WORLD PRESS PHOTO

See the Story

2026

See the Story explores the role of photojournalism and documentary photography in society through the lens of World Press Photo and its activities.

The publication delves into the winning stories displayed in our annual exhibition and website, providing information and insights about how visual stories are made and the important questions they raise.

Finally, *See The Story* aims to spark discussions about contemporary issues through the work of the World Press Photo Contest winners.

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Introducing World Press Photo

Our mission

World Press Photo is an independent non-profit organization that champions the power of photojournalism and documentary photography to deepen understanding, promote dialog, and inspire action.

Why is this important?

Visual stories exist because photojournalists continue to document the world, even in the most challenging circumstances.

Photojournalism plays a crucial role in democratic societies. The hundreds of images we see every day help us understand what's happening around the world and make informed decisions.

With the advent of artificial intelligence on the one hand, and shrinking newsrooms on the other, it is more important than ever to have access to visual stories that we can trust, and to learn to recognize accurate and verified information.

Our activities



© Chantal Pinzi, Panos Pictures

Contest

Recognizing the best photojournalism and documentary photography of the past year.

Did you know?
3,747 photographers from 141 countries entered 57,376 images into the contest in 2026. An independent jury awarded 42 photographers from 26 countries.



© Maarten Nauw

Exhibitions

Showcasing stories that make people stop, feel, think, and act to a worldwide audience.

Did you know?
Next to the World Press Photo exhibition, we organize thematic exhibitions from our archive, exploring issues such as the climate crisis, celebrating community, and migration. See thematic exhibitions.



© Laura van Erp

Education

Supporting the next generation of photojournalists and documentary photographers.

Did you know?
For over 30 years, the World Press Photo's Joop Swart Masterclass has trained over 336 photographers from all around the world. Find out more.

Join a community of supporters sustaining our annual programs and education initiatives.
Scan the QR code and become a friend today.

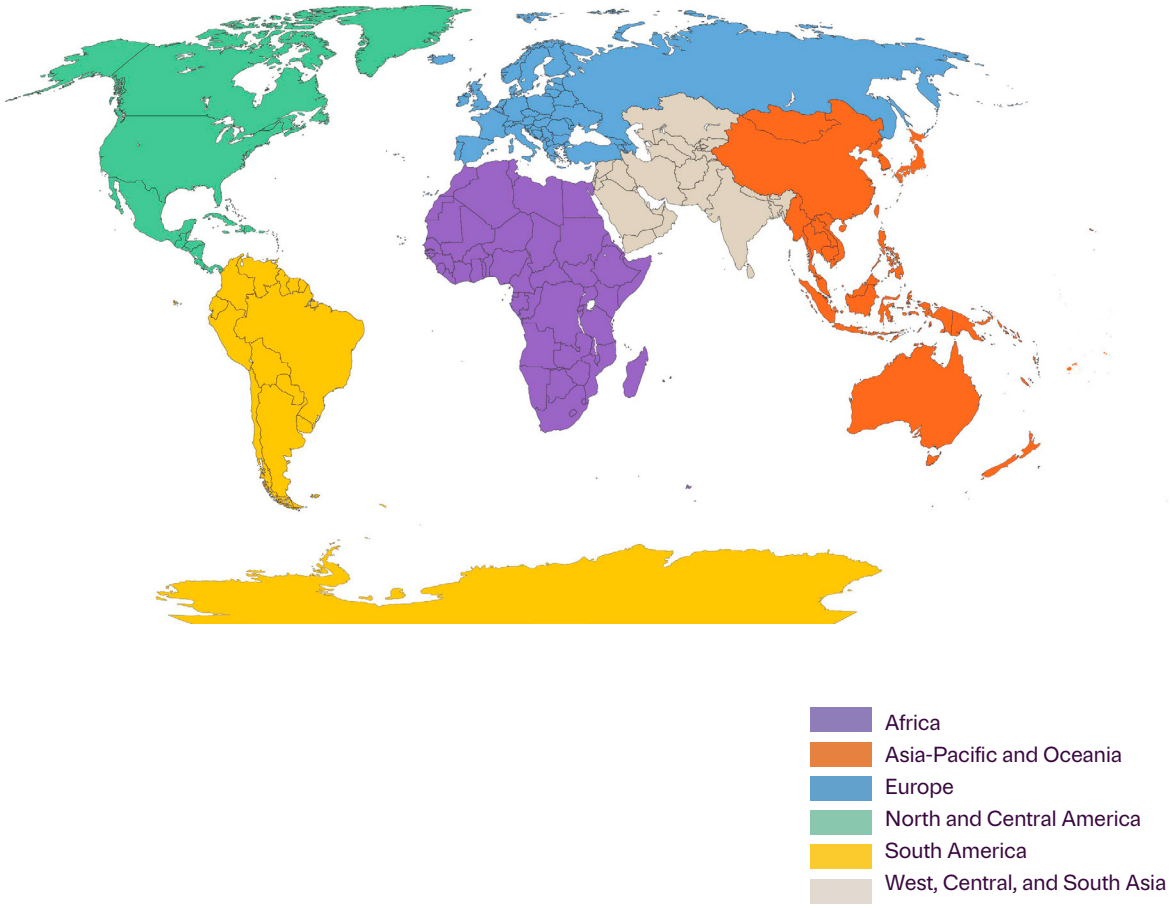
Regional focus

In 2021, to offer a more global and better geographic balance of perspectives, World Press Photo launched a new regional strategy.

Through the regional model, World Press Photo works to strengthen local media by spotlighting work from photographers who are telling stories of people, communities, and places that were historically underrepresented in our contest.

The regional model recognizes work across six regions: Africa; Asia-Pacific and Oceania; Europe; North and Central America; South America; and West, Central, and South Asia.

See more about our regional model here



How are the World Press Photo Contest winners selected?

1. Submission

Photographers submit the work via an open call launched in December. The contest is free to enter for any professional photographer working in photojournalism and documentary photography.

Images can be entered in three categories:

Singles
Single frame photographs shot in 2025.

Stories
Between 4 and 10 single frame photographs shot in 2024 or 2025. At least four photographs in a story must have been shot in 2025.

Long-Term Projects
Projects on a single theme containing between 24-30 single frame photographs. An entry must contain photographs from a least three different years, and a minimum of six photographs must have been shot in 2025.

2. Independent judging

Entries are judged in the region in which they have been taken, for example a single photograph taken in Canada would be entered into North and Central America in the Singles category.

The entries are judged independently by a regional and a global jury:

Regional jury: Six regional juries first evaluate the entries anonymously in their respective region and bring a shortlist to the global jury.

