



Coimisiún  
na Meán

# Guidelines in Respect of Coverage of Electoral Events

Publication date:  
September 2025



# Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Scope &amp; Jurisdiction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3. Effective Date</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>4. Achieving Fairness, Objectivity and Impartiality</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>4.1 Responsibility for Editorial Approach</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>4.2 Allocation of Airtime</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4.3 Diversity of Viewpoints</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>4.4 Audience Participation</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>4.5 Critical Examination of Views</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>5. Conflicts of Interest</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>6. Opinion Polls</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>7. Social Media</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>8. Advertising</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>9. Party Political Programmes</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>10. Critical Election and Referendum Period</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>10.1 Additional Care Requirement</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>10.2 Opinions expressed by programme contributors</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>10.3 Speculating on the outcome of a vote during polling hours</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>11. An Coimisiún Toghcháin</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>12. Diversity</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>13. Complaints</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>14. Guidance</b>	<b>14</b>



# 1. Introduction

These Guidelines set out for broadcasters<sup>1</sup> guidance and requirements with respect to coverage of electoral events, namely Dáil Éireann, Presidential, Seanad Éireann, Local and European Elections and Referendums.<sup>2</sup> These are in addition to the general requirements included in the *Code of Fairness, Objectivity and Impartiality in News and Current Affairs*.<sup>3</sup> The Guidelines have been developed further to Section 15.1 of the *Code of Fairness, Objectivity and Impartiality in News and Current Affairs* and should be read in conjunction with that Code.

## 2. Scope & Jurisdiction

The Guidelines apply to broadcasters within the jurisdiction of the Republic of Ireland and shall not apply to other services commonly received in this State but licensed in other jurisdictions. Coimisiún na Meán encourages broadcasters outside of the jurisdiction, whose services are receivable in the Republic of Ireland and who cover Irish news and current affairs, to be mindful of the Guidelines, where appropriate, when deciding on their approach to coverage of electoral events.

The Guidelines do not apply to print, social media, audiovisual on-demand media services or online print/audiovisual content.

The Guidelines apply only in the case of broadcast content that makes reference to an electoral event e.g. news and current affairs content or other content, for example a light entertainment programme covering the topic or an advertisement making reference to an electoral event.

## 3. Effective Date

The effective date for the Guidelines will be published by Coimisiún na Meán in advance of each electoral event to be held. The Guidelines will remain in effect until the closing of polling stations on the day of the poll.

---

<sup>1</sup> For the avoidance of doubt, the term 'broadcaster' does not refer to individual presenters or programme staff but rather to the company, co-operative etc., that owns and operates the broadcast service. This should not be taken to mean that individual presenters or programme staff are exempt from the obligations of these Guidelines.

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of the Guidelines, "*electoral event*" is defined with reference to Section 67(2) of the Electoral Reform Act 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Rule 27 of the Code requires broadcasters to comply with guidelines developed by the regulator with respect to coverage of elections or referendums. The Code may be accessed here: - [Code of Fairness, Objectivity & Impartiality](#) in News and Current Affairs.



## 4. Achieving Fairness, Objectivity and Impartiality

Broadcasters play an important and valuable role in the manner in which information about an electoral event is communicated to, and discussed by, the Irish public. This is achieved via accurate, fair, objective and impartial coverage.

For this reason, broadcasters are advised to cover electoral events in as comprehensive a manner as possible having due regard to the resources available to them, the target audience for the service and the types of programming that the broadcaster provides to the audience.

Broadcasters should note that fairness, objectivity and impartiality can be achieved by a variety of means, for example, through the selection of contributors, the scope of the debate, the structure of the programme, the presenter's handling of the topic, the make-up of audiences participating in programming, or through other suitable means.

### 4.1 Responsibility for Editorial Approach

It is appropriate that decisions in respect of editorial coverage of an electoral event rest solely with broadcasters.

