“IF [YOU] BELIEVE THAT IT’S TRUE THAT IN A DEMOCRACY, CITIZENS ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT ACTORS, THEN THE COVERAGE SHOULD BE CITIZEN-FOCUSED”

JENNIFER BRANDEL

HOW POLITICAL COVERAGE IS CHANGING TO GET BEYOND POLARIZATION AND PARTISANSHIP
Advocates for and against abortion demonstrate outside the Supreme Court after a leak of a draft majority opinion overturning Roe v. Wade.

Machines and the Mysterious Industry Behind Them” (WhoWhatWhy, 2020.)

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Paul McNally is the founder and executive director of Alibi Investigations, a non-profit investigative unit and training center in Johannesburg that develops journalists from Kenya, Nigeria, South Sudan, and other countries to produce African investigative podcasts.

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By Julia Craven

By Emre Kizilkaya

By Celeste Katz Marston

By Stefania D’Ignoti

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Nieman Notes

Afterimage

Kadri Gürel kisses his wife Nazime

Kalkan Gürel after his release from Silifke prison in Istanbul
Rukhshana Media: “Do Not Forget Afghanistan”

Zahra Joya, founder and editor of Rukhshana Media, spoke with the Nieman Foundation after being honored with the Louis M. Lyons Award for Conscience and Integrity in Journalism.

I n April, Nieman Fellows from the class of 2020 were hosted on Rukhshana Media, an online news outlet in Afghanistan, with the Louis M. Lyons Award for Conscience and Integrity in Journalism. Founded by Zahra Joya in 2020, Rukhshana Media centers the experiences of women throughout Afghanistan, reporting on “the difficulty of gaining inclusion in a society where religious conservatism and patriarchy have ruled all aspects of social life.” Through a team of mostly female reporters, Rukhshana publishes stories on a range of issues, including child marriage, gender violence, economic hardship, and street harassment. The work of reporting on gender inequality in Afghanistan has become even more important since the Taliban seized power last August, placing women in the country under threat.

Joya spoke with the Nieman Foundation in May about Afghanistan’s media landscape for women journalists, the work and founding of Rukhshana Media, finding hope, and more. Edited excerpts:

On the work of Rukhshana Media

“Rukhshana Media is a women-led news organization established in November 2020 to cover women’s issues in Afghanistan. Rukhshana Media has been named after a young woman, Rukhshana, who was stoned to death by the Taliban in 2015. Rukhshana Media tells the story of women from across Afghanistan, from how they’re treated at home [to] their role in society. We are publishing in two languages, Persian and English, covering Afghan women’s issues inside and outside of Afghanistan.

On Afghanistan’s media landscape for women journalists

We are publishing stories on the love, success, and failure of Afghan women from across the country every day. At Rukhshana Media, we tell the stories of the women and girls who are living under a regime of gender apartheid in the 21st century at a time when women can’t even choose their own clothes.

At Rukhshana Media, we want to tell what it means to lose not only your rights, your job, but also your social identity. We do not simply do journalism these days. We are also covering the laws of our own rights, of our own freedoms. It is hard and painful. One day, we write about girls being deprived of [going] to school. The next day, about women being banned from sports activities. We report on forced marriage, mysterious killings, and the list goes on.

Women journalists are particularly at risk. They are disappearing from Afghan media landscape simply because they are women. I am speaking to you here today as a woman journalist. Although it has never been easy to be a woman and a journalist in Afghanistan, it is now much more difficult to be even an author and a woman in Afghanistan.

Being a journalist is a far-reaching wish. There are very few female journalists remaining in the country. Taliban have forced them to wear hijab, ban them from appearing on film, and raising their voice on radio from some provinces. In our small newsroom, we usually listen to women telling their horrible stories while crying. When they talked about their lost dreams, they burst into tears.

On becoming a journalist and starting Rukhshana

When I was a child, my father was a prosecutor. Some of the women, they came to our house and asked my father to help them. At that time, I decided to become a lawyer and become a prosecutor like my father and help women. In 2011, I started my university lessons, one of my friends was working with one local news agency. She invited me to come to her office and see her colleagues. After that, she asked me, “If you want to work with us . . . let’s start.”

At that time, there were a lot of stories from my classmates. They wanted to share, but there wasn’t any platform. I walked the first steps working as a journalist. For three months I just learned. I just wanted to know: How should I interview with people? What are the main questions? What is necessary for a journalist?

After that, I started to work. In 2020, I decided to establish Rukhshana with a simple goal: to create a common conversation among Afghan women. Unfortunately, in Afghanistan, the women, they don’t have enough time to talk together and to write about their lives or read about some things. I asked my friends and female journalists, “I want to create an organization — for example, Rukhshana — do you want to join with me?” They said yes, we will help you [with] the details and for materials that we will publish for reporting. We started.

On leaving Afghanistan after the fall of Kabul

I want to say that on 15th of August last year, we did not lose only our government. We lost the result of our 20 years of our life. It is never easy.

I left Afghanistan on the 26th of August. It was a very heartbroken. It was like a very bad dream. When I came to the airport and I saw there [were] many families, children, old people who are trying to get out from Afghanistan, it was very hard for me.

When I left Afghanistan, we came with an army plane. I tried to look to Kabul for the last time. Unfortunately, there [weren’t] windows, and I can’t say good-bye to Kabul. I didn’t see the last moment, my beautiful city.

Unfortunately, since August, hundreds of journalists who had a very good experience left Afghanistan. Now, we are facing these problems, and we can’t find a journalist who has experience.

On finding hope in reporting on Afghanistan

All of these stories we are publishing, it’s sad. Honestly, I’m not excited for these stories, because in our team meetings, I ask my colleagues, “Please find a very positive story, an energetic story.” They say, “It is not the time that we publish a positive and exciting story.”

When I’ve been in touch with women, they are still hoping for their future, and still they’re protesting against the Taliban. It gives me hope. It’s a very small candle in the darkness. For me, when I see the women who are aware of their lives, and who are asking the Taliban to come and discuss with them, it is very helpful and positive. Still, I’m hoping for the future of Afghanistan.”
Dredging barges operated by illegal miners converge on the Madeira river, a tributary of the Caracas. But none of them mesmerized me living in Washington, D.C., Beijing, and have had the privilege to report from many new eyes? you reveal to a much larger audience? Are to ask: Which of my endless stories should de Almeida and I continued our boat trip basin.

enough for Peter Prengaman, climate and [356]reporting on the rainforest’s destruction [36]when the call miraculously came in [372], NF ’16, on the importance of [384]I asked my editors to go straight to [401]I, NF ’01, has launched [428]invaluable Indigenous knowledge, and [439]lived in the forest for centuries are on [451]worldwide, believe the planet can’t [462]with scientists and policy makers worldwide, believe the planet can’t afford to lose its most biodiverse forest, invaluable Indigenous knowledge, and crucial carbon sink. Tribes that have lived in the forest for centuries are on the frontlines of resisting development pressures, from cutting to mining, and fighting for land rights and sustainable practices. The Amazon is of global concern because life would be much worse without it. That’s the story I want to keep telling, and that’s why we are better as part of AP’s new climate team, spreading around the world. ■

I was about to attend a welcome meet- ing in a remote Arara tribe village when the call miraculously came in through the unreliable internet anten- nae. The connection lasted long enough for Peter Prengaman, climate and environmental editor for The Associated Press, to tell me I was selected to be the agency’s correspondent to the Amazon basin. The next day, as photographer Lalo de Almeida and I continued our boat trip through the magnificent yet unknown Irrir River, the world’s largest rainforest seemed to ask: Which of my endless stories should you reveal to a much larger audience? Are you ready for a fresh start, to see me with new eyes? In more than two decades as a reporter with Brazil’s newspaper Folha de S. Paulo, I have had the privilege to report from fascinating and complex places, including living in Washington, D.C., Beijing, and Caracas. But none of them mesmerized me more than the Amazon.

While fake news and alternative facts have seeped into the public consciousness, people know less about how underlying design and policy choices allow age-old phenomena like rumors and lies to dominate.

That’s why Claire Wardle, founder of First Draft News, and I started the Information Futures Lab (IFL) at the Brown University School of Public Health.

At its core, the Lab is built for individuals and organizations who help people access the information and knowledge they need to live healthy, socially connected lives. From journalists who contextualize news to community organizations that translate issues like changes in abortion rights to public health officials to librarians to educators — the lab equips them with resources, skills, and a network.

How do we do this? By creating rapid learning cycles connecting researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. Our team translates into plain language key findings from allied research fields such as misinformation, behavioral sciences, and the digital humanities. A literature review cell is leading this fall.

We work directly with practitioners, on evaluating and capturing new ways to build health literacy and misinformation resilience in communities of color hit hard by the pandemic.

We run design sprints, a fellowship program, and a global Community of Infodemics Managers to push for ideation and testing of practices for our new information realities.

We think that collectively, we can find out what works long-term to create information spaces that by and large benefit democracy, not threaten it.

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But reporters truly distinguish them- selves by doing enterprise stories they squeeze in during the rare quiet stretches.

The challenge was especially acute during the unprecedented FBI search of former President Donald Trump’s Florida home — the kind of week where a plot to kill the former U.S. national security adviser gets one minute of coverage.

