

July 26th, 2005
Communication 431

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Money, Mandates and the Masses: How Ownership Influences Election Coverage

All over the place, from the popular culture to the propaganda system, there is constant pressure to make people feel that they are helpless, that the only role they can have is to ratify decisions and to consume.

Noam Chomsky

Framing an important debate surrounding the role of the individual in democratic societies, Chomsky addresses the lack of opportunity citizens have to participate in the governance of their world. As consumer culture infiltrates all facets of social life, not even the political process is insulated from its reach. Election campaigns are increasingly dictated by financial constraints and private agendas; eroding the electoral process to a battle to be fought with twenty-second sound bites and political advertisements. As a central socializing agent, the mass media, particularly television, foster a milieu within which viewers are treated as such – spectators on the sidelines of the political ring. The democratic principle of power to the people is undermined, as individuals are alienated from the very process in which they are central actors. It is in this vein that this study examines how public and private broadcasters differ in their coverage of the 2005 BC Provincial Election.

Currently, there is much debate surrounding the role of broadcast news media in the democratic process in Canada. The news operates under a guise of absolute objectivity, however it is generally recognized as being somewhat biased. Regardless, broadcast news remains the primary source of information for the majority of voters, and therefore largely influences the outcome of democratic elections. If indeed there are biases in the news, they are likely best understood by examining the reasons for their existence. The purpose of this study is to examine the degree to which the framing of the news is dependent upon the structure of the broadcaster. A comparative analysis of privately and

publicly owned news broadcasters illustrates how different structural systems may influence the final presentation of the news. Using the entirety of a democratic election campaign as a sample, this study aims to answer the following research question:

How do publicly and privately owned Canadian broadcasters differ in their coverage of the 2005 BC Provincial Election?

The most effective way of comparing privately and publicly owned broadcasters is to examine a specific broadcaster from each structural system. Global was selected as a private broadcaster because it is the most highly watched news program in BC and Canada, and therefore is very pertinent to this study. CBC is the only national public broadcaster in Canada, so naturally it was selected as the opposing broadcaster in this study.

Research Methodology & Logic

In order to conduct a valid comparative analysis of each broadcaster, it was necessary to perform both a quantitative and qualitative examination of every election story throughout the entirety of the election campaign. A quantitative content analysis was conducted using a coding protocol and coding worksheet (please see Appendix) designed specifically for the 2005 BC Election. In order to ensure the validity and reliability of the results collected, a comprehensive inter-coder reliability test was performed as well (please see Appendix). The coding protocol described the format and position of each story through variables such as newscast date, story position, story length, and story title. The general themes of the story were captured by coding variables such as type of story, story topic, party and leader focus, and geographic focus. As well as the basic framework of the story, individual speakers featured in each story called “sources” or “story actors” were examined for their name, affiliation,

political orientation, gender and ethnicity, and amount of time quoted, to assess the quality and diversity of individuals used.

Overview of Public & Private Structural Systems

CBC and Global operate under fundamentally different structural systems, and as a result embrace distinctly different objectives. The purpose of this study is to determine how the objectives of each company are reflected in how they present the news. However, their mandates, financial resources, and corporate philosophy must first be identified.

CBC

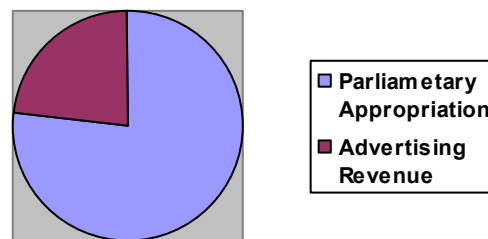
The public news program selected for this study is a British Columbian news hour called, *CBC: Canada Now*, which is owned by a larger national company, the *CBC/News Radio Corporation*. This station can be differentiated from all other broadcasters in Canada, as it is the nation's sole public broadcaster.

Public broadcasters are typically identified by their arms-length relationship with the state, and mandate to serve the needs of the public. This mandate can be generalized into three essential qualities. Firstly, the universality of service, dedication to cater to diversity and unity of a national culture and its subcultures are essential for a public broadcaster, as equality has become synonymous with the importance of this system of broadcasting (O'Sullivan, 1994, p. 251). Secondly, it is a system of public sponsorship that allows for the "protection" of broadcasters from the vested interests of various stakeholders (O'Sullivan, 1994, p. 251). Lastly, the service provided should be of good "quality" (O'Sullivan, 1994, p. 251). However, ambiguity surrounds this notion of good "quality" as there are few definitive indicators to judge quality by; quality is, in essence, subjective. Because public broadcasters have been paid "by the people, for the people" a kind of public trust has been developed (Uzelman, Hackett, & Stewart, 2005, p. 157). As a result, public broadcasters are expected

to be responsible and to execute journalism in a comprehensive, accurate, and objective manner (Uzelman et al., 2005, p. 157).

The CBC relies primarily on parliamentary appropriation as a source of revenue. However, it is important to note that even though the CBC is a publicly owned company, not all of CBC's revenue comes from the government. In 2003/2004 the CBC was granted 933 million dollars in government funding, but also generated 282 million dollars in ad revenue (2003-2004 Annual Report). The CBC therefore has two primary objectives: to meet the mandates of the government of Canada, and to maintain sufficient viewership to maintain ad revenues.

CBC Sources of Revenue



According to their website, the CBC's primary objective is to "provide consistent, high-quality information upon which all citizens may rely" (Handbook of Journalistic Standards of Practice: Foreword, 2005). Ingrained in every facet of its policy, the CBC strives to inform and empower Canadian citizens. CBC journalists obey a strict handbook of Journalistic Standards of Practice, which have been updated to suit technological changes in media. This handbook states that, "The Corporation itself takes no editorial position in its programming" (Handbook of Journalistic Standards of Practice: Principles, 2005), which illustrates the importance the CBC places on the objectivity and reliability of its productions. However, the CBC does have a secondary objective as it must compete with private media companies. However, due to its structure the CBC is at a notable disadvantage; arguably, the CBC has become devalued in recent years due to specialized channels, new technologies, like that of HDTV (high-definition television), and the increasing infiltration of American television stations

and programs (Tracey, 1997, p. 267). The development of technologies presents a hindrance to public broadcasting as they have challenged the hegemony of national broadcasters world-wide (Tracey, 1997, p. 273). With political and public pressures, along with its dwindling audiences, the CBC is beginning to suffer from an “identity crisis” as its societal value is being questioned.

