How do UK political elites reconcile with a low trust environment?

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Abstract

Evidence indicates that citizens widely regard politicians as untrustworthy. But do low levels of trust affect politicians' behaviour? In this paper, we draw on interviews conducted with UK political elites to understand: a) whether UK political elites recognise a lack of trust; b) what they perceive as its causes and present as solutions; c) how it affects the decision-making process; d) whether they feel it undermines their sense of legitimacy. Whilst we find that UK political elites do acknowledge low levels of trust, they reveal that this has only modest effects on their activities, the legitimacy to take major decisions is undented. Low trust offers political opportunities as well as threats. Low trust places few constraints on politicians' ability to wield power. As a result, leading politicians may lack the motivation to take meaningful action to arrest low levels of citizens' trust.

Keywords: Political elites, political trust, UK politics, decision-making

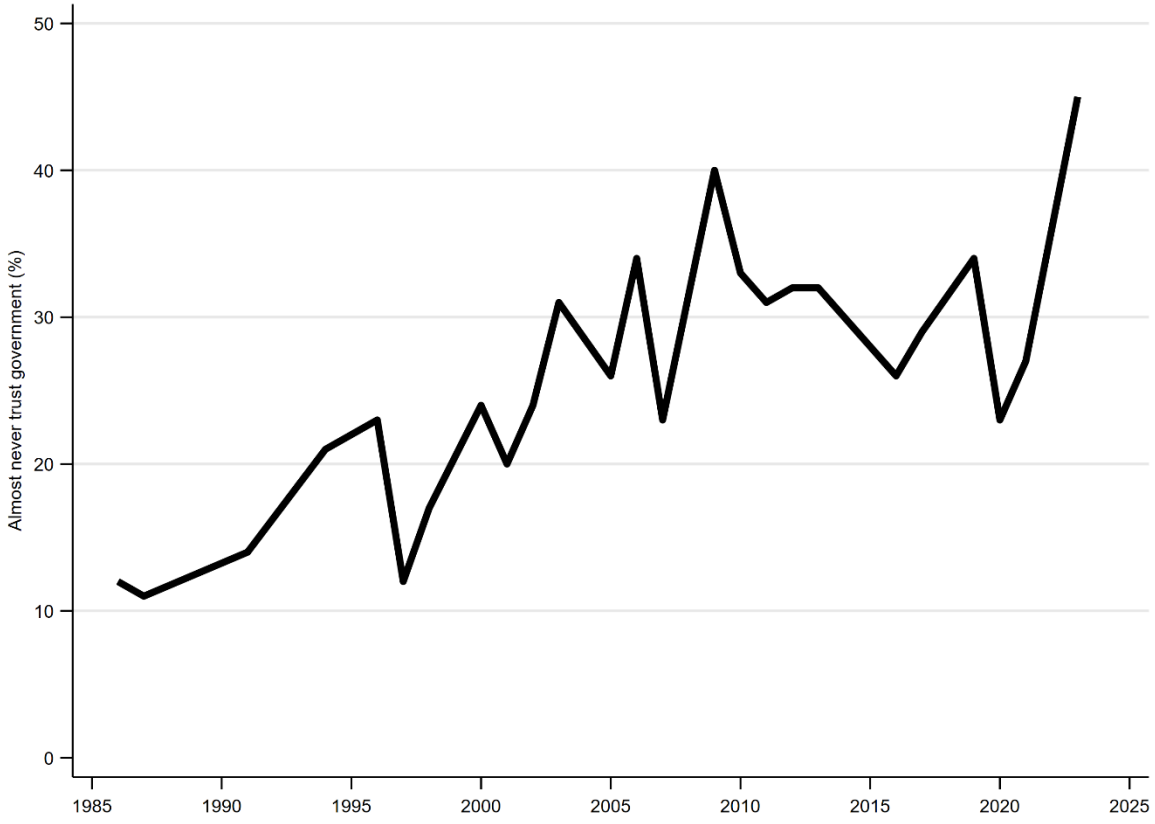
Introduction

For elected representatives not to be trusted by the citizens that elect her might be considered the definition of an existential crisis, an inner conflict about their identity and the meaning of their role. For an elected politician with an executive role charged with complex tasks of governing, an absence of public trust might be additionally concerning since trust is of 'great benefit' for executives, providing 'more leeway to govern effectively' (Hetherington, 1998: 803). Trust facilitates citizens' support for more ambitious policy programmes such as redistribution or adopting large-scale measures to tackle climate change. As Hetherington and Husser (2012:312) put it; 'people need to trust the government to support more government'. Trust is also connected to citizens' compliance with laws (Marien & Hooghe, 2011) and acquiescence to major behavioural changes demanded by government, as illustrated by a strong relationship between trust and adhering to lockdowns and getting vaccinated during the Covid-19 pandemic (Jennings et al, 2023). There are then good reasons for a politician (especially one with responsibility for policy decisions) to want to be trusted.

Yet there is considerable evidence to indicate that politicians are not trusted. Measuring trust in government and politicians presents a number of challenges, but a recent study using data for 143 countries and advanced Bayesian methods (Valgarðsson et al., forthcoming) demonstrates a global trend that trust in representative institutions (parliaments, governments and political parties) has generally been declining in recent decades, whereas trust in 'implementing' institutions (civil service, legal system and police) has been stable or rising. The UK case provides a good exemplar of these trends. An ONS/OECD survey (2024) fielded in 2023 revealed modest levels of trust on average in the courts and judicial system (with 62% indicating a score of 6 to 10 on a 11-point scale where 0 'is not at all' and 10 is 'completely'), the police (56%) and the national civil service (45%). In contrast, there was a substantially lower level of public trust in national government (35%), parliament (24%), and political parties (12%). The British Social Attitudes surveys have revealed that an increasing proportion of the UK public *almost never* trust governments of any party to place the needs of the

nation above the interests of their own political party (National Centre for Social Research 2024). As Figure 1 shows, in 1986, just 12% of people expressed that view, but this number has increased over time – with some notable fluctuations: sharp rises in the mid-1990s under the scandal-riven Major government and during the parliamentary expenses scandal of 2009, falls during the honeymoon of the Blair government (1997) and at the height of the pandemic 'rally-round-the-flag' in 2020, before surging to an all-time high of 45% in 2023.

Figure 1 Percentage of Britons indicating that they almost never trust the government to place needs of the nation above the interests of their own party



Data source: National Centre for Social Research 2024

The UK case therefore suggests that any benefits to politicians from being trusted by the public are increasingly likely to be absent. Global trends in political trust suggest that the British case in more likely an exemplar rather than an outlier (Valgarðsson et al., forthcoming). We offer some empirical

insights to how political elites judge the impact of the presence or absence of public trust. The experiences of British politicians and their advisors may well reflect those of other countries. However, our contribution is conceptual as well as empirical. We identify a series of questions connecting trust and policymaking. Do politicians consider they lack public trust? If so, why? Does this impact their behaviour or feelings of legitimacy? In addition, we develop a framework for analysing the responses to the questions. This exploratory study should encourage other investigations into what is an emerging dilemma for politicians who need public trust to act but may find themselves governing in a world of low political trust.

Whereas previous studies into political elites' perceptions of political trust (Coller et al., 2020; Esaiasson & Holmberg, 1996: 120-2; Weinberg, 2023a; Weinberg, 2023b) have surveyed the perceptions of elected officials at various levels, we focus on those who have served in government executives either as ministers or as special advisors. Our concern is to understand the impact that lack of trust has on those tasked with initiating, designing and implementing governmental tasks rather than the broader category of, for example, elected representatives. Those who wield executive power have a greater capacity to affect political trust and it is their actions who are most likely to be affected by levels of political trust. Of course, it is perhaps impossible to isolate the direct causal effects of low and declining political trust on policymakers' actions. We can never know for certain how governments might have approached issues differently had levels of political trust been different.

Our desire to explore political elites' understanding of the issues created by lack of trust led us to adopt the method of semi-structured interviews undertaken by the research team. We supplemented this with an analysis of relevant secondary data. Both the Institute for Government (IfG) and the ESRC's UK in a Changing Europe (UKICE) have archival collections of recorded long interviews with ministers and advisers that give insight into their decision-making and coincidently the role of trust in that process. We use relevant material from these resources (offering a combined

total of nearly 200 interviews) to supplement our own interviews (16 in total) and argue that they represent an underused but vital resource for future research. As such we combine the use of *primary* and *secondary* qualitative data, analysed using the same framework.

One reasonable reflection, given the perceived relevance of public trust to effective governance, is that political elites would be intensely aware of low trust and extremely concerned to address the issue. This reflection provides the starting point for our investigation into the extent to which elites recognise a lack of trust in politics among the public. The nature of any response to this first question is likely to reflect an understanding of its causes, hence our second question asked interviewees to explain the causes of lack of trust and identify solutions. After exploring how the issue is understood we move directly to its impact on behaviour. Does lack of trust change their policy choices? Does it present opportunities for political gain and not just a threat? Does it constrain their legitimacy to make major decisions?

We first present findings from our own interviews in response to the framework outlined above. We follow that with a supplementary analysis of the IfG and UKICE interviews. We conclude by noting how lack of public trust is recognised but that the most favoured proposed solutions are about managing and lowering expectations. Low trust has only modest impact on the behaviour of senior politicians and their advisers. It can limit their willingness to tackle some demanding issues but does not constrain their sense of legitimacy in exercising power, and occasionally provides an opportunity to exploit, if lack of trust can be focused on an opponent. Trust from their party, parliamentary colleagues, or other elite players such as the civil service is a more valuable resource for getting things done than the trust of the public. Further, UK politicians' sense of legitimacy is buoyed by the positive reception they perceive from their constituents and the relative democratic stability of the UK. These results demonstrate the need for future comparative research to explore whether politicians in systems without a constituency link or in more unstable systems also use motivated reasoning to reconcile themselves to operating with low political trust.

Responding to low public trust environment

Research on political trust is overwhelmingly (and understandably) focused on studies of citizens' attitudes and reasoning about the issue. Neither of the two recent state-of-the-art handbooks dealing with political and social trust (Zmerli and Van der Meer, 2017; Uslaner, 2018) include chapters that deal directly with the topic of elites' responses to working in a low trust (or indeed high trust) environment. There is a growing literature looking at public officials' trust in citizens, particularly in relation to how this affects their preferences for citizen participation policy programmes (Yang, 2005; Moyson et al., 2016), and how it affects the extent to which public officials promote such programmes to elected officials (Liao and Schachter, 2018). However, public officials themselves have less agency to initiate widespread citizen participation policy initiatives than executive-level decision-makers. Further, greater citizen involvement in policy initiatives is merely one of many commonly suggested solutions for restoring higher levels of political trust.

The small existing literature on political elites' responses to low levels of political trust has largely focused on politicians' perceptions of the causes and possible responses (Coller et al., 2020; Esaiasson and Holmberg, 1996; Weinberg, 2023a; Weinberg, 2023b), rather than its wider impact on their behaviours. We are interested in why those with the power to improve levels of political trust seem to be unable or unwilling to do so, given that levels of trust have been low and declining in Britain for several decades (Figure 1). This leads us to ask a wider set of questions than those covered in the small body of research that has previously looked at politicians' or public officials' perceptions of trust, in order to explore not only how low and declining trust is perceived and understood, but how it impacts on the behaviour of elites. There are fragments from existing research that can provide at least a starting point for our investigation.

The broad expectations highlighted by our review of evidence and arguments from earlier studies are captured in Table 1 below and provide themes that we expect to emerge in the analysis. We

distinguish between primary and secondary themes, with the assumption that the former will be more readily expressed. Our four questions for investigation are:

- Is low trust recognised as an issue?
- How is it understood and what solutions are proposed?
- What is the impact on decision-making?
- What is the impact on elites' sense of legitimacy?

These four questions capture a logic about the stages required to explore how political elites respond to operating in a low trust environment. To address an issue, step 1 is awareness, while step 2 requires some explanation of its dynamics that in turn should drive ideas about solutions. To understand the impact on behaviour we suggest a focus on two core functions of politics elites: the making of decisions and the claim to rule with legitimacy. 'To govern is to choose' proposed Pierre Mendes-France when Prime Minister of France in 1954-5. Political elites live by this maxim whether they wish to or not. Their role is to decide and to claim that they have the right to decide.

Table 1: Senior political elites' responses to low trust environment: expected themes

Response to issue	Primary	Secondary
Recognition	Sensitivity to public opinion indicates likelihood of awareness.	A sense that a lack of trust applies to others more than them may limit awareness.
Explanation	Attributed to a failure to perform according to expectations. Others (the media) might also be blamed.	Improving performance and keeping promises might be tempered by a recognition that lower expectations would restore public trust.

Impact on decision-making	Weakens desire to take on more ambitious policy challenges. Might also be seen as political opportunity to block the initiatives of opponents and yet build support for themselves and their party.	Might encourage greater risk-taking on the grounds that low trust means that there is nothing to lose.
Sense of legitimacy	Unlikely to be dented as strong sense of vocation and fitness for the role sustains sense of legitimacy.	Additional comfort from role as a local representative as well as a national politician.

Step 1 in understanding the impact of low trust on elite behaviour is to judge whether they are aware of the issue. Recent studies have shown that political elites are poor at precisely estimating public opinion, but tend to be aware of majority sentiment (Walgrave et al., 2023). Whilst it might be assumed to be an essential activity for politicians' to stay abreast of public opinion, many politicians do not put great efforts into this activity Soontjens and Walgrave (2021). Soontjens (2022) shows that many members of parliament do believe that voters are aware of what they do and that their behaviour may be taken into account by them at election time, especially in more candidate-focused electoral systems; an argument that might apply to the constituency-based electoral system of the UK.

