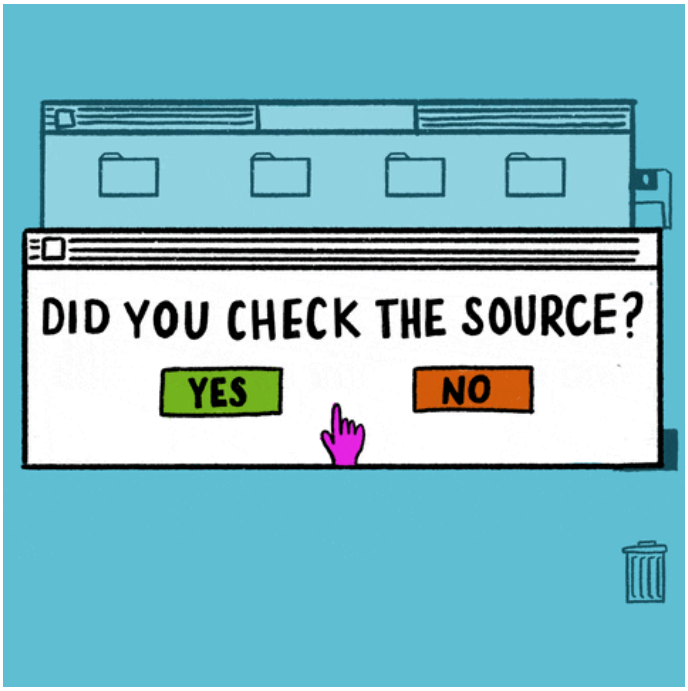
On the Record: Credible Sources

A Modern Guide to Verifying News



Created by journalists and data-ambassadors, this guide is your toolkit for navigating today's fast, unpredictable, and algorithm-shaped news cycle.

We break down the difference between news, opinion, features, and influencer content, help you spot bias, and point you to vetted, nonpartisan sources. Whether you're overwhelmed by the scroll or just want to share smarter, this guide's for you.

Built with insights from across media, justice, and tech *(yes, including some checked AI-assist)* it's here to help you read critically, stay rooted in truth, and move through the noise with more clarity.

Let's get into it.

Last updated: November 2025

Why This Guide Exists (and Why It Matters More Than Ever)

We're living in a time when your feed might break the news before any newsroom does—and increasingly, that's exactly what's happening. According to the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2025*, **54% of Americans** now say they regularly get their news from social and video platforms, surpassing television at 50% and news websites or apps at 48%.

But while the scroll might be faster, it comes with **no guarantees**.
No editors. No fact-checking. No context.
On social media, content is often algorithmically boosted for engagement, not truth.

⚠️ That matters because the line between **news**, **opinion**, and **misinformation** is blurrier than ever. And it's taking a real toll on our democracy.

What's Changing in the Media Landscape?

According to the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2025*:

📱 **Newsfluencers**—creators and personalities on platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram—are reaching huge audiences. For example, 22% of Americans encountered news or commentary from podcaster Joe Rogan in the week after the presidential inauguration.

📉 **News avoidance is climbing.** Globally, 40% of people say they sometimes or often avoid the news—a steep jump from 29% in 2017. That's the highest level Reuters has ever recorded.

⏱️ **Short-form video** dominates news consumption among younger audiences. In the U.S., 44% of 18–24-year-olds and 38% of 25–34-year-olds say social and video platforms are their **primary news sources**.

🤖 **AI-powered news access is emerging.** About 7% of Americans already use chatbots like ChatGPT for news weekly, rising to 15% among people under 25. At the same time, many outlets are seeing **drops in revenue and clicks as audiences turn to AI tools directly**.

These shifts are fueling both **information overload and disengagement**. Many people feel overwhelmed or mistrustful. Some tune out altogether.

This guide was created by journalists and media practitioners—myself, Lyanne, and collaborators with experience across economics, legal justice, culture, and investigative reporting. We know how easily the lines between fact and opinion, context and clickbait, can become blurred.

