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Is it all about the Game? A Study on News Framing of the 2015 Elections in the United Kingdom and Canada

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Abstract

This research seeks to assess the extent of the media's use of the game frame to present the 2015 elections in the United Kingdom and Canada. A content analysis was used to determine the degree of media framing of politics as a game in nationally distributed broadsheet newspapers during the 2015 elections in the UK and Canada. The findings indicated a significant presence of the game frame to articulate the 2015 elections in the UK and Canada. There was significant evidence of the media positioning issues as political manoeuvres of modern campaigning rather than providing substantive reporting.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The modernization process of democratic societies has resulted in a transformation in the role of mass media in political institutions and consequently, the electoral and campaigning process. Mancini and Swanson (1996) determine that "media institutions and practices become indissolubly linked to the institutions and practices of democratic politics, as campaigning for office and governing are increasingly tailored to the needs and interests of mass media" (p.11). The indissoluble link between media institutions and practices to democratic politics has allowed for the media to create the perception of politics as a game through the power of news framing.

Political communication scholars have acknowledged that news framing has the power to provide particular interpretations to audiences and voters through selection and salience, as well as signalling the important issues of an election campaign (Entman,1993; 2004; Gulati, Just & Crigler, 2004). The framing of politics as a strategic game can be characterized as a "focus on questions related to who is winning and losing, the performances of politicians and parties, and on campaign strategies and tactics" (Aalberg, Stromback & de Vreese, 2011, p.163). Media coverage of modern election campaigns have centred around the idea that politics is a strategic game and election campaigns are an opportunity for politicians to use political tactics in a race to the finish. Often, policy issues are simply characterized as political manoeuvres or strategies rather than positioned as opportunities for meaningful debate (Trimble and Sampert, 2004). This is problematic for modern democratic societies as it can foster political cynicism among the electorate. Therefore, it is imperative that the extent of the media's use of game frame to provide electoral coverage is thoroughly examined.

The aim of this research is to explore the concept of game frame in relation to the coverage of the 2015 elections in the United Kingdom and Canada. The research will seek to further conceptualize 'game frame' by breaking down the concept into two aspects: 'game' and 'strategy' in order to extract various subframes such as: performance, personalization, political strategy, spin, etc. Subframes are often used to further emphasize the main frame of politics as a game. This will provide a better understanding of the application of the framing of politics as a game in an electoral context. Both countries experienced significantly close call elections which was portrayed as a 'horse race' in the media. Media coverage placed an emphasis on competition, confrontation and the personalization of politicians rather than party policy or issue-based reporting. In both countries, the media significantly focused on political strategies and manoeuvres to further reiterate the central idea that politics is a game.

The research is grounded in the pre-existing notion that framing politics as a game has the consequence of depoliticizing democratic elections and reducing policy issues to political manoeuvres of modern campaigning (Gitlin, 1991; Reese, Gandy & Grant, 2003; Trimple & Sampert, 2004; Stromback & Dimitrova, 2006; Entman, 2010; Aalberg, Stromback & de Vreese, 2011). A study conducted by Stromback and Dimitrova (2006) that explores "the framing of politics in newspaper election news coverage in the United States and Sweden" (p.132); along with a study by Trimble and Sampert (2004) that examines the use of game frame election headlines in The Globe and Mail and National Post in Canada provide a foundation for the research in this dissertation to be conducted. Stromback and Dimitrova's (2006) study provides a significant takeaway regarding the framing of politics, specifically how framing "seems to be informed by the political system, media system, journalistic norms and values and strengths

and character of the party system" (p.143). Whereas, Trimple and Sampert (2004) study supports the assertion that "game framing trivializes and de-politicizes electoral democracy by telling stories about the most superficial, episodic and tactical elements of the campaign" (p.69). Together, these studies provide an informed starting point for the research to be conducted. However, there is a lack of empirical research, specifically within the comparative context of the United Kingdom and Canada. An abundance of the existing research focuses on the American experience; however, the relationship of the American political and media system cannot be universally applied to all contexts. Hence, a comparative study between the United Kingdom and Canada will seek to address a literary gap in research.

Therefore, this dissertation will use a content analysis to assess the degree of media framing of politics as a game in nationally distributed broadsheet newspapers during the 2015 elections in the United Kingdom and Canada. This dissertation will seek to answer the research question: to what extent has the game frame been used to frame coverage of the 2015 elections in the UK and Canada? The research will be undertaken firstly, with an examination of existing literature, followed by an outline of the methodological procedure of the study and finally, it will conclude with a presentation and discussion of the research findings.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The Process of Mediatization

The relationship between the media and politics has been widely discussed throughout political communication literature. Scholars have acknowledged that the process of mediatization can be used to better understand the transformation of political communication in western democracies (Stromback & Esser, 2014, p.5). Couldry and Hepp (2013) refer to mediatization as "the role of particular media in emergent processes of socio-cultural change" (p.197). This definition has limitations because it does not effectively emphasis the significance of media influence. Alternatively, Stromback and Esser (2014) define mediatization as a "social change process in which media have become increasingly influential in and deeply integrated into different spheres of society" (p.4). This definition conceptualizes mediatization in a more effective way because it emphasizes that the media does not only have a 'particular role' in change, but is a powerful force that has become integrated into society. Stromback and Esser's (2014) definition provides a more compelling understanding of mediatization because they acknowledge that it is an "inherently dynamic and process-oriented concept that cannot be reduced to the transmission of messages or communication through media" (p.4).

The process of mediatization is often reduced to a universal concept which causes problems for developing a better conceptualization of mediatization. Deacon and Stanyer (2014) identify that the "imprecise application of the term 'mediatization' means it resembles, a universal concept of no difference, a container in which different things can be placed" (p.11). The concept of mediatization needs more discriminatory power to identify what is not in order to impose boundaries on the concept (Deacon and Stanyer, 2014).

Stromback and Esser (2014) acknowledge that mediatization is a theory that still requires further analysis and cannot be reduced to a "loosely defined catch-all concept" (p.5). This provides a general context for the research to understand the process of mediatization and the current relationship between politics and the media. More specifically, the aspect of media logic that determines newsworthiness and the logic of appropriateness for the media. It is important to explore relevant literature on the process of mediatization and media logic in order to properly explore and analyze the impact of framing on election coverage in national media.

Media Logic

In western democracies, the news media is regarded as a legitimate and significant institution in the public sphere. Political communication scholars claim that there is an emergent shared culture between political actors and the media, where "principle actors strive to influence each other for their own benefit" (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995, p. 38). This has resulted in a constant power struggle between the logic of appropriateness of politics and the media. However, this claim downgrades the reality that political actors and media actors must cooperate strategically to exert influence or achieve their goals.

Political and media logic refer to the "formal and informal rules, routines and principles for thinking and acting within the political and media spheres respectively" (Stromback & Esser, 2014, p.14). The logic of appropriateness for politics and media outline the rules of engagement within the public sphere. Some scholars identify that media logic incorporates storytelling techniques that the media uses "in order to be competitive in the struggle to capture people's attention" (Stromback & Kaid, 2008, p.6).

In turn, this can create tensions between the media logic and political logic because of the difference in demands in the political system versus the media system. Consequently, throughout the process of mediatization political actors internalize media logic and news values which allows "the media logic and the standards of newsworthiness to become a built-in part of the governing process" (Stromback & Kaid, 2008, p.7). This assertion recognizes that political actors are inherently rational and therefore, understand that the internalization of media logic into the governing process aides in the achievement of their strategic political objectives.

Alternatively, some scholars have recognized that advancements in the news media in terms of professionalism, commercialism and technology have strengthened media influence causing a subordination of the political system to the media system (Stromback & Esser, 2014; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999). This has resulted in a shift in the way political news is reported and how political actors engage with the media. The media often incorporate a competitive framework into its logic to frame political news, especially election coverage in an attempt to achieve control over the news (Aalberg, Stromback & de Vreese, 2011). This can result in structural biases in political reporting or election news coverage.

Stromback and Shehata (2007) define structural biases as "the tendencies in which norms of journalism or reporter behaviour favour news about topics over others and that this news emphasis advantages some candidates and disadvantages others" (p.799). Structural biases can manifest through "the journalistic tendency to favour episodic rather than thematic framing and game framing rather than issue framing" (p.799). Consequently, political actors internalize the media's logic as a strategic tool to maintain control. This has resulted in a back and forth struggle to regain control. As Aalberg, Stromback and de Vreese (2011) note this

"links to rise of the strategic game frame to changes in the political system and the news business" (p.164). Therefore, the increased commercialization of journalism and the media has shifted journalistic norms to heavily focus on strategic aspects of politics in order to maintain relevancy and competitiveness (2011).

Americanization

The increase of power of media logic over the public sphere and the political arena have consequently transformed election campaigning. Scholars have argued a more autonomous news industry has resulted in a commercialization and 'americanization' of election news coverage resulting in more strategic campaigning (Mancini & Swanson, 1996; Blumler, Kavanagh & Nossiter, 1996; Norris, 1996; Kavanagh, 1995).

The idea of the americanization of campaigns is discussed throughout Dennis Kavanagh's book "Election Campaigning: The New Marketing of Politics" (1995). Kavanagh asserts that the americanization of campaigning is related to the idea of electioneering as political marketing that is framed as a competition (1995, p.10). The media has emphasized a competitive framework throughout election coverage resulting in a strategic shift in campaign communications. The changes in campaign communication can be attributed to advancements in technological and political developments that are the result of the process of modernization (Norris, 2002, p. 134). These advancements have transformed campaign organizations, news media and electorate (2002).

Norris (2002) identifies this as the 'post-modern campaign' or the permanent campaign, where communication professionals are becoming influentially integrated into party structures and election campaigns. This poses challenges to the effectiveness of campaign

communications because "post-modern campaigns are exemplified most clearly by contests" (2002, p. 142). The norms of political reporting tend to frame elections in a competitive nature which can undermines the substantive issues of the campaign and political logic.

