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## Letter from the Editor

Dear reader,

It is our pleasure to welcome you to the 11<sup>th</sup> volume of *Mapping Politics*, the student edited journal of the Department of Political Science at Memorial University. Throughout these pages, you will find the product of intensive intellectual inquiry, collaboration, and upcoming expertise from junior scholars from across Canada. While there was initially no intended topic for this issue and submissions from all aspects of political science were considered, there are nonetheless overarching themes this issue touches on – specifically ones concerning the underlying structural makeup of the Canadian state. From party dominance, the nature of Canadian mass media under a neoliberal regime, to Indigenous ontologies and crown relations, we are delighted to present to you critical scholarship touching on pressing issues of our day. We invite you to consider the various authors’ perspectives and hope it sparks critical reflection on these topics.

It has been around five years since the last publication of *Mapping Politics*, and much work has been undertaken to ensure the successful relaunch of the journal. What has become clear throughout this process is that the task of fully reviving a journal is much more difficult than one initially anticipates. But nonetheless, the long meetings, the outreach, the seemingly unavailing tasks, and the many challenges along the way have finally paid off. We are proud to have gathered a team of enthusiastic board members and to have collaborated with researchers across the country to at last produce this new edition.

Since the publication of our last edition, new advances in technology have radically shaped pedagogy and research in the university. Of course, I’m speaking of artificial intelligence (AI). Many have been quick to denounce these advances, proclaiming AI to be the death of intellectual thought and rigour itself. There is obviously no denying the low effort results it is capable of producing, the nonsensical ‘slop’ it regurgitates, and its frequent creation of false citations. Yet, AI is here to stay, and it will only advance to higher degrees of efficiency with time. The total rejection of AI technology is interesting, as we have seen many cases of technological scepticism in the past. One could even say it is in a sense reminiscent of the Luddite movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with mass resentment of machinery advances in the textile industry leading to organized destruction of these machines by workers. Of course, there is no physically putting a

sledgehammer to AI technology, but the Luddite spirit is nonetheless present in much of society's perceptions of AI. But considering the inevitability of AI, should this then not be a task of both established and upcoming scholars on how one can effectively utilize these technological advances? A question I would like to pose to readers is "how exactly AI can be utilized not to diminish academic inquiry as it has often been framed, but as a tool to enhance it?"

This is a challenge we at *Mapping Politics* have been grappling with. The AI question did not organically arise from anyone working directly with the journal, but rather through one of our reviewers that noted possible plagiarism regarding a submission. We at *Mapping Politics*, then, did not confront AI, but it indiscriminately confronted us through the nature of the context we live. A policy on AI was then agreed to be necessary, as we felt that confronting the real threat of technologically beamed plagiarism was necessary for the integrity of our journal, yet we also acknowledged its potential in aiding research and organization. Our AI policy is inspired by the pedagogy of Dr. Sarah Martin, encouraging its use with stated declarations on how it aided with the research process. AI is then a tool to be cited and elaborated on, a policy which respects advances in technology while limiting its potential of bastardizing the beauty of an author's voice and perspective in research.

That being said, we would like to thank the dozens of people who were interested in submitting their work for this edition and presenting their academic contributions to a larger audience. We also thank the selected authors for taking the time to revise their work upon receiving comments from our reviewers. Academic critique and revision may be the most difficult part of the research process, so we appreciate all for taking the time.

There are many people I would like to personally extend gratitude to. First, thank you to all editorial board members who volunteered any amount of time to create this new publication. I also thank the dozens of authors who submitted their work for this publication. Even if we did not go forward with your paper, simply submitting your work for review proves that you have something to say. And to those accepted, thank you for baring through our peer review process and for your patience in waiting for the official launch. I also extend thanks to all of our reviewers (students and professors) for lending us your expertise, wisdom, and time in ensuring contributions met the necessary academic standards. Without you, it would be dishonest to even call this an academic journal at all! I would like to especially thank Dr. Dimitrios Panagos, our volunteer faculty supervisor, for aiding us throughout this process. Organizing an academic

journal is no easy feat (especially on a volunteer basis) and it was Dr. Panagos who provided us the necessary guidance to see this through. And finally, thank you! If you are reading this that means you have at least an ounce of interest in *Mapping Politics*, which means we have succeeded in our goal of bringing junior scholarship to a broader audience!

Warm regards,  
Nathan Gillingham  
Editor

## **About the Journal**

*Mapping Politics*, a student-led journal, is hosted by the Department of Political Science at Memorial University in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. We currently accept submissions in all areas of political science and related fields from junior scholars across Canada.

## **Editor**

Nathan Gillingham is a final-year Bachelor of Arts (Hons) student and Public Policy Diploma candidate at Memorial University. An aspiring researcher and polymath, Nathan is passionate about all subjects in the humanities and social sciences, mainly from a Marxist lens. His main research interests include political economy, urban theory, and the histories of modernity. In his spare time, he enjoys writing and playing tennis.

## **Editorial Board**

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# **Ontological Disparities in Crown-Indigenous Mediations: A Coxian Analysis of the Elsipogtog-SWN Crisis**

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## **Abstract**

Amidst the complexities of Crown-Indigenous relations in 'Canada', there persists a palpable difficulty in embracing a critical stance in meditative practices (Hansen, 2019). Through the lens of Coxian critical theory (CCT), the paper contends that the assertions of sovereignty by settlers, especially perceptible in the context of the Elsipogtog-SWN crisis in New Brunswick, stem from entrenched normative ontologies rather than a positivist universalism. This assertion is substantiated through a systematic deconstruction of Crown-Indigenous mediation, advocating for a comprehensive, self-critical perspective that maintains an acute awareness of its ontological presuppositions. In the Elsipogtog-SWN crisis, the settler perspective reveals a disconnect with the intrinsic Mi'kmaq ontology, often overlooking its depth and significance. Indeed, the Mi'kmaq's unconventional resistance strategies are not acts of legal infidelity, but deliberate rejections of settler sovereignty predicated on challenges towards state-centric ideologies, social contract theories, and Weberian sovereignty. For effective future negotiations between the Canadian Crown and Indigenous nations, it is crucial to acknowledge and critically engage with these ontological and epistemological disparities between involved parties exemplified by such crisis.

## **Empirical and Theoretical Context**

Robert Cox, among other critical theorists, presents a meta-analysis of political theory. Within this context, Cox articulates that theoretical constructs, evident in the settler-colonial, liberal paradigm, are fundamentally grounded in normative ontological and epistemological assumptions. Such theoretical prescriptions invariably "serve someone for some purpose" (Cox, 1981, p.128). Notably, the prevailing settler-colonial paradigm reinforces an epistemological orientation that has normativized and internalized colonial forms of knowledge.

Epistemologically, within this schema, alternative knowledge systems are not perceived within their intrinsic ontological contexts but are contrasted based on their divergence from the "standardized [settler] norm" (Alcoff, 2013, p.205). Thus, in this epistemological framework shaped by settler perspectives, knowledge(s) emerging from settler contexts are imbued with semantic attributes of empiricism and objectivity. Conversely, Indigenous knowledge(s) tend to be semantically linked with notions of tradition and folklore, reflecting a differential valuation (Wilmer, 1996). Absolutely, this assertion is not novel and has been advanced by several Indigenous scholars specializing in settler-colonial studies, such as Audra Simpson. Simpson argues that the mere incorporation of Indigenous knowledge(s) into a settler, state-centric paradigm, as advocated by Nancy Fraser in her proposal that marginalized groups ought to pursue recognition (Simpson, 2014), serves only to perpetuate the peripheralization of Indigenous knowledge(s).

However, the present article, targeting settler policymakers, addresses this marginalization through the lens of Robert Cox's theoretical framework. This approach is not only strategically chosen for its accessibility to the intended audience but also because Cox's theoretical demarcation of *problem-solving theories*<sup>1</sup> aptly encapsulates the existing settler-colonial epistemology across 'Canada.' These theories, according to Cox, masquerade as positivist yet are underpinned by specific normative assumptions that facilitate the production and reproduction of certain power dynamics. Acknowledging this, the author admits to potential theoretical oversights in utilizing Coxian Critical Theory (CCT) as the principal framework for deconstructing settler ontological paradigms regarding the Elsipogtog-SWN Crisis. This concession indicates an awareness of the limitations and theoretical biases inherent in adopting any single theoretical lens, particularly one rooted squarely within a tradition of settler-academia when addressing complex and deeply rooted epistemological structures in settler-colonial contexts.

Nonetheless, anchored in CCT, this article aims to demystify the inherent normativity of settler ontologies, especially in the context of understanding the Elsipogtog-SWN crisis in New

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Cox described 'problem-solving theories' as theories that take the world as it is and address issues within this context, often supporting existing social and political structures rather than challenging them.

Brunswick, Canada. Specifically, it posits that settler assertions of sovereignty in relation to the Elsipogtog-SWN crisis are profoundly influenced by normative ontologies encompassing (1) state-centricity, (2) Lockean social contract theory, and (3) Weberian notions of sovereignty. Consequently, this manuscript fervently advocates that future negotiations between the Crown and Indigenous parties consciously integrate the epistemological frameworks of the affected Indigenous entities. It is pivotal that these frameworks are not merely assessed based on their divergence from settler epistemological normativity during mediation processes, but are rather recognized and respected as legitimate and valuable within their own epistemic faultlines.

As previously indicated, it's essential to recognize that the critical examination of theoretical assumptions should not be solely attributed to Robert Cox or any other contemporary settler critical theorist. Beyond Audra Simpson's argument, which highlights the reinforcement of the marginalization of Indigenous knowledge(s) through their mere inclusion in the dominant settler episteme and advocates for a *politics of refusal*<sup>2</sup>—rejecting the authority of the settler epistemic core to define the interpretation of Indigenous knowledge(s) and dictate Indigenous peoples' conduct (Simpson, 2014)—Indigenous epistemologies, particularly those originating from southern Turtle Island (2018, Robinson), have distinctively emphasized *pluriversality*.<sup>3</sup> This involves challenging overarching narratives and the necessity of scrutinizing normative biases, as discussed by Alimant & Demuro (2020). These perspectives underscore a contrast to the settler-centric epistemological approaches, advocating for a more diverse and inclusive understanding of knowledge systems while still displacing, or *de-linking*<sup>4</sup> the centrality of settler-knowledge(s) (Mignolo, 2007).

Nonetheless, as stated prior, due to my grounding in a colonial academic tradition and this document's intention to communicate to settler policy-makers via a framework accessible to them, this document, reluctantly, will fall back on CCT as the primary lens through which I

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<sup>2</sup> Audra Simpson's concept of refusal refers to the deliberate act of Indigenous peoples rejecting the oppressive and colonial frameworks imposed on them, asserting their own sovereignty and agency.

<sup>3</sup> Pluriversality is the concept that multiple, diverse worlds and ways of being coexist and interact in complex and non-hierarchical relationships.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Mignolo, in discussing "delinking," refers to the process of decolonizing knowledge and power structures by disconnecting from Western-centric ways of thinking and engaging with alternative, often Indigenous and marginalized, epistemologies and worldviews.

deconstruct the settler paradigm's interpretation of the Elsipogtog-SWN crisis. That said, upon this deconstruction, the article will draw upon relevant Elsipogtog-Mi'kmaq phenomenological insights to inform the reconstruction of the narrative in the subsequent section. Indeed, this document particularly seeks to re-envision notions of sovereignty within the Elsipogtog-SWN crisis by placing at its core the Mi'kmaq ontological perspectives on water as a dominant narrative and in doing so, hopes to establish a new paradigm by which Crown-Indigenous relations can be explored through moving forward.

Further, for the purposes of this document, the Elsipogtog-SWN crisis refers specifically to the situation by which the Elsipogtog First Nation, located in New Brunswick, Canada, opposed the shale gas exploration being carried out by the energy company SWN Resources. The community's concerns revolved around the potential environmental impacts of hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, and the lack of adequate consultation with the Indigenous peoples whose traditional territories would be directly impacted. Protests and blockades were established to halt SWN's seismic testing, leading to heightened tensions and eventual violent clashes with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) in October 2013 (Forestor, 2020). This document endeavors to elucidate the crisis by juxtaposing two distinct ontological and epistemological paradigms. To ensure the author's inherent ontological biases do not influence the depiction of the event, no further attempts will be made to describe the crisis in a 'non-value-latent' manner, beyond such context already provided.