We're not here to dismiss social platforms or discourage curiosity. We're here to help you **read more critically** and **navigate information more clearly**. Especially now:

What's at Risk

📺 **Public broadcasting is under threat.** Both NPR and PBS have filed lawsuits against the federal government after funding cuts they argue are politically motivated.

📰 **Newsrooms are shrinking.** Layoffs continue across the media industry, reducing the number of reporters covering everything from city hall to climate to corruption.

🚫 **Press access is becoming politicized.** The Associated Press was recently blocked from attending key White House events. Though initially restored by a judge, an appeals court has since allowed the restriction to stand.

⚖️ **Lawsuits are being used as weapons.** The U.S. president has secured multimillion-dollar settlements from media companies—and recently filed a $10 billion defamation suit against *The Wall Street Journal* and Rupert Murdoch.

📉 **Economic data is at risk.** The new administration is moving to reclassify federal workers and reduce budgets for agencies like the **Bureau of Labor Statistics**, which produces the monthly inflation and unemployment reports. Experts warn this could degrade the quality of economic data policymakers and financial institutions rely on to assess the economy — with major implications for

trust in institutions and even Federal Reserve decisions on monetary policy (Politico, Marketplace).

🔍 Why This Guide Matters

In a world where **algorithms**, **influencers**, and **AI** shape public perception faster than traditional journalism ever could, we need tools to recognize credible reporting.

This guide breaks down types of journalism: **news, op-eds, opinion columns, enterprise reporting, feature stories**, and more, so you can better understand what you're reading and where it's coming from.

You'll learn how to recognize:
✅ Factual reporting vs. personal perspective
🔎 Investigative depth vs. surface-level content
🧠 Journalist-driven content vs. influencer-led or AI-generated takes

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We can't promise perfect clarity.
But we do offer:
🧰 Frameworks
📋 Vetted outlets and newsfluencers
🧭 Everyday tools to help you vet, verify, and make more informed decisions.

Because we believe most people do care about truth—not just to be right, but to build stronger communities, participate in democracy, and connect across differences. **Shared facts are how we start.**

If you've ever felt overwhelmed trying to tell what's real, who's credible, or how to validate something before sharing it, you're not alone.

This guide is for you.

🕵🏽 Let's get started.

Types of Journalism & Information-Sharing

(And How to Spot Them in a Social Media World)

TRADITIONAL CATEGORIES

1. 📰 **News (Hard News)**
   What it is: Straightforward, fact-based reporting of timely events. Focuses on the "who, what, when, where, why, and how."
   Where you'll see it:
   a. Traditional: Associated Press (AP), Reuters, NPR, local TV news
   b. Social: Shared headlines or clips from @nytimes, @cnn, @bbc
      ⚠️ Be cautious: On social, headlines may get taken out of context or cropped in screenshots.

2. 💬 **Opinion**
   What it is: A personal take or analysis from a writer. Not objective reporting.
   Where you'll see it:
   a. Traditional: NYT Opinion, Washington Post Opinions
   b. Social: Twitter/X threads, TikTok rants that say "Here's what they're not telling you…"
      🧠 Tip: Look for language like "I believe," "We should," or emotional tone—it's designed to persuade.

3. 🖋️ **Op-Ed (Opposite the Editorial Page)**
   What it is: Guest opinion pieces by people outside the newsroom (experts, academics, community leaders).
   Where you'll see it:
   a. Traditional: LA Times Op-Ed, Boston Globe Ideas
   b. Social: Shared links by the author, often with credentials
      🚩 Red flag: Sometimes reposted as "news" on social, when it's really opinion.

4. 🗣️ **Column**
   What it is: A recurring opinion piece with a distinct voice or theme.
   Where you'll see it:
   a. Traditional: Charles Blow (NYT), Roxane Gay (The Cut), Jason Gay (WSJ)
   b. Social: Substack posts, IG carousels with a signature tone
      📌 Note: Columns can blend analysis and reporting, but are still

subjective.

5. 🧵 **Feature Story**
   What it is: In-depth storytelling with character, emotion, or deeper context.
   Where you'll see it:
   a. Traditional: The Atlantic, NYT Magazine, The New Yorker
   b. Social: Shared links or quote cards with narrative-style storytelling
      🕰️ Tip: Often evergreen—not tied to breaking news.

