

**All Things Gomery:
The use of the strategic frame in the coverage
of Gomery in English Canadian newspapers**

By Shannon Sampert, PhD
Department of Politics
University of Winnipeg
s.sampert@uwinnipeg.ca

Paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association,
York University

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It was a political event that had all the ingredients for a great news story. A secret slush fund set up to promote federalism. Taxpayer's money being spent inappropriately and a government that some felt had been in power for too long. For most of 2005, the words Gomery and sponsorship scandal became a part of Canada's political lexicon. This paper examines the agenda setting and framing functions of English Canada's two national newspapers in its coverage of the sponsorship scandal and the Gomery inquiry during four distinct time frames: May 3rd to May 10th, 2005 when Chuck Guité testified at the Gomery inquiry; May 23rd to May 30th, the time period following the release of the forensic accounts report to the inquiry; June 16th to 23rd when final arguments were made; and finally October 31st to November 7th, 2005 when the Gomery report was tabled. I argue that from an agenda setting perspective, the Gomery inquiry was an important news stories, driven by news values of conflict and drama. I also argue that the bulk of the reporting in both national newspapers framed Gomery strategically, with the focus on the "game frame". The outcome is coverage that lacked an in-depth analysis of the institutional environment that allowed the sponsorship scandal to occur. Instead, I suggest that while the Gomery inquiry garnered a great deal of coverage, the information presented to the public was highly interpretive relying on drama and conflict and arguably diminishing the debate on potential change in government accountability.

Background

In spring, 2002, the *Globe and Mail* using the Access to Information Act broke the story that the government had paid out \$550-thousand dollars to Groupaction Marketing for a report that was never written. Then Prime Minister Jean Chrétien asked Auditor General Sheila Fraser to investigate those allegations and in February 2004, she released her findings. What Fraser determined was that senior government officials running advertising and sponsorship contracts in Quebec and five Crown Corporations did not follow rules for contracting out and as such, "mishandled millions of dollars since 1995."¹ Fraser called the handling of the sponsorship contracts a "blatant misuse of public funds that is shocking. I am actually appalled by what we've found."²

Fraser's report and "revelations from the unraveling scandal"³ hurt the Liberals dearly. While Martin had asked Justice Gomery to hold an inquiry into the sponsorship scandal, his government cut short the House of Commons Committee on Public Works whose mandate it was to determine "who created the sponsorship program, whether ministers and bureaucrats followed parliamentary rules in conducting the program and whether politicians broke the law."⁴ The specter of the sponsorship scandal hurt the Liberals

¹ CBC News Online. *Indepth: Auditor General*. 11 February 2004. www.cbc.ca. Downloaded 23 May 2005.

² *ibid.*

³ CBC News Online. *Indepth: Federal Sponsorship Scandal* 01 February 2006. www.cbc.ca. Downloaded 08 February 2006.

⁴ *Ibid.*

considerably at the polls in June and the Liberals lost their majority hold in the House of Commons.

In September, 2004, Justice John Gomery began hearings into the sponsorship scandal. At first, the hearings were conducted under a publication ban, but that was lifted in part in April of 2005 and then more substantively in May. In May, Charles Chuck Guité, the man who oversaw the public works sponsorship program from 1996 to 1999 took the stand and testified to his role in the program. A publication ban on his testimony was lifted by Gomery, and reporters were allowed to report freely on what was being said. Later that month, a forensic accounting team released its report into the sponsorship scandal that increased the dollar figure on the amount of money spent on the scandal, suggesting that the Liberal government had spent \$355 million on sponsorship contracts rather than the original \$250 million cited by Fraser.⁵ In June, final arguments wrapped up and the first report from Gomery was tabled in the House of Commons on November 1, 2005. The Conservatives, quick to act on the outrage over the Gomery report, worked with the NDP to bring down the Liberal minority quickly thereafter with a non-confidence motion in the House of Commons. On November 28, 2005, the Liberal government fell, with Stephen Harper's Conservatives taking the helm, but again, as a minority government.

