

BBC

General Election Guidelines 2024

Polling Day: Thursday 4 July

1. The Election Period.....	3
1.1 The Election Period and when the Election Guidelines and Appendices (“the Guidelines”) come into effect.....	3
1.2 Elections	3
1.3 The Guidelines	3
1.4 Who the Guidelines apply to.....	5
2. Summary of Mandatory Issues and referrals	5
2.1 During the Election Period:.....	5
2.2 Polling day (until 2200).....	6
3. Due Impartiality	6
3.1 Coverage of Parties and Candidates	6
3.2 Impartiality in Programmes and Online Content.....	7
3.3 Coverage of other political issues and other elected bodies during the Election Period	8
3.4 Order of Parties	8
3.5 Items which may not require contributions from other parties or candidates	9
4. Fairness to Candidates - Code of Practice	9
4.1 Reports and debates in specific Electoral Areas (ie constituencies) 	9
4.2 Use of Candidates in issue based packages, wider debates and phone-ins	10
4.3 Welsh and Gaelic Language Services	11
5. Online, Social Media and Audience Contributions	11
5.1 Disinformation.....	11
5.2 Use of Social Media	12
5.3 Audience contributors	12
5.4 Vox Pops.....	13
5.5 Audience Programmes	13
5.6 Material from parties or candidates.....	13
6. Polls and other tests of opinion.....	14
6.1 Commissioning Polls.....	14
6.2 Reporting Polls.....	14
6.3 SMS/Online Voting	15
7. Party Leaders.....	16
8. Polling Day.....	16
9. Complaints.....	17

Appendix – Guidance on Coverage of Parties and Candidates.....	18
A1.1 Introduction.....	18
A1.2 OFCOM	18
A2.1 BBC UK-wide party coverage.....	19
A2.2 UK Coverage for other parties in Great Britain:	20
A2.3 Coverage of Northern Ireland parties on UK-wide outlets.....	20
A3 Party Coverage on BBC Scotland:.....	21
A4 Party Coverage on BBC Wales:	21
A5 Party Coverage on BBC Northern Ireland:.....	22
A6 Party Coverage in England and Local Radio	22
A7 Independent candidates	23
A8 Lists of candidates on BBC Online.....	23

1. The Election Period

1.1 The Election Period and when the Election Guidelines and Appendices (“the Guidelines”) come into effect

These guidelines take effect from the dissolution of Parliament, 25 working days before polling day:

00.01 on Thursday 30 May

The Guidelines remain in effect until the close of polls at 22.00 on Thursday 4 July

However, campaigning for a general election begins before the formal election period and content producers should take account of these guidelines in making judgements with regard to due impartiality in the period before the dissolution of Parliament. Advice is available from the Chief Adviser, Politics. See also Ofcom’s Note to Broadcasters, published 23 May 2024, regarding *“Due Impartiality requirements in the pre-election period”*

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/about-ofcom/bulletins/broadcast-bulletins/2024/issue-499/2024-05-23-election-note-to-broadcasters-2024.pdf>

There is no formal distinction, once the election has been called, between the periods before and after the close of nominations. It is all referred to as the “Election Period.”

Nominations close on **Friday 7 June**

1.2 Elections

The General Election will be contested on the basis of a first past the post system in the 650 Westminster constituencies across the whole of the UK.

Any subsequent Westminster by-elections during the following parliament will also invoke these Guidelines and parts A1.1 and 1.2 (only) of the Appendix.

1.3 The Guidelines

There is no area of broadcasting where the BBC’s commitment to due impartiality is more closely scrutinised than in reporting election campaigns.

These Guidelines are intended to offer a framework within which journalists:

- can operate in as free and creative an environment as possible,
- deliver to audiences impartial and independent reporting of the campaign, giving them fair coverage and rigorous scrutiny of the policies and campaigns of all parties.

The BBC is also legally obliged to adopt a Code of Practice with respect to “the participation of candidates at a parliamentary or local government

election in items about the constituency or electoral area in question which are included in relevant services during the election period”. The BBC must “have regard” for the Electoral Commission’s views of the Code, which is set out in Section 4 of these Guidelines.

The BBC is also required, under the terms of its Charter and Agreement to ensure that political issues are covered with due accuracy and due impartiality. These Election Guidelines supplement the Editorial Guidelines (Section 4, “Impartiality” and Section 10, “Politics, Public Policy and Polls”).

They should, in particular, be read in conjunction with the “UK Elections and Referendums” guidelines of Section 10 (10.3.13 – 10.3.17). This includes the following:

10.3.15 *The BBC should make, and be able to defend, editorial decisions on campaign coverage on the basis that they are reasonable and carefully reached, with due impartiality. News judgements must continue to drive editorial decision-making in news-based programmes and those judgements at election time must be made within a framework of democratic debate. That framework should ensure that due weight is given to conveying, examining and challenging the views and policies of all relevant parties. UK-wide coverage must take account of and reflect the different political structures in the four nations of the United Kingdom.*

10.3.16 *The way in which due impartiality is achieved among parties will vary, depending on the format, output and platform. Deciding respective levels of coverage for different political parties, who have varying levels of political support, requires, primarily, good and impartial editorial judgement, rather than mathematical formulae. But content producers must take responsibility for achieving due impartiality in their own output without necessarily relying on other BBC content or services.*

The Guidelines are publicly available and the BBC can expect to be held accountable for their implementation during the campaign.