On a quest for survival, it must rely secondarily on ad revenue generated by higher ratings. In order to generate higher ratings, the CBC must ensure that its programming appeals to audiences - enough to be able to realistically compete against private broadcasters who have a financial advantage. Recent studies of mass communication have argued for the importance of preserving a public sphere – one that is open and accessible to all – as a “key component of modern, participatory, democratic life” (Garnham, 1986). But in a nation that is commercially driven, theoretical notions may not be enough to preserve public broadcasting. Thus, the CBC has two pressures: to inform and empower the Canadian public, and to attract and maintain audiences.

Global

The Global News Hour in BC is one of the most highly watched television programs in North America. It is by far the leading source of news for most British Columbians. Its success is due in part to the fact that it is owned by one of the largest privately owned media companies in Canada, *CanWest Global Communications Corporation*, which operates on an international level including expansions in Australia, New Zealand, the Republic of Ireland, and the United States.

The objectives of this corporation are no different than the objectives of any other corporation. CanWest Global exists only to generate a return on investment for its shareholders. Its priorities are clearly summarized in its online mission statement, which states its primary objective is, “to serve the customer”. Fourth on the list is to “empower citizens with knowledge” (CanWest Global Mission Statement, 2005). While they *may* operate under standards and practices similar to the CBC, these regulations are not made available to the

public, and there is no internal reason for their existence. One could speculate that Global could essentially frame the news in whatever manner they desired if it were not for the presence of rival broadcasters such as the CBC. Thus, Global has a single objective – to generate profit and provide advertisers with audiences. Though it must maintain the appearance of legitimate news and objective reporting, its only real responsibility is to its investors. The informing and empowerment of the public is merely a necessary pretense for their product. The division between public and private broadcasters is highlighted through their respective journalistic styles as evidenced through various studies of past elections and television news broadcasts. In particular, the findings of Maier and Potter's study of the 1996 American presidential campaign were reflective of the mandates of each respective broadcaster. Public broadcasters approached stories in a manner of "objectivity," choosing to focus on issues and public participation in contrast to private broadcasters who pursued scandal-laden and negative stories regarding the campaign.

While not studying the election, Dueck's 1995 study of BCTV and CBC appears to reflect Maier and Potter's study. BCTV, now Global, framed their stories in what appeared to be a trivial manner looking for scandalous angles and attacking personalities rather than issues. CBC, on the other hand, chose to frame their stories based on the issue. Furthermore, the public broadcasting mandate of equality was represented when Everitt and Gidengil closely evaluated news coverage of females in the 1993 Federal election. They found that indeed there was a bias in gender coverage. Since elections are so often described with "masculine" metaphors, including sports and war metaphors, the political sphere has become "normative" for males; females are still "new players to the game." Because academics urge that public broadcasters must maintain "quality" programming amidst corporate encroachment and foreign influences, the journalistic styles of private and public broadcasters are essential in the debate of broadcasting public policy.

Private broadcasters, like that of Global, and public broadcasters, like that of CBC, are similar in the sense that they both must follow the Broadcasting Act

of 1991, an act that attempts to maintain Canadian ownership of media operations in this country (Uzelman et al., 2005, p. 158). However, there is a contrast in the manner in which private and public broadcasters are treated; CBC has additional responsibilities in providing “distinctly Canadian programming” (Uzelman et al., 2005, p. 158). But because of the interests of ownership, it is often overlooked that private broadcasters must follow many of the same rules of CBC in nation-building activities. It seems that private broadcasters have been naturalized as commercial entities whose purpose in a democratic society is relatively dismissed (Uzelman et al., 2005, p. 160). Consequently, private broadcasters are allowed by society to treat the public as consumers rather than citizens.

News Strategies

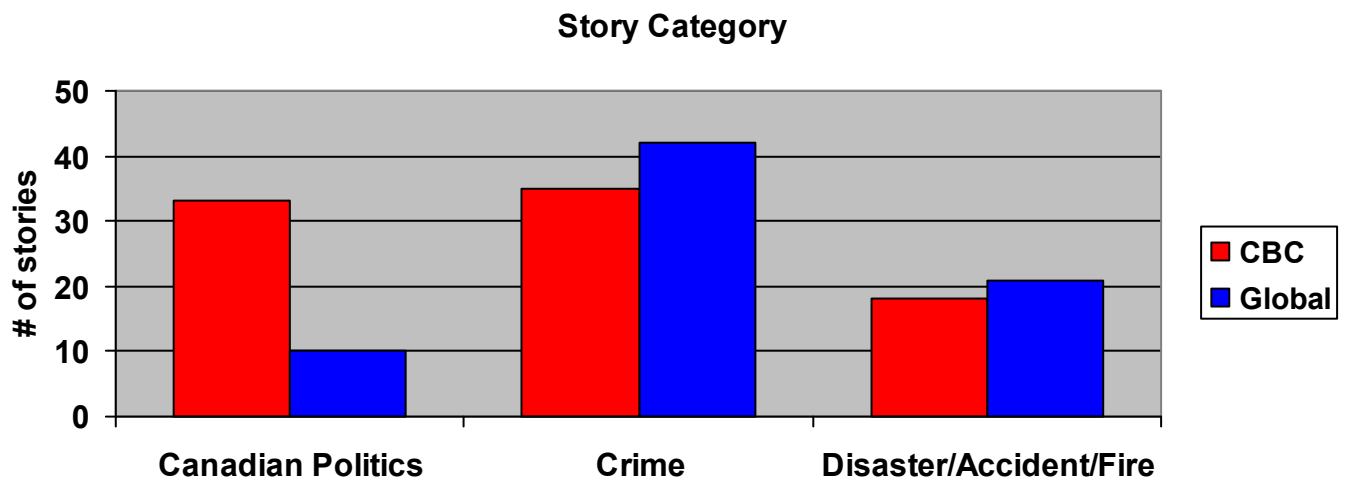
We have become just spectators, even voyeurs ...
 [There's] a view that government really doesn't matter,
 except as it provides occasional spectacular entertainment.
 It is not good news for democracy.
Michael Sandel

Different structural systems ultimately result in very different approaches to presenting the news. Using several examples from the election, this section on news strategy explains how each broadcaster addressed their viewers and constructed their audiences.