Agenda setting, framing and news values

The media are the primary conduit through which the public learns about political events. As David Taras suggests denying the media's power to shape public perceptions and influence government is akin to "arguing that the earth is flat or that Tinkerbell and the Tooth Fairy are real."⁶ The media have the ability to "alert the public about which events are important and to set the context within which those events could be understood."⁷ They do this in part through agenda setting and framing, both of which are influenced by dominant news values. According to Tamar Liebes, news values or newsworthiness is "the principle guiding selectivity."⁸ In other words, journalists use criteria by which a news stories is judged to be important or newsworthy. The media present a highly selective sample of events daily. Journalists are not like *National Postal* workers who deliver all messages. Instead, they select from thousands of pieces of information what they will cover.⁹ How an everyday occurrence becomes a news story is based on the journalistic bias towards enduring news values of "drama, timeliness, negativity, (and) conflict."¹⁰ Further, Regina Lawrence posits that media coverage of policy making is "most newsworthy" when "it is marked by a clear conflict that promises a resolution."¹¹

⁵ CBC News Online. *Indepth: Federal Sponsorship ScandalTimeline*. 05 May 2006. www.cbc.ca. Downloaded 23 May 2006.

⁶ Taras, David. *The NewsMakers: The Media's Influence On Canadian Politics*. (Toronto: Nelson Canada, 1990) 3.

⁷ Ibid, 30.

⁸ Liebes, Tamar. "Inside a News Item: A Dispute over Framing" *Political Communication* 17:4. 295.

⁹ Bain, George. *Gotcha! How the media distorts the news* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1994) 3.

¹⁰ Robert Hackett and Yuezhi Zhao, *Sustaining Democracy? Journalism and the Politics of Objectivity* (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1998) at 143.

¹¹ Lawrence, Regina G. "Game-Framing the Issues: Tracking the Strategy Frame in Public Policy News" *Political Communication* 17:2. 96.

In other words, policy debates and more generally debates about government actions are not given attention in the news media unless there is a clear outcome to those debates.

Based on this, it becomes clear that the Gomery inquiry, as a policy debate, contained all the main ingredients for a good news story. It provided drama, timeliness, negativity and conflict. Moreover, the conflict can be described as “conflict with movement” which means that the Gomery inquiry provided “clear, chronological markers” and an “identifiable outcome” – a final report that establishes responsibility.¹² In this analysis, I studied first the agenda setting function of the media when it comes to dealing with Gomery. This is important because there is evidence that “increased issue salience for the media leads to increased salience for the public.”¹³ How much newspapers space was given to the coverage of Gomery and what type of coverage was provided?

Second, this paper looks at how Gomery was framed. Framing “refers to subtle alterations in the statement or presentation of judgement and choice problems, and the term ‘framing effects’ refers to changes in decision outcomes resulting from these alterations.”¹⁴ Framing “asserts that issues, in and of themselves, can be arranged or presented in multiple fashions and as such influence citizens’ ensuing issue considerations and levels of policy support.”¹⁵ Framing “defines and constructs a political issue or public controversy.”¹⁶ In short, framing elevates some issues and downplays others and in the process, shapes and mediates public opinion.

Studies have indicated that journalists rely on the use of the game frame when they cover elections. In fact, the use of the game frame as a news practise in Canada was determined as early as 1979. The game frame in elections in essence “shapes the selection and content of news stories focusing on the horse-race elements of the campaign.”¹⁷ Inherent in the use of the game frame is an emphasis on battle or sports metaphors and a focus on winners and losers. While there has been a focus on the media’s use of the game frame during elections, there has been less emphasis on its use in Canada during policy discussions and this is a gap this paper hopes to address. As Lawrence determines, the use of a game frame in reporting a public policy issue is more likely to occur when the news event has what I have previously described as conflict with movement. In other words, when there are clear, chronological steps to the public policy debate. Moreover, the game frame is likely to be applied to public policy issues when they are discussed in national election news.¹⁸ Gomery, while not part of a national

¹² Ibid, 97.

¹³ Soroka, Stuart. “Issue Attributes and Agenda-Setting by Media, the Public, and Policymakers in Canada.” *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 14:3. 265.

¹⁴ Iyengar, Shanto. *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991) 11.

¹⁵ Terkildsen, Nayda and Frauke Schnell, “How Media Frames Move Public Opinion: An analysis of the Women’s Movement.” (1997) 50 *Political Research Quarterly*. 880 at 880.

