

Written evidence submitted by 38 Degrees

Summary

Public trust in politics is at an all-time low, with scandals and a lack of accountability leaving voters disillusioned. Over 70,000 people signed an open letter via people-powered campaign group 38 Degrees urging the Modernisation Committee to prioritise reforms that restore integrity and transparency in Parliament. This submission pulls together public opinion research involving tens of thousands of people, which highlights the top reforms citizens want: outlawing deliberate political deception, tightening restrictions on gifts and donations, implementing minimum attendance requirements, and limiting MPs' second jobs.

The Modernisation Committee has a critical opportunity to rebuild trust by enacting bold reforms, drawing inspiration from successful practices in other parliaments. By addressing public concerns, it can help restore confidence in the political system and strengthen democracy for the benefit of all.

We hope the committee finds the wealth of public opinion research contained in this submission useful - the 38 Degrees community would be happy to offer further evidence and collaborate with the committee as their recommendations are developed.

Introduction

38 Degrees is a community of more than a million people who – in a moment away from their busy days – take small actions on issues they care about, which all add up to something bigger, a movement for a better Britain for everyone who calls our country home. We take pride in empowering busy individuals to share their opinions and ensure their voices are heard by their MPs on the issues that matter most to them. Our community recognises the dedication and hard work most MPs put into serving their constituents. While our supporters may not always agree with every voting decision, they deeply value the crucial role MPs play in both our local communities and our national democracy.

However, at a time of increasing polarisation, intense public scrutiny, and deepening scepticism toward political institutions, the integrity of our elected representatives is more vital than ever. Recent years have brought scandal after scandal in Westminster, eroding public trust in politics and casting a long shadow over Parliament.

With public trust at an all-time low, calls for reforms to restore faith in the political system in recent months have been overwhelmingly backed by the public. From over 165,000 people from across the UK signing a [petition](#) via 38 Degrees calling for minimum service standards for MPs, to over 70,000 adding their name to an [open letter](#) urging the Modernisation Committee to act on specific recommendations.

This submission represents the outcome of extensive public opinion research involving tens of thousands of people over the last year, including focus groups, surveys, and polling conducted by Savanta on behalf of 38 Degrees. It also draws on discussions with organisations, think tanks, and experts from across the democracy sector and highlights key areas of concern, including deliberate political deception, gifts and donations, parliamentary attendance and MPs' second jobs.

The Modernisation Committee has a unique opportunity to rebuild public trust in Parliament by prioritising bold reforms that address widespread dissatisfaction with political integrity, transparency, and accountability.

Examples from other parliaments, such as the Senedd's initiative to outlaw political lying, the Parliament of Australia's enforcement of attendance standards, and the Jamaican Government's introduction of formal MP job descriptions, demonstrate practical steps that Westminster could also adopt.

By addressing these concerns and building on successful policies and practices elsewhere, the Committee can demonstrate a commitment to meaningful change and inspire renewed public confidence in the political system.

What the Modernisation Committee should prioritise

Public trust in politics is at an all-time low. Scandals, cronyism, and a perceived lack of accountability have left the public disillusioned, with many feeling that MPs prioritise their own interests over those of their constituents. As the Modernisation Committee embarks on its critical work, public sentiment is clear: bold reforms are needed to rebuild integrity, transparency, and trust in Parliament. It is in the interests of not only voters, and our democracy - but also of MPs themselves to do this.

Since the election, public priorities for reform have evolved as new scandals and issues have come to light, but what has remained constant is the growing demand for meaningful change. Immediately after the election, public polling commissioned by 38 Degrees highlighted a strong public desire for reforms like introducing a minimum attendance

requirement for MPs - likely influenced by high-profile examples such as Nigel Farage's trip to the U.S. while Parliament was sitting - which underscored concerns about MPs prioritising personal interests over parliamentary duties.

