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Canada's Democratic Malaise: Are the Media
to Blame?

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Summary

A number of authors maintain that a connection exists between media coverage of politics and a declining level of trust in politicians and political institutions. However, a review of the literature on this issue gives rise to mixed conclusions. Although it is difficult to establish a direct link between media coverage of politics and increasing cynicism in Canada and elsewhere, an exploration of this issue nonetheless highlights the widening gap between a certain concept of what constitutes the ideal way to cover politics and the forms of political journalism that currently exist.

Political journalists are widely criticized. They are accused of exaggerating the negative aspects of the facts, usurping the role of elected officials by giving themselves excessive visibility, redirecting voters' attention towards secondary issues, presenting abridged information on the issues and cheapening the image of politics by placing primary emphasis on partisan conflict.

Various reasons are cited to explain political journalism's apparent drift. The conditions under which political journalism is practised are called into question. The lack of resources and pressure from employers concerned about profitability may lead journalists to produce stereotyped, superficial and sensationalistic political coverage. Such trends have worsened over the past few years, due to increased media concentration and the weakening of public television in several countries, including Canada.

The solutions proposed in this study are based on an assessment that is neither totally positive nor totally negative. Three avenues are explored. First of all, we believe that journalists must promote more meaningful contact between elected officials and voters. To accomplish this, they must remain vigilant but learn to become less

omnipresent. They must also revive the tradition of investigative journalism and stop limiting themselves to a single interpretation of political issues based on partisan conflict. We also believe that the concentration of Canadian media ownerships makes it increasingly difficult to air in-depth, varied political perspectives, and recommend that there be a wide-ranging debate on this issue. Lastly, we deplore the fact that the public service news tradition in Canada is being eroded. We believe that increased, stable funding of this public service, with no political strings attached, would be a highly profitable civic investment. We therefore conclude that a serious return to the public service news tradition would serve well the requirements of Canadian democracy.

Canada's Democratic Malaise: Are the Media to Blame?

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It would be impossible today to hold a discussion on democracy without according a central position to the media. The media have profoundly transformed electoral campaigns¹ and modified conditions of political governance to the point that the authors of one study² provocatively entitled their work *Do the Media Govern?* and that Timothy Cook was able to write that “American news media...are now part of the government.”³ In this context it is not hard to see the political dynamic in democracy as being more and more explicitly conceived of as a triangle consisting of interactions between the elected, the electorate and the media.⁴

This growing appreciation of the role of the media by political observers coincides with the appearance of two noticeable trends in most established democracies. The first is the decline in confidence on the part of citizens toward politicians and political institutions.⁵ The second is the changing media coverage of politics, which is becoming increasingly negative and oriented toward partisan conflicts between political actors.⁶ To many specialists it appears difficult to deny the existence of a link between these two developments. “Many scholars,” writes Sören Holmberg, “... point to the media as one of the culprits behind the declining levels of political trust. And it is difficult to disagree.”⁷

The preceding comments show the seriousness of the grievances against the media. They are

reproached for both undermining the legitimacy of elected officials and exercising undue influence on their decisions. Patterson believes that “the press has gone way beyond the point of responsible criticism, and the effect is to rob political leaders of the public confidence that is required to govern.”⁸ Timothy Cook concludes that the undue influence of the media results in the diversion of the political agenda: “the greatest pitfalls of governing with the news is that it provides an incentive for political actors to anticipate the needs of the news in deciding what to do, needs that often detract from extrinsic standards of governance.”⁹

The charges levelled against the media are thus weighty. These accusations, disturbing in themselves, take on a particular significance given the expectations citizens and specialists have of the role of the media in a democracy. Hackett and Zhao aptly recall in this regard that the Royal Commission on Newspapers in Canada concluded, at the beginning of the 1980s, that “Canadians may not put newspapers on a pedestal but the great majority believe that newspapers, and the mass media in general, have responsibilities to the public different from those of other businesses,”¹⁰ an observation that led them to conclude that “Canadians widely believe that news media should seek more than their own profitability” and that “as institutions central to public life, they are widely expected to function in the public interest.”¹¹ The contribution to the public interest expected of the media is succinctly described by Entman: “The press,” he writes, “is supposed to enhance democracy both by stimulating the citizenry’s political interest and by providing the specific information they need to hold government accountable.”¹²

In this article we will review the case against the media, concentrating on the most serious accusations brought against them, those of undermining the legitimacy of democratic institutions and provoking the rise in cynicism and apathy among citizens. We will examine the evidence produced to

support this charge. We will note a certain rift between the weakness of the evidence and the seriousness of the accusations against the media. We will also note the growing gap, as have several observers, between a particular ideal of media coverage of politics and actual journalistic practices. This portrait, neither completely dark nor completely rosy, will inspire the recommendations that we will present to improve the contribution of the media to the quality of democratic life in Canada.

Who is Accused?

The best way to initiate the trial of the media is to concentrate on the identity of the accused. The term “video malaise,” which has been widespread for a long time, indicates that the finger was first pointed at television. Lang and Lang, in their pioneering text, and Robinson,¹³ who originated the expression, have been largely responsible for spreading the idea that the political journalism practised on television is principally responsible for citizens’ lack of confidence in political actors and institutions.¹⁴

The “video malaise” hypothesis rests on three principal arguments. The first emphasizes the dominance of television news as a source of political information.¹⁵ The second deals with the vulnerability of the accidental news consumer, who is the least sophisticated viewer. “Those who fall into the news,” proposes Robinson, that is, those who absorb the news inadvertently because their television set is on, “are particularly likely to suffer from video malaise because they do not have the background of a good newspaper and political discussion with friends to help them understand and interpret the news.”¹⁶ Finally, according to the third argument, the conditions under which television journalism is practised are said to be at the

root of the treatment of political news — short, superficial, episodic, instantaneous, oriented toward people and their motives rather than on issues — that is particularly responsible for undermining the confidence of citizens in the political process.¹⁷

The “video malaise” hypothesis makes television the principal source of the media problem in democracies. This view has been challenged since the early 1990s by Christina Holtz-Bacha, who emphasizes that the important distinction, from the point of view of media impact, is perhaps not television versus other media, but the content of the programs broadcast, regardless of the vehicle employed.¹⁸

This distinction between the medium and its content is important. It has informed writings on the issue for a decade, as attested by the presence, in numerous recent studies, of indicators that allow the types of content broadcast to be distinguished.¹⁹ Noting the changes in the approach to the issue, Kenneth Newton proposes the term “media malaise” rather than “video malaise”:

Although most malaise theory concentrates on television (hence video-malaise), the problem does not lie only with television but with all forms of modern mass media, both print and electronic. Hence the term “media malaise” is preferred...The term is used broadly to cover those types of democratic pathology which are supposed to be caused, at least in part, by the modern mass media — political apathy, alienation, distrust, cynicism, confusion, disillusionment and even fear.²⁰

Newton’s words point to a notable shift away from the vehicle (television) toward the content (political journalism) as the source of media malaise. Thus it is journalistic treatment of politics in general, both in the written press and in the electronic media, that is in the dock. It is thus appropriate to open the trial of the media by focusing first on general criticisms levelled at the journalistic profession, before establishing whether

these accusations are more serious or better founded in the case of television journalism in particular.

When Did the Incriminating Practices Begin?

The judgment passed by several authors on the media in general and political journalism in particular is severe, and some journalists themselves have added their voices to this indictment.²¹ The portion of responsibility for the decline in confidence in government institutions attributed to journalists is large and, to make matters worse, the journalistic practices that are the root of this phenomenon have become accentuated over the past few decades.²²

The idea of a change in journalistic practices since the 1960s in particular is important because it provides a benchmark against which to assess the current situation. There are some quite different perspectives on the past, as exemplified by two renowned critics of current journalistic practices, Larry Sabato and Thomas Patterson. Patterson contrasts the current style of political journalism, based on interpretation, with that which preceded it, based on the facts. The tone he adopts makes his own preferences clear:

[I]nterpretative journalism has replaced or is supplanting an older descriptive style where the journalist's main job was the straightforward reporting of the 'facts'...Today, facts and interpretation are freely intermixed in news reporting. Interpretation provides the theme, and the facts illuminate it. The theme is primary; the facts are illustrative. As a result, events are encompassed and joined together within a common theme. Reporters question politicians' motives and give them less of a chance to speak for themselves.²³

Larry Sabato also thinks that journalism has changed over the past few decades, and that this

evolution is not a positive one from the point of view of the quality of the democratic debate. What makes his viewpoint different from Patterson's, however, is his characterization of journalism in the United States before it took its current form. Thus, Sabato distinguishes three periods rather than two. During the first, which he dates from the beginning of the 1940s to the middle of the 1960s:

[J]ournalists engaged in...lapdog journalism — reporting that served and reinforced the political establishment. Mainstream journalists rarely challenged prevailing orthodoxy, accepted at face value much of what those in power told them, and protected politicians by revealing little about their nonofficial lives, even when private vices affected public performance.²⁴

This type of journalism, described as “complacent,” and which hardly represented a golden age of American journalism, was followed by the practice of “watchdog journalism” for about a decade. During this period, “reporters scrutinized the behavior of political elites by undertaking independent investigations of their statements.”²⁵ This interlude led up to the current form of journalism, “junkyard-dog journalism,” a confrontational style that Sabato characterizes as being “often hard, aggressive and intrusive” and whose result is that “the news media, both print and broadcast, have sometimes resembled piranhas or sharks in feeding frenzy.”²⁶

This contrast between Patterson's and Sabato's opinions of what journalism was before it took on its present style is interesting from several perspectives. First, it shows that the definition of the ideal form of political journalism in a democracy is not unanimous. In particular, it recalls Sabato's comment that journalism that presented an essentially favourable attitude toward political actors and institutions is scarcely more desirable than the “junkyard dog” journalism prevailing today. Aside from their differences, these authors do

agree in their condemnation of the current forms of political journalism, and in this they are not by any means alone.

