

**April 2024**

**Audience attitudes  
towards politicians  
presenting  
programmes on  
television and radio**

**An Ipsos report for Ofcom**

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# Foreword by Ofcom

At Ofcom, we are responsible for setting and enforcing rules for content broadcast on TV and radio. These rules protect audiences from harmful content, while respecting the right to freedom of expression. Audiences trust broadcast news to be duly accurate and duly impartial. Ensuring that due accuracy and due impartiality are preserved is central to Ofcom's role. Our rules on due impartiality ensure that audiences can receive a range of viewpoints in broadcast media and therefore aim to safeguard the integrity of democratic debate.

For our rules to remain relevant and effective, it's important that we listen and understand first-hand how audience attitudes change over time. That is why we undertake regular research to explore what viewers and listeners think.

While our rules prevent politicians from presenting news on television or radio, it has been a feature of UK broadcasting over the years for them to present other types of programmes. In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of politicians presenting current affairs content, which is permitted under Ofcom's Broadcasting Code as long as due impartiality is preserved.

This has led to a growing public interest in this area, as reflected in a rise in the number of complaints that Ofcom has received about this content. In light of this, and in order to update our evidence base in this area, Ofcom commissioned Ipsos UK to conduct qualitative research to help us understand audience attitudes towards these programmes.

This research report sets out what people have told us about politicians presenting programmes. The findings of this research will help broadcasters to better understand audiences' expectations about the use of politicians as presenters in their programmes.

The report will also inform Ofcom's decisions about any future complaints regarding politicians presenting programmes on TV and radio, while having full regard to broadcasters' and audiences' right to freedom of expression, including audiences' right to receive information and ideas without unnecessary interference.

# Executive summary

The rules in the Ofcom Broadcasting Code prevent politicians presenting news programmes.<sup>1</sup> Outside of this, there is no rule that restricts a politician from presenting or appearing on a TV or radio programme, provided:

- the broadcaster preserves due impartiality on matters of political or industrial controversy and matters relating to current public policy
- the politician is not a candidate in a UK election or a representative of a permitted participant in a UK referendum taking place.<sup>2</sup>

This means that politicians are allowed to present current affairs programmes which deal with matters of political or industrial controversy and matters relating to current public policy, provided steps are taken to ensure the programme reflects alternative views and/or provides appropriate context.<sup>3</sup>

Ofcom commissioned Ipsos UK to help it understand public attitudes towards politicians presenting programmes. The research involved 29 online focus groups with 157 participants in total between 16<sup>th</sup> August and 11<sup>th</sup> October 2023. It explored audiences' understanding of news and current affairs content, and their expectations of due impartiality when politicians are presenting this type of content.

## Distinguishing between news and current affairs content

**Participants thought they could easily distinguish between news and current affairs programmes in principle but struggled to consistently do so in practice.** They considered:

- **The format.** News content was typically associated with shorter, more breaking, factual and live reporting, often cutting to a reporter on the ground. This was compared to current affairs content which was perceived to be a long-form discussion of a single topic, which may include questions from guests or audiences.
- **The visual presentation.** News content was associated with rolling banners, presenters sitting behind a desk, a branded backdrop, and a ticker being visible across the screen with information about breaking news stories, whereas current affairs content was associated with a more relaxed presentation, which could include an audience, a panel or guests sitting on sofas.

On radio, participants thought the news would be a short segment on the hour and would be clearly signalled by the presenter with a jingle leading up to it. They suggested it was more straightforward to distinguish between news and current affairs on radio than on television.

<sup>1</sup> There are exceptional circumstances when a politician could present the news. The Broadcasting Code says: "No politician may be used as a newsreader, interviewer or reporter in any news programmes, unless, exceptionally, it is editorially justified. In that case, the political allegiance of that person must be made clear to the audience." For more information, see [Ofcom's Section Five Guidance](#).

<sup>2</sup> A candidate, an applicant to be a candidate or a prospective candidate, (i.e. a candidate for election who knows they have been chosen to represent a party at an election).

<sup>3</sup> Matters of political or industrial controversy are political or industrial issues on which politicians, industry and/or the media are in debate. Matters relating to current public policy need not be the subject of debate but relate to a policy under discussion or already decided by a local, regional or national government or by bodies mandated by those public bodies to make policy on their behalf, for example non-governmental organisations, relevant international institutions, etc. For more information, see [Ofcom's Section Five Guidance](#).

However, when asked to identify whether example clips were news or current affairs, the similarities in the topic and visual presentation sometimes led to confusion. This was particularly when participants felt programmes contained both news and non-news (i.e. current affairs) content.

### Implications of politicians acting as presenters

**Nearly all participants were instinctively against politicians presenting the news as they expected it to be factual and felt politicians would naturally have a viewpoint to promote.**

Trust in politicians was very low and so participants were unsurprised and reassured to learn there were additional rules preventing politicians from presenting the news compared to current affairs content. These restrictions were seen as appropriate with nearly all participants thinking it was right for politicians to be prevented from presenting the news on television and radio. They expected news content to be factual and feared politicians would naturally have an agenda to promote, making it difficult for them to be impartial. The potential risk for a conflict of interest was also identified if politicians were reporting on topics they had been involved in.

Participants expected rules around due impartiality to apply differently to news and current affairs content. They thought news content should be held to a higher standard because it has a broader audience who are tuning in to hear facts. There were concerns around whether audiences would be able to recognise the news was being presented by a politician, as if not, they might misunderstand their opinion as fact. It was therefore strongly felt that news content should be delivered by somebody impartial and that audiences would expect this.

This contrasted with current affairs content which participants expected would include more opinion-based discussions. They were more comfortable with the presenter expressing an opinion, as long as they were challenged by alternative viewpoints.

**Participants were concerned that politicians presenting current affairs content could promote an agenda and mislead audiences who might not be able to recognise politicians.**

Hesitation towards trusting politicians was partly based on the assumption that they would use a programme to promote their political agenda and support their party and colleagues. There were concerns this could result in:

- politicians presenting only part of a story and not the full perspective; and
- audiences not recognising that the presenter was a politician and treating their opinion as fact.

This raised concerns about politicians misleading audiences. Participants suggested it could lead to a more polarised society if audiences only consume content aligned with their views.

**Potential advantages to politicians presenting current affairs content were also recognised, including how this could provide an accountability mechanism for the public.**

For example, there was support for formats which allowed the public to challenge politicians by asking them questions directly, such as call-in shows. They also felt that these programmes could offer greater transparency about a politician's beliefs and how the political system operates.

## Contextual factors influencing views

### **Participants rarely changed their overall opinion towards politicians presenting current affairs.**

Groups tended to be more comfortable with politicians presenting current affairs content on smaller channels; in a documentary format; on a one-off occasion; or through live programming which could limit the editorial influence of politicians.<sup>4</sup> They were also more comfortable with former politicians presenting compared with current politicians, particularly those with frontbench roles.

The format of a programme also had an influence on views, with programmes where politicians were clearly challenged by those holding alternative viewpoints or by audiences being widely seen as more acceptable.

In contrast, the greatest concern was about politicians leading interviews, especially if this involved another member of their political party. Participants preferred alternative viewpoints to be provided by someone in-person rather than using editorial tools such as playing devil's advocate, through a clip or summarising an alternative perspective.

However, despite considering these factors, participants rarely changed their overall position. This reflected the deep-seated principles that shaped overall views, including the importance they placed on freedom of expression and the audience's freedom to choose content they wished to consume.

## Audiences' overall views on politicians presenting current affairs content

### **Although there was concern about politicians presenting current affairs content, there was no consensus for preventing them from doing so.**

The most prevalent opinion was feeling uncomfortable with politicians presenting current affairs content. Participants in this group held a range of political views and consumed news from a diverse mix of sources, including smaller channels. They expected politicians to lead conversations in a direction which promoted their own party and potentially mislead audiences by not voicing all perspectives. Amongst this group:

- Those against preventing politicians from presenting were influenced by considering the importance of freedom of expression.
- Those who were supportive of preventing politicians from presenting tended to reach their decision as they favoured a rules-based system.

Additionally, there were two groups whose opinion was less prevalent:

- Less concerned by politicians presenting current affairs content. Participants who were less concerned by politicians presenting were typically younger and less engaged with current affairs content. They often described keeping up to date with news through social media.

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<sup>4</sup> Reflecting the BARB and RAJAR results in Figure 1.1, certain channels including GB News, TalkTV/ TalkRadio, LBC and Times Radio are referred to as "smaller channels" throughout the report.

- Supportive of politicians presenting current affairs content. These participants were generally older, more likely to identify as right-wing and more likely to be regular viewers or listeners of smaller channels where politicians have typically been presenting programmes. However, not all audiences of these smaller channels belonged to this group. They were typically sceptical about imposing rules and were dismissive of them, saying additional rules would be patronising to audiences.

Participants' opinions on the acceptability of politicians presenting current affairs were not simply determined by whether they were regular viewers of the channels which typically broadcast this content. There were participants among the audiences of these channels who felt uncomfortable with politicians presenting and wanted to prevent them from doing so. Overall, across the groups, there was no consensus on preventing politicians from presenting current affairs.

### **Participants balanced concerns about a potential lack of due impartiality against the importance of freedom of expression.**

Those who thought politicians should be allowed to present current affairs content often prioritised freedom of expression. They explained that while they might disagree with a politician, they should still be able to share their viewpoint without interference.

This group also emphasised the importance of audiences being able to choose what they watch or listen to, recognising that some audiences enjoy current affairs content presented by politicians.

**While there was no consensus behind preventing politicians from presenting current affairs content, groups thought certain mitigations could help alleviate concerns about audiences being misled.** These included:

- **Making it easier to visually differentiate between current affairs content and news content on television.** They questioned whether visual features heavily associated with news content (e.g., a rolling banner) should be allowed on current affairs content and if the channel name should be on screen if it included the word "news".
- **Telling audiences that a politician is presenting and making clear their party affiliation.** This could warn audiences that the presenter might have a political agenda so they can make their own decision about what information to trust.
- **Making it clearer who counts as a "politician".** Participants were sometimes confused about who the current rules apply to and wanted greater clarity on whether the definition of "politician" applied to non-elected politicians, party employees or ex-politicians.
- **Preventing politicians from interviewing members of their own party.** This was because they feared both individuals could be promoting their party's agenda unchecked by any genuine challenge.
- **Ensuring politicians present alternative points of view robustly and respectfully.** Participants disliked it when politicians were dismissive in their treatment or summary of alternative viewpoints.

# 1 Introduction

## Background to the research

Ofcom commissioned Ipsos UK to help them understand audience attitudes towards politicians presenting programmes. Outside of news programmes, there are no rules in the Ofcom Broadcasting Code that prevent a politician from presenting or appearing on a television or radio programme, provided the broadcaster preserves due impartiality and they are not a candidate in any election or referendum that is currently taking place.<sup>5</sup> This means that politicians are allowed to present current affairs programmes which deal with matters of political or industrial controversy or relating to current public policy, provided steps are taken to ensure the programme reflects alternative views and/or provides appropriate context.<sup>6</sup>

Politicians presenting programmes on television and radio is not new. However, in recent years, there has been an increase in the number presenting current affairs (or non-news) content. This has led to public discussion and scrutiny about politicians presenting current affairs content which is broadcast on television and radio. It has also been reflected in a rise in the number of complaints that Ofcom has received about this content.

The purpose of the research was to understand audiences' current attitudes towards politicians presenting current affairs content. To this end, the research explored:

- Audiences' understanding and expectations of news and current affairs content.
- The impact of politicians presenting current affairs content on audiences' trust.
- The mitigations that audiences expect to see to ensure due impartiality is preserved when current affairs content is presented by politicians.

## Methodology

The research took a qualitative approach as a way of understanding the nuances in perspectives, the reasons why individual participants held their views and to capture the trade-offs involved. In total, Ipsos held 29 online focus groups with 157 people, each lasting 2.5 hours. Before each group, participants completed a pre-task where they watched or listened to examples of news and current affairs content.

The deliberative design meant spontaneous attitudes could be captured before giving participants information about Ofcom's responsibilities and the Broadcasting Code. This allowed for a more informed discussion. This was especially important, to move discussion away from focusing on individual politicians, channels or stations, instead exploring the principles underpinning views towards politicians presenting. Stimulus materials and hypothetical scenarios were used to support this, with the group setting enabling participants to hear alternative perspectives.

Fieldwork took place between **16<sup>th</sup> August and 11<sup>th</sup> October 2023**. The 29 focus groups involved 15 groups with frequent viewers or listeners of news and current affairs and three groups with lower engaged audiences. Given the differing political contexts and sensitivity of the discussion, these groups

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<sup>5</sup> A candidate, an applicant to be a candidate or a prospective candidate, i.e. a candidate for election who knows they have been chosen to represent a party at an election).

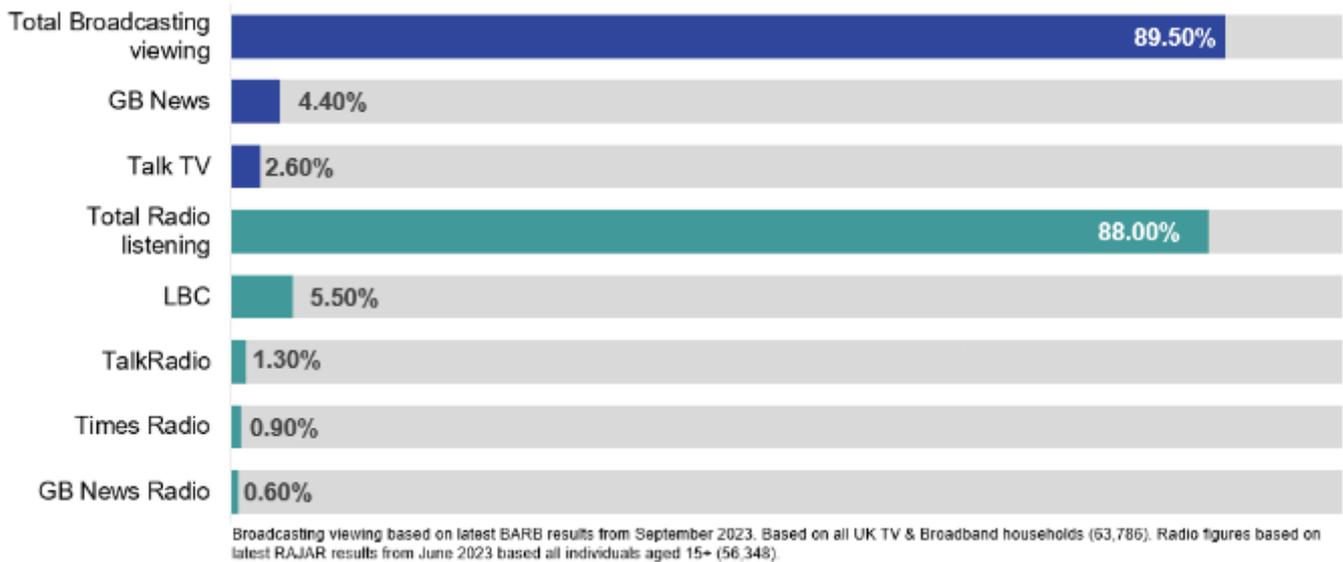
<sup>6</sup> Matters of political or industrial controversy are political or industrial issues on which politicians, industry and/or the media are in debate. Matters relating to current public policy need not be the subject of debate but relate to a policy under discussion or already decided by a local, regional or national government or by bodies mandated by those public bodies to make policy on their behalf, for example non-governmental organisations, relevant international institutions, etc. For more information, see [Ofcom's Section Five Guidance](#).

were segmented by nation and political leaning. A detailed explanation of the sampling approach is provided in the Appendix to this report.

A further 11 groups were conducted with audiences of channels where politicians have been presenting current affairs programmes more regularly, with participants from across the UK and political spectrum. These included four focus groups with GB News viewers or listeners (including one pilot), three focus groups with TalkTV / TalkRadio viewers or listeners, three focus groups with LBC listeners and one group with Times Radio listeners.

It was considered important to hear the views of those who watched or listened to channels and stations where politicians are more commonly found presenting, even though these channels reach smaller audiences. The BARB results below provide a breakdown of broadcasting viewership on these services.<sup>7</sup> The data also indicates that these audiences tend to be older. This is reflected in the demographic breakdown of participants in the audience specific focus groups, details of which can be found in the Appendix.

**Figure 1.1: BARB (September 2023) and RAJAR (June 2023) reach for smaller channels where politicians more frequently present current affairs content.**



A pre-task was completed in participants' own time ahead of the focus groups via an online platform. Participants were invited to complete a media diary about the news and current affairs content they had recently watched or listened to on television or radio. They were then asked to watch and listen to eight short clips of news and current affairs content. Most of the current affairs content involved a politician presenting. A total of 14 clips were rotated across the groups. Participants were told who was presenting in each clip but their profession in politics was not initially disclosed. Details of the exact content shown to participants can be found in the Appendix.

The focus groups explored participants' consumption of news and current affairs content and their reactions to the examples they watched in the pre-task. This was followed by an in-depth discussion of a range of hypothetical scenarios that did not name individual politicians. These scenarios were developed to stimulate discussions around specific contextual factors to see if they influenced views towards politicians presenting content. Group moderators introduced the hypothetical scenarios to participants

<sup>7</sup> For more details see: <https://www.barb.co.uk/> and <https://www.rajar.co.uk/>

one line at a time to identify the extent to which different factors influenced views. Details of these hypothetical scenarios can also be found in the Appendix.

