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# NEWS DEPRIVATION

Canadian communities starving for local news

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CANADIAN CENTRE  
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# Summary

**T**he last 16 years have not been kind to local news outlets in Canada. This report creates a new dataset which tracks the 2,900 local news outlets in Canada whether radio, TV and print (whether newspaper or online). It tracks changes in those outlets back to 2008, down to the postal code level. It is used to determine net losses in media coverage in Canada and where they have occurred.

**Devastation of the local print news industry:** Since 2008, we've seen a net loss of 11 per cent of print media outlets (whether newspapers or online). This has meant the closure of roughly 25 print media outlets a year since 2014 but with the devastating net loss of 83 outlets in 2023 due to the Metroland bankruptcy and Métro Média closures in Quebec.

**Private broadcasting is faring little better, but not by much:** Private broadcasting local news outlets, whether TV or radio, have fared little better, with the net closure of nine per cent of local broadcast news outlets since 2008. The worst year on record was 2024, with the net loss of 14.5 private broadcasting outlets, driven by the decrease in CTV outlets and decreases in service and closure of several Corus stations.

**2.5 million Canadians have almost no local news:** The net result of these changes is that 2.5 million Canadians now live in a postal code with only one or no local news outlets. This accounts for seven per cent of Canadians, up from three per cent a decade and a half ago. However, the more common situation for most Canadians is that they have some local news coverage but are in a state of constant news deprivation.

**All provinces/territories except Ontario saw declines in small town news:** Smaller towns, those with less than 30,000 people, have seen one in 10 news outlets close in the past decade and a half. In all provinces and territories except Ontario, we're seeing net losses of local news in towns

with less than 100,000 people. Smaller communities in Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, P.E.I., and Manitoba have seen the worst of it.

**Newfoundland and Labrador seen cataclysmic losses of local print outlets:** Outside of St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador lost three quarters of their news sources in the past 16 years. These smaller communities and rural areas often had only a single local outlet, generally a newspaper. However, many of these papers have closed shop, leading to a 100 per cent decline in print outlets for those small towns.

**News Deprivation Index in Canada's 45 big cities and capitals:** For the 45 cities with more than 140,000 people and all capital cities, we've created a news deprivation index to see if local news is keeping up to population growth. Here are the findings, at a glance:

- Three in five cities had a net loss of local news outlets while 11 per cent haven't seen a change and 27 per cent of had a net gain.
- Broadly, the cities with the **least news deprivation** are regional hubs that produce broadcast content for the remainder of their province or territory. These include Yellowknife and Whitehorse, Saint John, N.B., St. John's, NL, Charlottetown, P.E.I., where news content is re-aired on radio and TV repeater stations throughout those provinces and territories. Many of these have a strong public broadcasting presence.
- Broadly, the cities with the **most news deprivation** are the suburbs of larger centres: the suburbs in the Greater Toronto Area, Grand Montréal and Metro Vancouver populations have grown quickly but local news hasn't kept pace or has declined. This is as true for public broadcasting as it is for private outlets.
- The Toronto suburb of Vaughan has seen the largest loss of local outlets. It houses a third of a million people yet has only one print outlet. It lost one of its two local papers in 2013 and saw a decrease in service at the other, the *Vaughan Citizen*, in 2023.
- Gatineau, Quebec, saw decreases in service or outright closure of many of its local print outlets.
- Edmonton lost a third of its local news outlets, spanning decreases in both public and private broadcasting as well as the outright closure of numerous print outlets in the city.
- Vaughan, Langley and Surrey experienced among the largest losses of local outlets and, partially as a result, they also have among the worst local news deprivation.

- Brampton, North Vancouver and Mississauga have made proportionally large gains in the number of local news outlets. Brampton had an average of two local news sources in 2008 and is up to four in 2024. Mississauga went from three outlets to four. But each house three quarters of a million people and the additional outlets aren't nearly enough to cover the increase in population.
- On a rare bright side, Kelowna has gained news outlets and has a relatively low news deprivation.

**Bottom line:** The rate of local news deprivation across Canada is snowballing. This analysis demonstrates that the ad-funded local news model that has been dominant in Canada for more than a century is no longer viable. Despite efforts by the federal government to provide financial and regulatory supports for this model, the sector's demise is accelerating.

New models of local journalism are necessary for a new century. One way to address this is through the expansion of public media, such as the CBC and/or community broadcasting. The federal government could also improve support for local print journalism, which has borne the brunt of media losses. One thing is certain: nature abhors a vacuum. If responsible local news coverage is lacking, social media will quickly fill the gap—often with misinformation.

# Introduction

The state of news media in Canada is a persistent issue of concern, as the value of a healthy and robust news environment is central to Canada's democratic health. Many factors have influenced this concern about robust and diverse news and information for Canadians in the close to 100-year history of broadcasting (and longer for print media), from fears of cultural imperialism from Canada's southern neighbour, to challenges in serving such a vast geography, and fairly representing a multicultural population in two official languages. While much of the academic and political discussion about the health of Canada's news media has focused on the national level an equally important discussion is needed at the local level, which has become more important over the last five years as the local private-sector media environment is failing. The state of local news media in Canada is in sharp decline, which has serious implications for local communities and for the larger national dialogue about the democratic future of our country.

The purpose of this report is to better understand the decline in local news outlets across Canada and to understand what role public-service media (like the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, community and non-profit media) could take to tackle local news deprivation. Throughout the report, the focus is on the underservice in local news media in communities, big and small across the country. Within the policy and academic environments, this underservice is often referred to as "news deserts" and "areas of news poverty." News deserts refer to areas where there are no local news outlets, and areas of news poverty refer to limited access to local news outlets producing locally focused news and information.<sup>1</sup> The report begins with a brief overview of key factors that have led to where we are today. This includes a review of federal

government actions to try and shore up local news outlets, and news production and programming across all media (print, broadcasting and online). This is followed by an analysis of local news outlets data from across Canada, taking a comparative view of two snapshots in time, 2008 and 2024, to better understand where things stand in terms of local news outlets in communities across Canada. The report concludes with recommendations and opportunities for rebuilding Canada's local media to better serve the communities that they serve, as well as to better inform those communities and ultimately the regions and the nation overall.

# Broader context and policy

The Canadian news media environment is made up of a number of different elements. Traditionally, Canadians have received their local and national news either through print or broadcasting services, and more recently via online services. Local print media was delivered through community, local, or national newspapers, privately owned commercial ventures. Historically, most cities, large and small across Canada, had at least one local daily newspaper that was also locally owned. Examples of this include the *Toronto Star*, the *Whig Standard* in Kingston or the *Hamilton Spectator* in Hamilton. There was also often a strong network of community newspapers that were published weekly and served smaller communities. The commercial model for these publications was financed through local advertising.

In the broadcasting environment, there were local privately owned television and radio stations, also made viable by an advertising model. The local television stations, often an affiliate of a national network, like CTV or Global, provided different Canadian and American programming, as well as local news hours at various times throughout the day. In radio, privately owned stations dedicated to local news and public affairs programming were also common, alongside other music format stations that had local news requirements. Also in broadcasting, Canadians are served by public service broadcasters, including the CBC/Radio-Canada, which provides local, regional and national radio and television service across Canada, and provincial educational stations like TVO, Tele-Quebec or the Knowledge Network in British Columbia. Finally, Canadians in



various communities across the country have access to community public access television through cable providers, as well as community and campus radio.

This model of news media delivery was stable for most of the 20th century. Yet by the 1990s, the first of two significant factors that have led to the current failure of local news media—media concentration—began to take root. The second factor, the digital shift to online media content, developed in earnest through the first decades of the 21st century. The following provides a brief summary of the impact of these two factors and how they have collided in the early 2020s leading us to today's failing local media environment.

