

12-2011

# Comparing Newspaper Coverage of Climate Change During Election Campaigns in the United States, Canada and Australia

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study compares newspaper coverage of climate change and global warming during the national elections in Australia, Canada and the U.S. during 2007 and 2008. Using a census of newspaper coverage and in-depth interviews with reporters, editors and columnists in the three countries, the study confirmed the findings of earlier studies that the political agenda shapes the news agenda when it comes to climate change coverage. However, the study did find that coverage of general climate change stories continued during the election campaign periods in the three countries. Reporters who cover either politics or environmental issues or both found it difficult to make the connection in their stories between climate change concerns and the political debate, even in the case of the 2007 Australian and 2008 Canadian elections where climate change policy was a major issue. These problems highlight the need for newspapers to seriously reconsider how they approach coverage of climate change in general and in the political context by making more connections to related stories outside of the geographic area that they serve.

Comparing Newspaper Coverage of Climate Change During Election Campaigns in the  
United States, Canada and Australia

by

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Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Mass Communications.

Syracuse University  
December 2011

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Rebecca Fisch.

Lev Rowe.

Ken and Betty Rowe. Jennifer Quirke and Jamie Rowe. Toni Gerrits.

Paul and Helen Fisch, and the rest of the family.

Dr. Joan Deppa.

Prof. Charlotte Grimes.

Dr. Carol Leibler. Dr. Danny Hayes and Dr. Mark Meisner. Dr. Kristi Andersen.

Amy Arends. The rest of the faculty and staff at the Newhouse School. Meghan O'Brien,

Marti Collins, Jordan Storm, and Dan Schackman.

Mike Podgorski and Ben Medd.

The journalism and media studies crew at Humber College, especially Basil

Guinane, Mike Karapita, Carey French, and William Hanna.

Ivor Shapiro at Ryerson, Maija Saari at Laurier Brantford, and Minelle Mahtani.

All of the participants in the interviewing process.

Anyone at conferences who commented on papers or presentations.

Coffee shops on St. Clair West, especially World Class Bakers.

Rebecca Fisch. Again and again and always.

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## CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Environmental issues first began to gain a place in the consciousness of the public and the news media almost 50 years ago with the publication of Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring*, which focused mainly on pollution and the damage caused by synthetic pesticides (1962). In the years and decades since, the public's interest and the media's coverage of environmental issues have gone through a series of ups and downs. The media's focus has also shifted from initial issues such as pollution and acid rain to global warming or, as it is often called now, climate change. During the recent and sustained wave of coverage of environmental issues, but mostly of climate change, the coverage has been in global in scope. The interest in and awareness of climate change seems to cross borders, and while there are definitely differences in the way that governments and media outlets around the world have handled this issue, there are few places where it has not found its way on to the political agenda and the news agenda.

### ***Rationale***

The purpose of this research is to look at how journalism, elections and environmental issues came together in the United States and Canada in 2008 by looking at newspaper coverage of the elections in both those countries while comparing each of those cases with each other and the 2007 Australian election. It became apparent that these three factors might finally come together in 2008. The U.S. presidential election was wide open and started early; many candidates in both the Republican and Democratic parties took preliminary steps toward their candidacy in mid-2006. The 2008 federal election in Canada was, by comparison, somewhat unexpected. Climate change turned out to be a key issue in the Australian election, and it played a fairly significant role in



the Canadian election. In the U.S., it appeared slightly less prominent, but also manifested itself in the debate of energy-related issues, which were, at times, quite important to the national debate. There were also a number of uncontrollable variables – or as non-academics might call them, events – that conspired to alter the circumstances somewhat, but that’s what makes this type of research so potentially rich and revealing.

***Research on coverage of “climate change” or “global warming”***

Deppa and Rowe (2008) looked at the volume of stories featuring either of the phrases “climate change” or “global warming” in nine newspapers on three continents between 1997 and 2007. They did not select a random sample from each of those newspapers but rather conducted what could be called a census of these stories, divided into weeklong periods. This method permitted the tracking of variations in the coverage and guided which coverage should be closely examined. As a result, they were able to compare newspapers from different parts of the world and investigate what was prompting increases or decreases in coverage in each of those newspapers.

Some other recent research into trends in media coverage of climate change and global warming has used a different methodology. Boykoff and Boykoff (2007) looked at coverage of climate change on U.S. broadcast and cable TV network newscasts between 1988 and 2004. However, they selected a sample of that coverage from which to attempt to identify coverage trends. (They highlighted the types of stories – ecological/meteorological, political and scientific – that led to increased TV coverage of climate change.) An earlier study by the same co-authors looked at a sample of articles from four elite U.S. newspapers. Their sample comprised less than one-fifth of the articles in their population and the search terms did not include climate change. They also

omitted articles that appeared in sections such as sports, fashion and real estate (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004). Boykoff and Mansfield (2011) are also working on a project that has them collecting data from “50 newspapers across 20 countries and 6 continents.” They are using months, instead of weeks, as the time period for their study. Using weeks, as this study will, and Deppa and Rowe (2008) did, should provide more specific information about causes of increases and decreases. With fewer data points, the Boykoff and Mansfield study will provide a slightly less nuanced picture of the trends in newspaper coverage of climate change, but it will still serve their purpose. As Boykoff put it in an April 2009 e-mail correspondence: “We felt this was the most effective way to get a sense of the trends; we are not so concerned with the raw numbers, but rather how things appear to have shifted over time.”

Andrew Revkin, who covers environmental issues for *The New York Times* and keeps the blog DotEarth, has written recently that the media attention for climate change may be entering another “trance,” to use a phrase that Revkin attributes to President Barack Obama (2008, Nov. 25). The last such trance came around the time of the start of the Clinton administration in 1992 and coincided with a decrease in energy prices and an economic downturn. The beginning of a new Democratic administration in 2009 has similar circumstances. One key difference is that the boom in coverage that preceded this potential trance was one that, as Revkin put it, “could be seen as the journalistic equivalent of the global heat wave in 1998, propelled by a Pacific Ocean El Nino warming” (2008, Dec. 5, para. 5).

One of the goals of this project will be to discern any effect the elections may have played in this apparent decline in the volume of news coverage of environmental

issues or whether the decline was merely coincidental. There is little doubt that the enormous amount of coverage of the election, particularly the U.S. election, may have played some role in reducing the amount of coverage of environmental issues. But there may be other factors, including the shifting cost of energy over the campaign – gasoline prices fluctuated from more than \$4 a gallon in the summer of 2008 to just over \$2 a gallon by Election Day – that helped change the media’s agenda.

One more factor that needs to be considered is the possibility that the economic downturn has had a very direct effect on the size of the “news hole.”<sup>1</sup> U.S. newspaper industry figures show that the number of advertisements sold have dropped at the same time that the number of stories about climate change and global warming have dropped (Potter, 2008, Dec. 17). It would be nearly impossible to draw a causal link between these two trends, but there are enough facts to make a compelling argument for an interesting connection. We know that even during the 2006-2007 boom in stories about these issues, global warming and climate change were never at the top of the news agenda for the press or the public. And certainly during 2008, the elections in North America and, later, the economic woes regularly topped the news agenda. We also know that the amount of space that newspapers have to devote to stories is directly tied to the numbers of ads they have to place in their news pages. If, as the data from the Newspaper Association of America (and all of the subsequent layoffs and even newspaper closings) clearly suggests, newspaper ad sales have been dropping precipitously and, except for one brief blip, continuously since the middle months of 2006, then it stands to reason that there are fewer newspaper stories being published in general.

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<sup>1</sup> This is term commonly used in the newspaper industry to refer to the part of the newspaper dedicated to editorial content.

While most newspaper editors endeavor to include a fairly wide mix of stories in their pages, it is more of a challenge when trying to provide the required amount of coverage of era-defining stories like Obama's election (and to a slightly lesser extent in Canada, the failed coalition and the prorogation of Parliament) and the recession. In other words, stories about climate change and global warming may have been squeezed into a less prominent place in the international news agenda by some of these factors. It would be impossible to get a full picture of those factors and how they have affected that coverage without knowing what percentage of all news stories are about climate change or global warming and how that compares to earlier measurements. Even that level of detail would not fully explain any possible fluctuations in the percentage of stories about environmental issues.

While this study will take all of these factors into account, they are not the central focus of this study, although they will play a role in the analysis. By conducting interviews with newspaper reporters and editors who worked on the election campaigns in these three countries, I will be able to hear their rationale for the coverage or lack thereof. Close reading of newspaper coverage will also offer a clearer sense of the context and tone of the coverage. For instance, using the Canadian example, did climate change or the environment come up in stories or columns that were dismissive of the Liberal Party's Green Shift or the Green Party's *raison d'être*? Conducting a census of stories during and around the campaign period in a wider range of daily newspapers will provide insight into the shape and depth of the coverage. Together, these methods will provide a multi-dimensional picture of how newspapers covered environmental issues during election campaigns.

This project will contribute to the existing theory in a number of areas. First and foremost, it will make strong theoretical and methodological contributions to the field of comparative political communication. Comparing newspaper coverage of climate change during national election campaigns in these three quite similar countries should provide other researchers with an example of the similarities and differences in coverage of issues of global scope. For example, this study could quite easily be replicated (although while using a different time frame) to examine coverage of the current recession, which extends across so many borders that meetings of both the G7, which groups the world's richest nations, and the G20, which groups 19 countries and the European Union, focused on the crisis. This study will explore the extent to which national politics affects the response to international issues and what factors play a role in that response. It will also try to determine which types of frames are more successful when these three countries are examined collectively and which are more country-specific.

***Three Cases: Australia, Canada, and the U.S.***

In the fall of 2008, as Americans were in the final weeks of the presidential contest leading to the election of President Barack Obama, Canadians were thrust into a much shorter federal election campaign. The Canadian election, called in the first week of September with the votes cast in mid-October, seemed to get even less international attention than usual, perhaps because it was overshadowed by the fascinating campaign in the U.S. and because the vote led to essentially the same result as the preceding

election in early 2006: The Conservative Party, led by Stephen Harper, formed a second consecutive minority government, albeit with a slightly larger parliamentary advantage.<sup>2</sup>

In the months leading up to the official campaign, the major issues in the Canadian election campaign were the always-nebulous concept of leadership and the carbon tax proposed by Liberal Party leader Stephane Dion. Dion, a former political science professor who had previously served as the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs under Prime Minister Jean Chretien and as Minister of the Environment under Prime Minister Paul Martin, proposed a carbon tax plan as the major plank in his election platform. The plan, which Dion dubbed the Green Shift, using the green qualifier that had become so popular among marketers in almost every field, was based on similar plans employed in some European countries, including Sweden. It proposed to increase federal consumption taxes on carbon-based energy, excluding gasoline, while simultaneously lowering personal income taxes to offset the almost certain-to-increase cost of goods and services. The Conservative campaign was built on the strength of Harper's leadership qualities and Dion's comparative weakness as a leader.<sup>3</sup> The campaign also took aim at

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<sup>2</sup> Even though Harper's Conservatives earned a plurality of seats in the election, they were defeated in a non-confidence vote as soon as they returned to the House of Commons. The three opposition parties promptly pledged to defeat the government over its winter economic statement, plunging the country into a constitutional crisis that was resolved when the Governor General allowed Harper to "prorogue" Parliament, essentially canceling the legislative session until late January when the government could produce an economic plan that would not be defeated.

<sup>3</sup> The Conservative Party ran ads that focused heavily on these two themes. Harper appeared in a light blue sweater, regaling unsuspecting viewers with stories of his parenting prowess and general decency. At the same time, the party ran cartoonish ads lampooning Dion with his lanky frame and professorial detachment. They also launched a Web site cataloging Dion's shortcomings. Its address was [notaleader.ca](http://notaleader.ca)

the Green Shift, which they described in ads that appeared throughout the summer of 2008 as a “tax on everything” (Delacourt, 2008, June 10).

Just as the American election campaign was affected by the sudden economic freefall, the final days of the Canadian campaign were focused on the economy. The party leaders even spent more time than originally planned in the two leader debates (one is entirely in English and the other in French) to discuss the economy.<sup>4</sup>

The entire campaign, including the riddle of the Green Shift’s apparently sound bite-resistant complexity, raised interesting questions about media ethics and practices.<sup>5</sup> It also raised important questions of how the press covers environmental issues and policy questions when they arise as a part of an election campaign. In recent years, studies (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2007; Deppa & Rowe, 2008) have shown that coverage of environmental issues, including climate change and global warming, has increased over the last few years with a light dip in coverage in 2008, quite possibly caused, at least in part, by the attention devoted to the unusually long Democratic primary election campaign season in the United States and the fact that leading contenders in both parties advocated action on climate change.

Newspaper coverage of the environment has been varied, including stories ranging from the direct effects of climate change and other potentially calamitous

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<sup>4</sup> This also followed the American lead. The first presidential debate, which Sen. John McCain nearly missed because he was busy trying to solve the crisis, became more focused on economic issues than originally planned.

<sup>5</sup> On an entirely unrelated but attention-worthy note, one TV network chose to air a portion of an interview with Stephane Dion that it had agreed not to air. The news directors argued that the unaired segment, which showed the decidedly francophone and somewhat hearing-impaired Dion struggling to understand a poorly phrased question, was so important that they were willing to break their own word.

situations to lifestyle stories about eco-tourism, as well as extensive coverage of major international political summits where environmental topics were high on the agenda (Deppa & Rowe, 2008). But as of yet, there has been little research devoted to how the press covers environmental issues during election campaigns. This is not necessarily a failing by academics. There has been precious little attention devoted to environmental issues and related policy proposals during national elections in English-speaking Western democracies. Only recently, during and immediately after this recent wave of attention on climate change and other environmental concerns, have we seen elections like the one in Canada in 2008 and the 2007 Australian election with environmental issues at or very near the center of the debate.

At the same time, however, the 2008 U.S. presidential election took place in the wake of one of the most intense periods of media coverage of environmental issues in the United States, which was precipitated to some extent by the success of former Vice President Al Gore in raising the public's awareness of the issue through his film, books and speaking appearances, and winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007 (with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change). Both McCain and Obama offered only scant attention to climate change or environmental issues in their public addresses. The environment did, however, come up somewhat indirectly in the early stages of the campaign when high oil prices boosted the cost of gasoline, adding urgency to some calls for either more offshore drilling or alternative fuel sources. But during the primaries, there was little significant difference on climate change policy between the major candidates for each of the parties' nominations. In the national campaign, Obama frequently cited so-called green collar jobs as potential replacements for the blue- and



white-collar jobs that were being lost in the early stages of the economic downturn, even before the crisis was described as the worst since the Great Depression (CNN.com, 2008, May 4).

While, broadly speaking, Australia shares a number of similarities with the U.S. and even more with Canada, including a parliamentary system of government, its most recent national election – in November 2007 – came about a year before the Canadian and American elections. And climate change played a reasonably large role in the Australian campaign.

In the Australian election, the left-leaning Labor Party led by Kevin Rudd upended the 10-year long reign of John Howard, the leader of the Liberal/National coalition. Climate change – and perhaps more specifically the Kyoto Accord, which Howard opposed – was one of the key issues, but not the most important one. In the run-up to the election and during the campaign, Rudd's Labor Party seemed to try to use the question of climate change and whether Australia should have signed on to the Kyoto Accord as a way of marking a clear difference from the Howard government. Upon winning the election, one of Rudd's first acts was to ratify the Kyoto Accord, almost exactly 10 years after it was originally negotiated. This particular bit of news received attention around the world and sent a signal that the new Australian government was generally more progressive and was taking steps to reverse the inaction of the Howard years on this particular issue.

Interestingly enough, Rudd has been criticized in the press for not going far enough in taking steps to cut emissions, and he did back away from some of his pre-election promises. By the end of 2008, Rudd was being roundly criticized by

commentators and experts, at least one of whom compared Obama's post-election rhetoric to that of Rudd (Aly, 2008, Dec. 20), while opposition parties claimed that Rudd's emissions reduction policies were ultimately little different from what likely would have happened if Howard's Liberal/National coalition had been re-elected (Shanahan, 2008, Dec. 16). At this writing, it is still far too early to see how the American and Canadian media will cover the climate change policy debates in the post-election period, but studying the Australian case through the campaign and into the weeks and months after the election may provide some sense of what will come next, especially in the U.S. where there will be expectation that the new Democratic administration will take steps toward policies that at least take into account the idea that man-made climate change is a genuine concern.

Within these examples – Canada, the U.S. and Australia – we see a range of different responses to environmental policy as a serious topic during an election campaign and the press' response to reporting on these issues in a high pressure electoral setting. Perhaps most importantly, climate change is still a contested issue in each of these countries. This project, which will use a combination of methods, including interviews and a census of newspaper coverage of environmental issues before, during and after the election campaigns, will compare the three international cases. Together, they provide one of the first explorations of how the press handles the combination of electoral politics and environmental issues in the post-*Inconvenient Truth* era.

### ***Getting Started***

My interest in this intersection of politics, climate change, and media practices and ethics was piqued in the spring of 2007 when I began meeting with Dr. Joan Deppa

to discuss the possibility of working on an independent study project that summer. Early in our discussions, it became clear that one area that we were both very interested in was what seemed to our eyes to be the sudden boom of stories about climate change and global warming that had emerged in large part out of the attention generated by Hurricane Katrina and Al Gore and *An Inconvenient Truth*.

I was also drawn to the topic by the surprisingly dramatic events of the Canadian Liberal Party's leadership convention in December 2006.<sup>6</sup> Stéphane Dion came from third place on the first ballot to eventually defeat his far better known and better-funded opponents, former Ontario Premier Bob Rae and writer and academic Michael Ignatieff. Dion made environmental sustainability one of the three main components of his campaign. And at the convention, he and his supporters sported green scarves, eschewing the Liberal Party's traditional use of red. Not only was Dion's success a surprise, but the Liberal Party's embrace of environmental issues as a major issue also signaled a significant shift for the centrist party that under Chretien and Martin had tilted more to the right. The convention coincided with the Conservative Party, with its electoral base in the oil-rich western provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan, bungling the environment file and eventually replacing its original environment minister, Rona Ambrose. Considering the stated intentions of the newly elected leader of the Liberal Party and the Conservative's credibility gap on environmental issues, it seemed probable that these issues would have a significant role in the next Canadian election. And considering Zaller's theory of how elites help shape public opinion, the environment looked very likely to be a hotly contested space in Canada. (Zaller, 1992)

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<sup>6</sup> It was dramatic by Canadian standards, at least. And the fact that anything dramatic happened in Canadian politics is, almost by definition, surprising.

My interest also stems from personal experience – specifically, my time working as a reporter for two Canadian newspapers. During my stint at the *National Post*, I was assigned to write a number of stories about global warming in the context of the seemingly unusual weather events that were taking place around the world in the summer of 2002. These stories included round-ups of the extreme weather interspersed with comments from climate scientists to stories warning gardeners in southern Ontario to cover their tomato plants in late May to avoid damage from an unexpected frost and to longer features on NASA’s climate change research. The *National Post*, which was founded by Conrad Black<sup>7</sup>, was and is notoriously and unapologetically conservative editorially, so much so that one of the newspaper’s early missions when it started in the late 1990s was to unite Canada’s right-wing political parties.<sup>8</sup> After one of my stories appeared, I was sent an e-mail from the executive assistant of a prominent MP from the Canadian Alliance, then one of the two conservative parties, that was essentially a long list of people who might be considered experts who disputed the idea of man-made climate change. All of the newspaper’s senior editors were copied on the e-mail. To the credit of the editors, none of them said anything to me, and I never felt any pressure to include any of these or comparable sources in any of my stories.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> At this writing, Black is incarcerated in a federal penitentiary in Florida having been convicted of charges of obstruction of justice and mail and wire fraud.

<sup>8</sup> Which happened eventually, although the role of the *Post* in this process was probably negligible.

<sup>9</sup> The only time that I was asked to include something in a story on this topic was during the summer of 2002 when the actor Leonardo DiCaprio was speaking out on this issue. A senior editor asked me to include something from a wire story in the hopes that it would make DiCaprio look foolish. I chose not to include it and didn’t hear anything about it from the editor.

At the same time, it is clear that there are very specific political and commercial interests on both sides of this story that use every tool possible to lobby the press with the hopes of getting their side of the story included in any media coverage. In recent years, some of the most notable public relations efforts have come from think tanks that doubt the scientific claims behind climate change. Reporting has shown that a number of the think tanks have been funded by oil companies like ExxonMobil (Mooney, 2005) and, in one case, a coalition that was devoted to changing public opinion about the man-made nature of climate change was in possession of an internal report that said the impact of those emissions “cannot be denied” (Revkin, 2009, April 23). This has made the job of journalists very challenging because they have been trained to cover any story as fairly and accurately as possible but at the same time cover both sides of a story. One New Zealand study showed that there is, perhaps as a result of these challenges, a discrepancy between the facts of environmental problems and the public’s understanding of them that can distract the public from the actual problem (Bell, 1994). During an election campaign, particularly one in which two parties may have very different views on environmental policy, all of the challenges facing journalists would quite likely be heightened. And beyond all of that, climate change has proven to be an incredibly difficult story to cover in any context. The science (and the jargon that comes with it) may be difficult for most reporters to distill into relatively short stories (Ward, 2002).

### ***Outline***

This dissertation provides a thorough picture of the media coverage of environmental issues in the most recent national election campaigns in the U.S., Canada and Australia. This work fills an important gap in the literature that exists in part because

this is a fairly new phenomenon; environmental issues, especially climate change, have only recently become prominent enough to become important topics in election campaigns. The literature review (Chapter 2) provides a thorough account of the research that has already been done in relevant areas and the theories that apply to this study. Chapter 3 features a description of the news culture in each of the three countries, focusing on the demographics of newspaper journalists and their responses to common ethical dilemmas. This chapter also offers more of the political context for each of the three countries and reports the results of recent public opinion polls on the environment and the economy with an eye to providing some sense of the public mood in Canada, Australia and the U.S. The methods section (Chapter 4) gives a complete explanation of the methods for this study.

The rest of the dissertation is divided into five chapters. The first three of those chapters features the results for each of the three countries in the study. These parts include background information on the elections as well as a description of climate change coverage and the climate change debate in those countries leading up to the election and a description of the news culture and political system in each country. I tracked weekly and daily coverage of environmental issues during the election campaign. This is supplemented by a closer reading of a purposeful sample of articles – both straight news stories and opinion pieces – from this time period with a particular focus on articles from days or stretches of the campaign the census of the daily news coverage highlight as significant, either because of increased or decreased coverage. I also conducted extensive in-depth interviews with newspaper reporters and editors who covered the various campaigns and those who have specialized in climate change coverage. (Whenever

possible, these interviews were conducted in person.) The fourth results chapter will analyze the differences among the three countries, focusing on what the data revealed about each of the three sections and what important distinctions can be made through comparisons of the three questions.

The final chapter addresses the questions that have been raised by this research, including the extent to which it is generalizable to election coverage in other countries and other circumstances, and suggest paths for future research.

## CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

The growth in research into media coverage of climate change and other environmental issues has roughly mirrored the different waves of attention afforded to the key environmental topics of the last three decades. There was a great deal of research that paid attention to the first big wave of news stories about environmental concerns in the late 1980 and early 1990s. The research from that era, as we will see, focused on identifying a pattern that would explain the wax and wane of the press' coverage of these stories. We are only beginning to see the fruits of more research into the recent increase in coverage. That research varies from studies that simply track coverage to those that seek to explain the variations in coverage. This study will draw on a wide array of literature precisely because it focuses on such a specific slice of climate change coverage and seeks to explain the nature of that coverage through existing literature and key communications and political science theories. All of this literature provides the basis for the research questions and hypotheses that follow:

RQ1: How have climate change and other environmental policy issues been covered in recent national election campaigns in Canada, Australia and the U.S.?

RQ2: What challenges did the newspaper reporters and editors who were covering the campaigns face when reporting on climate change-related issues?

RQ3: How do different political and news cultures account for differences in coverage between Canada, Australia and the U.S.?

H1: Coverage of climate change as a political issue will decline in the period immediately before election day.

H2: Coverage of climate change as a political issue will increase in the immediate aftermath of the election.



H3: Total coverage of climate change and global warming will decline during election campaigns.

H4: The greater the difference in opinion on climate change between the main candidates in an election, the more news coverage of climate change there will be during an election campaign.

H5: During election campaigns, climate change coverage will be more likely to use political or economic frames than science or prevention frames.

H6: Newspapers with more conservative editorial positions will give less coverage to climate change during election campaigns than more liberal-leaning newspapers.

### **Media Coverage of Climate Change**

#### ***Issue Cycles***

Some of the earliest work by communications scholars examining news coverage of environmental issues was focused simply on how the media were covering this topic, which was a relatively new addition to the news agenda. Bowman and Hanaford (1977) did a content analysis of eight widely circulated magazines and tried to determine the type and frequency of coverage that they found in the wake of the first Earth Day in 1970. The study found that magazine coverage of environmental issues in the early 1970s peaked in 1974 with a sudden boom in stories about energy resource management. Before that, stories about pollution of the water and the air had made up the largest chunk of the coverage. And the growth of environmental coverage in the late 1960s and in the early 1970s led to the emergence of reporters who were dedicated to the environment beat and public relations campaigns, from all sides, on important environmental issues (Sachsmann, 1996).

Another one of the key works that inspired much of the work in the early and mid-1990s came from the early 1970s. Downs' work on a five-phase "issue-attention" cycle was originally seen as being very applicable to news coverage of environmental issues. Writing in 1972, Downs argued that environmental issues were, at that point, about midway through his five-phases. Coverage had been completely through the pre-problem stage and the "alarmed discovery and euphoric enthusiasm" phase and most of the way through the process of "realizing the cost of significant progress," which is the third phase. In fact, Downs thought that it was already moving toward the fourth phase, which was the "gradual decline of public interest." He believed that environmental issues would eventually move into the post-problem phase because, in part, the movement relied heavily on young people and was, for that reason, likely to be short-lived. And at the time when Downs was writing, most environmental issues were local in nature and none of the prominent environmental problems of the day were believed to have had the global scope of climate change.

A number of studies that were published more than two decades later were still trying to deal with how environmental coverage fit into Downs' cycle. This research also cast a wider net than the study by Bowman and Hanaford. Trumbo's 1996 content analysis of 500 randomly selected items on climate change in five major U.S. newspapers from 1985 to 1995 found three distinct phases of coverage of climate change – pre-controversy, controversy and post-controversy. Quite logically, Trumbo's research showed that there was little coverage in the pre-controversy period, but it rose considerably at the height of the controversy. The post-controversy phase of the cycle identified by Trumbo showed a diminution of coverage. Trumbo presumed that it would

take another newspeg or significant event for the cycle to resume. Another one of the key findings of this work was the apparent difference in the types of stories that appeared during each phase of the news cycle. The division was not perfectly clean, but scientists were more likely to appear as key sources in stories during the pre-controversy phase. After that, the stories were more likely to be focused on politicians as the public and the media turned to them to respond to whatever issues had caused the controversy.

*The New York Times* and *Washington Post* were the subject of another study that covered much the same time frame as Trumbo's work (McComas and Shanahan, 1999). This content analysis of stories randomly selected from those two newspapers between 1980 and 1995 also identified a number of phases in the typical news cycle for stories about environmental issues. McComas and Shanahan began with the media focused on an environmental threat of some sort. That was followed by stories focused on the scientific debate over the issue and then the potential economic cost of the threat that prompted the coverage cycle. As science has evolved and more attention has been paid to climate change, McComas and Shanahan's cycle could be very instructive. The lack of significant scientific dispute over climate change may have left the press with a void to fill in the middle of this most recent cycle. Shanahan updated the study for a climate change conference in Canada in 2000 and took into account the notion that the scientific community was closer to reaching a consensus opinion on the validity and threat of climate change. In this paper, Shanahan suggested that the coverage had been moving away from the scientific disputes of the past and was more likely to center on economic and international relations themes.

Some researchers, harkening back to Bowman and Hanaford, began to turn their attention to the major themes used by the press in media coverage of climate change. In another paper presented at the 2000 Climate Change Communication Conference in Waterloo, Ontario, Meisner studied articles from major Canadian and U.S. newspapers and newsmagazines and found that there appeared to be growing acceptance of global warming as a significant problem, but it was presented as something that was natural, unstoppable or both and over which individuals were seen to have little agency. Meisner made the case that stories with these sorts of narratives didn't tell the full story of climate change and, perhaps more importantly, didn't allow for individuals to take action.

An earlier set of studies focused on whether specific events – in this case, it was mainly instances of extreme weather – had any effect on the amount of media coverage of global warming, at first, and then climate change. Ungar's first study (1992), which focuses on interest in global warming that emerged after the North American drought of 1988, suggested that the extreme weather of that summer may have had a role in increasing media coverage of global warming. The later study (1999), which looked at extreme weather events covered by network television and identified by keywords in the Vanderbilt Archive between 1968 and 1996, found that when coverage of heat waves, droughts, floods, hurricanes and forest fires were combined in an index they revealed "a clear trend toward increased coverage of extreme events" (1999, p. 140). Ungar also compared total annual coverage of extreme weather events with annual coverage of global warming in general, but found no relationship between the variables. During this period, Ungar said, weather-pegged stories about climate change were rare, while peaks

in coverage about global warming on network news tended to relate to politics, such as the policies of the first Bush administration and the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

### ***Recent Analyses***

The first wave of the more recent research about how the news media are covering climate change and global warming has been largely focused on simply understanding the shape and scope of that coverage. As environmental issues have grown in prominence, it was clear to virtually any observer that the coverage itself was increasing. The first step, it seems, has been to track that coverage. As described in the previous chapter, Deppa and Rowe (2008) found that coverage generally increased in 2006 and 2007. The increase is in response to a growing awareness of these issues that came from, among other sources, Al Gore's reemergence as a climate change warrior and the political and pop cultural fallout, particularly in North America.<sup>10</sup> But they also found that there was growth in climate change coverage prior to the release of *An Inconvenient Truth* and all of its attendant hoopla, which may also be due in part to the coverage of Hurricane Katrina. The first of the nine papers that they examined to show a steady increase in coverage was *The Financial Times*, which carried many stories about the economic risks and opportunities presented by global warming. This suggests that while Gore and other factors may have focused the media's attention on climate change, media attention to the issue was already growing. While coverage declined in 2008, the level never dropped to pre-increase levels. Deppa and Rowe also found that some of the biggest individual spikes in coverage came when there was a political debate in a specific country about an internal issue, such as whether to sign on to the Kyoto Accord. And,

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<sup>10</sup> The role of Al Gore as the sort of pied piper of climate change, especially in the U.S., is an interesting topic for future study.

indeed, the *China Daily*, an English-language newspaper, gave virtually no attention to the issue until much later in the 10-year cycle when foreign governments and other potential business partners or investors from the European Union became very interested in issues of climate change and environmental sustainability. Election campaigns are among the biggest national political stories, so climate change, if it is considered an important enough issue, could see another boost during campaigns, but might also be swamped by coverage of other issues and the race to win the campaign.

Looking at other similar studies, researchers have found comparable trends and have begun taking steps to understand the coverage. Boykoff and Boykoff, for example, studied four major U.S. newspapers from 1988 to 2002 in one study (2004) and those same newspapers, as well as the nightly evening news broadcasts by the three U.S. broadcast networks with such newscasts, from 1988 to 2004 in another (2007). Both studies, which reached the conclusion that journalistic norms shaped coverage of global warming, were completed before 2005. “Rather than relying on external constrictions — such as overt censorship and the editorial spiking of stories — the mass-media depend on internal construction, disciplinary practices that produce the patterned communicative geography of the public sphere” (2007, p. 1202). Boykoff and Boykoff also called on researchers to continue examining U.S. media coverage of climate change, but some attention has shifted to other parts of the globe, particularly the southern hemisphere where coverage is more sporadic and the problem of climate change and other environmental degradation is arguably even more acute (Fahn, 2008).

### ***Politics in Climate Change Coverage***

Researchers have found that national politics played a major role in increases in the press's coverage of climate change. A British study, which looked at newspaper coverage of climate change in that country, also found that coverage of climate change has been "strongly linked to the political agenda on this issue" (Carvalho & Burgess, 2005, p. 1467). Others have also suggested that if a country's government has decided not to be involved in major international accords, as in this case, the Kyoto Accord, then the news media in that country are less likely to cover all of events surrounding those accords (McManus, 2000). This study found that there was a noticeable spike in coverage of climate change in the early years of Tony Blair's Labour government, which made climate change an issue in the United Kingdom. But the opposite was the case in Australia, which is of particular interest to this study. The government of Prime Minister John Howard was staunchly opposed to signing on to the Kyoto Accord, even though Australia had one of the higher levels of allowable emissions among developed nations under the terms of the deal. McManus argues that Australian newspapers gave less coverage of the Buenos Aires conference in 1998 than it did to Kyoto in 1997 because the political establishment in that country did not treat it as an important event. But this attitude in the press and in Australian politics shifted drastically in the 2007 election. Gascoigne (2008) states climate change became a campaign issue, chosen, in part, by the Labor Party leader Kevin Rudd to demonstrate his contention that John Howard was out of touch. And Gascoigne says that the media picked up on the issue. But going all the way back to the work by Ungar, he found that there was some unusual weather that helped provide a tangible backdrop for the growing debate – "a nationwide drought gave them the human impact factor and the pictures" to illustrate it (p. 527).

## *Election Campaigns and the Press*

### *Election Coverage*

In any Western democracy, the press plays a major role in how the public views and perceives the candidates and the campaign. The press' role is even more significant in national elections where most voters will have little direct interaction with the candidates and will have their impressions shaped by the coverage of the news and entertainment media. Even in parliamentary democracies, like Canada and Australia, federal elections often turn on the personalities and popularity of the party leaders. While it is true that there are some local candidates whose popularity may make them impervious to broader shifts in the political fortunes of their parties, these sorts of politicians are increasingly few and far between.

No American political campaign (nor any political campaign in the world) is as defined by the media's coverage as is the race for the presidency. The scope of the campaign, naturally, lends itself to considerable coverage among the nation's most popular newspapers, radio networks, TV networks, cable news networks, and Internet news and opinion sites. In *Out of Order*, Patterson (1994) wrote critically of the press's role in covering presidential campaigns. Patterson's complaints are typical of many critiques of the press. After quoting Walter Lippmann at the start of each chapter, he contends that the press tends to downplay the aspects of politics that are related to governing and focuses more on stories that are entertaining or likely to capture the attention of the audience, regardless of their significance and relationship to policy decisions. Using a range of examples, mostly from the last 35 years, Patterson suggests that there is ample proof that "a press-based electoral system" is not conducive to



choosing a president. He calls for networks to provide free time to candidates and argues that the reporters have put themselves in a more important position than the candidates. Regardless of whether or not some of Patterson's assertions are accurate – and that is, in many cases, very questionable – his suggestions, at worst, run counter to the idea of freedom of the press and are, at the very least, patronizing to the press and its audience. He also ignores the role that politicians and their advisors have played by participating in the process.

Since the arrival of CNN nearly 30 years ago now, the news cycle has sped up to fill 24 hours of programming. And with the more recent advent of other news channels, namely Fox News and MSNBC, there has been a marked rise in partisan coverage, conservative on Fox News and more liberal on MSNBC. DellaVigna and Kaplan (2007) found that there was an increase in the Republican vote in towns that had access to Fox News before the year 2000.

The other area where cable television news may be affecting presidential elections is in the type of coverage or format they provide. All three of the major American cable news networks like to set up segments where representatives from each of the two parties argue over a hot topic. Research has shown that this arrangement can maintain and attract the attention of viewers, but some of those viewers may be less trusting of politicians in general (Mutz & Reeves, 2005). An experiment also showed that camera angles and close-ups can make a difference in how people react to a political debate on a talk show. The more extreme the close-up and the more uncivil the debate, the more aroused a subject was likely to be and the more likely someone is to discredit the individual in the debate with a position that is the opposite of their own (Mutz, 2006). While this

dissertation is focused on newspaper coverage of election campaigns, the growth of cable television news coverage and the advent of the 24-hour news cycle has had an undeniable effect on the role of newspapers. For example, Prior (2007) found in his research that there is more television news being consumed than ever before because of the cable news networks. But there is a much smaller percentage of Americans who are consuming that news. In other words, a hardcore news audience has been developed, and news outlets are likely to tailor their coverage for them.

So far, all of the research in this section has focused on presidential elections and the American press' coverage of it, but most of these arguments can be applied to Australia and Canada. The 24-hour news cycle has arrived in both countries with the arrival of cable news networks, although there are fewer of them. (And in Canada, at least, the programming seems to be less reliant on partisan commentary.) But researchers in both of those countries have identified trends that are potential effects of changes in election coverage. Matthew Mendelsohn, perhaps the pre-eminent scholar of the media's effect on Canadian politics, looked at the 1988 federal election, which turned on the question of free trade with the United States (2003). He found that the frames used by the TV news in Canada were focused on leadership and the horserace, even when they considered free trade, which was the dominant issue in that campaign. Mendelsohn also found that strategy was an important frame for the day's coverage. He also argued that the Canadian news media avoided questions and topics that brought ideology to the forefront. For example, they did not look at who in Canada would benefit from a free trade deal with the U.S. but whether Canada, writ large, would benefit, which led to using sources from the business community who tended to support the pact. Another study that

also looked at the 1988 election, as well as the 1993 and 1997 contests, found that there was no evidence that interpersonal communication would serve as a corrective for the media's focus on leadership (Gidengil *et al.*, 2002).

The Australian situation, while similar to the Canadian one in terms of the system of government, has some peculiarities. Mughan (1995) compared the U.S. and Australian elections of the mid-1980s and tried to see if there was any of determining the effect that TV coverage of the eventual victor had on the public's perceptions of the candidates and, ultimately, the election results themselves. But he found that people who relied mainly on television for their information were not more likely to be influenced by the leader of the party (or the presidential candidate) in their political decision-making. One of the most unique qualities of Australian elections is the law that requires all citizens to vote. The result of this is that there are an even larger number of voters in Australia who are disinterested in politics but turn to the media (and other sources) to get information before they cast a vote if for no other reason than to avoid getting fined. And Denmark (2002) found that voters with the lowest level of political knowledge are the most susceptible to the messages delivered on television newscasts.

The effects of newspapers (the focus of this study, after all) are certainly different from those of TV news, although a British study found that newspaper readers whose political views are reinforced by the newspaper they read are more likely to vote than those who supported a different party from their newspaper (Newton & Brynin, 2001). This section, however, leaves aside the most recent media innovations, specially the Internet and all of its attendant formats from blogs to podcasts to the whimsically named Twitter. And it doesn't take into account the growing body of literature (Pfau, Cho and

Chong, 2001; Baum, 2002; Pfau, Houston and Semmler, 2005) that deals with the effects of non-traditional TV and radio sources like daytime talk shows, radio call-in shows, and late-night comedy shows, especially on voters who choose not to attend to traditional news sources. All of these factors are growing in significance as traditional news outlets see declines in their audiences. While these factors fall, for the most part, outside the scope of this project, the role of non-traditional news sources in the coverage of climate change during election periods is one that is worthy of study.

### ***The Press' Role in Covering Politics and Elections***

The relationship between reporters and campaigning politicians is at once symbiotic and uneasy. Reporters, for the most part, need to have a reasonable amount of access to the candidates and their staff if they want to break stories and do a better than average job. On the other hand, it is advantageous for politicians and their staff to have a good relationship with the reporters who are covering their campaign. In both cases, there is often a tendency, often quite well founded, to distrust the actions of the other. There is a great deal of literature that considers and probes this constantly changing and increasingly complicated relationship, occasionally offering possible solutions or correctives for the tensions that persist.

For example, Timothy Cook (1998) argues that the press should be recognized and treated as a political institution, and he makes some compelling points to back up his argument, pointing specifically to the amount of time and other resources, including money that politicians spend to court the media in one way or another, although he sees this as a problem that needs to be somehow solved. Cook, somewhat presciently, sees the Internet as a possible corrective, and he calls for more direct communication amongst

politicians and between politicians and the public, something that we certainly saw during the 2008 presidential campaign when Obama's campaign team employed new media to circumvent traditional media outlets. But the ultimate outcome of Obama's tactics and Cook's suggestions is to effectively reduce and diminish the role of reporters.

In the context of this particular study, the focus is on how reporters covered a particular issue during an election campaign. But one of the major factors that will govern how reporters cover any campaign is the amount of time and space devoted to horserace coverage. The literature shows that most of the press' coverage of campaigns is devoted to the horserace – for example, stories about polling and tactics in a campaign. As a result, space for serious discussion of issues is limited.

In the 1990s, a pair of American researchers (Miller & Denham, 1994) studied news coverage of election campaigns to determine if coverage of the so-called horserace between candidates was increasing as a proportion of total news coverage. The study compared the coverage of the 1988 and 1992 presidential elections and found that, as Election Day drew nearer, coverage of the horserace increased both times. A similar pattern had been observed during the 1980 presidential election (Stovall & Solomon, 1984). There was, however, less coverage of the horserace in the early months of the 1992 campaign than there had been in the same period in 1988.

Longtime *New York Times* political reporter Adam Clymer (2001) observed that the imperative for media organization to give polls prominent placement was due in part to the amount of time and money on commissioning the polls. They are also seen a valuable marketing tool for news organizations because publishing poll results that are then reported in other media outlets also provides news organizations a rare opportunity

to be mentioned by their competition (Rosenstiel, 2005). And while there is no quantitative research to support these assertions, one study does suggest that there may be a financial advantage to focusing on horserace coverage. Iyengar et al. (2004) produced a CD filled with stories from the 2000 presidential election that they gave to their subjects. The stimulus allowed the researchers to track the stories that were the most frequently viewed – in this study, they were horserace stories.

One area that is often overlooked when considering the role of the press in covering political campaigns is the role of the owners of media organizations. Bennett (1996) – who also called for journalists to avoid personalized storytelling techniques in favor of a more thematic approach that would theoretically focus on the issues, which might be especially useful for covering climate change – called for more regulatory control of media monopolies. As has also been pointed out by a number of other authors (Paletz & Entman, 1981; Bagdikian, 2000), the concentration of news media ownership can play a role in the relationship between the press and politicians. For example, existing government regulations of the public airwaves provide an important reason for broadcasters to avoid critical coverage of politicians. Political campaigns also provide millions of advertising dollars for TV and radio stations and networks during each campaign cycle. Media owners may also support specific candidates publicly with endorsements and financially with donations. Newspapers and other commercial media outlets that rely on advertising may also be unlikely to endorse or promote policies that could hurt businesses, like the automotive industry, that support their publications.

### **Journalism Ethics and Practices**

#### ***The Challenges of Covering Climate Change***

The challenges facing journalists who cover climate change is a significant factor that has seldom been directly addressed in academic studies. Much of the work on this topic has appeared not in academic texts but rather in trade publications for journalists and other magazines geared toward a wider audience. But there is a vast literature that generally addresses journalistic ethics and best practices.