## How to read this report

This report details the key findings from across the research. Qualitative research is illustrative, exploratory and based on perceptions. When reading the report, please note:

- We refer to ‘participants’ throughout and provide evidence through anonymised verbatim comments. These should not be interpreted as defining the views of all participants but have been selected to provide insight into views expressed at a particular point in time.
- References to individual politicians have been removed.
- Quotations have been attributed to individuals identified by key characteristics including gender, location and age. The report does not attribute quotes to audiences of specific channels or stations. This is because participants were watching and listening to a diverse range of sources across both general audience and audience specific groups.
- Reflecting the BARB and RAJAR results in Figure 1.1, certain channels including GB News, TalkTV/ TalkRadio, LBC and Times Radio are referred to as “smaller channels” throughout the report.

## 2 Audience perceptions of news and current affairs broadcast content

This chapter explores participants' news and current affairs consumption habits, including how they decide which content to access. It then looks at how participants distinguish between news and current affairs content.

Key findings include:

- News habits were often driven by daily routines, while audience decisions around current affairs content were also influenced by entertainment value and personal views.
- Participants thought they could easily distinguish between news and current affairs content and name common features of both in principle.
- However, in practice, the presentation and style of these types of content blurred the line between news and current affairs which confused participants particularly when a programme contained both.

### News and current affairs consumption habits

**News and current affairs consumption was often driven by daily routine.**

Participants described watching or listening to breakfast content while getting ready in the morning, tuning into the radio in the car and at work, looking at online sources during the day and catching up with the news and current affairs on evening television programmes. They highlighted the convenience of the radio in their busy routines, emphasising how short snippets of information kept them updated with events, and they often listen to the same channels daily.

**“Mine is convenience. With LBC Radio it's just in the background while I'm getting ready. I used to listen (to it) when I was younger. I think my parents used to listen to it so that's how I got onto it.”** *Male, South England, 18-34.*

Consumption habits varied by age. Older age groups discussed using more traditional sources, such as television and radio, while younger groups frequently described using social media in addition to traditional sources to keep up to date.

**“For me, watching them, it's not that often [that I watch television or listen to the radio]. I'll go and watch it with my grandparents. It's what we do together when I visit. It tends to be BBC News and Question Time. Social media as well, Instagram, Facebook, is where I pick up [the news] and watch clips.”** *Female, Scotland, 18-34.*

**Perceptions of current affairs were partly driven by entertainment value and personal views.**

Participants enjoyed current affairs content that was interactive and engaging, such as call-ins and debates with guests. Lower engaged audiences felt that entertaining content made current affairs more accessible. Presenters also drew participants to specific programmes. In particular, audiences who

access smaller channels discussed seeking out presenters known for controversy to keep them entertained. These presenters were associated with discussing topics they felt other mainstream channels might shy away from.

**“It’s about familiar faces, what you’re used to. It’s nostalgia as well. I just enjoy the personalities and enjoy listening to them.”** *Female, North England, 35-54.*

**“I do enjoy TalkTV and GB News in the evening. The presenters draw you in and pique your interest. [One politician] is a kind of Marmite character. I find them and their guests quite entertaining. The news is quite dull. If you want to be entertained, those are the places I go to.”** *Male, South England, 55+.*

Participants’ decisions about what to watch or listen to were also influenced by their personal views. Some described avoiding presenters who they disliked or programmes that did not align with their political perspectives. This was because these programmes could anger or annoy them.

**“I go with presenters you tend to politically align with. I wouldn’t listen to certain presenters I dislike. I know people do but not me.”** *Male, Midlands, 18-34.*

**Audiences of smaller channels described enjoying programmes that addressed controversial topics and where a diversity of views were represented.**

One reason some audiences were going to smaller channels for their news and current affairs was due to a distrust of mainstream sources. These participants tended to be older and discussed drifting away from channels such as the BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5 and Sky News in recent years. They felt that these channels were biased in their reporting during large events such as the Coronavirus pandemic or Brexit negotiations. In turn, this group of participants described accessing smaller channels for the diversity of their coverage and willingness to address controversial topics.

**“I tend to watch GB News as it’s not full of half-truths as a lot of other channels are. And they report on things other channels are frightened to as they may upset the mainstream media.”** *Male, South England, 55+.*

**“I like the way TalkTV tackle things, and they go to wherever they need to go. They have someone who is left wing and someone right wing and they do the debates. I watched the BBC during lockdown. There were so many things going on they weren’t prepared to discuss or expose.”** *Male, Wales, 55+.*

In some cases, other participants described accessing smaller channels to ensure they consumed diverse media sources. They discussed watching and listening to smaller channels to understand alternative views and discover perspectives that might challenge their own. This did not necessarily change their opinions and they described at times being shocked by views they disagreed with.

**“I watch GB News because I really dislike what they stand for. You know the saying keep your enemies closer? I like to know what they’re thinking, and they come out with things that shock me quite often. It actually reinforces my understanding of why people vote the way they do or think the way they do, and it gives me a different perspective.”** *Female, South England, 55+.*

**“I think in the past I've been somewhat left leaning, so I like to see what's going on, on the other side, but I take the opinions on TalkTV with a grain of salt. I normally come into work in the morning and it would be on, so less actively seeking it out in the beginning but now I find it entertaining.”** *Female, North England, 18-34.*

## Distinguishing between news and current affairs content

**The differences between news and current affairs content were familiar and straightforward for participants to distinguish in principle.**

When discussing news and current affairs content in the abstract, participants initially thought it was easy to distinguish between them, although groups who were less engaged with news and current affairs described finding this more challenging.

In terms of format, participants typically associated news content with shorter, more breaking, factual and live reporting, often cutting to a reporter on the ground. In comparison, current affairs content was perceived to be a long-form discussion of a single topic, which may include questions from guests or audiences. Current affairs content was judged to be more opinion-led, with presenters and guests providing their own points of view, in contrast to news content which participants expected to be grounded in facts.

**“The news is supposed to be fact-based whereas current affairs is a discussion. You get four or five people sat at a table. That is quite a noticeable difference.”** *Male, Scotland, 35-54.*

**“News is factual and current affairs is opinion-based and more of a discussion between different people.”** *Male, Midlands, 55+*

**“From my understanding current affairs is usually talked about in more length and depth. Whereas news, I associate more with factual bulletins and quite to the point information. There is no conversation or discussion. You're just being told the news.”** *Female, Northern Ireland, 18-34.*

Visual presentation also heavily influenced the distinctions made by participants. News content was associated with rolling banners, presenters sitting behind a desk, a branded backdrop, and a ticker being visible across the screen with information about breaking news stories, whereas current affairs content was perceived to have a more relaxed presentation, which could include guests sitting on sofas, a panel format or a live audience.

**“Headlines. Perhaps a ticker underneath. Usually, one or two hosts. Maybe outside broadcast to a location. Everything is brief. Briefer than current affairs in my opinion.”** *Female, Midlands, 55+.*

On the radio participants thought the news would be a short segment, every half an hour or on the hour, and would be clearly signalled by the presenter, with a jingle leading up to it. They also mentioned that headlines are sometimes read out by a different presenter, rather than the host of the programme. As such, they found it easier to distinguish between news and current affairs on the radio.

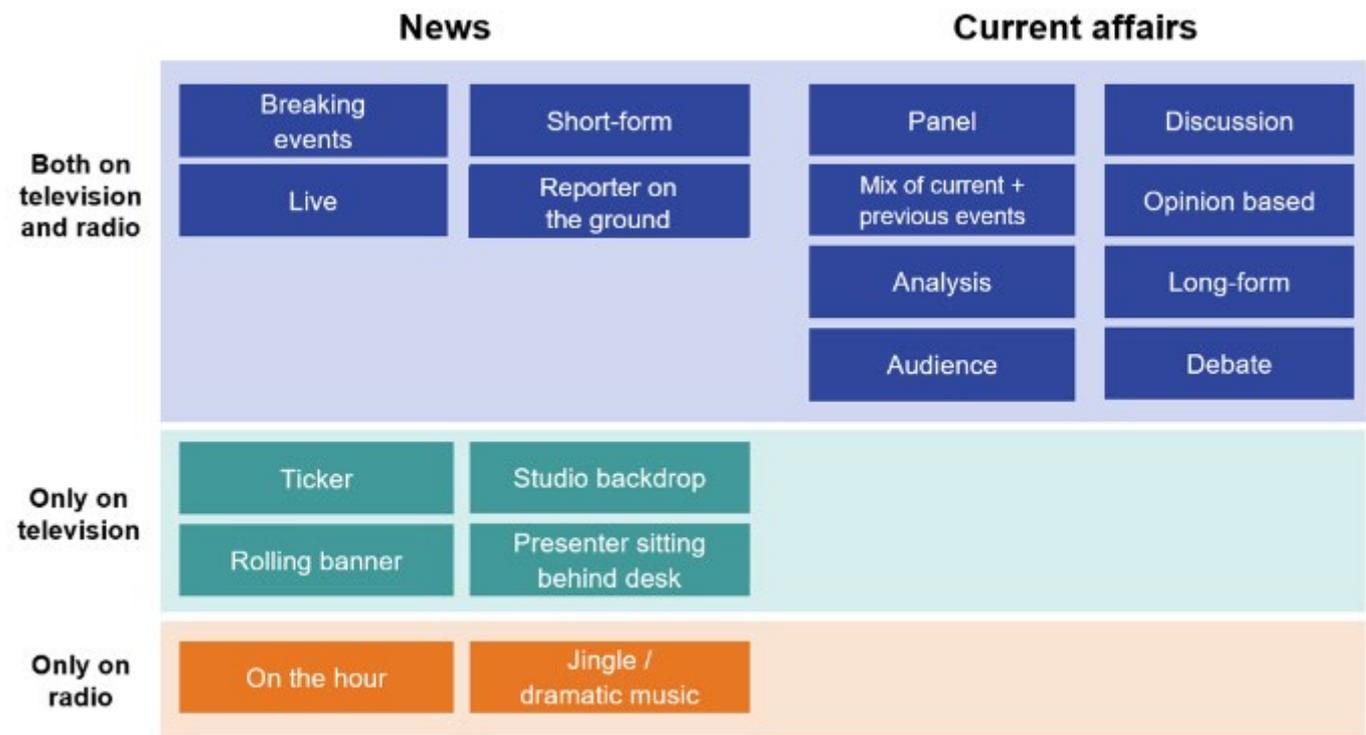
They described engaging more closely with radio content. For some, this was related to the environment they listened in. For example, they were more likely to pay attention if they are listening alone in the car.

They also tended to have the radio on the same channel for prolonged periods throughout the day. This meant they might hear a range of different viewpoints being broadcast across programmes. In groups with LBC listeners, this was described as a key motivation for engaging with the channel.

**“I think when you get the chance to listen to radio it can be more meaningful. If you're in the car on your own listening to something, that's when you can really pick it out.”** *Female, Midlands, 35-54.*

The diagram below summarises the key characteristics participants associated, in principle, with news and current affairs content.

**Figure 2.1: Key characteristics associated with news and current affairs content on television and on radio**



**In practice participants sometimes struggled to consistently distinguish between news and current affairs content across television and radio, partly because they often cover similar topics.**

Participants found it particularly challenging when they felt a single programme contained both news and current affairs content. This was typically associated with breakfast programmes. For example, they recognised that programmes can often start by reporting headline news, before segueing into a detailed current affairs discussion of the topic and its consequences. This meant it was not always clear to participants when the news ended and a current affairs discussion started, as they were often covering the same topic.

**“From my understanding, current affairs is usually talked about in more length and depth, whereas news I associate more with bulletins and quite to the point information... I was trying to use that as a gauge on which was which, but I still had no idea.”** *Male, Northern Ireland, 18-34.*

**“A lot of programmes have a mix with presenting the news and then part of the programme about a discussion of the news. That blurs the line with some programmes.”**

*Female, Midlands, 35-54.*

**The presentation and style of content was also seen to blur the line between news and current affairs content on television.**

Participants thought current affairs content that included “typical” news visuals such as a rolling banner, a branded or official backdrop (e.g. a political building, skyline or newsroom), and a presenter sitting behind a desk, could confuse viewers into thinking it was the news. They recognised that where TV programmes alternate between news and current affairs content, the presenter will sometimes move from behind the desk onto a sofa, which they found helpful in signalling a change.

**“With the rolling news at the bottom it suggests it is a live news programme even though it is current affairs. It’s very deceptive. It’s not following the same rules that a news programme would have to.”** *Male, Midlands, 55+.*

**“As soon as I see a rolling banner and the word ‘news’ I will take it as news, rather than a current affairs programme where it looks like they’re sitting around gossiping.”** *Female, Midlands, 18-34.*

**“Sitting at a desk always makes me feel like it’s a news programme. If you look at Breakfast Time they are sitting on a sofa. If you go to the news, they suddenly are sitting at a desk.”** *Male, North England, 35-54.*

## 3 Implications of politicians as presenters

This chapter discusses the advantages and disadvantages participants weighed when considering the acceptability of politicians presenting on television and radio.

Key findings include:

- Nearly all participants were instinctively against politicians presenting the news as they expected it to be factual and felt politicians would naturally have a viewpoint to promote. This contrasted with current affairs content, which participants expected to include more opinion-based discussions.
- Trust in politicians was very low and participants were concerned that if they presented current affairs content, they might promote a political agenda or mislead audiences. However, there was no consensus to prevent politicians presenting current affairs.
- Participants questioned whether audiences would be able to recognise politicians or if content was news or current affairs. This led to concerns that a politician's opinion may be mistaken for fact.
- Potential advantages to politicians presenting current affairs content were recognised, such as how it could provide an accountability mechanism for the public.

### Trust in politicians presenting programmes

#### Trust in politicians was very low among nearly all participants.

Participants were largely unfamiliar with the public debates about politicians presenting current affairs content. They were aware that politicians did present programmes but were surprised at the recent increase in the number doing so. Those who were aware of the debate typically referred to it in the context of more politicians starting to present on smaller channels, such as GB News or TalkTV.

**“I’m surprised actually. I didn’t notice the pattern [in the example content] until you pointed it out. They will be trying to sway their argument so it shouldn’t happen.”** *Female, North England, 35-54.*

Across political leanings, participants held an instinctively negative opinion of politicians and were firm in saying they generally would not trust them. They described how they would be automatically wary of information provided by politicians. This reflected a widespread negativity towards the current state of politics in general.

**“When you said they were politicians, I’ve then instantly made up my mind that I don’t trust any of them.”** *Male, Midlands, 18-34.*

#### Politicians were understood to have an agenda which focused on promoting themselves and their party, with a presenting role likely to distract them from their electoral duties.

Although the issue of politicians carrying out other work unrelated to their elected duties is not a matter for Ofcom, participants questioned how politicians would have the time to present programmes and

thought this would be better spent serving constituents. They believed that politicians would be financially motivated, assuming they would be well-paid to present a programme. There were also suggestions that they might be planning for a future career in the media after they left politics. Consequently, participants were more comfortable with former politicians presenting programmes, which is explored further in Chapter 4.

**“Why don’t politicians just be politicians? There’s enough for them to do, just do your job. What would you want to be on television for? Why do they want to stand in front of the camera and be a celebrity?”** *Male, Scotland, 55+.*

**“The public would expect that politician to be spending their time being a politician but if they’re earning extra money presenting it takes away from the profession.”** *Female, Midlands, 35-54.*

Hesitation towards trusting politicians was also based on the assumption that they would use the programme to promote their political agenda and support their party and colleagues. Their motivation was seen to be about winning votes and power for their party rather than presenting a compelling programme for audiences. Participants were concerned this would result in politicians presenting only part of a story to the audience and not the full perspective. However, when probed, they could identify advantages to politicians presenting, which are explored later in this chapter.

**“Straight away I would lose interest if a politician was presenting because of that bias aspect. I would feel like they’re not giving me the full picture or giving me the information from different perspectives because of their own agendas.”** *Female, Midlands, 18-34.*

## Politicians presenting the news

**Nearly all participants were instinctively against politicians presenting the news as they expected it to be factual and felt politicians would naturally have a viewpoint to promote.**

When the topic of politicians presenting programmes was introduced, participants were unsurprised and reassured to learn there were additional rules preventing them from presenting the news compared to current affairs. These restrictions were seen as appropriate with nearly all participants thinking it was right for politicians to be prevented from presenting the news. This was because news content was held to the highest possible standard of due impartiality, where participants did not expect an opinion to be provided by the presenter or reporters in any circumstances. They did not trust politicians to perform this role.

**“They shouldn’t be reading the news. Definitely not. The news is the news. Politicians will always be putting a slant on it which may or may not be correct depending on their motives. I would keep steering clear of them presenting the news.”** *Male, Midlands, 55+.*

**“Most people know politicians don’t always tell the truth. You rely on the news to be true.”** *Female, Scotland, 18-34.*

There was some acknowledgement that politicians could attempt to present the news impartially. However, participants did not think politicians would be successful in doing so, given their professional instinct to promote an agenda and the potential risk of a conflict of interest in reporting on topics they may have been involved in.

**“Grenfell, for example, and the group that approved the cladding. How would politicians handle that? I don't think they could be neutral so they couldn't read the news.”** *Female, Midlands, 55+.*

Even if a politician wanted to be impartial, participants questioned whether they would have the necessary skills to present the news. They assumed delivering the news impartially and professionally would require training in journalism. They were particularly worried they would not be able to refrain themselves from giving their opinion on contentious or political news stories.

