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Tracing the Thread: an exploration into the state of contemporary  
televised satire in the United Kingdom

Louise Elizabeth Eileen Macey

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for award of  
the degree of MPhil Film and Television in the Faculty of Arts

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the factors that have contributed to the state of contemporary televised satire in the United Kingdom, and the current discussions of impartiality surrounding this comedic style. Through providing context by tracing a thread in the recent history of UK political comedy and current affairs, discussing the regulations in place within the United Kingdom that aim to monitor and enforce impartiality in broadcasting, and conducting a content analysis of contemporary satirical programmes, this thesis establishes that the current regulations are resulting in a lack of understanding regarding the meaning of 'impartiality', and fuelling complaints. Furthermore, they lead to satire that struggles to hold those in power to account whilst also satisfying their audiences.

*Author's declaration*

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: L.Macey DATE:17/06/2021

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# Introduction

## Overview

This thesis traces a thread through the history of political comedy within the United Kingdom, with the aim of shedding light on the state of contemporary televisual satire.

Chapter One introduces the topic of humour and comedy theory, and sets out to discuss the ambiguities of humour in relation to the difficulty in defining it. An inclusion of the three historical theories relating to humour, along with information of the three styles of satire, and references to tricksters and irony serve to assist content analysis throughout the thesis. The chapter then moves to use existing literature on the topic of satire to establish the definitions of satire and successful satire that will be used within the thesis, aided by the inclusion of a definition and explanation of the terms ‘punching up’ and ‘punching down’. The chapter concludes with a discussion regarding the purpose of satire.

Chapter Two provides an overview of the history of television satire within the United Kingdom. This overview is provided to give context to its progression, and to identify where controversies have been previously found.

Following this, Chapter Three gives important historical and political context to the thesis by engaging with the topic of populism. Through discussing the broadness of the term, a comparison is made between arguments against broadly defining political rhetorics as populism and the discourse surrounding satirical content and ‘punching up’. The chapter moves on to discuss characteristics of populist leaders, looking to Donald Trump as an example. The notion of an entertainer transforming themselves into a populist leader is then further explored through examining similar occurrences throughout the world. Chapter Three then concludes by highlighting a contrasting phenomenon – the concept of a political leader actively becoming an entertainer.

Chapter Four gives further context to the thesis by discussing the regulations in place in the United Kingdom that aim to monitor and enforce impartiality in broadcasting, and the organisations that put these regulations in place. The chapter then progresses to examine how satirical television programmes within the United Kingdom handle requirements and notions of impartiality and bias, with reference to examples of the BBC acknowledging allegations of bias through satirical content.

A point of contrast is then provided in Chapter Five, which concerns the rise of ‘news satire’ the United States of America. Within the chapter, US programmes such as *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*, and *The Daily Show* are used to highlight the success of the satirical style, highlighting how they have been widely discussed and acclaimed. Following this, the chapter then acknowledges the similar programmes that have existed within the United Kingdom, but notes that they have not

reached the same heights of their US counterparts. The chapter highlights the equivalent regulations in the US, and poses a question as to whether there is a difference in US and UK regulations, or whether there is merely a *perceived* difference, which then causes the content to be dissimilar. Specific attention is given within this chapter to US news satire created during the campaigning period and subsequent presidential term of Donald Trump, investigating how these programmes chose to target the political leader. Comparisons are then made between how Donald Trump and Boris Johnson are satirised within the countries they lead, and their vastly contrasting reactions to such satire.

Chapter Six brings the thesis back to discussing impartiality within the BBC, with particular focus on *The Mash Report*. A deep-dive into a segment featured within the programme on the topic of impartiality presents an argument for how the BBC can use satire to reflect on the definition of satire, along with the content it produces. The chapter moves into a discussion on the cancellation of *The Mash Report*, and the subsequent media coverage. Chapter Six concludes by questioning the lack of clarification regarding the programme's cancellation, and how this could impact satire on public service broadcasting going forward.

Chapter Seven continues discussing *The Mash Report*, but through a content analysis of material featured within *The Mash Report*, compared with material from *Unspun with Matt Forde*, to establish whether reports in the mainstream print news media regarding the extent to which claims of 'bias' within *The Mash Report* were justified. Through analysing the amount of time sample episodes from both programmes spend satirising the two main political parties within the United Kingdom, the chapter identifies a potential misinterpretation that resulted in *The Mash Report* being subjected to unnecessary criticism. The chapter presents an argument that the regulations on the topics of bias and impartiality need to be elaborated upon within the *Broadcasting Code*, and have increased visibility and digestibility to members of the public.

Chapter Eight investigates the impact that the 2016 United Kingdom European Union referendum had on satirical television content. First, the chapter examines the context behind the referendum, the result, and the public's reactions, whilst referencing back to Chapter Three to present Brexit as a child of populism. Following this, focus shifts to a discussion on the risks and challenges presented by satirising Brexit and the referendum. The Chapter then develops into content analysis of several examples of satire on the topic of the referendum, examining them to establish how humour can be derived from a hugely divisive subject.

It is important to note the difficulties in presenting a completely unbiased account when writing about politics and comedy. Naturally, it is common for those writing about politics to have their own opinions on political parties, leaders, policies and events. The same can also be said for those who write about comedy – an individual will have their own views on what they find humorous.



The question of whether politics or comedy can be studied in an objective manner is complicated, and this thesis has been approached with these difficulties in mind.

### Literature Review

Though academic research on the topic of comedy is often regarded as being underrepresented, there are several academics who specialise in researching satirical content, its impact, and the regulations within the United Kingdom, and it is important to note the pre-existing work that has been undertaken on this topic.

One notable article regarding the relationship between the BBC and impartiality is Valérie Bélair-Gagnon's 'Revisiting Impartiality: Social Media and Journalism at the BBC'. Bélair-Gagnon attempts to provide "a powerful example of how processes of deliberation bring change to journalism" (2013), as part of a study of how the evolution of social media has forced the BBC to re-evaluate how they as an organisation can achieve impartiality through their journalism. The article provides an in-depth account of the origins and history of the notion of impartiality at the BBC, and uses examples that expose the potential risks of using content from social media within news stories constructed by BBC journalists. Perhaps surprisingly, this article does not consider regulations around impartiality in the United Kingdom that exist outside of the BBC. It is also important to note that this article is principally focused on online journalism rather than television broadcasting. This thesis will therefore build on this work but extend the relevance to television broadcasting and comedy.

A further useful touchstone is a paper by Ric Bailey (2018). Bailey endeavours to examine "the development of US and British TV satire and the consequences for political truth-telling" (2018), whilst also examining whether the rules regarding media impartiality within the United Kingdom hinder the creation of satire, in comparison to the US, which appears to be more focused on the idea of protecting free speech. Bailey's article offers a pointed evaluation of why satirical content within the UK appears to have become more cynical and negative towards politicians as the public opinion of those in power has declined. Bailey argues that in the new political landscape satire needs to "find the new 'due' in 'due impartiality'" (2018) rather than to free itself from it. This thesis will expand upon the analysis undertaken by Bailey concerning the impact of UK impartiality rules on satirical content, aided by further historical context of the evolution of impartiality within UK media. This thesis offers a case study to supplement and extend Bailey's argument, focusing on the topic of the 2016 EU Referendum, and how this political event may have permanently impacted the landscape of televised satire.

Whilst there are a plethora of articles and chapters written on the broad subject of media bias and impartiality, examples of literature discussing the BBC's relationship with impartiality in regards to specific topics are somewhat lacking.

An article published within the *Journal of Rural Studies*, which aimed to represent “the first systematic examination” (Stayner, 2021) of the BBC’s coverage of the culling of badgers to prevent the spread of bovine tuberculosis, provides insight into what should be considered when analysing the impartiality of the BBC. Written by James Stayner, *Biased or balanced? Assessing BBC news and current affairs performance in covering the badger cull in England* was, apparently “set against a background of criticism” (2021) of the BBC’s coverage of rural issues, which is what resulted in the article being written. Whilst the article may appear to contain little relevance to satirical television programmes and their rules, it does contain noteworthy comments regarding the need to critique the BBC and its output. Within the article, Stayner states that critiquing the BBC’s levels of impartiality is important because “as Ofcom note, the BBC’s output needs to conform to the requirements around due impartiality” (2021). This is of course greatly important, but it could be argued that there is a more significant reason for why conducting such evaluations is necessary – that the BBC is a public service broadcaster.

The difference however lies within the type of programme being discussed within this article, with the impartiality of news and current affairs broadcasting being scrutinised, rather than satirical entertainment programmes, which are held to different regulations. Despite this difference though, the paper provides great insight into a method of analysing televised content to test its impartiality.

Though not strictly relating to impartiality, the early 2000s onwards has seen much public discussion on the lack of female comedians featured on television comedy panel shows. The topic has been highly discussed in mainstream media, with many comedians voicing their concerns and annoyance at the lack of diversity within panels, such as comedian Jo Brand who revealed within an article for *The Guardian* in 2009 that “women are at times perceived as window dressing” (2009) when chosen for appearances on comedy panel shows. It has also been the topic of literary examination, such as through the paper from 2016 by Robert Lawson and Ursula Lutzky, *Not getting a word in edgeways? Language, gender, and identity in a British comedy panel show*.

The topic remains one of great relevance, with comedian Katherine Ryan choosing to no longer accept opportunities to appear on television comedy panel show *Mock the Week*, for fear of taking positions away from other female comedians;

“I love *Mock the Week*, I love Dara O’Briain, I think that that show has given a platform for so many British comedians, but I had to stop doing it, because I knew that every time I was booked on the show, I was taking food out of the mouth of another woman. I was never taking James Acaster’s spot, I was never taking Ed Gamble’s spot on that show. I was always, 100% of the time, taking a job away from one of my female peers, and I thought ‘okay I had my time on the show and now I have to give it to someone else, as much as I love to do it’.” (Ryan, 2020)

A highly relevant analysis of satire on the topic of the EU Referendum is offered in a chapter by Simon Weaver (2019). Weaver's chapter aims to not only identify Brexit Irony as a concept, but also then examine this irony in the context of comedy and its reception. The chapter successfully defines Brexit Irony as a form of situation irony inherent in the "internal contradiction, incongruity, or ambiguity in Brexit discourse" (2019). Weaver also discusses what contributes/leads to it, through a comedic discussion of the slogan featured on the Leave Campaign's bus, and also identifies the comic tropes used by Adam Hills and John Oliver within their comic responses to this example of Brexit Irony, within their satirical programmes *The Last Leg* and *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* respectively. Weaver offers examples of comic responses to Brexit Irony from both the United Kingdom and the United States of America. This thesis will expand upon this by further investigating the different styles of satire prevalent in both nations and the different contexts that pertain.

A review of academic work on political comedy and media bias identified a gap in the published literature around the relationship between satirical television content in the United Kingdom and the rules and regulations regarding impartiality to which this content must adhere.

The relationship between the BBC and impartiality is a topic that had been widely discussed by mainstream print media organisations within the United Kingdom, but rarely features in the academic literature on comedy. This is perhaps because the extension of this topic to include comedy and satirical content is a recent development, and is currently a live topic of debate in the UK following the appointment of a new BBC Director General, Tim Davie. During September 2020, it was widely reported that Davie stated that he wished to "tackle Left-wing comedy bias" (Braddick, 2020). This is a claim that if true, would have resulted in a full reimagining of the concept of impartiality within comedy television, particularly within those programmes broadcast through the BBC. The claim was later denied, but despite this, the conversation regarding the level of impartiality within comedy programmes still continues.

## Chapter One – Humour, Satire, and Ambiguities

Whilst humour has existed as a conscious aspect of society, it has been and continues to be difficult to define, due to its vastness and ambiguity. As stated by Morreall, the difficulty in building and developing theory around humour and comedy is that “we laugh in situations which are so diverse that they seem to have nothing in common but our laughter.” (Morreall, 1982). Whilst no theory is able to explain humour completely, there are three historical theories which do go some way in highlighting characteristics of laughter (Morreall, 1982).

The first of these theories, which dates back to Plato and Hobbes (Yus, 2016), is centered around the notion of superiority. This idea that humour is derived from a sensation of superiority over what is laughed at, can be experienced through instances such as when an audience member feels ‘in’ on the joke, which relates to the common perception of humans in psychology as being in a perpetual state of competition with their peers (Yus, 2016). Fife writes that “when audiences interpret nonliteral language to get the humorous payoff, they often find the decoding pleasurable and develop a more favourable view of the communication” (2016), which reflects the superiority theory. When this theory is featured within satirical content, the audience not only reacts to the humour of the joke, but additionally gains a positive reaction to being able to understand the joke. Feeling ‘in’ on the joke makes satire more enjoyable, though can also be a feature of its divisiveness.

The second of the three theories is based around humour occurring through the feeling of physiological relief, through the release of tension in the body via laughter (Morreall, 1982). This theory is often attributed to Freud, due to his hypothesis that there is pleasure derived through the releasing of physical tension (Yus, 2016). The third theory is the perception that humour occurs through apparent incongruities in what is laughed at. In examples of comedy where incongruity is the source of humour, the punchline(s) are unexpected or inappropriate, or indeed sometimes both (Yus, 2016). The idea that humour can be found through the differences in what is expected and what is actual was suggested by Aristotle, although Kant expanded upon this slightly by viewing humour “as a violation of expectations” (Yus, 2016), with James Beattie introducing ‘incongruity’ as a term for describing this phenomenon.

The above theories will be useful in this context as they will aid in analysing specific examples of satire. Nevertheless, they are theories that are designed to cover all types of humour. Therefore, it is also important to acknowledge the three stated forms of satire; Horatian, Juvenalian, and Menippean. Named after Horace, the Roman poet who first identified the style, Horatian satire provides social commentary that is “good-natured and light-hearted, looking to raise laughter to encourage moral improvement” (Gottlieb, 2019). Contrasting this is Juvenalian satire, named after Roman poet Juvenal, which “tends to be more bitter and dark, expressing anger and outrage at the state of the world” (Gottlieb, 2019). The third form, Menippean, named after the Greek parodist

Menippus, is “reserved for prose works that still resemble the original connotation of satire as a miscellany, or containing multitudes” (Gottlieb, 2019). As Lockyer states, “the satirical scale ranges from mere mild teasing and (destructive) cynicism to sharp invective with a moral and/or political purpose” (2007). These differences show us not only the varying tones and approaches to satire, but also potential differences in purpose. Often satirists will carefully pick where their content sits on the ‘satire scale’ depending on the audience, as well as the intended target. Satire always has a target, whether that is “a person, group, idea, or opinion” (Lockyer, 2007), which is on the receiving end of the satirical content.

It would be wrong to write of the theory behind humour and satire without the inclusion of the trickster. This theoretical figure is one who appears in tales to offer “solutions to problems or some explanation for the world being the way that it is” (Weaver and Mora, 2016). The trickster is often considered to be a crosser of boundaries, who is only able to offer up such resolutions as they themselves are outsiders, not directly involved in the disorder. Whilst not all comedy can be linked to trickster discourse, it can be argued that some satirists may fall into the definition of trickster, through crossing boundaries by examining situations and proposing solutions through their work (Weaver and Mora, 2016). This argument is backed up by Baym’s understanding of satire, as “a rhetoric of challenge that seeks through the asking of unanswered questions to clarify the underlying morality of a situation” (2005).

It is also essential when discussing humour and satire, to include the concept of irony in a comedic context. Milburn claims that irony “constructs a notional double audience” (2019); one which is naïve and fails to understand that content should not be taken literally, and the other which grasp the double meaning and identify the first audience’s confusion. It is often believed that those naïve audience members are “just as integral to the process of irony” (Sienkiewicz and Marx, 2021) as those who understand the joke straight away. This is because part of why irony can be used in a comedic context, is due to the feelings of superiority provided to those audience members who do understand, linking back the aforementioned theory, as they feel ‘in’ on the joke.

Humour in general is incredibly ambiguous and therefore difficult to define, and satire is no different. However, it is possible to recognise the difference between traits that often occur within satire, and traits that always occur, based on the existing scholarship in this field. These three elements are the metrics by which satire will be identified and defined throughout the thesis.

Firstly, satire must have a target. Hightet writes that “satire wounds and destroys individuals and groups in order to benefit society as a whole” (1962). Secondly, satire has an opinion. This opinion may be obvious within the satirical content, or it may be veiled and subtly revealed (Wagg, 2002). Finally, satire makes the audience feel something. This ‘something’ may not always be a positive reaction, and it is not uncommon for the same piece of satirical content to produce differing

emotions from different audience members. Nevertheless, emotions are always felt when consuming satirical content (Botha, 2014).

Colletta writes that "satire achieves its aim by shocking its audience" (2009), which suggests that incongruity is essential for content to be considered as satirical. Colletta's claim, however, is certainly debatable. Satire often has a subtlety to it, particularly Horatian satire, to which the outcome is overt as shock. The extent to which satirical content is either blatant or subtle can be influenced by a variety of aspects, such as performer, environment, and audience. Therefore, it is accurate to state that satirical content must evoke some form of emotion from the audience, but it would be incorrect to make a claim regarding what that emotion should be.

Within these metrics, a 'target' is mentioned, but is not clarified any further, and it is at this point in the thesis that a key clarification is required. Though not new concepts by any means, the terms 'punching up' and 'punching down' are relatively recent additions to the language used when discussing comedy (Subtitle Podcast, 2022). The phrases were supposedly first used in a literal sense in the sport of boxing, before first being used in a metaphorical sense by *The Times* in 2002 when discussing an incident between footballer Roy Keane and his manager, Brian Clough, before eventually being used in the context of comedy (Subtitle Podcast, 2022). The terms are used to discuss the target of satirical content, and where the power sits within that interaction; 'punching up' refers to a situation in which the target is in a higher position of power than the person delivering the joke, and 'punching down' is used when the target is in a lower position of power than the deliverer (Subtitle Podcast, 2022).

