Public reflections on economic crime

A major new large sample survey with MRP analysis

January 2024

UK Anti-Corruption Coalition

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Contents

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Overview

Throughout the UK, economic crime is clearly leaving its mark on public opinion. This major new survey of 6,466 people across Great Britain shows that, for an overwhelming majority (83%), economic crime is a serious issue in the UK today. An overwhelming 86% of people in the UK think the Government should take economic crime seriously, yet fewer than half (46%) believe it's doing so.

The UK Anti-Corruption Coalition commissioned Survation to carry out this large-scale poll (featuring MRP analysis) to understand public opinion in a range of areas, from perceptions of fairness to economic impact, political trust to housing. In many instances, such as whether there should be increased regulation (eg of the property market), political affiliation does not appear to be a key determinant of attitudes. Overall, the public exhibits a clear will for more to be done.

We found some significant variations in relation to respondents' age and region. Concern about economic crime appears to increase strongly with age, and older groups are far more likely to take the issue seriously. Traditionally, older people are more likely to vote, so this represents a key finding for political parties. At a regional level, people in London are more likely to be relaxed about the activities of enablers, and the presence of dirty money in the property market.

Despite these variations, the overall picture of public opinion about economic crime is negative, and even where there is a slightly more *laissez faire* attitude – such as in London – a clear majority takes the issue seriously and supports greater regulation.

A further striking incentive for greater action from government is the fact that respondents associate politicians with economic crime more than any other profession, even oligarchs and kleptocrats. Overall, respondents also struggled to choose which political party they trust most to tackle economic crime, where the most popular answer was "don't know".

So as we enter the General Election year, there's much for lawmakers to ponder in these results. While many of the perceptions uncovered here may alarm politicians, they also appear to signal a potentially popular area on which to focus greater discussion and action.

You can read the UK Anti-Corruption Coalition's proposed policy solutions to the issues discussed in this report on page 21.

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How does the UK public feel about economic crime?

Polling themes analysed:

- *How seriously, if at all, do you view the issue of money laundering, corruption, and fraud, and its effect on the UK?*
- *How important is it for the UK government to tackle economic crime?*
- *How seriously do you think the government takes economic crime in the UK today?*
- *How seriously do you think the government should take economic crime in the UK today?*

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86% say the government should take economic crime seriously

Economic crime is clearly perceived as a serious issue throughout Britain and there is a clear appetite for the government to do more to tackle it.

- 83% view economic crime and its effects seriously.
- 85% said it's important for the Government to tackle economic crime (54% of which said it's "very important").
- Just 46% believe the Government actually *does* take economic crime seriously.
- Most (86%) believe the Government should take it seriously.
- 81% of respondents educated to Level 1 said they felt it was important or very important for the UK government to tackle economic crime. This rose incrementally to 90% for Level 4, but the consensus is clear across all education levels.

We see a substantial disconnect between how serious the issue is to the public and how seriously people think the Government currently takes the issue.
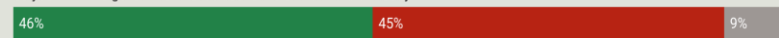
Throughout the research, older voters consistently viewed economic crime more seriously than younger voters. Of voters aged 65+:

- 92% said government action is important to them (compared to 74% of 18-24s).
- A near-unanimous 96% of over 65s said the government should take economic crime in the UK today seriously.
- But only 45% felt the government is taking it seriously.

Shown below is the relationship between the proportion of people aged over 65 in a constituency, and the percentage of people within a constituency who view the issue of money laundering, corruption, and fraud, and its effect on the UK seriously.
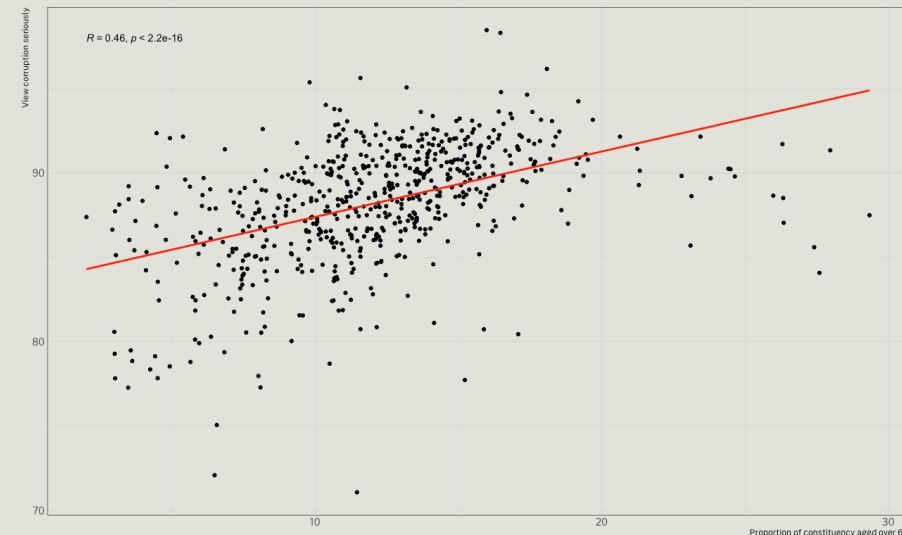
How seriously...