¹⁶ Nelson, Thomas E., Rosalee A. Clawson, and Zoe M. Oxley, “Media Framing of a Civil Liberties Conflict and Its Effect on Tolerance.” (1997) 91 *American Political Science Review*. 567 at 567.

¹⁷ Trimble, Linda and Shannon Sampert. “Who’s in the Game? The Framing of the Canadian Election 2000 by *The Globe and Mail* and *The National Post*.” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 37:1 (March 2004) 51.

¹⁸ Ibid, 98.

election story, was viewed by journalists as a precursor to a federal election, particularly since Prime Minister Martin promised to call an election after the final Gomery report was tabled.

By comparison, an issue frame provides an understanding of the news story that focuses on the issue itself rather than on conflict or personalities. The issue frame does not personalize the coverage with stories about performance or winning or losing, but instead provides information about the issue under discussion. Joseph Capella and Kathleen Hall Jamieson's analysis of the use of strategic or game frame dominated during policy discussions in the United States on health care reform in the early 1990s.¹⁹ Moreover, Lawrence's analysis determined that the depiction of the policy making process as game replete with a finish line and a score was evident during Clinton's welfare reform package in 1996.²⁰

Methodology

As I suggested, I conducted this analysis over four discreet time periods in 2005 that I considered to be highlights of the sponsorship scandal. The first time frame covered the testimony of one of the principle players in the scandal, Chuck Guité. The second time frame involved the release of the forensic accounting report. The third time frame included the wrap up of the final arguments. The fourth and final time frame covered the tabling of Gomery's first report to the House of Commons. I relied on the Factiva database to collect all newspapers stories published in the *Globe and Mail* and the *National Post* during the time periods outlined. I used the key words Gomery and sponsorship scandal to find the news stories. I then hired a research assistant to conduct a content analysis of the stories.²¹

Using Taras's criteria to determine Canada's most influential media outlets, which include national audience and resources, it becomes clear that both the *National Post* and the *Globe* can be considered within the inner ring in the country.²² Moreover, the *National Post* and the *Globe* are important to study because, particularly in the era of media concentration, both these newspapers tend to set the news agenda for other media.²³ What is considered important by the *National Post* or the *Globe* will likely be given some treatment on national television and in the local papers as well. Second, both newspapers are read with considerable interest by political strategists and researchers and news items covered in English Canada's national newspaper may become fodder for questions in Question Period.²⁴ Indeed, interest in the sponsorship program in Quebec was sparked by the work of Daniel Leblanc and Campbell Clark in the *Globe and Mail* who used the Access to Information Act to break the story about the sponsorship scandal.

¹⁹ Cappella Joseph and Kathleen Hall Jamieson. *Spiral of Cynicism: The Press and the Public Good*. (New York: Oxford, 1997) 34.

²⁰ Lawrence, 96.

²¹ I would like to thank Matthew Molnar for his assistance in coding this analysis.

²² Taras, 87.

²³ Sampert, Shannon. *Let Me Tell You A Story: The Depiction of Sexual Assault Crimes in English Canadian Newspapers in 2002*. Unpublishe PhD Disseration (University of Alberta: 2006) 85.

²⁴ Taras, 87.

This certainly set the tone for questions in the House of Commons that led ultimately to the Gomery inquiry.²⁵

To determine how both newspapers portrayed the Gomery inquiry, I utilized content analysis. Content analysis is defined as “objective and systematic counting and recording procedures to produce a quantitative description of the symbolic content in a text.”²⁶ In coding the stories, I was interested in examining the agenda setting and framing of the news reports. Thus, to determine the agenda setting aspects of the story, I looked at where the stories appeared and the type of news story it was. To determine the framing of the story, I coded to determine whether the focus was on a strategic or an issue frame. Was it a general overview of the inquiry or did it employ game metaphors? Moreover, I also coded to determine who was quoted first in the coverage and who was quoted second. Because news stories are designed along the lines of an inverted pyramid with the most important information placed near the beginning of the article, and the less important information appearing near the end, it is important to systematically study who was considered the most important source for the story. I also coded to determine who the second source was. The second source is often put into the position of having to refute the world view of the first source, and this I considered this to also be important.

