

COULD WE BUILD A JUST SOCIETY?

Reading time ~ 5 min.

When injustice reaches a certain point, even soldiers and policemen refuse to obey – as witness the French, Russian, Chinese, Indo-Chinese, and other revolutions.... The moment a state, grown too powerful, too weak, or too misguided, ceases to make the citizens feel they are governed justly, they have the right to insist on a change – peacefully if they possess the means, by force if they do not.

Ten to one there will be some imbecile who will deduce from these paragraphs that I am preaching revolution, just as there were some who asserted that I was recommending political assassinations. It is worth repeating, then: I am against violence. And it is precisely in order to forestall it that I have examined the conditions in which it usually breaks out."

Pierre Elliott Trudeau, 15th Prime Minister of Canada, in office 1968 — 1979

Plato argued that "our objective in founding the state was not the unbounded happiness of any one class, but the greatest happiness of all; we thought that in a state ordered with a view to the general welfare we would have more chance of discovering justice." Twenty-four centuries later, people are still trying to discover justice. Everything from vaccine passports to international conflicts is about what is just and unjust.

A just society is also about inequalities and social mobility. The speed and ease with which a child born into a poor family can rise to the top of the social hierarchy is one of the most important indicators of a just society.

For example, OECD research on social mobility indicates that parents' level of education has a direct impact on kids' education. In families, where parents don't have a university degree, only 10% of kids continue on to university education, compared to 65% of children with highly educated parents. Levels of education, in turn, determine the speed with which kids can rise to the top of the social hierarchy. That is why a modern, accessible and affordable education is one of the most important determinants of a just society.

Social mobility – in terms of earnings, occupation and education – is the highest in Nordic countries. It takes only two generations for children from the bottom of the earnings hierarchy to rise to the middle (see Chart 1 for more details).

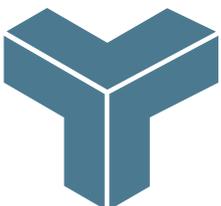
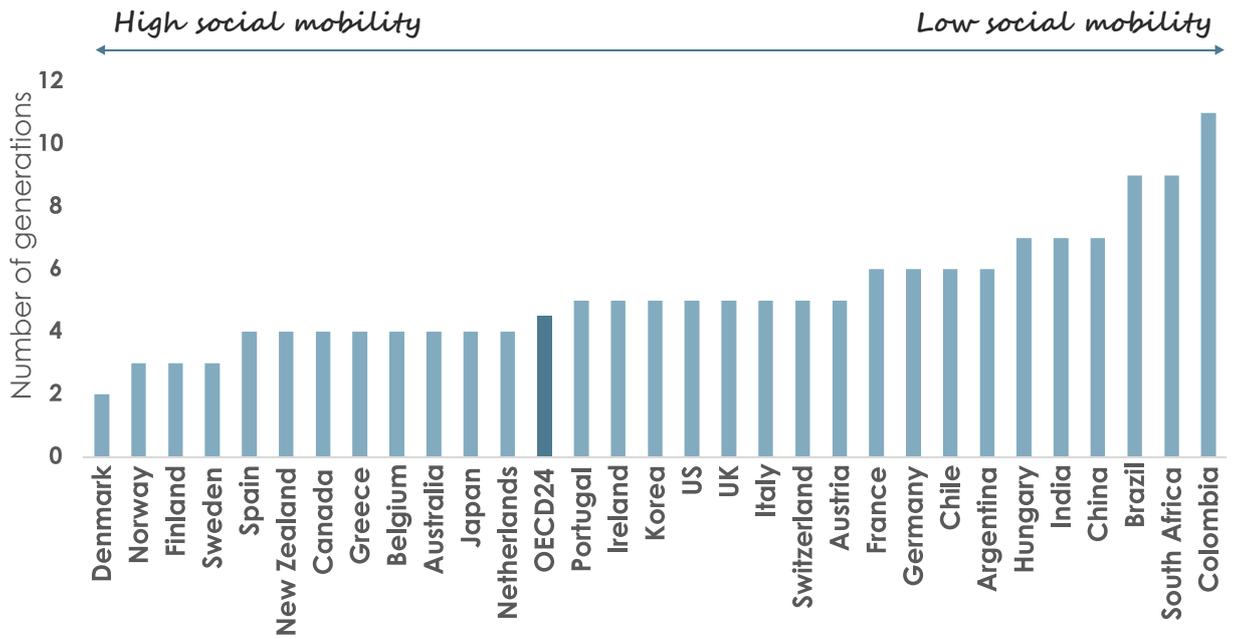


