



From Fact Deserts to Fact Streams: Expanding State and Local Fact-Checking in the U.S.

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A report from the Duke Reporters' Lab

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The Duke Reporters' Lab is a center for journalism research in the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University. Our core projects focus on fact-checking, but we also do occasional research about trust in the news media and other topics.

This report was edited by Bill Adair, Knight Professor for the Practice of Journalism and Public Policy and director of the Duke Reporters' Lab.

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Disclosure: Stencel is an unpaid contributing editor to PolitiFact North Carolina.

A Reporters' Lab review of local fact-checking across the country finds only a small percentage of politicians and public officials are held accountable for the accuracy of the claims they make.

The candidates running last year for an open seat in Ohio's 13th Congressional District exchanged a relentless barrage of scathing claims, counterclaims and counter-counterclaims.

Emilia Sykes was a former Democratic leader in the state legislature who came from a prominent political family. Her opponent called Sykes a lying, liberal career politician who raised her own pay, increased taxes on gas and retirement accounts, and took money from Medicare funds to "pay for free healthcare for illegals." Other attack ads warned voters that the Democrat backed legislation that would release dangerous criminals from jail.¹

Sykes' opponent, Republican Madison Gesiotto Gilbert, was an attorney, a former Miss Ohio, and a prominent supporter of former President Donald Trump. Sykes' and her backers called Gilbert a liar who would "push for tax cuts for millionaires" and slash Social Security and Medicare. Gilbert backed a total abortion ban with no exceptions, they warned ("not even if the rape victim is a 10 year old girl") and she had the support of political groups that aim to "outlaw birth control."²

Voters in one of the country's most contested U.S. House races heard those allegations over and over — in TV ads, social media posts and from the candidates themselves.

But were any of those statements and allegations true? Who knows?

Ohio was one of 25 states where no statewide or local media outlet consistently fact-checked political statements. So voters in the 13th District were on their own to sort out the truth and the lies.

But their experience was not unique. Throughout the country, few politicians had to worry about being held accountable for exaggerations or lies in ads or other claims during the campaign.

An extensive review by the Duke Reporters' Lab of candidates and races that were fact-checked found only a small percentage of politicians and public officials were held accountable for the accuracy of what they said.

¹ <https://nrcc.org/2022/08/31/fact-check-sykes-lies-to-oh-voters-in-first-tv-ad/>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pCQz6FCMMzo>
<https://congressionalleadershipfund.org/sykes-sided-with-criminals-over-public-safety/>

² <https://host2.adimpact.com/admo/viewer/a9400662-bc20-4e34-9a44-42d478efa451/>
<https://dccc.org/dccc-releases-new-tv-ad-in-oh-13-wrong/>

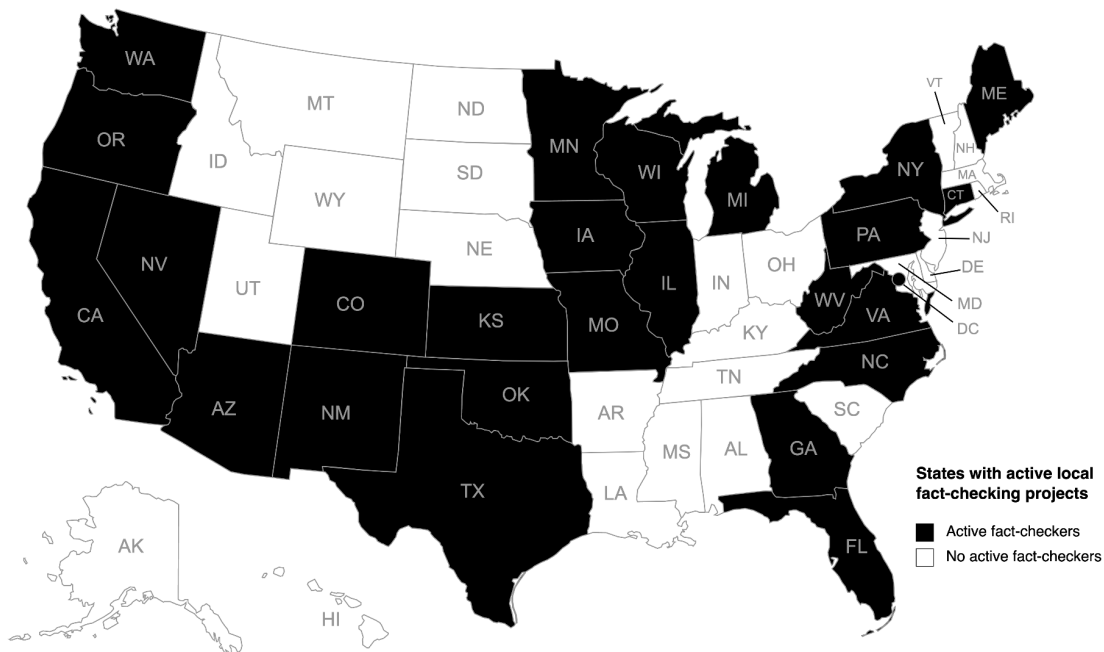
The results were striking.

Governors were the most likely elected officials to face review by fact-checkers at the state and local level. But still fewer than half of the governors had even a single statement checked (19 out of 50).

For those serving in Congress, the chances of being checked were even lower. Only 33 of 435 U.S. representatives (8%) were checked. In the U.S. Senate, a mere 16 of 100 lawmakers were checked by their home state news media.

The smaller the office, the smaller the chance of being checked. Out of 7,386 state legislative seats, just 47 of those lawmakers were checked (0.6%). And among the more than 1,400 U.S. mayors of cities of 30,000 people or more, just seven were checked (0.5%).

These results build on an earlier Reporters' Lab report³ immediately after the election, which showed vast geographical gaps in fact-checking at the state and local level. Voters in these "fact deserts" have few, if any, ways to keep up with misleading political claims on TV and social media. Nor can they easily hold public officials and institutions accountable for any inaccuracies and disinformation they spread.



³ <https://reporterslab.org/fact-deserts-leave-states-vulnerable-to-election-lies/>

Longstanding national fact-checking projects fill in some of the gaps. FactCheck.org, PolitiFact, The Washington Post, and the Associated Press sometimes focus on high-profile races at the state and local level. They and other national media outlets also monitor the statements of prominent state-level politicians who have their eyes fixed on higher offices — such as the White House.

But our review of the 2022 election finds that the legacy fact-checking groups have not scaled to the vast size and scope of the American political system. Voters need more fact-checks, on more politicians, more quickly. And fact-checkers need to develop more robust and creative ways to distribute and showcase those findings.

We found big gaps in coverage, but also opportunities for some relatively easy collaborations. Politicians and campaigns repeatedly use the same lines and talking points. Fact-checkers sometimes cite each other's work when the same claims pop up in other places and other mouths. But there's relatively little organized collaboration among fact-checkers to quickly respond to recycled claims. Collaborative projects in the international fact-checking community offer potential templates. Technology investments would help, too.

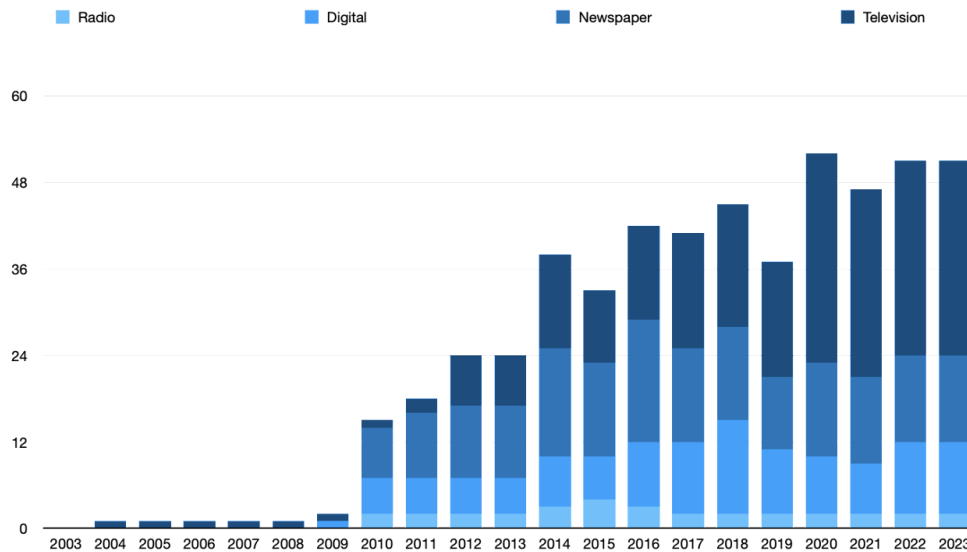
Who's Getting Fact-Checked?

