

BSA QUICK GUIDE TO ELECTION PROGRAMMES

What is the BSA's role in respect of election-related broadcast content?

The BSA's role is to address complaints about the content of 'election programmes' broadcast on TV or radio, and to determine whether they breach the Election Programmes Code (section 8(1) of the Broadcasting Act 1989). These complaints are made directly to the BSA. The BSA will endeavour to fast track election programme complaints, after giving the parties involved an opportunity to comment. Note: Only general elections or by-elections for members of the House of Representatives are covered. Local body elections are not covered by this Code.

The BSA also considers complaints about the content of other programmes which may relate to the election (eg, broadcast news and current affairs coverage, satire and comment), under the Code of Broadcasting Standards in New Zealand.

What is an 'election programme' under the Broadcasting Act?

Section 69(1) of the Broadcasting Act 1989 defines an election programme as a programme that is broadcast on TV or radio during an 'election period' (see below) and:

- encourages or persuades, or appears to encourage or persuade voters to vote, or not to vote, for a political party or the election of a constituency candidate; or
- advocates support for, or opposes, a constituency candidate or political party; or
- notifies meetings held or to be held in connection with an election.

Usually, election programmes will appear as short promotional / campaign clips broadcast on TV or on radio, for political parties or constituency candidates.

What about third party programmes?

The Court of Appeal has held that election programmes are only those that are broadcast *for political parties or candidates* – and **not** programmes initiated by broadcasters or other third parties ([The Electoral Commission v Watson & Jones, CA239/2015 \[2016\] NZCA 512, 20 October 2016](#)).

This means that other programmes about election matters that are broadcast on TV and radio, including news, comment or current affairs in relation to an election, are **not** 'election programmes' and are not subject to the Election Programmes Code. For example, if a comedy programme aired on television in the lead-up to the election included a skit featuring or parodying a particular party and candidate, it would not be considered an election programme. If a political documentary aired on television shortly before the election, which commented on a party's track record on a contestable policy issue, this also would not be considered an election programme.

These programmes must however comply with the relevant broadcasting standards in the Code of Broadcasting Standards in New Zealand.

If the item is a third party-initiated 'election advertisement', it may be subject to the requirements under the Electoral Act (for which the [Electoral Commission](#) has responsibility), and any complaints about the content of such an advertisement may be made to the [Advertising Standards Authority](#). Complaints about the content of TV or radio programmes that relate to the election, that are not election programmes or election advertisements, must be first made to the broadcaster under the relevant standards in the Code of Broadcasting Standards in New Zealand, and then referred to the BSA if the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome.

When can an election programme be broadcast?

Election programmes may only be broadcast during the 'election period'. It is an offence to broadcast an election programme for a party or candidate outside of this period. Contact the [Electoral Commission](#) for more information about this.

For this year's 2026 General Election, the election period runs from 4 October 2026 (writ day) to midnight on 6 November 2026 (the day before polling day).

What are the standards that apply to election programmes?

Election programmes must adhere to the following standards (Election Programmes Code, page 6):

- Standard E1: Election Programmes are subject to other broadcasting code (*except for the balance standard – see below*)
- Standard E2: Election Programme Advocacy – Distinguishing factual information from opinion or advocacy.
- Standard E3: Denigration - An election programme may not denigrate a political party or candidate.
- Standard E4: Misleading Programmes - An election programme may not imitate an existing programme, format or identifiable personality in a manner which is likely to mislead.

Only general elections or by-elections for members of the House of Representatives are covered. Local body elections are not covered by this Code.

Under Standard 1, election programmes are also subject to the same broadcasting standards as other programmes under the Code of Broadcasting Standards in New Zealand.

There is one important exception – the balance standard (which requires broadcasters to make reasonable efforts, or give reasonable opportunities, to present significant points of view on controversial issues of public importance) does not apply to election programmes (section 73 of the [Broadcasting \(Election Programmes and Election Advertising\) Amendment Act 2017](#)).

Who should I to complain to?

The table that follows outlines different types of concerns in relation to election content, and the corresponding organisation that you should direct your concerns or a complaint to. If you require further guidance on where to send a complaint please contact us and we can ensure that your complaint is directed to the right place.

