







OB argued in a number of articles that Conservative governments received more negative coverage than Liberal governments, and that NDP governments were covered least critically. It concluded there was "gross partisanship" in the media, which had "crossed the boundary from news reporting to news advocacy". However, OB reported only part of the story. For example, OB noted that Alberta's spending cuts under Ralph Klein received more negative coverage than Bob Rae's "ballooning deficit" in Ontario. But Alberta received twice as much coverage overall, indicating that it likely also received more positive coverage than Ontario's government. OB took issue with the media's use of the word "victims" (such as bleeding patients in emergency wards) to show the effects of budget cuts while the media showed no "victims" of Bob Rae's increasing deficit, except "business men and middle class tax protesters, hardly the images to invoke sympathy."

OB alleged repeatedly that public broadcasting was less balanced than private broadcasting. It argued in a number of articles that the CBC gave one-sided and overly negative coverage to economic issues, government budgets, globalization, and elections. However, OB employed a double standard when discussing the CBC. If the CBC demonstrated "more bias" than the private sector on a particular item, OB questioned the value of the public broadcaster. However, when CBC showed more balance than private broadcasters, OB neither indicated possible value in a public broadcaster, nor questioned the value of the private broadcaster. And although OB explicitly criticized a CBC story for its use of "innuendo, inconsistent media practices and ambush journalism," OB was relatively silent on the same tactics when employed by private sector media.

OB rarely considered conditions other than journalists' own alleged partisanship that might affect media coverage. There is an extensive body of literature spanning 50 years that has examined the effect of news values, news-gathering practices, advertising imperatives and news media ownership, on the content of news stories; however, these possibilities were not raised by the NMA. Even when OB criticized the media's attention to sensationalism, it made no comments on

Canada's review of On Balance, it is hard to distinguish NMA's goal of objective media analysis from the Fraser Institute's goal of influencing media coverage.

The work of the National Media Archive does have some merit. It provides public and academic access to the only archive of television news in western Canada, which is a valuable research resource. And the NMA's actual numbers are often reliable; indeed we have used them to critique the NMA's own conclusions. As well, some of the NMA's studies, especially in areas of crime reporting, are useful and insightful.

It is precisely because of its importance, though, that the work of the NMA needs to be subjected to critical scrutiny. Canadians need the kind of media monitoring that the National Media Archive is undertaking. We need to identify blindspots in the news and ask why some stories and

Perspectives on the debt and deficit provided by the federal Department of Finance and Minister of Finance Paul Martin made up the largest group in the sample. These were Fi