

Consumer Demand for Cynical and Negative News Frames*

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Abstract: Commentators regularly lament the proliferation of both negative and/or strategic (“horserace”) coverage in political news content. The most frequent account for this trends focuses on news norms, and/or the priorities of news journalists. Here, we build on recent work arguing for the importance of demand-side, rather than supply-side, explanations of news content. In short, news may be negative and/or strategy-focused because that is the kind of news that people are interested in. We use a lab experiment to capture participants’ news selection biases, alongside a survey capturing their stated news preferences. Politically-interested participants are more likely to select negative stories. Interest is associated with a greater preference for strategic frames as well. And results suggest that behavioral results do not conform to attitudinal ones. That is, regardless of what participants say, they exhibit a preference for negative news content.

Literature on political communication often finds itself concerned with two related themes in media content: (1) negative news frames that generally cast politicians and politics in an unfavourable light, and (2) cynical strategy¹ coverage that focuses on the “horserace” and conflictual aspects of politics. The two themes may be related, insofar as strategic coverage implies that politicians are motivated only by power, not the common good (e.g. Capella and Jamieson 1997). Regardless of their relation, the body of work on these frames makes two assumptions: first, that they are bad for society; and second, that their root cause lies in the actions of journalists.

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¹ We rely here on Capella and Jamieson’s (1997) definition of strategy coverage: “(1) winning and losing as the central concern; (2) the language of wars, games, and competition; (3) a story with performers, critics and audience (voters); (4) centrality of performance, style, and perception of the candidate; (5) heavy weighting of polls and the candidates” (31). In this way it includes both the “game” schema and “horserace” coverage - which often become muddled in the literature.

We seek here to question the second assumption through a simple supposition: that the content of any given media environment, both on the personal and systemic level, is determined by some interplay between what media sources supply, and what consumers demand.² Instead of looking at particular processes and norms inherent in the news-making process which may generate these themes (Sabato 1991; Patterson 1994; Lichter and Noyes 1995; Farnsworth and Lichter 2007), we instead focus on the additional role that demand plays in their provision. Put simply, we argue that the proliferation of negative and/or strategic content is at least in part a function of individuals' (quite possibly subconscious) preferences.

This is to our knowledge the first exploration of news selection biases outside the US context, and/or outside the context of an election campaign. It is in part an extension of existing work focused on consumer interest in horserace stories (e.g., Iyengar et al. 2004), or in negative content (e.g., Meffert et al. 2006), although it is the first to simultaneously consider both. It does so using a new lab-experimental approach that we believe has some advantages where both internal and external validity are concerned. It also provides a rare opportunity to compare actual news selection behavior with answers to survey questions about participants' preferences in media content.

We find, in sum, that individuals tend to select negative and strategic news frames, even when other options are available, and, moreover, even when their own stated preferences are for news that is less negative and/or strategic. Results thus support past work suggesting that participants are more likely to select negative stories rather than positive ones, though we find that this is particularly true for strategic stories. We also find evidence, in line with past work, that participants expressing high levels of political interest show a greater attraction to strategic stories. (This is true for citizens versus non-citizens as well.) Our own interpretation of these results draws on work in psychology, biology, economics, and political science on the "negativity-bias." But even a thin reading of our findings emphasizes a too-often overlooked aspect of news content: it is the way it is not just because of the nature of the supply of news, but also the demand.

The Cynical Media and their Audience

That the media are negative and cynical about politics and politicians is widely agreed upon in the literature. (For a recent review see Soroka 2012.) Most scholars see this trend as a product, or perhaps a mutation, of the media's role as the watchdog "Fourth Estate." Patterson (1994: 79) argues that journalist's understanding of what this role entails has evolved in a way that has caused them to shift from "silent skeptics" to "vocal cynics." Indeed, the great deal of literature surrounding

²For a useful distinction of demand- versus supply-side accounts of media content, see (Andrew 2007).

negativity in political news discusses how — in the American case — journalists have become hyper-critical of politicians and electoral campaigns. Calling political journalists, “sharks in a feeding frenzy,” Sabato (1991: 2) regards journalists as “more interested in finding sleaze and achieving fame and fortune than in serving as an honest broker of information between citizens and government.” This view of a negative-centric press is echoed in numerous other US studies (e.g., Lang and Lang 1966, 1968; Robinson and Sheehan 1983; Edelman 1987; Blumer and Gurevitch 1995; Lichter and Noyes 1995; Capella and Jamieson 1997; West 2001; Newton 2006; Farnsworth and Lichter 2007); it is evident in work elsewhere as well (e.g., Andrew et al. 2006).

