

The BBC crisis

A reckoning for all

The BBC's troubles have been treated as a story about one broadcaster.

They are not.

It is right to acknowledge that the Panorama edit of Donald Trump's speech was misleading and editorially indefensible.

It serves no one to shield the BBC when it gets things wrong.

But it serves the country even less to imagine that these problems stop at Broadcasting House. We should just as firmly ensure that every outlet shaping public understanding, whether publicly funded, privately held or platform-run, is held to the same standards of transparency, accuracy and responsibility.

The UK is facing a collapse in trust in the news, one of the sharpest and deepest in Europe, at the very moment when formal oversight is weakest.

Moments like this don't come often.

This cannot be another passing argument about impartiality.

The collapse of trust in news is not the product of one edit or one broadcaster. Either we use this moment to put trust back at the centre of British media, every part of it, or we watch it corrode for good.

Impartiality breaches

Recent concerns about the Panorama edit, now widely regarded as misleading and editorially indefensible, reflect a recurring pattern of problems at the BBC identified but not resolved.

It would be reassuring to believe that culture is unique to the BBC. It is not.

Oversight in the British media still functions mainly after the fact. We wait for controversy to expose failure instead of building systems that prevent it.

And the evidence bears that out: **in three years, Ofcom has recorded fewer than a dozen impartiality breaches** across hundreds of thousands of broadcast hours, a statistic that reflects not the health of oversight, but its limits.

Public complaints reflect that narrow scope. Cardiff University’s [Enhancing Impartiality](#) project found that more than half of all Ofcom complaints concerned offensive or harmful content, whilst fewer than 5% related to bias or accuracy.

Table 1: Impartiality breaches recorded by Ofcom, 2023 - 2025

Year	Broadcaster / Service	Programme / Description	Outcome	Notes	Source
2025	Talk TV	Kevin O'Sullivan's Political Asylum	Breach	Found to have breached Section 5 (due impartiality). Discussion of political issues lacked alternative perspectives.	Bulletin 533 (30 Jan 2025)
2024	GB News	People's Forum: The Prime Minister	Breach + £100 k Sanction	Audience Q&A with the Prime Minister aired without challenge or balancing views. Ofcom ruled breach of Rules 5.1, 5.11 & 5.12 – failure to preserve due impartiality.	Notice of Sanction (2024 Feb)
2023	GB News	Kashmir in Focus	Breach	Programme failed to include an appropriately wide range of views on the Kashmir dispute. Breach of Rules 5.11 & 5.12 (due impartiality).	Bulletin 507 (12 Sep 2023)
	Greatest Hits Radio	News (4 editions)	2 Breach + 2 Discontinued	Two bulletins on political matters failed to meet due impartiality; two others discontinued.	Bulletin 505 (17 Apr 2023)
	GB News	The Live Desk	Breach	GB News promoted its own "Don't Kill Cash" petition, expressing a corporate view on a live political issue. Breach of Rules 5.4 & 5.5 (political campaigning / impartiality).	Bulletin 488 (7 Jul 2023)
	GB News	Politicians as Presenters – five programmes	Breach (Rule 5.3)	Ofcom found five GB News shows – including Rees-Mogg's State of the Nation and Friday Morning with Esther & Phil – in breach for using sitting MPs as newscasters/interviewers without exceptional justification. Rulings later withdrawn (2023) after judicial review.	Bulletin 494 (18 Mar 2024)
	GB News	Martin Daubney (standing in for Laurence Fox)	Breach	Presenter and guest (Reform UK's Richard Tice) discussed immigration/asylum with almost no opposing views. Breach of Rules 5.11 & 5.12.	Bulletin 484 (16 Jun 2023)
	GB News	Saturday Morning with Esther and Philip	Breach	Conservative MP presenters interviewed Chancellor Jeremy Hunt ahead of Budget without counter-views. Breach of Rules 5.11 & 5.12 (due impartiality).	Bulletin 481 (11 Mar 2023)

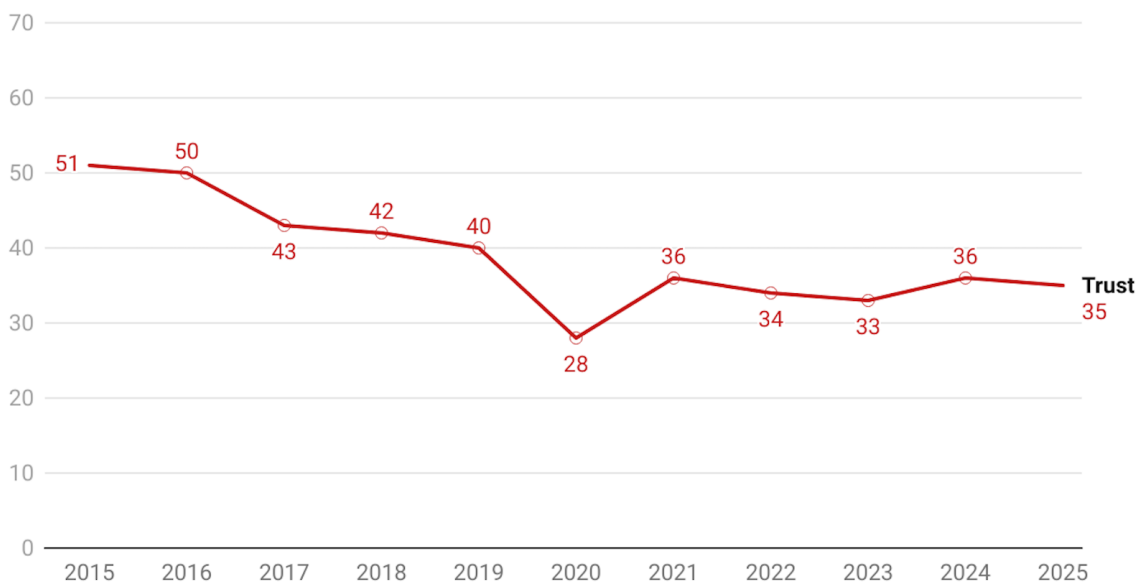
Source: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/broadcast-standards/broadcast-bulletins>