**“Plenty of people are training to be in those positions. If you're a politician you're on the other side and being interviewed. The news channels take you on. A journalist is a journalist, a news reporter is a news reporter.”** *Female, South England, 35-54.*

**“News is for journalists and those with skills in journalism. They can be impartial. I think if it's a politician presenting the news, it would take away.”** *Female, North England, 55+*

Groups who tended to be less engaged with news and current affairs were more open to the idea of politicians presenting news content. This was because they felt that in a newsreader role a politician would likely be reading from a script collectively written by news editors and have less opportunity to give their personal opinion or influence the content being presented. However, this view was not widely held across groups.

**“A presenter is reading a script going from one piece to the next. If a politician read it, there's no opportunity there to promote their party.”** *Male, Wales, 55+.*

On the whole, concerns about politicians presenting the news meant participants expected rules around due impartiality to apply differently to news and current affairs content. As mentioned above, groups thought news content should be held to a higher standard, so expected and relied on the news to be unbiased, trustworthy and provide facts about what is happening around the country and in the world. They assumed that news content would have a wide reach with most people engaging with it in some way. Participants therefore strongly felt that news content should be delivered by somebody impartial and that audiences would expect this. Otherwise, they feared the presenter may deliver the news in a way to promote their own agenda, which audiences may not realise and misunderstand as fact.

**“I would not want the news clouded with someone's opinion. Some newsreaders are really good at that. They give you the facts and the news and that's it. I think the person who is delivering the news should be impartial as far as we're aware.”** *Female, South England, 18-34.*

**“That's quite dangerous. People follow the news a lot. To then have someone who can put their own views into the news is not a great idea.”** *Male, Northern Ireland, 55+.*

This contrasted with current affairs content, which participants expected to include more opinion-based discussions. As such, they were more comfortable with politicians presenting current affairs content, as while the presenter may be partial, they expected them to be challenged by alternative viewpoints as part of the discussion. Participants were subsequently unsurprised and reassured to learn that politicians can present or appear on current affairs programmes but cannot be newsreaders, interviewers or reporters in any news content.

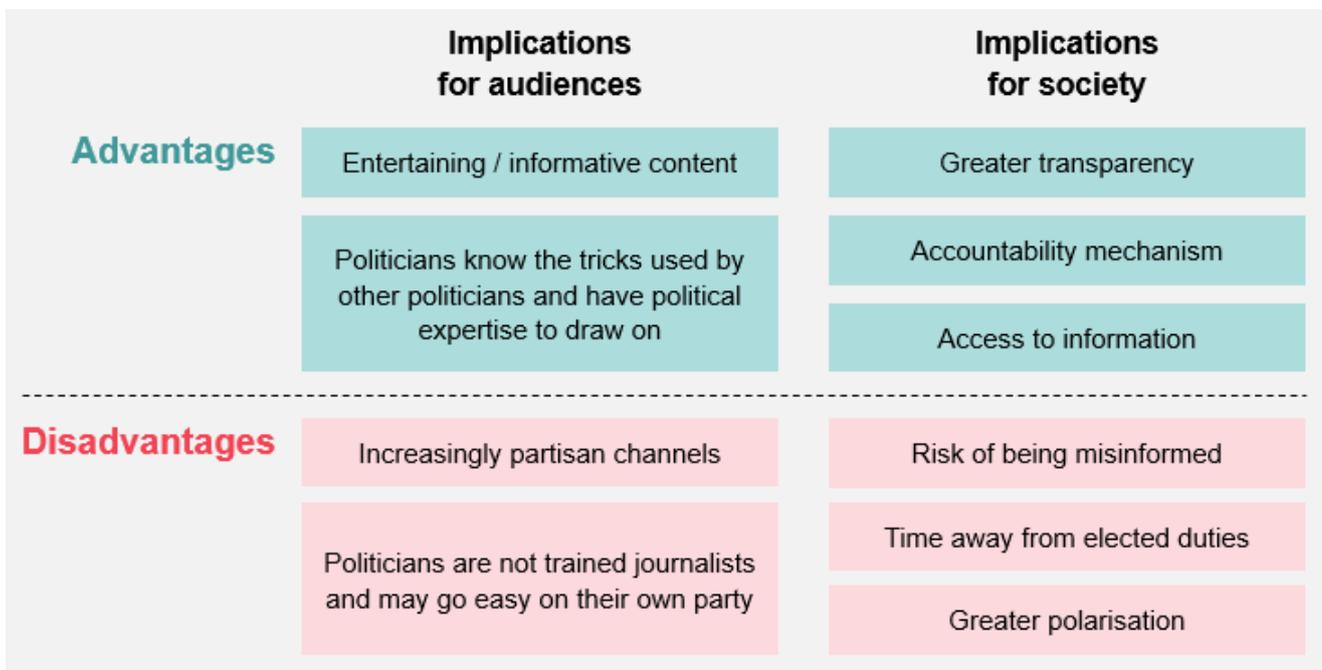
**“It makes sense for politicians to be involved in current affairs more than news. There is a huge proportion of society who take the news as gospel. The stuff they say. I think people take news seriously. As the truth.”** *Male, Northern Ireland, 18-34.*

**“I would hope they would both be impartial, but I would expect current affairs to be less impartial, and that’s because of the tone and conversation.”** *Female, North England, 18-34.*

### Advantages and disadvantages of politicians presenting current affairs

Participants identified a range of advantages and disadvantages of politicians presenting current affairs content and considered the implications these might have on both audiences and society as a whole. These are summarised in the diagram below and explored in detail in the rest of this chapter.

**Figure 3.1: The advantages and disadvantages of politicians presenting current affairs programmes which were identified by participants.**



**Participants expressed concerns about audiences being misled, doubting whether they could recognise if a programme was presented by a politician or whether content was news or current affairs.**

Participants questioned whether audiences would be able to identify that the presenter was a politician and their political leaning, reflecting how they were not always able to do this themselves when shown example content. As most participants were frequent consumers of current affairs, they assumed that wider audiences might struggle even more. Indeed, especially in groups with participants who engaged less frequently with current affairs content, there was limited awareness of the fact that some presenters in the examples shown during the pre-task were politicians. They expressed concerns that audiences might not recognise how the information presented to them by a politician was potentially partial unless this was made clear by the presenter.

**“I personally don’t know the names and faces of too many politicians, so I didn’t notice. It would help to know they were a politician.”** *Female, North England, 18-34.*

Participants also feared that audiences might wrongly interpret current affairs content as news. They felt this risked audiences thinking the discussion, in particular the politician's opinion, was factual reporting and more likely to be duly impartial. This was often due to the visual presentation of current affairs programmes on television which could make them look like news (e.g. the studio backdrop, news tickers, the politician being behind a desk), something which confused participants themselves as described in Chapter 1.

**“You're subconsciously thinking it's news. You take that as gospel, you think you've seen the news when it's actually current affairs.”** *Male, North England, 35-54.*

**“To someone going onto a news channel expecting it to be unbiased and trustworthy, it's completely not. Unless you're savvy to knowing who these people are, you think they know what they are talking about.”** *Female, Northern Ireland, 18-34.*

**“I am thinking about my Granny and Pa. They just believe anything they see on TV. If it is a politician saying it or someone else. I know that happens quite a lot. It can get quite confusing. They believe some weird stuff.”** *Female, Scotland, 18-34.*

**“It appears like a news item, but they are actually telling their spin. Unless you are savvy to what might be going on or can see through it, some people might see it as the news rather than an opinionated thing.”** *Male, Scotland, 35-54.*

**There were some concerns that politicians presenting current affairs content could lead to a more polarised society if audiences only consume content aligned with their views.**

There was a fear that if channels only hired politicians who were right-wing or left-wing as presenters, they might eventually gain a reputation for holding a political leaning which would attract some audiences and put off others. They worried this could limit the range of views available to audiences for those channels and result in audiences developing opinions through a partisan lens.

**“If you have a channel which is right-wing then how many people with the opposing view are going to watch it? You're going to get people with that view watching it and slapping each other on the back. That can be good but it's not going to give a broad consensus of opinion.”** *Male, South England, 55+.*

**Politicians presenting current affairs content did not erode participants' trust in the channel or wider broadcast media in general.**

As above, participants were wary that politicians might be pursuing an agenda when presenting current affairs content. However, this did not impact their trust in broadcast news and current affairs more generally. They felt personally well equipped to identify if a presenter might be trying to mislead them. They explained that they do not tend to watch or listen to this type of content in isolation but would also consider the wider context of the rest of the programme or other content on the channel. Their trust in other content on the channel would be determined by the information being provided within that programme, as opposed to the fact that a politician was presenting elsewhere.

**“It wouldn't make me distrust the news. It would just make me judge that programme.”** *Female, North England, 35-54.*

**“You’re going to have a biased report from the politician. As soon as that section is over with, the next section is going to be what grabs your attention. You’ve probably already forgot about this one.”** *Male, Wales, 55+.*

In some cases, participants said they would be less trusting of content broadcast by channels or stations which they thought expressed a political leaning.

### **Advantages to politicians presenting current affairs content were identified, such as accountability to the public and greater transparency.**

Participants expressed a preference for formats which allowed the public to challenge politicians by asking them questions directly, such as call-in shows. They recognised this gave audiences a chance they otherwise might not have to interact with elected officials and hold them to account. Simultaneously, participants felt these programmes gave politicians a useful gauge of public opinion to help inform their policy position.

**“There needs to be a way for the public to question them and if this is through presenting programmes so be it. How else are they going to interact with us? How else will we hold them to account and question them, hold them to their promises?”** *Male, North England, 35-54.*

Participants considered whether politicians presenting programmes could benefit wider society by providing greater transparency about their beliefs and how the political system operates. They thought politicians would be more at ease presenting their own programme than being interviewed elsewhere, because they might be more likely to provide their “unguarded” and honest opinions. On other current affairs content, where a politician was not presenting, they felt politicians were more likely to be defensive as journalists may often try to catch them out. Presenting was seen as an opportunity to “humanise” politicians and for audiences to become familiar with them before voting in an election.

**“I like politicians presenting to be honest. I think that usually politicians, a lot of them become more human. It puts a face to a person, whereas you watch them in the Houses of Parliament and they’re so distant. I like it. I think it’s a good idea.”** *Female, South England, 35-54.*

### **Opinion was mixed on whether audiences would benefit from the expertise that a politician might bring to current affairs content.**

Overall, participants worried that audiences might lose out from politicians not always having the necessary skills to present current affairs content. They expected current affairs presenters to ensure diverse viewpoints were being shared and questioned whether politicians would necessarily have the capacity to hold back on promoting their political agenda. Journalists were seen as overall better placed to achieve a duly impartial discussion because they are trained professionals who know how to effectively challenge interviewees. Participants questioned why a politician would be presenting instead.

Nevertheless, there was a recognition that audiences could benefit from a politician’s unique expertise from working inside political institutions and having knowledge of how they operate. Their experience would be first-hand and they would likely have in-depth knowledge of how policies are developed and the motivations behind them. Journalists were felt to be unlikely to be able to replicate this because they are not involved in day-to-day political decision-making.

**“I think [politicians are] the best for the job. They know the most about what’s going on politically, but it’s not unbiased news.”** *Female, Wales, 18-34.*

Participants also recognised that politicians could bring a level of media expertise from their experiences appearing on programmes. They felt that audiences might benefit from more informative and engaging interviews as politicians might know the “tricks” their colleagues use to evade questions and know how to overcome them.

## 4 Contextual factors influencing views of politicians presenting current affairs content

This chapter explores participants' understanding of due impartiality and how the context and format of programmes influenced participants' views towards politicians presenting current affairs content.

Key findings include:

- Participants rarely changed their overall opinion towards politicians presenting current affairs content, even when presented with a variety of contextual factors and formats.
- They tended to be more comfortable with politicians presenting current affairs content: on smaller channels; in a documentary format; on a one-off occasion; or through live programming which could limit the editorial influence of politicians.
- Participants were also more open to former politicians presenting compared with current politicians, particularly those with frontbench roles.
- Programmes where politicians were clearly challenged by those holding alternative viewpoints or by audiences was widely seen as more acceptable.
- The greatest concern was about politicians leading interviews especially if this involved another member of their political party.

Previous Ofcom research has established that the public tend to assess the acceptability of programmes based on the format and context of what is being broadcast.<sup>8</sup> In terms of politicians presenting current affairs content, participants focused on:

1. **Context:** This included typical considerations around how audiences access content on television and radio, and the genre of the programme. However, given the focus of this research, participants also reflected on the background of the politician and their party position.
2. **Format:** This included the role the politician was playing on the programme and how alternative views were provided.

Participants from both the general audience and channel specific groups acknowledged these factors either mitigated or aggravated their concern but did not necessarily change their overall opinion towards politicians presenting.

<sup>8</sup> For example, see "Exploring Audience Expectations of Linear and On Demand Services" (2023): [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0024/270618/Exploring-Audience-Expectations-of-Linear-On-Demand-Services.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0024/270618/Exploring-Audience-Expectations-of-Linear-On-Demand-Services.pdf)

The research gauged participants' opinions on these factors by using hypothetical scenarios which placed unnamed politicians in a range of situations presenting news and current affairs content. These hypothetical scenarios can be found in the Appendices to this report.

Before discussing the hypothetical scenarios, moderators explored participant's understanding of due impartiality, given it is central to the regulation of news and current affairs content. Due impartiality was introduced at this stage so participants would be able to provide a considered response when assessing the scenarios and refer back to the definition, if necessary, during discussion.

## Audiences' understanding of due impartiality

**Participants found due impartiality easy to define, although there was some confusion over the meaning of "due".**

Participants understood due impartiality as the need for content to provide a range of views and not unduly favour one side over another. This was recognised as having specific relevance to news and current affairs content. They valued the importance of broadcasters preserving due impartiality and sharing diverse viewpoints enabling audiences to make their own decisions about who to trust.

There was some confusion over the meaning of "due", particularly amongst groups who were less engaged with news and current affairs content. This group typically felt broadcasters should give different stances equal weight within programmes.

**"It's paramount. If there is no impartiality, then you only hear one side of the story. If it didn't exist, then we're all in the dark. It's extremely important."** *Male, Northern Ireland, 18-34.*

After an initial discussion, participants were provided with an explanation of what due impartiality means from Ofcom based on the Broadcasting Code. They were unsurprised by this definition as it largely matched their expectations:<sup>9</sup>

- Due impartiality means adequate or appropriate to the subject and nature of the programme, not favouring one side over another. Due impartiality does not mean that news and current affairs broadcasters must give an equal amount of time to every view. To require this would restrict broadcasters' editorial freedom and would create practical problems. News and current affairs providers are instead meant to be unbiased trusted sources in how they present different viewpoints – challenging, probing, testing alternatives as appropriate as well as providing context to help inform viewers.

Discussion then moved on to explore the hypothetical scenarios and consider the differing contexts or formats a politician might be presenting in.

## Considering the context of a programme

### The context of the programme

**Participants were less comfortable with politicians presenting current affairs content on mainstream channels given the likely larger audience who might not know what to expect.**

<sup>9</sup> Due impartiality is defined in [Section Five of the Broadcasting Code](#).

Participants did not expect politicians to be presenting on “mainstream” channels (which they felt to be the BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5 and Sky). This was because they thought these channels are watched or listened to by larger audiences and there was an expectation that they would have a greater responsibility to broadcast different viewpoints to reflect the range of their audiences’ beliefs. They felt that mainstream channels did not always achieve due impartiality but did take it seriously and were striving towards these principles.

**“I think [politicians presenting] erodes the impartiality. People have no trust in politicians. I think the mainstream TV channels would be in some big trouble if they showed them.”**

*Male, Wales, 55+.*

In contrast, politicians presenting on “smaller” channels was seen as more acceptable by both viewers and listeners of these channels and wider audiences. This was because these channels are typically further down TV or radio listings, meaning audiences would be more likely to seek out a programme on these channels and the average viewer or listener was unlikely to accidentally stumble across it. These smaller channels were seen to be tailoring their content to attract audiences with a particular viewpoint who would therefore know what to expect.

**“So, I’d expect to see politicians there [GB News]. However, if I was to see a politician presenting the Today programme on Radio 4, then that would be an issue.”**

*Male, Northern Ireland, 55+.*

### **Politicians presenting in a documentary format was seen as more acceptable than presenting discussion-based current affairs content.**

Participants instinctively thought current affairs content would be recorded in a studio and discuss various topical issues with a range of guests. However, when probed, they acknowledged it can also be presented in a documentary format, where participants tended to be more comfortable with politicians presenting. This was because documentaries tend to explore a single topic which viewers seek out if they are interested, so are more likely to be informed and know what to expect from the programme.

**“Whenever I watch documentaries, a lot of the time it is more one-sided, but I don’t generally mind that because you’re just interested in the subject. If it’s put across that it’s quite clearly from one party, that’s fine. If it’s done in a more interview situation it’s more misleading because it seems more like news.”**

*Male, South England, 18-34.*

Watching one-off documentaries contrasted with participants’ viewing habits for other current affairs content which tended to be more casual. As other current affairs content tends to cover a range of topical public matters, participants felt audiences might start watching without knowing the focus or who the presenter is. They suggested this created a risk audiences could unknowingly consume content from a partisan perspective.

### **Politicians presenting current affairs content live was deemed more acceptable because it mitigated the risk of politicians curating content which could mislead audiences.**

Participants assumed that pre-recorded content would be curated to remove segments that politicians were unhappy with, for example, if they slipped up or were asked difficult questions that they did not want broadcast. They felt these situations were important for audiences to see because they revealed the politician’s unfiltered opinions and provided an indication of how they would perform under pressure. Pre-recorded programmes provided the opportunity to edit content to enhance the politician’s

performance. As such, participants tended to be more in favour of live broadcasts, where they felt politicians would have less opportunity to put across a false impression and where they could be challenged in real time.

