

INFORMATION
INTEGRITY

SECURITY
& STABILITY

ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT

The Value of Journalism

Global evidence on why
media matters to economics,
national security and crises



SOCIAL
COHESION

Evidence Brief:

‘The Value of journalism’ - headline figures

Economic return

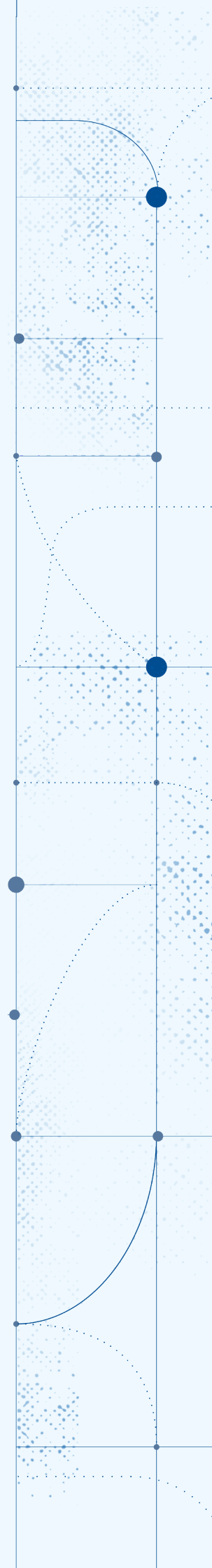
- Investigative journalism delivers strong returns. Every US\$1 spent on journalism can result in more than \$100 in savings to the public through reclaimed funds, improved public services and reduced corruption.
- Media freedom supports economic growth. A study of 97 countries has shown a 1-2 percent reduction in real GDP growth associated with declining press freedom.
- Disinformation costs societies an estimated US\$350–500 billion each year. Independent journalism is one of the most effective and evidence-based defences against it.

Security

- While governments routinely invest billions in military, cyber and border security, information insecurity is increasingly one of the most significant threats to democratic stability. In 2026, the World Economic Forum ranked disinformation as the second most pressing global risk. Supporting independent journalism offers a comparatively low-cost opportunity: experts estimate that 0.1% of global GDP – equivalent to just 15 days of global military spending – could fund healthy public media and secure information environments for citizens around the world.
- Media freedom dramatically reduces the likelihood of conflict, repression, and human rights violations. A study of 152 countries associated greater access to free media with a reduction in human rights abuses.

Crises and disaster

- News coverage has been shown to dramatically increase the size and speed of international humanitarian response and save lives. A study of more than 2,300 disasters showed that a single news story in the New York Times generated an additional half a million US dollars in official aid.



1. Introduction

Media freedom and journalism are under attack around the world. AI-fuelled disinformation is confusing and polarizing audiences, government censorship is sharply rising, physical and online violence towards journalists is increasing, and the journalism business model is failing. At the same time, funding for public media is declining,¹ and drastic cuts to international aid and media development budgets have reduced the amount of reliable, independent journalism available to audiences globally.²

This report explains why these cuts and attacks matter – and what is at stake when journalism declines and disappears. It synthesises the latest academic research on the value of journalism and its role in economics, national security and crises. The report is focused on public interest journalism, that is: reporting that is independent, accurate and ethical, and that seeks to inform the public about important issues affecting their lives, enable debate, and hold power to account.³

The evidence collected here demonstrates that this journalism can have a profound and positive impact on societies and individuals globally. Its role supporting democracy is very well established: journalism shares the information citizens need to cast meaningful votes, it is a check and balance on power, and it acts as a conduit between citizens and elected officials.⁴ But journalism's impact goes far beyond that. As the evidence in the report indicates:

- **Journalism is an economic enabler:** it can reduce corruption, lower the cost of doing business, encourage the fair and transparent distribution of resources, and support economic growth and development.
- **Journalism supports national security:** it makes societies more resilient to disinformation and the interference of malicious actors, and reduces the risk of conflict and war.
- **Journalism improves the response to crises:** it provides information that saves lives, and improves preparation and response to disaster and crises.

Journalism is also a surprisingly cost-effective way to achieve these positive outcomes, and it offers a high return on investment. As the evidence in this review shows, every \$1 spent on journalism, can result in more than \$100 in savings to the public through improved public services and reduced corruption.⁵

Journalism's most significant impact, however, is that it plays a *preventative* and *protective* role – as part of a healthy information infrastructure. Research suggests that public interest journalism can increase societal trust and protect communities from the harms of disinformation. This function is more important than ever, given the far reaching and profound impact of AI-fuelled disinformation that is estimated to cost hundreds of billions of dollars annually.⁶ This disinformation is also confusing audiences, undermining democratic institutions, increasing extremism and polarization, and exacerbating conflict and crises.⁷

Demonstrating the impact of journalism

It is notoriously difficult to demonstrate the full impact that journalism has on society.⁸ It is clear that individual news stories and campaigns can change the world: journalism has ended the careers of Presidents and Prime Ministers, revealed corruption and wrongdoing, and prompted far-reaching changes to law, policy, business and culture.⁹ Some of this impact can be captured in evaluations and cost benefit analyses.¹⁰

But journalism's biggest impact is at the aggregate level – as an institution that reports on day-to-day issues, educates audiences, and keeps power in check. Indeed, rigorous research shows that news outlets can have a positive impact on the world *simply by existing* because elites behave better when they think they will be monitored.¹¹

Moreover, journalism is an **enabling condition** and it can have numerous and ongoing, indirect benefits that are hard to measure. For example, independent journalism supports healthy democratic processes, and the benefits of good governance touch on almost every aspect of life – from lower mortality rates of children, to more competitive food prices.¹² In addition, journalism can have **cascading and compounding** returns: an investigation in one country can inspire and support similar work both locally and internationally.¹³

At the macro level, scholars have shown that media freedom is strongly correlated with a wide range of very positive outcomes. Countries with high levels of media freedom tend to enjoy higher levels of democracy, and human and economic development; and they have lower levels of corruption, polarization, conflict and poverty.¹⁴ Historically, it was unclear whether this was a case of correlation or causation. Could it be that the same external factors that enabled media freedom, also led to these higher levels of democracy and development, for example? Over the last two decades, a growing body of rigorous, cross-disciplinary research has demonstrated causation in some of these relationships, and illustrated the causal pathways that enable this impact.¹⁵

Some of the most rigorous findings come from large quantitative experiments, where participants are exposed to media content, and then surveyed or observed, and compared with control groups. This has included important natural experiments, where scholars have taken advantage of natural variation in news provision – for example, newspapers closing down, or a radio station extending the range of their broadcast – to understand the impact of journalism on communities.

Two of the most consistent findings in this literature are that journalism has a positive impact because 1) it provides trustworthy information – and continues to do so in an era of widespread disinformation; and 2) it creates greater accountability among officials and elites, which leads to a wide range of positive societal outcomes, from better governance to lower levels of pollution.

While the existing research shows that journalism *can* have a profound and positive impact on society – much more research is needed to understand exactly *when* and *how* this impact may occur. Key findings and concepts in the research literature are sometimes based on a single case study, and it is not clear whether the findings can be extrapolated to other geographic areas, or different forms of media content. The majority of this research has also been done in the United States and Europe, and there are far fewer studies exploring the impact of journalism in the Global South.

