

Handbook on Election Reporting in Kosovo

Tips and Resources

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1 Introduction

1.1 Why this Handbook?

In a democracy, elections are a critical moment when citizens are called to make decisions that shape the future of their communities and institutions. The media have a key responsibility in this process, not only to inform but to enable meaningful participation. From reporting on campaign promises and exposing misuse of power, to explaining how voting works and amplifying the voices of underrepresented groups, journalists play an essential role in helping voters make informed choices.

Reporting on elections in Kosovo, however, comes with unique challenges. Media professionals must navigate a complex legal landscape, maintain fairness while covering a highly polarized political discourse, and deal with an environment where online media are largely unregulated during elections. At the same time, journalists must hold themselves to the highest professional standards to ensure that their reporting remains accurate, independent, inclusive, and relevant. This becomes even more urgent in a context where trust in institutions is low and both disinformation and partisan reporting are widespread.

This handbook was developed to support journalists and editors in Kosovo as they prepare for and report on elections, both parliamentary and local. It combines legal obligations with editorial guidance, offering newsroom-friendly tools and tips that cover the full electoral cycle from early planning to campaign coverage, Election Day reporting, and results. The handbook also highlights practical solutions for small newsrooms with limited resources, including how to prioritize focus areas, develop visual content, and maintain ethical standards across platforms.

While the handbook is not specifically tailored for either general or local elections, the principles, tips, and tools it offers can be adapted for both. Each type of election has its political particularities, but the core mission of journalism remains the same: to serve the public with fair, informative, and empowering coverage. Editorial teams are encouraged to contextualize the advice provided here and apply it within the scope of each election and the specific needs of their audience.

Election periods are also a stress test for the media's credibility. How journalists report and what they choose to amplify or ignore leaves a lasting impression on the public. Upholding professional ethics, applying editorial discipline, and maintaining transparency in how political actors are covered not only meet legal obligations but also build trust. A principled, consistent approach during elections can strengthen a media outlet's credibility and audience loyalty long after the ballots are counted.

Rather than just reiterating legal requirements, this handbook aims to strengthen public service journalism by encouraging approaches that are citizen-centered, issue-based, and explanatory. It promotes inclusive practices that bring attention to youth, women, and non-majority communities and offers creative strategies for using visuals, social media, and storytelling formats to engage broader audiences, especially those who tend to be politically disengaged. Whether you're part of a large newsroom or a small online outlet, this guide will help you approach elections not just as a cycle of press

conferences and rallies, but as an opportunity to serve democracy through meaningful, responsible, and engaging journalism.

The handbook is methodologically and substantively based on the “Handbook on Election Reporting” published by Mediacentar Sarajevo in 2024, which was the result of years of research and numerous consultations with media professionals in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Recognizing the specificities of the Kosovar media and political context, this publication adapts and expands that model to address local challenges, while reaffirming shared regional standards of journalism in the public interest. By aligning local realities with regional standards, the handbook contributes to safeguarding media integrity and strengthening public trust during elections.

1.2 Brief Overview of Elections in Kosovo

Kosovo conducts parliamentary and local elections separately, each with a four-year mandate. The president calls parliamentary elections to elect 120 Assembly members through proportional representation in a single nationwide constituency, with a 5% threshold for non-minority parties. Twenty seats are reserved for ethnic minorities, including 10 for Serbs and 10 for other communities, such as the Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian, Bosniak, Turk, and Gorani, ensuring their representation.

Regular elections are held every four years, always on a Sunday, as stipulated by the Law on General Elections. They must take place no earlier than sixty days and no later than thirty days before the end of the Assembly’s mandate. The election date is formally set by the president, who, under the same law, must issue the decision no earlier than six months and no later than four months before Election Day.

However, political instability has frequently led to snap parliamentary elections triggered by the dissolution of the Assembly, votes of no confidence, or failure to form a government within 60 days.

Local elections select municipal assemblies and mayors across Kosovo’s 38 municipalities, with the election date also typically agreed upon months earlier through consultations between the president and political parties, and run-off elections held if no mayoral candidate secures a majority.

The Central Election Commission (CEC) oversees elections, managing voter registration, polling stations, and result tabulation at the Count and Results Center, ensuring preparations begin at least 45 days in advance. Parliamentary elections use an open-list system, allowing voters to select up to 10 candidates per party, with the campaign period beginning 30 days before the election, governed by CEC regulations.

Diaspora voting is facilitated by mail or at diplomatic missions and has significant participation. Elections in Serb-majority municipalities, particularly in northern Kosovo, such as North Mitrovica, face significant challenges, including low voter turnout, exemplified by 3.4% in the 2023 local elections in these municipalities, and Serbia’s political influence through Belgrade-backed boycotts, which undermine participation and integration.

2 General Professional Standards for Election Reporting

During elections, journalists carry an extraordinary responsibility, not just to report events, but to safeguard democracy through fair, accurate, and independent coverage. This section outlines the core professional standards that every editor and journalist should uphold throughout the electoral process. These principles ensure that election reporting informs rather than influences, empowers citizens with credible and contextual information, and upholds the public's right to make informed decisions at the ballot box.

1. Report and cover all political actors fairly, independently, and impartially

Every candidate and political party deserves equal access and fair representation in your reporting, without favoritism or disproportionate visibility. At the same time, equal treatment does not mean avoiding difficult questions; it means holding everyone to the same standard of scrutiny, regardless of power or popularity.

2. Serve the public interest by providing information that is independent of any political or group agenda

Citizens need journalism that supports informed decision-making, free from partisan messaging and any outside influence, including political, commercial, or institutional pressure. Serving the public interest means prioritizing accuracy, relevance, and transparency over speed or sensationalism. It requires resisting pressure from political actors, clearly distinguishing between facts and opinions, and centering your coverage on how electoral developments affect people's everyday lives.

3. Clearly label all paid political advertising and keep it visibly separate from editorial content

Transparency is essential: paid content must never be disguised as journalism. This distinction protects editorial integrity and ensures that voters understand what content is meant to inform and what is meant to persuade.

4. Interrogate political parties with a critical and informed lens

Political programs, public speeches, and campaign slogans must be examined for feasibility and credibility. Critical reporting connects the dots between what parties say, what they've done before, and what it would take to deliver on their promises, equipping the public to make informed decisions.

5. Provide comprehensive and contextual information throughout the election cycle

Go beyond covering rallies and press releases to explain how political programs intersect with voters' everyday lives and whether parties offer realistic, inclusive, and actionable solutions. Make elections more understandable and easier to engage with.

6. Put citizens at the center of your reporting.

Prioritize the concerns, questions, and daily experiences of voters rather than amplifying party agendas. When coverage is shaped by the public's needs, journalism serves its purpose.

7. Avoid amplifying hate speech, discriminatory language, or inflammatory rhetoric

When political actors use offensive or polarizing speech, you should report on it critically by providing context, challenging false claims, and including counter-speech or expert analysis. Reproducing such

content without framing risks inflaming tensions and undermining the media’s role in fostering democratic discourse.

8. Address disinformation and manipulated content

During elections, you must be prepared to identify and respond to disinformation and manipulated content, including deep fakes and AI-generated videos. These materials can mislead voters and distort public discourse. You should verify the authenticity of visuals, collaborate with fact-checkers, and communicate transparently with audiences to maintain trust and uphold professional standards.

3 Rules for the Media in Kosovo

3.1 Rules Applicable to all Media Outlets

Chapter VIII, “Media during the election campaign”, of [Law 08/L-228 on General Elections](#) applies to all broadcast, print, and online media from the opening of the 30-day campaign period until the close of polling stations. While the General Election Law’s provisions bind every outlet to standards of fairness, transparency, and impartiality, the Independent Media Commission (IMC) enforces those rules only against licensed audio-visual broadcasters, also known by the IMC as Media Service Providers. Through its [Regulation on the Obligations of Media Service Providers During the Election Campaign](#), the IMC provides further details for audiovisual broadcasters on election reporting obligations.

In addition to this primary regulation, newsrooms and journalists should also consult three other IMC regulations relevant to election coverage: the Code of Ethics for Media Service Providers, the Regulation on the Protection of Children, and the Regulation on Commercial Communication. Each contains specific provisions that may apply during the campaign period and should be taken into account to ensure comprehensive and responsible election reporting.

