

## How do the media connect Canadians to their government?

### WHAT'S IN THIS SECTION

In this section you will read about the role of the media in communicating information about government actions.

You will find:

- Information on how the media affects current affairs and issues.
- Comments from a reporter describing the challenges of reporting political issues.
- Examples of news groups that communicate the diverse needs and perspectives of Canada's peoples.

### What are you looking for?

As you read this section, look for:

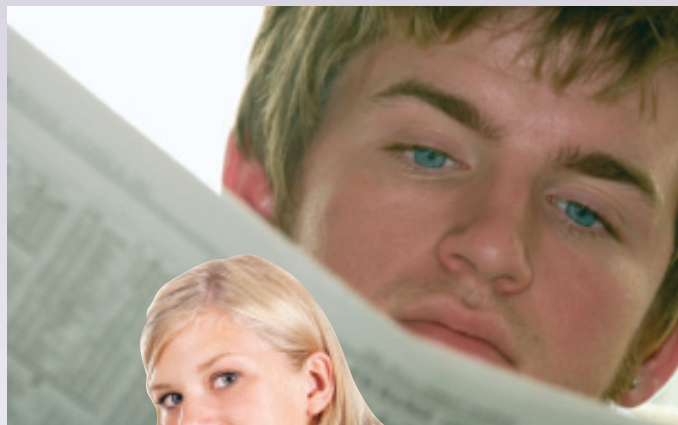
- How the media provides citizens opportunities to communicate their needs and concerns about political issues.

### THINK CRITICALLY: WHERE DO YOU GET YOUR NEWS?

How does the source of your news affect the information you get?

Do some formats communicate more effectively than others?

How do you know if you have access to reliable, balanced information?



## How do reporters see their role?

The media include newspapers, magazines, film, radio, television, the Internet, books and billboards. They deliver information and messages quickly to very large audiences.

The media don't just report the news. They influence our personal understanding of the world and how it works. All media messages are created by people who interpret the facts and make choices about how to tell the story. When a story is repeated in the media, it begins to affect what happens next.

Politicians develop key messages for the media, to control how the media present them, and to communicate what they want Canadians to know. Usually these are memorable quotes or phrases, almost like **slogans**.

Journalists make decisions about what news stories to cover and whose perspectives to include.

**slogan:** a phrase repeatedly used by politicians or marketers to present an idea

Our role is to inform people about the impact government is having on their lives. Because that's the essence of government: to try to change our society for the better. If they're not doing that, you vote them out and try someone else.

The big challenge for us is to get the truth. The truth is sometimes not very easy to find. You learn very quickly that the truth is not always what's on the government website. It's not in the first press release you pick up. You have to dig around. You have to find credible sources with credible information. You have to sort through the "spin" and the noise of Question Period to find those rare kernels of truth that people want to read about.



Don Martin is the national affairs columnist for the *Calgary Herald* and the *National Post*.



According to Mr. Martin, what is the main role of government? Do you agree or disagree? Why?



**CRITICAL THINKING CHALLENGE** How do different types of media cover government decision making? How do journalists get information? What is the relationship between politicians and the media?



**Why do you think groups in Canada want media outlets that serve their communities?**

## What's the Parliamentary Press Gallery?

Don Martin is a member of the Parliamentary Press Gallery, an association of reporters who cover the decisions and actions of Canada's government. The Press Gallery includes about 350 reporters from media outlets across Canada. For example, the Press Gallery includes:



**Aboriginal Peoples Television Network**

## ABORIGINAL PEOPLES TELEVISION NETWORK

APTN provides First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples "the opportunity to share their stories with all of Canada through a national television network dedicated to Aboriginal programming." APTN broadcasts in English, French and several Aboriginal languages.

## ASSOCIATION DE LA PRESSE FRANCOPHONE

This news organization serves Francophone communities outside of Québec. Its membership includes *Le Franco*, based in Edmonton. Why do you think Francophone communities in Alberta might have different perspectives on issues than Francophones living in Québec?



## CBC/RADIO-CANADA

CBC/Radio-Canada, Canada's public broadcaster, provides radio, television, Internet and satellite-based services in English, French and eight Aboriginal languages to all Canadians. It also broadcasts in nine languages to Canadians and international listeners abroad, and in eight languages to new and aspiring Canadians.

# LE DEVOIR

## LE DEVOIR

This French-language newspaper, based in Montréal, is distributed in Québec.