Prior to the boom in climate change coverage in the mid-2000s, one of the great challenges facing the few reporters who were on the environment beat was convincing their editors of the significance of the story, and once stories were written, editors often questioned reporters about their approach. One reporter who covered the environment beat for *The New York Times* wrote that he found that his editors were often skeptical of his work and, in one case, accused him of being too close to his sources (Shabecoff, 2002). Another major challenge is telling the complicated story of climate change, and other environmental problems, in a compelling, succinct and accurate way (Ward, 2002). The science is complicated and, as is the case with many other science or technology issues, can be difficult to condense. And one study shows that reporters, for whatever reason, have been prone to making mistakes or overstating some of the evidence for or against climate change, which only serves to confuse the matter and make it more difficult for the public to understand (Bell, 1994).

There are many other hurdles for journalists – some of which are placed intentionally – by groups and individuals with a vested interest in the debate over climate change. For example, an editorial in the journal *Climatic Change* noted that many scientists “shun opportunities for communication” in order to avoid the conflict that often attends media coverage of climate change (Manning, 2003). And when journalists turn

away from scientists as sources for their stories, they are likely to turn to politicians. Generally, there are more likely to be conflicting points of view when covering the political debate over climate change than when talking to scientists (Smith, 2005). At the same time, there has been growth in the number of well-funded and well-connected groups and interests on both sides of that political debate have sought to influence news coverage of climate change, especially in the U.S. but also in other Western countries. (McCright & Dunlap, 2000; Carpenter, 2001; Mooney, 2005). In the hothouse atmosphere of an election campaign, the partisanship that surrounds that debate over climate change may be even more acute, potentially making the issue even more challenging for reporters and editors, which leads to the second research question.

These challenges facing journalists are ones that go back to the time of Walter Lippmann, who did some of the earliest writings on the intersection of public opinion and journalism. These writings would serve as the foundations for communications theory and remains instructive today. Eighty-nine years ago, Lippmann wrote that true opinions can have a great effect on the public, but that false opinions can often have an even greater effect (1920). He wrote this in his book *Liberty and the News*, which also laid out his case for a more accurate and professional field of journalism. Coming at the start of the 1920s, Lippmann's ideas, which included a call for the establishment of journalism schools, must have seemed fairly bold and even revolutionary. Almost nine decades later, they form the basis of the standards and ethics to which American journalism attempts to adhere.

There are, of course, journalism schools now, but there is still no officially codified standard of professional behavior for all journalists. The text that comes closest



to filling that role is Kovach and Rosenstiel's *The Elements of Journalism* (2007).

Kovach and Rosenstiel's guidelines begin with the idea that the role of journalists is to provide information that will help citizens be free and self-governing. While Lippmann puts it a little more stylishly in his writings than do Kovach and Rosenstiel, they see this as the essence of the journalistic enterprise. And this, along with the rest of Kovach and Rosenstiel's elements – the journalist's first responsibility is to citizens; verifiability is essential; coverage must be proportional; reporters must be able to invoke their personal conscience; reporters must make important topics interesting to the audience – would serve as a useful guide for reporters and editors trying to figure out how to best cover a story as complicated as climate change.

As prescient as Lippmann was in some respects, it is unlikely that he could have conceived of the climate change crisis currently facing the world, but he would likely have understood the challenges of covering this story. It is not an easy story to cover because, for the most part, the threats can seldom be described as immediate or even visible. The story becomes a political one with parties lining up to argue whether or not government should get involved in trying to remedy the problem. It also develops as a financial story as corporations struggle to adapt their business for a future that may include cap-and-trade markets for carbon trading or carbon taxes or may actually provide markets for new goods and services. And it can be interpreted as a consumer story for shoppers who seek products that purport to be “green.”

While Kovach and Rosenstiel's elements provide an excellent guide for covering this story (or any other, for that matter), these principles did not just spring forth from these two authors. They have been forged through the years and across different eras in

American journalism history. As Schudson (1981) argues in his social history of journalism, the journalism of a particular era has tended to match the tenor of the times. He writes that in the 1830s there was no expectation that journalists or newspapers would be objective, but that began to change with the creation of the first wire service a decade or so later. The era of yellow journalism, which came at the end of the 19th Century, is also not noted for producing work that was restrained or carefully considered all sides of a particular topic. But some historians now argue that the idea that Hearst “furnished” the Spanish-American War was likely overstated and that there was some good journalism being committed among all of the sensationalism and the excesses (Spencer, 2007; Whyte, 2008). Another important development of this era was Adolph Ochs’ purchase of *The New York Times*, which was less prominent and successful than the papers of Hearst and Pulitzer at the time, but eventually became the symbol of sober, responsible journalism that it still is today.

Later in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, after the New Deal, the idea of social responsibility began to take hold. This was the idea that the press had a duty to cover stories that were important to society and important to the public and that they could, through diligent and evocative reporting, highlight social ills to the public and possibly even bring about change. A major example of this is covered in Roberts and Kilbanoff’s 2006 book, *The Race Beat*, about how a group of white and African-American reporters, photographers and editors helped to highlight the racial tensions in the southern United States with their coverage of the topic, even when there were considerable roadblocks and even danger in their way. Many reporters and editors either ignored or gave scant attention to a story that shared some of the characteristics of the global warming issue: It concerned a pervasive

phenomenon that many politicians and their constituents would have preferred to ignore, and it had major economic and social consequences. Without the civil rights movement and its coverage by journalists who took their responsibilities seriously, the issue might have emerged even more slowly onto the nation's political agenda.

Not only would Lippmann likely be stunned to learn of the climate change problem, but he would almost certainly be shocked (and quite possibly disturbed) by the current media environment. Political scientist Bruce Bimber (2003) describes four eras of communication revolution in the history of the U.S. The first era is marked by the emergence of American newspapers in the first half of the 1800s; the second coincided with the Industrial Revolution; and the third revolution was marked by the arrival of television. And we are in the midst of the fourth era, which Bimber argues is defined by an abundance of information. He says this era offers greater opportunities for individuals to communicate with others via the Internet and that these people often earn media attention for their efforts. Communications scholar and activist Robert McChesney (2007) also observes that we are in the midst of a communication revolution. He is concerned about the concentration of media ownership in just a few hands and the effect that will have on public discourse and the range of opinions and voices available to most people, but he sees the Internet as a possible corrective to this problem.

One of the biggest challenges facing journalism today is the pressure for profits, which emerges directly out of the growth of corporate ownership. As Downie and Kaiser (2003) explain in their book, *The News About the News*, the push to increase or at least maintain the often high profit margins at newspapers and TV stations has negatively affected the number of journalists who are employed at newspapers and TV stations, the

amount of time they have to work on a story, and even the sort of stories that they are able to cover. In the last part of 2008 and the early months of 2009, this problem has become a crisis with the layoffs of previous years escalating into the shuttering of newspapers in major American and Canadian cities like Denver and Halifax. Particularly in local TV news, there has been a push to adopt formats that have proven to be ratings winners in other markets and these often focus on particular types of news (usually crime coverage or consumer-watch style stories) at the expense of other more complex issues that are harder to cover (Rosenstiel *et al.*, 2007). Climate change is not a topic that lends itself to a live stand-up from a local reporter who is supposed to bring her viewers “eyewitness news.” And in newspapers, stories about climate change often require a fair amount of knowledge or time to gather the necessary background knowledge – time that reporters at most newspapers are seldom provided.

In some cases, the corporate ownership of a news outlet may have a direct effect on the tone and shape of coverage of climate change. As news outlets, particularly on cable TV and AM radio in the United States, have taken a more partisan stand in recent years, it is possible that that coverage could be clouded by their point-of-view. An international example comes from Canada where the Asper family owns the country’s largest newspaper chain and its second largest private TV network. The newspapers, including the *National Post*, have almost uniformly conservative editorial boards (Edge, 2007). One of the commonly heard claims among editorialists at the *Post* and other outlets was that the Liberal Party’s Green Shift was too hard to explain to voters (Unsigned editorial, 2008, Sept. 6), which is something that Kovach and Rosenstiel might argue is part of the job of journalists.

If Herbert Gans (2004) were following coverage of climate change, he would make three general points that apply to both the Canadian and American examples. The first is that government is trusted less than big business (and we've seen that play out in recently with some of the reaction to Bush and Obama administrations efforts to bail out struggling banks). Government distrust is manifested in the media through evidence of columnists and commentators who call for free-market solutions to large societal problems and general skepticism toward government projects. Secondly, he would say that the level of attention that the public is willing and able to pay to major issues is quick to fade. Even after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, TV news ratings, which soared in the days and weeks following the attack, soon dropped. And thirdly, the news media have a top-down approach to getting the news. In other words, the media take their cues from the political elites, which, until the most recent two U.S. elections, has been increasingly composed of conservative Republicans and centrist Democrats – groups that were generally unlikely to pay much heed to concerns about climate change or even put it in a prominent place on their political agenda.

The challenges laid out in this section can confront reporters covering almost any topic. The pressure for profits, corporate influence over the media, general disinterest from the public, and a distrust of government-led solutions are all contributing to a difficult climate for reporters and editors trying to cover climate change in a way that adheres to the principles of journalism sketched out first by Lippmann and later fleshed out by Kovach and Rosenstiel. However, it is fair to say that journalists have, in many cases, been tripped up by some the challenges particular to reporting on climate change. While there has been a recent increase in coverage around the world, the stories have not

always been successful in turning the topic into a pressing issue for the public and politicians. The good news is that journalists do have standards — and many have been taught them in journalism schools — to guide them in covering this story. As Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi and Damon (2002) write in their fascinating book comparing the ethical challenges facing journalists and scientists, there are always going to be structural issues like changes in technology and the pressure for profits that may make it more difficult for professionals to do their jobs in the way that they have been trained to do them. But the authors find that the best in both of these professions strive to good, ethical work and that it usually rises above the rest.

### ***Press Coverage of Science and the Environment***

Before global warming and climate change became a focus of coverage of environmental issues, a wider array of environmental issues were covered in the press. In many of these cases, these stories – like acid rain, toxic waste disposal, endangered species and smog – and their potential solutions were regional in nature. Throughout this period, communications researchers were studying how the press had covered these issues and the changing relationship between scientists and journalists.

On the latter point, it appears as though there has been a strengthening of the relationship between scientists and journalists, although it can still be fraught with potential problems, especially for journalists. A mail survey of more than 1,300 biomedical researchers in five different countries has found that only 3% of them evaluated their interactions with the press as bad and that 75% of them found their interactions to be mainly good (Peters *et al.*, 2008). As the authors note, this is a significantly different finding from the popular assumptions about the relationship

between the media and scientists. The authors believe that the change may be due in part to increased specialization in science journalism, more public relations training for scientists, and an increased willingness among the scientists to seek approval for their work through coverage in the press. But these findings aren't substantially different from those of much earlier studies of scientists (including social scientists) at two universities in Ohio (Dunwoody & Scott, 1979). That study found that most scientists were comfortable interacting with reporters and had done so on a regular basis, occasionally even initiating the contact. Reporters, on the other hand, still seem to find it challenging to cover science stories. A recent Canadian study<sup>11</sup> of science journalists at English-language newspapers in that country found it is still challenging to select the proper sources for science stories and to make the stories relevant to the audience. The reporters interviewed for the study also wished that they had more of a science background and that they had access to someone with that expertise in the newsroom (Ward & Jandciu, 2008).

When it comes specifically to covering environmental stories, the research shows some of the chronic problems with the work that reporters do and explains how audiences consume this type of coverage. One study suggests that a reporter's familiarity with that particular beat may lead to positive portrayals of environmental groups. McCluskey (2008) compared environmental stories by reporters assigned specifically to the environment beat for newspapers in Washington state to environmental stories by reporters assigned to different beats, including business, politics, and general assignment. He found that stories by environmental reporters portrayed environmental groups in a

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<sup>11</sup> The study is actually a small part of a larger international project.

more positive light and showed them as having different motives than stories penned by reporters on a different beat. Liebler and Bendix (1996) studied U.S. network TV news coverage of a debate over clear-cutting a forest and found that there was no evidence of bias in the news coverage, but that the reporters tended to choose the frame that favored clear-cutting because it was the most simplistic, suggesting a “lack of enterprise” on the part of the reporters (Liebler & Bendix, 1996, p. 62). A later study by the same authors on the same dispute but this time looking at newspaper coverage (Bendix & Liebler, 1999) found that the pro-cut side of the story tended to be covered more frequently. Along those lines, Greenberg *et al.* (1989) found that stories about unexpected and violent risks tended to get more news coverage than ongoing risks of equal or greater consequence.

Griffin and Dunwoody (1995) found that newspapers based in more diverse communities were more likely to report on stories about local issues than those in more homogenous markets. When coupled with Lacy, Riffe and Varouhakis’s 2007 finding that more Ohio residents get their environmental news from national sources than from local sources, Riffe, Lacy and Reimold’s 2007 survey, which showed that people found newspapers better than television at reporting on the costs of and solutions to environmental problems, suggests that audiences who want information on environmental issues have a good sense of where to find it. On the other hand, none of this research does an adequate job of tying the possible perceived differences in environmental coverage between TV and newspapers and large- or small-market to questions of media ownership or structural problems with local media, including increasingly low staffing levels that make it harder to report on often time-consuming and challenging stories. In many ways,



the challenges of reporting on global warming and climate change are similar to the challenges that have confronted people doing reporting on other environmental issues. The global nature of climate change and the general absence of sudden violent risks related to climate change may, in fact, make it even more challenging for reporters and scientists to make editors and audiences take notice.

### ***Agenda Setting***

One of the primary goals of this study is to better understand the processes that lead to the amount of attention that the news media devotes to environmental issues. Agenda setting is one process that should be applicable. McCombs and Shaw (1972; 1993) explain that agenda setting is the process in which the news media pay attention to a particular issue or story and, subsequently, that issue rises in prominence in the public's agenda. In the meantime, various communications theorists have tweaked and added to the hypothesis through their work (McCombs, 2005). Behr and Iyengar (1985), for example, found that the public's agenda is affected by news coverage but also by real-world conditions, particularly economic factors, which will be especially significant in the last half of 2008 and the early part of 2009.

Ader (1995), addressing agenda-setting and environmental issues, looked at coverage of pollution issues in *The New York Times* between 1970 and 1990. She tested whether real world conditions had some effect on the public agenda, but found that it did not. In other words, environmental issues did not become more or less salient as the severity of the problems – primarily air and other forms of pollution during this time period – improved or worsened. Ader concluded that the public needs cues from the

media to attend to environmental issues. These conclusions might be even more applicable when it comes to the virtually imperceptible effects of climate change.

Bakir's 2006 case study of a dispute in the northern European media over Shell's plans to dispose of off-shore drilling structure in the North Sea shows how the public's perceptions of the players in an environmental dispute and the potential risk to the environment can lead to increased prominence for an issue on the media and public agenda. Bakir found that Greenpeace's campaign against Shell's plans was successful in making the issue so prominent because of the public's esteem for and trust of Greenpeace in environmental matters (especially when it comes to oceans) and their low-levels of trust in Shell's concern for the ecological well-being of the North Sea. But Bakir write that Greenpeace was successful in making the issue salient in a relatively short period of time because the organization played up the immediate environmental risk of Shell's plan, even though the issue had previously been a policy debate about how to dispose of these offshore oil structures. This combination of tactics by Greenpeace helped to raise the issue in the media's and public's agenda while changing the tenor of the policy debate.

Considering the growth in news coverage of climate change over the last decade, it stands to reason that it would become a more important issue in election campaigns. In the American election in 2008, climate change nearly disappeared as an issue, but it did resurface in issues like energy prices. The debate on this issue between Obama and Clinton and, later, Obama and McCain tended not to directly address climate change, but rather the best approach for dealing with the high price of oil. Part of this could be explained by Zaller's work in *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (1992). He

suggests that the people take their cues from elites on most major issues. When elites agree on the response to a problem and a course of action, public support falls in line with the elite perspective. If elites are divided over the proper approach to an issue, the public will usually line up behind the different perspectives based on past policy issues. (For example, one who tends to like Barack Obama's stance on one issue is likely to end up agreeing with him on other, similar issues.) For politicians, there are two ways to potentially exploit the public's response to elites in these cases. On the one hand, if there is no clear advantage to be gained, perhaps because the public isn't very interested in an issue, politicians can move toward one another on a potentially controversial issue. This is the response that we saw between Obama and McCain, who was relatively progressive on questions of climate change. Had McCain been in the dwindling camp of politicians who deny the plausibility of man-made climate change, Obama might have been prompted to make climate change more of an issue during the campaign.

Bennett's 1991 work on his "indexing" hypothesis is also a very important piece in the same vein of elite-driven agenda setting. Bennett found that even news organizations that were seen by many to have a political point of view – in this case, *The New York Times* – their coverage of an international issue took a cue from or was indexed to the attention given to a story by political elites, specifically the U.S. Congress. Bennett notes that even at times when journalists may be inclined to fill the void left by political elites in the public discourse on a crucial issue, they still took their cues on the amount of coverage and placement of coverage from those elites.

This is the approach that Rudd attempted against Howard in Australia. Rudd tried to stake out a position on climate change that was sufficiently different from that of

Howard because he thought that it would be politically advantageous. For such a gambit to succeed, it has to involve an issue high on the public agenda. And, as we can see from the Canadian example, there are potential problems if the policy designed to respond to one issue affects the public's feeling about another issue. One poll (Ipsos-Reid, 2008, Sept. 16) released early in the Canadian election campaign showed that 14% of Canadians thought that the environment was the biggest issue in the campaign. It was tied for third with taxes, and both were behind the economy and the perennial Canadian quandary of healthcare. This may have proved especially problematic to Dion and the Liberals who tried to differentiate themselves from the Conservatives by proposing a tax on carbon and a decrease in income taxes for the middle class as part of a plan to reduce consumption of carbon. Whatever the role of agenda setting in each of these cases, they are clearly worth exploring further.

One scholar, however, has argued that the news coverage of and public response to environmental problems have been difficult to explain by the agenda-setting hypothesis. Hansen (1991) set out to explain why media scholars have had such a challenging time in trying to use theoretical perspectives to explain news coverage and public attention of environmental issues. He looked at a number of older agenda-setting studies (Atwater *et al.*, 1982; Protess *et al.*, 1987; Brosius & Kepplinger, 1990), but concluded that none were able to adequately explain why the media's attention to environmental issues waxes and wanes. Hansen called for studies that avoid linear descriptions of media influences. Hopefully, this study's methodology and comparative approach will allow it to paint a clearer and more complete picture of the processes that

explain the nature of coverage of environmental issues, particularly when they enter the political realm.

### ***Framing***

Entman succinctly defined framing as “the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation” (2007, p. 164). Pan and Kosicki (1993) explain framing by noting that every news story, regardless of medium, has a theme and that any analysis of frames should pay close attention to the language and images used to describe those themes in news stories as well as the organization of the story – in other words, which ideas and/or themes are given more prominence in news stories. Framing may affect the way that people respond to the issues that are being covered by the press. For example, one of the clearest examples of framing’s effects can be found in the 1997 experiment conducted by Nelson, Clawson and Oxley, which showed two groups a different story about a Ku Klux Klan rally. The first framed the rally as a free speech issue and the other employed a public safety frame. The authors concluded that participants who watched the free speech story were more sympathetic to the Klan than those who were exposed to the public safety theme.

Some recent theorizing has added elements to framing theory that are especially important in the context of this study. First, Chong and Druckman (2007) argue that frames will have a greater effect on individuals who are more knowledgeable on a particular topic because the frames help to build on that pre-existing knowledge and interest. However, they found that if people have very strong attitudes on a particular issue, those viewpoints will weaken the effects of the frame. Finally, and not surprisingly,

frequent exposure to frames will lead to learning about a particular topic. This assertion is particularly interesting in the context of the Canadian election where one of the complaints of the Liberal Party's climate change policy was that it was difficult for the public to understand and the press to explain. Lee, McLeod and Shah (2008) suggest that different types of frames activate different types of responses to those stories. They found that when a political story is described as one of competing political interests or strategies, people tend to discount political affiliation and consider other factors when making judgments about those issues.

A number of studies have looked at the role that political elites play in framing and how the public interprets those frames. Entman's 2003 study about framing after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 explains a model of cascading activation in which frames are spread from the highest level of officialdom in the U.S. – the White House. From there, the frames spread through other elites to the press and finally to the public. Entman also argues that there is essentially a feedback loop. He uses the examples of articles by journalists Thomas Friedman and Seymour Hersh calling for the war on terror to focus on Saudi Arabia instead of Iraq as oppositional frames that gained some traction in the rest of the media and questioned the then-popular Bush administration but failed to seriously challenge the hegemonic view of the war on terror. In the context of the climate change debate, this may explain why so much of the debate now centers on choosing one of two policy approaches – a carbon tax or the cap-and-trade system – while elites and the media are able to ignore more radical arguments that may raise questions about the effects of Western economic and political systems on the environment and the lack of a suitable and coherent policy response to the crisis.

One factor that may counteract the role of elite frames is interpersonal conversations (Druckman & Nelson, 2003). The authors found that deliberation between average citizens who have conflicting opinions can eliminate the effect of elite frames. Therefore the grassroots nature of the environmental movement and increased interpersonal interaction on the Internet may play a significant role in how the public responds to the framing of climate change.

In the specific context of climate change, one of the most contentious disputes has centered on calling into question the scientific evidence of man-made climate change. McCright and Dunlap have been studying the conservative response to global warming and climate change for more than a decade now, and their work shows the systematic effort of conservatives in the U.S. to discount the science behind climate change and frame the potential policy responses as harmful (2000) and how they were able to do so successfully (2003). Climate change deniers may have benefited from the way that the press framed climate change stories and other environmental coverage. Zehr (2000) argued that the press often used scientific uncertainty as a frame in early stories about climate change while Ghanem and Hendrickson (2003) found in a study of stories in local newspapers on the Canada-U.S. and U.S.-Mexico border that the most common frames were “prevention and maintenance” in the face of environmental problems followed by “harm.” The authors interpreted that to mean that the press was focused on events that had already occurred. In response to these challenges, a couple of articles have suggested ways for scientists to respond to these challenges using frames of their own. Nisbet and Mooney (2007) called on climate scientists to aggressively frame their research to fit into the political debate that they expected to happen during the U.S.

election. DeMerritt (2000) suggested a less confrontational tack – better explaining the way in which new scientific findings are rigorously reviewed and challenged within the scientific community in order to counter the claims of junk science. Whatever the approach, it is clear that frames are an important aspect of communications theory and political science and could play a direct role in coverage of climate change.

### **Comparative Media Analyses**

#### ***Climate Change Coverage***

Our increasingly interconnected world requires research that compares and contrasts the media and their effects in different countries. An issue like climate change, which has a truly global scope but elicits a range of reactions from different jurisdictions, is a perfect fit for this type of research. Comparative politics is already one of the major fields of study in political science, but comparative media analysis still seems to be finding its footing among communications scholars. As Esser and D'Angelo (2006) point out, the challenge with comparative media analysis that includes an element of political communication is to sort out how the political system, political culture and media systems in different countries interact to affect political communication. A 2008 study by Esser tried to compare the nature of sound bites in broadcast journalism across four different countries. His study relied on comparisons of the news culture in the different countries and the proximity of reporters to those who hold political power to help explain the nature and tone of the sound bites used in reports and newscasts. This study is also significant because it helped further define specific news cultures, which will be an important consideration in this study.

Some researchers have undertaken comparative media studies that focus on news



coverage of climate change and other environmental issues. Dispensa and Brulle's 2003 work compared coverage of global warming in media outlets in the U.S., Finland and New Zealand for differences in coverage, hoping to determine why those differences existed. The authors examined content for the year 2000 and found significant differences in the portrayal of global warming in the U.S. and the other countries (as well as differences between coverage in U.S. newspapers and U.S. scientific journals). Dispensa and Brulle (2003) argued that the pressure of large corporations, many of which are big advertisers with a stake in the global warming debate, was having a negative influence on U.S. media coverage of the story. A more recent study by Brossard, Shanahan and McComas (2004) compared newspaper coverage of global warming in France and the United States from 1987 to 1997. This work also observed differences in terms of sources used (*The New York Times* focused more on industry and business sources than the French newspaper *Le Monde*) and found that the amount of coverage was more consistent over time in French newspapers. Considering the research that shows how national political debates on the topic of climate change often leads to increased news coverage, there is a clear gap in the literature on matters of how politics and climate change interact during the press' coverage of a national election campaign.

### ***Election Coverage***

In a general sense, two main points emerge from the comparative literature on election campaigns. The first is that elections provide an excellent basis for a comparative analysis. And the second is that very few of these analyses have taken into account either media coverage of the campaign or any element of political communication. Plasser and Plasser (2002) compared campaign communication strategies in more than 50 countries

around the world, using as their starting point the idea that campaigns in Australia, Europe and West Asia have become media-centric and that this trend began in the U.S. As a result, they say, the core features of political campaigns in these countries that are otherwise politically and culturally dissimilar have become increasingly similar. Pfetsch and Esser (2004) echo many of the same themes in the introduction to a book they edited, but they added two key contributions in that piece. They addressed the potential problem of America as the baseline for any of these studies because it is generally seen as the country with the most advanced media system and the most professionalized and advanced practices when it comes to political communication. Pfetsch and Esser suggest that this may be a reason for more comparative studies because they may reveal how other countries are reacting to the so-called Americanization of political communication and the increased globalization of the media. They also offered a clear definition for this type of research: “As we understand it, comparative political communication research refers to a comparison between a minimum of two political systems (or their subelements) with respect to at least one object of investigation relevant to communication studies” (Pfetsch & Esser, 2004, p. 8).

One of the most common subjects of comparative analyses of election coverage is the amount of coverage that is focused on the horserace, the process, or so-called meta-coverage (coverage focused on the media coverage). Researchers have focused on whether the political system in a given country has an effect on the amount of coverage (Esser & D’Angelo, 2006; Stromback & Dimitrova, 2006). They have found that the system-level does make a difference in the amount of coverage – in other words, the unique nature of how the media industry is organized and administered in different

countries can affect the amount and nature of the political coverage produced in those countries. Stromback and Luengo (2008) compared election coverage in Spain and Sweden and found that the media systems in those countries may also have an effect on the nature of campaign coverage. For example, Swedish newspapers, which are abnormally competitive, focused on episodic horserace frames and were event-centered, while the Spanish newspapers, which tend to be geared to a more elite audience, were focused on issues and the actions of the top political actors.

While there have been some studies that look at how specific issues have been covered in different countries during election campaigns or national referendums – specifically, studies by de Vreese and other authors about the votes related to the European Union (de Vreese, 2004; Gleissner & de Vreese, 2005; de Vreese *et al.*, 2006) – most have focused on the nature of news coverage in general. These studies, which focus on a specific issue, makes them fairly unique in comparative political communication research – in part because there are few issues that are global or even regional, for example, affecting the EU.

### CHAPTER 3 – CONTEXT

The goal of this chapter is to provide context for each of the three countries being studied in this project. This chapter provides a snapshot of each of the countries and will attempt to answer a few basic questions about each country's news culture. The first question is: Who are the journalists? Surveys that identify and compare the demographics of journalists will be reviewed below. So will studies that compare the responses of journalists to key ethical questions and questions of the role of journalism in their respective countries. The second question is: What is the state of the newspaper industry? This will be answered by providing a general overview of trends in the newspaper industries of each of these countries and by looking at newspaper ownership. The third question is: What is the public's opinion of climate change? Public opinion polls are the most likely sources to provide timely data on this point. And finally, the last point will cover the most recent election, providing a very brief overview of the key players, the results of the election, and the electoral system.

The guide for this chapter was a 2002 study by Deuze that compared the results of a survey of Dutch journalists with comparable surveys of German, British, American and Australian journalists. Deuze had the advantage of being able to create a survey that included all of the elements of the other surveys so that there were no holes in his data and only occasional questions or topics that one researcher in another country neglected to include in his survey. Two major problems emerged in trying to find existing data for this chapter. First, there is much more data available on American journalists. And secondly, much of the data about reporters was gathered, at the latest, from the early part of the 2000s. But the purpose of this particular study is not to conduct a survey of

journalists. The data collected below does provide a very useful and easy way to compare the culture of journalism, the business of newspapers, recent electoral politics and feelings about climate change in the U.S., Australia, and Canada. All of this information is important for understanding any similarities and differences in the coverage between the three countries.

### **United States**

#### ***Reporters***

For decades now, Weaver and Wilhoit have been identifying and tracking the demographics of American journalists through a series of surveys that have been turned into books about the American journalist. The most recent edition in this series, published in 2006 and written by Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, and Wilhoit, featured the results of a survey of journalists conducted in 2002. These results probably offer the most exhaustive and accurate depiction of the people who are reporting the news in the U.S.

Weaver *et al.* found that the average 2002 reporter was a forty-something white male who worked for a newspaper. Compared to his counterpart from the study conducted 10 years earlier, he was less likely to be Protestant and more likely to have a Bachelor's degree. In general, the study found that journalists were getting older, more educated, more racially diverse, wealthier, and, despite the protestations of Limbaugh, O'Reilly *et al.*, more Republican (Weaver *et al.*, 2003). The studies also asked reporters questions about their role and the ethics of their job. For the most part, there has been little change in how journalists see their jobs. For 71% of reporters, investigating government claims is an extremely important part of their job, followed next by getting news to people quickly at 59%. In terms of reporting techniques, some have become

more acceptable in recent years – such as using business or government documents without authorization – while others – for example, going undercover – have become less acceptable to American journalists.

### ***Newspaper Industry***

The outlook for the U.S. newspaper industry is, in a word, bleak. The first months of 2009 have seen the closure of Denver's *Rocky Mountain News* while the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* and the *Christian Science Monitor* have moved almost exclusively to the Internet. In addition, there have been hundreds of layoffs and other funding cutbacks. The questions about the future of the newspaper industry have become a matter of widespread public debate, even reaching the floor of Congress (Bloomberg News, 2009, March 25). One of the most exhaustive and clear-eyed accounts of this industry is "The State of the News Media 2009," which is produced annually by the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism. Circulation dropped by close to 5% during the week and on Sunday in the six months ending in September 2008, but large national newspapers like *The New York Times* and *USA Today* weren't hit as hard as local newspapers. Newspaper advertising has dropped by 23% in the last two years. As a result, revenues and investment in the news have dropped accordingly, but newspapers are, for the most part, still profitable, although profit margins are dropping.

The stock prices of newspaper companies have also dropped during this crisis. Some major chains that are publicly traded, such as McClatchy, have dropped to below \$1 a share. In total, publicly traded newspaper companies have lost 83% of their value in 2008, after having already lost more 40% of their value in the previous two years (Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2009). Newspapers, however, maintain some

prestige for their media companies, especially large, national newspapers, like the *Wall Street Journal*, which was recently sold to News Corp. by the family trust that had controlled it through the Dow Jones Corp. Some newspaper-owning companies, like Hearst and Tribune, in particular, have been trying to sell or even close properties in recent months.

### ***Public Opinion of Climate Change***

Recent Gallup polls suggest that the American public's concern for and interest in global warming and environmental issues is waning slightly at the end of the decade. Among the findings of a handful of polls that were released in March, the most interesting may be the poll that showed that 41% of the U.S. public feels that the threat of global warming is exaggerated, which is the highest percentage to respond in that way since 1998. The poll also found that the percentage of both Republicans and Independents who believe that the threat of global warming is exaggerated is at an all time high. And the percentage of respondents between the ages of 18 and 29 who believe the threat is exaggerated has not increased, but it has in all other age groups, which suggests a generational difference on this issue. (Saad, 2009, March 11). At the same, another poll asked respondents whether increased economic growth should take priority over environmental protection. For the first time since the poll was first conducted in 1985, the percentage of Americans who were willing to give the economy precedence was higher – and by 9 percentage points, 51% to 42%. This is undoubtedly because of the recession, but the marked shift is noteworthy and demonstrates the somewhat limited levels of concern in the environment. Even when Gallup asked what environmental issues people are most worried about, global warming was at the bottom of the list (the public was most

concerned about pollution of drinking water) (Saad, 2009, March 25). It should be noted, however, that they did not use the phrase climate change in that poll, which may have some effect on the results.

### ***2008 Presidential Election***

The 2008 presidential election was a rarity because no sitting president or vice-president sought the presidency. As a result, the campaign began early – by the middle of 2006 – and featured an array of candidates for both the Republican and Democratic parties. After a sluggish start to the campaign, John McCain sewed up the Republican nomination in March 2008. The Democratic nomination was not decided until almost all of the primary votes were cast as the early favorite, then-New York Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, was defeated by Barack Obama, with Clinton finally conceding on June 7.

Presidential elections are decided by the electoral college, a process wherein a slate of electors from each state cast votes for the candidate that won the popular vote in their state. (There are two minor exceptions to this rule – Maine and Nebraska.) In 2008, Obama won 365 electoral votes to McCain's 173.

### **Canada**

#### ***Reporters and Newspaper Industry***

There are no studies in Canada that come close to approximating the work of the *American Journalist* series of books. There have been a number of studies that offer some insight into the mindset of Canadian reporters, but we know very little about their demographic makeup. A 2006 poll commissioned by Compas Inc., a Canadian polling company, asked a fairly small sample of 221 Canadian reporters about their thoughts on



freedom of the press in Canada. (The impetus for the poll was a controversy that emerged when a right-wing Canadian magazine re-published the infamous Danish cartoons of Mohammed.) The poll found that journalists felt the level of press freedom in Canada had not changed in the 10 years since an earlier study on the same topic. While they did express concern about the effects that their managers and owners were having on journalism, they said the greatest threat to journalism was poorly trained journalists (Winn, 2006). A panel study of Canadian journalists with a large sample tracked responses to questions about the role of journalists from 1996 to 2003 (Pritchard *et al.*, 2005). The researchers found that in just seven years, there was a decrease of seven percentage points or more in the number of journalists who thought it was important to accurately report the views of public figures, allow regular people a chance to speak their mind, and analyze complex problems.

Pritchard *et al.* also found that there was a slight increase in the level of concern over media ownership concentration between 1996 and 2003. This is not entirely surprising. Canadian newspaper ownership has been a common topic in the popular press and, to a lesser extent, in academia. The ownership of English-newspapers in Canada is highly concentrated. By the early part of this decade, 78% of the country's newspapers were owned by the five largest newspaper chains (Edge, 2007). Only one significant metropolitan newspaper has closed recently in Canada – the *Halifax Daily News* – but there have been substantial layoffs at the newspapers owned by CanWest Global (the *Vancouver Sun*, *Vancouver Province*, *Calgary Herald*, *Edmonton Journal*, *National Post*, *Ottawa Citizen*, *Regina Leader-Post*, and *Montreal Gazette*, to name a few) and the *Globe and Mail*, which is owned by CTVglobemedia Inc. Both of those companies

invested heavily in the idea of convergence and each owns two broadcast television networks and a series of cable TV networks. The recession has coincided with a dip in advertising revenue for newspapers and the television networks. And, in mid-April, CanWest Global's stock price had dropped to around CDN\$0.23 as the company faced the possibility of not being to make its next round of loan payments.

### ***Public Opinion of Climate Change***

The greatest expression of public opinion on questions related, at least in part, to climate change was the result of the 2008 federal election and the response to the Liberal Party's Green Shift. A couple of recent polls do, however, give some sense of the Canadian public's opinion of global warming and climate change. A recent Gallup poll found that 54% of Canadians are satisfied with the current efforts to preserve the environment, which was 4% higher than the response rate among American surveyed (Rice, 2009, Feb. 25). The same survey also found that 57% of Canadians believe climate change is the result of human causes. Another survey commissioned by an environmental organization found that 78% of respondents agreed, to some extent, that Canada should do whatever leading scientists suggest to counteract the effects of climate change, even if it hurts the economy (Pembina Institute, 2008). These results are quite different from those of a similar survey in the U.S.

### ***2008 Federal Election***

Prime Minister Stephen Harper called the 2008 federal election in September 2008, a little more than two-and-a-half years after the last election, even though Harper's government passed a law fixing the next election date for four years after the 2006 election. Canadian federal governments are elected to five-year terms. The government

can call an election at any time during those five years. Or the government can be defeated by the opposition members of parliament (MPs) in a non-confidence vote, which usually leads to an election.

In addition to Stephane Dion's Liberal Party, three other parties played a significant role in the election. The New Democratic Party, which is situated to the left of the centrist Liberals, is the third-largest national party, but in recent years has had the fourth-largest number of MPs behind the Bloc Quebecois. The Bloc Quebecois, the Quebec-based separatist party, regularly elects the most MPs in Quebec, Canada's second most-populous province. The Green Party has been increasing its share of the popular vote in recent elections and earning more media attention. It failed, however, to elect an MP in the 2008 election, but made an important step forward, earning its leader, Elizabeth May, an invitation to the two leaders' debates for the first time.

Victory in Canadian federal elections is earned by electing the most MPs. Harper's Conservatives won 143 of the 307 seats, an increase of 16 seats, but their share of the popular vote grew by less than 2%. In the end, it was not enough to ensure a majority government for the Conservatives.

## **Australia**

### ***Reporters and Newspaper Industry***

Ownership in the Australian newspaper industry is even more heavily concentrated than it is in Canada. Two companies dominate the country's major media markets. News Corp., Rupert Murdoch's international conglomerate, started in Australia and still has a massive presence there, owning the most widely circulated newspapers in Sydney and Melbourne as well as a national paper, *The Australian*. Murdoch's main

competitor in the Australian newspaper business is Fairfax Limited, which owns the second-most widely circulated papers in Sydney and Melbourne, a national business newspaper, and an array of papers in smaller centers. Based in Perth, *The West Australian* is one of the largest newspapers in the country not owned by one of those two companies and is instead controlled by a local company. In most cases, the News Corp. papers are more conservative than the Fairfax papers.

Like Canada, Australia has less research about its journalists and journalistic institutions than can be found in the U.S. The last exhaustive study of the demographics and ethical values of Australian journalists was conducted more than a decade ago (Henningham, 1996). This study has the advantage of attempting to replicate the work of Weaver and Wilhoit on U.S. journalists. Henningham found that, in many ways, the average Australian journalist was similar to the average American journalist in terms of age, gender, and class. He also found that Australian journalists had lower levels of formal education than their American counterparts and that America had almost twice as many journalists per capita as Australia during the time period of the study. Asked about which aspects of journalism were important to them, American journalists were more likely than Australian journalists to say that the opportunity to help people and earn “fringe benefits” were very important to them. On a whole range of questions about the significance of journalists in society, Australian reporters tended to view their role in society as more significant than did American journalists. Journalists in both countries responded similarly to questions about ethical issues, such as the importance of protecting confidential sources and the use of leaked government documents.

A more recent study of journalists and the public focused on how the public consumes the news and how they feel about journalists (Roy Morgan Research, 2004). The survey found that Australians do not hold journalists in high esteem. Only 10% of those surveyed found journalists to be honest and ethical; 9% of the same sample found politicians to be honest and ethical. Two-thirds of the public felt that journalists are often inaccurate. The journalists surveyed chalked up the public's displeasure with their work to the public's perception that some reporting was sensationalist or inaccurate. Journalists also thought that they were perceived as left wing, but the public did not detect a significant bias in either direction.

### ***2007 Federal Election***

The Australian national election on November 24, 2007 followed a six-week campaign. As mentioned earlier, the most unique element of Australian elections is the fact that all citizens are required by law to cast a ballot. As in the U.S., there are two main parties in Australia – the Labor Party, helmed to victory in this election by Kevin Rudd, and the incumbent Liberal/National Party, which was led into the election by John Howard, who had been prime minister for more than a decade. Despite the moniker, the Liberal/National Party is the more conservative of the two parties. It is, as the name suggests, also a standing coalition between two parties. The National Party is the smaller of the two parties and is historically strongest in rural parts of Australia. As in Canada, the prime minister is not directly elected by the entire country, but is elected as an MP in an electoral district. The upper house (senate, in this case) is elected instead of appointed, as it is in Canada and the United Kingdom.

In the 2007 election, Rudd's Labor Party and the Howard-led Liberal Party effectively swapped seats in parliament. Labor gained 23 seats while the Liberal Party lost 20. The National Party saw two of its 12 MPs lose their seats in the election. And two independents were elected. In another similarity with Canada, the Green Party won almost 8% of the popular vote, but did not elect an MP.

## CHAPTER 4 – METHODS

Yin's 2003 book on case study research explains that while case studies were originally seen as only being an appropriate method to use for exploratory research, some scholars now see them as appropriate for descriptive and explanatory research. As seen from the previous two chapters, especially in the research questions, this project does some of all those types of research. It brings a variety of data – a quantitative accounting of climate change coverage in three different national election campaigns, a close reading of a subset of that coverage, a set of in-depth interviews with the people responsible for that coverage, and a comparison of the three countries and their political and media systems – to this understudied phenomenon.

Yin also argues that the key to conducting good case study research is building a logical plan for collecting the data, whatever it may be, to ensure that the results generated by the data are strong and useful. He cites five key components of case study research design – a study's questions; its propositions, if there are any; its unit of analysis; the logic linking the data to the propositions; and the criteria for interpreting the findings. Most of that has been laid out in the previous two chapters, but this chapter will describe the process I used to collect and analyze the data for this study. In some ways, this method borrows some elements from grounded theory (Gilgun, 2001), primarily in the way that it coupled inductive methods with a sampling of different communications theories.

### *The 'Green' Conundrum*

One of the biggest challenges facing anyone who has done and intends to do research about the media's coverage of climate change has to do with the ever-shifting

terminology used to describe environmental problems. Deppa and Rowe (2008) chose to track the use of the terms “climate change” and “global warming.” But by no means were these the only terms used to describe environmental problems. Other specific terms, such as pollution or toxic waste, may refer to completely different environmental problems that, as the subject of a story, may not include any references to climate change or global warming.

The logical response was to use less sensitive terms like “the environment” or “green,” which, especially in recent years, has become a modifier for all sorts of other terms and used widely in fields that range from marketing to energy to politics. The problem, as Deppa and Rowe noted, was that no one has managed to come up with a solution to the problem of isolating the use of the word “green” or even “environment” in the context that we mean to use it. If one searches a newspaper database like Lexis/Nexis in search of coverage of environmental issues and uses only terms like “green” or “environment,” there is no way to avoid polluting the sample with stories that talk about the music of the Rev. Al Green or the work environment at Wal-Mart, neither of which are very likely to have anything to do with the matter at hand. At the same time, there is no completely effective way of modifying the search with other terms – for example, using “green” with “climate change” – without accidentally eliminating some stories that should be included in the sample.

There are two other particular problems that arise from the focus of this study. Because I looked at three different countries, there is an entirely different set of terms that would be useful for searching the newspapers from each of those countries. If, for example, the study had focused exclusively on the coverage of the Canadian election then



it would be easier to adjust the search terms for the census in order to include terms that are unique to the Canadian election – “Green Shift” and “carbon tax,” for example. But if the search terms were different for each of the three countries in this study then the coverage census would be less useful.