BBC output with regard to the election period is also subject to Sections 5 and 6 of the Ofcom Code (except 6.8 – 6.12) and the associated Guidance Notes which is consistent with adherence to these Guidelines. Ofcom also issued a Note to Broadcasters setting out its guidance for “Election programming in the General Election taking place on 4 July 2024.”

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/broadcast-codes/broadcast-code/section-five-due-impartiality-accuracy>

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/broadcast-codes/broadcast-code/section-six-elections-referendums>

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/about-ofcom/bulletins/broadcast-bulletins/2024/issue-499/2024-05-23-election-note-to-broadcasters-2024.pdf>

1.4 Who the Guidelines apply to

It is the responsibility of each editor to ensure that their content producers are aware of how the Guidelines apply to their output.

Any programme which does not usually cover political subjects or normally invite politicians to participate must consult the Chief Adviser Politics in advance before inviting a politician, candidate or anyone who has taken a prominent political stance to take part in their output, or before accepting a request to participate. This is irrespective of whether their proposed contribution is itself 'political'.

The Appendix sets out specific information regarding levels of coverage across the UK and in each nation.

Each programme, strand, website or channel must bear in mind the location of its intended audience in applying these Guidelines.

These Guidelines apply to any content intended for UK audiences, covering any aspect of the election.

2. Summary of Mandatory Issues and referrals

2.1 During the Election Period:

- Where content would not normally include political issues, political opinion or politicians (for example, sport, quiz/panel shows, factual entertainment) content producers must consult the Chief Adviser Politics in advance before inviting a politician (or anyone who has taken a prominent political stance) to take part in their output, or before accepting a request to participate. This reference is irrespective of whether their contribution to the output is itself 'political'. *
- Except for brief news interviews gathered on the day without pre-arrangement, any proposal to interview or profile party leaders (or other active participation) must be referred in advance, before any approach, to the Chief Adviser, Politics. In the nations of the UK, the respective Heads of News must also be consulted. Offers of such participation from the parties must also be referred before being accepted or declined.
- Any proposal to use a contribution from a candidate without an opportunity for comment or response from any other parties or candidates must be referred to a senior editorial figure and the Chief Adviser Politics. (see context 3.5).
- Any proposal to "empty-chair" a party representative must be referred to the Chief Adviser Politics (see 4.1).

- The BBC will not commission voting intention polls for publication during the campaign.
- Any proposal to commission an opinion poll on matters of public policy, political or industrial controversy, or on 'controversial subjects' in any other area must be referred to the Chief Adviser Politics.*
- The BBC will not carry out votes (online, SMS/text or social media) attempting to quantify support for a party, a candidate or a party political policy issue.
- Any proposal to conduct a vote (online, text or social media) on any political issue that could have a bearing on the election must be discussed with the Chief Adviser, Politics, as well as being referred to the relevant departmental senior editorial figure and ITACU.
- The BBC will not broadcast or publish numbers of e-mails, texts or other communications received on either side of any issue connected to the campaign.

* referral is also mandatory outside election periods.

2.2 Polling day (until 2200)

No opinion poll on any issue relating to the election may be published.

There will be no coverage of any issues directly pertinent to the election campaign on any BBC outlet or social media between 06.00 – 22.00 (any such coverage before 06.00 must be referred to the Chief Adviser Politics).

Whilst the polls are open, it is a criminal offence to publish anything about the way in which people have voted in that election, based on information from voters after they have voted.

3. Due Impartiality

3.1 Coverage of Parties and Candidates

To achieve due impartiality, each bulletin, programme or programme strand, as well as online and interactive services must ensure, in covering the elections, that the parties (and, where relevant, independent candidates) are covered proportionately over an appropriate period.

Determining appropriate levels of coverage should take into account levels of past and current electoral support (see Appendix and Ofcom's Digest, published 29 May 2024).

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/tv-radio-and-on-demand/broadcast-guidance/programme-guidance/election-guidance/general-election-digest-2024.pdf>

Electoral support in the previous equivalent election (see Appendix) is the starting point for making those judgements. However, other factors should be taken into account where appropriate, including evidence of variation in levels of support in other recent elections, changed political circumstances (e.g. new parties or party splits) as well as other evidence of current support, such as consistent and robust trends in opinion polls. The number of candidates a party is standing may also be a factor (see A2.3 and A3.3).

3.2 Impartiality in Programmes and Online Content

Daily news magazine programmes and podcasts should normally achieve proportional and appropriate coverage within the course of each week of the campaign.

This means that each strand (e.g. a drive time show on radio) is responsible for achieving impartiality itself within the week and cannot rely on other outlets at different times of day (e.g. the breakfast show) to do so for it. This does not preclude programmes, in specific circumstances, from co-operating to organise joint coverage, thereby achieving due impartiality across the station or channel. Such an arrangement needs explicit sign-posting.

