

## Second reading briefing – Representation of the People Bill

### Regulate political advertising and ensure effective oversight

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The government's [policy paper](#) for electoral reform recognised that our democracy “is being threatened by misinformation”. The Prime Minister [has said he is](#) “very worried about the potential for misinformation in future elections in this country.” However, the [Representation of the People Bill](#) does not address this serious and growing threat, and risks being [a missed opportunity](#) to safeguard UK democracy and restore public trust.

Despite these acknowledgements, the Bill contains no provisions addressing misinformation in non-broadcast political advertising. This leaves a significant gap and exposes UK politics to a continual erosion in public trust.

#### Unchecked political advertising

Voter confidence depends on the reliability of information presented during campaigns. [Evidence from the Electoral Commission](#) shows that people in the UK frequently encounter misleading claims about politics and policies, and only 5% think enough is being done to tackle misinformation and disinformation in elections.

Non-broadcast political advertising – including social media and targeted digital ads – is currently exempt from oversight by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA). This [longstanding exemption](#) leaves a regulatory gap: [no independent authority](#) has the power to adjudicate on the honesty or accuracy of political campaigns.

Expert bodies have emphasised the need for statutory oversight. In June 2020, [the Chief Executive of the ASA called](#) for political advertising to be regulated and suggested that “Experts from several appropriate regulators could take on the task.” The Committee on Democracy and Digital Technologies [echoed this call](#).

Public opinion supports reform. Opinion research, [commissioned by Reform Political Advertising in 2024](#), found that 56% of people would trust political adverts more if they knew they were regulated.

#### Current proposals are insufficient

The government's [policy paper](#) signalled plans to consult on a code of conduct for campaigning to “to ensure political debate is honest, transparent and remains civil and safe for all.” This reflected a proposal from the [Speaker's Conference](#). While this is a welcome recognition of the problem, this proposed code:

- is not included in the Representation of the People Bill as introduced;
- lacks clear scope, independent oversight and enforcement mechanisms; and
- leaves important questions unresolved, including around sanctions.

Without statutory backing and independent enforcement, voluntary guidance will have limited effect, particularly online where misleading content spreads rapidly and can influence voter perception before corrections occur.

#### Recommendations

##### **(1) Establish a statutory code of conduct**

The Bill should place the government's proposed code of conduct on a statutory footing, with minimum standards of honesty, accuracy and transparency in political ads, including for any use of AI-generated content. Compliance with the code should be mandatory for registered parties, candidates and campaigners.

##### **(2) Create independent regulatory oversight**

The Bill should establish a regulatory committee with powers to monitor and oversee compliance with these standards. Its membership should include experts from the ASA, Electoral Commission, Ofcom, UK Statistics Authority, and Information Commissioner's Office.

The regulatory committee must operate independently from government and political parties. Leadership and appointments should follow transparent processes that ensure a high level of independence. Sanctions and enforcement powers should be proportionate to correct breaches and deter non-compliance.

Given the speed and reach of digital campaigns, the committee must have the resources and processes to act promptly, ensuring misleading claims can be addressed before they affect an election.

## **Conclusion**

The Representation of the People Bill presents an opportunity for MPs to strengthen public trust in politics. By establishing robust statutory standards and independent enforcement for political campaigns, Parliament can ensure that voters encounter campaigns that are truthful, accountable, and transparent. Without these measures, misleading political content will continue to undermine confidence in democracy.

This is one in a series of briefings by Full Fact on measures to strengthen the Bill:

1. [Upgrade the Online Safety Act to safeguard the UK's democracy.](#)
2. [Create stronger rules to deal with political deepfakes.](#)
3. [Establish a comprehensive public library of political adverts.](#)
4. [Regulate to prevent misinformation and disinformation in political campaigns.](#)
5. [Create a transparent system for dealing with electoral information incidents.](#)
6. [Increase the investigative powers of the Electoral Commission.](#)
7. [Give platforms a statutory duty to support effective media and political literacy.](#)

For more information, please see our [policy paper](#). To discuss the issues raised in this briefing, please contact George Havenhand, Policy Manager at Full Fact, on [george.havenhand@fullfact.org](mailto:george.havenhand@fullfact.org).