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The quality of international journalism available to readers in the United States leaves much to be desired. Too often, media outlets send “parachute journalists” abroad to report on global communities. Lacking local context, their reporting often misrepresents those communities and defaults to well-trodden themes of war, famine, disease, and disaster. As a result, U.S. readers develop skewed perspectives about people and places abroad.

But what if there were a market in the United States for higher-quality, comprehensive international journalism? For example, what if U.S.-based audiences sought out stories written by local reporters who are from the communities they cover?

This study establishes that there is a deep reservoir of untapped demand from readers in the United States—across a wide range of demographics, including noncitizen, diaspora, and migrant populations—for international journalism that is local, precise, and representative.

It also resolves the puzzle of why U.S.-based audiences do not proactively seek out such journalism. The study demonstrates that readers in the United States are not typically aware that there are alternative models for international reporting to the parachute journalism that is typically offered by mainstream and legacy media outlets. Yet after just a small dose of exposure to media literacy materials, their preferences shift dramatically.

The study’s results are based on extensive quantitative and qualitative data collection. A large-scale, nationwide survey probed the preferences of more than 1,200 adults from a wide range of demographics living in the United States. Respondents shared their preferences before and after watching a series of media literacy videos that introduced concepts such as parachute journalism and alternative models of international journalism, including locally sourced and reported stories. In addition to monitoring quantitative shifts in respondent preferences, the study included a series of in-depth interviews as well as a multiday asynchronous focus group with a smaller set of participants who were shown the same materials. Their nuanced answers provided qualitative detail that enriched the quantitative survey results.

**NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS**

1,255

Survey and interview respondents come from across the United States and represent a diverse range of demographics.

**PREFERENCE FOR LOCAL REPORTERS**

77%

Percentage of U.S.-based readers of international news who expressed demand for stories written by local reporters who are from the communities they cover.

**PREFERENCE FOR DIGNIFIED AND PRECISE REPORTING**

71%

Percentage of U.S.-based readers who expressed a preference for sentences that exemplified dignified and precise language about the subjects of international journalism.
Three key findings emerged from the data, and they were robust across age, race, political affiliation, gender, and other demographics.

**U.S.-BASED READERS OF INTERNATIONAL JOURNALISM PREFER:**

1. **LOCAL AND REPRESENTATIVE JOURNALISTS**
   
   First, U.S. audiences prefer reading stories about international communities written by local journalists from those communities, rather than by parachute journalists.

2. **DIGNIFIED AND PRECISE LANGUAGE**
   
   Second, they value international reporting that is dignified, precise, and avoids tropes and stereotypes when covering global communities.

3. **CHANGING ROTE NARRATIVES**
   
   And third, U.S.-based readers are in favor of upending the rote narratives predominant in international news to instead, for example, report on solutions and provide comprehensive coverage of challenges that includes historical context.

Seizing the dual opportunity to improve international reporting and unlock reader demand will require investments in educating audiences in the United States about what higher-quality international journalism could look like. In parallel, the industry needs to build the capacity to deliver such higher-quality content to meet the latent demand demonstrated by this study.

For example, media outlets could provide their readers with access to local reporters in global communities by partnering with organizations operating in those communities and by elevating journalism produced by international collaborators known as “fixers,” who are too commonly treated as support staff.

Media funders also have an opportunity to invest in organizations that are most proximate to the stories they are telling. These efforts would generate rewards for all sides: news organizations could better engage readers across the United States who are informed and enthusiastic about consuming higher-quality international journalism.
INTRODUCTION
Audiences in the United States have access to more sources of news about the world than ever before. In addition to reading established publications with international coverage, readers can use social media and online searches to source an array of world news content produced both within and outside the United States. In short, it has never been easier to read about the world.

Yet the sheer quantity of available global news is by no means an indicator of its quality. U.S.-based audiences are bombarded through social media by news sources of varying levels of credibility. Even established, legacy outlets that aim to present world news to the most discerning readers often rely on reporters who are foreign to the areas they cover and can lack cultural context. Such reporters might be deployed on short-term assignments or even never travel to the area they are covering, instead reporting solely based on secondhand online research.

Most media outlets that offer international coverage only do so in a limited set of capital cities. And too often such content, when tailored for U.S. audiences, takes advantage of and perpetuates stereotypes about countries around the world, for example by focusing on themes such as war, poverty, natural disasters, and disease.\(^1\)

The COVID-19 pandemic put the shortcomings of existing international media practices in stark relief. As the pandemic shut borders and restricted travel, legacy media outlets brought home foreign correspondents, even as audience demand for news about the world spiked.\(^2\) This left few organizations that employed reporters living and working in the communities they covered. At the same time, independent and local radio stations around the world had been closing at an alarming rate leading up to the pandemic, leaving vast news deserts around the world.\(^3\) During the pandemic, our organization, Global Press, saw surging demand for its content in communities from rural Mongolia to eastern Zimbabwe, particularly among diaspora communities in the United States who were searching for news about their ancestral communities. Having reporters local to those areas who continued to live and work in their communities helped serve both local readers and global audiences.