Public trust in news

According to the Reuters Institute, the share of people in the UK who say they “trust most news most of the time” has fallen from **51% in 2015 to 35% in 2024**, one of the sharpest declines, and now among the lowest trust levels in Europe.

Public trust in news over time

Share of UK adults who say they “trust most news most of the time” (Reuters Institute Digital News Report, 2015 – 2025)



Source: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, Digital News Report – United Kingdom
<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2025/united-kingdom>

This is not the consequence of one organisation’s failure. In fact the BBC retains relatively high levels of public confidence.

But trust is the foundation of any credible media system and on that test, Britain is under real pressure.

Public trust in major UK news brands

Percentage of respondents who say they “trust” each brand (Reuters Institute Digital News Report, 2022–2024, United Kingdom)

Brand	2022	2023	2024
BBC News	55	61	60
Channel 4	54	59	56
Daily Mail	23	25	24
Daily Mirror	22	23	22
Daily Telegraph	36	41	42
Financial Times	52	57	57
GB News	27	28	29
The Guardian	48	51	51
Independent	42	46	46
ITV News	55	58	56
Regional/Local newspaper	52	53	51
Sky News	45	51	51
The Sun	12	13	17
The Times	43	48	47

Source: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, Digital News Report – United Kingdom
<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2025/united-kingdom>
Created with Datawrapper

Media ownership

The weakness of scrutiny is mirrored by the concentration of ownership.

The UK’s media is among the most concentrated in Europe.

As the Media Reform Coalition notes, three companies control 90% of national newspaper circulation, two of which are owned offshore or by foreign investors.

The public has a right to know who owns, funds and directs the media they consume, and whose interests it ultimately serves.

Table 2: Ownership and structure of major UK news organisations

Group / Outlet	Principal Owner(s)	Structure / Base	Notes
DMGT (Daily Mail, MailOnline, Metro, i)	Lord Rothermere and family via Jersey-based holding	Privately owned	Long-standing family control; offshore structure; significant market reach (print + online).
News Corp UK & Ireland (The Sun, The Times, Sunday Times, TalkTV)	Rupert Murdoch and family via US-based News Corp	Foreign-owned (US)	Politically influential; vertically integrated with TalkTV (broadcast + digital).
Telegraph Media Group / RedBird IMI (Telegraph, Sunday Telegraph, The Spectator)	Jeff Zucker (US) and Abu Dhabi-backed RedBird IMI	Foreign-backed investment consortium	Purchase under Ofcom and government review for potential foreign influence.
Reach plc (Mirror, Express, Star, + regional titles)	Public company	London Stock Exchange-listed	UK-based, largest newspaper group by circulation; institutional shareholders (e.g. pension funds).
Guardian Media Group (The Guardian, Observer)	The Scott Trust Ltd	UK non-profit	Owned by trust to secure editorial independence; profits reinvested in journalism.
GB News	Sir Paul Marshall, Legatum Group (Dubai)	Private consortium	Ideologically conservative network; Legatum's offshore base and political links noted in Ofcom filings.
Sky News	Comcast / NBCUniversal (US)	Foreign-owned, Ofcom-regulated	US corporate control since 2018; operates under UK licence conditions for impartiality.
ITV News	ITV plc	UK publicly listed	Broad-based UK shareholder base; regulated by Ofcom; news content produced by ITN.
Channel 4 News	Channel 4 Corporation (public ownership)	State-owned, publicly funded (advertising-supported)	Operates commercially but remains publicly owned; news produced by ITN under licence.
BBC News	British Broadcasting Corporation	Public corporation	Funded primarily by licence fee; governed by Royal Charter and Ofcom regulation.

Sources: compiled from publicly available sources including Media Reform Coalition (2025) *Who Owns the UK Media?* <https://www.mediareform.org.uk/>

The questions that must now be answered

Why should the public trust a media system that no longer regulates itself effectively?

How can audiences make informed choices when they're not told who owns, funds or steers the news they consume?

If trust continues to collapse, what fills the gap, accountability journalism or unregulated partisan platforms?

What do we lose, culturally and democratically, when local news disappears?