Canada is not excluded from this assessment. For more than a decade, political scientists and communications analysts have noted radical changes in the practice of journalism north of the 49th parallel. The geographical proximity of the United States has allowed considerable penetration of Canadian airwaves by American news programs. Some see this situation as being responsible for the Americanization of Canadian journalistic practices and the content of political news coverage.²⁷ The negative tone, the emphasis on scandals and conflicts, the greater visibility given to journalists and their growing tendency toward commentary are just a few identifiable symptoms of the significant changes in Canadian media coverage of political affairs that have occurred over the past 20 years.²⁸ This switch in orientation seems to be gaining an increasing number of critics, as we will see in the following section.

What are the Charges?

The list of grievances levelled at political journalism is long. We will review these grievances and then examine the evidence presented to support the most serious accusation against the media, which is that they produce cynicism among citizens and apathy on the part of the electorate.

Harbingers of Bad News²⁹

The first and perhaps the most important grievance is the negative bias of media's political coverage. Patterson argues that journalism today has pushed the maxim that "bad news makes for good news" to its limit. Referring to the American case, he claims "since the 60s, bad news has increased

by a factor of three and is now the dominant factor of news coverage of national politics."³⁰

Moreover, the extent and variety of the forms of negative journalism is revealed in writings on this topic. The increasing prominence given to political scandals,³¹ the viciousness toward political personalities³² and the excessive emphasis placed on bad economic news compared with good economic news are just a few manifestations of a phenomenon that appears to be quite generalized.³³ This is borne out by Westerstahl and Johansson with respect to Sweden, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse in the case of the House of Representatives in the United States³⁴ as well as numerous studies showing a progressive slide in the coverage of election campaigns in Canada, which were quite neutral or positive during the 1960s but have become increasingly negative over time.³⁵

According to Pratte this tendency toward "requisite skepticism" in the fourth power is commendable, but it produces harmful effects when it lapses into "obligatory cynicism" or exaggerated criticism. "[W]e are the watch dogs of democracy," writes Pratte.³⁶ "It is the essence of this function that we be critical...The media have always emphasized the bad news, dramas, scandals, failures. This is not only inevitable, it is also necessary. Other people — advertising professionals, public relations officers — are paid to broadcast the good news. Nevertheless, there is good reason to question the amplifying effect of the current media pugnacity." [Translation]

These comments of André Pratte's echo Robert Entman's analysis in *Democracy without Citizens*. In this work, Entman describes the retreat from investigative journalism in favour of confrontational journalism, citing the appearance of a dynamic he calls "aggressiveness without accountability." This dynamic, which is the result, according to this author, of journalists confusing vigilance (costly in time and effort) and aggressiveness (which would be a lesser form of

investigative journalism), has the effect of increasing citizens' cynicism, without making governments more accountable. This derivative of investigative journalism signals, according to Entman, "the faltering of accountability journalism, the seeming inability [of the media] to provide news that holds government to timely and consistent account, despite the trend toward increasingly skeptical if not cynical reporting."³⁷

Stardom

The second accusation levelled at political journalists is that they create a barrier between elected and electors by assuming an unwarranted place in the news and in feature articles. The journalist's speech has taken precedence over that of the political actor, which is now reduced to short clips. Studies of the decrease in the time allocated to the politician's presence in favour of that of the journalist, particularly in television programs,³⁸ support this criticism of journalistic style, a criticism that can be likened to the accusation that journalists are deviating from their mandate in democracies. Sabato's criticism is the most damning in this regard: "especially in the post-Watergate era," he writes "the press is perceived as being far more interested in finding sleaze and achieving fame and fortune than as serving as an honest broker of information between citizens and government."³⁹ Taras echoes these sentiments in issuing a call to arms against the trend to celebrity among Canadian journalists:

Journalists must step out of the stories they are covering. They should not be the stars of the show — the central focus of the events that they are reporting on. Political and community leaders who are being covered in TV news stories should be given enough 'clip' time to express full sentences and communicate ideas. The reporter's voice should not be the only one heard in news stories.⁴⁰

Denis Monière also refers to this situation in his comparative study of the production of televised news by public French language networks in France, Belgium, Switzerland and Canada. Monière observes that, following the example of American reporters, Canadian journalists allocate less speaking time to political actors than do their European colleagues. According to Monière, this observation could indicate that Canadian news practitioners have a more conflictual relationship with the political world.⁴¹ The manner in which the words of political spokespersons were framed in stories broadcast on the four public networks studied by Monière essentially confirms this fact. In Europe, political personalities express themselves most frequently on the television news through face-to-face interviews. According to Monière, this mode of presentation "reinforces the seriousness and official nature of the broadcast" and leaves an impression of "deference toward the political class" on the part of journalists. [Translation] In Canada, the framing of political actors in news stories consists of quotations from press conferences or improvised press briefings ("scrums"). This conclusion "confirms once again that Canadian journalists favour a confrontational relationship with politicians."⁴² [Translation]

Deviation from the Agenda

The third grievance against journalists flows naturally from the second. Deviating from their mandate involves deviating from the political agenda. The argument takes two forms. The first, which is the most widespread, is that the media focus the attention of electors on superficial and secondary issues.⁴³ The importance accorded to candidates' gaffes, polls and party strategies during campaigns⁴⁴ and the increasingly frequent intrusions on politicians' private lives⁴⁵ would be manifestations of this phenomenon.⁴⁶ The second form of the argument has been developed for the most part by Cook, and emphasizes the effects of

the interaction between the elected and the media.⁴⁷ According to this view, government priorities are dictated too much by the media reaction as anticipated by politicians and not enough by the needs and concerns of the electorate.

Pedagogical Shortcomings

An equally serious accusation deals with the pedagogical shortcomings of the media, that is, their inability to transmit complete, objective and relevant news, on most issues, to citizens. This argument has been presented under a large number of guises, emphasizing various sources of possible bias in the diffusion of factual information. Rothman and Lichter, for example, state that journalists' ideological preferences have greatly influenced their coverage of the nuclear energy issue and that consequently, "media coverage of the issue is largely responsible for public misperceptions of the views of scientists."⁴⁸

Patterson maintains that "negative news misleads the people about social trends," which could explain the fact that "by two-to-one margins, Americans wrongly believed that crime, inflation, unemployment, and the federal debt each increased."⁴⁹

Structural explanations are generally provided to explain the pedagogical shortcomings of the media, which appear all the more surprising in that they continue to be apparent when sources of information increase, a paradox that Entman explains with the formula "abundance without growth"⁵⁰ to indicate the contrast between the increase in vehicles of information over the past few decades and stagnation in citizens' factual knowledge about politics.⁵¹

The first of these explanations emphasizes the fundamental objectives of the media and journalists, profit and visibility, respectively. According to this argument, neither the media, as businesses, nor journalists, as professionals, are interested, from a strictly rational point of view, in systemat-

ically offering their readers content that emphasizes information over entertainment or provides the necessary background for understanding the information presented.⁵²

The second explanation emphasizes the impact of professional and organizational routines on the selection and treatment of news. Attraction to change is one of the most deeply rooted reflexes, according to Stimson: "Journalists pursue 'news' as a criterion of relevance. Change is news. Stability isn't."⁵³ In a study of political communication in France, Maarek presents another aspect of this kind of distortion:

Frequently, journalists only portray politicians marginally, or indirectly with epithets relating to the orientation that the latter want to give their speeches. All the same, journalists have a tendency to devote considerable coverage to politicians who 'change' their point of view, when it is precisely these changes that adversely affect positive penetration of the political speech by giving an impression of quite detrimental instability.⁵⁴
[Translation]

This emphasis on change has an impact on the quality of news provided to citizens. Nadeau et al., who examined the determinants of media coverage of economic news, observe that: "Not only do media reports emphasize change, they also stress the importance and significance of observed change. Rather than reporting change as a temporary deviation from the norm, changes are reported as an indication of the development or the aggravation of a trend."⁵⁵

Competition within the media industry and the speed with which news is disseminated could be leading the media to favour news that is easily accessible and can be quickly confirmed by their sources.⁵⁶ This news selection method and a style of reporting that focuses on sensationalism contribute to creating a gap between the news disseminated and political reality. Ansolabehere, Behr and Iyengar remark on this contrast when

they note that: "Simplicity, clarity, color, and clear story lines are the hallmarks of news reports. These same qualities, of course, are generally absent from the fuzzy and ambiguous world of politics and public affairs."⁵⁷

A final explanation, that of Gunther and Mughan, links the pedagogical deficiencies of the media to the weakness of the tradition of journalism as a public service in certain countries (notably the United States) and its progressive loss of ground in others (Great Britain and Canada, for example). According to the authors, this development has resulted in the appearance of "pathologies" in the media treatment of political activity that are deleterious to the quality of democratic debate. Thus Gunther and Mughan conclude that the decreasing quality of democratic life in the countries examined "derived from a reduced volume of policy-relevant information flowing to voters; from a shift from substantive issues to a focus on personalities and foibles of politicians, to the 'game' of politics and the excitement of the electoral 'horse race' and, more generally, the ephemera of politics; and from gratuitous editorializing by reporters."⁵⁸

The Temptation to Editorialize

One fundamental accusation aimed at the contemporary form of political journalism, an accusation that to a certain extent cuts across most of the others, is that it relies on a restricted interpretative framework of political dynamics in a democracy. The effect of such "framing," according to Cappella and Jamieson, is to reduce the public policy process (or, to cite Page's expression, "deliberation"⁵⁹) "to the sum of the leaders' self-interests and a chronicle of who won and who lost."⁶⁰

The analytical framework favoured by contemporary political journalism, oriented toward strategic interpretation and conflict rather than consensus and factual information, has been

given various labels: "strategy-driven," "conflict-based" and "strategic framing," all of which are geared to emphasize the deformed and diminished image of politics and politicians presented to electors. According to some⁶¹ this journalistic style strangles public policy deliberation, others⁶² believe it places too much emphasis on the struggle for power as opposed to the conditions under which it is exercised, and still others see it as discrediting the electoral process itself by reducing the broad debates of society to simple partisan issues, as Mendelsohn's particularly convincing work on the media coverage of the free-trade issue during the 1988 federal election shows.⁶³

Pack Journalism

An aggravating characteristic of political journalism is its homogeneity. "Pack journalism," as it is called, has numerous disadvantages. Conformity, aversion to risk and the pack mentality that characterize journalistic practices result in broad uniformity in the choice, treatment and interpretation of new policies.⁶⁴ This uniformity, which deprives citizens of the diversity of perspectives that normally produce competition and emulation,⁶⁵ reinforces the impact of the negative tendencies of contemporary political journalism (negative tone, stress on the actors' motives, etc.) by confronting citizens repeatedly and univocally with the same, devalued concept of politics.⁶⁶

A Harsh Indictment

The foregoing shows that the list of grievances against the media's political coverage is long and full. Contemporary political journalists are blamed for exaggerating the bleaker side of the facts, usurping the role of elected politicians by giving themselves unwarranted visibility, diverting electors' attention toward secondary issues, failing in their educational role by disseminating incomplete and reconstituted information about the issues, giving themselves the authority to spec-

ulate about actors' motives and, to this end, presenting an interpretive framework that produces a belittling image of politics and politicians, and indulging in bandwagon behaviour that accentuates the limitations of their practices.