The post-modern stage of campaigning emphasizes the structural biases in the way news is reported and plays in to the way the media are framing elections. Gulati, Just & Crigler (2004) identify how the media use agenda setting, priming and candidate image building to determine how political news is reported. The authors assert that these elements of election coverage are attributed to the competitive framework used for political reporting (2004, p.238). However, the research fails to analyze the impact of these structural biases of reporting, particularly on public opinion or voter perception.

The research conducted by Weaver, McCombs & Shaw (2004) attempt to fill in some of these literary gaps by identifying the concepts of second level agenda setting and framing. The authors assert that the primary difference between the two concepts is that "second level agenda setting research is more concerned with the relationship between media and audience ways of thinking" (p.264). Alternatively, framing research has focused on "how the media cover and present various subjects" (p.264). The author's make this distinction based on the idea of agenda melding that "seeks to explain why some individuals are more interested in certain issues and agendas than others through a combination of perceived relevance and uncertainty" (p.274). Framing can focus on individual's frames of thought and the frames used by the media to tell a story.

News Framing Theory

Todd Gitlin (1980) discusses how "frames are principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tactic of theories about what exists, what happens and what matters" (p.6). He discusses how individuals uses frames to organize reality "in order to negotiate it, manage it, comprehend it and choose appropriate repertories of cognition and action" (p.6). Whereas, media frames are used to "organize the world both for journalists who report it and for us who rely on their reports" (p.7). Therefore, media frames are "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation and presentation of selection, emphasis and exclusion by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual" (p.7). For the purpose of this dissertation, the analysis will be conducted within the theoretical framework for news or media framing to examine journalistic practices and processes in relation to electoral coverage in Canada and the United Kingdom.

Along the similar thinking as Gitlin, Robert Entman (1993) conceptualizes framing as a process "to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (p.52). News framing involves the selection and salience of particular problems, interpretations or opinions to make them more "more noticeable, meaningful or memorable to audiences" (Entman, 1993, p.53). Therefore, framing is a powerful process that can have a large impact on the way voters perceive issues or politicians during an election. Entman describes how framing can exert political power and "the frame in a news text is really the imprint of power" (Entman, 1993, p.55).

In the previous elections in the United Kingdom and Canada, the incumbent Conservative governments focused heavily on framing their opponents, Ed Miliband and Justin Trudeau, as inexperienced or ineffective leaders who were unfit for the job of Prime Minister. These frames were often reiterated throughout the media through contrasting commentary on whether either opposing leader would be fit to take on significant tasks such as managing budgets or job creation. Overall, this contributes to the competitive framework of election coverage.

Aalberg, Stromback and de Vreese (2011) investigate the conceptualization of the framing of politics as a strategic game. The authors characterize the framing of politics as a strategic game often "focus on questions related to who is winning and losing, the performances of politicians and parties, and on campaign strategies and tactics" (p.163). The authors identify the conceptual questions related to previous studies on framing of politics by acknowledging the difference between a game frame and a strategy frame. A game frame "refers to news stories that portray politics as a game and are centered around: who is winning or losing elections, in the battle for public opinion, in legislative debates, or in politics in general" (p. 168). Whereas, a strategy frame "refers to news stories that are centered around interpretations of candidates' or parties' motives for actions and positions; their strategies and tactics for achieving political or policy goals; how they campaign; and choices regarding leadership and integrity, including personal traits" (p.168). The breakdown of the concept of game framing into game and strategy will be relevant to this study to determine the extent of the game frame used to frame the 2015 elections in the United Kingdom and Canada.

The need for better conceptualization of framing is apparent in Brewer and Gross'

(2010) study on the "effects of framing on public opinion about policy issues." The authors

identify two common news frames used by the media, game or strategy frame or substance or

issue frame (p.160). The authors use game or strategy frame interchangeably noting that this

kind of framing "emphasizes political maneuvering by self-interested politicians" (p.160).

Whereas, substance or issue frame "emphasizes the particulars of policy proposals" (p.160).

The inconsistent conceptualization across different framing studies provides a literature gap for

other studies to be conducted that can contribute to the further definition and

conceptualization of the framing of political reporting and election coverage as a game.

Therefore, this is relevant to the research and analysis that will be conducted throughout this

dissertation as it will focus on the use of politics as a game to frame election coverage in

national newspapers in the UK and Canada. Furthermore, this study can contribute to the

distinction and conceptualization of game frame and strategy frame.

In de Vreese, Jochen and Semetko's (2001) study on the framing of the launch of the

Euro in four European countries, they distinguish between two approaches in the study of news

framing. The authors begin by distinguishing between an issue-specific news frame and generic

news frames. They conceptualize an issue-specific frame as frames that "pertain to specific

topics or news events" (2001, p.108). Whereas, generic news frames are "broadly applicable to

a range of different news topics, some even over time and potentially in different cultural

contexts" (2001, p.108). Based on these definitions of the two different types of framing, the

authors discuss an issue-specific approach that allows for "investigation of the framing of

particular events," and a generic approach that allows for "comparisons between frames, topics and potentially, framing practices in different countries" (p.108).

The authors examine the discussion in news in relation to the launch of the euro and the extent of conflict or economic indicators emerged in the framing of political and economic news (2001). The study examined a mix of public broadcasting services and private networks in Britain, Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands (2001). The cross-national study provided a comparative perspective across different political contexts in relation to joining the common currency. The results from the study suggested that "television journalists in all of the countries were more likely to emphasize the conflict in reporting political/economic news, but that in the coverage of the euro launch journalists in most of the countries emphasized economic consequences more than conflict" (2001, p.117). The authors noted that the conflict was significantly more dominant in political and economic news in general, rather than news specific to the launch of the euro. The authors highlight an opportunity for further research by suggesting that the dominance of conflict framing in political and economic news could be attributed to the internalized perception of professional journalistic norms. This highlights a possible connection between journalistic role perceptions to framing practices in different political contexts (p.118). This study provides a starting point for the examination of conflict or strategy framing in election coverage because of its suggestion that journalistic practices can be linked to framing practices. This provides an opportunity for the research in this dissertation to further examine the extent of strategy or game framing in election coverage.

Stromback and van Aelst (2010) conducted a study to "explore the importance of media channels and media types as antecedents of the media's framing of election news" (p.42). The

authors conducted a comparative analysis on election news coverage in Belgium and Sweden

by examining commercial and public service television news. The authors used game frame and

issue frame to analyze the various media types, but identified that a frame can consist of

subframes. They explain that within a game frame a subframe of a horse-race frame could exist

in order to focus on the winners and losers of the election (2010). This is important to the

conceptualization of strategy and issue framing because it identifies that frames are multi-

dimensional. Therefore, there is a significant likelihood that one frame can consist of different

subframes, such as a horse-race frame or a personalization frame. This allows for a more

accurate analysis of the extent of the use of frames in election news coverage.

The results of the study suggest that "media type is a more important antecedent than

media channels with respect to the metaframing of politics as a game" (2010, p. 50). The study

found that strategic subframes were generally more consistent in commercial news shows in

comparison to public broadcasting services news shows (2010). However, in print media, "in

Belgium, the quality papers applied at least one strategic subframe more often than the tabloid,

whereas in the Swedish case at least one strategic subframe was about as common in the

quality papers as in the tabloids" (p.51). The use of personalized subframes were found to be

significantly more common in the commercial than in the public service broadcasting news

shows and significantly more apparent in tabloid newspapers (p.53). The results from the study

"suggest that media type matters more than media channels and does not lend support to the

idea that television leads to a more personalized way of covering politics compared to print

media" (p.54). The authors synthesize the results by saying that "strategic framing and

personalized framing are two different ways that media can sell their election news to

audiences that are (perceived to be) less interested in news about politics and elections" (p.57). Therefore, "the media can choose to put more emphasis on one strategy rather than the other, leading to differences in the use of different strategic and personalized subframes" (p.57). This is an interesting conclusion because it reflects the variability of the media's emphasis on certain frames in election news coverage and how framing is consequential.

In a similar study conducted by McMenamin, Flynn, O'Malley and Rafter (2012), the others examine the "powerful influence of commercialization on election framing" in the 2011 Irish General Election. The authors note that there is "great variety in how Irish newspapers frame the election. Commercialization has not forced a common frame on the Irish media" (p.68). The study examines "whether and why, politics is framed as a game between competing teams or as a debate of issues and policies and a choice between political parties or ideologies" (p.169). The study conducts a content analysis on 12 Irish newspapers that are a mix of public and private, over a period of 24 days of the official 2011 election campaign period. The study focuses on articles that are more than 200 words long, in the main section of the newspapers (p.175). Not surprisingly, the findings from the study "did not support the hypothesis that commercialization has caused a convergence of election coverage" (p.177). However, the authors do note that that the findings do "suggest that variations in the commercial sensitivity of papers tend to explain the predominance of the game frame" (p.177). This study highlights the significance of the media system and the political context in the instance of framing in election coverage because "different commercial situations lead to a different framing of politics" (p.182).

This was idea was evident throughout Stromback and Dimitrova's (2006) study that compared election news coverage in Sweden and the United States. The media system in the United States is highly commercialized, allowing for private media companies to control the media landscape (p.133). Whereas, the media system in Sweden reflects a "dual system of public service and commercial media" (p.133). The study found that the framing of election coverage in U.S. articles emphasized the game and political strategy rather than substantive issue coverage. Alternatively, the Swedish media "coverage was more issue-oriented, providing more interpretive reporting election issues" (p.142). This highlights the importance of the media system in which the news media operate and the impact of commercialization on the extent of framing of election coverage.

