

The Importance of Context: The Effect of the Market on the Framing of Elections at the Subnational Level in Canada

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Abstract: In Canadian media studies, very little research has been done on how elections at the subnational level are covered by newspapers. This paper analyzes the way major newspapers in six Canadian capitals covered provincial elections between 2011 and 2012. The findings were interesting in that they underscored the importance of context in news coverage. Rather than a formulaic game frame focus, with an adherence to who's winning and who's losing, our study determined that each newspaper had a distinct voice and focus in their news coverage. This adds a new and interesting dimension to the study of election coverage in Canada.

Keywords: Election studies, media analysis, content analysis, framing, game frame, agenda setting.

Résumé: Dans les études de media canadiennes, très peu de recherches ont été effectués sur les élections au niveau régional qui sont couvertes par les journaux. Ce document analyse comment les journaux régionaux de six capitales canadiennes on couverts les élections provinciales entre les années 2011 et 2012. Les résultats étaient intéressants, ils insistaient sur l'importance du contexte pour la diffusion des actualités. Plutôt qu'un jeu stéréotypé, avec un gagnant et perdant, notre étude a déterminé que chaque journal avait une présentations et diffusion particulière. Cela ajoute une dimension nouvelle et intéressante aux études des élections régionales au Canada..

Mots-clés: étude d'élections, étude de media, étude du contenue, formulation, formulation du jeu, ordre du jour

Theoretical Framework

The literature on election media coverage in Canada tends to focus on national elections, overlooking the possibility of comparative election analysis at the subnational level. Based on the existing federal-level research, media outlets have received considerable criticism for their increased adherence to framing elections as “games” – contests in which the focus is on winners and losers, polls, strategies and campaign gaffes. With that type of framing, the concern is that news consumers are not provided adequate information about policies and issues; as a result, their ability to make informed decisions at the ballot box is stunted. This chapter expands on the current literature by evaluating election coverage at the subnational level using local newspapers. We are interested in further examining the concepts of mediatization and media logic – the news values and story telling techniques used to capture media audiences (Strömbäck, 2008; Strömbäck and Dimitrova, 2011). Is there a standard format to news coverage of elections or does the market in which the newspaper is located have an effect on how the election is portrayed?

Not every event that happens becomes a news story (Bain 1994). Mediatization literature holds that story selection relies on a number of different factors that are both *normative* – relating to format and news values – and *market oriented* – relating to market and audience competition (Landerer 2013, 243). The more competitive the media market, the “more the media have to take into consideration what audience segments advertisers are interested in reaching and what kind of news these audience segments are interested in”

(Strömbäck et al. 2012, 720). Landerer notes that the normative logic of media deals with concerns about what “they should do in order to contribute to the democratic process” (2013, 245). This clashes with market logic and is subordinated to concerns about the “maximization of audience... in order to generate profit” (2013, 244).

Election coverage in Canada clearly illustrates this conundrum. For journalists working on elections, their

“public service function suggests they should focus on issues and policies to guide voters through a myriad of promises. Yet elections are horse-races. The story of who is winning and who is losing often overshadows the issues” (Cox 2010, 97).

The ubiquity of a contest frame fulfills the market side of media logic which news media rely on in order “to be competitive in the ongoing struggle to capture people’s attention” (Strömbäck, 2008, 233). As Cox writes, “money determines everything” (2010, 105) and the need to entertain is seen as necessary to maintain audiences and attract readers. While issues “are supposed to be at the core of any debate over choosing a government... *who* will win and *how* is the story” (Cox 2010, 101, emphasis added).

