[IE] Guidelines for broadcast coverage of elections

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On 30 April 2024, the Irish media regulator *Coimisiún na Meán* published Guidelines in Respect of Broadcast Coverage of Elections (hereinafter "the Guidelines"), in advance of the European and local elections and the election for a directly elected Mayor of Limerick, scheduled to be held on 7 June 2024. These Guidelines were developed further to Rule 27 of the Code of Fairness, Objectivity and Impartiality in News and Current Affairs (hereinafter "the Code"), reviewed in 2022.

The Guidelines apply only to broadcasters (excluding print, social media, audiovisual on-demand media services and online print/audiovisual content) within the jurisdiction of the Republic of Ireland. *Coimisiún na Meán* however 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 elections. Besides, while the Guidelines apply only to broadcasters, the latter are required, further to the Code, 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 election coverage.

The Guidelines notably aim to achieve fairness, objectivity and impartiality, which can be attained through a variety of means, including 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. To support this goal, the Guidelines notably reflect on the editorial responsibility of broadcasters; the dynamic nature of elections should make them attentive to the need to amend their approach if they consider it necessary and appropriate. The guidelines also emphasise on the fair and proportional allocation of airtime for candidates and political parties, as opposed to a strict equal allocation. The approach taken may vary depending on, amongst other matters, the type of election, the resources available to broadcasters, their target audience, the types of programming that the broadcaster provides to the audience, the particular type of election programme etc. Achieving fairness, objectivity and impartiality also comes with seeking the diversity of viewpoints, including in the context of programmes which have an element of audience participation. Finally, the Guidelines state that the

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critical examination of the views of election interests is not 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 the statements and positions of such interests.

Other issues covered by the guidelines include conflicts of interest, opinion polls, advertising, party political programming and diversity.

The Guidelines also cover the moratorium required during election periods. According to the Guidelines, the moratorium operates from 2pm on the day before the poll takes place and throughout the day of the poll itself until polling stations close. However, broadcasters are required to strike a balance between requirements to keep the public informed over this period and ensuring that programming does not contravene the moratorium. During the review of the Code, industry stakeholders largely called for the removal of the moratorium while public ones shared rather mixed views. The Irish regulator will conduct a review of the moratorium in the second half of the year and undertake a public consultation. If warranted by the review updated Guidelines dealing with the moratorium are intended to be published in the fourth quarter of the year.

Complaints about programme content should first be made to the broadcaster and then to *Coimisiún na Meán*.

The guidelines came into force on 7 May 2024 and will apply until the polls close on 7 June 2024.

Guidelines in Respect of Coverage of Elections, 30 April 2024

https://www.cnam.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/2024_ElectionGuidelines_vFinal-1.pdf

Code of Fairness, Objectivity and Impartiality, April 2013

https://www.bai.ie/en/download/129469/

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