The fight for trust

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SMF Social Market Foundation

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CONTENTS

About the author 4
About this report 4
Foreword 6
Chapter One – Introduction 8
Chapter Two – Trust in the UK today 14
Chapter Three – Taking trust seriously 19
Chapter Four – Applying a ‘trust lens’ to policy challenges 24
Chapter Five – Developing a trust strategy 31
Chapter Six – Trusted for a second term? 38
Chapter Seven – Conclusion 40
Appendix 41
Bibliography 46
Endnotes 51

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Dr Steve van Riel started his career in politics and policy, working in Labour Party politics from 2003 to 2011, including stints as the party's head of research, director of policy and research, and as a political advisor on work and pensions and foreign affairs.

Since 2011 he has advised some of the world's most well-known brands on how they can measure, manage, and increase trust. He now works for the global communications agency, Edelman, as a senior strategy director and head of trust development for the European region. Edelman is well known for its sustained interest in trust, having published an annual 'Trust Barometer' poll for nearly 25 years.

Steve earned his doctorate working within the behavioural science group in Warwick Business School, and in his doctoral research he focussed on how ideas from behavioural economics can be applied to winning trust. His work on trust has been recently published in the peer reviewed scientific journal, the Journal of Consumer Behaviour. He is a member of the Global Association of Applied Behavioural Scientists (GAABS).

ABOUT THIS REPORT

The views expressed here are entirely the author's own, and do not represent those of his employer.

“The fight for trust is the battle that defines our political era”

Keir Starmer MP, King’s Speech Debate, 17 July 2024

FOREWORD

By Rt Hon Pat McFadden MP

One of Keir Starmer's greatest frustrations as Leader of the Opposition was the view that politicians were all the same and that no matter who you elected, it wouldn't make any difference. His frustration was not borne out of a plea for self-validation but rather alarm at the corrosive impact such a belief has. If they're all the same, why believe anyone can improve the NHS or get the economy growing or secure better opportunities for your child?

This belief not only encourages apathy, but it is fertile ground for the grifters and show ponies who want to point at someone to blame, attack what they call an "elite" – usually anyone they don't like – and profit from the attention and harm that they create.

Keir Starmer knows that simply saying "trust me" won't work. Government has to show, not tell. It has to demonstrate by its actions it will focus on sorting problems out and not sell the moonshine of the easy glib answer.

For representative democracy this is not just a tactical fight. It is one of the most important strategic battles of our age.

That is why Keir Starmer's response to the recent outbreak of right-wing violent disorder was so important and so telling. For our new Prime Minister, the most important part of the response was the visible and speedy operation of the criminal justice system. He did not dignify the violence with some speech meeting it halfway or like others who should have known better, make excuses for it. He wanted the perpetrators in court, charged and visibly punished. A cold shower of judicial reality on whatever motivations they thought they had or were sold by those trying to foster division. In stepping up to the plate so quickly and so effectively, the Prime Minister and the criminal justice system told the general public it was there for them, and would protect them against the violence which had been unleashed.

Trust is too precious a commodity to be cast aside. Politicians cannot accept defeat and mildly submit to the idea of a low trust society. Trust is the essential currency which enables every part of our society to function. For our healthcare, we entrust the care of ourselves and our families to doctors and nurses we may never have met before. The rule of law upon which our liberty as a nation depends is built on a basic trust in the institutions that make and enforce order. Businesses depend on trust for their licence to operate. In every election, voters repose their trust to a Government to decide the rules for how our society is run. Trust really matters.

Our newly elected Government will not claim everything we do is "world beating", but we will try to sort out the challenges the country faces and deliver for a population that has been let down too many times in recent years.

Trust is a word that underscores our political conversation but as a subject it is wholly underexplored. That's why this paper by Steve van Riel is so important. Steve has coupled a career in politics with years of study into how trust is built and measured.

As he charts in his paper, the decline in trust in politics goes far deeper than declining trust in politicians but also in the institutions that surround our political discourse: in our media; in the institutions of law and order; in the delivery of our public services. This matters for those of us who believe in the power of Government to do good, and the capacity of political leadership to change things – whether that was the foundation of the NHS or the social justice of the minimum wage.

There are no easy answers, no shortcut solutions. As this paper attests to, trust must be built from the concrete, from the credible, from the measurable, from the deliverable. Nor is this just a task for a single party or government. It is a fight for all of us who believe that democratic politics can and must be an essential force for good. Yet as a changed Labour Party that has been entrusted by the people to govern for the next five years we bear a big responsibility to show that politics can make a difference.

The foundational importance of trust permeates the agenda and approach we have taken to Government in our first weeks of office. For me, there are three pillars to our programme that speak directly to how we must seek to maintain and fulfil the trust that has been reposed in us.

First, we have to respect our own mandate. The large majority we were entrusted with is not an excuse for the Labour Party to resurrect a different manifesto than the one we fought the election on. We were elected as a changed Labour Party and that is how we must govern.

Second, fiscal responsibility must be the essential foundation upon which everything else is built. As the new Chancellor has said, if we cannot afford it, we will not do it. This was the platform on which we asked the British people for their trust, and it must be the platform for the decade of national renewal we wish to build.

Third, the five long-term missions which form the core of our manifesto must now be the lodestar for delivery that we dedicate the machinery of government to. It means the discipline of ending the sticking-plaster, easy promise approach to Government that has contributed to economic decline. It is a task that begins with fixing the foundations upon which economic growth must be built.

It would be a category error for anyone in politics to believe the size of the majority we were given on 4 July will somehow automatically translate into victory at the next election. Politics today is far too volatile for that thought to be entertained. We will only be trusted at the next election if we can show we have acted on the mandate we were given at the last election. If we can demonstrate that we have acted in the way that we said we would, and taken the concrete, credible steps that set our country back on the path of renewal.

I hope this paper stimulates new thinking on how we as a polity can approach the building of trust in the institutions and services upon which the public interest is served. As the Prime Minister says, it is the defining battle of our era.

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

Trust is an idea that today's politicians invoke in their most solemn and reflective moments. As Keir Starmer entered Downing Street, he spoke of a "lack of trust…[that] can only be healed by actions" and "how we will carry the responsibility of your trust as we rebuild our country." Standing in the same spot a year and half earlier, Rishi Sunak also promised to "restore trust".[1] But it's also a word they reach for in moments of political knockabout: one week's PMQs had Sunak telling the Commons that "we cannot trust a word [Starmer] says"[2] while another week saw Starmer asking "Why on earth would anyone trust the Tories with the economy ever again?"[3]

When we trust, we accept "vulnerability based upon positive expectations" of somebody or something else.[4] We allow someone else to have some kind of power or influence on our life because we think they'll use it in ways that help us. By that definition, trusting is one of the things we do every day, trusting friends and family, trusting businesses, trusting institutions and sources of information. The risky, vulnerable part of trust is what makes it an endlessly fascinating subject.

The new government elected in the UK has clearly been *entrusted* with the power that comes with a large majority in the House of Commons. Partly, that must be because, as Jeremy Hunt has admitted, "[The Conservatives]…decisively lost the trust of the British people"[5]. Polls have shown that, as Labour has become more popular under his leadership, more people have said they think Keir Starmer is personally trustworthy, rather than untrustworthy[6]. So if trust has already been won, how can it now be, in Starmer's words, the defining battle of our political era?

The bipartisan case for trust

Trust has fascinated academia for at least the last 20 years, and it has been a persistent theme in research around economics, political science, sociology, and behavioural science. One upshot of that academic interest is that there is now a body of evidence saying that trust matters, summarised in Table 1. While that research spans the economy, health, and democratic participation, the fundamental mechanism remains the same: when you trust, you don't have to be cautious. So a trusted employee can do what they think is right, without involving their boss or creating a long paper chain. If investors trust a business and its leaders, they can invest earlier, and give the leadership team a freer hand. If you trust your doctor, you can act immediately on their advice, without having to Google your symptoms or seek a second opinion. No surprise, perhaps, that polls in the UK showed that 79% 'building trust between people' should be an important or top priority, in order to build a better society[7].

Provided all this trust is well-founded, it accelerates our ability to pursue our goals, whether as individuals or societies. Trust allows us to do this in ever more complex ways. We drive on motorways, put our children in schools and nurseries, pay up front into pension schemes and investments, allow surgeons to operate on us – all because we believe, usually correctly, that taking on some level of initial vulnerability will ultimately give us better lives.[8]

The early sections of this paper bring together some of the evidence of why trust matters, especially for this government, and what levels of trust we see in different parts of British society today. But the most important questions, which the later sections start to tackle, are what should we do about trust, and how might we go about it? The approach set out here aims to help policymakers look a layer beneath the big, abstract concept of trust, and be strategic about where greater trust will really make a difference. And, if we can identify where we really want to see year-on-year growth in public trust, this paper goes on to look at exactly what that might take, across a range of examples, and informed by the latest research into how people decide who and what to trust.

The limits of trust

This is a paper about trust, from someone who has made it their specialist subject. Much of the rest of this paper will try to show how a trust-based perspective can add something to a very wide range of policy debates. So it is worth saying upfront that trust is not the answer to everything, nor is it relevant to every policy question.

Firstly, trust is often unnecessary or the wrong concept when we think about enforcement. When the last Labour government banned smoking in pubs, it was taking trust out of the equation. Today, criminal gangs might decide how much they want to risk being caught with different schemes, but we wouldn't say it comes down to their trust in the police's ability to catch them.

Secondly, trust doesn't speak directly to the question of redistribution. To some extent, we might say it involves trusting that benefit recipients will spend their money well, or that HMRC will collect taxes effectively and with integrity. But ultimately, this is another example where the state just steps in and acts, rather than needing people to trust it.

This helps highlight the places where trust matters: anywhere where there is a choice, where people could choose to make themselves more vulnerable, but only if they are reassured about the potential risks involved. As will be explored more below, these situations are ever-present; from the employee who decides to put huge efforts into a project in the hope that they will receive a promotion, to the consumer who decides to buy a new product from a start-up business, or even the politician who decides to risk their career over a point of principle.

Trust, Starmer-ism and the Blob

Keir Starmer isn't unusual in being a politician who talks about trust. But the quote that opened this paper suggests that trust plays a particularly important role in his view of the world. To understand that, we need to look at two things: firstly, the discussion of the state by today's centre left, and, secondly, Starmer's personal background in public service.

The role of an active state is what defines and excites the centre-left today. Labour's manifesto includes very few outright bans or explicit promises of redistribution. What it does have, however, is a strong commitment to the idea that the state can take a more active role in economic policy, on energy and the environment, and in

transport. The embrace of 'Bidenomics' in the US has put more confidence in a view that has been developing since the end of the last Labour government in 2010. And while there is no discomfort with the private sector today – and the manifesto envisages the private sector playing a role, for example, in cutting NHS waiting lists – the New Labour-era assumption that the private sector will always tend to be more efficient, responsive or innovative simply is not as strong today as it was in 1997 or even 2007.

This point of view only makes sense if we see the state as trustworthy. If the state is inherently incompetent or always pursuing its own interests, then a more activist state is a recipe for disaster. If the state can never be expected to adapt to the modern world, then investment in public services is throwing good money after bad.

