Key findings

1. Most of the UK public find it hard to identify false information online and believe it is harming democracy in the country.

2. A quarter of the UK public – particularly regular users of social media – are worried their political opinions are based on false information.

3. Most of the UK public expect false information to influence the next general election result and back the regulation of political claims.
Ahead of the general election in 2024, Full Fact commissioned Ipsos UK to conduct research among the UK public to understand attitudes to misinformation and politics.

Much has changed in the UK since the study was previously run in 2021, and therefore a new read on public opinion was required.

Experts have called the current macro context a ‘polycrisis’. In the past three years the UK has been through COVID-19 lockdowns and vaccinations, seen three Prime Ministers in one year, while the war in Ukraine and subsequent inflation and interest rates have risen to levels that, to a new generation, are unknown.

Fieldwork was conducted from the 19th – 21st December 2023.

2000 15-minute online, self-completed interviews were completed by a nationally representative sample of the adult UK public across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Data shown in this report refers to the UK General Public unless otherwise noted.

Quotas were set on age, gender and region to match UK population profile. The data is weighted so that the sample composition best reflect the demographic profile of the UK adult population according to the most recent census data.
The majority are worried about the spread of false or misleading information.

Q. To what extent, if at all, are you worried about the spread of false or misleading information about the news, current affairs or issues that affect you? (% worried)
Base (all adults): 2000

Q. What would you say are the most important issues facing Britain today? (Top 20)
Base (all adults): 2000

68% are worried about the spread of false or misleading information

23% Nearly a quarter say the spread of fake news and misinformation is one of the most important issues facing Britain today (above taxation, pensions and defence).
Most think the prevalence of false information online is harming UK democracy, politics and people’s health.

Q. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. (% agree)

Base (all adults): 2000

- 73% agree there is a negative effect on democracy in the UK
- 71% agree there is a negative effect on UK politics
- 64% agree there is a negative effect on people’s health
At least half think it’s not easy to tell true information from false online or trustworthy sources, and one in three has falsely believed a news story.

Q. Thinking about all the different types of information in the news and current affairs that you see online, how easy or difficult do you find it to tell the difference between [...] (% difficult / neither easy or difficult)
Base (all adults): 2000

Q. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. (% agree)
Base (all adults): 2000

Half say they do not find it easy to tell which sources are trustworthy and which are not*

*50% ‘not easy’

1/3 have falsely believed a news story was real until they found out it was fake*

*34% agree
While most don’t think they live in an ‘internet bubble’, they are much more convinced that others do.

Q. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. (% agree)
Base (all adults): 2000

I live in my own bubble on the internet, mostly connecting with people like myself and looking for opinions I already agree with.

The average person in the UK lives in their own ‘bubble’ on the internet, mostly connecting with people like themselves and looking for opinions they already agree with.

Younger people are more likely to say they live in an ‘internet bubble’. 

Ages 18-34: +13pp vs Ages 55-64: -10pp
More than half think the average person in the UK is indifferent to facts but they themselves always do further research on the news.

Q. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. (% agree)
Base (all adults): 2000
Below is a list of statements about the upcoming general election. Please indicate to what extent you agree, or disagree, with each of the following statements. (% agree)
Base (all adults): 2000

59%

The **average person in the UK doesn’t care about facts** about politics and society anymore, they just believe what they want.

56%

I always **do further research on the news** and current affairs information before I believe it.

+13pp

Those who say they have **changed their voting preference because of false or misleading claims in politics** are significantly more likely to think the average person doesn’t care about facts anymore.
Television remains widely used and highly trusted, in contrast to video sharing websites.

Q. Where, if anywhere, do you typically get your information from about the news, current affairs, and issues that affect you?
Base (all adults): 2000

Q. To what extent, if at all, do you trust what you read or hear from each of the following? (% trust)
Base (all adults): 2000

Note: Usage of media sources was asked about local, regional and national printed newspapers and magazines separately. The figure for ‘Printed newspapers and magazines’ is therefore an average of these three ratings.
Social media is overwhelmingly blamed for false information, and approximately half feel Government should take responsibility.