Since there is already a body of research devoted to tracking coverage of climate change and global warming, those terms should be used for any search and that they should be the basic building blocks for the database. In this case, however, consistency for the sake of consistency will not necessarily help answer all of my research questions. Therefore, I conducted other searches using terms that are specific to the different national election campaigns to create a more nuanced quantitative picture of the media’s coverage of environmental issues during these campaigns.

### ***Comparative Media Analysis***

Edelstein (1989) says that any sort of cross-cultural communications research must start from a place of equality. That is to say, all of the countries must be considered generally comparable. In many broad categories, Canada, Australia, and the U.S. fit that description. At the same time, there are clear differences in the political systems and media cultures of the three countries. Any comparative analysis needs to make those very clear and must consider them when considering any similarities or differences that may be uncovered. The first step in doing this is looking at the politics and media of each of the three countries using a combination of existing literature and information gleaned from reporters and editors during the in-depth interviews. Drawing on Kellner’s multi-pronged structure for cultural studies research (1995), this component of the project will, in Chapter 3, examine the state of the media in each of the three countries, including

newspaper ownership and ethics and practices; the structure of the political system and the proximity of the press to politicians; and a brief examination of how the media and politicians have addressed climate change in the past.

### *Census of News Coverage*

A complete and nuanced picture of the media coverage of climate change during the three election campaigns that are the focus of this study is essential because it will show the significance of the story in the three different countries and potential differences between coverage in Canada, Australia and the U.S. Given that another study (Deppa & Rowe, 2008) has adopted a comparable methodology, it is logical to continue with this approach.

For this study, the number of stories were counted by the week for the entire period and then I tracked the number of stories by the day during the designated election period. As mentioned in the previous section, the basic count will include stories that feature either of the phrases “climate change” or “global warming.” Again following the established practice in the earlier studies, all items from all sections of the newspaper were included in the general count, including letters to the editor. The rationale is not only a practical one – removing letters to the editor from article counts based on LexisNexis searches adds another layer of complexity and adds an opportunity for researcher-induced error – but letters to the editor are also a significant and, in most cases, representative indicator of the level of interest in a topic among the paper’s readers. From there, separate searches were conducted using terms specific to each of the campaigns or terms that turned up regularly after looking at some of the articles through the textual analysis component of the research.

One of the advantages of this method is that it allowed for and even encouraged unexpected discoveries and new directions to pursue, even in the middle of the process. Another strength of the method is that it does not rely on samples of coverage. While it may be a bit more work, the result should be as close to a complete accounting of the coverage as is possible. As a result, it was easier to pinpoint specific moments when the coverage either increased or decreased and to go back and look at the specific events of those days in the hopes of explaining what might have caused the changes.

Searching for stories that featured “climate change” or “global warming” offered a sense of how much coverage those topics got during the election campaign. (See Appendix B for the time frame of the study and a complete list of key dates in each of three country’s campaigns.) In order to know how much coverage was directly related to the election campaign, however, I did a search within those stories using terms that will reveal whether or not the story is one about the election or politics as well as climate change or global warming.<sup>12</sup> Tracking coverage in these two areas showed us whether an increase or decrease in stories about climate change during a campaign has any bearing on coverage of the topic in other parts of the newspaper during the same period. It also provided another basis of comparison between the difference countries.

When it came to selecting the sources that will be studied in each country, a number of factors were taken into consideration. The newspapers are among the most widely read in their respective countries, reflect a range of political leanings in the

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<sup>12</sup> The time period of the census will include stories not during the official campaign period, so the term “election” or “campaign” may not do a sufficient job of turning up all of the stories. This is of particular concern in Australia and Canada where there is a relatively brief official election campaign period, but there is quite often an unofficial period of campaigning before the election is called.

country, include a variety of formats (tabloid and broadsheet) and target audiences (national and local), represent the different regions of three large countries, and include properties owned by some of the largest newspaper chains in each of the three countries. In their 2004 study of global warming coverage in U.S. elite newspapers, Boykoff and Boykoff used four elite newspapers for their content analysis. Therefore six newspapers per country seemed like an appropriate number.

There were some other practical concerns including the availability of the newspaper on LexisNexis, which meant that some elite, widely circulated newspapers like the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Chicago Tribune* that would have been under consideration were not selected. In Canada, there was the additional problem of language. The third and fourth most widely circulated newspapers in the country are French-language papers, *La Presse* and *Le Journal de Montreal*. Unfortunately, the complication of dealing with a search in a different language (not to mention their lack of availability on LexisNexis) means that they have been left off the list of Canadian newspapers. This is, undeniably, a weakness in this study and one that I hope to rectify in future studies. (This situation will be even more important when it comes to studying the 2011 Canadian election when results from Quebec indicated a major and somewhat unexpected shift toward the NDP.)

A recently published study (Weaver & Bimber, 2008) compared Lexis/Nexis, the longtime standard among news databases, and Google News, the freely available web service. One of the most important findings of the research is that the role that wire service stories play in coverage of major stories. As Weaver and Bimber note, the ongoing staffing cutbacks at newspapers is making the role of news services like The

Associated Press, the Australian Associated Press, and The Canadian Press even more important. When Google News picked up AP stories in their sweep of news sources, the researchers found only 29% agreement between the two formats when they were looking at *The New York Times*. But now, neither LexisNexis or Google News include Associated Press stories in their formula, so as Weaver and Bimber put it, there is more agreement between the two. They found even greater discrepancies among international newspapers. In the end, both Lexis/Nexis and Google News have advantages and disadvantages. In the context of this study, LexisNexis is still the best fit, especially because it is consistent with the previous study by Deppa and Rowe (2008).

Another advantage of this particular study is that it used in-depth interviews, which helped pick up on issues that may have been missed. Also, the focus on major newspapers in each of the three main countries meant that the reliance on news service stories would be lower than if the study were looking at newspapers with smaller staffs and budgets.

The U.S. papers studied were *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, *The Denver Post*, *The New York Post*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Houston Chronicle*. Each of these papers is in the top 10 in circulation in the country and they include some of the largest media companies in the country. A Chicago newspaper was not included in the study, but as mentioned earlier, the *Tribune* was not available on the LexisNexis and the *New York Post* took the tabloid slot that could have gone to the *Sun-Times*. It was important to leave the *Post* in the study because it may be interesting to compare that News Corp. product with the three News Corp.-owned newspapers from Australia that were included in the project.

The six Australian newspapers studied were *The Herald Sun*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The West Australian*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Age*, and *The Australian*. With these selections, the two largest newspaper owners in the country: News Corp. and Fairfax Media are well represented with three and two titles, respectively. (The Perth-based *West Australian* is owned by a local group and offers some regional diversity.) There is also some political diversity as the Fairfax papers that tend to be more centrist than the News Corp. publications.

For Canada, the six newspapers studied were *The Toronto Star*, *The Globe and Mail*, *The Toronto Sun*, *The Ottawa Citizen*, *The Calgary Herald*, and Montreal's *The Gazette*. The last three of those newspapers are owned by Canwest Global Media, which owns most of the major metropolitan dailies outside of Toronto. The two most notable omissions are of the *National Post*, the sixth most widely circulated paper in the country, and any paper from one of the far less-populous Atlantic provinces. The *National Post* was omitted to leave room for the *Toronto Sun* so that the Sun Media chain was represented and there was a tabloid in the mix. Plus, most of the national news in the *Post* and the three Canwest papers is shared among the papers of the chain. (In 2010, the chain was sold to a group of investors and it was renamed Postmedia.) French-Canadian newspapers were omitted for practical reasons – lack of access via Lexis/Nexis and language. Unfortunately, this is a relatively common practice in Canadian political communications research (Andrew, 2007). (For a list of all 18 newspapers and some key information about all of them, please see Appendix C.)

The time frame selected for the study will allow for the analysis of each of the three countries to overlap completely. For the U.S., the primary elections began in Iowa

on Jan. 3, 2008 and the national election wasn't held until Nov. 4, 2008. For the sake of this study, the weekly story count began in November 2007 and continued until the end of 2008. Even though the election campaign was pretty much continuous throughout the whole year, the national campaign is usually said to begin after Labor Day, so the daily story tracking will begin on Labor Day and continue until the end of November.

Coincidentally, the Canadian election was called on Sept. 7 and the vote was held on Oct. 14, so both the weekly and daily tracking period for the U.S. election can also be used for the Canadian election. The Australian election was held on Nov. 24, 2007, so the daily tracking period ran from the start of September 2007 until the end of November 2007. The weekly tracking period will start in January 2007 but will continue through the end of 2008 and into 2009. (For more on this, please see Appendix B.)

The endpoint for the study is the meeting between President Obama and Prime Minister Harper on Feb. 19, 2009, slated to be the first foreign visit of Obama's administration. Even before a formal date had been set for the meeting and before Obama had been sworn in, news reports suggested that climate change and energy, particularly northern Alberta's pollution-producing oilsands, loomed large on the agenda (D'Aliesio & Fekete, 2009, Jan. 13; Gillies, 2009, Jan. 13; Bentley, 2009, Jan. 14). The meeting between Harper and Obama, which seemed likely to lead to a cross-border surge in attention for climate change as a matter of public policy, serves as an interesting endpoint for this particular study.

This provided some sense of what happens to coverage of environmental issues in the immediate and long-term aftermath of an election. The findings may allow me to

make predictions about what we might see in Canada and the U.S., especially if there are any similarities in coverage during the campaign between the countries.

This method provided the ability to identify key moments in the news cycle. Key moments can be defined in a variety of ways in this study. This included important dates in the election campaign, such as the day after televised debates or even the day after the election, but also included days when the census of news coverage shows a sharp increase or decrease across all, some or even just one of the newspapers in the sample. The examination of some of the articles from these selected periods will feature some aspects of both textual analysis and content analysis. The close reading of the articles involved simply identifying the tone and nature of the article as well as some of the key identifying factors such as whether or not they were op-ed columns and where they were placed in the newspaper. In some cases, especially those where coverage of climate change and global warming increased substantially above average, the topics of each of the stories were counted to determine if any one story was driving this change in coverage. This added texture to the overall picture of the quantity of global warming and climate change coverage by showing what topics gained attention from the media and, in those key moments, what frames, sources and themes were prevalent.

### ***In-depth Interviews***

The next component of the methodology for this project is the in-depth interviews. In his book on interviews, Kvale (1996) says that interviewing is designed to ask people about how they feel, understand or react to different situations. In the context of this study, interviewing newspaper reporters, columnists and editors who were responsible for covering the election campaigns and for planning their newspaper's



coverage of the election provided insight into why climate change and other environmental issues received the amount of attention that they did during the campaign. The reporters and editors were drawn primarily from the 18 newspapers selected for this study and listed earlier in this chapter, but there were two journalists from other newspapers who were interviewed. A convenience sample was used to select the interview participants. Because of the difficulty in arranging and scheduling interviews, those reporters and editors that fit the above description and were available and willing to be interviewed were a part of the sample. Reporters and editors were also asked about the challenges they faced in covering the issue when it did come up during the campaign and see if they have any thoughts about why it was not a bigger issue. In addition to interviewing reporters and editors specifically involved in covering the campaigns, some of the coverage of this topic during this period may come from the reporters devoted to covering environmental issues in each of the three countries. Their perspective on this topic was also useful for this project and of a piece with Hansen's idea of exploring multiple sources. In total, 21 journalists were interviewed for this project during a total of 20 interviews. In one interview, two people were interviewed simultaneously. Two of the interviews were conducted in two parts – in both cases, they were interrupted by urgent work-related matters – and in one of those two cases, the interview was completed the day after the first part of the interview was conducted. Eleven of the 21 journalists were interviewed in person while the rest were conducted over the phone. The average length of the interviews was 46:02. It was essential to have a mix of reporters and editors as possible because they have different roles in and views of the newsgathering process. A full list of the planned questions is included in Appendix A.

The interviews were transcribed and analyzed without the aid of any software. With each interview, the responses were assigned to one or a number of different overarching topics based on the content of those responses. The topics emerged from the research questions and hypotheses laid out in chapters 2 and 3 or emerged organically through conducting, transcribing and analyzing the interviews. That determination could have been based on either specific terms or the general theme of the interview subject's contents. A full list of the overarching topics and the parameters of those topics can be found in Appendix D. After the analysis was conducted, selected quotes were included in the text of the results chapters to highlight and illustrate the key themes and findings of this dissertation.

## CHAPTER 5 – RESULTS – AUSTRALIA

Although the three elections that are the focus of this study took place within a year, in hindsight the Australian election on Nov. 24, 2007, can be seen as taking place in a time very different from that of the Canadian election on Oct. 14, 2008, and the American election on Nov. 4, 2008. The Australian election, which saw the defeat of the Liberal/National coalition that had governed for more than 10 years under the leadership of John Howard and the election of the Labor Party led by Kevin Rudd, took place well before the economic downturn that dominated the final stages of Canada's federal election and the presidential election in the U.S. The consensus among the Australian newspaper reporters and columnists interviewed for this project is that climate change was one of the top five issues, if not one of the top three, in the campaign. Rarely, if ever, has climate change achieved such a high place on the political, news, and public agendas during a national election campaign.

For this study, the news coverage of climate change and global warming was studied by conducting a survey of news coverage in six Australian newspapers – *The Australian*, *The West Australian*, *The Age*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Daily Telegraph*, and *The Herald Sun*. These six newspapers were chosen because they offer a representative mix of different media ownership groups, political points of view, and the major cities and regions of the country. In addition, interviews were conducted with five journalists and columnists at these newspapers. All of the interviews were conducted over the telephone. Selected news articles from the time period that is the focus of this study – Dec. 31, 2006 to Feb. 28, 2009 – will be examined closely.

The Australian results provide some indication of what might happen if a major political party succeeded in making climate change a key issue in a national election campaign. (In Canada, the Liberal Party attempted, but ultimately, and perhaps because of the worldwide economic collapse, failed to make climate change a major issue; the U.S. election focused more heavily on energy-related issues that had some connection to climate change.) And just as interestingly, the Australian example offers us an opportunity to see how the issue was covered in the period immediately after an election – a period in which climate change remained a major issue in Australian national politics.

### ***Overall***

Studies that have tracked general news coverage of climate change and global warming around the world, looking at an even longer stretch of time, have shown that the coverage in Australia (or Oceania, which includes New Zealand) has increased in terms of the number of news stories using those phrases in recent years. This finding matches up with earlier studies that attempted to explain why the story had been less prominent on the Australian news agenda than it was in other parts of the world during the 1990s (McManus, 2000). McManus found that the reason for the lack of coverage was the fact that majority governments led by John Howard for most of the decade may have been second only to U.S. President George W. Bush's administration in the developed world in terms of overlooking the issue of climate change.

This began to change in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Boykoff & Mansfield 2011, Wholey & Deppa, 2010). In interviews for this study, journalists who have covered climate change or Australian politics or both for major Australian newspapers reported seeing climate change rise on the news, political, and public agendas in the run-up to the

2007 national election. Andrew Probyn, a political reporter for *The West Australian*, the largest newspaper in Perth, cites a major drought prior to 2007 as a catalyst for the interest in climate change:

The drought was turned into an example of climate change, which in fact Australia is a very dry continent and it was a cyclical drought that we were going through, perhaps as Australia had in the past, in the 1940s. It was turned into a debate or used by the climate change believers as an example of it and the public was open to that notion (A. Probyn, personal communication, October 6, 2009).

Lenore Taylor, a reporter for *The Australian* who was frequently cited by other reporters interviewed for this study as the leading journalist on climate change policy in Australia, said that while there were efforts by various groups to make climate change a part of the political agenda in Australia, it didn't happen until Rudd made it an issue in the 2007 election.

It never came right to the forefront, you know. It was never right in the heat of the political debate again until, you know, until the period in the lead up to the last election where it was a change in heart from the previous governments and you know on all previous policy (L. Taylor, personal communication, September 15-16, 2009).

Matthew Franklin, the lead political reporter during this period at *The Australian*, concurs with Taylor's interpretation of events. "I remember it being a story that came into increasing focus as Kevin Rudd, A) started to develop some ideas about what he wanted to do and B) as he became more and more popular in opinion polls on the basis of his full suite of policies."

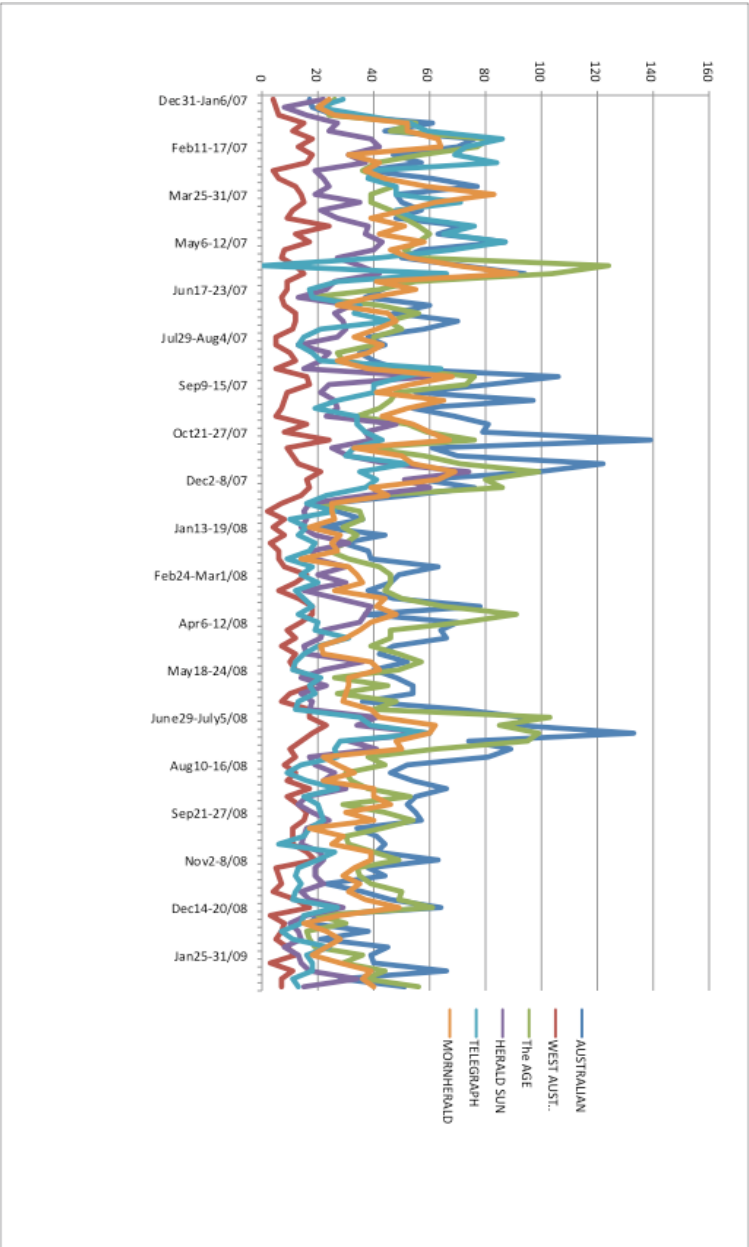
Franklin continued:

It wasn't on [Howard's] policy radar. It certainly wasn't on the opposition's radar to challenge him on it. So even before – after that election and the time before Kevin Rudd

became leader, it still wasn't something that people talked about. Kevin Rudd chose to make it an issue (M. Franklin, personal communication, August 5, 2009).

Once that happened, the number of stories in Australian newspapers mentioning climate change began to increase markedly. Some of the most recent counts show that Australia on a monthly basis has had some of the highest peaks of climate change or global warming coverage between 2007 and 2009 (Boykoff & Mansfield, 2009). At its peak, the Australian coverage tracked in this study was higher than in any week for any Canadian or American newspaper tracked during those years. During the week of Oct. 28 to Nov. 3, 2007, *The Australian*, a national newspaper based in Sydney and owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp., published 139 stories that mentioned either climate change or global warming. During the week of July 13 to July 19, 2008, *The Australian* almost matched those numbers, publishing 133 stories mentioning those terms. On two other occasions, a newspaper published more than 120 stories that referred to climate change or global warming in a single week: *The Age*, a Melbourne-based paper owned by Fairfax Media, published 124 articles during the week of May 27 to June 2, 2007, and *The Australian* published 122 stories between Nov. 18 and Nov. 24, 2007.

Overall, the trend of decreasing coverage through the time period studied for this paper is similar in Australia to the trends seen in Canada and the U.S. The primary difference is that the decline in the quantity of coverage through late 2007 and 2008 is less pronounced in Australia (see Chart 5.1). And of course, the sheer volume of stories in the largest of the Australian papers is greater than those in most of the American and Canadian newspapers, especially toward the end of the time period in the early part of 2009.



**Chart 5.1** – References to “climate change” and/or “global warming” in full text of Australian newspapers from December 2006 to February 2009

While *The Australian* often had the most coverage, it was a little late to the game when it came to devoting the largest amounts of space to covering climate change. In the early part of 2007, *The Daily Telegraph*, a Sydney-based and News Corp.-owned tabloid, was frequently publishing more stories mentioning climate change and global warming than any other newspaper examined for this study. By the summer of 2007 (or, in Australia, the winter of 2007), the volume of the *Telegraph*'s coverage had declined precipitously and other newspapers, chiefly *The Australian*, were taking the lead on climate change coverage among Australian newspapers. By the end of the time period tracked for this study, the *Telegraph* and the *Herald Sun*, a Melbourne-based paper also owned by News Corp., were near the bottom of the list with the much-smaller, Perth-based paper, *The West Australian*.

### ***Early 2007***

Kevin Rudd was elected leader of Australian Labor Party on Dec. 4, 2006, two days before Stephane Dion was elected leader of the Canadian Liberal Party, as it happened. From the early days of Rudd's leadership, he made it very clear that he would make climate change an important part of his leadership as the country moved toward the next campaign. Perhaps not surprisingly, and similar to what happened in the other countries, coverage of climate change or global warming by each of the Australian papers was at its peak at the start of the time period covered by this study. So for Rudd, his decision to make climate change such a key part of his platform must have seemed like a logical one, just as it did for Dion. Even though, as *The West Australian*'s Probyn notes, the Howard government had, perhaps reluctantly, come around to the idea of an emissions trading scheme of some sort.



But the counter from the Labor opposition was that they had 10 years to act and hadn't done so, but they should have done more. It turns out that in 2003, the Howard government had considered an emissions trading scheme that would have put carbon at an initial cost of something like \$5 a ton, but that was knocked back (A. Probyn, personal communication, October 6, 2009).

One of the differences between Rudd and Dion was that Howard and his party ultimately chose not to fight back against the claims that Rudd made about the coalition's inaction on the climate change file and how that put Howard's government out of touch with Australians and most of the rest of the world.

During the early part of 2007, Rudd took steps to lay out his party's *bona fides* on the matter of climate change. This constituted at least part of the extensive coverage of climate change in Australian newspapers during this part of the year. The most climate change stories – a total of 86 – in a single week in the first four months of 2007 were published in the *Telegraph*, a Sydney tabloid owned by News Corp., during the week of Feb. 4 to Feb. 10, 2007 (see Chart 5.1).

The second highest number of stories – 83 – published by *The Sydney Morning Herald* at any point in this study came in the week of March 25 to March 31, 2007. This was the week that Rudd announced his party's plans for its climate change policy, but it was also the week of the first Earth Hour, which the newspaper marked by including additional coverage of environmental issues in the Thursday and Friday paper, where many articles were tagged with the line “the Green Issue.” (The highest number of stories mentioning climate change or global warming came a little more than two months later, in early June.) By comparison, *The Australian* and the *Telegraph* published 48 stories each while *The Age* published 39 stories that same week.

For most of this period, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Australian* were in a similar range in terms of the number of stories each week with mentions of either climate change or global warming. By the middle of 2007, however, the newspapers would move in different directions: the *Telegraph's* coverage decreased while *The Australian*, which is considered the most serious-minded paper in the country despite its relative youth, increased markedly after the first few months of 2007.

The two papers that haven't yet been mentioned in this section remained consistently at the bottom end of the scale for most of the early part of 2007, and in one case, actually dropped after the first few months of 2007. The *Melbourne Herald Sun*, a tabloid owned by News Corp., tended to have between 20 and 40 stories during the early part of 2007, but in the later part of the time period used in this study, the *Herald Sun's* coverage fell regularly to fewer than 20 stories. With the exception of a few weeks over the course of the more than two years, *The West Australian* always published fewer than 20 stories mentioning climate change or global warming in a week. *The West Australian* is the only one of the six newspapers not owned by either Fairfax Media Group or News Corp., and it is based in the much smaller city of Perth on Australia's far less populous west coast. In other words, *The West Australian* is, quite simply, a smaller newspaper serving a smaller audience, but the region is an important producer of key natural resources, especially the coal industry, which plays an important role in the debate of carbon emissions trading schemes in Australia.

### ***Mid-2007***

Through the middle part of 2007, which includes Australia's winter, the numbers for all of the newspapers dipped regularly below 60 stories at the top end of the scale and

40 stories at the bottom end for the papers providing the most coverage. As noted above, this was the period where *The Daily Telegraph's* coverage dropped precipitously. (*The Australian's* coverage didn't really start to increase until fall 2007.)

One of the most interesting findings from this section is that the coverage peaked in the first 10 days of June, around the same time that coverage tends to peak in other parts of the world, including Canada and the U.S. The cause of this increased coverage is the annual G8 Summit, which was held in Germany in 2007. Of course, Australia is not a part of the G8, but it is a part of the G20, which held its first meeting in 2008.

Around the time of the summits, coverage increased in most Australian newspapers. The week before the conference, May 27 to June 2, 2007, *The Age* published a total of 120 stories that week. During this week, these stories showed a mix of topics related to climate change. First of all, late in the week, there was some coverage that previewed the G8, but there was also some news from Howard, who made an announcement about appointing a special envoy to handle the climate change file.

The next week, between June 3 and June 9, 2007, during the middle of the G8 Summit, coverage decreased slightly at *The Age*, dropping from 120 stories to 104 stories with references to either climate change or global warming. On June 5, *The Age* published a number of stories that were tagged in LexisNexis with a "World Environment Day" header. Toward the end of the week, there was some coverage that previewed that start of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) conference, which is an important international gathering for Australia that was going to be held in Australia in September of that year. Earlier in the week, the Liberal Party held a meeting of its federal council. Interestingly, a story in *The Age* quotes the prime minister toward the end of the

story as saying that climate change “may have been framed as an environmental issue, but it is really overwhelmingly an economic issue...” (Koutsoukis, 2007, June 3). Most of the other large newspapers in Australia increased their coverage during this week. *The Australian* had 94 stories with references to climate change and *The Sydney Morning Herald* had 91 stories that featured mentions of climate change and global warming.

Throughout the rest of the summer, there were almost no instances where newspapers published more than 60 stories referring to climate change in a single week. One of the exceptions was *The Australian*, which published 70 stories in the week of July 15 to July 21, 2007. The big news of this week was that Howard and his party unveiled their preferred option – cap-and-trade – when it came to a emissions trading scheme. Amidst these stories were more indications that climate change might be a key factor in the forthcoming federal election, including articles noting that Howard’s support among young people had begun to dwindle.

### ***Pre-Election***

On Oct. 17, 2007, Prime Minister John Howard called the Australian election for Nov. 24, 2007. By this time, it was clear to most observers that Kevin Rudd and the Labor Party were still planning to make climate change a major part of the campaign. Reporters covering federal politics in Australia for newspapers argue, however, that Howard had an opportunity to head off Rudd’s arguments and apparent advantage on the issue of climate change.

Malcolm Turnbull was the environment minister during the period leading up to and including the election. He was generally viewed as more progressive than most of his party on climate change. (Later, Turnbull would become the second person to serve as

leader of the Liberal Party after Howard resigned following his electoral defeat.) Lenore Taylor, writing for *The Australian*, broke a story during the second week of the campaign about internal Liberal Party discussions on its climate change policy. Said Taylor:

[Turnbull] had gone to the shadow cabinet about six weeks before the election proposing that they should reach and took position of ratification of Kyoto. Malcolm Turnbull thought it was a perfectly valid argument that look we are meeting accurate targets anyway so we've got nothing to lose from ratification and everything to gain because a lot of party is you know beating us on this issue you know basically over this symbolic thing. But the shadow cabinet was that that wouldn't look credible and that wasn't what happened (L. Taylor, personal communication, September 15-16, 2009).

By early September, most of the large newspapers tracked for this study began to show an increase in the number of stories they were publishing that referred to climate change. In the first full week of September, from Sept. 2 to Sept. 8, 2007, *The Australian* published 106 stories that fit these criteria. Much of the increase in coverage can be attributed to the fact that Sydney hosted the 2007 summit of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, which includes all of the nations that border the Pacific Ocean. Before the emergence of the G20 toward the end of the decade, this was the most important international group of which Australia was a member. During this week, there was also a fair amount of attention paid in *The Australian* to how Kevin Rudd, then just the leader of the Labor Party, responded to major international leaders, especially U.S. President George W. Bush (Karvelas & Dodd, 2007, September 7).

While *The Australian* leapt out to the front of this story, it was quickly followed by *The Age*, which was then followed closely by the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Both *The Age* and *The Morning Herald* are broadsheets owned by the Fairfax Media Group.

Generally speaking, the Fairfax papers are thought to be less politically conservative than the newspapers owned by News Corp., which includes *The Australian*.

For most of the rest of time period studied, *The Age* remained slightly ahead of the *Morning Herald*, but their coverage tended to chart fairly closely to each other. Part of the explanation for this is that the papers in the Fairfax chain – and the News Corp. chain, for that matter – frequently shared some reporting resources, especially when it comes to national politics and the bureau in Canberra, the nation’s capital.

The coverage in those three papers – *The Australian*, *The Age*, and *The Morning Herald* increased above the previous regular highs from mid-2007, but settled around the high numbers from the early part of 2007 – between 60 and 80 stories a week for the *Morning Herald* and *The Age*. *The Australian* was frequently publishing more than 80 stories a week in the run-up to official start of the election campaign.

International news intervened just five days before the election campaign began. The Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Al Gore and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. In many places, especially the U.S., the prize propelled one of the world’s best-known symbols of the struggle to do something about climate change back into the headlines and with the imprimatur of one of the world’s most respected honors. Between the start of September and the end of November 2007, *The Australian* published 61 stories mentioning Al Gore and climate change or global warming.

### ***General Election***

The general consensus among reporters and columnists who covered and observed the campaign was that climate change ranked very high on the public agenda and it remained a prominent issue in the campaign, peaking in significance at the end of

October and start of November. “I would say definitely it’s top three or four issues,” said Matthew Franklin of *The Australian*, who added: “I don’t recall that the big issue of the day that dominated everything was climate change on any particular day, but I do remember it as a constant back drop to the general political debate” (M. Franklin, personal communication, August 5, 2009).

Adam Morton, a political reporter who covered climate change policy and the Australian Greens for *The Age*, said: “I think it ... was one of the two or three main decisive factors during the election campaign” (A. Morton, personal communication, September 17, 2009).

Said *The West Australian*’s Andrew Probyn: “It was right up there with health and education” (A. Probyn, personal communication, October 6, 2009).

During the official campaign itself, which like the Canadian campaign, ran for about five weeks, overall coverage of climate change stayed more or less steady at most of the newspapers . The exception was *The Australian*. The national newspaper’s coverage peaked during the second full week of the campaign, which ran from Oct. 28 to Nov. 3, 2007. The newspaper published 139 stories that week mentioning either climate change or global warming – more than any other newspaper in any other week during the period studied for this project. This week was more or less the midway point of the election campaign and climate change had become one of the main topics in the campaign. A study by Media Monitors Australia that was cited in *The Australian* noted that climate change had the second most mentions in the news media across all platforms with 14,555, second to interest rates with more than 21,000 and almost twice as many as education policy, which had the third most mentions (Unattributed, 2007, November 1).

The stories in *The Australian* that referred to climate change or global warming that week ran the gamut from reported stories to columns to editorials.

Despite the volume of references to climate change and global warming in newspapers stories during the official election campaign, there was consensus among the reporters interviewed that the level of debate on a carbon emissions trading scheme was fairly simplistic, to borrow a term used by one of the reporters. “It’s very difficult to sell something as complex as an ETS, so the political campaign focused more on more simplistic [ideas],” said *The West Australian*’s Probyn (A. Probyn, personal communication, October 6, 2009).

*The Age*’s Morton noted that there was very little detail around the various emissions trading schemes. “So, during the election campaign, probably the debate on emissions trading scheme wasn’t very intelligent,” he said (A. Morton, personal communication, September 17, 2009). For his part, *The Australian*’s Franklin said that even if the terms of the debate were more detailed, he is uncertain if the general public would have been able to understand the debate: “Even how emissions trading scheme could work and the options about how you would decide it were not in my recollection, a part of the mainstream dialogue. And I suspect that the man in the street wouldn’t have known you know, wouldn’t have - wouldn’t have understood the language either.” (M. Franklin, personal communication, August 5, 2009).

At the same time, though, Rudd did make it a central part of his message, as the numbers of stories mentioning climate change or global warming clearly indicate. But as the interviews with reporters who covered the campaign and an examination of the stories themselves indicate, Rudd and the Labor Party used climate change both literally and



figuratively as a symbol in their election campaign. *The Australian*'s Franklin described the way that Rudd would refer to climate change while on the campaign trail, saying that it was embedded into the message of the day "When we are at some of those schools for example, where we had to talk about putting solar power cells on the roofs of those schools," he said. "It was built into his campaign stops" (M. Franklin, personal communication, August 5, 2009).

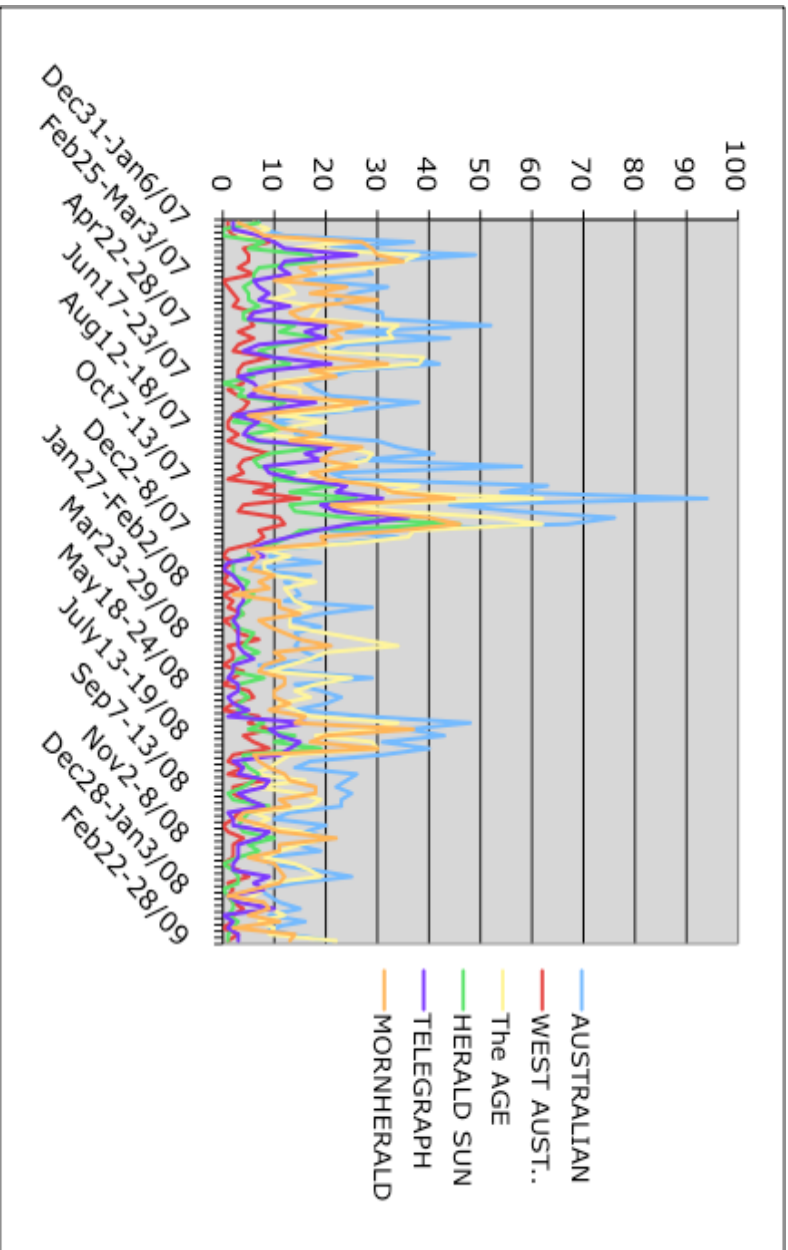
Neither *The Age* (76 stories) nor the *Morning Herald* (67 stories) showed any notable increase that week. *The Daily Telegraph* published 43 stories with mentions of climate change, which was a slightly above average number of stories for a week in the last half of 2007 for the *Telegraph*. *The West Australian* published 24 stories that week, making it one of the few weeks where the paper cracked 20 stories referring to climate change. The next time that happened was the week of the election and then it wouldn't happen again until July 2008.

Immediately after the week of Oct. 28 to Nov. 3, 2007, *The Australian*'s coverage dropped back closer to the level of previous weeks – at least until the week of the vote. With the vote coming on a Saturday, as is the tradition in Australia, the increase in coverage that coincided with Rudd's victory was spread over two weeks. *The Australian*, for example, had 122 stories referring to climate change or global warming during the week of Nov. 18 to Nov. 24, 2007. And then, during the following week, from Nov. 25 to Dec. 1, 2007, *The Australian* published 99 stories that fit the criteria. For every other newspaper except *The Daily Telegraph*, there were more stories referring to climate change in the first full week after the campaign than in the week that included the final week of the campaign and election day. Most of the stories in *The Australian* that fit that

criteria that week were, with the exception of a handful of science-themed stories, about the aftermath of the election, notably the transition of power and the selection of Rudd's cabinet. The same was true in *The Daily Telegraph*, the paper that saw a decrease in stories mentioning climate change or global warming immediately following the election.

In terms of stories mentioning either climate change or global warming and either politics or election (see Chart 5.2), the chart tends to follow a trend that is similar to the overall numbers. Not surprisingly, the numbers peak during the heat of the election campaign, dropping just before the week of the actual vote. It also comes as no particular surprise that *The Australian* was regularly publishing the most stories that fit all of these criteria, as they did most weeks when the criteria was just stories mentioning either climate change or global warming. However, if you consider the percentage of total stories mentioning climate change or global warming that also mentioned politics or election during the period preceding, including, and following the campaign, *The Australian* did not always have the highest proportion of those stories. In fact, in some instances, even in the campaign period, *The West Australian* had the highest proportion of climate change-related stories that also mentioned politics or election. (This is not entirely surprising, in the U.S., even *The New York Post*, which published the fewest stories mentioning climate change or global warming of any paper in this study, had the highest proportion of stories in some weeks that also mentioned politics or election.) Even though, climate change was generally thought to have a higher place on the news and political agenda in Australia than in the Canadian and American elections, it didn't regularly have a higher percentage of stories that mentioned climate change and

**Chart 5.2** – References to “climate change” and/or “global warming” and “politics” and/or “election” in full text of Australian newspapers from December 2006 to February 2009



politics or election than in those two countries. This may be due, in part, to the fact that the issue of climate change in general was more prominent in Australia and in 2007.

### ***Howard vs. Rudd***

One major aspect of the symbolism surrounding climate change in the 2007 Australian election is how Rudd and the Labor Party used it as a way of trying to show that the Liberal Party and Howard were out of touch. Lenore Taylor of *The Australian* said:

For the Labor Party ... it was part of their broad picture of things, the sort of forward looking modern new, fresh, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. For the Liberals, I think they would have preferred not to talk about it at all. That wasn't you know that wasn't what happened (L. Taylor, personal communication, September 15-16, 2009).

As Taylor reported during the election campaign, the Liberal Party had a plan in place that they could have used to deal with climate change before the campaign began, which could have served to mitigate some of Rudd's offensive on this point, but for various internal political reasons, Howard and his advisors chose to mostly ignore this topic, at least in the early part of the campaign. "So you know I don't think they handled it all well," Taylor said, "and I think in the election post-mortems they would concede that also" (L. Taylor, personal communication, September 15-16, 2009).

One interesting similarity with the coverage of the Canadian federal election of almost 11 months later is that the tracking of stories that feature references of either climate change or global warming and the names of either major leader – John Howard or Kevin Rudd – shows that between the start of September 2007 and election day in November most weeks most of the newspapers had more stories that included mentions of Howard than they did of Rudd. This is may be part of the advantage (or disadvantage)

of being the incumbent. Even though, by all accounts, Rudd was pushing the issue of climate change, it was Howard's name that was being connected to it most frequently during the election campaign (see Chart 5.3). However, unlike his counterpart in Canada, Stephen Harper, Howard was unable to use this built-in advantage to get re-elected.

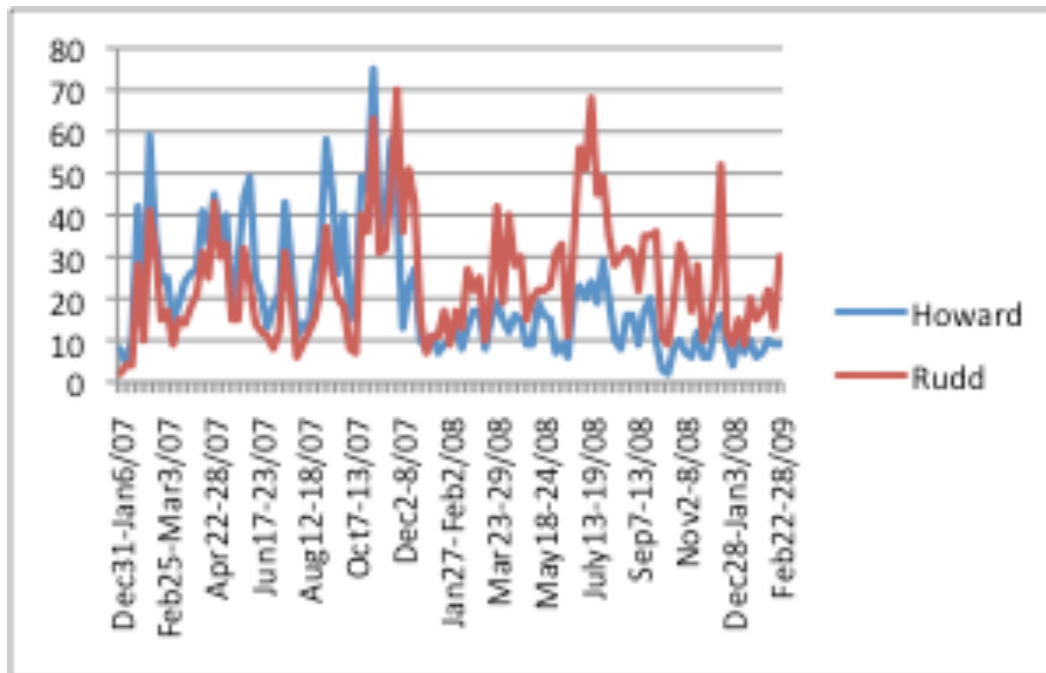
*The Australian's* Franklin pointed out that one other related issue that emerged as a hot button during the campaign was the use of nuclear power. Australia has long had an almost complete ban on the use of nuclear power in the country. (There is just one reactor in the country.) In Franklin's description of this side issue, Rudd appeared to use it as a major wedge in the campaign.

