

# CANADA

## A strong foundation with an uncertain future

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### Introduction

From its earliest days, when information often moved at the speed of canoes traversing rivers between villages, communication has played a defining feature in Canada's history. Spanning nearly ten million square kilometres, communication and media remain at the heart of the northern country's ongoing nation-building and cultural efforts. Canada's expansive landmass and its shared border with the US, the world's media superpower, continue to profoundly structure the country's communication and media system. Politically, Canada is considered a federal parliamentary democracy under a constitutional monarchy with different federal and provincial responsibilities (The World Factbook, 2021).

**Freedom in the World 2021:** status "free" (Score: 98/100, down from 99 in 2019). One point has been deducted in the category of Freedom of expression and belief, justified by the approval of a Quebec law "that prohibited civil servants in positions of 'authority' from wearing religious symbols in the workplace" (Freedom House, 2021).

**Liberal Democracy Index 2020:** Canada is placed in the Top 10–20% bracket (rank 28 of measured countries, down from 11 in 2016) (Varieties of Democracy, 2017, 2021).

**Freedom of Expression Index 2018:** rank 19 of measured countries, down from 17 in 2016 (Varieties of Democracy, 2017, 2019).

**2020 World Press Freedom Index:** rank 16 of 180 countries, up from 18 in 2019 (Reporters Without Borders, 2020).

Canadian media policy has historically focused on attempting to slow the persistent, powerful, and popular flow of American media across the 49th parallel separating the two countries. These concerns persist in the digital age. Ownership rules continue to prevent any Canadian media company from being controlled by foreign companies or people (with some easing of this rule in

telecommunications since 2012), and content regulations try to ensure space for Canadian productions despite the overwhelming presence of American programming. Recently, an independent panel studying Canada's broadcasting and telecommunication legislation, in fact, echoed historical themes of protecting Canadian sovereignty when it implored the federal government to redouble its efforts to ensure "Canadian stories [...] be told and discovered in a world of so many choices" (Canada, 2020: 10). The growth of US-based social media and streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon's Prime Video continue to stoke concerns about protecting Canadian culture during a time when news media in particular faces extensive financial challenges.

These contemporary sentiments echo similar historical worries about cultural sovereignty in the late 1920s and early 1930s, when American radio signals inundated Canada. A Royal Commission charged with studying the problem in 1929 concluded that Canada needed its own national broadcaster, leading to the creation of the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission, the predecessor of Canada's current public broadcaster, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (Société Radio-Canada in French-speaking Canada), or CBC/Radio-Canada. While it is envisioned as an arms-length entity, the majority of CBC/Radio-Canada's revenue comes directly from yearly parliamentary appropriations. Moreover, there have been questions about the independence of the politically appointed board of directors that controls the crown corporation (Taras et al., 2007). Additionally, CBC/Radio-Canada has faced considerable budget cuts over the last four decades, leaving it, as some have suggested, at a critical point where "either [it will] be reimagined and reinvented or die a slow death on the outskirts of the media world" in the coming years (Taras & Waddell, 2020: 9).

While the federal government boosted spending for the crown corporation in 2016–2017, Canada remains, relative to other OECD countries, home to one of the most poorly funded public broadcasters in the developed world, spending about CAD 34 per capita, compared to the likes of France and the UK, at CAD 73 and 105, respectively (Nordicity, 2018). Like other traditional broadcasters, CBC/Radio-Canada's audiences have diminished in recent years, particularly television viewership. Despite its declining budget and audience, CBC/Radio-Canada reaches an average of 20.2 million Canadians through its digital platforms each month (CBC, 2019). While CBC/Radio-Canada remains the biggest news gathering service in the country, their spending on news, according to the country's broadcast regulator, has declined over the last five years (CRTC 2019a: 174). Canada's broadcast industry is governed by the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), which, under the 1991 Broadcasting Act, has the authority to "regulate and supervise all aspects of the Canadian broadcasting system" (Canada 1991: 5.1).

Canada's commercial news media has also witnessed considerable downsizing and consolidation in recent decades. The overwhelming majority of Canada's

news media is owned by a core of big multimedia corporations, including Rogers, Bell, Corus, Postmedia, Torstar, and Quebecor. CTV, Canada's top-rated television network, is owned by Bell and broadcasts local news and current affairs programming, including the country's most watched television newscast at 23:00, *CTV National News*. Like CTV, Corus-owned Global News offers national and local newscasts on its television service across the country.

Concerns about ownership – complete with colourful press barons such as Lord Beaverbrook and Conrad Black – have swirled around Canada's newspaper industry since the early 1900s and persist today. Currently, three companies – Torstar, Postmedia, and The Globe and Mail – produce the vast circulation of Canada's daily newspapers. Postmedia, which notably emerged from the 2009 bankruptcy of Canwest Global Media Corporation, produces both a national newspaper, *The National Post*, as well as a string of major metro daily newspapers and community papers across Canada. The New York-based hedge fund Chatham Asset Management who is the de facto owner of Postmedia via debt holdings, has forced cost-cutting that has slashed staff considerably, and it closed numerous papers in the chain over the last decade in an effort to ease Postmedia's overwhelming debt. In Quebec, the *Journal de Montréal* and *Journal de Québec*, owned by Quebecor, continue to print newspapers, while the former French-language newspaper *La Presse* became an exclusively digital service in 2017. *The Globe and Mail* – founded in 1844 by George Brown, one of the subsequent fathers of Canadian confederation – now owned by the Thomson family, is commonly considered Canada's newspaper of record.

Canada is also home to a number of alternative and minority media services, including online news services like *The Tyee*, *rabble.ca*, and *The National Observer*. In recent years, right-wing media organisations, including Rebel Media and the True North Centre for Public Policy, have added their alt-right perspective to Canada's media landscape. These organisations only find small niche audiences online. Notably, a right-wing television news channel, Sun News Network, modelled after Fox News in the US, launched in 2011 but failed to find a large audience and went off the air in 2015. A wide range of ethnocultural and multilingual programming is broadcast on commercial and community television and radio as well, reflecting Canada's multicultural diversity. The Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN), the world's first Indigenous independent national television service, broadcasts its programming about and for Canada's First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples across the country. APTN is one of the few television services that the CRTC has determined must be carried by all broadcast distributors in Canada.

Conceptually, Canada's news media fits in what Hallin and Mancini (2004) describe as the North Atlantic or liberal model. To be sure, liberal thinking – whereby journalists are watchdogs and truth-speakers who play an important function in democracy (Ward, 2015) – underpins much of the thinking and

motivation of Canada's news media. In line with McQuail's (2009) conception, most Canadian journalists interviewed for this study see their role as monitorial. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Section 2b, declares the existence of the fundamental freedoms "of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication" (Canada, 1982). However, unlike the much-heralded First Amendment of the US constitution, Canadian press freedom is expressly stated to be subject to the limitation imposed in Section 1, which declares: "The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* guarantees the rights and freedoms set out in it subject only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society".

While there is clearly a strong foundation for journalism in Canada, like many other jurisdictions around the globe, Canadian news is currently facing enormous challenges brought on by a range of converging technological, political, and economic factors.

### *Covid-19*

The Covid-19 pandemic has proven devastating for Canadian news, as advertising revenues, already weakened over the previous decades, collapsed even further. In an opinion piece published in the *Toronto Star* in March 2020, Daniel Bernhard, executive director of Friends of Canadian Broadcasting, called the Covid-19 crisis a "six alarm fire" and predicted "we are staring down the end of Canadian private media as we know it. With few exceptions, we're talking about the extinction of the entire Canadian media industry" (Bernhard, 2020). In short order, the industry began to prove him right.

The Quebec newspaper *La Presse* reported that the National Cooperative of Independent Information, which brings together six daily newspapers in Quebec, would temporarily lay off 143 people because of the Covid-19 pandemic – almost half the number of people employed by the papers collectively (Marin & Paradis, 2020). West of Quebec, also in April, *Postmedia* announced the closure of 15 weekly newspapers in Manitoba and the Windsor-Essex area of Ontario. It blamed the closures on the financial fallout from Covid-19.

The Canadian Journalism Project, a collaboration of Ryerson University and Carleton University, maintained a database on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Canadian news providers, including a map demonstrating that news closures were not restricted to any one region of the country. According to this project, of the 51 news outlets that closed across Canada as of October 2020, 48 were community newspapers (J-Source, 2020). However, major cities were not spared the economic pain brought on by the Covid-related collapse of the advertising market. In May 2020, Torstar, the company which includes a wide

range of newspapers including the *Toronto Star*, Canada's highest-circulation newspaper, was sold for a price of CAD 52 million, or CAD .63 per share. Torstar stocks had been trading at CAD 1 per share in June 2019.

The horrible contradiction in this situation is that while the Covid-19 pandemic has proven economically devastating for news media across the country, the Canadian public maintained a very strong reliance upon news organisations for their information on the most significant health story in a century. This was captured in data from Statistics Canada for March–April 2020, which noted 51.3 per cent of Canadians named traditional news outlets as their main source of information about Covid-19 during the peak of the pandemic. The next-most popular source was daily announcements by public health and political leaders in individual provinces, at 12 per cent. Less than 10 per cent of Canadians listed social media as their main source (Statistics Canada, 2020). The data is clear that, by a wide margin, Canadians turned to established news sources in this period of emergency.