In addition to the focus on negative coverage by mass media, there is a related and overlapping area of research focusing on what Capella and Jamieson (1997: 31) call “strategy” coverage, said to include: “(1) winning and losing as the central concern; (2) the language of wars, games, and competition; (3) a story with performers, critics and audience (voters); (4) centrality of performance, style, and perception of the candidate; (5) heavy weighting of polls and the candidates.” We see strategy coverage as being related to negative coverage as it increases cynicism in viewers by calling into question the motivation of politicians; Jamieson and Capella argue that when the actions of those in politics is painted in a strategic light, viewers ascribe a motivation of power, rather than a concern for the common good, to those involved. Patterson (1994) and Jones (2004) convey similar concerns about the press ascribing cynical motivations to politicians. Moreover, this type of strategy coverage is seen to be dramatically on the rise, both inside the US (e.g., Jones 2004; Patterson 1994; Robinson 1976; Capella and Jamieson 1997) and elsewhere (Mendelsohn 1993; Pickup et al. 2010).

Why?: Supply-Side Explanations

Most existing work places the blame for strategic and negative political coverage on journalistic norms of cynicism towards public officials, stemming from a general decline of trust towards public figures in the United States from the 1970s onwards (Sabato 1991; Patterson 1994; Lichter and Noyes 1995; Capella and Jamieson 1997; West 2001; Farnsworth and Lichter 2007). For many, Watergate and Vietnam had an indelible and long lasting effect on both the American public and the journalistic culture. The deceit surrounding Watergate in particular spurred the frustrations of journalists, and led to a feeling that they “won’t get fooled again.” According to Farnsworth and Lichter (2007: 115), it is this inherent distrust of politicians which pushes the media to create negative and strategic news frames: “Reporters...view government pronouncements with suspicion and governmental figures with contempt” — a process which extends to politicians and candidates for elected office more generally.

Patterson makes a similar argument: “The voters possess a different schematic outlook [than do reporters]. They view politics primarily as a means of choosing leaders and solving their problems”; while reporters, he asserts, are more interested in the “game” of politics (Patterson 1994: 59). This difference for Patterson stems from the journalist’s desire for celebrity gained primarily through filling the role of cynics in the Bernstein and Woodward mould — leading to a situation of one-upmanship that progressively increases the level of rhetoric, and moves journalists from “silent sceptics” to “vocal cynics” (73-74).

It seems very likely that particular historical events, and the resulting journalistic norms, contribute to the production of both negative and strategic news frames. That said, the historical events-oriented account does little to explain why negative and strategic coverage are pervasive outside the US (see citations above). Journalists in other countries may have had similar defining moments, perhaps; and notions of how to conduct journalism may well have seeped from the US into other countries. But the apparent pervasiveness of negative and strategic coverage outside the US does seem to beg for an argument not rooted just in American political history.

There are several alternatives. Both Farnsworth and Lichter (2007) and Patterson (1994) suggest that the process of making news tends to push journalists towards strategic and negative news frames. Primarily, this argument revolves around the need for media to present new and exciting things to their audience. For a story to make the cut, it must have something to make it stand out. Framing politics as a horserace, a conflict between politicians, or as a series of errors made by individuals in the system, are methods of accomplishing this. Consider the campaign trail, where politicians move around each day and largely make the same stump-speech to various audiences. A journalist covering these events with an eye for policy-reporting would have little new to say each day. What does change is the candidate’s position in the horse-race, for example, and thus simply by virtue of being new, it makes the news.