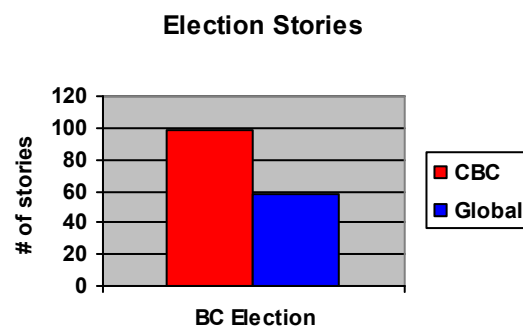
CBC Engages the Viewer Using Creative Presentations of News

CBC focuses on Canadian issues and aims to reaffirm national identity more so than Global. Since the CBC is owned by the Canadian people, it seems to include the reaffirmation of national and cultural identity into its agenda. Unlike CanWest Global, the CBC does not operate overseas or in the US. It therefore takes a relatively introspective approach to Canadian news and promotes public involvement. Of the non-election stories that were coded in this study, the three

most common story categories were Canadian Politics, Crime, and Disaster/Accident/Fire. As this diagram demonstrates, the CBC covered each category relatively equitably, whereas Global placed much more emphasis on crime rather than Canadian politics.



Keeping in mind that this data was recorded during a provincial election, when many British Columbians were considering their political options, it is remarkable that Global covered so few stories about other Canadian politics compared to CBC. Even more striking is the drastic difference in the number of BC election stories covered by each broadcaster:



One of the reasons CBC featured so many more election stories throughout the campaign is likely due to the number of recurring election segments. Every hour

of *Canada Now* throughout the campaign featured at least one of four different BC election segments:

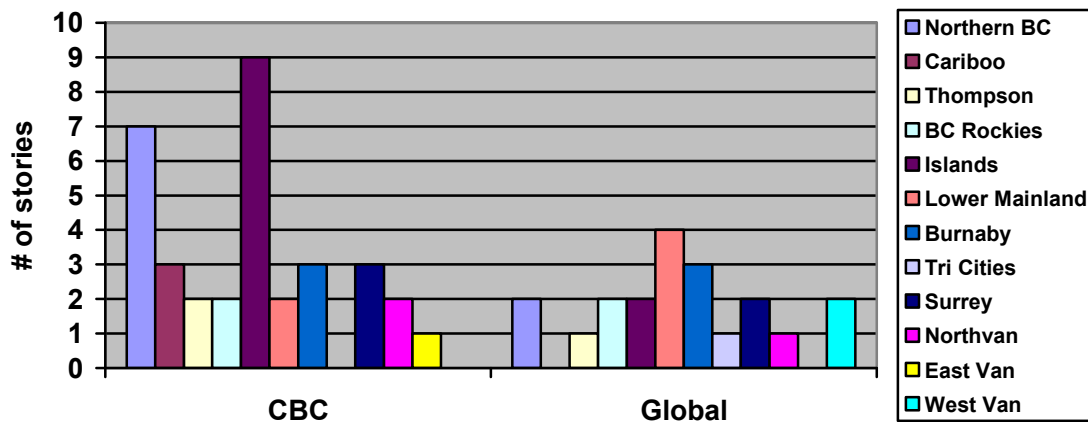
- 1) **Bob's BC:** Highly focused regional and individual profiles which used quirky humour to inform viewers about some of the human interest issues surrounding the BC election.
- 2) **Voter's Vox:** News stories based on viewer suggestions which mainly focused on some of the lesser-known election issues.
- 3) **Ballot Boxing:** Political debates which often contrasted two very different opinions on a single issue.
- 4) **Reality Check:** A fact-checking segment in which a reporter investigates the claims of major party leaders.

All four segments complimented each other and offered the viewer continuing engagement with the issues and events surrounding the election. The segments themselves were often dispersed relatively sporadically throughout individual broadcasts, reflecting CBC's desire to keep audiences continually engaged in BC politics.

Bob's BC serves as the perfect example of CBC's news strategy. In this particular segment, election stories are spun as humorous human-interest stories which develop into issue focused regional profiles. For example, Bob traveled to Northern BC where the privatization of BC Rail has caused political turmoil. Bob frames the issue in a surprising manner, highlighting some of the possible benefits of privatization, such as job creation and economic development. Bob also did a candidate profile on Adrienne Carr while visiting the Sunshine Coast. This story developed into a thoughtful piece about the impacts of logging - specifically on its potential effects on ecotourism. This segment is also attributed with having the only aboriginal news story throughout the entire campaign between both CBC and Global. These kinds of specialized segments effectively give deeper insight into the issues surrounding the election.

Provincial Coverage

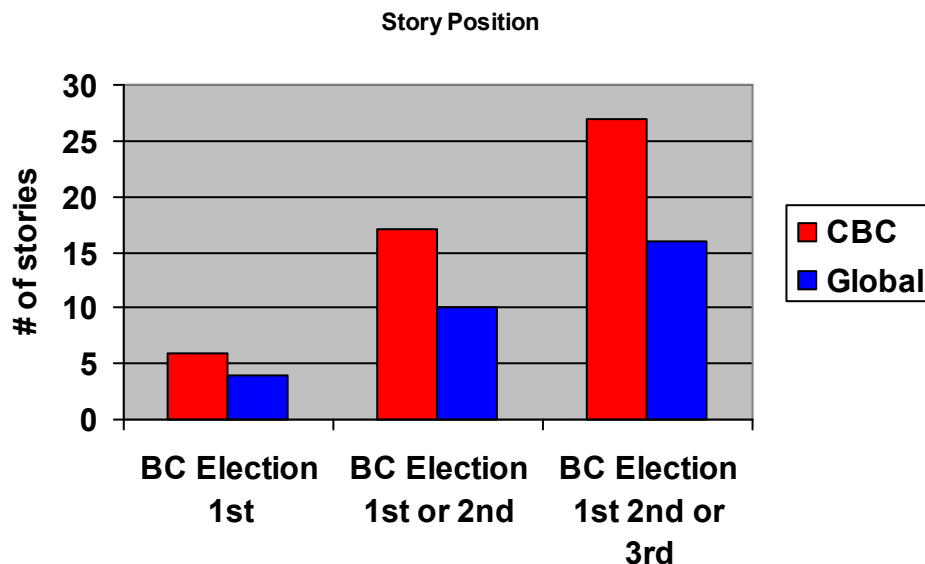
Since this election involved the entire province of British Columbia, and since citizens all over this province watch CBC or Global, it stands to reason that both broadcasters have a duty to cover issues from every corner of BC. The following is a chart of the election stories which had a geographic focus.



