



Public reflections on dirty money and trust in politics

A major new large sample survey with MRP analysis

February 2024



UK Anti-
Corruption
Coalition

Survation.

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You can download a copy of this report and full data tables at ukanticorruptioncoalition.org/2024-polling-reports

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Overview

You can download a copy of this report, full data tables, and the companion report on economic crime, at:

ukanticorruptioncoalition.org/2024-polling-reports

It's abundantly clear that voters' trust in politics is marked by a pervading sense of corruption at the top. This large sample survey of 6,466 people across Great Britain (with MRP modelling), commissioned by the UK Anti-Corruption Coalition, has made some very significant headline findings at the beginning of this General Election year.

We found, for example, that two thirds of voters believe UK politics is becoming more corrupt, while just one third had faith in their elected officials to put the public interest ahead of their own. And 80% of respondents said they think "some or all" of the main political parties are corrupt and untrustworthy.

The public do not appear to view individual instances of political corruption as 'bad eggs' in an otherwise healthy batch, but rather see a systemic issue with corruption in British politics.

In our previous report which focused specifically on economic crime, we found that politicians are the profession most strongly associated with economic crime. In this report, we drill down further, to look at regional variations, and to explore attitudes towards issues like political donations that are tainted by economic crime.

We found very distinct feelings of disenfranchisement throughout the research, for example respondents pledging to disengage from politics altogether in response to corruption.

But more than that, there was a strong sense of anger which could – arguably **must** – now be channelled positively, for the sake of our democracy. For example, throughout the polling and our initial focus group studies, it was very clear that there's much perceived corruption related to the Covid-19 pandemic. In this report, we outline some of that data and quotes, showing clear dissatisfaction with issues like the awarding of Government contracts without proper due diligence.

Whilst we found these issues to be highly salient and the cause of much frustration, it's also worth noting that we *could go* a long way to restore trust by implementing key policies which would make it much harder for politicians to abuse their entrusted power for private gain.

On the last page of this report, you can read the UK Anti-Corruption Coalition's proposed policy solutions for cleaning up politics and removing the influence of dirty money.

Is political corruption getting worse?

Polling themes analysed:

Do you think UK politics is becoming

- *Much more corrupt*
- *A little more corrupt*
- *Neither more nor less corrupt*
- *A little less corrupt*
- *Much less corrupt*
- *Don't know*

2/3 believe UK politics is becoming more corrupt

We asked respondents whether UK politics is becoming more or less corrupt.

- Two thirds (**66%**) believe UK politics is becoming more corrupt.
- Just 8% think it is becoming less corrupt, and 21% neither more nor less corrupt.
- Overall, Conservative voters are less likely to think politics is becoming more corrupt than other voters (52% vs. 66% sample average).
- However, almost two-thirds (**63%**) of 2019 Conservative voters think it is becoming more corrupt (see table below). This suggests Conservatives who've switched their voting intention may be most likely to believe politics is becoming more corrupt.
- Older people, who are most likely to think politicians still act with integrity, also overwhelmingly think UK politics is becoming more corrupt (73% of 55-64s and 68% of over-65s). Although they may not be as likely as younger voters to associate politicians with economic crime, for example (see page 15), they're more likely to believe the situation is worsening.

Some in the focus groups spoke of declining trust in politicians. For example, an NHS project worker from Leeds spoke about politicians acting with less integrity in the past decade while others accused politicians of cronyism.

The pandemic was frequently cited as evidence of a decline in standards and a system lacking in integrity and open to abuse (see pages 17-18).

Focus group view

"I don't think the UK is particularly fair today, and I would say it has definitely become less so over the past decade...I think that the extremely wealthy have been able to enrich themselves via actions of the government over the last few years, e.g. PPE during Covid."

Female, 28 years, Liberal Democrat Voter, London/South East.

Do you think UK politics is becoming...



A lack of faith in politicians was mentioned by many focus group participants, with references to politicians being complicit in cronyism. This was shown by language around politicians helping "their friends" being common, reflecting how many saw the divide between those with political influence and the people they're elected to represent.

MRP and regional analysis: is the UK becoming more corrupt?

The constituencies where the highest proportion of residents think UK politics is becoming more corrupt are found in the South West, Wales, and North West.

Ten Welsh constituencies fall within the top 100 seats but the top 20 are overwhelmingly in the North West and South West. No London constituency falls in the top 150 and just two Scottish seats are within the top 100.

