

BBC

Election Guidelines

Election Campaign for: **The General Election across the UK**

Polling Day: **Thursday 12th December 2019**

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Introduction

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

The Election Period, when these Guidelines come into effect, begins at 00.01 on 6th November (the dissolution of Parliament, 25 working days before polling day).

The Guidelines remain in effect until the close of polls at 22.00 on 12th December.

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 between now and then. Advice is available from the Chief Adviser, Politics.

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 14th November

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.

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”. This obligation is fulfilled by [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 ([Chapter 4, “Impartiality”](#) and [Chapter 10, “Politics, Public Policy and Polls”](#)).

They should, in particular, be read in conjunction with the “UK Elections and Referendums” section of Chapter 10. 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 sections 6.8 – 12), which is consistent with adherence to these Guidelines.

<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>

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.

For content which would not normally include political issues, political opinion or politicians (for example, sport, quiz/panel shows, factual entertainment), the Chief Adviser Politics must be consulted in advance before a politician (or anyone who has taken a prominent political stance) is invited to take part in such output, or before any request to participate is accepted. This reference is irrespective of whether their contribution to the output is itself ‘political’. (Mandatory guideline 10.2.1).

[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 programme or material intended for UK audiences, covering any aspect of the election.

2. Mandatory issues and referrals

2.1 During the Election Period:

- **Producers of content which does not usually include political issues, political opinion or the participation of politicians must consult the Chief Adviser Politics in advance, before a politician (or anyone who has taken a prominent political stance) is invited to take part.***
- **All bids for interviews with party leaders must be referred to the Chief Adviser Politics before parties are approached. Offers of such interviews should also be referred before being accepted.**
- **Any proposal to use a contribution from a politician without an opportunity for comment or response from any other parties must be referred to a senior editorial figure and the Chief Adviser Politics (in relation to 3.5).**
- **The BBC will not commission voting intention polls**
- **Any proposal to commission an opinion poll on politics or any other matter of public policy for any BBC service must be referred to the Chief Adviser Politics.***
- **There will be no online votes, social media or SMS/text votes attempting to quantify support for a party, a politician or a party political policy issue.**
- **Any proposal to conduct text voting on any political issue that could have a bearing on any of the elections 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 (00.30 – 22.00)

- **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 campaigns on any BBC outlet.**

- **It is a criminal offence to publish anything about the way in which people have voted in that election.**

3. Due Impartiality in coverage of parties and issues

3.1 Coverage of the Parties

To achieve due impartiality, each bulletin, programme or programme strand, as well as online and social media channels, must ensure that the parties are covered proportionately over an appropriate period and overall across the Election Period.

Determining appropriate levels of coverage should take into account levels of past and current electoral support, as consistent with the approach set out in Ofcom's Digest (and see Appendix).

https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0027/176409/electoral-digest-121219-general-election.pdf

Electoral support in the most recent equivalent elections (that is, the 2017 and 2015 General Elections) 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 sorts of elections, changed political circumstances (e.g. new parties or party splits) as well as other evidence of current support. The number of candidates a party is standing may also be a factor.

3.2 Impartiality in Programmes and Online Content

Daily news magazine programmes 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. But such an arrangement needs clear sign-posting and should normally be referred to the Chief Adviser, Politics.

Programme strands should avoid individual editions getting too far 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 on the relevant days.

Weekly programmes, 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. blogs, 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 5.1 below](#)).

[Editorial Guidelines \(4.3.12\)](#) say that programme-makers “...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 the General 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 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 and in newspaper reviews, they should also take account of any relevant subjective editorial stance.

Any programme or content giving coverage to any aspect of 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, other Parliaments, Assemblies and Councils in the UK 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 Assemblies in Wales, Northern Ireland and London and the European Parliament, 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 we are in 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 appear in packages or are introduced in discussions should normally be editorially driven. However, programme makers should take care to ensure they vary this order, where appropriate, so that no fixed pattern emerges in the course of the campaign. Fairness may sometimes be best achieved simply by, for instance, drawing straws.

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

In exceptional circumstances, comments from politicians 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 politician 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 and the Chief Adviser, Politics.

4. Fairness to Candidates - Code of Practice

4.1 Reports on specific Electoral Areas (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 constituency 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.

Reports or debates about a specific electoral area, (ie a Westminster constituency), should give due weight to candidates of parties which have demonstrated substantial electoral support in that area. This means that if any candidate takes part in an item about a specific constituency, 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.

