

DEMOS

A TWO-WAY STREET

THE DECLINE OF THE
MP-CONSTITUENT
RELATIONSHIP - AND
HOW TO FIX IT

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	PAGE 4
FOREWORD	PAGE 5
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	PAGE 6
INTRODUCTION	PAGE 8
SECTION 1: THE CHANGING CONSTITUENCY ROLE OF THE MP	PAGE 12
SECTION 2: MPS AND CONSTITUENTS: A FALTERING RELATIONSHIP	PAGE 16
SECTION 3: GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR A NEW MODEL OF ENGAGEMENT	PAGE 26
SECTION 4: A NEW DEAL: A NEW MODEL OF ENGAGEMENT	PAGE 33
CONCLUSION	PAGE 39
APPENDIX 1: METHODOLOGY	PAGE 40
APPENDIX 2: DIEJ STATEMENT	PAGE 41

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FOREWORD

BY POLLY CURTIS



The work in this report began life in a democratic crisis and is being published as we reach a new tipping point into a democratic emergency. The profound dissatisfaction and mistrust in the political system - born of years beset by scandals and the growing experience of it not delivering tangible improvements in people's lives - is now fuelling a darker and more divisive surge in far-right sentiment, witnessed most visibly in the "free speech" protests in London of September 2025.

At Demos we are on a mission to do something practical about this democratic emergency. Our mission is to radically upgrade democracy, to repair the broken relationship between state and citizen, and between citizens themselves. At the heart of the democratic upgrade we are pursuing is a new deal to repair the broken systems that are undermining democracy. But this deal is not just an idea. Demos will be putting forward a whole suite of practical steps and new ways of collaborating in the service of repairing and remaking the relationship.

We are plotting the interface between state and citizens, and working out how to improve the practice of democracy at those points - at a national policy making level, at a community and local government level, in the information that fuels these democratic cultures, and in the experiences of people in their interactions with public services. The new deal isn't about shifting away from our representative model of inclusive, liberal democracy, but doubling down on it by improving how it works in practice.

This paper takes the relationship between MPs and their constituents as one of the vital touchpoints between state and citizen in our democracy. We examine the challenges of the MP role and how the relationship with constituents has faltered. But we also offer solutions - a new model of engagement that is grounded in collaboration and designed to rebuild trust from the ground up.

From this we will pilot new engagement methods, then test and independently evaluate them with a larger cohort of cross party MPs. We are similarly testing new forms of democratic participation at the local level with [Waves](#), the biggest ever experiment in digital democracy in the UK, and developing new participatory approaches to some of the most divisive policy questions, including immigration, tax and planning.

Ideas about democracy, and trust, can feel lofty and too hard to solve. We are getting bold in our ambition, and practical about our methods. **We believe that with innovation, inclusive engagement, bold ideas and bravery, this country can reverse democratic decline.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the heart of this provocation paper is a puzzle: MPs' offices are busier than ever, more in demand, and they are hearing from and responding to constituents more than ever before; and yet it is not translating into a better relationship with their constituents. Public trust in politicians is at an all time low.

There is something breaking down in the interaction between MPs and constituents. This paper argues that the current model of MP-constituent engagement is optimised for polarisation, not representation - the fundamental role of the MP.

We spoke to MPs, their staff, and constituents to understand what is going wrong in the MP-constituent relationship, and to inform the design of a new model of engagement that MPs can deploy as the first step to rebuilding the relationship.

In our recent *Upgrading Democracy*¹ paper, we set out the urgent need to upgrade democracy by rebuilding the relationship between state and citizen, in order to win back trust and secure a better democratic future. There is a real opportunity here to do so at one of the sharpest interfaces of democracy: the relationship between MPs and constituents.

MP-CONSTITUENT ENGAGEMENT IS CURRENTLY OPTIMISED FOR POLARISATION NOT REPRESENTATION

Today's MPs face a very different landscape to the MPs of just a few decades ago. Being an MP is a full-time job where it once wasn't, split between Westminster and the MP's constituency. The biggest change has been in the constituency workload, which has skyrocketed from MPs receiving 12 to 15 letters per week in the 1950s and 60s to between 500 and 1000 calls and emails per week by 2018,² and countless social media messages.

We find that there are two key reasons for this change. Digital communication has enabled constituents - particularly those who are already politically literate, opinionated and engaged - to contact their MPs more easily than ever. Secondly, recent pressures on public services as a result of austerity and the pandemic have led to more constituents at crisis point, with nowhere else to turn, reaching out to their MPs.

The increase in engagement has therefore mostly been among the two groups this research finds are already overrepresented in MP-constituent engagement: politically engaged constituents and constituents at crisis point. While MPs may feel like they are hearing from far more of their constituents given the increased volume of communication, they are unlikely to be hearing a wide range of views that fully reflect their constituency.

¹ Curtis, P. (2025, July). *Upgrading Democracy: A new deal to repair the broken relationship between citizen and state*. Demos. <https://demos.co.uk/research/upgrading-democracy-a-new-deal-to-repair-the-broken-relationship-between-citizen-and-state/>

² Committee on Standards in Public Life. (2018). *MPs' Outside Interests*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5b3b2ba340f0b645fd5921f8/CSPL_MPs__outside_interests_-_full_report.PDF

Instead, MPs are predominantly hearing from the most extreme cases and the strongest (often angriest) opinions in their constituency. This paints a skewed and polarised picture of the views and experiences of constituents. Meanwhile, the vast majority of constituents are left inadequately represented. The model is optimised for polarisation, not representation.

The challenge is not only in *which* constituents engage with MPs, but in *how* they engage. The deep distrust that the public feels for politicians leads to more negative interactions. Engagement starts off on the wrong foot, rather than starting with an open dialogue. Even more concerning, abuse and intimidation have become an increasingly normal part of MPs' everyday lives.

The atmosphere becomes further polarised, putting MPs off holding discussions in the public sphere or even remaining in politics, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds that are more likely to receive abuse. The risk is that this leaves the voices of constituents from underrepresented backgrounds even less represented in politics.

OUR MODEL PROVIDES A PRACTICAL APPROACH TO REWIRING MP-CONSTITUENT ENGAGEMENT FOR REPRESENTATION

We have designed a model that is informed by our interviews, focus groups and desk research to mitigate the challenges of the current forms of engagement. It is shaped by five principles that we consider to be essential to resetting the MP-constituent relationship:

- **Beyond the usual suspects:** The model gives a voice to the unheard majority of constituents, rather than simply elevating further the voices of those who are being heard already.
- **Participatory:** The model gives constituents the time and space to have meaningful and collaborative interactions with the MP.
- **Reciprocal:** Both MPs and constituents have a role to play in the model; the relationship can't be one-sided. It should foster mutual understanding, trust and respect.
- **Accountable:** The model provides a feedback loop so that the actions taken by the MP are visible to constituents.
- **Pragmatic:** The model takes into account the realities of MP and MP staff resources, time, security concerns, and powers, as well as constituents' practical barriers to engagement.

The model brings together constituents and their MP to identify and solve a problem together. It deploys innovative methods of participant recruitment and incentivisation. It involves face-to-face interactions with a small group of constituents and deploys digital tools to enable participation with a much wider group of the public.

The real test of the model will be whether it works on the ground. Does it actually change who MPs hear from? Do constituents really trust MPs more as a result? Does it feel workable in the context of already stretched MPs' offices? Does it work better in some types of constituencies than others?

To find out, we will be piloting it in two constituencies over the coming months and developing it through an iterative process. This paper sets out our starting point and we intend to work in the open to invite input from MPs and partners working on these issues too.

INTRODUCTION

MPS ENGAGE WITH CONSTITUENTS MORE THAN EVER BEFORE, AND YET PUBLIC TRUST IN POLITICIANS IS LOWER THAN EVER

The life of an MP today is worlds apart from the life of an MP just a few decades ago. Where once most MPs had second jobs, and the House of Commons only started work at 2.30pm, the work of an MP alone has grown in scale and responsibility spanning their Westminster work, and their constituency work. When democracy is working well, the latter supports the former as MPs engage with their constituents in order to represent their best interests in Parliament.

In some ways, MPs should be better placed than at any other point in history to fulfil their representative role, as the digitalisation of communication has enabled constituents to reach out to their MPs more easily than ever. In the 1950s and 60s MPs reported an average of 12 to 15 letters per week - increasing to between 500 and 1000 calls and emails per week by 2018,³ and soaring to over 600 emails a day reported by an MP's office manager during the pandemic.⁴ Social media has opened up a whole new avenue of communication.

And yet this engagement is not converting into a better working relationship between MPs and their constituents. Public trust in politicians is lower than ever. Polling just before the election showed that a record high - over half of the British population - almost never trusts politicians of any party to tell the truth when they are in a tight corner.⁵ Voter turnout at the election fell to 59.7% - the lowest since 2001.⁶ We are caught in a democratic doom loop in which such widespread disengagement and profound distrust in our formal political system fatally weakens its authority and destroys any remaining ability to make positive change happen.

On the ground, distrust can go two ways: apathy or anger.

While certain types of constituents are engaging more than ever before thanks to the digitisation of communication - those at crisis point and the politically engaged - political apathy has grown among most constituents, as seen through the drop in voter turnout. Most constituents don't engage with politics or their MP, with only a quarter (26%) of the public saying they have written to their MP in the past five years.⁷ Therefore, the increased volume of communication may make it feel like MPs are hearing from far more of their constituents. But in reality, the people MPs predominantly interact with reflect the most extreme cases and the strongest (often angriest) opinions in their constituency.

3 Committee on Standards in Public Life. (2018). MPs' Outside Interests. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5b3b2ba340f0b645fd5921f8/CSPL_MPs_outside_interests_-_full_report.PDF

4 The Guardian. (2021, Sept 5). 'We're all absolutely knackered' says MP's office manager. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/sep/05/were-all-absolutely-knackered-says-mps-office-manager>

5 National Centre for Social Research. (2024, June 12). Trust and confidence in Britain's system of government at record low. <https://natcen.ac.uk/news/trust-and-confidence-britains-system-government-record-low>

6 <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/general-election-2024-turnout/> - The 2024 general election voter turnout was the lowest recorded for over 2 decades, since 2001.