## **Part 1. Settler Narrational Deconstruction**

### **Ontological Assumption 1: Weberian Sovereignty:**

The settler paradigm secures its authority and asserts its sovereignty by reinforcing settler interpretations of Weberian sovereignty, especially in terms of sovereignty's relationship to violence (Brett, Xidias & McClean, 2017). While the common interpretation of Weberian sovereignty suggests that it pertains to the entity which maintains a "monopoly of legitimate physical violence" (Weber, 1965, p34), a more accurate interpretation is that it concerns the entity which controls the delegation of such a monopoly (Gilmore, 2022). Based on this nuanced

understanding, neither individual police officers nor the overarching police establishment hold Weberian sovereignty. Instead, they are delegated the power to exercise violence by foundational ideologies, such as the continuous enterprise of settler-colonialism (Cassidy & Dale, 1988), paired with its ontological emphasis on commodified land ownership (Polanyi, 2001). This dynamic becomes particularly evident in the resource-extraction debates central to the Mi'kmaq-SWN dispute (Galloway & Taber, 2013). From a Weberian standpoint, settler-colonialism arrogates to itself the role of sovereign through its entrustment of violent power to ancillary entities like the RCMP.

Indeed, in the depiction of the Elsipogtog-SWN crisis by settler media, there are often subtle suggestions of police violence. However, this violence, being state-sanctioned, tends to be met with a more detached narrative, frequently cloaked in euphemisms like police “action” or neutral terms such as a “melee.” This language abstracts from any sense of willfulness or political agency from the officers involved (Galloway & Taber, 2013, p1). Yet, it is within the framework of the Weberian sovereignty debate that the charges against land defenders reveal their full implications. Notably, the allegations of “weapons infractions” – frequently mentioned in media as justification for an escalated police response (Galloway & Taber, 2013, p1) – imply that the mere possibility of violence from Indigenous people(s), merely due to their being armed, is seen as a valid reason for actual police aggression. This framing inherently reflects a conventional Weberian view of sovereignty wherein the *potential* violent threat posed by Indigenous armament is depicted as inherently inferior to the *actuality* of state-sanctioned police force. Given the contentious nature of ‘legitimacy’ in Weberian sovereignty (Rube, 2010, p167), it is clear that Weberian definitions of sovereignty—as the authoritative entity bestowing the monopoly of violence—remain equally contentious. As such, this interpretation ought to be critically examined by New Brunswick's settler commentators.

### **Ontological Assumption 2: Lockean Social-Contract Theory:**

The settler paradigm's fealty to settler-colonial interpretations of Lockean social contract theory is prominently displayed in settler accounts of the Elsipogtog crisis. For instance, within this framework, a clear jurisdictional dichotomy is drawn between on-reserve and off-reserve

areas, with explicit mention that the confrontation transpired off-reserve (Gordon, 2013). By emphasizing this distinction, the settler narrative establishes legal fidelity to treaties while concurrently maintaining settler-colonial claims of off-reserve legitimacy—neglecting to acknowledge the colonial mechanisms that presuppose and even enforced the creation of these treaties as well as the Indigenous actors excluded from the establishment of such social contract (Simpson, 2017).

Contextualized, the settler-colonial interpretation of Lockean social contract theory posits that an implicit agreement or ‘social contract’ with a sovereign entity is crucial for the collective safety of a nation (Oakeshott, 2017). Under this framework, acts of civil disobedience mandate moral defense, whereas legal fidelity is ontologically naturalized and demands no such justification (Lyons, 1998). This allocation of moral expectation—exempting legal adherence but burdening civil disobedience—effectively solidifies settler-colonial claims to sovereignty. Such an ontological stance is both mirrored and perpetuated in settler portrayals of the Elsipogtog crisis. These accounts often dysphemize land-defenders as ‘protestors’, insinuating that they carry an inherent burden of moral validation. Indeed, such naturalization of settler social-contract normativity positions land-defenders as reactionary, while state entities like the RCMP, in merely executing their duties and showing fidelity to law, require no such justification (Galloway & Taber, 2013, p1).

Despite the settler paradigm's efforts to cloud understanding, when viewed through a historical-materialist lens, it becomes evident that an authentic, uncoerced Indigenous participation in shaping the social contract is virtually absent, given the settlers' non-consensual occupation of Indigenous territories. The supposed authenticity of this 'social contract' is based on a "ruse of consent" that conceals its true colonial, historical-materialist origins (Simpson, 2017, p19). Indeed, when this context—of a social contract birthed from coercion and violence—is acknowledged, it essentially nullifies any obligation Indigenous peoples might have towards such a contract as per even the parameters of Lockean social contract theory (Locke, 2015).

This settler-driven strategy of coercion, coupled with the ensuing attempt to veil its origins in order to legitimize the continuous colonial endeavor, is also recognized by non-

Indigenous critical theorists. For instance, the Marxian interpretation asserts that colonizers do not possess rightful claims to the surplus value generated in 'the new world'. This stance arises from the understanding that the initial capital, which is a prerequisite for such surpluses, was originally appropriated through primitive accumulation (Marx, 1996). This acquisition was later rationalized using a colonial fabrication of the social contract (Polanyi, 2001). Indigenous scholar Steve Talbot fortifies this viewpoint, noting that the “westward expansion across Indian lands, had its origin in... the interest of colonial powers' ruling elites and for the purpose of generating capital” (Talbot, 1981, p120).

Given these perspectives, Talbot and Marx's assertions starkly challenge the settler narrative, which dictates that Mi'kmaq peoples should recognize and respect 'off-reserve' boundaries (Galloway & Taber, 2013, p1). This is because such demarcations were established through a camouflaged scheme of consent, which sought primarily to exploit Indigenous communities for capital accumulation.

### **Ontological Assumption 3: State-Centrism:**

It is imperative to highlight and deconstruct the settler paradigm's embrace of a settler-colonial state-centric worldview, which underpins their assertions of sovereignty, especially in relation to the Elsipogtog-SWN crisis. Clear markers of this embrace surface in settler media's frequent citations of structures and entities whose authority stems from the Canadian 'state'. These references include federal injunctions (Galloway & Taber, 2013), the legitimacy of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) (Forester, 2020, p1), and the use of colonial geographical terminology such as 'Canada' that furthers settler nation-building agendas (Cardinal, 2005). While the term "Canada" finds its roots in the language of the Huron-Iroquois (Vowell, 2016), such an etymological heritage holds little relevance in Mi'kmaq territories (Gloade, 2021). Moreover, the inherent state-centricity is arguably most vividly epitomized in the byline of one settler article's writer, described as a “parliamentary reporter” (Galloway & Taber, 2013, p1). This title in itself draws legitimacy from an epistemological foundation that privileges those armed with parliamentary knowledge(s) (Alcoff, 2013, p205), effectively

crafting an arguably undue appeal to authority rooted in settler-epistemic biases and invoking what can only be regarded as “the ego-politics of knowledge(s)” (Grosfoguel, 2008. p4).

Still, within the realm of settler-political ontology, especially as it is framed in the discipline of international relations (IR), there is an often uncritical gravitation towards state-centrism (Waltz, 2010). Interestingly, this steadfast adherence to state-centric viewpoints can, at times, unintentionally advance narratives of Indigenous liberation. A notable example is the significant oversight by settler International Relations (IR) scholars in predicting the rise of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN). This oversight originated from a theoretical blind spot that overlooked the possible influence of non-state actors, consequently enabling the EZLN to elude the biopolitical apparatus of power that might have otherwise constrained them (Enloe, 1996). Nonetheless, in scrutinizing this document's investigation of the Elsipogtog-SWN crisis as a case study, the focus shifts to a specific settler-authored article. This article, underpinned by the author's self-asserted authority, gains legitimacy through a dominant state-centric perspective. This viewpoint bestows a kind of sociological legitimacy upon the author's credentials, presenting them as in sync with what is perceived as objective truth. This occurs within a privileged point of epistemic dominance, the rejection of which is sometimes referred to by decolonial scholars as *punto cero*, or *point zero*<sup>5</sup> (Castro-Gomez, 2003). In this sense, the epistemic privilege endowed onto settler knowledge(s) stands in stark contrast to Indigenous epistemologies, which inherently challenge and operate outside state-centric norms (Vowel, 2016), and thus are frequently marginalized or overlooked in mainstream epistemic discourse.

## **Part 2. Narrational Reconstruction**

While the initial portion of this document utilized critical theory to scrutinize and disassemble a multitude of settler-based ontological and epistemological assumptions prevalent in the reporting of the Elsipogtog-SWN crisis, this subsequent segment endeavors to facilitate a

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<sup>5</sup> "Punto Cero" or "Point Zero," as referred to by decolonial scholars, is a conceptual framework for understanding and reconstructing knowledge from a place uncolonized by Western influences, essentially starting from a ground zero to rebuild and reorient knowledge systems.

narrative reconstruction rooted in Mi'kmaq worldviews and epistemologies. This reconstructive exercise aspires to enhance the ontological comprehension of future crown mediators, ensuring they are more attuned to the foundational normative presumptions steering Crown-Mi'kmaq dialogues.

Indeed, the Mi'kmaq worldview is elucidated through this document's trifold approach: by delving into Mi'kmaq mythos, which serves as an epistemological conduit for disseminating knowledge(s); by examining established cultural norms; and by assessing direct, phenomenological Mi'kmaq reactions to the Elsipogtog-SWN standoff. This narrative reconstruction culminates in embracing three ontological stances, each in contention with the previously dissected settler-oriented assumptions presented in the earlier deconstructive phase. These freshly imbibed Mi'kmaq stances encapsulate: the meta-narrative stature of water as foundational to life; the conception of water as a meta-narrative that delineates the passage of time; and the assertion of distinct Mi'kmaq sovereignty claims that inherently legitimize unconventional, albeit principled, strategies of resistance.

Regarding the inaugural two ontological standpoints, this exposition posits that should the Mi'kmaq perceive water as a paramount narrative underpinning both life and time, then any extractivist threats posed by settler initiatives against water consequently pose existential threats to both life and the Mi'kmaq understanding of temporality.

### **Determining Reconstruction Methodology**

As highlighted in the earlier sections of the document, numerous Indigenous knowledge systems align with the postmodernist critical approach of rejecting overarching meta-narratives. These Indigenous perspectives engage in a practice of pluriversality which aims to de-emphasize the primacy of settler knowledge(s) within the prevailing episteme. At the same time, this approach retains and engages with these settler knowledge systems, but on an equal footing (Alimant & Demuro, 2020). This concept aligns with what Walter D. Mignolo describes as “border thinking—or border epistemology,” (Mignolo, 2000. p121) which involves navigating and challenging the boundaries of conventional knowledge systems. This approach is perhaps best

explored via the EZLN attempt to construct “a world in which many world fit,” (Shenker, 2012) or Anishiaanbeg legal scholar Aaron Mills’ assertion that Anishinaabeg jurisprudence seeks to reject any universal metanarrative in seeking “kinship across worlds” (Mills, 2021).

Still, many Indigenous scholars rebuff postmodernism's holistic rejection of meta-narratives, including Anishaanebg and Mesoamerican projects of pluriversality. This latter approach, known as 'refusal,' as contrasted with 'pluriversalism,' specifically targets and rejects certain settler meta-narratives, and replaces them with their own Indigenous meta-narratives rather than challenging all meta-narratives broadly (Wilmer, 1996). This 'refusal' is a deliberate stance that confronts and disengages from particular dominant narratives propagated within settler colonial frameworks, distinguishing itself from 'pluriversalism,' which seeks to include a multitude of narratives and worldviews. Instead, such an approach advocates the substitution of settler meta-narratives with Indigenous meta-narratives as per Mi'kmaq knowledge(s) which subscribe to the latter approach (Premo, 2017).

Following, the Mi'kmaq understand water itself to serve as a meta-narrative in the sense that water serves as an ontological presupposition to both life and time. In an attempt to refrain from PanIndigenization (Starblanket & Stark, 2019) and to best situate this research within a New Brunswick context, the phenomenological ontologies of Elsipogtog derived Mi'kmaq people(s) will be prioritized in informing the subsequent re-construction of this article's narrative. Thus, narrational reconstruction will abandon this document's former section's used methodology of meta-ontological scrutiny and instead posit a narrative constructed directly from Mi'kmaq ontologies/epistemologies. Concurrently, phenomenological experiences within the nation are also non-monolithic (Glode, 2021). Therefore, paramount to this reconstruction is the inclusion of multitudinous experiences.

### ***Mi'kmaq Ontologies of Water Presupposing Life:***

Talbot (1981) argues that settler ontologies primarily function to promote economic expansion. In contrast, Glode (2021) posits that the Mi'kmaq's historical-material perspective emphasizes an environmental-centric ontology with regard to resource tenure. This distinction can be analogized with how water serves as a central meta-narrative within the Mi'kmaq

ideology, underpinning concepts of life and time, similar to how settler-economic expansion informs settler ontologies.

The Mi'kmaq's emphasis on narratives as sources of knowledge starkly differs from the empirical standards typically endorsed by settler epistemologies (Benwah, 2005). By authentically embracing Mi'kmaq narrative-based epistemological practices within their unique ontological context, rather than merely juxtaposing them against settler epistemologies, we gain insights into the profound ontological significance of water as foundational to life. Such insights pave the way for productive dialogues between Mi'kmaq and New Brunswick stakeholders. This ontological perspective within the Mi'kmaq worldview is exemplified in narratives that personify water, drawing parallels to motherhood. As described by Premo (2017), one narrative from an Elsipogtog woman highlights how water sustains life, drawing parallels to the nurturing and life-affirming role of mothers. Brown (2018, p.104) further provides an illustrative account of a character who perceives herself intrinsically connected to water, portraying her as a woman deeply rooted in the river.

