

Covering the 2026 Campaigns (Part 11)

The Election is Past - What's Next?

By

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Election Day is Past - What's Next?

The winners in the 2026 election will soon begin to govern. Some incumbents will continue to govern, but many newly elected officials will start the process of living up to their campaign promises.

One of the primary responsibilities of journalists is to hold elected officials accountable for how they govern. Whether you are personally pleased or displeased with the results of any election, keep that to yourself. Your job is to be politically independent and do your job of being curious, skeptical, objective, and accurate. There is no place in 'real journalism' for being an 'activist' journalist. If you think it is, think again. Activism is for activists — not journalists.

You should be as tough on officials you voted for as for those you didn’t. Who you voted for shouldn’t matter in doing your job. If you can’t get past that, please rethink your career choice. We need ‘real journalists’ today — not biased, unfair people pretending to be independent and honest journalists. Your audience, the public, deserves better than that.

Interviews and Follow-Ups

Set up interviews with the winners of last Tuesday's election. That includes local, county, state, and federal officials. I found that many winning politicians don't want to talk with journalists once their campaigns are finished. They often view members of the media and press as campaign pawns who get in their way after winning an election. Don't let that bother you. Your job is to communicate the news to your audience, and so if a winning politician won't grant you an interview, communicate that to your audience. Remember, your audience is made up of the voters who put these politicians into office. Let your audience know that you will request an interview every day and report the politician's response every day. If politicians think you'll finally give up asking, be sure to let their 'press secretary' or 'communications staff' know you don't play that game. Once staff members understand the power of the press

(many of them used to be working journalists), they'll find a way to get you the interview you want.

What do you ask the politician once you get the interview? Ask them the questions your audience wants to know. Here's an idea: Spend a few days before the interview talking with voters in your community about what they'd like to ask the candidates — then ask the winning candidates those questions. Once a politician knows you went to the trouble to talk with their 'constituents' and discovered what they want to know, you'll probably get some answers. Also, be ready with your own questions that are tough, to the point, and based on campaign promises and public needs that should be addressed.

Then be prepared to follow up on the official answers. Don’t just ask a question, get a lame answer, then go away. Stay on top of these winning candidates. Remember who they work for — the taxpaying public. Remind your viewers, readers, or listeners how much each official earns annually. Remind them how much taxpayer money they get to use for staff, office, official trips, etc.

The Fourth Estate

Our job as journalists has been known as years as the ‘Fourth Estate.’ The name came from a European concept of the ‘three estates of the realm’ (clergy, nobility, and commoners.’ They viewed the working press as a fourth pillar of position in European society. The American idea is of the press being a ‘watchdog’ on the three branches of government (executive, legislative, judicial). That was the reason the ‘freedom of the press’ was included in the First Amendment to the Constitution. Journalism exists to ‘inform’ the public about each branch of government and to hold elected officials and public institutions accountable to the public.

Journalists have unusual access to people in power compared to members of the public. Use that access wisely.

Next Time

How did you do on election night? What about your journalistic followup since then? We'll take a look at 'election' debriefing on the next Real Journalism.



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