Programme strands should avoid individual editions getting substantially out of kilter. There may be days when inevitably one party dominates the news agenda, e.g. when party manifestos are launched, but in that case care must be taken to ensure that appropriate coverage is given to other manifesto launches, parties or candidates on the relevant days and that there is appropriate signposting forwards and backwards.

Weekly and periodic programmes and podcasts, or running series within daily sequence programmes, which focus on one party or another, should signpost both forward and backwards so that it is clear to the audience that due impartiality is built in over time. In these instances, due impartiality should be achieved over the course of the campaign.

The same guidelines as those for programmes will apply to BBC Editorial content on all bbc.co.uk sites. These will apply to audio and video content as well as text content, e.g. podcasts and downloads, as well as any social media channels that are associated with the BBC, including material that appears on sites operated by third parties (see section 5 below).

Editorial Guidelines (4.3.12) say that *“we should not automatically assume that contributors from other organisations (such as academics, journalists, researchers and representatives of charities and think-tanks) are unbiased. Appropriate information about their affiliations, funding and particular viewpoints should be made available to the audience, when relevant to the context”*.

In the context of this election, content producers will need to take all reasonable steps to be sure that contributors are appropriately described, and that they have taken account, for instance, of comments made by them on social media, how their organisations are funded and the nature of quoted research or polling. In reporting, in particular, on press coverage of the campaign or involving newspaper journalists, as well as in newspaper reviews, they should also take account of any relevant subjective editorial stance.

Any programme or content giving coverage to the election must achieve due impartiality overall among parties during the course of the whole campaign.

Anyone who is in doubt as to how this applies to their own content should contact the Chief Adviser Politics, for advice.

3.3 Coverage of other political issues and other elected bodies during the Election Period

The election does not happen in isolation and other elected bodies may well continue their normal activity during the campaign. However, a General Election is particularly dominant and content producers need to comply with the general requirement of due accuracy and due impartiality, aware of the possible influence of any other political coverage on the election campaign.

This applies to all parliamentary reportage which may occur during the campaign, including from the Scottish Parliament, the Senedd in Wales, and assemblies in Northern Ireland and London as well as local government throughout the UK. These should continue to be covered in the normal way, but issues relating to the General Election across the UK which are discussed in the parliaments, assemblies or councils must be reported with care to maintain due impartiality.

All content producers need to bear in mind which issues are within the remit of the different bodies and ensure it is clear to the audience when stories have a bearing on the Election. Some members of other Parliaments and Assemblies may also be candidates in the General Election for the Westminster Parliament; care should be taken to ensure that unfair advantage in the election campaign is not derived from their other political roles.

Where there are other major news stories, special care is needed to ensure that any political element is covered comprehensively, but also reflects the fact that this is an election period. How this is achieved will depend on the particular circumstances of each case. For example, where there are major stories which fall outside inter-party rivalry, due impartiality may be achieved by allowing more time to those politicians most closely involved, reporting fully statements giving the audience factual information and, on occasion, reflecting vigorous internal debates within parties.

3.4 Order of Parties

The order in which parties or candidates appear in output should normally be editorially driven. However, content makers should take care to ensure they vary this order, where appropriate, so that no fixed or unfair pattern emerges in

the course of the campaign. It may sometimes be appropriate to achieve fairness, for instance in debates, simply by drawing lots.

3.5 Items which may not require contributions from other parties or candidates

In exceptional circumstances, comments from candidates can stand alone, without any other political contribution, where to use one might appear insensitive or risk the appearance of a media circus. This might include interviews about a personal tragedy, a public disaster, or where the person concerned is an eye witness to a news incident. Any proposal to use a comment in this way must be referred to a senior editorial figure, who may consult the Chief Adviser Politics.

4. Fairness to Candidates - Code of Practice

4.1 Reports and debates in specific Electoral Areas (ie constituencies)

The intention of these guidelines is to encourage vigorous debate and to give a higher profile to candidates in general, without giving unfair advantage to one candidate or party over another.

Candidates or parties declining to take part in electoral area reports or debates cannot, by doing so, effectively exercise a veto over such coverage.

However, this does not weaken in any way the BBC's obligations of fairness in ensuring the audience is informed of all main strands of argument; further advice should be sought, in such circumstances, from the Chief Adviser, Politics.

Programmes and other output may decide to use either candidates or their representatives in items. But if a candidate is invited to take part, the other participants should, where at all possible, also be candidates. In exceptional circumstances, if a candidate is genuinely unavailable, the opportunity may be offered instead to a suitable party representative or substitute from within the electoral area (e.g. party official or agent) but it should normally be made clear to the audience that the missing candidate was invited and why they were unable to take part. If a party or candidate declines to put forward a representative or nominates someone in a way which risks unfairness to other candidates, the item/programme may go ahead without them*.

Reports or debates about a specific electoral area should give due weight to candidates who have demonstrated substantial electoral support in that area (either through their own candidacy - for example, independents - or their party's). This means that if any candidate takes part in an item about a specific electoral area, then these other candidates should also be offered the opportunity to take part, or be given a similar opportunity across a series of reports.

