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Nieman

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THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

FIGHTING FOR A FREE PRESS IN UKRAINE — AND BEYOND

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George Keburia says goodbye to his wife, Maya, and children as they board a train to Lviv at the Odessa train station in Odessa, Ukraine

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Dr. Ashish Jha on Bracing for the Pandemic's Third Year

The leading public health expert discusses the press' role in relaying public health directives, combating misinformation, and more

By the spring of 2021, one year into the pandemic, a return to normalcy seemed near. Vaccines were becoming more available in the U.S., and masking and social distancing restrictions were loosened soon after. By the end of the summer, however, the Delta variant had run rampant across the globe; Omicron soon would follow. Heading into the pandemic's third year, new questions loom: What new variants await us? How can vaccines be equitably distributed worldwide? And at what point will the coronavirus become endemic?

From the pandemic's start, Dr. Ashish Jha has reflected on these questions and more. An expert on pandemic preparedness, Jha has offered guidance to state and federal policymakers on Covid-19. Recently appointed as the new White House Covid-19 response coordinator, Jha is also dean of Brown's School of Public Health and previously taught at Harvard's T.H. Chan School of Public Health and Harvard Medical School. His research has appeared in over 200 publications.

Jha spoke with the Nieman Foundation in February about the press' role in relaying public health directives, misinformation, and more. Edited excerpts:

On finding a middle ground on policy

I thought of the acute phase of this pandemic [as] lasting about 18 months and thought that the major disruption to our lives was going to last about that long.

My mental model was [that] at about 18 months in, we'd have pretty good vaccines. They'd be reasonably widely available, and sometime by the summer of 2021, we would be in much better shape. I looked like a genius in the spring of 2021 and then like an idiot by the fall of 2021.

It did play out that by spring into early summer things looked like they were getting better, and then the Delta wave hit the United States and then Omicron. There are two years of fatigue setting in. No politician likes to tell people, "Let me tell you the things you cannot do." That's not a classic way to run for election.

What I'm worried about at this moment is that, therefore, the alternative is do nothing. What we're entering into is this idea. You've all heard of this idea. "We've got to learn to live with this virus." That has become code for, "We got to act like the virus doesn't exist and just go back to 2019."

Somewhere between, "Go back to 2019," and really strong and very unpopular public health restrictions lies the path that we actually have to take. It's hard for political leaders to see that because the two messages they get are, "2,000 Americans are dying every day. You've got to do more," or, "We're two years in. We've got vaccines. You've got to stop everything."

The challenge for them is, how do they find the middle path on policy? Then the bigger challenge is, how do they communicate that to their people so that it feels politically palatable? That's hard.

On how media can help the public understand the bigger picture

There was uncertainty in March of 2020. There [was] uncertainty in February of 2022. They are very different types of uncertainty.

Explaining in some ways and helping people understand how we're in a very different place, and mostly a much, much better place. I don't mean to use "different" without some judgment there. There's a lot that's much, much better now than where we were two years ago.

For instance, I have no idea whether Omicron is going to be the last clinically and public health-wise important variant. I suspect it's not. I suspect we will get to know many more letters of the Greek alphabet. Those variants may look very different than Omicron.

Acknowledging that is the future we have to understand and prepare for [and] speaking openly and honestly about those kinds of things is extremely important. I don't know that I see a lot of that in journalism. There are some good pieces. It's not that that's not happening.

That kind of thing has become a large part of journalism with Covid [is], "The latest cases are down 10,000. We're heading towards endemic." The longer pieces that provide that broader context, there are people writing it.

Those are the things that need to be done more of to help people understand that yes, infection numbers will come down. They will go back up. That's not the most important thing that people need to understand.

The bigger picture is helping people understand the long arc of the pandemic and where we are in that arc.

On misinformation

Obviously, misinformation has been a huge problem in the United States throughout the whole pandemic. One thing I'm always reminded of is [that] Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube also exist in Europe. Misinformation exists in Europe.

Then the question is why are the Europeans so much less susceptible to misinformation? It is not that they're not susceptible at all. We see the rallies and the anti-vax movement, but they're just much smaller as far as I can tell, certainly by the evidence, in most European countries.

I look at places, for instance, like Puerto Rico in the United States — phenomenal vaccinations. Just amazing vaccinations. Early and sustained. Then, we try to dig into why. Are they wealthier? No, they're not all that wealthy. Did they have early access? No. They had access at about the same time, maybe even a little bit later.

One of the things that is going on is if you look at the major political parties in Puerto Rico, they're all very pro-vaccine. They fight about all sorts of other stuff: statehood, not statehood, a bunch of other issues. As far as I can tell, the political parties are largely all fully aligned on vaccines. That is not true, in many ways, on the U.S. mainland.



A leading public health expert, Dr. Ashish Jha has lent his expertise since the pandemic's early days, earning him a role as the White House's Covid-19 response coordinator. Jha says we haven't spent enough time preparing for the next potential variant

My best sense of this is that most people, as much as they may say they're doing their own research, really are not doing their own research.

What I mean by that is, what do their political leaders that they trust say? Other people whose opinions they value, what are they saying about these vaccines? When you have both vaccines and masks pretty politicized ... I will tell you, I've been disappointed.

There are plenty of Republicans who've been terrific on vaccines. Still, [there are] a lot of Republican leaders who played footsie, as it goes, with a lot of anti-vax folks. Not really condemning it, kind of tolerating it, and signaling that they're actually not that strongly pro-vaccine. That has really caused huge problems.

There is also one other issue which is not at all trivial, which is there are large chunks of the American population, largely racial ethnic minorities, who have had a long history of distrust of the government, for good reason, in the way that they have been treated.

In that context, misinformation about vaccines and other pandemic stuff has also found fertile ground, and that also continues to be a challenge. This is something I struggle with and think about

all the time. How do we understand the misinformation that's killing us?

Almost everybody who's dying right now is dying because of misinformation. If every adult had gotten vaccinated and boosted, [we'd] have close to no deaths or a very small number of deaths from Covid.

On moving away from predictions

The one feature of this pandemic has been that everybody who has made predictions has been wrong. It's been really hard to predict all the twists and turns of this pandemic.

I expected more variants. I don't know that I saw Omicron and its features coming because it was a little bit out of left field. If you look at the virus and how it has evolved, I expected something of the branches of Delta or maybe Beta. Omicron is just something totally unlike anything else. It's a reminder that Mother Nature has lots of tricks up her sleeve.

Our ability to predict what the next variant is going to be — what it's going to look like, where it's going to come from, when it will show up — is limited. That's the big picture. Anyone who tells you, "We are now in an endemic phase," or, "We are now this," [you] just have to take that with a large grain of salt.

It doesn't mean that we shouldn't do any prognostication or prediction. It's reasonable to say, "I expect that infection numbers are going to decline over the next three, four weeks. I expect that by the time we get into March, infection numbers will be very low across much of the country."

Instead of focusing on trying to get the prediction perfectly right, we should focus on the fact that there are enough curveballs that we should plan on. "What if I'm totally wrong? What if we see a new variant show up much sooner than any of us were expecting? What if the next variant is far more serious and far more deadly than Omicron or Delta?"

We should plan for those things and then figure out, "How do we keep our schools open? How do we keep businesses open? How do we let people get to work safely? How do we make sure our hospitals don't get filled up?"

We can do all of that, but we've spent so much energy focusing on prediction. We've spent far too little energy focusing on preparing for those things. The virus is going to be around for a long time. We can learn to live with it in a way that won't kill thousands of Americans every day. We've got to be humble and respectful of what Mother Nature can do and prepare for it. ■

A Lucky Break Leads To A Book About Covid Vaccines

David Heath, NF '06, kept digging until he found the scientists behind the mRNA research

In the pandemic's early days, I tried to persuade Moderna's press handlers to give me a behind-the-scenes look at how the Covid-19 vaccine was being made. I assumed scientists there were dissecting this new strain of virus to find its Achilles' heel. But even as Moderna refused to open its doors, I got a lucky break.

In doing my research, I discovered that Moderna's vaccine had actually been designed by a top scientist at the National Institutes of Health. His name was Barney Graham, and he was willing to talk. In my first interview, Graham explained how the vaccine had been a work in progress for at least a decade.

It all started because of Graham's career-long obsession with finding a vaccine for respiratory syncytial virus, better known as RSV. Although in most cases RSV is no worse than a cold, it is nonetheless a leading cause



President Joe Biden greets Moderna vaccine designer, Barney Graham, left, as he visits the National Institutes of Health in Feb. 2021

of hospitalizations for young children and can lead to lifelong complications. An effort to make a vaccine for it in the 1960s turned catastrophic. Sixteen of the 20 babies given an experimental vaccine had to be hospitalized with severe RSV complications. Two of them died. The vaccine had made the children more susceptible to the disease. That trial remains one of the biggest failures in vaccine history.

Graham's story — along with those of Katalin Karikó, a researcher focused on using messenger RNA in vaccines, and

Derrick Rossi, the biotech entrepreneur who founded Moderna but was pushed out of the company — became the basis for my book "Longshot: The Inside Story of the Race for a COVID-19 Vaccine."

By 2012, Graham and Jason McLellan, a scientist in his lab, made a breakthrough in vaccine science that should lead in coming years to a safe and effective RSV vaccine. They discovered how to deliver a protein from the virus to a cell in the most safe and effective way, allowing our immune systems to generate the best antibodies. Using their newfound discovery, the pair quickly turned their attention to coronaviruses in the wake of an outbreak of MERS in the Middle East.

Moderna wasn't even working on vaccines yet. And it would be years before Graham collaborated with the company. But by the time SARS-CoV-2 caused a panic in Wuhan, China, Graham had a coronavirus vaccine he only had to tweak. He did that on a Saturday morning at his home.

I spent countless hours interviewing these scientists — and many others — before the rest of the media figured out their significance. One of my editors at USA Today was so impressed by their stories that she contacted her literary agent, who signed me to a contract the next day.

The book is a story of scientists who persevered even as their colleagues failed to recognize the importance of their discoveries. It was only when the results of the vaccine trials were known that the scientific community woke up to their achievements. Their work holds promise that scientists will be able to make a vaccine on the fly the next time we're faced with a devastating pandemic. ■

The History of Tuberculosis Holds Lessons For Modern Day Public Health

Vidya Krishnan, NF '21, on writing her debut non-fiction book "Phantom Plague"

December 20, 2016, was one of those winter mornings in New Delhi, India, when everything was enveloped in the thick smog of chronic air pollution. On that day, in one of Delhi High Court's crowded court rooms, lawyers, activists, and the press had gathered for an extraordinary case. A father had filed a civil petition on behalf of his 18-year-old daughter, Shreya, who needed a new drug for tuberculosis.

The drug, Bedaquiline, was an antibiotic manufactured in India but owned by American pharmaceutical giant Johnson

and Johnson. I spent the next few months reporting this case, which she won but died in the process.

As a health journalist in India, reporting on infectious diseases like TB, HIV, dengue, and Zika was routine for me. I came of age reporting on the boom in India's domestic pharmaceutical industry, which we routinely call the "pharmacy of the world." Shreya's case was a hard pivot from that. I could not reconcile that the Indian health ministry systematically denied access to medicines that were being manufactured in India.

The court case led me down a rabbit

An NPR Series Reconsiders the Question: "Where Are You From?"

Anjali Sastry Krbechek, a 2021 visiting fellow, highlights how immigrant communities of color grapple with their own identities

When I first came up with the idea for "Where We Come From," I was trying to tell a version of a story I've heard my mom tell me so many times. She and my dad had an arranged marriage in the '90s. He went home to California after the wedding, while she waited in India for her green card. When she finally got it, she got on an international flight for the first time in her life and flew to a new country, leaving the entire world she knew behind.

I learn something new each time I hear this story: how terrified she was to be in a new place, how she felt a little excitement about meeting her new family. This story and other stories passed down about my family are something I carry with me constantly. They're what I think about when someone asks me, "Where are you from?"

This isn't just my family's story. It's a story other immigrants have passed on to their kids, and their kids in turn pass on to their own. These stories are an oral history of the people who make up the fabric of this country — stories that aren't told enough. I started "Where We Come From" because I know these stories are universal.

Each episode tackles a story like this through intergenerational conversation. My hope is to build greater understanding between the people talking to each other and the audience that is experiencing the conversation through NPR.

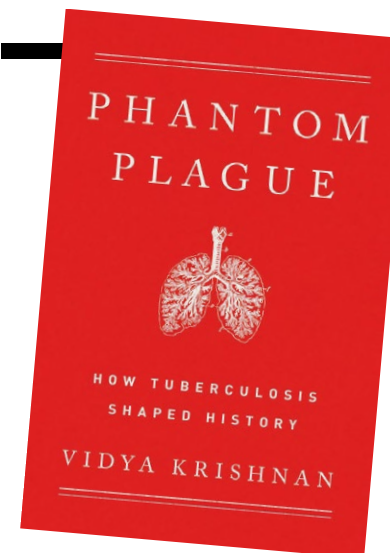
Our work culminated in four video



Emily Kwong, who is third-generation Chinese, interviews her father for NPR's "Where We Come From" series about what it means to lose a language to assimilate

episodes, four podcast episodes, and three national radio segments. We shared all the videos on Instagram and did two Twitter Spaces. I wanted to flood different platforms to reach as many people as possible. People were elated just hearing and seeing their own stories reflected back at them.

NPR has greenlit another set of podcast episodes of "Where We Come From." During the first season, I tried to do a ton: act as executive producer, be a project manager, find my series sponsor, report, help with PR, and edit social media posts. This time, I hope to find a singular theme and focus on what's most important to me: telling the stories about the communities at the heart of the series. ■



hole on tuberculosis, and I spent the next seven years tracing the evolution of the bacteria from ancient Egypt to 19th century New York before zooming the focus in on 21st century Mumbai. In writing "Phantom Plague: How Tuberculosis Shaped History," I found that history was replete with examples of scientific progress being denied to the sick, old, poor, and vulnerable. While I was working on this book, the world was brought to its knees by the coronavirus pandemic, with the fruits of modern medicine, once again, being held from developing countries. Across the

world, the poor are under-treated, without compassion, while the rich are over-treated. Both scenarios are contributing to an "antibiotic apocalypse" already dawning on Black and brown nations.

"Phantom Plague" started a conversation about the role of race, gender, and caste in perpetuating plagues. As we grapple with the pandemic, we can no longer ignore the suffering wrought by a global approach to health that doesn't care for the most vulnerable among us. Everyone deserves access to safe and humane health care. ■



IN PUTIN'S WAR ON UKRAINE, JOURNALISTS ARE TARGETS, TOO

Brent Renaud, a Nieman Fellow killed in Ukraine while working on a documentary about refugees, practiced a journalism of humility, humanity, and empathy

BY ANN MARIE LIPINSKI

WHEN I ASKED BRENT RENAUD where he wanted his picture taken, he chose a stairwell lined with Nieman Fellows' photographs at Harvard's Lippmann House. He was giving a big talk that night during his own fellowship year, and I was marking the moment. Posing in the company of other journalists who told stories with their cameras, the gifted documentary filmmaker looked serene and at home.

Four years later, the photo is a somber artifact. Two weeks into the war on Ukraine, Brent was shot and killed in an ambush outside Irpin, where he was working on a documentary about refugees. Visual journalism, so dependent on proximity, carries heightened risk during conflict. In a haunting reminder, the framed picture above Brent's left shoulder, of Santa talking to American troops, was made by Anja Niedringhaus, another Nieman Fellow killed on assignment, shot at close range in 2014 by a police officer in Afghanistan. "Where once reporters and photographers were seen as the impartial eyes and ears of crucial information," the AP said in announcing her death, "today they are often targets."

Fearless. Ballsy. Badass. Certain descriptions of Brent in the days following his death offered caricatures of conflict journalists and obscured the man many of us knew. They didn't capture his kindness and humility, or the humanity that was a hallmark of his work, whether documenting heroin addicts in New York or the Arkansas National Guard in Iraq. "Thoughtful stories about disenfranchised people" was how he described his mission.

There are tropes about conflict reporters that can camouflage the real reasons this young war has already killed seven journalists, injured 11, and claimed at least six as victims of kidnapping. From the indiscriminate attacks on civilians that also endanger reporters to the Russian government's successful campaign to snuff out the last of the country's independent press, it's clear that Vladimir Putin presents the greatest danger to journalism in the region. "The Putin regime," wrote Ukrainian journalist Katerina Sergatskova in Nieman Reports, "doesn't want eyewitnesses."

Brent did take risks in pursuit of stories, something he said he downplayed during his career out of concern it would sound boastful. In a 2013 interview with Filmmaker magazine he describes one trip to Mexico and Guatemala where "a soldier held a 9mm pistol to my head while another attempted to dangle me off the side of an ancient pyramid." The reward he sought for his calculated risks was a deeper story.

"It's a game of percentages," his brother and documentary partner Craig Renaud explained in that same interview, "and even in the most dangerous places on

earth your chances of survival are really high, and if you have a little extra experience with negotiating roadblocks, negotiating with warlords, and knowing where to stand when things get hairy, you really can do the job fairly safely. If we did not believe that we wouldn't do it."

Photographer Juan Arredondo, a Nieman classmate of Brent's who was wounded in the ambush in Ukraine and eventually evacuated to the U.S., told me that he rejects the old "distorted, romanticized image" of photographers personified by the late Robert Capa and long encouraged by an industry that rewarded inexperienced freelancers building their careers in hot spots. "The idea that you would give your life for a photo — no, absolutely not. If anything, in my photography I want to celebrate life and the human condition."

He said: "Maybe some want to celebrate him as dying for his bravery, but the Brent I knew was very shy, very smart, and very thoughtful. He was not going out there to try his luck. Everything was planned, every day assessing what we were doing and whether it was worth doing. There was none of that being a cowboy out there."

PREVIOUS SPREAD: UKRAINE DEFENSE MINISTRY/EYEPRESS NEWS VIA AFP



ABOVE: ANN MARIE LIPINSKI/NIEMAN FOUNDATION

Samantha Appleton, an experienced conflict photographer who was also a member of Brent's Nieman class, believes she understands why he wanted to make his way into Irpin for a documentary about refugees. "The very heart of this story is the moment a person decides (or is physically forced) to leave their home," she wrote to me. "Brent must have known he needed visual evidence of that decision itself. All he needed was one minute of footage but probably knew it was critical for the film ... It is that last 2 percent effort that makes a photo story or documentary really strike hard. It's also why visual journalists are more often the ones killed (not because they are macho or stupid). It's because we always sit in the front seat of a car. We stay on the street while writers go back to file. It's just the nature of visual journalism: You only file what you are close enough to see and capture in a frame at the exact moment it happens."

She added, "I have so many questions for him. But this is my best guess."

The first time I met Brent, he described periods of excruciating shyness growing up in Little Rock, Arkansas. Fearful of speaking to people he met, he devised a strategy he called "mayor-for-a-day," which required him to start a conversation with everyone he encountered, the way he imagined a mayor might. "I freaked out the guy at Starbucks," he recalled and laughed. Listening was easier. He was obsessed with television news and transfixed by stories from around a world mired in the Cold

War. His mother bought him a shortwave radio so that at night he could hear the BBC.

The day Brent died, I gathered with his grieving Nieman classmates on Zoom. Mattia Ferraresi, managing editor of the Italian newspaper Domani, said something that unlocked a part of Brent and made me question some of my own values. He recalled Brent telling him, "You've got to love what you report on," challenging the principle that you need to keep a distance from your subjects to report fairly. Brent was all about empathy. He believed he had to really enter your life to really tell your story."

I think Brent knew we thought he was special. "The best of us," I told his grieving family. But what made him so was not derring-do. It was his almost religious commitment to stand witness, to the fundamentals of reporting, to the power of telling someone's story close up. There was an inevitability about Brent. He couldn't not do what he did.

At the end of his Nieman year, I gave him a novel, "All the Light We Cannot See" by Anthony Doerr. In the book a French girl, blinded as a child, navigates the dangers of the German occupation through memory and her heightened powers of touch and perception, patiently making meaning out of chaos.

"You are very brave," a young German soldier tells her.

"But it is not bravery; I have no choice," she replies. "I wake up and live my life. Don't you do the same?" ■

Brent Renaud, a 2019 Nieman Fellow, was killed in Irpin, Ukraine, on March 13 while working on a documentary on the refugee crisis

PREVIOUS SPREAD: The TV tower in Kyiv, the capital city of Ukraine, is hit by a Russian strike on Tuesday afternoon, March 1, 2022. One journalist was killed in the attack



**“THIS WAR IS UNPREDICTABLE
AND DEADLY LIKE NO OTHER”**

Russia’s brutally simple Ukraine strategy poses
new risks for journalists

BY ROBERT MAHONEY

PREVIOUS SPREAD: Associated Press videographer Mstyslav Chernov walks amid smoke rising from an air defense base in the aftermath of a Russian strike in Mariupol

VETERAN REPORTERS IN UKRAINE knew what to expect from besieging Russian armies. Newer ones are beginning to find out.