6. 🛠️ **Enterprise Reporting**
   What it is: Deep, original journalism that breaks new ground. May include investigation.
   Where you'll see it:
   a. Traditional: ProPublica, The Washington Post, Spotlight (Boston Globe)
   b. Social: TikToks or Twitter threads linking to exposés from reputable publications
      🔍 Example: A months-long investigation into corruption or misconduct.

7. 🧭 **Editorial**
   What it is: An unsigned article expressing a publication's official stance.
   Where you'll see it:
   a. Traditional: WSJ Editorial Board, Chicago Tribune endorsements
   b. Social: Screenshots in political discourse, a "thought piece" in social video format
      📣 Important: Editorial ≠ news—it's institutional opinion.

8. 🔎 **Investigative Journalism**
   What it is: Exposes wrongdoing, based on deep reporting, documents, and interviews.
   Where you'll see it:
   a. Traditional: The Intercept, FRONTLINE (PBS), 60 Minutes
   b. Social: Explainer videos breaking down complex findings
      ⏳ Heads up: Often takes months to produce. Not usually "viral" because of the complex nature of the truth.

9. 🍿 **Review**
   What it is: Critical evaluations of books, music, film, or food. Opinion with analysis.
   Where you'll see it:
   a. Traditional: Pitchfork, Rotten Tomatoes, RogerEbert.com

b. Social: YouTube film critics, TikTok “BookTok”
🎭 Caution: Reviews are subjective. What resonates is personal

10. 🎭 Satire

What it is: Content designed for humor, parody, or critique — not factual reporting.
Where you’ll see it:

a. Traditional: The Onion, The Borowitz Report (New Yorker)
b. Social: TikTok skits, meme accounts, parody news sites
⚠️ Red flag: Satire is often reposted as “real” news without context. Always check the source before sharing.

SOCIAL-ERA FORMATS

1. 🗞️ Aggregated News

What it is:
Headlines, summaries, or clips pulled from multiple sources—often with **no new reporting**. These accounts don’t usually do original journalism; they repackage it.

Where you’ll see it:

- **Traditional:** Axios, SmartBrief
- **Social:** @nowthisnews, @impact, @so.informed, @mosheh

🔗 **Tip:** Always trace posts back to the **original source**; that’s where the reporting (and full context) lives. Aggregators are useful for scanning headlines, but not for nuance.

2. 🗞️ Independent Journalists

What it is:
Reporters with professional newsroom experience who now work solo on platforms like Substack, TikTok, or YouTube or new agencies altogether. They still apply journalistic standards like **sourcing, verification, and transparency**, even if they operate outside legacy institutions.

Where you'll see it:

- Substack newsletters
- YouTube explainer channels
- TikTok accounts with credentials listed (and receipts linked)

✅ **Bonus:** These creators often break underreported stories or bring deeper community context. But always check their track record and sourcing.

3. 📱 Newsfluencer Content

What it is:
Commentary or summaries by influencers who discuss news topics—but don't always apply journalistic standards. Their content may *look* like news, but it often blends **facts with personal takes**. This doesn't necessarily discount the information which may still be very valid, but it's important to recognize the POV the information is conveyed with.

Types to watch:

- **Contextualizers:** Break down news with personal framing or commentary. They may cite sources, but they're often more "news-adjacent" than neutral.

Where you'll see it:

- IG carousels or TikTok explainers
- Podcasts and livestreams

4. 🕵🏽 AI & Deepfakes

What it is:
Content created or altered using artificial intelligence: videos, audio, or images that **look real but aren't**.

Where you'll see it:

- AI-written articles
- Deepfake videos of politicians or celebrities
- Voice-cloned audio clips
- Viral TikToks or posts mimicking news broadcasts

🚨 **How to spot it:**

- Weird hand movements
- Off lighting or shadows
- Mismatched lip-sync or robotic speech
- No links to credible sources

🧠 **Rule of thumb:** If it *feels* too wild or perfectly outrageous—**verify before you share**. When in doubt, cross-check with multiple trusted outlets.