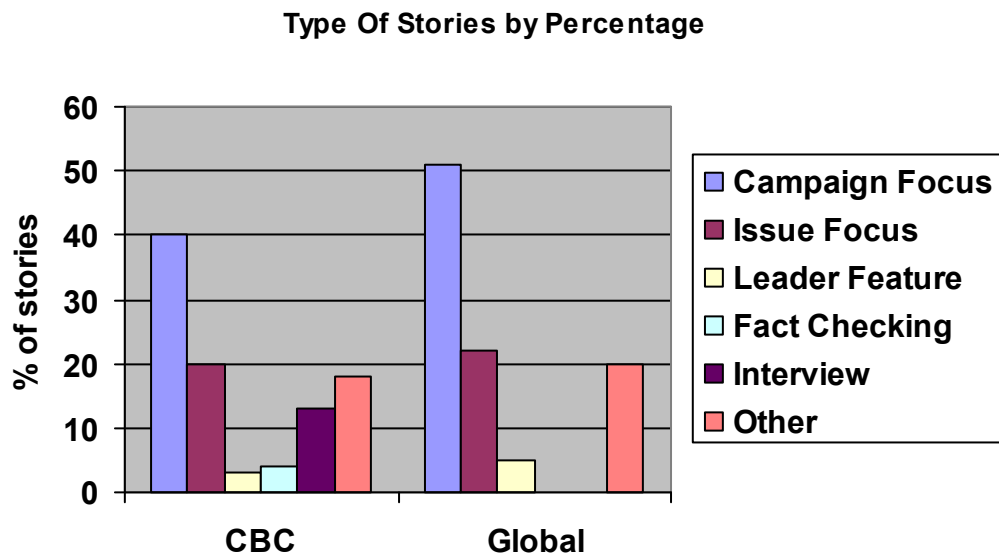
The CBC featured several stories which focused on areas outside of the Lower Mainland. Northern BC, the Cariboo, the Islands, and the Thompson/Okanagan are the most notable areas of focus. Global featured comparatively fewer stories outside the Lower Mainland. Ultimately, CBC is the only broadcaster to make a substantial effort to report on issues which stemmed from areas outside the Lower Mainland.

Global Under-Emphasizes the Election

Global adopted a very different approach to covering the election, which ultimately resulted in far fewer election stories. Rather than evenly distributing election stories throughout the news hour, they clustered their election stories into a single section, which was often after several headlining news stories. Global chose not to lead with election stories as often and generally did not feature much election coverage near the beginning of the news hour.



CBC's emphasis on Canadian identity and local diversity is indicative of a broader trend in their programming. CBC addresses viewers as critically engaged Canadian citizens with keen interests in local political issues. Rather than presuming their viewers to be passive receivers of information, they simultaneously target and construct a more knowledgeable and involved audience. The following chart illustrates the types of election stories each broadcaster covered. It has been calculated by percentages in order to compensate for Global's smaller sample of election stories.

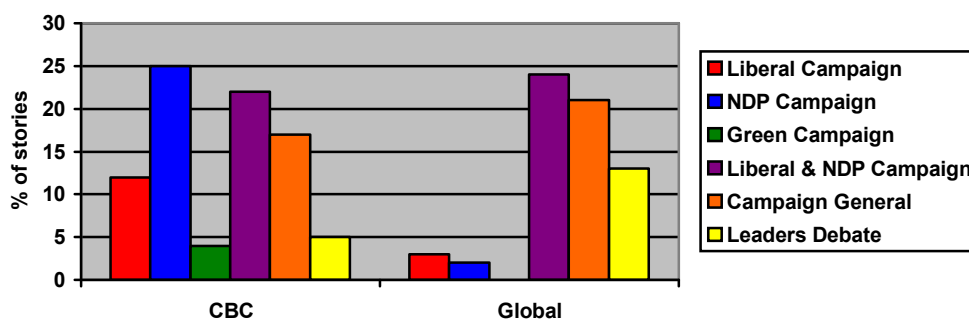


This chart illustrates a number of differences between CBC and Global’s strategy regarding the coverage of this election. While CBC engaged its audience with several different types of election stories, Global focused much more heavily on campaign stories, which are defined in the coding protocol as “stories that focus primarily on the campaign” (see Appendix for further details). Also of note is the complete absence of Fact Checking/Analysis stories and Interview Panels across Global’s coverage of the election campaign.

It is clear that Global did not have any intent on probing further into the claims made by leaders, or of hosting interviews which may have provided viewers with a more comprehensive understanding of some of the important issues and policies debated throughout the course of the election. For example, when seeking informed commentary throughout the election coverage, CBC turned to academic sources more than twice as much as Global did (23 times vs. 11 times). Although this figure is due, in part, to CBC’s large number of election stories, the fact remains that throughout the course of their coverage, Global did not offer the public as much access to informed sources regarding the election.

A Lethargic Approach to News

The majority of election news stories were campaign stories, which served to inform the public about the daily activities of the various leaders and candidates involved in the election. CBC and Global each took different approaches to covering campaign stories. The following chart illustrates how CBC tended to separate its coverage of campaign stories into different party profiles offering the viewer thoughtful insights into their strategies and objectives.



Global took an approach which effectively combined all the campaign news together as stories about the general state of the campaign, often citing a prediction for the win or a vague suggestion of who might be leading. There are comparatively very few Global stories which dealt exclusively with a particular party's campaign – rather, their stories covered both Liberal and NDP as a single story, or featured an even broader story about the campaign as a whole. Although the Green party gained unprecedented momentum in this year's election, Global did not feature a single story about the Green campaign.

Ultimately, the different approaches to presenting the news taken by each broadcaster reveal their philosophy regarding their own audiences. The CBC is intent on including political analysts and academic pundits into their coverage as a means of encouraging critical thought amongst its viewers. More structured and organized, their coverage allows for more specialized news stories. CBC targets every issue, regardless of region, and makes a point to present it in a creative and thought-provoking manner. Global reduces the complexities of the election to a relatively brief, packaged summary of the general situation of the election, simultaneously appealing to and creating an audience of apathetic viewers.

News Framing

The problem is not that television presents us with entertaining subject matter, but that all subject matter is presented as entertaining.
Neil Postman

It is clear there are differences between how CBC and Global approached the presentation of this election. However, the different ways in which certain issues and events were framed were not as clear. Something as simple as a subtle editorial choice or a clever spin can completely change the nature of a news story. These subtle biases are most easily identified by carefully examining key events or turning points in the campaign.

The Looming Threat of a BCTF Strike

On May 11th Global announced they had uncovered a secret document from the BC Teacher's Federation which suggested the possibility of a teacher's strike just days after election-day. This story was framed under a sense of urgency as reporters told viewers that it would have "a big impact on the campaign". The document itself, which was no more than a union letter sent to a few hundred of its members, was referred to by anchor Tony Parsons as a "secret document" retrieved by Global News.