Covering elections is expensive. Newspaper election coverage does not provide revenues for newspapers but instead creates an added expense, with papers having to pay for reporters to travel alongside political leaders (Cox 2010, 107). Media-sponsored polls during elections are also very expensive (Adams 2010 162). Canada’s newspapers struggling with falling circulation rates and advertising revenues, particularly in saturated media environments, must make decisions about what to cover and how to do so in order to maintain or build audiences while preserving the budgetary

bottom line. Previous studies in Canada focused on the news selection and framing of election coverage in newspapers, yet none have examined the context of the market logic used by media organizations during election coverage and none have examined the impact of market factors in how elections are covered. This chapter seeks to do this by providing a comparison of election coverage through a variety of newspapers and provinces, positing that the market context and political environment in which the papers operates influences the type of coverage provided.

The specific critique of the role of the media in framing elections concerns its potential effects on democracy. Studies in North America and Europe have determined that media tend to frame elections as contests and with limited substantive discussion regarding policy or policy outcomes (see for example Capella and Jamison, 1997). Framing is a necessary story telling technique and a way “of processing and packaging information so it can be quickly conveyed by reports and easily interpreted by the audience” (Trimble and Sampert 2004, 52). Contest coverage refers to the framing of elections as “a political contest between political actors with limited attention for the issues at stake” (Takens et al. 2013, 280). Inherent in that construct is an emphasis on the game, a “strategic meta-narrative” that relies on horse-racing, sports or battlefield metaphors (Trimble and Sampert 2004, 53) and is enhanced by the use of campaign polls and poll reporting in the media. As Strömbäck and Esser point out, the emphasis on the “game” or the contest frame in election coverage points to the market logic of media because it is competitiveness that drives

the media to select and frame election stories in this way (2009).

The use of the contest frame and the reliance on polling information to drive election coverage appears to be increasing at the federal level. Pétry and Bastien found that in the 2008 federal election, media outlets sponsored over 200 national surveys on voter intentions over a 37-day period. This compares to just 22 national polls reported over a 51-day period in the media in 1988 (2013, 1). A more general analysis of the 2004 and 2006 federal elections in seven daily Canadian newspapers determined that the contest focus was featured in more than half of the newspaper coverage in 2004 (55%), up from 45% in 2006 (Soroka and Andrew 2010, 116). In their study of the headlines in Canada’s two national newspapers (*The Globe and Mail* and the *National Post*), Trimble and Sampert determined that the contest frame was frequently used in the coverage of the 2001 federal election. Anderson studied the election coverage of the 1997 federal election in eleven Canadian daily newspapers and three television networks and found that polling information and the horse-race frame dominated news coverage at the expense of information about political issues (Anderson 2000, 294). There are concerns that the use of the contest frame is a “continuing obsession” for news organizations and that the creation of stories which are “easy to report” allows

news organizations to appear neutral and authoritative and absolve them of the responsibility to probe more deeply, explore issues more thoroughly, and describe the consequences of party positions for the country (Taras and Waddell 2012, 75).

Pétry and Bastien are very critical of the use of polling information, calling

the reliance on pollsters “a threat to democracy” because the inaccuracy of polling results coverage “deceives more than it informs voters” (2013, 20-21). Indeed, as McGrane points out in this edited collection, polling accuracy is of considerable concern particularly in pollsters ability to accurately forecast election outcomes.

An additional component to the mediatization literature outlining market logic is an emphasis on opinion writing and columns. As Sampert et al. determined in their analysis of the coverage of leadership campaigns in the *Globe and Mail* over a 37-year period, the use of simplified and personalized media coverage has increased over time – particularly after 2000 – as a direct result of market competition (Sampert et al. forthcoming). There are concerns that newspapers are moving away from reporting news stories and are instead providing opinion that is “often interpretive, critical, provocative and partial, standing in stark in contrast to the more thorough and balanced approach of the regular news story” (Sampert et al. forthcoming).