To examine the state of regional fact-checking, the Duke Reporters' Lab identified 50 active and locally focused fact-checking projects from 25 states and the District of Columbia.⁴ That count was little changed from the national election years since 2016, when an average of 46 fact-checking projects were active at the state and local level.

The fact-checking came from a mix of TV news stations, newspaper companies, digital media sites and services, and two public radio stations. PolitiFact's state news affiliates also include two university partnerships, including a student newspaper. (See appendix for a complete list and descriptions.)

⁴ After an earlier report in November 2022, our Lab identified a few more election-year fact-checking efforts. That meant our total count for the year increased from 46 to 50. And the number of states that had fact-checking efforts in that period increased from 21 to 25.

Active Local Fact-Checking Outlets by Year



Journalists from those news organizations cranked out 976 fact-checks, verifying the accuracy of more than 1,300 claims from Jan. 1, 2022, to Election Day.

But thousands more claims went unchecked. That became clear when we began to determine who was getting fact-checked.

As part of our research, we reviewed the fact-checkers' output in text, video and audio format. We identified a "claim" as a statement or image that served as the basis of a news report that analyzed its accuracy based on reliable evidence. That included a mix of political statements as well as other kinds of fact-checks — such as local issues, social trends and health concerns.

We excluded explanatory stories that did not analyze a specific claim or reach a conclusion. Of the more than 970 fact-checks we reviewed, about 13% examined multiple claims.

The Reporters' Lab found that a vast majority of politicians at the state and local level elude the fact-checking process, from city council to statewide office. But elected officials and candidates in some places got more scrutiny than others.

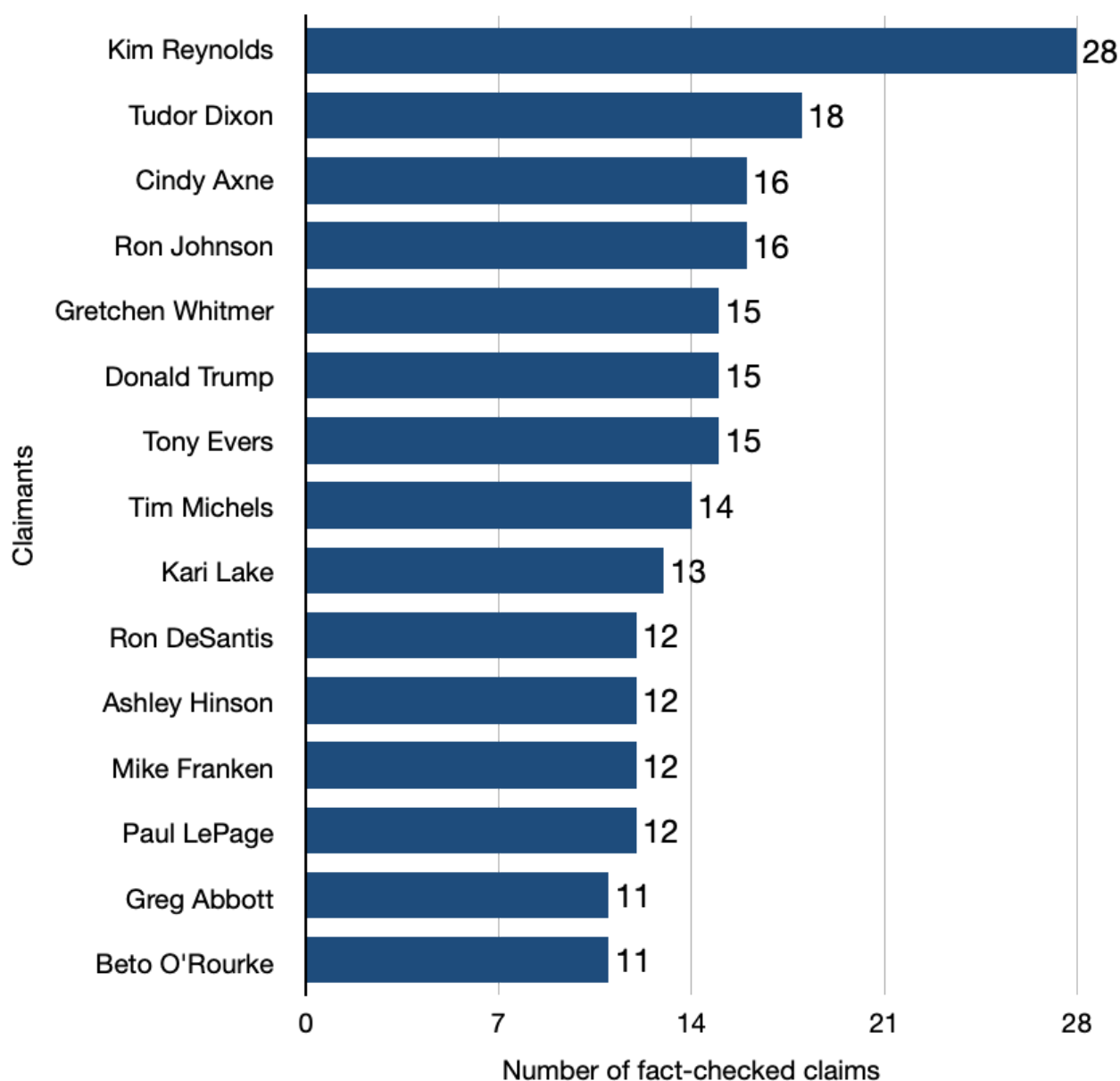
Some interesting findings:

The most-checked politician was Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds, a Republican. Reynolds topped the list with 28 claims checked, largely because of two in-depth articles from the Gazette Fact Checker in Cedar Rapids, which covered 10 claims from her Condition of the State address in January 2022, and another 10 from her delivery of the Republican response to President Joe Biden's State of the Union in March.

Other more frequently checked politicians included Michigan gubernatorial challenger Tudor Dixon, a Republican (18); Cindy Axne, a Democrat who lost her bid for reelection to a U.S. House seat in Iowa (16); and incumbent U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson of Wisconsin, a Republican (16).

