

# Veteran journalists Jorge Ramos and Marty Baron talk democracy and free press

## **‘Truth Across Borders’ panel at ASU welcomed bilingual dialogue between audience, panelists**

By Gabriella Kemp, ASU News  
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Arizona State University hosted "Truth Across Borders," a bilingual panel featuring two of America's most iconic journalists, last week in the Evelyn Smith Music Theatre on Arizona State University's Tempe campus

Jorge Ramos, former Univision anchor and Emmy Award-winning reporter who is often referred to as the Walter Cronkite of Spanish-language news, and Marty Baron, former executive editor of The Washington Post and Boston Globe whose Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporting helped uncover the church abuse scandal that was depicted in the Academy Award-winning film "Spotlight," engaged with audience members in a compelling discussion moderated by Javier Marin, CEO of El Tiempo and El Planeta media, on April 14.

The evening kicked off with a welcome by Mark Greenblatt, professor of practice in the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication, and Nicole Macias-Garibay, president of the student chapter of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists. It ended with questions from the audience, including Cronkite News journalist Isaías Soto Rodríguez.

Earlier in the day, the seasoned journalists took time out of their day to participate in a roundtable discussion at ASU's Hispanic Research Center with students from the Cronkite School and the School of Transborder Studies.

Here, they discuss the current climate in journalism and the importance of a free press.

*Note: Answers have been edited for length and/or clarity.*

**Question: Why is Spanish-language news still important in the United States?**

**Jorge Ramos:** The U.S. is already the second largest country in the world where Spanish is spoken, second after Mexico. More people speak Spanish here than in Argentina and Colombia. So, this is just going to continue.

**Marty Baron:** That is the American culture, a mix of people from all parts of the world, and that's what makes it such a fascinating country and inspiration to so many other countries as well.

**Q: Baron, how much of "Spotlight" was Hollywood? What was it like to pursue the truth when dealing with such big entities?**

**Baron:** The movie was a pretty good reflection of the evolution of that investigation. There was creative licensing, but I think it was a fairly great representation of the investigation itself. I was not focused on the pressures of the Catholic Church; I was focused on what our journalistic imperative is whenever we discover critical evidence of wrongdoing, particularly wrongdoing on the part of a powerful individual or an institution.

I think that we as journalists have an absolute obligation to look into those facts and find out what the truth is. The more powerful the institution, the more powerful the individual, the greater the obligation because those are the people and the organizations that can do greater wrong and can cover up that wrong because they have the power to do so.

**Q: And you, Jorge, spent years advocating for the voiceless as well. Tell us what that has meant to you and how border and immigration stories are facing new challenges today?**

**Ramos:** For me, it's quite simple. I'm an immigrant from Mexico in 1983. I think I'm privileged journalist; I had the opportunity to be 38 years in front of a camera, and I think part of my job has been and continues to be to give voice to those who are not as privileged as I am in the sense that their voices are not being heard. Author Sandra Cisneros has a beautiful analogy in which she calls us "alebrijes" — which are like mythical characters composed of different animals in Latin American culture — and in a way my job was not only to report but to be a bridge between many different cultures.

**Q: Why is journalism so important today?**

**Baron:** Journalism by its very nature should be a bridge across cultures. The whole idea of journalism is to explain parts of our community to other parts of our community. Our job as journalists is to bring to light ... what their struggles are, what their worries are, what their aspirations are ... so that other people can understand where other people are coming from; they don't have to agree. That to me is one of the great missions of journalism.

**Q: What is your advice to up-and-coming journalists?**

**Baron:** If you have a passion for it, please do it. In order to have a strong democracy, we need a free press. We need to fulfill our mission every day — and why we have a First Amendment, it's what the Founding Fathers had in mind. We need to uphold the absolute highest standards for ourselves, and we have to adjust in a rapid, disciplined and principled way to the changing media environment. It's not just a matter of passing along what you saw in social media, you have to go back and check it. Verification — and real verification — matters. That's what distinguishes real journalists from people who just call themselves journalists.

**Ramos:** I was reading a report the other day that said about 60% of influencers did not check their sources, and I think that's the main difference between real journalists and non-journalists. And I think it's important to keep high journalistic values. When in doubt, more journalism. One of the most important social responsibilities that we have is to challenge those who are in power, and if we don't do that, I don't think it's really journalism.

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*This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).*

## Main image



Award-winning journalists Jorge Ramos (left) and Marty Baron speak during the "Truth Across Borders" event held at ASU's Tempe campus on April 14. Photo by Emma Fitzgerald/ASU

## Gallery



Professor of Practice Mark Greenblatt and student journalist Nicole Macias-Garibay welcome the crowd during the "Truth Across Borders" event held at the Evelyn Smith Music Theatre on the Tempe campus on April 14.





A crowd of more than 300 people attended the "Truth Across Borders" discussion on April 14.



Cronkite News student journalist Isaias Soto-Rodriguez poses a question to the journalists during the event.