There is debate among comedians and satirists as to whether satire necessarily must punch up (Subtitle Podcast, 2022), however the vast amount of academic literature on the topic of satire refers at some point to targeting those in positions of power (see Colletta (2009), Bailey (2018), and Baumgartner and Lockerbie (2018) for examples). Therefore, in this thesis, content does not have to punch up to be labelled as satire, but it does have to punch up to be labelled as being successful satire. This distinction will be essential as the thesis continues.

One of the biggest debates had by academics and satirists themselves, is the purpose of satire, and more specifically, whether satirical content does or should aim to provoke change. Satire dates back to Greek and Roman times, but grew significantly in popularity during the Enlightenment (Colletta, 2009), when it was thought that through "using art as a mirror to reflect society" (Colletta, 2009), foolish behaviours could be put right. In Horatian and Juvenalian satire, the main aim is to improve society and the humans living within it. This suggests, as Colletta explains, that satire is "a hopeful genre" (2009), which "suggests progress and the betterment of society", and that "the arts can light the path of progress". Higgin notes that previous academic studies of satire have claimed that it

is “a form of political communication that can engage young voters, provide useful political information and commentary, and call politicians and the media to account” (2017).

Armando Iannucci, a writer and producer known for *The Day Today*, *The Thick of It*, and *Veep* believes otherwise. During a Chatham House event on *Media, Satire and Modern Politics* at The Royal Institution of International Affairs, chaired by Political Editor for *Newsnight*, Nick Watt, Iannucci claimed that “madness lies in the assumption that by satirising something, you're going to change people's views on it” (2017) and rather that “at its best, satire can help people crystallise or articulate opinions that they already have.”

If satire does not lead to change, this presents the question of why humour has been watched over by governments throughout history, who have perceived it to be a method of undermining their power and authority. One such example of this is the Licensing Act, a now defunct Act of Parliament introduced by Sir Robert Walpole in 1737, which censored the theatre and its supposed satirical hostility towards the British Government (Scott, 2014).

The difference in opinions could potentially be explained by taking a closer look at the sources. It could be suggested that the aims and purpose of satire should be considered different for those creating satirical content, those watching or listening to satirical content, those analysing it, and those targeted by it. It is not difficult to imagine that the requirement for satirical content to instigate change and alter perceptions could put a level of pressure on satirists that would potentially prevent the same amount and quality of satire from being created. The flexibility of the purpose and aims of satire, along with the numerous styles and formats that satire can exist within, provides satirists with a level of freedom that enables them to create without limits.

## Chapter Two – A Brief History of Televised Satire in the United Kingdom

Laura Basu has observed that "political satire has long been part of British television, and British TV satires have often served as inspiration for those produced in other countries" (2015). Before discussing the current state of television satire within the United Kingdom, it is therefore important to first understand how this form of satire began and developed. What follows is in no way meant to act as a complete guide to the history of television satire within the United Kingdom, but is instead intended as an overview of significant texts and key moments in its evolution.

A phenomenon occurred within the United Kingdom during the 1960s, known as the 'satire boom', which is often believed to be reflective of "important changes in the dominant values of British society in the post-war period" (Strinati and Wagg, 1992). Satire had of course existed in many forms prior to this 'boom'. However, it was within the 1960s that the genre really began to flourish within the United Kingdom. At the 1960 Edinburgh Festival Fringe, a new revue show premiered which was unlike any of the festival's previous content. The director of the Festival during this time, Robert Ponsonby, specifically recruited young writers and performers from Oxford and Cambridge University to "engineer a hit show that would outstrip the competition" (BBC, 2014). The show, entitled *Beyond the Fringe*, consisted of several sketches which made a target of the UK government, in particular the Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, is said to have "marked the entry of 'satire' into popular consciousness." (Strinati and Wagg, 1992). *Beyond the Fringe* not only found success within the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, but was consequently shown on the West End, and also transferred to New York. Though the show's four writers and performers, Peter Cook, Dudley Moore, Alan Bennett and Jonathan Miller, were hand-picked for their previous engagements with satire as a format from their times at university, their widespread success from *Beyond the Fringe* is what has led to the four figures being widely considered as the leading figures in the United Kingdom's Satire Boom (Strinati and Wagg, 1992).

Another well-known feature of the satire boom occurred in 1961 with the creation of *Private Eye*. The satirical magazine was born out of the success of Shrewsbury School's magazine *The Salopian* in the 1950s, (Ward, 2001) combined with the advancements in printing technology that were making producing magazines more accessible. After several of the student contributors from *The Salopian* went on to study at Oxford University met others with similar satirical interests, the publication was created, eventually gaining funding from Peter Cook and fellow satirical writer Nicholas Luard, who had co-founded the Soho nightclub The Establishment (Ward, 2001).

The magazine covers a wide range of current affairs news, whilst also critiquing the mainstream print media, and reporting on findings from the publication's own investigative journalism, all through the use of written articles and cartoons, "combining satirical humour and investigative journalism" (Lockyer, 2007). Throughout its history, *Private Eye* has covered and



investigated many highly significant political scandals in the United Kingdom, such as the 2009 MP expenses scandal, and the News International phone hacking scandal (Wagg, 2002). The interrogatory and satirical nature of *Private Eye* has attracted much criticism by its targets in the public sphere, with some even choosing to pursue legal action over the publication's coverage, most often due to claims of libel. The magazine is also not without its own controversies, with one prime example being their coverage of the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. *Private Eye*, noting the hypocrisy shown through not only the coverage within mainstream newspapers following her death, but the reactions of those buying and reading those newspapers, published an issue on 8th September 1997 with the headline "Media to Blame" (Private Eye, 1997). The other statements shown on front cover; "The papers are a disgrace", "Yes, I couldn't get one anywhere", and "Borrow mine, it's got a picture of the car" (Private Eye, 1997), along with content within the issue pertained to the notion captured by the headline, which many viewed to be insensitive and an improper angle to take during a time of national mourning, to such an extent that several retailers temporarily refused to sell the publication. Attitudes towards the coverage have changed over time however, as twenty years on from the controversy, Peyvand Khorsandi wrote for the *Independent* that "No other newspaper or magazine captured – or stood up to – the bonkersness that had gripped the country quite like the *Private Eye* did" (Khorsandi, 2017). At the time of writing, *Private Eye* remains a highly popular current affairs magazine, which is of little surprise when many believe that the publication "has always been at the heart of the modern satire business in Britain" (Wagg, 2002).

The "new Oxbridge culture of satire" (Strinati and Wagg, 1992) that had emerged within print and theatre extended into television also, and following on from the success of *Beyond the Fringe*, the first episode of *That Was the Week That Was* was broadcast on the BBC in November 1962 (Carpenter, 2000). Interestingly, the programme, which consisted of comic songs, monologues, and sketches, emerged from the broadcaster's Current Affairs department, which Wagg believes "reflected changing conceptions of politics and public service, rather than of comedy per se" (Strinati and Wagg, 1992). With the current awareness of Ofcom's *Broadcasting Code* and rules regarding impartiality, it is fascinating to consider a time during which televised satirical content was not viewed primarily as entertainment, as now, a satirical television programme labelled in that way would be a cause for concern for Ofcom.

At the end of the decade, televised satire began to take on a more surreal form. 1969 saw the first of six series of *Q...*, *Q5* (which subsequently became *Q6*, *Q7* etc. until the final series in 1982, which was titled *There's a Lot of It About*) (British Classic Comedy, 2019) Written by comedy writer Neil Shand, and Spike Milligan, who was previously known from the surreal comedy radio programme, *The Goon Show*, the *Q...* series' played a vital role in introducing television viewers to more absurdist styles of comedy. Featuring sketches that were incredibly fast-paced and often ended before their assumed conclusion, laced with outlandish costumes, viewers easily felt as though they

had stepped directly into the imaginations of the writers (BBC, 2014). The programme acted as a gateway into television for other satirical television programmes that were more nonsensical and unusual in style (BBC, 2014). One such programme was *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, which presented satirical content in a more surreal nature, was first broadcast on television in October 1969 (Landy, 2005). The programme featured sketches and visual gags that portrayed observations made by the writers about Great Britain, but presented these observations in a bizarre manner which meant that it did not receive the same level of criticism as other satirical content at the time (Landy, 2005). The surrealism offered by Monty Python's *Flying Circus* acted somewhat as a barrier against criticism – although the topics of discussion were similar to those of its realism-based counterparts, the surreal and absurd nature of the presentation of such topics allowed the programme to bypass the disapproval of politicians and journalists (Landy, 2005).

A wider variety of satirical content became available on televisions in the United Kingdom in the decades that followed, with one such example being *Not the Nine O'Clock News* (BBC, 2004). Broadcast on BBC2 from 1979 to 1982, the satirical show consisted of sketches based on topical news stories and elements of popular culture, whilst also featuring song parodies and re-edits of pre-existing videos, was initially broadcast as a comedic alternative to the *Nine O'Clock News* on BBC 1 (BBC, 2004). The programme also served as a launch pad for several actors and writers who went on to achieve further success, such as Rowan Atkinson and Griff Rhys Jones. It is said that the programme “gave the world alternative comedy and made the media scene we have today” (BBC, 2004). Following its conclusion, *Not the Nine O'Clock News* became a stage production in London and Oxford, though this venture was brief as many of the performers involved were starting new projects.

Satire continued to take on different forms within television broadcasting in the United Kingdom, such as through the comedy genre of sitcom. Political sitcom *Yes, Minister*, was first broadcast on 25<sup>th</sup> February 1980, and as stated by Crowder, through its content being “something of a novelty for a sitcom, and it quickly found success with audiences and critics” (Bose and Grieveson, 2010). Created by Antony Jay and Johnathan Lynn, two graduates of Cambridge University, the programme followed the main character of Jim Hacker, a Member of Parliament, and their trials and tribulations of working within government. (Granville, 2009) Remarkably, the programme managed a satirical take on those working within the civil service, whilst remaining politically neutral throughout. The political affiliation of the central characters was never revealed, as a result of careful choices made by production, such as choosing white as the colour for the political party, never showing the character of the Prime Minister on screen, and even going so far as to never specifying the party Leader's gender. This avoidance created what Shannon Granville describes as a “political vacuum” (2009) and subsequently created a barrier between the plot lines in the programme and the goings on in the real world. After four years of broadcasting, *Yes, Minister* came to an end, but only two years later, in 1986, a sequel, *Yes, Prime Minister* began broadcasting, and did so for two years.

The sequel continued to focus the character of Jim Hacker, though as the title suggests, followed his time as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.

Another political sitcom in the United Kingdom came in the form of *The New Statesman*, which ran from 1989 until 1994 on UK television channel ITV. The programme, described by Gavin Haynes in an article for the Guardian as “unhinged” (2017) satirised the Conservative Party government in power at the time, focusing on the character of Alan B’Stard, who Haynes defines as a “shameless, shagaholic money-grubber” (2017), played by rising star Rik Mayall. Though incredibly different in tone to *Yes, Minister*, the sitcom proved popular with the political minds of the time, even those within the party the programme was targeting. During an interview with Haynes, co-creator of *The New Statesman* Maurice Gran revealed that whilst selling books on the character of B’Stard at a Conservative Party Conference, members would approach him and Laurence Marks and make remarks such as “what a pity he isn’t real” (Haynes, 2017). It is interesting to contemplate whether such a portrayal of the government in place at the time, through fictional characters who were caricatures of unpleasantness and vulgarity would be as well received in the current political climate, and even back in the 1990s, how differently the programme could have been regarded if those in power did not approve of the character choices made.

In 1984, a vastly different form of satire emerged on television screens within the United Kingdom - *Spitting Image*, a programme which targeted politicians and other public figures not only through their actions and beliefs, but also their appearances, through the use of caricature style puppets (Meinhof and Smith, 2000). Taking the print media’s political cartoons and transferring them to television was a new concept, but one which resulted in huge viewing figures and a rather forgiving audience, as stated by co-creator of *Spitting Image*, Roger Law;

"Although an extremely cumbersome way to make television, the Spitting Image puppets had a huge advantage over actors. Viewers will accept the rudeness, violence, and disorder on screen because the protagonists are puppets. Mr Punch of Punch and Judy is an alcoholic wife beater and serial murderer who repeatedly whacks his baby for crying, yet young children adore him. Spitting Image puppets likewise moved from one sketch to another with mayhem and violence accepted by 15 million viewers on a Sunday evening. It is hard for actors to be relentlessly rude and unpleasant whilst nurturing a career, and perhaps playing tennis with their victims. Puppets have no agents or careers and, after the show, can be hung up in a cupboard" (Law, 2017).

*Spitting Image* parodied arguably every relevant and noteworthy member of the public sphere, such as sports personalities, actors, musicians, politicians and even comedians (Meinhof and Smith, 2000). Though celebrities did occasionally take complaint with the way they were presented on the programme, ultimately, being featured on Spitting image was a sign that you were popular enough to be satirised, and many even liked their puppet-based depictions, such as former Cabinet member for

the Conservative Party Norman Tebbit who revealed in 2020 that he was “rather fond” (Telegraph, 2020) of his puppet and its appearance on the programme. Following a decline in viewing figures, *Spitting Image* ended in 1996, however a reboot of the programme was frequently discussed, and was eventually picked up for broadcasting in 2020.

*Drop the Dead Donkey* was broadcast on Channel 4 between 1990 and 1998. Another satirical sitcom, though one with a different target to its predecessors, as rather than satirising politicians and government, *Drop the Dead Donkey* instead targeted broadcast news media, with the programme being set in the offices of a fictional television news organisation, GlobeLink News (Turner, 1999). The decision to film episodes close to their date of transmission allowed current affairs and news topics to be woven into the writing, which gave a sense of realism and familiarity unlike the purposefully vague *Yes, Minister*. The programme was critically acclaimed, and went on to feature on a list published by the British Film Institute in 2000, known as the BFI TV 100, which listed the 100 best British television programmes.

Lightly based on BBC Radio 4’s *The News Quiz*, *Have I Got News for You* began airing in September 1990, a programme which Basu states is “something of a British institution” (2015) and is still airing at the time of writing. *Have I Got News for You* marked the birth of the modern television panel show, a genre that began in the 1990s, but “mushroomed in British broadcasting post-2000” (Clayton, 2019). This particular panel show features a host, and two teams of two, which are captained each week by satirist Ian Hislop (who has been Editor of *Private Eye* since 1986), and actor and comedian Paul Merton, each of whom are accompanied by a guest who is usually a writer, presenter, comedian or politician (Drees and Leeuw, 2015). Episodes are filmed during the week of broadcasting, meaning the content is topical and varies weekly, though the format remains mostly unchanged from how the programme began. Other than the presenting of several satirical news headlines, often accompanied by video clips or images, it is largely up to the panelists to create the satirical content through the prompts given during four different rounds (Drees and Leeuw, 2015).

For the first twelve years of broadcasting, *Have I Got News for You* was hosted by Angus Deayton, though the BBC terminated his contract in 2002 after headlines emerged regarding scandals within Deayton’s private life, headlines which he was subsequently mocked for during the programme. Since the departure of Deayton, *Have I Got News for You* has featured guest hosts, allowing for a wide range of public figures to appear on the programme. The involvement of politicians as both panelists and guests has sparked much conversation regarding the purpose it serves not only for the programme, but for the career of the individual (Drees and Leeuw, 2015). One politician in particular, Boris Johnson, the current Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, is labelled by many as having risen to public fame through his appearances on the programme.

Between 1991 and 1992, a new radio programme aired on BBC Radio 4 that would launch a series of satirical programmes that were highly influential and significant. *On the Hour*, written by a host of big comedy names such as Stewart Lee, Armando Iannucci, Chris Morris, and Richard Herring, parodied traditional radio news broadcasting, presenting surreal and absurd news stories in the same serious manner and tone of traditional news readers. (Brassett and Sutton, 2017). The programme marked the beginning of two highly significant elements of British comedy – the first appearance of comedy character Alan Partridge, and the beginning of Morris’ inclusion of unaware participants in satirical content, a style of satire that became quintessential/known as being his, with Jonathan Gray describing Morris as “one of guerrilla interviewing’s greatest practitioners and innovators” (2009).

In 1994, a television adaptation of *On the Hour* aired for six episodes on BBC2 with a new title: *The Day Today*. Utilising the same comedic elements as *On the Hour*, *The Day Today* was able to broaden its humour through use of visuals, by parodying the television news programmes through the opening titles of the episodes, styles of camera shots, and set similar to that of a news programme. Though only one series was made of the programme, *The Day Today* was highly acclaimed, winning both a British Comedy Award and a BAFTA. The success of *The Day Today* led to Chris Morris creating his own programme for Channel Four, *Brass Eye* (Attwood and Lockyer, 2009). The programme grew upon the absurdities presented in *On the Hour* and *The Day Today*, and tackled the perceived sensationalist attitudes towards news reporting, with the title itself playing on the names of two current affairs programmes that were popular in the United Kingdom at the time, *Brass Tacks* and *Public Eye*. The programme, which ran between 1997 and 2001, was hugely controversial, often due to the inclusion of celebrities who were fooled into participating and presenting factually inaccurate information, under the guise of them supporting a good cause. (Drees and Leeuw, 2015) The programme and its controversies have been discussed by various academic publications, with many referencing one episode in particular – the 2001 special *Paedogeddon!* The episode “questioned whether, or to what extent, the media treatment of pedophiles and pedophilia is accurate and responsible” (Attwood and Lockyer, 2009) in response to the media coverage of a high-profile child abduction and murder case in the United Kingdom in 2000, along with the media campaigns that followed. As with all episodes of *Brass Eye*, celebrities appeared throughout the episode all believing to be campaigning against pedophilia. (Attwood and Lockyer, 2009) Though the majority of viewers were aware of the style of content that *Brass Eye* broadcasted, many believed that Morris had crossed the line with *Paedogeddon!*, and it was at the time, the “most-objected-to episode of television broadcast in the U.K” (Adams et al., 2013). With such a vast number of complaints made against the episode, it is interesting to consider how it would have been received if it were broadcast in the present day, and how Ofcom would have potentially responded.