By contrast, the obligations of print and online media derive solely from the Law on General Election and the Press Council of Kosovo’s [Code of Conduct](#), which sets only general reporting standards and, being a self-regulatory body established as an NGO with voluntary membership, lacks any enforcing mechanism. Consequently, online outlets operate largely free of regulation during elections: unlike broadcasters, they face no requirement to notify any regulator, keep weekly logs of political advertising, or submit to enforcement actions, leaving compliance entirely at their own discretion.

Notably, Kosovo has had no print newspapers since the COVID-19 pandemic, although two newspapers continue to publish online versions.

From the first day of the official campaign period, every licensed broadcaster, publisher, and online platform must cover election activities fairly, professionally, and impartially, in accordance with journalistic ethics and democratic norms. During the silence period, which lasts from the moment polling stations open until they officially close, no individual or media outlet may broadcast or publish any campaign-related material.

Once the election campaign officially begins, media service providers are prohibited from organizing or publishing online opinion polls or public-opinion surveys within their programming throughout the campaign period and on Election Day.

If any opinion poll is published or broadcast throughout the campaign period, it must include key methodological details: the name of the commissioning party, the implementing agency, the sample size, the margin of error, and the dates of fieldwork. However, starting 48 hours before polling stations open and continuing until voting concludes, the publication or broadcast of any opinion polls or electoral projections is strictly banned.

Additionally, during the final 24 hours before the close of polling stations, and continuing until the end of the electoral process, no media outlet is permitted to publish or broadcast the results of any public-opinion research related to the election, including projections of voter turnout.

Similarly, under the IMC's regulation, all polls must adhere to professional and ethical norms: unverified surveys, skewed or non-representative sampling methods, and leading or suggestive question wording are expressly prohibited. Should a poll fail to meet these requirements, the broadcaster may not air or publish its results.

3.2 Paid Political Advertising in Electronic Media

Media service providers that choose to include election campaign coverage in their programming must notify the IMC no later than seven calendar days before the campaign begins.

During the 30-day campaign period, media service providers must accept paid political advertisements from all certified entities on equal terms. Under the IMC's regulation, paid spots may run no longer than 120 seconds and must be separated from editorial content, and they may never be embedded within regular news bulletins.

At least seven days before the campaign, broadcasters must file with the IMC and publish their written tariff schedules for paid advertising. Rates for political ads may not exceed the lowest commercial rate charged for the same slot and day of the week over the preceding six months, and price lists must appear both in the offer to political subjects and on the broadcaster's website. In addition, the IMC compiles and publishes a summary table of all broadcasters' campaign schedules and rates.

Broadcasters who choose to sell political advertising are also required to reserve a minimum amount of free airtime for each certified political subject. Public-service television must offer at least 40 minutes of free transmission per campaign; Kosovo-wide private television at least 20 minutes; all other television stations at least 15 minutes; each public radio channel at least 30 minutes; each Kosovo-wide private radio station at least 15 minutes; and all other radio stations at least 10 minutes. Broadcasters may voluntarily provide additional airtime, provided that all certified political entities are treated fairly and equitably.

Free airtime during the election campaign may be provided based on the individual broadcaster's discretion and in agreement with certified political entities. This airtime can take various forms, including unpaid political advertising spots, participation in debates, discussion programs, or interviews outside the broadcaster's regular news programming. Broadcasters that decide not to carry paid political advertising are exempt from the obligation to provide free airtime; however, if they later choose to offer any free slots, they are required to do so equally and fairly for all political subjects.

Throughout the campaign, broadcasters must maintain daily logs of all paid and free political placements and submit them every Monday to the IMC, which are open to public inspection.

This diary form is annexed to the regulation.

Finally, the regulation caps the total saleable political airtime at six hours for the full campaign period, with no more than 90 minutes per certified subject in any single day and requires that prime-time and off-peak slots be offered in a balanced manner. Split-screen adverts, television promotions, radio promotions, and virtual ad formats are expressly prohibited as forms of political commercial communication.

3.3 Direct Addresses and Announcements by the CEC in Electronic Media

Unlike private broadcasters, the public broadcaster is obliged to publish all CEC-produced voter-education spots free of charge.

During the campaign period, broadcasters must schedule and publicize in advance all political debates and programs featuring certified political entities, ensuring each party or candidate receives an equal share of airtime regardless of their parliamentary strength. Hosts are required to divide speaking time into uniform minute segments for each participant, and the total time allocated to a party's candidate counts toward that party's overall airtime share.

Broadcasters' bear no liability if a party fails to use its allotted time, and no political debate or program may be sponsored by any certified political entity or other partisan actor.

During the election campaign, media service providers proactively promote the principles of gender equality and the inclusion of non-majority communities in Kosovo, whether by organizing political debates, hosting discussions with independent experts, or by any other means the outlet deems appropriate, so long as they do not conflict with the IMC regulation or the Law on General Elections.

On Election Day, no media service provider may broadcast or publish any campaign-related content from the moment polling stations open until they officially close. Nevertheless, outlets continue to cover the electoral process itself, reporting on voter turnout, official announcements from the CEC and other relevant bodies, and any emerging issues or incidents. They are required to inform the public of irregularities.

Based on guidance from the IMC, an exception allows statements from political party leaders or candidates for prime minister or mayor to be broadcast during Election Day, including live statements and press conferences. However, no remarks from candidates on parliamentary or assembly lists may be aired until after the polls close.

3.4 Obligations of Print and Online Media

Print and online outlets, while not overseen by the IMC, remain fully bound by the Law on General Elections' mandates for fairness, balance, and impartiality.

Under Article 48, the Law on General Elections expressly obliges every journalist, editor, and publisher to cover all certified political entities with equal professionalism and to refrain from any form of preferential treatment or editorial bias. In practical terms, this means that whenever a print or online medium chooses to cover the elections and carry paid political advertising, it must grant all certified parties access to the same space at the same non-discriminatory rate and to a comparable number of lines per page, while every ad must identify its sponsor.

In addition to paid spots, outlets must offer free advertising space and extend that free opportunity to every certified entity on request. Finally, the rates charged for political ads may not exceed the lowest officially published commercial rate for comparable space or column-inch within the thirty days preceding the campaign period.

Unlike broadcasters, however, print and online media face no external license-based enforcement; compliance depends on their voluntary adherence to the law, since the Press Council Kosovo, though empowered to receive complaints and act upon them, holds no sanctioning or enforcing authority.

4 Tips and Guidance for Election Reporting

Election reporting is one of the most demanding and consequential tasks a newsroom undertakes. Beyond organizing workflows and assigning beats, it requires ethical clarity, legal awareness, editorial courage, and deep public engagement.

This section offers hands-on guidance to help media outlets prepare across every stage of the election cycle, from pre-campaign monitoring to post-election reporting. It follows a chronological structure aligned with Kosovo's electoral calendar and includes practical advice on planning resources, developing inclusive editorial strategies, strengthening content formats, tackling hate speech, and holding power to account. It also supports newsrooms in defining a clear thematic focus that prioritizes citizens' needs over political agendas. The goal is to produce timely, fair, and impactful election journalism that truly serves the public interest.

4.1 Beginning of the Election Period: It's Time to Prepare

Each newsroom's regular workflow is disrupted once elections are set to begin. Editors must organize their editorial planning and teams accordingly. Preparations include deciding on a reporting approach, developing internal rules, setting up a system for work distribution, gathering all necessary materials, preparing the election calendar, resource list, graphic solutions, and other visuals necessary for social media.

TIP 1: Deciding on a reporting approach

Each newsroom should define its reporting approach with a clear editorial focus. While daily campaign developments often dominate broadcast and online media agendas, newsrooms can and should distinguish themselves by shifting the spotlight from political pledges to their feasibility, impact, and relevance to citizens' real concerns. This means framing stories around public interest, not party narratives, and focusing on issues that matter to people's everyday lives.