1	Wirral West	North West
2	Christchurch	South West
3	South Devon	South West
4	Worthing West	South East
5	Fylde	North West
6	Sefton Central	North West
7	Cheadle	North West
8	North Devon	South West
9	Altrincham and Sale West	North West
10	Honiton and Sidmouth	South West
11	West Dorset	South West
12	Blackpool North and Fleetwood	North West
13	Weston-super-Mare	South West
14	Exmouth and Exeter East	South West
15	Southport	North West
16	North East Somerset and Hanham	South West
17	Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe	Wales
18	Gower	Wales
19	Lewes	South East
20	North Somerset	South West

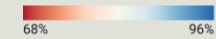
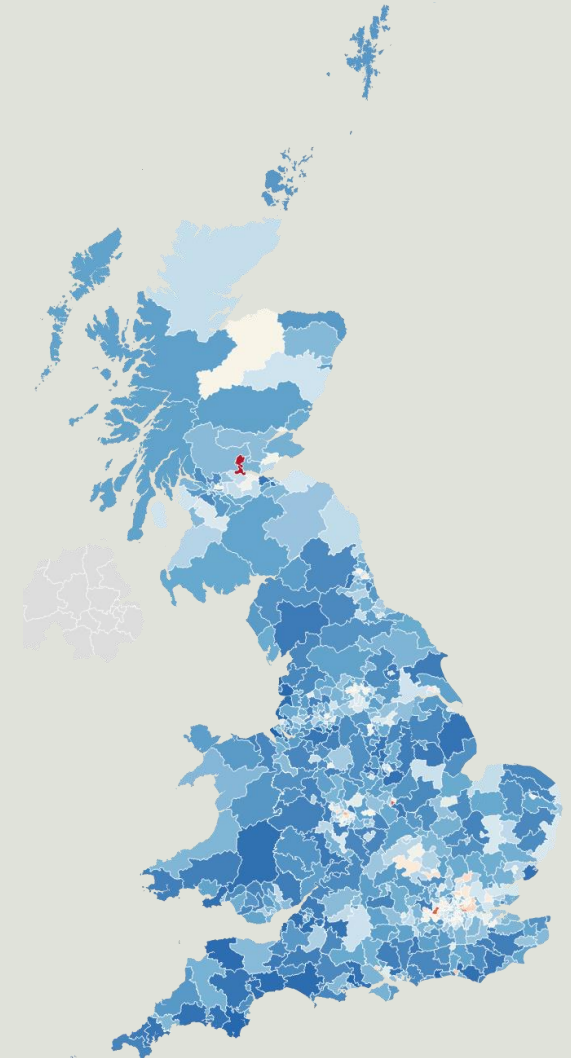
In the top 20 constituencies, we see several Conservative-held seats that we expect to be marginal at the next election.

These include Cheadle (7th), North Devon (8th), West Dorset (11th), Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe (17th), and Lewes (19th).

Liberal Democrat voters are 19% more likely to think UK politics is becoming more corrupt than Conservative voters, a sentiment that could influence some of these marginal races.

Of the top 50 constituencies with the highest proportion of those who think UK politics is becoming more corrupt, we estimate 28 were marginal or ultra-marginal¹ at the time of polling. The Liberal Democrats would be competitive in 10 of these 28 contests.

% who think UK politics is becoming more corrupt

How perceptions of corruption could affect voting intentions

Polling themes analysed:

Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

- A. All the main political parties in the UK are corrupt and untrustworthy.*
- B. Some of the main political parties in the UK are corrupt and untrustworthy.*
- C. None of the main political parties in the UK are corrupt and untrustworthy.*
- D. Don't know.*

IF A or B:

Does this make you more inclined to do any of the following? Please select all that apply.

Not vote - Spoil my vote in protest - Vote for a smaller party - Disengage further from politics - Actively protest - Other

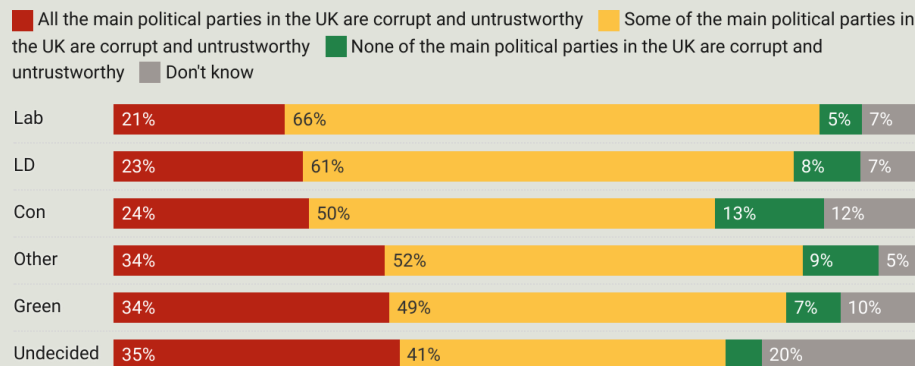
TO ALL:

Will the issue of political corruption affect how you will vote in the next election?

Sense of corruption is substantially contributing to political apathy

We asked people whether the main political parties in the UK are corrupt and untrustworthy. For those who believe at least “some” main parties are corrupt and untrustworthy, we asked whether, and how, they might be inclined to respond to that perception.

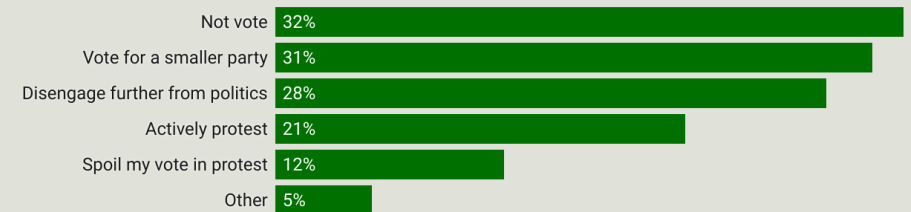
- Alarming, 80% of respondents thought at least some of the main political parties are corrupt and untrustworthy (53% said “some”, and 27% said “all”).
- Undecided voters (35%), Green voters (34%), and voters for “other” parties (34%) were most likely to think that “all” the main parties are corrupt.
- 21% of Labour voters and 24% of Conservative voters said “all” of the main parties are corrupt and untrustworthy, though Labour voters are +16% more likely to say “some”.
- Just 8% think “none” of the main parties is corrupt and untrustworthy.