Further, I coded all stories to determine the tone of coverage. As I have already suggested, I am arguing that the Gomery coverage relied on the game frame that looked at the issue in terms of winners and losers. Determining how both newspapers viewed the main players in Gomery—the Liberal Party of Canada, Prime Minister Paul Martin and his government, former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, and Opposition leader Stephen Harper and his MPs – would also be insightful. Thus the stories were coded to determine if these actors were portrayed in a positive, negative, or neutral manner. It is important to point out that the allegations made could hardly be viewed as positive, thus, the coding determined that if the information about the allegations was presented in language that was not highly inflammatory, it was considered to be a statement of fact and thus was coded as being neutral.

Finally, as indicated I broke the coverage down into four discreet time frames to determine if there were differences in the way the story was covered in either paper, as the inquiry continued. Originally, I felt that there would be more coverage of Gomery in the initial stages of the inquiry, during Chuck Guitee’s testimony, however it became clear that there was more coverage during the final time frame when the first report was tabled. Again, this supports Lawrence’s assertion that policy discussions and more generally coverage of government events are more likely to garner media attention when there is a concrete outcome.²⁷

²⁵ Press, Jordan. “*Globe* sponsorship coverage wins Michener Award” *Globe and Mail* (15 April 2005) A3.

²⁶ W. Lawrence Neuman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* 4th Edition (Toronto: Allyn and Bacon, 2000) at 293.

²⁷ Lawrence, 98.

The Findings -- Agenda Setting

From an agenda setting perspective, it becomes clear that both newspapers considered Gomery to be an important news story. Indeed, the *National Post* ran 85 stories on Gomery during the four time periods, while the *Globe and Mail* ran significantly less – 65. The story made the front page in the *Post* seven times (8.2% of the total stories in the *Post*) and nine times (13.8% of the total stories) in the *Globe and Mail*. The bulk of the coverage occurred when the first report of the inquiry was tabled in the House of Commons, October 31st to November 7, 2005. Sixty-four stories were published in that six day period, 40 in the *National Post* (47% of its overall coverage) and 24 in the *Globe and Mail* (36.9% of its overall coverage). The time frame that covered the Guité’s testimony, May 3rd to May 10th also yielded a great deal of coverage with the *Globe* dedicating 23 stories in that time frame (35.3% of its total stories) compared to 27 stories in the *Post* (31.8% of its total coverage).

Location of story by newspaper and time frame

<i>National Post</i>	May 3 to May 10	May 23 to May 30	June 16 to June 23	October 31 to November 7	Total
Front Page	3	2	0	2	7
% within time	11.1%	15.4%	.0%	5.0%	8.2%
Front Section	15	9	3	28	55
% within time	55.6%	69.2%	60.0%	70.0%	64.7%
Editorial Page	4	1	1	5	11
% within time	14.8%	7.7%	20.0%	12.5%	12.9%
Comment	4	1	1	4	10
% within time	14.8%	7.7%	20.0%	10.0%	11.8%
Other	1	0	0	1	2
% within time	3.7%	.0%	.0%	2.5%	2.4%
Total	27	13	5	40	85
% within time	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<i>Globe & Mail</i>	May 3 to May 10	May 23 to May 30	June 16 to June 23	October 31 to November 7	Total
Front Page	4	3	0	2	9
% within time	17.4%	23.1%	.0%	8.3%	13.8%
Front Section	14	8	4	15	41
% within time	60.9%	61.5%	80.0%	32.5%	63.1%
Editorial Page	2	0	0	1	3
% within time	8.7%	.0%	.0%	4.2%	4.6%
Comment	2	2	1	5	10
% within time	8.7%	15.4%	20.0%	20.8%	15.4%
Other	1	0	0	1	2
% within time	4.2%	.0%	.0%	4.2%	3.0%
Total	23	13	5	24	65
% within time	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The emphasis on the latter part of the Gomery inquiry certainly supports Lawrence’s assertion that news organizations need to “focus their limited space or time resources on the most consequential policy issues.”²⁸ The focus on the final stage of the inquiry, where there are findings of responsibility, is understandable. As Lawrence suggests the

²⁸ Lawrence, 97.

more important policy discussions are to “political futures of politicians, parties and administrations, the more attention should be paid to it.”²⁹