Moreover research on citizens who lack trust (Valgardson et al., 2022) suggests that those actors are less likely to engage in voting and formal political participation, such as contacting an MP. So in their constituency work politicians may meet a skewed sample of the public who are more generally trusting and more politically engaged. This context may explain both why politicians wrongly

anticipate that voters are more likely to agree with them (Pereira, 2021; Sevenans et al., 2023) and why they are more likely to believe that voters would speak openly to, seek help from or even vote for them than is the case in reality (Weinberg, 2022). An early study found that a majority of Swedish politicians correctly identified that levels of public trust had fallen in the preceding decades (Esaiasson & Holmberg, 1996), but a more recent Spanish study found that Conservative or longer-serving politicians were less likely to acknowledge a crisis (Coller et al., 2020). In short, the evidence suggests that it would be reasonable to expect politicians to be aware of the general lack of public trust in them and in government and politics generally, but that their understanding might be tempered by a lack of concern about the issue or a sense that it might apply to some politicians but not to them.

Step 2 in exploring the impact of low trust is to explore how elites understand and seek to respond to the issue. A Spanish case study (Coller et al., 2020) uncovered several factors identified by politicians that may be case-specific such as corruption by MPs or the natural evolution of politics in a relatively new democracy, but also causes such as media negativity and a lack of responsiveness to citizens' concerns. Weinberg's (2023a) cross-national study which asked politicians to reflect on what they themselves could do to build and sustain trust uncovered two main proposals – increased personal contact with voters and more authentic communication. However, despite the prompt for self-focus, politicians in that study also identified several solutions unrelated to their own behaviour, such as improving political education or reducing misinformation online.

Given their position of accountability, politicians are likely to view trust through a standard evaluative lens; you are trusted or not depending on your performance. Research into how politicians evaluate public opinion has found that they anticipate electoral accountability on the outcomes produced by policy decisions (Butler & Vis, 2023). In doing so they are following 'most empirically-minded scholars in defining political trust as the ratio of people's evaluation of government performance relative to their normative expectations of how government ought to

perform' (Hetherington and Husser, 2012:313). Trust is a relationship built on expectations to deliver: X trusts Y to do Z. If trust from voters is missing, it is likely that political elites will identify the solution of improving performance. The caveat here is that to improve the evaluation of performance might also involve a lowering of expectations on the part of the public. A standard formula in seeking to influence levels of satisfaction within accountable relationships is to manage expectations (Busuioc and Lodge, 2017); and politicians regularly attempt to argue they should be judged against a particular set of criteria. However, managing expectations in relation to public service performance (James, 2009; 2011) is not an easy task as citizens' normative expectations are difficult to change and the information provided by politicians (or their public servants) is not automatically trusted.

Step 3 moves focus directly to the impact of lack of trust on elite decision-making. Research suggests that impact of low trust on elite decision-making is likely to be negative in a variety of ways by leading elites to fail to tackle challenging issues, to behave irresponsibly, or simply to use low trust to justify a politics of blame and unwillingness to compromise. The dominant theme from research is that lack of trust dissuades politicians from tackling more tricky or challenging issues, if the public 'trust government—the entity that produces and administers public policies—they ought to be more likely to support more government involvement; if not, then less' (Hetherington and Husser, 2012: 313). Low levels of political trust have been associated with lower willingness to support environmental policies (Fairbrother, 2019), policies that benefit minorities (Hetherington, 2005), or welfare reform (Gabriel and Trüdinger, 2011; Goubin and Kumlin, 2022). Trust is seen as an important ingredient in persuading people to back longer-term commitments related to issues such as climate change (Jacobs, 2016: 440). The reasoning here is that if citizens lack trust then elites will be unwilling to risk seeking their support for measures that may bring short-term costs in return for long-term benefits. Jacobs and Matthews (2012) report from survey experiments that uncertainty about long-run policy commitments can substantially depress trust in those commitments and so undermine the support for long-term policymaking. However, in experiments with politicians,

Weinberg (2023b) finds that politicians who perceived higher levels of political trust are more drawn to cautious decision-making, which he theorises is because they are conscious of the risks of losing their good-standing. Conversely, low levels of political trust thus may lead to politicians taking greater risks.

Low trust may not just change risk calculations but might also encourage reassessments of strategic advantages and political positions. Where there is polarisation of trust the calculation for party leaders about how to operate can be shaped by the differential distribution of low trust. If partisan supporters are more trusting of their leaders and their party (Hetherington and Rudolph, 2020) and if that is matched by a sustained and entrenched lack of trust in other parties the calculation for party leaders becomes different. As Hetherington and Rudolph (2018:594) explain, when 'partisans deeply distrust the government run by the other party, they do not really want their party's representatives to work with the other side'. This in turn enables opposition party leaders to block initiatives if they can and to behave in a way that focuses on the interests of their party rather than the general good. Gridlock and a negative politics of blame is more likely to emerge as a result.

Stage 4 turns the focus from decision-making to the impact of low trust on the sense of legitimacy that is central to their role. It would be a telling impact of low trust if political elites felt their right as elected leaders was diminished by low trust. Yet there are good reasons why any impact on self-belief systems is likely to be modest. Politicians according to Weinberg's (2020) research come into office with value systems that are focused on helping others over themselves. Although many citizens may fail to perceive the virtue that politicians see as embedded in their behaviour this does not necessarily undermine their claim to virtue and therefore legitimacy. Further, while politicians nationally may not be supported, their local role as a constituency representative may bring far more positive feedback. Indeed, previous surveys of MPs have found that they derive satisfaction from acting as a local representative (Norris, 1997), and increasingly perceive this as the most important aspect of their role (Campbell and Lovenduski, 2015; Radice et al., 1987; Rosenblatt, 2006). Hence

there is no strong reason to suppose that a lack of expressed public trust in politics will lead politicians to the judgement that their role lacks legitimacy.

Research Design

To identify what category of elite is most relevant to the research question in focus we draw on Kertzer and Renshon's (2022) categorisation of occupational elites which defines a political elite according to the proximity of their access to decision-making power in government. This speaks aptly to the theoretical concerns at hand. Our aim is to understand how those "in government" with the potential capacity to affect levels of trust respond to this environment. That requires connecting with those who have had direct experience of initiating, directing and implementing government action, including secretaries of state, ministers and of course prime ministers but also those who have worked alongside these politicians in an advisory role not as permanent civil servants but as political advisors. Our interest is primarily in those *who govern*, rather than those *who represent* (though these categories overlap, of course). While advisers themselves do not face the existential angst of low political trust undermining their sense of democratic legitimacy, they are involved in the governing process alongside Ministers and are thus similarly potentially affected by low political trust limiting their ability to pursue certain policies (or, when in opposition, expanding their ability to attack their opponents). Further, advisers who do not go on to seek elected office have less incentive to portray themselves, or the administration they served, in a positive light unlike politicians who are more motivated to protect their legacy (Farrall et al., 2020).

Hence we sought the perspectives of those who had been at the heart of decision-making. Our initial list of interviewees to approach were individuals who had served either as Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, one of the 'great' Secretaries of State (Chancellor, Home Secretary, Foreign Secretary) or as Chief Whip in government at some point between the first Blair government in 1997 and the May government that fell in 2019, and an additional smaller list of individuals who served as Special Advisers to Prime Ministers in the same period. We did not approach individuals in the

Johnson, Truss or Sunak governments (which were in office at the time of our fieldwork) due to the difficulties in accessing elites currently in office. We did not attempt a representative sample, but one that was politically and gender balanced; the former in case of clear differences between different parties' perspectives on these matters and the latter since previous scholarship has argued that male and female politicians may differ in their support for the current practise of politics (Lovenduski, 2005). Where our initial enquiries proved less fruitful for some administrations, particularly in terms of female Cabinet Ministers or advisers, we widened our net and approached other Cabinet Ministers or Ministers of State from that administration.

In total we approached 76 UK political elites between February 2022 and January 2023, some multiple times. Potential interviewees were emailed an invitation to participate in a 20-30 minute online interview as part of the *(anonymised for peer review)* project, emphasising our desire to understand the perspectives of those who had served in government. We spoke to 16 participants, a 21% success rate. Table 2 summarises our respondents by party, role and gender. We generally had greater success accessing Labour rather than Conservative interviewees.

Table 2 Summary of respondents

	MINISTERS	**ADVISERS**	**TOTAL**
CONSERVATIVE	2	3	5
LABOUR	5	3	8
LIBERAL DEMOCRAT	3	0	3
MALE	7	5	12
FEMALE	3	1	4
TOTAL	10	6	16

There are limits to the representativeness of our sample. Although the response rate is similar to other general studies of UK political elites (e.g. Rose et al., 2020; see also Campbell and Lovenduski, 2015), we are conscious that political elites who accept an invitation to talk about political trust are more likely to have an interest in the topic. Nevertheless, we spoke to a broad mix of personnel who have served in various UK administrations in the last quarter of a century. Some had lost elections when standing as incumbent MPs, others had lost office when in executive positions, some had even been forced to resign from Cabinet. Many had spent decades working in politics.

Interviews were conducted online and followed a semi-structured format. In January 2022 we carried out a pilot interview with a former Labour Cabinet Minister, followed by a discussion between the interviewee and the authors. Subsequently, we refined our six questions which related to political elites' understanding of the concept and levels of political trust, whether they felt that levels of political trust were important, if they could recall any examples of levels of political trust affecting their decisions, how they would propose restoring levels of political trust, and why they believed the topic was not discussed more in the House of Commons. The interview script can be found in Appendix I. The use of online interviews offers the benefits of making it easier to access such elites who frequently have to rearrange appointments at the last minute and reducing some potential for positional imbalance between interviewer and interviewee in terms of the interview location (Vaagland, 2024). On the other hand, interviews conducted online may reduce the opportunity for 'rapport' to be built (Harvey, 2011) although we speculate that this has become less of an issue given the prevalence of online meetings since the Covid pandemic. The length of our interviews varied from 25 minutes to over an hour and our reflection is that participants were generally strongly engaged and undistracted during the interviews.

Interviewees were given the opportunity to review transcripts of the conservations. We subsequently undertook a thematic analysis (Neuendorf, 2019) of our data. For each of our four research questions we started with a codebook of the themes outlined in Table 1. However, given the relative lack of

existing empirical work in this area, we inductively developed this codebook to include codes for themes where politicians' responses overlapped. Two authors separately coded themes from the interviews before comparing codebooks and agreeing on a final version (see Appendix II). This inductive approach, following Nowell et al.'s (2017) guidelines on how to establish trustworthiness in thematic analysis allowed us to identify key themes that were not uncovered by the small body of previous work in this area. Subsequently we calculated how many of our interviewees mentioned each of these themes, and whether, for example, women, Conservatives or Special Advisers were more or less likely to identify particular issues. We provide this information in Appendix II.

Given the aforementioned limits to the representativeness of our sample, we later supplemented this data with an analysis of 143 interviews undertaken by the IfG with former Ministers (Institute for Government, 2023) and 38 interviews with elite UK political actors conducted by UKICE (UK in a Changing Europe, 2023). The first group forms the 'Ministers Reflect' series whereby former Ministers are asked about 'the realities of the role and how to be effective in government' (Institute for Government, 2023). The content of these interviews is thus appropriate for understanding how perceived levels of political trust impact executive behaviour. These interviews were conducted between June 2015 and August 2023 with those who had served in the UK government but also with some ministers from the UK's devolved administrations. The second smaller group of interviews focused on providing a contemporary account of the process of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union, a period of political turbulence that affected levels of political trust differently among different groups (Jennings et al., 2022). This potentially reveals how political elites deal with operating in a low-trust environment when taking decisions on a highly salient case. We searched these texts for mentions of the terms 'trust' or 'confidence', and then narrowed this data to excerpts where mentions of these terms referred to political trust. Two researchers then undertook a separate thematic analysis of this data, inductively developing 'themes' to describe the context in which trust was mentioned in these interviews, before again agreeing on a final set of themes. The results of this analysis are presented after the interviews conducted by the team.

There are potential pitfalls to relying on data from interviews, such as the possibility of participants misremembering or falsely reporting their behaviour during their time in office (Seldon, 1988). In this instance, since our research is focused on general themes rather than specific events, there is less incentive for political elites to oversell their own confidence or to provide a false narrative about decisions they were involved in taking. The focus of the interviews on general themes rather than specific incidents also reduces the potential problem of elites potentially falsely recalling either details or their thinking at the time. Since 9 of our 16 interviewees are still directly 'active' in politics as either MPs, members of the House of Lords or political consultants, and several served in local government earlier in their careers, when reflecting on the causes of and antidotes to declining trust our interviewees drew on reflections from across their careers rather than just on their experience of executive office. Of course, when asking our respondents to recall examples of how levels of political trust affected their decision-making in office, it is possible that they fail to recall examples of this, particularly where their experience of office finished some time before the interview took place (20 years prior in our most extreme case).

Our interviews were clearly affected by the political circumstances of the time. Conversations that took place in early 2022 did so in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and 'Partygate', the latter of which clearly negatively impacted trust in then Prime Minister Boris Johnson, if not in politics more widely (Hayton, 2022). In the autumn of 2022 perceptions were likely to have been affected by the disastrous 'Trussonomics' experiment (Jeffery et al., 2023). Where participants acknowledged that such events had affected their thinking, we mention these when presenting the results. Generally however, participants' reflections on levels of political trust and their importance drew on their experience of participating in politics over a long period of time, rather than fixating on the immediate circumstances.