To dig down further, we then asked the 80% who said “some” or “all” of the main political parties are corrupt and untrustworthy how they might be inclined to respond. The results are striking.

- The most popular response was “not vote” (32%). This represents just over one quarter of **all** respondents.
- 28% say they will “disengage further from politics”.
- 31% say they will “vote for a smaller party”.
- Mixed/multiple ethnic groups (44%) and Black (40%) respondents were much more likely to say they might “actively protest (eg. via campaigning, petitions, joining reforming organisations)” than the national avg. (21%).

Does this make you more inclined to do any of the following? Please select all that apply.



Base: Respondents who think some or all of the main political parties in the UK are corrupt and untrustworthy.

Labour and Lib Dem voters most likely to say vote will be affected

To understand how political corruption might affect respondents' voting intentions, we also asked all respondents how likely the issue is to affect their vote.

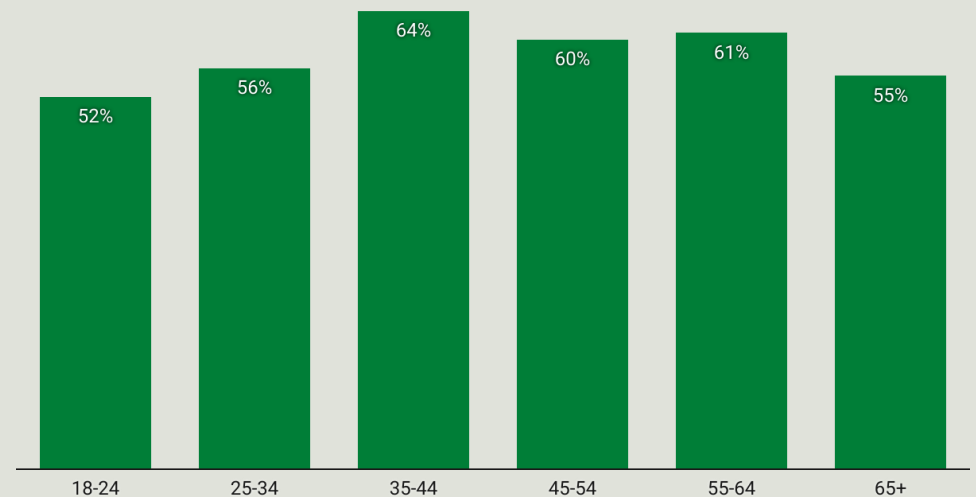
- A majority (58%) say their voting intentions will likely be affected by the issue.
- 66% of Labour voters and 68% of Liberal Democrat voters say their voting intentions will likely be affected by the issue.
- Conservative voters are far less swayed by political corruption, but 46% still say it's likely to affect their vote.
- They're also most likely to be unsure (36%) whether it will have an effect, a figure which is +15% higher than Liberal Democrat voters and +11% higher than Labour voters.

% who say the issue of political corruption will likely affect how they vote in the next election



Older respondents, who displayed the strongest feelings about corruption in other questions, are not the most likely to have it affect their voting intention. In line with findings elsewhere, younger respondents were the least likely to have the issue affect their choice at the ballot box.

Millennials (ages 35-44) are more likely than other age groups to say their voting will be influenced by this issue.

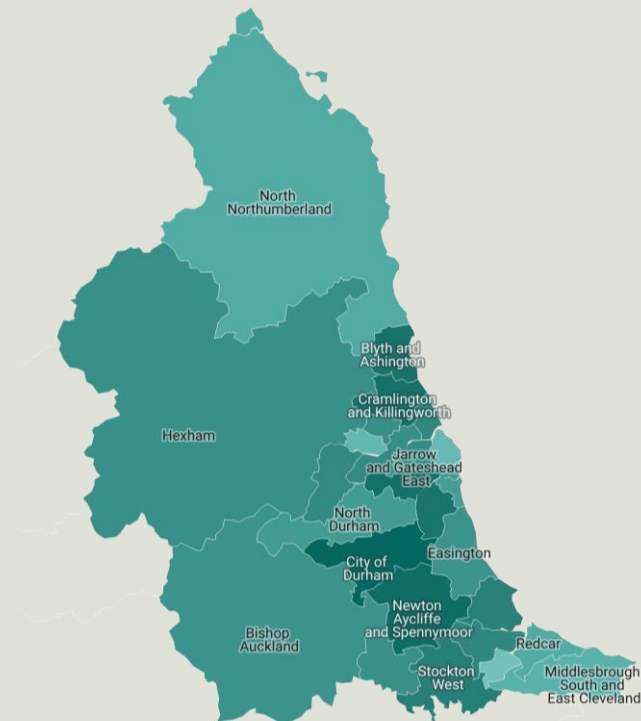


North East and Welsh voters most likely to be influenced by corruption perceptions