Always ask: what's missing in the news today? Have we been inclusive? Prioritize reporting on issues neglected by political parties and social groups that are typically underrepresented in media coverage. To achieve this, be cautious of "pack" journalism, as coined by Timothy Crouse, where reporters converge on the same events and interpret them from the same angle.

Several practical approaches can help newsrooms provide distinctive election coverage:

- **Issue-based reporting:** Allocate resources to examine the country's most pressing concerns, assessing how thoroughly political parties address these issues. Depending on your media's profile, you could focus broadly on topics like the economy, health, and education, or specifically explore women's employment, reproductive rights, or early childhood education. Consider listing critical issues to evaluate the depth and feasibility of party programs.
- **Looking backward & forward reporting:** Most political parties in Kosovo have previously held office, giving journalists a valuable opportunity to assess their track records. This approach starts by looking backward: Are parties introducing meaningful new ideas or simply recycling old promises? Have they fulfilled similar commitments in the past? But it doesn't stop there. Looking forward, journalists should also evaluate whether today's promises are realistic and implementable within a four-year mandate. This means examining the necessary budgets, legal frameworks, institutional capacity, and likely obstacles to implementation. This dual lens of past performance and future feasibility helps voters separate empty slogans from credible plans.
- **Citizen-centered reporting:** Go beyond campaign messaging by putting citizens at the center of your coverage. Let their concerns, questions, and daily realities shape your editorial choices from the angles you pursue to the questions you ask and the formats you use. Ground your reporting in the issues that affect people's lives, and treat voters not as passive recipients of information, but as the primary audience election journalism is meant to serve.

TIP 2: Developing internal rules

Internal rules should cover a range of editorial and operational decisions during the election period, including your approach to paid political advertising, coverage of political entities' press conferences, publication of press releases, use of political content from social media, and guidelines for how your employees use their own social media accounts.

Political advertising

Depending on your media type, whether audiovisual broadcaster or online media, your internal policy should include clear provisions regarding your approach to political advertising in accordance with the legal framework and professional standards. One recommendation is to designate a single individual to handle all advertisement requests from political parties and candidates. For broadcast media, this person should also maintain accurate records of all advertisement requests and broadcasts.

The designated person must be well-versed in all requirements and restrictions stipulated by the legal framework and the IMC, including the mandated minimum durations for paid and free advertisements allocated to each political party. Additionally, the policy should incorporate a transparent pricing list. In broadcast media specifically, this same individual should manage communications with the IMC and deliver advertisement logs each Monday.

Your political advertising policy should serve as a clear and consistent point of contact for all political parties and candidates, ensuring they fully understand the rules. Importantly, purchasing airtime does not grant political subjects the right to broadcast content that violates legal or ethical standards. Broadcasters must carefully review all political advertisements submitted by certified parties before airing, to ensure compliance with the IMC regulation.

Broadcaster have both the right and the responsibility to reject any political advertisement that contains hate speech, incites violence, or otherwise breaches applicable laws or ethical codes. This obligation applies equally to paid and unpaid content, and adherence to the IMC's rules is mandatory.

Furthermore, the policy must enforce a strict and visible separation between advertisements and other informative election coverage.

Make work easier

Submit a shortened version of your rules and pricing list to political entities, and be sure to highlight the name and surname of the person in charge, as well as their contact information. This way, you will facilitate communication between your media outlet and political entities, as well as the work of your editorial office.

Press conferences and political rallies

Although the IMC regulation recognizes rallies and conventions as forms of political party representation in the media, no media outlet is obliged to extensively cover these events. However, if your newsroom chooses to cover rallies, ensure consistent and equitable treatment for all registered entities.

Candidates will use these platforms to sell their achievements, promote their most popular policies, and criticize their opponents. In addition to focusing on what the candidates have to say, we also want to provide an accurate portrayal of the event. How many people attended? Where did they come from? Is there evidence of large numbers of supporters having been bussed in to swell the crowds? Have people attending the rallies been given food, t-shirts, and other inducements to be there? All of these things help to paint a picture of how much support the candidate has.

If you report on national election rallies held in cities, adopt a localized perspective. Although Kosovo has a decentralized governance system, political parties often use city-based rallies to make promises that directly affect local communities.

Focus on local issues

What are the achievements the political parties are selling? Do they stand? Is the political party addressing the city's particular problems? What solutions do they propose? Examine the party's history at the local level. Have they won elections or held office there previously? What are the city's historical voting patterns?

Rather than merely relaying political messages, aim to contextualize and inform voters about the relevance and implications of the rally for their community. Stay a bit longer after the rally ends, and talk to the people who attended. Ask what their expectations are, what concerns they have, and whether the party's promises address those concerns. These conversations can reveal disconnects between campaign messaging and public sentiment, offering deeper insight into local dynamics and voter priorities.

Social media accounts

With social media now a central arena for election campaigning, establishing clear editorial rules for how to handle posts from political actors has become more important than ever. Political parties increasingly attempt to bypass traditional outlets and speak directly to voters through digital platforms, but journalists should continue to treat social media like any other source: a medium requiring scrutiny rather than a substitute for reporting.

For voters, social media is one of the primary information sources, and what they see there can influence their decisions long before any media report on it. However, this direct access also means they receive only the party's polished message, without the critical analysis that journalists can provide. Reporting a social media statement as a standalone story without accompanying fact-checking, context, or explanation offers little added value, since citizens can already read the original post themselves.

Ultimately, social media should complement, not replace, other reporting methods. In addition to serving as a "topic nursery" that surfaces potential story ideas, these platforms must be cross-referenced with conventional sources to ensure accuracy, depth, and balance in your coverage.

Because it can be overwhelming to monitor every candidate's social media feed, create a hierarchy that prioritizes official channels: party accounts, leaders' profiles, and verified candidate pages. You do not need to cover every single post; instead, focus on those instances where social media serves as the

exclusive communication channel for an important statement, and reporting it aligns with your editorial standards and informational objectives.

How will you use social media?

Your internal policy should specify how editors and journalists may use social media during the election period. Although no legally binding rules exist, it is an ethical duty for journalists to maintain impartiality on personal accounts throughout election coverage. Journalists and editors serve as the public face of their newsroom – what they post can influence how their organization is perceived.

If a journalist posts biased or derogatory remarks about a candidate on a personal account, those comments may be interpreted as reflecting the views of the media outlet. This can damage both the journalist’s and the outlet’s credibility and perceived impartiality.

TIP 3: Resource planning

Election coverage is an all-hands-on-deck project. It typically exhausts every resource a newsroom has at its disposal. Journalists often need to move from one rally or meeting to another on a regular basis.

While larger media organizations such as television broadcasters are generally better equipped than online media, they still require a well-structured plan. This includes assigning clear responsibilities to ensure that the election calendar is followed, advertisement logs are maintained, contact lists are updated, and journalists are briefed and assigned to specific tasks. Journalists are often assigned to cover a particular political party, which involves tracking their events and rallies, while others may focus on preparing political debates. In the case of local elections, reporters are typically assigned to cover specific regions.

The real challenge lies with online media, which usually operate with small teams but still aim to cover elections extensively. When resources are limited, planning becomes even more essential. The key is to define a clear editorial focus, ideally one that aligns with your newsroom’s strengths.

For instance, if your newsroom excels in economic reporting, you can use that expertise to cover political party programs through an economic lens. This approach allows you to avoid the pressure of attending every rally or meeting. Instead, you can rely on collaborations with other media for regular news updates or follow political party livestreams on Facebook. To stand out from “pack journalism,” maintain a focused perspective and establish your newsroom as a go-to source for in-depth, topic-specific election coverage. Scrutinize political party platforms using your chosen lens, invite expert commentary, and connect policy debates to real people’s needs, whether in employment, housing, or other relevant issues. You can also conduct interviews with political candidates specifically on those topics.

This method is equally effective for local elections. For example, focus on urban economic development and bring in both experts and party representatives to discuss their plans.

Smaller online outlets are often hesitant to narrow their focus during elections, fearing they’ll miss out on the period’s potential for higher engagement. However, working with limited resources increases the risk

of errors that can damage your newsroom's credibility. Instead, use this moment to position your newsroom as offering voters a distinctive and insightful perspective on the elections. Major media will cover the same broad headlines, giving you an opportunity to stand out.