Results

Recognition

All politicians and advisers we interviewed acknowledged that levels of political trust in general were low. Politicians we spoke to were able to identify interactions with constituents that demonstrated this, highlighting the role of constituency representation in their awareness of public opinion (Soontjens and Walgrave, 2021). To give one example:

> *"You find people who say that they're not voting or not interested in politics who you really wouldn't expect to have those views. I can remember bumping into a couple of teachers during an election campaign, and them saying they weren't bothering to vote, and that is probably not representative, but it's not what you want to hear from people with that kind of status and importance in society."*
> (Male Liberal Democrat politician)

For most, there was also a shared sense that low trust mattered. Common themes that emerged were the risk of disgruntled voters supporting populist parties and the perceived effect low trust had on governments' ability to tackle difficult issues like climate change. In the words of one male Labour politician:

> *"It's very difficult to see how any of those can be resolved in a society that is both divided and where many, many people don't feel well represented. Because all of those require a level of cohesion, and, if you like, willingness to work together for the common good, which is almost impossible to create if people don't feel they're properly represented within the system."*

That said, not all respondents were equally concerned. One male Liberal Democrat politician estimated his level of concern as being 'six or seven' on a 1 to 10 scale where 10 was 'worry a lot', while six others queried that it was any worse than it had ever been. One reason for this complacency may be well summarised by the words of a male Labour adviser, *'What difference would it actually make if they really did trust politicians? What would actually be different?*'

Explanation

Several patterns of note emerged when analysing respondents' reflections on why levels of trust were low and what the solutions might be. Three politicians, all relatively older, perceived that the advent of a 24 hour news cycle combined with a gradual loss of deference from both media and citizens has led to greater transparency of government, warts and all, and a subsequent loss of trust. Further, some argued that it had led to a politics focused more on messaging than delivery:

> *"Announcements became announcements for the media. It wasn't just in this country... Whoever's managing the media is the person shaping how things are announced. And of course, if you're shaping how things are announced, you're shaping how things are thought about and then it's very short-term thinking, very media driven, shallower, and more for manipulation rather than for sincere consideration and announcement."* (Female Labour politician)

This manifested itself in several ways. Two Cabinet Ministers from the Blair government felt that their party had not been electorally rewarded for announcements of extra investments in healthcare and education because such announcements raised false hope about service delivery and people on the ground experienced the effects of policies differently to how they were perceived in Westminster. One former Conservative adviser also raised a recent tendency for politicians to hastily respond to constituents' demands online which ended up backing them into corners. Several interviewees lamented parties' habit of over-promising and under-delivering, or performing U-turns on their previous pronouncements. Unsurprisingly, Liberal Democrat politicians in particular were aware of this given the electoral punishment they had received for U-turning on several notable policies when in coalition (Dommett, 2013). This led seven politicians and former advisers to propose that one solution to increase political trust was for parties to be more realistic in their promises so that they could more clearly demonstrate to voters that they had kept their promises. In the words of one Liberal Democrat politician:

> *"The levelling-up agenda [is] a massively bold policy area. But actually, there's not been a lot of detail behind it and maybe not enough policy volume to really make a difference. Cameron's 'Big Society' would be another example of sort of a nice*

> *idea that didn't have much policy beef behind it. I think politicians have got to make sure that behind their policies and their rhetoric is enough meat to show the public that they can deliver, and that political promises are not just things that are made at election time and forgotten afterwards."*

11 of our 16 respondents identified a general failure of parties and politicians to effectively communicate with voters, either by reminding them of their successes or by explaining their thinking. Two politicians contrasted what they saw as their successful approaches to communicating with constituents along these lines in contrast to more wider failures of parties. One female adviser from the Cameron years admitted that they ran into difficulties over their healthcare reforms (Timmins, 2012) because they had not communicated them in advance to voters. One male Conservative political adviser proposed "*I think the only way out of it now is almost a new type of populism, a sort of anti-populist populism which is sort of 'These guys are promising you the world, it's all rubbish, I'm going to give it to you straight.'"*

There were differences of perspective over whether greater responsiveness to public opinion would restore levels of political trust. Some felt that responding to voters in the short-term sometimes led to long-term problems in terms of policy-making and thus political trust. On the other hand, one male Labour politician recalled the government partially responding to tabloid newspaper campaigns over sex offenders in a way that *'adapted what they were saying to an acceptable and practical policy'*, so *'that you weren't just going to say 'we're not doing anything' because we're not interested or because it's difficult'*, highlighting it as an example of how to retain public trust.

A different concept of responsiveness was raised by a respondent who recalled that Tony Blair had lost support due to voters' perceptions that his government had not paid sufficient attention to the *issues* that mattered to voters. Relatedly, two politicians highlighted the increasing importance of identity issues, and the greater need for mainstream politicians to respond to such issues, while seven respondents raised their (collective) failure to tackle big decisions:

> *"It's the politicians' tendency over a long time not to do those things, not to have those conversations, to put stuff off, to pretend things are ok when they're not, that has created the low levels of trust. I think for me that's the direction that causality works in. Politicians should have been doing bold things, they should have been having serious conversations. There's been so much sticking plaster."* (interview with male Labour adviser)

Four interviewees identified that politicians had less power to affect change than previously, either because of the power of financial markets, or because of delegating power to quangos or privatised companies, although the latter is the direct result of a series of decisions taken by UK politicians (Coxall et al., 2003).

A simpler explanation offered by six respondents was that trust had fallen simply because governments and politicians hadn't been doing their jobs effectively, whether that be the MPs' expenses scandal, or the failure to deliver economic goods to voters. One male Conservative politician, generally dismissive of the idea of a crisis of trust, summed it thus; '*Broadly speaking, if people think things are going well for them and the people that they know and the country, they will be pretty approving of the elected people.'*

A perhaps more unexpected ailment identified by six respondents was the quality of the personnel in office. Unsurprisingly, respondents of all parties raised Boris Johnson's personal conduct when musing on the state of political trust in the UK. However, several respondents pondered whether previous generations of politicians were better suited to their roles, while another queried the British system of 'generalism' involving both Ministers and Civil Servants shuffling around between departments. Given that our respondents were generally successful in terms of the heights they reached in their political careers, such thoughts are unlikely to be sour grapes, although of course they were more likely to identify mistakes made by others. In the words of one Conservative adviser, *"The problem is that through, I think, probably about three parts inevitability and seven parts the actions of politicians, those waves [of trust/ optimism] come crashing down pretty damn quickly."*

Three of our four female interviewees emphasised the need for more descriptively representative decision-makers but also for a less absolutist form of politics that allowed for more dissent. Female elites were also more likely to advocate allowing politicians to express themselves more freely from the party line to engender greater trust in what politicians say.

Several respondents mentioned the need for politicians to seek a common ground and attempt to lead the whole country rather than focusing on maximizing the reward for their party. Liberal Democrats identified this as a feature of the UK's first-past-the-post voting system, while most Labour politicians advocated for a different sort of constitutional reform; devolution. However one male Labour politician acknowledged the tension between a theoretical desire to devolve power and a practical desire when in government to maximise control over decision-making, due to a lack of trust that others would execute the policy as well as you would: *'Trust in your direction and what you were saying would be eroded if you messed it up. It led us to be slightly more diktat than we would have wished. It led us to be much more hands-on with co-ordinators in each locality ensuring that people were doing something than we would otherwise have wanted.'*

In sum, there was some acknowledgement of general and individual failings by the political class which have led to a loss of trust. Common themes were policy failures, under-delivering compared to the expectations that had been raised by campaigns and communications, and individual failings by others. Some proposed dealing with this problem by promising less, some by communicating more, and others raised commonly-cited solutions to trust in the UK such as electoral reform, devolution, or better citizenship education.

Impact on policy

When asked whether levels of political trust had ever influenced policy decisions, most respondents drew on examples of what they felt were successful initiatives they had been involved with that had secured trust from voters, including New Labour's raising of national insurance (Tempest, 2002),

introducing bans on smoking indoors (Cairney, 2007), blunting the success of the BNP (Copsey, 2012), retaining public confidence after the financial crash, introducing austerity or implementing Covid lockdowns.

When pushed as to whether low levels of political trust had ever led them or their party to duck a decision, interviewees recalled examples such as reforms to party political funding, social care reform and healthcare reform, all of which are long-running unresolved issues. Respondents reported that trust affects different parties' ability to tackle different issues. Multiple Conservatives mentioned their party's lack of trust from voters to tackle healthcare reform, whereas Labour respondents recalled a common fear that voters would not trust them to raise taxes and spend money. In an example of such a view, one interviewee reflected:

> *"When trust goes and the public think that all politicians are the same, that they're all in it for themselves… that belief tends to have worse consequences for the left, because they tend to believe in government, that government is a good thing. So, the more the public lose trust in government and think '*It's all a load of nonsense. They're all in it for themselves*', then you may as well have a government that does as little as possible."*

Low levels of political trust were also seen to impact general strategy rather than isolated decisions or issues. One former Conservative Party adviser offered the example of the strategy of the then Sunak government;

> *"I think the thinking behind those [Sunak's] five promises is absolutely right, which is that we only get a hearing from the public if we show delivery first. And so that is a response to a world of very, very low political trust. If you respond to that and start promising the world, then it ain't gonna change anyone's mind. If you show it through delivery, that is the best and only route to try and turn them around."*

It was widely acknowledged that low trust in incumbent governments created opportunities for opposition parties. Aside from obvious opportunities such as attacking Boris Johnson over trust, one former Conservative adviser recalled the case of the Conservative Party attacking Labour during the 2015 general election campaign for likely having to form a coalition with the SNP. For them, this

warning that parties would ditch their policies in backroom deals was explicitly about trust. Five participants agreed that low trust offered partisan opportunities and this helped to prevent cross-party working on the issue of political trust since in the words of one male Labour politician, “they think they're the answer. You think that it will be alright if you're in power.”

Our respondents did not mention or recall parties monitoring trust levels in British politics generally, but representatives of both main parties revealed that they polled levels of trust in party leaders. Voters’ trust in leaders was perceived as another aspect of how trust affected policy decisions. For example, a former Labour adviser highlighted how Ed Miliband’s proposed energy price cap polled well in isolation, but due to misgivings about his character voters did not trust his ability to deliver it. One Conservative MP, speaking in the context of partygate, highlighted that the main way a party could improve its trust rating from voters was by choosing a leader whom voters trusted.

Sense of legitimacy

When reflecting on why politicians don’t work together more to address concerns around a lack of trust, one veteran politician commented that individuals were only concerned about trust in so far as it affected them personally. Another former politician recalled how parties are concerned with getting enough votes to win and therefore disregard non-voters, rather than putting effort into tackling disengagement.

Three reasons were frequently mentioned when respondents were asked to reflect on why there is less political impetus to tackle the trust challenge. Firstly, that a lack of trust does not adversely affect individuals’ ability to get things done on a day-to-day basis (six mentions). Secondly, a perception that if their party gets into power and performs well, that would increase overall levels of trust (five mentions). Thirdly, individual MPs’ perspectives are influenced by the relatively higher esteem in which they are held by their own constituents (eight mentions).

One former MP starkly pointed out that governments need parliamentary approval but rarely popular trust in order to implement a policy. This also highlights that collectively, there is little reflection in Parliament on the impact individual decisions have on political trust. At a more individual level, politicians highlighted that whether as a Minister, Select Committee Chair or backbencher, trust from fellow Parliamentarians is more important than trust from voters in terms of achieving policy goals. Since low levels of political trust do not affect the ability of individuals in Westminster to get things done, tackling it is less of a priority. Related to this, five respondents highlighted examples of foreign countries where they thought levels of trust were more seriously affecting the practise of government, such as levels of affective polarisation in the USA, the size of far-right populist parties' parliamentary presence across Europe, the perceived lack of debate and policy change in countries like Germany where governments are always coalitions or Presidents in the USA and Brazil being reluctant to cede power.

For some respondents, there was a reluctance to think about ways in which parties could address the issue of lack of trust specifically. Instead, in the words of one male Conservative politician, '*Everything you do implicitly is designed to increase trust in your party. And when you do that, then the general level of political trust goes up as well*'. This summed up a common sentiment that if parties were successful in achieving their office and policy goals by getting elected and then successfully convincing voters that they had kept their promises, trust would increase as a by-product.

Those who had served as MPs tended to highlight the positive reception they received in their constituency, and felt that many good-minded colleagues would pick up on similar sentiments, providing a juxtaposition with their awareness of a lack of trust in politics generally. One male Liberal Democrat politician summed it thus:

> *"As long as people get returned to office, and they return their parliamentary seats, I think what tends to happen is that people distinguish between their own experience as individuals, and the kind of collective sense. Although we have all*

these public discussions about how politicians are despised and have lost faith, a lot of individuals at a constituency level find that they are actually quite liked and respected if they've worked hard and done the right things. The outpouring of good feeling around the two British MPs, one Labour, one Conservative who were assassinated, I think that speaks to a somewhat different perception of politicians."

Another frequently cited reason for inertia was simply that the Westminster model is too institutionalised. Several respondents who did not express a preference for electoral reform highlighted that the adversarial nature of UK politics stunts cross-party collaboration on such issues. One former adviser to Gordon Brown at the time of the expenses scandal, when asked to reflect on why there was not more cross-party collaboration on tackling the issue, commented:

"Whilst everybody had mud flung at them by the expenses scandal - all parties and MPs from all parties - each of them nonetheless could have had in mind the 2010 election because it was going to be a competitive election. So, they each had partisan considerations. And whilst that didn't extend, I don't think, to trying to discredit particular individuals, I think it did extend to a lack of trust in the negotiations. Because of wariness about the forthcoming election, were people using this to position themselves in partisan terms?"

Supplementary analysis

We now turn to our analysis of the text of 154 interviews with Ministers conducted by the IfG and 38 interviews conducted with senior politicians or advisers by UKICE. The focus of both of these sets of interviews were not on trust and there are next to no questions about it. Thus, we do not expect to find many reflections on explanations for levels of political trust. However, this data is appropriate for answering two main questions related to our themes of interest. Firstly, related to recognition – how frequently do interviewees mention political trust? Secondly, related to impact and sense of legitimacy - how does trust matter to their work?

