

Election Commission of Pakistan approved Media Guidelines for Elections 2013

Guideline 1: Duty to Inform the Public

During the election period all media have a duty to ensure that the public are properly informed about relevant electoral matters such as political parties, candidates, campaign issues, and voting processes.

Guideline 2: Duty of Balance and Impartiality

2.1. Publicly owned or funded media have a specific mandate requiring fairness and non-discrimination in their election reporting and not to discriminate against any political party or candidate. All media houses should follow professional standards and strive for accuracy, balance and impartiality.

2.2 News Media will try to the best of its ability that, news and current affairs, interviews, talk-shows, analyses, and information programmes are not biased in favour of, or against, any party or candidate. In particular, media shall encourage journalism of the highest ethical standards in their election coverage and shall

a) Try to the best of its ability to avoid all forms of rumour, speculation and disinformation, particularly when these concern specific political parties or candidates,

b) Ban all forms of hate speech that can be interpreted as incitement to violence or has the effect of promoting public disorder.

2.3 While it is not always possible to cover all candidates in an election, the media should strive to ensure that all candidates/parties shall be subject to journalistic scrutiny and appropriate media coverage.

Guideline 3: Laws Restricting Freedom of Expression

3.1. Freedom of expression and the rights of journalists to report freely should be respected by all parties/candidates and state authorities.

3.2. Access during the election. There should be provision of full access to information should be ensured during the elections election period and afterwards

Guideline 4: Duty to Respect and Promote Tolerance

The media have a duty to respect and promote tolerance and avoid all forms of expression that might be interpreted as incitement to violence or hatred on the basis of religion, creed, gender, or ethnicity.

Guideline 5: Duty to Punish Attacks against Media Personnel and Property

The authorities should make special efforts to investigate all acts of violence, intimidation or harassment directed against media personnel or the property or premises of a media outlet, and to bring those responsible to justice, particularly where the act was motivated by an intent to interfere with media freedom.

Guideline 6: Limits on Prior Restraint

6.1. There should be no prior censorship of any election coverage/ programme.

6.2 All political parties and state institutions must issue a clear statement that the media will not be penalised for broadcasting/publishing programmes/contents merely because they are critical of a certain party or a type of politics.

6.3 Neither the authorities nor media outlets should interfere with the broadcast of any election programme or printing of election coverage unless there is a real danger or threat of imminent harm and violence. Any decision to restrain a programme should be subject to prompt review by an independent body of reputed media persons in order to determine whether it was in conformity with these standards.

Guideline 7: Limits on Media Liability

The media shall not be held responsible legally for unlawful statements made by candidates or party representatives and broadcast/printed during the course of election campaigns. This however will not apply to the repeat/recorded telecast or publication.

Guideline 8: Corrections and Replies

Any candidate/party which has been defamed or is a victim of gross misrepresentation or other illegal injury by broadcast or publication of information should be entitled to a correction and where appropriate granted an opportunity to reply.

Guideline 9 News Coverage: Fair and Balanced

9.1 All media should also be careful to comply with any obligations of balance and impartiality that the law may place on them.

9.2 The duty of balance requires that parties/candidates receive news coverage commensurate with their relative importance in the election and the extent of their potential electoral support.

9.3. State and private media are urged to keep a clear distinction between editorial/opinion, news and paid content. There will not be paid or sponsored news, election evaluation, analysis and editorial opinion.

9.4. All paid materials, media campaigns for elections paid by candidates or their supporters must be clearly shown as Paid advertisement/campaign/content and should be done in a transparent manner in accordance with the code of ethics for elections issued by ECP.

9.3 Publicly owned or funded media should be particularly scrupulous in complying with their

obligations of balance and impartiality in their news and current affairs and are urged not to broadcast/print editorial opinions. Other broadcasters and publishers should endeavor to clearly identify editorial opinions and to avoid airing it during news programmes.

Guideline 10: Direct Access Programmes

10.1 Publicly owned or funded media should grant all political parties/candidates airtime and news space for direct access programmes on a fair and non-discriminatory basis. Other broadcasters may also be required to provide such airtime.