TIP 4: Create a contact list

During the election period, it is essential to create a comprehensive mailing list and contact directory of all political entities registered as participants in the process. If your newsroom's audience is focused on a specific city or municipality, a local-level directory will suffice. This directory will streamline communication throughout the campaign and allow for timely, proactive outreach, including offers to sell media space when paid political advertising is permitted.

At the same time, journalists must ensure their contact books are up to date, including direct contact information for all candidates, party spokespersons (ideally with after-hours numbers), election officials, emergency services, and election observers.

Include spokespersons from institutions like the CEC, local election commissions, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and relevant NGOs such as the Coalition "Democracy in Action" and international observers such as OSCE.

Establishing these connections early and building relationships through the campaign is crucial for effective reporting. All relevant contact details should be shared with the editor to ensure coordinated and responsive coverage.

TIP 5: Create an election calendar

An election calendar serves as a checklist and planning tool, outlining all key dates based on current election rules, such as the announcement of elections, certification deadlines, campaign period, Election Day, and results confirmation by the CEC. Making it accessible to all newsroom staff helps prevent legal, technical, or scheduling errors, ensures everyone is aligned on the timeline, and allows for better resource planning. It can also inspire story ideas and guide coverage throughout the campaign period.

TIP 6: Create a roster of experts and relevant civil organizations

Build a contact list of experts across key fields such as sociology, law, communication, economics, gender, and political science, as well as representatives from civil society organizations.

Don't forget local community or council representatives, especially during local elections, as they can provide valuable grassroots perspectives. Make sure to include potential interlocutors from the region and Europe for comparative insights on how similar challenges have been addressed elsewhere. Contact them in advance to let them know you may need their expertise for your election coverage, so they are informed and available when needed.

TIP 7: Create a list of resources

Create a comprehensive list of resources that includes a wide range of materials such as election laws, implementing regulations, rulebooks, procedural manuals, codes of conduct, media guidelines, official websites, public registers, archives of past election data, and fact-checking platforms. Include relevant reports from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics, research and monitoring reports from NGOs and think tanks, EU country reports, and any other documents that may help you fact-check claims, provide context, or support your reporting with credible references.

This kind of resource list will make your work easier, help you fact-check quickly, and give you a solid base for deeper stories or analyses. Having everything in one place will save you time when things get hectic and help you double-check claims or spot disinformation using reliable sources.

TIP 8: Develop profiles on candidates, parties, and regions

As soon as it's clear who is running in the elections, assign journalists to begin collecting background information, especially on candidates for prime minister or city mayors, who typically draw the most public attention and wield substantial influence. Profiles should include each candidate's role within their party, key supporters, positions on major issues, past controversies, and previous electoral performance.

In parallel, develop profiles of political parties that outline their platforms, ideologies, leadership histories, and policy priorities. Also, gather data on relevant electoral districts, including their economic base, demographic profile, key local issues, and past voting patterns. These materials will serve as the foundation for informative, well-contextualized coverage throughout the campaign and will help you better analyze and contextualize each party's political messaging and the programs they put forth.

TIP 9: Create graphic solutions

Prepared graphic solutions can help you report on elections more efficiently and creatively. Create templates that are easy to edit and modify for different needs and reporting formats, whether for tables, statistical indicators, or infographics on mandate distribution. These should be tailored to your platform and aligned with your editorial standards.

For online media especially, it's useful to prepare a set of social media templates in advance. Assigning different colors to each political party as a visual guide can help audiences quickly identify key information. This legend can be used consistently across posts since most newsrooms already know what kind of data they'll need to present based on past election cycles, such as turnout numbers, changes in voting patterns over the years, or vote counts. They can create visual frameworks ahead of time using tools like Flourish or Canva.

To implement this successfully, make sure you already have high-quality photographs of each political party's candidates and their official logos. This will allow for consistent and professional visual storytelling across your platforms.

Developing these tools doesn't require much time or expensive resources. With a smart combination of free or low-cost tools, your reporting can become more dynamic, accessible, and visually engaging.

4.2 Elections are Announced

In Kosovo, parliamentary elections must be held no earlier than 60 days and no later than 30 days before the end of the Assembly's mandate, as required by the Constitution and the Law on General Elections. The election date is formally set by the president, who must issue the decision no earlier than six months and no later than four months before Election Day. However, due to political instability, snap elections often occur with limited notice, leaving newsrooms little time to prepare. The February 9, 2025, election was an exception, announced on August 16, 2024, nearly six months in advance. This unusually early announcement, marking Kosovo's first regular parliamentary election since independence, allowed for better logistical coordination and planning. But such lead time is rare, and newsrooms usually need to respond quickly with minimal advance notice.

The period between the election announcement and the official start of the campaign often sees a surge in press releases, public appearances, and subtle forms of campaigning, frequently accompanied by abuses of power by officials seeking to influence voters. In Kosovo, political parties often begin informal campaigning even before elections are formally announced, especially when election talk is already in the air. This makes it particularly important for journalists to monitor how incumbents use their public positions, watching for vote-attracting decisions, publicity stunts, and early promotional events that blur the line between official duties and campaigning.

This chapter offers guidance on how to report during the pre-campaign phase, including what red flags to watch for in officials' actions, common pitfalls in media coverage, and how to avoid them.

TIP 10: Be aware of informal campaigning before the official start

In Kosovo, it is common for political parties to begin unofficial campaigning well before the official announcement of elections and the start of the 30-day formal campaign period. This makes it crucial for journalists to stay alert in the months leading up to the announcement. In the final year of a governmental mandate, opposition parties typically ramp up their activity, holding more regional meetings, increasing their social media presence, and seeking greater public visibility.

At the same time, incumbent governments often start promoting their achievements and making popular decisions, such as raising pensions or expanding the social assistance schemes, moves that may be aimed at gaining favor with voters. Journalists should closely scrutinize these actions through the lens of informal campaigning, evaluating whether such decisions are politically motivated and timed to influence public opinion.

For example, if reporting on a pension increase, ask why it's happening now and whether similar changes occurred earlier in the mandate. You can also reference past examples where previous governments made similar moves close to elections, offering context and comparison to help your audience better

understand the dynamics at play.

Additionally, be alert to any legal changes, especially amendments to election laws that may be introduced in ways that benefit the ruling party.

You should also serve as a watchdog: monitor whether government officials are using their official positions, events, or public resources to campaign. Keep an eye on whether public infrastructure, institutional platforms, or taxpayer money is being used for political gain. Early and vigilant reporting on these developments is key to ensuring transparency and accountability before the official campaign even begins.

TIP 11: Covering officials who are also candidates

Between the announcement of elections and the official start of the campaign, candidates who already hold public office often use their positions to boost their media presence, attending events, launching infrastructure projects, or visiting institutions under the guise of regular duties. While election laws don't fully address this loophole, this practice represents a misuse of public office and resources for electoral gain.

The media should approach such activities with caution. Although media can report on officials' regular duties, they must avoid linking them to candidacy or party affiliation unless required for context. To ensure balanced reporting, newsrooms should set internal rules for covering officials who are also candidates, avoiding protocol events and favoring thematic stories that center citizens and community needs. When reporting on issues like road reconstructions, dig into timing, budget data, and accountability, and choose diverse sources beyond the press offices of institutions.

Your newsroom should adopt clear editorial guidelines for covering officials who are also candidates.

TIP 12: Beware of social media advertising

Many political parties and their candidates begin promoting themselves on social media even before the official campaign period starts, exploiting the fact that online platforms are not covered by any specific regulation or law in Kosovo. This early advertising often sets the tone and narrative for the upcoming campaign, and it can give some parties an unfair head start. To track this activity, use tools like the Meta Ad Library, which allows you to monitor daily and weekly spending on Facebook and Instagram. This tool also helps you identify patterns in ad targeting and assess whether certain parties are gaining disproportionate visibility ahead of the official campaign timeline.