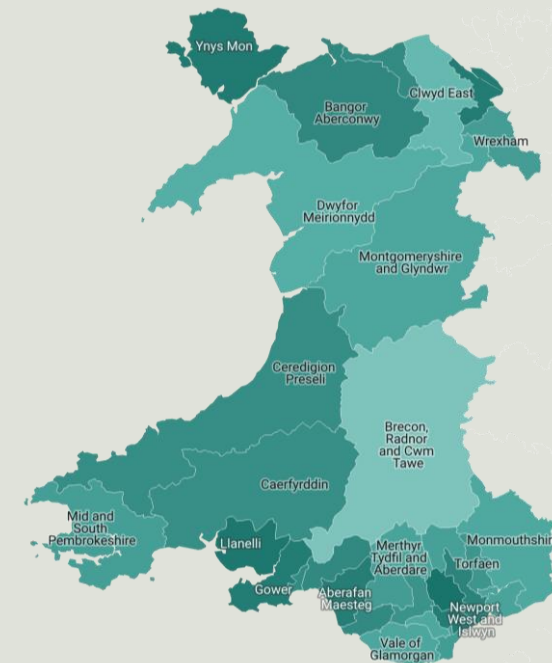
People in the North East are most likely to have their voting intention influenced by political corruption. Five of the 10 constituencies where the highest proportion of residents hold this view are in the North East, including Newton Aycliffe and Spennymoor (4th) – a new seat based on the Sedgefield constituency that the Conservatives won from Labour in 2019.

Closely following the North East, people in Wales are the second most likely to have their vote affected by the issue. Political corruption clearly resonates with voters in Plaid Cymru-held Ceredigion Preseli (76th), but also in the Conservative held Ynys Môn (18th) and Caerfyrddin (78th) – constituencies we expect Plaid Cymru to perform strongly in at the next election.

% in North East who say the issue of political corruption will likely affect how they vote in the next election



% in Wales who say the issue of political corruption will likely affect how they vote in the next election



Trust in politicians' intentions

Polling themes analysed:

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Politicians in the UK put important issues (national and local) before their own personal interests.

At the end of summer 2023, it was reported that MPs accepted £180,000 worth of 'freebies' from corporations in the summer period. Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

- *This gives me more confidence that policymakers will make impartial decisions.*
- *This gives me less confidence that policymakers will make impartial decisions.*
- *This does not affect my confidence that policymakers will make impartial decisions.*
- *Don't know.*

Would you be more or less likely to vote for a political party which accepted donations from individuals who have amassed their wealth via economic crimes?

Which of the following groups and professions do you most associate with economic crime?

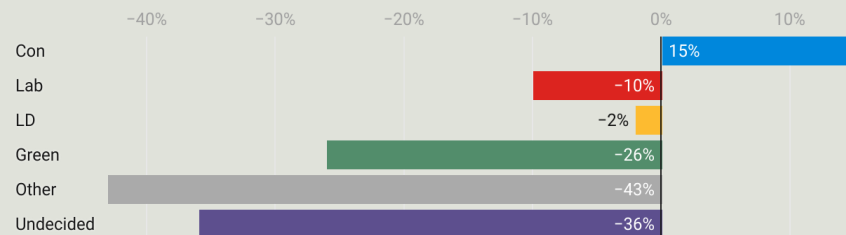
(Celebrities, oligarchs & kleptocrats, politicians, senior executives, small business owners, tradespeople, lawyers, accountants, bankers, estate agents...)

Self-interest vs the public interest

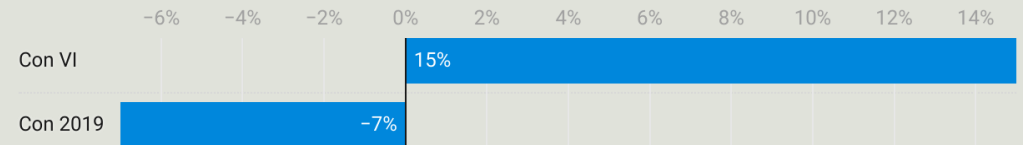
To gauge the public's general attitude towards politicians and their motivations, we asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree that "politicians in the UK put important issues (national and local) before their own personal interests".

- Only 33% agree that politicians in the UK put important issues (national and local) before their own interests.
- People intending to vote for a smaller party (see below) were more likely to disagree than those intending to vote for either Labour, the Liberal Democrats, or Conservative.
- Undecided voters were also much more likely to disagree, suggesting that distrust in politicians to put the national interest first could be encouraging some to vote for smaller parties and may contribute to voter apathy.

Net agreement that politicians in the UK put important issues before their personal interests



Trust in politicians to put their own interests aside is also differentiator between those who voted Conservative in 2019, and those who currently intend to vote for the party. Many of those who placed their trust in the party in 2019 do not believe politicians put important issues before their personal interests.



In focus groups, politicians were felt to be "lining their own pockets" rather than making decisions to benefit the people they represent. Some respondents talked about politicians holding shares in companies that benefited from political decisions, again showing a lack of trust in how decisions were made.

