



# All Pakistan Newspapers Society

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To: **All Member Publications**

Sub: **Code of Conduct for Media During Election 2013**

Dear Sirs,

We are pleased to inform you that the media organizations including APNS, CPNE, PBA and others in a joint meeting of the Election Commission of Pakistan have agreed to a Code of Conduct for media to be followed and implemented in coverage of political activity and campaigns for national and provincial elections scheduled to be held on May 11, 2013.

We attach hereby a file containing the Code of Conduct agreed by the media organizations and request all member publications to advise their concerned staff to strictly adhere to the Code of Conduct in the best national interest.

Thanking you,

Yours faithfully,

-s/d-

( Masood Hamid )  
Secretary General  
APNS

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# Media Code of Conduct

Election Commission of Pakistan has issued code of conduct for media for the forthcoming elections.

Election Commission has emphasized that all media should ensure that the people are properly informed about political parties, candidates, election campaign issues, and voting processes.

In a media code of conduct, issued in Islamabad on Wednesday, it said publicly owned media should not discriminate against any political party or candidate.

News media will try to the best of its ability that news, current affairs, interviews, talk-shows, analyses and information programmes are not biased in favour of, or against, any party or candidate.

The code envisages that media should discourage all forms of hate speech that can be interpreted as incitement to violence or has the effect of promoting public disorder.

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

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

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

State and private media have been urged to keep a clear distinction between, editorial or opinion, news and paid content.

Publicly owned media should grant all political parties or candidates airtime and news space for direct access programmes on a fair and non-discriminatory basis.

Direct access programmes by the state media should be aired at times when the broadcasts are likely to reach the largest audiences.

The code says if a broadcaster or 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.

It also envisages that broadcasters will not air any final, formal and definite elections results without the consent and or they will be aired only with clear disclaimer that they are unofficial, incomplete and partial results.

Election Commission will evolve a suitable mechanism for the implementation of Media Code of Ethics prepared by the representatives of various media organizations. The Complaint Committee will be headed by Add. DG (PR), ECP. It will comprise representatives from PBA, APNS, CPNE, Radio Pakistan and some other media organizations.

The complete text of Media Code of Conduct issued by Election Commission for the general elections is as follows:

## **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 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 also follow professional standards and strive for accuracy, balance and impartiality as far as possible.

2.2. News media will try to the best of its ability that news, 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 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 and where malicious intent is demonstrated,

b) Discourage 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 according to its area of target audience.

### **Guideline 3 - Laws Restricting Freedom of Expression**

Freedom of expression and the rights of journalists to report freely should be respected by all parties/candidates and state authorities during the election. There should be provision of full access to information during the 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 penalized 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 election coverage unless there is a real danger or threat of imminent harm and violence.

#### **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 during the course of election campaigns. This, however, will not apply to the repeat/recorded telecasts or publications.

#### **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 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, analyses and editorial opinion.

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

#### **Guideline 10 - Direct Access Programmes**

10.1. Publicly owned media should grant all political parties/candidates airtime and news space for direct access programmes on a fair and non-discriminatory basis.

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 levels 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 or opposed to the democratic process and constitutional framework should be avoided.

10.4 Direct access programmes by the state media 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 favourable times than those of others.

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

10.6 a party/candidates are to be allowed to purchase airtime/space for political advertisements they should have access to such time/space in a transparent manner in accordance with the Code of Ethics for political Parties.

### **Guideline 11 - Special Information Programmes and voter access**

11.1. During elections, the media should endeavor to 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 obligation of balance and impartiality.

### **Guideline 12 - Voter Education**

12.1. Publicly owned 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 endeavor to also introduce such programmes as a matter of public service.

12.2. Voter education programmes must endeavor be accurate and impartial and must attempt effectively to 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 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 elections 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 Complain 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.

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