Even as the pandemic’s restrictions are lifted, the underlying flaws of international journalism remain. U.S. audiences face an extremely limited landscape of quality journalism about most communities across Africa, Asia and Latin America. Established media outlets have resumed dispatching parachute journalists on temporary assignments.\(^4\) And acute events around the world, from the war in Ukraine to Queen Elizabeth II’s funeral in the United Kingdom, have attracted droves of foreign correspondents who report back to the United States for limited periods.

Coverage of other regions, such as the multitude of countries in sub-Saharan Africa, still focuses on problems such as conflict or famine without commensurate attention on nuanced interpretation of events and the long-term consequences of government policies or even solutions.\(^5\) In short, there is a clear deficit in the landscape of international journalism of higher-quality reporting, conducted by local and culturally informed reporters focused on accurately representing communities with dignity and precision.
Yet what if U.S. audiences fundamentally do not want to consume traditional parachute journalism? And what if the journalism industry’s insistence on covering traditional disaster-driven narratives is to blame for rising apathy among news consumers? Replacing parachute journalism with higher-quality local reporting might very well be salutary for international journalism—by better informing readers about the world, inspiring philanthropic investment and civic engagement, and promoting cross-cultural ties. But many might assume that asking U.S. audiences to consume higher-quality international journalism would surely be an uphill battle.

This report tests whether, in fact, U.S.-based audiences have a latent demand for higher-quality international journalism. There is a dearth of polling to quantify U.S. readers’ preferences for consuming world news. Studies of political polarization in the media hint that today’s international journalism is unhealthy and fragmented. For example, a Pew survey in September 2020 revealed that U.S. audience opinions on how the United States should engage with countries around the world is heavily colored by the partisan news sources read by either Democrats or Republicans ensconced in “news bubbles.” But purposefully built surveys to test readers’ appetite for higher-quality, independent international journalism are lacking.

One difficulty in evaluating U.S. audience preferences for higher-quality international journalism is that U.S. readers may not know what constitutes high quality. It may be the case that established media sources have assumed what readers want to hear about the world—or discovered what content drives clicks—and then produced content in line with those assumed preferences, which perpetuates audiences’ familiarity with global stereotypes.

A handful of groups such as Hearken, a consultancy that helps organizations better understand and engage their audiences, are helping news outlets avoid making assumptions about their readership. Still, the types of readers who demand international news are poorly understood. Some segments of U.S. audiences—such as those who regularly read international coverage by established media sources—may be oversampled in comparison to other segments, including diaspora and migrant communities. Ultimately, asking audiences if they are satisfied with generic, nonlocal, and stereotypical reporting on international communities may not reveal much information if respondents have little awareness that there may be a higher-quality alternative.

The headline result from this report is that there are, in fact, substantial segments of the U.S. audience that demand higher-quality international journalism—once they understand what that means and what is possible. This demand, which we label “latent demand” because it can be unlocked through education, is a remarkable finding. The path to improving the quality of international journalism for U.S. audiences remains arduous, but it is not impassable. By increasing awareness of what higher-quality international journalism can look like—and building the capacity and partnerships to deliver it—media organizations can access readers eager for their content.
STUDY DESIGN
This study seeks to understand the segments of the U.S.-based audience most interested in consuming international news, educate them on what higher-quality international journalism can look like, and then evaluate the latent demand of these readers for such journalism that can be unlocked. To design and implement the study, Global Press partnered with Goodwin Simon Strategic Research, an independent public opinion research firm, and Wonder: Strategies for Good, an expert in analyzing public opinion research. The methodology comprises a large-scale, nationwide survey as well as a curated set of in-depth interviews and a multiday focus group to complement the quantitative survey results with qualitative feedback from U.S.-based readers of international news.

The survey was conducted online and sampled 1,223 respondents nationwide. The survey was restricted to adults who read international news at least a few times a month or more. By design, these results are not representative of the overall U.S. population. Rather, the goal of the study was to test whether there is latent demand among existing readers of international news for a higher standard of global journalism, so the study screened out respondents who do not have a preexisting interest in international news.

Within this sample, the survey respondents come from a diverse range of backgrounds (Figure 1). The sample has strong diversity across gender, political affiliation, education level, region of the United States, and household income. And although the sample is skewed toward white respondents and those over 65 years old, there are substantial numbers of respondents across every age group and from several minority ethnicities.

The survey was designed to sample respondents’ attitudes before and after being presented with information on what constitutes higher-quality international journalism. Respondents were shown multiple videos covering different aspects of media literacy.

For example, one video describes the limitations of “parachute journalism,” explaining the value of representing communities with dignity and precision. During this video, a dial test recorded the instantaneous sentiment of survey respondents. Another video introduced respondents to local journalists reporting for Global Press in news bureaus around the world. Once equipped to develop informed opinions, respondents were then asked a range of questions to evaluate their preferences for local or foreign reporters, the level of dignity and precision of statements in news articles, and the focus of international journalism on problems or solutions.