To answer these questions, we searched the texts for mentions of the words 'trust' or 'confidence' and then undertook a thematic analysis of those sections of text to identify the context in which

political elites talk about 'trust' when reflecting on their experiences. The results of this analysis are provided in Appendix III. Firstly, we find that political trust is not a common feature of political elites' recollections in these interviews. There are just six reflections on political trust in the 143 IfG interviews, and four among the 38 UKICE interviews. Within the IfG interviews, most reflections on political trust related to wanting to honour the sense of trust placed in a new government (two mentions), or in a new devolved institution (three mentions). For example, former Labour Cabinet Minister Hazel Blears offered this reflection on New Labour's task after having come into office at the 1997 General Election:

> *"This was a chance, having been out of office for so long, actually to do some stuff and make a difference. And if we didn't step up and do it well, and make sure that it really did make a difference, then in some ways we were betraying the trust of all those people who had said they wanted change." (Hazel Blears)*

On a similar theme, Former First Minister of Wales Carywn Jones spoke about the risks of the public losing faith in the newly-devolved Welsh government during the 2001 'foot and mouth' crisis:

> *"There were two things that I remember thinking: that if this goes wrong you're finished and that's it, you're done in politics, and that this would be a test of devolution. If you can sound credible, and the Assembly as it was then can sound credible, it will mean that that people will have confidence in us and we'll be able to deal with the crisis." (Carwyn Jones)*

Within the UKICE data, the references to political trust were arguments that Brexit had led to a decline in political trust, but from different perspectives – either that voters were mis-sold Brexit or that voters were promised that the referendum result would be respected but Parliament was perceived to be blocking this. These echoed the findings from our own interviews that political elites perceive that political trust is lowered by a mismatch between expectations and delivery. An example of this is offered by former Labour MP Caroline Flint, a critic of her party's post-referendum Brexit position:

> *"Every time there was a vote in Parliament, every time there was another clever little tactic, my email box would be full of people saying 'We know what they're up to, we know what they're doing'. And again, it came back to trust which was being eroded day by day." (Caroline Flint)*

The one deviation from these patterns are the reflections of Nick Hurd on dealing with the aftermath of the Grenfell disaster[1]. While acknowledging the abyss of political trust in the aftermath of such an event, the interview does not go into detailed reflection on how they overcame this.

Our analysis uncovered a further 19 mentions of trust in the UKICE interviews and 122 in the IfG interviews. 14 of these related to 'partisan trust', i.e. voters' trust in the competence of particular parties, party leaders, or as constituency MPs. This reflects that political elites conceive of trust in them from voters related to levels of electoral support. For example, a former adviser to Theresa May commented on the need for May to secure trust from supporters of Brexit:

> *"We were very much in the post-referendum period, and I think we were incredibly conscious that Theresa [May] had campaigned for Remain, and so there was also a trust issue around actually delivering the outcomes that people had voted for." (Joanna Penn)*

Ten mentions of trust, mainly from the IfG interviews, referred to trust from interest groups or key stakeholders. One example of this comes from David Willetts, the former Minister for Universities and Science reflecting on his need for trust from stakeholders when overseeing a comprehensive spending review (CSR) during a period of severe austerity:

> *"I'm not a scientist and I'd not shadowed it for so long – I'd had off and on responsibility for it. I hadn't stuck with it for as long as I had with HE. So [I needed to] gain the confidence of the community when I was not a scientist and that related to the very tricky issue of the CSR and how we handled the CSR."*

[1] On 14 June 2017, seventy-two people lost their lives in the Grenfell Tower fire in west London. Grenfell was a local-authority managed residential building covered in non-compliant combustible cladding.

The remaining references to trust refer to trust between colleagues. This may refer to trust among parliamentary or party colleagues, between devolved institutions and Westminster, or between advisers and Ministers. One example from the UKICE interviews relates to trust between the leadership of the Labour and Conservative Parties when tentatively discussing cross-party working during the Parliamentary impasse over Brexit:

> *"That was part of the problem with Theresa May's position, in that she, to a certain extent, she bore the imprint of the last group that sat upon her. As a result of that, you couldn't really have much confidence in whatever she came up with, or delivering it for that matter." (John McDonnell)*

In the IfG interviews, the concept of trust most commonly related to trust from the Prime Minister in Cabinet colleagues, trust between the Cabinet Minister and Junior Ministers or the need for Ministers to have a mutually trusting relationship with civil servants. For example, former Conservative Minister of State Sayeeda Warsi spoke about how Prime Minister David *Cameron "was known to be quite trusting and would let you get on with things"*.

Cumulatively, analysis of this supplementary data reveal that trust is a concept that matters to Ministers and Parliamentarians on a day-to-day basis, but it is trust between colleagues or from stakeholders such as interest groups rather than trust from voters that matters. There are no references to levels of political trust acting as a constraint, with the exception of the reflections on reacting to the Grenfell disaster. Within the UKICE interviews there were a handful of reflections on how there were incentives to resolve Brexit in a particular way to combat declining political trust. However, there were no reflections on how low levels of political trust may affect long-term policymaking, demonstrating how far from the front of political elites' minds dealing with the challenge of low political trust is.

Conclusions

Given the long-term decline in political trust in the UK and elsewhere, and its potential ramifications for policy-making and support for mainstream parties, the question of how political elites operate with regards to trust is fundamental to many areas in the study of politics and international relations. In particular, how does this environment affect multi-faceted long-term policy challenges like tackling climate change? As such our findings should be relevant to researchers working in many fields seeking to understand the behaviour and motivations of political elites in a time of strain for liberal democracies.

Our research focused on four aspects of dealing with this environment – whether political elites recognised the lack of trust, their explanations for the phenomenon, and their perceptions of its impact on policy-making and their sense of legitimacy. In contrast to Coller et al. (2020), we do find that the overwhelming majority of UK elites from all parties recognise that voters don't have high trust in politicians, but there is some doubt over its significance. This finding is in line with our expectations that politicians would be aware of low trust given their sensitivity to public opinion, but that they may not be particularly concerned given the stability of the UK's political system. The crude challenge posed by one adviser of whether the operation of government would be any different if voters had higher trust exposes a truth that UK political elites are able to go about their daily business and affect political change without high levels of public trust in politicians and political institutions. They merely need a parliamentary majority. Some of the under-perception of the scale of the trust problem may arise as a result of what Fenno (1977) termed the 'paradox of Congressional Support' – that voters like their own representative but have a highly negative perception of politicians in general. Since politicians pick up on this positive local sentiment, this may lead to an under-estimation of the wider problem. However, most interviewees shared a despondence at the lack of trust in UK representatives.

Regarding explanations for the lack of trust, not all interviewees acknowledged the political class' failure to perform according to expectations, although some did cite a lack of responsiveness to voters' preferences or mentioned specific policy failures, and some even raised the lack of calibre of their political rivals. When asked to reflect on solutions however, very few of our sample recommended better performance. Instead, many interviewees identified the need for improved communication from parties to better manage voters' expectations around performance. In other words, if parties offered less to voters they would be more likely to satisfy their expectations. The inherent danger in such a suggestion is that parties' promises do not merely become more realistic, but less ambitious. In an economy with negligible real wage growth in 15 years (Bell and Blanchflower, 2020), productivity stifled by lack of investment (Goodridge et al., 2018), and oncoming climate crisis, this may not be the most ideal solution. For politicians then, it appears that the factors they perceive that drive trust are sustaining positive relationships, communicating effectively and avoiding blame. Trust is about managing the multiple accountabilities they face in an appropriate manner. Maintaining trust with colleagues might in this light be a higher focus of attention than sustaining trust among the public.

On the impact of trust on policy-making, there was some acknowledgement that this made it more difficult to tackle neglected issues, but a greater recognition of the opportunity it provided in the game of party advantage. Whilst it is possible that those we interviewed failed to remember how low political trust dissuaded their parties from undertaking long-term policymaking, the lack of mentions of this point in the IfG interviews - which are generally conducted much sooner after Ministers have served - give us confidence that our methods are not the reason why we observe few instances of political elites identifying the link between political trust and long-term decision-making. Instead, this reflects either a lack of concern about the UK's long-term policymaking or that they attribute other reasons for this failure (Richards et al., 2023).

Most strikingly, despite the broad acknowledgement of low trust from voters, it has seemingly had only a limited impact on politicians' sense of legitimacy. Several of our interviewees had been involved in policies over several decades, and whilst acknowledging the increased cynicism and hostility from voters in general, none reflected that this had adversely affected their motivation. However, none of the politicians we spoke to had voluntarily left politics mid-career, an event that is becoming increasingly common among UK MPs (Butler et al., 2021). It is feasible that there is a link between the lack of trust and this growing trend. MPs have reported quitting in recent Parliaments due to the level of abuse received, particularly on social media (Collignon et al., 2022). However, we did not uncover any evidence of low trust affecting politicians' self-esteem in the IfG or UKICE data, even from the Minister dealing with the traumatic aftermath of the Grenfell disaster.

These results demonstrate the need for future comparative research to explore whether politicians in systems without a constituency link, or where extremist and populist parties have achieved more success, might so easily reconcile themselves to operating with low political trust. In all, our interviews reveal that for politicians, politics is about power and lack of trust appears to be not so much a block as an opportunity and in so far as solutions are required it is about performance and presentation. If lack of trust is undermining democracy, as many commentators claim, then political elites are not likely to be strong champions of tackling that concern given their understanding of the issues, as revealed by our research.

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Appendix I

Script for conducting interviews with UK governing elites on political trust

1. Meaning of political trust

Objective: Meaning of political trust, which objects, which traits/types of performance/criteria to trust come to mind?

Questions:

- **What do you think of the current state of the relationship between politicians and voters?**
- **What is political trust, what does it mean to you, how do you understand it?**

2. Importance of political trust

Objective: To what extent and in what way is trust related to broader issues of legitimacy and democratic system?

Questions:

- **Do you think political trust is important? Why?**
- **Is political trust important for the functioning and legitimacy of democracy? Why?**

3. Perception of trends in political trust

Objective: Do they perceive it to be a theme of importance to others in the system? Is the (unwarranted) decline narrative dominant?

Questions:

- **Are YOU concerned about the state of political trust in this country?**
- **Are MPs concerned about political trust? More than before?**
- **Are levels of trust currently in decline or not? What indicators do you base this on?**
- **Do any events come to mind that have had a significant effect on political trust?**

4. Consequences of political trust - policy

Objective: What are the consequences of trust for public policy? Does a lack of trust or distrust matter for making policy decisions in government? Are there differences between sorts of policy issue, for example short-term crises like the pandemic vs. long-term problems like climate change.

Questions:

- **Can you think of any examples where the level of political trust impacted how you or your party approached an issue?**
- **Does public distrust make it more difficult to govern or campaign on issues? Is it any different for parties in opposition?**
- **Does trust play a role in your party's strategy?**

- **Does the sort of issue matter?**
- **Do politicians or parties ever exploit a lack of trust?**

5. Possible solutions

Objectives: What can be done about the perceived issues with political trust and distrust?

Questions:

- **How would you build trust or reduce distrust, etc.?**
- **Some say a sceptical trusting citizen is an ideal kind of citizen – would you agree? Why?**
- **How does politics need to change in order to increase trust?**

6. Trust in political discourse

Questions:

- **Finally, we want to ask a question about the role that political trust plays in parliamentary debates. We did an analysis on debates in parliament. We found that in the UK MPs only sporadically talk about political trust or public support, substantially less than some other countries, and then it is mainly used as a strategy to discredit opponents. Do you recognise that? Why do you think that is?**
- **How do you evaluate this? Should there be more debate in parliament about political trust, or not?**
- **Do you think MPs are more concerned about trust in them as a constituency MP than about trust in politics more generally?**

Appendix II Codebook and quantitative thematic analysis

Research Question 1: Do political elites recognise that trust is low and declining?

Code	**Mentioned by**
Trust is low, but has not declined	Male Conservative adviser Male Labour adviser Male Conservative politician Male Conservative politician Male Conservative adviser Male Labour adviser

Research Question 2: What are the perceived causes of low political trust and what are the perceived solutions?

Code	**Mentioned by**
Cause: advent of 24 hour news cycle	Male Labour politician Female Labour politician Male Labour politician
Cause: loss of deference from citizens and media	Male Conservative politician Female Conservative adviser Male Liberal Democrat politician
Cause: politicians/ governments prioritising getting the message right over the substance	Male Labour politician Female Labour politician Female Liberal Democrat politician
Cause: governments over-promising and under-delivering	Male Liberal Democrat politician Male Labour politician Male Labour adviser Male Liberal Democrat politician

Cause: Lack of effective communication	Female Labour politician Female Liberal Democrat politician Female Conservative adviser Male Labour politician Female Labour politician Male Labour adviser Male Conservative adviser Male Conservative politician Male Liberal Democrat politician Male Conservative adviser Male Labour politician
Cause: parties U-turning on previous commitments	Male Conservative adviser Male Liberal Democrat politician Female Conservative adviser
Cause: Failure to tackle big decisions	Male Liberal Democrat politician Male Labour adviser Male Labour adviser Male Labour adviser Female Labour politician Male Conservative politician Male Liberal Democrat politician
Cause: governments have less power to affect change	Female Labour politician Male Labour politician Male Labour adviser Male Liberal Democrat politician
Cause: Recent governments have performed poorly	Male Labour politician Male Liberal Democrat politician Male Conservative adviser Female Conservative adviser
Cause: the cast of politicians in office recently have been poor	Male Conservative adviser Female Labour politician Male Liberal Democrat politician Male Conservative politician

	Female Liberal Democrat politician Male Labour adviser
Solution: governments should only make more realistic promises	Male Labour adviser Male Liberal Democrat politician Male Labour politician Female Labour politician Male Labour politician Male Conservative adviser Male Conservative politician
Solution: respond more to the public's preferences	Male Labour adviser Male Labour politician
Solution: don't respond more to the public's preferences	Male Conservative adviser Female Labour politician Male Conservative adviser
Solution: respond to the issues the public deem important	Male Labour politician Male Labour politician Female Labour politician Male Labour politician
Solution: politicians should be free to express themselves away from party lines	Female Liberal Democrat politician Female Labour politician Female Conservative adviser Male Liberal Democrat politician
Solution: change electoral system	Female Liberal Democrat politician Male Liberal Democrat politician
Solution: greater descriptive representation	Female Conservative adviser Female Liberal Democrat politician Female Labour politician
Solution: prioritise country over party	Female Conservative adviser Male Labour politician
Solution: more devolution from Westminster	Male Labour politician Male Labour adviser Female Labour politician Male Labour politician

	Female Labour politician Male Labour adviser Female Liberal Democrat politician

Research Question 3: How does low trust affect political action?

