

A TB LABS WHITE PAPER

Trust, Political Conversation, and Perceived Trustworthiness

Data Collection: April 17 - April 21, 2026 | Report Date: May 28, 2026 | Sample: n=77 | Coded verbatims: n=76

Executive Summary

TB Labs collected 77 survey responses to test whether talking about politics changes how trustworthy someone seems. The answer in this sample is nuanced but clear: political conversation does not automatically damage trust. What matters most is how the conversation is handled. Respondents repeatedly rewarded respect, openness, and evidence-based reasoning, and they penalized extremity, hostility, and closed-mindedness.

Key Outcomes

- 88.3% say someone can be politically outspoken and still be highly trustworthy.
- 80.5% ranked respect and openness first when deciding whether to trust someone in political conversation.
- 79.2% say extreme political views erode trust; the strongest correlation links extremity and combative style ($\rho = 0.40$).
- Only 23.4% say politics is okay to discuss at work; 41.6% disagree.

Key Indicators

88.3%	80.5%	79.2%	23.4%
Say outspoken people can still be trustworthy.	Ranked respect and openness first.	Say extreme views erode trust.	Say politics is okay at work.

Deep Dive Contents

1. Survey snapshot	6. What respondents said
2. Strongest quantitative signal	7. Implications for leaders and teams
3. Respect matters more than alignment	8. Limitations & open questions
4. Political style affects social distance	9. Appendix: validation and testing
5. Workplace caution zone	

Glossary & Examples

Technical jargon	What it means	Example from this study
Spearman rho	Shows how strongly two ordered variables move together. Positive means they rise together; negative means that as one rises, the other falls.	$\rho = 0.40$ means people who react negatively to extreme political views also tend to react negatively to combative political talk.
p-value	Used here as a quick signal for whether a pattern is likely to be more than random noise in this sample. It does not prove causation.	$p = 0.023$ means the link between talking politics more often and being more comfortable with politics at work is probably not random in this sample.
q-value	An adjusted version of the p-value used when many tests are run at once. Lower is stronger after accounting for multiple comparisons.	The extremity-combateness link remained strong after adjustment ($q = 0.006$).
Rank-choice scoring	A simple way to summarize the stack-rank question. In this report, a first-place rank receives 4 points and a last-place rank receives 1 point.	Respect and openness earned the highest average score, showing broad preference beyond just first-choice counts.
Verbatim coding	A structured way to group open-ended comments into themes. One comment can count in more than one theme when multiple ideas are present.	A comment mentioning respect, evidence, and empathy could be coded to all three themes.

This report is for informational and educational purposes only. Findings are based on a limited, self-reported sample and should be interpreted as directional insights. This report does not provide legal, HR, or psychological advice and should not be used as a substitute for professional guidance. No part of this publication may be copied, reproduced, or distributed without prior written permission from TrustBuilder. TrustBuilder assumes no liability for actions taken based on information from this report.

Production Statement

This white paper is designed to be easy to skim and focused on what matters most, using plain language. AI was used for calculations, coding support, and drafting assistance, while the research interpretation and final conclusions remained human-led. TB Labs studies are practical research efforts designed to better understand trust in real-world settings.

Send requests, comments, and questions to info@mytrustbuilder.com.

Deep Analysis

The sections below unpack the survey pattern in more detail. The goal is to stay understandable in the main narrative while preserving enough detail to support decision-making.

1. Survey snapshot: people talk politics regularly, but trust depends on conduct

The cleaned sample includes 77 usable responses and 76 substantive verbatims. Most respondents do talk about politics with some regularity: 57.1% report doing so at least weekly. Even so, the sample is not simply pro-politics or anti-politics. The pattern is more conditional. Respondents do not reject political discussion outright; they react to what political discussion reveals about a person's respect, openness, judgment, and self-control.