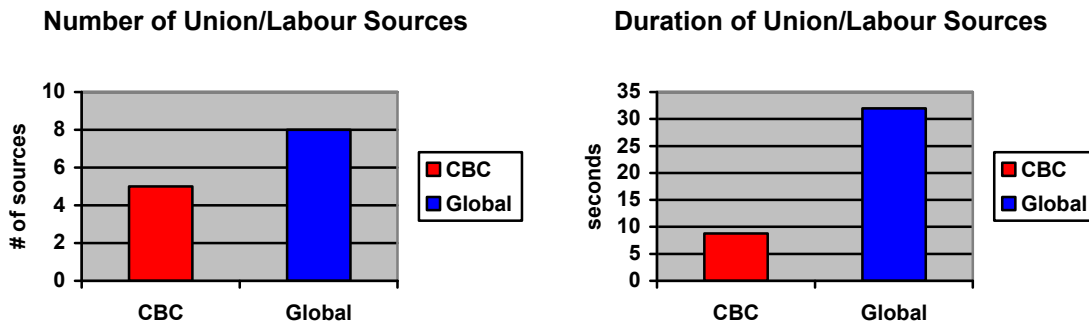
CBC covered the story by using the events surrounding the impending teacher's strike to discuss broader issues concerning both labour and education. There was no clear attempt to sensationalize the story or over-dramatize the importance of the document. CBC simply informed its viewers about the events surrounding the document and used it to address issues that had already been raised in the election. Global essentially constructed the story in two ways. Primarily, it was framed as a scandal, implicitly linking the NDP with union bosses. This story was congruent with the Liberal campaign which attacked the NDP for having ties to labour. In order to create a sense of urgency, Global iterated that the strike would coincide with final-exam periods.

Global framed the Liberals as the remedy for the situation, citing their declaration of education as an essential service. This is fundamentally erroneous since essential services are still subject to similar forms of labour action. Secondly, the story was meant to spectacularize an otherwise uneventful election campaign. The BCTF strike-threat fit extremely well into Global's agenda, which involves sensationalizing the news in order to increase ratings. Their coverage of this event suggests that Global frames the news with a political bias towards the Liberal party, regardless of how irresponsible and deceptive this may be.

NDP Connections to Labour

During the course of the election coverage, Global made several references to NDP associations with big labour movements. This connection was

meant to accuse the NDP of consorting with unions, ultimately hindering big business and undermining Campbell's claims of economic growth and stability.



While Global emphasized the NDP ties to Labour, they virtually omitted the opposing argument which criticizes the Liberals for having ties to big business, again exemplifying Global's tendency to frame the news in congruence with the Liberal agenda.

Post-Debate Spin

The hour-long leader's debate between Gordon Campbell, Carol James, and Adrienne Carr was televised on May 3rd. During the debate, Campbell was on the defensive as he was attacked by both James and Carr on the issue of trust. Campbell often appeared uncomfortable and unable to formulate an adequate rebuttal. It was clear to most who watched the debate that Carol James successfully discredited Campbell's platform as well as raised her own public profile.

The following day, CBC's lead story concerned James' victory during the debate. Their second story addressed the Liberal's reaction to the debate, primarily how Campbell appeared unaffected and confident that a win was still assured. The third story was about Adrienne Carr and her assertion that her performance during the debate raised her profile and helped to credit the Green party as a significant political movement. In succession, the three stories collectively offered the viewer a comprehensive account of every perspective regarding the outcome of the leader's debate.

On the same day, Global led with a story about an NDP candidate's possible connection to vigilante gang The Hell's Angels, which was completely unrelated to the debate. Global's second story did concern the debate – particularly on the effect it may have had on the vote. Global acknowledged the fact that Carol James was considered by most to have won the debate, but was quick to point out that Gordon Campbell did not necessarily lose. Rather, Global made the claim that every leader achieved what they had intended to in the debate. There was an under-emphasis on James' victory, and on the debate altogether. Tony Parsons opened the story by asking if the debate would have any impact on the election whatsoever. Global effectively chose to omit a very crucial NDP momentum shift.

Broader Implications

A flawed media, I suggest, leads to a flawed democracy.
 Ill-informed citizens cannot make proper judgments about their
 leaders' actions, about the actions that take place in their names,
 about the laws that govern them. The media matter.

Michael Buerk

The relationship between news and the public is changing. It increasingly resembles the relationship between product and consumer as broadcasters scramble for ratings and viewers crave entertainment before information.

Two distinct, primary differences were identified between Global and CBC. Firstly, CBC makes substantial attempts to engage its audience and cover multiple perspectives on every issue in the entire province. They also take time to maintain objectivity and cover a vast array of perspectives in their programming. Global under-emphasizes the importance of the election and tends to make generalizations which offer no real insight into the issues. Furthermore, Global spectacularizes trivial events to enhance the degree of entertainment of their

programming and often molds key events in congruence with the Liberal campaign.

According to Nielsen Media Ratings, the Global News Hour's rating in late May 2005, were at 8.6%, whereas Canada Now was not even present (Nielsen Media, 2005). Global News Hour is often rated the top program in Vancouver. Since Global has far more viewers than CBC, more British Columbian citizens are receiving their news from a comparatively irresponsible source. As a result, the general public is not being sufficiently informed about important issues which could have a significant effect on the vote. Global's tendency to neglect the importance of the election re-enforces voter apathy and discourages the public political discourse that is essential to the democratic process. Their favorable framing of the Liberal party, however subtle and imperceptible it may appear, is flagrantly deceptive. Their strategy serves only to perpetuate public indifference and discourage independent thought, which may result in political change.

Comparatively, CBC offers the public a forum in which to actively interact with the policy making of this province. Rather than simply stating facts and quoting figures about which candidate is likely to emerge victorious, the CBC encourages political discourse and perpetuates public involvement in the democratic process by offering extensive avenues to access information and express personal concerns. The fact that Global is a far more popular source of news is evidence to support the argument that the general public is not interested in political involvement. If entertainment based news is more popular than legitimate and informative reporting, than it stands to reason that Global simply provides the public with what they want. If this is the case, then the problem is not necessarily that Global has an agenda to foil democracy and maintain a Liberal government, but rather that Global simply treats the news as a product, and the public as its consumer.

Substantiated by the results we have gathered, it is clear that television coverage on both private and public broadcasters does not suffice to fully inform the public about political issues, nor does simply viewing a news broadcast substitute direct political participation. In order to facilitate a broader discussion

of democracy, the media should consistently devote coverage on stories pertaining to the rights of citizens and the progress made by politicians, such as updates on whether government action is reflective of their previously proclaimed platforms.