**“I like when they are responding to problems in real time, they don't have time or anywhere to hide.”** *Female, North England, 18-34.*

**Participants also tended to be more comfortable with a politician presenting on a one-off occasion, as opposed to presenting a regular programme.**

Presenting one-off programmes reduced some of the worries participants had about politicians being distracted from their role as an elected representative serving their constituents. It also mitigated fears that politicians were presenting simply for financial gain as they were unlikely to be paid excessive amounts for a single appearance. There were also suggestions that if another politician was presenting the next programme, this could provide an element of balance across a series.

**“How can it be right that as an MP you have a regular role taking you away from your work as a serving MP?”** *Male, Midlands, 55+.*

**There were some concerns about not being able to see a politician's body language on radio.**

Although participants felt the audio cues on radio more clearly drew a line between news and current affairs content, this was weighed against concerns about being unable to see the politician's body language. They felt seeing someone's body language could often provide an indication of their sincerity and opinion on a topic.

**“You can't get body language over the radio. When someone has been asked a question, you can see what their opinion is before they speak.”** *Female, Wales, 55+.*

There were also doubts about whether listeners would be able to identify a politician from their voice alone. Participants feared this could mean audiences might be unaware information was being presented to them by a politician, which could potentially be partial.

**“On certain radio shows you need someone saying this is your independent or right-wing voice. Constantly let people know what you're listening to because who knows sometimes.”** *Male, South England, 55+.*

### The politician's background

**A politician's job title and party had limited impact on most participants' overall opinions, although former politicians presenting was often seen as more acceptable.**

Participants had a broad definition of who they identified as a politician, generally encompassing most people currently involved or employed in the world of politics. This included Members of Parliament (and devolved parliaments), Members of the House of Lords, councillors, party employees and candidates.

Opinion was most wary towards either Government or Shadow ministers presenting. This was because participants felt that ministers would have a greater incentive to promote their party's agenda, something perceived to be part of their parliamentary role. Given their proximity to the party leadership, they thought ministers would feel more pressured to follow “party lines” on a topic as they might fear being disciplined or losing their position.

**“Can you imagine if a Tory Minister went and praised a Labour policy, can you imagine the flack they would get once done from their own party for talking up the opposition? I can’t see how they would do that.”** *Male, North England, 35-54.*

Participants also worried about content presented by politicians who belong to minority parties, particularly if they do not hold an elected office. They thought that smaller parties tended to promote a single issue and, as such, there were fears the politician would strongly push this agenda. If they were unelected, participants felt the individual would lack the unique insights an elected politician might bring because they do not have the same level of experience. They also feared that the politician of a smaller party might try to capitalise on the media opportunity and be more inclined to try to persuade audiences to vote for them compared to more established politicians.

**“They are not in Parliament and a minor politician. They are going to try to create an impression to make them look good to the public and possibly vote for them. It’s just wrong.”** *Male, South England, 55+.*

In some cases, participants mentioned that it would be more acceptable for a politician in local government to present content as they are paid less than an MP and often have supplementary jobs. They made more positive assumptions about a councillor’s motivations, reasoning they might be presenting in order to engage with their local communities. Similarly, participants were sometimes more comfortable with members of the House of Lords presenting, as they felt they would have time available and assumed they would have a rich expertise derived from a long career.

**“I think the House of Lords is different because they aren’t representing a constituency.”** *Female, South England, 35-54.*

**“I think it differs with an MP and say a local councillor, as they’re unpaid, and have other jobs. Councillors tend to be involved in their own local communities.”** *Male, South England, 55+.*

On the whole, participants were uneasy about former politicians presenting current affairs content with a political focus. They felt it would not be possible for the individual to separate themselves from their previous political views and connections, even if they were no longer officially working for a party. The context of the former politician’s career was also considered, particularly how they left politics, as participants felt this would impact how they reported on political stories, especially if they had left on negative terms. However, participants did not think it would be fair to stop former politicians from presenting, as they should be allowed to start a new career after leaving politics.

**“Current politicians should be banned because they want to promote their party, but ex-politicians, why not? They are people as well. If they want to work on TV or radio, why not?”** *Female, Wales, 35-54.*

## Considering the format of a programme

### The politician’s role on the programme

**Programmes where politicians were clearly challenged by those holding alternative viewpoints or by audiences were widely seen as more acceptable.**

Participants were less uncomfortable with formats where politicians were challenged as this was seen as an accountability mechanism for audiences. There was some sympathy for politicians who present programmes which include them being robustly challenged.

**“I think if you have a live audience, and they can challenge views that come out then I would find that more effective.”** *Female, South England, 18-34.*

However, participants were still uncomfortable with a politician having “editorial power” in these programmes. They worried that a politician might ignore questions or cut people off. They mentioned that one way to mitigate this risk was to have an independent moderator who would chair the session and ensure politicians were answering the questions put to them.

**“It’s one thing having a debate but it’s another thing entirely when they’re leading and the moderator. If the moderator isn’t a politician, it’s fairer and more even. Otherwise, it’s driven and skewed to how the presenter wants.”** *Male, South England, 18-34.*

They also thought it was important that questions were not shown to the politician beforehand. This would mean their answer would be more authentic and spontaneous as they would have less opportunity to plan their response.

**Participants had the greatest concern where politicians were leading interviews, especially if this involved another member of their political party.**

Participants generally believed that politicians should be answering questions and not asking them. They suggested a professionally trained journalist should be leading interviews and thought politicians would not have the necessary skills. Even if they had been a journalist in a previous career, participants remained uncomfortable as they felt the politician had lost their ability to be impartial by becoming aligned to a party. This included cases where the politician had subsequently left politics.

**“The politicians are there answering the questions. It’s the neutral person leading the conversation. You don’t need a politician to do that as then there is room for the bias.”** *Male, North England, 18-34.*

Concern was highest when a politician was interviewing someone from their own party. This was because participants felt that both individuals would be focused on promoting their party’s agenda in a positive light. It was assumed the questions would be shared with the politician being interviewed so answers could be prepared. They did not think the interviewer would be inclined to rigorously probe or challenge the politician being interviewed out of fear of being disciplined by their party. Even if the interviewer did challenge the politician, participants questioned whether they would find this genuine. Ultimately, participants felt unable to completely trust the information provided in an interview like this and felt it would prevent a range of perspectives being covered.

**“If they’re both from the same party, then it’s all going to be pre-planned. They’re going to get together and say right we’ll do this and say that.”** *Female, North England, 55+.*

Although participants remained uneasy with politicians interviewing someone from another party, they thought it was more likely they could challenge each other thus ensuring due impartiality. However, this was weighed against fears that the interviewer might push too hard on the politician and not ask questions which would allow them to put their party in a positive light.

**“Would they have a politician from one side and one from another side? I think that would be fairer. I think the discussions would have to be relevant. Then people can make the decision if they want to listen to it and believe it.”** *Female, Midlands, 55+.*

Opinion was more relaxed about a politician interviewing an expert in a specific area. They expected this conversation to be less overtly political. It was seen as an opportunity for both the audience and the politician to learn. Participants acknowledged the politician’s political expertise might equip them with interesting and relevant questions to ask the expert.

**Participants were concerned that politicians presenting a monologue or reporting on the ground would look too much like they were presenting the news.**

As a monologue does not involve having a discussion with others, participants questioned whether it would feel more like a news segment and could result in some of the audience misperceiving the politician’s opinion as news. They were also uncomfortable with the lack of possible challenge during a monologue. However, there was a suggestion that if the politician was an expert in the area, audiences might benefit from hearing the politician’s take.

**“The monologue is the one trying to blur the line. They are trying to present their opinion as news. It’s the attempt to blind. It’s designed to look like the news while being entertainment.”** *Male, Scotland, 18-34.*

**“I found the monologue quite informative. The way they talked about it. They took their time. They didn’t rush it. I’d be comfortable with politicians imparting information about a subject area.”** *Female, South England, 35-54.*

Similarly, groups struggled to imagine a scenario where it would be appropriate for a politician to act as a reporter on the ground as opposed to a journalist. They felt this was too close to presenting the “news” which they were inherently uncomfortable with. However, participants recognised this might be considered more appropriate in exceptional scenarios, for example, if a major story broke in their constituency and the politician was already on the scene (e.g. local flooding).

**“They can’t report the news. It should just be a no. Especially when it comes to politics, regardless of what their previous role was or how professional they are.”** *Female, Northern Ireland, 18-34.*

### Providing an alternative viewpoint

**Participants preferred alternative views to the one presented by the politician being provided by someone in the studio.**

Participants felt it was important to include alternative viewpoints when politicians are presenting current affairs content. Indeed, many described wanting to hear a diversity of opinion as one of the key reasons why they are interested in watching or listening to current affairs content. They wanted politicians to be challenged and preferred methods of providing an alternative opinion which involved a debate. For example, panel discussions were seen as an effective means of ensuring diverse opinions were shared.

Participants thought panellists would have the expertise to challenge the politician and make sure they were not only promoting their own opinion. They appreciated that several different viewpoints can be represented on a panel which helps make a debate less binary. Political balance on panels was consequently seen as important because it generates the type of content that audiences would be

interested in hearing. It also gives audiences the opportunity to develop their own opinion after hearing from multiple sides.

**“The panel makes a difference because what they've said is being challenged. Other viewpoints can come into play. From that challenge, they'd have to answer that. You'd get more information on what had happened.”** *Female, Midlands, 35-54.*

However, not everyone was comfortable with politicians leading panel discussions (as opposed to just contributing). There were concerns that politicians leading the discussion would place more weight on the side which aligned with their views or more heavily challenge a contributor with opposing views to them. This was perceived as unfair and participants suggested it would undermine the value of including alternative viewpoints in a programme. Overall, they felt it would be inappropriate for the politician leading the discussion to give their own opinion that would likely focus on promoting their party.

**“In terms of the person hosting the panel, the problem with them having a strong political leaning, it's not just a matter of how much time they give each person to speak but it's also an issue of the nature of questioning they give. If I agree with what you're saying I'm only going to critique for the sake of being balanced. But if I don't agree I will critique to prove that you're wrong. And that is the problem in the issue of bias.”** *Female, South England, 35-54.*

Participants were more supportive of a politician co-hosting with a journalist who could ensure the discussion was not being too heavily influenced because the co-host could challenge the politician if necessary. There were some suggestions that it would be better to have two politicians with opposing views presenting, because they would be able to challenge each other on their respective agendas.

**“Maybe there needs to be a co-presenter who should air the questions at them as they come in or two politicians? Just someone there to make sure they aren't dodging problems.”** *Male, North England, 35-54.*

**“I'd be ok with a politician presenting as long as it was a joint presenter. Someone other than a politician.”** *Male, North England, 35-54.*

**There was more hesitation towards methods of providing an alternative viewpoint which did not involve a politician being challenged in-person.**

Participants were familiar with presenters sometimes summarising an alternative viewpoint or playing 'devil's advocate' but did not think this was an effective means of ensuring due impartiality when politicians were presenting. They questioned the sincerity with which a politician would be able to deliver an opposing opinion and were worried they may do so in a dismissive or mocking tone. They ultimately did not think it would give enough weight to the other stance for audiences to take it seriously.

**“It's about whether it's possible for them to play that devil's advocate. I do question their ability to do that.”** *Female, South England, 18-34.*

**“Even where it says the presenter plays devil's advocate, I've seen it done in a very sarcastic and belittling way when they're talking about different views.”** *Male, South England, 35-54.*

There were similar questions around fairness when providing a clip of an alternative view. Participants felt a politician would be more likely to be given free rein to present their own perspective, while the person clipped would be unlikely to have any influence over how their view was depicted. For example, they would not be able to tailor their responses based on the context of the programme or what had already been said. Participants questioned how clips would be selected and whether they would include the breadth of alternative opinion. For this to be more effective, they thought that the clip needed to be presented with respect (e.g., the politician presenting being unable to chide in or talk over the clip).

**“Clips are cancelled out immediately as soon as the politician speaks over it. The presenter is giving their opinion on a live discussion but it’s not impartial because the clip isn’t live, giving an opinion on the discussion.”** *Male, Midlands, 18-34.*

Participants also doubted the effectiveness of presenting different viewpoints across a series of linked programmes presented by politicians. They felt that audiences might only watch or listen to one episode and not necessarily tune into the next. There were suggestions that audiences might feel disinclined to tune in if the next presenter was someone they disagreed with as there would be nobody to challenge their views. However, radio listeners were more likely to see this as appropriate given they tended to listen to a range of programmes throughout the course of the day, and at similar times so would be more likely to notice if a certain programme had a different presenter.

# 5 Audiences' overall views on politicians presenting current affairs content

This chapter summarises participants' overall opinions towards politicians presenting current affairs content. It outlines four attitudinal groups and the principles that influenced their opinions. The chapter concludes by outlining suggested mitigations which participants felt could help alleviate their concerns about audiences being misled and ensure due impartiality.

Key findings include:

- Although there was concern about politicians presenting current affairs content, there was no consensus for preventing them from doing so.
- The most prevalent opinion held among participants was feeling uncomfortable with politicians presenting current affairs content. However not everyone in this group thought they should be prevented from doing so.
- Participants' opinions of politicians presenting current affairs were not simply determined by whether they watch or listen to channels currently broadcasting this type of content.
- Concerns about a lack of due impartiality were balanced against the importance of freedom of expression and audiences' freedom to decide what they watch or listen to.
- However, participants suggested a range of mitigations which they felt would help alleviate their concerns. Mitigations which received the broadest level of support were making it easier to visually differentiate between current affairs and the news, and telling audiences when a politician was presenting.

## Overall opinions towards politicians presenting current affairs

**Across groups there was common concern about politicians presenting current affairs content, but this did not equate to a consensus on preventing them from presenting such content.**

Participant's overall opinion towards politicians presenting current affairs content tended to be determined by weighing up their concerns about misleading audiences and a potential lack of due impartiality, given the inherent partial viewpoints of those politicians, with the importance of freedom of expression and the audiences' freedom to choose what to watch or listen to.

Attitudes also tended to align with participant's outlook towards regulations in general. Those wanting to prevent politicians from presenting current affairs tended to favour a "rules-based" system. They did not think audiences were being provided with enough information to know what to expect from this content and favoured stronger regulations to protect audiences. However, other groups were typically sceptical about imposing rules and thought it was the audience's responsibility to make a judgement on whether they trust the content they are watching or listening to. They suggested that providing additional information could patronise audiences.

The most prevalent opinion held among participants was feeling uncomfortable with politicians presenting current affairs content. Participants in this group held a range of political views and consumed news from a diverse mix of sources, including smaller channels. They expected politicians to lead conversations in a direction which promoted their own party and potentially mislead audiences by not voicing all perspectives. Amongst this group:

- Those against preventing politicians from presenting were influenced by considering the importance of freedom of expression.
- Those who were supportive of preventing politicians from presenting tended to reach their decision as they favoured a rules-based system.

There were a further two groups whose opinion was less prevalent:

- Less concerned by politicians presenting current affairs content. Participants who were less concerned by politicians presenting were typically younger and less engaged with current affairs content. They often described keeping up to date with news through social media.
- Supportive of politicians presenting current affairs content. These participants were generally older, more likely to identify as right-wing and more likely to be regular viewers or listeners of smaller channels where politicians have typically been presenting programmes. However, not all audiences of these smaller channels belonged to this group. They were typically sceptical about imposing rules and were dismissive of them, saying additional rules would be patronising to audiences.

Overall, across the groups, there was no consensus on preventing politicians from presenting current affairs.

### **Participants' opinions of politicians presenting current affairs were not simply determined by whether they watch or listen to channels currently broadcasting this type of content.**

There was a diversity of views towards politicians presenting current affairs content among the audiences of smaller channels where politicians have increasingly been playing this role. Audiences of these channels were not automatically supportive of politicians presenting current affairs. Many of these participants had diverse media habits, consuming news and current affairs from a range of sources, including more mainstream channels. They valued the importance of media plurality and questioned sources they considered heavily partisan.

Indeed, there were participants among the audiences of channels including LBC, GB News, TalkTV and Times Radio who felt uncomfortable with politicians presenting current affairs content and wanted to prevent them from doing so. They expressed concerns about politicians putting forward their own agenda when presenting current affairs. These participants explained:

**“I just don't think politicians should be doing all these current affairs programmes, or not as many. Why are they suddenly deciding that's what they want to do? I am a bit worried to be honest. I think they bring their own agenda.”** *Female, South England, 55+.*

**“It undermines the topic they're presenting or discussing. To be on the safe side, stick with presenters who aren't associated with politics in any way. It doesn't do justice to the programme and the broadcasting company.”** *Female, Midlands, 35-54.*

**“To be honest it feels inappropriate. If I had a programme where I was discussing political issues, I don’t want a politician as the face of it, it should be someone objective and neutral.”** *Male, North England, 35-54.*

However, among participants who were supportive of politicians presenting, nearly all consumed content from these smaller channels (as well as other sources). Their support was based on personally enjoying similar content, particularly when politicians were challenged. They were interested in hearing a politician’s perspective on events and thought audiences would benefit from their expertise and political knowledge. These participants trusted certain politicians to be “straight-talking” and tell the truth in simple terms. For example, they explained:

**“I like it because they tell the truth. I personally find others skirt around and don’t answer. They will just say it, whether it’s to people’s tastes or not is irrelevant. I don’t always feel that the news is what I believe is the truth.”** *Female, South England, 35-54.*

**“I love when politicians go on these shows. They get a grilling regardless of the political spectrum they’re on. It’s nice to see a politician answer those questions. You get more truth than something that’s scripted for them. I personally like it. It makes them more personable which is nice to see.”** *Male, North England, 18-34.*

**“I think they should be allowed to do it. It shows more of their character. I haven’t got a problem with them presenting.”** *Female, Midlands, 55+.*

**There was agreement across groups that even if politicians were prevented from presenting current affairs, this should not be extended to all types of content.**

Participants thought it would be going too far to stop politicians from presenting all programmes. There was far less resistance towards politicians presenting non-political programmes, as it was understood they would have less opportunity to promote a political agenda in this format. Indeed, groups described enjoying documentaries presented by politicians and did not think it would be problematic for them to host wider entertainment shows such as sports programmes or travel documentaries. Their political expertise was also seen as potentially relevant to political documentaries reporting on past events.

