

Covering the Caribbean to Death?

The international media's coverage
of Caribbean disasters.

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A Planet in Crisis

- ❑ More than 136 billion people worldwide in need of humanitarian aid, according to the United Nation's Humanitarian Affairs office.
- ❑ As a result, the UN is seeking to raise \$22.5 billion in global appeals.
- ❑ This is the largest sum of money the entity has ever asked for, for humanitarian aid.

Worst humanitarian crises in 2017

Humanitarian Agencies say 2017 was one of the worst years for humanitarian emergencies.

Top humanitarian emergencies in 2017 were:

- ▶ Starvation of millions in Yemen.
- ▶ Starvation of millions in East Africa. More than 28 million people need humanitarian assistance.
- ▶ Ongoing Syrian refugee crisis - tens of thousands displaced.
- ▶ Myanmar refugees in Bangladesh.
- ▶ Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria - killed thousands in Haiti and hundreds elsewhere, left the island of Barbuda uninhabited for the first time in 300 years, crippled the US Caribbean territory of Puerto Rico and battered the United States.

Focus of this presentation

- ▶ Explores the argument that humanitarian crises in the Caribbean are under-covered by international media networks.
- ▶ Highlights some of the region's major humanitarian crises over the last decade and examines the possible relationship between the media's coverage of these disasters and the level of international relief and recovery efforts.
- ▶ Focuses primarily on humanitarian crises which have occurred as a result of natural disasters.

Methodology

- ▶ The study engaged a Mixed Methodology:
- ▶ Qualitative: interviews with experts in the humanitarian sector.
- ▶ Quantitative: Thematic review of news stories covering the topic.

Caribbean is disaster prone!

- ▶ Earthquake prone - sits on two major earthquake fault lines.
- ▶ Hurricane prone - average 10 storms/hurricanes each year.
- ▶ Volcano prone - some islands have active and inactive volcanoes.
- ▶ Below are scenes from different islands affected by Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria.









GETTY IMAGES





What and where is the Caribbean?

- ▶ Stunningly beautiful and unique group of islands in the Americas.
- ▶ Nestled between North, South and Central America. Just over an hour's flight to Miami.
- ▶ Over 7,000 islands stretching across 2.75 million square kilometres.
- ▶ About 40 million people in 31 countries speaking six official languages and numerous Creole dialects.
- ▶ Predominant mix of British, U.S and indigenous socio-political cultures.

Humanitarian Aid in the Caribbean

- ▶ According to Veillette (2006), U.S. assistance in the Caribbean dates back to the end of the second World War, increasing in the 1960s and again the 2000s.
- ▶ One of the major areas of funding is natural disaster relief.
- ▶ Basic Planet earth.com describes a disaster as any '*catastrophic event caused by nature or the natural processes of the earth*'.