Vladimir Putin's invasion has already cost thousands of lives, including those of seven journalists. Most civilian casualties are from aerial bombardment. "It just reminds me exactly of Chechnya," says Carlotta Gall of The New York Times. "Those terrible days in Grozny and the absolute disregard for everything."

Russia's urban warfare strategy is brutally simple: surround, pound, probe, and clear. Forces try to lay siege to a city, pulverize whole neighborhoods with artillery and missiles, send in small groups to probe enemy defenses and eventually take the city street by street with tanks and infantry. "My experience of the Russians is they have no regard for civilian areas, for hospitals, for humanitarian columns, for refugees fleeing, none of that," Gall says.

Hundreds of foreign journalists have poured into Ukraine since Russia invaded the country on Feb. 24. Many are concentrated in the capital of Kyiv and in the western city of Lviv, near the border with Poland. A lot of journalists haven't experienced conflict in the former Soviet Union under Russian fire, notes Gall, "and I think some of them don't quite realize how ruthless Russian forces can be."

The first part of the Kremlin's military playbook has already been on display in the besieged southeastern port of Mariupol. Many international journalists left the city, but some Ukrainian reporters stayed behind.

"In Mariupol I realized that nowhere is safe," says Ukrainian freelance photojournalist Evgeniy Maloletka, who has worked for numerous Western outlets, including the Associated Press. "Rockets can reach basements, destroy buildings, and kill people regardless of where they are hiding. Being encircled is the worst. I would highly recommend against ending up in an encircled city." Maloletka and a fellow Ukrainian journalist working for AP in the city produced an unforgettable story of the horrors of this war.

While much has been said about how Russia is employing similar tactics against Ukraine to the ones it used in Syria, journalists who have covered both conflicts say Ukraine could become even more dangerous.

"In Syria, a decade ago, I started saying, 'Women and children are not close to the frontline, they are the frontline,'" says Lyse Doucet, the BBC's chief international correspondent. "The difference with Syria is the

Syrian government, backed by Russia and Iran, gave very few visas to Western media and almost no access to the heart of the battlefield to Western media. In this war, journalists are arriving in great numbers in Kyiv and have been going to the outskirts, where control is constantly shifting between Russian and Ukrainian forces."

Several of the media deaths so far have occurred in and around the capital. News crews who have driven northwest towards the adjacent city of Irpin have come under fire. That was where U.S. filmmaker Brent Renaud was shot dead on March 13 while covering refugees fleeing Russian forces on the far side of Irpin. It is still not clear who fired on him and his colleague Juan Arredondo, who was wounded, but Ukrainian authorities blamed Russian troops.

The mayor of Irpin banned foreign journalists from visiting the city after the attack. A day later in the nearby town of Horenka, a Fox News team came under fire. Ukrainian journalist Oleksandra Kuvshynova and cameraman Pierre Zakrzewski were killed. Ukrainian camera operator Yevhenii Sakun was killed in a missile

PREVIOUS SPREAD: EVGENIY MALOLETKA/AP PHOTO



ABOVE: MSTYSLAV CHERNOV/AP PHOTO

strike on a Kyiv TV tower on March 1.

If journalists cluster at the site of an attack mingling with Ukrainian civilians and military, or if they stay too long in one place, they become potential targets for Russian artillery and snipers. Photographers and videographers are particularly vulnerable since they need to get up close for images. Unlike in the U.S.-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, there are few opportunities for reporters to embed with the armed forces. No Western outlets are with the Russian military, of course. But even the Ukrainian regular forces have taken only a handful of foreign embeds. Consequently, international news outlets have relied partly on Ukrainian military-supplied footage and content generated by civilians on smartphones.

One foreign correspondent who did travel with Ukrainian forces is the BBC's Quentin Sommerville who reported from besieged Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city. Sommerville covered the war in Syria from the rebel side. He said that conflict was worse for journalists but added: "At least for the moment, the threat is different. In Syria the risk wasn't from artillery — it was that gnawing threat of kidnapping. Afghanistan [was] IEDs [improvised explosive devices]. Here it's artillery and cruise missiles which worry me."

Another veteran of the Middle East conflict, Nabih Bulos of the Los Angeles Times, agrees: "This is early days. We haven't even begun to see the sorts of artil-

lery and mortar barrages that can be expected once the Russian army properly unleashes its military might."

That prospect haunts even war-hardened Ukrainian journalists.

"This time we didn't travel to a war zone. Instead war came to us, straight into our homes," says videographer Roman Stepanovych, who worked with U.S. outlets and co-founded the independent Ukrainian outlet Zaborona. "Having families and kids here makes us vulnerable."

Some Ukrainian journalists have been covering conflict since Russia invaded the east of the country in 2014. Others have been thrust into the war. They say they need hostile environment training and protective equipment, such as anti-ballistic vests and helmets, which are in short supply globally.

"As journalists we face difficulties in everything, including weak communication channels with combat units, paranoia from local residents, and lack of access to state officials," Stepanovych says.

"There's also [a] certain incompetence on the side of fellow journalists. Not all of them know how to evaluate risks properly, have experience in hostile environments, and follow journalistic ethics. I've covered Crimea, Donbas, Turkey-Syria, and Myanmar. But this war is unpredictable and deadly like no other. It's truly terrifying." ■

Additional reporting by Iulia Stashevskaya in Berlin.

People hide in an improvised bomb shelter in Mariupol. Russia's urban warfare strategy is brutally simple, with forces pulverizing whole neighborhoods with artillery and missiles

“THE PUTIN REGIME DOESN’T WANT EYEWITNESSES”

Prior to the invasion, few Ukrainian journalists had experience working in conflict zones. Now the war has come to their homes

BY KATERINA SERGATSKOVA

EARLY ON FEB. 24, Russia began bombing Ukrainian cities. That same morning, an endless marathon for Ukrainian journalists began. This nightmare feels endless.

Since the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, seven journalists have died and at least 11 have been injured as of April 8, according to Reporters Without Borders, an organization that promotes press freedom around the globe. On Mar. 23, Oksana Baulina, a journalist from The Insider, a Russian investigative outlet, went to film a bombed-out shopping mall in central Kyiv shortly after the explosion. While she was there, the Russians hit the same spot again. She died along with a civilian who had accompanied her.

Eleven journalists have been threatened by the Russians, five have been shot at but not killed, and six have been kidnapped as of March 23, reports the Kyiv-based Institute of Mass Information, a non-governmental organization that works at the intersection of media and civil society. Some of them were released, and the location of some of them is still unknown. There have been four attacks on editorial offices in different regions of Ukraine. Russian FSB agents raided the homes of four journalists with Melitopol’s MV-Holding, detained them for several hours, and seized computers. Ten TV towers have been fired upon, and the Russian military has turned off the broadcasts of six TV channels. Seventy media organizations have stopped their work because of the invasion.

Many journalists and editors were psychologically unprepared for the fact that the war came to their home. Some of them decided to take up arms and went to fight; some became volunteers; some left the country.

Prior to the invasion, most journalists in Ukraine had no experience with working in a war zone. Only a few

dozen correspondents worked in the Donbas, a territory controlled by Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine where fighting has been taking place for the past eight years. Few had security training or protective equipment — bulletproof vests and helmets with press patches. Only some had an understanding of cyberse-

MSTYSLAV CHERNOV/AP PHOTO



curity risks, mostly those who worked in the occupied territory of Crimea, where Russian-style repressive laws were enacted. Hundreds of journalists suddenly found themselves in new conditions without the tools to protect themselves and report from conflict areas — a glaring problem.

As the war began, foreign journalists came to Ukraine, looking for local producers and fixers to help them report the story. Many people — film producers, art managers, political scientists — have stepped up to help them, but they have practically no journalism or conflict reporting experience either. And many don’t have an understanding of how to calculate risks.

The number of injured and killed reporters is constantly rising. Working as a journalist in the field is very dangerous, even with a helmet and bulletproof vest. My colleagues and I have been woken up in the middle of the night by air raid sirens and have rushed to a bomb shelter to take cover. I’ve spent hours at a time sitting in the shelter because a bomb could fly into your house at any moment. Reporting on the street doesn’t feel safe, not only because of the danger from the sky but also because somebody could misinterpret your actions, as people are very suspicious of others these days. And, if you’re in Russian-occupied territory, it means that you can’t work as a journalist at all.

But it’s not just about the incredible destructiveness and unpredictability of the war in Ukraine: Russia is also targeting journalists for elimination as

part of its so-called “special military operation.”

Perhaps the most eloquent picture that describes the essence of this war unleashed by Putin is the footage of a pregnant woman being rushed out of a bombed-out maternity hospital in Mariupol, which was mercilessly destroyed by Russian troops. Those images were taken by my colleagues and friends, AP journalists Evgeniy Maloletka and Mstyslav Chernov. Russian state TV channels called them “propagandists” and alleged that the pictures were staged. Because of that reporting, Russian troops were hunting Maloletka and Chernov, who were under constant threat. With the help of the Ukrainian military, they miraculously managed to get out of the city surrounded by Russian troops.

The Putin regime doesn’t want eyewitnesses. His propaganda machine constantly lies, reporting that the Ukrainians are shelling their cities and civilians themselves. The Russian regime is trying to destroy the very value of freedom, and who, if not the press, can bear witness to his atrocities? For every lie, journalists find thousands of facts to disprove them every day. The work of reporters, editors, producers, photographers, and videographers in Ukraine has a very high price. Some have already paid with their lives. We use all our strength to keep reporting so that the world can see Russia’s invasion for what it is — an attempt to take our freedom from us. They may try, but they won’t succeed. ■

People prepare for the night in an improvised bomb shelter in a sports center in Mariupol. Many journalists were psychologically unprepared for the fact that war came to their homes



THE FREE PRESS UNDER ATTACK IN UKRAINE — AND BEYOND

As Ukrainians defend their country against the Russian invasion, journalists there and in other post-Soviet states guard their fragile press freedoms

BY ANN COOPER



Fears that Ukraine might only be the beginning of Putin's territorial ambitions have put other governments and journalists on high alert

WHEN RUSSIAN PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN ordered the invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, the journalists of the English-language Kyiv Independent set up a live blog with constant updates for Ukrainians and readers around the globe. Their earliest dispatches described skirmishes in the Pobeda and Glukhiv districts, announced the first-day death toll of 137, and published President Volodymyr Zelensky's call for governments around the world to impose crippling sanctions on Russia.

It was the kind of fact-based, comprehensive coverage of the Russian military threat that the site had been offering for weeks. Just days earlier, defense reporter Illia Ponomarenko fielded a reader's question about whether Ukraine had sufficient air defenses in case of a Russian attack. "Oh, no, we don't, I'm afraid we don't," replied Ponomarenko in a podcast interview. "I think it's safe to say that we are pretty weak." The fighter jets Ukraine could use in a battle with Russia, he noted, dated back to the Soviet era, more than 30 years ago.

Despite being outnumbered by better equipped Russian forces, the Ukrainian military — and a growing contingent of determined civilians — have fiercely resisted the invasion. The Kyiv Independent, Ukrainska Pravda, and a clutch of other Ukrainian news outlets have continued to report the war with a dogged devotion to truth-telling — despite themselves being targets of the Russian military. They have been documenting the plight of thousands of Ukrainians taking shelter in subway stations, the harsh conditions in the city Volnovakha where the bombardment has destroyed the power and water supplies, and how the Russians have been shelling residential areas.

Before the Russian invasion in February, Ukraine was

part of a group of post-Soviet states — along with Moldova, Armenia, and Georgia — that have endured both authoritarian rule and periods when the press could be considered partly free, depending on who won the last national election. These four countries have never achieved the broad freedoms and self-sustaining independence of media in former Soviet republics Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. But they also have not been squeezed into near extinction by the deeply entrenched dictators and autocrats who rule other former republics, where journalists are routinely jailed (Belarus and Azerbaijan), declared "foreign agents" (Russia), or have so little freedom that independent jour-

nalism never got a real foothold (most of the Central Asian republics).

Journalism in these four "midway media" countries lies somewhere between the freedom of the Baltics and the authoritarianism of most other post-Soviet states. Their press freedoms fluctuate, their funding is in constant deficit, and the survival of their independence still relies heavily on foreign funding, three decades after the Soviet collapse. The Russian invasion of Ukraine is a powerful reminder of the vital work these journalists and their newsrooms do — and how precarious press freedoms are in the face of aggression from Putin and other authoritarian leaders around the world. Fears that Ukraine might only be the beginning of Putin's territorial ambitions have put other governments and journalists on high alert. Among the midway media countries, Moldova and Georgia announced plans to apply quickly for European Union membership, as Ukraine has.

Here is a look at how the independent press is surviving in Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, and Georgia.

UKRAINE

UKRAINSKA PRAVDA is one of 10 independent news organizations that meet the "white list" high standards of balance, transparency, and ethics of Ukraine's nonprofit Institute for Mass Information. Much of the rest of the media in

Ukraine is linked to billionaires, politicians, and politically connected figures who own dozens of television and radio stations, newspapers, and magazines. Many outlets are little more than oligarch mouthpieces.

As the war drags on, it's not clear how long, and in what conditions, these newsrooms will be able to continue to operate. U.S. officials have said that Russia has a list of Ukrainians, including journalists, to be killed or sent to detention camps if Russia occupies the country.

That chilling claim did nothing to slow down the Ukrainian journalists delivering round-the-clock updates on Russia's invasion, like the frank, well-sourced analyses of Illia Ponomarenko, a Kyiv Independent reporter. Until recently, Ponomarenko covered the military for the English-language Kyiv Post, whose loyal readers included diplomats, academics, and expats in the Ukrainian capital. The 26-year-old Post newsroom had a reputation for tough-minded coverage of the country and its politics — until the day last November when owner Adnan Kivan abruptly fired Ponomarenko and all his colleagues. The move by Kivan, a construction tycoon, was seen by staff as retribution for its reporting on the government's weak anti-corruption record.

The firings silenced Ponomarenko, just as Russia began its massive troop buildup at Ukraine's borders. His fate, and the fate of his colleagues, might have gone down as yet another example of how business and politics too often combine to smother critical reporting in former Soviet states. But the story didn't end there. Within weeks, Ponomarenko and about 30 other fired Post staffers were back in business — online, under the new name Kyiv Independent, and without a business-owner.

The Independent's rapid startup was enabled by in-kind help from sympathetic Ukrainian businesses, by a nearly \$100,000 grant from the European Endowment for Democracy, and by financial pledges from several hundred individuals inside and outside Ukraine. Speaking before Russia's invasion, editor-in-chief Olga Rudenko said she wasn't surprised by the outpouring of support: "We were very proud of the journalism standards that we uphold."

In December, just a few weeks after the new site was born, its entire staff was honored with a "Journalist of the Year" award by Ukrainska Pravda, the country's largest independent news site. The recognition of the startup by an established newsroom speaks to the unity and communal support that Ukraine's independent journalists have mustered in times of crisis. And the public's early support of The Kyiv Independent reflects high levels of audience trust. Since the Russian invasion began, GoFundMe campaigns are raising millions of dollars to enable The Kyiv Independent, Ukrainska Pravda, and other independent media to continue their work.

"Freedom of speech is still a big value for Ukrainian society," said Sevgil Musaieva, editor-in-chief of Ukrainska Pravda, who also spoke to Nieman Reports before Russia's invasion. The site was created in 2000 with a grant from the U.S. embassy in Ukraine, during then-president Leonid Kuchma's rule, a period of heavy censorship and attacks on journalists. Publishing

ABOVE: Journalists report in Kyiv on March 3. As the war drags on, it's not clear how long, and in what conditions, newsrooms will be able to continue to operate

PREVIOUS SPREAD: People fleeing Ukraine cross the Irpin river on an improvised path under a bridge

PREVIOUS SPREAD: VADIM GHIRDA/AP PHOTO

ABOVE: RAPHAEL LAFARGUE/ABACA/SIPA VIA AP IMAGES

Ukrainska Pravda on the internet had been seen as a way around Kuchma's repressions.

But a few months after the site began running investigative reports on government corruption, the beheaded torso of founder Georgy Gongadze was discovered in a forest outside Kyiv. Though investigations eventually led to some convictions, no one was ever charged with ordering Gongadze's murder. Nor has the 2016 car bomb murder of Ukrainska Pravda journalist Pavel Sheremet been solved.

Through years of political turmoil, street revolutions, and the ebb and flow of press freedoms, Ukrainska Pravda has continued to investigate corruption. Early this year, the site broke stories exposing one member of parliament from President Volodymyr Zelenskyy party for accepting a \$20,000 bribe and another for attempting to bribe police. The parliamentarian who offered a bribe, caught on video obtained by the site, was quickly expelled from the party.

Since the Russian invasion began, Ukrainska Pravda has had wall-to-wall coverage of the fighting, detailing troop losses, civilian casualties, the roll out of sanctions, and the international response. Like many oth-

er outlets, Ukrainska Pravda's survival depended on foreign donors for years, but the site now is financed largely by advertising, according to Musaieva. A new membership program also provides about 10 percent of the budget.

Even before the invasion and the GoFundMe campaigns it has inspired, the independent online community in Ukraine had greater financial strength than its counterparts in other countries, thanks in part to population. Ukraine's 43 million people are more than 10 times the size of the populations of Moldova, Armenia, and Georgia. Whether this support holds — and what the media landscape will look like during and after the fighting — are unknowable.

Ukrainian news audiences also are more likely to sign up for subscriptions or media memberships, perhaps in part because of the high-profile role they saw journalists play in exposing corruption after the Maidan street revolution that sent President Viktor Yanukovich fleeing to Russia in 2014.

In May, Ukrainska Pravda announced its sale to Tomas Fiala, an investment banker who owns another popular Ukrainian news site, Novoye Vremya. Fiala

signed a detailed agreement pledging he would not interfere editorially, and the purchase quickly enabled Ukrainska Pravda to hire several investigative reporters. And though the purchase by a rich businessman might sound like cause for alarm, particularly after the lockout at the Kyiv Post, Fiala "is not an oligarch," said Musaieva. His business, Dragon Capital, "has no connection to state budget and to state companies" that would make him vulnerable to political pressure.

In some ways, Ukraine's journalists are better prepared to cover the new Russian invasion than they had been when Russia took over Crimea in 2014. Back then, few journalists were trained to cover conflict, but in the last eight years that has changed.

But the Russian assault may pose the most ominous threat yet to Ukraine's independent newsrooms. Russian attempts to take control of the Ukrainian capital could trigger widespread civil protests and make Ukrainian media a particular Kremlin target, predicts Gulnoza Said, CPJ program coordinator for the region: "The fight will be not just for establishing power in Kyiv or in newly invaded territories, but also for the hearts and minds of people in Ukraine."

MOLDOVA

IN 2004, ALINA RADU and a journalist friend set out to create a weekly investigative newspaper in the former Soviet republic of Moldova. They scraped together money for a design and layout computer. But stories were written on four jury-rigged desktops, cobbled together by Radu's engineer husband from a local bank's cast-off computers. New desks? Too much of a luxury, Radu decided, so the newsroom of Ziarul de Gardă (ZdG, or "Newspaper on Guard"), was furnished with borrowed tables and chairs.

Such humble surroundings were not what Radu was used to. For more than a decade, she had worked in well-resourced Moldovan newsrooms, starting with the state TV channel and later a privately-owned TV company. She left both jobs when politicians started dictating what journalists should write.



African residents in Ukraine wait on the platform inside Lviv railway station on Feb. 27. White Ukrainian refugees are being welcomed with open arms in a way darker-skin refugees seldom have been

CALL OUT BIGOTRY IN REPORTING ON THE UKRAINE INVASION

How journalists cover armed conflict shouldn't hinge on the color of people's skin

BY ISSAC BAILEY

IT DIDN'T TAKE THE SWISS leaving behind their well-known and well-worn status of neutrality to know the events unfolding in Ukraine are potentially world-changing and deserve the wall-to-wall, front-page coverage they are receiving.

There are plenty of reasons for news outlets to commit to saturation coverage of Russia's decision to invade a sovereign nation, to help audiences understand the suffering of Ukrainians, and to empathize with their plight.

But not because "European people with blue eyes and blonde hair are being killed."

Not because they "Look like any European family that you'd live next door to."

Not because "They seem so like us."

Not because "We're talking about Europeans leaving in cars that look like ours to save their lives."

And not for any other reasons that range from the insensitive to the clueless to the outright racist.

Vladimir Putin's decision to illegally invade another nation could easily spark another world war. President Joe Biden and American allies have to send a signal to other authoritarian rulers that it is not in their best interests to do what Putin has done.

