

Appendix I – Party Coverage 2015

General Election 2015 and Local Government Elections (England) Party Coverage

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 and formats. 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 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 in each electoral area (from the UK as a whole to individual constituencies) should reflect levels of past and/or current electoral support. In considering this, bearing in mind the location of the intended audience, although performance at the last equivalent election (i.e. the 2010 General election) in terms of representation and share of the vote is taken as the starting point, the following factors must be given due weight:

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

I. Party Coverage for broadcasts across the UK:

I.1 Larger Parties in Great Britain

Parties which secured a substantial share of the vote across Great Britain at the last General election are:

Labour, Conservatives and Liberal Democrats.

Bearing in mind the respective shares of the vote in 2010, Labour and the Conservatives should receive broadly similar levels of coverage. In many programmes and formats, the Liberal Democrats should receive similar levels of coverage to the two largest parties.

In England and Wales, since 2010 when it secured 3.1% of the vote, UKIP has demonstrated a substantial increase in electoral support in subsequent and different types of elections and

there is consistent and robust evidence of increased support across relevant opinion polling. UK-wide programmes must ensure that UKIP is given appropriate levels of coverage in output to which the largest parties contribute and, on some occasions, similar levels of coverage.

In Scotland and Wales, the SNP and Plaid Cymru respectively secured substantial electoral support at the last General Election. UK-wide programmes must ensure that the SNP and Plaid are given appropriate levels of coverage in output to which the largest parties contribute, and on some occasions, similar levels of coverage. Since 2010, the SNP in particular has demonstrated a substantial increase in electoral support and this should be reflected in the relative levels of UK-wide coverage the party receives.

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.

1.2 Smaller Parties in Great Britain

There is a wide variation from those parties which are represented at a national level or in local government to those which have not stood before in a general election, as well as those who have stood many times, but with little electoral success.

The Green Party of England and Wales won representation in the House of Commons in 2010 and the Scottish Green Party (separately) is represented in the Scottish Parliament. There is some evidence of increased electoral support since 2010, as well as more representation in the European Parliament and local government. UK-wide programmes must ensure that the Greens are given proportionate levels of coverage in output to which the larger parties contribute, and, on occasion, similar levels of coverage, if appropriate.

The following guidance (which applies to all GB parties) is aimed at ensuring minimum coverage for other 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 synch if available - of their manifesto launch (or an equivalent event) on the following output:

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

- BBC Parliament

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

- Radio 2 summaries; and,
- Newsbeat

The policies of each of these parties should also be reported in at least one substantial item (eg. as part of a package or as an interview) during the course of the campaign on:

- Today, World At One or PM on Radio 4; and,
- Breakfast or Drive on 5Live

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.

1.3 Coverage of Northern Ireland parties on UK-wide outlets

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 won in 2010, 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 synch if available) of their manifesto launch (or equivalent event) on the network outlets specified above (see 1.2).

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. Of those, parties only standing candidates in Northern Ireland, which can demonstrate some electoral support (for instance, through representation in the Assembly) can expect some coverage of their manifesto launch on the same UK-wide outlets (see 1.2).

These include the Green Party of Northern Ireland and the Traditional Unionist Voice Party.

2. Party Coverage on BBC Scotland, BBC Wales and BBC Northern Ireland

For smaller parties, this guidance is aimed at ensuring minimum coverage. It does not set a maximum.

2.1 BBC Scotland:

Parties which secured a substantial share of the vote in Scotland at the last General election are:

Labour, SNP, Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats.

These parties will receive similar levels of coverage.

The Scottish Green Party, with representation in the Scottish Parliament, can demonstrate some electoral support and should receive coverage proportionate with the larger parties, including, on occasion, similar levels of coverage. Similarly, UKIP in Scotland has demonstrated an increased level of electoral support and should also receive coverage proportionate to the larger parties, including, on occasion, similar levels of coverage.

All parties fielding candidates in at least one-sixth of the seats in Scotland will 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 (ie, Newsdrive, Radio Scotland; Reporting Scotland, BBC One Scotland; ; Aithris an Fheasgair, Radio nan Gàidheal; An La, BBC Alba).

