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# Full Fact Report 2023

**Informed citizens:  
Addressing bad information  
in a healthy democracy**



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## About this report

Full Fact fights bad information. We do this in four main ways. We fact check claims made by politicians, public institutions, in the press and online. We then follow up on these, to stop and reduce the spread of specific claims. We campaign for systems changes to help make bad information rarer and less harmful, and advocate for higher standards in public debate.

This report explores how the online UK information environment can be improved to tackle bad information so citizens are better informed. It follows on from our 2022 report *Tackling online misinformation in an open society—what law and regulation should do*<sup>1</sup> and Part 4 can be read as an update of that in the context of what has happened with the Online Safety Bill. Our 2021 report, *Fighting a pandemic needs good information*,<sup>2</sup> considered how good information, communicated well, can benefit both individuals and society. Our 2020 report, *Fighting the causes and consequences of bad information*,<sup>3</sup> looked at the evidence we had built up over ten years' of Full Fact's work to address misinformation and the harms it poses to democratic society. Parts 1, 2 and 3 of this report can be seen as building on those earlier reports. This 2023 report is the fourth report that we are able to produce thanks to the support of the Nuffield Foundation.

[The Nuffield Foundation](#) is an independent charitable trust with a mission to advance social well-being. It funds research that informs social policy, primarily in Education, Welfare, and Justice. It also funds student programmes that provide opportunities for young people to develop skills in quantitative and scientific methods. The Nuffield Foundation is the founder and co-funder of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics, the Ada Lovelace Institute and the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory. The Foundation has funded this project, but the views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily the Foundation.

This report was written by staff at Full Fact and the contents are the responsibility of the Chief Executive. They may or may not reflect the views of members of Full Fact's cross-party Board of Trustees.

We would like to extend our warmest thanks to Anand Menon, Maeve Walsh, Poppy Wood, Ellen Judson, Alex Tait and Mark Franks for their comments on an earlier version of this report.

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<sup>1</sup> [fullfact.org/about/policy/reports/full-fact-report-2022](https://fullfact.org/about/policy/reports/full-fact-report-2022)

<sup>2</sup> [fullfact.org/about/policy/reports/full-fact-report-2021](https://fullfact.org/about/policy/reports/full-fact-report-2021)

<sup>3</sup> [fullfact.org/about/policy/reports/full-fact-report-2020](https://fullfact.org/about/policy/reports/full-fact-report-2020)

In addition, we thank our other supporters, our trustees and other volunteers of Full Fact. Full details of [our funding](#) are available on our website.

We would welcome any thoughts or comments to our Head of Policy and Advocacy, Glen Tarman, at [glen.tarman@fullfact.org](mailto:glen.tarman@fullfact.org).



## Summary

**The next UK general election is now less than two years away. Candidates from all parties will ask millions of people for their votes, and their trust. But public faith in politics and politicians is low. Access to good, reliable information is under threat at a time the public needs it most.**

Full Fact fights bad information and campaigns for higher standards from politicians, the media, and in our shared information landscape. Last year we published 624 fact checks and requested more than 180 corrections.

2022 was a damaging year for standards in public debate:

- As many as 50 MPs, including two Prime Ministers, Cabinet and Shadow Cabinet Ministers, failed to correct false, unevidenced or misleading claims, despite repeated calls from Full Fact to do so
- The statistics regulator had to write to the UK Government at least 10 times to challenge it on its use of statistics or other data
- A false claim about employment statistics was repeated at least 9 times in Parliament by a sitting prime minister and has yet to be officially corrected, despite challenge by the Office for Statistics Regulation, UK Statistics Authority and the House of Commons Liaison Committee
- The government's Online Safety Bill rowed back on promises to address harmful misinformation and disinformation, and now fails to protect freedom of expression.

Last year Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said he wanted to 'restore trust into politics'. Leader of the Opposition Keir Starmer said 'trust has to be earned'. The latest public polling on faith in politics and politicians suggests neither has yet succeeded.<sup>4</sup>

But there are effective steps our elected representatives can take, now. Full Fact asks the same of every individual or organisation active in public debate: get your facts right, back up what you say with evidence, and correct your mistakes.

