

global —
2021 editorial
guidelines

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THE CONVERSATION

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1 Introduction & Guiding Principles

The purpose of these policies, above all, is to protect and foster the bond of trust between The Conversation and its readers, and to protect the integrity of the service and the editorial content it carries. The policies aim to help our audiences understand our ambitions and the obligations associated with our charter and mission and also assist us in meeting our audience's expectations.

The Conversation is committed to being open and accountable, which includes making our Global Editorial Policies publicly available.

The Conversation is a charitable organisation founded in 2011 on journalistic principles and ethics and these policies reflect the way in which our independence, integrity and creativity govern our actions. Our journalism is free to read and free to republish.

The policies cannot anticipate all eventualities and in instances where a policy does not directly apply we are guided by reasoned decisions, sound editorial judgment and common sense.

The Conversation is a collaboration between academics and journalists with a mandate to publish research-based news and analysis to inform public discourse. We adhere to the highest editorial standards and are committed to publishing journalism that is trusted, fact-based, informed, insightful, timely, transparent and useful.

Our editors will actively seek out responsible journalism that canvasses a range of views, reflecting the diversity of thought that exists in our academic institutions. We believe access to quality explanatory journalism is essential for healthy democracy and positive for society.

The Conversation is part of the overall global media landscape. We publish original content across a wide variety of topics while maintaining a close connection to day-to-day news and events.

We will engage in robust debate on issues of public interest but in doing so aim at all times to be non-partisan, free from bias and non-discriminatory.

2 Editorial Independence

The Conversation is driven by a commitment to serving the public good and operating with editorial integrity and independence.

The Conversation is free of political and commercial influence or agenda and protects editorial freedom in all commercial agreements.

In reaching agreements with partners of funders from the corporate, higher education and philanthropic sectors, The Conversation demands a commitment to those principles as part of our Charter.

Our funders, partners, donors and board members acknowledge that editorial decisions are made purely on merit and that The Conversation supports independent thinking and maintains editorial control over its content.

Editorial staff will act in a way that preserves this independence and the integrity of The Conversation.

The Editor has the final right to determine content for publication.

3 Accuracy, Sourcing and Attribution

The Conversation is committed to reporting accurately, fairly and with integrity. This includes correcting mistakes quickly and publicly when they occur (see Section 10).

We will not withhold or distort relevant facts to suit a narrative or agenda. We will not knowingly mislead our audience. When appropriate we will seek a right of reply from an individual or group who are subject to allegations of wrongdoing or serious criticism in our journalism (see Section 8).

We will conduct our own rigorous fact-checking process for all our output and all material will be well sourced. The sources of information should be identified as specifically as possible. Where necessary, we will be forthright in giving our audience the information they need to evaluate the credibility of our sources.

Transparency is a core value of The Conversation: we believe readers have the right to know who is speaking as well as what they are saying. Anonymity should only be granted to commenters or sources with the approval of the Editor and where there is a compelling reason to do so.

That said, a source who has been promised confidentiality must be protected at all costs. However, The Editor has the right to ask for the identity of anonymous sources to ensure all editorial processes are rigorously adhered to. The Editor is duty bound to maintain the confidentiality of the source in those circumstances.

Anonymous articles will not appear on The Conversation.

Direct quotes will not be edited except to omit offensive language if appropriate, unnecessary “filler” words, to protect against defamation or for very minor changes that clarify what was said.

Similarly, photographs will not be manipulated without clear explanation as to why and how they have been altered.

Any doubts or issues concerning accuracy will be escalated to the attention of The Editor before publication.

4 Harm, Offence, Discrimination

The Conversation supports freedom of expression but takes the utmost care to protect vulnerable groups and avoid causing unjustified offence and unnecessary distress. It is pertinent in this regard that our Charter instructs that we ensure we are operating for the public good.

We will not belittle or humiliate and will be ethical and professional across our entire publication. This includes the removal of readers' comments if this policy is breached (see section 12).

The Conversation aims to represent our diverse communities and will not spread, incite, promote or justify hatred or tolerate hate speech. This does not mean, however, that we will shy away from material that reflects existing prejudices and disadvantages in our community, as long as they are based on evidence and do not perpetuate offensive stereotypes.