To complement the large-scale survey results, the study also included in-depth interviews and focus groups with a smaller set of U.S. readers of international news. These interactive formats made it possible to explore participants’ detailed attitudes about international journalism. This detailed qualitative feedback can enrich the quantitative survey results to paint a fuller picture of what U.S. audiences want and if there is latent demand for higher-quality international journalism.

### Quantitative Survey

- **1,223 respondents nationwide**

### Qualitative Methods

- **6 in-depth interview participants**
- **26 focus group participants**

### Demographics

Adults who read international news at least a few times a month or more and represent a diverse range of demographics.

### Goal

To test whether there is latent demand among U.S.-based audiences for higher-quality international journalism.
Figure 1: Quantitative survey demographics

**Gender**
- Female: 55%
- Male: 45%

**Age**
- 18-34: 12%
- 35-49: 22%
- 50-64: 19%
- 65+: 47%

**Region**
- Northeast: 20%
- Midwest: 19%
- South: 39%
- West: 22%

**Ethnicity**
- White: 78%
- Black: 9%
- API: 5%
- Hispanic: 5%
- Mixed/Other: 3%

**Education**
- Grade school/Some high school: 23%
- High school degree: 14%
- Some college: 25%
- College degree: 9%
- Technical/vocational school: 2%
- Some postgraduate work: 5%
- Graduate degree: 14%

**Household Income**
- <$25K: 16%
- $24-49K: 23%
- $50K-74K: 21%
- $75-99K: 14%
- $100-149K: 13%
- $150K+: 8%

**Ideology**
- Very liberal: 13%
- Somewhat liberal: 17%
- Moderate: 33%
- Somewhat conservative: 20%
- Very conservative: 15%
- Unsure: 2%

**Party ID**
- Democrat: 39%
- Republican: 30%
- Independent: 27%
- Unsure: 2%

**Marital Status**
- Married: 53%
- Single/Never married: 13%
- Divorced: 9%
- Separated: 5%
- Widowed: 18%
- Living with partner: 1%
The study obtained qualitative feedback through two means. One was a series of six two-hour confidential in-depth interviews with six respondents. This slate of respondents was diverse across race, gender, and geography (Figure 2a). In addition to these intensive one-on-one interviews, the study also included a focus group of 26 participants, all of whom regularly read online international news. This group was also selected to be diverse across several dimensions (Figure 2b). The focus group was conducted asynchronously, using an online platform that enabled respondents to join remotely from around the country over a four-day period.

Participants in the in-depth interviews and in the focus groups were shown the same media literacy videos as were shown to the respondents in the large-scale quantitative survey. However, the two qualitative settings offered participants an opportunity to provide detailed, open-form responses about their views before and after learning more about higher-quality international journalism. This feedback makes it possible to add color to the statistical outcomes of the large-scale quantitative study, through the anecdotes and arguments of a diverse set of interview and focus group participants.

**Figure 2a: Demographics of in-depth interview participants**

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**Figure 2b: Demographics of focus group participants**

**PARTICIPANTS**

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<th>BORN IN THE U.S.</th>
<th>BORN OUTSIDE THE U.S.</th>
<th>BLACK</th>
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<td>26</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>from a geographic mix of states across the U.S.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2 women, 3 men</td>
<td>9</td>
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</table>

- **Race**
  - BORN IN THE U.S.
    - Black: 7 women, 4 men
    - Hispanic: 5 women, 3 men
  - BORN OUTSIDE THE U.S.
    - API: 5 women, 2 men
    - White: 9 women, 4 men
STUDY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
STUDY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study revealed three key insights about the latent demand for higher-quality international journalism.

01 LOCAL AND REPRESENTATIVE JOURNALISTS

U.S.-based audiences prefer local journalists, who live in the communities they cover, and they are wary of parachute journalism.

02 DIGNIFIED AND PRECISE LANGUAGE

U.S.-based audiences value dignified and precise language when reading international reporting.

03 CHANGING ROTE NARRATIVES

U.S.-based audiences support changing narratives about foreign communities.

Crucially, study participants reached these conclusions after exposure to the media literacy videos, demonstrating that a small dose of additional context and education is essential to unlocking latent demand. The results are robust across a diverse range of participants, both in the large-scale quantitative survey and the qualitative interviews and focus groups. The strength of these results suggests that among existing U.S. readers of international news, there is a sizable untapped market for higher-quality international journalism.
Local and Representative Journalists

One of the most striking results from this study is the clear shift in participants’ attitudes about the value of local perspectives in international journalism over the course of the survey, interviews, and focus groups. At the outset, participants expressed little demand for reading journalism produced by local reporters in international markets. When asked about the type of international news reporter they would prefer to hear from, 27% of survey respondents preferred U.S.-based reporters, compared with just 12% who preferred local reporters based in the communities they cover, with 47% preferring both types of reporters.