Broadcasters should develop mechanisms in respect to their approach to coverage that are open, transparent and fair to all interests and to the public. These mechanisms should be considered and developed at an early stage and information on the approach being adopted should be available to all interested parties upon request, including election / referendum interests.<sup>4</sup>

Broadcasters should note that electoral events are dynamic, and they should give active consideration to their approach to coverage over the duration of the campaign period of the electoral event and amend this approach if they consider it necessary and appropriate so as to ensure fairness, objectivity and impartiality.

The *Code of Fairness, Objectivity and Impartiality in News and Current Affairs* sets out in detail how fairness, objectivity and impartiality can and should be achieved. Broadcasters should ensure that all staff are familiar with this Code and these Guidelines.

---

<sup>4</sup> 'Election / referendum interests' include, but is not limited to, political parties, elected representatives, the Government, organisations established specifically for the purpose of campaigning during an election or referendum, individuals (including those holding or formerly holding a public office) campaigning for a particular outcome to an election / referendum, as well as existing social and civil society groups engaging in a campaign in respect of the election / referendum.



## 4.2 Allocation of Airtime

The approach to the allocation of airtime, whether strict or proportional, is a matter for broadcasters and may vary depending on, amongst other matters, the type of election or referendum, the resources available to broadcasters, their target audience, the types of programming that the broadcaster provides to the audience, and the particular type of programme (i.e. whether it is general coverage, Candidates' or Leaders' Debates<sup>5</sup>, Party Political Programmes<sup>6</sup> etc).

### **For Elections**

Fair allocation of airtime during election coverage is essential. This includes airtime afforded through normal editorial coverage of an election, "Leaders' Debates", debates between candidates, or party political programmes.

While a strict equal allocation of airtime for candidates and political parties is not precluded and may be appropriate in certain situations, such an approach to the allocation of airtime is not an automatic absolute requirement and a proportional approach to airtime allocation may also be adopted, where appropriate.

In the allocation of airtime, where a proportional approach is to be taken to such allocation, Coimisiún na Meán considers that a broadcaster may reasonably have regard to relevant contextual factors. These factors could, for example, include but are not limited to: -

- current elected representation.
- first preference votes in a prior election.
- the presence of candidates that have agreed to campaign on aligned election issues but who are not members of a political party.<sup>7</sup>
- the number of candidates being fielded in a forthcoming election.
- the need to reflect the diversity of political perspectives amongst candidates/parties participating in elections.
- the current support for parties/candidates evident from opinion polls or other data sources.

It is open to broadcasters to have regard to changes in the media, social and political landscape and review how any changes in this regard might impact on the contextual factors that it will apply to an election.

---

<sup>5</sup> The decision on which leaders are represented in any broadcast debates is an editorial matter for broadcasters in consultation with the political parties taking part.

<sup>6</sup> Formerly known as Party Political Broadcasts.

<sup>7</sup> This is not a relevant factor in the granting of Party Political Programmes (see section 9).



### **For Referendums**

The approach taken to the inclusion of referendum interests in programme coverage must be equitable to all interests and undertaken in a transparent manner. However, there is no obligation to automatically 'balance' each contribution by a referendum interest on an individual programme with an opposing contribution from another referendum interest. There is also no requirement to automatically allocate an absolute equality of airtime to referendum interests during coverage.

While it is important to ensure that coverage provides airtime to referendum interests to set out their views on proposed changes to the Irish Constitution or relevant matter, broadcasters are encouraged to approach coverage with an emphasis on the issues that the public must decide upon rather than taking an approach limited, simply, to a mathematical allocation of airtime to individuals or groups with views on the merits and outcome of the referendum or referendums. This may facilitate a focus on the issues which may be of greater benefit to the democratic choice to be made by individuals rather than an approach to coverage that is simply adversarial in nature. In addition to providing airtime to referendum interests, other contributors with no link to referendum interests can provide the necessary information to audiences.