The myths and narratives from the Mi'kmaq tradition underscore an ontological tension at the heart of the Mi'kmaq-SWN dispute. This tension can be framed as a dialectic-contradiction between a water-centric ontology and an economic-driven, extractivist ontology (Howe & López, 2017). The root of this conflict lies in how SWN fracking poses direct threats to the Mi'kmaq's access to potable water. Given that the Mi'kmaq narratives inherently treat water as foundational to life, any danger to these water sources is perceived as a danger to life itself (Howe & López, 2017). These narratives amplify the gravity of settler-driven extraction activities and consequent water degradation, as, in the Mi'kmaq ontology, water isn't an isolated element but rather an integral prerequisite to the essence of life.

Moreover, this deep-seated view of water challenges settler distinctions between 'off-reserve' and 'on-reserve' demarcations (Galloway & Taber, 2013, p.1). Even assuming that these boundaries were instituted with benign intentions, which historical evidence like Talbot (1981) suggests they were not, degradation of water in off-reserve areas still has repercussions for on-reserve ecological systems as the water cycle does not abide to normatively imposed, settler

borders. Hence, the quality and health of water systems directly influence environmental patterns, which subsequently shape Mi'kmaq existence, regardless of imposed colonial borders.

Additionally, even when analyzed through the lens of Lockean social contract theory—which significantly influences the settler paradigm in justifying its sovereignty—there appears to be a profound inconsistency. John Locke asserts, following the liberal social contract tradition, that fidelity to a sovereign is warranted only as long as that sovereign ensures the maximization of individual self-preservation (Locke, 2015). However, given that SWN's extractive activities compromise the water quality, which is foundational to life as per Mi'kmaq ontologies that view water as a central narrative, it can be inferred that the sovereign is not upholding its end of the social-contract concerning the maximization of Mi'kmaq people(s) self-preservation. Thus, even from the perspective of settler-influenced social contract theory, the social contract appears to be nullified in this context.

### **Mi'kmaq Ontologies of Water Presupposing Time:**

Steve Talbot's elucidation of settler-driven economic expansionism reveals an underlying ontology in which time is envisioned as a teleological, linear progression (Talbot, 1981). Such a linear view of time is frequently affirmed by individuals predominantly raised within a settler-centric worldview (Hammond, 2019) following industrial capital's "need of a constantly expanding market" (Marx, 1848). However, diverging from this settler notion of time, which is predominantly linear and unidirectional (Higgins, 2000), the Mi'kmaq perceive time as cyclical and deeply intertwined with environmental contexts (Gloade, 2021). Moreover, within the Mi'kmaq ontology, water's central narrative significance not only underscores conceptions of life but also shapes the abstract comprehension of time.

Indeed, historical-materialist perspectives contend that societies' abstract categorizations, including those of time, are fundamentally shaped by their prevailing material conditions (Marx, 1981). For instance, settler ontologies, with their linear, expansionist view of time, are underpinned by material imperatives focused on unidirectional economic progress, giving rise to a dominant historical narrative that is inherently teleological (Talbot, 1981). In contrast,

Mi'kmaq ontologies, informed by recurrent environmental patterns, posit a cyclical understanding of time, reflecting the repetitive nature of their material existence (Gloade, 2021).

The Mi'kmaq's non-teleological and environmentally-anchored ontology of time is deeply embedded in numerous aspects of their epistemological framework, and this is especially evident in their cultural tools for time measurement. One of the most salient examples is the Mi'kmaq calendar, which is structured around recurring environmental events. For instance, the month roughly corresponding to January is named "Punamujuikús," reflecting the period of cod spawning, while the month aligned with March is termed "Seiwkewikús," symbolizing the time when maple sap flows (Gloade, 2021, p.3). It's worth noting that all the environmental events that guide this calendar are intrinsically linked to water, further solidifying its position as an overarching meta-narrative in the Mi'kmaq ontology. Events such as cod spawning and the flow of maple sap are inherently tethered to the repetitive patterns of the water cycle. In this regard, water doesn't merely have a passive or symbolic role; it actively shapes the Mi'kmaq's temporal perceptions.

Given that the Mi'kmaq's understanding of time is inextricably connected to cyclical environmental events, and considering the paramount importance of water in orchestrating these events, any degradation of water sources poses a profound existential threat to the Mi'kmaq. Beyond the immediate physical implications, such degradation fundamentally disrupts the Mi'kmaq's very conception of time.

*Rephrased, this argument follows the following premises:*

1. Extractivist, settler fracking threatens water's health/mobility.
2. Water informs environmental phenomena.
3. Environmental phenomena inform the Mi'kmaq calendar.
4. Mi'kmaq calendar informs Mi'kmaq ontology of time.

*Ergo*, SWN's extractivist threats to water quality are equally understood as threats to Mi'kmaq conceptualizations of time.

The Mi'kmaq's emphasis on the cyclicity of time is profoundly embodied in their deliberate choice of a twelve-year-old to serve as the fire keeper, positioned at the forefront of blockades resisting RCMP intrusion (Premo, 2017). By placing a young individual at the center of their water-defense, the Mi'kmaq underscore the enduring and trans-generational importance of water as foundational to both life and the passage of time (Premo, 2017). This action symbolically intertwines water's role in shaping time with its centrality to the sustenance of life. The chosen youth's existence has been made possible through the sustenance provided by water, and so too will the existence of future generations hinge upon its continued availability (Premo, 2017). This arrangement illuminates a nuanced ontological triad connecting water, life, and time. While water underpins both life and time, these two entities concurrently interact with and reshape each other. The intricate dynamics of this relationship become clearer when one divests from the settler-centric viewpoint that sees nature adopt the commodity-form. Indeed, in adopting a Mi'kmaq ontology, the environmental events that guide their temporal measurements are, in essence, manifestations of life's intricate processes (Gloade, 2021).

### **Tactics Of Disobedience and Competing Ontologies Of Sovereignty:**

In the specific case of the Elsipogtog-SWN conflict, certain Mi'kmaq people(s) rejected the idea of engaging in extractivist reform, favoring extractivist abolitionism. This decision is a direct counter to the ingrained assumptions of settler state legitimacy. The narrative presented by settlers portrays these land defenders as mere 'protesters,' suggesting their disregard for the rule of law (Forester, 2020, p1) and a reluctance to discuss fracking within a democratic marketplace of ideas (Mill, 1998). However, the Mi'kmaq's actions, which might be perceived as contravening the law, are strategic rhetorical moves intended to question the very foundation of colonial law (Premo, 2017). Fundamentally, resolving the conflict through colonial judicial avenues would inadvertently affirm the supremacy of such colonial frameworks (Maynard, 2020). It's important to recognize that the concept of sovereignty is understood differently among various Indigenous peoples even within an intra-national context. For instance, Anishinaabeg legal scholar Alfred Taiaiake has argued that since Indigenous peoples had no notion of

sovereignty prior to contact with settlers, striving for 'sovereignty' should not be the central aim of Indigenous emancipation efforts (2006). In contrast, other Anishinaabeg jurists such as John Burrows (2004) and Leo Baskatawang (2023) suggest that the concept of 'sovereignty' as defined in settler jurisprudence could potentially be adapted to an Indigenous context, with the presumption of Indigenous emancipation. These varying perspectives highlight the complexity and diversity within Indigenous communities regarding the pursuit and definition of sovereignty.

Still, notwithstanding these varying approaches, the Mi'kmaq strategy did not encompass a complete rejection of the concept of sovereignty, as this would effectively default sovereignty to the settler-state. Nor did they aim to achieve sovereignty through the existing settler judicial system, which could be interpreted, in the vein of Jürgen Habermas, as an "othered plea for inclusion" (1998). This stance implies a nuanced approach to sovereignty, one that neither fully embraces nor entirely discards the concept, but rather navigates a path that acknowledges the complexities and limitations of both outright rejection and complete assimilation into settler-defined frameworks of sovereignty. In this context, the Mi'kmaq's avoidance of discursive mediation with the crown does not indicate an absence of civility. Instead, their reluctance to engage in discussions about SWN's water policies underscores the non-negotiable nature of water-related issues and Indigenous understandings of life and time (Tawinikay, 2020) again echoing what Audra Simpson might regard to be a strategy of refusal (Simpson, 2024). This strategy of discursive avoidance, or, politics of refusal, echoes the stance of pre-civil war abolitionists who chose not to debate against non-abolitionists, fearing it might suggest the negotiability of the freedom and humanity of black individuals (Douglass, 2019). Hence, this refusal to dialogue challenges the colonial, liberal approach's emphasis on a democratic exchange of ideas, especially since this approach mistakenly presupposes a level platform for idea exchange (Simpson, 2017). In this context, akin to how some abolitionists worried that engaging in discourse might inadvertently imply that their humanity as Black individuals was a topic open to debate, if the Mi'kmaq were to engage in discussion with the settler-state, it could unintentionally reinforce the notion that water preservation, and the underlying concepts they hold about time, are subjects for debate.

Moreover, while settler interpretations of the conflict might be shaped by a Weberian view of sovereignty, which legitimizes the actions of the RCMP based on their adherence to established laws, the intentional targeting and subsequent arson of police vehicles fundamentally challenges this concept of Weberian sovereignty. Accepting Weber's premise that sovereignty is defined by the exclusive right to use legitimate violence, and recognizing the RCMP as enforcers of colonial interests on behalf of the crown, any undermining of the RCMP's ability to exert such violence inherently calls into question the crown's sovereign authority. This is because it's the crown that has endowed the RCMP with their role. In a parallel manner, acts of sabotage against SWN's 'thumper trucks' can be interpreted as direct opposition to SWN's perceived environmental violence (Premo, 2017). Thus, if the crown supports SWN's operations, its own authority is similarly challenged when SWN's capability to carry out these operations is impeded and thus, the crown's ability to exercise its supposed 'monopoly of violence' onto the environment is challenged. Indeed, contrary to the dominant settler narrative that might paint these acts as unruly reactions devoid of moral grounding (Lyons, 1998), they can be understood as strategic maneuvers aimed at challenging the perceived legitimacy of the crown's distribution of violent authority to both the RCMP and SWN, consistent with Weberian principles of sovereignty. This critique implicitly questions the foundational sovereignty of the crown itself, particularly when its legitimacy is framed within the confines of its ability to delegate the role of enforcing its supposed 'legitimate monopoly on violence' to entities like the RCMP and SWN.

Additionally, the Mi'kmaq strategy of targeting tangible symbols of settler-claimed legitimacy draws parallels to afro-abolitionist methods, which deployed property damage to underscore the integral role of slavery in generating the wealth embodied in such property (Jones & Segal, 2019). To contextualize, given that modern American wealth is presupposed by slave labor, targeting this accumulated wealth via property damage is more than reactionary retaliation. It acts as a profound reminder to those benefiting from these assets that descendants of slaves recognize the historical processes that have led to the creation of such wealth. Through this act of property damage, they signal an intent to reassert control over their ancestors' labor-power embedded within said property, effectively symbolizing the reclaiming of surplus value derived from their ancestors' toil (Jones & Segal, 2019). Analogously, when Mi'kmaq activists disrupt fracking operations, especially through direct sabotage of SWN's thumper trucks, they're doing

more than just objecting to present-day practices. They're both undermining the crown's perceived right to exploit the land and, at a deeper level, challenging the very existence of these trucks as a form of capital, suggesting that their existence is predicated on stolen resources. This line of reasoning aligns with Steve Talbot's theory of primitive accumulation, which posits that current capital structures are grounded in the surpluses originally derived from appropriated resources and labor, a concept Marxists refer to as 'original capital' (Talbot, 1981) and remains ongoing via the contemporary proliferation of the settler-colonial project (Coulthard, 2014). Consequently, Indigenous communities can be seen as having a legitimate claim to SWN's assets, like the thumper trucks, given the argument that the foundational capital from which such assets have sprung was initially pilfered (Talbot, 1981).

### **Conclusion**

In essence, the Mi'kmaq-SWN conflict transcends mere territorial disputes. While the Mi'kmaq remain acutely conscious of the issue of consent, emphasized by their vocal declarations to the RCMP that "this is not [their] land" (Premo, 2017), the crux of the matter dives deep into clashing worldviews. For the Mi'kmaq, water isn't just a physical entity but a profound narrative underpinning their understanding of life and time. Therefore, endangering water quality is perceived not just as an environmental hazard but a profound existential threat.