This overall reliance on professional journalism has not made Canadians immune to the false information circulating associated with Covid-19. A study out of Carleton University surveyed Canadians' responses to Covid-19 conspiracy theories, and nearly half of those who responded (46%) believed at least one of four Covid-19 conspiracy theories and myths addressed in the survey. A quarter of Canadians surveyed (26%) believe a widely discredited conspiracy theory that the coronavirus that causes Covid-19 was engineered as a bioweapon in a Chinese lab and released into the general population. Despite the prevalence of conspiracy theories, over half of Canadians surveyed (57%) were confident that they can distinguish conspiracy theories and misinformation from factual information about Covid-19. The study also notes that the individuals who believe the discredited conspiracy theories spend more time every day on social media platforms than those who do not believe them (Carleton Newsroom, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic seems to have greatly accelerated the elements that our study reveals were already in place: Canadians look for information via professional journalism that current economic models simply will not sustain.

### *Leading news media sample*

Most of the data presented in this chapter comes from publicly available documents, reports, websites, and recent academic research. The figures presented in the coming pages are rounded out by a dozen anonymous interviews conducted with Canadian journalists, newsroom and union leaders, and former journalists-turned-academics or media and communication scholars. In order to gather a representative sample, interviews were conducted with people working at both

digital and traditional news organisations, including newspapers and broadcasters (radio and television), and mainstream and alternative news services all across the country. As well, the interview subjects reflect a cross-section of journalists and newsroom leaders working in both local and national newsrooms. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation/Société Radio-Canada chose not to participate in the study. Given the sensitivity of some of the indicators being assessed in this study, interview data is presented in a way so as to not identify any participants. Moreover, this work complies with the University of Calgary’s research ethics requirements.

## Indicators

### *Dimension: Freedom / Information (F)*

#### (F1) Geographic distribution of news media availability 2 POINTS

Because of Canada’s immense landmass and population distribution, large northern and rural parts of Canada’s regional areas are not well served by the news media when compared with the country’s large urban areas, where considerable news media is available in both digital and analogue forms.

As the second-largest country on the planet – 41 times larger than the UK – and a population density of four persons per square kilometre, big gaps and regional disparities, not surprisingly, exist in Canada. While there is media abundance in Canada’s urban areas, large parts of rural Canada, especially its vast north, are underserved by news media and broadband, mobile, and telephone coverage. Despite the challenges, CBC/Radio-Canada, APTN, and other Indigenous news media do offer services in several Indigenous languages in Canada’s arctic. There is also clear division between rural versus urban broadband speed. The federal government committed in 2019 to connect all Canadians, including many remote Indigenous communities, to reliable high-speed Internet by 2030 (Jordan, 2019). The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the digital divide, prompting the federal government to accelerate its commitment to speed up broadband in rural and remote communities.

Canada’s news media comprises a mixture of both public broadcasting (radio, television, and digital) and commercial radio, television, newspapers, magazines, and digital services. See Table 1 for details about household access to each media type.

**Table 1**     *Media use in Canada*

Media type	Household access (%)
Free-to-air television	97
Television subscriptions	72
Internet subscriptions	89
Radio	88
Daily newspapers	41
Magazines	23

*Source:* CRTC, 2017

More than 700 commercial radio stations (122 AM and 599 FM) are spread across the country. The vast majority (599) are English, while 97 broadcast in French, and 25 in a third language (CRTC, 2019a: 134). CBC/Radio-Canada has 66 radio stations across Canada, and their radio services are available, free-over-the-air, in every region in both official languages as well as online.

In the switch to digital, free-to-air television over the last decade, some communities (smaller cities and rural areas) have been left without service, including access to the public broadcaster. Conventional television transmitters remain only in mostly urban markets (CRTC, 2018; Taylor, 2013). Nearly three-quarters of Canadians subscribe to a television service (cable, satellite, or Internet). There has been a more than 10 per cent drop in television distribution since 2013, the first year Canadian television distribution had ever experienced a decline in customers. There are 94 private and 27 CBC/Radio-Canada conventional television stations across Canada (CRTC, 2019a: 178). Five Canadian networks – CTV, Global, CBC/Radio-Canada, Téléviseurs associés [associated telecasters], and CityTV – provide national and local services across the country.

The last decade has been bleak for newspapers in Canada, with hundreds of local news outlets – mostly community papers – closing. Reportage about civic affairs has declined, especially in smaller communities, raising normative questions about democratic information and participation (Lindgren & Corbett, 2018). As noted in the news journal *The Walrus*, “the symptoms of local news poverty are increasingly evident: the underreporting of complex political issues, the proliferation of superficial journalism, and a citizenry deprived of credible information” (Lindgren, 2019: para. 2).

Advertising revenue for newspapers in 2016 and 2017, the years in which the latest data is available, fell by 20 per cent. The challenges facing Canada’s news industry was made clear in the federal budget of 2018, in which the Liberal government pledged public support for local journalism. Despite the commitment of government support, local journalism has continued its decline. The Local News Map, a crowd-sourced research project tracking local news in

Canada, estimates Canada has lost 297 news services in smaller communities across the country since 2008 (Lindgren & Corbett, 2020: 2).

Despite more than a decade of tough times, slashing staff, budgets, and reducing the amount of coverage offered, newspapers continue to reach more than three million Canadians each day.

Canada has two national newspapers, *The Globe and Mail* and *The National Post*. As of 2017, *The Globe and Mail* no longer distributes its newspaper in Atlantic Canada. This move is indicative of the wider news distribution trend across Canada: larger cities are relatively well served while smaller communities are increasingly left with local news with very few journalists, or no local news at all.

The issue of limited local coverage may have reached a boiling point in March 2020, when CBC News (the division of CBC/Radio-Canada responsible for news programmes on its English-language operations) announced they were suspending local television newscasts in many regions of the country. Public reaction was swift and furious. The Premier of Prince Edward Island, Canada's smallest province, put out an angry public statement noting that CBC News was the only local television news in the province (Hurst, 2020). Two weeks later, CBC News was forced to backtrack and reinstate the local television news shows.

## (F2) Patterns of news media use (consumption of news) 3 POINTS

Despite challenges in smaller markets, Canadians have access to a wealth of news sources.

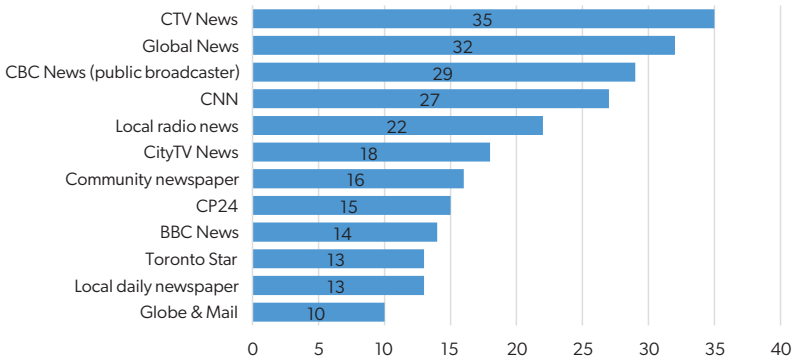
In 2018, Canadians could choose from 762 television services authorised for service, over 700 radio stations, and 88 paid-for daily newspapers (CRTC, 2019a; Winseck, 2019b). As an advanced democracy – with a high literacy rate and strong public education system – Canadian news consumption is relatively high.

A 2019 survey by the Canadian Journalism Foundation found that nearly eight in ten Canadians say they follow the news very or somewhat closely. Canadians get their news from a variety of news sources, including online (60%), television (59%), newspapers (34%), and radio (26%), according to the same survey conducted by the Canadian Journalism Foundation (2019). Older Canadians are more likely to get their news from traditional sources such as television, radio, newspapers, and magazines than younger Canadians, who tend to turn to online news sources. Almost two thirds (62%) of Canadians turn to legacy television, newspaper, or magazine websites to get online news. A large number of Canadians access news through social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, and social media sources have increased by 4 per cent since 2016. As Figures 1 and 2 illustrate, Canadians, according to the Reuters



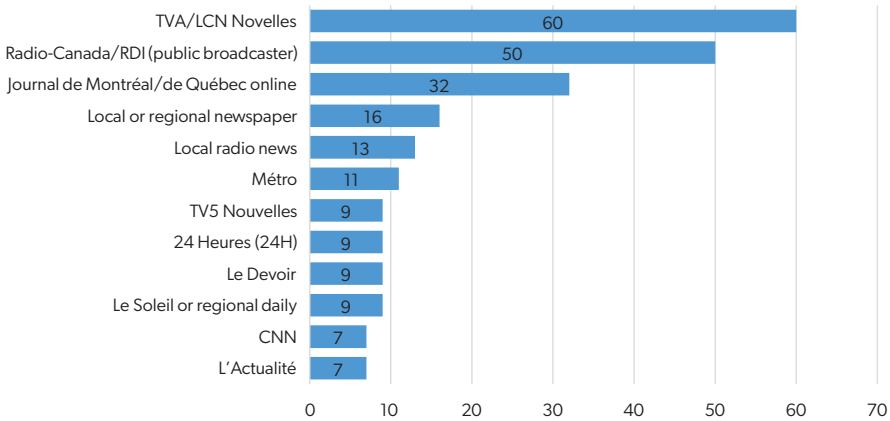
Institute for the Study of Journalism (2020), rely on a range of national, local, and international sources for their news.