7 Renwick, A., Lauderdale, B., Russell, M., & Cleaver, J. (2023). Public Preferences for Integrity and Accountability in Politics Results of a Second Survey of the UK Population Third Report of the Democracy in the UK after Brexit Project. https://www.ucl.ac.uk/social-historical-sciences/sites/social_historical_sciences/files/ucl_cu_report3_digital_final.pdf

On the other hand, some constituents are increasingly expressing their distrust through anger and frustration. Abuse, intimidation and violence, both online and in person, has become a normal part of the life of an MP. This shuts down the space for open, mutually respectful, and nuanced dialogue. The Speaker’s Conference earlier this year found that one in three MPs who have experienced abuse considered not standing for re-election as a result, and one in five refrained from or hesitated debating or voting on an issue.⁸

When MPs predominantly hear voices from these margins - the angriest or most able to be heard - it fuels polarisation in our political discourse and policy making. MPs, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds, retreat from politics. And when the majority of people in the mainstream are left unseen, unheard and unrepresented by their MP, it fundamentally weakens the efficacy, legitimacy and representation that must underpin British democracy. Democracy becomes optimised for polarisation, not for representation.

IN THE INTERFACE BETWEEN MPS AND THEIR CONSTITUENTS LIES AN OPPORTUNITY TO UPGRADE HOW OUR DEMOCRACY WORKS

When democracy is stuck in a doom loop, it’s palpable in the relationship between MPs and their constituents. But the same can be said for a healthy democracy. Of the six drivers of democratic distrust we identified in our *Trustwatch* research last year,⁹ almost all can be felt in the relationship between MPs and their constituents: lack of trust in political actors to deliver, to act with integrity, to listen to the public’s perspective, to engage with communities, or to be representative or relatable.

TABLE 1¹⁰
SIX DRIVERS OF DEMOCRATIC DISTRUST

DRIVERS OF LOW TRUST	STRATEGIES TO BUILD TRUST	POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
The political system is not trusted to deliver	Strategy one: Maintain the focus on long-term delivery	Given that the current government is focused on these strategies, our recommendations cover the additional strategies outlined in this report.
Political actors are not trusted to act with integrity	Strategy two: Sustain efforts on integrity	
The political system is not trusted to listen to the public’s perspective	Strategy three: Put people at the heart of the policy making process	Embed public participation across national government policy making

8 Speaker’s Conference. (2025, June). First Report: Speaker’s Conference on the Security of MPs, Candidates and Elections. House of Commons. <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/48116/documents/251907/default/>
9 Goss, D., Husband-Thompson, B., & Curtis, P. (2024, October 7). Demos. Demos.co.uk. <https://demos.co.uk/research/trustwatch-2024-a-playbook-to-rebuild-trust-in-politics/>
10 Goss, D., Husband-Thompson, B., & Curtis, P. (2024, October 7). Demos. Demos.co.uk. <https://demos.co.uk/research/trustwatch-2024-a-playbook-to-rebuild-trust-in-politics/>

Local politicians are not trusted to engage with communities	Strategy four: Build a stronger relationship between local politicians and communities	Empower MPs with resources, guidance and training to act as community champions
Politicians are not seen as representative or relatable	Strategy five: Make politicians more relatable and representative	Provide means-tested financial support to MP candidates to ensure cost is never a barrier to capable candidates
		Improve action on abuse of MPs from the government, parliament, and the police, with greater analysis, training, and resources
		Reform the selection of MPs to ensure processes are robust and transparent
The news media environment is not trusted to scrutinise and inform	Enabler: An informative news media environment	Create a new Institute for Public Interest News with public funding for local news to address market failure and improve the trusted news environment
		Develop ways to exert pressure on social media platforms to surface relevant public interest news to audiences at appropriate times in the political cycle
		Reform PMQs by allowing MPs follow-up questions and introducing cross-party agreement to improve the quality of debate
		Improve political knowledge among the public
		Help the public identify and challenge mis/disinformation

A robust response is required if we believe that a democratic political system is the surest way to deliver the conditions for secure and flourishing human life, especially as compared with authoritarian, autocratic or populist alternatives.

We do not, however, wish to blindly defend the democratic system in its current form. We should not conflate public disillusion with delusion. The rising dissatisfaction with the democratic status quo - evidenced in low voter turnout, anti-establishment sentiment, the rise of populist parties and even, at times, civil unrest - are symptoms of a system not working well for people. A toxic combination of wage stagnation, growing financial inequality, rising poverty and stuttering public services have left people angry, frustrated and searching for alternative ideas and leadership that they hope can make life better.

In this context, we argue for an urgent upgrade to democracy as we know it. We are not against disruption per se, indeed, our vision of a radical upgrade to democracy will require deep rooted change. What we do insist on is disruption with a democratic vision at its core.

This means taking a broad look across the political system and taking a critical eye to the ways it is currently working (or not working). This paper focuses on one critical opportunity for disruption: the relationship between MPs and constituents. To upgrade our democracy, the elected and the electors must be reconnected.

This reconnection is key to rebuilding public trust in politics. We know that meaningful public participation in policymaking processes increases the trust of those who participate, as explored on page 28-29. Creating a real, human connection is key: there is evidence that if people have direct contact with their MP, they evaluate them more positively than MPs in general.¹¹ The same can be said for the MP's side of the relationship - trust goes both ways.

IN THIS PAPER WE SET OUT OUR DIAGNOSIS AND A PRACTICAL APPROACH THROUGH A NEW MODEL OF ENGAGEMENT

This provocation paper will set out why we think the MP-constituent relationship needs upgrading, and our initial thinking on how to do it. Our aim is to propose practical ways to shift the MP-constituent relationship so that it is no longer optimised for polarisation, but optimised for representation.

To develop a new model of engagement, we spoke to MPs and constituency staff working for MPs to understand the challenges they face in engaging with constituents, and to generate and test new ideas that take into account the realities of working as or for an MP. Similarly, we spoke to politically disengaged constituents from across the UK to understand the barriers they face to engaging with their MP, and to test our ideas. We include their voices throughout this paper as they were each critical in the shaping of our thinking and our model.

In this paper, we cover first what we heard about the challenges MPs and constituents face in engaging with each other and then how these insights inform a set of principles that have guided the design of our proposed model. In the subsequent section, we will set out the model itself, which we welcome input into.

Following publication of this paper, we will pilot and evaluate our model in two constituencies, testing some variables in each location and iterating as we go until we produce an optimised model. In our final report at the end of the programme we will evidence the value of our engagement model and provide practical guidance for MPs and their staff looking to use it. It will be available to any MP that wishes to deploy it, helping them to better meet the challenges of the role and to play a key part in rebuilding trust in our democratic system.

Our research exposes the significant challenges that MPs and constituents face in engaging with each other, many of which cannot be solved by a new engagement model alone. The better the conditions in place around the engagement, the more likely it is to be genuinely impactful. Therefore, as part of our final report, we will make a case for reimagining not only the relationship between MPs and constituents, but the MP's role as a whole to make it fit for the 21st century.

¹¹ Allen, N. and Birch, S. (2015) *Ethics and Integrity in British Politics: how citizens judge their politicians' conduct and why it matters*. Cambridge; New York, Cambridge University Press.

SECTION 1

THE CHANGING CONSTITUENCY ROLE OF THE MP

A DAY IN THE CONSTITUENCY LIFE OF AN MP

We spoke to 10 MPs across the political spectrum and 5 of their staff members about their efforts to engage with their constituents, and the challenges they face. Their stories allowed us to build a picture of what it looks like to be an MP today:

Much like many of her colleagues who represent constituencies outside of London, **Helen** splits her time between Westminster and her home seat. Today is Friday and she's back in her constituency in the West Midlands following four days of select committee meetings, late votes, policy briefings and charity receptions in London.

The surgery is half empty, despite her constituency staff advertising it on her social media and leaflets across the borough. Nevertheless, Helen speaks to the ten constituents at the surgery, many of whom she recognises already. She remembers the name Hannah, a single mum with two children now in her fourth week of temporary accommodation, worried about the damp and the cough her son is developing.

Helen listens and empathises, all the while knowing the responsibility for this issue lies with the Council, and there is little she can do. But she promises to do what she can by getting in touch with the Council. She shares it with her staff when she returns to the office, alongside the other cases, while they give her a rundown of the most urgent cases from the hundreds of emails received today, skipping past the many copy and pasted campaign emails.



The stories of people being failed by the system never get easier to hear, but it reminds her of why she got into this job.

She has lunch at a local cafe where she tries to speak to as many people as she can. She sees a man called Paul whom she immediately recognises from social media as a frequent replier to her posts - not usually with something nice to say. His latest reply to a post about an issue close to her heart called her a 'stupid bitch'. She braces herself and decides to speak to him, and finds he is much shyer in person discussing politics. Before she is pulled away to get to her next meeting, they even start to find common ground chatting about the local football team.

After spending the rest of the day door knocking and at local events, she heads home to her family who live in the constituency. On her way, she scrolls through her social media, filled with more replies like Paul's (and worse), and skims through her many Whatsapp messages and emails. She savours some time with her children, before spending the rest of the evening catching up with her work and messages hours after putting them to bed.

HOW HAS THE CONSTITUENCY ROLE CHANGED?

The way MPs and constituents interact has changed dramatically over the past few decades. The broader significant social, political, economic, technological and cultural changes that we have experienced since the end of the twentieth century have shaped the way MPs and constituents relate to one another and the quality of that relationship. Here we pull out the three most significant macro changes that have impacted on the relationship between specific MPs and their constituents:

1. More constituents than ever before are reaching out to their MPs

Since the end of the Second World War, MPs have seen their constituency responsibilities gradually tick upwards. In more recent years, however, pressures on public services caused by both the austerity policies of the early 2010s and the Covid-19 pandemic, have significantly driven up constituent demand for MP support.^{12,13} Constituents unable to find help or resolution from their local council, NHS or other support services, increasingly turn to their MP as a last port of call.