In at least three of the six elections, it would seem that framing the election as a game would make sense. Based on early polls, government turnovers were possible in Alberta, Ontario and Manitoba. In Alberta and Manitoba, the incumbent premiers were facing their first election since winning the party leadership – Alison Redford and Greg Selinger. Redford’s Progressive Conservatives were thought to be confronting their first real competitive election in decades. In Manitoba, Selinger’s New Democrats were facing the electorate for the first time since the departure of the extremely popular Gary Doer. Some polls suggested the NDP was in trouble as PC leader Hugh

McFadyen offered a new vision for the province after twelve years of NDP rule. In Ontario, Dalton McGuinty’s Liberals were lagging in popular support. Indeed, a *Toronto Star* poll released in June of 2011 suggested that McGuinty was one of Canada’s most unpopular premiers (Benzie 07 June 2011). The other three provinces in our study, however, could also view the election as a game, particularly with a focus on potential changes in the number of seats being held by each party in the provincial legislatures. While PEI, Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), and Saskatchewan had governments that were still quite popular, improving their seat count was a focus.

As each election progressed, the parties and their leaders were forced to deal with a number of controversies that arose, even in the provinces with relatively certain election outcomes. For example, in NL, a controversial hydro-electric project in Muskrat Falls was an issue highlighted throughout the campaign, with concerns about cost overruns. In PEI, immigration became a central problem for the Liberals. A front-page *Globe and Mail* article referred to “unsubstantiated allegations of fraud and envelopes of money changing hands between PEI government bureaucrats and well-heeled Chinese immigrants, under PEI’s Provincial Nominee Program (McKenna and Desserud 2013, 68). In Saskatchewan, while there was no specific scandal, there was considerable discussion about program funding and as the weeks progressed, concerns about the profitable third-quarter earnings report from the Potash Corp increased, and centered on the NDP argument that these earnings should be used to pay for social spending (McGrane et al. 2013, 4). Thus, even in provinces in which the race’s

outcome was expected, there were still potential points of contestation and contention on which the media could hook.

Methodology

In order to compare newspaper coverage across provinces, we conducted a manual content analysis. In total, we examined six newspapers published in the capital city of each of the provinces in which elections were held in the study's time frame of 2011-2012. We analyzed coverage in *The Telegram* in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador; *The Guardian* in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island; the *Toronto Star* in Toronto, Ontario; the *Winnipeg Free Press* in Winnipeg, Manitoba; the *Leader Post* in Regina, Saskatchewan; and the *Edmonton Journal* in Edmonton, Alberta. In cities in which there was more than one newspaper available, we chose the newspaper with the highest circulation numbers. Where possible, we relied on the physical copy of the newspaper; however, some days were missing. We then used microfiche and as a last resort, the electronic versions of the newspapers.

Three of the papers in this study could be considered "large papers," not only because of their circulation size but also because of the media market in which they operate, while three of the newspapers could be considered "small papers". The *Toronto Star*, *Winnipeg Free Press* and *Edmonton Journal* have the top three circulation numbers of the papers in the study. The *Toronto Star* has the greatest average daily circulation numbers at 357,612. The *Winnipeg Free Press* reaches 113,251 households and the *Edmonton Journal* 101,950. By comparison, the *Leader Post* has 41,598 subscribers and the papers that publish in

the Atlantic provinces have the lowest circulation numbers at 25,645 for *The Telegram* and 17,724 for *The Guardian* (Canadian Newspaper Association). The *Guardian* and the *Telegram* publish a newspaper six days a week. The *Leader Post*, *Star*, and *Journal* publish as a broadsheet seven days a week. The *Winnipeg Free Press* also publishes seven days a week, but its Sunday paper is only available in stores or online thus we did not include it as part of the overall analysis as it was not widely available.