It is interesting that the *National Post* provided more coverage of Gomery than the *Globe and Mail* did. There were more stories and the story ran on the front page more often in the *Post* than in the *Globe*. This follows an earlier analysis by Trimble and Sampert comparing the coverage in the *Post* to the *Globe* in the 2000 federal election through an examination of headlines. In that study, the *Post* published 8% more stories on the federal election and tended to run headlines that were quite verbose.³⁰ In this case, the *Post* had 13.3% more stories than the *Globe* in its analysis of Gomery. Indeed, a former *Globe and Mail* editor suggests that the *National Post* “has a tendency to get onto an agenda story and hammer away at it in story after story. The *Globe* does not tend to do this. In the case of Gomery, the story fed into the *Post* agenda that the Liberal government was bad.”³¹

Not surprisingly, the bulk of the stories printed in both newspapers were news stories. In total, the *Post* had 59 news stories (69.4% of its total coverage) while the *Globe* had 36 (55.4% of its total coverage). Most surprisingly is the number of opinion pieces that ran in both papers on the topic. Overall, the *Post* ran more editorials on the topic than the *Globe* with 11 editorials compared to the *Globe*'s. However, largely because *Globe* columnist Christie Blatchford covered the inquiry and filed regular columns as a result, the *Globe* had more columns than the *Post*. The *Globe* ran 26 columns on the topic compared to only 14 columns in the *Post*. In total, opinion pieces made up 44.6% of the *Globe*'s overall coverage and 29.4% of the *Post*'s.

This is significant for a number of reasons. First, columnists and editorials are not expected to be neutral in their analysis of the news. Indeed, there is an expectation that a stance will be taken. Editorials are important because as van Dijk suggests, they are “the place for newspaper ideologies”³² (emphasis the author's). Columns, on the other hand “is writing with a point of view. It comes with an attitude.”³³ Overall, columnists are expected to provide an interpretive analysis of the news.³⁴ This means that a large percentage of what Canadians read about the Gomery inquiry was deliberately written with a political stance with no need to claim objectivity. This suggest further that the coverage of Gomery in the *Globe* in particular and to a lesser degree in the *Post*, relies on the columnists' interpretation of the events and allows for a more personalized perspective of the inquiry. This was particularly telling in that Blatchford's columns talked in detail about the physical appearances of the men testifying or describes their actions while appearing in front of Gomery.

The Findings -- Framing

²⁹ Ibid, 97.

³⁰ Trimble and Sampert, 68.

³¹ Cox, Bob. E-Mail correspondence. (19 May 2006).

³² van Dijk, Teun. *Racism and the Press* (Routledge: New York, 1991) at 150.

³³ Kostyu, Paul. “Columns are daily puzzles” in Jun/Jul 2004 92:5 *The Quill*. 44 at 44.

³⁴ Hackett, Robert A. and Yuezhi Zhao, *Sustaining Democracy? Journalism and the Politics of Objectivity*. (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1998) 42.

Overall, the majority of the stories in both newspapers were framed with a strategic frame, relying on either sports or battle metaphors or portraying the issue as having a clear loser. Only 14.5% of the stories overall used an issue frame to tell the story of Gomery. Issue frame stories included straight coverage of the Gomery inquiry, stories that examined the economic impact of the sponsorship issue, or transcripts of the testimony. In the *Globe*, 9.8% of the stories (4 stories) were considered to be issue framed, while in the *Post* that number jumped to 17.4% (12 stories).³⁵ The majority of the stories were framed strategically as either a game or a scandal or depicted as having winners and losers, or political fall out. It also becomes clear that as the coverage of Gomery continued, the framing of the story also changed. In the *Post* at the beginning of the coverage, during the coverage of Chuck Guité’s testimony, the frame was dominated by stories that used sports or game metaphors. However, when the Gomery report was tabled, the frame shifted in the *Post* to a winner/loser frame. In the *Globe*, Guité’s testimony was also framed as a “game,” but the stories that covered the final report shifted to be framed in terms of political fallout or winners and losers.