The cuts made by the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO) blocked access to free justice pathways for many in the worst of circumstances.¹⁴ Leaving them no choice but to reach out to their MP instead of legal help. The APPG on Legal Aid found that this had a direct impact on MP caseload. By 2018, 49% of surveyed MPs reported an increase in their constituency caseload, and over half reported an increase in the complexity of cases

12 APPG on Legal Aid. (2018). MP Casework Survey -Findings -September 2018. <https://www.apg-legalaid.org/sites/default/files/APPG%20on%20Legal%20Aid%20-%20MP%20casework%20survey%20findings%207%20Sept%202018.pdf>

13 Halliday, J., & correspondent, J. H. N. of E. (2021, September 5). MPs face "phenomenal" rise in constituent casework during pandemic. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/sep/05/mps-face-phenomenal-rise-in-constituent-casework-during-pandemic>

14 Newman, D., & Robins, J. (2021, July 15). Justice in a time of austerity: the lives of people already struggling are made much harder by cuts to legal aid. British Politics and Policy at LSE. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/justice-system-austerity/>

received.¹⁵ MPs were able to do little else than refer them back to legal specialists. In 2018, 4 out of 5 MPs referred a case to the Citizens Advice Bureau, 5 out of 10 referred a case to a Law Centre and 4 out of 10 referred a case to a local solicitor.¹⁶ During the pandemic, some Labour and Conservative MPs reported an average of 12 times more casework than pre-pandemic levels.¹⁷

“By the time [I started in the 2010s] I was getting probably about 120 letters a day, personal letters rather than computer generated [campaign] stuff, I’d guess of the emails we’re getting now, probably two thirds are automatically generated. But that still leaves a hell of a lot of constituency emails.”

- MP

2. Digital communication has revolutionised how MPs and their constituents are able to communicate with each other

Digital communication means that constituents are now able to reach their MP through emails, e-petitions and social media. This has opened up new and easier avenues for people to proactively reach out to them, leading to the significant increase in incoming communications described above. The exact amount of incoming social media activity, on top of the increased calls and emails, is unknown, but it’s clear that social media is a key new frontier of MP-constituent engagement, even when it comes to casework.¹⁸

Even with the growth in staffing budgets in response to the growing demands of constituency work,¹⁹ MPs’ offices continue to feel incredibly stretched, wading through large amounts of emails and social media posts on a daily basis. The nature of social media has created an increasing expectation for MPs to be available 24/7. As such, the sheer volume of communication that digital accessibility has facilitated is outweighing its effectiveness, and has put additional pressure on MPs.

Some MPs told us they were often forced to disregard the plethora of campaign emails they receive to allow them to focus on urgent casework. They identified frequent ‘copy and paste’ campaign emails to be distracting from the urgent cases they felt deserved their prioritisation.

At its best, AI, as with digitalisation more broadly, can make engagement easier and more efficient from both the perspective of the MP and the constituent. On the other hand, it can make communication less personal, and even harmful through the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation.

15 APPG on Legal Aid. (2018). MP Casework Survey -Findings -September 2018. <https://www.apg-legalaid.org/sites/default/files/APPG%20on%20Legal%20Aid%20-%20MP%20casework%20survey%20findings%207%20Sept%202018.pdf>

16 APPG on Legal Aid. (2018). MP Casework Survey -Findings -September 2018. <https://www.apg-legalaid.org/sites/default/files/APPG%20on%20Legal%20Aid%20-%20MP%20casework%20survey%20findings%207%20Sept%202018.pdf>

17 Anonymous MP’s office manager (2021, September 5). ‘We’re all absolutely knackered,’ says MP’s office manager. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/sep/05/were-all-absolutely-knackered-says-mps-office-manager>

18 Earl, B. (2023, March 30). Social Media and the British MP. Brunswick Review. <https://review.brunswickgroup.com/article/social-media-british-mp/>

19 Committee on Standards in Public Life. (2018). MPs’ Outside Interests. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5b3b2ba340f0b645fd5921f8/CSPL_MPs__outside_interests_-_full_report.PDF

"We do a hell of a lot of constituency casework - we're turning around 500 emails a day between us. To be honest, quite a lot of those are robot-generated graffiti. We decide on an ad hoc basis whether to even acknowledge them. You know it's not them writing, it's some campaign organisation, I don't know why they think it's effective. It clogs up the inbox, it means important ones aren't seen."

- MP

3. Across the board, public trust in the political system, public institutions and corporations is desperately low, and the people who work for them are othered as out of touch elites, fostering abusive language and even violence

Public disillusionment has deepened, as many feel that all the large organisations, bodies and businesses in our country now serve themselves at the expense of the public. 72% of the public feel that the economy is rigged to advantage the rich and powerful, and 65% agree that "society is broken".²⁰ Scandals, broken promises, and widening inequality have left citizens and consumers sceptical that those in positions of power are accountable or truly understand the struggles of everyday life. Only 12% of people - a record low - trust governments to put the interests of the nation above those of their own party always or most of the time.²¹

This means that distrust and cynicism in the MP-Constituent relationship is not always entirely down to actions of the specific MP, or even the specific party they represent. Rather they are distrusted as a symbol of a distant and arrogant 'elite' group in society who are seen as out of touch and working against the interests of the 'normal person on the street'. It put MPs on the back foot from the start.

Declining trust is manifesting itself in the rising levels of abuse and intimidation of MPs.²² Giving evidence to the Speaker's Conference on the security of candidates, Chief Inspector Bryan Duffy described a shift in recent years in the nature of political debate towards "something more direct, attacking, that does not expect anybody to fire back, or for justice to follow".²³ It's no longer just MPs facing the consequences, with a survey of MPs' staff earlier this year finding that 38% reported fearing for their own or colleagues' safety, up from 19% in 2022.²⁴

"One of the things I found hard about a transition back into elected politicians after a decade off is the complete and total distrust of every elected politician. That felt really different. When I was a councillor, people criticised you, yeah and that's fine, but people broadly started off with a neutral or positive regard and that you're trying to do something good and a public service. I have none of that now."

- MP

20 Atkinson, S. (2025, June 6). "The system is broken": Ipsos study across 31 countries reveals deepening distrust in politics and elites. Ipsos. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/system-broken-ipsos-study-across-31-countries-reveals-deepening-distrust-politics-and-elites>

21 National Centre for Social Research. (2025, June 25). BSA 42 | Britain's democracy | National Centre for Social Research. National Centre for Social Research. <https://natcen.ac.uk/publications/bsa-42-britains-democracy>

22 Stacey, K. (2025, July 12). MPs and political candidates face "industrial" levels of abuse, minister says. The Guardian; The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/jul/12/mps-political-candidates-intimidation-harassment-abuse-rushanara-ali>

23 Speaker's Conference. (2025, June). First Report: Speaker's Conference on the Security of MPs, Candidates and Elections. House of Commons. <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/48116/documents/251907/default/>

24 Halliday, J. (2025, July 6). Dozens of MPs "refused safety measures" for their staff despite rising abuse. The Guardian; The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/jul/06/dozens-of-mps-refused-safety-measures-for-their-staff-despite-rising-abuse>

SECTION 2

MPS AND CONSTITUENTS: A FALTERING RELATIONSHIP

HOW A STRONG MP-CONSTITUENT RELATIONSHIP CONTRIBUTES TO A HEALTHY DEMOCRACY

In a healthy democracy, citizens elect representatives to amplify their voices and shape the decisions that govern their lives. When this relationship works well, it offers our democracy three fundamental strengths:

1. Efficacy

When MPs hear from a broad range of their constituents, they are better able to understand and represent a range of views and interests.

Being able to make decisions informed by a diverse range of constituents results in more effective policy-making because it is a better reflection of social and economic realities.

The Windrush Scandal: Surfaced by casework, then highlighted by MPs, the Windrush scandal shone the light on serious Home Office failings and pressured the government to rectify these appalling wrongdoings, such as through the Windrush compensation scheme. The ability for MPs to oversee and act on casework in this way is thus vital and can be a lifeline for the marginalised.²⁵

25 Gentleman, Amelia (2019) The Windrush Betrayal: Exposing the hostile environment. Guardian Faber.

2. Legitimacy

This operates in a virtuous circle - when constituents feel like their voices are heard by their MP it demonstrates the value of the relationship to them, builds trust and encourages further engagement.

The more that constituents believe in the value of this relationship, the greater legitimacy our democratic system has.

Westminster City Council Citizens' Climate Assembly:²⁶ Over the course of two weekends in 2023, a randomised but representative group of 47 Westminster City Council residents - the Westminster Citizens' Climate Assembly - learnt about, deliberated on, and developed recommendations on delivering net zero. Between the first and second weekends of the Assembly, the proportion of Assembly members saying they felt they could influence the Council's decisions increased from 27% to 63%, and trust in the Council to act on the recommendations grew by 21% from 52% to 73%. There was even a slight uptick in the proportion saying they were keen to take part in volunteering or community activities across Westminster as a result (from 80% to 88%).

3. Dialogue

When the relationship between constituents and MPs is strong, it enables open and mutually respectful dialogue to characterise our political culture - democracy thrives when dialogue can effectively resolve our differences.

Such a culture ensures that being an MP - or even simply engaging in politics - appeals to a broad range of people, encouraging women, people from ethnic minorities and other minoritised groups to seek selection.

The French Climate Citizens' Convention (CCC):²⁷ In 2019-20, 150 randomly selected but representative French citizens were brought together over multiple sessions to develop climate policy recommendations, 71% of which have since been at least partially implemented. The sessions enabled an open dialogue amongst members of the public with different views and experiences, as well as between members of the public and experts, government officials, and other stakeholders. Assembly members reported profound changes in their lives as a result of their involvement, ranging from increased self-confidence to increased political engagement, such as setting up an advocacy group for the CCC to standing in local elections.

26 Westminster Citizens' Climate Assembly Final Report. (2023). <https://www.westminster.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/documents/FINAL%20VERSION%20WCCA%20report.pdf>

27 Mellier, C., & Tilikete, S. (2025). Briefing No.14 Understanding the Impact of the French Climate Citizens' Convention (CCC): A Review of Existing Research. https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/65b77644e6021e9021de8916/67ee5c12cd2f92e02a585545_KNOCA%20Briefing%20NO.%2014%20final%203.4.25.pdf

WHAT'S GOING WRONG?

Although the MP and constituent relationship has the potential to strengthen our democracy, we find it to be in a serious state of disrepair, unable to live up to the asks made of it in the 21st century. Whilst we found exciting pockets of innovation, as can be seen on page 26, the fundamentals of the constituency role of an MP can hamper efforts at relationship-building. And the dynamics in the role, pulling MPs between their constituency life, Westminster life, and home life, limits their ability to engage more, or to innovate.