In a study conducted by Trimble and Sampert (2004) on the framing of the Canadian Election in 2000 by The Globe and Mail and The National Post, the authors assessed the dominance of game framing in two national newspapers that play a role in agenda-setting for election coverage in the Canadian media landscape (p.52). The study focused on headlines for election related news coverage in two major newspapers in Canada, The Globe and Mail and The National Post (p.55). Both newspapers are nationally distributed and are recognized as prestigious newspapers that play a key role in agenda-setting. The findings of the study indicated that "both newspaper headlines framed the election as a game, focusing on leaders, strategies, poll results and nuances of party support. Neither newspaper engaged in substantive issue framing, as headlines paid little attention to party ideology, policy pronouncements or issues of concerns to the voting public" (p.60). The findings of the study highlight the significant shift in election coverage that focuses on game framing to individualize campaign coverage

(p.63). However, the significance of the study's findings is limited because of the sole focus on

the newspapers headlines during the election period, rather than full articles. Typically,

newspapers use interesting or intriguing headlines to catch readers' attention. Therefore, the

study provides a gap for further research to be conducted to assess the use of game framing in

election coverage by analyzing newspapers articles in their entirety.

Additionally, the study highlights the level of engagement in agenda-setting in

newspapers and major media outlets. The authors conclude by asserting that their analysis

"supports the assertion that game framing trivializes and de-politicizes electoral democracy by

telling stories about the most superficial, episodic and tactical elements of the campaign"

(p.69). This study provides an opportunity to investigate this assertion further, especially since

it was conducted over a decade ago. It is possible that major newspapers and media outlets

have increased their use of game framing to cover elections over the years, arguably, further

de-politicizing electoral democracy. Therefore, the literature discussed provides an opportunity

for further research to be conducted on the extent of framing in election news coverage.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The research techniques of a content analysis in conjunction with a news framing analysis will be employed to create valid and replicable interpretations of the information in order to answer the research question. Content analysis can be defined as "the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics" (Neuendorf, 2002, p.1). Content analysis is a suitable instrument to analyze the use of occurring language and the newspaper coverage of specific topics, particularly in print media (Neuendorf, 2002, p.1). A content analysis will be conducted to organize, codify and summarize the samples of news articles according to frames from each country during the election period. This will provide a basis for a thorough news framing analysis to determine if the game frame was a dominant way to frame election coverage during the 2015 elections in the United Kingdom and Canada.

News Framing Analysis

Framing in political communication is significant because it contributes to the public's interpretation of political activities and statements that helps to construct the legitimacy of the political world (Pan & Kosicki, 2003). News framing can be understood as a "continuous process where outcomes of certain sub processes serve as inputs for subsequent sub processes" (D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010, p.4). Therefore, a news framing analysis will be conducted to assess the "media's independence in crafting news frames across political contexts" (Lawrence, 2010, p.266). The game or strategy frame is characterized as a general frame that "emphasizes political maneuvering by self-interested politicians" (Brewer & Gross, 2010, p. 160). Alternatively, the issue frame "emphasizes the particulars of policy proposals" and often evaluates policy proposals in a real-life context (Brewer & Gross, 2010, p.160).

There are evident limitations in using this kind of method to analyze the media coverage during the respective election periods. Content analysis allows the research to recognize a pattern of messaging within the coverage but does not allow the researcher to assess its overall impact on audiences or public opinion (Norris, 2002). This is an apparent gap in the research that could be addressed by future research on the correlation between the framing of elections in newspapers and public opinion towards political parties, leaders, campaign platforms or election issues.

Research Sample

The samples for analysis will be collected from news sections and/or political/issues columns from nationally distributed newspapers in the United Kingdom and Canada. The research did not include editorial, commentary, op-ed or business features because of the critical nature of those types of articles and the overall limitations of being a sole researcher. Therefore, an analysis on a broad range of coverage during the election period will be conducted.

An online, searchable database of text archives called Lexis-Nexis will be used to access articles pertaining to the 2015 elections in the United Kingdom and Canada. The samples of articles will be taken from two prominent nationally distributed newspapers in each country. The samples will be taken from the first three days of the election period and the last three days of the election period. For UK sources, text search of 'General Election' in UK national newspapers will be used along with customized date ranges to find the articles. For Canada, a search of Canadian publications with the text search of 'Federal Election' will be used along with customized date ranges to find the articles.

In Canada, *The Globe and Mail* and *The National Post* will provide the sample of articles for the 2015 Federal Election. *The Globe and Mail* is a national newspaper that was founded over 170 years ago with a combined print and digital readership of over 6 million with Millennials (under 34) being the largest print readers (The Globe and Mail, 2017). It is known for its reputable and respected coverage of national and international news. Although, the editorial opinions of *The Global and Mail* have been known to take a centrist-liberal political view, with an emphasis on liberal economic and social policies. However, The Globe and Mail have endorsed either the Conservative and Liberal party in previous federal elections. *The National Post* is a much younger nationally distributed newspaper that was established in 1998 and has a combined print and digital readership of over 5 million (The National Post, 2015). The average *National Post* reader is male from the ages of 50-64 (The National Post, 2015). The newspapers political alignment is known to be Conservative and the editorial opinions of the National Post often criticize ideological liberals and the Liberal party.

In the United Kingdom, the sample of articles will be taken from *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Guardian*. *The Daily Telegraph* is a nationally distributed newspaper that was established over 160 years ago and has a combined print and digital readership of over 1 billion (Newsworks, 2016). The average reader of *The Daily Telegraph* is over 35 and predominantly male (Newsworks, 2016). *The Daily Telegraph* is an internationally recognized publication known for its reliable and respectable domestic and international news coverage. *The Daily Telegraph* is known to have Conservative political affiliation and editorial opinion to be centre-right leaning. *The Guardian* is a nationally distributed newspaper that was founded over 190

years ago. *The Guardian* has a combined print and digital readership of over 25 million. The

average reader of *The Guardian* is 15-34 and predominantly male (The Guardian, 2010).

The two countries have been selected based on obvious contextual similarities. Both

countries are parliamentary democracies that elect governments via the first past the post

voting system and both election campaigns occurred in 2015. Both countries are classified as

having a liberal model media system because of a neutral commercial press that emphasizes

information-oriented journalism with strong professionalization and self-regulation (Hallin &

Mancini, 2004, p. 67). The more dynamic similarities between the two countries exist in the

tactics used by the political parties during the election. In both Canada and the United Kingdom,

the incumbent Conservative party focused heavily on identifying the Liberal and Labour leader

as inadequate. In the United Kingdom, David Cameron and Conservative focused on Ed

Miliband as an individual by attempting to identify his inadequacies to be an effective Prime

Minister (Cowley & Kavanagh, 2016, p.171). A similar situation was present in Canada, where

Stephen Harper and the Conservative fervently focused on Justin Trudeau as an individual who

was 'just not ready' to govern. Therefore, the articles will be coded against variables such as

personalization and whether the articles highlight a politician's specific political performance.

Another, interesting strategic similarity between the two campaigns was the use of the

'dead cat strategy.' The strategy coined by Lynton Crosby suggests that if you 'throw a dead cat

on the table' then everyone will be talking about the dead cat. In election terms, this distracts

voters with an sensationalist issue rather than an salient election issue. In the United Kingdom,

the Conservatives employed the dead cat strategy to specifically attack Ed Miliband (Cowley &

Kavanagh, 2016, p.179). Whereas, in the Canadian election the Conservatives used the dead cat

strategy to divide voters with the hope in swinging fringe voters to vote Conservative.

Therefore, the articles will be coded against variables such as whether a subframe was used to

highlight political strategy or tactic to emphasize the primary frame.

Codebook Design

The codebook was designed based on other studies of a similar nature along with the

selection of appropriate variables in order to effectively answer the research question. The

procedure was deductive based on framing theory and election framing literature. The

codebook was designed as a three-stage coding process. Before the first stage of coding, it is

important to indicate the descriptive variables relevant to the study, such as unique story ID,

newspaper, section, country and headline of the article to organize and properly classify the

data.

The first stage of coding is designed to concentrate on the overall focus, theme or

stimulus of the article. Essentially, to answer the question why was the article written? The

codes for the theme or stimulus of the articles were determined based on relevancy to the

study such as: 'political strategy or stunt;' 'policy or issue debate;' 'coalition/minority

government;' 'opinion poll' and 'general election commentary or debate.' Codes for 'Other' or

'Mixed Themes' were included to ensure that the first stage of coding was exhaustive.

Next, to capture the personalization aspect of the game frame, individuals such as

political parties or party leaders were coded for when referenced in each article. There was

particular attention paid to the reference to party leaders as personalization is often an aspect

of framing politics as a game. For simplicity, it was instructed that coders focus on who is most

frequently mentioned throughout the entire article. A code for 'party representative' was incorporated if party leaders were not directly referenced.

The second stage of coding focused on the main frame or characteristic that is central throughout the article. The main frame was determined based on the dominate frame in the article, with a focus on the headline of the story and the lead of the article. This was a binary choice, either 'game/strategy frame' or 'issue/policy frame.' For the game/strategy frame, it was instructed to look for emphasizes on strategies of political campaigning, references to the horse race or winners/losers, instances of personalization of politicians and nuances of political performances. For the issue/policy frame, it was instructed to look for evidence of substantive policy or issue discussion that provides differences in policy position between each political party. A code for 'other' was provided to ensure that articles that did not fit into this list were properly coded and the data was accurate and exhaustive.

The third stage of coding focused on subframes used to emphasize the primary frame of politics as a game. For the game aspect of the primary frame, there was particular attention paid to references to opinion polls, speculation and metaphors that stress the 'game' of the election. This was captured with a variety of codes such as: 'horse race;' 'winners/losers;' 'sports metaphors;' 'war metaphors.' Codes such as: 'mixed;' 'other;' and 'not applicable' were included to ensure reliability of the coding process. This was done to try to capture how often the media depoliticize elections by characterizing them as simply a 'race to the finish.'

To capture the strategy aspect of the primary game frame, separate codes were created. Coders were instructed to look for references to personalization or performance of politicians or political parties, tactics of campaigning, spin/media management or media events.

