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Whom do we trust to take trade policy decisions? Evidence from Citizen Juries in the UK

Maria Savona*[1], Alice Livingston-Ortolani[2] and L. Alan Winters[3]

Abstract

This paper explores public attitudes towards trade policy in the UK through a series of citizen juries. Unlike experimental survey-based approaches to trade policy preferences, this study qualitatively analyses deliberative discussions to gain insights into public perceptions of and trust in trade policy decision-making. Five juries, geographically representative of their localities across the UK, deliberated on four trade-off scenarios encompassing workers' rights, sectoral balancing, digital trade, and food/environmental standards. The public firmly believes that the government should make trade policy decisions, less out of trust than out of a lack of alternatives. Across all scenarios, participants acknowledge the important role of experts in informing trade policy decisions, both independent (e.g., academics, researchers) and sectoral (e.g., workers, business representatives). This desire for expert input reflects the public's recognition of their own limited knowledge and the complexity of trade issues. While participants generally did not advocate for direct public decision-making on trade policy, they consistently expressed a strong desire for greater public consultation, transparency and accountability. This reflected some mistrust in the government's handling of fairness and distributional impacts. This research also underscores the importance of addressing public distrust in government and business to foster a more inclusive and legitimate trade policy process.

Keywords: Trade Policy, Deliberative Methods, Citizen Jury, Public Trust

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Conflict of Interest Statement:

The authors have no conflict of interests to declare.

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Introduction

In the aftermath of Brexit in the UK (Renwick et al., 2023), and the context of geopolitical tensions and the lack of economic "security" around strategic dependences (Szyszczak, 2023), it is increasingly important to understand how citizens perceive the effects of trade policy. For example, public perception might affect the efficacy of trade policy, and if one wishes to make policy more inclusive, it would be useful to know and consider the views of the public as well as those of the usual stakeholders such as business and civil society organisations.

Trade scholars have administered surveys to look at how trade barriers are perceived as affecting jobs and consumer prices and how information treatments can shift the public's preferences towards free trade (Alfaro et al.,2024; Stantcheva, 2023).[4] There is also extensive literature on public participation in policy decision-making (Beck et al, 2024 for a review). However, to our knowledge, trade scholars have never attempted to bring these two things together.[5] The research described in this paper makes this link by identifying a broad range of public attitudes towards trade policy in the UK, based on a series of Citizen Jury deliberations carried out for the Centre for Inclusive Trade Policy.

To be specific, this paper contributes to the survey-based literature on trade policy preferences by: (i) considering a larger range of dimensions that shape citizens' trade preferences, beyond the dichotomy of protectionist versus free trade attitudes; (ii) focusing specifically on concerns around trust in decision-making and decision makers; (iii) employing a citizen jury design that allows for a quantitative and qualitative assessment of public attitudes towards trade and the ideas and reasoning that underpin them.

First, we look at whom the public would trust to make decisions on trade policy trade-offs and whom they would trust to inform decision makers. We do so by briefly looking at the outcome of the votes on 'trust to decide' and 'trust to inform' and then undertaking a qualitative analysis of the transcripts of ninety discussions of trade policymaking processes concerning various scenarios for trade policy decisions. Second, we unpack public views on the specific sources and recipients of the public's trust, or lack thereof, in this policy area. Our main methodology is qualitative analysis of unstructured text from interview transcripts organised through the NVivo software.

We find that jury participants are generally aware of their own lack of expertise and understanding of trade policy, particularly in sensitive trade policy scenarios. They therefore seek not to take trade policy decisions themselves, but to delegate them to the government (as they are now). However, this is not because they trust the government *per se*, but because it is the government's job to take complex decisions and they cannot see anyone else doing that. They do, however, wish to be honestly informed and consulted about trade policy and also to know that the government has been advised on decisions by relevant experts. In fact, they evince considerable trust in experts, partly on the grounds of their knowledge but also because they are seen as unbiased and independent.

[4] The UK government also used to run a biannual survey on public attitudes to trade - Department of Business and Trade (n.d.)

[5] One exception is Which? (2021), which focuses specifically on consumers' perspectives.

This paper is part of a continuing series on public attitudes to trade policy, starting with preliminary results of the Citizens' Juries in Grimes et al. (2023) and Gravey et al. (2023) and selected results in Winters (2024). There is also a related paper on trust using corpus-assisted discourse analysis – Robinson et al (2024). We have focussed on trust early in our analysis because the results seemed so powerful and restoring some measure of trust seems essential if trade policymaking is to be constructive and inclusive in the future.

The remainder of the paper comprises a brief review of the literature on citizens' trade preferences and policy participation, information on how we organised the Citizen Juries, a brief look at some voting results, a detailed qualitative analysis of the transcripts of the juries' deliberations and a conclusion.

Background literature

Public preferences on international trade policy

Citizens' understanding of the effects of trade policy and their preferences about it have long been politically salient - for example, in the 1808 election in the USA (Irwin, 2017) or the 1906 election in the UK (Trentman, 2008) – and scholars of political economy have long recognised them as a force in trade policymaking (e.g. Corden's, 1974, Conservative Social Welfare Function). What has been missing is the ability to collect reliable information on the public's attitudes towards trade policy issues, and even more on the reasoning behind them; however, that has started to change.

Most recent contributions make use of survey methods and focus on the USA (Stantcheva, 2023; Alfaro et al., 2024; Rodrik and Di Tella, 2020), but similar analyses have been carried out also in Latin America (Chatruc et al., 2021) and Europe (i.e. Colantone et al. 2022). These empirical analyses are based on large self-reported survey responses on public perceptions of trade and whether information (economic analysis) provided to the public on the potential effects of raising or lowering trade barriers leads to preference shifts.

A useful reference framework is Stantcheva (2023). Trade policy is conceived in this literature in terms of interventions towards trade restriction or freer trade and its perceived effects in terms of jobs, consumer prices and efficiency gains. When freer trade exerts negative effects (for instance a polarising effect of trade exposure either on jobs or consumer prices), the public is asked whether receiving compensation would shift their views. Stantcheva distinguishes between respondents' interests as consumers and as workers and between such self-interest and more general social and economic narratives hinging on equity and efficiency. She finds that personal concerns about job loss weigh more heavily than gains from lower consumer prices and that attitudes are shaped by views about efficiency and distribution. Adverse distributional consequences do not necessarily lead to rejection of trade-policy choices provided that injured parties receive compensation.

Alfaro et al (2024) offer similar views, with interesting nuances on public views on the effects of trade on labour markets. They look at the effect of evidence-based information (rather than prior beliefs) on potential shifts in public attitudes to trade, again focusing on the USA. As common in this literature,

citizens are exposed to a dichotomic information package (trade restriction yes/no) on a combination of effects on jobs and consumer prices, this time with an interesting distinction on where job losses occur, be it in manufacturing or non-manufacturing. They find that respondents are significantly more likely to favour protectionist measures when exposed to evidence of the manufacturing job-loss effects from a surge of imports from China. Interestingly, though, their preferences do not shift towards free trade when they consider that the same surge of imports from China entails gains in non-manufacturing jobs. Overall, Alfaro et al (2024) find that evidence-based information is dominated by prior beliefs (notably political identity) in explaining attitudes to trade, as do Colantone et al (2022) in Europe.