In relation to the Elsipogtog-SWN crisis, the settler perspective seems unable or unwilling to recognize and respect this deep-seated Mi'kmaq ontology. Furthermore, unconventional resistance strategies employed by the Mi'kmaq, be it refusing dialogue, sabotaging fracking operations, or setting RCMP vehicles aflame, aren't haphazard acts of defiance. They emanate from a rejection of settler sovereignty assertions grounded in state-centric ideologies, social contract theories, and Weberian sovereignty. Each act of what might be termed as principled disobedience confronts and challenges these foundational settler beliefs. Indeed, in light of these findings, it's imperative for future negotiations, whether in the context of New Brunswick and the Mi'kmaq or more broadly between the Crown and Indigenous groups, to introspectively recognize and critically engage with these deep-seated ontological and epistemological differences.

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# **Exploring Indigenous Legal Traditions: Perspectives, Challenges, and Opportunities in Canadian Law**

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## **Introduction**

Like any other community, Indigenous communities rely heavily on the law. Indigenous law refers to the legal system that governs Indigenous peoples. Within and across the legal system, their laws regulate relationships, control land, and resolve problems. The following paper explores Indigenous perspectives on law and its legal traditions. This paper will look at various topics, including how Indigenous law has benefited Indigenous peoples and how it has influenced Canadian law. The paper has been organized into three sections: (1) Indigenous vs. Western Perspectives/ Law and Morality, (2) Canadian Law vs. First Nations Land Claims/Crime and Punishment, (3) European Colonist's Perspectives on Indigenous Law.

## **Indigenous Vs. Western Perspectives/Law and Morality**

When it comes to Indigenous perspectives of law, it is evident that they have developed their own views and customs of behaviour that are sometimes in conflict with Western perspectives of law. Indigenous laws are different because they are closely aligned with the traditions and roots of their lands and people. The Western perspective of law focuses on both common law and civil law to guide society. The different perspectives on the law between the two became apparent in Rupert Ross's monograph *Returning to the Teachings*. Ross's comparison of Indigenous justice systems to Western justice systems revealed many of the flaws present in the Western system. In Ross's monograph, Indigenous holistic healing methods can be compared with Western perspectives regarding the law, which principally rely on punishment and incarceration, with rehabilitation being something of an afterthought. The Indigenous community focuses on the healing circle and the influence of restorative justice. They would counsel those who misbehaved

and took an approach that dealt with teaching and healing while moving away from punishment (Ross, 1996). They believe that rather than punishing criminals, the focus should be moved to teaching and healing all parties involved, with an eye on the past to understand how things came to be and an eye on the future to design policies that have the best chance of making everyone better (Ross, 1996). In contrast to Western perspectives regarding the law, they rely on punitive justice and incarceration to rehabilitate someone. However, these methods are not always the best way to rehabilitate someone because, unlike the healing and teaching methods, these individuals do not realize what they did wrong. The healing and teaching method works toward rehabilitating someone properly so that they do not go out and re-offend.

We can learn many things from indigenous perspectives regarding law and morality. However, one main thing we can learn from the Indigenous peoples is their view on hierarchy. As analyzed through many readings, the Western legal system is heavily reliant on its hierarchical systems when it comes to the law. Hierarchy is a system in which people are ranked one above the other according to status or authority. Canada's legal system primarily focuses on hierarchy since they believe it promotes uniformity and attempts to remove any arbitrariness (Borrows, 2005). Due to this, they have little room for other forms of justice, such as restorative justice.

In comparison, the Indigenous community did not believe in a hierarchical system since they knew it would lead to a power imbalance. Instead, they rely on elders or sanctioned wisdom keepers to identify and communicate law to resolve conflicts more peacefully (Borrows, 2005). By diminishing the effects of the hierarchical system, one can truly realize the difference between good and bad. Indigenous people's decision to not rely on hierarchical systems is something the Western legal system may learn; however, this would not be easy since trying to eradicate hierarchies in current society will only lead to more issues. Yet, it is something they can work on in the future. By doing this, they will be able to transform the judicial system, allowing it to be more fair and less conflicting.

## **Canadian Law Vs. First Nations Land Claims/Crime and Punishment**

Modern Canadian law does not treat First Nations fairly with respect to land claims as it ideally should. Though there have been some improvements, most situations regarding First Nations land claims still require attention. The issue regarding First Nation's land claims came to light during the Tsilhqot'in Nation v British Columbia case. This case represented an ongoing conceptual, moral, and legal struggle over their land claims, acceptance, and understanding of Indigenous legal orders in Canadian law (Harland, 2018 ). The Tsilhqot'in people have lived in an isolated region in central British Columbia for many years. They lived in villages, managed lands for root and herb foraging, hunted, and trapped animals. They repelled invaders and negotiated deals with European traders who came to trade with them. The area has always been theirs, according to the Tsilhqot'in (Tsilhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia, 2014). However, Harland points out a significant issue in this case: the way Indigenous law is treated by the Canadian judicial system. He contends that both the Canadian Supreme Court in the Tsilhqot'in decision and the trial court preceding it viewed Indigenous law mainly as evidence to be assessed within the framework of Canadian common law (Harland, 2018 ). This approach effectively positioned Indigenous law as inferior to other recognized laws. Although the trial judge considered evidence of Indigenous law, it was neither discussed nor analyzed with the same depth as Canadian law. As a result, this diminished the status of Indigenous law, revealing that it does not genuinely hold equal standing with common law, despite assertions to the contrary (Harland, 2018 ).

Transitioning from the broader issues of legal treatment, the historical context further complicates the situation. As a result of changes in Canadian treaties and legislation, Indigenous people across Canada were often compelled to give up their land in exchange for reservations and other promises. Many regions in Canada entered treaties with Indigenous populations; however, these promises were not always kept. In contrast, British Columbia had a different approach, characterized by very little treaty-making with Indigenous nations. This lack of formal agreements led to numerous Indigenous groups in BC having claims to unceded lands, which were central to the disputes in the Tsilhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia case (2014). Due to this, since the beginning of 1938, the Tsilhqot'in Nation's lands have been destroyed and invaded without their agreement and consent, resulting in various disputes in this landmark case. The

court acknowledged that Canada had stripped the community of their Aboriginal title, which "encompasses the right to exclusive use and occupation of the land held pursuant to that title for a variety of purposes (Tsilhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia, 2014)."

Not only were their lands taken from them, but in the Tsilhqot'in case, indigenous law was viewed through a common law lens. Indigenous law should not be viewed through other lenses. It should be viewed as its own entity (Harland, 2018 ). It is important to give Indigenous perspectives equal weight as other laws in society because if we want Indigenous communities to feel that justice is being done correctly, their laws must play a prominent role in the courts (Harland, 2018 ). From First Nations land claims to Indigenous law, it is evident that Canadian courts are not willing to recognize the rightful place of Indigenous law and rights in the Canadian constitutional framework (Harland, 2018 ).

Canadian law does not appropriately recognize First Nations' approaches to crime and punishment. Unlike the Canadian justice system, which primarily relies on punitive measures, First Nations emphasize healing and teaching. The Canadian perspective often dismisses these methods as an "easy" way out, failing to appreciate their complexity and effectiveness. For example, in the monograph "The Cheyenne Way," the case of Cries Yia Eya illustrates this approach. After killing their chief, Cries Yia Eya was banished from the Cheyenne camp for three years (Karl N. Llewellyn, 1941 ). During his banishment, he reflected on his actions and sought ways to atone for his wrongdoing. Upon his return, he brought gifts such as tobacco and pelts, demonstrating his remorse and willingness to make amends. The Cheyenne elders, after consulting with the victim's wife, decided that Cries Yia Eya had learned his lesson and could be reintegrated into the tribe. However, this was not a simple "come back and all is forgiven" situation. As part of his return, Cries Yia Eya was required to support the victim's wife for the rest of her life, ensuring ongoing accountability and reparation (Karl N. Llewellyn, 1941 ). From a Canadian perspective, Cries Yia Eya's banishment and subsequent return might seem lenient. However, the process involved significant community engagement and long-term obligations, highlighting the depth and effectiveness of Indigenous restorative justice systems.

The healing and teaching methods within Indigenous justice systems focus on helping the offender genuinely recognize their wrongdoing and feel guilty for their actions. It is clear from Ross's writing how much power guilt has and how it can affect a person (Ross, 1996). Both

Western and Indigenous approaches can be used depending on the crime committed. As we know, some people can not be rehabilitated, which is why we can not abandon Western perspectives on crime and punishment. Alongside this, there is also another concern present, which is that wherever holistic Indigenous healing circles are used as a means of implementing Indigenous justice, the challenge arises that not every offender will readily participate in the process. This presents a significant issue because those who do not cooperate still need to be held accountable. A community cannot allow an offender to avoid the process, especially with traditional solutions like banishment no longer available. As a result, any offender unwilling to engage with Indigenous holistic healing methods must be prosecuted in the Crown courts. This dualistic approach allows offenders a choice, offering them the option to face the Crown courts, which could result in imprisonment based on the severity of the crime. Overall, neither side is wrong when it comes to crime and punishment. It is all dependent on the severity of the actions committed; however, Indigenous people's approaches to crime and punishment will not be viewed as proper in the eyes of modern Canadian law since they do not meet the standards of societal norms and do not fit into their constitutional framework.

### **European Colonists' Perspectives on Indigenous Law**

The European colonists treated indigenous people as having no law. In their perspective, Indigenous people had no government or law and were contradicted by their practice of dealing with them through treaties and agreements (Borrows, 2005). However, Indigenous laws were set in place before this land had become Canada. In Borrow's article, it became apparent that indigenous people do indeed have laws. Indigenous laws were included in the first treaties in North America. Before the arrival of the Europeans, these treaties existed and recorded formal agreements about how the parties would relate to all aspects of their world (Borrows, 2005). In addition, when settlers arrived in what is now Canada, they found land that was occupied by Indigenous peoples not just physically but also legally. European newcomers readily recognized that Indigenous lands and cultures were ruled by legal orders, yet they ignored it (Harland, 2018 ). Nowadays, people treat indigenous laws as something new when, in actuality, their laws came first before ours. However, they are not to blame since Indigenous legal orders were once

recognized historically, but with the development of society and the hierarchical structure, they have become suppressed and silenced (Harland, 2018).

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, this paper examines the Indigenous perspectives on law. The readings demonstrate how significant Indigenous perspectives on law are and how many people are unaware of them. Many of the readings stressed the persistent divide between the Westernized and Indigenous communities. However, this separation persists because Canada's justice system is unwilling to adapt and modify its framework. The readings also pointed out how impactful Indigenous perspectives on law can be regarding certain situations. Though they are not perfect, neither is Canada's justice system. For instance, Rupert Ross's analysis of Indigenous and Western ways revealed how our systems are flawed, yet many do not recognize this since we were taught this was the correct way.

Since the beginning of time, we have continued to owe the Indigenous community in many ways. The injustices that indigenous peoples have faced in the past have left a profound wound in their identity and pride that cannot be ignored. Canada has made significant improvements in addressing the needs of the Indigenous community, yet there remains more work ahead. With continued efforts, there will be greater positive transformations that will empower Indigenous peoples to reclaim what they have lost in the near future.

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# **Brokerage Politics, Catch-all Parties, and Canada's Contemporary Political Parties**

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## **Abstract**

In Canada, we often use the term "brokerage party" colloquially to describe the two largest contemporary parties, the Conservative Party of Canada and the Liberal Party of Canada. Authors in Canadian politics have done a thorough job of determining the defining characteristics of not only "brokerage parties", but the closely related term, "catch-all parties". One of the most prominent academics in the study of party politics, Dr. R.K. Carty, made the case in 2013 that the Canadian parties have been at best catch-all parties that have used brokerage politics in their past. In this research, I go even further to analyze today's parties using a slightly modified version of Carty's definition model and suggest that they do not make very good catch-all parties either. I examine the parties via observations of party/leadership behavior, campaigning, and policies. The paper provides us with a contemporary analysis of party politics in Canada and coins two terms, "brokerage moments," a concept that better describes moments in time when political parties who do not fit the definition of a brokerage party engage in brokerage politics and the term, "quasi-catch-all party," a concept that better describes the politics of today's CPC and LPC. All of this work comes to support further research into the ever-changing nature of Canadian politics and political parties.

## **Introduction**

I have been fascinated with the current Canadian political parties and their behavior ever since I could stay up late enough to watch the election debates. In conversations among local coffee drinkers, it is often said, "If the Liberals are elected, give it a couple of elections and when we're tired of them, we'll elect the Conservatives." There exists this fascinating notion that the two largest political parties in Canada routinely exchange power,

with only two exceptions to this occurring in the 21st century (The 2000 Federal Election saw the Canadian Reform Conservative Alliance take the opposition to the Liberal majority government and the 2011 Federal Election saw the NDP *take* control of the opposition to a CPC majority government). Election after election, the Liberal Party of Canada, which has long been considered the nation's “natural governing party”, either governs or opposes, having been cast to third in 2011 only. The other major player is the Conservative Party of Canada, a center-right party that has seen its influence grow nationwide.