Section 2 of this brief introduces the role of journalism in information integrity and good governance. Sections 3, 4 and 5 then summarise the research on journalism's impact in three specific thematic areas: the economy, national security, and the response to crisis and conflict.

2. Information integrity, accountability and good governance

Journalism plays a significant and positive role in society by providing trustworthy information, mobilizing citizens to vote, and holding the powerful to account. This contributes to a healthy information system and makes government and public services more effective.

Trustworthy news and information integrity

Journalism informs audiences about current affairs and the issues that affect them. An important natural experiment in Tanzania, for example, showed that communities with newly gained access to public interest radio became more knowledgeable and interested in public affairs. This included an eight percent increase in the average community member being able to name the Tanzanian Prime Minister.¹⁶ Similar findings have been replicated globally, using a wide range of methods.¹⁷ In the United States, for example, one large scale survey found that, in areas where there is more news coverage of the local US House representative, voters are more able to name their representatives, describe their ideological position, and have an opinion on their work.¹⁸

This knowledge can help insulate audiences from the impact of disinformation. A significant study tracking the online news consumption of 2,200 internet users in Brazil, included four waves of surveys asking respondents about their belief in various forms of disinformation. The researchers found that the more a respondent accessed legacy news sources, the less likely they were to believe in false rumours.¹⁹ These findings were corroborated in a significant international study of 4,732 participants in Brazil, India and the United Kingdom that showed news consumption helps people become more informed, and this may make them more resilient to disinformation.²⁰ In addition, one study in the United Kingdom showed that respondents who consumed more legacy media were far less likely to believe in, or share, disinformation about the national election²¹ (see also: Section 4: National security and stability).

Researchers have also demonstrated that journalism motivates audiences to engage with political processes, and turn-out to vote, and it is associated with higher levels of trust in political institutions. This has been demonstrated in multiple countries, using a range of research methods including surveys and experiments.²² A large experimental study in Mozambique, for example, found that the distribution of a free newspaper led to voter turnout increasing by five percent.²³ While a longitudinal study in the US of voting patterns from 1869 to 2004, found that newspapers had a robust positive effect on political participation.²⁴

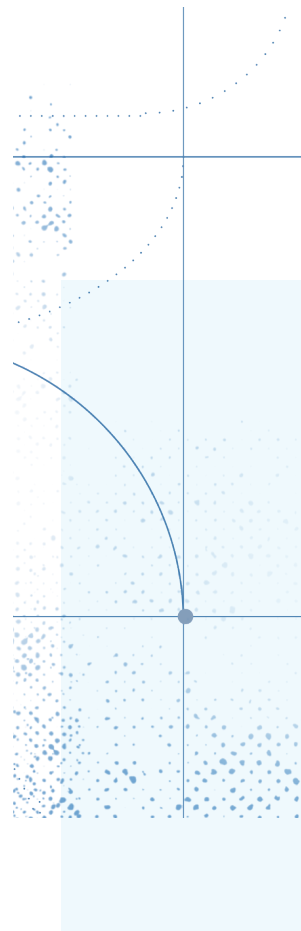
What happens in 'news deserts'?

There is a rich research literature exploring so-called 'news deserts': communities where commercial pressures have led to newsroom closures, and there is now little or no original local news being made. This research – primarily conducted in the United States – shows that, where local news outlets close, citizens become less informed; and voter turn-out and trust in democratic institutions goes down.²⁵ There is also less scrutiny of elected officials and local business after newspapers close, and government can become less efficient. One study found that newspaper closure was associated with the average municipal deficit increasing by approximately US\$53 per capita.²⁶ Companies are also more likely to commit financial violations, when there is no local newspaper present, and the average penalty for these goes up by 15.2 percent, suggesting that the lack of media scrutiny leads to more serious rule breaking.²⁷ Finally, one study has shown that, when newspapers close, companies start to pollute more.²⁸ These studies are based on large data sets and rigorous statistical regressions, and they control for other factors that may have caused the changes. A growing research literature has started exploring news deserts outside the United States, detailing large geographic areas with limited local news across Africa, Europe, Asia, and Latin America.²⁹ This is important work because media landscapes vary significantly, and local context is crucial for understanding the interplay between different forms of media, and their role in public life. Some scholars have cautioned against overly focusing on 'news deserts'³⁰ as it risks romanticizing the historical provision of local journalism (some of which was poor quality), nevertheless the underlying research does help illustrate the value of journalism to local communities.

Democracy, accountability and good governance

Journalism doesn't just share and disseminate information, it also has a critical and analytical function. Journalists monitor, investigate and critique the operation of power at all levels of society – from local court rooms to national governments, and the board rooms of global technology companies. Scholars have established that higher levels of media freedom are connected to stronger democratic systems.³¹ Indeed, there are no countries with high levels of democracy that do not have high levels of media freedom. Moreover, when countries experience democratic backsliding, media freedom is often the first element of democracy to come under attack and be eroded.³²

Journalism creates accountability among elites and civil servants. Research shows that this can significantly improve the quality and efficiency of public service delivery - from education, health,



and prison systems, through to public transport and street repairs. The economist James T. Hamilton demonstrates the wide range of this impact in his important book, *Democracy's Detectives*.³³ Analyzing 10,000 pieces of investigative journalism in the US, Hamilton finds that reporting often leads to resignations, indictments, less corruption, and more efficient public services – and these ultimately save the state money. In one example, an investigative series on the probation system in North Carolina led to corrupt and under-performing officials being fired, as well as the introduction of new laws, policies and state spending. Hamilton estimates that for each dollar the newsroom spent on the investigation, there was US\$287 in net policy benefits during the first year of the reforms alone.

Groves' important research experiments in Tanzania show that journalism can also improve service delivery, outside developed liberal democracies.³⁴ Groves worked with local radio stations to research and broadcast investigations on public service delivery failures in 103 communities across Tanzania. Seven months later, auditors who visited these communities scored their service delivery higher than a group of control communities. The impact of the journalism was equivalent to one in four of the communities receiving an additional road or water point repair that the control group communities did not receive. Groves' follow-up research showed that the district officials responded to journalism not because they were concerned with public perceptions – but because they worried about how negative coverage would make them look to their federal superiors.³⁵

As we see in later sections of this report, media accountability, and the fear of critical reporting, can incentivise elites to perform and behave better across sectors. This results in lower levels of corruption, more efficient markets, the more equitable and transparent distribution of public goods, and more comprehensive responses to humanitarian crises.

3. Journalism as an economic enabler

Press freedom is an important enabler for economic growth, stability and development. Journalism can lead to more efficient and equitable distribution of public resources, and it significantly reduces corruption and illicit financial flows.

Evidence base

- Countries with higher levels of press freedom have higher levels of GDP, economic growth, economic stability, foreign direct investment, and economic development; and they have lower levels of corruption.
- Public spending is more likely to be released, and go where it is intended, when there is local journalism present.
- Corrupt incumbents are less likely to be re-elected, when their actions are reported in local media.

Key data

- Every US\$1 spent on journalism can result in more than US\$100 in savings to the public through reclaimed funds, improved public services and reduced corruption.
- When a country declines in press freedom on the World Press Freedom Index, there is an associated 1-2 percent reduction in real GDP growth.
- In Norway, 25% of all fraud cases are detected by journalists.

