



## Brand South Africa

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### Research - Internal Analysis 2021 Edelman Trust Barometer

March 2021

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#### 1. Introduction

The 2021 Edelman Trust Barometer themed “Declaring Information Bankruptcy” is the 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Edelman Trust report, released by Edelman- a global communications firm that collaborates with business and organisations to evolve, promote and protect brands and reputation.

The findings in the 2021 Edelman Trust Barometer reveals a new era of information bankruptcy and a failing trust ecosystem that is unable to address the uncontrolled “infodemic”, leaving the four institutions focused on in the report: business, government, NGO’s and media in an environment of information bankruptcy and a mandate to rebuild trust and pave a new way forward.

The report highlights that the world’s most powerful countries have declined in their overall trust scores, mainly because of their respondent’s lack of trust in either of the four institutions. However, while there are indicators that reveal lack of trust in these four institutions. The business sector has managed to replace government from its top position it held in May 2020 shortly after the COVID-19 outbreak, leading the four institutions by standing alone at 50 points higher than government, indicating high competence and the rising level of ethical behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic.

South Africa’s trust in the 2021 Edelman Trust Barometer indicates a score of 48, from 44 in 2020. This alludes that South Africa moved from a weaker level to a stronger level by 4 points. However, the country still find itself stuck in the “distrusted” category from a global point of view.

## 2. Global trust findings in countries and institutions

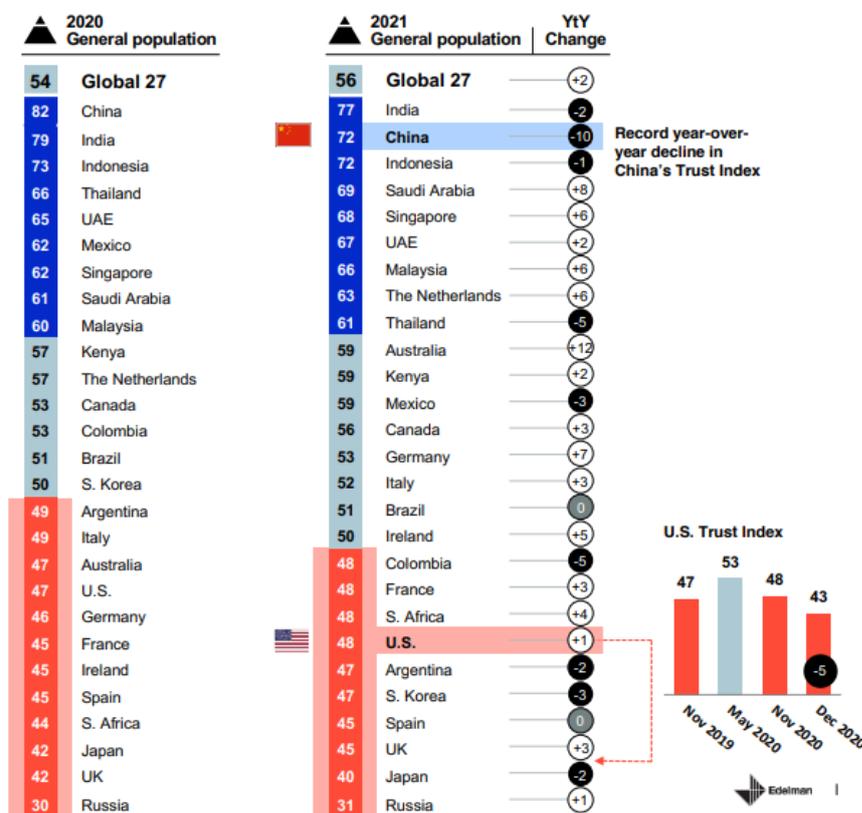
### 2.1 Global trust in counties

Globally, the report finds that of the 27 countries surveyed, 16 countries gained trust, while 9 countries lost trust. The world's most powerful countries, which are, Germany, United Kingdom, United States and China lost their trust in capital, being part of the 9 countries that have lost trust.

For the first time ever, China dropped by 18 points, costing the country its top position, which it held for the longest time since the establishment of the Edelman annual reporting in 2001. According to the report, China's drop is affected by its respondent's distrust in the business sector, regardless of country's strong capabilities of maintaining the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The United States of America also dropped from its usual position, putting the country 3<sup>rd</sup> from the bottom just above Japan and Russia. Trust in the United States of America declined in December 2020, indicating that it was influenced by Former President Donald Trump's voters, particularly relating to their lack of trust in NGO's, government and media.