Beyond specific grievances, the two most serious accusations against the media are that they exercise undue influence in the process of determining the political agenda and they undermine citizens' confidence in political actors and institutions. Several authors specifically mention this second accusation. Patterson, for example, states that: "The media's bad news tendency has heightened Americans' disillusionment with the political leaders and institutions."⁶⁷ Sabato claims that "The electorate's media-assisted cynicism has been confirmed in a host of studies and surveys."⁶⁸ Cappella and Jamieson believe that the interpretation of politics favoured by the media is at the root of a spiral of cynicism that affects political actors as much as the media themselves, while Rothman, speculating on the long-term consequences of contemporary political journalism, concludes that: "Public cynicism...[is] growing in the United States and, in so far as journalists played a role in this growth they...contribute to the erosion of the very cultural elements which created a free society."⁶⁹

Now that we have carefully outlined the charges, it is time to analyze the evidence supporting the most serious accusation, that of producing and perpetuating a level of cynicism toward political actors, institutions and processes that is deleterious to the quality and functioning of democratic life.⁷⁰ Before addressing the evidence as such, we should examine the conditions under which journalism is practised in order to determine whether they could be considered attenuating circumstances regarding the grievances levelled against political journalism.

Attenuating Circumstances: The Conditions Under Which Political Journalism is Practised

There are numerous constraints that make a certain ideal-type of political journalism difficult to attain in a democracy. The leeway of political journalists who cover politics is limited by more or less formal constraints that can be attributed to television as a genre, professional routines and the commercial objectives of media companies. As Pratte says in his study *Le syndrome de Pinocchio*: "Journalists have neither the time, nor the means, nor the will to verify."⁷¹ [Translation]

This suggests that the limitations of political journalism are due, in part at least, to the conditions under which it is practised. According to various authors, there are four constraints that contribute to restricting journalists' ability to produce news that is as rich and diversified as their detractors would like. Caught between a rock and a hard place, the product journalists present is the result of compromises among multiple demands, compromises that are inevitable to some and unacceptable for others.

Constraints of the Genre

The first constraint with which the journalist has to deal is that of the demands of journalistic writing. The news is a literary genre that has its own canons to which the journalist is expected to conform. The comments of Reuben Frank, producer of the CBC Evening News, describe these expectations well:

Every news story should, without any sacrifice of probity or responsibility, display the attributes of fiction, of drama. It should have structure and conflict, problem and denouement, rising action and falling action, a beginning, a middle and an end.⁷²

Technical Constraints

According to several commentators, the constraints associated with the production of televised news restrict even further the journalist's leeway in dealing with the news.⁷³ Thus the specific imperatives of television production are added to the constraints of journalistic writing in general. These constraints push the journalist toward rapid production of brief, rather superficial news often inclined toward an emphasis on personal experiences, image and emotions.

The analysis of Agnieszka Dobrzynska, who has examined the journalistic practices of Canadian television reporters covering the 1997 federal election campaign, confirms the existence of the same practical constraints in Canada.⁷⁴ Journalists themselves point out the limited time available in news bulletins for political or electoral information as an important determinant of the content and form of their stories. Political and electoral content has to compete with other categories of information (sports, culture, science) that must also be presented during the 22 or so minutes of airtime for a televised newscast.

Organizational Constraints

The constraints that are specific to the dominant genre of political information, television news, considerably limit the journalist's autonomy in the practice of the profession. To these already weighty constraints are added the organizational pressures journalists must face. Bennett, in a short but illuminating article, effectively demonstrates the pressure of the organizational routines that go along with "the beat," the demands of indexing and the tyranny exercised by sources over journalistic practices.⁷⁵

According to these routines, a journalist is typically assigned to a beat or a story that he or she regularly has to follow based on information collected from sources whose number is limited and whose make-up is almost unvarying. Under this

regime, journalists are caught in a stranglehold by the sources on which they depend and the organization to which they are answerable.

This dependence on sources is in fact a recurring theme of the sociology of journalists.⁷⁶ It is even greater if the journalist works in an organization where the resources devoted to newsgathering are limited and the editorial policy imprecise. Blais and Crête have shown that local journalists are often only the conveyer belts of information from their sources (e.g., elected or municipal officials).⁷⁷ Cormier notes that during the 1984 election there was a closer convergence between media coverage and party messages (from the Conservative Party especially) on TVA than there was on SRC and CBC, and drew from this observation the general hypothesis that "the more structured the editorial policy, the less the journalistic treatment will conform with the communication objectives of the source."⁷⁸ [Translation]

These results are echoed in classic works of Sigal and Gans.⁷⁹ Sigal showed that basically the sources of American journalists barely extend beyond the triangle formed by the White House, the Pentagon and Congress. Gans used the image of a dance between two partners to illustrate the relationship between journalists and their sources, a dance that is largely, if not entirely, led by the sources, which were more active, dynamic, resourceful and motivated in their quest for publicity than were journalists in their quest for information.⁸⁰ Gandy uses the expression "news subsidies" [Translation] to describe this system, whereby journalists with very limited resources take advantage of information provided for free by their sources.⁸¹ Zaller suggests that "the well-established reliance of reporters on their sources" can be attributed to journalists' lack of expertise and resources.⁸²

The Profitability Constraint

Some claim that the heart of the unequal power relations between journalists and their sources is

the limited resources the media allocates for handling information. Thus the pursuit of profitability would explain the media's desire to produce news at the lowest possible cost. This situation undoubtedly has an effect on news quality. Carper maintains that in general "the goals of marketing are in conflict with the role that the press should play in a democracy."⁸³ Reeves concludes that the imbalance between the resources provided to journalists to do their work and the means their sources have at their disposal (political parties, pressure groups, etc.) to influence the content of the news explains why "major news organizations routinely accept the assumptions and assertions of policy makers."⁸⁴

Journalists who cover political news must therefore do their jobs in a context of scarcity of resources, which prevents them from pushing their analytical or research efforts to the limit, unless they are given a specific dossier. Everything has to be done quickly and at the lowest possible cost to the company. Confronted with the numerous daily production deadlines that followed the advent of continuous information networks, journalists no longer have the time to do research or unearth alternative sources that might put into perspective or challenge the official speech they have to report.⁸⁵ According to Pratte, who cites the investigative journalist André Noël, the media have the means to allocate more resources to research and in-depth investigations but prefer to invest them in producing the "news of the day" [Translation] or in "news reports that are increasingly instantaneous, superficial and piecemeal" [Translation].⁸⁶ Media companies consider this kind of news report more profitable because it can be produced and aired more rapidly.

Still on the subject of the profitability constraints imposed on journalists, in his analysis of changes in the Canadian media landscape Taras points to the important fact that the American trend to produce information-entertainment

seems to be well entrenched in Canada. Citizens whose knowledge of politics is said to be minimal prefer to be entertained than informed. The reaction of media companies, which are always looking out for the demands and tastes but not the needs of their consumers, has been to offer more entertaining but less educational content. As Taras suggests, "politics no longer sells" and has "taken a back seat to celebrity news, entertainment news, business news, sports news, and lifestyle news." He elaborates:

The large conglomerates that own the TV networks but also major chunks of the world entertainment industry have a stake in promoting their own products — movies, books, celebrities, sports team, etc. — as news stories, and in appealing to audiences with news stories that are "lite and less filling" in order to boost ratings.⁸⁷

News priorities are dictated by the commercial interests of media companies. In the name of synergy and profitability, the content of stories must both contribute to the effort to market "products" offered by various components of the large press conglomerates and be constructed to retain the attention of an apathetic television viewer audience that values being entertained above all.

Between a Rock and a Hard Place

The conclusions presented here all seem to point to something of a paradox. How can one reconcile the image of the journalist who is at the mercy of his or her sources, and the increasingly negative treatment of politics in the media? John Zaller has resolved this apparent paradox brilliantly in his important work.⁸⁸

Zaller's thesis rests on the rationality of the actors. The media want to maximize their profitability, politicians their visibility and journalists their value-added, that is, their contribution as professionals to the depth and the quality of the news disseminated. These objectives are contra-

dictory. The media, according to Zaller, are not very interested in presenting high-quality news that does not respond to the tastes of a public that, succumbing to the law of the least effort, will be content with a light diet of news described as entertainment.⁸⁹ Meanwhile parties do not seek to inform electors but rather to influence them, and to this end they use a whole range of more or less sophisticated means⁹⁰ in order to get their messages disseminated through the news media.