So today's centre left must pit itself as a determined opponent of 'The Blob' thesis associated with Michael Gove, where a public sector elite pursues its own agenda and resists change. In more incandescent terms, we see the contrast when Liz Truss blames the failures of her premiership on "a huge establishment backlash and a lot of it actually came from the state itself."[9] Starmer has actually gone one step further and suggested that political cynicism is in the Conservatives' interest, because of its effect on trust in collective action:

> *"…Britain needs change, wants change, is crying out for change. And yet, trust in politics is now so low, so degraded, that nobody believes you can make a difference anymore…. [The Conservatives] now sense the opportunity of a new strategy, an attempt to take the change option off the table altogether."*[10]

This need for the state to be trustworthy is true across the Labour benches. What is unique to Starmer is how he talks about that trust, rooted in his career as a public servant. Firstly, in the most egregious examples of state failure, Starmer has described the problem in terms of trust:

> *"Passing through the doors of a hospital is a moment of profound vulnerability; you entrust your life into the hands of perfect strangers. We go to hospital for care. That is what many of the people affected [by the contaminated blood scandal] find so hard to accept—the betrayal of that trust by people and institutions that were meant to protect them."*[11].

> *"Three years ago, Sarah Everard was walking home when she was abducted and murdered by a serving police officer who should have been trusted to keep her safe."*[12]

So there is clearly a feeling, for Starmer, that when the state fails people to this extent, the after-effects of that failure are compounded by the fact that they amounted to a betrayal of trust.

Starmer also talks a great deal about service in the context of trust. Earlier this year he put emphasis on the "simple acknowledgement that public service is a privilege and that your government should treat every single person in this country with respect"[13]. While these words are powerful, they are also surprisingly apolitical; we could easily imagine the Cabinet Secretary saying something very similar. But they

are part of a political argument: if we imagine that the first part of 'the Blob' argument is that public servants are too often cosseted and self-interested, then an ethic of service offers an alternative perspective, and one that is much easier to trust.

In particular, it puts the public in the driving seat, ahead of any particular governing ideology – and that must be very deliberate. A state that tries to follow your interests and values seems a lot easier to trust than one that follows only the views of one faction within one political party. As Starmer himself puts it "because I have changed the Labour Party to be back in service of working people, I believe we can be trusted to change the country."[14]

The second 'Blob' accusation is that the state is not able to change or keep pace with the modern world. This is still a question of trust – but a very different one. People can believe that public servants are full of good intentions, while still being fundamentally pessimistic about their ability to deliver. In Opposition, Labour has talked about the potential of structural reform, of new technology, or of mission-driven government – more of which later – precisely because these offer reasons to hope that some of the more traditional parts of the public sector could be trusted to deliver more than they do today. They have also pointed to Starmer's CV as proof of competence: both what he delivered as the leader of the Crown Prosecution Service and the way he professionalised the Labour Party into "credible opposition… taking the job seriously".[15]

So what is this battle that could define our political era? For everyone, of all political stripes, there is the desire to strengthen trust because trust helps every part of our society to function. But more particularly for this government, the battle is twofold. To rebuild trust in the idea that the state will follow the public's values, as expressed through a more trusted politics. And, at the same time, to prove that the same state can be trusted, with the right resources, to achieve more than it does today, either in the private economy or public services.

Table 1: Summary of some of the key academic findings on the importance of trust

Economy & business	
Countries where people trust each other more tend to invest more and grow faster	Zak & Knack, 2001
When a country's citizens are seen as particularly trustworthy, investors are more willing to take bigger risks on their businesses	Bottazzi, Da Rin, & Hellmann, 2016
Countries where people have lower trust in each other demand greater regulation in the economy	Aghion, Algan, Cahuc, & Shleifer, 2010
Levels of generalised trust explain a significant part of different countries' growth trajectories over time	Algan & Cahuc, 2010
On average, individuals with higher generalised trust have higher incomes	Slemrod & Katuscak, 2005
Greater generalised trust is associated with lower inflation, better high school graduation rates, and a shift from small family-run	La Porta et al., 1997

firms to larger, more efficient ones: "in sum trust enhances economic performance across countries" (p.336).	
Greater trust in a new technology predicts its likely adoption	Slade, Dwivedi, Piercy, & Williams, 2015
In markets where generalised trust is lower, businesses have to pay higher interest rates	Meng & Yin, 2019; Howorth & Moro, 2012
People who are less trusting in general are less likely to participate in the stock market	Guiso, Sapienza, & Zingales, 2008
Healthcare	
European countries with higher generalised trust have longer life expectancies and life satisfactio	OECD 2017b
Betrayals of trust by medical professionals can have long-lasting effects on how people use healthcare, and therefore on health outcomes including longevity	Aslan & Wanamaker, 201
Higher trust in key institutions predicts acceptance of new technology, such as gene technology	Siegrist, 2000
News reports of an advisor breaking lockdown rules during the Covid-19 pandemic were associated with reduced trust in government and somewhat reduced self-reported compliance with Covid rules	Fancourt, Steptoe, & Wright, 2020
High trust is associated with higher levels of self-reported well-being	Poulin & Hasse, 2015
Countries where people trust each other less tended to see more deaths in the early stages of the coronavirus pandemic	Elgar, Stefaniak, & Wohl, 2020
Countries where people trusted scientists less were more likely to see widespread belief in coronavirus misinformation	Roozenbeek et al. 2020
UK citizens who trusted the government were more likely to report that they complied with coronavirus guidelines	Wright, Steptoe, & Fancourt, 2020
Democracy	
Mistrust of national and global governance institutions is associated with support for populist parties	Inglehart & Norris, 2016
Countries where people trust each other more score higher for judicial efficiency, anti-corruption efforts, bureaucratic efficiency, and tax compliance	La Porta et al, 1997
European countries with trust in government and the judiciary have lower corruption.	OECD 2017b
Community	
When people trust more, they believe their neighbourhoods are safer (even controlling for their personal experience of crime)	Uslaner, 2013
Negotiations between organisations are easier when the parties trust each other	Zaheer, McEvily, & Perrone, 1998

Stronger trust in the fairness of police decisionmaking is associated with stronger feelings of obligation to obey the law	Jackson et al., 2012
Organisations	
Where trust is higher, employee performance, risk-taking, and acting as a 'good citizen' within the organisation were all higher	Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007
In organisations that lack trust, workers lose focus on tasks because they are worrying about covering themselves around potential risks	Mayer & Gavin, 2005
When trust is higher, more employees propose new innovations and ensure they are implemented	Clegg, Unsworth, Epitropaki, & Parker, 2002
When employees have higher trust in their leaders, they have higher job satisfaction and organisational commitment	Dirks & Ferrin, 2002
When trust is higher, motivated employees seek to collaborate with others rather than succeed solo	Dirks, 1999
When teams trust each other more, they work harder and learn more from each other	de Jong & Eflring, 2010

Source: detailed references of the papers is in Bibliography

CHAPTER TWO – TRUST IN THE UK TODAY

Who do we trust – and distrust?

So when we hear talk about a crisis in trust, people across the political spectrum have a reason to worry. In response, we should report some good news, shown at the top end of Figure 1. The vast majority in the UK do have a lot of trust in some places. 82% say they trust their family completely[16]. Nearly everyone (98%) at least somewhat trusts the wider circle of people they know[17] or live near (83%)[18]. Some UK institutions receive comparable ratings, like the Office for National Statistics (ONS) (87%) or Bank of England (79%)[19]. Hard science receives similarly widespread trust: with big majorities trusting the scientific process (86%), the discipline of physics (86%), environmental science (80%). So do some of scientists' most important conclusions: for example, substantial majorities trust scientific claims about humans causing climate change (76%).

None of this polling is beyond question (see Box 1) and to try and get a fuller picture, you have to look at data gathered in different years and with slightly different methodologies, drawn together in Figure 1. But, however you look at it, there are some places where trust doesn't have much room to go any higher. After all, perhaps partly through contrariness or human error, only 88% disagree with the statement that 'the earth is flat'.[20].

The idea that trust has somehow fallen off a cliff can also be easily overblown. If you graph levels of trust in different institutions over time, whichever source you use, the feature you see more often than not is, essentially, a flat line (see Figure 2). The coronavirus pandemic saw some uplift in trust in government, which then fell away with the sense of immediate crisis[21]. Some metrics have risen substantially: trust in business overall to do the right thing[22], or in scientists or bankers to tell the truth, are both up substantially[23] over the long term. The belief that most people can be trusted is up since the 1990s and 2000s[24]. Trust may have been higher in the post-war period, but we don't have comparable data that shows some kind of sharp fall in the 70s, 80s or 90s before reaching today's overall plateau. When asked about politicians putting the national interest ahead of party political interest, the numbers are substantially lower today than in 2019, but rather than a move from trust to distrust, this looks to really be a hardening of pre-existing distrust: with respondents moving from being most likely to say this happens "only some of the time" to saying it "almost never" happens[25].

But that reassurance can't blind us to the fact that some kinds of trust have stabilised at unacceptably low levels. Trust that politicians and ministers will tell the truth has never been high but now it stands at under 10% of the adult population - comparable with the flat earthers. Trust in news media doesn't come back much higher[26]: with influential newspapers like *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail* only scoring single figures for trustworthiness[27]. Perhaps tabloids and individual politicians were always going to be treated with caution. But trust in the wider institutions of government and parliament is also a minority sport, standing at 27% and 24% respectively[28]. Only 18% have faith that a politician would turn down a well-paid job in return for a political favour[29]. The best performing news broadcaster – the BBC – is still only seen as trustworthy by

only 44%[30], while the best performing newspaper – *The Financial Times* – is only seen as trustworthy by 40%[31].

The situation is better for public services, but the polls hardly show the widespread trust we might hope for. Most people say they trust nurses and doctors to tell the truth[32], but trust in our healthcare system stands at 62%, low compared to European peers[33]. A majority still trust the police, but there is evidence that has fallen in recent years[34]. Universities, one of the UK's key areas of comparative advantage, are only trusted by 67%, again, lower than many of our European peers[35]. Only a minority (47%) trust that our public infrastructure is ready for an emergency or will treat people equally (48%)[36]. Trust in local government is lower still, at 34%[37]. Even fewer (24%) believe that widespread complaints would drive a failing public sector body to improve[38].

Looking to the future, again, trust seems unacceptably low. Only a minority (46%) think that the laws and regulations for business will be stable and predictable or that regulation will keep up with new technology (48%)[39]. Fewer still (35%) say they trust the government to reduce greenhouse gases over the long term or that government departments will successfully help public services to innovate (30%)[40].

Box 1: Measuring trust

The traditional way to measure trust is through surveys. Figure 1 summarises just some of the publicly available surveys of trust that cover the UK. Any attempt to compare polls conducted by different organisations, with different focuses and budgets, can only ever be indicative: they each use different methodologies, sample sizes, weights and so on. However, that is only the start of the battle when it comes to measuring trust.

Every trust statement has an implicit or explicit limit. If we say we trust our friend, we don't normally mean that we would be happy for them to perform major surgery if we needed it. If I say I trust my surgeon, it doesn't imply that I think she always recommends great restaurants.