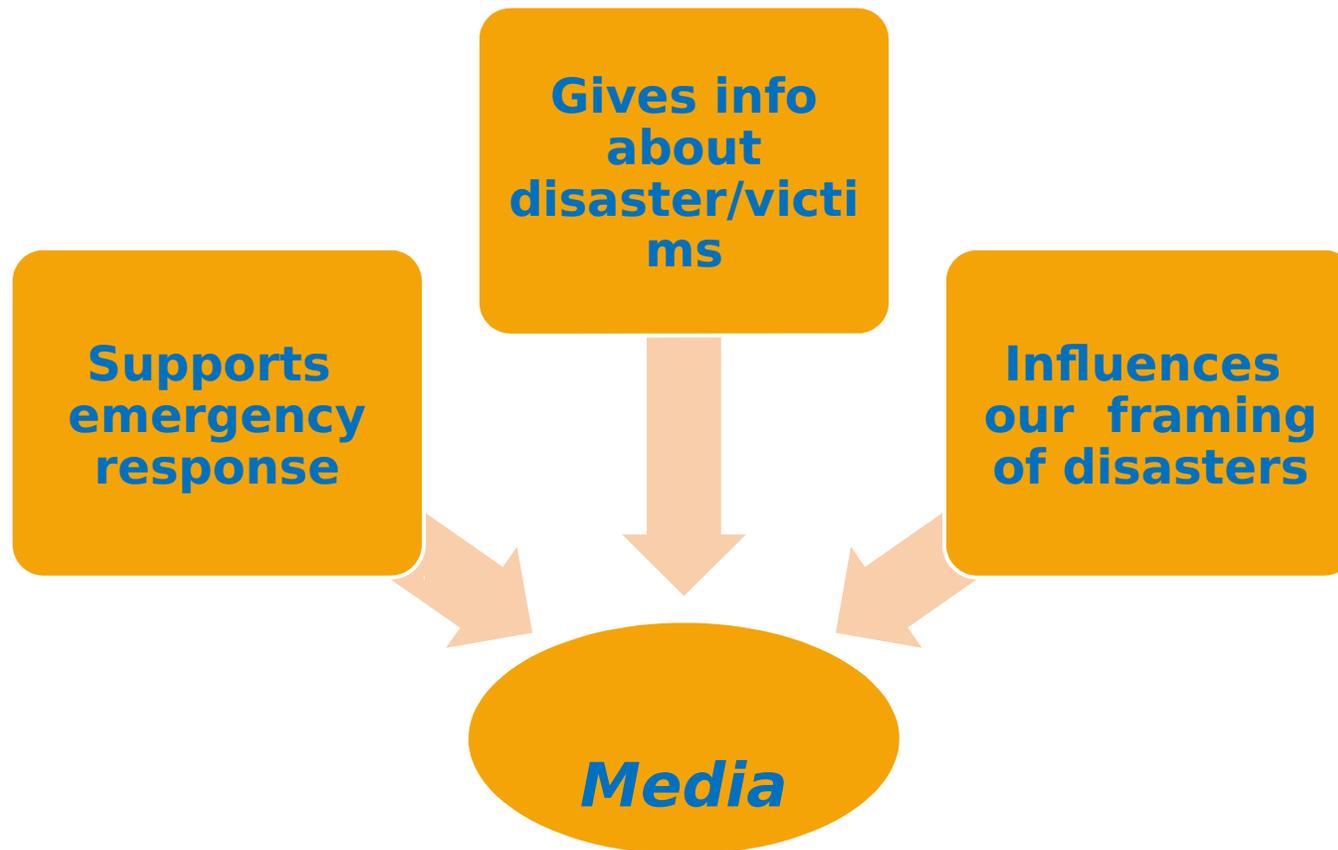
How disasters are measured

Lives
lost

Economic
Loss

Nation's
ability
to
rebuild

Media's role in a disaster



Media's role in a disaster contin...

**Community
Forum**

**Early
warning
beacon**

**Platform for
people to
support each
other**

**Media
is Vital**

**Media
is
Critical**

The Mount Tambora story

- ▶ When Mount Tambora, in what is now Indonesia, erupted on April 10, 1815, several months passed before news of the disaster became widely known.
- ▶ The eruption pushed ash some 45 kilometers into the stratosphere.
- ▶ [It remains the largest ever recorded volcanic disaster in human history.](#) It contributed to a major disruption in global temperatures and to the deaths of nearly **100,000** people.
- ▶ On August 31, 1883, Mount Krakatoa, also in Indonesia, erupted violently as well, setting off a tsunami that killed **nearly 40,000** people who inhabited the islands of the Sunda Strait region between Java and Sumatra.
- ▶ Strong waves were reported as far away as France, barometers peaked in Bogota and Washington, and bodies washed ashore in Zanzibar (*Winchester, 2005*).
- ▶ *Josh Greenberg and T. Joseph Scanlon, "Risk Communication and Warnings, Response " . Online Publication Date: Jul 2016*

The Mount Tambora story contin...