The snapshot below presents findings of the 27 counties highlighted in the report, indicating a year-to-year change in points between the years 2020 and 2021:



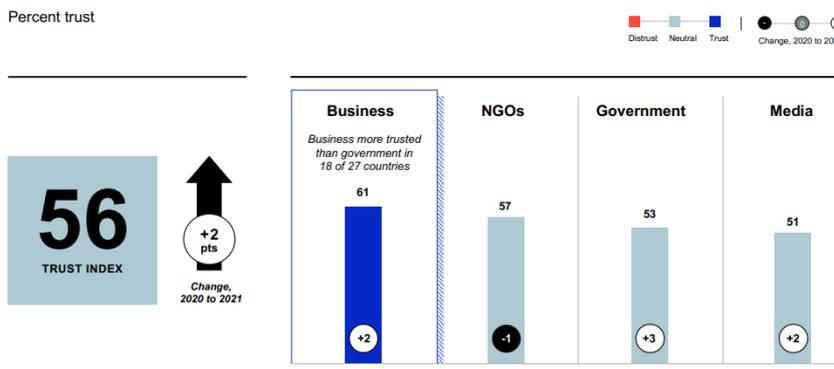
Source: 2021 Edelman Trust Barometer

## 2.2 Global trust in institutions

In May 2020, government was the most trusted institution. However, government then lost its lead 6 months later, being replaced by business towards January 2021. Currently, business is more trusted than government in 18 of the 27 countries, sitting alone at the top, followed by NGO's, government and media. According to the report, the business sector rose 50 points higher than government in competence and its rising ethical behaviour, next to NGO's.

The snapshot below provides an overview of global trust in the four institutions:

### BUSINESS BECOMES ONLY TRUSTED INSTITUTION



Source: 2021 Edelman Trust Barometer Annual Report

Part of the reasons why business has risen to the top, overtaking NGO's, government and media is because the business sector has a mandate in the following four areas, which boost the confidence of citizens in the private sector:

- Job skills
- Sustainability
- Quality of Information
- Return to work safely

### 3. Edelman Trust Barometer findings on South Africa and Domestic Perceptions Study

According to the survey, business has taken over NGO's as the most trusted institution in South Africa, while media and government are still seen as distrusted, unethical and incompetent. The rise of business becoming the most trusted institution in South Africa comes after a number of private organisations took steps to protect their employees and local communities during the pandemic.

The table below presents South Africa’s respondents trust in all four institutions evaluated in the report:

2021 Edelman Trust Barometer: Trust in South Africa’s four institutions		
Institution	Score	Year to Year Change
Business	61	+3
NGO’S	60	+1
Government	27	+7
Media	42	+2

As presented in the table above. The business sector occupies the highest score in trust among the three other institutions according to the collated data of respondents who took part of the survey in South Africa, followed by NGO’s and media. While government is the least trusted institution.

In a statement made by the CEO of Edelman Africa- Jordan Rittenberry “as the pandemic puts trust to test, business has a clear mandate to help society navigate the COVID-19 storm and take the lead on driving change, with private sector organisations expected to fill the void left by government.” It is evident that business institutions have become the only hope to assist their employees and communities towards fighting the pandemic.

A comparison between the findings made in the Edelman Trust Barometer and Brand South Africa’s 2021 Domestic Perceptions Annual Report. The Domestic Perceptions Annual Report finds that business sector still ranks the highest at 28%, although the score declined slightly since last year. Government still enjoys the second place at 24%, followed by Civil Society at 20%. Media slipped into fourth at 19% in 2021, from the third in 2020, clearly indicating that South Africans are slowly losing trust in the sector. Political parties and their leaders remain last in position as both the Edelman Trust Barometer and Domestic Perceptions Study state that citizens have lost trust in political leaders due to their empty promises, political party factions and corruption.

The snapshot below presents the findings unpacked in the paragraph above from the 2021 Domestic Perceptions Annual Study:



Source: 2021 Domestic Perceptions Annual Report

#### 4. Recommendations

The 2021 Edelman Trust Barometer provides the following four recommendations to assist countries and institutions in emerging from information bankruptcy in accordance to the findings made in the report:

1. **Business: Embrace expanded mandate**  
CEO's must lead on issues from sustainability and systemic racism to upskilling.
2. **Lead with facts and act with empathy**  
Social leaders must have the courage to provide straight talk, but also emphasize and address people's fears.
3. **Provide trustworthy content**  
All institutions must provide truthful, unbiased and reliable information.
4. **Don't do it alone**  
Business, government, NGO's and others must find a common purpose and take collective action to solve societal problems.

#### 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the 2021 Edelman Trust Barometer Annual report revealed findings that indicate a drastic change in the overall scores of the world's most powerful countries declining from their usual positions due to the lack of trust in their four highlighted institutions from their respondents. While some countries were negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift of trust it came with, some of these countries were positively affected by the pandemic as indicated in the report.

South Africa's overall performance in the report does not necessarily depict a negative picture about the country's respondents trust in the highlighted institutions considering that the country's overall trust rose by 4 points despite its lack of trust in the three other institutions except business while other large economies experienced greater loss in their respondent's trust.

#### References

- Edelman. 2021. Edelman Trust Barometer Annual Report.  
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