How impact occurs

Journalism acts as a conduit between government, financial institutions and the public, providing fast, reliable information. This reduces information asymmetries, can lower the cost of doing business, and attract investment. Journalism also increase accountability for elites, which can lead to more efficient distribution of resources, and lower levels of corruption.

Global studies have repeatedly demonstrated the connection between journalism, economic development and growth.³⁶

A robust study of 97 countries shows that when a country declines in press freedom on the World Press Freedom Index, there is an associated 1-2 percent reduction in real GDP growth – and that this is slow to recover.³⁷

Independent journalism also appears to have a strong stabilizing effect on national economies. An analysis of 259 banks in 46 countries found that press freedom is associated with lower systemic risk in the banking sector.³⁸ In addition, Roll and Talbott's analysis shows that media freedom is one of 14 policy areas where countries can make changes that significantly improve short to medium term economic activity. Conversely, the authors find that restrictions on political freedoms or the press are typically followed by substantial reductions in economic growth.³⁹ Recent studies have started to illustrate how this impact takes place in practice.

Journalism provides a conduit for fast, reliable information between financial institutions, corporations, governments, and the public. This information make countries more attractive to investors, because it is associated with lower costs of doing business, less risk in the banking sector, increased compliance with the rule of law, and lower information asymmetries.⁴⁰ Multiple studies⁴¹ show that the increased presence of journalists lowers the rate at which companies exaggerate their financial results; and it also reveals financial misconduct, which improves financial transparency. An analysis of 263 firms sanctioned for accounting fraud in the United States finds that in 29 percent of cases, the press reported on the fraud before the firm made a public acknowledgement.

More broadly, journalism supports economic development through its scrutiny of elites, which can lead to more efficient governance and better public service delivery (see Section 2). It can also ensure that the benefits of economic growth are redistributed, rather than captured by elites.⁴² Single country case studies provide compelling examples of how this works in practice. In Uganda, for example, one significant study explored what happened when the national government began publishing the amount of funding that was allocated to primary schools, in newspapers local to the schools. This created scrutiny of spending, and questions about where resources were going. The newspaper campaign resulted in a substantial increase of funds reaching the schools – from 13 percent to 80 percent.⁴³

Media coverage may also incentivise elites to act in the public interest, and this can lead to greater redistribution of resources.⁴⁴ A study in India found that the expectation that newspapers would publish performance 'report cards' led to electoral candidates placing greater emphasis on pro-poor spending in high-poverty areas.⁴⁵ In the United States, a seminal study showed that federal assistance to low-income households was greater in counties where more households had radios and were better informed.⁴⁶ The author suggests that radio became a conduit between citizen and elected representative, making the latter more responsive to the public.

Exposing and deterring corruption

Journalism plays an important role supporting economic performance by both revealing corruption, and deterring it from taking place in the future. Global studies consistently show that high levels of press freedom are correlated with lower levels of corruption.⁴⁷ A study of more than 1,200 corporate fraud cases occurring in 79 countries found a very strong correlation between free press and reported fraud cases, noting: "the more freely journalists can write, the more events are detected."⁴⁸ One analysis in Norway found that investigative journalists were instrumental in detecting 25 percent of all fraud cases in the country.⁴⁹ In addition, a study of fraud in large US companies showed that the media identified 13 percent of all incidences compared to only 7 percent detected by the financial regulator.⁵⁰ Conversely, newspaper closures can lead to an increase in corporate misconduct (see Section 2, News deserts).

The presence of local news outlets can increase the chance that an elected official will lose their seat, after the revelation of corruption or financial mismanagement. This was shown in an important natural experiment in Brazil that analysed what happened after the federal government began auditing the budgets of local municipalities at random, and publishing the results.⁵¹ The researchers

found that, following the publication of a negative audit, an incumbent's likelihood of re-election went down by seven percentage points. Crucially the effect of these negative audits was almost 50 percent greater when there was a local radio station present that broadcast the results. Similar research in Mexico corroborated these findings.⁵²

Impact spotlight: Gupta Leaks

The #GuptaLeaks scandal in South Africa showcases the dramatic and far-reaching impact of investigative journalism, in this instance a collaboration between the news organizations *amaBhungane*, the *Daily Maverick* and *News24*. The investigation followed the leak of more than 300,000 emails that detailed corrupt dealings between the Gupta family and numerous politicians and public officials in the awarding of government tenders and contracts. Investigators cautiously estimated that almost US\$ 3 billion of lost public money had been traced.⁵³ A targeted investigation of the role of global management consultants McKinsey & Company in the corruption scandal by the *Daily Maverick* and *amaBhungane* – resulted in the company returning US\$63 million to the South African government in 2021.⁵⁴ The money returned to date far exceeds the cost of the investigation, which *Daily Maverick* co-founder Branko Brkic estimated to be around US\$700,000 to cover extensive IT costs and support for whistleblowers, among other expenditure. While describing this investigation as the 'story of his life', Brkic believes that the impact and value of the *Daily Maverick's* day to day reporting on important public issues that matter to its audience, far exceeds the results of any single investigation.⁵⁵

Investigative journalism has also led the charge against illicit financial flows (IFFs).⁵⁶ These cases have led to institutional and legislative reform, criminal proceedings, and – crucially – the return of stolen public funds. This is impressively demonstrated by the work of the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), which states that its work has led to the recovery of more than US\$12 billion in fines levied and money seized. Of this, around \$1 billion was returned to the US, representing an estimated return on investment of \$100 for every \$1 of US government support to the organization. OCCRP investigations have also led to 140 resignations and sackings, 482 official investigations, and 803 indictments and arrests.⁵⁷

Two investigations a decade apart demonstrate the impact of journalism in countering illicit financial flows. First, the trailblazing *Biens Mal Acquis* (BMA) affair in 2007 exposed how leaders and officials in multiple countries were using corruptly acquired public funds to purchase properties and investments. This led to a new legislative mechanism for the restitution of stolen assets and the confiscation of assets and fines totalling 150 million Euros.⁵⁸ In 2016-2017, following the leak of 11.5 million financial and legal records, the Panama Papers famously exposed a highly secretive offshore finance industry that implicated more than 100 politicians and public officials, criminals, celebrities, and billionaires. As a direct outcome of the investigation, governments around the world recovered an estimated US\$1.36 billion in back taxes and penalties.⁵⁹ It also triggered further investigations in multiple countries, promoted major legal and political reform, and led nations to tighten their regulation of tax havens.

However, it's important to note that the impact of investigative journalism still depends enormously on the wider democratic environment in the country where an investigation takes place.⁶⁰ Journalists can reveal important and far-reaching wrongdoing, without it leading to change.

4. National security and stability

Media freedom is strongly correlated with national security and political stability. Research suggests that journalism can make communities more resilient to disinformation campaigns, counter false information, and hold those who produce it to account. Free media also decreases the likelihood of international and domestic conflict and state repression of human rights. Experts estimate that 0.1% of global GDP – equivalent to just 15 days of global military spending – could fund healthy public media and secure information environments for citizens around the world.

Evidence base:

- Malicious actors are using disinformation campaigns to undermine elections and political stability. The 2026 World Economic Forum Global Risks Perception Survey ranked disinformation as the second most pressing challenge facing the globe.
- Journalism contributes to 'epistemic security' by providing trustworthy information and helping audiences know how to evaluate claims.
- Studies suggest that the more news media audiences consume, the less likely they are to believe in disinformation, and that the countries most resilient to disinformation have publicly funded media and high levels of media trust.
- International conflict, state violence and repression of human rights are less likely in countries with high levels of press freedom.