Reporting on the Justice Department can be a hectic and unpredictable enterprise. Covering the FBI search of Mar-A-Lago meant it was time to dump out the toolbox and deploy every tool. That started with calls to national security experts, criminal defense lawyers, and figures in the Trump orbit. Next came electronic searches of the court docket in south Florida and trips to Justice Department headquarters to prove the hallways. NPR’s flagship shows, Morning Edition and All Things Considered, wanted regular updates, from 5 a.m. to 5 p.m. Podcasts — including Up First and the Politics Podcast — asked for more context, in a more conversational tone. Our stories explained the high bar it took for the FBI to convince a judge to approve a search warrant, the laws that prosecutors say might have been broken, and why the public was not likely to see much of the underlying affidavit describing the Justice Department’s sources and methods.

In between breaking news coverage, the network aired a story I reported about an innovative education program for people in jail. Email and phone traffic from others involved in the criminal justice system poured in, so I gathered leads to pursue whenever the flood of news ends.

At its best, radio transports listeners into new experiences, making powerful connections between the people featured in stories and the audience members in their homes, their cars, or their offices.

In my free time, I choose to bring those listeners the voices they’re unlikely to hear elsewhere: the stories of incarcerated people, their families, and their advocates. They’re speaking to their fellow Americans and to policymakers about the ways the system fails them, and why that should matter to all of us. ■

So, in 2016, when I came back to Brazil from my Nieman fellowship, I asked my editors to go straight to Manaus and reopen the newspaper bureau in the town from which had been closed the year before. Despite the high costs and budget restraints, they said yes. Journalism is born of friction. In the Amazon, it focuses on the ongoing destruction of its mysterious beauty. More often than not, I feel like I have been covering a prolonged 16th century: My stories have dealt with illegal invasions of Indigenous territories, a gold rush, logging, and forest conversion to pasture through fire.

Instead of improving, all these colonial-era practices got worse after 2019, when far-right President Jair Bolsonaro took office and weakened Brazil’s environmental law enforcement and Indigenous rights, all in the name of economic development. Many who live in the forest, along with scientists and policy makers worldwide, believe the planet can’t afford to lose its most biodiverse forest, invaluable Indigenous knowledge, and crucial carbon sink. Tribes that have lived in the forest for centuries are on the frontlines of resisting development pressures, from cutting to mining, and fighting for land rights and sustainable practices.

The Amazon is of global concern because life would be much worse without it. That’s the story I want to keep telling, and that’s why we are better as part of AP’s new climate team, spreading around the world. ■

A “Fresh Start” Covering the Amazon Fabiano Masionnave, NF ’16, on the importance of reporting on the rainforest’s destruction
“I ALWAYS JUST GO BACK TO BEING A HUMAN FIRST”

Trauma-informed reporting can help journalists better connect with sources dealing with grief, pain, and loss

BY JULIA CRAVEN
It’s not the same as me talking to you now.”

intense physiological crashes. Several things struck me in interviewing these folks. It costs them to do an interview. They work in pandemic preparedness or emergency response before the virus. ’s official found in the United States. For them, the coronavirus had been a big deal for months, and they interviewed felt exhausted. They worked in pandemic preparedness or emergency response before the virus. A few weeks later toward the end of May, Yong, a staff writer at The Atlantic, started to consider how the mental health of his sources intersected with his responsibilities as a journalist. He’d begun interviewing people who tested positive for Covid-19 — some requiring hospitalization — and had persistent symptoms even weeks later, a group that would become known as long haulers. Yong didn’t know how an interview would reflect poorly on reporters and be seen as exploitative.”

In an industry that prioritizes objectivity and distance from the issues we cover, it may seem counterintuitive for journalists to take the mental health of their sources into account. But over the last few years, as the pandemic and the fight for racial justice forced newsrooms to reevaluate which voices are elevated, the toll the process of being included in a story can take on vulnerable people is coming into more focus.

From interviewing a family member of a crime victim to framing the plight of a migrant seeking asylum to writing about a person experiencing addiction to selecting a photograph of a sexual assault survivor, reporters and photographers across various beats have begun employing the same tactics that mental health journalists have used throughout their careers, taking care to center the perspective of their sources, stay clear of tropes, and recognize a wide range of traumas. As news organizations attempt to embrace new audiences — and highlight communities that are often at the margins — it’s imperative that we come to terms with how taxing it can be to interact with reporters and the fact that our work has a profound influence on the public’s understanding of trauma. Trauma-informed reporting recognizes what the person being interviewed has experienced, how it could be affecting them currently, and how the interview process could burden them further. But it also doesn’t reduce anyone to their trauma. At its best, trauma-informed reporting acknowledges what happened and seeks to understand how the individual is moving forward. “It’s important that reporters speak to their interviewee and see a person there, not just a source of information. By humanizing, rather than objectifying, the people reporters talk to, they are more likely to build rapport and gain trust,” says Melissa Stanger, a social worker, psychotherapist, and former journalist. “It’s important that reporters not glamorize or sensationalize a traumatic event for a story, as it could reflect poorly on reporters and be seen as exploitative.”
Within many cultures, mental health disorders are highly stigmatized. Cultural identity isn’t a risk marker for experiencing mental illness, but navigating a mental health disorder can be especially difficult when identities intersect. For example, Black women are more likely to live with depression and chronic anxiety but less likely to receive treatment — a vastly underreported topic. In a piece for the New York Times, John Elison explored the soul-crushing ways that racism affects mental health. Migrants and asylum seekers, as explored in Univision’s reporting on the trauma endured by people seeking asylum in the U.S., have a high incidence rate of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, too. Vox writer Aja Romano points out that LGBTQ+ folks are more likely to experience mental health disorders and various forms of violence, and writes about the implications of Florida’s “don’t say gay” bill, including doxing queer people who are accused of “grooming” children, and the toxic transphobic trope meant to malign queer people.

What these stories have in common is a rejection of stereotypes and a focus on the humanity of the people being reported on. “We’re all exposed to a lot of inaccu- curate information and a lot of stereotypes about mental health. And [there are] a lot of stigmas composed of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination,” says Monica Cullins, an associate professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania. “Much of that exposure does come through the media.”

Cullins advises all journalists to be aware of these stereotypes. During interviews, Cullins suggests acknowledging that mental illness may be difficult to talk about and making sure to be sensitive to that reality. Perpetuating ideas like mental illness only affects people with evil or the result of a moral failing often prevents people from seeking help or talking about their experiences. Avoiding making certain connections, such as saying someone who died by suicide was experiencing depression without proof from their medical provider, and associating random people with violence and schizophrenia with obsessive-compulsive disorder — is also key. Cullins adds that it’s important to remember that parents aren’t to blame for a child’s mental health disorder, too.

Ashley Yates, a Black Lives Matter organizer, became an activist after the police killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson. Since the Black Lives Matter movement regained momentum in 2020, journalists have reported on the mental health toll activism can take. Williams at the 2018 U.S. Open, the world was watching her — a young, introverted, soft-spoken Black woman whose demeanor clashes with the collective imagination of who an athlete should be. Dealing with mental health issues and setting bound- arieties to protect oneself contradicts the idea that athletes aren’t always recognized as such. But the backlash to this disregard for the mental health of those protesting has uplifted the need for more tactful coverage across the board. Be- low are some key factors to consider when interviewing a source.

A Los Angeles Times piece on mental health services in California notes that racism shaped his life and death — relying on "George Floyd’s Search for Salvation." Rao’s prose is straightforward and affable.

The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, an organization that develops best practices for trauma reporting, recommends saying, “I’m sorry that happened to you.” That’s advice that should apply to everyone we interview — especially those who are dealing with a sig- nificant mental health issue or who have experienced trauma. Despite Covid-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement giving it more prominence, this sensitivity has been missing during events that are viewed as being more political than human-centric. This trauma is familiar to Black people in America, though the feelings of grief that follow such indignities aren’t always recognized as such. But the backlash to this disregard for the mental health of those protesting has uplifted the need for more tactful coverage across the board. Be- low are some key factors to consider when interviewing a source.

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in South L.A. highlights the cultural stigma that complicates navigating depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation as well as accessing treatment — for Black and Latino people. Sergio Nuño, one person interviewed in the piece, shared that his parents weren’t quite sure how to help him. “The only mental health providers they’d ever seen were ones in upscale Jalous, where they’re from, going to therapy meant you were ‘crazy,’” Courtney, another interviewee, shared how she almost didn’t attend therapy because she was afraid people would find out she was engaging in something that was “for white people.”

Reporter Joe Mozingo found Courtney and Nuño through his contacts at Martin Luther King Jr. Community Hospital. “The only way I could see [for] finding the right people was to go through someone who was already doing good work in that field, was trusted by the community, and who understood the mission of journalism and getting the word out,” Mozingo says.

By interviewing the psychiatrist who worked with both Nuño and Courtney, Mozingo makes clear that, with treatment, people do get better. His work here is indicative of in-depth, tactical interviewing and what’s possible when a journalist is able and willing to collaborate with their sources.

Similar steps can be taken when approaching sources that have gone through physical trauma. When Kristen Capps, a journalist based in Washington, D.C., reached out to write about John Powers, an artist who lost several fingers to an industrial accident in 2016, after months of going to court dates and being overwhelmed, and decline to answer anything that makes them uncomfortable. Newman. Likewise, sources might need space to feel their emotions openly, stop the interview if they feel overwhelmed, and decline to answer anything that makes them uncomfortable.