Programmes may decide to use either candidates or party representatives. But if a candidate from one of the parties is invited to take part, the other participants should, where at all possible, also be candidates (see below [4.3 Welsh and Gaelic Language Services](#)). In exceptional circumstances, if a candidate is genuinely unavailable, the opportunity may be offered instead to a suitable party representative from within the constituency (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 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 and items which refer to any candidates should also refer – as a minimum – to an online list of all candidates and parties standing. (Please note: until such lists are available – after the close of nominations – each constituency report will require a list of known candidates so far to be compiled and either used in full within the report or specifically made available online). If such a report is being broadcast several times on the same channel in a day, the online list of candidates should be referred to on each occasion and at least once the list should feature visually or verbally. For longer items, especially where only some candidates are receiving significant coverage, such as debates, then – as a minimum - all the candidates should be listed, visually or verbally, during or immediately after the item.

Content producers must ensure generally that candidates are not given an unfair advantage; for instance, camera operators should take care where a candidate's name is featured prominently through depicting posters or rosettes etc.

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.

Before the close of nominations, content producers need to ensure due impartiality in regard to contributors who may have expressed an intention or who are expected to stand as a candidate.

Reports referring to the list of candidates before the close of nominations should make it clear that these are known candidates so far.

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

As well as debates or other items using candidates within constituencies, all types of content may use an appropriate range of candidates from different constituencies 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 a constituency, for instance, to local hospitals, schools, 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 parties represented should be appropriate to the item. The choice of candidate 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 or that a party spokesperson does not gain disproportionate coverage at the expense of candidates from other parties.

If a candidate is being interviewed as a national spokesperson, they should not be allowed to gain an unfair advantage over their local opponents by making repeated references to their own area. This can best be achieved by advising them in advance of the BBC's due impartiality obligations. If this fails, swift intervention by the presenter of a live programme, or editing before broadcast, will be 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 contributors with a political agenda. Care must be taken that over time programmes are not giving undue prominence to one party or undue preference to one candidate over another. 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.

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. Social Media and Audience Contributions

5.1 Disinformation

This is an Election in which the social and digital campaign is expected to be a major battleground, so 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 fake news, 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 impartiality or bringing the BBC into disrepute by their activities, such as by expressing their own views on political matters, either on personal websites or social media, eg personal Twitter accounts.

5.3 Audience contributions

Audience contributions offer immediacy and interactivity to the BBC's output both broadcast and on the web. 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, we must not seek to achieve what might be considered "artificial" balance by giving a misleading account of the weight of opinion.

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 we receive them, 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 such as political blogs or relevant news articles. All election-related discussion areas on bbc.co.uk must have appropriate moderation, filtering and escalation in place.

Journalists and moderators will have to make fine judgements between remarks that constitute robust debate and personal abuse. The general rule of thumb should be if we would not broadcast it 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, we must not broadcast or publish numbers of contributions received on any campaign issue 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 to programmes 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 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 his/her website contradicting the manifesto on the party's website) and then it will be linked only for a limited period and mindful of any impartiality issues.

BBC News Online will list links to all available party sites, provided that it does not give strong 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 strategy must be activated immediately, and it may be necessary to, for example, put a message board into pre-moderation or read only mode.

6. Polls and other tests of opinion

Section 6 of the Election Guidelines should, where appropriate, be read in conjunction with Chapter 10 of Editorial Guidelines and the Editorial Policy Guidance "[Opinion Polls, Surveys, Questionnaires, Votes, Straw Polls](#)", available on the Editorial Policy website.

6.1 Reporting Polls

During the campaign our reporting of 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 we must 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, we should not normally base a news story 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; reference to the online poll-tracker, containing fuller context and explanation, may be appropriate.
- care should be taken to ensure that assumptions about polling are not unduly driving the direction of broader editorial judgements.

So, the general rules and guidance about reporting polls need to be scrupulously followed. They are:

- 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 in itself merits being the lead or headlined and reference to the poll's findings is necessary to make sense of the story;
- not to rely on the interpretation given to a poll's results by the organisation or publication which commissioned it, but to come to our own view by looking at the questions, the results and the trend;
- to report the findings of voting intentions polls in the context of trend. The trend 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 defy trends without convincing explanation should be treated with particular scepticism and caution;
- not to use language which gives greater credibility to the polls than they deserve: polls "suggest" but never "prove" or even "show";

- to report the expected margin of error if the gap between the contenders is within the margin. On television and online, graphics should *always* show the margin of error; and
- to report the organisation which carried out the poll and the organisation or publication which commissioned it.

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.

6.2 Commissioning Polls

The BBC does not commission voting intention opinion polls during election periods. Editorial Guidelines say “any proposal to commission an opinion poll on politics or any other matter of public policy for any BBC service must be referred to the Chief Adviser Politics for approval”.

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.

6.3 SMS/Online Voting

There will be no SMS/text or online votes attempting to quantify support for a party, politician or 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 any of the elections must be discussed with the Chief Adviser, Politics, as well as being referred to the relevant departmental senior editorial figure and ITACU.

