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2021 Introduction It's a common misconception that there's nowhere to complain about
online political ads. But, did you know that a range of organisations can help
address most concerns? Online political ads, know them like they know you It's a
crime to make or publish a false statement about the personal character or conduct of
a candidate, but other than that and the laws on the publication of offensive
material, political parties, candidates or campaigners are not restricted in what
they say in campaign materials. But that doesn't mean you can't raise concerns.
Claims made in online political ads Who do I contact if I see a false statement about
the personal character or conduct of a candidate? That's a matter for the police.
Whether it's a print or online ad, report your concerns to the police online. Report
now Who do I contact if I'm concerned about an ad which deals with a specific
political issue or that's run by a part of government? The Advertising Standards
Authority (ASA) doesn't regulate claims in ads whose principal function is to
influence voters in national, local, regional or international elections or
referendums. However, the ASA does regulate claims in ads made by local or central
government, which aren't considered to be part of an election or referendum campaigns
– for example a health department stop smoking campaign. In some circumstances, where
an ad appears in paid-for space and isn't intended to sway voters, it also regulates
ads about political issues – for example a proposed airport expansion, placed by an
individual, a business, a charity, campaign/ interest group or other type of
organisation. Its remit doesn't extend to 'causes and ideas' in non-paid for ad
space, such as leaflets or websites. It's sometimes difficult to work out if an ad is
about a political issue, run by government, or part of an election campaign. If in
doubt, the ASA recommends that you contact the political party responsible in the
first instance to tell them what you think. If you're not satisfied with the outcome,
then you can make a complaint to the ASA. Make a complaint to the ASA Advertising
Standards Authority Advertising Standards Authority The Advertising Standards
Authority (ASA) regulates general advertising, sales promotions and direct marketing
across all media. All adverts must be "legal, decent, honest and truthful." As an
independent regulator, the ASA enforces the Advertising Codes; there are separate
codes for non-broadcast advertisements (known as the CAP Code) and broadcast
advertisements (known as the BCAP Code). The two codes have broadly consistent rules
that prohibit discriminatory treatment and/or harm and offence. Ads whose principal
function is to influence voters in local, regional, national or international
elections or referendums are exempt from both codes. Claims made in online political
ads Who do I contact if I'm concerned that a statistic used in an online political ad
is inaccurate or misleading? Who do I contact if I'm concerned that a statistic used
in an online political ad is inaccurate or misleading? The UK Statistics Authority
and its executive arm the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) work to promote and
safeguard the production and publication of official statistics. In advance of
elections and referendums, the UK Statistics Authority and OSR encourage political

parties to ensure that: statistical sources should be clear and accessible to all any caveats or limitations in the statistics should be respected campaigns should not pick out single numbers that differ from the picture painted by the statistics as a whole If you see an online ad which doesn't take this guidance into account, then they can help. Contact the UK Statistics Authority UK Statistics Authority UK Statistics Authority The UK Statistics Authority and its executive arm the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) are both independent arm's length bodies that are separate from government. They have the statutory objective of promoting and safeguarding the production and publication of official statistics that 'serve the public good'. The public good includes: informing the public about social and economic matters assisting in the development and evaluation of public policy regulating quality and publicly challenging the misuse of statistics While statistics can provide powerful support for political arguments, the UK Statistics Authority, supported by OSR, advises party leaders before elections and referendums that the misuse of statistics damages their integrity, causes confusion and undermines trust. It can also lead debate to focus too much on the statistics themselves, distracting from the issues at hand. This is particularly important during the intense public scrutiny of an election campaign, where misinformation can spread quickly. The UK Statistics Authority and OSR have an interventions policy that guides their work on making statements on the use of statistics in public debate. This policy recognises that candidates want to persuade voters of their proposals, and it's part of normal political debate for them to draw on a wide range of sources including statistics to make their case. As such the UK Statistics Authority and OSR don't try to check the truthfulness of every statement made or verify every fact-like assertion, but instead make sure that, in political debate, the underlying statistics are not being misrepresented – and if they are, to help clarify how they should be interpreted. Claims made in online political ads Who do I contact if I have concerns about a political ad I've seen on TV or heard on the radio? Political advertising on TV or the radio is not allowed in the UK. This includes ads designed to: influence the outcome of elections and referendums promote the interests of a party bring about changes to the law influence public opinion on a matter of public controversy Instead, political parties are allowed to make party political broadcasts which are not classified as advertising. If you're concerned that an ad you've seen or heard is political advertising then you can complain to Ofcom. Ofcom can also examine whether TV and radio programmes have adhered to its rules relating to due impartiality and due accuracy. Contact Ofcom Ofcom Ofcom Ofcom regulates TV, radio and video-on-demand services. Broadcasters which have an Ofcom licence must adhere to the rules set out in the Broadcasting Code and Ofcom assess all programmes and complaints against these rules. During an election period, broadcasters must also adhere to the rules in Section Six of the Broadcasting Code relating to elections and referendums. This includes rules which require broadcasters to ensure that political parties and independent candidates are given appropriate levels of coverage. Ofcom assess every complaint before deciding whether or not to investigate. Given the importance of elections, they can expedite complaints about election coverage. During election periods, Ofcom puts together an Election Committee , comprising members of their main Board and their specialist Content Board. The committee deals with disputes between broadcasters and political parties about the allocations of party election broadcasts, as well as looking at significant complaints they receive about programmes broadcast during the election period. Under the BBC's Charter, complaints about BBC programmes are normally dealt with by the BBC initially – during elections

such complaints Ofcom expects the BBC to deal with complaints it receives as quickly as possible. But if somebody is unhappy with how the BBC has dealt with their complaint, they can contact Ofcom about their case (if the complaint is about BBC TV or radio), and Ofcom will assess it to decide whether it raises any issues under their Code that warrant investigation. about Ofcom's role during a UK general election Other questions you might have Who's responsible for an online political ad? Who's paid for an online political ad? Are there limits on how much campaigners can spend online? How did a party or campaigner get my data? Why have I been targeted with an online political ad? What is this ad telling me? Your location: Change England Northern Ireland Scotland Wales Overseas We're showing you content for . Select 'change' to choose a different location. Related content Register to vote All you need to register to vote is 5 minutes and your National Insurance number. Our Commissioners Donations and loans Find out about donations and loans to a political party, individual or other organisation Report: How the 2017 UK general election was run Read our report about how the 2017 general election was run