

## **The Nigerian Media Code of Election Coverage**

### **PREAMBLE**

*WHEREAS* it is an established principle that informed consent promotes democracy;

*WHEREAS* it is equally established that democracy thrives on good democratic practises, the kernel of which is the right of the people, to freely and knowledgably choose their representatives;

*RECOGNIZING* that the media enables voters to make informed choices by providing information that enhance their knowledge of electoral processes;

*NOTING* that the media as watchdog of the society should be catalysts of transparent electoral processes and credible, free, fair and peaceful elections;

*REALIZING* that this obligation entails the performance of oversight, public education, open forum and conflict management roles by the media during elections;

*CONSCIOUS* that the effective performance of these important roles requires the observance of the highest standards of professionalism, maximum compliance with regulatory frameworks and deference to the public good and interest;

*AGREEING* therefore that it is desirable to have a set of guidelines that regulate the professional conduct of the media and journalists during elections;

*MINDFUL* of the fact that compliance with the guidelines will facilitate credible elections and corresponding social order;

KNOWING that such guidelines should align with international standards, instruments and declarations on best practices in election reporting with the underpinning principles of:

- The promotion of the right of citizens to freely express themselves and have unfettered access to information on the electoral processes;
- The protection of the right of the media to freely access and truthfully disseminate information on the electoral processes;
- The promotion of the right of media access by parties, candidates and under-represented groups; and
- The promotion of democratic norms and values.

WE, the representatives of Nigerian media organisations, institutions, professional bodies and support groups, hereby agree to abide by this MEDIA CODE OF ELECTION COVERAGE.

### **STATEMENT OF BROAD PRINCIPLES**

This media code of election coverage is predicated on the principle and expectation that relevant institutional stakeholders including the Government, the Political Parties, the Election Management Body and Civil Society Organisations will contribute to the creation of an enabling environment for the media to perform its professional and social obligations during electoral processes.

#### **i. The Government**

- The government and its agencies shall ensure the safety of journalists during electoral processes, including refraining from assault or intimidation in any manner whatsoever;
- The government and its relevant agencies shall ensure prompt investigation and prosecution of any individual or group accused of assault or intimidation against the media and journalists during electoral processes;
- The government and its agencies shall channel any complaint over the conduct of journalists during electoral processes to regulatory or

legal institutions and refrain from extra-judicial actions or other forms of self-help;

- The government and its agencies shall ensure the free movement of journalists in any part of the country during electoral processes and refrain from any act that shall inhibit such;
- The government shall abide by institutional, regulatory and legal frameworks requiring equitable access to state media by parties and candidates contesting elections.

ii. The Political Parties

- Political parties shall respect the right of journalists to cover and report their activities and refrain from harassing them in any manner whatsoever;
- Political parties should support the investigation of any act of assault or intimidation against the media and journalists by their members or agents and ensure that alleged perpetrators are promptly brought to justice;
- Political parties shall channel any complaint over the conduct of journalists covering their activities to regulatory or legal institutions and refrain from extra-judicial actions or any other form of self-help;
- Political parties shall provide prompt notification and adequate information on their activities;
- Political parties shall **not** offer bribes or other forms of inducement to journalists to publish or suppress information about themselves or their activities.

iii. The Election Management Body

- The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) shall proactively provide the media and journalists with information on its activities to aid the factual and credible reporting of the electoral processes;

- The Independent National Electoral Commission shall provide information and materials to the media to enable them carry out accurate and effective civic and voter education;
- The Independent National Electoral Commission should support capacity building for journalists and other media professionals on the reporting of elections;
  - The Independent National Electoral Commission shall make electoral information freely available to the media to enhance factual and credible reporting of electoral processes;

#### iv. Civil Society Organisations and Media Support Groups

- CSOs and Media Support Groups shall collaborate with the media on the conduct of civic and voter education;
- CSOs and Media Support Groups shall support capacity building for Journalists and other media professionals on election reporting;
- CSOs and Media Support Groups shall take proactive measures in the defense of the right of the media and journalists to freely report electoral processes without any form of harassment or intimidation;
- CSOs and Media Support Groups shall proactively share reports of their observations of electoral processes with the media.