I don't know what it will take to do that effectively. But I know how we cover these events will help shape international reaction to the millions of refugees this conflict is producing, just as our coverage has affected refugees from other conflicts that unfolded years before Russian tanks headed across the Ukrainian border.

The differences are stark. Ukrainian refugees are being welcomed with open arms in a way darker-skin refugees seldom have been.

And while we are quick to proclaim that we are just objective observers, the truth is that the words we use

to describe various types of refugees influence public perceptions and thus public support for immigration policies for those fleeing conflict. As we've already seen, that has made it easier for journalists to empathize with Ukrainians, easier for journalists to tell those stories in ways more likely to open hearts rather than close minds. Suffering Ukrainians should be empathized with, and Putin should be called exactly what he is: a thug who has committed an evil against a neighboring country.

Not because Ukrainians are Europeans, but because they are fellow human beings who are no better or worse than the refugees from the Syrian conflict, the Iraq invasion, the war in Yemen, or unrest in parts of Africa.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is dominating media coverage for obvious and sensible reasons. It has ramifications for just about everyone around the globe, either directly or indirectly. The invasion means the chances of nuclear war just increased, if only slightly.

But we should not make the mistake that too many of us did at the outset of the Covid-19 pandemic, when coverage of anti-Asian sentiment took a backseat until it had fully erupted into harassment and physical attacks.

The racialization of this invasion — from Putin's lies about launching it in part to fight Nazis to straight-news journalists, government officials, and pundits showing more empathy on air because those suffering are European — is not a side issue to be dealt with later. It is an important factor that must be grappled with now.

That's why every time a journalist dips into race- or ethnic-based bigotry, whether intentional or not, it needs to be noted and corrected. Every editor and producer should be on alert. We should not wait until things settle down, because we don't know when that will be, and the damage is being done now.

BERNAT ARMANGUE/AP PHOTO



Alina Radu left her previous newsroom job to start ZdG, an independent weekly investigative paper. But unlike privately owned media companies in Moldova, independent outlets like ZdG struggle to maintain funding

Her third reporting post was at a weekly paper that eventually became Moldova's first privately-owned daily. "It was beautiful," says Radu. "We did a lot of courageous, critical journalism." But that ended just like her earlier jobs when the owner — a member of parliament — issued strict orders on covering upcoming elections. Finally, at ZdG, Radu and her colleagues were in control. No one would tell them what to write, or how to write it. "When we started, we were so happy," she says. "We are free, yes, we had all the freedom." There was just one problem: They didn't have any money.

Radu had run up against the existential challenge that has threatened independent journalism for three decades since the official collapse of the Soviet Union. In Moldova, as in most of the 15 former Soviet republics, advertising and subscription revenues have rarely provided a survival budget, and the wealthy politicians or businessmen with money to invest in media demand editorial control in return. In the end, ZdG — like so many other independents — got a financial lifeline from foreign funders eager to help democratic norms and independent media thrive across the region.

Back in 2004, ZdG survived first on a six-month grant from the Romanian government, then another from the U.S. After that, says Radu, "I just learned to apply everywhere" — the Canadian embassy, media institutions in Amsterdam, public and private donors in the United Kingdom and France. Those funders have kept ZdG in business, investigating the corruption that is often de-

finied as endemic in this midway media country — corruption that is routinely exposed by Moldova's small, independent journalism community.

Many corruption stories carry the bylines of journalists from ZdG or the investigative site RISE Moldova, founded in 2014. Newer independents that pursue some investigative reporting include Agora, Cu Sens, and the Russian-language NewsMaker. But independent journalism is practiced in only about 15 percent of Moldova's newsrooms, according to a 2019 report by IREX, a Washington-based non-governmental organization. The other 85 percent "serve the governing forces or political parties, not the public interest," says IREX.

The 85 percent have been "captured" over the years by politicians or their wealthy allies, a process that began in Moldova and other former Soviet republics soon after independence in 1991. Today nearly all TV channels, where many Moldovans say they get their news, are owned by politically aligned companies or directly by the politicians themselves. Two of those media owners also control the vast majority of the country's advertising market, steering business to their TV stations through what competitors charge amounts to a cartel.

With a population of less than 3 million and an economic rating as one of Europe's poorest countries, Moldova has a small ad market to begin with. With much of that market under political control, independent newsrooms can count on little support from advertising. NewsMaker, for example, makes only about

20 percent of its budget from ads, says Galina Vasilieva, editor-in-chief of the seven-year-old independent site. The rest comes from foreign funders such as George Soros's Open Society Foundations and the U.S.-funded National Endowment for Democracy.

"All independent media [in Moldova] are funded through international funds," says Vasilieva. "We can't exist without these funds."

Though it translates some stories into Romanian, which most Moldovans speak, NewsMaker's target audience is the country's Russian speakers, including those living in Transnistria, a secession-minded region that lies on the border with Ukraine and maintains some political autonomy within Moldova. (Russian soldiers have long been stationed there, and there is widespread concern that Putin might also seek to annex the territory as part of his attack on Ukraine.) Russian trolls and Kremlin-financed media bombard Transnistria's largely Russian and Ukrainian population with propaganda and disinformation; NewsMaker promotes itself as an alternative, promising, "We don't distort reality."

NewsMaker, ZdG, and several other independent outlets are part of a project run by the international NGO Internews, aimed at reducing reliance on foreign funding by building audience support. ZdG, for example, has expanded its reporting beyond investigations, updating the site throughout the day with breaking news, analysis, and videos. Radu says that has made ZdG's website one of the top five audience destinations for news and enabled it to start a sustaining membership campaign with about 200 supporters. That support — along with kiosk sales of a ZdG print version, some online advertising, and income from selling commercial services such as photography — has reduced the foreign aid share of the budget from 100 percent to 70 percent.

"The model now is to have a little bit [of income] from everywhere," says Corina Cepoi, the Internews country director for Moldova.

RISE Moldova, another partner in the Internews project, says 90 percent of its funding comes from foreign donors, some through its partnership with the nonprofit Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project. RISE worked with OCCRP journalists in 2014 to help expose the involvement of Moldovan bankers and judges in an elaborate Russian money-laundering scheme. More recent RISE stories, about former president Igor Dodon's frequent meetings in Moscow with a Kremlin office "established to oversee and guide the Socialist Party leader," were credited with helping current president Maia Sandu defeat Dodon's Socialist Party.

Sandu was elected last July with the strongest anti-corruption mandate of any post-independence Moldovan government. That's raised hopes among journalists that their years of documenting official malfeasance will lead to serious legal reforms and prosecutions. While they wait to see what the new government delivers, independent journalists are also at work scrutinizing its top officials. Already, they've questioned offshore holdings and wealth reports by some in the Sandu government.

The message is clear, says Cepoi. A new government can promise reforms, but "no matter what government

comes to power, investigative journalists continue to do their work."

ARMENIA

IN 2000, the Washington-based International Center for Journalists brought a group of Armenian journalists to the U.S. for a three-week tour. The Armenians attended the annual conference of Investigative Reporters and Editors, visited 60 Minutes and other newsrooms, and learned the tools and techniques of investigative reporting from seasoned American practitioners. "I think the main purpose of the organizers was to inspire us," says Gegham Vardanyan, who was a young reporter at a popular independent Armenian TV channel when he was chosen for the U.S. trip.

If inspiration was the organizers' goal, it worked. Not long after Vardanyan and the others returned home, several of them began talking about creating a new venture: a nonprofit newsroom devoted exclusively to investigative reporting. By 2001, inspiration became reality when Hetq ("Trace") Online was launched.

Two decades later, Hetq's site draws over 200,000 visitors a month, according to Google Analytics, for stories about the sex trafficking of young Armenian women in the United Arab Emirates, exposing a cybercrime ring, and revealing corruption at all levels of government. Some stories have had significant impact, such as winning reversals of corrupt sales of public kindergarten buildings and public forest lands. Other investigations have had another kind of impact: physical, verbal, and cyberattacks on Hetq and its journalists.

Despite its successes, Hetq continues to rely on foreign donors for 90 percent of its budget, according to deputy editor Liana Sayadyan. Those donors include the European Union, individual E.U. governments, and U.S. entities such as the National Endowment for Democracy, many of which also underwrite two other independent outlets in the country, Civilnet and EVN Report. EVN is named for the airport code for Yerevan, the Armenian capital. It began as an English-language site, targeting the estimated seven million Armenians and their descendants living in the diaspora. Both Civilnet and EVN emphasize political analysis and features, more than breaking news.

Three million people live in Armenia, where the Armenian-language service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty is popular with audiences seeking balanced breaking news reporting. "Balance" can be dangerous, though, as RFE/RL journalists learned in 2020, when new fighting erupted in Armenia's 30-year-old conflict with Azerbaijan over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. Both governments regularly claimed their side was winning. While most local media ignored Azerbaijan's claims, RFE/RL reported what each country said, earning threats and even physical attacks from an angry Armenian crowd. "We think people have a right to know what the other side is saying," says RFE/RL reporter Artak Hambardzumyan. "But if you report anything from the Azerbaijani side, you are becoming the enemy."



The news landscape in Armenia is typical of the midway media countries: a handful of foreign-funded outlets forms a tiny archipelago of independent journalism, surrounded by a sea of bare-knuckled, highly partisan media



People take part in a funeral ceremony of the Georgian cameraman Lekso Lashkarava in Tbilisi, Georgia, in July 2021. Lashkarava was killed by far-right activists during an anti-LGBTQ pride rally

The news landscape in Armenia is typical of the mid-way media countries: a handful of foreign-funded outlets forms a tiny archipelago of independent journalism, surrounded by a sea of bare-knuckled, highly partisan media — particularly on the 20 TV channels that reach national audiences or those in Yerevan.

Perhaps the best-known practitioner of this bare-knuckled “news” is Armenia’s current prime minister, Nikol Pashinyan. Before he led the 2018 “velvet revolution” that catapulted him to high office, Pashinyan worked at several flamboyantly oppositionist tabloids, including a long stint as editor-in-chief of Haykakan Zhamanak (“Armenian Times”).

When Pashinyan took to the streets in 2018 with his political grievances against then-president Serzh Sargsyan, television stations — virtually all of them controlled by the government or its supporters — ignored him. And that might have been the end of Pashinyan’s protest, but for the livestreams of independent journalists. Their online coverage prompted a genuine political uprising, until the street crowds grew so large that they forced Sargsyan’s resignation.

Any gratitude Pashinyan might have felt for that 2018 media coverage is long forgotten. As prime minister, he lambastes Armenia’s media as “a garbage dump” full of “fake news” and corrupt journalists. His party has curbed journalist access to parliament and reinstated criminal penalties for libel, a decade after Armenia eliminated them. “He tells people, ‘Don’t trust these corrupt journalists,’” says Shushan Doydoyan, a former radio producer who now heads

the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia. And though Pashinyan’s anti-media rhetoric and actions haven’t reached the repressive levels of some of his predecessors, “He’s creating a very aggressive environment toward media.”

Pashinyan’s rhetoric reflects the unvarnished, highly partisan language he wielded as a newspaper editor. In fact, say local journalists, Armenian audiences are now so used to consuming news presented from sharply partisan perspectives that many are puzzled by the efforts of RFE/RL, EVN, and others to be more balanced.

“We have a very politicized media field,” says Vardanyan, the TV reporter who went to the U.S. in 2000 and now edits a media monitoring site funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development. “Polarized, politicized, with a lot of paid articles, with a lot of news websites [and] TV channels taking sides,” he says. “I cannot say we have a healthy news field.”

To change that, Hetq’s editors aim to train more new journalists in the standards and techniques the site’s founders studied in their 2000 visit to America. A more than \$300,000 grant from the U.S. government enabled Hetq staff to recruit non-journalists for a one-year program in investigative, data, and multimedia reporting. When the first two dozen students graduated in 2021, half got jobs in education or other non-journalism institutions, but several others went to work in media — including independent sites like Hetq, Civilnet, and EVN.

But continued foreign funding — of the school and of newsrooms — is essential if the archipelago of indepen-

dents is to survive and grow, says EVN managing editor Roubina Margossian. Her message to funders: “Make sure there are 10 more EVN Reports. Make sure there are 10 more Hetqs and Civilnet[s] and Radio Liberty’s.”

GEORGIA

GEOORGIAN MEDIA IS OFTEN SUMMED UP in just two words: “pluralistic” and “polarized.”

If pluralism were purely a numbers game, then TV — where opinion polls show about three-quarters of Georgians go for news — would certainly fit the definition. The population of just under four million is served by nearly 100 TV channels.

But to hear more than one point of view, it’s necessary to channel surf — from the government-loyal programming of Imedi TV to the drumbeat of anti-government criticism on opposition channel Mtavari, whose website’s motto is, “Gain your freedom together with us!” (Mtavari has heavily covered the imprisonment and trial of Georgian opposition leader and ex-president Mikheil Saakashvili, who was arrested in October when he returned from exile.)

The pluralist-but-polarized news on TV reflects Georgia’s operatic and often vengeful politics, in which the flamboyant Saakashvili and his United National Movement are pitted against the ruling Georgian Dream party of billionaire tycoon Bidzina Ivanishvili. “The media, especially TV, are perceived by parties as instruments of political struggle,” according to an October 2020 report by Transparency International’s Georgia office. That report accused Georgian Dream of launching politically-motivated legal actions against leaders of opposition TV channels — such as a “questionable investigation” of money-laundering charges against the father of the founder of TV Pirveli.

The report also documents verbal attacks on individual journalists (mainly those who work for opposition TV channels) who have been publicly denounced by Georgian Dream politicians as “immoral and unscrupulous,” “depraved,” and “anti-state and anti-church.” The party’s politicians generally refuse to appear on opposition channels.

Georgia does have a handful of digital sites regarded as reliable sources of independent reporting, among them, on.ge, netgazeti.ge, and the English-language civil.ge. Dispatch, the sassy twice-a-week email newsletter put out by civil.ge, speaks with equal irreverence about Georgian Dream and its rivals. And when Tbilisi officials announced a doubling of bus fares to start in February, Dispatch proclaimed “Hell Getting Expensive,” the “hell” being the city’s notoriously poor bus service.

The Europe-based Center for Media, Data and Society reported in 2020 that without foreign philanthropy Georgia’s independent media would have developed “much less and at a much slower pace.” The U.S.-based National Endowment for Democracy, one of several donors listed by civil.ge, is the largest foreign supporter of Georgian media, according to the report.

The online sites reach only small audiences but pro-

vide more neutral news and analysis than TV. “The biased editorial policy of broadcasters is reflected in their negative coverage of the political entities that they dislike,” according to a report by the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics, a journalist-led monitoring group. In contrast, the charter reported in an analysis of 2021 elections coverage, “Most online media display a high degree of editorial independence,” thanks in part to financial support from international donors.

Georgia’s public broadcaster, though perceived by some as pro-government, also strives for political neutrality; its Channel One is the only platform that got candidates from all parties to come together in a face-to-face debate during the 2021 elections. In a country where TV news can look like a blood sport, her goal, says Director General Tinatin Berdzenishvili, is to provide viewers with “pure information without any analysis.”

Another outlet, the U.S.-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty’s Georgian service, has a reputation for evenhandedness — though it has to strike a balance without the actual on-air presence of Georgian Dream politicians, says Natia Zambakhidze, the station’s director. “They are not boycotting us, per se,” she says. “But they are not coming. They say, ‘Oh, we don’t have time. Not today, maybe tomorrow. Not tomorrow, maybe the day after tomorrow.’”

But when it comes to audience size, none of these outlets has anything close to the influence of the TV channels, whose owners are active in politics or openly sympathetic to one party or the other. And yet, in spite of their heavily politicized messaging, opposition channels such as Mtavari play a crucial accountability role in Georgia, says former journalist and media development specialist Tamar Kikacheishvili.

Without them, TV news would be confined to the government’s version of events. “We wouldn’t know about important issues that are happening and affecting people,” such as the state of Covid-19 in Georgia or why the inflation rate is running in double digits, says Kikacheishvili. “To have Mtavari as a critical channel, it’s still very important, even though it’s not politically independent.”

Mtavari and other opposition channels also provide a platform for voices shut out of pro-government TV programming. That includes LGBTQ activists, whose planned gay pride rally last July was thwarted when demonstrators opposed to their cause filled the streets in Tbilisi. The anti-gay demonstration was covered by journalists from opposition channels and the public broadcaster, who became targets when the gathering turned violent. More than 50 journalists were assaulted, many of them needing medical care, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists.

In the days following the assaults, journalists launched their own protests, blaming the government for inaction against the anti-gay organizers. Though most of the organizers remain unpunished, Georgia’s opposition media is likely to continue pressing for action. Keeping the pressure on is important, says Kikacheishvili, noting: “If there is not this type of pressure, then we will get Belarus here.” ■

The pluralist-but-polarized news on TV reflects Georgia’s operatic and often vengeful politics

PUTIN SHUTS DOWN RUSSIA'S FREE PRESS

The crackdown on independent news outlets takes the country back to the Soviet era

BY ELIZAVETA KUZNETSOVA

ON THE MORNING OF MARCH 4, the last remaining independent news outlet in Russia — the award-winning Novaya Gazeta — announced the end of its reporting on the war in Ukraine in response to Russian government demands.

A new law that bans the “dissemination of knowingly false information” about the Russian armed forces — and carries up to a 15-year penalty — was the final blow. The newspaper vowed to continue informing the public about the consequences of the economic sanctions, problems with import of medications, and other social issues.

This came a day after the independent TV channel Dozhd announced a temporary suspension of its operation in its broadcast on March 3. “We need strength to exhale and understand how to continue. We really hope that we will return on air,” said General Manager Natalia Sindeeva. At the end of the broadcast, Dozhd streamed Swan Lake, a reference to the August coup of 1991, when all Soviet TV channels played the ballet on repeat instead of showing images of the coup, becoming a symbol of suppression of truthful information.

Over the course of just one week, the independent media landscape in Russia was shuttered, returning the country to the pre-Perestroika state without any semblance of a free press. Russian media regulator Roskomnadzor blocked access to several independent media outlets, including MediaZona, Meduza, Nastoyashee Vremya, The New Times, Doxa, The Village, and Tayga.Info. Russian prosecutors justify the move by accusing the outlets of purposeful and systematic dissemination of “false information about the essence of the special military operation.” But, they were accurately reporting news of Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine. Many international media corporations, including CNN, BBC, Bloomberg News, ABC, CBS News, and Radio Liberty, were forced to suspend operations in Russia.

The new law curbing what journalists can say about the military is essentially censorship of what journalists can say about the invasion of Ukraine. Any data on casualties or information on the resistance the Ukrainians are mounting could be considered “fake information.” Under the legislation, truthful reporting of the conflict is nearly impossible.

“It has been decided to eradicate journalism entirely and to put all disagreeable behind bars,” said Sergey Smirnov, the editor-in-chief of MediaZona, an independent investigative outlet. “Even if you don’t say anything [about the war], it might not save you if they [the Russian government] don’t like you.”

Controlling the narrative is particularly important for the Russian government amid the growing dissent in the country. The invasion of Ukraine coincided with the new trial of Alexei Navalny, the opposition activist who rose to international prominence after being poisoned with a nerve agent. Convicted of stealing donations from his anti-corruption foundation, Navalny was sentenced to an additional nine years in prison. Navalny’s allies, who continue to produce livestreams on YouTube debunking state propaganda, believe the timing of the trial is not random. As Navalny said in a recent Instagram post, “We will circumvent blockages until the internet functions in Russia. And if it gets blocked, we will be using Morse code to deliver news to you.”

For years, independent media in Russia have reported on corruption, protests, and politics, reaching their audiences online often through social media. The daily number of subscribers of news channels on Telegram, a cloud-based messaging app, has grown precipitously since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, according to TGStat.ru, a non-profit project that tracks the platform. But social media is not immune to state control and state propaganda, and the online news environment is often used to amplify confusion and misinformation.



YURI KOCHETKOV/EPA-EFE VIA SHUTTERSTOCK

Tech companies are under pressure from both sides of the conflict, which can result in questionable decisions that further aggravate the situation for independent outlets. Echo Moskvy, an independent radio station controlled by Russian state-owned company Gazprom-Media, reported being suspended by YouTube and Twitter even though the outlet maintained editorial independence and provided truthful reporting. Coincidentally, on March 3, the board of directors of Echo Moskvy decided to liquidate the outlet, according to its editor-in-chief Aleksey Venediktov, after Russian officials blocked its website over its reporting on Ukraine. Its dissolution is symbolic as the Russian government’s decision to spare the outlet from repression until now helped maintain at least a façade of freedom of press in the country.