**Figure 1** Weekly use of television, radio, and print in English (per cent)



Source: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2020

**Figure 2** Weekly use of television, radio, and print in French (per cent)

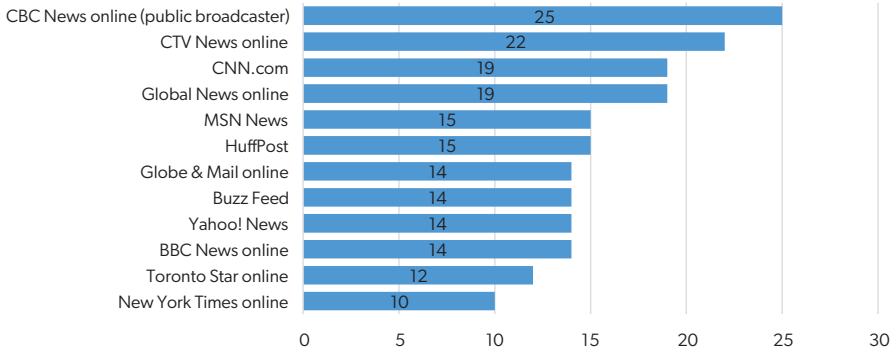


Source: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2020

Most Canadians can access free-to-air radio. More than a quarter of Canadians say they rely on radio for news (Canadian Journalism Foundation, 2019), and almost nine in ten Canadians tune in to traditional radio every month. Streaming music and video surveys are growing in popularity, with the average 18+ Canadian reporting that they listen, on average, to about eight hours a week of streaming audio services (CRTC, 2019a: 136). As Figures 3 and 4 show,

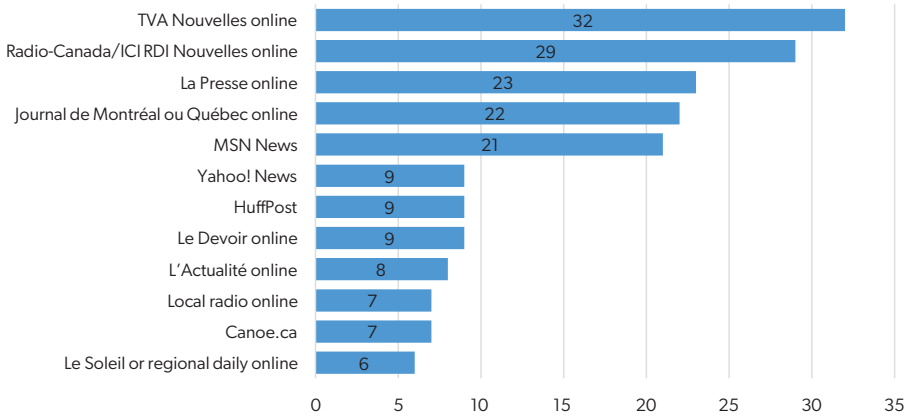
many Canadians (both English and French) spend considerable time listening to CBC/Radio-Canada’s information programming or commercial news talk radio services. Notably, more than a third (36%) of Canadians listen to a podcast each month (Briggs, 2019).

**Figure 3** Weekly use of online news in English (per cent)



Source: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2020

**Figure 4** Weekly use of online news in French (per cent)



Source: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2020

CBC/Radio-Canada, with 14 AM stations and 52 FM stations across the country, attracts big audiences, capturing a total share of 18 per cent of the country. The public broadcaster’s advertising-free radio services are often the only sources of information for minority-language communities across the country.

The CRTC estimates that 68 per cent of Canadians would lose radio service in their first official language without CBC/Radio-Canada (CRTC, 2019a).

In 2018, Canadians watched 24.5 hours of television per week. The vast majority of that time (89%) was traditional television, while the remaining time was Internet-based service (CRTC, 2019a: 168). A survey of Canadians in the same year found that only 7 per cent of Canadians report watching conventional over-the-air television. While declining slightly, nearly six in ten (59%) Canadians still rely on television to get their news (Canadian Journalism Foundation, 2019).

New online news ventures have emerged with varying degrees of success. Names such as *The Tye*, *The Narwhal*, *Huffington Post*, *Buzzfeed*, *Vice*, *Policy Options*, *Canadaland*, *iPolitics*, *The Sprawl*, and others have provided some new voices and variety in Canadian journalism. However, according to Dwayne Winseck and the Canadian Media Concentration Research Project at Carleton University,

Perhaps most tellingly, while the increasing diversity brought about by new journalist ventures is important, none of the outlets noted above ranks even in the list of the top 60 internet news sources that people in Canada turn to for their news on the internet [...]. This implies that they account for under one percent of internet news traffic, suggesting that they speak mainly to small and specialized audiences. (Winseck, 2019a: 53)

A similar point was raised by former CRTC Chair Jean-Pierre Blais in his testimony before the Standing Committee of Canadian Heritage on the continued relevance of traditional news sources:

Digital platforms certainly offer quick and easy communication. But, at least for now, they cannot provide a reliable alternative to the skills of investigation and analysis that established media have developed over the past decades. Established media also have the advantage of having journalists who adhere to professional standards and codes, and who are trained to gather and interpret facts to create valuable, intelligent news analysis. (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2017: 60)

So, despite the appearance of exciting new digital journalism ventures in Canada, it is the more traditional sources of information that continue to garner the lion's share of the public's attention.

While CBC/Radio-Canada's radio and online news services have a large reach and dominate in English, it is important to note, unlike most European countries, that commercial television broadcasters attract considerably more viewers to their television newscasts than Canada's public broadcaster.

While Canada continues to be served by a wide range of "traditional" media, the advertising base for commercial news is crumbling, and new journalism start-ups have yet to reach a broad audience, as noted in a key 2017 study:

Established news organisations have been left gasping, while native digital alternatives have failed to develop journalistic mass, especially in local news. The financial degradation has been insidiously incremental, but one whose accumulation and now acceleration has brought to the fore the issue of sustainability of newsgathering in our democracy. (Public Policy Forum, 2017)

Overall, Canadians continue to rely upon a journalistic model that finds itself on a very shaky economic foundation.

### (F3) Diversity of news sources

2 POINTS

Canada's English-speaking audiences have a wide – national and international – array of news sources. French-speaking Canadians have less. All Canadian news organisations have scaled back their foreign correspondents. Moreover, critics charge – and many of the journalists interviewed for this study concede – that Canada's news media tends to index too much of its coverage to elite (non-diverse) sources.

Diversity remains a problem in Canada's news. Indigenous people, women, racialised people, and divergent opinions are underrepresented in Canada's news, and Canadian newsrooms remain disproportionately white. Women of colour and Indigenous women, in particular, remain seriously underrepresented in the production of Canadian media (Golick & Daniels, 2019). Even at Canada's public broadcaster, only 12 per cent of staff is a visible minority (CBC, 2018). The Global Media Monitoring Project reported that women are systematically underrepresented and stereotyped in Canadian news (Sikka, 2015), and recent media monitoring also shows that women tend to be quoted significantly less than men in Canada's news media (Informed Opinions, 2021).

The lack of diversity in Canada's news media is well documented. Tolley (2016) starkly concludes that systematic assumptions about visible minorities decidedly shape negative news coverage of Canada's minorities. The problems are not new. In 2010, a content analysis conducted for CBC News found that its radio and television news underrepresented the voices of women and visible minorities (Spears et al., 2010). Similarly, Clark's (2014a) analysis of Canada's major television broadcasters, for instance, found that Indigenous people are often invisible in news broadcasts and that longstanding colonial stereotypes connected to Indigenous people persist in the broadcaster's coverage. In a similar vein, Clark (2014b) concluded that Canadian news organisations still face considerable challenges to better represent the diversity of Canada's Indigenous and growing multicultural population, because white mainstream news editors tend to frame news from dominant perspectives. For instance, DeCillia (2018) shows that because Canadian journalists overwhelmingly indexed their coverage to officials, the coverage of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan lacked diversity of opinion and critical appraisal of the mission.

The number of Canadian eyes and ears around the world has decreased over the last decade: “We have almost no foreign correspondents reporting back to Canada anymore”, observed one long-time journalist and former news executive. Increasingly, Canadian news organisations rely on wire services or stringers to report news from around the world. CBC News has shut bureaus in the last decade or so in Cape Town, South Africa, Mexico City, Jerusalem, Nairobi, Kenya, and Bangkok. Canadian news executives have suggested in recent years that they can cover the world more economically by occasionally sending their reporters abroad, parachuting them into hot zones or big stories, or setting up so-called short-term “pocket bureaus” around the world when news warrants the demand for Canadian eyes and ears abroad. The Canadian journalists interviewed for this research are not so sure, expressing concern that generic wire stories cannot replace having Canadians around the world reporting home.

Diversity of options and sources is also a repercussion of newsroom job losses and budget cuts. One journalist worried about the lack of coverage of municipal issues, noting that “the number of reporters at city hall has really, really been radically reduced over the last decade or so”. Postmedia, owner of a national newspaper and chain of daily newspapers across the country, is doing less enterprising reporting. Moreover, the news organisation merged newsrooms in cities where it owned both the broadsheet and tabloid newspaper. As well, daily newspapers are increasingly using Canadian Press wire stories instead of assigning its own reporters, to save costs. Plus, the national newspaper chain requires its newspapers to run national editorials and endorse conservative parties at the federal and provincial level, undermining the local independence that daily newspapers had to make their own endorsements. Clearly, diversity of news sources remains a problem for Canadian journalism.

(F4) Internal rules for practice of newsroom democracy 2 POINTS

While there are no written rules for newsroom democracy in Canada’s media system, journalists do have input and freedom.