### **Section 1.**

#### 1.0. Equitable Access

*The performance of campaign platform and public forum role of the Nigerian media during elections requires deference to the right of parties and candidates in elections to equitable media access especially as envisaged by legislative and institutional frameworks and other relevant instruments including the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended), the Nigerian Broadcasting Code (as revised) and the Nigeria Press Organisation Code of Ethics for Nigerian Journalists. It also requires giving opportunity to under-represented groups to express their views.*

Accordingly:

### 1.1. Parties and Candidates

#### *The Responsibility of Media Organisations*

- 1.1.1. A broadcast medium shall ensure equitable allocation of time at specific but similar periods for all parties contesting elections to state their programmes;
- 1.1.2. A media organisation shall regularly apply the principle of equity in the coverage and reportage of campaigns and other activities of parties and candidates contesting elections;
- 1.1.3. A media organisation shall at all times uphold the right of parties and candidates to reply to allegations made against them;
- 1.1.4. A broadcast medium shall strive to ensure the participation of all parties and candidates contesting elections in political debates.

### 1.2. Under-represented groups

#### *The Responsibility of Media Organisations*

- 1.2.1. A media organisation shall, as a matter of deliberate editorial policy, target under-represented groups, especially women, youths, persons living with disabilities and rural dwellers in the coverage of electoral processes;
- 1.2.2. A media organisation shall consciously reflect the views and perspectives of women, youths, persons living with disabilities and rural dwellers in electoral reports.

## **Section 2.**

### **2.0. Professionalism & Social Responsibility**

*As the chief purveyor of information on the electoral processes, the media shall at all times embrace best professional practises by acting in accordance with the principles of social responsibility.*

Accordingly:

2.1. Fairness, Accuracy & Balance

*The responsibility of journalists*

- 2.1.1. A journalist shall report elections accurately and without bias;
- 2.1.2. A journalist shall report elections in a fair and balanced manner;
- 2.1.3. A journalist shall report only fact-based electoral information;
- 2.1.4. A journalist shall verify any allegation made against a party, candidate or any other interest and reflect all sides in the story;
- 2.1.5. A journalist shall report the views of candidates and political parties directly and in their own words, rather than as they are interpreted by others;

*The responsibility of media organisations*

- 2.1.6. A media organisation shall ensure accurate and impartial voter education on parties, candidates, registration, verification, voting centres, voting procedures, complaint procedures, etc as provided by relevant agencies;
- 2.1.7. A media organisation shall disseminate voter education in indigenous languages and through messages that target under-represented groups including women, youths and People Living with Disabilities;
- 2.1.8. A media organisation shall uphold the right of the people to free expression by providing opportunity for ordinary citizens to express their views during electoral processes.

Section 3:

### 3.0. Ethical Conduct

Good journalism requires decent conduct that conforms to acceptable social norms, values and ethical codes; it also requires that journalists are well resourced and are able to act independently of the subjects of their reports.

Accordingly:

#### 3.1. Integrity

##### *The responsibility of journalists*

- 3.1.1. A journalist shall NOT solicit or accept bribes or make other pecuniary demands from parties and candidates to publish or suppress reports;
- 3.1.2. A journalist shall NOT betray partisan interest by presenting personal opinion as facts in reports;
- 3.1.3. A journalist shall NOT betray partisan interest by donning the insignia of candidates and parties;

##### *The responsibility of media organisations*

- 3.1.4. A media organisation shall respect and abide by the confidentiality of sources who so request;
- 3.1.5. A media organisation shall provide adequate resources for journalists to independently report activities of parties and candidates;
- 3.1.6. A media organisation shall refrain from publishing or airing news items and interviews that are patently one-sided.

#### 3.2. Credibility:

##### *The responsibility of journalists*

- 3.2.1. A journalist shall use investigative methods and instruments to ensure factual and accurate reporting of electoral processes;

3.2.2. A journalist shall report electoral processes proactively and avoid excessive reliance on press releases and media briefings;;

3.2.3. A journalist shall not deliberately distort or misrepresent the facts of a political or electoral issue;

*The responsibility of media organisations*

3.2.4. A media organisation shall at all times uphold the right of reply to issues in election reports and programmes;

3.2.5. A media organisation shall promptly correct any inaccurate, misleading or false information with the same prominence as the original report.

