



## **Covering the 2026 Campaigns (Part 4)**

### **How to Improve Your Campaign Coverage**

**By**

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In the last two newsletters we have seen that the ‘public’ views the national news media as a ‘failure’ in covering political campaigns, as well as other news. Local news did a little better, though not by much.

It’s one thing to point out the ‘problems’ in how journalists are covering the 2026 campaigns. It’s another thing to recommend ways to ‘fix’ the problems. Here are some ideas that might help journalists:

1. Don’t take sides in your coverage. Every journalist has the right to cast a private ballot in an election, but they don’t have the right to use their news coverage to support their favorite candidates.
2. Be curious and skeptical in your coverage. Ask candidates many questions and don’t believe every answer. If they make ‘truth claims’ about themselves or their opponents, ask them for proof — evidence. If they give you evidence, follow up on it to see if it’s true. Report the truth — not rumors or innuendos.
3. Be accurate and fair in your coverage. Demonstrate respect for each candidate, but ‘fact check’ what they

tell you. If you find that a candidate lied or bent the truth in answer to your questions, in their speeches, or in their campaign advertising, call them on it. Have the ‘facts’ ready to counter their claims. Do your homework.

4. Find ways to do ‘original reporting’ in your coverage. That includes doing investigative reporting. If you’re not experienced in how to investigate, I’ve written many newsletters about that topic and will link to them at the end of this newsletter.
5. Prepare well for every candidate interview. Know your subject well and be prepared to ask tough and probing questions that will help voters know the candidates. Be ready for your interviewee to dodge tough questions. Don’t let them. Dodging means you’ve probably hit a nerve. Keep asking the question until you get a good answer, they refuse to answer, or walk out of your interview. Any of those three will help voters learn more about the candidate’s personal character and qualifications for public office.

I was a member of RTNDA for many years when it was known as the Radio and Television News Directors Association. I also worked with several consultants from Frank N Magid Associates when I was a TV news manager, so I found this article interesting about what local news consumers want journalists to do when covering political campaigns:

“Most U.S. local news consumers want journalists to ask tough, but respectful, questions of candidates and regularly fact-check those running for office.

This was one of many key takeaways from a fact-finding research project on trust in elections coverage, commissioned by the Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA) and conducted by Magid. The findings were released publicly for the first time Thursday at RTDNA23 in Minneapolis.

According to the study, 62 percent of local news viewers and listeners say it is “very important” that local sources and journalists “ask tough, but respectful questions to get answers,” and 61 percent said it is

very important they fact-check those candidates. Fifty-eight percent of the local news audience said it was very important those outlets have regular fact-checking segments.

“In our highly polarized society, Americans need to rely on their trusted local sources of news to get the facts about candidates, campaigns and other political issues,” said RTDNA President and CEO Dan Shelley. “These findings offer a clear roadmap to ensure local reporters and news managers are providing voters with the information they crave to make critical decisions in the voting booth.”

RTNDA/Magid

# Investigative Reporting 101

Real journalism has always been ‘investigative.’ Somewhere in the deep recesses of the past, journalists lost their way. Many now view ‘investigative journalism’ as a ‘speciality.’ In fact, real journalism should be investigative. How else do you discover, uncover, confirm, and report the truth of anything if you don’t investigate? If you find the idea of being a real journalist a challenge worth pursuing, here are some articles you might find helpful:

[The Basics of Uncovering What’s Hidden](#)

[Entering With Eyes Wide Open](#)

[First Amendment Rights?](#)

[‘Going Undercover’ to Get the Story](#)

[Looking Back to Look Forward](#)

[Legal Protection in the ‘Tool Box’](#)

[Technical Tools for Your Toolbox](#)

Investigating Anti-Semitism in Your Community #1

Investigating Anti-Semitism in Your Community #2

Documenting Your Investigation #1

Documenting Your Investigation #2

Documenting Your Investigation #3

Documenting Your Investigation #4

Finding Supporting Documents #1

Finding Supporting Documents #2

Stepping Into Investigative 'Holes'

The Challenge of Finding 'Memory Holes' in the Age of AI

The Challenges of Investigating 'People'

Business Investigations - 'For Profit' and 'Not For' Profit

What It Means To Be An Investigative Reporter

## Next Time

Capitalist, Communist, Socialist — Oh, My! These and many other ‘names’ are being used by candidates and their surrogates. Are they using the terms correctly? Have you asked them? I’ll share some thoughts about how to cover ‘campaign language’ in the next part of our series, *Covering the 2026 Campaigns*.



1960s Radio News, © Mark McGee