A Manual on
Promoting Professional Media Coverage and Conflict Sensitive Reporting of the 2023 Election in Sierra Leone

PREFACE

This manual introduces and emphasises the knowledge of journalists, station managers and editors on professional media coverage of elections with specific reference to the electoral processes, electoral legal framework, covering and reporting elections, conflict-sensitive reporting, guidelines on elections reporting in Sierra Leone and the safety and security of journalists.

The manual is produced within the context of professional media coverage of the elections with specific reference to conflict-sensitive reporting. Much of the aspect on conflict-sensitive reporting, that is contained in the second manual, is derived from Ross Howard's works. This manual also contains various presentations on the electoral processes and elections reporting from the past presentations and materials from MRCG's training sessions in 2018, the then National Electoral Commission (NEC), Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC) and the Independent Media Commission (IMC).

Through the responsible practice of professional journalism, journalists will perform their role in the electoral process and contribute to the promotion of democracy, peace and stability in the nation.

Editors, station managers and journalists are expected to use this manual as a guide to promote good journalistic practices before, during and after elections, thus preventing any potential conflict.

Special thanks to Dr. Isaac Massaquoi, Mr. Joshua Nicol, Dr. Tonya Musa, Mr. Khalil Kallon, Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone (ECSL) and Africa Check whose presentations informed the production of this manual.

Francis Sowa
National Coordinator, MRCG

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TOPIC ONE: THE ELECTORAL PROCESSES AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

AIM OF THE TOPIC
To enable participants, understand the laws, regulations, policies and codes dealing with electoral processes in Sierra Leone.

Content	The electoral laws: international and national instruments
Training Methodology	Presentation, discussions and exercises
Training Materials	Projector and laptop, flipcharts, markers
Key Reading Materials/Sources	The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Constitution of Sierra Leone, Act No. 6 of 19911, Public Elections Act, 2022 Political Parties Regulation Commission (PPRC) Act, 2022 ECSL's Presentation on the Proportional Representation

The constitutions of most developing democracies include the international standards for elections defined by the United Nations in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966 and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, 1981. (These treaties specify that each citizen has the right to participate in elections as a voter and/or candidate.

In order to achieve efficient and impartial electoral coverage, journalists must first prepare themselves by acquiring basic knowledge of any relevant legal document. To be able to inform others, the journalist should first be well informed.

Thus, journalists covering elections also need to have some knowledge of legal documents such as the Constitution, the Electoral Code, and any media regulations associated with their work.

The Electoral Process in Sierra Leone

The Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone is an independent body set up as the primary Elections Management Body pursuant to Section 33 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991 (Act No. 6 of 1991). Further extensions of the mandate are found in the Public Elections Act (PEA), 2022 (Act No. 17 of 2022).

The independence of the Commission to perform its mandate and functions is guaranteed under Section 33(11) of the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991(Act No. 6 of 1991).

The functions of the Commission according to the Constitution include: the conduct of all public elections and referenda, the registration of voters, boundaries delimitation, voter education and making of regulations for the efficient performance of its functions such as the powers to appoint its own staff.

Constitutional provisions on elections in Sierra Leone

Chapter IV of the Constitution of Sierra Leone, 1991 (Act No. 6 of 1991) provides for 'The Representation of the People.'

This Chapter provides for the establishment and functions of the Electoral Commission and the Political Parties Registration Commission, which is now The Political Parties Regulation Commission, after the amendment of its Act in 2022. Sections 31-39 of the Constitution deal with:

- Registration of Voters
- The Electoral Commission
- Functions of the Electoral Commission
- Political Parties Registration Commission
- Registration and Conduct of Political Parties
- Secret Ballot
- Referendum
- Constituencies and Elections
- Filling of Vacancies

Constitutional Amendment 2001

The Constitution of Sierra Leone (Amendment) Act 2001 amended Section 38 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991. It provides:

The Constitution of Sierra Leone is amended— (a) by the insertion immediately after Section 38 thereof of the following: —

38A. (1) Where, under any law for the time being in force, a date for a general election of Members of Parliament has been appointed but constituencies have not been established in accordance with subsection (3) of section 38 for the purposes of such election, the President may, after consultation with the Electoral Commission, direct that such election shall be conducted on the basis of the existing districts in a manner to be known as the district block representation system instead of constituencies.

(2) In the district block representation system, the election shall be contested in each specified district by political parties for the block or number of seats in Parliament allocated to the district by or under an Act of Parliament and the political parties shall be allocated seats in Parliament by the Electoral Commission on the basis of their proportional share of the total district vote.

(3) Members of Parliament for the seats won by a political party in a district shall be determined by the Electoral Commission from a list of the candidates of that political party for the district submitted to the Electoral Commission before the date of the election and showing the order of preference of the candidates.

Constitutional amendment 2022

The Constitution of Sierra Leone (Amendment) Act, 2022 (Act No. 22 of 2022) is an Act to amend the Constitution of Sierra Leone (Act No. 6 of 199), to rename the "Political Parties Registration Commission" as the "Political Parties Regulation Commission", to replace the Administrator and Registrar General with Executive Secretary as secretary to the Commission and to provide for other related matters.

The Public Elections Act 2022 (Act No. 17 of 2022)

The Public Elections Act 2022 is an Act to repeal and replace the Public Elections Act 2012 (Act No. 4 of 2012), to provide for supplementary provisions to Sections 32 and 33 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991(Act No. 6 of 1991) with respect to the Electoral Commission and to provide for other related matters.

The Act contains the following part:

- Part I - Preliminary
- Part II-The Electoral Commission 2. Continuation of Commission.
- Part III-Registration of Voters
- Part IV-Procedure for Registration of Voters Appointment Of
- Part V-Presidential Elections
- Part VI-Election of Members of Parliament
- Part VII-Procedures and Arrangements for Elections
- Part VIII-Election of Paramount Chief Members of Parliament
- Part IX-Election of Members of Local Councils
- Part X-Election of Village or Town Head
- Part XI-Electoral Offences
- Part XII - Offences Related to Information Technology
- Part XIII-Election Offences and Petitions Court
- Part XIV-Election Campaign Period
- Part XV- Miscellaneous Provisions

Section 2(1) of the Act provides that "There shall continue in existence the Electoral Commission…" while Section 2(2) of the said Act provides that "The Electoral Commission shall consist of - (a) the Chief Electoral Commissioner, who shall be the Chairman; and (b) 5 other members who shall be known as Electoral Commissioners, appointed by the President for each region, after consultation with the leaders of all registered political parties, subject to the approval of Parliament and in accordance with Subsection (3) of Section 32 of the Constitution."

Section 7(1) provides that "The object of the Commission is to perform the following functions, in accordance with section 33 of the Constitution

(a) the continuous registration of eligible voters for public elections and referenda;

(b) the preparation, maintenance and regular revision of the Register of Voters;

(c) the delimitation of constituencies and wards in accordance with the Constitution and any other enactment;

(d) the regulation of the process for nomination of candidates for elections;

(e) the conduct of civic electoral education;

(f) the facilitation of the observation, monitoring and evaluation of elections;

(g) the promotion of sound democratic election processes; and

(h) such other functions as may be provided for by the Constitution, this Act or any other enactment."

