

EPISTEMIC SECURITY BRIEFING

BOOSTING PROMINENCE OF
PUBLIC INTEREST MEDIA FAQ

22nd June 2026

1. What are prominence or 'must carry' rules?

In the UK, prominence rules have long underpinned the visibility and accessibility of public service broadcasting on traditional linear television. The rules ensure that public service broadcasters such as the BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 occupy the most accessible and visible positions on electronic programme guides (EPGs), so that audiences can easily find trusted public service content.

Alongside this, 'must-carry' rules have required certain television and communications platform operators to carry designated broadcast and radio services, whether public service or local broadcasters. While must-carry rules focus on ensuring availability i.e. they *can* be found, prominence rules focus on ensuring discoverability i.e. they are very obviously visible.

More broadly, prominence rules create obligations on platforms to make public interest content visible and accessible across media environments. Historically this has meant channel placement on television, but increasingly the debate concerns the responsibilities of large online platforms, whose algorithms and commercial incentives now play a central role in determining what information audiences see.

Prominence rules seek to ensure that these powerful gatekeepers are not the sole decision-makers determining the visibility of public interest content.

2. Why should we care about prominence?

In the platform environment, reforms to prominence rules are typically proposed to address two related challenges:

- Improve citizens' access to public interest information, and the democratic benefits that flow from it, including informed civic participation and greater resilience to mis- and disinformation.
- Address the financial pressures facing news publishers and public interest journalism.

These objectives are closely connected, but they are not identical. Prominence rules designed to improve citizens' access to information may differ in important ways from those intended primarily to deliver financial benefits to media organisations.

Both goals are important and can reinforce one another. Demos research and policy work has emphasised that citizens' access to public interest information should be the guiding principle for any reform of the prominence rules. The primary purpose of prominence rules should be to ensure that people can readily discover trusted, diverse and high-quality information in increasingly platform-mediated media environments.

3. Why do citizens need greater access to public interest information?

Access to public interest information is foundational to a functioning democracy. Citizens need reliable, high-quality, and locally relevant information to participate meaningfully in public debate in the UK, hold those in positions of power to account, and build resilience against mis- and disinformation.

As people increasingly consume news through digital platforms, the challenge is not simply whether trustworthy and locally relevant information exists, but whether citizens can find it. Social media feeds, search engines and recommendation systems now play a significant role in determining what information people encounter, yet these systems – which are largely owned by US Big Tech companies – do not always prioritise or even ensure inclusion of accurate, reliable, locally relevant or public interest content.

The evidence suggests that prominence must evolve to reflect where audiences now get their information. In 2026, 40% of UK adults [cited](#) social media as their main source of news. Over the last 12 years, television news audiences have fallen from 79% to 47%, while print news consumption has declined from 59% to 12%. In 2026, YouTube overtook the BBC on audience reach, with [BARB figures](#) showing YouTube reaching 51.9 million people per month compared with 50.8 million for the BBC.

The challenge is no longer whether public interest information exists, but whether citizens can discover it. Prominence reforms seek to ensure that trustworthy, diverse, locally relevant and high-quality public interest content remains visible in the digital environments where people increasingly spend their time.

4. How will prominence support the financial challenges of the news industry?

Prominence could help address some of the financial challenges facing the news industry by increasing the visibility and discoverability of public interest content on the platforms where audiences now spend their time.

For many publishers, audience reach and revenue are increasingly shaped by platform referral traffic. The decline in referrals from major platforms has therefore had significant implications for the sustainability of news organisations. Between 2018 and 2023, Facebook referral traffic to news publishers fell by between 40% and 55%, while from 2022-23, referrals from X declined by 20% to 48% depending on the news publishers.¹

Prominence reforms could help counteract these trends by ensuring that high-quality public interest content remains visible and discoverable within platform feeds, recommendation systems and search results. Greater discoverability can support audience growth, increase engagement,

¹ Digiday. (2023)

<https://digiday.com/media/publishers-reckon-with-declining-facebook-referral-traffic-as-the-platform-pulls-a-way-from-news/>

and create more opportunities for publishers to generate revenue through advertising, subscriptions and memberships.

However, prominence is not a complete solution to the financial challenges facing the sector. Rather, it is one tool that can help ensure public interest journalism is able to compete for attention in digital environments increasingly shaped by platforms.

