

Party Political Broadcasts/General Election + Party-Political Conferences/Ard Fheisenna on RTÉ

This document sets out RTÉ's approach to Party Political Broadcasts (PPBs) for the General Election and also RTÉ's plans for coverage of party conferences post the General Election.

1. Party Political Broadcasts (Programmes)

The RTÉ Election Steering Group has decided that Party Political Broadcasts (now referred to as Party Political Programmes in legislation) will be offered to qualifying parties in the General Election, subject to the total number of parties who qualify.

Parties will be aware that RTÉ has previously outlined difficulties with the past criteria used which resulted in more parties qualifying for PPBs than available days in the election cycle in the 2020 General Election.

As a result, RTÉ has revised past qualifying criteria.

In doing so, RTÉ notes the Updated Election Guidance issued by Coimisiún na Meán on 30 April 2024 which acknowledged:

Recognising their independence and editorial freedom, the approach to the allocation of airtime, whether strict or proportional, is a matter for broadcasters and may vary depending on, amongst other matters, the type of election (General, Presidential, Seanad, Local and European Elections), 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 (general coverage, Leaders's Debates, Party Political Programmes etc).

In particular RTÉ notes the updated guidance outlines contextual factors such as current elected representation, first preference votes in a prior election and reflecting a diversity of political perspectives. The Commission's updated guidance can be accessed at [Coimisiún na Meán | Ireland's media regulator \(cnam.ie\)](https://www.cnam.ie)

In order to offer PPBs for the General Election, RTÉ has to be satisfied that it can provide a predictable, manageable, and equitable rotation among qualifying parties.

Qualifying Criteria

Having regard to the updated guidance, the RTÉ Election Steering Group has revised qualifying criteria as follows:

- A party must be on the Register of Political Parties
- Any party which achieved 2% or more of the First Preference Vote in the last General Election and/or
- Has at least 1 TD elected in the out-going Dáil.

Based on these criteria, 10 parties in the current Dáil qualify and will be offered a PPB. The ten parties are: Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, Sinn Féin, Green Party, Labour Party, Social Democrats, People Before Profit/Solidarity, Aontú, Independent Ireland and Right to Change.

In view of the multiple media platforms now available to all parties, RTÉ will offer a PPB of maximum duration of 1 minute on television and 30 seconds on radio (RTÉ Radio 1 and RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta).

However, RTÉ will continue to accord due recognition to the level of support achieved by first preference vote in the previous General Election and this will be reflected in the number of rotations.

As 3 parties – Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Sinn Féin – achieved more than 20% of the FPV, just three times the level of support of the next nearest party, they will be offered a total of 3 rotations each. The other parties qualifying for a PPB will be offered 1 rotation each. This weighting is consistent with rotations in past elections when PPBs were offered.

The above offer will provide a 16 day rotation of PPBs in the General Election campaign.

Broadcasts

RTÉ One: The PPBs will air post the *Six One News* at around 18.55 (Mon-Fri) and Approx 18.25 (Sat/Sun)

RTÉ Radio 1: The PPBs will air at approx.12.59 before the *News At One*

RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta: The PPBs will air at approx. 14.05 (Mon-Fri) after *Nuacht a hAon*, and approx.12.59 (Sat/Sun), before *Nuacht a hAon*.

In allocating broadcast times for PPBs, RTÉ notes the updated guidance from the Commission which states broadcasters:

“shall ensure that they are transmitted at times that are aimed at achieving a similar audience for all such broadcasts. Similar broadcast treatment shall be provided for all party political programmes, both at their introduction and at their conclusion.”

As per previous elections when PPBs were offered, the rotation will be on the following basis:

- The Opposition Party with the largest number of PPBs opens the sequence and the Government party with the largest number closes.
- Sinn Féin will open the sequence. As both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have an equal number of PPBs, the party with the greatest number of TDs elected in 2020 will close the sequence. Fianna Fáil will close the sequence.
- As Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Sinn Fein have 3 broadcasts each, their respective 3 broadcasts will be placed at the commencement, at the mid-point and at the end of the sequence.
- The general principle that the biggest parties (after FG, FF, and SF) will be placed towards the end of rotation will be applied. As two parties, Right to Change and Independent Ireland were not in existence at the 2020 General Election, they will be placed after the first rotation of the 3 biggest parties in the order of Right to Change, Independent Ireland, followed by Aontú.
- After the second rotation for the 3 biggest parties, the rotation will be People Before Profit/Solidarity, Social Democrats, Labour Party and Green Party.
- The final rotation will be the 3 biggest parties.

Final details and dates will be confirmed once the election is called, and polling day is known.

Also, as a PPB constitutes uncontested airtime, RTÉ will apply a moratorium on the last PPB. The last PPB will be broadcast on the day before the eve of polling. For example, if polling is on the 6th of the month, the last PPB will run on the 4th.

This position will apply irrespective of any decision taken by Coimisiún na Meán on the wider broadcast moratorium.

Technical Specifications

Television: Attached are the technical specifications for broadcast on RTÉ One.

RTÉ is aware that the cost of a PPB is a matter a party has to consider. The technical specifications outlined in the attached document are basic broadcast standards. They do not require high end production facilities, although the amount any party wishes to spend on a PPB is a matter for that party.

If any party has any queries regarding technical specifications, RTÉ will be happy to address these.