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<sup>4</sup> Ipsos Issues Index, February 2023  
[ipsos.com/en-uk/economy-and-inflation-return-as-most-mentioned-important-issues-facing-britain](https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/economy-and-inflation-return-as-most-mentioned-important-issues-facing-britain)

In our 2023 report, we show how these principles should be applied in every area of public life to improve trust, enforce high standards and improve our information landscape ahead of the next general election.

## Honest politics

Ministers and government departments must provide evidence for what they say, and ensure that any statistics and data they rely on to back up their claims are provided publicly and responsibly.

This requires a strengthening of the Ministerial code, a culture change by both Ministers and government departments, and strong scrutiny by the statistics regulator and parliamentary committees.

Mistakes will always happen. But when they do they must be corrected quickly and transparently. It is important whether the claim is made on social media, or in a live broadcast, or in the House of Commons—40,000 people have joined Full Fact's campaign to extend Parliament's official corrections system to all MPs.

Bad information spreads rapidly unless it is clearly and prominently corrected.

## Safeguarding the next election

Every voter deserves good information. That is a challenge as the information environment becomes increasingly fragmented and fast moving, and those who seek to influence our vote communicate false or misleading information.

Our democratic process is vulnerable. Ahead of the next UK general election we need to make sure it is protected.

This means better and more formalised scrutiny of the political parties election manifestos, and the proper regulation of electoral advertising. It will also require improvements to the rules around the transparency of campaign materials to prevent deceptive tricks such as disguising the provenance of electoral material, or masquerading it as something separate and independent like a local newspaper.

We must also recognise that modern elections now take place against the backdrop of a highly connected online environment in which election misinformation and disinformation can spread rapidly and at scale. We urgently need more robust arrangements for dealing with situations that could quickly threaten the integrity of an election in the UK, including

by establishing a new Critical Election Incident Public Protocol and ensuring that internet platforms have adequate policies in place.

## Tackling bad information online

The Online Safety Bill that is currently progressing through Parliament will not properly address harmful misinformation and disinformation, or protect our freedom of expression. The House of Lords must take urgent steps to address what is currently a missed opportunity.

Regardless of how the Bill ends up, it must not be seen as the end of the story for online regulation, but the beginning of a new and evolving system. The rapid emergence of new, accessible generative AI shows how quickly new challenges can arise that threaten our information landscape.

## Our recommendations

1. **Government must evidence its claims:** ministers and government departments must provide evidence for what they say.
2. **Government must use official information responsibly:** ministers and government departments have a responsibility to be open and honest in their use of information, and must be held to account when they fail to do so.
3. **Fix the Parliamentary corrections system:** MPs must agree new Parliamentary rules that make it easy to correct mistakes—and sanction those who don't.
4. **Correcting claims beyond Parliament:** politicians making false and misleading claims in public must make corrections and the media that air these claims should do more to address them.
5. **End bullshit manifestos:** introduce better and more formalised scrutiny of election manifestos with political parties meeting higher standards in the presentation of their policy commitments.
6. **Reform electoral advertising:** political parties should accept the need for accountability and move to independent oversight of their advertising practices.
7. **End deceptive campaign practices by political parties:** parties must stop using misleading formats to gain votes, and new rules should be put in place.

8. **Protect electoral integrity, particularly in the online space:** government, Parliament and other authorities must act in recognition that the UK does not have adequate protections for our elections.
9. **Ensure the Online Safety Bill tackles bad information:** turnaround the Bill's failure to properly address harmful online misinformation and disinformation.
10. **Tackle harmful health misinformation:** government must prioritise addressing harmful health misinformation in online safety regulation and with a multifaceted set of responses and actors.
11. **Prioritise better online media literacy:** help protect people from harmful bad information online by ensuring they have the skills and understanding to spot and deal with it.
12. **Make the future online regulatory framework work to address harmful misinformation:** a proactive approach is needed to make the most out of the forthcoming regulatory framework while ensuring that it is improved to better address bad information in timely and effective ways.

Full Fact's work is only possible thanks to the support of the thousands of individuals across the country. **For updates and opportunities to take action against bad information, join us: [fullfact.org/signup](https://fullfact.org/signup)**



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