This news-process explanation for strategic and negative frames is likely more generalizable (that is, more easily applicable outside the US) than the journalistic norms theory. There are other possible accounts as well, however, focused not on the process of producing news so much as on the process of consuming it.

Why?: Demand-Side Explanations

The existing literature is unclear about how media consumers feel about negative and/or strategic coverage, in part because many of the major works on the condition of political reporting in the US focus on the process of producing news much more than on the ways in which we consume it. When the existing literature does address consumer demand, it most often focuses on evidence of the low and/or declining scores the public gives to media (as a whole) in surveys as evidence of a distaste

towards the increasing prominence of negative and strategic frames.

There are some exceptions. There is for instance a small body of work that looks at Pew survey questions asking about respondents' feelings about media content. The critical question, asked (to our knowledge) sixteen times from 1985 to 2011, is as follows: "Some people think that by criticizing political leaders, news organizations keep political leaders from doing their job. Others think that such criticism is worth it because it keeps political leaders from doing things that should not be done. Which position is closer to your opinion?"³ West (2001: 104) notes that support for the so called "watchdog" role of the press declined from the mid-1980s to mid-1990s; Lichter and Noyes (1995) use these data to support the proposition that the public doesn't agree with journalists, who behave as though they believe that cynicism is in the best interest of the public discourse. But the mid-1990s seems to be a particularly low point for US public support for the mass media. Looking over the entire 25-year period suggests only a slight decline in support for a watchdog role. Roughly two thirds of the American public selects "keep political leaders from doing things that should not be done" (67% in 1985; down to 58% in 2011); roughly one quarter selects "keep political leaders from doing their job" (17% in 1985; up to 25% in 2011). There does not appear to be markedly declining support for a watchdog media, then; but there clearly is a significant (and slightly increasing) minority unsupportive of that role. So survey results support the notion that the press remains negative and strategy-oriented in spite of there being a large minority with preferences for other ("better") content.

Our own inclination is to be wary of survey evidence on this issue, however. Attitudes on news coverage are likely influenced by the current tone of politics and the media. The particularly vitriolic political climate surrounding the first Clinton presidency may be what drove the shift observed by both West, and Lichter and Noyes. More importantly, it may also be that respondents' stated preferences for news content do not accurately reflect their actual news choices. That is, people may say they want one kind of news, even as they systematically select another.

There are certainly reasons to believe that this is true; at least, there are reasons to believe that, in spite of what may appear in survey results, the vast majority of news consumers are regularly attracted to a combination of negative and/or strategic news. There is after all a growing body of work describing a "negativity bias" in human behavior. In short, individuals may have a propensity to weight negative information more heavily than positive information. This seems relatively clear in work in psychology on impression formation (e.g., de Pligt et al. 1980; Vonk 1996); it is reflected in work on loss aversion in economics (Kahneman and Tversky 1979); and it is evidenced in work on political behavior and communications as well (e.g., Altheide 1997; Diagnault et al. 2012; Harrington 1989; Patterson 1994; Shoemaker et al. 1987). Some work links the negativity bias to evolutionary processes (e.g.,

³Data are available at <http://www.people-press.org>.

Shoemaker 1996; Soroka and McAdams 2012). Work also focuses on the importance of a reference point to the negativity bias: humans tend to be mildly optimistic; negative information is thus further away from our expectations than is positive information; and we thus view negative information as both more deviant, and potentially more useful as well (e.g., Fiske 1980; Skowronski and Carlston 1989).

The notion that it is the potential usefulness of deviant/negative information that makes it particularly attractive to, in this case, news consumers, is echoed in work on why news consumers have a rational incentive to focus on negative and/or strategic news frames. It has long been hypothesized that individuals seek ‘shortcuts’ in their information gathering – shortcuts that can systematically bias their media content environments. This argument is rooted in both (a) Downs’s (1957) argument that individuals have little incentive to become informed about or participate in politics, since the impact of their voting decisions on election outcomes are miniscule; and (b) Fiske’s (1984) notion of individuals as “cognitive misers.” In both cases, citizens have limited incentives to pay close attention to most political information. For Fiske, this means they will seek “rapid adequate solutions, rather than slow articulate solutions” (12).

