UK IN A CHANGING EUROPE

WILL GETTING BREXIT DONE RESTORE POLITICAL TRUST?

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FOREWORD

There has been much written and said about the degree of trust that voters have in their government, and in politicians in general. At a time of considerable uncertainty around Covid-19, as well as around the various laws and guidelines governing public behaviour during the pandemic, these questions have taken on a newfound urgency.

I am profoundly grateful to the TrustGov team for putting together this series of focus groups to explore the issue of trust at such a crucial time. Ultimately, to know what voters think, it makes sense to talk to them. The conversations reported are fascinating, though point to potential problems ahead for the government.

'Getting Brexit done' proved a highly effective campaign slogan for the 2019 election. However, the evidence presented here suggests it is going to be of limited use in reinforcing voter trust going forward. Respondents felt that Brexit has been done. As Brexit nudges itself back into the headlines, this may prove to be a mixed blessing for the government.

Given that voters think Brexit has been done, renewed focus on it might call that assumption into question and hence impact on trust in the government. While there are those, including apparently Michel Barnier, who suspect that the Internal Market Bill and consequent debate over the Withdrawal Agreement were partly manufactured to deflect attention from the government's handling of the pandemic, these findings indicate that, if this is genuinely the case, it might not prove to be an effective strategy.

In addition, and fascinatingly, leave voters in particular expressed concern that the government might attempt to 'hide' any negative economic impacts caused by Brexit behind the (initially) larger economic effects of the pandemic. Which points to the fact that, ultimately, trust in the government might hinge on how effectively it manages the combined economic fallouts of Covid-19 and Brexit. As those impacts hit, Boris Johnson's success in 'getting Brexit done' might come to seem more pyrrhic than real.

While it is too early to draw any firm conclusions about any of this, the evidence presented in what follows provides a starting point for those interested in tracking the relationship between government and governed in this Parliament. As with all the work funded by the UK in a Changing Europe, the point is to provide evidence with which to inform the ongoing debate. My thanks to Will Jennings and his team for doing just that.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 14 December 2019, a day after winning an 80-seat parliamentary majority, Boris Johnson held a rally in Sedgefield, the constituency formerly held by Labour's longest-serving Prime Minister, Tony Blair. In his speech, Johnson vowed that everything he did as PM would be "devoted" to "repaying the trust" that voters had put in him - not least to "Get Brexit Done".

Will getting Brexit done be sufficient to restore public trust?
Our conclusion, drawing on evidence from focus groups conducted during the summer of 2020, is that getting Brexit done may not deliver a restoration of trust in politics or necessarily lead to sustained support for the PM and the government.

There are five reasons for this view.

— The PM was right to focus on trust because it matters to many voters, but their expectations that politicians or government could be trusted to deliver a better life for them are *generally low*. There is a desire to trust among citizens, but also a sense that their yearning is likely to remain unfulfilled.

— The Covid-19 crisis has had a major impact through *diverting public attention* onto both the government's direct management of the pandemic and its fallout for the economy, the health system and education. There are high levels of *latent trust* in government to protect people in a crisis - trust as a leap of faith in government, even as people express cynicism or criticism of government on more specific grounds. As failings in managing Covid-19 become more strongly evident that latent trust gives way to returning doubts and sarcastic humour at the government's expense.

— The PM and his government are trusted on the issue of Brexit, but the benefit from that is limited as Brexit is largely seen as ***already done*** by both Leavers and Remainers and credit for that allocated happily by the former and fatalistically by the latter; voters on both sides of the Brexit divide seem ready to move on. Validating further the idea for both Leavers and Remainers that getting Brexit done is a *card that has already been played.*

— Citizens make trust judgements using a *combination of analytical and emotional reasoning,* drawing on a variety of sources of information not all of which can be framed or driven by elites. People's trust judgements are also *updated over time in response to events.* The dominant self-image of voters is as sceptical observers, judging trust by what they see.

— Future battles for the trust of the public are likely to be focused on a post-Covid-19 recovery. As for the prospects for the post-Brexit deal (or no deal), anxiety and cynicism were the dominant themes. Most participants *expected a need to delay the negotiations* (even after the deadline had passed for an extension), many expressed fears over the double whammy of simultaneous economic shocks of Brexit and Covid-19. There was a widespread cynicism especially among Leavers that government would try to 'hide behind Covid-19' when it came to any negative economic impacts of Brexit. If Brexit is revived in the public mind, through wrangling over trade deals with the EU, there is a risk that it undermines rather than enhances trust in the government, which is *heavily premised on having got Brexit done.*

1. INTRODUCTION

On 14 December 2019, a day after winning an 80-seat parliamentary majority, Boris Johnson held a rally in Sedgefield, the constituency formerly held by Labour's longest-serving Prime Minister, Tony Blair. In his speech, Johnson vowed that everything he did as PM would be "devoted" to "repaying the trust" that voters had put in him - not least to "Get Brexit Done". His speech was aimed at disillusioned former Labour voters in the party's traditional heartlands who had put their distrust aside and opted for the Conservatives. In post mortems of the reasons for Labour's defeat, a lack of trust has become a shared narrative among all the leadership contenders - with voters not trusting the party over Brexit or on its manifesto promises. Trust was claimed to be 'the ballot's defining factor' (McCann, 2019).

There is substantial evidence of a loss of generalized trust in political elites in the UK (Clarke et al., 2018). The assumption that democracies need a reservoir of trust has been at the forefront of recent debates in political science (Citrin and Stoker, 2018). But the trust debate has been complicated by a recognition that trust is becoming more polarized and more partisan. The issue is not just low trust, but *divided* trust too: who trusts who and why. Increasingly, different groups in society are less trusting and more distrusting of each other. There is evidence that Brexit has contributed to such affective polarization (Hobolt et al., 2020). In the USA, partisan polarization of trust has been identified as a reason 'why Washington won't work' (Hetherington and Rudolph, 2015). But it remains unclear how such a change is impacting British politics, and how it will play out as the UK leaves the EU and continues to negotiate its future relationship. We need to understand far better what is driving trust judgements in order for political elites to confidently assert that they have the right strategies - in rhetorical or policy terms - to restore or retain trust. Will getting Brexit done be sufficient?

