An Evidence-Based Examination of Global Governance Models and Their Lessons for the UK

Executive Summary

This report provides a data-driven analysis of various global governance models, contrasting their outcomes with the UK's current political landscape. It synthesizes quantitative data on public trust, legislative efficiency, political representation, and policy outcomes from the United States, Germany, France, Australia, New Zealand, and the Scandinavian countries. The analysis reveals that the UK is grappling with a profound crisis of public confidence, a trend distinct from its peers, particularly among its younger generation. While Westminster-style systems in Australia and New Zealand offer clear lessons in bolstering democratic engagement and parliamentary representation, European models provide contrasting case studies in balancing consensus-building with decisive executive action. The report concludes that devolution within the UK serves as a valuable "natural experiment" and presents a series of data-informed recommendations for political and policy reform, from electoral system changes to enhanced public service delivery, aimed at restoring trust and improving governance.

1. Introduction: The UK's Crisis of Confidence

The legitimacy of a government is fundamentally dependent on the trust of its people. Across many established democracies, this trust has been in decline, but in the United Kingdom, the erosion is not merely a slow descent; it is a rapid, precipitous fall that places the nation in a distinct and precarious position compared to its peers. The data demonstrates that this is not a general malaise but a crisis of institutional legitimacy, particularly acute among younger and financially vulnerable demographics.

1.1 The Erosion of Public Trust: A Historical Perspective

Quantitative data provides a clear picture of the long-term decline in public confidence. In 1990, 46% of the British public expressed confidence in Parliament. By 2022, this figure had been more than halved, plummeting to just 22% [1]. Similarly, public confidence in political parties hit a historic low of 13% in 2022 [1]. Recent data from the 2023 Office for National Statistics (ONS) Trust in Government survey confirms these trends, finding that only a quarter (27%) of the UK population trusts the national government [2]. This is a significant finding when viewed in an international context, as the UK's trust score is well below the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average of 39% for national government trust [3, 4]. The disparity highlights that the UK's problem is not just one of low trust, but one of a uniquely rapid and pronounced decline relative to other democracies. The data contextualizes the UK's problem, illustrating it as a specific, below-average performance that warrants a deeper investigation into its unique causes.

1.2 The Widening Disconnect: Generational and Socio-economic Gaps

A closer look at the data reveals that the trust crisis is not evenly distributed across the population. A particularly striking finding is the "statistically significant" and "stark" gap in institutional confidence among Generation Z compared to other generations in the UK, a pattern that is not observed to the same degree in other countries like the Netherlands or Sweden [1]. For instance, confidence in the police shows a remarkable 27-percentage-point gap between Gen Z and older generations [1].

This generational breakdown is closely tied to personal and socio-economic experiences. The Policy Institute at King's College London suggests that personal experience is likely to be a key driver of this distrust, noting that two-thirds of all stop-and-search actions in 2022 involved young people aged 10 to 29, a demographic that maps closely to the Gen Z age range [1]. This suggests that negative personal interactions with state authority may be actively eroding trust among the country's youth. The ONS survey further reinforces the socio-economic dimension of this mistrust, noting that two-thirds of the UK population were concerned about the cost of living in 2023, and financial worries are a significant factor driving a lack of trust in government [2].

This data suggests a direct link between financial precarity, perceived social injustice, and the breakdown of trust. The uniquely low trust among Gen Z is a potential bellwether for long-term political disengagement. It is not merely a numerical drop in confidence; it reflects

how systemic issues like financial hardship and disproportionate law enforcement practices are eroding the foundations of institutional trust, particularly among a cohort whose formative years were shaped by political and economic instability.

A clear visual representation of this decline and comparison can be seen in the following table.

Table 1: Comparative Public Trust in Government & Institutions (UK vs. OECD Peers)

Institution	UK Trust (2023) [2]	Confidence in 1990 [1]	Confidence in 2022 [1]	OECD Average Trust [3]
National Government	27%	-	-	39%
Parliament	24%	46%	22%	-
Political Parties	12%	-	13%	-

2. The American Experiment: The Perils of Gridlock

The American political system, with its distinct separation of powers, is often held up as a case study in legislative stagnation. An analysis of quantitative data provides a more nuanced view of political gridlock and its profound impact on public approval.