What is the nature of these rapid solutions? A focus on negativity, and/or strategy, and/or political conflict is a possibility. When politicians form a consensus around a policy, that policy is likely to be implemented whomever wins an election or political fight. However, where there is controversy or two opposing viewpoints, political support for one side may determine what is implemented, thus giving the individual an incentive to pay attention. In short, “The rational voter is engaged by political conflict and bored by political consensus” Zaller (1999: 16). When the media reduce complex political issues to strategy coverage that highlights disagreement, citizens may reward them with increased viewership.

Theories focused on an evolution-inspired negativity bias, or on modern-day rational decision making to improve the cost-benefit ratio where political learning is concerned, are quite clearly related: both suggest that the selection of negative and/or strategic information is for strategic (rather than just entertainment) reasons. Each is focused on the need to use a limited amount of attention to efficiently process a potentially vast body of political information. The end result may be a preference for information that is negative, and/or strategic; and a body of media content that is produced to match that preference.

Note that this preference for negative and/or strategic information may be subconscious. That is, we may find ourselves selecting negative and/or strategic stories even as we state that we would like other types of information. The presence of survey responses that suggest some wariness about negative and strategic frames in media, even as media consumption seems to point towards a preference for those types of information, may reflect this fact. This would be in line with findings that individuals “frequently grumbled about oversimplified treatment of all news,”

while being unwilling in their actual habits to view more complex coverage (Graber 1984: 105); or that those who call for public-affairs programming tend to not watch it when it is actually made available (Neuman 1991: 95). In short, previous research already lends support to the notion that individuals' conscious signalling of what news ought to be does not necessarily match their actual patterns of news consumption.

This previous research suggests three hypotheses. First, we expect that participants will be more likely to read news stories that are negative and/or strategy-focused. Second, we expect that participants' interest in politics will mediate the impact of negativity and/or strategy on story selection. More precisely, we expect that those with a greater interest in politics will show a greater tendency towards negative and strategic stories, since these individuals are more able to make use of these more efficient frames. Third, we expect that the relationship between behavior (in story selection) will be weakly correlated with attitudes (about negativity and strategy frames). We expect news-selection processes to be partly subconscious; stated preferences may consequently be weakly, if at all, related to story selection.

From Attitudinal to Behavioral Analyses

In order to assess the effects of demand on the content of news, then, we require a way to examine news choices directly, that is, focusing on behavioral (actual news selection) rather than attitudinal (survey question-based) data. There are several valuable examples of this approach. Meffert et al. (2006) look at whether there is a demand for negative information about political candidates in an electoral campaign setting using the “dynamic information-board” method pioneered by Lau and Redlawsk (2006), and focused on “motivated information processing.” Over the course of the experiment, participants are presented with campaign material — news headlines, candidate information, and poll numbers — as though they are witnessing a real-life campaign cycle (albeit much more quickly). Tracking what information is viewed allows researchers to observe the types of information that participants use to create or solidify vote choices. Results suggest that participants are more inclined to rely on negative information.

Iyengar et al. (2004) take a different approach: they send out to test subjects a CD containing an extensive collection of articles on the then-ongoing 2000 United States presidential election. CDs included software that tracked participants' news selection; participants were encouraged to use the CD software in order to gather information on the election; and news selections were analyzed. Results suggest that the “horserace” frame (similar to what we refer to as a strategy frame) received a disproportionately high level of viewership compared to the other categories. The authors suggest this was caused by consumer's desire for “exciting” news content, as opposed to “drab” policy discussions. In their words, “the uncertainty and suspense

associated with the depiction of the candidates as strategic players is more likely to boost audience share than more ‘substantive’ aspects of the campaign” (Iyengar et al. 2004: 159).

Tewksbury’s (2005) approach (also see Tewksbury 2006) is similar, though the focus of his work is on, respectively, the demographic homogeneity of audiences for news websites, and selective exposure to public affairs content. To analyze consumer choice, Tewksbury utilizes the Nielsen company’s ratings system, which monitors the web history of a large cross section of Americans participants who sign into the tracking software whenever they browse the Internet. In each study, Tewksbury monitors selected websites, and explores participants’ news selections based on their demographic information.