But perhaps the most important thing a reporter can do during the interview process is show compassion. Having empathy and tact is what, essentially, underpins trauma-informed reporting. In 2019, when Brianna Sacks, an investigative reporter at Buzzfeed, was covering the Walmart shooting in El Paso by a white supremacist, she spent time with the family of Javier Ámi Rodriguez — a 15-year-old who was killed. The teen’s uncle had survived the shooting and invited Sacks to the hospital. She introduced herself and, for about 30 minutes, she just sat with them. Then she asked if they’d eaten before going to get everyone some food. When Dora Chavez, the teen’s grandmother, began crying after watching a video of Javier, Sacks put her arm around Chavez’s shoulders, who leaned into her and cried for a while. Sacks never interviewed the woman again.

“…I always go back to where people first versus reporter and try to put myself in their shoes and think about what I would want and need if I lost a family member or my child was being shot — and I do come back to ‘Someone who cares and listens.’”

This was the guiding principle for Tyler Tynes, a staff writer at GQ Magazine, as he covered the trial of Cardell Hayes, the man convicted of murder and manslaughter in the killing of former New Orleans Saints player Will Smith in 2016. After months of going to court dates and being overwhelmed, and decline to answer anything that makes them uncomfortable.

From the beginning, it was clear to those working on the project that “Unheard” wouldn’t uphold traditional reporter and subject roles. Instead, the reporting and publishing process was designed so that survivors of sexual abuse felt safe. Michelle Theriault Boots and Kyle Hopkins, two reporters with the Anchorage Daily News who worked on the project, have both written stories of 29 men and women who were sexually assaulted in Alaska, is a marquee example. During the reporting process, the journalists shared quotes with the people who were highlighted in the project to confirm their accuracy and gave them full creative control over how they were visually portrayed. The photographer allowed everyone to review their pictures once the photo sessions were finished. And when the written piece was completed, the reporters read the text to the survivors to ensure the tone was appropriate.

The best way to report on trauma and mental health is imperative for building long-term trust. ProPublica and the Anchorage Daily News’ 2020 project “Unheard,” which shares the stories of 29 men and women who were sexually assaulted in Alaska, is a marquee example. During the reporting process, the journalists shared quotes with the people who were highlighted in the project to confirm their accuracy and gave them full creative control over how they were visually portrayed. The photographer allowed everyone to review their pictures once the photo sessions were finished. And when the written piece was completed, the reporters read the text to the survivors to ensure the tone was appropriate.

For the first time, the Dart Center’s Newman recommends reporters do a gut check of their prose. “The thing that I ask journalists to do is, at the end of the story, when you’ve finished your product, do a check and say, ‘If this was my aunt, my father, my mother, somebody I loved, is there anything I would change in the tone?’” Newman says. “That’s a helpful way to know if you’ve accidentally absorbed some cultural tropes.”

“If you establish yourself as being worthy of someone’s trust, people are more willing to engage. People are more willing to open up and be vulnerable and share what they’re really thinking,” Yong says. “All of the practices we’ve talked about help the sources, but I think that they immensely help me as a reporter. It’s not a zero-sum game. If we play our cards right, everyone wins.”
DIVIDED WE FALL

HOW POLITICAL COVERAGE IS CHANGING TO GET BEYOND POLARIZATION AND PARTISANSHIP

BY CELESTE KATZ MARSTON
In writing about Sarah Palin and her 2022 bid for Congress, T.A. Frank made a promise to readers — and to himself.

"I think where we miss out... is taking the time to hear people (out) fully, not just, 'What do you think? Tell me your opinion,' but "Where did that opinion come from?'"

Of course, these divisions existed before the 2022 election cycle. A study released in 2020 by researchers from Brown and Stanford Universities found that the polarization gap — how negatively members of opposing political parties viewed each other — soared by nearly 70 percent between 1978 and 2018. The researchers said this was possibly due in part to the membership in the two major parties self-sorting more sharply along racial and religious lines in addition to ideology — making the people across the aisle look even more different.

In Congress, Pew has found, "Both parties have moved further away from the ideological center since the early 1970s. Democrats on average have become somewhat more liberal, while Republicans on average have become much more conservative." One notable difference between the U.S. and countries where polarization declined over the same period, the study found, was the growing prevalence of partisan cable news networks in America versus the higher per-capita spending on public media elsewhere.

There’s a lot of blame to go around for America’s political schism. Still, as Elizabeth Kolbert has written in The New Yorker, “The fact that each party regards the other as a ‘serious threat’ doesn’t mean that they are equally threatening. The January 6th attack on the Capitol, the ongoing attempts to discredit the 2020 election, the new state laws that will make it more difficult for millions of people to vote, particularly in communities of color — only one party is responsible for these.”

Nevertheless, coverage of electoral politics, polarization, and other contentious issues can be more useful — and more accurate — when it considers voters rather than just vote-seekers, explores divisions without oversimplifying or overstating them, and identifies not only the existence of problems but possible solutions. Of course, there should be no nuance to some political stories. Political violence, election denial, voter suppression, racist attacks must all be called out and condemned. But a more modulated depiction of voters and issues can help deprive those looking to exploit and inflame division of a chance to spread misinformation or outright lies for their own political gain.

Here’s a look at some of the ways journalists and other experts are advancing coverage that gets beyond “us versus them.”

A Pew study released in August found that Republicans and Democrats not only have negative views of the other party, but increasingly describe people in that other party as “less more closed-minded, dishonest, immoral and unintelligent than other Americans.”

In other words, it’s personal.

The rise in those feelings of hostility in just the last few years has been jaw-dropping. In 2016, about 35 percent of Democrats and 47 percent of Republicans thought people in the other party were more immoral than other Americans; in 2022, Pew found, that shot up to 63 percent for Democrats and 72 percent for Republicans. Pew also found that “most registered vot-
ers — regardless of whether they identify with a party or are independents who lean toward a party — say it is unlikely they will cast a ballot for a candidate from the other party for any office over the next several years.2

Extreme partisan reactions ratcheted up among allies of former President Donald Trump over the summer when the FBI executed a search warrant at the former president’s Florida estate. The agents were looking for documents Trump was not authorized to keep when he completed his term as president. They retrieved more than 50 boxes of materials, including some marked “top secret,” per court documents. Some of those who had rallied to Trump’s publicly false claims that the 2020 election was rigged against him amped up their violent rhetoric after the search, with the most enraged even talking about civil war. Within days, a veteran who had expressed support for Trump on social media attempted to breach an FBI field office in Ohio, firing a nail gun at law enforcement officers. The magistrate judge who approved the warrant became the target of death threats and antisemitic slurs, and the Department of Homeland Security warned of increased menacing of federal officials.

Most people are not that extreme — nor are most people’s views, even on contentious issues. While gun regulation is oftentimes the only way in which Americans want stricter gun laws, according to a recent University of Chicago/ABC poll. Research also shows that Americans have increasing complex views of issues related to gender, with most thinking trans people should be protected from discrimination.

News reporting is “oftentimes the only way in which we get to actually see the other side,” says Dan Vallone, U.S. director of More in Common, a non-partisan nonprofit that studies polarization. At a time when partisans “see the other political side as not just an opponent, but as a threat, [not] just on policy goals, but on the survival of the country, on their own family’s well-being, [the] stakes are very high, and it’s a critical moment for all of us — not just journalists, but citizens — to do a much better job of trying to grapple with more complex descriptions and depictions of other Americans.”

It’s a tough job for a lot of reasons, including what’s called the perception gap — the difference between what Side A believes Side B thinks and what Side B actually thinks. The higher a person’s perception gap, the more distorted — and negative — are their views of people on the other side. “People with large perception gaps are more likely to describe their opponents as ‘hateful,’ ‘ignorant,’ and ‘bigoted,’” according to More in Common’s research. The media people consume, the wider the gap. In fact, people who said in a More in Common/YouGov survey that they read the news “most of the time” had views of the other side that were three times more distorted than occasional news consumers.

The largest increases in the perception gap, per the More in Common/YouGov study, were associated with consumers of right-leaning outlets, including Breitbart News, Drudge Report, and the Sean Hannity Show. People who consumed news from those sources had a perception gap nine to 11 percentage points higher than those who didn’t. The perception gaps tied to liberal media were smaller, but still considerable — about eight percentage points higher than those who didn’t get information from those sites. Fox viewers had a larger gap than viewers of MSNBC and CNN. Only consumers of the three major television networks — ABC, CBS, and NBC — were “associated with better understanding of other Americans’ views.”

“IT HELPS TO HAVE PEOPLE OF THE OTHER POLITICAL PARTY IN YOUR SOCIAL NETWORK TO REDUCE YOUR PERCEPTION GAP”

DAN VALLONE
U.S. Director, More in Common

“IT HELPS TO HAVE PEOPLE OF THE OTHER POLITICAL PARTY IN YOUR SOCIAL NETWORK TO REDUCE YOUR PERCEPTION GAP”

In her book “High Conflict: Why We Get Trapped and How We Get Out,” in essence, conflict shifts into “high” gear when people start to view each other as “us” and “them,” or “right” and “wrong,” or even “good” and “evil.” As Ripley has written, when people feel threatened, they become hypervigilant. “In this hypervigilant state, we feel an involuntary need to defend our side and attack the other. That anxiety renders us immune to new information. In other words: no amount of investigative reporting or leaked documents will change our mind, no matter what.”

