

The Role of the Media and Lobby Groups in Canada's Democracy



Voicing the opinions of Canadians as part of
our democratic process.

Lobby Groups



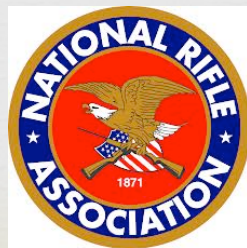
A form of direct or indirect communication
with the government members to influence
public policy

Scope and Focus



- ❧ Can be focused on one specific issue, or be broadly based
- ❧ Pressure groups may represent labor unions, agriculture, religious groups, ethnic groups, the environment, major corporations or industries, etc.
 - ❧ There are businesses that have entire departments dedicated to influencing government decisions.
- ❧ Examples: NRA, MADD, Pro-life/Pro-choice,

NAACP, PETA...



Techniques to gain attention



- ❧ social media (blogging, podcasts, Facebook)
- ❧ advertising campaigns
- ❧ stunts to gain media attention (sometimes related to civil disobedience)
- ❧ finance opinion polls or research projects



Opinion Polls



- ❧ In the 20th century opinion polls became very important tools to influence politicians
 - ❧ Politicians wanted to get the most votes possible, so they would ask people what their opinion was regarding a specific policy. Then the politician would decide how they could create a policy that would attract the most voters
- ❧ Usually the lobby group or politicians hire a company to ask a certain number of people in a specific area a few questions.
 - ❧ These companies work hard to try and create a poll that could give a representation of all of the people in that area (while you want an opinion poll of all Canadians, you can't call all of them)

Issues with opinion polls



- ❧ Political parties changing their policies because of opinion polls
 - ❧ Is that more democratic, or is it rejecting the people who supported the original policies and voted the party into power?
- ❧ Size of group polled and getting a broad base
 - ❧ Today many people do not answer opinion polls (or even answer the phone if they see it is from a call center), so how can we say these polls do in fact represent the people of an area

Influencing the legislative and executive branches of government



- ☞ Lobby (or pressure) groups are interested in directing political decisions, NOT holding political office.
- ☞ Will often make an impact on the opinions of government officials by building relationship with the bureaucrats that work with the politician
- ☞ Many lobby groups will also help to finance the election campaigns of politicians.



Influencing the judicial branch



- ☞ Lobby groups may also use the judicial branch by launching Supreme Court cases that will challenge the validity and constitutionality of laws.



Role of Media



Specifically news sources (newspapers, news magazines, television, radio, Internet)

Sharing Information



- ☞ In order for citizens in a democracy to participate in governing the country, they must be informed
 - ☞ Remember – one of the key aspects of a democracy is the free press
- ☞ Media informs us on what the government is doing – keeps them accountable



Using the Media



- ❧ The government can use the media to share their ideas and try to persuade us to support them
 - ❧ Examples: advertising campaigns, being interviewed on news programs, “scrum” (like in rugby, but when discussing government, it is a tightly-packed group of reporters surrounding a member of the Canadian House of Commons)



Using the Media



- ⌘ Political parties use the media to gain support for their party (often by attacking the other party)
 - ⌘ Examples: election ads, attack ads, campaign billboards



Using the Media



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Using the Media



- ☞ We can use the media to let the government know what we think about their policies and actions
 - ☞ Examples: protest rally, letters to the editor, getting an interview on a news program



Issue – bias



☞ *“No matter how much we may try to ignore it, human communication always takes place in a context, through a medium, and among individuals and groups who are situated historically, politically, economically, and socially. This state of affairs is neither bad nor good. It simply is. Bias is a small word that identifies the collective influences of the entire context of a message.”*

Issue – bias



- ❧ 100+ years ago, newspapers were very biased as they were seen as a way to promote a specific point of view on events.
- ❧ Many people would buy competing newspapers to see the differing opinions.
 - ❧ Some newspapers would turn to yellow journalism to sell more newspapers
 - ❧ If it bleeds it leads, conspiracy theories.
 - ❧ Today we can see the same in television news channels as their ratings lead to greater advertising revenues

Issue – bias



- ❧ Then, in the 20th century, news organizations were committed giving the news in an unbiased way
- ❧ Many people who had strong left-wing or right-wing views felt that there still was a bias in the media (often perceived as being slightly left of center).
 - ❧ This relates to how your ideology influences how you see the world – if you are right wing, anything to the left of you is left-wing, and vice-versa.