Where experimental design is concerned, there are advantages and disadvantages to each approach. Iyengar et al. and Tewksbury allow respondents to participate at home, in a more natural environment than the experimental lab setting used by Meffert et al. The resulting external validity comes at a cost, however — they cannot fully control the experimental treatment, since (a) participants may be viewing not just the CD news, but news elsewhere as well, and (b) people other than the participant may be accessing the CD/software. Meffert et al., in contrast, have complete control over the information environment. But there are increased concerns about external validity; and the experiment is quite clearly focused on a “motivated” campaign environment, and may or may not apply to day-to-day passive news readership. In all of the above cases, individuals are also acutely aware that their selections are being studied, either because they are taking part in a lab experiment about news selection, or because they turn on tracking software at home.

The Experiment

Our objective here is to further examine the possibility that political news is negative and/or strategic because this is the content that more reliably generates an audience. We do so using a lab experiment allowing us to directly observe the kinds of stories that participants choose to read.

Our study is somewhat different from past work. In short, we rely on a method which attempts to maximize the benefits of the two approaches described above, while minimizing the negatives. The study is designed with four objectives:

1. maximize the external validity of the experiment by creating as “natural” a news-reading environment as possible;
2. minimize the effects of social desirability on news selection by making respondents believe that their news selections are not the object of study;
3. use an experimental setting that allows for a high degree of control over the

material that is presented to individuals so that they have to make choices between alternatives;

4. match news selection decisions (behavioral data) with survey questions on participants' stated preferences on news content (attitudinal data), so that implicit preferences for media content can be directly compared with explicitly-stated preferences.

The experiment which we designed to meet these goals proceeded as follows. First, groups of up to six participants enter a room, sit down at a computer, and are told that the purpose of the experiment is to track their eye movements as they watch a number of television news stories. Test-subjects are given a brief explanation of how the eye-tracking software operates. They are told that in order to obtain a base-line measurement on their eye-movements, we will have them browse a webpage of recent news articles for between 3 and 9 minutes. It is important that they read during that time (in order to calibrate the eye-tracking software properly), but they can choose whatever they like, and proceed at their own pace. After they read articles, they will watch two television news stories. Finally, they will respond to a brief survey.

The critical part of this experiment is that there is in fact no eye-tracking software, and no video is recorded (though the webcam light on the experimental computers was turned on make the eye-tracking story seem more credible). The focus on eye-tracking here is just a ruse — what we are really interested in are the stories participants select from the news webpage. The idea of the eye-tracking story, then, is to encourage participants to read in a relatively normal manner, as though their responses are not the object of study. They understand that they must read; but they can read whatever they like, and there is no sign that what they read is being monitored. And the two videos are included in the experiment only so that respondents believe that those are the objects of study, because we want to get responses to survey questions before the final debriefing, when participants are told the real objectives of the experiment.

The main component of this experiment, the artificial news webpage, is coded in html and run in the MediaLab software program. The experimental database includes fifty articles in total. All articles were selected by the co-authors from the two weeks directly preceding the experiment; all were about Canadian politics. All articles were also coded by a team of three expert coders for both tone (positive/negative/neutral),⁴ as well as topic (policy/strategy/neither).⁵ Where topic is

⁴The tone of stories was, for coding, defined very broadly: negative stories were defined as those in which, overall, the tone is negative; positive stories were defined as those, in which, overall, the tone was positive. Stories which coders decided fit in neither of those categories were coded neutral. In the fifty cases used here, there was unanimous agreement about tone across the three coders.