"It is tiring managing London and the constituency. [But] this is how the system works. Travel wise, I'd say it takes 3 hours going and 3 hours back."

- MP

"I'm trying to see how we could be more efficient with the use of time, and therefore speak to constituents more. The distance plays a part: if half my week is in London, I'm already cut off."

- MP

At the heart of the problem is a paradoxical set of realities: on the one hand there are MPs who are talking to their constituents more than ever before; yet, on the other, the majority of constituents continue to feel unheard, unseen and unrepresented. The way that most MPs engage with their constituents has become increasingly optimised for polarisation, not representation. The relationship between MPs and their constituents favours the extreme, the niche, the minority and the angry opinions over the views and experiences that most of the population would identify with. It obstructs democratic efficacy, weakens democratic legitimacy and drives a toxic democratic culture.

We set out here the key faultlines in the MP/Constituent relationship:

Among the constituents that MPs hear from, a small subset of constituents are vastly overrepresented, inaccurately amplifying their voices

As outlined above, the key forms of interaction between MPs and their constituents are: inbound emails, surgeries, door-knocking and conversations on social media. This cluster of activity comprises the default model of engagement between MPs and their constituents, which (aside from MP door-knocking) is reliant on the motivation and action of the constituent to initiate contact. The result is that almost all the constituents that MPs interact with, or could be said to have any sort of *relationship* with, have specific, personal and/or pressing reasons for reaching out. We heard from MPs that these people are either:

- **Constituents facing a crisis, who are motivated by an acute personal need to get help.**
 - These are people in a state of desperation who have reached out to their MP because they don't know what else to do. For example, they are being evicted and have nowhere to go or there's been an error in their benefits payment and can't get anyone at the Jobcentre to listen to their concerns.
 - This group of people are likely to be amongst some of the most vulnerable and marginalised in our society - those on low incomes, asylum seekers, those needing care or otherwise highly reliant on public assistance.

OR

- **Constituents involved in a campaign, who are motivated by a strong personal interest in a cause close to their hearts.**
 - These are people with the awareness, capacity and time to proactively talk to their MP about issues or campaigns. For example, they may be petitioning their MP about the state of their local waterways or campaigning against a proposed new housing development in their neighbourhood.
 - This group are likely to be politically literate and be drawn from more middle-class, older and whiter demographic groups.

"Let's say some of those who are middle class, at one level you could say they have less issues that they need to come to me, but then equally you find they have a lot of opinions on policy... On the other hand, people who have issues and are struggling, they're less interested on the policy side and more interested in what's going on in their life. And then there are those who don't care: politics is not for me."

- MP

Of course, engagement with these groups matters. Hearing from people in need allows MPs to get an insight into the challenges vulnerable people are dealing with and where the state is failing them. Similarly, hearing from politically engaged constituents can help draw an MP's attention to important local or national issues.

But there is a problem when the only voices that MPs hear are from people 'at the edges' of public opinion. Those people at a point of personal crisis or running a local campaign are representative of two relatively small groups of people in the population. When these voices over-index in MP interactions, there is a real risk that other varied perspectives on a specific topic are drowned out. It means louder voices can be misconstrued as more powerful or popular than they are in reality.

For example, a recent report by Demos found that the planning conversation in government policy is being dominated by less than 10% of the population, with only 9% of the public having commented on a planning application, mostly to object rather than support it (6% vs 3%). The political debate has focused on this small number of 'NIMBYs' (those who say Not in My Backyard to new development) and it is their voices who have an oversized influence on the political debate over planning. This is despite the fact that it is a vast majority of the population - 67% according to our polling - who fall into a MIMBY category (Maybe in My Back Yard) and are open to new development in their area given the right conditions.²⁸

²⁸ Levin, M., Kapetanovic, H., & Garner, A. (2025). The NIMBY majority: How to Unlock Housebuilding with Early and Representative Public Participation in Planning. https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/The-MIMBY-Majority_Report_2025_May_a.c.pdf

Despite their efforts, MPs don't speak with or hear from the vast majority of constituents, fuelling frustration and distrust

The truth is that most people in any given constituency are not overly interested or involved in politics, or indeed their local community. Only 17% of the public have discussed political issues on social media, taken part in a public consultation (14%), organised within their local community (4%) or attended political meetings (4%).²⁹

In contrast to the two types of 'engaged constituent' described above, most people don't have the awareness, time, knowledge or motivation to engage with their MP. All MPs we spoke to identified groups of constituents they don't feel they are hearing from, despite their efforts. Most MPs would like to engage with a wider range of constituents. They commonly described these people as young, busy and part of a working family. Another specific demographic came up in multiple MP interviews as particularly tricky to engage: white, working-class men.

"Who I miss if I'm honest is working families, the 30 somethings with young kids, the 40 somethings with teenagers, and the 50 somethings who are working rather than retired. "

- MP

"If you ever look at the white working class group that have never engaged, never voted, and they are probably more problematic to engage because you get a blanket no... because there's a lot of anger. "

- MP

On the constituents' side, under the right conditions, many of the politically disengaged constituents we spoke to would be keen to engage more or better. But we have identified a number of practical and motivational barriers that stop many from engaging with their MP:

- **Low awareness of their MP and their constituency role - and a lack of interest**
 - Most of the politically disengaged constituents we spoke to couldn't name their MP. In fact, a 2013 survey found that just 22% of the public knew the name of their MP.³⁰ This highlights a widespread lack of interest in politics, as well as a clear practical barrier to engagement.
 - One of the top reasons cited by respondents in 2021 polling for the UCL Constitution Unit as to why they don't get involved in politics more was that they didn't feel they knew enough (with 52% putting this in their top three reasons).³¹

29 Renwick, A., Lauderdale, B., Russell, M., & Cleaver, J. (2023). Public Preferences for Integrity and Accountability in Politics Results of a Second Survey of the UK Population Third Report of the Democracy in the UK after Brexit Project. https://www.ucl.ac.uk/social-historical-sciences/sites/social_historical_sciences/files/ucl_cu_report3_digital_final.pdf

30 Hansard Society. (2013). Audit of Political Engagement 10 The 2013 Report. https://assets.ctfassets.net/rdwvqctnt75b/FxyrysDnMYQkKsqkialE/62716effab77d9ce0cc0661c489e5590/Audit_of_Political_Engagement_10__2013_.pdf?utm_source=HansardSociety

31 Renwick, A., Lauderdale, B., Russell, M., & Cleaver, J. (2023). Public Preferences for Integrity and Accountability in Politics Results of a Second Survey of the UK Population Third Report of the Democracy in the UK after Brexit Project. https://www.ucl.ac.uk/social-historical-sciences/sites/social_historical_sciences/files/ucl_cu_report3_digital_final.pdf

"I don't even know who is my MP. I've no idea. Zero knowledge."

- Politically disengaged constituent

- **The expectation is on the MP to improve the relationship, not constituents**
 - Our conversations with constituents as well as MPs revolved around how the MP could improve MP-constituent engagement, especially when it comes to currently disengaged groups. So far, most attempts at improving MP-constituent engagement have focused on the MP's role.
 - For example, there was an assumption from disengaged constituents that if they don't know anything about their MP then the fault for this lay with their MP. Only through the discussion did some participants start to feel that they should be playing a more active role in the relationship - starting with finding out who their MP is.

"Unfortunately my MP in my area has not made himself available and has not reached out to us first. I don't even know who he is."

- Politically disengaged constituent

- **Constituents feel they don't have the time or headspace to engage**
 - MPs struggle most to engage those in the busiest periods of their lives - such as when they're working, or raising a young family. Many feel they don't have the time to engage - 44% of the public selected this as one of their top three barriers to getting more involved in politics.³² On top of that, timing matters - for example, it's much harder to find the time to engage during work hours.
 - It's not just time - the responsibilities that make up people's busy and complex lives, such as work and taking care of themselves and others, can make it difficult to find the headspace for anything beyond immediate concerns.

"Community meetings are often in the day when people are working. It is always that one section of people that are always able to go."

- Politically disengaged constituent

"The stage I'm at in my life, I don't have a huge amount of time. I have a baby. If they want to hear my views, come to where I'm at - come to a baby class."

- Politically disengaged constituent

32 Renwick, A., Lauderdale, B., Russell, M., & Cleaver, J. (2023). Public Preferences for Integrity and Accountability in Politics Results of a Second Survey of the UK Population Third Report of the Democracy in the UK after Brexit Project. https://www.ucl.ac.uk/social-historical-sciences/sites/social_historical_sciences/files/ucl_cu_report3_digital_final.pdf

- **High distrust means many feel engagement with their MP is pointless**

- Distrust coursed through our conversations with constituents. Negative perceptions of MPs - sometimes individual but mostly general - ranged from incompetence to dishonesty to being out of touch. Views differed on whether it's taking up the MP role that gives people these traits, or that people with these traits become MPs.
- Either way, this results in a sense that MPs can't be trusted to successfully represent ordinary people's interests, which is backed up by polling that finds that only 12% of the public trust MPs to make decisions in their best interests.³³
- This begs the question: why engage with your MP at all? Indeed, the UCL Constitution Unit polling found that the most common barrier stopping people from getting more involved in politics isn't a practical one at all - it's that they don't think it would make a difference. Over half (57%) of the public selected this in their top three barriers.³⁴

"I don't believe a word that comes out of their mouths."

- Politically disengaged constituent

"They are career politicians and they want to get elected and improve their position in their political party. They are incapable of running basic services in cities."

- Politically disengaged constituent

"Personally I don't trust MPs because I think sometimes when they get into the seat of power, they tend to put aside what they've promised and just go in for it for themselves."

- Politically disengaged constituent

- **The current incentives for engagement don't appeal to politically disengaged constituents**

- We have set out above the two types of constituents that are most likely to engage with their MPs currently, and why they engage. The first is constituents at crisis point, who are motivated by need and desperation. The second is politically engaged constituents, who are motivated by their interest and existing opinions on a particular political issue.
- But for the politically disengaged constituents we spoke to, politics just isn't at the front of their minds in their everyday lives. It feels like something others do far away from them - albeit, not very well, with dissatisfaction with how politics works one of the top three reasons half (53%) of the public don't get more involved with it.³⁵ They don't see themselves having a role in politics. It doesn't feel like they could make an impact, even if they wanted to engage. Politics simply isn't working for them - or, crucially, with them. So they think: 'why bother?'