**“I have no issue if a politician wanted to host a programme next week about football. Not a problem.”** *Male, Scotland, 18-34.*

However, some participants still expressed concerns that a politician might (even subconsciously) push an agenda in a non-political programme and audiences might not recognise this was happening given their expectations about the genre of the show.

## Considering freedom of expression

**Participants balanced concerns about a potential lack of due impartiality against the importance of freedom of expression.**

Overall, participants were familiar with the concept of freedom of expression and valued everyone’s right to express their opinions without interference. They thought it was essential for a healthy democracy to have opportunities for debate and to allow for broadcasting a diversity of views, although there was a recognition of the difficult balance between this freedom and ensuring views do not cause harm or offence.

**“Extremely important. Freedom of speech is what our democracy is built on. If you can’t debate with anyone, then you can’t have democracy.”** *Female, Midlands, 55+.*

Those who thought politicians should be allowed to present current affairs content often described prioritising freedom of expression. These participants felt that while they might disagree with a politician, the latter should still be able to share their viewpoint without interference. This was seen as an important part of a healthy democracy as audiences can decide whether to trust the information or not. There were concerns that preventing politicians from presenting current affairs content based on their profession would limit their freedom of expression.

**“There is a great advantage in having freedom of thought. We are all adults, and we are all allowed our opinions. That is what democracy is about.”** *Female, Midlands, 55+.*

**“I don’t think they should do it, but I don’t think you can ban them as you live in a democracy. I think we are stuck.”** *Female, South England, 55+.*

Groups who wanted to prevent politicians from presenting current affairs argued that it would not limit their freedom of speech as they would be able to put their viewpoint across as a guest on programmes. They thought it would be appropriate to have a more impartial presenter who ensured the politician answered questions and that alternative viewpoints were provided.

**“So long as you don’t limit the airtime the parties get. I don’t think stopping politicians doing this impedes on their ability to promote their campaigns, it gives everyone an equal opportunity.”** *Male, Wales, 18-34.*

## Considering the freedom to choose

**In cases where they could identify the politician, participants felt equipped to understand their agenda and decide for themselves who to trust.**

While concerned about whether wider audiences would be able to do the same, participants believed programmes presented by politicians tend to be on smaller channels that viewers or listeners would purposefully seek out and therefore know what to expect. They suggested freedom of expression also includes the audience’s freedom to receive information and ideas. Participants felt that audiences’ personal choice was a key factor in deciding what to watch or listen to. There was a recognition that some audiences enjoy these programmes, so it would be unfair to stop them being broadcast.

**“That is on the listener to be a little bit more diligent to the information they receive. I have to be a little bit intentional and know if I hear something if it doesn’t chime with me. I sense something in the way someone speaks I know to discern them. It’s for you to sit through it responsibly.”** *Male, Scotland 18-34.*

Those who were supportive of politicians presenting current affairs were in favour of the freedom to choose what they wanted to watch or listen to and were dismissive of rules being introduced and thought it would risk creating a “nanny state” environment. They did not necessarily expect all current affairs content to meet the same standards of due impartiality. In some cases, having content that reflected more heavily on one side of an argument than another was seen as acceptable as they expected current affairs content to be more opinion based and partial in discussion. Similarly, dependent on the channel or presenter, audiences might select a programme expecting to hear a specific viewpoint.

**“We don’t want too many rules. You know what you’re getting in these programmes. I don’t think they’re deceiving you in any way. It would be insulting to say to people you need to put a label across the screen in case people realise it’s not the truth. That’s a bit too far.”** *Male, Wales, 55+.*

**“It depends on the programme. If a programme is presenting itself as impartial, it has a duty to be impartial, or try to be. If it’s clear with its biases, it’s not necessarily wrong to be partial.”** *Male, Scotland, 18-34.*

However, for those supportive of preventing politicians presenting, concerns that audiences might watch or listen to a programme and be unknowingly influenced were greater than the importance of individual choice over what content to consume. As explored above, they were far more comfortable with imposing regulation to protect audiences from this.

**“To someone going onto a news channel expecting it to be unbiased and trustworthy, it’s completely not. Unless you’re savvy to knowing who these people are, you think they know what they are talking about. They are feeding the viewers their agenda. People would assume they are independent.”** *Male, Scotland, 35-54.*

## Conclusion

**While there was no consensus for preventing politicians from presenting current affairs, groups thought certain mitigations could help alleviate concerns about audiences being misled.**

On the whole, suggestions revolved around making it clearer to audiences that content is current affairs (rather than news) and is being presented by a politician. This was seen as crucial to ensuring audiences did not mistake a politician’s opinion as fact. There were also suggestions around editorial decisions which could be taken to help ensure due impartiality. These focused on ensuring that the politician presented alternative points of view robustly and respectfully.

These suggestions received various levels of support across the attitudinal groups. Participants’ opinions were driven by weighing up their concern with audiences being misled against their approach to rules, the importance of freedom of expression and audience choice. The rest of this chapter explores these suggestions in greater detail.

**Participants thought more could be done to avoid current affairs content being mistaken for the news.**

As explored in Chapter 2, participants worried about current affairs content on television being mistaken for the news where content shares similar visual features (e.g., a rolling banner, sitting behind a desk, Westminster background). In particular, there were suggestions that “rolling banners” with breaking news at the bottom of a screen could be removed from current affairs content as they were heavily associated with the news.

**“The banners come across as the news. For me to sit and watch it, I’d take more of it as fact rather than views. Having a better understanding, I could be taking someone else’s views as facts.”** *Female, Midlands, 18-34.*

In some cases, participants were also uncomfortable with the channel name being on screen during current affairs programmes if it included the word “news” as they felt this was potentially deceptive. They

thought it would be more appropriate for the programme name to be displayed instead if this made clear the content was current affairs (e.g., it included the name of the politician).

**“There’s a whole channel called GB News but most of its output is talk-based, opinion-based. I like it personally, but others might be misled by that. People might be tuning in to it thinking it’s the daily news. Others might not realise they are getting opinion.”** *Male, South England, 55+.*

### **Participants wanted broadcasters to tell audiences when a politician was presenting and the party they belonged to.**

It was considered very important for a politician to disclose their profession and party upfront when presenting current affairs content. This could warn audiences that the presenter might have a potential agenda so they can make their own decision about what information to trust. It alleviated concerns about audiences being unknowingly influenced by the presenter.

**“I wish in an ideal world there could be a set of rules that could perfectly define impartiality and you can input that into current affairs shows but that isn’t going to happen. There is no defined metric. Instead of making rules stricter you need to make people aware this is not factual, it’s opinion.”** *Male, Northern Ireland, 18-34.*

In some cases, participants wanted a written disclaimer for television programmes stating the presenter is a politician and the party they represent which could stay on the screen throughout the programme. This was because someone might miss a verbal warning if, for example, they are not watching the programme in its entirety. On radio, they expected regular reminders that the host was a politician.

**“It’s almost like I don’t know whether it was stamped with a health warning like a pack of cigarettes, or a tickertape across to say ‘this is such and such from the Labour or Green Party’ just to keep you focused on what angle it might be coming from. I may be overthinking it but otherwise it’s like they are brainwashing us.”** *Female, North England, 55+.*

### **Participants felt the definition of who counts as a “politician” could be made clearer.**

Throughout discussions, participants were sometimes confused about who the current rules apply to and wanted greater clarity on whether the definition of “politician” applied to non-elected politicians, party employees or ex-politicians. On the whole, participants felt the definition of “politician” should include non-elected politicians and party employees because they would still have an agenda to promote.

There were some concerns about former politicians presenting current affairs content, given they may still be promoting a political agenda after leaving office. However, on the whole, they decided it would be unrealistic to attempt to prevent them from doing so. For example, they questioned how long restrictions would apply if someone had left their political career decades ago. In some cases, participants thought there should be a period when former politicians are not allowed to present after ending their affiliation to a political party (e.g. a few years).

### **There were some suggestions around preventing politicians from interviewing members of their own party and ensuring they present alternative views robustly and respectfully.**

Participants appreciated there were benefits to politicians presenting current affairs content where they are interacting with and being challenged by the public. However, as explored in Chapter 4, they were more uncomfortable when politicians were interviewing members of their own party. Consequently, there were suggestions about preventing them from doing so. This was because they feared both individuals could be promoting their party's agenda unchecked by any genuine challenge.

**“I don't mind when they have a particular slot. Ultimately the presenter, if they are politically engaged, they will have an opinion. But it bothers me when they have a particular relationship with the people they are talking to. That shouldn't be allowed. That is their boss, who put them in their position in cabinet.”** *Female, London, 35-54.*

Similarly, participants disliked it when politicians were dismissive in their treatment or summary of alternative viewpoints. They thought politicians should be required to treat alternative points of view with respect so audiences can hear both sides and form their own opinion.

**“They of course can be professional. They can't just hang up on somebody because they don't like what they asked them. They need to be professional enough to take both sides of the coin depending on the questions, and I'm not sure whether I have that faith and confidence for politicians to be that way.”** *Female, Scotland, 35-54.*

Overall, while there was no consensus for preventing politicians from presenting current affairs content, participants suggested a range of mitigations which could help alleviate concerns about audiences being misled and ensure due impartiality:

- Making it easier to visually differentiate between current affairs and the news.
- Telling audiences that a politician is presenting and disclosing their party.
- Making it clearer who counts as a “politician”.
- Preventing politicians from interviewing members of their own party.
- Ensuring politicians present alternative points of view robustly and respectfully.

Although there were differing levels of support for each, it was felt these mitigations could help balance participants' concerns around misleading audiences and ensuring due impartiality, with their belief in freedom of expression and freedom to choose what to watch or listen to.

# 6 Appendices

## Appendix A - Methodology

The research took a qualitative approach to understand the nuances in participant perspectives and the reasons why individual participants held their views. The focus group setting meant there was sufficient time to capture spontaneous opinions before moving participants towards more considered and informed views, having learned more about the topic of due impartiality and associated regulations in the Broadcasting Code. A deliberative discussion meant moderators could fully probe participants and explore whether their opinions varied with different contextual factors and allowed them to consider trade-offs (e.g. any concerns vs. the importance of freedom of expression).

Fieldwork took place between 16<sup>th</sup> August and 11<sup>th</sup> October 2023 and consisted of 157 participants across 29 focus groups. The groups each lasted 2.5 hours and involved:

- 15 focus groups with frequent viewers or listeners of news and current affairs programmes (i.e. those consuming this content at least weekly) from across the UK.
- Three focus groups with lower engaged audiences in England who did not frequently watch or listen to these type of programmes (i.e. once a month or less)
- 11 groups with audiences of channels where politicians have been presenting current affairs content more regularly, with participants from across the UK and political spectrum.

### Sample breakdown

#### General audience focus groups

Given differing political contexts across the UK and the potential sensitivities of the discussion, the general audience groups were segmented by nation and political leaning. Groups conducted with lower engaged participants took place in England, with one group per political leaning. These groups had diverse news and current affairs habits and did not exclude participants who told us they watched or listened to GB News, TalkTV / TalkRadio, LBC or Times Radio.



In total, 99 participants were included in the general audience groups. The table below provides a demographic breakdown of these groups:

**Table 1.1: Demographic breakdown of general audience focus groups**

|               |        |    |
|---------------|--------|----|
| <b>Gender</b> | Male   | 52 |
|               | Female | 47 |
| <b>Age</b>    | 18-34  | 34 |

|                                 |   |    |
|---------------------------------|---|----|
|                                 | 35-54   | 34 |
|                                 | 55+   | 31 |
| Social grade                    | AB  | 34 |
|                                 | C1C2  | 35 |
|                                 | DE  | 30 |
| Region                          | South England                                   | 14 |
|                                 | Midlands  | 15 |
|                                 | North England                                   | 15 |
|                                 | Wales   | 15 |
|                                 | Scotland  | 22 |
|                                 | Northern Ireland                                | 18 |
| Political leaning               | Right   | 20 |
|                                 | Left  | 22 |
|                                 | Centre  | 17 |
|                                 | Unionist (in Scotland)                          | 11 |
|                                 | Independence (in Scotland)                      | 11 |
|                                 | Unionist (in Northern Ireland)                  | 6  |
|                                 | Nationalist (in Northern Ireland)               | 6  |
|                                 | Neither (in Northern Ireland)                   | 6  |
| News and current affairs habits | Frequent viewers or listeners (at least weekly) | 82 |
|                                 | Lower engaged (monthly or less)                 | 17 |

### Audience specific focus groups

The audience specific groups involved speaking to 58 participants. These were participants who told us they frequently watched or listened to the respective channel and had a favourable view towards it.



Table 1.2: Demographic breakdown of audience specific focus groups

|              |               |    |
|--------------|---------------|----|
| Gender       | Male          | 30 |
|              | Female        | 28 |
| Age          | 18-34         | 10 |
|              | 35-54         | 22 |
|              | 55+           | 26 |
| Social grade | AB            | 24 |
|              | C1C2          | 25 |
|              | DE            | 9  |
| Region       | South England | 31 |

|                   |                  |    |
|-------------------|------------------|----|
|                   | Midlands         | 12 |
|                   | North England    | 11 |
|                   | Wales            | 1  |
|                   | Scotland         | 2  |
|                   | Northern Ireland | 1  |
| Political leaning | Right            | 31 |
|                   | Left             | 19 |
|                   | Centre           | 8  |

## Appendix B – Research materials

### Summary of clips

A pre-task was completed in participants' own time ahead of the focus groups via an online platform. Participants were asked to watch and listen to eight short clips of news and current affairs content. Most of the current affairs content involved a politician presenting. Clips were carefully chosen to ensure they included politicians from a range of different political parties, different channels and performing different roles within the clip (e.g. interviewing a guest, delivering a monologue etc.) Clips were important to bring the topic to life for participants. They were used as a springboard for the discussion, with groups then focusing more heavily on exploring hypothetical scenarios to avoid conversation becoming dominated by feelings towards individuals in the clips.

A total of 14 clips were rotated across the groups. Participants were told who was presenting in each clip but their profession in politics was not initially disclosed as it was important to see whether participants recognised them as politicians.

| 1 - <i>Sky News Breakfast</i> , Sky News, 16 April 2023                   |  |                           |
|---|--|---------------------------|
| Type of clip  | Description provided to participants   | Number of groups shown to |
| Standard news report  | You are about to watch a report from <i>Sky News Breakfast</i> about animal rights protesters disrupting the Grand National horse races.   | 27                        |
| 2 - <i>Question Time</i> , BBC One, 27 October 2022                       |  |                           |
| Type of clip  | Description provided to participants   | Number of groups shown to |
| Standard current affairs programme  | You are about to watch a clip from the BBC's <i>Question Time</i> , a programme where a panel answers questions from the public about topical issues. This episode, based in Dulwich, London, was presented by Fiona Bruce and the panel guests were Lucy Frazer, David Lammy, Julia Hartley-Brewer and Armando Iannucci. In this clip, an audience member asks a question about Rishi Sunak's leadership of the Conservative Party. | 23                        |
| 3 - <i>Jacob Rees-Mogg's State of the Nation</i> , GB News, 21 March 2023 |  |                           |
| Type of clip  | Description provided to participants   | Number of groups shown to |

|  |  |                                  |
|--|--|----------------------------------|
| Politician delivering monologue                                      | You are about to watch a clip from a programme presented by Jacob Rees-Mogg on GB News, called <i>Jacob Rees-Mogg's State of the Nation</i> in which he delivers a monologue about the Windsor Framework (which sets out post-Brexit arrangements between the UK and the EU particularly relating to Northern Ireland).  | 10                               |
| <b>OR <i>The Nigel Farage Show</i>, LBC, 29 August 2019</b>          |  |                                  |
| <b>Type of clip</b>  | <b>Description provided to participants</b>  | <b>Number of groups shown to</b> |
| Politician delivering monologue                                      | You are about to listen to a clip from <i>The Nigel Farage Show</i> presented on LBC by Nigel Farage. During the clip, Nigel Farage comments on Jeremy Corbyn's plans to block a 'no-deal' Brexit.   | 11                               |
| <b>4 - <i>James O'Brien (Sadiq Khan)</i>, LBC, 27 October 2017</b>   |  |                                  |
| <b>Type of clip</b>  | <b>Description provided to participants</b>  | <b>Number of groups shown to</b> |
| Politician being challenged  | You are about to listen to a clip of Sadiq Khan standing in as a guest presenter on the <i>James O'Brien</i> radio show on LBC. During a segment where listeners are encouraged to phone in to speak to the presenter, Sadiq Khan takes a call from a listener about his policy on Uber drivers in London and the treatment of minorities in Europe compared to the UK.  | 27                               |
| <b>5 - <i>Friday Night with Nadine</i>, Talk TV, 3 February 2023</b> |  |                                  |
| <b>Type of clip</b>  | <b>Description provided to participants</b>  | <b>Number of groups shown to</b> |
| Politician interviewing own party                                    | You are about to watch a clip of a programme presented by Nadine Dorries, in which she interviews Boris Johnson on the Conservative Party's prospects of winning the next election. Nadine Dorries also had a panel discussion with three guests: Sebastian Payne (former Whitehall editor of the Financial Times and author of the book "The Fall of Boris Johnson"), Charlotte Ivers (political correspondent at Times Radio) and Scarlett McGwire (former Labour adviser). The panel provided comments and analysis on Boris Johnson's statements in the interview. | 27                               |