Q. Who, if anyone, do you think is most to blame for the spreading of false or misleading information in the news, current affairs, or about issues that affect you?
Base (all adults): 2000

Q. In your opinion, who, if anyone, should be responsible for tackling the problem of spreading false or misleading information in the news, current affairs or issues that affect you?
Base (all adults): 2000
Facebook is the most used and most blamed for spreading false or misleading information.

Q. How often, if at all, do you use each of the following social media platforms or messaging services? % most days in a week or more

Base (all adults): 2000

Q. And which of the following social media and video-sharing sites do you think are most to blame for spreading false or misleading information in the news, current affairs, or about issues that affect you?

Base (use social media): 1100

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media or Messaging Service</th>
<th>Most to Blame</th>
<th>Use Most Days in a Week or More</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X (formerly Twitter)</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TikTok</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snapchat</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reddit</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threads</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitch</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ages 18-34

Younger people are more likely to think Instagram and YouTube are to blame for spreading false information.

+12pp

+15pp
The vast majority think false information is deliberately spread, with pushing an agenda being the top motivation for doing so.

Q. What do you think are the main reasons, if any, some people or organisations spread false or misleading information in the news, current affairs, or about issues that affect you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They want to change people’s opinion on a topic or push their own agenda</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They want to make money by getting more people to view, read or see their content</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They want to turn different groups of people against each other</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They want to encourage people to adopt extreme political views</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They want to interfere in the democratic process</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They want to be famous or raise their profile</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They want to erode trust in institutions</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are not aware of what they are doing or they do it by mistake</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those who are worried about false information are significantly more likely to state all factors as motivations except for the accidental spread of false information.
Political impact of misinformation
Most think voters will be misled by false claims in next election campaign, and a quarter are worried their own political opinions are based on false information.

Q. Below is a list of statements about the upcoming general election. Please indicate to what extent you agree, or disagree, with each of the following statements. (% agree)

Base (all adults): 2000

Q. Out of the following list, please select the top 5 media channels you watch, read, or listen to.

Base (social media in top 5 channels): 853

Q. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. (% agree)

Base (agree negative effect on democracy): 643

I am concerned voters will be misled by false or misleading claims in the election campaign. 71%

I am worried that my own political opinions are based on false or misleading information. 25%

Those who think false information online has a negative effect on democracy in the UK are significantly more likely to feel that voters will be misled by false claims. 80%

Those who say social media channels among their top 5 media sources are more likely to be concerned that their own political opinions are based on false information. 34%
Most expect misinformation, generative AI, and deepfakes to have an impact on the election result.

Q. Thinking further about the upcoming election, what impact, if any, do you think the following will have on the general election result? % At least some impact
Base (all adults): 2000

Q. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. (% agree)
Base (all adults): 2000

it is possible to have a better, safer and more truthful internet in the future 58%

Election impact

Misinformation
Generative AI
Deepfakes

75%
54%
58%

Ages 18-34
+9 pp
+8 pp

Younger people are more likely to think that generative AI and deepfakes will have at least some impact on the general election result.
Lack of faith in politics is seen as a greater issue facing Britain than education or wages.

Q. What would you say are the most important issues facing Britain today? (Top 20)

Base (all adults): 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NHS / hospitals / healthcare</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflation / prices</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration / immigrants</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty / inequality</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pollution / environment / climate change</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ageing population / social care for elderly</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health / well-being</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime / law and order / anti-Social Behaviour</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of faith in politics / politicians / government</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public services in general</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low pay / minimum wage / fair wages</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education / schools</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petrol prices / fuel</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The spread of fake news / misinformation</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxation</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pensions / social security / benefits</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local government / council tax</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defence / foreign affairs / terrorism</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population levels / overpopulation</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Faith in the political system is very low – most think lying has increased in the last five years, and politicians are the least trusted source of news.