Framing of story by newspaper and time frame

<i>National Post</i>	May 3 to May 10	May 23 to May 30	June 16 to June 23	October 31 to November 7	Total
Strategic	21	6	4	26	57
% within time	95.5%	66.7%	100.0%	75.5%	82.6%
Issue	6	7	1	14	28
% within time	22.2%	53.8%	20.0%	35.0%	32.9%
Total	27	13	5	40	85
% within time	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<i>Globe & Mail</i>	May 3 to May 10	May 23 to May 30	June 16 to June 23	October 31 to November 7	Total
Strategic	11	5	3	18	37
% within time	47.8%	38.5%	60.0%	75.0%	56.9%
Issue	12	8	2	6	28
% within time	52.2%	61.5%	40.0%	25.0%	43.1%
Total	23	13	5	24	65
% within time	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

When looking at both newspapers, the use of the strategic frame was dominant in editorial and columns. It was used in 83% (45 stories) of the editorials and columns, while the issue frame was used in only 16% of the opinion pieces (9 stories). Conversely, news stories were just as likely to be framed strategically as they were to be issued framed. Slightly more than half of the news stories (51.5% or 49 stories) were framed strategically while 49.5% were issue framed (47 stories). However, when you look at the papers individually, some interesting differences do occur. All but one of the *Post*’s opinion pieces were framed strategically (96% or 24 stories). In the *Globe*, that percentage drops to 72.4% (21 out of 29 stories).

The *Post* utilized sources in the most of its stories (82 out of 85 stories or 96.4%); however, in the *Globe* 12.3% of the stories did not have a source quoted directly quoted

³⁵³⁵ At this point, an intercoder reliability has not been conducted on this analysis and thus these numbers may change. Please ensure that you contact the author before citing this paper.

(57 stories out of 65 utilized sources). The fact that more than 10% of the *Globe* stories were written without source attribution is due in part to the prevalence of columns written about Gomery. This suggests that the newspaper coverage in the *Globe* of Gomery is mirroring television coverage of politicians in the U.S. Research there indicates that politicians have become “almost voiceless” because of journalists increased interpretive coverage.³⁶ In other words, the main players in political events are not given the opportunity to directly speak, but instead their responses are summarized and paraphrased, often negatively.³⁷

In the Gomery coverage, Justice Gomery was not surprisingly the most frequently quoted news source in both papers. In the *National Post*, he was quoted in 14 stories (16.5% of the coverage) while in the *Globe*, he was the first source in significantly less stories – only 5 (7.7% of the overall coverage). Former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, Harper, and Martin or their spokespersons were also in the top five of the first sources quoted in both papers. In the *National Post*, six stories each quoted Chrétien, Harper or Martin first (7% of the overall stories). In the *Globe*, Harper was the first person quoted in four stories (6.1% of the total stories), while Chrétien was quoted first in 3 stories (4.6% of the total stories) and Martin twice (3% of the total stories).

Gomery was also the second source quoted in the majority of the stories printed in both the *National Post* and the *Globe*. Gomery was the second source in 13 stories (15.3% of the overall stories) in the *National Post* and in 8 stories in the *Globe* (12.3%). In most cases, Gomery was quoted second while witnesses to the hearing were quoted first. Thus, Gomery is put in the position of either reinforcing or refuting the position put forth by the first person quoted. Overall, it becomes clear that Gomery was seen as an important source for use by both newspapers and his voice was given dominance in stories that contained a quotation. The use of Gomery as a first and a second source was particularly dominant during the final phase of coverage analyzed, when the final report was tabled.

Not surprisingly, the tone toward the Liberal Party of Canada in the coverage in both newspapers was overwhelmingly negative. However, what was interesting is that the coverage in both papers was not particularly positive toward Stephen Harper. This then suggests that while the strategic frame utilized by both papers demonstrated a clear loser, there was no clear winner in the coverage overall. In the *National Post*, 42 stories that mentioned the Liberal Party were negative in tone (49.4% of the stories), while 14 were neutral (16.5% of the stories) and one was positive (1.2% of the stories). In the *Globe*, the tone toward the Liberals was negative in 34 stories (52.3% of the overall stories) and neutral in 13 (20%). In the *National Post*, the negative covered for the Party was found primarily during the time frame that detailed the tabling of the final report. In the *Globe*, it was somewhat evenly split between the Guité testimony and the final report time periods.

Tone toward Liberal Party of Canada by newspaper and time frame

³⁶ Mazzoleni, Gianpietro and Winfried Schulz. “‘Mediatization’ of Politics: A Challenge for Democracy?” *Political Communication*. 16, 1999. 251.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 251.