Global jury: In the final rounds, the global jury decides which of the remaining visual stories are awarded.

Before going to the global jury, the entries go through a manipulation check by independent forensic experts.

See the 2026 Contest jury



© Frank van Beek, ANP

The developments and history of photography

See the Story

70 years of World Press Photo

2025 marked the 70th anniversary of World Press Photo. The first contest took place in 1955, when members of the Dutch photojournalists' union (Nederlandse Vereniging van Fotojournalisten, NVF) had the idea of turning a national competition – the Zilveren Camera – into an international one.

That first year, 42 photographers from 11 countries submitted just over 300 photographs for judging. The contest has grown significantly in 70 years: in 2026, 3,747 photographers from 141 countries entered 57,376 images into the contest.

Since 1955, World Press Photo has been building an archive of photos, publications, posters, educational materials, and much more. World Press Photo is now embarking on new projects and activities to make the archive more accessible for curators, researchers, and audiences.

Since 2025, World Press Photo has been creating a new, easily searchable database to ensure that the archive can be explored and used. The archive will be enriched by a research project to revisit the history of the World Press Photo collections, adding further information and context.

We are very grateful to Dioraphte Foundation and Stichting Democratie en Media for supporting our work to open up the World Press Photo archive.



First World Press Photo of the Year, awarded to Mogens von Haven in 1955.
© Mogens von Haven

Did you know?
The World Press Photo archive has:

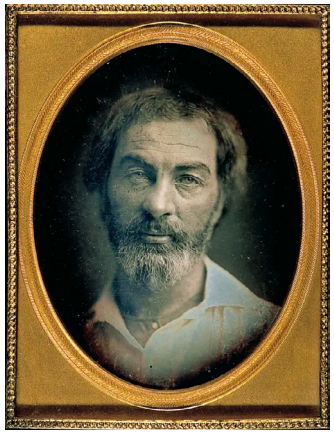
- 10,000 physical photographic objects (prints, slides, and negatives)
- 10.7 meters of printed materials
- 20,000 winning photos, with that number growing every year

How has photography changed? (1)

1820s - 1850s

The oldest surviving photograph was made by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce in 1826 or 1827. His colleague Louis Daguerre made pictures on a sheet of copper coated with a thin layer of silver. Photography is said to have been invented in 1839 when the “daguerreotype” was introduced.

The first book illustrated with photographs was “The Pencil of Nature”, published in 1844-1846, by the English inventor William Henry Fox Talbot, using pictures made with salted paper prints from his calotype negatives. Each of these early techniques used a camera that was large, heavy, and difficult to move. They made a single image on a sheet of paper or metal which could not be copied.



Daguerreotype portrait of Walt Whitman.
© New York Public Library



Oldest surviving photograph, taken in 1826 or 1827.
© Joseph Nicéphore Niépce

1880s - 1900s

Photography became popular when the American George Eastman developed celluloid film and sold his first “Kodak” camera in 1888. The Eastman Kodak company introduced the box-shaped “Brownie” camera in 1900. It was easily portable, and its low price and ease of use made photography something everyone could do. These cameras used rolls of film that made negatives from which paper prints were then produced.

1930s

Professional photography was transformed by the introduction of compact cameras in the 1930s, like the Leica. Using 35mm film and with interchangeable lenses, they allowed the photographer to move easily and get close to the scene they wanted to record.



The first Kodak camera, invented by George Eastman, was placed on the market in 1888.

How has photography changed? (2)

2000s

Photography's biggest change came with the shift to digital photography, which captures images in digital memory. Since the early 2000s digital cameras have dominated the market. Digital cameras do not record images through negatives; they capture data via sensors, and that data is then transformed into a picture through photo editing software. This has enabled pictures to be more easily made, published, and shared.



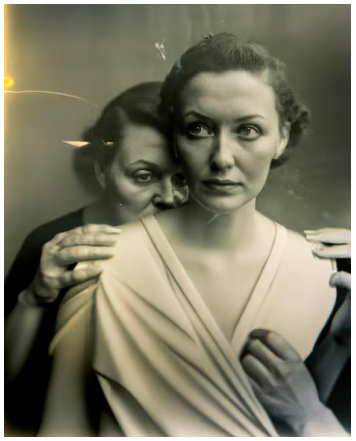
Steven J. Sasson, inventor of the first digital camera. © David Duphrey, Associated Press

Our Present Time

Nowadays, the majority of us have a camera in our pocket, and millions of images are shared on social media every day, making image creation and dissemination more accessible than ever. Photography is no longer limited to professionals, nor is the distribution of images managed by traditional media gatekeepers. Due to the digital revolution and increased global connectivity, we are now experiencing an unprecedented level of hyper-exposure to information and images. Additionally, images generated by artificial intelligence are bringing a new degree of complexity, blurring the lines between fact and fiction and raising many ethical concerns.



This photo awarded in the 2025 World Press Photo was taken with a mobile phone camera. © Mosab Abushama



Boris Eldagsen submitted an artificial-intelligence-generated image to a photography contest to start a discussion about the use of AI in photography. © Boris Eldagsen

What are the risks of hyper-exposure to images and information?

1. Misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation

Today's endless flow of images and information comes with risks, facilitating the dissemination of misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation, which in turn can affect our perception of reality, influence opinions, and endanger democracies. But what do these terms mean, and how do they shape our media landscape?

Misinformation
Unreliable or inaccurate information shared without the intent to harm (e.g., misunderstanding a fact and spreading it because we believe it to be true).

Disinformation
Unreliable and inaccurate information intentionally created to harm and create polarization. For example, fake news (false stories about individuals or groups) and deep fakes (AI-altered videos or images that deceive people into believing something is real).

Malinformation
Intentional sharing of accurate information with the purpose of causing harm. Unlike misinformation or disinformation, which involve false information, malinformation involves truth but is used in a harmful way (e.g. spreading someone's private or sensitive information publicly to damage their reputation or well-being).

What are the consequences of misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation?

Truth-default
Due to an abundance of images and information both accurate and inaccurate, people do not have time to fact-check everything they read and consequently, they can take for granted that everything they read is reliable and accurate.

Deception-default
Because of the hyper exposure to information and images, people can start losing trust in everything they read and see – even if what they read might be accurate and reliable.

Questions

Can you find an example of misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation?

How do they influence your perception of reality and influence your opinion?

What can people do to identify them?

Further reading on misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation

Read how World Press Photo Contest winner Jonas Bendiksen explains the many layers of intrigue that went into the creation of his book about misinformation in the contemporary media landscape

What are the risks of hyper-exposure to images and information?