- ▶ These disasters were severe.
- ▶ *But what distinguished them?* The Media phenomenon
- ▶ Word of the Krakatoa eruption spread quickly.
- ▶ Innovations in media technologies and institutions, namely advances in telegraphy, the laying of undersea cables, and flourishing global news agencies, citizens in the world's more advanced nations learned about the disaster within moments of its happening.
- ▶ Response and recovery efforts.
- ▶ [The eruption of Krakatoa was effectively the first global geological media event in history.](#)

The Caribbean and International Media

- ▶ International Media came with colonization and later with cultural imperialism.
- ▶ As a previously colonized region, the Caribbean retains the trappings of US and British culture.
- ▶ Media in the region were styled off the British model, then later, the US model.
- ▶ Though the region has a strong indigenous media culture, Caribbean people get much of their news from US and British Based global networks like CNN and BBC
- ▶ . International media is a staple in the Caribbean. Most regional cable operators are U.S. subscribers

How Caribbean people are impacted by global media content

The international stories we attend to are usually those featured by US based global media conglomerates.

Global media outlets like CNN and BBC are considered 'world class' by Caribbean audiences.

We tend to value as important, the stories that are most featured by these news networks.

Our reactions to the news we consume are impacted by our media consumption.

The Big Questions?

- ▶ How well are humanitarian crises in the Caribbean covered by international media?
- ▶ Are they forgotten emergencies?
- ▶ Do they receive more or less coverage than similar crises in the developed world, particularly those in the US?
- ▶ Does the level of coverage impact the volume of relief received for Caribbean disasters?

Global Media coverage of emergencies is important

▶ *“People need information as much as water, food, medicine or shelter.”*

▶ THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES 2005 WORLD DISASTER REPORT.

Not all humanitarian crises are equal

Some disasters receive more coverage than others!

The so-called CNN Effect.

Asian Tsunami 2004

- ▶ Most documented disaster in history. Killed over 250,000 people. Received some 6.2 billion dollars in donation.
- ▶ An article in the Guardian newspaper's online edition entitle, *Where did the Indian Ocean tsunami aid money go?*
- ▶ The Guardian News paper (UK) referred to the donations to the Tsunami as 'colossal'.
- ▶ Aid agencies say the response was unlike any they had seen before, particularly in the scale of donations from the public.
- ▶ ***The Tsunami Evaluation Committee, consisting of UN agencies and other NGOs, described the aid commitments as the most generous and immediately funded humanitarian response in history.***

Asian Tsunami... the media connection

The Tsunami, which killed over 250,000 people, monopolized both the media's attention and the world's philanthropic endeavors for well over a month, much longer than previous crises (Wynter, 2005).

Therefore, donations to relief agencies during this period largely reflect donor responses to the tsunami itself.

Hurricane Katrina 2005

The devastation of New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina dominated news coverage in the weeks and months that followed, and more than two-thirds of Americans donated money to hurricane-related causes (Conference Board, 2006).

Hurricane Katrina, which killed 1,800 people in the U.S., saw a rapid rise in the use of blogging and community journalism internet sites.

Haitian Earthquake 2010

- ▶ Media analysts says the Haitian earthquake was one of the most covered media events in history.
- ▶ In his May 2011 Huffington Post article entitled, *Media Coverage of Haitian Earthquake Can't Go There*, Joseph A. Palermo described the global humanitarian effort for Haiti as 'astounding'.
- ▶ He said the media's publicity of the catastrophe has generated tens of millions of dollars in relief donations.
- ▶ Haiti received \$13.5 billion in aid - the largest aid response of all time.

The coverage comparison

- ▶ The rest of the presentation will look specifically at the disparity in the level of coverage between three recent natural disasters which have affected both the Caribbean and the United States.
- ▶ It will look at the humanitarian aid received for these disasters compared to those received for the Caribbean.

