[IE] New Broadcasting Guidelines on Election Coverage

IRIS 2014-5:1/23

Damien McCallig
School of Law, National University of Ireland, Galway

On 10 March 2014, the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) published BAI Guidelines in Respect of Coverage of Local and European Elections. The Guidelines set out the rules and approach that should be adopted by all Irish broadcasters when covering the forthcoming local and European elections. Polling for both elections is scheduled to take place on 23 May 2014.

Rule 27 of the BAI Code of Fairness, Objectivity and Impartiality in News and Current Affairs provides that broadcasters must comply with Guidelines and Codes of practice on election and referenda coverage (see IRIS 2013-5/32). The Guidelines replace the BAI Broadcasting Code on Election Coverage, issued in 2011 (see IRIS 2011-5/26), and are broadly in line with existing practice and the former Code.

The Guidelines also give effect to various general requirements set out in the Broadcasting Act 2009. These include the section 39 requirements that broadcasters ensure that all news and current affairs is reported and presented in an objective and impartial manner without any expression of the broadcaster's own views on election candidates, parties or election.

Section 41(3) of the Broadcasting Act 2009 provides that a broadcaster shall not broadcast an advertisement which is directed towards a political end. However, in line with sections 29(2) and 41(3) they may broadcast Party Political Broadcasts provided that in the allocation of time for such broadcasts no political party is given an unfair preference and no charge is applied for such broadcasts.

There is no requirement that absolute equality of airtime be allocated to opposing parties or candidates during election debates. The Guidelines require broadcasters to ensure that the allocation of airtime is equitable and fair to all interests concerned and is undertaken in a transparent manner; equal airtime is not the only measure of fairness.

Broadcasters are specifically reminded that they are required to have in place appropriate policies and procedures for handling contributions and on-air references to social media. In the context of election coverage, broadcasters must ensure that all references to social media are accurate, fair, objective and impartial. The Guidelines also encourage broadcasters to provide opportunities to cover the elections in the Irish language.

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

A moratorium period is maintained as a mechanism to ensure that fairness, objectivity and impartiality are achieved during this critical period in the election process and to allow voters a period for reflection before going to the polls. The moratorium period runs from two p.m. on the day before the poll takes place and throughout the day of the poll itself until polling stations close. Is not intended to preclude coverage of legitimate news and current affairs, during the moratorium period, but broadcasters should avoid content that may influence or manipulate voters' decisions during the moratorium.

The Guidelines, which are effective since 10 March 2014, apply to all broadcasters within the jurisdiction of Ireland and shall not apply to other services commonly received in Ireland but regulated in other jurisdictions.

Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI), Guidelines in Respect of Coverage of Local and European Elections, 10 March 2014

http://www.bai.ie/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/201402_Rule27_ElectGuide_English_vFinal.pdf

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026