The Effect of Neoliberalism
on the Proliferation of Pre-election Polls in the Canadian media

by

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Abstract

Poll-based, horserace reporting by the news media during election campaigns has been shown to: influence voting intention and support for candidates; reduce the amount of substantial information provided by the media; contribute to citizens' political apathy; and contribute to the debasement of political communication. Also, in recent times, the polling industry in Canada and other Western countries has faced major challenges which culminated in the failure of polls. The primary purpose of this study is to demonstrate, through a longitudinal content analysis of Canada's national newspaper's election reportage, how the Canadian media's use of pre-elections polls has increased in the neoliberal era. It then goes on to consider why criticisms of polls and problems of the polling industry have apparently not affected the media's use of polls. Here, a Critical Political Economy approach is used to argue that the cause is commercialization of the media.

Keywords: pre-election polls; democracy; commercialization; neoliberalism; political economy; media; Canada.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"Media and journalism are under some form of – at least moral – obligation to democracy" (Strömbäck, 2005, p.333). At no time is this democratic obligation of the media more important in western liberal democracies than during elections, which are the primary means by which their citizens participate in the political process. Thus, it is generally agreed that the media ought to play an important role as information provider during elections, though as will be seen in the next section, the nature and extent of this obligation can vary depending on how democracy is perceived. Pre-election polls have become important features of the media's reporting of elections in many Western countries, Canada included.

The use of polls is considered problematic due to some of their purported effects. These include: influencing voting intention (through the so-called strategic and bandwagon effects) and support for candidates; contributing to voter apathy by reducing the citizenry to spectators; shrinking the news time or space dedicated to more substantial issues; and influencing how leaders' political communication is framed. Furthermore, in recent times, the failures of polls in provincial elections in Canada in 2012 and 2013, the 2015 United Kingdom general election and the 2016 United States general have drawn attention to the challenges being faced by the polling industry. The predictions made by most pollsters in these elections widely diverged from the outcomes of these elections.

Hence, this study seeks to understand why polls continue to be important in the news media's campaign coverage despite these factors. The major question posed is: How has the Canadian media's use of pre-elections polls increased in the neoliberal era? A second and related question this thesis also seeks to consider is why criticisms of polls and problems of the polling

industry have not affected the media's use of polls. The answer to these questions require an analysis of democracy and the rampant commercialization of the media in the neoliberal era; and debates over polling. This study suggests that polls have become increasingly important in the Canadian news media's election coverage in spite of the numerous challenges facing the polling industry that influence the quality of polls. This focus on polls is spurred on by rampant commercialization of the media in the neoliberal era, and defenses of polls that emerge within scholarship and find their way into the media.

In this vein, this introductory chapter begins by exploring the role of the media in liberal democracies. Afterwards, the increased commercialization of the media in the neoliberal and the rise of poll use in campaign coverage is examined in the light of the roles of the media outlined. The rest of the chapter presents the organization of study and the methodology adopted, defines terms pertinent to this study and provides an insight to the approach employed in this study – the Critical Political Economy (CPE) of the media.

1.1 The Role of the Media in Liberal Democracies

As aforementioned, the media is generally regarded to be under some form of obligation to democracy. However, as Strömbäck (2005) argues, the scope of this obligation is controversial and differs across normative conceptions of democracy. In other words, the roles ascribed to the media in democratic societies largely depends on the model of democracy subscribed to. This explains, for example, why two notable experts on the American media, Patterson (2000b) and Norris (2000b), writing at the same time can provide widely diverging views on the state of the country's media. While Patterson provides a pessimistic view of the American news media, that "soft news and critical journalism are weakening the foundation of democracy by diminishing the

public's information about public affairs and its interest in politics", Norris argues that the "American news media are far healthier than naysayers would have us believe" (p.306, p.2). These opposing views of the condition of the American news media reflect different understandings of what democracy is and what the media's role within a democracy is. Hence, these perceptions of the state of the American media could be accurate within their respective democratic conceptions.

Given this, it is necessary to examine major models of democracy and the conception of media roles within them. This is critical to understanding the angle from which varying views of the media are presented in this study. This section draws upon the models of democracy identified by Strömbäck, who argues that these models determine not just the roles ascribed to the media – in and out of elections – but also what is considered "high quality news journalism" (2005, p.332). In this vein, he identifies four models of democracy and their implications for the media. They include:

- *Procedural democracy*, which mainly asks that citizens "respect the rules and procedures of democracy" (p.334), and that the media give people whatever form of news they want as expressed through market mechanisms.
- *Competitive democracy* draws heavily on Schumpeter and considers elections to be the lifeblood of citizens' participation in the democratic process, where "the political elites *act*…(and) the citizens react" (p.334). Here, the media is to provide the citizens with adequate information – on the past record of officeholders, and the candidate and party platforms – which they require to make the right choices during elections.
- *Participatory democracy* conceives that democracy "has to be built and sustained by the actions of a large number of people" who "engage in public life and different types of political action" (p.335-6). Here, the news should not only provide information on

important issues like competitive democracy necessitates, but also frame politics as "open for citizen participation, not as a strategic game played by those already engaged" (p.340).

- *Deliberative democracy* essentially sees "deliberative discussions among all sections of the public and their representatives" as the lifeblood of democracy (p.337) and the role of the media here is to "mobilize people's interest and engagement" (p.340). The major way it differs from participatory democracy is its emphasis on political discussions.

Despite these broadly defined models of democracy and what they mean for the media, the democratic views expressed in the literature do not always align with the media roles outlined. This is largely due to a pessimistic outlook on the possibility of change in how the news media functions, and is especially common among those whose views of democracy can be subsumed under participatory or deliberative democracy. They find the roles ascribed to the commercial media in the views of democracy they subscribe to, to be too great. For Crouch the "mass market for news makes it unsuitable for seriousness" (2004, p.47). This suggests that the commercial roles of the media are so prominent that they tend to overrule their democratic roles. Similarly, Patterson argues that "changes in communication and politics in the past few decades have placed an extraordinary burden on the press – it is increasingly expected by apologists and critics alike to organize public opinion and debate" (2000a, p.263). He regards these roles as extraordinary burdens because the media view themselves as primarily profit seekers rather than players in the democratic system, and suggests that institutions aside from the media be developed to perform these deliberative roles.

However, Crouch and Patterson seem to have fallen prey to the over emphasis on practicality which Crouch himself considers to be unhelpful and even dangerous. This is as participatory and deliberative models could be regarded as ideal models which he suggests "can almost never be fully achieved, but like all impossible ideals, it sets a marker. It is always valuable and intensely practical to consider where our conduct stands in relation to an ideal, since in that way we can try to improve" (Crouch, 2004, p.3). Thus, while the roles for the media outlined by the deliberative and participatory conceptions may seem unattainable, they can at the very least serve as ways by which the performance of the media can be assessed, and a target that can be aspired to.

This is important, because an emphasis on practicality tends to produce a very low standard for the news media and consequently creates a weaker conception of democracy. An example of how this takes place can be seen in Zaller's "Burglar Alarm standard" for the news media. The roles outlined for the news media under this standard are developed based on the argument that any standard for the news must be "practical: given existing institutional and cultural constraints, news media must be willing to produce and citizens must be willing to consume the indicated kind of news" and it is unreasonable to "urge higher standards of news quality" (Zaller, 2003, p.117). Hence, he develops a low standard for the news media because he believes that is what is obtainable under a commercial media. As Crouch argues, what this approach to democracy – which ultimately underlies the development of this kind of news standard – does, in its bid to "scale down the definitions of the ideal so that they conform to what we easily achieve" is to create a standard that is so complacent that it ignores significant ways in which democracy is being weakened (2004, p.3).

Furthermore, as Macpherson notes, the claim that such a standard is better because it is more realistic "rests ultimately on an unverifiable assumption" that people are uninterested in spending their time or energy on political activity (1977, p.86). This is exactly the argument that Zaller presents as the rationale for developing a "less stringent standard" for the news media; he suggests that a news standard like that required by participatory, deliberative or even the minimalist competitive democracy "makes unrealistically heavy demands on many citizens" (2003, p.110). Thus, he calls for the adoption of his Burglar Alarm standard, in which "the key idea is that news should provide information in the manner of attention-catching "burglar alarms" about acute problems, rather than "police patrols" over vast areas that pose no immediate problems" (p.110).

Zaller's analysis implies that this standard is in the interest of citizens, because a greater quality of news is too burdensome for them. This is one of the basic claims of those who argue that too high standards are being set for the news media; citizens do not want a higher quality of news, and that is why soft news sell. Since even competitive democracy does not provide such a minimal normative role for the media, Zaller's view fits more into procedural democracy. As Strömbäck notes, procedural democracy does not consider media commercialism a problem because "market mechanisms rather than normative demands will ensure that media and journalism provide the information people need" (2005, p.338).

Thus, in this view, it follows that if the media produces extremely trivialized content, it is because this is what the audience desires. However, like McChesney argues, this is not true because media markets are oligopolistic, people must "consume from a relatively narrow range of what media firms find most lucrative to produce" (2004, p.199). These contents are more lucrative in the sense that they are easily marketable and will be supported by the advertising system. This is

the same way pollsters justify polls by claiming that they give people information they want and even need, when in reality, they are simply giving what they have and want to be paid money for.

Zaller's view also provides an insight into why an increased focus on pre-election polls by the media during campaign coverage would be considered not only unproblematic, but essential to democracy, at least from the perspective of a procedural model of democracy. He argues that during election coverage, "the news should ignore races in which the opposition party mounts no serious challenge while paying close attention to those in which it does" (2003, p.125). Thus, in this view, the news media is encouraged to shape their coverage according to the horserace, and what better way to identify these races than pre-election polls. While this may seem to be such a low conception of news media roles, the argument here is usually that most citizens don't need information from the media during elections anyway, since the "highly informed (tend) to be more partisan" (Zaller, 2003, p.117). Agreeing with this view, Norris further notes that because of this "there is little support for either the optimistic belief that the media can generate civic engagement or the pessimistic view that can dampen it down" (2000b, p.277).

Thus, Norris argues that the problems – such as low voter turnout which exemplifies citizen disengagement and political apathy – that arise within the elitist, competitive democracy currently practiced in western liberal democracies are caused by "deep-seated flaws within the political systems and institutional arrangements (of specific) …societies" and not "by political communication per se" (2000, p.319). However, the elitist, competitive model of democracy as conceived of by Schumpeter, itself also contributes to these problems. Macpherson suggests this is because it "assigns the main role in the political process to self-chosen groups of leaders" which the citizens then have to pick from and reduces democracy to "a market mechanism…(where) the

voters are the consumers and the politicians are the entrepreneurs" (1977, p.77, 79). Thus, the innate way that competitive democratic functions also contributes to democratic malaise.

It is important to conclude this section by looking at how each model of democracy views horserace coverage – which essentially involves poll use – by the news media during campaign reportage. This is largely derived from the normative role of the media highlighted under each model. This is essential because it is against the backdrop of these views that the arguments on poll reportage presented in this thesis should be examined. Per Strömbäck, participatory and deliberative models of democracy believe "the news should frame politics as issues and as open for citizen participation, not as a strategic game played by those already engaged" (2005, p.340). Hence, it is evident that these models would regard a poll-focused (horserace) campaign coverage as harmful not just in the way that it limits the availability of useful information to the electorate, but also how it excludes the citizens and relegates them to the position of spectators in the political process. The procedural model, as discussed above, sees no problem with the use of polls, and as conceived from the views of Zaller (2003) may even regard them as important tools for the media to determine which candidates and races should be covered. The competitive model, as Stromback (2005) notes, may see a minor problem with horserace coverage, not in the way that it relegates the citizens to spectators, but due to its inherently conflictual nature which fosters distrust of political leaders.

1.2 Neoliberalism and the Commercialization of the Media

There is a tense, antithetical relationship between capitalism and democracy within liberal democracies, and this is largely due to the way the liberal democratic system emerged. According to Macpherson, (2011) the liberal capitalist system – organized on the principle of rights and

freedoms, particularly those of property – existed before the advent of democracy (popular rule). Democracy was added to liberalism through the gradual expansion of voting rights until universal adult suffrage was attained. However, democracy did not abolish the class structure of the liberal capitalist system; it only adapted the political system to it and combined the contending systems of capitalism and democracy; egalitarian politics and inegalitarian economics (Macpherson, 1977). The wealthy few (elites) retained their advantage over the masses in the liberal democratic system.

The tenuous relationship between capitalism and democracy in liberal democracies has worsened in the neoliberal era and contributed to mass disengagement from the political process, as exemplified in declining voter turnout rates across western democracies (Mair, 2013; Crouch, 2004; Macpherson, 1977; McChesney, 2000; Lewis et al, 2001). While voter turnout in the 2015 Canadian federal election increased to 68.5%, a height not seen since the 1997 election, this does not necessarily indicate a reversal of the downward trend. As Mair notes, "indicators of turnout change are somewhat like those of climate change: the shifts we see do not necessarily occur in great leaps or bounds, and are not always linear" (2013, p.26). Hence, because the decline in voter turnout does not always take the form of undisturbed downward trends, an increase in one election year does not discredit the assertion that there has been considerable decline in voter turnout in Canada in previous years.

One important change that has taken place in the neoliberal era is that the traditional political debate over whether a planning or market economy is the most ideal has been settled in favour of markets (Hardin, 2000). The American and Canadian media went ahead of other sectors to embrace the neoliberal notion that profit-making (and the market) should be allowed to regulate every aspect of life (McChesney, 2004, Vipond, 2011).

Thus, the deregulation engendered by neoliberalism allowed the media to become increasingly commercialized and dominated by large, profit-driven corporate firms (Crouch, 2004, Louw, 2010, McChesney, 2004). The rampant commercialization in Canada is particularly expressed through: the increase in concentration; the defunding of public media like the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, which makes it more reliant on advertising revenue; and the loosening of regulation. Concentration encourages increased commercialization, because it leads to an intensified focus on profit maximization, cost reduction, improved efficiency and the creation of a controlled environment (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006**)**. Concentration of media ownership in Canada, particularly in the newspapers industry, which has been taking place in various forms since the start of the twentieth century peaked in the 1980s, with the advent of neoliberal policies (Siegel, 1996). Also, Canada has the most concentrated TV industry ownership of any G8 country, and the second most concentrated TV audience (Tencer, 2012).

This increase in commercial pressures on media companies – aided by concentration of media ownership and deregulation of the media industry – has contributed to the growth in the phenomenon of reporting news as: an *entertaining spectacle/hype*, which focuses on entertaining the audience (Louw, 2010); *competitive sport/game*, in which politicians' struggle for power is depicted as a game (McChesney, 2004; Patterson, 1993); and *fluff*, which involves a focus on sensational and trivial aspects of politics (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006). These patterns of reportage share common features, they are: cheap to produce, sensational, believed to generate a large audience and can be managed and scripted through a collaborative process (Louw, 2010).

Pre-election polls conducted for and reported by the media during elections also possess these features: they are relatively cheap compared to the audience they generate, and are managed through a collaborative process between pollsters and journalists. Given these attractive features

of polls, it is no surprise that they have played an increasing role in news media coverage of campaigns in the neoliberal era across western democracies, from the United States and European countries to Canada (Pickup, 2010; Turcotte, 2011). As Turcotte (2011) argues, "this abundance of (polling) data obfuscates rather than illuminates the political landscape" (p.216).

Using horserace polls, with the sole intent of predicting which candidate is 'leading', elections are framed as games in which candidates seek power for their selfish interests. It has been argued that this kind of coverage not only makes the citizenry to distrust the government – which is not necessarily a bad thing – but also alienates them from the political process and makes them apathetic (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997, Strömbäck, 2012). This is because reportage of the horserace relegates viewers to the role of spectators observing the electoral process rather than decision makers who collectively determine the outcome (Mendehlson, 1996, Patterson, 1993).

Also, the focus on who is winning is usually at the expense of policy discussion that could help citizens in making their decisions on who to vote for (Mendehlson, 1996). Even when policies are discussed, it is in the light of polls, and this reduces them to mere tactical devices employed by candidates to improve their standing in the polls (Patterson, 1993, Trimble & Sampert, 2004). This invariably results in a trivialization of politics, in which policy differences (or similarities) are hardly discussed, particularly if there is no contention over them, and it is made to appear as if there are no policy issues at stake (Mendelsohn, 1996). Not only can this contribute to political apathy, but it makes the election immensely personalized; with no policy issues at stake, the focus becomes choosing leaders based more on their personalities.

Crouch also notes that "the mass of citizens plays a passive, quiescent, even apathetic part, responding only to the signals given them…(because) politics is really shaped in private by interactions between elected governments and elites that overwhelmingly represent business

interests" (2004, p.4). In the same vein, Macpherson argues that "social inequality…creates political apathy" because the wealthier have more of the resources – time, energy and money – required to be active participants in the political process than the working class (1977, p.88). This contributes to political disengagement in Western democracies, which is also expressed through a reduction in commitment to partisan politics (Mair, 2013). Because voters' preferences are less guided by partisan attachments, there is greater room for the media to set the agenda.

The quality of the news media's campaign coverage is even more important due to the processes of mediatization and political marketing. This occurs when the media's pattern of reportage – media logic (Altheide & Snow, 1979) – which has been greatly influenced by commercialization becomes so important that it influences how political candidates and parties communicate with the electorate. This is the process of mediatization, in which candidates, in a bid to regain control of communication from the media, shape their communicative processes to suit the media's logic (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999). Consequently, the form of political communication produced is reduced to the media's standard. Political marketing is an outgrowth of this attempt by candidates to control political communication using media logic, and is particularly employed during election campaigns (Brants & Voltmer, 2011). Herein, political communication is reduced to unabashed marketing of candidates using negative advertising and spin. In this process, citizens are mostly unable to get substantial information from the candidates on their intentions when they reach office, as the goal is just to 'sell' the candidate to them. Also, this process of political marketing reduces the citizens to speculators, even consumers.

1.3 Organization of Study

In answering the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter, this thesis is divided into five chapters. The rest of this chapter explores the methodology, theoretical and analytic

frameworks adopted and defines terms pertinent to this study. Chapter two examines the tension between capitalism and democracy in the neoliberal era and how this is replicated in the media. This is done using the critical political economy approach, to assess the growth of commercialization and competitive pressures in the Canadian media, and examine how this has contributed to the proliferation of pre-election polls in the neoliberal era. The chapter also examines the processes of mediatization and political marketing to understand how media logic has influenced political communication by candidates and parties.

In chapter three, an in-depth analysis of polling is conducted by reviewing critical literature on the history of polling, factors that determine the quality of polls, and the debates on the effects of the news media's focus on pre-election polls during election campaign coverage. Chapter four presents the results of the content analysis of all election articles published by the *Globe and Mail* during the campaign period of nine Canadian elections from 1963 to 2015, against the backdrop of the evolution of the use and criticism of pre-election polls in campaign reporting. This is to understand why polls continued to be used by the media in the neoliberal era despite the criticisms and the problems being faced by the polling industry. Chapter five concludes the thesis with a restatement of its major argument, that rampant commercialization has contributed to the media's increasing use of pre-election polls in the neoliberal era. Also, the problems of polling have not impacted this use because of the closeness between pollsters and much of the scholarly world studying polls, as defenses emerge within scholarship which then find their way into the media

1.4 Methodology

Longitudinal content analysis

The empirical research of chapter four is a content analysis of all election articles published by the *Globe and Mail* during the campaign period of selected Canadian federal elections from the year 1963 till 2015. To ensure adequate coverage of elections throughout the period, I began the selection process by choosing every third election. This amounts to six election years, namely 1963, 1972, 1979/1980, 1993, 2004 and 2011. To this basic selection, 1984 was added to ensure the inclusion of the election generally considered to be the one that marked the emergence of the neoliberal era, and 2008 and 2015 were added to ensure that trends in more recent years are included.

The *Globe and Mail* was selected for this analysis because it is a prestigious Canadian national daily that has substantial input in setting the agenda for election coverage (Trimble & Sampert, 2004). It has also been a protagonist in the creation of rules for polling – alongside five other newspapers, the *Globe* challenged the law that made it a criminal offence to publish the results of polls conducted in the final three days of an election. The law was consequently struck down by the Supreme court in 1998. While effects of increasing dominance of polls in election coverage can also be observed in other media like television and on the internet, the implications of this study are confined to the print media. The quality of information produced by the print media is important because other media heavily rely on the information it produces (McChesney & Nichols, 2010, Sauvageau, 2012)

1963 was chosen as the starting point of the analysis because it was the year the final traces of racial and religious discrimination were eliminated from the law governing the federal franchise in Canada, and true universal adult suffrage was attained (Elections Canada, 2007). The content

analysis will span *Globe and Mail* articles written about the election during the official campaign period for each election year. In this vein, all *Globe and Mail* articles that contain statements about the election, election events or party and candidate activities and in the aforementioned time frame was coded according to the presence or absence of the following:

- Pre-election polls were mentioned in the article
- Polls were the major focus of the article (i.e. the article headline referenced polls or polls were discussed more than any other issue in the report)
- Polls were used to interpret events or actions of the parties and the leaders
- A winner was predicted
- Polls from various firms were compared

The purpose of this content analysis is to understand why use of polls by the media in the neoliberal era continued to increase despite criticisms of polling. This study hypothesizes that the closeness between pollsters and much of the scholarly world that is studying polling is a major reason for this, as defenses of polling emerge within scholarship and find their way into the media. The analysis will also enable us to adequately compare pre-election poll reportage in the pre-neoliberal period with the neoliberal period and examine trends within the neoliberal period.

The content analysis will also examine the quality of poll reporting by considering if polls are accompanied by adequate provision of methodological information. Thus, *Globe and Mail* articles referencing polls in the aforementioned time frame are checked for the inclusion of the following methodological information provided for in Section 326 of the Canada Election Act (2000):

- the name of the sponsor of the survey;
- the name of the person or organization that conducted the survey;

- the date on which or period during which the survey was conducted;
- the population from which the sample of respondents was drawn;
- the number of people who were contacted to participate in the survey;
- if applicable, the margin of error in respect of the data obtained.

Canada

The first national poll in Canada was conducted by the Liberal Party in 1942 and the first pre-election poll by the Canadian Institute of Public Opinion (CIPO) in 1945. However, pre-election polls did not become a significant part of the Canadian campaign reporting until the 1980s, at the start of the neoliberal period, with various polling agencies being commissioned by the media and political parties (Pickup, 2010; Emery, 1994). Polling became so widespread in Canada at the time, that Lachapelle (1991) was commissioned by the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing to research polling in Canada. He found that "many people fear that it (polling) has acquired undue influence…over voters" particularly through the strategic and bandwagon effects on voting intentions (Lachapelle, 1991, p.11).

One of Lachapelle's recommendations resulted in the amendment of Section 322.1 of the Canada Elections Act in 1993, which prohibited the release of the results of newly conducted polls three days before the election. The poll ban was challenged in court by a group of newspapers, and was struck down by the Supreme court in 1998. Per Emery, there were several other attempts to introduce bills "to regulate or ban the publication of polls during federal elections; however, none was endorsed by the House of Commons" (1994, p.10).

Another one of Lachapelle's recommendations culminated in the creation of Section 326 of the Canada Election Act in June, 2000. This legislation sought to regulate the reporting of methodology in new pre-election polls. Some of its specific requirements include: the name of the

sponsor; the name of the person or organization that conducted the survey; the date the survey was conducted; the population from which the sample of respondents was drawn; the number of people who were contacted to participate in the survey; and if applicable, the margin of error in respect of the data obtained. The publication of this methodological information is considered essential to evaluating the validity of these polls. However, there has been a low level of compliance with the requirements provided for in the Section 326, which is reportedly because many reporters are unaware of these laws (Gosselin & Petry, 2009; Ferguson & de Clercy, 2005).

Regardless, regulation of poll-reporting is not as prominent in other countries as it is in Canada. Self-regulation through the American Association for Public Opinion Research in the US, and European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research for the UK is mostly how polls have been managed in these countries. Similar self-regulation have also existed among Canadian pollsters and news media, through organizations like the Canadian Association of Marketing Research Organizations and the Canadian Daily Newspaper Publisher Association respectively, even before the creation of Section 326. However, Lachapelle (1991) found that this self-regulation was not complied with, and he recommended they be included in the Canada Election Act.

The use of Canada as the country of study for this research is therefore pertinent because although Canada has made considerable attempts to regulate the publication of pre-election polls, especially compared to the US & UK in which there's been little or no regulation, the quality of the media's reporting of polls during elections in Canada is not much better than in these countries. This is evidenced in the minimal compliance with Section 326 that has been observed. Furthermore, the provisions of this regulation do not address the deeper issues caused by pre-election polls, namely the way the focus on the horserace by the news media displaces important

information, contributes to apathy, influences support for candidates or even influences voting intention.

Mostly Canadian sources will be employed during this study though sources from other countries may be occasionally used to make theoretical points.

1.5 Definition of Terms

This section defines some key terms that feature prominently in this study.

Pre-election poll

Pre-election polls, in the context of this study, refer to surveys carried out after the writ is dropped to predict the voting intention of the electorate prior to an election. Poll-based horserace journalism describes reportage of elections which focus on poll results and relative party standings, usually at the expense of investigating important issues useful to voters in making their choices at the polls (Andersen, 2000; Matthews et al, 2012). Daily tracking polls provide insight into the candidates' standing every day during election coverage. Per Rosenstiel a tracking poll is "the cheapest and most frequent kind of poll…(and) offers only a horse race understanding of the day's events, that encourages more stories that define the election race in tactical, strategic, and horse race term" (2005, p.707).

Tracking polls differ from other types of polls, particularly in terms of their length and sample sizes; they ask fewer questions of fewer people. They are regarded as more inaccurate than regular polls because of their larger margin of error (due to their smaller sample size) (Rosenstiel, 2005). Also, because they focus on predicting the race and nothing else, they can only be framed in terms of who is winning or losing the race (Petry & Bastien, 2013, Rosenstiel, 2005). The major

appeal of tracking polls is that they serve as a form of marketing for the news organizations that commission them (Rosenstiel, 2005).

Liberal democracy

Macpherson posits that liberal democracy can have two meanings, either "the democracy of a capitalist market society (no matter how modified that society appears to be by the welfare state)" or "a society striving to ensure that all its members are equally free to realize their capabilities" (1977, p.1). These two meanings are evidently inconsistent, as the first could mean the stronger citizens dominate the weaker while the latter suggests equal freedom for everyone to use and develop their capacities. Macpherson (1977) however argues that liberal democracy has tried to combine these two meanings, though the market view has mostly prevailed, with the term 'liberal' being assumed to mean 'capitalist'.

Elections are regarded as the lifeblood of liberal democracies because they are the major way by which the democratic ideal of popular rule is expressed. The citizenry select individuals who will make political decisions on their behalf. It is widely believed that liberalism as a system of politics and governance existed long before the democratic element was added (Louw, 2010, Macpherson, 2011, Zakaria, 2003). The liberal capitalist system evolved into a liberal democracy when nineteenth century oligarchs (the elite propertied class who alone could vote) incrementally reformed political processes and extended franchise to other members of the population, albeit without losing control (Louw, 2011). The need to reform the political process – add a democratic element to the existing liberal political system – was due to a pressure for democracy by the lower class who demanded for a vote (Macpherson, 1965).