Focus group view

"I don't think there's much about the UK that can be considered fair when you look at the cost-of-living crisis affecting so many people, and senior members of the government making obscene amounts of money from it, or corporations continuing to make billions in profit."

Female, 35 years, Labour voter, London/South East.

70% say 'freebies' give them less confidence in politicians

To understand what might be driving the lack of trust in politicians and their association with economic crime, we asked respondents how [MPs' acceptance of £180,000 worth of 'freebies' from corporations](#) in the summer of 2023 affected their confidence that policymakers will make impartial decision.

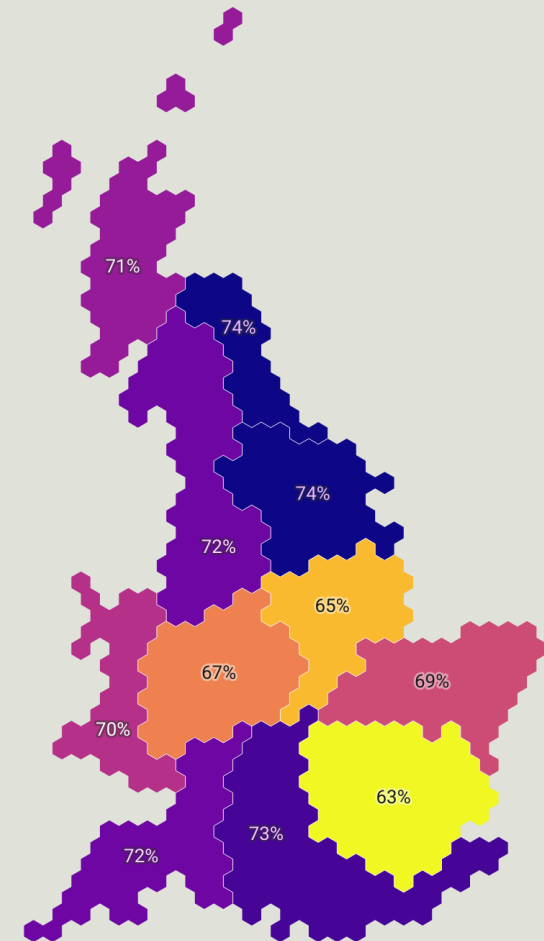
- An overwhelming majority (70%) says it gives them less confidence that policymakers will make impartial decisions.
- Most regions have similar levels of respondents reporting it made them less confident - approximately 7 in 10 (69-74%).
- London and the East Midlands (63% and 65% respectively) have the lowest levels of agreement, albeit still clear majorities.

This view was shared with focus group participants, and one participant asked, "how can you remain impartial when deciding on things like windfall tax and increasing tax on these companies in general?" (female, 42 years, Liberal Democrat voter, London/South East).

Londoners being slightly less troubled by "freebies" is comparable to our previous finding (www.ukanticorruptioncoalition.org/work/report-reflections-economic-crime) that they were slightly less supportive of solutions which place heavier punishments on professionals complicit in economic crime – although again, there was still clear overall appetite for greater regulation.

In our London/South East focus group, some spoke about "corporate perks", with no distinction made about the ethics of public servants accepting freebies, and the role this might have on decision making. One participant commented: "corporate perks are always corporate perks" (male, 45 years, Conservative voter, London/South East).

% who said the acceptance of 'freebies' gives them less confidence in policymakers' impartiality



51% say dodgy donations likely to affect voting intentions

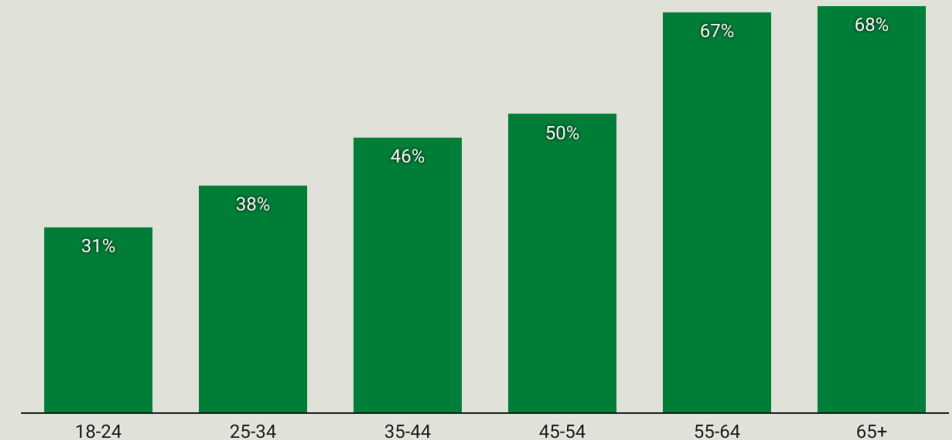
We asked if people would be more or less likely to vote for a political party which accepted donations from individuals who have amassed their wealth via economic crime.

