



NEWSBANK HOT TOPICS

October 2021

CURRENT EVENTS

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURE: Worldwide – Extreme Weather Disasters

TOPIC: A new United Nations report contrasting the number of extreme weather disasters between the years 1970-79 and 2010-19 has found that the number has increased from 771 to 3,165 events. While increased reporting of these events might be one cause, the current climate crisis is the more likely driver in the increase. What did the report classify as extreme weather disasters? What was the economic impact of these events estimated to be? What extreme weather has your country experienced this year, if any?

SEARCH TERMS: UN AND “extreme weather disasters”

SCIENCE: Worldwide – Volcanoes and Dinosaurs

TOPIC: New research says that major volcanic eruptions fostered climate change that allowed the dinosaurs to become the dominant species on the planet 230 million years ago. A period of monsoon rainfall led to a collapse of biodiversity in oceans, but allowed plants and animals to thrive. Where was this study done, and what evidence was found to support this conclusion? What plants and other animals benefited by this period of volcanism and heavy rains and what is its scientific name?

SEARCH TERMS: volcanoes AND dinosaurs

ECONOMICS: Supply Chain Strain

TOPIC: Over a year and a half into the pandemic supply chain issues still haunt many businesses. What are some of the areas where companies are having trouble getting supplies and why? What are some areas where the pandemic has caused a high demand that has been hard to keep up with, how did the economy adapt to fill this demand and what challenges still linger for some of these items? Where are some areas that safety issues in production work still impacts the supply chain?

SEARCH TERMS: “supply chain” AND (pandemic OR COVID OR coronavirus OR “COVID-19”)

HEALTH: Worldwide – Covid Cases/Deaths Falling

TOPIC: The World Health Organization has announced that new covid cases and deaths have fallen by about 10% worldwide. The drop began in mid-September. That said, the most recent week had an estimated 3.3 million new infections and 55,000 deaths. Will these rates continue to decline as vaccine penetration increases? Will the Northern Hemisphere countries undergo the kind of spikes in both cases and deaths that the Southern Hemisphere countries experienced as they went through winter?

SEARCH TERMS: WHO AND (coronavirus or covid) AND (cases OR deaths)

HEALTH: COVID Booster Shots in the U.S.

TOPIC: The Pfizer coronavirus vaccine booster shot has been approved by the FDA and the Moderna booster shot has been announced as likely to get approval soon. What are the conditions in which the booster shot is recommended and how could those conditions change? What position has the World Health Organization taken on COVID booster shots and why? What are the most compelling arguments the American public has made for and against the booster shots?

SEARCH TERMS: (COVID OR “COVID-19 OR coronavirus OR pandemic) AND (vaccine OR vaccines)



BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS

BUSINESS: Australia – Media Companies and Comments

TOPIC: The Australian high court ruled that media companies can be held liable for the content of comments posted on their social media pages. While this allows a case involving Dylan Voller to go forward, it has potentially important consequences for media companies. What did the media companies argue when claiming they should not be liable for the comments? What did the court say in its ruling? What are some of the likely consequences of this ruling? Will other entities beyond media companies take steps to avoid this liability?

SEARCH TERMS: “Media companies” AND “social media” AND “Dylan Voller”

BUSINESS: American Airlines and JetBlue Sued

TOPIC: The U.S. Justice Department (DOJ) has filed a lawsuit against JetBlue and American Airlines claiming they colluded in raising prices and limiting consumer choices. What are the laws in these areas and why? What is the DOJ claiming as evidence and what are JetBlue and American Airlines saying in their defense?

SEARCH TERMS: JetBlue AND “American Airlines” AND (DOJ OR “Department of Justice” OR “Justice Department” OR “Justice Dept.”) AND prices AND (lawsuit OR sued)

BUSINESS: Google and Apple Remove Navalny App

TOPIC: Google LLC and Apple Inc. have removed an app called Smart Voting, that was designed to support Alexey Navalny’s political movement, from Russian stores. What was this app, what other kinds of candidates was it designed to help and how? What pressure did Google and Apple come under to remove this app? What has reaction to Apple and Google’s decision and why?