The year 2000 saw the commencement of *Dead Ringers*, a radio programme broadcast on BBC Radio 4, which focused on satirising celebrities and public figures through impressions, and featured the voices of many established impressionists. Following the success of the radio programme, the BBC went on to commission a version of the programme for television two years later, with many of the same performers providing the impressions, which ran for five years, until 2007 (BBC, 2002). The popularity of the radio programme was shown through its continuation, with new episodes being recorded and broadcast until 2018.

The decision made by former Labour Party Prime Minister Tony Blair in 2003 to invade Iraq shocked many, and caught the attention of satirist Armando Iannucci, leading to the creation of what is possibly the most well-known political satire programme from Blair's time as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. After Tony Blair's government took office, Iannucci, who had already been established as a strong satirical writer, admitted that he found himself "obsessing" (OxfordUnion, 2017) over how Blair's administration was attempting to run, with their focus on timetabling announcements and the idea of 'spin'. The decision by Blair to invade Iraq raised questions for Iannucci such as "how is our democracy working now?" (Oxford Union, 2017). In 2004, Iannucci was asked by the BBC to 'champion' the sitcom *Yes, Minister* for a Best Sitcom poll organised for BBC2. Through re-watching the series, his appreciation for its writing and the thought that "it was the first inkling the British public had of how Westminster worked" (JOE, 2017), gave him the idea for a show which eventually became *The Thick of It*.

First airing in 2005, *The Thick of It* documented the goings-on in the fictional Department of Social Affairs (later becoming the Department of Social Affairs and Citizenship), as it "focused on satirising the mechanics behind keeping politicians unsatirisable" (Kumar, 2017). The character of Malcolm Tucker, who worked as Director of Communications in the series was said to be inspired by Alistair Campbell, who worked as both the Downing Street Press Secretary and the Director of Communications during Blair's premiership, and who was known to be a fan of the show, and enjoyed that "it exaggerates stuff that is possible" (2014). The show's writers were reluctant to use any specific real-life events for inspiration, in fear of 'dating' the show, which contrasts greatly with the approach of *Drop the Dead Donkey* over a decade before. Since the conclusion of the show in 2012, Chris Addison, who starred in the show, has remarked that when looking back on fictional policy ideas created for the series, "almost everything that happened that we went 'that couldn't possibly happen' has since happened", (2020) (such as the idea of a spare room database, and the banning of school breakfast clubs).

Broadcast on Channel 4 between 1999 and 2010, *Bremner, Bird, and Fortune* was the amalgamation of impressionist Rory Bremner, with the satirical duo John Bird and John Fortune (who had both previously worked individually on satirical television programmes including *That Was the*

*Week That Was* and *Yes, Minister*). The programme emerged as the natural evolution of a programme that Bremner had begun working on with the BBC in 1986, *Now Something Else*, though the name, format, and performers had changed during that time. Featuring only sketches of a political nature for the majority of its episodes, *Bremner, Bird, and Fortune* was primarily satirising through impressions, concluding each installment with a musical number (ScreenOnline, n.d.). The vast number of episodes produced speaks volumes for the programme's popularity, with sixteen series and several one-off specials being broadcast.

Adding to the line-up of panel shows that seemed to be ever-expanding, *Mock the Week* premiered in June 2005 and at the time of writing, new episodes are still airing. The programme is hosted by Irish comedian, Dara ÓBriain who each week is joined by six panellists, all comedians, some of whom have had regular positions on the programme over the years. In a similar vein to *Have I Got News for You*, the programme is filmed during the week of broadcasting, allowing for the inclusion of topical news stories, and the satirical content within *Mock the Week* also derives mostly from the panellists' (and often O'Briain's) responses to prompts given during each round (Declercq, 2018).

It is interesting to note that the first series of *Mock the Week* was incredibly different to those that followed, both in terms of the rounds that were played, and the panellists. When the programme began, comedians who featured on the teams were often known for producing satirical material, such as John Oliver (who will be spoken about in more detail at a later point within this thesis), or Al Murray, who's persona The Pub Landlord was used to discuss political and social issues. Additionally, Rory Bremner had a fixed position as a *Mock the Week* panellist for the first two series of the programme. The rounds that were included within the first series of the *Mock the Week* utilised the satirical stylings of the panellists, often requiring elements of impersonation. As the programme has progressed, it has evolved away from covering political current affairs topics to the extent that it used to, and seems to be less focused on spotlighting comedians with backgrounds in satire, though some do still make appearances.

*Mock the Week* has been on the receiving end of a significant amount of criticism regarding the make-up of the panels within each episode, and also individual panellists, most notably Frankie Boyle. Boyle's cynical and dark sense of humour was a source of controversy, with several of the jokes he performed on the programme resulting in complaints being made, such as comments about Olympic swimmer Rebecca Adlington, which were judged by the BBC Editorial Standards Committee to be "unjustified" (BBC, 2009).

After leaving *Mock the Week* in 2009, Boyle began focusing on his own projects. The first of these projects was broadcast in 2010 on Channel 4 – a comedy programme titled *Frankie Boyle's Tramadol Nights*, which contained a mixture of Boyle performing stand-up material, along with pre-

recorded sketches. The programme remained true to Boyle's controversial and dark style of comedy, with Ofcom receiving approximately 500 complaints regarding a segment within the second episode of the six episode series. During the segment in question, Boyle's joke targeted Harvey Price, the disabled son of celebrity Katie Price and former footballer Dwight Yorke. Ofcom reviewed the complaints and published their reached decision in *Broadcast Bulletin 179*, believing Boyle's jokes to be in breach of Rules 2.1 and 2.3 of their *Broadcasting Code* (Ofcom, 2011).

Following on from the recording of an unsuccessful pilot, a one-off broadcast of a programme entitled *The Boyle Variety Performance* (a play on *The Royal Variety Performance*), and appearing in the short comedy film *Gasping*, Boyle began presenting his own satirical series *Autopsy* from 2014 to 2016, which was exclusively available via the BBC online streaming service, BBC iPlayer. Following on from the success of the *Autopsy* series, Boyle presented *Frankie Boyle's New World Order* on BBC 2. Following a similar structure to *Autopsy*, Boyle began each episode with a few minutes of topical stand-up, before making two statements and then discussing these statements with the episode's guest line-up, which usually consisted of comedians, writers, and presenters. At the time of writing, *Frankie Boyle's New World Order* is still being produced and broadcast.

The satirical programme *The Revolution Will Be Televised* was broadcast from 2012 to 2015 on BBC 3, featuring sketches and pranks directed at targets such as Tony Blair, and the Finnish Embassy in London, with a tone that Sam Wollaston described during their review of the programme for *The Guardian* as "Sacha Baron Cohen with a bit more substance", (2012) as behind the laughter were strong statements about the corruption and hypocrisy of government. Whilst many of the sketches were stand-alone, there were some regular features within the programme, such as one of the three creators of the programme, Jolyon Rubenstein taking on the character of Dale Maily (a play on the title of *The Daily Mail*, a tabloid newspaper within the United Kingdom. The character attended events such as marches and protests, attempting to "deliver fair, impartial news" (*The Revolution Will Be Televised*, 2013), though their reporting consistently failed to achieve this. Through comments made by Maily, such as his description of the English Defense League (a right-wing and notoriously Islamophobic organisation) as "a patriotic bunch" who "simply love England" (*The Revolution Will Be Televised*, 2013) whilst referring to striking Junior Doctors as "Marxist quacks" and "hippies" (Don't Panic London, 2016) the programme mocked and exposed the language frequently used within tabloid journalism. Similarly to Morris' style of satire, the members of the public involved in the pranks and sketches on *The Revolution Will Be Televised* were usually completely aware that they were being tricked, and part of the satire came from their responses.

*Charlie Brooker's Screenwipe* was broadcast on BBC 4 from 2006 to 2008, and was designed to provide reviews of current television programmes, as well as provide insight into how television was produced. (British Comedy Guide, n.d. a) Following on from *Screenwipe*, several spin-offs were



created - *Newswipe with Charlie Brooker* was broadcast in 2009 and 2010, and focused more specifically on revealing the inner workings of news media, whilst *Charlie Brooker's Gameswipe* in 2009 tackled reviewing video games and consoles whilst discussing the gaming industry. (British Comedy Guide, n.d. a) Several years later, running from 2013 to 2016, *Charlie Brooker's Weekly Wipe* began airing, which brought together the themes and topics discussed in each of the former programmes in the *Wipe* series (British Comedy Guide, n.d. a). The satire used throughout all of the programmes within this series largely came from Brooker's delivery as the presenter, with his commentary being sarcastic and cynical in delivery.

Though typically labelled as dystopian science fiction rather than a satirical television programme, *Black Mirror*, created by Charlie Brooker, used standalone episodes to examine elements of modern society and technology through fictional plots set in alternate realities or versions the near future. Inspired by *The Twilight Zone*, Brooker created *Black Mirror* as an anthology series (British Comedy Guide, n.d. a). Though easter eggs that alluded to some form of link between episodes occasionally appeared, every episode was set within a different location and included no recurring characters, a distinguishing factor that set *Black Mirror* apart from other programmes. Despite not primarily being viewed as a satirical programme, there are certain episodes within the series that use dark humour directed towards those in society in positions of power, which is of course a characteristic of satirical content.

There have been many attempts by satirists in the United Kingdom to adopt the news desk style of satire that had been popularised in the US, with one of the more notable examples being *Unspun with Matt Forde*. Broadcast between 2016 and 2018 on Dave, a television channel within the United Kingdom which is known for broadcasting a variety of entertainment shows, consisting of both acquisitions and original programming. Airing weekly, *Unspun with Matt Forde* covered current affairs topics through straight-to-camera presenting, interviews, and sketches, along with featuring in-house band MP4, which consists of three current and one previous Members of Parliament (British Comedy Guide, n.d. b). Though the programme was broadcast for four series, it never found its feet in the same manner of its US counterparts. It could be argued that the prominence, or lack thereof of Dave as a television channel in comparison to the likes of channels from BBC and ITV could have potentially been a contributing factor, though the differences between the culture surrounding political satire in the United Kingdom and the US are worth considering when searching for an explanation (an angle that will be discussed in more detail later in this thesis).

Another programme which attempted to emulate the news desk style satire of the US was *The Mash Report*, which was created as a spin-off of the popular satirical website *The Daily Mash*. The programme aired on BBC 2 between 2017 and 2020, and aimed to cover "fake news, real news, and everything in between" (Ovid, 2018a). The programme was hosted by Nish Kumar, and featured a

number of comedians as ‘correspondents’ who parodied the style of current affairs broadcasting within the United Kingdom. The comparison was achieved by not only emulating the physical set up, choosing to either sit comedians behind news desks with papers to shuffle through, or having them standing in front of a presentation screen for longer and more ‘informative’ segments, but also through the language and tone used by all performers, as it strongly mimicked that of BBC news presenters, though often adapted a more sarcastic and passive-aggressive tone to suit the satirical content that was being spoken. Similarly to *Unspun with Matt Forde*, *The Mash Report* utilised sketches, straight-to-camera presenting, and interviews to present its satirical content.

Originally existing as a programme that followed Channel 4’s coverage of the London 2012 Summer Paralympic Games, *The Last Leg*, which is hosted by the Australian comedian Adam Hills, and co-presented by Alex Brooker and Josh Widdicombe, morphed into a weekly discussion of topical news stories. Unlike other programmes featured within this overview, *The Last Leg* is broadcast live. This allows the programme to fully embrace the rise of social media, which they do so by encouraging viewers to interact with the programme’s content, particularly through the use of hashtags. The usage of social media in particular has helped to present *The Last Leg* as a programme that can readily engage with younger voters (Higgie, 2017). Though not as strictly a version of the US news desk style of satire, *The Last Leg* certainly contains elements of this format, such as having Hills sit behind a desk, delivering large chunks of dialogue directly to the camera. *The Last Leg* satirises current affairs through discussions amongst the hosts and visiting guests, video clips, games, sketches, interviews, and a ‘bullshit’ button for when host Hills has grown tired of what they are hearing or watching. Clips from the programme are easily found on social media websites, with many having gone viral during its broadcasting, and the interviews with politicians have been widely praised, with Hugo Rifkind writing for *The Spectator* that Alex Brooker’s interview with Nick Clegg “was a model of how to talk normally to a politician – and make them talk normally back” (2015).

As shown through this chapter, writers and performers of satire in the United Kingdom have produced a wide variety of satirical television programmes of differing styles and formats. This satirical content has evolved and been presented in new styles to reflect the changes in targets and political goings-on over time. This chapter also shows that there has been a lack of new satirical television programmes in the United Kingdom over the last ten years, with panel shows that have been broadcast for a large number of years taking the spotlight. With one style of television satire being so prominent in the contemporary space, it is important to consider why this may be. One possible reason lies with the regulations that have been put in place since the 1990’s, which could have potentially impacted the televised satire being created and broadcast.

## Chapter Three – Populism and the Rise of the Entertainer as Populist Leader

Populism is often seen as a political theory, or form of rhetoric. It is a rhetoric that is difficult to pin down precisely, as its messages and claims are fairly broad. Defining what populism is exactly is a complex task, with many academics debating the intricacies and nuances of the term. At its core, populism draws dividing lines through questioning “the rightful location of power and authority” (Norris and Inglehart, 2019), stating that “legitimate power rests with ‘the people’ not the elites.”

Under some definitions, populism can be seen as existing within the left and right wing spheres (also often referred to as progressive and authoritarian, depending on geographical location). However, it could be questioned whether this allows for a fair definition. In the United Kingdom, for example, a popular left-wing rhetoric that is often regarded as populism is the notion that power and control of the state should be lessened for those in higher classes, who have a disproportionately large share of the nation’s wealth. It could then be questioned that this cannot be classed as the same form of politics as the anti-immigration rhetoric commonly spoken by right-wing politicians, which is also viewed as populism. This discrepancy occurs because of the “chameleon-like quality” (Norris and Inglehart 2019) of populism, as other than claiming power should be given to ‘the people’, populism “remains silent about second-order principles, concerning what should be done, what policies should be followed, what decisions should be made” (Norris and Inglehart 2019), which allows the term to be used flexibly, in reference to a wide range of ideologies (Taggart, 2004). In some ways, the argument surrounding what can and cannot be classified as populism links strongly with the notion of ‘punching up’ in satire. As previously mentioned, ‘punching up’ refers to comics targeting those who are in a higher position of power. If going by these same standards, it would be difficult to compare the left creating negative discourse around the rich, to the right creating negative discourse around immigrants – one target has power whilst the other does not. In this instance, the discourse created by the left would be regarded as ‘punching up’, and the discourse created by the right would be considered ‘punching down’.

A populist leader typically presents themselves as “insurgents willing to ride roughshod over long-standing conventions, disrupting mainstream ‘politics as usual’” (Norris and Inglehart, 2019). They claim that they are the only person who can reflect and restore the “authentic voice of ordinary people”, and can “restore collective security against threats”. In what Norris and Inglehart regard as “authoritarian populism”, this is often done through the politics of fear, instilling feelings of “us versus them” and Othering.

Populists, and in particular populist leaders, claim that they speak the popular opinions of ordinary people, which in turn results in a circumstance “where majority preferences override minority interests” (Norris and Inglehart, 2019). However, it is often claimed that there are “fuzzy

lines” (Norris and Inglehart, 2019) between what a populist leader may say is the priority of the nation, and what may in fact be in their own personal interest.

Taggart states that “the idea of living at a turning point in history is an important one for populist ideas” (2004). This not only reflects the notion that populism and populist leaders rely on belief that they are the right person, but also that they are in this position at exactly the right moment. This presents a scenario in which populist leaders share characteristics with the aforementioned tricksters, in terms of them explaining situations and being the individual to offer solutions.

When looking for examples of contemporary populist leaders, perhaps the most notable is Donald Trump as President of the United States, following his success in the 2016 US Presidential Election. Though America had seen many populist political figures prior to Trump, he was the first to become the leader of one of the US’s main political parties and subsequently gain the Presidency (Norris and Inglehart 2019). It is true that in contemporary US politics, presidential candidates from both the Democrat and Republican parties had used populist rhetoric in their campaigning, but Trump’s authoritarian style of populism was distinct, as noted by Norris and Inglehart:

“In the United States, Donald Trump has overthrown numerous conventions in American politics. His aggressive rejection of political correctness, his belligerent style, and his willingness to engage in cultural wars against liberal targets seems to be particularly appealing to older, religious, white men in rural communities, especially social conservatives and xenophobes” (Norris and Inglehart, 2019).

Though often regarded as unexpected, Trump’s ascension to the position of President links back to several cultural changes occurring within the US years before he began his venture into the political sphere, which resulted in his campaign rhetoric appealing strongly to “social conservatives concerned with their declining position” (Norris and Inglehart, 2019). Combining this right-wing authoritarian approach with the charisma that is commonly found in populist leaders, (Taggart, 2004) made Trump, who used his business career to launch himself as a media personality, a Presidential candidate whose success is fairly easy to understand.

At first glance, through looking at global media coverage of the topic, it may appear that Trump’s pivot from entertainer to election as a populist leader was something of an anomaly, an exception to the rule. Milburn notes how historically, it would have been considered highly unusual to see a large number of comedians entering politics. Despite this, there has been a trend of comedians becoming political leaders throughout the world, particularly since the 2010s (Milburn, 2019).

Beppe Grillo, an Italian comedian who pivoted into anti-corruption campaigning, leading to Grillo creating a new political party, Movimento 5 Stelle, in 2010. It was said by many that Grillo’s rallies were not dissimilar in style to a stand-up show, (Milburn, 2019).

French comedian and actor Dieudonné M'bala M'bala (who goes by his stage name, Dieudonné), ran for parliament in 1997 after his stand-up shows grew in popularity, which “resemble political rallies for the dispossessed and disgruntled” (Milburn, 2019). In a similar vein to Trump, Dieudonné was known for making controversial comments about particular groups of people. In particular, Dieudonné was known for their jokes on the topic of antisemitism, which have frequently resulted in legal action being taken against him.