Profile metric	Value
Usable quantitative responses	77
Meaningful verbatims coded	76
Talk politics weekly or more often	57.1%
Agree outspoken people can still be trustworthy	88.3%
Agree extreme political views erode trust	79.2%
Agree politics is okay at work	23.4%

Two toplines matter most. First, political outspokenness itself is not the issue: 88.3% say someone can be outspoken and still be highly trustworthy. Second, people draw a sharp line around context: only 23.4% say politics is okay to discuss at work, while 41.6% disagree. The implication is that respondents separate general trustworthiness from situational appropriateness.

What stood out	Why it matters	Technical note
Outspokenness survives as long as political talk stays respectful.	People are not punishing honesty alone; they are judging the character signals inside the conversation.	88.3% agree outspoken people can still be trustworthy.
Workplace comfort breaks from the rest of the pattern.	Even respondents who accept political talk in general are much more hesitant in work settings.	Only 23.4% agree politics is okay at work; 41.6% disagree.

2. The strongest quantitative signal: extreme and combative political styles move together

The clearest correlation in the dataset links extremity and tone. Respondents who say extreme political views erode trust also tend to say combative political talk reduces trust ($\rho = 0.40$, $p < 0.001$). In plain terms, the strongest trust penalty in the survey is not about whether politics is discussed at all; it is about whether the conversation feels rigid, aggressive, or hostile.

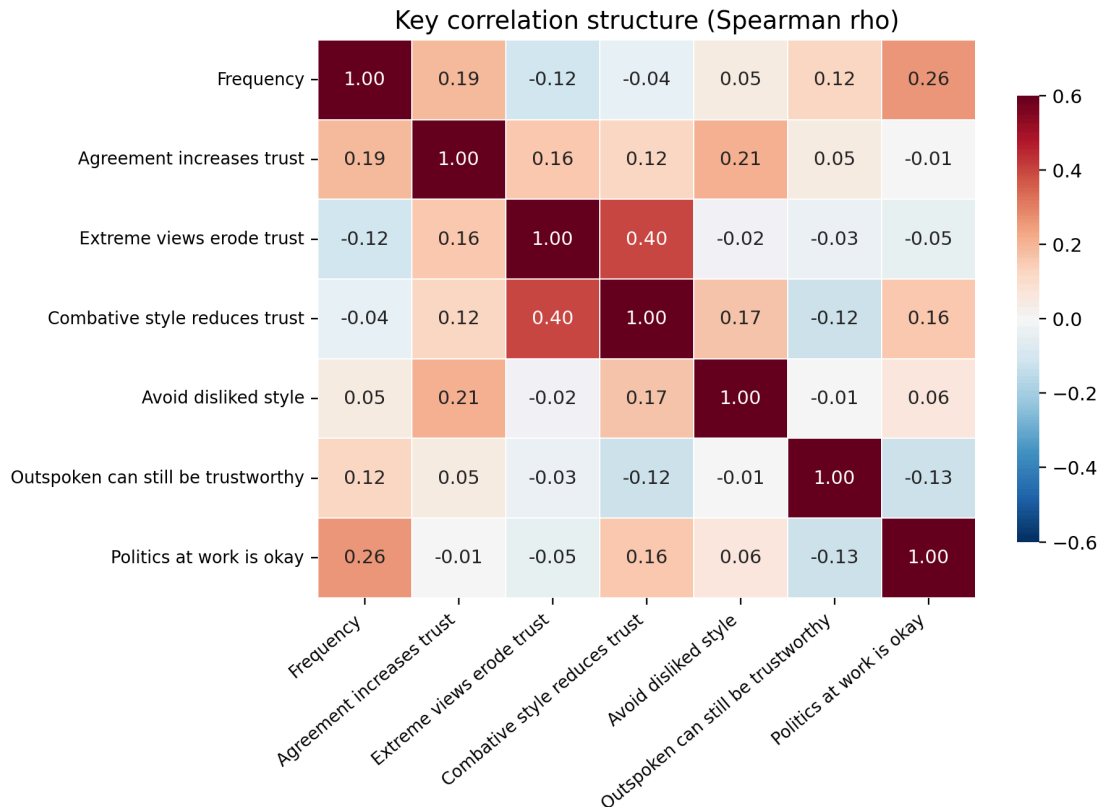


Figure 1. Spearman correlation structure for the most decision-relevant quantitative variables.