SEARCH TERMS: Google AND Apple AND Navalny AND app

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SEARCH TERMS: “supply chain” AND (pandemic OR COVID OR coronavirus OR “COVID-19”)

ECONOMICS: China – Evergrande’s Debt Problems

TOPIC: China’s Evergrande Group, a property developer, may be unable to repay the \$89 billion in loans it has accrued over time. It has received pressure from the ruling Communist Party to reduce debt burdens that has squeezed the corporation. Why has the government decided that debt is a problem? How much is the debt to annual economic output for the country as a whole? Are other developers in the same situation as Evergrande?

SEARCH TERMS: China AND Evergrande AND debt

FINANCE: Pandemic Relief and Poverty

TOPIC: Recent data and surveys are showing that federal pandemic relief measures helped many Americans not only avoid poverty but also helped them advance financially beyond where they were before the pandemic hit. What measures have to take place to transfer the economy back to running on its own and how is that taking place? What are some fears for the public government funding has to roll back?

SEARCH TERMS: poverty AND (pandemic OR COVID OR coronavirus) AND relief



CIVICS, GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS: Arizona Audit Shows Biden Won

TOPIC: The election audit in Maricopa County, Arizona has substantiated that President Joe Biden did win the county vote over Donald Trump, and that Biden also won by more votes than originally thought. What drove the Maricopa County audit to take place? What were some of the high-profile reactions to the result of this audit?

SEARCH TERMS: "Maricopa County" AND audit AND Arizona

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS: Canada –Trudeau Re-elected

TOPIC: Justin Trudeau called for an early election, believing that his party's response to the Covid-19 pandemic would aid its re-election. While he won re-election, he did not significantly increase the number of seats his party held. Who ran against Trudeau and what policies did they run on? Why didn't the Liberal Party increase its seats?

SEARCH TERMS: "Justin Trudeau" AND election

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS: Debt Ceiling

TOPIC: A bill to suspend the nation's debt ceiling and extend federal relief funding until December 3rd has been blocked. What options are left now to prevent the government from shutting down? What would be the result of a government shutdown under the COVID economy?

SEARCH TERMS: "Debt Ceiling" AND (House OR Senate OR Congress OR Republicans)

HISTORY: Polynesia – Genetic Study Reveals How It Was Settled

TOPIC: A major genetic study has revealed the order in which the islands of Polynesia were settled with Samoa as a starting point and Rapa Nui (Easter Island) among the last to be reached. How does DNA help date the settlements of these far-flung islands? What types of ships were used in this exploration? How long do they estimate that it took from the settlement of Samoa to the arrival of peoples on Rapa Nui?

SEARCH TERMS: Polynesia AND (exploration OR settlement)

HISTORY: Oldest Human Footprints in North America

TOPIC: New data on fossilized ancient human footprints discovered in New Mexico's White Sands National Park in 2009 shows that the footprints date back to about 23,000 years ago, much earlier than any previous record of humans in North America. How is this dating done? How does this new discovery change the assumptions of the history of North America?

SEARCH TERMS: oldest AND (footprint OR footprints) AND "White Sands National Park"

SOCIAL ISSUES

CRIME AND LAW: No-Knocks and Chokeholds Banned

TOPIC: The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) has announced it is banning federal law enforcement from using no-knock entries and neck restraints (often referred to as chokeholds) when making arrests. What were the conditions that had previously allowed police to use a no-knock entry and how was it done? What were the problems with the no-knock entry practice? When were the circumstances that allowed the chokehold to be used and what problems happened due to its use?

SEARCH TERMS: "no-knock" AND (chokeholds OR chokehold OR "choke hold" OR "chock holds") AND Justice AND (banned OR ban OR banning)

**CRIME AND LAW: South Africa – Digital Vibes Contract Questioned**

TOPIC: Former health minister Dr. Zweli Mkhize is under investigation by a Special Investigating Unit for a contract given to Digital Vibes for communications around the Covid-19 pandemic. It is alleged that the company was run by two close associates of his and that money from the contract paid for work done on Mkhize's home. Dr. Mkhize resigned from office in August but denies any wrongdoing. What other allegations have been made about this contract? Are there other examples of Covid relief money being used wrongly in South Africa, and if so, what are they?