This was done to try to capture how the media often characterize issues during elections as strategic manoeuvres or tactics of campaign rather than providing substantive issue discussions.

To distinguish between articles that emphasized the game frame and the issue frame, subframes for the primary issue frame were recorded in a general sense since it was not the main focus on the story. It was instructed to look for references to particular policy positions, or reporting that translated policies into a real-life context for voters to understand. It was important to include the issue frame and some subframes, if only in a broad manner, in order to produce comprehensive data and make informative conclusions. This was captured in a broad fashion by coding for: 'policy position;' 'real life context.' Codes for 'other' and 'not applicable' were also included to ensure data was accurate and replicable.

The following chapter will present the findings of the research, followed by a comprehensive discussion of the findings in relation to other scholarly works and evaluations as to why this was the case.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

Overall, the content analysis found that the main game frame was evident in 66.2% of articles analyzed across the four selected newspapers in the United Kingdom and Canada (Table 1). However, the content analysis did not find that the coverage consistently applied the different subframes to articulate the main frame of politics as a game. This was discussed by Stromback and van Aelst (2010), who acknowledged that "in many cases a particular frame consists of different subframe" (p.47). For instance, for articles that were coded as presenting a game frame only 14.8% consisted of a horse-race subframe (Table 4). Additionally, for the strategy aspect of the framing of politics as a game, only 37.8% of articles consisted of a political performance subframe (Table 3).

Interestingly, personalization of political leaders was not found to be used as a subframe on its own. But rather, in combination with other subframes such as political performance or political strategy. The results found that generally tend to focus on multiple leaders rather than placing emphasis on one leader and their individual attributes. However, in Canadian coverage it was found that Stephen Harper was referenced most frequently. This is not surprising as he was the incumbent Prime Minister, but interesting since the Conservatives focused their attack ads on personalizing Justin Trudeau as an inexperience and unfit leader. In the coverage from the United Kingdom, it appeared to be the opposite where Nick Clegg was referred to most frequently. This could be attributed to how the coverage tended to focus on speculation surrounding potential coalition governments in the event of a hung Parliament.

The results found that that the game frame was used in 63.8% of UK based newspaper articles covering the 2015 General Election, and was found in 68.4% of Canadian based newspapers articles that covered the 2015 Federal Election (Table 1). In comparison, the issue frame was apparent in 16.2% of all articles examined (19.4% for the UK; 13.1% for Canada) (Table 1). The prominence of the game frame in political reporting of elections highlights the modern reality of journalists attempting to attain control over the news (Aalberg & Stromback, 2011).

Table 1: Main Frame by Country

	Game Frame	Issue Frame	Other	Total
United Kingdom	63.8% (23)	19.4% (7)	16.6% (6)	100% (36)
Canada	68.4% (26)	13.1% (5)	18.4% (7)	100% (38)
Total	66.2% (49)	0.16% (12)	0.17% (13)	100% (74)

(n = in brackets)

United Kingdom: The Guardian

The articles analyzed from *The Guardian* proved to be the least driven by the game frame with 57.8% of articles coded as demonstrating a game frame (Table 2). However, the coverage in *The Guardian* was driven predominantly by the reality of the election result to be a coalition or minority government. Interestingly, the coverage did not largely focus on speculation but was mostly fact-based reporting with references to opinion polls. However, 31.5% of articles analyzed from *The Guardian* coverage did focus on the overall performance of each political leader and political party (Table 3). *The Guardian's* endorsement and support for the Labour Party and Ed Miliband was apparent throughout its coverage, as it often framed the Labour Party or Ed Miliband favourably and often highlighted the Conservative's political

manoeuvres against Labour. For example, at the beginning of the campaigning period, *The Guardian* focused attention on David Cameron and the Conservative's campaigning tactics of targeting Ed Miliband and running a "highly personalized campaign" against the Labour leader (31 March 2015).

Some of the coverage provided by *The Guardian* focused on the business leaders letter backing the Tories and their economic strategy (1 April 2015). *The Guardian* framed the letter as a political stunt orchestrated by the Conservatives in an attempt to discredit Ed Miliband and the Labour Party's economic strategy if elected. This was evident in headlines such as: "Labour dismisses pro-Tory letter from business leaders as party political stunt" (1 April 2015). Additionally, article leads such as: "The letter signed by Conservative-supporting businesspeople and published in the Daily Telegraph is a traditional element of the general election campaign," further reiterated the narrative that the letter was typical of the Conservatives and was strategically published in a Tory-supporting newspaper (1 April 2015). This commentary attempted to delegitimize the letter by implying that it was simply a tactic of modern campaigns.

This was furthered reiterated in other articles published on the same day, with leads such as: "Labour have been targeted in a letter signed by more than 100 business leaders backing the Tories and warning that any 'change in course' after the general election would threaten jobs and put the UK's economic recovery at risk" (1 April 2015). The article goes on to defend the Labour Party's economic strategy by referring to a recent announcement that "a Labour government would reverse the final reduction – due to take effect later this month – in order to hand a cut in business rates to small firms" (1 April 2015).

Structural biases were very apparent in *The Guardian's* coverage of the 2015 General

Election as a significant amount of the coverage depicted the Labour Party and Ed Miliband

favourably as a credible option for a new direction in Britain. The coverage focused on the

possibility of an effective coalition government between Labour and the Scottish Nationalist

Party (SNP) suggesting that "they have the best chance of getting enough seats to form a

majority and ideological overlap when it comes to left-wing politics" (1 April 2015). This

attempted to discredit the Conservative narrative warning of the political chaos that could

occur if there was a Labour minority government with support from the SNP.

Interestingly, The Guardian's coverage leading up to election day seemed to significantly

slow down as there were not nearly as many articles available as at the beginning of the

election period. It is possible that this is because that the result of the election was looking like

a Conservative victory.

Table 2: Main Frame by Newspaper

	Game Frame	Issue Frame	Other	Total
The Guardian	57.8% (11)	21.0% (4)	21.0% (4)	100% (19)
The Daily Telegraph	70.5% (12)	17.6% (3)	11.7% (2)	100% (17)
The National Post	60.0% (9)	20.0% (3)	20.0% (3)	100% (15)
The Globe and Mail	73.9% (17)	0.08% (2)	17.3% (4)	100% (23)
Total	66.2% (49)	16.2% (12)	17.5% (13)	100% (74)

(n = in brackets)

Table 3: Subframe (Strategy) by Newspaper

	Personalization	Performance	Strategy	Spin/Media Management	Mixed	Other	N/A	Total
The Guardian	-	31.5% (6)	15.7% (3)	10.5% (2)	-	-	42.1% (8)	100% (19)
The Daily Telegraph	-	47.0% (8)	17.6% (3)	-	11.7% (2)	0.05% (1)	17.6% (3)	100% (17)
The National Post	-	26.6% (4)	13.3% (2)	-	20.0% (3)	-	40.0% (6)	100% (15)
The Globe and Mail	-	43.4% (10)	17.3% (4)	0.04% (1)	13.0% (3)	-	21.7% (5)	100% (23)
Total	-	37.8% (28)	16.2% (12)	0.04% (3)	10.8% (8)	0.01% (1)	29.7% (22)	100% (74)

(n = in brackets)

United Kingdom: The Daily Telegraph

Overall, a game frame was evident in 70.5% of articles examined from *The Daily Telegraph* (Table 2). 47.0% of the articles consisted of a political/politician performance subframe to enforce the strategic aspect of main frame of politics as a game (Table 3). This was apparent in statements referring to polls that suggested: "David Cameron is significantly more trusted than Ed Miliband with Britain's national security, international relations and the economy, a poll has found" (5 May 2015). However, *The Daily Telegraph* is known to have a Conservative political affiliation with a readership that typically votes Conservative. Therefore, newspapers often cite polls that reinforce their political affiliation and their preferred electoral outcome (Deacon & Wring, 2015). This follows the logic of commercialization of the newspaper industry, as most people purchase or read newspaper that reflect their political beliefs.

At the beginning of the election period, a significant amount of articles found in *The Daily Telegraph* presented a main game frame with relatively speculative election commentary that discussed the leadership capabilities of David Cameron or Ed Miliband as the next Prime Minister. However, in the final few days of the election period, the articles in *The Daily Telegraph* significantly emphasized the ongoing political chaos that had been reiterated by David Cameron and the Conservatives throughout the entire election period. Comments such as: "Britain is facing weeks of political chaos that could leave the country without a new government until June, as Thursday's general election heads toward deadlock," further emphasized the Conservative's narrative throughout the campaign that a hung Parliament could result in a coalition government between Labour and the Scottish Nationalist Party (4 May 2015).

The coverage in *The Daily Telegraph* reinforced the main frame of politics as game by utilizing a horse-race subframe to emphasize the political uncertainty surrounding the outcome of the election (Table 4). The articles suggested that the public must vote tactically because the future of Britain hung in the balance, particularly in reference to the possibility of an EU referendum. Statements such as: "Fewer than 100,000 votes in handful of marginal constituencies – mostly held by the Liberal Democrats – are key to a Conservative election victory, David Cameron's advisers believe" (4 May 2015).

A significant amount of coverage was focused on speculation on the likelihood of a hung Parliament and which parties would form a coalition government. This reduced the substance of coverage because it simply focused on the winners and losers of the election without providing substantive commentary on policy issues.

