Twitter Thread by Election Coverage and Democracy (ECAD) Network

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@ecademocracy

Good morning, friends.

So here's a question: How should journalists deal with baseless claims undermining the integrity of the election, given that these claims are cited as the reason that the President is refusing to concede?

A thread: 1/

This moment poses a challenge in terms of avoiding amplifying false claims on the one hand, and reporting on Trump's failure to concede on the other.

Some background and some guidelines from political scientists and scholars of journalism and democracy:

President Trump has lost both the popular vote and the Electoral College. And yet, the president and many of his Republican allies are refusing to accept the declared outcome of a free and fair election.

However, his refusal to concede should not come as a surprise.

The administration and GOP elites questioned the results before the polls had opened. They falsely claimed that there is significant & widespread voter fraud through illegal mail-in ballots, & had already stated that the election would be illegitimate if the president didn't win.

■The New York Times investigated these claims, speaking with election representatives from every state.

The result was consistent and unequivocal: There was no evidence of voter fraud in this election. https://t.co/G41ghU13tA

So how should journalists deal with these fraudulent claims, given that they are cited as the reason that the President is refusing to concede?

SIX USEFUL TIPS:

1) Distinguish between legitimate, evidence-based challenges to vote counts and illegitimate ones that are intended to delay or call into question accepted procedures.

Do not amplify the illegitimate claims.

Again: Do not amplify the illegitimate claims.

2) Use a democracy-worthy frame, not a partisan one.

This means denying a platform to partisan pundits who advance false claims.

It also means incorporating expert sources from election law and history to inform coverage.

3) Don't use social media to stand in for election information. Resist covering social media posts as a story in their own right. Don't let media discourse influence the tone or focus of your news coverage.
Remember: Social media does NOT represent the American electorate.

4) Use state- and local-level expertise to provide locally-relevant information. They are here to help provide accurate information, and provide insights to explain discrepancies between actual election processes and false allegations of malfeasance.

5) Embrace existing democratic institutions. Prioritize the sanctity/stability of American democracy. We saw this in excellent coverage last week: stories that reduced uncertainty & elevated citizen efficacy by highlighting processes & procedures ("this is how elections work").

...Explicitly covering procedures for ballot counting, post-election auditing, recounts, and certification helps to demystify these processes. emphasize and explain the legal processes used to adjudicate claims of voter fraud or election errors.

Finally 6) : Unequivocally Call Upon the President to Concede. The U.S. Constitution is clear that the "The person having the greatest number of votes for President, shall be the President if such number be a majority of the whole number of Electors appointed."

...News coverage should unambiguously and repeatedly remind the public of that fact, and explain how the Electoral College works and electors are chosen in the states. This means stating frequently and clearly that democracy requires peaceful transfer of power.

Journalists are doing amazing work. These are challenging circumstances but we know how to do it in ways that protect our democratic republic.

We got this.
#media4democracy

More at: https://t.co/g49JzWvNE9