Key data:

- The cost of disinformation to society in the year 2024, was estimated at somewhere between US\$350 and 510 billion.
- The 2025 Digital News Report showed that trusted news outlets remain the most important source of information that people use to check if a claim is true.
- Journalism-led fact checking at AFP reduced the circulation of disinformation on the largest social media platform by approximately 8 percent, and reduced the rate of future sharing.
- A study of 152 countries in the Global South and Eastern Europe from 1989-2002 found that where citizens have greater access to more free media, radio, TV, and internet, there is a reduction in the extent of human rights violations.

How impact occurs:

Journalism provides citizens with reliable information that can build resilience to disinformation, and foster civic engagement and trust; in addition, targeted interventions can 'pre-bunk' and 'debunk' falsehoods. The media also operate as a forum for dialogue on divisive issues in society. This can raise awareness of the human and economic costs of conflict, and increase the chances that disputes will be resolved peacefully.

Disinformation⁶¹ poses a critical threat to international stability, national security and peace. The circulation of falsehoods creates instability within and across countries, eroding social cohesion and undermining democratic processes.⁶² At its most virulent, disinformation can directly incite violence. In South Sudan, for example, disinformation campaigns have become central to the conflict, operating as organised precursors to physical violence, perpetuating conflict, destroying social cohesion, and endangering humanitarian operations.⁶³ In Myanmar, hate speech has contributed to violence against the Rohingya population, leading a United Nations fact finding group saying

that social media was a major contributing factor in the atrocity.⁶⁴ Disinformation campaigns also pose a significant threat to national stability during elections, since they aim not only at influencing outcomes but at undermining citizen participation and the broader democratic process.⁶⁵

Policy debates about disinformation in Europe have placed significant emphasis on foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI). This approach underlines the geopolitical dimension of disinformation, and its use as a form of information warfare, where malicious state and non-state actors use disinformation campaigns to undermine stability in other countries.⁶⁶ These actors are spending very significant budgets on the creation of propaganda and disinformation, which vastly exceed the amount being spent to fight disinformation.⁶⁷ However, it is important to stress that the disinformation that undermines national stability can come from a wide range of sources – both domestic and international – and is frequently produced and disseminated for reasons unconnected to geopolitics, including political and financial gain. Its dissemination and impact are shaped by domestic political actors, social dynamics, and local digital communication ecosystems, in ways that vary significantly around the world.⁶⁸

One recent estimate puts the global cost of disinformation at between US\$355 and \$516 billion annually, across social, political and financial markets.⁶⁹

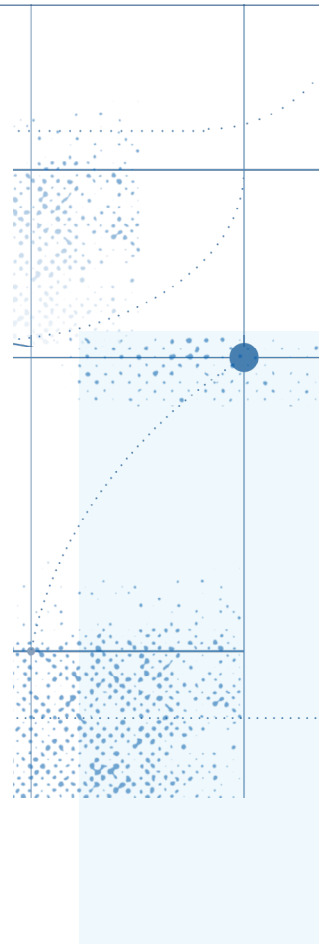
In addition, disinformation causes enormous harm to social cohesion, trust in institutions, can increase polarization, and exacerbate crises. For these reasons, the 2026 World Economic Forum Global Risks Perception Survey ranked mis- and disinformation as the second most pressing challenge facing the globe.⁷⁰

Given the scale and complexity of the issue, disinformation is typically seen as needing a ‘whole-of-society’ approach that includes, for example, regulatory measures, media literacy interventions, fact checking, engagement with civil society organizations, and communication strategies.⁷¹ Research suggests that the provision of independent journalism is very important and effective component of this ‘whole-of-society’ response.⁷² Indeed, media support is one of the most common recommendations within the grey literature and international policy proposals on the topic.⁷³

Journalism plays an important *preventative* role in the fight against disinformation. This is because journalism is a vital component of a healthy information system: it informs audiences, and provides ongoing access to reliable information (see Section 2). Research from Brazil⁷⁴ and the United Kingdom⁷⁵ shows that audiences that consume more legacy news are less likely to believe in disinformation. Significantly, the 2025 Digital News Report showed that trusted news outlets remain the most important source of information that people turn to when they are unsure about the veracity of an online claim.⁷⁶ This demonstrates the ongoing role of journalism as an ‘anchor point’ that citizens turn to – particularly during times of crises and uncertainty.⁷⁷ Journalism can also help audiences understand which sources they should and should not trust by exposing lies and disinformation. This contributes to ‘epistemic security’ – where citizens are confident about what information can be trusted, and they know how to evaluate claims to see if they are false. Epistemic security is increasingly seen as a crucial component of national defence – as important as ‘national security’ and ‘cyber security’, given the role of disinformation in contemporary geopolitics and warfare.⁷⁸

A comparative study of 18 countries found that those most resilient to disinformation have high levels of media trust as well as strong public service broadcasting, as the general public’s knowledge about current affairs is considerably higher.⁷⁹ These findings are supported by the rich research on ‘news deserts’ that shows that, in areas where there is limited or no local journalism, citizens become less knowledgeable, more polarised and more apathetic – making them more vulnerable to disinformation (see Section 2).

In addition to system-wide function, individual newsrooms can fight disinformation, by ‘pre-bunking’ and fact-checking the harmful falsehoods that drive instability.⁸⁰ In one randomised control trial, for example, fact-checking by AFP reduced the circulation of disinformation on Facebook by



approximately 8 percent. It also made audiences who had shared the fact-checked information less likely to share disinformation in the future.⁸¹ Journalistic reporting on disinformation is particularly important in conflict and crisis situations, where it may help to challenge harmful narratives. For example, a 2025 project from Journalists for Human Rights (JHR) in South Sudan, used youth radio, digital platforms and popular blogs to raise awareness and counter hate speech.⁸² Preliminary project evaluations suggest this may be an effective intervention, as seen in a project in the Central African Republic (see box).

Impact spotlight: Can radio fight disinformation in conflict-afflicted areas? The impact of Radio Ndeke Luka in Central African Republic

Disinformation has fuelled conflict in the Central African Republic (CAR), feeding into violence and human rights violations.⁸³ In conflict-affected areas, disinformation can be enabled by information vacuums⁸⁴ and, in CAR, this is exacerbated by cultural, colonial, political and social factors that mean distrust can play a “protective role” in communities.⁸⁵ A project by Foundation Hirondelle researched the impact of new FM radio transmitters in three localities across CAR that broadcast Radio Ndeke Luka – the biggest private radio network in the country. Household surveys were conducted before and after the launch in 2021, exploring audience attitudes and behaviour. These showed that, after the radio launch, residents in all three regions felt more confident in their ability to ascertain fact from fiction.⁸⁶ In one locality, the proportion of respondents who said they would try to verify the truth of information increased from 33 percent to 59 percent. Moreover, the proportion of people who said they would share information immediately rather than check its veracity first decreased from 22 percent to 10 percent.⁸⁷ While the study demonstrates the potential role of trusted media as an intervention against disinformation, it also points to the need for highly contextualised responses.