Only one other relationship reached conventional significance: people who talk politics more often are somewhat more likely to think political conversation is okay at work ($\rho = 0.26$, $p = 0.023$). After correcting for the fact that many correlations were tested, the extremity-combateness link remains the only clearly robust pair. That makes it the best candidate for the report's main quantitative headline.

3. Respect matters more than alignment

The stack-rank item is one of the most important questions in the study because it forces respondents to prioritize. Respect and openness dominate. 80.5% ranked attitude of respect and openness even if you disagree first, and the same option also earned the highest average rank score by a wide margin. Political alignment came in a distant second.

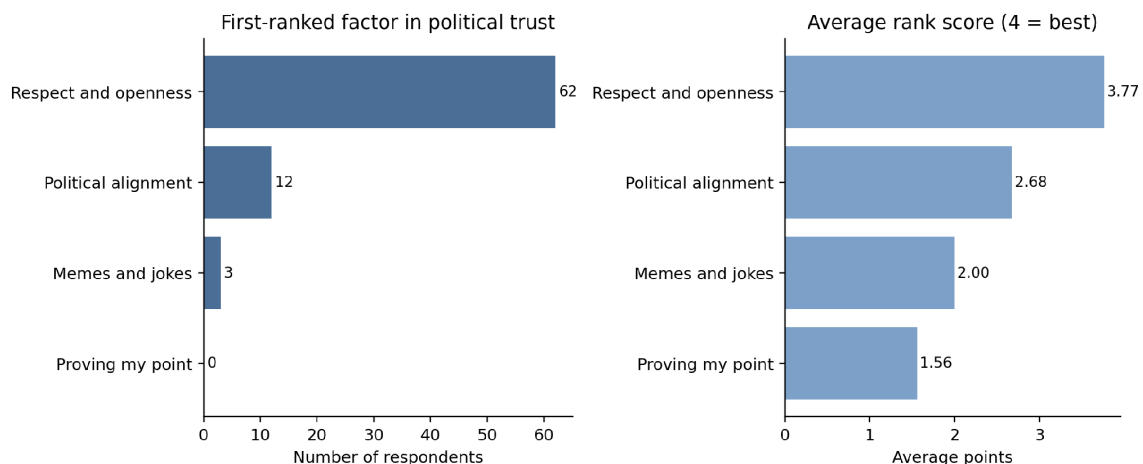


Figure 2. Rank-order results show respondents prioritize respect and openness over alignment.

This matters because the alignment question by itself still pulls in one direction: 58.4% agree that if they agree with someone politically, they tend to trust them more. So alignment does matter. But when respondents are forced to choose what matters

most, interpersonal conduct decisively outranks ideological similarity. That is the core tension in the dataset: agreement can help trust, but respect appears to matter more.

4. Political style affects social distance and trust behavior

The survey does not stop at abstract opinions. It also captures whether political style changes who people move toward or away from. A majority agree that combative political talk reduces trust (57.1%), and the exact same share say they avoid people who talk politics in a way they dislike. This is a meaningful behavioral signal: the trust effects of political conversation influence relationship formation, not just impression management.

Behavioral indicator	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Combative political talk reduces trust	57.1%	22.1%	20.8%
I avoid people who talk politics in a way I dislike	57.1%	14.3%	28.6%
If I agree politically, I tend to trust more	58.4%	27.3%	14.3%

The implications are practical. Politics can shape social distance quickly. People are not only deciding what they think of others; they are deciding who feels safe, worth engaging, or worth getting closer to. That makes political conversation a trust filter in social and organizational life.

5. The workplace is the clearest caution zone

The biggest contextual warning sign in the survey is work. Respondents generally believe a person can discuss politics and still be trustworthy, but they remain far less comfortable with politics in workplace settings. Only 23.4% say politics is okay at work, 35.1% are neutral, and 41.6% disagree. In short: trustworthiness and workplace appropriateness are not the same judgment.