Candidates or parties who have not demonstrated that they have substantial electoral support in that area must still be offered proportionate coverage. How

that is achieved will be a matter for editorial judgment, but the following should be regarded as a minimum:

Short reports and items, including those online, which refer to only some of the candidates in an electoral area (or areas) should include, in sound and/or vision, a list of all candidates standing and their party (where applicable), or should refer to an online list of all candidates and parties standing if and when available. If such a report is being broadcast several times on the same channel or station, a list of candidates should be referred to on each occasion and at least once the list should feature in sound and/or vision.

For longer items or programmes, such as debates, if not all the candidates are taking part, then other known candidates should be listed, in sound and/or vision, in addition to any reference to an online list of candidates.

Content producers should take particular care in ensuring impartiality before the close of nominations in featuring those who might be expected to become candidates. They must ensure generally that candidates are not given an unfair advantage (for instance, taking care where a candidate's name is featured prominently through depicting posters or rosettes etc).

Once the Election Period has begun, programmes not normally covering politics should not arrange and broadcast new appearances by candidates (see Ofcom Rule 6.7).

Where candidates have other roles – political or non-political - care should be taken to ensure that they do not gain an unfair advantage in the election campaign over other candidates.

*see 2.1: mandatory referrals

4.2 Use of Candidates in issue based packages, wider debates and phone-ins

As well as debates or other items using candidates within electoral areas, all types of content may use an appropriate range of candidates from different electoral areas or to discuss together election issues. There may also be circumstances in which it is appropriate to use both candidates and non-candidates (for instance, where a party spokesperson is not standing, or for debates between party leaders.)

Reasonable references to local examples within an electoral area, for instance, to local hospitals, schools, examples of crime, etc, are allowed, providing it does not result in any unfairness to a candidate who is not taking part.

In order to maintain due impartiality, the choice of candidates or parties represented should be appropriate to the item. Who takes part and in what format, for instance, in debates, is a matter for editorial judgement, so long as that is exercised with due impartiality in the context of the election period.

The choice of individual to represent a party will be made on editorial grounds, but care must be taken over the course of the campaign to ensure that one candidate is not unduly favoured at the expense of others. A candidate taking part as a national spokesperson should not gain an unfair advantage over other candidates while discussing issues directly relevant to their electoral area. This may mean advising them in advance of the BBC's due impartiality obligations, or swift intervention by the presenter of a live programme, or editing before broadcast, as necessary.

Candidates may be encouraged to take part in phone-ins about the election or election issues. However, callers must be checked to see if they are candidates and it must be clear to the audience that they are speaking not as ordinary members of the public but as candidates taking part in the election. Care must be taken that over time programmes and other output are not giving undue prominence to one party or undue preference to one candidate over others in the same electoral area. Care should also be taken – and advice sought – with regard to any contribution from a candidate during a phone-in or similar programme which is not about the election or political issues more generally.

Please note: with regard to the definition of “candidate”, in relation to its Rule 6.6, Ofcom issued guidance, referenced and linked in its Note to Broadcasters, (23 May 2024):

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/about-ofcom/bulletins/broadcast-bulletins/2024/issue-499/2024-05-23-election-note-to-broadcasters-2024.pdf>

Further advice on use of candidates can be sought from the Chief Adviser, Politics.

4.3 Welsh and Gaelic Language Services

Some politicians in Wales are not Welsh language speakers. In the event that a party is unable to find a Welsh speaker, Radio Cymru and BBC Wales programmes for S4C may draw on both candidates and other party representatives.

Few politicians are Gaelic speakers. In the event that a party is unable to find a Gaelic speaking candidate, Radio nan Gaidheal and BBC Alba programmes may draw on both candidates and other party representatives.

5. Online, Social Media and Audience Contributions

The same guidelines as those for programmes (see section 1.3 above) will apply to BBC editorial content on all bbc.co.uk sites. These will apply to audio and video content as well as text content, e.g. podcasts and downloads, as well as any social media identified with the BBC, including material that appears on sites operated by third parties.

5.1 Disinformation

Social and digital campaigning is a key battleground during elections and the threat of disinformation playing a part in the outcome is significant. Central to the BBC's approach to the election will be working to inform audiences about the democratic process and exposing disinformation, so they can make choices based on evidence they can trust.

5.2 Use of Social Media

BBC editorial staff and anyone involved in producing election-related content must avoid compromising the BBC's – or their own – impartiality or bringing the BBC into disrepute by their activities, such as by expressing their own views (or endorsing the views of others) on political matters, either on personal websites or social media accounts. (see amended guidance):

<https://www.bbc.com/editorialguidelines/guidance/individual-use-of-social-media>

5.3 Audience contributors

Audience contributions offer immediacy and interactivity to the BBC's output. These contributions are an expression of opinion and are not an indication of the weight of opinion on one side or another of a question. The range selected for inclusion must be chosen to achieve due impartiality, not just by the weight of audience activity. However, seeking what might be considered "false" balance, by giving a misleading account of the weight of opinion, should also be avoided.

