



## **Buckle Up Journalists! (Part One)**

**2024 may be a 'wild ride'**

**By**

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The journalistic ‘leap’ from 2023 to 2024 may be BIGGER than we can imagine at this moment. I remember my leap from 1967 to 1968. It was my leap from being a ‘news stringer’ for a radio station in a major market to being a full-time radio journalist in a small market.

I was so excited to get started in January 1968 — having no idea what the year would bring. In addition to the ‘regular’ news a local journalist covers, my twice-hourly newscasts also covered stories like these —

- The Tet Offensive in Vietnam
- The My Lai massacre
- Russia invaded Czechoslovakia
- President Johnson announced he would not seek nor accept the presidential renomination from the Democrat party
- Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy were assassinated
- North Korea captured the USS Pueblo and tortured American crew members

- During the Summer Olympics in Mexico City, two United States black athletes silently protested racial discrimination with raised fists from the winners' stage during the National Anthem
- Police and anti-war demonstrators clashed at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.
- The issue of abortion on demand was heating up in the courts

In 1968, the country seemed to be having a nervous breakdown as battles erupted over the Vietnam War, cultural values and race. It was a hinge point in history, one of the most consequential and tumultuous years in the American experience, and it changed the country forever. U.S. News & World Report

I think **2024** has the potential to be even bigger than 1968. That's what I will share with you during the five Tuesday newsletters in January — the stories to watch carefully and cover thoughtfully and thoroughly. Let's begin with **Elections, Wars, and Protests**.

# Elections

You may have some hot races in the local communities you cover, so keep your eyes out for everything from mayor and city council contests to school board and county commission races. What issues seem to rise to top in their campaigns? Also watch races for district attorneys, judges, and state offices. Those include governors, lieutenant governors, state legislators, and other state-wide positions.

What are the issues? What are the campaign tactics? How are voters responding to what they see? Are the candidates addressing voter concerns? If not, what are their concerns?

I think the biggest stories in 2024 are going to be the Primary and General Elections for President and Congress. As I write this article, former President Trump seems to have the lead going into the Iowa Caucuses, but he faces several indictments and possible trials this year. Several states are trying to keep Trump off primary ballots because of the U.S. Constitution's insurrectionist ban. What do voters in your

community think about it? Election interference or election integrity?

President Biden has his own challenges this election year with falling poll numbers and Congress formalizing an official impeachment inquiry. President Biden's son also faces serious legal problems this year that could carry sizable fines and prison time if convicted. How might his situation affect his father's re-election bid?

The balance of Congress in both Houses is razor thin and many members of Congress have already announced they are not going to run again this year. Which party or parties get control of the Senate and the House of Representatives, along with who wins the Presidency, could have a big impact on the future of our country.

This is a huge year for covering elections at local, state, and national levels. Journalists, stay on top of this one. Your audience deserves your best efforts.

# Wars

Wars are always big news, and we have several going on across the world that impact the U.S. in major ways. I wrote about covering the ‘local’ angle to wars in a recent newsletter, so I’ll [link to it here as a reminder](#) for you. The newsletter details some recommendations for covering protests that come from wars as well. I think we’re going to see more of those this year.

[If you are covering news ‘in’ a war zone, your employer should provide you with special training in how to do that safely and effectively.]

Another question that is harder to answer is whether future wars will continue to use ‘conventional’ weapons or if they could escalate to the use of ‘nuclear’ weapons? What do your viewers think about that? Do you have local experts in military and scientific fields who could help your audience better understand what could happen and what it might mean for them?

The 'Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists' explained the concerns about nuclear war from their perspective in an article published last week —

Globally, the world experienced renewed interests in nuclear weapons as countries looked for ways to ensure their security in the context of rising global tensions. Fearing that “Ukraine today may be Asia tomorrow,” some leaders in South Korea and Japan pressed the United States to reinforce its extended deterrence to Seoul and Tokyo. Pakistan continues to gradually expand its nuclear arsenal with more warheads, more delivery systems, and a growing fissile material production industry. And experts voiced concerns that nuclear-armed countries continue proliferating their nuclear technologies and materials in the Middle East and beyond. In the United States, a congressional commission has called for adding new nuclear capabilities to counter China’s growing nuclear arsenal—a strategy critics consider ineffective and potentially leading to a nuclear arms race.



# Protests

The number of protests across the world will most likely increase in 2024, and some of them may be in your coverage area. According to the [‘Global Protest Tracker’](#) there are currently more than 400 ‘significant antigovernment protests,’ and more than 132 countries experiencing ‘significant protests.’ People are protesting about wars, anti-semitism, abortion, racial justice, government reform, police reform, court reform, systemic reform, etc. The number and intensity of those protests will most likely increase in 2024. Be ready for any that come to a ‘city near you.’

Many of the protests are occurring on college and university campuses across the country and the world. That places student journalists in the challenging position of remaining neutral in their reporting even if they have strong positions about the protests. Journalism professors can and should take a leading role in guiding student journalists in the proper way to cover and report controversial protests and other stories on campus.

Student journalism is your opportunity to ‘do’ now what you may ‘do’ for much of your adult life if you choose journalism as a career. Now is your opportunity to learn how to do it well.

One thing I learned as a journalist is not to let ‘powerful’ and ‘influential’ people intimidate me from doing the right thing in covering a story. Some of the most powerful university presidents are currently under the microscope for their positions on a variety of issues. Interviewing someone like that — the president of your college or university — can be intimidating, but this is your opportunity to learn the importance and power of the ‘press.’ You have a ‘right,’ in fact a ‘responsibility’ to your readers, listeners, and viewers to ask the ‘tough’ questions of people who are in charge of powerful and influential institutions. This is where you as a student journalist ‘learn’ the craft of *Real Journalism*. Be polite and professional as you address university presidents, deans, professors, and fellow students, but be firm knowing that the First Amendment covers your right to ask those questions. Be accurate and objective in all that you do.



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