To say we trust someone or something on every possible question starts to wander into a near religious faith[41].

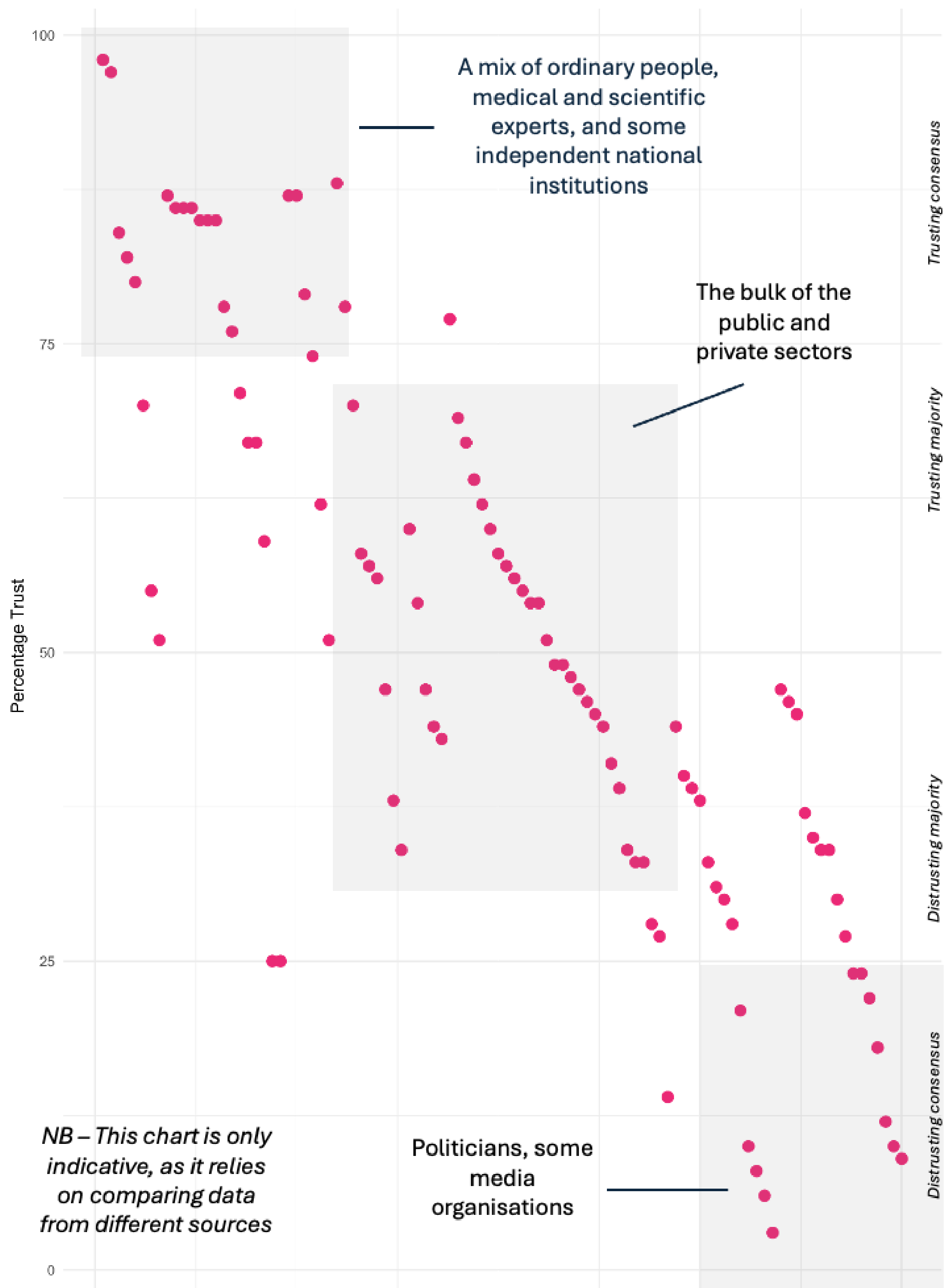
Many poll questions leave this implicit. If people say they trust their fellow citizens but don't trust politicians, it isn't necessarily clear whether they are (dis)trusting them to do the same things. There is evidence that people give different answers, depending on whether they think an overall trust question is trying to drive at character or competence[42] . Some polls try to solve this by being more specific: for example, Ipsos specify that the question is about trusting someone to 'tell the truth'. However, this can create more questions. It shows we trust nurses to tell the truth and don't trust estate agents to do the same. But does this mean these people are more honest in everything they do, or just that we can easily think of situations where estate agents have to be economical with the truth, and can't easily think of similar situations for nurses?

Stepping back, some have questioned whether surveys can really capture the idea of trust. Survey responses are often quick and instinctive, and it may be easier for people to simply respond positively about organisations, individuals, brands that they like, rather than really thinking if they *trust* them. Psychologists and behavioural scientists call this the 'affect heuristic'[43]. It could mean that surveys overstate trust in likeable but not especially trustworthy subjects, and understate trust in less friendly, but fundamentally reliable ones[44]. Participants may struggle to distinguish between different trust subjects – for example, between parliament and political parties – and so give highly correlated answers across independent organisations.[45]

Behavioural scientists and experimental economists have developed new research tools to measure trust in terms of what people really do, rather than simply who they say is trustworthy.[46] These 'trust games' usually involve giving people some real money which they can choose to entrust to somebody else – but where the other person has the chance to abscond with the cash.[47]

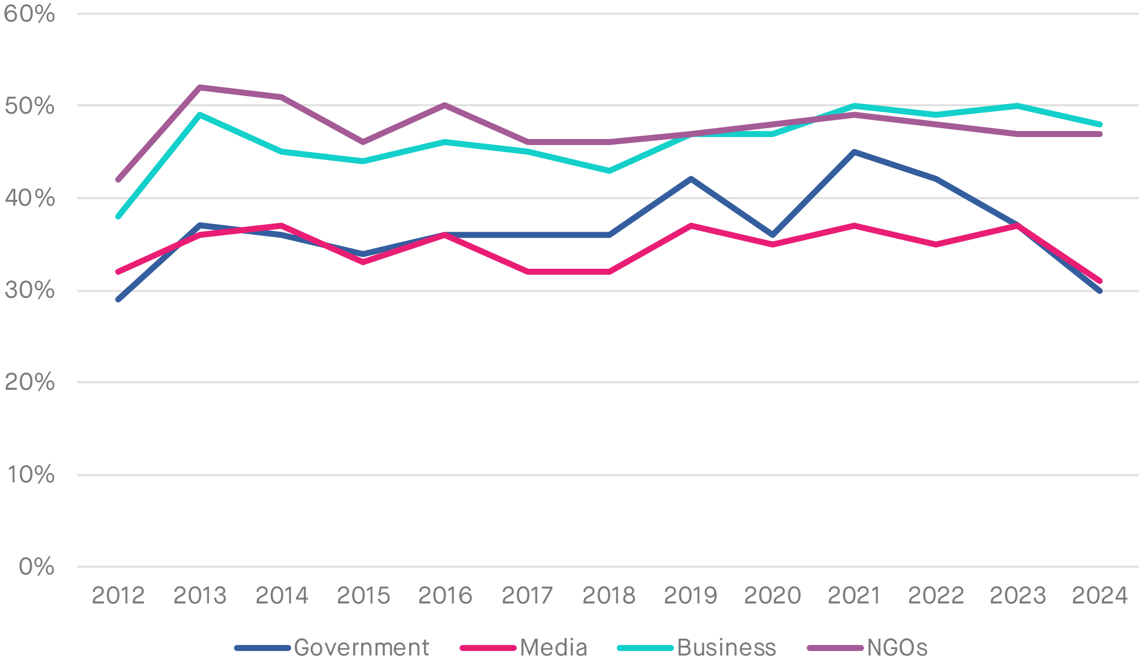
Such approaches have not normally been applied outside the area of general trust between strangers, but recent research has started to map out how they could be applied to the study of trust in specific organisations[48]. Any future overarching government strategy designed to build trust would benefit from these kind of behavioural insights. For example, they could help to show where, for example, *dislike* of the other side's politicians does or does not filter through to more distrustful behaviour when those politicians are in power.

Figure 1: Selected trust levels for different organisations and questions



Source: various; full details provided in Appendix Figure A1

Figure 2: Trust in UK government, media, businesses, and NGOs



Source: Edelman Trust Barometer, 2012-2024, see notes to Figure A1 in the appendix for further details.

CHAPTER THREE – TAKING TRUST SERIOUSLY

What should we do about it?

Normally, this is where the political commentary around trust switches from analysis into prescription. We've established trust is too low. So let's rebalance the economy. Or abolish the House of Lords. Or educate the voters. Or devolve power to local councils. Or at least stop tolerating corruption in high office. And suddenly an entire manifesto is dedicated to restoring trust – albeit, it looks suspiciously similar to the manifesto that had been prepared before trust became the word of the moment.

The argument of this paper is that we need to take trust more seriously than that. If we think trust matters, we need to create an explicit plan to achieve greater trust.

But let's consider what might be the 'base case'. We might decide that trust levels are driven by bigger trends in society and the economy, and so long as we set those going in the right direction, trust will look after itself. A certain amount of trust appears to be dispositional: so if you trust at 25, you'll likely trust at 45 no matter what has happened in the intervening decades[49]. Trust levels can be driven by unpredictable national crises – like wars or terrorist attacks[50]. Changes in education, religiosity, inequality and ethnic diversity might also play a role in these long-term shifts in trust[51]. There's an argument to say that, if the government can kick-start the economy or reduce inequality, for example, then a rising tide will lift all metrics – including trust – and that's the best we can hope for.

Then there's the related idea that says that, ultimately, you get the trust you deserve. You just need to "be trustworthy and you will be trusted"[52]. So if trust in politicians has gone down, it's because we've had a bad crop of politicians. And in the long-run, it makes intuitive sense: if you keep doing the right thing, eventually people will trust you.

But it is this laissez-faire attitude to trust that I want to take issue with in this paper. If trust is "the battle that defines our political era", it isn't enough to simply hope for the best.

Yes, some people might have a propensity to trust, but we do not give up on public health campaigns just because we know some people have a genetic disposition towards obesity. Yes, a stronger or more equal economy might well support greater trust, just as it might be associated with better health or lower crime. That does not stop us from directly trying to improve health or reduce crime. If trust is something we are taking seriously, it should not be possible for one unpopular prime minister to knock it off course.

Box 2: Inequalities in trust

Much of the data presented here describes trust at a national level, but trust can look very different depending on where you stand in society. The data tends to get less reliable as we go more granular, but the most robust international data shows the same trends. If you are young, if you are poor,

if you are a woman, if you are less educated, then you are more likely to withhold your trust, at least in some situations or from some institutions[53]. Trust in the Metropolitan Police is substantially lower than average amongst Black and LGBT+ Londoners[54]. You are also less likely to trust national institutions if you voted against the government of the day[55]. These disparities aren't restricted to government institutions, however: *The Guardian* and *The Times* were only trusted by 25 and 22 per cent of those in the poorer C2DE demographic respectively, a substantial drop off from the trust they received in the wealthier ABC1 group[56].