Zaller sees journalists as being caught in the crossfire: “Journalists are thus fighting a two-front war to control their professional turf. On one side, they must fend off market competition that forces them to dilute the news values that are their professional bread-and-butter. And on the other side, they must struggle with politicians to maintain control of their work market.”⁹¹ Their reaction to this double pressure explains the superficial character and negative tone of political news, argues Zaller. With few resources and under severe organizational constraints, journalists react by producing news reports that are rather superficial, homogeneous, predictable, focus on the political game and essentially conform to the dominant discourse of political elites. Subject to a sustained attempt by the parties to control the political agenda, these journalists, prompted by the desire not be manipulated, adopt an increasingly confrontational style.⁹² This situation has led Bennett to suggest that journalists, seeking to escape the rather untenable constraints to which they are subjected, practise both “pack” and “attack” journalism.⁹³

Dissatisfied Journalists

Two conclusions emerge from this rapid overview of the conditions of the practice of political journalism. The first is that journalists are more and more dissatisfied, confronted with the problem of reconciling their professional ambition to produce high-quality news reports with the

constraints to which they are subject.⁹⁴ This observation echoes an extensive survey of 1,400 journalists by Weaver and Wilhoit, in which the authors conclude that: “One of the most significant predictors of job satisfaction is the extent to which journalists see the organization as informing the audience.”⁹⁵

The second observation is that the organizational pressures on journalists have more influence on the journalistic product than pressures from their sources, as Zaller eloquently points out:

A central tension of media politics is between journalists, who wish to produce a sophisticated news product, and ordinary citizens, who want something less sophisticated. The best evidence of the kind of product journalists would like to produce comes from markets in which they face relatively less competitive pressure to cater the mass tastes. In these markets — modern American newspapers, TV network news in the 1960s, and British television — we find a relatively high-quality news product and a determination to keep it so. But from markets in which competition is greater, especially TV news, we find a lower quality news product that is, one must assume, closer to what mass tastes in news actually are.⁹⁶

Has the Equilibrium Been Destroyed?

Over the past few years the growth of the phenomenon of press concentration has fuelled debate over the objectivity and variety of media coverage of politics.⁹⁷ Canada has not escaped this phenomenon, as demonstrated recently by concerns about editorial policies imposed by CanWest Global on all its newspapers as well as the eventual problems of content integration among media outlets owned by Quebec communication giants Gesca or Quebecor Media. The debate over the diversity of journalistic coverage of politics is obviously very old. It has been driven in Canada, as elsewhere, by two broad currents, a more conservative view that reproaches the media for being biased towards ideas and parties on the left

of the political spectrum⁹⁸ and another, opposing trend that blames the media for being a cog in the establishment.⁹⁹

A more recent direction in the debate over the objectivity of the media emphasizes the notion of equilibrium. This equilibrium between journalists' more liberal leanings¹⁰⁰ and media owners' more conservative ones¹⁰¹ is said to have contributed in the past to maintaining a certain amount of variety in the exchange of ideas, which feeds political debate. The weakening of the public service tradition in the media, combined with market deregulation and the resulting concentration of the news media has destroyed this equilibrium and caused the quality and diversity of journalistic treatment of politics to deteriorate.¹⁰² The intensity of this debate recently reflects concerns about the contribution of the media to the quality of democratic life, to which we will return in our conclusion.

Are the Media Guilty?

Having outlined the accusations and the attenuating circumstances, it is now time to examine the evidence presented by contemporary political journalism's detractors to determine whether it is truly incriminating. But first, we will make three observations. The first is that the media generally, and political journalism specifically, will be deemed innocent as long as their guilt is not proven beyond a reasonable doubt. The burden of proof is thus on the side of the media's detractors (or accusers). This idea is clearly expressed by Pippa Norris: "It is incumbent on proponents of the media malaise thesis," she writes, "...to demonstrate media influence at the societal level, if they can."¹⁰³

The second observation has to do with the identity of the accused. Who is responsible for the increasing cynicism, television alone, or all the

media? Does responsibility fall on a particular type of program? In other words, is this cynicism occasioned by exposure to political reporting in general, televised political news in particular, or entertainment programs? There again, is it the combination of a medium and a genre (televised news) that produces voter disenchantment?

The third observation deals with the logic of the evidence. Robinson's pioneering work¹⁰⁴ that introduced the "media-malaise" hypothesis and the work of his successors¹⁰⁵ rests on the type of proof that Patterson summarizes thus: "Unlike the situation of the 60s, increased news exposure is now positively correlated with a heightened mistrust of government."¹⁰⁶ The reasoning behind this evidence is clear. Because contemporary political journalism began adopting the character for which it is blamed in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, it is from that point in time that we should begin to observe a definite link between exposure to media coverage of politics and an increase in cynicism in the established democracies. Is this in fact the case?

Is The Evidence Convincing?

The evidence supporting the charges against the media has two characteristics that lessen its impact. The first is that it is circumstantial, based more on the coincidence between the decreasing confidence in political institutions and changes in journalistic practices than on the demonstration of a direct link between media exposure and the manifestation of a higher level of cynicism.¹⁰⁷ The second is that the evidence is rather old, and for a decade it has been severely shaken by a strong revisionist trend principally led by Pippa Norris.¹⁰⁸

The media's detractors have pointed the finger at one vehicle, television, and one genre, political journalism. Moreover, as early as the beginning of

the 1990s, Christina Holtz-Bacha showed that reading newspapers and exposure to television news was connected not positively but quite negatively to a composite indicator of political alienation. Noting that the reverse was true for entertainment media, she thus concluded that: “No connection was found between political malaise and the contents of political programming, which leads to the conclusion that the videomalaise thesis is unwarranted. Instead, political alienation and low participation are related to the use made of entertainment content in both television and press.”¹⁰⁹

The studies published in the following decade have, overall, confirmed Holtz-Bacha’s conclusions. Bowen, Stamm and Clark concluded from their study based on a sample of voters in Seattle that: “Robinson’s videomalaise theory is subject to a number of contingencies that limit its generality, including the probability that newspaper reliance may actually contribute to reduce political malaise,”¹¹⁰ while Holmberg concluded from his reading of works on the Swedish case that “commercialized media is to blame.”¹¹¹

These kinds of conclusions overlap with Newton’s, based on data from the 1996 British Social Attitudes Survey.¹¹² In this study, Newton examines the link between different types of media content and various indicators measuring information about voters: their interest in politics, their degree of cynicism, their confidence in political actors and institutions and their satisfaction with the functioning of democracy. His analyses show that reading newspapers (other than the tabloids) and watching television news have a positive effect on most of these indicators, while exposure to more entertainment-oriented programming (general television and tabloid), lowers them, albeit less markedly. These results lead Newton to conclude that the media malaise hypothesis “finds little to no support” and that “it seems to be the content of the media, rather than its form which is important.”¹¹³

Other studies contribute to exonerating the

media. In Canada, Nadeau et al., for example, show that confidence in various political institutions (federal and provincial governments, courts, police, army, etc.) is not systematically linked to six different measures of media exposure.¹¹⁴ This is similar to what Moy, Pfau and Kahlor conclude from their study based on 1996 American National Election Study data, that confidence in the presidency, Congress, the courts and the police is not linked to various measures of media exposure (including non-traditional media and phone-in broadcasts).¹¹⁵

The best documented rebuttal of the video malaise hypothesis comes from Pippa Norris, who shows in a series of studies based on American and European data that reading newspapers and watching the television news are positively linked to indicators measuring political interest, information and participation.¹¹⁶ What is more, Norris has also shown that this positive link between media exposure and political support has, contrary to what Patterson claims, remained essentially the same since the beginning of the 1970s. To Norris this seems to demonstrate that political journalism has not changed as much as has been claimed, because exposure to media coverage of politics seems to have the same positive effect on confidence in political actors and institutions now that it did in the past.

What would be the decision of a jury that had to convict or acquit the media of feeding cynicism in most of the established democracies? There would hardly be any doubt about the verdict. Based on the evidence presented and its inherent logic, the jury would acquit the media, undoubtedly after expressing its surprise at the harshness of the accusations, the baselessness of the evidence and its skepticism at the significance of the results regarding entertainment programming and media. (Why would political cynicism be associated with these kinds of coverage and not the television news, which should represent the most accomplished form of journalism today?)

Is this the end of the story? No, because several questions remain unanswered. The first has to do with the evidence itself. Does it really let us get to the bottom of the question? If not, what evidence would allow us to dispose of the issue in a more satisfactory manner? Moreover, isn't this type of evidence too limited? Is the fact that there is no statistical association between media exposure and political cynicism enough to acquit political journalism? In other words, can one deduce from the statistical evidence presented by Pippa Norris that citizens in general are satisfied with the media and view their contribution to democratic life positively? Nothing could be less certain.

What if the Problem Lies Elsewhere?

The first factor that should be entered onto the record in the event of the trial being reopened is the ambiguity of the evidence of a positive link between media exposure and political support. The caution on the part of even those most skeptical of the media malaise hypothesis is noteworthy. Newton, for example, concludes in his article that "we should be cautious about making cause and effect statements. This article has talked in terms of associations...because it is exceedingly difficult to untangle cause and effect relationships in mass media research."¹¹⁷ Norris expresses the same view when she concludes prudently: "Why should we find a positive link between civic engagement and attention to the news media?" she asks. "There are...possible answers, which cannot be resolved here."¹¹⁸

The major difficulty in interpreting the statistical link between media exposure and political commitment is the problem of selection, that is, how inclined are those voters who are most inter-

ested and most confident in political, media or other institutions to be more exposed to political news.¹¹⁹ This factor increases both the difficulty of observing a positive association between media exposure and cynicism (the media malaise hypothesis) and the ambiguity of works that arrive at the opposite result. Undoubtedly, this is why Newton hesitates to conclude that watching television stimulates political commitment,¹²⁰ and Pippa Norris merely presents her hypothesis of a virtuous circle between media exposure and civic commitment as being plausible but not proven.¹²¹

This caution, this reluctance to draw definitive conclusions of an association between indicators of media exposure and political commitment, also recalls Zukin's conclusion in his exhaustive study of the issue some twenty years ago. "The question of whether the mass media contributed to the growth of political malaise," he wrote, "...probably will never be satisfactorily answered."¹²²

One day a more sophisticated methodology will allow us to resolve the issue clearly.¹²³ For now, "media malaise" supporters appear to have been defeated on their own ground, proving incapable of demonstrating a positive link between media exposure and cynicism. In addition, the fact that their opponents have achieved a modest victory and hesitate to conclude that being a media consumer increases support for political actors and institutions is a good indication that this debate, for the time being at least, does not lend itself well to definitive conclusions. Some might even be tempted to conclude that "media malaise" is still a good cause that has not been well defended, while others, in view of the harshness of the attacks on the media and the eloquence of some of its detractors, would perhaps be inclined to think exactly the opposite.