5. How do you safeguard prominence rules from state capture?

A key risk in establishing prominence rules is the potential for state capture, where government influence could allow prominence rules to be used to favour particular interests or viewpoints. A robust framework must therefore include safeguards to ensure that decisions about which content receives prominence are made independently, transparently and in the public interest.

Demos has made a number of recommendations for enablers that would support this:

- **Co-regulation:** Co-regulation provides a model of collaborative governance, combining independent oversight with input from industry and expert stakeholders. This can ensure accountability while avoiding excessive government control over decisions about which content should be prioritised. Independent oversight should also apply to the processes used to determine what content qualifies as 'public interest' and therefore merits prominence. These decisions should be subject to regular review, with transparency requirements and public reporting on the outcomes of the regime.
- **Appeals:** Prominence rules should include robust appeals mechanisms, allowing media organisations and members of the public to challenge prioritisation decisions.
- **Increased transparency:** Transparency and independent scrutiny are also essential. Our recommendations include improving researcher access to platform data, enabling independent experts to assess how prominence systems operate, evaluate whether public interest content is being surfaced effectively, and identify potential biases or unintended consequences.

6. How has the debate on 'prominence' in the UK evolved?

In the UK, debates on prominence have evolved from a focus on ensuring the visibility of public service broadcasting on traditional television services to questions about how public interest content can remain discoverable in digital environments.

This shift has been shaped by several key developments:

- The adoption of the [Media Act \(2024\)](#), which extended prominence and must-carry obligations beyond traditional broadcast services to connected TVs and smart radios.
- The [House of Lords' Future of News report \(2024\)](#), which highlighted the need to consider how trusted news can achieve greater prominence on social media platforms.
- [Ofcom's Transmission Critical report \(2025\)](#), which examined the importance of ensuring prominence for public service broadcasting news and children's content on video-sharing platforms such as YouTube.

- [Demos' Fairer Feeds report \(2026\)](#), which builds on this debate by advocating for statutory prominence for public service broadcasters on video-sharing platforms and for public interest news on social media platforms.

Together, these developments reflect a broader recognition that the mechanisms determining what information citizens encounter have shifted from traditional channel listings to platform feeds, recommendations and search systems.

7. Prominence on social media

7.1 What is Demos recommending for updating prominence rules on social media?

At Demos, we are calling for new legislation that requires platforms to give prominence to 'public interest' news sources on social media feeds.

Currently, the algorithmic design choices and content prioritisation processes on online platforms are having concerning implications for citizens' ability to access information. Engagement-driven models can reward content that is misleading, inflammatory and hateful, while accurate and reliable news sources face declining visibility.

Algorithmic prominence for 'public interest' news sources would help address this imbalance. The aim is not to determine what citizens see, but to ensure that high-quality public interest information can compete for attention in systems that currently prioritise engagement, and therefore support citizen access to information.

As emphasised at point 5 above, legislation will be needed to ensure these measures are underpinned by transparency, accountability and independent oversight – all subject to a public interest test. Voluntary agreements, as business-to-business agreements, are not subject to external scrutiny, lack meaningful mechanisms for oversight or enforcement and operate without public interest tests. Importantly, they risk reinforcing the unequal bargaining power between large platforms and news organisations.

A statutory prominence framework would ensure that platforms' responsibilities reflect the important role they now play in shaping access to information in a democratic society.

7.2 How will it work in practice?

Algorithmic prominence of 'public interest' news sources on social media feeds should be achieved through a parameter-based approach to support media plurality, and allow diverse 'public interest' news publishers to benefit.

Rather than platforms deciding which individual outlets receive prominence, eligibility for 'public interest' news sources should be based on a transparent criteria that links to standards for trustworthy editorial workflows, procedural fairness, and governance structures that are transparent, accountable, and responsive to the public.

The [Journalism Trust Initiative](#) by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) serves as a valuable technical precedent for a parameter-based approach: using 130 signals to determine the trustworthiness of media organisations, the approach has been backed by 2,400 media outlets in 127 countries.

The parameters for 'public interest news' should be developed independently, without government involvement. This process should bring together media industry professionals, civil

society, and the public, ensuring that the definition of public interest news has democratic legitimacy and reflects a broad range of perspectives. Oversight of these parameters should sit with an independent co-regulatory body, ensuring media independence and preventing state capture (see Question 5).