Supported by funding from *UK in a Changing Europe*, we ran a series of ten focus groups in towns and cities across England between 27 May and 16 July. Our original intention had been to hold the groups face-to-face, touring the country to hear what Leave and Remain supporters in different places had to say about trust and distrust, how they made judgements about *who to trust*, and whether they trusted people on the other side of the Brexit divide. We also were interested to find out what government and politicians might do to win back public trust - from both Leave and Remain voters. Inevitably, our study

was disrupted by the Covid-19 outbreak in terms of the practical logistics of holding the groups and significantly influencing the context and focus of the group discussions. The lockdown led us, working with Ipsos MORI, to move the groups online and to explore political trust in the context of the pandemic – a topic that invariably was raised by participants in conversations, even before they were prompted. Brexit remained a central theme, but undoubtedly Covid-19 affected the way that participants thought about trust and government, and impacted the salience of Brexit to opinions and identities – as the existential crisis put Brexit and trust in context, to some degree.

Our choice of groups was designed to explore the Brexit divide in English politics – both according to Leave and Remain identities, and according to place. We held four of the focus groups in towns in the North West that have experienced relative demographic and economic decline in recent decades (Blackpool, Oldham and Bolton), contrasted with six groups in major cities in the South that have experienced relative growth (London and Bristol). Across the different areas we held groups of both Leavers and Remainers, drawn from different age groups and social classes, with a mix of partisans. In the groups we asked participants whether they trusted government to make their lives better, what issues they most and least trusted government on, how they formed judgements about who to trust, the sources of information they relied upon, and how they viewed people on the other side of the Brexit divide and how their opponents might be persuaded of their view of Brexit. We also asked people what 'get Brexit done' meant to them and what the government needed to do to repay the trust of voters who had switched to the Conservatives for the first time.

In this report, we outline the key observations drawn from the focus groups with a primary focus on trust and Brexit in general terms, in a crisis and across a salient divide. Through an inductive analytical framework, we analysed the data along three main axes: we looked for areas of consensus within and across the groups around the themes that emerged in participants' answers; we identified areas where Leave and Remain supporters provided similar and diverging answers; we examined the constructions of trust positions and perspectives along the Brexit divide. Not only do these findings offer insights into the state of public trust on Brexit in the summer of 2020, they also hint at how voters might react to the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020, as the UK faces the dilemma of 'deal or no deal'.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF TRUST

Most of the focus group participants *do not trust government to make their life better*. Roughly three in five participants made it plain that they did not trust government, with just one in ten offering a positive view. Of those who do not trust the government to make their lives better, the main reasons cited primarily related to a negative perception of politicians: they lie, don't give you a straight answer, pedal empty promises at election times and then don't fulfil them, are self-interested or incompetent. A few participants highlighted the nature of the political system – short-term election cycles, influence of campaign funders and big businesses, and the two party-system and lack of proportional representation.

Some four out of five participants claimed that trust in government matters to them, but at the same time two out of three feel it does not matter *to the government* whether the public trust them or not. There is a sense that citizens want to trust, but that desire is unlikely to be fulfilled. The groups suggested that citizens tend towards a *latent trust* in government to look out for their best interests, especially at times of crisis, even as they expressed doubt about their specific actions and performance.

> **GEORGE[1]:** I mean, if I've got a car and I take it to the mechanic and I don't trust that he's going to be able to fix it for me, that's kind of an example of what I'm talking about regarding the government. So, for me, I think trust is a big thing, regarding getting things done and that you believe that they're going to make the decision the right way or the right steps, and that's how I kind of look at it. If I don't trust somebody, it's very hard to, kind of, put your faith in, regarding them getting something done for you. (FG1b, Leave, London)[2]

Participants, including Leave supporters, were quite open about the fact it is sometimes hard to trust the government in light of some of their actions:

> **ROSIE:** Yes, I think it's very important to trust the government, or to want to trust them, because, basically, they're dictating what we can and can't do in our daily lives, so there's going to be no compliance, really, if nobody trusts them at the moment... I think the Cummings issue was a real, sort of, kick in the guts for them, so anybody that did maybe trust them then, don't trust them now on advice, whether to stay home or go out or form bubbles. I think people are basically just following their own common sense.

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1.   All the participants' names have been pseudonymised.
2.   See Appendix for details of focus group composition, date and locations.

> **ETHAN:** I think it's important that we aim to trust the government in terms of, you know, what they're hopefully telling us is the right thing to do, but yes, I think that, you know, certain things have come out where we've lost that trust and it's then difficult to get it back. So, you know, then you start disbelieving what they're telling you then, so then you've just lost it and then it just doesn't come back then, very quickly. As much as gaining. Once you've got trust, it's okay, but as soon as you've lost it, it's very difficult to get it back. (FG3b, Leave, Bristol)

One feature about trust that is sometimes overlooked is that is a relationship with three parts. A trusts B to do X. What X is matters; a trust judgement is about both an actor and their capacity in different arenas. You might trust one of your friends to advise you over a clothing purchase but not trust them to cut your hair.

To understand the detail of how citizens trust government it is vital to know the arena of their trust judgement. We asked – without any prompting – participants in our focus groups to write down those issues over which they most trust the Johnson government and those issues which over which they least trusted the government. We record the frequencies of each response (out of a total of 75 participants) and report the top five in Table 1.

Table 1. Most and least trusted issues for the Johnson Government

Issue	Most trusted	Least trusted	NET SCORE	Frequency
Economy	25	8	+ 17	33
Covid-19	24	25	–1	49
Nothing	17	3	+14	20
Brexit	15	11	+4	26
Healthcare	8	21	–13	29

Table 1 indicates that Covid-19 and its impact was the issue most at the forefront of trust judgements, with participants split evenly between trusting or distrusting the government on the issue. When Brexit was mentioned, the majority of the participants expressed the view they had not considered it for a long time in light of the pandemic, and just over a fifth of the participants openly stated Brexit had, by necessity, taken a back seat. The pandemic – with its lockdowns, furloughing, clapping for the NHS, government briefings, wall-to-wall media coverage, social and economic disruption, and loss of loved ones – is a genuinely shared experience. It is not surprising that it, rather than Brexit, was the prime focus of public attention.

The economy and health care (each heavily related to the Covid-19 crisis) come next in terms of frequency of mentions, with the former a more positive issue for the Conservatives. Nearly a quarter of the group indicated there was no issue they could trust the government on. Brexit was raised as an issue but much less frequently than those relating to Covid-19.

3. Covid-19:
A MIXED EFFECT ON POLITICAL TRUST

Covid-19 is an issue where the balance between trusted and not trusted is matched. We think that citizens are on a journey reflecting how in a crisis latent trust in the government is activated and expressed – through some sort of 'rally-round-the-flag' effect[3] – and then more negative judgements gradually emerge as that honeymoon unwinds and evaluations are updated in response to failings of government.