⁵Policy stories were defined as those which discuss the policies and policy proposals of government or opposition members in an in-depth way. Making the distinction with the strategy category

concerned, in all fifty cases used here there was unanimous agreement about topic across the three coders. This was true for both the article as a whole, and for the headline alone — since we are interested here in the initial selection of stories, based on headlines, it is the topic of the headline that matters most. For tone, we do not expect complete inter-coder reliability, but rather treat inter-coder differences as a sign of ambiguity. In short, if two coders see a headline as negative and a third coder sees it as neutral, then we see that article as less clearly negative than if all three coders agreed (e.g., Young and Soroka 2012).⁶ So our measure of tone is based on an average of the three codes, where -1 is very negative and +1 is very positive.

The sample of fifty articles was carefully selected to provide articles distributed across the range of both tone of topic, as well as across a broad swath of national (domestic) political topics. Particular care was given to ensuring that no one political party was over or under-represented, and that particular current events did not dominate the article selection. In other words, as much care as possible was taken to ensure that there were not systematic biases in the content of any of the categories.

No respondent sees all fifty articles. Instead, each respondent is presented with a webpage of 30 articles, randomly drawn from the 50-article sample, and presented in a random order. Table 1 shows the number of times that each type of story was presented over the course of the experiment, alongside an example headline for each category. All article headlines are listed in the Appendix.

Table 1: Article Selection

	Unclear	Policy	Strategy
Negative	null	n=598; Budget cuts require a scalpel, not an axe, executives argue	n=885; Mulcair’s leftist credentials under fire in Montreal debate
Neutral	n=73; Canada’s promise needs to be kept	n=444; Flaherty taps Conservative riding president as port authority	n=84; Political fates tied to pipeline progress
Positive	n=59; Layton named 2011’s top newsmaker	n=540; Shrinking federal deficit gives Flaherty breathing room for budget	n=677; Poll shows Liberal rebound

The study has (at least) two limitations. First, test subjects included 100 un-

— these articles don’t focus on competition, but rather on the substance of policies. Strategy stories were defined as those which discuss politics and policies as a ”game” with winners and losers, or emphasize the political conflict element in a given situation. They often include poll numbers or discuss how politics and policies affect future poll numbers. As above, in the fifty cases used here there was unanimous agreement about topic across the three coders.

⁶There are no instances here in which codes ranges from negative to positive, just negative/neutral and positive/neutral.

dergraduate students at McGill University. This is a good number of participants, but there are of course limits to using undergraduate subjects. Note, however, that we are not attempting to make a population estimate, but rather trying to uncover a cognitive process. As such, the use a non-representative sample with respect to education, age, and income should be a relatively minor problem (see, e.g., Morton and Williams 2008). Second, like almost any lab experiment, there is the possibility of confounding effects — the main concern is that implicit cues can be given regarding what sort of behaviour the study is looking to find by simple acts such as reading the briefing in a certain manner (McDermott 2002). This concern was minimized in this case by sticking carefully to the text written for briefings, a text which emphasized the eye-tracking portion of the study, while presenting the news selection "base-line measurement" as almost an afterthought. (The full text of the briefing is including in the Appendix.)

Properly implemented, this experimental design made it very likely that test-subjects would focus on their actions in the fictional video experiment, while acting in a more natural manner in the news-selection section of the experiment. The deception thus accomplished objectives 1 and 2 above. In short, misdirection likely resulted a more natural (apparently un-watched) reading environment, and less social-desirability in news selection, while at the same time allowing us the kind of tight control over stimuli that can only occur in a lab setting. Of course, we will never fully remove the artificiality of the lab environment, or for that matter, match the "natural" environment of at-home studies (Tewksbury 2006; Iyengar et al. 2004). However, we feel that this experiment balances the concerns of external and internal validity in a way that improves upon those studies.⁷

A survey was administered after the fictional eye-tracking study. The survey included a battery of questions on what participants thought the news should be like, as well as a series of basic demographic and partisanship variables. We cannot avoid the possibility that survey responses are affected by the stories respondents read in the first section of the experiment. Since news selection should be conditioned by underlying preferences in news, however, we believe that contamination of survey responses by web news is in this case relatively unlikely, however. And in order to minimize the effects of video news on survey responses, we randomize the videos — we use five videos in total, where each participant views two. Videos are drawn from a previous study [redacted], where the aim was to select videos that were relatively mundane — they vary in tone from mildly negative to mildly positive. Information on the videos used is included in the Appendix.