In the past, these two parties have not claimed to represent any specific ideologies, attitudes, or beliefs. So, what exactly do they represent as political parties? Throughout some of my studies in political science, the term *brokerage* party, albeit through a relatively simplistic view, has been attributed to both dominant parties. An accomplished Canadian political scientist, Dr. R.K. Carty introduced readers to a more nuanced understanding of this term. One of his core criteria was that a brokerage party appeals to the entire electorate. An essay question asking if respondents found the two parties to still fit the concept of brokerage made me begin to question the concept, given the existence of policies and platforms *that* did not appeal to the entire (or majority) electorate. Upon reading some of the most important and influential works of Canadian political science, including the work by Carty, I was introduced to both, a more nuanced concept of brokerage parties and a new concept, the catch-all party. These two detailed terms, brokerage and catch-all parties, share some similar aspects while having some characteristics that set them apart. This result has led me to the question - which of these two terms more appropriately applies to today's Canadian political parties?

In its application to Canadian politics, this research question needs to be answered because the idea of brokerage has long been attributed (arguably incorrectly) to Canadian politics and its parties. Additionally, because political parties, their leaders, their policy aspirations, and ultimately their competitive practices dictate so much of a given society, I argue that it is important to have an *accurate* understanding of our modern political parties and their behavior. Are they brokerage parties? Are they catch-all parties? Are they neither? As this work examines the differences in the concept, it provides a detailed account for

political scientists to use in their research into political parties, party behavior, and politics in Canada as a whole. This account takes a form that revolves around the defining concepts of brokerage parties and catch-all parties and will be more appropriately applied and as a result, more reflective of current-day political parties in Canada. Within this essay, I explore various works in Canadian political science, to summarize, analyze, and apply the concepts of brokerage and catch-all parties to the contemporary parties in Canada.

In greater detail, this work focuses on a concept model originally written by Carty in his 2013 chapter; an essay that argued that the two parties *could not* be considered brokerage parties, but rather catch-all parties. Revisiting my research question, I find half of Carty's conclusion compelling and push to question if today's parties *are even catch-all parties*. This model was the result of years of concept work, built up by the works of some of the most distinguished authors in the field, and, although I use the model for its application in my research, it does not come without criticism. Three parts are irrelevant to my contemporary analysis, shifting the conceptual weight and focus onto the remaining three characteristics: the target [voters] of the subject party, the party's expressive function, and the party's leadership. (Bittner, Amanda, Royce Koop, and R.K. Carty. 2013.) At the end of my analysis, we will be able to see how the Conservative Party of Canada and the Liberal Party of Canada stand concerning the concept of *catch-all* parties.

### **Brokerage vs. Catch-All Parties and Carty's Model**

Suffice it to say, Dr. Carty has had a tremendous impact on Canadian politics. Even further, Carty has been imperative in the subfield of Canadian political parties. Carty's work on topics like brokerage parties and brokerage politics makes up a respectable proportion of his contributions. One of the most vital pieces to *this* research is their chapter in Bittner and Koop's book, *Parties, Elections, and the Future of Canadian Politics*. Within that specific chapter, (Bittner et al. 2013) Carty defines and compares two concepts: brokerage parties and catch-all parties, with the former having been influenced heavily by John Meisel and the latter being defined by the works of Otto Kirchheimer (Meisel, J. 1963). Carty's chapter produces <sup>1</sup>a six-part concept model to differentiate the two (see Table 1), which will reveal

itself as of great importance to the analysis to follow.

The six characteristics of a party *that* the model includes are the target [voter], origin, expressive function, loyalty, leadership, and membership (2013). For the sake of my analysis, we do not need aspects of origin, loyalty, and membership. The revision of an already-established concept the must have its revisions explained. I take the position and defend that the most relevant and distinct features of a catch-all party are: the voters that they target, the party's expressive function, and their leadership.

**Figure 1**

<b>Key differences between catch-all and brokerage parties</b>		
<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Catch-all parties</b>	<b>Brokerage parties</b>
Target	Constrained by historic core	Entire electorate
Origins	Competition with other catch-all opponents	Created as original political instruments
Expressive function	Restrained to balance appeals to old supporters and new targets	Central message as articulation of national interest
Loyalty	Limited expectation	Supreme virtue
Leaders	Personification of message	Creator of message
Members	No significant role	Active participants

### **Critiques and the Revised Model**

When we think of the parties and the concepts in front of us, their behavior, specifically

their appeal to the electorate, is what we scrutinize the most. The origin of a political party might have done well *in* differentiating brokerage parties from catch-all parties way back in a period when certain parties were created with the purpose of brokerage in mind (as Carty illustrates). For example, John A. Macdonald's Conservative Party of Canada was built as a brand new organization to further the building of the new nation and did so by brokering the entire electorate, which included English and French citizens, to promote unity and nation-building (Bittner, Koop, and Carty, 2013). As Carty wrote, "Such parties are the deliberate and independent creations of political leaders who wish to establish an autonomous organizational base." (Bittner, Koop, and Carty, 2013.) Today, there is the possibility for an originally *non-brokerage* party to become immersed in brokerage to the point that it becomes one and, reversely, there could be original brokerage parties that move to ditch the brokerage attitude. In either situation, the origin fails to tell us about how it appeals to the electorate, becoming irrelevant to our cases (See Section "Notes" Point a). Akin to Heraclitus' river analogy, a party could be ever-changing, making it a completely different party than it was at its creation, and we are concerned with who they are in the contemporary.

Using the loyalty of individuals to a party is also a troublesome tactic, as the internals of a party, including loyalty, are obviously heavily influenced by the expressive function/what the party offers. While I agree with Carty's claim as to why loyalty plays a distinguishing part between catch-all and brokerage parties, it is a very internal detail for a rather external analysis, especially one where we are only *concerned about the catch-all criteria*. Thirdly, the membership aspect of parties is irrelevant for reasons shared between the last two factors. It is an internal aspect of parties while I consider the necessary features for the two concepts to be external. Specific to membership as a characteristic, most statistics regarding political party memberships in Canada demonstrate dwindling membership numbers across the entire political spectrum. Articulating that information makes membership even more irrelevant to discuss. Another theoretical party could exist with a large and active membership base (as opposed to "no significant role" as Carty puts it) while expressing policies that appeal to new voters, balancing old voters, and being catch-all in their expressive function. We can now see why origin, loyalty, and membership prove to be insignificant in an analysis of whether or not political parties fit the concept of catch-call parties.

## Brokerage Moments

As a sort of interlude, Carty concludes his chapter by summarizing his observations stemming from his conceptual analysis of Canada's two largest parties. He argues that Quebec's "rejection" of the Liberals (signifying a rejection from a longtime Liberal-represented French Canada) caused the party to lose its classification as a brokerage party (Bittner, Koop, and Carty, 2013). He ushers in this notion that the LPC is a catch-all party, just like the CPC. Just like that, so long as you accept Carty's arguments, as I do, neither one of the parties is a truly consistent brokerage party (Bittner, Koop, and Carty, 2013.).' To expand Carty's conclusion, he is not suggesting that neither party ever utilized brokerage politics; rather he is claiming that they have not participated enough in brokerage politics to test the concept (Bittner, Koop, and Carty, 2013.). He does this by providing a retrospective look at the LPC and CPC throughout history and this led me to take a look of my own (Bittner, Koop, and Carty, 2013.).

No different than the conclusion of Carty's chapter, I found that the parties rarely fit the definition. The exception is that there were *moments* when the political environment required special attention to major divisions and saw parties broker divisions in light of national interest. For that reason, I strongly suggest the term *brokerage moments*. The essence of the concept uses the classification of "brokerage party" as only a temporary term, requested and defined by the context in which a party commits themselves to brokerage politics. Rather than regard the CPC as a catch-all party that once practiced brokerage politics, it would be better suited to classify that moment in history as a brokerage moment.

As Carty's chapter illustrates, the history of brokerage politics used by either the CPC or LPC is relatively sparse (Bittner, Koop, and Carty, 2013.). Akin to how Carty kicked off his chapter, it is remarkable to see a country be superficially known as a political system of brokerage politics while simultaneously having a political history with only mere sprinkles of brokerage moments. In Canada, the primary divisions that have been a political focal point for Canadian governments have almost all carried a regional influence. One of those regional divides is in Quebec. It began as a French-English divide that demanded proper brokerage and the challenge was taken up loosely by Macdonald's

Liberal-Conservatives as they formed the Province of Quebec in the name of nation-building. Macdonald created a message of national interest and appealed to the entire electorate. This would constitute a "brokerage moment". That all came to an end shortly after the Conscription Crisis in 1917 when French Canadians felt abandoned by Borden's Conservatives. That's why the original Conservative Party of Canada earned a brokerage moment, but not the title of brokerage party. Since then, French Canadians had found consistent representation under the Liberals, encountering turbulence just before the 1980 Quebec Referendum. Another notable example of what could be a brokerage moment is Pierre Trudeau's campaigning for national unity on behalf of the Federal Government (Bastien, Frédéric. Canada: Dundurn, 2014.)Trudeau did not create this message but certainly expressed the position of national interest to the entire electorate. Therefore, Trudeau's actions as the leader of the Liberals at the time could be considered a brokerage moment, avoiding the certain dismissal of it being acknowledged as a brokerage party.

### **The New Model and its Application to the Contemporary Parties**

I finally seek to get down to the application of the concept model on which I based my research. Firstly, there needs to be a brief expansion of the three specific characteristics from Carty's model that will make it through into my version: the target, the expressive function, and the leadership. We will then apply them to the contemporary parties; the application will be done by seeing evidence given for each feature. Articles, policies, polls, and reports are some of the forms that the evidence comes in, all to be gauged either in support of or in conflict with the catch-all party model.

As a reminder, I accept Carty's claim that the CPC and LPC are not brokerage parties, hence my solution, *brokerage moments*, and why I am only concerned with the catch-all concept. The main motivation for using the three aforementioned details is that I believe that I can make the case that those features are all necessary conditions for the concept. Imagining the model on a real, ideal party; the party seeks to catch as many voters as possible (appealing to new targets while retaining old supporters) through articulations of popular policies and campaigns but is not forced to appeal to the entire

electorate as a brokerage party would be (Kirchheimer, Otto. 1966.) . The target is as many voter groups as possible, the expressive function is whatever method the party articulates to reach out to the target electorate (usually aims to appeal to the majority of voters, which are typically found in the center of the political spectrum, which demands non-extreme, popular policies), (Downs, Anthony, 1957) and leadership is once again the medium for which all of this is achieved through (Bittner, Koop, and Carty, 2013). *In theory, a proper catch-all party tries to appeal to a range of voters; anywhere from the environmentally conscious to the fiscally responsible, all while bolstering a strong leader that personifies the message.*"(Bittner, Koop, and Carty, 2013.).

Lastly, as a second argument in favor of the selected features, the careful reader would have noticed that the features are interconnected and describe the outward behavior of the parties. All of this comes together as we move forward in their application to the modern-*day* CPC and LPC.

## **The Conservative Party of Canada**

Erin O'Toole, once the leader of the CPC, indirectly provided support to this research two years before it even began. He spoke at the Conservative policy convention in 2021 describing what he perceived the CPC needed to do to be elected, "To move beyond *a* party that only does well in certain parts of Canada, while leaving other Canadians out. We need to be the party of all of Canada." (Tasker, John Paul, 2021.) O'Toole is in stark contrast to his successor, Pierre Poilievre, and perhaps this is why the current leader does not echo the beliefs *that* were held by his ousted predecessor.

It is apparent, I believe, to most Canadians, that Poilievre's Conservative Party is certainly different compared to the party under O'Toole. What O'Toole did observe was that the Conservative Party of Canada was a party that did not appeal to the entirety of the nation and he took steps to make it a party that was more appealing to everybody (See Section "Notes" Point c). For the sake of this research, I am concerned not with analyzing O'Toole's CPC, but the party under the current leader. This point in my paper is where the

contemporary CPC's behavior is analyzed and compared to the model to get a sense of whether the party is a catch-all party or not.

Firstly, as of the time of this research (2023-2024), Poilievre has not been the leader for a very long time, posing a caveat. It must be noted that certain examples I have included are related to Poilievre before becoming leader of the party. As a response to expected objections, if the case is related to the leader and occurred before they became the party leader, I track the behavior well into their leadership to connect to the contemporary version of the party. Relatedly, the first example is where Pierre Poilievre expresses his support for the Freedom Convoy protests (See Section "Notes" Point d). He initiated this relationship before he became party leader, so it makes it a perfect example to demonstrate the way the support affects the party and how the support has followed him through the party leadership election. The protests started in 2022 and featured anti-establishment, anti-vaccine, and anti-liberal sentiments and ( Taylor, Stephanie 2022.) ideologies.