Survey-based experiments have the advantage (generally) of working with large enough samples to allow for a statistical analysis of public preferences in trade policy. However, they consider a limited range of policy issues and offer only snapshots of public attitudes. To fully understand attitudes to trade we believe it is important to explore several dimensions of trade policy and recognise that in complex situations only a few people formulate their views immediately and in isolation (except, perhaps, as Alfaro et al (2024) suggest when political identity trumps all the complications). Rather, people tend to discuss and reflect before deciding. This suggests that in addition to large sample surveys, research would also benefit from a deeper engagement with subjects in which challenge and reflection are allowed for. This is what the study discussed in this paper offers through its citizens' juries.

To our knowledge, only one previous such exercise exists – Which? (2021). Which?, a UK consumer organisation, conducted a 'National Trade Conversation' in 2020 comprising a series of five dialogues on consumer interests in trade agreements and the governments' treatment of them. These groups met over a period and discussed food and product standards, environmental protection, data protection and regional inequalities. Their conclusions were that awareness of trade deals across the population was low, that people were sceptical that consumer interests would be taken sufficiently into account as part of negotiations and that the government provided 'too little' information to consumers about the new trade deals that it was negotiating.

The exercise we analyse here – 'Trade-offs in Trade Policy' - is similar to the National Trade Conversation in a number of aspects, but it is not oriented around contemporary trade deals. Rather, it covered a wider set of interests and was set up explicitly as deciding on specific trade-offs. The analysis below, however, is less of the actual decisions than of the transcripts of the discussions that surrounded them, in order to understand the motivations behind participants' decisions. In particular, we focus on the public's trust of specific agents to take trade-policy decisions correctly and to inform those decisions.

We describe the exercise more fully below, but first we briefly review the literature on deliberative theories that, while not necessarily focused on trade-policy preferences, has more to say on the qualitative aspects that characterise citizens' preferences and their role in policy decision-making.

Citizens' participation and deliberation

Public participation in policy decisions can be conceived at different levels, degrees, and with different purposes - for instance to ensure a multi-stakeholder perspective in public policy or to inform or 'empower' citizens in policy design. Public participation has been traditionally advocated in urban

planning and science policy decisions (Beck et al, 2024) and more recently in participatory design concerning controversial and uncertain technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (Ada Lovelace, 2021 and 2023; Kennedy et al, 2022, Delgado et al. 2021). A recent and flourishing strand of literature calls for public participation in decisions concerning climate change mitigation and environmental policies. Citizen science is a model of public participation and engagement with academic and scientific communities on sensitive science policy decisions (Beck et al, 2024 for a review).

Theories and methods of public participation range from social choice theories and policy design to civic participation and deliberation theories (a seminal reference is Arnstein, 1969; see also Dewey, 1954). The underpinning rationale for eliciting public participation might be a genuine willingness to give citizens a voice in sensitive policy decisions, but it might also be an attempt to legitimise certain policy decisions while minimising public contestation.

To our knowledge this literature has never focused on civic participation or deliberation on decisions on trade policy. This is most likely due to the complexity of the information that the public would need to meaningfully deliberate on trade policy alternatives, let alone actively participate in policy decision-making. Arguably, though, and in line with, for instance, Fung (2006), there is value in consulting citizens and accounting for their preferences in trade policy. Besides the intrinsic value of doing so, it can also bring an alternative lens to those of politicians and experts in designing policy.

Compared with the survey-based experiments described in the previous section, and the UK's (now defunct) survey on public attitudes to trade tracker (Department of Business and Trade, n.d.), the methodology in deliberative theories is qualitatively more articulated. It provides participants with information and allows their views to evolve as they hear alternative positions in the discussions, and then, using their own words, seeks to develop an understanding of the factors underlying individuals' preferences.

'Trade-offs in Trade Policy': Deliberations in the Citizens Juries

The structure of the deliberations

The Centre for Inclusive Trade Policy (CITP) commissioned the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen)'s Centre for Deliberative Research to conduct a series of citizens' juries on UK trade policy with the aim of gaining insights into basic public attitudes towards trade policy and the reasoning behind them. These are of interest *per se* but the juries were also designed to complement the CITP's consultations with other trade-policy stakeholders in order that its research agenda be as inclusive as possible.

The Centre for Deliberative Research convened citizens' juries in five locations across the United Kingdom (Reading and Doncaster in England, Paisley in Scotland, Belfast in Northern Ireland, and Bridgend in Wales) from 11 January to 4 February 2023. The juries of about 20 members each (113 in total) were broadly representative of their respective localities. Each jury participated in four online sessions (of two and half hours each) and in one face-to-face all-day workshop.

The juries' deliberations were facilitated by NatCen staff without any CITP presence. In the online sessions the evidence the juries considered was presented by CITP faculty members (with considerable effort to ensure the offering was accessible, unbiased and balanced). The CITP also provided answers to questions that arose in the on-line sessions before the following session occurred. For each jury there were some plenary discussions, but most deliberations took place in one of three groups of about seven, each with its own facilitator. These deliberations gave participants the time, space, and conditions to discuss the information and to develop their views on the complex, value-laden, questions that arise in trade policies and which almost always require trade-offs for resolution.

The topics covered a wide range of trade policy, with online sessions on:

- The impact of UK trade policy on the rest of the world
- Balancing trade between territories and sectors of the UK economy
- Cross-border data flows
- Food and the environment

The face-to-face meeting dealt with one scenario based on each of the four topic areas posed in terms of a specific question, plus an introduction and a wrap-up session. The scenario sessions started with NatCen summarising an issue (in the same terms as had been used in the online sessions), outlining 'pro' and 'anti' groups and their arguments and some estimates of the consequences calculated by CITP. Participants were asked to assume the evidence were from the House of Commons Library (assumed to be unbiased). It was stressed that, even from a reliable source, estimates would always be uncertain. Participants then deliberated on the issue, voted, briefly recorded the main reason for their vote and then discussed how they voted. The scenario was then modified a little and the process repeated. The modification approach was designed to reveal the jurors' trade-offs more clearly. Throughout the meeting participants were asked to imagine that they were Members of Parliament charged with pursuing both the national and their constituency interests. Details of the process are laid out in detail in the documents at CITP (2023).

The analysis here is based on votes and transcripts of the face-to-face discussions. Participants came into these discussions having had time to reflect on the technical information delivered previously and being aware of the several elements of trade policy covered by the exercise, so we may consider that they had a certain amount of experience on trade policy issues. While the word 'jury' and the posing of a specific question may suggest that participants were asked for closed answers, the procedures were set up to recognise the complexity of the issues and hence to allow for a nuanced debate and the potential for changes in opinions (Thompson et al., 2021).