In Iceland, comedian Jón Gnarr established an “anarcho-surrealist” (Milburn, 2019) political party named the Best Party, which was originally created to satirise the Icelandic political parties. However, the Best Party gained 34.7% of votes in the 2010 city elections, and Gnarr became mayor of Reykjavík until 2014 (Milburn, 2019).

Jimmy Morales achieved fame through becoming a comedian on Guatemalan television, and went on to become President of Guatemala in 2016, serving a four year term. Morales' campaigning saw the popularity of his associated political party skyrocket, through his choice to focus his campaign on anti-corruption (Milburn, 2019).

Servant of the People was a comedy series created by Ukrainian comedian Volodymyr Zelenskyy which received huge international acclaim (Kaminsky, 2021). Zelenskyy starred as the main character, a teacher who becomes President after gaining popularity through a viral video criticising the government's corruption. According to Kaminsky, the programme “takes the worn out language of democratisation, reflects of it through a process of ironical estrangement, and reactivates its core message in an admittedly simplified but highly mobilising version” (2021). Through interweaving the fictional narrative of the programme with the reality of the Ukrainian government, Zelenskyy's character became well-loved, as did Zelenskyy himself. A political party was formed bearing the same name as the television programme, and as a member of the party, Zelenskyy won the 2019 Ukrainian presidential election and is currently serving as President (Kaminsky, 2019).

The examples listed above all serve as evidence to suggest that the wave of comedians becoming political leaders have presented a populist narrative through their campaigning. Milburn believes that this trend reveals a problem within politics that is “both obscured by political satire and caused by it” (2019), revealing the difficulty in “putting forward sincere political statements in an age of widespread cynical irony”. Such irony eats away at beliefs that groups of people can implement meaningful change, which feeds into the necessity for a populist leader who has the power to make the change, but represents the voice of the people. In the contemporary political landscape, it has become increasingly complicated to make authentic statements without being viewed as either disillusioned or inexperienced, due to the previously mentioned fictitious double audience that irony creates. (Milburn, 2019). As comedians, the figures discussed above will naturally be familiar and

comfortable with the concept of irony. This is how, as a political figure, Milburn believes they can shift from irony to sincerity so easily, in a post-ironic manner.

Conversely to this, another phenomenon is occurring within contemporary politics, which not many studies have examined the effects of (Higgie, 2017). This is the growing number of politicians participating in or creating satirical content.

Possibly the most notable example is current Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Boris Johnson. As previously mentioned in Chapter Two, Johnson is regarded as having risen to fame through appearing on *Have I Got News for You*. The appearance marked the creation of Johnson's "self-caricature" (Milburn, 2019), which has hugely impacted the public's perception of him. The idea behind the caricature is a smart one, as through presenting a highly restricted set of characteristics that are often viewed as comical, Johnson has an element of control over how he is perceived publicly. He can ensure that he is essentially giving 'material' for satirists to work from, controlling his image. Additionally, the caricature serves to hide who Johnson really is, making it difficult to confirm his own beliefs (Milburn, 2019).

It could certainly be argued that the choice to present a carefully curated caricature, and participate in satirical television programmes, is a choice that hugely aligns with the aforementioned characteristics and aims of the populist leader. If a person wishes to be perceived as an authentic figure who represents the voice of the people, bringing politics, and yourself, to an arguably more accessible form of television will only strengthen this image.

Though a broad term, examining populism, and in particular, the rise of populist leaders, is valuable when considering the context surrounding contemporary satirical television programmes. The increasing number of entertainers as populist leaders, and political leaders such as Boris Johnson making themselves easier to satirise, suggests a growing level of recognition for satire as an influential tool.

## Chapter Four – Regulations Relating to Impartiality and Bias, and Satirising ‘bias’ at the BBC

With contemporary conversations regarding television news media in the United Kingdom becoming increasingly linked to the topic of impartiality, such as Waterson (2020) and Power (2020), it is unsurprising that these discussions are also being had on the topic of satirical television programmes such as (Moore, 2020). It is therefore imperative to understand the regulations in place in the United Kingdom that related to impartiality and bias, to allow further discussion about contemporary satire to take place.

The creation of the Office of Communications, Ofcom, was first discussed in The Communications White Paper entitled *A New Future for Communications*, published on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2000, and was used to outline the Labour government’s plans to overhaul the regulatory systems for telecoms and broadcasting. The rapid advancements within the technological world had resulted in a broadcasting sector which was unable to manage such a fast rate of development, and the regulators at the time were struggling to keep up. Replacing and merging these smaller regulators into one larger "super-regulator" (Feintuck, 2001), was further outlined in the Office of Communications Act 2002, and then enacted upon with the Communications Act 2003.

Following the launch of Ofcom on 29<sup>th</sup> December 2003, the regulator gained the responsibilities that had been previously held by five smaller regulatory bodies; the Independent Telecommunications Commission, the Radiocommunications Agency, the Radio Authority, the Broadcasting Standards Commission and The Office of Telecommunications.

Under the Communications Act 2003, Ofcom was required to produce and publish a *Broadcasting Code* "which sets out standards for the content of television and radio services" (Ofcom, 2010). The writing of the Code, and all subsequent changes made were done with the *European Convention of Human Rights* in mind, particularly the "right to freedom of expression" (Ofcom, 2010), which includes "the freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas" (Ofcom, 2010). The independent regulator itself describes the Code as existing "to protect viewers and listeners from harmful and offensive content but also ensures that broadcasters have the freedom to make challenging programmes" (Ofcom n.d.(a)).

It is important to note that the *Broadcasting Code* has been edited, amended, and added to on many occasions since its original publication. One example is the re-publication of the Code during the period of the United Kingdom’s European Union Referendum in 2016. During this time, additions and amendments were made to Section Five (which at the time was titled "Due Impartiality and Due Accuracy and Undue Prominence of Views and Opinions" (Ofcom, 2015) and Section Six "Elections

and Referendums” (Ofcom, 2015) in preparation for the upcoming broadcasting of Referendum content.

These edits and additions are also often made as a result of Ofcom discovering limitations within the Code, often through working on complaint cases. One such example of this can be found within a publicly available document found within the Ofcom website, entitled ‘*Decision of the Election Committee on a due impartiality and due weight complaint brought by Vote Leave Limited in relation to ITV’s coverage of the EU Referendum*’, (2016) which was prepared after the meeting of Ofcom’s Election Committee on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2016, to discuss a complaint made to Ofcom by Vote Leave Limited, an organisation that supported the United Kingdom’s proposed withdrawal from the European Union.

The complaint was directed against ITV, one of the larger channels and news broadcasters in the United Kingdom, and their supposed lack of impartiality and due weight regarding the subject of the EU Referendum. Within this document, it is revealed that through the process of deciding whether to uphold Vote Leave Limited’s complaint, the Ofcom Election Committee recognised that whilst the idea of “due weight” is mentioned frequently within Sections Five and Six of the Code, a definition of this phrase is never provided. Contrasting this, the edition of the Code published at this time did contain a detailed description of the meaning of “due impartiality”. The Committee judged that similarly to due impartiality, due weight is “a flexible concept that should be applied on a case-by-case basis, having regard to the subject and nature of the programming in question” (Ofcom, 2016).

It is interesting to note that whilst the absence of definition is noted as a potential cause of ambiguity and uncertainty, at the time of writing, no such definition of “due weight” has been added to the Code. Considering the Committee deemed it to be similar in nature to “due impartiality”, the decision to include an explanation for one but not the other is somewhat baffling.

It is important to note that for the purpose of this thesis, the edition of the *Broadcasting Code* that is referred to in each section will vary according to which version was published at the relevant time period.

At the time of writing, the current Code, which covers “all programmes broadcast on or after 23:00 on 31 December 2020” (Ofcom n.d. (b)) is divided into ten main sections, with three additional topics added at the end of the Code. Section One covers specific guidance for protecting viewers who are under the age of eighteen. Section Two gives information surrounding the regulations on generally damaging and offensive content, with Section Three going into specific information surrounding content featuring “crime, disorder, hatred, and abuse” (Ofcom n.d. (b)), and Section Four dedicated specifically to content featuring religion. The topics of “due impartiality and due accuracy” (Ofcom n.d. (b)) are covered in Section Five, with Section Six discussing regulations around elections and referendums. Sections Seven and Eight cover fairness and privacy respectively. Section Nine focuses



on the topic of commercial references on television, and Section Ten is focused on how commercial communications are regulated in radio content. Additionally, the Appendix covers Ofcom's regulations on financial promotions and investment recommendations (Ofcom n.d. (b)), whilst the Cross-promotional Code encompasses regulations for broadcasters promoting features such as programmes and other channels, without it being viewed as an advertisement. The final topic covers the specific guidelines for on-demand programmes.

For the purpose of this thesis, Sections Five and Six are the areas of the *Broadcasting Code* that will be focused on, as they are the sections of most relevance to the topics that are being discussed. Importantly, Section Five of the *Broadcasting Code* focuses on "the concept of "due impartiality" as it applies to news and other programmes" (Ofcom n.d. (c)) and is based on the principle that "news, in whatever form, is reported with due accuracy and presented with due impartiality", which Ofcom defines as follows;

"Due" is an important qualification to the concept of impartiality. Impartiality itself means not favouring one side over another. "Due" means adequate or appropriate to the subject and nature of the programme. So "due impartiality" does not mean an equal division of time has to be given to every view, or that every argument and every facet of every argument has to be represented. The approach to due impartiality may vary according to the nature of the subject, the type of programme and channel, the likely expectation of the audience as to content, and the extent to which the content and approach is signalled to the audience." (Ofcom n.d. (c))

Due to the aforementioned flexibility of 'due impartiality' and 'due weight', it can be easily understood why complaints are often made to Ofcom regarding a suggested lack of both or either within a programme. However, it is the duty of Ofcom to provide consistency within its rulings that will aid in the process of debating future cases, and to make this information clear to broadcasters and the general public.

Though Ofcom is the regulatory body for all television and radio broadcasting, the BBC also have their own *Editorial Guidelines* which provide the framework for how employees within the BBC achieve impartiality within their work. The BBC have claimed to be independent of the government since 1923, though as stated by Valérie Bélaïr-Gagnon, "it took almost two decades before the BBC formally defined in its policy notes what it meant to be impartial as an organisation" (2013). Bélaïr-Gagnon goes on to reveal that "it was not until the 1996 Royal Charter that the BBC enshrined due impartiality in its Editorial Guidelines" (2013). Similarly to Ofcom, the BBC defines 'due' as having "no absolute test of accuracy or impartiality", which means that cases are looked at on individual bases, though previous examples are used to provide context. Bélaïr-Gagnon also mentions *From Seesaw to Wagon Wheel*, a report by the BBC on how to uphold their standard of impartiality in the twenty first century, which provides a further definition of what impartiality at the BBC consists of;

“accuracy, balance, context, distance, even-handedness, fairness, objectivity, open-mindedness, rigor, self-awareness, transparency, and truth” (2013).

Despite this awareness of what impartiality should look like within BBC programming, complaints are still made by viewers who believe that the BBC is not upholding these standards. When reviewing complaints, the BBC looks upon its own guidance and reviews it in accordance with the appropriate section from their Guidelines. At the time of writing, the Guidelines consist of eighteen sections, with an appendix. Section one is focused on outlining the “BBC’s Editorial Standards” (BBC, 2021), with Section Two setting out how the Guidelines should be used. Section 3 discusses accuracy, and Section 4 is dedicated to looking at impartiality. Similarly to Ofcom’s *Broadcasting Code*, there is a section dedicated to the general idea of harm and offence, which in the BBC’s Guidelines is Section 5. Section 6 covers “Fairness to Contributors and Consent” (BBC, 2021), and Section 7 is focused on the topic of privacy. Section 8 gives their guidance on how and when to report criminal activity and anti-social behaviour, and in a slightly different perspective to Ofcom’s *Broadcasting Code*, Section 9 of the BBC’s Guidelines focuses on children, but from the perspective of them as contributors. “Politics, Public Policy and Polls” (BBC, 2021) is a topic covered in Section 10, and “War, Terror and Emergencies” (BBC, 2021) featured in Section 11. Again, similarly to Ofcom’s Code, the BBC’s Guidelines feature a section (Section 12 in this case) dedicated to content of a religious nature. Section 13 tackles “Re-use, Reversioning and Permanent Availability” (BBC, 2021), followed by Section 14 covering how the BBC maintains “Independence from External Interests (BBC, 2021), naturally followed by Section 15 on the topic of conflicts of interest. Linking to this again, is Section 16, which discusses “External Relationships and Financing” (BBC, 2021). Section 17 covers “Competitions, Votes and Interactivity (BBC, 2021) whilst Section 18 is appropriately named “The Law” (BBC, 2021). The Appendix to the Guidelines at the time of writing is entitled “Election guidelines 2021” (BBC, 2021).

Once a complaint has been reviewed, the BBC then publishes its findings. Whilst it could be expected that the BBC would refrain from communicating about such accusations outside of a professional interview setting or statement, this hasn’t been the case. In fact, the BBC has on several occasions broadcast satirical content which addresses the supposed lack of balance within its broadcasting.

### Satirising ‘bias’ at the BBC

The topic of the BBC’s alleged lack of impartiality has been used as material by comedians within the “Scenes We’d Like to See” round of *Mock the Week* on more than one occasion. During this round, the comedians featured as panelists within the episode gather on the sides of the performance space and host Dara O’Briain reads out a scenario as it appears in text on the screen behind the panelists, that is to be used as a prompt and set up for the next few jokes within the round.

The panelists then take it in turns to walk to the microphone in the centre of the performance space and deliver a one-liner that appropriately fits the scenario in question. The scenarios vary in theme, with some referencing famous films or books, though their content is often influenced by current affairs topics of the week, with subjects such as elections or other political ongoings being frequently utilised for material.

Within the scenario “Things you didn’t hear during the election” which was broadcast on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2017, Ed Gamble took to the performance space and stated "Here at the BBC, we need balance". Gamble then paused to stand on one leg, before exclaiming “Jeremy Corbyn's shit" (BBC, 2017a). Here, Gamble uses a play on words, presenting the physical act of balancing before saying something inflammatory. This could also be seen as Gamble satirising the BBC’s attitude to balance - them acknowledging the need for balance through their Guidelines, before making a provocative statement within a programme that acts to contradict the aforementioned Guidelines.

In an episode broadcast only a few months later, on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2017, with the prompt of “Things a news reporter would never say”, James Acaster stepped up to the microphone and excitedly said "Damn right BBC News is biased, this next story is about how I'm hot to trot and all the ladies wanna do me" (BBC, 2017b) Acaster’s joke reflects an awareness of bias but supposed lack of motivation to change, and suggests using it to their advantage if they can’t change it.

## Chapter Five – US News Satire and Regulations: A Comparison

Whilst televised satire within the United Kingdom is highly shaped by the forerunners of such programming, and by current affairs, it is also important to acknowledge external influences that have contributed to making contemporary televised satire within the United Kingdom what it is currently. A highly successful and influential style exists within contemporary televised satire in the United States of America, which this chapter examines.

Within the United States of America, one specific style of satire has emerged as pre-eminent, and its success shows no sign of halting. This style is commonly referred to as ‘news satire’, as it parodies the format of traditional conventional journalism. Though news satire exists in many formats, the type that will be referred to in this chapter is specifically news satire which is broadcast on television. The following examples have been chosen not just for their prominence within the genre, but also to act as comparators for satirical television programmes in the United Kingdom, to show the perceived regulatory differences between the United Kingdom and the United States.

*The Daily Show* was first broadcast in 1996, as a half-hour long programme hosted by American sport and political commentator and comedian Craig Kilborn, creating satirical content based on current affairs and entertainment. In 1999, the programme became *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* in 1999, and was taken in a more politics-focused direction with new host, Jon Stewart. Within “*Mocking the News: How The Daily Show with Jon Stewart Holds Traditional Broadcast News Accountable*”, Chad Painter and Louis Hodges used textual analysis of 154 episodes of *The Daily Show*, all of which were broadcast between 2008 and 2010, and determined that Jon Stewart and the team behind *The Daily Show* held the mainstream broadcast news media accountable through four methods; “pointing out falsehoods”, “pointing out inconsistencies”, “pointing out when inconsequential news is blown out of proportion”, and “by critiquing the nature of broadcast news” (2010). Painter and Hodges describing audience reactions as “laughter informed by ethical standards” (2010), stating that Stewart’s humour acted as “proverbial spoonful of sugar that helps the medicine go down” (2010).

Paul Brewer and Emily Marquardt, among many others, refer to the programme as sitting within the genre of “soft news media” (2007), as the programme mocks and parodies the traditional television broadcast news set up – the host takes on the character of the news anchor, and sits behind a desk whilst presenting the night’s top news stories and conducting interviews. The set behind the host features a screen playing relevant video footage to accompany certain news stories, in the same style as a traditional news or current affairs programme. Additionally, several comedians hold roles as ‘Correspondents’ on the programme, who present interviews and reporting segments, adding to the parody. As Jamie Warner states, if one were to watch the programme without any sound or subtitles,

it could be easily mistaken as a regular broadcast news programme, but “turning the volume up should let you in on the secret” (2007). Since 2015, *The Daily Show* has been hosted by Trevor Noah.

2005 saw the launch of another news satire programme within the United States – *The Colbert Report*, hosted by Stephen Colbert. *The Colbert Report* differs to *The Daily Show* in that rather than parodying and mocking news media as a whole, it instead targets one specific type of news programme and personality. Taking on the character of Stephen Colbert (occasionally referred to as “The Reverend Sir Dr. Stephen T. Mos Def Colbert D.F.A., Heavyweight Champion of the World” (Gregory, 2016), who was designed to parody the presenters of cable news channels in the United States. Episodes began with an opening sequence that not only parodied the openings of television news shows, but also mocked their overblown patriotism. This was achieved through using footage of Colbert waving the American Flag, along with footage of an eagle flying, and a substantial usage of red, white and blue throughout. After this opening sequence, Colbert proceeded to read out a number of recent headlines in a manner that once again parodied the presenters of cable news channels, before then going on to discussing a particular theme for the episode, with the addition of video footage, and on-screen images and text which either supported or hugely contradicted what Colbert was saying. Lisa Colletta stated in 2009 that *The Colbert Report* “takes conservative positions and spins them out to their most ludicrous extreme” (2009). The programme was not without its controversies, with one notable example being the use of a character named “Ching-Chong Ding-Dong” (Yang, 2014) who was created to “satirize knee-jerk mockery of Asian dialect”, but was viewed by many as being racially insensitive. The programme ended in 2014 and left quite a legacy behind it, including introducing the word ‘truthiness’ into the lexicon of American English, in a similar manner to *The Thick of It’s* ‘omnishambles’, to the extent that it was named Word of the Year in 2005 by the American Dialect Society (2005). Colbert later moved on to hosting *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, (replacing David Letterman), which had previously been labelled as a late-night talk show, but switched the focus of the programme more towards satirising current affairs once Colbert took on the role of host.

