

Let's put an end to bullshit manifestos

Full Fact's 10 ways to ensure manifestos at the next election are honest, accessible and meaningful

Full Fact is calling for an end to bullshit manifestos in general elections. Voters want to make fully informed choices at the next election, and we deserve better than [parties including commitments in their manifestos](#) that are unclear, as good as meaningless or even misleading.

Meeting standards for manifestos to improve public debate and help voters be better informed.

Full Fact has worked with others to set out 10 standards that political parties should meet ahead of the publication of their manifestos, and following their release. They simply call for manifestos to be accurate, and presented in a clear and transparent manner. Meeting these standards is the minimum we expect from political parties to allow more meaningful scrutiny of each party's pledges.

10 election manifesto standards for political parties

1. Get your facts right

- 1.1. Ensure your claims are factually correct.
- 1.2. Be accurate about your record and that of other political parties.

2. Don't mislead voters

- 2.1. Present your manifesto in a way that a reasonable person is likely to understand and use clear language.
- 2.2. Don't omit important information or use information selectively or out of context, and do acknowledge any important caveats.
- 2.3. Define things clearly and consistently.
- 2.4. Say how and when things will happen, include clear timelines for the delivery of commitments.

3. Evidence your claims

- 3.1. Provide supporting evidence wherever possible.
- 3.2. Use high quality, widely accepted sources and clearly identify them.
- 3.3. Explain your calculations.

4. Make sure your spending commitments add up and show your workings

- 4.1. Ensure that each commitment is accurately costed and explained.
- 4.2. Make it easy to work out the overall costs and implications of your tax and spending commitments.
- 4.3. Cost and spend information should be in the manifesto itself, or in clearly signposted accompanying material.

5. Don't over promise

- 5.1. Ensure your promises are viable, individually and as a package.
- 5.2. Where possible, ensure that new policy ideas are adequately stress-tested with appropriate experts before making commitments.

6. Make sure your manifesto hangs together

- 6.1. Ensure your manifesto is coherent and consistent, don't make overlapping or conflicting promises.

7. Release your manifesto in a timely way

- 7.1. Make your manifesto public within two weeks of an election being called to give sufficient time for scrutiny and public debate.

8. Have a fully accessible manifesto for all voters

- 8.1. Produce fully accessible versions of your manifesto and make them available on the day it is launched.¹
- 8.2. Make sure a version of your manifesto at first release is available as HTML.

9. Correct your mistakes

- 9.1. Correct any errors promptly and prominently.

¹ Accessibility includes ensuring that manifestos are available in alternative formats suitable for people with different types of impairment (for example large print, braille, easy-to-read or audio versions) and, as the Electoral Commission recommends, at the same time so people with a disability have the same length of time as everyone else to understand what the parties stand for and make an informed decision. This includes easy read versions to make manifestos easier to understand for people that may have difficulty reading the main version. Other areas of accessibility will be added here following consultations with or representations from expert/representative groups.

- 9.2. Ensure mistakes in the manifesto are also corrected across all other relevant materials and channels.

10. Don't misrepresent your manifesto

- 10.1. Represent your manifesto accurately when campaigning.
- 10.2. Ensure your other campaign materials are consistent with your manifesto promises.

Why manifestos matter

Manifestos matter because they set the debate during the election period and set out what a political party promises to do if it forms the next government. If the winning party's manifesto pledges included legislative changes, the '[Salisbury convention](#)' means they will not be opposed in the House of Lords. This is why it is vital that parties set out their manifestos in ways that allow meaningful scrutiny and audit of their pledges.

In the 2019 general election Full Fact scrutinised each of the main parties' manifestos, looking at the detail behind the biggest claims and campaign pledges. We published in-depth analysis of the [Conservative](#), [Labour](#), [Liberal Democrat](#) and [SNP](#) manifestos. What we saw was manifestos and claims being set out in ways that are not clear or meaningful, including:

- Using vague or technical language to overstate what a promise would mean in practice.²
- Using numbers in a misleading way by omitting important explanation about how they have been calculated.³
- Leaving out important context which makes a claim misleading.⁴

² One of the key pledges of the 2019 Conservative manifesto, to build "40 new hospitals", has been widely [contested since](#), including on the basis of what constitutes a [new hospital](#).

³ The [2019 Conservative manifesto](#) promised 50,000 more nurses, although it didn't say when this would be delivered - nor what was reported after the manifesto was launched, which was that it would include many thousands of existing nurses who will be encouraged to remain.

⁴ For example, in [2019 Labour](#) spoke of 96,000 vacancies in the NHS which does not mean that no-one was doing those jobs (NHS Improvement had previously said that between 90-95% of these vacancies were being filled by temporary staff).