All of the journalists, newsroom leaders, union officials, and academics interviewed for this research confirmed that there are no existing rules surrounding newsroom democracy. Most newsrooms, however, feature story or editorial meetings where journalists, editors, and newsroom leaders collaboratively discuss their coverage of issues and events. While newsroom leaders, such as managing editors or executive producers, have the final say over story assignments and treatments, most journalists interviewed for this study talked about the synergy and collective decision-making that happens at these meetings. One

reporter told us there are “no rules”, stressing that editors are keen to hear “great ideas” from their journalists. Many journalists, especially more senior ones and investigative reporters, stressed the freedom they have to pitch and pursue stories, emphasising that their bosses give them considerable latitude to produce rigorous journalism. Media unions often focus their advocacy on working conditions and industrial matters surrounding the rights of journalists. There is a veto right for bylines in many unions’ contracts – that is, journalists can refuse to attach their name to their story. At the national level, an advisory committee of the Canadian Association of Journalists (CAJ) offers advice on ethical issues faced by working journalists. While there is no written rule, the journalists we spoke to feel free to pursue a wide range of stories. The choice of executives (editors-in-chief, managing editors, executive producers) who run news organisations is not a democratic one; these positions are determined by the leaders or owners of news organisations. In the case of CBC/Radio-Canada, the president is appointed by the federal government.

(F5) Company rules against internal influence on  
newsroom/editorial staff

2 POINTS

The influence of media proprietors is more subtle than direct in newsroom decisions.

Internal influences are most often not overt, making the question of influence a complicated assessment. While most Canadian news organisations’ journalistic mandate and ethics herald their independence, several interviewees talked about the subtle influence bosses or owners can have on the content and direction of editorial matters. Several journalists interviewed for this study stressed that owners and bosses make hiring and promotion decisions. It follows then that bosses and owners do not need to explicitly say what they want; the people they hire will conform because they want to please their bosses.

At CBC News, there are clear distinctions between the roles of journalists and newsroom bosses. All assignment decisions at the public broadcaster are made by journalists who are members of the corporation’s unions. News executives, outside the union, have control of journalistic standards and ethical questions, allowing them to kill stories that do not meet the public broadcaster’s standards – but these bosses cannot assign stories.

In an interview with a reporter for a major Canadian news organisation, the reporter stated “as far as I know, [the owner] has never called up and said, you know, we want this story covered and in this way”. This was supported by other journalists who insisted they had a large degree of autonomy. Canadian journalists by and large told us they bristle when bosses insert themselves in

editorial matters; however, there are some examples of this very thing happening in Canadian media.

In 2015, for instance, the president of Bell Media, the owner of Canada's most-watched newscast CTV, was forced to apologise after he interfered in news coverage concerning Canada's broadcast regulator. Kevin Crull had told his news service not to use interview footage of CRTC chair Jean-Pierre Blais after the regulator had announced a decision to unbundle cable channels, which hurt Bell's bottom line. While daytime news on CTV acquiesced to Crull's demand, CTV's Chief anchor Lisa Laflamme and senior correspondent Robert Fife defied the order and ran part of the interview with Blais on the late national broadcast (Bradshaw, 2015). The next day, the CRTC released a public statement reprimanding Bell for interfering in the journalism process.

The allegation [...] that the largest communication company in Canada is manipulating news coverage is disturbing. Holding a radio or television license is a privilege that comes with important obligations that are in the public interest, especially in regards to high-quality news coverage and reporting.

An informed citizenry cannot be sacrificed for a company's commercial interests. Canadians can only wonder how many times corporate interests may have been placed ahead of the fair and balanced news reporting they expect from their broadcasting system. (Canada, 2015b)

Crull publicly conceded it was wrong of him to intrude in the editorial process, and a month later, released a statement announcing his departure and stressing that the independence of the telecommunication giant's news service was of "paramount importance" (Faguy, 2015).

Another notable exception to the general sense of journalistic freedom in the Canadian press is found in the powerful Postmedia newspaper chain. Despite financial struggles resulting in successive debt restructuring (Krashinsky Robertson, 2019), the company remains Canada's largest newspaper chain, with holdings including *The National Post* and 33 other daily newspapers, such as the *Ottawa Citizen*, *Edmonton Journal*, *Calgary Herald*, *Vancouver Sun*, and *Montreal Gazette* (as well as dozens of non-daily newspapers). A series of investigations from varied news sources including online start-ups such as *Canadaland* (Craig, 2019) and more established news magazines such as *Maclean's* (Subramanian, 2019) have uncovered the strict limitations placed upon editorial (opinion and commentary) direction across all Postmedia properties. The corporate ownership insists on a consistent conservative voice on editorial matters across all papers, including the endorsement of political candidates (see Figure 5). In a clear act of journalistic dissent, both members of the *Ottawa Citizen* editorial board resigned in 2015. The national impact of the editorial centralisation at Postmedia was illustrated in the twitter feed of journalist Jonathan Goldsbie during the 2019 federal election (see Figure 5).

Figure 5 Postmedia editorials



Comments: Clockwise from top left: Vancouver Sun, Calgary Herald, Edmonton Journal, Saskatoon StarPhoenix, Regina Leader-Post, London Free Press, Montreal Gazette, Ottawa Citizen, and Windsor Star.

Source: Goldsbie, 2019

Despite occasional instances, which have been appropriately met with national outrage, most Canadian journalists claim freedom to pursue their work. Editorial decisions at Postmedia have unfortunately clearly been centralised, despite a promise to the Competition Bureau in 2015 that their newspapers would maintain “distinct editorial departments” (Canada, 2015a).

(F6) Company rules against external influence on newsroom/editorial staff 3 POINTS

There are very few external influences on newsrooms in Canada.

There is little evidence to suggest that external forces have a direct influence on Canadian news content. Like internal influences, the power of external forces is sometimes subtle and not direct. As noted earlier, Postmedia’s opinion pages across the country are decidedly conservative. Some journalists worried about the influence of this conservative view leaking into editorial decision-making, including news selection and treatment.

Most news organisations pride themselves on their independence. While some broadcast journalists and newsroom leaders told stories of advertisers



complaining about news coverage or trying to shape the news, these efforts were always rebuffed. A reporter interviewed at a major news organisation recognised the efforts of advertisers to tilt the news in their favour but claimed it had little effect: “Yes, advertisers have pulled advertising in reaction to stories that we’ve written in the last three years [...]. We don’t have discussions with our advertising department about this. There is a real separation of church and state”. Another reporter interviewed agreed:

When a company is being quite aggressive with us, they might in some sort of ham-fisted way try to threaten that they wouldn’t advertise with us, but I’ve never heard of any reporter or editor backing down on this story because of that.

One newsroom leader talked about how a car dealership commercial may get strategically moved from blocks containing investigative stories highlighting the deficiencies of automobiles. This journalist, however, proudly highlighted how the broadcasting station’s senior manager had even scolded the car dealership advertisers who complained about critical news coverage.

#### (F7) Procedures on news selection and news processing 2 POINTS

A fluid and divergent process of news selection does not lend itself to formal rules in Canadian newsrooms.

Our research found little evidence of formal written rules for selecting news stories. Generally, there are some universal news values (Galtung & Ruge, 1965) that lead newsrooms and journalists to prize some stories – some narrative elements – over others. Investigative reporters, we heard, do not pay much attention to agenda news or press releases. Moreover, some news organisations market or differentiate themselves by their commitment to investigative journalism. CBC News, for instance, heralds its commitment to investigative reporting. The news organisation’s Go Public investigative unit encourages Canadians to “hold power to account” by shining a light on alleged wrongdoing by government or business. It follows, then, that the journalists responsible for producing this news segment for radio, online, and television look for and select compelling characters with stories, for instance, about medical treatments gone wrong, consumers being ripped off by big corporations, or people being treated unfairly by business or government.

As Shoemaker and Reese’s (2014) hierarchy of influence model suggests, and our interviews confirmed, journalists value stories that are important or unusual, timely, reflect a human interest, convey a clear conflict, and are nearby. None of the journalists, newsroom leaders, or scholars we interviewed talked

about formal rules or a stylebook for news selection. “News is news”, said one interviewee, adding “you know it when you see it”. A number of journalists highlighted the importance of news meetings to “kick around” or “hash out” story ideas and potential treatments. Some journalists talked about the benefits of “blue skying” or “story boarding” their ideas in story meetings to decide if their idea warranted further pursuit. Often, it is at these meetings or smaller assignment meetings where stories originating from social media get a critical eye or review before deciding whether there is merit to assigning a reporter or producer for further pursuit.

### (F8) Rules and practices on internal gender equality 2 POINTS

Addressing gender equality in a structural way in Canada’s news media remains a challenge.

For the first time ever, Canada’s 2019 English-language federal leaders’ debate featured an all-female line-up of journalist moderators. Notable as well, all three major network television main newscasts feature women anchors. Women have made considerable advancements in the Canadian news media, with the most recent census data showing that 48 per cent of all journalists in Canada are female (Statistics Canada, 2016). Ground-breaking research done in 2011 by the International Women’s Media Foundation found that while women make up nearly half of the employees at news organisations in Canada, they often encounter a “glass ceiling” in senior management (Byerly, 2011). Women, the study determined, tend to plateau in middle-management jobs. Things have changed since 2011, and the heads of news at both CTV and CBC/Radio-Canada are now both women. Moreover, most news organisations’ hiring practices are sensitive to questions of gender equity.

All the journalists and newsroom leaders interviewed for this study had no really substantive equity complaints about their working conditions. Most interviewees discuss their organisations’ sensitivity to efforts to eliminate inequality and promote women, and some of the journalists we interviewed raised concerns about men being more assertive about negotiating higher salaries than their female counterparts. Media unions in Canada also remain concerned about inequalities and continue to push news organisations and media companies, through their collective bargaining and other advocacy, to do more to reduce inequality and make newsrooms more sensitive to the needs of female journalists.