4.3 The Election Campaign has started

In Kosovo, the official election campaign period lasts 30 days. It's important to distinguish between the formal announcement of elections (made by presidential decree) and the start of the official campaign period (set by the CEC, typically 30 days before Election Day in regular elections). During this time, political

advertising is permitted by the Law on General Elections and regulations set by the IMC. Media outlets are required to cover election activities professionally, fairly, and on time while upholding journalistic ethics and standards.

The most important principle in covering elections is remembering that the media exists to serve the public. Our role is to ensure voters are informed and empowered to make choices in a free and fair process.

As one election reporting handbook aptly put it, during elections the voters are in charge. Election officials are merely “temporary hired help,” and campaigns are essentially “job applications” submitted by politicians. It’s the candidates’ responsibility to prove they’re qualified for the job. The media’s responsibility is to help conduct the job interview by asking tough questions, verifying claims, and holding candidates accountable throughout the process.

TIP 13: Watch out for the content of both paid and unpaid political advertising

While paid political advertising is permitted during the official campaign period, it’s essential to monitor its content carefully. According to the IMC’s regulation, political ads must not include children or minors for political purposes, and media outlets have the right to reject such material. Always review all submitted content before broadcasting or publishing.

Ensure that all political parties are given equal opportunity to advertise with your outlet. If you’re a broadcaster, maintain clear and updated logs of all paid advertisements and submit them to the IMC every Monday as required.

Remember your legal obligations: if your media outlet accepts paid political ads, you are also required to provide unpaid advertising space or airtime to political parties, ensuring balanced access across the board.

Finally, don’t forget to monitor political party advertising on social media during the election campaign. Pay attention to what they are promoting and assess whether their messages align with the Code of Conduct. Social media advertising is often less transparent and harder to regulate, so it’s crucial to keep track of content that may cross ethical or legal lines. Use tools like Meta’s Ad Library to track how much parties are spending, what kind of ads they’re running, and who they’re targeting. This can help you spot potential imbalances, manipulation tactics, or violations of campaign rules.

TIP 14: Follow the programs of political parties

In Kosovo, political parties often fail to update their websites or publish their programs on time (or at all). These documents are rarely accessible publicly and often need to be obtained directly from party spokespersons. Try to secure party programs before the campaign officially begins.

Political programs are critical resources. They outline the framework of each party’s campaign, guiding speeches, rallies, and interviews, and serve as their platform for governance if elected. These documents can help journalists generate informed questions, assess the feasibility of promises, and evaluate whether

parties are responding to public needs. Scrutinize the proposals: are they realistic? Do the budgets make sense? Are they overpromising to win votes?

Use these programs as the basis for analytical articles, expert interviews, and comparisons across parties. If a party delays publishing its program, especially just days before the vote, hold them accountable. Often, late publication is a strategy to avoid journalistic scrutiny and to push coverage toward vague rally statements.

However, if political parties don't publish programs at all, as is often the case in local elections, journalists should gather information from rallies, local debates, press conferences, and candidate interviews to piece together their priorities and promises. Even without formal documents, it's still possible to critically analyze their messaging and intentions. In such cases, journalists should also rely on the party's or candidate's record in government to assess their likely future approach. Examining what they have done (or failed to do) in previous mandates can offer voters valuable insights into what they can realistically expect going forward.

TIP 15: Publish profiles to give voters clarity and context

Once the necessary information is gathered, don't let it sit in your files. Remember the data you've collected on candidates, parties, and regional profiles? Synthesize it and prepare it for publication early in the campaign period. Try producing a profile for each candidate running for prime minister or city mayor, each party in the race, and the most electorally significant regions. These don't need to include every possible detail – the goal is to help citizens make sense of their choices in a contextualized way to avoid presenting each option in isolation.

Doing so equips voters with essential context before campaign rhetoric intensifies. These profiles can help cut through fragmented “he said, she said” coverage by anchoring reporting in verified facts and background. Well-timed publication empowers voters to better understand who is running, what they represent, and how they might perform in a given region.

TIP 16: Prepare and conduct interviews with candidates

Interviews with candidates or party leaders are central to election coverage. They give journalists the chance to examine political programs in detail and offer voters a clearer view of a candidate's plans, priorities, and character. Interviewing politicians requires strong preparation, critical thinking, and firm control of the conversation.

Start by researching the candidate's background. Gather information on their previous positions, public statements, policy track record, campaign promises, funding sources, and reputation. Evaluate how they've performed in past roles, what they've delivered or failed to deliver, and how they're perceived by allies and opponents alike.

Prepare your questions in advance, listing them in order of importance. Keep them short, specific, and open-ended. Long or vague questions allow politicians to steer the conversation to their advantage. Focus

on the “how”: how will promises be implemented, funded, and prioritized? What sets them apart from other candidates? Tailor your questions to real concerns raised by citizens, covering key issues like the economy, healthcare, education, environmental policy, or social protection. For local elections, align your questions with the region’s specific challenges.

Remember that the interview is not a platform for campaigning. As a journalist, your role is not to give candidates free airtime to advertise their program. Be alert to whether what they’re saying makes sense and whether it aligns with their past actions. Always follow up with sharp, clarifying questions to ensure that citizens get accurate, meaningful information to help them make informed decisions.

During the interview, maintain control. Skilled politicians may deflect or try to dominate the conversation. Politely interrupt if necessary and return to your original question until you receive a clear answer. Be persistent but always respectful.

TIP 16: Set the same principles for all candidates

Always apply the principle of equal treatment to all candidates and political entities. If you decide to interview one candidate, you should offer the same opportunity to all other candidates running for the same position, whether they are running for parliament or the city assembly. This principle should be upheld across all platforms, print, online, or broadcast, to avoid perceptions of bias or favoritism and to protect your newsroom from accusations of political alignment.

However, equal treatment should never come at the expense of editorial independence. Upholding fairness does not mean refraining from asking tough questions or holding candidates accountable. You should continue to critically examine all political entities, challenge their claims, and call out hate speech and legal violations.

By ensuring equal access while maintaining a firm editorial stance, you enhance your outlet’s credibility and foster public trust in your reporting.

TIP 17: Prepare the debates well

Well-organized election debates are a vital part of campaign coverage and offer voters the chance to hear directly from candidates or experts on key issues. There are typically three types of debates: between candidates or party representatives, between candidates and experts, and expert roundtables that explore election-related topics from a non-partisan perspective.

Candidate debates can take two main formats. In one, candidates interact directly and argue their points, allowing for a dynamic clash of ideas, but this format requires a skilled moderator to keep the discussion civil, balanced, and on-topic. The second format involves each candidate answering the same set of questions in turn, which ensures fairness and equal speaking time but may limit the opportunity to challenge inconsistencies or vague promises.

Debates between candidates and experts typically follow a moderated Q&A format, where experts pose

targeted questions based on their field of expertise, challenging candidates to explain and defend their positions. This format encourages deeper discussion of policies, allows for fact-based scrutiny, and helps bridge the gap between political promises and practical realities.

Expert or civil society roundtables are another valuable format, especially when aimed at unpacking policy implications and providing independent, in-depth analysis on specific electoral issues. These debates can help voters better understand what's at stake politically and programmatically.

If your newsroom decides to host a debate, prepare thoroughly. Share the debate format, topics, and rules with all participants in advance. At the start, clearly explain the structure to both the guests: how many questions will be asked, how long each candidate has to speak, how many rounds of responses are allowed, and how rebuttals will be handled. Ask specific, implementation-focused questions – don't just ask what they plan to do, but how they intend to do it. Include questions that reflect citizens' concerns and everyday realities.

To make the debate more engaging, involve the audience. Announce the event on social media, invite users to submit questions, and select a few to ask during the debate. Audience participation adds value and ensures public interest is reflected in the discussion.

Above all, set clear rules and apply them consistently. Equal speaking time, respectful dialogue, and transparency in the debate format are essential to maintaining credibility and fairness throughout the process.

If a political party refuses to participate in your debate, you are not held legally responsible, as long as you offered them a fair and equal opportunity to take part. Your duty as a media outlet is to provide the space, send formal invitations, and ensure transparency. If a party declines to attend, make this clear to the public and explain their absence. This not only protects your editorial integrity, but also ensures that voters understand which parties are avoiding public scrutiny and debate.

