

Election coverage checklist: Putting the audience first

At Election SOS, we believe that democracy must be preserved and newsrooms have the responsibility to meaningfully listen and respond to the communities they serve and aim to serve, so the public can fully participate in the democratic process.

Here is a checklist for journalists to use at each state of the reporting process to evaluate how well your election coverage puts the audience's needs first.

Assigning the story

- 💡 We will make sure that stories about problems will include actions people can take to address the problem.
- 💡 Our coverage will prioritize [consistency and clarity](#) over novelty.

Reporting

Polling

- 🗳️ Our reporting on results includes context stating the larger picture, including what numbers represent out of the whole.

Protests

- 🗳️ Our reporting on protests provides context on how many peaceful gatherings there have been.

Related resource: [SPJ Journalist's Toolbox: Covering Protests](#)

Misinformation

- 🗳️ If we report on unverified claims, we will state what is true rather than repeating the unverified claims.

Related resources: [The "truth sandwich" method for reporting false or dubious claims](#)
[Mail-In Voter Fraud: Anatomy of a Disinformation Campaign](#)

Voting process and returns

- 🗳️ We will find [external resources](#) that could help people navigate the process of voting.
- 🗳️ Our reporting bucks stereotypical and polarizing portrayals of people, [complicating the narrative](#) to show complexity and nuance.
- 🗳️ We will remind our audience members often about what they can expect this election season.

Related resource: [Covering the gears of democracy: How three election reporters are connecting readers to politics by explaining the right to vote](#)

Publishing

- 🗳️ We will make sure that our reporting on problems is accompanied by actions readers can take to address them.
- 🗳️ We will monitor our coverage to ensure the attention we give to controversial issues is commensurate with their *actual* scope and impact. We will not give equal time to fringe issues simply to avoid accusations of bias. We will reject [bothsidesism](#). In other words, we will aim for appropriate coverage, not equal coverage.
- 🗳️ We will issue alerts only when a significant development has occurred, or misinformation is gaining traction that needs to be quickly corrected. That might mean actually slowing down our publishing, rather than speeding it up.