Recent Caribbean disasters

**Hurricane
Matthew
September 2016**

Disasters

**Hurricane Irma
(August 2017)**

**Hurricane Maria
(September
2017)**

Hurricane Matthew

- ▶ Hurricane Matthew was the first Category 5 Atlantic hurricane since 2007.
- ▶ Hit Caribbean territories of Cuba, Haiti, Dominican Republic and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Bahamas and Venezuela
- ▶ Florida in the United States
- ▶ Killed 603 people and caused catastrophic damage and a humanitarian crisis in Haiti.
- ▶ Over 400 in Haiti alone.
- ▶ Cost of damage = \$15.9 billion USD.
- ▶

Hurricane Irma

- ▶ Hurricane Irma was the strongest Category 5 Atlantic hurricane in history.
- ▶ Hit Caribbean territories of Cuba, Antigua and Barbuda, Turks and Caicos, St. Maarten, Anguilla, British and US Virgin Islands, Dominican Republic, Dominica, Guadeloupe, Monserrat, St. Barthelemy and Haiti.
- ▶ Killed 184 people and caused catastrophic damage and a humanitarian crisis in Haiti and wiped out the entire island of Barbuda.
- ▶ 112 of those were in the Caribbean
- ▶ Cost of damage = \$64.76 billion.

Hurricane Maria

- ▶ Hurricane Maria was Category 5 Hurricane.
- ▶ Hit Caribbean islands of Dominica, British Virgin islands, US Virgin island, St. Kitts and Nevis and Puerto Rico
- ▶ Killed 1,700 people and wiped out the entire infrastructure of the island of Barbuda. Wiped out electricity and crippled the US owned Caribbean territory of Puerto Rico.
- ▶ Cost of damage = \$91.6 billion in damage

Caribbean got less coverage

- ▶ In her Essence magazine article, *On Hurricanes, The U.S. Virgin Islands And Who Really Matters During Natural Disasters*, Tanya Chistian describes how she searched major global channels for news when Hurricane Irma hit the US Virgin Islands. But there was very little.
- ▶ “I thought a Google search on “St. Thomas” might ease my anxiety, but even the most powerful search engine produced little results. TV coverage was no better. Every channel I flipped to warned of the same thing: Hurricane Irma was set to hit the U.S. on Sunday.”
- ▶
- ▶ “I’m annoyed that headlines read of power outages in the Southeast U.S. when the V.I. has been without it for over a week. I’m bothered that every news station has a man on the ground in the Florida Keys but it appears not a single major outlet was on the ground in St. John, St. Thomas, or St. Croix when Irma passed through their shores.
- ▶ And I’m irritated that Vice President Mike Pence would give a press conference from the FEMA headquarters in Washington saying, “Wherever Hurricane Irma goes, we’ll be there first.”

Caribbean got less coverage contin...

- ▶ Catana (2017) said the natural disasters in Texas, Florida, and the Caribbean (Harvey, Irma and Maria), all took place within weeks of each other, with Harvey first striking Texas on August 25.
- ▶ Hurricane Irma then hit the Caribbean in early September before striking Florida. The media dedicated more sentences per day to Harvey and Irma both online and on air, according to Five thirty-eight.
- ▶ Shah, Ko and Peina (2017) said even those in charge of American newsrooms who are aware that Maria and its aftermath is a domestic disaster did not cover the catastrophe as extensively as they did Texas and Florida.
- ▶ .