Legend: Seriously · Not Seriously · Don't know

do you view the issue of money laundering, corruption, and fraud, and its effect on the UK?
Seriously	Not Seriously	Don't know
83%	11%	5%

do you think the government takes economic crime in the UK today?
Seriously	Not Seriously	Don't know
46%	45%	9%

do you think the government should take economic crime in the UK today?
Seriously	Not Seriously	Don't know
86%	10%	4%

Relationship between the proportion of people aged over 65 in a constituency and those who view the issue of money laundering, corruption, and fraud, and its effect on the UK seriously

$R = 0.46$, $p < 2.2e-16$

View corruption seriously (y-axis)

Proportion of constituency aged over 65 (x-axis)

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Economic crime taken seriously across political and regional lines

2019 Conservative voters were marginally more likely to think the government should be taking economic crime more seriously than other voters. Those intending to vote Conservative were also, however, 21% more likely (67%) than the sample average (46%) to think the Government takes the issue seriously – the reciprocal figure for undecided voters was just 37%. Survation's current projections estimate that 16 of the top 50 constituencies where the issue of money laundering, corruption, and fraud, and its effect on the UK is taken most seriously are currently ultra-marginal[2], meaning there is potential to advance the issue for political gain here.

% who responded 'Somewhat' or 'Very' seriously

	How seriously do you think the government takes economic crime in the UK today?	How seriously do you think the government should take economic crime in the UK today?
CON	67%	90%
Lab	44%	89%
LD	45%	90%
Undecided	37%	87%

There was little regional variation in how seriously people take the issue of money laundering, corruption and fraud, and its effect on the UK.
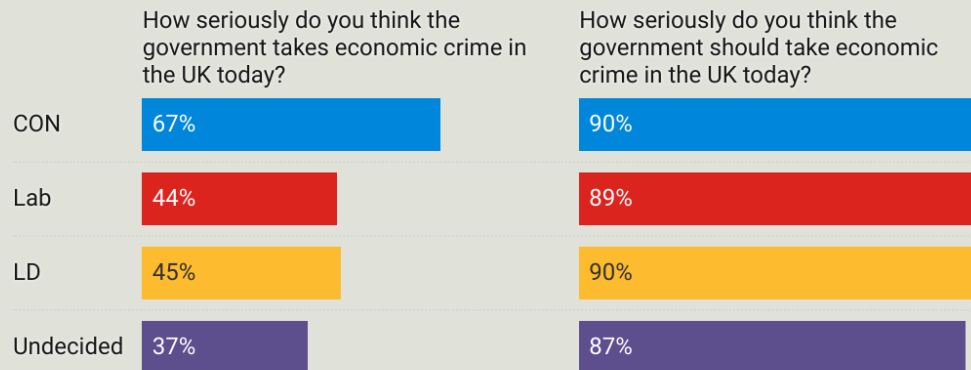
% who view the issue of money laundering, corruption, and fraud, and its effect on the UK seriously

71%   98%
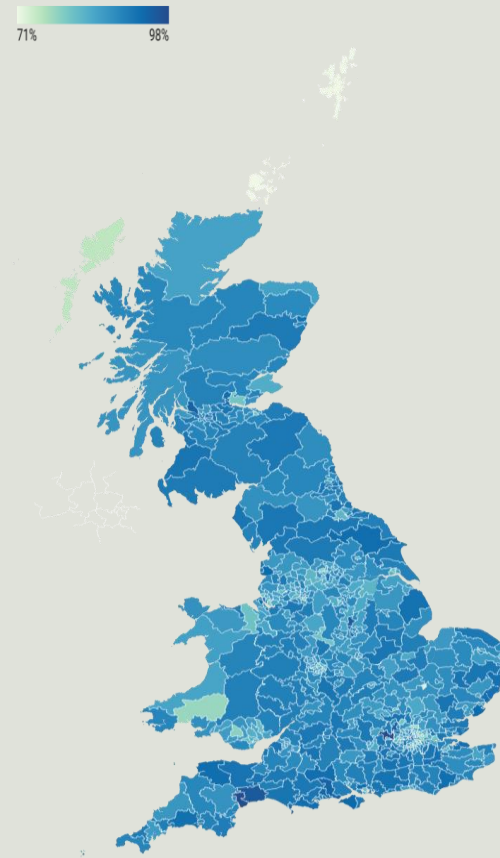
London, an outlier across several issues in this research, is generally aligned with the rest of Britain on this question. 10 of its constituencies land in the 100 with the highest proportion of residents who view the issue seriously, inc. Cities of London & Westminster (5th), Kensington & Bayswater (12th), and Hampstead & Highgate (32nd).

An overwhelming majority of people in Red Wall[1] constituencies said they take the issue of economic crime seriously. However, fewer people in Red Wall seats take the issue as seriously as the national average. 21 of these constituencies are among the 200 seats with the lowest percentage of people who take the issue seriously. Just four of 44 Red Wall seats appear in the top 100.