The ownership model and media market in which the papers operate is also important to understand. The *Star* is owned by Torstar, which also owns the *Metro*, a free daily distributed in nine cities, and it also operates in one of the most highly saturated and competitive media markets (see for example Androich 02 November 2012). The *Toronto Star* is Canada's largest daily newspaper in Canada's largest city. The *Winnipeg Free Press* is an independent newspaper owned by FP Canadian Newspapers, which also owns the *Brandon Sun*. Winnipeg's media market is viewed as quite small, with the *Free Press* competing with the *Metro* and the *Sun* for newspaper advertising revenue, but Winnipeg is considered the only major city in Manitoba, so all major newspaper advertising revenue will be spent in that market first. The *Edmonton Journal* and *Leader Post* are part of the Postmedia chain, which has 9 daily papers including the *National Post*. In terms of population, Edmonton is larger than Winnipeg, while Regina is smaller. The *Guardian* and the *Telegram* are both owned by TC. Media, a company which has nine newspapers in PEI, NL, Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan as well as one in Montreal. Both of these newspapers service population areas that are quite small. In terms of economies of

scale, the expense of covering elections in Edmonton and Regina may be ameliorated somewhat by the presence of “sister” publications in the same province. For example, the cost of covering the leaders’ tours in Alberta can be shared between the *Edmonton Journal* and the *Calgary Herald*. The same could be said about coverage of the Saskatchewan election with Regina and Saskatoon sharing election costs. The “news traffic” in each city would be substantially different as well. Toronto is the centre for Canada’s financial and business news, making competition for attention by the media intense. In comparison, smaller cities like Charlottetown and St. John’s would have less “news traffic” making the possibility of getting published in either the *Telegram* or the *Guardian* easier.

The decision to study newspapers rather than television stories was deliberate. First, newspapers at both the national and subnational level are still viewed as important agenda setters, particularly by political strategists (Taras 1990; Trimble and Sampert, 2004). Second, newspapers provide more in-depth coverage of elections when compared to television stations, which are limited by their format. Finally, given that this study incorporates six provinces, it was most feasible to obtain copies of newspapers stories when compared to attempting to access video transcripts.

The period of analysis was four weeks from the day after each election was called, excluding Alberta since its election date was not fixed. In the Alberta case, we studied the newspapers from the day after the writ was dropped (March 26, 2012) until the day after the election (April 24, 2012). The actual number of days studied varied depending on publication days (some newspapers only publish six days a week) and statutory

holidays (some newspapers do not publish on a statutory holiday). Headlines and stories were coded separately because the headline function is different than the story (van Dijk 1991, 50). Headlines are meant to capture the reader’s attention and deliver information in a short, pithy format, thus aligning with the market logistics of entertainment. By comparison, stories are meant to provide more in-depth information and detail. Two coders were trained to manually code each story. An intercoder reliability test conducted on a random sample of ten percent of the news stories found there was agreement on coding individual variables at least 70% of the time.¹

This paper examines the nature of the coverage of six provincial elections across Canada and explores two main hypotheses. First, we argue that elections would be considered important news stories particularly in cities in which the government had the potential to fall. Therefore, we anticipated more attention to be paid to the election in Toronto, Winnipeg and Edmonton. In addition, we reasoned that the contest frame would be ubiquitous in all of the provinces, but more prominent in the three provinces in which the governing party was in jeopardy. Explored below, our findings indicate there were very clear differences in how the provincial election stories were told and how they were framed as contests. Instead of a media logic influencing journalistic standards that were replicated in each election, we determined interesting nuances that suggest that market logic considerations, such as community and size of newspaper, were significant factors in newspaper coverage.

Findings

Just by looking at the newspapers, it becomes clear that each election was covered in the paper's unique way. For example, the *Edmonton Journal* provided a large amount of graphics to showcase information about the Alberta election. Additionally, it provided a specific section called "venting" in which readers were invited to write comments about the election. While we did not include coding of the venting segment in our following data, it is important to note that there were 59 of these vents published in the *Journal*, many of which were extremely negative towards politics in general. Conversely, the *Winnipeg Free Press* launched the "Democracy Project" a year ahead of the election date, in a bid to get more people interested in voting. During its election coverage, several stories were written about voter apathy alongside stories that attempted to educate constituents about voting (Goodhand 02 October 2010). In addition, the *Free Press'* front page does not contain any editorial content. Instead, it offers graphics and photos, with editorial content continued on subsequent pages. Coverage of the election in the Atlantic papers was much more traditional, with a focus on news stories rather than graphics or photographs.

