

Politics and Policy Analysis

Gabriella Jones- 2404975

Executive summary:

The media is a dominant source of political communication and is presented through print media, broadcast media and digital media. Each form of media can influence people's political viewpoints; therefore, it is a key aspect of the UK political system. The use of media can be informative; however, it can be used to easily manipulate the way people think. This has shifted the UK to create different levels of trust when viewing different forms of media. Political information is transforming from television and radio formats to social media and the internet becoming a main form of communication, especially within the younger and upcoming generations.

The UK public have expressed doubt on systems within the two parliament chambers, such as some lords not being able to carry out certain responsibilities due to being unqualified and the system in which they are appointed. Ethical concerns have been raised about peers pay and allowance as well as an unprofessional environment within debates. Areas of the UK feel underrepresented due to the lack of diversity in both houses, with a specific demographic being favoured.

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This report will evaluate the UK political system and identify aspects and characteristics, looking at two areas; The mass media and political communication and the two houses of parliament.

The UK government is led by the Prime minister, currently Kier Starmer, running since 5th July 2024 (GOV, n.d), in the Labour party, who is responsible for policies and decisions, appointing members of government and oversees the Civil Service and government agencies operations (GOV.UK, 2022).

The current most popular UK political parties are;

- Reform UK
- Labour Party
- Conservative Party
- The Green Party
- Liberal Democrats
- Scottish National Party
- Plaid Cymru

(Politico, 2024)

The Mass Media and Political Communication

The communication of political information is one of the most important parts of the political process, with mass media playing a key part in the process. Mass media is how political information is presented to majority of the public; it is a communication channel that exchanges opinions and information between people in power and electorates and holds politicians accountable (Coxall et al., 2003) (LinkedIn, 2019).

Media outlets in politics includes:

- Print media: newspapers and magazines
- Broadcast media: film, television, radio
- Digital media: social media, articles, videos

(University, 2024)

Although media in politics is important for conveying information many see it as anti-democratic as it has the ability to manipulate the way people think about politics, spread misinformation and propaganda.

Due to the level of misinformation, the public have certain levels of trust which each media form. Print media is commonly split in two sections; quality press and tabloids. Quality press is usually newspapers whereas tabloids are usually magazines.

Tabloids focus on celebrities, rumours and are considered less serious, however political news, specifically drama is often covered, examples such as The Sun, Mirror, Private Eye. Tabloids are not usually a trusted source of political communication as they are seen as more entertainment than factual (Anonim, 2006).

Quality press focuses on important news, political events or sport, examples such as The Times, The Guardian and Financial Times. Quality press is aimed at specific demographics like class, political opinion, and location which differs levels trust as many sources can be biased or catering towards a certain demographic. However, an Ofcom report found that the public's level of trust, accuracy and impartiality in print newspapers has increased from 60% in 2018, to 70% in 2025. *

Television and radio broadcasting allows politicians to reach millions, create a public image, spread awareness and inform; a 2024 ITV debate with Rishi Sunak and Kier Starmer gained 5.5 million viewers (ITV, 2024), showing that this is a popular form of political communication.

Televised election debates, such as ITV's and BBC's broadcastings, have become popular since introduced during the 2010 general election (Johnston, 2019). These broadcastings involve the leaders of different parties giving their views and challenge one another on concerns like NHS, immigration, tax and climate change (BBC Bitesize, 2025)

Although televised debates and broadcasting is popular, it is no longer the dominant source for all demographics, with social media and the internet taking over.

The main age group watching television is 65+ year olds, with 16–24-year-olds watching seven times less, (Ofcom, 2022) similarly, those aged 55+ are more likely to listen to the radio. When looking at the most popular audio types for different ages, speech radio is second most popular for those aged 55+, 35–54-year-olds use radio for music and 16–34-year-olds prefer to listen to music on streaming platforms and are less likely to listen to the radio (Ofcom, 2024). This shows that not all age groups are exposed to this form of political communication.

Social media is a relatively new form of political communication with many MPs having a social media presence on platforms such as TikTok, X, Instagram and Facebook. In 2024 and 2019 money spend on Facebook, Instagram, Google and YouTube accounted for half of all advertising spend, compared to around a quarter in 2025 (Power, 2025). Social media allows the public to directly communicate with politicians via comments, messages, and hashtags. TikTok does not allow paid spending on political ads (TikTok, 2025), however many politicians move around these rules. Politicians like Nigel Farage

(Reform) and Zack Polanski (Green Party) have a large social media presence and use it to target youths by engaging in online trends and emotionally resonant content to seem

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more likeable and relatable. Nigel Farage often posts less serious content and has created what many see as a cultivated persona used as political strategy, similar to Boris Johnson, too attractive to the younger audience by becoming 'meme-able'. No matter whether there are positive or negative interactions on social media, all engagement boosts the video reach, meaning that negative engagement can still lead to the content reaching the correct audience, however this does not mean it is reaching UK voters, or indicating voting intention (Office, 2024) (Ewen, 2015) (Harris, 2025).