For example when this participant answered the question about whether he trusted the government to make his life better, he answered negatively:

> **DYLAN:** I've not really had trust in government for a long, long while. I think it's purely based on, we've got career politicians. We've got people who have been in politics since they were nineteen, twenty, never had a job, never done anything real, apart from try to get as high as they can in politics. I don't support Trump, because he just seems an idiot, but actually having someone who's got some business experience being in a high position seems quite sensible, and we just don't have that. COVID has not really made a difference. I think they've given money, they've done those kind of things, but whoever was in government would have to have done that, just for the economy. Stuff like the masks, to me it seems as though it's more reactive, based upon what's available. I think if we had unlimited supplies of masks from the beginning, they would have said, 'Wear masks.' They've said we could meet people in gardens, they wouldn't have done that if the weather were crap, and now they're saying, 'Wear masks,' but that's only because there's mask availability going on. I think they're just trying to make themselves look good, still, like they did before COVID, without having any real plan.

But later on in the discussion when asked about the Covid-19 crisis more specifically, he provided an expression of latent trust - as faith:

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3   W. Jennings. (2020). 'Covid-19 and the 'rally-round-the flag' effect.' UK in a Changing Europe blog, 30th March 2020. https://ukandeu.ac.uk/covid-19-and-the-rally-round-the-flag-effect/

> **DYLAN:** Yes, we've got to trust them, ultimately, that they make the decisions on this, but they've got to weigh this up with the economy as well, so opening pubs before opening schools and stuff is an example of that. I mean, this money that they've given, it's not printed money, is it? We're getting into massive debt because of it and it's going to affect us for a long time. Now, the other stuff, they've made a lot of mistakes, definitely as ELIZA said there, that track and trace has been a bit of an issue. Apple and Google haven't got any political sway over here, they don't need to, so when they say, 'Your government has messed it up because they've not worked with us.' Then you've got to believe that. It's another one were, from what I understand, the person who was responsible for this, putting it in place is a relative of Cummings or something. It's all jobs for the boys, or woman in this case, I think it was. There's probably a lot more educated, well, not educated, experienced people who can put this into place who are being ignored. (FG7, Leave, Oldham)

Many focus group participants noted that the pandemic was an unprecedented event, and no one really knew how best to respond to it. Where people generally expressed trust in government to handle the crisis, it was expressed as a matter of faith. This is best illustrated by the following remark, although it was a view expressed in almost every group in some way:

> **SOPHIA:** I've got to trust them like you've got to trust the doctor. He gives you something you've got to trust that tablet. You've got to trust the expert. (FG1, Leave, London)

Despite pandemics having long been identified as a global threat and the existence of official preparedness plans, most people empathised with the difficulty of the task facing the government in its response to the crisis:

> **IVY:** I'm not a massive fan of Boris Johnson, never have been. But I wouldn't want his job for all the tea in China at the moment I'm afraid. (FG1, Leave, London)

The general consensus was that, if a little slowly at first, the government acted to deal with the crisis in a way that brought people together.

> **NOAH:** I think there's a strong sense of community and togetherness for the country. We're all in this together. (FG 1, Leave, London)

Some aspects of the government's handling of Covid-19 received support: the use of experts in daily briefings to help explain what needed to be done and, in particular, the furlough scheme:

> **CHARLOTTE:** At the beginning of this there was no book that Boris had telling him what do you. He was reliant on his decisions, his scientists, everyone around

> him. So we've just got to trust what he's doing. And I completely trust them. And he's got the best people around him. (FG1, Leave, London)
>
> **DAVID:** I think the financial support has been fantastic. There've been loans, there've been grants for business rates, and obviously, the furlough scheme. (FG2b, Remain, London)

But there are clear signs that trust in the government is fraying. Paradoxically when asked, Covid-19 was the issue over which the government was both most and least trusted. With one or two participants putting themselves in both camps. Negativity emerged in response to the perceived delay in locking down, PPE shortages or failures in safeguarding care homes. There was generally a strong sense that those errors are made worse by attempts to diminish responsibility or mislead the public about what went wrong. The idea that owning up to mistakes is a prerequisite for trusting the government was raised in almost every group:

> **IVY:** If you've messed up, tell us you've messed up you know, and why, and tell us what you're going to do about it, don't hide it from us. We're big boys and girls now, we can handle it. (FG1, Leave, London)

Another strong negative narrative formed around moments of perceived ineptitude, exemplified by the PM's first speech moving towards an easing of lockdown on 10th May. This was frequently recalled by participants as a comic moment when faith in the idea that government had control of the crisis began to fade, with people quoting versions of the speech rather like their favourite parts of comedy sketches. Indeed, at times the [viral Matt Lucas imitation of the PM](#) seems to have merged with memories of the actual speech. Asked whether they trusted information from the government about the pandemic, one of our two Bristol groups expressed a mixture of confusion and amusement:

> **WILLOW:** I think the information is completely bonkers, really. You know, stay at home, stay alert at home, I mean, that was a classic, or go to work, but don't leave your home unless you can, and if you can, don't take public transport but there is public transport. I was confused.
>
> **RUBY:** There have been so many, like, updates, you just, kind of, get a bit lost with what you're supposed to be doing now, don't you? I know I do.
>
> **WILLOW:** I mean, who came up with 'stay alert at home' is just-, it makes no sense. Stay home. One thing.
>
> **JOSHUA:** Your eyes are wide open. I'm alert now.
>
> **ALFIE:** Sorry, just staying alert to an airborne pandemic is quite hilarious, yes.

> **JOSHUA:** Keep dodging those spores, they're everywhere. (FG4, Remain, Bristol)

Another repeated narrative is the breakdown in trust created by the controversy over Dominic Cummings' trips to Durham and Barnard Castle. In the groups held shortly after the revelations, this received surprisingly little discussion and there was a fair degree of understanding of the circumstances. As time has passed, this gave way to a story that this is the point when everyone took it as a signal that Covid-19 was now a free-for-all:

> **GEORGIA:** I feel like the decisions are really shaky, and I feel like once that guy started going off to see his family…I think at first it was everybody together, the decisions, everyone was gung ho on it…and then I feel like when they started doing what they wanted, just showing to the masses 'you've all got to do this but we're going to dance to the beat of our own drums because we're different', I think that's when it went.' (FG7, Leave, Oldham)

The moral authority of the government was lost not by the event itself, but through the retelling of the story and reflections on its implications. Following the initial two groups we ran the day after the story broke in the media, it came up unprompted in every group when people were asked what issues the current government was most and least trustworthy on, as illustrated by the following exchange:

> **ROSIE:** I think the Cummings issue was a real, sort of, kick in the guts for them, so anybody that did maybe trust them then, don't trust them now on advice, whether to stay home or go out or form bubbles. I think people are basically just following their own common sense.
>
> EVIE: Yes, I think that was a real key moment, like when some people that I know started to just, sort of, make it up a bit for themselves, thinking, 'Well, you know, they're, kind of, not telling him off, are they? They're not doing anything about it, so why are we all being so strict?'
>
> **ROSIE:** One rule for them, one rule for us. (FG3b, Leave, Bristol)

Covid-19 therefore has had mixed consequences for political trust. Following an initial boost (or 'rally-round-the flag') in expressions of latent trust in the government to manage the crisis and protect its citizens, public trust has since dissipated in light of perceived mismanagements and claims that the government was not upholding its own standards. The confusing messages, lack of direction, and U-turns on issues such as coming out of lockdown, face masks or pupils' return to school has given rise to much ridicule at times, incredulity, anger or despair, all of which have served to temper the initial surge in public trust afforded to the government at the onset of the crisis.