Types of elections in Sierra Leone

The National Electoral Commission, now the Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone, as mandated by the Constitution, conducts the following:
- **Presidential Election** – This is an election to choose the President.
- **Parliamentary Election** – This is an election to choose a representative (Ordinary Member of Parliament) after every five years.
- **Paramount Chief Member of Parliament Elections** – These elections are conducted to choose Paramount Chief district representatives to Parliament. Voters in these elections are called an Electoral College. An electoral college is a group of people who are given the mandate to elect or select representatives on behalf of the people. This applies to the Paramount Chieftaincy elections.
- **Local Council Elections** – These are elections for choosing Mayors of Municipalities, (Cities) District Council Chairmen and Councilors. Local Council elections are held after every five years in Sierra Leone.
- **By-Election** – A by-election is an election conducted to replace an elected representative who has died, resigned or lost a petition resulting in a vacant seat.
- **Referendum** – This is an election in which voters express their opinion on an issue (such as new Constitution or new provisions within the existing Constitution)

The Electoral Cycle

An electoral cycle is a period in which a range of activities are undertaken within one election period. It comprises three phases or periods in which various activities take place.

Pre-Election Period – This is a period way before the election date. It is the period for planning, training, voter registration, stakeholders' engagements, and civic education.

Election Period – This is the actual period when the electoral climate is obvious. It is a period for nomination, distribution of ballot papers and voting materials, establishment of codes of conduct
campaigns, voting, counting and announcement of results, and complaints and appeals in relation to the elections.

Post-Election Period – This includes institutional strengthening and capacity/professional development, networking with other partners, electoral management body reforms, legal reforms proposals, archiving and research and audits and evaluations.

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

LEGAL FRAMEWORK: Section 38(A) of the Constitution of Sierra Leone, 1991 as amended in 2002.

"Where, under any law for the time being in force, a date for a general election of Members of Parliament has been appointed but constituencies have not been established in accordance with subsection (3) of section 38 for the purposes of such election, the President may, after consultation with the Electoral Commission, direct that such election shall be conducted on the basis of the existing districts in a manner to be known as the district block representation system instead of constituencies."

SUPREME COURT'S DECLARATION ON PR SYSTEM:

"That pursuant to and subject to the current law in the country inclusive of the Constitution and Statutory Instrument Nos. 13 & 14 of 16th November, 2002, Local Council elections will be expected to be by the District Block Representation system approved as the mode for the 2023 elections."

ELECTORAL SYSTEMS TO BE USED FOR THE 2023 ELECTIONS

Electoral System: A system by which votes cast are converted into seats. Example, Simple Plurality/First Past the Post; Proportional Representation; Two Round System, etc.

Presidential Election: Majoritarian/Two-Round System.

Mayor/Chairperson Election: Simple Plurality/FPTP/Winner takes all.

Parliamentary Election (PR District Block System): an electoral system in which established districts serve as electoral areas to elect multi-member representatives. Seats are assigned in proportion to the percentage of votes obtained by a political party or independent candidate.

Local Council Election: Proportional Representation system in which council localities serve as electoral areas to elect multi-member representatives. Seats are assigned based on percentage of votes obtained.

In Sierra Leone PR National List was used 1996. In 2002 District Block PR System was used.

How Will PR Work for the 2023 Elections?

- PR will only be used for electing Members of Parliament and Local Councillors.

- For Parliamentary elections, District Block system will be used in which all 16 electoral districts serve as multi-member electoral areas.

- For Local Council elections, the 22 Localities serve as multi-member electoral areas.

- For both Parliamentary and Local Council elections, Party List Proportional Representation is going to be used.

- For Nomination of Political Party Candidates, the leadership of political parties will submit lists of endorsed candidates (twice the number required) in order of preference.

- For Independent Candidates, nomination is done as an individual.

- "For every 3 candidate nominated…, one of them **shall** be female (Section 58(2) of the Public Elections Act 2022).

- Nominated candidates MUST pay a nomination fee as prescribed by the Public Elections Act 2022. (Mandatory for nominated candidates of number of seats available).

- **President** = Minimum wage x 12 months x 5 years

- **Member of Parliament & PCMP candidate** = Minimum wage x 6 months

- **Mayor or Chairman** = Minimum wage x 3 months

- **Councilor** = Minimum Wage

- **Village Head** = Half of Minimum Wage

Allocation of seats

- Seats will be allocated to Political Party candidates in the order of preference as they appear on the list.
- A Threshold of **11.9%** for Parliamentary and **4.5%** for Local Council election is required to win a seat.
- Threshold is calculated by dividing the total number seats by the number of electoral areas multiplied by 100.
- Parliamentary election $16 \div 135 \times 100 = 11.9\%$
- Local Council election $22 \div 493 \times 100 = 4.5\%$
- Threshold is determined by the total number **Valid Votes** obtained by a political party or independent candidate

Allocation of Seats for PR System

Allocation of seats for District Block PR system is based on

(i) Current parliamentary seat allocation based on the 2016 Population and Housing Census figures and 132 Parliamentary Seats and

(ii) Seat allocation based on the 2021 Mid-Term population and housing census using the Highest Remainder Method and on 132 seats.

(iii) Add the two seat allocations and divide by two for **135** seats.

Allocation of seats for Local Council PR system is based on

(i)   Current local council seat allocation base on the 2016 Population and Housing Census figures and 489 Local Council Seats and

(ii) Seat allocation based on the 2021 Mid-Term population and housing census using the Highest Remainder Method and based on 489 seats

(iii) Add the two seat allocations and divide by two for **493** seats.

Allocation of 135 Seats to 16 District Blocks

	Allocation of seats in 2016	Allocated based on 2021 Census figure	Total	Average
KAILAHUN	10	10	20	10
KENEMA	11	13	24	12
KONO	9	11	20	10
	30	**34**		**32**
BOMBALI	8	7	15	8
FALABA	4	3	7	4
KOINADUGU	4	4	8	4
TONKOLILI	10	10	20	10
	26	**24**		**26**
KAMBIA	6	6	12	6
KARENE	5	5	10	5
PORT LOKO	10	9	19	10
	21	**20**		**21**
BO	11	13	24	12
BONTHE	4	5	9	5
MOYAMBA	6	6	12	6
PUJEHUN	6	7	13	7
	27	**31**		**30**
WESTERN RURAL	8	12	20	10
WESTERN URBAN	20	11	31	16
	28	**23**		**26**
TOTAL	**132**	**132**		**135**