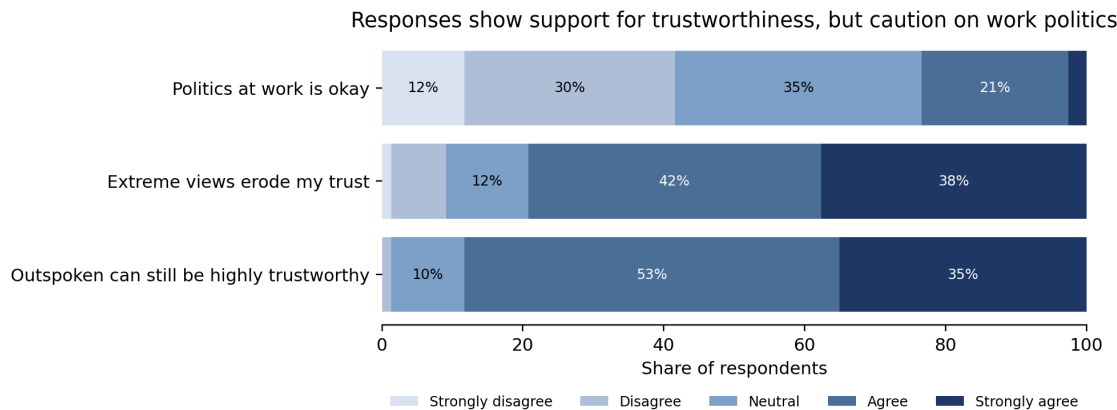


Figure 3. The sample separates general trustworthiness from political appropriateness at work.

The frequency question adds one more nuance. People who talk politics more often are modestly more likely to say it is okay at work ($\rho = 0.26$). That suggests familiarity may soften the workplace boundary for some respondents, but it does not erase the underlying caution. Work remains the setting where political conversation feels riskiest.

6. What respondents said in their own words

The qualitative comments strongly reinforce the quantitative story. Respondents rarely describe trust in purely ideological terms. Instead, they describe the conduct of the conversation: whether the other person listens, stays grounded in facts, avoids hostility, and shows empathy or humility. Multiple themes could be assigned to the same comment, so the counts below reflect overlap rather than mutually exclusive buckets.

Theme	Mentions	Share of coded verbatims	What respondents meant
Respect / openness / listening	34	44.7%	Trust rises when people hear other viewpoints, stay open, and treat disagreement respectfully.
Evidence / facts / informed reasoning	17	22.4%	Respondents trust people more when they appear informed, researched, and able to separate facts from slogans.
Extremity / rigidity / dogmatism	12	15.8%	Rigid or all-consuming political identities reduce trust, especially when people seem unable to admit uncertainty.
Personal attacks / degrading tone	12	15.8%	Belittling, bashing, steamrolling, or personal attacks are major trust-breakers.
Humility / curiosity / empathy / fairness	13	17.1%	Curiosity, compassion, fairness, and willingness to self-correct make political conversation safer.

