

Fahrenheit C-51 and The October Crisis of 2014:  
Media Framing of the Government Response to Domestic Terror Threats

Royal Roads University  
School of Communication and Culture

May 27, 2015

Kevin MacLean

Author note

This research paper was prepared for PCOM660, supervised by Dr. Virginia McKendry

### Abstract

When two Canadian soldiers were murdered in October 2014 by radicalized individuals in acts that our federal government labelled Jihadist terrorism, the country was rightly shocked and appalled. Fear was a prominent reaction and it was one that the Canadian government, with an election on the horizon, cynically exploited for political purposes. Rather than calming the populace, Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his governing Conservatives used fear to politicize Canadians' security, attempted to capitalize on post-attack patriotic fervour, and incited people to be wary of "others." Harper's immediate promise after the attacks, to give Canada's police and spy services additional and unprecedented new powers, was realized three months later when Bill C-51: The Anti-terrorism Act, 2015, was unveiled, not in Parliament, but at a campaign-style event in suburban Toronto. Harper's agenda setting and framing of terror and security issues was apparent from October onward, and through a critical discourse analysis this paper examines how three major media sites, the Toronto Star, the Globe and Mail, and National Post, in turn framed and presented the news and commentary on Bill C-51 to the ultimate receiver: the reader. When the government and opposition parties, afraid to be seen as "soft on terror," abdicated their leadership roles and opted for political expediency, the media became the unofficial opposition, leading the debate, asking the important questions, and offering the constructive criticism that our leaders refused to address. It was not our political leadership's finest hour, however, Canada's media were equal to the challenge and showed their readiness to act as the conscience and voice of the nation when elected officials were unable and unwilling to do so.

*Keywords:* Bill C-51, media, terrorism, Stephen Harper, framing, agenda setting

Fahrenheit C-51 and The October Crisis of 2014:  
Media Framing of the Government Response to Domestic Terror Threats

**Introduction**

The world changed forever on Tuesday, September 11, 2001, when attacks on America by terrorists from another part of the world – strange “others” whom North Americans didn’t really know much about – were labelled acts of war and Americans were assured by their leaders that they should indeed be afraid. Capitalizing on that climate of fear, U.S. President George W. Bush and Vice-president Dick Cheney took control of the agenda and sought special powers for the “war” on terror. The result was the government gained unlimited war powers and the passage of the Patriot Act (Lakoff, 2011, paras. 1-2). Now Canada has headed down the same path.

Like many other countries, Canada has supported strong anti-terror action in the years since 2001, as successive governments spent billions and passed anti-terror legislation to try to keep the country safe from “others” and even those who live among us but have been radicalized by “others.” As well, as part of the ongoing “war on terror” post-9/11, Canadian military personnel have been deployed as part of international anti-terror operations and many Canadian soldiers have lost their lives as a result. In October 2014, two shocking, violent acts within days of one another shook Canadians to their core, and spread fear and loathing in their wake. The murders of Warrant Officer Patrice Vincent and Corporal Nathan Cirillo in separate incidents were immediately framed as terrorism by Prime Minister Stephen Harper and the federal government quickly announced plans to give police and security agencies additional sweeping, investigative powers. While political leaders generally call for calm from the public, and attempt

to appear non-partisan and statesman-like in crises such as this, Harper and his cabinet ministers adopted the Bush-Cheney theme of framing the agenda around fear and the unknown “others.”

In what would turn out to be the single biggest news story of 2014 (Cheadle, 2014), the federal government embarked on an orchestrated and organized three-month effort to set the agenda, frame key messages and ultimately, on January 30, 2015, announce new legislation that would give more powers to security agencies while simultaneously restricting or removing some rights to which Canadians had become accustomed. The agenda setting started in October with the first attack, by framing it as a terrorist action only four hours after it occurred and well before police or military investigators had conducted investigations. Speaking in the House of Commons during daily Question Period on October 20, 2014, the Prime Minister was asked by an obscure backbench Member of Parliament about “unconfirmed reports of a possible terror attack,” although at the time there were no such reports (Clark, 2014, para. 10). The so-called planted question served to allow the Prime Minister to frame the issue and set the agenda by describing an incident south of Montreal in St. Jean-sur-Richelieu as a likely terrorist attack. The unusual, if not unprecedented, move by the country’s top political leader was done to get the news out right away, he said later, and additionally, the Prime Minister’s Office spoke of a radicalized individual known to authorities (Clark, 2014, para. 10). Almost 24 hours later, the usual conduits for such information, the investigators, in this case the Quebec provincial police and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), held a news conference to describe the situation. As a result, the idea that radicalized domestic terrorists were responsible for the first attack was framed in the MSM and the public consciousness, by the federal government initially, and investigators subsequently.

After the first tragedy, the government's agenda setting and framing continued. Two days after the Prime Minister's announcement in the House of Commons, a homeless, apparently radicalized drug addict murdered the second soldier and then stormed in to the Parliament Buildings before being killed. The second attack supported the already-established terror agenda and the framing continued around the need to act to ensure the security of Parliament, of ordinary Canadians, and of the country as a whole. This was not happening in a vacuum, however. The two domestic attacks, coupled with the Canadian military's involvement in war actions against the Islamic State (IS), meant the media agenda repeatedly coupled security with fear of the unknown, the "others", the spectre of future attacks. The country was told these attacks are the kinds of problems Canadians might expect domestically as a result of the country's military involvement in the "war on terror" against the IS. As well, this framing helped solidify the government message that our national security services require more powers to ensure domestic security and safety.

In the days immediately after the attacks, that theme of the need for more powers appeared to resonate with the public, despite limited opposition to the idea of curbing citizens' rights, and, indeed, some question about whether these two killers even should be labelled terrorists (Curry, 2014, paras. 1-4). Some viewed the government's immediate reaction in October as precisely the prescription needed in uncertain times. However, others saw this strategy as more the expected reaction of a police state than a Western democracy and a change that might unfairly abrogate the rights of innocent people (Globe and Mail, 2014a; Globe and Mail, 2014b; Lee, 2014). Within a few weeks of the October Crisis of 2014, media coverage waned and public discussion of the promised legislation to give security services more power receded considerably. Behind the scenes, the impending legislation was being crafted and fine-

tuned. Then, on January 30, 2015, just over three months after the attacks, at a “political rally” (Clark, 2015, para. 2) at a community centre in Richmond Hill, Ontario, the Prime Minister unveiled Bill C-51, The Anti-terrorism Act, 2015.

The Harper Conservatives, a hyper-partisan government that is always focused on exploiting opportunities that will help ensure its re-election, saw the October attacks as a chance to appear “tough on terror”, to enact stringent laws giving security agencies new powers, and to do so all while casting the governing party as the only choice for Canadians in the upcoming October 2015 election. To try to determine how the MSM portrayed the government’s new legislation and interpreted it for Canadians, I examined the major themes around Bill C-51 that were presented, framed, and discussed in the news stories, opinion pieces and editorials of three major Canadian mainstream media (MSM) outlets in the four weeks following the introduction of the proposal on January 30. My research question was: How did major Canadian media frame coverage and discussions of Bill C-51’s proposals to give police and security agencies increased investigative powers?

Using a critical paradigmatic approach and drawing on agenda setting, framing, and rhetorical theory, I examined themes in 140 news stories, columns, and editorials from the National Post, the Globe and Mail, and the Toronto Star. Stories related to the government’s plan for increased policing powers were studied and a critical discourse analysis was conducted to determine what recurring themes were the focus of coverage by these three politically and ideologically diverse media sites, respectively conservative, centrist and liberal. By choosing three major daily newspapers from Canada’s largest city, each with a strong focus on national affairs, but each historically promoting divergent political viewpoints, I hoped to determine how these media texts framed the news and arguments about the government’s plans, and whether

those publications' political leanings were reflected in themes, tone, story selection, interpretation, or overall coverage of Bill C-51.

What I discovered was illuminating. For much of the aftermath of the October Crisis of 2014 and in the weeks after the introduction of Bill C-51, the Canadian media became the de facto official Opposition, asking the tough questions, demanding answers, and outlining potential problems with the government's response and its anti-terror legislation. Because the whole matter of responding to the October attacks and Bill C-51 was so highly politicized by the ruling Conservatives from the outset and enjoyed widespread public support as a result, the NDP and the Liberals feared jeopardizing their political positions by being cast as "soft on terror." Thus, while Canada's political leaders were more concerned with taking positions that would help them appear "tough on terror", the MSM led the debate and discussion about whether Bill C-51 was the proper response to the October Crisis of 2014. The fact that disparate media from all parts of the political spectrum recognized the leadership vacuum and responded by independently leading a wholesome, constructive debate is a reflection of the significant role the MSM played in response to the October Crisis, and in trying to give Canadians the whole picture.

### **Literature Review**

Agenda setting and framing of the political and MSM discourse around this research question requires examining how the Canadian political leadership's attempt to present the situation was mediated by the MSM. To create the conceptual framework for my research, I drew on agenda setting theory and framing theory. It's also important to understand the rhetorical devices used to constitute the discourse and thus I also drew upon studies on the uses

of interpellation, the uses of spectacle and symbolism, and recent research on how politics has become a perpetual campaign more aligned with branding than policy-making.

### **Agenda Setting Theory and Framing Theory**

Agenda setting and framing are related theories in the fields of mass communication and public opinion. Dreier and Martin (2010) note that Entman (1993), as well as McCombs and Shaw (1972), consider agenda setting and framing to be overlapping functions. Agenda setting refers to how the MSM organizes, constructs and presents news, political and otherwise. McCombs (2004), drawing on decades of research on agenda setting and framing, concludes that journalists significantly influence their publics' picture of the world (Dreier & Martin, 2010, p. 763). The concept of salience also plays a role. In setting the agenda (in other words, telling publics what news events to think about) MSM heighten the salience, or relative importance, of particular aspects of an issue among publics (Matthews, 2009, p. 158). For instance, while reporting the tragedy of the murders of the two soldiers and the government's desire to give police more powers to protect society, public salience was raised about security or fears for people's safety (Wanta, 2009, p. 54). Priming, the process of media content's effect on public opinion, leads to publics evaluating or judging political leaders. Priming is also at work in agenda setting (Kiousis, 2008, p. 653). For instance, if a political leader is seen in stories to be speaking often about security or promising to be tough on crime, then publics are primed to evaluate that leader based on the salience of those characteristics among those publics.

