

WEAREBROADCASTERS

Last Year In  
**AMERICA**  
2018 Report





LAST YEAR IN AMERICA:

# A Look Back at 2018

## Local broadcast news reports bring national stories home to communities nationwide

More Americans get their news and information from local broadcast news than any other source, according to the Pew Research Center. In media markets ranging from New York to Charlotte, local stations draw significant audiences. And 270 million Americans listen to local radio each week.<sup>1</sup>

So, why does this sizable audience turn to broadcasters more than any other news source? Beyond free entertainment, local news stations cover issues of national importance, and they also cover town council meetings and state fairs, conduct comprehensive investigations and serve a critical role during natural disasters and public emergencies.

Looking at the most-covered local stories of the year gives a lens into some of the important issues facing cities and towns across the country.<sup>2</sup>

### HERE ARE SOME OF THE TOP TRENDS OF THE YEAR:

1. Broadcasters Highlight Midterm and Local Elections
2. Health Care in the Spotlight
3. In the Eye of the Storm: Reporting on Hurricanes
4. Shining a Light on the Opioid Epidemic
5. Constant Coverage of Wildfires
6. Policing Communities
7. Jobs. Jobs. Jobs.
8. Football Reigns Supreme
9. Stopping Scams

1: Nielsen, July 2017 and Alliance for Audited Media, March 2017

2: Data based on analysis of information provided by Critical Mention

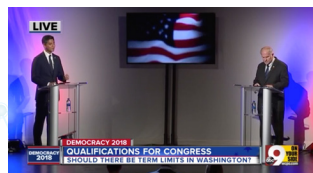


## TREND 1:

# Broadcasters Highlight Midterm and Local Elections

Midterm and local elections earned more coverage from broadcasters than nearly any other topic in 2018. From the first primaries to election recaps, local radio and TV stations aired nearly 6 million stories about elections. Dozens of stations nationwide—including those in Florida, New York, Ohio, Texas, Virginia and Washington—held debates, so candidates could explain their views on immigration, gun control, taxes and more.

**SOME DEBATE COVERAGE HIGHLIGHTS, CLICK TO VIEW:**



## TREND 2:

# Health Care in the Spotlight

Polls indicated that health care was a top issue for voters in the midterm elections. Americans' interest in the topic was evident in broadcast trends, too: TV and radio stations ran more than 4 million segments on health care in 2018.

**CLICK TO READ:**





### TREND 3:

## In the Eye of the Storm: Reporting on Hurricanes

During the series of deadly hurricanes on the East Coast last year, broadcasters braved conditions and provided non-stop coverage of the storms. Nationwide, there were nearly 3 million stories on radio and TV about hurricanes.

Producing — and airing — those stories came with some unique difficulties. During Hurricane Florence, meteorologist Donnie Cox at WCTI, in New Bern, North Carolina, stayed on air even as his station flooded and his coworkers were forced to evacuate. As Hurricane Michael hit Florida, Cumulus Pensacola had four breaks each hour with information about the storm. The local announcers provided these constant updates to community members relying on this information.

They also came with tragic consequences: anchor and reporter Mike McCormick and photographer Aaron Smeltzer, of WYFF-TV in Greenville, South Carolina, were killed while covering Hurricane Alberto. This is a stark reminder of the bravery of local reporters and the harrowing conditions they face reporting on disasters.

### STORIES COVERAGING THE 2018 HURRICANE SEASON:

NATIONAL

**2.8  
MILLION**

FLORIDA

**268,660**

PANAMA CITY

**71,019**

### TREND 4:

## Shining a Light on the Opioid Epidemic

Every day, more than 115 Americans die after overdosing on opioids. These tragedies aren't isolated to one state or region but are part of a nationwide crisis. The more than 2 million stories on the epidemic, from stations across the country, reflect that.

Broadcast coverage exposes changing trends in the conversation around opioids and addiction. Over the course of the year, the word "fentanyl" began to appear in more and more stories, as it contributed to an increasing number of overdoses. References to names of two drugs that can reverse overdoses, "Narcan" and "Naloxone" also grew over the course of the year.

FENTANYL MENTIONS

**+63%**

NARCAN / NALOXONE MENTIONS

**+38%**



#### TREND 5:

## Constant Coverage of Wildfires

The historic nature of last year's wildfire season — the deadliest in California's history — can be seen in local coverage of the disasters. There were nearly 2 million airings on wildfires throughout 2018.

These weren't just one-off stories, in many cases stations aired constant coverage as fires blazed in communities. During the summer's Carr fire, Redding's KRCR News Channel 7 and Chico's KHSL Channel 12, produced 230 hours of continuous live coverage on television.

Radio's stations in Redding broadcast 24/7, even after the fire knocked out their transmitters. The stations used a 106-foot, 14,000 pound portable tower to continue to provide crucial information during the fire.

#### STORIES COVERING WILDFIRES IN 2018:

NATIONAL

**1.7  
MILLION**

CALIFORNIA

**190,838**

SACRAMENTO

**48,138**



#### TREND 6:

## Policing Communities

Police activities remain a topic of interest in communities nationwide. Radio and TV stations highlighted the heroic work done by police officers in communities across the country to keep residents safe — and exposed corruption when police departments were run by bad actors.

A story from WXIA's Brendan Keefe went viral after he exposed an Atlanta-area police department that made an arrest based on the flip of a coin.

#### CLICK TO READ:



INVESTIGATIONS

**Police chief responds to 'coin-toss' arrest**



#### TREND 7:

## Jobs. Jobs. Jobs.

As unemployment neared record lows, jobs remained a popular topic on broadcast stations. There were more than **1 million airings in 2018** about the monthly employment figures released each month by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Many of those airings went beyond national figures and gave viewers a look at regional, state and local breakdowns.



#### TREND 8:

## Football Reigns Supreme

When it comes to high school sports, football is king. Across the country, 90 percent of stories about high school sports state championships were about football.

#### HOW THE NUMBER OF STORIES COMPARE:

##### FOOTBALL STATE CHAMPIONSHIPS

**180,000**

##### ALL OTHER STATE CHAMPIONSHIPS

**20,000**



#### TREND 9:

## Stopping Scams

Consumer protection stories are a hallmark of broadcast coverage and that trend continued in 2018. Stations ran **more than 20,000 stories on fraud** that resulted in tens of millions of dollars recovered for audiences.

The 2018 local news trends illustrate the crucial role local broadcasters play in their communities, helping to expose corruption and keep residents safe during emergencies.

For information about the work of local radio and TV stations nationwide, visit **[WeAreBroadcasters.com](http://WeAreBroadcasters.com)**.