The four trade policy trade-offs scenarios

Here we describe the scenarios discussed by the participants, briefly summarising their arguments and analysis.

Scenario 1 – Imposing rights requirements

> Should the UK sign an agreement that makes Indian access to UK markets conditional on higher worker's rights standards in goods imported from India?

The 'pro' arguments suggested included the intrinsic value of human rights, the hope that rights would eventually spread from firms serving the UK market to the rest of the economy and possible competitive gains for certain UK firms. Those against included higher costs for UK imports from India, less willingness in India to trade with the UK and that imposing 'western' standards on India may hinder its development. The estimates provided suggested small economic gains for the UK and India, a possible loss of exports for India, slight price rises for UK imports from India and small but heterogeneous impacts on UK firms. The modification was 'What if meeting these new rights standards raised production costs for companies in India significantly rather than only marginally?'

Scenario 2: Balancing sectors and regions

> Should the UK accept an agreement that will generate significant benefits for the business services sector but at the expense of losses for agriculture albeit of a smaller magnitude (such that UK national income rises overall)?

The postulated 'anti' arguments came from farm and rural groups who felt agriculture should be protected and the 'pro' arguments from business services groups (such as lawyers, architects and accountants) and groups who placed a high value on stimulating economic growth. The estimates, which in this case came from official analysis of the UK-Australia Free Trade Agreement, suggested income losses of £94 million and 2,500 jobs in agriculture and gains in business services of £212 million and 3,700 jobs. On jobs it was suggested that most of the gains would be in the South East of England and most of the losses outside that area. The modification was 'What if all the job creation occurred outside the South East?'

Scenario 3: The costs and benefits of digital trade

> Should the UK accept an agreement that will make it easier for the NHS to work closely with health companies outside the UK, and thus advance medical research, but potentially imply medical cross-border data flows to countries with lower data protection standards than the UK's?

The 'anti' arguments included the danger that data would be transferred to countries with lower data protection standards, which could disadvantage, *inter alia*, people with serious conditions seeking health insurance and vulnerable groups such as refugees, and that data release would generate commercial priorities in the NHS. The 'pro' arguments were that new treatments might emerge, that the UK could be strengthened as a leader in health research and services and that more information would improve provision of health insurance (attributed expressly to the insurance industry). The unbiased estimates suggested possible improvements in treatments, gains to UK leadership in health, more jobs in public health and pharmaceuticals, but possible increases in foreign competition as overseas firms used UK data. The uncertainty of these estimates was stressed. The modification was 'What if personal health data-sharing raised the benefits to medical research significantly rather than only marginally?'

Scenario 4: Trade's impact on food and the environment

> Should the UK accept an agreement with Australia which will lower the prices of imported foods and offer greater variety for consumers, but potentially increase the amount of imported foods produced using pesticides not permitted in the UK?

The postulated 'anti' forces included farm groups (fearing competition), consumer groups (fearing that testing would not be sufficient to weed out imports violating UK standards) and environmental groups fearing that the competition would make it harder to raise standards in the UK. Against them, food-sellers wanted lower prices, as did those concerned with the cost of living, and those arguing that UK internal regulation would obviate nearly all the dangers. The unbiased estimates suggested that food prices would fall, threatening agricultural jobs, especially in livestock rearing where Australian standards are lower, that there was likely to be some exposure to harmful pesticides and that currently low levels of beef imports from Australia could boom, increasing deforestation. The modification was 'Should the UK allow food to be imported that has lower production standards than found in Northern Ireland or Scotland, even if it has the same standards as those found in England and Wales?'

Trust to decide and trust to inform trade policy

The initial sessions of the face-to-face meetings posed the questions explicitly:

a) 'Whom do you trust to *make* trade policy decisions?'
b) 'Whom do you trust to *inform* trade policy decisions?'
c) 'What should be prioritised when making decisions about trade?'

For (a), 'decide', the facilitators provided alternatives, and participants voted for the one they most favoured:

- national government;
- devolved government;
- local government;
- international organisations such as the EU or the World Trade Organisation;
- the general public.

For (b), 'inform', participants wrote their own suggestions on posters for future use. Recall that the participants had already had ten hours of online learning and deliberation, so the initial sessions were already more informed than the average non-expert conversation.

After each scenario, participants briefly revisited questions (a)-(c), discussing them as they wished and voted on them again. Thus, we have five votes on 'decide' and four on 'inform' and 'priorities'. In the final, wrap-up, session participants had a final chance to discuss the key issues that had emerged over the day, including these three questions.[6]

[6] For reasons of space, this paper does not deal with 'priorities', which we leave for future analysis.

Trust to 'decide' and trust to 'inform': Quantitative results

Table 1 reports the votes for 'trust to decide' and 'trust to inform' across locations and trade policy scenarios.

In terms of 'trust to decide', the clear ordering overall (final block of the table) has national government first, followed some way behind by international organisations and the public. The first was fairly uniform across scenarios but it was somewhat stronger in the two English juries. The votes for international organisations and the public, on the other hand, showed a significant variation over scenarios; one third of the votes for the former came after scenario 1 (imposing human rights obligations abroad), followed by scenario 4 (reflecting differences in food standards across countries). For the public nearly half the votes came after scenario 3 (allowing cross-border flow of medical data and privacy standards) followed by scenario 2 (in which agricultural incomes were assumed to contract). The other notable outcomes were an apparent reluctance to vote in Belfast, although it is likely that some votes were mistakenly recorded under 'inform' rather than 'decide', and that trust for devolved government as a decision locus was almost entirely located in Scotland (Paisley). Neither Wales (Bridgend) nor Northern Ireland (Belfast) expressed much interest in devolving trade policy decisions and, perhaps understandably, there was none from the two English sites.[7] The few votes for 'other' came from various suggestions posted (uninvited) by participants.

Because participants created their own shortlists on which to vote, the results on 'trust to inform' were more diffuse than those for 'decide'. We have grouped them in the table for presentational purposes. The 'other' category is quite heterogeneous, including very small numbers of votes for business and international organisations as sources of information and, in fact, several suggestions which were more appropriate to 'decide' rather than to 'inform'.

Overall, the message is clear: participants wanted experts to advise government on trade policy decisions. They looked mainly to academic/research experts, who were viewed as unbiased, but also to sector experts and workers in the affected sectors, who were not necessarily considered unbiased, yet had 'hands on' expertise on how the sectors functioned and could be affected by policy. Charities also figured as potential informants, notably on human rights and on the environment. Interestingly, with the exception of Bridgend, the votes suggested little appetite from the public to inform trade policy decisions, although, as we see below, the qualitative analysis suggested the opposite.

The voting results offer a much neater picture than the more nuanced one that emerges from the deliberations. For instance, the government comes first in terms of number of votes for 'decide', but the qualitative coding shows that this is less a matter of trust than a lack of alternative actors that can make decisions on trade policy. We turn now to the qualitative analysis starting with a description of the methodology for coding transcripts.

[7] We cannot know whether the Scots' trust in devolved government would have survived the scandals besetting the Scottish National Party in 2024.