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.

2.2 BBC Wales:

Parties which secured a substantial share of the vote in Wales at the last General election are: Labour, Conservative, Plaid Cymru and the Liberal Democrats.

These four parties will receive similar levels of coverage.

In addition, UKIP has demonstrated a substantial increase in electoral support, in European elections and across relevant opinion polling. On many occasions, therefore, UKIP will receive similar levels of coverage to the other four larger parties.

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 (ie Good Evening, Radio Wales; Post Prynhawn Wales, Radio Cymru; Wales Today, BBC One Wales; Newyddion, S4C).

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.

2.3 BBC Northern Ireland

Parties which secured a substantial share of the vote and/or representation at the last General election in Northern Ireland are:

the DUP, Sinn Fein, the Ulster Unionists (which in 2010 stood as the Ulster Conservatives and Unionists – New Force), the SDLP and the Alliance Party.

Bearing in mind the respective shares of the vote and the level of representation won in 2010, the DUP and Sinn Fein should receive similar levels of coverage. The UUP, the SDLP and the Alliance Party may receive similar levels of coverage to the two largest parties in some output. These may include debates, items detailing distinctive policies, as well as sequences of interviews with party leaders and other senior figures.

All parties fielding candidates in at least one-sixth of the seats in Northern Ireland will have – as a minimum – their manifesto launch (or equivalent event) covered on appropriate TV and radio news and current affairs programmes and online (ie, Evening Extra, Radio Ulster; Newsline, BBC One NI).

Among these other parties, those which can demonstrate some electoral support (for instance with representation in the Northern Ireland Assembly), 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.

2.4. Party Coverage in English Regions and Local Radio

Parties which secured a substantial share of the vote across England at the last General election are:

Labour, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats

They should be represented with similar levels of coverage in appropriate election output. So too on some occasions should UKIP, which has demonstrated a substantial increase in electoral support, in subsequent and different types of elections and with a consistent and robust track record across relevant opinion polling.

In each area, however, regional and local programmes should take account of any differing levels of support in the way they cover issues relating to the General Election. In particular, in areas where the Green Party of England and Wales can demonstrate significant electoral

support, they should be given appropriate levels of coverage in output to which the largest parties contribute, up to and including similar levels of coverage.

On regional TV, parties fielding candidates in at least one-sixth of the seats in the area covered will have – as a minimum – one significant item (including synch 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 will have – as a minimum – one significant item (including synch 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.

3. Coverage of Local Elections in England

3.1 Larger Parties

The largest parties of local government in England are the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats and in output primarily concerning the local elections, they should each be represented appropriately, with broadly similar levels of coverage.

3.2 Smaller Parties

In areas where other parties, for instance, UKIP and the Green Party, can demonstrate significant electoral support in local government, or in other recent elections, they too should be represented appropriately – up to and including similar levels of coverage to the largest parties - in any such output.

3.3 Independents

Independent candidates attract significant levels of support in many local elections and the audience will expect that to be reflected in relevant coverage. Independent candidates should be given proportionate coverage (on occasion up to similar levels to the larger parties in some wards or councils), where they have demonstrated either:

- significant previous electoral support (eg are incumbents), or
- there is evidence of significant current electoral support.

In addition there will be circumstances in which there is a possibility of No Overall Control within a council, meaning it will be editorially appropriate for any one or more independent candidates to receive more coverage, for instance, in the context of “coalition-building”.

Relevant output should also take into account the political context in which candidates are standing: for instance, where an Independent candidate indicates some support for a political party, or where a group of Independents are acting together, whether or not on a common manifesto; the objective will be to ensure the audience is given clear and accurate information and that due weight is applied to the various political perspectives.

4. Lists of candidates on BBC Online

BBC News Online, the Nations’ and English Regions’ websites (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. Provisional lists should be available before the close of nominations.

In the local elections, any ward reports or use of candidates will need the relevant list of candidates to be made available by the programme or website concerned.

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