As a means of determining the importance of the election, we looked at the overall number of stories given to election coverage in each newspaper and determined the average number of stories that ran per day. Not surprisingly, the largest newspaper – the *Toronto Star* – had the highest average number of stories per day over the election period under study, publishing slightly more than ten stories a day. However, the much smaller

Guardian reported the second highest average, followed by the *Journal*, the *Free Press*, the *Telegram* and finally, the *Leader Post*. These findings make it difficult to make any assertions about newspaper coverage of elections based on size of circulation, competitiveness of the newspaper market, or even volatility of the election. Instead, it would appear that the decision to dedicate time and resources to covering the provincial election is dependent on the newspaper managerial team's dedication to the subject.

Another way to gauge the level of importance given to the provincial election is its placement in the newspaper. The front-page is where the most important stories of the day will be found and it is used to capture the reader's interest (see for example Gibson 2011). Thus, the use of the front-page is indicative of the market logic of the media. It is used to "sell" the paper. Clearly, the *Toronto Star* did not see it as a part of its market logic, because it had the lowest number of front-page stories than any other newspaper in our study – only 15. The *Star* opted instead to place election stories in its "Insight" and "Greater Toronto" sections. The *Guardian* had the highest number of front-page stories with 43. The *Telegram* was third with 38, the *Edmonton Journal* followed with 33, the *Leader Post* had 27 and the *Free Press* had 21. The *Free Press* numbers are also interesting because it is devoid of editorial content on the front-page, making room for more headlines than in a conventional front-page, yet it had the least front-page headlines overall.

Table 1: Number of election stories per paper

	<i>Star</i>	<i>Free Press</i>	<i>Journal</i>	<i>Leader Post</i>	<i>Telegram</i>	<i>Guardian</i>
Total number of stories	288*	172**	264*	148	160	222
Average stories per day	10.3	7.2	8.8	6.2	7	9.3
Front-page stories	15	21***	33	27	38	43

* indicates the inclusion of Sunday publication

** does not include headlines from front-page with no editorial comment

*** the Free Press front-page has no editorial content, thus these are headlines and not stories

Table 2: Story type by newspaper

	<i>Star</i>	<i>Free Press</i>	<i>Journal</i>	<i>Leader Post</i>	<i>Telegram</i>	<i>Guardian</i>
Hard News	165 57.3%	110 57.0%	196 74.2%	92 62.2%	125 78.1%	151 68.0%
Editorial	12 4.2%	12 6.2%	16 6.1%	6 4.1%	9 5.6%	12 5.4%
Columns	54 18.8%	26 13.5%	35 13.3%	40 27.0%	23 14.4%	13 5.9%
Briefs	43 14.9%	15 7.8%	8 3.0%	0 0%	2 1.3%	37 16.7%
In-Depth Feature	1 .3%	1 .5%	1 .4%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
Personality Profile	10 3.5%	1 .6%	0 0%	2 1.4%	1 .6%	8 3.6%
Voter Info	0 0%	6 3.1%	7 2.7%	4 2.7%	0 0%	1 .5%

Coverage of the election was not consistent over the campaign period, either. Examining the weekly number of articles in each newspaper reveals different styles in how newspapers used

more intensive election coverage. The *Guardian*, for instance, published a relatively greater number of election stories in Week 1 of the PEI campaign, while the remaining papers started

unhurriedly, steadily increasing their campaign coverage until Election Day. The higher quantity of stories by the *Toronto Star* and *Edmonton Journal* came in the final week of the election, when their coverage leapt in comparison to other papers.