These responses are broadly consistent with the international news sources that survey respondents reported reading on a regular basis. A majority of respondents reported obtaining their international news from The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, National Public Radio, and National Geographic. All of these outlets largely rely on foreign correspondents from the United States to report on news abroad.

Survey participants then watched a series of short videos. One video introduced participants to Global Press reporters around the world, including Mongolia, Zimbabwe and Mexico, with each reporter explaining why their local roots in the community offered unique access to sources, stories, and local perspectives. Participants also watched an animated video that provided an overview of parachute journalism.

This video outlined the limitations that parachute journalists face—including lacking local context, not speaking the local language, and struggling to gain access to local sources and stories. Survey respondents reacted in real time to the parachute journalism video through a dial test. Regardless of their initial preference—whether for U.S.-based reporters, local reporters, both, or neither—respondents across the board reported thinking differently by the time they reached the end of the video (Figure 3). And 85% of survey respondents reported that this video made a compelling case for why international news should be covered by local reporters rather than parachute journalists (Figure 4).

**Figure 3: Survey participant real-time sentiment dial test response to video on parachute journalism**

Survey respondent preferences for reporter location before engagement with media literacy materials:

- U.S. reporters (n: 322)
- Local reporters (n: 146)
- Important to hear from both (n: 573)
- No preference (n: 134)

Makes me think differently

Does not make me think differently

**Video Time Elapsed**
STUDY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION | LOCAL AND REPRESENTATIVE

Figure 4: Survey participant responses to questions about video on parachute journalism

The video makes a compelling case for why international news should be covered by local reporters [...] This video made me think about reporters covering international news in a way I hadn’t before.

I learned new information about reporters who cover international news.

Figure 5: Survey participant preferences for local vs. U.S. reporters before and after engaging with media literacy materials

Figure 6: Changes in preferences for local reporters across survey participant demographics
After respondents were given a chance to learn about the distinctions between parachute journalists and local reporters, the shift in their preferences was stark. The percentage of respondents who reported preferring local reporters of international news tripled, compared with the responses before watching the video content (Figure 5). This strong shift in preference away from U.S.-based reporters and toward local reporters was robust across respondent demographics, including across all ages and ethnicities in the survey sample (Figure 6).

The participants in the in-depth interviews and focus groups exhibited the same striking shift toward preferring local reporters as that observed from the large-scale quantitative survey results. The interview and focus group formats made it possible to probe why participants changed their attitudes so sharply.

At the outset, most participants preferred to read international news coverage produced by U.S.-based correspondents sent abroad. Many explained that journalists from the United States can act as a bridge between foreign news events and U.S. readers, and that the stories they write can be more relatable because they share a cultural connection with their audiences. By contrast, participants’ initial attitudes toward local reporters were less positive. Some shared that local reporters might be biased and lack objectivity because of their personal link to the communities they report on, and others worried that local reporters may lack adequate training and equipment (Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Initial participant preferences about reporter reporter location before engagement with media literacy materials**

I prefer someone from the U.S. reporting. I feel I would understand the language and context better and I feel they have ‘no skin in the game’ and would be less biased.

**WHITE FEMALE, 35-54, CONSERVATIVE, BORN IN THE U.S.**

I assume [foreign correspondents] establish a connection to the region, the people, gain an understanding of the culture, the social dynamics, etc. There is a better understanding of how things work overall when you are fully immersed in the situation.

**API FEMALE, 35-54, LIBERAL, BORN IN ANOTHER COUNTRY**

...Provide a bridge/translation between the foreign culture and US culture since #2 understands US culture from originally being from there and the foreign culture from living there, which would help them explain so US people can understand.

**API FEMALE, 18-34, MODERATE, BORN IN THE U.S.**

They become familiar to me and allow me to develop a trusting in their news reporting. I look forward to following news they report. I respect their position in journalism.

**BLACK MALE, 55-70, LIBERAL, BORN IN THE U.S.**
After learning more about the limitations of parachute journalism and the benefits that local reporters bring, participants’ attitudes shifted sharply. During the one-on-one in-depth interview sessions, respondents shared their strong beliefs that local journalists can better understand the unique political, social, and historical context of the community they are from. Moreover, they emphasized the importance of local journalists’ superior access to local sources. In the focus groups, participants interacted with one another in spirited discussions about the video content they had watched. A strong majority emerged among the focus group participants in favor of local perspectives in international journalism, and this result was robust across ethnicities, political affiliation, gender, and age group (Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Participant preferences about reporter location after engagement with media literacy materials**

Local perspective is more important to me because it means it would come from the perspective of someone living in the community. They have first-hand experience and knowledge about the issues affecting their community.

**HISPANIC FEMALE, 35-54, LIBERAL, BORN IN ANOTHER COUNTRY**

I agree with my fellow participants. Everyone agrees that local reporters generally are better equipped to cover stories in their own regions/countries. ...I think that local reporters do have more knowledge and contacts and therefore can provide more detailed and factual stories.