Sometimes this distrust has a very rational cause. For example, one research paper in the US looked at the consequences for trust when it became public in 1972 that hundreds of African-American men were secretly and deliberately left untreated for syphilis by the Alabama health authorities. The researchers found that the after-effects of this deep breach of trust could still be measurably observed today, in terms of African-American men's engagement with medical practitioners – with consequences for their ultimate health and life chances[57].

But distrust can easily become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Those who grow up with adversity have lower trust in later life[58]. Low trust is associated with less engagement with formal financial institutions[59], while those with high incomes tend to be more trusting in general[60]. So if people who have grown up poorer have less trust in market institutions, and consequently save and invest less, that they stand to miss out over the long term – not because they've had their trust betrayed, but because they never had the confidence needed to make the most of the systems that wealthier people rely on to deliver for them in old age.

Nor can we simply wait for the public to notice how trustworthy everything has become. After the MPs' expenses scandal, every MP received criticism, not just those with indefensible expense claims. MPs who weren't even in parliament when the story hit the headlines still face questions about it today. Each political party chooses candidates in a semi-devolved way, and reforms to the way parliament works usually require some measure of cross-party consensus. Simply waiting for a better set of politicians to come along, and for the public to recognise them as such, seems inadequate next to polls showing trust in political institutions in the low twenties – or even in single figures. Similarly, if we thought trust in the police was unfairly low, it would take a very long time for perceptions to change simply based on improved one-to-one interactions, given that only a relatively small minority speak to a police officer each year.[61]

What is the alternative? Some private companies have decided that trust – trust in their brands – is a valuable driver of their success[i]. As the OECD puts it "trust is a

[i] The author worked as consultant to both McDonald's UK and NatWest Group at various points during these periods but does not do so at the time of writing.

multi-billion dollar headache for companies... [and] gaining and regaining trust is a commercial imperative."[62] Overall, trust in business has climbed over the last decade[63]. Banks and financial services have seen widespread recovery, bouncing back after the global financial crash[64]. Publicly available data shows how NatWest has been part of that shift. In 2014, the proportion of the population who trusted NatWest, minus those who distrusted, stood at 41%. By 2020 that had risen to 69%.[65] But dramatic gains in trust are not limited to bankers: in a campaign that won a prestigious marketing award, McDonald's UK revealed that it had successfully driven trust from a little over 20% in 2007 to over 50% in 2019[66].

Building trust in a public institution will of course be very different from building trust in a business. Parliament and McDonald's are trusted for very different things. But then again, Parliament and the Metropolitan Police are trusted for very different things, and the BBC or the Bank of England might be just as different again. What these examples from successful businesses show, however, is that trust levels are not locked in. With the right decisions, with the right investments, with a disciplined focus on shifting perceptions, it's possible to achieve dramatic increases in trust within a decade.

If brands feel they need to take concerted actions to win trust where it matters to their employees or their customers, why doesn't government?

Who wins trust and how do they do it?

Trust isn't the responsibility of any one government department. Even when we drill down to a specific trust challenge, trust can only be won in collaboration. For example, suppose we wanted to increase trust in His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC). In part, that will be delivered by HMRC civil servants performing their jobs effectively and with integrity. Just as important might be HMRC's aims and purpose, as set by ministers: for example, are they prioritising the right cases for enforcement? Over time, these will affect trust through the direct experience of taxpayers and businesses, and the positive or negative word-of-mouth that this generates. But trust in HMRC will also be influenced by the organisation's reputation – both how it promotes itself and how it handles problems and crises that emerge. Without this, even strong overall performance can be eclipsed by a highly symbolic negative incident, such as the child benefit data loss as HMRC experienced in 2009. Trust building is the work of those responsible for policymaking, for delivery, and those working in public information and government communications.

Which matters most – performance or reputation? In part, that depends on our role: for example, few of us will ever have contact with MI5 or MI6, so we have to somehow judge if we trust the security services based on what we hear and read about them. But it's also possible to have a positive direct experience, while thinking that a wider organisation is failing – 'I've been lucky syndrome' as Labour adviser Deborah Mattinson labelled public attitudes to the NHS during the last Labour government[67].

For many organisations, trust has to be won in the face of scepticism if not outright hostility. Businesses must win trust despite the alternatives and, at least implied,

criticism of the competition. Media naturally see a more interesting story in an incident where trust is broken, than in one where trust is sustained. Politicians have rivals and opponents whose job it is to point out that the glass is half empty.

It might also depend on how much attention the trustor – the stakeholder – is paying. There is evidence that people assess trustworthiness differently, depending on how engaged they are in the decision[68]. When they have little reason or need to think in depth, people might use quick 'heuristics' to help them decide whether to trust. For example, there is a body of evidence that people trust things more if they feel simple and straightforward[69]. However, when the stakes are high, trust judgements can be more influenced by the evidence, even if that evidence is complicated and requires some analysis and inference to apply. In my own academic research, I found it was possible to increase trust in banks simply by reminding people of the power of the Current Account Switch Guarantee; if they were paying attention, people inferred that this gave banks an incentive to do the right thing, or their customers could quite easily leave them.[70].

Devolution, democratic reform, and changing who we need to trust

Trust is often invoked in the debate about devolution, localisation and democratic reform. Given the low overall levels of trust in politics and politicians (see Chart A), this is hardly surprising. The point that is often missed in these discussions is that these reforms change the ground on which the battle for trust is fought, rather than always addressing trust directly. For example, suppose parliament decided to make a citizen's assembly responsible for a particular policy. We still have to win trust; only now we need to win trust in the citizen's assembly, rather than in parliament. This new battleground may be more or less favourable, and it is not always obvious which.

On the one hand, the trust ratings people give to people like themselves or in their local neighbourhoods are dramatically higher than those they give to national politicians (see Figure 1). There is also evidence that familiarity and closeness can play a powerful role in increasing trust in some contexts[71]. However, local government itself does not score especially well on trust today. The introduction of police and crime commissioners has not prevented a decline in trust in the police, discussed in more detail below. New institutions have none of the baggage of the old, but they also have no track record of trustworthiness.

This paper does not dig deep into this agenda, except to say that, if we are taking trust seriously, any institutional change designed to build trust needs to be clear on how this will be achieved and measured. Is the institutional change designed to improve trust in the values behind policy, or in the ability of policymakers to actually make a difference on the ground (see Box 4)? Have we thought through how institutional change could reduce trust, and what could prevent this? Some substantial localisation of power might well be justified in its own right in a highly centralised country like the UK; but the jury is out on whether it would increase trust and in who.

Box 3: Trust and mission-driven government

The new government has put great store in its long-term national missions. The idea of long-term, mission-driven government aims to galvanise disparate public bodies around big goals and help focus attention on addressing the long-term causes of issues, rather than simply responding to the latest set of consequences. What role might trust have in helping or hindering the new government's pursuit of these missions?

Firstly, there's the question of trust in the government's commitments to these missions. A lot of attention has been devoted to how a mission-driven government might operate day-to-day[72], but the political reality of mission-driven government has been less widely considered. If there is no belief that the top of government will prioritise these missions, at short-term political cost when necessary, then why should ministers make difficult decisions, why should civil servants work late, why should MPs back them in controversial votes? If the missions start to fade into the background, if noisy opposition can easily derail a supposedly mission-critical activity, or if the constant political hunger for novelty forces politicians to 'move on', then all the advantages of long-term policy-setting will be lost.

If it is to succeed, sometimes the desire to stay 'on mission' will need to seem obstinate or out-of-touch. That is how everyone will learn that it is serious. If the most senior politicians and other policymakers stake their own credibility on sticking to the mission, then everyone else will be able to trust that the policymaking environment really is stable, that long-term decision-making will be rewarded, and it is worth them putting in the hard yards that will be necessary to achieve change on the scale envisaged.

CHAPTER FOUR – APPLYING A 'TRUST LENS' TO POLICY CHALLENGES

The Nobel Prize winning economist Kenneth Arrow once offered a fascinating perspective on the ubiquity of trust:

> *"Virtually every commercial transaction has within itself an element of trust, certainly any transaction conducted over a period of time. It can be plausibly argued that much of the economic backwardness in the world can be explained by the lack of mutual confidence…"*[73]

Arrow wasn't saying that trust is the be all and end all. But he was saying trust is a larger or smaller part of almost every interaction between different players in the economy, public or private. So an alternative way of thinking about trust is to ask, are there places where the loss of trust would fatally undermine an aspect of one of the new government's national missions? More optimistically, are there places where progress will be accelerated dramatically if those involved feel they can trust each other?

Applying such a 'trust lens' to a government's policy agenda moves the policymaking conversation away from a mechanistic idea that each policy issue has an 'answer' we need to uncover. Outcomes don't simply come about through new directions from officials, or new laws passed in Westminster. They only happen when human beings react to those policy levers in the desired ways – and that, very often, comes down to whether they have trust in what is happening.

The following isn't an exhaustive list of where trust might matter to achieving the new government's missions, but it focuses on some of the big agenda items. Again and again, these missions require someone – whether they are a Chief Financial Officer, a Chief Constable, or just an ordinary member of the public – to make themselves a little vulnerable, in the hope and expectation that policymakers can and will deliver for them. If the key players around a policy are unwilling to trust, then progress will be slower, politically more risky, or substantially more expensive for a cash-strapped state. Win trust and even the most ambitious missions start to look achievable.

Trust and economic stability

In the last year, stability is the theme that Rachel Reeves has returned to again and again. She has promised that the government will "build all its plans for the future on the bedrock of economic stability"[74]. And she has been explicit that, by aiming for greater certainty, that should allow people to be vulnerable – essentially, to put their trust in others and in their own capacities:

> *"Securonomics is about providing the platform from which to take risks; not to retreat from an uncertain future, but to embrace change and the opportunities it brings with clarity of purpose and stability of direction. To know that people can stand and fall on their own merits, not on the basis of events far beyond their control"[75].*

Economic stability isn't all about trust in the government's policy intentions, or even in its abilities. Some causes of instability might come from well outside the Chancellor's purview, or outside the range of things a medium-sized country like Britain can be expected to influence. But part of economic stability *is* trust: trust that the policy direction is set and won't change, that governments won't suddenly swoop in with unexpected taxes or regulations, and that they won't put short term political priorities ahead of the need to keep interest rates and inflation low and stable.

Economic forecasting is awash with statistics, but this is actually an area where – given its importance – hard data is hard to come by. There are many surveys of business and consumer confidence, conducted by the ONS, the Bank of England, the Confederation of British Industry and others but they aren't focused on trust in any institution's ability to maintain macroeconomic stability. The OECD/ONS study asks the general public if they trust that "laws for business will be stable and predictable" and a little under half the population say they do[76], a touch above the OECD average[77]. But that question is narrow and regulatory, and by looking only at the general public, it fails to tell us about the views of those who make large and consequential investment decisions.

Trust in the ability of our governing institutions to deliver macroeconomic stability might often be about *not* doing things that risk destabilising the economy. But without the data to know, to track, and to focus on those who are weighing major investment decisions, we have little to provide early warnings if cracks in the foundations were ever to appear.