7. Party Leader Interviews

Except for brief news interviews gathered on the day, without pre-arrangement, all bids for party leader interviews must be referred to the Chief Adviser Politics before parties are approached. Unsolicited offers should not be accepted without consultation with senior managers and a reference to the Chief Adviser Politics.

8. Polling Day

There will be no coverage of the election campaign on polling day, from 00.30 until polls close at 22.00 on TV, radio or bbc.co.uk. However, online sites will not have to remove archive reports. Coverage will be restricted to factual accounts with nothing which could be construed as influencing the ballots.

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.

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 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 now culminates with Ofcom.

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

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Appendix – Party Coverage 2019

A1i Introduction

Deciding respective levels of coverage for different political parties, 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, formats and topics.

So although each outlet must ensure its coverage is proportionate between the parties, 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 across the UK as a whole, or across each nation, or within individual constituencies, should reflect levels of past and/or current electoral support. In considering this, and while bearing in mind the location of the intended audience, performance at the most recent equivalent elections (i.e. the 2017 and the 2015 General Elections) in terms of both seats won and share of the vote is taken as the starting point, the following additional factors must be given due weight:

- performance in other sorts of elections, where relevant.
- other relevant evidence of current electoral support, including robust patterns in 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.

Coverage of Brexit

The EU referendum and the execution of its outcome remains the UK's dominant political issue and we must achieve due impartiality in this election having regard to Brexit by taking account of an appropriate range of views and differences which may cut across party lines. With regard to content relating directly to Brexit, we should bear in mind the distinct positions of relevant parties (taking account, for instance, both of the EU referendum result and the relative strength of electoral support for parties in the recent 2019 European elections) and ensure that all main strands of argument regarding Brexit receive similar levels of coverage during the campaign.

Advice is available, on a case by case basis, from the Chief Adviser, Politics, both before and throughout the campaign.

A1ii OFCOM

This Appendix is subject to Section 6 of the Ofcom Code (updated January 2019, and takes account of the associated Guidance Notes (22nd March 2017) and relevant evidence of electoral support as set out in the Ofcom Digest .

https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0027/176409/electoral-digest-121219-general-election.pdf

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

Ofcom takes into account the following factors when considering election related complaints and as such, this provides helpful guidance to programme makers when making editorial decisions based on parties' electoral support

- *“we place greater weight on the actual performance of a political party 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 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 past elections not being contested at a given time;*
- *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 the different devolved nations of the UK;*
- *whilst 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;*
- *our intention is always to undertake a balanced assessment having regard to the totality of relevant evidence”.*

A2i BBC UK-wide 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 the Brexit Party may also receive significant levels of coverage up to and including similar levels to the largest parties.

Bearing in mind the same factors (including number of candidates), consideration should also be given to coverage of UKIP and Change UK.

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 ii 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 any one nation of Great Britain 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 (normally News at Five),
- Radio 4 1800,
- Radio 5 Live Drive,
- BBC Online, and
- BBC Parliament.

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

- Radio 2 summaries; and,
- Newsbeat

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

A2iii Coverage of Northern Ireland parties on UK-wide outlets¹

The largest parties in Northern Ireland are: the Democratic Unionists, Sinn Fein, the Ulster Unionist Party, the SDLP and the Alliance 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 Fein. The UUP, the SDLP and the Alliance Party 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 and 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 2017 and 2015 and in other recent elections: these parties should receive broadly similar levels of coverage.

The Scottish Green Party and the Brexit Party have demonstrated significant 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 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.

¹ Please refer to Section A5 for Party Coverage on BBC Northern Ireland.

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 and 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, Plaid Cymru, the Liberal Democrats and the Brexit Party secured substantial electoral support in Wales at the 2017 and 2015 general elections and in other recent elections: these parties will receive broadly similar levels of coverage.

Bearing in mind the same factors (including number of candidates), consideration should also be given to coverage of UKIP, the Green Party and Change UK.

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 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 Ulster Unionists, the SDLP and the Alliance Party.

Bearing in mind the levels of electoral support won in 2017, 2015 and since, the DUP and Sinn Fein should receive similar levels of coverage. The UUP, the SDLP and the Alliance Party may receive, on occasion, similar levels of coverage to the two largest parties.

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 2017), 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 Northern Ireland, but which are running serious campaigns, should also receive coverage, as a minimum on BBC Online, at some stage in the campaign.

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 and they should normally be represented with similar levels of coverage in appropriate election output.

At other elections, the Liberal Democrats, the Brexit Party and the Green Party have demonstrated significant electoral support and should receive coverage proportionate with the largest parties, including, on occasion, similar levels of coverage.

Bearing in mind the same factors (including candidacy), consideration should also be given to coverage of UKIP and Change UK.

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 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.
- 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 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.

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.