ALLOCATION OF 493 COUNCILOR SEATS TO 22 LOCAL CO

NO	DISTRICT	LOCALITY	Allocation of seats in 2016
1	KAILAHUN	KAILAHUN DISTRICT COUNCIL	29
2	KENEMA	KENEMA CITY COUNCIL	18
3	KENEMA	KENEMA DISTRICT COUNCIL	25
4	KONO	KONO NEW SEMBEHUN CITY COUNCIL	15
5	KONO	KONO DISTRICT COUNCIL	24
6	BOMBALI	MAKENI CITY COUNCIL	16
7	BOMBALI	BOMBALI DISTRICT COUNCIL	21
8	FALABA	FALABA DISTRICT COUNCIL	18
9	KOINADUGU	KOINADUGU DISTRICT COUNCIL	18
10	TONKOLILI	TONKOLILI DISTRICT COUNCIL	29
11	KAMBIA	KAMBIA DISTRICT COUNCIL	23
12	KARENE	KARENE DISTRICT COUNCIL	21
13	PORT LOKO	PORT LOKO CITY COUNCIL	13
14	PORT LOKO	PORT LOKO DISTRICT COUNCIL	28
15	BO	BO CITY COUNCIL	17
16	BO	BO DISTRICT COUNCIL	25
17	BONTHE	BONTHE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL	11
18	BONTHE	BONTHE DISTRICT COUNCIL	18
19	MOYAMBA	MOYAMBA DISTRICT COUNCIL	22
20	PUJEHUN	PUJEHUN DISTRICT COUNCIL	23
21	WESTERN AREA RURAL	WESTERN RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL	27
22	WESTERN AREA URBAN	FREETOWN CITY COUNCIL	48
			489

APPORTIONING OF SEATS

1. Add valid votes obtained by all contestants which total **41,550**

2. Divide valid votes obtained by each candidate by the total valid votes cast and multiply by 100 to get the product E.g. For **Party A: 15,700 ÷ 41,550×100 = 37.7858**

3. Add the product of all political parties and independent candidates that obtain the minimum threshold of **11.9%** and above. **E.g. 37.7858+21.4199+24.5487 = 84%**

4. Divide the product of each political party and independent candidate by the total sum of those that meet the threshold and multiply the quotient by the total number of seats allocated to the district to get a representational quotient.

- **E.g. Party A: 37.7858 ÷ 84 x 4 = 1.7993**

5. Assign to each political party and independent candidate, number of seats equal to the whole number in the representational quotient. E.g. Party A = 1; Independent = 1 and Party E = 1

6. Apportion the remainder of seats using the highest remainder method. Party A with 0.7 shall be assigned one more seat.

Apportioning of Seats for Parliamentary Election

This refers to how valid votes cast are converted into seats won.

	Party A	Party B	Independent candidate	Party D	Party E	Party F	Total
Threshold	11.9%						
Votes obtained	15,700	4,600	8,900	1,350	10,200	800	41,550
Product/percentage	37.7858	11.0710	21.4200	3.2491	24.5487	1.9254	100
11.9% threshold and above	37.7858		21.4200		24.5487		84
Representational Quotient	1.7993		1.0200		1.1690		4
First apportioning of seat	**1**		**1**		**1**		**3**
Final apportioning of seat using highest remainder	**2**		**1**		**1**		**4**
Next highest-ranking Party					**1**		

1. Add valid votes obtained by all contestants which total **41,550**

2. Divide valid votes obtained by each candidate by the total valid votes cast and multiply by 100 to get a fraction. E.g. For **Party A: 15,700 ÷ 41,550×100 = 37.7858**

3. Add the product of all political parties and independent candidates that obtain the minimum threshold of **4.5%** and above. **E.g. 37.7858+21.4199+11.0709+24.5487 = 95%**

4. Divide the product of each political party and independent candidate by the total sum of those that meet the threshold and multiply the quotient by the total number of seats allocated to the district to get a representational quotient.

- **E.g. Party A: 37.7858 ÷ 95 x 100 = 4.3751**

5. Assign to each political party and independent candidate, a number of seats equal to the whole number in the representational quotient. **E.g., Party A = 4; Party B = 2; Independent = 1 and Party E = 2**

6. Apportion the remainder of seats using the highest remainder method. Party A with 0.8 and Party B with 0.4 shall be assigned one more seat each.

Apportioning of Seats for Local Council Election

This refers to how valid votes cast are converted into seats won.

	Party A	Party B	Independent candidate	Party D	Party E	Party F	Total
Threshold	4.50%						
Votes obtained	15,700	8,900	4,600	1,350	10,200	800	41,550
Product/percentage	37.7858	21.4200	11.0710	3.2491	24.5487	1.9254	100
4.5% threshold and above	37.7858	21.4200	11.0710		24.5487		95
Representational Quotient	4.3752	2.4802	1.2819		2.8425		11
First apportioning of seat	**4**	**2**	**1**		**2**		**9**
Final apportioning of seat using highest remainder	**4**	**3**	**1**		**3**		**11**
Next highest-ranking Party	**1**						

ELECTION PREPAREDNESS

No	Districts	Male	Female	District Total	Total Disability
GENDER AND DISABILITY ANALYSIS OF FINAL VOTER REGISTRATION FIGURES				
1	Kailahun	91,340	102,238	193,578	1,189
2	Kenema	153,426	164,552	317,978	2,628
3	Kono	88,724	85,481	174,205	1,221
4	Bombali	95,222	111,028	206,250	1,738
5	Falaba	31,844	37,284	69,128	357
6	Koinadugu	39,561	45,697	85,258	506
7	Tonkolili	94,272	113,070	207,342	1,601
8	Kambia	70,041	82,508	152,549	992
9	Karene	45,405	54,740	100,145	907
10	Port Loko	106,848	130,075	236,923	1,503
11	Bo	150,563	167,022	317,585	1,699
12	Bonthe	51,007	56,525	107,532	848
13	Moyamba	68,374	81,836	150,210	1,440
14	Pujehun	56,968	58,821	115,789	1,296
15	W/ Area Rural	166,243	175,521	341,764	1,990
16	WArea Urban	304,891	293,131	598,022	2,470
	NATIONAL TOTAL	**1,614,729**	**1,759,529**	**3,374,258**	**22,385**

VOTER REGISTRATION ANALYSIS

NO	DISTRICT	NO. OF CENTRES	NO OF STATIONS
POLLING CENTRE AND STATION ANALYSIS		
1	Kailahun	244	679
2	Kenema	371	1125
3	Kono	251	617
4	Bombali	241	720
5	Falaba	141	250
6	Koinadugu	143	309
7	Tonkolili	256	728
8	Kambia	188	548
9	Karene	170	358
10	Port Loko	298	837
11	Bo	330	1109
12	Bonthe	142	385
13	Moyamba	240	537
14	Pujehun	191	422
15	Western Area Rural	142	1162
16	Western Area Urban	282	2046

TOPIC TWO: COVERING AND REPORTING ELECTIONS

AIM OF THE TOPIC
To enable participants understand how to cover and report on the entire electoral processes in Sierra Leone.