In a further illustration of the power and effects of agenda setting, Dreier and Martin (2010) use the case of ACORN, a grassroots community organization that was targeted by conservative Republicans who, before the 2008 U.S. presidential elections, "created narratives of a national voter fraud controversy" based on some localized problems that ACORN was dealing



with (p. 782). The local became national because a steady barrage of information from conservative opinion entrepreneurs influenced the agenda-setting and news-framing actions of the media. We saw the ACORN scenario re-enacted in the days after the attacks on the two Canadian soldiers.

Closely related to agenda setting is the communicational strategy of framing. In news presentation, agenda setting by media and other powers such as politicians tells publics *what* to think about, while framing tells publics *how* to think about it. Framing “determines whether most people notice and how they understand and remember a problem” (Entman, 1993, p. 54), which is why politicians, corporations, and others often compete with journalists and among themselves regarding how their messages for stories by the MSM are framed. Everyone wants to control, or at least influence, the media message, and hence control the agenda. As well, Dreier and Martin (2010) outline how Gitlin (1980) stated that the way MSM portrays issues can signify to an audience what is important that they know about those issues, and ultimately can significantly affect audience attitudes and public policy (DeVreese, Peter & Semetko, 2001). The authors also note Iyengar (1991) postulated that MSM framing can shape people’s perceptions of who is responsible for particular social problems (p. 829), and we saw this in the case of the murdered Canadian soldiers. However, while Barnard-Wills (2011) suggests that the MSM help to maintain the hegemony of specific social groups by “promulgating social myths and imaginaries,” he also argues that “media representations do not have a direct effect on audience because audiences are capable of active interpretation and reinterpretation of the political and social world” revealed in the MSM (p. 551). While my study was not concerned with media effects *per se*, I was interested in how the MSM narrowed and presented the range of interpretations to their publics.

Because politics, ideology, and sociological perceptions were all part of the agenda setting and framing narratives after the October attacks, my research looked at whether ideologically different MSM texts subsequently presented and interpreted the issues as framed and set by the government. Were traditionally conservative-leaning media more supportive of the government's messaging on Bill C-51? Were centrist or liberal-leaning media critical, hostile, supportive of the government narrative? How was the government messaging portrayed and did disparate media take different approaches? I believed it would be useful to view ideologically different MSM texts to assess whether those ideological disparities had any influence over themes in the news agenda, commentary, or the framing of narratives. Citizens trust the MSM to present and analyze the news agenda independent of the partisan and political messaging endemic in the manipulative framing of government messages by the party in power. Hence, if rightist, centrist, and leftist MSM come to similar conclusions about how a government is acting, then that is a truly illuminating commentary on the state of the state.

Agenda setting and framing can have positive or negative connotations depending on the receiver's own interpretation or allegiances. For instance, whether the Canadian government's attempt to set the agenda and frame how publics think about the attacks on the two soldiers was interpreted positively or negatively could have been influenced by partisan allegiances or personal feelings about the issue. However, whether the government's agenda-setting and framing action from October through the introduction of Bill C-51 was politically motivated or designed to simply disseminate information is moot because the result was the Prime Minister was able to do what he wanted: to frame the issue and direct the communication agenda. For the purposes of this paper, I have focused on how the MSM (as a receiver) took the government narrative and mediated the message for consumption by the ultimate receivers, the MSM's

publics. The Prime Minister's statements in the days after the attacks and again after the unveiling of Bill C-51 were the subject of major stories from coast to coast, and the themes of security and protection that he framed were widely disseminated by the MSM. My research examined what level of reciprocity or criticism, if any, there was, in the MSM reportage after the unveiling of Bill C-51.

### **Interpellation: Hailing Publics As Patriots**

One of the effects of agenda setting is interpellation, which reconstitutes Canadians as patriots, rather than citizens. Interpellation, when humans behave socially in ways that we feel society and others expect us to, is an extension of framing. If framing tells us *how* to think about something, interpellation is our way of adopting so-called normative cultural notions, such as associating boys with blue and girls with pink, boys with trucks and girls with dolls. In outlining the mechanism of interpellation, Althusser (1971, as cited in Chandler, n.d.) theorized that mass media are able to position subjects so that media representations are seen to reflect everyday reality. Such textual determinism has been challenged by modern semioticians who emphasize the polysemic nature of texts (Chandler, para. 16). While semioticians might reject the idea that Harper or the MSM forced Canadians to view themselves as patriots, by repeatedly promoting such ideas, especially on the cusp of a fall 2015 election, escaping exposure to the government's frame is nearly impossible. In this time of crisis, by rhetorically hailing Canadians as patriots if they stand up to those who would launch such gruesome attacks on home soil, the Prime Minister not only framed the story as one of patriots versus enemies, but by implication he called upon all good citizens to recognize this is how our society expects all good citizens to react and behave (Chase, 2014, para. 6).

The rhetorical device of an Aristotelian enthymeme – a three-part argument in which one

part is unstated, left to the receiver to deduce – was also at play in this instance. Immediately after the attacks, Harper’s language intimated that the radicalized perpetrators of the murders were “others” to be feared, but that patriotic Canadians would not stand for such terrorism on domestic soil. In a crisis such as the murders of the two soldiers, the dominant, influential codes of the MSM, coupled with the national leader’s political rhetoric, ensured the representations mediated by power were disseminated to the masses via the MSM (Chase, 2014, paras. 5-6). The Prime Minister also employed this rhetorical strategy the day he unveiled Bill C-51 by saying, “Jihadist terrorism is one of the most dangerous enemies that our world has ever faced. Plots have become more frequent and more dangerous, including here in Canada” (Boutilier & Campion-Smith, 2015, paras. 8-9). Unstated was the enthymeme that, without Bill C-51, these Jihadist “others” would visit more attacks upon Canadians. With narratives such as these unfolded the effort to: frame the news around the desired “us versus them” representation; to interpellate or hail Canadians as standing for Canadian values; and, to set the tone and agenda within the media that a forceful government response was needed in order to protect law-abiding citizens. That effort continued after Bill C-51 was unveiled and by examining the themes delineated by the MSM, I hoped to learn how the media portrayed these appeals to people’s emotions, patriotism, and Canadian values.

### **Rhetoric, Drama, and Symbolism**

The Canadian government acted quickly to begin setting the agenda and framing the debate. Within days of the attacks, the federal police force, the RCMP, and the country’s spy agencies, the Communications Security Establishment (CSE, formerly Communications Security Establishment Canada or CSEC), and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), asked for more and new extensive powers to thwart future domestic terror attacks. The federal

government's quick reaction to announce its agreement came with little public debate or discussion, and ultimately it led to Bill C-51. As well, the whole premise of whether the attacks could even properly be called "terrorism" was raised by some political opponents as a dangerous and politically-driven rhetorical move (Curry, 2014, paras. 1-4). The murders of the two soldiers were a shock, prompting fear and concern. The October attacks were gripping, tragic spectacles, followed live via all forms of MSM, social media, blogs, and the internet.

In political life, spectacle and symbolism also play important roles as symbolic acts and imagery have become vital to the very conduct of politics. Look no further than Barack Obama's first presidential campaign in 2008, which focused on image and spectacle, hope and change, with constructs purposely designed to capture media and public attention (Kellner, 2009, p. 517). More than 50 years ago, Murray Edelman's notion of "symbolic politics" may have been the first examination of framing politics as having dramaturgical and symbolic value (Sanders, 2009, p. 45), but modern politicians have taken that drama and symbolism to unforeseen levels. As Edelman noted, "the function of, political spectacle ... is dramaturgy rather than policymaking. Like drama, it is constructed to be presented to the public" (Sanders, 2009, p. 45-46). By constructing the image of an evil terrorist striking in Canada's capital city, a dramatic framing of events to a fearful public ensured little political opposition was heard regarding the government's plan to bestow greater powers upon security agencies. The implied rhetorical message, another instance of the use of an enthymeme, was that no one would want a repeat of the latest incidents, so the nation's security forces needed more power to ensure everyone's safety. Examining how the MSM portrayed and reported this dramatic construct was crucial to understanding how the political agenda and the government's framing of the attacks and Bill C-51 influenced the themes that the MSM communicated to Canadians and primed audiences to view the attacks through a

particular lens of patriotism and the need for C-51's enhanced security powers. Additionally, I hoped to determine whether the political practice of the non-stop campaign had any effect on the framing practices of both those in political power and the MSM disseminating it.

### **Politics, the Permanent Campaign, and Branding**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, political debate and discourse have become a form of performance art, wherein context, truth, and detail are collateral damage in the desire for hegemonic power and control. This is the era of the “permanent campaign” outlined by Sanders (2009, p. 73) and also by Hecló (2000) in Marsh and Fawcett (2011, p. 520). In fact, as Blumenthal (1982) states “there is no clear distinction between campaigning and governing, as the individuals and tactics used in campaigning often shape the successful candidate's actions in office” (Marsh & Fawcett, 2011, p. 520). In Canada, this has been well documented at the federal level, where the Harper government's focus on a ceaseless campaign never wavers (Wherry, 2012, paras. 1-8). Canada's federal government is not the only one enamoured of the permanent campaign, but it is the most adept at it.