During the final 18 months of the Howard government there was suddenly a - a debate which happened about whether Australia should have some nuclear power reactors.... During that period in which there was a growing awareness of climate change and particularly after Kevin Rudd became [leader], the Howard government started talking about the use of nuclear energy and the possible way to reduce carbon emissions.... Kevin Rudd, actually through his ministers or his front bench, ran a violently anti-nuclear, a strongly anti-nuclear part of their campaign, to the point of going around the country saying, 'Well, John Howard says we need 30 nuclear reactors, so you are going to have to put them here.' And he would go to a town and say there is going to be a nuclear reactor here because of John Howard (M. Franklin, personal communication, August 5, 2009).

### ***Climate change as metaphor***

The disconnect between Rudd's lack of a firm plan for a carbon emissions trading scheme during the 2007 election campaign and his insistence on focusing on climate change as a key issue during that same campaign can be explained by the fact that Rudd used the issue as a metaphor or a symbol, according to most of the reporters interviewed for this project.

**Chart 5.3** – Comparing the number of references to “climate change” and/or “global warming” and Kevin Rudd and John Howard in full text stories in *The Australian* from December 2006 to February 2009



“It really served as a sort of metaphor,” Andrew Bolt, a conservative columnist with the *Melbourne Herald Sun*, said of the role of climate change during the election campaign. He added:

It worked very well for [Rudd] because climate change for him was not just an issue that was popular, particularly with young voters but is also symbolized out of touch fuddy-duddy John Howard, then the prime minister, being there for more than a decade and he was fresh, new, future. It just coincided beautifully.... And the government tried desperately to cover by saying it believed in climate change too, and it, too, would promise an emissions trading scheme, but the issue really symbolized new change and therefore worked much better for Labor than it did for the incumbent Liberals (A. Bolt, personal communication, August 14, 2009).

*The Australian's* Lenore Taylor used different language than Bolt but saw the role of climate change in the campaign in a similar way:

The opposition used it as a sort of a totemic issue to show why they were sort of fresh and new and different. Public opinion was strongly on [Rudd's] side. There were a lot of grassroots groups also campaigning on it. There was support [from a] coalition of unions and green groups and some business groups campaigning on it. The sort of, the irony, I guess, is that the former government had changed their views and had said that they would have an emissions trading scheme and the position of the parties in terms of domestic instruments wasn't one, it wasn't all that different going into the last election but the Labor Party had the sort of totemic issue that they were going ratify the Kyoto Protocol (L. Taylor, personal communication, September 15-16, 2009).

As has been noted elsewhere in this chapter and in this dissertation, Rudd's decision appears to have been a wise one, considering the challenges of campaigning on a specific climate change-related plan as per the Canadian example. And more generally, Rudd's strategy to use climate change as a symbol of other larger themes in the campaign

also suggested an agreement with the idea – however cynical it may be – that election campaigns are not the time for serious policy discussions. This only added to the challenges for reporters like Taylor who were attempting to cover this story from a political angle.

It was highly frustrating.... You couldn't figure out what sort of emissions or the percentages they would, you know, they would preside over. It wasn't clear what the conditions or parameters were in terms of the negotiation of the deal that we're now looking at.... It was kept deliberately pretty vague but the now government Labor Party said that they would have this reviewed (L. Taylor, personal communication, September 15-16, 2009).

During the election campaign, at least, the Howard government may have offered a more concrete plan than Rudd's Labor Party, who promised to ratify Kyoto and then follow the guidance of Ross Garnaut, the eminent economist who would study the issue for them. Said Taylor:

In fact, probably, the former government had a more detailed position to decide to commission a report by the – headed by the head of the department and prime minister and cabinet at which came down before the election and sort of provided the broad framework for an emissions trading scheme that they said that they would implement after the election, you know, if they were returned (L. Taylor, personal communication, September 15-16, 2009).

### ***Post-election and Bali Conference***

The symbolism of climate change that Rudd helped use to carry the Labor to its electoral victory carried over in the immediate aftermath of the election. Indeed, Rudd's first act as Australia's prime minister was to announce that the country would reverse its longtime stance and become a signatory of the Kyoto Accord. This decision, as *The Australian's* Franklin explained, was pure symbolism. "I remember covering election



night and I could be wrong but I bet - I'm 99% sure - that climate change was something that he ratified at Kyoto was something he mentioned right in his speech in which he declared victory" (M. Franklin, personal communication, August 5, 2009).

And on Dec. 3, 2007, Rudd formally ratified the Kyoto Protocol. "He made a big deal out of it," Franklin said, "and he held press conference saying you know, 'I'll just sign this, it's on, I said I'll do it and it's the first thing I've done. '"

A leader (which is comparable to an editorial in a North American newspaper) in *The Age* on Dec. 3, 2007 argued that Rudd's approach to foreign policy, specifically the signing of the Kyoto Protocol, was indicative that the tide had turned. "Mr. Rudd sees the need for 'active participation in the multilateral world'. That shift in emphasis is likely to be of profound significance in determining Australia's place in the world in years to come" (Unsigned, 2007, Dec. 3).

In addition to using climate change to cast the Howard government as being removed from the mainstream, Rudd also used it to align the Liberal-led coalition government with the largely disliked Bush administration, which was certainly the most prominent abstainer when it came to Kyoto. Rudd also promised voters that his government would change Australia's role on the world stage from one that aligned with the American regime, increasingly discredited and heading into its term limit-imposed final days, to one that would enhance the country's standing in the rest of the world. Like his vague promises on climate change policy, this was a proposition that clearly appealed to many Australians and was a relatively easy promise to deliver on.

Perfectly, for Rudd and his government, the first opportunity was the United Nations Conference on Climate Change in Bali, Indonesia in early December 2007, just

days after Rudd's victory. This conference offered a number of opportunities for Rudd. He had just made international headlines – for example, the *Toronto Star* headlined its Australian election wrap-up, “Labor's Rudd wins election; In abrupt shift, vows to sign Kyoto, leave Iraq” (Star wire services, 2007, November 25) and the *Financial Times* titled its page three story on the Monday after the election, “Rudd vows to ratify Kyoto and withdraw from Iraq” (Smith, 2007, November 26) – for unseating the long-serving by Howard promising action on climate change, and here was a large international gathering, not far from home (by Australian standards, at least), where Rudd would get a chance to make a splash on the world stage. Said *The Australian's* Franklin: “And he was almost appealing but not, not overtly, but almost appealing to a sense of shame you know, Australia has been in the bad one on the block here.” Franklin also said that this idea that was not a part of the international solution on climate change was Rudd's “key international policy” (M. Franklin, personal communication, August 5, 2009).

Most of the Australian newspapers examined for this study sent reporters to follow the new prime minister to the Bali conference, where he would address the conference. And those political and environmental reporters who weren't lucky enough to get assigned to Bali chipped in by providing reporting from home (A. Morton, personal communication, September 17, 2009).

And as it turned out, Rudd and at least one of his new ministers had a chance to acquit themselves on the international stage in an impressive way for such newcomers. Penny Wong was named minister for climate change and water when Rudd assumed the office of prime minister. By the end of the conference in Bali, newspaper reporters were singing her praise. In *The Age*, Michelle Grattan wrote:

It's easy to see why Rudd chose Wong for this portfolio. She can hold a line under the toughest questioning, and she was pressed again and again at yesterday's news conference, held a day after her arrival in Bali and just over a week since she was sworn in to a portfolio with which she had no previous detailed familiarity (Grattan, 2007, December 12).

By the end of the week, as *The Australian* reported, Wong was leading a small group of key ministers seeking a last-minute agreement in Bali (Warren & Franklin, 2007, December 15).

During the first two full weeks of December 2007 – Dec. 2 to 8 and Dec. 9 to 15 – the number of stories referring to either climate change or global warming in the six Australian newspapers tracked for this project remained high coming out of the election (see Chart 5.5). For example, *The Age* published 80 stories meeting these criteria in the week of Dec. 2 and then 86 stories in the week of Dec. 9, the highest of any of the six newspapers in each week. Very soon after, however, the numbers of stories with references to climate change or global warming began to drop as the politically transformative year wound up and Australia eased into the holidays, the heart of summer, and the new year.

### ***Early 2008***

The apparent drop in coverage of climate change and global warming that suddenly became evident at the end of December 2007 continued – and increased – into the early weeks of 2008 (see Chart 5.1). *The Australian* published just 27 stories referring to climate change or global warming in the week of Dec. 30, 2007 to Jan. 5, 2008. Two weeks later, the same paper published only 21 stories that included the two search terms. Other newspapers didn't dip quite as low as *The Australian*. *The Age* and

*The Morning Herald* showed a small decline in coverage, but it wasn't as severe. In the same week – Jan. 13 to Jan. 19, 2008 – that *The Australian* published 21 stories that matched the criteria, *The Age* published 29, making that one of the few weeks, especially this late in the time period, where the *The Age* published more stories referencing climate change or global warming than *The Australian*.

Undoubtedly, one factor behind the low numbers is, as was mentioned in the section about early 2007, the time of the year. Not only it is the Christmas and New Year holiday season, but it is also the heart of Australia's sweltering summer. As is the case in Canada and the U.S., coverage of climate change has tended to drop around the Christmas holidays and often in the early part of the summer. But there may be other factors at play here. Coming off such an intense election campaign, it is possible that the news media and the public were experiencing a little bit of fatigue on this issue.

Reporters in Canada, in particular, have noted the difficulty in finding new environmental-themed stories to write about climate change, the challenges would have been just as difficult for political reporters covering the newly-elected government in Australia. Since Rudd had not spoken in great detail about what his policy would be, and was essentially waiting to act until economist Ross Garnaut's report was ready there may not have been much to report on – or, at least, as much to write about. While the problem appears to have been less acute in Australia, newspapers and the media companies that own them were struggling with declining ad revenues, which, almost inevitably, leads to smaller news holes. The drop in stories may also correspond to declining interest in climate change as an issue. That is not to say that climate change is not still of great concern for a lot of people, but that the public's interest had begun to move on to other

issues, perhaps in part because there were fewer new stories to report on the potential effects of climate change.

For most of the rest of the next four months, coverage remained relatively low at all six newspapers. It increased from the lows of early January 2008, but it eventually peaked toward the end of March, specifically at *The Australian* and *The Age*. During the week of March 23 to March 29, 2008, *The Australian* published 78 stories with a reference to climate change or global warming while *The Age* published 65 stories. During this week, *The Age* was very occupied with daily stories leading up to Earth Hour, an international event launched by its sister paper in Sydney, that encouraged individuals and institutions to turn off their power for an hour. Simultaneously, *The Australian* published a massive series of stories this weekend about climate change. Two weeks later, in the week of April 6 to April 12, 2008, *The Australian* published 70 stories and *The Age* published 72 stories. This was the week when Rudd, who, famously, speaks Mandarin, made his first official visit to China.

### ***Mid-2008***

Through most of May and June 2008, the level of coverage in the six Australian newspapers examined for this study returned to the levels that were fairly consistent with their numbers through much of the time period. While still below the peaks of the early 2007 and the election, most of the newspapers had settled back into a number of stories mentioning climate change or global warming that was higher than the numbers during the holiday season and early 2008 (see Chart 5.1).

The weekly total of stories in *The Australian* tended to fall in the 40s and 50s most weeks. The two Fairfax Media Group broadsheets were more likely to publish fewer

stories – often dipping to the 20s – that met these criteria in a week than *The Australian*, but they frequently reached the 40s, in the case of *The Morning Herald*, and the 50s, in the case of *The Age*. *The Herald Sun* fell somewhere between the three newspapers at the top end of the scale and the tabloids at the bottom of the scale with the paper falling between 15 and 36 stories a week referencing climate change and global warming during this period. *The Daily Telegraph* and *The West Australian* tended to lurk in the low-double digits, with the *Telegraph* peaking at 20 and *The West Australian* peaked at 17.

The news story that led to a huge increase in coverage was the release of a draft report of Ross Garnaut's much anticipated study on how the Rudd government should proceed with a policy reaction to the problem of climate change – in other words, this was the first step to devising and implementing an carbon emissions trading scheme. On June 30, 2008, Garnaut released the draft report and it promptly became a huge news story in Australia. During the week of June 29 to July 5, 2008, *The Age* published 103 stories that met the criteria and *The Australian* published 94 stories that week. *The Herald Sun* (41), *The Morning Herald* (42), the *Telegraph* (35), and *The West Australian* (17) remained more or less in their usual story range. But in the week after the announcement, the numbers remained almost as high – *The Australian* published 91 stories, down four from the previous week – and in other cases, the number of stories increased by almost 50% - *The Morning Herald* published 62 stories referring to climate change or global warming, 20 more than the week of the announcement.

Perhaps most notably, the coverage remained fairly high for the rest of the summer for all newspapers. Indeed, one of the weeks with the highest number of stories for any newspaper in any country in this entire study came in the summer of 2008 when

*The Australian* published 133 stories during the week of July 13 to July 19, 2008, which was the week after the G8 Summit in Japan. The meeting also came at a time when oil prices, and, consequently, fuel prices, were still close to unprecedented highs.

The number of stories referring to climate change or global warming dipped slightly in the final two weeks of August. The month that would follow would be notable for a confluence of major national and international news events that would come to dominate much of the news agenda in Australia and even around the world.

### ***Economic downturn***

In the middle of September 2008, Lehman Bros., the U.S.-based investment house, collapsed, setting off an international chain reaction that affected most of the world and had a significant effect on the economies of countries around the world, including Australia's. Almost immediately, this became the most important international story, supplanting most other news stories, at least in the short term, and even altering the course of the U.S. presidential election campaign.

In Canada and the U.S., where national elections were in progress, this study found that there was, in both cases, a small and fairly brief decline in the number of newspaper stories mentioning climate change and global warming during the week of the Lehman Bros. bankruptcy and its immediate aftermath. There is, in fact, no question, based on information gleaned from public opinion polls and interviews with reporters, editors, and columnists, that the economic crisis rose to the top of the news agenda for politicians, voters, and the news media.

In Australia, which is more geographically and even economically removed from the heart of the economic problems, there was no noticeable decline in stories mentioning

either climate change or global warming among the Australian newspapers examined for this study. Between the week starting on Aug. 31, 2008 and the week starting on Sept. 28, 2008, the most stories fitting these criteria published in a single week by *The Australian* was 52 in the week of Sept. 14 to Sept. 20, 2008. The most *The Australian* published during that time period was 66 during the week of Aug. 31 to Sept. 6, 2008. The most significant drop – and it is considerable – was at *The Age* where the number of stories referring to climate change dropped from 53 in the week of Sept. 7 to Sept. 13, 2008 to 29 the following week. At the same time, however, *The Morning Herald*, the other Fairfax Media broadsheet, increased its coverage from 40 to 46 in the same two weeks.

One failing of this study is that it does not measure simultaneously how many stories were being written about topics that might have ranked fairly high on the news agendas of these three countries. For example, it's likely that the number of economic stories increased during this time period..Common sense suggests that it they almost certainly did. But what stands out as unique in the Australian example is that the references to climate change or global warming did not drop significantly as this new, massive financial story emerged, rather suddenly, in mid-September.

At the time of the Lehman Bros. bankruptcy, climate change had a higher place on the news agenda, political agenda, and even the public's agenda in Australia than in the U.S. and Canada at that time. The differences in the numbers between public concern about climate change in the three countries and newspaper stories referring to that topic during this volatile time period suggest that there may be a direct relationship between these factors. It is possible that climate change ranked so high on the news agenda in Australia that when the news of the economic collapse began to dominate the news



media, climate change did not get bumped from the pages of the newspaper in the way it did, to some extent, in Canada and the U.S. This is definitely an area that would warrant further and different types of studies.

Another thing that is worthy of mention is the fact that the economic downturn was not mentioned by Australian reporters during their interviews. To be perfectly clear, the interview questions tended to focus on the election campaign, but there were questions that did cover the entire two-year period of the study. And in the case of most of the Australian interviews, many of the answers touched on ongoing news stories – in particular, the efforts of the Rudd government to pass an emissions trading scheme after the release of the much-anticipated Garnaut Report.

### ***The Garnaut Report***

On September 30, 2008, Ross Garnaut released the final version of his report. Kevin Rudd had commissioned the report in April 2007, months before he was elected prime minister. Before, during, and after the election itself, Rudd repeatedly cited the study as being a guide for him and his government for the best way to proceed with policy responses to the problem of climate change. Said *The Australian's* Franklin:

Rudd had to develop a policy that would allow him to get elected without scaring the many, many tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of people in this country whose jobs depend on the coal industry. So he bought himself time by appointing Ross Garnaut to do this research (M. Franklin, personal communication, August 5, 2009).

In interviews, however, reporters note that by the time Garnaut officially released his report, Rudd and his government had started to back away from committing to adopt every element in Garnaut's study. One column from the immediate aftermath of

Garnaut's announcement that ran in at least two Murdoch-owned papers described the Garnaut report as "dead, dead, dead before it hit the table" (McCrann, 2008, October 1).

This may explain why the release of Garnaut's full report in late September didn't generate as much of an increase in stories referring to climate change as when the draft was released in June 2008. (The end of June 2008 was, however, the peak for the number of stories in all six papers mentioning either climate change or global warming as well as "Garnaut". It is also possible that Garnaut's announcement in June stole some of the thunder from his final report in September. Another possible explanation is that while there was still plenty of room for the same amount of climate change coverage in the newspapers, there was no room for more coverage of climate change given the economic downturn and other events in the world, like the U.S. election. It's also possible that the suddenly precarious economy may have made people less interested in climate change and more interested in issues that have a more direct effect on their life.

During the week of the announcement, for example, *The Australian* published 57 stories that fit the criteria. This was almost matched by *The Age* with 54 while *The Morning Herald* published 40. The most interesting numbers came in the weeks immediately following the announcement. In the week after, between Oct. 4 and Oct. 11, 2008, the number of stories published in each of the six newspapers dropped substantially from the week before: *The Australian* went from 57 to 34; *The West Australian* went from 15 to 11; *The Age* dropped from 54 to 43; *The Herald Sun* dropped from 24 to 16; *The Daily Telegraph* went from 22 to 17; and *The Morning Herald* declined by more than 50% - 40 to 17.

But generally it was a story that earned a fair amount of media attention, especially among the reporters who covered federal politics and climate change as part of their regular beat or, as they are called in Australia, their rounds. “I thought I was going to go mad if I had to write about it one more time,” said *The Australian*’s Taylor, when asked if the release of the Garnaut Report led to an interest from her editors in long, in-depth stories on emissions trading schemes (L. Taylor, personal communication, September 15-16, 2009).

### ***Late 2008***

In the last four months of 2008, the number of stories mentioning either climate change or global warming settled into a fairly consistent pattern that carried over into the first two months of 2009 (see Chart 5.1) Most noticeably, the occasional peaks in coverage that had occurred in previous months did not happen toward the end of 2008. It is possible that this may have something to do with the economic downturn becoming a more prominent issue or a decline in the prominence of climate change as an issue.

The three newspapers that had had the most stories that included references to climate change or global warming remained *The Australian*, *The Age*, and *The Morning Herald*, in that order. The range of stories per week with either one of those terms in those three newspapers tended to fall between 60 at the highly end (usually *The Australian*) and 30. *The Daily Telegraph*, which had the most extreme increases and decreases in coverage among the Australian newspapers that were tracked, settled into a prolonged period of decreased coverage.

There were only a handful of instances when there were more than 60 stories mentioning either climate change or global warming in a given newspaper. These

included *The Australian* during the weeks of Aug. 31 to Sept. 6, 2008 (66) and Nov. 2 to Nov. 8, 2008 (63). During the week beginning Aug. 31, 2008, there was no specific story that led to the increased coverage in *The Australian*, although there was a small package of stories on Sept. 6 about the Garnaut report. And throughout the week, stories about Sarah Palin, who had recently been selected as the Republican vice-presidential nominee, found their way into the paper. As for the week of Nov. 2, 2008, 20 of the 63 stories in *The Australian* that meet the criteria that week were in a special report on climate change and water that was published in the paper on Nov. 8, 2008.

During the week of Dec. 14 to Dec. 20, 2008, *The Australian* published 64 stories that mentioned one of climate change or global warming while *The Age* published 61 stories including those terms during the same week. This was the week where the economic downturn and the promises that Rudd and his government had made on climate change policy came home to roost. “Two of Labor's central election undertakings – an emissions trading scheme and a broadband service for 99 per cent of Australians – have fallen victim to reality,” wrote Dennis Shanahan in *The Australian* (Shanahan, 2008, December 16). By the end of the week, a university lecturer wrote in *The Age*:

Well, it not so much a question of morality now. That sort of language has been comprehensively shelved in favour of terms such as "responsibility". The language of leadership has given way to the politics of following: we may commit to deeper cuts in future, but the rest of the world must agree to do this first. To do otherwise would be to risk our economic wellbeing. This day, pragmatism is king and moral absolutism is beside the point (Aly, 2008, December 20).

In the first two months of 2009 – the last stretch of time covered by the tracking project portion of the dissertation – *The Australian* published 66 stories during the week

of Feb. 8 to Feb. 14, 2009. This was the week when the wildfires that killed hundreds of people in Australia reached their worst point. Interestingly, though, the number of stories mentioning climate change or global warming did not really extend above the range that was common for that period. As it turned out, there were very few stories in any of the six newspapers in a given week – and in many weeks, none whatsoever – that mentioned either climate change or global warming and wildfire.

One reporter from a regional newspaper, Andrew Probyn at *The West Australian*, noted that drought – but not necessarily wildfires – did play a role in keeping newspaper editors interested in the topic originally, but that may have waned since the story became more about the domestic politics.

In Australia, there's been a lot of interest in climate change. And that again goes back to the fact that we have suffered a very bad drought. The politics of it, they do get a bit of bored of it because it does seem to be slightly circular, but there is general interest. I think newspaper editors recognize that emissions trading schemes have impacts on the way we live our lives (A. Probyn, personal communication, October 6, 2009).

The data shows that the number of stories that mentioned either climate change or global warming and drought tended to be consistently fewer than 10 per week at every newspaper with a small uptick in February 2009 when the deadly wildfires occurred. Overall, the trend for these numbers followed the same trend as the overall numbers in Australia, showing a slight decline from the start of the period.

***Fairfax Media Group vs. News Corp.***

One of the unique features of the print media landscape in Australia – at least in comparison to the U.S. and Canada – is the complete dominance of the industry by two major companies – News Corp. and Fairfax Media Group. News Corp. is, of course, well

known to media observers throughout the English-speaking world and even beyond. The Rupert Murdoch-owned firm is one of the largest media companies in the world, claiming Fox News Channel, Fox TV, and the *New York Post* among its most prominent U.S.-based properties. The company, however, got its start in Australia, Murdoch's homeland. Three of the six newspapers being tracked for this study – *The Australian*, a national broadsheet, and two metropolitan tabloids, *The Melbourne Herald Sun* and *The Daily Telegraph* in Sydney. On the other hand, the Fairfax Media Group is a company that owns a wide range of media properties in Australia and New Zealand, but has limited its expansion beyond that part of the world to a group of agricultural magazines in the U.S. For this study, the two Fairfax properties that were examined were *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* in Melbourne. Both are considered to be quality metropolitan broadsheets.

Another very important factor when considering the differences between these two companies and the newspapers they own is the political leanings of their owners, editors, and editorial boards. Generally, the Fairfax newspapers are seen as being more liberal or centrist than their News Corp.-owned counterparts. The Fairfax papers are usually thought to be more devoted to serious news coverage than the News Corp. tabloids, at least. The one wrinkle in all of this is *The Australian*, which is a very serious paper, has one of the largest staffs of any newspaper in the country. Perhaps the most interesting finding in the numbers that compare the data from the Fairfax newspapers, with the data from the News Corp. newspapers, is that, aside from *The Australian*, the Melbourne and Sydney dailies owned by each company have very similar numbers of stories mentioning climate change or global warming. This finding is reminiscent to some

of the findings of the Canwest newspapers in Canada and raises questions and possible future study topics for looking at how much actual overlap there is at these newspapers in terms of the stories they are publishing about climate change and other topics.

Not surprisingly, when the reporters were asked how their own newspaper covered this story and how they thought the rest of the news media in Australia did, some dissension showed along predictable lines. For example, Andrew Bolt, the conservative columnist and blogger for News Corp.'s *Herald Sun*, was dismissive of the competition, which is more liberal, a broadsheet, and has a different corporate parent. Bolt said:

The Fairfax Media is particularly evangelical about it to the point where *The Age*, and that is in a Fairfax paper in Melbourne, that's my competitor, there are two daily papers in Melbourne, the second biggest city. *The Age* went through a whole period where it not once, not once mentioned that the world had been cooling since 2001.... You think of *The New York Times* and then put it through yet another re-education camp and you will approach what *The Age* is like (A. Bolt, personal communication, August 14, 2009).

Bolt was also highly critical of ABC, the government-funded television network, and its coverage of climate change.

Generally, though, most of the Australian reporters felt that the media coverage of climate change was solid. Lenore Taylor, *The Australian* reporter frequently cited as the top reporter in the country on the political ramifications of climate change, said there was a difference in the quality of coverage of climate change as a science story and as a political story.

The science of it has been quite widely covered quite well by the ABC, by the Fairfax Media. And the politics of it, I think, has been covered less well because it's sort of complicated and you know it's complicated policy and to do it properly you need to understand the policy as well as

the politics. So I think the paper I used to work at, called the *Financial Review*, does it pretty well and I think we did pretty [well] (L. Taylor, personal communication, September 15-16, 2009).

Part of the problem may stem from the fact that the Australian news media – and political reporters, in particular – are playing catch-up. As McManus (2000) noted, the Australian news media didn't cover climate change as much as other countries because of the fact that the media follows the lead of the government and John Howard largely avoid this issue during his time in office.

*The Australian's* Franklin, who is one of the more prominent political reporters in the country, brought up this idea (without referring to the McManus study) and offered his own thoughts on that possibility.

Our paper is generally a conservative paper. I think -- I think that for a lot of the time we were until, well, until relatively recently, rather dubious about – not about climate change itself – but about the extent to which it was a problem and the way it was sort of represented by some people. But you know, we also pride ourselves on providing debates. So we would have you know, we would have had opinion pieces from the area over the time with others. But we have to check that ... from various sides of the debates (M. Franklin, personal communication, August 5, 2009).

Franklin said that the major shift in the news media's attitude to covering this topic came after Rudd was elected leader of the Labor Party, which brought with it the emergence of environmental lobby groups. And in general, there was growing interest, at least within Franklin's paper, in coverage of climate change as a policy issue. "Editors were in my judgment suddenly more interested in this because it was all everyone was talking about it," he said (M. Franklin, personal communication, August 5, 2009).

Franklin went on:



At the time when there was significant evidence that climate change was a problem, that Australia had a government that wasn't doing anything about it, to what extent [did] the Australian media question that and -- and look closer at the evidence of whether there was a problem (M. Franklin, personal communication, August 5, 2009).

***Reporting on climate change policy***

Those comments from Franklin also speak to the challenges that reporters face when trying to report on climate change policy. Reporting on the topic of policy solutions for climate change presents reporters and editors with a unique set of circumstances. As part of the in-depth interview portion of this project, interview subjects in Canada, the U.S., and Australia were asked a series of questions about those challenges. In each of the three results chapters, those answers will be recorded and then finally compared in the discussion chapter.

Franklin's colleague at *The Australian*, Lenore Taylor, is widely considered the best reporter on this particular beat in Australia and had a lot to say about the various challenges that she and other reporters covering this issue. Said Taylor:

In terms of general reporting, I think, you know, most people would get interested just around a big meeting, around the time of Kyoto, around the time of Bali, in the lead up to Copenhagen, or when there's a major piece of domestic legislation like the emissions trading legislation now. And I think for the majority of reporters the complexities is not something they want to be engaged in most of the time (L. Taylor, personal communication, September 15-16, 2009).

A challenge that is at least as daunting as keeping reporters and editors interested in the complexities of climate change-related policy is the problem of keeping the potential news audience interested and assessing the extent to which they are aware of and understand the implications and intricacies of these policies. *The West Australian's*

Probyn explained the problems facing reporters. “These things are complicated to explain, especially in media that has to inform and entertain readers. If you’re just going to bore readers ... they’re going to get poor prominence in the newspaper or news bulletins” (A. Probyn, personal communication, October 6, 2009).

Probyn added that the adage that many journalists attempt to follow – keep it simple, stupid – is more difficult to adhere to given the inherent complexities of climate change policy.

Keeping emissions trading simple is difficult, and so the politics of climate change is often focused on the personalities, unfortunately. Maybe there’s a lot of a focus on the more extreme views simply because that gives you light and shade because this is a topic that, in the political sphere, has a lot of grays. Is the public being served by the political debate on climate change? Probably not. Are they being served by newspapers? Well, unfortunately, we can only deal in what we’re being told or witnessing (A. Probyn, personal communication, October 6, 2009).

But Probyn said the problem is not that his newspaper is uninterested in reporting this issue, but rather all of the challenges of keeping it interesting to audiences and even some reporters.

We have ample opportunity to do longer features or stuff, and that is done. It’s whether people are engaged in that level of debate and most people aren’t. A lot of the news is simply not interesting. And the simple message that we want to reduce emissions is far simpler than how we go about it. As I said before, you can’t go into the details. Unfortunately, it is agonizingly boring. And of course, we don’t know what the final shape of any emissions trading scheme is going to be in Australia or the U.S. until both countries have dealt with it (A. Probyn, personal communication, October 6, 2009).

Probyn went on to describe the state of coverage of climate change policy in Australia today and one of the challenges that is becoming more acute for political reporters.

I think every newspaper has played its role. The tabloid newspapers have got bored of it. Being a resource state, *The West Australian*, we cover it. It is becoming mired in domestic politics and sometimes that's been reflected in the coverage of it.... You have to be responsible to make sure that some people who are clearly outliers aren't given more coverage than they should be. That's a call that every journalist has to make, day in and day out (A. Probyn, personal communication, October 6, 2009).

*The Australian's* Taylor, who Probyn cited specifically as a "very good reporter," (A. Probyn, personal communication, October 6, 2009) noted that reporters need to make the effort or have the time to understand the context and complexity of climate change policy (L. Taylor, personal communication, September 15-16, 2009).

[There are] some stories that you can write as you know he said, she said stories and reports of the different groups. But in this instance I think you really need to understand the complexities of the science, the complexities of the international negotiations, the complexities of how a carbon market works, the complexities of, you know, all the manifest complexities of this story because in order to make sense of what the different groups are telling you, because they can so easily be lead astray on the context of something.... If you can't put that in some sort of context and if you can't say what it means and how it fits into the debate and you know the extent to which it's critical, then you're really not doing, not really helping things much (L. Taylor, personal communication, September 15-16, 2009).

As for the audience's understanding of the issue, Taylor doesn't know how much they know about climate change policy, but said that it has been written about so much, that she assume "some prior knowledge" (L. Taylor, personal communication, September 15-16, 2009). She added: "In [the] space available it's not possible to go back over the

sort of recent history although I have found lately that I'm probably supposing too much prior knowledge" (L. Taylor, personal communication, September 15-16, 2009). Taylor then related a story about an Australian senator who had told her excitedly about something that he had found out about the opposition party, but Taylor had to tell the senator that his party had already addressed this issue and in fact supported the measure (L. Taylor, personal communication, September 15-16, 2009).

If climate change policy is this difficult to understand for people who are supposed to make the policy and people who have been covering it for years, then the difficulties of a reporter thrust into this beat in the midst of the 2007 election campaign may provide a useful example of the challenges of reporting on climate change as a political issue. After some personnel changes at *The Age*, Adam Morton was moved into the environmental beat in the heat of an election campaign in which the issue was more prominent than it had ever been. "I had to get my head around it very quickly," Morton said. "I suppose that was a primary challenge. The political lines that are drawn in your campaign tend to be very broad so understanding that is also very difficult" (A. Morton, personal communication, September 17, 2009).

One of the things that Morton tried to do was find sources – both politicians and experts – that he could turn to in the hopes of having the issue explained to him in a fairly clear and prompt way. He also needed people he could turn to on a regular basis and trust to provide him with useful information and analysis when new angles and stories emerged during the campaign. "You obviously go out and try to pick their brains as quickly and as thoroughly as you can" (A. Morton, personal communication, September 17, 2009). Ultimately, Morton felt that he was able to do a reasonably good job of

reporting on this issue, but maybe more importantly, he may have been able to provide a fresh set of eyes. “When you are new to an area ... you are less likely to assume your audience has got a great grasp of the subject matter,” Morton said (A. Morton, personal communication, September 17, 2009).

For Taylor, who has spent a large chunk of her career covering this issue, the structures of election campaigns in Australia generally made her work more difficult, even though she was able to break some important stories while taking a break from traveling on the campaign trail. “It’s harder in the campaign insofar as there are such tight control of information,” Taylor said (L. Taylor, personal communication, September 15-16, 2009). As a result of this, some Australian news organizations are beginning to change their approach to reporting on election campaigns.

It used to be that the most senior journalists move around with the politicians on the planes, okay. As, you know, the 24-hour news cycle intensifies and, you know, more and more when you’re doing that you’re just a transcription machine and writing back what they said yesterday, you know, ‘On a sunny beach in, you know, name-of-town today....’ Increasingly, senior journalists aren’t going on the campaign trail or only going for very limited periods, you know, around the time of the campaign launches because it’s much easier to do proper reporting and analysis in your office with your stuff around you and all your resources and the benefits of being on the campaign trail, you know, are increasingly minimal. So I think, for instance, in the last campaign I went on the road for about a week around the time of the campaign launches and the rest of the time I stayed in my office (L. Taylor, personal communication, September 15-16, 2009).

Taylor added that, from her perspective, this is the best way to cover the campaign and it will likely remain that way unless the campaigns and parties decide to offer more access

to the leaders and their advisors (L. Taylor, personal communication, September 15-16, 2009).

One of the problems that emerged in Australia's political culture between 2007 and 2009 was that reporters writing about climate change not only had to worry about balancing the comments of the vast majority of scientists who support the notion of human-created climate change and the much-smaller group of scientist with skeptical views, they also had to deal with politicians with views on both sides of the issue. Of course, most of these politicians are not scientists or experts in this particular field, but they do have much influence over policy and presumably public opinion. Said Taylor:

I guess it would happen with any complicated issue. I mean, this issue here at the moment is intensely politicized and it's completely tied to the timing of the next election, probably with the future of the opposition leader, you know, possibly with the future of the coalition ... of parties that are making up the opposition at the moment so a lot of people are interested in it for political reason. They are probably not actually interested in for policy reasons at all and maybe that's why it sort of, you know, in a difficult spot here right now (L. Taylor, personal communication, September 15-16, 2009).

In short, Taylor described this challenge as the problem of what to do about the politicians whose opinions are outside of the mainstream on climate change, but are fairly prominent politicians who are making what might be considered noteworthy statements on a very significant issue (L. Taylor, personal communication, September 15-16, 2009).

*The Age's* Morton said that "they are an elected official representing a section of the public, they are entitled to their view," and that journalists have to decide how to handle these situations on a "story by story" basis (A. Morton, personal communication, September 17, 2009). For her part, Taylor said:

I think there is a danger in journalism that you report the different or the fringe because it's sort of newsworthy by being different it assumes a significance that it may not have when you look at the you know when you're trying to fairly represent views across the debate so I'm always sort of careful not to over elevate (L. Taylor, personal communication, September 15-16, 2009).

Taylor went on:

I think it's really important because it's the politicians facing this issue of acting, doing things that may cause upheaval or cost to this generation for the benefit of future generations. Politicians don't usually have time horizons like that. They usually have time horizons that don't extend beyond the next election (L. Taylor, personal communication, September 15-16, 2009).

***Rudd's efforts to pass an emissions trading scheme***

By the time the interviews were conducted with reporters in the late summer and fall (in North America, at least) of 2009, the issue in Australia had become very political as Rudd's government had attempted and failed to get an emissions trading scheme – although not the one suggested by Ross Garnaut – though the senate. The main topic of discussion at this time among the journalists was, first and foremost, would another failed attempt to pass an emissions trading scheme lead to a “double dissolution” election, where both the lower and upper houses of the Australian parliament were dissolved at the same time – a very uncommon occurrence.

At the time of the interviews, *The Australian's* Franklin said that this was the most important issue of the day and it was being talked about on street corners. “Rudd reached a position, found a position, and he's now using this issue just to hammer the opposition which is still divided” (M. Franklin, personal communication, August 5,

2009). *The West Australian's* Probyn said the political rhetoric might actually be clouding the significance of the issue:

I think there are very few people in Australia who fully understand the impact of tackling climate change through an emissions trading scheme. It's that kind of difficulty that the opposition is trying to pierce by showing that it would make a big impact. That's their tactic at the moment. While the government is simply wanting to paint the opposition as climate change deniers or climate change dinosaurs (A. Probyn, personal communication, October 6, 2009).

*The Age's* Morton, though, felt that climate change had become more of a political story than anything else in Australia by this time. "Certainly, the economic implications [are] more [significant] than the environmental implications and the political implications more than the economic implications," he said (A. Morton, personal communication, September 17, 2009).

The international climate change meetings in Copenhagen in December 2009 were also very much on the minds of politicians and reporters in Australia, according to Probyn, who thought that the outcome of the conference would have an effect on domestic politics.

The dynamic will change after Copenhagen. Say it doesn't produce anything concrete, then domestically here, the focus will then go on whether Australia should go ahead with its own plans. That's where it becomes problematic because the critics of emissions trading schemes believe that's where it could damage our economy for no global benefit, no global emissions benefit. And that becomes a very tricky policy to sell (A. Probyn, personal communication, October 6, 2009).

As it turned out, Rudd, who had been so closely linked to climate change-related policies, had failed to effectively institute any climate change policy aside from signing on to the Kyoto Accord in a largely symbolic gesture immediately after his election. And



his failure to act on this – and other issues – ultimately contributed to Rudd’s resignation as leader of the Labor Party and prime minister in June 2010, just before an election was called in Australia for August 21, 2010. As a result, the case of Rudd and his efforts to bring a meaningful climate change policy to Australia can be added to the electoral failure of Stephane Dion’s Liberals in Canada as another cautionary tale for politicians attempting to act on this issue.

## CHAPTER 6 – RESULTS – CANADA

The largest domestic news story in Canada from the last quarter of 2006 to early 2009 was the build-up to the 2008 election and the subsequent drama over the possibility of a Liberal-led coalition. A major part of this storyline was Liberal Party leader Stephane Dion's plan to institute a carbon tax if his party was elected to form the government. Even though this policy could have brought climate change to the political forefront, the findings of this study show that the week when Dion announced the Green Shift policy was one of the weeks when newspapers featured more stories than almost any other week during the period studied for this dissertation.

A census of news stories from six Canadian newspapers – *The Globe and Mail*, *Toronto Star*, *Toronto Sun*, *Montreal Gazette*, *Calgary Herald*, and *Ottawa Citizen* – with mentions of the phrases “climate change” or “global warming” anywhere in the text reveals a steady drop in coverage between the end of 2006 and the start of 2009. In-depth interviews with reporters, columnists, and editors from these, and other, Canadian newspapers also shows that interest in this climate change as a news story was beginning to wane during this time period.

One of the most vexing and important questions facing anyone looking at coverage of climate change and global warming is whether this decline in coverage reflects declining public interest in climate change or if other factors have caused this decrease. As discussed earlier in this dissertation, newspaper advertising revenue began to drop at roughly the same time that the climate change coverage dropped. Was it possible that there was a connection between the dwindling size of news holes and decreased climate change coverage? In 2008, a series of huge news stories, starting with

the historic U.S. election campaign and culminating with the near-collapse of the international banking system in September 2008, ate up large amounts of the news media's time and space.

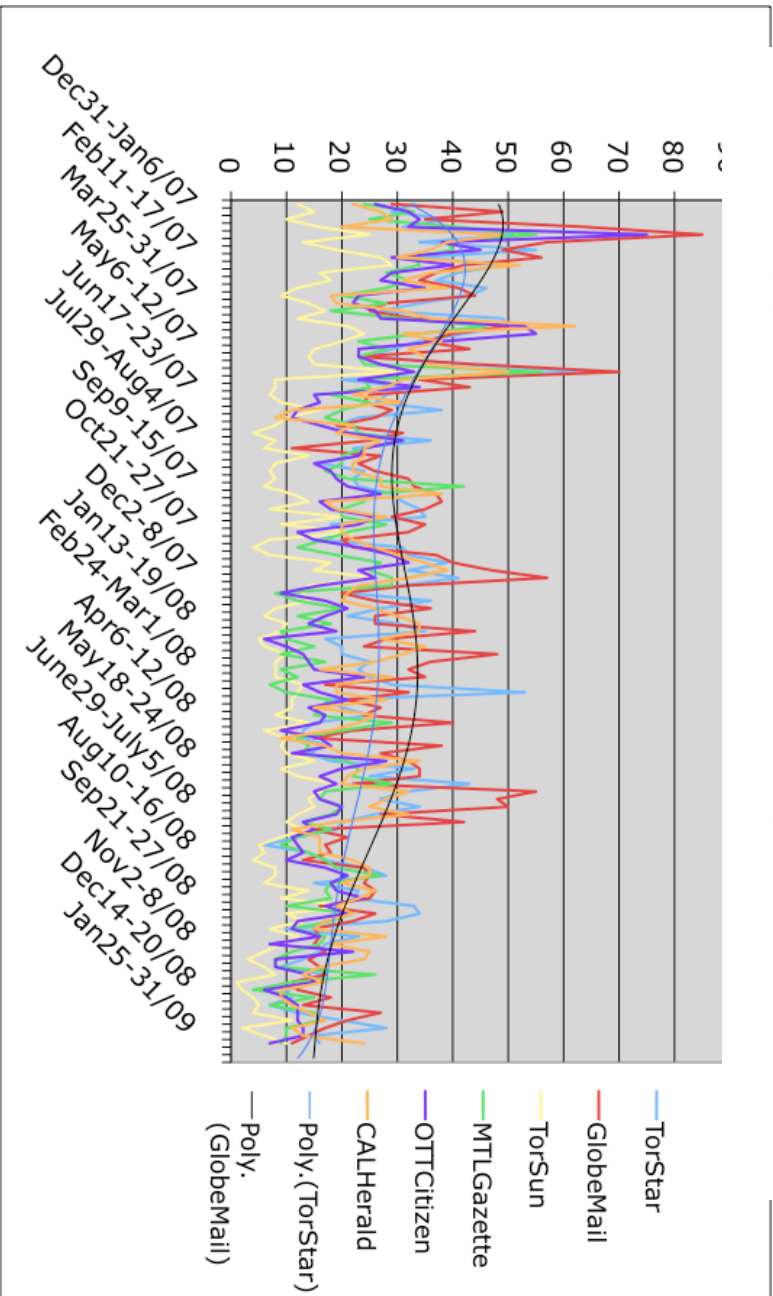
### **Overall**

Perhaps the simplest way to illustrate the declining number of stories mentioning “climate change” or “global warming” aside from pointing to a chart of the Canadian newspaper coverage between 2007 and 2009 (see Chart 6.1) is to that most of the six newspapers were publishing between 10 and 40 stories a week on climate change in the first six months of 2007. By the last six months of 2008, the range had shifted to between zero and 30 stories.