In this narrative, not only was democracy added to the liberal state because it was demanded for by the lower classes who felt excluded from the political process, it was also

admitted on competitive liberal grounds. It was demanded as the logical completion of the market society and Western liberal oligarchies, facing the threat of revolution from the underclass, reformed themselves into democracies to prevent action by the disenfranchised that might threaten the capitalist economy. (Louw, 2010). However, the position of the original oligarchs was preserved, and the 'massification' of the liberal political processes did not undermine the de-facto control that the propertied class continued to exercise (McChesney, 2004; Louw, 2010).

Thus, it is important to distinguish between the concepts of liberalism and democracy and how they come to play in a liberal democracy. As McChesney (2000) emphasizes, although liberal freedoms are essential in a democratic society, democracy and liberalism are very distinctly different, because defining democracy as liberalism pushes the notion of popular rule which underscores democracy to the background. Three major features of democracy: as identified by Riker (1982) include: popular *participation* in government, mainly carried out through voting; *liberty* to pursue one's goals in order to ensure effective political participation; and *equality* of votes, before the law and sometimes of educational and economic equality.

Neoliberalism

Several wide-ranging policies constitute the general approach designated 'neoliberalism', and they are hardly ever found in some pure form. Neoliberalism as a worldview embodying both an economic theory and a political philosophy exists in various forms in different countries across the world (Crouch, 2015, Palley, 2012). The economic and political aspects of neoliberal theory are united in that they consist of a range of policies that seek to maximize the role of markets and profit-making as the most effective way of running the state, while minimizing the role of nonmarket (government) institutions (Crouch, 2011, McChesny, 2000, Palley, 2012). In other

words, the neoliberal view is that capitalist economies produce roughly efficient economic outcomes when they are left without government intervention.

Commencing in the 1980s and championed by the US's Ronald Reagan and the UK's Margaret Thatcher, neoliberalism has transcended partisan divisions in the US, UK, Canada and other western democracies (Evans & Smith 2015, McChesney, 2004; Mair, 2013). Because neoliberal policies tend to capture parties on both sides of the political aisle, it has become extremely difficult to dislodge because the parties package these policies in a way that makes them seem opposite to each other, when they have the same neoliberal underpinnings (Palley, 2012).

Palley (2012) identifies the following as essential components of a neoliberal policy package: *globalization*, spurred by policies that encourage free trade and capital mobility; *small government policies* that push privatization, deregulation and/or minimal regulation by the government couched in terms of liberating the economy; and *labour market flexibility*, which involves attacking unions, minimum wage and other forms of employee rights, and according to neoliberal economic theory is supposed to generate full employment. Neoliberalism tends to develop in such a way that once its economic aspects are adopted in a state, it eventually extends to virtually every dimension of society (Brown, 2015).

In neoliberal understanding, the media – like any other industry – will operate best when left to free-market principles. It is believed that a media market open to competitive pressures "allows for the greatest circulation of ideas, information and expression. In competitive markets, media firms must be responsive to what the public wants in order to remain viable" (Hardy, 2014, p.59). In this view, the goods produced by the news media is no different from any other, and should be left to the control of consumers through the market, with little or no government regulation.

Commercialization and commodification

It is important to note that this study does not claim that commercialization and commodification are new phenomena in the media system. Instead, using the critical political economy approach, it seeks to examine how they these processes have intensified in the neoliberal era due to competitive pressures.

Commercialization occurs when the major emphasis in an activity is profit making. According to Mosco commercialization takes place when "the state replaces forms of regulation based on public interest, public service, and related standards such as universality, with market standards that establish market regulation" (2009, p.176). This signifies that policy making and implementation (regulation) plays a crucial role in the commercialization of any sector or product. Hardy (2014) describes commercialization in cultural industries like the media, as a combination of processes in which commercial interests shape the content produced by the media. Thus, commercialization in the media leads to increased focus on advertising revenue, content that draws more audiences and also links to other media that generate more revenue (cross-ownership) (Mosco, 2009). McChesney sees 'hyper-commercialism' as the maximization of the profit-making desire such that it reshapes the operations of media organization (2004, p.191).

Related to this is the concept of commodification, which Hardy defines as "the process of transforming objects, products and commodities into things that can be bought and sold for money" (2014, p.136). Commodification of the media occurs in the sense that dependence on advertising transforms news into commodities designed to attract audiences rather than a source of information for citizens, who are in turn sold on advertisers' products (Golding & Murdock, 2000; Sotiron, 2005). Commodification of the media also results in a greater emphasis on audience size, advertising revenue and content that links up to other revenue generating media (Mosco, 2009).

1.6 Critical Political Economy of the Media

The examination of how increased commercialization and competitive pressures in the neoliberal era have contributed to the news media's dependence on polls for election coverage undertaken in chapter two will be carried out using the critical political economy approach. Thus, it is important to expound upon this approach. According to Hardy, the central claim of Critical Political Economy (CPE) is that the "different ways of organising and financing communications have implications for the range and nature of media content, and the ways in which this is consumed and used" (2014, p.7). The peculiar nature of the goods produced by the media – particularly the news media – is such that they have both economic (profit-making) and political roles (dissemination of information).

These two functions are often considered to be antithetical and critical political economy seeks to understand how this contradictory relationship impinges on media content (Golding & Murdock, 2000). Furthermore, McChesney (2003) argues that any study of the media that seeks to answer critical questions that ask "why" must examine the role played by profit-making processes such as the ownership and market structure, to understand how they affect the content produced by the media. In this way, CPE examines how "media systems interact with capitalism and either promote or undermine democratic values" (McChesney, 2003, p.37). It asks 'big' questions about the relationship between media, capitalism and democracy" (Hardy, 2010, p. 205).

According to Hardy (2014) an application of the critical political economy approach to the media involves: an examination of how the media works, by considering fundamental issues like ownership, finance and support mechanisms like advertising; the effect of the various ways of organising the media (whether commercial, public, state or a combination of any of these) on its content; and the significance of the media content for society. Per Golding & Murdock (2000)

there are four distinguishable features of critical political economy. First, it is holistic, in the way that it considers the relations of economic organization, political and social life to understand how "particular micro-contexts are shaped by general economic dynamics and the wider structures they sustain" (p.73). Thus, the political economy approach is holistic in the way it examines the totality of social relations (Mosco, 2009). It seeks to understand how media content and structures are shaped by economic concerns such as ownership and advertising, then links the media system endeavors to the operations of economic, political and social systems and the operations of power within them (McChesney, 2008).

Second, it is historical, interested particularly in understanding the historical progression of the following processes: "the growth of the media, the extension of corporate reach, commodification; and the changing role of state and government intervention" (Golding & Murdock, 2000, p.74). Critical political economy places an emphasis on understanding how historical transformation within the media takes place to show that the current media system is not natural and impervious to change, but emerged through changes in regulatory framework (McChesney, 2008, Mosco, 2009). The second chapter of this thesis particularly examines these processes and how they have operated in the Canadian media in the neoliberal era, to understand the rate of increase in commercialization and competitive pressures.

The third concern of CPE as identified by Golding & Murdock (2000) is to appropriately balance capitalist enterprise with public intervention in the media industries, because it is believed the market system has some deficiencies which can only be rectified by public intervention, though there's no agreement on the form this intervention should take. Finally, CPE is also concerned with moral issues of justice, equity and the public good.

Thus, the critical political economy approach sees "economic dynamics as playing a central role in defining the key features of the general environment within which communicative activity takes place, but not as a complete explanation of the nature of that activity" (Golding & Murdock, 2000, p.74). Herein, understanding of the way production is conducted is critical to understanding how media content is created (Hardy, 2014). Important issues in CPE include: evaluations of how market structures, media ownership, advertising support, labor relations, profit motivation, technologies, and government policies shaped media industries, journalistic practices, and the content of news and entertainment (Hardy, 2014; McChesney, 2007).

The major criticisms of CPE accuse it of economic reductionism, in which the content of the news media is simply reduced to their economic structure and the interest of those who control the media (Schudson, 1989; Hesmondhaglh, 2007). Hardy (2014) argues that this criticism is largely a critique of CPE's Marxist foundations, which in its most 'vulgar Marxist' form sees the media as a tool with which the capitalist media owners and advertisers use to advance their economic and political interests. Golding & Murdock (2000) however argue that CPE is not instrumentalist in its approach; it does not consider the media as simply a tool for capitalists to control the flow of information. Furthermore, they argue that CPE addresses the role of economic dynamics in the media system, but doesn't claim that it completely explains the production of media content.

This is especially important to note in the context of this study, because the focus is not necessarily on how media owners and other political/economic elite use the media to control the public in the tradition of Herman & Chomsky (1988). Instead, this study is more focused on how commercial and competitive interests of news media owners, which has become heightened in the

neoliberal era has affected news content, and how the proliferation of pre-election polls in election coverage is an outgrowth of this.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CANADIAN MEDIA IN THE NEOLIBERAL ERA

This chapter begins with an examination of how democracy emerged in liberal capitalist states to show the tension between capitalism and democracy and how this has worsened in the neoliberal era. The forms this tension takes in the media system – between the political and economic functions of the media – and how this has become exacerbated in the neoliberal era is also considered. This is done by using the critical political economy approach to understand commercialization in the Canadian media and involves: examining the growth of the Canadian media; the extension of corporate reach; commercialization and commodification; and media regulation. How commercialization contributed to the increasing use of pre-election polls as a significant part of horserace election coverage in the neoliberal era is also analysed. Finally, the influence of commercialized media logic on political communication by parties and candidates (mediatization) as expressed through political marketing is considered

2.1 The Creation of Liberal Democracies

There is a tense, antithetical relationship between capitalism and democracy within liberal democracies, and this is largely due to the way the liberal democratic system emerged; from the contradictions of capitalism (Therborm, 1977). Western liberal democracies began as simply liberal states which gradually became democratized with the extension of voting rights to previously excluded social groups. The form in which these liberal states existed has been described in various ways such as: liberal capitalist states (Macpherson, 2011); constitutional liberal states (Zakaria, 2003); and liberal oligarchies (Louw, 2010). Despite these varying labels,

there is a consensus on the features possessed by these states in that form. They include: laws to ensure the proper functioning of the market society; division of society into the upper capitalist class (property owners) and the lower working class; inequality of opportunity for self-determination between both classes; and protection of individuals' rights to self-determination.

Per Macpherson (2011) while the liberal capitalist system of government was organized on the principle of freedom of choice for all citizens, some were freer than others because of economic inequality. Hence, although the core freedom of the capitalist society (right to property ownership) was supplemented with others such as the freedoms of speech, assembly and religion, liberalism did not require popular rule. The inequalities of the liberal society created "a pressure for democracy which became irresistible" (Macpherson, 1965, p.9). Also, advancements of capitalism such as the "legal emancipation of labor and the creation of a free labor market, industrialization, concentration of capital" inadvertently strengthened the working class in their struggle for democracy (Therborn, 1977, p.29).

The franchise in western liberal capitalist states was gradually expanded until full universal adult suffrage was attained, and they were transformed into liberal democracies. Voting rights were extended to previously excluded groups in liberal states for a variety of reasons. They include:

- To prevent revolution against the state – by the excluded working class clamouring for their rights – which would disrupt the capital accumulation process (Louw, 2010, Macpherson, 2011).
- The mobilization of citizens for war required states to "gain the allegiance of increasing numbers of citizens" by extending suffrage to them (Freeman and Snidal, 1982, p.303).

- Internal factors like “the independent strength of the agrarian petty and small bourgeois landowners, and divisions within the ruling-class (or power) bloc” (Therborn, 1977, p.23).
- Underlying these factors, was “a common, consistent force: the working class” which employed these factors as tools in its struggle for democracy (Therborn, 1977, p.28).

Not only did liberal states become democratized in this process, but democracy also became liberalized. Democracy was liberalized in the way that “it had to accommodate itself to the soil that had already been prepared by the operation of the competitive, individualist, market society, and by the operation of the liberal state” (Macpherson, 2011, p.6). Thus, the form of democracy that was practised was restricted by liberal concerns, especially through constitutional limitations (critical to the functioning of liberal societies) on these rights.

The process of extending franchise began in most Western countries in the 19th century, first with the extension of suffrage to propertyless white males, then white women, and finally, non-white people (Louw, 2010, p. 34). In Canada, federal laws removed property rights in 1898, opened the vote to women in 1917 and full universal adult suffrage was attained by 1963 (Elections Canada, 2007). This expansion of voting rights did not however undermine the position of the propertied elites in any real sense. As Macpherson (1977) argues, the democratic system that emerged did not abolish the class structure of the liberal capitalist system, but only adapted the political system to it and combined the contending systems of capitalism and democracy – inegalitarian economics and politics that appeared egalitarian on the surface (because voting rights were extended to everyone). Per Louw, not only did the elites retain their advantage over the masses in liberal democracies, but they learned to steer the enfranchised masses through

communication processes, an integral part of which was "a mass media facilitating the discursive management of the masses" (2010, p.36).

Thus, like in the liberal capitalist state, power relations also exist in a liberal democracy as the already accumulated capital and the effective power to accumulate it is in the hands of a relatively small number of people because there is an unequal access to the means of labour (land, materials or capital) (Macpherson, 2011). This situation is at variance with the ideals of democracy which centre on equality of opportunity to realize one's human capacities, but are essential parts of any capitalist market, though this is usually obscured by the fact that capitalism "has been enormously more productive than any previous system, and so has been able to afford a higher material standard than could any previous system" (Macpherson, 2011, p.64).

2.2 Commercial Media in the Neoliberal Era

The tension between capitalism and democracy in liberal democracies has worsened in the neoliberal era. Commencing in the late 1970s, championed by the US's Ronald Reagan and the UK's Margaret Thatcher, neoliberalism has transcended partisan divisions in the US, UK, Canada and other western democracies (Evans & Smith 2015, Mair, 2013, McChesney, 2004, Palley 2012). Palley (2012) defines neoliberalism as a worldview embodying both a political philosophy and an economic theory, that assumes market economies produce roughly efficient economic outcomes when they are without government intervention. While this is akin to liberalism in its classical form (prior to the addition of democracy) a major difference between neoliberalism and classical liberalism is the way "the logic of the market (has been brought) to bear on seemingly every facet of social life, rather than just economic life…" (Braedley & Luxton, 2010, p.7).

The neoliberal agenda includes a wide-ranging group of policies that are proposed and implemented in different forms, linked through global market mechanisms and circulated through various institutions ranging from business media to the IMF, World Bank, OECD and neoliberal states like the United States (Connell, 2010). The logic of the supremacy of the market is that competition engendered by the free market results in the maximization of the freedom of choice (Braedley & Luxton, 2010). Thus, the ideals of competition, choice, entrepreneurship, and individualism are usually used to legitimise neoliberalism by politicians, think-tanks, mass media, businessmen and other institutions which promote neoliberalism (Connell, 2010; Harvey, 2005). These ideals are used to justify the economic inequalities engendered by neoliberalism, by suggesting that it is the hardworking and successful individuals that are rewarded. However, as Harvey (2005) argues, neoliberal policies have rarely, if ever, worked in the way suggested by neoliberalism. Yet, this hasn't diminished support for neoliberalism, which has been a success from the standpoint of the elites, who continue to propagate the myth that competition is essential for states' success (Harvey, 2005).

In the neoliberal era, the traditional political debate over the most ideal type of economy – whether a planning or market economy – has been settled in favour of markets (Hardin, 2000) and the rampant commercialization of the media is one of the results of this. The American and Canadian media went ahead of other sectors to embrace the neoliberal notion that profit-making should be allowed to regulate every aspect of life (McChesney, 2004, Vipond, 2011). The effects of commercialization are evidenced in the increased conglomeration, concentration, convergence and cross ownership of media companies in the hands of a few. The deregulation engendered by neoliberalism allowed the media to become highly commercialized and dominated by large, profit-driven corporate firms (Crouch, 2004, Louw, 2010, McChesney, 2004).

The commercialised media in the neoliberal era displays and creates its own tensions between capitalism and democracy in liberal democracies. While the news media is generally expected to fulfil the democratic function of providing information to the citizenry, commercial media combines this with the economic function of making profit for its owners. The profit-making function tends to conflict with the democratic one, as commercial news owners claim that what attracts the most audiences is not necessarily what is most informative. However, it is not usually that people necessarily like junk entertainment, but that's all they're offered. As Asquith, Roberts & Robinson note, when media companies "find themselves in an increasingly costly, competitive, conglomerate oriented environment, they hedge their bets by producing formulaic easily marketable entertainment" (2011, p.199-200). These contents are more lucrative in the sense that they are easily marketable and will be supported by the advertising system. The contradiction herein is that when all offer the same fare, they collectively lose their audience.

Some features of news content found attractive by commercial media include, content that is: cheap to produce, sensational, can generate a large audience, and can be managed and scripted through a collaborative process (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006, Louw, 2010, McChesney, 2004, Patterson, 1993). These are features all possessed by pre-election polls and this is partly why they have become so widely used in the news media's election coverage in the neoliberal era. Crouch argues that the adoption of such news content to retain viewers' increasingly waning attention "prioritizes extreme simplification and sensationalization, which in turn degrades the quality of political discussion and reduces the competence of citizens". (2004, p.47)

The role of the media in liberal democracies – especially during elections – as discussed in chapter one involves at the very least, the provision of accurate, essential information to the citizenry. The reduction in partisan commitment in western liberal democracies has further

expanded the role of the media during elections (Hardin, 2000, Mair, 2013). This is because voters' preferences are less guided by partisan attachments, and a greater campaign effort is required from parties and candidates (Mair, 2006). Hence, there is more room for the news media to structure political communication.

However, campaign advertisements, which are mostly negative and provide no useful information to the electorate, take up a substantial part of the media coverage of the election (Mcchesney & Nichols, 2010). Coverage of the horse-race (pre-election polls), and strategies employed by the candidates to stay ahead also takes up a considerable part of media coverage (Mcchesney, 2004) because polls possess the aforementioned features that make them attractive and profitable to commercial media. However, this leaves barely any room for the media to provide the electorate with meaningful information with which they can select their leaders.

2.3 A Critical Political Economic Approach to The Canadian Media

This section uses the Critical Political Economy (CPE) approach to analyse the Canadian media to see how it is organized and the influence this has on news media content. It also sheds more light on the conflicting economic and political roles of the commercial news media. This is essential to understanding the environment that has created an increased reliance on pre-election polls for election coverage by the media. This analysis employs the historical processes of CPE analysis identified by Golding & Murdock (2000). As discussed in the previous chapter, CPE places an emphasis on understanding how historical transformation within the media takes place, to show that the current media system is not natural and impervious to change, but has emerged through changes in the regulatory framework (McChesney, 2008, Mosco, 2009).

Thus, the examination of these historical processes and how they have operated in the Canadian media in the neoliberal era will help to understand the rate of increase in commercialization and competitive pressures. They include: "the growth of the media; the extension of corporate reach; commodification; and the changing role of state and government intervention" (Golding & Murdock, 2000, p.74). Each of these processes are examined first, broadly, and then in the way they relate to the Canadian media.

The growth of the media: Concentration, convergence, conglomeration and cross ownership

Concentration in the media industries has intensified in the neoliberal era due to the scramble by major companies to position themselves in a rapidly moving communications environment created by technological innovations and deregulation resulted in the biggest wave of mergers and acquisitions in media history (Murdock & Golding, 2000, 2005, Vipond, 2011). These mergers and acquisitions – as expressed in concentration, convergence and cross ownership in media industries – resulted in the takeover of media ownership by large corporations, and a profit-making orientation became the imperative for this media, replacing all other concerns. Per Balčytienė & Harro-Loit (2010), it is widely believed that there is a convergence of media systems across the world.

Various dimensions of convergence have been identified in the literature. Gasher (2014) distinguishes between technological and corporate convergence, with the former describing the process by which various analogue media forms – newspapers, television, video – merged into a single form as found in digital media and the latter being a product of digitization, corporate concentration and deregulation of media policies which allow large media conglomerates to own different kind of media. Taras sees four areas of convergence, namely; "the convergence of

technologies, the convergence of corporations, the convergence of information with entertainment and the convergence of cultures" (2001, p.61).

However, for our purposes, it is corporate convergence – used interchangeably with concentration, conglomeration and cross ownership – that is most important. This is because it encourages increased commercialization, which in turn, affects media content and the push for news that is cheap and entertaining enough. It is also usually the root of all other forms of convergence. Corporate convergence has several economic advantages for the corporations involved, such as: profit maximization, cost reduction, improved efficiency and the creation of a controlled environment (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006**)**.

When this corporate convergence takes place, it is usually framed by most news media as a business story (Balčytienė & Harro-Loit, 2010, Croteau & Hoynes, 2006, Davidson, 2006). The problem with this focus on the business angle of media mergers, is that they leave their politico-economic impacts, and the way they impinge on media content and practices unconsidered (Balčytienė & Harro-Loit, 2010). One of such politico-economic impacts of convergence is the production of content that is "homogenized, imitative, trivial and constrained" (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006, p.157). Also, Taras argues that due to the convergence of information with entertainment in the Canadian media, “more and more of the stories that appear on TV news, especially local news, are either "framed" in an eye-catching, sensational and entertaining way or are about the entertainment industry" (2001, p.83) due to their cheapness and because they are believed to be what the audience want. This focus on local news tends to encourage proliferation of stations and distracts people from important national and international news.

The typical response to the accusations of the trivialization of content is the free market view that the media gives the people what they want, and if media content has become deficient,

it is because that is what the audience demands for. However, as Hardy argues, the "commercial media do not give people what they want; they give what is profitable to provide...(and) what the advertising system will support" (2014, p.144). Thus, people are made to consume “from a relatively narrow range of what media firms find most lucrative to produce " (McChesney, 2004, p.199). Furthermore, as McChesney (2004) argues, increased concentration in the media industry has resulted in the creation of oligopolistic media markets, and the lack of competition means the system cannot be entirely responsive to the audience.

The Canadian media industry, like its American counterpart, has gone ahead of other sectors within the country to afford itself of the benefits of the neoliberal era and become increasingly enmeshed in concentration, convergence, conglomeration and cross ownership (McChesney, 2000, Vipond, 2011). Although concentration of media ownership in Canada – particularly in the newspaper industry – has been taking place in various forms since the start of the twentieth century, it has peaked in the neoliberal era. According to Siegel, "during the 1970s, concentration saw a considerable upsurge...During the 1980s, concentration gained further momentum, with major publishing chains taking over or becoming principal stockholders of other chains" (1996, p.127). Furthermore, he notes that cross ownership – which occurs when a firm in one line of media buys a major interest in another media operation not directly related to its original business (Mosco, 2009) – emerged as an entirely new form of concentration in the Canadian media system as neoliberal policies began to be implemented.

Given this, it is important to consider the pattern of convergence, concentration and cross ownership in the Canadian media in recent times. A report from Analysis Group found that Canada has the most concentrated TV industry ownership of any G8 country, and the second most concentrated TV audience (Tencer, 2012). Bell Canada Enterprises, with its media subsidiaries

Bell Media and Bell owns 58 television services, over 30 radio stations, several websites (Theckedath & Thomas, 2012) and the *Globe and Mail* newspaper until 2010. Astral was another large Canadian media corporation, which had 23 television services, 83 radio services and 100 radio stations (Theckedath & Thomas, 2012). In 2012, Astral accepted an ownership bid from Bell Media. However, the acquisition of Astral by Bell was blocked by the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) because of concerns over the excessively high market power Bell would have in certain markets after the acquisition. Thus, Astral had to sell off some of its subsidiary media businesses, before Bell could acquire what was left (Houpt and Trichur, 2013).

Concerns over increased concentration within the media industry as expressed in the movement to bar Bell Media from acquiring Astral are not new to Canada. Similar concerns resulted in the creation of the Senate Special Committee on the Mass Media (the Davey Committee) in 1970. The Committee's report (1970) noted that while there was a 'natural' tendency for print and electronic media to merge into larger units due to economic concerns of cutting costs and maximizing profits, the concentration of media ownership had an undesirable effect on the quality of media content. When concentration continued to gain ground in 1980 with the full onset of neoliberalism, another federal inquiry; the Royal Commission on Newspapers (Kent Commission) was convened, and it confirmed the Davey Committee's observations.

The 2006 Standing Senate Committee on the Canadian News Media also expressed concern about corporate concentration, but the only outcome of the committee were actions taken by the CRTC in 2008 which imposed a few limits that affect no current corporate arrangements (Vipond, 2011). Most of these concerns over concentration are predicated on the belief that it threatens produces a lack of diversity in the media content produced. As Anderson & Hackett

argue, concentration "has meant the loss by Canadians of crucial access to a diverse range of information and viewpoints about our communities, our country and the world--and lost access to a means of expressing ourselves to a mass audience" (2007, p.10).

The reduction in competition is antithetical to the promised outcome of deregulation of the media industries in neoliberal logic, because as Croteau & Hoynes argue, "market theory promised diversity in...an unregulated market, instead the same old (or even worse, in the neoliberal era) media content is being sold in new packaging" (2006, p.115). Carlin (2000) also notes that deregulation, which was supposedly to achieve greater competition resulted in the opposite – the endangering of competition in both the Canadian and American media sectors. Per Siegel (1996) the end to competition in several Canadian cities such as Winnipeg, Ottawa and Vancouver which now have one newspaper occurred in 1980, at the start of the neoliberal era. Almost all daily newspapers left are also all in various forms of concentrated ownership. Siegel (1996) argues that the lack of competition in the daily newspaper industry goes hand-in-hand with concentration, because concentration increases the barriers to entry for new companies.

The major arguments presented by those who defend concentrated media ownership are that there are several media outlets in Canada and media owners have no desire to control media content (Soderlund et al, 2012). For the first argument, Taras (2001) argues that these varying media outlets tend to produce similar fare, and the provision of more of the same is not the same as having several choices. As to the second argument that media owners have no interest in controlling content, this thesis does not argue that the effect of concentration and cross ownership on media content is always through intentional or direct manipulation of content by media owners. As McChesney (2003) puts it, "lacking any necessarily conspiratorial intent and acting in their own economic self-interest, media conglomerates exist simply to make money by selling light

escapist entertainment"(p.36). Thus, it is the way the profit-driven motives of these conglomerates impact media content that is focused upon here.

The extension of corporate reach: media policy and regulation

This section examines two of the aforementioned processes of critical political economy identified by Golding & Murdock (2000) – the extension of corporate reach and the changing role of state and government intervention (media policy and regulation). They are intertwined since media policy is influenced by and influences industrial structure and corporate reach. For example, policies like the Canadian government's 1970 edict that Canadian broadcasting systems become Canadian owned inadvertently aided the processes of concentration of media ownership in Canada. This is because it forced the sale of several privately-owned broadcast properties and consequently created a greater ownership presence for Canadian companies like Power Corporation and Rogers Communication (Soderlund et al, 2012).

As mentioned in the previous section, media production has been increasingly commandeered by large corporations and moulded to suit their economic interests and strategies, and this is the process which Golding and Murdock describe as “the extension of corporate reach” (2000, p.74). While this is not a new phenomenon, it has been “considerably extended in recent years by the push towards 'privatization' and the declining vitality of publicly funded cultural institutions" (Golding & Murdock, 2000, p.74). Privatization is one of the outcomes of the deregulation in the media industry engendered by neoliberalism, which has enhanced the extent of corporate reach.