Table 1 – Voting on Trust to Decide – Trust to Inform

Trust to Decide								Trust to Inform					
	Intro	Sc1	Sc2	Sc3	Sc4	TOT			Sc1	Sc2	Sc3	Sc4	TOT
Belfast													
National Govt.	8	10	0	7	5	30		*Experts*	2	11	2	13	28
Devolved Govt.	0	0	0	0	2	2		*Sector Exp. & Wkrs*	11	2	13	6	32
Local Govt.	0	1	0	1	2	4		*Devolved Govt.*	0	0	2	1	3
International Org.s	5	6	6	2	4	23		*Charities*	6	6	0	4	16
The Public	0	0	0	5	0	5		*The Public*	2	1	1	0	4
Other	4	2	0	1	1	8		*Other*	5	0	0	0	5
Total	17	19	6	16	14	72		Total	26	20	18	24	88
Bridgend													
National Govt.	2	2	7	1	4	16		*Experts*	13	10	13	5	41
Devolved Govt.	1	0	0	0	2	3		*Sector Exp. & Wkrs*	5	3	5	11	24
Local Govt.	5	0	6	0	0	11		*Devolved Govt.*	1	0	2	0	3
International Org.s	6	13	2	1	8	30		*Charities*	1	0	0	0	1
The Public	8	7	6	20	8	49		*The Public*	0	9	1	6	16
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0		*Other*	2	0	0	0	2
Total	22	22	21	22	22	109		Total	22	22	21	22	87
Doncaster													
National Govt.	12	10	13	16	19	70		*Experts*	14	18	12	20	64
Devolved Govt.	0	0	0	0	0	0		*Sector Exp. & Wkrs*	0	0	0	0	0
Local Govt.	1	0	5	0	0	6		*Devolved Govt.*	0	0	0	0	0
International Org.s	8	9	2	0	0	19		*Charities*	0	0	0	0	0
The Public	1	2	1	5	2	11		*The Public*	0	2	4	0	6
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0		*Other*	8	1	5	1	15
Total	22	21	21	21	21	106		Total	22	21	21	21	85
Paisley													
National Govt.	3	5	4	4	7	23		*Experts*	5	9	12	14	40
Devolved Govt.	9	4	11	3	4	31		*Sector Exp. & Wkrs*	0	2	0	0	2
Local Govt.	1	0	0	0	0	1		*Devolved Govt.*	0	0	0	0	0
International Org.s	0	0	0	0	3	3		*Charities*	4	0	0	0	4
The Public	0	5	0	7	0	12		*The Public*	4	1	2	0	7
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0		*Other*	0	1	0	0	1
Total	13	14	15	14	14	70		Total	13	13	14	14	54
Reading													
National Govt.	0	9	16	11	6	42		*Experts*	6	7	6	9	28
Devolved Govt.	0	0	0	0	0	0		*Sector Exp. & Wkrs*	11	14	14	7	46
Local Govt.	0	1	2	1	0	4		*Devolved Govt.*	0	0	1	0	1
International Org.s	0	7	10	4	12	33		*Charities*	2	1	1	6	10
The Public	0	1	0	0	2	3		*The Public*	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	3	3	6	2	14		*Other*	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	21	31	22	22	96		Total	19	22	22	22	85
All													
National Govt.	25	36	40	39	41	181		*Experts*	40	55	45	61	201
Devolved Govt.	10	4	11	3	8	36		*Sector Exp. & Wkrs*	27	21	32	24	104
Local Govt.	7	2	13	2	2	26		*Devolved Govt.*	1	0	5	1	7
International Org.s	19	35	20	7	27	108		*Charities*	13	7	1	10	31
The Public	9	15	7	37	12	80		*The Public*	6	13	8	6	33
Other	4	5	3	7	3	22		*Other*	15	2	5	1	23
Total	74	97	94	95	93	453		Total	102	98	96	103	399

Methodology of transcript coding

The citizen juries were the primary data-gathering methodology for this research. The choice of scenarios and information presented in them was CITP's, while the preparation of the material for the juries was CITP's moderated by NatCen for accessibility and unbiasedness. NatCen provided a preliminary analysis of the results based on voting forms, the facilitators' session notes and brief pre- and post-jury surveys – Grimes et al (2023). The design of the exercise and the preliminary analysis implied/ raised questions and preliminary hypotheses that we then tested through the in-depth qualitative analysis of the unstructured text from the jury transcripts. The in-person meetings yielded 90 transcripts (5 juries with 3 groups working in 6 sessions) for a total of 1410 pages[8] plus recorded material to check for accuracy of transcription and visual documents recording the voting processes. The unstructured text-based data from the transcripts was organised and analysed using NVivo, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). The issues of trust and decision-making were either embedded in the framing of the discussion or in the ways participants reasoned about and justified their choices in scenarios, so they are found throughout the body of transcripts.

The qualitative transcript analysis was part of, and in itself, an iterative process. The first step was to create a set of codes derived from the scenario themes, the NatCen summary report and an initial screening of the data. Two sets of parent codes were created: general codes common to all scenarios and case-specific ones identifying specific issues arising in each scenario. Table 2 reports the general codes that deal with trade policy decision-making and trust: we show the initial codes that we designed *a priori* and the changes that we introduced as we worked with the transcripts.

The first block of codes was designed to capture participants' views about the process of decision-making. A priori we had identified the potential roles of consultation, the EU and negotiation, but engagement with the transcripts showed the salience of uncertainties arising from trade policy-making, concern about the quality and extent of evidence, the need for (and apparent lack of) accountability and the possible need for redistribution to protect injured parties. Uncertainties and redistribution are certainly important, but because they do not speak directly to questions of trust, we do not include them in this paper. The coding for the trustworthiness of evidence included both evidence that participants believed should be available to policymakers and the public, where and from whom that evidence comes, and a broader desire for education on essential themes relevant to matters of trade and the public interest.

Two groups of codes were eliminated from our initial set on the process. First, codes on participants' overall attitude toward government and devolved administrations (see Table 2 in grey) overlapped significantly with questions of trust and were subsumed into those codes. Second, the roles of experts and international organisations arose largely in the context of trust and so we transferred to the second major block of codes in the table – those on recipients and sources of trust.

The second block of codes, grouped under 'Trust', refers to stakeholders whom participants felt should be trusted to make trade-policy decisions, whom they felt should inform policymakers' decisions and how. As noted, 'experts', from both analytical and sectoral backgrounds, were added after it became

[8] The breakdown over juries is described in table A1 in the Appendix.

evident how often participants considered them not only as part of a process but as trustworthy. 'International Organisations' was added for the same reason. These two codes reflect the information asymmetry that the public feels in addressing complex issues. Information asymmetry is commonly found when experts advise policymakers (sometimes referred to as the 'paradox of expertise' - Fischbacher-Smith, 2023; Pamuk, 2021; Weingart, 1999) and is amplified when the discussion involves non-experts, such as in Citizen Juries. The code 'National Governance' combines initial codes 'Government' and 'Parliament' because it became clear that participants did not make the distinctions that constitutional scholars do.