The uncertainty of conclusions on the "media malaise" issue is an argument in favour of broadening a debate that has until now opposed those who think that the media exert a negative influ-

ence on political support and those who reject this hypothesis. Some recent observers have proposed that the issue be recast from the wider perspective of the decline in confidence not only in government institutions but also in almost all institutions, including the media.¹²⁴

Confidence in the media and government institutions appears both to be weak and to have dropped.¹²⁵ Gallup polls show, for example, that only 21 percent of Canadians believe that values like honesty and integrity are high among journalists (14 percent have the same opinion of members of Parliament).¹²⁶ In addition, a study by Nadeau et al. shows that only 36 percent of Canadians have confidence in the media, an even lower proportion than that recorded for the federal and provincial governments (44 and 41 percent, respectively), and barely higher than the confidence expressed in unions, which brings up the rear at 29 percent.¹²⁷

Among those who have pondered the common woes of the media and governments are Bennett et al.¹²⁸ Noting the existence of a very strong positive association between confidence in media and government institutions and the disappearance of all links between media exposure and government support when the variable measuring confidence in the media is included in the analysis, these authors conclude, “the traditional video-malaise notion needs to be revised. Jaundiced views of government and the media co-vary, raising the possibility that the public views both government and the media in the same vein.”¹²⁹

The work of Bennett’s group reframes the media malaise debate pertinently by clearly asking whether the simultaneous decline in confidence in the media and political institutions is a result of a decrease in support for institutions in general or whether it can be attributed to a dynamic that is specific to the relationship between journalists and politicians, a sort of vicious circle whereby the actors mutually rein-

force the disrepute to which they have been subject. These questions remain unanswered: “Perceptions of the media and the government may rise and fall together. This may reflect a broader trend: that support for institutions in general has changed...but it might also represent the mutual destruction of government officials and the media.”¹³⁰ To the ambiguity of the link between media exposure and confidence in political institutions, we therefore add that of the association between confidence in media and political institutions, as such.

One way to dispel this ambiguity is to examine media confidence in more detail. We have already noted that this confidence is rather weak and on the decline. The question is, why? In other words, are there data that would allow us to confirm, following Cappella and Jamieson, that “the public now tends to see the media as part of the problem, not part of the solution.”¹³¹

There are many parts to the phenomenon of media confidence. Two of them appear to be decisive: equity and relevance. Studies of the perception of equity in television coverage of politics (the partisan press is a separate case) suggest that while the majority of voters in established democracies do not think television news is systematically biased against certain parties or political currents, a substantial minority think that it is.¹³²

To this first source of discontent for some, we would add another, more important one, the lack of relevance. The lack of relevance of political news appears to be a fundamental aspect of media malaise. This malaise is manifested in two major complaints by voters. They believe that the media wield too much influence, in other words, that they take up (and give themselves) a disproportionate amount of airtime in news presentations. The data of Nadeau et al. are particularly explicit on this topic.¹³³ They show, first of all, the gap between perceived and desired media influence: one out of every two Canadians thinks that the

media have too much influence in society, but only one out of twenty-five are satisfied with things as they are. They then show, and this is important, that this gap between the media's perceived and desired influence is positively linked to elector cynicism.

Electors do not reproach the media only for adopting too large a role. They reproach them for speaking to them about issues that do not interest them. On this point the collective that produced *Crosstalk* are eloquent. They write: "Journalists...might want to rethink the horse-race and strategy emphasis, not because of the scolding of political scientists, or even because of public criticism of the media's preoccupation with scandal and trivia. Our focus group reveals that horse-race journalism is neither useful nor interesting for the public."¹³⁴

This is similar to the conclusion of Cappella and Jamieson, who explicitly mention this gap between the media's supply and the citizens' demand:

The data from our studies indicate that people have strong opinions about media practices, believing that they choose stories that are more strategic than substantive and, once chosen, tend to slant the stories toward more strategic and sensational frames. The same people who hold these beliefs implicitly do not themselves select stories on the basis of more strategic headlines. To the contrary, their choices seem dictated more by topic than frame...Preferred news events included those that involved the news media least — debates, lengthy interviews, and unedited speeches.¹³⁵

The weakness of the evidence of the harshest media detractors suggests that contemporary political journalism does not deserve the opprobrium to which it is subjected in some circles. However, the gap between what the media offer and citizens' expectations obviously creates a malaise. These expectations of the media are, however, qualified. Citizens' desire to see the media

wield less influence goes in hand with a wish to see them play an even more active role as government watch dogs and protectors of citizens' rights against abuses of power.¹³⁶

There is a new type of political reporting that is devoting itself to exactly this task: public journalism, or civic journalism. Defenders of public journalism are pushing reflection on the links between political journalism and the quality of democratic life even further.¹³⁷ This journalistic practice places citizens' needs at the centre of the political coverage strategy generally and the electoral framework in particular.

From this angle, electoral news must principally focus on citizens' questions about issues they consider to be priorities and on party positions concerning these precise issues. The reporting in public journalism must cover campaigns by uncovering ordinary citizens' experiences, the content of programs, local realities and election issues. Politicians get to speak in order to respond specifically to these needs. The preferred interlocutor for journalism is no longer the political actor but the citizen.¹³⁸ In contrast with the traditional model, media campaign coverage is no longer at the service of political organizations, but geared to listening to electors. In this context, news that deals with events of the campaign trail and the electoral strategies of political organizations becomes secondary.

The objective of this somewhat idealistic approach to political reporting, which originates in the United States and has been practised there since the beginning of the 1990s, is to stimulate political participation and deliberation by citizens as they are confronted with the broad issues that affect their communities.¹³⁹ The proponents of public journalism are attempting to present a new conception of the media's audience. They reject the commercial vision that presumes their audience consists of consumers, victims or passive spectators.¹⁴⁰ Instead they consider media coverage

of politics to be addressing communities of involved citizens who must be consulted, sensitized, informed and stimulated.

In this journalistic context, which seems to be a reaction to the media's loss of legitimacy in the public eye¹⁴¹ and to critics who take aim at the harmful effects of traditional campaign journalism oriented toward partisan strategies and competition between candidates,¹⁴² the media present themselves as social actors, vehicles of change in the markets they serve. They describe their explicit mission as being one of forging solidarity, out-reach and pedagogy.¹⁴³ No longer are they just spectators and reporters of political or electoral events. In collaboration with citizens, practitioners of public journalism set priorities and design their coverage in order to offer their audience complete solutions to issues that concern them. The media thus serve as places for social actors to meet, deliberate and debate.¹⁴⁴

Since 1990, more than 300 American media organizations have launched civic journalism initiatives of one type or another. Some of these experiments have produced worthwhile results for the media, politicians and the electorate. In 1996, the Poynter Institute for Media Studies conducted a study during the American presidential election in 20 communities where the local media (newspapers, radio and television) adopted various public journalism models in their coverage of the final seven weeks of the campaign. In the 10 markets where electoral coverage was principally of the civic type, citizens' knowledge of general politics, candidates' positions and electoral issues had increased more than in the other 10 regions where the public journalism approach was much less pronounced in the media coverage.¹⁴⁵

Public journalism thus attempts to respond to citizens' demands and needs with respect to political news. But there is a paradox. On the one hand, citizens claim to be dissatisfied with what the media offers. They would like to be able to get

more analysis, debates and in-depth interviews in which journalists are more discrete. On the other hand, this call for a return to rigour and substance in the practice of political journalism seems puzzling when compared with citizens' real news consumption habits. The viewership for programs that offer news that is fuller and less commented upon by journalists is low. This is a considerable stumbling block with which defenders of public journalism must contend.

Zussman, who paints a picture of Canadians' declining confidence in their public institutions and politicians says that this contradiction can be explained by intellectual laziness, a rational ignorance displayed by the public toward information news programs.¹⁴⁶ Political news consumption habits seem to be controlled by the law of the least effort. This rational behaviour spurs citizens to consume (when they take the trouble to do so) political news that is briefer and more entertaining rather than serious and in-depth. Zussman argues that "what sells newspapers and attracts viewers are stories that portray conflict and controversy, and journalists are often rewarded based on these criteria. This approach is driven, in large measure, by what Walter Lippman called the public preference for the curiously trivial against the dull important."¹⁴⁷

This situation is evident in the public disaffection experienced by the large Western public television networks (CBC-SRC, France2, PBS, among others) that are attempting to preserve a public service tradition by producing political programs with more rigorous and in-depth content. These broadcasters are losing large portions of their viewership to private networks that offer brief reports centred on conflict, leaders' images or political anecdotes whose objective is to keep viewers' attention by entertaining them.¹⁴⁸

This gradual leakage in their audiences is a concern for public television services, which have to derive larger and larger proportions of their rev-

enue from advertising sales.¹⁴⁹ In Canada the estimates vary, but available data indicate that between 40 and 50 percent of the operating budgets of the two Canadian public television networks comes from this source of financing.¹⁵⁰ This situation is prompting public networks to review their mandates by offering more commercial programs and stories¹⁵¹ in order to increase their audience ratings, audience ratings that are driven by the tastes of a public that is apathetic and indifferent to politics and prefers to be entertained when they are watching the news.¹⁵² The competition between public and private broadcasters is increasing to meet citizens' demands. This situation is leading to increasing uniformity in the content of reporting and a decline in the quality of political reporting.¹⁵³ This situation can only accentuate the increasing cynicism toward political actors. The mismatch between citizens' stated expectations vis-à-vis the news and their real news consumption habits is striking.