Audience contributions may come by text, social media message or email, or some other interactivity mechanism, including "vox pop". They may be unsolicited, or they may arise from calls to action, in either broadcast output or online. However they are received, content producers should be rigorous about establishing the origins of materials offered as audience contributions and take responsibility for their authenticity. It may be necessary to verify that a contribution apparently from an individual in the public eye is genuine. Where such contributions come from candidates, that must be clearly identified.

All web pages prompting debate on the election will be properly moderated to encourage a wide range of views. Those parts of the BBC's online presence which do not normally engage in political issues must seek advice from the Chief Adviser Politics, before doing so.

Unless specifically hosting election discussions, non-news sites should direct users who want to discuss the election to appropriate areas of the news site. All election-related discussion areas on bbc.co.uk must have appropriate moderation, filtering and escalation in place.

Journalists and moderators will sometimes have to make fine judgements between remarks that constitute robust debate and personal abuse. The general rule of thumb should be if something would not be broadcast on radio or TV, it should not be online. Filters for harm and offence and personal abuse will operate as usual, but they should not be relied on as a substitute for effective moderation.

During the Election Period, the numbers of contributions received on any campaign issue must not be used to estimate support for any side or party.

If contributions are edited for length, care should be taken to ensure that the contributor's opinions are fairly and accurately represented.

5.4 Vox Pops

The value of vox pops is to allow different sides of an issue in question to be expressed through the voices of the public. But the context should always make it clear that they are an expression of an argument, not an indication of the weight of opinion on either side. It follows that special care must be taken with vox pops during an election campaign, for instance, to give consideration to the location in which they are recorded and to edit them, when appropriate, in such a way as to ensure a range of views is reflected.

Vox pop should be commissioned sparingly with appropriate editorial purpose.

5.5 Audience Programmes

Any programme covering the election and planning to use a live audience (either in studio or online) should consult the Chief Adviser Politics to discuss the selection of the audience and how to achieve due impartiality. All such procedures must stand up to public scrutiny.

5.6 Material from parties or candidates

BBC News Online will not normally link directly to election-related material on the websites either of political parties or individual candidates, unless there is an editorial justification (e.g. a row caused by a prominent figure publishing policy on their website contradicting the manifesto on the party's website) and then consideration should be given to any impartiality issues.

BBC News Online will list links to all available party sites, provided that it does not give grounds for concern that this breaches the BBC Harm and Offence guidelines, the Ofcom Code, or the law e.g. defamation or incitement to racial hatred.

<https://www.bbc.com/editorialguidelines/guidelines/harm-and-offence>

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/broadcast-codes/broadcast-code/section-two-harm-offence>

Any speeches or other material published or contributed by candidates or parties which are carried in full or in part must be selected on news value, while bearing in mind that due impartiality requires that an appropriate range of such material is carried.

Content producers should be particularly alert to organised campaigns or lobbying by parties, pressure groups, candidates or people acting on their

behalf. If mass mailings or other organised lobbying is suspected during the Election Period, contributors may be asked to provide contact details for verification purposes. The [bbc.co.uk](https://www.bbc.co.uk/escalation) escalation strategy must be activated immediately, and it may be necessary, for example, to put a message board into pre-moderation or read only mode.

6. Polls and other tests of opinion

This section should, where appropriate, be read in conjunction with Section 10 of Editorial Guidelines and the Editorial Policy Guidance “[Opinion Polls, Surveys, Questionnaires, Votes, Straw Polls](#)”, available on the Editorial Policy website.

6.1 Commissioning Polls

The BBC does not commission voting intention opinion polls for publication during election periods.

Care must be taken to ensure that any poll commissioned by the BBC is not used to suggest a BBC view on a particular policy or issue. A poll may be commissioned to help inform the audience’s understanding of a current controversy, but it should not be used to imply BBC intervention in a current controversy.

Any proposal to commission an opinion poll on matters of public policy, political or industrial controversy, or on ‘controversial subjects’ in any other area must be referred to the Chief Adviser Politics*

6.2 Reporting Polls

During the campaign, the BBC’s reporting of voting intention opinion polls should take into account several key factors:

- they are part of the story of the campaign and audiences should, where appropriate, be informed about them;
- context is essential, and it is important to ensure the accuracy and appropriateness of the language used in reporting them;
- polls can be wrong - there are real dangers in only reporting the most “newsworthy” polls – i.e. those which, on a one-off basis, show dramatic movement. For that reason, a news story should not normally be based solely on a single voting intention poll, unless its impact has caused a separately newsworthy story.
- there may be particular issues around more informal referencing of polls, for instance, in presenters’ questions or correspondents’ 2-ways, when due accuracy and scepticism are as important as in more formally scripted reporting;
- care should be taken to ensure that assumptions about polling are not

unduly driving the direction of broader editorial judgements.