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## Media concentration

Beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Canadian media companies, both those who owned local and national newspapers, as well as commercial broadcasting properties, began a decades-long expansion through ongoing consolidation of media assets and companies. The idea was that by owning various commercial media properties, owners could benefit from more advertising revenue and a consolidation of programming production costs (including news content) that could be delivered across various media properties. In the early stages, companies sought to expand their ownership through horizontal integration, by purchasing more properties within their existing line of business. For example, the expansion of newspaper ownership groups like the Southam chain, which owned numerous local daily newspapers across Canada, such as the *Vancouver Province*, *Ottawa Citizen*, and the *Winnipeg Tribune*, among others. Other models of concentration were more vertically integrated, where companies like Canwest, which began in broadcasting, expanded to own commercial radio, television and newspaper properties across Canada. More recently, companies like BCE, Astral and Shaw Communications have consolidated ownership of both media infrastructure (cable and telecommunication networks that provide cable and telecom (mobile) services), as well as the delivery and production of media content (television, radio, print and online content such as news content). The most recent and concerning change in concentrated media ownership is the selling off of Canadian media companies, like Postmedia, to foreign owners. The majority of Postmedia's shares are owned by American hedge fund Chatham Asset Management.<sup>2</sup> Another aspect of

this more recent model of consolidation is that the new owners, whether Canadian or foreign, are financial services enterprises (e.g. hedge funds, asset management companies etc), not companies focused on media production as their primary function. This is concerning because it removes ownership of local media outlets from the local environment and beyond national legislative and regulatory reach. It also removes whatever revenues that are generated from these media properties from necessarily staying in Canada, to be reinvested in the Canadian media sector.

Central to this concentration in ownership was the purchase of local media outlets, whether newspapers, radio or television stations. As these outlets changed hands, ownership and management moved further from the local community and often resulted in significant and successive reductions in local news programming, production and staff. One example of this was when seemingly different newspapers began sharing reporters and content, thereby effectively turning several news sources in a city into one: for example, the *Ottawa Citizen* and *Ottawa Sun*, *Edmonton Examiner*, *Edmonton Sun* and *Edmonton Journal*. It also meant that editorial responsibility for local content moved further from the communities being served, with little recourse for residents and officials to advocate for better coverage for their communities.

This media concentration was facilitated by the federal government through various channels, including by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunication Commission (CRTC), the regulatory body responsible for the implementation and regulation of the *Broadcasting Act 1991* and *Telecommunication Act 1993*. The CRTC was responsible for approving changes in ownership of broadcasting properties, since the commission grants licences and regulates the frequencies over which broadcasters provided programming. In successive rulings, the CRTC would stipulate conditions of licences in terms of programming or specify benefits, usually financial, that would come from the different rounds of consolidation. These financial benefits (called “tangible benefits” in policy discourse) would be fed back through the CRTC via various funds supporting Canadian content production or local news programming. The entire premise behind supporting the benefits of media concentration was based on the argument that the larger media entity would leverage content from various sources to continue to accrue more and more advertising revenue to make the concentrated enterprise not only viable, but profitable.

By the early 2000s, the CRTC began to recognize the negative implications the increasing consolidated media ownership environment

was having on local media outlets. First, the commission began requiring more specific “conditions of licence” for media groups when it came to local news and information programming. In 2008, it announced its “Diversity of Voices” policy, in an attempt to restrict the number of media properties owned by one group in a single community.<sup>3</sup> By 2016, the CRTC’s television policy outlined specific local programming requirements for all commercial television stations in French and English.<sup>4</sup>

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## Digital shift

The second factor that collided with media concentration to lead us to where we are now is the digital shift in the delivery of media content that has grown exponentially since the mid-2000s. The digital shift in print news saw newspapers move online, often behind a paywall. In broadcasting, online services such as YouTube, Netflix and social media like Facebook and Instagram have disrupted the traditional private-sector media model in Canada and beyond. The main way it has done this is to provide easier access to news content and other programming, while undercutting the traditional commercial delivery. In the example of newspapers, print subscriptions fell, as more content was available online, thus devaluing the advertising model that newspapers were built upon. Similarly, as television viewers moved to subscription services like Netflix and others to access ad-free content, the traditional local television model, built on the number of viewer eyeballs for advertising dollars, was also devalued. Although recent moves have seen the reintroduced advertising into streaming platforms, which will aid those platforms’ bottom line, this will not directly support Canadian cultural or news production, as the earlier model of ad revenue did.

The signs of the digital disruptions were clear to see as far back as the 1990s. The federal government, through the CRTC, had two opportunities—first in 1999 and again in 2009—to set up a regulatory process to support the digital shift of news and Canadian content to the digital environment. In 1999, the CRTC first studied the impact of “new media undertakings” (aka digital and internet broadcasting) and it decided to exempt these “new media undertakings” from regulation.<sup>5</sup> In 2009, the commission reviewed Canadian broadcasting in new media and again decided to extend the regulatory exemption.<sup>6</sup>

By the late 2010s and early 2020s, the collision of large, consolidated media companies that dominate the local news environment, which is

heavily reliant on advertising revenue with the digital shift of Canadians seeking content online, came to fruition. It was only at this crisis point that the federal government began to intervene to bolster the commercial media model in a digital shift. This included through financial incentives, as well as changes to the *Broadcasting Act*, to attempt to reclaim and generate new income to support media companies.

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## Financial incentives

The federal government has long provided financial incentives to print and broadcasters to support the Canadian news and creative sectors; for example, the Canadian Periodical Fund supports publishers of print magazines, print community newspapers (non-daily) and digital periodicals.<sup>7</sup> In the early decades of the 21st century, the federal government also introduced other financial incentives to support Canadian and, specifically, local news and information at both the subscriber level and the news production level. Some examples of this are as follows.

- Digital News Tax Credit, which is a 15 per cent tax credit for Canadians who subscribe to Canadian newspapers and other written media that are available online.<sup>8</sup> It supports only online subscriptions to Canadian news sources but excludes broadcasters and the CBC.
- The Local Journalism Initiative, which is a federal fund that “supports the creation of original civic journalism that covers the diverse needs of underserved communities across Canada.”<sup>9</sup> This fund is made available to Canadian media organizations to pay for the creation of “civic journalism” in underserved communities; the latter are explicitly defined as “news deserts” or areas of “news poverty.”<sup>10</sup> The fund allows local news organizations (newspapers, local radio or television stations) to hire journalists or pay freelancers to develop local content in these underserved communities.
- The Local Program Improvement Fund (LPIF) was a CRTC funding program that was available from 2008-14. It provided conventional local television stations in “non-metropolitan” markets with financial assistance to create local programming.<sup>11</sup>
- The Independent Local News Fund was created by the CRTC in 2016 to support local television and radio stations that were independently

owned and not part of a media ownership group. The fund provides assistance to sustain local news programming.

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## Legislative measures

In 2023, the federal government passed two Acts that updated the legislative approach to broadcasting: the *Online Streaming Act* and the *Online News Act*. The latter Act was designed to counter the shift of the advertising revenue online by establishing a system whereby news organizations were compensated by online media companies (e.g. Meta, Google) for the use of Canadian and local news content to generate advertising revenue for these American technology companies. While the goal of the Act was to bring revenue back to Canadian news organizations, the result has been, in many cases, more damaging for local news outlets, as Meta has refused not only to comply with the Act, but also now blocks Canadian news content from their various social media platforms.<sup>12</sup>

These recent government interventions are too little and too late for many communities across Canada. The financial incentives are limited in their scope. For example, the Local Journalism Initiative does not provide long-term, consistent funding for local staff dedicated to producing local news. Additionally, one consequence of the *Online News Act* has been to disrupt how many Canadians accessed local news online, through Meta's applications, which has made access more difficult.

The consequence of these changes for local communities has been a marked reduction in the number of local media outlets across the country. As the analysis below illustrates, over the last 16 years, media companies have closed local newspapers and divested of local broadcasting licences. This has resulted in what April Lindgren, professor emerita at Toronto Metropolitan University, terms news poverty—when people don't have access to the information they need to navigate daily life and participate in decision making that affects them.<sup>13</sup> Essentially, the consolidation of Canada's private-sector media has led to a diminishment and scarcity of local news—news deprivation, if you will.