In the months that followed, as MPs returned to work, 38 Degrees surveyed the public again to identify which reforms mattered most. The results revealed overwhelming support for a comprehensive package of measures to raise MP standards, including outlawing deliberate political deception, tightening restrictions on gifts and donations, and addressing conflicts of interest caused by certain second jobs. These findings demonstrate widespread and enduring public support for stronger accountability and higher ethical standards in Parliament.

The public's top three priorities

A recent survey during November 2024 of 33,307 members of the public across all regions of the UK conducted by 38 Degrees, found that 'outlawing deliberate political deception' was the top issue they would like to see the Modernisation Committee prioritise over the next parliament. This was followed by 'tightening restrictions on political gifts and donations' in second place, and 'implementing a minimum parliamentary attendance requirement' and 'banning certain second jobs' which were tied for third.

Outlawing deliberate political deception

One of the most significant findings from our research is the substantial support for outlawing intentional political deception with almost half of respondents (46.5%) selecting this as their top priority. **This reform would make it illegal for MPs to knowingly lie, particularly in official settings like Parliament or through public communications.**

Introducing a legal framework to address this issue would mark a significant step towards greater accountability. It would also signal to the public that integrity is a cornerstone of parliamentary conduct, helping to rebuild trust in the political system.

"Politicians should not be above the law. If they knowingly lie, they should face the same consequences as anyone else."

Andrew, Cardiff

Tightening restrictions on political gifts and donations

Public concern about the influence of money in politics came through strongly in our research, with a quarter (25%) of respondents ranking stronger rules on gifts and donations as their second-highest priority. The current system is widely seen as a

gateway for undue influence from wealthy individuals and corporations, leading to decisions that often appear to prioritise donors' interests over the public good.

The public's proposals include capping the amount individuals or organisations can donate to MPs and political parties, increasing transparency about donations, and introducing more rigorous penalties for rule-breakers.

"We need to know who is funding MPs and why. Transparency is critical for democracy."

Anonymous, Brighton

Minimum Attendance Requirement

Public trust in the political system is tied to the perception that MPs are working hard on behalf of their constituents. If MPs are seen to be absent or disengaged, it erodes trust in the political process. That's why almost a quarter of respondents (23%) ranked this as their third highest priority for the Modernisation Committee to look into.

A minimum attendance requirement is not uncommon within the political system. Peers are subject to a statutory provision in the House of Lords Reform Act 2014: failing to attend during a session means they cease to be a member of the House of Lords at the beginning of the following session. Local councillors who fail to attend a meeting for six consecutive months are struck off as a member of the authority, unless extenuating circumstances are accepted before the six-month period expires.

Constituencies should have the right to recall their MP for breaches of attendance and behaviour and an annual review of MP's attendance in Parliament along with their reasons for non-attendance, should be available to the public

"I have no real idea what MPs actually do. Every time I look at Parliament on TV the chambers always seem empty."

Peter, County Durham

Banning certain second jobs

Another key area of concern for the public is MPs' ability to hold second jobs, which was ranked in fourth place by 19.5% of respondents. While some roles - such as practising medicine - are seen as acceptable because they maintain professional qualifications, the public feels strongly that lucrative side gigs can often create conflicts of interest.

The Committee should consider reforms that limit MPs holding 'second jobs' to roles with clear public benefit or those necessary for maintaining professional

expertise, like law or medicine, ensuring their focus remains on serving their constituents.

“Being an MP is a full-time job. If they can’t dedicate themselves to it, they shouldn’t stand for election.”

Khosrow, Glasgow

Other policy proposals that were popular with those surveyed included creating a proper job description and banning bets on political outcomes. These sentiments were reinforced by the public in a poll conducted by Savanta, commissioned by 38 Degrees in August 2024. The results of the polling saw outlawing political lying topping the list of reforms supported by the public to improve MPs' conduct after years of sleaze scandals by a handful of MPs. It also showed overwhelming support for a range of measures to raise MP standards, with more than two-thirds of respondents also endorsing other proposals such as introducing a minimum attendance requirement, and limiting second jobs.