The permanent campaign has put branding and marketing high on the agenda for politicians, and, as a result, political messages, marketing, and communication reflect ideals that cast politicians in a positive light and support the governing party's desire to retain power. For instance, Harper's Conservative party has branded itself as a pro-military and pro law-and-order party that is the best choice for protecting Canada and its citizens. Marsh and Fawcett (2011) concluded such branding is a way of selling policy to the electorate, will likely lead to “more managed, rather than responsive government” (p. 527), and “might well undermine representative and parliamentary democracy” (p. 525). In other words, if a governing power is continually focused on damage control, managing messages, and using its position for partisan

purposes, then it is serving the political party's best interests, not the citizens' best interests. Indeed, Schneider (2004) suggests that political marketing is used "not to orient voters, but to manipulate them" (p. 61). Additionally, Schneider, citing Beresford (1998), said political marketing strategies could undermine democracy "by placing undue emphasis on persuading voters rather than genuinely informing them" (2004, p. 61). While the Canadian government portrays itself as a strong supporter of the nation's military personnel, the government's actions haven't always supported that rhetoric (Anderson, 2014). The reality is that when it comes to serving the needs of wounded military veterans, the government has been far less genuine in its treatment of those men and women (Renzetti, 2014). For instance, despite government rhetoric about looking after injured and maimed military veterans, an investigation by Canada's Auditor-General found that veterans can wait months, even years, to receive care (Renzetti, 2014). As well, in the fall of 2014, a new and highly touted government announcement about \$200 million for veterans with mental health issues, was initially portrayed by the government as an expenditure over the next six years, but turned out to be spread over an estimated 50 years (Galloway, 2014).

These permanent campaign, branding, and marketing trends are now dominant in the Canadian political discourse, and because of their potential damaging effect on our democratic system (Marsh & Fawcett, 2011, p. 525) it was important to examine how Canada's media presented and interpreted the government's public communication and messaging in the aftermath of the October Crisis of 2014 and introduction of Bill C-51.

### **Summary**

Canada's federal government came to a decisive conclusion after the October murders of the two soldiers: these were the acts of radicalized, Canadian-bred terrorists, and in response

Canada needs Bill C-51 to boost security and give police agencies greater powers of arrest, detention, surveillance, and prosecution. Using rhetoric and agenda-setting techniques, and framing the situation as an “us versus them” scenario, the government aimed to inspire patriotic fervour in hopes that citizens would support the new security measures, even if some rights were abrogated along the way. The MSM play a key role in relating, reporting and, analyzing the news narrative for Canadians, therefore examining how the MSM responded to the government’s agenda setting and framing of these issues was a research question that goes to the heart of how much Canadians can trust the media to cut through the political rhetoric and messaging, to deliver the news, and to critically examine issues that are of genuine public importance.

### **Methods**

The Canadian government’s agenda setting and framing of the October attacks as terrorist acts deserving of a swift increase in police agency powers, the introduction of Bill C-51, and the subsequent narrative framing of the issue by the MSM, required that I examine those outcomes from a critical viewpoint. From Merrigan, Huston, & Johnston (2012), we know that critical studies deal with how social power structures and resources benefit some people and oppress others. When examining texts, such studies do not separate communication from other factors in the overall system of oppressive forces (2012, p. 222). Additionally, Merrigan et al., and Peshkin (1988) argue that in critical analysis, theory and method are highly interconnected and that critical scholars embrace subjectivity, believing that subjective views are impossible to avoid in research and that subjectivity can have a positive effect in describing, evaluating, and reforming society” (Merrigan et al., 2012, p. 224). In critically analyzing the MSM framing of the government narrative around Bill C-51, while acknowledging the subjectivity of selecting only certain texts and a certain time frame, I anticipated being able to describe and evaluate the



performance and output of the MSM in a way that would be beneficial for society and for journalism.

Using critical discourse analysis (CDA), what van Dijk (2001) called discourse analysis “with an attitude” (p. 96), I employed van Dijk’s multidisciplinary socio-cognitive approach (p. 97) and examined certain texts of MSM to discover themes that were common among the three MSM outlets studied, any differences that stood out, and any themes that perhaps were exclusive to some of the media outlets. In choosing this methodology, I hoped to determine if, and how, the MSM was influenced by the government’s agenda setting and framing, how the MSM’s own political leanings affected coverage, and how the MSM portrayed the narrative. Ruth Wodak, one of the pre-eminent scholars associated with CDA, outlines that CDA is not concerned with evaluating what is “right” or “wrong” (Wodak, 2001, p. 65). Instead, the researcher must make use of his or her background and contextual knowledge to embed “the communicative or interactional structures of a discursive event in a wider frame of social and political relations, processes and circumstances” (Wodak, 2001, p. 65). As a journalist and former media gatekeeper for more than 30 years, one who made daily decisions on what would be written about, what would be published, and how it would be presented or mediated, this is an area in which I have much insight. Based on my experience, I expected there might be some evidence of ideologically allied media being more overtly supportive of the Conservative government’s agenda, and possibly endorsing populist attitudes propagated by the government; but, without studying the published narratives, those remained only uncomfortable assumptions. My experience also enabled me to recognize any subtleties or alterations in direction or theme as the stories unfolded in the weeks after Bill C-51 was unveiled. This allowed me to revisit and perhaps rethink my prior assumptions, based upon the evidence found in the stories.

### **Data and Data Collection**

Initially I intended only to analyze stories in the weeks after the October 2014 attacks but with the Harper government's unveiling of Bill C-51 on January 30, 2015, my analysis shifted to coverage in the four weeks immediately after the unveiling of the bill. In order to compare and contrast the differing themes that were mediated in the MSM, I examine the published narratives in three large, high-circulation Canadian daily newspapers that frequently include comprehensive coverage of news of national issues. The three publications are also generally identified as positing different ideological viewpoints, particularly in their commentary and editorial opinion sections: the National Post (conservative), Globe and Mail (centrist) and Toronto Star (liberal). Examining news stories, opinion columns and editorials on the websites of those three newspapers allowed me to triangulate the expressed, implied, and omitted themes. By using this form of triangulation, a concept espoused by Ruth Wodak and Ron Scollon, among others, and outlined by Meyer (2001), I was able to uncover thematic commonalities, divergences and contradictions among the analyzed texts, as well as divergences and contradictions involving my own expectations about what differences I assumed would be found among the publications (p. 30).

In the immediate aftermath of January 30, news coverage and commentary was substantial. Some days, the MSM I examined each published up to six pieces about Bill C-51. As the weeks passed, while the themes of the stories remained relatively constant, the volume of news stories slowed. This is the typical ebb and flow of the news cycle. Based on my experience, in the first days of such a major national news event, coverage is heavy, and that was reflected in my research. Then, over time, frequency diminished slightly, unless new developments caused renewed MSM interest. For instance, the Toronto Star published six stories dated January 30,

compared to three by the Globe and two by the National Post. On February 10, the Star and Post each had one story while the Globe published none. However, as debate roiled about whether the New Democratic Party would officially oppose the bill, on February 18, the Post published five pieces, the Star four and the Globe three. The next day, February 19, the Globe had five stories, and the Post and Star each ran two. This reflected that even three weeks after Bill C-51 was introduced, it was still a topical and important item for the MSM, which was seeking to spell out and analyze for Canadians the implications of the proposed law. Most importantly, by studying a defined period immediately after the introduction of Bill C-51, I was able to examine how social power, abuse, dominance, and inequality were enacted, reproduced and resisted within social and political contexts (Merrigan et al., 2012, p. 222).

### **Data Analysis**

Because CDA deals with those whose “interests” are represented, helped, or harmed by the things people in power or power structures say, write, or do (Merrigan et al., 2012, p. 222), it was an effective method for examining how the MSM framed the media narratives and commentary about the government’s proposed security changes.

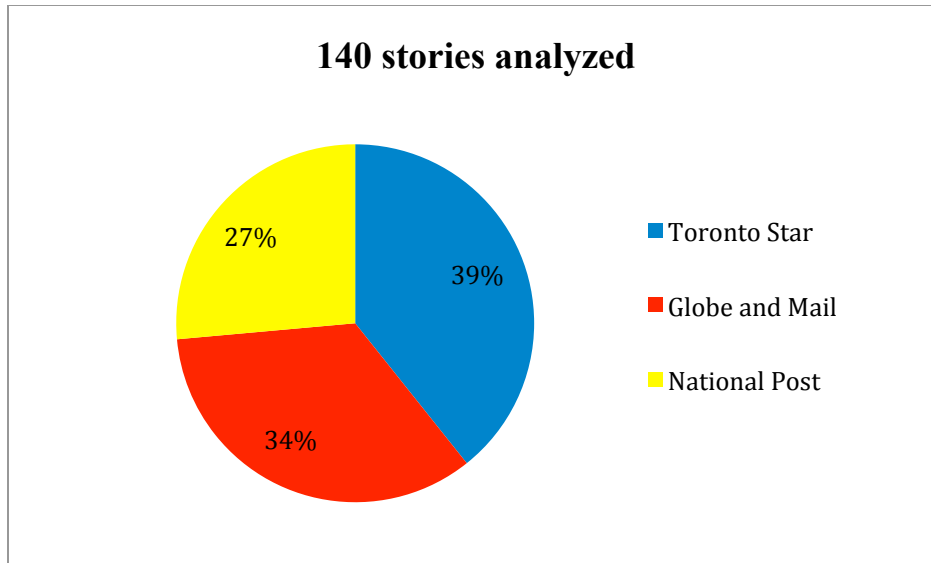
I primarily used meso-level analysis of my data (Fairclough, 1995). Fairclough outlines three levels of CDA: micro, meso, and macro-level interpretation. At the micro-level, the text’s syntax and structure are analyzed. The meso-level examines the text’s production, consumption and how power relations are enacted, while the macro-level is concerned with intertextual understanding and broad, societal currents (Barry, Carroll, & Hansen, p. 1095). Using meso-level analysis, I studied how power relations were enacted between the Canadian government and the MSM in the production and consumption of the messaging and narratives about Bill C-51. The federal government, in the person of the Prime Minister, acted quickly as far back as