# News deprivation in Canada

The goal of this section is to quantify the changes in local news coverage over the past 16 years in Canada. It examines the local news sources that currently exist down to the postal code level, to determine how many have been lost or gained since 2008—including not just full closures, but also deprivation of coverage (like the loss of reporters). These changes will be tracked across three broad categories: public broadcasters (like the CBC, Radio-Canada, TVO, Indigenous-owned and community stations), private broadcasters (like the major private TV networks and private radio stations) and print journalism including newspapers, community papers and online outlets.

Our dataset tracks trends at the Forward Sortation Area (FSA), which is the first three digits of the postal code. All geography definitions are pushed down to the FSA level and aggregated back up as needed.

In total, our dataset includes 2,901 local news outlets in Canada: 1,162 newspapers or online news sites, 1,373 radio stations and 366 TV stations. Unfortunately, this drastically overestimates the actual number of news outlets. There are often multiple print news outlets for the same geographic area, with the same owner producing the same news but under different mastheads. For example, the *Ladysmith Chemainus Chronicle* and the *Chemainus Valley Courier* both provide news for Chemainus, B.C.—both are owned by Black Press Media with nearly identical news content. These are treated as only a single source of news for Chemainus, B.C. A similar approach is taken in broadcasting. For instance, most Canadians can receive a CBC Radio One and a separate

CBC music station. These only count as a single source in our analysis, CBC radio.

However, we count dailies, even if owned by the same owner, as their own source. For instance, *the Ottawa Citizen* and the *Ottawa Sun* are both owned by Postmedia but each count as a news sources for Ottawa.

In the case of radio and TV stations, 1,178 of the 1,739 stations are repeaters—they rebroadcast content that has been created elsewhere. In our analysis, broadcast repeaters aren't counted as local news outlets.

No quality adjustments have been made for the various outlets, nor do we tackle employment losses or increases among journalists in the local news arena. For example, a monthly community paper is considered one source and a major daily newspaper is also considered one source. There isn't a consistent method to properly adjust the amount of local news being produced for each of the outlets.

The result of this lack of quality adjustments will be an overly optimistic picture of local news. Outlet counting is the “best case” of local news coverage.

Throughout this analysis, we utilize a “net change in outlets” measure, which spans any changes between 2008 and December 2024. If a new outlet opens in an area, the net change goes up by one, but if an outlet decreases its service, the net change will fall by 0.5. If an outlet closes, the area's net change will go down by one and so on.

For more detailed information, see the methodology section.

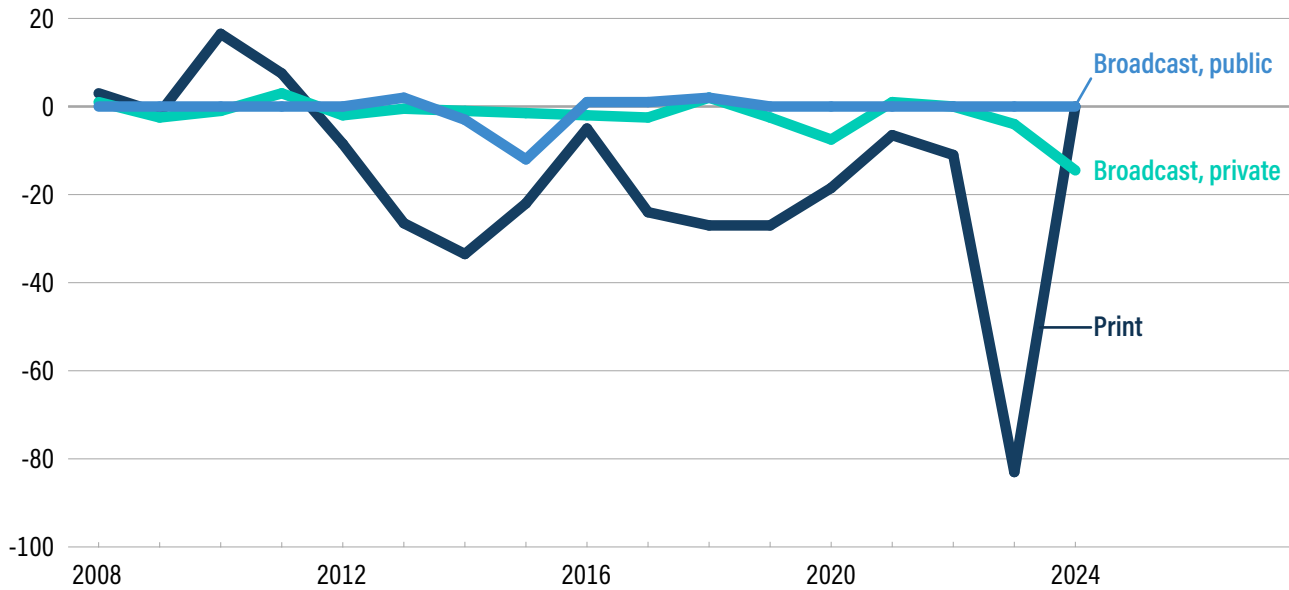
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## Changes in local news coverage: the national picture

The last 16 years have not been kind to local media in Canada. During most years in the 2010s, Canada had a net loss of roughly 25 print outlets a year. In some years, like in 2014, cuts in public broadcasting bumped the total outlets lost to over 30.

Although the 2010s pale in comparison to what happened to print media in 2023—which stands as the worst year in recent history for the net loss of local print outlets, with the net loss of 83. Most of this wasn't outright closure, just big reductions in service across 71 of the Metroland group papers. When an outlet decreases coverage, in this case by laying off journalists, the score given is -0.5, not the full -1. This happened in the same year as the outright closure of Métro Média community newspapers across Quebec. Also, Torstar allowed its chain of “local” branded online sites to go defunct.

**Figure 1 / Net change in local news outlets by year and type since 2008**



**Source** Local News Research Project, Local News Directory, Canadian Radio Directory and authors' calculations. See the methodology section.

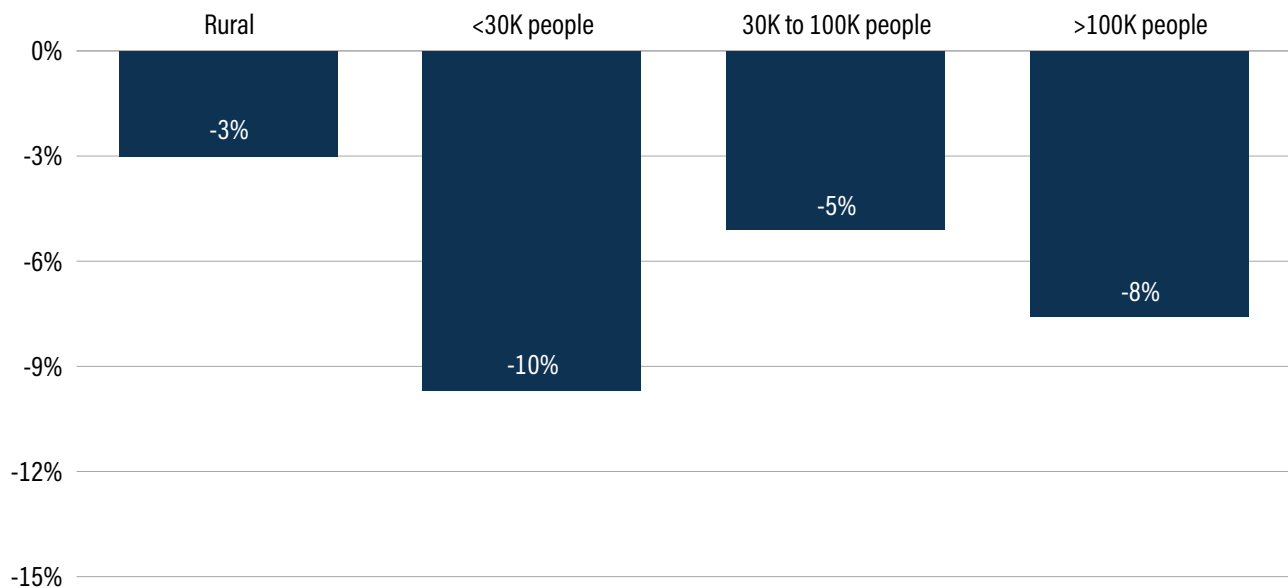
Last year, 2024, wasn't quite as catastrophic for local print outlets, but it marked the worst year on record for the net loss of private broadcasting outlets, with a loss of 14.5. This was driven by the decrease in newscasts across many CTV stations in February 2024 as well as cuts and a decrease in service of local broadcasting in several Corus stations in the summer of that year.