Individualist POLITICAL SPECTRUM

Interventionist

Interventionist

Dictatorship

Democracy

Dictatorship



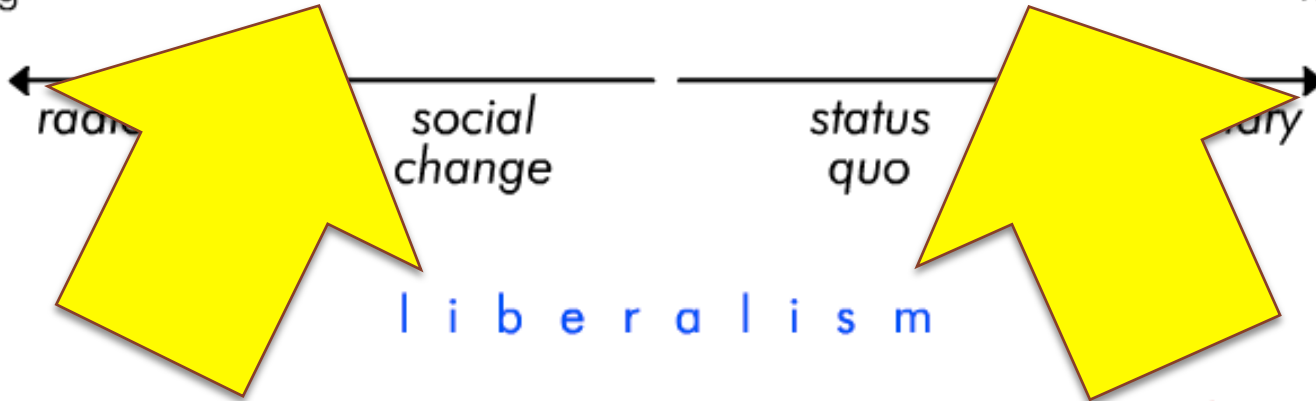
extreme
left wing

left wing

centre

right wing

extreme
right wing



communism

socialism

conservatism

fascism

l i b e r a l i s m



Issue – bias



- ☞ It is difficult to not be biased, because the news editor must decide what to include and what to cut, so parts of the story are always missing.
 - ☞ Even a positive story can be seen as bias, even though we usually notice a negative bias more.
- ☞ So news organizations like FOX News have created news stations that admit to their bias (they are right-wing) because they said too much of media has a left-wing slant.

Critical questions for detecting bias



- ❧ With what social, political, or professional groups is the speaker identified?
- ❧ Does the speaker have anything to gain personally from delivering the message?
- ❧ Who is paying for the message? Where does the message appear? Who stands to gain?
- ❧ What sources does the speaker use, and how credible are they? Does the speaker cite statistics? If so, how were the data gathered, who gathered the data, and are the data being presented fully?
- ❧ How does the speaker present arguments? Does the speaker fairly present alternative arguments? Does the speaker ignore obviously conflicting arguments?
- ❧ Does the speaker use positive words and images to describe his/her point of view and negative words and images to describe other points of view?

Some types of bias in journalism

- ❧ **Commercial bias:** The news media are money-making businesses. As such, they must deliver a good product to their customers to make a profit. The customers of the news media are advertisers. The news media are biased toward conflict (re: bad news and narrative biases below) because conflict draws readers and viewers. Harmony is boring.
- ❧ **Temporal bias:** The news media are biased toward the immediate. News is what's new and fresh. To be immediate and fresh, the news must be ever-changing even when there is little news to cover.
- ❧ **Visual bias:** Television (and, increasingly, newspapers) is biased toward visual depictions of news. Television is nothing without pictures.

- ❧ **Bad news bias:** Good news is boring (and probably does not photograph well, either). This bias makes the world look like a more dangerous place than it really is. Plus, this bias makes politicians look far more crooked than they really are.
- ❧ **Narrative bias:** The news media cover the news in terms of "stories" that must have a beginning, middle, and end. The news media apply a narrative structure to ambiguous events suggesting that these events are easily understood and have clear cause-and-effect relationships. Good storytelling requires drama, and so this bias often leads journalists to add, or seek out, drama for the sake of drama.
- ❧ **Glory bias:** The glory bias shows itself in particularly obnoxious ways in television journalism. News promos with stirring music and heroic pictures of individual reporters create the aura of omnipresence and omnipotence. I ascribe the use of the satellite phone to this bias. Note how often it's used in situations in which a normal video feed should be no problem to establish. The jerky pictures and fuzzy sound of the satellite phone create a romantic image of foreign adventure.

Key terms covered today



- ∞ Bias
- ∞ Lobby Group
- ∞ Media