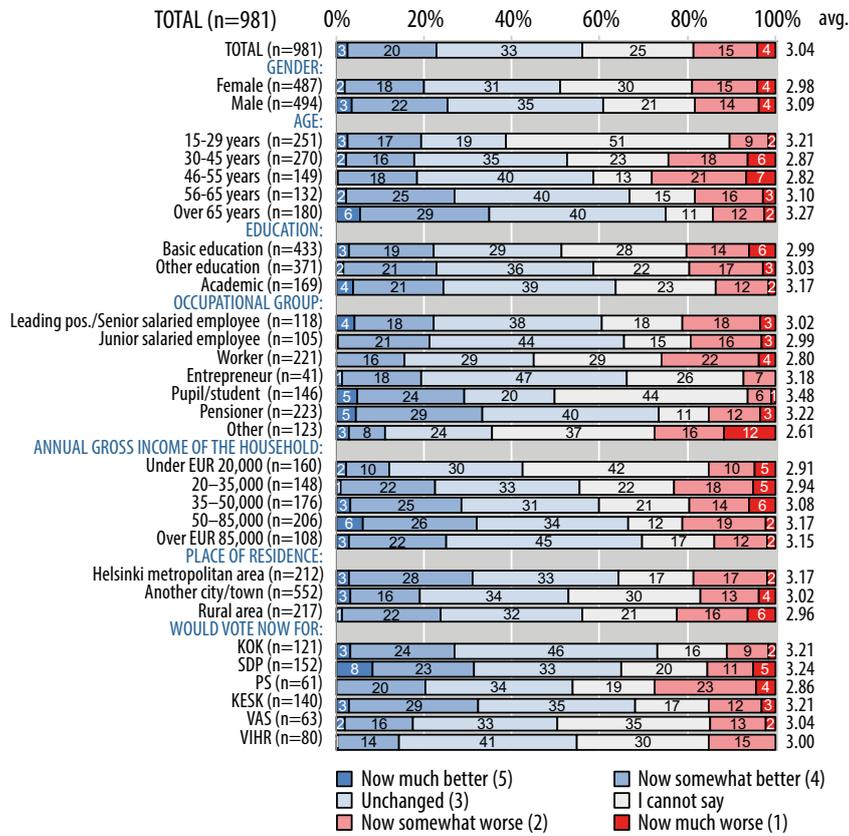


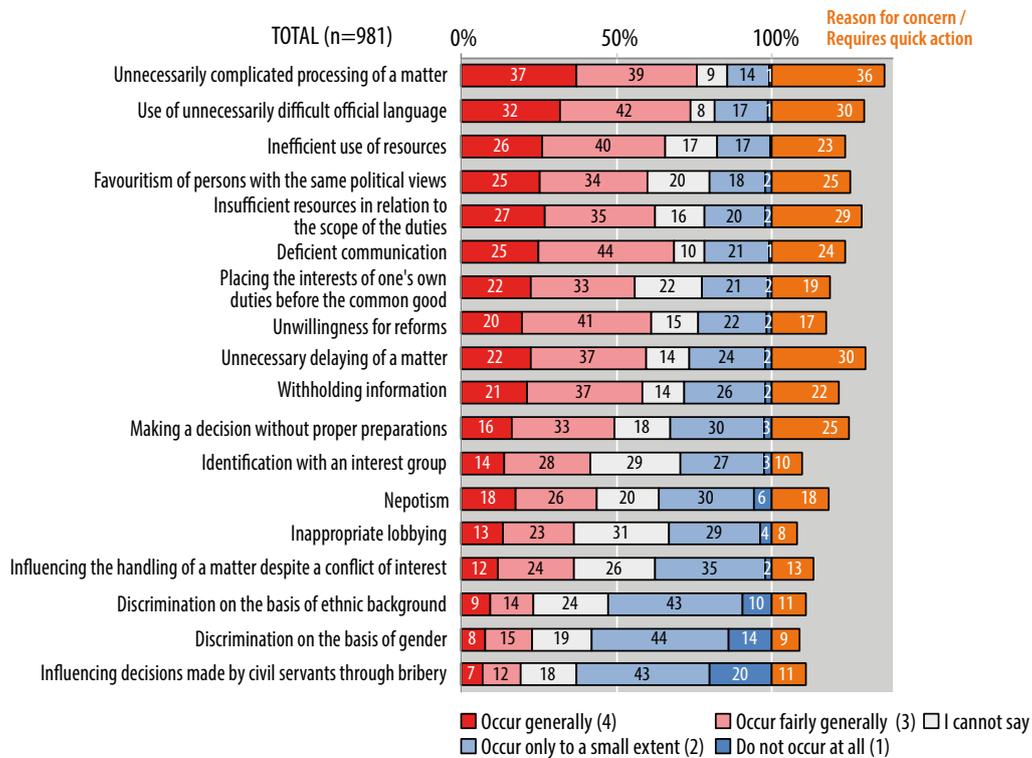
Figure 15. Present state of civil service ethics in State administration compared with the early 2000s, by background factors

## 5 Occurrence of unethical practices in State administration

The survey also asked the respondents' opinion on whether there are any unethical activities in the State administration. For this purpose, each respondent was presented with a long list of different practices that can be deemed inappropriate in the public administration.