In each of those specific time frames, extremes were found. For example, *The Globe and Mail* made a commitment to writing about climate change in the early part of 2007 and stretches in 2008, while the *Calgary Herald*, the daily broadsheet in the financial capital of Canada's oil industry, had no stories about climate change. But, in general, references to “climate change” and “global warming” in these six newspapers dropped by roughly a quarter in the span of two years.

In terms of the individual newspapers, either *The Globe and Mail* or the *Toronto Star*, Canada's two largest English-language newspapers, had the most coverage almost every single week. In the early part of 2007 and in June 2008, when Stephane Dion unveiled the carbon tax scheme, *The Globe* coverage outstripped the other five newspapers by a wide margin. But during the campaign, the *Star* often had more climate change stories than *The Globe* did. One possible explanation for this distinction is that the *Star* has historically supported the Liberal Party editorially while, in recent years, *The*

**Chart 6.1 –** References to “climate change” and/or “global warming” in full text of Canadian newspapers from December 2006 to February 2009



*Globe and Mail* has been criticized in some quarters (Wells, 2009) for devoting too much attention to political strategy and backroom politics. This may explain the explosion of coverage when the policy was announced followed by the near abandonment of the topic during the campaign by the newspapers and, to some extent, the candidates.

The *Toronto Sun*, a right-leaning conservative tabloid owned by Quebecor, had the least amount of climate change coverage of any of the six newspapers and many of those stories were on the editorial or op-ed pages of the newspaper. Given the *Sun*'s propensity to focus on the sensational and the local (fires, car accidents, crime, etc.), these findings are not entirely surprising.

A comparison of the three Canwest Global newspapers included in the study also revealed some interesting results. The *Ottawa Citizen* and the *Montreal Gazette*, which serve very different cities though separated only by about a 90-minute drive, had very similar coverage trends through most of the two-year time period. They differed only when the story became overtly political, during the election campaigns or international conferences, when the *Citizen*, based in the nation's capital, wrote more stories about climate change. One reason for the similar coverage trends is the newspapers' parent company's aggressive strategy of sharing coverage, from a joint bureau on Parliament Hill and all other stories produced by either staff reporters or freelancers.

The third Canwest newspaper in this study, the *Calgary Herald*, tended to differ, often greatly, from the *Citizen* and *The Gazette*. At times, the *Herald* had weeks with almost no mentions of climate change or global warming while in some weeks they were at or near the top of the pack. Given the prominence of the oil industry in Calgary, climate change policy and emissions trading schemes are a very important story in the

news and business section. The differences in the coverage between the *Herald* and the *Citizen* and *Gazette* show how the staffs of these papers are able to adjust the coverage for the interests of the local audience.

### ***Early 2007***

One of the most striking elements of the graph that charts the number of stories with references anywhere in the text to “climate change” or “global warming” is the enormous peak in early 2007 for *The Globe and Mail*. These can be explained by the initiative of the staffs of the paper, who, at the direction of the editor-in-chief, chose to devote space and resources to climate change and global warming.

The most prominent example of this came in the week of Jan. 28, 2007 to Feb. 3, 2007 when *The Globe and Mail* published 85 stories that mentioned climate change or global warming, easily the highest number of stories published in a single week by any of the six papers during the study. The most important article explaining that peak in coverage actually appeared in the Saturday, Jan. 26, 2007 edition of *The Globe and Mail*. In a Letter from the Editor column, then editor-in-chief Edward Greenspon announced on page A2 of the Saturday newspaper that, to quote the headline: “It’s crystal clear: The environment will be the single most important issue of 2007.”

Greenspon used the recent election of Stephane Dion to the leadership of the Liberal Party as a catalyst for a massive public debate. It was, however, not a public debate about climate change – “we concluded that debate over whether global warming and climate change actually exists was over,” Greenspon wrote – but a debate about what to do about climate change. Greenspon’s column was one of 21 stories on the topic that appeared that Saturday (Greenspon, 2007, January 26). The stories included 2,100-words

on the political implications of climate change's growing prominence as an issue; 2,111-words on how climate change will alter Canada by 2099; 1,116-words on a public opinion poll about climate change; an editorial; columns by Jeffrey Simpson and Rex Murphy, two of the paper's most prominent columnists; and 2,506-words by another prominent columnist and avowed climate change skeptic Margaret Wenté.

In an interview, Wenté described the way the newspaper handled her feature that weekend:

*The Globe*, to its credit, has always allowed room for dissent and questioning. And some other papers have not done [that]. You know, some of the papers have been absolutely full speed ahead on, you know, we are destroying the planet and must do something now (M. Wenté, personal communication, July 14, 2009).

Wenté also said that she has never felt any pressure from her editors at *The Globe* to present the story in a particular way or make sure her work was somehow balanced when she is writing her thrice-weekly column, but that there were some discussions with her editors on a longer news analysis from earlier in 2007 (M. Wenté, personal communication, July 14, 2009).

The 85 stories from the week that followed included 26 letters to the editor, 15 editorials or columns on the topic, 14 stories that were connected to politics, and 10 stories that were business-oriented. The vast majority of the columns and editorials were about the political implications of climate change, meaning that an even larger portion of the climate change and global warming story was connected to political issues. Indeed, 26 of the 85 stories were found to have either of the words "politics" or "election" in the text. As shown in Chart 6.1, the volume of coverage declined steadily in *The Globe and Mail* and most papers from early 2007 onward. Longtime *Globe and Mail* science

reporter Martin Mittelstaedt, who was cited in Greenspon's column as a key asset in the new focus on climate change, offered some possible reasons for the change in the interest level.

I think as somebody writing news, I'm always looking for things that are new. And on the climate change file, I think that it's more difficult to find new angles. You know, everybody knows that, you know, the sea ice is melting; everybody knows that certain polar bear populations are impacted. You know, there is a widespread knowledge that it may impact, you know, crop yields and water levels and those sort of things (M. Mittelstaedt, personal communication, May 14, 2009).

Later, Mittelstaedt added:

There almost has to be studies now that are kind of definitive or, for some reason, the prestige of the people making the claims or whatever. And these stories are all incremental in nature and not breakthrough stories. And you know, I found that I have been able to write stories that I think are breakthrough stories on other topics and not necessarily the climate file. The climate file is too well known and too – you know, very well reported (M. Mittelstaedt, personal communication, May 14, 2009).

Not long after *The Globe's* big push on climate change, Mittelstaedt said that he found himself writing more stories about topics like toxic chemicals that were turning up in household plastics, most notably cups designed specifically for newborn children. The story gained major coverage in Canada and other parts of the world (M. Mittelstaedt, personal communication, May 14, 2009).

### ***Summer 2007***

The decline in stories mentioning climate change coverage was beginning to reveal itself by the summer of 2007. There were a few notable peaks in the spring of 2007 that were specifically related to the political reaction to climate change policy proposals.



In the week of April 22, 2007, all six newspapers increased their coverage as Stephen Harper's Conservative government announced its own plan for reducing emissions. During the week of the announcement, the *Calgary Herald* ran the most stories (62) mentioning "climate change" or "global warming," including a front page story that appeared before the government's plan was announced. It warned that a carbon tax could "crush" Alberta's oil sands project (Schmidt & D'Aliesio, 2007, April 26). The word "crush" was attributed to the chief executive of the Canadian Oil Sands Trust, the biggest partner in the biggest oil sands project in the province. After the plan was announced, however, the headlines – on page A5 – were less alarmist, but still deferred to the major local industry: "Federal green plan has no emissions; Oilpatch still wary of tough targets"<sup>13</sup> (Schmidt, 2007, April 27).

The week after the announcement, newspaper coverage of the government's plan remained relatively high, ranging from 24 stories at the tabloid *Sun* to 55 stories at the *Ottawa Citizen*. The *Citizen* devoted a great deal of space to covering the political fallout of the announcement, which included at least one op-ed calling for the defeat of the Conservatives over their climate change policy and coverage of the comments by Green Party leader Elizabeth May, who said the Conservative emissions policy was worse than the appeasement of Hitler.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Purely coincidentally, Al Gore was making a public appearance in Calgary the very same week and his appearance received considerable attention in the *Herald* and helped to produce the high number of stories, especially when Gore spoke out on the Canadian government's plans.

<sup>14</sup> If nothing else, May successfully injected herself into the debate, although she was widely excoriated for her "outrageous" and "hateful" statement, according to then-Environment Minister John Baird (CTV.ca News Staff, 2007, May 1).

### ***International Conferences***

One trend that has remained consistent from an earlier study (Deppa & Rowe, 2008) is increased coverage in newspapers when world leaders or their representatives attend major international conferences. Annually, the G8 Summit stimulates climate change coverage. The conferences in 2007 and 2008 were no exception. Each of the Canadian newspapers saw an increase in their coverage during the weeks surrounding these events. The U.N. meeting in Bali in December 2007 also spurred more coverage. The coverage was highest among papers that tend to give more attention to national and international news, especially *The Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star*. The *Calgary Herald* also had a high number of stories (39) during the week of the Bali conference in December 2007. The *Herald's* peaks are especially interesting because they offer some insight into which stories were piquing the interest (or are expected to pique the interest) of the leaders of Canada's oil industry and the people whose economic fates were closely connected to the success or failure of Alberta's oil patch.

### ***Late 2007 and Early 2008***

Aside from those weeks in early June 2007 and early December 2007 when international conferences captured significant space on the news agenda, the last half of 2007 and the first half of 2008 marked a key transition for climate change coverage in the six Canadian newspapers that were studied. The raw number of stories referring to "climate change" or "global warming" began to drop from being consistently between 10 and 40 per week to somewhere between 0 and 30 by the end of 2008. A close look at Chart 6.1 shows that in late 2007 only the *Toronto Sun* consistently had fewer than 10 stories on climate change over the course of a given week. Among papers tending to pay

the most attention, however, the peaks were starting to regularly fall below 40 and were settling around 30.

By spring 2008, only *The Globe* and the *Star* were publishing more than 30 stories a week on climate change. On rare occasions, the *Calgary Herald* also published more than 30 stories a week, but the other two CanWest papers and the *Toronto Sun* had generally settled in between 10 and 20. At this point, the bottom had not fallen out of the coverage – the bottom end of the scale remains near 10. Almost immediately after the Canadian election on Oct. 14, some of the newspapers were publishing fewer than 10 stories per week on climate change, and there were rarely more than 20 published in a week by a given newspaper.

In late 2007 and early 2008, some of the possible explanations for decreasing newspaper coverage of climate change may not yet have been applicable. For example, fuel prices were still historically high in North America. Newspaper advertising revenues were dropping, but the economic downturn that would have a very negative effect on most media industries had not fully kicked in yet. The U.S. presidential primaries, however, were a major news event that was being covered closely by Canadian newspapers, which would have been taking up some of the space. Another factor, as cited earlier by *The Globe's* Mittelstaedt, could have been fatigue with climate change stories. Wentz, a *Globe and Mail* columnist, said that “tales of fresh disaster” are what is needed to keep climate change on the front pages.

This story has been fueled in the – in the popular media for years by dying polar bears and, sinking – sinking islands, rising seas and sinking islands, you know, pestilence, plagues, locusts, floods and famine.... And if you look at the newspaper coverage and you are seeing far, far fewer of those, you know, drowning polar bear stories than you [did]

two years ago, because we have all read those, and we have all read, you know, chunks of Antarctic ice shelf is dropping and so on (M. Wentz, personal communication, July 14, 2009).

To that point, Andrew Potter, a news editor at the *Ottawa Citizen* who is responsible for choosing national and international stories from the paper's various wire services, said, "Both the quality and quantity of the stories that we're getting on the subject is poor. The quality was not great and there was too much of it" (A. Potter, personal communication, May 28, 2009). Potter explained:

The problem we had, and I brought it up with the guy at the CanWest News Service, Mike DeSouza, and his editor, was that there is actually no distinction between an incrementally advanced story and a big change. And so there was no way of flagging to editors what was a substantial story (A. Potter, personal communication, May 28, 2009).

### ***The Green Shift***

Most of the nine Canadian reporters, editors, and columnists interviewed for this project agree that climate change appeared to be one of the main political issues in the country – on the federal level, at least – in 2007 and that it would likely remain a key issue in any election campaign, whenever it came. For example, *The Globe and Mail's* Mittelstaedt said:

In 2007, I thought that the climate change would be one of the main focuses of the election and, you know, I think ultimately it wasn't. And I think it moved into more, you know, personality politics rather than issue politics (M. Mittelstaedt, personal communication, May 14, 2009).

Allan Woods, a reporter in the *Toronto Star's* Ottawa bureau who covers environmental policy as part of his beat, remembered that his editors were very interested in the issue.

There was a huge – huge appetite for [environmental policy stories] and probably in the spring, early summer of 2007, I could write an environmental story a day and it would more often than not get front page placement (A. Woods, personal communication, May 28, 2009).

Stephane Dion's announcement of his policy on climate change on June 19, 2008, was, in retrospect, the first step in the build-up to the Oct. 14, 2008, federal election. The Green Shift, as the policy was branded, was the long-awaited manifestation of Dion's well-known devotion to improving the environment.<sup>15</sup> He proposed a carbon tax that would coincide with a cut in income taxes for the middle class. (Over time, a series of amendments to the plan offered relief for key interest groups, such as farmers.)

In the week of the announcement, the number of stories with mentions of climate change rose in four of the six Canadian newspapers surveyed. *The Globe and Mail* and the *Calgary Herald* were the two exceptions, but their coverage peaked in the week after the announcement (June 22 to June 28, 2008). Scott Stinson, the current national editor of the *National Post*, recalled that the Green Shift was a big story even the first couple of days after the announcement.

My recollection is that when the Green Shift was announced it was certainly front-page news and for, I mean, not necessarily days in a row but top of the agenda for at least a couple of weeks when it was first announced and then there was always a sense that Stephane Dion was going to go sell it and kind of explain it to the public that summer, and he didn't really that I can recall... And this would be the issue on which the election was fought. And it didn't really kind of play out that way, partly because of the economy, but I think also partly, I mean, we had people telling us by the end of the election and after the election that they had like internal polling in the Liberals that found

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<sup>15</sup> Another less significant but widely known manifestation of this devotion is the name of the Dion family dog: Kyoto.

it was just going over like a wet balloon (S. Stinson, personal communication, June 30, 2009).

*The Star*'s Woods also said that the lack of clarity from Dion and the Liberals on the policy gave the Harper and the Conservatives an opening not only to take shots at the policy, but also, as we will see later in this chapter, connect the uncertainty over Dion's carbon tax policy with the personal attacks on Dion that attempted to present him as someone who was, to use the tagline from a Conservative commercial, "not a leader."

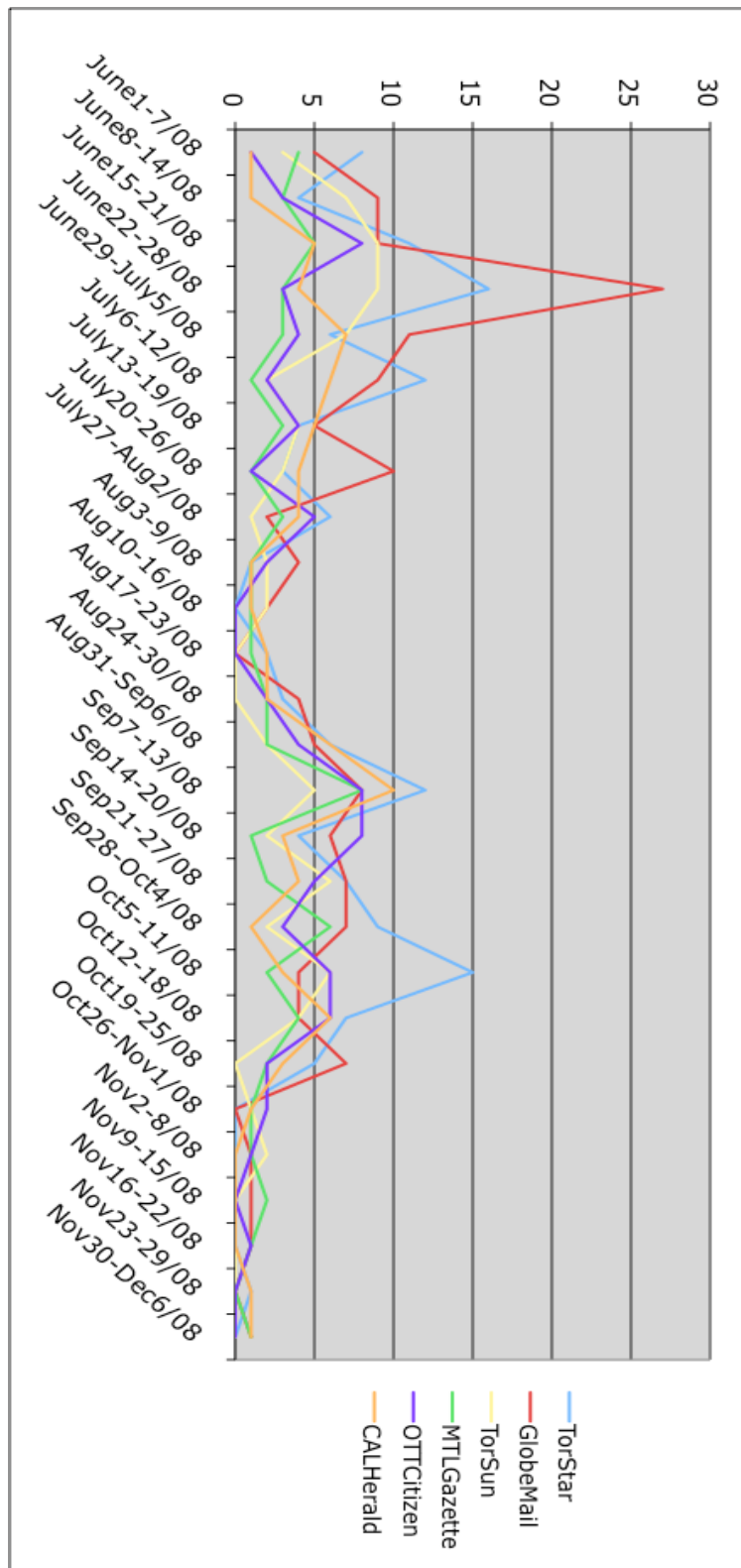
It wasn't quite clear exactly how it was going to be hammered out. It wasn't an ironclad policy. It was the broad brushstrokes of the policy. In terms of political ramifications, it was quite obvious how that was going to play out pretty early because the Conservative attacked it very vigorously (A. Woods, personal communication, May 26, 2009).

To get a clearer sense of how this story was covered, let's take a closer look at two weeks surrounding Dion's announcement as covered by three different newspapers.

#### *Toronto Star*

During the week of the Green Shift announcement (June 15-21, 2008), the *Toronto Star* devoted more coverage than any other paper to stories mentioning climate change and global warming (43 stories) (See Chart 6.2). The next closest was the *Ottawa Citizen* with 29. The *Star* also had the largest number of stories that featured the word "politics" or "election" alongside the other two base phrases with 16, and had the most stories featuring mentioning "Green Shift" or "carbon tax" with 11 (see Chart 6.2). The story made the front page for three consecutive days, starting with a story the day before the announcement and concluding with a front-page op-ed by Chantal Hebert, one of the *Star*'s best-known national affairs columnist and a panelist on the CBC's Thursday night "At Issue" segment on *The National*.

**Chart 6.2** – References to “climate change” and/or “global warming” and “Green Shift” and/or “carbon tax” in full text of Canadian newspaper stories between June and December 2008



The week after the announcement, the total of number of stories on climate change and global warming dropped from 43 to 32 and the number of stories also featuring mentions of politics and election dropped from 16 to 13. (As a proportion, however, there was an increase in the percentage of climate change and global warming stories with references to politics or election from just over 37% to more than 40%. All other papers saw a drop in the proportion of stories mentioning climate change or global warming and politics or election in the week after Dion's announcement. Of course, the week of the announcement saw major increases in this percentage in all six newspapers.) In the week after the announcement, most of the coverage of Dion's carbon tax announcement had shifted from the news page to the editorial and op-ed pages, including feedback from readers.

*The Globe and Mail*

Coverage of Dion's announcement was, in the immediate aftermath, fairly slight. During the week of June 15 to 21, there were only 22 stories with mentions of climate change or global warming, although more than half of those (12) also featured references to politics or election. The story only made the front page of the paper in the day after the announcement, with a story by Ottawa bureau chief Brian Laghi. For the most part, the coverage consisted of columns by Jeffrey Simpson, the venerable Ottawa-based columnist, who had recently published a book on climate change.

In the following week, the number of stories featuring climate change or global warming increased from 22 to 55 – the highest by far - and the number of those stories that also included references to politics or election doubled from 12 to 24. The number of mentions of “green shift” or “carbon tax” in those 55 stories tripled from 9 to 27 in the



same week. In looking at the stories that were published by *The Globe and Mail* that week, only two were actual news stories published on the Green Shift. (There were also three stories on the carbon tax being proposed and eventually passed by British Columbia Premier Gordon Campbell.) The topic got more coverage in the newspaper's Report on Business and even more attention in the paper's opinion pages. So while the Green Shift was commanding lots of the newspaper's space, very little was coming in the form of reported news stories.

*Calgary Herald*

The *Calgary Herald's* news coverage of Dion's proposed Green Shift is notable for its virtual absence. The announcement did not rate a front-page story – CanWest Ottawa bureau reporter Juliet O'Neill's story appeared on page A9 – on the day of the announcement. And there was also an editorial referring, in the headline, to the proposal, as a “flip-flop” and “opportunism” (O'Neill, 2008, June 19). On the day after the announcement, there was no news story dedicated to the topic.

In the following week, the most prominent article about the carbon tax proposal was a column by Don Martin, who also writes columns from Ottawa for the *National Post*, which appeared on Tuesday, June 24, 2008. Martin's piece was a fairly straightforward analysis of the issue, but the headline was: “‘Crazy’ Green Shift sets stage for wild summer” (Martin, 2008, June 24). The quotation of the word “crazy” comes from the response to the proposal by Prime Minister Stephen Harper, whose reaction to the proposal was, as Martin notes, “uncharacteristically blustery” (Martin, 2008, June 24). That week news coverage of climate change not related to the Green

Shift also included comments by a group of U.S. mayors who criticized the “dirty oil” produced in the Alberta oil sands (Harding, 2008, June 24).

On one hand, the *Calgary Herald*'s decision to almost completely ignore the Green Shift can be understood by local politics. At this time, all of Alberta's Members of Parliament were Conservatives, and the Prime Minister himself represented a Calgary constituency. (The Conservatives have governed Alberta without interruption or even serious challenge since the late 1970s.) On the other hand, the Liberals are the Official Opposition and Dion's policy proposal, if enacted, likely would have had an effect on the most significant industry in the city of Calgary.

More generally, the way in which this announcement was covered may speak to the nature of political journalism in these newspapers. The coverage did, in general, increase in the week after the Green Shift was unveiled, but much of that coverage came on pages dedicated to opinion. *The Star*'s Woods said that opinion writing on the Green Shift did take up a great deal of space, and it may have hurt Dion's plan.

It polluted a lot of the air. Luckily, the columnists are confined to one section of the paper.... Your boss may say we know about that, we've had enough of it, on to something else, perhaps. But there's the sense of fatigue in news coverage, right. I think that may have contributed to a sense of fatigue that you know that might have damned or doomed this (A. Woods, personal communication, May 26, 2009).

With the exception of the Liberal-supporting *Toronto Star*, which endorsed the Green Shift, most of the papers' editorial boards and staff columnists would be described as either right-leaning or unabashedly right-wing.

On the other hand, a couple of editors interviewed for this project said that the Green Shift served as a very useful news hook for stories that could compare and contrast

the various policy solutions that have been put forward as a means of curbing the use of carbon. Andrew Potter, national and international news editor for the *Ottawa Citizen*, said,

The Green Shift was useful from our coverage perspective in that it offered an actual policy response and a set policies, right, and so we were able - it gave us sort of a hook for the coverage of the paper, sort of you know midway through the election campaign, you know, what is the Green Shift (A. Potter, personal communication, May 28, 2009).

The *National Post*'s Stinson added:

I know I had a reporter looking into cap and trade versus carbon tax and the various different mechanisms that could be approached in terms of how a government regulates the emissions that are produced by its industry (S. Stinson, personal communication, June 30, 2009).

### ***The Election***

By the end of August, an election appeared inevitable. In the last days of the month and the first part of September, Prime Minister Harper held individual meetings at 24 Sussex Drive with each of the leaders of the three opposition parties. After those meetings, Harper determined that it would be impossible for him to accomplish anything that was on his agenda during the planned fall session of Parliament, so he asked the Governor General to call an election. The election, called for Oct. 14, was announced officially on Sept. 7.

In the month before the election was called, the number of stories about climate change and global warming dropped in the six Canadian newspapers. There was a general increase during the month of September and the start of October, some of which, as we will see, may be attributable to the election and the prominence of Dion's Green Shift during that period. But the overall number of stories with mention of climate change and

global warming remained lower than they had been in the spring. In fact, the fall of 2008, which included the Canadian (and American) election, marked the beginning of the period when the number of stories in a week with climate change and global warming references rarely broke 30. As has been mentioned previously, this may have been because of the news value of the U.S. election, even in Canada. But it does not appear to have had a direct link to coverage of the economic downturn. Aside from the week of the collapse of Lehman Bros., when all news outlets were dominated by financial coverage, there was no noticeable decline in coverage, and even during that week, Sept. 14 to 20, there was only a slight decrease in stories mentioning climate change. For example, in *The Globe*, the climate change stories went from 25 in the week before the Lehman Bros. collapse to 24 during that week and back up to 26 the following week. The drop was more precipitous in newspapers like *The Star* (from 28 to 15 and then back up to 23) and *The Gazette* (from 27 to 18 and then to 17), although numbers in the teens were more common for *The Gazette*. Neither *The Gazette* nor the *Star* are renowned for their business coverage, so it is possible that both of those papers had to free up more of their news hole to cover the beginnings of the recession than *The Globe*, which has a substantial business section on a daily basis. The other factor, of course, was the economic downturn itself, which affected the newspaper industry before mid-September (Potter, 2008, Dec. 17).

To get a sense of what percentage of the stories with mentions of climate change or global warming might be related to the election, a second LexisNexis search was done of the stories that featured those mentions and also included a mention of either “election” or “politics.” This search does not preclude the possibility that these stories

had no direct link to the Canadian election (during this time period they could certainly include references to the U.S. election), but it does give a very useful picture of coverage at this time.

During September and October 2008, it was not uncommon for more than 50% of the climate change or global warming stories to feature a reference to either “politics” or “election.” This rarely happened in the months before the election campaign when this percentage tended to hover in the 30% range. (Remember, of course, that in terms of raw numbers fewer stories were being produced in this time period with references to climate change or global warming.) The *Toronto Star* regularly featured the highest proportion (peaking at 76.5% during the week of August 24 to August 30, 2008) of these stories with references to climate change and politics only dipping as low as 54.2% during the first week of September. (The *Star*, it should be noted, also featured the most climate change or global warming stories during this period.) The first full week after the election, Oct. 19 to 25, the *Star*’s percentage of climate change or global warming stories dropped steeply from 67.6% to 39.2%.

The *Citizen* had the next highest proportion of stories, peaking at 70.6% in the week before the election but dropping to 47.6% during the week of the vote itself. Interestingly, the proportion of stories in the *Globe* hovered consistently around the 50% mark, ranging from 41.7% in the week of the Lehman Bros. collapse to 62.5% in the week before the vote.

In terms of the way that this coverage manifested itself in actual stories, one of the most common approaches by Canadian newspapers (and Australian and American papers) was to use the more widely circulated weekend newspapers to focus on one of the

big issues in the campaign. In American newspapers, the range of topics that are covered with large “takeout” stories is wider than in Canada or Australia if for no other reason that there are more weekends in the presidential campaign to devote to different topics. The short campaigns in Canada and Australia limit the number of topics to five or six. In the Canadian election, most reporters and editors who referenced this method of issue coverage included climate change or the environment in their list of key issues. (Other commonly used formats mentioned by reporters and editors, including The *Star*’s Woods, are “reality checks” on key issues and claims made by parties and their leaders and the infamous chart comparing each of the party’s positions on the major issues in the campaign) (A. Woods, personal communication, May 26, 2009). As Potter and Stinson mentioned earlier, the Green Shift did offer an opportunity for some in-depth stories on a very difficult topic. But that only went so far. And in the midst of a short and very close election campaign, the horserace approach gained primacy, even when it came to coverage of the Green Shift. One Ottawa-based political reporter who asked not to be named (but who I will call Abbott for the sake of making distinctions with other interview subjects who asked for anonymity) explained the focus on the political ramifications of the Green Shift.

I think I would have to say that the Green Shift stories were always written pretty much through a political focus as opposed to explaining how it would affect climate change. Basically [the Liberals] didn’t explain it very well. And it was all about the ads. Most of the stories were about the political dynamic and context also. (Anonymous, personal communication)

Another Ottawa-based political reporter (whom I’ll call Bennett) went on to explain the challenges facing journalists trying to cover something as complex as the

Green Shift, but also something that Dion and the Liberals were accused of having a difficult time explaining to the public.

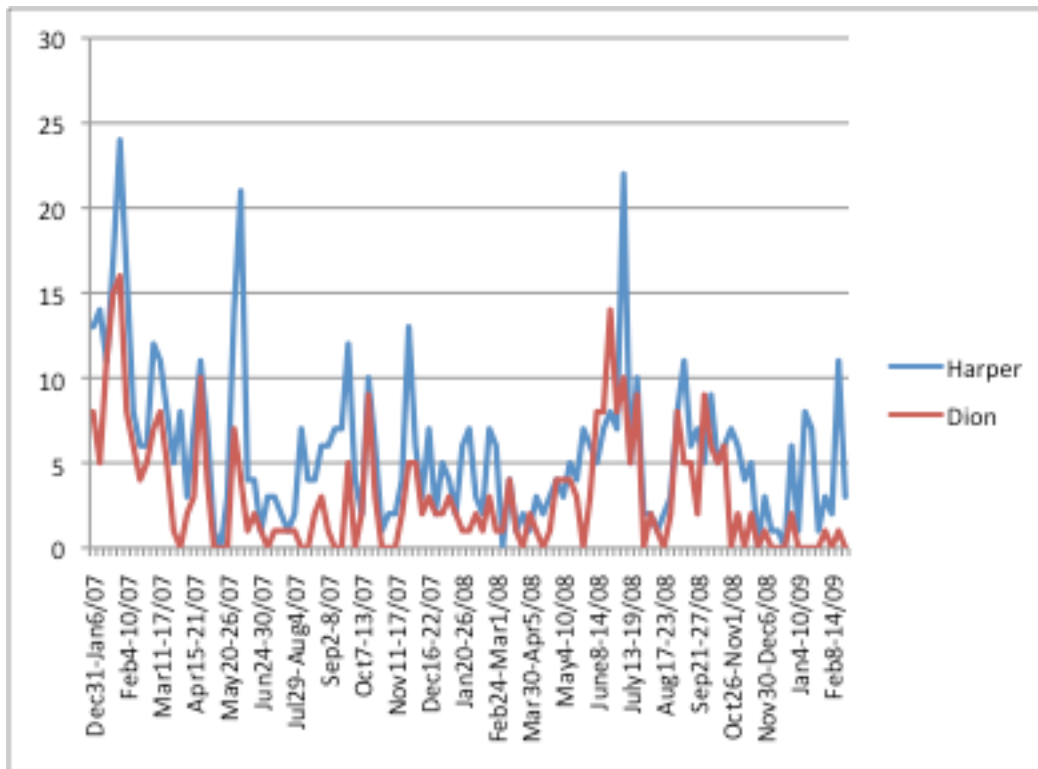
There's got to be a story on it, I'm afraid. You can't just explain something to somebody over and over again ... right from the beginning we did a full page in the carbon tax. I did it. I explained to people. I know the Liberals said you did a good job of explaining how that worked. But you know once that's done, it's not my job to sell the policy. It's their job. If they can't do that, we report on the fact that they can't do that (Anonymous, personal communication).

Bennett also described the challenge for reporters who were covering the campaign and the run-up to the campaign. The Green Shift was hard to explain and/or poorly explained by Dion. The Conservatives filled that void – and also appealed to the news media's interest in horserace stories – by attacking the substance and execution of the Green Shift instead of countering by offering their own plan for reducing carbon emissions (Anonymous, personal communication).

### ***Dion vs. Harper***

One of the most interesting findings of the census of newspaper coverage was that even though Stephane Dion made climate change and environmental issues a central part of his appeal to voters, Stephen Harper's name quite often appeared in more stories about climate change than Dion's (see Chart 6.3). A search of stories that reference either climate change or global warming and one of the two leaders (which means that there will be overlap in many, if not most, of these stories) revealed that Harper was often mentioned more than Dion. This is not altogether surprising because any prime minister has the advantage (and occasionally the disadvantage) of being the focal point of the press coverage of any political story in the country, especially during an election campaign. What was surprising about this was the number of times when Harper received

**Chart 6.3** – Comparing the number of references to “climate change” and/or “global warming” and Stephen Harper and Stephane Dion in full text Globe and Mail stories from December 2006 to February 2009





more mentions than Dion.

Even in the first week of January, less than a month after Dion came from behind to win the Liberal Party leadership, every newspaper had more climate change stories with references to Harper than Dion except for the Montreal *Gazette*, which had six for each. The week when Dion announced the Green Shift, June 15 to 21, 2008, he had the edge in mentions over Harper by one story in *The Globe*, the *Sun*, the *Citizen*, and the *Herald*. The *Star* had the exact same number of mentions for Harper and Dion (11, the most of any paper for both men). And *The Gazette*, Dion's hometown newspaper, had two more mentions of Harper than Dion. The week after Dion's announcement, as coverage turned to the political implications of the Green Shift, five of the six newspapers had more mentions of Dion in climate change stories.

In the six weeks surrounding and including the election campaign, Dion only rated more mentions than Harper in climate change stories seven times. In other words, in 36 opportunities (six weeks by six newspapers), there were only seven times (two in *The Globe*, two in the *Sun*, two in *The Gazette*, and one in the *Citizen*) where Dion's name appeared in stories that also referred to climate change or global warming more than Harper's name. For someone who had clearly hoped to launch a policy that would capture the public's interest in and concern for the environment, this has to be seen as something of a failure, especially considering the Conservative response to Dion's Green Shift, which was to simply criticize the plan as a "tax on everything."

Reporters, editors, and columnists interviewed for this project were essentially satisfied with the way they handled the coverage of the campaign. For the most part, they

assigned any blame for the failure of the Green Shift to Dion's historic failure as the leader of the Liberal Party in the 2008 election campaign. The *Star's* Woods said:

As a reporter it's not our job to defend Stephane Dion. Sometimes it's our job to set the records straight, but by no means do we have to bail anyone out. You know, so – I have a vague recollection of watching the debates and watching Stephane Dion trying, you know, to admonish Stephen Harper saying that your plan admits it will raise costs as well, but it was like a child throwing a punch at Mike Tyson (A. Woods, personal communication, May 26, 2009).

In hindsight, many of the interview subjects also noted the success of Harper and the Conservatives to frame Dion and the Green Shift as a risky choice for prime minister and a risky policy for the country, especially once the world's economy went into its mid-September nosedive. *The Globe's* Mittelstaedt said:

It was more the Conservatives were able to cast [Dion] in a negative ... light as a ditherer, you know, a kind of a bungler rather than as a leader and so the campaign revolved around that rather than carbon pricing (M. Mittelstaedt, personal communication, May 14, 2009).

Abbott, another Ottawa-based reporter, used stronger words to describe the Conservatives' strategy of discrediting Dion and the Green Shift:

They were kind of fear mongering with the Canadian public about what this carbon tax would mean to them, you know, positioning it more as a tax on everything. I think that's how they called it, tax on everything. So there was a lot of fear mongering leading up to the campaign and through the early part of the campaign and things shifted pretty dramatically, turned upside down about midway when the economy started to tank (Anonymous, personal communication).

Wente, *The Globe* columnist, described the use of the phrase "tax on everything," which was repeated in Conservative advertisements and used by like-minded commentators on

talk shows and other public forums, as “a brilliant response because it was sort of true enough. It was truish” (M. Wente, personal communication, July 14, 2009).

Abbott also noted one unusual turn of events in this campaign that certainly benefited the Conservatives.

It was very peculiar for the party that’s in power to be able to just have this ability to pound on the opposition party without giving the public that elected them any alternatives because they really didn’t give anything substantial in terms of environmental policy at all (Anonymous, personal communication).

This quote suggests that, specifically on environmental policy and the Green Shift, the news media and, to some extent, the public accepted the Conservative frame. The fact that no serious competing environmental policy was ever put forward by the Conservatives meant that the government-opposition tables were almost shifted.

### ***Covering Dion and the Green Shift***

One of the most striking trends from the interviews with reporters, editors, and columnists was their criticisms of Dion’s ability as a campaigner. Most of the reporters who spent any amount of time covering him on the campaign trail were keen to share anecdotes about his somewhat inscrutable and chilly personality and his inability to effectively communicate with the public and the media, especially on the main plank in election platform, despite early coverage of the Green Shift that CanWest’s De Souza said could be described as positive (M. De Souza, personal communication, May 27, 2009).

For Abbott, the problems for Dion were evident in the first days after the Green Shift was announced in June 2008.

We had an editorial board meeting with him ... this was a few days after the launch, and so it was the first time he had been with a group of senior editors at a newspaper and he got savaged. He performed exceptionally like more poorly than I could even imagine in my wildest fantasy. He couldn't explain things. He couldn't explain how it would benefit people. He couldn't say how it would benefit the goal of reducing climate change problems or anything (Anonymous, personal communication).

Dion's inability to effectively convince the public and the media of the usefulness of the Green Shift began to reveal some of Dion's shortcomings as a politician. After the campaign, reporters and editors shared some of the flaws or – to be more charitable to Dion – differences in Dion's personality. For example, the *Star's* Woods said:

[Politicians] can fire on any issue at any given time, a good politician can. But [Dion] is more like a scholar in that he dedicates himself to a massive task, comes up with an answer or solution to that problem and he is firmly dedicated to it for the rest of his life (A. Woods, personal communication, May 26, 2009).

Abbott and Bennett, a pair of Ottawa-based political reporters, also dismissed the notion that Dion's problems with speaking English were part of his problem, which would have been potentially considered unfair in a country like Canada that is predominantly composed of Anglophones, but is officially bilingual. Said Abbott:

I think a lot of focus was put on his ability to speak English. It wasn't just that, though. Like, to be fair, I mean, he was mocked to some degree with his ability and then halfway through the campaign he said, 'Oh, it's a hearing problem,' and what not, but I think it was much bigger than just his bilingualism.... He just had a complete inability for someone that is an academic and spent the earlier part of his career teaching and writing. He is a very poor communicator and a poor salesman as well, and to some degree, it just made him a poor politician and a poor leader (Anonymous, personal communication).

Facility with the English language, as one reporter noted, was not a problem for Prime Minister Jean Chretien, who was elected to three majority governments in the 1990s and 2000s despite often mangling the English language in unprepared remarks. But beyond Dion's communications problems, Bennett observed and heard from other reporters that Dion had an unusual personality that didn't translate well to the reporters who were following him on the campaign trail and, quite possibly, to the voting public (Anonymous, personal communication). For example, Bennett heard from another reporter that, after a campaign stop in Churchill, Manitoba, that included a helicopter trip to see the many wild polar bears that are the main tourist attraction of the town on Hudson's Bay, Dion didn't exhibit much enthusiasm for the bears and his spectacular photo-op.

I mean, you know, these are polar bears, right, I'd put on the TV right now and everybody would be glued to the TV. You know, and you can't get excited about polar bears, when you were seeing them in person from a helicopter, then -- and isn't that a bit odd. He was kind of that way with almost everything (Anonymous, personal communication).

In other words, what reporters seemed to be seeing from Dion was behavior that they felt did not conform to the usual way that politicians carry themselves. While reporters, commentators, and members of the public often talk about a desire to have a politician who somehow is not a typical politician, there is a very fine line that must not be crossed by any politician who is not suitably polished or presents himself in a manner that is different from that of a consummate politician, embodied by the likes of former President Bill Clinton or, to use a Canadian example, British Columbia Premier Gordon Campbell. The Conservative ad campaign against Dion, which began shortly after he was

elected leader of the Liberal Party, may have had some effect on the public's perception of Dion and his ability to effectively communicate his ideas. The *Star's* Woods said:

Well, the Conservative campaign against him was very much an ad hominem attack. It was very much ridiculing him both of his statures, his physical stature, right, his shrugging of his shoulders as well as - you know, the line that played in most ads, you need to make priorities. He sounds like a twit, but he is not. He is very educated -- educated in some of the best schools in Paris. He is a university professor, smart, passionate man. But they stuck. The portrait that they painted of him stuck (A. Woods, personal communication, May 26, 2009).

The Conservative ad campaign that was as sustained and mean-spirited as anything seen in Canadian politics was, as Bennett explains, sustained by the unprecedented fundraising advantage enjoyed by the Conservatives (Anonymous, personal communication). The Liberal Party had just come through a long and competitive leadership campaign in which key donors had aligned behind the top candidates. And in an unusual twist, Dion won despite not having the support of the party's top donors and fundraisers. Not only was he in personal debt but also he didn't have strong connections with the party's top donors to top up the party's resources and counter the Conservatives' pre-election ad blitz. Said Bennett:

The Tories had had the money to do it as well but the Liberals just didn't -- without any money, they shouldn't have left the Tories run rampant like that. The Tories were raising like over \$40 million a quarter, you know, the Liberals were raising, what, \$600,000, \$700,000 a quarter, so there is no chance fighting and the Liberals were in debt, the Tories were flush with cash (Anonymous, personal communication).

While all of these may help explain some of the problems that Dion had when it came to selling and communicating the Green Shift, the *Citizen's* Potter accurately

summed up the feelings of the journalists interviewed for this project. “I think the main reason was Stephane Dion himself. He was just simply not a credible salesman for it” (A. Potter, personal communication, May 28, 2009).