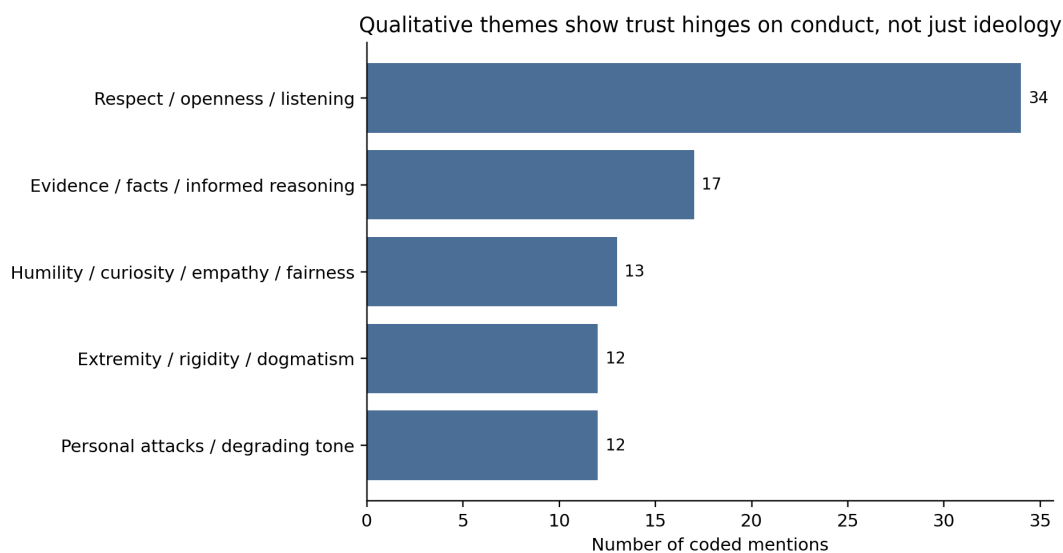


Figure 4. Frequency of qualitative themes (multi-code allowed).

Illustrative theme	Representative respondent language
Respect / openness / listening	"Respect and openness."
Evidence / facts / informed reasoning	"Whether they have multiple sources to back up their perspective."
Personal attacks / degrading tone	"Personal attacks or degrading someone for their beliefs would erode trust."
Humility / curiosity / empathy / fairness	"Attitude of openness, humility even if speaking with conviction, willingness to fully listen."

The pattern across comments is especially important because it answers the study's central question in plain language. Talking about politics becomes a trust test when it reveals whether a person is respectful, thoughtful, fair, and emotionally regulated. The distrust trigger is not just disagreement. It is what disagreement brings out in people.

7. Implications for leaders, teams, and trust builders

What the data suggest

- Build norms for respectful disagreement before trying to normalize political conversation. Tone appears more important than ideology in this sample.
- Do not confuse authenticity with trust. People accept outspoken views when those views are communicated with humility, openness, and self-control.
- Treat workplace politics as a higher-risk context. Teams may need clearer boundaries, facilitation norms, or off-ramps than they do in private settings.

- Use trust-building interventions that focus on listening, curiosity, evidence, and fairness.

8. Limitations & Open Questions

Limitations: This dataset should be read as directional, not representative. The sample is modest, self-reported, and cross-sectional, so it can show association but not causation. The survey also focuses on perceived trustworthiness, not observed behavior over time. In addition, the stack-rank item used playful response options for lower-ranked choices, which may slightly amplify the gap between top-ranked trust factors and less serious ones.

Questions to consider:

- What kinds of political conversations increase trust rather than simply avoiding damage?
- Which norms help teams discuss polarizing issues without importing unnecessary risk into the workplace?
- How do these patterns differ across political identity, industry, age, or leadership level?
- Would scenario-based experiments produce the same result: that style outweighs ideology?

Appendix

This appendix collects the technical and validation material so the main narrative can stay easy to read. Each appendix section begins with a short explanation of what the table or statistic means.

Appendix B. Technical definitions and exact tests

Why this appendix matters

The main report uses a few technical summaries - such as Spearman correlations, q-values, and rank scoring. This section explains what those terms mean and lists the supporting tests behind key statements in the narrative.

Finding	Comparison	Test statistic	p-value	Interpretation
Strongest style link	Extreme views erode trust vs combative style reduces trust	Spearman rho = 0.401	<0.001	People who penalize extremity also penalize combative tone.
Workplace comfort by frequency	Frequency of political talk vs politics at work is okay	Spearman rho = 0.259	0.023	More frequent political talk is associated with more comfort discussing politics at work.
Political identity priority	Respect/openness first-choice share	62 of 77 respondents	-	Respect and openness was the dominant first-ranked trust factor.
Substantive theme coding	Open-ended verbatims	Multi-code thematic count	-	Comments were coded into overlapping themes such as respect, evidence, and extremity.