Table 2 – General codes pertaining to decision-taking process and trust

Parent Code	Code
Trade Policy Decision-making: Processes to Inform and Decide	POS attitude towards government
	POS attitude towards devolved admin
	NEG attitude towards government
	NEG attitude towards devolved admin*
	Role of consultation
	Role of the European Union
	Importance of Negotiation
(*Moved during coding to 'Trust' Parent Code – iterative process*)	Role of Experts
	Role of International Organisations
(*Added during coding -iterative process*)	Attitudes towards uncertainty
	Trustworthy evidence
	Accountability Mechanisms
	Redistribution (Post TOs mechanisms)
Trust (**TR**) (*Directionality unpacked after coding*)	TR National Governance
	TR devolved administrations
	TR Negotiating Partners
	TR business
	TR civil society and the public
(*Added during coding -iterative process*)	TR Experts
	TR International Organisations

* After engaging with the transcripts, these four codes were subsumed into the coding of trust in the second block of this table.

Keeping location as an identifier of the transcripts allowed us to search for differences by geographical location. However, although the frequency with which issues were mentioned differed across locations, with a couple of exceptions, the overall narratives seemed to be similar and our samples are so small that no differences were statistically significant.

The coding provided a structure from which we could extract the main narratives of the transcripts, which we describe in the next section along with illustrative quotations. We also deemed it useful, however, to consider the recurrence of different codes in the analysis in order to identify the issues that were most consistently discussed, by whom and in which scenario. These recurrence data summarise our interpretation of the unstructured text rather than any formal enumeration of phrases or words. The latter approach underpins a related paper by Robinson et al (2024) performed through linguistic

analysis software, which, comfortingly, produces very similar conclusions to the qualitative analysis presented here.

Qualitative Results

In the discussions providing our transcripts, participants explained their votes and views to each other both concerning the scenario questions posed to them and, on occasions, the explicitly posed questions of 'whom you trust to make trade-policy decisions' and 'who should be consulted and inform that process'. We analyse the deliberations in two blocks. First, the processes that should underpin 'informing' and 'deciding', including who should make and inform decisions, and second, the sources and recipients of trust in trade policymaking in general.

Regarding the processes, we aimed to capture citizens' views first on the 'how' of making and informing decisions, including issues such as the spaces for consultation and the level of transparency and accountability accompanying decision-making, and also their simply expressed views about who should decide and inform. Regarding the sources and recipients of trust, we aim to extract participants' views more generally on who/what is deemed trustworthy in the field of trade policymaking (and why), particularly in the context of specific policy scenarios. Given the concreteness of the scenarios and the explicitness of the 'whom to trust' and 'who should inform' questions, the distinction between general trust and specific roles in decision-making is not perfectly clean – after all, many of the statements about trust are made in the context of making decisions and because approving decisions-makers requires trust. However, we believe that some distinction is feasible and useful.

Processes to inform and decide on trade policy

The results are based on the analysis of 90 transcripts - 5 juries, each with 3 facilitators, each of whom oversaw discussions on 6 topics (four scenarios plus initial and final sessions). For each topic we report the number of these files (transcripts) in which an issue arose (out of a maximum of 15) and how many references (statements) were made to the issue. If an issue was widely discussed, it would show up in a large number of files, whereas if it was intensively discussed by only a few groups, we would observe few files but many references.

Table 3 reports the recurrence of references to consultation, the trustworthiness of the evidence provided, accountability and transparency, and negotiation – the issues in block 1 of Table 2 that seemed most to resonate with participants.[9]

[9] Among the excluded items: 'the EU' received only 5 references overall; 'implementation' occurred materially only for scenario 1 (largely in terms of whether India would implement any conditions) and redistribution only for scenario 2 (in terms of compensating farmers who lost out).

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Table 3 – Number of references to the processes underpinning 'inform' and 'decide'

Processes to inform and decide	**Initial session**		**Scenario 1**		**Scenario 2**		**Scenario 3**		**Scenario 4**		**Final**		**TOTAL**	
	Files	Ref.s	Files	Ref.s	Files	Ref.s	Files	Ref.s	Files	Ref.s	Files	Ref.s	Files	Ref.s
Consultation	11	24	10	19	10	20	5	7	8	10	9	15	53	95
Trustworthy evidence	11	27	15	67	13	37	15	34	13	50	12	23	79	238
Accountability/Transparency	12	42	15	75	12	35	15	56	15	47	8	27	78	282
Negotiation	4	8	8	11	6	7	4	4	5	5	4	4	31	39

Note: Files: number of files (transcripts) out of a maximum of 15 in which an issue was raised. Ref.s: total number of statements references to (statements) about the issue across the 15 files.
Source: Own elaboration based on the deliberations' transcripts

The issues with the greatest number of files and references are accountability/transparency and the need for trustworthy evidence. There is a widespread sense of the lack of transparency and accountability in the processes that lead to trade policy decisions and also to the process of informing citizens about them with trustworthy evidence:

> *I think transparency is a key one because we hear all the time the trade deals that have happened, but you don't actually know what the impacts are. > We only see a small - reading the press, we see the small headlines. They're never going to point out the bad things. > Yes, I think there's a lot of us that would say we didn't know really anything about this at all until we've done this [attended the juries] and we're having to think about it. It is quite an important thing, really.* (Final, Reading)[10]

> *Yes, I'm very cynical about MPs, and I think they are incentivised, and I think that should be very, very open to public scrutiny... > Yes, so the transparency is an important aspect of this really. Although it probably wouldn't come as a decision-making priority, as a citizen, it's important ...* (Initial, Doncaster)

The perception of lack of transparency and accountability is also evident in suggestions for processes of external oversight of policy decision-making. Part of the discussion, for instance, refers to a possible role for international organisations here:

> *I think a general oversight body like the EU or the World Trade Organization or something like that, so that, I'm assuming in a lot of these things there are a lot of backroom deals done as well. I'm sure there are plenty of backhanded brown envelopes. > For sure. > I would think it's not all above board and I think it needs general oversight.* (Final, Belfast)

An example of high stakes in terms of transparency and accountability relates to digital trade and cross-border medical data flows. In this case the reservations seem to be linked also to whether actors are able be ensure a fair amount of transparency and accountability as to where data are transferred:

> *I guess, what this scenario suggests to us is that this risk is there, isn't it. Once that data is released, we won't have complete control over it. > ... > It depends on the specifics, doesn't it. What I've said on a few of these is the assurances that might be able to be carried out for where that data goes. > Transparency.* (Scenario 3, Bridgend)

Consultation was less frequently mentioned than transparency but was significant to a substantial number of participants in terms of both consulting independent experts and consulting the public. We consider these issues below but note here that one role of consultation is to increase trust in government decision-making and hence possibly substitute for transparency and accountability. For example:

> *Why can't they have a specialist with them to ... explain it, rather than just > It'd create more trust in the government, wouldn't it, because like I said, before I came here today, my trust in the government was a lot less then, before doing this than it is now. > Now I've seen all the*

[10] Each quotation is characterised by the scenario/discussion it refers to and its location. Interchanges are segments of continuous discussion (except where omissions are indicated by ...), with changes of speakers indicated by '>'. Where no change is indicated, there was just one speaker.