Without independent media, the Russian public will become hostage to the state narrative about “the special operation” aimed at “de-Nazification” of Ukraine, as Moscow describes its war against the country. In fact, the use of the word “war” to refer to the conflict in Ukraine is prohibited in Russia. In the alternative reality of Russian propaganda, Zelenskyy’s government has lost control over the country after giving weapons to neo-Nazi groups that use combat drugs. “Without drugs people cannot shoot at their own citizens,” said Russian political expert Sergey Karnouhov, a common guest commentator, on state-run TV channel Rossiya 24 on March 5. “They [neo-Nazis in Ukraine] use Captagone, just like ISIS fighters,” he falsely added, while showing unverified footage from Syria.

To the domestic public, the crackdown on independent press is falsely presented as an exodus of traitors who have been misinforming the Russian public for decades.

“Western media allege that there is no journalism in Russia, but in reality, they just need to abide by the Russian laws,” said one presenter on Rossiya 24 on March 5. He then reminded the audience that it was Germany and France that blocked the Russian international TV station RT, widely viewed as a government propaganda vehicle.


Apart from state control, independent outlets that rely on crowdfunding also struggle with the consequences of the economic sanctions, introduced by the U.S. and the E.U. in response to the invasion.

“How can we survive,” said Smirnov in a Telegram post. “Due to the shutdown of Russian banks and the blocking of MediaZona, donations are starkly shrinking.”

Blocked independent outlets will continue to fight for their right to report through the courts. However, the situation will only intensify as the war in Ukraine goes on. With many journalists fleeing Russia, independent reporting is still possible from abroad. And local audiences can use VPN connections to access blocked sites and social media. But without international support, the free press in Russia will not survive, and the isolation of the Russian audience will continue.

“Right now, independent journalism can survive only outside of Russia,” said Smirnov. “Inside the country compromises are no longer possible.” ■

Russian policemen detain a participant in a rally against Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in downtown Moscow on March 6

A photograph of a woman with dark curly hair, wearing a teal zip-up jacket, holding a young child in a light green long-sleeved shirt. They are both looking to the right. The background is dark and out of focus, showing other people in a crowd. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the woman's face and the child's shirt.

BEYOND THE BORDER

Immigration coverage
overwhelmingly focuses on
politics. It's time to center
migrants' stories

BY ALLEGRA HOBBS

WHEN URIEL J. GARCÍA, AN IMMIGRATION REPORTER for The Texas Tribune, approaches migrants in hopes of quoting them in one of his stories about the strife along the Texas-Mexico border, he knows he will most likely be rejected. “They’ll almost always say no at first,” he says. In some cases, he’s been able to convince them to share their stories, which is fortunate — he considers these interviews integral to the reporting process, providing that vital human element to pieces that are fundamentally about human suffering and triumph. A recent story he wrote on calls to beef up border security in Texas takes care to extensively quote migrants seeking asylum and their family members.

Without these stories, García says, reporters can easily fall into a habit of simply quoting experts on immigration policy. Human stories risk being reduced to cold political matters; people with often traumatic life experiences are reduced to data and election talking points.

But García can’t blame these prospective sources for shying away from the press. As a Mexican immigrant himself, having grown up in a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood in Phoenix, Arizona, he’s sympathetic to the distrust of his profession. For one thing, he says, “We have a lot to lose if we say something wrong.” Additionally, the press hasn’t accumulated goodwill within the immigrant communities already in the United States.

“When a journalist approaches [an immigrant] and says, ‘I want to hear what you have to say,’ it’s because Trump did something, [or] Biden did something,” says García. “No one is necessarily asking them, ‘I want to hear what you have to say, because I see you as a member of the community’ ... A lot of them are being questioned for the first time publicly about an immigration policy, but for them, why aren’t they being asked about the local elections? Why aren’t they [being asked] about changes in their neighborhood? ... They’re just not used to being approached by someone who’s interested in their stories.”

García’s experience, both as an immigrant and an immigration reporter, encapsulates some of the challenges facing this fraught beat at a time when the topic is hounded by inflammatory rhetoric and misinformation. When it comes to immigration, the American public is woefully misinformed. A Pew Research Center study published in 2019 revealed that more than a third of Americans wrongly believed “that most immigrants are in the country illegally.” In fact, as of 2016, about three-quarters of all immigrants in the U.S. are legal residents.

Fear-mongering coupled with the shortcomings of how American media outlets frame the issue — focusing on criminality rather than the human beings behind the statistics and how U.S. policy has helped create the conditions they are fleeing — has resulted in coverage that often whips up fear and offers a narrow view of

the immigrant experience. What’s needed instead, say García and other reporters trying to refocus the beat, is coverage of immigration and immigrant communities that reminds audiences what’s at stake — human lives.

León Krauze, a Mexican journalist for Univision and a contributing columnist for The Washington Post’s Global Opinions section, wrote a column in March that had some strong words for the English-language press. “The border crisis is about human pain and desperation. Why can’t the media grasp this?” asks the headline. In the piece, Krauze calls the media’s coverage of the border “solipsistic,” consumed by quibbling over the use of the word “crisis” (which should be used, he believes), and argues that reporters are too focused on the political ramifications. “The reality faced by hundreds of thousands of children, teenagers and parents south of the border should be of enormous consequence in the nation’s immigration debate,” writes Krauze. “But it isn’t, and that’s a shame.”

The reality, Krauze says, is that a combination of “crime, corruption and even climate change” has created an unlivable situation in parts of Central America — a situation worsened by American disengagement. Migrants are fleeing gang violence, police brutality, domestic and sexual abuse, and the devastation of repeated hurricanes. But this is not what dominates immigration coverage in America.

“I think that my colleagues, with a few exceptions, look at immigration basically as a political issue,” Krauze

says. “What does this or that policy do to the political balance in Washington? Does this hurt the president?”

Alisa Zaira Reznick, who covers southern Arizona for the radio station KJZZ’s Fronteras Desk and previously covered the border and immigration for Arizona Public Media, agrees it can be easy to go down a “policy rabbit hole” instead of focusing on the communities that will be impacted by the policy in question. This points to the importance of local news in covering immigration; national outlets with reporters parachuting in are more likely to overlook important local angles.

“Part of the benefit and part of the challenge of reporting on immigration locally is you’re not just reporting on a policy change, because NPR is already going to do that,” she says. “Step two is, what does this mean for the communities that I’m covering? What does it mean in Arizona? What does it mean in Tucson?”

In July, Reznick wrote a two-part report on the effect of Title 42, a pandemic-era policy facilitating the mass expulsion of asylum-seekers, and uncertainty around an exemption allowing migrants in particularly desperate situations to circumvent the policy. The report takes readers inside a shelter in Nogales, Arizona, where migrants are offered temporary accommodation and food after being processed. In addition to explaining the policy itself, Reznick underscores the experience of the shelter workers and asylum-seekers. A migrant going by the pseudonym Yessica gives voice to this experience as she is ultimately allowed entry into the U.S.

Some mainstream newsrooms partner with outlets serving immigrant communities. Univision, for example, has partnered with ProPublica both for the latter’s “Electionland” and “Documenting Hate” projects. ProPublica was able to field tips and comments from Spanish speakers through Univision, allowing it to better cover immigrant communities.

Rachel Glickhouse, partner manager for both “Electionland” and “Documenting Hate,” wrote that these tips helped produce hundreds of stories. The project received more than 35 reports of anti-immigrant incidents and attacks occurring in Walmart stores across the country, resulting in a Univision piece about how employees felt they received inadequate support when confronted with vitriol on the job. Univision also reported on a Spanish-language version of neo-Nazi website the Daily Stormer, which aimed to spread racist and anti-Semitic messages to Spanish speakers and recruit Spanish-speaking volunteers. The site “removed the name of a popular Spanish forum ... after legal action was threatened,” according to ProPublica.

The America-centric approach to immigration coverage is compounded by what researchers say is a geographically limited view of the immigration beat, which focuses mostly on the border itself. Krauze points to televised news coverage of Vice President Kamala Harris’ trip to Guatemala and Mexico in June as an example. The trip was an opportunity to delve into the conditions in Guatemala and Mexico, the effects American

Lula Abdi, originally from Somalia, helps kindergartners at Connor Elementary School learn their letters using clay figures. “Immigration and patterns of migration affect almost every sector of life,” says Uriel García of the Texas Tribune



PREVIOUS SPREAD: Immigrants stand near the bank of the Rio Grande after crossing the river from Mexico in Roma, Texas, April 2021. Immigration coverage should center the people most affected by policy, reporters on the beat say

PREVIOUS SPREAD: JOHN MOORE/GETTY IMAGES

MELANIE STETSON FREEMAN/CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

“I think that my colleagues, with few exceptions, look at immigration basically as a political issue”

**León Krauze
Univision**

guns are having on violence in Mexico, and the effects of American foreign policy on the region. “What did [the media] care about?” asks Krauze. “When are you going to the border?” So that kind of myopic approach, I think, is sadly all too common in American English-language media when it comes to immigration.”

When Internews, a non-profit supporting independent media in dozens of countries, teamed up with immigration newsletter Migratory Notes to analyze the more than 4,500 immigration stories that had been curated in the newsletter from 2017 to 2020, it found that immigration coverage is dominated by stories centering illegality and criminality, in which migrants are being detained or otherwise have no agency.

In addition, coverage tends to revolve around the southern border region, excluding large immigrant communities in states like Florida and New Jersey. Florida, for example, while containing 10.2 percent of the U.S. immigrant population, was only the focus of 3.9 percent of 721 location-based immigrant stories examined by the research. And national news outlets based in New York, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C., dominate immigration coverage, per the study.

“There is an opportunity to invest in these communities, which are generally outside traditional landing places and national media centers, and train local reporters in [the] fundamentals of immigration coverage and provide story grants or other incentives to foster coverage,” the study argues.

García also recommends a more holistic approach to immigration coverage, one that gives more attention to immigrant communities already in the U.S. “We have to also write about immigration from inside the country as opposed to just the border,” he says. “Immigration and patterns of migration affect almost every sector of life — think income, schooling, hospitals, public safety, businesses, the type of food we eat.” In October, García wrote a piece highlighting business owners along the Texas-Mexico border and how restrictions on border crossings have impacted them. The piece depicts the Mexican-American business owners who sell their wares in border cities like El Paso and Brownsville, where Mexican tourism is an important source of foot traffic.

The Internews study also found that “the reporting of national relevance during the previous administration overwhelmingly highlighted detention, enforcement, the border and the plight of asylum seekers” — a continuing trend, it argued, though the Trump administration made it more severe. There is, in English-language media, a tendency toward using dehumanizing language to describe migrants and migration trends. The word “surge” has become ubiquitous across headlines in mainstream media outlets when describing migrants approaching the U.S.-Mexico border.

Poynter recently argued such language is not only dehumanizing but inaccurate, contributing to an unnecessary alarmism. It’s not just right-wing news sources like Fox News that use this language. NBC News has described migrants as “flood[ing] the southern border;” NPR has referenced a “surge of migrants.”

Reznick from KJZZ’s Fronteras Desk says she avoids

such language herself because these word choices impact the way readers receive information about an already controversial topic. “It’s going to change what your piece looks like if you say migrants are ‘flooding’ the border or there’s a ‘surge’ of migrants at the border,” she says. “Those things look small, but they’re extremely consequential in the way people read your work. The people reading these stories might be people who have never seen the border, or ever thought about the border.”

Also front of mind for Reznick is the climate of alarmism and fear-mongering in which she is reporting. It’s difficult to ignore and influences how she thinks about her job. “If anything, it makes you hypervigilant not just about what you’re saying but how you’re saying it,” she says. Indeed, right-wing media pundits like Tucker Carlson of Fox News have perpetuated anti-immigration conspiracy theories about white extinction and speak of immigration in an alarmist manner, claiming immigrants are making America “poorer and dirtier.”

Aside from such plainly racist rhetoric, Fox News has sounded the alarm about “COVID-positive migrants” (despite otherwise dismissing the seriousness of Covid-19), contributing to the baseless theory that migrants are driving case counts. Then there is the false claim, perpetuated by Fox News, that Biden has pursued an “open borders” strategy that has driven an increase in migrants arriving at the border.

The deluge of misinformation and sensationalist rhetoric can create added pressure, as some immigration reporters see their role as, in a way, a counterbalance to the very loud hyperpartisan sector of the media making these false claims.

Hamed Aleaziz, who covers immigration for BuzzFeed News, feels the best way to deal with misinformation is to simply do one’s own work as well as possible and not worry about what response it might elicit from bad actors. “I focus on trying to stick to the facts and to tell stories that break news on upcoming policy changes, or shed light on problems with how the government is implementing policies or handling people, and to speak to the people who are more impacted by these policies,” he says. “Sometimes this work can be used to shape a political agenda, but I think ultimately focusing on those factors and treating each story with nuance and rigor is the best path. I think it’s smart to always counter any misinformation with focusing on facts.”

It’s also important to be cautious when quoting sources who spout misinformation, notes García. “I think it’s important to contrast a politician’s claims on immigration to actual facts,” he says. “For example, if you quote someone saying that the border is wide open, I think it’s important to note that [the] majority of the undocumented people living in the U.S. had come here legally, overstaying their visas.”

Drawing attention to real immigrant stories can help blunt the spread of fear-mongering narratives. “Ultimately, the best way to debunk a lot of the false narratives is to highlight immigrants’ stories by giving them a platform to speak for themselves,” García argues.

Plus, it’s not just right-wing news sources that will



JOHN MOORE/GETTY IMAGES

fumble the framing of an immigration story; mainstream outlets have also contributed sensationalist or misleading journalism. “If you watch TV news or listen to pundits, or half of Congress, you think Joe Biden flung the gates open and there’s a million people and they’re all being let in,” says Gaby Del Valle, who writes Substack newsletter BORDER/LINES with fellow immigration reporter Felipe De La Hoz. “It’s not happening.”

And those outlets that spread misinformation have an attentive audience. According to the Pew Research Center, immigration was one of the most-covered topics during the early days of the Biden administration across 25 major news outlets but was especially dominant in outlets with a right-leaning audience. Those right-leaning readers were also more likely to want even more coverage of immigration. This complements a 2018 research study from Pew, which found “illegal immigration [was] the highest-ranked national problem among GOP voters.” This view is likely encouraged by the fear-mongering from outlets like Fox News, which, in turn creates a greater demand for such content: News consumers are told disease-carrying migrants are coming to “plunder” their country, then become eager for updates on this apparent crisis. President Trump contributed to this rash of misinformation before the 2018 midterms when he falsely described migrant “caravans” arriving in the U.S. as largely comprised of criminals who have “injured” and “attacked” people.

Del Valle and De La Hoz launched the weekly dis-

patch BORDER/LINES to provide a digestible breakdown of a whirlwind of policy changes. The decision to launch a guide to immigration news came when photos of migrant camps on the border spawned finger-pointing that was missing vital context, says Del Valle. “People would be like, ‘This is Trump’s immigration policy,’ and people would be like, ‘Actually this is Obama’s immigration policy, too,’” she recalls. “My reason for founding the newsletter was to contextualize what seemed like new, cruel policies — not to let the Trump administration off the hook, but to show how deeply entrenched all of this stuff is, how it’s not necessarily the product of one person’s ideology but decades of congressional funding and bipartisan agreement.”

Last September, the newsletter took on the heavily covered story of the Haitian migrant encampment in Del Rio, Texas, which drew attention for its size, squalor, and the harsh response from Border Patrol. BORDER/LINES noted that for decades Haitian migrants have been largely barred from claiming asylum status, instead categorized as “economic migrants,” because the U.S. was avoiding acknowledging its role in a humanitarian crisis there. (The government was materially supporting dictator François Duvalier, who was in power until 1971).

“All news coverage of immigration, by virtue of being news coverage, has a bias towards the new,” says Del Valle. She hopes that by providing deeper context on what came before, she and other reporters can foster a better understanding of what is happening now. ■

Haitian immigrants cross the Rio Grande from Del Rio, Texas to Ciudad Acuna, Mexico in Sept. 2021. The Substack newsletter BORDER/LINES analyzed how U.S. border policy produced the Haitian migrant encampment crisis

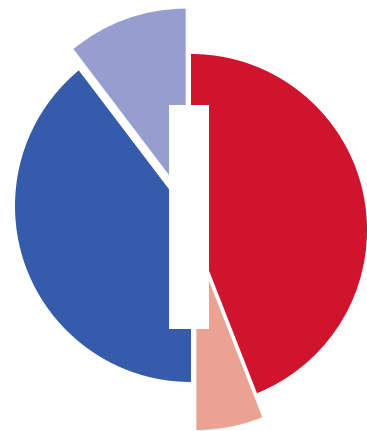


THE MIDTERMS ARE COMING. HERE'S HOW TO COVER POLLING

In an age of hyperpartisanship, adding context to survey data is key to giving audiences the full picture

BY CELESTE KATZ MARSTON

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DOUG CHAYKA



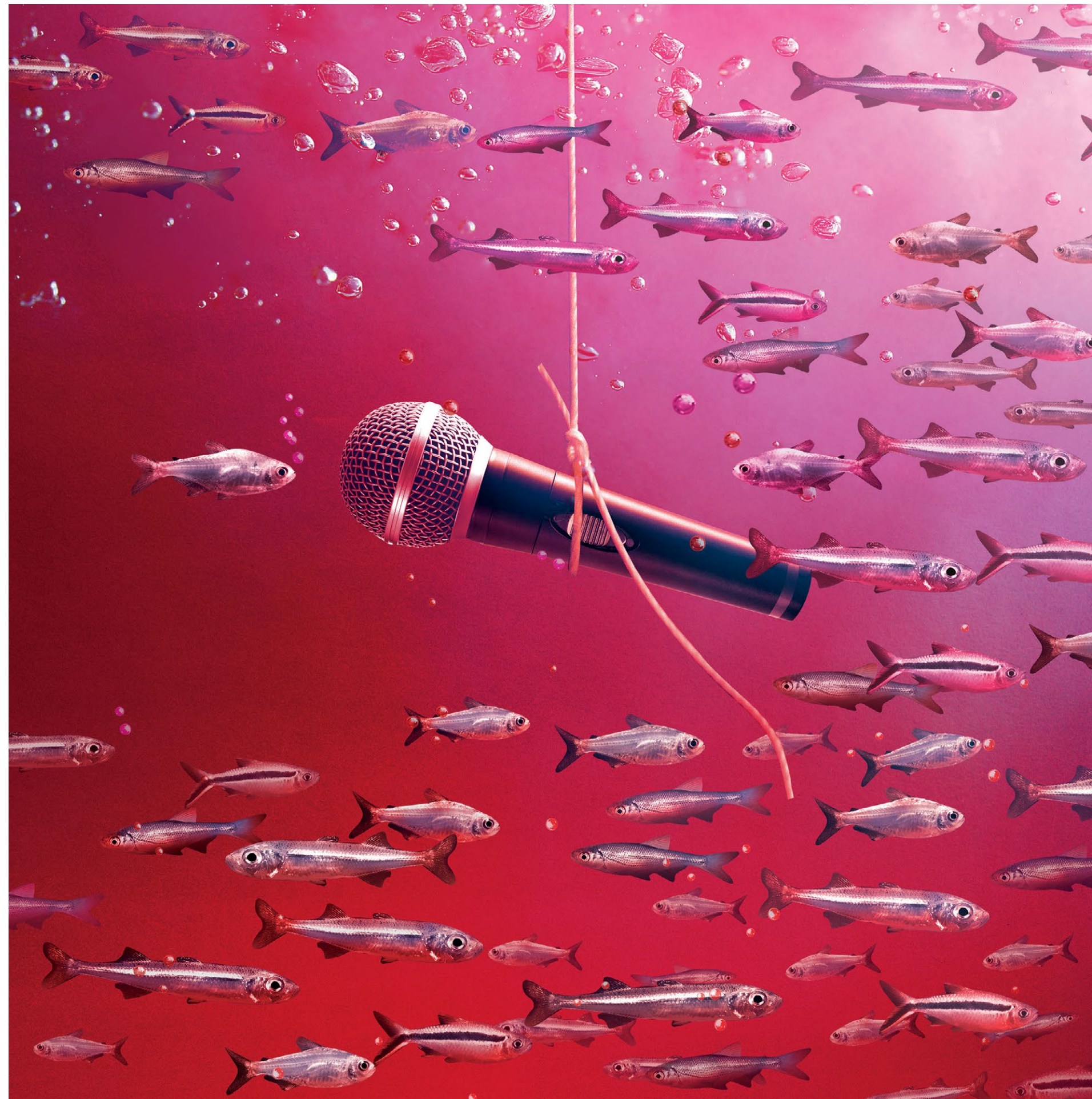
IN THE SUMMER OF 2017, Susan Potter of The Atlanta Journal-Constitution wrote the kind of column that no editor wants to pen.

“Our poll of the 6th Congressional District race, conducted two weeks before the June 20 runoff, missed the mark. There’s just no

getting around it,” Potter wrote. “It showed Democrat Jon Ossoff with a 7-point lead among likely voters, with a margin of error of 4 percentage points. Republican Karen Handel ended up winning by 4 points.”