**How do you think the variety of Canada's media affect the way Canadians deal with issues?**

## MING PAO NEWS

This Chinese-language newspaper, based in Hong Kong, has Canadian editions in Toronto and Vancouver.

## OMNI TELEVISION

This television broadcaster aims to "reflect Canada's diversity through... multicultural, multilingual and multi-faith programming." It broadcasts in several languages and targets many cultural groups in Canada, including South Asian, Italian, Portuguese, Chinese, and Caribbean communities.

In this photo, NDP leader and MP Jack Layton answers reporters. Politicians answer reporters' questions as one way to connect to the public. They sometimes hold press conferences to communicate their ideas, concerns and positions on issues to citizens.





## HOW TO DETECT BIAS

The news media are one way we can explore perspectives on issues. You need a way to tell whether the news you read, watch and hear is accurate, and whether it reflects a balance of views and perspectives. You need to be on the alert for bias.

**Bias** is a type of thinking rooted in a person's point of view. Sometimes a bias towards one subject or another creates unbalanced information in the news. The key is to be open-minded when presenting and analyzing the issues.

Practise your skills of detecting bias using the article on this page. The following questions will help you pull apart and evaluate the article for bias.

- Who is the writer(s) or speaker(s)?
- Do they have authority to speak about the subject?
- Does the information provide facts and evidence?
- Does it use stereotyping, or appeal to fear or emotion?
- Does it ignore any people or groups?
- How does the information fit with what you already know?
- How could you verify the information for accuracy?

**bias:** an opinion based on unchallenged assumptions



Scan news sources and collect three or four pieces of information on a current issue. Analyze each item for bias.

Summarize and share your findings. Describe how the articles are similar and different. Identify and describe any examples of bias.

Create a visual of the items you found. Include a title, subtitles and an explanation of how bias can be found in media reports. Share your visual with the class.

### Law to Fix Election Dates

November 7, 2006

OTTAWA — The Conservative government has proposed a law to set, or “fix,” federal election dates every four years. The proposed law received third reading in the House of Commons yesterday.

Under the current system, the prime minister of a majority government can call an election at any time within five years of taking power. “The prime minister is able to choose the date of an election, not based on what is in the best interest of the country, but what is in the interest of his or her party,” says Minister of Justice Rob Nicholson, who introduced the legislation last May.

With fixed election dates, the timing of general elections would be known by all citizens and political parties four years in advance. “Fixed election dates stop leaders from trying to manipulate the calendar,” Prime Minister Stephen Harper says. “They level the playing field for all political parties.”

Liberals have questioned the wisdom of changing the current system, which they say has served Canada well for 130 years. They say fixed election dates would make the ruling party less accountable to voters, since the government could do whatever it wanted without facing an unexpected election.

— Based on research into events, views and perspectives.


 connect to the big ideas

1. Choose an issue about government currently in the news. Then, try one or two of the following activities over a two- or three-week period to find out how much the media affects the issue. After, describe how this exercise will affect the way you read and listen to the news in the future.
  - Each day, record the number of times you encounter the issue in the newspaper, on television or the Internet. Is the issue reported more or less as the days go by? Why do you think this is happening? When was the issue dropped by the media?
  - Each day, record one or two key messages that were common to the stories. Notice how the story changes over time. What appears to be influencing the story and causing these changes?
  - How are the media reporting people's reaction to the issue? Are people writing letters to the editor? Are politicians and influential people being interviewed? What are their ideas and concerns?
  - What groups of people have expressed viewpoints on the issue? Are the media reporting all sides of the issue equally and fairly, or is there evidence of bias? What evidence is there that the media has remained neutral or that it has taken a position on the issue?
  - Each day, predict how the issue might be resolved based upon what you know about it from the media. Explain your reasoning.
  - List actions or decisions that aimed to resolve the issue. Who was involved? What role did the media play?
  - Make a visual, create a graph or use an organizer to show how the issue evolved as a news story over the period. Show when interest in the story was at its peak and when interest began to fade. Why might this happen?
2. Invite a local reporter to your class to talk about their role in communicating political issues. Write a news article about what you heard for your school newsletter or community newspaper. Include a balance of opinions and views about what the reporter said and the reaction of the students. **Refer to the Skills Centre on page 371 for ideas on how to write a news story.**
3. In your opinion, who should have more responsibility for communicating issues: government, the media, or citizens? Why? Explain your reasons.