Table 4: Subframe (Game) by Newspaper

	Horse Race	Winners/Losers	Sports Metaphors	War Metaphors	Mixed	Other	Not Applicable	Total
The Guardian	10.5% (2)	26.3% (5)	0.05% (1)	-	-	0.05% (1)	52.6% (10)	100% (19)
The Daily Telegraph	29.4% (5)	23.5% (4)	-	-	11.7% (2)	0.05% (1)	29.4% (5)	100% (17)
The National Post	0.06% (1)	13.3% (2)	0.06% (1)	0.06% (1)	23.0% (3)	0.06% (1)	40.0% (6)	100% (15)
The Globe and Mail	13.0% (3)	17.3% (4)	-	0.08% (2)	21.7% (5)	-	39.1% (9)	100% (23)
Total	14.8% (11)	20.2% (15)	0.02% (2)	0.04% (3)	13.5% (10)	0.04% (3)	40.5% (30)	100% (74)

(n = in brackets)

Canada: The National Post

The main game frame was found to be in 60.0% of articles analyzed from *The National Post.* In comparison, only 20% of articles depicted an issue or policy frame resulting in a significant lack of substantive political reporting of the election (Table 2). Overall, the coverage in *The National Post* did not significantly emphasize the main frame of politics as a game with subframes. However, the coverage did focus on the performance of politicians in reference to the multiple leader debates and the performance of each party in relation to national polls.

At the beginning of the election period, coverage was heavily focused on the horse-race aspect of the election to emphasize the main frame of politics as a game. The coverage in *The National Post* was mainly driven by commentary on performances during the first leaders debate that took place within the first few days of the campaign. Headlines and article leads such as:

"Ladies and gentlemen, start your engines. Tonight, four of the five party leaders will square off in the first federal election debate, hosted by Maclean's magazine in Toronto. Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper, NDP Opposition Leader Thomas Mulcair, Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau and Green Party Leader Elizabeth May will all put pedal to the metal, hoping to leave their rivals in the dust - and if they're lucky, make them crash and burn along the way" (6 August 2015).

Interestingly, the coverage echoed a tone normally seen in tabloid-style papers rather than national dailies. The coverage significantly emphasized the horse-race aspect of the campaign and reduced coverage to the simple fact that an election is only about who makes it to the finish first. Consequently, the commentary on the significance of the first leaders debate emphasized the subframe of sports or war metaphors with commentary such as: "the Conservative goal is to let Harper try for consistent singles and doubles, and invite the other candidates to take the riskier swings for the fences" (6 August 2015).

The commentary highlighted the political strategy of each party leader and each leader's performance in the debate to determine who would be the "challenger" to incumbent Prime Minister, Stephen Harper. The coverage referred to the results of the debate by referencing which leader chose to go on the "attack" and use the strategy of the "knockout line." This did not offer any substantive commentary on the issues discussed during the debate or leader's policy positions.

This style of commentary continued throughout the coverage of the election in *The National Post* with significant emphasize on the tightness of the race and the "battle" surrounding the subsequent leaders' debates. This allowed for commentary to stress the

metaphoric notion that an election is like a war or a battle with headlines such as: "Liberals set date in Quebec battle" (6 August 2015).

The coverage in *The National Post* in the latter part of the campaign tended to focus on the reality that polls suggested the Liberals were in the lead. But, the coverage seemed to reiterate the Conservative message questioning Justin Trudeau's ability to be Prime Minister. *The National Post* seemed to shift its coverage from general election commentary or speculation to providing a synopsis of the highlights of Stephen Harper's nearly decade in power. It is arguable that this would be in line with *The National Post's* political affiliation and predominantly Conservative readership. The editorials featured in *The National Post* often harshly criticize the Liberal Party so it is in line with the paper's affiliation to focus attention on Harper's accomplishments ahead of his projected defeat.

Additionally, *The National Post* coverage tried to express the fatigue surrounding the campaign, as it was the longest in modern Canadian history, with a reference to pop culture such as: "Canada has been in election-mode longer than Kim Kardashian's first marriage" (17 October 2015). This appeared to make light of the campaign by degrading the significance of the election instead of stressing the importance of voters making an informed decision.

Canada: The Globe and Mail

The Globe and Mail featured the most articles that appeared to follow the main frame of politics as a game with 73.9% of the articles analyzed (Table 2). The articles from *The Globe and Mail* emphasized the game frame and various subframes such as the horse-race frame, the most consistently. For instance, 60.8% the articles examined stressed the game frame by using various subframes such as: horse race frame, winners and losers frame or war and sports

metaphors (Table 4). Additionally, the articles *in The Globe and Mail* significantly emphasized the strategy aspect of the game frame with 78.2% of articles exhibiting strategic subframes such as: performance of a politician or political party, tactics of a political campaign or spin (Table 3).

Similar to *The National Post*, the coverage at the beginning of the campaign heavily focused on the first leaders' debate. A significant amount of the articles from the start of the election period possessed game frame which lead to a large amount of coverage focusing on each leader's performance at the debate and the winner and losers of the debate. The coverage significantly focused on Justin Trudeau's performance in the first debate, as there was a lot of speculation prior to the debate if he would be able to assert himself as a legitimate challenger to Stephen Harper. Commentary such as: "For Mr. Trudeau, it was always a game of showing he could stand toe to toe with heavyweights" (7 August 2015). The coverage extensively discussed how Justin Trudeau's strategy in the first debate was to demonstrate his ability to be an effective leader. *The Globe and Mail's* coverage largely focused on Justin Trudeau as its commentary largely stressed the need for change in Canadian politics. However, in an editorial piece on the 2015 Federal Election, *The Globe and Mail* ultimately endorsed the Conservatives but not under the leadership of Stephen Harper. Therefore, most of *The Globe and Mail's* election coverage followed this script and accentuated the strategic aspects of each party's tactics to defeat Harper.

Headlines such as: "For Mulcair and Trudeau, a fight to become Harper's chief opponent" set the tone for the coverage of the campaign by stressing the battle to come out on top (6 August 2015). A large amount of the coverage failed to highlight the policy differences

between Trudeau's Liberals and Harper's Conservative by focusing on whether Trudeau had the "fight" to be Harper's challenger. *The Globe and Mail* coverage lacked substantive reporting on the election with only 0.08% of the articles examined featuring an issue or policy frame (Table 2). Ultimately, the coverage reiterated the political strategy of each leader's tactic in the initial debate by focusing the narrative on the combative nature of the debate and the election as a whole.

The coverage in the latter part of the campaign seemed to follow the same narrative with 53.8% of articles emphasizing the strategic aspect of the game by focusing on the performance of a politician or political party and the tight horse-race apparent even at the beginning of the campaign. Interestingly, *The Globe and Mail* seemed to cover the potential scandal of Justin Trudeau's top campaign adviser possibly acting in a conflict of interest more than *The National Post*. However, the coverage on the conflict of interest was relatively objective and did not insinuate a political position against Trudeau or the Liberals.

Following the strategic narrative seen throughout *The Globe and Mail's* coverage of the campaign, the last bit of coverage stressed the reality of strategic or tactical voting in order to defeat Stephen Harper. This is similar to what was seen in coverage near the end of the 2015 General Election in the United Kingdom.

The Globe and Mail's dislike for Stephen Harper was apparent in headlines such as: "Trudeau; Liberal Leader has emerged as lead competitor against Conservatives, but he'll need more than anti-Harper sentiment on his side" (17 October 2015). The last articles published before election day suggested that voters would have to abandon traditional party allegiances, especially to smaller parties like the Green Party of Canada, if they wanted to see a change in

Canadian politics. The horse-race frame was reiterated throughout most of the coverage of the

campaign but significantly stressed days before voters went to the polls, with headlines stating:

"The tightest three-way race in Canada" (17 October 2015).

Overall, the findings suggest that the reporting of politics as a game is apparent in both

Canada and the United Kingdom's coverage of the 2015 elections. This will be further examined

in the discussion chapter of this dissertation.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overall, the findings indicated that the game frame was used as the primary frame to present coverage of the 2015 elections in the United Kingdom and Canada. However, the findings suggest the game frame was not applied equally between the two countries during their respective election periods. The findings indicated that the extent of the game frame used to frame election coverage was more prevalent in Canadian media and coverage of the 2015 Federal Election. The Canadian results suggest that Canadian voters were exposed to more fractured and episodic coverage that heavily focused on the strategic aspects of the campaign. The findings suggested that the coverage from the United Kingdom provided a slightly more substantive and interpretative reporting, but the coverage was still largely dominated by framing politics as a game. The remainder of the chapter will provide a thorough discussion to better understand why these results are significant and examine some mediating variables that could have contributed to the prominence of the game frame in the coverage.

Mediatization

The findings present a link to the process of mediatization and the shift of campaign techniques and communications towards the post-modern campaign. The post-modern campaign reflects a shift "towards the permanent campaign, in which the techniques of electioneering become intertwined with those governing" (Norris, 2002, p.147). The move to the post-modern campaign has contributed to the way politics or elections are reported as "post-modern campaigns are exemplified most clearly by contests" (2002, p.142).

This was evident in election coverage in the UK and Canada where coverage focused on the strategic behaviours of political parties and performances of politicians or political leaders within in a competitive and confrontational framework (Norris, 2002). The permanent campaign is a result of the process of the mediatization that has generated an indissoluble link between media practices and political institutions. However, the findings from this study suggest that the post-modern campaign has contributed to the media's coverage of politics as a game. The findings from the UK and Canada highlight how the reality of the post-modern campaign has been translated into the media as framing politics as a game.

Media Logic: Structural Biases & Press Partisanship

Media logic is understood as the "logic or the rationale, emphasis and orientation promoted by media production, processes and messages – tends to be evocative, encapsulated, highly thematic, familiar to audiences and easy to use" (Altheide, 2004, p.294). Consequently, "media culture is produced by the widespread application of media logic" (2004, p.294). In liberal model media system like the United Kingdom and Canada, media culture has embraced storytelling techniques that provide a simplification of politics, elections and world events to satisfy standards of newsworthiness.

The election coverage in the United Kingdom and Canada reflect the media's incorporation of storytelling techniques to garner public attention and maintain control. The coverage reflected news values linked to newsworthiness such as: competition, confrontation, drama, personalization and speculation. The coverage of the 2015 elections in the UK and Canada highlighted the tendency of inherent structural biases by journalists and the media in

political reporting. The framing of politics as a game rather than as issues or policies is an example of structural biases (Gulati, Just & Crigler, 2004; Stromback & Shehata, 2007).