Giving voice to people who are conflicted about an issue — whether it be how to spend tax dollars or whether to mandate Covid vaccines for public-facing workers — should not be seen as diluting a story, but as enriching it and making it more accurate, Ripley says. Based on her own work with conflict mediators, Ripley has some prescriptions for reporters covering conflict-ridden events and issues, including elections. She suggests amplifying the stories of people who don’t hold standard, easily categorized views on controversial issues or simply haven’t made up their minds, because it presents a real-world view of how not everyone falls into one column or the other on disputed issues.

She also advocates for asking questions that explore people’s underlying beliefs and motivations, not just their positions — as The Atlantic did about abortion in its Up for Debate newsletter in May, enabling it to gather and present an array of compelling, diverse personal stories by simply asking people what they thought. One respondent said she generally considered abortion “a moral wrong that ends a life” — but also favored discussing “looser restrictions on late-term abortions” in cases where it’s revealed that “the child has a condition that is not compatible with life.”

Braver Angles uses “bridging” techniques — some of which derive from approaches used in couples therapy — to get people at extremes of the political spectrum to actively listen to each other. The group connects people through “Walks a Mile in My News” pairings “designed to break people out of their media silos by getting them to read articles from the other side of the political divide, and get to know someone who appreciates what those articles are saying,” according to a piece published on the Braver Angles website by Mónica Guzmán, senior fellow for public practice at the organization.

In the case of political news coverage, “a lot of people [just] don’t think that the people creating that media even know what their concerns truly are,” says Guzmán.
In one session, two women — "red" Wynette and "blue" Vera — read and talked about voter rights and election integrity. Vera sent Wynette a New York Times piece that called restrictive voting laws "Jim Crow 2.0," for example. Wynette sent Vera an Atlanta Journal-Constitution story on two GOP lawmakers who deliberately used false signatures as a test to apply successfully for absentee ballots. The women were ultimately able to have a civil, genuine conversation — and a better understanding of why they still disagreed on key points.

"When it comes to understanding what an issue is truly about, I think where we miss out … is taking the time to hear people out fully, not just, 'What do you think? Tell me your opinion,' but 'Where did that opinion come from? What are the experiences that inform that for you? And then what are the concerns that animated for you?' If you can get some of those experiences and concerns behind somebody's opinion … you give your readers a way into that person's perspective," Guzmán says.

Also, there is ample room for a reckoning about how social media algorithms distribute and reward content. Research published in Nature Human Behavior in February found that "the popularity of a news source is weakly associated with its reliability" — understood as the source's credibility and transparency. The scholars suggested creating an algorithm that boosted stories from outlets with more partisan diversity among its readership, because those sources tend to be more reliable. The approach could also help control the spread of extreme misinformation.

Meanwhile, as Ripley suggests, thoughtfully conveying that no group is monolithic can go a long way. As footing to talk about people who have changed their mind on a controversial topic. One example: A February Guardian story about a group of former vaccine skeptics working to help others who are hesitant find science-based answers to their concerns about Covid-19 shots. The piece spends time laying out the controversial issue — vaccine hesitancy — and explains how people are trying to address it on a grassroots level. It also manages to examine the underlying fears and worries of those who oppose vaccines, but without falling into the trap of letting their rationales stand on the same plane as empirical evidence.

"Abortion is often held up as one of the most classically divisive issues in the U.S. and is often used as a litmus test for candidates. However, this simply isn’t as much of a 50-50 issue as some news coverage would have you believe. A June 2022 Pew report showed, "A 61% majority of U.S. adults say abortion should be legal in all or most cases, while 37% think abortion should be illegal in all or most cases." That’s been the case for the last few years, according to Pew. The organization also reported that when it comes to the Supreme Court’s overturning of Roe v. Wade, which federally enshrined the right to legal abortion, “Nearly six-in-ten adults (57%) disapprove of the court’s sweeping decision, including 45% who strongly disapprove.”

Katie Woodruff, social science fellow in reproductive and maternal health at Advancing New Standards in Reproductive Health, based at the University of California San Francisco, studied how three top news sources — The New York Times, The Washington Post, and The Associated Press — covered abortion in 2013 and 2016. "Most of the time when abortion was in the news, it was covered in a political context — so not as a health issue or even a quote-unquote women’s issue," Woodruff says. "Even when it was discussed substantively, it was in sort of a partisan, horserace kind of analysis, like who wins and who loses among the political parties or candidates by using the issue of abortion in one way or another.”

"Nothing is more important than understanding what issues are in people’s minds, and the debates that are happening on the ground. In the March 2022 Pew survey, 61% of U.S. adults say abortion should be legal in all or most cases, while 37% say it should be illegal. While there is a wide range of views on abortion, many people support legal access to abortion for those who need it. The fact that the majority support legal access reflects the public’s understanding that abortion is a normal, safe, and effective medical procedure that is necessary for women’s lives."
“Citizens Agenda” approach to reporting that gives the audience a bigger say in how stories are selected and produced. “The Citizen’s Agenda is really all about asking the electorate, ‘What do you not know that you want politicians to be talking about as they compete for your vote?’” Brandel says. “When newsrooms optimize for relationships and relevance and trust, they include the people that they’re serving in the decision-making process, rather than assuming they know what’s best and kind of going with whatever is the fastest and cheapest to produce.”

To that end, programs like Election SOS and Democracy SOS, in concert with Solutions Journalism Network (SJN), Pew Center, Poynter, and other partners, are helping newsrooms identify and rethink how they handle coverage, including soliciting questions and comments from the audience and incorporating those throughout the reporting. Democracy SOS has awarded training fellowships to an array of news outlets, especially in swing states, with a goal of helping the industry “replace stories about conflicting and competing polls and candidates — which we know contribute to distrust — with more deep, ongoing examinations of important social issues,” according to its website. Election SOS this year offered training sessions specifically geared toward midterms coverage, including material on identifying and communicating with audiences newsrooms aren’t reaching.

This midterm cycle is a hot one for swing state Wisconsin, given the high profile Senate and governor races. As The New York Times has reported, the GOP nominee for governor, Tim Michels, is a Trump ally who “has embraced calls to dismantle the state’s bipartisan election commission, invoked conspiratorial films about the 2020 election and even expressed openness to the false idea that Mr. Trump’s loss can still be decertified.”

The Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel is pursuing what it calls “Wisconsin Main Street Agenda” with the La Follette School of Public Affairs at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Wisconsin Public Radio. The project is asking citizens what issues they want their politicians to talk about and also holding a series of in-person events around the state that gives locals a chance to air their concerns.

“It’s a chance for people to have a thoughtful discussion in an age when thoughtful discussion and deliberation is really hard to do,” says David Haynes, who oversees the Journal-Sentinel’s Ideas Lab and solutions journalism efforts, and has worked with Democracy SOS. “We’ve got politics right now that is all boilized up because we can’t talk to one another very well, and we’ve got social media platforms that don’t encourage deliberation — in fact, just the contrary; they encourage conflict.”

The project has given the paper insight into not only where partisans diverge, but a nuanced view of issues that multiple groups identify as a concern — each in their own way. For example, as Haynes reported in August based on survey results, “people who identify themselves as Republicans, Democrats and Independents, say they are concerned about our democracy. But they may mean different things: For Republicans, it might mean ensuring that elections are secure. For Democrats and Independents, it might mean concerns about a continuing refusal by some on the political right to accept that Joe Biden won the 2020 presidential election.”

In Pennsylvania, another battleground state, public radio station WITF largely eschews political coverage that solely focuses on the outcome of horserace polls, because even when they’re accurate, they don’t hold much news value and can even “potentially suppress votes.” We’ll use a line or two about a poll, but we’re not focusing a story on a poll,” says Tim Lambert, multimedia news director for the station, which is also part of the Democracy SOS 2022 cohort.

Scott Blanchard, WITF’s director of journalism, says the station, which serves 17 counties in central and south-central Pennsylvania, generally turns away from blow-by-blow coverage of campaign attack ads, Facebook brawls, and “all that sort of inflaming and political strategizing stuff.” How to treat candidate endorsement stories, which can matter in certain instances but can also have a definite scorekeeping feel to them, is also something the station has discussed, including considering when to limit them to the digital site versus making them the focus of a radio story.

Instead, WITF is focusing on digging into issues surrounding their big midterm races — and considering who to craft that coverage for, not just about “what we believe [is] there’s a segment of the population … not on either extreme or either fringe that is actually looking for good, reliable, trustworthy information about issues that they care about,” says Blanchard. “That’s who we should be talking to — not the people on either edge.”

Sharon Jarvis, an associate professor of communications at the University of Texas, has re-searched how the language used in articles can affect how citizens see themselves within the electoral system. When the press portrays voters as having agency versus being pawns of political strategists, it can have a lasting impact.

Adults who read articles in the “mobilized participant” frame — which depicted voters as making choices and being mobilized by parties and candidates — responded more positively and were more likely to “depict citizens as efficacious,” according to Jarvis’ research. Those who read an article in the “isolated spectator” frame — which depicted voters as pawns of political strategists — were more inclined to talk about elections as a “negative game that did not involve them” and to voice frustra-tion with both politics and the media, she found.