TIP 18: Watch out for inflammatory and hateful speech

Hate speech is common during election campaigns, especially in the rhetoric exchanged between political parties and candidates. These statements can inflame tensions, discourage voter participation, and polarize communities. In Kosovo, complaints about such language are usually handled by the Election Complaints and Appeals Panel (PZAP), which has the authority to fine political parties and candidates for using hateful or derogatory rhetoric. The PZAP responds to complaints and may impose limited sanctions, typically in the form of monetary fines. However, hate speech that constitutes a criminal offense falls under the jurisdiction of the judiciary and not the election bodies.

As a journalist, it's crucial not to reproduce hate speech uncritically. Instead, report that it was used and contextualize it: explain why such language is harmful by including expert commentary, and refer to the relevant legal framework and PZAP rulings. Always consider the broader context: Why was the statement made? In what setting? Who was the target? Was it a distraction from another issue? Is it a case of political

spin?

Avoid amplifying discriminatory, sexist, or inflammatory speech. Frame such incidents critically and responsibly, helping audiences understand not just what was said, but why it matters and why it's problematic. This approach protects your credibility and contributes to a more informed and respectful public discourse.

TIP 19: Ensure gender representation and inclusivity throughout your election coverage

Gender equality isn't just a legal obligation during elections – it's also a journalistic responsibility. As an editor or journalist, your role is not only to reflect the diversity of the political landscape, but also to critically examine how inclusive that landscape truly is. Gender representation goes beyond meeting quotas: it's about visibility, voice, and how both candidates and issues are framed in public discourse. Your editorial choices — who gets interviewed, who appears in debates, and how stories are written and sourced directly shape public perception of women in politics. Pay close attention to how gender issues are addressed, or entirely omitted, in party programs. Are they treated as core policy priorities or sidelined with vague references? Election coverage that overlooks these dynamics risks reinforcing systemic inequalities rather than challenging them. Here are four things to bear in mind as you work toward more inclusive and gender-aware election reporting.

a) Ensuring gender balance on the ballot

Kosovo's electoral system includes a gender quota that requires at least 30% of candidates on every party list to be women and at least 30% to be men. Additionally, the law mandates that in every sequence of three candidates on the list, at least one must be of a different gender, ensuring a more even distribution rather than placing women at the bottom. As part of your election reporting, monitor whether parties are complying with this quota, and highlight if any go beyond the minimum, signaling a deeper commitment to gender equality. Pay close attention to how candidates are positioned: Are women placed in electable spots, or are they included only to meet the legal threshold?

b) Ensure gender representation in your debates and expert discussions

When organizing debates, interviews, or expert roundtables, avoid all-male panels. The lack of women's voices reinforces inequality and fails to reflect the diversity of society. Be intentional about including women, whether as candidates, experts, or civil society representatives. If few women are running in a race, include relevant female voices from parties or issue-based organizations. Gender balance should be reflected across your programming. Your role as moderator also includes challenging sexist or exclusionary remarks and maintaining a respectful, equitable environment.

c) Watch out for gender bias and discrimination in media portrayals

Be mindful of how you portray women in your coverage. Avoid gender stereotypes and ensure women candidates are treated with the same seriousness and journalistic scrutiny as male candidates. Challenge sexist or dismissive language, and don't shy away from calling out efforts to delegitimize women in politics. Pay close attention to how women candidates are being

targeted in public discourse, whether through social media attacks, discrediting narratives, or character-focused criticism that male candidates typically don't face. Address these patterns in your reporting to help audiences recognize and understand the broader dynamics of gender inequality in political life.

d) Ensure a gender-sensitive approach in your reporting

Go beyond counting the number of women on candidate lists, and analyze how gender issues are addressed in party programs. What do political parties propose regarding women's employment, healthcare, unpaid care work, protection from gender-based violence, education, and leadership opportunities? Back your reporting with relevant data on women's unemployment rates, the burden of unpaid care work, and the prevalence of gender-based violence to highlight the urgency of these issues. Pay attention to whether parties are sidelining these structural problems and instead reducing women's roles to caregivers or mothers, rather than presenting them as equal social and political actors.

TIP 20: Ensure coverage of ethnic minority communities and parties

Kosovo is a multiethnic society, and its electoral system reflects this by reserving 20 seats in the Assembly for minority communities — 10 for the Serb community and 10 for other non-majority communities, including Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians, Bosniaks, Turks, and Gorani. Despite this structure, election coverage in Kosovo media tends to focus almost exclusively on Albanian political parties and the Albanian population. As a result, the needs, concerns, and political dynamics of minority communities often go unreported, while parties representing these communities receive far less journalistic scrutiny compared to their Albanian counterparts.

This gap is even more visible during local elections, where minority communities often face systemic underrepresentation and their political agendas go largely unexamined. Local elections are a key space for addressing immediate, community-level concerns such as education, infrastructure, employment, and access to services. The media have a responsibility to actively include minority voices and ensure that voters from these communities are equally informed and represented.

a) Serb Community

Parties representing the Serb community play a significant role in Kosovo's political system, particularly in municipalities with a Serb majority. Journalists should cover their platforms with the same rigor applied to other political entities, reporting on their promises, performance, and positions on key issues. Monitor how these parties address the needs of their constituencies, how they engage with Kosovo's institutions, and how their campaign rhetoric aligns with or diverges from broader efforts toward interethnic cooperation. Pay special attention to whether these parties promote inclusive policies or reinforce ethnic divisions, and make sure to highlight voter concerns in these areas through interviews and on-the-ground reporting.

b) Other ethnic minorities (Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians, Bosniaks, Turks and Gorani)

Parties and candidates representing other non-Serb minority communities often receive minimal media attention, despite being vital parts of Kosovo's democratic fabric. These communities face

unique social and economic challenges, such as systemic discrimination, lack of access to services, underemployment, and social exclusion. During the election period, journalists should ensure coverage that reflects the voices, priorities, and political platforms of these communities. Profile candidates from these backgrounds, report from their regions, and assess how political parties plan to address their issues.

Also, monitor whether the legal framework for minority representation is being respected in candidate lists and party strategies. Give space to community-based organizations and experts who can contextualize the concerns of these populations within the broader electoral landscape.

TIP 20: Engage young people

Kosovo has one of Europe’s youngest populations, yet young people are often politically disengaged and underrepresented in election coverage. Many bypass traditional media, favoring platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Reaching them requires tailored formats, relatable language, and content that reflects their concerns, such as jobs, education, and human rights.

Media must go beyond informing young people to actively engaging them. Create opportunities for participation, inviting their voices, involving them in conversations, and amplifying their perspectives on key issues. Use short videos or social media polls to explain voting processes and highlight youth-relevant policies, ensuring content includes voices from minority and rural youth to reflect Kosovo’s diversity.

TIP 21: Contribute to voter education

In every election, media play a vital role not only in reporting on parties and candidates but also in educating the public on how to participate in the electoral process. According to Kosovo’s Law on General Elections, public broadcasters are legally obligated to broadcast all educational materials produced by the CEC. These materials typically include information about voting procedures, registration processes, and voters’ rights.

However, this responsibility shouldn’t fall solely on public broadcasters. All media, including television, radio, and online outlets should contribute to voter education. Doing so supports informed participation and strengthens the democratic process. Citizens need more than party slogans and soundbites – they need reliable, accessible information about how to exercise their right to vote.

Journalists have to explain voting procedures clearly and consistently, including:

- Who is eligible to vote
- How and where to register to vote
- When polls open and close
- Where, when, and how to cast a ballot
- How many candidates a citizen is allowed to vote for, depending on the election type
- How to locate their polling station

- How to vote from abroad (diaspora voting)
- How to vote if they are outside their municipality or city of residence on election day

To make voter education more inclusive and effective, special attention should be given to two key groups:

- First-time voters, especially those turning 18 before Election Day. Media should provide clear, accessible, and targeted information about how, when, and where they can vote, using youth-friendly formats and language.
- Diaspora voters, who must register by a fixed deadline in order to vote from abroad. Journalists should emphasize this deadline early in the campaign period to ensure eligible voters have sufficient time to complete the registration process and participate.