We are here to help

If we receive a complaint that ought to be considered by the Electoral Commission, the New Zealand Media Council or the Advertising Standards Authority, we will ensure you are referred to the correct agency, and advise you where it has been sent.

What can I complain about and who do I complain to?

If I'm concerned about...	Who should I direct my complaint / query to?
<p>The content of an election programme broadcast on TV or radio, during the general election period.</p> <p><i>Example: In a TV clip initiated by, and promoting, political party X, the party leader used coarse language that offended me</i></p> <p><i>Example: In a radio programme slot paid for by political party X, the party leader interviewed a party X candidate about party X's election policies, and the candidate denigrated another party</i></p>	<p>Send your complaint directly to the BSA by post, email or online complaint form:</p> <p>Broadcasting Standards Authority PO Box 9213 Wellington 6141 Email: info@bsa.govt.nz Online complaint form: www.bsa.govt.nz under Complaints/Election Programmes Complaint to the BSA</p> <p>You need to lodge your complaint in writing with the BSA within 60 working days of the broadcast being complained about. (However, the nature of election programmes means that complaints are most effectively brought as soon after the broadcast as possible.)</p> <p>Your complaint must include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Details about the broadcast including the date and time of the broadcast, the name of the programme, the party or candidate featured in the broadcast, and the relevant channel/station. • The standards in the Election Programmes Code you believe have been breached, and why. • If you nominate Standard 1: Election Programmes Subject to Other Code, also the standards in the Code of Broadcasting Standards in New Zealand you believe have been breached, and why.
<p>The content of an election advertisement published in any other media, including print, online, pamphlets, billboards.</p> <p><i>Example: A billboard campaigning for a particular election candidate attacked another candidate</i></p>	<p>Send your complaint directly to the ASA:</p> <p>Advertising Standards Authority PO Box 10675 Wellington 6143 Phone: (04) 472 7852 Freephone: 0800 234 357 Email: asa@asa.co.nz Web: www.asa.co.nz</p>
<p>The content of a programme discussing election matters, broadcast on TV or radio (or on-demand, provided it was also broadcast on TV or radio).</p> <p><i>Example: A panel discussion on a news or current affairs programme misrepresented a particular party policy</i></p>	<p>Send your complaint to the relevant broadcaster, within 20 working days of the broadcast. (If you are complaining about <u>privacy only</u>, send your complaint directly to the BSA.)</p> <p>Your complaint must be in writing and must include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Details about the broadcast including the date and time of the broadcast, the programme title, and the relevant channel/station • The standards in the Code of Broadcasting Standards in New Zealand you believe have been breached, and the reasons why.

<p><i>Example: A comedy programme did a skit making fun of a particular election candidate</i></p> <p><i>Example: Either of the above examples viewed/listened to on-demand on a broadcaster's website, so long as the content was also broadcast on TV or radio, and the complainant can provide the details of the original broadcast</i></p>	<p>If you are dissatisfied with the broadcaster's response to your complaint, you are entitled to refer your complaint to the BSA for review.</p>
<p>A discussion of election matters in the editorial content (as distinct from advertising) in NZ Media Council members' publications.</p> <p><i>Example: A column in a newspaper (or the online version) covering election matters denigrated a particular candidate</i></p>	<p>Contact the NZ Media Council for advice on how to complain. Generally, a complaint needs to be lodged with the editor/broadcaster before you can take the complaint to the Media Council. For a list of Media Council members see the Media Council's website (below).</p> <p>NZ Media Council PO Box 10 879 The Terrace Wellington 6143 Phone: (04) 473 5220 Freephone: 0800 969 357 Email: info@mediacouncil.org.nz Web: www.mediacouncil.org.nz</p>
<p>The requirements relating to election programmes (under the Broadcasting Act), or election advertisements (under the Electoral Act), such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the requirement to include a 'promoter • statement' (who initiated the • programme/advertisement) • written authorisation to promote a party or • candidate • funding allocations for election • programmes/advertisements on TV, radio or • the internet • timing of broadcasting an election programme • requirements for candidate election • programmes • expense limits for election advertising 	<p>Contact the Electoral Commission:</p> <p>Electoral Commission PO Box 3220 Wellington 6140 Phone: (04) 495 0030 Email: enquiries@elections.govt.nz Web: www.elections.nz</p> <p>For more information about election advertisements and requirements, see the Electoral Commission's website and media handbook</p>