If a respondent evaluated that some unethical practice(s) occur fairly generally or generally, one or several further questions were asked. They were asked to assess whether these were things that raise concern or require action. The result, shown with the orange column, can be interpreted as such that the greater the proportion of those giving a critical evaluation find a matter worrisome, the closer to them the matter itself is deemed to be.

Before answering, the various practices were named as ones that are generally regarded as unethical.



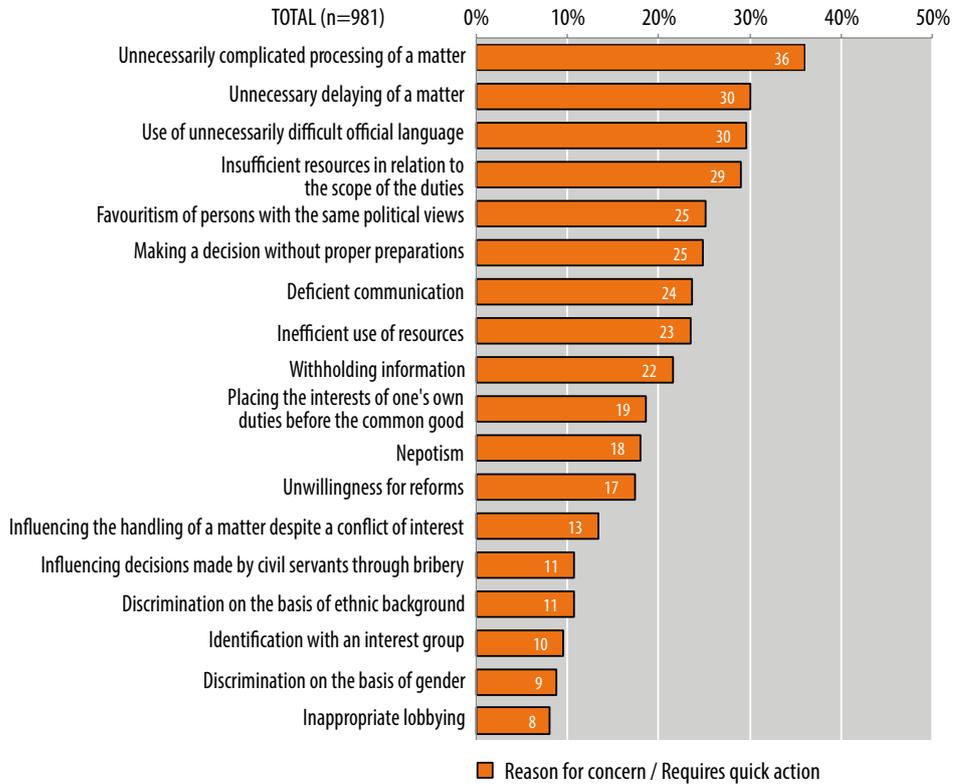
**Figure 16. The following practices are generally regarded as unethical. In your opinion, do these occur in the State administration in Finland?**

As can be discerned from Figure 16, at the top of the list for areas of development are unnecessarily complicated processing of a matter, use of difficult official language, inefficient use of resources, favouritism of persons with the same political views and deficient communication.

Respondents believe there is the least amount of influence on decisions made by civil servants through bribery, discrimination on the basis of gender, or discrimination on the basis of ethnic background.

Since it is deemed that almost all of the matters asked about occur to a worrisome extent, we should also look at the list of areas of development people find most important (Figure 17).

Unnecessarily complicated processing of a matter also takes the top of this list. Respondents find that the next most crucial practices are unnecessary delaying of a matter, use of difficult official language, resources deemed insufficient in relation to the scope of the duties, favouritism of persons with the same political views, making a decision without proper preparations and deficient communication.