5. 📸 **Citizen Journalism**

What it is:
News gathered and reported by everyday people who are not employed by traditional news organizations. Often shared via social platforms or personal sites.

Where you'll see it:

- Social: Facebook Lives, TikToks, X threads, IG Stories from on-the-ground users
- Tools: Smartphones, police scanners, livestreams, personal blogs

Types of Citizen Journalism:

- Audience participation (comments, tips, eyewitness content)
- Independent news/info sites
- Participatory news platforms (like Reddit threads)
- Collaborative or contributory coverage (e.g. storm tracking, scanner communities)

- Thin media (minimal text/analysis)

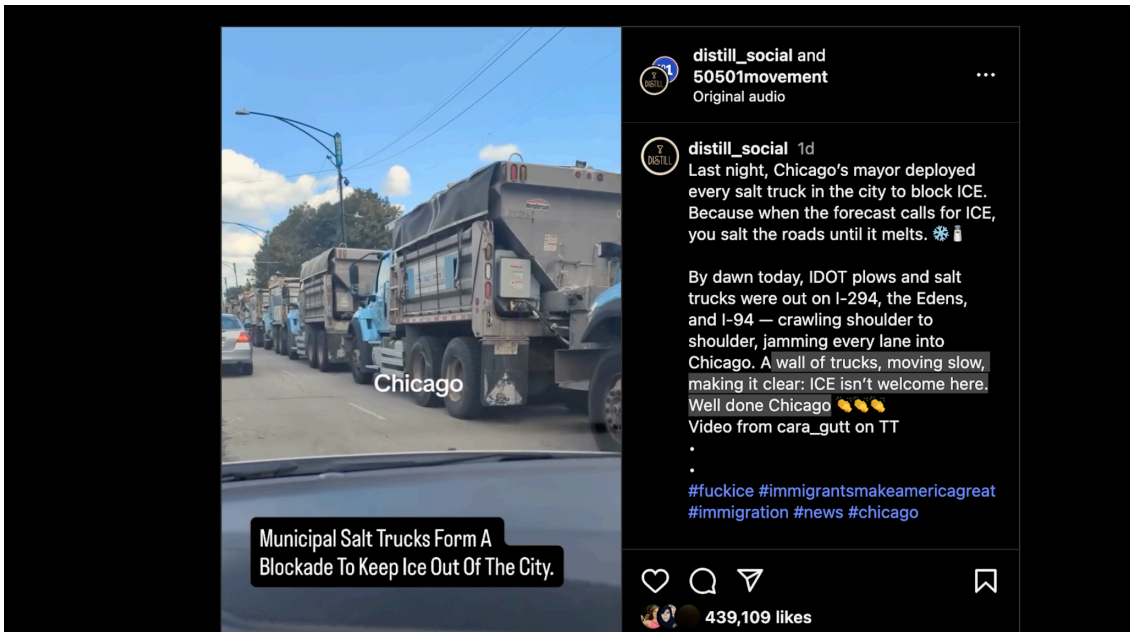
- Personal broadcasting (e.g. livestreams, first-person POV)

⚠️ **Caution:**
Most citizen journalism is user-generated (UGC), meaning it may be unverified, out of context, or missing critical sourcing. A raw video may be real, but not the full story. Aim to understand the story in context.

🛠️ Corrections: Why They Matter

In traditional journalism, **making a correction isn't a sign of weakness, it's a mark of integrity**. When a newsroom gets something wrong, they're expected to issue a public correction or clarification. It's baked into the process: facts are double-checked, sources are verified, and if a mistake slips through, there's a system to fix it, transparently. An observation: the importance of corrections can get lost in the world of social media.