Caribbean gets less coverage

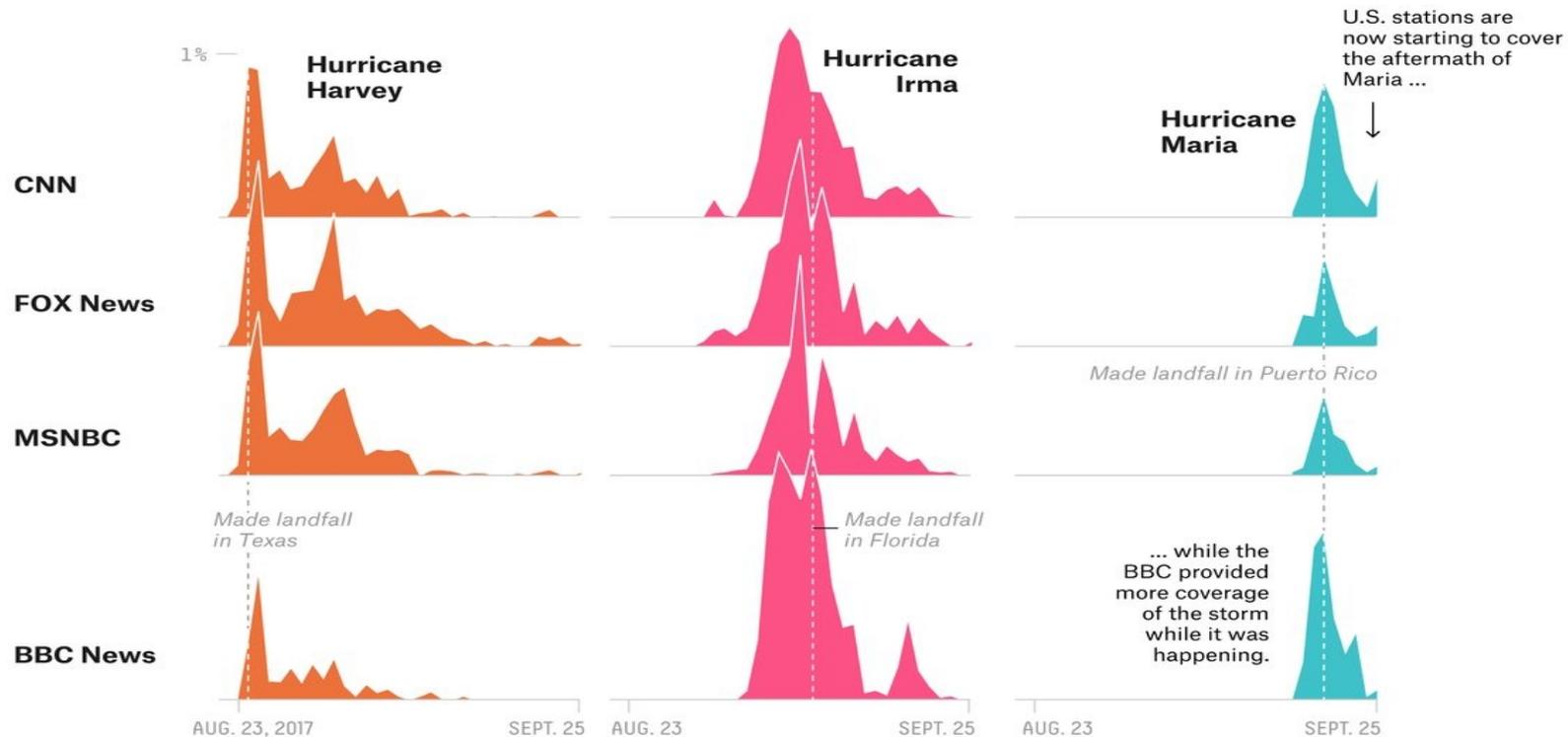
- ▶ According to Washington Posts' writer Paul Fahr (2017) the five top-rated broadcast and cable networks' Sunday news-discussion programs devoted less than one minute to Puerto Rico, according to a count by Media Matters, the liberal watchdog group. : Three of the five shows - ABC's "This Week," CBS' "Face the Nation," and Fox Broadcasting Co.'s "Fox News Sunday" - didn't mention Puerto Rico at all, days after the event.

AS many have noted, it took a while for the global news media , especially in the USA and Europe, to note the devastation of the recent Hurricane matthew in the Caribbean, and especially its ... If this is not the case, then efforts to ameliorate racial bias in media coverage would require an entirely different course of action.