The type of story used to describe election events also provides insight into election coverage. As discussed, there is evidence that opinion pieces or columns are replacing news stories as part of newspapers' market logic. This means that consumers are being provided with fewer opportunities to read about events that are presented as regular news – news that follows journalist guidelines of fairness and balance. Instead, the news is mediated through editorials or columns that hold a particular perspective. There are variations on the level of mediation across the board. For example, hard news comprised less than 60% of the *Toronto Star's* coverage (57.3%). Almost 20% of its coverage appeared in columns, and 4.2% of its election stories were editorials. The *Regina Leader Post* also had a relatively low percentage of hard news stories (62.2%). By contrast, the *Leader Post's* columns were 27% of its overall coverage and editorials made up 4.1% of the news coverage. Coverage in the *Telegram* was found predominantly in hard news stories (78.1%), and less than 20% of its stories were mediated through columns and opinion pieces. Interestingly, the *Guardian* had the highest percentage of election news stories in the “in brief” format – that is, short election stories with limited information. For the *Guardian*, “in brief” stories made up 16.7% of its overall coverage. The *Star* also had a higher percentage of “in brief” stories at 14.9% (43 stories). Such articles usually provided brief information about election

events including where leaders or candidates were to appear and contained little substantive information. The largest paper (the *Star*) and one of the smallest papers (*Guardian*) had the highest overall percentage of “in brief” stories, suggesting that this may have been a managerial decision to use briefs to fill news holes in the newspaper.

Next, we examined the prevalence of the contest or game frame in the election coverage. As the literature suggests, the contest frame should be ubiquitous in all the papers, but in particular, we expected to see its use entrenched in provinces in which there was an anticipated potential change in government. It did not happen. Only two of the three papers in which the race was viewed as competitive used the game frame in over 50% of the stories: the *Star* and the *Journal* (67.7% and 54.5%) while the *Free Press* used a contest frame in just 35.5% of its stories. The *Free Press's* concerted effort to increase voter turnout through its Democracy Project, a clear decision to focus on the public interest or normative logic in media, accounted for some of this variance. In the smaller papers, the contest frame was used in under 50% of the stories. It was found in 45.3% of the *Leader Post* stories, 47.5% of the *Telegram* stories and 32.4% of the *Guardian's*. This is remarkable given that the analysis of news coverage at the federal level indicates that the contest frame should be the common frame for the story. Using a chi-square test, we determined a relationship between newspaper and the use of the game frame.² For example, both the *Star* and the *Journal* had higher percentages than expected for game frame stories, while the *Free Press* and the *Guardian* had much lower percentages than expected. Both the *Leader Post* and the *Telegram's*

Table 3: Story Frame by Newspaper

	<i>Star</i>	<i>Free Press</i>	<i>Journal</i>	<i>Leader Post</i>	<i>Telegram</i>	<i>Guardian</i>
Game	196 67.7%	61 35.5%	144 54.5%	67 45.3%	76 47.5%	74 32.4%
Issue	75 26.0%	100 58.1%	109 41.3%	71 48.0%	78 48.8%	117 52.7%
Other	17 5.9%	11 6.4%	11 4.2%	10 6.8%	6 3.8%	33 14.9%
Total	288 100%	172 100%	264 100%	148 100%	160 100%	222 100%

Table 4: Top five categories of game frame by newspaper

	<i>Star</i>	<i>Free Press</i>	<i>Journal</i>	<i>Leader Post</i>	<i>Telegram</i>	<i>Guardian</i>
Strategies	52 26.5%	23 37.7%	24 16.7%	21 31.3%	17 22.4%	9 12.5%
Leader	47 24.0%	10 16.4%	27 18.8%	16 23.9%	15 19.7%	15 20.8%
Candidate	34 17.3%	3 4.9%	40 27.8%	7 10.4%	14 18.4%	10 13.9%
Party	17 8.7%	15 24.6%	33 22.9%	9 13.4%	16 21.1%	15 20.8%
Polls	14 7.1%	5 8.2%	9 6.3%	5 7.5%	9 11.8%	11 15.3%

percentage of stories that contained a game frame were close to what was expected.