- A majority (51%) of respondents said they would be less likely.
- Conservative voters are the most ambivalent to dubious donations (46%), though there is a notable disconnect here with people who voted Conservative in 2019 (56%).
- People supporting “other” parties (67%) and undecideds (62%) were the most supportive of potentially avoiding parties who accepted these donations. “Other” includes SNP, Plaid Cymru, Reform, and various smaller parties.

Despite associating politicians with economic crime most closely, younger respondents are least likely to say their support for a party would be adversely affected by these donations (31%).

In the focus groups, corrupt money was strongly associated with political donations and a decline in political standards. While lobbying was not mentioned specifically, many did allude to the power that lobbying and political donations could hold.

% who would be less likely to vote for a political party which accepted donations from individuals who have amassed their wealth via economic crimes



Politicians are the profession most associated with economic crime

In the question below, we asked respondents to identify the groups and professions they most associate with economic crime. Concerningly, politicians are the group most associated with economic crime.

- “Politicians” beats “oligarchs and kleptocrats” by 10 points.
- Younger respondents are most likely to associate politicians with economic crime.
- Even among those aged 65+, where politicians are not the group most associated with economic crime (oligarchs and kleptocrats), 43% still make the association.

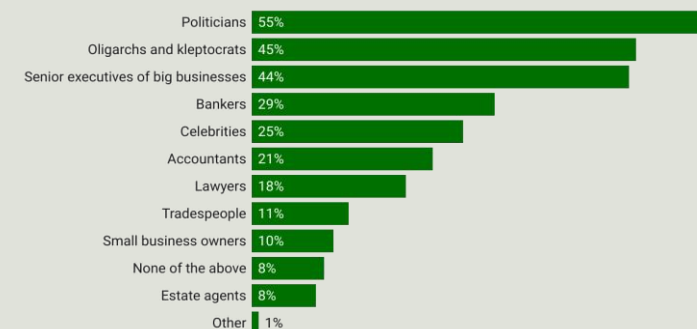
In another recent Survation poll of 1,027 people asking: “How would you rate the current government’s handling of economic corruption?”, 55% of respondents said either “poor” or “very poor”, a comparatively worse perception than its handling of key issues like inflation, climate change, Brexit, and the war in Gaza.

The association of politicians with economic crime was corroborated in the focus groups, where many participants felt like the consequences of economic crime were overlooked and not dealt with by authorities or the government. The instances of corruption that most respondents brought up unprompted were those involving politicians, with specific references to Covid-19 PPE contracts (see pages 17-18).

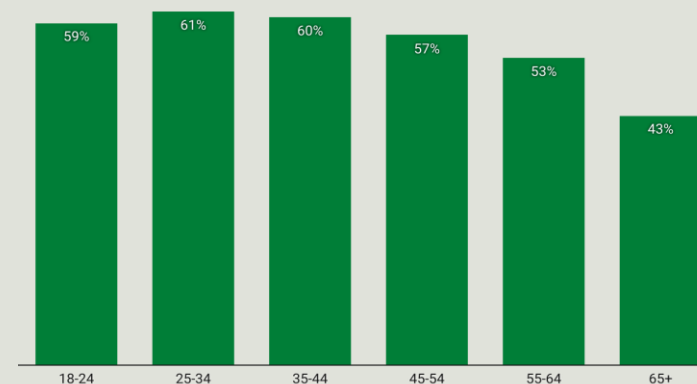
Focus group view

“One person can buy the ear of the government while the working class have to get 100,000 signatures on a petition”
Female, 35 years, Labour voter, North/Midlands

Which of the following groups and professions do you most associate with economic crime? Please select up to 3 options.