Corporations dominate the media and affect media content and structure in two ways: major conglomerates dominate a significant and increasing portion of media productions; and

those not directly involved in production could influence the direction of cultural activity in their role as advertisers/sponsors (Golding & Murdock, 2000). Corporate reach also extends beyond borders "partly spurred by policies encouraging free trade and capital mobility" (Palley 2012, p.38). Thus, media corporations have taken advantage of newer opportunities to transcend national boundaries and operations in the neoliberal era (Hardy, 2014).

Market oriented media policies encourage the processes of commercialization, convergence, concentration and cross-ownership. As McChesney argues, deregulation in the media industry and not technology is the major factor engendering these phenomena, because "there is nothing inherent in the (new) technology that required neoliberalism; new digital communications could have been used, for example, simply to enhance public service media, had a society elected to do so" (2003, p.30). Hence, media policies have significantly encouraged the international extension of corporate reach. Furthermore, Hallin & Mancini (2004) argue that media policies across western liberal democracies have become increasingly similar due to media convergence and the extension of corporate reach.

Media policy and regulation

The democratic roles ascribed to the media makes media policy analysis an important undertaking. Per Hardy, media policy analysis “considers how, why and in whose interests governments, public agencies, and others, act or fail to act, and how others interact with such decision making and its repercussions" (2014, p.177). Raboy (2003) conceptualizes media policy as intervening in the processes of commercialization and commodification, to restore the balance where market considerations have led media to forgo the public interest. Golding & Murdock (2000) believe an examination of policy is important because of the way it influences media

content and structure. McChesney (2003) sees policies as the starting point for any examination of the political economy of communications because of the ways they shape media systems, whether directly or indirectly.

Given this importance of media policy, it is important to consider how it has been shaped in Western liberal democracies in general, and Canada in particular. According to Hardy, media ownership policies became relaxed "across all advanced economies and most developing countries" in the neoliberal era (2014, p.179). Neoliberalism has influenced Western media policy making, such that it increasingly favors the processes of concentration, consolidation, and cross ownership, despite opposition from civil society groups, and even some political actors and bodies (Hardy 2014; McChesney, 2004). This is because neoliberalism has engendered the reduction in, or total removal (deregulation) of policies, paving the way for concentration.

An example of the influence of neoliberalism on media policy is the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which is the United States' principal neoliberal policy measure relating to the media. According to Croteau & Hoynes (2006) the Act describes the public interest within the media industry as competition, and lifted ownership restrictions and other regulations to ensure this ideal. This is evidently a view of public interest from the neoliberal perspective, which sees the market as an efficient regulator of the media system. However, the deregulation brought about by the Telecommunications act did not encourage competition, but entrenched concentration and cross ownership and resulted in the creation of an oligopolistic media industry in the US (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006).

This situation, in which media policies place market and business values over public provision in the neoliberal era, has been described as marketization (Hardy, 2010; Murdock &

Golding, 1999). Hardy (2010) identifies four major processes of marketization which are often combined but distinguishable:

- *liberalization*, the opening of previously restricted markets to new competition;
- *deregulation* or reregulation, which involves a shift from policies based on public interest to those that encourage market competition and self-regulation;
- *privatization*, the sale of state media assets to private investors; and
- *corporatization*, which involves pressuring publicly financed media organizations to become more profit oriented by maximizing their market values (p.200).

These processes of marketization, coupled with the extension of the ownership of media companies across state borders, have served to greatly increase the extent of corporate reach.

An examination of policy making in the Canadian media system shows that the Canadian media has always been accorded important political roles. According to Hallin & Pancini (2010) Canada, alongside the United States, United Kingdom and Ireland adopts a liberal approach to the regulation of the media, in which the role of the state is by definition, very limited. However, in Canada (and Ireland), this liberalism has been limited by concerns about national identity (Hallin & Pancini, 2010). The media is believed to play a crucial role – disseminating information, ideas, opinions and cultural values – in Canada's struggle for nationhood, because there was no war of independence or revolution to unify the country (Siegel, 1996).

The role of nationalism is evident in the history of the development of Canadian broadcasting. Peers, in his historical account of Canadian broadcasting, notes that "nationalist sentiments had achieved Canadian ownership and control of stations and the aims had been: national survival, national unity, cultural development and the serving of Canadian economic interests... (and) an identity distinguishable from that of the US" (1969, p.440). Hence, to make

sure these concerns of national identity were protected, the Canadian government significantly regulated the broadcast industry. This regulations are discussed in subsequent parts of this section.

According to Romanow & Soderlund (1996) it has been argued that the Canadian government's legislations on the media, particularly those which seek to make media content distinctively Canadian – in the interest of national unity – contradict the libertarian freedoms of the media as espoused in the constitution. However, considerable policy intervention in the Canadian media in the interest of unity is largely due to Canada's physical and demographic characteristics – its closeness to the United States and substantial French-speaking population (Skinner and Gasher, 2005). In this vein, Vipond (2011) summarizes the Canadian media policy environment as follows:

> the Canadian government has been involved in a delicate balancing act: it has encouraged private media enterprises while simultaneously enacting measures designed to mitigate the consequences of private ownership that are deemed damaging to the many needs of the society and polity (p.138).

Because different governments have different ideas on how this should be done, this has resulted in the development of varying media policies. However, Canadian media policies in recent years have tended towards encouraging strengthening commercial media (Anderson & Hackett, 2007, Vipond, 2011).

This is evident in elements of marketization like privatization and corporatization that have been observed as ongoing in Canadian media policy making. According to Anderson & Hackett (2007) and Chernov (2010) Canadian public broadcasters have been forced to either become more reliant on commercial revenue (corporatization) or become outrightly privatized. For example, the Parliamentary funding received by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) has

substantially diminished, making the CBC more dependent on advertising and involved in the commercialization process (Anderson & Hackett, 2007; Chernov, 2010). Raboy argues that this deregulation of media policy in the neoliberal era is not unique to Canada; "since the 1980s, Canada, like other industrialized countries, has experienced the retreat of the state from its traditional responsibilities towards public service broadcasting, and the increased economic liberalization and expansion of market-based broadcasting services" (1994, p.9). Thus, “in their competition for the same public, public and commercial media are expected to adhere to the same logic” (Takens et al, 2013, p.282).

It is important to consider specific Canadian media policies, first in the newspaper industry and then in broadcasting. Canadian newspaper policy is considerably laxer than that of broadcasting. According to Romanow & Soderlund (1996) concentration of ownership is the primary concern of the Canadian government in the newspaper industry. This is evident in the establishment of the two aforementioned commissions – the 1970 Davey committee and the 1981 Kent Commission – to study concentration in the media industry. However, these commissions barely had any impact on the spate of newspaper concentration. For example, although the Kent Commission's recommendation to bar cross ownership of newspapers alongside radio and TV stations was accepted in principle by the Trudeau government; it’s implementation by the CRTC was very limited, and it was dropped outrightly by the Mulroney government (Creery et al, 2011).

Another policy instrument used by the Canadian government to regulate the newspaper industry is the *Income Tax Act.* The act functions in two ways: directly, as a way of decreasing commodification in the pursuit of advertising revenue; and indirectly, to prevent non-Canadians (particularly Americans) from gaining ownership of newspapers and magazines (Romanow and Soderlund, 1996). The latter use of the act brings to the fore the concern in Canadian media policy

making of keeping media ownership in Canadian hands. Skinner & Gasher (2005) note that while newspaper regulation designed to prevent Canadian media from being extensions of their American counterparts has been informal (taking the form of tax policies), it is more direct in broadcasting, where there is direct legislation barring foreign ownership.

This direct legislation in the broadcasting system was carried out through the CRTC, which repatriated broadcasting licences of foreign controlled Canadian broadcast companies starting in 1969 (Skinner & Gasher, 2005). The act that created this legislation was the *1968 Broadcasting Act,* which reduced "foreign ownership in all broadcasting entities…to a minority and non-controlling position" (Caplan et al, 1986, p.639). This however had the unintended consequence of increasing the already rising levels of concentration. Concerns over protecting the Canadian media system from being infiltrated by American content was raised again in the mid-1980s as "both the political climate and technology…(helped) U.S broadcast satellites bleed into Canada…(and) threatened to overwhelm the structure of Canadian broadcast regulation" (Skinner & Gasher, 2005, p.64).

A Task Force on Broadcasting Policy was created to address these concerns, and its recommendations were greatly influenced, and perhaps even constrained by the neoliberal ideals of the time. This is evident in the Terms of Reference for the Task Force that notes that the recommended strategy should take "full account of the overall social and economic goals of the government…including the need for fiscal restraint (and) increased reliance on private sector initiatives" (Caplan et al, 1986, p.703). The task force also encouraged the government to accept more concentration because "concentration in Canadian broadcasting and the media generally must be seen in the context of growing concentration in other countries" and at the same time "take into account the role of the broadcasting system in Canada" (Caplan et al, 1986, 645).

This difference between the form of anti-foreign ownership regulations in the Canadian newspaper and broadcasting systems shows how different the level of government involvement in each of these media is. Broadcasting is traditionally the most regulated form of media because of the special features broadcast forms – radio and television – are believed to possess. Some of these features include: broadcasters use public airwaves; spectrum scarcity restricts entry into the broadcast market; and radio and TV impact audiences more emotionally and sensually than print (Romanow & Soderlund, 1996; Vipond, 2011). Vipond notes that although technological change has challenged the spectrum scarcity argument and the impact theory has also been challenged, regulation of Canadian broadcasting has "existed since the early days of radio, and is unlikely to end soon" (2011, p.159).

Legislation on broadcasting is based on the Canadian constitution and broadcasting act of 1991. According to Raboy (1994) the Act recognizes broadcasting as a public service aimed at enhancing national identity regardless of ownership. The Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) is the regulatory body for Canadian broadcasting. The CRTC establishes and implements policy for the industry; issues licenses to both public and private broadcasters; renews, suspends or revokes licenses as needed; and holds public hearings to make the regulatory process accessible to the Canadian community (Romanow & Soderlund, 1996)

Unlike American media policy making which McChesney (2000**)** argues has had no public participation in broadcasting policy making since the early 1930s, Raboy (1994) argues that public participation is encouraged in Canadian broadcasting policy making, as though the CRTC:

> is particularly subject to the play of pressure and influence between the state, private capital and the public...the CRTC also provides an important space for public debate about the

> general orientation of Canadian broadcasting as well as the performance of individual broadcasters, both in the public and private sectors (p.19).

This notwithstanding, as aforementioned, Canadian media policy has been described as leaning towards support for business interests in the neoliberal era (Anderson and Hackett, 2007, Raboy, 1994, Vipond, 2011). Canadian media policies, especially as pertains to cross-ownership have also been criticised for not being firm. For example, the 1978 Report of the Royal Commission on Corporate Concentration directed that the CRTC should maintain a separation between print and broadcast ownership; "not only to constrain print media from controlling broadcast and electronic media... but also to prevent broadcast media from acquiring or controlling major print media" (Canada, 1978, p.353). However, according to Romanow and Soderlund (1996) this policy fell apart when the CRTC allowed Rogers Communication – Canada's largest cable television owner at the time – to takeover Maclean Hunter limited, which had massive broadcast and newspaper holdings.

Commodification and commercialization

The historical processes of critical political economy – the growth of the media, the extension of corporate reach, commodification and regulation – as identified by Murdock and Golding (2000) can be described as a reinforcing cycle. Concentration of corporate ownership as aided by deregulation increases corporate reach and the push for more profits (commercialization) which results in even more concentration of media ownership. Corporate media owners maximize profits and minimize costs through rapid expansion within their markets, and these profits are in turn used to invest in even more media (Vipond, 2011). The meanings of commodification and commercialization were examined in chapter one, and commodification was described as the

transformation of a product into something that can be exchanged at a price while commercialization occurs when the major emphasis in an activity is profit making. Although these twin processes are not new occurrences in the media system, they are believed to have worsened in the neoliberal era with the adoption of market oriented media policies by Western countries.

Advertising plays an important role in commodification and commercialization. This is especially because it is the major source of revenue for both print and broadcast media. For example, the average Canadian newspaper derives more than 80% of its income from advertising (Chernov, 2010). It has been argued that this dependence on advertising has created a dislocation between the source of revenue and the demand, which makes it appear not only that the advertisers are buying the audience, but that they have a greater influence on content than do the audience (Chernov, 2010; Vipond, 2011).

Dependence on advertising also transforms news into commodities designed to attract audiences rather than a source of information for citizens, who are in turn sold on advertisers' products; thus completing the commercialization of the press and turning it into an industry like any other (Golding & Murdock, 2000; Sotiron, 2005). This results in the narrowing of media content, and focus on content that rarely challenges established views to retain the size and composition of the audience as required by the advertisers (Golding & Murdock, 2000). There is also a greater emphasis on audience size, advertising revenue and content that links up to other revenue generating media (Mosco, 2009).

According to Hardy (2014) advertiser influence on media content can be explained in two alternative ways: instrumentalist explanations, which view advertisers as trying to influence media content directly through various means; and structuralist explanations which see advertising influence as impersonal or indirect. This study focuses on a more structuralist effect of advertising,

in which the advertiser does not necessarily intervene to shape media content, but concerns for advertising revenue indirectly shape how the media structure their content. Some of the ways by which this can occur, according to Baker (1994) include: creation of a buying mood that makes audiences responsive to advertisements; reduction of controversial and partisan elements in order to have a greater potential reach; and avoidance of content which advertisers can find offensive. This attempt to retain the value of a media program as an advertising spot results in the restriction of content to familiar and simplistic ones, because entertainment is considered more profitable than information (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006, Murdock & Golding, 2000).

As mentioned above, the dependence of commercial media on advertising for sustenance is not a new occurrence. However, the deregulation engendered by neoliberalism resulted in an intensified focus on profit making by the media which McChesney describes as 'hypercommercialism' (2004, p.175). In this process, the media's product is treated like any other consumer product, in which the major aim of the producer is profit maximization. However, it has been argued that media product differs from other products in various ways, and this makes the market system an inadequate way of organizing it. The primary reason why news media product is regarded as unique, is because of the democratic role it plays. While the structure of media companies may resemble that of others, their goods are different because they deal in ideas, information and culture, and play an important role in organizing how people make sense of the world (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006, Murdock and Golding, 2005).

Media products are also considered unique because they occur in a dual market. Per Baker (2001) this is because the media enterprise sells media products to audiences, then sells audiences to advertisers. This creates a potential for conflict between advertiser and audience interests in the media content, which Croteau and Hoynes (2006) argue is settled mostly in favor of the advertiser,

rather than the audience. This is because, as previously stated, a substantial amount of news media funding is sourced from advertising. Also, the media market in the neoliberal era is believed to be an uncompetitive oligopoly, due to concentration engendered by deregulation. This is considered a problem for the market model of the media, because for markets to function properly, there must be enough suppliers (Croteau and Hoynes, 2006).

According to Sotiron (2005) British North American newspapers did not become transformed from a source of information into a commodity to be sold to a large readership and garner more advertising revenue, until the 1890s. Before then, the profit motive was less important, as newspapers were partisan and primarily sought to persuade or inform. There was no mass audience to reach because most Canadians were uneducated, revenues from ads were small and the major source of funding in this partisan era was government printing contracts and partisan subscribers (Siegel, 1996). As both Sotiron (2005) and Siegel (1996) note, with the shift towards profit making and dependence on advertising by 1890 spurred by increased readership, newspaper content changed substantially and drifted towards coverage of sensational and spectacular events.

Public broadcasters have been involved in this process of commercialization/commodification in the neoliberal era. This is because defunding of public broadcasters like the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) has left them increasingly dependent on advertising revenue (Anderson & Hackett, 2007). Chernov (2010) also suggests that the impact of commercialization of the news "goes beyond private media, and raises questions about a contradiction with the CBC mandate of serving public interest" (p.45).

Hyper-commercialization, concentration and other problems that the media is believed to have in the neoliberal era can be linked to the fundamental tension between the media's economic (profit-making) and political (dissemination of information) functions (Croteau and Hoynes, 2001,

Hallin and Mancini 2004, Vipond, 2011). This is a manifestation of the conflict between capitalism and democracy in liberal democracies discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Media policy making is an important intervening factor in the process of commercialization, because as Strömbäck (2008) notes "the more independent the media are or become from politics, the more dependent they become on market forces. Increasing independence from politics thus tends to increase commercialism in the media sector" (p.241)**.** Thus, increased commercialization occurs when regulation centred on the media's provision of a public service is replaced with regulation that emphasizes profit making and market position (Mosco, 2009). The largest private sector media companies in Canada include: Bell Media, Postmedia Network Inc, Quebecor Media Inc, Rogers Communication Inc, Shaw Communications Inc and Torstar. Since these profit-seeking conglomerates take up a substantial part of the media industry, it can be said that the Canadian news system is commercially based.

2.4 A CPE Approach to the Proliferation of Pre-election polls in the News Media in the Neoliberal Era

Concentration, commercialization and deregulation of the media in western liberal democracies have resulted in significant developments in the reportage and framing of news in the neoliberal era. These developments have been variously described as a shift towards reporting news as: an *entertaining spectacle/hype*, which focuses on entertaining the audience (Louw, 2010); *competitive sport* (horserace), in which politicians' struggle for power is depicted as a game (McChesney, 2004; Patterson, 1993); and *fluff*, which involves a focus on sensational and trivial aspects of politics (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006). These patterns of reportage share common features; they are: cheap to produce, sensational, believed to generate a large audience and can be managed

and scripted through a collaborative process. Pre-election polls possess these features: they are relatively cheap compared to the audience they generate, and are managed through a collaborative process between pollsters and journalists.

Increased commercial pressures have been found to play a crucial role in the news media's adoption of these forms of reportage in election news coverage. Patterson (1993) found that the adoption of the game frame in reporting politics in the United States was an outgrowth of commercialism. However, because the US has a largely commercial system, Strömbäck & van Aelst (2010) replicated this research in Belgium and Sweden which like Canada, have a significant public service media. They compared the framing of election news coverage by the commercial media with that of the public service media. They found that the game frame was more common in commercial news than public broadcasting news and concluded that "media type – commercial versus public service TV news and tabloids versus quality newspapers – is one important antecedent of the media's framing of politics" (Strömbäck & van Aelst, 2010, p.56).

Thus, Iyengar et al (2004) argue that the polls are widely used by the news media because they sell, and Taras & Waddell (2012) insist that they sell because they are easy to follow. Since profit making is the major goal of the commercialized media, they are willing to simplify the news using polls in order to retain viewers' attention and retain advertising revenue. However, Crouch (2004) sees this as a grave problem because it results in "extreme simplification and sensationalization, which in turn degrade the quality of political discussion and reduce the competence of citizens" (p. 47). This search for lower cost is "carried to its logical conclusion with 'competing' media conglomerates pooling their newsgathering resources" (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006, p. 170). This is expressed when various news media come together to sponsor pre-election polls. Croteau and Hoynes (2006) argue that this pooling of resources to reduce the cost of news

production results in the production of similar news content. This pooling of resources is coupled with the stifling of diversity already created by the concentration of corporate ownership and the market ideal of 'giving the people what they want' (Croteau and Hoynes, 2006, McChesney, 2004). The lack of diversity is considered a problem because multiplicity of ideas considered essential in liberal democracies.

The horserace as a crucial point of media coverage began to emerge in the neoliberal era. There was an increase in the rate of media polls conducted in liberal democracies such as Canada, the United States and European countries between 1976 and 1988 (Iyengar et al, 2004, Turcotte, 2011). In Canada particularly, polls published during elections have consistently increased in terms of sheer number; 23 nationwide polls were published in the 2000 Canadian federal election, 66 in the year 2004 and 113 in the 2008 Canadian federal election (Turcotte, 2011; Pickup, 2010). As Turcotte (2011) argues, “this abundance of data obfuscates rather than illuminates the political landscape” (p.216). Furthermore, the dominance of polls in election reporting goes beyond the amount of time spent analysing poll results, and includes reliance on the strategy/game frame in which political candidates are cast as engaging in a contest against each other (Iyengar et al, 2004).

As commercialization contributes to the media’s use of pre-election polls, the media’s pattern of reportage (media logic) sets the marker for political communication through the process of mediatization in which candidates try to regain control of communication from the media by shaping their communicative processes to suit the media’s logic. Consequently, the form of political communication produced by parties and candidates – expressed through political marketing – is reduced to the media’s standard. Hence, it is important to consider the processes of mediatization and political marketing to see how the use of polls contributes to the degeneration of political communication.

Media logic and mediatization

As liberal capitalist states transformed into democracies by extending franchise to excluded groups, the media developed as a means of linking the governors and governed. Louw (2010) argues that the primary reason for this was for the elite to continue to manage the mass of voters that had been granted franchise, and retain a de-facto control of the political system. Regardless of this, the media is regarded as an essential forum for participation in a democracy because it connects the masses with information vital to their involvement in the democratic process (McChesney, 2000, Patterson, 2000a). Hence, *mediation* describes the neutral act by which the media transmits information from the rulers to the citizens (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999).

Mediatization, on the other hand, is a more intense process which has existed since the introduction of television, but accelerated with the commercialization of media systems in the neoliberal era. Mazzoleni & Schulz (1999) describe mediatization as the situation in which politics is dependent on and increasingly shaped by the media. This occurs when the media become such an important source of information and vehicle of communication between citizens and their governments, that the political actors are forced to respond to the media's rules, aims, production logics, and constraints (Altheide and Snow, 1979; Strömbäck, 2008). Because increased commercialization is largely a result of the media's independence from politics (deregulation) commercialism contributes to the process of the mediatization (Strömbäck, 2008)

It is important to consider the concepts of media logic and political logic to fully understand the process of mediatization. Media logic is particularly important because of the way it is influenced by commercialization. Altheide and Snow (1979) define media logic as the format in which the media presents information, which consists of "how material is organized, the style in which it is presented, the focus or emphasis on particular characteristics of behavior, and the

grammar of media communication". This is akin to 'framing', which Cappella & Jamieson (1997) describe as the context in which information is interpreted by the media. Thus, media logic refers to the situation in which news values and storytelling frames adopted by the media to gain their audience's attention are adopted as the primary form of political communication (Strömbäck, 2008). Some of the frames that have been adopted by the media include: personalization, the framing of politics as a contest/game, negative coverage and simplification (Patterson, 1993; Takens, van Atteveldt, van Hoof & Kleinnijenhuis, 2013).

Political logic, on the other hand, describes the situation in which policy issues, as presented by politicians are the primary form of political communication (Patterson, 2000a, Stromback, 2008). According to Stromback (2008) the milieu of political communication is driven either by media logic or political logic; in the former, the media's values and storytelling frames take centre stage (mediatization) while in the latter, political institutions shape political communication. The juxtaposition of media logic and political logic is akin to Croteau & Hoynes (2006) comparison of the market model of the media and the public sphere model. In the market model, where media logic reigns supreme, the commercial imperatives of delivering audiences to advertisers drives political communication, while the public sphere model adopts political logic and provision of a forum for debate and dissemination of information is the primary goal.

Adopting the concepts of media and political logic, Stromback (2008) identifies four dimensions of mediatization. They include:

> the degree to which the media constitute the most important or dominant source of information on politics and society...the degree to which the media are independent from political institutions in terms of how the media are governed...the degree to which the

> media content is governed by a political logic or by media logic...the degree to which political actors are governed by a political logic or by media logic (p.234).

These dimensions determine the degree to which politics is mediatized – the degree to which the media's logic influence political communication. Mazzoleni & Schulz (1999) also identify three processes that contribute to mediatization. First, the media only present whatever actors, events and issues they consider newsworthy based on media logic, and it is only these events the citizenry are exposed to. Second, this agenda setting functions of the media mean they determine which actors and issues are important by selecting some, at the expense of others. Third, media logic has been greatly affected by commercial motives in the neoliberal, which as aforementioned, encourage the simplification of political communication in order to retain audiences.

Political marketing

Political marketing and news management can be described as the response to mediatization. It is the process in which political players in trying to regain the upper hand and control the process of political communication adopt media logic. For Louw (2010) this involves the intrusion of public relations, spin-doctoring and hype into the political process, in order to "manufacture consent" and communicatively "steer" the masses (p.194). Mazzoleni & Schulz (1999) note that:

> the adaptation of political language to the media's commercial patterns has been observed in three domains: (a) the communication "outlook" of political actors, be they the government, the parties, leaders, or candidates for office; (b) the communication techniques that are used; and (c) the content of political discourse (p.251).

Thus, it is believed that mediatization affects the technique and content of political discourse. At this point, the media becomes so important that political actors must adapt to them by increasing their news management and spinning skills (Stromback, 2008). It is not that the media directly influences or seeks to influence the political process, but political actors adjust themselves in line with media logic. Also, it does not necessarily mean that the media has utterly dominated the political process at this point, because "there are still many political actors who think that the increased importance of the media is not legitimate and that politics should continue to be in command of the interactions" (Stromback, 2008, p.239).

In this vein, political marketing can be defined as the process by which politicians seek to regain the upper hand from the media in the process of political communication, particularly during election campaigns (Brants & Voltmer, 2011). This is done by incorporating media logic into the structure and content of their communication, and professionalizing this process by applying commercial marketing techniques in disseminating this content. Political marketing involves various aspects, ranging from advertising to public relations and telemarketing (Giasson, Lees-Marshment and Marland, 2012). The media is actively involved in each of these aspects. Essential participants in the political marketing process include an array of professional consultants – pollsters, public relations experts, spin doctors, advertisers – who constitute the 'war room', and create the image of the politicians or parties that is portrayed to the citizenry through the media (Hoy, 1989, Louw, 2010, Negrine & Lilleker, 2002, Norris, 2000).

The political techniques utilized by these professionals takes place mostly during campaign at the national level, as campaigns at the local constituencies levels still adopt typically 'premodern' techniques like door-to-door outreaches and communication via the local press (Negrine & Lilleker, 2002, Norris, 2000). The process of political marketing and news management especially

plays out during election campaigns, as this is when political aspirants are 'sold' to voters. Political communication conducted by political marketers during election campaigns are carried out directly through advertising – both paid and unpaid, as in the case of Canada – and indirectly through public relations activities such as leaders' tours and press conferences (Giasson, 2012).

Political marketing techniques have also been employed by Canadian politicians. According to Kozolanka (2012) political marketing in Canada can be traced back to the ascension of neoliberal policies in the 1980s, as an increase in professional management of government communication was essential in "selling controversial shifts in the structure and role of the state" that had occurred as a result of neoliberal policies (p.117). Canadian political marketing has also intensified due to the 24/7 news cycle and heightened party competition engendered by campaign finance laws that necessitate the attraction of small donations from several citizens (Dufresene & Marland, 2012). According to McGrane (2011) political marketing played a major role in the New Democratic Party's historic breakthrough in the 2011 Canadian federal election, in which the party won more seats and a higher popular vote than the Liberals for the first time, and formed the official opposition in the House of Commons.

Furthermore, content analysis by Giasson (2012) of 7 Canadian news outlets evening news during the federal election campaigns of 2000, 2004, 2005-6 and 2008 showed that majority of the campaign stories were dominated by reporting about voting intentions and other concepts of political marketing such as leaders' tours and campaign organization activities.