Another prominent programme in the United States that falls under news satire is *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*, which began airing in 2014. The host, John Oliver, had previously worked on *The Daily Show*, and *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* maintained many of the same characteristics of *The Daily Show*, but was broadcast on a weekly basis as the name suggests. The programme is another that parodies the traditional news media, but this is done mainly through the similarities in the layout and features of the studio. Instead of focusing on current affairs stories from the news in the same manner as *The Daily Show*, episodes of *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* begin with a short segment that briefly discusses recent headlines, before then concentrating on one particular topic and covering it in depth. Oliver uses video and images to aid his presenting, and is also well known for his use of fake mascots to aid in highlighting certain issues, such as “Jeff the

Diseased Lung with a Cowboy Hat”, (LastWeekTonight, 2015) who was used during Oliver’s segment titled *Tobacco*, and is shown in Figure 1, to scrutinise the effects of Tobacco industry on public health.



Figure 1. Screenshot from the ‘Tobacco’ segment, uploaded onto the LastWeekTonight YouTube channel, of John Oliver introducing Jeff the Diseased Lung with a Cowboy Hat (LastWeekTonight, 2015).

The aforementioned programmes are widely discussed in academic literature, in an attempt to understand the impact that they have had on American society, and the political sphere. Michael A. Xenos, and Amy Becker write in their 2009 article for the journal *Political Communication, Moments of Zen: Effects of The Daily Show on Information Seeking and Political Learning*, that though the creators of these news satire programmes in the United States may not think so themselves, “ordinary citizens have come to view entertainment programming that features political content as a significant force in American politics” (2009).

It would be incorrect to state that this ‘news satire’ which not only parodies news programmes but also primarily covers current affairs topics, has only existed on television within the United States. In fact, previously mentioned BBC programme *That Was the Week That Was* does classify as news satire. However, the news satire style of satirical television programme appeared to disappear from the landscape of satire within the United Kingdom after this. A brief resurgence of sorts occurred within the 1990s with *The Day Today* and *Brass Eye*, but though these programmes still parodied the format and style of traditional television news broadcasting, they did not satirise current events of the time, focusing instead on fictionalised news stories.

After the 2016 United Kingdom European Union referendum, two new news satire programmes began airing – *Unspun with Matt Forde*, and *The Mash Report*. With the news satire programmes within the United States having such prominence in the media, it would be easy to expect that the same style of programmes broadcast in the United Kingdom have the same successes. However, this is not the case. Though there have been attempts to provide the United Kingdom with a news satire programme that could reach the same heights as the likes of *The Daily Show* and *The*

*Colbert Report*, none of them have managed to achieve this. It could be argued that this is the case for several reasons, but the most discussed factor is that of the differing rules regarding impartiality and bias in the United Kingdom and the United States.

The previously mentioned regulations surrounding impartiality and bias in television broadcasting that are present in the United Kingdom do not exist in broadcasting regulations universally, which is shown in part through Simon Weaver's aforementioned chapter on Brexit Irony (2019). News satire content in the United States is something that is considered to hugely benefit from this, largely due to the presence of The First Amendment to the United States Constitution. A part of the Bill of Rights, The First Amendment prevents laws being made by the American government which would restrict the freedom of several elements of American society; religion, assembly, petition, free press, and most relevant in this case, free speech and expression (Bailey, 2018). This freedom of speech and expression prevents the United States government from censoring and restraining the voicing of opinions (with some limitations).

As Ric Bailey observes, "impartiality and freedom of speech may both have been significant features for each jurisdiction, but in the United States, the latter tends to trump the former; in the United Kingdom, it can seem as if the former trumps the latter" (2018). However, Bailey then goes on to state that the difference in regulation forms "subtly varying attitudes" (2018) to what satire can and cannot do within both of these locations, which they believe has resulted in an exaggerated belief of what news satire in the United Kingdom is unable to do as a result of the regulations they must adhere to, when in reality, such limitations may not actually occur.

The programmes within the United States that fall under the category of news satire have found success through "speaking truth to power" (Edinburgh Television Festival, 2017), which according to Bailey is perhaps incorrectly viewed as not being possible within the United Kingdom. When examining styles of satire used within *The Daily Show* and *The Mash Report*, for example, they are in fact remarkably similar. If this is the case, and the view that such satirical content is possible within satirical television content in the United Kingdom, it would perhaps be appropriate and important for the regulations that exist within the United Kingdom to be elaborated upon, and for these regulations to be more readily available and more easily digestible for the general public. Such changes would not only clarify the regulatory position on satire for those who wish to create it, but also for those who are viewing and reviewing such content.

As previously mentioned in Chapter Three, Donald Trump's rise into politics, his presidential campaign, and his subsequent four-year term as President of the United States of America were built on a foundation of right-wing authoritarian populism. It is interesting to consider how these US news satire programmes responded to Trump, and to what extent.

It could certainly be argued that the rise of Donald Trump also resulted in the rise of satirical figures in the United States, such as Jordan Klepper (Sienkiewicz and Marx, 2021). Klepper, who began working on *The Daily Show* in 2014, was established as a strong figure in the sphere of liberal satirical television content through “his ironic confrontations with supporters of Donald Trump” (Sienkiewicz and Marx, 2021) via the crudely titled segment; ‘*Jordan Klepper Fingers the Pulse*’.

In terms of examining the satirical content produced that targets Trump, parody is a useful starting point. The distinct voice, appearance, and mannerisms (both physical and audible) of Trump naturally invite impersonations, and many have been provided by satirists worldwide. For US news satire programmes, Trevor Noah and Stephen Colbert have both been known for impersonating Trump in their programmes. Not only did satirists on US news satire programmes parody Trump through direct impersonation, but they also parodied the exceedingly patriotic aesthetic used as an integral aspect of his presidential campaign. On *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, in a segment named ‘*Trumpiness*’, Stephen Colbert parodied the style through the over-usage of the flag of the United States of America, along with Captain America and Uncle Sam iconography and props (The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, 2016). Such parodies, both personal and aesthetic, use irony within the satirical content to ridicule and mock the figure of Trump. Often, they also rely on incongruities to surprise and shock the audience, such as dressing to physically look like Trump but saying something very out of character.

The language used by Trump both when speaking publicly and via social media has provided US news satire programmes with a plethora of content, particularly after Trump’s claim that he “has the best words” (The Daily Show with Trevor Noah, 2018). *The Daily Show* in particular made use of this material, going so far as to create ‘*Trump’s Best Words*’, a series of compilation videos consisting of video footage of Trump’s verbal missteps and made-up language (The Daily Show with Trevor Noah, 2019). The videos were initially produced as a yearly roundup of such content, but the series was then also extended to include special editions such as ‘State of the Union Edition’ (The Daily Show with Trevor Noah, 2020a) and ‘Coronavirus Briefing Edition’ (The Daily Show with Trevor Noah, 2020b).

One of the more notable examples of US news satire targeting Donald Trump occurred before he had even been confirmed as a presidential candidate. In February 2016, months before the 2016 Presidential election in November, Oliver performed a monologue over 21 minutes in length as the ‘Main Story’ for *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*, in which he analyses and explains the appeal of Donald Trump as a Presidential candidate (LastWeekTonight, 2016). Within the monologue, Oliver breaks down several claims made by Trump supporters, and presents the irony within each confident assertion, such as Trump’s self-proclaimed reluctance to accept campaign donations, whilst several ‘donate’ buttons were situated on his campaign website (LastWeekTonight, 2016). Oliver’s analysis is



broken up by quips about Trump's appearance. Oliver uses the irony to debunk several of Trump's claims, and humour emerged from the incongruity of what the reality was, as opposed to what Trump stated it was. There are also elements of the superiority theory at play here – through Oliver's examination, audience members can feel superior in comparison to Trump supporters, and Trump himself, through the mocking.

Oliver then goes on to state that he does understand how members of the public in the United States could consider Trump a good choice for a presidential candidate, due to the association of 'Trump' with wealth and success (LastWeekTonight, 2016). This leads into the final segment of the monologue, in which Oliver reveals that at some point in Trump's ancestry, the last name had been changed to 'Trump' from 'Drumpf' (LastWeekTonight, 2016). Noting that Drumpf sounds less powerful and influential, Oliver suggests that viewers “#MakeDonaldDrumpf Again” (LastWeekTonight, 2016) a direct parody of Trump's 'Make America Great Again' campaign slogan.

The monologue was not only popular at the time, with international news outlets reporting on the segment (HBO/Last Week Tonight with John Oliver, 2016), but it also quickly went viral after being uploaded to YouTube. As of May 2022, the video has over 40 million views.

Of course, it is also worth noting that Trump's response to satire targeting him has been different to the responses of similar world leaders. As mentioned previously in Chapter Three, Johnson openly invites parody and comedic content through his self-caricature. Trump, in contrast, openly expresses annoyance at satirical content in which he is the target, often taking to social media to convey his vexation (Film Quarterly, 2021).

It is interesting to consider whether satirising Donald Trump on British televised satire if he were the elected leader of the United Kingdom would have evoked the same strength of reaction from him, considering the perception of UK broadcasting regulations, and whether the opposite could be said if Johnson was satirised by US news satire as the elected leader of the United States. Televised satire in the United Kingdom that targets Boris Johnson is focused on the elements of himself (or his caricature) that he allows the satirist to target. However, there are other elements of Johnson's life that he is reluctant to discuss publicly, such as his family life. It is not difficult to imagine a scenario in which John Oliver produces a monologue in which he closely analyses Johnson's family tree, but it feels somewhat unlikely that we would see the same hard-hitting content from an equivalent television news satire programme in the United Kingdom.

There have been many studies which serve to analyse whether there is any form of correlation between watching political news desk style satirical programmes, such as *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, and political participation (Baumgartner and Lockerbie, 2018). In Baumgartner and Lockerbie's study, *Maybe it Is More Than a Joke: Satire, Mobilization, and Political Participation*, they establish that viewership of the aforementioned programmes had a positive impact on political

mobilisation, a claim which is also suggested by numerous other studies (Baumgartner and Lockerbie, 2018). The concluding paragraph to this study is particularly interesting;

“Not only does the watching of these shows have an effect on political participation, it also has an asymmetric effect on vote choice. With the addition of new shows of a similar nature, we might see increased viewership in total, thereby working to the advantage of the Democratic Party. The election of 2020, sure to be preceded by a barrage of anti-Trump satire, will be an interesting test case” (Baumgartner and Lockerbie, 2018).

It is interesting that Baumgartner and Lockerbie consider that the rise in number of US news satire programmes, and an increased amount of satire targeting Trump could have *such* an impact on viewers and their political participation, to the extent that the result of a presidential election could be influenced.

Additionally, Baumgartner and Lockerbie note that in the years soon after the 2016 US Presidential Election, US late night talk shows such as *Conan* and *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* became more “explicitly political” (Baumgartner and Lockerbie, 2018), which could be interpreted as an attempt to ride on the successes of US news satire programmes like *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* and *The Daily Show*.

Overall, news satire programmes in the United States continue to boom as a style of satirical content, with the rise of Donald Trump providing ample material. Meanwhile, news satire programmes in the United Kingdom have not managed to reach the same or even similar heights, even with a similarly satirisable leader in Boris Johnson. It is certainly worth considering whether this contrast is due to what are widely considered to be vastly different regulations regarding impartiality, or as Bailey states, whether these are merely *perceived* regulatory differences, and whether more explicitness in UK regulations could result in satirical content more similar to that found in the United States.

## Chapter Six – The BBC and Impartiality – *The Mash Report*

The following section offers an analysis of how contemporary BBC television satire tends to handle accusations of bias, using the example of BBC 2's *The Mash Report*. Throughout the four series of the programme, frequent mentions were made to the BBC's supposed bias. A common feature within *The Mash Report* was a segment during which co-presenter Rachel Parris would appear to read out and react to comments that people had been making about the programme. The tweets mentioned were however pre-written for the episodes, providing moments to give commentary on several current affairs topics, and under the guise of fake and often crude usernames. During the second episode of the first series, *The Mash Report* used this segment of the programme to present the argument of the BBC's reported bias, through the form of '@AngrySteve828' tweeting "STOP HAVING A GO AT CORBYN AND MAY! TYPICAL LEFT WING AND RIGHT WING BBC BIAS. #themashreport" (Ovid, 2018b) as shown in Figure 1. Usually when the BBC is accused of bias, such an accusation is made by an individual or group with one particular political leaning, alleging the BBC is bias towards the oppositional political leaning. This argument is one that is used by both sides, and the tweet reflects this irony, by presenting *The Mash Report* as containing both left wing and right wing bias, which would presumably cancel each other out and result in the programme being 'balanced'. The fake tweet also alludes to the notion that anybody with either political alignment could spot and report bias against them if they feel as though coverage had not targeted both sides equally.

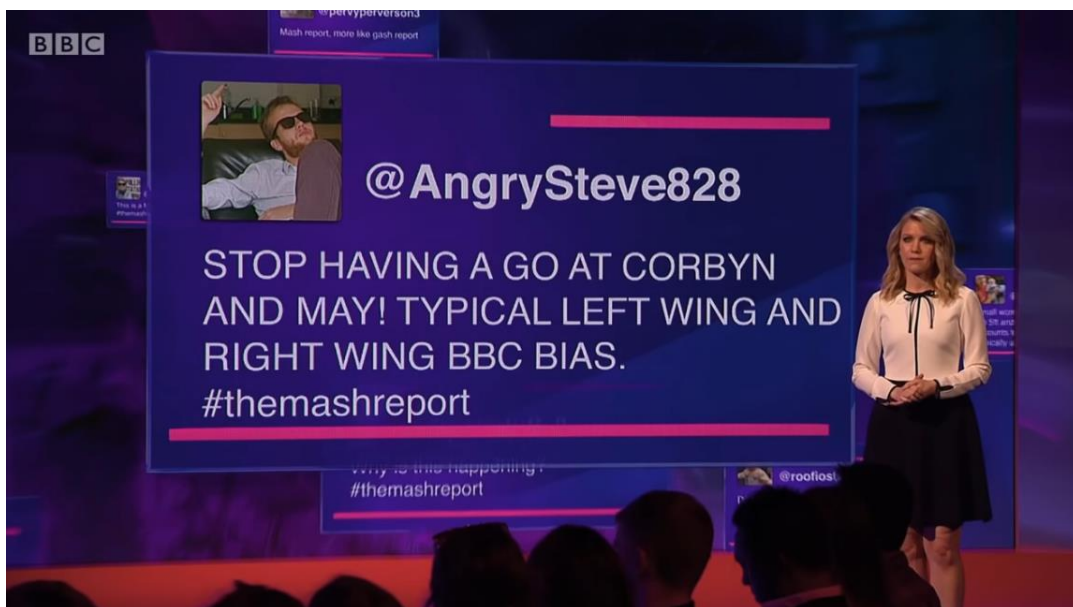


Figure 2: A fake tweet posted by fictitious Twitter user '@AngrySteve828', constructed by *The Mash Report* to highlight the absurdity of one programme being labelled as bias from both political leanings. BBC Two (2018).

On 12<sup>th</sup> November 2018, the impartiality of political satire broadcast by the BBC was the focus of several Twitter posts by Andrew Neil, a Scottish journalist and broadcaster, who was formally the editor of *The Sunday Times*, and worked for the BBC for twenty five years presenting political television programmes such as *Sunday Politics*, *Daily Politics*, *Politics Live*, and *The Andrew Neil Show*. Neil posted several Tweets which declared his opinion that “when it comes to so called comedy the BBC has long given up on balance” (as shown in Figure 2), and that programmes such as *The Mash Report* are “contrived ideological commentary” (as shown in Figure 3). Neil then went on to target *The Mash Report* more specifically, stating his belief that the programme is “thirty minutes of self satisfied, self adulatory, unchallenged left wing propaganda” and that this “could never happen on a politics show. Except this has become a politics show.” (as shown in Figure 4).



Figures 3, 4 and 5: Tweets posted by Andrew Neil regarding his opinions on the impartiality and balance of political satire on the BBC on the 12<sup>th</sup> November 2018 BBC Two (2018).

*The Mash Report* then went on to provide a satirical response to Neil’s criticisms directly, during a segment in which ‘correspondent’ Rachel Parris took on the role of Impartiality Monitor’. The segment (BBC, 2018), navigated through Neil’s comments in a manner that altered the message behind the satirical output throughout, and can be split into three smaller sections.

The first section of the segment acts as an irreverent response, designed to puncture the pomposity of Neil’s statements, whilst also informing the audience of how much, or rather, how little those involved with *The Mash Report* were bothered by Neil’s comments. The segment begins by showing Parris wearing a sash with her new title written on it. Speaking directly to the camera, Parris states that Andrew Neil’s tweets regarding the programme had “inspired” them to “address this issue of bias”. Parris then continues by briefly explaining to the viewers that the BBC is obliged to “show due impartiality and to reflect a broad range of views”, and that it is now her responsibility to ensure the show reflects this requirement. Parris then refers to the sash as her new “uniform” for the role,

though states that it was “recycled from a hen do, which is why it smells of prosecco and lube.” The notion of Parris needing a uniform for this role suggests that it is official and noteworthy. However, this is then immediately contrasted by the revelation that the sash was in fact recycled from a hen do, which implies that they didn’t care enough about the role to have a specific sash made, and that it was simply thrown together with what was supposedly available. The irony this situation displays is humorous not only through its contradictions, but it acts as a mirror of how little those at *The Mash Report* care about Neil’s claims, which then produces further humour.