| <b>6 - <i>Good Morning Britain</i>, ITV, 5 July 2023</b>  |  |                                  |
|---|--|----------------------------------|
| <b>Type of clip</b>   | <b>Description provided to participants</b>  | <b>Number of groups shown to</b> |
| Ex-politician   | You are about to watch a clip of <i>Good Morning Britain</i> on ITV presented by Ed Balls and Susanna Reid. The presenters interview Wes Streeting about the NHS.  | 27                               |
| <b>7 - <i>Friday Morning with Esther and Philip</i>, GB News, 17 March 2023</b>                 |  |                                  |
| <b>Type of clip</b>   | <b>Description provided to participants</b>  | <b>Number of groups shown to</b> |
| Politicians switching to a reporter on ground   | You are about to watch a clip of <i>Friday Morning with Esther and Philip</i> on GB News, presented by Esther McVey and Philip Davies. In this clip, the presenters speak to a reporter about the Duke of Sussex's libel court case against Associated Newspapers Limited. | 27                               |
| <b>8 - <i>The Unremembered: Britain's Forgotten War Heroes</i>, Channel 4, 10 November 2019</b> |  |                                  |
| <b>Type of clip</b>   | <b>Description provided to participants</b>  | <b>Number of groups shown to</b> |
| Documentary   | You are about to watch a clip from <i>The Unremembered: Britain's Forgotten War Heroes</i> on Channel 4 in which the presenter, David Lammy, visits a First World War cemetery in Kenya.   | 13                               |
| <b>OR - <i>Have I Got News For You?</i>, BBC One, 10 December 2021</b>                          |  |                                  |
| <b>Type of clip</b>   | <b>Description provided to participants</b>  | <b>Number of groups shown to</b> |
| Satirical comedy  | You are about to watch a clip from the BBC's <i>Have I Got News For You?</i> , presented by Jess Phillips. In the clip, Jess Phillips makes jokes about the (then) Prince of Wales, Boris Johnson and Sir Keir Starmer.  | 12                               |
| <b>9 - <i>The Briefing with Arlene Foster</i>, GB News, 22 April 2022</b>                       |  |                                  |
| <b>Type of clip</b>   | <b>Description provided to participants</b>  | <b>Number of groups shown to</b> |

| <p>Politician leading interview</p> <p>(Shown in Northern Ireland and one GB News group. Switched with clip 3)</p> | <p>You are about to watch a clip of GB News' <i>The Briefing with Arlene Foster</i>. In this clip the presenter, Arlene Foster, interviews guest Jo-Anne Nadler (former adviser to John Major) about the newly launched Privileges Committee inquiry into whether Boris Johnson misled Parliament over Covid-19 rule breaches.</p>   | 4                         |
|--|--|---------------------------|
| <p><b>10 - Ruth Davidson, Times Radio, 18 February 2022</b></p>  |  |                           |
| Type of clip   | Description provided to participants   | Number of groups shown to |
| <p>Politician leading interview</p> <p>(Shown in Scotland only. Switched with clip 8)</p>                          | <p>You are about to listen to a clip from <i>Ruth Davidson</i> on Times Radio. In this clip, the presenter Ruth Davidson interviews guests Lindsay McIntosh and Kevin Schofield about public trust in the Metropolitan Police and the resignation of its Commissioner, Cressida Dick.</p>  | 5                         |
| <p><b>11 - Question Time, BBC One, 13 February 2020</b></p>  |  |                           |
| Type of clip   | Description provided to participants   | Number of groups shown to |
| <p>Standard current affairs programme</p> <p>(Shown in Scotland only to include MSPs. Switched with clip 2)</p>    | <p>You are about to watch a clip from the BBC's <i>Question Time</i>, a programme where a panel answers questions from the public about topical issues. This episode, based in Dundee, was presented by Fiona Bruce and the panel guests were Tom Tugendhat, Ian Murray, Joanna Cherry, Val McDermin and Alex Massie. In this clip, an audience member asks a question about why Scotland wants to leave the United Kingdom and join the European Union.</p> | 4                         |
| <p><b>12 - Chris Bryant, LBC, 20 July 2022</b></p>   |  |                           |
| Type of clip   | Description provided to participants   | Number of groups shown to |

|   |  |          |
|---|--|----------|
| <p>Politician delivering monologue</p> <p>(Shown in Wales only to include Welsh MP. Switched with clip 8)</p> | <p>You are about to listen to a clip of Chris Bryant presenting his radio programme on LBC. In this clip, Chris Bryant discusses the Conservative leadership candidates Rishi Sunak, Penny Mordaunt and Liz Truss.</p> | <p>2</p> |
|---|--|----------|

### Table of hypothetical scenarios

Participants discussed a range of hypothetical written scenarios during the groups. These scenarios were developed by the research team to stimulate discussions around the contextual factors of politicians presenting content. The hypothetical scenarios did not name any politicians which meant the research could test the principle of politicians presenting, without discussion focusing on individuals who might evoke strong feelings. The scenarios presented are purely hypothetical and have been developed for illustrative purposes only. They are not intended to represent or predict any real-life scenarios. Any similarities to real life are coincidental and unintentional.

Group moderators drip fed information about the scenarios to participants and did not name any individual politicians. The scenarios were rotated across groups and each group did not discuss all the scenarios.

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>1 – Politician interviews another politician</b></p> | <p>A broadcaster recently launched a programme called “Inside Westminster”. The programme is hosted by a politician and is on a news channel called “News Today”. The politician said they wanted to show viewers how decisions are really made in government. The programme broadcasts once a week and involves interviews with guests and discussions about relevant news.</p> <p>In one episode, the politician explains they will be showing a pre-recorded interview with the Home Secretary. The week before, the Home Secretary had announced they were increasing police recruitment so more officers would be on the streets.</p> <p>The politician is currently a Security Minister in the same party as the Home Secretary and had campaigned for increasing police recruitment on the programme in the past. They were both involved in this announcement and discuss what went into making it possible, including how they had to work across parties to win support, as they say some other parties believed there wasn't enough funding for this policy.</p> <p>After the interview finishes, the politician, who is a Labour politician, cuts to a panel to comment on the discussion, including a right-wing newspaper journalist who criticises the policy saying the recruitment was unfunded and the Labour government is relying on “a magic money tree.”</p> |
| <p><b>2 – Former political advisor</b></p>                 | <p>The former chief adviser to the Prime Minister has presented a current affairs show for the last three years since resigning as an adviser.</p> <p>They start with a rundown of the main headlines from the day before launching into a monologue talking to camera where they discuss the Prime Minister's re-election chances.</p>  |

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | <p>The show is broadcast amid speculation in the newspapers that a General Election might be called soon. They share a clip of the Leader of the Opposition from an interview on another channel who says: <i>“a General Election will finally give the country a chance of to get rid of this reckless government.”</i></p> <p>The Prime Minister is being interviewed by the broadcaster’s political editor on the same channel later that evening. The former adviser says, <i>“I’ve known the Prime Minister for years. They should be feeling confident about facing the voters.”</i></p>  |
| <p><b>3 – Minor party leader</b></p>                     | <p>A politician leads a panel discussion on a mainstream TV channel following the news at 10pm.</p> <p>The politician is the leader of a minor party with few councillors and no MPs in Parliament. They have personally never held public office before.</p> <p>The panellists include two journalists, one from a left-wing newspaper, another from a right-wing paper, and a spokesperson from a refugee charity.</p> <p>The spokesperson from the refugee charity accuses the politician of lying after they say, <i>“millions of illegal immigrants are landing on our shores.”</i> The politician admits the numbers are in the tens of thousands and apologises for exaggerating. They then say, <i>“although if nothing is done, give it a few years, and I think we’ll be talking about millions.”</i></p> <p>The broadcaster clips this part of the conversation and shares it on their social media platform where it goes viral.</p>        |
| <p><b>4 - Politician interviews a party activist</b></p> | <p>A party activist was invited to take part in a live radio discussion. The format of the programme involves short interviews with multiple different people. Audiences can call-in to ask questions to both interviewees and the presenter.</p> <p>The guest presenter in this episode is a politician who used to be the environment minister until a few months ago. Although they lost their job as the environment minister, they are still an MP for the party in power.</p> <p>The party activist says they do not think the government is doing enough for the environment. The politician cuts off the interview and goes to a caller who is waiting.</p> <p>The next caller is a representative from the petrol industry. They start by laughing about the previous interview and the politician calls the activist <i>“a complete idiot.”</i></p> <p>The guest presenter for tomorrow’s episode is a politician from a different party.</p> |

## 5 – Politician as a reporter

A newsreader is presenting a news story in the studio and says they will now be cutting over to a reporter on the ground who has more details on the story. The reporter is also a serving politician.

The reporter is a serving MP from the Opposition (their party is not in government), and on the screen, it says they are “reporting live” outside the Houses of Parliament in Westminster. They are standing alone and speaking directly into the camera with a microphone. Before coming into Parliament, they had been a full-time political reporter.

The story is about a vote on a Healthcare Bill that the Government had narrowly won earlier that evening. The politician explains “*the atmosphere had been tense in Parliament*” and they personally had voted against it.

The newsreader thanks the politician for the latest report. They follow up by asking them why they think the Government won the vote. The politician says the Health Minister, in the opposing party to them, “*made a very convincing speech before the vote where they put forward a passionate case about how it could mean the government are able to build new hospitals.*”

## Discussion Guide

| Timings     | Discussion  |
|-------------|---|
| 5 mins      | <b>Introduction and set up</b>  |
| 5.30-5.35pm | <p>Moderator to introduce self, notetakers, and any observers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain the role of Ipsos - we are an independent research agency, aiming to help you share your views, ensuring we hear from everyone. Ipsos is working with Ofcom, the communications regulator, on a research study which aims to understand what is important to people when they are watching or listening to news and current affairs programmes.</li> </ul> <p>Explain confidentiality and MRS Guidelines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain that the groups will be video recorded, this will be securely held and deleted at the end of the research.</li> <li>• Explain that we will start the recording after we have done introductions (both audio and video). Explain that personal information, e.g., full name, email etc. will not be shared with Ofcom. The video recording will be securely deleted after the research project has ended. If needed ask participants to remove any surnames from their Zoom name.</li> <li>• Written report - will use quotes but no detailed attribution.</li> </ul> <p>Housekeeping/ground rules:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All opinions are valid / no right or wrong answers</li> <li>• Disagreements are fine but respect each other's opinions</li> <li>• Please try not to talk over each other</li> <li>• The group will last 2.5 hours and there will be a break in the middle.</li> <li>• There will be a lot to cover so we may need to move people on. This is not personal, but only to ensure we fit everything in.</li> <li>• Please keep your videos on throughout the group.</li> <li>• Please sit somewhere you're unlikely to be interrupted in so you can participate in the discussion. If you do need to leave to use the bathroom or to attend to something urgent then that's fine but please try to minimise this.</li> <li>• If your Wi-Fi stops working or you disconnect from the call, then please try your best to rejoin. If possible, we will get someone to call you to help you to join the discussion again. If my Wi-Fi drops out, then please wait on the call until I'm able to rejoin.</li> </ul> |

|                    |  |
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|                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will be recording the discussion, but we want this to be a safe space where people can share their opinions in confidence, so would ask that you don't and that you <b><u>do not circulate any information to do with this discussion with anyone outside of the group, e.g., in conversation, on social media.</u></b></li> </ul> <p><u>Participant introductions:</u></p> <p><b>Moderator to ask each participant for their name, where they are from and what news or current affairs programmes they've been watching or listening to recently.</b></p>  |
| <b>15 mins</b>     | <b>News and current affairs habits</b>   |
| <b>5.35-5.50pm</b> | <p><b>I want to begin our discussion by exploring how you watch or listen to news or current affairs programmes in more detail.</b></p> <p><b>How do you decide where to go for news? What about current affairs programmes? [IF NEEDED: Current affairs could include programmes discussing topical political or social events.]</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What channel / station / website / app?</li> <li>When are you accessing these?</li> <li>Why are you picking these platforms? PROBE: distinctiveness, impartiality, news coverage, speed of breaking news, trust in sources, format, channel, relevance, range of opinions etc.</li> </ul> <p><b>Thinking about the clips we asked you to watch beforehand, how did you decide what type of programme it was? e.g. whether it was a news or current affairs programme or something different?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Was it difficult / easy?</li> <li>What factors informed your decision?</li> </ul> <p><b>What does a "<u>current affairs</u> programme" look like?</b></p> |

- What's the typical format of these shows?
- Are there any features that you associate with current affairs programmes compared to other types of shows?
- Is this different for the radio?

**How do current affairs programmes compare to the news?**

- How are they similar / different?
- Who presents them?

**What else might indicate a show is a news programme?**

- What might you expect to see on the screen?
- PROBE: Rolling news headlines? Time / weather stamps? Live / reporting from journalists 'on the ground'? Reporting on events as they happen or have happened very recently (e.g. in the last 12-24 hours)? The backdrop? The presenter reading to the audience? Length? Westminster backdrop?
- Would you expect to see these features on a current affairs programme?
- What indicates a news programme on the radio? How does this compare to a current affairs programme on the radio? PROBE: news bulletins, types of content e.g. weather, sport, certain sounds e.g. Big Ben, time e.g. on the hour

SHOW SLIDES 5-6 DEFINING NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS PROGRAMMES

**Are those the characteristics you would expect for a news programme?**

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
|                 | <p><b>What about a current affairs programme?</b></p> <p><b>How clear or unclear are the distinctions between news and current affairs programmes? What stands out to you?</b></p>   |
| <b>10 mins</b>  | <b>Spontaneous reactions to politicians presenting</b>   |
| <b>5.50-6pm</b> | <p><b>I want you to think about aspects of the clips in a bit more detail now.</b></p> <p><i>Moderators to note: this is an opportunity to discuss any spontaneous political views here before we park these topics to focus on the primary question of politicians presenting programmes.</i></p> <p><b>What did you think about the clips we showed you as part of the pre-task?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did anything stand out to you? Why?</li> </ul> <p><b>Did you notice any of the programmes used in the clips were presented by politicians?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who did you recognise?</li> <li>• Do you know which political party they are affiliated to?</li> </ul> <p><b>[SHARE SCREEN – TAKE THROUGH POLITICIANS]</b></p> <p><b>Are there any programmes or channels where you would expect to hear or see politicians presenting programmes?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What would you expect them to be doing?</li> </ul> |

- Are there any types of programmes you would be more comfortable with politicians presenting? Less comfortable?
- Do you watch or listen to any news / current affairs programmes presented by politicians? What do you like / dislike about these programmes?

**In general, how do you feel about politicians presenting current affairs programmes?**

- What are some of the benefits or downsides of politicians presenting programmes? What impact might this have on public debates in society?  
PROBE: Engaging with the public, accountability, democratic debate vs. lack of impartiality, partisanship etc.
- How would you feel if politicians were banned from presenting these programmes? Any benefits / downsides?
- To what extent do you trust the information provided in these programmes? How could this impact your trust in the channel more broadly?
- How is this different or similar to news programmes? In what ways / for what reasons?

**How would you feel about politicians being involved in presenting the news?**

- Would it change how you feel about watching/listening to the news?
- To what extent would you trust the information provided in these programmes?
- Do you think politicians should be allowed to do any of the following in news programmes:
  - To present the news?

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
|                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ To be a news reporter?</li> <li>○ To be interviewer within a news programme?</li> </ul>  |
| <b>15 mins</b>  | <b>Introducing due impartiality</b>   |
| <b>6-6.15pm</b> | <p><b>Before we discuss some of the clips you watched or listened to in more detail, I thought it would be helpful to explain Ofcom’s responsibilities when it comes to news and current affairs programmes. I’m going to share my screen and introduce you to some information.</b></p> <p>MODERATOR TO SHARE SLIDE 7 WITH AN OVERVIEW OF THE BROADCASTING CODE.</p> <p><b>Ofcom implements the Broadcasting Code which outlines the rules by which programmes broadcast on television and radio in the UK must abide. As you can see here, it sets out the rules across a range of topics, including due impartiality and due accuracy. Due impartiality is going to be the focus of our discussion today.</b></p> <p><b>I want to pause there briefly and think about “due impartiality”.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does “due impartiality” mean to you?</li> <li>• And what about “freedom of expression” – what does that mean to you?</li> </ul> <p><b>How important are these concepts to you personally? How important are they for society?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What would the impact be on TV or radio programmes if we didn’t have due impartiality / freedom of expression?</li> </ul> |

- What steps do you think broadcasters need to take to ensure a programme meets these standards?

PROBE FOR IMPARTIALITY: Sharing alternative perspectives, opinions being challenged, panel discussion, playing devil's advocate; presenters could summarise with due objectivity or ensure that the views expressed in a news item are challenged critically by presenters and reporters within the programmes; make clear that a broadcaster has sought alternative views from particular individuals or organisations etc.