CBC/Radio-Canada offers potentially interesting insight into gender equality in Canada’s news media. Women make up almost half of all employees at CBC/Radio-Canada, according to the public broadcaster’s most recent employment equity report, and the public broadcaster is led by its first female president,

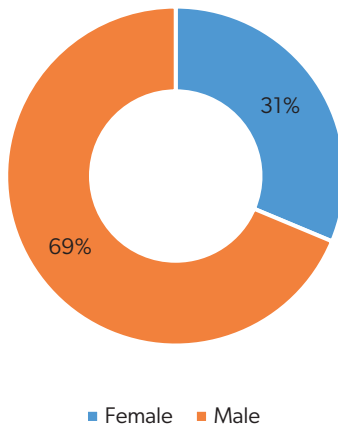
Catherine Tait. Women also occupy many of the corporation’s top jobs, including the head of English-language services, news, and radio, and television programming. Yet, data unearthed in 2018 using Canada’s access to information law, in the wake of the gender pay gap scandal at the British Broadcasting Corporation, revealed that male hosts earn almost 9.5 per cent more than their female counterparts (Haupt, 2018). According to a reporter at a major media organisation, there is a need for more work to improve gender equity: “There should be rules”, the reporter told us, adding, “I think all these organisations could do a better job of promoting women”. Despite some progress, there is clearly still room for improvement.

(F9) Gender equality in media content 1 POINT

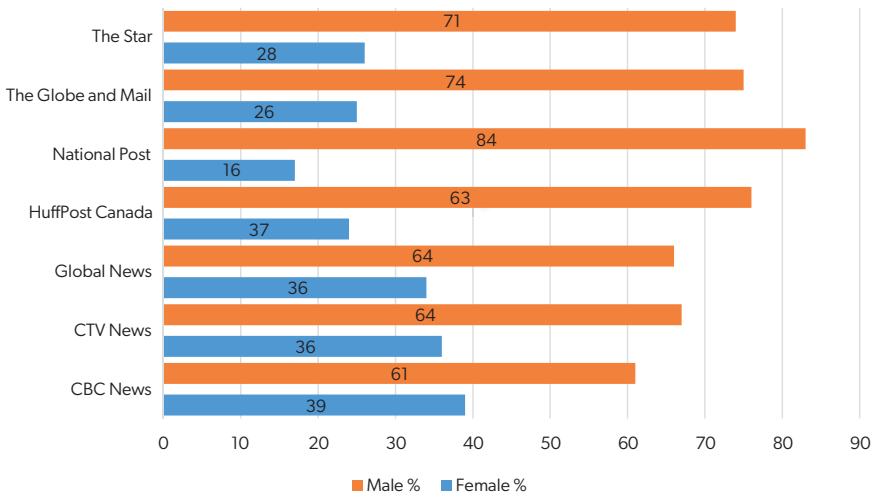
Acknowledging gender inequalities in media content is not enough. Canadian news organisations must approach the problem of promoting free expression and the inclusion of diverse voices in a more meaningful and structural way.

Launched in 2019 by Simon Fraser University’s Research Computing Group, the continuously updating Gender Gap Tracker (Informed Opinions, 2021) clearly shows that major news organisations in Canada feature women as sources in stories far less than men – one-third less, in fact (Figures 6 and 7 make the disparity clear).

**Figure 6** Female underrepresentation in Canadian news media



Source: Informed Opinions, 2021

**Figure 7** Ratio of female to male sources in Canadian news media

Source: Informed Opinions, 2021

Several news media workers stressed the importance of trying to do stories highlighting women. Furthermore, several journalists and newsroom leaders discussed how they continuously tried to incorporate more female voices and opinions in their reportage. Much of this thinking and discussions about these concerns also happened in story or editorial meetings. Some newsroom leaders and journalists mentioned efforts to informally track the number of female sources, with the intention of increasing the number of women featured in news and current affairs. There was no discussion in our interviews about the extent of newsroom rules, codes, or guidelines aimed at gender-sensitive coverage of gender-based violence.

## (F10) Misinformation and digital platforms (alias social media)

3 POINTS

While Canadian newsrooms are worried about disinformation and misinformation, there are few recent examples of coordinated efforts to misinform the population.

There are real concerns about misinformation and disinformation in Canada. A national poll in 2019 suggests nine in ten Canadians thought they had fallen for fake news (Thompson, 2019). Canadian journalists and news organisations share these concerns. There was real – and pronounced – fears about foreign actors disrupting the 2019 federal election with disinformation. Experts and

election officials warned about the potential spread of disinformation during the political campaign, and the federal government tightened rules about online advertising and invested millions of dollars in security and intelligence efforts aimed at combatting any foreign meddling in Canada's general election. Additionally, the Canadian Journalism Foundation launched a public service campaign aimed at encouraging Canadians to critically evaluate news media so they could spot the difference between legitimate journalism and fake news being spread on social media. During the 2019 federal election, CBC News offered Canadians a "chat bot" to help news consumers spot so-called fake news. The public and journalists armed themselves for an information battle that never really materialised.

A 2020 study from the Digital Democracy Project, based out of McGill University in Montreal, studied the effect of misinformation on the 2019 Canadian federal election and came to the following conclusion:

Our finding is that disinformation did not play a major role in the 2019 Canadian election campaign. This is consistent with the findings of many other investigations by journalists, academics, government agencies and officials, and the private sector. That is not to say there were no instances of disinformation, but what there was generally did not appear co-ordinated and had limited impact. (The Digital Democracy Project, 2020)

This view was supported by a veteran Canadian journalist interviewed for this study:

Most news organisations, the CBC and I think *The Globe and Mail* and *The [Toronto] Star* and some others thought that misinformation and disinformation would be a big issue in the [2019] election campaign. And so, had someone assigned to that beat. And I think other publications did, too. But I think we discovered that there, in fact, wasn't very much. And the studies I've seen have shown that there wasn't an awful lot and that the biggest distributors of disinformation and misinformation are political parties and candidates. And so, they [journalists] didn't really have an awful lot to do.

Despite the recent example of the 2019 election, many of the journalists or newsroom leaders interviewed for this research worried about misinformation and disinformation; however, none of them detailed any sophisticated mechanisms or technology being used to counter the problem. Many of the journalists talked about being sceptical of information originating from social media platforms, and special attention is paid to checking the veracity of social media content. Journalists detailed procedures such as labelling and identifying information from social media, and verifying information with a second or third source before reporting it. CBC News' journalistic standards and practices are clear:

Material that originates from a non-CBC source is clearly identified as such. Before text, image, video or audio is published, we try to verify the information with a second source. There may be times when a third source is required. (CBC, 2020)

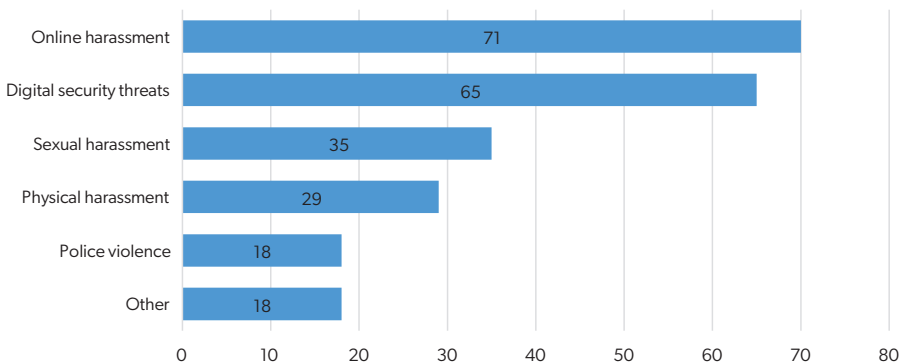
Moreover, a number of Canadian news organisations have responded to misinformation and disinformation with a focus on fact-checking. No journalists mentioned training aimed specifically at spotting misinformation.

### (F11) Protection of journalists against (online) harassment 2 POINTS

No specific laws protect Canadian journalists against online harassment. News organisations apply an ad hoc approach to helping their journalists when they become the target of online trolls.

A 2019 survey of journalists conducted by the Committee to Protect Journalists suggests worry about becoming an online target because of their need to use social media for work (Westcott, 2019; see Figure 8). Seven in ten Canadian journalists called online harassment, including threats of violence or harm, the biggest threat they face. Female journalists, in particular, face a range of harassment, including death threats and unsolicited sexual messages through social media. Male journalists interviewed for this study cited “nightmare stuff” they have heard from their female colleagues.

**Figure 8** Largest threats to Canadian journalists' safety (per cent)



Source: Westcott, 2019

Canada's criminal code does not address online harassment of journalists specifically. To date, Canada's legal system has not dealt with cases involving harassment or disinformation campaigns aimed at journalists. An Ontario case

in 2016 found a man not guilty of using the Internet to harass a pair of feminist activists (Csanady, 2016).

Most of the journalists and newsroom leaders interviewed for this study expressed concern about online harassment and described it as a real problem. Yet, most also detailed ad hoc procedures aimed at protecting journalists who are targeted online. Some journalists described generic policies and training aimed at protecting them from online harassment, and a number of interviewees described newsroom bosses as being supportive and understanding when harassment occurs. Union officials representing Canadian journalists believe news organisations need to do more to protect journalists.

### *Dimension: Equality / Interest Mediation (E)*

(E1) Media ownership concentration national level 2 POINTS

The issue of news concentration has been the subject of successive government studies for 50 years, with very little change. The digital environment has provided a wealth of viewpoints, introducing new problems.

The limited ownership in Canadian national media remains a stubborn and persistent problem. Newspapers in particular have proven to be a small club where very few new voices are able to compete. Successive federal studies in 1970 (the Davey Commission) and 1981 (the Kent Commission) raised concerns about media concentration in Canada and the implications it might have on the availability of differing views, and by extension, democracy (Montgomery, 2019).