Journalism can also act as a ‘watch dog’ of those that create disinformation, revealing their strategies and helping to inoculate the public against future attempts. This dynamic has been observed in a European context, where media investigations uncovered foreign efforts to discredit political leaders.⁸⁸ Public exposure of these activities not only revealed the tactics used but also increased the reputational and strategic costs of future interference. This approach is recognised as part of the “resilience” theme in the EU’s FIMI Toolbox, which states, “[e]xposure alone does not stop operations, but it creates reputational pressure and increases operational and political costs. Exposure can also be used to discourage advertisers and commercial partners from financially supporting FIMI activities.”⁸⁹

Finally, journalists are tackling disinformation through the introduction of new, innovative reporting methods and audience engagement strategies. One study in Brazil, for example, found journalists using editorial strategies such as dedicated fact-checking units and platform accountability reporting, as well as audience outreach involving deep listening, community cooperation, creative audience participation, and radical collaborations.⁹⁰ Further research in India, the Philippines and South Africa⁹¹ shows that highly contextualised ‘mission driven journalism’ in particular, may help to build trust between audiences and newsrooms, and this trusted relationship enables journalists to more effectively fight disinformation. This promising research shows the importance of working directly in partnership with affected communities in the response to disinformation.

Journalism reduces the risk of conflict, violence and repression

There is strong evidence that journalism can help to maintain stability and peace, both domestically and internationally. An important OSCE report drawing on rich longitudinal data from the V-Dem Institute demonstrates that, as media freedom increases in two countries, there is a corresponding decline in the likelihood of a militarised interstate dispute between them. Media freedom is also very strongly and positively associated with domestic stability, a decline in the likelihood of civil war and attacks on human rights.⁹² Moreover, the indicators relating to media freedom are some of

the elements of democracy that are *most* correlated to peace (more so than, for example, indicators relating to elections, academic freedom and so on).

An analysis of a global dataset from 1981-2006 found that even when governments are faced with growing terror attacks and armed conflict, escalating state repression is less likely when there is free media.⁹³ A later study focused on 1970-2014 found that states with higher press freedom are less likely to experience domestic conflict.⁹⁴

Similarly, one study of 152 countries in the Global South and Eastern Europe from 1989-2002 found that where citizens have greater access to more free media, radio, TV, and internet, there is a reduction in the extent of human rights violations.⁹⁵

Finally, research shows that there is a correlation between low levels of press freedom and high numbers of refugees from that country of origin: a measure of acute insecurity. As a recent, important report from V-Dem Institute states:

“The most fundamental point from the accumulated academic knowledge in this field is that there is no security without democracy, and there is no democracy without media freedom. The implications of these findings are clear: to ensure international and domestic security, it is essential to protect and promote independent and pluralistic media.”⁹⁶

Scholars have proposed a number of reasons to explain why the relationship between media freedom and peace is so strong. It is likely that all these variables play a role, over time and in different contexts, and in ways that mutually reinforce one another. First, media freedom is an enabling condition for democracy (see Section 2) and democratic countries have very rarely – if ever – gone to war with one another.⁹⁷ Second, a critical, free press can challenge and prevent the spread of propaganda and lies, including the dehumanization of the opposing population, which can play a role generating popular support for war. Third, media coverage creates political accountability and may ‘raise the costs’ for politicians of going to war – for example, making re-election more difficult after an expensive conflict.⁹⁸ Fourth, the media may (in some circumstances) reduce the risk of war by informing the population of the tragedy of war – and its profound human costs, as well as drawing attention to more peaceful policy alternatives into democratic practices and norms.⁹⁹

Domestically, researchers suggest that the media may help to provide a civic forum for conflicting parties to air their grievances – and operates as a ‘pressure valve’.¹⁰⁰ In addition, scholars argue that a free press enhances the credibility and legitimacy of the state, and contributes to positive economic conditions and governance, making disorder and violent overthrow less likely in the first place.¹⁰¹ Media content can also support social cohesion and peacebuilding after conflict, making its recurrence less likely. Important research in Rwanda has shown that radio programmes can help build more tolerant inter-group behaviour, for example. In one large experiment, treatment groups were exposed to a soap opera featuring a love story between Hutu and Tutsi. Compared to a control group, participants became less likely to say inflammatory things about other ethnic groups, and more likely to seek inclusive solutions to problems. The researcher argued that the soap opera changed perceptions of prevailing social norms and what was considered appropriate communication.¹⁰² Finally, journalism appears to play an important role in the success of transitions to democracy: a study of six countries in Eastern Europe found that the media contributes to the “political socialization” of citizens into democratic norms.¹⁰³

5. Crisis and humanitarian response

Journalism plays a profound role in the response to crises and humanitarian disasters. It provides lifesaving information to communities affected by crisis, and it can improve the way officials prepare and respond. News coverage also has a direct impact on the levels of official humanitarian aid that are committed in response to a crisis.

Evidence base:

- In times of crisis, citizens turn to the media more than usual for information. Journalism can share crucial information about risks and support, that reduce the severity and duration of a crisis.
- Journalism can help counter disinformation, which is having a profound and negative impact on crises by confusing affected communities and undermining official responses.
- Journalism puts pressure on officials to be better prepared for crises, and to respond more swiftly and effectively.

Key data

- News coverage can increase levels of humanitarian aid. A study of 2,337 disasters shows that every additional story in the *New York Times* is worth US\$500,000 in official aid.
- Journalism can encourage audience to seek health treatment. A study in Burkina Faso showed that radio health programmes dramatically increased the rate at which caregivers took children to health centres, reducing under-five deaths by an average of 7.1 percent per year, and saving an estimated 2,967 lives.
- Local authorities in India respond faster and more extensively to food shortages, in areas when there is higher newspaper circulation.

How impact occurs

Information shared by the media helps affected communities access support, and it counters disinformation. Journalism about crises creates 'issue salience' that pushes governments and local officials to take action, leading to more efficient and extensive response. The media's critical reporting also acts as a watchdog on the aid sector – leading to resignations and reform, and more effective responses.

False narratives, rumours and disinformation are exacerbating crises, and undermining the ability of communities to prepare, respond and rebuild after a disaster. These challenges are documented in the World Disasters Report 2026, which frames harmful information as a de facto humanitarian crisis in its own right.¹⁰⁴ The report also highlights the false and harmful disinformation that prevents aid reaching affected communities, and has prompted violence towards aid workers. False and harmful information can also exacerbate and intensify conflict.¹⁰⁵ Trusted journalism acts as a crucial source of information to counter these narratives and convey expert advice.