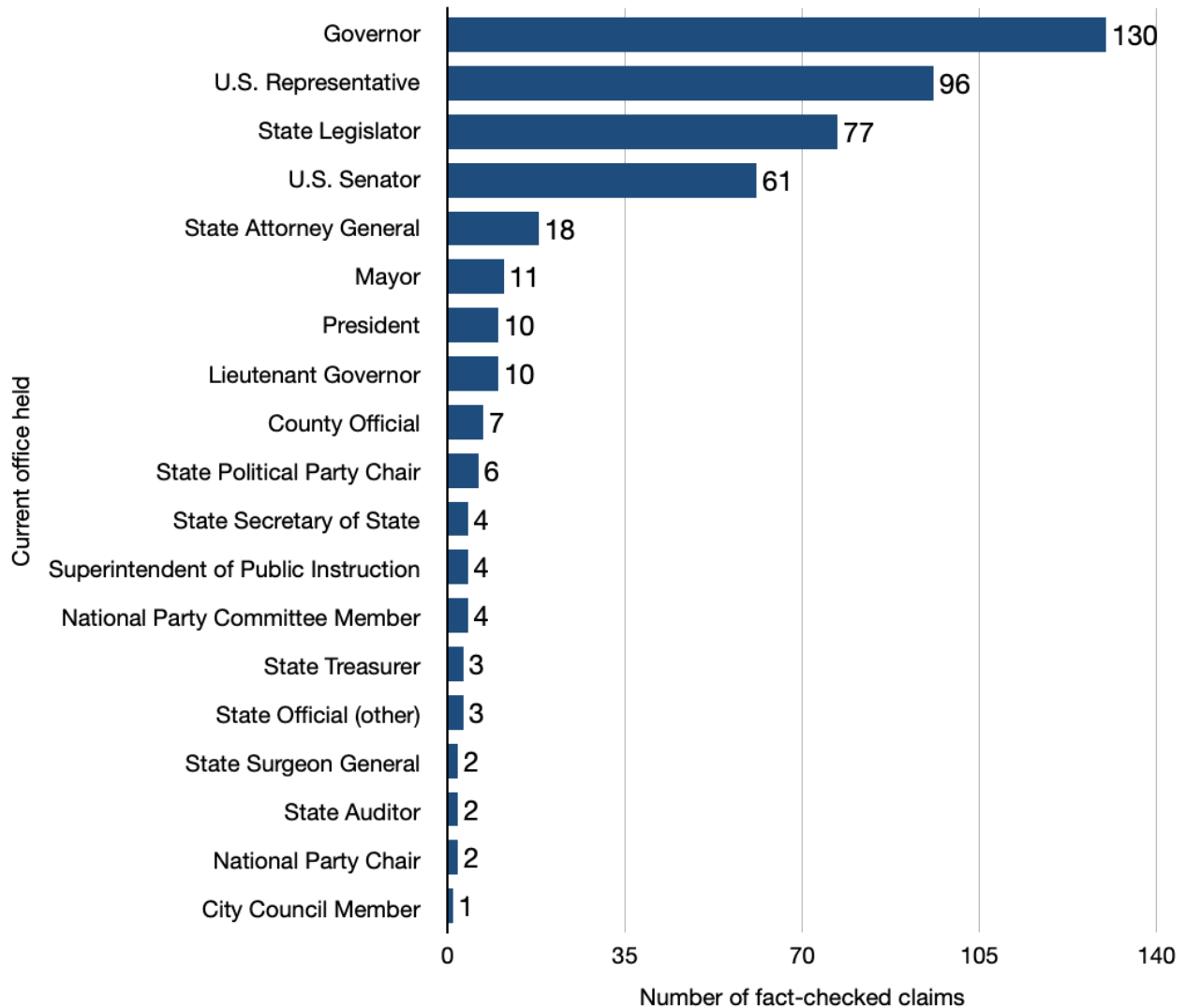
Also near the top of the list were former President Trump, a Republican (15), who was sometimes checked on claims during local appearances; Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, a Democrat (15); Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers, a Democrat (15); Evers' Republican challenger Tim Michels (14); Arizona gubernatorial candidate Kari Lake, a Republican (13); and Florida's Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis (12).

Most-Checked Politicians



Overall, individual claims by sitting governors were checked 130 times (10% of claims); by U.S. representatives 96 times (7%); by state legislators 77 times (6%); by U.S. senators 61 times (5%); and by mayors 11 times (1%).

Most-Checked Politicians By Office Held



For comparison, President Joe Biden’s claims were checked more than 100 times by national fact-checkers from PolitiFact, The Washington Post and others.

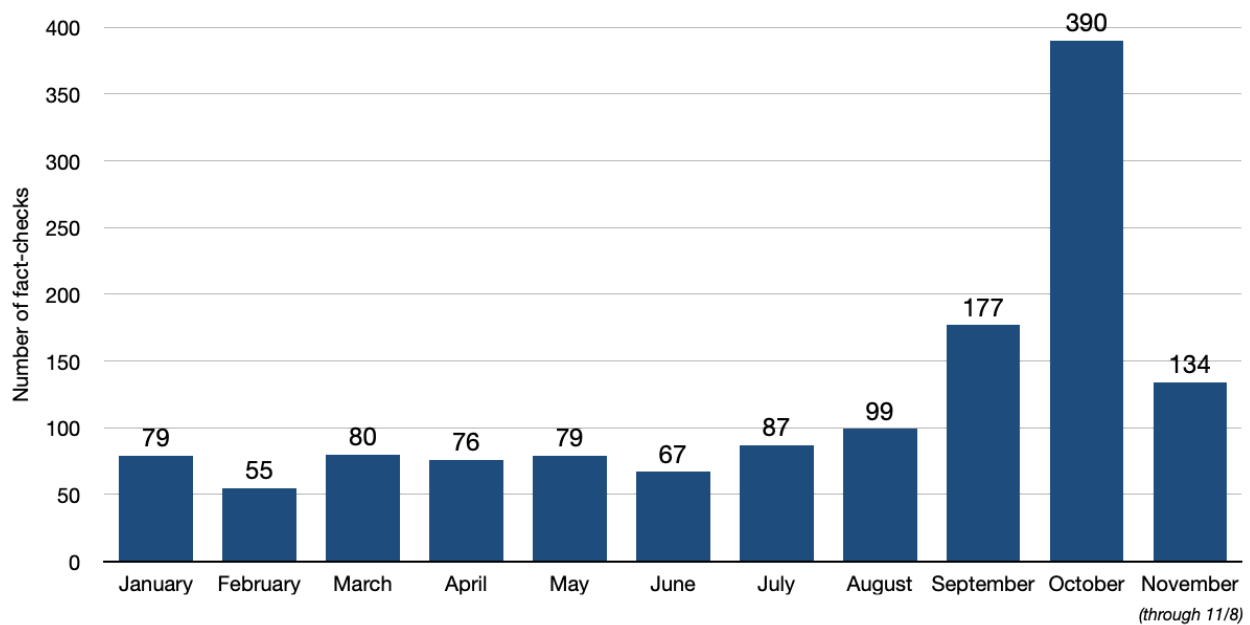
While these numbers focus on direct checking of the politicians themselves, fact-checkers also analyzed claims by other partisan sources, including deep-pocket political organizations running attack ads in many races.

There was more checking of Republicans/conservative politicians and political groups (553 claims, or 42%) than Democratic/progressive groups (382 claims, or 29%). If we look strictly at the 942 claims from claimants we identified as political, 59% were Republican/conservative and 41% were Democratic/progressive.

A Patchwork of Facts

Local fact-checking is often seasonal — with fact-checks picking up right before Election Day. More than half of the fact-checking in our dataset was done from Sept. 1 to Nov. 8.