Trust and planning reform

The new government's economic mission of achieving the highest sustained growth in the G7 will be delivered in part, perhaps in large part, through changes to the planning system. Already, we have seen reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and housing legislation in the King's Speech. Taken together, these should make it more difficult for local campaigns to block new developments.

But weakening the legal need for local consent to developments will not, in itself, help build local support for these developments. If local opposition remains as determined as it is today, it will seek new avenues to block unpopular developments. Energies currently devoted to influencing local planning committees might turn instead into single-issue political campaigns, by-election defeats for the government of the day, or a new wave of challenges in the courts.

So if the new government wants to 'get Britain building again' for the long term, it has to match the legislative changes with a serious attempt to try and win support of people that they might have pegged as NIMBYs. *This* is where trust matters. Some opponents of development just oppose the development in itself and won't be persuaded. But I suspect many more could live with a new housing estate being built around the corner, for example, but they worry about the impact on already struggling public services or already packed transport infrastructure.

When new developments are proposed, they often come with promises and reassurances about how the local infrastructure will cope or receive the investment it needs. But *trusting* these promises isn't simple. Once a new housing estate is built, who will really be held accountable if the local GP's practice actually ends up not having the capacity to cope? Not the developer, but also probably not the local council or NHS either. Without trust-winning assurances on infrastructure, the 'NIMBY' lobby will always be artificially swelled with people who could actually be persuaded to support new developments, and the political foundations of any long-term increase in productivity will always risk being torn away.

Trust and an active industrial strategy

For at least two decades, governments have talked about a more active industrial policy. One of the biggest debates on the centre and centre-left has been about a greater willingness for the state to intervene and invest where there is a chance to secure long-term growth. In the US, the Biden administration has made this central to its economic strategy and the new government in the UK is set to do the same, through a new National Wealth Fund and a new, publicly-owned energy company.

The creation of these new institutions will change this debate from one of economic theory – can we do better than the attempt to pick winners in the 1960s and 1970s? – to one of trust: can *this organisation* get it right? The debate about whether they should be set up is over. The question on whether they will have enough trust to survive into the 2030s is the one their new leaders will need to consider and prepare for very carefully.

But these new institutions will need to cultivate different kinds of trust. Firstly, there is a question of aims and integrity. The levelling up agenda of the previous government was quickly mired in accusations that it was designed for political advantage. Given the scale of the funds involved, any sense that this is a quick-fix fund, able to help politicians through a tricky parliamentary vote or by-election will quickly undermine trust in its long-term aims.

Perhaps more potent is the challenge of maintaining trust in long-term investments, many of which are not guaranteed success. The impact of much of this spending might not be truly apparent this side of the next general election. How will they maintain trust when – inevitably – some of their investments are delayed or fail to live up to expectations? In this country, we are used to trusting – or distrusting – our public institutions to deliver what was promised, on-time and on-budget. It is a different thing to ask a public body to manage money and take investment risks on our behalf and it requires a different model of trust, one that is more like the relationship between a wealthy individual and their asset manager. If the public are not persuaded to make that mental shift, it will be hard for an active industrial strategy to retain public trust.

Trust, electrification and net zero

The new government has been clear about its mission to reach net zero carbon emissions, and, ambitiously in the short term, make the electricity grid zero carbon

by 2030. Much of this can and must be achieved through changes to laws and regulation: for example, making it easier to build on-shore wind farms or banning the sale of new internal combustion engine cars from a specific date. But a lot of the lifting will also have to come from businesses and individuals changing their behaviour, and this is where trust will play a large role.

A repeated pattern in the energy transition is that consumers and businesses will face a choice: stick with the dirtier technology you currently have or invest up-front in a cleaner technology that will ultimately reduce your costs over the long term. It is the same dynamic whether you are customer eyeing a roof-mounted solar panel or a heat pump, or a business deciding how to upgrade its fleet of vehicles or industrial machinery.

The up-front costs are, no doubt, a barrier, especially now interest rates make borrowing more expensive than a few years ago. But I suspect, at least as often, the barrier is about trust. The existing technology is a known quantity, the upgrade is a leap into the unknown. The people saying it will pay for itself are usually either the sellers themselves – and they would say that wouldn't they? – or environmental advocates whose main interest is in the consequences for global carbon emissions, not whether any individual buyer gets a good or a bad deal. It is especially hard to trust when some parts of the infrastructure, such as EV charging points, may not really be under the control of the company you are buying from.

Today, in the UK, clean technologies and their providers receive some of the highest trust levels in opinion polling (see Figure 1). But if individuals and businesses start to gripe that they aren't seeing the results that were promised, this could seriously undermine, not just those technologies themselves, but the whole concept of a money-*saving* shift towards net zero for many families and businesses, stripping political support away from this mission as a whole.

Trust and public confidence in the police and courts

The new government's mission on justice and home affairs is unusual in that it frames itself, fairly explicitly, around trust:

> *"Take back our streets by halving serious violent crime and **raising confidence** in the police and criminal justice system to its highest levels." [Emphasis added]*[78]

In her recent review of the Metropolitan Police Service, Baroness Casey set out the role, and need, for trust even more explicitly:

> *"However, we have to be able to have faith in the police. They stand in the way of danger for us. We need to be able to tell our children to go to them when they are in danger. We give the police exceptional powers and we trust them to use them responsibly. That is how policing by consent works. It's a deal: a deal that we now need to restore in London. The police want to earn our trust. And we want to trust the police."*[79]

This concern about trust obviously comes on the back of several examples where individual officers were found to have committed appalling crimes or a wider,

prejudiced police culture was exposed. Policing is one of the areas where the UK has seen some very substantial falls in trust over recent years: trust in the police to tell the truth is down from around three-quarters of the population in 2019 to just 56% now[80].

However, these recent falls do need to be seen in the context of Figure 1. Overall, a solid majority say they trust the police. More say they trust the courts and judicial system (62%). That is well above our political and media institutions, and many other parts of the public and private sectors. In an internationally comparable survey in 2022, Britain was pretty close to the OECD average: with more trust in both the police and courts than in France, but lower, for the most part, than in the Nordic countries. However, as noted in Box 3, there are some important inequalities in *who* trusts the police. Poll Londoners and only 34% say they trust Metropolitan Police officers and only 29% trusting the institution as whole[81]. That puts London's police in the same kind of trust space as politicians, journalists, and oil companies.

Policing is one of the few areas of policy where there are already established plans aimed at increasing public trust. As well as the Casey Review, there has been a Home Office-led review of the police disciplinary system and the new Metropolitan Police Commissioner has launched a turnaround plan designed to root out officers with criminal pasts or abusive presents. The new government was elected on a commitment to visible neighbourhood policing and has promised new action on anti-social behaviour, knife crime, and violence against women and girls. The crisis in prison and court capacity is reported to be one of the most urgent challenges in the new ministerial 'in-tray' and has seen the government reach appoint a non-politician, James Timpson, as the new prisons minister.

Will these efforts, and more like them, be enough to rebuild trust in policing and the courts system? They might well be successful in improving the integrity of police officers, raising detection and conviction rates, and even improving the quality of life in areas that have been particularly plagued by gangs or knife crime. But it might take some time for these effects to show up in the trust statistics. Research into how people respond to broken trust suggests that they are wary for a long time afterwards, particularly when a breach in trust is seen as being driven by a failure of values, rather than a failure of ability[82].

The state could try to actively communicate improvements as they are made. After the horsemeat food scandal, supermarkets did not simply fix the problem and wait for people to notice. They fixed the problem and then invested millions in telling consumers their positive messages about quality, sourcing, and food provenance. But people will tolerate a slightly self-serving advertising campaign, telling them that their frozen meals are made with 100% beef. It will be some time before the Met has a level of public permission to take that sort of self-confident, self-promoting step. Mayors or Police and Crime Commissioners are just as open to the 'well they would say that, wouldn't they?' response.

However, in His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) there are established, independent, credible organisations that can give an impartial and

informed view about the trustworthiness of the criminal justice system. They are both explicit in the priority they place on public trust in policing.[83] The Chief Inspector of Constabulary says "I can readily understand why it would be easy for the public [to conclude that the police]... can't be trusted. Perception is equally as important as reality." But while both are focussed on helping change the reality on the ground, neither is really equipped today to address perceptions, and lead an attempt to rebuild trust with the many millions of people who don't have day-to-day contact with the police but are not currently willing to give them their trust.

Box 4: Trusted for your values, or trusted for your abilities?

When politicians use the word trust in their rhetoric, it comes with a moral charge. Trust is earned. Trust is built. There's a note of admiration, or at least of respect, in the way trust is framed. Our trust is never merely disappointed, it is betrayed. In some situations, especially news reporting, the key questions are about bias and honesty, and therefore trust becomes entirely about accuracy and integrity. Much of this unstated framing around trust has then fed into the way we ask the public questions about trust, and the way those answers are analysed (see Box 1).

But trust does not have to be restricted to a judgement of saints and sinners. Firstly, and most obviously, trust is as much about what you *can* do, as what you *choose* to do. We could have a parliament of deeply virtuous politicians, and the public might still distrust it if they suspected it was unable to reduce crime or increase employment, for example. If the Bank of England's priority is to achieve its inflation target, it is much less important that people think the Governor is a kind and honest individual, as it is that they believe that it will be able to stop price rises from getting out of hand. The ability to run government effectively and avoid avoidable calamities – 'the politics of competence'[84] – is probably reflected more in voter behaviour than in political discourse, and also tends to be underweighted in any discussion of trust.

So we always need to ask, are we trying to win trust in our choices or our capabilities? If we misdiagnose this, we speak at cross-purposes with our audiences. If people are worried about their data being hacked, you can reassure them by pointing to your layers of advanced technology and expertise in preventing data breaches. If people are worried that you will sell their data to the highest bidder, such reassurances will fall flat. Importantly, it is the trustor – the audience – who gets to decide what matters here. There's evidence that those in powerful positions tend to see problems in terms of competence, while those on the receiving end of that power are more likely to see trust in terms of priorities and choices[85].

Does that mean, to be trusted, we have to convince everyone we are superhumanly wonderful human beings? The hope, surely, with a question like 'trust in government', is that people would still have some kind of trust

in government even when it was being led by politicians they fundamentally disagreed with. One of the advantages of focusing on trust, rather than just popularity, is it allows us to be clear that we don't have to turn into a country that adores its politicians, or its bankers, or its journalists – just one that thinks it can rely on them for the important stuff.

How might that happen? Firstly, we might be able to trust people we do not love because we believe they are effectively checked and monitored. So we might believe that all brands would try and stretch the truth about their products, but that the Advertising Standards Authority is so tough, none of these attempts are likely to make it through. If that's the case, we can rely on the promises we see in the billboards every day.

