

The Scottish Green Party

The Scottish Green Party welcomes the review of the list of larger parties and supports the proposal to remove it. As we have argued previously, the distinction between “major” and “minor” parties does not reflect an increasingly complex political landscape, especially in Scotland.

Indeed, in the run up to the 2016 Holyrood election, Ofcom’s list of major parties which excluded the Greens flew in the face of polling evidence, prompted a public outcry and was ultimately ignored by STV, who chose to host a debate featuring all five parliamentary parties. BBC Scotland also included the Greens.

The proposal to give broadcasters greater editorial freedom to take decisions by reference to evidence of election results and polling is broadly supportable.

However, we would be concerned if this results in broadcasters seeking to reduce the range of voices in their coverage, and choosing to restrict interview and debate opportunities. The political context in Scotland is that we have a parliament of minorities in which all parties have an opportunity to influence debates, legislation and budgets, so drawing a line between the 3rd and 4th largest parties, for example, would not provide the public with the relevant range of viewpoints.

We note, in point 3.27, that “with greater flexibility, broadcasters could more easily reflect their local political landscape.” While this is welcome, it should also be clear to broadcasters that in considering national coverage, local variations are important. For example, across Scotland the Conservatives are now viewed as Scotland’s 2nd party, due to the Holyrood 2016 election result, and the Greens 4th, yet on Glasgow City Council the Greens are the 3rd largest party and the Conservatives are 4th with only one councillor.

It is also worth reminding of the constitutional context, with the possibility of another referendum on Scottish independence. In that context, broadcasters must ensure balance between pro and anti-independence parties and between parties within each side. This should apply not just during any formal referendum campaign period but in all coverage of the constitutional issue.

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January 2017