

A snapshot on Canadian political journalism

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The Parliament of Canada, based in the country's capital Ottawa. A study from the organization Samara examined coverage of two political stories by Canadian media.

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The Canadian charity Samara has released research suggesting that coverage of Canadian politics by the country's media is fair, but adds that coverage is not as informing as it should.

Samara, a charity established to improve political and civic engagement throughout the country, examined two stories from the fall of 2011, the Occupy protests which started in New York and went through parts of Canada and pieces of the legislative agenda in Canada's parliament, including a removal of a gun registry and the removal of the monopoly of the Canadian Wheat Board. After a review of nearly 4,600 stories, Samara noted there were distinctions between how the stories were covered in the country's newspapers and television outlets.

Alison Loat, Samara's co-founder and executive director, told Uloop in a telephone interview from her office in Toronto that this was a great start to have a thorough look at the country's media. "Some studies are contained to election periods," Loat said. "We're interested in how citizens interact with politics every day. We're clear that its a snapshot and look at two stories over one period."

Loat emphasized however that the issues raised were not the same for every issue. "This is not all political news all the time," Loat said. But [the issues raised] are big. We hope they generate big questions to think about."

Loat says that journalism is going through significant changes. "Just like in the US, journalism is going through a fundamental change, from advertising to distribution and production," Loat said. "Any industry with many simultaneous changes is a hard one to be in, especially considering the traditional approach to cover news." Loat adds that journalism has a very important role in a democracy. "Journalism in a robust current affairs discourse is important," Loat said. "It's essential that the public is aware of the role of journalists. What's interesting for us is how that's changing."



In the study, Samara examined three aspects—the view that the news is too negative, was not as informative as it should, and also examined the horse race, which examines differences in politicians. Of the three aspects, two had been false, the research says.

Loat adds that interesting questions are raised within those perceptions despite the study's examination of solely two stories, and added that there are conversations going on across the country's newsrooms on how to make coverage better. "I know a lot of people who cover it and their often thinking of how they can do it better," Loat said. "It's a tough industry now and everyone is aware of the changes. We can have a more robust discussion."