In general, we do not publish personal characteristics such as race or ethnic background, sexuality or religion unless that information is pertinent to the article.

We will adhere to common editorial principles of sensitivity such as avoiding gratuitously offensive material and not naming casualties until next of kin are notified.

There may be occasions when public interest outweighs the negative impact on an individual or group, in which case editorial judgement will be exercised and context given.

There may be times when it is deemed necessary to publish confronting and upsetting images, but editors will take extreme care, and give due consideration to our policy of avoiding unjustified offence and unnecessary distress, before doing so. Decisions of this nature should be escalated to The Editor when appropriate.

In circumstances when a decision is made to either publish or not publish newsworthy images or material that are prone to cause offence, context behind that decision may be given where applicable.

Graphic content warnings may also be issued where appropriate, for example in the case of strong language or confronting images and full context given whenever necessary.

We take the utmost consideration of cultural sensitivities, including for example those around death. In these cases, warnings will be issued where appropriate.

We are careful to avoid unjustified fear-mongering, particularly around health issues or crime.

Where appropriate, we follow the guidelines offered by relevant expert organisations in reporting issues such as suicide.

If there is a reason why guidelines such as these are not followed due to editorial discretion, context and explanation will be given when required where appropriate.

5 Authorship/ Contributors

The Conversation publishes the work of researchers and academics in collaboration with staff journalists to provide the public with clarity and insight into the big issues facing society.

All authors and editors sign up to our [Editorial Charter](#) and abide by our [Community Standards](#).

We allow authors only to write on subjects on which they have expertise. Potential conflicts of interest must be disclosed (see Section 6).

The Conversation will only publish articles written by academics employed by or otherwise formally connected to accredited institutions, including universities and other research bodies that receive government funding or grant degrees.

Generally speaking, academic authors will have attained the level of PhD candidature and/or have a teaching position and/or an active research profile.

Non-academic staff without a track record of teaching or research will generally not be eligible to write.

The Editor shall be responsible for deciding who is eligible to write and accreditation of an institution is at the discretion of the Editor. If there is dispute over a decision it can be referred to the Editorial Board.

The Conversation demonstrates a commitment to seeking out diversity and inclusion in its choice of authors. This will include cultural background, gender, age and geography (where the author is based). We conduct periodic internal audits to honour this assurance.

6 Declarations of Interest/ Conflicts of Interest

Authors are obliged to disclose any affiliation or funding that is relevant, or could be perceived to be relevant, to the subject about which they are writing. This transparency is designed to protect the author's reputation and the integrity and independence of The Conversation.

If deemed inappropriate or the conflict impossible to overcome, an editor should consider a different author.

For the most part this policy is not intended to prevent the publication of articles, but is concerned with informing our audience about the existence of any conflict. The declaration of any conflict will appear alongside the article.

Authors who fail to disclose relevant information may be excluded from contributing in future.

Conflicts may include the receipt of funding, political affiliations or a financial interest such as holding shares in a company relevant to the article.

Our commissioning editors are asked to declare an interest to their manager when editing an article to which they have a clear connection or there are doubts about their impartiality in dealings with a contributor.

7

Editing Process

Commissioning, Editing & Author Approval

The Conversation's editors are instructed to source quality, diverse and fact-based content providing a range of views from experts in the academic and research community.

Over an appropriate period of time, the range of views should reflect the comparative prominence and prevalence of the main relevant perspectives on major issues that exist in academic institutions.

The Conversation will endeavour to explore all serious angles of an issue. While no significant viewpoint should be ignored, this does not mean that all views must be canvassed. The Conversation has an inclusive outlook that reflects a breadth of evidence-based viewpoints and opinion.

It is recognised that The Conversation will publish many articles that take a position on a controversial or newsworthy topic and present a specific perspective to the possible exclusion of other ideas. As such, there is no requirement for The Conversation to be impartial. But in articles where a particular position is taken, relevant facts will not be selectively excluded for the sake of convenience in supporting that position.

Where valid alternative and legitimate views supported by compelling evidence are available, they should be sought out. And where important issues are being overlooked or under-investigated, The Conversation will endeavour to seek out those issues and place them on the agenda.