Appendix C. Sensitivity check and adjusted-significance summary

Why this appendix matters

Sensitivity checks show which relationships remain strongest after accounting for many comparisons. Lower q-values indicate stronger evidence after multiple-testing adjustment.

Variable A	Variable B	n	rho	p-value	q-value
Extreme views erode trust	Combative style reduces trust	77	0.401	<0.001	0.006
Frequency	Politics at work is okay	77	0.259	0.023	0.238
Agreement increases trust	Avoid disliked style	77	0.209	0.069	0.478
Frequency	Agreement increases trust	77	0.193	0.093	0.478
Combative style reduces trust	Avoid disliked style	77	0.165	0.151	0.478
Combative style reduces trust	Politics at work is okay	77	0.162	0.159	0.478
Agreement increases trust	Extreme views erode trust	77	0.162	0.159	0.478
Outspoken can still be trustworthy	Politics at work is okay	77	-0.126	0.274	0.556

Appendix D. Qualitative coding notes

Why this appendix matters

The main report summarizes the themes at a high level. This section records the code meanings used to organize the verbatims so the qualitative analysis is transparent and reproducible.

Theme label	Coding meaning
Respect / openness / listening	Signals that the speaker is willing to hear other viewpoints and disagree respectfully.
Evidence / facts / informed reasoning	References to sources, research, facts, critical thinking, or separating evidence from slogans.
Extremity / rigidity / dogmatism	Language about extremity, rigidity, political identity takeover, or inability to admit uncertainty.
Personal attacks / degrading tone	Belittling, bashing, personal attacks, arrogance, steamrolling, or degrading other people.
Humility / curiosity / empathy / fairness	Curiosity, compassion, fairness, self-awareness, humility, or willingness to revise one's view.

Appendix E. Full correlation matrix - Spearman rho

How to use this table

The numbers show how strongly variables move together. Negative values mean that higher scores on one variable tend to go with lower scores on the other; positive values mean they rise together. Values closer to zero indicate weaker relationships.

Variable	Frequency	Agreement increases trust	Extreme views erode trust	Combative style reduces trust	Avoid disliked style	Outspoken can still be trustworthy	Politics at work is okay
Frequency	1.00	0.19	-0.12	-0.04	0.05	0.12	0.26
Agreement increases trust	0.19	1.00	0.16	0.12	0.21	0.05	-0.01
Extreme views erode trust	-0.12	0.16	1.00	0.40	-0.02	-0.03	-0.05

Combative style reduces trust	-0.04	0.12	0.40	1.00	0.17	-0.12	0.16
Avoid disliked style	0.05	0.21	-0.02	0.17	1.00	-0.01	0.06
Outspoken can still be trustworthy	0.12	0.05	-0.03	-0.12	-0.01	1.00	-0.13
Politics at work is okay	0.26	-0.01	-0.05	0.16	0.06	-0.13	1.00

Appendix F. Full correlation matrix - p-values**How to use this table**

Smaller p-values indicate stronger evidence that the observed relationship is unlikely to be random noise in this sample. They do not prove causation.

Variable	Frequency	Agreement increases trust	Extreme views erode trust	Combative style reduces trust	Avoid disliked style	Outspoken can still be trustworthy	Politics at work is okay
Frequency	<0.001	0.093	0.318	0.731	0.696	0.306	0.023
Agreement increases trust	0.093	<0.001	0.159	0.289	0.069	0.695	0.950
Extreme views erode trust	0.318	0.159	<0.001	<0.001	0.845	0.807	0.689
Combative style reduces trust	0.731	0.289	<0.001	<0.001	0.151	0.282	0.159
Avoid disliked style	0.696	0.069	0.845	0.151	<0.001	0.953	0.603
Outspoken can still be trustworthy	0.306	0.695	0.807	0.282	0.953	<0.001	0.274
Politics at work is okay	0.023	0.950	0.689	0.159	0.603	0.274	<0.001