It is therefore appropriate, in the light of this observation, to conclude our article by briefly examining solutions that would allow the media to respond to citizens' wishes with respect to news and avoid the perverse effects of acceleration in the commercialization of televised political journalism.

What Should be Done?

Some preliminary remarks are necessary before making recommendations on journalistic practices. First, we should note that even the most hardened critics of contemporary political journalism recognize the essential role the media plays in democracies, and they do not question the need for journalists to adopt a critical approach toward political power. On the contrary, this behaviour is valued and its

opposite excess, complacency, is denounced just as vigorously.¹⁵⁴

We should also point out that contemporary political journalism does not lack champions. Some think, for example, that the criticisms levelled at journalists are largely exaggerated, if not baseless.¹⁵⁵ Others maintain that the conditions under which journalism is practised are to blame, and that it is contradictory to want news that is both instantaneous and in-depth. Others, like Zaller, think it is to be expected that journalists and the media look after their own interests first and foremost, and that the market for news includes sufficient control and self-regulation mechanisms to adequately respond to citizens' needs.¹⁵⁶

This is the perspective of Page, who believes that the media, even when functioning imperfectly, play their role adequately in the process of deliberation leading to the adoption of public policy.¹⁵⁷ Finally, others think that the media malaise debate is a false one, whether because the causes of the decline in government support lie elsewhere,¹⁵⁸ because the media malaise hypothesis has not been proven,¹⁵⁹ or because, contrary to the claims of champions of this school of thought, the dynamic between media exposure and political attitudes is not a vicious circle that leads to cynicism, but a virtuous circle that leads to participation or engagement.¹⁶⁰

It is with these qualifications and nuances in mind that we will now examine some remedies to the ills of political journalism. In so doing, we will also keep in mind that journalistic practices have structural roots (technological and economic) and they do not derive exclusively, or even primarily, from the active encouragement of practitioners of the trade. The leeway journalists possess is rather circumscribed, as they frequently have few resources and are forced to deal with a restrictive editorial orientation and pronounced dependence on their sources. That said, they do have

some freedom to manoeuvre, and in this respect we share Entman's view that some of the current problems in the media coverage of politics stem from the resistance of journalists themselves to questioning some of their practices, a situation that he calls "pressure without reform."¹⁶¹ Our perspective, in the final analysis, borrows less from those who accuse the media of giving rise to political cynicism than from the body of works that observes a growing gap between the media coverage ideal as represented by so-called public service television and the contemporary forms of journalistic treatment of politics, a gap Robert Entman describes eloquently in his blunt, but not unfounded statement that "democracy has gained little from the rise of media power."¹⁶²

In a certain sense, these remedies are self-evident. If the media wish to contribute more positively to democratic life, they will have to continue to be just as vigilant while becoming less omnipresent. The widespread perceptions of excessive media influence, Hallin's work on the "shrinking soundbite," the analyses of Entman, Jamieson, Pratte, Taras, Bennett, Patterson, Sabato, Cook and several others on the excessive power of the journalistic profession, and the complete absence of media accountability presents a whole array of data and perspectives that militate strongly in favour of recasting political reporting in favour of forms that would give a greater prominence to the facts, issues and politicians' speeches than to the journalistic interpretation of the same data. We believe with Patterson that "The public interest would be better served if journalists recognized the limitations of their craft."¹⁶³ The objective of this strategic withdrawal by the media is better communication between the elected and the electorate. In this we subscribe to Cook's argument that "in crafting public policy and practice, we should find ways for political actors to have more opportunities to reach each other and the public directly, without having to be channeled by the news."¹⁶⁴

By re-establishing better contact between elected and elector, the media will fulfill their mission and serve democracy better. They would play a less visible but more useful role by allowing citizens to listen to their elected politicians in a more direct and sustained manner, offering them more detailed information on the issues and dispensing with the continual references to the actors' motives and strategies, the usual interpretive framework for political events.

The predominance of this interpretive framework can be attributed to the homogeneity of journalistic practices. A product as uniform as political news interpreted through the prism of partisan motivation clearly does not offer the diversity and wealth of analytical angles that citizens want and that are desirable in a democracy. On the contrary, it contributes to a devaluation of the political process and the impoverishment of the information disseminated. Better access to the resources necessary to disseminate ideas would allow the conditions of press freedom to be met and possibly the monopoly of this reductionist framework for interpreting political events to be broken.

This objective could be partly achieved if public journalism practices become more widespread within the Canadian media. The emphasis in this journalistic approach on voters' preoccupations and a thorough, detailed contextualization of social issues might help break the stranglehold of the dominant interpretation of politics, essentially based on a reading of the strategic and partisan motivations of political actors. Colette Brin's work, which shows that journalists at Radio-Canada and RDI were partly inspired by this professional approach in their coverage of recent election campaigns,¹⁶⁵ leads us to believe that positive changes might already be taking place in this area.

Nevertheless, the penetration of public journalism remains limited. Traditional electoral coverage that focuses on surveys and on party leaders' campaign trail still predominates. This could be the

result of reticence on the part of some journalists to call their professional routines into question¹⁶⁶ and, perhaps even more fundamentally, resistance on the part of media companies to investing the resources necessary to champion this type of journalistic project.¹⁶⁷ It should, however, be noted that the unquestioning adoption of the concepts of public journalism could lead to other excesses. It would be easy for journalists who put effort into the mission of defending citizens' interests to fall into the stardom trap and give in to the temptation to editorialize. The objective of diversifying media coverage of politics, taking inspiration from the public journalism stream, must not be achieved at the expense of re-establishing better contact between the elected and the voters.

The diversity of media coverage of politics that might emerge out of more widespread adoption of civic journalism practices would, in our opinion, better serve the interests of Canadians in general and possibly those of the youngest citizens, who are turning away from politics at a far greater rate than are their elders.¹⁶⁸ This diversification is an essential component of press freedom which, as Cook rightly reminds us, consists not only of guaranteeing the freedom of expression of those who have resources, but also of allowing the opinions of the less well-off to be disseminated.¹⁶⁹

From this point of view the recent concentration of Canadian media companies is disturbing, particularly because the hopes that were placed in the spread of new vehicles of information (such as the Internet) to enrich public debate have not really materialized.¹⁷⁰ Solutions to the problem of excessive press concentration are always tricky and often difficult to put into practice.¹⁷¹ That being said, the current state of tension between the imperative of press freedom and the reality of press concentration leads us to think that the interests of Canadian democracy would be well served by a wide debate over the issue of press ownership concentration in Canada.

The ultimate objective of reflecting on the conditions under which political journalism is practised is to end up with a general balance sheet of the quality of media coverage of politics. Having done this, we conclude that the media must demonstrate more seriousness, rigour and originality if they wish to serve citizens better. This conclusion, which is neither a condemnation of the media in principle nor a suggestion that their practices be completely disrupted, highlights the importance of recent work by Gunther and Mughan.¹⁷² These authors examined journalistic practices in 10 countries and concluded that citizens' needs and the requirements of democracy were better served in countries where the concept of journalism as a public service has strong roots. Their observations seem to show that the active involvement of the public sector, far from being an impediment to the free circulation of diversified and high quality news, greatly encourages the production and dissemination of news in established democracies.

We share this viewpoint, but unfortunately also agree with the analysis of these authors that "even countries with strong public-service broadcasting traditions are showing signs of following the trajectory of American television's 'infotainment' style of political coverage."¹⁷³ The analyses of Taras and of Pratte, and the conclusions of the report of the Mandate Review Committee CBC, NFB, Telefilm, chaired by Pierre Juneau in 1996, confirm that this situation also prevails in Canada.

The *CBC*, the Canadian public broadcaster, has been confronted with two major business transformations that have stimulated its shift toward a more commercial orientation. First, the environment in the communications industry has changed profoundly over the past 10 years.¹⁷⁴ Cable TV services have accelerated their penetration of the Canadian market, television networks and specialized services have multiplied and there have been important mergers of private broadcasting

and communications companies. This situation has caused considerable fragmentation of audiences in Canada, increased competition in the audience ratings battle and diluted news content in a flood of entertainment programs.

The decrease in federal government funding to the *CBC* over the past 15 years has contributed to the precarious situation of public television. The Crown corporation's parliamentary credits have been reduced by 36 percent since the mid-1980s. Canada holds the unenviable record of being the country that saw the largest decrease in funding to public broadcasting of all OECD member states between 1995 and 1997 (-16 percent).¹⁷⁵ With a global operating budget of one billion dollars, which is very modest compared with other large Western public broadcasting corporations,¹⁷⁶ the *CBC* has had to make up its shortfall by increasing advertising revenues. This objective has been achieved, according to the Juneau report, at the price of a commercial shift that has notably affected the nature of its programming.¹⁷⁷

This commercial reorientation by *Canada's public broadcaster* is preventing it from completely fulfilling its mandate.¹⁷⁸ In its production of entertainment and information broadcasting, Canadian public television is distinguishing itself less and less from the other networks. Its broad mandate, as stated in the 1991 *Broadcasting Act*, is to present unique Canadian programming and produce broadcasts that inform, enlighten and entertain the Canadian people.¹⁷⁹ At this point in time, the achievement of these objectives is increasingly compromised. Hopefully this situation will change and Canada will, in the management of its media environment, revive the strong public service tradition that has for so long been one of its distinctive features.

Only public television that is free from political pressure and undue business constraints can truly hope to fulfill an informational and pedagogical mandate. Recent surveys show a majority

of Canadian citizens recognize that the *CBC*, in spite of its commercial reorientation, still performs this task better than its private sector competitors. The news and public affairs broadcasts produced by the corporation are perceived as being more credible, fairer and as dealing with more diverse issues than those aired by its private or American competitors.¹⁸⁰ The conditions to allow this tradition of excellence to persist and become stronger have to be established as soon as possible.