*IF GROUP MENTIONS GIVING DIFFERENT VOICES EQUAL WEIGHT / TIMING. SEE NOTES ON SLIDE 9 OF STIMULUS:*

***What might the challenges of this approach be?***

- *Who would be responsible for enforcing this?*
- *Could one side still be favoured over the other? What if someone spoke strongly vs. someone speaking weakly?*

**I'm now going to provide definitions for due impartiality and freedom of expression.**

MODERATOR TO SHARE SLIDES 8-9-10 WITH DEFINITIONS.

- What do you think about these definitions? Are you surprised by anything?
- Would you expect broadcasters to treat news and current affairs programmes differently in how they ensure due impartiality?
  - Do you think more restrictions should be placed on news programmes compared to current affairs programmes?
  - What about in terms of who can present current affairs programmes vs. news programmes?

**I'm now going to explain how the rules apply to news and current affairs programmes, and connect this back to the conversation we were having about politicians presenting programmes.**

MODERATOR TO SHARE SLIDE 11-16 EXPLAINING HOW RULES APPLY TO NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS PROGRAMMING.

**How do you feel about the rules applying differently across news and current affairs programmes?**

- Are you surprised? Does this make sense to you? Why/why not?
- PROBE: different characteristics of news vs. current affairs, role played by news programmes vs. current affairs programmes in society e.g., information giving, audience expectations of different programmes, freedom of expression
- Does it matter that the rules are different across news and current affairs programmes?
- What do you think about the steps broadcasters can take to achieve due impartiality on TV or radio programmes?
  - Do you think these approaches are enough / too much for a typical current affairs programme?
  - What about for a current affairs programme presented by a politician – are these enough / too much?
  - How do you weigh this against freedom of expression? Are audiences being prevented from accessing content they want to watch/listen to?
  - To what extent do you feel this is censoring politicians by putting limits on what they are able to do on TV and radio? To what extent is that acceptable/ unacceptable?
- What do you think some of the consequences of the rules being different might be?

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
|                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What might the potential harm of politicians presenting programmes be?</li> <li>○ And what might the potential benefits of politicians presenting programmes be?</li> </ul> <p>PROBE: For you as a viewer? For wider audiences? For society overall? For democracy?</p>   |
| <b>20 mins</b>     | <b>Deeper reflection on the clips</b>  |
| <b>6.15-6.35pm</b> | <p><b>Now we have discussed Ofcom’s responsibilities, and given what we’ve learned about due impartiality, I want to go back to look at some of the clips you watched before this group.</b></p> <p><b>Does what we’ve told you make you feel any differently about the clips we discussed? For what reasons?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do any stand out as more or less acceptable?</li> <li>• In what ways did the presenters ensure due impartiality?</li> </ul> <p><b>How do you think the rules around due impartiality should apply to these clips?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PROBE: are there any elements that you feel were more or less effective? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Answering questions / interviewing someone / hosting a panel discussion / sharing their views with the camera?</li> <li>○ Playing devils advocate / panel discussion / pre-recorded clips with alternative views/ reading out quotes etc.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How does this balance with the need for freedom of expression?</li> </ul> |

- To what extent, if at all, does this differ depending on the programme genre or topic? E.g. news vs. current affairs vs. documentary

### **Presentation**

**I want to think about different aspects of the clips we showed you. I'm going to share my screen and remind you of how some the programmes were set up.**

MODERATOR SHOW SLIDE 18 SHOWING DIFFERENT FACTORS. MODERATORS TO USE CLIP SUMMARY SLIDES AS NEEDED.

**As we've explored, the rules are different for whether politicians can present news programmes vs. current affairs programmes.**

**Does the presentation make a difference to whether audiences can identify whether a programme is current affairs or news?**

**[IF NOT COVERED]: What about:**

**How the presenter is sitting?**

- Does it make a difference if they are behind a desk? On a panel? On a sofa? Why / why not?
- What do the different settings suggest?

**The name of the channel?**

- Does it make a difference that Nadine Dorries is presenting on “Talk TV” vs. Esther McVey and Phillip Davies presenting on “GB News”?
- Does being on a “news” channel make a difference vs. a more general channel?
- What if the channel name wasn’t visible on the screen?

**The name of the show?**

- Does it make a difference if the programme name is shown on screen? E.g., “*Friday Night with Nadine*”?

**Rolling news banners being at the bottom of screen?**

- What, if anything, does this suggest about the show?
- What about the time and weather being shown?

**The backdrop being used during the interview?**

- Does a Westminster background make a difference to a more generic background? Why / why not?
- What, if anything, do different backgrounds suggest about the show?

**The subtitle being used?**

- Does it make a difference when they stress it’s someone’s opinion (e.g., “*Jacob’s take*”) vs. presenting daily events?

**Overall, how clear do you think it is visually that these programmes are current affairs rather than news?**

|                                       |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|
|                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What might the harm be if these distinctions are blurred? Does this matter?</li> </ul> <p><b>Overall, how do you feel about politicians presenting current affairs programmes?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the potential benefits? To you? Society overall?</li> <li>• What are the potential downsides? To you? Society overall?</li> </ul> <p><b>What elements do you think need to be in place to ensure due impartiality?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How should this be balanced against freedom of expression / giving individuals an opportunity to voice their views?</li> <li>• Should this be the same or different across news and current affairs programmes? For what reasons?</li> </ul> |
| <b>60 mins +<br/>10 min<br/>break</b> | <b>Hypothetical scenarios</b>  |
| <b>6.35-7.45pm</b>                    | <p><b>Welcome back. We're going to move on from the clips and do something a bit different for the rest of the focus group. I'm now going to share my screen and read out some hypothetical scenarios of how politicians might be involved in different programmes. We're going to discuss each of these in turn.</b></p> <p>MODERATOR TO DISCUSS SCENARIOS IN RANDOMISED ORDER</p> <p>GENERIC PROBES IF NEEDED:</p> <p><b>What do you think about this scenario?</b></p>  |

**How do you think it relates to due impartiality?****MODERATOR TO SHOW SLIDE 9 TO REMIND PARTICIPANTS OF THE MEANING OF DUE IMPARTIALITY****Does it make a difference if...**

- The role the politician is playing on the show (e.g., presenter vs. interviewer vs. contributor)
- The format of the show (e.g., call-ins vs. panel discussion vs. monologue; pre-recorded vs. live)
- Platform / channel (e.g., TV vs. radio vs. online; PSB vs. non-PSB, smaller channels etc.)
- The topic they are discussing and programme genre
- Politician's role within their party (and political leaning)
- Whether the politician / individual is in Parliament / Government or in a devolved legislature / devolved administration
- Who they are speaking to / who else is on the show
- The genre (e.g. established current affairs series vs. documentaries vs. light entertainment)
- The size of their party or whether their party has elected representatives?
- The channel / station they are on
- The timing of the discussion? (e.g., is it during following a major vote / announcement / around an election)
- Whether the programme is one of a series of editorially linked programmes covering the same topic

**To what extent would you trust the information shared during the programme?**

- Would this impact your trust of wider news / current affairs? On this channel? More generally?

**SCENARIO SPECIFIC PROBES: MODERATOR TO RANDOMISE THE ORDER THESE SCENARIOS ARE DISCUSSED IN.****1. Politician interviews another politician scenario:**

**A broadcaster recently launched a programme called “*Inside Westminster*”. The programme is hosted by a politician and is on a news channel called “News Today”. The politician said they wanted to show viewers how decisions are really made in government. The programme broadcasts once a week and involves interviews with guests and discussions about relevant news.**

- How would you feel about a politician presenting a show like this?
- What do you think about the reasons the politician gives as their motivations?
- From this description, would you think this show is a news or current affairs programme?
- The programme is considered a current affairs programme. How do you feel about it being included on a channel called “News Today”? Does it make a difference to your views that the channel is a specialist news and current affairs broadcaster?
- How would you expect the programme to meet due impartiality rules? [PROBE IF NECESSARY: Type of guests later in programme? Robust questioning? Presenter playing devil’s advocate? Summary of alternative viewpoint (i.e. screenshot of quotes / playing clips of interviews?)]

**In one episode, the politician explains they will be showing a pre-recorded interview with the Home Secretary. The week before, the Home Secretary had announced they were increasing police recruitment so more officers would be on the streets.**

- How do you feel about this? Would your opinion change: If the interview was live vs. pre-recorded? If the topic was less controversial? If there had been a policy announcement? Or if the announcement was due after the programme?

**The politician is currently a Security Minister in the same party as the Home Secretary and had campaigned for increasing police recruitment on the programme in the past. They were both involved in this announcement and discuss what went into making it possible, including how they had to work across parties to win support, as they say some other parties believed there wasn't enough funding for this policy.**

- How do you feel about the politician and the Home Secretary being in the same party? How might this affect the interview?
- Does your opinion change given they are both in the government? Is this different to just being in the same party? For what reasons? Would it make a difference if they were from different political parties?
- Does it become more or less acceptable given the politician is a security minister and the interview is about policing? How do you feel about them being involved in the announcement?
- What do you think about the content of the discussion? Would you be interested in hearing what made the announcement possible from them? Why / why not?

- To what extent is this an appropriate format for this discussion among politicians? Would an alternative format/genre be more or less acceptable? E.g. documentary
- To what extent do you feel the politicians provide a unique perspective? What might the impact of this be? On audiences? On society? On democratic debate?
- Does it make a difference that they acknowledge that some other parties had doubts about the policy? Why / why not?

**After the interview finishes, the politician, who is a Labour politician, cuts to a panel to comment on the discussion, including a right-wing newspaper journalist who criticises the policy saying the recruitment was unfunded and the Labour government is relying on “a magic money tree.”**

- Do you think the panel discussion with opposing points of view means the programme is impartial? Why / why not?
- Does your opinion change given the politicians are in a Labour government as opposed to a Conservative government? For what reasons?

**2. Former political adviser scenario:**

**The former chief adviser to the Prime Minister has presented a current affairs show for the last three years since resigning as an adviser.**

- How would you feel about this situation? Is this any different to a politician presenting a programme? Why / why not? [IF NEEDED Probe: adviser role, closeness to the Prime Minister, role in public life.]

- Does the fact they've been presenting the programme for three years influence your opinion at all? What if they were a journalist before going into politics?

**They start with a rundown of the main headlines from the day before launching into a monologue talking to camera where they discuss the Prime Minister's re-election chances.**

- From this description, would you think this show is a news or current affairs programme?
- What concerns, if any, would you have about this format? PROBE: What type of headlines might you expect them to cover? How do you feel about it being a monologue? How is that similar or different to other guests / presenters being involved?
- How do you feel about the former adviser discussing the PM's re-election chances? What might be the benefits or downsides of this for audiences?
- The adviser never joined the Prime Minister's political party, they just worked for them. Does that change how you feel at all? For what reasons?

**The show is broadcast amid speculation in the newspapers that a General Election might be called soon. They share a clip of the Leader of the Opposition from an interview on another channel who says "*a General Election will finally give the country a chance of to get rid of this reckless government.*"**

- Does your opinion change given a General Election is anticipated? How might this broadcast influence voters?
- Does the clip from the Leader of the Opposition change your opinion about the earlier programme? Why / why not? How do you think this relates to due impartiality?

**The Prime Minister is being interviewed by the broadcaster's political editor on the same channel later that evening. The former adviser says, "I've known the Prime Minister for years. They should be feeling confident about facing the voters."**

- How might watching this programme impact your opinion of the PM's interview being broadcast later that evening? Why?
- What do you think about the adviser's tone? How does this change your opinion? Is it important they disclose their relationship with the PM?
- Would it make a difference if there are different perspectives broadcast on the same channel even if they are not shown on the programme itself?

**3. Minor party leader scenario:**

**A politician leads a panel discussion on a mainstream TV channel following the news at 10pm.**

- How would you feel about a politician presenting a show like this? Who might you expect / want to see on the panel?
- Does it make any difference that the programme follows the news at 10pm? Why / why not?
- From this description, would you think this show is a news or current affairs programme?

**The politician is the leader of a minor party with few councillors and no MPs in Parliament. They have personally never held public office before.**

- Does the politician's position change your opinion at all? Does it make a difference that they are not in Parliament[/devolved legislature]? For what reasons?

- Does it make any difference that their party does have *some* councillors but no MPs? For what reasons?

**The panellists include two journalists, one from a left-wing newspaper, another from a right-wing paper, and a spokesperson from a refugee charity.**

- Does the panel mix change your opinion at all? Why / why not? What if all the panellists were all from a right-wing party/perspective? Or a left-wing party /perspective?
- If you're watching programmes like this, how much attention, if any, do you pay to how politically balanced the panel is? Does it matter?

**The spokesperson from the refugee charity accuses the politician of lying after they say, "*millions of illegal immigrants are landing on our shores*". The politician admits the numbers are in the tens of thousands and apologises for exaggerating.**

**They then say, "*although if nothing is done, give it a few years, and I think we'll be talking about millions.*"**

- What do you think about this situation? What might the consequences of this be?
- Does it make a difference that someone is able to challenge the politician? Why / why not?
- What do you think about the politician's apology? Do you think this was enough / too much?

**The broadcaster clips this part of the conversation and shares it on their social media platform where it goes viral.**

- How would you feel about this? Why do you think the broadcaster has shared this clip?
- Does it change how you feel about the politician presenting the programme?

**4. Politician interviews a party activist scenario:**

**A party activist was invited to take part in a live radio discussion. The format of the programme involves short interviews with multiple different people. Audiences can call-in to ask questions to both interviewees and the presenter.**

- How would you feel about a politician interviewing a party activist like this? What might the pros or cons of this be? Does it make a difference it is on the radio? How about the fact it is a live broadcast?
- Does it make a difference if the party activist and politician both work for the same party? What if they work for different parties?
- How would you feel about a party activist taking part in the show? Is this different to a politician? Why / why not?
- Does it make a difference that the politician interviews multiple people? What type of other people would you want included in the programme? Why?
- Does the fact the audience can call in and ask questions make a difference to your opinion? For what reasons?
- Does it make a difference if the public are there in person vs. a call-in?

**The guest presenter in this episode is a politician who used to be the environment minister until a few months ago. Although they lost their job as the environment minister, they are still an MP for the party in power.**

- Does it make any difference that the politician was the environment minister, and the conversation is about the party's environmental position?

- Would it make a difference if the party activist had a very different position to the politician? What if they had similar perspectives? For what reasons?
- How would you feel about ex-Ministers presenting programmes like this? Is it any different to a serving politician? For what reasons?
- What if the party activist was the presenter interviewing the politician? Is that more or less acceptable?
- What if the politician was a former Prime Minister instead of a more junior minister in the party? What if they were a Party Leader (in an opposition party)?
- Does it make any difference that their party is still in power? (i.e., their party leader is still the Prime Minister) Why?

**The party activist says they do not think the government is doing enough for the environment. The politician cuts off the interview and goes to a caller who is waiting.**

- How would you feel if the politician did this? How would you want a politician to act in this situation?
- What if the activist wasn't allowing the politician to respond and had been repeatedly speaking over them?

**The next caller is a representative from the petrol industry. They start by laughing about the previous interview and the politician calls the activist "a complete idiot."**

- How would you feel if a politician did this? Is your overall opinion changed by how they treated the caller?
- Does the fact the next caller is from the petrol industry change your opinion about their discussion with the activist at all?

**The guest presenter for tomorrow's episode is a politician from a different party.**

- Does it make a difference that the politician is a guest presenter rather than a regular presenter for the programme?
- Does the fact there are alternative perspectives each day make a difference to how you feel about this episode?

How effective is having different presenters across a series at ensuring due impartiality? What are the potential benefits and risks?

**5. Politician as a reporter scenario:**

**A newsreader is presenting a news story in the studio and says they will now be cutting over to a reporter on the ground who has more details on the story. The reporter is also a serving politician.**

- How would you feel about a serving politician acting as a reporter like this?
- Does it depend on what the story is about? Are there stories where a politician reporting would be more or less acceptable?
- Does it make a difference that a newsreader is leading discussion? How might this impact the impartiality of the discussion?

**The reporter is a serving MP from the Opposition (their party is not in government), and on the screen, it says they are "reporting live" outside the Houses of Parliament in Westminster. They are standing alone and speaking directly into the camera with a microphone. Before coming into Parliament, they had been a full-time political reporter.**

- Does it make a difference that they are an Opposition MP? Why / why not? *MODERATOR TO EXPLAIN WHAT OPPOSITION MP MEANS IF NECESSARY.*

- How do you feel about the format of the discussion? Would you consider this to be news or current affairs?
- Does it make a difference that the reporting is happening live?
- Does the setting outside the Houses of Parliament make a difference to your opinion? Why / why not?
- Does the politician's previous career make a difference to how you feel? Why / why not?

**The story is about a vote on a Healthcare Bill that the Government had narrowly won earlier that evening. The politician explains “the atmosphere had been tense in Parliament” and they personally had voted against it.**

- How do you feel about this scenario? What do you think the politician is adding to the story, if anything?
- How do you feel about the politician saying they had voted against the Bill? Is it important that the politician discloses any potential biases?
- Does it make a difference that the politician was on the losing side of the vote? Why / why not?

**The newsreader thanks the politician for the latest report. They follow up by asking them why they think the Government won the vote. The politician says the Health Minister, in the opposing party to them, “*made a very convincing speech before the vote where they put forward a passionate case about how it could mean the government are able to build new hospitals.*”**

- Does this change how you feel at all?
- Would something like this be enough to make the report duly impartial? Why / why not?