% who associated politicians with economic crime



Political associations with economic crime most likely in urban areas

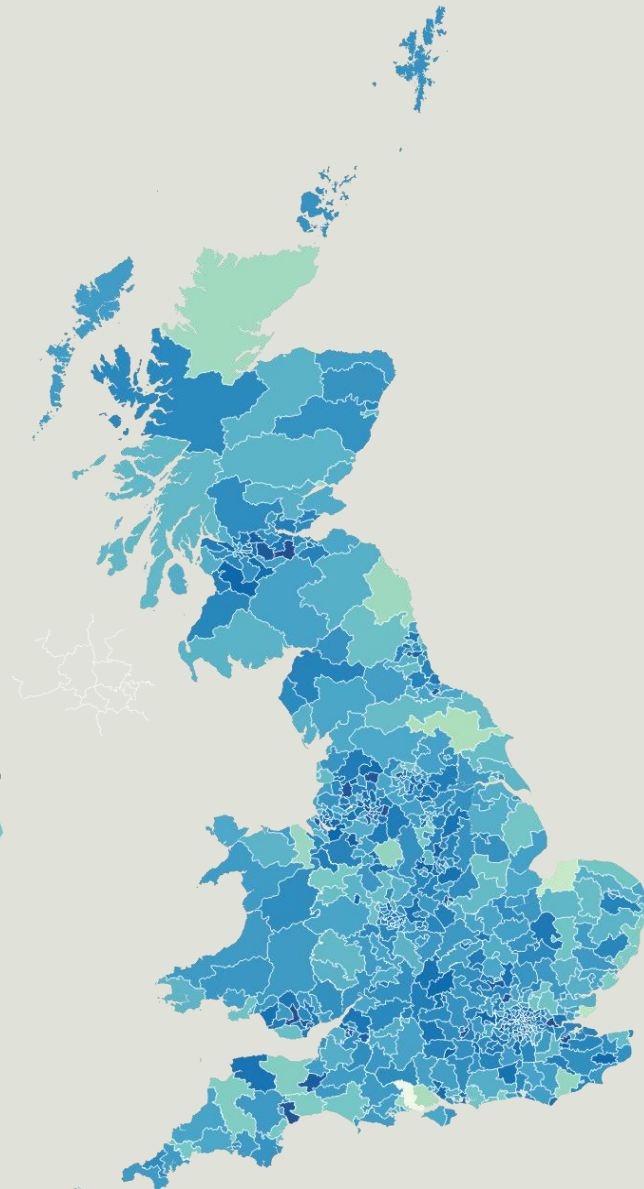
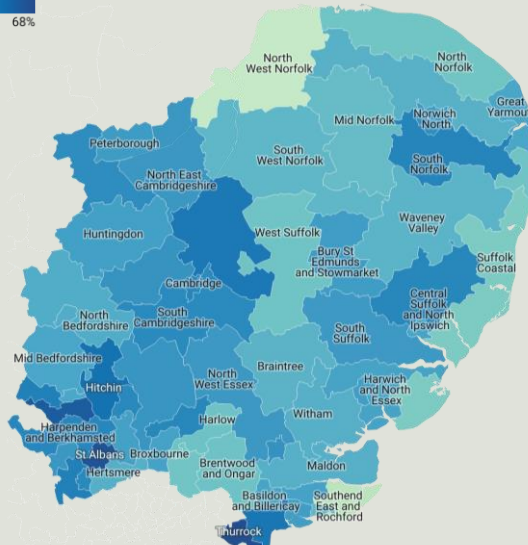
As younger respondents were more likely to associate politicians with economic crime, it's unsurprising that MRP analysis reveals the constituencies where the highest proportion of residents made this association are overwhelmingly urban.

- Top constituencies to make this association include Brighton Pavilion (1st), Salford (2nd), and Bristol Central (8th), all with relatively young populations.
- Of the 100 seats with the highest proportion associating politicians with economic crime, none are designated as rural by the Office for National Statistics, and one in five (22) are in London.
- East of England was the region where constituents least associate politicians with economic crime. Outlier constituencies, including Thurrock (5th), St Albans (9th), and Luton South and South Bedfordshire (24th) have younger, more urban populations.

We estimate that Labour, who perform particularly well with young urban-dwellers, would win 41 of the 50 seats where the association between politicians and economic crime is strongest. Despite this analysis suggesting the Conservatives would be reduced to just 156 seats overall, it shows them holding 25 of the 50 seats where the association is weakest.

% in the East of England who selected 'Politicians' as one of the top three groups and professions most associated with economic crime

33% 68%



How Government handling of the pandemic undermined trust

Polling themes analysed:

Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

- A. My trust in British politics has been eroded by one or more specific events, issues, or scandals.*
- B. My trust in British politics has not been eroded by one or more specific events, issues, or scandals*

IF A:

*Which one event/issue/scandal would you say has had the greatest negative effect on your trust in British politics?
Please provide as much detail as possible.*

What is MRP?

Context

In order to fully understand the nuances of public opinion towards economic crime, Survation conducted MRP (Multilevel Regression and Poststratification) analysis on the data to uncover nuances between individual constituencies. MRP is a way of producing estimates of opinion and attitudes for small defined geographic areas. It works by combining information from the large national sample polling conducted here with ONS and census data.

The MR (Multi-level Regression) part

The responses given by respondents are modelled on the basis of their demographic characteristics and what we know about their area (its past voting history, how it voted in the EU referendum, and so on). This is the “multilevel regression” part. For example, a 23 year old female living in London who works in the media sector and has a university education has a higher probability of being a remain voter than a 72 year old male living in Grimsby who is a retired former fisherman that left school at 16. There are elements of a person’s lifestyle, background and life experience that may provide an indication as to their likelihood to hold certain views. “Multi-level regression” examines to what extent each of these elements influences behaviour.

The P (Post-stratification) part

In the subsequent “post-stratification” stage, we use census data to calculate how many people of each demographic type live in each area and combine this with additional relevant contextual information to predict how many of these people will have a certain opinion. In this way, the estimates, although they are derived from a national sample, end up being representative of the demographic make-up of each constituency.

Methodology

Fieldwork Dates

26th September – 9th October 2023

Data Collection Method

The survey was conducted via online interview.

Invitations to complete surveys were sent out to members of an online panel. Differential response rates from different demographic groups were taken into account.

(contnd overleaf)

Data Weighting

Data were weighted to the profile of all adults in the UK aged 18+. Data were weighted by age, sex, region, highest level of qualification, annual equivalised household income, 2019 General Election Vote, and 2016 EU Referendum Vote. Targets for the weighted data were derived from Office for National Statistics Data and the results of the 2019 UK General Election and the 2016 EU Referendum.

Population

Residents aged 18+ living in Great Britain.

