



BIP Survey | 4

The quality of the journalistic coverage of the “storm train” that hit Portugal



Pressão Média

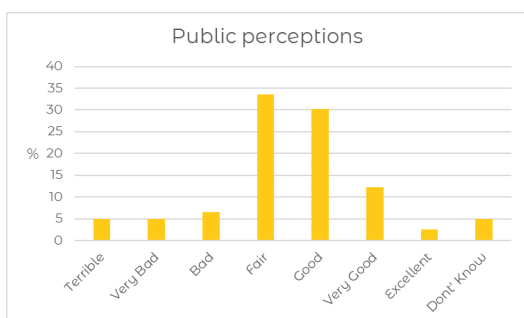
Survey question: How would you assess the quality of journalistic coverage of the ‘storm train’ that hit Portugal between 22 January and 8 February 2026?

Public availability from 5 March to 29 May 2026

Respondents: 122

Sample: non-probability accidental sample (does not allow for statistical generalisation)

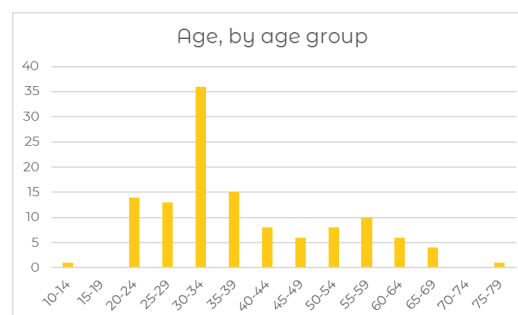
What the survey shows: the “storm train” coverage is rated chiefly as good



Graphic 1 – Public perception of the quality of the news coverage of the “storm train” that hit Portugal

Graphic 1, which presents the distribution of responses from the 122 participants, shows that 33.6% of the sample rated the quality of news coverage on the “train storm” as “Fair”, making this the most frequently selected category (mode). However, it is noteworthy that a substantial proportion of participants rated the coverage positively: 45.1% selected “Good”, “Very Good” or “Excellent”. Of the 122 participants, 110 (90.1%) have higher education qualifications — 37.7% at the bachelor’s level, 42.6% at the master’s level, and 9.8% at the doctoral level. This over-representation in the sample reflects BIP’s academic context, since outreach beyond this community is still in progress. Only one participant (0.8%) has

second cycle qualifications, the same percentage has the third cycle. The number of participants that completed secondary education is 10 (8,2%). Thus, regarding this variable there is a bias that limits the representativeness of the general public. Regarding participants’ ages (Graphic 2), the 30-34 (36 participants) and the 35-39 age groups (15 participants) are the most represented in this survey sample, followed by the 20-24 (14 participants) and the 25-29 (13 participants) age groups.



Graphic 2 – Distribution of participants by age group
On what concerns the “Place of residence” variable, Porto (30 participants, 24,6%) and Braga (22 participants, 18%) are the most represented locations. Nearby locations, such as Amarante (7 participants, 5,7%) Monção and Vila Nova de Gaia (each with 4 participants/3.3%) are recorded. Overall,

the participation from northern Portugal is the most expressive.

What research and specialists say:

Research on disaster journalism and risk communication indicates that the media coverage of phenomena such as the recent “storm train” should help people understand risk and act accordingly (e.g. Houston et al., 2019; Lowrey et al., 2017). Top-down models of communication are not effective and local communities should be properly involved throughout the crisis (Stewart et al., 2023).

: The “storm train” was a hydrometeorological, cumulative, and socially disruptive event. Antunes et al. (2022) point out that, in Portugal, these major disasters are mostly covered with a focus on relief actions, while paying less attention to social vulnerability, resilience, and preparedness. This tendency can be understood through the distinction between episodic and structural disaster reporting. Episodic coverage focuses on immediate damage, human suffering, and emergency response, while structural coverage examines vulnerability, preparedness, public policy, and long-term recovery. Studies of disaster coverage in other contexts have identified similar patterns, showing that journalism often highlights consequences more than underlying causes and institutional accountability (Santos & Serato, 2025; Husni, 2025; Oktavian et al., 2026). This is in line with the expert opinion of Alice Balbé, a researcher whose work has focused on climate and disaster coverage. Although this survey’s participants have rated the journalistic coverage as “good”, Balbé states that “news coverage was mostly centered on the consequences of the

storms, such as financial losses, people who were evicted and without energy, number of deaths and incidents”, while less attention was paid to explaining the phenomena. She argues that Portugal’s investment in the adaptation and mitigation of climate change has not been nearly enough. Yet, journalistic discourse soon claimed the Government’s responsibility in supporting local communities. Carlos Camponez is another researcher whose expertise focuses on journalism and journalistic practices. He lives in one of the most affected regions and, during this “train storm”, he was without communications for several days. Still, he managed to listen to radio broadcasters Antena 1 and TSF and criticises some of the coverage: “The morning after the big storm, TSF dedicated its forum to football competitions”. When it comes to the public broadcasting service, Camponez argues that Antena 1 has journalists who are familiar with the region and others who are very experienced in covering risk situations. Nonetheless, they were not sent to the region: “Had it been in Lisbon, and it would have been different”. He recalls that the first hours after the event were completely absent from most newsrooms in Lisbon and Oporto. This is also related to the growing precarity within journalism, both experts agree. “The emptying of national newsrooms ended with local delegations, who would have found a way to communicate with national newsrooms and inform about the region”, Camponez believes. When it comes to disaster coverage, Alice Balbé says, it requires a holistic approach that is harder to follow with less resources:

“There are less journalists on the field, and the ones who are working have less time and precarious work conditions”.

Camponez highlights that radio and local reporting in general should be included in civil protection frameworks, so that people do not go without communications in disaster situations. “There is no point in telling people to have battery radios for crisis situations when there is nothing being broadcasted”, he points out.

“Information helps decision-making in crisis situations and avoids making things even harder for the places where it happens”, he says. However, the researcher emphasizes the role that local newspapers had in covering this “train storm”: “They certainly made a great mobilization effort” - this may help explain this survey’s public perception of the journalistic coverage. In times like this, journalism should “mediate, inform, describe”. According to Camponez, “journalists’ main role is to tell people what is happening, then mediate between authorities and populations”, to inform about recommendations, attitudes and behaviors. In his opinion, “this train storm highlighted the important role of information and proximity journalism”.

Alice Balbé notes that there is still a lot to be done when it comes to risk prevention, since news coverage is usually a response to an event. “News coverage should not only be done after the disaster but on a long term, including inequalities, claiming action from authorities that encompass non-structural decisions, and showing the impact of political and economic measures”, she argues. This expert notices that climate change requires a structural approach from journalism.

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