October 20 to set the news agenda and frame the rhetorical “us versus them” narrative, invoking words and images of terrorism and war reminiscent of those of George W. Bush immediately after the 9/11 attacks on America in 2001 (Lakoff, 2011, paras. 1-2). In doing so, the Prime Minister was trying to leverage his influence as one of the country’s top newsmakers. By this I mean that, when the Prime Minister or any head of government says something important, provocative, or unusual, it becomes news (Eriksson & Ostman, 2013, p. 319). In the immediate aftermath of the October crisis and in the weeks after Bill C-51 was released in January, the MSM and Canadians alike looked to the Prime Minister for leadership, and therefore his statements and actions constituted major news. MSM coverage of a leader’s message can attract the attention of millions of voters because leaders such as the Prime Minister are seen as central sources of information (De Clercy, 2005, p. 176). Significantly, leaders also “shape how the public perceives political reality” (De Clercy, 2005, p. 176), which I believe was what the Prime Minister intended through his use of “others” rhetoric and enthymeme in his statements immediately after the attacks (Chase, 2014, paras. 5-6), and “Jihadist terrorism” on the day he introduced the bill (Boutilier & Campion-Smith, 2015, paras. 8-9). By analyzing themes emerging from how the MSM subsequently portrayed and reported on Bill C-51, I was able to examine how the government’s agenda setting, framing and rhetorical statements became a part of the mediated discourse on this significant and potentially divisive issue of power.

To capture the widest number of stories, data were gathered by manual searches of the websites of all three publications, using the key words “Bill C-51”, “terror law”, and “terror.” In addition, online daily archival searches were done of each publication to ensure that no pertinent stories were missed. No missing stories were found.

I conducted detailed qualitative analysis and limited quantitative analysis of all 140 stories found (Figure 1). Qualitative content analysis is what Krippendorff (1989) described as a systematic examination of the main themes of media content “to infer the importance writers, producers, media or even whole cultures assign to particular subject-matter categories from the frequency or volumes with which the subject matter is mentioned” (p. 404). Quantitative analysis is a measurement procedure that reduces communication phenomena to manageable numbers from which inferences can be drawn about the phenomena (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2014, p. 18).

I used first-cycle open coding, which Saldana called “initial coding” (2009, p. 81), to manually determine which topics dominated stories. I had no preconceived codes in mind, so remained open to all possibilities. Second-cycle coding employed focused coding (Saldana, 2009, p. 155) to determine the most frequent and salient initial codes, allowing for identification and quantification of the most common or dominant themes that occurred in the data. The quantitative data determined the total number of stories each website published, on which dates, and I delineated the total number of news stories, opinion columns, and editorials for each publication. As well, I quantified which opinion writers published the most number of related columns (Appendix 1).



*Figure 1.* Total stories analyzed. In the four weeks after January 30, 2015, a total of 140 stories about Bill C-51 were published by the three media sites studied.

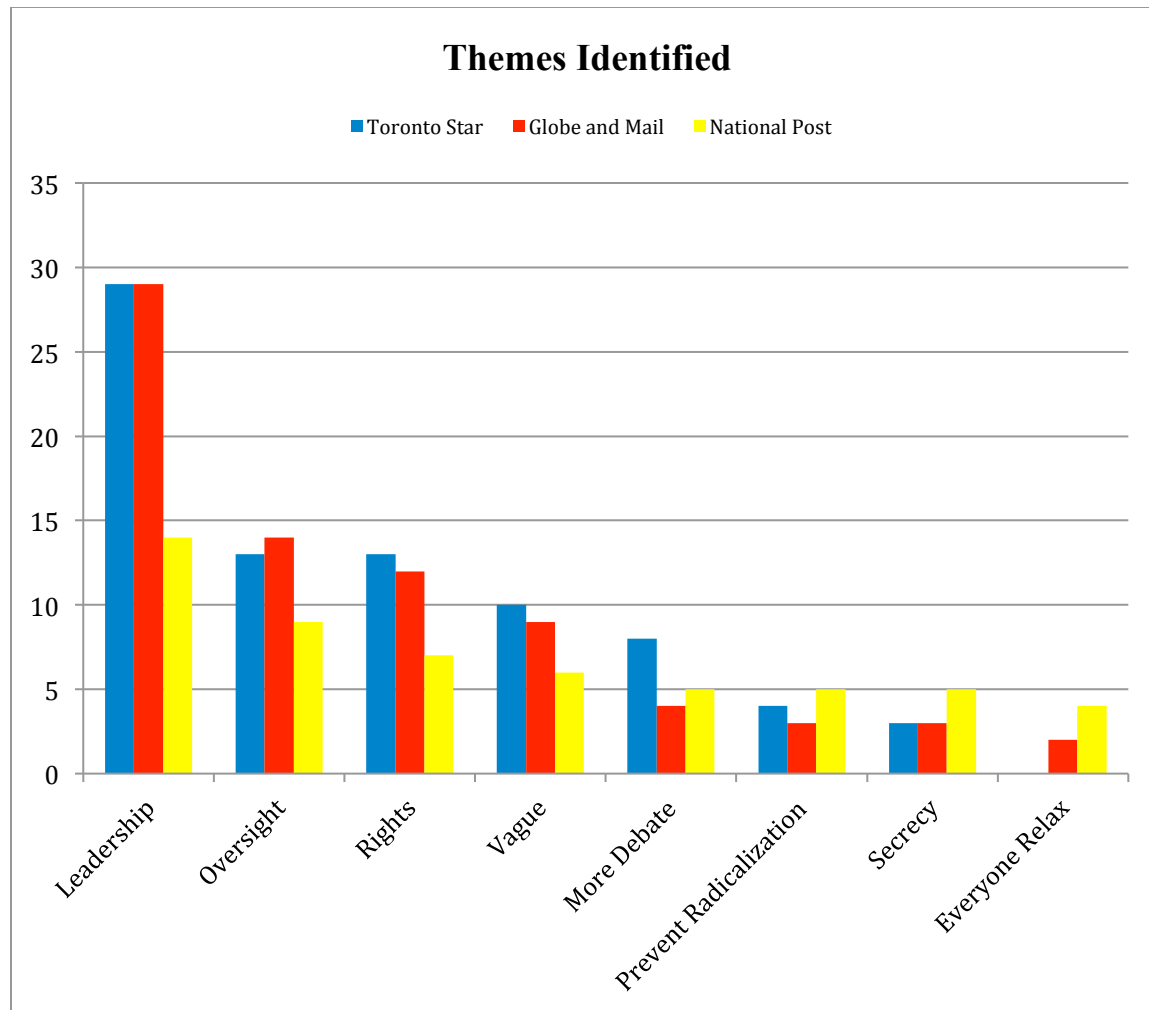
Because of the large number of stories, qualitative data coding was used to identify the main themes of each story. To be considered a theme, topics had to be focused on in some detail, not just mentioned briefly. I anticipated that recurring themes would appear across all three MSM over the four-week period and my analysis bore that out, allowing me to quantify which themes were most dominant in each publication. All stories contained multiple themes, but eight recurring major themes were coded. By quantifying the qualitative results through focused coding, combined with qualitative analysis of the substance of the coded themes, I was able to determine commonalities and differences among the three publications.

### **Results of Analysis**

My analysis showed that almost universally, the MSM was highly critical of the content of Bill C-51, its effect on the rights and privacy of ordinary Canadians, and the Harper government's use of politically-biased framing and fear-mongering to promote the legislation (Appendix 1). The data also pointed to a leadership vacuum among Canadian politicians, as the

government used rhetoric to instill fear in the populace and to intimidate the opposition parties, which refused to take stands or hold the government to account out of fear of seeming “soft on terror.” The result was the MSM stood up to the government and effectively became the de facto opposition, acting as a watchdog and guardian of the public interest (Eriksson & Ostman, 2013, p. 321). Over most of the four weeks analyzed, as the opposition parties took the politically safe route, it was left to the MSM to lead by asking pertinent questions, rebuking the government for its partisanship, and demanding changes to C-51, while also suggesting alternatives and encouraging discussion.

The data generated eight themes. The top five themes, from leadership through the need for open debate, reflected the strong stances taken by the MSM, largely in the absence of any substantive position by members of the Liberal or New Democratic parties. *Leadership*, which included politicizing security and fear-mongering, was the dominant theme across all three MSM publications and one might even argue that many subsequent themes could be considered sub-themes of leadership (Figure 2). The need for additional, independent *oversight* of newly-empowered security agencies, *rights* (and privacy infringements), *vague wording* (or ill-defined wording of the bill), and *more debate* were the other predominant themes across all publications and will form the bulk of this paper’s analysis. Three other emergent themes – *preventing radicalization*, *secrecy*, and *everyone relax* – were important as well, but in the stories studied were not as prominent as the other themes. Each theme is discussed in detail, below.



*Figure 2.* Dominant themes. Leadership was the top theme across all the MSM studied, followed by oversight of Canada’s security agencies and Bill C-51’s effects on rights and privacy.

### **Leadership**

The leadership theme encompassed the politicization of public security, the government’s use of fear rhetoric, and the lack of leadership shown by the NDP and Liberal party, which were both criticized in the MSM for taking weak stands on the bill or being afraid to be seen as “soft on terror.” In the first days after Bill C-51 was unveiled, only Green Party leader Elizabeth May seemed unafraid to speak up, saying the bill goes too far and is designed to make the Prime Minister look tough. “Right now, I think Stephen Harper is trying to scare Canadians out of their



mind for political purposes,” May said (Whittington, 2015, paras. 16-17). It was left to the MSM from the outset to take strong positions, and offer criticisms and insights.