10.2 Parties/candidates that represent minorities or special interest communities and groups and are formally registered should be granted access to some airtime and news space

10.3 State and private media will make every effort to ensure that space/airtime should be allocated on a relative, proportionate basis, according to objective criteria indicating general level of support for different parties. The registered parties that represent any section of people should normally receive some airtime. Airtime for parties that have been banned or are operating under new names and are publicly engaged in violent acts of opposed to the democratic process and constitutional framework should be avoided.

10.4 Direct access programmes should be aired at times when the broadcasts are likely to reach the largest audiences. The duty of balance would be deemed to have been breached if the programmes of some parties/candidates are aired at less favorable times than those of others.

10.5 Direct access slots should be made available by the private sector media on equal financial terms for all parties/candidates. State media should provide all parties/candidates a reasonable amount of time free of charge or for a nominal sum.

10.6 If parties/candidates are to be allowed to purchase airtime / space for political advertisements, they should have access to such time/space in accordance with the election code of ethics for political parties.

Guideline 11: Special Information Programmes and voter access

11.1 During elections, the media should provide special information programmes that provide an opportunity for members of the public to put questions directly to party leaders and candidates, and for candidates to debate with each other on policy matters and issues that are of great concern to the electorate.

11.2 Candidates standing for office should not, however, act as anchors or presenters during the election period.

11.3 Attempt to air special information programmes regarding policy matters and the issues of public importance should be aired during prime viewing or listening hours.

11.4 Broadcasters and publishers have greater editorial discretion in relation to such content than the news. But such discretion is subject to the general obligations of balance and impartiality.

Guideline 12: Voter Education

12.1 Publicly owned media are obliged to broadcast voter education programmes, at least to the extent that this is not already sufficiently covered by other information initiatives. Other media should also introduce such programmes as a matter of public service.

12.2 Voter education programmes must endeavor to be accurate and impartial and must effectively inform voters about the voting process, including how, when and where to vote, to register to vote and to verify proper registration, the secrecy of the ballot (and thus safety from retaliation), the importance of voting, the functions of the offices that are under contention, and similar matters.

12.3 These programmes should reach the greatest number of voters, including where most relevant, through programmes in regional languages and targeting groups traditionally excluded from the political process, such as women, the under-privileged, and religious and ethnic minorities.

Guideline 13: Opinion Polls and Election Projections

13.1 If a broadcaster/newspaper publishes the results of an opinion poll or election projection, they should strive to report the results fairly and in a proper context explaining the scope and limits of such polls that have their own peculiar limitations.

13.2 Opinion polls should be accompanied by information to assist viewers/listeners/readers to understand the poll's significance, such as who conducted, commissioned and paid for the poll, the methodology used, the sample size, the margin of error, the fieldwork dates, and data used.

Guideline 14: Announcement of Results

14.1 Broadcasters will not air any final, formal and definite results without the consent and or they will be aired only with clear disclaimer that they are unofficial, incomplete and partial results which should not be taken as final results until election commission has announced final results.

Guideline 15: Regulatory and Complaints Mechanisms

15.1 The Election Commission of Pakistan will evolve a suitable mechanism for the implementation of Media Code of Ethics prepared by the representatives of various media organizations.

15.2 The Complaint Committee will be headed by Add. DG (PR), ECP and will comprise of representatives from PBA, APNS, PCP, CPNE, PTV, PBC, PFUJ, SAFMA and SAWN.

15.1 Election broadcasts and publications should be monitored and regulated by an independent, impartial commission of media practitioners and civil society representatives the Media Commission for Monitoring Elections (MCME) formed by a bipartisan committee of the Senate and reporting to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to take necessary measures.

Guideline 16 - Local Elections

16.1. These guidelines should be appropriately modified and applied by local and regional media in local, municipal and regional elections.

{Adopted from Reporting Elections Broadcast Guidelines, Article 19, Index, Reuters Foundation and UNESCO; Guidelines of Pakistan Coalition for Ethical Journalism; Election Reporting Handbook, International Federation of Journalists.}