**WHITE MALE, 35-54, CONSERVATIVE, BORN IN THE U.S.**

To further probe U.S.-based audience preferences, study participants were also shown a series of example articles, including the news media brand, the article title, and the reporter’s name and headshot. Participants repeatedly expressed their preference for the articles written by reporters who are from the country being covered. In the quantitative survey, 67% of respondents indicated the local reporter would best understand the context for a story in Democratic Republic of the Congo—compared to 54% of respondents who assessed the same for the U.S.-based reporter—regardless of their familiarity with the news media brands presented. These results were consistent across each study segment. Once audiences were aware of the option to receive higher-quality news from local reporters, they preferred those local journalists regardless of the news outlet shown in the masthead.

Because it is like any other person or people, generally if you are from somewhere you are more compassionate ... more in tune. You know more history; you know the facts.. It is like being from Columbus, Ohio. I know Columbus, Ohio, more than most people because it is my hometown, so could I report the news from there more than most people? Absolutely...

**BLACK FEMALE, 51, LIBERAL, BORN IN THE U.S.**
The explanations from focus group participants for why they chose local reporters over parachute journalists are revealing (Figure 9). For example, participants were asked to choose among different bylines for a story about Zimbabwe. On first pass, most participants defaulted to the source they were most familiar with—National Public Radio—and chose the byline of a white, male reporter with a prominent title within NPR. Participants were then asked to reflect on their choice and think about what benefit they would receive if they had selected a different reporter. A remarkable 88% of participants changed their minds, choosing a female reporter hailing from Zimbabwe.

Several participants explained that because this reporter appeared to be from Zimbabwe, she could provide better coverage with greater context. After reflection, they found that the NPR correspondent, who did not appear to be from Zimbabwe, might be more likely to produce superficial or negative coverage of the country—and that his coverage may not provide anything substantially different than that provided by other mainstream or legacy news organizations. It is worth noting that a very small minority of respondents—all of whom identified as politically conservative—continued to prefer the foreign correspondent even after reflection, explaining that he would be “impartial” because he is not from the area.

In summary, this first finding of the study—that there is latent demand from U.S.-based audiences for local journalists to produce international news—is remarkable. More than 1,200 participants began the study as regular readers of established media sources that rely heavily on foreign correspondents to produce content about the world. But with just a small dose of exposure to video content explaining what local reporters have to offer, the survey respondents sharply shifted away from their prior preference for reporters from the United States and toward a desire to read international news produced by journalists who live in the communities they cover. In other words, a small dose of education unlocked a large reservoir of demand.

To be sure, this study’s results cannot demonstrate that those preference shifts will be durable. And there are well-documented risks when survey questionnaires provide information that can lead respondents to a preferred answer. This study aimed to mitigate those risks by adding qualitative interview and focus group components to the quantitative survey. Whether participants were interviewed one-on-one or placed in discussion with other U.S.-based readers from different demographics, the exact same shift in preferences occurred, and participants gave strong and coherent explanations for why they changed their attitudes after watching the video content.

In some cases, respondents needed to be prompted to spend just ten seconds to reflect on their answers, and they autonomously shifted sharply toward a preference for local reporters. On balance, the evidence suggests that respondents were not whimsical in their shifts, but rather made thoughtful and considered choices in support of local reporters who can produce the highest-quality international journalism.

Figure 9: Participant responses when asked to reflect about making a choice between two article headlines, bylines, and reporter headshots

There is a disconnect between his name, how he looks, and his affiliation and the focus of the story. That is not to say he could not report empathetically but he may not even know the right questions to ask. And maybe the local people will not feel an affinity with him so won’t be forthcoming about their suffering.

HISPANIC FEMALE, 35-54, LIBERAL, BORN IN ANOTHER COUNTRY

I think this reporter will be a natural only because she looks like she has more of a connection there. Maybe she could be from there and she is right in the middle of the crisis.

WHITE FEMALE, 55-70, LIBERAL, BORN IN THE U.S.
The second main finding from the study is that U.S. audiences strongly prefer that international reporting use dignified and precise vocabulary to describe global events. Mainstream international news coverage is replete with shorthand phrases, such as “ethnic conflict” and “developing world,” that can often mislead readers, perpetuate stereotypes, or force audiences to make assumptions. This study aimed to probe if U.S.-based readers of international news preferred more precise language as well as descriptions that represent communities with dignity rather than stereotypes or shorthand.

To do so, survey participants were presented with a series of choices between two passages about international news. Each choice presented a shorter passage sacrificing thoughtful descriptions for brevity, as well as a longer passage representing complex subjects and communities with dignity and precision. The longer passages were written using the Global Press Style Guide, a guide that exists to complement or fill in where the Associated Press Stylebook is silent on international word choice.

The Global Press Style Guide bans phrases such as “Global South” and “ethnic” in favor of language that more thoughtfully conveys substantive meaning in order to offer dignity to the subject of the news and precision and clarity to the reader.