In a recent interview with The Whole Story, a publication of the Solutions Journalism Network, Jarvis also explained that presenting solutions to election threats gives people a sense of control relative to stories that highlight the dangers without exploring how they might be avoided or ad-dressed. A test by Jarvis and others at the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life at the University of Texas at Austin of voting-related social media content also found “tweets written to increase aware-ness of voter suppression without offering individual-level solutions decrease trust in the election.”

In other words, focusing on the problem but not the solution creates more distrust, pushing audiences away a time when journalism needs to bring them in.

Frank says the “alternative perspective” he tried with his piece on Sarah Palin may not be suited to every po- litical or election story. Still, “it’s useful for journalists to keep in mind that a lot of the actions taken by our fellow humans can be as easily cast in a positive light as in a negative light, and, in political journalism, which light we choose can easily depend on whether we like that person’s politics,” he says. “If we respect disaffect-ed readers enough to understand and remedy some of what made them lose faith, then surely journalists can rebuild trust, bit by bit.”
“A KISS OF FREEDOM” FOR TURKEY’S PRESS

Independent journalists are stubbornly persisting in digital formats from newsletters to video to podcasts

BY EMRE KIZILKAYA
In 2017, Turkey was the world’s worst offender when it came to jailing reporters for their work. After a brief period of improvement, this year the government launched a fresh wave of mass arrests targeting reporters and criminalizing journalism with new laws ahead of the elections in which Erdoğan is seeking another term. In addition to the ongoing criminalization of journalism, Turkish journalists face physical and online attacks, hefty administrative fines for critical reporting, strategic private and government lawsuits, insufficient financial and technological resources, low public trust, and the algorithmic bias of digital platforms that boost pro-government media outlets. These challenges generate a powerful chilling effect, spreading self-censorship and creating the false perception that independent journalism in Turkey is no longer possible.

But Turkish journalism is giving itself its own kiss of freedom. Many independent journalists are stubbornly persisting with a mission to sustain quality journalism in Turkey despite the political, social, and technological challenges. Although the mainstream media is almost totally controlled by Erdoğan and his allies, a new breed of independent reporting flourishes in various digital mediums and formats, from newsletters to video podcasts. There are dozens of examples, but here are four in the vanguard of next-generation Turkish journalism.

**KAPSİL**

Three years after they married in a prison, Bayülgen and Öğretken, who was released in December 2017, founded Kapsül, a newsletter that began appearing in the first days of the Covid-19 pandemic. Launched as a one-page factcheck to filter out the disinformation, propaganda, and editorializing around Covid, Kapsül now has 54,000 subscribers, more than the real circulation of many newspapers controlled by Erdoğan and his cronies.

“A news bombardment started with the pandemic,” says Bayülgen. “And we were confused, as were many readers. Experts were speaking, sometimes voicing conflicting opinions, and graphs and data were shared, although it was hard to verify them.” Eying 100,000 subscribers by the end of 2022, Bayülgen and Öğretken are on their way to financial sustainability, attracting donations from readers as well as commercial investors and sponsorship deals for their daily and weekly newsletters.

In addition to covering important stories, Kapsül is committed to treating its journalists well. “I wish the priority of media outlets in Turkey was investing in their journalists,” Bayülgen says. “And that Kapsül’s goal is to provide better professional conditions — shorter working hours, private health insurance, and professional equipment, as well as ‘human’ salaries and severance fees — to its growing team of reporters. ‘There are many journalists in Turkey who keep producing news bravely — and paying the price.’”

That price can be astonishingly high. In 1995 when he was an AFP reporter, Gürsel was kidnapped by militants from the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). He was freed by Milliyet in 2017, four years after the newspaper was sold to the Demirören Group, a staunchly pro-government corporation that owns assets in the energy, industry, mining, real estate, and media sectors. According to Gürsel’s memoir, the corporation’s owner, Erdoğan Demirören, offered to keep paying his salary if the columnist would stop writing his columns, which were critical of the ruling party, during the run up to the 2018 elections. Gürsel declined what he described as “a dirty offer” and was fired. He was soon hired as a columnist and editorial adviser of Cumhuriyet, which was one of the last major independent newspapers in Turkey then. Soon afterward, Gürsel was impaneled for some 11 months during the controversial Cumhuriyet trial, which was slammed by press freedom groups as yet another attempt by the Erdoğan administration to capture independent media. The evidence in the indictment was essentially news reports and op-ed criticisms of Erdoğan and his political allies. IHP, which monitored the trial, noted that “the case against key figures at one of Turkey’s last three independent daily newspapers involved no crime, no evidence and no justice.”

Gürsel, now a member of the administrative council of the Paris-based Reporters Without Borders, believes the seed of Turkish journalism’s future is being sown in smaller newsrooms and start-ups. Today’s smaller outlets may one day become the “new mainstream” media if they can grow organically “through structural, financial, and institutional enhancement,” he says.

Gürsel thinks that in today’s harsh environment, solidarity among journalists is the key to creating that infrastructure. He believes that independent outlets should defend each other by uniting around the common mission of press freedom. Solidarity serves as “an umbrella for good journalism that would hatch when the best moment will come or like seeds that would grow fine flowers when democracy would wash away the toxic agents of authoritarianism in the soil,” he adds. And there are signs of solidarity, even amidst competition. When independent broadcaster TELO was fined 1.8 million Turkish liras in June for coverage unfavorable to Erdoğan and his allies, its competitor Halk TV offered to pay the fine because, as Halk TV’s Chair Cüfer Mahiroglu said in a tweet in June 2022, “we should light the candles against the darkness all together.”

**MEDYASCOPE**

Medyascope was founded in 2015 by Rüyen Çakır, a senior journalist who worked for some of Turkey’s most prominent media outlets in broadcast and print journalism. Initially focusing solely on video journalism and political news analysis distributed via social media platforms, the outlet has recently significantly increased its reach and impact.

Only a few months after its founding, Medyascope had already become a destination for news and analysis, such as when it provided all-day coverage of the Ankara bombings in 2015, the deadliest terrorist attack in Turkey’s history, or when it aired a live video interview with former deputy prime minister Bilent Arınç, revealing that the top politician was now highly critical of the ruling party that he had co-founded.

Medyascope’s impactful reporting from the field continues. When Turkey’s mainstream media outlets, censored by the ruling party, were mostly silent about the government’s poor response to devastating forest fires in the summer of 2021, Medyascope sent multiple reporters to the worst-affected areas, producing original jour-
Legacy newsrooms are innovating, too. The daily Stûcî, which has one of the highest circulations in the country, is also among the most trusted news brands, according to the latest Reuters Digital News Report. Stûcî’s chief digital officer, Reha Başoğul, stresses that it is trying to innovate with a “reader-first” mindset. Stûcî “contextualizes” the first-party data of millions of its active users to understand their behaviors and needs. “We enrich this data with surveys, user experience studies, customer relationship management databases and in many other ways to cater the best content and the best product to our readers,” he adds.

Başoğul emphasizes that Stûcî is not only trusted by its audience but also by advertisers, unlike many digital publishers in Turkey, the newspaper prioritizes user engagement over page views as its primary metric. It also applies a unique policy for brand safety, blacklisting certain types of digital ads by using not only legal and commercial measures but also ethical ones. Başoğul believes that such steps enabled Stûcî to maintain reliable ad revenue even in such a harsh political and economic environment.

Yet legacy newsrooms are not immune from the lack of institutionalization and money. Turkey from institutions including the European Endowment Medyascope — unlike most media outlets in Turkey rocketing inflation to why the house of the only Assyrian journalists to things that affect the daily life of the local important. Medyascope’s Diyarbakir-based reporter coverage from the field in the southeast is even more — Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir — Medyascope also has International Press Institute’s Free Media Pioneer Award for Journalism the public craved. The outlet, which had won the Last year, Medyascope was targeted by a pro-govern- Producers today are more self-aware, more connected to their audience than ever before. Their content is not only news but also entertainment, and they are using digital tools to reach new audiences.

From the moment such a lawsuit is launched, you find “For more seasoned journalists, such lawsuits are not especially younger reporters who work without job se- forced to pay nearly $1,700 in compensation. In March, a court ruled that Toker “defamed” a founda- tion politician criticizing the ruling party. Erdoğan administration’s efforts to muzzle critical The outlet has become a destination for many independent outlets, according to the latest Medyascope’s rising interest in sponsorship and advertising in Turkish-language podcasts. The Kisa Dalga (Short Wave) podcast, Daktilo (Typewriter) 1984 pod- cast, and the Kapsül newsletter’s daily podcast Bulten (Bulletin) are among the best examples of next-genera- tion journalism in Turkey,” says Kaspar.

Podfresh also entered into a collective bargaining agreement with Turkey’s Journalists’ Union (TGS), the first for an independent news outlet outside of Turkey. It also produces a monthly podcast called “The Power of Local News” which highlights the important role local journalism plays in keeping people informed and engaged with their communities.

“President Erdoğan’s crackdown on independent media has led to a rise in investigative journalism in Turkey,” says Çiğdem Toker, one of the founders of Podfresh. “We believe that journalism should not only inform but also challenge power.”