Limitations and Areas of Future Research

While content analysis provides helpful descriptive statistics, a comprehensive qualitative analysis is necessary when analyzing broadcast news. However, this study was limited by time constraints, and an inability to research the methodologies reporters and editors employ when presenting the news.

Imperative to this study was the combination of both quantitative and qualitative analytic methods. Certain ambiguities in the coding protocol would have led to false conclusions without the qualitative reading (Gina & Hackett, 1997, p.17). Because this study was limited by an allotted time frame, a thorough qualitative analysis was only possible for a limited selection of news-stories. However, the total sample was small enough for every election story to be watched several times, so a broad qualitative analysis was suitable for this study. The research may have been enhanced by a more profound understanding of the methods used by editors and reporters when making key decisions about their programming. This study provides an interpretation of CBC and Global's news strategy, but is unable to provide a description of how their strategies are manifest in the every-day decision processes of the people involved in each news hour.

When discussing the impact of election television coverage on the democratic process, it is evident that one area of research lacking in our study is audience research. By creating a focus group of random television news viewers or creating a questionnaire, one can begin to assess the true impact of the media

on the democratic process. This area of research should be complemented with in-depth interviews with journalists and producers, or the respective local television station since they could help one gain further insight as to why a story either leads, or fails to lead a broadcast as well as why individuals are chosen for “street” interviews. With honest answers, we can begin to formulate solutions to the problems associated with election coverage, such as whether these are issues inherent to the structure of the media, or whether the downfalls of election coverage can be solely attributed to the individual choices of journalists.

Conclusion

The priorities and motivations of broadcast media companies are determinate of their news strategy, and ultimately of the way in which the news is presented.

CBC: Balancing Two Important Priorities

Since the CBC is publicly owned, and therefore has a federal mandate to inform the public, their news should theoretically be absolutely objective, inclusive, and as informative as possible. Their adherence to this mandate is clearly reflected in their programming. However, the constraints of television as a medium, and the necessity of maintaining ad revenue for survival, means they must harmonize two conflicting agendas. The result is a news program which effectively disguises substantially informative news as engaging and thought-provoking entertainment. Their coverage of the 2005 BC Election displays passionate dedication to covering BC politics and the issues surrounding the election. The CBC constructs an audience of critically thinking citizens, empowering them and encouraging them to be involved in policy making in their community, and their province.

Global: A Single Agenda

Although Global generally appears to embody the qualities of a legitimate source of news, acting in servitude of the public and maintaining objectivity, it is merely a necessary façade for what is a completely different purpose. A privately owned news company has a single priority; to earn profit. Global's true loyalty is with its shareholders, not with the Canadian public. The result is a news program which features mainly entertainment based news stories. Their 2005 BC Election coverage was presented in a manner which emphasized what little competition and scandal occurred during the campaign. In addition to the poor representation of the election, Global often framed the Liberal party in a favorable light, reflecting contempt for certain journalistic standards of practice. Ultimately, the Global News Hour encourages its massive audience to take an apathetic position towards provincial policy making, and to adhere to mainstream modes of thought, rather than to consider the possibility for change.

The centrality of television in the lives of those living in a media saturated society is most clearly demonstrated in the weeks prior to an election. As political advertisements and campaign coverage begin to pepper the televisual landscape, viewers are immediately positioned on the periphery of the political process. The structure of television as a one-way medium makes it a powerful instrument during election campaigns. The temporal instantaneity of images and sounds leaves viewers with little opportunity to critically assess its messages. A fundamental premise of democracy is that individuals are able to collectively decide how they should be governed. In order to exercise this right, it is crucial that individuals are informed of not only the substantive issues being discussed, but also the logic of the electoral process. Casting a ballot is much more than selecting which candidate best manages their image – it is about defining values and collaborating with other citizens to negotiate how a just and equitable society can be realized.

By critically examining both public and private broadcasters, we assessed the current state of democracy as has manifested itself through television. Holding broadcasters accountable to the public it is intended to serve is

undoubtedly a contentious task, but one that we have already begun. Such an evaluation is necessary if debate is to be stimulated surrounding the role of the citizen in democratic societies, the role of the public broadcaster to balance corporate interests, and the role of elections as a legitimate form of political expression. The necessity for the presence of a public broadcaster to provide equitable, creative, and substantive coverage is best captured by Bill Moyers, a PBS journalist, as he states:

An unconscious people, an indoctrinated people, a people fed only partisan information and opinion that confirm their own bias, a people made morbidly obese in mind and spirit by the junk food of propaganda, is less inclined to put up a fight, ask questions, and be skeptical. And just as a democracy can die of too many lies, so that kind of orthodoxy can kill us, too.

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Corporate Sources

CBC: <http://www.cbc.radio-canada.ca>

Global: <http://www.canada.com/vancouver/globaltv/info/about.html>

Appendix

Coding Protocol

Each coder must complete a separate coding sheet for each news item being examined. Individual news items are identified according to a break or interlude with an anchor. Include the anchor's segment when timing the news item. If any discrepancies arise during coding, make a note of the issue and consult other group members.

1. **Coder:** Identify yourself by first and last name on all coding sheets.
2. **Newscast Date:** Enter the date of the newscast, not the date you coded it.
3. **Newscast Station**
 01. CBC
 02. Global
4. **Story Position:** Count the total number of news stories in one night's broadcast (the broadcast being coded) and number the position of the item being coded. For example, 5/20 indicates the 5th story of a total of 20 stories. A story is defined as being a part of the broadcast that is not narrated by any anchor (main, sports, weather, etc.).
5. **Start Time:** Record in the format HH:SS. This will include an anchor's introduction.
6. **End Time:** Record in the format HH:SS. This will include an anchor's conclusion.
7. **Story Title:** A succinct statement that captures the essence of a story.
8. **Story Description:** This provides the coder an opportunity to provide more details of a broadcast to prompt one's memory when reviewing the coding sheet.
9. **Story Category:** The coder must identify a categorization of the entire news story. If the story is a BC Election (1) story, the rest of the coding sheet must be completed. If the story falls under any other category, the coding sheet does not need to be filled in beyond this point.
 01. BC Election
 02. Other Canadian Politics
 03. International Politics
 04. Business/Economy
 05. Labour/Workplace
 06. Health Education
 07. Crime

- 08. Children/Family
- 09. Women
- 10. Visible Minorities
- 11. Urban Affairs
- 12. Disaster/Accident/Fire
- 13. Religion/Spirituality
- 14. Human Interest
- 15. Lifestyle
- 16. Consumer Issues
- 17. Entertainment/Celebrity
- 18. Sports
- 19. Weather
- 99. Other (Define)

10. Type of Story: Code One. The type of story will be coded based on a fifty-percent plus one model. For instance, a story may look at the campaign trail and election issues, but only one will be coded in this section depending on how much of the story is dedicated to a particular theme.