By a large margin, survey respondents consistently chose the passages that were dignified and precise. For example, two-thirds of respondents found it clearer, more interesting, and more meaningful to read a description explaining the conflict arising from one tribe’s livestock destroying another tribe’s crops in Democratic Republic of the Congo’s Ituri province. By contrast, the shorthand phrase “ethnic tensions,” which carries little to no substantive meaning without context, did not appeal to most respondents (Figure 10a).

An even larger margin of respondents preferred a passage honing in on Zimbabwe and a precise estimate of the country’s funding for adapting to climate change, compared with a vague statement about climate struggles in the “Global South” (Figure 10b). Similarly, respondents overwhelmingly preferred a longer passage with a dignified and precise description of a single mother and her five children, compared with a brief and negative statement (Figure 10c).

The qualitative responses from interviews and focus groups adds color to these robust quantitative survey findings. One interviewee explained the value of a longer passage that “gave me background knowledge. I didn’t know that two sides were arguing over land. I feel like I can take more from the story when I’m not relying on my own assumptions.” Another supported the longer passage because “I felt it was more genuine and less condescending.”
Figure 10: Survey participant preferences when asked to make a choice between two sentences: (1) a passage appearing in a real news story published by a legacy media outlet; and (2) a rewritten version of the passage adhering to the Global Press Style Guide (note: participants were not told in advance the origin of either sentence)

**REAL PASSAGE FROM LEGACY MEDIA STORY**

“Ethnic tensions flared in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo this week as age-old tribal battles moved into Virunga National Park, the famed gorilla sanctuary.”

**REWRITTEN PASSAGE THAT ADHERES TO GLOBAL PRESS STYLE GUIDE**

“In Democratic Republic of the Congo’s Ituri province, which shares a border with Uganda, fighting over a 50-acre plot of land escalated this week when cattle owned by members of the Hema tribe destroyed crops owned by the Lendu tribe. Conflict between the two tribes, herders and farmers, respectively, has been ongoing here since 1970.”

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<th>CLEARER</th>
<th>MORE INTERESTING</th>
<th>MORE MEANINGFUL</th>
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<td>64%</td>
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**REAL PASSAGE FROM LEGACY MEDIA STORY**

“The Global South has struggled with funding for innovative agricultural solutions, despite increasing drought and unpredictable weather.”

**REWRITTEN PASSAGE THAT ADHERES TO GLOBAL PRESS STYLE GUIDE**

“Zimbabwe faces increasing drought and unpredictable weather. But only 7% of the country’s annual agriculture budget goes to innovative solutions, such as drought-resistant seeds and solar-powered irrigation.”

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**REAL PASSAGE FROM LEGACY MEDIA STORY**

“A victim of both domestic violence and poverty, Rose Odengo and her five children are now living in Kenya’s largest slum.”

**REWRITTEN PASSAGE THAT ADHERES TO GLOBAL PRESS STYLE GUIDE**

“Rose Odengo and her five children painted their front door yellow, a symbol of welcome, when they moved to Kibera. Their home is small, just one room, and lacks running water and electricity. But Odengo says she sleeps well here because her family is safe and healthy. They fled here, an area known for overcrowding and a lack of infrastructure, when her husband was arrested after punching her in a public market.”

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<th>CLEARER</th>
<th>MORE INTERESTING</th>
<th>MORE MEANINGFUL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>68%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When focus group participants were then shown the Global Press Style Guide, a large majority of respondents said they believed that the principles it embodied would improve international news coverage (Figure 11). To be sure, a small minority of respondents objected to the principles of dignity and precision, with one reporting being “fatigued by this new woke mindset.” Nevertheless, most reacted positively to learning about how international news coverage can represent the communities it covers with dignity and precision.

This is another critical finding of the study. Although a small minority of U.S. readers remained unconvinced, large majorities across the nationwide survey, focus groups and individual interviews reported a preference for language that is dignified and precise. And upon learning about principles to promote such language in international journalism, these audiences are broadly supportive of those principles. The clear finding is that there is latent demand among U.S. audiences for higher-quality international journalism that is dignified and precise.

Figure 11: Participant feedback on the Global Press Style Guide

These principles make a lot of sense and certainly do center the dignity and humanity of the individual. In practice, they would help us loosen our existing definitions and categories and think more specifically about people and places.

WHITE FEMALE, 55-70, LIBERAL, BORN IN THE U.S.

Absolutely they would make it better. People rationalize everything, it’s part of our nature. Reducing humans to labels such as ‘immigrants, third-world people, refugees, victims, etc.’ strips a part of humanity away from them in order to make it more palatable for readers. Forcing readers to stop and empathize with other’s situations I think would lead to more action and less complacency.

WHITE MALE, 18-34, LIBERAL, BORN IN THE U.S.

