

Purpose test: The regulated period in an early UK Parliamentary general election | Electoral Commission

Non-party campaigners: Where to start

You are in the Non-party campaigners: Where to start section

Home Non-party campaigners: Where to start

View the navigation tree

Go to main guidance section:

Non-party campaigners: Where to start

What are the rules for non-party campaigners?

Elections Act 2022: Changes for non-party campaigners - overview

Elections Act 2022: Code of Practice for non-party campaigners

Elections Act 2022: New limits on campaigning by non-UK individuals and organisations

Elections Act 2022: New notification threshold

How to notify us to register as a non-party campaigner

Elections Act 2022: Reporting threshold

Elections Act 2022: Reporting at a UKPGE

What spending is regulated?

Does your campaign activity meet the purpose test?

Purpose test: Intention

Purpose test: Campaigning on an issue

What happens if the policy I have been campaigning on is adopted by a political party?

Purpose test: Charities and other organisations with limits on their political activities

Purpose test: The regulated period in an early UK Parliamentary general election

Staff costs and other overheads

Joint campaigning

Purpose test: The regulated period in an early UK Parliamentary general election

The non-party campaigner rules under PPERA only apply in the period before certain elections. This is known as the 'regulated period'.

Election type

Length of regulated period

UK Parliamentary general elections

365 days before polling day

Scottish Parliamentary elections

Senedd elections

Northern Ireland Assembly elections

4 months before polling day

In an unscheduled UK Parliamentary general election, such as the 2017 UK Parliamentary general election, the time between the election's announcement and polling day is typically shorter than the length of the regulated period. When this happens, the regulated period will still run for 365 days. It will therefore have started before the election was announced. This does not happen in unscheduled elections to the Scottish Parliament, Senedd or Northern Ireland Assembly. It is a feature of early UK Parliamentary general elections. Campaign activity before an election is announced

The retrospective nature of the regulated period may concern campaigners due to uncertainty about whether the rules apply. However, most campaign activity undertaken before an election is announced is unlikely to meet the purpose test. First, many campaigns are purely issues-based rather than focusing on candidates or parties. Policies and issues may not be sufficiently closely and publicly associated with a party, parties or category of candidates for the campaign activity to meet the purpose test. This is especially true when the campaigns were intended to take place outside of an election period, since then they are less likely to have a call to action to voters, or even to mention parties or candidates. Second, you are unlikely to be reasonably regarded as intending to influence people to vote in an election when you do not know or expect that the election is happening. Therefore, where this was the case, your activity is unlikely to have met the purpose test. The likely exceptions to this are if either: you ran campaigns which met the purpose test in a different election in the regulated period – for example you campaigned in local elections earlier in the year you anticipated or made reference to the future election before it was announced – for example "Vote Conservative in the coming election", or "Unseat MPs who voted for austerity". If you spend money on campaigning like this at any time, then you will need to keep a record of what you have spent. This is so that if an early UK Parliamentary general election is called, you will know how much regulated spending you have incurred in the regulated period.

Last updated: 17 December 2021

Book traversal links for Purpose test: The regulated period in an early UK Parliamentary general election

Purpose test: Charities and other organisations with limits on their

political activities Staff costs and other overheads