More interesting, though, is an idea going back to Adam Smith: that organisations can be trusted to do the right thing if they have an incentive to build and preserve a good reputation. This relies on the right kind of institutions, market and non-market, to work. There has to be a means to learn which organisation is doing the right thing, and a means to punish those who get it wrong. As mentioned above, in my own academic research, the reminding people about the Current Account Switch Guarantee could increase trust in a bank, if they were paying attention, because it offered a reason to think banks need to look after their customers.[86]

To take action on trust, we have to move things on a step from the broad trust-related sentiments that tend to be used in polls. So, for example, moving on from the idea of high generalised trust in doctors, and focusing more on how much trust doctors are trusted for highly specific things: to diagnose accurately, to make the effort to listen to patients, to know the very latest research in their specialism, to make medical recommendations that go against their financial interests, to quickly admit mistakes, or even to be caught by the General Medical Council if they abuse their position. Poll on any of these specifics and you might find that the numbers differ sharply from the 85% who say they trust doctors to tell the truth.

CHAPTER FIVE – DEVELOPING A TRUST STRATEGY

The new government is not lacking in either priorities or problems. The argument set out so far is to say that trust has a claim to be one of its priorities, and achieving greater trust could help unlock progress on other fronts too. But, given the limited resources and attention that government can apply to this, where should it focus its efforts?

Figure 1 includes 100 different potential trustees and it is certainly not exhaustive. Each trustee is trusted for many things, but, in being more strategic, we might also want to get more specific about exactly where trust is most critical. We might say it is more important that people trust that the BBC will be unbiased than to trust that its experts truly understand the complex issues they are reporting on – or we might decide the opposite.

Not every trust relationship is easily addressable by public policy. Suppose we decided that not enough people trusted their close family, what exactly would we propose that government does about it? Some trust issues might be much more tractable than others. Fewer than 1 in 10 say they trust politicians in general to tell the truth[87]. Given there is no body responsible for politicians in general it is hard to see how that can be addressed directly. Even if, say, one party made a serious commitment to promoting those politicians who were most honest, and demoting those who manipulated the facts, there would still be plenty of other politicians out there, able, willing, and perhaps even more incentivised to be economical with the truth.

Given the limited scope of this paper, it is not possible to look across the board at every trust relationship that the new government might want to strengthen. Instead, the final section of this paper aims to do two things: firstly, to provide a model that departments and other public bodies could apply if their leaders decide they need to take trust more seriously. Secondly, it 'whets the appetite' for the kind of thinking that such reviews might produce, by proposing five initial jumping off points for where the new government's trust thinking could start.

The process to create a departmental or public-body level trust strategy

If a new minister or one of the heads of a public body did decide that they wanted to turn the government's high-level pledges around trust into practical action, where would they begin? Based both on my experience advising global brands and UK institutions, and my work around some of the latest academic literature, I believe there is a relatively straightforward process that could be followed, visualised in Figure 3.

STEP 1: DEFINING THE RIGHT TRUST AMBITION

The first step is to look at the multiple different trust relationships you are responsible for and ask, where is it most important to move the dial? This might be because increasing trust is an end in-itself; for example, for an organisation like the ONS, being trusted for the accuracy of its data is fundamental to its purpose. But for

other organisations, greater trust might be a means to achieving a specific goal. The NHS is committed to encouraging vaccine take-up, and building trust is one potential to achieving this[88].

STEP 2: UNDERSTANDING THE TRUST YOU ASK FOR

It is a very different thing to ask for trust in your capabilities – what you *can* do – rather than trust in your values and integrity – what you will *choose* to do (see Box 4). Often, organisations have to fight on both fronts: for example, the Metropolitan Police must prove both that it is *able* to make an impact on crime in the capital and that its officers will serve all Londoners without prejudice. But the two tasks have to be treated as two distinct jobs to be done: moves to increase trust in the Met's abilities might do nothing, or even undermine, trust in its integrity.

STEP 3: THE TRUST/TRUSTWORTHINESS GAP

Any organisation wanting to increase trust has to ask itself the question: are we trust*worthy*? Putting it another way, if we aren't trusted enough today, is that because our audiences have made a fair assessment that we cannot be fully relied upon? If so, this points us towards substantive action designed to improve performance or introduce higher standards of integrity. But there might also be cases where the organisation believes its standards and integrity are generally high, but trust is undeservedly low. This leads us to ask what perceptions and what doubts, might be holding trust back in face of evidence that this organisation is trustworthy.

STEP 4: LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT

Is trusting something we do almost without thinking, or is it something that requires a lot of consideration? It depends on the nature of the decision. A global company deciding whether or not to invest in building a new operation in the UK might carefully consider how much it can rely on the government's promises of a stable, pro-business environment. An ordinary person, in a hurry, might tick or untick a box that allows their GP to share their health data with the wider NHS, without really thinking very deeply about the pros and cons for their own privacy, for NHS efficiency, or the potential of the data to be used for groundbreaking medical research.

Depending on that level of engagement, the answer to building trust might be very different. As discussed above, detailed, complex information can still build trust – when people are paying attention. But when they are not, they might rely on simple symbols and heuristics. That leaves leaders with a choice: either try to win deeper attention so that your more complex messages can drive a significant reappraisal, or go with the flow, and focus on the symbols and heuristics that best represent the trustworthiness of the organisation.

STEP 5: CHOICE OF APPROACHES

Based on the decisions made in the preceding steps, it is then possible to identify an archetypical strategy, from four broad approaches, that is most likely to succeed in building trust in one critical area.

Approach A: Rebuild

In this approach, the organisation is distrusted for good reason, and the trustors are paying attention. So this is the most rational and straightforward: the organisation has to address the core reasons for distrust, improve performance and integrity, and then it should see trust grow with that progress.

Approach B: Fix, then disrupt

Here, trust is low because the organisation is failing in some way, but the people who are being failed are not focussing on exactly why the organisation is untrustworthy and its latest moves to improve. Here, firstly, of course, the organisation has to fix the problem. But in this case that is unlikely to be sufficient: if people are assuming that the organisation is untrustworthy and not paying attention, they have no reason to change their minds, even if the organisation does fix its problems. So once performance is improving, the organisation needs to communicate in bold, engaging ways to drive a reappraisal.

Approach C: Persuade

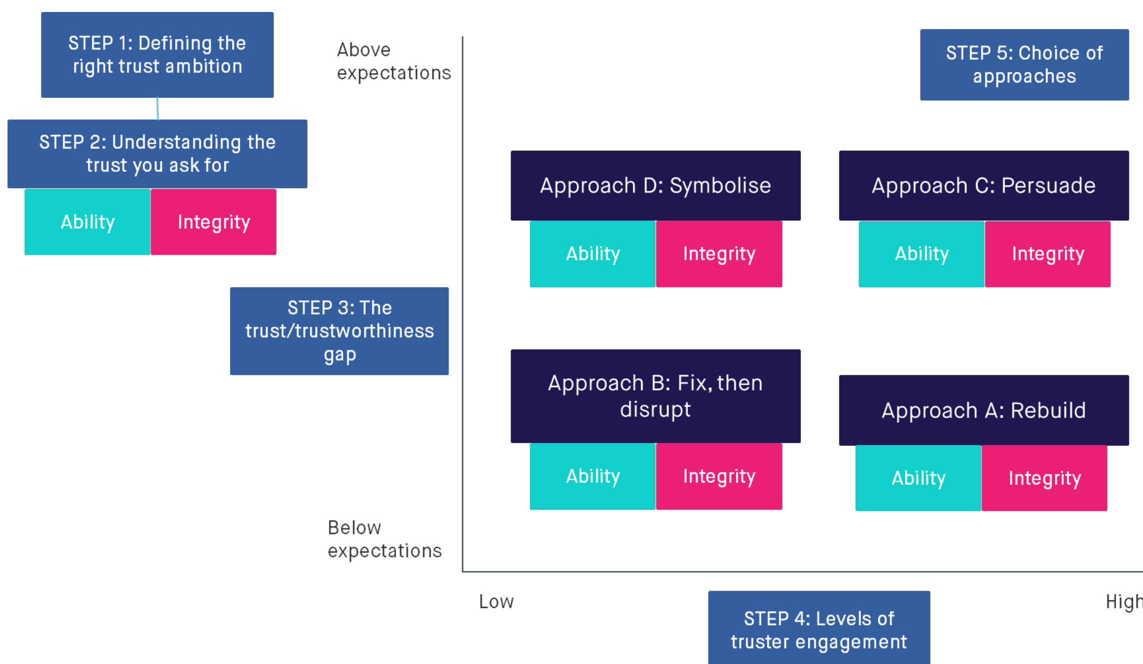
In this situation, the trustor *is* paying attention, the fundamental evidence is good, but they still are not quite convinced. Here, we really need to look at why this audience is still sceptical. Are they addressing the wrong kind of trust challenge e.g. talking about ability when doubts focus on integrity? Are they asserting rather than proving e.g. having positive symbols and soundbites, but failing to provide strong reasons why this organisation will be trustworthy, now and in the future? In these situations, there is room for more detail, and small policy changes, clearly explained, might tip people over from scepticism towards trust.

Approach D: Symbolise

Finally, we have a situation where there are good reasons to trust, but the trustor is not paying attention to them. Here, simply providing more and more detail and data about why the organisation is trustworthy is unlikely to win hearts or minds. Instead, the organisation needs to think creatively about how to get its message out in easily understood ways, and bring simple heuristics to bear on the problem. For example, telling someone that 95% of patients have allowed their GP to share their anonymised data with NHS researchers might be much more reassuring than describing, in detail, the processes that protect this data and the uses to which it might be put.

By thinking through where trust matters most, what form it needs to take, and how big the gap is between trust and trustworthiness, it should be possible for public bodies to address trust in a serious way. This approach avoids simply saying ‘deliver more, and hope that trust will follow’. But it also avoids making trust a communications issue, rather than an issue of performance. Ultimately, organisations can only achieve a step change on trust when they achieve – and are seen to achieve – the levels of trustworthiness that their stakeholders demand.

Figure 3: Process to create a departmental or public-body level trust strategy



Source: Adapted from Van Riel, 2021[89]

Initial jumping off points for where the new government's approach to trust

As well as a process and an overall argument, this paper aims at 'whetting the appetite' for trust-based policymaking by showing the range and variety of policy areas where it could be relevant, and might add a new dimension to policy innovation. Below are five possible starting points for trust-related policymaking, ranging across different departmental responsibilities, but each rooted in following through the thought: what if we took trust as seriously as we take GDP growth or NHS waiting times?

1. Address unevidenced low trust around political graft and corruption

As shown in Figure 1, politicians and government ministers are only trusted by a fraction of the population and, as shown in the OECD trust study, there is particularly low trust that politicians will choose the public interest over personal gain. Only 18% answer yes to the question 'If a politician was offered a well-paid job in the private sector in exchange for a political favour, how likely do you think it is that they would refuse it?[90]' This speaks to a saloon-bar cynicism that imagines a world where British politicians personally enrich themselves with every policy decision they make. While, especially during the Coronavirus crisis, there have been some shocking examples of individuals making money from the public purse, surely this issue is an example of where the political class is actually somewhat more trustworthy than it is trusted?

Of course, there are already institutions like the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards or the Independent Adviser on Ministers' Interests that are meant to act as a check on misuse of office. The police and CPS are the guards against criminal

activity. But these are fire alarms that can be pulled after a problem has been discovered. They don't hold politicians to a higher standard of financial probity before the fact, although this is what voters and media often imply that they expect when they talk about politicians and money.