Content	Types of elections, Activities within the Electoral Cycle, Elections Reporting, etc.
Training Methodology	Presentation, Discussions and Exercises
Training Materials	Projector and laptop, flipcharts, markers
Key Reading Materials	Massaquoi, I. *Media and Elections, presentations at at the Promoting Professional Media Coverage and Conflict Sensitive Reporting of the 2018 Multi-Tier Elections in Sierra Leone* Reporters Without Borders- For Freedom of Information and Organization Internationale Francophonie. *Handbook For Journalists During Elections.* Ross Howard; edited by Amanda Gibbs. 2004 IMPACS – Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society. *Media and Elections: An Elections Reporting Handbook* Search for Common Ground and Radio for Peacebuilding Africa. *Responsible Media Coverage of Elections: A Training Guide.*

Introduction

Elections correspond to periods of heightened media coverage and reporting. With each political party wanting to lead the country, these transitional times are often fraught with competitive language, rising tensions, and occasional political violence, sometimes even resulting in violent conflicts. The media is the primary facilitator of these dynamics.

TYPES OF ELECTIONS

Ritualistic Elections

These are elections conducted by countries in fulfilment of a pseudo-democratic five-yearly ritual. It is done mostly to satisfy the demands of mainly Western donors and to create the impression of being democratic among their people.

Democratic Elections

These are the type of elections that at least meet the accepted minimum standard to pass the democratic test. A key requirement is the acceptance of international observers throughout the process. Their verdict is normally a major plank for democratic legitimacy.

The Media

For elections to be truly free and fair, citizens must also have access to sufficient information about the parties, candidates and voting procedures. Access to sufficient information can only occur where all the players, including candidates, political parties, citizens, civil society and journalists, can openly provide facts and express political positions.

"Free and fair" elections depend not only on factors like adequate election management bodies, transparency and the absence of coercion. For elections to be truly free and fair, citizens must also have access to sufficient information about the parties, candidates and voting procedures. The media play a vital role in this process, to the extent that democratic elections are simply unthinkable without free media

Role of the Media

In an often fragile context, and with a mind to conflict prevention, journalists must depend on their professional skills. They must commit to delivering thorough, verified, and unbiased information, pulled from a number of diverse sources, to their listeners or readers. At the same time, they must refrain from publishing information that encourages divisions or hostile and unfriendly discussions, which are likely to incite violence or threaten social cohesion.

The processes

Election coverage has improved considerably in Sierra Leone since the end of military rule in 1996. This has been largely due to an exponential increase in media outlets, massive improvement in technology and the constant training of journalists.

But there is a need to constantly re-charge our professional batteries while taking some introspective look at our approach to election reporting at all the stages of the process– registration of voters, nomination of candidates and their profiles, manifestos, voter education, elections and post-elections.

Covering Elections in Sierra Leone

This has largely followed a very familiar path as if all elections were the same. It has been very much more about the personality of the candidates and street carnivals and less about the real issues that the vast majority of the ordinary people care about. The reason for this is we have allowed the politicians and their spin doctors to define the issues of the campaign.
So what are the issues?

On a daily basis, journalists interact with people – the politicians and civil servants, people in the private sector, university students and their lecturers, trade unions and ordinary people in depressed communities throughout the country. Those engagements must help journalists get a sense of their concerns.

Politicians like to make big pronouncements. Ask them **HOW** they will deliver on those promises, and you will surely get some waffle.

Unless we commit ourselves to seeking clear answers to the many **HOW** questions on behalf

of the people, we may as well become public relations outfits.

In some countries, parties have lost elections for failing to live up to their manifesto commitments. Manifestos can be a good starting point for elections reporting.

Reporting on women and persons with disabilities

Journalists must pay particular attention to groups that are traditionally marginalised by their society, such as women and persons with disabilities, and ensure that their voice and concerns are heard during the campaigns.

When covering elections, the media should check whether the nation is signatory to international and regional instruments that commit it to increasing the percentage of women running for and holding political offices. They should pay attention to Section 58(2) of the Public Elections Act 2022 with reference to nomination of women. The section provides that for every three candidates nominated one of them shall be a female.

Political parties and governments should be held accountable as to whether the percentage of women candidates fielded for elections is in accordance with these instruments. If not, why not?

The media also need to look into the type of electoral system(s) followed for presidential, parliamentary and local government elections in the country and whether they help or hinder women's entry into political office.

The media can also analyse trends (if any) in female candidates standing for elections and women holding political offices, using accurate and verifiable data to support the analysis.

The media must also examine the issues affecting persons with disabilities for contesting elections. It should pay attention to raising issues on the participation of persons with disabilities in the electoral processes.

Portrayal/Language

- Does the story contain language that promotes sexism, gender bias or discrimination, or gender stereotypes?
- Does the language hype or sensationalise the situation beyond what has actually happened in order to sell the news and attract audiences?
- Do any of the adjectives used to describe the character or physical appearance of women politicians or candidates convey prejudice?

Challenges to accessing information

Journalists face many constraints in their daily work, thus preventing them from accessing even the most basic data.

In countries where states have monopolised the media landscape for decades, access is restricted by a strong tradition of withholding public information. Yet, free and fair elections

require transparency and communication devoid of deliberate lies and propaganda.

The lack of access to information can lead the media to report rumours, to voice fake opinion polls, and to make hazardous forecasts with devastating consequences.

The second challenge to citizen access to information is the limited reach of most of the media. In many African countries, the written press is limited to the capital city. Print runs are generally small. Even if newspapers circulate from one reader to the next, they still only reach a small number of the urban elite. Extreme poverty means that large portions of the population are illiterate or unable to purchase newspapers.

Costly television set and expensive and unreliable access to electricity mean that televised news also have a very limited reach.

The results

Announcing the final results of an election is never as easy as it may sound. These are times when the nation is normally on edge and any mistake of not following laid down procedures of releasing final results could spark trouble and make ACCEPTANCE difficult.

Helping losing politicians graciously accept defeat and congratulate the winner is a major task of the media and it does not have to wait for the hours after the start of counting. All politicians must trust the media as being fair throughout the electioneering process. When losers publicly accept defeat and congratulate winners, they touch the heart of their supporters and take a major step in Re-Uniting the nation after usually divisive elections.

Remember to inject some humour in the whole campaign

There is no doubt that elections everywhere are very serious matters. But it makes a whole lot of sense to inject some humour into the reporting process particularly in the mainstream media to achieve a few objectives:

1. To re-enforce the humanity of the candidates. Too serious a coverage makes them look super-human. The carry an all-work-and-play personality that scares many voters away.

2. Humour helps bring people together to have a good laugh while receiving serious messages and also lowering expectations particularly in situations where a do-or-die mentality is beginning to take hold – like what we have right now. But it's not the kind of humour that denigrates a particular candidate or makes a mockery of tribes, organizations in a vicious way that is being referred to here. This kind of humour is too dangerous to contemplate.

These days, media appearances by political leaders are becoming too contrived and controlled because of the possibility of negative social media portrayals of the slightest mistakes they make. If we are not able to bring them out for the people to see and hear from them or freely interact with them, we may as well surrender to the growing spin industry that now manifests itself in the many so-called media teams that all candidates now go around with.

Remember to always be even-handed in dealing with parties and individual candidates.

Elections Reporting: Covering Politicians: Dos and Don'ts

- Watch for candidates who employ Public Relations tactics that have nothing to do with real election issues. Some candidates find out that they can call attention to themselves by launching a hate campaign against their opponents rather than addressing important issues.

