

Phone hacking: is it time to get tough on the press? (guest blog on POLIS debate)

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The happy panel

Polis's [public debate on the phone-hacking scandal](#)

“Is it time to get tough on the press?” – highlighted a central tension for British journalists going forward in the days since News of the World shut down, Trisha Audette reports.

At the end of the day, is meeting a higher standard of ethical reporting an internal or external matter?

“I don’t think that regulation is actually the issue. I think ethics is the issue,” said panelist and Times columnist David Aaronovitch, who argued “the ethical path” was lost long before allegations arose that a murdered schoolgirl’s voicemail had been hacked.

Society of Editors executive director Bob Satchwell, a member of Wednesday night’s audience, argued the allegations of phone-hacking will be dealt with by the law, and any further changes have “got to be done from within.”

But if self-regulation hasn’t worked so far, Media Standards Trust Director Martin Moore asked, what comes next? Journalists, he said, need to be frank about what was wrong and what’s needed to put it right.

The panel discussion took place on the heels of Wednesday’s news that News International publisher Rupert Murdoch had abandoned his bid for BSkyB.

“We are still in quite a frenzied environment, it seems to me,” Moore said.

Panelist Charlotte Harris, a media lawyer with Mishcon de Reya, wondered if focusing on just one newspaper in recent days has led to a too-narrow questioning of the scope of phone-hacking.

“We have moved from one rogue reporter, now to one rogue newspaper...” she said.

“I don’t know whether any regulation will be totally effective until we change what we ask journalists to do.”

The presence on the panel of Paul Staines – the man behind the Guido Fawkes blog “of plots, rumours and conspiracy” in British politics – brings to mind another question, however. If new efforts are made to either regulate the traditional mainstream press or make their internal investigative practices public, what is to be done with independent online bloggers?

— Trish Audette is a Canadian journalist and Polis intern currently studying in the Media, Communication and Development program at the LSE.

Video and audio podcasts of the [debate are available here](#)

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