4. BREXIT: A BOOST FOR TRUST?

Table 1 presented earlier reveals that trust over Brexit is one of the issues that brings some support to the Johnson government, with interestingly slightly more Remain (60%) than Leave (40%) voters mentioning it. That trust reflects a sense that Brexit has been done. Leave supporters expressed this view:

> **IVY:** Hmm... most trustworthy, getting us out of the EU, so they followed through with Brexit although there were times were it was a bit like 'uh, are we aren't we?' Second referendum and all that kind of stuff - no, they did it.
>
> **LENNY:** Er, so I wrote. To undertake Brexit at all costs. So that's something that the government has been forging on with.
>
> **SOPHIA:** I first really trusted the Brexit, they've got it done, they said they were going to get it done, they got it done, and so that was a big tick that they did what they said they were going to do, you know... (FG1, Leave, London)

It is noteworthy that a greater number of Remain supporters identify Brexit as the issue they felt the government most trustworthy on, as many recognised its commitment to 'get Brexit done':

> **LEO:** So, the current government, like, issue that's most trustworthy in my opinion is that they're trying to get the best Brexit deal. Even though they kind of cocked it up in the first place and got us to this ridiculous situation, I think they're genuinely trying to sort it out.
>
> **FREDDIE:** I think the most trustworthy issue is Brexit because, at the end of the day, we have left the EU. They're still trying to get a deal, obviously, and that's at the end of this year, but when Boris Johnson came to power there was a lot of uncertainty. Obviously, it caused a general election, but at the end of the day, as he kept on repeating, they have got Brexit done to an extent at the moment, so I think that's most trustworthy. (FG2b, Remain, London)
>
> **JOSHUA:** I'm really struggling with this one, but the one I'm thinking about with most trustworthy on, I am leaning towards this Brexit thing, you know, because as much as I think it was perhaps a wrong thing to do, we're out now. We've got to run with it, and again, this is where BoJo, I think he's going to fight our corner on getting a trade deal with Europe for this. Whether he gets what he wants, I don't know, but I trust that he's going to fight the corner. (FG4, Remain, Bristol)

But Leave supporters also recognised the amount of time it had taken following

the 2016 Referendum when choosing Brexit as their least trustworthy issue for the current government:

> **GEORGE:** Also agree regarding the Brexit situation, you know, it was done, people made their vote, their choice, etc., and then we're faffing about for how many months?
>
> **EMILY:** And Brexit. Everyone voted for Brexit, everyone made their decision, we were good to go and then all of a sudden it was all, you know, we were all, kind of, left hanging for months, months and months. They're least trustworthy I think in Brexit as well. I think there was a lot more to that. (FG1b, Leave, London)
>
> **BELLA:** Then I'd say least trustworthy, probably Brexit, because it was delayed, and then once we voted to leave, since then they've said that we're going to have another vote, as if the first vote didn't matter. Yes, it just doesn't make sense to me.
>
> **GEORGIA:** You know, that for me, and my Nana actually said something before she passed away just after this, she said, 'Remember if there was actually a choice in your voting, they wouldn't give you a vote.' If you could actually make an impact with the vote, they wouldn't give you that choice, and for me Brexit has just shown that, that the people spoke and they went, 'Right, let's rehash that plan because that didn't go to plan.' That for me is the pinnacle of it all that it's nearly five years now. (FG7, Leave, Oldham)

When Remain supporters selected Brexit as their least trusted issue, it reflected the uncertainty of the current situation:

> **HARRIET:** Least, I think Brexit. The fact that we're, you know, getting out of the EU at the end of the year and they're still unsure of what's really going on, nobody really knows. It's been up, down, everywhere, hasn't it? Then throughout the whole campaigns, it's been around what will happen, what we'll do, but will that even happen, is that going to come true? Because it's so unknown, I think that's where, yes, where I feel like that's where it's not as, you know, as trustworthy as it could be. (FG8, Remain, Oldham)
>
> **TOBY:** In terms of least trustworthy I would say that at the moment I'm not sure what's happening with Brexit, I think that's kind of a standstill at the moment. I would also mention about the economy. There's just no clarity around it and so much uncertainty. (FG2, Remain, London)

This highlights that The PM and his government are trusted on the issue of Brexit, but the resulting benefits are limited as Brexit is largely seen as done by both Leave and Remain supporters. Credit for that is allocated happily by the former and fatalistically by the latter. Voters on both sides of the Brexit divide seem ready to move on, validating further the idea for both Leavers and

Remainers that getting Brexit done is a card that has already been played:

> **POPPY:** I mean, obviously, the decision's been made. Not what I wanted, but it's been made. It's taken three years to get this far, so I just think it's about time they, you know, fixed it and did it, and let's just move forward and see what the future brings for us. (FG4. Remain, Bristol)
>
> **ALICE:** I agree with DAISY. I think at one point, we became the laughing stock, because it did, it just dragged on and on and on, and we kept moving the goalposts, didn't we? […] Just make some positive decisions and just go ahead with them. I think, like DAISY said, people have just lost interest and they're fed up. Nobody properly knows. I mean Covid-19's thrown a curveball into it all, because it's all gone very quiet. Before, it was Brexit this and Brexit that, and now, you don't hear about it at all, but nevertheless, what's happening with the deadline? Is it being moved again?
>
> **LOGAN:** I think, to a greater extent, it's what other people are saying. We need timelines, and at the moment, there aren't any, really. I mean, it's taken us four years and we're still not out. We voted to leave four years ago, and we're still negotiating about when we can leave and under what terms. If you hand your notice in at work, you give a month, or whatever, and within that month you do whatever you need to do to tie all your loose ends up at work, but it just seems like it's never-ending, Brexit, to be honest. (FG6, Leave, Bolton)

While there was therefore an acknowledgement on all sides that the Johnson government had got Brexit done, the biggest determinants for future trust will be how Brexit translates into practice for citizens as our evidence shows that the way people make their trust judgements is both complex and based on iterative evaluations of what they see in terms of actions and results from the government.