Possibly better? I don’t know. This is not an influencing point for me. If anything, I am fatigued by this new woke mindset where anyone at any moment could be cancelled for a poor word choice. We are too ultrasensitive nowadays.

WHITE FEMALE, 35-54, CONSERVATIVE, BORN IN THE U.S.
The third main finding in this study is that U.S.-based audiences have latent demand for international journalism that does not hew to negative stereotypes of communities around the world. Rather, they prefer stories that present accuracy in context by including robust reporting on solutions as well as problems, help readers gain a holistic picture of what matters to local communities, and explain the consequences of world events on communities in the near and long term.

The large-scale quantitative survey asked respondents to make a series of choices between two article headlines. Each choice included one headline that focused on a problem in a foreign community and another headline that proposed a solution to that problem. By wide margins, respondents reported that they were more likely to read stories about solutions compared with those focused only on problems (Figure 12). This is an important finding. The preponderance of negative news coverage of communities around the world can lead readers to harmful stereotypes about those communities. The clear response in this study suggests that U.S. readers strongly demand reporting that presents not only problems but also efforts by communities to advance solutions.

Figure 12:
Survey participant responses to the prompt, “Which headline are you more likely to click on?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article Title</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Filtering Polluted River Requires Cooperation – and a Secret Ingredient</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents Grapple with Legacy of Industrial Water Contamination</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never Again: Officials Pledge to Fix Failed Volcanic Warning System</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officials Trade Blame for Failed Volcanic Warning System</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can Eggshells Save One of Mexico’s Most Polluted Rivers?</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factory Wastewater and Local Garbage Make Lerma River Most Polluted in Mexico</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The qualitative interviews and focus groups offered a chance to delve deeper into participants’ latent desire for narrative change. Most focus group participants agreed that international news offers a heavy dose of negative and rote narratives such as war, poverty, disaster, and disease. Yet such coverage is misaligned with what participants seek out by consuming international news.

A strong theme across focus group and interview respondents was that a personal connection to a community abroad is one of the strongest motivators to read international news. Every single participant born in another country reported that they read news about their country of birth. And participants that had traveled or studied abroad, particularly for extended periods, reported seeking out news about the communities they had visited or lived in. Participants uniformly reported that these personal connections motivated them to seek out news beyond negative depictions alone, from disasters to poverty.

Many participants—regardless of any personal connection to communities abroad—reported a desire to read positive news coverage about other countries and to read stories that shed light on the culture and everyday lives of communities around the world. And several participants expressed interest in longform journalism and stories that focus on the longer-term consequences of events such as disasters that are typically only covered in their immediate aftermath.

The implications of this rich feedback suggest that there is latent demand among U.S. audiences for higher-quality international journalism that breaks the mold of negative, stereotypical coverage. Because the strongest demand for international news comes from readers with a personal connection to communities abroad, there may be new opportunities to serve audiences such as diaspora communities.
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS
CONCLUSION

The findings in this study point the way toward a remarkable opportunity. U.S. audiences across a diverse range of demographics prefer higher-quality international journalism that is defined by more proximate reporting, dignified and precise language, and comprehensive coverage—once they know it is an option. The media industry and media funders have an opportunity to unlock this latent demand, making it possible to serve readers engaging international news without sacrificing quality.

The benefits of higher-quality international journalism are numerous, from better informing U.S. readers about the world to helping readers empathize with communities abroad that are represented with dignity and precision. The key insight from this study is that there does not need to be any trade-off between serving news that is salutary for U.S.-based audiences and serving content that they demand—it can be the same content.

Prior to this study, there has been little research conducted on how U.S.-based audiences might respond to a concerted push to raise the quality of international journalism. Today, these readers find it all too easy to access generic, nonlocal, and stereotypical reporting on communities around the world, entrenching audience expectations of what international journalism is. And existing media outlets producing international news often cater to narrow segments of U.S. audiences that may appear to be lucrative targets for subscription revenue while neglecting segments such as migrant, diaspora, and refugee communities.

Yet as this study reveals, audiences in the United States do not actually prefer international reporting based on tropes, stereotypes, or rote narratives. Rather, the demand from U.S.-based readers for international journalism is tied to the quality of the content. To a large degree, however, U.S.-based audiences only have access to parachute journalism that covers the world without cultural, historical, or political context, while failing to represent communities with dignified and precise language.

This study demonstrates that U.S.-based audiences do not have a ready understanding of the limitations of today’s international journalism. But with a small dose of explanation—about the concept of parachute journalism, for example—most U.S. readers immediately shift their preferences. Indeed, the number of respondents in the quantitative survey expressing a preference for local rather than U.S.-based reporters triples after exposure to media literacy materials. Presenting audiences with what is possible—from solutions-oriented headlines to local reporters who live in the communities they cover—unlocks demand for higher-quality international journalism that is representative, precise, and locally produced.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

INVEST IN MEDIA LITERACY
(RECOMMENDATION TO FUNDERS)

It is critical to educate U.S.-based audiences about what is possible. Thoughtfully conceived media literacy campaigns can build a groundswell of demand for higher-quality international journalism, just as the media literacy videos in this study unlocked participants’ latent demand. This study also supports a strategy of targeting such campaigns to communities with a strong personal connection to a particular community abroad, such as diasporas seeking to read about their ancestral communities. Media funders should prioritize supporting media literacy campaigns to educate prospective audiences in the United States. They might partner with organizations such as the American Press Institute and the American Journalism Project, which have the platforms and experience to implement effective media literacy campaigns that reach diverse U.S.-based audiences. For their part, media outlets have an opportunity to proactively partner with and advance these efforts to broaden and deepen reader engagement with international content.