Potter, the Journal-Constitution’s senior editor for state government and politics, wrote that the sample of nearly 800 likely voters didn’t have enough young, female, or minority respondents. The pollster, Abt Associates, overweighted the responses from those groups to make up for it. “Typically, such adjustments don’t have a big impact on the final results,” Potter explained. “But in this case, the demographic groups adjusted for tended to vote disproportionately for the Democrat.”

But rather than shrink back after the missed call in the Ossoff-Handel faceoff — which at the time was the most expensive House race in U.S. history — the paper continues to commission polls as a tool to inform its coverage. “I have to keep an eye on what we’re learning about polling, [and] we will have to keep evaluating our methodology and, eventually, whether we keep on doing it,” Potter explains. “But right now, it remains the best tool we have for getting some picture of public sentiment.”

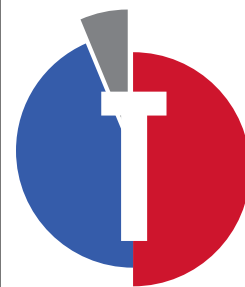


The Atlanta paper's bad experience involved a single race in a single congressional district, but since the 2016 presidential election, news organizations across the country have been forced to reckon with both the inaccuracies of political polling as well as the misguided editorial choices that created an aura of invincibility around Hillary Clinton's campaign. There were a variety of problems with polls that media outlets used (and commissioned) while covering the election: Some surveys did not weight the responses properly to ensure the polls properly reflected the electorate. Some were affected by "nonresponse bias," which occurs when the population that doesn't respond to a poll is substantially different than the one that does. At the same time, news organizations often failed to give context to survey data, playing up single polls in an attempt to inject excitement into their horserace coverage. This dynamic has led many Americans to doubt the polling reported on in the media, and research suggests that people are more inclined to believe polls that tell them what they want to hear.

The Capitol insurrection on Jan. 6, 2021, was "one of the ultimate evidence points of what happens when people's mistrust in polling and election results and the reporting around that gets weaponized," says Margaret Talev, managing editor for politics at Axios. When polling data is off — as in 2020 when polling indicated that Joe Biden had a larger lead than what he wound up winning by — and coverage amplifies it, that dynamic can lead to distrust, especially in such a hyperpartisan environment. "It's added an additional layer [of] responsibility [to] the way we cover data and elections," Talev explains.

When handled with care, surveys can enhance coverage of not only elections, but many other issues, from the Covid-19 response to international relations to abortion. They can give insights into how attitudes on certain issues change over time or explain how our government fails to deliver key reforms despite overwhelming public support. (For example, 84 percent of Americans support background checks for gun purchases, but Congress has made little progress in advancing legislation.) "Voters in federal elections only get to weigh in every two years as to who represents them in Washington and what issues they want them to focus on," says Steven Shepard, senior campaigns and elections editor and chief polling analyst for Politico. "Polling is a way to get the voice of the people in front of their leaders more frequently than that."

As news outlets prepare for the 2022 midterms and beyond, many are grappling with how to best cover polls as part of an accurate and balanced news diet. The question remains: How can we get the most useful information out of polling — and convey that information well — while avoiding pitfalls of small sample sizes, leading questions, and the narrowness of horserace coverage?



TO UNDERSTAND THE PATH forward, it's important to look back at the 2016 and 2020 election cycles.

A day after the 2016 election, Reuters reported in one analysis after the dust settled, "pollsters and statisticians gave Hillary Clinton odds of between 75 and 99 percent of winning the U.S. presidential election." Clinton did beat Trump in the popular vote, but some state-level polling and projections used by aggregators were off. The American Association for Public Opinion Research

(AAPOR)'s review of the 2016 election found a variety of factors likely led to the underestimation of support for a Donald Trump presidency. That included a large change in vote preference in the final days of the race. Pollsters also failed to adjust for an overrepresentation of more educated voters, particularly in state-level polls, AAPOR found. People with more formal education were more likely to support Hillary Clinton — and highly educated people were also more likely to agree to participate in surveys.

That same post-mortem also stressed the difference between polls and forecasts. "Pollsters and astute poll reporters are often careful to describe their findings as a snapshot in time, measuring public opinion when they

are fielded," the study noted. "Forecasting models do something different — they attempt to predict a future event. As the 2016 election proved, that can be a fraught exercise, and the net benefit to the country is unclear."

Heading into 2020, both pollsters and news outlets promised to do better. Groups like Hart Research, a pollster for NBC News/Wall Street Journal research, changed weighting by education as early as 2016, while Ipsos and Pew also moved to adjust their education weighting within racial categories. Other considerations included paying increased attention to where they found survey respondents — urban vs. rural areas, for example — and to reaching people by mobile phone (including texting) versus landline. While most

Voters wait in line before the polls open for the 2016 U.S. presidential election in Peoria Township, Kansas. Conducting polls through new methods, like text or email, can help pollsters reach underrepresented rural communities

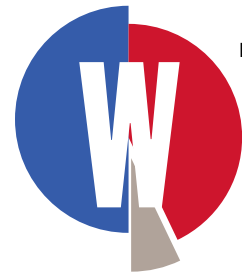
LARRY W. SMITH/EPA/SHUTTERSTOCK

national polls correctly estimated Joe Biden would get more votes than Trump, Biden's ultimate margin of victory wasn't as big as the numbers had indicated. "The polls overstated the Biden-Trump margin by 3.9 points in the national popular vote and by 4.3 points in state-level presidential poll," AAPOR's analysis of pre-2020 election surveys found.

Looking ahead, pollsters will need to recognize the importance of reaching people in different ways, says Politico's Shepard. This means including more cell phone interviews and branching out to email, text message, or regular mail. Other analyses have pointed to the need to consider educational attainment as a bigger part of the equation, along with attributes such as age, gender, and geographic location.

Pew, a formidable name in polling, has already announced substantial changes to its survey system, including altering the weighting of its polls to better reflect America's partisan balance, retiring thousands of "demographically overrepresented" panelists and recruiting new ones, updating its recruitment materials, and adding respondents who prefer to answer poll questions by mail.

These adjustments could help address some of the fault lines of polling for better accuracy, but the press will still have lots to be cautious about — and will need to alter coverage practices — no matter how polls are conducted.



WHEN IT COMES TO the business of journalism, the amount of time spent on poll coverage, even with its perils, makes sense.

"Journalists are taught that what is [more] dramatic makes for better news, because it incentivizes the audiences to tune in," says Kathleen Searles, associate professor of political communication at Louisiana State University. If drama's what sells, the "lowest-cost, lowest-hanging fruit way to do that is to use polls, because polls are high in supply, the audience demands it, [and they] can be packaged for television news in a way that has more visual appeal and perhaps more interest for a lot of political junkies, which are the kind of people that like to tune into news anyway," she says.

In a 2016 paper, Searles and her coauthors dug into TV news coverage of the 2008 presidential race and found that although Democrat Barack Obama was pretty consistently outperforming John McCain in polls, "if you were just to take news coverage at stock value, you would be well inclined to walk away thinking that there was [a] very close race." (It was not: Obama handily defeated McCain 52 percents to 45.7 percent.)

Why? Media gatekeepers made editorial choices about which polls to play up and which to disregard. Some of these choices, the study found, aligned with the outlet's ideological slant or favored polls that showed "significant changes" in the standing of the competitors. "If media is the conduit by which the public gauges the

state of the race, then we are being misled," Searles and her collaborators wrote.

Addressing the much-critiqued poll-driven horserace mentality is key to fixing this. As Harvard's Kennedy School has noted, horserace coverage has been linked to distrust in public officials and news outlets, to hurting women candidates who focus more on policy issues, and to sidelining third-party candidates via coverage of politics through a two-party lens. But it's not about stopping the coverage. It's about adding context. Reporting on real neck-and-neck results, says Joshua Dyck, professor of political science and director of the Center for Public Opinion at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, may be of real public service: "It can raise the stakes, which increases the probability that those voters at the margins turn out, and I think that that can be a positive for democracy."

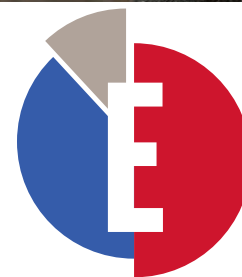
Speaking directly to voters at home and on the trail provides color and context, but there's no getting around the fact that polls cover a broader swath of public sentiment than reporters can ever reach through anecdotes, no matter how many they gather and how fastidiously.

Sometimes, as hard as it may be, journalists need to take a step back from covering individual polls, says Amy Walter, publisher and editor-in-chief of the Cook Political Report with Amy Walter. Take, for example, the stories about President Biden's 33 percent approval rating in a mid-January Quinnipiac poll, which got widespread coverage. "Instead of breathlessly covering [this as], 'Oh my God, Quinnipiac shows him at 33 percent,'" she advises, media outlets can say, "Well, let's wait and see, as other polls come in, where this fits into the trend line.' Is that really where he is, or is [that] one poll? Put it [into] context."

Putting too much focus on outlier polls can give the public a skewed version of the overall trajectory of an issue or race and create a false impression of a momentum shift that candidates or advocacy groups can use to raise funds and recruit — or as Pacific Standard once put it, allowing polls to create changes "instead of detecting them."

The long-term approach can be particularly revealing on social-issue and policy polls. Talev points to Axios' ongoing survey research on Covid-19, done in conjunction with Ipsos, that's been cited by research published in the journal *Nature* for its accuracy. Through sustained polling, Axios/Ipsos has been able to gather both anecdotes and data-driven insights about Americans' views on the coronavirus crisis and vaccinations. The polling has investigated how news consumption habits relate to infection rates and willingness to get vaccinated, and studied attitudes about in-person versus remote schooling.

"We do see value in the trends that polls reveal and in the crosstabs for a lot of responses to big questions of our day," she says. "A poll is only as good as the moment in which you ask it, the sample, and the model for your sample. And so multiple waves of a poll, being able to look back at that pattern, that duration, tells you much more than a snapshot in time does, and that's been the real value of that survey to us."



EXPERTS ON CONDUCTING, analyzing, and covering polls caution that it's vital for the press to understand and convey exactly what polls tell us — and what they do not or cannot.

Polls don't tell us who's actually going to win. (Anyone who needs a reminder on this can look to the AP Stylebook, updated in 2018 to advise specifically against making a single political horserace poll the subject or headline of a whole news story.) Presenting polls as oracles is a recipe for heartburn — especially as even the most rigorous pollsters have run into new challenges in recent cycles.

"For many pollsters, response rates have dropped into the single digits, which means that pollsters have difficulty generating representative samples and it is hard to gauge turnout at a time when there have been substantial fluctuations in who turns out to vote," says Darrell West, vice president of governance studies at the Brookings Institution.

It's also important to remember that polls don't "tell you [information] beyond exactly what the question asks," says David Moore, senior fellow at the University of New Hampshire's Carsey School of Public Policy. "You can go ahead and try to ascribe to public opinion [polls] the reasons why people hold [certain beliefs], but that's speculative."

There is also the danger that pollsters will still attempt to extract an opinion even if respondents know little or nothing about an issue, candidate, or policy. They do this

by providing a little information to the respondent. "It's just the refusal of the polling industry to try to acknowledge that there are significant portions of the public who are unengaged in any issues," adds Moore. "Instead, they try to make it appear as though, you know, essentially we have a fully informed and fully opinionated public."

After Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer announced in January that he'd retire at the end of the court's current term, Moore said he was ready to see a spate of polls asking the public what they thought of President Biden's eventual nominee — who would in all likelihood be a jurist most people simply didn't know. "It's going to be creating the illusion of public opinion. There will not be a sufficient number of people who have any idea about the new nominee to make a sober judgment," says Moore. "Why even do a poll like that?"

True to Moore's prediction, within days of Biden's announcement of his Supreme Court pick, at least four polls asked Americans to evaluate Biden's choice, he notes. Two of these, one by The Economist/YouGov and another by Quinnipiac, found about seven in ten Americans with an opinion about Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson. "That would be an amazing degree of recognition," Moore says, "if the polls bore any semblance to reality. But they don't."

One of the biggest problems with horserace election polling is that it's one of the few, if not the only, kinds of surveys that attempts to capture the views of a population that does not yet exist: Voters in a particular election.

"There are literally hundreds of thousands of well-intentioned Americans that intend to vote and say that they're going to vote on a survey and then don't show up

People protest against the Covid-19 school mask mandate outside a Hillsborough County School Board meeting in Tampa, Florida, May 2021. Polls like those conducted by Axios/Ipsos help paint the larger picture of public opinion around Covid by pairing data with anecdotes

OCTAVIO JONES/REUTERS

— and vice versa,” says David Dutwin, a senior vice president at NORC at the University of Chicago, a non-partisan research group that works with the Associated Press. “Election polling, for that reason, is harder than any other type of research out there.”

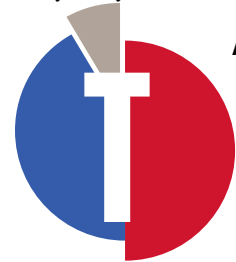
Internal polls from campaigns and those conducted by partisan or affiliated researchers should be reviewed with wariness. Campaigns release those because they want the public — or their opponents — to see them, and not necessarily because they accurately reflect the state of the race.

Media outlets make some exceptions depending on context and format. Politico, for example, ran a November 2021 story about internal GOP polling showing Republicans with a potential advantage in the 2022 midterms. The piece clearly identified the poll as partisan and noted that it fell largely in line with public polling. In other cases, outlets like The Atlanta Journal-Constitution — which now conducts polls with the University of Georgia — will cite an internal poll in a political newsletter or blog format instead of a standard, general-consumption news story. Those mentions come with cautionary language and are meant to help tell a larger story about a campaign’s operations.

But it’s not just political polling reporters have to look out for. “Polls that are conducted by companies that reinforce their brand identities are things you should just toss in the garbage,” says Philip Bump, a national correspondent for The Washington Post. “It’s just an ad, and we should absolutely not be in the business of just running people’s ads for them.” Companies make supposedly data-based claims all the time, but obviously, it’s to their advantage to frame the data in the most profitable way. In 2007, for example, the U.K.’s Advertising Standards Authority ordered Colgate-Palmolive to stop claiming four out of five dentists recommended its toothpaste, because the survey actually allowed the participants to recommend multiple brands.

Other things to avoid include self-selecting polls, where the response group is not a representative sample of a larger population, but entirely composed of people who felt like taking a poll — sometimes repeatedly. Think of television talent shows like “The Voice,” where people can vote up to 10 times, or polls on the web, where anyone who wants to vote can (and get like-minded friends to do the same) — which is how the R.R.S. Sir David Attenborough was almost christened Boaty McBoatface by internet voters.

“There are ways in which you would vet a source for a story that you should similarly vet a poll,” advises Bump.



AKING TO HEART the lessons of 2016 and 2020 is one thing. But reporters also shouldn’t be overcautious to the point of being factually inaccurate, warns Dyck, from UMass Lowell.

Take a contest between two candidates. There’s a two-point spread and the poll’s margin of error is plus or minus three percent. Because the spread is within the margin, “That is not a statistically significant finding,” says Dyck. In this situation, reporters often roll out “my least favor-

ite press word in all of coverage, which is that the poll reveals a ‘statistical tie.’ Okay, there is no such thing as a ‘statistical tie.’ ... Probabilistically, in the poll, Candidate X actually is ahead of Candidate Y — just not at a scientific level of certainty.”

So, what does the reporter or headline writer do? Simple language can be most accurate: “A close poll reveals a close race,” Dyck says. Transparency also matters. Experts consistently recommend at the very least disclosing who conducted the poll, the dates the polling took place, the margin of error, the number of respondents, and methodology.

Within specific polls, it’s also vital to avoid overblowing findings within the crosstabs, which break down responses by categories such as age, gender, and ethnicity. Once the poll breaks down the entire sample group into smaller categories, the margin of error goes up. Walter says her personal rule is to disregard groupings with fewer than 100 respondents, because “the margin of error is going to be out of control.”

Polling aggregators combine survey data — often through averaging individual polls or regression-based analyses — to give a broader picture about the state of political race or public sentiment about the direction of country. RealClearPolitics and Electoral-vote.com — debuting in 2000 and 2004 respectively — are among the earliest aggregators to gain traction. They were soon followed by what would become a major player in the aggregator landscape: FiveThirtyEight, which Nate Silver launched in 2008 and eventually became part of ABC News. FiveThirtyEight’s accuracy in predicting the outcomes of the 2008 and 2012 elections created “the golden age of poll aggregation,” as Vox once called it.

“I think aggregators can add a lot of context [and] also make for more responsible reporting at the end of the day,” says FiveThirtyEight elections analyst Geoffrey Skelley. Aggregators show trends not only across the lifespan of something like an election cycle, but across many different polling sources, with extra features like ratings for the quality of the pollsters included in its aggregates and detailed explanations of its process and methods.

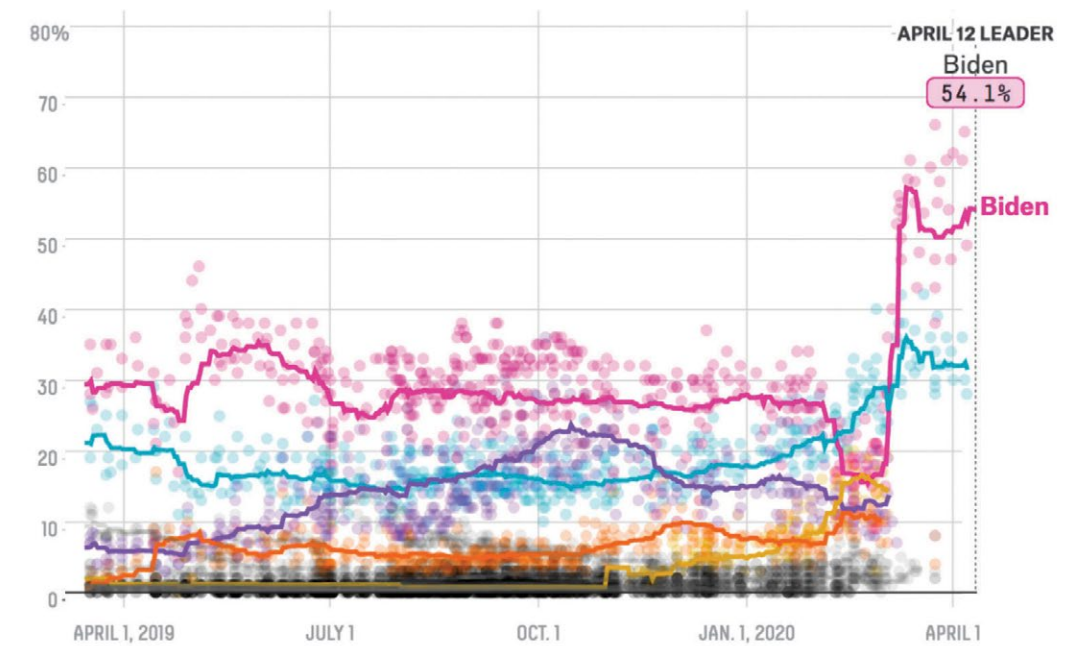
Still, Skelley notes that aggregators rely on individual polls, all of which have some level of error built into them. “There’s always going to be a confidence interval around your estimate based on the polling you’re looking at because of just the fact that polls can’t sample everyone, so it is not possible to get a perfect estimate,” he says.

NORC’s Dutwin praises aspects of what FiveThirtyEight and RealClearPolitics do and the sophistication of their models, but says there’s often “an assumption by journalists that they have to be right.” For example, he asks, what if there’s a systemic issue with many of the polls that go into the average for a certain race or cycle, such as non-response error that doesn’t fully account for Trump supporters?

“The aggregators aggregate under the assumption that essentially error [across polls] is random, too, that it goes both ways. The reality is that if errors are only going in one direction, then the aggregation isn’t really making anything more accurate,” he says. Still, he says, the average the aggregator spits out “is a number that

Who’s ahead in the national polls?

Updating average for each Democratic candidate in 2020 primary polls, accounting for each poll’s quality, sample size and recency



In April 2020, FiveThirtyEight, a polling aggregator, put Joe Biden in the lead in the 2020 presidential election. “Aggregators can add a lot of context [and] also make for more responsible reporting at the end of the day,” says FiveThirtyEight elections analyst Geoffrey Skelley

then journalists take to press as a golden number, when in reality, it’s no different than the number that most single polls are getting.”

In 2016, Trump won the presidency with 306 electoral votes to Clinton’s 228. Plenty of pollsters, aggregators, and media outlets got it wrong: FiveThirtyEight went with Clinton 302/Trump 235; the Associated Press calculated it as Clinton 274/Trump 190, leaving out from its total a handful of states that were too close to call.