Despite the launch of the English-language *The National Post* in 1998, there remain limited national news outlets. In 2020, *The Post* is heavily indebted and largely controlled by New York-based hedge funds. Many arguments similar to the Davey and Kent Commissions have been resurrected in more recent studies:

Canada has one of the highest rates of media concentration in the world, and the Committee has noted that no federal government body has the mandate to intervene when necessary to ensure a healthy and competitive media industry. Collapsing media revenues have become a justification invoked by media conglomerates to explain the need for merging, acquiring, selling and shutting down media outlets, shutting down newsrooms, moving corporate headquarters, layoffs by the tens of thousands, and to concentrate a growing proportion of media in the hands of a small group of businesses that are less and less diverse. (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2017)

However, another key 2017 study questioned the continued relevance of the concentration of ownership concern in the time of ubiquitous digital content:

The odd blend of content fragmentation, revenue consolidation and indifference to truth has overtaken simple concentration of ownership as the main threat to holding public officials to account and reflecting Canadian society back to its citizens. (Public Policy Forum, 2017)

According to the authors of this report, all Canadians now have the ability to express viewpoints and be exposed to a range of ideas online – therefore, concentration is not the paramount issue; the problem now rests with the ability to provide professional, reliable journalism as the established economic model is collapsing. The digital world offers a wide range of information from a broad scope of perspectives, so the concerns of previous decades have been usurped by new questions regarding quality of reporting and shared information among citizens.

## (E2) Media ownership concentration regional (local) level 3 POINTS

Local media continues to struggle but does not suffer from the same ownership concentration as the national news services.

The Canadian small-market news that manages to continue under these difficult economic circumstances has a fairly diversified ownership base. The following data is from the Local News Research Project out of Ryerson University in Toronto. According to this survey of newspapers with less than 50,000 readers, family-owned and regional chains continue to play a significant role (see Table 2).

**Table 2** Ownership characterisation

Answer choices	Responses (%)
Owned by a national newspaper chain	22.1
Owned by a regional newspaper chain	30.7
Owned by a hedge fund or non-journalism company	5.5
Government owned	0
Locally or community owned	12.6
Family owned	36.2

Source: Lindgren et al., 2019

Support for local news has come at the level of national media policy as well. The CRTC recognised the significance in supporting local news broadcasting in small markets and established the Independent Local News Fund in 2016.



This policy required cable and satellite providers to contribute 0.3 per cent of their previous year's broadcast revenues to help support local, small-market television news (CRTC, 2016).

Perhaps it is because local news is more diverse in ownership that it does not have the same capital to draw from as the more vertically integrated major national news, and has not been able to sustain the pressures of the loss of advertising revenue, coupled with people unwilling to pay for small-market digital news.

(E3) Diversity of news formats 3 POINTS

There is great diversity of formats for Canadian news.

Canadians have an abundance of media options across a range of formats. The country's early embrace of cable television distribution opened the broadcasting world to a wealth of channels. In 2018, Canada offered 762 television channels, not including streaming services (CRTC, 2019b).

According to a 2015 survey, 36.2 per cent of Canadians got their local news from television, 23.3 per cent from newspapers, 20.7 per cent from radio, and 18 per cent from the Internet (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2017). While its television ratings have been problematic, the national public broadcaster CBC/Radio-Canada offers very popular radio programming and also hosts the most-visited news website in the country.

In the online world as well, Canadians have many options. According to the Canadian Media Concentration Research Project, "Canadians get their news from a wide plurality of internet news sources, both old (CBC, Postmedia, CTV, Toronto Star) and new (Huffington Post), as well as domestic and foreign (CNN, CBS, BBC, NBC, Guardian, New York Times)" (Winseck, 2019b: viii). There are many avenues of news information in Canada.

(E4) Minority/Alternative media 3 POINTS

Efforts have been made to establish a minority and alternative media sector within the wider news system.

Ethnic media has a history in Canada spanning more than four decades. In 1978, the Canadian Ethnic Journalists and Writers Club was founded, which evolved to later become the Canadian Ethnic Media Association. In the last two decades, there has been a wider effort to expand Canadian media beyond the traditional English and French mainstream (Taylor, 2008).

There is a broad range of Indigenous media, including independent print news (Baker, 2016). The Native Broadcasting Policy (CRTC, 1990) emphasises the importance of Indigenous ownership and the preservation of Indigenous languages and cultures. In 2019, the CRTC announced a review of this policy in an effort to ensure that it reflects the current needs of Indigenous communities.

According to the CRTC, there are over 50 licensed – and hundreds of licence-exempted – Indigenous radio stations across Canada (CRTC, 2019b). The APTN is the first national Indigenous television network in the world, run by Indigenous people and designed to reflect their communities in many of their languages. APTN must be carried by all television service providers.

Canada licenses a national multilingual, multi-ethnic service called *Omni Television*. In 2019, the CRTC issued a rare must-carry order that determined *Omni* must be offered by all licensed television distributors (CRTC, 2019a). This means that all Canadians with access to cable or satellite distribution (which is all Canadians) have the ability to acquire *Omni Television* if desired.

The country also has a range of alternative media in print. In December 2015, *MIREMS*, a firm that tracks trends in ethnic media, estimated that at least 460 print or web-based ethnic news organisations and 160 broadcast outlets have a total audience reach of 6.7 million in Canada. For many Canadians, ethnic publications are a primary source of news. In 2008, *Ethnique Media* found that 55 per cent of those with South Asian and Chinese heritage read English newspapers, versus 75 per cent for ethnic publications (Public Policy Forum, 2017). *Diversity Votes*, a website dedicated to the study of ethnic news in Canada, cites over 800 ethnics news outlets across the country (Diversity Votes, 2019). Their 2019 study on ethnic media and the 2019 election demonstrates political divisions between various communities, with a slight edge for liberals – in other words, a view similar to the wider Canadian public.

Outside the mainstream political spectrum, far-right-wing news sites such as *The Rebel* have a small following. During the 2019 election, there was debate regarding whether such populist media organisations were, in fact, journalism (Levant, 2019).

## (E5) Affordable public and private news media

2 POINTS

Prices vary, but Canadians can access news.

Cost of news to consumers is not often measured. According to the 1991 *Broadcasting Act*, the media regulator CRTC can intervene if prices for broadcasting services are too high:

- 3 (1) It is hereby declared as the broadcasting policy for Canada that [...]  
(t) distribution undertakings [...] (ii) should provide efficient delivery of pro-

gramming *at affordable rates*, using the most effective technologies available at reasonable cost [italics added]. (Canada, 1991)

While broadcasting news is accessible to Canadians, newspaper subscriptions have suffered, and online sources have not fared well either – only 9 per cent of Canadians pay for online news (Newman et al., 2019). Costs of Canadian newspapers can be a factor. More Canadians have subscriptions to the relatively cheaper *The New York Times* than *The Globe and Mail* (Adams, 2017).

(E6) Content monitoring instruments 0 POINTS

There is no formal monitoring.

There is no formal mechanism to monitor media content in Canada, though there were past efforts. In 1987, the Fraser Institute, a conservative think tank, established the National Media Archive that monitored the national newscasts of CBC/Radio-Canada and CTV. The project was largely dismissed as a vehicle to promote the anti-CBC, free-market ideology of the Fraser Institute and was discontinued after a decade. The anti-public broadcasting view remains one held closely by conservative politicians and supporters in Canada.

(E7) Code of ethics at the national level 1 POINT

While most news organisations have a code of ethics or set of journalistic standards of practice during their work, there is no mandatory national code of ethics in Canada.

There is no compulsory national-level code of ethics in Canada. All of the major news organisations in Canada have their own code, rulebook, or standards of practice. Generally, all of them highlight core journalistic principles such as accuracy, fairness, balance, independence, and integrity. The CAJ offers ethical guidelines for the ethical behaviour of journalists, and the Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA) also has a code of journalistic ethics. The Canadian Broadcast Standards Council (CBSC) acts as a voluntary programming-standards watchdog for the country's private broadcasters, providing a code of conduct on a range of issues including violence on television, equitable portrayal, and journalistic ethics. The CBSC does not apply to print or online news services (for more information on the CBSC, see Indicator E8 – Level of self-regulation).

## (E8) Level of self-regulation

2 POINTS

An established broadcasting self-regulator for private broadcasters.

The CBSC is a broadcasting self and co-regulating body overseeing radio and television. It was created by the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB) in 1989 and is more of a co-regulatory body, since the national regulator CRTC can still overrule decisions, and the public can appeal CSBC decisions to the CRTC. Membership in the CBSC is often a required condition for new broadcasters to be licensed by the CRTC. The areas of authority for CBSC involve the administration of five codes: CAB Code of Ethics; CAB Violence Code; CAB Equitable Portrayal Code; RTDNA Code of Ethics; and the Journalistic Independence Code (CBSC, 2020). The last two are of greatest relevance for this study. The Radio Television Digital News Association's (RTDNA) code notes, "It is our responsibility to act independently, to be fair and respectful, and to report the facts" (CBSC, 2016: preamble). The Journalistic Independence Code has three set criteria that Canadian broadcasters are expected to support:

- the effective use of news-gathering resources in a manner which ensures that Canadians have access to diversity and quality of information assembled and reported by broadcast journalists;
- the existence of diverse and distinct editorial and news reporting voices in their broadcast and print media; and
- the independence and separation of the management of news departments in their broadcast and newspaper divisions with common ownership.

(CBSC, 2008: Introduction)

The launch of the CBSC in 1989 included the creation of a governing body composed of industry representatives as well as experts and local representatives from across Canada. A 2007 report commissioned by the CRTC found that the CBSC had been largely successful in its mandate (Dunbar & Leblanc, 2007). CBC/Radio-Canada is not a member of the CBSC but does have a public ombudsperson. Similarly, traditional print media are not part of the Council.