3.3. Opinion Polls:

*The responsibility of journalists*

3.3.1. A journalist shall ensure due diligence and exercise restraint in reporting the findings of election opinion polls by clearly stating the context, particularly:

- Those who commissioned and conducted the poll;
- The specific questions that were asked;
- The number and diversity of people interviewed; and
- The limitations and margin of error of the poll;

*The responsibility of media organisations*

3.3.2. A media organisation shall make use of objective methodologies that neither favour nor exclude particular groups and interests in conducting election opinion polls.

3.4. Endorsements:

*The responsibility of media organisations*

3.4.1. A media organisation that endorses candidate(s) for particular office(s) shall disclose that the endorsement represents ONLY its opinion and will not impair the



balanced coverage of campaigns by all parties and candidates contesting elections.

### 3.5. Political advertisement:

#### *The responsibility of media organisations*

3.5.1. A media organisation shall clearly identify political adverts and advertorials and refrain from presenting them as independent news or opinion of the organisation;

3.5.2. A media organisation shall not publish or air political adverts, advertorials and sponsored political news that seek to create hatred or incite violence.

## **Section 4.**

### 4.0. Hate Speech and Incitement

Hate speech and other forms of incitement could lead to violence and threaten the democratic fabric of a society. The social obligations of the media during elections therefore include the prevention of hate speech.

Accordingly:

#### *The responsibility of journalists*

4.1. A journalist shall make use of temperate language in reporting electoral processes;

4.2. A presenter of a live programme shall refrain from airing pejorative comments;

#### *The responsibility of media organisations*

4.3. A media organisation shall reject any material intended for publication or airing by parties, candidates and other interests that contains hateful or inciting words and messages;

4.4. A media organisation shall refrain from publishing or airing abusive editorial comments or opinions that denigrate individuals or groups on account of disability, race, ethnicity, tribe, gender or belief;

- 4.5. A media organisation shall meticulously monitor the content of its social media platforms to stop the spread of hate and inciting messages;
- 4.6. A broadcast medium shall, prior to a recorded or a live political debate, request participants to endorse a NO-HATE-SPEECH MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING committing them NOT to use words or gestures that disparage others on account of disability, race, ethnicity, tribe, gender or belief.

## **Section 5.**

### 5.0. Conflict Sensitivity

Violent conflicts are obstacles to the conduct of free, fair and peaceful elections as they could lead to voters' apathy and hinder the free performance of media roles and responsibilities during electoral processes.

Accordingly:

#### *The responsibility of journalists*

- 5.1. A journalist shall be conflict-sensitive and pro-actively report early warning signals of possible outbreak of violent conflict during elections;
- 5.2. A journalist shall work for the de-escalation of violent conflict should they occur during elections;
- 5.3. A journalist shall give equitable opportunity to diverse sides of a political or electoral conflict to state their case;
- 5.4. A journalist shall use temperate language and non-offensive images in reporting political/electoral tensions and conflicts;
- 5.5. A journalist shall keep to the facts of a political/electoral conflict;
- 5.6. A journalist shall be cautious in reporting figures and identities of casualties of violent conflicts;

#### *The responsibility of media organisations*

- 5.7. A media organisation shall work for the reduction of conflict and promote the common value of peace without compromising the duty to inform;
- 5.8. A media organisation shall exercise good judgement in the choice of news stories and headlines.

## **Section 6.**

### **6.0. Monitoring & Implementation**

- 6.1. A media organisation shall regularly monitor its election reports to ensure compliance with the standards set out in this Nigerian Media Code of Election Coverage
- 6.2. The organisations endorsing this document agree to make use of internal mechanisms including the office of the ombudsman, the ethics and disciplinary committee etc to ensure implementation.

## **Section 7.**

### **7.0. Binding provisions/effective date of operation:**

- 7.1. The regulations in this code were adopted on the 30<sup>th</sup> day of October, 2014 by:

- Newspapers Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN)
- Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ)
- Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE)
- Broadcasting Organisations of Nigeria (BON)
- Radio, Television, Theatre and Arts Workers Union of Nigeria (RATTAWU)
- Nigeria Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ)
- Media Rights Agenda (MRA)
- International Press Centre (IPC)