



## Pakistan Coalition for Ethical Journalism

# Code of Conduct for Media and Journalism and Coverage of Elections in Pakistan

1. The aim of journalism on all media platforms is to provide coverage that is fair, unbiased and ethical. This is essential in reporting of political affairs and particularly at times of elections.
2. Media and ethical journalists in Pakistan strive at all times to
  - a) avoid discrimination against any political party, political leader or candidate
  - b) provide information that will assist citizens to better understand the issues, policies and perspectives of all democratic participants in the election process
  - c) ensure all communities are made fully aware of the election process and how they can freely exercise their right to vote
3. Media recognise that it is not always possible to cover all candidates in an election, but they shall strive to ensure that all candidates representing democratic values and a credible and significant body of opinion shall be subject to scrutiny and appropriate media coverage.
4. In this regard media shall apply principles of fairness in the allocation of time and space in provision of coverage to political parties and candidates while recognising that balance and fairness are achieved over a reasonable period of time.
5. In line with their responsibility to be inclusive and independent, media will canvass the voices and opinions of all sections of society and all democratic groups in their coverage of political affairs and elections.

In doing so all media, both public and private, shall scrupulously observe the distinction between advertising and editorial and shall not allow

forms of advertising or paid political promotion to be disguised as editorial content. Paid political content must be identified as such.

A balance between broadcasting of paid for content and editorial content shall be maintained in line with agreed industry standards.

6. Media shall encourage journalism of the highest ethical standards in their election coverage and shall, in particular,
  - a) Avoid all forms of rumour, speculation and disinformation, particularly when these concern specific political parties or candidates,
  - b) Forbid the publication of unsubstantiated allegations or personal remarks or opinions that are designed to be offensive and malicious and verify information regarding individuals or parties which is critical or negative before it is telecast, broadcast or published,
  - c) Ban all forms of hate speech that can be interpreted as incitement to violence or has the effect of promoting public disorder.
7. This pledge to avoid inflammatory expression shall apply to coverage of political activities at all levels including when it applies to the reporting of statements or remarks by political leaders or candidates.
8. Media recognise that the power of elections rests with the people of Pakistan and the voters. They will exercise caution in the use of opinion polls and agree to work together to ensure that announcement of results is managed in an equitable and transparent manner ensuring that all media are able to report accurately the results as they emerge from the ECP and the election control room.
9. All media shall ensure that all their staff, including those working at local level have employment rights and enjoy social protection. They shall prepare staff for the task of election coverage in line with the checklist of principles and actions attached to this code.
10. Safety of journalists and media staff is paramount and all media shall provide staff with training and advice on security issues with appropriate support including insurance.
11. Candidates in Pakistan elections shall not act as news anchors, interviewers or presenters of any type of programme during the election period.

12. When a candidate takes part in an item about his or her particular election, then candidates of each of the major parties shall be offered the opportunity to take part. However, if they refuse or are unable to participate, the item may nevertheless go ahead.
13. Broadcasters must offer the opportunity to major candidates to take part in discussions covering a particular electoral area. This also applies to independent candidates. However, if a candidate refuses or is unable to participate, the item may nevertheless go ahead.
14. All media shall give the audience regular information about appropriate websites or other information source listing all candidates taking part in the elections.
15. Pakistan media agree to establish an election media monitoring group comprised of respected, non-partisan figures to protect the press from aggression and to investigate any incidents.
  - a) The group will follow the coverage of the election and register all incidents of threats or intimidation or other improper violation of media rights to report freely. It shall receive and consider relevant information from media monitoring groups including the Press Council of Pakistan and PEMRA.
  - b) It shall further be committed to protect the interests of media and should work under the umbrella of the Pakistan Broadcasters Association, the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists, the Pakistan Newspaper Society and the Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors.
  - c) This group shall deal with all complaints and issues arising from media coverage of the elections and shall strive to ensure professional respect for the principles and values set out in this code.
  - d) The group shall ensure that media act together to protect each other from acts of violence or political intimidation and that fair and transparent systems are used for the allocation of state and political advertising related to the elections.

This code, which has been drafted by the Pakistan Coalition for Ethical Journalism after consultation with Pakistan media and journalists at meetings in Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad, is submitted to all media and to media support organisations for their further consideration.

It is also submitted to the election commission and to all political parties, who are asked to recognise and support the self-regulating commitment of media, and to respect the right of all journalists to report freely in conditions of safety and security.

Islamabad,

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