Parris continues by quoting one of Andrew Neil’s tweets stating that he believed the show to be “self satisfied, self adulatory, unchallenged left wing propaganda” (BBC, 2018). Parris then takes a moment to look across at co-presenter Kumar, and says “Oh Nish, he’s found out about your self-adultating” followed by a long pause for audience laughter, whilst the camera switches between shots of Parris portraying a sense of awkwardness, and Kumar attempting to maintain a neutral expression to not present any feelings of embarrassment towards what is being discussed about himself. Whilst self-adulation typically means “The quality of having an excessively high opinion of oneself or one’s importance” (Lexico n.d.), Parris is in this case using the term as a double entendre, suggesting a more physical response to having a high opinion of oneself, through the act of masturbation. Though this joke is targeting Kumar, it does still impact how seriously Neil’s original statement can be taken. By puncturing Neil’s statement through the double entendre, it targets the pomposity of Neil’s language. Usage of a double entendre also invokes the superiority theory – viewers who understand the double entendre and recognise that not everybody will have understood will feel a sense of superiority in comparison to their peers, but also all viewers will feel a sense of superiority over Kumar, due to the teasing.

During the next section of the segment, Parris sarcastically states that the statement “hit the Mash family very hard”. The language used is a coded method of showing how little the production team for *The Mash Report* care about what Neil has said, through using a phrase commonly associated with news reporting.

Parris then makes a callback to the aforementioned joke about masturbation by looking directly at the camera and stating “Nish couldn’t self-adulate for a week after hearing that”, with a serious expression, before the camera cuts to Kumar laughing at the comment. Another long pause is given for Parris to portray a sympathetic expression, as the studio audience laughs and applauds, and Kumar descends further into laughter, whilst also covering his face somewhat with his hand to yet again attempt to hide any embarrassment at what is being discussed.

Neil’s tweets call for *The Mash Report* to take a form of responsibility for enforcing impartiality. The show’s flippant response suggests a counterview, that it is not possible or reasonable to insist that comedy should be ‘impartial’. Moreover, it becomes clear that *The Mash Report* offers

itself as a correctional balance to BBC and media bias more generally. The sequence continued with a counterattack on Andrew Neil: “The right-wing, pro-Brexit, BBC News Anchor criticised us as part of a fair and balanced early morning Twitter tirade about Observer journalist Carole Cadwalladr. He’s annoyed that Carole has exposed funding and electoral irregularities at the heart of the Leave campaign, and so in a fair and balanced manner, he called her a ‘mad cat woman’. This echoes a year-long campaign of often misogynistic abuse directed at Carole led by Leave.EU supremo Aaron Banks.”

The repetition of “fair and balanced” is used here sarcastically to highlight Neil’s bluster. A “tirade” is, by definition, an angry, sustained, and one-sided attack, rather than the careful weighing of evidence implied by the word ‘balance’. The commentary further alleges Neil’s remarks to be motivated by misogyny and part of a broader campaign to undermine democratic process, which bestows a further irony on the word ‘fair’.

At this point, Kumar steps in and questions whether what Parris had just said is balanced, to which Parris asks if Kumar is “mansplaining” her presentation to her. Kumar’s wide-eyed expression and exclamations of “No! God No!” were then met by Parris informing Kumar that she was joking, and that his comments are “what this programme needs”, before asking Kumar when he is going to remove himself from his “feminist liberal bubble, and shame a woman for having an opinion”, another strong use of irony. Within this section, Parris appears to send the tone of the conversation in one direction, accusing Kumar of misogyny, before then turning the dialogue on its head and approaching the topic from an angle that is implied as the thought process of Neil.

Parris then continues by stating “Unlike Nish, Andrew Neil is always perfectly balanced. How else would that thing stay on his head?” as the screen behind Parris then displays a photograph of Andrew Neil, who notoriously has the appearance of wearing a toupee.

The third section of this satirical segment diverted attention away from Neil momentarily, and instead focused on questioning the impartiality of political current affairs broadcasting within the BBC through further use of irony. Stating that impartiality is a “high ideal that’s meant to mean that the corporation doesn’t end up promoting one political ideology over another”, but in practice it means giving a huge amount of airtime to fringe nutcases”, Parris goes on to list a number of circumstances within which political topics have been discussed, and the BBC has chosen to give “huge platforms to unelected weirdos with outdated or demonstrably false opinions”, such as asking Nigel Lawson’s appearances of BBC Radio 4, during which he denied the existence of man-made climate change, and was given “the same amount of time as the whole of science”. Moments later in the segment, Parris states that “science is biased towards facts”, which again highlights the absurdity of the BBC’s attempts at presenting impartiality. Additionally, the phrase exemplifies how the word

'bias' is grotesquely misused in contemporary discourse, with it often used to suggest mere inclination or attitude, but more importantly suggests the disregarding of facts in favour of prejudice.

Kumar then sums up Parris' argument by asking "what you're saying is we should provide a platform for widely discredited views because the license fee dictates that we should pander to weirdos?" to which Parris responded "yes, but for the sake of impartiality, that's also a terrible idea." This sentence alone sums up that section of the satirical response as a whole – focusing on the absurdity of potentially having to show balance – here expressed as contradiction – in every circumstance.

To finish the segment, Parris reveals that Cadwalladr had not been "given the right of reply on the BBC for the misogyny directed at her by Andrew Neil" so *The Mash Report* reached out to her for a statement. Cadwalladr's statement read;

"Mad cat woman is the 21<sup>st</sup> version of calling a woman a witch. Next time Andrew Neil seeks to undermine the credibility of my reporting in order to shield his Tory mates who have been caught breaking the law on a truly epic scale, can I suggest he simply cuts to the chase and burns me at the stake."

Parris then ended the statement by concluding that "Balance is restored." By saying this, Parris is suggesting that by not providing Cadwalladr with the space to respond to Neil's comments, there is a lack of impartiality at play. By allowing Cadwalladr to provide a statement, the argument could therefore be seen as balanced and impartial by the standards set by Parris' aforementioned examples, as both parties have had the opportunity to speak. In this context, the content of either party's statement is irrelevant, which acts as a reflection of what impartiality is often mistaken as being.

#### The Cancellation of *The Mash Report*

On 12<sup>th</sup> March 2021, it was revealed that after four series, *The Mash Report* had been cancelled by the BBC. An online article published by the BBC, stated that they needed to "make difficult decisions" which would allow them to "make room for new comedy shows" (BBC, 2021). Whilst it has been well documented that the programme has lacked the viewing figures expected from its time slot (Chortle, 2017), the programme was popular on BBC's online iPlayer, and its format worked well for clipping segments for social media posts, many of which have gone viral (Chortle, 2017). One such example is a video posted to BBC Comedy's Facebook page. The clip features another of Parris' satirical informative segments, with this particular segment entitled "How not to sexually harass someone", and as of 6<sup>th</sup> April 2021, the video has received forty-two million views on the platform.

When it came to reporting *The Mash Report's* cancellation however, the headlines of online newspapers were focused on one specific element of the programme in light of its cancellation. *The Independent* titled their article on the show's cancellation "BBC cancels *The Mash Report* in perceived crackdown on network's 'left-wing bias'" (Nugent, 2021), whilst the *Evening Standard* led with "*The Mash Report* axed by BBC after claims of left-wing bias" (Davis, 2021). The title of *The Express* article exclaimed "*The Mash Report* cancelled: BBC show AXED following years of woke left-wing criticism" (Davies, 2021) whilst *The Sun* ran with the following headline: "NISH MASH BOSH! BBC director general Tim Davie axes Nish Kumar's *The Mash Report* in victory in his war against woke lefties" (Halls, 2021). It is interesting to note that all of the aforementioned articles discuss *The Mash Report's* supposed left-wing bias as a reason for the programme's departure from the BBC, despite there being no mention of this from the BBC in regards to the cancellation. Whether or not the show's ideological leaning was ultimately a factor, Neil's accusation that the programme did not suit the BBC's public broadcasting requirements for impartiality had evidently 'stuck'.

In an article for the *New York Times*, published on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021, Kumar spoke about the programme's cancellation, and stated that he wanted the BBC to "make a definitive statement that it was not a political decision", (Ibekwe, 2021) and questioned what precedent would be set if such a clarification was not made. This is a valid point to make - whilst the insinuations that *The Mash Report* was cancelled due to a supposed bias are purely speculative, the lack of clarification from the BBC could suggest that the theories were not entirely unfounded. This then raises the question of how the future of satire on public service broadcasting would look, if this extent of balance and impartiality was required.



## Chapter Seven – Content Analysis – *The Mash Report & Unspun with Matt Forde*

With the topics of impartiality and bias being so regularly mentioned in conversation about *The Mash Report*, it is important to understand whether there was a legitimate reason for this. This section of the thesis therefore concerns conducting a content analysis, to determine whether the reports of bias did hold any weight.

To allow us to distinguish whether the claims of bias and a lack of impartiality within *The Mash Report* had any accuracy to them, this chapter will concern itself with content analysis of episodes of *The Mash Report*, alongside episodes of another satirical television programme that aired in the United Kingdom, but was not subject to the same criticism. The overall aim of this analysis is to establish whether the content featured within *The Mash Report* could be considered as having a bias, or whether reports of a lack of impartiality were unfounded.

For the matter of what will be analysed within each programme, the two main political parties within the United Kingdom; the Conservative Party, and the Labour Party, have been selected, not just for their prominence within the political sphere, but also as they are viewed as often representing opposing views.

With *The Mash Report* comprising of twenty-eight episodes in total, this examination uses a sample size of twelve episodes, taking three episodes from each series. The comparison will be done through analysing the amount of time dedicated to satirising either of the two main political parties within the United Kingdom; the Conservative Party and the Labour Party. This included jokes targeted directly at members of either party or policies from either party, or jokes targeting or relating to the supporters of either party. This clarification is important, as it specifically separates mentions of either political party and jokes targeting either party. As news satire programmes, neither show consists purely of just satirical content – often time is given to providing background information and giving context to current affairs. Therefore, it would have been incorrect to include every mention of either political party within this analysis, as it would have likely presented a sway towards the party in power, due to their prominence in political current affairs. This clarification ensures that the analysis remains focused on the satirical content.

The comparison aspect of the analysis involves episodes of *Unspun with Matt Forde*, as it is the other most noteworthy example of the news desk style of satire in the United Kingdom. As twenty-seven episodes of *Unspun with Matt Forde* were broadcast, twelve episodes will be analysed, in the same style as *The Mash Report*, with three episodes being sampled from each series of the programme. It is important to note that this analysis does exclude an aspect of each episode of the programme – the interviews. In the final segment of each episode, an MP from one of the political

parties within the United Kingdom is interviewed by Matt Forde. These interviews have not been included in the analysis as each guest's political leaning would massively shift the data, though comments will be made regarding the political diversity of the guests featured in the episodes from the sample.

Results

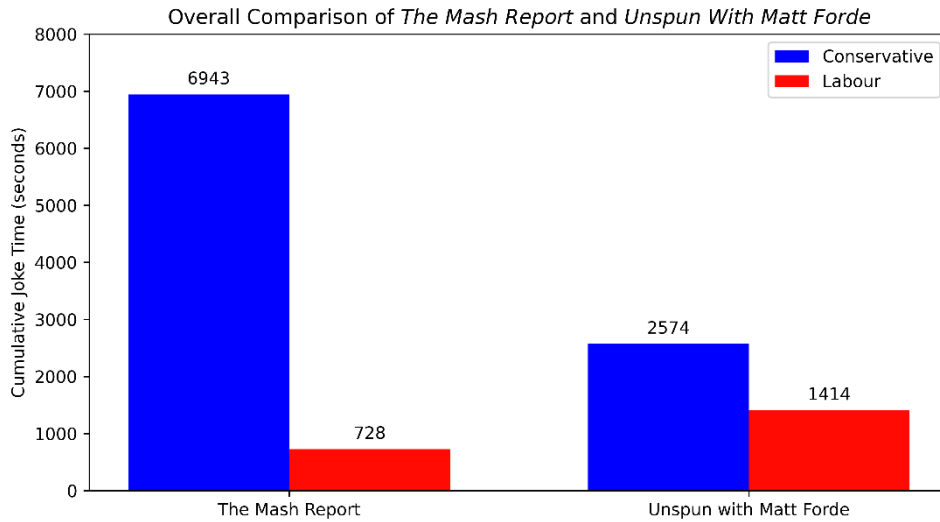
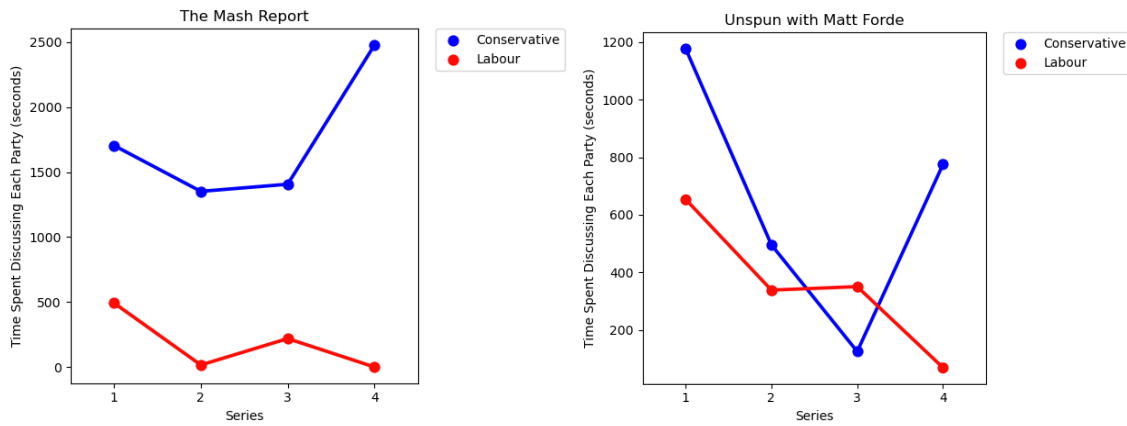
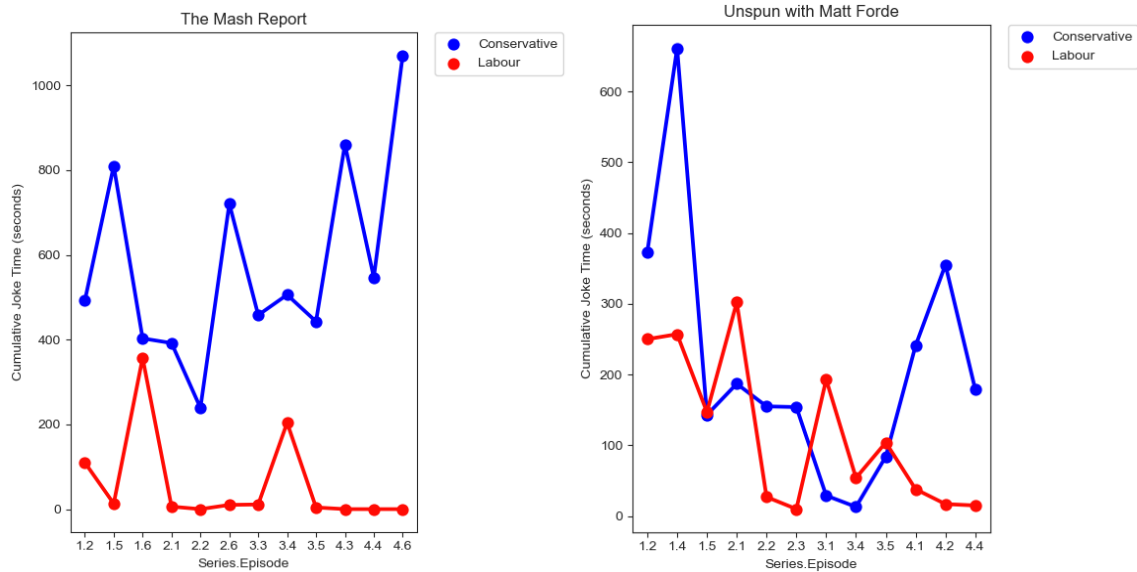


Figure 6, showing the overall comparison of the sample data.



Figures 7 and 8, showing the sample data breakdown by series.



Figures 9 and 10, showing the sample data breakdown by episode.

Through observing the data accumulated from the sample episodes of *The Mash Report*, it can be observed that throughout the sample, though mentions of the Labour Party did vary drastically episode to episode, with 728 seconds of satirical content featuring the party in the sample data. The Conservative Party, were satirised for 6943 seconds within the sample episodes. Additionally, in every sampled episode, there was a larger amount of satirical content targeting the Conservative Party. In only one of the sampled episodes did *The Mash Report* come close to satirising both political parties for the same length of time, in Series 1 Episode 6. Within this episode, there was a specific segment dedicated to the Labour Party’s position on Brexit, which provides a clear explanation for why the comparative figures are closer in size in this instance. The other episode in which satirical content targeting the Labour Party is markedly higher, Series 3 Episode 4, contains content relating to a recent Labour Party conference. The analysis of data from *The Mash Report* suggests that unless a segment within an episode is dedicated to discussing the Labour Party, either through policy, events, or individuals, then the party is barely mentioned. Comparing the satirical content targeting the two parties, *The Mash Report* undoubtedly satirised the Conservative Party to a greater extent.