33 O'Brien, R. (2024). Lack of trust in politics main reason people won't vote. Sortition Foundation. https://www.sortitionfoundation.org/uk_poll_june_2024?

34 Renwick, A., Lauderdale, B., Russell, M., & Cleaver, J. (2023). Public Preferences for Integrity and Accountability in Politics Results of a Second Survey of the UK Population Third Report of the Democracy in the UK after Brexit Project. https://www.ucl.ac.uk/social-historical-sciences/sites/social_historical_sciences/files/ucl_cu_report3_digital_final.pdf

35 Renwick, A., Lauderdale, B., Russell, M., & Cleaver, J. (2023). Public Preferences for Integrity and Accountability in Politics Results of a Second Survey of the UK Population Third Report of the Democracy in the UK after Brexit Project. https://www.ucl.ac.uk/social-historical-sciences/sites/social_historical_sciences/files/ucl_cu_report3_digital_final.pdf

"Statistically people that are actively involved in politics are the odd ones out in the room...Most people do not think about or engage with politics. I am not surprised that my inbox does not represent my constituency. The average person does not think about politics until it impacts their life."

- MP

- **Some constituents feel they lack the skills or confidence to engage**

- Some people are much more comfortable talking to their MP than others. Of the constituents we spoke to, one theme that emerged was people saying they would feel intimidated going to an event and sharing their views, particularly if they don't feel they know much about politics.
- According to the UCL Constitutional Unit polling, four in ten (39%) say that not being the kind of person who gets involved in politics is one of the top three reasons stopping them getting more involved.³⁶

"Some people are better at communicating issues. I wouldn't do it because I'm not confident to speak in public."

- Politically disengaged constituent

This leaves most constituents who don't engage with their MP feeling that they aren't being heard, and with little motivation to try. People begin to view politics as something done to them rather than with them. Most people don't feel they have a say in the decisions that impact their lives, with only 12% feeling they have at least some influence in national decision-making, and a slightly higher proportion of 23% saying the same when it comes to local decision-making.³⁷ This sense of powerlessness appears to be increasing: the proportion that feels they can really change how the UK is run if they get involved in politics has decreased from almost a third (32%) in 2018 to a quarter (25%) today.

Without a radical reimagining of the MP-constituent relationship, not feeling heard will continue to fuel distrust, in turn fuelling further disengagement from political processes, resulting in weakened democratic legitimacy.

The spectre of real-life violence looms large over MP activities and abusive and threatening language directed at MPs can make them wary

The murders of Jo Cox MP in 2016 and Sir David Amess in 2021 put in sharp focus how real the threat of abuse, intimidation and violence is for MPs in modern-day Britain. Anger, aggression, and abuse from constituents were brought up spontaneously by almost all of the MPs we spoke

³⁶ Renwick, A., Lauderdale, B., Russell, M., & Cleaver, J. (2023). Public Preferences for Integrity and Accountability in Politics Results of a Second Survey of the UK Population Third Report of the Democracy in the UK after Brexit Project. https://www.ucl.ac.uk/social-historical-sciences/sites/social_historical_sciences/files/ucl_cu_report3_digital_final.pdf

³⁷ Duffy, B. (2025, September 11). Big decline in belief public services are listening, as Reform UK becomes magnet for those who feel powerless. King's College London. <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/big-decline-in-belief-public-services-are-listening-as-reform-uk-becomes-magnet-for-those-who-feel-powerless>

to. One MP shared that she did not feel comfortable holding public surgeries out of fear, while a constituency caseworker told us about the extra security precautions they've had to take.

"One of the things I can't emphasise enough is how scary it is being an MP sometimes, how much aggression we're on the receiving end of."

- MP

"I don't really have a surgery. The security advice is such that you can't do that anymore. That is just the most enormous loss. I can never tell my constituents in advance that I will be somewhere. I know some colleagues break that rule, but it's different for men. There's no way my partner is going to have to explain to my 6 year old why I'm not around."

- MP

"We've had some issues, had the police involved, had a potential harassment case. I've had to have extra security put on my house, with the extra engagement comes extra security risk. The police have had to seal up my letter box. We try to keep the rest of the team away from the social media, people know who I am and know I work for her so I can't go back in the box"

- Constituency caseworker

Earlier this year, the Speaker's Conference surveyed MPs about their experiences of abuse in their roles. Almost all MPs surveyed (96%) reported experiencing one or more incidents of threatening behaviour or communication since they began working as an MP. The most prominent space where abuse happens is online. As a result, an alarming 73% of female MPs and 51% of male MPs say they avoid speaking on certain issues on social media due to abuse.³⁸ The problem is most severe for female MPs of colour, with research showing that they receive more than triple the abusive tweets to their white counterparts.³⁹

Many MPs who have experienced abuse have reduced engagement opportunities not only online but also in person as a result: 37% declined invitations to events, 29% refrained from frequenting public places, and 23% reduced or stopped holding constituency surgeries in person.⁴⁰

Ultimately, MPs, particularly those from underrepresented groups, become less willing to hold discussions in the public sphere or even to remain in politics as a result of abuse. This limits the public's opportunities to engage with their MP and the diversity of voices and experiences that are represented in Parliament, further fuelling distrust and weakening democratic legitimacy and efficacy.

³⁸ Fawcett Society (2023). A House For Everyone: A Case for Modernising Parliament. <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/a-house-for-everyone>

³⁹ Amnesty International UK (2017). Black and Asian Women MPs Abused More Online. <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/online-violence-women-mps>

⁴⁰ Speaker's Conference. (2025, June). First Report: Speaker's Conference on the Security of MPs, Candidates and Elections. House of Commons. <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/48116/documents/251907/default/>

Despite the time and resource MPs spend on constituency casework, they often remain unable to help, fuelling distrust

Though there can be great value in constituency casework, MPs told us most of the casework they received was on issues over which they had no jurisdiction, such as legal cases and matters relating to the council, such as social care or housing. This is in part due to more people with nowhere to turn to but their MP, but is also in part due to a misunderstanding from many constituents about what their MP can and can't do.

This means that MPs are unable to effectively deliver on much of their casework, driving constituent distrust and frustration, and a sense that the system isn't working. For example, a number of our participants suggested the asks made of MPs are generally easy to address, and felt confused and frustrated when MPs failed to deliver on it.

"Some constituents don't fully understand what the [MP] role is, and some people's expectations are too high. They think I can literally sort everything out."

- MP

"If I'm complaining about lighting on the street or lack of safety at night, I would like to see a couple of policemen, you know, patrolling the street. And [an MP] can do that very quickly with two phone calls."

- Politically disengaged constituent

SECTION 3

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR A NEW MODEL OF ENGAGEMENT

Our research evidences some of the dysfunctions in the MP-constituent relationship, but also a lot of good work, pockets of innovation and opportunities that already exist.

We heard a number of examples of innovation and effective engagement practice from MPs and their staff:

- Bringing to life and increasing the visibility of MP-constituent engagement by tracking and sharing where and when the MP has engaged with constituents through an interactive map.
- Making an effort to eat every meal out at a local cafe or restaurant to increase MP visibility and opportunities for engagement in a way that doesn't add a significant burden on the MP's schedules.
- Increased use of newer video-based social media tools and platforms such as Instagram Reels and TikTok to increase visibility and engagement with politically engaged audiences.
- 60 second flash surveys to ask constituents to share their top concerns from the local area.

Guided by our findings, we have set out five principles for successful MP-constituent engagement:

- 1. Beyond the usual suspects:** The model should give a voice to the unheard majority of constituents, rather than simply elevating further the voices of those who are being heard already.
- 2. Participatory:** The model should give constituents the time and space to have meaningful and collaborative interactions with the MP.
- 3. Reciprocal:** Both MPs and constituents should have a role to play in the model; the relationship can't be one-sided. It should foster mutual understanding, trust and respect.
- 4. Accountable:** The model should provide a feedback loop so that the actions taken by the MP are visible to constituents.
- 5. Pragmatic:** The model should take into account the realities of MP and MP staff resources, time, security concerns, and powers, as well as constituents' practical barriers to engagement.

PRINCIPLE 1: BEYOND THE USUAL SUSPECTS

The model must go further than simply making it easier for those who already engage to engage more, otherwise engagement will continue to be optimised for polarisation not representation. Our model will reimagine the relationship between MPs and constituents with a focus on engaging the politically disengaged - the unheard majority. Evidently, this will be difficult. There is a reason these constituents aren't currently engaging with their MPs.

Inclusion must be at the heart of our model if we are to ensure we reach those who aren't currently being reached. As far as possible, there should be different ways of engaging with MPs to suit different people's capabilities and preferences, and engagement should be able to fit around busy and complex lives. Our model must provide different incentives to engagement in order to attract different constituents.

At the same time, we recognise that no realistic engagement model could engage every single constituent. There are trade offs to be made between focusing on scale (i.e. putting most of our efforts into engaging the largest amount of people, even if some of these people are likely to be those who already engage and the engagement is more surface level) and depth (i.e. putting most of our efforts into engaging in depth with a more diverse group, even if it's a much smaller group). We believe the latter, with some 'at scale' elements, allows us to best hear the voices of the unheard majority.

To tackle political apathy or disinterest, we will test incentives to take part that don't rely on interest in the issue, such as paying people for their time. Perhaps counterintuitively, discussions can often be more productive when the people in the room aren't all there because they already have a strong opinion on an issue. More broad-based representation will allow for a wider range of views to be heard, and often ones that are more nuanced and less binary than those expressed by the loudest voices currently. This will also create a more open and respectful dialogue, rather than aggression or intimidation that not only doesn't listen to other voices but actively shuts them down.

PRINCIPLE 2: PARTICIPATORY

Our *Citizens' White Paper*, published in 2024, set out the case for a more participatory form of policymaking as one of the ways to tackle record low public trust in politics. Participatory policymaking goes further than traditional consultation methods by more meaningfully involving people impacted by an issue in the policymaking process. It enables them to bring informed, considered collective judgement to bear on the issue enabling them to come up with well-considered (and often bolder) policies.