### ***The Economic Downturn***

Another possible explanation for the failure of the Green Shift is the collapse of the economy in the middle of the campaign. But the sudden emergence of the economic downturn as the undisputed top issue on the political, public and news agenda in the middle of September (and the federal election campaign) did not appear to have a huge effect on the number of climate change stories published in the immediate aftermath of the Lehman Bros. collapse or in the long-term, but the coverage during that very specific time period warrants a closer examination.

In the week of Sept. 14 to 20, *The Globe and Mail* published 24 stories that referenced either climate change or global warming. Of those stories, ten featured references to politics or election, which makes up 41.7% of the total of climate change or global warming stories. This is the lowest such number for *The Globe* of any week during the entire length of the Canadian election campaign and the only paper that had a lower proportion of politics references in climate change stories during this week was the *Calgary Herald* with 40% (8 out of 20).

In the first three weeks of the campaign, 75 stories with references to climate change or global warming were published in *The Globe and Mail*. Just one of those, a lengthy narrative of the first day of the campaign made the front page of the newspaper. There were other stories on page 1 of the Report on Business section or a section dedicated exclusively to news in British Columbia (and distributed only to readers in that

province) but two of those were more about the provincial government's proposed carbon tax than about Dion's plan.

In the same time frame, the *Star* published 66 stories, but a higher proportion of those referencing climate change or global warming referred to the election or, more generally, politics. In the early days of the campaign, like *The Globe*, general stories the major issues confronting voters appeared twice on the front page of the paper. The next time one of these stories made it onto the front page was another Chantal Hebert column on Sept. 15 arguing that Dion had to turn his campaign around quickly, noting the "lack of traction" for his Green Shift. The next time a climate change story found its way to the front page was on Sept. 26 when Moira Welsh wrote about Green Party Leader Elizabeth May's claim that environmental lobby groups were stopped from speaking out during the campaign by the twin concerns of losing their charitable status and retribution from the Conservative Party. (It is also worth noting that the Saturday, Sept. 27, feature section, which is dubbed Ideas, had a cover story about how Sweden and Denmark have implemented a carbon tax.)

For the most part, journalists attributed any shift in the news agenda and the political agenda to the interests of the public. Abbott said:

I think when times are good people care about the environment, right. They are more generous and they are more willing to share the burden of whatever costs are involved to protect the environment. But when times get tough, they care about number one. They care about themselves and they care about their families and they care about their jobs and so they are not willing to make the investments that they might have been willing in good times (Anonymous, personal communication).

Along the same lines, Bennett added:



[The economy] was the most important issue for [the public] and I think that drove the topic away. I think it will come back as the economy improves and we will be leading up to Copenhagen in the fall that will probably bring it -- everybody globally would be talking about it then because it's a new agreement, right. So people will be keen to talk about it, but I think it will take the recession going away for people to care about it again (Anonymous, personal communication).

CanWest's De Souza, while admitting that he hadn't tracked coverage, believed that the economy did affect the amount of coverage of climate change, but his take was that this was as a phenomenon that was specific to North America.

I would say the economic crisis bumped a lot of climate change news off of the [agenda]. I don't know if you've looked at Europe coverage but newspapers in Europe still give it more coverage than newspapers here in North America or Australia or the U.S. or Canada. There's a different mentality there towards environmental issues. They're a generation ahead of us, I think (M. De Souza, personal communication, May 27, 2009).

### ***Post-Election***

In the weeks immediately following the federal election, Canadian newspapers turned away from coverage of climate change. Part of the decline clearly came from the reduction of stories related to the politics of the topic. By the week of Nov. 23 to 29, all of the papers had dropped the number of stories about politics and climate change down to around 5 and under. In other words, the number of non-politics related climate change or global warming stories stayed roughly the same as it had been before and during the election campaign.

The exception to this rule was the *Calgary Herald*, which consistently had the most climate change coverage of any of the six newspapers during the last two months of 2008 and first two months of 2009. There were a number of factors that explain this. First

of all, there was concern that the election of Barack Obama in the U.S. would mean a sharp shift in energy and environment policy away from his predecessor's policies in the White House, potentially harming the oil industry. News about Obama's cabinet appointments in related areas were widely covered. During the coalition situation in Canada in late November and early December, there were op-eds in the *Herald* warning that the thwarted Liberal-NDP-Bloc coalition would be bad for the oil industry. There was a major local political issue as Premier Ed Stelmach's Progressive Conservative government pledged money to research and develop carbon capture technology. (This technology would come up again when both Obama and Harper mentioned it during the news conference after their Ottawa meeting in February 2009.)

But everywhere else, climate change had lost some momentum as a political issue in Canada. It reemerged for about a week or so in anticipation of Obama's meeting with Harper, but it was a short-lived spike common to those associated with other international summits. At best, climate change had become a regional story. The reporters and editors who covered this story tended to agree with that sentiment. "I don't think anybody took it terribly seriously," Bennett said (Anonymous, personal communication).

Most of the interviews with Canadian reporters, editors, and journalists took place in the spring and summer of 2009. At that time, they were asked to speculate about what might make climate change more prominent on the news agenda. As *The Globe's* Mittelstaedt said, the Copenhagen meetings in December 2009 were cited by most of them as a point when the attention of the country and the world would return, at least briefly, to the problem of climate change (M. Mittelstaedt, personal communication, May

14, 2009). The other thing that Mittelstaedt said would increase coverage is “some climate disaster.”

You know, Australia has had a climate disaster but it’s at the other end of the world and, you know, they’re baking in the dust there, you know. It isn’t top of mind. You would have to have something like that happen in, you know, the U.S. or in Europe (M. Mittelstaedt, personal communication, May 14, 2009).

Another factor that at least one reporter said has made it a harder issue for the media to cover is the Harper government’s decision to basically align with the Obama government in the U.S. on this issue. “It’s there but it’s sleeping right now,” said The *Star*’s Woods.

It’s going to come up again but I talked to one of the environmental groups, one of the guys I know from there in the last week or so. I interviewed him, invited him for a story that I was doing and at the end of it he asked me the exact same question you were asking me: How do you get environmental stories into the paper these days? We are scratching our heads. We are banging them against the wall. People don’t seem to be interested. And it’s such an intense, complicated issue that has no immediate resolution. It’s not like tomorrow we are going to wake up and greenhouse gases will be reduced to 1990 levels. It’s not going to happen like that. So you have to pick your moments as a reporter. You have to, sort of, keep an eye on it, know where things are, what’s going on and jump in at various targeted points, because you can beat people over the head with it and it is not going to further your cause (A. Woods, personal communication, May 26, 2009).

Aside from occasional news on studies or reports, there was little attention paid in Canada to climate change policy until the fall of 2009. A couple of events started to get the story back in the news. The new Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff made a speech on climate change in Vancouver in October that earned some coverage from the news media. And a group of young protestors disrupted Question Period in the House of Commons in

late October and were forcibly ejected from the Parliament Buildings. Despite timing their protest for the first day of the newly formatted CBC News Network, a 24-hour cable channel, the story quickly devolved into a discussion about the political affiliations of the people who organized the protest. By late November and early December 2009, the world had started to pay attention to not only the Copenhagen meetings, which were heavily covered by Canadian newspapers, but also the so-called Climategate scandal.<sup>16</sup>

### ***Reporting on Climate Change Policy***

One of the most obvious and difficult to resolve problems for reporters and editors is the question of how to handle the complexity of the subject matter. Leaving aside all of the complicated science that informs that actions behind this issue, most of the policy solutions on this topic must be informed by economic principles that are even harder to explain. And when it comes to debating the difference between a cap and trade scheme and a carbon tax scheme, which are essentially two taxes with different groups making the direct payment of the tax, the distinction and explanation can become even more convoluted. When confronted with dwindling readership and less space in the hard copy of the newspaper for their stories, the Canadian journalists interviewed for this project concede that explaining the topic in a brief and clear way without getting bogged down in details and numbers (something journalists are taught to avoid, especially when it's just background information for a story) is still a problem. "I always struggled with this, even to this day," said the *Star's* Woods. The challenge, he added:

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<sup>16</sup> In late 2009, e-mails from researchers at Climactic Research Unit in the U.K. were released by hackers and some commentators suggested that the e-mails were proof of malfeasance by the scientists. Independent investigations later cleared the researchers of any wrongdoing.

is how to work into a paragraph [that] Canada's Kyoto commitments are 6% below 1990 levels but measured from a 2006 [baseline]. You know the Conservative government's controlling is measured from 2006 baseline versus 1990 baseline, which is what the rest of the world uses primarily. You know there is a lot of background, there is a lot of institutional knowledge that goes into this. You know anytime you are dealing with the UN process, you know, if you read any of their documents, you know it's a different language. So, it's, you know, how to understand this and understand what's significant for yourself and then how to relay that to your readers (A. Woods, personal communication, May 26, 2009).

What Woods leaves out of the equation is the problem of keeping readers interested in a story. From her perspective as a columnist and a former editor, *The Globe's* Wenté said having to set aside so much space in the middle of a "political reported story" about what a politician's plan for a carbon emissions trading scheme means can hurt the level of reader interest in a story. "Those are the stories that readers never read because they are really only interested in the political gotcha story" (M. Wenté, personal communication, July 14, 2009).

Another challenge for any reporter covering climate change from a political perspective is dealing with all of the potential sources and stakeholders involved with an issue like this. The *Star's* Allan Woods was very open in describing the landscape facing reporters working the environment beat on Parliament Hill. And his accounts and descriptions were corroborated by a variety of other interview subjects. First and foremost, he described the dynamic between "business on the right, environmentalists on the left and then there is sort of this mushy centre of non-partisan experts" (A. Woods, personal communication, May 26, 2009). From those three groups, Woods had to work to

find the right mix of people to rely on for information and, almost as importantly, explanations of key and complex issues.

You find people to draw on, you know, people that you can say, okay, what does this mean? Why is this important? So, fairly early once I got onto this beat because you always spent a lot of time trying to meet people, you realize that you will get limited returns if you deal only with the environmentalists, only with the business lobby. So I was finding those people who'd come at the issue from a certain angle but will be able to tell you fairly clearly and fairly in a fairly non-partisan fashion what's going on. There's a few of those and a few are quite helpful (A. Woods, personal communication, May 26, 2009).

While there might be an impulse among some people to be more trusting of the between six and 12 environmental groups that Woods said are represented in Ottawa, he described the close knit way in which the employees of the different organizations work together.

You can talk to one, you can talk to the other, you can talk to every single one of them, but the thing you have to realize is they all talk to each other, right. They are a big family and they have meetings and they share information and they say which journalist has called me on what and this is the way the story is working out to be. They all know each other. They all go for lunch together. They all bike ride together, to work and back. And it's a bit dirty really. I can remember when I first realized this, I made sort of a comment about one of them to the other and realized like they are best friends. And I said I got to watch myself, right. I got to watch myself both in terms of the information I am getting because it's like everything else I can get from the government and business and slanted in a direction. And so getting good information, getting good advice is critical and difficult. I am satisfied that I found a few people who I could rely on (A. Woods, personal communication, May 26, 2009).

Bennett, an Ottawa-based political reporter who asked not to be named, mentioned specific environmental groups that he was worked with or spoken to for stories.

I felt that David Suzuki Foundation was pretty good. He himself, he's got obviously a celebrity face in Canada that people like and he was good.... I would chat with a lot of different people. People like, you know, the Pembina Institute I would chat with. I don't know if I often quoted them all, but I often will chat with them and talk things through (Anonymous, personal communication).

Interestingly, Woods did not have as much to say about his interaction with the business lobby in Ottawa, primarily because, according to his account, the business lobby is less interested in dealing with the press. "It's aimed at policymakers," Woods said. "They target the politicians. They're more low profile" (A. Woods, personal communication, May 26, 2009). The scenario described by Woods reveals an interesting picture of the communications strategies used by the different sides of this issue in Ottawa. On the one side, the environmental lobby groups are working the media to get attention for their issue in the press, presumably to get the public on their side. Meanwhile, the business lobby is working at a somewhat higher level, trying to get the political elites to see their side of the story. Because the news media cover what politicians say, this approach is a good way of possibly getting their message into the media from sources that are more likely to be taken seriously than a lobbyist for a group representing the oil industry or Canadian small business owners.

Woods and other reporters said that they do get feedback from politicians and their staffers when they quote them on stories about environmental policy. "Every comment, every sentence was being scrutinized," Woods said. "So if you erred one way

or the other, it was noticed.... It wasn't always mentioned but I think it's fair to say it's probably noticed" (A. Woods, personal communication, May 26, 2009). During the campaign itself, Wente, *The Globe and Mail* columnist, said she received direct feedback from people in the Liberal Party on columns that she wrote about this issue (M. Wente, personal communication, July 14, 2009).

The public is not heard from as much by members of the Canadian news media, especially in comparison with their counterparts in the U.S. A few of the interview subjects mentioned some response from the readership of the newspaper to their work. This is more difficult for some of the people who work for bureaus that serve a chain of newspapers because there is less opportunity for direct interaction with those reporters. But even Andrew Potter, a national and international news editor at the *Ottawa Citizen*, said that he has had a difficult time ascertaining the level of interest from readers on the topic of climate change. Potter, who is a former philosophy professor, author and columnist for *Maclean's* magazine, now working at a newspaper for the first time, said that he didn't trust most of the Canadian public opinion polling and that there didn't seem to be any audience research available to the editors at the newspaper.

Because we don't get a lot of letters on it I was asking, like, you know, in all honesty, like, should I be running this? What's the reader's appetite? And he just sort of said – I think he, the editor at the time was fairly conservative, probably a skeptic – but he just said, 'If you're going to run these stories, at the very least, can you make sure you don't describe carbon dioxide as a pollutant.' And that was - that was really the only feedback I got from senior editors at the *Citizen*. To this day, I still have no idea what the appetite amongst our readers is. I have no idea. We've never done a survey (A. Potter, personal communication, May 28, 2009).



Most of the Canadian reporters interviewed said they did not encounter much in the way of difficulties from their editors when it came to reporting on climate change. It should also be noted that most of the interview subjects were fairly new to their beats. *The Globe's* Martin Mittelstaedt was the most experienced reporter on this topic and he did recount running into some difficulties with editors, mainly in the 1990s, based on either the politics of the editor or, as Mittelstaedt put it, their philosophy of choosing and reporting on news stories (M. Mittelstaedt, personal communication, May 14, 2009).

In all of the interviews with Canadian, American, and Australian journalists, there was one story of a reporter – CanWest's Mike De Souza – who believed that he had his work altered and rejected by one newspaper because of that paper's political leanings.

#### ***De Souza and the National Post***

In the middle part of the 2000s, the CanWest Global newspaper chain, which was the former Southam chain, purchased by the Asper family from disgraced media magnate Conrad Black in 2002, formed its own CanWest News Desk with the express intent of providing its own news content and eliminating the need for its papers to use (and pay the fees) to The Canadian Press. The largest bureau in the Winnipeg-based CanWest News Desk is in Ottawa, where federal politics are covered for all of the chain's papers by a central bureau. For a while, reporters were assigned to do local stories for the major newspapers in the chain.<sup>17</sup> (The *Citizen* does have some additional reporters who cover Parliament for its paper.) But since then, the bureau has assigned reporters to specific beats. "It wasn't supposed to be part of my beat," said CanWest reporter Mike De Souza.

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<sup>17</sup> For example, Peter O'Neil once wrote stories specifically for the *Vancouver Sun*, but they were adaptable for other newspapers in the chain.

When I arrived at this bureau no one was covering environmental issues and it was starting to become an issue that the public was more interested in because of Al Gore's movie, which sparked a lot of interest in it, in the issue, and Hurricane Katrina, at the same time, was a big factor (M. De Souza, personal communication, May 27, 2009).

De Souza described his role in the bureau as one in which the reporters are fairly independent and can cover the stories that they want to cover. At the other end of the process, the chain's newspapers are also free to decide what they want to pick up from the CanWest News Desk. From the reporters' end, they can see the pickup of their stories across the chain and determine the level of interest in the stories they are covering. De Souza said he saw a great deal of interest in his stories "from spring of 2006 until maybe the beginning of last summer, 2008" (M. De Souza, personal communication, May 27, 2009).

The major difference came in the *National Post*, the Toronto-based newspaper which De Souza described as "the exception in our chain." But De Souza noticed that editors at the paper were altering his stories.

What I wrote, if they did run stories, would often be different in the *Post* than what it was in other papers. They have what I guess you could call a proactive editorial stance on an issue like climate change and so they, some of the stories would be slanted and they would be changed (M. De Souza, personal communication, May 27, 2009).

At the time of our interview, De Souza was unable to recall specific examples of alterations made to his stories by the *Post*.

If you go to the search engines and look at a specific day and look at a story and how it appeared in the *Montreal Gazette* versus the *National Post*, you would be able to see for yourself. I mean sometimes they're blatant and obvious. There would be certain voices cut out of the story. Sometimes the lede would be completely changed to have a

certain viewpoint. I mean, it speaks for itself. I'm not going to go into the details, you can see for yourself (M. De Souza, personal communication, May 27, 2009).

A search of some De Souza's stories from the time period that he mentioned revealed a handful of examples of the changes that De Souza described. One example is a story that De Souza wrote for CanWest on May 11, 2007. The story was focused on the arrest of a civil servant at Environment Canada who was accused of leaking a draft of the government's planned course of action on climate change to the media. The lede of De Souza's story as it appeared in *The Gazette* was:

The Harper government denied it was trying to intimidate whistleblowers in the civil service after the RCMP arrested an Environment Canada employee and escorted him out of his office in handcuffs in connection with a leak of the government's secret plan to improve air quality and fight climate change (De Souza & Mayeda, *Gazette*, 2007, May 10).

De Souza's lede in the *Post* read this way:

An Environment Canada employee was arrested and escorted from his office in handcuffs yesterday in connection with a leak of Environment Minister John Baird's climate change plan (De Souza & Mayeda, *Post*, 2007, May 10).

Another interesting difference in the two versions of the story came in the second paragraph. The version in *The Gazette* featured a quote from a spokesperson for a coalition of environmental groups calling the arrest part of a "witch hunt" (De Souza, *Gazette*, 2007, May 11). The *Post* moved a quote from the environment minister into the second paragraph. (It appeared in the fourth paragraph of *The Gazette*'s version of the story.) The *Post*'s story completely omitted the quote from the representative of the Climate Action Network (De Souza, *Post*, 2007, May 11).

A less blatant but still noteworthy example of the *Post*'s changes to De Souza's story can be found in a story that was published three days later. *The Gazette*'s version's lede read:

The threat of global warming, bulk exports and high household water use are putting Canada's status as a water-rich nation in jeopardy, say newly released federal documents obtained by CanWest News Service (De Souza, *Gazette*, 2007, May 14).

The version that ran in the *Post* moved the placement of global warming in the lede:

The threat of bulk exports, high household water use and global warming are putting Canada's status as a water-rich nation in jeopardy, say newly released federal documents obtained by CanWest News Service (De Souza, *Post*, 2007, May 14).

In fairness to the *Post*, the rest of the story that appeared in both papers featured more references to bulk exports than global warming.

Scott Stinson, the national editor for the *National Post*, handles stories from the Ottawa bureau for the *Post*, but said he was not in that job at the time when De Souza saw his stories being changed by editorial staff at the *Post*. Still, Stinson was able to offer an account of how the paper handles stories from the CanWest bureau. He said that the paper is permitted to edit stories from the bureau and that if there are any major rewrites he would run it by the bureau "because you don't want somebody to feel that they've written a story one way and then have it appear a completely opposite way." Stinson added that there are rare scenarios where the reporter may ask to have the byline removed from the story that appears in the *Post*, which was the case with De Souza. He said that some of the disagreements between the *Post* and the Ottawa bureau have been the result of their different goals. Because the bureau also produces breaking news stories posted on

Canwest Global Web sites, stories are sometimes written with more of an emphasis on reaction to the news of the day or a specific announcement. Stinson said the *Post* often rearranges the story to put the announcement at the top of the story, but it is not a conscious effort to lower points of view that may differ with the *Post*'s consistently right-wing point of view (S. Stinson, personal communication, June 30, 2009).

De Souza explained how he and his direct bosses at the Ottawa bureau attempted to deal with the issue.

There would be conversations with my bosses and with that editor at the *Post*. I mean, it's not an issue for climate change, they would change any story for any social issue or, sorry, I mean any political issue. There would be changes in a lot of stories and it happens that the reporter will, if it happens, at the paper or any others, the reporter is going to talk to the editor to find out why at that paper and takes steps to ensure that it wouldn't happen again. Quite often, I think what would happen, later on down the road, [was] that the *Post* would stop running anything that I write or they would take my name off of it. And that would be, I would ask for that to happen. If they were going to make major changes, they should remove the name, the byline because it's not my work anymore (M. De Souza, personal communication, May 27, 2009).

De Souza's stint on the environment beat was clearly controversial. The *Star*'s Woods, who worked in the Canwest bureau before moving over to the *Star*, referred to the problems that De Souza faced on the beat specifically the *Post* (A. Woods, personal communication, May 26, 2009). Meanwhile, another editor, Potter at the *Citizen*, expressed complaints about the work that De Souza produced.

Relying on the wires was not that helpful. I mean I complained about the reporter to the editor at Canwest News and said, you know, 'He's not giving us what we need.' And the editor's response was, 'Well,' he said, 'I hate to tell him to stop, he's so energetic' (A. Potter, personal communication, May 28, 2009).

Since the 2008 election, De Souza has been moved off of the environment beat. He has now been assigned to cover the implementation of the Canadian government's stimulus package and the rest of its response to the recession (M. De Souza, personal communication, May 27, 2009). From Potter's perspective, the coverage of environmental issues from Canwest's Ottawa bureau, which is now handled by Juliet O'Neill, has not improved.

Now they basically switched from climate change to the Arctic. It's the same problem.... It's easier for reporters to keep following the story than it is to find a new story. To be honest what I would have wanted is fewer stories on the topic, largely because my job in part is to give the readers a mix of, you know, what I think are the stories going on in the world and I just happen to think that global warming is just one story about the environment amongst others (A. Potter, personal communication, May 28, 2009).

In the immediate aftermath of the election, the data suggests that coverage of climate change-related policy was beginning to decline. This was, as previous research suggests, a reflection of the Harper government's lack of interest in making this an issue that could require much time and effort. It was exacerbated by Dion's electoral failure. The economic collapse in the U.S. – and other parts of the world – was closely followed in the news in Canada, but it was generally seen to not have had as much of an impact in Canada (in part because of the strength of Canada's almost oligopolistic financial sector). The link between the economy, unemployment rates, and climate change, however, may have been more explicit in Canada than in the U.S. and Australia because of the success of the tar sands in northern Alberta and Saskatchewan, which continued to produce, at great financial and, by most accounts, environmental costs, oil that could be transported with relative ease to the fuel-hungry U.S. These projects sustained and created lucrative

jobs that drew Canadians – mostly young men – from all parts of the country and served as a positive economic and employment story in a time of great global concern. As a result, much like in U.S. politics around the time of the 2008 presidential election, there was little genuine sustained opposition among political elites in Canada to the oil sands and climate change barely rated more than a perfunctory mention in the 2011 federal election that saw Harper’s Conservatives returned with a majority.

## CHAPTER 7 – RESULTS – U.S.A.

The major tracking studies of newspaper coverage of climate change and global warming have shown that, generally speaking, the number of stories in North American publications on these topics have trended down between 2007 and the start of 2009 (Deppa & Rowe, 2008; Boykoff & Mansfield, 2011). The census of six U.S. newspapers – *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, the *New York Post*, the *Houston Chronicle*, and the *Denver Post* – conducted for this study shows, however, that the volume of coverage of this topic stayed fairly constant during this two-year period (see Chart 7.1).

Considering the tumultuous times for the newspaper industry and the incredible news events of the period, this is both an interesting and surprising finding. It is made even more interesting by the fact that American newspaper reporters and editors interviewed for this project all agreed that climate change was not one of the top issues in what is probably the biggest news story of this time period – the presidential election. It also appears that the decline of ad revenue for newspapers did not have a significant influence on the amount of coverage that these six newspapers provided for this issue in the aggregate. But the smaller regional newspapers did show a decrease in coverage over this period while *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* maintained the same amount of coverage and, in the case of the *Times*, even increased their coverage by the end of the two-year time period.

The interviews with reporters and editors helped to explain some of these trends. Most reporters and editors said that budget cutbacks have hampered their ability to cover a wide range of stories, including climate change and any other national political story.



But *The New York Times*, beginning in early 2009, created an environment cluster, and dedicated a section editor to manage a team of environment reporters and to attend the daily Page One news meetings for the *Times*. This placed an advocate for environment-related news in this meeting to set the Page One agenda.

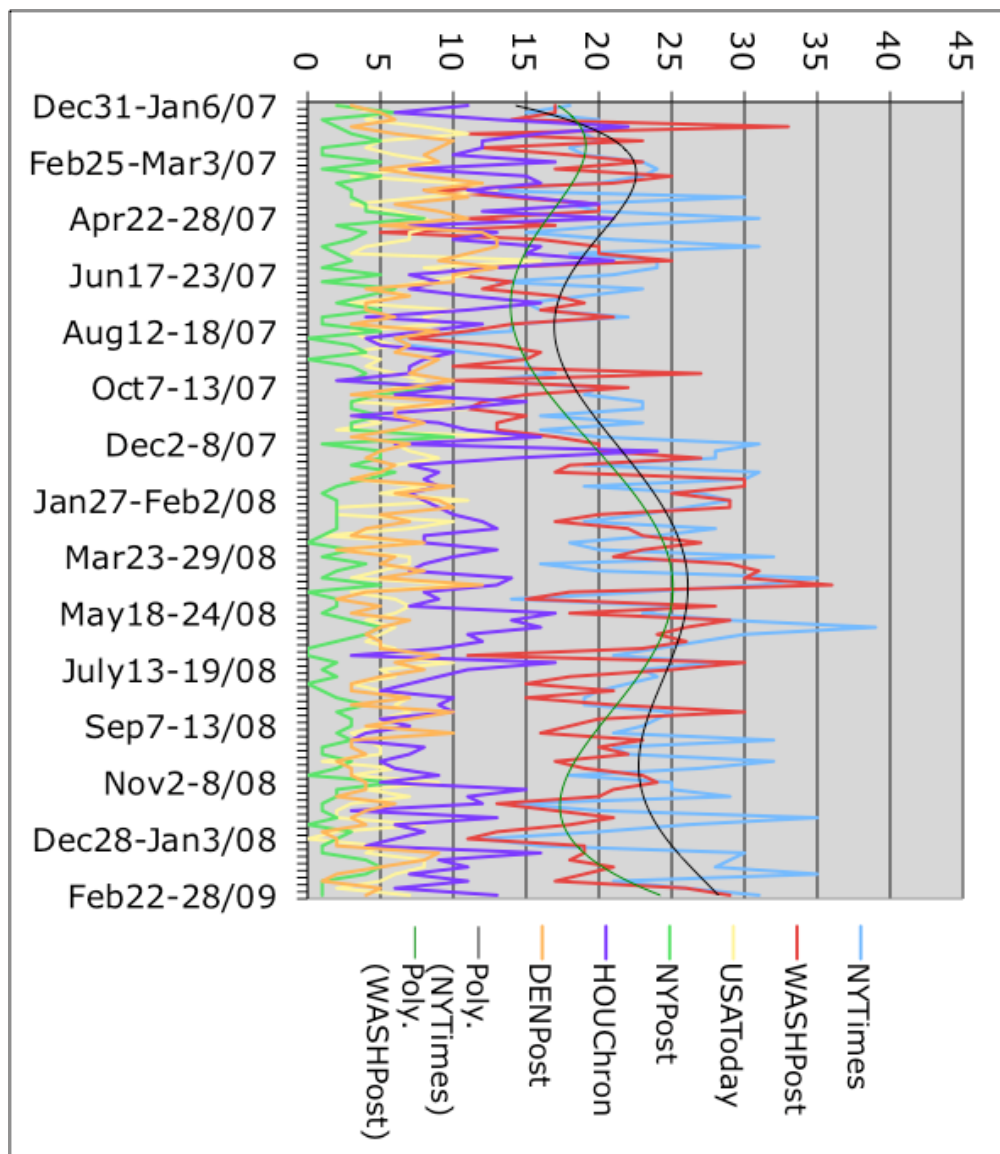
### ***Overall***

The consistency in newspaper coverage of climate change and global warming is clear by looking at Chart 7.1, which tracks references to either “climate change” and “global warming” anywhere in news stories in the six U.S. newspapers studied. Although in early 2007 the six newspapers were relatively close in the number of stories that mentioned climate change or global warming, they diverged markedly after that, with a surprisingly small number of times when the lines closed, especially after the first few months of 2007.

*The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* were the two newspapers at the top of the chart for the entire time period, but from May 2008 onward *The Times* tended to exceed *The Post*. Both generally devote a great deal of attention to national and international news by comparison with any other newspapers in the country, but the increase in the Times climate change coverage was clear in the months leading up to and including its change in assigning staff and resources to this issue.

The *Houston Chronicle* emerged as the third layer in the chart. It is, on some levels, surprising that the *Chronicle* devoted more attention to this issue than *USA Today*, but there is a precedent for the economic interests of a particular newspaper readership driving news coverage of climate change, as illustrated by the *Calgary Herald* coverage described in the Canadian chapter and by the relatively early attention to the issue by the

**Chart 7.1** – References to “climate change” and/or “global warming” in full text of American newspapers from December 2006 to February 2009



*Financial Times* documented in Deppa and Rowe (2008). As noted by Rick Dunham, the *Chronicle's* Washington bureau chief and the Hearst newspaper chain's Washington bureau chief, Houston is not only one of the oil industry capitals of the U.S., but it is also the capital of the renewable energy industry for the country, which makes it doubly interested in the issue of climate change. A closer look at when the paper's coverage of climate change and global warming peaked indicates that the city's connection to the energy industry appears to be a factor driving news coverage. When gas prices rose across the country in the late winter and spring of 2008, coverage referring to climate change increased in the *Houston Chronicle*. In the immediate aftermath of Barack Obama's election, when he mentioned the issue of climate change in his first presidential address (on YouTube, no less), the *Chronicle's* coverage increased.

In the other three newspapers studied for this project, there was very little that was able to move the proverbial needle when it came to increasing or even decreasing coverage of climate change. The *New York Post* rarely wrote about climate change or global warming – and when it did it was often to poke fun at Al Gore. (The most notable exception was an article attributed to the paper's owner Rupert Murdoch announcing News Corp.'s acknowledgement of the problem of climate change. The same article, which ran on May 10, 2007, also appeared in Murdoch's Australian newspapers.)

Coverage of climate change and global warming in the *Denver Post* declined from the earliest part of 2007 and remained low until late August 2008 when it increased slightly. The news that prompted that increase was the Democratic National Convention that was held in Denver around that time. In an era where local or regional newspapers are increasingly unable to provide their own national or international news coverage and

more likely to leave that sort of coverage out of their pages with the exception of the biggest stories on the assumption that their readers will get the news from TV or the Internet, this shows that one of the few exceptions to that rule: When a major national news story comes to city such as Denver, it becomes an important regional news story.

The number of stories in *USA Today* with references to either climate change or global warming was consistently below the weekly totals for the *Houston Chronicle* and in the same range as the *Denver Post*, but higher than the numbers for the *New York Post*. The national newspaper is known for its snippet-sized approach to news, but is one of the country's most widely circulated newspapers.

By the end of the period of the survey, one reporter, Andrew Revkin of *The New York Times*, perhaps the most prominent reporter writing about climate change in the U.S., noted that there was likely a disconnect between the public agenda and the news agenda in 2009.

Well, from what I understand from reading polling and stuff, I think reader interest has declined. The coverage is still at a pretty high level. In part, because of the climate legislation being debated and ... the Copenhagen talks coming up this year and, and I think the attention is still there, the media are still paying more attention to it this year than they did in the other lulls. (A. Revkin, personal communication, September 4, 2009)

### ***Early 2007***

In the week of January 21 to 27, 2007, the *Washington Post* published 33 stories that referenced either climate change or global warming. This was the highest weekly total for any of the six newspapers examined in this study until *The New York Times* published 35 more than a year later – the week of April 13 to 18, 2008. The *Post's* coverage that week was driven by a series of somewhat unrelated events. A number of

stories about President George W. Bush's State of the Union address featured references to climate change. And, coincidentally, that was the week that Al Gore's film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, was nominated for an Oscar, which amounted to a local angle for the *Post*. But there were also stories with references to climate change on the editorial pages and in the Style section and Metro section as well as the national and international news pages.

At this time, a couple of weeks before then-Senator Barack Obama announced his improbable candidacy for the presidency in Springfield, Illinois, on February 10, climate change was a fairly prominent topic on the nation's news agenda. More than any other time during the two-year span of the study, the six newspapers' weekly count of stories referring to climate change and global warming were all close to each other. For example, during the week of January 28, 2007, to February 3, 2007 — the week after the *Post* ran its 33 stories — four newspapers had between 11 and 19 stories on climate change — the *Times* (19), the *Chronicle* (16), and the *Washington Post* and *USA Today* (each with 11).

In the early part of 2007, the *Houston Chronicle* frequently published as many or more stories with references to climate change and global warming as either the *Times* or the *Washington Post*. While the *Chronicle* would settle in as the paper in this study with the third highest number of stories, by the summer of 2007 it already tended to fall consistently below the *Times* and *Post*.

Even the *Denver Post* and *USA Today* were devoting more stories to this topic in this period. Both papers had their highest story total in the first half of 2007. *USA Today* published 16 stories on the topic during the week of June 3 to June 9, 2007. Of those stories, seven were about the G8 Summit of that week. Two weeks before that and the

week after that, the *Denver Post* published 13 stories in each of two weeks – the largest number of stories in a single week for the Denver paper.

A number of factors may explain what was happening at this time in the U.S. Climate change was, generally, a more prominent story – we have seen this in Canada and Australia, at the same time. It was then also a story to which newspapers were choosing to devote resources and attention, as we saw with *The Globe and Mail* in Canada. It is also important to note that earlier studies (Deppa & Rowe, 2008) have argued that the nature of climate change coverage in the U.S. is different from that in other countries. For example, U.S. coverage of climate change is more likely to be driven by pop culture connections than in other countries. By early 2007, climate change had almost completely infiltrated the pop culture consciousness in the U.S. As the country moved toward one of the most contentious national elections in recent history, the issue moved from the contentious but slightly amusing arena of pop culture into the political sphere, which is highly contested space, especially in the U.S., where the actions of lobby groups and think tanks funded by industry are well-documented (Mooney, 2003).

### ***Late 2007 and Early 2008***

In the 2008 study by Deppa and Rowe that looked at climate change coverage in nine different newspapers on three continents between 1997 and 2007, one consistent finding was that coverage of climate change tended to drop in the summer. Prior to that, heat waves and droughts often increased coverage of global warming, but as the story has moved beyond extreme weather as a news peg, the summer tends to be a slow time for news stories. This is as much a reflection of the ebbs and flows of the newspaper business

when advertising declines and staffers are away on holidays as it is of the fact that the science of global warming is better understood than it was two decades ago.

All six newspapers in this study saw a small decline in coverage in the summer of 2007. In the fall the *Times* and *Washington Post* not only returned their climate change stories to the pre-summer levels, but actually increased them. For most of the early part of 2007, both the *Times* and the *Post* tended to publish between 15 and 25 stories mentioning climate change and global warming per week during the first part of summer. Later in the year, the numbers for the *Times* and the *Post* start to increase, and by the end of 2007 and the start of 2008, both papers are publishing between 20 and 30 stories per week.

This change is remarkable for a number of reasons. First, the other U.S. newspapers studied for this project did not even recover with any consistency to the pre-summer 2007 levels. Secondly, earlier studies and this study all indicated that coverage of climate change in newspapers was trending downward. Part of that may be related to the third reason why this is remarkable, which is the financial problems that were starting to face the newspaper industry. It wasn't until after the recession hit with full force in September 2008 that newspapers were closed, but by late 2007 newsroom budgets and staffs were already being slashed to make up for declining ad revenue, which also affects the size of the news hole. And finally, the hotly contested Republican and Democratic primaries and caucuses were heating up in anticipation of the first vote in Iowa on January 3, 2008.

One factor that seems to have helped get climate change a more prominent place in the news agenda was the Bali conference on climate change in early December 2007.

During the time of that major international negotiation, the *Times* and the *Post* published over 25 stories in a week for the first time in months. The *Houston Chronicle* also climbed to 24 stories in the week of December 9 to 15, 2007. But this also happened to be the week when Al Gore made his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech.

It was in this time period the *Times* and the *Washington Post* began to separate from the other four newspapers. The *Houston Chronicle* had been the only newspaper to come close to the *Times* and the *Post* on any sort of a regular basis, but after December 2007, the *Chronicle* slid closer to *USA Today*, the *New York Post*, and the *Denver Post*. As The Hearst Newspapers' Washington Bureau Chief Rick Dunham mentioned in his interview, it wasn't necessarily because of the lack of interest from the paper but because of budget cuts and even changes to the format of the newspaper. "What happened was we were caught in the middle of the economic collapse last year in our bureau during the year, we went from five people at the beginning of the year to two," Dunham said. "And two of the three of us who were covering the presidential campaign were laid off in the fall, so again our coverage in the fall had to be less comprehensive than in the primaries when we had more time for more issues" (R. Dunham, personal communication, July 7, 2009).

The Bali conference in early December 2007 also served as a point of demarcation for another key measurement in this study. After early December 2007, the number of stories with references to climate change and global warming as well as a reference to either politics or election reached its highest point in December. This probably has less to do with the Bali conference than it did with the arrival of the primary season.



### ***Primary Elections***

The 2008 presidential primary elections were the first in more than a half-century in which neither party's nomination was sought by a sitting president or vice-president. On the Democratic side, the two main combatants were New York Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton and Illinois Senator Barack Obama. Both candidates, a woman and an African-American man, brought attributes that were unique in the history of presidential politics. On the Republican side, the wide-open race featured a former mayor of New York (Rudy Guiliani), a guitar-playing former Arkansas governor (Mike Huckabee), a Mormon who had served as the governor of Massachusetts (Mitt Romney), and the war hero and veteran Arizona senator, John McCain, who ultimately earned the nomination.

Some of the primaries and caucuses were moved up to the earliest possible dates in the first days of early 2008, while the struggle between Obama and Clinton lasted well into the spring, longer than any primary battle in recent memory. The election was definitely the most notable story of the first half of 2008 and Obama's victory dominated the news agenda.

As mentioned in the previous section, the overall number of stories referring to climate change or global warming remained steady from the fall of 2007 and into the first half of 2008. The trends for each of the six newspapers also remained unchanged in this time period. If anything, the number of stories mentioning climate change and global warming began to increase slightly as the summer approached and gas prices reached unprecedented highs.

However, climate change was not, by anyone's account, an important issue in the primary election. Well before the first votes were cast in Iowa in January, countless

debates were held around the country. As *USA Today* politics editor Catalina Camia recalls, climate change was an important issue for most of the Democratic candidates, but still it tended not to have a prominent place in those debates.

The issue was certainly a prominent one for Democrats. Because of the contested nature of the Democratic primary, you have more candidates talk about it in campaign events and in campaign visits, position papers and what not. I think this is the first presidential campaign in recent memory where it was such a predominant issue. I don't recall it coming up in Democratic debates. (C. Camia, personal communication, July 17, 2009).

There was little difference among the candidates for both parties on the question of climate change. On the Republican side, most of the candidates agreed on the main issues of allowing more offshore drilling and urging caution when negotiating international carbon emissions treaty. If anything, John McCain had the most liberal approach to the issue. As for Obama and Clinton, there was virtually no difference in their positions on this front. Because there was little room for debate on climate change, it did not gain much traction as a wedge issue. Even as the main candidates in the primary ultimately did little more than offer platitudes on climate change, the issue remained very contentious in certain quarters. The question of how the U.S. should deal with the potential threat of climate change is still very much up for debate.

For this study, the number of stories mentioning climate change or global warming as well as election or politics was tracked. In the first three months of 2008, the *Times* and the *Washington Post* generally published between six and 12 stories that featured these terms. This roughly accounted for around a quarter of all the stories in each of those two papers referring to climate change or global warming.

Most newspapers did not see the story as a major political issue when the long election campaign began. John Broder is a reporter in the Washington bureau of *The New York Times*, and his beat includes environmental policy. For most of late 2007 and 2008, Broder was pulled off of his beat and assigned to cover a variety of candidates on the campaign trail from Mitt Romney and John McCain to Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. By the end of the general election, Broder was assigned to cover vice-presidential candidate Joe Biden and found he was often the only print reporter following the future vice-president.

Clearly *The New York Times* and the rest of the so-called mainstream media were not heavily focused on this issue last year. I mean my assignment is, you know, concrete evidence of that. I was covering the environment at least, you know, when there was nothing more important for me to do in 2007. You know, I was pulled off to do things like the Virginia Tech shootings and the Blackwater story – that was in the spring, Blackwater was in the fall – for weeks at a time on both of these [and was] pulled away from covering environment and then full-time in December and January (J. Broder, personal communication, July 7, 2009).

The *Times* wasn't the only major newspaper to switch its environmental policy reporter to coverage of the election campaign. The *Washington Post* pulled Juliet Eilperin, whose name came up frequently in interviews as one of the environment reporters whose coverage is highly regarded, off her beat to cover candidates for most of 2008. It is important to note that Broder said that this did happen to other beat reporters in the *Times*' Washington bureau as well.

Both Dunham and Broder recalled moments while the Democratic primary campaign was still underway when John McCain was grappling with the differences between his own views on climate change and those of some of the key fundraising

groups and supporters of the Republican Party. For Dunham and the *Houston Chronicle*, one particularly big story was when McCain “made peace” with the oil industry (R. Dunham, personal communication, July 7, 2009). Meanwhile, Broder recalled one particular speech that McCain made on how to deal with carbon emissions in mid-May 2008.

The speech became controversial because it changed between a draft that they released to the reporters and what was delivered and what changed, again I would urge you to go back to the coverage, had to do with language that was in the draft that suggested that the United States might be justified in imposing some sort of trade sanctions against countries which do not limit their carbon emissions, which would get some sort of a price and trade advantage by not pricing that into their steel, their glass, their aluminum, the high energy intensive products. And then in the later - in the actual version he delivered, that language came out because it was anathema to the Republican free trade philosophy. But it was frankly about the most significant moment in the campaign in which climate was an issue (J. Broder, personal communication, July 7, 2009).

In May and June 2008, as gas prices rose, the number of stories that combined references to climate change and politics rose slightly in all newspapers. When the price of a gallon of gas climbed above \$4 and Hillary Clinton made a desperate pitch for votes by vowing to suspend federal gas taxes, it appeared as though climate change might, via the debate of energy, creep toward the top of the agenda for the public, politicians, and the press.