5. HOW PEOPLE MAKE THEIR TRUST JUDGEMENTS

In the focus groups, we explored not only *what* trust judgements people made but also how they made them. The self-image of the most participants was that they were sceptical observers. Indeed, when presented with three personas we proposed to them (see the Appendix for more details), 8 out 10 identified with the one who 'believes the government *may not* act on their behalf and in their interests but will modify that judgement to confirm trust or otherwise according to information and context'. Citizens think of themselves as critical observers, emphasising the contingent and complex nature of those decisions, and the need to emphasise the processes and reasonings involved in making them.

A classic distinction is between reasoning that is analytical, based on the sifting of evidence, a judgement about the consequences of the actions of another; and reasoning that is more intuitive, based on feelings or affect orientation towards the object of trust. Table 2 reports how the focus groups participants expressed their argument for those issues over which they trusted the Johnson government and those which they did not. The more positive (most trustworthy) judgements were more often based on analysis, and most negative ones (least trustworthy), on feelings.

Both forms of reasoning are valid given the complexity of making a trust judgement about a political actor over which you have very little influence and only a modest amount of information.

Table 2. Modes of reasoning for trust judgements (frequency of mentions)

	Most trustworthy issue	Least trustworthy issue
Based on analysis	36	26
Based on feelings	27	47

We also asked about the sources of information that people use to come to their judgments. Table 3 presents the findings. Newspapers hardly figure directly as a source except as filtered through apps on smart phones. TV news plays a strong role, being mentioned more than any other information source. Friends and family seem to be important too, often used in discussions as a clinching piece of evidence in justifying or validating a decision.

Table 3. Reliable information sources (frequency of mentions)

National news on TV	27
Social media	19
News – apps on phone	19
Self, friends and family	19
Other	6
Newspapers	5
Internet (as a broad source of info)	4
Official sources – government	3
Radio	3

There are some interesting differences between Leave and Remain supporters on the sources of information they find reliable, as shown below. 'Self, friends and family' is the most cited reliable source of information for Leave supporters, whereas 'social media' is the one most cited by Remain supporters. There was consensus around the idea that it was difficult to evaluate the veracity of information sources:

LUCAS: Instead of reading just a particular paper or news channel, I tend to try and go through the lot, and you get a lot more information correct. The bits that sound correct, I would take are right.

Moderator: And how do you judge what sounds correct, LUCAS?

LUCAS: Good question. One of which I have no answer. It's a difficult one to answer to be honest with you. It's veering off of it slightly, but I used to read a lot of books by a guy called Bob Woodward who broke the Watergate scandal, and they always went for something called the deep background. It's basically they have to have two people tell them the same thing, exactly the same, then they know it's right, and I sort of try and follow that a bit I think. I try to read what's in the paper and if it's accurate, then I tend to lean to believe in it. (FG4, Remain, Bristol)

Citizens see themselves as sceptical observers, judging trust by what they see through processes that are simultaneously difficult, complex and evolving. They make trust judgements combining analytical and emotional reasoning, using a variety of sources of information not all of which can be framed or driven by elites. People's trust judgements are also updated over time. We argue that as a result, this will have important consequences for the government's attempts to regain and maintain the public's trust in a post-Covid-19, post-Brexit environment.

6. FUTURE BATTLES

Future battles for the trust of the public are likely to be focused on assessing the realities of post-Brexit Britain in a post-Covid-19 recovery.

BREXIT IN THE AGE OF Covid-19

As for the prospects for the deal (or no deal), anxiety and cynicism were the dominant themes of discussions in the focus groups. Most participants (including more Leave than Remain voters) expected a need to delay the negotiations (even after the deadline had passed for an extension of the transition period). Many also expressed fears over the double whammy of economic shocks of Brexit and Covid-19.

> **JACK:** My thoughts are, under the COVID situation, it would be wise to have an extension in sealing all the loose ends because rushing anything, we might not get the best deals in terms of trading, funding or agriculture, farming or immigration. So, I think there's no need to rush, everybody's in the same boat, you know, the European Union are fighting against the same pandemic as us. So, I think an extension would be wise, so we can all reflect and make sure we're getting the best deals. (FG1b, Leave, London)
>
> **LIAM:** I think it does. I think it probably would be more comfortable if they'd maybe delayed it a bit, because I think you run the risk of doing a bad deal quickly. I think they've lost an awful lot of ground that should have been done in the years between the referendum and the actual leaving, so to speak. (FG6, Leave, Bolton)
>
> **EDWARD:** Yeah I agree I just don't see how they could conceivably focus on both at the same time. Like put out one fire before you start another. Because it's a global pandemic, I don't see how it's going to be possible for us to focus. And even if it were possible, I don't think we should be doing it because we're going to be seeing the fallout from the coronavirus until way after the virus itself is gone. (FG2, Remain, London)

First, although some see it as highly likely now, there was little support for a no deal Brexit, even more so in the COVID situation:

> **CHLOE:** I think it is quite likely, because nothing seems to have moved on since the vote anyway, and nobody else seems to be able to agree what the deal is going to be. So, if they end up with a deal, it'd have to be a quick deal that comes in. I can't see other people agreeing with it. They'll still be all arguing between themselves as to what a deal should be. (FG6, Remain, Bolton)
>
> **DANIEL:** Disappointment, I think no deal would be, because we all voted to leave and I think that it would definitely make us not trust the government. They're

> already borderline on it now, I think they'd have a lot of issues if they didn't leave, I think there'd be a big uproar. (FG7, Leave, Oldham)

Only four participants (three Leave and one Remain supporters) out of a total of 75 expressed a positive opinion towards the prospect of a 'no deal Brexit', and this was heavily linked to a strong desire to move on:

> **JOSHUA:** I think we've got this far, we've got to get on with it. Get it done, deal or no deal. Let's get finished. (FG4, Remain, Bristol)

Second, while there is widespread agreement that a deal is necessary, this is combined with limited understanding of the actual negotiating situation and different views on what is possible. Leave supporters believe in the possibility of a good deal:

> **EMILY:** I think just tie it all up, tie up the loose ends and get a deal. So, I was talking to my friend about all this today, and she was saying about having a deal in place because, obviously, at the time that we're in at the minute, if we kind of go into Brexit with no deal, we're kind of left with all this stuff hanging over us from Covid-19, whereas if we kind of go in with a bit of a deal from other places and other countries, you know, places like America and stuff, obviously we've got some backup and we've got some help. So, my friend and I were having quite a detailed chat about all this today, but I just think Brexit, it's kind of lost its way a little bit, hasn't it, because Covid-19's overtaken. So, I know I haven't had a Brexit conversation with anybody for about four or five months because this has all been going on, so. (FG1b, Leave, London)
>
> **JESSICA:** Everyone voted to leave with a deal, and at this moment in time, there's not a deal. The one worry about this pandemic is it will just slip through the net. I think they really need to have a deal set in stone and it be what we all wanted and that we're all happy with that. (FG3b, Leave, Bristol)
>
> **LIAM:** I think it probably would be more comfortable if they'd maybe delayed it a bit, because I think you run the risk of doing a bad deal quickly. I think they've lost an awful lot of ground that should have been done in the years between the referendum and the actual leaving, so to speak.
>
> **DAISY:** I think I agree with what LIAM said. You know, get something put in place, get some negotiations done, get a solid agreement that works for everybody, because it's just been dragging out for so long. (FG6, Leave, Bolton)

While Remain supporters were more sceptical of that possibility while still emphasising the necessity of a deal:

> **LEO:** Yes, so I think like NATHAN said, if there's a super-good deal, then yes,

fantastic, but I just don't see how we walk away from this with a good deal. (FG2b, Remain, London)

ALFIE: Why have politicians stopped talking about it? Because they haven't got a clue what they're doing because they're in a situation that, you know, regardless of whether you look at it and go, '52% said they wanted it,' but what did those 52% want? What exactly did Brexit mean, because nobody explained it to anybody? Nobody said, 'If we do this, this will happen. This amount of money. We'll get £350 million for the NHS.' We got more back from the European Union than we paid into it, you know, and a lot of people said, 'Oh, it means we don't have to give all this money to charity.' Our foreign aid's got nothing to do with the money that we spent on Europe. That's completely separate. It's completely ring-fenced.

Moderator: What do we think about the possibility of a no-deal Brexit at the end of the year?

ALFIE: We're screwed. (FG4, Remain, Bristol)

Or this conversation:

LOUIS: I think they were voting for flying unicorns… Well, they just had no idea what they were voting for, did they?

AIDEN: For me… it's over now anyway. We can't do anything.

LOUIS: We've got a deal coming from America, which is a load of beef that's injected with hormones beyond belief, the chickens are fed and brought up in a way that we banned years ago and we're now doing a deal… Japan has given us six weeks to get a deal done and sort it out with Europe or they're not going to bother with us anymore. There's a lot going on.

FLORENCE: To get it right, they are going to have to do the work, aren't they? It's going to take some time… Get the right deals for us. We're not desperate, well, we are, but we're not. If we rush it, then we might make the wrong decisions. (FG5, Remain, Blackpool)

There was also a widespread 'cynical' view that the government would try to 'hide behind Covid-19' when it came to any negative economic impacts of Brexit, which was interestingly more prevalent among Leave supporters.

HARRY: I think the pandemic is a bit of a get-out-of-jail-free card for the government, actually, because I guess pretty much everybody here before Covid-19 would've said, 'Oh, just get it done.' Now the majority of people are saying, 'Oh, don't rush.' So, it's exactly what the government wants, just some more time to dilly-dally and dither and wonder what the hell they should do… As

much as I just want to get it done, yes, you probably can't, but then it's played right into their hands, really, hasn't it?

AVA: It's fortuitous.

OLIVER: I think he might try and get it done because he might be able to hide behind the economic ramifications after Covid-19. So, you won't realise how much of a hit we do take when we leave, or something like that.

HARRY: Become a swan song for him, wouldn't it?

OLIVER: Yes, he might just try and brush it in, merge the two of them together.

AVA: Yes, you're absolutely right... It'll be like if this all went to hell in a handbasket, 'It wasn't my fault. Covid-19 caused it all'. (FG1b, Leave, London)

ROSIE: I think the pandemic's been a bit of a godsend, actually, to the current government. I think they're going to sneak us through with no deal, which isn't what we voted for, or which wasn't what the vote was for. You know, the British public did vote to leave, but they voted to leave with a deal, and I don't think we're going to have a deal. I think, because the focus has been taken away from it, it, kind of, gives licence to the current government to exit however they like, you know, as hard as they want to...

Yes, [the prospect of a no-deal] does worry me. I mean, we've left the Union, haven't we, so it's only until the end of the year when everything's going to be finalised, or most things are going to be finalised, especially trade deals. Yes, it does worry me. You know, they're not being held to account, really, are they, because all the focus is on the pandemic and their handling of that. (FG3b, Leave, Bristol)

This denotes a relatively high level of consensus among participants for the need to move on and look to the future and focus on 'real' priorities:

LEO: Everyone's fed up, though, yes. It seems like it's just been dragged out for so long, they just want it done with. Like, it was a mess in the beginning, it's a mess now, let's just turn this page. (FG2b, Remain, London)

BRIDGING OUR POLITICAL DIVIDES

One of our research objectives was to explore the perceptions over Brexit identities of 'Leavers' and 'Remainers', and to do so we asked participants which group they thought were most trustworthy, which had the better arguments, and which was better at convincing the other. The ability to have constructive dialogue is essential in bridging societal divides, and to better understand participants' views on such bridges, we asked them what their top three arguments would be to convince supporters of groups they identified

with, and from the other group.

The following participant's reaction to our question about how to convince Leave voters like themselves that Brexit would be bad is indicative of a more widespread attitude pointing to a reduction in salience of the Leave-Remain Brexit identities:

> EVIE: I just don't see the point of it, because everyone knows we're going to Leave, so why would we want to do that? Surely you've got to be optimistic, now, about the future, because we've got no choice, we can't change it. Sorry. (FG3b, Leave, Bristol)

Where does that leave us in terms of government trying to retain or regain the public's trust in a post-Covid-19, post-Brexit UK?

