

Newspapers

What are the problems?

The role of the media is essential to the proper functioning of a democracy. Without fair and equal access to independent, unbiased, factual reporting of the issues of the day voters are unable to make an informed decision about who or what to vote for. Although print media is being challenged by digital news and social media, the agenda is often still set by the newspapers. In the UK there are multiple problems with the way our newspapers operate:

- **Concentration of ownership.** Just a handful of billionaires own over 75% of UK newspapers. They can appoint editors who will reflect their personal opinions and promote policies that favour their own (business) interests

Circulation % Share



- Constant news cycle. Reporting what's new rather than what's important
- Trivial and sensational reporting. Distracting from the major issues
- Lack of knowledge. Only science journalists appear to understand how bad the climate situation is
- False balance and cherry-picking. Not presenting a true picture of the facts
- Unethical behaviour. Hounding innocent people, phone hacking etc
- Churnalism. Reproducing government and corporation press releases without fact-checking or doing their own research
- Class bias. 80% of journalists come from professional or upper-class backgrounds, and bring their own particular perspective to their reporting

How does this relate to the climate and nature crises?

The severity and urgency of the crises demand that they be given prominence in every news outlet. But even when major environmental events take place the story rarely makes the front pages and, if they do, they only stay there for a brief time. To resolve the climate and nature emergency we need public pressure on politicians and corporations, but that will not happen if the public is ill-informed on the latest scientific studies, unaware of the multiple extreme weather events taking place around the world and distracted by trivial stories about celebrities and sport.



What can we do to help?

Think carefully about where you get your news. Who owns the outlet? What influences and biases might be at work? Are they reporting what really matters? Although many newspapers suffer from the problems overleaf, be very wary of

alternative news sources online as these can sometimes be worse. There are good, reliable, independent news sources out there but you will need to do some research to find them. Support campaigns to improve the standard of journalism.

What do you think?

Should newspapers be overseen by a stronger, independent regulatory body? Who should decide what's newsworthy and what isn't? How can we revive local journalism in a cost-effective way?

What else can be done?

The press must be allowed to maintain its freedom, and it may be difficult to strike the right balance, but there are many policies that governments could adopt to improve matters – look up Media Reform Coalition or Hacked Off for a list of proposals. These policies could include:

- Setting a limit on audience share
- Rules to ensure owners cannot influence content, along with representation for workers on the boards of newspapers
- Promoting community media and media cooperatives
- Implementing “Leveson 2”
- Public investment in printed media
- Briefing ALL journalists on the climate and nature crises

Keywords for further research

Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO); Byline Times; Double Down News; Open Democracy; Ethical Consumer; Bristol Cable; Leveson enquiry; IMPRESS; paywalls as a two-tier system; Manufacturing Consent; Citizen Media Assemblies; media commons