

EMBARGOED UNTIL JUNE 27TH, 2012

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Report: New research questions old assumptions about political news

Toronto, June 27th, 2012 – New research into television and newspaper media’s coverage of Canadian politics reveals that commonly held criticisms of the press may not be entirely true.

A new report entitled *Occupiers and Legislators: A Snapshot of Political Media Coverage* contrasted the coverage of two political stories from fall 2011: the federal government’s legislative agenda and the Occupy movement. Prepared by Samara, the report calls into question long-held beliefs about news media’s performance, and shows that, for this snapshot in time, the political coverage was not uniformly negative or focused on political games, as the accusation often goes. However, the investigation found that the news media may not offer Canadians enough information on Canadian politics.

“Canadians are often criticized for not knowing enough about politics,” says Alison Loat, Samara’s Co-Founder and Executive Director. “This study reveals that about one quarter of news stories were considered ‘very informative.’ People would have to watch an hour of news to get 15 minutes of information, indicating that learning about politics requires significant time and energy.”

The report specifically found:

- 1) The tone of political coverage is not uniformly negative; in fact, it fluctuates in response to events.
- 2) There were notable differences between the tone of coverage on television and newspapers. In these two stories, television tended to be more positive when covering government legislation and negative when covering the Occupy movement; whereas newspapers tended to be more neutral when covering Occupy and more negative when covering government legislation.
- 3) Between one third (for television) and one half (for newspapers) of all news stories are focussed on the issues, with the remainder focusing on political games and process.
- 4) With regards to these two stories, Samara found that media coverage lacked context and facts, with less than one third of stories about Occupy and one quarter of stories about government legislation considered “very informative.”

“Although this report covers a small snapshot in time, it highlights the concerns that many Canadians have about political news coverage in today’s fragmented media landscape,” says Michael MacMillan, Samara’s Co-founder and Chair. “Though this report would indicate that our public affairs journalism is doing a lot right, there’s still room for improvement. Since public affairs journalism is a fundamental link between government and citizens, we need to identify and break down barriers to its success.”

Samara, a charitable organization that works to improve political and civic engagement in Canada, prepared *Occupiers and Legislators* as part of a larger research project, Samara’s Democracy Index, a report on the overall health of Canada’s democracy (see below).

Samara’s research is designed to shine a light on areas of concern and ultimately focus attention on strengthening Canada’s democracy. If you would like to learn more, or let us know what you think about this report or the Index overall, please visit our website at www.samaracanada.com

About Samara

Samara is a charitable organization that works to improve political and civic engagement in Canada. Founded in 2009 by Michael MacMillan and Alison Loat, it is among the country’s leading organizations dedicated to reconnecting citizens to politics and public life.

Samara’s initial research project was the first-ever [exit interviews for former Members of Parliament](#). We are currently interviewing MPs who retired from political life before the May 2011 election.

More information on the report and how to get involved with Samara’s work is available at www.samaracanada.com.

You can also follow Samara on [Twitter](#) or [Google+](#), or join the [Facebook](#) group.

About the Samara Democracy Index

Occupiers and Legislators is a part of Samara’s ongoing research project, the Samara Democracy Index, which is an annual measurement of the health of Canada’s democracy and democratic engagement. The Index specifically looks at three components of democracy: political leadership, public engagement with politics and public affairs journalism. The results will be released in 2013 and annually thereafter.