Fact-Checking By Month

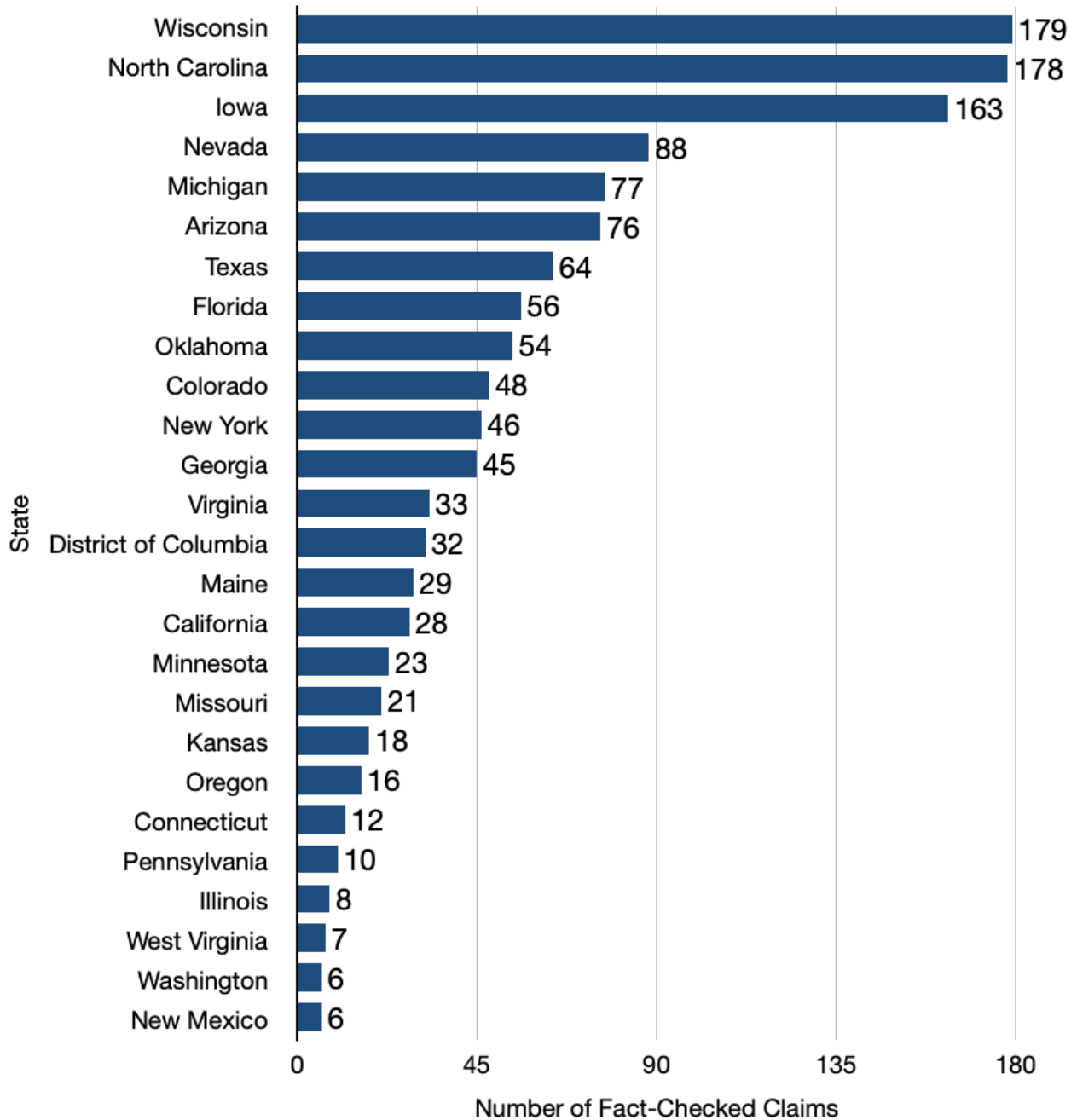


Candidates for governor were the most frequently checked, with 280 claims assessed (21% of the total). Candidates for U.S. House races were next with 124 (9%), and 113 claims by candidates for U.S. Senate were checked (9%).

At the local level, the places where there are active fact-checking efforts aren't always the same as the places with the most hotly contested elections.

The state with the most claims checked in the 2022 election cycle was Wisconsin, with 179 (14% of all the claims we found). The state was home to two of the most active fact-checking outlets — PolitiFact Wisconsin, based at the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, and the nonprofit news site Wisconsin Watch. Together they checked almost 170 claims.

Number of Claims Fact-Checked By State



The Wisconsin governor's race was one of the most-checked, with 37 claims by candidates checked, including 15 from Democratic incumbent Tony Evers and 14 by Republican challenger Tim Michels.

The other governor races that topped our results — Michigan (47 claims), Iowa (34 claims), Florida (25 claims) and Texas (21 claims) — weren't as close at the polls as races with less

fact-checking of candidates' claims, including Arizona (16 claims), Nevada (11 claims), Kansas (8 claims), and Oregon (8 claims).

When it came to U.S. Senate races, we found no active state or local fact-checking outlets that consistently reviewed claims from the candidates in the hot race in Georgia, and there was very little direct fact-checking of the candidates in the tight races in Arizona, Nevada and Pennsylvania.

The most-checked U.S. House race was a close one — Democrat incumbent Cindy Axne's loss to Republican Zach Nunn in Iowa (16 claims checked for her, eight for him).

But candidates in very few other House races had to worry about being checked — even in competitive districts like Ohio's 13th, where we found no fact-checking at all.

Faster Facts

With politicians able to lie and exaggerate so freely, there's an urgent need for more and faster fact-checking.

One of the newest U.S. fact-checking organizations is taking on that problem directly. Gigafact is a California-based nonprofit that partnered with three newsrooms to counter misinformation during the midterms: The Arizona Center for Investigative Reporting, The Nevada Independent and Wisconsin Watch. Using technology that was donated by Repustar, a benefit corporation in the San Francisco Bay Area, Gigafact and its three nonprofit news partners produced a series of “fact briefs” — short, timely reports designed to answer yes or no questions, such as “Is Nevada's violent crime rate higher than the national average?” Together, the three partner organizations fact-checked more than 220 claims by Election Day 2022.

In addition to increasing the number of fact-checked claims, we also need to make sure there are fact-checkers in the states where there are currently none. Twenty-five states lacked any dedicated fact-checking effort at all, and in some states, previous efforts have dried up.

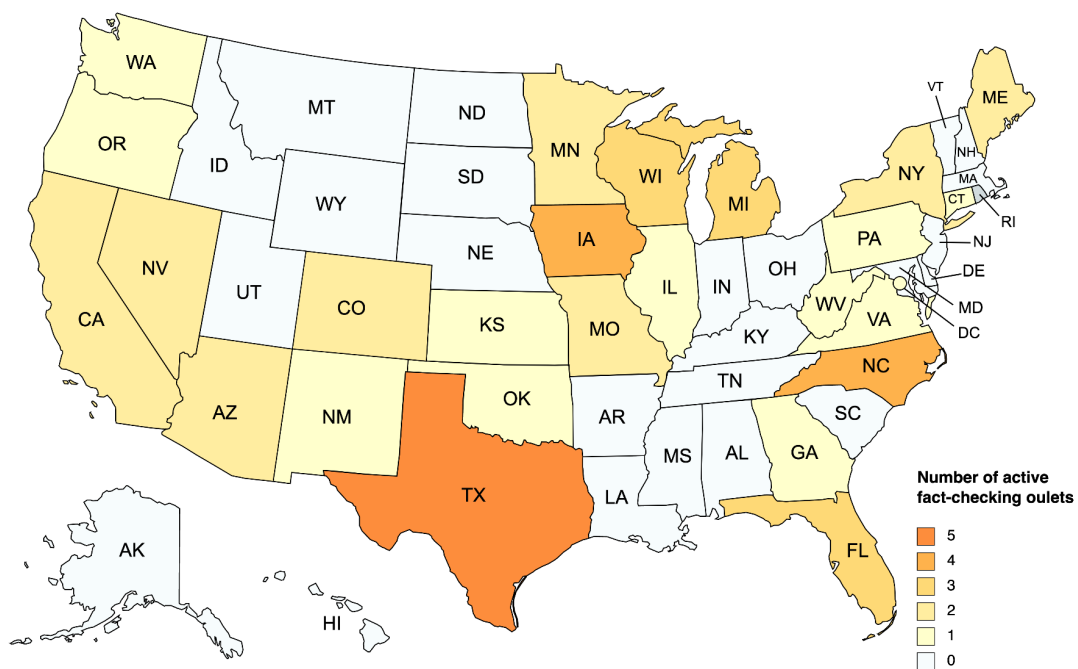
Ohio has been one of the hardest hit states. It has been home to four fact-checking outlets over the years — the Cincinnati Enquirer's Ad Watch, PolitiFact Ohio, Cleveland.com's Truth in Numbers, and WCPO-TV's Fact Check Friday in Cincinnati. None of those remain active, though some local outlets produce occasional fact-checks.

Seven other states have lost past fact-checking outlets — Hawaii, Kentucky, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Rhode Island and Vermont. But 17 states have never been home to an active fact-checker in the Reporters' Lab global fact-checking map and database⁵.

⁵ <https://reporterslab.org/fact-checking/>

The shrinking has also occurred in places that still have active fact-checkers. Georgia, Kansas, Pennsylvania and Washington state are all down to one active fact-checking outlet since two past efforts ended. Since we began tracking for the Reporters' Lab global database in 2014, 38 state and local projects have gone inactive.

On the positive side, 25 states and the District of Columbia do have active fact-checking outlets, and most states with one active fact-checker tend to have at least two (14 of the 25 states). The most robust states for fact-checking include Texas (5 outlets), Iowa (4), North Carolina (4), Florida (3), Michigan (3), Wisconsin (3). During 2022, the top states for number of claims checked were Wisconsin (179), North Carolina (178) and Iowa (163).



The oldest active fact-checker dates to 2004 (Wisconsin's News 3 Reality Check), and 12 fact-checkers (24%) have been active for 10 years or more.

New fact-checkers are still popping up. Twenty-one state and local fact-checkers (42%) in the Reporters' Lab database got their start since the beginning of 2020.