It has been argued that the increased application of political marketing techniques is necessary and somewhat inevitable for coping with evolving modern times, as new specializations are required to cope with new technologies and ways of doing things (Negrine & Lilleker, 2002; Norris, 2000). However, Crouch considers political marketing to be a reduction of elections – the

major form of citizens' participation in western liberal democracies – to "a marketing campaign based quite openly on the manipulative techniques used to sell products" (2004, p.103). This contributes to the debasement of political communication, and limits the citizens' input into political discourse and communication about the quality of service.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has examined the tension between capitalism and democracy in western liberal democracies which has worsened in the neoliberal era. This was done to understand how these tensions have been reproduced in the media – between the political and economic functions of the media – and contributed to the growth of commercialization. This in turn produced an increased use of pre-election polls for campaign coverage in the neoliberal era. A critical political economy analysis of the Canadian media was also carried out by examining the processes of concentration, the extension of corporate reach; commodification; and regulation in the media. This is to understand how the way the commercial media is organized determines the kind of media content produced, and what this content portends for the democratic process.

Media logic, mediatization and political marketing were also considered as means by which the media's form of reportage (media logic) which has been greatly influenced by commercialization, intersects with and even influences how political communication is carried out by political candidates and parties. Candidates, in a bid to regain the upper hand shape their communicative processes to suit the media's logic, and consequently, the form of political communication produced is reduced to the media's standard. Political marketing is an outgrowth of this attempt by candidates to control political communication using media logic, and is particularly employed during election campaigns. Herein, political communication is reduced to

unabashed marketing of candidates using negative advertising and spin. Citizens are mostly unable to get substantial information from the candidates on their intentions when they reach office, as the goal is just to ‘sell’ the candidate to them. Furthermore, this process of political marketing reduces the citizens to speculators of the political process, and even consumers.

CHAPTER THREE

DEBATES OVER POLLING: THE QUALITY AND EFFECT OF POLLS

This chapter reviews critical literature on the history of pre-election polls, factors that determine the quality of polls, and the debates on the effects of the news media's focus on pre-election polls during campaign coverage.

3.1 History of Pre-election Polling

Straw polls are generally believed to be the precursors of modern day scientific polling. They were used by journalists in the early 20th century United States to predict election winners, and the *Literary Digest* – an American weekly magazine – popularized the use of straw polls in predicting voting intentions. These polls were conducted by mailing out postcards to people whose names had been sourced from lists of automobile and telephones owners to know their voting intentions (Moore, 2008). The *Digest* conducted its first straw poll for the 1914 American presidential election, and every four years until 1936.

Publishing the straw polls proved a great marketing success for the *Digest*, which gained publicity from being the country's largest straw polling operation and accurately predicting presidential election outcomes despite its crude sampling techniques (Robinson, 1999; Moore, 2008). This however changed with the 1936 American presidential election when the *Digest* conducted its straw poll as usual, but failed to accurately predict the winner of the election because the inherent inadequacies in the methodology employed finally caught up with it (Moore, 2008; Traugott, 2015).

That same year, George Gallup also conducted his first poll for the 1936 American presidential election. He had developed a polling relationship with the *Washington Post* and successfully predicted Franklin Roosevelt's winning the election (Traugott, 2015). He adopted 'scientific' polling techniques superior to the *Digest's* straw poll and predicted that the *Digest's* prediction would fail. Elmo Roper and Archibald Crossley also conducted polls in the 1936 election and accurately predicted the winner of the election, but it was Gallup who became the main advocate of polls and the crucial role he believed they would play in the democratic process by being the voice of the people (Gallup & Rae, 1940, Robinson, 1999). Hoy believes Gallup became the most successful/well-known pollster because he was "the first pollster to recognize the value of the publicity that numbers could generate" by using newspapers to spread polls and promote himself (1989, p.13)

Newspapers were the major subscribers of polls conducted by Gallup's *American Institute of Public Opinion*, and when he formed similar organizations in other countries – including Canada – the same pattern was followed (Robinson, 1999, Strömbäck, 2012). Like Gallup, Roper and Crossley also had media partners through which they established a public face for their polling. This was the beginning of the relationship between the media and pollsters, in which the media bought syndicated polls from pollsters (Brettschneider, 2008). This is usually described as the 'symbiotic relationship' between journalists and pollsters in which pollsters used the exposure from media publication of their pre-election polls to promote the commercial side of their business while the media used polls as a storyline for the news during elections (Taras & Waddell, 2012; Traugott, 2012).

Pre-election polls in Canada

Like in the US, where Gallup, Roper and Crossley were involved in market research for business organizations before they began polling on public opinion, opinion polling in Canada also has market research as its predecessor, preceding it by over 10 years (Robinson, 1999). Canada's first polling organization; the Canadian Institute of Public Opinion (CIPO) was established in 1941 as a Gallup import. CIPO carried out the first election poll in Canada in 1945 (Emery, 1994) and by that time, *The Gallup Poll* – which measured public opinion on wide-ranging issues of political, social and economic importance – was regularly published in Canadian newspapers (Turcotte, 2011).

Though the first national poll was conducted by the Liberal Party in 1942 and first pre-election poll by the CIPO was conducted in 1945, pre-election polls did not become a significant part of the Canadian electoral process until the 1980s – the start of the neoliberal period – with various polling agencies being commissioned by the media and political parties (Pickup, 2010; Emery, 1994). Pre-election poll reporting as part of Canadian news media coverage became so prominent that, according to Lachapelle (1991) "many people fear that it has acquired undue influence…over voters" (p.11).

Hence, attempts were made to regulate the reporting of pre-election polls in Canada. One of such attempts was Section 322.1 of the Canada Elections Act in 1993, which prohibited the reporting of newly conducted polls three days before an election. This poll ban was challenged in court by a group of newspapers, and eventually struck down by the Supreme Court in 1998. Emery (1994) notes that there were several other attempts to introduce bills "to regulate or ban the

publication of polls during federal elections; however, none was endorsed by the House of Commons" (p.10).

One law regulating poll reporting in Canada, that has existed without opposition was included in Section 326 of the Canada Election Act in May 2000. This legislation sought to regulate the reporting of election poll methodology. Some of its specific requirements include: the name of the sponsor; the name of the person or organization that conducted the survey; the period during which the survey was conducted; the population from which the sample of respondents was drawn; the number of people who were contacted to participate in the survey; and if applicable, the margin of error in respect of the data obtained. The publication of this methodological information is considered essential for the critical evaluation of the validity of these polls.

However, possibly in an attempt to avoid technical data, coupled with the fact that may reporters are unaware of these methodological requirements provided for in the Election Act, there has been a low level of compliance with these rules on poll reporting in the Canadian news media (Gosselin & Petry, 2009; Ferguson & de Clercy, 2005). This regulation has also gone virtually unchallenged through the years, perhaps because it does not have any major effect on the way these polls are used by the media.

Regardless, Canada's attempts to regulate the publication of pre-election polls is notable compared to the US & UK in which there's been little or no regulation. Self-regulation through the American Association for Public Opinion research in the US, and European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research for the UK is how polls in these countries have been managed. Since before the creation of some of the aforementioned laws, self-regulation was also employed by Canadian pollsters and news media, through organizations like the Canadian Association of

Marketing Research Organizations and the Canadian Daily Newspaper Publisher Association respectively. However, as Lachapelle (1991) notes, this self-regulation hardly produced any visible effect on the way polls are reported by the Canadian media.

In sum, not only have the regulations created to govern pre-election poll reporting in Canada not been complied with by the media, they do not address the deeper issues arising from the focus on polls discussed in subsequent parts of this chapter, particularly the way this focus is at the expense of other important information that should be provided to voters and how it affects the overall quality of election coverage.

Mass Observation and a parallel history of polling

Before examining the debates on the effects of pre-election polls, it is important to consider a kind of survey research similar to the current understanding of scientific polls to some extent, but also different in many ways. This is necessary, to weigh the quality of Gallup's claims that polls play an important role as the voice of citizens in a democracy (Gallup & Rae, 1940). As a major progenitor and defender of modern day polling, Gallup strongly extolled the essential democratic role he believed public opinion polling played, and many modern-day pollsters and their supporters draw upon him. A comparison of the Gallup style polls with a different kind of polling endeavor carried out by Mass Observation from 1936 – 1949 is a crucial step towards determining if the democratic claims of Gallup's polls were truly warranted.

Mass Observation was a social research organization formed in Britain in 1936, a year before Gallup's Britain branch – The British Institute of Public Opinion (BIPO) – was established. Though the two organizations sought to collect public opinion, they differed in significant ways. According to Goot (2008) BIPO was a "business, whose public face, financed by the press, focused

largely on politics and public affairs; (while mass observation,) … an organization made up mostly of volunteers, financially dependent on benefactors, documented attitudes to politics, but also, practices, utterances and beliefs of every other kind" (p.93).

Another major observable difference between Mass Observation and Gallup besides their basic setup, was their conception of public opinion and the methodology they employed in measuring it. Gallup was interested in public opinion as collected through polls/surveys while Mass Observation, though it had a group of volunteers who regularly responded to open-ended questionnaires, was more concerned with people's opinions as communicated in ordinary conversation (Cross, 1990; Goot, 2008). The latter information for Mass Observation was collected by volunteer observers, either gleaned from their personal conversations or those they overheard, and recorded in diaries which were later sent to Mass Observation. Per Pickering & Chaney (1986) this was done to discover people's real opinions on important issues. The organizers of mass observation felt this information was being distorted by the media, and could also be distorted by forms of respondent bias which could arise if people knew they were being interviewed. Also, Gallup used scientific sampling techniques to generate quantitative data while Mass Observation focused on smaller areas and the generation of qualitative data (Summerfield, 1985).

Despite these differences in their understanding of public opinion and how it should be measured, they were united in the view that public opinion plays an important role in democratic states. Mass Organization wanted to "give both ear and voice" to the public, because they felt these necessary components of the democratic process were being neglected and abused by the media (Madge & Harrisson, 1939 cited in Pickering & Chaney, 1986; Cross 1990). Gallup also attached importance to the voice of the people in the democratic process, arguing that polls helped "the people speak for themselves" (Gallup & Rae, 1940, p.287).

Mass-Observation as originally founded came to an end in 1949. Some reasons for its demise that are commonly suggested include: the research methods it adopted; its attempt to combine academically respectable research and the creation of social change; and the changes brought on by the end of the Second World War (Summerfield, 1985; Goot, 2008). Goot (2008) however argues that a major reason why Mass Observation faded while Gallup went on to flourish was because the Gallup poll had always been geared to the needs of the press. What Gallup had to offer, which the press was prepared to finance, were answers to questions on topical issues, presented in binary form, which the press could easily convert to news. Thus, after the war, mass organization also succumbed to developing this kind of product, and was superseded by Mass-Observation Ltd, a market research organization which used the representative sampling technique and the questionnaire like all other research firms (Summerfield, 1985).

From this brief description, it is evident that one major reason an organization like Mass Organization did not survive was because its products were not suited to the interests of the media, which happen to be the major marketers of public opinion research. This further highlights the symbiotic relationship between the media and pollsters. However, this dependence of Gallup polls on the media for the marketability of polls served to somewhat negate the democratic promise Gallup had claimed.

Gallup Canada (CIPO) promised a regeneration of the democratic process in which the voice of ordinary citizens would compete with those of elites through its polls. Instead, it continued to underrepresent, or not represent groups that had already been disenfranchised in Canada. The way in which this occurred, according to Robinson (1999) was that, like in the US, the CIPO's composite of the voting public differed fundamentally from the Canadian adult population. Because the major focus was on accurately predicting voting intentions rather than the acclaimed

voice of the people role, "women and low socio-economic groups were again underreported" because it was popularly believed that they didn't vote often" (Robinson, 1999, p.64). Thus, because pre-election polls were avenues for CIPO to prove the accuracy of its polls and promote the commercial side of the business, the so-called democratic promise of the poll, as claimed by Gallup, which may have been fulfilled in a more representative sample of the populace was compromised.

3.2 Quality of Poll Reporting

Various polling mishaps have occurred in countries where pre-election polls are conducted. According to Traugott (2015) they range from outright wrong predictions to situations where there the right winner was predicted, but with an under/over estimation of the respective vote share. The latter tends to occur more often. Various causes of polling mishaps include: *methodology*, including issues of sampling, weighting and treatment of non-disclosures; *socio-politics*, which include unique characteristics of the campaign and electoral system, among other issues; and *sociology*, which include socio-demographic characteristics (Durand et al, 2010).

The first major mishap in the history of modern polling was in the 1948 American presidential election, when Gallup, Crossley and Roper all released polls that showed Thomas Dewey would win over Harry Truman by several points, but he didn't (Traugott, 2015). This was as a result of various methodological problems, particularly the overrepresentation of those with a higher socio-economic status, just like the 1936 Literary Digest poll had done (Traugott, 2015). The 1957 Canadian election was another major polling miss, in which Gallup predicted the Liberals would win by a large margin, but the Progressive Conservative party won a minority

government. Pre-election polls in the 1992 UK election also wrongly predicted a Conservative loss, and pollsters afterwards attributed this failure to the misrepresentation of voting intention by those who voted for the Conservatives.

More recent polling failures in Canada have occurred at the provincial level. In the 2012 Alberta election, all seven pollsters predicted the Wildrose Party would win, but the Progressive Conservatives won 61 seats to the Wildrose's 17 seats and had ten percentage points more of the popular votes than the Wildrose party. In the 2013 British Columbia election, all eight pollsters predicted an NDP win, but the Liberals won 49 seats to the NDP's 34 seats and had five percent more of the popular votes. Recent polling failures in other countries at the federal level include: the 2015 United Kingdom general election, in which a hung parliament was predicted by most pollsters; and the 2016 American presidential election where a Donald Trump loss was predicted.

Though overt polling failures such as these are rare, it is important to examine the quality of poll reporting for a variety of other reasons. As Hardmeier (2008) notes, alongside the effects of polls on voting intentions, the quality of poll reporting is a critical aspect of discourse on pre-election polls. Stromback argues that "the media's coverage of opinion polls is…a matter of not only quantity, but quality" (2012, p. 8). That is, it is not just the sheer increase in the use of polls by the news media for election coverage but also the quality of these polls and the way they are reported is important. Petersen argues that polls are the "most reliable" kind of "factual information" available to voters that can help them make choices during elections (2012, p.65-66). To determine how accurate this assertion is, it is important to examine some factors that impinge on the accuracy of mediated poll reports.

The importance of the quality of polls is reflected in the requirements stipulated in Section 326 of the Canada Election Act that regulates the reporting of election poll methodology examined in the preceding section. They are essential for proper poll reporting because they are the tools with which the validity of polls are evaluated (Anderson, 2000). Furthermore, if it is believed that polls influence voting intentions, then reports of misrepresented polls could unduly influence the election outcome. However, there has been a low level of compliance with these rules of poll reporting by the Canadian media. In an analysis of the coverage of the 2004 Canadian election by the print media, Ferguson & de Clercy (2005) found that the print media had not complied "with the requirements (of Section 326) to report basic methodology information for election poll data reported during federal elections" (p.253). This is telling on the quality of poll reporting by the Canadian news media.

Beyond the inclusion of methodological information, another important factor that impinges on the quality of poll reporting is how polls are interpreted. Because poll results are usually only raw data, they largely derive their meaning for the audience through the way they are processed and interpreted by journalists and pollsters. Hence, the quality of this interpretation is important. Willnat, Weaver and Choi (2013) in surveys conducted among Canadian journalists found that they regard interpretation as "one of their most important roles, even more important than the dissemination of information in some cases" (p.176). This is partly because polls allow journalists to retain their claims of objectivity even while becoming increasingly interpretive in their coverage (Stromback, 2012).

The description of change and the elevation of pollsters

Given the importance vested in the art and science of interpreting polls, it has been argued that journalists are ill-equipped for this task and typically do a shoddy job of it. One major type of

misinterpretation, is in the description of changes in voting intention. Reporting of change is a fundamental part of horserace reporting (which seeks to determine how candidates are faring as the campaign progresses). Journalists like to focus on the degree of change between support for various candidates or parties to hold the interest of the audience, as policy issues are difficult to enliven while horseraces are filled with action and full of events (Broh, 1980, Patterson, 1993).

As Larson (2003) argues, it is the search for fresh materials for news reports that "prompts the talk of polls "surging," "shifting," and "tightening" (even when)…the polls presented don't support these claims" (p.75). Tracking polls in particular, are conducted for the sole purpose of showing changes in voting intention from day to day. To show that a change in voting intention has occurred, journalists often compare the results of polls conducted by different organizations, using different methodologies, margins of error and sample sizes at different times (Espey et al, 2011, Patterson, 2005, Taras & Waddell, 2012, Traugott, 2004). This is a problem because any of these factors could be the cause of variation between these polls. Comparing polls from one time to another overlooks sampling errors while comparing polls from one agency to another ignores the variation in undecided voters (Broh, 1980).

Despite this however, variations between results of polls – conducted by different organizations, using different methodologies and sample sizes, at different times – are often interpreted by the media to be results of strategies and actions of the political candidates to improve their standing in the horse race. Patterson (2005) argues that while reporters are aware of these factors which explain changes in between polls, they prefer to find their explanations for these changes in candidates' strategies. Others, like Hoy (1989) and Traugott (2004) however insist that journalists ignore these factors because most of them are clueless on how to work with empirical research. Although they play a crucial role as interpreter of polls to their audience, most journalists

are ill-equipped for this task, as instruction on dealing with public opinion is hardly part of their formal training (Brettschneider, 2008, Genovese & Streb, 2004, Hoy, 1989). Thus, they focus on change that can be explained by varying methodology, time frame and margin of error because they may be unaware that these are potential sources of change.

Per Stromback, not only are journalists bad at interpreting polls, they also "oftentimes have a hard time following, explaining, and analyzing the substance of different policy problems or proposals" and this is one reason why they rely on polls so much in the first place (2012, p.15). In this view, polls are a means of avoiding in-depth analysis of policy issues which journalists may be unfamiliar with. Similarly, Hoy (1980) argues that although many journalists are unfamiliar with polling methodology and Canadian history, "the simplicity and easy accessibility of polling data emboldens them to become instant pundits, or worse still, experts" (p.205-206). This situation in which journalists are believed to misinterpret or misunderstand polls could at least partly have to do with the way neoliberalism has transformed the news media from inside out as discussed in the previous chapter. As Fenton notes, "fewer journalists (are) doing more work" in the neoliberal era (2011, p.65). This suggests journalists are being paid too badly to devote the time needed to do any story properly and must rely more on polls which they do not understand.

Furthermore, Hoy (1989) argues that this focus on meaningless shifts between differing polls shows that the media "give polls more weight than pollsters do" because pollsters understand how empirical research works, unlike journalists (p. 226). However, for Turcotte it is pollsters who "may have exaggerated the degree to which they can accurately measure public opinion by downplaying the impact of statistical significance and margins of error in return for the greater public profile" (2011, p. 198). Hence, the misinterpretation of change reduces the quality of polls reporting and results in inaccurate reporting of what is actually happening in the campaigns.

Moreover, Shaw and Roberts (2000) have found that polls that show a significant shift in voting intention in a short while without any identifiable triggering event are almost always an outcome of polling error.

Taras and Waddell (2012) note that in the 2011 Canadian election coverage, news organizations reported shifts in voting intention as fact or near fact, without explaining why these changes took place in such a short while (from day to day). This reverent treatment of polls by a large portion of the news media also extends to how they elevate pollsters to pundits whose knowledge of elections extend beyond conducting pre-election polls. As Andersen notes, the treatment of poll results as factual in the 1997 Canadian election was "reflected in the widespread use of pollsters as experts not only on their polls, but on the campaign as a whole" (2000, p.294). Journalists' lack of knowledge about public opinion as aforementioned also contributes to this excessive reliance on pollsters as experts.

Interpretation of the margin of error

Related to the description of change, another factor that affects the quality of poll reporting is the interpretation of the margin of error. The margin of error describes how close a survey result – derived from a sample – is to what would have been attained if the entire population had been queried. Given its importance in determining the accuracy of a poll, Larson (2003) argues that an important way to evaluate the coverage of a poll is to see if the margin of error is provided. It was also included in Section 326 of the Canada Elections Act, which regulates the reporting of election poll methodology, as an important feature to be relayed by the media while presenting poll results. Larson (2003) however believes the importance of margin of error goes beyond its inclusion in poll stories, and includes how accurately it is used to interpret and present poll results. This is

because “misunderstanding the margin of error can encourage journalists to provide ‘fantastic explanations’ for ‘possibly meaningless shifts’ in polls” (Larson, 2003, p.69).

She also notes that the margin of error is most misinterpreted in the description of who is ahead in the horserace, as candidates which are not within the required limit – twice the margin of error – are still described as being ahead. Petry & Bastien (2013) found that Canadian journalists do not have a clear understanding of how to use the margin of error to interpret poll results, and usually defer to pollsters to provide the explanation. This could however constitute a conflict of interest as pollsters, keeping with the game frame, may be tempted to provide provocative results, as these usually get the most attention (Rosenstiel, 2005).

Hence, while journalists are frequent blamed for mishandling methodological information, pollsters also have their faults. In fact, Petry & Bastien (2013) in their analysis of the 2008 Canadian election found that pollsters sometimes provided inaccurate interpretation of the margin of error to the media. They argue that this is not because these pollsters don’t understand the margin of error, but because they want their interpretation of poll results to remain within the game frame of who is “leading,” “trailing,” “gaining ground” and “losing ground”, even when the polls don’t necessarily support this (Petry & Bastien, 2013, p.20). Considering this, journalists suffer from problems of ability as well as intent to provide the correct interpretation for the margin of error, and while pollsters may have the first problem, they certainly have the second.

There are some other factors that also influence the quality of polls. First, according to Moore, the forced choice format of questions most polls use to measure candidate preferences and suppress indecision “often present a highly misleading if not outright false picture of how candidates are faring and what voters are thinking” (2008, p.58). Second, the date polls are

conducted could also influence their accuracy. Moore (2008) argues that polls conducted in the weeks, months and years before an election are especially misleading and inaccurate, because most voters have not made up their minds about who they are voting for. Polling being stopped too early – 10 days before the vote – was regarded as one of the causes of the failure of the 1948 American presidential election polls (Hoy, 2001). Third, tracking polls, which are the type of polls most employed by the news media during election coverage are fraught with complications. According to Rosenstiel (2005) while tracking polls may be attractive to news organizations which commission them as a form of marketing, they are inherently volatile because they ask fewer questions of a much smaller sample. They have a greater margin of error, due to their smaller sample size (Petry & Bastien, 2013).

Finally, there is a peculiarity of the Canadian political and electoral system that influences the quality of polls; Canada doesn't have a national political market. Instead, it has a series of regional ones, with different competitors, socio-economic interests and even different voter attitudes and values (Espey, Herle and Swann, 2011, Hale, 2004, Hoy, 2001, Gidengil, 2008, Marzolini, 2004). This means that national results are virtually useless in predicting voting intentions, and polls that seek to be more accurate would have to focus on regions/provinces. However, these provincial results that provide the most insight are usually improperly polled with very small and insufficient sample sizes and large margins of error (Andersen, 2000, Hale, 2004). Espey et al (2011) believe this is what was at play in the 2011 Canadian general election, where the large amount of polling done inaccurately predicted provincial results that shaped the election because insufficient sample sizes were polled at the provincial levels. Andersen (2000) also reported a similar situation of insufficient samples at provincial polls during the 1997 Canadian general election.

Given the various factors that impinge on the accuracy of polls and the way they are reported, Moore (2008) argues that "the biggest problem with pre-election polls is that people believe them" (p.112). He believes that at best, they produce rough estimates of what the public is thinking and the smallest differences in question wording or the order in which questions are read can profoundly influence results. Because of the close relationship between journalists and pollsters, journalists – even if they had the ability to determine the level of accuracy of a poll using its methodology, which previous analysis has shown most don't – are less interested in confirming the accuracy of polls. As Taras and Waddell (2012) note, "having struck a deal with one polling company, each news organization has a vested interest in authenticating that partner's results sometimes to the exclusion of all others" (p.90). A Canadian example of the media's nearly unquestioned belief in the accuracy of polls, can be observed as far back as the 1957 election, when a Gallup poll predicted that the Liberals would win the election. Based on the result of this poll, *Maclean's* – a Canadian magazine – wrote an editorial announcing the predictable re-election of the liberals and published it the day after the election, but the Conservatives had won the election (Hoy, 2001).

While pollsters may claim they've had relative success in accurately predicting the vote, Turcotte (2011) believes accepting the claim of relative success signifies that polling is "possibly the only profession in which being right once in a while is a sufficient measure of success" (p.199). Inadequate knowledge of polling methodology and their close link with pollsters could hinder journalists from investigating how truly accurate these polls are.

3.3 Effects of polls on voting intentions

The major issue of debate concerning pre-election polls, is their effect on voting intention. Preoccupation with understanding the effects of published polls and what they portend for the democratic process dates to the early days of scientific public opinion polling. The earliest critics of polls argued that they had a bandwagon effect on voting intention (Gallup & Rae, 1940). A *bandwagon (or contagion) effect* occurs when voters rally to the party/candidate predicted as the winner in a pre-election poll (Henshel & Johnston, 1987; Blais et al, 2006). Of course, pollsters have also defended themselves against such charges and, in the earliest days of polling, Gallup & Rae (1940), for instance, simply argued there was little scientific evidence of the existence of a bandwagon effect, and that other factors like journalists and politician's predictions influenced voting intentions far more than polls ever could.

Subsequently however, some studies have found the existence of a bandwagon effect. Skalaban (1988) found that the dissemination of poll results by the media had a bandwagon effect on voting intention in the 1980 American presidential election. He also found that the probability of voting for the leading candidate, Ronald Reagan, increased by as much as 30%, especially for voters who had the weakest prior political opinions. This is significant because it has been observed that there is an increasing detachment of citizens from party loyalties in Western liberal democracies – Canada included (Crouch, 2004, Mair, 2013). Thus, it follows from Skalaban's hypothesis that this increasing number of non-partisan voters would be more susceptible to a bandwagon effect of pre-election polls.

Another commonly considered (and more widely accepted) effect of pre-election polls on voting intention is the *strategic effect***.** Strategic voting occurs when an individual votes for a party

other than the one he prefers because the polls show the former has a greater chance of winning the election (Blais et al, 2006; Johnston et al, 1992). Simply put, the information provided by polls regarding candidates' chances of winning the election results in "voting for one's second choice to prevent one's third or lower choice from winning an election" (Johnston et al, 1992, p.244). Compared to bandwagon voting, there is so much more emphasis on strategic voting that Nadeau argues that "researchers may have abandoned the search (for the existence of a bandwagon effect) too quickly, favouring research on…the strategic vote" (1993, p.203-204).

This is likely because most of the research on polling is carried out by pollsters and those with close links to the polling industry. Hence, if strategic voting is said to be more important than bandwagon, pollsters can claim to provide an important public service by helping voters make informed choices. This is evident in Lago, Guinjoan and Bermudez's claims that "polls are very useful tools for voters' coordination in mass elections…(they) are an effective public coordinating signal that results in "correct" voting – choosing the candidate who best represents a voter's interest – even when voters are relatively uninformed about candidate platform positions" (2015, p.935). Not only does this view take for granted the accuracy of polls, which as considered in the preceding section, can be quite questionable, it also seeks to present polls as sufficient information for the electorate. The voters may be relatively uninformed about the platforms of those they want to elect, but at least they know how others are voting, thanks to polls, and that should be enough. However, as the next section will explain, this reduction of the quantity and/or quality information required by voters does not make for a well-informed electorate needed in a participatory democracy.

