

Export Report Syndicate 10: Global perspectives on crisis and disaster journalism

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In 2024, the Emergency Events Database (EM-DAT) recorded close to 400 natural disasters globally. The United States alone has experienced 27-billion-dollar weather and climate disasters since the end of 2024 (World Economic Forum, 2025). Similarly, the 2025 Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID) indicates that countries and territories around the globe reported their highest disaster displacement figures on record, with 65.8 million internal displacements recorded (Reliefweb, 2024). The costliest 2024 events included many tropical cyclones including US Atlantic Hurricanes Helene and Milton, wildfires on almost every continent, flooding events in Italy, Spain and South and Central China, and Earthquakes in Myanmar and landslides in Peru (Reliefweb, 2024). In 2025, crisis and disaster journalism stand at a critical crossroads, shaped by escalating global emergencies, technological transformation, restructuring from a public health crisis (2020 Covid-19) and shifting public trust (Edleman Trust Barometer, 2025).

Journalists face the threat of government budget cuts to agencies that share much of the official information, making the job of local journalists more challenging (Nielsen, 2025). While disaster journalism relevant and a growing a global concern, it remains grounded in local reporting practices and the news values of proximity and impact (Mast & Temmerman, 2021; O’neill & Harcup, 2009). Studies concerning the proximity element of disasters (Ahva & Pantti, 2014) and the role of local information in emergencies (Radcliffe and Wallace, 2021). When a disaster strikes people are still more likely to seek out information from local government and social media before local news (Liu, Fraustino & Jin, 2015). Journalism and disasters are interdependent, especially trust in reporter meteorologists when weather related disasters ensue (Clark-Ginsberg & Roberts, 2020; Perreault, G. Perreault, M. and Maares, 2024).

With increased climate disasters comes more need for climate reporting. Local journalists must have boots on the ground to report on disasters, but their stories must also compete with the stories of citizens, government agencies and non-local social media influencers. Local reporting practices and the news values of proximity and impact have been tied to crisis reporting (Mast and Temmerman, 2021). Research on media coverage of disasters shows gaps between what journalists cover, and what audiences and authorities think they should cover (Ewart & McLean, 2019). Other research has looked at the criticism of disaster news coverage by government officials, emergency managers and experts (Joye & DeWitt, 2018). The need for public information in crises is something both journalists and public information entities recognize as vital to initial response, and even long-term resiliency (Worley, Smith-Frigerio, Houston, 2024). As the world grapples with increasingly interconnected crises—ranging from climate change and geopolitical conflict to pandemics and economic instability—the role of journalism in informing, contextualizing, and mobilizing public response has never been more vital. The wars taking place in Ukraine, Sudan, and Gaza are apt examples as well.

Climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and unsustainable development are converging to create complex, cascading disasters. These crises are not only environmental but also social and political, often exacerbating existing inequalities and vulnerabilities. Science reporting and science journalism have a challenging task to educate people of the crisis or disaster at hand but also engage the public around the long-term implications of crises and disasters (Harrison, 2024, Dunwoody, 2020). The World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report 2025 echoes this sentiment, highlighting a fractured global landscape where geopolitical tensions, cyber threats, and misinformation compound the challenges of disaster response (Daco & Rozkrut, 2025). That said, journalists are increasingly required to navigate this complexity, connecting dots across disciplines and regions to provide holistic coverage with less resources and more niche audiences.

Crisis journalism today is tasked with more than just reporting facts—it must interpret, contextualize, and humanize. It also faces the challenge of misinformation and setting the record straight. The news media still plays a crucial role in shaping public understanding and policy responses post disaster. However, the pressure to deliver real-

time updates often clashes with the need for depth and accuracy. The International Rescue Committee's 2025 Emergency Watchlist identifies the top 10 humanitarian crises, including those in Sudan, Syria, and Myanmar, where conflict, climate, and economic instability converge (International Rescue Committee, 2025). In these regions, journalists face immense challenges: restricted access, safety threats, and the ethical dilemma of reporting on suffering without sensationalism. In a disaster journalists must seek to provide information while also navigating precarious and unsure circumstances, hazards and impacts (Perreault, MF et al., 2024). They may be unable to report in their communities because they evacuate with others or lack the resources to cover more complex disasters.

As mentioned, much local news often lacks local information (Napoli, 2018) need to address critical information needs. Studies have also found that audiences say that trustworthy local news is increasingly hard to find (Pew, 2018) and that said local newspapers still provide more local news than any other source (more than 60 percent) (Mahone, 2019). That said, research has found that people trust the local government sources often shared in local reporting, even if they are found on social media (Kim, Lowrey, Buzzelli & Heath, 2020). This means that journalists and specifically local journalists have a responsibility to share this information directly (through news publications) and indirectly (through social media and other channels). In summary we several key challenges define the current state of disaster journalism: misinformation and disinformation, access and safety, resource constraints and audience fatigue.

Given these concerns we acknowledge that the state of journalism in disaster and crisis is in peril and journalists must find new ways to engage readers without resorting to sensationalism or despair and with less repeatable sources and public trust. The **central question** the members of this syndicate will discuss and answer is: ***"What are the local, national, and global implications of changes that influence news coverage and change access?"***

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