The coverage of the Canadian federal election significantly highlighted structural biases in political reporting because of the large emphasis on the horse race and political strategies of each party leaders rather than policy issues. A large amount of the coverage of the Canadian election focused on the six separate leaders debates which strategically played into media logic and what is deemed as newsworthy. The multiple leader's debates easily fit into media logic as they were stylized as competitive and confrontational with an emphasize on leader's personality, style, and performance rather than policy positions.

Commentary on the leaders debates focused on the "the pugilistic metaphor of the 'knockout line' is one of the big draws of election campaign debates" (The National Post, 6 August 2015). The coverage significantly lacked any substantive narrative or analysis on the policy positions presented by each leader during the debate or the policy differences between each major party. Alternatively, the coverage centered around leader performance, 'knock out' lines and who came out on top.

Press Partisanship

Press partisanship can also attribute to the structural biases of political reporting as press partisanship can guide news emphasis that can benefit some candidates and disadvantages others (Stromback and Shehata, 2007). Press partisanship was evident in coverage in the UK general election, where *The Daily Telegraph,* ran a headline such as: "Stick with PM to keep Britain safe, say voters." This was followed by an article lead that read: "David

Cameron is significantly more trusted than Ed Miliband with Britain's national security, international relations and the economy, a poll has found" (The Daily Telegraph, 5 May 2015).

Journalists and newspapers often disguise their political biases in electoral reporting by referencing an opinion poll that supports their opinion as a way to provide legitimacy to their coverage. The reference to these polls helped to emphasize the 'political chaos' or 'political uncertainty' narrative that was apparent in the latter half of the UK general election coverage. This was evident in coverage provided by *The Daily Telegraph* in the last few days of the campaign which emphasized the result of the general election could head towards "deadlock" and the impact marginal constituencies could have on the election result (4 May 2015; 5 May 2015). Arguably, this narrative played into the Conservative's strategy to distinguish David Cameron as the safest option to guide Britain's future. The Daily Telegraph's consistent reiteration of the Conservative's message that political chaos was inevitable if the election resulted in a hung Parliament highlighted the obvious structural biases apparent in the coverage of the 2015 General Election.

An evident example of the emergence of robust press partisanship in the British media coverage of the 2015 election was *The Daily Telegraph*'s publishing of an open letter from corporate executives and business leaders praising the successful economic policies of David Cameron's Conservative and openly criticizing opposition policies. (The open letter was not included in this study as it did not fit the criteria of the research but was referenced in many articles analyzed for this dissertation). The open letter dominated and influenced the news agenda during the campaign as there were significant reports on it found in *The Guardian*. For example, electoral coverage on 1 April 2015 was mostly focused on *The Daily Telegraph* letter.

Multiple headlines appeared in *The Guardian*, such as: "More than 100 business leaders sign

letter backing Tories; Letter to *The Daily Telegraph* from business chiefs praises George

Osborne's lowering of corporation tax and comes as Ed Miliband attacks zero-hours contracts'"

(1 April 2015). Along with a headline that stated: "Labour dismisses pro-Tory letter from

business leaders as party political stunt; Labour says letter is 'concocted and organized by the

Conservative party to appear in Tory-supporting newspaper signed by mainly Tory donors'" (1

April 2015). *The Guardian* coverage of the letter heavily focused on the partisan nature of the

letter and implicated *The Daily Telegraph* in contributing to press partisanship in its coverage of

the election. This finding was substantiated in the election analysis provided by Philip Cowley

and Dennis Kavanagh in their book "The British General Election of 2015" (2016).

Americanization and Tabloidization of Canadian Media

Kavanagh (1995) discusses how new campaign communications focus on projecting a

favourable image as a key objective of modern campaigning. This is attributed to the

professionalization or Americanization of campaign communication and practices. The

professionalization of campaign communication has been reflected in the way electoral

campaigns are covered in the media. This has caused a dilemma for political journalists to

define their roles in a changing political climate resulting in the media associating

newsworthiness with competition, confrontation or personalization.

In Canada, the findings pointed to evidence of the Americanization of Canadian

electoral coverage as a result of the process of mediatization and modernization of

campaigning that favours personalization, confrontation and strategy. It was apparent that the

increased Americanization of Canadian media has resulted in an increase in the use of the game

frame to report on elections. This was evident in the coverage surrounding the multiple leader debates throughout the election period. The narrative surrounding the multiple leaders debates significantly emphasized the frame of politics as a game with significant references to war or sports metaphors to characterize the debates. The coverage on the leaders debates significant lacked any focus on policy positions between each party but rather paid particular attention to leader's performances or strategies or tactics.

The narrative surrounding a majority of the 2015 Federal Election largely focused on who would be the overall challenger to Stephen Harper. The coverage tended to focus more on individual leader's style, performance and personality rather than the party as a whole. The narrative presented in the media was reflective in campaign communications that used specific strategies to shape voter's perception of electoral success or leadership. For example, prior to the first leader's debate in Canada, Justin Trudeau's campaign team orchestrated a boxing style photo op of the leader to convey that he was a 'heavyweight challenger' to Stephen Harper. This was reported as a strategic manoeuvre to make "the debate about combativeness" to change the narrative around Justin Trudeau's image as not being a strong contender for Prime Minister (The Globe and Mail, 7 August 2015).

It is arguable that the Canadian media is largely influenced by American media practices and often take cues from American counterparts and this has become evident in Canadian media's coverage of the 2015 Federal Election. This is apparent as there has been an increase of tabloidization of Canadian media as a result of modernization, mediatization and the large influence American media culture has on Canadian media practices. This was apparent throughout this research as a significant amount of headlines reflected a tabloid-style tone not

normally seen in a national daily newspaper. For example, the headline from *The National Post*:

"Start your engines…Everything you need to know about the political strategy involve in

tonight's debate" reflects a tabloid-style headline that was not found in the analysis of UK

coverage (6 August 2015). The headline also highlights the Canadian media's focus on political

strategy rather than providing substantive reporting on the first leaders debate.

The narrative in Canadian media significantly followed the 'politics as a game'

framework and this was particularly evident on the emphasis put on the tight race in influential

provinces such as Quebec. Headlines such as: "Quebec set to hold more sway" reiterated the

horse race subframe. However, the headlines offered little context or substance as to why the

province of Quebec could sway the federal election. (The Globe and Mail, 17 October 2015).

The "Battle for Quebec" was a consistent narrative presented throughout coverage in the 2015

Federal Election. This is similar to the narrative surrounding U.S. Presidential Elections that

often illustrate certain states as "battleground states" or identify historically swing states such

as Florida. Consequently, the 'battle' or 'game' narrative that was emphasized throughout the

coverage of the 2015 Federal Elections trivializes and de-politicizes the electoral process

because of the media's lack of substantive coverage. The presence of the framing politics as a

game to report on the Canadian election further highlights the ongoing Americanization of

Canadian media.

News Framing: Close-Call Elections & Political Strategy

Stromback and Dimitrova (2006) assert that "news framing is the result of various

factors at work, among them commercial imperatives, the political system and its configuration,

political-cultural notions and values, and frames presented by powerful elites" (p.135) The

findings have shown that the game frame was evident in 63.8% of articles examined from the United Kingdom and 68.4% of articles examined from Canada. It was apparent that UK voters were slightly exposed to a more substantive style of political reporting than voters in Canada. Although, the UK and Canada are characterized as having a similar liberal-democratic media system it is evident that Canadian media has become significantly influenced by American media resulting in a more frequent use of the politics as a game frame to report on the 2015 Canadian election.

Close Call Elections

Blumler, Kavanagh and Nossiter (1996) determined that "political communication is served and is shaped by a society's political structure and culture" (p.58). In the UK and Canada, it was evident that the political structure and culture can contribute to the way each election was reported in the media. Both countries experienced close-call elections resulting in coverage significantly emphasizing subframes of the game frame such as: the horse-race and winners/losers. Overall, 35% of coverage used the horse-race or winners/losers subframe to emphasize the primary game frame. The horse-race subframe was characterized by statements such as: "Fewer than 100,000 votes in a handful of marginal constituencies" (The Daily Telegraph, 4 May 2015). It was characterized more blatantly in Canadian media with statements such as: "The 2015 campaign is the first serious three-way race in recent memory" (The Globe and Mail, 7 August 2015). Therefore, the political context in each country contributed to the way each election was reported (McMenamin, et al.,2012). It is arguable that the style of modern politics, that focuses on strategy and perception, allows for politics and elections to be reported as a game.

The perception of a minority or hung parliament allowed for references to opinion polls, assessments of leader's performances and significant speculation. The political commentary surrounding each election often featured statements such as: "Recent polls have shown that the Conservatives have pulled ahead in dozens of the marginal constituencies held by Nick Clegg's party" (The Daily Telegraph, 4 May 2015). Many reports featured references to polls to further reinforce the horse-race subframe and overall, closeness of the election. However, the polls referenced often favoured the newspapers election outcome (Deacon & Wring, 2015, p.332).

Political Strategy

As a result of the close-call elections experienced in both countries, the media's coverage largely focused on the strategic aspects of the campaign. The findings reflected a prominence of strategy subframes to emphasize the frame of politics as a game. This was evident in 58% of coverage from the United Kingdom and Canada. The closeness of the elections in both countries fit into media logic and what is considered 'newsworthy.' The coverage tended to focus on the strategic manoeuvres of issues throughout the campaign, rather than providing ideological distinctions or context on the issue. For example, the coverage surrounding the pro-Tory economic policies by prominent business leaders in the UK largely focused on how the letter was a strategic tactic made by the Conservatives rather than identifying the differences in economic policies proposed by each party.

