

THE  
CONVER  
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global —  
2021 editorial  
guidelines

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The Conversation 

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 is  the world's

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leading publisher 

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 of research-based

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news and analysis. 


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 It is a unique

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 collaboration 

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between  academics

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and journalists. 

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# Introduction & Guiding Principles

The purpose of these policies, above all, is to protect and foster the bond of trust between The Conversation and our readers, and to protect the integrity of the service and its editorial content.

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.

The Conversation operates in several countries, each with an independent Editor and editorial team who publish content relevant to their region and curate their own editions of The Conversation website. Each edition of The Conversation is covered by these policies.

While the policies are framed primarily in regard to published articles, they apply to everything we publish, including podcasts, social media posts, videos and all other forms of public communication.

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 judgement 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.

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

# 1 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 and protects editorial freedom in all commercial agreements.

In reaching partnership agreements with funders from the corporate, higher education, government 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 on merit and that The Conversation supports independent thinking and maintains editorial control over the content.

All sources of funding will be acknowledged and will be transparently and publicly disclosed in a timely way. (See Section 6.)

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

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

## 2 Accuracy, Sourcing & 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.

# 3 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 all our publications. 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 illustrates existing prejudices and disadvantages in our community, as long as it is based on evidence and does not perpetuate offensive stereotypes.

In general, we do not publish personal characteristics such as race, ethnicity, 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 before doing so and give due consideration to our policy of avoiding unjustified offence and unnecessary distress. 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 is 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.

# 4 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 and other matters of interest to our readers.

All authors and editors are required to comply with our [Editorial Charter](#) and abide by our [Community Standards](#).

Except in exceptional circumstances, we allow authors only to write on subjects about which they have significant research expertise, even if it concerns a topic they are personally passionate about. 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 accredited research bodies. Accreditation of an institution is at the discretion of the Editor in the relevant region and the Editor shall be responsible for deciding who is eligible to write.

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

Non-academic staff without a track record of teaching or a standard of peer-reviewed research on a par with university academics will generally not be eligible to write.

If there is dispute over a decision around eligibility or accreditation, it can be referred to the Editorial Board\*.

*\*In countries where The Conversation does not have an Editorial Board, decisions can be referred to the Global Editorial Committee. The Global Editorial Committee is made up of Editors from each of the countries in which The Conversation operates.*



# 5 Diversity & Inclusion

The Conversation is committed to seeking out diversity and inclusion not only in our journalism (see section 7) but also in our choice of author.

This will include diversity in an academic's cultural background, gender, age and geography (where the author is based).

# 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 or discussing. 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 publication, but is concerned with informing our audience about the existence of any conflict. The declaration of any conflict will appear alongside the article or be disclosed in the podcast or video.

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 journalism providing a range of informed perspectives from experts in the academic and research community.

The Conversation will not shy away from contentious or complex issues, with perspectives expressed and articles presented in a way that is considered, constructive and non-partisan.

Over an appropriate period of time, a range of analysis should be sought to reflect the diversity of informed perspectives found in academic institutions.

The Conversation will endeavour to explore all serious angles of an issue. While no significant credible perspective should be ignored, this does not mean all perspectives must be canvassed or given equal weight.

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. 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 commissioned. 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 Editor.

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

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.

The lead author must give approval before publication of the article, including headline, pictures and captions.

# 8 Right of Reply

The Conversation's policies around right of reply can be separated into pre-publication and post-publication.

## Pre-publication

Our authors are entitled to express views and write analysis of 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 on grounds of fairness, accuracy, balance or legal considerations.

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

## 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.

If an academic wishes to write an alternative or contradictory evidence-based analysis on the same topic, this will be considered in line with our established commissioning and editing 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.

Articles published on The Conversation's network are available globally, so any legal concerns and ramifications should be considered in that context.

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

The Conversation respects privacy and privacy laws and errs 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, this should make no difference to the implementation of The Conversation's own editorial processes.

Equally, The Conversation will not republish material from social media unless doing so is consistent with our editorial policies and a person's privacy is not compromised.

# 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.

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, it will be corrected as soon as possible — fully, quickly, publicly and ungrudgingly. The Conversation will inform all republishers of any corrections and readers will be notified of any changes (except in the case of corrections of spelling, grammar or very minor alterations).

The author will be consulted about the form of words associated with a correction when practical.

The Conversation believes it is important to maintain an accurate record of public discussion as part of our goal of providing informed, transparent debate. So The Conversation considers the full retraction of an article a last resort and will only remove an article entirely when:

- i. it is a legal requirement to do so (if the article is found to be defamatory or in violation of copyright, for example).
- ii. 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.
- iii. 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 The Conversation's 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](http://theconversation.com) to submit a removal request.

# 11 Complaints

## The Conversation has a clear process of dealing with complaints.

Complaints should be emailed to the corrections address found on the Contact Us page of [theconversation.com](http://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 is 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.

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.

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:

- assess the complaint and recommend a response.
- refer the matter to the full Editorial Board for determination.
- convene an investigation panel. This may occur when subject matter experts are required. The panel will provide its findings to the Editorial Board.
- 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.

*\* In countries where The Conversation does not have an Editorial Board, the Global Editorial Committee will fulfil the same function.*

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 the publication of an article offering an alternative view (as stipulated in section 8).

# 12 Comments

As our Charter states, The Conversation provides 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.

The Conversation respectfully exchange ideas and encourage others to question and challenge what is published.

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 reserve the right to publish only the comments that will advance discussion and further inform our readers.
- Comments are open only on selected articles and are typically open for 72 hours.
- The Conversation **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, prior to commenting.
- Comments should be relevant to the article and replies to the comment relevant to the initiating post.

The Conversation reserves 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 the company 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 The Conversation's 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.
- The site has been targeted by **'agenda trolls'**.

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

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

Routine moderation decisions will not be reviewed, 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 partnerships with the university and research sector, philanthropic organisations, government, the corporate sector and thousands of individual donors.

The Conversation generates 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, The Conversation ensures the sites' integrity by obtaining non-partisan sponsorship only from any education, government or private partners. Any advertising will be relevant and non-obtrusive.

As such there will generally be no advertising on The Conversation's sites, however some advertising is accepted off site, for example at events where the sponsor fits in with The Conversation's 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](#).

# 15 Regional Editorial Policies

The Conversation operates in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Indonesia, Canada, the United States, Africa, France and Spain.

Editorial teams in each region may adopt policies relevant only to that region and these are listed below.