8. Prominence for video-sharing platforms

8.1 What is Demos recommending for updating prominence rules on video-sharing platforms?

At Demos, we are calling for the government to create a new regime requiring video-sharing platforms to give prominence to PSB content of highest civic value on video-sharing platforms through measures to increase algorithmic prominence, or user interface design. Video-sharing platforms host user-uploaded content or third-party video content but do not have editorial responsibility for the content (i.e. YouTube or TikTok). They are distinct from Video-on-Demand platforms which choose and control their catalogues and hold editorial responsibility (i.e. Netflix or Disney+).

These prominence measures will extend existing requirements for PSB prominence under the Media Act (2024) into the platform environment, representing a logical next step as audiences increasingly access public service content through online services rather than traditional broadcast channels.

These prominence measures recognise the important role that public service media plays in a healthy democracy when they operate according to their fundamental principles of accountability, accessibility, impartiality, independence, pluralism, reliability, and universalism. Additionally, PSBs still remain the most used and trusted sources of news for UK audiences.

To support media plurality and independence, it is essential that any measures to enhance the prominence of public service broadcaster content are introduced with strong safeguards to prevent undue government or commercial influence (see Question 5).

8.2 Should there be new legislation introduced or should this be left for the platforms to decide?

Prominence should not be left solely to voluntary agreements with platforms. While platforms have an important role to play in improving the visibility of public interest information, voluntary approaches are not subject to a public interest test and do not provide sufficient guarantees that citizens' access to trusted, diverse and high-quality information will be prioritised.

Historically, prominence rules have recognised that access to public interest content is too important to be determined solely by market incentives. As audiences increasingly rely on digital platforms for news and information, similar principles should apply to the systems that shape what people discover online, including feeds, recommendations and search rankings.

New legislation should establish a clear framework of obligations and safeguards. This should include requirements for transparency, independent oversight, researcher access and appeals processes, ensuring that prominence decisions can be scrutinised and held accountable.

Platforms should therefore have a role in delivering prominence, but within a regulatory framework that ensures decisions about the visibility of public interest information are made in the public interest, rather than solely according to commercial priorities.

9. What is Demos recommending for a 5% levy on video-sharing platforms?

Demos recommends that video-sharing platforms contribute 5% of their UK revenues to a dedicated UK Public Interest Content Fund supporting UK public interest audiovisual media content.

The levy would apply to video-sharing platforms exceeding a specified annual UK revenue threshold, such as those generating more than £25 million annually. The fund would support a broad range of organisations, including public service broadcasters, independent media organisations, content creators and influencers producing public interest content. It should be administered by an independent body, separate from government and industry interests, to ensure accountability and independence.

The proposal builds on international precedent. Canada's Online Streaming Act (2023) requires eligible platforms to contribute 5% of their Canadian revenues to media funds, while France's SMAD regime (2021) requires streaming services to invest 20-25% of French turnover in domestic and European productions. Similar calls have been made in the UK, including by the Culture, Media and Sport Committee's [British film and high-end television report](#), which supported a 5% contribution from streamers to a cultural fund.

10. Which other countries have implemented prominence regimes?

Other countries are increasingly updating prominence rules to reflect digital and platform environments, moving beyond traditional "must-carry" obligations for broadcast TV, and requiring major digital platforms to prioritise public interest and local content.

Canada and France are particularly noteworthy international precedents because both countries have introduced legislation that extends existing prominence rules to the platform environment, and combined with financial obligations to contribute to the production and sustainability of media content.

Canada's Online Streaming Act (2023) requires platforms to make Canadian content discoverable and contribute at least 5% of their Canadian revenues to support domestic content production, while France's Services de Médias Audiovisuels à la Demande requires platforms to give appropriate visibility to European works and reinvest 20–25% of French turnover into European and French audiovisual production.

In the EU, existing rules under the Audiovisual Media Services Directive already require on-demand services to ensure at least 30% of their catalogues are European works. With a review of the AVMSD forthcoming in 2026, there is growing momentum to further clarify and expand prominence requirements on platforms. In late 2025, 26 out of 27 member states supported the Danish Presidency's [proposals](#) for the European Democracy Shield to require platforms to increase access to accurate and reliable news.