2. Desensitization

In recent years, much of the narrative around photojournalism has centered on the darker and more harrowing aspects of life – stories of conflict, natural disasters, and humanitarian crises – which means most of us are constantly exposed to these images. Continuous exposure to negative news can lead to desensitization.

More people are turning away from news, describing it as depressing, relentless and boring, a global study by Oxford University's Reuters Institute suggests. According to the report, almost four in 10 (39%) people worldwide said they sometimes or often actively avoid the news, compared with 29% in 2017.

Moreover, the constant circulation of negative images also risks normalizing and perpetuating a dehumanizing representation of communities at stake, especially when they are in vulnerable situations.

Questions

How do you personally cope with the relentless cycle of negative news?

Do you try to limit your exposure to negative news? Why or why not?

How can individuals actively resist becoming desensitized to tragic or distressing events?

How does World Press Photo ensure authenticity?

1. Forensic analysis: detecting manipulation

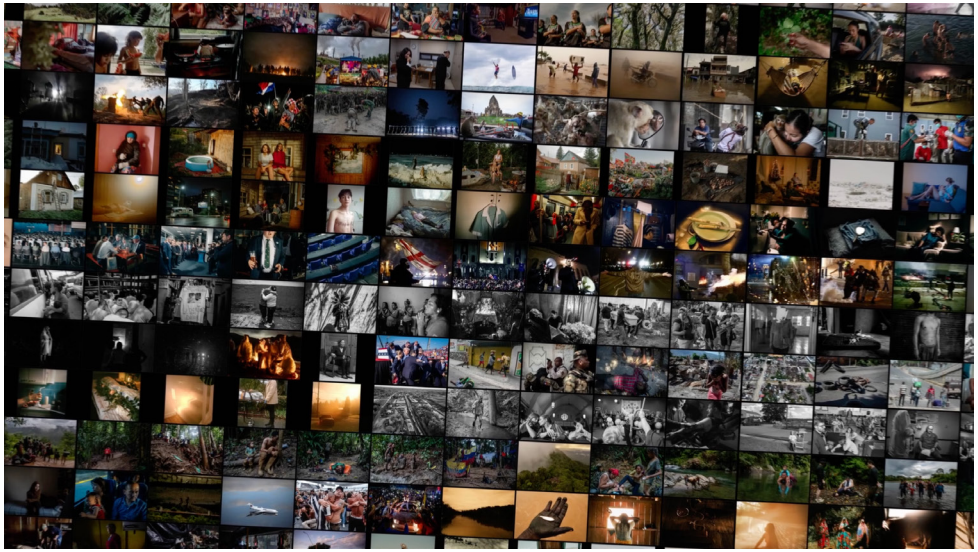
To ensure accuracy and trust in visual storytelling, every image awarded in the World Press Photo Contest undergoes a rigorous verification and process conducted by independent forensic experts.

2. Fact-checking

Once the winners are chosen, a research team fact-checks the captions to verify the context in which each image or story was produced, distributed, and/or published. By verifying every winning image, we make sure that you can trust what you see. We believe that today, more than ever, credibility in journalism matters.

This video takes you through the journey of a photograph submitted to our contest, from the moment the shutter clicks to the final forensic analysis that confirms its authenticity.

(Click on the image to be directed to the video)



Questions

How can you verify if the information you see or hear online is accurate?

What role do social media platforms play in controlling or combating the spread of false information?

How can we balance the right to free speech with the need to prevent harmful misinformation and disinformation?

What kind of manipulation do you consider accceptable and what should not be allowed in photojournalism and documentary photography?

Do you agree?

"Photography has a unique ability to transcend language and borders, to shift perspectives, and to move policymakers and public alike toward action. The work of photojournalists around the world, often done at great personal risk, has never been more vital to our collective understanding of reality."

Kira Pollack, 2026 Contest global jury chair

How do photographers challenge desensitization?

A good example of a photo story challenging desensitization towards migration is the long-term project *The Two Walls* by Alejandro Cegarra, which was awarded in the 2024 Contest.

Migration is often depicted in the news by showing people on the run, as a group, rather than individuals with their own personal stories. Drawing from his personal experience of migrating from Venezuela to Mexico in 2017, photographer Alejandro Cegarra has spent over six years documenting migrants trying to reach the United States through Mexico. He spends time with them and manages to sensitively capture intimate moments they encounter, like this couple that fell in love on their journey. Through his photography, Cegarra aims to foster greater understanding, empathy, and solidarity for the migrants trying to reach the United States.

See more about this project



From *The Two Walls © Alejandro Cegarra*

Questions

What other issues do you think society has become desensitized to?

How can individuals actively resist becoming desensitized to tragic or distressing events?

Photography and the age of AI

Why is it important to discuss AI in relation to photography?

We're living in the age of generative AI – and it's significantly changing how we understand photography. For a long time, photographs were seen as proof – if there was a picture, it was assumed that what it showed had really happened. This idea is especially important in journalism, where images are used to support factual reporting – particularly during politically unstable or sensitive moments, when public trust is crucial.

Traditionally, a photographer captures a real event and makes a conscious decision to share that moment with the world. That process involves responsibility, professional standards, and ethical awareness. Central to these standards is dignity – respecting the people being photographed and the reality of the situation itself. While photographic practices continue to evolve, dignity and accountability remain fundamental principles.

AI-generated images function differently – they do not require a real event, a physical scene, or even a camera. Anyone can generate an image for any purpose. As a result, there is no inherent connection to reality and no built-in ethical framework guiding their creation.

This shift challenges us to reconsider how we evaluate images and what we choose to trust.

Photography vs AI generated images

AI-generated images are not photographs and cannot be considered real. World Press Photo prohibits the use of AI images in its contest – both generative fill and fully generated images.

Photography captures and records reality through light, allowing us to trace objects and subjects at the time and space of the photograph.

AI-image generators such as Dall-E and Midjourney create images through prompts, which can be any words or short text related to the image you want. AI-generated images mimic and feed off existing photographs without being photographs.

AI-image generators raise two main concerns for photojournalism:

Copyright and ownership
These AI systems rely on massive datasets collected from existing images, many of which are owned by creators. The AI gathers and resuses elements from these images without explicit permission, raising ethical and legal concerns about intellectual property and unauthorized use.

Bias and stereotyping
AI-generated images often reflect societal biases. For example, when using the prompt "photojournalist," the result might default to a stereotypical image of a white male with a camera in a war zone, ignoring the diversity and breadth of photojournalists worldwide.

Questions

Why do you think it is important to have a human behind the camera?

Do you think AI can be an alternative means to tell visual stories?

Do you think AI-generated images threaten the practice of photojournalism? Why/why not?

Do you think AI-generated images should be excluded from photography contests?