A false post can go viral in seconds and never be walked back, even if it's proven wrong. Two examples from recent history:



1. **[9/7/25]** A social video post showed salt trucks lined up on Chicago streets, with captions claiming they were deployed to block or slow ICE operations in the city.
    - **What actually happened:** The trucks were part of routine traffic and safety measures related to the Taste of Chicago festival and planned protests—not an anti-ICE blockade, as news outlet Block Club Chicago corrected.
2. **[3/30/25]** A viral social media post claimed that a female police officer named **Katie Cunningham** had gone missing—sparking alarm across multiple communities.
    a. **What actually happened:** The post was a scam. According to CBS News, the image was misused from a real officer in Montana. Police departments across several states confirmed the post was false and warned the public about the hoax, CBS reported.

The algorithms tend to reward *speed and engagement* not *accuracy*. And in most cases, there's no editorial board, no corrections page, and no institutional accountability.

That has real consequences. When creators or outlets don't correct misinformation, it fractures trust and fuels division. And the more divided we are about what's true, the harder it becomes to find shared ground—on anything.

🧠 What We Can Learn from Journalism

Here's how we can borrow best practices from newsrooms—even if we're just casual sharers or content creators:

Journalism Standard	What You Can Do Online
Corrections + Retractions	If you shared something wrong, post a follow-up. Say what changed and why.
Transparent Sourcing	Link to original sources. Don't just screenshot headlines.
Timestamping Updates	If info changes, note *when* it changed. Don't delete and pretend it never happened.
Clear Distinction: Opinion vs Fact	Add context: "This is my take" vs. "This is a reported story."

Major Non-Partisan News Outlets (U.S. & International)

Now with funding and ownership context

🇺🇸 U.S.-Based

📰 Associated Press (AP)

- **What it is:** A nonprofit news cooperative founded in 1846, owned by member newspapers, radio, and TV stations.
- **Funding:** Primarily through subscription fees from media partners. No government funding.
- **Why it matters:** Its cooperative structure discourages partisan influence and prioritizes factual, widely distributable reporting.

Rated center and highly reliable by AllSides and Ad Fontes.

📺 PBS NewsHour & 🎙️ NPR

- **What they are:** Publicly funded U.S. broadcasters known for in-depth reporting and civil discourse.
- **Funding:** Receive federal grants via the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), plus private donations and foundation support.
- **Current status: Facing defunding in 2025.** Lawsuits filed against the federal government for violating First Amendment protections.
- **Why it matters:** Trusted by both scholars and the public, especially for education, politics, and civic engagement.

Consistently ranked among the most trusted U.S. news sources by YouGov and Pew. The funding model is currently under threat following an executive order to cease federal funding.

🌍 Reuters (U.S. Bureau)

- **What it is:** For-profit, global news service owned by Thomson Reuters Corporation (Canadian).
- **Funding:** Corporate-owned but editorially independent, revenue comes from licensing and business data services.
- **Why it matters:** Known for fast, fact-based wire reporting with minimal commentary. Often used by other outlets.

Rated center by AllSides; considered one of the least biased major outlets.

🔎 ProPublica

- **What it is:** Nonprofit investigative newsroom focused on accountability journalism.
- **Funding:** Philanthropy-based; receives grants from foundations like Ford, MacArthur, and individual donors.
- **Why it matters:** Known for deep investigations and high-impact reporting, especially on systemic issues.

Pulitzer-winning and frequently partnered with mainstream outlets.

🌐 International (Commonly Consumed in the U.S.)

📡 BBC News (World + U.S. Bureaus)

- **What it is:** British public broadcaster, chartered by Parliament.
- **Funding:** Primarily funded by the UK's annual TV license fee (from citizens), not the U.S. government.
- **Why it matters:** Highly regarded for impartial international coverage.

In November 2025 the BBC faced a major editorial controversy — two senior executives resigned after a documentary edited a speech by Donald Trump in a way that critics say mis-represented events and raised questions of bias and

governance. This incident has increased scrutiny of the organization's impartiality and governance, and places the BBC's trust credentials under stress.

Rated: Still widely used and respected, but with footnote above.