Recalling some surveys that he saw during the campaign, Broder says that climate change ranked twentieth out of 20 issues on the public’s agenda, while environmental issues, more broadly, was ranked slightly higher – seventeenth. And while he was following candidates from both parties on the campaign trail and repeatedly attending so-

called town hall meetings, Broder heard no one in the audience ask a candidate about climate change. “They asked about oil prices,” Broder said (J. Broder, personal communication, July 7, 2009).

### *Oil prices*

In the spring and summer of 2008, gas prices were climbing to levels that had never been seen before and that would have been almost unimaginable to anyone other than a peak oil doomsayer or an optimistic oil speculator. In May and June of 2008, the average price of a gallon of gas was over \$4 in the U.S., so in some parts of the country where taxes were higher, like California, the price of a gallon gas would have been well into the \$4 range.

Much like the economic downturn that hit with full force in mid-September 2008, high gas prices were an issue that was imposed on the political discourse. On the Republican side, the primary solution offered was to produce more oil, specifically from homegrown sources, which meant protected areas in Alaska and offshore drilling anywhere oil could be found. On the Democratic side, the candidates talked about energy independence and the need to develop alternative energy sources. As mentioned in the last section, Clinton proposed a rebate of the federal gas tax. Obama and most economists rejected the idea and so did the public, ultimately rejecting Clinton’s last pitch for the Democratic nomination. Said *The Times*’s Broder:

It was nine cents a gallon or something like that. And Obama said, ‘No.’ And everybody thought, ‘Well, that’s a stupid thing, a stupid political thing.’ But it turned out to be a great political move because her policy was seen as the pandering that it was. So, there is a case, but see that was not an environmental issue, it wasn’t even an energy issue. It’s purely, you know, a pocketbook economic thing. (J. Broder, personal communication, July 7, 2009)

Many people have speculated about the relationship between energy costs and climate change or global warming. One of the most logical explanations is that as the costs of fuel used for heating and/or transportation rise so to does the interest in finding alternative energy sources. This allows room for climate change activists, who have a slightly different end goal from the person who has to heat a 1,500 square-foot house in the suburbs and then drive 45 minutes each way to work, to offer solutions that may address both the energy shortage and climate change.

To see how closely these six U.S. newspapers were making the connection between gas prices and climate change, this study also tracked the number of stories with references to climate change or global warming and gas prices. For the most part, this topic barely registered. Through most of 2007, most newspapers hovered around one or two stories a week, if not zero, that met these criteria. In a couple of periods there was a small increase – the first in the spring of 2007, just before the summer travel season when people tended to be more concerned about gas prices – and the second during two weeks in November and December 2007, when *The New York Times* published five stories in each of those weeks that fit this descriptions. In each of those two weeks, two of the five stories were specifically related to American politics and specifically the lack of action taken by Congress on an energy bill that would legislate more efficiency. The other stories ranged from international stories to one about recreational vehicle sales in the face of high gas prices.

No other paper published five stories with these criteria until the *Houston Chronicle* did so in the week of February 24 to March 1, 2008. Two of the five stories appeared in the Sunday Business section. One was about the Alberta tar sands while the

other, curiously enough, was a column wondering why the presidential candidates had spent so little time talking about energy (Steffy, 2008, February 24). This also fits with the trend found elsewhere when the financial interest of a readership may drive a particular newspaper to cover a story before others do. And for the next few weeks, the *Houston Chronicle* had the most stories that connected climate change and gas prices in some way.

By the end of April 2008, as gas prices neared their peak, other newspapers, notably *The New York Times*, began to surpass the *Chronicle* in the number of stories being published. During the peak months of the spring and summer 2008, the *Times* was the only paper that consistently produced more stories on this topic than the *Chronicle*.

The peak for all newspapers using gas prices in combination with climate change and/or global warming was nine stories by the *Times* on the week of June 1 to 7, 2008. Four of these stories appeared in the Business section of the *Times* while another two stories addressed a bill on global warming that was being considered by the Senate. A month later, the week of July 6 to 12, 2008, the *Chronicle* reached its peak of eight stories. Two of the eight stories in the *Chronicle* that fit the criteria that week were produced by the Hearst Washington bureau. One story, written by Dunham, had the headline “Political spin blurs energy realities,” and appeared on the front page of the Sunday newspaper. Three more of the stories were about the G8 Summit held that week. By the end of July, when the *Times* published seven stories in the week of July 27 to August 2, 2008, these stories were starting to diminish in number. There wouldn’t be another week when a newspaper published more than five stories with references to climate change and gas prices. And the only time any paper published five stories that fit

these criteria was *The New York Times* during the last two full weeks of the general election campaign. In the first of those weeks, from Oct. 19 to Oct. 25, 2008, there were three stories in the Business section, one in the Sunday Styles section and a large story that also appeared on Sunday by Andrew Revkin on the candidates' positions on climate change. The next week – the last full week before the vote – two of the stories appeared in the business section, two of the references came in letters to the editor, and the final reference was in an editorial about Sarah Palin.

### ***The General Election***

The Democratic nomination was settled, for all intents and purposes, by early June. The summer, which included Obama's headline-grabbing tour of Europe, was part of the build up to the general election period when the Democratic and Republican candidates would square off. As had been the case in recent elections, the parties moved their conventions back as far as possible into August for the Democrats and September for the Republicans in the hopes of benefiting from the post-convention bounce. The conventions attracted massive TV audiences for Obama's acceptance speech for the Democratic presidential nomination and Alaska Governor Sarah Palin's speech as John McCain's running mate.

For most of the general election period, which will be defined for the purposes of this project as extending from the start of the conventions until Election Day, the number of stories referencing climate change and global warming remained steady. *The New York Times'* total consistently ranged between 20 and 30 stories while the *Washington Post* was between 15 and 25 stories most weeks. The other papers failed to break the plateau of 10 such stories in a week after the middle of July when the *Houston Chronicle* had a



week in which they published 11 stories. The *Denver Post* published 10 stories that fit these criteria in each of the weeks that encompassed and surrounded the Democratic Convention, which was held in that city. And all but one of the stories during convention week were directly tied to the event itself.

The U.S. reporters and editors interviewed for this project who covered the campaign, either on a regional basis or by following the candidates on the campaign trail, all said that climate change was not a major issue in the campaign. Said *The Times'*

Broder:

[L]et's put it this way. I don't recall an editor ever calling and saying why don't we do a story about what they're saying about energy or why don't you ask them about it. Now, at some point in the campaign ... we did do, as part of a series of issue stories, we did do a story about Obama and McCain and climate and energy. It was by Andy Revkin who has been following this issue for 20 years.... He talked to either both the candidates or both their environmental advisers and put together quite a comprehensive piece (J. Broder, personal correspondence, July 7, 2009).

Hearst's Rick Dunham said:

[I]mmigration and climate change were two of those issues where there was not a huge contrast drawn by either of the candidates during the general election and the two - if you talk about two significant issues that I don't want to say were off the table but - but they were not at the centre of the debate - and it's interesting because climate change has become so important this year [2009] (R. Dunham, personal correspondence, July 7, 2009).

A closer look at the number of stories with references to climate change or global warming and politics or election supports the observations of the interview subjects.

There seems to be a baseline of coverage of climate change as a political issue during the

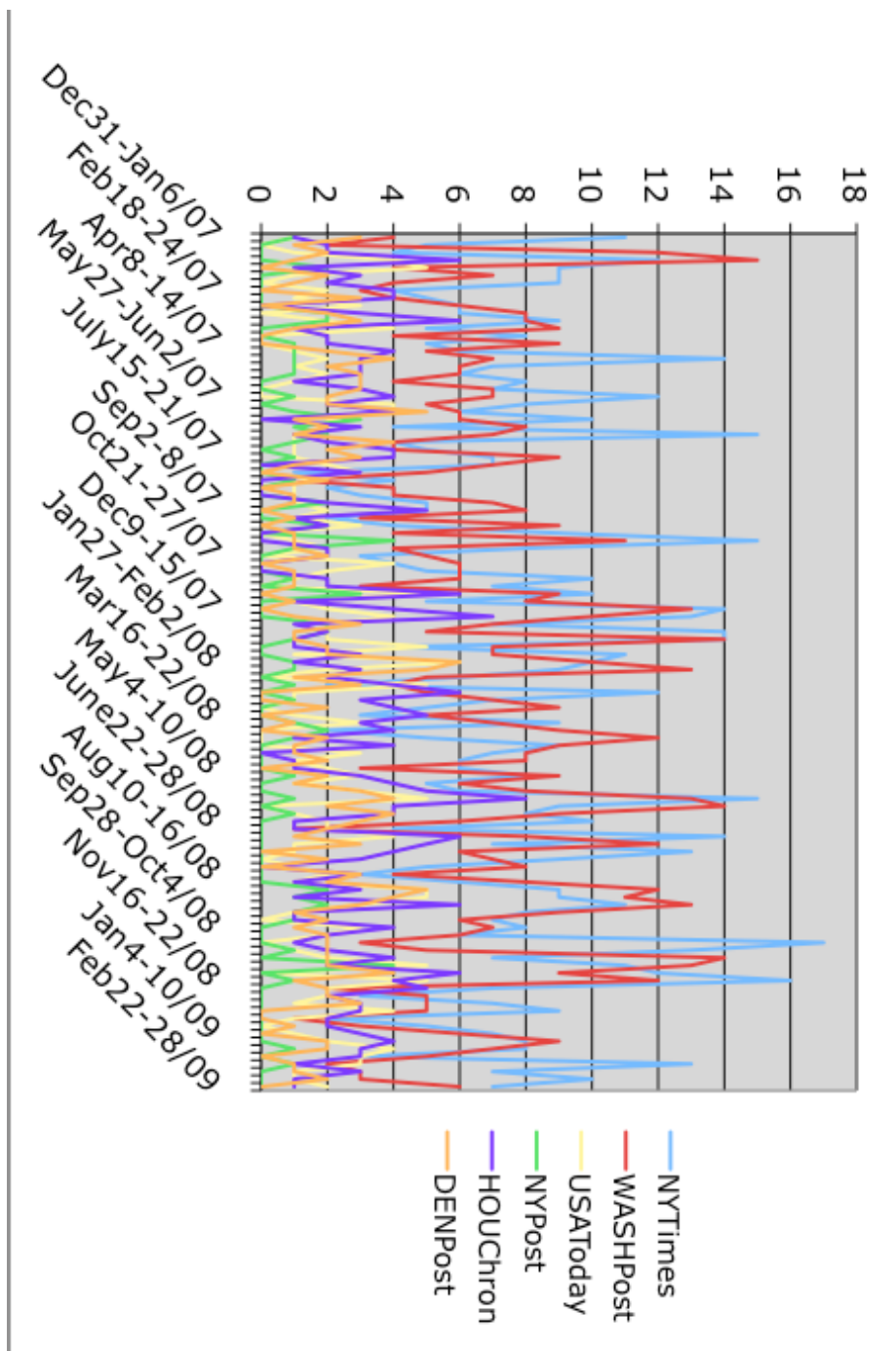
election campaign (see Chart 7.2). The only thing that had any effect on it at all was the stunning news of mid-September when the bottom fell out of the economy.

### ***Economic downturn***

In early September, it would have been difficult to conceive a story that could rival the presidential election as the biggest story of 2008. When Lehman Bros. collapsed in mid-September 2008, and threatened to take down the whole world's financial system (Krugman, 2010), the bigger story emerged. Two days before the first presidential debate, John McCain announced he was suspending his campaign and called for the debate to be postponed. Emergency legislation was required to deal with the potential collapse of the American banking system and since both candidates were sitting senators and the de facto leaders of their parties, they were involved in the negotiations over the legislation (Bumiller & Zeleny, 2008, Sept. 24; Chen & Goldman, 2008, Sept. 26). It wasn't quite a literal October surprise, but the economic downturn threw a major wrench into the campaign.

For media outlets, the economic crisis was a major story that had to be covered while they followed the election campaign and dealt with their own financial situations, which, like those of everyone else, had just gotten much worse. Leaving aside the *New York Post*, the *Denver Post*, and *USA Today*, which had a very small total number of stories per week, the three papers that had been providing the most coverage of climate change saw their percentage of stories about that topic which also mentioned politics drop during the week of and week after the Lehman Bros. collapse. This suggests that the economy drew at least some of the attention away from climate change as a political issue. But interestingly enough, it did not appear to have a significant effect on the

**Chart 7.2** – References to “climate change” and/or “global warming” and “politics” and/or “election” in full text of American newspapers from December 2006 to February 2009



overall number of stories referencing climate change or global warming.

The economic crisis may have had a long-term influence on the news agenda, the public agenda, and, to a lesser extent, the political agenda in early 2009 with attention focused on the earliest bailouts (Andrews & Labaton, 2009, Feb. 10; Vlasic & Bunkley, 2009, Feb. 17) and the Bernie Madoff story.

### ***Obama vs. McCain***

Of all the candidates for the Republican nomination for president, John McCain was the one whose position on climate change and, more generally, environmental issues was closest to whomever would have ended up being the Democratic nominee. *USA Today* politics editor Catalina Camia noted that one place where the newspaper did survey all of the candidates' views on climate was an online interactive feature that they dubbed the Candidate Match Game.

I'm fairly certain and I have to go back and take a look at it that there was one question on climate change issues on the first incarnation of the game. And in the second incarnation of the game, which was just between Obama and McCain, we had interactive that showed that McCain and Obama were actually pretty closer on the issue than people thought because they both supported cap and trade (C. Camia, personal correspondence, July 17, 2009).

As a result of this similarity, it was clear to most reporters and editors that policy solutions for coping with climate change were unlikely to become a significant issue in the election. Hearst's Rick Dunham was one of those people who thought that the issue might have earned more attention if the Republicans had chosen a different candidate.

In the general election probably, I would think there probably was less coverage of climate change in that McCain and Obama did not offer huge contrast. If it had been a Romney or Huckabee or a Giuliani, it probably

would have had much more ... written on the subject (R. Dunham, personal communication, July 7, 2009).

As a result, some very interesting trends emerge when stories are examined that referenced either climate change or global warming and the names of one of the candidates. The number of stories mentioning climate change and Obama increase steadily from virtually none in late 2006 to more after he is elected than during the campaign itself. The trend for McCain is similar to Obama's, but drops off immediately after the election.

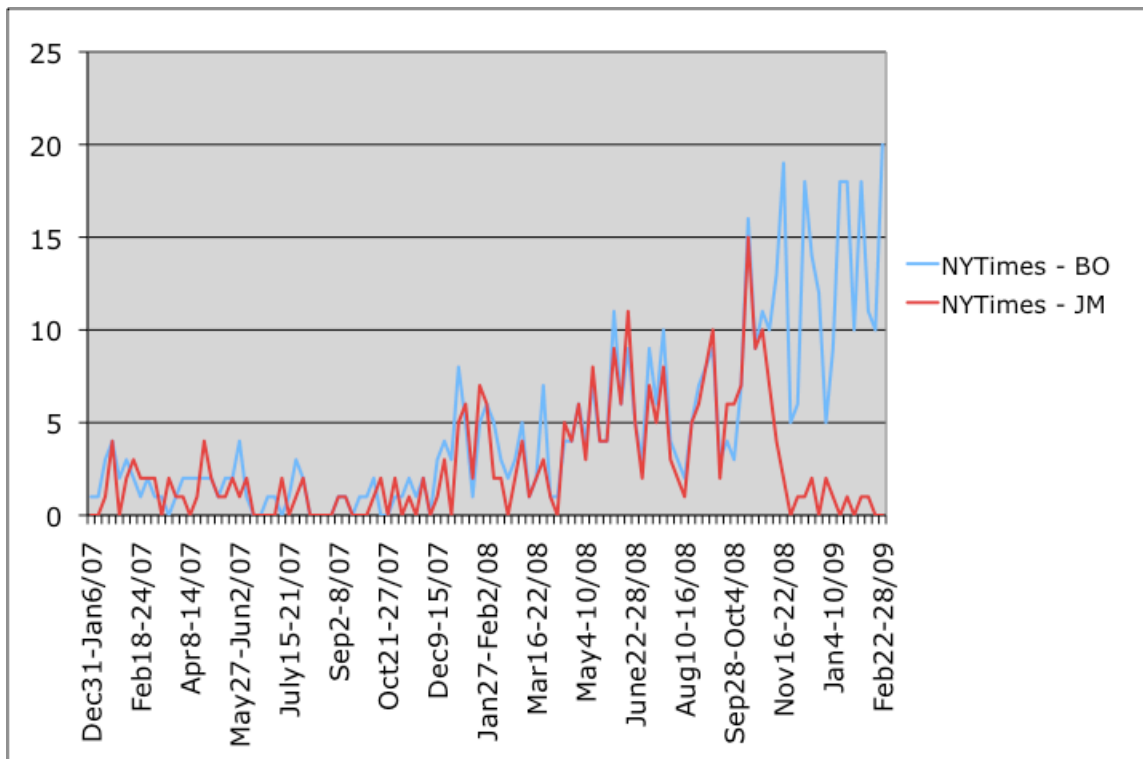
But perhaps the most interesting finding of all comes when numbers are charted side-by-side for Obama and McCain mentions in stories that also refer to climate change or global warming. In Chart 7.3, *The New York Times* figures are shown for stories with references to Obama and McCain. It is remarkable, especially during the heart of campaign, how closely these two lines track to one another. Tracking of climate change stories with a reference to either of the two major parties reveals a similar trend, at least during the general election. In 2007 and during the primaries, the Democratic Party was more likely to be mentioned alongside climate change in a story.

### ***“Drill, Baby, drill”***

It was unclear that a Republican candidate other than McCain (or, for that matter, a Democrat other than Obama) would have resulted in climate change having a more significant role in the campaign, although some reporters and editors speculated in the interviews that the issue could have become more of a wedge issue.

The closest test of that theory comes from the campaign itself. When McCain named Sarah Palin as his running mate, the former Alaska governor came to the campaign with a strong position on the question of offshore drilling and energy

**Chart 7.3** – Comparing the number of references to “climate change” and/or “global warming” and the two presidential candidates in full text New York Times stories from December 2006 to February 2009



independence, if not specifically climate change. Her husband, Todd, worked for an oil company on the state's North Slope. Palin also said in her famous interview with CBS anchor Katie Couric that the cause of global warming "kinda doesn't matter" (O' Carroll, 2008, Oct. 1).

But perhaps the most memorable campaign reference to the energy issue was the phrase, "Drill, baby, drill," which became a rallying cry at Republican rallies, especially those headlined by Palin. A search of LexisNexis shows that the first reference to the phrase came in an editorial in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* published after a speech by current Republican National Committee chairman Michael Steele and then the crowd chanted it during the acceptance speech by Sarah Palin on Sept. 3, 2008 at the Republican Convention in Minnesota (Unsigned, 2008, September 4). Even though, the phrase became something of a cultural touchstone, the catchy slogan failed to significantly increase the salience of the issue.

But there was logic behind trying to make offshore drilling a wedge issue in the campaign. *Washington Post* reporter David Fahrenthold was working for the Metro section of the newspaper during the 2008 elections and was focusing mainly on local environmental issues, specifically the possibility of offshore drilling in Chesapeake Bay, an issue that affected elections in Virginia and Maryland. (In early 2009, he began to cover the Waxman-Markey Bill, the cap and trade legislation intended to curb carbon emissions.) After observing the offshore drilling debate on a local level, Fahrenthold had some ideas about why that particular issue had so much traction during the 2008 campaign:

There's a lot more said about offshore drilling, whether it was a good idea, than climate change, I think, because it's a

much more sort of immediate idea. People can understand both the problems that offshore drilling might create because it's a sort of physical thing out of the water, and they understand what an oil spill is, and they can also understand sort of what was portrayed as the need for offshore drilling as gas prices were so high. It seems like ... we had that debate [in] much more concrete and sort of detailed terms (D. Fahrenthold, personal communication, July 7, 2009).

Fahrenthold went on to explain why he thought the public and politicians (and quite possibly the media) were less willing to engage in a substantive debate directly about climate change and preferred to see the issue combined with side issues like oil prices and offshore drilling.

It seemed like it was at a point where most people were comfortable with the idea that it existed; something ought to be done with it, something done about it. But the idea what to be done about it was some sort of an abstract at that point on both sides that I never thought it was a real sort of -- it became the real piece of the meat of the campaign. (D. Fahrenthold, personal communication, July 7, 2009)

The *Times*' Revkin said that he thought everyone in the media could have done a bit more to not only make the connection between energy and oil prices and climate change, but that there should have been more attention paid explicitly to climate change. "But again it's the function of how we look at political stories, we are often led to whatever the politicians are choosing to be their focus," Revkin said. "It's harder to write about what they are not focusing on" (A. Revkin, personal communication, September 4, 2009).

That said, there are a few opportunities when journalists have a genuine opportunity to ask politicians questions and shouldn't have to adhere to the agenda of the politicians. But Revkin tracked the most prominent of those forums and found little



attention paid to climate change. “On the blog I wrote a piece at one point on an assessment of the Sunday talk shows and how little, how few questions were asked related to climate by those, you know, *Meet the Press*-types,” Revkin said (A. Revkin, personal communication, September 4, 2009).

Considering the prominence of the issue in the early part of 2009, the *Post*'s Farhenthold said that maybe climate change was an issue that politicians and the media should have paid more attention to:

I just covered this debate in Congress about the cap and trade bill, and there's a huge amount of opposition from Republicans now. But it doesn't seem that that was something that McCain played up or that was a big deal in the Republican primary.... Maybe nobody realized how big a deal it was going to be or sort of what it would look like when it was actually finished (D. Fahrenthold, personal communication, July 7, 2009).

### ***Post-Election***

The numbers suggest that, in the first three months after the election, climate change became an even more prominent issue for both the *Houston Chronicle* and *The New York Times*. However, a comparison of the election and post-election period in that chart with Chart 7.2, which looks at references to politics or election within those stories from Dec. 31, 2006 through January 2009, indicates that the political nature of the coverage had declined, which may simply reflect the fact that the election was over so there were fewer references to it in the newspaper.

In his first address to the nation as president-elect, Obama spoke about the importance of addressing the issue of climate change, which might have gotten the news media interested considering their tendency to closely follow the president's agenda. This may have been the case at both the *Times* and the *Chronicle*. Certainly, the *Chronicle*'s

local business interest in the debate of how to deal with climate change would have been a logical explanation for the increased coverage of climate change. For example, as would be expected, Obama's choices for key energy-related cabinet portfolios got prominent play in the news and business pages of the *Chronicle*. Unlike the *Calgary Herald*, however, most of the *Chronicle's* stories were reported stories instead of columns or editorials.

While the *Washington Post's* coverage of climate change was increasing in the first months of 2009, *The New York Times* was publishing more stories that addressed the topic in some way. Part of this increase in stories is likely due to a major internal decision at the newspaper. In early 2009, the *Times* created an "environment cluster." A cluster at the *Times* is considered to be on the same level as a section, but has no dedicated section in the newspaper. The only other cluster at the *Times* covers the media. The *Times'* Broder explained some of the thinking behind the new environment cluster.

Our readers are a very select and self-selected group of elites in this country who have always placed the environment, you know, somewhat higher on their list of priorities than the general public. And are we following their preferences? To some extent, maybe. And, you know, the best feedback we have is our most emailed list, and environment stories tend to rise near the top of that list. People read them and email them around. Again it probably reflects our readership. They tend to be Sierra Club members; they tend to, you know, care about the earth and the environment. It's something of a, as others more cynical than I have called it, luxury good (J. Broder, personal communication, July 7, 2009).

Aside from the Waxman-Markey Bill, which will be discussed at length shortly, there were a couple of other issues that prominent members of the *Times'* new environment cluster identified as top climate change stories in 2009. Erica Goode, the

environment editor for the *Times*, identified, as did many of the other people interviewed for this project, the global treaty negotiations in Copenhagen in December. “We’re going to be covering the hell out of it all fall,” she said (E. Goode, personal communication, September 9, 2009).

Meanwhile, Revkin was using his blog, Dot Earth, to track Obama’s progress in dealing with climate change.

Rather than gauging what he is saying versus what he said during the campaign, and again I have been trying on the blog to write as much as I can about laying out what was promised versus what’s achievable. I have done a series of posts on the dilemma facing any president trying to deal with big issues like health and climate at the same time (A. Revkin, personal communication, September 7, 2009).

Despite all of the renewed efforts to cover climate change, Revkin is not confident that the issue will find a more prominent place on the public agenda.

My sense is that it will remain roughly where it is now. There will be periodic efforts you know it depends on what happens to the legislation and the treaty process is going to grind on and on all those fronts. Yeah, unless there were some big development and again in terms of a climate related event I don’t see it changing much (A. Revkin, personal communication, September 7, 2009).

### ***The New York Times environment cluster***

The decision of the senior editors at *The New York Times* to create an environment cluster is a potentially important development connected to the topic of this dissertation. The creation of the *Times*’ environment cluster is a tacit acknowledgement of the challenge of covering climate change and other environmental issues. Covering climate change and other complex environment stories are a unique challenge for the reporters and editors who are working on these stories on a daily basis, and it requires

more resources dedicated specifically to helping those people produce stronger journalism. It is also an admission of sorts, as *Times* reporter Andrew Revkin puts it, that traditional journalism has a difficult time making sense of climate change stories. “Here and now, dominates over someday somewhere. And complexity is not a selling point for a story,” said Revkin (A. Revkin, personal communication, September 7, 2009).

Erica Goode, the editor of the *Times*’ environment cluster, also notes that stories about the environment fit into an assortment of sections in the newspaper. “We provide stories that go in foreign, national, metro, science, home, styles – you know, all over the paper,” she said. But the cluster does allow the paper to think more systematically about how it covers the environment (E. Goode, personal communication, September 9, 2009). Revkin, who said he was one of the people pushing the *Times* to create the cluster, adds that it brings out the natural connections between climate change and other issues.

Every story on climate is not just a science story ... it tells us a story about business and economics and technology and all those things, equity and poverty. So, we now have more coordination within the paper’s coverage, which is good. And beyond that it’s just a matter of just trying to keep making the case a certain story matters in the daily fights over what gets prominent play or doesn’t (A. Revkin, personal communication, September 7, 2009).

Goode is involved in the twice-daily meetings to decide what will appear on the front page of the newspaper and the home page of the Web site (E. Goode, personal communication, September 9, 2009). Broder, for one, has noticed a change in how the paper has played environment stories since the creation of the cluster.

There has definitely been more of it. There has definitely been more of it on the front page. I mean I haven’t got back and counted my front page stories but, you know, just last week in a span of five days, I had three page one stories, mostly related to the House’s Waxman-Markey Bill, its

passage and then Obama did an interview with a small group of reporters about it and the issue (J. Broder, personal communication, July 7, 2009).

More importantly, Broder said that the stories themselves have improved, thanks to the addition of the environment cluster.

I think the stories get read more closely and there is more give and take between the reporter and the editor than I found before when I was writing even environmentally related stories for the national desk. Then I was a national correspondent in California for four years before I came back to Washington in '06. There was, sort of, a general attitude and it is probably not fair and I won't name any names but there is sort of, 'Yeah, yeah, that's fine, we'll put it in the paper. Can you make it a little shorter?' (J. Broder, personal communication, July 7, 2009).

Aside from the fact the *Times* was willing to make an investment in a new cluster when most papers were cutting back on all new investment – Goode called it “extraordinary” and “amazing” (J. Broder, personal communication, July 7, 2009) – the environment cluster, if it leads to more well placed stories in the *Times*, could have something of an agenda-setting effect. Even in this fractured media environment, *The New York Times* is still one of the media outlets that key policy makers and other members of the media turn to daily – and now with Web, many times a day. If the environment and climate change are getting more play in *The New York Times*, it could trickle down to other media outlets and up to the political elites.

### ***Waxman-Markey Bill***

Officially known as the American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009, the so-called Waxman-Markey Bill (named for the two Democratic congressmen, Henry Waxman and Edward Markey, who co-sponsored the bill), was one of the top domestic climate change stories in the U.S. of the first half of 2009. The bill, which was approved

narrowly by the House of Representatives in June 2009, provided for a number of environmental measures, the most prominent of which was the establishment of a cap-and-trade system for curbing carbon emissions. In a political sense, the Waxman-Markey Bill was one of the first major parts of President Obama's long-term agenda to take action on issues like climate change and health care reform that were largely ignored during the Bush administration.

Though much of the coverage of the Waxman-Markey Bill came after the end of the survey of news coverage for this study, most of the reporters and editors were interviewed in the immediate aftermath of the bill's passage, and many of them were directly involved in coverage of the story. They expressed surprise that dealing with carbon emissions became such an important legislative issue so quickly after Obama took office.

They also acknowledged that it raised the challenges that confront reporters working on environmental or science stories even when they don't relate to policy. The *Washington Post's* Fahrenthold said that while the bill helped to make the issue of climate change a little bit more immediate for some of the paper's readers, there was still the problem of trying to explain the principles of cap and trade and other key elements of the deal. By comparison, Fahrenthold said that health care reform, which became the legislative story of the last half of 2009, was easier to explain and get people interested in for a variety of reasons. "I think that's because people know what healthcare is and they understand separate ways to healthcare reform," he said, pointing to the past debates over healthcare reform, most notably President Clinton's doomed 1993 efforts (D. Fahrenthold, personal communication, July 7, 2009).

The *Times*' Broder explained what types of stories on the Waxman-Markey Bill piqued the interest of his editors.

There was little appetite for pure process stories. They were interested in the lobbying, pro and con, which, you know, I would have to say that I didn't do as much of as I could have and should have. They were interested in explanations of how it works and how it got to look the way it did and, you know, again they don't want a story like that every week. I wrote two that I can think of that were significant. Both were played on the front page and one was basically what is cap and trade anyway and how did it become the drug of choice in Washington.... And then the one just last week about how this bill became larded up with special deals for individual lawmakers and individual industries (J. Broder, personal communication, July 7, 2009).

One editor, Catalina Camia at *USA Today*, said that she had yet to find a way to cover the Waxman-Markey Bill by the summer of 2009. "We've used wire copy, but there are reporters here who have been thinking of enterprising ways to weigh in on the debate particularly since the debate will be different in the Senate," said Camia. "And I'm sure that in the coming weeks we will produce coverage that makes sense for us" (C. Camia, personal communication, July 17, 2009). She also outlined the main elements that she would be seeking in any coverage of the bill.

You've got to be able to explain to someone how cap and trade affects them and their families. It doesn't naturally lend itself to a headline per se. So, you've got to - in the case of the house bill, you've got to be able to say, okay, what, you know, 'What's this going to cost every household or every family? What are these provisions going to do to affect my daily life?' (C. Camia, personal communication, July 17, 2009).

Another key element of the story was how the House Republicans responded to the story. As was the case for much of the early part of 2009 on every issue, the reporters covering the bill said the GOP representatives had a tough time coming up with a

coherent message to counter the Democrats on the Waxman-Markey Bill. The *Post's* Fahrenthold said that once the Republicans came up with something, it ultimately helped them to cohere as a caucus. They ended up using a message similar to Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper's in the federal election there. (D. Fahrenthold, personal communication, July 7, 2009). As *The Times's* Broder said, while the Republicans used that message, the Democrats who opposed the bill expressed a different reason:

The Republican message was it's a giant tax. The Democratic message was it's going to hurt jobs in our region, drive up costs and put United States manufacturers at a competitive disadvantage. And they got some of what they wanted but for a number of members, 44 Democrats to be precise, it wasn't enough and a large number of them are from districts that are swing districts or that even voted for McCain, so they thought, you know, fearing that the Republican message that this is just a big fat job-killing tax was going to resonate in southeastern Ohio or western Pennsylvania or any place in Michigan, voted against it (J. Broder, personal communication, July 7, 2009).

### ***Reporting on climate change policy***

As reporters, editors, and columnists from all three countries covered in this study said in their interviews, there are peculiar challenges to reporting on climate change policy that make it one of the more difficult stories to report on for a newspaper. The problems are as basic as dwindling space available for stories thanks to larger typefaces to accommodate aging readers and smaller page sizes to save costs on newsprint, as Hearst's Dunham said:

Our stories are really limited in space if they are not front-page stories so that is the difference.... We might have been able to get a 25 or 30 inch inside story on an important subject in Houston before, and now it really is 18 or 20 inches max if it's not on page one. San Francisco is different and we have gotten 30 inch inside stories there but it's hard. And it's getting harder because San Francisco has



had a real financial pinch and so they are trying to figure out ways to save money from shrinking news hole to shrinking staff (R. Dunham, personal communication, July 7, 2009).

Interestingly enough, one of the few reporters from a smaller, regional paper in any country to say that they did not have any trouble finding space for their stories was Mark Schliefsstein at the *New Orleans Times Picayune*. He said their stories on climate change and other environmental issues that are particularly crucial to area have been “longer than anyone else’s in the United States.”

The last two years ... we have been required to drop back into more ‘realistic’ lengths which [means] 25 to 30 inches, maybe 40, and sometimes 50 to 60 inches. So even chopped stories are nowhere near as short as the stories that are occurring in other newspapers across the nation (M. Schliefsstein, personal communication, September 3, 2009).

Of course, New Orleans is particularly interested in a number of environmental issues related to climate change above and beyond the ongoing fallout and response to Hurricane Katrina. The case of the *Times Picayune* does offer some anecdotal confirmation for the notion that a climate change-related catastrophe is the only thing that will get people to not only cover the story but also to act on it.

Another challenge that the *Washington Post*’s Fahrenthold and other reporters identified was that of quickly and clearly explaining difficult concepts in newspaper stories so that they don’t overwhelm the rest of the story.

Even sort of the basic idea, you know, the simplest way to sum up with [the Waxman-Markey] bill was this idea of a 17 percent reduction below the 2005 levels by 2020. And even that is like not a self-explanatory concept, so we spent a lot of time looking for ways to sort of explain this. (D. Fahrenthold, personal communication, July 7, 2009)

Hearst's Dunham agreed, adding that it was much easier to report on the political implications of the bill (R. Dunham, personal communication, July 7, 2009).

While scientists and lobbyists working on climate change-related issues provide a set of challenges for reporters using them as sources, so, too, do elected officials who are trying to work on climate change legislation. The *Post's* Farenthold said that while most politicians and their staffers pay close attention to what journalists write, he only had one complaint from the staffer of a congressman while covering the Waxman-Markey Bill.

I quoted him saying something he'd said, like, on a Sunday talk show or something. He was – they were – unhappy that we did not use more context, but, in general, they were – he was – the only one who was unhappy. But the rest of them, I think, you know, [Republican Texas Congressman Joe] Barton, we quoted him extensively, you know, but in general –and Dana Rohrabacher from California – but they really believed, you know, that climate change isn't a big deal, so we don't mind being quoted saying that (D. Farenthold, personal communication, July 7, 2009).

On perhaps the thorniest question of all when it comes to reporting on climate change – balance – Erica Goode, the *Times's* environment editor, said that it is much easier to achieve some notion of balance with a story about the politics of climate change than one on the science of climate change.

I think our greatest challenge in the global warming range is that it's still - it's trying to figure out ... the complicated issue that the science is still complicated, you know, but it has also reached a certain consensus level (E. Goode, personal communication, September 9, 2009).

As for the science, Goode made it clear that the *Times* is open to alternative scientific explanations for some elements of climate change as long as they have sufficient backing from the scientific community.

We try to keep a skeptical mind going not necessarily about ... the basic science of global warming, but what is still uncertain, how much uncertainty is there, you know, which of the people who raised skeptical claims had science to back that with, who doesn't, you know, how far does it go. All of those questions are constantly in our minds (E. Goode, personal communication, September 9, 2009).

The problem with all of this is that it doesn't directly address the problem of balancing competing views of climate change in a science-focused story, but especially in a political story. If congressmen like Barton and Rohrabacher, mentioned earlier, are prominent enough, they may warrant being quoted in a story even though the scientific underpinnings of what they are saying is, to most scientists, dubious. This is a problem for which there is no obvious answer. And it may be one reason why certain pro-business lobby groups are not entirely opposed to this issue being debated in the political arena – it is the one place where their points of view get a more complete airing. When politics and science collide, like in the example provided by the *Post*'s Fahrenthold, when the Republicans in Congress invited Cato Institute scientist and climate change skeptic Patrick Michaels to address a Congressional committee. For his story, Fahrenthold attempted to get reaction to Michaels' statements from government organizations like the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (D. Fahrenthold, personal communication, July 7, 2009).

For his part, *The Times*' Andrew Revkin said that political stories about climate change tend to get precedence because, in fact, they are easier for the media. "It's a more familiar framing of the story for the news media so it gets a lot of attention and the stories are easier to do," he said. The "traditions of journalism," as Revkin put it, can get in the way of covering climate change in the best possible.

Here and now, dominates over someday somewhere and complexity is not a selling point for a story. And the reality of global warming is that ... the things that matter to society – the pace the sea level rise, species loss, intensification of hurricanes – are really complicated. And there really are legitimate scientific disagreements about what's going on (A. Revkin, personal communication, September 4, 2009).

## CHAPTER 8 – RESULTS – COMPARATIVE

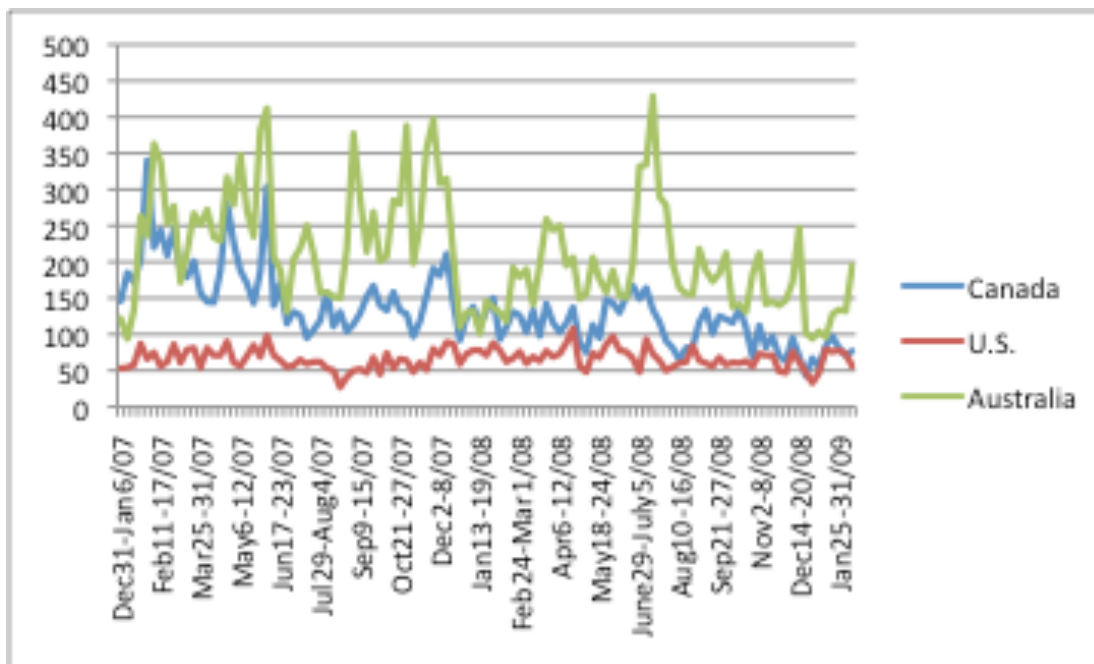
While the previous three chapters of results have described, country-by-country, how newspapers in each of Canada, the U.S., and Australia covered climate change as an issue in and around the most recent national elections in those countries, this chapter will use the research questions and hypotheses laid out in the literature review as a way of comparing and contrasting the differences among the media coverage in the three countries.

RQ1: How have climate change and other environmental policy issues been covered in recent national election campaigns in Canada, Australia and the U.S.?

Both the story count and the interviews with journalists showed some clear differences in the way climate change and other environmental policy issues were covered by newspapers in each of the three countries being examined in this study. The most noticeable difference was that in Canada and Australia climate change was treated as a more significant campaign issue than it was in the U.S. Reporters and editors in Canada and Australia said that climate change was near the top of political, public, and news agenda at the time of the campaigns in their respective country. Their counterparts in the U.S. said it was closer to the bottom of the top 20 issues in the campaign. Public polls published in the news media in each of the three countries at the time of the campaigns tended to reflect this interpretation.

In terms of how this played out in the newspaper coverage in each of the three countries, the largest Australian newspapers consistently produced the most coverage with references to climate change or global warming of newspapers in all three countries (see Chart 8.1). This coverage peaked around the time of the Australian election in

**Chart 8.1** – References to “climate change” and/or “global warming” in the six newspapers in each country combined between December 2006 and February 2009



November 2007, which was won by Kevin Rudd's Labor Party, which ran on a platform that pushed a more proactive approach to curbing carbon emissions. Newspaper stories mentioning either climate change or global warming remained relatively consistent in 2008. In Canada, stories mentioning climate change and global warming dropped steadily over the two years from early 2007 to early 2009. At the high point of coverage in early 2007, Canadian newspaper coverage was, in terms of sheer volume, the same as the average Australian newspaper coverage between 2007 and 2009.

In the U.S., meanwhile, the number of stories referring to climate change and global warming on a regular basis were, at the high end (i.e., in *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post*), about half the number of stories published in the largest Australian papers. I argue that part of this can be attributed to climate change's relatively low place on the political agenda in the U.S., but it may also be attributed to the way that climate change was framed in the U.S. and tackled by the primary candidates in the U.S. presidential election. John McCain and Barack Obama had positions on climate change that were about as close as possible for any Democratic and Republican presidential candidates. Furthermore, climate change was barely raised directly as an issue in the campaign, but it was raised in the context of other issues, like offshore drilling, energy independence, and even so-called "green jobs." As a result, the data collected for this study may not have fully captured the extent to which this issue was covered. But at the same time, a debate about energy independence is qualitatively different from a debate about a carbon emissions trading scheme.

A number of the hypotheses laid out in the literature review chapter dealt directly with how climate change coverage changes in and around the time of elections. These

hypotheses were built on the ideas that national politics and the positions of the heads of government on climate change affect the extent to which the news media in that particular country report on climate change (McManus, 2000).

H1: Coverage of climate change as a political issue will decline in the period immediately before election day.

H1 was partially supported by the data collected in the census portion of this project. In Australia, the number of stories mentioning climate change or global warming and politics or election increased steadily from late August and early September through election day.

In Canada, leaving aside the burst of newspaper coverage of climate change in early 2007 spurred on by *The Globe and Mail's* special coverage of climate change and the environment, the number of stories featuring the terms climate change or global warming and politics or election increased briefly in June 2008, when Stephane Dion announced his Green Shift plan. Through the rest of the summer, and the run-up to the somewhat unexpected election, the number of stories with these terms dropped considerably until the election campaign through the month of September and the first half of October. Interestingly, the fall of 2008 – the period of the election campaign – was one of the few periods when *The Globe and Mail* did not regularly have the most stories in a week that fit these criteria. The *Toronto Star*, a newspaper that has been historically associated with the Liberal Party and center-left politics, had the most coverage. The *Calgary Herald* did not top the list of newspapers with stories featuring some combination of terms during the election campaign, but it did publish more stories that fit the criteria, suggesting that this was an important issue in the region that the paper covers and very significant to the business community in the area.