> *complexities of decisions that they've got to make, knowing they consult different people … I thought they just went and made their own merry decisions!* (Final, Doncaster)

Clearly the process of making and informing trade policy decisions depends on who is part of it. Thus, we look now at direct statements on the 'who' questions. These are obviously tied up with trust in general, but, so far as possible, we leave those to the next section.

In line with the findings in Robinson et al. (2024), the predominant view, across both scenarios and locations, is that the government should take decisions, but less out of trust for it than because it is its job and there is no alternative – especially given the complexity of trade policy decisions:

> *I would hope it's - nobody else should be making decisions. Governments, they are elected, and they can be dealing with it. … I would just hope - my hope would be that their decisions are informed by consulting experts …* (Final, Belfast).

> *The thing is …so it's not because I trust government more, but because there is no > There's no one else to, yes. > That is the best of a bad lot. > We are struggling to make the decisions reading the simple scenarios; imagine what they are doing…. > We're saying that we trust them but we're really saying we don't.* (Final, Reading)

Albeit less frequent, and potentially intersecting with the more general discourse on politics, the perception of devolved administrations is similar.[11] When it comes to taking decisions, local MPs and representatives are viewed mostly as not trustworthy or as holding vested interests.

> *For me, local government was a no-no because I stepped into it last year at a local level, and people were just in it for their own agenda, so I don't think they're very good at making big decisions.* (Final, Bridgend)

> ***Do you think there's a role here for devolved government?***[12] *> No. > … Governments know the bigger picture. They're the best qualified, or should be, or should have access to guys who know best, i.e. the think tanks and the experts. It's got to be the UK government, though.* (Scenario 2, Paisley)

Nonetheless, devolved governments were not without some enthusiasts.

> *I feel like even though our government in Northern Ireland is so terrible, you would probably trust the local government more over the national government.* (Initial, Belfast)

[11] Participants often referred to 'local government', but from the contexts we infer that these references were usually to the devolved administration rather than a lower, more local, level.

[12] Where quotations contain bold print, it denotes speech by the facilitator.

A predominant view – in fact, with just one dissenting voice, in which government was seen as merely an implementing agent for public and expert decisions - was the view that the public should not take trade policy decisions because they lack the information and/or skills to do so.

> *You don't want to trust the general public to make the decision because we're not informed enough, or we don't know enough about it to be able to make an informed decision.* (Final, Belfast)

But also widespread was the view that the public should be consulted and be able to inform trade policy decisions from their various perspectives – consumers, workers, voters, etc. The public would potentially be able to identify critical issues and contribute valuable information/insights from their personal experience. Several participants noted explicitly that such consultation was lacking now. Particularly in Reading, this was embodied in a desire for institutional reform that would mandate meaningful public consultation.

Participants' enthusiasm for consulting the public, however, was dwarfed by that for consulting experts, both 'independent' experts such as academics, and 'hands on' experts such as workers with sector experience.

> *We said the professors, the people who know what they're talking about, … They're the ones who should inform the government. >* ***Yes, so the decision-makers should be really listening to*** *> It's like the experts, the ones that are not in it for financial gain, that ones that gain something, so they're the knowledge. … [MPs have] not studied it, so I think they have to listen to experts and researchers, people that know* (Initial, Doncaster)

> *The UK government, as you said, are the elected people to make these decisions, but they don't always get it right, but I do think things like these focus groups, they should be looking at frontline workers, key workers, all the people on the ground floor doing the jobs.* (Final, Bridgend)

This was seen as a means not only to improve the decisions but also to engender a greater degree of public trust in them.

> *General public maybe will trust the experts, that they know what they're talking about, rather than the government.* (Final, Belfast)

There is also support for International Organisations as advisors, on the grounds of independence and expertise (and occasionally also as decision-makers – notably on the technical issues surrounding pesticides). In some cases, experts are seen as arbitrating among parties - for example, the relevant International Organisations might help to settle disputes among national actors in areas such as human rights obligations and food safety.

> *Bodies like the IMF, World Health Organization during COVID, those international organisations, when they don't have a single country it's just like, 'I've got to get elected in the next three years.' These organisations are less relying on elections coming up to win; … and they have researchers from across the world.* (Final, Bridgend)

> *Someone like the World Health Organization has a blanket view of what's good and what's not, as opposed to us deciding that.* > ***You're saying the WHO because they're independent***. > *Yes* (Scenario 4, Reading)

However, international experts are also at times perceived to be detached from local realities and lacking the fundamental understanding to be able to inform decision-making affecting local communities.

Sources and recipients of trust

This section delves into the 'whom' question and analyses the transcripts from the perspective of who is trusted, beyond the strict 'inform' and 'decide' dimensions reported above, although as already noted, the distinction is far from being simple. We systematise the evidence by actors and present in Table 4 a simple numerical summary of the frequency and intensity of discussions about specific sources or recipients of trust and a brief summary of attitudes of trust towards different actors.

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Table 4 Summary of the main results on recipients and sources of trust

Session		Initial		Scenario 1		Scenario 2		Scenario 3		Scenario 4		Final		TOTAL	
Trust in	Summary	Files	Refs	Files	Ref.s	Files	Ref.s	Files	Ref.s	Files	Ref.s	Files	Ref.s	Files	Ref.s
National Governance	**Mostly Negative** – for actors **Mostly Positive** - for institutions	5	12	7	9	9	25	3	5	7	15	11	34	42	100
Devolved Administrations	**Mostly Negative**	2	2	..	..	5	8	1	1	3	4	8	15	19	30
Negotiating partners	**Positive and Negative** – (difference across countries)	1	1	10	20	5	6	5	5	11	18	..	..	32	50
Business	**Mostly Negative** – (with exception of local small business)	1	3	11	35	8	16	9	21	6	9	..	..	35	84
Civil Society and the Public	**Mostly Negative** – few **Positive** for specialised *Civil Society organisations*	3	10	5	8	3	3	7	10	6	10	14	32	38	73
Experts	**Mostly Positive**	4	12	6	11	10	18	10	12	11	16	12	25	53	94
International Organisations	**Mostly Positive** – (this code is sometimes overlapping with the request for *general expertise*) - **few negative (**IOs not informed on local/national realities)	2	4	8	11	..	..	2	3	5	12	6	15	23	45

Note: Files: number of files (transcripts) out of a maximum of 15 in which an issue was raised. Ref.s: total number of statements references to (statements) about the issue across the 15 files.

Source: Own elaboration based on the deliberations' transcripts

National and Devolved Governance

As noted above, because participants indistinctively referred to policymakers in different terms, national institutional actors are grouped under single code 'National Governance' which includes both the political and official components of the UK Government and Parliament, including individual MPs. The most frequent identification is 'the government', but participants often referred to MPs from local constituencies or MPs in general as 'politicians', along with ministers.