## **4.3 Diversity of Viewpoints**

Broadcasters are advised to seek out the widest range of opinions relating to the relevant issues at the centre of electoral events. Notwithstanding this, broadcasters have a duty to protect audiences from content that is harmful, or which may pose legal or liability risks to the broadcaster. It is a matter for broadcasters to manage these risks on a case-by-case basis, for example via the use of pre-recorded interviews or by declining to air views that they believe pose such risks. However, when doing so, a broadcaster should be in a position to objectively justify the approach taken to managing such risks.

### **For Elections**

In addition to exploring the manifestos of political parties and the campaign positions of candidates, election campaigns generally address a range of social, cultural and political issues. In this respect, to ensure that audiences are not only familiar with the candidates seeking election but also the wider issues that may be at the centre of election campaigns, broadcasters are advised to seek out the widest range of opinions on these issues. This will include contributions from election interests but also other individuals and organisations who may not be involved in campaigning but who may potentially provide audiences with valuable information and insights.



### **For Referendums**

Broadcasters are advised to seek out the widest range of opinions on the issues raised by proposed constitutional amendment(s) or other relevant matter. This will include contributions from referendum interests who are campaigning for or against, and others who may have important insights, regardless of whether they have a stated voting option.

## **4.4 Audience Participation**

In the context of programmes which have an element of audience participation, including contributions by phone or text and live debates, broadcasters should ensure that an appropriate range of views are adequately represented in the questions, comments and issues raised during such programmes.

Broadcasters should not automatically assume that contributors who are participating in a programme, but who do not represent interests linked to an electoral event, are unbiased. Broadcasters should take reasonable steps to identify any affiliation between programme contributors and election / referendum interests (e.g., party representation, or where a contribution has a human-interest element directly linked to the referendum issue) and make such affiliation known to audiences at the time of broadcast.

## **4.5 Critical Examination of Views**

The critical examination of the views of interests linked to electoral events is not, in and of itself, evidence of a lack of fairness, objectivity and impartiality since it is an appropriate role for broadcasters to ensure that time is afforded to examine, challenge (sometimes robustly, where required) the statements and positions of such interests.

However, this does not override the requirement to seek the views of relevant interests, to include them in programming, and / or to reflect their perspective in broadcast content, in circumstances where it is necessary to achieve fairness, objectivity and impartiality.

The role of the presenter as ‘devil’s advocate’ is also important in presenting alternative or challenging perspectives to those offered by contributors.



## 5. Conflicts of Interest

The *Code of Fairness, Objectivity and Impartiality in News and Current Affairs* requires that each broadcaster put in place, and implement, appropriate policies and procedures to address any conflicts of interests that may exist or arise in respect of anyone with an editorial involvement in any news or current affairs content, whether such person works on-air or off-air.<sup>8</sup> This requirement is of particular importance in the context of coverage of electoral events.

Broadcast content must not display bias in favour of, or against, any interest participating in the electoral event, including parties or candidates. Endorsements on-air by a broadcaster of election or referendum interests, including candidates or parties are not permitted. In addition, endorsements on-air by staff (who are employed, contracted or who volunteer with a broadcaster) of election or referendum interests, including candidates, are also not permitted.

Broadcasters should note that comments made by programme presenters in non-broadcast media, for example via social media, in respect of election or referendum interests, including candidates, may have the potential to undermine the perceived impartiality of their coverage. This is particularly the case where the comments are made by presenters of news and current affairs programming. It is a matter for broadcasters to deal with such issues in the context of determining their approach to coverage and in the context of their contractual, employment or volunteer relationship with presenters. Notwithstanding this, Coimisiún na Meán may have regard to such comments where there is an evident link with a broadcast.

Broadcasters should note that the inherent qualities or personal circumstances of an individual will not, of itself, constitute a conflict of interest e.g. a person's age, gender, marital status, ethnicity, family status, sexual orientation, beliefs etc.