While Poilievre welcomed *and* appealed to this new voter demographic, other CPC leadership candidates distanced themselves from the movements. (Woods, Michael, 2022.) Polls suggest that the Convoy was wildly unpopular across the nation and yet, the current leadership supported them then, and remnants of that support remain today. A Nanos poll *at* the end of 2022 concluded, "Seven in ten Canadians (70%) say that they would have a more negative or a somewhat more negative impression of a politician if they had openly supported the trucker protest in Ottawa. " (Nanos Research. Majority See a Politician's Support of Trucker Protest in Ottawa as Negative. Nanos, 2022.) Fast forward to Poilievre's role as Leader of the Official Opposition, he has made it clear that the support remains the same, making certain *that* he addresses the House of Commons on behalf of the Freedom Convoy in certain speeches (Poilievre, Pierre, 2023.).

The way this contrasts with the model is that the unpopularity of the movement, coupled with his appeal to and support of it, goes against how we would expect a party to behave. A key characteristic of a catch-all party is to appeal to most demographics while avoiding extreme demographics or ideals, as they may conflict with the majority (Bittner, Koop, and Carty, 2013.) If the mere idea of the Freedom Convoy is widely unfavorable to the majority of Canadians, a catch-all leader would not embrace a rather small demographic,

with the risk of disconnecting with other demographics. expect a catch-all

Secondly, Poilievre and the Conservatives have begun directing their attention to an American issue, the "Culture War". Specifically, the opposition leadership has two enemies to fight, "wokeism" and socialism (arguably non-existent in Canada). Firstly, he has made it a priority to focus the attention of opposition speeches on fighting "woke," a recently adopted word for political messengers who oppose progressive causes. Poilievre accused the "woke left" of supporting Bill C-11 because they wanted to control the media (Poilievre, 2023). He issued the following response after a Liberal MP asked him to define the word "woke," "[...] as for the definition of woke, woke has one purpose, only one purpose, plenty of pretexts, but only one purpose - control. It is designed to divide people by race, gender, ethnicity, religion, vaccine status, and any other way they can divide people into groups. Then you can justify having a government to control all those groups. No more woke, we need freedom." (Poilievre, 2023.)

As a note to the contrary, as listed simply by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "woke" is defined as, "[somebody who is] aware of and actively attentive to important societal facts and issues (especially issues of racial and social justice) (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2023.) . This example is not a popular policy suggestion to appeal to the majority of Canadians (or even *a comment* that appeals to the majority). It is the party's engagement with an ideological position which in turn further distances themselves from the catch-all's appeal to the center median that we would expect (Downs, Anthony, 1957; Kirchheimer, Otto, 1966.). One thing is certain after observing Poilievre's featured rants about "wokeism," it is *not very catch-all of them*.

Additionally, Poilievre has made statements that reveal his refusal to work with those who are not free market economy supporters as he demonizes regulation or government intervention (Peterson, 2022.) . Appearing in a popular (6.77 million YouTube subscribers and 2.5 million views on that specific video) conservative pundit's YouTube video in May of 2022, Poilievre outlined socialism and regulatory forms of government intervention as one of the biggest problems that Canada faces (Peterson, Jordan B, Pierre Poilievre, 2022.). Relatedly, he has reiterated right-wing propaganda, falsely claiming online that Hitler's Nazi party was socialist (Klein, David. 2021.). The only effect that these actions have is pandering

to an ideologically driven base of voters, one particularly engaged in history revisionism, all while failing to appeal to the median and potentially making themselves look less appealing to the median voter (Lévesque, Catherine. 2022.).

A third and final example, (I have certainly not exhausted the possible list of examples) is the absence of a national climate plan. Back when O'Toole was leader, he urged the CPC to adopt climate change as a real policy concern and developed a climate plan that would rival Trudeau's. Poilievre has not seized the torch on this issue and has done nothing but call for an end to the Liberals' carbon tax.

The National Post (*a* newspaper owned by Postmedia, which consistently endorses the Conservatives) reported, "When asked how Poilievre would reduce emissions without a carbon tax, his office redirected the National Post to prepared remarks the new leader delivered in the House of Commons that essentially criticize the Liberals' approach to climate change." This is the very opposite of what a catch-all party might do, especially since "7 in 10 Canadians [are] worried about climate change. Instead, the CPC under this leadership refuses to present a climate plan, likely because of the opposition from right-wing social conservatives and climate change deniers (Lévesque, Catherine,, 2022. See Section "Notes" Point f.).

As I mentioned, those three main observations are not exhaustive of all the behaviors that Poilievre and the CPC embrace that push them away from the concept of catch-all parties. Additionally, there are, as I like to call them, some honorable mentions. For the second straight leadership, the CPC has hired Mobilize Media, a campaign firm that has built and managed the Ontario Proud and Canada Proud Facebook pages (Rabson, Mia, 2023.). The firm specializes in creating shareable anti-liberal and anti-progressive media for social media persuasion (Cullen, Catherine, 2022.). Once again, these acts of partisan politics are examples of ideological reinforcement and not catch-all politics (See Section "Notes" Point g.). Other brief examples are Poilievre's disdain, avoidance, and demonization of media, which commentators and experts have described as pandering to the conspiratorial demographic in opposition to "mainstream media" and its dysfunction regarding the party's stance on abortion (Mulcair, Thomas, 2022; Fournier, Philippe J, 2022.).

## The Liberal Party of Canada

Long considered Canada's "Natural Governing Party," the Liberal Party of Canada had seen consecutive governments formed under the leadership of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Since 2015, Trudeau has led a version of the Liberal Party *that* differs quite substantially from the party under his predecessors, notably Chrétien and briefly, Martin. These past leaders raise a contrast according to Dr. Royce Koop, professor of political science at the University of Manitoba. He acknowledged Chrétien's entertainment of the more traditional status quo of Canadian politics, giving big speeches about how great Canada is.

All of this is in contrast to Trudeau's employment of a more progressive stance, including making remarks that routinely include the admission of Canadian faults. It can be supported by the idea of old politics of "campaign to the left, govern to the right" in contrast with a rather socially progressive contemporary Liberal party. All of this is to say All of this is to say *that* Trudeau's government has been unique, and not without conflict relating to trying to appeal to the greater demographic. The best observable example that damages this idea of the LPC being a catch-all party lies in its gun-banning policies. When I talk about the Liberal gun policies, I do not mean the assault weapons legislation tabled in the wake of the Nova Scotia Mass Shooting in 2020. That ban included 1500 models of firearms but was overtly popular across the country, drawing 82% favorability from an Ipsos poll (Ipsos, 2020). The policy that I am concerned with, is the late-2022/early-2023 proposed ban on most semi-automatic non-restricted firearms. It was such an unpopular piece of legislation that even the NDP and Bloc Québécois initially pulled support away from the Liberals (Vieira, Paul, 2023.). I articulate that this legislation attempt, in hand with the controversial handgun freeze, has been to speak to metropolitan voter demographics which have long tended to support strict firearm regulations, all the while alienating an enormous number of other voters, including progressive rural voters, left-leaning urban (Brown, R. Blake, 2020.) gun owners, and Indigenous communities.\*\* This

is a prime example of not just failing *to appeal to* but alienating a large collection of voting demographics across Canada.

This is where the Liberals tend to differentiate themselves from the Conservatives. Despite plummeting in the polls, other examples are not as clear-cut for seeing if the LPC fits the catch-all criteria. Knowing Canadian politics, a featured divide you need to touch on is the West's (primarily oil and gas supporters) general disdain for the Liberals and the notorious "Carbon Tax," a complicated relationship. Specifically, Trudeau is and has been seeking to shift to renewable energy, promote the use of electricity over gas, and tax polluters, all through his 2030 Climate Plan; strangely however, *while still* subsidizing fossil fuel *operations* (approximately \$18 billion in subsidies, tax breaks, etc.) (Environmental Defence Canada, 2021.) “ Likely because of this, the Oil Sands Pathways to Net Zero Alliance, a group of six Canadian oil companies, appears to be cooperating, targeting a 32% cut by 2030, aiming for net-zero emissions by 2050.” (Williams, Nia, 2022.). Additionally, moving to renewables is not some fringe view. Yet I challenge you, the reader, to go on the *absurd* task of asking an oil and gas supporter to vote for the Liberals. Does this mean that Trudeau fails a catch-all criteria test? Not *at all*. Rather, this example is Trudeau playing both sides to appeal to new voters while keeping the base satisfied, by parking the party in the middle - ultimately upsetting both environmentalists and Westerners.

Lastly, a third key issue in today's LPC is not so much an unpopular one, so much as it is an observation that demonstrates Trudeau's expressive reinforcement of his socially progressive base. Since their success in the 2015 Federal Election, Trudeau and the Liberals have dedicated themselves to the principles of equity and inclusion, notably appointing a highly diverse first cabinet built up of 15 men and 15 women, two people with disabilities, and was mixed with diverse ethnicities, as well as both political veterans and rookies (Author, Unknown, CTV News, 2015.). An article with a reflective review of Trudeau's leadership over the years produced the following testimony, "Asked to assess the prime minister's strengths and weaknesses, one former government official said Trudeau can be relentless in pursuing his vision and is most concerned with reconciliation, climate change and the government's broader equality agenda.

This social progressive position is not identical to the gun legislation or the CPC's support of the Freedom Convoy (Wherry, Aaron, 2023). Rather than seeing leaders and parties adopt an unpopular position or behavior to reinforce an ideological base at the expense of the centre median, what it still is, is an observable sign (by rigidly putting socially progressive values and issues at the forefront of the party's agenda) that the party is pushing further to the left on the social plane of the political spectrum, becoming closer to an ideological party. I consider the majority of my observations of the LPC to be a little less clear than those of the CPC, except for the gun policies, which support my thesis well. Now, we could go on about other notably unpopular actions, including the Liberals proposing further MAID expansion to those struggling with irremediable mental illness, the calling of the early election during the pandemic, and way they have handled claims of foreign interference (Angus Reid, 2023.).

All of these examples are simply poorly the made decisions that discredit their popularity at the centre median and not truly examples of taking an ideological position at the median's expense (with perhaps a small argument related to the MAID claim). Exactly which demographics are in full support of MAID expansion is complex, the only way this observation goes against the catch-all criteria is if they are progressives or Liberal-leaning voters who campaign for the right to access medical assistance in dying for patients with other illnesses. Then, this case of MAID expansion would hold a bit of water relative to my claim that the LPC is taking an unpopular position (a poll from the Angus Reid Institute; only 31% of Canadians support the expansion whereas the approval for the current MAID laws (without the expansion) was at 61%.) (Angus Reid Institute, 2023.) to reinforce an ideological position.

## **Expected Critique**

It is not without an expected critique *that* I provide the reader with my arguments in

support of my thesis; that the contemporary CPC and LPC are not very good catch-all parties. Firstly, one objection that an individual might argue is that the CPC's adoption of the Freedom Convoy voter demographic is merely another group of voters accepted under the "big tent" of voter groups. To that, I rebut with a couple of counterpoints.

Firstly, the work already established by Kirchheimer and then Carty demonstrates consistently that the nature of a catch-all party (Downs' *An Economic Theory of Political Action in a Democracy* also supports this notion but with political parties in general) lies in its appeal to the majority of voters, mostly found near the centre median (Downs, Anthony, 1957.). Kirchheimer spoke about how catch-all parties fight for the centre and wrote, "Such convergence results from a "catch-all" style of competition between "Tweedledum and Tweedledee" or "the ins versus the outs." (Kirchheimer, Otto, 1966.) Carty took that and articulated it to say that fringe voter demographics, the groups that are most likely to conflict with other groups that are appealed to by a given party, are not to be the demographic that catch-all parties seek out."( Bittner, Koop, and Carty, 2013.) The national disapproval proved that the Freedom Convoy movement was one to be found on the fringes and therefore, should not be a priority for parties to appeal to.

A second critique may suggest that most voters found under the Freedom Convoy banner were Conservative Party voters already, therefore Poilievre supporting the movement is not so much absorbing and riling up a fringe base as it is the lesser-known feature of catch-all politics where parties must satisfy their loyal base voters." (Bittner, Koop, and Carty, 2013.). It *could be*, however, that there is a strong link between the anti-vax, anti-establish movements, and the relatively new People's Party of Canada; calling into question who the Freedom Convoy members might truly be aligned with (Duffy, Andrew, 2022). Returning to the critique, I may also point out that at the time of the Convoy, O'Toole had just been ousted as party leader (February 2022) and Poilievre saw it as an opportunity to adopt the Convoy voters for his leadership race. An interesting distinction to be made is that most of the other leaders did not show the same approval, most notably Jean Charest and his opposition to the occupation in Ottawa; meaning that, had another candidate been chosen to lead the party, those voters would not have belonged to the party without the campaigning that Poilievre did (Woods, Michae, 2022.). This is why I tracked his support well into his role in leadership to see if Poilievre made

the effort to retain *that* demographic *in* his appeal to voters.