The focus on political manoeuvres and strategies was apparent in the coverage in both countries. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Trimble and Sampert on the framing of the 2000 Canadian Federal Election by The Globe and Mail and The National Post

(2004). The study highlighted that the headlines on the 2000 federal election positioned issues as "strategic manoeuvres rather than as evidence of ideological distinctions between parties or meaningful debates about ideas" (2004, p.54). The study focused on the two newspapers agenda-setting function, noting that this could translate into more "substantive, issue-based election coverage" (2004, p.55). However, the study found that "both newspapers' headlines framed the election as a game, focusing on leaders, strategies, poll results and nuances of party support" (p.60). This dissertation provided a more in depth analysis on the content of articles in newspapers with agenda-setting functions in the United Kingdom and Canada and found that election coverage was still framed as politics as a game with an emphasis on strategic manoeuvres, performances and the horse-race campaign.

Political Landscape

The results from the study present an interesting takeaway that illustrates the significance of the relationship between the media system and the political context in which it operates in. Both Canada and the United Kingdom are categorized as having a liberal model media system because of their relatively neutral commercialized press and overall, information-oriented style of journalism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, pg. 67). As well, both countries operate within a parliamentary style democratic system. Elections in a parliamentary system typically require a more cohesive party campaign strategy because of the significant role local ridings play in achieving a majority government. But, the 2015 elections in Canada and the UK highlighted the prominence of individualized campaigns for future Prime Minister and the declining role of political parties.

This shift in the political landscape in the UK and Canada was reflected in the way each election was covered. The decline of strong parties has allowed countries with a parliamentary system like the United Kingdom and Canada, to be more susceptible to the influences of public opinion presented in the media. As presented in the findings chapter, a majority of the election coverage in both countries emphasized the politics as a game frame by focusing on leader's performances, strengths or weaknesses, political strategies or gaffes and the overall battle for Prime Minister. Coverage in both countries focused on the need for voters to vote strategically or tactically.

In the United Kingdom, the narrative focused on the political chaos or uncertainty facing the future of the United Kingdom, particularly with the reality of a referendum on exiting the European Union if the election resulted in another hung Parliament. The narrative of 'political chaos' arguably worked in the Conservatives favour as they were able to win a majority government. This narrative was consistently reiterated throughout coverage provided by *The Daily Telegraph* which attempted to insinuate to voters that a non-Conservative vote could result in political uncertainty for Britain's future.

Throughout Canadian coverage of the 2015 Federal Election, journalists highlighted the need for voters to vote tactically at the expense of smaller and less influential parties in order to defeat Stephen Harper's Conservatives. The narrative surrounding a majority of the electoral coverage reflected the cumbersome public mood toward incumbent Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his nearly decade in power. This was particularly apparent in *The Globe and Mail's* coverage of the election and was further reinforced when the paper endorsed the Conservative party but not under the leadership of Stephen Harper.

Chapter 6: Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, news framing can contribute to the way the electorate act towards elections and democratic governance, in general (Hertog & McLeod, 2003). Consequently, the media's framing of elections has the power to contribute to the public perception of electoral campaigns as mere 'horse race' or a calculated game based on strategic manoeuvres. This can be problematic for modern democracies as it can depoliticize elections and it can result in a cycle of political cynicism amongst the electoral. Therefore, it is imperative that academic research is conducted to assess the extent of game framing in modern democratic elections.

A significant amount of the research available on news framing of election campaigns has been focused on the American experience. There is a limited number of works that focus on countries with liberal media systems, like the United Kingdom and Canada. This dissertation sought to fill that research gap by determining to what extent the 'game frame' was used to frame the 2015 elections in the United Kingdom and Canada. The research broke down the concept of 'game frame' into two aspects, game and strategy, in order to further conceptualize game frame and This allowed for an assessment of the various subframes used to reinforce the primary frame of politics as a game.

The findings indicated a significant presence of the game frame to articulate the 2015 elections in the United Kingdom and Canada. There was significant evidence of the media positioning issues as political manoeuvres of modern campaigning rather than providing substantive reporting. The findings demonstrated evidence of structural biases in reporting, and press partisanship. Additionally, the findings highlighted how political context, such as a

close-call election can contribute to news framing of politics as a game with a focus on political strategies.

The coverage in the UK and Canada highlighted the presence of structural biases and robust press partisanship as an element of media logic. In Canada, the structural biases of political reporting tended to emerge as a result of the many leader's debates throughout the campaign. The debates were typically stylized as combative and confrontational and each leader's performance was positioned as a calculated political manoeuvre. In the United Kingdom, press partisanship contributed to the structural biases of reporting on the 2015 election. Each newspaper's political affiliation was apparent throughout its coverage and presentation of the election. *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Guardian* each tended to reiterate the party line of their political affiliation throughout its coverage resulting in structural biases in its reporting.

Additionally, the findings underlined a connection between political/electoral environment and news framing of elections. A country's political environment and culture shapes political communication which in turn can contribute to the way elections are reported and framed (Blumler, Kavanagh & Nossiter, 1996). The close-call election in both countries provided a viable environment for the framing of politics as a game to guide the election coverage. This allowed for coverage to be focused on the political strategies or tactics of the campaign with an emphasis on individual leader's performances. In response to the research question, the extent of the game frame used to frame the 2015 elections in Canada and the United Kingdom was significant and was used a primary frame for the coverage. Further

research can be conducted to assess the implications of the game frame on voter behaviour,

public perception of politicians, political cynicism and political engagement.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Newspapers, headlines and dates

The Guardian: 31 March 2015 – 2 April 2015

31 March 2015 'Election morning briefing: personal digs and calculators at dawn'

31 March 2015 'SNP plans to approach left wing Labour MPs over progressive bloc after election; Party sources tell of proposal to build coalition with Greens and Plaid Cymru at Westminster to stop renewal of Trident and obstruct deeper cuts'

31 March 2015 'David Cameron launches election campaign with swipes at Ed Miliband; In sign of things to come, the prime minister takes rare step amid the formalities of dissolving parliament to criticise the opposition leader'

31 March 2015 'Nigel Farage: immigration has left Britain almost unrecognisable; UKIP leader unveils first general election poster and makes immigration centre of the party's campaign'

1 April 2015 'Nick Clegg refuses to rule out cutting 40p tax threshold; Lib Dem leader says priority is to raise threshold for basic rate of tax, as all leaders are pushed to rule out raising VAT and national insurance'

1 April 2015 'Labour dismisses pro-Tory letter from business leaders as party political stunt; Labour says letter is 'concocted and organized by the Conservative party to appear in Tory-supporting newspaper signed by mainly Tory donors'

1 April 2015 'Labour fears SNP election landslide as Scottish party post clear lead in poll; ITV News' poll puts Nicola Sturgeon's party on the brink of winning about 28 new seats and close to becoming Westminster's third largest party'

1 April 2015 'Tories and Labour ignore new UK political landscape at their peril; The numbers no longer add up for the two main parties, with electorate split along fault lines that have become even deeper since the last election'

1 April 2015 'More than 100 business leaders sign letter backing Tories; Letter to Daily Telegraph from business chiefs praises George Osborne's lowering of corporation tax and comes as Ed Miliband attacks zero-hours contracts'

1 April 2015 'Donors and peers among signatories of pro-Tory business letter; Telegraph letter was signed by 103 business leaders acting in a personal capacity, 27 of whom are Tory party donors'

2 April 2015   "Nigel Farage accuses BBC of bias over questions about candidates; UKIP leader criticises broadcaster after Today programme interview for failing to ask other party leaders about 'bad eggs in their ranks'

2 April 2015   'Lutfur Rahman party could challenge Labour in East End constituencies; The bitter struggles between the Tower Hamlets mayor and the party that forsook him could extend to the general election'

2 April 2015   'Are UKIP racist?' – top Google searches for each UK political party; Users of Google in March also wanted to know why the Conservative party is known as the Tories, and whether Londoners can vote SNP'

2 April 2015 'Nick Clegg: I could work with David Cameron in coalition again; Lib Dem leader says he and PM 'found a way of working together' and he 'of course' could do business with Tories in another coalition'

4 May 2015 – 6 May 2015

4 May 2015   'The Tory Leader's Group donor club: 'A change for like-minded people to talk'; A payment of £50,000 gives business people direct access to David Cameron and other senior Conservatives at dinners, drinks receptions and other events Tory donor's firm tries to cut size of homes in town built with £30m subsidy'

4 May 2015   'Kenneth Clarke: chaos of second general election this year would fix nothing; Former chancellor's warning comes as fears grow of move against David Cameron from the Tory right'

4 May 2015   'Ed Miliband urges voters to focuses on big issues; Labour leader says election is choice between running the country for the rich and powerful or putting working people first'

4 May 2015 'Cameron 'will try to cling to power even if coalition loses majority'; Labour fears Tories will try to form government with Lib Dems and Democratic Unionists and to claim a majority Labour government would have no legitimacy'

4 May 2015   'Westminster cuts could fuel demand for new independence vote – SNP; Stewart Hosie indicates Scottish party's attitude towards calling for another referendum will depend on next UK government's policies'

5 May 2015   'Children are all right wing, which is why we're doomed; The Tories got 40% in a mock election held by First News. Well, kids are like George Osborne – have you ever tried telling one to share a biscuit?'