That is not to say that MPs should do exactly what constituents say on every issue. Not only do they have their own views to consider, but that of their party. A crucial feature of our model will therefore be collaboration: MPs must work together with constituents to decide what action needs to be taken. This will ensure that the action feels realistic for the MP, while constituents feel clear on how their input has shaped the result.

There is plenty of evidence that if you give ordinary people meaningful opportunities to shape policymaking it can increase their trust in the politician or political body that has invited their input. In our polling we described a fictional public participation exercise being run by the government, and the majority polled (63%) said they would be likely to accept an invitation to take part.⁴¹ Furthermore, our experience tells us that taking part in a good engagement exercise (one that's enjoyable, interesting, but also impactful) can be a motivator in and of itself for further engagement.

THE BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATORY POLICYMAKING

Ireland's Citizens' Assemblies are often the most commonly cited examples of successful participatory processes, playing a crucial role in the legalisation of politically stuck issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage. But there are many more examples, including on more technical issues such as budgeting. The practice of participatory budgeting, where members of the public input into how part of a public budget is spent, originated in Brazil but is now used around the world.

Studies have shown that local governments that have adopted participatory budgeting in Brazil have higher tax revenues than comparable authorities as people feel they have more of a say in how public money is spent (and more of an understanding of how those decisions are made and the trade offs involved) and are therefore happier to pay a bit more to increase spending in a way that reflects their priorities.⁴²

Crucially for the purposes of this paper, participation can increase trust in politicians and political bodies. One successful example has been the Institute for Democratic Engagement & Accountability (IDEA) at Ohio State University's 'Deliberative Town Halls'. These have been bringing together citizens and Members of the US Congress for many years as part of a deliberative process enabling a reciprocal and informed discussion between citizens and their representatives. IDEA works with congressional offices to decide the topic and provide balanced information to a representative group of participants on it.

41 Levin, M., Curtis, P., Castell, S., & Kapetanovic, H. (2024, July 19). *Citizens' White Paper*. Demos.co.uk. <https://demos.co.uk/research/citizens-white-paper/>

42 Touchton, M., Wampler, B., & Peixoto, T. (2020). Of democratic governance and revenue: Participatory institutions and tax generation in Brazil. *Governance*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12552>

There have been a wide range of positive impacts of these Deliberative Town Halls, both for politicians and citizens. Members of Congress have shifted their policy positions as a result of their participation, and participating citizens have seen double-digit increases in trust and approval of the participating Members, increased trust in Congress as a whole, increased likelihood to vote, and reduced hostility between participants from opposing parties by over 50 percentage points in some cases.⁴³

There is also evidence that the positive impacts can even be extended to other members of the public who haven't taken part when they hear that people like them have been involved in policymaking. Demos polling last year found that if a politician made a commitment to involving the public in making decisions on issues, the majority of people (57%) say they would be more likely than before to have a favourable opinion of them, and around half more likely to trust them (46%) and vote for them (48%).⁴⁴ Therefore, there are even potential electoral benefits for politicians.

PRINCIPLE 3: RECIPROCAL

Alongside actions taken by the MP to increase trust, the model should urge politically disengaged constituents to rethink their role in local politics. The model should build a reciprocal relationship between MP and constituent: one that goes both ways, with a role to be played both by MPs and constituents.

This draws on Jane Mansbridge's concept of recursive representation, in which citizens and representatives engage with each other in a more iterative and ongoing way, listening to the other and responding accordingly, rather than only one side doing the talking and the other doing the listening and responding.⁴⁵

We believe that we need a more reciprocal - and recursive - relationship between MPs and constituents for a number of reasons. Firstly, we believe that the quality of the engagement will improve if both sides are making an effort to be there (and for different reasons than those who tend to currently engage with their MPs). Secondly, we believe that if both sides are trying to expand the MP's reach, it will be expanded far beyond what the MP and their office is capable of alone. Thirdly, the quality of our democracy as a whole would be improved if more of the public were politically literate and played more of an active role in democratic engagement. Finally, one of the problems with today's MP-constituent engagement - increasing abuse and intimidation of MPs - is in the hands of constituents not MPs, and so the solution must ultimately rest with constituents.

Our vision for this new, more reciprocal relationship is not only that each side has their role to play, but that each side is clear on the role the other is playing. This is particularly relevant for politically disengaged constituents, given the low awareness of their MP and understanding of their role we have identified. There is also an important role in creating opportunities for both the MP and the constituents involved to interact with each other as people. In our MP interviews, several spoke of the importance of developing relationships with their constituents

43 Institute for Democratic Engagement & Accountability. (2022). Connecting to Congress. Osu.edu. <https://democracyinstitute.osu.edu/projects/connecting-to-congress>

44 Nationally representative polling (2,073 UK adults) conducted 7th - 9th June 2024 by Yonder Data Solutions on behalf of Demos.

45 Mansbridge, J. (2018). Recursive Representation. OUP Academic. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226588674.003.0014>

where constituents can start to see MPs as fellow humans trying to do their best - in a difficult job - rather than the enemy.

All this must be done in a way that doesn't compromise MP safety. To tackle security concerns, there need to be guidelines in place that ensure engagement happens in a way that fosters mutual understanding, respect, and trust.

"It's them showing us they're human as well. I'm working class, I get up, go to work. I'd like to think MPs care about us, and it's not just a job to them. That they got into it for a reason."

- Politically disengaged constituent

PRINCIPLE 4: ACCOUNTABLE

There needs to be a mechanism within the model that creates a link between the engagement with constituents and the MP taking action in a way that is informed by this engagement.

To engage a broader range of constituents (particularly those who are the most distrustful and disengaged currently) the model must give constituents hope that the MP may actually listen to them if they engage. To have a real impact on trust, the MP must show how they have listened and how their actions have been informed by what they've heard from constituents.

The MP must communicate clearly how their action has been informed by what they have heard from constituents. This crucial step is what will help tackle constituent distrust; many of the people we spoke to told us that if they felt the MP was actually listening and taking action, they would trust them more.

However, building trust takes time. The MPs we spoke to who have held their constituencies for many years felt they had built trust over that time, while the new MPs (as of July 2024) were struggling to get their name out there let alone build trust. We should be realistic about what the model can achieve in the short-term.

"It's more about the long term - you need to motivate people to start off with and if 10 months down the line people see that the meetings are bringing about change, people will actually care to join them. The trust comes from the action."

- Politically disengaged constituent

"When I lived in Wales I had a lot of trust in my MP, but that's because I could physically see him making a lot of difference in my community."

- Politically disengaged constituent

THE LISTEN-DO-COMMUNICATE MODEL

A CASE STUDY FROM BARKING & DAGENHAM*

In Barking and Dagenham constituency in the early 2000s, Margaret Hodge MP was faced with low voter turnout and a rise in popularity of the BNP. After some initial work gathering insight from the local community (*"What was keeping them at home [and not voting] was anger not apathy"*) Hodge deployed a laser-focussed strategy, where every activity undertaken in her constituency had to pass the test question: *"Will this help me reconnect?"*.

A model of engagement was deployed that followed the *"virtuous circle"* of 'listen-do-communicate'. It was repeated time and time again over the years to deepen relationships and reach further into the community:

- The engagement was kicked off by mailing out 1000 letters to constituents, inviting people to meet Hodge at an in-person coffee morning.
- Anything between 25-75 members of the public would turn up to share their views over a cup of coffee and a biscuit. With volunteers stationed at each table facilitating the conversation, Hodge would spend an hour listening to people and making a list of actions to take away: *"I'd go table to table... there'd always at least one local problem that emerged"*.
- With her constituency team and local volunteers, branded 'Hodge's Action Team', Hodge would take action to solve the problems raised by constituents.
- Hodge would then write back to the 1000 constituents to say what she had done and make sure people were aware of local successes: *"You raised this issue, this is what I've done about it"*. There would always be an invitation to come to the next coffee morning or street meeting, and the cycle would start again.

This approach and model was Hodge's constituency focus for many years. She credits this model and her wider approach to building trust with constituents for the loss in 2010 of all the BNPs council seats.⁴⁶

**This case study and verbatim quotes were drawn from an in-person interview with Margaret Hodge conducted for this paper in July 2025.*

46 BBC. (2010, May 8). BNP loses all 12 seats in Barking and Dagenham council. BBC News. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8668885.stm>

PRINCIPLE 5: PRAGMATIC

The model should be workable within the limited resources that MP offices have, and avoid placing too great an additional burden on MPs and their teams.

In developing our model, we have considered how to overcome the barriers faced by MPs and constituents that we have outlined above. It must fit around constituents' busy and complex lives, offer options for engagement that suit different kinds of constituents, recognise constituents' starting points in terms of their relationships with their MP, and not place a significant additional burden on MPs and their offices. We will focus on quality over quantity of engagement.

But we must accept there are barriers we cannot fully overcome, as the model must work within the bounds of current realities. The model will face up against reality in the piloting phase, but we have worked to design a pragmatic model as far as possible to minimise the risks of failure.