During an emergency or crisis, information can be as important as food, water and shelter: it helps affected people find safety and access support. One study examining the role of radio after a major earthquake, for example, found that it shared urgent and relevant information about safety, hygiene, clean drinking water and shelter. This helped prevent the outbreak of deadly disease; helped displaced communities access food and shelter; connected families to lost ones; and encouraged children to return to school.¹⁰⁶

This phenomenon has been documented globally with journalism playing a key role in the immediate response and recovery to earthquakes, floods, wildfires, storms and conflict.¹⁰⁷ In one study, BBC

Media Action analysed the role of a media content initiative, Lifeline, in communities affected by conflict in Nigeria, and climate displacement in Somalia. This found that more than 85 percent of participants in both communities learnt new information about health, sanitation and education through its programmes.¹⁰⁸

Journalism plays a particularly important role supporting public health outcomes – by encouraging audiences to take precautions and seek treatment. In a significant cluster randomised control trial in Burkina Faso, for example, radio programmes about the risks of infant malaria, pneumonia and diarrhoea, dramatically increased the rate at which caregivers took children to health centres, reducing deaths of children under five years old by an average of 7.1 percent per year, and saving an estimated 2,967 children's lives.¹⁰⁹ Similar positive results have been found with media content directed at parents in 28 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan.¹¹⁰

Disinformation has caused significant harm and damage during health crises in what the World Health Organization describes as an "Infodemic" – an overwhelming amount of information, both true and false, that can confuse audiences and lead to poor health decisions.¹¹¹ One meta review of research found that disinformation could lead to vaccine hesitancy, physical interruption to health care, an increase in social fear, panic, stress and mental disorders; and misallocation of health resources, among other negative effects.¹¹² The importance of journalism in countering this damaging disinformation was demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic (See box).

Impact spotlight: COVID-19 reporting

The COVID-19 pandemic, arguably more than any global event in recent memory, demonstrated the value and importance of journalism to citizens and society. A study of 365 news outlets in 37 countries showed that during the pandemic, journalists focused on providing 'news that audiences could use'¹¹³ such as documenting the risks of infection and available precautions. Audiences also consumed news media in far greater quantities than usual during the pandemic, and specifically – audiences increased their consumption of news that is considered 'trustworthy' by independent indices.¹¹⁴ This reporting helped audiences diagnose the disease – a single news story has been shown to lead to a spike in Google searches for particular symptoms.¹¹⁵ It also prompted audiences to follow expert health advice. A study of 200,000 local news stories in Sweden across a calendar year, compared with movement data, showed that exposure to COVID-19 reporting was specifically responsible for people staying at home – despite there being no mandate to do this.¹¹⁶ A study of Rohingya refugee communities in Bangladesh also found that participants exposed to media content about COVID had greater knowledge than non-listeners, and that this knowledge translated into action.¹¹⁷

Importantly, multiple international studies show consumption of independent journalism was associated with lower belief in COVID-19 disinformation¹¹⁸, and greater compliance with social distancing, vaccines and other preventative measures. An experimental survey study in Brazil with 5,233 participants found that a news story highlighting the safety/efficiency of vaccines made participants more likely to say they would get vaccinated and immunise their children.¹¹⁹ In Nigeria, an evaluation of radio content designed to address vaccine misinformation and vaccine hesitancy found that the programmes increased the confidence of regular listeners to identify and challenge disinformation.¹²⁰

These are profoundly significant findings, given that disinformation caused enormous harm during COVID-19 to health, wellbeing and the economy.¹²¹ One study estimated that disinformation led to nearly 2.3 million cases of COVID and 66,000 hospitalizations in 2021 in the United States alone – resulting in US\$2 billion in extra costs of hospitalization and 45,000 avoidable deaths.

Improving the emergency response

News coverage can improve how local authorities and elites respond to a crisis. Journalism does this by creating 'issue salience' around a crisis – that leads to more political accountability among those expected to respond. The Nobel prize-winning economist Amartya Sen famously made this case, arguing that famine was not 'natural' but rather a man-made phenomenon. Sen argued that the media was a pivotal institution in preventing famines from happening, because governments "cannot afford to fail to take prompt action when large-scale starvation threatens. Newspapers play an important part in this, in making the facts known and forcing the challenge to be faced."¹²²

A seminal study by the economists Burgess and Besley provides evidence for this claim. The authors studied flood and crop failure in India between 1958 – 1992, and found that local governments were faster and more effective in their response to a crisis in areas with higher newspaper circulation, even when controlling for other factors, including levels of development and wealth.¹²³ This finding is supported by a wider international literature showing that governments are more responsive to the needs of their citizens when independent journalism shines a spotlight on issues (see Section 2 and 3).¹²⁴

Higher levels of news coverage lead to higher levels of humanitarian aid being committed by the international community in response to a crisis.

A study of 2,337 disasters found that the US government's response was strongly correlated to the volume of news, with every additional story in the *New York Times* worth an additional half a million dollars in emergency aid.¹²⁵

Another study demonstrates that if a crisis takes place when a large media event is dominating the news agenda, such as the Olympic Games, it receives considerably less humanitarian funding than those occurring outside it.¹²⁶ Scott and colleagues interviewed directors and senior policy makers in 16 of the world's largest donor countries, and found that the relationship between news and emergency aid levels is a case of causation not correlation: the policy makers they spoke to said that news coverage raised the salience of the crises, and this triggered citizens and civil society to put pressure on political elites to take action and commit funding.¹²⁷

Finally, news coverage can also prompt significant charitable giving from audiences.¹²⁸ One of the most famous examples of this was Michael Buerk's reporting from Ethiopia in 1984, that is credited with raising more than US\$200 million for famine relief. More recently, the photo of the drowned child, Alan Kurdi, taken by a Turkish photojournalist, raised worldwide attention to the Syrian conflict and led to a huge increase in donations, including a 50-fold increase in funding to some NGOs.

Accountability, preparedness and resilience

Journalism can also put pressure on authorities to better prepare for disasters. For example, one study shows that a consistent campaign by journalists at the *Los Angeles Times* led to new building codes that made the city more resilient to earthquakes. Because journalism helps to counter corruption (see Section 3), it can lead to greater compliance with safety codes and regulations, which make communities significantly safer in the face of disasters. One analysis of 344 major earthquakes in 42 countries found that a country's level of public sector corruption was positively and significantly correlated with the fatalities caused by earthquakes.¹²⁹

International studies also find a strong correlation between free press and more stringent environmental policies – and these protect the environment, and make communities more resilient to environmental shock.¹³⁰ The news media are the main source of information for the public about the climate crisis¹³¹ and it can shape public perceptions of climate change issues and behaviour.¹³² One eight-country survey found that the more frequently citizens consume climate news, the greater their perception that extreme weather events are worsening and that they are personally more at risk.¹³³ In addition, a recent study of public opinion and media in the UK discusses how the deliberate reframing of climate change by media outlets including the Guardian and BBC using terms such as 'climate emergency', 'climate crisis' and 'climate catastrophe' led to an increase in public commitment to action and funding.¹³⁴

There are concrete examples of environmental journalism leading to better protection of natural ecosystems. For example, in Thailand, an online magazine reporting on wastewater discharge from a landfill site, promoted the authorities to step in; and in Uganda investigations into illegal sand mining led to a nationwide ban.¹³⁵ There is also emerging evidence that solutions journalism – where reporting emphasises potential responses to a problem – may have a positive impact on audience behaviour in relation to climate change.¹³⁶

Finally, journalism can lead to major reform within the aid sector itself – as demonstrated during the #AidToo scandal, where journalists revealed abuse of power in Haiti at Oxfam and Save the Children – leading to widespread resignations and reform. Despite the fact that the abuse was a ‘well known secret’ and had been discussed on social media, it was nonetheless the traditional news media that elevated the wrongdoing to ‘mainstream’ attention, and prompted institutional responses.¹³⁷

6. Conclusion

The evidence collected in this report shows that journalism plays an important role in the response to some of the most pressing issues facing the globe today – from geopolitical instability and illicit financial flows to climate emergency and disaster. Journalism can also have a positive impact on economic efficiency and development, and public service delivery, and it both reveals and deters corruption.