BUILD HIGHER-QUALITY INTERNATIONAL JOURNALISM CAPACITY THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS
(RECOMMENDATION TO NEWSROOMS)

In parallel to educating U.S. audiences, it is critical to build industry capacity to produce higher-quality international journalism. Partnerships can play an important role. Media outlets that do not currently employ local reporters can partner with media organizations that do in order to deliver international content to U.S. audiences. Such investments in global partnerships can be cost-efficient, achieve swift market access, and deliver higher-quality content—particularly when compared with dispatching ever more parachute journalists. These partnerships represent low-hanging fruit for newsrooms seeking to rapidly boost the quality of international journalism; they offer a mechanism to harness the extensive expertise and reporting capacity that already exists in local media organizations around the world.
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

03

INCREASE TRANSPARENCY IN INTERNATIONAL JOURNALISM (RECOMMENDATION TO NEWSROOMS)

A partnership strategy will not be sustainable in the long term if newsrooms marginalize their global collaborators. Therefore, the media industry needs to increase the transparency of the international news production process, particularly when working with partners. For example, all too often a foreign correspondent receives the only visible byline, omitting local journalists, photographers, and editors who may have contributed. Investing in an industry culture of valuing local contributions will be critical to attracting talent and building capacity to produce higher-quality international journalism. In addition, transparently identifying when reporters used translators and the method of translation is important to preserving both the accuracy of the source’s words and trust with the reader.

04

INVEST IN LOCAL EXPERTISE AND HIRE LOCAL REPORTERS (RECOMMENDATION TO FUNDERS AND NEWSROOMS)

Although partnerships offer a way to swiftly scale up international reporting capacity, there is limited media coverage even by locally based outlets in many communities around the world. Moreover, in most countries around the world, there is a worrying trend of independent local media organizations shuttering. Therefore, media funders in collaboration with the media industry should prioritize investments in hiring local reporters who are representative of the communities they cover, especially in media markets that are underserved. Doing so will not only better serve those communities but also enable the delivery of higher-quality international content for audiences in the United States.

These are foundational changes to an industry and will require dedication and investment by legacy outlets, new innovators, and media funders. But the effort is worth the prize. This study has demonstrated that there is strong alignment between what U.S. audiences want to read about the world and the higher-quality international journalism that the industry must work hard to produce. A compelling opportunity exists to reinvent international journalism—and meet a pressing need.
REFERENCES


ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Laxmi Parthasarathy is the Chief Operating Officer of Global Press, where she leads worldwide operations, oversees local audience development, and launched the Global Press News Services division. Prior to Global Press, Laxmi served as Director of Global Media Partnerships at Ashoka, the world’s largest association of social entrepreneurs. Over her career, she has lived and worked around the world, from Rwanda to Swaziland, and led media development initiatives in more than a dozen countries. She is the author of *The Bottom-Up Media Revolution: How Social Entrepreneurs Are Building Trust Between Communities and the Media* and an author of the book *Kamala Harris and the Rise of Indian Americans* (Wisdom Tree, 2021). Laxmi has been named a Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation Mentor and one of six American Express Next Generation Leaders. She holds a master’s degree from the London School of Economics and graduated from Carleton University. Originally from Toronto, Canada, Laxmi is the founder of My Roots, a Toronto-based media organization and quarterly print publication. She now lives in Washington, D.C. with her husband.

Cristi Hegranes is the CEO of Global Press, a nonprofit news organization she founded in 2006 to train and employ local women journalists in some of the world’s least-covered places. At a time when many people have lost trust in the media, she is working to rebuild it by connecting readers with the journalists who are closest to the narrative in their own communities. Cristi has received many honors and awards for her work, including the Society of Professional Journalists’ Journalism Innovation Prize, the Ida B. Wells Award for Bravery in Journalism, and the Grinnell Prize for Social Justice Innovation, among others. Cristi teaches at Georgetown University and was a Social Entrepreneur-in-Residence at Stanford University. She is the author of the forthcoming book *Byline: How Local Journalists Can Improve the Global News Industry and Change the World* (Forbes, September 2023). Originally from Santa Fe, New Mexico, Cristi now lives outside of Washington D.C. with her toddler son Henry.
Report design by Jacqueline Dinarte

All photos in the report feature Global Press reporters around the world.

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