High-quality public television is not only important for its regular audience, but for all viewers. Several studies have shown that the *CBC* is a reference for the private television networks in their treatment of political information.¹⁸¹ The public network's influence beyond its audience means that it has the characteristics of a public good and gives particular relevance to David Taras' pointed remark that "It may be a strange paradox of the Canadian condition that the people want to know that the public broadcaster is there, and they support its values even if they don't regularly watch or listen to the *CBC* themselves."¹⁸²

Echoing the recommendations of the Juneau report, which proposes that the *CBC* be distinctive, have no advertising and be rooted in the regions, we favour a sizeable reinvestment of public funds in Canadian public television, and we would like to see a more effective method of financing (based on government credits or tax revenues) that is adequate, stable and free from political pressure. Various formulae are possible, taking the examples of public television broadcasters in other countries. One thing is for sure: the status quo is unacceptable, and the *CBC* current method of financing is probably one of the most inadequate conceivable for a high-quality public television network in an advanced industrial democracy.

There is obviously a price to be paid for implementing the suggestions we have proposed. We

believe, however, that adequate public television funding is a very profitable civic investment and Canadian society would be well advised to provide its public broadcaster the necessary means to completely fulfill its mandate. If this were done, it would be possible to ensure the survival of a public news service that is free of all commercial and political imperatives and can truly offer profound and rigorous coverage of politics. In comparison with the uniform policies of its private competitors, the uniqueness of the *CBC* would emerge in no uncertain terms. Its broadcasts would thus respond more to citizens' news needs and expectations. This accentuated return to the tradition of public service in news reporting would well serve the requirements of democracy in Canada

Notes

- 1 Fletcher and Everett (1991, pp. 223-226); Wilson (1992, p. 500); Farrell (1996, p. 170).
- 2 Iyengar and Reeves (1997).
- 3 Cook (1998, p. 164).
- 4 Ansolabehere et al. (1993); Zaller (1999).
- 5 Nevitte (1996); Zussman (1997); Norris (1999); Pharr and Putnam (2000).
- 6 Patterson (1993); Mendelsohn (1993); Taras (1999); Gunther and Mughan (2000).
- 7 Holmberg (1999, p. 119).
- 8 Patterson (1996, p. 19).
- 9 Cook (1998, p. 189).
- 10 Canada (1981, p. 36).
- 11 Hackett and Zhao (1998, p. 1).
- 12 Entman (1989, p. 3).
- 13 Lang and Lang (1959); Robinson (1976).
- 14 Authors whose perspectives differed from those of Robinson and his successors also pointed the finger at television. The advent of television ushered in, according to Wattenberg (1991) and Spencer and Bolan (1991), a decline in parties, by allowing political leaders to communicate directly with electors (but see Bartels 2000, who challenges this position). In a perspective that is closer to the one that interests us in this article, Putnam (1995a,b; 2000) claims that the penetration of television contributed decisively to eroding interpersonal links and confidence, erosion that brought with it a decrease in confidence in government institutions. (For a criticism of Putnam's thesis, see Schudson 1995 and Norris 1996.)
- 15 Fletcher and Everett (1991, p. 223); Ansolabehere et al. (1993, p. 45); Monière (1999, p. 9).
- 16 Newton (1999, p. 579).
- 17 Iyengar (1991); Hart (1999); Taras (1999, p. 34).
- 18 Holtz-Bacha (1990).
- 19 Moy and Pfau (2000); Price and Zaller (1996).
- 20 Newton (1999, p. 579).
- 21 Fallows (1996); Taras (1999); Pratte (2000); Dobrzynska (2002).
- 22 Patterson (1993, 1997); Sabato (1993); Taras (1999).
- 23 Patterson (1997, p. 451).
- 24 Sabato (1992, p. 128).
- 25 Van der Eijk's study of the impact of the transformation of the Dutch journalistic landscape on relations between the media and the party system shows an evolution similar to journalistic practices in that country: "The shift from the *zeil* identification to professional independence had serious consequences for political parties and other groups that had grown accustomed to easy access to, and uncritical coverage from, related, and hence friendly, media organizations. In the late 60s and early 70s, the major parties representing the various *zeilen* in Dutch society were suddenly confronted with what they often took to be journalistic hostility" (2000, p. 320).
- 26 Sabato (1992, p. 128).
- 27 Fletcher and Everett (1991); Wilson (1992); Monière (1999).
- 28 Quebec has not escaped this trend, according to renowned journalist and researcher Armande Saint-Jean (1996, p. 21). According to her analysis, Quebec journalism "apart from a few cultural particularities...follows the same patterns and trends as in the rest of Canada and, for that matter, North America."
- 29 In the French version of the current article, the title, "Les oiseaux de malheur," is borrowed from the title of a book by André Pratte, editorial page editor of the Montreal newspaper *La Presse*.
- 30 Patterson (1996, p. 17).
- 31 Patterson (1996); Zussman (1997).
- 32 See among others Sabato (1992, pp. 138-140); McKee (1992); Mendelsohn and Nadeau (1999); Pratte (2000, pp. 90-91). The descriptions of journalistic behaviour toward politicians — "feeding frenzy" by Sabato (1992) and "character assassination" by McKee (1992) — are indicative of the vicious attitude toward politicians attributed to the media.
- 33 Harrington (1989); Nadeau et al. (1999).
- 34 Hibbing and Theiss-Morse add an interesting perspective to the rise in negative coverage of political institutions by linking it, in part, to a decline in the partisan press. "We have little quarrel," they write, "with the contention that media coverage of Congress has become more hostile over the course of the last few decades. To be sure, negative coverage of Congress is hardly new, although in the days of the partisan press it may have been easier to put the criticism in perspective. Today...Congress is short on defenders in the media" (1998, p. 482).
- 35 Westerstahl and Johansson (1986); Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (1995); Clarke et al. (1984); Qualter and MacKirdy (1964); Soderlund et al. (1984); Frizzell and Pammatt (1994); Mendelsohn and Nadeau (1999).
- 36 Pratte (2000, p. 76).
- 37 Entman (1989, p. 8).
- 38 Hallin (1992) used the expression "shrinking soundbite" to describe the decrease in the duration of excerpts of presidential candidates' speeches from 42 seconds in 1968 to less than 10 seconds during the 1990s. Studies by the Center for Media and Public Affairs (1994) have shown that at the beginning of the 1990s journalists' speaking time in a story on a presidential candidate was five times greater than that of the candidate.
- 39 Sabato (1993, p. 2); see also Patterson (1997).
- 40 Taras (1999, pp. 223-224).
- 41 Monière (1999, p. 109).
- 42 Monière's analysis (1999, p. 109) shows that face-to-face interviews account for 19 percent, 45 percent, 71.9 percent and 79.5 percent of the types of interventions of political speakers on Radio-Canada, France2, RTBF (Belgium) and TSR (Switzerland), respectively. Inversely, excerpts from press conferences account for 32.8 percent of interventions by political actors in the reports of Radio-Canada, but for 10 percent, 9 percent and 7.3 percent of the inter-

- ventions presented in news programs on France2, RTBF and TSR.
- 43 Just et al. (1996); Patterson (1993, p. 36).
- 44 In Canada, Nadeau et al. (2002c) present data for the 2000 electoral campaign showing that nearly three-quarters of stories broadcast dealt with various aspects of the electoral race rather than with the issues. Similar proportions emerged in the 1997 Canadian election and in other electoral studies in the United States and Great Britain (see West 1997; Norris et al. 1999). This preoccupation with polls and the "race to victory" ("horse-race journalism") was clearly expressed by Wagenberg and his collaborators (1988, p. 119), who conclude from this development that it "lend[s] credence to the fears of those who feel that essential democratic goals of the electoral process are being undermined."
- 45 Patterson (1997); Just et al. (1996); Sabato (1992, 1993).
- 46 Two Canadian studies appear to corroborate this argument. Nadeau et al. have shown that barely one in five Canadians believed at the time of the 1997 election, as the facts stated, that unemployment had decreased over the course of Jean Chétien's mandate and that an overwhelming majority of them thought, erroneously, that the lot of the First Nations was as enviable, if not better, than that of other Canadians or that crime had been on the rise over the course of the past few years (Nadeau et al. 2000, 2002a).
- 47 Cook (1998).
- 48 Rothman and Lichter (1987, p. 383).
- 49 Patterson (1997, p. 452); see also Taras (1999, p. 41) and Nadeau et al. (2002b).
- 50 Entman (1989, p. 8).
- 51 Carpini and Keeter (1996).
- 52 Jamieson (1992, p. 11); McManus (1994); Taras (1999); Kuklinski et al. (2000). Kuklinski et al. also emphasize the fact that politicians are not necessarily interested in disseminating complete and high-quality information on the issues either. Consequently, neither of these actors offers citizens "a coherent and balanced package of information" (Kuklinski et al. 2000, p. 794).
- 53 Stimson (1991).
- 54 Maarek (1992, p. 142).
- 55 Nadeau et al. (1999, pp. 118-119); see also Van Raaij (1989, p. 484) and Andreassen (1987).
- 56 Zaller (1992, ch. 11); Dobrzynska (2002).
- 57 Ansolabehere et al. (1993, p. 65).
- 58 Gunther and Mughan (2000, pp. 25-26).
- 59 It is interesting to note that Page's model (1996) of the discussion surrounding the creation and implementation of public policy rests explicitly on the politicians-media-electors triangle.
- 60 Cappella and Jamieson (1997, p. 4).
- 61 Cappella and Jamieson (1997).
- 62 Patterson (1997).
- 63 Mendelsohn (1993, 1996).
- 64 Ansolabehere et al. (1993, pp. 54-55); Sabato (1992, pp. 131-132).
- 65 Sabato (1992, p. 132).
- 66 Zussman (1997).
- 67 Patterson (1996, p. 19).
- 68 Sabato (1992, p. 144).
- 69 Cappella and Jamieson (1997); Rothman (1996, p. 62).
- 70 An important nuance is the conceptual meaning of the notion of confidence. Several authors have stressed the fact that a prerequisite for an adequately functioning democracy is the critical vigilance of citizens toward government institutions, which entails a lot more skepticism than confidence (see Warren 1999). The accusation against the media is thus less that they maintain skepticism than that they feed cynicism, which is its exacerbated form (Patterson 1997; Cappella and Jamieson 1997).
- 71 Pratte (1997, p. 24).
- 72 Cited by Epstein (1973, pp. 4-5) and reproduced and translated by Cormier (1991, p. 50).
- 73 Gunther and Mughan (2000, pp. 20-21).
- 74 Dobrzynska (2002, pp. 86-88).
- 75 Bennett (1997); see also Charron (1994), Gingras (1999) and Dobrzynska (2002).
- 76 Sigal (1973); Charron (1994); Gingras (1999); Zaller (1999).
- 77 Blais and Crête (1982, p. 65).
- 78 Cormier (1991, p. 63).
- 79 Sigal (1973); Gans (1979); see also Tuchman (1978).
- 80 Gans (1979, p. 116).
- 81 Gandy (1982).
- 82 Zaller (1992, p. 315).
- 83 Carper (1997, p. 46).
- 84 Reeves (1997, p. 101); see also McManus (1994) and Dorman (1997) for similar interpretations.
- 85 Dobrzynska (2002, p. 93).
- 86 Pratte (2000, p. 49).
- 87 Taras (1999 p. 33).
- 88 Zaller (1999).
- 89 Zaller (1999, pp. 19-20).
- 90 Zaller (1999) explicitly showed the increase in the quality and quantity of means used by parties to win the battle for the agenda. According to several commentators, this trend is due to the decline of the partisan press. This phenomenon, the transformation of the links between the media and parties, illustrated in the case of the United States by Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (1995, 1998) and Zaller (2000), is also present in other democracies, as demonstrated by Taras for Canada (1990, p. 65) and Eijk for the Netherlands (2000).
- 91 Zaller (1999, p. 54).
- 92 Monière (1999); van der Eijk (2000).
- 93 Bennett (1997).