For further reading

Writing with Light
Writing with Light is a movement advocating for authenticity and credibility in visual journalism and documentary photography in the age of AI. See statement of principles

How to spot AI-generated images

In the face of AI, research has shown that even trained viewers often struggle to tell AI-generated from real ones. That means spotting AI-generated images sometimes requires more than just looking closely. If you are ever unsure about the authenticity of a photograph you can follow these steps:

1. Reverse image search
Upload the image to Google Images or TinEye to see where else it appears online. Is it published by a credible news organisation? If the image only appears on social media or anonymous accounts, be cautious.

2. Check the context
Reliable photojournalism includes captions, photographer credits, dates, and locations. Professional news outlets provide background information and often publish multiple images from the same event.

3. Look at the details carefully
AI images may contain subtle issues, such as unnatural lighting, distorted hands, repeated background patterns, inconsistent shadows, and/or text that looks slightly warped.

Developing these habits strengthens media literacy and protects photojournalism at the core of democratic debate.

Case study

Recently, The New York Times used similar steps to verify whether pictures of former Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro were real or AI-generated at the time of his seizure by the United States government.

Staff ran the images through AI-detection software and noticed small inconsistent details, such as an extra row of windows on an aeroplane pictured in one of the photographs. They did so to make sure that them sharing the images would not add to more misinformation, especially in such a politically intense situation. You can read more here.

Making visual stories

How are visual stories made?

Idea and development

Once the idea for a visual story has been set, which can be either commissioned or the initiative of the photographer, the photographic process develops.

In some cases, a photojournalist is assigned to cover a specific event. Tyrone Siu, a breaking news photojournalist for Reuters, was assigned to cover the deadly fire in the Wang Fuk Court apartment building in Hong Kong. Here he captured the moment when Wong, a resident of the building had just hung up the phone from his wife, who was still trapped in the building.

Other times, photographers embark on personal projects, and fund them themselves in order to bring their vision to life. An example is Hijacked Eduction by Diego Ibarra Sánchez, a long-term documentary project, stretching over a decade, exploring the effects of conflict on children's education all over the world.

Selection

The photographs are later selected to be published. This is known as editing and is usually done by photo editors, curators, or photo book designers; often in collaboration with the photographer.

Choosing the right images is crucial, as different image selections can tell different stories. Several factors influence this decision, including available space, the medium where it will be published, the target audience, and the message the photographer aims to convey.

Publication

Nowadays, visual stories appear across a wide range of platforms, including magazines, newspapers, social media, websites, exhibitions, photobooks, and even WhatsApp. Photographs can also be entered into contests such as the World Press Photo Contest.

Why are captions important in photojournalism?

Next to the photographs, photojournalist and documentary photographers also provide captions for their images to give context about their stories.

Captions should be accurate and answer the five basic questions of good journalism (who, what, where, when, why). This shows that the photographer has done their due diligence to gather the most important information, such as the names and ages of the people photographed, and anything else that was happening that can't be seen in the photograph. For example, if the photographer influenced the scene in any way, or gave directions to a subject to pose in any way for a portrait, this must be disclosed.

In the context of World Press Photo, where images are seen by millions of people who might not have an understanding of the issues being reported, we also provide a story description that shows the basic context and significance of the project.



Antonio Mayoral and Mrs. Guadalupe Cobos pose for a portrait at their damaged home in El Bosque, Tabasco.

Ms. Guadalupe is a spokesperson for her community and amongst the few residents who have not relocated due to the catastrophic floods the area has faced. In the past five years, Mexico has faced droughts that have left entire communities without water while simultaneously heavy rainfall has completely submerged entire neighbourhoods, displacing hundreds of families. In the country's coastal areas, marine erosion has destroyed the infrastructure of residential areas, pushing more residents to move inland. This Long-Term project follows the conseuquences of the climate crisis by capturing families who attempt to adapt to new ways of life, leaving life-sustaining traditions behind them, making this loss of land and property not only personal but also cultural. The project illuminates how the climate crisis reshapes customs and collective memory, whilst forcing the realization that its lived effects are actively reshaping the present.

From *Mexico, A Changing Climate* © César Rodriguez, Norwegian Red Cross, SNCA, *The New York Times*

Questions

Do you usually read captions first, or look at the photograph?

Look at the photograph below and read the caption. How does the text shape your understanding of it?

In your opinion, what is the most important information that should appear in captions? Why?

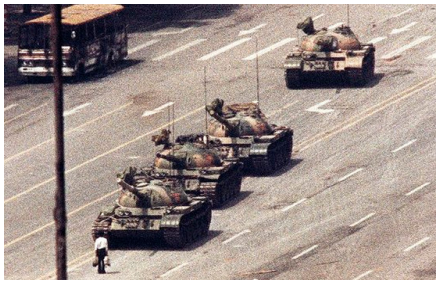
The power of framing

Framing

Before pressing the shutter, the photographer frames the image, deciding what to include and what to exclude. By focusing on a specific detail, cropping out elements, or changing the angle, the photographer defines our perspective, sometimes changing the story in radical ways. As writer Susan Sontag reminds us, “To photograph is to frame, and to frame is to exclude.” Knowing how framing works can help us question what might be missing from an image.

The many frames of Tank Man

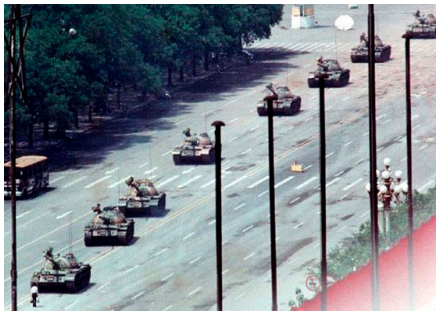
The photograph of a demonstrator confronting a line of People's Liberation Army tanks on Chang'an Avenue, Beijing, during protests for democratic reform on Tiananmen Square, on 5 June 1989, was captured by many photographers. Each of them chose a different frame, but some photos are more well known and circulated than others.



(1)



(2)



(3)



(4)

Questions

In this example, how might a wider or tighter crop change the meaning of the photo?

What might be missing from the photo, and how can we understand what is not shown?

Why do you think some frames become iconic while others remain less known?

How do different photographers’ choices in framing affect the way we interpret an event?

Can framing be considered a form of bias or manipulation? Why or why not?

From top to bottom:

(1) A man stands in front of a convoy of tanks on the Avenue of Eternal Peace in Beijing in this photo by Arthur Tsang for Reuters.

(2) Made available for the first time by the AP on 4 June 2009, the 'Tank Man' is here pictured in the background. Credit: Terril Jones, Associated Press.