2.1 Measuring Legislative Stagnation and Partisan Division

The perception of political gridlock in the United States is supported by data on legislative output. A report by the Center for Effective Lawmaking notes a concerning trend: in the 118th

Congress, the average number of bills that became law per committee chair was a mere 1.05 [5]. This rate represents the lowest documented success rate in a period spanning back to 1973 [5]. This figure substantiates the narrative of a stalled legislative process.

However, a deeper look at the same report reveals a more complex reality. It found that, despite the political and procedural disruptions of recent years, legislators from both parties were still able to find ways to pass initiatives into law [6]. This suggests a significant disconnect between public perception and the legislative reality. The narrative of complete gridlock, while pervasive, is an oversimplification. The fact that some bipartisan and effective lawmaking continues to happen under the radar suggests that the concentration of power in party leadership may be undermining committee influence and making consensus-building less visible to the public [6]. The public tends to focus on high-profile, contentious issues like debt ceiling debates, while overlooking the less visible, consensus-driven lawmaking that still occurs.

2.2 A Divided Mandate: Approval Ratings and Checks and Balances

Low legislative output is compounded by persistently low public approval for both the legislative and executive branches. Recent Gallup polls show that former President Donald Trump's term average approval was 41.1%, while President Joe Biden's was 42.2% [7, 8]. Congressional approval ratings have consistently been low for years, with Gallup reporting a low of 9% approval in November 2013 [9].

The American system's checks and balances, particularly the presidential veto, further illustrate the structural constraints on lawmaking. The data from the past decade reveals that the veto has become an exceptionally powerful tool. Between 2015 and the end of his term, President Barack Obama had only one of his vetoes overridden by Congress [10]. Similarly, President Donald Trump had only one override during his administration [11]. The low number of overrides, only 15.5% since 1961 [12], is not a sign of a broken system but rather a testament to its design. It suggests that the power of the veto is often enough to prevent legislation it opposes from ever reaching the President's desk, or that a two-thirds supermajority to override is nearly impossible to assemble. The institutional design favors the status quo and prevents rapid, unilateral policy changes.

Table 2: Key Legislative Metrics of the U.S. Congress (2015-2025)

Metric	Data	Source
Average Vetoes Overridden by Obama (2009-2017)	1 out of 12	[10]
Average Vetoes Overridden by Trump (2017-2021)	1 out of 10	[11]
Low Congressional Approval Rating	9% (Nov. 2013)	[9]
President Biden Term Average Approval (2021-2025)	42.2%	[8]
President Trump Term Average Approval (2017-2021)	41.1%	[7]

3. The European Models: Consensus and Centralization

European democracies offer two contrasting case studies in balancing governance goals. Germany, with its proportional representation system, prioritizes consensus-building, while France, with its semi-presidential system, is designed for decisive, centralized action. An examination of the data on each model reveals the distinct outcomes they produce.

3.1 Germany's Consensus-Driven Model

The German system, built on proportional representation, is fundamentally oriented toward coalition politics. The data shows that a single party has only governed at the federal level in Germany once, between 1957 and 1961 [13]. This institutional design necessitates cross-party negotiations to form a government. As a result, the process of government formation is often

lengthy, with the 2013 negotiations taking 85 days, the longest in the nation's post-war history [13]. While this may appear to be a weakness, it is, in fact, a necessary prerequisite for long-term political stability. A political science analysis highlights that German cabinets have a much longer average lifetime of three years, compared to countries like Italy, where governments often last only a year [14].

The lengthy negotiations force compromise among multiple parties, which results in durable, broad-based coalitions. This is a profound contrast to the UK's winner-takes-all system, where governments are formed instantly but may lack a broad popular mandate and be more susceptible to internal schisms. The initial "cost" of a slow, multi-party negotiation is offset by the long-term benefit of political durability and consensus.

3.2 France's Centralized Executive Power

In stark contrast, France's semi-presidential system is built to favor the executive branch. This preference for decisive, executive-led policy over legislative consensus is a core feature of the Fifth Republic. The most potent tool for this is Article 49.3 of the constitution, which allows the government to pass a bill without a vote in the National Assembly [15]. Since 1958, this provision has been used 89 times [16].