Between 2008 and 2024, there were major losses in local media news but over the same period, Canada's population rose by a quarter—from 33 million to 41 million.<sup>14</sup> While Canadian communities are much bigger in 2024, the news we receive about them continues to shrink. Of course, the start date of changes in local media may also influence the results because there were plenty of closures prior to 2008.

If we look at the deprivation of local news by community size, there are two community sizes that have been hardest hit: cities with more than 100,000 people and small towns with less than 30,000 people. Each saw an average loss of eight per cent to 10 per cent of their local news outlets, respectively, since 2008. Three quarters of all Canadians live in big cities; another fifth live in smaller towns with under 30,000 people, so these categories represent the vast majority of Canadians.



**Figure 2 / Net change in outlets by community size since 2008**



**Source** Local News Research Project, Local News Directory and authors' calculations. See the methodology section.

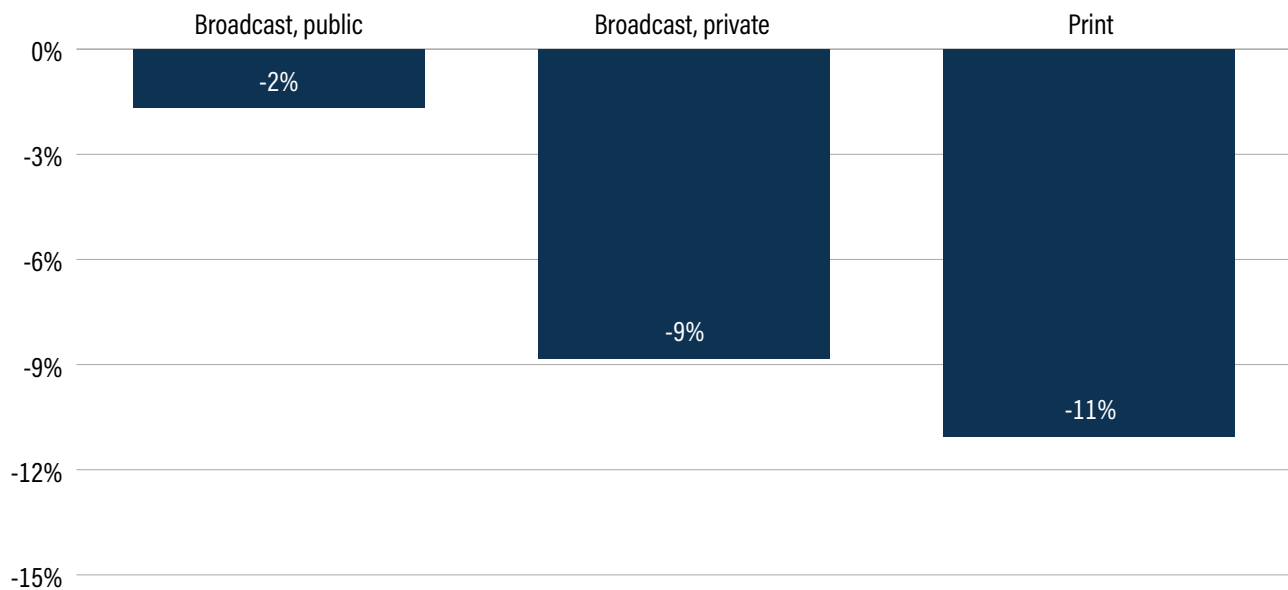
Both rural areas and larger towns with between 30,000 and 100,000 people also saw the deprivation of local news, but in a more limited way. However, only 14 per cent of Canadians lived in these communities in 2021.

Net local news outlets lost since 2008 has been quite different depending on the type. Public broadcasting has fared the best. The average area in Canada hasn't seen much change in the public broadcasting outlet count, although there was a reduction in local coverage across many CBC TV stations in 2015 and Aboriginal Voices radio network stations were closed in 2014 and 2015. This was offset by several new CBC radio stations opening and the expansion of TVO news hubs in 2017-18.

The situation was much worse for the other media types of private broadcasters and print outlets. Across Canada, there was an average nine per cent decline in private local news broadcasting (both TV and radio), although a third of postal codes didn't have any private local broadcast outlets to begin with, so there weren't any to lose since 2008.

Local print outlets have fared the worst. Here, on average, we've seen a net loss of 11 per cent in newspapers, community papers or online-only sources. These national averages show the basic breakdown, but these

**Figure 3 / Net change in local outlets by media type since 2008**



**Source** Local News Research Project, Local News Directory, Canadian Radio Directory and authors' calculations. See the methodology section.

trends can be much worse at the provincial or city level, as we'll see below.

The net result of these changes isn't the total lack of local outlets for most Canadians, it's rather an ongoing deprivation of access to local news. From our dataset, there are 2.5 million—or seven per cent of Canadians—that live in postal codes with one or no local outlets. Communities with at least two news outlets can be considered to have some basic "diversity of voices", as defined by the CRTC.<sup>15</sup> However, the proportion of Canadians with one or no local outlets has doubled since 2008, rising from only three per cent of the population in 2008 to seven per cent today.

Of the 37 million Canadians in 2021, it is these 2.5 million who have almost no access to news about their community. While a small percentage of Canada's population can be considered completely news deprived, the phenomenon is rapidly growing.

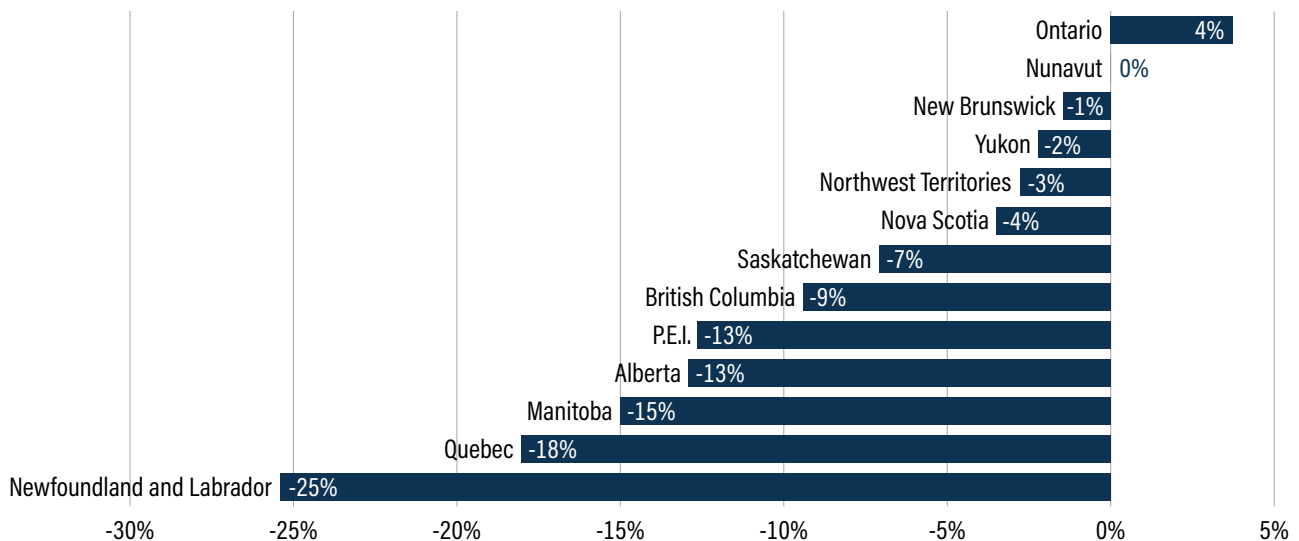
## Local news changes in smaller communities since 2008

Canada's larger cities will be examined separately below, but in this section, we examine the changes since 2008 in smaller communities of less than 100,000 people. This is where a third of Canadians live and it includes three of the four size categories: rural areas, small towns of less than 30,000 people and larger towns of between 30,000 and 100,000 people.