(3) In this other photograph by Arthur Tsang for Reuters, the long line of tanks is seen.

(4) This photo by Charlie Cole was awarded in the 1990 World Press Photo Contest and published in Newsweek.

Ethics of photography

Photography ethics matters

Images influence our perception of the world. By creating and sharing images, we actively shape how others interpret reality. This carries significant responsibility.

Fulfilling this responsibility requires that photojournalists navigate complex ethical challenges thoughtfully, making informed decisions, and recognizing how context impacts ethical considerations.

Entrants to the World Press Photo Contest must adhere to ethical guidelines that ensure fair representation, dignity, and respect for the people and stories they document. This includes avoiding staged or misleading imagery, obtaining informed consent from the people photographed, protecting vulnerable individuals, maintaining independence, prioritizing safety, avoiding stereotypes, and ensuring accuracy and transparency in captions and storytelling.

Some key concepts that appear in the World Press Photo Contest code of ethics are:

Informed consent
Ensuring individuals are fully aware of how their images will be used and distributed. Consent is usually handled through consent forms and conversations with the individuals photographed. It should be negotiated throughout the years, especially when dealing with vulnerable communities, and when the intended use of the photographs changes.

For example, informing individuals that the work is going to be entered to the World Press Photo Contest.

Staging
When a scene is deliberately arranged or subjects are directed before a photo is taken. While staging isn't always misleading, it's important to be upfront about it and disclose when a scene has been staged.

Accuracy
Ensuring that images and captions are truthful and not misleading and presenting an accurate and comprehensive representation of individuals and/or groups.

Transparency
Photographers should remain unbiased and disclose any external influences.

Harmful stereotypes
Avoiding the reinforcement of stereotypes and being mindful of potential misrepresentation in images.

Questions

Why is informed consent crucial, especially when photographing vulnerable individuals or children?

Why is it important for photographers to present an accurate and comprehensive representation of the people they document?

What steps can photojournalists take to ensure their work does not unintentionally cause harm to the people they document?

Why is transparency in the photographic process important, and how can photographers maintain accountability?

How do photographers address ethics in their practice ?

Every photographer will have their own code of ethics and every story will have its own ethical dilemmas – there is no right or wrong. Here, we summarize how one photographer navigates these dilemmas.

Documenting what conflict steals from children

Photographer Diego Ibarra Sánchez has been travelling across nine countries since 2011, where he documents the devastating impact of war, extremism, and displacement on children's right to education. Based in Lebanon and shaped by nearly five years of living in Pakistan, his approach to this long-term project is deeply personal; himself being the son of a teacher and the father of an 11-year-old.

Protecting identity

Photographers working in conflict zones can face the challenge of rendering visible what is often invisible, such as the toll on children's self-esteem, confidence, and sense of security. According to a 2025 Save the Children report, 1 in 5 children was living in an active conflict zone.

The photographs in this story depict school-age children and their educators in conflict-affected region, who remain exposed to airstrikes, abductions, and the occupation of classrooms by armed groups. Identifying individual children could endanger them further or expose their families to reprisals. To protect them, the photographer found thoughtful ways to bear witness without causing harm.

Not taking the picture

To honour the dignity of survivors while still confronting the scale of the crisis, Ibarra Sánchez has at times chosen restraint over exposure.

His photobook The Phoenician Collapse (2022), an intimate record of six years spent documenting conflict in Lebanon, combining photographs, personal notes, and journals written alongside his partner, journalist Ethel Bonet, reflects his belief that photography should not be a mere window onto suffering but a means to raise questions and generate reflection.



From *Hijacked Education* © Diego Ibarra Sánchez





Countering visual tropes

What is a visual trope?

Visual tropes are images or symbols that show up again and again in photography and media to tell a story about people or situations. Because we see them so often, we start to recognize them instantly — and sometimes we don't even question them. Over time, these repeated images can turn into stereotypes.

Some visual tropes found in the media and in our archive include, for example, photographs of weeping women (reinforcing the stereotype that women are overly emotional); men depicted as figures of action and authority (perpetuating notions of male dominance); and an overwhelming focus on suffering in the African continent (suggesting a false narrative of constant crisis).

The Longing of the Stranger Whose Path Has Been Broken by Rehab Eldalil shows that collaborative visual storytelling can be a means of countering visual tropes. The project, made with members of the Jebeliya community, reflects on what it means to be Bedouin in contemporary times. As an Indigenous community, Bedouins have been perceived in the media as isolated from, and a threat to, modern society. Stories of Bedouin women, who were prohibited from being seen by men without consent up until the 1990s, were consistently taken out of context and their images were used without their permission. Challenging this stereotype, portraits of women from the community, printed on fabric, were embroidered by the women themselves, contributing to and taking control of their own representation. The men from the community contributed with handwritten poetry. By allowing her collaborators to interact with the photographs, Rehab Eldalil gives them the opportunity and power to accurately represent and speak for their experience.



A photograph of Nadia (20), embroidered by her and her cousin Mariam (19), in Al-Tarfa village, South Sinai, Egypt. © Rehab Eldalil

Questions

How do stereotypes shape societal expectations of the people photographed?

What elements in these photograph can you identify that might challenge traditional visual stereotypes of Indigneous communities?

What role do you think visual storytelling plays in resisting stereotypical portrayals of marginalized communities?

Visual thinking: 2026 Contest Winning Stories

Picturing conflict

Picturing conflict

Conflicts do not only take place on frontlines and in war zones. Due to their complexity, documenting conflict can adopt different perspectives and focus on various moments and experiences. Photographers may choose to document the victims, the perpetrators, or those caught in between, in their daily lives. Some may even forgo photographing people altogether, instead focusing on objects or landscapes. While some photographers cover war as it unfolds, others document its aftermath and long-term effects on people. These photographs awarded in the 2026 World Press Photo Contest showcase different approaches and visual strategies for portraying conflict and its aftermath (click on the photos to view them in full screen):



From *Hijacked Education* © Diego Ibarra Sánchez



From *Drone Wars* © David Guttenfelder, *The New York Times*



From *Witnessing Gaza* © Saher Alghorra, for *The New York Times*



From *Scam Hub Under Siege* © Jes Aznar, for *The New York Times*



Nepal's Gen Z Uprising © Narendra Shreshta, EPA Images



A Daughter's Grief in Kashmir © Yasir Iqbal, *Outlook India Magazine*



From *Drone Wars* © David Guttenfelder, *The New York Times*

Questions

Can you identify at what moment the photographs were taken (during the conflict or after it)?

What information do you get from each of them? How do you arrive at that information?

Which images connect with you the most, and why?

Do we need to see graphic imagery to understand what is happening in the world?