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Analysing trust in political parties to tackle economic crime

Polling themes analysed:

- *Which political party do you trust the **most** to deal with corruption and economic crime?*
- *Which political party do you trust the **least** to deal with corruption and economic crime?*

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Who's more trusted to fight economic crime? It's all to play for.

There's substantial uncertainty around which party is trusted to deal with corruption and economic crime. More respondents were unsure (30%) than chose a specific party, and the data from undecided voters was especially striking.

- Three quarters (73%) of currently undecided voters don't know which political party they trust **most** to deal with corruption and economic crime (just 4% selected Conservative and 6% selected Labour).
- A clear majority (55%) said they didn't know who they trust **least**.
- 23% of undecideds trust the Conservatives **least** – more than three times the number that selected Labour (7%).

Looking at the overall polling figures, both the largest parties are lacking a majority of public trust in this area, but Labour fared slightly better.

- Labour were the **most** trusted party overall to deal with corruption and economic crime, but only with 29%. 16% of respondents trust Conservatives with this the **most**.
- 37% **least** trust the Conservatives, while 20% **least** trust Labour.
- For over 65s, among whom the Conservatives hold a 10-point lead over Labour in our poll, 37% trust the Conservatives **least**. One in five trust Labour **least** (3% less than the 23% answering 'don't know').
- 37% of 2019 Conservative voters trust them **most,** which seems weak when 65% of 2019 Labour voters trust the party they voted for **most**.

Which party do you trust the most to deal with corruption and economic crime?

Con	16%
Lab	29%
LD	7%
Other	17%
Don't know	31%

Which party do you trust the least to deal with corruption and economic crime?

Con	37%
Lab	20%
LD	4%
Other	16%
Don't know	23%
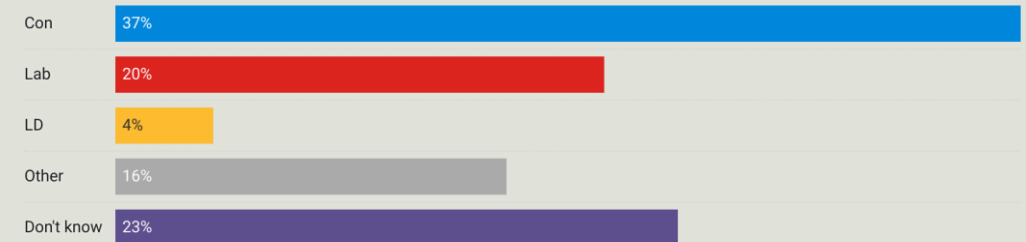
Source: Survation • Created with Datawrapper

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The effects of economic crime on the economy

Polling themes analysed:

Thinking about economic crime, which of the following statements is closest to your view?
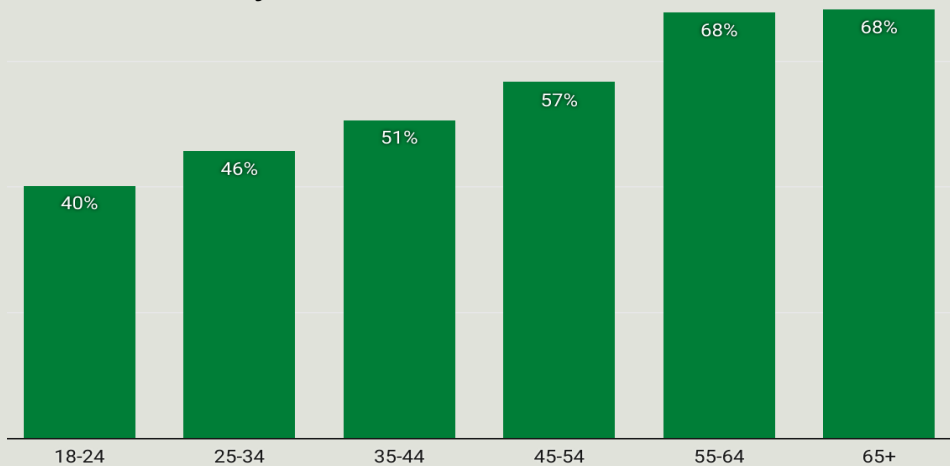- *Economic crime has a positive impact on the British economy*
- *Economic crime has a negative impact on the British economy*
- *Economic crime does not impact the British economy*
- *Don't know*

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We found that a majority of people think economic crime has a negative impact on the British economy, and we also identified further discrepancies between age ranges.

- Overall, 56% believe economic crime has a negative impact on the economy.
- Over two-thirds (68%) of those aged 65+ think its impact is negative compared to 40% of 18-24s.
- A third (32%) of 18-24s believe economic crime has no effect on the economy – a view shared by just 5% of over 65s.

% who think economic crime has a negative impact on the British economy


We found striking regional differences too.

- In London and W. Midlands, "economic crime has a negative impact on the economy" is a minority (49%) view.
- But in the North West and South East, it's a majority view of 61%.

In terms of voting intentions:

- 2019 Conservative voters were 5% more likely to think economic crime has a negative impact on the economy than Labour voters.
- Those currently intending to vote Labour were as likely (+1%) as those intending to vote Conservative.
- Undecided voters (60%) are more likely than Labour (56%) or Conservative (55%) ones to think this. We estimate that approximately 40% of current undecideds voted Conservative in 2019. These are voters the party must regain to avoid a landslide defeat; our research shows this key group of voters is concerned about economic crime.