Media can fulfill this role by producing explainers, infographics, Q&A formats, video guides, and social media posts, especially targeting first-time voters and marginalized communities.

4.4 Election Silence

Until 2021, the election silence period lasted 24 hours. However, under the current law on General Elections, amended in 2021, it is now limited to the 12 hours of the polling day, from 07:00 to 19:00. These 12 hours are strictly regulated to ensure that voters can make their decisions without last-minute influence or pressure from political entities or the media.

From the opening of the polling stations until their official closing, political entities, their supporters, and candidates are prohibited from engaging in the following actions:

- Distributing or displaying any kind of material intended to influence voters within or in the courtyard of polling stations;
- Engaging in any form of campaigning.

This also applies strictly to media outlets. No election-related content promoting or criticizing political parties, candidates, or platforms should be broadcast, published, or shared. That includes interviews, campaign materials, political analysis, or indirect promotion through commentary.

To avoid violations, newsrooms must carefully review their programming and editorial schedules the day before election silence begins. Ensure all political ads and campaign-related content are removed from circulation across all platforms.

Remember: Based on the IMC regulation, no broadcaster is permitted to publish or broadcast any results of public opinion polls related to the election campaign, including voter turnout, during the period beginning 24 hours before the official close of polling stations and lasting until the completion of the electoral process.

4.5 Election Day and Vote Counting

Election Day is one of the most intense moments in a newsroom’s election coverage plan. It requires coordination, clarity of roles, and strict adherence to legal and editorial standards.

Journalists have a dual responsibility: to respect the election silence period and to report actively and responsibly on the progress and integrity of the voting process. According to Kosovo’s Law on General Elections and the IMC regulation, media are not allowed to broadcast or publish any campaign-related content from the moment polling stations open at 7:00 a.m. until they close at 7:00 p.m. During this period, the media may not air statements from candidates, except for political party leaders or candidates for prime minister and mayors.

However, journalists are still expected to cover the election process itself. This includes informing the public about voter turnout, logistical challenges, incidents at polling stations, and updates from the CEC and other relevant institutions.

The section below provides tips for covering Election Day while remaining compliant with election silence regulations, allowing media to inform the public responsibly without interfering with the electoral process.

TIP 22: Making sure everyone knows what to do

Newsrooms should prepare thoroughly ahead of Election Day. This includes assigning reporters to specific regions or polling stations and ensuring they understand the editorial goals for the day. Editors should be clear on how many journalists will be in the field, how they will travel, whether transportation is arranged, and how communication will be maintained throughout the day. Field reporters should know whether they can file from their location and who in the newsroom is coordinating real-time updates. Meanwhile, others should remain at the office to follow leads, monitor social media chatter for breaking developments, and support live coverage.

Reporters going into the field must be properly briefed on their assignments and equipped with everything they need, from updated contact lists to knowledge of voting procedures and media responsibilities. They should know which polling stations they’re covering, what questions to pursue, and how their coverage contributes to the newsroom’s broader strategy. Editors should ensure reporters are familiar with the legal boundaries of what they can and cannot report on during the silence period.

Reporters on Election Day

Reporters on the ground should be well-prepared, briefed, and equipped:

- Do I know which polling stations I need to visit?
- Have I reviewed voting procedures and regulations?
- Do I have access to updated maps, logistics info, or emergency contacts?
- Do I have all the necessary equipment (phone, recorder, ID badge, power bank)?

- Have I been assigned a specific story focus or theme?

TIP 23: What to report on Election Day?

Despite the chaotic nature of Election Day, many stories follow predictable lines. Journalists should closely monitor whether polling stations opened and closed on time and whether there were enough materials, such as ballot papers and voter lists, at each site.

The voting experience itself offers several angles: Were there long queues? Were elderly voters or people with disabilities assisted properly? Did anyone face challenges or get turned away? Were there any attempts to interfere with voter secrecy or security concerns that affected the process?

Beyond logistics, Election Day reporting should also assess the behavior of political actors and their supporters. Journalists should observe whether anyone was campaigning in or around polling stations, wearing political symbols, or attempting to pressure voters. If disruptions occurred, it's important to document who was involved, whether the disruption interfered with voting, and whether authorities responded appropriately.

At the same time, media should cover official updates. Press conferences held by the CEC throughout the day offer verified information on turnout, reported irregularities, and the status of the process. These are essential for balanced and authoritative reporting. In addition to the CEC, journalists should follow independent election observers and civil society organizations that monitor the vote. These groups, such as Democracy in Action and others, frequently release assessments on election transparency, voter access, and procedural fairness. Their findings can serve as critical sources, especially when cross-verified.

TIP 24: Reporting on fraud allegations

Allegations of election fraud are common, especially in heated campaigns or close contests. Political parties often accuse one another prematurely, sometimes without evidence, and such claims, if reported uncritically, can seriously undermine public trust in the electoral process. Journalists must be cautious: not every irregularity constitutes fraud. Some issues, such as failure to follow procedures at polling stations, may stem from poor training or administrative oversight rather than malicious intent. It's important to assess the context, speak with election workers or observers, and consult official sources before drawing conclusions.

Fraud is defined as a deliberate act to alter the outcome of an election. If such cases emerge, they must be reported carefully, based on verified facts and multiple sources. A single incident of confirmed fraud does not invalidate an entire election, especially if voting elsewhere proceeds smoothly. Journalists should avoid amplifying isolated or unconfirmed claims as if they reflect the broader process.

Whenever possible, balance your reporting with reactions from CEC and independent observers to ensure accuracy and scale are correctly represented. Journalists should also avoid sensational language or assumptions when covering observer reports. An irregularity reported in one station should be treated in

proportion, not as evidence of system-wide collapse. If a journalist personally witnesses misconduct, they must seek to understand the surrounding circumstances and avoid overgeneralizing based on one experience. Level-headedness, context, and fact-checking are essential when reporting on fraud, because even small inaccuracies can fuel political polarization and damage the legitimacy of the democratic process.

TIP 25: Announcement of results

Once the polling stations close, everyone wants to know the results, but reporting on election outcomes requires extreme caution. Journalists must never publish or broadcast any results before they are officially announced by the CEC. Doing so not only violates Kosovo's election law but also risks causing public confusion and undermining trust in the electoral process.

It is crucial to clearly explain the process to the public: that the CEC will begin counting votes after polls close, that preliminary results will be made available over time, and that no result is final until it is certified. Journalists should emphasize that the certification process, which includes potential appeals and recounts, can take several weeks.

TIP 26: Exit polls

Some media outlets collaborate with research organizations to conduct exit polls on Election Day. Typically, they announce in advance when these results will be made public, usually right after polling stations close. While exit polls can offer early insights, they are inherently limited. Voters may withhold or misstate their choices, and results may not be representative.

If your newsroom reports on exit poll data or statistical projections based on partial results, you must clearly communicate the methodology used, the margin of error, and any legal or ethical restrictions in place. These results should never be published before the last polling station has closed.

TIP 27: Relying on political parties' exit polls

Political parties often conduct their exit polls and hold press conferences soon after polls close to announce their projected results. These announcements must be treated with skepticism. Parties have a clear interest in presenting the most favorable interpretation of the outcome, and their numbers are often exaggerated. Journalists covering these press conferences should clearly identify the source of the data, avoid presenting it as fact, and always contextualize it alongside official information or note its unverified nature.

TIP 28: Partial results

CEC may begin releasing partial results progressively, by polling station or municipality, as counting advances. Journalists can report on these updates, but only if they are officially announced by presiding officers or the CEC, in accordance with the law. Any unofficial numbers or internal party data should be avoided unless explicitly identified as such and properly contextualized.

Although the CEC provides real-time updates on its website, these figures should be reported with care. During the 2025 elections, for example, technical issues caused discrepancies in early data, leading to confusion and misreporting. Journalists should remind the public that early figures are provisional, subject to change, and may not reflect the final vote count. Cross-checking information and clearly stating its status as preliminary helps maintain public trust and ensures accurate, responsible reporting.

TIP 29: Final results

Final results are certified by the CEC, typically within one month of the election. This timeline accounts for the legal period in which appeals can be filed and for any necessary recounts or verifications. Journalists should make it clear to the public that until this certification is completed, results remain preliminary.