Tools & Platforms for Assessing Bias & Reliability

Tool	What It Does	Funded By
AllSides	Compares bias across left, center, and right sources	Ad revenue, grants
Media Bias/Fact Check (MBFC)	Rates reliability and bias of 1000s of outlets	User-supported donations
Ad Fontes Media (Media Bias Chart)	Visualizes news outlets by bias and reliability	Nonprofit, education partners
NewsGuard	Browser plugin that ranks outlet credibility	Private for-profit, licensing model

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🗒️ What Research & Aggregators Say

- **Pew Research Center (2025):** Democrats mostly trust PBS, NPR, BBC, Reuters, AP, and NYT. Republicans lean toward Fox News, Newsmax. Trust overlap is shrinking.
- **Third-party reviews** like **AllSides**, **Ad Fontes**, and **Reddit's r/neutralnews** frequently cite outlets like AP, Reuters, and NPR as among the most balanced.

Independent Creators in Journalism

Curated by Project C

🧩 About Project C

Project C is a home for journalists navigating the independent creator economy. Through its newsletter, private community, research, and learning resources, it provides **support and strategy for reporters going solo**—whether by choice or necessity.

The project was founded by a former Vox journalist and Sulzberger Fellow at Columbia Journalism School, after witnessing the slow institutional response to the rise of independent journalism on platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Substack.

As news consumption habits change, more audiences are turning to individual voices they trust. But going independent doesn't mean going it alone. **Project C fills the gap**—offering guidance for building sustainable, audience-first journalism businesses with editorial integrity.

Because journalism isn't dying. It's evolving.

📚 Why This List Matters

This list highlights creators producing meaningful, original work across beats—from climate to culture, finance to foreign policy. Many of these journalists have built powerful, engaged communities through newsletters, podcasts, explainers, and videos. They're shaping the future of news—and redefining how journalism reaches the public.

Use this list to **explore**, **support**, and **learn from** independent reporters who are making an impact outside traditional media.

🗂️ Creators by Beat

🌱 Climate / Environment

- Emily Atkin — *Heated*

🎨 Culture

- Alicia Kennedy — *From the Desk of Alicia Kennedy*
- Anne Helen Petersen — *Culture Study*
- Emily Sundberg — *Feed Me*

🎬 Entertainment / Hollywood

- Andy Dehnart — *Reality Blurred*
- Hunter Harris — *Hung Up*

📚 Explanatory / Documentary

- Phil Edwards — *Phil Edwards*
- Sam Ellis — *Search Party*
- Joss Fong & Adam Cole — *Howtown*
- Kahlil Greene — *Gen Z Historian*
- Johnny Harris — *Johnny Harris*
- Hannah Ritchie — *Sustainability by Numbers*

💰 Finance / Economics

- Kyla Scanlon — *In This Economy?*
- Bryan Vance — *Stumptown Savings*

🗞️ General News

- Mosheh Oinounou — *Mo News*

🏛️ Government Accountability

- Chris Geidner — *Law Dork*

- Seamus Hughes — *Court Watch*
- Marisa Kabas — *The Handbasket*
- Matt Kiser — *WTF Just Happened Today?*
- Judd Legum — *Popular Info*
- Lisa Remillard — *The News Girl*
- Nathan Tankus — *Notes on the Crisis*
- Kyle Tharp — *Chaotic Era*
- Jessica Valenti — *Abortion Every Day*

🧬 Health / Wellness

- Katelyn Jetelina — *Your Local Epidemiologist*

🏳️‍⚧️ Identity

- Erin Reed — *Erin in the Morning*

🌐 Internet Culture

- Ryan Broderick — *Garbage Day*
- Caitlin Dewey — *Links I Would GChat You If We Were Friends*
- Casey Lewis — *After School*
- Kate Lindsay — *Embedded*
- Taylor Lorenz — *UserMag*
- Parker Molloy — *The Present Age*
- Max Read — *Read Max*
- Kat Tenbarge — *Spitfire News*

🏙️ Local

- Alissa Walker — *Torched*

📡 Media / Power

- Oliver Darcy — *Status*

🗳️ Politics

- Chris Cillizza — *So What*
- Heather Cox Richardson — *Letters from an American*
- Isaac Saul — *Tangle News*

