[IE] Election Guidelines

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Prior to the General Election held on 17 May 2002, the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland (BCI) published guidelines indicating the general approach to be adopted by independent broadcasters in their coverage of the election. The guidelines were in addition to the statutory provisions already in existence. The Radio and Television Act, 1988, requires all news to be reported in an objective and impartial manner without any expression of the broadcaster's own views. In addition, it requires the broadcast treatment of current affairs to be fair to all sides (section 9(1)). Party political broadcasts are permitted under the Act, but time must be allocated to them in a manner which will not give an unfair preference to any political party (section 9(2)). Advertisements directed towards any political end are not permitted (section 10(3)).

The guidelines covered issues such as taking care to balance the exposure given to the non-political activities of candidates or interest groups, such as attendance at functions, sporting events, etc. (Guideline No. 5). In current affairs programmes intended to focus on candidates or electoral interests, all candidates and electoral interests had to be invited, with reasonable notice, to be represented either in the same programme or in a series of programmes (Guideline No. 6). During the final twenty-four hours and on election day, no coverage of candidates or electoral interests was permitted and stations were required to ensure that broadcast output did not include any material which might be reasonably considered to have the potential to influence the outcome of the election (Guideline No. 9).

Meanwhile, during the election campaign, the national public service broadcaster, RTÉ, decided to drop a radio advertisement by An Taisce (the national heritage protection organisation) that criticised the government's housing and environmental record. The legislation under which RTÉ operates also bans advertisements directed towards any political end (Broadcasting Authority Act, 1960, section 20(4)).

General Election Guidelines: General Election 2002, Broadcasting Commission of Ireland, April 2002

http://www.bci.ie/electguide.htm

The Radio and Television Act, 1988 of 3 July

http://193.120.124.98/ZZA20Y1988.html

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