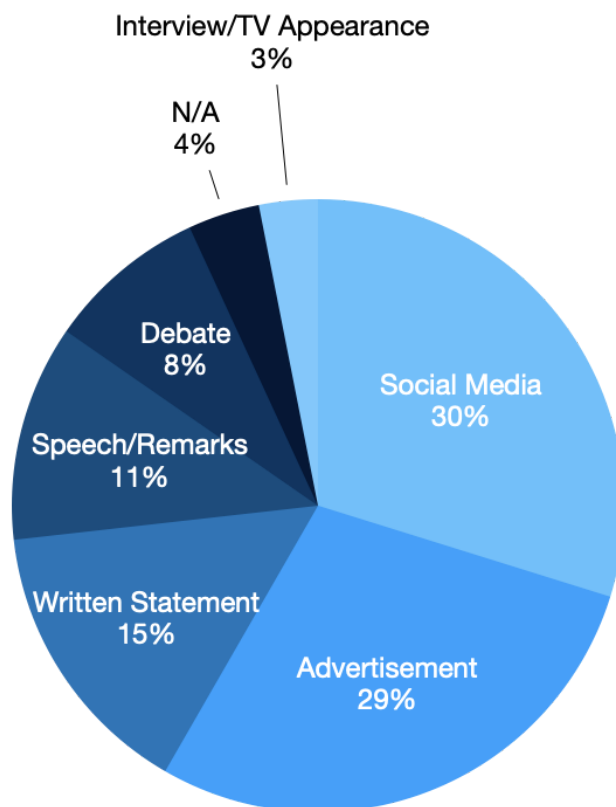
Drinking From the Fact Firehose

In an earlier era of fact-checking — by which we mean five years ago — journalists sometimes found it hard to find claims that were worth checking.

One of the earliest uses of automation in the fact-checking process were tools that helped reporters identify potential claims. The Reporters' Lab developed a system based on an algorithm that was devised by computer scientists at the University of Texas, Arlington. It would scan tweets and TV transcripts to help harvest potential claims, which we then sent in daily emails to fact-checking reporters around the country. In Argentina and elsewhere, members of the international fact-checking community were developing similar tools, while others built chatbots to help reporters automatically find and debunk misinformation.

Finding claims is no longer the issue. The challenge now is keeping up with them.

Number of Claims Fact-Checked By Source



During the 2022 midterm campaign, fact-checkers were bombarded with statements in many shapes, sizes and formats. The most common source of claims in our analysis of local

fact-checking was social media (394 claims checked, or 30%). About half of those claims were made by politicians, political organizations and other partisan sources. Another half were from users who were not officially political, but often still involved claims that related to the elections or were political in nature.

Political ads were the second biggest source of claims. Almost a third of the claims (378 claims, or 29%) were from ads. And the fact-checkers certainly had their work cut out for them. As the analytics firm AdImpact reports⁶, the 2022 cycle was the most expensive midterm election on record, with almost \$9 billion spent on political ads. Ads aired millions of times on broadcast and cable TV, and there were more ads popping up online.

AdImpact found that 19% of political ads included claims about abortion, and Democrats aired more than 10 times as many ads on the topic than in the 2018 and 2020 election cycles. Abortion was also among the most-checked topics for local fact-checkers, with 124 claims checked (9%) falling into our Abortion/Women category.

During this election cycle, Republican ads tended to focus on taxation, inflation and crime, which also aligned with our findings of the most commonly checked topics. Economic issues were near the top (264 claims checked, or 20%), as well as Law and Crime and Policing (225 claims, or 17%).

Health claims (191, or 14%) and claims about Voting/Elections (159, or 12%) were also common.

In the states participating in the Gigafact project, Voting/Elections got more of a focus from fact-checkers, with 41% of claims checked in Arizona, 33% of claims checked in Nevada, and 21% of claims in Wisconsin falling into this category (compared to the overall 12%). In Iowa and Michigan, claims about abortion/women were a focus, with 14% of claims in Iowa and 21% in Michigan falling in this category (compared to the overall 9%). In Texas and New York, health was the most common topic checked (28% of claims in New York and 47% in Texas, compared to the overall 14%).

The Rise of TV

Fact-checking at the state and local level has largely become a TV genre — which is remarkable since the TV stations that air those reports are often debunking claims in paid ads that also appear on their broadcasts.

The Reporters' Lab found that 27 of the 50 state and local fact-checking projects we found were affiliated with TV newsrooms. Of the other formats, 11 were based in newspaper companies (22%); nine were digital-only outlets (18%), and two were public radio stations (4%). Hearst

⁶ <https://adimpact.com/2022-cycle-in-review/>

Connecticut Media Group's ConnectiFact is part of a newspaper group that also includes a digital-only site.

Television outlets started outpacing newspapers as the most-common medium for fact-checks in 2017 — a time when cable and broadcast news shows in particular were criticized for failing to call out Donald Trump's misstatements and outright lies during the previous year's presidential race. By 2020, the TV fact-checking ranks continued to grow.

Tegna, Graham Media Group and other television companies began to prioritize fact-checks on their local station's newscasts in that same period. Tegna's Verify segments are produced by local stations and by a team of national reporters. And its national team has also evolved into a standalone national fact-checking site (VerifyThis.com) that also is showcased on its station's websites.

Meanwhile, the stations owned by Graham Media have developed a unified Trust Index brand.

Of more than 60 Tegna stations in 51 media markets, eight produce significant inhouse streams of local fact-checking and explanatory reporting, according to Jonathan Forsythe, Verify's managing editor. Graham Media has five.

The majority of local fact-checks are still done in article format (585 fact-checks, or 60%), including some text-only articles that are written specifically for TV news sites. More than a third (363, or 37%) were video or video-and-article combinations.

Viewer feedback and participation are a big part of TV news fact-checking. As the anchor of "The Story" at KGW-TV in Portland, Oregon, Pat Dooris made fact-checking a major part of his program in the run-up to the election — partly driven by questions from his audience. "[W]e did indeed get requests from viewers to fact check the ads so we decided to dive on in," he said. "Viewers seemed to appreciate it and I had a blast doing it!"

The Reporters' Lab counted 91 fact-checks (with 109 claims) among all fact-checking outlets that were sourced to an audience member's question.

Some state and local TV fact-checks often focus on rumors or other claims in which the exact source is hard to pin down. We tracked 42 fact-checks (58 claims) for which the source was best characterized as a "you may have heard" story. In some ways, these are fact-checks based on community chatter rather than specifying a single source or claim. Stories like this do answer questions that are interesting and timely to the public. Such as: Does peeing on a jellyfish sting relieve the pain? (No.) Or: Does hitting the snooze button several times make you groggy during the day? (Yes.) But the same story format can address more serious or complicated topics. Such as: Does the Covid-19 booster make you test positive for Covid-19? (No.)

Measuring the Truth

Most of the state and local fact-checkers the Reporters' Lab examined use meters, labels and grades to explain their fact-checks. While somewhat gimmicky, it has proven to be a helpful device for fact-checkers to explain their findings to their audiences -- much like a restaurant columnist or a movie critic might use a four-star rating to make recommendations.

PolitiFact pioneered this approach in 2007, when it launched its Truth-O-Meter — a five-point scale that goes from True to False, with an additional “Pants on Fire” rating for the most outlandish claims, plus three levels for “flip-flops.” PolitiFact’s state news partners use the same system. Around that same time The Washington Post came up with its four-Pinocchio rating scale.

Those approaches have inspired fact-checkers around the world to come up with creative ways to explain whether a claim is true, false or somewhere in between. And the same has been true for state and local fact-checkers in the United States as well.

Sometimes fact-checkers come up with similar systems. For instance, the 5 Eyewitness News Truth Test from KSTP-TV in St. Paul, Minnesota, and The Gazette Fact Checker in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, both “grade” the claims they work on using a scholastic A-to-F scale.

Other recent efforts in the U.S. aim to collaborate on shared rating systems, much as PolitiFact did with its state news partners.

In 2020, five TV stations owned by the Graham Media Group⁷ jointly developed their Trust Index. Its color-coded rating system offers a three-point system: “It’s True” (shown in green), “Be Careful” (yellow) and “Not True” (red). Newsroom leaders at the company worked with a former AP journalist, Fergus Bell of Fathom, who had previously helped launch a fact-checking project focusing on the 2018 election in Mexico.

Gigafact and its three state news partners use a process for extracting claims that can then be reduced into a clear “Yes” or “No” answers.