SEARCH TERMS: "Digital Vibes" AND "Zweli Mkhize"

CRIME AND LAW: France – Bataclan Attack Trial Begins

TOPIC: A trial about the terrorist attacks in Paris on November 13, 2015, which included the attack on the audience of a performance at the Bataclan Theater, has begun in Paris in a specially constructed courtroom. There are fourteen defendants, including Salah Abdeslam, who is already in jail on other charges. What other attacks happened that evening in Paris and where did they occur? Why is Abdeslam a focus of this trial?

SEARCH TERMS: France AND terrorism AND Bataclan

EDUCATION: Teacher Shortages

TOPIC: Stresses on education practices caused from the COVID-19 pandemic impact on teachers has caused a rash of retirements and resignations that has left a significant teacher shortage in the U.S. What states have suffered the biggest shortages and why? How are different schools handling their teacher shortages?

SEARCH TERMS: (national OR states) AND ("teacher shortage" OR "teacher shortages")

RELIGION: Albert Raboteau

TOPIC: Albert Raboteau was a well-respected scholar and expert on African-American religious history. Where did Professor Raboteau teach and what are some of his most noteworthy books and why? What is the basic root of African-American Christianity in the United States and how did Professor Raboteau explain it in his books?

SEARCH TERMS: "Albert Raboteau" AND (religion OR religious OR Christian)

SOCIAL RELATIONS: Afghanistan – Taliban Rules

TOPIC: The Taliban has told barbers in the southern province of Helmand that they should not be shaving men's beards or trimming them. This, they claim, is in line with Sharia law. This follows a series of decisions limiting the role of women in Afghani society. What is Sharia law and what does it say about men's grooming? What limitations have been placed on the role of women in public life?

SEARCH TERMS: Afghanistan AND (shaving OR women) AND Sharia

SOCIAL RELATIONS: Texas Abortion Law

TOPIC: Texas has recently passed a law called the Texas Heartbeat Act that restricts abortions after the first six weeks of pregnancy. What is unprecedented about this law and what has been the reaction from the public? What is unusual in the way that this law can be enforced?

SEARCH TERMS: Texas AND (abortion OR "Heartbeat Act") AND law



SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND HEALTH

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURE: Worldwide – Extreme Weather Disasters

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ENVIRONMENT AND NATURE: Civilian Climate Corps

TOPIC: President Biden is pushing to create a Civilian Climate Corps that would provide work for young people aimed at helping to restore natural areas and create an environment that can help deter wildfires and prepare for other natural disasters. What are some of the specific jobs that would work toward these goals? What are some concerns about the Civilian Climate Corps?

SEARCH TERMS: “Civilian Climate Corps”

HEALTH: France – Government to Pay Therapy Appointments

TOPIC: France has announced that beginning next year they will join other countries that pay for mental health therapy treatments. Psychiatric treatment is already covered by the state. How did the pandemic help bring this decision about? What percent of the French population is thought to suffer from depression? What percent has thought about suicide according to a recent study?

SEARCH TERMS: France AND therapy AND “mental health”

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SEARCH TERMS: (COVID OR “COVID-19 OR coronavirus OR pandemic) AND (vaccine OR vaccines)

**HEALTH: Nursing Staffing Crisis**

TOPIC: Hospitals and medical centers in several states are suffering from nursing shortages due to COVID issues and due to resignations in protest over vaccine mandates. What states and cities are facing the worst shortages and why? What are some of the reasons nurses are giving for not wanting to get vaccinated?