All three of the MSMs analyzed took a hard line on the need for calm leadership. In the Star’s first editorial on C-51, published online the same day the bill was unveiled, the newspaper urged the NDP and Liberals to lead the push for more oversight of the powers bestowed by the bill, “Rather than limply wave these new measures through the Commons for fear of looking “soft” in an election year” (Toronto Star, 2015, para. 16). In the Globe the same day, columnist Campbell Clark accused Harper of using a political rally instead of Parliament to unveil the bill and “blithely rejecting the suggestion that security measures must be balanced with civil liberties” (Clark, 2015a, para. 2). Clark then criticized the Prime Minister for exploiting the bill for political gain:

Security, it seems, is a political winner, so that’s presumably why Mr. Harper delivered this bill with chest-thumping, backed by a giant flag and introduced by two ministers, arguing that his Conservatives will take the necessary measures to confront *jihadi* terrorism, but other parties won’t. Polls suggest most people want action, at home and abroad. (Clark, 2015a, para. 4).

For a government that embraces the permanent campaign, and takes every opportunity to politicize issues for partisan gain, security is not so much a matter of Canadians’ safety as it is an opportunity to show voters who is “tough on terror.” The Post also took the government to task, on February 2 saying:

The Conservatives believe they have found a ballot box winner and appear intent on politicizing an issue – the safety of Canadians – that should be one of non-partisan consensus. And the opposition parties appear content to roll over and let them do so.

(Iverson, 2015, para. 32)

Iverson pointed out not only how the government politicized what should be a non-partisan issue – people’s safety – but, very early in the debate, recognized how the opposition parties were afraid to tackle the issue.

The media’s focus on leadership and their criticism of the bill, the government and the opposition parties continued throughout February. NDP leader Thomas Mulcair and Liberal leader Justin Trudeau “should do their job, and hold this legislation up to the light of rigorous debate”, the Post said in an editorial (National Post, 2015, para. 6). Likewise, in a February 23 Globe column headlined, Tories play politics with new anti-terrorism measures, Clark accused the government of employing “Orwellian” tactics for limiting debate on C-51 and politicizing security:

After nine years in power, the Conservatives are in a rush. It’s a rush to chalk up terrorism talking points for this year’s election. They want this bill passed before the Commons breaks for summer and an election campaign. They want it in the ads. Who needs a bunch of talk? (Clark, 2015b, para. 3)

In sum, the MSM developed an analysis that identified Orwellian doublethink, a government making political hay of Canadians’ security, and opposition parties so worried about how the electorate would perceive them that they simply did nothing. The MSM connected the dots for Canadians, by calling out the political opposition leadership for refusing to engage in meaningful debate, and by illustrating how, with an election a few months away, the Harper Conservatives were manipulating issues for partisan gain, working hard to limit any criticism or debate of Bill C-51.

The examples of the MSM stepping up to hold power to account and question the

government's actions on C-51, when Canadian political parties were reticent to do so, show the so-called Fourth Estate fulfilling its leadership role as a watchdog and guardian of the public interest in a democratic society (Eriksson & Ostman, 2013, p. 321). Likewise, the Canadian MSM's actions align with the task of meeting civic demands wherein journalists inform the citizenry and focus on interpretive, critical, and disseminating tasks to fulfill the crucial social roles that citizens expect of the media (Van der Wurff & Schoenbach, 2014, p. 446). In doing so, the MSM was invaluable in filling the leadership void created in the wake of the October Crisis of 2014 and the introduction of Bill C-51.

### **Oversight**

The government was adamant that current methods of watching over the nation's spies and police agencies are adequate, even if those agencies get substantially more powers under C-51. Harper staunchly defended the oversight mechanisms and one of his MPs suggested that additional controls on spy agencies would be "needless red tape" (Whittington, 2015, para. 6). However, most of the MSM and government critics stated that giving police and security agencies more powers without instituting additional, independent oversight was a bad idea. For the NDP and Liberals it was seen to be a safe stance, standing up for individuals' rights by wanting to ensure police and spies don't overstep the law (Leblanc, 2015, February 4, para. 4) while not seeming "soft on terror." One exception was Star columnist Thomas Walkom, a vocal and prolific opponent of C-51. Pessimistically, perhaps cynically, he said that despite oversight mechanisms in other countries, most of those overseers have no real power (Walkom, 2015). However, from the day C-51 was unveiled, the Post's John Ivison questioned the government's stance: "Who is watching the spies to make sure they comply with their mandate? ... A beefed

up oversight function should have accompanied the expansion of CSIS's powers" (2015a, paras. 18-19).

It is difficult to accept that the government actually believes its own rhetoric on oversight, but ideology can be blinding. With so many MSM and social critics questioning the lack of additional checks and balances, giving opponents a small victory would seem a simple way for the Conservatives to dissipate some of the criticism. However, having dug in their heels, and not wanting to add any more "red tape," the government refused to relent. It also seems ironic that a government that has criticized a so-called "activist" judiciary and had several run-ins with the Supreme Court on issues would now be adamant that having judges oversee secret warrants is sufficient oversight for C-51's new powers.

The chorus of calls for more robust oversight of the country's security services continued throughout February, as did the government's rejections of the idea. After a letter signed by four former prime ministers, several ex-Supreme Court judges, and others was published in the *Globe*, Defence Minister Jason Kenney, who had made headlines a few days earlier on February 19 when he warned there is a "high probability" of future terrorist attacks in Canada (Chase, 2015, para. 7), was in the news again when he reiterated that more oversight of security services is unwarranted. "We have the same system that has worked well in Canada for over 25 years" and there is no reason the change it (Chase, 2015a, para. 5). In the view of Kenney and the government, the status quo is sufficient, but in the view of the other political parties, the MSM, and many other critics, more oversight is essential.

## **Rights**

Many of the rights Canadians take for granted could be lost under Bill C-51, in certain circumstances. One of the first and most vocal opponents of C-51 was the British Columbia Civil

Liberties Association (BCCLA), which questioned the plan to allow preventive detention whereby people could be held if it is suspected they “may” carry out a terrorist act. The ordinary legal threshold is that someone “will” carry out an illegal act. Ivison noted that BCCLA executive director Josh Paterson had legitimate concerns about Canadians losing rights and liberties when he stated, “This is a stripping of an individual's liberty, where no criminal offence has been found to have been committed and runs against the most basic principle of fundamental justice” (Ivison, 2015, paras. 11,12). Fundamental principles that Canadians value could be trampled by C-51, but there has been little debate allowed on the matter, and limited public outrage, seemingly because few people understand how intrusive the new powers can be.

The government saw the rights issue differently from the outset, framing the “us versus ‘others’ ” theme and subtly interpellating Canadians to be understanding patriots who trust their government to do the right thing. On January 30, when a reporter asked Harper whether his government’s crackdown on “Jihadi terrorism” might conflict with civil liberties, the Prime Minister rejected the idea, saying, “This is really what we get from our opposition, that every time we talk about security, they suggest that somehow our freedoms are threatened” (Chase & Leblanc, 2015, paras. 6-8). On CBC news the same day, reporter Terry Milewski’s critical analysis of C-51 quoted Harper further suggesting that abrogation of rights is not a concern. “I think Canadians understand that, more often than not, their freedom and security go hand in hand ... We do not buy the argument that every time you protect Canadians you somehow take away their liberties” (Milewski, 2015, para. 16). In an age when privacy and liberties are prominent concerns, the federal privacy commissioner, Daniel Therrien, also sounded the alarm about the “breadth” of C-51, saying, “It is not clear that this would be a proportional measure that respects the privacy rights of Canadians” (Boutilier & Campion-Smith, 2015 paras. 13-14). Privacy and

rights became recurring themes, and were the focus of a day of protests held across the country in March, events that received prominent coverage across the MSM.

### **Vague Wording**

The wording of C-51 leaves too much open to interpretation and possible abuse, the MSM and other critics warned repeatedly. In particular, two Canadian academics, Craig Forcese and Kent Roach, were prominently quoted across the MSM, and also contributed opinion pieces throughout February to all three publications studied. As experts in terror and security issues, they expressed serious misgivings about the wording and intent of the bill (Roach & Forcese, 2015). That the MSM would so often and so prominently publish opinion pieces written by Roach and Forcese is unusual if only because MSM outlets rarely publish commentary or op-ed stories by authors whose work has appeared in a competitive publication. A reflection of the seriousness with which the MSM viewed the lack of debate on C-51 and the respect Roach and Forcese had garnered for their analyses, this unusual circumstance showed how seriously the MSM took their role as the Fourth Estate.

### **More Debate**

The wording of the statute, and the government's plan to rush debate so the bill could become law by summer, prompted repeated calls from the MSM and critics to allow more than the four days of formal debate originally granted by the Conservatives. Citing the bill's vague wording and lack of oversight despite new spying powers, a National Post editorial noted "credible people of all stripes have raised reasoned objections to sections of this bill, which deserve to be debated" (National Post, 2015a, para. 6). However, instead of listening to its critics, the government planned to cut off debate and use its parliamentary majority to push C-51 through quickly. Few, other than the governing party, seemed content to limit debate on the bill,

and many columnists and political opponents expressed the view that vigorous debate was essential. The Star (2015a) and Globe (Clark, 2015b) published editorials or columns castigating the Conservatives for playing politics and not allowing full debate of such a crucial measure. The media and political storm seemed to help, because in late February, the government effectively doubled the amount of debate it would allow. It still wasn't the full debate the opposition sought, as many, including the federal privacy commissioner, were not allowed to speak, but it did let more opinions be heard on the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the legislation. It also led to additional coverage of the issue as the MSM reported on the hearings.