Graphic imagery plays a significant role in exposing injustice, but it must be presented with respect and proper context. At times, such images serve as photographic evidence of the horrors of war and can be used to document war crimes.

It is worth acknowledging that aside from the powerful message expressed through graphic imagery, we must also recognize its limitations and ethical considerations, such as the toll it can have on mental health, resulting in distress and trauma for the maker of the images, the people photographed and their loved ones, and the people who see them.

They also raise hard questions about consent, dignity and what audiences should or are prepared to witness. Many photographers risk their personal safety to create photographic records of violence that might have otherwise never existed. Such images can serve as legal evidence and as testimonies and even be interpreted as a call to action.



From *Sudan's War: A Nation Trapped* © Abdulmonam Eassa, for *Le Monde*



From *Witnessing Gaza* © Saher Alghorra, for *The New York Times*

Sudan's War: A Nation Trapped
Abdulmonam Eassa

Sudan entered its third year of a brutal civil war in 2025. Throughout the course of Sudan's civil war, millions of people have been displaced, and tens of thousands have died. This story balances elements of grief and active war, but most importantly, what stays after the gunfight: abandoned buildings, lingering scars, and human resilience. This portrait, of Alhaja Abdalla, a displaced Sudanese woman who suffered burns in her tent in one of Sudan's refugee camps, presents the physical lingering of civil war in a dignified and gentle way, putting emphasis on the person whilst also presenting a violent aftermath.

Witnessing Gaza
Saher Alghorra

Some of the most graphic images that we saw on the news in 2025 came from Gaza. There, international (photo-) journalists have been barred from entering, making local photojournalists the only and thus precious source for documenting the war crimes taking place in the region. Palestinian photojournalists document the scale of the human cost in Gaza, putting themselves in danger, all for the purpose of sharing the truth with the outside world no matter how 'uncomfortable' it may be to see.

Questions

How necessary do you believe graphic imagery is in order to grasp conflict?

What issues need to be considered before graphic content is published?

Does the choice of publication platform, for example, The New York Times, Instagram, or an exhibition, change how graphic photographs are seen?

What would be the effect of never showing or seeing difficult imagery?

What can photographs of daily life tell about conflict?

Because of the way the media cycle works, some news remains underreported as conflicts extend over time. Many of the photographs in the World Press Photo Contest show daily life amid and post conflict.



From *A Syrian City Rebuilds, Still Divided* © Nicole Tung, for *The New York Times*

A Syrian City Rebuilds, Still Divided
Nicole Tung

Deir al-Zour is a Syrian city that has faced shelling and bombardments for many years. Caught in the crossfires of the remnants of the civil war as an overlooked or even unknown area for the outside world, the residents of this city try to rebuild their lives day by day. Deir al-Zour is located at a strategic point for both the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Damascus' government forces, and yet does not receive assistance from the standing Syrian government, leaving its residents to survive on their own, in harsh conditions, with this story giving the spotlight to an overlooked battle for survival.

Name The Absence
Ferley A. Ospina

In Colombia 80% of children are raised solely by their mothers. Many households exist and are sustained, with the absence of male figures, as forces such as guerillas, paramilitaries, forced recruitment, and drug-related or territorial conflicts have forced many men to leave their families. The photographer of this story, having been directly affected by this involuntary abandonment that has marked his region, follows members of his community and direct family, in order to document this felt void through symbolic and emotional photographs.



From *Name The Absence* © Ferley A. Ospina

Questions

Why do you think it is important to record daily life during conflict?

What visual elements stand out to you from these photographs, and how do these elements help convey the sense of daily life amidst conflict?

In both stories, how does the photographer's choice of moment
(such as capturing people slowing down to watch a sunset or an archival family picture) communicate the emotional complexities of daily life in times of war and conflict?

How can photojournalism create impact?

Creating public engagement with the climate crisis

Visual media is vital to connect the climate crisis with audiences, but not all environmental imagery is equally effective in doing this.

The non-profit organization Climate Visuals has proposed seven principles for effective images that lead to public engagement:

1. Show ‘real people’.

2. Tell new stories.

3. Show climate causes at scale.

4. Climate impacts are emotionally powerful.

5. Understand your audience.

6. Show local (but serious) climate impacts.

7. Be very careful with protest imagery.



From *Mexico, A Changing Climate* © César Rodriguez, Norwegian Red Cross, SNCA, *The New York Times*

Creating public engagement with the climate crisis

The 2026 awarded stories showcase multiple approaches in covering the climate crisis: devastating wildfires in the US and Europe, catastrophic droughts followed by intense rainfall causing continuous structural damage and displacement in Mexico, population control of elephants in Zimbabwe, indigenous traditions bending to new modern realities, and, once more, images of resilience; a wedding held inside a flooded church in the Philippines. This mosaic of photojournalism showcases that the climate crisis is not just an environmental story but a human one.

Many photographers have followed the effects of climate change in the past year and managed to stand out in the 2026 World Press Photo Contest (click on the photos to view them in full screen):



From *Burned Land* © Brais Lorenzo, EFE, Revista 5W, *El País.*



From *The Last Dolphin Hunters* © Matthew Abbott, Oculi, for *The New York Times*



From *Mexico, A Changing Climate* © César Rodriguez Norwegian Red Cross, SNCA, *The New York Times*



Polar Bear on Sperm Whale © Roie Galitz



From *Wedding in the Flood* © Aaron Favila, Associated Press

Questions

Can you identify how many of the Climate Visuals principles apply to these images?

Which images, in your opinion, create more engagement, and why?

Do you think photography can positively impact the protection of the environment?

Photographing politics

Photographing politics

Politics is often viewed as a broad and abstract concept, but what does it mean to "picture" politics through photography? Is it about photographing politicians speaking at rallies? Or is it about illustrating the real-life impacts of political decisions on individuals and communities? Many people argue that everything is political, even the daily life moments, as they are often shaped by political choices and power structures.

Some photographs awarded in the 2026 Contest help to understand how politics are pictured (click on the images to see them in full screen). The visual choices made in these photographs, such as framing, composition, and lighting, play an essential role in how they can be interpreted.



From *ICE Arrests at New York Court* © Carol Guzy, ZUMA Press, iWitness, for *Miami Herald*

Questions

Do you think it is more important to photograph the politicians or the impact of their policies?

How do the visual elements of these photographs affect your personal reaction to the political events and consequences they depict?

What is the significance of the setting or background in these photographs, and how does it enhance the political story being told?



