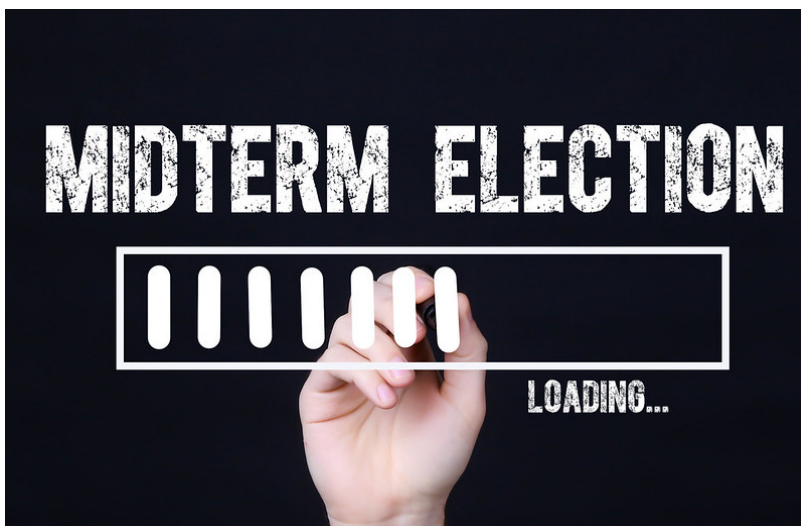


As most trusted news sources, local outlets can do more to promote media literacy, especially around elections

The [success of election-deniers](#) in the Midterm Elections shows just how much work confronts us in our efforts to increase media literacy in the US.

As happened in primary contests in August, candidates who promoted the Republican Party's so-called "big lie" that the 2020 election was stolen [did well again](#), although the anticipated red wave did not appear to have materialized. Nonetheless, the strength of the disinformation and how it continues to shape voters is troubling.

At least 80 people who [questioned the 2020 election results](#) won congressional seats, Axios reported.



(Photo by Jernej Furman via Flickr)

This year for U.S. National Media Literacy Week advocates focused on ways schools can do a better job of teaching young readers how to spot fake news and verify information. Already, 15 states promote some form of media literacy education,

although last year, Illinois became the first to mandate instruction.

It's clearly not enough.

Media literacy teaches readers (and viewers) how to apply critical thinking skills to the stories, social media posts, images and videos that saturate our lives.

Media literacy advocates want consumers to not only better evaluate the information but also to make better decisions about where it comes from.

Obviously these efforts benefit all of us in the news business, particularly as we compete with hyper-partisan, emotionally validating news sources for attention. It's even harder to stand out when our words lack the glitz to push information past the whirl of video reels and portable technologies. Printed facts are not always glamorous.

But what's often lost in both our coverage of media literacy and in the discussion about its role in creating a smarter society is our own part in educating consumers about what we do, how we do it and why it matters. Given the mistrust, falsely promoted, around elections since 2020, the Associated Press made a point [to explain how](#) it called the winners in elections. There are multiple ways local news organizations can explain how they cover elections and why they choose even to rely on the AP.

Local media outlets remain the most trusted news source, according to a [Knight-Gallup study](#) released at the end of October.

Six in 10 Americans believe local news organizations are informing their communities about what matters, and local journalists are seen as more caring (36%), trustworthy (29%) and neutral or unbiased (23%).

Additionally, Americans think the local news media strike a more balanced perspective than national media: 53% describe their local news media as “about right,” while 26% say it is “too liberal” and 15% “too conservative.”

Although we are not immune to growing mistrust in media more generally, we have an opportunity to leverage the trust that we did have to help promote media literacy.

That means partnering with schools to help young readers understand what we, as their neighbors, do to report a story. While it’s not our job to defend national media, it benefits all of us who practice journalism when we note that the vast majority of journalists, regardless of where they work, do try to be fair and impartial.

Even though our newsrooms are smaller and our editors and reporters are stretched covering larger and larger coverage areas, we need to make a commitment to promote media literacy.

In sharing how we verify information and images, we are not only giving our readers tools to help them decipher what is real or fake, what can be trusted or not, we also are reinforcing the idea that truth is a value to us, too.

The explanation helps fill a void where suspicion thrives. In other words, people make assumptions about our motives when they don’t know any better.

Many of our readers also do not know the difference between news and opinion. I recently had a student cite two news articles to bolster a scientific case they were trying to make. One was an opinion piece (clearly labeled as such) and the other was from a credible website, but they had taken the information out of context. Both articles also were outdated.

The pandemic, flu season, the upcoming school board meeting and the price of groceries all give us an opportunity to explain, explain and explain again how we are reporting, what

we are paying attention to and why it matters.

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