Beware of Exaggerating Controversy

- Too often some reporters create and exaggerate a potential conflict. Please avoid this.

Equal Time for All

- Keep a meticulous running score on space and play (front page, inside, 1st item – Prominence) given to each candidate. Uneven reporting is the most certain way to lose credibility and readers.

Don't Forget the Voters
- Reporters should keep up with what the voters are thinking, not only through polls and man-in-the-street quick quotes, but by meaningful probing of how families are surviving.
- Remember to cover the regions, not just the key areas of the country.

Beware of Polls
- Polls can be useful but they can be overused and manipulated.

Don't Over-Analyze
- Much of the energy and time devoted to analyzing the candidates' every move would be better utilized telling readers what voters think rather than what you wish would happen.

Beware of Creeping Legitimacy
- This occurs when one news organisation publishes a story based on a rumour and because of the fear of losing out on the story another media house may publish.
- The reporter must never serve as a mere conduit for unchecked personal information on a candidate, especially from a questionable source.
- Stick by your own standard of fact-checking before pulling the trigger.
- During the course of an election campaign, you may have cause to interview many politicians on all sides.
- Before you go to an interview, determine just what it is you want to get out of it. It is normal that you will put down three or four topics you want to discuss.
- Do not feel imprisoned by your list.

Do Some Research
- Gather clippings, check the internet, talk to people who know your subject and his reputation.

Managing information and expectations

Voting and vote-counting may give rise to massive and flagrant fraud, including ballot box-stuffing, and falsification of official results. These types of actions have been on the decrease during the past decade, above all, because of the increased presence of election observers in voting stations.

Still, the risk remains, and fraud may occur at each stage of the process. Possibilities include threats to voters when they cast their ballots, ballot destruction or adding to vote tallies during counting, switching of ballot boxes during transport to the regional election commission, falsification of regional results before their transmission to the national election commission.

Announcement of Results

A journalist should treat the announcement of election results carefully. Covered unwisely, this news can generate unrest, especially when parties or candidates have accused each other during the campaign of planning to commit vote fraud. When challenges and appeals are filed, a journalist must explain precisely the reasons for the appeal and the step-by-step details of the appeal process.

The fundamental rule is that a journalist must never publish or broadcast official election results before the election commission has officially announced them. In most countries, journalists and news organizations face legal penalties for breaking this rule. In Sierra Leone, the Independent Radio Network (IRN) is allowed to announce 'provisional results' posted on polling centres and stations.

Election reporting places obligations of responsibility on professional journalists. This means journalists protect their sources when they cannot be named. It means they use only honest, legal methods to obtain the news. It means journalists avoid reporting what has been reported elsewhere without checking the facts. And even in campaigns, journalism does not knowingly repeat inaccurate allegations and offensive speech without allowing the other side to comment or answer. This is what makes a democratic election – well-informed voters freely making up their own minds.

News reports must be factual, accurate, well-sourced and based on sound evidence.
A culture of ethical and evidence based reporting should be promoted by media houses and be applicable at editorial and journalistic levels.

TOPIC 3: CONFLICT-SENSITIVE REPORTING

AIM OF THE TOPIC
To enable participants understand the concept of conflict-sensitive reporting, appreciate how it should be done and apply such skills in covering and reporting on the 2023 elections in Sierra Leone.

Content	Meaning of conflict, its causes, journalism and conflict and best practices exist for journalists covering conflict, etc.
Training Methodology	Presentation, Discussions and Exercises
Training Materials	Projector and laptop, flipcharts, markers
Key Reading Materials	Nicol, J. *Conflict Sensitive Reporting, presentations at at the Promoting Professional Media Coverage and Conflict Sensitive Reporting of the 2018 Multi-Tier Elections in Sierra Leone* Ross Howard. *Rethinking Peace and Security in Africa The Media and the Rwanda Genocide Conflict Sensitive Journalism- A Hand Book* Tips for Training Conflict Sensitive Reporting, etc.

"Professional journalists do not set out to reduce conflict. They seek to present accurate and impartial news. But it is often through good reporting that conflict is reduced" (Ross Howard).

Conflict-Sensitive Reporting and Elections

Elections are a process, involving citizens, choosing through the ballot box: leaders or rulers, who would preside over their affairs for a given period. Free, fair, credible and transparent elections give legitimacy to an individual or sets of individuals to lord over them, for a specific period of time. Elections are therefore, overwhelmingly, competitive and contribute to heightening of tension.

Elections are a process, involving citizens, choosing through the ballot box: leaders or rulers; who would preside over their affairs for a given period Free, Fair, Credible and Transparent Elections give legitimacy to an individual or; sets of individuals to lord over them, for a specific period of time. Elections are therefore, overwhelmingly competitive; and contribute to heightening of tension.

Gatekeeping Role of the Media

Note

- Elections – being competitive for position, power and authority – may invariably lead to heightened tension.

- Individuals or parties may try to influence the outcome of an election through rigging or gerrymandering of constituencies or electoral districts.

Establish elections coverage structure within the Media outfit.

Key Media Role is to watch-dog the process.

What then is conflict-sensitive reporting?

Conflict-sensitive reporting looks at the way and manner in which newsmen and women take cognizance of the impact of their news stories on the nation (in Krio adage: Dar True wey you go tork wey go mek Marrade ose scatter, nor tork, but dar lie wey go mek man en wef dey togeda, nor frade for lie…

It may increase tensions or enhance prospects for peace.

It also speaks to their ability of limiting the harm/hurt their interpretation of the news event may cause.

Journalists that are conflict-sensitive should not take sides. They should engage in fair/accurate, independent and responsible journalism.

Conflict-Sensitive Journalism

According to Abiodun Onadipe (2002), "Experience around the world has shown that journalists, intentionally or otherwise, are conflict specialists. This is because much time and energy are spent describing and analyzing the behaviour of individuals and groups in conflict".

On the other hand, the media can be an instrument of and for peace if used professionally, in proffering peaceful alternatives to violence.

British/Australian Journalist Phillip Knightly says, when conflict breaks out, the first casualty is the truth, but Professor Johan Galtung says, it's the peace!

The central concept of conflict-sensitive reporting is that violent conflict attracts intense news media attention that requires greater analytical depth and skills to report on it without contributing to further violence or overlooking peace building opportunities.

The intention is to make reporting on conflict more insightful, more comprehensive and thus more influential, since being comprehensive includes making clearer the possibilities of resolving conflict rather than perpetuating it. Conflict-sensitive reporting contributes to reconciliation and peace-building.

Thus, there are many ways we can use conflict-sensitive reporting in creating the conducive environment for Peace.

Journalists can provide the platform for politicians to pitch their manifestos at the public.

Media channels should not be used by politicians to hurl threats/abuses and insults at each other.
The journalist should:
provide information about the electoral process, ensuring everyone understands the electoral

laws and processes;

provide education on how to seek redress for grievances through legal means rather than violence;

Give a voice to marginalized groups;

Fact-check and counteract unfounded rumours;

ensure that their channels are not used as a platform for inflammatory statements by politicians;

not offer a platform for derogatory statements by one politician against his/her opponent.