5 May 2015   'Will we really need a second general election before Christmas?; Reality check: Nick Clegg says this is inevitable without a coalition involving the Lib Dems – but minority government can be effective'

5 May 2015 'David Cameron: Miliband would not be legitimate as PM if Labour came second; Prime Minister claims his general election rival would have a 'massive credibility problem' if his party did not win more seats than the Conservatives'

5 May 2015 'Lib Dems' narrow hold on Bristol West threatened by student vote; The party's U-turn on tuition fees may prove costly in this key target seat for the Greens, where students make up almost a quarter of the adult population'

5 May 2015 'Ed Miliband says NHS faces £2bn deficit in 2015; Labour leader says hospital trust could have to make 'swingeing cuts' as he pushes to put health services at centre of election campaign'

6 May 2015 'Police warn Scottish election officials over nationalists' anti-rigging campaign; Officials warn of 'conspiracy theories' as radical pro-independence campaigners urge voters to photograph ballot papers and follow ballot boxes in transit'

The Daily Telegraph: 31 March 2015 – 2 April 2015

31 March 2015 'Labour hopes for Brown boost as former PM takes battle to the SNP'

31 March 2015 'Miliband the man to take Britain back to square one, says Cameron; Tory leader sets 'full employment' target as he launches highly personal attack on rival PM's PROMISES'

31 March 2015 'Minority government is better than coalition, says Scottish Tory leader'

1 April 2015   'How Miliband ripped up Labour's credibility with attacks on the City; Blair and Mandelson's charm offensive wooed business chiefs, but the party's relationship with the money men has chilled dramatically as tax and property policies target wealth creators'

1 April 2015 'Voters know who I am this time, laments Clegg'

1 April 2015 'Scrapping Trident is our red line, says Sturgeon; SCOTTISH SEATS'

2 April 2015 'Poll Clegs! At risk of being unseated'

2 April 2015 'Clegg's among three Lib Dem seats at risk, says Ashcroft'

2 April 2015 'TV Debate? I'm glad its him, not me'

2 April 2015 'Labour admits it would work with Nationalists but 'only in opposition'; Scotland'

4 May 2015 – 6 May 2015

4 May 2015 'The 100,000 voters who could win Tories power; Party targets 23 seats that could tip balance as Cameron urges public: choose me, or their will be chaos'

4 May 2015 'Cameron and Clegg talk terms of new deal'

5 May 2015 'A vote for UKIP is a 'suicide note for Britain,' says IDS'

5 May 2015 'Stick with PM to keep Britain safe, say voters'

5 May 2015 'Brand U-turn Opponent of voting urges 9.6 million followers to back Labour'

6 May 2015 'What could happen in the event of a hung parliament; Fallout Friday'

6 May 2015 'Don't fall for SNP's make believe'; Brown insists Nationalists will be irrelevance; Former PM says SNP won't force Tories out of power'

The Globe and Mail: 5 August 2015 – 7 August 2015

5 August 2015   'B.C. Candidates mostly in place for federal election'

5 August 2015 'Party leaders prepare to set campaign tone in first debate'

5 August 2015 'Tories to revive home-renovation credit; Harper promises to bring back the popular tax credit and make it permanent – once Ottawa can afford the $1.5 billion a year plan'

6 August 2015 'New survey shows reach of Harper's ads'

6 August 2015 'For Mulcair and Trudeau, a fight to become Harper's chief opponent'

6 August 2015 'The measure of a message; As politicians hit the campaign trail, Canadians prepare for the onslaught of advertising – but is any of it any good?'

7 August 2015 'Notley tells Harper to butt out; Prime Minister's remarks about provincial NDP government disrespectful of the electorate, Premier says'

7 August 2015 'Leaders set tone in bruising first debate; On the attack Main rivals try to paint Harper into a tight corner as an out-of-touch leader who remains insulated from a faltering economy'

7 August 2015 'Leaders set ton in bruising first debate; Game plans for a less aggressive Mulcair and a pugnacious Trudeau, their debate tactics reflected their relative positions in the polls'

7 August 2015 'Lobbyists gather in Conservative war room'

16 October 2015 – 18 October 2015

16 October 2015 'Mulcairs goes on offence in Quebec; With support flagging, NDP Leader seeks to recover from niqab controversy and fend off challenges to previously safe seats'

16 October 2015 'Environmental leaders turn away from Green Party'

16 October 2015 'Top adviser worked for Liberals while employed by oil firm'

16 October 2015 '14 Key moments of the campaign'

17 October 2015 'Liberals face attacks over former staffer; Campaign co-chair Gagnier resigned after revelations that he advised TransCanada on best ways to lobby government after election'

17 October 2015 'Political discourse has become un-Canadian; Plumbing the depths of U.S.-style vitriol and sleaze'

17 October2015 'Storm clouds gather over B.C.'s rainmaker; Liberal fundraiser draws criticism and praise as he woos voters in Chinese-Canadian community'

17 October 2015 'Quebec set to hold more sway; Broader cross-section of MPs would end power vacuum the province has suffered sine Chretien years'

17 October 2015 'The tightest three-way race in Canada; If British Columbia's results are evenly split between the parties, it could determine the national outcome, Ian Bailey writes'

17 October 2015   'Cracks widening in Conservatives' Albertan fortress'

17 October 2015 'Safe ridings aren't so safe; West of Calgary, breakthroughs for parties other than the Tories may have to be measured on relative competitiveness, Kelly Cryderman writes'

17 October 2015 'Ready or not, these leaders aren't funny; Real change might involve heeding the Rhinoceros Party platform, or summoning the ghosts of Macdonald, Diefenbaker and Douglas'

17 October 2015 'Harperendum tests qualms about Trudeau; Liberal Leader has emerged as lead competitor against the Conservatives, but he'll need more than anti-Harper sentiment on his side'

The National Post: 5 August 2015 – 7 August 2015

5 August 2015 'bloc looks to regain NDP votes; Battle for Quebec; Uphill fight for soft nationalist support'

6 August 2015 'Liberals set date in Quebec battle; Trudeau ally'

6 August 2015 'Winning is survival of the chillest'

6 August 2015 'Start your engines… Everything you need to know about the political strategy involves in tonight's debate'

6 August 2015 'Debate will be a clash of optics; Social media raise stakes for party leaders'

6 August 2015 'Trudeau foments class warfare'

16 October 2015 – 18 October 2015

16 October 2015 'The Niqab Mystique'

17 October 2015 'Harper's place in history; His is the story of a prime minister who did many great things for this country, but hung on to power a little too long'

17 October 2015 'Trudeau faces grilling over lobbying advice'

17 October 2015 'First son of a Prime Minister to be elected Prime Minister'

17 October 2015 'Parachuting candidates into Quebec; Green Party'

17 October 2015 'A 'zen' Harper in the homestretch; Conservative leader unbuttons as campaign reaches climax with polls suggesting Liberals in the lead'

17 October 2015 'The case for Harper'

17 October 2015 'Liberals enjoy momentum in final days: poll; Five-point lead'

17 October 2015 'Firsts past the post'

Appendix 2: Codebook

Descriptive Variables

Unique Story ID:

Date of Publication:

Newspaper:
N1 = The Guardian
N2 = The Daily Telegraph
N3 = The Globe and Mail
N4 = The National Post

Section:
S1 = News
S2 = Political
S3 = Issues

Country:
C1 = United Kingdom
C2 = Canada

Headline:

(1) First stage of coding focuses on the overall focus/themes/stimulus of the news article

What is the main theme of the news article?
(Code for the prominent theme of the article, specifically the overall reason of why the article has been written. Code for Other if the story does not fit into the theme variables. Code for mixed if the article focuses on more than one theme)
T1 = Political strategy or stunt
T2 = Policy or issue debate
T3 = Coalition/Minority Government
T4= Opinion poll
T5 = General election commentary/Debate
T6 = Mixed themes
T7 = Other

Who is the main focus of the article?
(Code for who is the primary focus of the article. If two subjects are mentioned, focus on who is most frequently mentioned throughout the entire article. Code for Party representative if other

party member is mentioned within the article, as the main focus is on party leaders. Code for Mixed if multiple parties are mentioned. Code for Other if does not fit into any categories)

M1 = Conservative (UK)
M2 = Labour
M3 = Liberal Democrats
M4 = UK Independence Party
M5 = Scottish Nationalist Party
M6 = Conservative (Canada)
M7 = Liberal
M8 = New Democrat Party
M9 = Green Party
M10 = Other Party
M11 = Mixed

M12 = David Cameron
M13 = Nick Clegg
M14 = Ed Miliband
M15 = Nigel Farage
M16 = Nicola Sturgeon
M17 = Stephen Harper
M18 = Justin Trudeau
M19 = Thomas Mulcair
M20 = Elizabeth May
M21 = Party representative
M22 = Other

(2) Second stage of coding focuses on the main frame or characteristic that is central throughout the article.

Main Frame
(Focus on the dominant frame, including the headline of the story and the lead in the article. Once, the dominant frame has been coded, code for the subframes present in the article. Separate codes apply for the game frame and issue frame. For game frame look for focuses on strategies of political campaigning, horse race, winners/losers, personalization, performances of politicians/political parties. For issue/policy frame, code if there is evidence of policy discussion and substantive reporting on specific policy or issue. Code for Other if does not follow into either frames).

F1 = Game or Strategy Frame
F2 = Issue or Policy frame
F3 = Other

(3) Third stage of coding focuses on the subframes within the article that emphasize and characterize the primary frame

Subframe: Game
(For subframes that emphasize the Game Frame look for references to opinion polls, speculation and metaphors that stress 'the game')

G1 = Horse race
G2 = Winners/losers
G3 = Sports metaphors
G4 = War metaphors
G5 = Mixed
G6 = Other
G7 = N/A

(For subframes that emphasize the strategy aspect of the Game Frame, look for references of personalization or performance of politicians/parties, tactics of campaigning, spin/media management or media events)

S1 = Personalization
S2 = Performance of a politician or political party
S3 = Strategy or tactics of political campaign (i.e. dead cat strategy/coalition strategy)
S4 = Spin/Media management
S5 = Mixed
S6 = Other
S7 = N/A

Subframe: Issue
(For the subframe of the main Issue Frame, look for references to particular policy positions, or reporting that translates policies into a real-life context for voters to understand. Code for other if does not fit into the two categories. As the issue frame is not the primary focus on the study, it only needs to be recorded in a general sense.)
I1 = Policy position
I2 = Real life context
I3 = Other
I4 = N/A

Interesting use of language or discourse? *(Code for yes if the article uses particular language or discourse that reinforces the frame)*
L1 = Yes
L2 = No

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