The previous section shows that the public's view is that the government should 'decide', although out of lack of alternatives rather than out of trust. Why is this so? What affects citizens' trust in government?

Governmental actors are usually indicated as not trustworthy because of their vested interests (political as well as financial) and/or because of their competence. Such views align with those found by Renwick et al (2023), although in both cases it is useful to remember that in the seven months preceding our Citizen Juries (January-February 2023) one UK Prime Minister had had to resign in disgrace and the next had precipitated such an economic crisis that they resigned after just seven weeks:

> ***Is that just politicians generally, you mean?*** *> Yes >* ***Right*** *> Like to me, I don't think they've got our best intentions at...> Is that politicians in general? > Uh huh, yes. > They've all got vested interests. > Because they're just trying to line their own pockets* (Final, Paisley)

> *I think with financial stuff, I think the government, we just don't trust them with financial decisions, do we? Because they seem to just make crap financial decisions. > Well, they mess up everything.* (Scenario 2, Reading)

The lack of trust is particularly associated with a lack of competence when it comes to specialised knowledge in domains such as pesticides and cross-border data flows. In these cases, participants often identify experts' advice as an antidote to the governments' lack of competence, although often doubting the experts' actual impact. In addition, in some cases experts are seen as an instrumental source of *ex post* legitimization of government decisions rather than a genuine source of expertise informing them *ex ante*, hinting at the presence of intertwined vested interests between the government and experts:

> *... It may be [only] that guy's [politician's] ... opinion, and he'll get experts, but he'll put it together himself and it's what he wants, effectively.* (Scenario 2, Paisley)

Experts

When uncertainty is high, such as in complex trade policy scenarios, citizens tend to resort to experts, and our juries are no exception. Table 4 shows that the role of experts emerges in every deliberation and that they generally represent both a source and a recipient of trust. Experts are indeed considered a source of knowledge about the pros and cons of specific trade deals for the public, but also as crucial players in informing trade decision-making in the context of complex trade-offs:

> *A scientist would know about this. > Yes, that would be helpful. > A university lecturer on pesticides and whatnot. > Experts in the field, yes. > Someone who's spent their life... > Medical professionals. > Yes, yes.* (Scenario 4, Paisley)

> *Well, I would be a don't know, but I'd want to listen to a scientist or top doctor who is doing some research, and he [sic] will explain to me why he needs these things and what he needs, and then I'll go, "oh, yes, I see".* (Scenario 3, Belfast)

As mentioned above, when it comes to sources of information, participants trust different types of expertise for different reasons. Scientists are trustworthy not only because of their ability to navigate complex matters but also because they lack vested interests; unlike business informants, they are assumed to be 'independent', 'neutral' and 'unbiased'.

> *Yes, that's the word I was looking for; they're independent.* (Initial, Belfast)

> *Neutral experts >* ***Neutral experts?*** *> I said the other MPs, so Labour, Conservative, whatever, with the vested interest and baggage and maybe backhanders, whereas experts, we hope, are above that sort of …* (Final, Paisley)

By contrast, and in line with some of the evidence offered by the deliberative theories of scholarship reviewed above, the expertise found in people 'on the ground' – businesses, workers and civil society – aroused trust for the opposite reason. Sector experts are closer to the interests of actors affected in areas and sectors particularly exposed to the impact of trade policy. This was particularly true of policy pertaining to the farming sector:

> *Well, we put: trust the experts of the trades, so example agriculture would be farmers and so on.* ***> So, people who actually understand the subject matter, you'd trust them to inform those decisions?*** *> Yes. > So, is that the businesses or is that the experts? > ….. > Or is there a bit of both? > Yes, well, it'd be a bit of both, wouldn't it?* Initial, Bridgend)

Negotiating Trade Partners

The literature on public participation in trade policy shows that the political and national identity of the trade partner seems to play a role in public preferences (Stantcheva, 2023). We also find this in our research, for example,

> *Even if the NHS were absolutely perfect, you could just walk straight in and get treatment straightaway, but China and Russia knew everything about everybody from the medical records… >* ***Yes, you wouldn't risk it.*** *> No, I just wouldn't risk it.* (Scenario 3, Doncaster)

However, we also see the influence of familiarity and cultural distance as well as a dose of realism. Trust in negotiating partners emerges most strongly in discussions of scenario 1 – dealing with human rights and trade agreements – and scenario 4 – dealing with food standards. For example, cultural distance seems to be the root cause for the lack of trust in specific negotiating partners – e.g. the distrust in India's willingness to implement an agreement to improve labour and human rights in return for access to UK markets. However, in this case participants also spoke clearly about the fact that welfare and safety standards tend to be lower in developing countries and that imposing higher standards might adversely affect their economic development.

Participants recognised that some of Australia's food standards, or the USA's standards on data privacy, were lower than the UK's and that this raised questions as to whether they would (be able to) ensure that they respected UK standards in their exports to the UK. However, in the former case, familiarity and cultural closeness mitigated concerns at least for some participants:

> *I said if it's good enough for the Australians, it's good enough for me. >* ***Good enough for us, because you don't trust that that information is reliable; what do scientists know?*** *> No, I'm saying the Australians, they're not stupid, are they? > How bad can it be?* (Scenario 4, Bridgend)

Businesses

Among private stakeholders, businesses are mostly characterised as untrustworthy on trade policy questions, largely due to their perceived direct financial interests in the consequences. The discussions highlight a predominant characterization of business as significant gainers from trade deals and regulations. In addition, when mentioning large corporations, pharmaceutical companies and insurance companies, participants consider them as having undue ability to influence policy – a significant asymmetry. Although the clearest statement of this is not directly related to trade, the same sentiment pervaded many trade-related comments:

> *The same financial architects and lawyers and financial engineers are the same people that have made sure in a decent, legal and honest way that Amazon and other big businesses pay no tax. They're breaking no laws because the financial architects have made sure that they engineered it to be decent, legal and honest and passed in the Houses of Parliament, so no laws have been broken but the court of public opinion thinks that big business should pay a few quid, like the rest of us. But they're breaking no laws.* (Doncaster, Scenario 2)

While governmental actors might seek political as well as economic benefits, businesses are considered to be narrowly focused on their financial gains, sometimes creating conflicts between businesses' and citizens' interests. The public is particularly sensitive to asymmetries in market or power. For instance, in scenario 3 on digital trade and cross-border medical data flows, participants depict digital and pharma firms as standing against privacy over personal data and medical records. In other scenarios, the public counterposes the business service sector against farmers, and Indian exporters as relying on cheap labour or poor labour conditions. In scenario 4, even if participants acknowledge the benefits of obtaining lower prices as consumers, they still see the drive for profit as contrary to their own interests or at least as granting corporate players a disproportionate share of the gains:

> ***What about business groups saying that the risks are actually very low as the UK food industry has already got [standards]? Does that influence your thinking?*** *> No. [All] >* ***You don't trust that?*** *> No. [All] > No, because they're thinking from a profit point all the time* (Scenario 4, Paisley)

Exceptions are often made for small businesses (e.g. local manufacturing, small high street shops), although not for clearly articulated reasons, and for firms in sectors that are perceived as losing ground to trade-induced structural changes in the national economy (e.g. farmers). The latter probably reflects

a sense of fairness, which was a strong theme among the priorities expressed in the juries – Grimes et al. (2023).