Power of Words
- The power of words (both connotative and denotative meanings) has far-reaching consequences. For example: Tumultous Crowd/Mammoth/Massive/Hundreds of Thousands

- It is also important to show the power of language and how journalists can manipulate readers or listeners in a certain direction, for example, by reporting on a social group or an ethnic group in a certain way.

- Tabloidization (Sensationalization of News Reports)

- In some cases, journalists might deliberately use inflammatory language, or hate speech. The best known example of this is in Rwanda, where private radio station Radio Television Libre des Mille Collines played a key role in inciting ethnic Hutus to kill Tutsis and inflaming the genocide in 1994 (See The Media and the Rwanda Genocide)

Managing Expectations
- During an Election, everybody expects his/her preferred Candidate or Party to win.

- Opinion Polls— Exit Polls a dangerous Proposition/Prospect

- Managing the Expectations of the Citizenry

- Newspaper headlines proclaiming the Next President abounds

- Announcement of Results…Mandate of ECSL

- Provisional Results may be announced…

The Final Word

- Make the IMC Code of Practice and SLAJ's Code of Ethics your guide!

- Remember, Elections in Africa are very divisive; Sierra Leone is no exception!

- The Media is very crucial in Peace-building; it should support the efforts to strengthen the prospects, for internal peace in formerly war-torn societies; and decrease the likelihood of renewed violent conflict. (Abiodun Onadipe)

- Therefore, the Peace-building Role of the Media, must be recognized at all times!

TOPIC FOUR: GUIDELINES ON ELECTIONS REPORTING IN SIERRA LEONE

AIM OF THE TOPIC
To enable participants understand the ethical standards and Independent Media Commission's guidelines on covering and reporting lections in Sierra Leone.

Content	Regulations and ethical reporting
Training Methodology	Presentation, Discussions and Exercises
Training Materials	Projector and laptop, flipcharts, markers
Key Reading Materials	The Independent Media Commission Act 2020 (Act No. 5 of 2020) The Independent Media Commission Elections (Coverage and Reporting) Regulations, 2022: Statutory Instrument No. 17 of 2022 Independent Media Commission (Print and Electronic Media) Regulations, 2022: Statutory Instrument No. 11 of 2022

1. Introduction

"The Independent Media Commission Elections (Coverage and Reporting) Regulations 2022" contains guidelines for media practitioners and institutions regarding their work during elections. The Regulations were developed in accordance with provisions of the Independent Media Commission Act 2020. The Regulations replaced the provisions on elections coverage in the Independent Media Commission Media Code of Practice, 2007.

The Regulations contain the following:

- Elections Media Coverage and Reporting
- General Elections Media Coverage and Reporting Guidelines
- Complaint and Enforcement Procedures
- Offences

The Regulations apply to media practitioners and institutions in Sierra Leone.

2. Rationale for media coverage and reporting on elections

The coverage and reporting on elections should:

- Promote democracy, peace and good governance.
- Provide fair, adequate and equitable media coverage and reporting of the activities of political parties in Sierra Leone.
- Offer equal opportunity and access to all political parties and candidates in presenting their manifestoes to the public.
- Provide truthful, comprehensive, accurate, balanced and fair account of events in a context which gives them meaning etc.

3. Elections Media Coverage and Reporting

The Regulations require professional coverage and reporting of all political activities.

3.1 General guidelines for elections media coverage and reporting

A media practitioner or institution shall not publish or broadcast any content that will:

- Promote or incite racial, ethnic or regional hatred or bias.
- Promote or cause public disorder, or become a threat to the security of society or the state.
- Ridicule, stigmatise or demonise persons on the basis of gender, race, class, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation and physical or mental ability.

A media practitioner or institution shall:

- Maintain professional independence, free of control and direction of government, opposition, political parties, individuals, groups or organisations.
- Provide truthful, comprehensive, accurate, balanced and fair account of events.
- Serve as a forum for the exchange of public comment, opinion, discussion and criticism in a balanced and reasonable manner.
- Offer an accurate picture of the constituent groups, organisations and parties contesting the elections, elections management bodies and of society in general.
- Undertake to deal responsibly with complaints received in respect of reports published or broadcast, containing errors of fact.

3.2 Coverage and reporting of political activities

A media practitioner or institution shall:

- Collect and disseminate truthful, fair, accurate, impartial, unbiased, objective information.
- Give political parties, candidates and members of the public an opportunity to express their views.

3.3 Coverage and reporting of elections process (political personalities and events)

A media practitioner or institution shall:

- Give the electorate an opportunity to discuss and understand the issue to report on.
- Cover all phases of the election process, including official campaign periods, election days and post- election periods.

3.4 Coverage and reporting of political manifestos.

A media practitioner or institution shall:

- Give equal editorial space to all candidates and their manifestoes.
- Encourage candidates to use their manifestoes as the basis for discussions or any other

issues pertinent to their campaign or in the public interest.

3.5 Coverage and reporting of political advertising.

A media practitioner or institution shall:

- Offer equal opportunity to all political parties without discrimination, to access media services and purchase advertising and promotion space in newspapers and electronic media.
- Ensure that the content of political advertising is not offensive.

3.6 Coverage and reporting of elections campaigns

A media practitioner or institution shall:

- Ensure accurate balanced and credible reporting.
- Desist from the publication or broadcast of inaccurate, misleading or distorted information and materials including pictures.
- Make all reasonable efforts to check and cross- check the accuracy of stories prior to publication or broadcast.
- Exercise proper editorial judgement in favor of good taste and respect for public safety, security and morality.

Key information: Media institutions should not censor or edit materials submitted by political parties or their agents. But proper editorial judgement should be exercised in favor of good taste and respect for public safety, security and morality. A publication or broadcast can be refused if materials are hateful, ethnically offensive and likely to provoke public disorder or threaten the security of the state. Where publication or broadcast of such materials is refused, the concerned political party or its agent should be given an opportunity to modify the material in order to conform to acceptable standards.

3.7 Coverage and reporting of political opinion polls

'Opinion poll' means a formal or informal assessment of public opinion obtained by questioning a representative sample via interviews, surveys or questionnaires.

A media practitioner or institution should only cover opinion poll that includes:

- the name of the person or organisation that conducted, commissioned or sponsored the poll.
- the exact questions, explanations and information given to respondents;
- a description of the population under study;
- a description of the sampling procedures, size and gender; and
- the place or location where the poll was conducted and period of time covered by the poll.

A media practitioner or institution should avoid bias or manipulation of opinion polls.

3.8 Coverage and reporting of incumbent

'Incumbent' means an official or regime currently holding office.

A media practitioner or institution shall:

- Distinguish between activities of the Government and the activities of the ruling political party and individual candidates.
- Ensure that the incumbent does not gain an unfair access to the media.

3.9 Coverage and reporting on nomination day

A media practitioner or institution shall:

- Make available an equal amount of free space day and time for all political parties contesting the elections.