Chart 1. How Many Generations It Takes to Advance

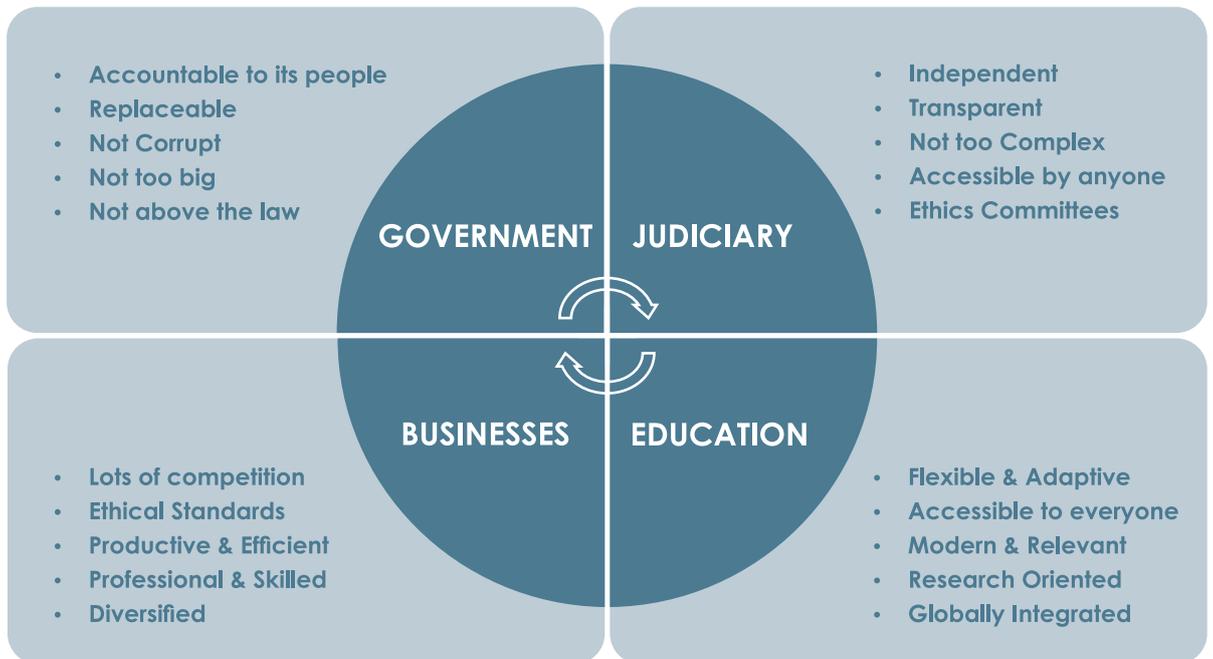


*Expected number of generations it would take the offspring from a family at the bottom 10% to reach the mean income in society.

Source: OECD (2018), A Broken Social Elevator? How to Promote Social Mobility

Conclusion: The very concept of a just society is complex. We tried to address this issue throughout our reports. Below we have reproduced one of the diagrams we have used in the past because we believe it is the most relevant to the topic of a just society.

Diagram 1: The Four Pillars of the Ecosystem¹



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¹ What is an Ecosystem?

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