The Editorial Guidelines regarding general reporting of polls (10.3.30) need to be followed with particular care during the election period:

- *the result of an opinion poll should not be the lead or be headlined in broadcast or other output, unless it has prompted a story which itself merits being the lead or headlined and reference to the poll's findings is necessary to make sense of the story*
- *language should not give greater credibility to polls than they deserve. For example, polls 'suggest' and 'indicate', but never 'prove' or 'show'*
- *the BBC should not normally rely on the interpretation given to a poll's results by the organisation or publication which commissioned it*
- *the BBC should report the methodology used, the organisation which carried out the poll and the organisation or publication which commissioned it. Such polls should not be described as 'a BBC poll'. All relevant details, including the questions, results and sample size, should be made available so the audience can understand the methodology and results*
- *where editorially relevant, dates of the fieldwork and subsequent events which may have shifted opinion should be reported.*

Additional consideration when reporting voting intentions:

- *the findings of voting intention polls must be reported in the context of trend, which may consist of the results of all major polls over a period or may be limited to the change in a single pollster's findings. Poll results which are out of step without convincing explanation should be treated with particular care*
- *the audience should be told when the reported difference between two significant parties is less than the margin of error of the polling methodology.*

In addition, particular care should be taken with newspaper reviews. The result of a poll should not be the lead item in a newspaper review and should always be reported with a sentence of context (e.g: "that's rather out of line with other polls this week").

No opinion poll on any subject relating to the election may be published on polling day until after the polls have closed.

6.3 SMS/Online Voting

There will be no SMS/text or online votes attempting to quantify support for a party, politician or a party political policy issue during the election period, nor should other quantitative methods, such as a count of the number of texts or social media contributions, be used to assess the level of support.

Producers must ensure that votes are not translated into anything that could be

construed either as a representation of public opinion as a whole, or the perception of a BBC opinion. Any proposal to conduct text or online voting on any political issue that could have a bearing on the election must be discussed with the Chief Adviser Politics, as well as being referred to the relevant departmental senior editorial figure and ITACU.

7. Party Leaders

Except for brief news interviews gathered on the day without pre-arrangement, any proposal to interview or profile party leaders (or other active participation) must be referred in advance, before any approach, to the Chief Adviser Politics. In the nations of the UK, the respective Heads of News must also be consulted.

Offers of such participation from the parties must also be referred before being accepted or declined. This is in conjunction with the mandatory reference set out in the Editorial Guidelines (10.3.3) and is particularly important during election campaigns.

8. Polling Day

There will be no coverage of any issues directly pertinent to the election campaign on any BBC outlet or social media between 06.00 – 22.00 (any such coverage before 06.00 must be referred to the Chief Adviser Politics).

The Editorial Guidelines (10.3.17) say: *Coverage will be restricted to uncontroversial factual accounts, such as the appearance of politicians at polling stations, or the weather. Subjects which have been at issue or part of the campaign, or other controversial matters relating to the election, must not receive coverage before the polls close, to ensure that nothing in the BBC's output can be construed as influencing the ballot.*

Online sites will not have to remove archive reports, but should not republish them.

Stories about the mechanics of the vote (such as incidents which may have occurred at polling stations) can be reported with appropriate impartiality. Advice is available from the Chief Adviser Politics.

Particular care should also be taken in personal use of social media on polling day.

No opinion poll on any issue relating to the election may be published until after the polls have closed.

Whilst the polls are open, it is a criminal offence to publish anything about the way in which people have voted in that election, based on information from voters after they have voted.

9. Complaints

Complaints will be handled at the appropriate level from programme editors upwards. The aim is to ensure that whether a complaint has come via BBC Audience Services, direct to a programme or to a correspondent or individual journalist, from a politician or member of the public (who may or may not be a political activist), from a senior party official or an individual candidate, the BBC's response is consistent, robust and swift.

For that reason, normally, on receiving a formal complaint, details should be taken and referred to the appropriate person (normally the relevant editor) before any initial response – other than acknowledgement and timescale – is given to the complainant.

Complaints regarding the election, including those involving impartiality and accuracy, may be subject to an expedited process which could culminate with Ofcom, so it is imperative that they are referred without delay.

Anyone requiring further advice on the application of these Guidelines should consult the Chief Adviser Politics.

Appendix – Guidance on Coverage of Parties and Candidates

The appendix applies to all UK-wide output, all content intended for anywhere within the UK.

A1.1 Introduction

Deciding respective levels of coverage for different candidates in the election, who have varying levels of political support, requires, primarily, good and impartial editorial judgement. There will be legitimate differences in interpretation and application for different programmes and formats. The following guidance is aimed at ensuring there are appropriate levels of coverage, with some minimum level for smaller parties and independent candidates – it does not set any maximum. Advice is available, on a case by case basis, from the Chief Adviser, Politics, both before and throughout the campaign.

So although each outlet must ensure its coverage is proportionate with regard to parties and candidates, that should be treated as a guide rather than as a set mathematical formula. However, there must be good editorial reasons for any significant variation and these cannot supersede the over-riding obligation for due impartiality and fairness.

The relative amount of coverage given to political parties and independent candidates in each electoral area (for instance, within individual constituencies or across a group of constituencies) should reflect levels of past and/or current electoral support in that electoral area. In considering this, bearing in mind the location of the intended audience, performance at the last equivalent elections, over at least two electoral cycles (ie 2019 and 2017), is taken as the starting point in terms of representation and share of the vote; the following factors must also be given due weight:

- performance in other elections, where relevant
- other relevant evidence of current electoral support, including robust patterns in relevant opinion polls.
- the number of candidates a party fields in the election
- other relevant editorial issues, such as electoral pacts, new parties, coalition agreements etc.