The maximum duration for television will be 1 minute.

Radio: An audio file should be delivered with the following specifications:

- An uncompressed .wav format audio file
- With a duration not longer than 30 seconds

Delivery

Details of the delivery contact points for television and radio will issue when polling day is confirmed.

If the duration of the television file is shorter than 1 minute and/or the radio file is shorter than 30 seconds, it is important to advise RTÉ as early as possible and not later than the delivery time, in order to facilitate planning/scheduling in the broadcast system.

Legal/liability risks

RTÉ also draws attention to its obligations in respect of the requirements of the broadcasting legislation, the broadcasting codes, and wider legislative provisions such as defamation, etc.

While PPBs are uncontested airtime, all PPBs are subject to pre-broadcast clearance by RTÉ, to ensure the content is compliant with RTÉ's legal and regulatory obligations and they do not pose any legal/liability risks.

In this regard, RTÉ draws the attention of parties to the following in the updated guidance issued by the Commission:

“broadcasters have a duty to protect audiences from content that is harmful, or which may pose legal or liability risks to the broadcaster. It is a matter for broadcasters to manage these risks on a case-by-case basis, for example via the use of pre-recorded interviews or by declining to air views that they believe pose such risks. However, when doing so, a broadcaster should be in a position to objectively justify the approach taken to managing such risks.”

RTÉ reserves the right not to broadcast a PPB if it is deemed to pose a legal or liability risk.

Please also note, this offer of PPBs for the General Election is conditional on the current qualification of 10 parties in Dáil Eireann, which provides for a predictable and manageable rotation. If between the date of this correspondence and the dissolution of the Dáil, the number of qualifying parties in Dáil Eireann was to increase (that is, a new party or parties with a TD or TDs is registered on the Register of Political Parties), the RTÉ Election Steering Group reserves the right to review, revise or withdraw the offer.

2. Party Political Conferences/Ard Fheisenna

In the past, qualification for live coverage of an annual conference (the Leader Address and one hour of live conference coverage) was linked to Dáil Standing Orders on the minimum number of TDs to form a group in the House. This was an objective metric.

In the current Dáil a total of 7 parties qualified, although only 6 have availed of this coverage.

It is always open to Dáil Eireann to amend this Standing Order, to increase or reduce the minimum number of TDs.

The RTÉ Steering Group in reviewing coverage plans has determined that providing live coverage to a total of 6 parties represents a fair and proportionate access to the national broadcaster for uncontested airtime, and reflects a diverse political perspective based on the decisions made by the electorate.

The following criteria will apply after the next General Election:

- A party must be on the Register of Political Parties
- The first 6 parties in order of their total First Preference Votes in the election will qualify for live coverage (that is, broadcast of the Leader Address and one hour of conference proceedings).
- A party conference/Ard Fheis must be a national gathering of party delegates, representatives to discuss policy issues, etc which is typically held on an annual basis. A qualifying party will only receive live coverage once in a calendar year.
- Aside from the change to the qualifying criteria it is envisaged the current coverage arrangements for qualifying parties will remain after the General Election.

Coverage of the conferences/Ard Fheis of parties who are not in the first 6 parties (but who are on the Register of Political Parties), will be determined by news value at the time and may include television/radio/online coverage such as reports, interviews with a party leader.

RTÉ decided qualification will be based on the total number of First Preference Votes achieved by a registered party in the General Election, as this is an impartial and objective metric that is fixed by the Electoral Commission when all votes have been counted. Likewise, this metric directly reflects the decisions made by the electorate in terms of their political choices at the time of the election.

Given the nature of multi-seat constituencies and proportional representation, there potentially could be a situation where a party with a lower number of national first

preference votes may elect more TDs than another party with a higher total first preference votes.

However, the total number of TDs in a party, at any point in the duration of a Dáil is variable and may change due to circumstances such as changing party and/or political affiliations or by-elections where a party may lose or gain a seat.

In contrast, the total number of First Preference Votes reflects a definitive metric which demonstrates the level of national public support achieved by a party at the time of the election.

If there are changes in the composition of political parties during the lifetime of the next Dáil these will be considered on a case-by-case basis. For example, if a party that qualifies in the first 6 ceases to exist during the lifetime of the next Dáil, for instance by merger with another party, the RTÉ Steering Group will review any such changes at the time. It will not automatically follow that a newly formed party will get live coverage or that the party that was next in line (the 7th highest party in terms of total FPVs) will automatically qualify for coverage. Likewise, if a group of TDs in the next Dáil were to form a new party, it will not automatically follow that this party will qualify for live coverage.

It is RTÉ's intention to apply the criteria of the first 6 parties with the most national first preference votes throughout the next Dáil. It is not possible to foresee every potential political change. Therefore, any changes in the composition of political parties in the Dáil, such as the examples above but not excluding other potential circumstances, will be considered if they arise, taking account of the political landscape and RTÉ's scheduling and budgetary circumstances.

RTÉ also confirms there will be no live conference/Ard Fheis coverage prior to the General Election if the election is held in early 2025.

RTÉ applies a six-week moratorium to live coverage in advance of an election as this is uncontested airtime. As a General Election must be called by mid-February at the latest, this effectively rules out live coverage in January/February 2025 if the election is next year.

Issued on behalf of the RTÉ Election Steering Group

September 2024