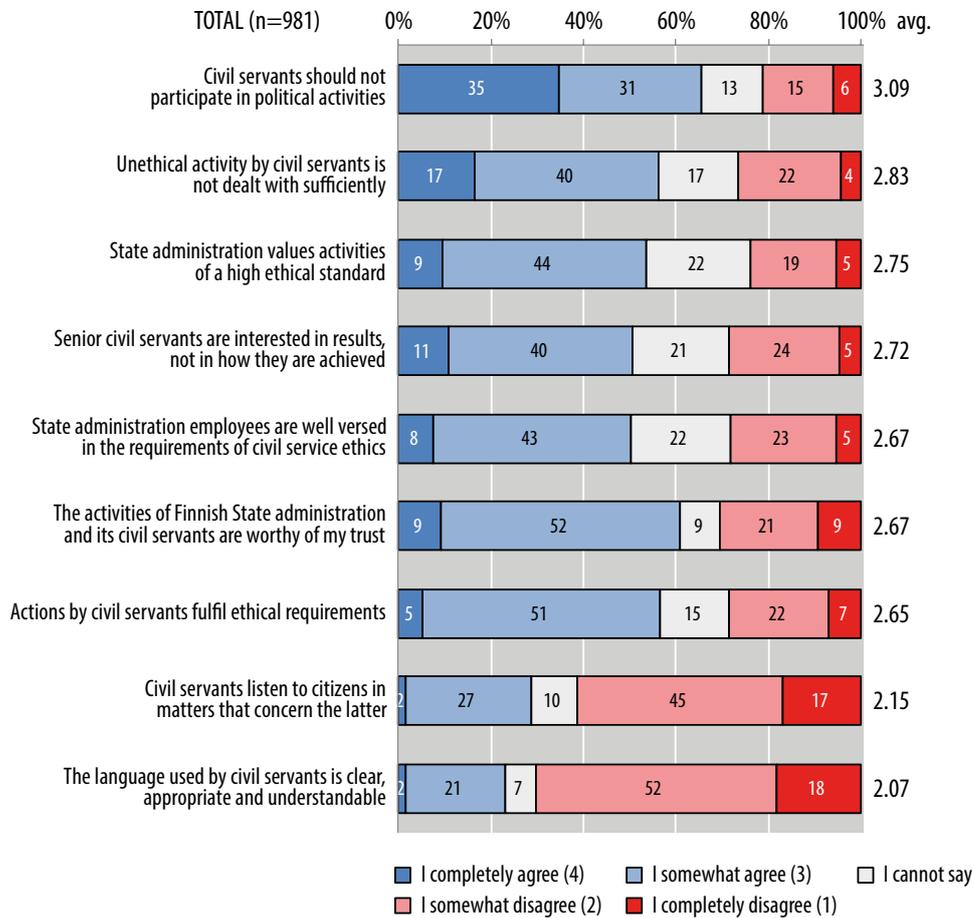


**Figure 17.** The following practices are generally regarded as unethical. In your opinion, is there reason for concern or quick action?

## **6 Attitudes related to the activities of civil servants**

### **6.1 Attitudes on action by civil servants**

Finally, the respondents were asked about the extent to which they agree or disagree with some statements presented to them concerning the activities of civil servants, and how much they trust the Finnish State administration and its civil servants. As Figure 18 reflects, the respondents' opinions diverged rather significantly.



**Figure 18.** Describe the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following claims related to civil service ethics

The majority of the respondents (66%) agreed that civil servants should not participate in political activities. Slightly more than a fifth disagreed, and 13% could not assess the matter. Most of the respondents (57%) also agreed that unethical activity by civil servants is not dealt with sufficiently, whereas slightly more than a quarter disagreed, and 17% could not assess the matter. Approximately a fifth of the respondents could not comment on whether State administration regards activities of a high ethical standard as important, if senior civil servants are more interested in results than in how they are achieved, or whether State administration employees are well versed in the requirements of civil service ethics. One can say that these matters are fairly foreign issues and people do not think about them very actively.

A clear majority thinks civil servants do not listen to citizens and that the language used by civil servants is not clear, appropriate or understandable. Respondents were able to assess these matters well (few “can’t say” responses), so the results give the civil service some work to do to improve these aspects.

## 6.2 Trust in the Finnish State administration and the activities of its civil servants

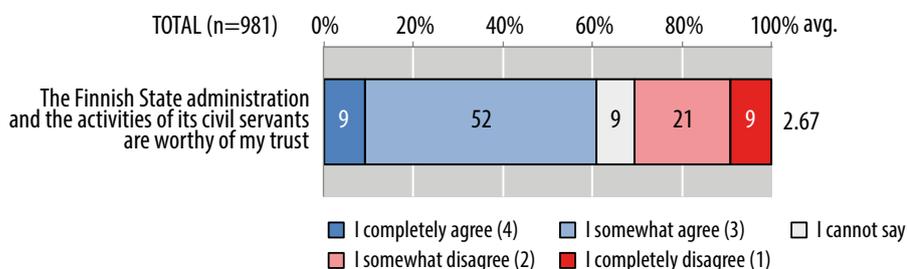
Special attention should be paid to whether the Finnish State administration and activities of its civil servants are deemed worthy of people's trust.