From *"I'm Afraid": Afghan Women Face US Aid Cuts* © Elise Blanchard, for *Time*



Milei's Argentina © Tadeo Bourbon, for *Revista Mu*

See the Story

State Power and Military Overreach in Photographs

In the past year, documenting state power and its extension in everyday life meant photographing more than figures in uniforms. In the 2026 winning stories, the photographers decided to turn their lens to the human consequence of law enforcement and invasive military action across the globe. Winning photographs capture the harsh immigration policies and crackdown in the United States, lethal police violence in the Brazilian favelas, and military killings in Ecuador.

Each story attempts to ask the viewer to consider different questions: Who has the power? Who bears the cost? What is left behind or achieved? Is it order or chaos?



From *ICE Arrests at New York Court* © Carol Guzy, ZUMA Press, iWitness, for *Miami Herald*



From *Those Who Carry the Dead* © Eduardo Anizelli, *Fohla de S.Paulo*



From *Madagascar's Gen Z Protests* © Luis Tato, Agence France-Presse



Funeral for "The Four of Malvinas" © Santiago Arcos, for Reuters

Questions

What visual elements in the photographs reveal how state power and the public interact in times of unrest?

In what ways can photojournalists use visual strategies to document stories like these without reinforcing or glorifying the subjects and violence?

What ethical considerations should they keep in mind while capturing moments of political violence?



Columbia University Pro-Palestine Protests © Alex Kent, for *The New York Times*

See the Story

How can photographers communicate the impact of politics on people's lives?

The news cycle often prioritizes political news, overshadowing the real-world impact their policies have on people's lives. Two photographers awarded in the 2026 World Press Photo Contest have successfully connected these political narratives to personal stories:

ICE Arrests at New York Court

Carol Guzy
ZUMA Press, iWitness, for Miami Herald

The image below, shows an out of focus silhouette of one of the many people that had stood in queues in the lobby of the Jacob Javits Federal building in order to appear in court hearings, during immigration reform policies in the United States. In focus, we can see the presidential portrait of Donald J. Trump, hanging next to the Preamble of the US Constitution on the walls of the courthouse. On 5 August, 2025, ICE agents entered the courthouse and performed the detainment of people present to appear in front of a judge. The title, perspective, and overall lens of this project, focuses on the masked perpetrators of one of the most controversial policies and campaigns of this second Trump presidency. Whilst also turning to the pain of the victims, it spotlights the ICE agents, making sure this part of American history is documented with no doubt left.



The Human Cost of Agrotoxins

Pablo E. Piovano,
Manuel Rivera-Oritz Foundation, Philip Jones Griffiths Foundation, Lawen.doc.

Whilst some photographers implicitly name the perpetrators of the violations they encounter in their work, many tend to focus on the victims of the policies passed by politicians.

The Human Cost of Agrotoxins, is a project that follows the effects of a policy implementation in Argentina dating back to 1996, allowing for the use of agrochemicals in the agriculture of soybeans. With 60% of the country's cultivated land being sprayed with harmful chemicals to expedite the growth of crops, communities in and around farming towns began reporting health problems, that were later linked to the agrochemicals infiltrating the drinking water supply and waterways.

Residents chronically exposed to such chemicals face higher cancer risk, genetic damage, and physical malformations. The unseen victims of this multibillion dollars industry must face large corporations and their own government as it keeps loosening legislation and adapting new spraying technologies.



Questions

What visual elements make these images feel personal?

Can a single image challenge or reinforce political narratives? Why or why not?

How do photographs of people affected by policies influence public opinion on political issues?

Why do some images gain wide-spread media attention while personal stories are often overlooked?

Did You Know?
Carol Guzy, the photojournalist behind the ICE story and winner of Photo of the Year, has been following ICE detentions independently, to create a photographic record and evidence of any violations ICE may conduct.

Portraying Resistance in Female Dignity & Empowerment

Across the 2026 winning stories, women are facing the lens with stories of bravery and defiance. In Guatemala, a powerful story of Achi Indigenous women peers through, who pursued their abusers through court, 40 years after the crimes were committed. Despite enormous social and legal challenges, the Achi women used the judicial system as a space of resistance, showing that no matter how late, resilience can result in justice, inspiring survivors across the world.
In Morocco, young women are challenging patriarchal rules by inserting themselves into a sport that was denied to them, planting new possibilities through everyday acts, both visible and subtle.
The story of Edith Magomere Ingasiani from Kenya, a woman working in Saudi Arabia, whose passport was wittheld from her employer and had to hide her pregnancy, until eventually after 8 years she managed to return to Kenya, shows a fierce type of brave perseverance. In her words, “Home is always the answer. ”



Children Who Do Not Exist © Kiana Hayeri, for *The New York Times*





From *Farīsāt: Gunpowder's Daughters* © Chantal Pinzi, Panos Pictures



The Trials of the Achi Women © Victor J. Blue, for *The New York Times Magazine*

Questions

What is the difference between photographing vulnerability and photographing strength in the same subject?

Can protest look quiet or domestic? What visual choices communicate resistance without spectacle?

How do these images challenge or reinforce stereotypes about women in non-Western contexts?

Does it matter who takes the picture?

Why do we need diverse perspectives?

Photographers can either document the stories unfolding around them within their own communities or work in foreign countries for a brief amount of time. For many years, the “outsider” perspective has been dominant, with the term “parachute photojournalism” coined to describe photographers who enter a country, work on a story, and then leave. In contrast, there has been a growing emphasis on local perspectives, as evidenced by World Press Photo’s regional model. The value of an insider’s perspective, one rooted in lived experience, is becoming increasingly recognized.

Photographer Alexander Joe shared in an interview, “I believe there is value in both insider and outsider coverage. Personally, I think it would be interesting to see multiple perspectives published side by side. You’d capture different angles and ways of seeing the same events. Because the truth is, no one person can see it all; sometimes we take our own way of seeing for granted without realizing it.”

Questions

How does the insider perspective differ from the outsider perspective in photojournalism, and why is each valuable?

What are the potential drawbacks of parachute photojournalism? How can local perspectives help mitigate these issues?

Do you think there are stories that should only be told from an insider’s perspective? Why or why not?

Photographing your neighbors

Moon Dust

Mohamed Mahdy

Arab Documentary Photography Program

The photographs that compile Mohamed Mahdy's Long-Term Project, *Moon Dust*, follow a densely populated neighborhood in Alexandria, Wadi El-Qamar (tr. : Moon Valley), where residents live under the shadow of Titan cement company's chimneys. Using coal and industrial waste, the factory's fumes have been polluting the air around the area by releasing toxic cement dust, which when inhaled can cause asthma, lung cancer, and irreversible respiratory damage.