4.6 Engaging Content for the Audience

Amid the deadlines, legal frameworks, and editorial constraints of election reporting, it’s easy to lose sight of a core truth: audiences will only follow election coverage if it speaks to them. Reporting on elections doesn’t have to be dry or confined to politicians’ statements. With thoughtful planning and creative formats, media can produce content that is informative, relevant, and genuinely engaging.

Elections are not just another news cycle – they are pivotal moments that shape people’s everyday lives. And they don’t have to be boring. The media plays a vital role in making elections meaningful and accessible. When done right, election reporting can inspire participation, helping people understand what’s at stake and make informed decisions about who truly represents their interests, whether at the national or local level. This is the moment to promote political literacy and empower citizens to engage as active, informed voters.

Election reporting is not just about covering events – it’s about serving the public by translating complex political processes into accessible, actionable information. To truly engage people, coverage must reflect the diversity of society, especially the voices of women, youth, and non-majority communities.

Creativity isn’t a luxury, it’s a necessity. Audiences today are overloaded with content, and the most effective election reporting is often that which dares to experiment, not only with formats but also with the overall reporting approach. Newsrooms should rethink how they frame stories, prioritize themes, and engage with voters’ concerns, rather than simply following the campaign trail. They should also experiment with formats: use visuals, short-form video, carousels, data storytelling, and clear, accessible language to reach people where they are. Engaging content also builds resilience against information pollution: when citizens are well-informed, they’re far less likely to be misled.

TIP 30: Explain why voting matters visually, and repeatedly

Many voters, especially youth, don’t participate in elections simply because no one has ever explained why they matter. Go beyond slogans and statistics. Break it down: what powers do the national and local governments have? What difference does one vote make? How does a law passed by parliament shape

someone's everyday life? Use relatable language, short videos, infographics, or personal stories to drive home the message. Repackage the same point in multiple formats: a visual explainer on Instagram, a carousel post, or a Q&A reel, and adapt the tone to different platforms and audiences.

TIP 31: Focus on the issues, not just the parties

Instead of structuring your coverage around political entities, structure it around issues. Ask your audience: What do you care about in this election? Use that input to produce stories that answer concrete questions: what are the parties' plans for affordable housing? How do their proposals on education or the environment compare? Develop explainers and fact-checks that stay grounded in voters' real concerns. This type of issue-based reporting builds trust and avoids the "he said, she said" trap of traditional campaign journalism.

TIP 32: Involve people in your reporting process

Don't just report about the public, report with them. Let citizens shape your coverage. You can ask people to submit their questions for debates, share stories about how public services affect them, or comment on what would motivate them to vote. Let their concerns guide your questions in interviews and their voices feature in your stories. By doing so, you turn passive readers into participants.

TIP 33: Use social media as a storytelling space, not just a distribution channel

Don't just post links to your articles, tell stories within the platform. Use visuals, animations, short-form videos, quote cards, and infographics to convey key information directly in social media. For instance, visualize how a law is passed or how many women are running in this election compared to the last. You can also produce quick guides: "How to vote from abroad," "What each party says on climate policy," or "What each party says on youth." Make sure your content is fact-based, accessible, and easy to share – that's what gets attention, especially from Gen Z.

TIP 34: Make the electoral process part of the story

Don't assume your audience already understands how elections work. Go behind the scenes: explain what happens when someone registers as a candidate, how votes are counted, what the CEC actually does, or how polling stations are prepared. Use animations, behind-the-scenes reels, or first-person explainers to demystify the process. The more transparent the process feels, the more empowered and invested voters will be.

Glossary of Terms

Central Election Commission (CEC): The independent body responsible for administering elections in Kosovo. It oversees all aspects of the electoral process, including managing the voter registry, organizing polling stations, counting votes, and certifying final results.

Election Calendar: A planning tool outlining critical dates in the election process, including election announcements, deadlines for candidate certification, the start and end of the campaign period, election day, and the official announcement of results.

Election Silence Period: A legally mandated timeframe during which political entities and the media are prohibited from promoting any campaign messages. In Kosovo, this period begins at 7:00, when polling stations open, and lasts until they close at 19:00 on Election Day.

Election Campaign: The official 30-day period during which political parties and candidates may legally promote their platforms, participate in debates, and advertise, according to regulations set by the Law on Elections and the Independent Media Commission (IMC).

Exit Polls: Surveys conducted with voters immediately after they have cast their ballots, aimed at predicting election results before official counts are released. These should not be published before polling stations close and must be reported with clear methodology and disclaimers.

Partial Results: Preliminary vote counts released by the CEC before final certification. They are updated progressively and must be reported with caution, clearly labeled as unofficial or subject to revision.

Final Results: The official election outcomes certified by the CEC following the resolution of all complaints and potential recounts. These are the only legally binding results.

PZAP (Election Complaints and Appeals Panel): The body responsible for addressing complaints and legal violations during the election process. It can issue fines and penalties to political parties or candidates for breaches such as hate speech or misuse of public office.

Political Advertising: Any paid content promoting a political party or candidate. Its publication is regulated – prohibited before the campaign period, permitted with restrictions during the campaign, and banned during the silence period.

Unofficial Campaigning / Informal Campaign: Campaigning activities that take place before the official start of the campaign period. These often include the strategic use of public appearances, government decisions, or social media to build political support prematurely.

Equal Treatment Principle: A journalistic standard requiring that all political candidates and parties be given fair and balanced media access and coverage. This principle supports impartiality and public trust but does not mean avoiding critical scrutiny.

Gender Quota: A legal requirement in Kosovo’s electoral law mandates that at least 30% of candidates on each political party’s list must be women and that every group of three candidates must include at least one person of a different gender.

Reserved Seats: Twenty seats in Kosovo’s Assembly are set aside for non-majority communities—ten for the Serb community and ten for other ethnic minorities such as Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians, Bosniaks, Turks and Gorani.

Observer Missions: Organizations, often from civil society or international institutions, that monitor the electoral process for fairness, transparency, and compliance with legal standards. Their assessments are key sources for media coverage of election integrity.

Pack Journalism: A term describing media behavior in which many journalists report on the same events in the same way, often failing to offer fresh angles or independent analysis. Avoiding this tendency helps your newsroom provide more distinctive and valuable election coverage.

Debate Formats: Organized discussions involving candidates or experts during the campaign. Formats vary from confrontational (candidates debating each other directly) to structured (turn-based responses to moderator questions). Fair moderation and inclusion of diverse voices are key.

Electoral District Profile: A brief, researched overview of a voting district, including its demographic makeup, economic base, past voting patterns, and major local issues. These are useful for regional-focused election stories.

Broadcast Media: Traditional media channels such as television and radio that distribute content to the public over airwaves or cable. In election coverage, broadcasters have specific legal obligations related to political advertising, reporting neutrality, and maintaining logs for the IMC.

Online Media: Digital news outlets that publish content on websites, mobile platforms, or social media. During election periods, they operate largely without regulation, being bound only by the Law on General Elections. However, adherence to this law and to professional election reporting standards is mostly left to their discretion due to the lack of enforcement mechanisms.

Resources

[Law 08/L-228 on General Elections](#)

[Law No. 03/L-072 on Local Elections in the Republic of Kosovo](#)

[Independent Media Commission Regulation on the Obligations of Media Service Providers During the Election Campaign](#)

[Independent Media Commission Regulation on Audiovisual Commercial Communications](#)

[Independent Media Commission Regulation on the Protection of Children and Minors in Audiovisual Media Services](#)

[Code of Ethics for Providers of Audio and Audiovisual Media](#)

[Press Council of Kosovo – Code of Conduct](#)

[Central Election Commission \(KQZ\)](#)

[Election Complaints and Appeals Panel \(PZAP\)](#)

[Covering Elections: A Manual by Thomson Foundation \(2023\)](#)

[Handbook for Journalists During Elections – Reporters Without Borders \(RSF\)](#)

[Tips to Avoid ‘Horse-Race’ Coverage and Both-Sides Reporting – IJNet](#)

[Conflict-Sensitive Election Reporting Manual – Internews](#)

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