For smaller communities, every province and territory—with the exception of Ontario—has seen declines in local news outlets since 2008. Smaller communities in Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, P.E.I., and Manitoba have seen the worst of it. The average Newfoundland and Labrador postal code in smaller communities has seen a quarter of its local news sources disappear. In the smaller communities in Quebec, Alberta and Manitoba, it's more like one in seven local news outlets have closed.

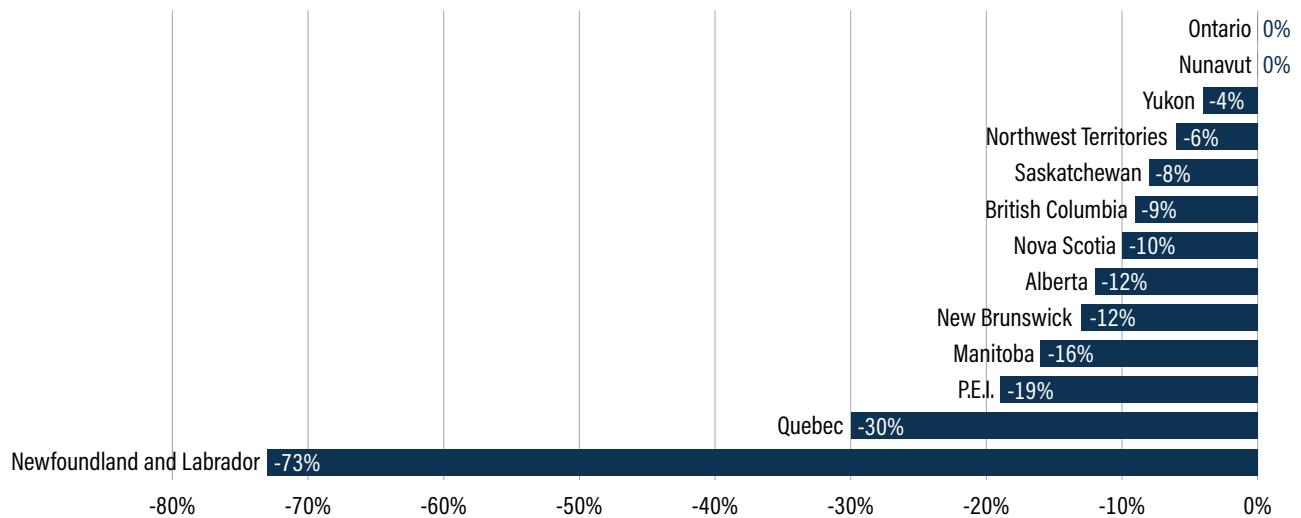
If we break down the losses by news types, some of the biggest declines in smaller communities have been cataclysmic. Let's first look

**Figure 4 / Net change in local news outlets for communities with under 100,000 people**



**Source** Local News Research Project, Local News Directory, Canadian Radio Directory and authors' calculations. See the methodology section.

**Figure 5 / Net change in print and online news outlets for communities under 100,000 people**



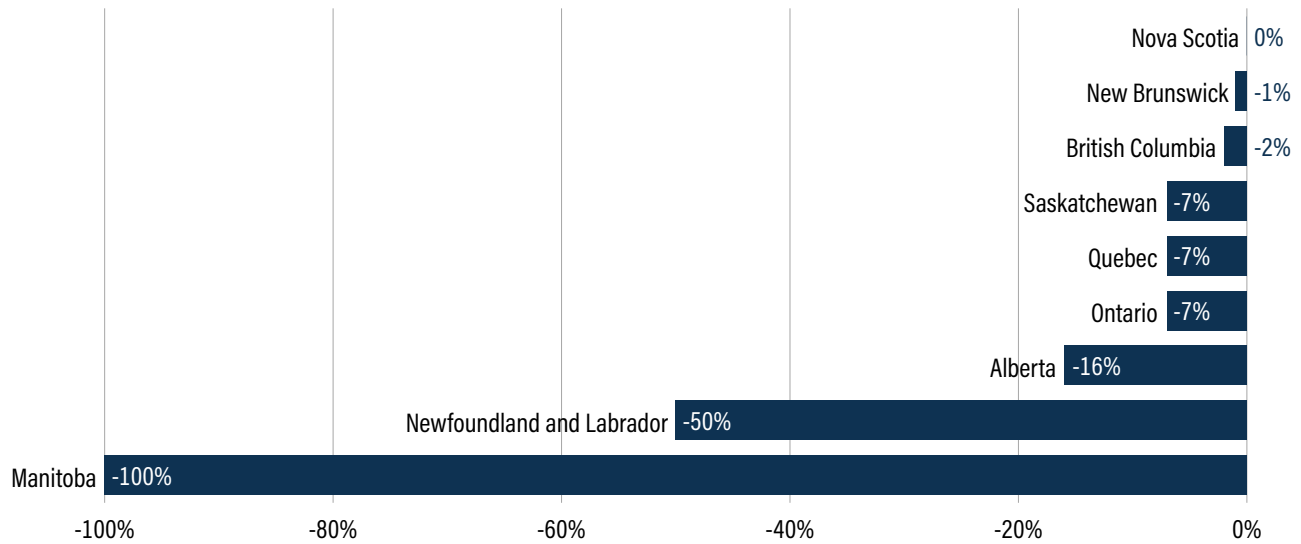
**Source** Local News Research Project, Local News Directory, Canadian Radio Directory and authors' calculations. See the methodology section.

at the decline in local print journalism, including both newspapers, community papers and online local news.

Newfoundland and Labrador tops the charts with a loss of 73 per cent of their news sources in the past 16 years. Outside of St. John's, the province consists of smaller towns and rural areas. These communities often used to each have a single newspaper providing local content. However, many of these smaller local papers have closed shop in the last decade-and-a-half, leading to a 100 per cent decline in print news sources for those small towns. For instance, the *Charter*, serving Placentia, or the *Packet*, from Clarendville, were the only newspapers in town suffering from a complete loss (100 per cent) of local print journalism, driving up the provincial average.

Quebec print outlets in smaller communities have been hit hard as well, with three in 10 lost in the past 15 years. The large-scale closure of local media didn't hinge on a single event, although there were some large community paper closures by Transcontinental in 2014. Métro Média's closure of all of its community papers in 2023 shuttered many local newspapers in smaller communities that had been publishing for decades.

**Figure 6 / Net change in private TV and radio local news outlets for communities under 100,000 people**



**Note** The territories and P.E.I. have no private local TV or radio news outside the big cities, so are excluded from this graph

**Source** Local News Research Project, Local News Directory, Canadian Radio Directory and authors' calculations. See the methodology section.

Only Ontario recorded an increase in print outlets since 2008 in its smaller communities. All provinces or territories reported a decrease in print outlets in smaller communities outside of the big cities.

When it comes to the loss of local private news broadcast outlets, the situation is not quite as dire as the loss of print media outlets in smaller communities, but the losses are still universal.

Manitoba tops the scales, but for a particular reason. It has no private broadcast outlets, either radio and TV, outside of Winnipeg and Brandon. Since this section is only looking at smaller communities, only Brandon is represented. In 2009, Brandon lost its only local TV station, CKX-TV—a 100 per cent loss of private broadcasting for that community, which drove the average up.

Somewhat similarly, few of Newfoundland and Labrador's smaller communities had private news stations to begin with—so the closure of several key radio stations, including in Corner Brook, Marystown and Labrador City, had a major impact on private news outlets in smaller towns.