- 01. **News Campaign Focus:** all stories that focus primarily upon the details of the campaign, including leader's activities, rallies, campaign strategies, elections polls, etc. These event-based items frame news about the election in terms of its impact upon the campaign and upon the electoral success (or failure) of a particular leader, party, or candidate.
- 02. **Issue Focus:** all stories that focus primarily upon substantive social , political, and/or economic issues associated with the election campaign, including the policies, programs and positions of parties that providing significant background and/or historical information that goes beyond the event-based focus of the news. These items frame news about the election in terms of the substantive policy and ideological differences between parties.
- 03. **Leader/party feature:** all stories that focus upon an individual or party, providing significant background and/or historical information that goes beyond the event-based focus of the news.
- 04. **Fact-Checking/Critical Analysis:** all stories in which reporters engage in a critical assessment of claims made by political parties.
- 05. **Interview/panel:** an uninterrupted interview by a reporter with one or more guests. These would include political panels featuring guests representing a variety of political viewpoints.
- 06. **News, Other Focus:** all news stories that do not focus upon the election per se, but cover news stories that directly mention the election in some form.
- 99. **Other:** describe all other types of stories that do not fit this model.

11. Story Topic: All coders are expected to identify the major or dominant, primary topic of the story, followed by a secondary topic. The primary topic may not be the first topic in the story but is the most dominant. There are two steps to documenting the topics for each item, outlined below.

Step One: Put the topic in your own words: At first, do not code the topic. Instead, the coder is to write what their perception of the topic is in their own words.

Step Two: Code the topic using the general categories provided: There are a number of categories of stories provided. The coder needs to indicate which of the general categories each of these topics are included in. Feel free to use “other” if the unit does not fit easily into any of the categories offered. Be specific about your coding choice if you identify the “other” category.

General Categories: There are two sets of general categories. The first is focused on issues and the second set on the processes of the campaign. Each of these topics is outlined below:

Issue Topics

01. **First Nations Issues:** This topic would be coded for stories that the media has covered as concerning First Nations people, such as housing on reserves or land claims treaties. If the unit focuses on a First Nations person as an expert, a candidate or a representation of an First Nations person, but does not discuss First Nations issues, it would not be coded here.
02. **Agriculture:** Include stories about farming, and the agricultural industry.
03. **Arts:** Include stories about arts funding & the arts industry (visual arts, music, theater, etc.)
04. **Crime (law and order):** Include stories about legal issues, court cases, crimes. However, any pending court cases or illegal activities of individual candidates or parties would not be coded here.
05. **Economy – general:** Include if the specific topic is not included in this list. For example, a story about the economic situation in a forestry community the story topic would be “forestry”. However, if the story is about the economic situation in a community in general, or about the economy of the province, code it here.
06. **Education:** Include stories about k-12 and post-secondary education, including funding, student concerns, teachers, parents of students, schools and universities.
07. **STV Referendum:** This includes all stories about the STV referendum as well as other issues with respect to the reformation of the electoral process. It does not include practical stories about where to vote and advance polling information, which would be coded as ‘other’.

08. **Employment:** Including unemployment, loss of employment, employment insurance, etc.
09. **Environment:** Stories about environmental concerns, including air, land and water pollution and other environmental concerns. Stories regarding environmental protests and concerns of the fishing industry, forestry industry, and mining industry will not be coded here.
10. **Fishing/Aquaculture:** Stories about the fishing industry and fishing stocks in BC. This would include any environmentally focused protests or concerns of the fishing industry.
11. **Forestry:** Stories about the forestry industry, either in general or specific forestry companies. Stories regarding the relationship between B.C.'s forestry industry and the federal government of Canada or the United States (i.e. NAFTA) and environmentally focused protests or concerns of the forestry industry should be coded here.
12. **Gambling:** Stories about gambling (sometimes referred to as "gaming") issues, whether about the industry (expanding gambling) or social issues such as the result of gambling addictions.
13. **Government Integrity:** Stories that talk about the voter's trust in government excluding any stories look at scandals associated with a party or candidate.
14. **Government Spending:** Stories that focus or comment on government budgets, past, present, and future as well as spending on specific issues.
15. **Health/Disability:** All aspects of health care, from nurses job action, doctor's demands, privatization, patients experiences and the costs and expenditures of health care.
16. **Hydro:** Stories about BC hydro in particular as well as hydro services or access in general, and privatization. Any election stories discussing BCTC (British Columbia Transmission Corporation) and Accenture will also be coded here.
17. **ICBC:** Stories about the auto insurance services ICBC and privatizing the service.
18. **Mining:** Stories about mining, including proposed mines, exploration, specific companies. This would include any environmentally focused protests of the mining industry.
19. **Oil & Gas:** Stories about oil & gas exploration, party promises, industry predictions, etc.
20. **Poverty:** Including street people, general statistics and specific examples.
21. **Real Estate:** Stories about the industry, housing starts and sales, and predictions.
22. **Taxes:** Stories about tax policy, tax cuts, comparable taxation.
23. **Transportation:** Stories about roads and highways, and other transportation services.
24. **Voting Process:** Code any stories, not linked to STV, of voters confidence level in the electoral process in B.C., i.e. youth disillusionment of government, here.
99. **Other:** Specify in your own words what the story category could be if it

does not fit with any of the above issue topics.