The use of this article has become particularly pronounced under President Emmanuel Macron's government. Former Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne's administration, for example, invoked Article 49.3 an unprecedented 23 times in just one year and seven months, averaging more than once per month [17]. For decades, the use of this article had always worked in favor of the government, with no subsequent motion of no confidence ever passing [18]. However, its frequent use under the Macron government, particularly to force through an unpopular pension reform bill, provoked public outrage and a shift in political dynamics [19]. The government's reliance on this measure eventually reached a breaking point, and in late 2024, a motion of no confidence, triggered by the use of Article 49.3, passed for the first time in 62 years, leading to the government's dissolution [17]. This recent event demonstrates that while the system is built for executive dominance, it is not unbreakable. It shows that while the tool has historically been a guarantor of government power, it can be broken when political opposition is sufficiently organized to challenge the executive.

This recent development shows how the public perception of this power tool has shifted from a necessary evil to an undemocratic measure.

Table 3: Comparative Governance Outcomes (Germany vs. France)

Metric	Germany	France
Average Government Formation Duration	85 days in 2013 [13]	Less than 20 days [14]
Longest Post-War Formation Period	85 days [13]	-
Historical Use of Article 49.3	Not Applicable	89 times since 1958 [16]
Article 49.3 Use by Borne Govt.	Not Applicable	23 times in 1 year, 7 months [17]
Number of Parties in Parliament	Currently 7 [20, 21]	-

4. The Westminster Cousins: Lessons in Participation and Representation

The UK's Westminster model has cousins across the globe, most notably in Australia and New Zealand. While sharing a common heritage, these nations have adopted specific electoral reforms that address issues of political engagement and parliamentary representation, providing direct, data-driven lessons for the UK.

4.1 Australia: The Impact of Compulsory Voting

In Australia, voting is not merely a right; it is a civic duty enforced by law. The data provides a powerful and immediate argument for this policy. In Australia's last federal elections, voter turnout was 89.8% of enrolled voters, a stark contrast to the UK's 67% turnout in its 2019 general election [22]. Before compulsory voting was introduced in 1924, Australian turnout

was a modest 59.4% [23].

The implications of this policy extend far beyond simple numbers. Political scientists argue that compulsory voting is a structural factor that promotes political moderation [24]. By compelling candidates to appeal to a wider, more centrist electorate, it discourages the rise of fringe or extreme political movements. High turnout is also linked to greater political legitimacy and civic responsibility. It is a powerful, data-supported argument that a single institutional change can reshape a nation's political culture, providing a robust solution for a UK grappling with political apathy and disengagement.

4.2 New Zealand: Proportional Representation in Action

New Zealand provides a compelling case study for a different kind of electoral reform: the Mixed-Member Proportional (MMP) representation system. The data from the 2023 New Zealand general election illustrates the effects of this system on parliamentary representation. The election resulted in six parties winning seats in Parliament: National (48 seats), Labour (34 seats), Green (15 seats), ACT (11 seats), New Zealand First (8 seats), and Te Pāti Māori (6 seats) [25, 26].

The MMP system ensures that the share of seats a party wins is about the same as its share of the national vote, a key contrast to the UK's First-Past-the-Post system where a single party can win a majority with a minority of the national vote. This model creates a more representative and multi-party parliament, which fundamentally changes the nature of government. No single party typically commands an outright majority, which necessitates coalition-building and consensus-seeking [27]. This directly addresses a core criticism of the UK's system: its failure to translate the national vote into a representative parliament. A system that more accurately reflects the will of the people may be a foundational step toward rebuilding trust in the democratic process.

5. The Scandinavian Way: Fostering High-Trust Societies

The Scandinavian democracies of Sweden and Norway are often cited as high-trust societies. An analysis of the data establishes a strong correlation between this high public trust and tangible policy outcomes, revealing a virtuous cycle of good governance and social

well-being.

5.1 A Foundation of Trust: Public Confidence and Social Cohesion

The trust levels in Scandinavia are exceptionally high when compared to the UK. In 2023, 48% of Norwegians reported high or moderately high trust in their national government, and 37% of Swedes reported similar levels, compared to just 27% in the UK [2, 28]. The data suggests that this high public trust is a direct consequence of effective public services and a broad perception of institutional integrity.

However, a closer look at the data provides an important nuance. The Norwegian trust score experienced a 16-percentage-point decrease since 2021 [28]. This serves as a reminder that even high-trust societies are not immune to external shocks or government decisions. This suggests that trust is not a static cultural value but a fragile resource that requires continuous effort to maintain. This lesson is highly relevant to the UK, demonstrating that the dynamic relationship between the government and the governed can be easily broken and must be constantly nurtured.