Transparency around how these polling aggregators work — and explicitly about their limitations — help audiences better interpret the results. In unveiling its first-ever American election forecast for the 2020 election, The Economist provided readers with highly detailed information about how it gathered data and who it worked with on the forecast, as well as the potential weaknesses of its system. The outlet, which gave a 97 percent certainty that Biden would win, even published source code for a section of the model it used.

In fact, whether outlets commission or conduct their own polls or just cover what’s out there, experts say creating and sharing standards on how they develop and cover polls or present forecasts can build audience trust. ABC News, for example, has a detailed methodology page for the survey it conducts with The Washington Post, written by its former director of polling Gary Langer. (See “Serious Problems Demand Serious Data.”) The explanation gets into detail as granular as the number of phone interviews conducted for different states by landline and cell.

Beyond creating standards, some news outlets are reconfiguring how they handle polls. Heading into 2022, NBC is “doing fewer polls but deeper dives and larger samples,” says Chuck Todd, the network’s political di-

rector. “We know that the demographics are the story of our politics, whether looking at a county level or nationally. ... We believe we have a great sense of what the American electorate actually looks like so if we can get bigger samples, our demographic dives will give us great insight in just about any state or congressional district.”

CNN Polling Director Jennifer Agiesta has written that the network will debut a new methodology for its public opinion surveys. CNN plans to include “online and telephone interviews, allowing respondents to participate in whichever way is more comfortable for them, and will use different methods for measuring long-term trends and for reactions to breaking news,” according to Agiesta. She also says CNN and partner SSRS would conduct polls with a larger sample size and longer field period than in the past, selecting respondents randomly by address and contacting them initially by mail.

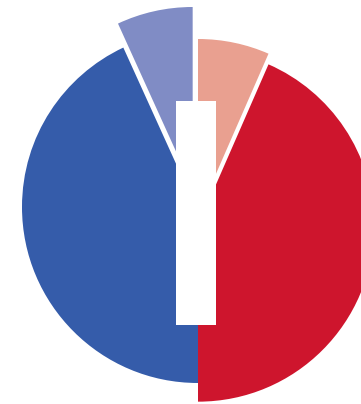
No matter how many improvements are made to polling, polls aren’t a crystal ball, and they can’t tell the whole story. It’s key to remember that beyond how polls are conducted, interpreted, and packaged, they can only tell us so much, and using the information they provide should be weighted the way a reporter would weigh using a quote or other material gathered while telling a full, rich, nuanced story.

“A lot of people on a daily basis don’t have the time or interest to even engage in politics. If you’re randomly calling them and [saying], ‘Tell me all your opinions about politics,’ you may actually be getting opinions that aren’t deeply held,” says LSU’s Searles. “In the past, academics have interpreted [the finding] of opinions that fluctuate [as] evidence that the public is stupid — but really what it’s evidence of is that the public just doesn’t walk around thinking about their public opinions all day.” ■

SERIOUS PROBLEMS DEMAND SERIOUS DATA

Polling standards are the antidote
to bad survey data

BY GARY LANGER



T WAS A FINE MARCH MORNING 16 years ago and the phones in my office at ABC News were ringing hard. The Associated Press had moved a story on a poll by the American Medical Association with an undeniably sexy

topic: specifically, spring break sex.

Nightline was interested. Radio was raring to go. Just one thing was missing: a green light from the Polling Unit.

You can find both beauty and the uglies in this little episode, one of hundreds like it in my tenure as ABC's director of polling. This nugget may stand out in memory simply because an organization as respected as the AMA ginned up a survey that, on inspection, was pure nonsense. It gives the lie to the notion that a seemingly reputable source is all we need.

The sad part is that, all these years later, the issue's the same: Problematic surveys clog our inboxes and fill our column inches every bit as much now as then. And the need for vigilance — for polling standards — is as urgent as ever.

The redemption: We were empowered to shoot it down. With the support of management, we'd developed carefully thought-out poll reporting policies that included such requirements as full disclosure, probability sampling, neutral questions, and honest analysis. And we had the authority to implement them.

Every newsroom needs these kinds of guideposts. To this day, too few have them.

More soon about standards, but let's look first at the offending AMA poll: "SEX AND INTOXICATION MORE COMMON ON SPRING BREAK, ACCORDING TO POLL OF FEMALE COLLEGE STUDENTS AND GRADUATES," the association's pitch shouted. "As college students depart for alcohol-filled spring breaks, the American Medical Association (AMA) releases new polling data and b-roll about the dangers of high-risk drinking during this college tradition, especially for women."

Unless you missed the drift, the supporting B-roll video, per the AMA's release, featured "spring break party images" and "college females drinking."

The AP's reporting on the poll was breathless. "All but confirming what goes on in those 'Girls Gone Wild' videos, 83 percent of college women and graduates surveyed by the AMA said spring break involves heavier-than-usual drinking, and 74 percent said the trips result in increased sexual activity," read its coverage. "Sizable numbers reported getting sick from drinking, and blacking out and engaging in unprotected sex or sex with more than one partner, activities that increase their risks for sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies."

**MOST NEWS WE COVER DOES
GET THE SCRUTINY IT DESERVES.
POLLS, SADLY, GET A BYE.
THEY'RE OFTEN COMPELLING —
PERHAPS TOO MUCH SO**

For us, this party ended early because we applied our standards. A quick review found that the AMA poll wasn't based on a representative, random sample of respondents; it was conducted among people who'd signed themselves up to click through questionnaires online for payment. Among the college women who participated, 71 percent had never taken a spring break trip; they were asked what they'd heard about others who'd done so — that is, rank hearsay. And the "sizable number" who reported engaging in unprotected spring break sex (as it was asked, they could have answered yes because they were with a committed partner) or undefined sexual activity with more than one partner was ... 4 percent.

Don't get me wrong: Irresponsible, risky behavior is a public health concern. But serious problems demand

serious data. And this was far from reliable data — the imprimatur of the American Medical Association and The Associated Press notwithstanding.

I'll admit to a little grim satisfaction when, almost three months after we took a bye on this piece of work, the AP issued a "corrective," in its parlance, withdrawing its story.

Much more satisfaction came from the good side of this go-round: the simple fact that we could keep bad data off the air.

On a hype job around spring break sex, maybe this is not such a big deal. But the bigger picture cuts to the fundamental pact between news organizations and their audiences: the promise that we check out what we're reporting, because that's our job. We don't just pass unverified assertions from point A to B; social media can handle that quite well, thank you. We add value along the way, through the simple act of employing our reportorial skills to establish, to the best of our ability, that the information we're reporting is true, meaningful, and worthy of our audience's attention. Break this deal and we may as well go sell fish.

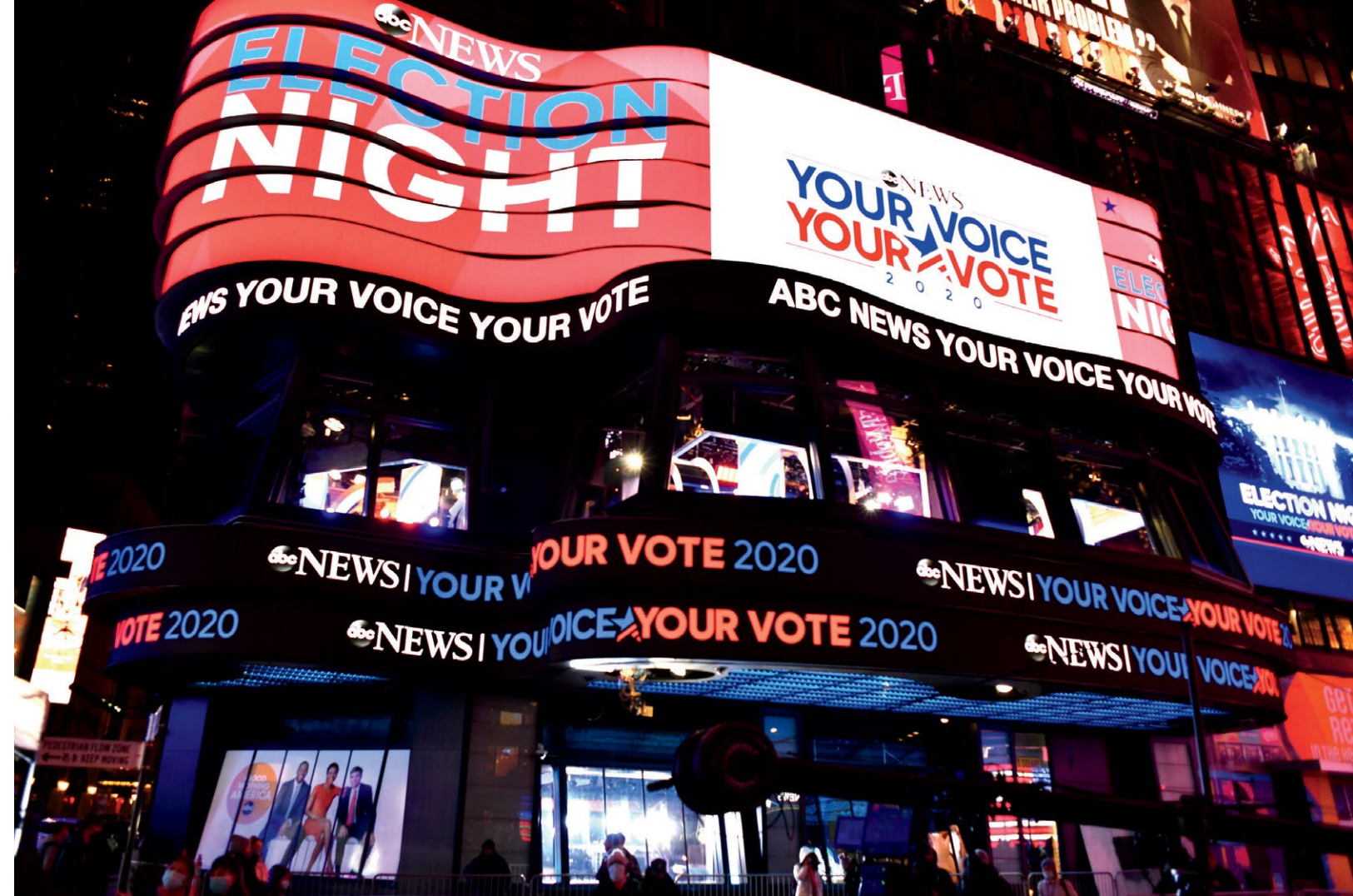
Most news we cover does get the scrutiny it deserves. Polls, sadly, get a bye. They're often compelling — perhaps too much so. They're authoritative, or seem that way, because they are presented with supposed mathematical certainty. They add structure to news reports that often otherwise would be based on mere anecdote and assumption.

And checking them out seems complicated, especially in understaffed newsrooms full of undertrained English majors. The plain reality is that the news media for far too long have indulged themselves in the lazy luxury of being both data hungry and math-phobic. We work up a story, grab the nearest data point that seems to support our premise, slap it in, and move on — without the due diligence we bring to every other element of the reporting profession.

The stakes are serious. Bad data aren't just funny numbers. Manufactured surveys traffic in misinformation, even downright disinformation. Often, they're cranked up to support someone's product, agenda, or point of view. Other times they're the product of plain old poor practice. They come at us from all corners — corporate America and its PR agents, political players, interest and advocacy groups, and academia alike. Good data invaluablely inform well-reasoned decisions. Bad data do precisely the opposite. And the difference is knowable.

Standards are the antidote. They start at the same place: disclosure. Thinking about reporting a survey? Get a detailed description of the methodology (not just a vague claim of representativeness), the full questionnaire, and the overall results to each question. If you don't get them, it's a no-go, full stop.

With disclosure in hand, we can see whether the sample meets reasonable standards, the questions are unbiased, and the analysis stays true to the results. We may have more questions, but this is where we dig in first, because it's where polls go wrong: through unreli-



able sampling, leading and biased questions, and cherry-picked analysis.

We may be primed to look for junk data from outfits with an interest in the outcome, but that approach lacks nuance. Some advocacy groups care enough about their issues to investigate them with unbiased research. Conversely, I see as many utterly compromised surveys produced under the imprimatur of major academic institutions as from any other source, and as many junk studies published by leading news organizations as anywhere else.

Holding the fort is no small thing. Every time a news organization denies itself a story, it's putting itself at a competitive disadvantage, especially in these days of click-counting. I argue that the alternative, having and holding standards, provides something of higher value: an integrity advantage. While admittedly that's tougher to quantify, I still hold that it's the one that matters.

Polling discussions inevitably turn to pre-election polls; they account for a small sliver of the survey research enterprise but win outsize attention. Just as with other types of polling, suffice to say that the more news organizations do to inform themselves about the particulars of public opinion polling, the better positioned they'll be to report on election polls — like all others — with appropriate caution, care, and insight.

You've noticed by now that I've held back on one el-

ement: precisely what polling standards should be. I'm devoted to probability-based samples — the principles of inferential statistics demand them — and highly dubious of convenience sampling, including opt-in internet polls. The American Association for Public Opinion Research reported back in 2010 that it's wrong to claim that results of opt-in online panels are representative of any broader population. That report stands today, supported by the preponderance of the literature on the subject.

But survey methods aren't a religion, and even researchers themselves won't all agree on what constitutes valid, reliable, and responsible survey research, from sampling to questions to analysis. So rather than presuming to dictate standards, I take another tack: Have some.

Assign someone in the newsroom to investigate and understand survey methods. Look at polling standards that other organizations have developed. Work up your own standards, announce them, enforce them, be ready and willing to explain and defend them.

Because it matters. News organizations cover what people do, because it's important; through polls, we cover what people think, because it's important, too. Reliable, independent public opinion research chases away spin, speculation, and punditry. It informs our judgment in unique and irreplaceable ways, on virtually every issue we cover. In this, as in all else, we are called upon — quite simply — to get it right. ■

ABC News aired special prime time coverage of Election Day 2020. News organizations reporting on polls need to arm themselves with standards and give full context to the numbers

DONNA SVENNEVIK/ABC VIA GETTY IMAGES



REBUILDING THE JOURNALISM PIPELINE

**Newsrooms need new entry points for
young journalists from diverse backgrounds**

BY CLIO CHANG PORTRAITS BY TREVOR PAULHUS

José Romero always thought he was something of an introvert until he discovered a love for journalism and interviewing people at Tarrant County College, a two-year community college in Fort Worth, Texas. Romero joined the school paper, *The Collegian*, where after a few semesters, he was elected editor-in-chief. Next year he'll transfer to the University of Texas at Arlington, and he wants to pursue journalism as a career. His dream job: to become a video game journalist at a publication like Bloomberg.

But as a 21-year-old Hispanic journalist who grew up working-class in Texas without a degree from a well-known university, Romero is unsure about what the path might look like for him to get there.

"My status is going to be something people look at and say that I'm not distinguished enough and that I didn't get the proper education needed to be a journalist," Romero says, noting that he hopes the training and mentorship he's getting at school will help overcome some of the barriers. "It's an unfortunate reality, and I hope that I'm exaggerating, but it's stuff I have to put into consideration. I'm going to have to put in that extra effort and need to find a way to get myself known because I don't know anyone in the industry."

The lack of adequate pipelines into journalism for candidates from different backgrounds has contributed to the fact that newsrooms too often don't look like the communities they cover — a refrain often repeated but rarely addressed. According to the American Society of News Editors' diversity survey published in 2019, people of color were only 21.9 percent of the workforce of the 428 U.S. newsrooms that responded. A survey published in 2016 from researchers at the University of Missouri and University of Illinois showed that nearly 94 percent of working journalists who responded had at least a bachelor's degree, despite the fact that a little more than one-third of adults in America do.

It's not hard to understand why this might be. Many of the traditional entry paths to journalism — whether it's coming up through the private university school paper, the state school journalism undergrad program (which can still cost multiple tens of thousands of dollars), or by attending a J-School master's program — are inaccessible for most people. Journalism, like many other culture-worker, white collar jobs, tends to recruit from the same set of colleges and backgrounds. A 2018 survey of summer interns at seven national publications — *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, NPR, *Politico*, and the *Chicago Tribune* — found that 65 percent of the interns came from highly selective universities that make up only 13 percent of four-year colleges.

Aside from the full rides that some elite private schools can offer low-income students, going through most of these paths means taking on hefty student loans and starting in debt in a precarious industry. Yet those schools are often necessary for many non-white, non-rich people starting out in journalism. As journalist Rachele Hampton wrote in *Slate*, "As a Black woman I didn't have a choice not to go to J-school. ... Journalism

is an industry rife with nepotism, where career trajectories are determined more often by the people that you know rather than the quality of your work."

Without deep networks or safety nets, getting a coveted entry-level internship or trying to start out by freelancing can be extremely difficult; many people are locked out by default. Yet journalism desperately needs more reporters who have backgrounds like Romero's and Hampton's. Much of the pipeline problem has to do with retention issues — how journalists from different backgrounds are treated when they enter institutions that were not made for them. But it's also about how, and whether, journalists can even enter the industry in the first place.

Some people within newsrooms, non-profit organizations, and educational institutions are attempting to build up and reimagine these pipelines, even as the industry continues to face financial challenges, whether through sustained mentorship programs, investing in wider outreach for paid internships and training, or expanding flexibility around what journalism work looks like. Labor unions are also working to lift workplace conditions overall by raising salaries and improving benefits, which are some of the most straightforward ways

to allow people from different kinds of backgrounds to support themselves. There are a number of solutions, well-trod and inventive alike, should institutions care to invest in them.

For a time, the traditional pipeline into journalism was to get experience as an intern or entry-level assistant at a smaller local paper, maybe moving into a general assignment reporting job at a medium-size regional newsroom, then perhaps honing a beat and eventually getting hired at a larger, national newsroom. But over the past few decades local newsrooms have been under duress; a PEN America report from 2019 found that since 2004, over 1,800 newspapers — an estimated 20 percent of the national total — had closed.

The decimation has continued in recent years. Poynter recently memorialized 90 local newsrooms, some more than 100 years old, that have closed since the pandemic began. Broadcast television has been relatively more stable job-wise, but faces similar threats with corporate consolidation. With the shuttering of these regional newsrooms comes the decline of that natural progression that used to usher many journalists through the early days of their careers.



PREVIOUS SPREAD AND RIGHT: José Romero works at the student newspaper at Tarrant County College. For young journalists of color like Romero, the pipeline into a full-time journalism career can be inaccessible



Report for America corps member Alejandra Martinez reports for KERA in Dallas, Texas. Programs like RFA can provide young journalists the institutional backing to propel them into a career

While new entry points into journalism have appeared — new reporters can always, say, start a Substack or podcast — those options don’t necessarily ensure a secure career. “The future when I was a young journalist was much clearer than the future now,” but there are fewer paths available today, says Kim Kleman, senior vice president of Report for America, a national service program responding to the decimation of local journalism. For journalists who might be graduating with hefty student loans, Kleman says, it’s hard to imagine or plan for a sustainable future in the industry.

Report for America places emerging journalists — nearly half of whom are journalists of color — into newsrooms around the country. The program pays half of the journalist’s salary for the first year and provides training and mentorship for corps members.

Eve Zuckoff, a 25-year-old climate change and environment reporter for public radio station CAI in Woods Hole, Massachusetts, went through this pipeline: She was hired by the station after completing a Report for America program there. Before she was a corp member, Zuckoff was doing freelance production for a radio station in Boston, but her situation was less than stable. “The pipeline from freelance producer to paid employee is really hard to navigate and can be really disheartening,” Zuckoff says. She wanted to do more reporting and credited Report for America — which also paired her with a newsroom mentor at WCAI — for allowing her to learn the skills she needed to cover her beat. “It’s really, really hard to be a local reporter and learn how to do that job. To do it with institutional support, it really made a difference and was helpful in a holistic way,” she adds.

Megan Greenwell, co-director of the Princeton Summer Journalism Program, which provides journalism mentorship and training for low-income high school students, says that many of the students who have gone through their program don’t necessarily end up in journalism even if they’re interested, because of the industry’s precariousness. “There’s less and less out there,” Greenwell says of local entry level newsroom opportunities, noting that her students at Syracuse University, where she taught sports journalism, now mostly apply for production assistant or editorial assistant jobs at big national publications. “The best part of local newspaper internships was that they were so small that someone would go on vacation, and I would get to take their beat, which was amazing, and try all these different things.” At their best, those internships were in places where the cost of living might be much lower, allowing for a broader swath of people to get a foothold in an industry.

Over the past decade, there has been a movement to eliminate unpaid internships, a practice that severely restricts who can get a foot in the door in any industry. However, one 2018 survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers found that 43 percent of all internships at for-profit companies are still unpaid. When it comes to journalism itself, even paid internships often pay too little, without considering covering expenses like housing or transportation. Many interns interviewed by The Objective, a non-profit newsroom reporting on the industry’s systemic biases, pointed out how it was an issue that, say, some publications expected their interns to have access to a car to do the necessary reporting, instead of providing one for them.