What might restore trust? The ongoing monitoring of politicians' finances by a qualified agency like HMRC. How might this work? A unit of forensic accountants could be tasked with ongoing monitoring of the sources and tax status of all the money going to any Member of Parliament, peer or chief executive of an arms-length government body. They might well find nothing. But it would allow every leading politician in the country to say they had been inspected and been given a clean bill of health by an independent set of experts. Anyone who found these requirements too onerous could give up their titles or resign their role.

2. Boost trust in money-saving sustainable technologies

As discussed above, as the economy transitions towards net zero, individuals and businesses will be asked to invest in new technologies – from electric vehicles to heat pumps and beyond – that are often expected to save them money in the long run. However, when a company says that its product will pay for itself in a few years' time, it is down to individuals and businesses to try and judge if this will really be true. If they have doubts, then they will delay the technological adoptions needed to achieve the government's sustainability goals.

Once possible answer might be to look at the Consumer Credit Act (1974). This law included a clause that said, essentially, if you used a credit card to order something that then didn't arrive or didn't work, you could be refunded by the credit card company. This gave people the confidence to use the new system of credit and, when online shopping arrived, helped make Britain an early adopter.

Could the government do something similar again? For example, could it assess certain technologies as definitely having lower total costs of ownership over a period, and offer a government-backed guarantee for those it was sure were credible. This might make it much easier for businesses and individuals to make the early leap to new technologies that will ultimately reduce costs and carbon. Of course, there would be a risk if the government misjudged the potential of a technology to save money but sharing that risk at a societal level would be justified in the face of the urgent need to address climate change.

3. Enable local government to make easy-to-trust pledges

Trust during the planning process, as mentioned earlier in this paper, often comes down to whether local residents believe promises that new infrastructure will be delivered alongside new housing. Trust in local government is not especially high – see Figure 1 – and once planning permission is given, local residents have no levers outside the ballot box to ensure pledges are met.

It's easy to take the view that political pledges can never be enforceable. Because governments cannot bind their successors, one prime minister might pledge to ban the sale of new petrol or diesel cars by 2040, another might bring it forward to 2030,

and yet another might shift it back to 2035. Whether the pledges are written in stone, or even in legislation, they are always, ultimately, mutable.

But this is to ignore the status of local government in the UK system. Local government can be bound by national government – indeed, much of its role and funding these days focuses on its statutory duties, such as social care. But that also opens up an intriguing possibility: local government can, much more effectively than national government, tie its own hands. It can make promises, say that a new road will be put in place before people start moving into a new development, and it can make those promises enforceable by national government, specifying the consequences, for example, in a voluntary fine, if the pledge isn't met. Suddenly the pledges of local government – critical on issues of planning – could become the most obviously reliable of any made by any politician in the UK.

4. Oblige specific public bodies to build trust in line with trustworthiness

Some institutions stand capable of judging the trustworthiness of others. That might be because they inspect and set standards, as with Ofsted and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services. In the case of the BBC, it is a judgement exercised not only in its investigatory reporting, but in who it judges to be credible or expert voices as it presents an impartial picture of the issues of the day.

What if these bodies had a duty to build trust *in those they judge trustworthy*? Not a generalised responsibility, turning, say, HMICFRS into cheerleaders for the police. But where they do see trust below the level they believe justified, they should feel empowered and obligated to step in and try to increase it. So if, for example, the Metropolitan Police changed its culture in the way envisaged by the Casey Review, we wouldn't just be reliant on them telling us – we would see it in what was being actively promoted about them by HMICFRS.

The BBC could be an especially important player here, and it is worth considering ahead of its charter renewal. Often, when we talk about the BBC and trust, we think of trust *in the BBC*. But what about the BBC's role in building trust in other institutions and individuals? The BBC still has the trust of the plurality of the public, higher than any other media outlet. That firepower, aimed at increasing trust in the right places for society, could be powerful. It is something it does every day, perhaps without conscious choice, every time it decides that this organisation is worth listening to, this person is worth putting on Question Time and so on.

Could an obligation to build trust be done impartially? Perhaps if it made its decisions about trustworthiness explicit and open to challenge. For example, the BBC has made the judgement that the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) are genuine experts in fiscal policy. That judgement should always be open to challenge if, for example, standards somehow slipped at the IFS. But having made the judgement that they are trustworthy, could the BBC be bolder in telling everyone else that the IFS is a source that can be relied on? And if you apply that logic, could it take you to other topics; for example, building trust in the Climate Change Committee and refusing to build trust in, say, a climate-sceptic campaign that, when examined, based their views on much less rigorous approaches? To make the BBC a deliberate counterweight to the

cynicism that can be the natural default for most media could be one of the most powerful ways of changing the way political issues are debated in the UK.

5. Measure trust across more audiences, organisations and in greater depth

Figure 1 could give the misleading impression that trust is over-measured today. Several different organisations regularly poll on trust in many different organisations, from trust in each other to trust in government or business. These polls can be debated and critiqued in similar ways (see Box 1). But, for the purposes set out in this paper, they leave the policymaker wanting more: they don't tell policymakers exactly who trusts, for what, on the most pressing public policy issues.

For example, as mentioned above, there is some polling on economic stability, but it doesn't ask the most consequential decision makers – those making the call on whether or not to make significant business investments – whether they trust the Government and the Bank of England to maintain economic stability.

If government is to take trust seriously, it needs metrics that are clearly defined as 'A trusts B to do C'[91], where the A is the group that matters most to the policy, the B is the group that policy can be addressed by, and the C is the behaviour that matters most to the policy. So, for example, statistics on overall national trust in the police are much less useful than statistics that say that tell us how much people who live in more crime-prone areas of London (A) trust the Metropolitan Police (B) to catch and charge those who have committed certain offences (C).

As much as possible, this effort should be made in collaboration with the OECD[92]. They have already made trust measurement a priority and their involvement would help ensure international comparability. Given the latitude for trust to be defined and measured in different ways, their involvement would also help reassure everyone that the data is itself trustworthy and not manipulated to fit with a particular political agenda.

CHAPTER SIX – TRUSTED FOR A SECOND TERM?

For the next few months, perhaps the next few years, Westminster will focus on what the new government is doing, and how the opposition and Labour backbenchers are responding to it. But sooner or later, politics will start to crystallise around the questions that will be decisive around the next general election. Are Labour to be trusted with a second term? Or can the Conservatives present that second term as too much of a risk – and themselves as a more trustworthy party of government?

In framing the next election in these terms, it moves the conversation beyond simply "have Labour delivered?" No doubt, by 2029, Labour will be able to point to successes and the Opposition will be able to claim that progress has been too slow in places, or perhaps has even gone backwards. But voters will not be totting up on scorecards, nor looking across the whole range of different policy areas. Even if they were, past success is no guarantee of future office: in 2010, there was a fair consensus that Gordon Brown had played a vital role during the global financial crisis, but it didn't help him avoid electoral defeat.

The things Labour does in this parliament can, instead, be thought of as providing the reasons to trust them for the next. And so it is important to think about which achievements in the next few years will have that stretch into the future. For example, if Labour's planning reforms are seen to have succeeded, it could be seen as proof of an excellent planning reform policy. But it could also be seen as proof of a government that can be trusted to grasp difficult issues quickly and push through in the national interest.

In studies around trust, questions of principle have power across topics, because what you do in one space can affect how you are seen elsewhere[93]. Being seen to put the long-term ahead of the short term, being impartial between supporters and opponents, being able to listen and learn when you've got something wrong – if the government can demonstrate these qualities in specific policy areas in the here and now, then they can, with some credibility, say that those qualities will be brought to bear on the challenges of the next parliament. Alternatively, get any of those things wrong, and the doubts don't just apply to, say, planning – they apply to your whole agenda for a second term.

Competence is often thought to be a much more subject-specific aspect of trust[94]. Being a good lawyer doesn't mean you can run a hospital, and running a good hospital doesn't mean you would be a good government minister. But, with the right attention to detail, leaders can tell a story that shows the analogies, and gives the reasons to trust. For example, as discussed above, this government has inherited a prisons crisis. Suppose that the prison system is stabilised and made to deliver, at least at a basic level, by the next election. That story might not help the government win trust in its competence to deliver the next generation of hospital care or a stronger Royal Navy. But it might be crucial in convincing people that Labour knows how to deal with the next major public service failure, whatever it might be.

In opposition, Keir Starmer was successful in using the canvas he had – the Labour Party – to give people reasons to trust him. As he put it in the Labour manifesto: "I

have changed my party. Now I want the chance to bring that change to the country."[95] The canvas of government is much, much bigger, and, in many ways, much less under his control. But the same attitude has to be adopted: what am I doing now that will prove I will be trustworthy in the future? For the Conservatives, now re-entering Opposition for the first time in 14 years, the challenge is reversed: how can they get used to painting on that small canvas, and do it in ways that tell voters who they are and what they could be relied on to deliver in office.

For both parties, the key is to work backwards: what will voters need to trust us for in the next parliament? What doubts will they have, that might hold them back from giving us that power? And how can we show, through the actions we are taking today, that those doubts are unfounded? Answer those questions and you start to form a strategy for winning trust at the next election.