Sample Size

6,466

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using Multilevel Regression and Poststratification (MRP) modelling to estimate the percentage of respondents providing an answer to a given question in 632 GB Parliamentary Constituencies. The 632 constituencies represent newly formed constituencies for the 2024 General Election as proposed by the independent boundary commissions for each nation.

Data tables for this project can be accessed below:

1. Survation conducted an online poll of 6,466 adults in the UK on behalf of the UK Anti-Corruption Coalition. Fieldwork was conducted between the 26th September – 9th October 2023. Tables for the nationally representative polling can be accessed [here](#).
2. Data were analysed using Multilinear Regression and Poststratification modelling to estimate the percentage of respondents providing an answer to a given question in 632 GB Parliamentary Constituencies. Parliamentary constituencies are derived from the 2023 final proposals to Parliament made by the respective boundary commissions for each nation. The constituency level topline estimates produced by the Multilinear Regression and Poststratification analysis are available [here](#).
3. Survation conducted an online poll of 1,027 adults in the UK. Fieldwork was conducted between 10-11 Jan 2024. Tables for the polling can be accessed [here](#).

Notes

¹ Red Wall seats were defined as the 44 constituencies across the Wakes, the Midlands, and North of England where the Conservative Party won the seat from an incumbent Labour MP. This list represents Survation's interpretation of Red Wall seats based on new constituency boundaries. The formulation of this list takes into account 2019 modelled results by Survation, and the actual results of the 2019 election based on current constituency boundaries.

² Marginal seats are defined as those which we estimate could change hands with a +10 or -10 vote change from our estimates in November 2023. Ultra-marginal seats are those which could change hands with a +5 or -5 vote change.

³ The definition of Blue Wall follows that of English (2021). These are 52 constituencies across the South or East of England, where: the Conservative party is estimated to have won in the 2019 General Election; constituents in those seats are estimated to have favoured (50%+) Remain in 2016; constituencies contain higher than average (25%+) share of graduates (Level4+ equivalent). The original post can be accessed [here](#). We take into account Survation-modelled estimates of 2019 General Election results, 2016 EU Referendum vote share, and proportion of population with graduate-level qualifications. The conceptualisation takes into account Survation-modelled estimates of 2019 General Election results based on new constituency boundaries, 2016 EU Referendum vote share, and proportion of population with graduate-level qualifications.

Survation. Engaging opinion to inform the future.

Survation provides vital insights for brands and organisations wanting to better understand authentic opinion, adding value and credibility to the research we provide to our clients. We are an innovative and creative market researcher and do not believe any single method can always be the right answer to complex client objectives. We conduct bespoke online and telephone custom research, omnibus surveys, face to face research, and advanced statistical modelling and data analysis.

Survation is an MRS Company Partner. All MRS Company Partners and their employees agree to adhere to the MRS Code of Conduct and MRS Company Partner Quality Commitment whilst undertaking research. As a member of the British Polling Council, Survation has a strong commitment to transparency and the integrity of our work.

The Living Wage

Survation is proud to be a Living Wage Employer. This means that every member of staff in our organisation plus any contract staff are paid the London Living Wage. The Living Wage is an hourly rate set independently and updated annually, based on the cost living in the UK. We believe that every member of staff deserves at least a Living Wage. You can find out more about the Living Wage by visiting www.livingwage.org.uk



British Polling Council

About the UK Anti-Corruption Coalition

The UK Anti-Corruption Coalition brings together the UK's leading anti-corruption organisations. To properly address the issues in this report, and to restore public trust in several key areas, the coalition urges lawmakers to adopt the following solutions.

Clean up political finance

- Cap spending and donations in line with recommendations by the CSPL to **end the corrosive influence of big money** in politics.
- Increase transparency without adding unnecessary burdens on political parties by making donation reporting thresholds consistent with permissibility thresholds (currently £500).
- Carry out proper checks on the source of party donors' funds; **enforce current electoral law** much more strongly; and review whether existing laws are effective enough.

Raise and enforce standards

- Rebuild the Ministerial Code as a code of conduct on ethical standards, including a **statutory requirement** for Prime Ministers to issue it (similar to codes of conduct for the civil service, SpAds, and the diplomatic service) so it can't be discarded or disregarded.
- Give the Independent Adviser on Ministerial Interests **true independence**, with the ability to initiate investigations; the resources and powers to do so properly; and the ability to report findings and recommend sanctions without the Prime Minister's permission.
- Create a new, clear **statutory offence of corruption in public life** that includes abuse of function and trading in influence, so that people who commit serious abuses of power for private gain can be held criminally accountable.
- Make a statutory lobbying register to cover **all** lobbyists, including better quality and more regular government disclosures, with a strong accountability mechanism to ensure departments file the right information on time.

Prevent rogue conduct

- Tighten bans on paid lobbying for Parliamentarians and enforce them robustly to avoid creating the perception that those in public office are acting on behalf of outside private interests.
- **Control more closely who can fund Parliamentarians' overseas visits.** Trips sponsored either directly or indirectly by corrupt and repressive regimes may present the perception that someone's judgement and actions are influenced by the intent of their hosts.
- Set greater limits on Parliamentarians' outside activities to **prevent conflicts of interest** between elected roles and second jobs.