<i>National Post</i>	May 3 to May 10	May 23 to May 30	June 16 to June 23	October 31 to November 7	Total
Positive	1	0	0	0	1
% within time	3.7%	.0%	.0%	.0%	1.2%
Negative	7	7	2	26	42
% within time	25.9%	53.8%	40.0%	65.0%	49.4%
Neutral	5	3	0	6	14
% within time	18.5%	23.1%	.0%	15.0%	16.5%
No Mention	14	3	3	8	28
% within time	51.9%	23.1%	60.0%	20.0%	32.9%
Total	27	13	5	40	85
% within time	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<i>Globe & Mail</i>	May 3 to May 10	May 23 to May 30	June 16 to June 23	October 31 to November 7	Total
Positive	0	0	0	0	0
% within time	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%
Negative	13	8	2	11	34
% within time	56.5%	61.5%	40.0%	45.8%	52.3%
Neutral	5	3	0	5	13
% within time	20.8%	23.1%	.0%	20.8%	20.0%
No Mention	5	2	3	8	18
% within time	21.7%	15.4%	60.0%	33.3%	27.7%
Total	23	13	5	24	65
% within time	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The treatment of former Prime Minister Chrétien was surprisingly muted. Only 42 stories named Chrétien in the *National Post* and 39 in the *Globe* and in those stories, the tone toward Chrétien made it clear that he was not the fall guy for culpability in the Gomery coverage. The tone toward Chrétien was viewed as negative in 21 stories in the *National Post* (or 24.7% of the overall coverage) while in the *Globe*, that number dropped to six stories that were considered negative (9.2% of the overall coverage). For Chrétien, the negative coverage in the *National Post* was found predominantly in the coverage of the final report.

Tone toward Chrétien by newspaper and time frame

<i>National Post</i>	May 3 to May 10	May 23 to May 30	June 16 to June 23	October 31 to November 7	Total
Positive	1	1	0	0	2
% within time	3.7%	7.7%	.0%	.0%	2.4%
Negative	2	0	2	17	21
% within time	7.4%	.0%	4.0%	42.5%	24.7%
Neutral	5	4	3	7	19
% within time	18.5%	30.8%	60.0%	17.5%	22.4%
No Mention	19	8	0	16	43
% within time	70.4%	61.5%	.0%	40.0%	50.6%
Total	27	13	5	40	85
% within time	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<i>Globe & Mail</i>	May 3 to May 10	May 23 to May 30	June 16 to June 23	October 31 to November 7	Total
Positive	0	0	1	0	1
% within time	.0%	.0%	20.0%	.0%	1.5%
Negative	2	1	0	3	6
% within time	8.7 %	7.7%	.0%	12.5%	9.2%
Neutral	10	8	3	11	32

% within time	43.5%	61.5%	60.0%	45.8%	49.2%
No Mention	11	4	1	10	26
% within time	47.8%	30.8%	20.0%	41.7%	40.0%
Total	23	13	5	24	65
% within time	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Additionally, Paul Martin's treatment in both newspapers, while not overwhelmingly positive, did not hold him out as the scapegoat for the Liberal party's actions. In the *National Post*, the tone toward Martin was viewed as positive in 4 stories (4.7% of the overall stories), negative in 30 stories (35.3% of the overall coverage) and neutral in 19 stories (22.4% of the overall stories). In the *Globe*, the coverage is positive in one story (1.5%), negative in 15 stories (23%) and neutral in 21 (32.3%). For Martin, particularly in the *Globe*, the negative coverage became more dominant during the time frame that covered the tabling of the final report.