Lastly, a third critique of my work could reason, “Ok, so they're not perfect catch-all parties, they don't hunt for the centre median voter and thus the majority of voters all the time. So what? They might not be perfect, but they could still be considered catch-all." From my experience of politics in Canada, the ability of a party to truly appeal to the broader electorate (of course often while ignoring fringe groups) is no different than a stream of clean water; some of the observations highlighted in my case might be brief actions or behaviours, but much like tiny drops of oil, they may be few in quantity but are quite concentrated/potent in its effect of polluting water/polluting their ability to appeal to the broader electorate. I doubt the need to have evidence of the idea that some voters tend to not forget, partisanship is forged and held, and conflicts can remain rigid even through different bouts of leadership. For that reason, I liken the notion of ideologically driven behaviour to the oil that might pollute an otherwise clean body of water; understanding that it is hard to backtrack on things like Trudeau's gun reform policies to one day turn and pander to conservative voters or progressive gun owners. That is the exact point where my conclusion comes into play and interacts with how we might view the two parties going forward.

## **Conclusion**

The main purpose of this paper was to explore various observations that would demonstrate how Canada's two largest contemporary political parties, the Conservative Party of Canada and the Liberal Party of Canada, are not good catch-all parties. The key features of the catch-all party that we are concerned with are the target of the expressive function, the expressive function itself, and the leadership of the party (Bittner, Koop, and Carty, 2013.). Throughout the analysis of both parties, there has been an array of examples that paint them in a light that differs from the usual image of a grand catch-all party that we are used to. From Poilievre's adoption of the Freedom Convoy to Trudeau's unpopular gun reform policies. Both of these examples, among others, consist of behaviours and actions *that* came from either the leader or party and indicate less of a catch-all appeal to voters and more of an ideological drive.

Regarding the observations and behaviours, the target voters have been diverse, but many of the demographics have belonged to areas outside of the majority centre on the political spectrum. A prime example of this would be the anti-liberal, anti-government voters targeted by the online campaigns produce by Mobilize Media and paid for by the Conservatives, the anti-vax movement found under the fringe umbrella of the Freedom Convoy, and the urban voters hardened by extremely tight gun control. The expressive functions have certainly gone against the expected functions of a catch-all party, which would be to consistently appeal to the largest demographics without pandering to conflicting groups. The functions of the two parties, in reality, have taken a variety of shapes, including making social progressivism a pinnacle of the party mandate, preaching in favour of a culture war inspired by the USA, and appearing online to condemn market interventionists. Leadership has been the contrasting feature from the other two characteristics and is the only model feature that both parties match perfectly.

A catch-all party, according to the conclusions drawn by Carty and Kirchheimer, features a leader that personifies the message of the party (Bittner, Koop, and Carty, 2013; Kirchheimer, Otto, 1966.). In its application to the CPC and LPC, anybody can see that this is true; almost all of the observations explored have either heavy involvement by the leader or were orchestrated by them. This is another reason why we tracked Poilievre's support for demographics belonging to the Freedom Convoy right through his leadership bid and well into his position as party leader, among other examples. As the leader of the LPC, Trudeau has become notorious for the personification of the agenda held by the Liberals, with some staffers holding the view that he is often the main advocate for the party's positions. I argue that we can also see this through the rise in dissenting flags depicting crude language and the leader's last name. This is to say that both party leaders have kept their parties closer to the concept of catch-all parties by aligning with an important defining feature of the concept.

Now what can we do with this information? As was touched on at the end of the section, *Expected Critique*, looking at today's parties leaves us with a bit of uncertainty as to whether or not they are truly catch-all parties or not. To that, relative to how I countered the critique that the observations may not be enough to simply disqualify them from the concept of catch-all politics, I suggest the following breakdown of my conclusion. They are certainly not fully-

fledged, ideologically-driven parties that refuse to appeal to any voter other than those concerned with the single or few issues represented by the party. However, today's parties are also certainly not very good catch-all parties either; marking a movement away from Carty's conclusion at the end of his work that claimed that the parties (before 2013) were not brokerage parties but rather catch-all parties (See Section "Notes" Point h). Unsurprisingly, a similar position has been held before, notably in Katz and Mair's 1996 work; "It must also be added, of course, that there are in fact no fully fledged cartel parties, just as there are, or 59 were, no fully fledged mass parties, catch-all parties, or cadre parties (Katz, R. S., & Mair, P. (1996), CTVNews, 2023.). This conclusion was held about the parties that governed through the nineteenth hundreds, is now held about the parties in the twenty-first century, and is the introduction for my solution to the classification.

As we see the parties behave today in a way that has them sitting between a position of catch-all politics and a position of ideological politics, I recommend the following classification - the quasi-catch-all party. Essentially, the term would seek to envelop any political party that features a greater ideological influence than what was held by the concepts laid out in the works of Carty and Kirchheimer. A quasi-catch-all party does not quite execute a perfect catch-all method of appealing to voters but is the same concerning ideological politics as well. In Canada, I see this term better describing today's versions of the Conservative Party of Canada and the Liberal Party of Canada; potentially prompting further consideration of the idea of quasi-catch-allism as a way of truly representing what consists of the concept. Regardless of whether or not the parties remain this way, in a sort of limbo between catch-all politics and ideological politics, this shift certainly marks a turning point for Canadian politics.

## **This Work and the Emergence of the *Canada Future* Party**

I wrote this paper between January 2023 and October 2023, with revisions and edits taking place through the next several months. As this was happening, a new Canadian federal party emerged, the *Canada Future Party*, led by interim leader Dominic Cardy (CTV News,

2023.). The reason I raise this is because it has emerged out of the open space in federal politics that this paper has illustrated. Coincidentally enough, in the same fashion that I have argued that neither the LPC nor CPC are very good catch-all parties, the new Canada Future Party seeks to be the party for all Canadians. Keep in mind that we are looking at a platform that has just been created; the real way the party behaves will likely only be visible closer to the next federal election (likely 2025) as they begin debating, promising, and positioning themselves. That said, however, their promise to fill this party gap tells us that this paper has correctly highlighted what other Canadians have superficially observed, consequently providing more validity to my conclusion. As a result, I simply could not refuse to make a note on the matter given the perfect timing of this party's creation and my work on the topic.

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## Notes

- a) In contrast to Carty's solid association of origins to both concepts.
- b) In contrast, Carty's model suggests that catch-all parties are going to have "limited expectation" relative to loyalty.
- c) Erin O'Toole is credited with changes to the CPC that included policies like a climate plan that would rival that of the Liberals'.
- d) The Freedom Convoy was a protest movement that occupied much of downtown Ottawa during the early months of 2022. The movement was characterized by a diverse set of grievances, including opposition to COVID policies, an array of conspiratorial positions, and an overall anti-establishment goal. The three leaders of the movement presented a proposition to the Trudeau Government that requested that Parliament be dissolved and all executive power be placed in the hands of the leaders.
- e) Bill C-11 is a piece of legislation to update the policies that dictate the scope of services that the CRTC can regulate; it expands the criteria to include online streaming platforms that provide content to the Canadian public.
- f) Note: It must be noted that The National Post has been proven to host a right-wing bias, exemplifying an instance where even an ideological ally in the media has an issue with a given response.
- g) The pages have been found to explicitly target progressive politicians with sometimes fictitious media as a way of swaying voters toward the Conservative candidate. A notable target was Kathleen Wynne, the Ontario Liberal Premier who lost the 2018 Provincial Election to Doug Ford's Progressive Conservatives approximately a year after the creation of the Ontario Proud page.
- h) So long as you agree with my stream analogy which highlights the idea *that* voters tend to not forget or where I argue that certain observations (like Trudeau's gun reform) 'poison the water' or make it hard to go back and appeal to voters that were displeased initially, you will likely with my conclusion that they are not very good catch-all parties.

## Neoliberalism, Mass Media, and the Monopoly of Modern Consumption

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Discussions surrounding the media landscape in contemporary times too often center around capitalist tales leveraged amidst the rise of neoliberalism. Modern media corporations will lead us to believe and push the story of the competitive marketplace whereas consumer choice and demand are representative of broadcasters programming. Furthermore, it follows that if a company fails to provide entertaining, insightful, or at least interesting content to the masses, they will be forced into bankruptcy and a new media firm will take their place to fill the need (Waterman McChesney 2004).

The age of sensationalism, however, has put the profit motive at the center of decision making bringing this anecdote into doubt. An accelerating worldwide trend towards huge media conglomerates has been in evidence for a decade or two amidst policies of deregulation, and the ability to get more clicks, views, and watch time has been the driving-force here, using ever more complicated means to do so all while entrenching profit.

The business strategy of these companies whether Canadian or international, is based on convergence: the entertainment industry's need for vast financial resources, the communications industry's need for content, and the pressure on both groups to secure positions in electronic communications software, technology, and commerce, all in the context of increasing globalization of the marketplace (Vipond 2011). Quite frankly, the financialization of modern media, news and entertainment delivered on a global scale, has become dominant of mainstream providers of every format. Likewise, monopolistic power that come with mergers, large audiences, and market dominance give unprecedented tools to control narratives. Ultimately, this is bad for society and is a poison pill for any democracy.

Moreover, the Concentration of power in the hands of so few, has brought alarm as economic forces unite in a way that remove true competition. Mass media companies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century act as oligopolies meaning only a small number of giant companies make up most of the media market with 6 big firms owning 90% of the media marketplace in the US, and the

Canadian market is now dominated by the ‘big five’ — Bell, Rogers, Telus, Shaw and Quebecor who account for nearly three-quarters (72.1%) of all revenues across Canada’s telecom, media and internet industries (CRTC 2019). Therefore, it is not exaggerating to say that media markets are in many respects textbook examples of corporate-dominated oligopolies ruled by a small number of firms (McChesney 2004).

Consequently, this stifles any attempts of competition or innovation by any smaller media firm since they do not have the vast quantity of resources and capital at their disposal to challenge them. Additionally, these large companies use horizontal integration which is the increased production of certain parts of the supply chain producing what is profitable, allowing them to offset the few risks companies take, leading to repetitive content. Simply it must be also stressed that the media system is not simply an economic category; it is responsible for transmitting culture, journalism, and politically relevant information. Fulfilling those needs is mandatory for self-governance as our main source of information about our own society (McChesney 2003).

With that being said, this paper will further dive into these various aspects that makeup economics’ role in our understanding of contemporary media. We will make a critique of and argue against claims these corporations make regarding media policy to sustain their power, as well look at the role government has, or could take in the form of policy as it relates to reforming these monopolies. Moreover, we will look at neoliberalism as an ideology and analyze its various cascade of failures in dealing with (and playing a role in) the emergence of the contemporary media environment that has descended away from its call to action as the fourth estate. Additionally, we will engage with the business practices of these massive firms to more thoroughly understand how they as an institution have become such prevalent forces in society and we will look at the various ways organizations are fighting back to counter this corporate backed status quo.

### **Advertising and the Influence of the Profit Motive**

The major modern communications systems are now so evidently key institutions in advanced capitalist societies. Studies of the ownership and control of the capitalist press, the

capitalist cinema, and capitalist and state capitalist radio and television are important given they interlock historically with wider capitalist society (Durham 2012). What this is to say that political economy must take its place in our discussions surrounding the role media plays in contemporary times. How these institutions affect and play a role is important given how they have the ability to shape and mould public discourse.

While criticisms and debate regarding media have always been around, it is fair to say that media has without a doubt underwent a drastic change in the last 40 years leading to wider discussion and knowledge of its various shortcomings. Many are familiar with the rise of neoliberalism and how it undermined and gutted golden age policies of regulation. The move towards ‘cutting burdensome red-tape’ has unleashed the beast of media consumerism that attempts to take a larger spot in our daily life’s. The repeal of the Fairness Doctrine, as well as the passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 in the US are representative of this move towards deregulation and private media’s overwhelming influence.

In an article by Natalie Fenton, she discusses the consequences of a neoliberal agenda for the provision of news and information which are numerous. Media and journalists are experiencing difficulties in coping with a context of ubiquitous 24/7 news brought to consumers through an ever-increasing number of platforms, channels, and formats. The market model on which commercial news media operate is not producing varied, pluralistic, critical, and quality news, essential for democracy. Fenton argues that the increased homogenization and trivialization of content, the concentration in cross-ownership, combined with pressures on networked journalists to be multifaceted and multifunctional, has in effect led to market failure from a democratic perspective (Cammaerts & Calabrese 2011).

Additionally, with the rise of the 24/7 news cycle and more recently social media, increasing political division has caused public opinion to have no consensus leading to ideological fracturing and polarization. This undermines the public-service orientation of leading media outlets and their contributions to the democratic process. The erosion of these outlets, and their agenda-setting power during periods of normal political activity and the limited impact of consumer-driven alternatives could accelerate the deterioration of shared discourse on matters of wide-ranging significance. This would weaken the search for common ground on such matters and exacerbate social division (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein 2015).