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## Local news in Canada's big cities

Having looked at smaller cities, towns and rural areas, it's now time to examine bigger centres, by name. In this section, we include cities with populations over 140,000 people or capital cities, which results in looking at 45 cities.

As with the smaller cities, there are vastly different experiences, depending on the city. Broadly speaking, cities are seeing a loss of local news, but this isn't universal. Three in five cities are worse off in terms of local news outlets compared to 2008 while 11 per cent of cities haven't seen a change and 27 per cent of cities have more local news outlets today.

The Toronto suburb of Vaughan has seen the biggest average loss of news outlets since 2008. It lost one of its two local papers with the closure of *Vaughan Today* in 2013 and a decrease in service at the other, the *Vaughan Citizen*, with the Metroland bankruptcy in 2023. Gatineau saw decreases in service or outright closure of many of its local print outlets. Edmonton lost a third of its local news outlets, spanning decreases in service in both public and private broadcasting as well as the outright closure of numerous print outlets in the city.

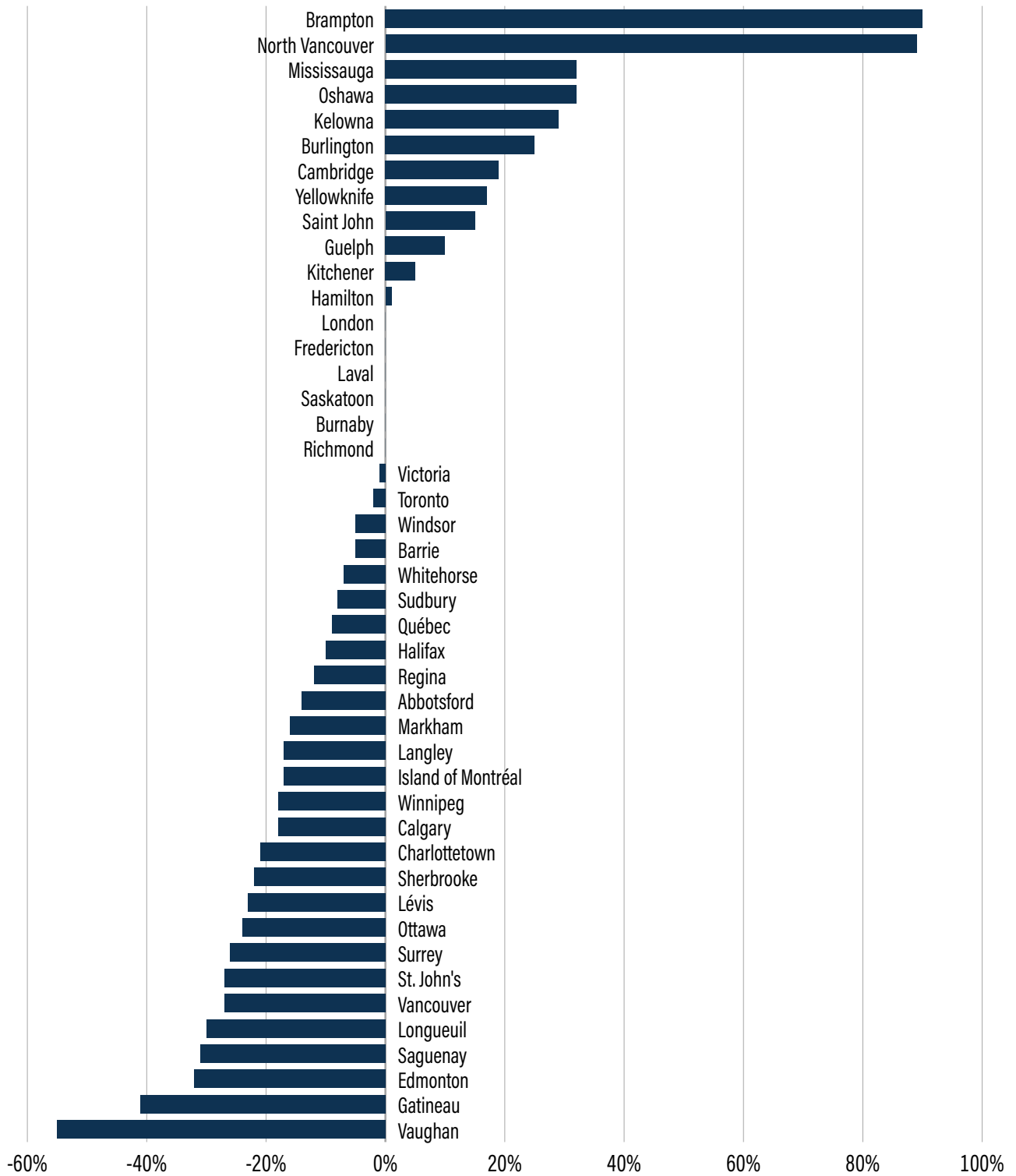
Unfortunately, some of the cities that have seen the largest losses since 2008 have among the lowest local news coverage of Canadian cities, as we'll see below. Vaughan and Surrey experienced the largest loss of local outlets and, partially as a result, they also have among the worst news deprivation in our index below.

Brampton, North Vancouver and Mississauga have made proportionally large gains in the number of local news outlets, but they were starting from very few outlets to begin with. As we'll see below though, these gains are nowhere near sufficient to supply the rapidly growing populations in these cities with local news meaning they rank poorly on our News Deprivation Index.

On a rare bright side, Kelowna has gained news outlets and ranks relatively well in our news deprivation index.

North Vancouver doubled its local news outlets since 2008 by going from one to two when it gained the *Global Canadian* in 2018, now the *North Shore Daily Post*. Brampton had an average of two local news sources in 2008 and are up to four in 2024. Mississauga went from three local news sources to four in a decade-and-a-half. However, these additional outlets aren't nearly enough to cover the number of people who live in these communities.

**Figure 7 / Net change in local news outlets by city since 2008**



Source Local News Research Project, Local News Directory, Canadian Radio Directory and authors' calculations. See the methodology section.

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## News deprivation index in Canada's big cities

While it is informative to see where and why local news is changing in Canada's biggest cities, it's worthwhile analyzing whether there are sufficient outlets to properly cover local events like city council meetings, school board meetings, community issues, local business, cultural events and so on. In larger cities, one would reasonably expect more local news and more outlets attempting to cover it, which we do find. In smaller communities, we may expect fewer news and outlets. Therefore, the raw count of local outlets is adjusted for the population size in this section.

What's clear from the figure below is that strong local news coverage is often found in regional hubs. What's often happening is that public and private broadcast studios are in these hubs. The news generated in these hubs is re-broadcast through both radio and TV repeaters throughout that region, province or territory. Since the physical station and reporters are in these regional hubs, they get quite good local coverage, well out of proportion to their population. These stations will likely have a mandate to cover a larger area, but much of the news will end up being local.