### **Preventing Radicalization**

The idea that measures need to be taken to prevent Canadians from becoming radicalized and wanting to join terrorist organizations was a relatively minor theme, but still seen as important by the MSM. The bill could emphasize working with religious and community leaders, and peers, especially peers who were formerly radicalized but have reformed, said Michael Zekulin in a Globe opinion piece (Zekulin, 2015, paras. 2, 6). Colin Robertson made a similar argument (Robertson, 2015, paras. 9-10). While some in the right-wing have little time for prevention or searching for root causes of radicalization, without doing so in a meaningful way, how can we ever hope to counter the efforts to radicalize people? The fact the MSM saw the omission of radicalization prevention from the bill again reflected the media's desire to ask the necessary questions and focus the debate.

### **Secrecy**

The theme of secrecy was interwoven among some of the arguments against abrogation of rights and privacy, and in the way security agencies would operate under C-51, from obtaining secret warrants to clandestine spy activity to parliamentary oversight. The larger secrecy concern

was articulated from the outset by the MSM and some politicians. Most notably, the Globe's editorial the day after C-51 was unveiled called on Parliament to reject the "secret policeman bill":

Under the cloud of fear produced by [Harper's] repeated hyperbole about the scope and nature of the threat, he now wants to turn our domestic spy agency into something that looks disturbingly like a secret police force. Canadians should not be willing to accept such an obvious threat to their basic liberties. Our existing laws and our society are strong enough to stand up to the threat of terrorism without compromising our values. (Globe and Mail, 2015, paras. 1-2)

While even many staunch opponents acknowledged that secrecy is important for security services to be effective, many also worried about how much and how far C-51's secrecy would pervade Canadians' lives. In turn, all the MSM studied expressed similar worries about the secrecy surrounding C-51, the partisanship of the Conservatives in playing politics with Canadians' rights and security, and potential problems with the legislation's wording and vagueness. The government's attitude and enthymatic platitudes of "Be a good Canadian. Trust us because we will keep you safe" are hollow and self-serving.

### **Everyone Relax**

Not everyone thinks Canadians should be concerned about Bill C-51. Though the vast majority of MSM analysis spoke to the perceived problems with the bill, a few stories in the Post and Globe suggested otherwise. No such pieces appeared in the Star. While the Post (rightist) and Globe (centrist) might be seen to have taken a bit of a partisan turn by publishing such viewpoints, given the sheer volume and weight of the overall coverage in all three publications, I don't believe partisanship is at play here. It seems more an attempt to offer alternate views. For



instance, on February 2, the Post's Kelly McParland (2015) suggested there is little to worry about and Canadians need to have faith that our leaders will ensure our country remains safe. Likewise, S.A. McCartan (2015), an Ontario criminal prosecutor, suggested the new security and spy powers are actually modest, Canadians' rights are already well-protected, and many of our allies have far more invasive laws than C-51. Ron Atkey, the first chair of the Security Intelligence Review Committee (SIRC), which oversees Canada's spy agencies, in a Globe opinion piece disputed the opinions of the "instant critics" who questioned the exclusion of more oversight from C-51. While he acknowledged there should be vigorous parliamentary debate, he said current judicial oversight is sufficient (Atkey, 2015). In another opinion piece, Bob Rae, a former senior Liberal and SIRC member, said the government's proposed security powers were the correct response, but its refusal to include better oversight is mistaken (Rae, 2015): "Robust powers of surveillance needed to be matched by robust accountability and review" (Rae, 2015, para. 9). Instead, by the government dismissing critics and ignoring oversight, Rae suggested that Harper is dividing the country. As a result, the leadership that Canadians expect from politicians in times of crisis, came not from the government, but from the MSM and commentators who carried on the debate that the government worked hard to avoid.

### **Summary**

All MSM have reciprocal relationships within the media-government dynamic. To a degree, both parties rely on each other: the MSM relies on the government for information and leadership on issues, and the government relies on the MSM to disseminate the message to the public. However, as the Fourth Estate, the MSM is an independent overseer and critic of government, and even though politically some of the MSM studied here might align with the views of the Conservative government, there is no evidence in the coverage of the Bill C-51

debate that media politics played any role in the way the issues were covered. This meso-level critical discourse analysis illustrated that all three MSM sites constructed narratives that were highly critical of Bill C-51 and the government's pursuit of an ideological solution in the wake of the October Crisis of 2014. The politicization of citizen issues in the interests of boosting the fortunes of the governing party, the curbing of debate, and ultimately, the lack of leadership by the entire Canadian political leadership revealed an unusual and unexpected level of unanimity among the MSM in their condemnation of Bill C-51 and the government's behaviour. Because our parliamentary system allows majority governments like the current one to push through legislation as it sees fit, Bill C-51 was never going to be stopped. However, the MSM showed in this media-government power dynamic that the Fourth Estate was up to the challenge of leading discussion and debate when our political leadership wanted little to do with such a political "hot potato."

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

In the wake of the October Crisis of 2014 and the introduction of Bill C-51, Canada's political opposition parties, the federal New Democratic and Liberal parties, largely abdicated their roles as critics of the federal government. There was a leadership vacuum, extending from the Prime Minister, who purposely politicized an issue of public security, through to the major political parties in Parliament. Other than the lone voice of Green Party leader Elizabeth May, Canada's parliamentarians were publicly either 100 per cent behind Bill C-51 or reticent to delve into meaningful debate on the law (Whittington, 2015, paras. 16-17).

In embarking on this study of how the Canadian MSM framed coverage of Bill C-51, I expected to find some evidence of media bias or at least inklings of it either in story selection, story omission, or political leanings. There were a few (Appendix 1), but even those identified

could be debated as more editorial choice than outright bias. Significantly, of the eight themes identified in this study, all the three publications addressed all but one (only the eighth, *everyone relax*, did not appear in the Star data). Such unanimity of theme and purpose is rare. The Star, a liberal-leaning publication, published the largest number of stories. While all the Star's news pieces were balanced, the overall coverage was overwhelmingly against C-51, though in one instance the absence of timely coverage of opinion polls showing strong public support for C-51 is a concern (Appendix 1). The centrist Globe offered extensive insights and several opinion pieces by experts, and almost as many total stories as the Star, including some that suggested C-51 is not really a bad idea. The right-leaning Post, while publishing the fewest number of stories, was a surprise in that its criticism of the right-leaning federal government was unequivocally blistering at times. The Post showed no evidence of its political mindset affecting how it treated C-51. It is unfortunate that the same cannot be said for our elected officials.

What there is no doubt about is the leadership role the MSM played, from the days of the tragic attacks in October, through a month of debate and analysis after C-51 was unveiled. When the Canadian government and opposition parties failed to lead the debate and discussion on potentially the biggest change to Canadian society since the introduction of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982, the MSM became the de facto official Opposition and filled the leadership vacuum left by our elected leaders.

It was not a time during which the Canadian political leadership did us proud, focusing more on the political than leadership. The Prime Minister, facing an election in a few months, opted not to lead but rather embrace the politics of division, inspire fear, especially of "others," and ratchet up the rhetoric rather than try to calm the populace. Opposition leader Tom Mulcair of the NDP prevaricated for almost three weeks, but eventually took a strong stand in response to

C-51, seemingly after arm-twisting from senior party icons. Liberal leader Justin Trudeau, like Mulcair, not wanting to be seen as “soft on terror,” immediately supported the bill, but promised to fix its lack of oversight once he is prime minister. On February 25, senior Globe and Mail columnist Jeffrey Simpson wrote perhaps the most incisive, and devastating, critique of the political leadership void during the Bill C-51 debate. Touching on the government’s agenda-setting and framing, interpellation, rhetoric, and permanent campaign, Simpson summed up how the Conservatives’ partisan “war on terror” and terror’s role in getting the government re-elected is the only thing that matters to the governing party:

Terror at home. Terror abroad. Tough on crime. Tough on terror. Fear stalking the land.

Threats. Bad guys. It’s a dangerous world out there, folks, and only the Conservatives can protect us. The other parties? Soft on terror. Weak-kneed. They are listening to “elites” nattering about personal privacy at a time of menace. Only we can keep the country safe.

For this government, the narrative is heaven-sent. (Simpson, 2015, para. 9).

Politics aside, on an issue that goes to the heart of people’s personal safety and security, Canadians deserve, and should expect, better from their political leadership. As a journalist, it is heartening to see that the Fourth Estate stepped up and showed its readiness to act as the conscience and voice of the nation at a time when our elected governors were not up to the task.

### **Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research**

This paper examined themes in 140 stories, across three MSM publications in Canada’s largest city, over a four-week period, which is a limited snapshot compared to what was published nationally in response to Bill C-51. Given the reduction in staffing among MSM in recent years and governments’ focus on rhetoric and messaging, by studying or comparing the data from major market publications with publications in much smaller centres we could

examine how small-market MSM frame the government's agenda on major issues like C-51 (Colistra, 2012, p. 123). My study was limited to online stories, most of which also were published in the respective print editions. However, no video stories (either by print or broadcast organizations), tweets, Facebook or Instagram postings, were examined. In addition, other than some reader letters that reflected the public mood immediately after the October murders, no letters to the editor and no reader comments on online stories were examined. Each and all of these platforms merit consideration for future studies, though perhaps reader comments and letters might hold the most accessible and detailed data for determining how government agenda-setting and media framing of those messages was interpreted and viewed by the ultimate receiver: the reader.