% who think economic crime has a negative impact on the British economy by region

49% 61%

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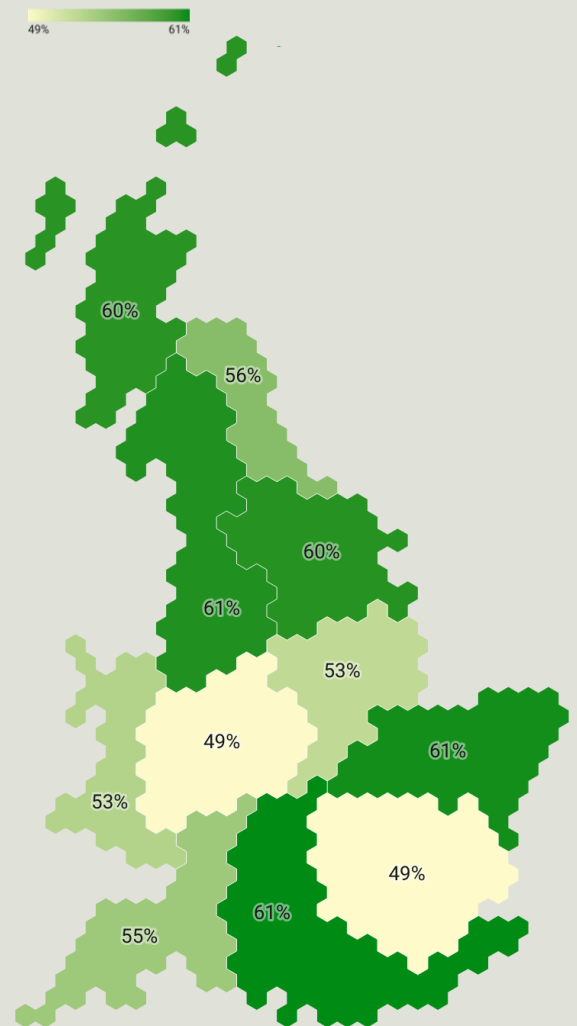
Who commits economic crime and how easy is it to hide?

Polling themes analysed:

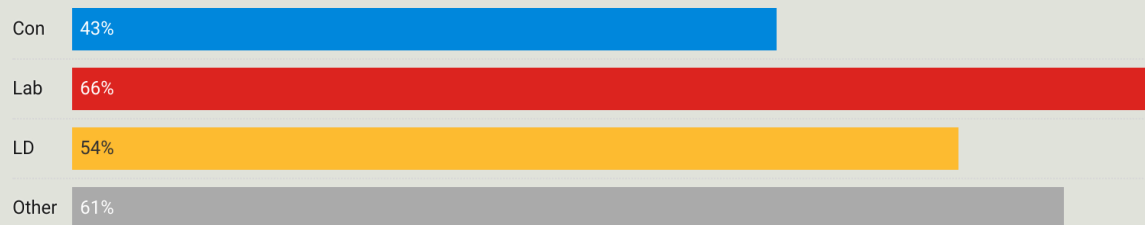- *Which of the following groups and professions do you most associate with economic crime?*
(Celebrities, oligarchs & kleptocrats, politicians, senior executives, small business owners, tradespeople, lawyers, accountants, bankers, estate agents...)

- *How easy is it for wealthy/less wealthy people to use complicated financial arrangements to make it harder to track their wealth?*

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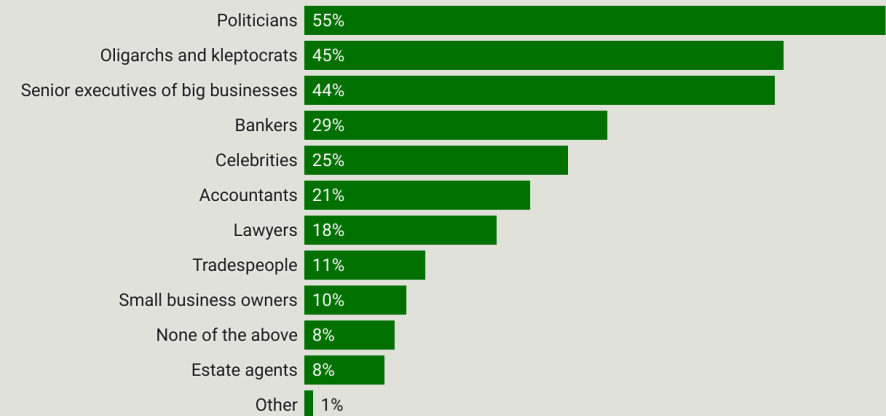# Politicians more associated with economic crime than any other profession

By a substantial margin, the public identified politicians as the professional class they most associate with economic crime, beating even oligarchs and kleptocrats.