3.10 Coverage and reporting on elections day

A media practitioner or institution shall:

- Encourage people to vote throughout election day, stating the voting locations, how to vote, time of closure of polling stations, etc.
- Media institutions shall not make statements that may incite the members or supporters of political parties and result in chaos and break down of law and order.
- Media institutions shall not publish or broadcast political campaigns 24 hours prior to the opening of polling stations.

Key information: Media institutions shall not publish or broadcast interviews or statements from candidates, political parties or political representatives, 24 hours prior to elections day, except for the promotion of public peace and public safety.

3.11 Coverage and reporting of post- elections period.

A media practitioner or institution shall:

- Avoid giving the impression of one-sidedness or favouring one particular party over another.
- Refrain from expressing personal political views.
- Clearly label as 'Provisional Result', results released from polling stations immediately after vote counting.

Key information: A media practitioner should not wear or exhibit symbols or colours associated with a political party or candidate.

4. General Elections Media Coverage and Reporting Guidelines

The Regulations prohibit other acts and conducts.

Endorsement of political candidates prohibited.

- A media practitioner or institution shall not, for the purpose of maintaining their credibility and integrity, endorse a political candidate.

Publication of incredible party releases prohibited.

- A media practitioner or institution shall not publish a party release which-is clearly not credible; and has not been properly checked and cross checked with the party.

Conflict of interest

A media practitioner or institution shall:

- Avoid actual or apparent conflict of interest including activities, public comment or writing that calls into question a journalist's ability to report fairly on a subject matter.
- Activities that may compromise a journalist's integrity or credibility, including wearing of party design, pins, badges, etc.

Identification requirement

- A media practitioner or institution shall at a political event or party activity, identify himself as a member of the media by wearing or displaying the official Elections Commission of Sierra Leone identification or accreditation card and carry his media house identification and accreditation at all media functions.

Duty to obey security order.

A media practitioner or institution shall respect legitimate police order such as to move away from a particular scene or to remain within a designated area.

Equal Access to paid political advertising

- A media practitioner or institution shall give equal access and opportunity to all political parties, without discrimination, to purchase space in newspapers and prime time on radio and television stations to promote their respective political views during the elections period.

Key information: The media house should make available to contesting political parties full information about the availability of space and air time for advertising; and published advertising rates available to all public relations firms, advertising agencies, political parties and candidates.

5. Offences

The offences are breaches of any provision under Part II of the Regulations 'Elections Media Coverage and Reporting' with specific reference to the 'General guidelines for elections media coverage and reporting.'

The other offences are the same with the provisions in the Regulations for the Print and

Electronic Media.

Key information: A media practitioner or institution that contravenes the guidelines for coverage and reporting of elections shall be liable to a fine not below 5,000 Leones and not above 20,000 Leones.

6. Complaint and Enforcement Procedures

The Regulations make reference to the Complaints Committee appointed the Independent Media Commission Act, 2020. The Committee shall determine complaints referred to it by the Commission within one month unless it requires further investigation. This includes complaints against media practitioners or media institutions for publications that are in contravention of the Regulations. The general Complaint Committee procedures apply to the Regulations on elections.

TOPIC FIVE: SAFETY AND PROTECTION OF JOURNALISTS

AIM OF THE TOPIC
To make the participants understand the safety and protection tips they should utilise while covering the electoral processes.

Content	Safety rules and protection tips
Training Methodology	Presentation, Discussions and Exercises
Training Materials	Projector and laptop, flipcharts, markers
Key Reading Materials	International News Safety Institute International Women's Media Foundation Safety Guide For Journalists: A handbook for reporters in high-risk environments

Introduction

During elections, journalists frequently cover rallies, campaign events, and protests, which can increase their risk of being attacked, harassed, damaged and detained. It is important and timely for the MRCG-SL and its partners to organize training of editors, reporters, producers, managers, and photojournalists on how to report the 2023 elections and understand the ways to mitigate physical, psychological, and digital risk. The overall objective is to promote conflict sensitive and professional reporting of the 2023 elections in Sierra Leone. This presentation ensures journalists stay safe and secured while reporting on the 2023 elections.

Why?

In times of elections, the media is very vulnerable to attacks, harassments and intimidation from various political stakeholders including political party cadres, political party sympathizers, and at times even members of the public.

Media plays an integral role in the implementation of free and fair elections—but election coverage can be highly demanding, stressful, and dangerous for media practitioners. UNESCO and several other media development agencies have proposed a number of activities to ensure or guarantee the safety of journalists: these include strengthening of self-regulatory mechanisms among media professionals, training of media professionals on the revised code of conduct and other issues of concern related to ethical, objective and conflict sensitive reporting and engage media professionals to commit to abiding to the code of conduct.

The need for objectivity, impartiality and balance in journalism is an everyday challenge for media professionals, but there is no greater test of professionalism in media than that posed by the heat and pressure of bitterly-fought political elections.

Elections also represent a test of political commitment to democracy, when the impulse to manipulate media and to control information is strongest among ruling parties and candidates running for office.

The election process provides a further challenge to media because it brings into sharp focus the need of media to provide citizens with access to all the facts, opinions and ideas being in the campaign. Journalists must also provide access to media so that citizen's voices can be heard above the babble of political debate.

Key points to note:

Situation Assessment

Assess the situation to determine the sensitivity relating to the conduct of political parties, politicians, security personnel, the judiciary, ethnic and regional dynamics and the availability of hospitals, codes of conduct, elections reporting guidelines etc.

In a volatile political situation, anything can happen. Journalists need to be on the lookout for certain signs of violence. These include the presence of offensive weapons at events (stones, batons, guns, anti-tear gas kit, etc..) It is also vital to listen to what people in the crowd are saying, including on media organisations. Finally, journalists need to observe the presence of security forces and their attitude to the crowd.

Planning is essential to effective election coverage. Journalists need to be familiar with all the details of the elections, including registration date, start and closing day of the campaign period and election day specifics (organisation of the polling, schedule for elections returns and announcements of results, etc.) This information can be obtained from electoral commissions.

Personal Safety

Before leaving for a potentially stressful assignment or coverage, make sure all personal matters and plans at home are taken care of. This will help you reduce your anxiety or stress while in the field and will allow you to focus more clearly on your own physical safety and psychosocial care while reporting.

If violence breaks out, seek a safe location to film and take pictures away from the immediate area of confrontation. Journalists should avoid at all times confrontation with the crowd and must keep their press credentials clearly visible unless they believe violence is targeted at media. In such cases, they must seek the protection of security forces and leave the area.

Identification and Attire

Use your own judgment when deciding whether to keep your press card visible. If your card is not visible, keep it where it is easily accessible, such as your shirt pocket. Do not put your press card in your wallet. Wear comfortable, neutral clothing and footwear that is not associated with a political party. If you do not have access to a gas mask, bring swimming goggles and handkerchiefs to cover your face and eyes in case of tear gas.

Stress Management

Election coverage is often an intense and stressful job. Practice daily stress management and anxiety techniques, such as meditation, to assist in reducing these effects. Make sure you are sleeping and eating well. Form networks with other journalists who you can talk to and who can relate to the work you are doing.