SEARCH TERMS: (nurse OR nurses) AND (staff OR staffing) AND shortage

SCIENCE: SpaceX Sends All-Civilian Crew to Space

TOPIC: SpaceX has operated the first orbital spaceflight mission containing only private citizens called the Inspiration4 mission. What CEO functioned as mission commander and what charitable cause did this spaceflight support? Who were the crew on this flight and why were they chosen?

SEARCH TERMS: SpaceX AND (civilian OR civilians OR "private citizens") and (Isaacman OR Arceneaux)

SCIENCE: Worldwide – Volcanoes and Dinosaurs

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SEARCH TERMS: volcanoes AND dinosaurs

TECHNOLOGY: Great Britain – Clive Sinclair

TOPIC: Clive Sinclair produced an early home computer for the British market. He was a serial entrepreneur, making radios, then electric watches, and calculators before producing a line of home computers and an early electric car. When did he produce these computers and what were their capabilities? How successful were they in the marketplace? What did he see as the biggest flaw in his electric car?

SEARCH TERMS: "Clive Sinclair"

TECHNOLOGY: Kai-Fu Lee Warning About Artificial Intelligence

TOPIC: Kai-Fu Lee is a Taiwanese computer scientist, a venture capitalist and a writer who has some strong concerns about the growing use of artificial intelligence (AI) and its future implications. What are the concerns of Kai-Fu Lee and how were they expressed? What is Kai-Fu Lee's background in working with artificial intelligence? What are some current uses of AI and what are the benefits and concerns?

SEARCH TERMS: "Kai-Fu Lee" AND ("Artificial Intelligence" OR AI)

SPORTS**SPORTS: Ryder Cup**

TOPIC: The United States, led by team captain Steve Stricker, has beaten Europe in the 2021 Ryder Cup golf competition. What is the history of the Ryder Cup and how is it played? What were the most impressive shots in this year's competition? Where was this year's Ryder Cup played and what is the course like?

SEARCH TERMS: "Ryder Cup" AND Stricker AND (Wisconsin OR "Whistling Straits" OR Haven)

SPORTS: Philippines – Boxing Great Retires

TOPIC: Manny Pacquiao has announced his retirement from boxing, while hinting that he plans to go into politics. What was his record in the ring? What titles did he win? What weight divisions did he fight in?

SEARCH TERMS: "Manny Pacquiao"

**SPORTS: U.S. Open**

TOPIC: Russian Daniil Medvedev has won the men's singles and the UK's Emma Raducanu has won the women's singles at this year's U.S. Open tennis tournament. What are the major strengths and weaknesses of these two players and how was that seen in their matches? Who were the winners of the doubles tournament and what were their strengths?

SEARCH TERMS: ("US Open" OR "U.S. Open") AND (Medvedev OR Raducanu) AND (tennis OR set OR match)

SPORTS: Portugal – Highest Scoring Player

TOPIC: Cristiano Ronaldo has scored his 110th goal for his country as Portugal played Ireland in a World Cup qualifier. This beats the record of Iranian striker Ali Daei, who had 109 goals during his international career. Ronaldo actually scored twice in the game against Ireland. When did Daei play, who did he play for in his club career, and how successful was he during his playing days? What other scoring records does Ronaldo hold?

SEARCH TERMS: ("Cristiano Ronaldo" OR "Ali Daei") AND "scoring records"

SPORTS: Automobile Racing – 100 wins for Lewis Hamilton

TOPIC: Lewis Hamilton won the Russian Grand Prix making it his 100th victory in Formula One. He is the first driver to achieve that record. Who is his closest competitor this season and what happened to them in the Italian Grand Prix? How often has he won the Russian Grand Prix? What driver has he surpassed with this victory?

SEARCH TERMS: "Lewis Hamilton" AND "Russian Grand Prix"

SPORTS: ESPN First All-Woman Broadcast

TOPIC: The sports TV network ESPN has announced its first all-female broadcast team for a nationally televised major league baseball game. Who are the sportscasters and what are their backgrounds? Who are some of the leading female sportscasters today in the United States?