Rigorous, experimental studies show that journalism informs audiences, increases political participation, and holds elites to account. This day-to-day reporting underpins a healthy information system and creates more ‘epistemic security’, where citizens know how to find information they can trust. This is particularly significant during crises and conflict, when information can save lives, and help to insulate communities from harmful disinformation.

Moreover, the research likely understates the impact of journalism. This is because journalism is an **enabling condition** that underpins good governance and democratic processes, and these have many indirect, positive benefits for society that are hard to measure. In addition, the impact of journalism is **cascading, and compounding**: one investigation can lead to future investigations in other contexts, extensive rule changes, and deterrence of wrong-doing, all of which can have ongoing, positive impact.

As the evidence in this review has shown, journalism can also be very cost effective way to achieve these positive impacts. Experts have estimated that approximately 0.1% of global GDP¹³⁸ – equivalent to just 15 days of global military spending – could fund healthy public media and secure information environments for citizens around the world.

It is important to note, however, that the impact of journalism is often very contingent upon the presence of other functioning, democratic institutions. For example, a journalistic investigation may reveal major corruption – but this may not lead to change if there are not institutions or groups that can act on this information (e.g. financial regulators, criminal investigations, citizens voting in free and fair elections).

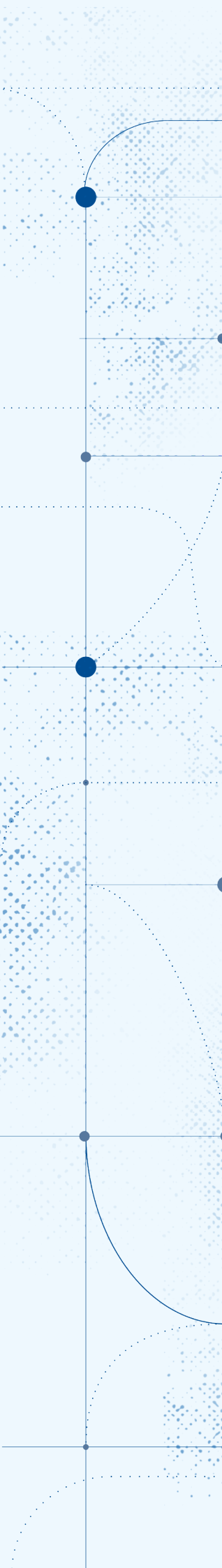
Finally, while the research demonstrating the value of journalism has improved significantly over the last two decades, much more work is still needed. Some of our knowledge about journalism impact is based on single case studies, and we cannot assume the same results will be found in other contexts, given the profound variation between media industries, political systems, and social dynamics. Other concepts are based on programme evaluations, rather than independent academic studies. Given the speed at which AI-fuelled disinformation is evolving, research on the role of journalism in helping to counter this challenge is a key priority. This research needs to pay particular attention to Global South contexts, which have been neglected within existing studies. Research demonstrates that interventions that fail to account for local dynamics are frequently ineffective and can even cause harm.¹³⁹

Endnotes

- 1 Public Media Alliance 2026.
- 2 [Sabet & Abbot 2026](#); [DW Akademie 2026](#).
- 3 Following [BBC Media Action 2020](#).
- 4 There is an extensive literature on this topic. See for example: Norris 2000, Pickard 2020.
- 5 Hamilton 2016 demonstrates the significant return on investment that investigative journalism has in the United States, including examples of nearly \$300 of value for every \$1 spent (see p. 5 of the review). In addition, the OCCRP estimates getting back \$100 in reclaimed money for every \$1 spent on its investigations (see p. 7 of the review). Another high profile example is the Gupta leaks investigation, where more than US \$60million has been returned to the South African government, for an investigation that cost under around \$700,000, and there are many ongoing attempts to reclaim further funds (see p. 7).
- 6 [Sopra Steria 2026](#).
- 7 [World Economic Forum 2026](#); Von Sikorski & Hameleers 2025.
- 8 [Tofel 2013](#).
- 9 For example Hamilton 2016.
- 10 For an overview of approaches to impact collection see: Schiffrin et al 2025; [Green-Barber & Stonbely 2020](#).
- 11 Banerjee et al 2024; Groves 2024.
- 12 [Zinnbauer 2024](#).
- 13 Schiffrin et al 2025b.
- 14 [Guseva 2008](#); Norris 2008; [Stiglitz et al 2024](#); [Nord et al 2024](#).
- 15 For a summary of the evolving literature see: Schiffrin et al 2025; [Stiglitz et al 2024](#).
- 16 Green et al 2024.
- 17 Aalberg & Curran 2012.
- 18 Snyder & Strömberg 2010.
- 19 Mont'Alverne et al 2024.
- 20 Altay et al 2024.
- 21 Vaccari et al 2022.
- 22 Altay et al 2025; Scheufele et al 2002; Shaker 2014; Baekgaard et al 2014; [Banerjee 2011](#).
- 23 Aker et al 2017.
- 24 Gentzkow et al 2011.
- 25 [Abernathy 2020](#); Abernathy 2023; Darr et al 2018; Hesse et al 2022.
- 26 Gao et al 2020.
- 27 Hesse et al 2022.
- 28 Campa 2018.
- 29 Marquez 2023; Moreira et al 2021; Tai et al 2023 ; Madrid-Morales, 2023 ; Verza et al 2023; da Silva & Pimenta 2020.
- 30 Usher 2023.
- 31 [Nord et al 2026](#) ; [Norris 2008](#).
- 32 [Nord et al 2024](#).
- 33 Hamilton 2016.
- 34 [Groves 2022](#).
- 35 Groves 2024.
- 36 E.g. Alam & Ali Shah 2013; Ketteni & Maniou 2025; Bellver & Kaufmann 2005.
- 37 Nguyen et al 2021.
- 38 Kladakis & Skouralis 2025. Systemic risk in financial sectors is associated with potential for market failure, which in turn is linked to economic downturn and social costs.
- 39 Roll & Talbott 2003.
- 40 Alam & Ali Shah 2013; Pal 2011; Miller 2006; Kladakis & Skouralis 2025; Nguyen et al 2021.
- 41 Chen et al 2021 ; [Ko et al 2023](#).
- 42 [Bellver & Kaufmann 2005](#); [Stiglitz et al 2024](#).
- 43 Reinikka & Svensson 2004 – discussed in Cagé 2009.
- 44 Bidwell et al 2020.
- 45 Banerjee et al 2024.
- 46 Strömberg 2004.
- 47 Brunetti & Weder 2003; Camaj 2012; Hamada et al 2019; Stapenhurst 2000.
- 48 Keresztúri et al 2023.
- 49 Gottschalk 2021.
- 50 Dyck et al 2010.
- 51 Ferraz & Finan 2008.
- 52 Larreguy et al 2020.
- 53 [Davis 2021](#).
- 54 [Comrie 2020](#); see also: [US Department of Justice 2024](#)