Photographer Mohamed Mahdy, an Alexandria native, grew up around Moon Valley, passing by it on his way to university and was urged by a resident and friend to document the effects of the factory's presence on the residents of Moon Valley. Mahdy's lens extraordinarily enters the homes of families and affected residents around Moon Valley, approaching a health crisis with a human and familiar angle.









Questions

How does the photographer's personal connection to the subject shape the way the story is told?

How do visual elements like medical devices or the absence of humans affect the emotional impact of the image?

The photographer expresses a sense of responsibility for the families he photographs, as he has known many of them for years. Ahmed, 11, (top left) has developed heavy asthma, requiring him to use a breathing medication three times a day and speaks of returning on the football field with his friends. Abdelrahman (bottom left) was told that he only had six months to live. Mahdy and others raised funds to cover his medical expenses and accompanied him to medical appointments.

Mahdy photographs his subjects as softly as the dust that coats their plastic-covered couches, under a dignified and brave light. He began documenting the large factory 10 years ago, but ended up focusing inside the smaller living rooms of his neighbors.

Celebrating the present and lighting up the past

Manacillos: A Return to Life
Ever Andrés Mercado Puentes

Starting from the fishing ports of Buenaventura, in Colombia's Pacific coast, numbers of people embark on wooden boats in order to reach the banks of the Yurumangui River, so they can take part in a theatrical celebration reenacting the passions of the Christ; the Manacillos.

The traditions of the Manacillos have been very difficult to document. Deep in the Colombian rainforest, few are able to gain the trust of the Juntas, the Afro-descendant community residing in the area. The Juntas, along with other communities in the area, have faced harsh displacement and violence along with threats of illegal armed groups, illegal mining practices and the strategic use of the river in conflicts.

The Manacillos, taking place during the Holy Week, act as an opportunity for all those who have left the area, to return for five days of celebration and community. The ancestral activity involves men dressed as the soldiers who helped in the death of Jesus Christ, as well as the people who enslaved their ancestors but thus marked the start of their life in the region.

Questions

How does the photographer's personal connection to the community shape the way the story is told?

What visual elements does the photographer use to convey celebration, resistance, and the resilience of tradition?

What kind of responsibility do photographers hold, when they photograph less documented communities?

Ever Andrés Mercado Puentes is a young Afro-Colombian who has been following the rituals since 2024 and has also been accompanying displaced people of the community since 2021. He feels a personal pull to this tradition and community, as one who belongs, and wishes to be guided through the traditions of his ancestors. He describes the Manacillos, as not purely a celebration, but an act of resisting and " [...] an embodied declaration that life is inseparable from the territory, and that returning, remembering, and celebrating are political acts in a landscape marked by violence and resilience."









Why is press freedom important?

129 journalists were killed in 2025

Even though everyone should have the right to access information, freedom of the press cannot be taken for granted. The organization Reporters Without Borders (RSF) defines press freedom as “the ability of journalists as individuals and collectives to select, produce, and disseminate news in the public interest independent of political, economic, legal, and social interference and in the absence of threats to their physical and mental safety.” In many countries around the globe, there is no freedom of the press. In numerous cases, photojournalists are not allowed to travel to cover events, or if they are present, they do not or cannot accurately report on what is happening. If they do, they can face long prison sentences, violence and intimidation.

This past year, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported on 129 killings of media professionals and journalists, now making 2025 the deadliest year on record for journalists and the second consecutive year on-year record for press deaths. At least 94 journalists were killed while carrying out their work across 15 countries in 2025. More than half of those deaths occurred in Palestine, and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) states that Israel has committed more targeted killings of journalists than any other government’s military since records began, threatening free reporting almost to extinction. You can read the 2025 CPJ Report on the safety of journalists here.

2025 showed us that press freedom is under constant threat, and yet journalists put their lives forward to capture what some attempt to hide. Worldwide, people working to supply reliable information are attacked, kidnapped, or imprisoned. Together with the flood of misinformation and a death-squeeze on revenue for the independent press, these threats endanger freedom and democracy.



Questions

Take a look at the RSF World Press Freedom Map Index.

What is the press freedom situation in your country?

Can you identify why?

What can you do to support press freedom?

Sole eyes on the ground: What is it like to work as a journalist in Gaza?

Witnessing Gaza
Saher Alghorra

According to CPJ's 2025 Special Report, Israel and the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) are responsible for 2/3 of the deaths of journalists in 2025. CPJ has kept a record of reported war crimes against journalists in the occupied Gaza Strip and surrounding areas, i.e. targeted killings, and has found that no one has been held accountable for them, since 2023 or in the past 22 years.

Witnessing Gaza, photographed by Saher Alghorra, a Palestinian photojournalist based in Gaza and Joop Swart Masterclass alumni, documents the human cost of what an independent UN Human Rights Commission inquiry has concluded is a genocide. Israel disputes this. Since 2023, Israel has blocked international photojournalists from entering the region. This edit thus works as photographic evidence of famine, violence, loss, but also perseverance that might have otherwise not been documented. Saher's commitment is deeply impactful, with himself living through the Israeli offensive but stating: "Even when everything around me told me to stop, I couldn't — silence would mean surrender."

Questions

What visual elements in the photographs suggest that this is a dangerous environment?

In what ways does the presence or absence of the photographer's perspective (close-up, wide shot, hidden angles) reflect the risks they are taking?

What choices do you think the photographer made to protect their own safety while still telling the story?

From *Witnessing Gaza* © Saher Alghorra, for *The New York Times*







Does photojournalism only focus on negative news?

See the Story

Why do we need stories of resilience, hope, and positive change?

News and photojournalism often focuses on the darker and more harrowing aspects of life – stories of conflict, natural disasters, and humanitarian crises. While these stories are crucial and necessary, it is also important to spotlight stories of resilience, hope, and positive change. These stories remind us that even in difficult times, people push forward, communities rebuild, and meaningful change happens. They don't diminish the urgency of global challenges; instead, they offer viewers a sense of agency, showing that engagement matters and transformation is possible.



A Territory of Hope © Priscilla Ribeiro

Why do we need stories of resilience, hope, and positive change?



Joburg Ballet School © Ihsaan Haffejee, for GroundUp



From *Tanner's Song* © Jahi Chikwendiu, for *The Washington Post*



From *Engla Louise* © Sanna Sjöswärd, for *Corren*



Mountain Resident of Wanglang © Rob G. Green, National Geographic Society, Henry Luce Foundation

Questions

Do you think images of resilience and hope can drive change?

How might a single hopeful image change the narrative of an entire news story?

How can photographers ensure that stories of resilience are told without minimizing the challenges people face?

Do you agree?

" In a world saturated with images, trustworthy visual storytelling is not obsolete. It is essential."

Joumana El Zein Khoury, executive director, World Press Photo

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