On the more elaborate side of the fact-checking scale is the 9News Truth Test from KUSA-TV, a Tegna-owned NBC affiliate in Denver. 9News has been fact-checking since 2012. But Marshall Zelinger, an investigative political reporter introduced on-air as the “politics guy,” traded in what was once a more conventional rating system for something more dynamic. The new 9News process depends on a series of colloquial labels, such as “No,” “Yes,” “Yes But,” “Close,” “Kind Of,” “Was True,” a “Stretch” and “Extreme.” The on-screen conclusions in Zelinger’s reports are also illustrated with emoji-like caricatures of the reporter acting out his findings. The cartoon Zelinger also dons helpful costumes — such as an illustration of him dressed as a traffic light for “Slow Down,” or in a pig costume that stands for rolling around in the... let’s say “muck.”

⁷ <https://www.grahammedia.com/news/tag/trust+index>

As a Tegna station, 9News also does Verify segments, which typically do not use a formalized rating process. And that too may well be a trend. In past research, the Reporters' Lab found that 70-90% of the global fact-checking community used rating systems. That's declined in recent years, and the pattern for U.S. fact-checkers seems to be heading in the same direction.

Our Recommendations

Fact-checking is a challenging type of journalism. It requires speed, meticulous research and a thick skin. It also requires a willingness to call things as they are, instead of hiding behind the misleading niceties of both-siderism. And yet, over the past decade, dozens of state and local news organizations have adopted this new type of journalism.

The 50 fact-checking programs we examined during last year's midterm election invested time, energy and money to combat political falsehoods and push back against other types of misinformation. Even at a time of upheaval in the local news business, we have seen TV news stations, newspaper companies, and nonprofit newsrooms embrace this mission.

But all this work is not enough.

Misinformation and disinformation spread far, fast and at a scale that is almost impossible for news media fact-checkers to keep pace. If journalists aim to reestablish a common set of facts, we need to do more fact-checking.

Our recommendations for dramatically increasing local media's capacity for fact-checking include:

Invest in more fact-checking

The challenge: Despite the diligent work of local fact-checking outlets in 25 states and the District of Columbia, only a relative handful of politicians and public officials were ever fact-checked. And in half the country, there was no active fact-checking at all.

The recommendation: It is clear that an investment in this vital journalism is sorely needed. Voters in "fact desert" states like Ohio and New Hampshire will be key to the 2024 elections. And those voters should be able to trust in local journalism to provide a check on the lies that politicians are sure to peddle in political ads, debates and other campaign events.

Even in states where local fact-checking efforts exist, they are severely outmatched by a tsunami of claims, as political organizations pump billions of dollars into campaign ads, and social media messages accelerate the spread of misinformation far and wide. The low numbers of claims checked locally in the 2022 Senate races in Arizona, Georgia, Nevada and Pennsylvania demonstrate that additional help is needed in manpower and financial resources for the journalists trying to keep up with the campaign cycle.

One way to increase the volume of local fact-checking would be to incentivize projects like Gigafact and PolitiFact. These existing models can be replicated by other organizations and added in additional states. The Gigafact partners in Arizona, Nevada and Wisconsin produced dozens of 140-word “fact briefs” in the run-up to the 2022 election. These structured fact-checks, which answer yes/no questions, have proved popular with audiences. Dee J. Hall, managing editor at Wisconsin Watch, which participated in the Gigafact pilot in 2022, reported that eight of the organization’s ten most popular stories in November were fact briefs.

The journalism education community can also help. During the 2022 election, PolitiFact worked with the journalism department at West Virginia University and the student newspaper at the University of Iowa to produce fact-checks for voters in their states. Expanding that model, potentially in collaboration with other national fact-checkers, could transform most of the barren “fact deserts” we’ve described in time for the 2024 general election campaign.

Elevate fact-checking

The challenge: Fact-checking is still a niche form of reporting. It shares DNA with explanatory and investigative journalism. But it is rarely discussed at major news media conferences. There are few forums for fact-checkers at the state and local level to compare their efforts, learn from one another and focus on their distinctive reporting problems.

The Recommendation: As we continue increasing the volume of local fact-checking, audiences and potential funders need to view fact-checking with the same importance as investigative work. Investigative reporting has been a cornerstone of local news outlets’ identity and public service mission for decades. Fact-checking should be equally revered. Both are vital forms of journalism that are closely related to each other.

Some local news outlets already take this approach, with their investigative teams also producing fact-checking of claims. For example, 4 Investigates Fact Check at KOB-TV in New Mexico is an offshoot of its 4 Investigates team, and FactFinder 12 Fact Check at KWCH-TV in Kansas uses a similar model.

Fact-checkers also can elevate their work by explaining it more forcefully — on-air, online and even in person. This is an essential way to promote trust in their work. We found that 17 state and local fact-checking efforts do not provide any explanation of their process or methodology to their audiences. Offering this kind of basic guidance does not require creating and maintaining separate dedicated “about” or methodology pages. Instead, some fact-checkers, such as ConnectiFact and the Gazette Fact Checker in Iowa, embed explanations directly within their fact-checks. In this mobile era, that in-line approach might well be more important. Likewise, as TV continues to play an increasing role in fact-checking, broadcasters also need to help their viewers understand what they’re seeing.

Embrace technology and collaborate

The challenge: Several national fact-checkers in the United States work closely together with the Reporters' Lab, as well as other academic researchers and independent developers, to test new approaches to their work. We've seen that same spirit of community in the International Fact-Checking Network at the Poynter Institute, which has fostered cross-border collaborations and technology initiatives. In contrast, few state and local press in the United States have the capacity or technological know-how to experiment on their own. Fact-checking also has a low-profile in journalism's investigative and tech circles.

The recommendation: There is a critical need for more investment in technology to assist fact-checkers at the state and local level. As bad actors push misinformation on social media and politicians take advantage of new technologies to mislead voters, an equal effort must be made to boost the truth.

AI can be leveraged to better track the spread of misinformation, such as catching repetitions of false talking points that catch on and circulate all around the country. A talking point tracker could help fact-checkers prioritize and respond to false claims that have already been fact-checked.

AI can also be leveraged to help with the debunking of false claims. Once a repeated talking point has been identified, a system using AI could then create the building blocks of a fact-check that a journalist could review and publish.

But none of these ideas will get very far unless journalists are willing to collaborate. Collaboration can cut down on duplication and allow more effort to be spent on fact-checking new claims. The use of technology would also have a greater impact if more organizations are willing to swap data and make use of each others' research.

Make fact-checking easier to find

The challenge: Fact-checking in the United States has grown significantly since 2017. But fact-checks are still easy to miss on cluttered digital news feeds. Existing technology can help fact-checkers raise their profiles. But some state and local fact-checks don't even have basic features that call attention to their reporting.

The Recommendation: Nearly 180 fact-checking projects across the United States and around the world have embraced open-source systems designed to provide data that elevate their work in search results and on large social media and messaging services. State and local fact-checkers should adopt this system as well.

The Reporters' Lab joined with Google and Schema.org to develop a tagging system called ClaimReview. ClaimReview provides data that major digital platforms can use to recognize and suppress misinformation on their feeds. A second, related schema called MediaReview is generating similar data for visual misinformation.

ClaimReview has helped feed a prominent collection of recent fact-checks on the front of the Google News page in half a dozen countries, including the U.S. But so far, most state and local fact-checking projects are not using ClaimReview.

Meanwhile, the regional fact-checkers have even more foundational work to do. That more than a quarter of the active fact-checkers (13 of 50) have no dedicated page or tag for the public to find these stories is disappointing. Overcoming the limitations of inflexible publishing systems often make simple things hard. But all fact-checkers need to do more to showcase their work. Fact-checks have a long shelf life and enormous value to their audiences.

Appendix I: Methodology

Local Fact-Checking Content

For our content analysis, we collected URLs of fact-checks posted from Jan. 1, 2022, to Nov. 8, 2022, by the 50 active fact-checkers listed in the global database maintained by the Duke Reporters' Lab. We counted articles, videos or audio segments that analyzed at least one claim — a direct statement made by a politician, political group, social media user, etc., or an inferred statement derived from a general rumor or viewer question. Articles, videos or audio segments that explained a process or concept were excluded if they did not analyze a claim and/or if they did not arrive at a conclusion (yes/no, true/false, or an assessment that fell somewhere in between).