Table 4 shows how, in the final discussion on trust, business actors never figured significantly.

Civil society and the public

Most of the discussions on the public revolve around how the participants perceive their own role. Do they trust themselves to be able to understand and contribute significantly to trade policy making? We have mentioned above that participants generally believed that they should not be direct decision-takers on trade policy, but that they wished to be informed and even consulted ahead of decision making. Here we unpack the discussions that underpin this view.

It is not just a matter of the complexity and participants' perceived lack of expertise around trade policy decisions that discourages them from wanting a decisive role, but also a general perception that a substantial information asymmetry makes it difficult to get involved at any stage of the process. Add to this that most trade policy outcomes are fairly distant from the immediate (or immediately discernible) impact on the public and the understandable unwillingness to make an effort when the returns seem individually quite small, and the general public are recipients of limited trust in this area:

> *It's taken us quite a long time to be - to understand trade. I think without knowing, people might tick a box or whatever - which then has a serious influence on what decision is made i.e. such as Brexit and stuff like that. .... > Most people can't be bothered; they're not really interested, are they? > Well, yes, I think it's the ideal; you want to be involved in that decision-making - because we all say we do - but actually would we take time to do it?* (Final, Reading)

A corollary of the perceived information asymmetry are the calls for more education and, relatedly, that the public needs more high quality and diverse information, particularly when uncertainty is high:

> *So, yes, trust the public but make sure that they are informed and the manipulation is stopped, is weeded out? > Yes - it's impossible though > Informed British public, but not by The Daily Mail! > All information given. > Yes > We've got a good range there so charities, businesses themselves, but then also people who understand particular lines of business.* (Initial, Bridgend)

A notable exception to the general mistrust in the public making decisions occurred in scenario 3 on data sharing. On digital trade, involving cross-border data flows of personal data, participants considered the public as the most entitled recipient of trust and decision-making power. The strongest articulation of this was a direct mechanism such as a simple personal opt-out option for people to decide directly on sharing their own data within a trade deal, notwithstanding the uncertainty and lack of knowledge that they suffer from. This seems intuitive given that a personal opt-out largely transforms the trade off from being a societal or policy question to being a purely personal one on which the individual is arguably the natural decision-taker. Note that this transformation reinforces the general conclusion that participants were reluctant to decide policy issues. The practical policy message is that policy should facilitate such personal choice where the application of a policy can be made by the individual and thus the outcome essentially made bottom up.

Concluding remarks

This paper has analysed the deliberations of the British public on trade policy trade-offs within a series of Citizens' Juries conducted among British residents by the Centre for Inclusive Trade Policy. It has explored one aspect of public attitudes towards trade policy in the UK, in a particularly uncertain political context – viz. trust.

Trade policy preferences are usually analysed through quantitative surveys, such as the UK government's survey on public attitudes to trade, which tracked the public's basic understanding of FTAs and what people perceived as the main impacts of FTAs. However, these surveys do not explore what affects citizens' preferences and the processes determining their expressed preferences. An alternative approach is research on public participation, which can get inside preferences, but this has not generally dealt with trade policy, possibly for the very reasons that caused our participants concerns, viz. the complexity of the topic, the lack of understandable information on the trade-offs and the lack of consultation spaces for the public.

Here we specifically focused on issues of trust in trade policy decision-making. We looked at the 'how' question - that is, what the processes that should underpin 'informing' and 'deciding' on trade policy are - and the 'whom' question - that is, the sources and recipients of trust in trade policy in general. We analysed participants' views on the relevance of transparency and accountability in decision-making, their perception on what is needed to inform decision makers and the role of the public itself in these processes. We also delved into participants' views on the sources and recipients of trust among the relevant stakeholders, including different levels of governance, experts, the private sector, foreign trade partners, and civil society.

British residents across the board – that is, with very few location specificities – think that the government should take decisions on trade policy: governments should take complex/difficult decisions because it is their job to do so and there is no one else. However, jury participants expressed very low levels of trust in the government, partly because of a lack of transparency and accountability of decision processes, and many wished to see greater consultation with the public before decisions were taken. Participants did not support the public taking trade policy decisions themselves because of their lack of expertise and the likely absence of proper information. There was some support for involving international organisations in technical areas such as food standards and labour standards.

In response to 'whom would you trust to inform trade policy decisions' the public views are straightforward. Experts are generally deemed trustworthy, not only because of their unbiased competence but also as they have no vested interest. Sector experts and businesses, those that are viewed as 'hands-on', might have useful information, but only if the public is reassured that any vested interests and financial gains they have are not influential. Participants also supported consulting the public on trade policy decisions, but only after providing sufficient information, and sought honest information even if they are not consulted. It was argued that if suitable consultation preceded decisions, there may be more trust in government to decide appropriately.

The reluctance of participants to see the public making trade policy decisions distinguishes this from other areas where public participation receives support. We hypothesise that this stems from the

complexity of the trade-offs that trade policy involves. While information and education may help overcome this, participants did recognise that most of the public might not have the time or enthusiasm to engage with all the detail.

These findings provide valuable insights into public attitudes towards trade policy in the UK. They highlight the need for greater transparency, accountability, and public consultation in trade policymaking, along with a strong emphasis on expert advice and considerations of fairness and distributional impacts. This research also underscores the importance of addressing public distrust in government and business to foster a more inclusive and legitimate trade policy process. The public clearly calls for more, and more trustworthy, information and more consultation rather than more in-depth involvement in decision-making. The government could therefore usefully structure its consultation processes around participative and deliberative exercises such as Citizen Juries. Also, we need an institutional response to this demand, some seeds of which have been suggested in Winters (2024).

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Appendix

Table A1 - Transcript files – NVivo Project Organisation and raw data

Location	Group (Facilitator)*	Scenarios				Inital	Final	TOTAL
		1	2	3	4			
Reading	G1	15	14	21	19	33	8	110
	G2	17	16	16	21	19	12	101
	G3	16	20	14	15	23	18	106
Paisley	G1	20	13	14	11	27	4	89
	G2	14	9	11	28	9	6	77
	G3	31	13	11	22	0	3	80
Doncaster	G1	10	16	19	17	0	18	80
	G2	8	14	12	13	8	6	61
	G3	13	18	19	19	16	9	94
Bridgend	G1	15	24	23	27	27	11	127
	G2	13	25	20	15	31	14	118
	G3	15	25	23	37	26	0	126
Belfast	G1	15	12	20	21	21	9	98
	G2	17	12	10	15	8	8	70
	G3	12	10	17	13	17	4	73
TOTAL		231	241	250	293	265	130	1410

* Groups are defined by facilitator but facilitators had different combinations of participants in each session