Istanbul, investigated the awful conditions in animal shelters, and reported from the demonstrations of women against femicide. She became the story in March 2021 when police arrested her while covering a demon- stration of Boğaziçi University students, who were protesting the government’s anti-democratic moves to “capture” this institution, too. Like countless women in Turkey, Kaya had to cope with sexual harassment while doing her job. “I get used to silly remarks by men, like “for those who sarcastically ask why I have make-up and use perfume, because you know, I’m a journalist,” she says. Verbal abuse is the norm, and physical harassment is not rare if you’re a female journalist in Turkey.”
How to Increase Coverage of Assassinations, Safely

Reporting on targeted killings has lagged in South Africa, but networks of journalists are helping piece these stories together.

By Paul McNally
According to data by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC), assassinations in South Africa are on the rise. Between 2000 and 2020, there were more than 1,800 assassinations — 85% of which happened in the last five years, the initiative’s research shows. That means that in the six years between 2015 and 2020 almost the same number of assassinations happened as during the period between 2000 and 2015. But coverage of these killings has lagged.

This is understandable, says Julian Rademeyer, a journalist and director of the Organized Crime Observatory for East and Southern Africa at GI-TOC, noting that his organization has found that after coverage of the initial murder these stories are often forgotten. “The media space in South Africa has shrunk with smaller newsrooms, smaller budgets, and little local and rural coverage. That means that in a province like KwaZulu-Natal [where Mkhize was killed], there is very little follow-up coverage.”

There has been media coverage, but given the scale of the crisis, it has been superficial, Rademeyer adds. “The practice of taking a story and running with it over time has gone. We need to document this violence in a way that forces action,” he says. “There needs to be constant pressure on a set of politicians that are mostly out of touch with their citizens.”

That vigilance could come at a cost to the personal safety of journalists and their families and any whistleblowers who come forward to provide crucial information in the reporting process. Journalists around the world are increasingly under threat of harassment and detention — and in some cases of being tortured or killed — and most news outlets don’t have the resources to adequately protect them. It’s imperative that we consider their safety as we advocate for more coverage of potentially dangerous topics. “The Committee to Protect Journalists’ annual Global Impunity Index states that ‘Somalia remains the world’s worst country for unsolved killings of journalists.’ And, according to the same research, no one has been held accountable in 81 percent of cases worldwide where a journalist was murdered between 2011 and 2021.

With regards to my own safety, covering assassinations has made me hypervigilant when it comes to covering every story, no matter what the topic. Even if there isn’t an assassination featured in my story, I’ve become aware that certain actors can still use a contract killing, part of the economy of violence in South Africa, as an instrument to silence me. “Effectively it is about risk versus reward,” says Colin Pereira, chief strategist on journalist safety for the Committee to Protect Journalists. “Whenever you are dealing with people who have no respect for human life, like assassins, and also when there is money involved (even if the amount is relatively small) and you threaten that money supply or their reputations, then the risk is immense. As a journalist, you need to always do this analysis of the risk in advance.”

Pereira says that journalists often get focused to such an extent on their stories that even if they know the risks, they will ignore them or convinces themselves that those risks do not apply to them. When you calculate the risk, you need to think about the impact your reporting has on your life and your family. Pereira stresses, CPJ suggests investing “time in understanding the security implications of your topic; identifying the major actors and learning their motivations.” And be clear about whether you want to be identified. Stop the byline if the story will be appearing in a publication that is seen as an adversary to the state.

One organization devoted to keeping journalists safe is Periodistas de a Pie, a Mexican collaborative that seeks to elevate the quality of the country’s journalism through trainings, network building, and sharing resources. In addition to training up journalists in investigative techniques, reporting strategies, and other technical skills, Periodistas de a Pie also addresses the personal needs of journalists at a time when systemic violence is on the rise by offering support in self-care, security, and other coping and protection measures.

Maxime Koami Domegni, a reporter originally from Togo but who now works from Senegal, has covered apparent political assassinations in the past, including that of former minister, journalist, and president of the Movement for National Development political party, Atsutsé Kokouvi Agbobli, who was discovered dead on a beach in August 2008. “Official reports indicated that he committed suicide by drowning, after escaping from a hospital,” says Domegni. “But there were many contradictions around his death. I wrote about this in 2019. We still had to be extremely cautious, and very few people would accept talking about it.” Agbobli’s son revealed to Domegni that his father was planning to run as a candidate in the next presidential election. “In a country where hundreds of people have been killed for political reasons, under the same regime, some stories are particularly sensitive. Even 10 years after the fact,” says Domegni. Some 400 to 500 people were killed and thousands injured in Togo after the sudden death of its long-time president, Gnassingbé Eyadéma, in February 2005, and the subsequent disputed presidential elections in April. “Victims have filed complaints in court. But none of them have been investigated. Even the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Court of Justice condemned the Togolese state for denying...
“Extraction is a very complicated process,” says Pereira. “First, the threat needs to be verified as genuine, and an assessment carried out to determine if the individual can be relocated within the country or if a complete extraction is necessary. Will the family accompany them? Will it be permanent or temporary? “The question of funding the extraction and long-term support of the individual and family is crucial,” he says.

Domegni suggests creating a “shadow network” of journalists that would be willing to take over working on stories in case the original journalists are deported or worse. “It would split for virtual shadowing because this will mean there is no physical surveillance possible,” says Ruona J. Meyer, chair of the board at Alibi Investigations, a non-profit investigative unit and training center in Johannesburg. He founds that African journalists produce investigative podcasts, as well as an Emmy-nominated, multimedia investigative journalist and consultant originally from Nigeria. This would create a sense that even an assassination wouldn’t extinguish the story, and the coverage would endure regardless.

Indeed, organizations like Forbidden Stories, whose tagline is “Killing the journalist won’t kill the story,” already do this kind of work. Forbidden Stories completes and publishes the investigations of journalists who can no longer pursue their projects due to threats, imprisonment, or murder. After a journalist in danger submits their initial reporting, Forbidden Stories collaborates with both local and international media outlets to continue the journalist’s investigation. The goal, according to Forbidden Stories’ mission statement, is to show press freedom enemies that “even if you succeed in stopping a single messenger, you will not stop the coming of new voices.”

Creating shadow networks of journalists takes “power away from those who harm or harass and deport journalists,” says Meyer. “It provides real protection for the journalist because they can even leave before they are forced to. They know a shadow will take over. It is also about creating journalism practices that纽带ly prioritize the people, rather than profit. Press freedom needs to adapt and be as tactical and relentless as its attackers.”

When done right, stories about assassination get to the people behind the murder — not just the person or people responsible for the actual killing. I did a podcast series over a year ago called “Too Many Enemies” that looked at the assassination of a wealthy South African businessman Wandile Busani. A host of hitmen were arrested for the crime, and four were recently convicted of murder. But no arrest of “the mastermind” has been made.

In my reporting I have found disgruntled police officers to be the best source of information when looking for a massacre. In South Africa, it is common practice for a police officer to be moved off a case when he or she gets too close to solving it, if higher ups don’t want a conclusion. This can leave the officer despondent and eager to talk, at least anonymously.

It’s also imperative to remember that the people who are feeding you information are taking a risk in talking to you — whether they are a source for a story about assassinations or a whistleblower on a major investigation. The Platform to Protect Whistleblowers in Africa榴弹 rounds has proceedings, and deploys lawyers to help litigate on their behalf, argues that whistleblowers need a strong, independent media to counter these systems. “The media has a tendency to fight for the story and not necessarily the whistleblower, whose person becomes the evidence they require,” says investigative journalist and PLAAF board member Shadha Shaffir. “If the media house is not careful, their electronic or physical paper trail could expose the whistleblower,” which could put them at risk of assassination.

South Africa has benefited hugely from whistleblowers coming forward in the last few years to expose government corruption with assassinations escalating — and becoming prominent in public spaces — protection is becoming more difficult to offer.

In early June 2022, two men walked into a fancy eatery on the southeast seaboard of Rosebank, a neighborhood of glossy malls and high-rise apartments, and opened fire on a customer named Jason Lambe. The victim was a businessman who, according to police, was armed but had no time to reach for his gun as he sat waiting for a breakfast takeaway at 10:00 on a Thursday morning. One of the last major news reports on the killing was a press release from Johannesburg: “The victim was killed. He had no time to reach for his gun as he sat waiting for a breakfast takeaway at 10:00 on a Thursday morning. One of the last major news reports on the killing was a press release from Johannesburg: “The victim was killed. He had no time to reach for his gun as he sat waiting for a breakfast takeaway at 10:00 on a Thursday morning.”

“Extraction is a very complicated process,” says Domegni, who argues that journalists should consider most of these deaths as assassinations. In South Africa, it is common practice for a police officer to be moved off a case when he or she gets too close to solving it, if higher ups don’t want a conclusion. This can leave the officer despondent and eager to talk, at least anonymously.

Indeed, organizations like Forbidden Stories, whose tagline is “Killing the journalist won’t kill the story,” already do this kind of work. Forbidden Stories completes and publishes the investigations of journalists who can no longer pursue their projects due to threats, imprisonment, or murder. After a journalist in danger submits their initial reporting, Forbidden Stories collaborates with both local and international media outlets to continue the journalist’s investigation. The goal, according to Forbidden Stories’ mission statement, is to show press freedom enemies that “even if you succeed in stopping a single messenger, you will not stop the coming of new voices.”