Successful initiatives that secured trust	Male Labour politician Male Labour politician Female Liberal Democrat politician Male Labour politician Male Liberal Democrat politician Male Labour adviser Female Conservative adviser Male Conservative politician Male Conservative adviser
Caused them or their party to duck a difficult decision	Male Conservative adviser Male Labour adviser Male Liberal Democrat politician
Affects parties' ability to enact reforms on particular issues where they aren't trusted	Male Conservative politician Female Conservative adviser
The most necessary trust currency is citizens' trust in a party's leadership	Male Conservative adviser Male Liberal Democrat politician Male Labour politician Male Conservative politician Male Labour adviser
Low trust provides opportunities for opposition parties	Male Labour adviser Male Labour politician Female Liberal Democrat politician Female Conservative adviser Male Conservative adviser

Research Question 4: How does low trust affect politicians' sense of legitimacy?

Low trust doesn't affect day-to-day behaviour	Male Labour politician Male Liberal Democrat politician Female Labour politician Male Labour politician Male Liberal Democrat politician Male Labour adviser
UK adversarial system incentives parties to seek partisan advantage over cross-party solutions	Male Labour adviser Male Labour adviser Male Labour adviser Male Conservative politician Female Liberal Democrat politician Male Liberal Democrat politician
Political elites believe that they can solve it by winning office and delivering on their plans	Male Conservative politician Male Labour politician Female Labour politician Male Labour adviser Male Labour politician
General low trust offset by high trust from constituents in individual MPs	Male Liberal Democrat politician Female Liberal Democrat politician Female Labour politician Male Conservative politician Male Conservative politician Male Labour politician Female Labour politician Male Liberal Democrat politician
Other countries have worse political crises	Male Liberal Democrat politician Female Conservative adviser Male Conservative politician Male Conservative politician Male Conservative adviser

Appendix III

Mentions of 'trust' or 'confidence' within 'Ministers Reflect' interviews conducted by the Institute for Government up to August 2023

Public trust

i. This was a chance, having been out of office for so long, actually to do some stuff and make a difference. And if we didn't step up and do it well, and make sure that it really did make a difference, then in some ways we were betraying the **trust** of all those people who had said they wanted change. So I think there was joy but there was also a sense of responsibility around all of that. (Hazel Blears)

ii. I was asked to chair the emergency services committee and then Theresa asked me to be the minister for Grenfell victims, which is a unique role. Well not quite unique. Tessa Jowell [Labour culture secretary 2001-07] did something similar after 7/7 [the terrorist bombings in London on 7 July 2005]. In terms of experience in government, that's not normal. It was undoubtedly the most challenging experience of my ministerial time just because the context was literally traumatic and having to manage a lot of trauma around me and near me and with no training for it at all. Just a really, really demanding situation where you had to try and start a process of trying to build some **trust** where there was none. How could there be? There was zero trust. Again, it was unlike anything, anything that I'd done before. (Nick Hurd)

iii. It was hugely important to have somebody, particularly in the early days, holding a press conference every day, because there were so many rumours going around that it had appeared here, there and everywhere. It was massively important that people felt that there was a source of information that could be trusted, and I had to make sure it was us. So I would front the press conference every day. At the start I was almost trying to answer the veterinary questions as well, until it was pointed out to me that perhaps the vet might be a better person to answer those questions. But it established, I think, an air of competence, but also of **trust**, that would have been lost had we not done that in the first few days. (Carwyn Jones on foot & mouth)

iv. I was 33 when it arrived, and there were two things that I remember thinking: that if this goes wrong you're finished and that's it, you're done in politics, and that this would be a test of devolution. If you can sound credible, and the Assembly as it was then can sound credible, it will mean that that people will have **confidence** in us and we'll be able to deal with the crisis. (Carwyn Jones on foot & mouth)

v. I suppose, going full circle back to November 2001, when I took the view that one, I had to step up to the plate and be First Minister, but secondly, that I had to sort out what at that point was the declining **confidence** in devolution and go for stability before we went onto progress. (Jack McConnell)

vi. There was much to repair from that loss of **confidence** and authority in government that had taken place between '97 and 2010. I think, in a way, the Coalition Government helped to do that: the mere process of going to the public and saying 'Here are two parties that fought each other at the election but for the good of the country we've come together.' (Alistair Burt)

Trust in parties/ individuals

vii. Donald Dewar was the ideal first minister, because people knew of him as a sort of eccentric, but they **trusted** him. (Helen Liddell)

viii. I think the Scottish government were keen to push the envelope after that, in terms of things that they wanted included in the Scotland Act 2012. Generally, their position was we don't support this because it's not independence, but we'll take it anyway. My recollection is, after the 2011 election, there was a list of additional demands that were presented. And we, I think, held the line on that, to say our commitment is the Calman Commission. I think there were one or two issues that were added in with agreement, but generally they had been dealt with separately anyway. But we held the line. I think there was still something on spirits duty, there was a range of new issues that came forward from the Scottish government, and we didn't accept those. Clearly there was also an increased imperative to complete the legislative process and demonstrate that we could be **trusted** to deliver on a promise of further devolution. (David Mundell)

ix. Although I suppose the key thing, you know, what's different from if you're running a company or something, is that media does matter. How you project yourself, the fact you've got to exude **confidence**. We got into real trouble over Northern Rock, because it looked like we'd lost control, 'the runaway bank' and so on, whereas we didn't have that problem a year later. (Alistair Darling)

Trust from interest groups

x. I tried to build up **confidence** between the teaching profession and myself. So my aim was to get to the stage where I could give them the difficult messages because they knew that I understood the job they did. (Estelle Morris)

xi. I've worked with small businesses, I've worked in large businesses. I spoke the language if you want to put it that bluntly… it meant that I was immediately at ease when I was talking to businesses, and the more I was in the department the more I was able to influence how the messages were received and create a strategy. So, for me, it was very clear. It also meant that there was a sense of **trust** from businesses to spend their time with government because there were people there who understood the issues (Baroness Fairhead)

xii. Having run a small business, I had instant **credibility** with the business community, and we took the business community extremely seriously. (Margot James)

xiii. I had NHS England, primary care, they're all part of cancer. But then the cancer charities sat aside to that and I felt that they should be central to Team Cancer, they have the patient voice and I wanted them to be at the heart of the policy making. I had cancer round tables two or three times a year when we would share things with them, and the way I said it to them is: "Look, if I share things with you, if you run out of the room and say them publicly, then I'm not going to share them with you next time. But equally, if I can **trust** you with things and you can help us with policy development, then that's to your benefit and to mine." (Steve Brine)

xiv. I suppose that I am quite proud of the fact that I helped to increase **confidence** in the MoJ. My predecessor had had a very tough time and there was general disillusionment amongst the lawyers and others about the MoJ, the cuts, whether or not they were properly focused on access to justice and so forth. (Lord Faulks)

xv. For example, in the banks the most obvious one was they had to be recapitalised. Unless we got through that and had a plan and, critically, executed the plan in terms of the announcement and appearing **confident** and so on, the rest of it would just fall away. (Alistair Darling)

xvi. That is undoubtedly one of the reasons why the financial markets **trusted** our deficit reduction programme – because when you are cutting deficits, what can you do? You can raise taxes, you can cut programmes and services and you can cut your overhead costs. What we were doing was entirely about the third of those, because if too much of the burden of what you are doing falls on the first two, then actually what the financial markets will do is they will think that you are going to suffer real political push-back. (Francis Maude)

xvii. Well, neither universities nor science are bad things where Britain is notoriously weak. So fundamentally your job is to be the servant of a community, which has got lots of prior expertise greater than yours, is going to be around long after you've gone, but you can push it in certain directions to do that. They've got to **trust** that you're fundamentally on their side. And you are more likely to get change if it comes from an honest friend rather than they think someone is parachuted in to get headlines for two years by beating up on them and then moving on. So you need to communicate from early on that you're a servant of the community. (David Willetts)

xviii. I'm not a scientist and I'd not shadowed it for so long – I'd had off and on responsibility for it. I hadn't stuck with it for as long as I had with HE. So [I needed to] gain the **confidence** of the community when I was not a scientist and that related to the very tricky issue of the CSR [Comprehensive Spending Review] and how we handled the CSR. (David Willetts)

Trust between politicians/ political institutions

xix. ***One of the key things that you worked on during that time was the review of intergovernmental relations. What was it like working with colleagues in the Scottish government, the Welsh government, and – when it was established – the Northern Ireland executive? And how did external affairs and the context at the time, including Brexit, have an impact on your ability to make progress on the review?***
I left the role before it came to a conclusion, so I am only able to answer your question in terms of the time that I was there. But it was absolutely challenging, no doubt about that, including some people using those meetings for a bit of posturing. In the end, it was all a very good illustration of how power works. The truth is, in these years that we are talking about, you had a demonstration of power, or lack of power, in terms of

parliamentary **confidence**, in terms of parliamentary majority, in terms of who could get things done, in terms of who could be trusted to do things. (Chloe Smith)

xx. Running CCHQ was like running a small department, so you have the ability to just get on and do things. We had a really good team, and the PM was brilliant in that she just **trusted** us to do our job – I had a really good relationship with Theresa. (Brandon Lewis)

xxi. Because I'd been a press secretary to David Cameron, I think they **trusted** me to not leak anything. (George Eustice)

xxii. So having the **confidence** of your boss and knowing that he has, when inevitably Number 10 say, "Why are we not doing, can we not do any [better]," whatever it might be, saying "Well, actually no, I genuinely think this is where it should land." And that is what allows you to get the maximum amount of money out of Treasury, which is what we did. (Matt Warman)

xxiii. Literally, having to deal with the same senior civil servants, there was an instant degree of **trust** and all of that, which isn't to say they wouldn't have **trusted** other ministers, but you just don't have that relationship. (Matt Warman)

xxiv. I think the way we set things up in 2020 worked really well. It's a bit like what was done for Kate Bingham's vaccine taskforce in a totally different environment: where you set up an ad hoc group of people with a mix of experts, and, in our case, civil servants we knew and **trusted** and SpAds (special advisers), all part of the team. (Lord Frost)

xxv. Make sure you've got a private office you completely **trust**, obviously. Get as many SpAds as you can and make sure they're really good. (Lord Frost)

xxvi. That's what she did very successfully. It's so important for a chief whip to be unconditionally **trusted** by a prime minster or a party leader for any of that to work. (Jim Murphy)

xxvii. I never had a separate meeting with Conservatives, and I thought that was important to build a degree of **trust**… You needed to ensure that **trust** existed. You needed to ensure that it wouldn't be possible for anybody to play games inside the department. (Eric Pickles)

xxviii. I did expect us to show something, some commitment to veterans of Northern Ireland. I was very clear with him – the veterans agenda was a joke; I was embarrassed to be his minister leading it, and I couldn't **trust** anything anyone told me – including people in his team. (Johnny Mercer)

xxix. Chris [Woodhead] has a lot to offer. Educationally, he has a lot to offer, I just personally found it difficult to work with. And you couldn't **trust** what he was going to say. I think that was the real problem. (Estelle Morris)

xxx. There was also a process of **trust**. I felt that I was dealing with somebody who, if he gave you his word, then that was trustworthy, and I'd like to think that he felt the same. So it was just a question then of focusing on what those priorities would be, and what we would want in return. (Kirsty Williams on coalition negotiations)

xxxi. The first minister had a huge amount of belief in me, more belief in me than I think I had, and assured me that I was ready and that I was well suited to the role. The **confidence** that he had in me carried me through those early stages of self-doubt. (Ken Skates)

xxxii. I really worked that bill, and I really built a relationship where we would push to get to the best result we could on any particular element. Given the political context and given both sides weren't going to agree on all things. But equally, I was doing trade, and most people don't object to trade. But there were some really gnarly bits to get through, and it really is about building those **trusted** relationships. (Baroness Fairhead)

xxxiii. If you're working with someone, it requires quite a high level of **confidence** at secretary of state level. (Nick Hurd)

xxxiv. In that scenario, I felt more **confident** in allowing myself to be more dependent on the officials in that role. Partly because I had come to understand how government worked and partly because I had a very, very pressing top priority in the area of data protection, which I wasn't anticipating at all, and in which I had very little knowledge or interest, to be quite honest. (Margot James)

xxxv. I was made his PPS out of the blue, to me. I did a year with him and got to know him. Having that relationship was critical to my **confidence** to be able to go and see him and try and successfully persuade him to back offshore wind. (Amber Rudd on George Osborne)

xxxvi. she had reappointed me as attorney general [after the 2017 general election], which was very gratifying. She didn't have to do that. She had plenty of other people she could have appointed and it's quite usual, as we've discovered, for there to be a bit of a clear-out. And this job, in particular, you should have someone who you **trust**. (Jeremy Wright)

xxxvii. On the Conservative side, we weren't sure that our Liberal Democratic colleagues were always going to show up for the tough stuff. The things that they had always said they didn't like, but which they'd agreed, grudgingly or otherwise, to accept as part of the coalition package. And day after day, week after week, as they did so, did show up, did vote, held their noses, went through the lobbies with us, we became more and more **confident** that this was going to work. (Jeremy Wright)

xxxviii. ***You mentioned that you were in post at the Ministry of Justice for a relatively long time – how did that longevity help you to get things done?*** **SG:** You get to know the team, you build **trust**, get a certain **trust** in the team. (Sam Gyimah)

xxxix. There were certain times where we demand meetings and sitting in a room to speak and get that. I think it would be fair to say our experience of her, and I think the other side would have made the same point, was that it's very hard to really know where she was. I think, particularly as we got through February and March last year, there were decisions that we made that perhaps if we had just been more confident as to where she was going to end up, there were things that I and others did that maybe we wouldn't have done if we'd been fully **confident** in which direction she was going to jump. (David Gauke)