- The three groups and professions most associated with economic crime were politicians (55%), oligarchs and kleptocrats (45%), and senior executives of big businesses (44%).
- 59% of 18-24s selected politicians. Respondents were more likely to select celebrities (28%) than oligarchs and kleptocrats (16%).
- Conversely, over-65s were the most likely to associate economic crime with oligarchs and kleptocrats (71%). This group was less likely to associate politicians with economic crime, but a significant 43% still did so.
- Leave voters (49%) were less suspicious of politicians than Remain voters (59%).
- People intending to vote Conservative were significantly less likely to associate politicians (39%) with economic crime than Labour (64%), Green (60%), Liberal Democrat (55%), and undecided voters (55%).

% who associate politicians with economic crime

Con	43%
Lab	66%
LD	54%
Other	61%

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

Politicians	55%
Oligarchs and kleptocrats	45%
Senior executives of big businesses	44%
Bankers	29%
Celebrities	25%
Accountants	21%
Lawyers	18%
Tradespeople	11%
Small business owners	10%
None of the above	8%
Estate agents	8%
Other	1%

A majority (63%) agree it's easier for wealthy people "to use complicated financial arrangements to make it harder to track their wealth and its origins than it is for ordinary people". A fifth (21%) said it's equally easy for both groups. In London, the proportion saying it's easier for wealthy people shrinks to 54%, while "equally easy" rises to more than one in four (27%).

Londoners were also least likely to associate senior executives (39%) and bankers (25%) with economic crime. This suggests the capital is distinct in both who it perceives to perpetrate economic crime and in how easy it believes it is to commit such crime.

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Perceptions of fairness and economic crime

Polling themes analysed:

• *To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? "Economic crime is making the UK a more unfair place to live for people like me."*

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Most people say economic crime is making the UK more unfair for them

Throughout Britain, a large majority of the public agrees that "economic crime is making the UK a more unfair place to live for people like me".

- Overall, 70% of respondents agree economic crime is making the UK a more unfair place to live for them.
- Agreement is robust in every region, but very strong in Scottish and Welsh seats.
- Our MRP analysis finds that 11/15 seats with the highest levels of agreement are in Scotland. On current projections, many of these constituencies are ultra-marginal, including Aberdeenshire North and Moray East (2nd) and Argyll, Bute and South Lochaber (7th).
- More than half of all Welsh seats are in the top 100, including the ultra-marginal Ceredigion (3rd) and Neath and Swansea East (17th).
- In London net agreement is +61%, though half of London constituencies fall in the 100 seats with the lowest level of agreement.

There was universal agreement regardless of voting intention, with those intending to vote Labour (77%) and Liberal Democrat (76%) more likely to agree than those intending to vote Conservative (67%). Potentially as a result of the 'people like me' framing, many seats in the prosperous Blue Wall, such as Chelsea and Fulham (628th) and Woking (609th), have lower levels of agreement. Almost half of all seats in the Blue Wall[3] fall in the bottom 150.

The majority of all age groups are in agreement, with seven in ten over-35s agreeing (72-75%). The number drops to 57% for 18-24s and 67% for 25-34s.
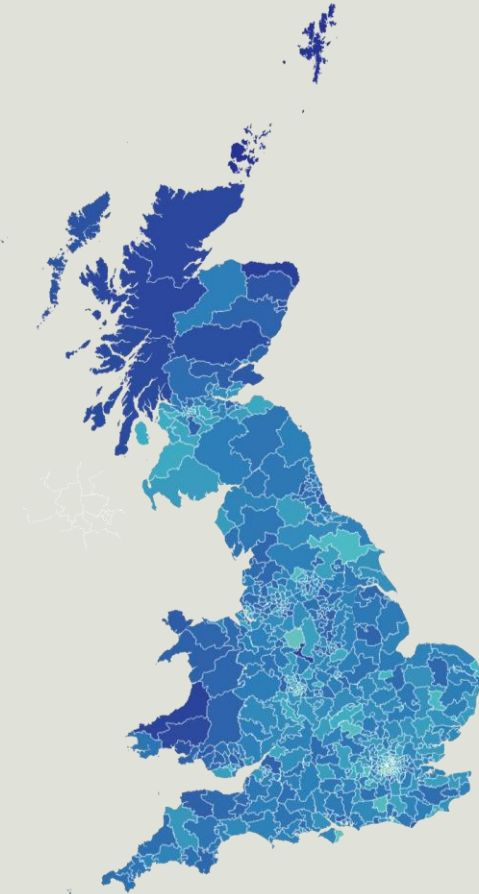
% who agree 'Economic crime is making the UK a more unfair place to live for people like me'

