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Journalism in 2026: Key trends from Nieman Lab's annual prediction series

Journalism will transform in 2026, according to Nieman Lab's 200+ predictions, with AI-powered newsrooms and community-centric reporting. Experts forecast a renewed focus on trust, as journalists will blend technological innovation with human-centered storytelling in an increasingly complex media ecosystem.

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In 2026, [Nieman Lab's Predictions for Journalism](#) reached its 16-year mark: a long-running barometer of how the news industry shifts, adapts, and fights to survive.

A review of past editions, from 2011 through 2025, reveals successive waves of disruption and reinvention. Nieman Lab maintains a very [valuable archive of its predictions](#). Looking more closely at the emerging themes since 2021, newsrooms have wrestled with pandemic fatigue, pursued Substack ventures, expanded into audio, embraced hybrid work, and shifted from chasing clicks to building loyalty. By 2022, burnout deepened, unions gained strength, and AI quietly embedded itself into the craft. 2023 ushered in the AI era, fractured social platforms, subscription fatigue, and the rise of influencers as information brokers. In 2024, as platforms retreated, publishers confronted misinformation, political polarisation, and redefined trust, diversity, and journalistic objectivity. By 2025, AI had reshaped newsroom economics, creators had challenged legacy

media, and local news, surprisingly, had shown sparks of resilience.

Having already entered 2026, we grouped this year's [210 predictions](#) into five broad areas: AI and automation, local and community-focused journalism, new and experimental business models, ethics, fact-checking and human judgement, and the evolving nature of audience engagement.

Here's what we learnt, highlighting the predictions that left the strongest impression.

AI will continue to reshape news and [newsrooms](#) in 2026. Journalists will continue to [battle AI slop](#), readers will interact with AI-generated content, and generative [AI will ingest journalism as data](#).

Most experts stressed that it would become the backbone of news, [for better](#) or [for worse](#).

[Nikita Roy](#), the founder of [the Newsroom Robots Lab](#) at the [Harvard Innovation Labs](#), predicted that newsrooms will shift [from article factories to AI-native knowledge engines](#), rebuilding workflows, teams, and editorial structures around value, not just legacy formats. [Daniel Trielli](#), professor of media and democracy at the University of Maryland, [wrote](#) that by 2026, journalism will increasingly be designed for AI systems rather than humans. This “agentic journalism” could increase reach and personalisation but will also include risks, such as reducing editorial control, deepening dependence on algorithms, and transforming journalism into a service for AI rather than the public. [Susie Cagle](#), the enterprise editor of The [San Francisco Standard](#), argued that to win back trust and attention from mass-produced AI content, newsrooms [must make the people behind the work more visible](#) through original voice, narrative depth, community spaces, and authentic relationships with the readers.

Meanwhile, at the local news level, journalists will use AI through vibe coding tools to [prototype apps, websites](#), and resources. [Jesenia De Moya Correa](#), a community engagement journalist and the creator of [Huellas Media Lab](#), wrote that AI will [assist a more participatory and action-orientated](#) journalism, giving communities agency and accountability alongside reporters.

“This is the year we recognise that community-rooted journalism is the foundation for any hope of rebuilding trust in news,” wrote [Sarabeth Berman](#), the CEO of the [American Journalism Project](#). She [explained](#) that news organisations (and the public) will recognise the value of reporters who show up day after day in neighbourhoods, schools, and city halls. JFK Fellow 2026 at Stanford University, [Terry Parris Jr](#), also emphasised the [importance of being present](#), “the act of being there”, proving that community-rooted journalism is the backbone of public trust.

In the same spirit, [Adam Thomas](#), a strategic advisor for [Report for the World](#), argued in his [essay](#) that journalism must move away from industrial, extractive, product-driven models and instead be designed and governed as “a civic commons”, echoed by technologist and consultant Dana [Lacey](#), where communities can shape coverage and co-steward information, technology, and legitimacy as a public resource.