Several studies have found evidence of strategic voting in: Canada (Blais et al, 2006; Johnston et al, 1992; Lanoue & Bowler 1998), USA (Abramson et al, 1995), Britain (Alvarez &

Nagler 2000; Franklin et al, 1994) and Germany (Gschwend 2007; Shikano et al. 2009) among other western countries. However, while Meffert & Gschwend agree that there is evidence of strategic voting in most elections, they argue that the number of voters who actually engage in strategic voting is fairly low, "typically ranging between 5 and 15 per cent of the electorate" (2011, p.638).

Given these conflicting accounts, some researchers insist that pre-election polls have little or no effects on voting intentions, whether strategic or bandwagon (Hardmeier, 2008; Smith, 2004; Donsbach, 2001; Donsbach & Hartung, 2008). Hardmeier (2008) argues that the results of a meta-analysis on 74 studies that examined the impact of published polls in USA, UK, Canada & Germany, which found that published polls have no strong effect on voting intention shows "the fears…about the impact of published opinion polls are exaggerated." (p.510).

The criticisms of pre-election polls examined so far claim that polls may unduly influence the electoral process and are unreliable. However, those who support the use of polls by the media note that while these arguments may be viable, polls are not the only instruments that could be accused of doing this. Other factors that could influence the electoral process include political advertisements, (Hardmeier, 2008) and statements made by journalists and even the candidates themselves (Donbasch, 2001, Gallup & Rae, 1940, Hoy, 1989, Lago, Guinjoan and Bermudez, 2015). Despite this however, polls differ from these other sources of information because, as aforementioned, they are often treated by the media as hard facts. Thus, they tend to be more highly regarded than these other sources of political information. Supporters of polls also argue that voters have the right to all information that could help them in making their political choices (Donbasch, 2001; Goldfarb, 1985). While this is true, they should not be treated as absolutely accurate, and they should not be an essential part of election coverage for reasons examined in the next section.

3.4 Other effects of polls

Beyond the arguments on the quality of polls and their effects on voting intention, some other effects of published polls on the democratic process have been identified in the literature.

Support for candidates

Published pre-election polls could not only influence voters' support for candidates, but also the financial support and even the media coverage provided a candidate. The publication of pre-election polls could result in an alteration in the following: the flow of financial contributions to candidates; volunteerism and morale of party workers; and the quality and quantity of endorsements (Henshel & Johnston, 1987, Emery, 1994). The increase/decrease in any of these factors as a result of the publication of polls then influences voting intention. As Hanke (2007) argues "the media's power to show the numbers during election campaigns is the power to mobilize or demobilize individuals and groups" (p.89). In other words, a published poll is elevated from a forecast to a factor that influences elections (Champagne, 1997).

While there has been very limited research on the relationship between published pre-election polls and campaign contributions, Mutz (1995) notes that it could either take the form of bandwagon – giving money to a candidate who has the most likely chance of winning – or underdog; giving money to a candidate who truly needs it to win. Whatever form it takes, the goal is to maximize the impact of the contributions. The effects of polls on contribution is believed to be most notable during primary elections, and Fuchs, Adler and Mitchell (2000) also found that as poll results tighten, campaign contribution increases in primary elections. The relationship between pre-election polls and campaign contributions are important because as Eagles (1993) has

found, contribution plays a complex but significant role in the determination of election outcomes in Canadian constituencies.

Another indirect influence of poll results is their impact on media coverage of individual candidates. According to Emery (1994) the “momentum” of a campaign is affected by polls, as it becomes difficult for a party to gain ground once the media have decided, on the basis of polls, that it is no longer a viable contender. Moore (2008) also notes that this use of polls by the news media to evaluate which candidates deserve to be covered can constitute a self-fulfilling prophecy. This is as candidates who are screened out may find it difficult to attract contributors and voters, and this justifies the media’s original decision not to cover them. An example of a situation in which publication of pre-election polls is believed to have altered the media’s perception of a party's standing, was in the 2004 Canadian federal election, when "it was not until one poll showed that the Green Party had 6 percent popular support that the editor in chief of The Globe and Mail made a decision to publish their platform on the newspaper’s website” (Hanke, 2007, p.81). However, there is a paucity of research that investigates the occurrence of this double influence.

Increase in voter apathy

It has been argued that there is a high level of citizen disengagement from the political process in Western democracies as evidenced in declining voter turnout rates (Mair, 2013). This decline, particularly in the neoliberal era, is believed to have been caused by factors such as declining partisanship and ethnic cleavages. (Mair, 2006). However, focus on polls by media in election coverage as a part of larger game frame/strategy contributes to this apathy by treating the electorate less as active participants in the democratic process who need to be well informed and more as spectators to be made aware of how candidates are faring in the contest for political power.

The viewers are reduced to spectators observing the electoral process rather than the major decision makers who determine the outcome of these elections (Mendehlson, 1996, Patterson, 1993). This situation in which focus on the horse-race subjugates voters to the background contradicts Gallup's claim that polls serve as the voice of citizens in the democratic process (Gallup and Rae, 1940). As Espey et al note, focus on the horse race during election coverage reduces "the electorate's input to the grand narrative to who they liked and didn't like" (2011, p.89). They are treated as spectators in the way that they are provided with "information about who is winning, not information to help determine who will win" (Mendehlson, 1996, p.148).

Also, while discussion of the horserace may feature some statement of policy issues, this is usually done in the light of polls, thereby reducing policies to mere tactical devices employed by candidates to improve their standing in the polls (Patterson, 1993, Trimble & Sampert, 2004). This also encourages a trivialization of the political process, as differences (or similarities) in policy issues are hardly discussed unless they are objects of contention, creating the appearance that there is nothing – in terms of concrete policy – at stake in elections (Iyengar et al, 2004, Mendelsohn, 1996). Not only can this contribute to political apathy, but it makes the election immensely personalized (Trimble & Sampert, 2004); with no policy issues at stake, the focus becomes choosing leaders based more on their personalities.

Also, it has been argued that the inherently conflictual nature of horserace reporting, as a larger part of game frame can be demoralizing (Patterson 1993; 2001) and makes the citizens more distrustful of political leaders (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997, Strömbäck, 2012). However, Stromback (2012) believes that the latter is not necessarily a negative thing.

Less focus on 'the issues'

Focus on pre-election polls can also lessen the overall quality of election news coverage by detracting from serious analysis of policy issues and investigation into areas of voter concern (Emery, 1994). When the news media gives excessive attention to horse-race polls, it is typically at the expense of these other information. As Hanke puts it, "A major consequence of profit-oriented, poll-driven news is that the public is inundated with political information but remains uninformed, uncertain, and never quite sure of the differences in platform, policies, or ideas among the contenders for political power" (2007, p.80). The dominance of polls in campaign reporting goes beyond the amount of time spent analysing poll results and includes the reliance on a game frame in which political candidates are cast as engaged in a contest against each other.

Furthermore, polls dominate coverage not only when they are the direct focus of news reports, but when most events, strategies and occurrences during a campaign are explained using polls. Patterson argues that when issues are subordinated to the drama of the horserace, this depoliticizes the issues, presenting them more as "political tokens in the struggle for power than as objects for serious debate" (2000, p.256). Also, Patterson (1993) sees the relegation of issues to the background in the media's treatment of pre-election polls as a result of the disconnect between the amount of value attached by the media and voters to the 'game' and 'governing' schemas.

While both the media and voters may be interested in the governing schema – focus on how the leaders can solve the citizens' problems using their policies – and the game schema – focus on candidates' strategic actions in the horserace – the level of value attached by each party to each varies (Patterson, 1993). He argues that the media tends to focus on the game much more

than citizens are interested in it. This could contribute to detachment from the mediated political process.

The excessive focus on the horserace leads to media coverage that is barely useful to the electorate in its choice of a leader. Also, tracking polls, commonly employed by the news media during election coverage are not only inherently limited and unable to bear the weight of the interpretation put on them, but provide a shallow understanding of the race. There is a focus on who is winning the races and other important concerns during an election such as "candidate record, vision, values, policy offerings, promises, the state of the country economically and in other ways, and the interplay of those with the electorate psychologically" are ignored (Rosenstiel, 2005, p.710). Furthermore, this focus of daily tracking polls on predicting the horserace does not consider whether there is any actual change in voting intention (Petry & Bastien, 2013).

However, Mathews, Pickup and Cutler argue that poll-centered election coverage does not necessarily hinder the discussion of substantive issues, and "as long as journalists' interpretations of polls are used to highlight the issues, polls could serve as a source of political learning for voters" (2012, p.281). Aside from the fact that this viewpoint takes the accuracy of polls for granted, it reduces policy problems and strategies to mere tools of candidates in the struggle for political position, which are mentioned, but not discussed (Mendelsohn, 1996, Patterson, 1993).

Leaders policies framing

Polls could also influence the way political candidates frame their policies and political communication, due to the process of mediatization discussed in the previous chapter in which politicians adopt media logic – news values – in framing their political communication to gain the upper hand in political communication over the media. In other words, mediated polls are

important tools with which political spin-doctors structure the narrative they provide the media with. Louw (2010) argues that there is a symbiotic relationship between journalists, pollsters and spin doctors – journalists evaluate candidates based on their standing in polls (as provided by pollsters) and spin doctors structure their candidates' discourse on the basis of polling results. Thus, published polls play a critical role in political marketing and news management.

Furthermore, Stromback notes that "the fact that politicians believe that opinion polls have an influence on how people vote…can also be expected to influence their strategies and tactics" (2012, p.253). The processes of mediation and mediatization discussed in the previous chapter also come to play in the reporting of polls by the media. The extent to which the media neutrally present poll results is mediation, while mediatization occurs when "the media are actively involved in the process of commissioning, reporting, interpreting and using the polls to guide their overall coverage…" (Stromback, 2012, p.256). The importance of interpretation in the process of poll reporting shows that it is a mediated form of information. Thus, the result of polls, regardless of whether they are an accurate measure of voting intention or not could drive candidates' policymaking, to appeal to a larger section of voters. Similarly, Hoy (1989) argues that polls have become larger than life in the way that their results guide both politicians and the news media.

Several (presumed) effects of pre-election polls have been examined in this chapter, but the question remains, what do they portend for the democratic process? The answer to this question, as discussed in the first chapter, depends to a large extent on how democracy is conceived of and the role of the news media within that vision of democracy. The role of the news media during elections in liberal democracies is to, at the very least, function as a crucial channel through which political communication flows between candidates and voters. To the extent that they limit the consideration of other substantial issues during campaign coverage by the news media,

contribute to apathy, and may reduce financial and other forms of support for candidates, the role of pre-election polls in the news media is greater than their actual worth. This is more so when the factors that determine the quality of poll reporting examined in this chapter are taken into consideration.

CHAPTER FOUR

Analysis of media reporting on polls

This chapter undertakes a content analysis of election coverage in the *Globe and Mail* for nine elections spanning the years 1963 to 2015 and recalls the arguments on the quality and effect of polls considered in the previous chapter. This is to understand why the use of polls in the media's campaign reportage has continued to increase despite criticisms of polls and the problems being faced by the polling industry. The analysis will also help to assess the quality of pre-election poll reporting by the Canadian media. As mentioned in chapter one, the *Globe* – Canada's newspaper of record – was selected as the focus of analysis because newspapers are generally regarded as providers of the most in-depth news stories which other media rely on. Thus, while other news sources like television and internet sites may have become more popular than newspapers in recent times, an examination of this newspaper is useful in exploring the media's reporting of polls.

In this vein, this chapter begins by providing a timeline of poll reporting, in which the media's consistently increasing use of polls and the criticisms that accompanied it are examined year by year. This is done using both articles from the *Globe and Mail* in the years under consideration, and scholarly literature published in the same timeframe. Other sections in this chapter also use primary data from the *Globe* to track the development of specific features of the media's poll reporting and literature that supported or criticized them. These features determine the quality of poll reportage and include: the number of articles that focus on polls; the quality of methodological information provided; the rate of comparison of polls conducted by different organizations at various times and using different methodologies; the estimation of pollsters as

experts; and the rate of media criticism of polls. The intent of this is to, among other things, see how defenses of polls that emerge within scholarship find their way into the media.

Methodology

This chapter presents the result of the content analysis of all election articles published by the *Globe and Mail* during the campaign period of selected Canadian federal elections from the year 1963 till 2015. To ensure adequate coverage of elections throughout the period, I began the selection process by choosing every third election in this period. This amounts to six election years, namely 1963, 1972, 1979/1980, 1993, 2004 and 2011. 1984 was added to this basic selection ensure the inclusion of the election generally considered to be the one that marked the emergence of the neoliberal era, and 2008 and 2015 were added to ensure that trends in more recent years are included. These selections will enable us to adequately compare pre-election poll reportage in the pre-neoliberal period with the neoliberal period, and to examine trends within the neoliberal period. Table 4.1 shows the length of campaign periods for all the years under consideration.

Table 4.1 Length of Campaign

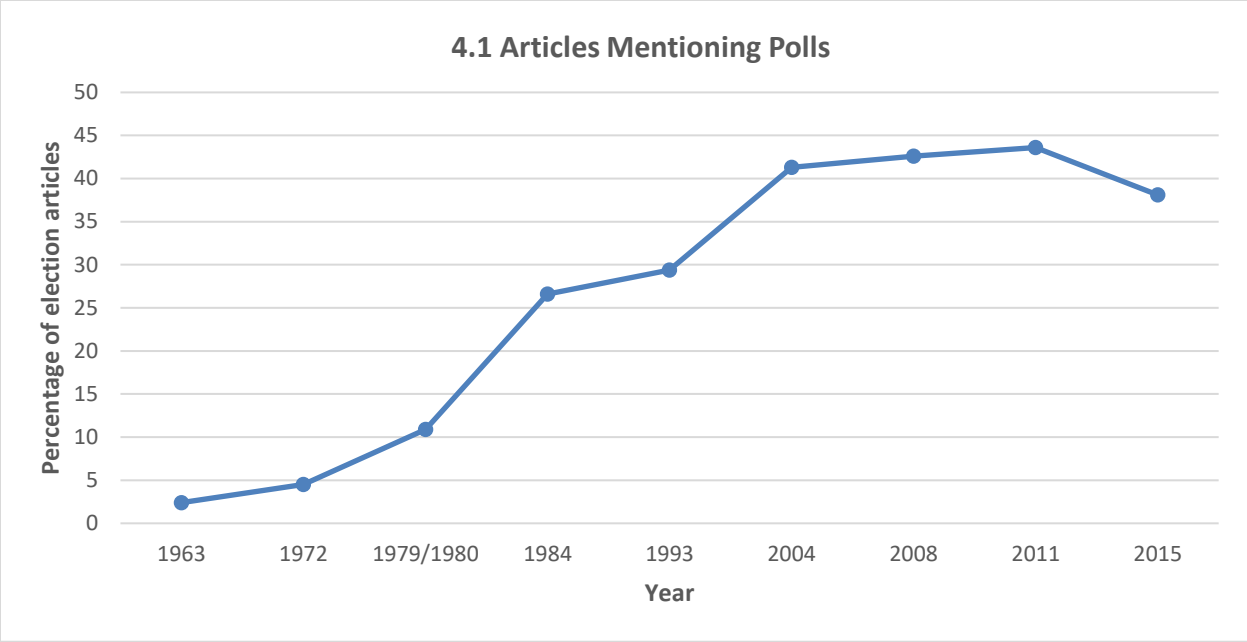
Year	Writ issued	Election Day	Days of Campaign
2015	2015/08/02	2015/10/19	78
2011	2011/03/26	2011/05/02	37
2008	2008/09/07	2008/10/14	37
2004	2004/05/23	2004/06/28	36
1993	1993/09/08	1993/10/25	47

1984	1984/07/09	1984.09.04	57
1979/1980	1979/12/14	1980/02/18	66
1972	1972/09/01	1972/10/30	59
1963	1963/02/06	1963/04/08	61

Source: Parliament of Canada (2015).

4.1 Timeline of Poll Reporting

The articles described as 'election articles' in this study are essentially all articles that discuss elections, election events, parties and/or their candidates. The total number of such articles published in the *Globe and Mail* in the nine elections under consideration is 3174, and 719 (22.6%) of these articles mention polls. This section will outline the major developments in polling and poll-related occurrences in each year using figure 4.1, alongside criticisms of these developments in the literature. Figure 4.1 shows a steady increase in the percentage of articles that mentioned polls from 1963 up until 2011. There was a slight drop from 2011 to 2015, and this can be explained by several factors which are discussed under the analysis of the year 2015.



1963

In 1963 scholarly discourse on polls involved debates chiefly focused on the existence of a bandwagon effect of published polls. Per Gallup & Rae, who were pioneers of polling, the major criticism of polls were that they "weaken(ed) the democratic process, either by destroying interest in the election or by creating a 'bandwagon vote' among the doubtful voters" (1940, p.214). Not only did Gallup & Rae argue that there was little evidence for the bandwagon theory they also presented a defense of polls which is still invoked in favor of polls. They noted that "polls have no monopoly in the field of election forecasting. Predictions by newspaper correspondents, party leaders and candidates have been an accepted part of political campaign…" (1940, p.247-248). This remained the state of understanding of polls at the time of the 1963 election

As figure 4.1 shows, 1963 had the lowest mention of polls in the entire sample. There were 15 mentions of polls that year which made up only 2.4% of election-focused articles. Yet, as Hoy (1983) notes, a few political parties – particularly the Liberal party – were already getting

themselves involved in polling. Hence, some of the polls mentioned in *Globe* articles had been commissioned by the Liberal party for its own uses before being released to the media (e.g. no 26, 03/21/63)[1]. Other parties criticised the perceived overreliance of the Liberals on polls (no 41, 03/12/63; no 114, 03/09/63). Per Hoy, the Democratic party in the 1960 US Presidential election was the first to extensively use polling data in the way it is commonly used by parties today – "to exploit and manipulate, while at the same time allowing it to set the agenda for the campaign…" (1989, p.22). After observing how the Democrats carried this out, the Liberal party's (American) pollster replicated this strategic use of polls for them in the 1963 Canadian election (Hoy, 1989).

Globe reporters also occasionally conducted straw polls by interviewing very small groups of people – as little as 20 people – to discover their views and voting intentions, and presented the results of these 'polls' in the news section (e.g. no 58, 04/02/63). These straw polls were not coded as polls in this study. Another alternative to polls in 1963 were voting trends, which were determined based on prior election results and used to predict election outcomes (e.g. no 78, 04/06/63). This system of presenting the number of votes candidates gained in prior elections was the most common way of predicting candidates' political standing in this election. The practice has continued in subsequent election years, where voting trends are typically used in conjunction with poll results (this is how seat projections are basically determined).

In sum, polls were mostly disregarded by the media and political candidates outside the Liberal party in the 1963 election.

[1] *Globe and Mail* articles cited in this chapter are referenced by the numbers and dates with which they are presented in the Proquest Historical Newspaper Database as outlined in Appendix A. Hence, no 26, 03/21/63 refers to article number 26 from March 21, 1963.

1972

The disdain for polls shown by parties and their candidates in the 1963 election had evaporated by the 1972 campaign. Hoy notes that while the NDP was the greatest critic of polls in the early 1960s, it had also started using pollsters by this election, although unlike other parties, it did not have specific in-house pollsters (1963, p.28-30). This is in accordance with a front-page article in the *Globe* early in the 1972 campaign, which noted that other political parties had joined the Liberals in the polling trend by commissioning polls and shaping their strategies according to the results of these polls (no 6, 09/16/72). Furthermore, Hoy argues that the reliance on pollsters so transformed the internal workings of parties at the time that "the old-time political insiders often serving the party out of genuine conviction have been replaced by the technocrats, the men and machines with the latest tabulations." (1989, p.7). For Hoy, a scenario was created where the views MPs developed through relations with their constituents would be regarded by parties as incomparable to the seemingly scientific information provided by pollsters.

However, political parties' excitement over polls barely spilled over into the media (or at least into the *Globe*) and there were only 18 mentions of polls throughout the 1972 campaign coverage which spanned almost 400 articles. It was however a little higher than that of 1963 as figure 4.1 shows. Half of the articles that mentioned polls were published only two days to the end of the election campaign. Instead of professional polls, straw polls carried out by journalists and votes gained by candidates in past elections continued to be reported as election predictions. *Globe* reporters conducted one of such straw polls on a larger scale than usual, interviewing over 200 people (no 81-83, 10/28/72).

Despite the minimal use of polls in this election, there were already concerns over the way they were being conducted and presented in the media. This was evident in the proceedings of a

National Assembly committee studying electoral reform (no 62, 10/27/72). This committee considered potential ways of regulating polls and polling companies suggested that self-regulation of the media's presentation of important methodological information was the best way to go about this. Although no law was developed from the committee's proceeding, this showed that there was already an aversion to government regulation of polling at this time.

Some media had also begun to embrace the use of polls. The CTV decided to defy the broadcast custom of not airing poll results the day before the election which originated from the law that prohibits partisan broadcasting 24 hours before the election (no 97, 10/28/72). A director at CTV argued that the network had decided to that because "polls are news" and not partisan information. Yet, it was this law prohibiting partisan broadcasting that formed the basis of Lachapelle's (1991) recommendations for a 72-hour poll ban which was included in the Canada Elections Act in 1993. This is discussed in further detail in subsequent sections

1979/1980

By this time, polls were being widely used by the American media, and this was evident in the existence of American scholarly literature discussing the merits and demerits of polls. There was less of such discussion in the Canadian context, but this would change only a few years later after the 1984 Canadian election. The American literature seemed to suggest that polls were useful if the media handled them properly. Fleitas (1971) argued that whatever bandwagon or underdog effect polls had could be mitigated by the media providing other important policy information and Broh (1980) maintained that polls helped to enhance the excitement of campaigns. These views suggest an acceptance of polls in America.

In Canada, the reporting of polls by the *Globe* slightly increased in the 1979/1980 campaign as figure 4.1 shows, and 33 election articles mentioned polls. Some media organizations began to conduct their own polls, though they did not use conventional survey organizations. One newspaper had students of the marketing department of a university conducting its polls (e.g. no 60, 01/29/80) and Southam news services had another university's school of journalism doing its polls (no 55, 12/25/79). This, coupled with other trends identified in this chapter, suggests there is a closeness between pollsters and much of the scholarly world studying polls, a relationship which has continued till present as there appears to be a form of revolving door between academia and the polling industry. This relationship needs to be further researched because it has troubling implications for our understanding of poling.

1984

Critical new trends in the media's treatment of polls appeared in 1984, and reflected the neoliberal ideals of the time. Polls were mentioned in 123 articles, a very substantial increase compared to the 33 mentions in the 1979/1980 election as figure 4.1 shows. The burst in polling in the 1980s was widely acknowledged in the literature, and the effects of polls on voting intention has begun to be much more widely discussed. However, Canadian scholars adopted the American view of polls as a necessary evil. Frizzell and Westell while noting the increase in media polling in the 1984 election argued that "pollsters were consistently catching up with public opinion rather than forming it, and their findings were as surprising to them as they were to others involved in the campaign" (1985, p.85). Hence, they concluded that polls were useful in measuring the impact of specific campaign events.

The fact that the *Globe* started doing its own private polling in this election contributed to the high mention of polls this year. The newspaper had not one, but two polling companies (CROP Inc. and Environics) conducting polls for them. This campaign also saw the development of several other new polling trends such as pollsters writing articles that focused on polls instead of journalists and the comparison of multiple polls. These trends are discussed further in subsequent sections of this chapter.

As the use of polls by the Canadian media increased in this election, political candidates also became highly dependent on polls. It was believed that the Liberal leader and Prime Minister who had only been in office for three months, called the election because the pre-writ period polls showed that his party was ahead (no 10, 07/09/84). However, midway through the election, as polls begun to show that he was losing ground, his party blamed polls and the media for interfering in the election (no 32, 08/24/84). The PC leader's choice of the riding to run in was also based partly on where polls indicated he had the best chance of winning (no 3, 07/12/84). Even the portrayal of citizens' views toward polls in the media had changed to some extent. For example, one article suggested that some citizens would be voting strategically based on poll results in the PC leader's riding (no 10 07/24/84). It was noted that one citizen would "be watching the polls as carefully as he watches interest rates".

Polls also began to be treated as near facts, and the reporting of the NDP's purported loss of support was a vivid example of this. Several articles mentioned the NDP's "record low poll numbers" though the actual poll numbers and the organizations that produced them were rarely ever mentioned (e.g. no 20, 21, 08/02/84). One article did not even use the word 'poll', and simply stated authoritatively that "the NDP's support in the last 18 months has tumbled from 22 per cent to 11 per cent…Thousands of people who had previously favored the NDP deserted the party" (no

31, 07/27/84). In spite all of this, at the end of the election the NDP ended up losing only one of its 31 seats and had 18 percent of the popular vote, one percent less than it had in the previous election.

The poor treatment of methodological information that accompanied the newfound reliance on polls was evident in the way the margin of error was regarded. For example, a poll with a margin of error of 5.2, was treated with deference, and it was not even acknowledged that the margin of error was high (no 31, 09/01). This casual treatment of the margin of error is believed to be a result of journalists putting too much confidence in the accuracy of poll results. As Hoy argues, the widespread ignoring of the margin of error in poll reporting equates treating poll numbers "as if they are precise" when they are not (1989, p.88). This act of neglecting what the margin of error portends for poll results sometimes occurs because journalists do not know how to work with empirical research (Traugott, 2004, Larson, 2003)

1984 also had the first mention of seat projections, which were developed using the most current poll results and the results of the previous election (no 34, 08/23/84; no 32, 09/03/84). These projections were developed by two professors, Barry Kay and Steven Brown. In sum, 1984 saw an increase in reliance on polls and pollsters for both the media and political parties. This was not limited to Canada alone, and Brettschneider (2008) notes that the increase in pre-election polls in the 1980s also took place in the US and Germany.

1993

The *Globe's* use of polls increased slightly in 1993 as figure 4.1 shows, and a lot had happened before this campaign. The widespread use of polls in the 1984 and 1988 election led to demands for the regulation of polls. Thus, the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party

Financing established in 1989 to suggest changes to Canadian election law commissioned Guy Lachapelle to research on polling in Canada. Lachapelle notes that the subject of regulating polls in Canada had become so important that he received "many suggestions from political parties and organizations, the media, pollsters, researchers, interest groups and individuals" on how this regulation should be carried out (1991, p.13). One of Lachapelle's recommendations was a 72-hour blackout on the publication of poll results. He believed this was necessary if polls were considered partisan information, because it would mean that the law prohibiting the publication of partisan opinion 48 hours before elections applied to polls also. The essence of this was so that the public would "be allowed to exercise its right of rejoinder within a reasonable period" (Lachapelle, 1991, p.154). That is, candidates would have the opportunity to challenge or at least discuss poll results.

In 1993, this recommendation was included in Section 322.1 of the Canada Election Act which made it a criminal offence to publish the results of polls conducted in the final three days of an election. An editorial was written in the *Globe* to denounce this law (which five newspapers, including the *Globe* were challenging in the courts at the time) which the editorial described as not just against the freedom of the press, but also undemocratic (no 117, 10/22/93). After the ban, Barry Kay – one of the professors who had developed seat projection models – published an article in a journal that argued that the 1988 election showed there was little evidence of the existence of a bandwagon effect. However, as aforementioned, this was not the basis of Lachapelle's recommendation of the ban – it was the belief that polls constituted a form of partisan information.