For each URL, we collected information about: the state it was from; the organization that posted it; the date; the author; the title; and alternate/duplicate URLs. We then tagged each URL with the following categories: claimant name; type of claimant (political/nonpolitical); political designation (politician, political organization, political campaign, no official role); party affiliation; topic; source of statement; the format of the fact-check (article, video, audio, or a combination); whether a definitive rating was given by the fact-checker; and whether multiple claims were examined in one article/video/audio segment. For URLs tagged with "politician" as claimant, we further tagged for whether they were a current officeholder; their current position; whether they were running for office; and their aspiring position.

For topics, we tagged for the following categories: Economic Issues; Government Operations; Voting/Elections; Civil Rights, Minority Issues and Civil Liberties; Immigration and Refugee Issues; LGBTQ; Race; Religion; Social Welfare; Education; Abortion/Women; Health; Law and Crime and Policing; Guns; History; Individual Record; Legislation; Agriculture; Energy and Environment; Community Development and Housing; Technology, Science, Space; Media and Communications

For source of statement, we tagged for the following categories: Advertisement; Debate; Social Media; Speech/Remarks; TV Appearance/Interview; Written Statement; N/A

For fact-checks with multiple claims, each claim was tagged separately to account for different claimants, different topics, etc.

Local Fact-Checking Outlets

For this report, we focused on active fact-checking organizations operating at the state and local level in the United States that qualified for inclusion in the global fact-checking database maintained by the Duke Reporters' Lab.

The fact-checking database tracks several hundred non-partisan organizations around the world. These projects regularly publish articles, videos or audio reports that:

- verify the accuracy of claims made by prominent public figures and institutions;
- debunk rumors, hoaxes and other forms of misinformation that spread online;
- or review the status of political promises made by candidates and political parties

The Lab considers many attributes in determining which organizations to include, such as whether the site:

- reviews statements by all parties and sides;
- examines discrete claims and reaches conclusions;
- transparently identifies its sources and explains its methods;
- discloses its funding and affiliations.

Further details about how we identify fact-checkers are available on [the Reporters' Lab website](#).

Appendix II: Local Fact-Checking Projects

Arizona

[Arizona Center for Investigative Reporting \(Gigafact\)](#) | Phoenix

Fact-checking for the Gigafact project by an independent, nonprofit newsroom in Phoenix funded by individual donors, foundations, fee-for-service revenue and other sources. Gigafact is a nonprofit that provides training, a publishing platform and startup funding for newsrooms to publish “fact briefs” — short, timely fact checks that address unsupported claims online. Gigafact’s technology was donated by Repustar, a benefit corporation in the San Francisco Bay Area.

[PolitiFact Arizona](#) | Phoenix

The Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University is PolitiFact’s local affiliate in Arizona. PolitiFact previously worked in Arizona with KNXV-TV (ABC15), ABC’s local affiliate in Phoenix, as part of partnership with the station’s owner, Scripps TV Station Group. (KNXV-TV had previously produced its own Truth Test segments.) PolitiFact’s national staff maintained the site starting with the 2018 midterm election cycle until the fact-checking organization partnered with ASU in 2022.

California

[PolitiFact California](#) | Sacramento

Affiliate of PolitiFact, staffed by reporters at Capital Public Radio.

[Sacramento Bee Fact Check](#) | Sacramento

Fact-checks by Sacramento Bee reporters appear in its Capitol Alert section, especially in election years. Began as an Ad Watch feature focused on political advertising.

Colorado

[9News Truth Test](#) | Denver

NBC’s local TV affiliate in Denver has long done political fact-checking, particularly during elections. In addition, the Tegna-owned station also actively contributes to the Verify initiative — a companywide fact-checking and explanatory journalism project that involves a mix of local stories and national reporting shared across more than 60 stations (<https://www.9news.com/verify>). 9News relies on funding from advertising and local carriage fees from cable, satellite and digital TV service providers.

[CBS4 Reality Check](#) | Denver

Election-year fact-checks from Denver’s local, CBS-owned commercial TV affiliate.

Connecticut

[ConnectiFact](#) | **Norwalk**

A project of the Hearst Connecticut Media Group that examines statements made by candidates for political office. The group is made up of eight daily newspapers and other publications in the state, as well as CTInsider.com, a statewide news website.

District of Columbia

[WUSA9 Verify](#) | **Washington**

WUSA9 is among the most active contributors in Tegna's Verify initiative — a companywide fact-checking and explanatory journalism project that involves a mix of local stories and national reporting shared across more than 60 stations. The Washington-area's CBS affiliate relies on funding from advertising and local carriage fees from cable, satellite and digital TV service providers.

Florida

[News4Jax Trust Index](#) | **Jacksonville**

Fact-checking by the news team at WJXT-TV (News4Jax), an independent commercial TV station in Jacksonville, Florida. News4Jax is owned by the Graham Media Group, a commercial media company whose stations launched their Trust Index reporting during the 2020 U.S. elections with help and training from Fathom, a media lab and international consulting group.

[News 6 Trust Index](#) | **Orlando**

Fact-checking by the news team at WKMG-TV (News 6), the CBS affiliate in Orlando, Florida. News 6 is owned by the Graham Media Group, a commercial media company whose regional TV stations launched their Trust Index reporting during the 2020 U.S. elections with help and training from Fathom, a media lab and international consulting group.

[PolitiFact Florida](#) | **St. Petersburg**

PolitiFact's reporting on the state is produced in affiliation with the Tampa Bay Times. The newspaper's bureau in Washington, D.C., was the fact-checking service's original home before it was folded into the Poynter Institute — a non-profit media training center in St. Petersburg, Florida, that also owns the Times and its commercial publishing company. From 2010 to 2017, the Miami Herald was also a PolitiFact Florida reporting and distribution partner.

Georgia

[11 Alive Verify](#) | **Atlanta**

WXIA is among the most active contributors in Tegna's Verify initiative — a companywide fact-checking and explanatory journalism project that involves a mix of local stories and national reporting shared across more than 60 stations. The Atlanta-area's NBC affiliate relies on funding from advertising and local carriage fees from cable, satellite and digital TV service providers.

Illinois

[PolitiFact Illinois](#) | **Chicago**

Affiliate of PolitiFact, staffed by reporters and researchers from the Better Government Association, a nonprofit watchdog organization founded in 1923 that focuses on investigative journalism. PolitiFact's previous news partner in the state was Reboot Illinois, a for-profit digital news service.

Iowa

[Gazette Fact Checker](#) | **Cedar Rapids**

Fact-checks by reporters at The Cedar Rapids Gazette. The newspaper previously worked on its fact-checks in collaboration with KCRG-TV, a local TV station the Gazette owned until 2015.

[KCCI's Get the Facts](#) | **Des Moines**

Fact-checks of campaign ads during election cycles by reporters at the Des Moines, Iowa, CBS affiliate, a commercial station owned by Hearst Television.

[KCRG-TV's I9 Fact Checker](#) | **Cedar Rapids**

Occasional fact-checks presented by commercial station KCRG-TV's I9 Investigation team. The local ABC affiliate in Cedar Rapids was previously owned by the area's local newspaper, The Cedar Rapids Gazette. The two news organizations worked together on fact-checks from 2014 to 2018.

[PolitiFact Iowa](#) | **Iowa City**

Affiliate of PolitiFact, staffed by reporters at The Daily Iowan, the independent student newspaper at the University of Iowa. PolitiFact's previous state partner in Iowa was the Des Moines Register.

Kansas

[FactFinder12 Fact Check](#) | **Wichita**

Fact-checks of political ads by the FactFinder 12 investigative team at KWCH, the Gray Television-owned CBS affiliate in Wichita.

Maine

[Bangor Daily News Ad Watch](#) | **Bangor**

Fact-checks of campaign ads during election season by staffers at the Bangor daily newspaper.

[Portland Press Herald](#) | **Portland**

Fact-checks of campaign ads during election cycles by staffers at the daily newspaper in Portland, Maine.

Michigan

[Bridge Michigan](#) | Detroit

An ongoing reporting project published mainly in election years by Bridge Magazine, an online journal published by the non-profit Center for Michigan. Originally called The Truth Squad, the project began as a standalone site before it merged with the center and its magazine in 2012. The Bridge's fact-checkers also have collaborated with public media's [Michigan Radio](#).