### **For Elections**

It is the opinion of Coimisiún na Meán that it is not appropriate for election candidates to present programmes during the campaign period of an electoral event (including news and current affairs programmes). The campaign period is understood to commence when an election is called. There may be unplanned instances where a programme(s) will be presented by or feature an election candidate and where the programme has been recorded prior to the calling of an election and is scheduled for broadcast during the campaign period. In such circumstances, with the exception of news and current affairs programming which should not be presented either live or as a prerecord by a candidate, it is a matter for broadcasters to decide on a case-by-case basis whether it is appropriate to broadcast such a programme during the campaign period.

---

<sup>8</sup> Section 14.9





In doing so, broadcasters are asked to have regard to the following matters: -

- the public interest,
- their statutory obligations to fairness, objectivity and impartiality,
- the type of programme concerned,
- the frequency of the broadcast during the relevant period,
- the risk that the broadcast may confer an unfair advantage on a candidate relative to others,
- whether the programme can be rescheduled for broadcast,
- and in the context of the contractual, employment or volunteer relationship between the relevant person and the broadcaster.

## 6. Opinion Polls

Opinion polls are a useful tool to inform the audience of voting intentions. Where opinion polls are being used as part of the coverage of electoral events, coverage must be accompanied by information to assist viewers/listeners to understand the significance of the opinion poll. Information on the details of the date of the poll, by whom it was commissioned and/or paid for, the company/organisation who conducted it, the number of people polled, and their location must be provided on-air.

In representing the findings of opinion polls to viewers and listeners, broadcasters are advised to take into account not only the interpretation of the findings provided by those who have commissioned/undertaken the opinion poll but to also have regard to their own critical analysis of the results and the methodology used to undertake the poll.

While having regard to public opinion shown in polls is legitimate, broadcasters should remember that a majority view does not make an opposing position less legitimate. Due regard should also be given to the merits of arguments presented by all sides.

Reporting on or discussion of opinion polls are not permitted during polling hours (Section 10.3).

## 7. Social Media

Broadcasters are reminded that they are required, further to the *Code of Fairness, Objectivity and Impartiality in News and Current Affairs*, to have in place appropriate policies and procedures for handling on-air contributions via social media. These policies and practices must be applied where social media is referenced on-air in the context of coverage of electoral events.

As trusted sources of news and current affairs content, broadcasters are an important barrier against the spread of misinformation and disinformation that has become prevalent around political and other types of debate of importance to society.



Given this and given the importance of electoral events, additional steps should be implemented by broadcasters to ensure that on-air references to social media content are accurate and that on-air references to such content does not spread misinformation or disinformation.

Given the increasing presence of audio and video content (including audio and audiovisual 'deepfakes') being generated by artificial intelligence, broadcasters should take steps to manage these risks and minimise the potential for such content to make it on-air and mislead audiences.

## 8. Advertising

Section 46M(2) of the Broadcasting Act 2009 as amended provides that a broadcaster shall not broadcast an advertisement which is directed towards a 'political end'. In this context, broadcasters shall ensure that advertising is free of material that might be reasonably considered as being directed towards a 'political end' in contravention of Section 46M(2). This prohibition applies to advertising for events, notices regarding meetings or other events being organised by election or referendum interests as part of their campaign but does not include announcements broadcast on behalf of An Coimisiún Toghcháin which concern a referendum.

In determining whether an advertisement may contravene the statutory prohibition, Coimisiún na Meán is of the view that it is reasonable for broadcasters to take into account the following three factors: -

- The content of the advertisement.
- The context in which the advertisement is broadcast.
- The aims and objectives of the advertiser and of the advertising campaign.

It is likely that one or more of the three factors may play a determining role in deciding whether an advertisement complies with the statutory prohibition. Separate guidance on advertising directed towards a 'political end' has been developed.<sup>9</sup>

## 9. Party Political Programmes

Party political programmes, formerly known as party political broadcasts, are permitted during electoral event campaigns further to Section 46M(4) of the Broadcasting Act 2009 as amended.

There is no obligation on broadcasters to transmit party political programmes during the campaign period of an electoral event. However, broadcasters that do carry such programmes shall ensure that they are transmitted at times that are aimed at achieving a similar audience for all such broadcasts.