How major news channels covered three Hurricanes

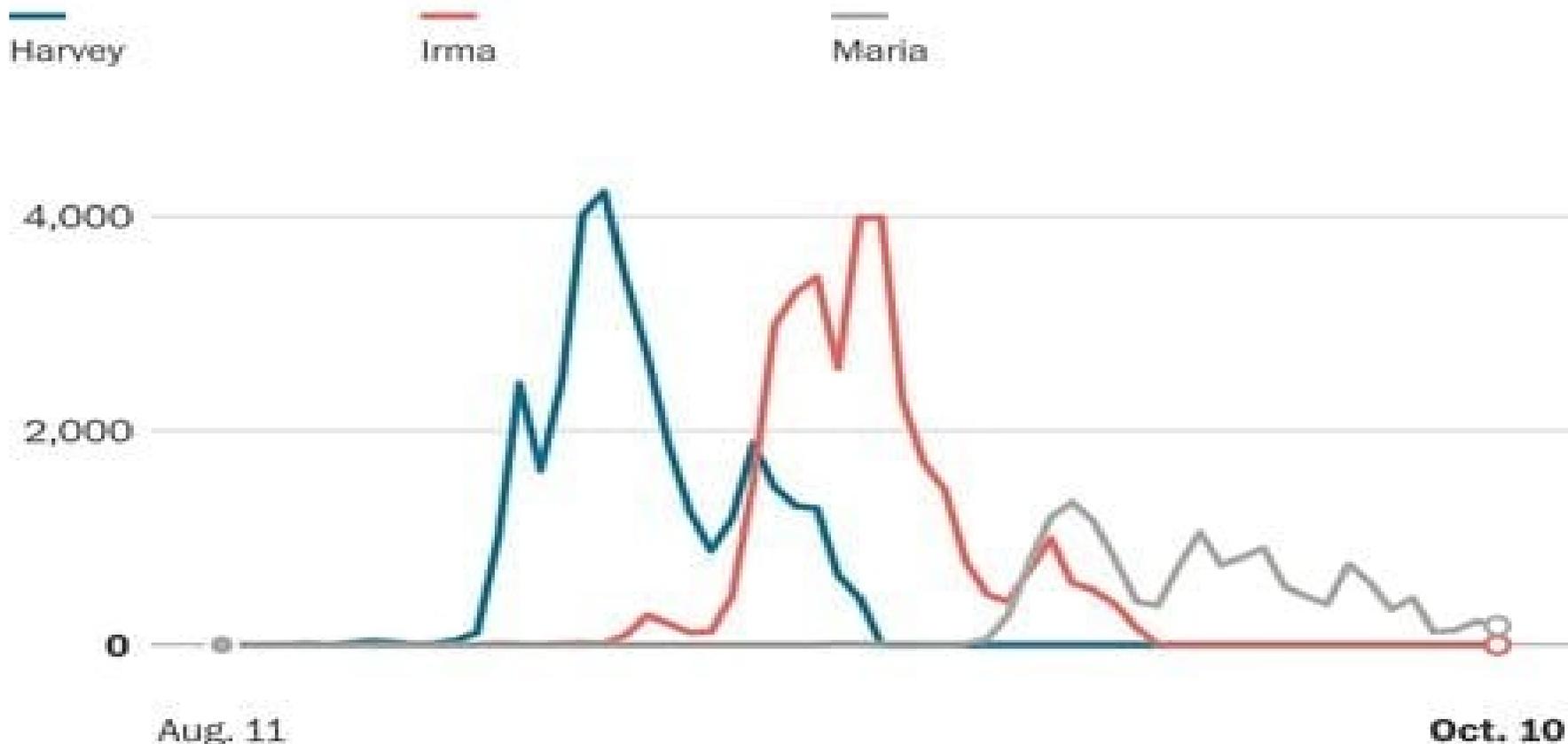
How different news channels covered the hurricanes