SEARCH TERMS: ESPN AND ("all-woman" OR "all-women" OR "all-female") AND (MLB OR "Major League Baseball") AND Newman AND Mendoza

ARTS AND LITERATURE**FINE ARTS AND ARCHITECTURE: Met Gala Fashion Show**

TOPIC: Met Gala Fashion Show, an annual fashion show by New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute, has reopened after missing a year due to the pandemic. What is the history and significance of the Met Gala for fundraising and for fashion? What is the connection of Vogue magazine to this Met Gala? What were some of the standout costumes this year?

SEARCH TERMS: "Met Gala" AND (fashion OR costume OR Vogue)

FINE ARTS AND ARCHITECTURE: Germany – Humboldt Forum Opens

TOPIC: Berlin has a new museum on its Museum Island – the Humboldt Forum. When its artifacts are fully displayed, the Asian, African, and other works will stand as equals to the classical works in nearby museums. What building was destroyed during World War II where the Forum now stands, and what later structure replaced it? What happened to that other building? What is controversial about some of the Forum's holdings?

SEARCH TERMS: "Humboldt Forum"

**LITERATURE: Great Britain – Women’s Prize for Literature**

TOPIC: Susanna Clarke has won this year’s Women’s Prize for Literature with her fantasy novel *Piranesi*. Who were some of the other candidates for the prize and who are some of the previous winners? What was Clarke’s first book and how long ago was it published? From the descriptions of the plot of *Piranesi*, does it sound like an interesting book?

SEARCH TERMS: “Susanna Clarke” and (“Women’s Prize for Literature” OR “Piranesi”)

LITERATURE: Peril

TOPIC: Bob Woodward and Robert Costa have written a book titled *Peril* about the President Trump’s last year in office and transition to the presidency of Joe Biden. What are some of the most noteworthy claims by this book? What has been the general reaction to this book? What are some other books that Woodward has written about the Trump presidency?

SEARCH TERMS: Peril AND “Bob Woodward” AND “Robert Costa”

MOVIES AND TELEVISION: Emmy Awards

TOPIC: Comedy TV show *Ted Lasso* and the historical television drama *The Crown* were the big winners at this year’s Emmy Awards. What were the qualities in these two shows that impressed the critics? What adjustments did the Emmy Awards presentation make for the COVID-19 pandemic? What TV shows were some other notable winners?

SEARCH TERMS: “Emmy Awards” AND (“Ted Lasso” OR “The Crown”)

MOVIES AND TELEVISION: Great Britain/Canada – Film Festivals Return

TOPIC: Both the London and Toronto film festivals took place in September after being disrupted last year by the pandemic. How did they differ in their approaches to live audiences versus streaming films? Were any films featured at both festivals? Which films won awards at them and which films were popular with their audiences?

SEARCH TERMS: “London Film Festival” OR “Toronto International Film Festival”

MUSIC: Sweden – ABBA Returns!

TOPIC: The Swedish pop group ABBA will release a new album in November and has authorized a holographic stage show of their greatest hits which will run in London. Their last album was in 1981. Who are the members of ABBA and how was the group named? How did they come to prominence and what were some of their greatest hits? What theatrical work using their music brought them back to the public’s attention?

SEARCH TERMS: ABBA

MUSIC: Terence Blanchard Opera

TOPIC: New York City’s Metropolitan Opera is reopening after an 18-month shutdown during the pandemic with its first presentation of a work by a black composer. The opera is *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* by composer and jazz trumpeter Terrence Blanchard. How long has the Metropolitan Opera been in existence? When did the Metropolitan Opera first announce it was staging this opera? What are most successful pieces of music and what filmmaker has often turned to him to score his movies? What is *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* about and what are critics saying about it?

SEARCH TERMS: (“Metropolitan Opera” OR “MET Opera” AND “Fire Shut Up in My Bones”)

**PERFORMING ARTS: Tony Awards**

TOPIC: *The Inheritance*, *Moulin Rouge* and *Jagged Little Pill* were the big winners at this year's Tony Awards. What were the qualities in these plays that impressed the critics? What were some impressive performances at this year's Tony Awards show?