This assurance to reflect over a suitable time an appropriate diversity of perspectives on controversial or contested issues is overseen by the Editorial Board and subject to periodic internal audits.

As stated in our Charter, this is an editorially independent forum, free of commercial or political bias.

Any views expressed in articles are the personal opinions of the experts named. They may not represent the views of The Conversation.

The Conversation will not commission articles by academics or researchers who are writing outside their area of expertise, even if it concerns a subject they are personally passionate about.

The push and pull between editor and author is a process that should be welcomed rather than resisted in order to balance the expectations of the author and of the audience and to ensure The Conversation's values are upheld.

Author approval is a condition of publication, and a key part of The Conversation's Charter.

8 Right of Reply

Pre-publication

Our authors are entitled to express views and write analysis about known facts and matters on the public record. Usually where an academic is writing on such matters, a right of reply is not necessary.

However, there are many instances when it is appropriate and prudent for an editor or author to go to the subject of a story and seek input before publication: for example, when the content of an article is potentially defamatory, even if it is based on known facts. We should also seek a response in cases where claims about the conduct of an individual or company go beyond what is on the public record to insinuate something further such as dishonesty or incompetence. In these cases it is only fair that the subject of serious allegations have the opportunity to respond. This may often also help with the accuracy and balance of the article.

The more serious the criticism or allegations we are publishing, the greater the obligation to seek a response.

Any such conversations or correspondence with the party offered a right of reply should be documented and retained.

Post-publication

Anyone is invited to post a comment about an article in the comments section under a story and state a contrary view, as long as it adheres to our policies in section 12. In some cases, editors may decide to retain a pertinent contrary view to the top of the comments section to ensure its long-term visibility.

The only occasion we may consider publishing a full separate story countering claims in an article is if it is pitched by the direct subject of the original article. Publication would be at the Editor's discretion and all the usual editorial processes around commissioning and editing would apply.

If an academic wishes to write an alternative or contradictory evidence-based analysis on the same subject matter this will be considered in line with our established commissioning processes. But an article that simply attempts to rebut elements of a published piece will not generally be considered.

9 Legal

The Conversation will make every attempt to comply with the law. This includes laws around plagiarism, privacy, contempt of court, the use of confidential information and defamation.

Furthermore, just because material is legally fit for publication does not mean it necessarily adheres to our standards, and ethical considerations will always be taken into account.

Laws will be different in different jurisdictions and Editors should acquaint themselves with local laws around the legality of obtaining information, recording conversations, and receiving, copying or holding documents and so on.

We will obtain legal advice when necessary but the final decision on whether to publish rests with The Editor.

We respect privacy and privacy laws and err on the side of caution and compassion. The expectation of privacy will only be waived in the event that it is outweighed by public interest. Just because other media may make decisions around privacy and identification, it does not necessarily follow that The Conversation will make the same decision. In fact, it should make no difference to the implementation of our own editorial processes.

Equally, we will not republish any material from social media unless doing so is consistent with our editorial policies.

10 Errors, Corrections & Retractions

The Conversation strives for fairness and accuracy at all times and encourages readers to advise us of any significant errors. If a mistake has been made, we will correct it as soon as possible — fully, quickly, publicly and ungrudgingly.

Readers will be notified of the change (except in the case of corrections of spelling, grammar or very minor alterations).

The author will also be contacted to agree on the form of words associated with the correction.

We believe it is important to maintain an accurate record of public discussion as part of our goal of providing informed, transparent debate. So we consider the full retraction of an article an extreme last resort and will only remove an article entirely when:

1. we are legally required to do so (if the article is found to be defamatory or in violation of copyright, for example)
1. it contains major flaws, inaccuracies or breaches community standards to the extent that renders the article unsalvageable. In this regard, the complaints process in section 11 is likely to be relevant.
1. in the event that subsequent investigation finds that internal procedures were not followed correctly an article may in some circumstances be removed to uphold the values and integrity of The Conversation.

If an article is retracted in full, an explanation will be provided to readers.

Photographs

Similarly, photographs will only be removed if they violate our editorial principles or if they are licensed incorrectly. People who believe a photograph has been used inappropriately or without permission may email the corrections and complaints address found on the Contact Us page of theconversation.com to submit a removal request.