- 55 Interview with author 9 April, 2026
- 56 Ferwerda & Unger 2021.
- 57 [OCCRP 2026](#),
- 58 [OECD 2023](#).
- 59 [Escudero & Reuter 2025](#).
- 60 Hamada et al 2019.
- 61 Disinformation is used as a broad term to describe false or misleading content that has potentially harmful consequences. That is, rather than distinguishing between mis and dis-information and other forms of falsehoods. Following: [Posetti & Bontcheva 2020](#).
- 62 [Report of Secretary-General United Nations 2022](#)
- 63 [Thomson Foundation 2026](#)
- 64 [Schulman 2019](#); [United Nations 2018](#); Schissler 2025.
- 65 [Tenove et al 2018](#)
- 66 Proto et al 2025; [UK Foreign Affairs Committee 2026](#); [International IDEA 2025](#)
- 67 [Deane & Taki 2025](#)
- 68 [Wardle & Derakhshan 2017](#); Hale et al 2024; Ong & Jackson 2026.
- 69 [Sopra Steria 2026](#). This analysis broke costs down to financial, social and political. Financial costs included fraud, scams, and market manipulation. Social costs encompass the erosion of institutional trust, the fragmentation of social cohesion, and health-related impacts. Political costs include expenditure linked to threats to democratic integrity, foreign influence operations, and the countermeasures deployed in response — by both public and private actors (detection, moderation, fact-checking, counter-operations, etc.).
- 70 [World Economic Forum 2026](#)
- 71 [Bateman & Jackson 2024](#); [Donovan & Wardle 2020](#); [Seeger et al 2026](#); Blair et al 2024. [Council of Europe 2025](#).
- 72 [Bateman & Jackson 2024](#).
- 73 See, for example: [United Nations Global Principles for Information Integrity](#); [Council of Europe, Resisting Disinformation OECD, Disinformation and Misinformation](#); Blair et al 2023.
- 74 Mont'Alverne et al 2024.
- 75 Vaccari et al 2022.
- 76 [Newman et al 2025](#), p. 23. Global respondents were asked how they would check to find out if something was false, misleading or fake. The er one response was 'a news outlet they trust'. This ranked higher than official sources, such as a government website.
- 77 Altay et al 2022.
- 78 [Seeger et al 2020](#).
- 79 Humprecht et al 2020. Citizens in countries with public service broadcasting have the highest levels of news and public affairs knowledge - this is partly due to the strong PSB itself, but also because the existence of PSB drives up the quality of other news outlets in a country. The authors argue that a well-informed citizenry is inherently resilient against disinformation as it is less susceptible to bias and naive realism.
- 80 [Bateman & Jackson 2024](#).
- 81 Cagé et al 2025.
- 82 [Journalists for Human Rights 2025](#).
- 83 Miyashita et al 2025.
- 84 Sey et al 2022.
- 85 Gallagher 2024.
- 86 [FOME 2025](#).
- 87 [Conroy-Krutz 2024](#).
- 88 [Karásková 2024](#).
- 89 [European External Affairs Service FIMI Threat Report 2026](#), p.19.
- 90 [Esperidião et al 2025](#).
- 91 [Posetti et al 2019](#).
- 92 [Nord et al 2024](#). See also: Hegre et al 2020 who analysed 173 countries for the period 1900-2010, and find that the features of democracy most closely associated with stability and peace were those relating to a healthy civil society, including free media.
- 93 Carey et al 2023.
- 94 Taydas & Peksen 2026.
- 95 Apocada 2007.
- 96 Nord et al. 2024, 6.
- 97 [Nord et al 2024](#).
- 98 Van Belle 1997.
- 99 Van Belle 1997; Choi & James 2006; McIntyre & Sobel, 2018.
- 100 Groshek & Christensen 2017; [Nord et al 2024](#).
- 101 Taydas & Peksen 2026.
- 102 Paluck 2009.
- 103 Loveless 2008.
- 104 [IFRC 2026](#).

- 105 Schissler 2025; [Reeves 2017](#); [Thomson Foundation 2026](#).
- 106 Rahman et al 2021.
- 107 Cottle & Cooper 2015; Buoncompagni 2024; [Hannides 2015](#); [IFRC 2026](#).
- 108 [BBC Media Action 2024](#).
- 109 Murray et al 2018.
- 110 Dhawan et al 2020; Fatema & Lariscy 2020; Aboagye et al 2022.
- 111 Altay et al 2022; Lowrey 2004.
- 112 Borges do Nascimento et al 2022.
- 113 Hallin et al 2023.
- 114 Altay et al 2022.
- 115 Panuganti et al 2020.
- 116 Garz & Zhuang 2024.
- 117 [Bailey et al 2021](#).
- 118 [Bridgman et al 2020](#); Romer & Jamieson 2021; Stecula & Pickup 2020.
- 119 Avelino-Silva 2023; see also: Motta et al 2021.
- 120 [BBC Media Action 2023](#)
- 121 Ferreira Caceres et al 2022; [Bruns et al 2023](#).
- 122 Sen 1984, p.84 cited in Besley & Burgess 2002, p.2
- 123 Besley & Burgess 2002.
- 124 Groves 2022, 2024; Banerjee et al 2024.
- 125 Drury et al 2005. A similar study from van Belle, Rioux & Potter 2004 found that, "every additional article in Le Monde correlates with an increase of an additional \$66,640 in aid".
- 126 Eisensee and Strömberg 2007.
- 127 Scott et al 2022; See also: Franks 2014 in-depth study of the UK government's response to famine in Ethiopia shows that news coverage is important because it affects audiences, and "once there was a public reaction ...this made officials and politicians want to be seen to care".
- 128 Cooper 2015.
- 129 Escaleras 2007. This was tragically evidenced in the 2023 earthquake in Turkey, where corruption in the building industry led to widespread safety code violations, and avoidable death tolls, see: Cifuentes-Faura 2024.
- 130 Martínez-Zarzoso & Phillips 2020; see also Rahmani et al 2024.
- 131 [Newman et al 2024](#).
- 132 Schäfer & Mahl 2025; Metag et al 2017; [Ejaz et al 2025](#).
- 133 [Ejaz et al 2025](#).
- 134 Happer 2024.
- 135 [Zinnbauer 2024](#).
- 136 Thier & Linn 2022; Maduneme & Cohen 2024.
- 137 Cooper 2021. This is a common phenomenon documented in analyses of scandal e.g. Greer & McLaughlin 2017; Langer & Gruber 2020.
- 138 [Forum for Information and Democracy 2021](#)
- 139 Ong & Jackson 2026.



About this brief

This evidence brief was commissioned by DW Akademie, IFPIM and UNESCO as members of the Research Working Group of the Media Viability Manifesto initiative.

Authors

Professor Mel Bunce, the lead author, is the Director of the Centre for Journalism and Democracy, and Professor of International Journalism and Politics at City St George's, University of London

Dr Beth Pearson is a Research Fellow at City St George's, University of London

Editorial coordination

DW Akademie (Laura Moore, Ines Drefs), IFPIM (Maha Taki, Pierrick Judeaux), UNESCO (Saorla McCabe)

Graphic design: Luiza Maximo

The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNESCO, DW Akademie or IFPIM concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or areas or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

The ideas and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors; they are not necessarily those of UNESCO, DW Akademie or IFPIM and do not commit the organizations.