American newspapers remained relatively steady throughout the time period studied when it comes to stories featuring either of the terms climate change or global warming and politics or election. Most of the six U.S. papers that were tracked for this study published fewer than six articles per week that fit these criteria. Only the *Washington Post* and *The New York Times* regularly published more stories than that. (The *Houston Chronicle* occasionally published more than six of these stories in a week.) Before the summer of 2008, the *Post* only published more than 12 stories that fit these criteria only four times while the *Times* only published more than 12 of these stories in six weeks. But as the presidential election campaign moved closer to election day, the number of stories mentioning this combination of terms increased in both the *Times* and the *Post*.

H2: Coverage of climate change as a political issue will increase in the immediate aftermath of the election.

The theoretical underpinnings for H2 are two-fold: 1) election coverage in each of these three countries tends to be more focused on the horserace (who is leading in the polls? Who has committed a gaffe?) than on substantive policy issues; and 2) the amount of coverage of climate change is dependent on the political agenda of the country's government (Bennett, 1990; McManus, 2000).

In Canada, where the party that formed the government after the election, the Conservative Party, was opposed to taking immediate action on carbon emissions to curb climate change, coverage declined quite sharply in the immediate aftermath of the election in October 2010. However, by the time President Obama made his official visit to Ottawa in February 2009, coverage increased as climate change was fairly high on the agenda for this brief meeting.

Even though climate change wasn't as much of a factor in the U.S. election, President Obama said immediately after his election and inauguration that taking action on climate change would be important to his administration. The data from American newspapers shows that the number of stories mentioning climate change and global warming reflects this to some extent. The most prestigious newspapers among the six that were tracked – the *Times* and the *Post* – saw a small increase in coverage shortly after election day. And coverage also increased, in the very short-term, in the *Houston Chronicle* after the election.

In Australia, where reporters said that climate change was one of the top three or four issues during the election campaign, coverage of that issue declined in the immediate aftermath of the election, even though the new prime minister pushed for action on the issue and it remained at the forefront of the political agenda. This seems to run counter to some of the pre-existing research on this issue as well as the ideas that underpinned H3.

H3: Total coverage of climate change and global warming will decline during election campaigns.

A great deal of scholarship suggests that news coverage during election campaigns focuses on the horserace and not issues, so it was reasonable to assume that the number of stories in the newspapers whose coverage was tracked would see a decline during the period of the election campaign. This was certainly not the case in Australia, which saw a substantial increase in coverage in the immediate run-up to the campaign and during the campaign itself. Of course, this could be explained by the fact that one of the parties made climate change such a prominent issue in the campaign. But in Canada, the Liberal Party attempted to do the same thing and coverage declined noticeably. One possible factor could be the sudden economic downturn during the middle of the

Canadian election campaign. But in the U.S. presidential campaign, where climate change was nowhere near as prominent as it was in Canada or Australia, the coverage of that topic in U.S. newspapers remained more or less steady. Either it was so far from the top of the news agenda in the U.S. that the explosion of attention for the economic downturn had little, if any, effect on the amount of climate change coverage or U.S. news media (and politicians) were not making the direct connection between climate change and political and economic issues.

H4: The greater the difference in opinion on climate change between the main candidates in an election, the more news coverage of climate change there will be during an election campaign.

The data – both qualitative and quantitative – supports H4. Of the three elections examined for this study, the U.S. presidential election was the one where the main candidates – at least at the time of the campaign – had the closest position on climate change and the lowest volume of news coverage. The numbers show that the sheer volume of stories mentioning climate change or global warming in Australia was higher than the other two countries while Canada was about the same as the U.S. during the election. The interviews with reporters in each of the three countries also revealed that there was very little appetite for stories about climate change in U.S. newspapers during the election campaign while reporters in Canada and especially Australia found that their editors were more interested in writing about climate change.

H5: During election campaigns, climate change coverage will be more likely to use political or economic frames than science or prevention frames.

While the political reporting about climate change during the election campaign varied among newspapers in the three different countries, there were still stories

appearing in these same newspapers that could fall into the category of science or environment stories. In other words, these were stories that didn't directly reference the political or economic implications of climate change or the related policies that were being posited at that given time. H5 was confirmed, and there were more stories that mentioned climate change or global warming and politics or election during the period of the campaign or when key policy announcements were made by politicians in advance of or after the election. But interviews with reporters who cover climate change primarily as part of an environment or science beat have suggested that interest in these stories among editors and possibly readers is beginning to wane. If nothing else, editors and readers and some beat reporters feel they know about as much as they need to on the effects of climate change and unless there is a truly groundbreaking new study or report, the incremental details are not especially interesting to audiences. In the case of some papers, this manifested itself as a decline in the number of stories, and in some papers it meant that there was less space devoted to stories about the effects of climate change. The one exception among the newspapers tracked is *The New York Times*, which launched an environment cluster at the start of 2009.

RQ2: What challenges did the newspaper reporters and editors who were covering the campaigns face when reporting on climate change-related issues?

The series of interviews with reporters, editors and columnists painted a very clear picture of the challenges that faced reporters and editors who attempted to cover this issue during and around the time of the election campaigns. Most of the challenges are similar to the ones that have frequently been discovered in other research about election coverage and environment coverage. In all three countries, reporters covering elections,

for example, found the experience of traveling with the campaign to not be as valuable for doing serious reporting as they hoped. They also found that the challenges of more and quicker deadlines, increased competition, and decreased resources make stories about a complicated issue like climate change more difficult and less likely to even be assigned or written during an election campaign. And the only thing more difficult to explain in a brief newspaper article than the science behind climate change is the policy to address it, i.e., efforts to create emissions trading schemes or implement a carbon tax in the hopes of retarding climate change.

On the plus side, however, reporters, especially the few who have been on the environment beat for a long time, said that editors are more likely to believe that climate change is a real phenomenon and an important story. But, as a number of reporters noted, there is much uncertainty about the level of public knowledge of climate change, which is a challenge for reporters and editors when trying to consider how much background information needs to be included in a given story.

After all these years of reporting on global warming and climate change, the biggest challenge is balance. Most reporters, especially the ones on an environment or science beat, said they had a pretty good sense of how to handle the so-called climate change skeptics. But the challenge has been renewed and probably complicated as the story has moved from the science beat to the capital bureaus, just as many of the issue cycle theorists and researchers might have predicted it would. As reporters in every country, but especially the U.S. and Australia, noted, the balance problem now is trying to figure out what to do with politicians, particularly fairly prominent politicians, who express views that ignore or directly contradict the scientific consensus on climate

change. These politicians are more difficult to ignore or properly contextualize than scientists on the fringes of their discipline. The politicians are being quoted and covered because they are elected representatives of the people and because they have a direct effect on policy. Their knowledge of science presumably affects policymaking (especially on a topic like this), but they shouldn't necessarily be disqualified from the public debate or have their voice in that debate limited by the news media for the ignorance on a particular topic. In fact, as was pointed out by a couple of reporters, often the more a particular comment by an elected politician falls outside the mainstream, the more likely it is to get reported by the media. Given the rapidly changing news cultures in Canada, Australia, and the U.S. and the demonstrated efforts of well-funded groups to change public opinion and public policy on climate change, this is the greatest and most crucial challenge facing reporters covering climate change today.

## CHAPTER 9 – CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This study has focused on a very specific and very tumultuous time in the recent history of Australia, Canada, and the U.S — indeed, the world — and has described, in great detail, these through the lens of politics and journalism. But it should serve as the starting point for more exploration, research, and action on this issue. Even though there has been political change in each of these three countries in the intervening years — especially in Australia, where Kevin Rudd was deposed by his own party in 2010, and in Canada, where the Liberal Party’s dismal showing in the 2011 federal election has precipitated an existential crisis for the party, the significance of issues at the core of this study — climate change and the communication by politicians and journalists of climate change-related policy — has not lessened in the intervening months and years. In fact, in keeping with the findings of McManus (2000) and Carvalho and Burgess (2005), it would be reasonable to hypothesize that a comparable study at the time of this writing (in the spring of 2011) would find increased attention to the issue of climate change in U.S. newspapers as compared to Canada and Australia, where governments are in place due in part to the electorate’s repudiation of the policies of Stephane Dion and Rudd.

All of this is a long way of saying that the various components of this study can and should be replicated and applied to other jurisdictions (at both the national and regional level) encompassing time frames subsequent to the one used for this study. Its methodology could also be applied to other key social issues. While few may be as replicable internationally as climate change — although energy, disease and poverty might benefit from such studies on a global basis — there is potentially room for

investigations comparing how various provinces or states or even cities have dealt with issues as diverse as childcare, education, health care and public transit.

The findings of this study suggest that some predictions can be made about the conditions that will lead to climate change-related policy becoming an important issue in a national election, but it also provides a sense of how the media may cover the issue during an election in a given country and offers some suggestions about what candidates interested in making climate change a key election issue would need to do to be successful. The findings of this study are useful to a variety of scholars and practitioners.

When it comes to the various candidates themselves and how they handled the issue of climate change, the stark contrast of Rudd to Dion proved highly instructive. While each had other strengths and weaknesses, the ability of Rudd to connect his concern about climate change to other relatable issues, using imagery that worked well in newspaper photographs proved successful in the short term: he was elected prime minister. His resignation as Labor Party leader in June 2010, less than three years later, followed the failure of key policies, one of which was his promotion of a carbon emissions reduction scheme. In the Canadian election, Dion outlined a very specific policy that was designed to use a tax to get people and corporations to change their consumption of carbon. Dion's well-chronicled communication problems and his inability to explain the importance of the issue to Canadians and the news media led to his party's defeat and his own demise as leader of the Liberal Party. (Although, improbably, he survived the Liberal Party's drubbing in the 2011 federal election that promptly sent his successor as Liberal leader, Michael Ignatieff, back to academia.) In other words, the political competency of a candidate and his ability to communicate the



value of policies to voters is heightened when an issue is complex and as challenging to report as climate change.

The collection and analysis of data that was conducted for this study would also be useful in looking at news media practices for covering climate change. If the greatest challenge facing reporters covering climate change is the fact that the opinions of elected officials – even if they are out of step with those of the majority of scientists studying climate change – deserve to be reported, then the solution to this problem lies with journalistic practices and the way that virtually every major newspaper orients itself. With rare exceptions, most newspapers focus on attracting the attention of audiences with a geographic focus. News coverage is organized in those newspapers to report stories of the most interest and significance to people in specific locations. Therefore, most sizable newspapers devote resources – be it journalists or space in their pages and web sites – to cover institutions like city hall, the state house (or the provincial legislature), and the federal government.

Studies, including this one and others before it (McManus, 2000; Burgess & Carvalho, 2005), have shown that the local and national political agenda play a part in shaping the amount of climate change coverage that appears in newspapers at any given time. And more general studies (Bennett, 1990; Zaller, 1992) note that news coverage and public discourse is shaped by or, to use Bennett's term, indexed to the range of debate and opinions of the political elite at any point in time. As a result, politicians and other key figures in the policy making process are given a great deal of attention when it comes to any major issue, including climate change policy, but their interests are very much tied up in the short-term pursuit of gaining and maintaining political office. By

following their lead, news coverage and the public discourse rise and fall according to such short-term strategies, even when implications of an issue, especially that of climate change, call for long-term policy changes.

Generally speaking, the news media have paid a great deal of attention to the issue of climate change. This study and others that have tracked coverage of climate change (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2007; Rowe & Deppa, 2008; Boykoff & Mansfield, 2009) in selections of elite newspapers in the world have shown that there have been weeks when there are hundreds of stories published that mention climate change or global warming. The problem is not necessarily with the volume of coverage or even a lack of attention for climate change. Instead, the coverage of climate change that has been published has failed, to date, to have enough effect on the public and political agenda to result in the adoption of effective climate change policy in most jurisdictions. Certainly that is the case in the three countries that were the focus of this study.

Most of the journalists interviewed for this study expressed some level of dissatisfaction with how climate change has been covered by the news media in general, their news organizations, and even themselves. But they were also unable to think of any better approaches for covering the issue, which makes sense given the volume of coverage and the inherent restrictions created by the routines of most newspapers and their reporters and editors. For most issues, from federal income taxes down to local trash collection, the orientation of serious political coverage in newspapers toward political institutions can and should provide the best coverage for audiences. Climate change has proven to be a different kind of case, primarily because of its global nature. Without being too trite, climate change is a global issue and stories about climate change require,

in most instances, a broader, global focus. (The same is true of decisions and deliberations on climate change policy.) Therefore, newspapers reporters and editors need to find a way to situate climate change stories in a broader global context while still explaining the significance of the story to their locally or nationally focused audience.

This problem has also been identified by Stephen J.A. Ward in his 2010 book, *Global Journalism Ethics*, which offers a framework for considering complex global issues like this. Ward argues persuasively that this new approach would require that “journalists come to place greater emphasis on their responsibilities to people beyond their borders” (p. 161). Ward also outlines three imperatives of this new “cosmopolitan” approach to journalism. He calls for journalists to “act as global agents”, “serve the citizens of the word”, and “promote non-parochial understandings” (p. 162). The findings of this study emphatically underline Ward’s views on what he calls global journalism ethics. The local, regional and national political maneuverings on climate change and other environmental issues need to be covered, but the focus and scope of the coverage absolutely must extend beyond the ramifications to the politicians involved and the citizens whom they govern. All climate change-related policy action and inaction needs to include reporting on its implications for people around the world and their environment. To be successful, this requires a major rethinking of how stories and beats are assigned within newsrooms and it also demands a reconsideration of the goal of newspapers and news outlets. The changing media landscape has already created a situation in which no media outlet exists in a spatial (or even temporal) vacuum. Likewise, a diminishing number of audience members exist in that same vacuum. Each individual news media audience member with access to the Internet has a unique media

diet that is evolving and influenced by his or her interests, experiences, and backgrounds. By taking a more wide-ranging view of important issues and the world, some news organizations may actually find that they are doing a better job of reflecting the interconnectedness and the range of interests and experiences of their potential audience, instead of serving an increasingly narrow slice of their news and information needs.

Part of the challenge facing newspapers, and other news media, when covering climate change is how best to assign resources that, during the time period that was covered in this study, were becoming increasingly scarce. The example of *The New York Times* and its environment cluster is worth further study to see if it has any tangible effect on environmental coverage in the newspaper, including the quantity of stories, the placement of stories, the quality of stories, and the agenda-setting effect of increased attention on environmental stories. Further qualitative research into the *Times*' environment cluster would also reveal practical suggestions for improving its coverage and that of other newspapers when it comes to climate change. It could also be useful to investigate whether the *Times* is influencing environmental coverage through aggregators who may link to specific stories.

More importantly, the current news media and mass communication landscape lends itself to easier global communication. The Internet and social media could fill some of the gaps in newspaper coverage identified by this study, but a separate study is desperately needed to consider the shape of climate change coverage on Internet-only sources and the extent to which they affect the news, public and political agendas, if at all. Such a study should compare such coverage with that of sources operating on a traditional-plus Internet basis.

The top newspapers still have the resources and the talent required to produce better and more comprehensive coverage of climate change, but editors and reporters will need to reimagine their approach to this topic in order to satisfy all of the needs of their audience as they respond to the challenge of global climate change. There is room for academics, specifically those with journalism experience, to work closely with news organizations and/or their undergraduate and graduate students to experiment in this area in an effort to find better ways to report on climate change, keeping in mind Ward's global journalism ethics.

Moving away from journalism-specific ideas and research, these findings can also provide guidance for communicators, including those who work for politicians, government and non-governmental organizations, about which climate change-related messages are successfully adapted by audiences and communicated by the news media. Mass communications researchers need to pursue more methodologically sophisticated research into the efficacy of using messages to change the behavior of the public when it comes to climate change-related policy and carbon consumption.

In the most general terms, this study shows the importance of pairing effective communications with one's position on the essential issue of climate change. It is not enough to believe that being on the right side of the issue and having the facts and the scientific consensus on one's side to convince people of a policy. More effective climate change-related communication can only improve the place of this story in the public agenda, the political agenda, and the news agenda. Communication experts and scholars need to exert more influence over this debate if it is to move in a direction that satisfies

those who see it as among the most pressing issues facing our world in this time and the future.

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**APPENDIX A - QUESTIONS FOR REPORTERS/EDITORS**

-Can you remember the first time that climate change came up in the context of the election campaign?

-Did you use it in a story?

-How did you use it in the story? For instance, was it in the lede? How prominent was the story?

-What can you tell me about how you handled that story?

-At what point did you think climate change was going to be important in the campaign?

-Was there a point in the campaign where the issue became really important?

-When did it start to decline in significance? Why did that happen?

-Were editors receptive to coverage about climate change during the campaign?

-Whom did you turn to for expert sources on climate change stories or to suggest expert sources for such stories?

-Describe how your newspaper balanced coverage of issues and the horseshoe or process.

-What, from your point of view, were the major issues in the election campaign?

-Describe the role that climate change played in your paper's political coverage during and around the campaign.

-Compared with past elections, do you think that the amount of coverage of climate change gone up, gone down or stayed the same from past elections? Either way, why do you think this happened?

-Were there other differences in the coverage of climate change and environmental issues by comparison with past election? Please describe them.

-Play media critic: How did other newspapers and media outlets do in covering climate change issues?

-Describe the main challenges of working on a climate change-related story.

-Describe the challenges of relating climate change-related policies to readers/viewers.

-How well do you feel that you understand climate change and the related issues in this campaign? Why?

-When covering climate change as a political issue, how do you handle the problem of balancing the coverage between scientists and deniers? And between different parties?

-What, if any, responsibilities do you think journalists have to encourage the public to see climate change as an issue?

-If so, how could that be accomplished? If not, why not?

-How much responsibility do you have to explain the different positions taken by politicians, by environmental advocates, scientists and the energy industries, and their potential effects on the environment/the economy/etc.?

-Describe the frames that the different parties used in relation to climate change during the campaign.

-How can you avoid using the frames of one candidate or another to describe an issue, climate change or otherwise?

-What, if anything, would you change about the coverage?

-What sources do you use in stories about climate change?

-What are the pros and cons of using politicians as sources?

-What are the pros and cons of using scientists as sources?

-What are the pros and cons of using representatives from interest groups as sources?

-What kind of response do you get from your viewership/readership when you cover environmental stories?

-Do they want to see more or less coverage?

-Are there ever any claims of bias?

-In your opinion, does the readership response differ significantly from any other potentially contentious topics?

-Have you heard of any complaints from ownership or management about your environmental coverage?

-If so, what were the complaints and how were they addressed? What was the ultimate outcome?

-Where do you believe climate change ranks in terms of stories that readers care about?

-Where do you think that it should rank in terms of stories that readers should care about?

-What role, if any, do you have in environmental coverage in general?

-Has environmental coverage changed at all in the last five years? 10 years?

-How does your news organization typically cover environmental issues?

-Do you have a special section/segment devoted to them? If so, how frequently does it appear?

-If so, is it a topic that falls under general assignment or do you have a reporter/editor specifically devoted to the topic?

-How has your newspaper covered climate change or global warming?

-Has it been treated as a scientific problem, a political problem, or a societal problem? Or all three?

-What is your position at the newspaper?

-How long have you worked as a journalist? At your current position?

-How many elections have you covered?

-What role do you have in political coverage?

-What role did you play in your newspaper's coverage of the last national election?

## APPENDIX B – TIMELINE (DECEMBER 2006 – FEBRUARY 2009)

### *Legend*

The items are color-coded by country or item

United States

Australia

Canada

Gas price

International event

Dec. 4, 2006 – Kevin Rudd elected leader of Australia’s Labor Party.

Dec. 6, 2006 – Former Environment Minister Stephane Dion elected leader of Canada’s Liberal Party.

Jan. 1, 2007 – The price of one gallon of regular gas in the U.S. - \$2.29 6/10.

Jan. 4, 2007 – Rona Ambrose replaced as Canada’s Environment Minister by John Baird.

Feb. 10, 2007 – Barack Obama announces candidacy for President of the U.S.

Feb. 25, 2007 – An Inconvenient Truth, the film about Al Gore’s climate change campaign wins two Academy Awards.

March 31, 2007 – Kevin Rudd releases blueprint for dealing with climate change if elected.

April 2, 2007 – The price of one gallon of regular gas in the U.S. - \$2.63 6/10.

June 6-8, 2007 – G8 Summit in Germany.

July 2, 2007 – The price of one gallon of regular gas in the U.S. - \$2.93 3/10.

Oct. 1, 2007 – The price of one gallon of regular gas in the U.S. - \$2.78 4/10.

Oct. 12, 2007 – Al Gore and the U.N.’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change wins the Nobel Peace Prize.

Oct. 17, 2007 – National election is called in Australia.

Nov. 24, 2007 – Kevin Rudd’s Labor Party wins majority government in Australian election.

Dec. 3, 2007 – Kevin Rudd signs the Kyoto Protocol on behalf of Australia in his first act as prime minister.

Dec. 3-14, 2007 – U.N. Climate Change Conference in Bali, Indonesia.

Jan. 3, 2008 – The Iowa caucuses are won by Barack Obama and Mike Huckabee.

Jan. 7, 2008 – The price of one gallon of regular gas in the U.S. - \$3.08 8/10.

Jan. 8, 2008 – The New Hampshire primary is won by Hillary Clinton and John McCain.

Feb. 19, 2008 – The provincial government of British Columbia introduces a carbon tax.

March 4, 2008 – John McCain becomes presumptive Republican Party nominee for president.

April 7, 2008 – The price of one gallon of regular gas in the U.S. - \$3.29 9/10.

June 3, 2008 – Barack Obama clinches Democratic Party nomination.

June 19, 2008 – Stephane Dion unveils the Liberal Party's Green Shift plan to introduce a national carbon tax.

July 7, 2008 – The price of one gallon of regular gas in the U.S. - \$4.05 1/10.

July 7-9, 2008 – G8 Summit in Japan.

September 7, 2008 – Canadian Parliament dissolved for federal election campaign.

Oct. 6, 2008 – The price of one gallon of regular gas in the U.S. - \$3.48 5/10.

Oct. 14, 2008 – Stephen Harper's Conservative Party re-elected with another minority government.

Nov. 4, 2008 – Barack Obama elected President of the United States.

Nov. 27, 2008 – Conservative Party introduces fiscal update, which is opposed by all opposition parties, who agree to form a coalition government.

Dec. 1-12, 2008 – U.N. Climate Change Conference in Poznan, Poland.

Dec. 4, 2008 – Canadian Governor General Michaëlle Jean agrees to prorogue Parliament, ending the possibility of the government's imminent defeat.

Dec. 10, 2008 – Stephane Dion resigns as leader of the Liberal Party and is replaced by Michael Ignatieff.



Dec. 15, 2008 – Kevin Rudd’s government releases report on climate change that is heavily criticized.

Dec. 15, 2008: Barack Obama announces key members of his energy and environment team, including Steven Chu as secretary of energy, Lisa Jackson as EPA administrator, and Carol Browner as assistant to the president for energy and climate change.

Jan. 5, 2009 – The price of one gallon of regular gas in the U.S. - \$1.67 2/10.

Jan. 20, 2009 – Presidential inauguration of Barack Obama.

Jan 27, 2009 – After prorogation of Canadian parliament, Conservative Party tables a new budget that is approved by the opposition parties.

Feb. 7, 2009 – Massive bushfire begins in Victoria, Australia. It last more than a month and kills 173 people.

Feb. 16, 2009 – The price of one gallon of regular gas in the U.S. - \$1.93 1/10.

Feb. 19, 2009 – President Obama visits Canada.

## APPENDIX C – LIST OF NEWSPAPERS

### *U.S. Newspapers*

#### *The New York Times*

Location: New York, but considered a national newspaper

Format: Broadsheet

Ownership: The New York Times Company

Ranking in national circulation figures<sup>18</sup>: 3

#### *The Washington Post*

Location: Washington, D.C.

Format: Broadsheet

Ownership: Washington Post Company

Ranking in national circulation figures: 5

#### *USA Today*

Location: National newspaper based in McLean, VA

Format: Broadsheet

Ownership: Gannett Company Inc.

Ranking in national circulation figures: 1

#### *The New York Post*

Location: New York

Format: Tabloid

Ownership: News Corp.

Ranking in national circulation figures: 7

#### *Houston Chronicle*

Location: Houston, TX

Format: Broadsheet

Ownership: Hearst Corporation

Ranking in national circulation figures: 9

#### *Denver Post*

Location: Denver, CO

Format: Broadsheet

Ownership: MediaNews Group

Ranking in national circulation figures: 31

### *Canadian Newspapers*

#### *The Globe and Mail*

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<sup>18</sup> U.S. national circulation figures are from 2006 and based on daily figures, excluding Sunday editions (Unattributed, 2006).

Location: Toronto, but considered a national newspaper

Format: Broadsheet

Ownership: CTVglobemedia Inc.

Ranking in national circulation figures<sup>19</sup>: 2

*The Toronto Star*

Location: Toronto

Format: Broadsheet

Ownership: Torstar Inc.

Ranking in national circulation figures: 1

*The Toronto Sun*

Location: Toronto

Format: Tabloid

Ownership: Quebecor Inc.

Ranking in national circulation figures: 5

*The Gazette*

Location: Montreal, Quebec

Format: Broadsheet

Ownership: Canwest Global

Ranking in national circulation figures: 8

*The Ottawa Citizen*

Location: Ottawa, Ontario

Format: Broadsheet

Ownership: Canwest Global

Ranking in national circulation figures: 9

*The Calgary Herald*

Location: Calgary, Alberta

Format: Broadsheet

Ownership: Canwest Global

Ranking in national circulation figures: 13

***Australian Newspapers***

*The Australian*

Location: National newspaper headquartered in Sydney

Type of paper: Broadsheet

Ownership: News Corp.

Ranking in national circulation figures: 8

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<sup>19</sup> The circulation figures for Canadian newspapers are taken from data made publicly available by the Canadian Newspaper Association (Unattributed, 2008).

*The West Australian*

Location: Perth

Format: Tabloid

Ownership: West Australian Newspapers Limited

Ranking in national circulation figures: 6

*The Herald Sun*

Location: Melbourne

Format: Tabloid

Ownership: News Corp.

Ranking in national circulation figures: 1

*Sydney Morning Herald*

Location: Sydney

Format: Broadsheet

Ownership: Fairfax Media

Ranking in national circulation figures: 3

*The Daily Telegraph*

Location: Sydney

Format: Tabloid

Ownership: News Corp.

Ranking in national circulation figures: 2

*The Age*

Location: Melbourne

Format: Broadsheet

Ownership: Fairfax Media

Ranking in national circulation figures: 4

## APPENDIX D – INTERVIEW CODING GUIDE

Based on the list of questions and general themes that emerged during the interviewing process, a coding guide was developed to group responses from the 21 journalists interviewed into a series of key categories that include most of the responses from the journalists. In some cases, there was some overlap between categories in where some of the responses fit. From there, the responses in each of these areas were grouped together and further analyzed for common and/or notable themes that emerged.

- 1) **Journalist’s Background/First Time Covering Climate Change:** This covered a series of questions about the journalist’s educational background and career path.
- 2) **Ebbs and Flows in Coverage:** Comments that relate to the idea that coverage of this (and any) issue tends to go in waves, both during the election campaigns and more generally.
- 3) **Where Did Climate Change Rank as a Campaign Issue:** These were responses to specific questions about the prominence of this issue in the campaign and related questions and comments about how it came to that level of prominence and what caused any changes.
- 4) **How Was the Election Covered:** In general, these grouping of answers dealt with how the reporters and their news organizations covered the campaign and the issue of climate change during that issue.
- 5) **Challenges of Covering Climate Change:** All comments related to any challenges facing reporters when covering climate change.

- 6) **“Play Media Critic”**: Comments about how well or how poorly the media in general and specific outlets covered the issue of climate change.
- 7) **Reader Response to Coverage**
- 8) **Source/Stakeholder Response to Coverage**
- 9) **Internal Newspaper Response to Coverage**: Comments about how editors handled climate change stories and how, if at all, senior management or owners felt about coverage of climate change.
- 10) **What Role Should Journalists Play in Covering Climate Change**: These comments addressed the wide array of potential challenges for journalists when reporting on all aspects of climate change.
- 11) **What Do You See Happening Next With This Story**: What did the journalists believe was going to be the next major phase in climate change coverage, both domestically and internationally.
- 12) **What Role Did You Play in the Campaign Coverage**
- 13) **The History of Climate Change as a Political Issue**

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**RYERSON UNIVERSITY, TORONTO, ONTARIO*****Part-time instructor (January 2010-May 2011)***

- Developed and taught a new seminar course at Ryerson's School of Journalism called Theory in Journalism and Mass Communications
- This marked the first time that this course was taught at Ryerson so I was allowed to build the syllabus and shape the course to meet the needs of undergraduate journalism students
- Teaching a communications course, Audiences and the Public, to graduate students from three different programs – journalism, media production, and professional communications

**LAURIER BRANTFORD, BRANTFORD, ONTARIO**

***Part-time instructor (January 2010–May 2010)***

- Taught two classes in the Winter 2010 semester – one in the Journalism department and the other in Media Studies
- Reading Media is a large lecture class designed to introduce students to media semiotics and other key concepts that students can use to deconstruct visual media content
- Introductory Skills: New Media Journalism is a workshop intended to give journalism students a hands-on introduction to the skills and tools needed for journalism on new media platforms

**SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY, Syracuse, New York**

***Instructor of record (August 2007–May 2009)***

- Taught a graduate level class called Applied Media Research in the spring 2009 semester
- Applied Media Research, a class geared to students in the graduate program in broadcast journalism, teaches the students how to do content analyses and audience research while discussing the challenges of reporting of polls and research
- Team-taught Communications and Society, the introductory communications class for all incoming Newhouse School students, in fall 2008
- Communications and Society, which had 74 students enrolled in it, required the students to complete a multimedia project in addition to essays, exams and current events quizzes
- Taught two sections of the introductory news writing class for undergraduate students
- Responsible for leading a class of 16 freshman, sophomore and junior students in the fall semester and 18 students in the spring semester
- Prepared and wrote lectures, assignments, exams and quizzes

***Research assistant (May 2007–August 2007; May 2008–August 2008)***

- Assisted a professor in conducting an online survey of political journalists from TV stations and newspapers around the United States
- Analyzed the results and prepared the data for presentation at a meeting of professors holding Knight Chairs in journalism

***Teaching assistant (August 2006 –May 2007)***

- Served as TA for sections of Communications and Society in both the fall and spring semesters.
- Led lectures in the fall on the Jayson Blair scandal and public relations, and in the spring, I lectured on the book publishing and magazine industries.



- Other duties included writing and leading regular current events quizzes, marking essays and exams, holding office hours, and helping professors prepare materials for class.
- Participated in the Newhouse School's Future Professoriate Program.

### **UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO, London, Ontario**

#### ***Teaching assistant (September 2001 – December 2001)***

- Responsible for marking papers, holding regular office hours, working with students, and leading some classes for a first-year course on the history of Canadian media.

### **PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYMENT OVERVIEW**

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#### **FREELANCE WRITER, Syracuse, New York and Toronto, Ontario**

##### ***Writer, reviewer and columnist (October 2003 – present)***

- Contributed articles to the Review and Toronto section of *The Globe and Mail*
- Wrote a weekly books column for six months in 2004 in the *National Post*
- Published book reviews in both the *National Post* and the *Vancouver Sun* that have been picked up by other newspapers across the country including the *Ottawa Citizen*, the *Calgary Herald* and the *Victoria Times-Colonist*
- Wrote news stories and book reviews for *Quill & Quire*
- Contributed an omnibus review of Canadian political books to *Canadian Notes & Queries*
- Contributed a short item to *Toronto Life*

#### **QUILL & QUIRE, Toronto, Ontario**

##### ***News editor (April 2004 – July 2006)***

- Responsible for assigning, editing, and posting news items on *Quill & Quire's* website on a daily basis; the items covered all aspects of the book trade in Canada.
- Co-ordinating the Frontmatter and News/Features sections of the monthly print issue of the magazine.
- Assigning and editing each of the articles, working closely with the staff writer, intern, other editors, and a large roster of freelance writers.
- Writing features for the magazine, including a profile of *Generation X* author Douglas Coupland and controversial Canadian journalist Paul William Roberts, and an article about the new supply chain software implemented by Indigo,

Canada's largest bookstore chain, which was nominated for best retail story category in the 2004 Kenneth R. Wilson Awards for business press journalism.

***Staff writer (September 2003 – April 2004)***

- Wrote articles for *Inside Report*, *Quill & Quire's* twice-weekly news service, and the print issue.
- Responsible for In the Works, a monthly column detailing the major Canadian book deals.
- Wrote news articles that included news about Indigo and its impact on the industry, author profiles, and coverage of international book fairs, including the Frankfurt Book Fair.
- Received a nomination for best feature in the 2003 Kenneth R. Wilson Awards for business press journalism for a story about the need for the publishing industry to stimulate interest in reading.

**VANCOUVER SUN, Vancouver, B.C.**

***Reporter (October 2002 – August 2003)***

- Reported to both the City Editor and the Arts Editor, contributing news stories and arts stories, including profiles and reviews.
- Covered news stories ranging from the problem of homelessness in Vancouver, to local, provincial, and federal politics.
- Conducted interviews with B.C. Premier Gordon Campbell and then-U.S. Ambassador to Canada Paul Cellucci, among others.
- Reviewed dance festivals and concerts by bands such as Coldplay and Pearl Jam, and profiled a variety of artists like Billy Bragg and *FOUND* magazine founder Davy Rothbart.

**NATIONAL POST, Toronto, Ontario**

***Intern (May 2002 – August 2002)***

- Wrote daily stories for various sections of the newspaper.
- Completed a number of research assignments, including compiling information for the Ontario provincial budget.
- Traveled to the U.S. for features ranging from NASA research into climate change at a U.S. Air Force base to an Ernest Hemingway look-alike contest.

**QUEEN'S JOURNAL, Kingston, Ontario**

***Section editor (November 1998 – April 2001)***

- Edited three sections of the student newspaper, beginning with the Opinions section, moving to the editorial page, and concluding with the Arts and Entertainment section.

- Developed editorial skills such as learning to work with contributing writers and other editors.
- Contributed articles to all sections of the newspaper

## **COURSES TAUGHT**

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- Theory in Journalism and Mass Communications
- Introductory Skills: New Media Journalism
- Reading Media
- Communications and Society
- Applied Media Research
- Web Writing and Design
- The Role of Media in Society
- Multi-Platform Community Reporting
- Introduction to Journalism and Public Relations
- Advanced Online Journalism
- News Reporting
- Audiences and the Public

## **JOURNAL ARTICLES**

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- Rowe, Dan and Marti Howell. "Power *Wire*: Understanding the Depiction of Power in TV Drama." Volume 7 of *The Journal of the Institute of Justice & International Studies*, October 2009.

## **SPECIAL PUBLICATION**

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- Solis, Patricia and 50 co-authors (incl. Dan Rowe). (2011). *Climate Change and Hazards in the Americas: International Interdisciplinary Research Directions and Opportunities*. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Geographers.

## CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION

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- Participated in the Institute for the Integration of Research on Climate Change and Hazards in the Americas sponsored by the U.S. National Science Foundation's Pan-American Advanced Studies Institute Program. The institute met in Panama City, Panama between June 14 and June 25, 2010.

## CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

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- Rowe, Dan. "Comparing and Contrasting the Challenge Faced by Journalists Reporting on Climate Change During the 2008 Elections in Canada and the U.S." Presented at the 2010 Canadian Communication Association conference in Montreal, QC in June 2010.
- Rowe, Dan. "Reporting the 'Green Shift': Newspaper Journalists on the Challenges of Covering the Climate Change Policy Debate in the 2008 Canadian Federal Election." Presented at Qualitatives 2010: The 27<sup>th</sup> Annual Qualitative Analysis Conference in Brantford, ON in May 2010.
- Rowe, Dan. "Newspaper Coverage of Climate Change During the 2008 Canadian Federal Election." Presented at the 2009 Canadian Communication Association in Ottawa, ON in May 2009.
- Rowe, Dan. "The Effect of Polls and Election Coverage: The 2006 Canadian Federal Election." Presented at the AEJMC Midwinter Conference in Norman, Oklahoma in March 2009.
- Rowe, Dan and Marti Howell. "Power *Wire*: Depictions of Power in TV Drama." Presented at the Crime and Popular Culture Conference in Warrensburg, Missouri in October 2008.
- Deppa, Joan and Dan Rowe. "Exploring Coverage of Global Warming in North America, Europe and Asia." Presented at the AEJMC Conference in Chicago, IL, August 2008.
- Rowe, Dan. "Changing Media Depictions of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside." Presented at the Canadian Communications Association Annual Conference in Vancouver, B.C., June 2008

## INVITED PRESENTATIONS

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- “Incorporating Environmental Concerns into Affordable Housing Strategies.” Group presentation (with Liza Horowitz and Mike Charendoff) to the board of the MultiFaith Alliance to End Homelessness, Toronto, ON, March 2010.
- “Environmental Reporting.” Critical Journalism class, University of Toronto – Scarborough Campus, November 2009.
- “The Past, Present and Future of the Book Publishing Industry.” Communications and Society class, Syracuse University, March 2009.
- “The Canadian Media Landscape.” Communications and Society class, Syracuse University, April 2007.
- “Magazines: From *Life* to *Cat Fancy*.” Communications and Society class, Syracuse University, February 2007.
- “The World of Book Publishing.” Communications and Society class, Syracuse University, January 2007.
- “Tips for More Effective Interviewing.” Political Reporting class, Syracuse University, November 2006.
- “Internships and Beyond.” The staff of *The Queen’s Journal* student newspaper, Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario. February 2006.

### **RECENT NON-ACADEMIC WRITING (SELECTED)**

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- Rowe, Dan. (Winter 2010). “Cancon.” (A review of three books about the Canadian conservatism.) *Canadian Notes & Queries*, 78.
- Rowe, Dan. (2010, March). “Review of Rod McQueen’s *BlackBerry: The Inside Story of Research In Motion*.” *Quill & Quire*. 76 (2).
- Rowe, Dan. (2010, February 20). “A career spent being curious about Vancouver.” *Vancouver Sun*, p. F10.
- Rowe, Dan. (2010, January/February). “Look to the stars.” *Quill & Quire*. 76 (1).
- Rowe, Dan. (2009, December.) “Review of Harvey Sawler’s *Frank McKenna: Beyond Politics*.” *Quill & Quire*. 75 (10).
- Rowe, Dan. (2009, November). “Review of Gordon Laird’s *The Price of a Bargain: The Quest for Cheap and the Death of Globalization*.” *Quill & Quire*. 75 (9).

- Rowe, Dan. (2009, October). "Tundra in transition." *Quill & Quire*. 75 (8).
- Rowe, Dan. (2009, September). "Review of Hal Niedzviecki's *The Peep Diaries: How We're Learning to Love Watching Ourselves and Our Neighbours*." *Quill & Quire*. 75 (7).
- Rowe, Dan. (2009, May). "Review of Rudyard Griffiths's *Who We Are: A Citizen's Manifesto*." *Quill & Quire*. 75 (4).
- Rowe, Dan. (2008, December). "Review of John Ralston Saul's *A Fair Country: Telling Truths About Canada*." *Quill & Quire*. 74 (10).
- Rowe, Dan. (2008, December). "Review of Kenneth Whyte's *The Uncrowned King: The Sensational Rise of William Randolph Hearst*." *Quill & Quire*, 74 (10).
- Rowe, Dan. (2008, October). "Review of Patrick Brown's *Butterfly Mind: Revolution, Recovery, and One Reporter's Road to Understanding China*." *Quill & Quire*, 74 (8), 45.
- Rowe, Dan. (2008, August 30). "Reimagining the past; Lee Henderson conjures up Vancouver in the 1880s." *The Vancouver Sun*, pp. C11.
- Rowe, Dan. (2008, April). "Review of *My Life As a Dame: The Personal and the Political in the Writings of Christina McCall*." *Quill & Quire*, 74 (3), 37.
- Rowe, Dan. (2008, April). "Review of Mel Hurtig's *The Truth About Canada: Some Important, Some Astonishing, and Some Truly Appalling Things All Canadians Should Know About Their Country*." *Quill & Quire*, 74 (3), 41.
- Rowe, Dan. (2008, January/February). "Media moguls [Review of Marc Edge's *Asper Nation: Canada's Most Dangerous Media Company* and *High Wire Act: Ted Rogers and the Empire that Debt Built*]." *Quill & Quire*, 74 (1), 54.
- Rowe, Dan. (2008, January 12). "Terrific, like Tom; Lydia Millet follows novelist Perrotta's lead to great effect." *The Vancouver Sun*, pp. C9.
- Rowe, Dan. (2007, December). "Review of George Tombs' *Robber Baron: Lord Black of Crossharbor*." *Quill & Quire*, 73 (10), 39.
- Rowe, Dan. (2007, November). "Review of Warren Kinsella's *The War Room: Political Strategies for Business, NGOs, and Anyone Who Wants to Win*." *Quill & Quire*, 73 (9), 33.
- Rowe, Dan. (2007, October). "Masters of disaster [Review of Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*]." *Quill & Quire*, 73 (8), 42.

- Rowe, Dan. (2007, July/August). "The good old days [Review of Roy MacGregor's *Canadians: A Portrait of a Century and Its People*, Rudyard Griffith's *Great Questions of Canada (Revised Edition)* and Andrew Cohen's *The Unfinished Canadians: The People We Are*]." *Quill & Quire*, 73 (6), 54.
- Rowe, Dan. (2007, June). "Review of J.L. Granatstein's *Whose War Is It? How Canada Can Survive the Post 9/11 World* and Linda McQuaig's *Holding the Bully's Coat: Canada and the U.S. Empire*." *Quill & Quire*, 73 (5), 43.
- Rowe, Dan. (2007, May). "Review of Chantal Hebert's *French Kiss: Stephen Harper's Blind Date with Quebec*." *Quill & Quire*, 73 (4), 36.
- Rowe, Dan. (2007, February 24). "As ever, war is hell: U.S. soldier Joshua Key walked away from the Iraq War but seems not to have processed what he learned." *The Vancouver Sun*, pp. C9.
- Rowe, Dan. (2006, December 2). "A slice of Dublin life: A Roddy Doyle character from 1997 comes back, in better shape." *The Vancouver Sun*, pp. C10.
- Rowe, Dan. (2005, September 17). "A friendship doomed to end badly; The case of former prime minister Brian Mulroney and writer Peter Newman isn't unusual. Subjects and biographers often become enemies." *The Globe and Mail*, pp. R6.

#### **SERVICE TO DEPARTMENT, UNIVERSITY, AND DISCIPLINE**

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- Paper reviewer for International Communication Division of the 2011 Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication conference

#### **PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS**

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- Canadian Communication Association
- Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication

#### **REFERENCES**

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