Share of sentences mentioning each hurricane



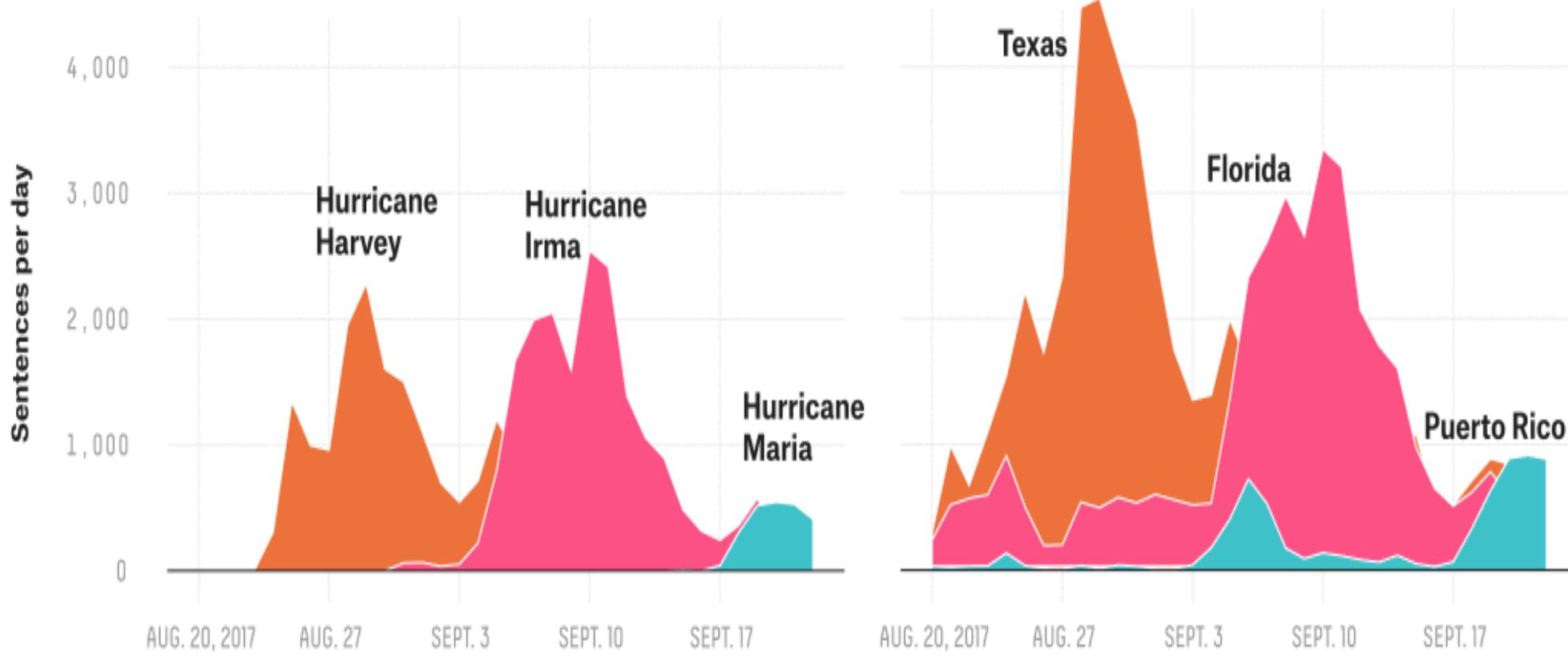
Which hurricane was a big story?

Hurricane Maria got far less coverage by 84 major media organizations than Hurricane Harvey or Hurricane Irma had. This chart tracks sentences mentioning each storm beginning a week before the hurricane made landfall and ending a week after the storm became inactive.



Hurricane Maria and Puerto Rico got comparatively little online coverage

Number of sentences mentioning each hurricane and the place it made landfall, among outlets in Media Cloud's "U.S. Top Online News" collection



Global media is predominantly western

- ▶ Greenberg and Scanlon (2014) notes that mass media are quick to carry coverage of emergencies, but the attention they devote to any given disaster situation is likely to be determined by who is affected, where it occurred and the type of incident involved.
- ▶ The dominant international media language is English.
- ▶ The main global media nerve centers are located in London and New York.
- ▶ Hence, main stream international media will more likely pay attention is more likely to be sustained if an event occurs in the West or affects westerners in one way or another.
- ▶ When an event is seen as important, media are likely to converge on the scene and commit significant resources to the coverage.

Conclusion

- ▶ Watch out for more detailed information in the full paper.

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