Yet these internships — as hard as they are for many

COURTESY OF REPORT FOR AMERICA

to get into — are often a prerequisite to get a full-time job in the industry, or even simply to get another, “bigger” internship. Take Hampton’s experience — she said she worked three internships during college, most of which she credited getting mainly because of the connections she had by attending Northwestern. She then secured her first fellowship out of college at The New Republic in New York City, where she made \$30,000 per year, a difficult salary to live on. (Full disclosure: I am also a past TNR fellow.)

Hampton says she had no idea how she was even going to afford the move, until she won \$4,000 from an essay contest at her school. “I remember getting that email in one of my final classes, and I started crying,” Hampton says. “Up until that point, I had zero clue how I was going to afford [it].” Considering up-front costs for interns, investing in meaningful mentorship and training, and hiring students from non-elite colleges are some clear ways newsrooms can make their programs more accessible.

And then there’s the bigger question, as Doris Truong, director of training and diversity at the Poynter Institute, wrote in Nieman Lab, of whether the internship pipeline should be so one-directional in the first place. Truong cites Poynter adjunct Kathy Lu, who notes that the system is “set up to eventually benefit the larger, dominant newsrooms (a colonist move), who get to pay intern wages to hard-working reporters who have already had several summers of experience.” Instead, Lu suggests inverting the talent pipeline, so that the bigger papers with the most resources train and supply talent for local news outlets that so desperately need coverage.

“It’s all misbilled to us that local journalism is a stepping stone; it actually doesn’t have to be at all,” says Zuckoff, the CAI reporter. She points to the depth of local expertise needed to cover her community and says she values the impact she can have as a local journalist.

It’s clear that as news deserts grow, local, in-house opportunities are diminishing. Carrie Graham got into journalism because she was seeing so much misinformation on Facebook and wanted to do something about it. The 33-year-old enrolled in Santa Ana College, which is a community college, in 2019 to take journalism classes. She’s now the editor-in-chief for the school’s paper, *el Don*, where she especially enjoys the service journalism they do. An article they posted on how to get your stimulus check found an audience beyond the school because the larger community is often lacking the information it needs. Graham’s goal is to keep doing this kind of hyper-local journalism, but she’s worried that with growing news deserts, those jobs will be hard to come by.

Still, the existing network of community colleges can play a big role in training journalists and expanding the pool. Sarah Bennett, who chairs the communications and media studies department at Santa Ana, notes that schools like hers are already acting as a pipeline to bring more voices into the journalism industry. “A lot of newsrooms are going backwards and asking, ‘How do we reconnect with the community?’” she says, pointing out that colleges like hers are already uniquely positioned to figure out how to get journalism skills to more peo-

ple. “We are the community. These are programs that already exist on a community basis.”

Bennett, who was once a student in the same program she now chairs, is herself a product of this very pipeline. She eventually transferred from Santa Ana to the University of Southern California, where she came to the student newspaper with experience in multiple sections from her work in a smaller student newsroom. Bennett started writing professionally by freelancing at alt-weeklies and eventually became an editor at *LA Weekly*. There, she found it difficult to keep expanding the pipeline and mentor younger writers since the publication relied more on experienced freelancers with ready-to-go copy, so Bennett turned to teaching when the opportunity arose.

“IT’S REALLY, REALLY HARD TO BE A LOCAL REPORTER AND LEARN HOW TO DO THAT JOB. TO DO IT WITH INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT, IT REALLY MADE A DIFFERENCE”

EVE ZUCKOFF, CAI WOODS HOLE

What’s clear is that many programs that might be overlooked by hiring managers are already training the exact people the industry needs. “There are so many different kinds of perspectives lacking in newsrooms because we have had such a rigid idea overall of what qualifies somebody to become a good journalist,” says Rhema Bland, director of the Ida B. Wells Society for Investigative Reporting, a national organization that works to train reporters of color.

One program the Ida B. Wells Society runs partners with major news organizations’ investigative units and works with them to recruit interns from historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and colleges that are often overlooked. Bland says their organization also provides training and mentorship for these interns, which helps create a community they can turn to. “It’s isolating to be the Black or brown person in the room when there aren’t a whole lot,” Bland says. “We understand the importance of that support.”

Greg Morton, a 25-year-old student who graduated from Howard University in 2021 with an economics degree, was an Ida B. Wells Society data intern at ProPublica this past summer. He says applying for journalism internships was daunting, given that it wasn’t his major and he only had a couple of bylines; many required more experience or clips. The ProPublica internship application, though, felt approachable. “I think ProPublica and Ida went out of their way to have big tent applications to try to bring in as many people as possible and do that with the genuine intention of growing people as journalists,” Morton says. Going into the actual internship, he was nervous given that he didn’t come from the

“I GREW UP TRYING TO LOOK FOR PEOPLE

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THE SAME LOOKING KIND OF GUYS”

JOSÉ ROMERO, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF THE COLLEGIAN

“traditional” journalism path, but with the mentorship and community provided by the program, he was able to feel more grounded and comfortable.

For many, the entry point is cut off before they even attempt to enter a newsroom. As Joshua Benton wrote in a piece for Nieman Lab, educational institutions have a big role to play in developing these pipelines.

On the training end, Benton suggests an “alternative certification” program with some institutional prestige — similar to what K-12 teachers can get — that is affordable and accessible. Benton argues for a course that would cost a few thousand dollars and could be done remotely, with flexible hours, so that a much wider swath of people could attend. It would not only offer journalism training but also networking opportunities and would be attached to some institution with a big name in the industry. As Benton puts it, “Maybe it’s time for the profession to build a new path into the industry — not just try to tweak the old ones.”

It also falls on employers to be more expansive and flexible in what they look for when hiring journalists into entry level positions. Not only do newsrooms need to look beyond certain colleges, they also have to think more broadly of ways to make their companies more accessible.

Take the move to remote work during the pandemic; allowing people to work from anywhere removes one big barrier to entry for those who might want to apply to jobs in expensive cities (although this would mainly apply to national publications). “This has to be up to organizations to be flexible in what work looks like and what showing up on the job location-wise looks like,” says Tina Sturdevant, director of talent, diversity, and inclusion at The Athletic; otherwise companies have to subsidize those moving costs. When NPR made its fall internships remote during the pandemic, the organization received 20,520 applicants for 27 openings, versus 2,597 applicants for 55 openings the year before. (I spoke with Sturdevant before The New York Times announced in January an agreement to purchase The Athletic.)

Sturdevant, who went to San Diego State University, understands the challenges of creating these pipelines. “You actively have to work at this and actively have to keep hiring managers accountable,” Sturdevant says. “A really interesting thought that’s harder to implement in practice is having the conversation of organizations putting their [diversity, equity, and inclusion] metrics and goals against their company [key performance indicators]. Are they saying, ‘If you’re not hiring diversely and

not having a safe work environment, then your bonus is impacted because you did not hit the goal?’”

Not all of it has to come at a large cost; The New York Times recently launched a corps program that will pair mostly freshman and sophomore college students with Times journalists, who will meet with those students a few times a year as career mentors until they graduate. “Understanding how journalism operates and understanding different kinds of reporting, this idea of knowing the terrain, it’s a big thing,” says Theodore Kim, director of newsroom career programs at The Times, noting that many schools don’t have robust career guidance infrastructure for journalism.

“I think publications need to consider this part of their responsibility. We actually have a social responsibility to help hire young people and give them a path,” the Princeton Summer Journalism Program’s Greenwell says. Sustained mentorship and career guidance over time is a helpful tool; programs like that at Princeton not only provide high schoolers with summer training, but also help advise them with college applications and often into their first internships and jobs. There are also programs that have helped early career journalists, especially during the pandemic, such as the Latinas in Journalism Mentorship Program, which aims to create long-term relationships between mentors and mentees. And the Ida B. Wells Society launched a pilot program this past fall to partner with a journalism class in Riverside High School in Durham, North Carolina, which has a majority non-white student body, to train and introduce students early on to investigative journalism and working journalists.

Bennett at Santa Ana College also points to an open house that the Latino caucuses at the Los Angeles Times and Washington Post guilds hosted. She says a reporter from the Times reached out to her to make sure her students, and those at other community colleges, knew about the event. “There’s enough people now to form a caucus within the union and they are reaching down, asking how our experiences can help you get up to this level,” Bennett says.

Newsrooms need to consider alternative pipelines as a core part of their responsibility and develop them early on. Romero himself has many of the experiences that should be considered important early career training for any journalist. He has found one-on-one mentorship through his program advisors. The school paper he’s learned to report and edit at, The Collegian, is an award-winning publication that still puts out a weekly print edition. But his future in the industry is still uncertain. Romero is a first-generation college student and emphasized that he doesn’t have family money to fall back on if things don’t work out. Even if he got a coveted entry-level job at a national paper in a city like New York or Los Angeles, he’d unlikely be able to afford to move there.

Romero himself speaks to the importance of seeing other people like him succeeding in the industry and hopes he can eventually do the same. “I grew up trying to look for people who look like me in the industry, and it was always the same looking kind of guys,” Romero said. “Now I’m fed up.” ■

WANT TO MAKE REAL PROGRESS IN NEWSROOM DEI? AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT IS ESSENTIAL

Most newsrooms think of diversity and inclusion work as an internal affair, but those efforts won’t succeed in a bubble

BY JENNIFER KHO AND JENNIFER BRANDEL

It’s a story we’ve heard over and over again: A newsroom makes a commitment to diversity and takes steps to bring in candidates from different backgrounds when it has open positions. But even when it successfully hires people from underrepresented communities, those employees may not thrive or may decide to leave if the news organization hasn’t done enough to create a truly inclusive culture.

What does a truly inclusive culture look like? Most newsrooms think of diversity and inclusion work primarily as an internal affair — being respectful to everyone in the organization and treating everyone within that sphere equally. But inclusion work can’t succeed in a bubble.

We’ve heard frequently from journalists in underrepresented groups that a lack of consideration for diverse audiences — and a feeling that the stories that matter to diverse communities aren’t prioritized or supported — has led them to leave a publication.

**WE BELIEVE THAT SERVING DIVERSE AUDIENCES EXTERNALLY
IS AS ESSENTIAL AS CREATING AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE
INTERNALLY. THE TWO ARE INEXTRICABLY LINKED. THE KEY
HERE LIES IN AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT**

We believe that serving diverse audiences externally is as essential as creating an inclusive culture internally. The two are inextricably linked. The key here lies in audience engagement, and connecting it to your diversity, equity, and inclusion work.

Loosely defined, the culture of any newsroom is “how we do things around here.” And one of the biggest cultural markers of any newsroom is forged in editorial meetings where staff decisions of what’s considered “newsworthy” and a “good story” are made.

If decisions about what coverage gets prioritized, resourced, and promoted are ingrained in the perspectives of a historically homogeneous staff, it makes it all the more challenging for the perspectives and pitches of reporters and editors from more diverse groups to be accepted.

Furthermore, if a newsroom’s audience is less diverse than the population the newsroom aims to serve, then stories for the existing audience will tend to perform better in terms of absolute metrics. This reinforces the status quo when newsrooms make decisions based primarily on those metrics — rewarding and repeating the same type of coverage that has “done well” in the past, creating yet another barrier to greenlighting stories of importance to smaller segments of its audience.

Engaging the audiences you want to serve, not only your largest current audiences, is a key way around this. While relying purely on editors’ gut instincts or “the way things have always been done” amplifies unconscious bias, collecting reader and viewer feedback that can shape editorial decisions — beyond topline metrics such as page views and unique visitors — does the opposite. It gives the whole newsroom the necessary opportunity to state the unspoken assumptions, get conscious about embedded biases, and unpack what gets covered and why.

Why it is necessary to look beyond those topline metrics? Those numbers show the behavior of your largest audiences, so if you’re trying to grow audiences that make up a minority of your overall audience today, you’ll miss them. Engaging with those smaller audiences qualitatively, not only quantitatively, is one way to understand how you can better include them. In 2017 and 2018, for example, HuffPost conducted a bus tour to less-covered locations across America, interviewing

nearly 1,700 people about what mattered to them, then changed its editorial strategy accordingly. It also conducted regular reader surveys, polls, and focus groups to get more information.

When employees from underrepresented groups don’t truly have a seat at the table and the power to influence decision-making, efforts to diversify newsrooms can easily fall into the traps of tokenism, marginalization, or exploitation. Including more perspectives in the editorial decision-making process — and basing editors’ judgments on audience needs defined by research and data, not only their own experiences — can help newsrooms avoid those traps. And importantly, bringing engagement insights to editorial meetings also enables staff the treasured time to be creative, theorize, experiment, and learn together — which supports the entire organization in becoming more inclusive.

In short, news organizations won’t be able to make real progress on inclusion and equity unless and until they operationalize engagement with their communities and make it part of the core workflow.

So how can you incorporate the kind of inclusive engagement into your newsroom that supports a more inclusive workplace? There is no perfect formula for each newsroom, but there are durable principles and techniques that you can draw from to create your own strategy. And there are journalism support organizations that teach these practices.

Ask yourself the following questions:

■ What opportunities do individuals outside of your newsroom have to shape your stories and coverage decisions?

There are a variety of approaches to draw on here, from more traditional options — such as creating community advisory boards, publishing op-eds and letters to the editor, conducting surveys, and hosting events and office hours in the community — to bolder ones, including creating an open newsroom, opening editorial meetings to the public, running an information concierge desk for readers, and inviting community members to contribute insights or questions they’d like you to consider covering (public-powered journalism). The key is that whatever you do to include the public can’t be performative; it has to be meaningful.

■ Who actually hears those insights and questions from your audiences and communities?

In order to be meaningful, the outside engagement must be heard and acted upon. It’s critically important that the listening, feedback, and ideas that your audience-facing staff is collecting gets surfaced consistently in editorial meetings. If not, all of that feedback stays siloed and prevents the shaping of decisions about what content is prioritized and why. Consider making it a 15-minute part of your daily agenda to discuss what the newsroom is hearing from the public, a particular audience segment, or community. You can also collect those insights from staff and send out a weekly email that summarizes the listening you’re doing and what decisions you’ve made based on that listening.



■ Does your newsroom have a stated commitment to listening and engagement?

In other words, how can you not be an extractive “askhole” in the engagement you do? How do you ensure that you’re not just counting how many people completed a survey or took some action that you can count as “engagement,” but that their insights actually shaped decisions that were made? Whenever you’re creating an opportunity for engagement and listening, it’s imperative that you tell people what to expect: What you will do with their insights or participation, and how it will matter? This could be as simple as explaining your process clearly, like Crosscut does for their public-powered work. If you’re constrained for space and doing a call to action on social media, create a page to link to that gives sufficient context as to why you’re asking and what will happen next. Just make sure you are willing to share the same information you are asking for.

■ Does your newsroom share back with the people who have engaged to thank them and let them know that they mattered?

Think of engagement as a ring, a feedback loop, that can’t be achieved until the full cycle is completed. People are going to wonder whether they should bother to engage if they don’t see their efforts making a difference.

One of the most important ways you can show that you’re listening to people outside of your core audience is by including them in the stories you create. On the deeper end of the inclusion spectrum, that can mean inviting members of the public to co-create, ride along, and be part of your reporting. Lighter methods involve including them as a source, publishing (with permission) a photo or video of their

participation, and explaining how their involvement made a difference. The more a newsroom can show it’s serving a diverse audience, the more that staff who aren’t part of the historically included groups can feel assured they belong.

■ Does your newsroom track the diversity of your sources?

There are great efforts from a variety of organizations to help you understand whose voices you’re lifting up when doing reporting that doesn’t include more expansive audience engagement. Chalkbeat, America Amplified, and the Institute for Nonprofit News have all shared their lessons learned on this front, while the American Press Institute has built an automated tool to audit a newsroom’s sourcing. What all of these efforts help elucidate is that you can’t create a coordinated effort to “do better” without establishing a benchmark for how you’re doing. In many cases, newsrooms may not realize they have sourcing gaps until they begin collecting this data. Unveiling data about the diversity of your sourcing helps identify any underrepresentation, giving reporters a reason to think twice before reaching for the same old contacts, and is key to creating a strategy to widen your reach.

Taking the time to answer and discuss these questions should illuminate where there’s work to be done and help ensure your inclusion efforts — for your staff and your audiences — create a more equitable workplace and society.

If this feels daunting, or like more work with a hard-to-quantify payoff, just remember that engagement makes for higher-performing stories, differentiated content, and creates revenue that aligns with journalism’s main mission: serving the public. ■

Jennifer Kho (left) and Jennifer Brandel offer best practices for how to craft audience engagement strategies that foster diversity and inclusion both in and outside the newsroom

COURTESY OF JENNIFER KHO AND JENNIFER BRANDEL

“He Was Understanding Their Souls”

Celebrating the extraordinary life and work of **Brent Renaud**, NF '19, who was killed reporting in Ukraine

Brent Renaud, a gifted documentary filmmaker and photographer and a member of the Nieman class of 2019, was shot and killed in Irpin, Ukraine, a suburb of Kyiv, on March 13, 2022. He was 50 years old.

At the time, Brent was working on a film about the experiences of refugees and migrants in 10 countries around the world for Time Studios. While in Ukraine, he wanted to document people leaving their homes and fleeing their country as a result of the Russian invasion and provide them with an iPhone, with which they could record their journey wherever it took them. He had already been filming the project for a year, in Africa, Europe, and South America, working with individuals fleeing the climate crisis, war, and gender violence.

When he was killed, Brent was with his Nieman classmate Juan Arredondo, another visual journalist, who was also wounded in the attack but received medical care and is recovering from his wounds. In a video interview posted on Twitter by Annalisa Camilli, a journalist for Internazionale, Juan indicates that the two men came under attack while traveling by car to reach an area where refugees were crossing a bridge.

According to The New York Times, Anton Gerashchenko, an adviser to Ukraine's interior minister, said in a statement that Brent “paid with his life for attempting to expose the insidiousness, cruelty and ruthlessness of the aggressor.”

The Nieman community is deeply saddened by this tragic death. Nieman curator Ann Marie Lipinski said: “Brent’s filmmaking was exceptional and what made it so was not just his abundant skill but a kindness and deep humanity he brought to his work. He told us that what

he sought in his journalism was ‘thoughtful stories about disenfranchised people,’ and he lived up to that credo every day. His death is a devastating loss.”

A native of Little Rock, Arkansas, Brent began his career covering the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the war in Afghanistan. Since then, he had worked mostly with his brother Craig on film projects including the HBO heroin documentary “Dope Sick Love” and the TV series “Off to War,” about a National Guard unit deployed to Iraq. He covered the earthquake in Haiti, cartel violence in Mexico, the youth refugee crisis in Central America, political upheaval in Egypt, and the war on extremism in Africa and the Middle East. In 2015, he received a Peabody Award for the Vice News series “Last Chance High,” about a therapeutic school in Chicago.

At Harvard, Brent studied the effects of trauma and mental and emotional illness on rates of poverty and violence in America.

Brent’s Nieman classmates remember him not just as an extraordinary journalist but as an extraordinary person — humble, sensitive, gentle, smart, funny. “He came to his work with a human-first attitude,” says Mary Ellen Klas, capital bureau chief for The Miami Herald in Tallahassee, Florida. He conveyed to his subjects “not just that he was listening to their words, but that he was understanding their souls, who they are.”

Kaeti Hinck, leader of the data and visuals team at CNN, recalls coming away from every conversation with Brent “having learned something new, discovering some wild story, finding out some fascinating thing about his life. He never bragged. He was just this kind, compassionate presence.”

Brent loved animals — especially his dog, Chai — and was devoted to animal

rights. He also loved old motorcycles and constructed a hybrid studio/repair shop, where he could edit videos and tinker with his beloved bikes. Though instinctively shy, Brent experimented with stand-up comedy, and after his Nieman fellowship, took up teaching visual journalism in addition to continuing his filmmaking practice.

Though Brent came to his Nieman fellowship an accomplished visual journalist, he quickly revealed himself as a powerful writer as well. “His writing was superb,” says author Steve Almond, who teaches the Nieman narrative nonfiction class for fellows. “He was shy and didn’t speak a lot in class, but when he did his comments were astonishingly sensitive and precise. We all kind of waited for Brent to weigh in — he had that kind of quiet power of insight.”

For someone with such a natural gift for connecting to other people’s stories, Brent was sometimes hesitant to share his own. But, early on in the fellowship, when Brent spoke movingly about his own struggles to connect, he “cracked something open in the class,” says photographer Samantha Appleton. “He opened us all up to being more vulnerable together. He changed the chemistry of the entire class.”