Kay also argued that the existence of a strategic effect of polls was more likely, and this was not necessarily negative because "information that permits a voter to make an informed strategic decision is not of the same order as someone who merely wants to be on the winning side

as an end in itself" (1996, p.24). Like the previous chapter discussed, this line of argument in favor of the existence of a strategic effect is one pollsters like to make, so they can claim to provide an important public service which helps voters make informed choices.

Prior to the law, most of the literature which criticized polls were against an outright ban, though a ban of a few days like the law provided was hardly discussed. The common argument was that "those who would ban polls would strip the voter of one of many influences that go into the numbers the electoral officer tallies on election night" (Hoy, 1989, p.227). The recurring theme was that polls may be flawed, but they had roles to play, especially in curtailing politicians. As Frizzell notes, "polls do tend to limit just how much politicians can control the agenda of an election" (1989, p.100). In 1998, the poll ban was struck down by the Supreme Court which found it to be an "excessive, vague and wrong-headed measure based on a disturbing assumption that citizens are naive receptacles who lack the facilities to sift through information and cast a responsible vote" (Makin 1998, A5, cited in Ferguson and de Clecy, 2005).

Despite the importance polling had attained for parties and the media in 1993, the polling industry began to encounter some problems which were admitted in the media. A news article titled *Public less receptive to polling* noted that pollsters were facing steadily declining response rates while collecting voting intention, and in a recent poll by the *Globe*, "50 percent of the people contacted refused to participate" (no 54, 09/16/93). The article noted that the cause of the decline in response rates could be traced to "the busy lives people live, the increasing use of answering machines and general fatigue from telemarketing and polls".

However, pollsters still downplayed the evidence of an increase in non-response rates. As an article published in the World Association for Public Opinion Research's (WAPOR) journal notes, "instead of falsely believing in a universal, on-going, and inevitable rise in non-response,

survey researchers need to realize that non-response rates vary greatly in absolute level, and trends in non-response go in various directions" (Smith, 1995, p.168). Thus, as Andersen, in his analysis of poll reporting in the 1997 election notes, the fact that "problems with polling methodology were seldom discussed" in the media showed that polls were still "given an unjustified aura of certainty, and treated as straightforward matters of fact" at this time (2000, p.292).

2004

As figure 4.1 shows, there was a considerable increase in the mention of polls in the 2004 campaign coverage, about 12 percent higher than in 1993. There was substantial discussion in the literature of technological developments in the polling industry and how they influenced the reporting of polls. Hanke argued that these developments, particularly the use of seat projection and online polls which "make a complete break with social science methodology" enabled "journalists to intervene in the political process in the name of technological progress" (2007, p.75). Furthermore, while seat projections had been reported by the media in other elections, according to Hanke, it was in 2004 that they were first commissioned by major multimedia corporations – including BellGlobe Media which owned the *Globe*. Pollsters who did not conduct seat projections tended to distance themselves from it, regarding it as a more volatile form of polling. As Hanke notes "pollsters defended the accuracy of polling and argued that the "real folly" was in seat projections based on aggregated poll data" (2007, p.77).

The casual treatment of high margin of error also mostly remained the same, and though side statements were sometimes made to indicate that the margin of error was high, such polls were mostly treated as near facts (e.g. no 2 and 18, 06/08/04; no 7 06/11/04). This was the first election in the sample to take place after new regulations were added to Section 326 of the Canada

Election Act in March 2000. This regulation, which required the provision of specific methodological information when reporting new polls had also emerged out of Lachapelle's recommendations. Lachapelle recommended that a standardized methodology accompany the reporting of polls because there were "significant shortcomings in the media treatment of polls, journalists don't adhere to their own standards on broadcasting specific methodological information" and the public had a right to this information which did not infringe on the media's freedoms (1991, p.155). Yet, this recommendation had not been included alongside the three-day poll ban in the 1993 Canada Election Act reform.

Lachapelle's recommendation on the provision of methodological information virtually emerged out of self-regulating rules developed by the Canadian Association of Market Research Organizations in line with American Association of Public Opinion Researchers (AAPOR) and World Association of Public Opinion Researchers (WAPOR) standards, and the Canadian Daily Newspaper Publishers Association's standards (1991, p72-75). Hence, neither the media, nor the polling industry found it needful to oppose the legislation like they had done the 72-hour poll ban. In fact, there was no mention of it in the *Globe's* coverage of the 2004 election. The media was also largely unconcerned about this law since it was evident compliance could hardly be monitored because Lachapelle's recommendation for the creation of a polling commission to monitor the way polls are reported was ignored (1991, p.155).

Substantial research has been carried out to assess the Canadian media's compliance with this law. Durand – a professor and current president of WAPOR – analyzed poll coverage in the 2000 election and found that the law resulted in the provision of "only slightly better (methodological) information about the polls published in the media" (2002, p.545). In a similar study, De Clercy and Ferguson argue that their findings were contrary to Durand's, and that the

law “seems to increase the dissemination of methodological information about opinion polls in many categories” (2003, p.371). However, in a subsequent research, analyzing poll reporting by 18 newspapers (including the *Globe*) during the 2004 election, Ferguson and de Clercy found that several media did not comply with the regulation largely due to “ignorance of the law's requirements” (2005, p.255). This is in contrast to Durand’s analysis of poll reporting in the same election, in which she found that “overall, the media respect the formal provisions of section 326 in their publications” (2005, p.30). Gosselin & Petry (2009) also find similar ignorance of the specific stipulations of the Act.

In sum, section 326 of the Canada Elections Act which regulates the reporting of poll methodology was unchallenged in the media and in the literature, because it was in line with the media and pollsters’ own regulations, and perhaps, also because compliance with this law was not monitored. Hence, as research has shown, there has been minimum compliance with the regulation in the media.

2008

A year before the 2008 election, Hanke (2007) identified several problems bedeviling the polling industry. These include: a drop in average sample size; increase in average margin of error; a refusal rate of about 80%; and problems facing telephone polling like answering machine and cell phone use. What these problems largely signified for polls was that those being interviewed were not representative of eligible voters. Thus, Hanke strongly argued that “the polling industry’s credibility is based on keeping economic, technological, and methodological secrets from the public” (2007, p.80). Similarly, Hale also noted that increased rejection rates had plagued pollsters

who conducted the 2004 election, and that given this, "the best advice is still *caveat lector* — don't believe everything you read" (2004, p.81).

These concerns over the problems facing the polling industry were not evident in the media. Instead, one article discussed how the increase in the spate of polling created a lot of business for call centers that conducted phone interviews for polling companies (no 51, 10/01/08). This article painted the picture of a thriving polling industry, "at a time when talk of a slowing Canadian economy has become near-deafening", without considering the problems polling was facing.

Overall, the coverage of polls in the *Globe* in 2008 continued pretty much as usual, and figure 4.1 shows a slight increase in poll mentions from 2004 to 2008. Major trends that continued in the 2008 reportage was a high rate of poll comparisons and interviewing of pollsters that closely mirrored that of 1984. These trends are discussed in further detail in subsequent sections of this chapter that focus on these issues. The same dismal treatment of the margin of error observed in previous years also continued. One article simply stated that "the margin of error is expected to range between 4.1% and 8.1%" (no 59, 09/26/08); a margin of error as high as 10.3% was glossed over as large, but still showing that "something seems to be changing…" (no 33, 10/11/08); and another article mentioned that despite the high margin, the poll 'still reflects trends since the start of the campaign' (no 40, 10/06/08).

This casual treatment of the margin of error suggests to uninformed readers that such large margins of error matter less for the accuracy of polls than they actually do. Petry and Bastien found that this misinterpretation occurred in the 2008 election because "Canadian journalists are unsure about the definition of the margin of error that they should apply in their horse- race interpretations" so they "defer to the interpretations (provided by) … pollsters' reports" (2013, p.17). However, these pollsters sometimes misinterpreted the margin of error in their reports to the

media, presumably to ensure these results were in line with the horse-race frame and so it could be claimed that candidates were "leading," "trailing," "gaining ground" and "losing ground", even when polls did not support this (Petry & Bastien, 2013, p.19-20).

2011

As figure 4.1 shows, 2011 had the highest percentage of articles that mentioned polls of the entire sample. Per Espey, Herle and Swann – two of which were pollsters – a major reason for the frequent release of polls across all media in this election was the "rapid development of relatively inexpensive sampling methods like interactive voice response telephone technologies…" (2011, p.86). It is interesting to note that while Espey et al identified these advances in polling technology, they did not address the consequent problems they brought about, namely that they also made it easier for people to ignore pollsters' calls and contributed to low response rate. These problems as identified by Hanke (2007) and Hale (2004) have been mentioned in the previous section that considered polling in the 2008 election. Hence, they were already evident by 2011, and would later be pinpointed as part of the factors responsible for the failures of polls in provincial elections in Alberta in 2012 and British Colombia in 2013.

Nanos Research conducted a daily tracking poll for the *Globe and Mail*, and the results of this poll were incorporated into at least one article every day of the campaign. This increased use of polls was not accompanied by an improved quality of poll reporting, and as figures 4.6 and 4.7 show, this year had one of the lowest provision of methodological information in the sample. Thus, Taras & Waddell observed that "the 2011 election established a new high-water mark in the volume of polls, the range of methodologies and polling techniques employed, the extent of

contradictory poll results, voter confusion, and the media's focus on horse-race numbers to the exclusion of everything else" (2012, p.90).

The daily polls conducted by Nanos for the *Globe* were described as the "Leadership Index Score – a compendium of voter's attitudes towards each leader's trustworthiness, vision and competence" (No 2, 04/11/11). Since Canada does not have a national election – in the sense that citizens vote for their representatives in parliament and not the Prime Minister – this form of polling that focuses on the leaders' chances rather than on predicting the regional numbers seems curious. As Hale puts it, "national polling figures are functionally irrelevant to election forecasts" (2004, p.76). An article in the *Globe*, supporting the use of leadership scores, argued that they are important because while Canada is "on paper a parliamentary system…(voters) don't vote for the candidate they want to represent them in the House of Commons, they vote for the leader and party they want to form the government" (no 2, 04/12/11). There is little evidence of this and Espey et al insist that pollsters in the 2011 election only polled very small samples at the provincial level due to this focus on national polls, and "the consequence was an unprecedented amount of polling that failed to forecast accurately key the regional results that determined the shape of the House of Commons" (2011, p.86).

One notable thing about polls as reported by the *Globe* in 2011 was the emphasis on an "NDP surge" in the last week of the election. This is considered in further detail in subsequent sections of this chapter.

2015

In the four years after the 2011 election, the Canadian polling industry experienced prominent failures of polls in provincial elections. In the 2012 Alberta election, the Progressive

Conservatives had a nearly ten-point victory over the Wildrose party which all seven organizations that polled in the election had predicted would win. Also, in the 2013 British Colombia election, all eight polling organizations in the election predicted the NDP would win but it lost by five points to the Liberals. Not only did these failures shake the polling industry, but they also resulted in the media finally admitting the problems of polls, and at least three articles published in the *Globe* during the 2015 election delved deeply into these polling failures (no 13, 08/21/15; no 27, 10/19/15; no 31, 09/30/15). These articles – two of which were written by journalists and one by a pollster – are further examined in the course of this chapter. While the media displayed considerable awareness of the challenges being faced by Canadian pollsters since 2011, scholarly literature seemed silent on this subject.

In fact, the only article found that considered the failure of the provincial polls was co-authored by the chief executive officer of the polling company Abacus Data, David Coletto. Coletto and Breguet argued that the major factor responsible for the failure of the provincial polls was the "absolute change in voter turnout" from previous elections (2015, p.47). This means that the population of actual voters did not accord with the model of likely voters developed by pollsters. This is a typical explanation, as pollsters tend to shy away from identifying economic, and technological problems as responsible for polling misses and focus more on things like voter volatility which may not primarily be their fault. Other factors Coletto and Breguet (2015) identified as contributing to the poll failures to a lesser degree include: the volatility of voters (which resulted in a last-minute swing of undecided voters) and the survey methodology adopted – Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing polls were deemed more accurate than those conducted by Interactive-Voice Response (Robo-polls) or internet.

The media's acknowledgement of the problems of polls seemed to be only perfunctory, as polls still played an important role in the 2015 campaign reportage of the *Globe*, especially in the discussion of strategic voting by anti-Conservative voters. This is despite the slight drop in the mention of polls from 2011 to 2015 evident in figure 4.1. There are several explanations for this drop in 2015 evident from the *Globe and Mail's* campaign reportage of the election. First, the exceptional length of the 78-day campaign – the longest campaign in modern Canadian history – meant that not a lot of polling (or election reporting) was done at the beginning of the campaign. For example, Nanos did not begin its daily tracking poll for the *Globe* until September 8, about five weeks after the election had begun. Second, related to the length of the campaign, is its cost. An article that chronicled the effect of the long campaign on media budgets noted that the increased cost of covering the campaign "has prompted a rethinking of the value of trailing party leaders daily" (no 33, 08/31/15). This may have also contributed to fewer polls being conducted by pollsters or commissioned by the media, particularly at the beginning of the election.

Third, several other polls which were not focused on determining voting intention were conducted, and this meant there were slightly fewer horserace polls available to be referenced in articles. This was possibly because the length of the election meant tracking voting intention early on would be pointless. These other kinds of polls ranged from polls to determine the rate of support for assisted suicide (no 9, 09/03/15) and taking in more refugees (no 6, 09/05/15) based on party affiliation, to a series of weekly polls conducted over five weeks to understand how advertisements commissioned by parties influenced voting intentions (e.g. no 30, 09/07/15; no 5, 10/03/15).

Fourth, there was little change in the polls for over half of the election. As one article noted six weeks into the election, "the three main parties (are) still locked in a virtual tie at around 30 per cent each and one month to go until the vote" (no 2, 09/22/15). This made it impossible for

articles to regularly refer to polls since they were largely unchanging. A final explanation for the slightly fewer mention of polls relative to total election stories in 2015 was the aforementioned failure of provincial polls and other challenges being faced by the polling industry. Given these numerous factors outlined above, it is somewhat surprising that absolute poll mentions in 2015 did not drop much lower than they did. This year also saw more mention of online polls in the *Globe* (e.g. no 15, 09/05/15; no 61, 10/15/15). As one article noted, "online surveys do not have an associated margin of error", which means that the degree of their accuracy cannot be easily determined (no 6, 09/28/15).

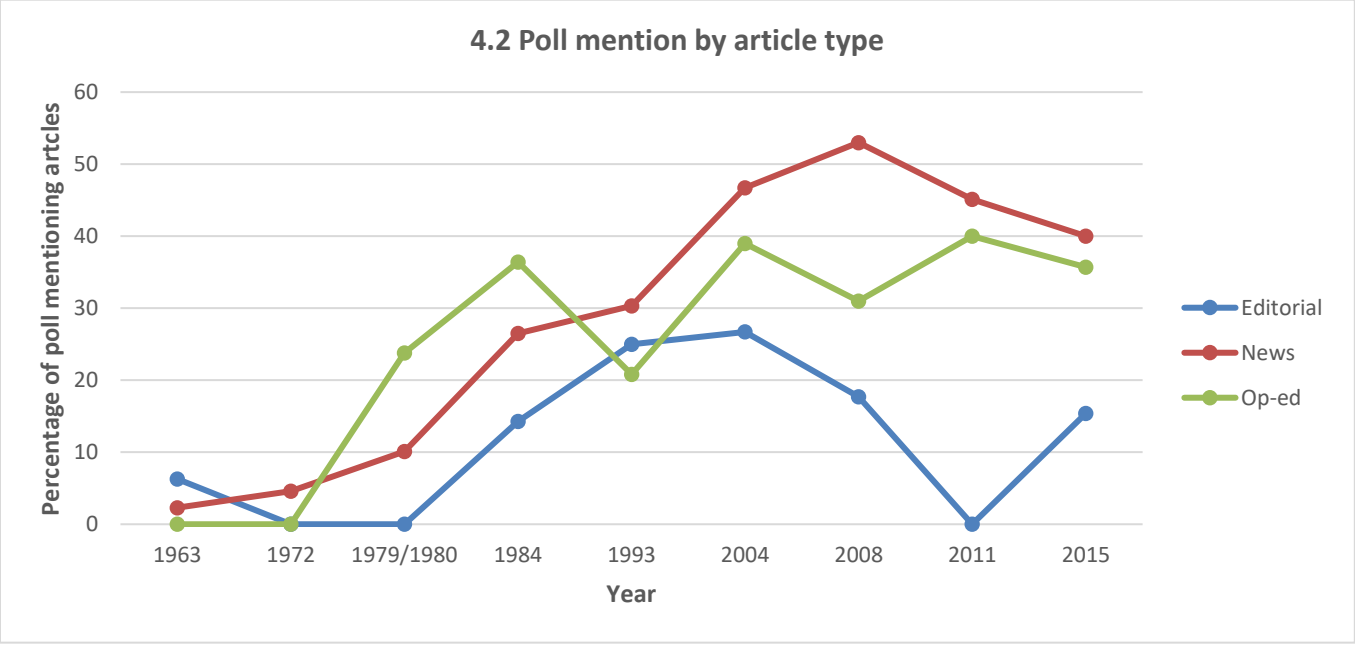
It is impossible to consider the *Globe*'s coverage of the 2015 election without mentioning the frequent discussion of strategic voting based on poll numbers. The first article dedicated to this issue titled *How strategic voting might play out in October* was published only five days after the election was called (no 6, 08/07/15). It suggested that strategic voting would be an option for non-Conservative voters who wanted to ensure the Conservatives were defeated. They would decide on a riding basis, to vote for the party with the most likelihood to win, whether the Liberals, New Democrats or the Greens. Another article focused on enumerating the recent problems encountered by the polling industry also noted that "as dubious polling becomes more prevalent, the industry looks poised to have an *unusually large impact on this year's federal election*" because over two-thirds of voters were looking to replace the Harper government, and would likely resort to strategic voting "heavily determined" by polling to achieve this (no 13, 08/21/15).

As election day drew closer, at least three more articles discussed strategic voting. One interviewed members of LeadNow – an independent advocacy group promoting strategic voting which had had more than 80,000 people sign a pledge to vote strategically based on both the results of polls and vote totals from the previous election (no 102, 10/09/15). Another article argued that

while LeadNow had the "best-organized strategic voting project", the reliability of their local polling was in doubt because their sample sizes were "perilously small" (no 10, 10/12/15). The third article focused on strategic voting was about Green supporters who had decided to vote strategically for other left-leaning parties (NDP or Liberals) in ridings where the Greens didn't have a chance (no 106, 10/16/15). Other articles, while not specifically mentioning strategic voting, claimed that many Liberal/NDP/Green voters were "in a state of flux" and could easily vote for any of these parties (e.g. no 2, 08/04/15).

In sum, although criticism of polls had to be admitted in the media's coverage of the 2015 election due to the recent failure of provincial polls, they continued to rely heavily on polls for campaign coverage, with only a perfunctory acknowledgement of the problems.

4.2 Types of Articles Mentioning polls



It can be seen from figure 4.2 that news articles tend to mention polls the most, followed by op-eds and then editorials. This is expected, because most election articles are found in the news section, which typically use polls to qualify or interpret the actions and/or chances of candidates and political parties in the election. Some examples of these include claims that: the Conservatives' lead was eroding because the leader ignored economic issues (no 69, 10/07/08) and the Bloc Québécois rose in Quebec polls because the Conservatives showed contempt for the arts (no 83, 08/26/08).

The first mention of polls in an editorial in this sample was in 1963, where it was claimed that "qualified observers and pollsters across the country are unanimous in their prediction that the Liberals will win…" (no 56, 04/05/63). While no specific poll was mentioned, this claim was used to further the argument that voting for the Conservatives or NDP would equal voting for the Social Credit party headed by "one of the most irresponsible politicians ever to be inflicted upon this country". Thus, polls were simply used as a tool to advance the editors' picks. However, editorials that mention poll in more recent times simply use them as they are used in news stories – mostly unnamed 'polls' used to support the claim that specific actions by candidates have led to the reduction of their support base. There is virtually no discussion in the literature of what article type portends for poll reporting.

4.3 Poll-focused Articles

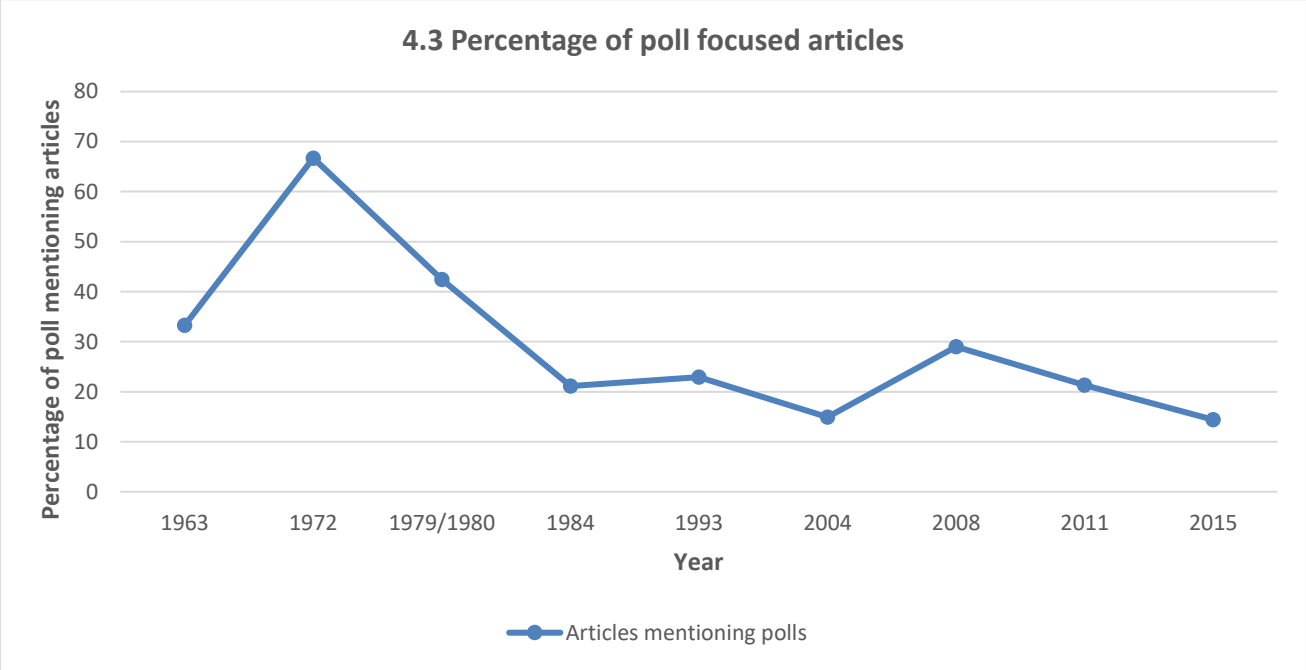


Figure 4.3 shows that the percentage of poll-focused articles of all articles mentioning polls has been on an almost steady decline since it peaked in 1972. In the early days of opinion polling, especially from 1963 to 1980, the few times that polls were mentioned were mostly in poll-focused articles. As the next section shows, the up-side of articles focusing on polls is that they generally do a better job of reporting poll methodology and explaining what the polls suggest. This is unlike articles that simply refer to polls, which use them as a support for whatever argument is being made about a party or candidate's actions and chances. The declining rate of poll focused articles seen in figure 4.3 is at variance with the increasing rate of poll mentions in figure 4.1. Since poll focused articles are mostly published when the results of a new poll are released, it suggests that much less polls are being conducted in comparison to the frequency with which they are being cited. This begs the question of how 'stale' the polls constantly being referred to are.

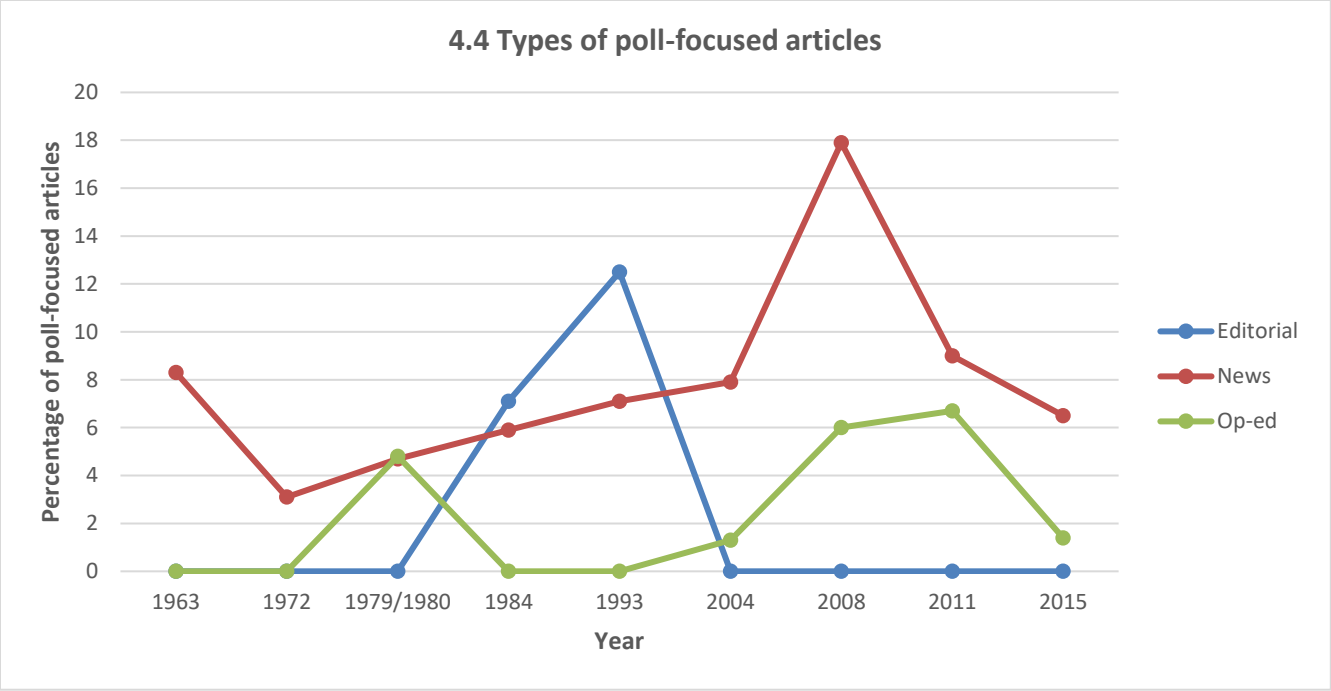


Figure 4.4 largely mirrors figure 4.2, and shows that the most poll-focused articles are found in the news section, followed by op-eds and then editorials. Poll-focused news stories usually present results of freshly conducted polls. One exception to this was a very long news article in the 2015 election that while not entirely critical of polls, chronicled all the problems being faced by Canadian pollsters in recent times (no 13, 08/21/15). Articles of this type are usually op-eds, and the inclusion of this in the news section showed that the media had begun to admit the issues affecting polling. Thus, it is important to consider some of the reflections on polling made in the article.