94 Taras (1999, p. 34); Pratte (2000); Zaller (1999).
 95 Weaver and Wilhoit (1996, p. 24).
 96 Zaller (1999, p. 51).
 97 Hackett and Zhao (1998); Gunther and Mughan (2000).
 98 Cooper (1994).
 99 Winter (1996).
 100 Rothman and Lichter (1987).
 101 Bagdikian (1994).
 102 Hackett and Zhao (1998); Gunther and Mughan (2000).
 103 Norris (2000b, pp. 252-253).
 104 Robinson (1976).
 105 Ranney (1983, pp. 75-79); Cappella and Jamieson (1997).
 106 Patterson (1996, p. 19).
 107 The most convincing demonstration of this viewpoint is *Why People Don't Trust Government?* by Nye et al. (1997), who examine several possible explanations for the erosion of confidence in the American government and conclude that the media malaise hypothesis is one of the most plausible. This conclusion has, however, been challenged by Norris (2000b, ch. 13).
 108 Norris (1999, 2000b).
 109 Holtz-Bacha (1990, p. 73).
 110 Bowen, Stamm and Clark (2000, p. 94).
 111 Holmberg (1999, p. 121).
 112 Newton (1999).
 113 Newton (1999, p. 577).
 114 Nadeau, Blais, Gidengil and Nevitte (2002b).
 115 Moy, Pfau and Kahlor (1999).
 116 Norris (1999, 2000b).
 117 Newton (1999, p. 598).
 118 Norris (2000a p. 9).
 119 Moy, Pfau and Kahlor (1999); Nadeau et al. (2000c).
 120 Newton (1999, p. 598).
 121 Pippa Norris's reticence to use an assertive causal language proliferates in her work *A Virtuous Circle* (for example, she says: "It is not possible for us...to resolve the direction of causality..." [p. 18] and: "The interpretation remains theoretical for we lack direct proof" [p. 309]). Moreover, one subsection of her work bears the revealing title "The Classic Chicken-and-Egg Issue of Causality." We should also point out that if Norris rejects the "media malaise" hypothesis, she does not conclude that the negative coverage of issues is not without consequences. On the contrary, she demonstrates a link between the generally negative coverage of the issue of the Euro and mounting Euroskepticism.
 122 Zukin (1981, p. 382).
 123 For example, several authors, including the current ones, favour the diachronic method (panel, rolling cross-section) to examine the issue of the media. On the other hand, one could question whether election campaigns, short as they are, are the best context in which to examine the long-term effect of the media on confidence in government institu-

tions (see Norris et al. 1999). The "cultivation analysis" approach (Signorielli et al. 1990), which states that the effect of the media is cumulative and long term, could undoubtedly inspire political observers in their research on the links between progressive change in the media environment (media and practices) and the secular decline in support for political actors and institutions.

Although rarely used, the experimental method represents another approach of analysis (see Cappella and Jamieson 1997 for the exception). The principle in this method is to present, to randomly selected groups, news sequences constructed according to descriptive and interpretive styles (Patterson 1997) or according to a strategic or issue-oriented interpretive framework (Cappella and Jamieson 1997). Works based on this method are, all in all, not very conclusive for now. The minimal benefit of this type of experiment is that it collects participants' opinions of the type of news presented.

Finally, in addition to a number of methodological problems raised here, we add that of measures of media exposure. The work of Bartels (1993), for example, raises important questions about the quality of media exposure indicators used in studies of the impact of the press and television.

124 Nevitte (1996); Nye et al. (1997, p. 1).

125 Lambeth (1998, p. 34).

126 The percentages for the other professions included in the survey are as follows:

	%
Pharmacists	68
Doctors	62
Police	53
Engineers	50
Academics	45
Clergy members	44
Accountants	37
Pollsters	28
Entrepreneurs	21
Lawyers	19
Real estate agents	15
Union leaders	15
Advertisers	14
Parliamentarians	14

Source: The Gallup Poll, Vol. 59, no. 25 (April 14, 1999).

127 See Nadeau et al. (2002b). In comparison, no less than 84 percent of respondents expressed confidence in the police, 70 percent in public schools, 60 percent in the courts, 57 percent in the armed forces and 53 percent in churches.

128 Bennett et al. (1999); see also Cook, Gronke and Rattliff (2000); Moy and Pfau (2000).

129 Bennett et al. (1999, p. 8).

130 Bennett et al. (1999, p. 17).

131 Cappella and Jamieson (1997, p. 227).

132 See among others Curtice (1998, p. 9) of the existence of this dissatisfied minority appears to be similar to what is

presented in the current of works that examines the “hostile media environment” (see Vallone et al. 1985; Perloff 1989; Gunther 1992) and claims that a good number of electors believe the media are hostile to their preferred political party.

- 133 Nadeau et al. (2002*b*); see also Cook, Gronke and Rattliff (2000) pertaining to this question.
- 134 Just et al. (1996, p. 240).
- 135 Cappella and Jamieson (1997, p. 227).
- 136 Cook et al. (2000, p. 17).
- 137 See among others Rosen (1999); Lambeth (1998); Rosen and Merritt (1994).
- 138 Brin (2000, p. 7).
- 139 Lambeth (1998, p. 17).
- 140 Rosen (1999).
- 141 Lambeth (1998, p. 34).
- 142 Brin (2000, pp. 7-8).
- 143 Lambeth (1998, p. 18).
- 144 Lambeth (1998, pp. 27-29).
- 145 Meyer et Potter (1996).
- 146 Zussman (1997); Pratte (2000, p. 232); Zaller (1999, pp. 14-20).
- 147 Zussman (1997, p. 250).
- 148 Monière and Fortier (2000, pp. 16-17); Dobrzynska (2002, p. 87); Taras (2000, p. 128).
- 149 Fraser (2000, p. 47).
- 150 Juneau et al. (1996, p. 37); Taras (1999, p. 129); Fraser (2000, p. 45).
- 151 Juneau et al. (1996).
- 152 Taras (1999, p. 128).
- 153 Juneau et al. (1996, pp. 72-75); Dobrzynska (2002, p. 87).
- 154 Sabato (1992); Pratte (2000).
- 155 Schudson (1995, pp. 16-33).
- 156 Zaller (1999).
- 157 Page (1996).
- 158 Bennett et al. (1999); Norris (2000*b*).
- 159 Newton (1999).
- 160 Norris (2000*b*).
- 161 Entman (1989, p. 8).
- 162 Entman (1989, p. 129).
- 163 Patterson (1997, p. 453).
- 164 Cook (1998, p. 190).
- 165 In her analysis of electoral coverage by Radio-Canada and RDI during the 1997 federal election and the 1998 Quebec provincial election, Colette Brin (2000: 2) noted that the public journalism movement made a noted entry into the Crown corporation’s television newscats. In 1997, management openly incorporated this approach into its coverage strategy. Although traditional electoral journalism, which emphasizes candidates tours, campaign events and partisan strategies had been applied in 52 percent of the stories broadcast by Radio-Canada and RDI, 26 percent of the news segments had been developed according to a public journalism angle. This proportion climbed to 32 percent during the 1998 Quebec election, when management did not openly ask that public journalism be practised (Brin 2000, p. 15). Despite all this, horse-race journalism was still dominant in the two campaigns, especially in Radio-Canada and in all newscats with large audiences.
- 166 Brin (2000, p. 21).
- 167 Lambeth (1998, p. 18).
- 168 Blais et al. (2002).
- 169 Cook (1998).
- 170 Margolis and Resnick (2000).
- 171 Entman (1989, p. 136).
- 172 Gunther and Mughan (2000).
- 173 Gunther and Mughan (2000, p. 431).
- 174 Juneau et al. (1996, p. 72).
- 175 OECD (1999, p. 124).
- 176 OECD (1999, p. 124); Taras (1999, p. 179); Fraser (2000).
- 177 Juneau et al. (1996, pp. 72-73).
- 178 Juneau et al. (1996, p. 95).
- 179 Taras (1999, p. 127).
- 180 Juneau et al. (1996, p. 75); Taras (1999, p. 182).
- 181 See among others Mendelsohn (1993) and Taras (1993).
- 182 Taras (1999, p. 182).

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