

Response to Ofcom Major Parties 2015 Consultation

Question 1. Please provide your views on:

a) The evidence of current support laid out in Annex 2

We believe that the evidence of current support laid out is inadequate, for three reasons.

First, there is insufficient polling data on support for parties other than the four listed by the Poll of Polls and Polling Observatory to permit a robust comparison. The sources of polling data used on Green Party support (in Figure 23) are completely unclear; the consultation document only cites “Various polling organisations”. This makes the case for including additional measures of current support even more compelling.

Second, there are several other measures which provide important indications of current support. These are primarily membership numbers but also support for a party’s policies and of public interest in a party. We find excluding these to be incomprehensible, especially in the light of our comment on the quality of polling data above. We provide more information on the evidence we wish to see included in the revised assessment, in our response to Question 1b below.

Third, the evidence presented as an indication of “current support” gives undue weight to historic support. We believe that more weight should be attached to recent data than to data from two or three years prior to the election. This will provide a better indication of which parties the public wish to learn about. We note that Ofcom intends to use updated polling data in its revised decision, and request that you weight your analysis to primarily reflect genuine current support over older levels of support.

b) Whether there is any other relevant evidence which you consider Ofcom should take into account for the purposes of the 2015 review of the list of major parties.

We wish to see the following evidence included in the revised 2015 review of the list of major parties. Below we enumerate the types of evidence we wish to see included, alongside specific data and evidence that we wish to submit for consideration.

1. *Party membership.* The decision to join a political party represents a significant commitment and we find it a striking omission that this has not been considered in the review. We submit the following evidence: Green Party membership stands at 52,223 on 2 February 2015 for England and Wales, 8,490 for Scotland, and 322 for Northern Ireland, i.e. a total of 61,035 for the UK. This is higher than the membership of the Liberal Democrats or UKIP as last reported¹.
2. *Data on public support for policies.* This is available from the website Vote for Policies² which provides data from 514,064 completed surveys of the views of members of the public on the policy positions of different parties. A range of polls have also been conducted on major policy areas which are distinct to different parties. We submit the following evidence: Vote for Policies puts support for the policies of each party at: Green Party 27.36%, Labour 20.07%, Liberal

¹ Liberal Democrat membership was reported to be 44,576 and UKIP membership 41,943 by The Guardian, 15 January 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/jan/15/green-party-membership-surge-leaders-debates>

² <http://voteforpolitics.org.uk/>

Democrats 16.74%, Conservatives 14.04%, UKIP 11.91%, BNP 9.98%³. YouGov has polled levels of support for three core Green Party policies which are distinct from those of other parties and results show that: 66% support bringing the railway back into public hands⁴, 66% support the building of more social housing⁵, and 64% of respondents support a mandatory living wage⁶.

3. *Data on the level of interest among the public in a party receiving public exposure.* The high level of support among the general public for the inclusion of the Green Party in the TV leaders' debates reflects a high level of interest in greater exposure to our policies and candidates. As the award of 'major party' status has statutory implications for the opportunities for media exposure (though not necessarily for the composition of debates), we believe that Ofcom should be responsive to the expression of public opinion as to which parties they wish to hear more about. We submit the following evidence: Over 79% of the public believe the Green Party leader should be invited to participate in TV debates according to an ICM poll⁷ and over 280,000 people have signed a petition to this end⁸.
4. We also submit the following up to date polling data and request its inclusion in the updated decision:
 - The Ashcroft National Poll: Green Party at 11%⁹
 - Guardian/ICM: Green Party at 9%.¹⁰
 - YouGov: Green Party at 8% (ahead of the Liberal Democrats who are on 7%) and in tied second place at 22% among 18-24 year olds.¹¹

³ <http://voteforpolicies.org.uk/> [data accessed on 22 January 2015]

⁴ <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2013/11/04/nationalise-energy-and-rail-companies-say-public/>

⁵ <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2014/04/10/londoners-blame-rich-foreigners-housing-boom/>

⁶ <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2013/10/23/londoners-living-wage-legally-required/>

⁷ <http://www.icmunlimited.com/data/media/pdf/OmGreens-ITV%20debate.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.change.org/p/bbc-itv-channel-4-sky-include-the-green-party-in-the-tv-leaders-debates-ahead-of-the-2015-general-election>

⁹ The Ashcroft National Poll, January 2015 <http://lordashcroftpolls.com/2015/01/ashcroft-national-poll-con-29-lab-28-lib-dem-9-ukip-15-green-11/>

¹⁰ Guardian/ICM poll, January 2015 <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/jan/20/poll-labour-lead-fall-green-conservative-lib-dem-ukip>

¹¹ YouGov/The Sun, January 2015 http://cdn.yougov.com/cumulus_uploads/document/6s0ppk6ajx/YG-Archive-Pol-Sun-results-190115.pdf

Question 2. Do you agree with our assessment in relation to each of:

a) The traditional major parties

No comment. We accept the assessment that these parties merit major party status.

b) Traditional Unionist Voice in Northern Ireland

No comment.

c) The Green Party (including the Scottish Green Party)

We believe that the assessment that the Green Party should not be awarded major party status is incorrect, given the fact that major party status has been awarded to UKIP. Our reasons are as follows:

First, the Green Party's current support is much higher than the consultation document suggests. Recent polls show much higher figures than those cited in the consultation document, and we believe that additional evidence should have been considered in the assessment of current support, with more weight given to more recent evidence, as explained in our response to Question 1.