## (E9) Participation

2 POINTS

While some avenues remain open, others have closed to greater public contributions.

Many print news outlets reserve space for reader submissions. Newspapers such as *The Globe and Mail* contain letters to the editor and also accept pieces of approximately 700 words from the public. Major broadcasting media such as

CBC/Radio-Canada accept and encourage video and photography submissions but do not pay for them. *The Globe and Mail* also hosts speaking events at its Toronto offices for its readership.

Citizen journalism in Canada had a major impact in a story about the taser electroshock-related death of Polish immigrant Robert Dziekanski at the Vancouver International Airport in 2007. Paul Pritchard filmed four police officers subduing Dziekanski and turned his video over to police, who claimed it was necessary for their investigation. When Pritchard learned the investigation's conclusion was not what he had seen and police refused to return his film, he hired a lawyer, held a news conference, and threatened to use legal action to get it back. When his film was returned, he took it to the news media and the resulting outcry resulted in a major investigation into police tactics (CBC News, 2009).

Online comments to news stories have proven more problematic for both journalists who do not appreciate being professionally maligned and news outlets that do not want to be associated with the often-hurtful comments that can appear. Canada's largest newspaper, the *Toronto Star*, suspended online comments entirely in 2015, due to what the public editor called "a cesspool of complaints" (English, 2020). *The Star* quietly reopened comments in 2020. In 2015, CBC News halted comments on its online news stories that specifically dealt with Indigenous issues, due to the "clearly hateful and vitriolic" nature of much of the rhetoric (CBC News, 2015).

While there are avenues for public input, news organisations want to limit incendiary online comments.

## (E10) Rules and practices on internal pluralism

2 POINTS

A wide variety of rules and practices exist when it comes to ensuring that news organisations include a wide variety of perspectives.

All of the journalists and news executives interviewed for this research recognised the importance of including diverse views in their coverage. Despite this recognition, the empirical evidence (as detailed above) suggests the Canadian news media has considerable work to do when it comes to reflecting the diversity of the multicultural country. There are some glimmers of progress. The wide range of ethnocultural and multilingual programming does a better job than the mainstream media reflecting multicultural diversity. Similarly, the APTN focuses on and highlights stories about Canada's First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples. CBC News' Indigenous Digital Unit focuses on news content about Canada's first people.

Most journalists interviewed for this research described ad hoc processes to ensure diversity in their coverage: “This is something we talk about internally”, one reporter said, adding, however, that it “depends on the particular reporter”. While some reporters described informal internal “counting exercises”, whereby editors tracked the representation of diversity in coverage, many reporters talked about personal efforts to better reflect the diversity of Canada. One reporter stressed the importance of “getting the best sources”, while acknowledging an effort to avoid filling stories with “old white guys”.

In the summer of 2020, inspired by the international Black Lives Matter movement, both CBC/Radio-Canada and *The Globe and Mail* faced internal concerns over the diversity of their newsrooms. At CBC/Radio-Canada, reporters expressed apprehensions that the corporation’s Journalistic Standards and Practices policy might restrict journalists from voicing their personal views and critical experiences amidst the global protests sparked by the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis. There was strong among the journalists that the public broadcaster’s Journalistic Standards and Practices was not truly inclusive (Press Progress, 2020). On June 11, 2020, Unifor, the union representing *The Globe and Mail* employees, issued an internal statement noting the “lack of diversity among employees” and expressing the need to make *The Globe and Mail* “a more diverse workplace”. The statement was not public, but it was released on social media by several of *The Globe and Mail*’s journalists.

### *Dimension: Control / Watchdog (C)*

(C1) Supervising the watchdog “control of the controllers”

2 POINTS

Several independent observers scrutinise Canada’s news media.

Canada is home to a robust debate about the news media; however, there is no central body that carries out regular review. Many news organisations have mechanisms to hear and adjudicate complaints. *The Globe and Mail*, for instance, has a public editor who frequently critiques the national newspaper’s coverage. CBC/Radio-Canada’s independent ombudsperson adjudicates public complaints about the public broadcaster’s journalism. The independent CBSC handles public complaints about alleged transgressions of Canadian broadcasters’ code of conduct. In a similar vein, the voluntary National NewsMedia Council, an amalgam of former provincial press councils, promotes ethical practices in the news media. The Council adjudicates complaints about journalistic standards and ethics.

Canada's news media is also the subject of intense media scrutiny. The podcast *Canadaland*, for instance, is a focal point of news media critique. The progressive online news sites *Rabble.ca* and *PressProgress* often features debate and critique about Canada's mainstream media's watchdog function.

(C2) Independence of the news media from  
powerholders

3 POINTS

Legal instruments, democratic traditions, and journalistic standards and practices protect the Canadian news media's independence.

Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms enshrines the freedom of the press. Moreover, the country's courts and democratic institutions frequently herald the autonomy of the news media, noting that reliable information is "integral to a functioning democracy" (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2017: 1). According to the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2019*, 49 per cent of Canadians think the media does a good job in monitoring the powerful (Newman et al., 2019).

In 2017, Canada adopted a so-called shield law to protect journalists from revealing confidential sources. The Journalistic Source Protection Act was approved unanimously by both chambers of Canada's parliament. Before the law, Canadian journalists had to convince a judge that protecting their confidential source had merit. It was up then up to the court to decide if the journalist must name their source. The new law shifts the burden to judicial authorities to convince a judge that the journalist's information cannot reasonably be obtained through other means and that the public interest in the information outweighs the importance of eroding the freedom of the press (Taylor et al., 2017).

When it comes to the autonomy of CBC News, there remains a contentious issue concerning the transparency and accountability of appointing the public broadcaster's President and CEO (under the Broadcasting Act, the president is the chief executive officer) and Board of Directors. The CBC/Radio-Canada Board is composed of ten members, plus the chair and the president and CEO, all of whom are appointed by the governor in council (federal cabinet), as outlined in Section 36 (2) of the Broadcasting Act (Canada, 1991). This framework calls into question the ability of CBC/Radio-Canada to maintain its arm's-length independence from the sitting government (Taylor, 2017). The Liberal government of Justin Trudeau reformed the selection of the board in 2017, creating an independent advisory committee to appoint broad "experts in broadcasting and digital technology, representatives of cultural sectors from across Canada" (Haupt, 2017).

## (C3) Transparency of data on leading news media 2 POINTS

There is little discussion about media system transparency.

While considerable information about Canada's media companies exist online in regulatory, corporate, and academic publications, this information is rarely the subject of intense public attention. CBC/Radio-Canada, as a public broadcaster, publishes an annual report detailing its spending and corporate priorities, but critics charge the corporation is often too secretive and lacks proper oversight (Friends of Canadian Broadcasting, 2020). Canada's broadcast regulator, the CRTC, publishes detailed and regular information about the country's media system, including an annual *Communications Monitoring Report*. Moreover, numerous parliamentary reports over the last decade have provided a comprehensive picture of Canada's news media. The 2017 Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage provides an in-depth analysis, for instance, of the disruption and changes in the news industry sparked by digital technology. Given the growing concentration, decline of local news, and general disruption in Canada's media system over the last decade, there has been increasing public debate about the future of news and access to information.

## (C4) Journalism professionalism 2 POINTS

Most Canadian journalists receive professional training.

Journalism programmes (college and university level) are available all across Canada. Up slightly from 2006 (with about 2,300 students), there were 2,700 students enrolled in journalism programmes at Canadian universities in 2016. In addition to formal university education, most journalists talk about on-the-job training as well. A number of journalists reported taking short courses at conferences hosted by CAJ or RTDNA. Newsroom leaders stressed that they want their journalists to participate in ongoing education and training.

Despite the overall professionalism of Canadian journalists, the current economic realities of the news industry have affected the quality of reporting. This is supported by a Canadian authority interviewed for this study:

When they lay people off or cut back on staff and get rid of and do buyouts, you end up with less experience, less knowledge in newsrooms, fewer people doing editing, journalists being asked to do more things. It's not a great environment in which to work at the moment, in the midst of all the cutbacks and changes. What we've seen is a pretty significant move away from, in most cases, journalists that had any degree of specialisation and turning more and more people into general assignment reporters: generalists who are doing a



bit of everything. And when you when you have those sorts of jobs, it's very difficult to develop any expertise or any knowledge in some complicated fields. So the quality journalism we get isn't that great.

Essentially, training – many journalists and newsroom leaders told us – depends on budgets.

### (C5) Journalists' job security

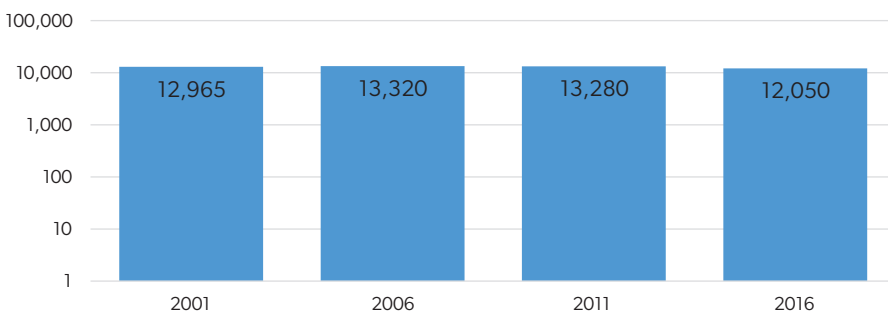
1 POINT

Job security is elusive in Canada's news media.