77%   99%

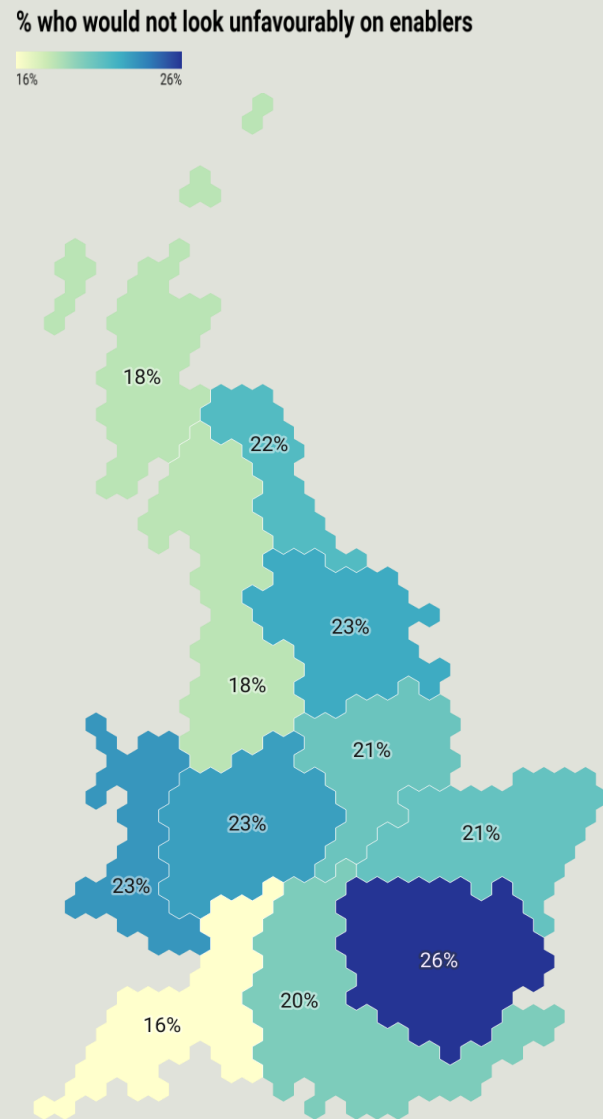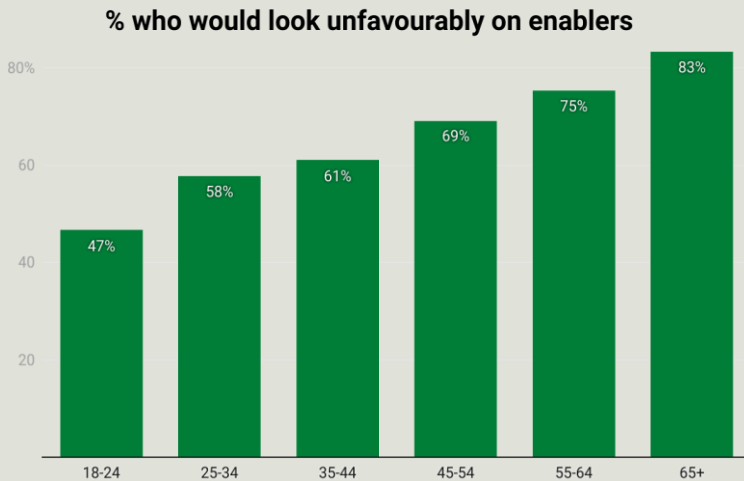**Survation.**

Enablers of economic crime and whistleblowers

Polling themes analysed:

- *Perpetrators of economic crimes often require the expertise provided by British professional services (accountants, lawyers, estate agents, etc.) To what extent do you agree or disagree that British professional services should be better regulated to ensure they detect and prevent economic crime, and held more accountable when they fail to do so?*
- *Would you look unfavourably on a British professional service provider that chooses to turn a blind eye to the activities of certain clients tied to economic crimes such as corruption and money laundering?*
- *Does the UK need strong protections for whistleblowers in the public and private sector who disclose information about certain activities within our financial and legal institutions?*

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69% favour better regulation for professional services

We found widespread agreement around regulations for professional service providers (accountants, lawyers, estate agents etc) who enable economic crime.

- There was +69% net agreement that professional services should be better regulated to ensure they detect and prevent economic crime and held more accountable when they don't.
- There was little variation across voting intentions.
- Agreement was 35% higher among over-65s (89%) than it was for 18-24-year-olds (54%).
- London was the only region in which net agreement fell below 60%, although disagreement remained tepid.

% who would look unfavourably on enablers

% who would not look unfavourably on enablers

16%   26%

The public also takes a dim view of those professional services providers who deliberately enable economic crime.

- 68% would look unfavourably on a British professional service provider that chooses to turn a blind eye to client activities tied to economic crimes like corruption and money laundering
- People aged 65+ were 31% more likely to report looking unfavourably on such providers than 18-24 year olds.
- In London respondents were least likely to say they would look unfavourably (61%).

Throughout the country, we found strong support for protecting whistleblowers of economic crime (81%). Alongside this, 72% think Britain should take more responsibility to work with its offshore financial centres to tackle money laundering and tax evasion

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The housing market and economic crime

Polling themes analysed:

- *Should the UK government make it more difficult for individuals to purchase property in the UK with money they have made through illegal or illicit means?*
- *When an individual is purchasing property in the UK, is it important to know whether they made their money through illegal or illicit means?*