Campaign Topics

27. **Liberal Campaign:** Stories about Liberal campaign strategy, campaign activities, supporters, candidates, endorsements and the leader's tour.
28. **NDP Campaign:** Stories about New Democrats' campaign strategy, campaign activities, supporters, candidates, endorsements and the leader's tour.
29. **Liberal & NDP Campaign:** Stories that talk about both the Liberal and NDP campaigns, including strategy, campaign activities, supporters, candidates, endorsements, and the leader's tours.
30. **Green Campaign:** Stories about Green Party campaign strategy, campaign activities, supporters, candidates, endorsements and the leader's tour.
31. **NDP & Green Campaign (left split):** Stories that talk about both the Liberal and NDP campaigns, including strategy, campaign activities, supporters, candidates, endorsements, and the leader's tours, as well as the split on the left and the "race for second place" stories.
32. **Other Campaign:** Stories about campaigns by independents and other parties (eg. Socred, Rhino) not included above, includes campaign strategy, campaign activities, supporters, candidates, endorsements, and the leader's tours.
33. **Campaign History:** Stories about previous campaigns and elections.
34. **Campaign Predictions:** Stories that focus on predictions for the results of the upcoming election.
35. **Candidate Scandal/Gaffe:** Stories about a specific candidate's mistake, scandal or "gaffe" regardless of the topic of the gaffe.
36. **Liberal Record:** Stories about the Liberal record in government.
37. **NDP Record:** Stories about the NDP party while in opposition, its policies and strategies.
38. **Poll Results:** Results of all polls, including public opinion surveys and "straw polls" of unofficial polls.
39. **Leadership:** Stories that talk about the leadership abilities and skills of the leader.
40. **Party Support:** Non-poll stories about general or specific support for parties, endorsements, etc, when more than one party is included.
41. **Leader's Debates:** Stories about all organized debates between leaders.
42. **Campaign General:** Stories about aspects of the campaign not covered by other topics here. This would include candidate or riding profiles, costs of promises, political ads and signs, costs of campaign, and voter apathy.
43. **NDP Relationship With Unions:** All stories that explore the relationship between NDP and organized labour.
44. **Liberal Relationship With Business:** All stories that explore the relationship between the Liberal party and business.
45. **Previous NDP Government Record:** Stories that focus upon the record of previous NDP governments.

46. **Campaign Finance:** All stories about campaign finance, including allegations of impropriety.

12. Sources or ‘Story Actors’: There are six values to code for when examining story actors or sources that are to be filled out in the given coding sheet. A Source or ‘Story Actor’ includes any person who contributes to the understanding of an issue, whether the rhetoric is of an emotional, political or academic stance, excluding the narrating journalist/anchor.

Step One: Identify the name of the source or actor.

Step Two: Provide the source’s affiliation. Code the source according to the following schematic:

Affiliation

01. Gordon Campbell (Liberal Leader)
02. Carole James (NDP Leader)
03. Adrienne Carr (Green Leader)
04. Liberal candidate/worker/supporter
05. NDP candidate/worker/supporter
06. Green candidate/worker/supporter
07. Other party leader/candidate/worker/supporter/
08. Former provincial politician
09. Other politician (federal or municipal)
10. Corporate/trade association spokesperson
11. Union/labour association spokesperson
12. Pollster
13. Academic/Neutral political pundit
14. Activist
15. NGO spokesperson
16. Citizen, concerned about and/or directly affected by political action/inaction
17. Citizen, ‘person on the street’
99. Other

Step Three: For each source, identify the political orientation of the speaker – do they clearly articulate either a preference or a dislike/criticism of a particular political party as framed in the story? If the political orientation of the speaker is unclear, please identify the source as neutral/indeterminate. Use the following schematic:

Political Orientation

01. Pro-Green
02. Anti-Green
03. Pro-Other party

- 04. Anti-Other party
- 05. Neutral/indeterminate
- 06. Pro-Liberal/Anti-NDP
- 07. Pro-Liberal/Anti-Green
- 08. Pro-NDP/Anti-Liberal
- 09. Pro-NDP/Anti-Green
- 10. Pro-Green/Anti-Liberal
- 11. Pro-Green/Anti-NDP

Step 4: Identify the gender of the source using the following schematic:

- 01. Female
- 02. Male

Step 5: Identify the ethnicity of the source using the following schematic:

- 01. Visible Minority (Asian, East Indian, First Nations, Hispanic, etc)
- 02. Caucasian
- 03. Indeterminate
- 04. Other

Step 6: Identify the duration of time each source is quoted in the format HH:SS.

13. Party Coverage

Identify the party coverage in the provided graph.

Parties: Each party will be coded as to whether they are the focus of the story unit, just mentioned or altogether absent. If a party is featured for at least 50% of the story, it is considered to be a focus. If the name of the party is brought up at any time, it is considered to be only mentioned.

Leaders: Each party leader will be coded as to whether they are the focus of the story, mentioned, or absent. There can be more than one focus if the unit gives equitable attention to more than one leader, and there may be multiple “mentions.”

14. Geographic Focus

Identify the geographic focus of the story. In many cases, this will be the same as the location of the reporter covering the story. However, in some cases there may be multiple locations in which case the coder must identify the primary geographic focus, if there is a focus at all. Note that a geographic location is only considered to be a focus if it is featured for at least 50% of the news story. Please use the following schematic:

01. Northern B.C.: For definition, please see map.

02. **Cariboo Chilcotin Coast:** For definition, please see map.
03. **Thompson Okanagan:** For definition, please see map.
04. **B.C. Rockies:** For definition, please see map.
05. **The Islands:** For definition, please see map.
06. **Whistler**
07. **Squamish/Pemberton**
08. **Lower Mainland:** any part of the lower mainland as defined by the map excluding the locations mentioned below (09-17).
09. **Burnaby**
10. **TriCities:** Port Moody, Port Coquitlam, Coquitlam
11. **Whalley area**
12. **Surrey:** any part of Surrey excluding Whalley
13. **North/West Vancouver**
14. **Downtown Vancouver**
15. **East Vancouver:** Chinatown would be coded here.
16. **East Hastings:** This will include any streets in the downtown “East Hastings” area.
17. **West side of Vancouver:** UBC, Kits, Point Grey
18. No mention/Not relevant to the story.
- 15. Use of Visuals:** For the purpose of this study, visuals will be limited to graphs, charts or illustrations.
01. Yes
02. No
- 16. How Was the Viewer Addressed:** State in your own words how you would describe how the show addressed the audience (such as consumer, citizen, or collective public).
- 17. Additional Comments:** How did the broadcast appellate the viewer – as a consumer, citizen, or a collective public? If possible, note how the coverage addresses issues of democracy, political participation and the role of the media in the electoral system.

14. Party Coverage	
Liberal: <input type="radio"/> Focus <input type="radio"/> Mention	Campell: <input type="radio"/> Focus <input type="radio"/> Mention
NDP: <input type="radio"/> Focus <input type="radio"/> Mention	James: <input type="radio"/> Focus <input type="radio"/> Mention
Green: <input type="radio"/> Focus <input type="radio"/> Mention	Carr: <input type="radio"/> Focus <input type="radio"/> Mention
Other: <input type="radio"/> Focus <input type="radio"/> Mention	Other: <input type="radio"/> Focus <input type="radio"/> Mention
<input type="radio"/> No Party Focus	<input type="radio"/> No Leader Focus
<input type="radio"/> No Party Mention	<input type="radio"/> No Leader Mention

15. Geographic Focus (identify, then Code): _____

16. Use of Visuals ___ Yes ___ No

17. How was the viewer Addressed? _____

18. Additional Comments _____