---

<sup>9</sup> [Broadcasting Authority of Ireland Guidance Note on Advertising Directed Towards a Political End](#)



Similar broadcast treatment shall be provided for all party political programmes, both at their introduction and at their conclusion. Such programmes may only be availed of by political parties included on the *Register of Political Parties*.<sup>10</sup>

To ensure that a party political programme does not rank as an advertisement (which is prohibited by Section 46M(2) of the Broadcasting 2009 Act as amended) no payment or similar consideration shall be applied for such broadcasts.

### **For Referendums**

If a party political programme is broadcast as part of a referendum campaign, the total time allocated must provide equal airtime to views supporting and opposing the proposed changes. If equal airtime cannot be met, no such programmes should be broadcast.

## **10. Critical Election and Referendum Period**

From October 2024, the moratorium on coverage of electoral events has been removed. Broadcasters are now free to provide coverage of electoral events (with some limited restrictions during polling hours), during the period when the moratorium once applied (2pm prior to the poll and up until the closing of polling stations on the day of the election). In place of the moratorium, Coimisiún na Meán has established a “Critical Election and Referendum Period”. This period runs from 7am on the day before polling begins until polls close on voting day (usually 10pm).

During this Period, broadcasters are required to take a higher level of editorial care (the “**additional care requirement**”) in their coverage of an electoral event. The rationale for this requirement is that during coverage of the electoral event, new information (such as breaking news stories) broadcast during this period can have a heightened impact on the electoral process. This is because there may be a more limited opportunity to ensure fairness, objectivity and impartiality in the immediate period before polling commences and during polling hours.

The additional care requirement does not prohibit coverage of the electoral event, related issues, candidates or new information (such as breaking news stories) but rather sets out a number of considerations that Coimisiún na Meán considers broadcasters should have regard to during the Critical Election and Referendum Period. It also sets out restrictions on reporting of opinion polls and exit polls.

Broadcasters are reminded of their crucial role as a barrier against misinformation and disinformation throughout the election or referendum period, particularly with regards to the verification of social media content and addressing risks from AI-generated material, as outlined above under Section 7.

---

<sup>10</sup> [An Coimisiún Toghcháin- Register of Political Parties](#)



## 10.1 Additional Care Requirement

During the Critical Election and Referendum Period: -

- Broadcasters should treat with a higher degree of editorial care new information relating to an electoral event that it believes, or ought reasonably to believe, has been circulated during this period that appears intended to mislead or confuse voters, or where an inability to verify or accurately report on the new information in a timely manner might similarly mislead or confuse voters.
- Broadcasters should put in place suitable precautions to ensure that such information is treated with higher editorial care. Examples of such precautions may include establishing an appropriate editorial review process for the period, having fact-checking resources readily available, implementing screening procedures for live calls, or by the use of pre-recorded material. Such precautions should be proportionate to the size and resources of the broadcaster.
- Broadcasters retain editorial discretion to decide whether, and how, to treat such information during this period. In such circumstances, broadcasters may consider:
  - Not covering the new information at all if they are not confident that they can report is fairly, objectively and impartially.
  - Covering it specifically with a view to correcting misconceptions that may arise, or have arisen, from the new information.
  - Covering the item with appropriate fact-checking and context.
  - Delaying coverage of the item until it can be adequately verified.
- If choosing to cover such information, broadcasters should make their best efforts to ensure that their coverage reduces the likelihood of audience confusion, rather than amplifying it.

Broadcasters should be aware that new information may be misleading or confusing, even if it is factually true but its significance, accuracy or context is difficult to establish during the Critical Election and Referendum Period.

Broadcasters should note the information whose release appears to have been deliberately timed—that is, by virtue of the nature of the information or facts to which the information relates it could reasonably have been released earlier—so that it enters the public domain or comes to the broadcaster’s attention during the Critical Election and Referendum Period should normally be treated as being intended or likely to confuse or mislead voters and so the guidance relating to treatment with additional care should apply.