xl. I'd worked with George [Osborne, chancellor of the exchequer 2010–16] for three years on the frontbench together, I knew where he stood on these issues, that he shared those objectives and wanted me to get on and do that and, thankfully, I think he had quite a lot of **trust** in me. (David Gauke)

xli. We ended up with someone who was trying to convince Tories that he could be **trusted** doing this vital role of chief secretary to the Treasury. (Norman Lamb)

xlii. And you kept that cities role as well when you moved on to the Cabinet Office? GC: From the Cabinet Office and then to what was then BIS [Department for Business, Innovation and Skills], I kept it with me, I think partly because… 100 years of centralisation and

you're making some progress… perhaps I'm not sufficiently **trusting** of my colleagues, but I didn't want it to get lost on the way. (Greg Clark)

xliii. Eric [Pickles, then secretary of state] at the communities department is a first-class administrator, he ran the department in a very impressive and efficient way, and I learnt a lot from the way that he conducted the administration of the department. But part of that was that he **trusted** me to do my stuff, he was briefed as to what I was doing, but didn't want to meddle at all. (Greg Clark)

xliv. And my point about the deputy, it's not just the title but it's the degree of **trust** that needs to be there and there needs to be a seamless partnership between whoever heads the Cabinet Office and the prime minister and his or her team. (David Lidington)

xlv. So I went and had 35 minutes with him, in Number 10 and what he said to me was that he was genuine about getting a deal [with the EU] and also, this meant a lot to me, he said he had had looked at what the detail of no deal would mean and was very clear – he perhaps differed from me, saying it still needed to be there, in the locker – but it was not something that anyone, any sensible prime minister would choose to go down as their preference. And he said: "look, I want you to **trust** me until the European Council [in October 2019], to see if I can get this deal." And when the prime minister looks you in the eye and says, "look, I'm a new prime minister struggling to get this one through," I think you say, "okay, I will give you the benefit of the doubt". (David Lidington)

xlvi. First, understand your private office. **Trust** your private secretary or if you can't, you don't think they are up to the job, talk to the permanent secretary about getting somebody else in. You will see more of your private secretary than you will of your wife or husband. (David Lidington)

xlvii. I built up that **trust** with my civil servants, often with very junior civil servants who were astonished to be coming to a meeting with the secretary of state every single week. (Jeremy Hunt)

xlviii. I saw Simon Stevens [NHS England chief executive] every Monday and we would sit around and have an NHS operational meeting, and we didn't ever really spend any time talking about what… who's constitutionally responsible. You know, I was like the chairman of the board and we talked about operational pressures and the best way to resolve them. That way I was fully briefed for what was going on in parliament. I hope he felt that he always got the political support that he needed. So, we broke down barriers by ignoring the constitutional divisions between us and meeting each other every week. And I think that meant that we developed **trust** and an effective working relationship. (Jeremy Hunt)

xlix. I sort of talked to her about what are the things that she'd done that I was really proud of and what were the things that she'd said that I disagreed with, as a way of trying to find out what she really thought about some of these things, and so I could understand her properly. And I put a lot of weight on that first conversation. I think it was really important for building a relationship, between the two of us because the person has to **trust** you and to be able to share with you privately, when it's just the two of you in the room, what they're thinking, fearing, hoping for whatever, and you've got to have that kind of close relationship. (Gavin Barwell)

l. In my life before Parliament, I'd always had really good relationships with chief executives that I'd worked for; they'd admired and respected the advice that I was giving. I think that's the same sort of relationship you have with the secretary of state,

you have to be absolutely on your portfolio, so that they know and respect and **trust** you in your policy decisions. (Tracey Crouch)

li. Richard Good was actually the acting general secretary of the Alliance Party when I was first elected to the Assembly in 1998. He did various other things, he was at the time of my election working as head of the Speaker's office in the Assembly, having been selected by the all-party commission for that post, so he knew the way the Assembly worked, and he knew the Alliance Party. I'd known him since his mother was holding him like [a baby], so we had complete **confidence** in each other. In fact, just last week I was speaking to a senior civil servant who said: "We knew if we went to Richard, we would get straight answers and that would be what you would say if we came back with a formal proposal a month later." (David Ford)

lii. I was very lucky in that I'd worked with Jeremy for 10 years in one way or another and so he totally **trusted** me, and I **trusted** him. It just meant that if I wanted something, the civil service knew that Jeremy would support me getting it or finding it. (Lord O'Shaugnessy)

liii. "The thing is, when you stand up as a Lords minister, you have to remember that the person who is asking the question has probably written a book on the topic!" So, it's quite important to engage with them up front and make sure that you have established the **trust**. (Lord O'Shaugnessy)

liv. *What do you think makes an effective secretary of state?* One who gets out of my hair, basically! And lets me get on with it. One with whom you can develop a relationship of **trust**, so that they know that you know what you're doing, understand where you're trying to go with your brief and let you get on with it. (Jo Johnson)

lv. Matt [Hancock] was, and is, so brilliant, so bright, he basically said: "Look, you know more about this department right now than me, so I **trust** you. Tell me what are the big things on your desk." (Steve Brine)

lvi. People were prepared to accept her as a Lib Dem in government. And she was prepared to come into government, because she said: "Look, you know, we've known each other since '99, we were there from the start." I think she felt she could **trust** me not to stitch her up in some way, which has never happened. (Carwyn Jones)

lvii. *So you weren't involved in the wider coalition negotiations, but did you draw any lessons from the parts of the process that you did see about what works well in forming a coalition?* I think that there needs be trust at the senior levels. Rhodri has now written a bit about this in his posthumous autobiography [Rhodri: A Political Life in Wales and Westminster (2017)]. There needs to be people who can maintain that **trust** and move forward on it. (Leighton Andrews)

lviii. The senior staff meetings were critical, very important, to say what you wanted to achieve, a general 'brains **trust**'. I think I also created a general **trust**. (Kenny MacAskill on working with civil servants)

lix. We forged some reasonable working relationships with most ministers but there were always issues of **trust**. I guess it was a kind of functional relationship. (Shona Robinson)

lx. I think that background is important in the lead up to 2007, because what had happened was the opposition parties had started to work together and **trusted** each other. (Iuean Wyn Jones)

lxi. Plus, to be brutally honest, I was also a key ally of Jack and if you're going to put somebody in charge of the money, and therefore the political priorities, then you put somebody in charge that you can **trust** and that you have a relationship with. (Andy Kerr)

lxii. I probably wasn't as cautious with the need to get coalition agreement on the education policies as I would have been on finance and I was as First Minister. I think that was partly because I had built a good relationship with the Liberal Democrat leadership as Finance Minister; I knew they **trusted** me. And I had a Liberal Democrat deputy. (Jack McConnell)

lxiii. So although one or two members of the group were quite challenging to me when I took over, there were other members who could have been challenging who were quite sympathetic to me, as a person they felt they could **trust**. And in a coalition **trust** is 99% of the story. (Jack McConnell)

lxiv. I suppose the key challenge of that period was moving from the first few months – which had to be about stability, about getting the ship back under control and getting a bit more professionalism around, raising people's morale and their **confidence** in the system – moving from that to making sure that there were both some achievements and some signals of direction that would help prepare for the 2003 election, which was going to be the first test in terms of public opinion. (Jack McConnell on civil servants)

lxv. John wanted to know everything and see everything, he checked your homework. Whenever you went to him with a policy, he went through it all over again with the civil servants, when you'd already been through it with the civil servants. Ken was much more trusting. They were both good bosses, but Ken delegated much more (Michael Fallon on working with different Secretaries of State)

lxvi. I know that the press had a bit about people jumping on and off planes to go around Europe. But there's nothing like sitting across a table and talking to somebody, getting a point across. You can do all you like, by video, all you like by email. The only way you get trust is by looking at somebody and being with them rather than just having a phone call where you know it's probably being listened to. (Baroness Anelay on negotiating with the EU)

lxvii. David Cameron had a reputation for letting his Secretaries of State get on with things. PM: Yes, that is certainly true in certain areas. Although they would want to know everything that was going on and they would sometimes say, "Hey, we don't like this speech," or whatever, but usually that was all sorted out before it came up to me. Once he trusted them, he did let them get on with it. (Patrick McLoughlin)

lxviii. On a more practical issue, I was presented with, "Here is your Private Secretary, here is your Diary Secretary." I was probably a bit naughty because I said, "Actually, this is the person I want to come in as my Private Secretary, and we need to deal with this early on so that the person who's currently allocated to me doesn't think it's a personal slight to them", as it was not. I just felt that we were going to be dealing with very sensitive issues, and I wanted to work with somebody I had already built up a relationship with and had complete trust in. (Lord Dunlop)

lxix. When I got into difficulty with the lone parent benefit cut in the past, before we had been in government, my main soulmates for talking about problems were Tony [Blair] and Gordon [Brown]. Well, Tony was the Prime Minister now and Gordon was the Chancellor, and the idea of saying "I've got really stuck with this one" was impossible. No

doubt Gordon would have advanced his cuts by an extra few billion, seeing my fragility and weakness, and Tony would have brought forward the moment I was sacked. Having a group that is knowledgeable and informed, who you can talk to about what is going on, would have helped. You have to command the confidence and sustain the confidence of your department. (Harriet Harman)

lxx. David gave people quite a wide bandwidth within which to operate. He was known to be quite trusting and would let you get on with things. (Sayeeda Warsi)

lxxi. I had a great Private Secretary, she was really good and we had a very frank way with each other, I'd trust her advice. (Lord O'Neill)

lxxii. David Laws was there and Edward Timpson who both knew their briefs incredibly well, they were great. Although that's good and it's bad as it means you wonder 'Do they know more than you?', and sometimes they are taking decisions where you're thinking 'Well I probably should be more aware of what's going on'. Actually we had a good ministerial team so we trusted each other, so that wasn't really an issue. (Nicky Morgan)

lxxiii. Departmental civil servants in my experience don't really pay any attention to anyone except the secretary of state. They are totally, focused on the secretary of state and in fact legally speaking, I suppose the rest of the ministers don't exist. If there's a junior minister that matters, the junior minister matters because the junior minister has the confidence of the secretary of state. (Oliver Letwin)

lxxiv. I suppose it was partly because when you first arrive in government, you tend to be quite suspicious of the advice civil servants are giving you. It took me a while to get to know the civil servants and to get a better understanding of their outlook on life and get to a point where I trusted their judgement in a way that I had not previously. (Theresa Villiers)

lxxv. I had a great deal of confidence in my Secretary of State, Justine Greening, and her judgement. I was not at any stage desiring to change the direction set by her and the PM. (Desmond Swayne)

lxxvi. One of the things I really benefited from at the Wales Office was having a quite clear understanding of where David Cameron was coming from in terms of his general approach to devolution issues. You know, there were a few fixed principles and then in the meantime he just wanted the secretaries of state for the territories to get on and do the job, with quite a lot of latitude and quite a lot of trust towards us, really. (Stephen Crabb)

lxxvii. He was very aware that relations between the DWP and the Treasury had hit rock bottom. You know, he wanted me to do a job of working much more closely with George Osborne and getting the officials to trust each other and the department and the spads as well. (Stephen Crabb)

lxxviii. And if you've got good talented people running these organisations, you're mad if you don't give them space, because they will know more about running museums or the Arts Council or the lottery regulator than you do. It's different though, when you have somebody who you have less confidence in, because you can't let them get on with it,

secure in the knowledge that they're going to succeed brilliantly and the government will look good as a result. (John Penrose)

lxxix. I was responsible for delivering half of the referendum bill, I had to work with David Lidington [Foreign Office minister] and between the two of us come up with something that was going to be acceptable, to make sure we could actually get the thing through Parliament. That meant we had to square people who were potentially rebels and could endanger the majority, and Number 10 as well. So that was a complicated piece of legislation, where David Liddington and I had to be seen to be trying to create a level playing field for the poll. There were plenty of people who were hugely concerned and potentially distrustful on both sides so we had to make sure they weren't being unfairly disadvantaged. (John Penrose)

lxxx. Political teams are usually made up of people who aren't natural team players. They work well up to a point, but you need to be aware that just sometimes someone will behave egregiously badly and trust is something which is hard to acquire. You will know who you can trust and you will know who you can't. (John Penrose)

lxxxi. I thought there was an opportunity there to forge a cross-party consensus. That turned out to be harder than I had hoped, because there is quite a large degree of mistrust over voter registration, because the Labour party thinks that low rates of registration benefit the Conservatives. It took a while to persuade them that I was actually quite genuine about this and that I wanted to do something about it… Even though the Boundary Commission is at arms-length, and would shriek loudly if any serving minister tried to interfere, nonetheless suspicions persist. So establishing trust turned out to be a slower business, although I had reasonably good relations across the House. (John Penrose)

lxxxii. Do you have any examples of how you used your special advisers? So what it was that you were getting from them that you couldn't get through the traditional civil service machine? AJ: Any specific examples? One might come to me… But I mean, basically they're the only people in that office that you've appointed. They're your personal appointments and therefore you've got a closeness to them and a faith in them, a confidence in them that is crucial in this cold, harsh world that you're dealing with. You trust them. So they're giving you not just the continuity when you're changing departments, they give you that trust that they will tell you things absolutely straight forwardly. (Alan Johnson)

lxxxiii. You have to get on with your Principal Private Secretary, you have to have faith and confidence in them. (Alan Johnson)

lxxxiv. I think generally cooperation between different government departments is quite difficult and I think that's why they keep on reorganising governments – because some issue it becomes clear is not being well-handled between the different departments, so they reorganise the departments to handle that particular issue well and then it turns out there were other issues that you then split up and it's much harder. I think if you have a committed group of ministers with a clear brief then you can do it, I think. Clear brief, good civil servants, everyone agrees what the shared task is. The different ministers willing to trust each other, then you can do it. (Stephen Timms)

lxxxv. I was very fortunate that my private office staff and my departments always had very good relationships with my special advisers, who I think managed the relationships very

well, were very trusted and people understood that if my special adviser said something it was like me saying it, basically. (Ben Bradshaw)

lxxxvi. The challenge in a department like the Home Office is that very rarely did the facts that you were originally presented with turn out to be true. So very often you would find the facts changing several times over the course of three or four days and that was very difficult to deal with at the Home Office, but, you know, all you can do is just try and get the facts on the table as fast as possible.