Building on this vision, the focus shifts to the power of local networks and collective action. [Collaboration, not outside saviours](#), will be the key to keeping local news alive, wrote [Dale R. Anglin](#), executive director of [Press Forward](#).

By 2026, journalism can no longer rely on exposing wrongdoing to hold the powerful accountable. [Paul Cheung](#), a strategic advisor at [Hacks/Hackers](#) and president of the [non-profit Committee of 100](#), [argued](#) that news organisations must shift tactics: applying financial pressure, leveraging technical enforcement, intervening earlier in audience discovery, and mobilising communities as active participants. [Ben Werdmuller](#), senior director of technology at [ProPublica](#), wrote that [newsrooms will reclaim control over technology](#). Collaboration and independent, mission-aligned open-source teams “will create tools that serve core newsroom needs, including secure communication, privacy-preserving analytics, and sustainable distribution,” he added.

[LaSharah S. Bunting](#), vice president at [The 19th](#), predicts that the strongest newsrooms in 2026 won’t be the ones chasing every platform shift or business trend, but [the ones prepared to survive multiple futures](#) at once. As she wrote, scenario planning — practiced consistently, across teams, and before crises hit — will become a core newsroom discipline.

“Play isn’t just for kids. Joy isn’t just to be scrolled through.” [Samantha Ragland](#), senior vice president at the [American Press Institute](#), wrote that this year, [community-focused newsrooms](#)

[will prioritise joy and play](#) alongside hard reporting. They can achieve this by designing storytelling, events, and spaces that inspire awe, connection, and creativity; they build resilience, combat burnout, strengthen civic engagement, and foster trust—making emotional and social value as central as information itself.

[Scott Klein](#), publisher advocate at [Newspack](#), predicted that 2026 will mark a revival of open-source culture in newsrooms, a necessity after a decade-long decline in code sharing and collaborative tooling. The need to collectively survive in the AI era will push journalists to “show their work” again by publishing methodologies, sharing code, and developing projects in the open.

On the opposite side of openness, [Cristina Tardáguila](#), the founder of Agência Lupa and an anti-disinformation [specialist](#), predicted that [fact-checking will shift from politics](#) to personal safety. As AI scams, deepfakes, and identity fraud rise, verification will focus less on campaign rhetoric and more on protecting people from deception in daily life, safeguarding finances, relationships, and personal security.

“I’m on TikTok now. A place I said I would never be. A place I never wanted to be. A place I never studied to be. But I’m here, and so are my peers,” wrote [Dominic-Madori Davis](#), a reporter at [TechCrunch](#), predicting that in 2026 journalists will need to master digital presence and multimedia skills to stay relevant. They will embrace constant learning to navigate AI and layoffs in a highly competitive, attention-driven media landscape.

Even journalism schools will [embrace the creator economy](#).

On the other hand, newsrooms will [operate as support networks](#) for independent journalists, will [embrace vertical video](#), and audiences [will shape reporting](#) more than ever. “The audience has taken the wheel, and we’re all in the passenger seat now,” wrote [Julia Angwin](#), founding director of a new program at [Harvard’s Shorenstein Center](#). She predicted that publishers will compete to attract and retain creators, providing research, marketing, legal support, and tailored compensation, recognising that audiences follow individuals, not institutions, and that empowering reporters is the key to sustaining trust, reach, and high-quality journalism.

The year began amid widespread turmoil — a reality reflected throughout this year’s predictions.

Journalists and experts emphasised that coverage from the global majority will reach broader audiences, while exiled media will seek sustainability [beyond support based on grants](#), such as [USAID](#).

The fight for independence, integrity, and the safety of journalists is no longer optional. Press freedom and democracy will face heightened threats, demanding unprecedented solidarity and resilience from journalists. Legal battles will become central, as [reporters and news organisations team up with lawyers](#) to defend their work and hold the powerful accountable. Journalists will increasingly [embrace collective action](#) and challenge both state-sanctioned attacks and platform manipulation.