When participants were asked about what the government could do to repay the trust of voters, or gain the trust of Remain supporters who might be unhappy about Brexit, the top five answers were:

1. Deliver on promises

2. Deliver a successful Brexit

3. Be honest and transparent

4. Provide social safety nets

5. That is not possible

While Leave and Remain voters strongly agree on the need to deliver on promises, which further emphasises the areas of consensus described earlier, their visions of a successful Brexit vary. Leave voters are generally (and unsurprisingly) more optimistic about this possibility:

> **JACK:** I think they should make the Brexit process be a successful one with good outcomes for the next few years that we can, you know, see the real, kind of, advantage of why we did the Brexit. It has to be a successful outcome, one, with good track records in terms of economy, in terms of, you know, immigration, farming and all the industries. So, we have to have some good, positive outcomes. (FG1b, Leave, London)
>
> ---
>
> **ROSIE:** Leave with a good deal.
>
> **JESSICA:** I'd agree, actually, with ROSIE, and the fact that everyone voted to leave with a deal, and at this moment in time, there's not a deal. The one worry about this pandemic is it will just slip through the net. I think they really need to have a deal set in stone and it be what we all wanted and that we're all happy with that. (FG3b, Leave, Bristol)

Remain supporters are far more sceptical about the prospects of post-Brexit deals:

> **DAVID:** One of the key issues that I think the leave party had was immigration, but then what we've seen is that as soon as there's been a slight slowdown, there's been a shortfall of blue-collar workers, especially in rural areas like Northamptonshire, Peterborough and the Midlands, which just need those types of skilled workers. So, now, based on coronavirus and this particular issue, which is making just the movement of people a lot more difficult, I think that's only going to get a lot worse, so I think there will be a huge shortfall of workers, which is what, ultimately, we need to build an economy. (FG2b, Remain, London)
>
> **MYLES:** Yes, if Britain becomes better than it was now, like, I don't think Britain was in a bad state before, this is the thing, so you've got to make it better than good. Britain was already pretty good, and I don't see how being out of the EU will deliver that, but I think if you can, somehow, then fair play. (FG8, Remain, Oldham)

Our analysis further shows that the divide over Brexit remains a feature of participants' trust judgements. When asked which groups were more trustworthy or had the best arguments, around 40% of participant selected the side they identified with, and less than 10% the opposing side. This means that if 'Brexit' is revived in the public mind, through wrangling over trade deals with the EU, there is a risk that it undermines rather than boosts trust in the government, which is heavily premised on having got Brexit done.

What both sides decidedly agree on, however, is that greater honesty (43% of participants), transparency and admitting mistakes (27%) as well as delivering on promises (24%) are seen as essential to restoring trust.

This conversation is illustrative of the broad consensus:

> **JACOB:** I've written 'honest and open', which is basically we don't know all the answers, and clearly the government don't, but if they're completely transparent in their approach, and honest, and say, 'This is what we know, and this is what we don't know,' and maybe review it the following week and go, 'We got that wrong,' then that would be, for me, what they should do, but they're not going to do it.
>
> **JESSICA:** I would say, again, going with JACOB, honest and open, and just putting the best interests of the public most forefront and knowing what we want and explaining how they're going to do that for us.

> **GRACE:** Well, I actually wrote down exactly what JACOB said. I think they need to be transparent, admit when they make mistakes. If they know we want something and they can't deliver, just tell us why.
>
> **ETHAN:** I've got here 'recognise failures and come up with a plan and stick to it'. Those are my key things.
>
> **OSCAR:** Yes, same as the others, really. Admit when they're wrong. Fewer brain-washy-style statements of 'fact', inverted commas, you know, less Trump politics, really. That seems to be in fashion at the moment, just say what you want and pretend it's true, so less of that. (FG3b, Leave, Bristol)

Or this conversation among Remain supporters:

> **RUBY:** Mostly the same, be honest, follow through. Say what you mean and mean what you say and do it.
>
> **ALFIE:** Yes, exactly the same, stop telling lies and admit when you're wrong. Everybody makes mistakes, be big enough to go, 'Yes, we messed up, let's try this instead.'
>
> **POPPY:** Honesty. Just be honest with us and follow everything through what ALFIE just said and that's all we want to hear, is just for them to be honest and follow everything through.
>
> **LUCAS:** Same. Honest. Honesty. That's the best policy.
>
> **JOSHUA:** I think there's a trend here, isn't there? I put, 'To openly, honestly and respectfully get the job done.'
>
> **WILLOW:** Along the same lines, saying they should be honest and respectful and stop treating people like fools.
>
> **SIENNA:** Honest, respectful to the electorate. Not have double standards. That's something that really gets me pissed off, and also have a sense of humility as well, as in, if they've got something wrong, bloody apologise for it and I've said bloody twice now. (FG4, Remain, Bristol)

While it might seem advantageous to play up rifts with the EU over the terms of a deal, or an acrimonious no deal, there is a risk that it undermines trust in the government, which is heavily premised on having got Brexit done, at a time when Leave voters expect everyone to see the benefits of Brexit:

> **JACK:** I think they should make the Brexit process be a successful one with good outcomes for the next few years that we can, you know, see the real, kind of, advantage of why we did the Brexit. (FG1b, Leave, London)

And Remain voters, sceptical of post-Brexit outcomes, may currently be giving the government the benefit of the doubt in terms of their intentions to at least mitigate the double fallout of Covid-19 and Brexit by conducting a fair and transparent process:

> **ZOE:** The main thing they can do is to prove to us that all the reasons we voted Remain, and all the things we think will be detrimental about Brexit won't have as much of a negative effect as Remainers thought there would be. Get Brexit done in a way that won't have as much of a negative impact as everyone thought there was going to be. (FG2, Remain, London)
>
> **EDWARD:** Yeah I just think similarly to what ZOE said, I think it's not necessarily about placating the Remain supporters and saying that this won't be detrimental to you. Because the cold hard truth is that there are things as a Remain supporter you will want to see from Britain and the EU that you won't get from Brexit. So it's about being transparent and not like... pulling the wool over people's eyes and trying leading them the garden path and saying this is why this is good for us. Just be honest about the pros and the cons to the whole thing, which I don't think we get from this government at all. (FG2, Remain, London)

So the government faces a political dilemma - of balancing the potential political gains of pitching the EU as the enemy, galvanising its Leave-voting base, but at the risk of highlighting that Brexit is not 'over' (at least in the way that many expected it to be).

7. CONCLUSION

In this report, we have used data from our focus groups conducted in towns and cities in England to suggest that the PM was right to focus on trust because it something that matters to many voters. At the same time the public's expectations that politicians or government can be trusted to deliver a better life for them *are generally low.* There is a desire to trust among citizens, but also a sense that this longing is destined to be frustrated.

The coronavirus crisis has had a major impact through *diverting public attention* onto both the government's direct management of the pandemic and the resulting fallout for the economy, the NHS and education. Citizens express high levels of latent trust in government to protect them in a time of crisis: trust as a leap of faith in government, even as people express cynicism or criticism of government on more specific grounds. As failings in managing Covid-19 become evident, that latent trust gives way to returning doubts and sarcastic humour at the government's expense.

The PM and his government are trusted on the issue of Brexit, but the benefit from that is limited as Brexit is largely seen as ***already done*** by both Leavers and Remainers and credit for that allocated happily by the former and fatalistically by the latter; voters on both sides of the Brexit divide seem ready to move on. Getting Brexit done is *a card that has already been played.* How the public might react to Brexit wrangling returning to the top of political agenda remains to be seen.