All this is to say that, in economic turns, ‘cost-minimizers’ and ‘profit maximizers’ have therefore chipped away the foundation of good media through its budget cuts to production and increased ever more trivializing way to spoon-feed more and more through the 24-7 media engine. This brings up a pertinent question and inquiry then into the ways in which modern media is funded and earns profit. That mainly being advertisers.

Most of the money business spend on advertising goes to the mass media. Most of the financing of the mass media comes from advertising. The Link is symbiotic (Vipond 2011). In most countries, the largest advertisers, many of them global corporations, have determined the direction and character of media development because of the means (that is the media) which allows them to reach potential customers (Sinclair 2012). The realities of the advertising market tend to favour larger firms since most consumer goods are produced by large American based corporations (Vipond 2011). The influence of these firms to reflect what is shown in the media can be described as present yet subtle. Media often tailor their coverage, stories, articles, shows, films to the taste of their advertisers as not to risk losing a source of funding, However, there is no policy or direction on this. The expectation is thought to be already there.

Various studies have assessed advertisers’ use of economic pressure and the threat of actual withdrawal of advertising as a means of influencing media coverage. The influence of advertising on non-advertising content can include favourable editorial coverage of advertisers’ products and corporate interests, creating an editorial environment conducive to marketers’ promotions, favouring higher income audiences, and reducing partisan or controversial content that may divide or delimit target audiences (Hardy 2017).

The result of which leads to a decline in quality media content and a move towards hyper-consumerism rewarded by capitalism. This has proven to have especially dreadful effects on commercial journalism in the United States, and worldwide. Commercial journalism routinely emphasizes business stories and issues of importance to investors. Material concerning poor and working-class communities is very uncommon, and usually framed in terms of how it affects the more privileged. It is a poison pill for democratic governance (McChesney 2003).

## Neoliberal Deregulation

It is important to understand the ideology that sustains the corporate media hegemony. The neoliberal agenda of the eighties stated that “government is not the solution to our problems, the government is the problem” (Reagan Foundation 1981). A phrase uttered by perhaps the father of neoliberalism, U.S President Ronald Reagan at his inaugural address. Indeed, Reagan did push for & preside over massive deregulation of what still influences modern conservatism shifting the political spectrum rightward. What came after was barrage of policy changes of how politicians and regulators viewed and interacted with media for generations to come.

Deregulation in practice in media markets is synonymous with increased commercialization. One look at the United States provides a crystal-clear example of the degradation of media policymaking once the system has been deregulated to private interests (McChesney 2003). As we mentioned earlier, in media policymaking the claim is often made that relaxing ownership regulations to allow more concentration, and capital mobility, will lead to increased marketplace competition, with lower prices and higher quality for the public. On the contrary however, the pattern is a follow-up wave of mergers in the affected industries. Firms use relaxed ownership rules to get much larger, and therefore make it much more difficult for newcomers to enter their markets.

Consider what has happened in US radio, the one industry most directly reshaped by the 1996 Telecommunications Act heavily influenced by industry and lobbyists. Prior to 1996 a single company was permitted to own 28 stations nationally, and no more than four in a single community (Until the 1980s the limits had been much stricter). The 1996 Act removed the national limit and permitted a single firm to own up to eight stations in the largest communities. Since 1996 well over half of US stations have been sold, and a stunning consolidation has hit the industry. One firm, Clear Channel, now owns nearly 1,200 stations. Every market is dominated by two or three firms that own nearly all the stations between them. The firms have stripped radio of local content, especially journalism, and have substituted generic, inexpensive national programming. The amount of advertising and commercialism has also increased (2003).

In Canada, the Progressive Conservative Government of Brian Mulroney removed restrictions on cross-media ownership that had been enacted after recommendations by the Royal

Commission on Newspapers in 1981. It opened the floodgates for the convergence decade of mergers and buying out competitors. Amid that policy disaster, a Senate committee began examining Canada's news media, issuing a report in 2006 that included a scathing indictment of federal regulatory failure (Edge 2016).

This makes evident that the move towards deregulation is not reflective of simply allowing the free market to do what it does best. It simply creates an environment where a few large firms dominate the market only having to deal with each other, perhaps the furthest thing from true competition that proponents of this laissez-faire style system espouse. It is as former FCC Chair William Kennard said, the function of the FCC, 'is to referee fights between the wealthy and the super wealthy'.

This is emblematic of the larger problem being how deregulation under neoliberalism not only permits but encourages media firms to act. Policy failures make it totally rational and normal for the interest of these firms to take center stage in keeping the status quo of monopoly and non-competition going. Almost everywhere that media and communication are deregulated, there follow waves of corruption in the practices of these firms. Large private firms use the lack of public oversight to fleece shareholders, workers, customers, and taxpayers all to the detriment of society.

### **An Alternative Way & Media Reform**

Putting aside the many failures of the deregulated media industry; pundits, executives, and many other tv spokespeople with questionable agendas often misleadingly state: there is no other way besides the status quo. They equate a free and open media acting as one of the bedrock pillars of society with the free market of unfettered capitalism, which "of course is left better without government intervention". This short-sighted libertarian approach is ignorant of history and the role of government in the creation of media as well as the many mild reforms that could simply improve media coverage in our democratic society. Moreover, as we mentioned being a pillar of democratic governance, The media system is better understood as a social institution similar to the education system, which few would argue should be turned over entirely to market forces (McChesney 2004).

Media reform is premised on a simple notion: “the problem of the media” This phrase refers to the fact that communication and media systems are always the result of government policies, rules, regulations, and subsidies, both direct and indirect. There is no natural media system; it is always created. It is a problem to be solved, like an algebraic equation, with the difference being that there is no “right” answer, only a range of answers that reflect different values and priorities (Obar et al. 2020) Media reform is a great and difficult challenge as it encompasses so many aspects of our intertwined society for which media permeates. The challenge is manifested in battles over the future of investigative journalism, media ownership, misinformation, speech rights, broadband access, net neutrality, the surveillance apparatus, digital literacy, and many others (2020).

Consequently, this means media reform is no singular task to simply ‘fix’. Media reform requires engaging with a whole host of issues, actors, and institutions. Media reform will be a continual struggle on many fronts and participating with a political system that too often shields corporate power structures from systemic change will be no easy feat. Media reform movements are, therefore, a response to expressions of concentrated media power and develop in the context of ongoing struggles over the distribution of communicative resources.

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, neoliberal public policies, combined with government inaction regarding concentration of media ownership in Canada, helped spur a range of media activism. We have seen vibrant campaigns for net neutrality, press freedom, affordable broadband, community radio, publicly funded broadcasting, ownership transparency, and media diversity. Additionally, fights against cyber-surveillance, unethical and inaccurate journalism, ownership deregulation, internet censorship, and state intimidation have emerged. These struggles for communication rights are part of a wider challenge to social and economic inequalities and an essential component of a vision for a just and democratic society that for too long have been eroded under neoliberalism.

Raising awareness of these important issues will be key to tipping the scales away from the wealthy and powerful. Money and lobbying efforts are powerful, but so are political pressure and grassroots initiatives. Governments are more likely to step in if they feel substantive pressure to change policy, and even big interests are sometimes sideswiped for electoral gain. Groups like ‘OpenMedia’ (originally: Canadians for Democratic Media or CDM) are good examples of a

group that is bringing policy to the forefront and public eye. Several OpenMedia campaigns have been driven by crowd-sourced policy recommendation reports, submissions and interventions which are then used as leveraging tools in attempts to democratize decision-making processes at the federal level (CRTC 2019). Simply put it, engaging citizens can be a powerful tool for change.

### **Media Reform Campaigns in Contemporary Times**

Media reform in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can now be advocated through modern technology that afford new means to get involved with and voice our opinions digitally. The Internet is relevant to current battles for media reform in two ways: first, as a tool for advancing activist objectives thus enhancing the capabilities of media reform organizations; and second, as a site of struggle over the future of the media (Obar et al. 2020). Max Halupka's idea of 'clicktivism' is very relevant here. This open arena that is the Internet allows for new means of political communications to take surface. The idea that by simply signing an online petition, uploading a photo, or evening liking and sharing an online video act as an effective form of social political communications (Halupka 2014).

As the media landscape shifts online and as users increasingly access the Internet as a primary source for news and information, telecom policy is a site of struggle over both the future of the media and the future of democracy (CRTC 2019). It is in this context that OpenMedia was founded as a digitally driven advocacy organization focused on facilitating mass public engagement with media reform issues. The organization's first campaign – Stop the Big Media Takeover – focused on the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) Diversity of Voices hearing, a public consultation examining rising concentration of media ownership. CDM's website was the focal point for providing information and signing members to a mailing list, as well as a page where citizens could directly respond to the Commission's call for public comments. More than 2,000 people wrote in and a CDM delegation that included both activists and academics made the trip to Ottawa to appear at the hearing (Skinner et al. 2015).

These campaigns were ongoing given the context of the time whereas big media companies in Canada were intensifying their vertical integration of content. Control of the internet and related wireless markets was at the heart of these corporate plays, setting the stage for a series of struggles over the dimensions of public policy. CDM began to engage with the challenges this shift presented. Working with a number of partners, the organization helped organize a Net Neutrality rally on Parliament Hill in Ottawa in May 2008 leading up to a CRTC hearing on the issue in July 2009. CDM helped organize the ‘SaveOurNet’ campaign, a coalition that brought together interested citizens, businesses, and activist groups. In the face of these actions, the CRTC adopted new traffic management guidelines, some resembling those put forward by SaveOurNet.ca (2015).

More campaigns such as the ‘Stop the Meter’ campaign to intervene in a CRTC decision to allow internet providers the power to impose ‘usage-based billing’ (pay-per-byte) on independent internet service providers, and thus on many Canadian internet users. This campaign marked a major turning point for both the organization and online organizing in Canada. Deploying social media, and particularly Facebook, to accelerate the message, over the course of several months the campaign garnered more than 300,000 signatures to its online petition and flooded the CRTC offices with over 100,000 comments, an unprecedented level of public engagement with telecommunications policy (2015).

These campaigns have seen widespread success by and large to the ability to frame complex political issues of regulatory policy into accessible and populist campaigns that most of society can easily engage with. This is not to say that OpenMedia ‘oversimplifies’ policy, on the contrary, they decipher technocratic jargon that allows people to get involved with policy making and perhaps learn more over time. The group also claims to be ‘post-partisan’ as not to alienate those across the political spectrum. The result of all this is a healthier democracy where more people can become educated and voice their opinions all while standing up against unpopular pro-business policies of neoliberalism.

## Why Media Reform is Important

So far, we have discussed the problems of the neoliberal mass media and the various ways it has affected our society and democracy. We have looked at the relationship between advertisers and media organizations and how they are key sources of funding for the latter and how this is often reflective of programming choices on content as profit supersedes all. We have examined and discussed some of the problematic arguments that neoliberal proponents of deregulation often espouse and moreover, we have taken a look at alternative approaches to the neoliberal status quo through engaging with campaigns of media reform. But one question lingers, why is media reform so important?

What this is to say is that although we have had an in-depth approach to the contemporary economics of media reform, what makes it such a key political and socio-economic issue that must be engaged with? That is the topic for which we will conclude this paper on. To put it in simple broad terms; media reform is related to all other issues. Corporate control and influence simply cannot be ignored when the media that is supposed to be one of the pillars of democratic society is eroded away to act as mouthpieces for corporate monopolies. As we mentioned earlier, the media system is better understood as a social institution similar to the education system, which few would argue should be turned over entirely to market forces. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that media fulfill its duties in keeping good democratic governance for which it has failed under deregulated for-profit forces.

Take the example of radio in the United States after the Telecommunications Act of 1996, while of course mergers occurred and local content was flushed out, discourse also shifted to promote very pro-business policies. The political commentary on US commercial radio is almost entirely on the far political right. Commentators sympathetic to the role of corporations in US political and economic life and unsympathetic to the concerns of poor people and the working class, not to mention traditional liberals, are locked out by owners and advertisers. Even communities that vote to the liberal-left overwhelmingly like Eugene, Oregon, Detroit, Michigan, and Madison, Wisconsin are inundated by far-right radio programming. Were a Martian to visit the United States, they might determine from listening to US commercial radio that the nation was populated almost entirely by militantly hardline far-rightists (McChesney 2003).

Quite simply, good government and social cohesion that takes issues seriously requires an informed electorate and the mass media must be reformed to meet and bring attention to real social and economic needs of inequality. It has been shown that media issues do have the capacity, to stir people to take political action and to link media policies with stakes broader than personal preferences –liberty, democracy, press freedom, global peace (Hackett & Carroll 2006). This is evident in the examples of campaigns of media reform we discussed previously. In it is in this context then that the relevance of media reform must be stressed. Media systems are not simply an economic category; it is responsible for transmitting culture, journalism, and politically relevant information. Fulfilling those needs is mandatory for self-governance as our main source of information about our own society. The economics of contemporary media then should not be focused on sustaining the viewpoints of the wealthy and powerful through deregulation at the expense of us all, it should be reflective of our will as citizens in a healthy democracy.

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