In contrast to this, the data collected from the twelve sample episodes of *Unspun with Matt Forde* presents very different information regarding the amount of time spent satirising either political party within the sampled episodes. In four of the twelve episodes (Series 2 Episode 1, Series 3 Episode 1, Series 3 Episode 4, and Series 3 Episode 5) contain more time satirising the Labour Party than the Conservative Party. It is also interesting to note that both political parties were overall mentioned less within the sample episodes of *Unspun with Matt Forde* when compared to *The Mash Report*, which suggests that time was also spent in each episode discussing other political parties within the United Kingdom. Additionally, it is worth noting that the programme also covered a large

amount of international news, with satire targeting US politics and Asia featuring in the majority of episodes within the sample. This difference in content is something which also impacts the weighting of satirical content for either the Conservative Party or the Labour Party. Through examining the sample episodes, it is clear that though the sample episodes of *Unspun with Matt Forde* did mostly contain a larger amount of satirical content targeting the Conservative Party, overall, the programme gave an increased weighting to a larger variety of political parties in the United Kingdom, as well as time dedicated to covering international politics. This means that the satirical content targeting the Conservative Party could be less blatant and visible to a viewer.

*Unspun by Matt Forde*, which Rachel Aroesti stated when writing for *The Guardian* is “fuelled by a heady enthusiasm for those in charge” (2016). This may be in part due to the fact that Forde spent several years working as a political advisor to the Labour Party prior to becoming a comedian, which undoubtedly unveils a humanizing aspect to politicians that is often absent to the member of the general public. Forde has been consistently vocal about the need to support and respect politicians, even when satirising them, stating that “there has to be baseline of respect, from which the disrespect is launched from” (Forde, 2017), a belief which is obvious when viewing the programme. This attitude is also presented through Forde’s inclusion of MP4, the programme’s house band which consists of three current and one former Member of Parliament, who he regularly speaks to throughout episodes. The tone this creates is greatly different to the tone presented by *The Mash Report*. Whilst much of the content within *The Mash Report* dives deep into mockery and is not afraid to be more forthright, giving the impression of disdain and distaste for the government, *Unspun with Matt Forde* is a friendlier form of political satire, which does not produce the hard-hitting satirical blows, and one which perhaps politicians themselves would enjoy watching.

As mentioned previously, the interview sections of *Unspun with Matt Forde* were not included within the analysis, however it is still interesting to note the political party affiliation of each guest, to establish how diverse the selection of guests was. The following table displays the name of each guest featured within the sample episodes of *Unspun with Matt Forde*;

Episode	Politician	Political Party Affiliation (at the time of recording)
Series 1 (Summer) Episode 1	Alan Johnson	Labour Party
Series 1 (Winter) Episode 5	Ruth Davidson	Scottish Conservative Party
Series 1 (Winter) Episode 6	Angus Robertson	Scottish National Party
Series 2 Episode 1	Tim Farron	Liberal Democrats
Series 2 Episode 2	Michael Fabricant	Conservative Party
Series 2 Episode 6	Tony Blair	Labour Party
Series 3 Episode 3	Jacqui Smith	Labour Party
Series 3 Episode 4	Suzanne Evans	UKIP
Series 3 Episode 5	Chris Huhne	Liberal Democrats
Series 4 Episode 3	Vince Cable	Liberal Democrats
Series 4 Episode 4	Alastair Campbell	Labour Party
Series 4 Episode 6	Justine Greening	Conservative Party

*Figure 11, showing the guests featured within each sample episode.*

As shown by the table, the guests featured within the sample episodes were diverse in terms of political party attachment, which, as shown by the above content analysis, reflects the content within the programme as a whole.

Through comparing the data for both programmes, it is clear that a higher proportion of time within episodes of *The Mash Report* was dedicated to covering the two main political parties in comparison to *Unspun with Matt Forde*, which is one contributing factor to why the time spent discussing the Conservative Party within *The Mash Report* was so much greater than the time *Unspun with Matt Forde* spent doing the same. In addition to this, the time spent satirising the Conservative Party in the sampled episodes of *The Mash Report* was, for the majority of episodes, vastly greater than time spent satirising the Labour Party, which is likely to result in viewers noticing the prominence of satire within the programme that targeted the Conservative Party.

It must be taken into consideration that naturally, there are limitations to this analysis. As both *The Mash Report* and *Unspun with Matt Forde* satirised current events, the topics featured within their episodes were based around the goings on within that particular week. This means that there was not necessarily a great deal of choice of targets for satirising within an episode, as certain news stories may be too prominent to not cover. Additionally, it is unsurprising that the data collected shows that the Conservative Party was featured more frequently within these satirical programmes, considering they were at the time of broadcast the party in government in the United Kingdom. As a result, they were the easiest target for political satire, and the results reflect this. This is a clear example of the concept of ‘punching up’ within satire, as those in positions of relative power are more likely to be targets of satire. Despite these limitations, the analysis does present a clear view of the difference in content within two satirical programmes of the same style, and sheds light on potential reasoning behind several claims of bias within *The Mash Report*.

Overall, through the completion of this content analysis, it is easy to see why many were quick to call out *The Mash Report* for bias and lack of impartiality when looking at how much time was spent discussing each of the two political parties. However, as Ofcom’s *Broadcasting Code* states; due impartiality “does not mean an equal division of time has to be given to every view”, (Ofcom n.d. (c)), meaning that a disparity in the amount of time each party that is discussed on the programme is not enough to claim the coverage has not been impartial. It is therefore important that the general public, along with those within media organisations who report on issues such as bias and lack of impartiality, are aware of the specifics of Ofcom’s regulations, to avoid programmes being incorrectly labelled which will inevitably cause frictions. It could be argued that the impartiality regulations that are currently in place, while suitable for current affairs and news broadcasting, are not suitable for evaluating comedy.

## Chapter Eight – The Impact of the 2016 United Kingdom European Union Referendum

When examining contemporary satire, it is important to not only note the previous satirical programmes that have existed, but also to acknowledge other factors that could have contributed to a shift in the creation and performance of televised satire. This section looks at one such factor – The 2016 United Kingdom European Union Referendum and its impact on televised satire in the United Kingdom.

In May 2012, a portmanteau word that would go on to define a political era was first used. Coined by Peter Wilding, a solicitor in EU law, in a blog post which focused on the likelihood of a political referendum, a word was created that would not only take the spotlight in the majority of British political communications for years following, but would also become the target of jokes from the media and public within the United Kingdom, and also internationally. The word, of course, is ‘Brexit’.

A combination of the words ‘Britain’ and ‘exit’, Brexit was the name given to the process of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union, following a referendum vote on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2016. Debates regarding the United Kingdom’s membership of the European Union had begun taking place soon after they had initially joined in 1972, with a referendum taking place just three years later. The result of this referendum showed that 67.23% of the population within the United Kingdom were happy to be part of what was known at the time as the European Economic Community. However, discussions continued and in 2013, UK Prime Minister David Cameron revealed his plans to hold a referendum on the subject of whether the United Kingdom should stay within the European Union. In May 2015, the European Union Referendum Act 2015 was passed, and political groups began forming to campaign to either ‘Leave’ or ‘Remain’.

The campaigns from both sides were full of strong statements and “toxic threats” (Taylor, 2017), which served to “further intensify feelings of alienation and anger” of the supporters of either campaign. The Remain campaign, of which David Cameron was a member, focused on free trade with Europe, the economy, and the idea of unity. Conversely, the Leave campaign highlighted the growing levels of distrust and disenfranchisement within the European Union, and the increasingly hot-topic of immigration (Taylor, 2017). The sheer volume of political noise made navigating this already complicated decision even more troublesome, and the battle between both sides became extremely divisive.

Such divisiveness did not cease after the referendum vote had taken place. Despite it being publicly broadcast that the Remain campaign were expected to win, the result revealed that 51.89% of those who voted wanted the United Kingdom to leave the European Union (The Electoral

Commission, 2019). The result “shocked Britain’s image of itself” (Norris and Inglehart, 2019), but looking back at the years before the referendum, and its “long historical roots” (Taylor, 2017), it is perhaps not so difficult to see how this result occurred.

When examining the lead up to the referendum, and the campaigning throughout, it becomes clear that Brexit is a prime example of populism at work. Dorling and Tomlinson state that in the years before the vote, the British public had been fed “decades of innuendo and then outright propaganda” (2019), that the main cause of inequalities and unhappiness was immigration. This rhetoric is an example of the Othering, ‘us versus them’, technique, which as previously mentioned in Chapter Three, is a common feature within populist narratives. As stated by Taylor, “issues of immigration, political disengagement and economic insecurity” (2017) were strongly utilised within Leave campaigning, which fed into the populist narrative that voting to leave the European Union would be *the* decision that would solve those problems. According to Norris and Inglehart, populist rhetoric “seeks to corrode faith in the legitimate authority of elected representatives”, which is exactly what Leave campaigns attempted, through claiming that the European Parliament and other EU decision-making bodies, were made by “a small number of unelected people” (VoteLeaveTakeControl (n.d.) and that Britain had “lost control” (VoteLeaveTakeControl (n.d.)). Taylor believes that the success of the Leave campaign was due to a perceived “relative deprivation” (2017), based on what a person’s lived experience was in comparison to what they may have expected (Taylor, 2017). These populist techniques, when viewed together, all present a reasonable explanation for why the referendum vote ended in the way that it did.

As a democracy, a decision had been made. However, the conclusion of the referendum did not bring to a halt the conversations from both sides. Instead, discussions regarding the two stances on the referendum became even more heated in the years of uncertainty that followed, as the vote had effectively split the country into two almost equal sides, and became “a divisive element in the United Kingdom’s politics for years to come” (Dorling and Tomlinson, 2019).

The satire surrounding Brexit was and continues to be as divisive as the referendum it was born out of, and is a topic that many comedians choose to omit from their routines for this very reason. Naturally, coverage of a political event on this scale could not be avoided by satirical television programmes, though their choices of what content to include in their broadcasts on the topic of the referendum and its outcome have provoked many discussions on the way in which the subject is approached within comedy.

Creating satire on the topic of Brexit was and continues to be an incredibly complex task, as shown by Weaver (2019). When attempting to create satirical content, the topic in question is usually broken down into smaller aspects, giving satirists a particular element of the broader matter on which to target and focus their material on. Though this is usually a more viable approach, satirists may still

find that they run into problems when creating satire on these smaller elements. With Brexit in particular, these issues most commonly arose when considering the audience for such material. Ultimately, the target of the satire will be more strongly related to one side of the referendum or the other, which presents difficulties due to the complexities surrounding the “socio-cultural dynamics underpinning Brexit” (Taylor, 2017).

Taylor does a great deal to explain the “‘two tribes’ interpretation of Brexit” (2017) that was suggested by many political commentators, which presented the notion that “the two sides of the referendum campaign represented opposing cultures marked by dominant and subaltern identities”. In this interpretation, the Remain supporters are presented as the “‘winners’ in contemporary society, associated with the cultural values of cosmopolitan liberalism and multiculturalism” (Taylor, 2017). Contrasting this, the Leave supporters are labelled as “the ‘losers’ in contemporary society, defined by the values of communitarianism, nativism, and patriotism” (Taylor, 2017). This is a rather simplistic viewpoint, and is of course, rather flawed. Not only does it convey Brexit “from the perspective of disappointed ‘winners’” (2017), which results in “scapegoating” (2017) the Leave supporters. Additionally, considering the politicians who organised and led the Leave campaign were elite individuals both politically and financially, the ‘two tribes’ notion is a “convenient story” (2017) “the revolt of ‘ordinary’, ‘decent’ and ‘patriotic’ people against a ‘privileged’ and ‘unpatriotic’ elite”. This focus also creates an unrealistic portrayal of the demographics of voters from both sides. Research into the demographics of Leave voters has shown that a significant number came from middle-class backgrounds (Taylor, 2017), and “people who were poorer or younger were not most likely to vote Leave; they were most likely to not vote at all” (Dorling and Tomlinson, 2019). Ultimately, this shows that it is difficult to make satirical content that solely targets the voters from either side, as both sides are so demographically diverse.

Such matters are complicated further by the notion voiced by many, that the British public ultimately did not know what they were voting for (Press Association, 2016; English, 2019). Targeting these voters, as if implying a sense of ignorance, would not be perceived as punching up. It could be argued that due to the divisive nature of the referendum, either side could believe that they are punching up when targeting the ‘opposition’. Though this statement could be correct, content involving this type of punching up would only be well-received when the audience shared the same opinions as the performer regarding these topics. It is not unusual for a comedian to create satirical content that targets a topic they personally disagree with, and this is often done with the knowledge that representatives of that target may sit within their audiences. Often content such as this relates firmly with the superiority theory. Content relating to the referendum and Brexit seems to present an exception to this, as the tension caused by the referendum and the often-hostile language used during discussions has resulted in many people becoming defensive. To criticise either side of the argument



has not just been seen as querying a political perspective, but attacking and undermining an entrenched political identity.

One relatively safe avenue discovered by comedians was the concept of the general public being told to vote on something for which they lacked information. This circumvented, to some extent, the implication of voter ignorance, and instead targeted the politicians and governing bodies that failed to adequately explain the case on either side.

Another route was to focus on the emergence of political stalemate, since both sides could agree that deadlock served nobody well. One such example of satire focusing on the mechanics of Brexit involved the host of *The Last Leg*, Adam Hills, who decided to measure the length of time it took for the United Kingdom to officially leave the European Union by growing out his facial hair. As the programme aired weekly, it was possible to adequately track the progress of the beard as each new episode was broadcast, and it acted as a visual representation of how long it was taking the UK Government to finalise the official exit from the European Union. In this instance, humour could be found through incongruity, as this was an unusual and quirky way to measure the passing of time. Hills himself was astounded by how long the joke lasted, as he believed he would only have to stop shaving for ten weeks. However, the joke ran for over a year, with his beard growing increasingly unkempt, providing a visual representation of the exhausting process of conducting Brexit negotiations (Figures 12 and 13).



*Figures 12 and 13. Photograph of Adam Hills without facial hair (left) (Hills, 2018) and photograph of Adam Hills ninety minutes before his beard was shaved off live on television (right) (Hills, 2020).*

Eventually, Hills's beard was shaved off live on television by his co-hosts, at the exact moment that the United Kingdom left the European Union, whilst joined by guests including satirist Armando Iannucci. This is a prime example of how focusing on the mechanics of Brexit (in this instance, the lengthy amount of time it took to negotiate the official departure from the European Union), creates successful satire, and the knowledge that the joke went on for a longer period of time than anybody had expected it to, meant that it created an even bigger statement than was initially anticipated, providing further incongruity, only added to its success.

One of the most well-known comments regarding the referendum and Brexit was made by a comedian who is known for having unique approach for discussing a variety of subjects, James Acaster, on Series 15 Episode 2 of *Mock the Week*, which aired just under a month after the referendum took place;

“‘In and out’, it’s a very hard decision. It’s like the other day, my flatmate was making me a peppermint tea, and he said ‘would you like the bag leaving in, or taken out?’ It’s very hard, because if you leave the bag in, then over time the cup of tea itself as a whole will get stronger, and it might appear like the bag is getting weaker, but it’s now part of a stronger cup of tea. Whereas if you take the bag out, the tea’s now quite weak, and the bag itself goes directly in the bin.” – (thelostpiranha, 2016).

This metaphor begins with a seemingly irrelevant comment about Acaster's flatmate making him a cup of peppermint tea, but he then references the commonly had and divisive discussion between tea drinkers about whether a teabag should be left in the cup, or whether it should be removed. The “in” and “out” options clearly parallel the choice brought up by the referendum of voting for the United Kingdom to ‘Remain’ or ‘Leave’ the European Union, with the teabag representing the United Kingdom and the cup of hot water symbolising the European Union. Acaster could have ended the metaphor at this point and it would have still been an interesting metaphor for how contentious the referendum choices were. However, he then continues his analogy and dives deeper into the metaphor. Through his comments about leaving the teabag in, Acaster is implying that if the United Kingdom remained within the European Union, it would be able to continue contributing to this larger body, and aid in its decision making. Therefore, whilst it may appear that the United Kingdom is weaker due to the contributions it makes, those contributions are for something bigger, something that the UK is part of and does benefit from, that allows space for opportunities for larger impacts and changes to be made. This aspect of the metaphor, presenting an emphasis on strength through unity, was an angle frequently used by the Remain campaign. Acaster then moves on to the other part of the metaphor – removing the teabag from the cup. It is implied that without the United Kingdom, the European Union will be weaker, as it will be missing a member and contributor. This then suggests that the United Kingdom will be weaker if not part of the European Union as it would no longer

receive the benefits associated with EU membership and could not contribute to their discussions and plans. The language used at the end of the metaphor is the big punchline, and though his language and demeanour throughout the delivery implied he was weighing up both options equally, this conclusion clearly presents Acaster's opinion on the topic. Instead of stating that the teabag is removed from the tea and put to one side, his choice of words is far more forthright, stating that the teabag goes "directly into the bin" playing into the theory of incongruity, as the audience are set up to not expect such bluntness after what had been an apparently thoughtful and profound moment. With the teabag representing the United Kingdom, the notion of it belonging in the bin if not a part of the cup of tea is a blunt way to imply that the United Kingdom would be negatively impacted if not part of the European Union.

The audience and Acaster's fellow panellists reacted with laughter to this comment, with host Dara O'Briain stating that it "may be the smartest thing anyone has said in the last two months" (thelostpiranha, 2016). This level of praise is arguably not only a result of the joke being witty metaphor for the referendum, but also due to the succinct manner in which it presents an argument for one side of the vote in a relatable manner whilst using basic language without jargon, something which politicians and experts had been failing to do. As with many jokes featured within *Mock the Week*, Acaster's teabag joke featured within one of his live shows, with it also included in his Netflix special, *Repertoire*. Acaster is well aware that the responses from audience members and viewers whilst performing material relating to Brexit receives very mixed reactions, as mentioned in an article interview published in the Guardian in 2018;

"You'd be amazed at how angry Brexiteers get about it. If you voted Leave, try not to lose your mind in the comments section or on social media about what's quite a whimsical metaphor" (Hogan, 2018).

Whilst programmes have specific demographics within their audiences, there is no way of knowing who may end up seeing a joke, particularly with the rise of internet streaming and online catch-up services, and the possibility of content going 'viral' on social media. The result of this is that whilst many praised Acaster for his humorous take on the referendum, others were quick to voice their opinions, which were quite the opposite to those mentioned previously, on social media. Once again, this displays how polarising the referendum was.