Framing appeared to evolve over the course of the election. The fourth and final week of each election saw each paper’s share of the game frame surpass the issue frame, with most newspapers nearly doubling the use of game frame over the course of the campaign. For example, in the *Guardian*, use of the game frame increased from 24.5% of the total stories in Week 1 to 64% in the final week; in the *Telegram*, from 47.6% to 62.5%; in the *Star*, from 69.8% to 71.5%; and in the *Free Press*, from 20% to 48.1%. In the *Leader Post*, the game frame increased from 44.8% of the stories to

55.6% in the last week, and in the *Journal*, it climbed from 40.4% to 59.5%. In sum, there was a clear “race to the finish” mentality among all newspapers, although some used the horse-race frame more than others.

Remarkably unlike federal elections, polls did not push election coverage in the provinces under examination. In stories that contained the game frame, we coded to determine what was the impetus behind the contest frame and determined the top five indicators to be (in order of overall frequency) campaign strategies, leader performance, candidate performance, party performance, and polls. Polling stories only made up only 8.6% of stories framed

as a contest. The focus on strategies and insider's looks at leaders, candidates and party performances speaks to the prominence of market logic. Such stories represent a potential "scoop" for newspapers and the possibility for scandal since they reveal "behind-the-scenes information that the parties do not really want public" (Cox 2010, 105).

Implications

This is the first time in Canada that a comparative analysis of newspaper coverage of provincial elections has been conducted, adding more dimensions to the growing study of media in the country. What can be made of the findings? First, provincial election coverage is not like federal election coverage. It becomes obvious that when it comes to writing about elections, the role of market logic, including competitiveness and market size, shape news coverage. For example, the *Star* had the resources and the newspaper space to provide coverage of the provincial election, and so it is no surprise that it had the highest average for number of stories per day at 10.3 stories a day. However, the smallest newspaper in the study, the *Guardian* had the second highest average at 9.3 stories a day suggesting that management considered the story important. The two smaller papers – the *Telegram* and the *Guardian* had the most front-page stories, more than the competitive races in Toronto and Calgary. This points to the smaller media and news market influencing what is published, suggesting that in markets where the newspaper is not competing for advertising revenues, the normative – or public service function of the news – is given primacy.

The role of market logic is underscored further in the examination of framing. The two large papers operating in saturated media markets in the context of a potential government upset – the *Edmonton Journal* and the *Toronto Star* – clearly used a contest frame to portray the election. The smaller papers covering elections that were not likely to see a change in government focused on issues. Perhaps more telling, in an election in which there was a potential for an upset – the Manitoba election – the story frame was predominantly issue-based. This may be in part due to the commitment made by the newspaper to provide information about the election as part of its Democracy Project but it also may be in part the result of the market. The *Winnipeg Free Press* dominates its market throughout the province and unlike Edmonton and Toronto does not have as much competition. For the smaller papers, even when there was a potential for scandal, the focus remained on the issues rather than on the contest. For example, the Provincial Nominee Program in PEI and the Muskrat Falls story in NL could have easily been framed as controversies, playing up the conflict and employing a game frame replete with boxing or war metaphors. Neither paper resorted to this. Instead, the coverage provided an overview of the issues with limited mediation.

More exploration needs to be done to fully understand the differences. The next step would be to conduct interviews with editors and journalists at these papers to determine the community contexts in which they operate. Smaller communities who feel a close affinity with their newspapers may not react well to stories that are overly negative or that ignore issues for a contest frame. As well, more elections need to be studied. For

example, would a small market newspaper covering an election in which the government was facing a potential upset still rely on normative rather than market logic? Are there interesting comparisons we can make between provincial and federal elections by one newspaper? There are many questions that remain unanswered, signaling that more research needs to be done at the subnational level.

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Endnotes

¹ Intercoder reliability scores are by no means uniform nor is the method by which they are conducted. Studies have been published citing intercoder reliability rates as low as 56% and as high as 85% (see for example Manganello and Blake 2012; Schnidermann et al. 2005).

² A chi-square test was performed and a relationship was found between the newspaper and the use of the game frame $\chi^2(10, N=1254)=102.49, p=.000$.