SEARCH TERMS: ("Tony Awards" OR "Tony Award") AND (Inheritance OR "Moulin Rouge" OR "Jagged Little Pill")

PEOPLE**PEOPLE: Melvin Van Peebles**

TOPIC: Melvin Van Peebles was an actor, playwright, novelist and composer but mostly known as a filmmaker who made critically praised films in a variety of genres, mostly notably the controversial "Blaxploitation" genre that was popular in the early 1970s. What were the qualities in Melvin Van Peebles work as a filmmaker that impressed the critics and what are some of his most acclaimed films? What are some of his most acclaimed books and plays and why?

SEARCH TERMS: "Melvin Van Peebles" AND (director OR film OR films OR movies OR blaxploitation)

PEOPLE: Peru – Abimael Guzman

TOPIC: Abimael Guzman was a terrorist who was in jail. Peru passed a law mandating cremation for terrorists after his death. What did Guzman do before starting the revolutionary movement? What were some of the more memorable terrorist acts the Shining Path attempted during its years of existence? When was Guzman captured and how long had he been in jail? What was the rationale for the new Peruvian law?

SEARCH TERMS: "Abimael Guzman" OR "Shining Path"

PEOPLE: France – Jean-Paul Belmondo

TOPIC: Jean-Paul Belmondo was a French actor who came to international attention in the 1960 New Wave film *Breathless* directed by Jean-Luc Godard and he remained a major French star for the next two decades. What were some of his greatest roles? Who were some of the directors he worked with? Who were some of his notable male and female co-stars? Why did he prefer to work in the French cinema and avoid English-language films?

SEARCH TERMS: "Jean-Paul Belmondo"

PEOPLE: Jane Powell

TOPIC: Jane Powell was a popular film actress who expanded to theater later in her career. What were some of the more popular films she was in and what qualities made her popular? How did her talent as a singer help her film career and what singing work did she do?

SEARCH TERMS: "Jane Powell" AND actress AND (film OR films OR movie OR movies)

PEOPLE: Norm MacDonald

TOPIC: Norm MacDonald was a popular comedian, best known for his work as satirical newscaster on the TV show *Saturday Night Live*. How was his humor described and what did critics like about his work? What were some controversial statements and jokes that he was criticized for?

SEARCH TERMS: "Norm MacDonald" AND (comedian OR comedy OR SNL OR "Saturday Night Live")

**PEOPLE: George Holliday**

TOPIC: George Holliday was a Los Angeles plumber in 1991 when he stood on his porch and filmed a group of officers beating Rodney King. What were the chain of events that followed the media running the video that Holliday took? How does his video compare to the videos people have posted on YouTube of police abuse in current times?

SEARCH TERMS: "George Holliday" AND "Rodney King"

PEOPLE: South Africa – Franz Marx

TOPIC: Franz Marx's soap opera *Egoli: Place of Gold* ran for 18 years from 1992 to 2010. He was an actor, director, writer, and producer. *Egoli* was noted for being the first bilingual soap opera on the air in South Africa. What was notable about Marx's acting career? What films did he direct? What was his goal in creating *Egoli*?

SEARCH TERMS: "Franz Marx"

PEOPLE: Great Britain – Anthony Hewish

TOPIC: Anthony Hewish devised the telescope that determined that pulsars exist and won the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1974 for his work. He was one of the first astronomers to be so honored along with his fellow winner Martin Ryle. What are pulsars? What was controversial about Hewish and Ryle winning the Nobel?

SEARCH TERMS: "Anthony Hewish"

PEOPLE: Gavin Newsom Defeats a Recall Attempt

TOPIC: California Governor Gavin Newsom has won a recall election by a wide margin. What was the reason stated on the petition to hold an election recalling him? Who were his strongest competitors in the election and what were their political positions in challenging the Governor? What is the history of recall elections in the U.S. and more specifically in the state of California?

SEARCH TERMS: recall AND California AND ("Gavin Newsom" OR "Governor Newsom" OR "Gov. Newsom")