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
|                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How effective do you think it is to have the news reader asking questions like this to bring out opposing points of view? Are there any risks?</li> <li>• How might this segment impact how you feel about the rest of the news programme? Even if they move on to discuss other stories? How might it feel about your trust in news in general?</li> </ul>   |
| <b>15 mins</b>  | <b>Future of the rules and wrap up</b>   |
| <b>7.45-8pm</b> | <p><b>I want to end by reflecting on everything we've been discussing today and how things might change in the future.</b></p> <p><b>What elements do you think need to be in place to ensure due impartiality?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How should this be balanced against freedom of expression / giving individuals an opportunity to voice their views?</li> <li>• Should this be the same or different across news and current affairs programmes? For what reasons?</li> </ul> <p><b>Overall, what do you think about politicians presenting <u>current affairs</u> programmes?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think the potential benefits are?</li> <li>• What, if any, concerns do you have? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What would make politicians presenting current affairs programmes more acceptable? PROBE: presentation (e.g. name of programme/ channel, rolling news banner etc.; balance of perspectives throughout programme; role of politician and their party/affiliations)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |

**Does this change your trust in news and current affairs more generally? In what ways?**

- PROBE: Does this just apply to programmes involving politicians? Or does this also affect your views towards other news/ current affairs programmes?
- **PROBE: How might this impact wider society, if at all?** PROBE: access to information, polarisation, political bias, trust in news media, effects on democratic debate

**What would be the consequences of extending the rules restricting politicians from presenting news to current affairs programmes?**

- What might be the positives / benefits of this? For who?
  - PROBE: impartial/ informed discussions, trust in broadcast media, reduced polarisation
- What might be the downsides? For who?
  - PROBE: freedom of expression, democratic debate, un-informed electorate
- In what ways could this impact society, if at all? Does it matter?
  - PROBE: impartial discussions? Informed discussions? Trust in the media? Connecting with the electorate? Informing the electorate? Impact on public debate? Freedom of expression?
- What might the challenges of extending the rules be?

- From what we've spoken about today, do you think restrictions on current affairs programmes should be as strict as news programmes? Why / why not? What about in terms of who can present them?

**What about if the rules were extended to all types of programmes? What might the impact of this be?**

**Overall, how do you think the rules about due impartiality should change in the future, if at all?**

- What impact could this have on viewers / listeners? Wider society?
- What would the benefits or downsides be of these changes?

**MODERATOR TO CLOSE SESSION:**

**Ask if there is anything else they would like to share with Ofcom about what we've been speaking about today.**

**Thank participants and explain incentives.**

## Stimulus materials

Classification: CONFIDENTIAL

### Thank you for watching the clips



Sky News Breakfast



Question Time



The Nigel Farage Show



James O'Brien (Sadiq Khan)



Friday Night with Nadine



Good Morning Britain



Friday Morning with Esther and Philip



The Unremembered: Britain's Forgotten War Heroes

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### News programmes

Each news programme is different, but some typical factors include:

-  A newsreader presenting to the audience
-  A running order or list of stories, often in short form
-  Use of reporters or correspondents to deliver packages or live reports
-  A mix of video and reporter items



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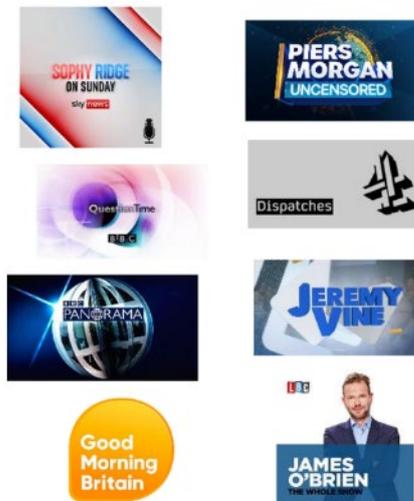
Classification: CONFIDENTIAL

### Current affairs programmes

Each programme is different, but content typically covers explanation and/or analysis of current issues and events, including matters dealing with political or industrial controversy or with current public policy.

Examples of features include, but are not limited to:

- A longer form programme
- Extensive discussion, analysis, panels or interviews with guests, often live
- Long form pre-recorded reports



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## The Broadcasting Code

|                                 |                                 |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Protecting the under-18s        | Fairness                        |
| Harm and offence                | Privacy                         |
| Crime, disorder, hatred + abuse | Due impartiality + due accuracy |
| Religion                        | Commercial references           |

Ofcom also considers freedom of expression when making decisions about TV and radio content.

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## Due impartiality means...

What are the rules for?

- To make sure viewers and listeners can trust what they see and hear in news and current affairs programmes.
- To make sure that news and current affairs programmes with politically controversial subjects are duly impartial.

Why are they needed?

- To ensure that the broadcast media provide a counter-weight to other, often partial, sources of news. They therefore contribute to properly informed democratic debate.

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## Due impartiality means:



**Due impartiality does not** mean that news and current affairs broadcasters must give an equal amount of time to every view. To require this would restrict broadcasters' editorial freedom and would create practical problems.

News and current affairs providers are instead meant to be **unbiased trusted sources in how they present different viewpoints** – challenging, probing, testing alternatives as appropriate as well as providing context to help inform viewers.

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## It is also important to consider freedom of expression...

**Freedom of expression is everyone's right to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference**

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## Due impartiality in news and current affairs programmes

### News programmes

News must be reported with due accuracy and presented with due impartiality

### Current affairs programmes

Non-news programmes must preserve due impartiality where they deal with matters of political or industrial controversy and/or matters relating to current public policy

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## . And the rules are slightly different during a general election and referendum...

- During an election/referendum period, political candidates or people representing organisations taking part in a referendum must not present any TV or radio programme.
- They are allowed to appear in (but not present) non-political programmes that were planned or scheduled before an election/referendum period

Classification: CONFIDENTIAL

## How do the rules apply to politicians...

### ... on news programmes?

Politicians cannot be newsreaders, interviewers or reporters in any news programme (unless, exceptionally, it is editorially justified)



### ... on current affairs programmes?

Politicians can present or appear on current affairs programmes (but must preserve due impartiality on programmes dealing with matters of political controversy and/or current public policy)



And the rules are slightly different during a general election and referendum...

- During an election/referendum period, political candidates or people representing organisations taking part in a referendum must not present any TV or radio programme.
- They are allowed to appear in (but not present) non-political programmes that were planned or scheduled before an election/referendum period

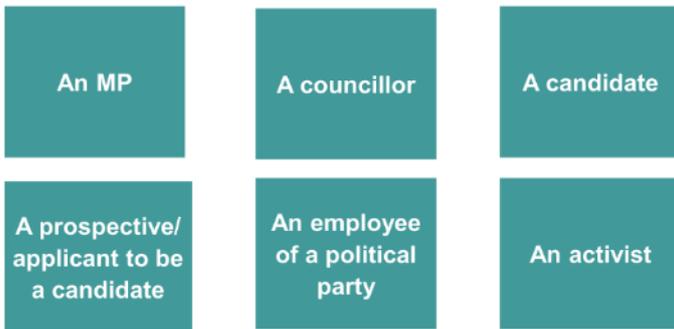
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## Who counts as a politician?

A politician is likely to include an elected representative, but may be considered to be:



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## What could make a programme impartial?



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## Why Ofcom are interested in hearing your views



In recent months, there has been an increasing use of politicians as presenters in current affairs programmes.

This has led to recent public interest and debate about politicians presenting and appearing on TV and radio.

Our discussion will inform their thinking on whether the current due impartiality rules are still best serving the purpose they were designed for.



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## What we are interested in about talking today...

- 1 **Your opinion on the current rules and how they apply differently to news and current affairs**
- 2 **Whether you think the distinction between news and current affairs programmes are clear**
- 3 **Whether the due impartiality rules should change (e.g., extending rules for news to other programmes)**

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## Sky News Breakfast, Sky News, 16 April 2023



A report from Sky News Breakfast about animal rights protesters disrupting the Grand National horse races.

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Classification: CONFIDENTIAL

## Question Time, BBC One, 27 October 2022



A programme where a panel answers questions from the public about topical issues. This episode, based in Dulwich, London, was presented by Fiona Bruce and the panel guests were Lucy Frazer, David Lammy, Julia Hartley-Brewer and Armando Iannucci. In this clip, an audience member asks a question about Rishi Sunak's leadership of the Conservative Party.

Classification: CONFIDENTIAL

## Question Time, BBC One, 13 February 2020



A clip from the BBC's Question Time, a programme where a panel answers questions from the public about topical issues. This episode, based in Dundee, was presented by Fiona Bruce and the panel guests were Tom Tugendhat, Ian Murray, Joanna Cherry, Val McDermid and Alex Massie. In this clip, an audience member asks a question about why Scotland wants to leave the United Kingdom and join the European Union.

Classification: CONFIDENTIAL

## The Nigel Farage Show, LBC, 29 August 2019

The Nigel Farage Show, LBC,  
29 August 2019

The Nigel Farage Show presented on LBC by Nigel Farage. During the clip, Nigel Farage comments on Jeremy Corbyn's plans to block a 'no-deal' Brexit.

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Classification: CONFIDENTIAL

## Jacob Rees-Mogg's State of the Nation, GB News, 21 March 2023



A clip from a programme presented by Jacob Rees-Mogg on GB News, called Jacob Rees-Mogg's State of the Nation in which he delivers a monologue about the Windsor Framework (which sets out post-Brexit arrangements between the UK and the EU particularly relating to Northern Ireland).

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## James O'Brien (Sadiq Khan), LBC, 27 October 2017



Sadiq Khan standing in as a guest presenter on the *James O'Brien* radio show on LBC. During a segment where listeners are encouraged to phone in to speak to the presenter, Sadiq Khan takes a call from a listener about his policy on Uber drivers in London and the treatment of minorities in Europe compared to the UK.

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Classification: CONFIDENTIAL

## Friday Night with Nadine, Talk TV, 3 February 2023



A programme presented by Nadine Dorries, in which she interviews Boris Johnson on the Conservative Party's prospects of winning the next election. Nadine Dorries also had a panel discussion with three guests: Sebastian Payne, Charlotte Ivers and Scarlett McGwire. The panel provided comments and analysis on Boris Johnson's statements in the interview.

Classification: CONFIDENTIAL

## Good Morning Britain, ITV, 5 July 2023



An episode of Good Morning Britain on ITV presented by Ed Balls and Susanna Reid. The presenters interview Wes Streeting about the NHS.

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Classification: CONFIDENTIAL

## Friday Morning with Esther and Philip, GB News, 17 March 2023



A programme presented by Esther McVey and Philip Davies. In this clip, the presenters speak to a reporter about the Duke of Sussex's libel court case against Associated Newspapers Limited.

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Classification: CONFIDENTIAL

## The Unremembered: Britain's Forgotten War Heroes, Channel 4, 10 November 2019



A programme in which the presenter, David Lammy, visits a First World War cemetery in Kenya.

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Classification: CONFIDENTIAL

## Have I Got News For You?, BBC One, 10 December 2021



A clip from the BBC's Have I Got News For You?, presented by Jess Phillips. In the clip, Jess Phillips makes jokes about the (then) Prince of Wales, Boris Johnson and Sir Keir Starmer.

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Classification: CONFIDENTIAL

## The Briefing with Arlene Foster, GB News, 22 April 2022



A clip of GB News' The Briefing with Arlene Foster. In this clip the presenter, Arlene Foster, interviews guest Jo-Anne Nadler (former adviser to John Major) about the newly launched Privileges Committee inquiry into whether Boris Johnson misled Parliament over covid rule breaches.

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Classification: CONFIDENTIAL

## Ruth Davidson, Times Radio, 18 February 2022



A clip from Ruth Davidson on Times Radio. In this clip, the presenter Ruth Davidson interviews guests Lindsay McIntosh and Kevin Schofield about public trust in the Metropolitan Police and the resignation of its Commissioner, Cressida Dick.

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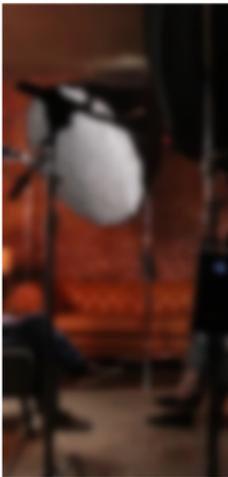
Classification: CONFIDENTIAL

## Chris Bryant, LBC, 20 July 2022



You are about to listen to a clip of Chris Bryant presenting his radio programme on LBC. In this clip, Chris Bryant discusses the Conservative leadership candidates Rishi Sunak, Penny Mordaunt and Liz Truss.

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A broadcaster recently launched a programme called "Inside Westminster". The programme is hosted by a politician and is on a news channel called "News Today". The politician said they wanted to show viewers how decisions are really made in government. The programme broadcasts once a week and involves interviews with guests and discussions about relevant news.

In one episode, the politician explains they will be showing a pre-recorded interview with the Home Secretary. The week before, the Home Secretary had announced they were increasing police recruitment so more officers would be on the streets.

The politician is currently a Security Minister in the same party as the Home Secretary and had campaigned for increasing police recruitment on the programme in the past. They were both involved in this announcement and discuss what went into making it possible, including how they had to work across parties to win support, as they say some other parties believed there wasn't enough funding for this policy.

After the interview finishes, the politician, who is a Labour politician, cuts to a panel to comment on the discussion, including a right-wing newspaper journalist who criticises the policy saying the recruitment was unfunded and the Labour government is relying on "a magic money tree."

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The former chief adviser to the Prime Minister has presented a current affairs show for the last three years since resigning as an adviser.

They start with a rundown of the main headlines from the day before launching into a monologue talking to camera where they discuss the Prime Minister's re-election chances.

The show is broadcast amid speculation in the newspapers that a General Election might be called soon. They share a clip of the Leader of the Opposition from an interview on another channel who says: "a General Election will finally give the country a chance of to get rid of this reckless government."

The Prime Minister is being interviewed by the broadcaster's political editor on the same channel later that evening. The former adviser says, "I've known the Prime Minister for years. They should be feeling confident about facing the voters."

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A politician leads a panel discussion on a mainstream TV channel following the news at 10pm.

The politician is the leader of a minor party with few councillors and no MPs in Parliament. They have personally never held public office before.

The panellists include two journalists, one from a left-wing newspaper, another from a right-wing paper, and a spokesperson from a refugee charity.

The spokesperson from the refugee charity accuses the politician of lying after they say, "millions of illegal immigrants are landing on our shores." The politician admits the numbers are in the tens of thousands and apologises for exaggerating. They then say, "although if nothing is done, give it a few years, and I think we'll be talking about millions."

The broadcaster clips this part of the conversation and shares it on their social media platform where it goes viral.

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A party activist was invited to take part in a live radio discussion. The format of the programme involves short interviews with multiple different people. Audiences can call-in to ask questions to both interviewees and the presenter.

The guest presenter in this episode is a politician who used to be the environment minister until a few months ago. Although they lost their job as the environment minister, they are still an MP for the party in power.

The party activist says they do not think the government is doing enough for the environment. The politician cuts off the interview and goes to a caller who is waiting.

The next caller is a representative from the petrol industry. They start by laughing about the previous interview and the politician calls the activist "a complete idiot."

The guest presenter for tomorrow's episode is a politician from a different party.

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A newsreader is presenting a news story in the studio and says they will now be cutting over to a reporter on the ground who has more details on the story. The reporter is also a serving politician.

The reporter is a serving MP from the Opposition (their party is not in government), and on the screen, it says they are "reporting live" outside the Houses of Parliament in Westminster. They are standing alone and speaking directly into the camera with a microphone. Before coming into Parliament, they had been a full-time political reporter.

The story is about a vote on a Healthcare Bill that the Government had narrowly won earlier that evening. The politician explains "the atmosphere had been tense in Parliament" and they personally had voted against it.

The newsreader thanks the politician for the latest report. They follow up by asking them why they think the Government won the vote. The politician says the Health Minister, in the opposing party to them, "made a very convincing speech before the vote where they put forward a passionate case about how it could mean the government are able to build new hospitals."

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# Our standards and accreditations

Ipsos' standards and accreditations provide our clients with the peace of mind that they can always depend on us to deliver reliable, sustainable findings. Our focus on quality and continuous improvement means we have embedded a "right first time" approach throughout our organisation.



## ISO 20252

This is the international market research specific standard that supersedes BS 7911/MRQSA and incorporates IQCS (Interviewer Quality Control Scheme). It covers the five stages of a Market Research project. Ipsos was the first company in the world to gain this accreditation.



## Market Research Society (MRS) Company Partnership

By being an MRS Company Partner, Ipsos endorses and supports the core MRS brand values of professionalism, research excellence and business effectiveness, and commits to comply with the MRS Code of Conduct throughout the organisation. We were the first company to sign up to the requirements and self-regulation of the MRS Code. More than 350 companies have followed our lead.



## ISO 9001

This is the international general company standard with a focus on continual improvement through quality management systems. In 1994, we became one of the early adopters of the ISO 9001 business standard.



## ISO 27001

This is the international standard for information security, designed to ensure the selection of adequate and proportionate security controls. Ipsos was the first research company in the UK to be awarded this in August 2008.



## The UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the UK Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018

Ipsos is required to comply with the UK GDPR and the UK DPA. It covers the processing of personal data and the protection of privacy.



## HMG Cyber Essentials

This is a government-backed scheme and a key deliverable of the UK's National Cyber Security Programme. Ipsos was assessment-validated for Cyber Essentials certification in 2016. Cyber Essentials defines a set of controls which, when properly implemented, provide organisations with basic protection from the most prevalent forms of threat coming from the internet.



## Fair Data

Ipsos is signed up as a "Fair Data" company, agreeing to adhere to 10 core principles. The principles support and complement other standards such as ISOs, and the requirements of Data Protection legislation.

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