CHAPTER SEVEN – CONCLUSION

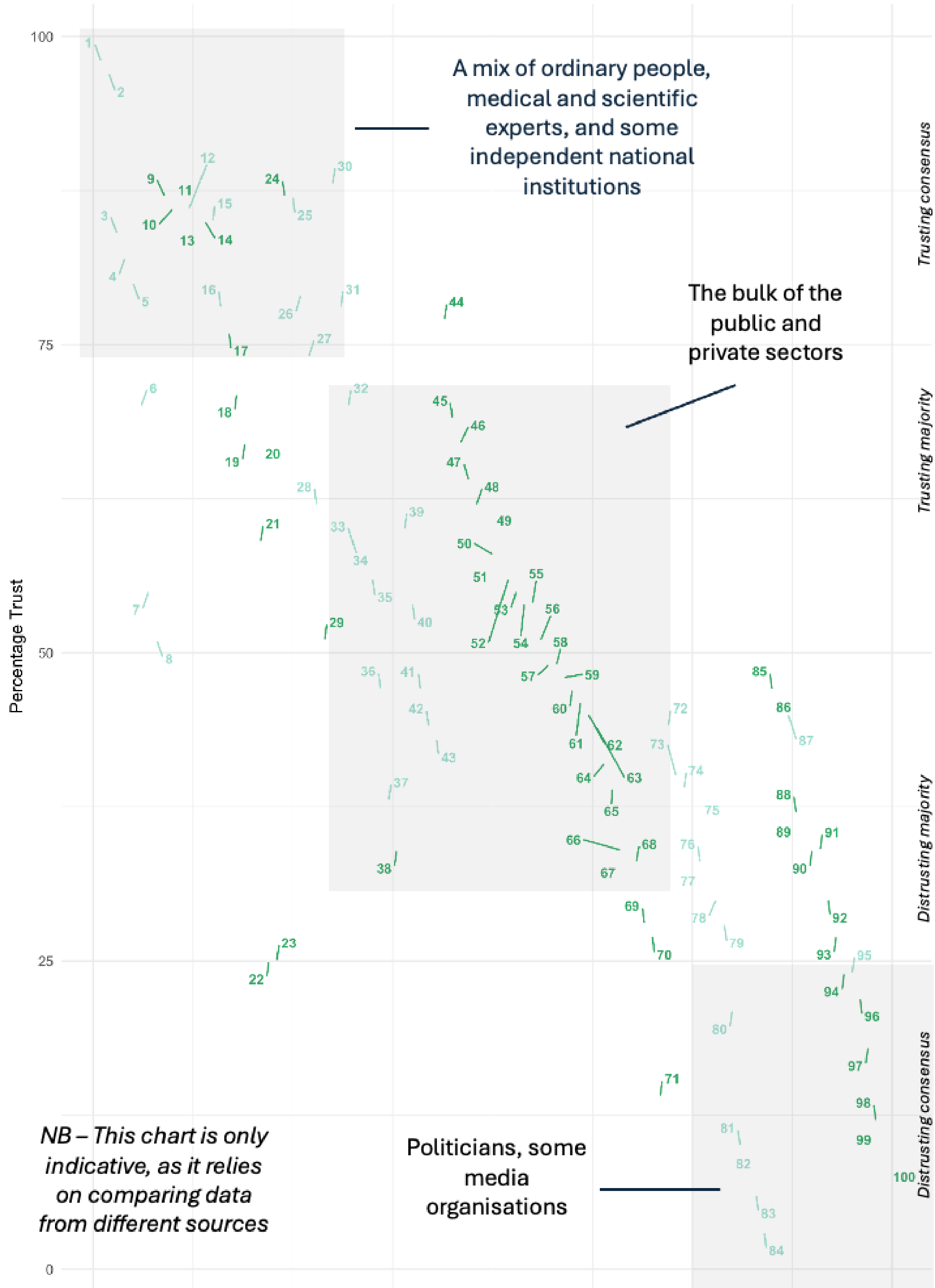
The new government does not have an easy starting point. The problems are easily recited: weak growth, poor public finances, a public realm crying out for remedial investment, a moment of serious instability in international relations. While the public might have some understanding that these problems were not of this government's making, their patience will be limited.

Many of the new government's key players are veterans from the 1997-2010 period and have seen how every government loses popular support eventually. Despite some of the extraordinary things that government achieved, by the end, it was unloved. So too was the Attlee government, though we now focus on its long-term legacy rather than the manner in which it lost power. At least its reforms were built on by its successors, while much of the progress that made ministers proudest over the 1997-2010 period was then reversed between 2010 and 2024.

Trust could be this government's legacy. It isn't, of itself, expensive, or reliant on a benign external environment. It doesn't require individual leaders to stay popular forever. It could enable a host of more effective policies with material benefits for the people of the United Kingdom. It is not an easy win: people will be, and should be sceptical, especially after the failings of our politics over recent years. But it can be done. There is a realism, but also a dignity, in saying that, whatever else we do, we will return a sense of trust to our politics, our government, and our wider society.

APPENDIX

Figure A1: Selected trust levels for different organisations and questions



Key	Proportion of the UK population surveyed who have trust in…	Source (see notes below)
1	Your family	World Values Survey
2	People you know personally	World Values Survey
3	Your neighbourhood	World Values Survey
4	People of another nationality	World Values Survey
5	People of another religion	World Values Survey
6	Most people	ONS / OECD Trust in Government Study
7	People you meet for the first time	World Values Survey
8	Ordinary man/woman in the street	Ipsos Veracity Index
9	Medical science	European Social Survey
10	Scientific methods	European Social Survey
11	Physics	European Social Survey
12	Librarians	Ipsos Veracity Index
13	Scientists	European Social Survey
14	Engineers	Ipsos Veracity Index
15	Doctors	Ipsos Veracity Index
16	Hospitals, clinics and other medical care facilities	Edelman Trust Barometer
17	[Scientists say] The Earth's climate is changing as a result of greenhouse gas emissions caused by human activity	European Social Survey
18	Vaccines	Edelman Trust Barometer
19	[Scientists say] Antibiotics do not work against viruses because they only kill bacteria	European Social Survey
20	Universities	European Social Survey
21	[Scientists say] The universe expands at an increasing rate	European Social Survey
22	[Scientists say] Genetic modification of plants improves the productivity of farming without posing health risks for consumers	European Social Survey
23	Genetically modified foods	Edelman Trust Barometer
24	Airline pilots	Ipsos Veracity Index
25	Office for National Statistics	NatCen
26	Bank of England	NatCen
27	Judges	Ipsos Veracity Index
28	The courts and judicial system	ONS / OECD Trust in Government Study
29	Lawyers	Ipsos Veracity Index
30	Nurses	Ipsos Veracity Index
31	Teachers	Ipsos Veracity Index
32	Education	Edelman Trust Barometer
33	Benefits and services to treat applicants fairly	ONS / OECD Trust in Government Study
34	Managers in the NHS	Ipsos Veracity Index
35	The police	ONS / OECD Trust in Government Study
36	Public agency's use data for legitimate purposes only	ONS / OECD Trust in Government Study
37	A public servant to refuse bribes	ONS / OECD Trust in Government Study
38	Local government	ONS / OECD Trust in Government Study
39	Football referees	Ipsos Veracity Index

40	Clergy/priests	Ipsos Veracity Index
41	NGOs	Edelman Trust Barometer
42	Charity chief executives	Ipsos Veracity Index
43	Trade Union officials	Ipsos Veracity Index
44	My employer	Edelman Trust Barometer
45	Wind power companies	Edelman Trust Barometer
46	Food and beverage companies	Edelman Trust Barometer
47	Supermarkets	Edelman Trust Barometer
48	Technology sector companies	Edelman Trust Barometer
49	Manufacturing companies	Edelman Trust Barometer
50	Brewing and spirits companies	Edelman Trust Barometer
51	Banks	Edelman Trust Barometer
52	Pharmaceutical/drug companies	Edelman Trust Barometer
53	Airlines	Edelman Trust Barometer
54	Automotive companies	Edelman Trust Barometer
55	Consumer Packaged Goods companies	Edelman Trust Barometer
56	Telecommunications companies	Edelman Trust Barometer
57	Financial services companies	Edelman Trust Barometer
58	Natural gas companies	Edelman Trust Barometer
59	Business	Edelman Trust Barometer
60	Fast food restaurant companies	Edelman Trust Barometer
61	Personal insurance companies	Edelman Trust Barometer
62	Fashion companies	Edelman Trust Barometer
63	Electric vehicle companies	Edelman Trust Barometer
64	Utilities	Edelman Trust Barometer
65	Financial advisory/wealth management companies	Edelman Trust Barometer
66	Oil companies	Edelman Trust Barometer
67	AI Companies	Edelman Trust Barometer
68	Fintech / digital payments / non-bank personal finance apps	Edelman Trust Barometer
69	Estate agents	Ipsos Veracity Index
70	Social media companies	Edelman Trust Barometer
71	Cryptocurrency/ Digital assets	Edelman Trust Barometer
72	BBC	YouGov
73	The Financial Times	YouGov
74	ITV	YouGov
75	Channel 4	YouGov
76	The Guardian	YouGov
77	Media	Edelman Trust Barometer
78	The Times	YouGov
79	Sky	YouGov
80	Journalists	Ipsos Veracity Index
81	The Daily Mail	YouGov
82	The Mirror	YouGov
83	The Sun	YouGov

84	The Star	YouGov
85	Government's readiness for a large-scale emergency	ONS / OECD Trust in Government Study
86	Laws for business will be stable and predictable	ONS / OECD Trust in Government Study
87	The civil service	ONS / OECD Trust in Government Study
88	Government to use the best evidence to make decisions	ONS / OECD Trust in Government Study
89	UK will reduce emissions in next decade	ONS / OECD Trust in Government Study
90	Government to appropriately regulate new technology	ONS / OECD Trust in Government Study
91	Local councillors	Ipsos Veracity Index
92	Government to adopt innovative ideas for public sector improvements	ONS / OECD Trust in Government Study
93	The UK government	ONS / OECD Trust in Government Study
94	Parliament (the House of Commons and the House of Lords)	ONS / OECD Trust in Government Study
95	Public service responsive to complaints	ONS / OECD Trust in Government Study
96	Government resisting corporate lobbying	ONS / OECD Trust in Government Study
97	Politicians to refuse cash for favours	ONS / OECD Trust in Government Study
98	Political parties	ONS / OECD Trust in Government Study
99	Government ministers	Ipsos Veracity Index
100	Politicians generally	Ipsos Veracity Index

Source; All data is for the UK, and for the most recent year available at the time of writing. A fully labelled version of this chart is provided in the Appendix.

- *The European Social Survey (ESS) ran the Cross-National Online Survey 2 (CRONOS-2) in 12 countries, including the UK, across 2021-2023. It is distributed by the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research. Data shown here are only for the UK.*

  The dataset is explorable and details of the survey and questionnaire are available here:

  https://ess.sikt.no/en/series/655615e6-8e4f-4e84-a9c9-27d24b93f866?tab=overview

- *The global Edelman Trust Barometer is produced annually by the communications agency Edelman (the author's employer), and is supplemented by additional reports throughout the year. Note that trust questions usually specify that they are about trusting an institution 'to do the right thing'.*

  The results and methodology are available here:

  https://www.edelman.com/trust/trust-barometer

- *The Ipsos Veracity Index is the polling company's annual telephone survey focussed on trust in different professions. Note that the polling question explicitly focussed on trust in different groups to tell the truth: 'Now I will read you a list of different types of people. For each would you tell me if you generally trust them to tell the truth or not?' Full details of the methodology are available here:*

  https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2023-12/ipsos-trust-in-professions-veracity-index-2023-charts.pdf

- *The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has run two in-depth surveys on trust as part of a 30 country Trust in Government study conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation And Development (OECD). The survey cited here was conducted in September and October 2023. The full summary tables for the UK are available here:*

  https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/trustingovernmentuk

- *The National Centre for Social Research conducted research on trust in official statistics on behalf of the UK Statistics Authority, and published this data in May 2024. Their report also covers other institutions that might be comparable to the Office for National Statistics. They summarise their findings and methodology here:*

  https://natcen.ac.uk/publications/public-confidence-official-statistics

- *The World Values Survey (WVS) is an international academic research programme that now operates in over 120 countries. Its data is free to explore at the link below, and the data cited in the above chart for the UK is from World Values Survey Wave 7: 2017-2022. It is edited by Inglehart, R., C. Haerpfer, A. Moreno, C. Welzel, K. Kizilova, J. Diez-Medrano, M. Lagos, P. Norris, E. Ponarin & B. Puranen and distributed by the JD Systems Institute. https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp*

- *The research company YouGov polled on levels of trust in different media outlets in May 2023. They summarise the findings and methodology here:https://yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/45744-which-media-outlets-do-britons-trust-2023.*

  The summary tables for print media are available here:

  https://d3nkl3psvxxpe9.cloudfront.net/documents/Internal_MediaOrganisations_230518.pdf

  The summary tables for broadcast media are available here:

  https://d3nkl3psvxxpe9.cloudfront.net/documents/Internal_NewsBroadcasters_230522.pdf

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