Whilst satirists have without question found making comedy from Brexit a challenging experience, there have been occasions where seemingly no joke writing is necessary, and reality instead naturally creates satirical content. One such example of this was the ongoing occurrence of politicians and public figures misspeaking, and referring to Brexit as 'Breakfast'. This vocal blunder, which seems not unlike an event taken from pages of script from *The Thick of It*, quickly became a joke featured within both print and broadcast media, and focus upon it was amplified by the sheer number of political figures and reporters who were making this slip up whilst on camera. The joke

became so widespread that a Google Chrome extension was created which, when installed, would not only change every mention of 'Brexit' on a webpage to 'Breakfast', but would alter the entirety of the text to fit the breakfast theme (Figure 14).

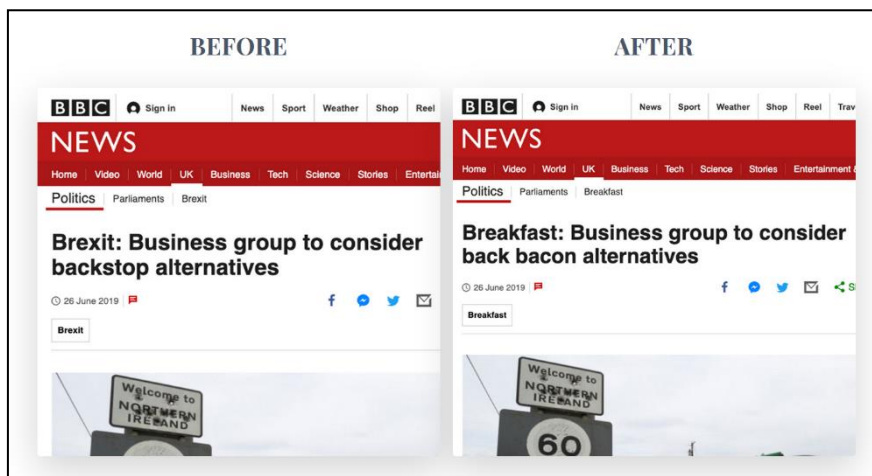


Figure 14. Screenshot of a BBC news article before (left) and after (right) usage of the *Brexit means Breakfast* Chrome extension (*Brexit Means Breakfast*, 2019).

It is intriguing to observe how comedians themselves perceived the referendum, particularly in regards to the expected longevity of the referendum featuring as a topic within satirical panel shows. A noteworthy remark was made by Hugh Dennis during Series 15 Episode 1 of *Mock the Week*, which was the last episode to air before the referendum vote took place. During the episode, Dennis joked that the panellists were having to refrain from using up all of their material on the referendum within that episode, as they had to make the content last for three weeks. This comment is notable based on the assumption that three weeks of jokes on the topic would be all that was required, and after that period of time, jokes about the referendum would fall into irrelevance. It is interesting to consider how the passing of time impacts a viewer's response to a satirical comment. Re-watching Dennis make this statement in 2020 is an entirely different experience, with the knowledge that the referendum and Brexit remain relevant and highly discussed topics four years later. Additionally, it is interesting to consider the implication within this remark that writers and performers of material on a subject. It is arguable that there is always a new and interesting approach to create a joke on any topic, no matter how much material already exists. However, no topic appears to have lived up to this standard as well as Brexit. As a huge political event, its longevity and ongoing developments result in new opportunities for comedic content, which either target existing elements but approach them from different angles, or focus on the new aspects that appear as political discussions progress. However, it is still important for satirists to ensure that this new content does not alienate their audiences, and to focus their attention on elements that voters from both sides of the referendum can see as comical.

There is no shortage of satirical content relating to the EU referendum and Brexit, however the type of satire discussed by Bremner, which engages with topics through analysis and provokes further discussion, does appear to have been somewhat lacking on satirical television programmes in the United Kingdom when covering subjects such as the referendum and Brexit. Throughout this chapter, the limitations and difficulties surrounding creating satire on these divisive topics, such as the notion of punching up, have been investigated, and examples of jokes about both the referendum and Brexit made on satirical television programmes have highlighted the methods by which satire can be created on this subject. This exploration has displayed how given the divisive nature of the referendum, creating satire that does not alienate at least a part of your audience is a troublesome task. However, through targeting particular elements of the referendum, such as the words of politicians or the mechanics behind Brexit negotiations, satire can be created that circumvents the difficulties. Certainly, the effects of the referendum are something which must be considered when contemplating the future of satire within the United Kingdom, as continuing to conquer the divisiveness will be key to a programme's success.

## Conclusion

Through this thesis, a thread has been traced through the recent history of political comedy within the United Kingdom, highlighting significant satirical programmes and their varying styles and formats whilst providing context as to how they developed. Insight has been given into the regulations set in place by both Ofcom and the BBC to ensure impartiality is maintained, as well as how the concept of ‘bias’ is satirised within BBC programmes.

A discussion on populism, which included a breakdown of the growing phenomenon of entertainers who became populist leaders, served to inform a later discussion on the rise of Donald Trump and the satire created on this topic on US news satire programmes. The inclusion of US news satire programmes as a comparator for regulatory framework and boundaries in the US and the UK presented an interesting question of how different the regulations are, and whether the differences in satirical content are in fact from *perceived* regulatory boundaries in the United Kingdom.

The content analysis of episodes of *The Mash Report* and *Unspun with Matt Forde* brought to light how two satirical television programmes of similar styles can present satirical content in vastly different ways. The data collected from sample episodes of *The Mash Report* revealed that the programme produced a much larger amount of satirical content targeting the Conservative Party in comparison to satirical content targeting the Labour Party, with the Labour Party receiving far less coverage unless an episode dedicated a segment to satirising them. The data collected from the sample episodes of *Unspun with Matt Forde*, however, presented a satirical programme that balanced targeting the two political parties to a greater extent, along with including satirical content on other UK political parties and international politics. The analysis adds further understanding to why *The Mash Report* was subject to many claims of bias, but due to Ofcom’s definition of impartiality, highlights that a key reason for the claims likely comes from misunderstanding and misinterpreting the rules within Ofcom’s *Broadcasting Code*.

Additionally, this thesis included a study the impact of the 2016 United Kingdom European Union Referendum on televised satire in the United Kingdom. The exploration discovered that the divisiveness caused by the referendum had resulted in limitations and difficulties when creating satire on the topic. However, insight was also gained into how satirists manoeuvred around these issues, through choosing to target the mechanics of Brexit and the referendum, along with the politicians involved. This study presented a strong argument that Brexit impacted television satire in the United Kingdom, and will have a lasting impact on what is created and what is well-received, noting that the divide caused by the referendum is unlikely to disappear in the near future, and satirists will need to continue to recognise this.

Overall, this thesis has shown that accusations of bias and a lack of impartiality are seemingly fuelled by a lack of understanding of the regulations in place, and could also be related to the divisiveness that has formed as a result of the 2016 Referendum. Furthermore, it is questionable whether the regulations that exist to maintain impartiality within news and current affairs programming are appropriate for evaluating comedy. To ensure that televised satire can continue to hold those in power to account whilst satisfying their audiences, further clarification regarding these regulations must be provided, with due consideration given to comedic content. Additionally, it should be considered whether specific regulations are required for comedic content, to prevent further confusion among creators and consumers, and potentially hinder the creation of new satirical programmes.

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## Appendix

Raw content analysis data from *The Mash Report* and *Unspun with Matt Forde*.

<b>Total Time (min:sec)</b>	<b>Total Seconds</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Episode</b>	<b>Series</b>	<b>Show</b>	<b>Series.Episode</b>
00:01:01	61	Labour	2	1	The Mash Report	1.2
00:02:56	176	Conservative	2	1	The Mash Report	1.2
00:00:49	49	Labour	2	1	The Mash Report	1.2
00:05:04	304	Conservative	2	1	The Mash Report	1.2
00:00:05	5	Conservative	2	1	The Mash Report	1.2
00:00:07	7	Conservative	2	1	The Mash Report	1.2
00:00:24	24	Conservative	2	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.2
00:00:09	9	Labour	2	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.2
00:00:07	7	Conservative	2	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.2
00:00:09	9	Labour	2	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.2
00:00:12	12	Conservative	2	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.2
00:00:14	14	Conservative	2	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.2
00:00:49	49	Conservative	2	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.2
00:00:45	45	Labour	2	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.2
00:00:44	44	Conservative	2	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.2
00:00:15	15	Conservative	2	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.2
00:02:52	172	Labour	2	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.2
00:00:01	1	Conservative	2	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.2
00:03:08	188	Conservative	2	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.2
00:00:19	19	Conservative	2	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.2
00:00:15	15	Labour	2	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.2
00:00:05	5	Conservative	4	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.4
00:00:04	4	Labour	4	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.4
00:00:13	13	Labour	4	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.4

00:00:15	15	Conservative	4	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.4
00:03:34	214	Conservative	4	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.4
00:01:33	93	Conservative	4	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.4
00:02:19	139	Labour	4	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.4
00:04:12	252	Conservative	4	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.4
00:01:22	82	Conservative	4	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.4
00:01:26	86	Labour	4	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.4
00:00:15	15	Labour	4	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.4
00:01:34	94	Conservative	5	1	The Mash Report	1.5
00:04:41	281	Conservative	5	1	The Mash Report	1.5
00:00:39	39	Conservative	5	1	The Mash Report	1.5
00:00:07	7	Conservative	5	1	The Mash Report	1.5
00:05:33	333	Conservative	5	1	The Mash Report	1.5
00:00:05	5	Labour	5	1	The Mash Report	1.5
00:00:36	36	Conservative	5	1	The Mash Report	1.5
00:00:20	20	Conservative	5	1	The Mash Report	1.5
00:00:21	21	Labour	5	1	The Mash Report	1.5
00:00:03	3	Labour	5	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.5
00:00:15	15	Labour	5	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.5
00:01:36	96	Labour	5	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.5
00:00:33	33	Labour	5	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.5
00:02:23	143	Conservative	5	1	Unspun with Matt Forde	1.5
00:01:06	66	Labour	6	1	The Mash Report	1.6
00:06:43	403	Conservative	6	1	The Mash Report	1.6
00:00:18	18	Labour	6	1	The Mash Report	1.6
00:04:33	273	Labour	6	1	The Mash Report	1.6
00:00:06	6	Labour	1	2	The Mash Report	2.1

00:00:09	9	Conservative	1	2	The Mash Report	2.1
00:00:25	25	Conservative	1	2	The Mash Report	2.1
00:00:14	14	Conservative	1	2	The Mash Report	2.1
00:00:20	20	Conservative	1	2	The Mash Report	2.1
00:00:53	53	Conservative	1	2	The Mash Report	2.1
00:04:31	271	Conservative	1	2	The Mash Report	2.1
00:00:23	23	Labour	1	2	Unspun with Matt Forde	2.1
00:00:14	14	Conservative	1	2	Unspun with Matt Forde	2.1
00:03:04	184	Labour	1	2	Unspun with Matt Forde	2.1
00:01:31	91	Labour	1	2	Unspun with Matt Forde	2.1
00:02:24	144	Conservative	1	2	Unspun with Matt Forde	2.1
00:00:04	4	Labour	1	2	Unspun with Matt Forde	2.1
00:00:29	29	Conservative	1	2	Unspun with Matt Forde	2.1
00:00:03	3	Conservative	2	2	The Mash Report	2.2
00:00:31	31	Conservative	2	2	The Mash Report	2.2
00:01:21	81	Conservative	2	2	The Mash Report	2.2
00:02:04	124	Conservative	2	2	The Mash Report	2.2
00:00:28	28	Conservative	2	2	Unspun with Matt Forde	2.2
00:00:03	3	Labour	2	2	Unspun with Matt Forde	2.2
00:00:11	11	Conservative	2	2	Unspun with Matt Forde	2.2
00:00:37	37	Conservative	2	2	Unspun with Matt Forde	2.2
00:01:00	60	Conservative	2	2	Unspun with Matt Forde	2.2
00:00:18	18	Labour	2	2	Unspun with Matt Forde	2.2
00:00:06	6	Labour	2	2	Unspun with Matt Forde	2.2
00:00:19	19	Conservative	2	2	Unspun with Matt Forde	2.2
00:01:57	117	Conservative	3	2	Unspun with Matt Forde	2.3
00:00:09	9	Conservative	3	2	Unspun with Matt Forde	2.3

00:00:28	28	Conservative	3	2	Unspun with Matt Forde	2.3
00:00:10	10	Labour	3	2	Unspun with Matt Forde	2.3
00:00:07	7	Conservative	6	2	The Mash Report	2.6
00:00:06	6	Labour	6	2	The Mash Report	2.6
00:01:16	76	Conservative	6	2	The Mash Report	2.6
00:04:00	240	Conservative	6	2	The Mash Report	2.6
00:00:25	25	Conservative	6	2	The Mash Report	2.6
00:00:33	33	Conservative	6	2	The Mash Report	2.6
00:05:40	340	Conservative	6	2	The Mash Report	2.6
00:00:04	4	Labour	6	2	The Mash Report	2.6
00:00:23	23	Conservative	1	3	Unspun with Matt Forde	3.1
00:00:06	6	Conservative	1	3	Unspun with Matt Forde	3.1
00:00:04	4	Labour	1	3	Unspun with Matt Forde	3.1
00:02:19	139	Labour	1	3	Unspun with Matt Forde	3.1
00:00:50	50	Labour	1	3	Unspun with Matt Forde	3.1
00:00:03	3	Conservative	3	3	The Mash Report	3.3
00:01:58	118	Conservative	3	3	The Mash Report	3.3
00:00:04	4	Labour	3	3	The Mash Report	3.3
00:00:07	7	Labour	3	3	The Mash Report	3.3
00:05:16	316	Conservative	3	3	The Mash Report	3.3
00:00:21	21	Conservative	3	3	The Mash Report	3.3
00:00:32	32	Conservative	4	3	The Mash Report	3.4
00:00:43	43	Conservative	4	3	The Mash Report	3.4
00:01:03	63	Labour	4	3	The Mash Report	3.4
00:00:02	2	Conservative	4	3	The Mash Report	3.4
00:00:05	5	Labour	4	3	The Mash Report	3.4
00:01:49	109	Conservative	4	3	The Mash Report	3.4

00:04:37	277	Conservative	4	3	The Mash Report	3.4
00:00:25	25	Conservative	4	3	The Mash Report	3.4
00:00:04	4	Conservative	4	3	The Mash Report	3.4
00:02:16	136	Labour	4	3	The Mash Report	3.4
00:00:14	14	Conservative	4	3	The Mash Report	3.4
00:00:13	13	Conservative	4	3	Unspun with Matt Forde	3.4
00:00:54	54	Labour	4	3	Unspun with Matt Forde	3.4
00:00:02	2	Labour	5	3	The Mash Report	3.5
00:00:02	2	Conservative	5	3	The Mash Report	3.5
00:01:52	112	Conservative	5	3	The Mash Report	3.5
00:00:02	2	Conservative	5	3	The Mash Report	3.5
00:00:02	2	Labour	5	3	The Mash Report	3.5
00:05:27	327	Conservative	5	3	The Mash Report	3.5
00:00:04	4	Labour	5	3	Unspun with Matt Forde	3.5
00:00:17	17	Conservative	5	3	Unspun with Matt Forde	3.5
00:01:40	100	Labour	5	3	Unspun with Matt Forde	3.5
00:01:07	67	Conservative	5	3	Unspun with Matt Forde	3.5
00:00:17	17	Conservative	1	4	Unspun with Matt Forde	4.1
00:00:20	20	Conservative	1	4	Unspun with Matt Forde	4.1
00:01:37	97	Conservative	1	4	Unspun with Matt Forde	4.1
00:00:24	24	Labour	1	4	Unspun with Matt Forde	4.1
00:00:14	14	Labour	1	4	Unspun with Matt Forde	4.1
00:01:47	107	Conservative	1	4	Unspun with Matt Forde	4.1
00:00:10	10	Conservative	2	4	Unspun with Matt Forde	4.2
00:00:17	17	Labour	2	4	Unspun with Matt Forde	4.2
00:00:47	47	Conservative	2	4	Unspun with Matt Forde	4.2
00:00:05	5	Conservative	2	4	Unspun with Matt Forde	4.2

00:04:53	293	Conservative	2	4	Unspun with Matt Forde	4.2
00:01:07	67	Conservative	3	4	The Mash Report	4.3
00:03:11	191	Conservative	3	4	The Mash Report	4.3
00:06:09	369	Conservative	3	4	The Mash Report	4.3
00:03:54	234	Conservative	3	4	The Mash Report	4.3
00:00:02	2	Conservative	4	4	The Mash Report	4.4
00:00:59	59	Conservative	4	4	The Mash Report	4.4
00:00:12	12	Conservative	4	4	The Mash Report	4.4
00:00:21	21	Conservative	4	4	The Mash Report	4.4
00:06:31	391	Conservative	4	4	The Mash Report	4.4
00:01:02	62	Conservative	4	4	The Mash Report	4.4
00:00:15	15	Labour	4	4	Unspun with Matt Forde	4.4
00:00:16	16	Conservative	4	4	Unspun with Matt Forde	4.4
00:00:03	3	Conservative	4	4	Unspun with Matt Forde	4.4
00:00:02	2	Conservative	4	4	Unspun with Matt Forde	4.4
00:00:41	41	Conservative	4	4	Unspun with Matt Forde	4.4
00:01:57	117	Conservative	4	4	Unspun with Matt Forde	4.4
00:00:47	47	Conservative	6	4	The Mash Report	4.6
00:01:16	76	Conservative	6	4	The Mash Report	4.6
00:05:23	323	Conservative	6	4	The Mash Report	4.6
00:02:51	171	Conservative	6	4	The Mash Report	4.6
00:03:29	209	Conservative	6	4	The Mash Report	4.6
00:03:23	203	Conservative	6	4	The Mash Report	4.6
00:00:42	42	Conservative	6	4	The Mash Report	4.6