Citizens, who see themselves as sceptical observers, judging trust by what they see, make trust judgements using a *combination of analytical and emotional reasoning,* drawing on a variety of sources of information not all of which can be framed or driven by elites. People's trust judgements are also *updated over time in response to events.*

Future battles for public trust will likely be focused on assessing the realities of economic recovery after Covid-19 and after Brexit. Anxiety and cynicism were the dominant themes on the prospects for the post-Brexit deal (or no deal). Most participants *expected a need to delay the negotiations* (even after the deadline had passed for an extension), something that could lead to public consternation if the government finds itself managing crises on multiple fronts later in the year. Many expressed fears over the double whammy of simultaneous economic shocks of Brexit and Covid-19. There was a widespread cynicism, especially among Leavers, that government would try to 'hide behind Covid-19' when it came to any negative economic impacts of Brexit.

In getting Brexit done, the current government has successfully tapped into a broad consensus on the need to move on from the Brexit debate that has divided the UK since the 2016 Referendum. Leave voters now expect everyone to see the benefits of Brexit, and Remain supporters are prepared to concede that the government is at least trying their best to achieve a best possible outcome. As such delivering a 'successful Brexit' seems a widely agreed upon opportunity to restore trust. But though they appear less salient at the moment, Brexit identities and the divides they rest upon persist. So the government faces a political dilemma in negotiating its Brexit deal (Forsyth 2020) – of balancing the potential political gains of pitching the EU as a bogeyman, galvanising its Leave-supporting base, but at the risk of highlighting Brexit is not 'over' and that the divisions and acrimony of recent years are likely to persist.

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APPENDIX

1.   FOCUS GROUP DETAILS

10 focus groups across England. 27 May – 16 July 2020.

FG code	No people	Location	Date	Leave/Remain	Age group	Socio-economic
1	7*	London	27.05.20	Leave	35-54	ABC1
2	7	London	27.05.20	Remain	18-34	ABC1
1b	8	London	16.06.20	Leave	35-54	ABC1
2b	8	London	18.06.20	Remain	18-34	ABC1
3b	7	Bristol	18.06.20	Leave	35-54	ABC1
4	8	Bristol	23.06.20	Remain	55+	C2DE
5	8	Blackpool	23.06.20	Remain	35-54	Mixed
6	5	Bolton	14.07.20	Leave	55+	C2DE
7	8	Oldham	16.07.20	Leave	18-34	C2DE
8	9	Oldham	16.07.20	Remain	18-34	Mixed

2.   QUESTION SCHEDULE

Intro and ice breaker.

A.   TRUST, MISTRUST, AND DISTRUST JUDGEMENTS

To what extent do you trust the government generally to make your life better?

—   What makes you say that?

—   What will the government make better?

—   What can't the government make better?

—   To what extent are you thinking about the current government or government more generally?

—   Do you think it matters that you trust or not trust the government?

—   For you?

—   For the government?

Now I want to introduce you to three different personas that we have created – Alex, Chris, and Charlie. Each of these characters sees government in different ways.

— Alex believes the government *will* generally act on their behalf and in their interests

— Chris believes the government *may* not act on their behalf and in their interests but will modify that judgement to confirm trust or otherwise according to information and context

— Charlie believes that the government *will* not act on their behalf will prioritize the interests of themselves or others

We have nine statements. For each one, I want you to tell me who said each one and why – it's possible that more than one character could say a statement.

a. I am unsure whether to believe most politicians

b. In general, the government usually does the right thing

c. Information provided by the government is generally unreliable

d. It is best to be cautious about trusting the government

e. Most politicians are honest and truthful

f. Politicians are often incompetent and ineffective

g. Politicians don't respect people like me

h. Politicians usually ignore my community

i. The government usually has good intentions

We often ask questions about politicians, and questions about the government. Reflecting on the statements above, is there a difference for you when making a trust judgement between politicians and government?

Now let's turn to the current government. Take a moment and write down your answers to the following:

— Which issue is the current government most trustworthy on, in your opinion?

  • Which is it least trustworthy on?

  • And how do you decide on these things? .

— What information do you use to help you decide - media, TV, social media, other people you know, etc.?

— What influence do past accomplishments play?

— What about hopes for the future?

B.   TRUST DURING THE CRISIS

As you know, there is a global pandemic. In Britain, the government announced lockdown on 23rd March, though it is gradually being eased.

To what extent do you trust the current government to manage the crisis effectively?

How much do you trust the information that you get from the government?

To what extent do you think that Party or Brexit Leave/Remain divides influence how people feel about the government at this time of crisis?

Official figures from the Office of National Statistics and an initial review by Public Health England tell us that deprived areas have around double the death rate from coronavirus-related factors compared to affluent ones, and those of Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority background have between a 10-50% higher risk of death. A House of Commons Committee has launched an inquiry into other unequal impacts of the virus and the measures taken to tackle it.

In the light of this, to what extent do you think that is correct to say, "It's humanity against the virus - we are in this together, and together we will prevail."

Before we wrap up this section and move on to another topic, I want to discuss the lockdown a bit. To what extent do you think the government is placing too much emphasis on minimising infections from the coronavirus and not enough on keeping the economy going?

C.   TRUST JUDGEMENTS DURING POLARISED CONTESTS

What does "get Brexit done" mean in our new context?

Given the current crisis, to what extent do you think the UK will be better off outside the EU?

PROMPT: an example of how opinions differ between supporters of Leave and supporters of Remain.

Given these clear differences between Leave and Remain supporters, I'd like

you to take 5 minutes on your own and write down your answers to these four questions, then send them to us separately:

1. Who do you think is generally more trustworthy?

   a. Leavers

   b. Remainers

2. Which group is making the best argument and why?

3. Which group is more effective at convincing the other and why?

4. What are the differences between Leavers and Remainers in your opinion?

Thinking beyond Leave and Remain, which groups in society do you think could be trusted to give accurate information or fair arguments about Brexit?

Our top three arguments that might convince Leave supporters that Brexit will be bad for your area

Our top three arguments that might convince Remain supporters that Brexit will be good for your area

During the last election, many people voted for the Conservatives for the first time in a while, or even the first time ever. Imagine the Prime Minister said this in your area:

What do you think the government needs to do to repay the trust of voters who switched to the Conservatives?

What do you think the government can do to win the trust of Remain supporters unhappy over Brexit?

Wrap up:

One last thing. Thinking about everything we've talked about this evening, please all write down your answer to the following question:

— What is the most important thing government must do to be trustworthy, in your opinion?

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