Creating shadow networks of journalists takes “power away from those who harm or harass and deport journalists,” says Meyer. “It provides real protection for the journalist because they can even leave before they
“TO TELL YOUR OWN STORY IS A BASIC HUMAN RIGHT”

As more people are displaced from their home countries, newsrooms inside refugee camps are giving voice to these marginalized communities.

BY STEFANIA D’IGNOTI
Houzabay is a member of Dispatches in Exile, an editorial project giving migrants and asylum-seekers transiting through Bosnia and Herzegovina on their way to the European Union a platform to tell their own stories. The project, which began in 2012, was launched as the Covid-19 pandemic was worsening an already dire situation for migrants in Bosnia. Headed by the VII Foundation, a nonprofit media education group, Dispatches has shed light on refugees’ everyday lives inside Bosnian camps, from what they’ve been eating to the entrepreneurial initiatives they’ve launched to engage with the outside world.

As more people are displaced from their home countries due to conflicts, persecution, poverty, and the climate crisis, media outlets have covered the news mainly through numbers and facts reported by journalists who visit refugee camps but have little personal connection to the issue itself. To bridge that gap, some newsrooms have attempted to include more reporters with immigrant backgrounds to report on refugees. Dispatches is one example of a newsroom established inside a refugee camp — where the news is produced by migrants, for migrants. “Representation is very important in the media sector. [Western] journalists reporting on refugee camps will not approach and reflect on the situation on the ground in the same way as reporters who are, or were, refugees themselves,” says Katrin Schatz, project manager at the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom, which works with journalists in exile in Europe. “Refugees being able to tell their own stories will help break down stereotypes, clichés, and prejudices in the media, and consequently in people’s minds.”

Some European countries, especially those ringing the Mediterranean Sea, have taken in hundreds of thousands of refugees since 2015 due to their proximity to Africa and the Middle East. This has sometimes resulted in hostilities from locals, which have at times escalated into clashes, and a rise in nationalist politics across the continent. In 2018, the far-right, xenophobic League party, headed by Matteo Salvini, came to power in Italy and introduced anti-migrant measures. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has called migrants “a public security and terror risk” and is openly anti-immigrant, warning in July that Hungary must not become a “mixed-race” country. In 2021, Greece expanded a wall that was built a decade ago with the aim of stopping the wave of migrants attempting to cross into Europe.

More than a million people have transited through Greece and Italy since late 2014. Many of them have gone through the national asylum systems, which often entail long periods of waiting until an asylum application is approved. In the meantime, they are required to live with other asylum-seekers in the same reception centers where they will also attend school and language classes — sometimes amid local anti-migrant sentiments. In 2020, for example, violence erupted on Lesbos, a Greek island hosting thousands of asylum-seekers, where far-right vigilantes attacked humanitarian workers helping migrants.

**MIGRATORY BIRDS**

**IN GREECE**, where refugee camps are located near big cities like Athens, it often seems difficult to reach Greek audiences and educate them about what happens a few meters from their houses. Over the past five years, Migratory Birds — a refugee-run newspaper — has tried to do just that.

Migratory Birds was founded as a language improvement workshop led by the Network for Children’s Rights youth center, one of the many local NGOs working inside the Ritsona refugee camp, just outside the Greek capital. But it quickly turned into an opportunity to tackle misinformation about refugees in Greece. A group of 15 Afghan girls — fed up with the way asylum-seekers were depicted in mainstream European media — decided to turn the journalism workshop into an actual newspaper. Aside from writing about camp events, “the goal was to turn it into an outlet to communicate their fears and frustrations, but also their hopes and dreams,” explains Ioanna Papaioannou, a professional journalist and media trainer who used to work in documentary filmmaking.

The first issue was published in April 2017 and included stories on the situation in the camp, book reviews, and stories about refugees’ journeys to
Europe. Today, the team includes two dozen reporters between the ages of 13 and 25 and publishes in five languages. Articles in each issue vary from reported features on Athens’ best places to eat to essays about love, pieces about food and traditions in writers’ home countries, and poetry. In 2020, Migratory Birds also launched a website to act as an archive of the print editions.

Mahdia Hossaini, an Afghan refugee born and raised in Iran and living in Athens since 2016, has been with the Migratory Birds team since its inception. “The newspaper initially helped me to familiarize myself with the small community of the camp because, as a woman, it was very difficult to integrate into that specific space,” Hossaini says. Many of the men in the camp did not support the idea of women being in charge of a news outlet because they felt it would distract them from more suitable activities for women. However, “we slowly left behind the closed space of the camp,” Hossaini explains. “This project was a way to enter the local community. We were even invited to speak at many different schools and universities.”

The first issue of Migratory Birds was integrated into a Greek newspaper — Efimerida ton Sintakton — as an 8-page insert. In total, around 13,000 copies are distributed bi-monthly across the country. “It’s a unique experience for us Greeks,” Papaioannou says. “Even people in small villages are exposed to the sight of foreign alphabets next to the Greek one and to images from migrants’ lenses that they wouldn’t otherwise see.”

Despite the anti-migrant rhetoric from some in the country, the reception has so far mainly been positive, she adds. Readers have sent letters of support to Migratory Birds, thanking the writers for contributing a different perspective to news about the camps and migrants. Migratory Birds hopes one day this will lead to political change, at least on the local level, as more people see the human stories behind the international crisis.

The team receives training from journalists from outlets like Reporters United, an organization that promotes investigative journalism in Greece, and Efimerida. They help with headline writing and digital publishing as well as audio editing for occasional

Staffed only by refugees in Kakuma, Kenya’s second largest refugee camp, Kanere’s goal is to challenge the narrative aid agencies present to international journalists.

Photograph by Tania Triantafyllou
Since the majority of asylum seekers own a smartphone, Gafić had a good starting point to develop a newsroom. “Our newsroom is very low-cost, and the professional training focuses on refining their skills to produce photos and videos, accompanied by a catchy text, to post on social media,” Gafić explains. “Even if the majority of participants in these projects will not become professional journalists, the skill of knowing how to tell your own story has a significant psychological effect on [their] lives.”

As a social media-focused outlet (although stories are also shared on Dispatch’s website), one of the first assignments is to publish on Instagram about their daily meals. They write something about themselves as well as any personal story connected to the specific meal pictured in the post. Some documented the daily food they received from the United Nations agencies administering the transit camps to raise awareness of nutritional problems migrants face; others preferred to show how they cook for themselves and each other to replicate the flavors of home.

“Refugees being able to tell their own stories will help break down stereotypes, clichés, and prejudices in the media, and consequently in people’s minds”

KATRIN SCHATZ, PROJECT MANAGER, EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR PRESS AND MEDIA FREEDOM

From there, participants like Iranian photographer Hozhabry were able to improve technical skills with a focus on creating a storytelling narrative to engage audiences. Ayanle, who is from Somalia and declined to give his last name for security reasons, traveled without family to Bosnia and decided to open up about the traumas he experienced along the way through a short video showing his current living conditions in the camp. Twenty-year-old Afghan twins Roseena and Melina Hafizi documented the clothes they designed during their three-month stay in the Ušivak transit camp to show how migrants are eager to contribute their professional and artistic skills to local communities.

When a fashion brand run by asylum-seekers in Ušivak was launched and had a runway show in Sarajevo, Hozhabry reported the story. He documented the whole process, from the brand’s inception to the sewing and design sessions to the gala night itself. Hozhabry’s photos were picked up by local Bosnian newspapers. “But they misspelled my name, when giving me credits in the print edition,” Hozhabry says. “It made me feel without an identity. I think this would not have happened, there would have been more attention to this detail, if a migrant were in the newsroom. It might seem like an irrelevant detail to anyone else, but it made me realize how much we still need to achieve representa- tion.”

To develop yet another perspective on migration, Gafić is hoping to bring Dispatches to the migrants’ countries...
of origin, particularly Ukraine and Afghanistan, to document the beginnings of migrants’ journeys. “It’s fundamental to keep these projects alive, and reproduce them elsewhere, specifically in the places they come from,” Gafić says. “It empowers them even before they start making their way to Western countries.”

MIGRANTES 2.0

IN SOME CASES, already established news outlets are setting aside spaces for migrant voices. In Sicily, Salvo Cona, managing director of the online newspaper Il Soldalite, launched in 2016 a section in his local newspaper called Migrantes 2.0, aimed at giving a platform to those seeking asylum in Italy. “The goal was to let them tell stories about their own lives and their experiences in the new community,” Cona explains. “We wanted to be setting an example of a multi-ethnic newsroom that had the unique feature of having part of its staff speaking from inside the Italian asylum system.”

Participants were scouted through a summer workshop to improve their Italian language skills. Some like 17-year-old Tanin from Bangladesh prefer to talk about their new life in Sicily and their plans to fully integrate once they receive their paperwork; others prefer to engage with stories about their home countries, such as 18-year-old Saher Belili, who wrote an essay about the white beaches of his native Hammamet in Tunisia, or 20-year-old Dalma Huang, who described in detail a typical wedding ceremony in her native Congo. Cona provides journalism training, which includes interviewing and multimedia skills, as well as press freedom education. Italian teachers from the language school in the refugee centers provide the writing and editing support.