This article written by a *Globe* correspondent Andrew-Gee was majorly composed of interviews with several pollsters, some of whom had polled in the 2012 Alberta and 2013 British Colombia elections which saw great polling failures. He described the Canadian polling industry as going in to the 2015 campaign "in a nervous state. Its earnings are shrinking; its reputation is tarnished and its methodologies are in flux. Known for their bravado and influence, many pollsters

are left feeling vulnerable" (no 13, 08/21/15). This gave the impression that pollsters had been humbled by their failures, but their actions in the 2015 election, as will be seen in the section of this chapter that considers the estimation of pollsters as experts, hardly reflected this. The pollster for the *Globe*, for example, still frequently provided his 'expert opinion' on areas of the campaign that transcended polls. This brings to mind Frizell's comment after the 1988 election that "the fact that pollsters have come to see themselves as political commentators and gurus is worrying, especially since their prognostications are so often wrong" (1989, p.93).

Andrew-Gee also identified some reasons for the challenges being faced in the polling industry, which mirrored those identified by Hale (2004) and Hanke (2007) which have been considered before. They include: technological changes like the use of caller ID which makes it easier for people to ignore pollsters and increased cellphone use, and social change evidenced by an increase in the refusal rate from below 20 per cent to up to 90 percent (no 13, 08/21/15). Towards the end of the article, Andrew-Gee noted that "as dubious polling (social media polls and some online polls) becomes more prevalent, the industry looks poised to have an unusually large impact on this year's federal election" because strategic voting by anti-Conservative voters would be determined by polling (no 13, 08/21/15). Despite the many challenges faced by the entire Canadian polling industry which had already been chronicled in the article, the only concern raised was over the so-called 'dubious' polling and its impact on strategic voting.

Hence, the article concluded by noting that "in an effort to shore up their credibility and their bottom lines ahead of such a crucial test, Canadian pollsters have begun trying to self-police" through a new association called The Canadian Association for Public Opinion Research (CAPOR) which would set standards for how polls are conducted and reported (no 13, 08/21/15). CAPOR purportedly "brought together a unique coalition of pollsters, journalists, and academics"

(MRIA, n.d), another testament to the close relationship between those who conduct/report polls and those who write scholarly literature on polls.

However, the formation of CAPOR was hardly the solution to the failure of polls. Several organizations that set standards for pollsters and the media have existed in Canada since before Lachapelle (1991) was assigned by the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing to research the reporting of polls in Canadian elections. Lachapelle acknowledged that there were several self-regulatory bodies that had made substantial rules guiding the conduct and reporting of polls. Hence his recommendations on the provision of specific methodological information when reporting new polls which were added to Section 326 of the Canadian Election Act emerged out of self-regulating rules developed by the Canadian Association of Market Research Organizations (CAMRO) in line with AAPOR and WAPOR standards.

However, it was because Lachapelle had discovered that the standards of these self-regulatory bodies were not being followed by the media and pollsters that he'd recommended they be made into law. The now dissolved CAMRO was replaced by the Marketing Research and Intelligence Association (MRIA) which was still fully functional when CAPOR was formed in 2015. Hence, it would appear that the formation of CAPOR was simply an attempt to show that pollsters were making efforts to address the issues that had resulted in the provincial polling failures. The formation of CAPOR was however bedeviled by infighting between pollsters, some of whom had felt they were being excluded from making equal impact in the organization and were "concerned that its handpicked board will set industry standards designed to exclude competitors" (Thomson, 2015). Consequently, CAPOR is now on the verge of being absorbed by the MRIA.

Only two editorials in this sample focused on polls, and both were written to defend the use of polls. The first was published during the 1984 election – a big year for the use of polls by the media. Titled *No Case Against Polls*, it berated a political candidate for suggesting that polls should be banned during campaigns because they caused bandwagon effects and bad polls could demoralize party workers (no 41, 08/28/84). A few years after this, Henshel and Johnston (1987) proposed that polls could indirectly create a bandwagon effect when a published poll results in the alteration of financial contributions, volunteerism (campaign support), and the endorsements received by a candidate.

However, the 1984 editorial argued that the bandwagon effect had never been demonstrated, a ban against polls would deprive citizens of essential information and that the demoralization of party workers/volunteers did not justify banning polls. This claim that the existence of a bandwagon effect was unproven was the same one that had been presented in literature supporting polls since the time of Gallup & Rae (1940). This argument was contrary to an article in the same year, which suggested that the results of a poll may have created a bandwagon effect reflected in the result of another poll (no 33, 08/22/84). The second poll-focused editorial in this sample has been discussed earlier in this chapter. It was published in 1993 and by this time, the fears of a poll ban reflected in the 1984 editorial had materialized. Hence, this editorial focused on denouncing the election law that made it a criminal offence to publish the results of polls conducted in the final three days of a campaign (no 117, 10/22/93).

Generally, op-eds that focus on polls tend to be critical of polls and/or the way they are being handled by the media. The first op-ed to focus on polls in this sample was in the 1979/1980 election campaign. Titled *An irrelevant poll*, it criticized the use of a Gallup poll conducted prior to the defeat of the government and released almost two weeks into the election (no 45, 01/03/80).

The writer argues that the eventful time that lapsed between when the poll was conducted and when it was released had made it irrelevant, as "a changed context can alter voting intentions". The use of polls picked up fully in the next election (in 1984) and the next poll-focused op-ed wasn't until 2004.

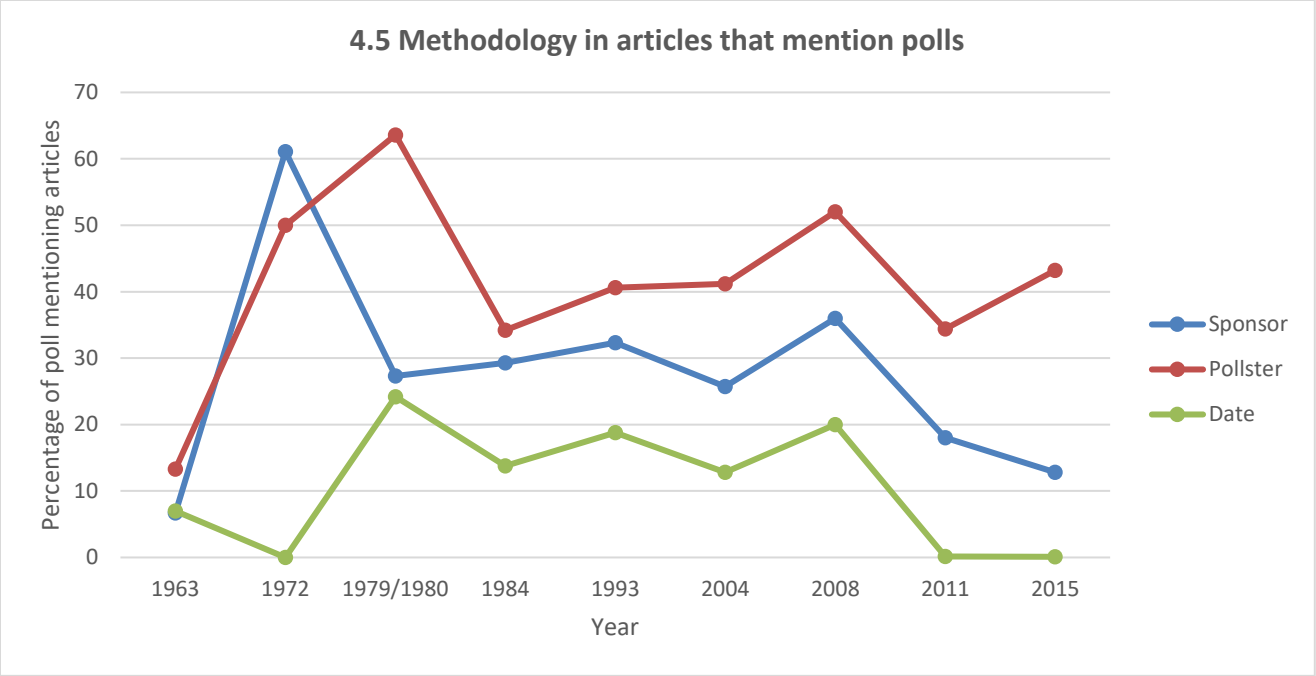
A more recent example of an op-ed focused on polls is a 2015 article titled *Taking the national pulse, or trying to* written by Donna Dasko, a former pollster (no 27, 10/19/15). After enumerating the many challenges the Canadian polling industry was facing much like Andrew-Gee (2015) had done, she concludes that "with issues such as these, it's a wonder that any opinion polls today can accurately gauge the electorate or predict outcomes. But the changes are long-term and structural and are not going away. We have to live with it". This practice of chronicling the problems of the polling industry and then dismissing them by saying that polls are not going away, or their use in reporting can be bettered by some slight changes, cuts across literature on polling and shows the commitment to the use of polls regardless of what happens.

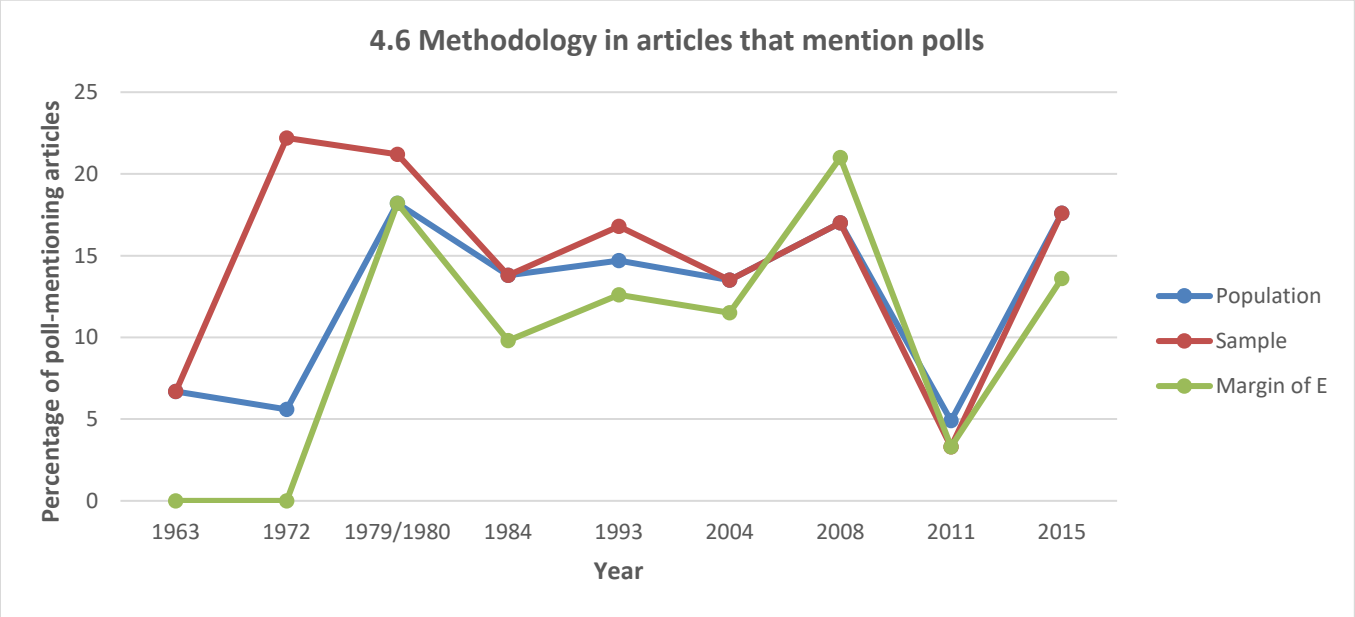
This is also exemplified by Hale, who insisted that "polls remain useful ways for the voting public to observe political trends during elections…" but then added that "with an increasingly disengaged electorate, much of which is reluctant to answer pollsters' phone calls, the best advice is still *caveat lector* — don't believe everything you read" (2004, p.81). Polls were framed as integral parts of campaign reporting which could not be done away with, regardless of whatever problems the polling industry was facing. This explains the fact that although the problems of polls were admitted in the 2015 campaign reportage because polling failures had made them too evident to be dismissed, the use of polls was still prevalent in this election.

4.4 Reporting of Methodology

The importance of including methodological information in media coverage of polls was considered in the previous chapter, and the inclusion of this information is an important determinant of the quality of poll reporting. Per Brettschneider, this information "is important in order to judge the reliability, the validity, and the relevance of poll results" (2008, p.485). However, in articles that only make passing references to polls, there's usually little space to include the complete methodological information for the polls. Thus, the inclusion of at least the basic methodological information in figure 4.5 would still be helpful to the readers in assessing the quality of polls referenced. Yet, as figure 4.5 shows, even the provision of this minimal information has been on a decline throughout most of the neoliberal era, except for a small increase in 2008.

Consequently, when figures 4.5 and 4.1 are compared, it is evident that the increase in the rate of poll mentions has not been accompanied by an increase in the provision of methodological information required to asses poll results. In fact, 2011, which saw the highest rate of poll mention in this sample also had the poorest treatment of both the information in figures 4.5 and 4.6. 2015 saw a slight increase only in the provision of the name of pollsters. One interesting thing to note from figure 4.5 is that the date polls were conducted is evidently the least provided information across all election years, and especially in 2015.





The poor provision of information on population, sample and margin of error in figure 4.6 is largely expected for articles that mention polls. As Frizzelli noted after the 1988 election, methodological information is hardly included "when polls are mentioned as secondary aspects in a story. Data which may well have been qualified when originally published are often commented

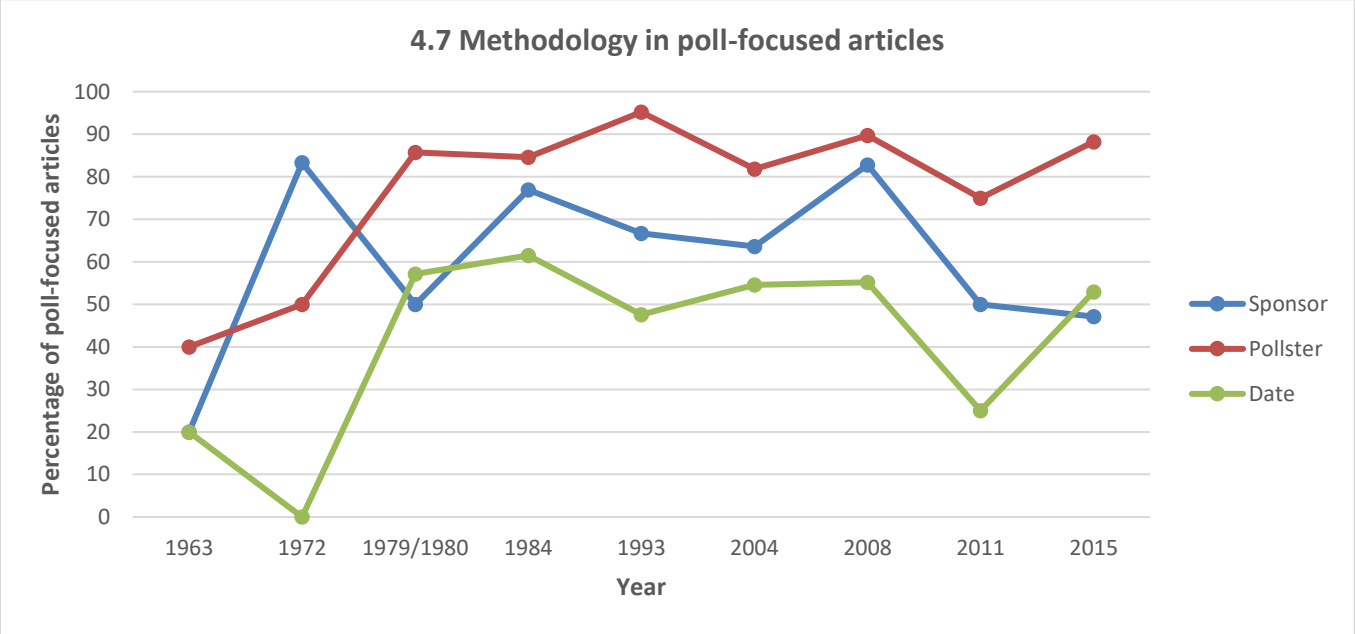
on as gospel" (1989, p.98). The provision of this information in 2011 was very awful, though 2015 showed minor improvements. Hence, the margin of error was not just mentioned a little more frequently in the 2015 coverage than in previous years, but also explained.

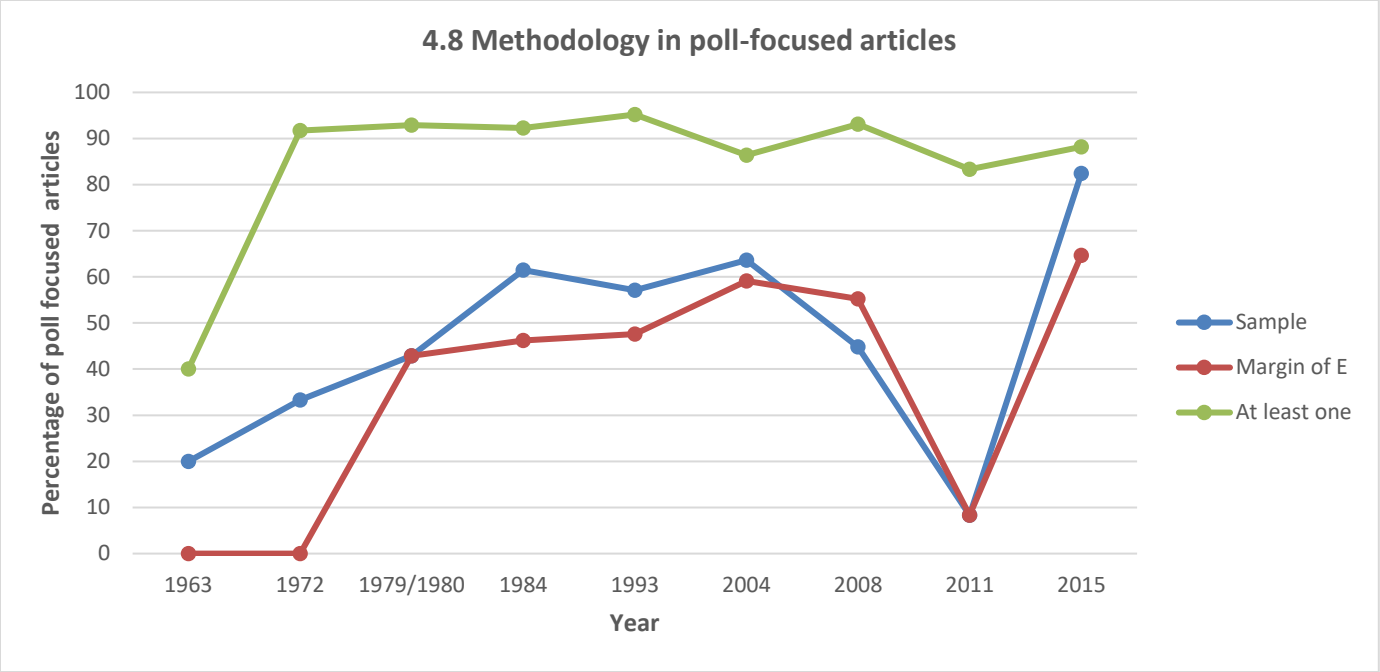
An article published at the beginning of the campaign noted that a new Nanos poll showed that "the Conservatives hold a statistically insignificant lead over the NDP, at 31.5 per cent to 30.1 per cent, with the Liberals close behind, at 29.3 per cent. Since the poll's margin of error is 3.1 percentage points, the three parties are in essence tied going into the campaign" (no 1, 08/03/15). This kind of detailed explanation of the margin of error was rare in previous years, but commonly used in the 2015 election. As Coletto notes, "throughout the campaign, headlines warned readers about the unreliability of polls" (2016, p.309). Again, this was primarily because the shortcomings of polling had been made evident by the polling failures in provincial elections. While these shortcomings were acknowledged, this did not deter the media from using polls like they'd always done. Instead, they settled for providing more information about polls, particularly the margin of error.

However, it could be argued that this comparatively thorough provision and interpretation of the margin of error was done, at least in part, to support the claim that was made for several weeks during the campaign – that there was an unprecedented three-way race among the political parties. The first article to mention this was released on the first day of the campaign. Describing the Conservatives' lead in a poll as "statistically insignificant" – a term rarely seen in poll reportage – it was mentioned, that; "since the poll's margin of error is 3.1 percentage points, the three parties are in essence tied going into the campaign" (no1, 08/03/15). The only other methodological information provided in this article was the name of the pollster. This narrative was continued well into the election, and one article published six weeks into the election noted that polls showed "the

three main parties (are) still locked in a virtual tie at around 30 per cent each and one month to go until the vote" (no 2, 09/22/15).

Hence, the improved treatment of the margin of error did not carry over into the provision of other methodological information like the date polls were published, as figure 4.5 shows. There is also the question of why Nanos continued to conduct polls with such a small sample of 250 persons, that resulted in such a low margin of error and required the constant reiteration of the claim that "with a margin of error of 3.1 percentage points 19 times out of 20, the race continues to be essentially tied" (no 11, 08/18). It was a largely useless series of polls in this sense, and the very careful way in which it was reported suggested that the journalists that used it were aware of this.





As figures 4.7 and 4.8 clearly show, the provision of methodological information is generally better in articles that focus on polls than in articles that simply mention them (Figures 4.5 and 4.6). The poor performance in the reporting of methodological information in 2011 also carried over into articles that focus on polls, as figure 4.8 shows. Nanos Research conducted a daily tracking poll for the *Globe* during this election and it seems there was an attempt to incorporate the results of this poll into at least one article per issue. However, even in articles that focused on polls, limited methodological information was provided (e.g. no 15 04/01/11). This laxity in reporting polls is especially important problematic given the role polls played in the election.

In the final week of the 2011 election, there was much emphasis on an "NDP surge" in the *Globe and Mail*, as in other media. Per Turcotte, a CROP poll was the first to show the "NDP surging into the lead in the province of Quebec" and it's surprising results were immediately questioned, especially since CROP itself did not "include a margin of error, citing the non-

randomness of the sample" (2011, p.195). Some of the articles discussing the surge in the *Globe* centred on analyzing the numbers of specific polls, while many others simply stated that the surge was according to "the polls" without so much as mentioning what firms conducted the polls being referred to.

More extreme still, others articles simply took the surge as a given and did not mention that it was determined to be occurring because of poll predictions, talk less of providing the methodological information of said polls. For example, one article focused squarely on the horserace that begins with the statement "the New Democrats (NDP) are surging nationally, the Liberals are pushing back to win back an old stronghold, and a revolt is taking hold in a once safe Tory seat" makes no mention of polls, or any prediction of voting intention upon which this analysis is predicated (no 30, 04/26/11).

Evidently, it was assumed that not only were the readers familiar with all the polls predicting an NDP surge, but that the polls were accurate. With the news flooded with reports of an NDP surge in the week before the election, the question that arises is, to what extent did the reports of polls showing a NDP surge contribute to votes for the NDP? Is it possible that some Liberal voters, seeing that the NDP had better chances than the Liberals of defeating the Conservatives, decided to vote for the NDP? As Turcotte argues, "after the release of the CROP poll, any balance in coverage evaporated. The Liberal and Green camps at the national level – and to some extent the Bloc campaign in Quebec – were forced into an uphill and somewhat futile battle to change the storyline and regain the spotlight." (2011, p.212). Similarly, Dufresne et al found that NDP gains were "made at the expense of the Bloc Quebecois and Liberals" but did not significantly impact the Conservative vote share (2014, p.15).

It has been noted that the 2011 Canadian election refuted the notion that campaigns have minimal effects on voting intention and showed how effective political marketing techniques can be in an election (no 76, 04/30/11; Dufresne et al, 2014; McGrane, 2011). However, the effect of poll reporting in that election have hardly been considered in the literature.

4.5 Comparison of polls

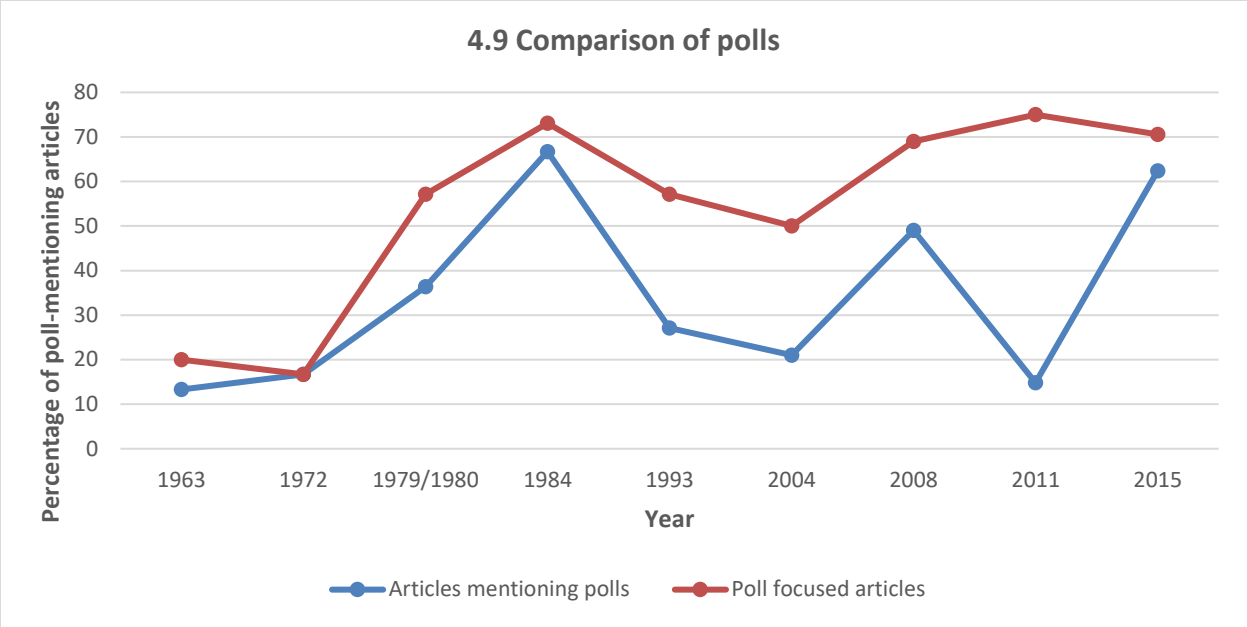
Another factor that determines the quality of poll reporting aside from methodology is the rate at which different polls – whether conducted by different organizations, using different methodologies, margins of error and sample sizes or at different times – are compared. The problem that arises from this kind of comparison as discussed in the previous chapter is that while any of these factors could be responsible for a variation between polls, when journalists report polls, they usually ignore them in the interest of showing that there has been a 'surge' or 'shift' in voting intentions.

Most of the literature that considers this issue notes that polls are compared solely in keeping with the horserace – to show that changes are taking place in voting intention. Traugott argues that polls are taken frequently during campaigns with expectations of change so "reporters often compare the results of surveys that were conducted by different organizations at different points in time. This can present problems for inferring and explaining change" (2004, p.88). This is because, as Patterson (2005) notes movement in candidate support from one poll to the next is usually caused more by sampling error than an actual change in voter preference.