Why the Modernisation Committee should prioritise tackling the issues raised by the public

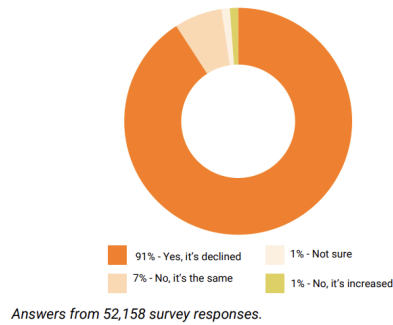
By addressing the concerns raised by the public, the Modernisation Committee has a unique opportunity to rebuild trust and counter political apathy. Strengthening accountability and transparency through its work can revitalise democracy and inspire renewed public engagement in civic life.

A lack of trust in MPs

Another survey of 52,297 members of the public via 38 Degrees between July 25th and August 25th 2024, echoed many of the sentiments from the polling we commissioned and other research from across the sector around trust in politics.

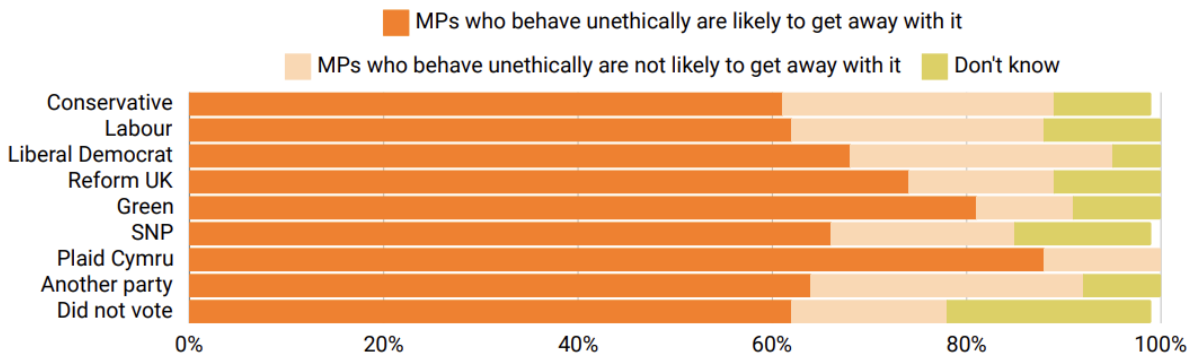
For example, when asked if their trust in MPs has declined in recent years, the overwhelming majority (91%) said that it had, 7% said it had remained the same, and only 1% said it had increased. This demonstrates both the sheer scale and urgency of the Modernisation Committee’s challenge to build back public trust.

In general, has your trust in MPs declined in recent years?



The Savanta polling shows nearly two thirds (65%) of voters believe that, in the current political system, MPs who behave unethically are likely to get away with it. This sentiment cuts across party lines, with 74% of 2024 Reform UK voters, 61% of Conservative voters, and 62% of Labour voters expressing the same concern.

Which of the following is closest to your view?
by 2024 vote



Focus group analysis

In August 2024, 38 Degrees held a focus group with members of the public representing diverse backgrounds and beliefs for a deep-dive discussion on MP standards.

Many participants reported a decline in trust in politicians due to perceived dishonesty, lack of integrity, and broken promises. While some acknowledged that many MPs act ethically, others pointed to high-profile cases of misconduct as eroding trust in politicians overall.

Participants also agreed that current MP standards are inadequate with insufficient accountability. They emphasised the need for clear consequences when MPs breach standards.

“Looking at MP standards clearly needs to happen, and instant sanctions should be applied for any accusations.”