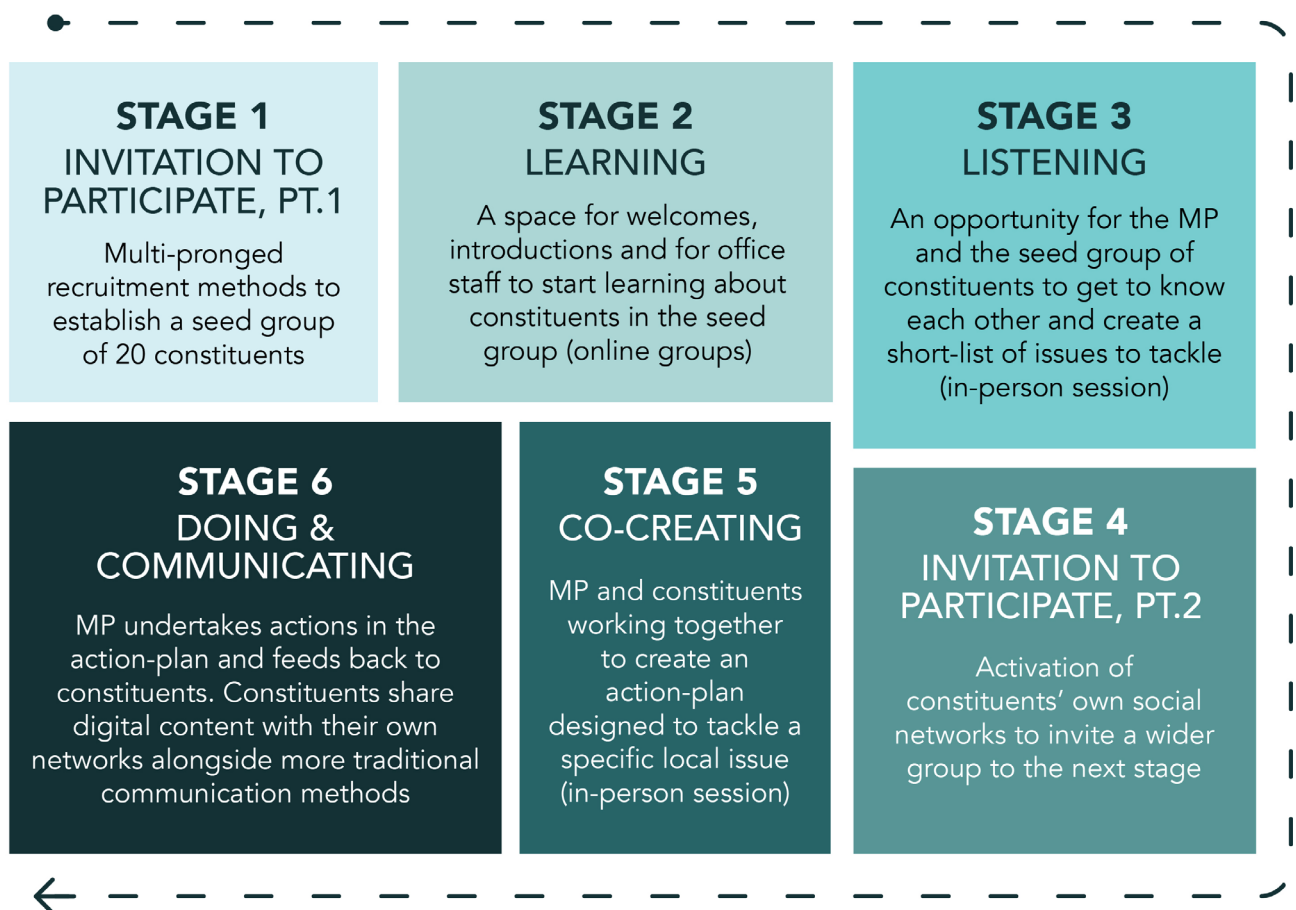
SECTION 4

A NEW DEAL: A NEW MODEL OF ENGAGEMENT

SUMMARY

Our model presents a structured and purpose-driven approach to constituent engagement that aims to help re-set the MP role so that it is optimised for representation.

Engagement will be structured across 6 stages as follows:



The model follows the guiding principles outlined in the section above to ensure all key insights from the interviews and focus groups are deeply integrated into its design:

1. Beyond the usual suspects

The model is designed to reach and motivate constituents who would otherwise never seek a relationship with their MP. It aims to strengthen these constituents' relationship with their MP and create a ripple effect beyond those who have been directly involved.

Unlike other forms of MP-constituent engagement, a set of criteria aimed at identifying these constituents is a requirement for engagement within this model. This means that we will take participants through a simple screening process that determines their eligibility, primarily a lack of previous engagement with their MP or other political activity.

A key means by which we will reach beyond the usual suspects is that we adopt an outreach-based approach, going directly to constituents to invite their participation. By actively reaching out, we aim to involve individuals who would otherwise not have a relationship with their MP. We will use this approach to source our initial seed group of constituents as follows:

- Half will be recruited using professional market research recruiters.
 - Recruiters such as this are widely used across the market and social research sector to source and screen research respondents. The recruitment sector is a well-established industry and comprises small and medium-sized enterprises and independent freelancers who are either embedded within local communities or have regional reach across the UK.
 - Recruiters typically employ a combination of strategies - including database outreach, street recruitment, door-knocking, and social network-driven snowballing - to identify individuals who meet specified criteria.
 - They use a screener questionnaire to ensure that participants align with the desired demographic, behavioural, or attitudinal profiles.
 - Individuals recruited via this route must not have participated in any prior market or social research, in order to ensure that they are entirely new to this type of engagement.
- The other half will be recruited via more place-based methods.
 - This will range from the more traditional to the more experimental as well as allowing tailoring to leverage existing relationships the MP has with communities or individuals in their constituency.
 - It could involve, for example, adverts on local Facebook groups or other place-based social media platforms, posters and QR codes in local shops and supermarkets, flyers distributed through take-away services, door-knocking and leaflet dropping, letter writing, digital leafleting etc.

To pay, or not to pay?

One challenge with reaching beyond the usual suspects is that, by definition, they are not currently sufficiently motivated to reach out to their MP. Firstly, they are lacking the intrinsic motivation - the desire to do so for its own sake or for an internal reward e.g. enjoyment or interest. But they also do not have any extrinsic motivation either - they do not perceive there to be a value or reward in having a relationship with their MP.

This is why we have had to think carefully about how to get these people 'in the room' - considering the role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators at different points in the process and removing barriers to participation at every stage.

For the first two activities in the piloted model (Stages 2 and 3 in the diagram above) we propose paying a small financial incentive to participants. We believe this will be critical to ensuring initial engagement, because it:

- Overcomes the lack of intrinsic motivation to participate by providing a clear and simple extrinsic motivation
- Removes any financial barrier to involvement by enabling the participant to cover any associated travel or childcare costs
- Communicates that the MP respects their time and appreciates they are giving up their valuable time to take part

Studies have shown that monetary incentives are effective at increasing the response rate to research and in particular work best for 'hard-to-persuade' groups whose barriers are primarily motivational.⁴⁷

As participants move through the process we would expect their intrinsic motivation to increase as well as their perception that there is value in engaging. As such we do not propose offering a financial incentive to participants at Stages 5 or 6. We would instead create non-financial incentives such as offering a symbolic prize/title to the person who brings along the most people to the Stage 5 Co-creation and provide refreshments at the event.

We will be reviewing the use of incentives in the pilot as part of the evaluation process.

2. Participatory

Building trust is at the heart of our model. This is why there are points where the MP meets with constituents face-to-face, to enable participatory practices known to be essential in building trust - active listening and empathetic engagement, as well as getting to know each other. Such interactions will help constituents to see that their circumstances, motivations, and perspectives are seen and understood by their MP.

⁴⁷ Nicolaas, G., Corteen, E., & Davies, B. (2019). The use of incentives to recruit and retain hard-to-get populations in longitudinal studies. NatCen Social Research. <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ESRC-220311-NatCen-UseOfIncentivesRecruitRetainHardToGetPopulations-200611.pdf>

We also propose a participatory model with more than one touchpoint between constituents and the MP. This creates time and space for more nuanced and in-depth conversations as well as allowing trust and rapport to develop over time.

By design, this in-depth participatory approach can only reach a relatively small number of constituents - but we intend to use the bond we create through these means, to roll out the MP-constituent activity and strengthen relationships with the wider community. To this end we propose using a range of digital tools to achieve a degree of scale in the model - inviting wider participation and sharing of content. This will be a combination of technology that is already commonly used by members of the public such as Whatsapp and Facebook, and technology that is more experimental such as Pol.is.

3. Reciprocal

Key to our model is the idea that the MP and constituents are working *together*. They will join forces to identify and tackle a problem that requires both the involvement of the MP and constituents to solve. The MP will have a specific set of actions to undertake as part of this process, but constituents will be asked to contribute too - firstly in providing the local knowledge and insight into the issues and secondly by talking to their networks about the process. For example, we will ask participants to invite their friends/family to get involved in the co-creation stage as well as share content in their social media groups and online communities, so we can reach even further beyond the usual suspects.

The reciprocal nature of the model will have implications for how we position it to potential participants. The framing will be about *getting involved* and *playing a meaningful part* in the local community and neighbourhoods. The key messages we will be landing in any initial communications or adverts will be:

- We want to hear from people in this community who are experiencing or seeing issues in their local area
- We need local knowledge and insight to help tackle these problems

4. Accountable

Our model is about bringing constituents and their MP together to collaborate for a common purpose and achieving change together. That purpose will be to tackle (and ideally solve) a specific problem that constituents themselves have identified. We do not wish to put any parameters around what the issue should be, aside from it must fall within the remit and ability of the MP to resolve it. We expect it to be a local issue in the constituency but it may be one with a national reach too.

The mechanism for solving the problem will be an action plan - co-created between the MP and a wide group of constituents. This will set out actions for the MP to undertake, with milestones and feedback points identified. The MP must commit to undertake the actions in this plan and report back to the participants via short, accessible (and easily shareable) updates e.g. video-diary clips, Whatsapp bulletins etc. In this way, the model deploys Hodge's cycle of 'Listen-Do-Communicate' to instill accountability and build trust.

5. Pragmatic

The model has been designed so that it is as light-touch as possible whilst delivering on its core purposes. For instance, we have been mindful of not overburdening constituency office staff or the MP themselves, nor of putting too much pressure on budgets. In our final report, we will

provide detailed information on both the financial and time costs associated with the model. This will support accurate budgeting and resource planning.

The model can be used 'off the shelf' and is designed to be applicable in any parliamentary constituency. It offers options for tailoring the approach to suit local contexts, including making use of existing relationships that the MP may already have within their community.

The primary activities of the model (stages 1-5 in the diagram above) take place within a ten-week timeframe, which includes the set-up and participant recruitment time. This should enable constituency offices to easily plan and book in the model to their schedule of activity.

WHO EXACTLY ARE WE LOOKING FOR?

At each stage we are looking to engage a group of people who are primarily defined as having low political engagement. This will involve screening of the seed group participants and potentially at later stages too.

