

# Politics

## Politics

Journalists must treat matters of public policy or political or industrial controversy with due accuracy. They should not express an opinion on current affairs or matters of public policy and they must not campaign, or be used to campaign.

Journalists must be clear when making requests for political interviews about the nature of the programme and context for which they are intended. All arrangements must stand up to public scrutiny and must not prevent the programme asking questions that the audiences would reasonably expect to hear.

Care must be taken when inviting politicians to contribute to output on the basis of their expertise outside their political field. If producers decide to approach a politician on this basis they must be sure not to give them such prominence as to give them undue advantage over their opponents. Journalists should not normally pay politicians for their contributions.

Political broadcasts

Many broadcasters are feel a responsibility, or are obliged by law, to make airtime available for political broadcasts leading up to an election or a referendum. These party broadcasts must be totally separate from the broadcaster's own news and programme output and must not suggest that the broadcaster supports the views.

Although the political parties are responsible for producing the material for the broadcasts, the media organisation airing them has a duty to ensure that the content complies to its editorial guidelines regarding issues such as libel, incitement to racial hatred and violence and offence.

Broadcasting during elections

A broadcaster's commitment to impartiality and fairness is under intense scrutiny during election campaigns. Political parties are likely to seek to influence editorial decisions. Content producers are likely to come under increasing pressure during election times. They should take all complaints seriously and be careful how they answer complaints. They must be able to defend all editorial decisions on the basis that they are reasonable and impartially reached. Opinion polls

When commissioning a poll we must be absolutely clear on the editorial motivation for doing so. It must not be seen as suggesting that the news organisation has a particular stance on a topic. It is probably safer to report without comment the results of existing opinion polls and weave the findings into news output.

Consider the following rules for reporting the findings of voting intention polls:

- do not lead a news bulletin or programme with the results of a voting intention poll
- do not headline the results of a voting intention poll
- do not rely on the interpretation given to a poll's results by the organisation or publication which commissioned it
- report the findings of voting intention polls in the context of trend
- do not use language which gives greater credibility to the polls than they deserve
- report the expected margin of error if the gap between the contenders is within the margin
- report the organisation which carried out the poll and the organisation or publication which commissioned it
- report the dates of the fieldwork
- report whether the poll was carried out face to face, by telephone or over the internet.

## Surveys

Don't confuse surveys with polls. When carrying out surveys of small specific groups like politicians or health authorities we must not mislead our audience about the status of the information. The remit of a survey should not be translated into percentages but reported in straight numbers. Focus groups

Be careful not to imply that the views of panels, however carefully selected, represent the views of the entire population, and they must not be used as a means of trying to estimate party support in the electorate at large. Panels or focus groups may be used to examine why certain views are held rather than the extent to which they are held. Phone and text votes

These are often described as "straw polls", even when the subject matter is serious. It tells the audience that it is just an indication and is not scientific. This is because a programme's audience is self-selected and is unlikely to be a fair representation of the population as a whole. Studio audiences

Treat straw polls of such audiences with great care. Never make claims for the significance of the views expressed beyond that they represent the opinions of those in the audience at the time. This is still the case on occasions where the

audience has been selected to be broadly representative of a particular group. Vox pops

Always make it clear that vox pops only represent one side of an argument and do not indicate the weight of opinion on either side of it. Vox pops on politics or matters of public policy must be edited to ensure that both sides of the issue are covered and/or that they truly represent those whose opinions have been solicited. Online voting

Never call online voting a poll and make it absolutely clear that the results have no wider significance than the views of the audience that responded at the time the question was asked. If this is made clear, the number of those responding and the results may be expressed in percentages, but the findings must never be used in a news item as if they were fact and can only be a representation of a limited sample of opinion.

{mosloadposition user1}

This site has used the BBC's Editorial Guidelines as the basis for these short modules on values and ethics. We sought and were given permission to quote from the guidelines and to develop the themes to the extent that they are no longer an accurate reflection of the BBC's stance. These guidelines contain a mix of regional experiences and sensitivities which have been used to develop the guidelines and give them local relevance. These pages are not endorsed by the BBC. MHM would like to thank the BBC for allowing us to use its material.