

Public Trust Has Plunged in Recent Years as Corruption Plagues UK Politics

By [Political Concern](#)

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A recent [Telegraph](#) investigation (paywall) revealed that senior MPs and peers, including many ministers, have given access to Parliament to spouses involved in lobbying for companies and campaign groups. Karen Bradley, the Northern Ireland Secretary, and Sir Kevin Barron, the chairman of the Commons Standards and Privileges Committee (Telegraph, 'sleaze watchdog'), are among 900 parliamentarians whose partners hold "spouse passes" entitling them to around-the-clock access to the Palace of Westminster despite their work for organisations that lobby MPs and ministers over policies and funding.

[Transparency International UK](#) (UKTI) has published a [policy paper on politics](#) and report on the [Revolving Door](#).

They note that in recent years politics in the UK has been plagued by corruption scandals and public trust in politicians is plunging.

These scandals have exposed serious fault lines in the UK political system, and have raised particular concerns over the following:

- The regime for parliamentary expenses
- Lobbying of politicians by those who can apparently buy access that influences legislation spending priorities or policy decisions;
- The revolving door between government and resources-resources-business;
- Political party funding; and
- Oversight regimes.

They explain that the problem lies when it happens behind closed doors and away from public scrutiny. It can lead politicians in office to steer away from good government. Their decisions can benefit those who fund them. The public interest comes second. Special interests, backed by money, may sway decision-making and undermine democracy.

Opaque lobbying practices backed up by extensive funds at the disposal of interest groups can lead to undue, unfair influence in policies – creating risks for political corruption and undermining public trust in decision-making institutions. We can attribute this factor, in part, to the crisis of confidence in politics we have seen unravel in the UK in recent years, resulting in apathy and low voter turnouts.

TI-UK believes regulation needs to address both those who seek to influence inappropriately and those who are being lobbied:

- Money should not be a distorting factor in forming policy or gaining access to decision makers.
- Lobbying on any particular issue or decision should be visible and have an audit trail.

Such information should be presented in a manner that is accessible and comparable for the public, media and civil society to scrutinise.

The [report](#) on UK corruption by TI-UK revealed that the British public perceive political parties to be the most corrupt sector in the UK and parliament to be the third most corrupt. It concludes there is a danger that the public will cease to regard decisions made by government and parliament as legitimate and fair; this represents a serious threat to British democracy and ultimately, to the rule of law.

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