Paul, London

Rebuilding public trust

Despite the public's concerns, it was evident that many people still believe it is possible, though challenging, to restore trust and integrity in our political system - provided the right reforms are implemented. To illustrate this sentiment, we've gathered a selection of personal testimonials from individuals across the country who took part in the 38 Degrees survey in November 2024, each sharing their unique perspectives on why these issues matter to them and how they affect the core principles of our democracy.

Here are just a selection of views from survey respondents:

“I want to be able to trust politicians to have integrity, a moral compass, compassion, competence, clarity of purpose and judgement, a hinterland and energy. Asking too much? Probably. Some of these characteristics could be contained within a job description and person specification.”

Christine, Brighton and Hove

“I feel we now live in a plutocracy rather than a democracy. The wealthy shovel donations at political parties to secure legislation in their interest.”

Eleanor, Oxford

“It is vital to the democratic process that politicians are truthful, unaffiliated to big business or donors, and willing to fully represent their constituents.”

Dewi, Pembrokeshire

“Deliberate political deception (or lying in common parlance) erodes confidence in parliament and our way of life generally. If we can't believe our representatives, who can we believe?”

Pauline, North Yorkshire

“Lack of trust in politicians results in a rise in populism and the thoroughly unpleasant people who come to the fore with it.”

William, Greater Manchester

“We feel that whatever we say or whatever we would like to happen, goes unheeded. It would be good to know that our government and MPs have to adhere to certain rules or face consequences.”

Ann, Surrey

“Lies by politicians have no consequences. Lies by citizens have serious consequences, often leading to criminal convictions. We must stop one rule for politicians and an opposite rule for us.”

Kevin, Manchester

And here are a just handful of messages, representing thousands of others, that survey respondents wanted to address directly to the Modernisation Committee:

“Be brave, honest and determined.”

Maxine, Kent

“I always vote but the behaviour of many politicians in recent years has meant that many young people have no faith in the system. Democracy is threatened if people don't see the point in voting.”

Liz, Sheffield

“I want MPs to be held to the same standards as the general public, not be allowed to get away with things which are unacceptable in normal life.”

James, Staffordshire

“I want to live in a democratic country where the political system can be trusted and those voted into it show kindness and respect.”

Mora, Northumberland

“Our society and country are under intense attack by malign influences both domestic and international. If we are to survive we must know that our politicians are acting in what they perceive is our best interests even when we don't agree with a particular decision.”

Stephen, Surrey

“Servants of the people are role-models for now and for a better future for everyone. Their behaviour and values lived, are the foundation to a better future.”

Hertha, London

“Our political system cannot afford to simply play to short-term ‘wins’. If the UK is going to fight back in the growing misinformation war, we need to show people that their representatives have ethical standards that can be measured, and those that break the rules are held to account. Trust needs to be invited back into the arena.”

Stevie, Hampshire

It’s clear: the public are looking to the Modernisation Committee for bold and pragmatic change. The Committee must not only create new rules but ensure transparent and consistent enforcement of all rules, old and new. Public trust demands accountability, with clear, visible processes to address breaches swiftly and fairly. Without this, even the best reforms risk being seen as superficial. The Committee must act decisively to show it is serious about integrity and service, rebuilding trust and healing divisions with the people it serves.

Case studies for the Committee to consider

When exploring reforms to raise MP standards, the Modernisation Committee could draw valuable insights from other parliaments, particularly on outlawing political deception, enforcing minimum attendance requirements, and implementing formal job descriptions for MPs. Together, the reforms outlined below offer just a handful of practical pathways to strengthen the democratic process and rebuild public confidence in politics.

Outlawing public deception

The Modernisation Committee can draw valuable lessons from the Senedd’s commitment to outlaw political lying. The Welsh Government’s landmark decision, following a cross-party consensus and a campaign led by Compassion in Politics and others across the democracy sector, aims to make it a criminal offence for politicians to deliberately deceive the public. Backed by extensive public support - including more than 270,000 people who have signed petitions calling for similar legislation to be introduced to Westminster - the proposal signifies a shift toward prioritising honesty in democracy, with experts like Prof. Andrew Blick from King’s College London highlighting the global implications of such “path-breaking” legislation. While implementation challenges remain, including enforcement timeframes, the Senedd’s proactive approach underscores the necessity of harder regulation to restore public trust in politics.