Interactions

Do not be seen being too friendly with security forces. Remain neutral and avoid confrontations or arguments with both protestors and police. Try to watch conflicts from aside. Do not move physically from one side of the conflict directly to another side or cross a police line. If you find yourself in the middle of a disturbance, move away without running, as people who are running are often seen as targets.

Debrief and Relax

Following coverage of elections in the field, schedule debriefs with editors, solidarity groups, and a counselor. It is important for your mental health to be taken care of during and after assignments. Debriefs allow you to work through anything disturbing that you may have witnessed or any feelings of anxiety, stress, and anger. Do things you enjoy—keep social contacts, walk, exercise, nap, cook, etc. These are positive coping mechanisms and do no harm in the long run.

Keep Proper Tone in Reporting and Guard against Hate Speech

Words and language matter in elections reporting. Journalists should use appropriate language and avoid inflammatory, hyperbole tone which can give false – or undermine – voters' hopes in the outcome. This includes measured commentary of polls, bearing in mind that they have over times proved unreliable and cannot replace good political reporting.

Elections can be divisive on community, ethnic and party lines, providing some political actors to adopt hate speech and violent rhetoric. Journalists should never provide a platform for such politics and clear protocols must be developed to avoid media being used for inciting violence and hatred.

Allegations of bias in the news media happen all the time, but they are most evident at election time. Journalists know that for politicians and public interest groups consider as bias the omission of certain news items in newspapers, on radio and television news bulletins, the angle given to a story or the choice made about its place in a page or a bulletin. Journalists can allay those concerns by making efforts to achieve a balance in their reporting through a fair representation of candidates' views.

Ethics Matter

Every journalist should seek to follow the time tested road map to excellence in covering elections, by considering the key professional ethics in media:

1. **Editorial Independence**

Independent journalism is an essential part of any credible democracy. Journalists in newsrooms and on the campaign trail must ensure that voters have access to impartial and independent information.

2. Facts Checking
The accuracy of information is a priority in elections reporting and journalists need to establish the candidates' statements by checking with credible sources such as officials, civil society organisations and elections monitors. Special care must be taken to confirm, before publication, information from social media which can be misleading or have a bias in favour of/against a candidate or a political party.

Social media presence and activism

1. Posting and comments

2. Conversations

3. Fact checking

4. Misleading postings

5. Fact checking

6. Sharing of false information

TOPIC SIX: FACT-CHECKING AND VERIFICATION

WHY FACTS MATTER?
- People need access to accurate information to make well-informed decisions
- Making sense of false information
- How and why it spreads

Disinformation
- False information that is deliberately made up or manipulated and shared to mislead.
- The person sharing it knows it is false.

It includes:
- Clickbait for financial gain.
- Information used to spread political and other propaganda.

Misinformation
- False information that is shared unintentionally or mistakenly.
- The person sharing it usually does not know it is false.

SPOTTING FALSE INFORMATION
Tips for spotting false information
- Ask yourself: Does it make me feel scared, angry or satisfied?
- Does it sound too good, shocking or unlikely to be true? Then it probably isn't true.
- Make sure info comes from a trusted news source
- Check social media handles
- Verify screenshots of shocking "news reports"
- Seeing grammar and spelling errors? Be very suspicious.

Read replies and comments on social media to see if there are questions about whether a post is true.
Image and video verification
With images or videos, ask yourself:
- When was it taken?
- Where was it taken?

Verifying images
- What is a reverse image search?
- Searching for where an image appears online by uploading the image or using its online image address (image URL)

Reverse image search tools
- Google Images/Google Lens
- Bing
- Yandex
- TinEye

Photo and video geolocation techniques
What's important?
- Think creatively
- Cross-reference
- What should you see and what do you see?

Tools for verifying videos
Works on the same principles as verifying images

WHAT CAN BE FACT-CHECKED?
Fact vs opinion
Opinion
- Subjective
- Not based on evidence that can be checked
- Often biased as it's based on someone's experiences, world view and belief system

Fact
- Backed up by evidence
- Can be checked or verified

What is not fact-checkable?
- Opinions
- Claims about the future

AFRICA CHECK'S 5-STEP FACT-CHECKING PROCESS (POWERPOINT 4)
Step 1: Identify the source and verify the content
Step 2: Define the terms and concepts in the claim
Step 3: Inspect the evidence using the latest reliable data
Step 4: Approach experts
- Contact expels in the field to verify/clarify information.
- Ask which data sources or research you should consult
- Always ask them: Is the claim correct? How should the data be interpreted?

Step 5: Set out your evidence
- Explain step by step how you reached your conclusion.
- Always hyperlink to original sources and include citations.
- Inform the person you have fact-checked of your conclusion.

Verdicts
- Correct
- Mostly correct
- Unproven
- Misleading
- Exaggerated
- Understated
- Incorrect

Applying the fact-checking process in your work: 10 tips for journalists
- Mark facts to check as you write.
- Pay attention to numbers, names, titles, places quotes.
- Don't take information from a secondary source (e.g. a newspaper) without verifying it.
- Compare the text version of a speech with its video or audio version.
- Use press releases only as a starting point. Ask where the info comes from.
- Don't allow a source to hide behind technical language.
- Explain jargon and technical terms to your audience.
- Don't simply repeat a statistic. Determine if the person you're quoting has used the latest data and whether it's reliable.
- Make sure a source or expert has direct knowledge of the information they are providing.
- When writing, include links to original sources.

FACT-CHECKING THE ELECTIONS: BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER
Claims to fact-check: pre-election
- Claims in campaign speeches, manifestoes and social media posts.
- Claims of achievement in office •Claims about election preparations.

Claims to fact-check: during election
- Photos and videos of events of the day •Claims of electoral fraud and violence.
- Claims of electoral victory before the official result is announced.
- Unauthorized election results.

Claims to fact-check: after the election
- Tracking electoral promises.
- Claims about fulfillment of electoral promises.

SOURCES

- Conflict Sensitive Journalism- A Hand Book, by Ross Howard

- Conflict sensitive journalism: best practices and recommendations. Buromensky Mykhailo, Shturkhetsky Serhiy, Beals Emma, Kazanji Zoya, Betz Michelle, Schuepp Chris, 2016 OSCE- Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe

- Conflict-Sensitive Reporting: State of the Art A Course for Journalists and Journalism Educators. By Ross Howard- Published in 2009 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

- International News Safety Institute: www.newssafety.org

- International Women's Media Foundation: www.iwmf.org

- reporterswithoutboarders.org

- Ross Howard, Conflict-sensitive journalism. International Media Support (IMS) and IMPACS: http://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/

- ims-csjhandbook-2004.pdf Safety Guide for Journalists: A handbook for reporters in high-risk environments

- unesco.org

- Rethinking Peace and Security in Africa (Edited by M. Ozonnia Ojielo)

- The Media and the Rwanda Genocide (Edited by Allan Thompson)

- Tips for Training Conflict Sensitive Reporting (Kerstin Kilanowski talked to Kate Hairsine)