[GB] Geo News violates Ofcom Boradcasting Code by excluding election candidates and failing to list all names

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Julian Wilkins
Wordley Partnership

Ofcom received three complaints regarding the Geo News current affairs programme "Aapas Ki Baat" (the programme), which aired on 25 June 2024, in the run-up to the UK General Election on 4 July 2024. The complaints concerned interviews with Labour Party and independent candidates from the Birmingham Ladywood, Hall Green, and Moseley constituencies, while failing to include other candidates from those constituencies. The opportunity to take part in the programme was not offered to all the candidates, and a full list of candidates standing for election in each featured constituency was not listed. These failures were found to be a breach of Rules 6.9 and 6.10 of Ofcom's Broadcasting Code.

The licence for Geo News is held by Geo TV Ltd (the Licensee). Geo News is an Urdu news and current affairs channel aimed at the Pakistani community in the UK. Ofcom's decision and the Licensee's response to the complaints are based on a revised translation of the programme's transcript as the broadcast language was in Urdu.

The programme included interviews with Labour and other independent parliamentary candidates but a number of other political party candidates such as Conservative, Liberal Democrats and the Green Party were not given the opportunity to be interviewed for the programme. Further, during the programme there was no summary list of candidates standing in the respective parliamentary constituencies listed in the programme. However, during the interviews there were incidental references to various other political parties standing in the election.

Rule 6.9 of the Ofcom Broadcasting Code states:

If a candidate takes part in an item about his/her particular constituency, or electoral area, then the broadcasters must offer the opportunity to take part in such items to all candidates within the constituency or electoral area representing parties with previous significant electoral support or where there is evidence of significant current support. This also applies to independent candidates. However, if a candidate refuses or is unable to participate, the item may nevertheless go ahead.

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Rule 6.10 of the Ofcom Broadcasting Code states:

Any constituency or electoral area report or discussion after the close of nominations must include a list of all candidates standing, giving first names, surnames and the name of the party they represent or, if they are standing independently, the fact that they are an independent candidate. This must be conveyed in sound and /or vision.

The Licensee explained that due to the small size of the production team (three in total) and the pressure they were under, the producer “mistakenly assumed that a list of all the other candidates” had been included in the programme. The Licensee also stated that the names would have appeared on screen had it not been for a technical error and the challenges of the day.

The Licensee further argued that Rules 6.9 and 6.10 were not applicable, as this was an inadvertent technical issue rather than a deliberate violation of the rules. The Licensee claimed that, given the steps, including further training by its production team, taken to prevent future errors and the negligible audience impact, there was no breach of impartiality or fairness during the election period, and that the matter should be considered resolved. The Licensee claimed that the audience was null and the error and any harm was "purely theoretical".

Ofcom acknowledged the breach was not deliberate and that the Licensee had taken steps to avoid a repeat of the violation of the Broadcasting Code. Also, Ofcom took account of the provisions of Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights relating to freedom of expression. Ofcom also noted that the Licensee had in other broadcasts included a full list of candidates in a constituency.

However, Rule 6 of the Broadcasting Code had been introduced to comply with section 93 of the Representation of People Act 1983 (as amended) to ensure all candidates were properly represented in any broadcast or at least had the opportunity.

The Licensee had on this occasion omitted political parties and their candidates with significant political support. The purpose of the Broadcasting Code, including rule 6.9 and 6.10, was to prevent any political party gaining an unfair advantage over other candidates contesting the same election irrespective of audience size. Rules 6.9 and 6.10 were basic requirements during the coverage of a political election, and as a consequence, Ofcom ruled that the Licensee had indeed violated Rules 6.9 and 6.10.

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https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/about-ofcom/bulletins/broad-bulletins/2025/517/aapas-ki-baat-geo-news-25-june-2024-

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