

Purdah (pre-election period)

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Purdah is the pre-election period in the [United Kingdom](#), specifically the time between an announced election and the final election results.^[1] The time period offers a prior opportunity for government departments to develop guidance and policy due to any impact resulting from the election. It also prevents central and [local government](#) departments from making announcements about any new or controversial government initiatives (such as modernisation initiatives or administrative and legislative changes) which could be seen to be advantageous to any candidates or parties in the forthcoming election, or which may commit any incoming new administration to policies which it wouldn't support.

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The purdah period typically begins six weeks before the scheduled election, in each authority on the day the notice of election is published; for the 2014 local and European elections, purdah began in many authorities on Monday 7 April.^[2]

Purdah does not have actual legal force, rather is considered a "self-denying ordinance", and has considerable [moral authority](#); because of the lack of statute, different local authorities adopt different standards as to the extent to which they observe the convention,^[3] and authorities are always mindful of the possibility of results and decisions being open to challenge in the event of a breach of purdah. When local elections are being held at the same time as a general election a higher standard is usually applied.^[4]

At the national level, major decisions on policy are postponed until after the purdah period, unless it is in the national interest to proceed or a delay would waste public money. The [Cabinet Office](#) issues guidance before each election to civil servants, including those in the devolved national parliaments and assemblies.^[1] Purdah also continues after the election during the time in which new MPs and ministers are sworn in. In the event of an inconclusive election result, purdah does not end until a new government forms. When no party has an overall majority, it may take some time before a minority or coalition government is formed.

Local government[[edit](#)]

For local elections, the activities of local authorities in the pre-election period are governed by the *Code of recommended practice on local authority publicity*, which is issued as part of the provisions of the [Local Government Act 1986](#).^{[1][5]}

Elections, referendums and petitions

41. The period between the notice of an election and the election itself should preclude proactive publicity in all its forms of candidates and other politicians involved directly in the election. Publicity should not deal with controversial issues or

report views, proposals or recommendations in such a way that identifies them with individual members or groups of members. However, it is acceptable for the authority to respond in appropriate circumstances to events and legitimate service enquiries provided that their answers are factual and not party political. Members holding key political or civic positions should be able to comment in an emergency or where there is a genuine need for a member level response to an important event outside the authority's control. Proactive events arranged in this period should not involve members likely to be standing for election.

42. *The Local Authorities (Referendums) (Petitions and Directions) (England) Regulations 2000* [REPEALED] (which apply under the Local Government Act 2000 to county councils, district councils and London borough councils) prohibit an authority from incurring any expenditure to

- Publish material which appears designed to influence local people in deciding whether or not to sign a petition requesting a referendum on proposals for an elected mayor;
- Assist anyone else in publishing such material; or
- Influence or assist others to influence local people in deciding whether or not to sign a petition.

Publicity in these circumstances should, therefore, be restricted to the publication of factual details which are presented fairly about the petition proposition and to explaining the council's existing arrangements. Local authorities should not mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view in relation to petitions generally or on a specific proposal.

Purdah in local government ends at the annual meeting of the council in the new municipal year (usually the first full council meeting after the election) when the appointment of a new executive by the leader occurs