## References

- Anderson, B. (2014, November 27). Why do the Conservatives treat veterans so poorly. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/why-do-the-conservatives-treat-veterans-so-poorly/article21809664/>
- Atkey, R. (2015, February 3). CSIS oversight is alive and well. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/csis-oversight-is-alive-and-well/article22750488/>
- Barnard-Wills, D. (1992). UK news media discourses of surveillance. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 52(4), 548-567. doi: 10.1111/j.1533-8525.2011.01219.x
- Barry, D., Carroll, B., & Hansen, H. (2006). To Text or Context? Endotextual, Exotextual, and Multi-textual Approaches to Narrative and Discursive Organizational Studies. *Organization Studies*, 27(8), 1091-1110. doi:10.1177/0170840606064568
- Bill C-51. (2015). *The Anti-terrorism Act, 2015*. Retrieved from <http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?Language=E&Mode=1&DocId=6932136&Col=1&File=4>
- Boutilier, A., & Champion-Smith, B. (2015, January 30). Conservative government's terror bill increases spy agency powers. *The Toronto Star*. Retrieved from <http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2015/01/30/terror-bill-dramatically-increases-police-power.html>
- Chandler, D. (n.d.). *Semiotics for beginners: Modes of address*. Retrieved from <http://visual-memory.co.uk/daniel/Documents/S4B/sem08b.html>
- Chase, S. (2014, October 23). Harper vows to fast-track boost to spy, policing powers after shooting. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/harper-vows-to-fast-track-boost-to-spy-policing-powers-after-shooting/article21282699/>

Chase, S. (2015, February 19). More jihadist attacks likely, Kenney says, defending anti-terror bill. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/more-jihadist-attacks-likely-kenney-says-defending-anti-terror-bill/article23070749/>

Chase, S. (2015a, February 22). Kenney rejects call to increase oversight of national-security agencies. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/kenney-spurns-call-to-increase-oversight-of-national-security-agencies/article23147599/>

Chase, S., & Leblanc, D. (2015, January 30, 2015). Harper proposes new powers for spies, plays down civil liberties concerns. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/anti-terror-legislation/article22716849/>

Cheadle, D. (2014, December 25). Ottawa terror attack named Canadian Press news story of 2014. *The Globe and Mail*, via The Canadian Press. Retrieved from

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/ottawa-terror-attack-named-canadian-press-news-story-of-2014/article22206413/>

Clark, C. (2014, October 22). When the Prime Minister becomes a central character in story of a terrorism incident. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/globe-politics-insider/when-the-prime-minister-becomes-a-central-character-in-story-of-a-terrorism-incident/article21217258/>

Clark, C. (2015, February 19). New poll finds Harper's anti-terror bill is a political juggernaut.

- The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/new-poll-finds-harpers-anti-terror-bill-is-a-political-juggernaut/article23067983/>
- Clark, C. (2015a, January 30). Security debates are now about posturing in pre-election times. Retrieved from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/security-debates-are-now-about-campaigning-in-pre-election-times/article22731412/>
- Clark, C. (2015b, February 23). Tories play politics with new anti-terrorism measures. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/globe-politics-insider/tories-play-politics-with-new-anti-terrorism-measures/article23145461/>
- Colistra, R. (2012). Shaping and cutting the media agenda: Television reporters' perceptions of agenda- and frame-building and agenda-cutting influences. *Journalism & Communication Monographs*, 14(2), 85-146. doi: 10.1177/1522637912444106
- Curry, B. (2014, October 29). Mulcair says Ottawa shooter a criminal, not a terrorist. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/mulcair-says-ottawa-shooter-a-criminal-not-a-terrorist/article21367392/>
- De Clercy, C. (2005). Leadership and uncertainty in fiscal restructuring: Ralph Klein and Roy Romanow. *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 38(1), 175-202. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.royalroads.ca/stable/25165779>
- DeVreese, C., Peter, J., & Semetko, H. (2001). Framing politics at the launch of the Euro: A crossnational comparative study of frames in the news. *Political Communication*, 18, 107-122. doi:10.1080/105846001750322934
- Dreier, P. & Martin, C.R. (2010). How ACORN was framed: Political controversy and media agenda setting. *Perspectives on Politics*, 8(3), 761-792. doi: 10.1017/S1537592710002069



- Entman, R. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43, 51-58. 10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x
- Eriksson, G., & Ostman, J. (2013). Cooperative of adversarial? Journalists' enactment of the watchdog function in political news production. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 18(3), 304-324. doi: 10.1177/1940161213482493
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis*. London: Longman.
- Galloway, G. (2014, November 28). Fine print on Ottawa's \$200-million veterans fund: It'll take 50 years to pay. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/veterans-fund-of-200-million-to-be-spent-over-the-next-50-years/article21821944/>
- Gitlin, T. (1980). *The whole world is watching: Mass media in the making and unmaking of the New Left*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Globe and Mail. (2014a, October 23). Tragedy's aftermath – letters to editor. Retrieved from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/oct-24-wednesdays-aftermath-letters-to-editor/article21277900/>
- Globe and Mail. (2014b, October 25). This week's Talking Point: What drove the assault on Parliament Hill? – and letters to the editor. Retrieved from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/letters/oct-25-this-weeks-talking-point-what-drove-the-assault-on-parliament-hill-and-letters-to-the-editor/article21286903/>
- Iverson, J. (2015, February 2). Tories intent on politicizing what should be a non-partisan issue—the safety of Canadians. *National Post*. Retrieved from <http://news.nationalpost.com/2015/02/02/john-iverson-tories-intent-on-politicizing-what-should-be-a-non-partisan-issue-the-safety-of-canadians/>

Iverson, J. (2015a, January 30). Harper terror legislation has possibility to disrupt a balance that

has served Canadians remarkably well. *National Post*. Retrieved from

[http://news.nationalpost.com/2015/01/30/john-iverson-harper-terror-legislation-has-](http://news.nationalpost.com/2015/01/30/john-iverson-harper-terror-legislation-has-possibility-to-disrupt-a-balance-that-has-served-canadians-remarkably-well/)

[possibility-to-disrupt-a-balance-that-has-served-canadians-remarkably-well/](http://news.nationalpost.com/2015/01/30/john-iverson-harper-terror-legislation-has-possibility-to-disrupt-a-balance-that-has-served-canadians-remarkably-well/)

Iyengar, S. (1987). Television news and citizens' explanations of national affairs. *American*

*Political Science Review*, 81(3), 815-831. Retrieved from

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1962678>

Kellner, D. (2009). Barack Obama and celebrity spectacle, *International Journal of*

*Communication*, 3, 715-741. Retrieved from

<http://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/559/350>

Kiousis, S. (2008). Priming. In Holtz-Bacha, C. & Kaid, L. L. (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of*

*political communication* (pp. 653-655). Los Angeles: Sage. Retrieved from

[http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.royalroads.ca/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/ZTAwMHhu](http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.royalroads.ca/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/ZTAwMHhuYV9fNDc0MjgwX19BTg2?sid=0bd2fbf2-0dff-45fb-9ccd-8949467dc5a8@sessionmgr4002&vid=0&format=EB&rid=1)

[YV9fNDc0MjgwX19BTg2?sid=0bd2fbf2-0dff-45fb-9ccd-](http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.royalroads.ca/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/ZTAwMHhuYV9fNDc0MjgwX19BTg2?sid=0bd2fbf2-0dff-45fb-9ccd-8949467dc5a8@sessionmgr4002&vid=0&format=EB&rid=1)

[8949467dc5a8@sessionmgr4002&vid=0&format=EB&rid=1](http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.royalroads.ca/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/ZTAwMHhuYV9fNDc0MjgwX19BTg2?sid=0bd2fbf2-0dff-45fb-9ccd-8949467dc5a8@sessionmgr4002&vid=0&format=EB&rid=1)

Krippendorff, K. (1989). Content analysis. In E. Barnouw, G. Gerbner, W. Schramm, T. L.

Worth, & L. Gross (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of communication*, 1, (pp. 403-407).

New York, NY: Oxford University Press. Retrieved from

[http://repository.upenn.edu/asc\\_papers/226](http://repository.upenn.edu/asc_papers/226)

Lakoff, G. (2011, September 10). The use of 9/11 to consolidate conservative power:

Intimidation via framing. *Huffington Post*. Retrieved from

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/george-lakoff/the-use-of-911-to-consoli\\_b\\_955954.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/george-lakoff/the-use-of-911-to-consoli_b_955954.html)

- Leblanc, D. (2015, February 4). Liberals to support Conservative anti-terror bill, will address the 'gaps' later. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/liberals-to-support-conservative-anti-terror-bill-but-want-more-oversight/article22784759/>
- Lee, C. (2014, October 23). Too soon: Should Stars' Torquil Campbell have criticized Stephen Harper during the Ottawa shooting? *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/celebrity-news/too-soon-should-stars-torquil-campbell-have-criticized-stephen-harper-during-the-shootings/article21264382/>
- Lippert, R. K. & Wood, D. M. (2012). The new urban surveillance: Technology, mobility, and diversity in 21<sup>st</sup> century cities, *Surveillance & Society*, 9(3), 257-262. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.royalroads.ca/docview/1314692597/fulltextPDF?accountid=8056>.
- MacCharles, T. & Campion-Smith, B. (2015, February 19) Stephen Harper rejects calls for more oversight of new spy powers. *The Toronto Star*. Retrieved from <http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2015/02/19/canada-faces-high-risk-of-terror-attack-jason-kenney-says.html>
- MacDonald, L. I. (2015, February 21). Harper riding terror to new popularity in Quebec. *The Toronto Star*. Retrieved from <http://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2015/02/21/harper-riding-terror-to-new-popularity-in-quebec.html>
- Marsh, D. & Fawcett, P. (2011). Branding, politics and democracy. *Policy Studies*, 32(5), 515-530. doi: 10.1080/01442872.2011.586498
- Matthews, G. (2009). Bias: Agenda setting, priming, and framing. In Sterling, C. H. (Ed.),

*Encyclopedia of Journalism* (pp. 157-161). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Retrieved from [http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.royalroads.ca/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook?sid=501053df-5cc9-455c-bdb6-668ab57927d4%40sessionmgr4005&ppid=pp\\_54&hid=4106&vid=0&format=EB](http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.royalroads.ca/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook?sid=501053df-5cc9-455c-bdb6-668ab57927d4%40sessionmgr4005&ppid=pp_54&hid=4106&vid=0&format=EB)

McCartan, S. A. (2015, February 3). Virtually all of Canada's allies give their spy agencies powers to prevent terror attacks. Why not us? *National Post*. Retrieved from <http://news.nationalpost.com/2015/02/03/s-a-mccartan-virtually-all-of-canadas-allies-give-their-spy-agencies-powers-to-prevent-terror-why-not-us/>

McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36, 176–187. Retrieved from <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.royalroads.ca/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=bc87881f-4104-4073-94d9-e15a37580684%40sessionmgr113&vid=8&hid=102>

McParland, K. (2015, February 2). Hold the crisis, Harper's new anti-terror bill will not make Canada a police state. *National Post*. Retrieved from <http://news.nationalpost.com/2015/02/02/kelly-mcparland-hold-the-crisis-harpers-new-anti-terror-bill-will-not-make-canada-a-police-state/>

Merrigan, G., Huston, C. L., & Johnston, R. (2012). *Communication research methods* (Canadian ed.). Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press.