The cities with the highest concentration of local news given their populations are Yellowknife and Whitehorse. These tend to be the central production hubs for news media for their respective territories thus providing far more local coverage than their populations would suggest

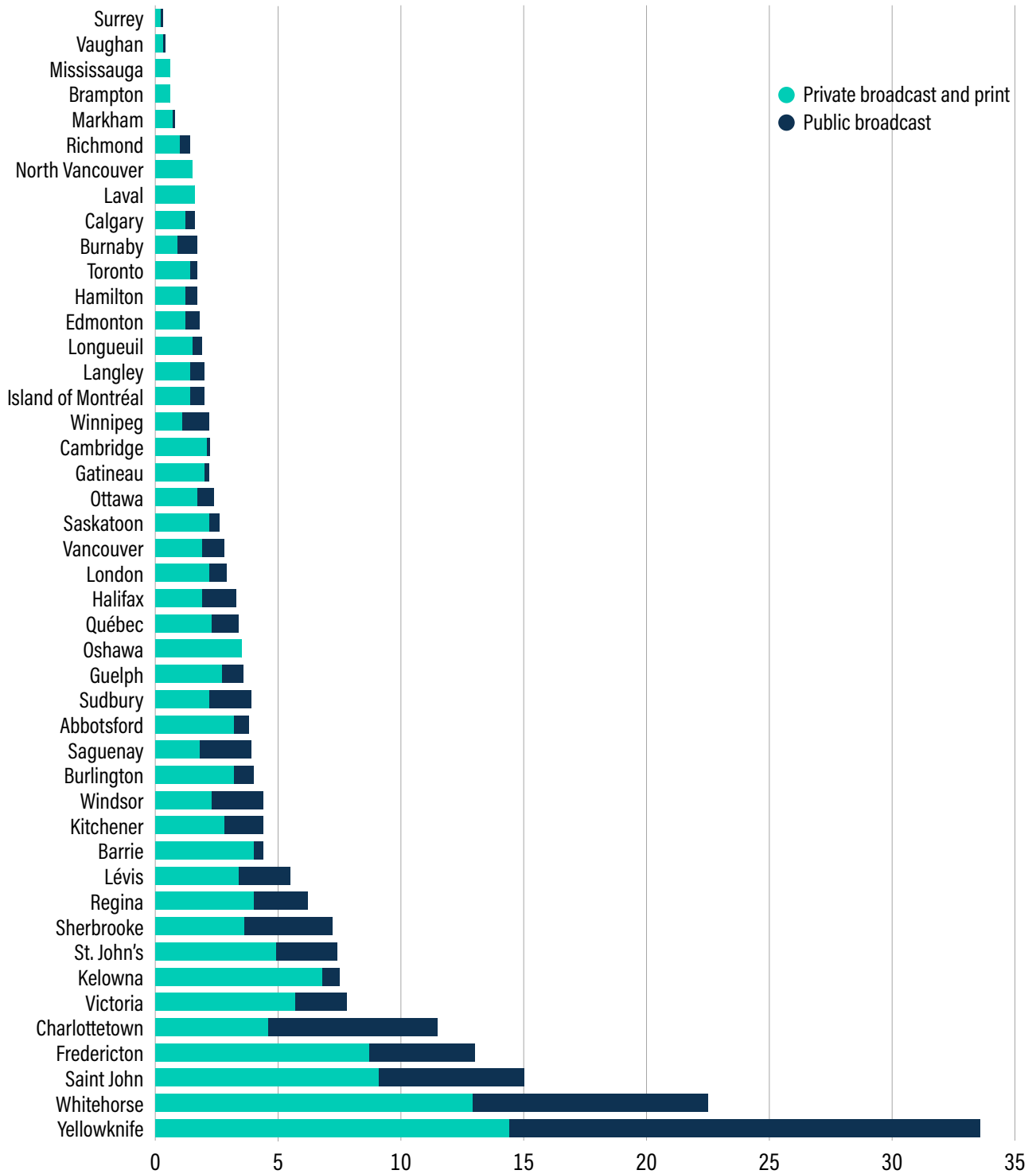
Saint John, N.B., St. John's, NL, Charlottetown, P.E.I. stations equally produce broadcast content for the remainder of the province and those news shows are re-aired on radio and TV repeater stations throughout those provinces. In all these regional hubs, public broadcasters play a leading role, making up half of all the local news sources.

At the other end of the spectrum, we find local news deprivation is prevalent in suburban centres located just outside of large cities. These cities have long been included in what Statistics Canada terms Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs), due to the high level of commuter integration between the suburban city and the neighbouring "big" city—for example, Vaughan is highly integrated with Toronto. It is argued that these cities benefit from the local news generated in the neighbouring big city due to this integration. Regardless of this integration, these are cities that have their own municipal governments and have experienced rapid growth since 2008. Some new local outlets have started up in several of these cities, but not nearly enough to properly report on their local affairs, given their population size.



**Figure 8 / News Deprivation Index: Local news outlets per 100,000 people**

December 2024



Source Local News Directory, Canadian Radio Directory and authors' calculations. See the methodology section.

Vaughan, a suburb of Toronto, has over 300,000 people but has only two local news sources: the *Vaughan Citizen* and *Radio Humber*, having already lost the *Vaughan Today* in 2013.

The City of Surrey, a suburb of Vancouver, has only two news outlets despite the fact that half a million people live there. All its print media—*Cloverdale Reporter*, *Peace Arch News* and the *Surrey Now-Leader*—are all owned by Black Press Media and are grouped together in our index.

Two more suburbs, Mississauga and Brampton, have seen some growth in local news sources in the past decade-and-a-half, but they still sit in the shadow of their neighbour, Toronto. The postal codes in each of those communities have, on average, four sources serving them while each city has three quarters of a million people.

Unlike in the regional hubs, public broadcasters haven't expanded into these rapidly growing suburbs with new local stations. Many of these suburban areas house half a million people or more. There is plenty of local news to cover, separate from what may be happening in urban downtowns, but they're experiencing news deprivation.

In cities where there are less than two local outlets per 100,000 people, public broadcasters are an important firewall, on average, by providing a quarter of all the news outlets.

For public or private broadcasters, these suburban areas fall under the umbrella of nearby larger centres of Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal. There are major studios located in the downtowns of Canada's big cities and, through either strong transmitters or rebroadcasting towers, the signals from the centre permeate the suburbs. In the past, suburban communities were smaller than their nearby city centres, arguably not meriting local coverage of their own affairs. Not so today. But as local news withers on the vine, there seems to be little appetite to expand news coverage in these areas. Instead, suburban news ends up as a footnote to what is happening in downtown Toronto or Vancouver.

# Where do we go from here?

The rate of local news deprivation across Canada is snowballing. What this analysis demonstrates is that the commercial media model that has been dominant in Canada for more than a century is no longer viable. Despite efforts by the federal government to provide financial and regulatory supports for this model, its demise is accelerating. The solution cannot be to shut the lights and lock the door on local news and public affairs. The demise of the traditional local media model does not signal the demise of the demand for local news and information. Instead, according to the Department of Canadian Heritage, most Canadians now get their news online.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, it is time to rethink, rebuild and renew how Canadians access local news and public affairs. All communities need and deserve access to local news, information and public discourse. It is central to a healthy democracy and engaged communities. With the increase in climate related emergencies, it is also essential for the safety of those communities.

Moving forward, a more balanced approach needs to be taken to ensure a resilient and responsive network of local media across the country. This can include many parts of the existing media system in Canada taking on new or augmented roles. It may also include new and innovative ways to make better use of existing technologies and resources. The following outlines some suggested next steps.

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## A digital shift in local print

Local and community newspapers have been hardest hit by the digital shift to online news habits. While they were once ubiquitous in almost all communities, big and small, across Canada that is no longer the case. Despite the demise of the printed newspaper, the knowledge and skill behind that, the journalism and editorial teams, should not be lost. Instead, there is an opportunity to pivot to better online delivery of this form of print local information. Large media groups like Metroland and Black Press still own the mastheads of former local and community newspapers and have moved many of these outlets online. While there has been a deprivation in the level of local content in many of these cases, there remains an opportunity to rebuild. One option is to follow the model being tested by new entrants in this area, like Insauga, a group of community news websites in Southern Ontario that provides free local news supported by micro-targeted advertising. Another example of innovation in print news online is where local journalists are turning to digital solutions to continue to serve their communities, whether through Substack or their own websites, often financed through crowdfunding. The two key challenges to these models are the long-term sustainability of each, as well as the public awareness of the news provided. A key next step is to design systems that can raise awareness of these nascent local news services to community residents. We need to keep experimenting with ways that community partners can be engaged to assist with building awareness and access—for example through municipal channels, schools and local libraries as locales to amplify what local online content is available in any community.

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## Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

The CBC/Radio-Canada is the country's national public broadcaster. It reaches across Canada and serves the provinces and territories in both official languages in radio and television. CBC presents a diversity of genres of programming, from drama, comedy, documentary, music, live performances, public affairs and news content. While CBC already provides local broadcasting in a number of cities and communities across the country, it is not consistent in its existing service, and it has been hesitant and resistant, at times in its history, to take on a larger role in local and regional service.