This Guidance will remain open to amendment due to any new relevant evidence of current electoral support until the day after the close of nominations.

A1.2 OFCOM

This Appendix is subject to Section 6 of the Ofcom Code (updated January 2019, and takes account of the associated Guidance Notes (22 March 2017).

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/broadcast-codes/broadcast-code/section-six-elections-referendums>

Ofcom's Digest "Evidence of past electoral support and evidence of current support ahead of the General Election taking place on 4 July 2024" was published on 29 May 2024:

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/tv-radio-and-on-demand/broadcast-guidance/programme-guidance/election-guidance/general-election-digest-2024.pdf>

It sets out some of the factors Ofcom takes into account when considering complaints made under Section 6 of the Code:

- *we place greater weight on the actual performance of a political party or an independent candidate in elections over opinion poll data. This reflects the fact that electoral performance is a measure of how voters have actually exercised their democratic choice. This compares with the greater uncertainty associated with support in opinion polls, which may not translate into actual votes or seats at an election;*
- *in considering past electoral support, we take into account factors such as the electoral performance of parties (including the numbers of elected candidates and overall percentage of vote received) in the previous set of corresponding elections over at least two electoral cycles;*
- *we also take into account performance in other relevant past elections being contested at the same time, as well as performance in other recent past elections;*
- *we take into account the electoral performance of parties over at least two electoral cycles when considering performance in any given type of elections. However, we place less weight on the evidence of electoral performance two or more electoral cycles ago given the historical nature of this evidence;*
- *where relevant we consider evidence in relation to electoral performance in the different nations of the UK;*
- *while putting less weight on levels of current support as opposed to actual performance, we put weight on evidence of current support that is objective and measurable. One type of objective and measurable evidence of current support is opinion poll data, where it is available. There may be other types of evidence of current support but in considering such evidence we would take into account the consistency and objectivity of each type of evidence; and*
- *our intention is always to undertake a balanced assessment having regard to the totality of relevant evidence.*

A2.1 BBC UK-wide party coverage

The electoral strength of parties across the UK is reflected in different ways, with variations according to nation, candidature (location and numbers), type of election, timescale, the share of votes and the number of seats won. In addition,

the formation of new parties, potential electoral pacts or agreements and robust patterns across relevant opinion polling may all be relevant factors in the assessment of appropriate coverage during the election.

The Conservatives and Labour are the two largest parties in the context of a Westminster Parliamentary election and should receive broadly similar levels of coverage.

The Scottish National Party and the Liberal Democrats should receive significant levels of coverage, up to and including similar amounts to the two largest parties, depending on the relevance of issues, geographical context, etc.

UK-wide programmes must also ensure that Plaid Cymru is given appropriate and proportionate levels of coverage in output to which the largest parties contribute and, on occasion, similar levels of coverage, if appropriate.

The Greens (the Green Party of England and Wales and the Scottish Green Party) and Reform UK should also receive proportionate coverage, up to and including similar levels to the largest parties when appropriate.

Content producers should have regard to which policy areas are devolved and which are in the domain of the Westminster Parliament and, therefore, directly at issue in the General Election.

A2.2 UK Coverage for other parties in Great Britain:

The following guidance (which applies to all GB parties) is aimed at ensuring minimum coverage for smaller parties – it does not set a maximum.

Parties standing candidates in a minimum of one-sixth of the seats in England can expect coverage - including a clip if available - of their manifesto launch (or an equivalent event) on each of the following:

- at least two of the main bulletins on BBC One (ie One, Six, Ten)
- The News Channel
- Radio 4 1800
- Radio 5 Live Drive
- BBC Online

There should also be reference to the launch or event on:

- Radio 2 summaries
- Newsbeat

Parties standing candidates in less than one-sixth of the seats across England, which are running serious campaigns, should receive some coverage, where appropriate, on BBC Online.

A2.3 Coverage of Northern Ireland parties on UK-wide outlets

The largest parties in Northern Ireland are: the Democratic Unionists, Sinn Féin, the Alliance Party, the SDLP and the Ulster Unionist Party. Bearing in mind the respective share of the vote and the level of representation across the last two

electoral cycles, UK-wide programmes which report on the election as it affects Northern Ireland should give similar levels of coverage to the DUP and Sinn Féin.

The Alliance Party, the SDLP and the UUP should also be given appropriate levels of coverage in output which includes the largest two parties, up to and including similar levels of coverage.

The five larger parties can expect, as a minimum, coverage (including a clip if available) of their manifesto launch (or equivalent event) on the network outlets specified above.

Other parties which stand candidates in at least one-sixth of the seats in Northern Ireland can expect coverage, as a minimum, on BBC Online.

A3 Party Coverage on BBC Scotland:

The electoral strength of parties in Scotland is reflected in different ways with variations according to types of elections, candidature, timescale, the share of votes and the number of seats won. In addition, the formation of new parties, potential electoral pacts or agreements and robust patterns across relevant opinion polling may all be relevant factors in the assessment of appropriate coverage during the election.

