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# **THE ELECTION CHARTER FOR NIGERIAN JOURNALISTS**

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

This Charter of Election Good Practice, freely adopted by independent editors and journalists of Nigeria, is a voluntary commitment to raising professional standards during the most vital moments in the democratic cycle. It sets the threshold of fundamental values by which the country's media can judge itself and be judged. It both determines the rules which the signatories to this Code undertake to observe and tells Nigeria's electors what they are entitled to expect from a free and responsible media sensitive to the needs of its audience during the democratic election process.

At its heart, the Code seeks to balance freedom of expression and the media's right to be partisan, and the equal rights of electors to expect openness, honesty and fair-dealing in the reporting of elections. It specifies standards of accuracy, professional integrity and due sensitivity that embrace the best values both of Nigeria's cultural heritage and ethnic diversity and of modern international society. It also safeguards journalism in the genuine public interest and the freedom to editorialise: to challenge, stimulate, campaign, and criticise.

It is essential that a voluntary code be honoured not only to the letter, but also in the full spirit. It should neither be interpreted so narrowly as to compromise its commitment to respect individual rights nor so broadly as to prevent publication in the public interest.

The Code should be strictly observed by all participating publishers, editors and their journalists and contributors – including non-journalists – in print format, broadcasting and on-line.

## 2. ACCURATE REPORTING

2.1: The media must take all reasonable care to avoid inaccuracy, misrepresentation or distortion in reporting election news, photographs and other images. Any significant digital manipulation of images should be clearly labelled.

2.2: Fact-checking – and the avoidance of fake news – is paramount, especially when using externally-sourced material, where the provenance of images or text is uncertain or suspect. Online material, such as from blogs or social media, should be treated with great caution and not be re-posted without validity-checks back to the original source. Where verification of facts is not feasible or practicable, that should be clearly stated in the report.

2.3: Editors and their staff, including external contributors, should not publish material in such a way as to endorse any matter which they know or have reason to believe to be false, inaccurate, prejudiced or unfairly biased.

2.4: Plagiarism must be avoided. Legitimate use of another person's work should be duly attributed.

2.5: The press, while free to be partisan and to editorialise and campaign in elections, must distinguish clearly between comment, conjecture and fact and have due regard for overall fairness and balance.

### 3. CORRECTIONS

3.1: Where the editor recognises that a report was materially incorrect, it should be corrected at the first opportunity and with due prominence – and, where appropriate, with an apology –except where a public remedy is against the aggrieved party's wishes.

### 4. OPPORTUNITY TO REPLY

4.1: A fair and reasonable opportunity to reply should be given to individuals or organisations in the campaign in respect of factually incorrect statements significantly endangering their reputation, privacy or office. The reply should be confined to the complainant's version of the facts and no longer than necessary to correct the alleged inaccuracy.

4.2: Media or journalists, who respond to a complainant's reply other than to apologise or regret the error, should then be prepared to offer the aggrieved party a fresh opportunity to reply.

## 5. CONFIDENTIAL SOURCES

5.1: Every journalist has a moral obligation to:

- i. Protect confidential sources of information, unless that source authorises otherwise.
- ii. Honour genuine agreements not to publish comments made on an off-the-record basis unless there is an over-riding public interest in publication.

## 6. GENERAL REPORTING and WRITING

6.1: **Hate Speech:** A journalist shall not knowingly or wilfully promote communal or religious discord or violence, by any means, with intent to influence the outcome of an election, or any other reason.

6.2: Special care should be taken to avoid dealing with any such issues in a discriminatory manner that might inflame election tensions, even without intent.

6.3**Social issues:** In dealing with election coverage of a particularly shocking or emotionally painful nature – such as atrocity, violence, drug abuse, brutality, sadism, sexual salacity or obscenity – the press should take special care to present facts, opinions, photographs and graphics with due sensitivity and discretion, subject to its duty to publish in the public interest.

6.4i: **Discrimination:** The media must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to a candidate on the grounds of race, colour, religion, gender, or to any physical or mental illness or disability.

6.4ii. They must avoid publishing details of a person's race, religion, physical or mental illness or disability unless these are directly relevant to the story

## 7. HARASSMENT and SUBTERFUGE

7.1: Journalists, including photo-journalists, should not seek to obtain election information or images through intimidation, harassment, misrepresentation or subterfuge; or use of long-lens cameras or listening devices; or intercept private telephone calls or digital communications, unless this can be justified in the public interest and the material cannot be obtained by other means.

## 8. INTEGRITY

8.1: **Conflicts of interest** should be avoided. All journalists should act with integrity and honour in the performance of their work and conduct themselves with openness and transparency.

8.2i: They are free to be partisan and take an active part in the election debate but must not hide behind pretence of impartiality, which could deceive readers and voters.

8.2ii Payment should not be sought or accepted as a reward for including favourable – or excluding hostile – editorial election material.

8.2iii Journalists should not accept offers or gifts that might threaten their integrity.

8.2iv If such conflict is genuinely unavoidable, it should normally be disclosed to the reader.

8.2v They should inform their editor or responsible superior of any possible conflict, such as a compromising personal connection with any candidate or story in which they are significantly engaged.

8.2vi Media companies should disclose to readers any significant corporate or political relationship or direct or indirect connection with election stories they publish.

## 9. INTERPRETATION

In extenuating cases, there may be exceptions to these rules, where that can be clearly demonstrated by the media concerned to be in the greater public interest.

The Public Interest includes:

9.1i. The protection of democracy, good governance, freedom of expression, human rights and keeping the people informed of the actions of their elected government, political parties and other public officials.

9.1ii. This also includes, but is not confined to:

- Deliberate or accidental interference with the course of the election.
- Detecting or exposing crime or the threat of electoral, or other, crime.
- Disclosing a person or organisation's failure or likely failure to comply with any legal or electoral obligation to which they are subject.
- Disclosing a miscarriage of justice.
- Raising or contributing to an important matter of public debate, including serious cases of impropriety, unethical conduct or incompetence concerning the public.
- Disclosing concealment, or likely concealment, of any of the above.
- Protecting public health and security and social, cultural and educational standards;
- Protecting the public from being misled by some statement or action of an individual or organisation.

*9.2: In any case where the public interest is involved, the Editor or journalist concerned should be able to demonstrate beyond doubt how the public interest was served.*