There are no legal provisions in Canada protecting the job security of journalists. Unionised journalists have rights when they are laid off. Casuals or temps comprise about one-quarter of CBC's unionised workforce who work in English-speaking Canada and Radio-Canada employees outside of Quebec and Moncton, New Brunswick. Many of these public broadcasting workers complain that they have little agency or security, leading to poor morale (Houpt, 2019). CBC/Radio-Canada's most recent collective agreement with the Canadian Media Guild included the provision to convert 41 employees into permanent workers at the public broadcaster.

Many newsrooms have downsized. In 2019, for instance, the Torstar publishing company shut down dozens of daily and community newspapers across the country, cutting 70 jobs. In a time of job slashing in the news industry, Statistics Canada census data from 2016 shows that the number of journalists working in Canada declined by 7 per cent since 2001 (see Figure 9). When asked to reflect on the state of job security in Canadian journalism, a well-known scholar in the field interviewed for this study remarked "everyone's kind of trying to stay alive and keep their jobs".

**Figure 9** Number of journalists in Canada, 2001–2016



Source: Skelton, 2018

A close look at statistics reveals that the number of journalists working in Canada has, in fact, risen slightly in absolute terms since 1987 (Wilkinson & Winseck, 2019). But, as a percentage of the total Canadian working population, journalists fall from .08 per cent in 1987 to .06 per cent in 2017. More journalists are working as freelancers or in permanent positions for news organisations. Wilkinson and Winseck (2019) contend that while there have indeed been substantial layoffs at legacy media organisations, a lot of Canadian journalists are working at new digital news services or as social media managers.

### (C6) Practice of access to information

2 POINTS

While laws offer access to public information, problems with Canada's freedom of information laws persist. Moreover, Canadian officials and the legal system often blunts journalists' efforts to obtain information.

Canada's freedom of information laws are outdated and flawed (McKie, 2012). Introduced in 1980, Canada's Access to Information Act was envisaged as an economical and efficient means for Canadians to get information about their government and its work. Yet, some forty years later, advocates for transparency and journalists often both complain about the lack of information the law produces and the obsequiousness of bureaucrats administering the programme. In fact, the commissioner charged with overseeing Canada's information laws called the system "very outdated" in 2018 (Desmarais, 2018). Critics of Canada's freedom of information process say there are too many loopholes for the government to withhold information. As well, journalists have expressed concern about the secrecy that cloaks government decision-making, and they complain it is hard to illuminate how the government arrives at policy options if administrators of the programme constantly exempt records because they are deemed to be a cabinet confidence or advice to a minister.

Journalists interviewed for this project complained vociferously about Canada's freedom of information laws at both the provincial and federal levels. Journalists called the system hopelessly broken, noting it often takes too long and costs too much (the government often imposes exorbitant search fees) to get little information. While the journalists and experts interviewed for this project describe a wealth of information available online and through publicly available databases, many noted there has been a retrenchment of access to experts and civil servants. Public relations controls have clamped down on access to sources. One long-time journalist remembered being able to call up low- and mid-level bureaucrats in the 1980s: "There was no rule against most public servants talking to most reporters about things that were within their area of competence", the journalist recalled, stressing, "that has completely changed",

with government rules now requiring reporters to go through public relations officials to request information and interviews. Statistics Canada data shows that there are 4.1 public relations professionals for every Canadian journalist (Baluja, 2014).

Reporters Without Borders' most recent report highlighted a number of troubling incidents blocking Canadian journalists from getting access to information, including the national police force's efforts to block journalists from reporting on a protest of the construction of a natural gas pipeline. The Royal Canadian Mountain Police threatened to arrest journalists if they crossed the force's assembled roadblock near camps erected by Indigenous protestors. Reporters covering the protest also complained that jammed communication signals in the area prevented them from filing their stories. Reporters Without Borders also raised concerns about a ruling by Canada's top court that forced a VICE reporter to hand over to police all his communication with an alleged Canadian terrorist. As well, the report also highlighted concerns about a Radio-Canada reporter who was compelled by a Quebec Superior Court to reveal her sources surrounding a corruption scandal (Reporters Without Borders, 2020). Clearly, access to information remains a problem for Canadian journalism.

(C7) The watchdog and the news media's mission statement

3 POINTS

Canadian journalists see themselves as a watchdog.

Despite all the challenges they face, being a watchdog remains intrinsic to Canadian journalists' identity. In line with Burke's notion of a fourth estate, journalists and newsroom leaders see it as their job to hold decision-makers (government and business) to account. Canadian journalists envision themselves as independent truth-tellers and honest brokers of information, playing an important role in Canadian democracy. By their nature, Canadian journalists are sceptical of authority and see it as their job to challenge authority.

In line with the watchdog role, CBC/Radio-Canada's mission "is to inform, to reveal, to contribute to the understanding of issues of public interest and to encourage citizens to participate in our free and democratic society" (CBC, 2020). Similarly, the *Toronto Star's* so-called Atkinson Principles, named after the newspaper's founder, commits the news organisation to "the advancement of society through pursuit of social, economic and political reforms" (Toronto Star, 2019). Moreover, many journalists interviewed for this study highlighted their commitment to holding decision-makers accountable, especially in a time marked by political spin and post-truth politics. One interviewee described their job as fact-checking what powerful people say.

## (C8) Professional training

2 POINTS

Most media organisations offer some sort of training.

Training is available for some journalists, but not all. Often, access to training depends on budgets. Most interviewees confirmed that training is important, especially as newer technology means journalists are doing more. While CBC/Radio-Canada offers in-house training to its journalists on everything from storytelling, media law, video, and audio editing – and even hostile region and security awareness training – many journalists who work for private media say training is increasingly poorly resourced at their news organisations. Regular training seems to be a luxury largely restricted to news organisations with the necessary capital.

Most professional organisations – including CAJ and RTDNA – frequently offer training, workshops, and panel discussions at their annual conventions.

## (C9) Watchdog function and financial resources

2 POINTS

While many news organisations say they are committed to enterprising and investigative journalism, fewer resources are making it harder to produce good journalism.

Consistent with Davies's (2009) *Flat Earth News*, the downsizing of newsrooms across Canada has made it tougher for Canadian journalists to fulfill their watchdog function. The reporters left in the newsrooms across Canada told us they are squeezed to produce more. Many journalists are shooting and editing their stories as well as writing their online copy, and reporters complain about the constant grind to report more (sometimes for multiple platforms) and churn out a steady stream of social media. These demands, they worry, detract from reporting and advancing stories. As a result, journalists say they are forced to produce more single-source stories and stories based on news releases, news conferences, and official statements. Journalists worry they are not doing enough fact-checking.

Still, most news workers and newsroom leaders say investigative journalism is important and central to what they do. They stressed that even in financially tough times, it is important not to short-change audiences by failing to dig deeper and uncover important truths. CBC News and *The Globe and Mail*, for instance, have committed significant resources to producing investigative news, reinvesting in investigative units. CBC's *The Fifth Estate* and CTV's *W5* produces a steady stream of in-depth investigative reporting that prompts government reaction and policy changes. The television programme has also exposed serious miscarriages of justice in Canada's legal system. The public broadcaster

argues its investigative work sets it apart from the rest of Canada's news media, highlighting its important journalistic contribution as part of its mandate and a justification for the taxpayer money spent on the public broadcaster.

## Conclusions

Canada has developed a solid foundation in journalism that now finds itself struggling for its very survival. Unlike its southern neighbour, Canada has not succumbed to accepting accusations of “fake news” or the view that the press is somehow “the enemy of the people”. To the contrary, Canadians seem to show continued faith in their institutions of professional journalism. A national public broadcaster active across a range of media has certainly helped ensure that news is accessible to Canadians and generally open to public scrutiny. The economic model for private journalism, however – based upon advertising revenue and paid subscriptions – is in freefall.

The Liberal government under Justin Trudeau brought forth measures in its 2018 budget to try and offer some relief to the struggling news industry, and in so doing opened an entirely new set of concerns. The government's annual budget described the problem and proposed solution:

As more and more people get their news online, and share their interests directly through social media, many communities have been left without local newspapers to tell their stories. To ensure trusted, local perspectives as well as accountability in local communities, the Government proposes to provide \$500 million over five years, starting in 2018–19, to one or more independent non-governmental organisations that will support local journalism in underserved communities. The organisations will have full responsibility to administer the funds, respecting the independence of the press. (Canada, 2018)

This initiative had to walk a delicate balance between government support for the news industry and not making the press reliant on direct government subsidy, thereby questioning its independence. The government proposed an arm's-length panel that includes representatives of eight media organisations, including the CAJ, News Media Canada, the Association de la presse francophone [association of the French-speaking press], the Quebec Community Newspaper Association, the National Ethnic Press and Media Council of Canada, the Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec [professional federation of Quebec journalists], Unifor, and the Fédération nationale des communications [national communications federation] (Parry, 2019). Despite the range of representation, many journalists continue to question not only the panel composition, but the very principle of the government assistance plan.

In *The National Post*, a newspaper unable to climb out of mounting debt issues, columnist Andrew Coyne was adamant that the Liberal government's plan is the wrong remedy for what ails the news industry:

To hell with it. To hell with all of it. No newspaper publisher should have anything to do with this plan. And no journalist worthy of the name should go anywhere near that accursed panel. (Coyne, 2018)

Despite apprehensions among journalists, it is clear that the private marketplace on its own will not continue to deliver the type of journalism to which Canadians have become accustomed. Multiple studies and government reports have yet to devise a plan that seems acceptable to all involved. The Liberal government plan is bolder than previous government inactions and, predictably, faces a strong backlash.

Meanwhile, the problems outlined in this chapter have not eased; in fact, they appear to be gaining momentum.

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