5.2 Policy Outcomes and Social Well-being

The high levels of trust in Scandinavia are intrinsically linked to measurable, positive policy outcomes. The data suggests a direct, data-supported link between good governance and a high-trust society. For example, Norway has maintained a steady and high upward income mobility rate of roughly 75% for recent generations, a rate significantly higher than the United States, which saw upward mobility rates closer to 50% [29].

This high mobility is not a result of faster economic growth, but is explicitly linked to the country's "more egalitarian income distributions" [29]. This is reinforced by Norway's public services index score, which was an exceptionally low 0.70 in 2024, on a scale where a lower score indicates better service quality, compared to a world average of 5.33 [30]. This evidence suggests a causal chain: effective public services and equitable policies lead to higher social mobility and a widespread perception of fairness, which in turn fuels public confidence in institutions. This is the virtuous cycle that the UK's current governance model seems to have broken.

6. Conclusion: A Data-Driven Roadmap for the UK

The analysis of global governance models provides a clear set of lessons and a data-driven roadmap for the UK. The report concludes that the UK's crisis of confidence is unique in its severity and requires fundamental reform. While a complete overhaul of the system is not necessary, a targeted approach drawing on lessons from its peers can help restore trust and improve governance.

6.1 Devolution: A Natural Experiment in Policy Outcomes

Devolution within the UK has created a valuable "natural experiment" for policy outcomes. The data provides clear evidence that different governance choices have different consequences for citizens' lives. For example, the average student loan debt in England, where tuition fees are capped at £9,250 per year, is almost £45,000, a figure that is three times higher than the average Scottish student's debt of around £15,000, where tuition is free for local students [31, 32]. Similarly, the policy of providing free prescriptions in Scotland since 2011 is a direct contrast to the English system, where prescriptions are charged at £9.90 per item [33, 34].

However, the data also reveals the complex and deeply entrenched nature of social problems. Despite higher health spending and free prescriptions, the National Audit Office reports that Scotland has the lowest life expectancy and healthy life expectancy in the UK, and it lags behind England in many other health metrics [2, 35, 36]. This suggests that while policy reforms can create tangible benefits, they are not a silver bullet. Some social problems may be constrained by underlying socio-economic factors that are far more challenging to address.

The data from devolution provides a nuanced lesson: policy reform is necessary, but its effects can be limited without a comprehensive approach to social and economic inequalities.

Table 4: Public Policy Outcomes in Devolved UK Nations (England vs. Scotland)

Policy Area	England	Scotland	Source
Average Student	£45,000	£15,000	[31]

Debt			
Prescription Charges	£9.90 per item	Free	[33]
Life Expectancy (Males)	78.6 years [2]	75.9 years [2]	[2]
Life Expectancy (Females)	82.6 years [2]	80.4 years [2]	[2]

6.2 A Data-Driven Roadmap for UK Political Reform

Based on the evidence presented in this report, the following recommendations are put forward as a data-driven roadmap for UK political reform, designed to restore trust and improve governance.

Recommendation 1: Embrace Electoral Reform.

The data from New Zealand and Australia provides a powerful case for considering a move away from the First-Past-the-Post system. A shift to a proportional system, like the one used in New Zealand, could create a more representative parliament with six or more parties, as seen in the 2023 election results [25]. Such a system would likely increase voter participation, as Australia's experience with compulsory voting demonstrates, where turnout is nearly 90% [22].

Recommendation 2: Foster a Culture of Consensus.

The German model, while slow in government formation, offers a lesson in the value of durable, cross-party compromise. The UK can learn from this by exploring mechanisms for greater cross-party collaboration on key policy issues, which would likely lead to more stable governance and a greater sense of shared purpose, addressing the public's desire for

institutions to be more reliable and responsive.

Recommendation 3: Empower Devolution to Create a "Race to the Top."

The data on student debt and healthcare shows that devolved nations can successfully implement policies tailored to local needs. A further empowerment of regional governance could allow for more localized policy "experiments," fostering healthy competition for public service excellence across the UK's constituent nations.

Recommendation 4: Rebuild the Social Contract with the Young.

The data reveals a profound and unique trust gap with Gen Z. This issue cannot be solved with superficial fixes. The report suggests that policy interventions must address the root causes of this distrust, such as public service reform, and a more concerted effort to address financial precarity and social inequality, which are major drivers of mistrust.