Meyer, M. (2001). Between theory, method, and politics: Positioning of the approaches to CDA. In Meyer, M. & Wodak, R. (Eds), *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (pp. 14-31). London: Sage.

Milewski, T. (2015). Stephen Harper takes aim at terror, opposition gets dinged: Warning: When tackling terrorism in an election year, inaccuracies may occur. *CBC.ca*. Retrieved from

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/stephen-harper-takes-aim-at-terror-opposition-gets-dinged-1.2938587>

National Post. (2015, February 5). Why is the opposition silent on the government's anti-terror bill? Retrieved from <http://news.nationalpost.com/2015/02/05/national-post-view-why-is-the-opposition-silent-on-the-governments-anti-terror-bill/>

National Post. (2015a, February 23). We need parliamentary debate on Bill C-51. Retrieved from <http://news.nationalpost.com/2015/02/23/national-post-view-we-need-parliamentary-debate-on-bill-c-51/>

Peshkin, A. (1988). In search of subjectivity—one's own. *Educational Researcher*, 17(7), 17-22. Retrieved from <http://kakali.org/edld6384/8561/readings/peshkin%20in%20search%20of%20subjectivity.pdf>

Rae, B. (2015, February 3). Harper got spy powers right, but civilian oversight very wrong. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/harper-got-spy-powers-right-but-civilian-oversight-very-wrong/article22756827/>

Renzetti, E. (2014, December 1). Love the military, fail the veterans. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/love-the-military-fail-the-veterans/article21835226/>

Riffe, D., Lacy, S., & Fico, F. (2014). *Using quantitative content analysis in research*. (Third ed.). New York, NY: Routledge

- Roach, K., & Forcese, C. (2015, January 30). Red, yellow lights for security measures. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/red-yellow-lights-for-security-measures/article22728620/>
- Robertson, C. (2015, February 3). Balance between liberty and security is crucial, even as governments press for wider surveillance to fight terror. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/world-insider/balance-between-liberty-and-security-is-crucial-even-as-governments-press-for-wider-surveillance-to-fight-terror/article22754635/>
- Saldana, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sanders, K. (2009). *Communicating politics in the 21st century*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Schneider, H. (2004) Branding in politics: Manifestations, relevance and identity-oriented management. *Journal of Political Marketing*, 3(3), 41-67. doi: 10.1300/J199v03n03\_03
- Simpson, J. (2015, February 25). And along came terror. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/then-along-came-terror/article23187576/>
- Toronto Star. (2015, January 30). Parliament needs a panel to scrutinize anti-terror operations: Editorial. Retrieved from <http://www.thestar.com/opinion/editorials/2015/01/30/parliament-needs-a-panel-to-scrutinize-anti-terror-operations-editorial.html>
- Toronto Star. (2015a, February 25). Parliament should give Harper's flawed anti-terror bill the scrutiny it merits. Retrieved from

<http://www.thestar.com/opinion/editorials/2015/02/25/parliament-should-give-harpers-flawed-anti-terror-bill-the-scrutiny-it-merits-editorial.html>

Van der Wurff, R., & Schoenbach, K. (2014). Civic and citizen demands of news media and journalists: What does the audience expect from good journalism? *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 91(3), 433-451. doi: 10.1177/1077699014538974

Van Dijk, T. A. (2001). Multi-disciplinary CDA: A plea for diversity, in Meyer, M. & Wodak, R. (Eds), *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (pp. 95-120). London: Sage.

Walkom, T. (2015, February 4). Parliamentary oversight not likely to rein in Canada's spies. *The Toronto Star*. Retrieved from <http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2015/02/04/parliamentary-oversight-not-likely-to-rein-in-canadas-spies-walkom.html>

Wanta, W. (2009). Agenda setting. In Sterling, C. H. (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of journalism* (pp. 54-57). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Retrieved from [http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.royalroads.ca/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook?sid=501053df-5cc9-455c-bdb6-668ab57927d4%40sessionmgr4005&ppid=pp\\_54&hid=4106&vid=0&format=EB](http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.royalroads.ca/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook?sid=501053df-5cc9-455c-bdb6-668ab57927d4%40sessionmgr4005&ppid=pp_54&hid=4106&vid=0&format=EB)

Wherry, A. (2012, January 9). Every day is election day in Canada. *Macleans.ca*. Retrieved from <http://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/every-day-is-now-election-day/>

Whittington, L. (2015, February 2). Opposition MPs want more controls on CSIS. *The Toronto Star*. Retrieved from <http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2015/02/02/opposition-mps-want-more-controls-on-csis.html>

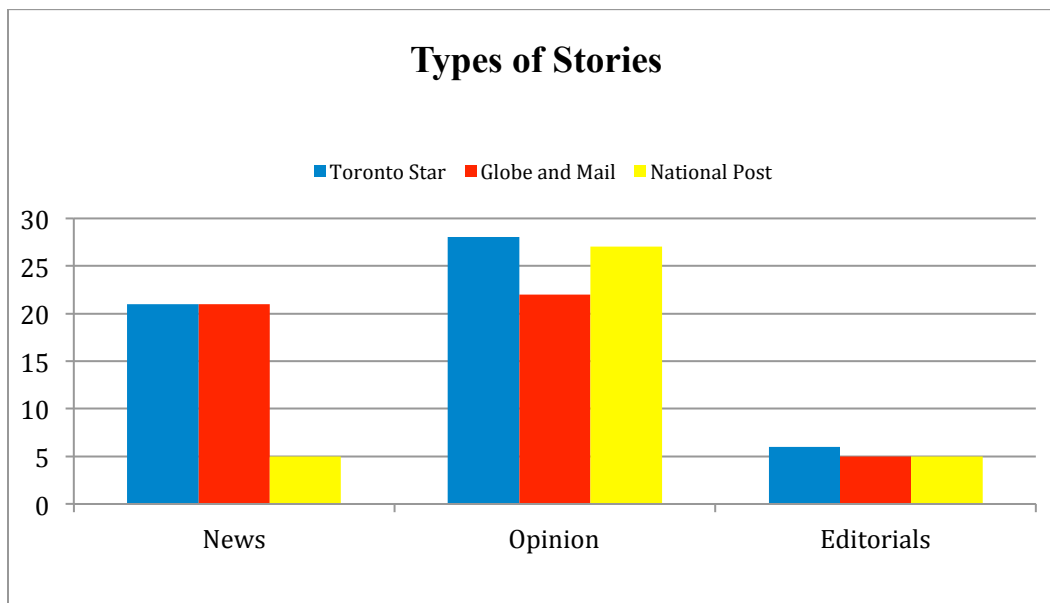
Wodak, R. (2001). The discourse-historical approach. In Meyer, M. & Wodak, R. (Eds), *Methods of critical discourse analysis*, pp. 63-94. London: Sage.

Zekulin, M. (2015, February 17). Anti-jihad videos can work – but not if they come from the government. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/anti-jihad-videos-can-work---but-not-if-they-come-from-the-government/article23024063/>



### Appendix

The data showed (Figure 3) that the Toronto Star published the most stories in all categories (total: 55), comprising 21 news stories, 28 opinion columns, and 6 editorials. The Globe and Mail (total: 48), comprising 21 news stories, 22 opinion columns, and 5 editorials. The National Post (total: 37), including 5 news stories, 27 opinion columns, and 5 editorials. As well, I examined which opinion writer at each publication contributed the most number of pieces (Star: Thomas Walkom, 9; Post: Chris Selley, 6; Globe: Campbell Clark, five).



*Figure 3.* Variety of stories. The Star and Globe published the same number of news stories, substantially more than the Post. However, the Star and Post published almost the same number of opinion pieces (28 and 27 respectively), compared to the Globe's 22.

While the Star and Globe totals are statistically close, the Post published far fewer news stories than the other two. This appears to be a reflection of the Post's reliance on its opinion columnists to impart both news and commentary in their columns. Walkom of the Star was a strong opponent of Bill C-51, which is reflected in the large number of columns he wrote on the subject. Selley's total is somewhat inflated as five of his six pieces were Full Pundit aggregate

columns that highlight topics from his own and other publications. Only one of his pieces was a traditional personal opinion column.

Also, interestingly, among the stories published nationally on February 19 was coverage of an Angus Reid poll showing 82 per cent support nationally for Bill C-51 and 87 per cent support in Quebec. The Globe gave detailed analysis of this topic (Clark, 2015), the Post included mention of the poll in Selley's Full Pundit column, but the Star that day only stated that "broad public support for the bill" was reported by pollster Angus Reid. This came within another Star story headlined, "Stephen Harper rejects calls for more oversight of new spy powers", (MacCharles & Campion-Smith, 2015, para. 6). It is unknown whether this lack of coverage was an intentional news decision or an oversight, but two days later, on February 21, the Star published an opinion piece by L. Ian MacDonald from the website [ipolitics.ca](http://ipolitics.ca). The column was headlined, "Harper riding terror to new popularity in Quebec", and it focused on the Angus Reid poll and other surveys (MacDonald, 2015, paras. 13-14).