11 Complaints

The Conversation has a clear process of dealing with complaints.

11.1 Complaints should be emailed to the corrections address found on the Contact Us page of theconversation.com. The commissioning editor responsible for the article will assess the complaint and discuss it with the author. If the commissioning editor and author agree there was a factual error, a correction will be published and steps taken as outlined in section 10. If the author and commissioning editor find no significant error worthy of correction, the complaint will be rejected. The complainant will be notified of the outcome of the complaint.

11.2 If a complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of a complaint, they may contact the Editor who will attempt to resolve the issue to the satisfaction of all parties.

11.3 If this fails, the Editor may refer the complaint to the Chair of the Editorial Board and the complainant will be invited to make a further submission, if required.

The Chair of the Editorial Board, at the Chair's sole discretion, may:

11.3.i assess the complaint and recommend a response

11.3.ii refer the matter to the full Editorial Board for determination

11.3.iii convene an investigation panel. This may occur when subject matter experts are required. The panel will provide its findings to the Editorial Board.

11.4.iv refer the complaint to the author's university for action. All decisions of the Editorial Board will be final. The complaints process will be handled in this way whether the complaint comes from a member of the public, another academic, one of our partners or donors, or a board member of The Conversation.

11.5 If a complaint regards legitimate critique or debate, it may be best resolved through public discussion, for example in the comments stream, or in some cases a right of reply or the publication of an article offering an alternative view (as stipulated in section 8).

12 Comments

As our Charter states, The Conversation creates an open site for people around the world to share best practices and collaborate on developing smart, sustainable solutions. As such, The Conversation fosters a culture of constructive criticism and feedback. We respectfully exchange ideas and encourage others to question and challenge what we publish.

Our community standards are in place to ensure a space for engaged, lively, respectful debate to help us create a positive fact-based discussion.

Our policies are as follows:

- We treat our comments streams as a curated editorial product. We reserve the right to select only the comments that will advance discussion and further inform our readers.
- Comments are open only on selected articles and are typically open for 72hrs.
- We require real names to be used and we

reserve the right to delete comments made under aliases. Users who have signed in via Twitter are requested to change their Twitter handle to their real name using their Conversation profile page.

- Comments should be relevant to the article and replies to the comment relevant to the initiating post.

We reserve the right to delete comments for reasons including:

- They are off-topic.
- Personal attacks.
- All forms of discrimination. We have a zero-tolerance approach to abuse and encourage readers to report anything they think may be abusive.
- Posts identifying or sharing the personal information of another person.
- Comments that are commercial or repeatedly-shared external links.
- Comments that are defamatory, breach copyright or put us in legal jeopardy.
- Deliberate attempts to misinform, distort facts, provoke or misrepresent the opinions of others.
- The thread of replies to an original comment that has been deleted.
- Editorial discretion if we deem a comment has breached our community standards.

12 Comments

Comments that comply with community standards will not be removed, save in exceptional circumstances such as:

- The comment poses a risk to someone's health (mental or physical) or safety.
- A reader's account has been compromised.
- It raises a legal issue that requires removal.
- We have been targeted by 'agenda trolls'.

This is not an exhaustive list, but the general principle is that what is said cannot be unsaid, so we request readers think carefully before they post. We commit to ensuring vulnerable people or groups are protected.

We reserve the right to the lock accounts of readers who repeatedly breach standards.

We won't review routine moderation decisions, but people wishing to seek clarity on a decision may contact the email address for editorial questions or concerns listed on the Contact Us page.

13 Advertising & Funding

The Conversation is funded through partners from the university and research sector, some philanthropic organisations and thousands of individual donors.

We generate revenue to fund editorial excellence, innovate and deliver engagement for university partners. We have a focus on partnerships with universities, seeking and strengthening philanthropic and foundation support, and growing reader donations.

As our Charter states, we ensure the site's integrity by obtaining non-partisan sponsorship only from education, government and private partners. Any advertising will be relevant and non-obtrusive.

As such there will generally be no advertising on our sites, however some advertising is accepted off site, for example at events where the sponsor fits in with our values and policies.

14 Republication

A free and open flow of information is central to The Conversation's Charter.

All content is available free for republication via Creative Commons. For the full republication policy see [here](#).