Q. And finally, do you think there is more, less or about the same amount of lying and misuse of facts in politics and media in the UK than there was five years ago? (% more)

Q. Below is a list of statements about the upcoming general election. Please indicate to what extent you agree, or disagree, with each of the following statements. (% agree)

Q. Below is a list of different ways you might get news about politics and current affairs. To what extent, if at all, do you trust what you read or hear from each of the following? Bases (all adults): 2000

Politicians are considered the least trustworthy source of news about politics and current affairs.

65% do not trust what they read or hear from politicians.
The public is highly sceptical that parties will be running honest campaigns.

Q. Thinking about the upcoming general election, how confident, if at all, are you that the following political parties will run honest campaigns?*

Base (all adults): 2000

*respondents were asked about political parties across all nations, but as base sizes for Wales and Northern Ireland are below n=100, these aren’t shown.
Manipulating evidence is seen as the most unacceptable behaviour in campaigns; the public strongly back regulation of political adverts.

Q. Below is a list of behaviours politicians and parties may engage in as part of a general election campaign. Which of these, if any, do you consider to be the most unacceptable?
Base (all adults): 2000

Q. Do you think it should or should not be a legal requirement that factual claims in political adverts must be accurate?
Base (all adults): 2000

**Most unacceptable behaviours among political parties**

- Actively manipulating or falsifying evidence: 34%
- Making a promise to voters they know they may not be able to deliver: 29%
- Making unrealistic or inaccurate manifesto promises: 25%
- Repeating claims even after they have been found to be false: 21%
- Keeping the public in the dark by withholding information: 19%
- Cherry picking statistics or using the most impressive numbers to support their view: 15%
- Misrepresenting each other’s policies: 10%
- Making a claim that was found to be false and correcting themselves: 9%
- Designing campaign materials to look like something they are not, such as to look like local newspapers: 8%
- Putting out campaign materials without prominent branding or posing as other organisations: 7%

**Legal requirement for political adverts**

88% think it should be a legal requirement that factual claims in political adverts must be accurate.
Over a third have been put off voting due to misleading political claims, and more than a quarter have changed their voting preference.

Q. Below is a list of statements about the upcoming general election. Please indicate to what extent you agree, or disagree, with each of the following statements. % agree

Base (all adults): 2000

- I have been put off voting by the level of false or misleading claims in current politics / the previous election campaign: 38%
- I have changed my voting preference due to false or misleading claims in current politics / the previous election campaign: 29%

Impact of false information on voting behaviour

Ages 18-34 vs Ages 55-64

+14pp vs -8pp

Younger people are more likely to have been put off voting by misinformation.
Four in five want to see politicians held to account on their claims, but only a minority feel empowered to make a difference.

Q. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. (% agree)

Base (all adults): 2000
There is high support for parties adopting honesty standards in manifestos and having spending commitments independently checked.

Q. Below is a list of statements about the upcoming general election. Please indicate to what extent you agree, or disagree, with each of the following statements. (% agree)

Base (all adults): 2000

- I trust what I read in or hear about political party manifestos: 25%
- I support political parties adopting a set of standards for honesty and transparency in manifests: 71%
- The spending commitments political parties make in their manifestos should be checked and costed by an independent body: 76%
- The commitments made in political party manifestos are important to me when determining my vote: 61%

Younger people are significantly more likely to trust what they read in or hear about political party manifestos than older generations.

Ages 18-34: +19pp
Ages 55-64: -17pp
Nearly a third have been motivated to get more involved due to false claims in politics and the previous election.

Q. Below is a list of statements about the upcoming general election. Please indicate to what extent you agree, or disagree, with each of the following statements. % agree

Base (all adults): 2000

Q. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. (% agree)

Base (those who agree it is possible to make real changes): 706

Those who believe that, when they get involved in politics, it is possible to make real changes to how the UK is run are significantly more motivated to get involved because of false claims.
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