Did you change your approach, noticing that after you'd been there for a while?

Yeah, you were just a bit more careful. You learnt who to trust. (Liam Byrne)

lxxxvii. Tessa Jowell: what made the Olympics the success it was, was the consistency, continuity and trust of the relationships between the key players and that would have been destabilised if I'd gone off to another job

lxxxviii. Tessa Jowell: both of my first SpAds were people who knew me very well. The department trusted them to speak as me.

lxxxix. Tessa Jowell: I think I was greatly fortified in DCMS, again, because I understood so much more about how the Civil Service worked. They have confidence in you if they know that you will stand up for them and not blame them.

xc. Margaret Beckett: One is you have to try and build relationships of trust with people with whom for whatever reason you have to work. It won't work with everybody, but that's what you have to try and do. Or you can surround yourself with people you already trust.

xci. Iain Duncan Smith: We're very good friends and there was a high degree of trust between us. We didn't have any problem about sorting out different coalition priorities. He was very good about times when he said 'I'm going to be unable to help you on that one because our position is going to be quite different.

xcii. Ed Balls: Well, I think my advice to a new minister would be that the relationships you have with the permanent secretary and your most senior officials are hugely important and establishing a relationship of openness and trust and honesty and collective purpose

xciii. Jacqui Smith: Develop the relationships with the key civil servants that will deliver the policy priorities that are most important to you and get a sort of feeling of trust and understanding between you about what you want to do.

xciv. Francis Maude: For most of the time, I just had Nick Hurd, who was totally brilliant, who did four years until he was quite unconscionably dropped. I am so happy he has been brought back, albeit into a different job. So there was a high degree of continuity and Nick had worked with the sector and knew his subject absolutely inside out. I totally trusted him, so that was fantastic.

xcv. David Hanson: Talking of secretaries of state, how did you establish good working relationships with them? You must have had a few different people… DH: Well, actually, it worked all right on all of them… who did I have? I had Paul Murphy in the

Wales Office, who I knew because it was a Welsh thing and he was fine. Paul was quite relaxed in the sense he was much slower to temper than the others. I had Peter Hain in Northern Ireland. And Peter was great, because Peter just said, 'Get on with it' because he had enough to be getting on with. He'd say, 'Get on with it'. He'd trust my judgement.

xcvi. Jack Straw: I remember one morning I was on the Today programme, we had an ISDN box at home, so I'd been getting keyed up to do this at ten past eight and Tony would come on the phone at ten to eight to take me through my lines! I used to have to say to him, 'Tony you just have to trust me', because it would just raise the blood pressure.

xcvii. Jack Straw: In the Home Office, I mean, bear in mind at that stage my relationship with Tony was very close, he had every reason to trust me and vice-versa. I was doing the job that he was primed for. He'd approved of my approach to this, so he trusted my judgement on it. With some exceptions, basically he left me to get on with it and I made sure I did.

xcviii. Jack Straw: In the Home Office [there was] a colleague, George Howarth MP, who worked for me for two years. He was and is a very close personal pal, so I just gave him a whole [area of responsibility], he was a parly sec [Parliamentary Under-Secretary] but he likes horse racing so I gave him all the stuff that went off to the DCMS [Department for Culture, Media and Sport] and a lot of other stuff and just said 'Get on with it, come and see me if you ever need a steer'. He had a great time. Similarly with Mike O'Brien on other areas, I tried to give them stuff and say to them that I trusted them about whether they came to me. Sometimes, in the Ministry of Justice, it was a bit tricky.

xcix. Jim Knight: But working out how the Civil Service worked and how to manage the throughput of work, how to get the confidence in the chamber, particularly when mostly I was answering on things I wasn't responsible for. That just took a fair amount of operating outside your comfort zone and getting used to it.

c. Ken Clarke: So I involved the ministers as much as possible in policy making, particularly I did have some that were just trusted, they were on my wavelength. I'd try out ideas on them and then they would help me deliver and help me do a lot of the public argument, because I was usually in the middle of controversial rows or strikes or whatever it happened to be [in] most of my departments, which was typical of the '80s and true of the '90s a bit.

ci. David Laws: It required working across the Coalition, including with Michael's special advisers to make them confident in what we were doing, particularly as some of that meant focusing more on progress rather than raw attainment

cii. *How did you build up networks to get that influence?*

A bit of trial and error. And yes, you tended to learn from your mistakes. A lot of it was personal. I used every opportunity at Cabinet to capture a ministerial colleague. I became a real supporter of the old-fashioned way of voting in the House of Commons, because I spent my years in opposition thinking it was a great way when votes are on to catch a minister that you would never get past the private office to meet. I once helped Des Browne avoid a massive disaster with veteran's medals in Scotland on account of that. But I realised then as a minister, actually it was one of the best ways to catch up with harder to reach colleagues: you were free of absolutely every other barrier like

PPSs! [Principal Private Secretaries] In fact, I guess the Chancellor and the Home Secretary and others hated it, because other ministers could nobble them. But that was the way you did it and you built up a personal relationship, you built up trust. (Michael Moore)

ciii. Susan Kramer: I'm sure there's a difference. I mean, first of all, the coalition, like any government, didn't have a majority in the Lords. So in the Commons, they could assume that legislation would go through; government could win every vote. Whereas I would have to take people with me and I've got to take people with me across parties. And on the issue that most exercised people, which was HS2, the project was clearly going to have to survive many different administrations if it was going to be a successful project. So that means you've got to build cross-party consensus.

Then of course many of those opposed to HS2 were in Conservative constituencies and that was reflected in the Lords. A lot of their concerns were fanned by the hyperbole of the anti-HS2 groups. So it was really important to make sure that I was building trust and was in conversation with them. I do think it is important to do that kind of work in the Lords and it was much easier that I was actually a minister in the department rather than being a Whip which, in transport, must be pure hell, frankly.

civ. Gregory Barker: We tried to have a specialist adviser and it ended in tears, partly because the department didn't like the fact that the person actually was an expert and was able to challenge independently some of the advice that I was getting. But it would be much, much better if I had somebody who was reporting to me, that I had trust in, that understood my mind-set, that had technical knowledge that I didn't have and was capable of going into more detail in a way that I wouldn't be able to as a second set of eyes.

cv. Gregory Barker: I did make an effort to spend time in the Chamber and also keep my political antennae alive by being part of dining clubs or policy groups, particularly with the new intake of MPs and spend time with the team and things. And that sort of informal networking, which can sound like sloping off, actually was extremely valuable because if you lose the confidence of your colleagues, even simply fail to explain what you are doing

cvi. Gregory Barker: I think there are different ways of working. I think that's part of the problem. Some people do like everything on paper. Some people relish very thick documents. I like things in very sharp summaries and salient points. I like to be able to thrash things out with people so that's, to a degree, a matter of personal choice. It's whether or not you can gain the confidence of the officials that you work with and work effectively with them, getting the best out of them as well as getting the best for you and making them feel valued and engaged and part of the process.

cvii. Jonathan Djanogly: I think I'd been with him for three years by the time we went into government. And I was the only shadow minister actually from his business team that came over with him to [the Ministry of] Justice. So I think there's a trust element there that worked well. And obviously, he knew me, [and] I knew him.

cviii. Paul Burstow: But I suppose the most important thing I draw from all of that was the importance of really good relationships. I don't think in the Lords the legislation would

have gone through were it not for the effective work of Freddie Howe, and for the work that I did more behind the scenes with colleagues in the Lords to build their trust that we were trying to do the right thing in difficult circumstances.

cix. Paul Burstow (on social care): The other problem with it was that because there was a heated row in 2010 between the Conservatives and the Labour Party over approaches to this question, there was a high level of distrust between the two sides.

cx. Simon Hughes: Having talked to Tom McNally and talked to the private office, I wrote a document at the beginning and then about twice through my 18 months. We looked at it together, going back and moving things around and so on. So being really clear with your team what your priorities are. Gaining the confidence of your civil servants so that they see you're working together in a partnership which may sometimes mean you are tough with them.

cxi. *When you were working for Peter Lilley, how did the relationship with him work and also his special advisers? Because you had a discrete area or two areas of pensions and benefit fraud, how much freedom were you given by him? And also how important was it to keep his special advisers on board?*

We got on very well. I mean Peter is an old friend, he is my neighbour and he and I think along fairly similar lines on these issues. So I had his confidence, he was confident in what I was doing. (Oliver Heald)

cxii. Oliver Heald: An effective minister retains the confidence of his colleagues whilst effecting change and presenting it to the public.

cxiii. Lord McNally: I knew that most of the management was for a good cause. I knew Elizabeth very well, and trusted both her political judgement and her knowledge of me. And I very quickly got to have the same opinion about Emma [Private Secretary]. So in a way I was quite willing to be managed, although they would deny it! [laughter]

cxiv. David Willetts: And again, a further thing on all these issues, discussing them with Vince, we would have had an arms race within BIS. More special advisers, more private officers. Vince would have a bigger private office, I would have a bigger private office, and the job of the bigger private office would be demolishing each other's private office. There would have been distrustful escalation. So the best way to deal with Vince was relatively small private offices and he and I to talk about things his office was next to mine, he would come into my office to talk about things. I would go into his office to talk about things. We would have a proper catch up once a week – the two of us perhaps with a private secretary or a special adviser there – where we would fairly frankly go through the issues.

cxv. David Willetts: And you know probably in terms of making things happen, for many issues the Treasury relationship and the confidence on spending is crucial. I used to do things like if George [Osborne] provided me with some money for some project I had put to him, I would then, not even formally but six months on, 'You know that money you gave me for those incubator sites on the university campuses, I went the other day, you gave them the money six months ago and the building is already going up. It's going to be finished by the end of the year, do you want to go to the opening?' So the relationship with the Treasury matters a lot.

cxvi. Lord Wallace: This is an interesting thing about coalition trust: Donald Dewar within the first few weeks of government, said he would like to see me. He said: "This is very sensitive but the prime minister wants to hold an election on the first Thursday in May next year and that will only be four days after the census, which you're responsible for by the way, and we've got to work this through because some people are questioning down south as to whether we can; if you've got people coming up garden paths to take census information they might get confused with people knocking on doors." So he told me 10 months out when the prime minister wanted to hold the next general election. I never told that to any of my Lib Dem colleagues because I thought it was a matter of trust… If a future coalition was to come about, I think my advice to a deputy first minister would be to make sure that there is a good bond of trust between the first minister and deputy first minister.

cxvii. Lord Wallace: Certainly, there was at least one occasion when Nicol Stephen led the UK without any UK minister present on an Education Council, because both UK ministers were unavailable. So it was quite handy they could just send a Scot over. But again the line was agreed. And it's all a question of trust.

cxviii. Lord Wallace: I think when it comes to negotiating with the UK government, you've got to try and make sure that there are no surprises. You've got to try and build up the kind of personal relationships which go beyond politics. I think, too, that you've got to be very clear on what you want, make sure you're well briefed and you know your case. But it is a matter of give and take and it does require a lot of trust.

cxix. Mark Hoban: Both Secretaries of State trusted me to get on with the job. Both were interested in the areas that were more controversial and actually it was good to have that sort of sounding board and that source of support.

cxx. Damian Green: it was the case with Theresa [May, Home Secretary] that if you established trust with her, then she would let you do what she wanted you to do. And that… a lot of it is mechanics and personal chemistry and so on, but that is the important thing. One should never underestimate the importance of personal relationships in government's decisions

cxxi. Chris Huhne: Obviously you have to make sure that the department is working, so you have to have confidence in your senior departmental staff and you have to make sure that the Permanent Secretary is actually dealing with any issues within the department and dealing with them effectively.

cxxii. Lynne Featherstone: Andrew Adonis' advice, equally valuable, was trust your civil servants. He said, 'If you don't direct them, they will keep your diary full. But if there is something you want to do, you make sure that that is their priority and direct them and they will go to the ends of the earth for you.

cxxiii. Hugh Robertson: And did you ever find any of those classic tensions around autonomy of those organisations to do some of their functions? HR: Yes. Those stresses and strains are always there, but actually that's the reason why you need to talk to them. I think it was quite a shock to find that they had to come and see us that regularly. But once you've established trust with them, then you have a much more able relationship as a result.

cxxiv. Nick Harvey: They have got to have a strong private office and they have then got to trust them to get on and make judgements on their behalf. If they don't think they have started out with or inherited a strong enough private office, take immediate steps to change it and get a stronger one. You have got to see the wood for the trees, you have got to decide which are the areas you want to impose yourself upon and which are the areas you trust people enough to more or less sign off what they are doing, subject to sort of period spot checks or whatever.

cxxv. Jo Swinson: Also, you get a feel for, bluntly, which officials you really can trust in terms of there'll be some people who you've dealt with for months and you realise they have excellent judgement and if they're explaining that this thing is fairly uncontroversial or they say that these groups are very happy with it then you trust and believe that.

cxxvi. Steve Webb: But early on basically I had to earn his [Iain Duncan Smith's] trust. So on day one or very early on, we did a joint thing and that went well and gradually as I made smaller judgement calls and the world didn't fall in, and actually one or two things went quite well, it was like 'Oh, okay, we trust this guy'. And I think as well, we got on well on a personal level. You know, we weren't mates as it were but we could work constructively. So I think I had to earn that – there's this phrase, 'earned autonomy' and there's an element of that.

cxxvii. Andrew Mitchell: The Prime Minister was extremely interested in international development, very knowledgeable about it, and because I'd worked with him for five years on this, we could complete each other's sentences. And therefore I think he trusted my judgement on development and I sort of knew I had his support.

cxxviii. Andrew Mitchell: I had two extremely effective ones. They were good because they'd worked for me in opposition and knew precisely what we wanted to do. And therefore the civil servants trusted them to give a good steer, and the civil servants would go to them saying, 'We're working this up, what will he say? Will he understand this? Will he think this works?' And they could tell civil servants the answer. And they would get it right and the civil servants knew they would get it right.