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Three quarters in favour of greater housing market regulation
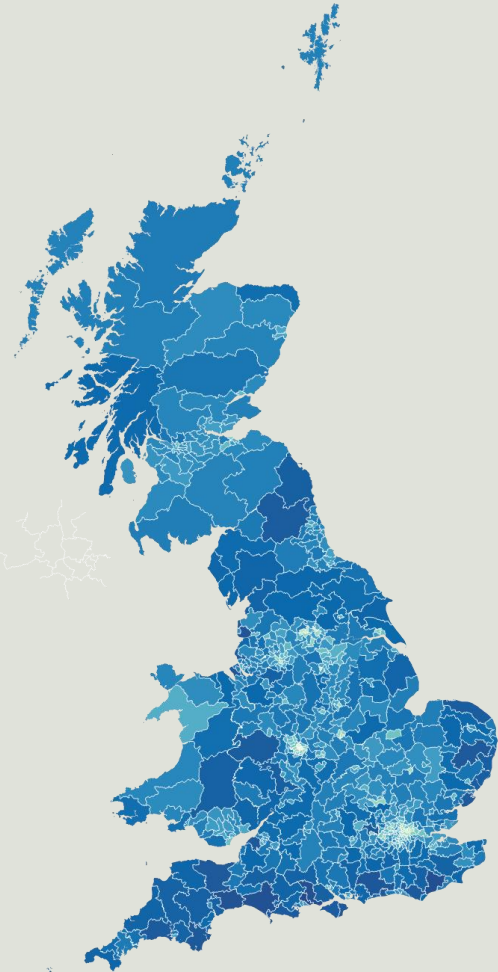
There's a clear appetite for limiting the extent to which the property market can be used to launder the proceeds of economic crime.

- Three quarters (74%) think the government should make it more difficult for individuals to purchase property in the UK with money made through illegal or illicit means
- 75% think it's important to know whether an individual purchasing property made their money through illegal or illicit means.
- Likelihood of supporting these two viewpoints increased with respondents' age.

We found some very clear regional differences in attitudes to these questions.

- Making it more difficult to buy property with money made through illegal or illicit means is most popular in the South East and South West of England.
- Although these two regions account for less than one quarter of all seats, they make up more than half (58) of the 100 seats most supportive of government action.
- Christchurch (1st) and West Dorset (4th) in the South West, and New Forest West (2nd) and Bexhill and Battle (3rd) in the South East led the top 100.

People who voted Conservative or Liberal Democrat in 2019 were most likely to support stronger regulation of property purchases, so it's unsurprising that 14 Blue Wall constituencies are in the 100 seats most supportive of more government action. This includes Lewes (17th), which Survation predict would've been an ultra-marginal contest between the two parties at the time of polling. The Blue Wall constituencies showing the lowest support are mostly concentrated in London, eg Harrow East, Hendon, and Chelsea and Fulham.

% who think the government should make it more difficult for individuals to purchase property in the UK with money made through illegal or illicit means

65%   90%

18

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Examining the London bubble

A clear majority of Londoners (67%) believes the government should make it harder for individuals involved in economic crime to purchase property. A similar proportion (63%) says it's important to know where a house buyer's money comes from.

But London does demonstrate the lowest levels of support of any region, with one in four opposing more regulation to make it harder to purchase property with money made illegally. In the chart below, the red line shows average support across the UK.
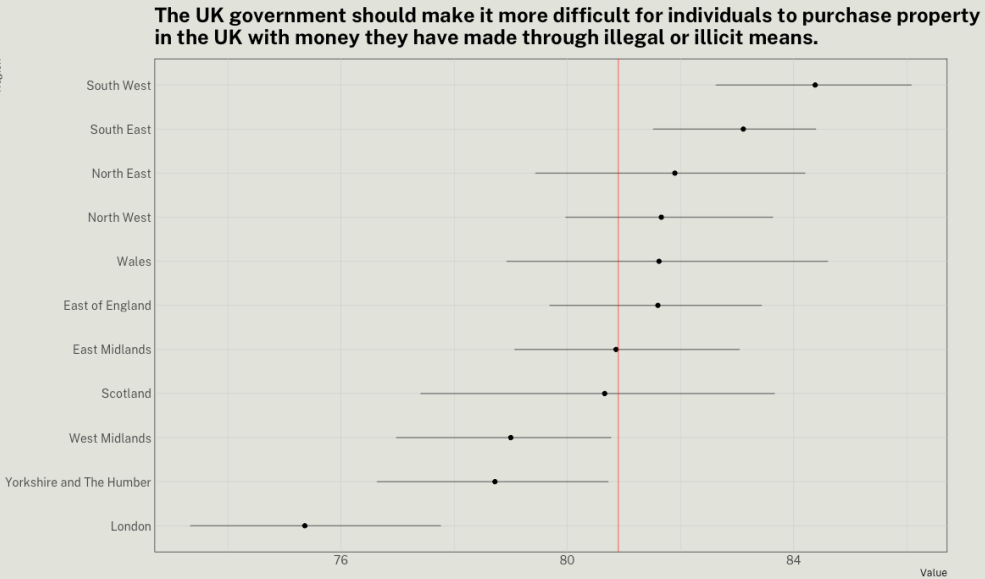
Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (147th) is the only constituency in London which falls in the top 200 seats most supportive of increased regulation. No constituency in inner London is in the top 250, the first to appear being the re-established Hampstead and Highgate (266th). Of the capital's 75 constituencies, 41 are in the bottom 100.