Specifically we submit that:

- The Green Party of England and Wales is the fourth largest party in terms of membership, above UKIP and the Liberal Democrats.
- The Green Party is polling at up to 11%¹² (far above the maximum reported in the consultation document, which was listed as 5.9%) and at 22% (joint second place with the Conservatives) among young people aged 18-14¹³.
- Our level of support has shown consistent growth from 2.1% in January 2013 (according to data presented in Annex 2 of the consultation document), to 9% and 11% in the most recently reported polls. The observations presented to explain UKIP's classification as a major party (Paragraph 2.18) include that "The level of support for UKIP in the opinion poll data... has been steadily growing for a number of years in the period since the 2010 General Election". We submit that the same is true of the Green Party.
- Green Party policies are more popular than those of any other party according to Vote for Policies.

Second, we believe that the Green Party's electoral performance since 2014 provides sufficient evidence of major party status, given that this UKIP is deemed to have demonstrated sufficient electoral support. We submit that:

- The Green Party won one seat in the 2010 General Election and UKIP won none. The Green Party has been active in Parliament for over four years, while UKIP have had a Parliamentary presence for only two months having won its first seat in a by-election in November 2014.
- The Green Party won its Parliamentary seat in a General Election with a candidate campaigning on a Green Party platform. UKIP won its two seats in by-elections when already popular MPs defected to the party, so these victories are as likely to reflect confidence in these individuals as an endorsement of the UKIP platform. This is noted in paragraph 2.18 of the consultation document but insufficient weight appears to have been given to this fact.

¹² The Ashcroft National Poll, 19 January 2015 <http://lordashcroftpolls.com/2015/01/ashcroft-national-poll-con-29-lab-28-lib-dem-9-ukip-15-green-11/>

¹³ http://cdn.yougov.com/cumulus_uploads/document/6s0ppk6ajx/YG-Archive-Pol-Sun-results-190115.pdf

- The Green Party received more votes than the Liberal Democrats and more than twice as many votes as UKIP in the 2012 London Mayoral Elections. The share of the vote was: Green Party 4.5%, Liberal Democrat 4.2%, UKIP 2.0%.
- The Green Party received nearly twice as many votes as UKIP and more than the Liberal Democrats in London-wide vote in the 2012 London Assembly Elections. The share of the vote was: Green Party 8.5%, Liberal Democrat 6.8%, UKIP 4.5%.¹⁴
- The Green Party received more votes than the Liberal Democrats in the 2014 European Elections across England, Wales and Scotland, and won three seats whereas the Liberal Democrats won just one. The share of the vote was: 8.0% Green Party, 7.0% Liberal Democrats (a difference of more than 160,000 votes¹⁵). The Green Party won three seats and the Liberal Democrats won one.

Third, there is a strong public desire for the Green Party to be given equal opportunity to that given UKIP to present its policies and commitments publically through broadcast media. The public believes that the Green Party is a significant political force which has earned an equal place on the public stage. Ofcom has a legal duty to “further the interests of citizens”¹⁶. We believe that this is best delivered by ensuring that broadcast coverage in election periods responds to high levels of public interest in particular voices being heard, where this is also backed up by evidence of high (and growing) current support and electoral performance, particularly when a party is engaging young people in the political process.

d) UKIP

We believe that UKIP should be awarded major party status provided the Green Party is too.

- It is misleading to characterise UKIP’s victory in two by-elections, where the MP elected in both cases was a popular incumbent defecting from another party, as “strong performance in other significant forms of election” (Paragraph 2.18 of the consultation document) as this is as likely to represent confidence in the individual elected based on their past record as a local MP as it is to reflect strong support for UKIP’s policies.
- UKIP did not win any seats in the 2010 General Election.
- The Green Party received more than twice as many votes as UKIP in the 2012 London Mayoral Elections and London Assembly Elections.
- The Green Party’s membership (UK wide) is 61,035 higher than that of UKIP (see figures given above under Question 1b).

¹⁴ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-17541752>

¹⁵ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/events/vote2014/eu-uk-results>

¹⁶ <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/about/what-is-ofcom/>