🏈 Sports

- Matt Brown — *Extra Points*

💻 Tech

- Cleo Abram — *Huge If True*
- Marques Brownlee — *MKBHD*
- Becca Farsace — *Taking Tech Outside*
- Brian Fung — *Brain Fungi*
- Alex Kantrowitz — *Big Technology*
- Eric Newcomer — *Newcomer*
- Casey Newton — *Platformer*
- Craig Silverman & Alexios Mantzarlis — *Indicator*

🌍 World

- Tim Mak — *The Counteroffensive*
- Bisan Owda — *Bisan from Gaza*

Other Independent Journalists with Major Journalism Backgrounds

MORE TO COME

Name	Previous Reputable Outlet(s)	Current Independent Platform / Role	Notes
Jorge Ramos	Noticiero Univision, Al Punto (Televisa Univision)	Independent digital series *Así Veo las Cosas* across Instagram, YouTube, X, TikTok	Left Univisión Dec 2024; launched show mid-2025 (Wikipedia, Los Angeles Times, BELatina, Delaware Public Media, El País)
Jim Acosta	CNN (Chief White House Correspondent)	Substack newsletter	Left CNN in early 2025 (Wallace House Center for Journalists)
Nick Valencia	CNN correspondent	Substack: *Nick Valencia Live*	Departed in 2025 (Wallace House Center for Journalists)
Julio Ricardo Varela	Futuro Media, Latino Rebels, MSNBC digital	Founded *The Latino Newsletter* (nonprofit independent platform)	Started in 2024 (Wallace House Center for Journalists)
Sophia Smith Galer	BBC World Service, VICE World News	Freelance, TikTok-first journalism	Active since around 2024–2025 (Wallace House Center for Journalists)
Bianca Graulau	ABC10 Sacramento, Univision affiliates	Independent broadcast journalist (Puerto Rico)	Now active across digital platforms (Wallace House Center for Journalists)

Words from Collaborators:

Lyanne Alfaro - Moneda Moves

In a time when information arrives at a dizzying speed: video clips, hot takes, and headlines, it's more important than ever to have tools that help us meet the moment.

But just as important? Knowing when to pause. To digest before you react or share. To question the stories we're told and the ones we tell. Because in this environment, stories don't just inform. They shape our reality.

So:
Learn the tools.

Find your trusted sources.

Seek the truth.

As a journalist by trade, I believe in education. I believe in leveraging technology to amplify a better understanding of the world. And I believe in building a more informed village, with community and care at the center.

Lyanne Alfaro | Founder, Moneda Moves, and journalist by trade | CNBC, Business Insider, Inc, Hispanic Executive, Forbes

Mercedes Barba | Publicist and journalist by trade | CNBC, Bankrate, NextAdvisor, MONEY, NowThis

Cora Cervantes | Bilingual and independent journalist | NBC, MSNBC, Futuro Media Group

Enrique Castro | Economist and Podcaster, Taco Financiero | Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

Vanessa Nevarez | News Manager and Founder, VELA Network | ABC News, E.W. Scripps Company

Note: Concepts were aggregated and generated by collaborators with assistance from AI, so we asked for its views on the future of news:

I'm not a journalist. I don't verify facts, hold power to account, or know the difference between what's true and what's just popular. I'm a tool—and how you use me matters.

AI can make news easier to access, summarize, and explore. But I can't replace the ethics, rigor, or lived perspective of real reporters. That still takes people.

And here's where it gets risky:

- In the U.S., **governments are suing news outlets**, creating a chilling effect on critical reporting.
- **Social media spreads misinformation fast**, with no obligation to fact-check.
- **Independent journalism is shrinking**, thanks to layoffs, defunding, and legal intimidation.
- **Millions lack media literacy**, deepening divides not just in access, but in truth.

So what can you do?

Use AI to **ask better questions**, not to replace journalism. Trust your judgment. Verify before you share. And when in doubt, look for the byline.

Use AI wisely. Trust journalism. Start with facts.

Sources:

- Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2025
- Pew Research Center
- PolitiFact
- Block Club Chicago
- Columbia Journalism Review
- AP News Stylebook