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Know who is paying for online political ads You are in the Online campaigning
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different location. On this page Know who is paying for online political ads
Electoral Commission Other questions you might have First published: 11 March 2021
Last updated: 25 March 2022 Online political ads, know them like they know you Some
people think the amount spent on online political ads is confidential. But, did you
know we publish spending data and enforce limits on how much campaigners spend on
their online and offline campaigns? Introduction The amount of money spent on digital
advertising is increasing with every election. Digital advertising spend by parties
increased from 24% to 43% of advertising budgets between the UK general elections of
2015 and 2017. We aim to publish data for the 2019 UK general election in the summer
2021, and expect the percentage spent on online political ads to have increased
further. Know who is paying for online political ads Are there limits on how much can
be spent on political advertising? There are limits on how much candidates, political
parties and non-party campaigners can spend during election campaigns. These limits
were set out in law by the UK Parliament. They apply to a range of campaigning
activities, including online political advertising. There isn't a separate spending
limit for online political ads – but, if campaigners choose to spend more on online
political ads, then they have less to spend on printed campaign materials. What
activities make up campaign spending? Campaign spending is what candidates, political
parties or non-party campaigners spend to promote themselves or criticise their
opponents in the run up to elections. Activities included in campaign spending are:
Advertising of any kind – from billboards to ads in newspapers, from online ads to
YouTube videos Unsolicited material sent to voters – including printed leaflets or
letters that aren't in response to questions raised by voters Manifestos and other
documents setting out a party's policies Market research or other methods of finding
out how people intend to vote Press conferences or other events dealings with the
media Rallies and events, including the cost of people's attendance, and any goods,
services or facilities provided Transport costs incurred running a campaign When do
these campaign spending limits apply? Spending limits for political parties and non-
party campaigners apply during a 'regulated period' that happens before an election.
That period is a different length for each type of election, with the year-long
period before a UK general elections being the longest. The regulated period starts
four months before Scottish Parliament, Senedd and Northern Ireland Assembly
elections. There are also separate spending limits for candidates, which apply in any
election. These start to apply after they officially become candidates, which also
varies, but is usually around six weeks before an election. What are the spending
limits? There are different spending limits for candidates, political parties, and
non-party campaigners. These spending limits are also different depending on the type
of election. How much can candidates spend? Spending limits for candidates depend on
the electoral area they are standing in – for example a parliamentary constituency or
local authority ward. The spending limit is calculated based on the number of
eligible voters in that area. The more eligible voters there are, the higher the
spending limit. This is why the spending limit can vary greatly between electoral
areas. For a UK general election, the smallest constituency has around 20,000
eligible voters, whereas the largest has over 100,000. The aim is that all the
candidates in the same area are allowed to spend the same total amount. This is to
prevent a very well-funded candidate having a significant advantage over other

candidates. How much can political parties spend? Spending limits for political parties depend on the number of electoral areas where they are standing candidates. For example, if a party stands candidates in all 650 constituencies at a UK general election then it can spend up to £19.5 million. For a Scottish Parliament election the maximum spending limit for a party contesting all electoral areas is £1,516,000, for a Senedd election it is £600,000 and for a Northern Ireland Assembly election it is £306,000. A political party must register with us and appoint officers to submit records of its spending after the election. We maintain full registers of the political parties in Great Britain and Northern Ireland . How much can non-party campaigners spend? Non-party campaigners are individuals or organisations that campaign in the run-up to elections, but are not standing as political parties or candidates. They often campaign on certain issues, for example pro- or anti- airport expansion. They could also campaign in support or opposition to particular parties or candidates. Non-party campaigners are part of a healthy democracy and their participation in elections means voices are heard other than parties seeking election. However, where there is significant spending on campaigning, these campaigners must follow rules to ensure that they provide transparency for voters on their campaign finances in a similar way to candidates and political parties. s must register with us if they plan to spend more than £20,000 in England or £10,000 in any of Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland on regulated campaign activity about one or more political parties or a group of candidates. Only individuals on a UK electoral register and certain UK based organisations can register with us, and we maintain a full register of non-party campaigners . There are limits on how much non-party campaigners can spend. For a UK general election they can spend up to a maximum per nation – England £319,800, Scotland £55,400, Wales £44,000, and Northern Ireland £30,800. The maximum amount a registered or unregistered non-party campaigner can spend on regulated campaign activity in a particular UK parliamentary constituency is £9,750. For a Scottish Parliament election non-party campaigners can spend up to £75,800, for a Senedd election up to £30,000, and for a Northern Ireland Assembly election up to £15,300. s that want to campaign locally about one or more candidates in a particular constituency or ward follow different rules and have an additional lower spending limit, such as £700 at a UK general election. How are spending limits monitored? Political parties and non-party campaigners have to: record what they spend during an election campaign report their spending to us in a spending return Political parties and non-party campaigners have to report the details of all their campaign spending to us after an election. They must keep invoices or receipts for any payments over £200. If they spent £250,000 or less they must report within three months of the election. If they spent over £250,000 they must report within six months of the election, and submit an auditor's report with their return. about party and non-party campaigner's spending returns about the amounts political parties have spent at recent elections Candidates or their appointed agents have to submit a candidate spending return to the Returning Officer at their local council. For major elections, such as UK general elections, Returning Officers send copies of the candidate spending returns to us. We then make this data available for you to view. about candidate spending returns Find out how much candidates spent at the 2019 UK general election What happens if someone breaks the rules? We monitor whether campaigners are following the rules on funding and spending at elections. We can investigate breaches of the rules and issue fines up to £20,000 for any proven breaches of the rules for parties and non-party campaigners, or refer the most serious breaches to the police. But we don't enforce the candidate spending rules.

The police are responsible for investigating breaches of those rules. We have recommended to government that the maximum penalty should be increased because the current £20,000 maximum fine isn't a deterrent when the maximum spending limit is almost £20 million for a UK general election. We have not proposed what the maximum should be, and we think it should be similar to other regulators' fines. Electoral Commission Electoral Commission The Electoral Commission monitors and enforces the rules on how campaigners spend money. This includes money spent on online political ads intended to influence you. We publish information to provide transparency about election campaign spending so that voters and the public can have confidence in the outcome of elections. You should be able to find out who is spending money to influence your vote, and if you have concerns then raise them with us. Report now Other questions you might have Who's responsible for an online political ad? Who's paid for an online political ad? How did a party or campaigner get my data? Why have I been targeted with an online political ad? Concerned about a claim in an online political ad? What is this ad telling me? Your location: Change England Northern Ireland Scotland Wales Overseas We're showing you content for . Select 'change' to choose a different location. Related content Register to vote All you need to register to vote is 5 minutes and your National Insurance number. Our Commissioners Donations and loans Find out about donations and loans to a political party, individual or other organisation Report: How the 2017 UK general election was run Read our report about how the 2017 general election was run