## 10.2 Opinions expressed by programme contributors

During the Critical Election and Referendum Period broadcasters should take additional care to ensure that opinions expressed by programme contributors do not interfere with the electoral process by making a false or misleading claim with respect to the integrity of the electoral procedure.

'Electoral procedure', for the purposes of this subsection, refers to content of a factual nature relating to the holding of an electoral event including but not limited to the registration of voters or candidates, voting times and locations, arrangements for postal voting, the secrecy of the ballot, the counting of votes and any other factual content relating to the holding of a particular electoral event or events more generally.

## 10.3 Speculating on the outcome of a vote during polling hours

During polling hours, a broadcaster should not feature in its coverage any speculation on the outcome of a vote. Speculation for this purpose includes any inference drawn from data arising from or connected to how individual voters have cast their vote. Broadcasters may include factual observations on turnout in their coverage during polling hours; however, they may not include any speculation drawn from these trends on the performance of individuals or parties.

For the avoidance of doubt, an exit poll is an example of speculation on the outcome of a vote. Therefore, a broadcaster should not broadcast coverage relating to an exit poll until the vote to which that poll relates has ended and polls have closed.

In addition, a broadcaster should not feature in its coverage during polling hours any reporting on or discussion of opinion polls connected to the electoral event.

## 11. An Coimisiún Toghcháin

In the case of a referendum, the Minister for Culture, Communications and Sport may direct RTÉ and TG4 to arrange for the allocation of broadcasting time to facilitate An Coimisiún Toghcháin in its role.<sup>11</sup> The Minister may also direct Coimisiún na Meán to ensure the allocation of broadcasting time on radio and television services licensed by Coimisiún na Meán.<sup>12</sup>

Announcements by the Referendum Commission do not constitute advertisements and do not count towards the calculation of advertising airtime or the limits on such airtime in place for Irish radio and television broadcasters.

---

<sup>11</sup> Further to Section 32(2) of the Electoral Reform Act 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Further to Section 32(3) of the Electoral Reform Act 2022.



## 12. Diversity

It is a strategic objective of Coimisiún na Meán to foster a media landscape that is representative of, and accessible to, the diversity of Irish society. It is also a strategic objective to foster and promote quality programming in the Irish language. In this context, broadcasters are encouraged to include a mix of voices and opinions in their coverage of electoral events, including a mix of voices representing gender and cultural and social diversity.

Coimisiún na Meán also encourages English language services to provide additional opportunities to cover electoral events in the Irish language above and beyond their contractual obligations.

While the Access Rules do not include obligations about providing accessible coverage in respect of news and current affairs, Coimisiún na Meán encourages television broadcasters to provide coverage of electoral events that is accessible. This can be achieved via the provision of subtitling, audio description or Irish Sign Language.

## 13. Complaints

Audiences, referendum and election interests who wish to make a complaint about programme content should make such complaints in the first instance to the broadcaster. Thereafter, a complaint may be made to Coimisiún na Meán. Coimisiún na Meán has established a Contact Centre for handling queries, including complaints. The Contact Centre may be contacted by phone on + 353 1 963 7755 and by email at [usersupport@cnam.ie](mailto:usersupport@cnam.ie).

## 14. Guidance

Coimisiún na Meán can provide additional guidance on the practical application of the Guidelines but will only do so when requests of this nature are accompanied by proposed broadcast copy submitted in accordance with the procedures provided for in the Guidance Notes accompanying the *Code of Fairness, Objectivity and Impartiality in News and Current Affairs*. Requests should be emailed to [election@cnam.ie](mailto:election@cnam.ie).

### NOTE

These Guidelines do not purport to constitute a comprehensive statement of the law. Coimisiún na Meán reserves the right to amend these Guidelines if it deems it necessary or prudent to do so. Coimisiún na Meán may provide informal guidance, without liability. This will not affect its discretion to decide upon cases/complaints after broadcast nor the exercise of its regulatory duties. Broadcasters should seek their own legal advice on compliance issues, where required.