Minimum attendance

Many parliaments worldwide enforce minimum attendance standards that Westminster could adopt to raise accountability for MPs. For instance, the House of Lords removes peers who fail to attend sessions unless on approved leave, while local councils disqualify members absent for six consecutive months under the Local Government Act 1972. The U.S. state of Oregon disqualifies legislators with ten unexcused absences, though enforcement challenges persist. In Australia, a two-month absence rule ensures parliamentary engagement. The Commons itself mandates select committee members attend at least 60% of meetings, but wider attendance tracking is informal and reliant on public scrutiny or party whips. Introducing structured minimum standards, alongside metrics for constituency work, could ensure MPs visibly meet public expectations, aligning with the Nolan Principle of Accountability.

Job descriptions

Introducing formal job descriptions for MPs would clarify their responsibilities, improve accountability, and reconnect politics with local communities. Public understanding of MPs' roles is limited, and many constituents feel poorly served, particularly in cases where MPs neglect constituency work. Unlike parliamentary activities, constituency engagement lacks formal oversight, leaving no consistent way to measure or enforce standards despite its importance.

Drawing from the Jamaican Government's recent introduction of job descriptions for MPs and Ministers, such a framework could set clear expectations for casework, availability, and community activity. It would also align with the Nolan Principle of Accountability, which emphasises public scrutiny of decisions and actions.

Other measures like annual reports for constituents, which are often voluntarily produced but not currently mandated, would help enforce minimum standards and ensure MPs remain accessible and effective at the constituency level. By formalising their reporting duties MPs can better bridge the gap between Westminster and their constituencies, restoring trust and strengthening democratic engagement.

Our offer to the Modernisation Committee

We are eager to continue collaborating with the Modernisation Committee and would welcome the opportunity to support further discussions. We are able to conduct surveys and gather input from thousands of people across the country, providing valuable insights. Additionally, we would be happy to meet with the Committee to present our research and findings in more depth. For further inquiries, please contact Tom Kuehnel at publicaffairs@38degrees.org.uk.

About 38 Degrees

38 Degrees is a community of a million people who - in a moment away from their busy days - take small actions on issues they care about, which all add up to something bigger, a movement for a better Britain for everyone who calls our country home.

With supporters in every UK constituency, we come from all walks of life; we're nurses, taxi drivers, parents, shopkeepers, pensioners and more.

With on and offline campaigning technology, a creative and dedicated staff team and a people powered movement, we work to change lives, communities and our country, and by coming together we can have an impact far greater than any of us could achieve alone.

Whether it's the grieving wife who forced the Government to review betting laws after the tragic loss of her husband to gambling-related suicide, or the hundreds of thousands of us who convinced the Culture Secretary to keep Channel 4 public, every time we win, we move our country a step towards the fairer, more sustainable place we're fighting for, where we are treated - and treat each other - with respect.

Who makes up the 38 Degrees community?

- **We live in every part of the UK:** There are hundreds of 38 Degrees supporters in every single UK constituency.
- **We vote for all parties and none:** But convincing us matters: prior to the July 2024 election there were 96 UK constituencies where the number of 38 Degrees supporters is higher than the local MP's majority.
- **We unite the Red Wall and the Blue Wall:** Our supporters live - and vote - in the areas watched most closely by politicians. Prior to the July 2024 election there were 125,744 38 Degrees supporters in key Red Wall seats, and 179,413 in the most vital Blue Wall constituencies.
- **We chip in to make change:** Over the last year, people from every single UK constituency have contributed money to make our eye-catching tactics a reality.

December 2024