% who think the government should make it more difficult for individuals to purchase property in the UK with money made through illegal or illicit means

The UK government should make it more difficult for individuals to purchase property in the UK with money they have made through illegal or illicit means.

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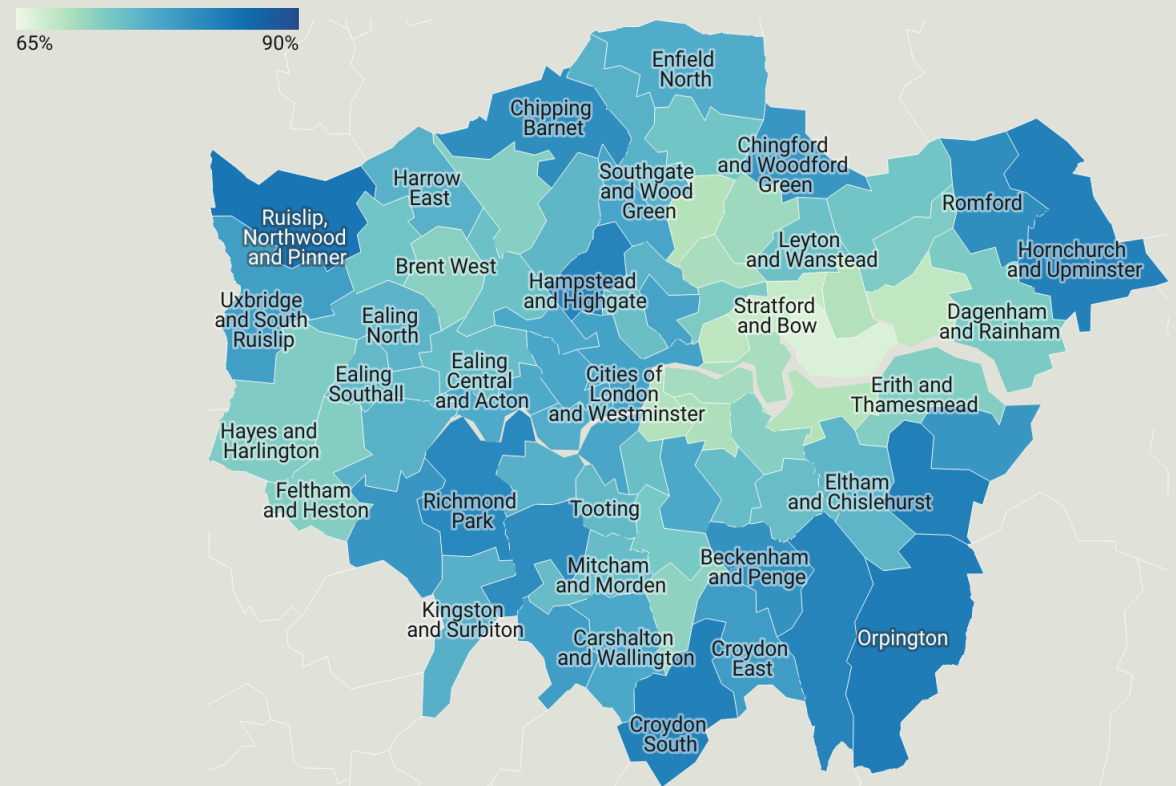
About the UK Anti-Corruption Coalition

The UK Anti-Corruption Coalition brings together the UK's leading anti-corruption organisations. We advocate to policymakers, hold those with power to account, and work towards driving real world change. To properly address the issues highlighted in this report, and to restore public trust in several key areas, the coalition urges lawmakers to adopt the following solutions.

Political
- Ensure there's a cabinet level Minister responsible for Economic Crime; review the oversight and accountability mechanisms for tackling economic crime and corruption; and review the case for an independent commissioner.
- Prevent money laundering, sanctions evasion and other criminal activity being hidden by shell companies in Britain's offshore financial centres by making sure Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies open up their corporate registries without delay.
- Return corrupt assets seized by the UK to the people they were originally stolen from, in a responsible, transparent and accountable manner consistent with international asset recovery principles.

Legal
- Prevent trusts providing loopholes in property transparency laws by making information about parties to trusts held by Companies House and HMRC more transparent. At a minimum, civil society and journalists should have access to this information so they can complement law enforcement in rooting out suspicious activity.
- Ensure corporate executives can be held legally to account when companies they run engage in misconduct.
- Improve the legal protections for whistleblowers and significantly expand whistleblower compensation schemes.

Enforcement
- Create an attractive career path in the law enforcement of economic crime by undertaking a comprehensive review of salaries, training pathways, and how to recruit and retain the best expertise.
- Ensure the UK has an effective first line of defence against economic crime, by consolidating underperforming supervisory bodies charged with enforcing anti-money laundering rules into a new, strengthened statutory body.
- Reinvest economic crime fines and more criminal funds seized by law enforcement back into their work.

UK Anti-Corruption Coalition

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.

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.

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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.

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Further information

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.

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.

This report was prepared by Jack Peacock, Research Manager at Survation, and Stevie Wolfe, Communications Manager at the UK Anti-Corruption Coalition. For more information please contact researchteam@survation.com and/or stevie.wolfe@transparency.org.uk

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The Living Wage

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