The importance of expanding the CBC's role in local/regional news was articulated most recently by the Minister of Canadian Heritage in the release of the report entitled *The Future of CBC/Radio-Canada* on February 20, 2025. The minister's report presents the CBC's role in local news as an opportunity to seize. The report notes,

"At a time when many private media outlets are cutting spending, withholding new investment, or withdrawing from the communities they once served, the role of public service broadcasting in civil society and public discourse has never been more essential to active and informed participation in civic life."<sup>17</sup>

The report formally recommends that the CBC's legislative mandate should include specific reference to the "important role that the broadcaster plays in the presentation of news, information and public affairs."<sup>18</sup>

While this is an important general first step, what is needed is a more formal policy and implementation strategy within the CBC for local news service across communities that is equitable, extensive and transparent. This needs to go beyond the recent announcements of single reporters serving large geographic areas.<sup>19</sup> Communities across Canada deserve local CBC stations, whether in radio or TV, that provide local news and feed that local context into larger regional and national dialogues. Funding for this can be drawn from the new proposed funding model outlined in the minister's recent report, as well as from revenues the CBC receives from the *Online News Act*.

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## Community media

Another option for local and community news can come from community media. Community and campus radio and television stations are an entrenched part of the broadcasting ecosystem in Canada. Community and campus radio stations have a long and important history in Canada. They were first established to better serve remote and rural communities. The difference between these radio stations and local stations is that community stations are designed to empower community members to have a hand in media production. The operational structure of these broadcasters is non-profit, often linked to universities and colleges as educational resources for students. They have long been overlooked as a means to better serve local communities, yet the *Online Streaming Act*<sup>20</sup> has outlined a stronger and more specific role for community

broadcasting through its amendments to the *Broadcasting Act*. It now falls to the CRTC to create a better framework for this implementation, as well as to provide adequate funding for these community stations to deliver on this updated legislative direction. It is important to note that community stations are eligible for revenues generated from the *Online News Act*.<sup>21</sup>

Community access television has long been a central source of local information and public affairs. In many communities, these stations provided opportunities for community production of content and televised local council meetings, municipal election debates and other local events and activities of note. Originally, these services were provided by cable companies as a regulatory quid pro quo for monopoly access to the communities they served. While the provision of cable services is no longer a monopoly environment, and more Canadians are leaving those services for digital streaming services, the community access television stations still exist, and continue to offer local programming. Additionally, many of them are transitioning their programming online, which could extend their value for local communities.

# Conclusion

Despite Canada's population expanding by eight million people since 2008, we have seen a precipitous drop in local news outlets: 2023 marked the worst year on record for the loss of local print outlets and 2024 marked the worst year for local private broadcasting closures. The loss of local print journalism in Newfoundland and Labrador's smaller communities has been nothing short of catastrophic, with often the only paper in town closing.

Public broadcasting, despite seeing some net declines in the mid-2010s, remained the mainstay of local news in Canada.

News deprivation is the norm in large suburban cities. Local news outlets simply haven't expanded fast enough. In many cases, they haven't expanded at all to provide local news to these large populations. Public broadcasting could be playing a much bigger role in reporting the local story, but it hasn't expanded to follow the population and the changing trends in the information landscape.

New models of local journalism are necessary for a new century. One way is the expansion of public media through either the expansion of public broadcasting like the CBC and/or community broadcasting. Another way is to better support local print journalism in its digital transition, which has borne the brunt of media losses.

One thing is certain: nature abhors a vacuum. If responsible local news coverage is lacking, social media will quickly fill the gap—often with misinformation.

# Methodology

The dataset created for this analysis is at the Forward Sortation Area level (FSA). FSAs are the first three digits of a postal code. All geographic terms for cities or neighbourhoods have been converted to FSAs. The broadcast area of stations has also been converted to FSAs.

If more than one outlet provides news to a FSA but has the same owner, we only count this as a single outlet. For example, a FSA receiving both a CBC radio one broadcast and a CBC music broadcast only counts as a single outlet. However, exemptions are made for daily newspapers, so each counts as its own outlet even if they have the same owner. For instance, Postmedia owns both the *Ottawa Citizen* and the *Ottawa Sun*, but each one counts as an outlet.

Our dataset integrates five main data sources.

1. To track the changes in local news, we use the Local News Research Project: Local News Map data.<sup>22</sup> It tracks detailed changes in local news media between 2008 to December 2024.
2. To determine the overall count of local TV and print news sources, we use the CBC local news database.<sup>23</sup> It has been updated to match more recent data from the Local News Map.
3. To supplement the CBC local news database the Publication List from Project Oasis for Canada were added where appropriate<sup>24</sup>
4. The Canadian Radio Directory<sup>25</sup> provides a complete list of all radio stations in Canada, with their primary focus and whether they are public, private or community stations. We only include stations whose focus is news or Indigenous content.



5. The website [fccdata.org](https://fccdata.org) maps the practical broadcast area of all radio and TV signals in Canada. We determine all FSAs within each TV or radio station's broadcast area using these maps.

The focus of this analysis is local media, not news about the country or the world. The focus here is on the ability report on local events on an ongoing basis. This can include traditional news sources like local radio and TV stations with reporters in the community. It can also include traditional daily newspapers. We also include community papers that have recently proliferated as well as online-only print journalism. This analysis does not judge the quality of the news. For instance, both daily and monthly papers count as a single outlet. Nor does the study tackle employment losses or increases among journalists in the local news arena.

For broadcasters, the use of repeaters has become increasingly common. This is when a broadcasting station that may have historically served a single geographic area now reaches beyond those boundaries to other cities or regions. The repeater extends or "repeats" the station frequency and its local content to a broader geographic audience. For our analysis, repeaters do not count as local news stations, although the originator station does.

As well, high-powered radio and TV stations can reach a vast audience at high elevations, like atop the CN tower in Toronto or at the peak of Mont Royal in Montreal. For instance, a CN tower station can reach almost 10 million people—a quarter of the Canadian population. These broadcasts will have local reporters and news broadcasts but the station's licence requirements are to serve only the city within which it is licenced. Therefore, this analysis accounts for these stations as local to where the station is located. For example, broadcasting from the CN tower is local news for the residents of Toronto but not Barrie, Ontario (which can receive some of these Toronto broadcasts).

Outside of the large broadcast areas noted above, the FSAs receiving a broadcast from all TV and radio stations in our dataset has been determined. Any FSA receiving a TV or radio station from a primary transmitter (not a repeater) is determined to be a local news outlet for that FSA.

A net change in local outlets is calculated for each FSA. The net change compares 2008 to December 2024, unless otherwise noted. Any outlets that both opened and then closed between those end dates effectively cancel themselves out and aren't included in this analysis.

**Table 1 / Translation of Local News Research Project coding to net change score**

Local News Research Project coding	Net change score
Closed	-1
Closed due to merger	-0.5
Daily becomes a community paper	-0.5
Decrease in service—like moving from publishing 6 days a week to 5	-0.5
Increase in service	0.5
New	1
New outlet produced by merger	0
Shifted to online—eliminating the printed paper	-0.5

The Local News Research Project provides the most recent status of a news outlet and, therefore, only a single record per outlet. To correctly create the net change calculation, a record for an outlet’s creation is necessary if it happened between 2008 and 2024.

The Local News Research Project has eight transitions a media outlet can experience. Each is assigned a net change score as outlined in Table 1 and those changes are summed for a given geography. Decreases in service through loss of a print paper for older Canadians, changing to a community paper, the loss in service due to a merger are all treated like half of the outlet is lost. These transitions are better than full closure but will affect the amount of local news being produced and accessed. A new outlet being produced through a merger doesn’t change the count, as it doesn’t offset the loss of in attention from the two merged papers.

In some cases, print outlets merge several times into ever larger papers and then that final larger paper is closed. In those cases, all the original papers are simply coded as closed and the subsequent merger coding is removed.

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