Tone toward Martin by newspaper and time frame

<i>National Post</i>	May 3 to May 10	May 23 to May 30	June 16 to June 23	October 31 to November 7	Total
Positive	1	0	1	2	4
% within time	3.7%	.0%	20.0%	5.0%	4.7%
Negative	9	5	3	13	30
% within time	33.0%	38.5%	60.0%	32.5%	35.3%
Neutral	5	2	0	12	19
% within time	18.5%	15.4%	.0%	30.0%	22.4%
No Mention	12	6	1	13	32
% within time	44.4%	46.2%	20.0%	32.5%	37.6%
Total	27	13	5	40	85
% within time	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<i>Globe & Mail</i>	May 3 to May 10	May 23 to May 30	June 16 to June 23	October 31 to November 7	Total
Positive	1	0	0	0	1
% within time	4.3%	.0%	.0%	.0%	1.5%
Negative	2	1	0	12	15
% within time	8.7%	7.7%	.0%	50.0%	23.1%
Neutral	4	7	3	7	21
% within time	17.4%	53.8%	60.0%	29.2%	32.3%
No Mention	16	5	2	5	28
% within time	69.6%	38.5%	40.0%	20.8%	43.1%
Total	23	13	5	24	65
% within time	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Finally, as stated previously Harper was not considered the stand out winner in the Gomery coverage. Only 4 stories (4.7% of the overall stories) in the *Post* treated Harper positively, while another 10 stories were negative (11.8% of the stories) and 5 were neutral (5.9%). In the *Globe*, only 2 stories were considered positive toward Harper (3.0% of the overall stories), while 8 were negative (12.3%) and 7 were neutral (10.8%). In Harper's case, in both papers, the negative stories dominated the time frame that reported on Guité's testimony.

Tone toward Harper by newspaper and time frame

<i>National Post</i>	May 3 to May 10	May 23 to May 30	June 16 to June 23	October 31 to November 7	Total
Positive	1	1	0	2	4
% within time	3.7%	7.7%	.0%	5.0%	4.7%
Negative	7	0	0	3	10
% within time	25.9%	.0%	.0%	7.5%	11.8%
Neutral	5	1	2	9	17
% within time	18.5%	7.7%	40.0%	22.5%	20.0%
No Mention	14	11	3	26	54
% within time	51.9%	84.6%	60.0%	65.0%	63.5%
Total	27	13	5	40	85
% within time	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<i>Globe & Mail</i>	May 3 to May 10	May 23 to May 30	June 16 to June 23	October 31 to November 7	Total
Positive	0	0	0	2	2
% within time	.0%	.0%	.0%	8.3%	3.1%
Negative	4	0	1	3	8
% within time	17.4%	.0%	20.0%	12.5%	12.3%
Neutral	1	1	2	3	7
% within time	4.3%	7.7%	40.0%	12.5%	10.8%
No Mention	18	12	2	16	48
% within time	78.3%	92.3%	40.0%	66.7%	73.8%
Total	23	13	5	24	65
% within time	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Conclusion

This paper analyzed coverage of the Gomery commission along four distinct time frames in both of English Canada’s national newspapers. While the inquiry was not a debate about a public policy issue per se, it was a quasi-judicial inquiry into political party practices that raised fundamental questions about government ethics. Additionally, Prime Minister Martin made it clear that following the final findings of the Gomery commission in February, he would call a federal election. Of course that move was pre-empted by the Opposition Parties in December, forcing an early election call. However, it becomes clear that the newspapers under study evaluated Gomery in light of an election call and to a large degree a strategy frame was utilized to frame the coverage. It is also clear that from an agenda setting perspective, Gomery was viewed as an important story, largely because of its news values that included conflict and drama. Finally, it becomes clear that the events of Gomery were interpreted in opinion pieces without the need to demonstrate objectivity or balance.

Why is this significant? According to Cappella and Hall Jamieson, the use of the strategy or game frame can have an impact on the public’s cynicism about politicians. As they argue, press coverage is a factor “in declining confidence” in government institutions.³⁸ Moreover, while the Gomery inquiry did set out what went wrong, there was little coverage of discussions by any of the political parties on how to fix it. Government accountability and ethics remained framed as a political game of strategy rather than issues that required substantive research and discussion.

³⁸ Cappella and Hall Jamieson., 37.

The good news is that for some, the game schema can be considered useful in that it does provide the public with some information, albeit one-dimensional. Certainly Gomery did provide enough information for the public to respond at the polls in January to defeat the Liberals and elect a minority Tory government. As Lawrence points out quite rightly, “politics *is* often about battle and strategy and winning and losing, after all, and the motives of politicians *are* at times cynical.”³⁹ Perhaps then, the newspapers are only reflecting what the public actually feels.

³⁹ Lawrence, 111.

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