This aspect can be evaluated relatively well, as 91% of the respondents expressed their opinion on this issue.

Trust in the State administration and its civil servants is not without reservations. One reason for this is that the respondents are not very familiar with details related to the matter, as indicated by the results of the attitude claims discussed in the previous section.

Only 9% completely agree on the matter. A more reserved, positive opinion is expressed by 52% of the respondents. In all, 61% of Finns regard the State administration and the activities of its civil servants as worthy of their trust.

On the other hand, mistrust is expressed by 30% of the respondents; of these, 9% completely disagree and 21% feel a more reserved level of mistrust.



**Figure 19. Finnish State administration and the activities of its civil servants are worthy of my trust**

Women and men have the same amount of trust in the State administration. A review by age group shows that the youngest and oldest age groups have the greatest amount of trust, but cracks in this trust are strongest among 30–45 year olds.

The higher the education a respondent has, the more the person trusts the State administration; trust is clearly highest among those with an academic education and lowest with those who have a basic education. Of the different occupational groups, most mistrust can be found among workers and entrepreneurs, while salaried officials have the most trust.

Also, trust increases as the income level of the household rises. Trust is greater in the Helsinki metropolitan area than in other cities/towns or in rural areas. Of the supporters of the various parties, those supporting the National Coalition, the Centre Party, and the Social Democratic Party have the highest amount of trust.

Mistrust is clearly highest among the Finns Party, but also supporters of the Green League and the Left Alliance have more mistrust of State administration and the activities of its civil servants than respondents in general.

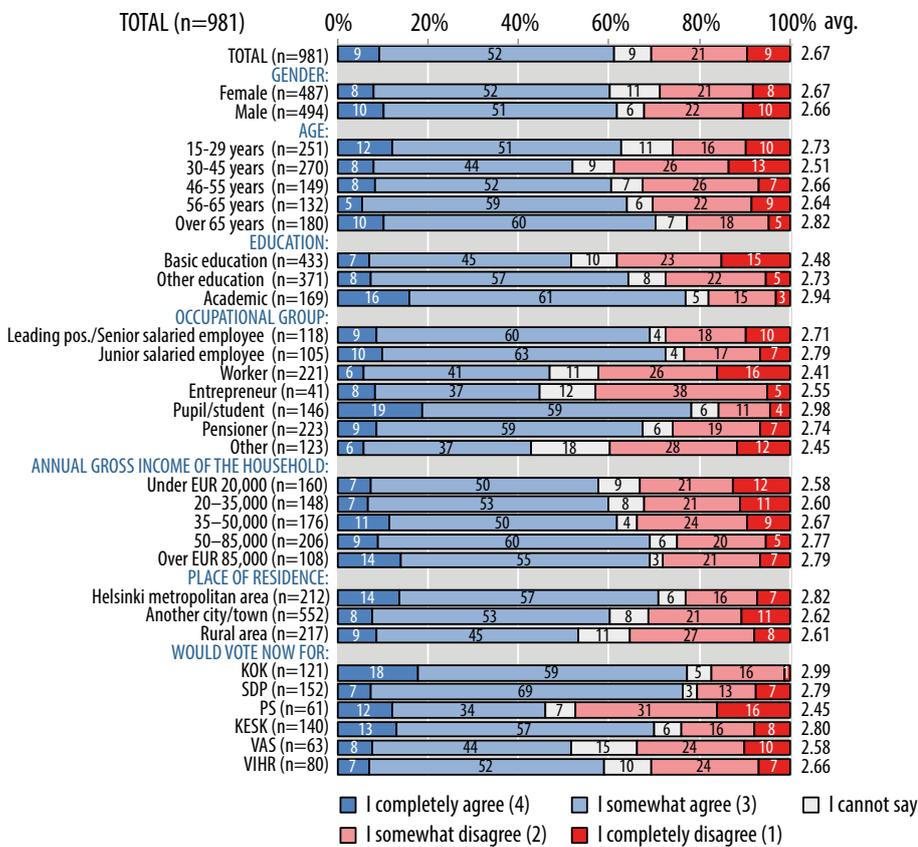
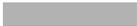


Figure 20. Finnish State administration and the activities of its civil servants are worthy of my trust, by background factors





MINISTRY OF FINANCE  
Snellmaninkatu 1 A  
PO BOX 28, 00023 Government  
Tel. +358 295 160 01  
Fax 09 160 33123  
[www.financeministry.fi](http://www.financeministry.fi)

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