The SNP, Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats received substantial electoral support at the general elections in 2019 and 2017 and in other recent elections: these parties should receive broadly similar levels of coverage.

The Scottish Green Party has demonstrated significant electoral support and should receive coverage proportionate with the largest parties, including, on occasion, similar levels of coverage.

Bearing in mind other evidence of past and/or current electoral support, Alba and Reform UK should also receive coverage proportionate to the Scottish Greens including, on occasion, similar levels of coverage.

All parties fielding candidates in at least one-sixth of the seats in Scotland can expect to have – as a minimum – their manifesto launch (or equivalent event) covered on appropriate TV and radio news and current affairs programmes in Scotland and online.

Parties standing candidates in less than one-sixth of the seats in Scotland, but which are running serious campaigns, should also receive coverage, as a minimum on BBC Online, at some stage in the campaign.

A4 Party Coverage on BBC Wales:

The electoral strength of parties in Wales is reflected in different ways with variations according to types of elections, candidature, timescale, the share of votes and the number of seats won. In addition, the formation of new parties, potential electoral pacts or agreements and robust patterns across relevant

opinion polling may all be relevant factors in the assessment of appropriate coverage during the election.

Labour, the Conservatives and Plaid Cymru received substantial electoral support in Wales at the 2019 and 2017 general elections and in other recent elections: these parties will receive broadly similar levels of coverage. The Liberal Democrats and Reform UK have demonstrated electoral support and should receive coverage proportionate with the largest parties, including, on occasion, similar levels of coverage.

Other parties fielding candidates in at least one-sixth of the seats in Wales will have – as a minimum – their manifesto launch (or equivalent event) covered on appropriate TV and radio news and current affairs programmes in Wales and online.

Parties standing candidates in less than one-sixth of the seats in Wales, but which are running serious campaigns, should also receive coverage, as a minimum on BBC Online, at some stage in the campaign.

A5 Party Coverage on BBC Northern Ireland:

Parties which have secured substantial electoral support during the last two electoral cycles in Northern Ireland are:

the DUP, Sinn Fein, the Alliance Party, the SDLP and the Ulster Unionists.

Bearing in mind the levels of electoral support won in 2019, 2017 and in other recent elections, the DUP and Sinn Fein should receive similar levels of coverage. The Alliance Party, the SDLP and the UUP may receive, on occasion, similar levels of coverage to the two largest parties.

The TUV has demonstrated some electoral support and should receive coverage proportionate with the largest parties, including, on occasion, similar levels of coverage.

All parties fielding candidates in at least one-sixth of the seats in Northern Ireland can expect to have – as a minimum – their manifesto launch (or equivalent event) covered on appropriate TV and radio news and current affairs programmes and online.

Among these other parties, those which can demonstrate some electoral support (for instance those winning representation in the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2022), should receive - proportionate with the larger parties - more coverage than those which cannot.

A6 Party Coverage in England and Local Radio

In each area, regional and local programmes should take account of any differing levels of support in the way they cover issues relating to the General Election and the levels of coverage given to different parties. Across England as a whole, however, parties which have secured substantial electoral support during the last two electoral cycles are:

Labour and the Conservatives; they should normally be represented with similar levels of coverage in appropriate election output; the Liberal Democrats have demonstrated significant electoral support and should receive coverage proportionate with the two largest parties, including, on occasion, similar levels of coverage.

Bearing in mind other evidence of past and/or current electoral support, the Green Party and Reform UK should also receive proportionate coverage including, on occasion, similar levels of coverage to the larger parties.

On regional TV, parties fielding candidates in at least one-sixth of the seats in the area covered can expect to have – as a minimum – one significant item (including a clip where possible) on both the 6.30 programme and on Sunday Politics during the campaign.

On local radio stations, parties fielding candidates in at least one-sixth of the seats in the area covered can expect to have – as a minimum – one significant item (including a clip where possible) on a designated programme in each week of the campaign, following close of nominations.

Parties which, in addition to standing candidates in one-sixth of the relevant seats, can demonstrate some electoral support (for instance, in local council seats), should receive - proportionate with the larger parties - more coverage than those which cannot.

Parties standing candidates in less than one-sixth of the seats in the area, but which are running serious campaigns, should also receive coverage online at some stage in the campaign as should any independent candidates running serious campaigns.

A7 Independent candidates

Many candidates without party affiliation will stand. In coverage of individual constituencies, it may be appropriate to ensure that independent candidates receive proportionate coverage to candidates representing larger or smaller political parties, especially where they have:

- significant previous electoral support or incumbency.
- evidence of significant current electoral support.

A8 Lists of candidates on BBC Online

BBC News Online, the Nations and on websites across England (in close liaison with each other to ensure a consistent BBC wide approach) will publish a complete list of candidates (in alphabetical order by last name) in all constituencies for the General Election, which can be referred to by programmes ensuring fairness to all candidates. Until that list is available – after the close of nominations – broadcast or online constituency reports will need to compile their own list of known candidates, when appropriate.

Any new and significant relevant evidence of current electoral support will continue to be taken into account until the day after the close of nominations. This Guidance will, therefore, remain open to amendment until that date.