Mattia Ferraresi, managing editor of the Italian newspaper Domani, remembers Brent telling him, “You’ve got to love what you report on,” challenging the principle that you need to keep a distance from your subjects to report fairly. Brent was all about empathy. He believed he had to really enter your life to really tell your story.”

Through his personality and presence, as well as the stories he told, Brent entered the lives of his classmates and colleagues at Nieman in ways that will not be forgotten. ■



LISA A BITTOL/NIEMAN FOUNDATION

NIEMAN NOTES

1966

Robert Caro's work is being featured in the New-York Historical Society's exhibit, "'Turn Every Page': Inside the Robert A. Caro Archive." The exhibit includes notes he prepared while writing his Pulitzer-winning books on Robert Moses and Lyndon B. Johnson.

1968

Floyd McKay died on March 4. He was a leading journalist at The Oregon Statesman in Salem and a long-time news analyst at KGW-TV in Portland, and went on to become one of the founding faculty members for Western Washington University's journalism program after his Nieman year.

1980

Daniel Passent, a Polish journalist, writer, podcaster, and diplomat, died on Feb. 14 at the age of 83. A Holocaust survivor and well-known figure in his country, Passent was long associated with the Polish weekly *Polityka*, where he wrote weekly columns and published his political blog "En passant."

1985

Hsiao Ching-chang has died at the age of 95. A reporter for China's *Wenhui Daily*, Hsiao later became a scholar at the China Times Center for Media and Social Studies at the University of Minnesota.

2001

Andrew Sussman, along with **Hannah Allam**, NF '09, **Jim Urquhart**, NF '22, and **Walter Ray Watson Jr.**, NF '08, received a 2021 National Headliner Award for their coverage of extremism on NPR.

2003

Susan Smith Richardson has been named managing editor

at Guardian US, where she has been serving as deputy editor for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

2009

Rosita Boland's new essay collection exploring friendship, "Comrades: A Lifetime of Friendships," was published by Doubleday Ireland in December.

Graciela Mochkofsky is the author of the forthcoming book "The Prophet of the Andes: an Unlikely Journey to the Promised Land," set for release by Knopf in August 2022.

Ernie Suggs' first book, "The Many Lives of Andrew Young," was published by NewSouth Books in March 2022. With a forward written by Jimmy Carter, the book tells the story of civil rights hero, congressman, ambassador, mayor, and American icon Andrew Young.

2010

Alejandra Matus is host of the new investigative journalism program "Jaque Matus," which airs on the private La Red television channel in Chile.

2011

Florence Martin-Kessler, founder and CEO of Live Magazine in Paris, has been named one of "100 Femmes de Culture," a group of leading French women honored for their contributions to the cultural and creative industries.

2012

Tyler Bridges is author of "The Flight: A Father's War, A Son's Search," the story of his father's service in World War II and what happened after he was shot down from a B-24 bomber.

2013

Mary Beth Sheridan won a 2021 Maria Moors Cabot Prize, which honors outstanding reporting on the Americas. She has written about human rights

violations, attacks on the press, corruption, drug trafficking, and the disappearances of tens of thousands of people.

Mónica Guzmán is the author of the book, "I Never Thought of It That Way: How to Have Fearlessly Curious Conversations in Dangerously Divided Times," which was published by BenBella Books in March.

Paula Molina, anchor and news editor at Radio Cooperativa in Chile, along with **Christina Andreasen**, NF '19, press and communications advisor at the Consulate General of Denmark in New York, and 2020 affiliate **Gabriela Manuli**, deputy director of the Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN), have been named to Poynter's 2021 Leadership Academy for Women in Media.

Beauregard Tromp was recently appointed as Africa editor at OCCRP, a cross-border investigative journalism organization.

2014

David Smydra, a senior curation lead at Twitter, has been re-elected to the Online News Association's board of directors, where he serves as vice president.

2015

Kitty Eisele is the host and executive producer of "Demented: When you become your parent's parent." The podcast is based on her own experience with the challenges of caring for an elderly parent with dementia.

Celeste LeCompte is the new chief audience officer at Chicago Public Media, home of WBEZ Chicago. She previously worked as the vice president of strategy and operations at ProPublica.

2016

Christine Willmsen and her colleague Beth Healy have won a national Edward R. Murrow Award for Dying on the Sheriff's Watch, a four-part WBUR series about the deaths and suffering in Massachusetts jails caused by poor medical care, systemic secrecy, and a lack of oversight.

2018

Nneka Nwosu Faison has joined ABC affiliate WLS-Channel 7 in Chicago as assistant news director. She will oversee digital (including the channel's new streaming newscasts), specials, and storytelling.

2019

Kaeti Hinck has been promoted to executive editor for data and visuals at CNN Digital. She was previously the director of visual news.

Steve Myers has joined ProPublica as an editor for its Local Reporting Network. He will help oversee five new projects as part of the local news initiative.

Myroslava Gongadze has been named Voice of America's first ever Eastern Europe chief. She will lead expanded coverage of a region threatened by war and disinformation.

Francesca Panetta is now the alternate realities curator for the Sheffield DocFest in the U.K.

Taylor Lorenz joined The Washington Post as a columnist in March, where she will focus on how technology is reshaping culture, online life, influencers, memes, and business.

2020

Chastity Pratt co-produced "Gradually, Then Suddenly: The Bankruptcy of Detroit," winner of the 2021 Library of Congress Lavine/Ken Burns Prize for Film.

Wendy Lu has been named

Kari Howard: An editor who loved good stories and storytellers

Howard, who inspired writers at the LA Times, Reuters, and Nieman, died at 59

BY JAMES GEARY

I'd told a few friends but asked them to keep it under their hats," Kari emailed me in the spring of 2016. She had just been appointed editor of Nieman Storyboard, and we weren't quite ready to make the news public. ("Hmm, where did that saying get its start?" she wondered about the expression, "Keep it under your hat." "Did people hide things under their hats?")

I found that in a batch of email exchanges I read through after I learned of Kari Howard's death on Jan. 10. These simple lines struck me as so representative of her character as a person and as an editor — tremendous personal warmth, a whimsical curiosity, and a fine eye for the nuances of phrase and meaning.

Kari was a longtime editor at the Los Angeles Times, including of Column One, the paper's signature narrative journalism feature, and most recently was the storytelling editor at Reuters in London. I knew her as the editor of Storyboard, where she was characteristically generous with her warmth and whimsy and where lovers of literary journalism learned so much from all the nuances her fine eye picked up.

Kari produced a weekly playlist newsletter for readers — Storyboard and other distinctive pieces paired with her recommendations for music to read by. "Story soundtracks," she called them. Kari's story soundtracks were marvelous miniature narratives in themselves, a



form in which she eloquently practiced the storytelling skills she advanced and extolled through her editing. Her piece, "Bowie and Thoreau — now there's a pair to draw to," from June 2016 is a wonderful example of Kari's gifts as a writer and her virtuosity in matching great verbal narratives with great vocal ones.

Back in June of 2016, Kari wrote her introductory note as editor of Storyboard from her beloved Maine farmhouse. From her porch she could see — and smell — what she described as possibly the biggest

lilac bush in Waldo County: "In the space of just two weeks, I've watched the buds go from deep purple to lilac to blush with an edging of brown. But somehow their impermanence makes them that much more beautiful."

Kari imagined Storyboard "as a community center with a bit of a coffeehouse vibe, where people can hang out and, most importantly, have a great conversation." The conversations Kari started are still ongoing, made that much more beautiful by her storytelling. ■

one of Forbes 30 Under 30 on their media list.

Anne Godlasky is the new director of journalism training at the National Press Foundation. She previously worked at USA Today.

Rob Chaney, a senior staff writer at The Missoulian in Montana, has been chosen as a 2022 Alicia Patterson Fellow. He will receive a research grant for his project "Playing God in Glacier Park," which examines the manipulation of

nature on public lands.

Hannane Ferdjani recently became the permanent bilingual correspondent for France 24 in Ivory Coast, where she has been based for more than a year. She also covers Ghana and Liberia.

Oliver Roeder is the author of the new book published by W.W. Norton & Company, "Seven Games: A Human History." Roeder examines the origins and historical importance of seven classic

table games and explores why and how people around the world play them.

2021

Valeria Fernández, the managing editor of *palabra*, has founded Altavoz Lab, a collaborative project to strengthen reporters at community outlets that serve Black, Indigenous, immigrant, and other communities of color in the U.S.

A number of Niemans across the globe were among the more than 600 journalists who

contributed to the Pandora Papers, the largest international investigation in journalism history. The Nieman journalists include: Natalia Viana, NF '22, Fernando Rodrigues, NF '08, Carlos Eduardo Huertas, NF '12, Giannina Segnini, NF '02, Mónica Almeida, NF '09, Frederik Obermaier, NF '18, Andras Petho, NF '20, Wahyu Dhyatmika, NF '15, Gustavo Gorriti, NF '86, Caelainn Barr, NF '22, Reuben Fischer-Baum, NF '22, Souad Mekhennet, NF '13, David Barboza, 2016 Visiting Fellow, and Uri Blau, NF '14. ■

CELEBRATING 75 YEARS

It seems to me that the labor field will be of prime importance because the industrial society in which we live is so complex; it has so many bottlenecks; there are so many keys at every point which may lead to disaster that the mechanism in the machinery has to be understood."

This quote comes not from our recent story on why the labor beat is resurgent, but from remarks made by pioneering labor reporter Louis Stark published in the January 1952 issue of Nieman Reports. Stark was right about the importance of covering labor, then and now. Steven Greenhouse's piece for us shows just how complex labor issues have become — from the impact of Covid-19 and the #MeToo movement to the need for child care — and how important it is for the machinery of labor to be understood.

Nieman Reports turned 75 in February. The premiere issue appeared in February 1947. A lot has changed in journalism since Nieman Reports was founded as a quarterly print magazine by a group of Nieman alumni, but our mission as they originally defined it has not: "It has no pattern, formula or policy except to seek to serve the purpose of the Nieman Foundation 'to promote standards of journalism in America.'"

That mission has been extended beyond America, of course. With Russian President Vladimir Putin's barbaric invasion of Ukraine and the threat to the country's free press it brings, we continue to highlight efforts to create independent, sustainable news outlets in places ruled by or emerging from authoritarian regimes.

To mark our birthday, we will be looking back at how journalism — and our coverage of it — has changed over the past 75 years. We will be pairing articles from

our archives, like Louis Stark's assessment of the labor beat, with more recent coverage of the same issues, like Steven Greenhouse's piece on covering the workplace.

In the summer of 1979, Nieman Reports published a special issue on women and journalism, featuring reflections from Mary Ellen Leary and Charlotte FitzHenry, the first two female Niemans (class of 1946) and a piece on groundbreaking investigative reporter Nelly Bly. More recently, Nieman Reports published two cover packages on female newsroom leadership, *Where Are the Women?* in 2014 and *Where Are the Mothers?* in 2017.

In the Spring 1956 issue, Jet reporter and 1951 Nieman fellow Simeon Booker's account of the Emmett Till trial related how Black and white reporters worked together to cover the effort to find three key witnesses to Till's horrific murder. In the summer of 2020, after George Floyd's horrific murder, Nieman Reports published a collection of pieces detailing how newsrooms are fundamentally rethinking how stories are covered — and by whom.

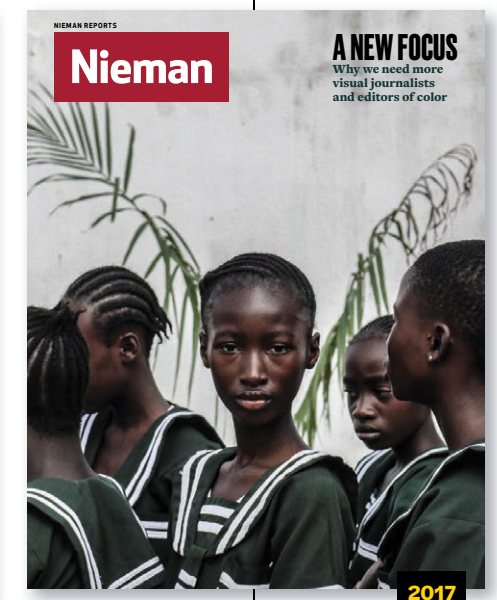
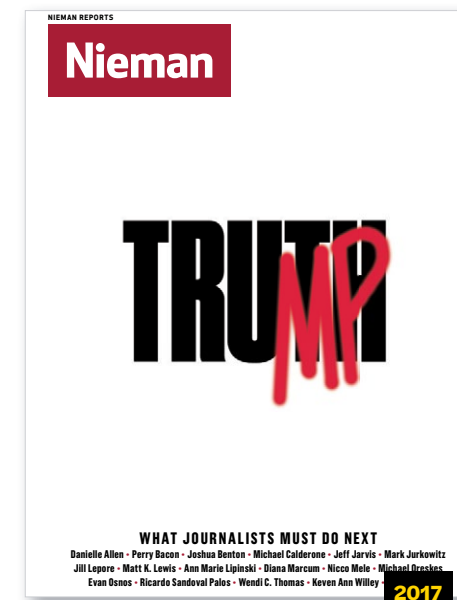
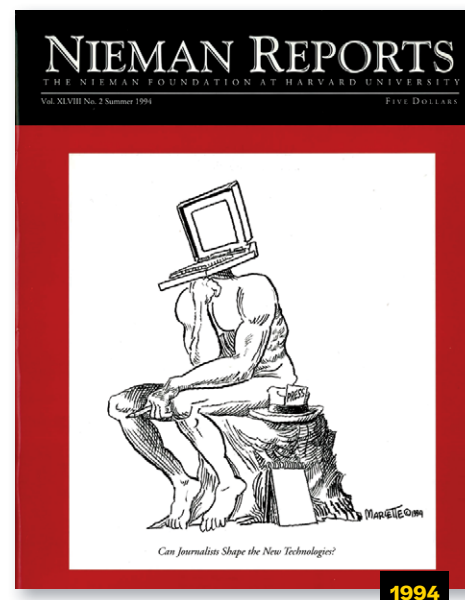
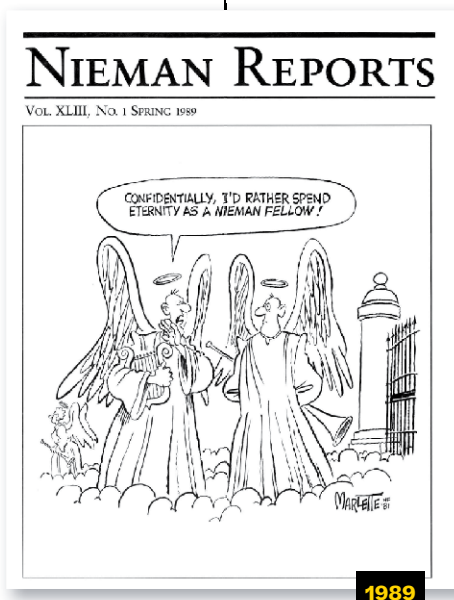
Nieman Reports didn't always get things right. That first 1947 cover story, "What's Wrong with the Newspaper Reader," is marred by sexist language and offensive descriptions of India's post-war struggle for independence from Great Britain. We hope our then-and-now story pairings show, though, how we can do, have done, and will continue to do better.

Over the next 12 months, you can follow along with the celebration on Twitter (@NiemanReports) and Instagram (@niemanfoundation). You can also drop us a line at nreditor@harvard.edu. We'd love to hear from you. ■

OF NIEMAN REPORTS



Nieman Reports published its first issue in Feb. 1947 (left). Nieman Reports has since reported on a myriad of issues, from press freedom to labor to Black Lives Matter (below)



Through Diversity, We Find People's Full Humanity

Why opening up documentary filmmaking is important for both the storytellers and the communities we cover

BY DAVE MAYERS

We probably shouldn't hire you," the co-bureau chief said near the end of our interview. I couldn't argue as she went through the reasons — I was new to the continent and South Africa and didn't speak any of the local languages. It was the summer of 2009, and I had just moved to Johannesburg, partly to teach multimedia journalism at Wits University and partly to pick up any freelance work I could.

"But you're young, you're Black, and you'd be connected to a different community than we are," she said. With that, I was brought on board as the videographer and researcher for the Johannesburg desk of *The New York Times*.

My new boss was pointing to the importance she saw in having different voices in our little outpost of a newsroom. Celia Duggar and her husband Barry Bearak shared the bureau and are still some of the best journalists I've ever known. But there were also aspects of life in South Africa that they would never get; there were stories I'd be closer to simply because I was young and Black.

Four years in South Africa, working in and teaching journalism, made me hyperaware of other coverage of the country — how often international outlets oversimplified local problems, misidentified their root causes, and failed to humanize the people. International newsrooms also missed countless stories, examples not just of struggle, but of simple joy and triumph. The humor I saw everywhere around me was absent from so much of the coverage. I began to realize that outlets weren't telling these stories because, at best, they were blind to them, and, at worst, they were willfully ignorant.

And that was due in part to not being diverse enough — not having people who



could see the complexity of a country still righting itself after generations of apartheid.

By 2016, I found myself in Brooklyn interviewing for an associate producer job at Vice for a new nightly news show on HBO. They asked what I thought about their coverage of the continent, and I laid into some of it. Vice was both a magazine I had read since I was a kid and home to some of the storytelling with which I had huge issues. At times, its work did the opposite of what I thought the best journalism does — illustrate people's full humanity. Vice sometimes veered into white boy adventurism. I thought they could do better, and I was told later I



I've spent the past several months trying to see why the industry looks the way it does

pounded the table while pointing this out.

Ultimately, I took the job because it was clear the company wanted to change. I was part of a hiring wave that created the most diverse workplace I've ever seen. It's hard to overstate just how transformative the people in the newsroom were to Vice's overall coverage.

We followed a Black Santa in New Orleans' Seventh Ward, a movement by gangs in Detroit to take up paintballing, and the persistent problem of Black land loss throughout the South. All of these stories — which may not even have been pitched in other newsrooms — were made better because of the diversity of our crews.

But what really drove home the importance of a diverse newsroom to me was our reporting on the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd. As Minneapolis was convulsing in protest, our crew sat on a porch interviewing Valerie Castile. Four years earlier, police had shot and killed her son Philando during a traffic stop.

She had opened up immediately to our crew — three Black men and a Mexican-American woman. Castile buzzed with moral clarity and righteous anger that yet another Black man had been killed at the hands of the police just a few miles away. "My son died, so that you, and you and you," she said as she pointed to us, "could see what's really happening in this world." I was silent. We all were.

It was a moment that wouldn't have been possible had our crew looked like so many others in Minneapolis. I had thought the same thing the day before when Minnesota State Troopers had arrested us at gunpoint.

We were released early the next morning and the charges were eventually dropped. Our work, along with that of a number of our colleagues reporting from around the country, was recognized with an Emmy. But more significantly, it clarified the importance of having people from a range of backgrounds telling these stories.

I applied for a Nieman fellowship to look at ways to open up documentary filmmaking to underrepresented communities. I've spent the past several months trying to see why the industry looks the way it does and investigating ways to try to change that, both in the newsroom and the classroom.

I want to do this not simply because it's right, but because it benefits us as storytellers and the communities we cover. ■

ALZO SLADE



AFTERIMAGE

When They Started Running

BY MACIEK NABRDALIK

Ibegan covering the refugee crisis on the Polish border for *The New York Times* on the very first day of the Russian invasion in Ukraine. At the very beginning, in the first day or two, I would see mainly calm women. Usually, some children with some kind of overhead luggage, small bags. Most of them seemed like they knew where they were going and how they were going to get there.

The border wasn't really organized yet. They were confident crossing it. It looked almost like they hoped to get back to Ukraine, even within a week. I knew that most of these women left behind their sons, fathers, partners, and husbands, because Ukraine announced that any man between the ages of 18 and 60 must stay in the country.

Then that night, in the photograph you see here, it started slightly changing. You would see people with larger luggage, rushing. Even though from our perspective, it didn't look like it was necessary. Poland is on the western border; it seemed like a quiet, safe space. They looked like they had less of

an idea where they were going. I started meeting people who literally had no plans. They were completely indifferent to whether they were going to stay in Poland, or if they'd be taken somewhere else, to Germany or to the Netherlands.

I remember seeing this family in the photograph, and that's the moment when I started seeing the change. They were on an empty road, coming from the customs offices. But they were running. It looked like they were running to catch a cab or train or bus. They were just running, to cross into Poland. This was the way that people were coming now.

I met more people like that — people who have no idea. But there are also fewer people who will mention that their loved ones are left behind, even though they are. This was a big change. The first women, with the hand luggage, would quite often complain that their husbands weren't allowed to come. With these people, you don't hear that. They just come. They want to feel safe, and they want to find any place where they can wait for what's next. ■

A family crosses the Polish-Ukrainian border after Russian forces invaded Ukraine. In the first several weeks of the conflict, millions have fled to countries like Poland, Hungary, and Romania