People's political views can be influenced via the type media and communication they use to source news, point of views, and keep up with events depending on which demographic they are a part of. Because of this politicians can target specific demographics in different ways to get the public favouring them. It can work like a marketing strategy where people are easily influenced by what they see and hear if it comes from a source they trust most. An example of this is targeting the older generation via TV or Facebook speaking on policies they are most likely to resonate with such as pensions, healthcare and immigration (44% of over-65s, say immigration is among their 'top' issues), and the growth of more left-wing politicians using social media such as TikTok as they have more policies that attract younger people such as housing crisis, climate change and cost of living (around 50% of younger voters saying cost of living is among their 'top' issues) (Smith, 2024).

The Two Houses of Parliament

UK Parliament is made up of two chambers; House of Commons and House of Lords. The prime minister selects members of parliament (MPs) from both the House of Commons and the House of Lords to help with decision making and provide support, with the most important MPs making up a group called the Cabinet, who discuss important issues on a weekly basis. Currently there are 22 cabinet ministers, and 99 other ministers (GOV.UK, 2022).

House of common members are voted for by the public, whereas members of the house of lords are not voted for by the public but usually inherit their status or are chosen by the prime minister as they are experts in their field, and appointed by the King. Typically, decisions made in one house have to be approved by the other house (BBC Bitesize, n.d) (Newsround, 2012). Many believe the House of Lords system to be unfair, with 255,617 members of the public signing a petition, run by the electoral reform society, that hopes to reform the second chamber and believe peers should be "chosen by people and not appointed by politicians." (Reform, 2025). Over 60% of the UK have a negative view on

the House of Lords, 28% having a neutral opinion, and only 11% having something positive to say (Titles, 2021).

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It can be argued that the House of Lords is not democratic. The principal functions of the House of Lords are legitimisation, scrutiny, and influence of legislation, and holding government to account to decisions. Not all lords are able to carry out these functions effectively, as only some lords have expertise, and the unelected and unrepresentative nature of the remaining lords lacks scrutiny.

As of 2024, majority of lords are entitled (but can chose not to claim), to a £342 daily allowance, for each sitting day attended, tax free (Edgington, 2022). Lords who live outside of London are also partly reimbursed for accommodation and travel when they attend sittings (BBC, 2024). In 2020, lords saw their daily allowance rise by more than 3%, above inflation, whereas UK workers saw a pay rise of just 1.1%, (Reform, 2020) where many lords merely have to sign in to claim their allowance and do not have to speak during seatings or participate in votes or committees. In 2017, former Lord, Lady D'Souza, said she had witnessed a lord who has gotten out of a taxi outside the peers' entrance, ran in, presumable to show attendance, and ran back out whilst the engine was still running. She says there are many peers who contribute nothing yet still claim full allowance (Flood, 2017).

There is a lack of diversity with the House of Lords, with:

- 3 in every 4 lords being men (72.1% of Lords are men and 27.9% are women)
- the average age being 71
- around a third being members of the conservative party
- 86.4% of members being born in the UK, with 44% having a place of residence in London and the southeast
- 70% of lords received private education
- 95% having a university degree
- 85% being married with the most common number of children being 2

(Titles, 2021)

These statistics show that the demographics within the House of Lords are outdated and favour a specific group of people; diminishing women, ethnic minorities, political views, different lifestyles and overrepresenting wealthy, prestigious and privileged backgrounds. Leaving large areas and groups of people in the UK underrepresented.

The number of lords with a university degree shows that there are high levels of expertise which can contribute to informed decision making, varied knowledge and credibility.

Question time within the House of Commons is often led to shouting matches, booing, and heckling, former prime minister David Cameron once compared these debates to “Punch and Judy” (Francis, 2025). This creates an unprofessional atmosphere where politicians are meant to be constrictively debating and holding government to account.

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It undermines the seriousness of the debates and comes across as childish and toxic which can damage the public view and become unproductive.

Criticism has been drawn due to the excessive use of Statutory Instruments (SI) within the House of Commons. SI's become laws immediately, with the approval of parliament, to make urgent changes. It allows the government to act quickly; however, it raises the concern of overuse. During COVID-19, 360 Statutory Instruments were introduced such as face covering regulations, the large number of SI's raises concerns on the lack of scrutiny and use proper decision-making systems, lowering the public's confidence in the Houses accountability and responsibility (Society, 2021).

Diversity in the House of Commons is considerably better than the Lords with:

- 90 MP's (14%) coming from minority ethnic backgrounds, which is the biggest increase yet
- 263 (40%) MP's being female
- 405 MP's being members of the Labour party, followed by 119 MP's being members of the Conservative party.
- The average age being 48

(Future, 2024) (Carthew, 2023) (Watson et al., 2024) (Parliament, 2024)

Compared to the Lords, the diversity is wider within the House of Commons, meaning there is potentially a larger number of varied perspectives and experiences, leading to strong and more informed decision making. It also allows more of the public to be factored into decisions as it covers more areas of people and their life's.

When looking at both the House of Lords and the House of Commons scrutinising government legislation, it could be said that the Lords do a better job. The House of Lords is unable to outright reject any legislation, however they can suggest amendments, rather than introduce new laws themselves, meaning they have more time and commitment to scrutinise, compared to the House of Commons.

The House of Commons has more democratic and legislative power compared to the House of Lords, as members are appointed by the public, as well as having the power to override the House of Lords proposals. However, similar to the Lords, the UK public have shown dissatisfaction with the Commons due to the way it is operated, not representative of public interest and low levels of trust.

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