Abdullah Abdulrahman, a 20-year-old Libyan living in Italy since 2018, recently published a story for Migrantes 2.0 about Marcelin Oumbaru, a man from Cameroon living in the Tusca camp inMessina who was in a play organized by the local community. Abdulrahman says publishing this story gave him the motivation to keep writing about the struggles and successes of migrant journeys to Europe. “Being a journalist is my real dream. I don’t like being a teacher because I like to write or because I want to be on TV. I like it because I want to help those who want to get their message out in the world.”

KANERE

ALTHOUGH MIGRANT newsrooms are just starting to emerge in Europe, in Africa — a continent that hosts an estimated 30 million refugees — a similar initiative that has been running for decades has evolved into a prominent media outlet. Kanere began in 2008 as a school club inside the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, which accommodates around 200,000 people from countries like South Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia. The outlet quickly turned into a watchdog platform to protect the rights of the residents.

Staffed only by refugees in Kakuma, Kanere covers every aspect of life in this city-like camp. With its six print editions per year and a digital platform launched in 2016, its goal is to hold aid agencies working inside the camp accountable and challenge the narrative they present to international journalists during press visits. The outlet also provides residents crucial information they might need to move around and be safe during their daily lives.

“Humanitarian workers have been telling stories on our behalf, but from our own perspective, targeting donors’ money and giving a completely disconnected image of our everyday reality,” says Tolossa Asrat, lead editor of Kanere, who’s been living in Kakuma for the past 10 years. “We felt a moral obligation to tell the story of what is going on inside the camp, from our own perspective.”

Asrat had been a radio reporter at a local station in Ethiopia before migrating to Kenya. This background led him to volunteer as a trainer around six years ago. During that time, he has been able to break stories that had an impact on his fellow refugees.

Recently, his reporting shed light on the increasing suicide rates in Kakuma and the U.N.’s response to the camp’s social health issues. “We report for our own security and protection, as refugees and journalists,” Asrat says. “But we also hope to target policymakers as an audience. If they read us, it can help them make informed decisions that will lead to positive changes in our lives.”

The outlet is expanding its scope and reporting more regularly from outside the camp. After living in Kakuma for four years, Qaabata Boru resettled in Canada but continues to report for Kanere to give those living in the camp an outside perspective. One of his recent stories — which detailed how authorities stood the lives of people displaced by unstable regime, famine, and natural disasters are increasingly essential.

“If we neglect refugee voices in the media, there’ll be no room for improvement of mainstream coverage of migration,” Gafić says.
In the early 1980s until the Press closed in 1982.


Anita Harris is author of “The View From Third Street,” a memoir that recounts her experiences co-founding the Harrisburg Independent Press (HIP), a weekly alternative newspaper HIP began in conjunction with the 1972 trial of the Harrisburg Seven, in which anti-war nuns and priests were accused of conspiring to kidnap National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger and blow up underground heating tunnels in Washington, D.C.

Bernard Edinger died in Paris on June 25, 2022. A French national, Edinger grew up in the United States in the 1950s and attended the French Lycée in New York. He returned to France and resided in Paris and reported from nearly 50 countries on four continents.

In 1952, Giago joined the Navy and served on the USS “Boxer,” a ship of the “Boxer” class, and reported from nearly 50 countries on four continents. During his 32-year career with the news agency, he worked from London, Paris, Kiev, Jerusalem, and Nairobi. The many stories he covered included the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, the 1979 fall of Saigon, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, and coups and uprisings in Africa. In 2004, Edinger was named Chevalier (Knight) of the Légion d’Honneur, the highest French decoration for military and civil accomplishments.

George Abraham, founder and publisher of New Canadian Media (NCM), accepted the Carnegie Foundation in 1996 and reported from nearly 50 countries on four continents. During his 32-year career with the news agency, he worked from London, Paris, Kiev, Jerusalem, and Nairobi. The many stories he covered included the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, the 1979 fall of Saigon, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, and coups and uprisings in Africa. In 2004, Edinger was named Chevalier (Knight) of the Légion d’Honneur, the highest French decoration for military and civil accomplishments.

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Giacomo Mochhosky is the new dean of the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at the City University of New York (CUNY). A native of Argentina, she is the only Latina serving as dean at a
graduate school of journalism in the U.S. Mochhosky joined The New York Times in 2016 and launched the nation’s first bilingual master’s journalism program in English and Spanish. She later became executive director of the Center for Community Media (CCM), which supports news outlets covering immigrants and communities of color across the country.

Tim Giago, an Ogala Lakota journalist, newspaper pioneer, and 1991 Nieman Fellow, died in Rapid City, S.D., on July 24, 2022, at the age of 88.

In 1981, Giago founded the Lakota Times (later renamed Indian Country Today), the first independently owned Native American weekly in the United States. He later founded other newspapers including the Lakota Journal and the Native Sun News.

Giago helped launch the Native American Press Association (now called the Native American Journalists Association) in 1983 and served on its first executive board. In 1994, he was selected for the South Dakota Hall of Fame, and in 2007, he became the first Native American to be inducted into the South Dakota Newspaper Hall of Fame. His other honors include the 1985 H. L. Mencken Award for editorial writing and 2000 National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) Achievement Award for his lifetime service to journalism and dedication to NABJ.

Throughout his career, he mentored and trained other Native journalists and worked tirelessly to promote and support a free press in Indigenous communities.

As a boy, he attended the Holy Rosary Indian Mission School (now the Red Cloud Indian School) on the Pine Ridge Reservation, where he was born and raised. He wrote about his experiences in his book “Children Left Behind: The Dark Legacy of Indian Mission Boarding Schools,” which tells the story of the widespread abuse suffered by the children in the schools run by the Catholic Church and the attempted destruction of Lakota culture, religion and traditions. The book was illustrated by his daughter Denise Giago.

In 1952, Giago joined the Navy and went to college on the GI Bill, attending the University of Nevada, Reno. Reflecting on his life and career, he explained that he received his Lakota name, Namwica Kichi, He Stands Up for Them — an inpi (sweat lodge) ceremony celebrating his safe return from service in Korea. His weekly column, “Notes from Indian Country,” was syndicated by Knight Ridder and appeared in newspapers across the U.S.

In 2005, Giago wrote in Nieman Reports about freedom of the press in Indian Country and what drove him to start The Lakota Times. “While working as a reporter for The Rapid City Journal, I was bothered by the fact that although I had been born and raised on the nearby Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, I was seldom given the opportunity to do news stories about the people of that reservation. One editor told me he believed that since I was Native American, I would not be able to be objective in my reporting. I replied, ‘All of your other reporters are white. Are they objective when covering the white community?’”

He told Nieman Reports that his proudest accomplishment was bringing more Native Americans into journalism. “My lasting legacy would be the dozens of young Indian journalists I sent out into the mainstream media in both newspapers and radio.”
Going beyond surface level diversity talk requires Power Dynamics in Journalism

Sounding context of stories I brought forward.

There were many times race, racism, and police brutality. Often, especially when discussing stories about him his name (it was Lonnie Moore), young man stopped to talk to me. I asked a young Black man was like — from being called for 10 years, I was a journalist at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. I worked on a national, award-winning daily radio show called The Current, which had 2.5 million listeners a week. I was fueled for the role formally, I was told I would launch a new civil rights movement and unleash a public reckoning about anti-Black racism in every industry, including journalism. I pushed back on editorial decisions deeply and spelled it out loud to make sure I got it right: “J-A-R-R-O-D. Jones.”

As our conversation started, another young man joined us. I asked him his name (it was Lonnie Moore), turned on my mic, and asked him: How many Black men were in this neighborhood? Lonnie described what life as a young Black man was like — from being called the-n-word, being stopped for no apparent reason by police, and the heartbreak of watching injustices toward Black people repeatedly.

As our conversation started, another young man joined us. I asked him his name and spelled it out loud to make sure I got it right: “J-A-R-O-D. Jones.”

What followed was a 45-minute duet in which these two strangers were completing each other's sentences, mirroring each other's accounts of being harassed by police for being Black. I wanted to air the powerful conversation between Lonnie and Jarrod.

But my executive producer questioned if the men had given me their real names — implying that she didn’t believe what they described and didn’t trust that they were who they said they were. I told her that Jarrod corrected the spelling of his name.

The “at home everywhere and nowhere” theme is a large part of what right by many of my communities. I felt like it was describing my entire life. I had spent my whole childhood on the move — going from Egypt to Toronto to Saudi Arabia and then to high school in the U.A.E.

The “at home everywhere and nowhere” theme is a large part of what pushed me toward journalism. As an Egyptian-Canadian, Muslim, Arabic-, English- and French-speaking girl, I knew that the media often had not done right by many of my communities. I felt I never quite belong. That quote hung above my 10th grade English teacher’s desk. "No," he said. "J-A-R-R-O-D. Jones."

Writing the hard truths about journalism opened the door for me to be part of shaping its future.
“IF [YOU] BELIEVE THAT IT’S TRUE THAT IN A DEMOCRACY, CITIZENS ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT ACTORS, THEN THE COVERAGE SHOULD BE CITIZEN-FOCUSED”

JENNIFER BRANDEL