[Local 4 Trust Index](#) | Detroit

Fact-checking by the news team at WDIV-TV (Local 4), the NBC affiliate for Detroit, Michigan. Local 4 is owned by the Graham Media Group, a commercial media company whose regional TV stations launched their Trust Index reporting during the 2020 U.S. elections with help and training from Fathom, a media lab and international consulting group.

[PolitiFact Michigan](#) | Detroit

Affiliate of PolitiFact, staffed by reporters from the Detroit Free Press. The newspaper previously did fact-checking on its own during the 2014 midterm elections.

Minnesota

[5 Eyewitness News Truth Test](#) | St. Paul

Election season fact-checking by the local ABC affiliate's political reporter.

[CBS Minnesota Reality Check](#) | Minneapolis

Fact-checking by the news staff at the local CBS affiliate in Minneapolis.

Missouri

[KY3 Fact Finders](#) | Springfield

Fact-checks by an anchor/reporter for the NBC affiliate in Springfield, Missouri. Focuses on rumors and questions from viewers.

[News 4 Fact Check](#) | St. Louis

Election season fact-checks by reporters at CBS's local affiliate in St. Louis.

Nevada

[Reno Gazette-Journal Fact Checker](#) | Reno

Fact-checks by RGJ's local government reporter and engagement director. The position is supported by donations and grants.

[The Nevada Independent \(Gigafact\)](#) | Las Vegas

Fact-checking for the Gigafact project by a nonprofit news website in Las Vegas funded by corporate donations, memberships, foundation grants and other sources. Gigafact is a nonprofit that provides training, a publishing platform and startup funding for newsrooms to publish “fact briefs” — short, timely fact checks that address unsupported claims online. Gigafact’s technology was donated by Repustar, a benefit corporation in the San Francisco Bay Area.

New Mexico

[4 Investigates Fact Check](#) | Albuquerque

Occasional fact-checks by the investigative news team at KOB-TV (KOB4), a commercial TV station owned by Hubbard Broadcasting Company that is NBC’s local affiliate in Albuquerque, New Mexico. A reporter conducts the fact-checks with the help of a political scientist from the University of New Mexico.

New York

[News10NBC Fact Check](#) | Rochester

Fact-checks by an anchor/reporter at the Rochester, New York, NBC affiliate, that focus on rumors and questions from viewers.

[PolitiFact New York](#) | Buffalo

Affiliate of PolitiFact, staffed by reporters from the Buffalo News.

North Carolina

[CBS 17 Truth Tracker and Digging Deeper](#) | Raleigh-Goldsboro

Fact-checks by a data reporter from the Raleigh-area’s local CBS affiliate — a commercial TV station owned by Nexstar Media Group. Televised versions of the Digging Deeper segments are supplemented with source material on the station’s website, with political Truth Tracker reports appearing on its election news page.

[PolitiFact North Carolina](#) | Raleigh

Affiliate of PolitiFact, staffed by reporters at WRAL-TV, a privately owned commercial station that is NBC’s local affiliate in the Raleigh-Durham area. The News & Observer, a McClatchy-owned newspaper in Raleigh, was PolitiFact’s original local news partner in the state from 2016 to 2019.

[The News & Observer’s Fact-Checking Project](#) | Raleigh

Fact-checks by the reporting staff of The News & Observer, the McClatchy owned newspaper in Raleigh, North Carolina. It freely distributes its fact-checking to other media in the state. The N&O previously did fact-checking as PolitiFact’s state partner from 2016 to 2019.

[WCNC Verify](#) | Charlotte

WCNC is among the most active contributors in Tegna’s Verify initiative — a companywide fact-checking and explanatory journalism project that involves a mix of local stories and national reporting shared

across more than 60 stations. The Charlotte-area's NBC affiliate relies on funding from advertising and local carriage fees from cable, satellite and digital TV service providers.

Oklahoma

[The Frontier fact checks](#) | Tulsa

Fact-checking by reporters from this non-profit news site based in Tulsa. The fact-checks appear in the form of thematic roundups posted with the site's other news stories. The Frontiers' work is also used by other Oklahoma media. The Frontier Media Group Inc. operates the site with support from foundations, corporate supporters and individual donors.

Oregon

[KGW8's The Story Fact Checks](#) | Portland

Fact-checks of political ads by the team at The Story, an evening news program on KGW, the Tegna-owned NBC affiliate in Portland. Tegna's Verify initiative is a companywide fact-checking and explanatory journalism project that involves a mix of local stories and national reporting shared across more than 60 stations.

Pennsylvania

[News 8 Ad Watch](#) | Lancaster

Ad Watch segments appear during election campaigns in televised newscasts and on the politics page of this local, commercially supported TV station. Based in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, WGAL-TV is owned by Hearst Television and is the local NBC affiliate for the Susquehanna Valley region, including the state capital in Harrisburg.

Texas

[KHOU11 Verify](#) | Houston

KHOU is among the most active contributors in Tegna's Verify initiative — a companywide fact-checking and explanatory journalism project that involves a mix of local stories and national reporting shared across more than 60 stations. The Houston-area's CBS affiliate relies on funding from advertising and local carriage fees from cable, satellite and digital TV service providers.

[KPRC Trust Index](#) | Houston

Fact-checking by the news team at KPRC-TV, the NBC affiliate for Houston, Texas. KPRC is owned by the Graham Media Group, a commercial media company whose local TV stations launched their Trust Index reporting during the 2020 U.S. elections with help and training from Fathom, a media lab and international consulting group.

[KSAT Trust Index](#) | **San Antonio**

Fact-checking by the news team at KSAT-TV, the ABC affiliate in San Antonio, Texas. KSAT is owned by the Graham Media Group, a commercial media company whose regional TV stations launched their Trust Index reporting during the 2020 U.S. elections with help and training from Fathm, a media lab and international consulting group.

[PolitiFact Texas](#) | **Austin, Houston, San Antonio**

Affiliate of PolitiFact, with contributions from its three newspaper partners in the state, Austin American Statesman, Houston Chronicle and San Antonio Express-News.

[WFAA's Verify Road Trip](#) | **Dallas**

WFAA-TV's contribution to Tegna's companywide fact-checking and explanatory journalism project is its Verify Road Trip segments. For these stories, the Dallas-area ABC affiliate enlists viewers to be "guest reporters" who join the news team to find answers to their questions. The station relies on funding from advertising and local carriage fees from cable, satellite and digital TV service providers. Verify Road Trip also has a [YouTube page](#).

Virginia

[PolitiFact Virginia](#) | **Richmond**

Staffed by reporters from the news team at WCVE-FM in the Richmond/Petersburg area, where the station is part of a cluster of regional public broadcasters. WCVE revived PolitiFact's presence in the commonwealth after a nearly two-year hiatus. (PolitiFact's original local news partner, the Richmond Times Dispatch, operated the Virginia site from 2010 to 2016.)

Washington

[KING 5 News Verify](#) | **Seattle**

A contributor to Tegna's Verify initiative — a companywide fact-checking and explanatory journalism project that involves a mix of local stories and national reporting shared across more than 60 stations. The Seattle NBC affiliate is a commercial TV station that is supported by advertising. King 5 ran a previous fact-checking initiative focused on the state's 2018 elections.

West Virginia

[PolitiFact West Virginia](#) | **Morgantown**

Affiliate of PolitiFact, staffed by student reporters at West Virginia University's Reed College of Media.

Wisconsin

[News 3 Reality Check](#) | **Madison**

Video fact-checking segments by News 3 team on Wisconsin politics and TV ads, especially during election season.

[PolitiFact Wisconsin](#) | Milwaukee

Affiliate of PolitiFact, staffed by reporters from the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.

[Wisconsin Watch \(Gigafact\)](#) | Madison

Fact-checking for the Gigafact project by a nonprofit news outlet in Wisconsin funded by grants from foundations, individual and corporate donations and other sources. Gigafact is a nonprofit that provides training, a publishing platform and startup funding for newsrooms to publish “fact briefs” — short, timely fact checks that address unsupported claims online. Gigafact’s technology was donated by Repustar, a benefit corporation in the San Francisco Bay Area.