After the 2011 election, Espey et al criticized the efforts of the blog ThreeHundredEight.com, which averaged polls conducted by various pollsters to develop its seat projections. While this was done to account for the very small samples polled at the provincial

level, they argue that this averaging of polls that vary on so many accounts – question wording, sample size, time-frame of collection – "leads to something that is less precise than would be desirable" (2011, p.87). In their analysis of the same election, Taras and Waddell provide a similar view of the media's indiscriminate comparison of polls, and added that "using these comparisons, news organizations reported the shifts in voting intention and seat projection as fact or near fact, not pausing to explain why changes took place from day to day (probably because they couldn't do it)" (2012, p.92).

Figure 4.9 shows that articles which focus on polls tend to compare more polls than articles that simply mention polls. The advantage of this is that poll-focused articles at least do a better job of providing the methodological information of these polls, even if they may not explain how the differences between these polls mean that any comparison between them should be taken very lightly. The 1979/1980 election was the first year in this sample to have an article compare more than two polls (no 2, 02/18/80). As figure 4.9 shows, there was a peak of poll comparisons in both articles that mention and focus on polls in 1984, with up to six polls conducted by five different firms at various times being mentioned in one poll-focused article (no 31, 09/01/84). This article provided different combinations of methodological information for each poll, but only two of them had complete information provided. This practice of comparing polls was so widespread in 1984 that a candidate complained it was wrong to compare polls from two different pollsters because "polling organizations collect their information differently" (no 81, 08/27/84).

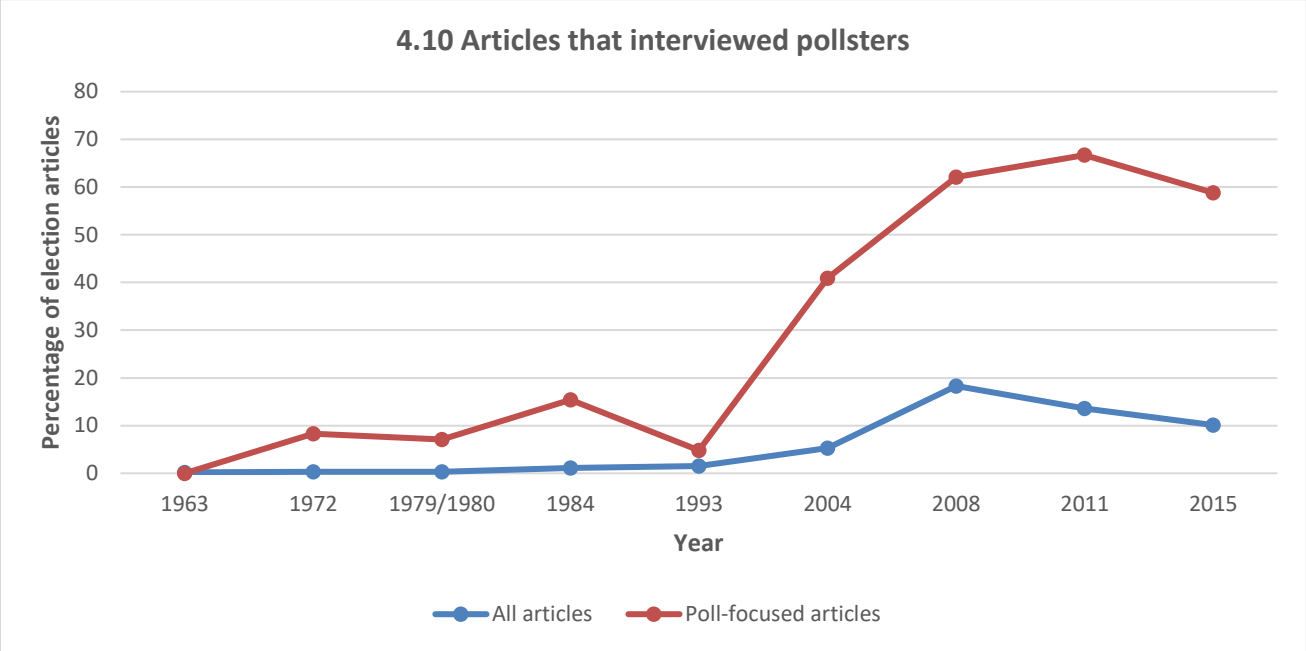


While this form of comparison subsided a bit in the years following 1984, it shot up again in 2008, and this year saw the comparison of multiple polls in one article that closely mirrored that of 1984. In 2008, one poll-focused article that compared up to three polls had a poor inclusion of methodological information, with only the margin of error for one of the polls being provided, and no sample, population or date provided for any of the polls (no 5, 10/13/08). Other articles compared up to four polls and supplied varying methodological information for each poll mentioned (no 44, 10/08/08; no 46, 09/30/08). These articles that compared polls also interviewed several pollsters, and this practice is examined in further detail in the next section.

The comparison of polls in more recent years is majorly between two polls conducted by different polling companies, or even one freshly conducted poll being contrasted with nameless polls. For example, a poll-focused article in 2015, argued that the result of a newly conducted poll was “a warning sign for the New Democrats, who since spring have enjoyed a wave of momentum and passed Justin Trudeau's Liberals in nationwide opinion polls” (no 8, 08/12/15). While the

nationwide polls being referred to were not named, the reference to them made it seem like the newly conducted poll was providing fresh information.

4.6 Pollsters as Experts



In the 1980s, the major reason the elevation of pollsters to experts was criticized in the literature was because they were not infallible. Hoy noted that although "examples of abuse mushroomed and wildly conflicting poll results became commonplace (in the 1980s)… the media consistently treated pollsters with an awestruck wonderment not afforded any other group" (1989, p.40, 42). Similarly, Frizzell argued that "the fact that pollsters have come to see themselves as political commentators and gurus is worrying, especially since their prognostications are so often wrong" (1989, p.93).

The elevation of pollsters to experts negates the common argument made in favor of polls, which is embodied in a statement by Donsbach, a member of the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research (ESOMAR). He argues that polls are "still comparatively rational information in a sea of partisan and biased statements from other sources about the possible outcome of the election" (2001, p.12). However, as Hoy argues pollsters are "all partisan…all of them have their own axes to grind, just as everybody does" (p.205). Hence, if pollsters are relied on so much to interpret poll results and even voice their opinions on political issues not related to polls, surely this lack of partisanship that makes polls better than other sources during a campaign is diminished to some extent.

Pollsters have always been regarded in much of the literature as arrogant and overemphasizing the level of understanding of politics they attain in the course of polling. Martin Goldfarb, one of Canada's foremost pollsters, lends much credence to this view in his description of pollsters as not only the collectors of public opinion, but those best suited to interpret it (1985). He argues that pollsters are "gatekeepers of political information…(who) tell what issues are salient to the public, how the public is reacting to the campaign and what the scorecard is" (Goldfarb, 1985, p.304). However, he did not explain what made pollsters so knowledgeable beyond their data collection skill. Hoy suggests that "Goldfarb is of note among other pollsters as the one most willing to interpret results of his surveys, often venturing far beyond conclusions his numbers actually support" (1989, p.123). However, while most pollsters may not be as blatant as Goldfarb in stating that they allocate to themselves grand interpretive roles well beyond their polls, instances from the *Globe*'s reportage considered in this section suggest that they possess a similar mindset.

Figure 4.10 shows that the interviewing of pollsters in articles that focused on polls began to increase in 1984, though the chart remained mostly flat when the interviewing of pollsters in all campaign articles for the year is considered. One new and short-lived trend that occurred in 1984 was that pollsters wrote articles presenting newly conducted polls sponsored by the *Globe and Mail* in the news section (e.g. no 5, 08/24/84; no 22, 08/25/84). However, this did not take place in other years, and seemed borne of the exuberance of hiring in-house pollsters for the first time.

Interviewing pollsters to shed more light on how polls were conducted, and perhaps provide further explanation of technical information can hardly be considered a problem. This is sometimes the case in poll focused articles. For example, a 2008 article interviewed two pollsters from different polling companies to make predictions based on results from their respective polls (no 46, 09/30/08). Sometimes, not just the pollsters who conducted the polls the articles focused on, but even random pollsters, were quoted in articles that focused on polls (no 47 09/12/08)

However, several times when pollsters are interviewed, they are not asked about polls, but to provide information on issues outside their purview. Worse still, these articles in which they are consulted to give their 'expert' opinion may not even mention polls. For example, in the 2008 election, a pollster was questioned – in an article that did not mention polls – about the significance of the breakdown of the Liberal Party's plane for the party in the election (no 45, 09/08/08). The pollster questioned happened to be the one conducting the Globe and Mail/CTV tracking polls, so he was likely consulted because he was easily accessible and his services were already being paid for.

Some instances of this were also seen in 2011, where articles in which polls were not under consideration or even mentioned, included interviews with pollsters on their opinion of the

political climate and leaders' chances. (e.g. no 2,04/14/11). One article even asked a pollster how a politician's religious affiliations impacted his chances of winning (no 28, 04/22/11). One can only wonder what qualified him to speak authoritatively on this issue. Per Andersen, the frequent "use of pollsters as experts not only on their polls, but on the campaign as a whole" reflects the extent to which polls have become afforded "overwhelming credibility" (2000, p.294).

This trend continued in the 2015 election coverage, and the *Globe*'s pollster for the election – Nik Nanos – was often interviewed, even in articles that did not mention polls. On one occasion, he was asked the political implication of the Conservatives new policy on Syrian refugees and if he thought this would improve their chances of getting the vote (no 3 09/21). When Nanos was asked what he thought the best way for the Liberals to present their platform was, he said "I'm no political strategist …" meaning that he knew he wasn't really 'qualified' to speak on this issue, but then he went ahead and provided his best guess anyway (no 23, 09/16/15).

On another occasion, where he was described as "a wise observer of the scene" Nanos predicted that the Trans-Pacific Partnership would not influence the outcome of the election, and did not refer to any poll to support this claim (no 12, 10/06/15). In fact, there were no polls mentioned in this article, which means rather than being interviewed to expound upon his findings as a pollster, he was providing his 'expert' opinion on all things related to the campaign. Only three days later, a Nanos poll published in the *Globe* suggested that "Canadians have concerns about the deal. Three-quarters of respondents were worried about the impact on the dairy and automotive industries" (no 10, 10/09). Hence, his expert opinion was contrary to what his polls suggested.

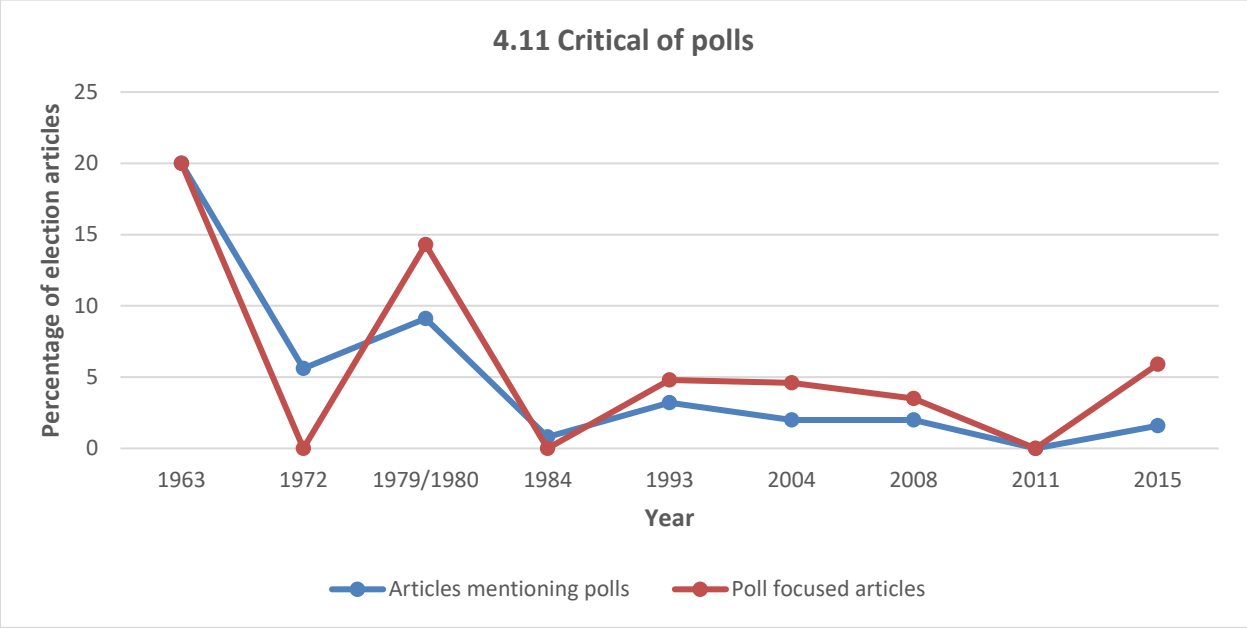
Also in 2015, a trend towards quoting nameless "pollsters" who said one thing or the other was observed (e.g. no 1 and no 6, 08/07/15). The mere mention of pollsters – even nameless ones – was considered sufficient to provide the expert backup to specific views and opinions. Thus, although figure 4.10 shows a slight drop in the interviewing of pollsters between 2011 and 2015, this does not seem to be the result of a reduction in the estimation of pollsters by journalists. Instead, the drop can be explained by most of the factors identified earlier on in this chapter as responsible for the drop in poll mentions between 2011 and 2015.

In sum, the fact that the media's acknowledgement of the problems of polling – made necessary due to recent poll failures in provincial elections – in the 2015 campaign coverage was mostly perfunctory was evident in the media's continued reliance on pollsters as experts. This brings to mind Hoy's assertion in the wake of the 1988 federal election that "journalists will blithely report the pronouncements of "name" pollsters regardless of how much or how often they contradict themselves" (1989, p.205).

4.7 Media criticism of Polls

Media criticism of polls – whether of specific polls/pollsters or the entire industry – have always been rare. As Hoy noted after the 1988 election "journalists suffer a collective amnesia in not reminding readers, viewers and listeners of the excesses of past predictions from the same pollster" (1989, p.205). Figure 4.11 shows that the percentage of articles that included criticisms of polls peaked in 1963, largely because very few articles that mentioned polls in that election (only 15). Several of these criticisms were made by candidates and referenced in news articles. An example of this in 1963 was when one candidate scorned poll results that did not favor him and

referred to the failure of polls in the 1948 American election as evidence that polls were untrustworthy (no 104, 02/20/63). However, candidates sometimes made valid criticisms beyond the "polls are wrong because my party is losing" arguments typically expected of them. A candidate described Gallup's polls as inaccurate because they only gave respondents the option of choosing between voting for the Conservative, Liberals, or 'other' and left out other parties (no 89, 03/07/63).



The only critical article in 1984 – a year in which polls were greatly employed in campaign – was one that reported an MP's call for the ban of polls because a recent Gallup poll had "depressed Conservative workers and influenced voters to jump on the Liberal bandwagon" (no 24, 08/24/84). Four days later, an editorial appeared in the *Globe* challenging this claims and arguing against a poll ban (no 21, 08/28/84). Figure 4.11 shows a similar scarcity of critical articles in the 2011 election which saw the largest percentage of poll mention in this sample. Overall however, in all election years considered, the number of articles critical of polls, or even only

asking questions about the way polls are conducted or reported by the media are usually very few, generally less than five in number.

As has been discussed throughout this chapter, in 2015, a handful of articles, while not outrightly critical of polls, discussed recent polling failures, the problems being faced by the polling industry and whether this meant less trust should be placed in polls (e.g. no 27, 10/19/15, no 31, 09/30/15). Ultimately, these articles constituted no more than a token acknowledgment of the problem of polls, and the media's use of polls in the 2015 election remained the same in most ways.

4.8 Coverage summary

This analysis has shown that in the *Globe and Mail*'s coverage of the 1984 campaign, several polling trends emerged which reflected the neoliberal ideals of the time. In that year, poll mentions increased sharply from the 1979/1980 election, the *Globe* hired its own pollsters, multiple polls were compared in single articles and pollsters were regularly interviewed. All this was despite criticisms of polls. As the use of polls increased, and new forms of polling such as online polls and seat projections emerged, new criticisms were added which questioned their methodologies and reliability. This took place alongside the consideration of effects of polls on voting intention which continued to be examined. At the same time, due to the closeness between pollsters and much of the scholarly world that studies polling, defenses of poll use emerged within scholarship which found their way into the media.

Poll reporting consistently increased until the 2011 campaign, which had the highest number of articles that mentioned polls and interviewed pollsters in the sample. However, 2011

also had the poorest provision of methodological information in poll reporting. Most literature released after this election included criticism of how polls were conducted and reported in the election. By the 2015 campaign, prominent failures of polls in provincial elections, particularly in Alberta in 2012 and British Colombia in 2013 meant that the problems of the polling industry could no longer be ignored in the media.

Criticisms of polls were admitted in the *Globe's* 2015 coverage, primarily through frequent references to the provincial poll failures, considerations of technological and social challenges facing the polling industry and an improved provision and explanation of the margin of error. However, this amounted to not much more than a perfunctory acknowledgement of the problems of polls for a variety of reasons. First, the use of poll in campaigns was just as widespread in 2015 as in previous campaigns and the slight drop in poll mention between 2011 and 2015 evident in figure 4.1 can be explained by several factors, particularly the exceptionally long 78-day campaign.

Second, the improved explanation and provision of the margin of error may have also been part of an attempt to support the narrative that the poll numbers showed the 2015 election had the first ever three-way race in Canadian history. This is especially evident as other important methodological information aside from the margin of error – particularly the date the poll was conducted – were frequently omitted in articles that mentioned poll in the 2015 coverage. Third, the deferential treatment accorded pollsters as 'experts' whose purview surpassed the polls they conducted and whose views were important even if they contradicted the results of their own polls, still continued unabated in 2015. Hence, polls still played an important role in the 2015 campaign coverage, and there was much discussion of strategic voting based on poll results.

The coverage of polls in the 2015 Canadian federal election in no way suggest that the roles of polls and pollsters in Canadian media coverage of campaigns is poised to diminish in any substantial way. The media is content to rely on the defenses of polling emerging from within scholarship as justification for their continued use of polls despite the problems facing polling. It has been suggested in literature supporting polls that if the media would only commission polls that focus less on investigating voting intention and more on discovering where people stand on policy issues (Espey et al, 2011) and if "pollsters can put their house in order" (Frizelli, 1982) polls would be very useful in election reporting.

Hence, after the 2015 election, Coletto – CEO of the polling company Abacus Data – argued that despite the setbacks the polling industry had encountered after the 2011 election, polls not only "did a good job of anticipating the popular vote percentages" in 2015, they were also useful in understanding "how the electorate was reacting to each party's policy, how this ultimately influenced their individual voting decisions (and) why the horse race was changing" (2016, p.309, 323). In the 2015 election, several polls focused on issues other than voting intention were conducted and this is evidently what Coletto was referring to in his self-congratulatory statement that polls go beyond the horserace – reporting on which party was ahead based on poll numbers – to provide information on how citizens view parties' policies. Since the Canadian media shows no sign of slowing down its use of polls, perhaps this new defense of polls emerging from within scholarship is soon to find its way into the media.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

This thesis has posited that the Canadian media's election reportage has increasingly focused on pre-election polls in the neoliberal era. A major reason for this focus on polls is rampant commercialization in the media industry in the neoliberal era. This level of commercialization in the Canadian media has been attained and expressed through an increase in concentration, commodification of existing public media and deregulation. Pre-election polls possess features that make them especially useful to the commercial media. This is because they are among other things: relatively cheap to produce compared to the audience they generate; can be used to produce sensational and exciting stories; and can be managed through a collaborative process between pollsters and journalists. A critical political economy analysis of the Canadian media showed how the current media system emerged through changes in the regulatory framework.

The way the use of polls as a part of horserace reporting displaces essential information required by the electorate while also relegating them to the position of spectators in the political process was examined. This is especially so for the masses (the bulk of the citizenry located below the upper and upper middle classes) who already have little or no political purchasing power – time, energy or money – required to be involved in the political process. Hence, this contributes to the detachment of citizens from the political process evident in many western countries today through declining voter turnout in elections.

The tension between capitalism and democracy in western liberal democracies which has worsened in the neoliberal era was also considered. This was done to understand how these tensions have been reproduced in the media – between the political and economic functions of the media – and contributed to the growth of commercialization. Mediatization and political marketing were also considered as means by which the media's form of reportage (media logic)

which has been greatly influenced by commercialization, intersects with and even influences how candidates and parties communicate. Mediatization is the process by which candidates, in a bid to regain control of communication from the media, shape their communicative processes to suit the media's logic. Consequently, the form of political communication produced is reduced to the media's standard. Political marketing is an outgrowth of this attempt by candidates to control political communication using media logic, and is particularly employed during election campaigns. Herein, political communication is reduced to unabashed marketing of candidates using negative advertising and spin. In this process, citizens are mostly unable to get substantial information from the candidates on their intentions when they reach office, as the goal is just to 'sell' the candidate to them. Also, this process of political marketing reduces the citizens to speculators, even consumers.

Against the backdrop of rampant commercialization contributing to the increased use of polls by the media, factors affecting the quality of polls and the effects of polls on voting intention were considered. The quality of polls is affected by factors such as the description of change across different polls and the provision of complete and accurate methodological information, especially but not limited to the margin of error. The effects of polls include: the bandwagon and strategic effects of polls on voting intention; the level of financial support and media coverage provided to a candidate; voter apathy, resulting from the relegation of citizens to spectators and trivialization of discussions on policy; and reduction in the focus on issues of policy. The extent to which these effects of polls are considered problems depend largely on the normative conception of democracy subscribed to and the role of the media within that vision of democracy. This is explored further in the discussion section of this chapter.

5.1 Review of media coverage

The longitudinal content analysis of the *Globe and Mail*'s campaign coverage across nine election years (between 1963 and 2015) was carried out to understand why the criticisms of polling and problems of the polling industry have not affected the media's use of polls. This is largely because, due to the closeness between pollsters and much of the scholarly world that studies polling, defenses of poll use have emerged within scholarship which found their way into the media. The media is content to rely on these defenses of polling, and a recent one emerging from the 2015 election was that polls go beyond the horserace – reporting on which party was ahead based on poll numbers – to provide information on how citizens view parties' policies

The content analysis also showed that articles that mention polls have increased steadily since 1963, and especially increased in the 1984 election due to the emergence of several new polling trends which reflected the neoliberal ideals of the time. Prominent among these, was that the *Globe and Mail* commissioned its own private polling for the first time, pollsters were regularly interviewed and articles that focused on polls began to compare multiple polls. This increase in the media's use of polls was despite criticisms. Some of these criticisms led to the creation of Section 326 of the Canada Election Act – which regulates the reporting of election poll methodology – in 2000. The steadily rising use of polls in campaign reporting was however unaccompanied by the provision of methodological information required by this law.

The 2011 election saw the highest number of articles that mentioned polls but also had the poorest provision of methodological information in the sample. After the 2011 election, the Canadian polling industry was shaken by the failure of polls in provincial elections, particularly in Alberta in 2012 and British Colombia in 2013. Hence, the problems of polls could no longer be ignored by the media, and were frequently discussed in the 2015 campaign reportage. Scholarly criticisms of polls were admitted primarily through frequent references to the

provincial polling failures; considerations of technological and social challenges facing the polling industry; and an improved provision and explanation of the margin of error. However, this amounted to not much more than a perfunctory acknowledgement of the problems of polls for a variety of reasons. Not only was poll reporting in the 2015 campaign just as widespread as it had been in previous campaigns, the media's reliance pollsters as 'experts' on all things political – whether poll related or not – was also very evident.

Furthermore, the improved provision and explanation of the margin of error did not carry over into other methodological information – particularly the dates polls were conducted – which were still frequently omitted in articles that mentioned poll in the 2015 coverage. This suggests that the improved explanation and provision of the margin of error may have mostly been the result of an attempt to support the narrative that the poll numbers showed the 2015 election was the first ever three-way race in Canadian history. Hence, regardless of the slight drop in poll mention between 2011 and 2015 which can be explained by several factors relating to the exceptionally long 78-day campaign, and the cursory acknowledgement of challenges being faced by the polling industry, polls still played an important role in the 2015 campaign coverage.

Contribution to knowledge

The analysis of campaign coverage in the *Globe and Mail* produced some findings on the Canadian reportage of pre-election polls which can be added to the existing body of knowledge. They include:

- In the 2015 campaign – compared to poll reporting in previous campaigns in the neoliberal era – the media openly admitted criticisms of polling due to the failure of provincial polls in previous years.
- The only visible effect this acknowledgment of the problems of polls had on poll reporting was an improved provision and explanation of the margin of error, but polls

and pollsters continued to be consulted and deferred to throughout the campaign much like before.

- Due to the closeness between pollsters and much of the scholarly world that studies polling, defenses of poll use have emerged within scholarship and then found their way into the media.

A further area of research that appears to be indicated is to determine that a significantly large proportion of the research on polling is done by pollsters and those with close ties to polling like members of the American Association of Public Opinion Researchers and World Association of Public Opinion Researchers. This needs to be further researched because if this were to be true it has troubling implications for our understanding of poling.

5.2 Discussion

The normative view of democracy subscribed to determines whether poll-based horserace reporting in campaigns is considered to have any effect on the democratic process. As considered in chapter one, a *procedural* view of democracy argues that the media gives the people what they want, so if campaign news happens to be focused on polls, it is because this is what the people want. Hence, it sees no problems with the use of polls or horserace reporting. A *competitive* view of democracy considers the role of the media as provider of essential information during elections to be critical, because elections are the only space provided for citizens' political participation in this conception of democracy. This minimalist view of democracy contends that they need all the information they can get in choosing their representatives.

Hence, pre-election polls as part of the larger horserace reporting would be regarded as a problem in competitive democracy because of the extent to which they may displace other important information required by the populace during campaigns. However, a competitive

conception of democracy could still consider polls as essential information citizens require to make their sole opportunity to participate in the political process count. This is by using poll results to determine which of their preferred candidates have the greatest chance of winning and voting strategically based on this. This is akin to the form of strategic voting that took place in the 2015 election as reported by the *Globe and Mail*. Thus, the competitive view of democracy may not see polls may not consider polls totally harmful or useless.

The *participatory* and *deliberative* conceptions of democracy go beyond competitive democracy in their normative demands for the media. They require the media to not only provide essential information to citizens, but to help mobilize them and make them feel involved in the political process. Thus, it is unsurprising that these normative views of democracy regard most unkindly the horserace form of campaign reportage that employs pre-election polls, because not only does it deprive the citizenry of critical information, but it reduces them to spectators. While the procedural and competitive conceptions may lay claim to providing more 'practical' roles for the media than the participatory or deliberative democracy, what this does is to create a view of democracy that ignores the challenges being faced by the media and how campaign reportage can be improved.

Thus, it is important to understand the view of democracy being subscribed to when it is claimed that the way polls are employed by the media is unimportant or unchangeable. This view suggests that a procedural, or at best competitive view of democracy is the most efficient and nothing else can be attained or aspired to. As Crouch (2004) notes, the danger of this is that it results in "complacency, self-congratulations and an absence of concern to identify ways in which democracy is being weakened" (p.3). If a more participatory or deliberative model of democracy is subscribed to, the exclusionary tendencies of horserace reporting in which pre-election polls play a significant part would be regarded as problematic.

The analysis of media coverage has shown that the Canadian media is in no hurry to do away with pre-election polls, regardless of the challenges the polling industry have faced and continue to face which impact the quality of polls. Even if polls were to be banned in the media, we have the internet and what is released there cannot be controlled. Still, it is important to set standards for what is effective media coverage of elections and if there is a role for polls therein.

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