Other

cxxix. Chloe Smith on DWP: People need to be able to **trust** that they will get the right help when they come to use those services. All of that needs to be absolutely rigorous and needs to be accountable to citizens and just simply needs to be held to the highest standards.

cxxx. Lord Bethell during Covid: We did a COPI [control of patient information] notice on data but look at the COPI notice. It just says, "You should have an inclination to share." It did not abandon cybersecurity and privacy rules. We knew we had to preserve **trust and confidence** amongst the public and we thought that this might go on for years.

cxxxi. Robert Buckland: My advice to departmental ministers was to **trust** your lawyers.

cxxxii. Dominic Grieve: The work of superintendence of the Crown Prosecution Service and the Serious Fraud Office and the GLS is about establishing personal relationships, it is about making sure that you and the DPP and the director of the Serious Fraud Office **trust** each

other, that you are mutually supportive, that you understand each other's roles, that you are there to provide political guidance and direction and highlight where you think the banana skins are likely to be in difficult policy decisions that they carry out. And you can also front up for them in Parliament and make sure that politicians are kept off their backs, because you are there to protect them from political interference.

Mentions of 'trust' or 'confidence' within UKICE's 'Brexit Archives'

Public trust/ public confidence

1. Amber Rudd: *Do you think Brexit has changed the relationship between the Conservatives and the business community? Because, obviously, much of business wanted a different sort of Brexit to the one that occurred.* Yes, I do think it has. I think it's lowered trust in politicians, but that can be rebuilt. But I think the Conservative Party, as a friend of business, is going to be difficult to rebuild. That's the opportunity for Labour, really.

2. Caroline Flint: Every time there was a vote in Parliament, every time there was another clever little tactic, my email box would be full of people saying 'We know what they're up to, we know what they're doing'. And again, it came back to trust which was being eroded day by day.

3. Dominic Grive: So, I think that that trust breakdown is the most serious thing. In the old days, I put it this way, they thought politicians were decent people who made promises, went to Westminster and proved through circumstance unable to deliver on them. But a lot of people now think that we're just a group of crooks, and that we don't mean what we say at all. And that, you know, when we say we're going to try and do something, actually we have another agenda.

4. Naomi Long: I think we've lost that art of communicating complicated ideas with the public in a way that isn't patronising but is honest. To me, what's patronising is telling people that you can have your cake and eat it, and expecting them to believe it. I think we have fallen into that trap with Brexit, of saying to people, 'Yes, our side of the street will always be sunny, everything will be fine', and believing that, by saying it, it will be. I just think that will, ultimately, cause a lot of harm, and that harm will mainly be felt by the people who don't see it for what it is, which is fluff. People who think they can believe their politicians and trust them, those are the people who will be hurt the most and they're the people who are always affected by our decisions. They're the most vulnerable, they're the people who are already on the edge. I just think it feels exploitative, the way our political discourse has moved.

Trust from interest groups

5. Alistair Campbell: I remember her taking me aside once and saying, 'Listen, this immigration thing is getting bigger and bigger. It is a real problem'. That would have been somewhere between election one (1997) and election two (2001), I would say. Politics and government are often about very difficult competing pressures. So, on the one hand, we were trying to show business that we were serious about business and that we could be trusted on the economy.

Trust in individuals/ parties

6. Caroline Flint: But it is about rebuilding trust which isn't straightforward. Labour lost voters who for generations, had voted nothing but Labour. There is a magic in that relationship. But once the spell is broken, you can't just think you're going to get it back. And of course, Brexit wasn't the only issue. A lot of these voters felt uncomfortable with, or actively hostile to, Jeremy Corbyn. Even in the northern seats we won, like Ed Miliband's and Yvette Cooper's, their much larger majorities went down enormously. Where people didn't vote Tory, they voted for the Brexit Party. Now, will they come back? I think we can work to win their support and earn their trust again. The danger is that they don't vote at all, they've had enough of politics.

7. Caroline Flint: Keir and the front bench team need to earn people's trust in Labour again. People can see through what is tactical and what is sincere.

8. First, it is about reconnecting and winning back trust. And Labour has got a bit of time to work that out. When the public want to listen to Labour again, what Keir says and how he is perceived will stick in voters' minds, so he needs to make it count.

9. Gavin Barwell: She clearly felt a need to demonstrate – both to those people in the country that had voted Leave, and to the bits of the Tory Party that had campaigned for it – that although she'd campaigned for Remain, she understood what was required. So, there as a little bit of proving that you can be trusted on this, I guess.

10. James Schneider (Momentum): It's going to be harder because Brexit isn't a settled issue, and Brexit was a settled issue in 2017. It's going to be harder because Jeremy's M.O. of, basically, being straight-talking, honest, trustworthy, has been undermined by the Brexit process.

11. Jess Philips: But yes, I remember somebody was telling me – and doesn't this bloody speak volumes – that the best rating Remain got was when David Cameron appeared on the television, talking about it. I remember somebody in one of the campaign centres saying that to me, that he was actually a trusted voice as the Prime Minister. But I remember my husband saying to me – and my husband is a deeply passionate European – 'I feel like I want to vote the other way because David Cameron is telling me to say it.'

12. Jess Philips: *Did you think your constituents ultimately could be persuaded that freedom of movement was a price worth paying?*

    Yes, easily. Without question. I think that my constituents could understand and be persuaded. What's more, I think that they could be persuaded that, even if they didn't agree with me on it, there was loads that they did agree with me on. It wasn't something that I considered to be difficult. Do you know how many times my constituents have raised the Single Market with me?

    UKICE: Why do you think so many of your fellow MPs weren't as convinced as you were that you could have sold it?

    I was a good saleswoman? I can't answer why I think that. But I felt confident in my constituency, I felt confident in the relationship that I have with my constituents. There are some who were absolutely right, and it was a much bigger issue for them as it turned out. So, if I look at the Stoke seats, I don't think that they are not brilliant Members of Parliament who could sell snow to the Eskimos. It was just a considerably bigger issue for them to have to sell it than it was for me. What I was confident of is that it was not the thing that would be the deciding factor in whether my constituents would vote for me or not. And I decided that they quite like it when they disagree with me. They like me enough to like disagreeing with me.

13. Joanna Cherry: My private view was, you can't be in a Government of National Unity because we'll get slated at home. You'll be like Michael Collins coming back with the Treaty. Nobody will be very happy with you. But if you take part in an emergency government or something on the understanding you get a couple of the offices and you get this concession, that would be an amazing concession for us to have got out of it…..
    Also, there is huge mistrust in Scotland, in my party in particular. You'd really have wanted to got it in writing and signed before you agreed to anything

14. Joanna Penn: We were very much in the post-referendum period, and I think we were incredibly conscious that Theresa had campaigned for Remain, and so there was also a trust issue around actually delivering the outcomes that people had voted for

15. Julian Smith: I think it was difficult with some of these Humble Addresses because it was really threatening the very nature of civil service advice, and private advice, and all of that. I think the use of this was just showing how far trust had broken down. There was also the speech that the Prime Minister made attacking MPs, which I was very unhappy about.

16. Julian Smith: Theresa led the effort, but even then, we didn't update people on what Brexit would mean in reality or have the confidence to do it. I think there's a catastrophic failure of confidence of all of us involved in articulating that centreground position and that frictionless position

Trust in political colleagues

17. Andrew Fisher: But for us, we didn't trust that there were safeguards in place on the core stuff. We didn't trust their negotiating priorities on the environment, on workers' rights, or on the whole range of other things. There was still too much wiggle room in what they were calling a customs union, which they were very clear was temporary until the negotiations finished

18. Carwyn Jones: But that's not the way they operate in Whitehall. I'm not sure that they really felt comfortable sharing some of the information that they had. They couldn't give us more than they gave the Scots, and they actively did not trust the Scots. So, there was a limit as to how much information we were being given, I suspect.

19. David Davis: trusted Nick and Fi to give the Prime Minister robust advice on these things, you know?

20. David Davis: To quote Boris Johnson, if I had not resigned, neither would he. His words to me. Neither would he, and we'd both be sitting around the table doing Withdrawal Agreement 14 by now. This is what he said to me just earlier last year, and he's right. So, essentially, the only way to get a proper Brexit was to break this, and I thought there would be an 80 per cent probability – maybe more – that if I went she would go at some point. Not immediately, but at some point. And I thought party discipline would fracture because the ERG were only being supportive for as long as I was there. To some extent the DUP as well, actually. Not out of any particular affinity or loyalty to me, but they generally trusted me to blow the whistle if it went wrong.

21. Denzil Davidson: Obviously, one of the difficulties, and a profound difficulty was that there was no devolved government in Northern Ireland, so there was no formal channel to have a conversation with Northern Irish politicians. And I'm not an expert on the devolution settlement or the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, but it's quite difficult to talk to any of the Northern Irish parties without talking to all of them. So, the ironic result is that there had been too few conversations. And the process with the DUP was obviously corrosive of trust between us and them, which is not entirely perhaps surprising. And certainly the EU made very little effort at that stage, and I don't think have made much effort since, to earn the Unionist community's confidence.

22. Dominic Grieve: I have to recognise that, by then, the trust relationship that had been built up on a cross-party basis was quite extensive, and, on the whole, I wanted to try to maintain that.

    I should emphasise that Oliver Letwin and I were in contact and consulted each other throughout. Our disagreement on a second referendum was always very amicable and we trusted each other when we co-operated. He discussed his amendment with me before tabling it and we were in agreement as to its necessity.

That, coupled with ties of growing trust with MPs from other parties when you've been successfully working together and talking to each other, means that actually some of the barriers which nationalism can often create start to evaporate. This meant that, perhaps by October, some of them could see that if there was a chance of keeping the UK in the EU altogether, that was better than the short-term political advantage of gaining more seats in a UK-wide general election.

Although, as I say, I accept they have been under huge stress, and the disrespect for convention is a serious issue because conventions do underpin trust, and we're now in an environment where the trust elements have largely gone, and the most worrying thing of all, the trust element has now gone between government and governed as well.

23. Emily Thornberry: So what used to happen, was that we would make a decision. I didn't trust Seumas to not change it, so I would write down exactly what it was that we'd agreed. Then I'd go onto Channel 4 – I did it twice – and announce it, so they couldn't go back on it. They'd get furious with me.

    I kept trying to bring it out in Brexit meetings, and people just weren't having it. There were times when people would even try and say, 'Of course, whoever it is that has done this polling, they're a Tory, or they're a Remainer, or they can't be trusted.' Just trying to undermine all this sort of stuff. I kept saying, 'Okay, so you don't want to see this polling. What's our polling?' Like, 'Share our polling. What polling are we doing?

24. Jess Philips: But it was very much like, 'Give us something that we can feel confident in. Close relationships, Single Market, customs union, all of that sort of stuff. And there is a place where we can get to where we could support this.' You know, there were lots of times I was saying to Government ministers, Government whips, 'I want to be able to vote for a good deal. I voted to trigger Article 50, I want to be able to do this

25. Joanna Penn: I think, even when I reflect on when we did have those discussions with the Labour Party later on, the strength of feeling against that amongst our own benches was incredibly strong. I think that is partly from a trust over delivering Brexit point of view. I think it was partly over the fact that the Labour Party was Corbyn's Labour Party at that time, as well. That made it much more difficult.

26. John McDonnell: That was part of the problem with Theresa May's position, in that she, to a certain extent, she bore the imprint of the last group that sat upon her. As a result of that, you couldn't really have much confidence in whatever she came up with, or delivering it for that matter.

27. Jo Swinson: Oliver Letwin would be a good example. He was a very straightforward person involved in these conversations, and I was much more involved once the Lib Dem leadership campaign was over, but he was very straightforward. He wanted a Brexit deal, but he was prepared to do whatever was required to prevent no deal. I think it is fair to say he didn't have a huge amount of trust in the word of the Prime Minister, and wanted to make sure that it was legally tight, watertight, in terms of what the government could and couldn't do

28. Jo Swinson: I think it was during recess, the idea of proroguing Parliament. That was one of those things where just suddenly you couldn't trust that the normal institutions would act as you would expect them to. That was why you had to get really creative when thinking about how you stopped no deal if the Conservatives say they are going to try and call a general election.

29. Michael Russell: There has to be mutual respect and trust between Ministers and officials on key issues. If the ministers don't know what they are doing or where they want to take an issue, officials find it difficult to advise. That was often the situation that seemed to prevail in the UK Government.

30. Michael Russell: I sought an assurance that they were not going to impose things upon us, through emergency powers, and Lidington gave me that assurance. I was always able to trust what he said. I wouldn't trust Gove, but I was always able to trust what David Lidington said.

31. Philip Hammond: Gavin became a tremendous confidante of the Prime Minister, and she trusted him. He never let her down but he absolutely, I think, developed the most productive relationship with her, in that he knew exactly where his boundaries were.

32. David Lidington: There was no trust and there were all sorts of conversations from time to time, so the option was explored. There were some senior people in Labour who said, 'Look, if you will go for a second referendum, then we will…' The question was, 'What are the options? What are the options to be in the second referendum?' You're into this two, three options issue there.

33. Stephen Gethins: it is a smaller party, so we know each other in a way and have a relationship with each other in a way the Conservative Parliamentary Party doesn't, because it is that much bigger. Just a human thing. These are people that I have known for 25 years, since I was a student. So, you have that relationship that maybe others don't.

    We had a lot of autonomy and, of course, you wanted to consult with the group as well, but we were able to just pick up the phone to each other and make those decisions. I think there was a lot of trust there as well.