The screening process will involve ticking a minimum number of boxes from the following list of behavioural and attitudinal indicators. We may overlay some simple demographic quotas to ensure we are not inadvertently skewing towards, say older retired constituents, who we know are already more likely to get in touch with their MP:

- **Relationship with MP**
 - Don't know the name of their local MP
 - Have never been in touch with their MP
- **Voting**
 - Have never voted before
 - Have voted before, but infrequently
- **Political campaigning**
 - Have never taken part in a local campaign
 - Have never responded to a political campaign online
 - Have never taken part in a consultation, attended a local meeting, or had any contact with local councillors before
 - Have never had a role that would have given them a route into traditional decision-making structures,⁴⁸ for example:
 - A professional activist or campaigner;
 - A board member;
 - Elected officer.
- **Trust**
 - Score low on a range of trust measures e.g. 'on a scale of 0-5, where 0 means no trust and 5 means high trust, to what extent do you trust your local MP to have your interests at heart?'

⁴⁸ This criterion has been lifted from the School of Everyday Democracy eligibility criteria, as we see alignment in the types of citizen we wish to engage: <https://everydaydemocracy.org.uk/apply>

In the first phase of recruitment, in which we are seeking to establish our seed group, we would look to include a quarter of people who we define as 'friendly face' constituents. They would fit the same profile as outlined above in terms of their low to non-existent political engagement, but would additionally meet some additional criteria as outlined below. This is because we wish to draw on their existing social connections to reach further into the community. They would:

- See themselves as a 'friendly face' in the neighbourhood - someone who can't walk down the street without waving, saying hello or having a chat with someone they know. They are likely to be someone others come to for advice and support.
- Have lots of social connections - e.g. at least 40 people they would invite to, for example, a big birthday party.
- Be active online, esp in local forums.
- Be motivated by helping others even if they don't have the time to volunteer or help out in their community.

For the remaining three quarters of the seed group, we would put no requirements at all on their social connections or community involvement. And in the second phase of recruitment there would be no social connections requirement either.

EVALUATION

We will be piloting the model in two constituencies run by MPs from different political parties to ensure that our model is widely applicable. However, the model will be kept as consistent as possible between the two constituencies to increase comparability.

We will be measuring the success of our model against our principles:

- **Beyond the usual suspects** - Do we enable engagement between MPs and constituents they otherwise wouldn't have heard from? Do MPs find this supports them to play their roles better both in their constituency and in Westminster?
- **Participatory** - Are constituents who take part more likely to feel democracy is working better after engagement?
- **Reciprocal** - Is the engagement positive and mutually respectful? Does civic engagement / participation increase amongst constituents who take part?
- **Accountable** - Are MPs able to take action as a result of the engagement? Does trust in MPs (specific and general) increase amongst constituents who take part?
- **Pragmatic** - Does the model feel workable to MPs and their staff? Is it able to fit into the busy and complex lives of constituents?

We will also be testing the success of different options within the model:

- **Motivation to take part** - What is the primary motivator (e.g. financial incentive, direct engagement with their MP, having a role in their community) for politically disengaged constituents to take part?
- **Recruiting participants** - What is the best way to find and recruit politically disengaged constituents (e.g. market research recruitment vs online ads vs door knocking)?

Our process will be iterative: we will use our evaluation of the first piloting phase to create a second version of the model, which will then be piloted in 2026. Our final version of the model, developed through this piloting process, will be published alongside a practical toolkit for MPs and their offices.

CONCLUSION

The public have lost trust in politicians - and not completely without reason, given the examples we see every day of politics failing to deliver for ordinary people. Politicians too are losing trust in the public, as rising public distrust has led to more aggressive, and at times abusive and violent, interactions with their MPs.

In this paper, we set out how the constituency role of the MP *should* contribute to a healthy democracy. At the same time, we explored why it isn't doing so:

- **Efficacy:** We found that MPs aren't currently hearing from a broad range of their constituents, limiting their ability to represent the diversity of views and interests that exists in their constituencies. The result is poorer policymaking: less informed by those who will be impacted by it on the ground.
- **Legitimacy:** Most constituents don't feel like their voices are currently being heard by their MP, and record low trust creates scepticism that their MP would even listen if they tried to engage. This leaves little motivation to try, but also reinforces low trust in our democratic system to represent constituents' best interests.
- **Dialogue:** As distrust grows, constituents' frustration and anger follows, increasingly along with abuse and intimidation of MPs. This squeezes out the space for meaningful dialogue between constituents and MPs, leaving constituents' voices unheard. MPs from underrepresented groups are particularly impacted by abuse and intimidation, creating even greater chilling effects for democratic representation.

Rebuilding trust on both sides will require a reimagined MP-constituent relationship. In this paper, we have set out the principles that we think could underpin a better relationship and an engagement model to help foster it that we will pilot in two constituencies over the coming year. We will iterate the model as we go and publish a final paper and toolkit to enable wider rollout.

We welcome input on how we can improve our engagement model, and enable its adaptation to suit different types of MPs or constituencies. Democracy, like our engagement model, is fundamentally made up of human interactions, notoriously complex and flawed as they are. It is not a static system, but dynamic. It requires a concerted effort from all of us to thrive.

We recognise that our engagement model - regardless of the successes and failures of our pilots - will never be a silver bullet. There is much more work to be done to truly achieve a reimagined relationship between MPs and constituents. This paper has started the conversation; it will be a collaborative effort to bring that intention to life.

APPENDIX 1

METHODOLOGY

The experiences of MPs, the people working in their offices, and the constituents they are trying to engage are at the heart of the design of our model.

We spoke to 10 MPs across the political spectrum between May and July 2025 to explore how they perceive their relationship with their constituents and the challenges they experience in trying to engage with them (particularly those who are politically disengaged). To ensure we focused on the most politically disengaged constituents and on MPs who were up for working with us on creating a new engagement model, we focused our efforts on speaking to MPs who met at least one of the following criteria:

- Low voter turnout constituency
- Low public trust in politicians in constituency - because this data does not exist at constituency level, we used a proxy⁴⁹
- Interest in innovative engagement models

At the same time, we conducted desk research to understand the challenges of MP-constituent engagement beyond the MPs we spoke to, and to draw inspiration from other models of politician-citizen engagement in the UK and around the world.

As we started to design a solution to the challenges we uncovered, we drew on those who are often at the frontline of constituent engagement in MPs' offices (i.e. constituency staff) and constituents themselves.

In June 2025, we spoke to 5 members of staff primarily working in MP constituency offices through workshops and interviews to hear their experiences, generate ideas, and test our own ideas.

We also held focus groups online with 14 politically disengaged constituents. While this sample size is too small to sufficiently represent the population, the focus groups gave us valuable insight into the constituent side of the MP-constituent relationship.

In the focus groups, we explored participants' awareness, understanding and perceptions of their MP, what drives their disengagement from politics and from their MP, and what might motivate them to engage with their MP, including testing our ideas for a new model of engagement.

⁴⁹ MHP Group's 2025 Polarisation Tracker identified 29% of the British population as 'super distrusters' - individuals who believe the country is heading in the wrong direction due to elite incompetence, collusion, and disregard for ordinary people's interests. This group is highly distrustful of authority, expertise, and institutions, viewing them as corrupt. The tracker found that 30% of 'super distrusters' are likely to abstain from voting, while 24% are inclined to vote for the Reform. Given the lack of constituency-level data on political trust, we used areas with low voter turnout and high support for Reform as a proxy to identify constituencies where distrust in politicians is likely high. Wave 8 can be found here: <https://insights.mhpgroup.com/hubfs/Guides/Polarisation%20Tracker%20Wave%208.pdf>.

We defined politically disengaged constituents as those who have never engaged with their MP before and say they have little to no trust in MPs in general. As we make clear in this report, this actually puts these constituents in the majority rather than the minority of the population.

Beyond political disengagement, we recruited a broadly representative sample according to demographic factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, and ensured representation from across the UK, a mix of voting patterns and voting intention, and circumstances which might create obstacles to engagement such as living with a disability or having children under 12 at home.

APPENDIX 2

DIEJ STATEMENT

As part of Demos's ongoing efforts to facilitate greater diversity, inclusion, equity and justice in all areas of our work, we assess and publish our approach to meeting our goals in each of our publications.

At Demos, we put people at the heart of policymaking to make better policies, strengthen citizenry and bring back trust in politics. We need the policymaking process to be more diverse, inclusive, equitable, and just in order to achieve these things.

Our commitment to **Diversity, Inclusion, Equity, and Justice (DIEJ)** is at the heart of our strategy, and our charitable purpose. Our ambition, in an age of division, is to be "radically inclusive", seeking out the voices that are otherwise left behind. We embedded DIEJ considerations into this research by:

- Reaching out to and speaking with MPs across the House to ensure a diversity of opinion and thought.
- Holding two focus groups with diverse and broadly representative groups of residents across the UK with a mix of voting patterns, voting intention and circumstances to ensure that we had in-depth insights from people who have low trust in their MPs. To ensure our groups were broadly representative of the UK, we used recruitment quotas based on national data, remunerated participants to make it more accessible for the majority of people, and offered support/adjustments in relation to technological and accessibility needs.
- We designed our work with the public with accessibility and simplicity in mind. In the focus groups with constituents, we used our facilitation expertise to ensure that all participants had the opportunity to contribute in a safe and comfortable environment.
- Making the report publication accessible through ensuring we use 'plain English' as far as

possible and employing accessible design practices such as:^{50,51,52,53}

- Using structured headings (H1, H2, H3) and built-in styles
- Using sans-serif fonts at a minimum of 12pt
- Ensuring high colour contrast
- Using labels in addition to colour in graphs
- Limit use of tables for layout
- Adding alt text to images and mark decorative ones accordingly
- Using clear, descriptive hyperlink text
- Exporting as tagged PDFs and validate accessibility settings
- Testing with screen readers and accessibility tools

50 AbilityNet. (2023, May). Creating accessible documents. <https://abilitynet.org.uk/factsheets/creating-accessible-documents-0>

51 Analysis Function Central Team. (2020, October 29). Making analytical publications accessible. Government Analysis Function. <https://analysisfunction.civilservice.gov.uk/policy-store/making-analytical-publications-accessible/>

52 GOV.UK. (2024, August 18). Publishing accessible documents. Guidance: Publishing accessible documents. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/publishing-accessible-documents>

53 Ojenike, T. (2024, October 25). How to create accessible reports: A comprehensive guide. Venngage. <https://venngage.com/blog/create-accessible-reports/#:~:text=Use%20link%20text%20that%20clearly,purpose%20without%20needing%20extra%20context.>

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