⁷Put another way, the objective here should not be viewed as achieving "mundane" realism, but "experimental realism" — an environment in which participants believe the situation, and are interested and engaged. See McDermott (2002).

Results

The Impact of Topic and Tone

Table 2 shows some basic diagnostic data for the experiment. Reported for each cell is: the number of stories in that category presented to all respondents over the course of the experiment (P); the number of stories in that category selected to be read by respondents (S); and finally the percentage of stories read out of those presented. The table thus offers a broad picture of participants’ tendencies to select some types of stories over others.

Table 2: Aggregate Story Selection

	Unclear	Policy	Strategy	Total
Negative	—	P:598 S:63 10.5%	P:885 S:78 8.8%	P:1483 S:141 10.5%
Neutral	P:73 S:16 22%	P:444 S:44 9.9%	P:84 S:6 7.3%	P:601 S:66 9.1%
Positive	P:59 S:9 15.2%	P:540 S:59 10.9%	P:677 S:40 6.0%	P:1275 S:108 8.5%
Total	P:132 S:25 18.9%	P:1582 S:166 10.5%	P:1646 S:124 7.6%	—

Looking across the “total” rows and columns allows us to compare the relative performance of articles on tone and topic. Note first that the differences in the percentage read between categories seems relatively small — the range is from 6.0% (for positive, strategic stories) to 22.0% (for unclear, neutral stories). These are not inconsequential differences, however. Each respondent was presented with 30 stories, of which individuals read approximately 3 stories on average (min=1, max=10). In total, 315 out of the 3360 stories presented to all respondents combined were actually read. If tone and topic have no effect on the respondents, then, we should expect the frequency of each cell to be 9.6%. It is deviations from this value, 9.6%, that suggest impacts of topic and/or tone.

With that in mind, note that results for tone are in the expected direction. Negative stories were chosen 10.5% of the time, compared to 9.1% of the time for neutral stories and 8.5% for positive stories. Results for topic appear to run contrary to expectations. Strategy stories were selected 7.6% of the time, while policy stories were selected 10.5% of the time.

The basic descriptive data in Table 2 likely lacks a few important control variables, and thus understates the influence of both topic and tone on news selection. A set of more complete logit analyses are presented in Table 3. All models use each person-story combination as a case and predicts whether a particular story, for a particular individual was selected (1) or not selected (0).

While our main interest is in how the tone and topic of a particular story affect its selection, we first include several important control variables in each model. The placement of stories on the webpage likely matters to story selection, so we capture placement in two ways: Column is coded as 1 for the left column and 2 for the right column, and Row is coded from 1 to 15 based on the row in which a story appeared.⁸ (Recall that stories are randomly ordered for each participant.) Because the amount of time varied across experiments, we also include Time, coded as 5, 7 or 9 for the number minutes a respondent had to read the stories.⁹

All models are estimated using a simple random-effects logit estimation (to account for the fact that cases are not independent, since there are thirty cases per respondent).¹⁰ Table 3 shows the resulting odds ratios, capturing the probability of a story being read. For the sake of comparison, the table includes models used in subsequent sections as well; for the time being, we focus just on Models 1 and 2. The main interest in Model 1 here is in the effects of the topic and tone of the articles. The former is captured with a binary variable, equal to 1 for stories with headlines that are strategy- (rather than policy-) oriented. Tone is captured based on data from four expert coders, each of whom assigned a negative (-1), neutral (0) or positive (+1) tone to each headline. Codes across the four coders were averaged to produce an interval-level tone variable ranging from -1 (clearly negative) to +1 (clearly positive).

The first column shows results for the basic model (Model 1). The column in which a story appears, left or right, does not seem to matter to the likelihood that it is selected by respondents. The row in which a story appears does matter — moving down one row decreases the likelihood of selection by roughly 3%. The time respondents had to read the news page also matters, of course — each additional minute leads to increased probability of a story being read of about 11%.

Results for *Topic* and *Tone* largely confirm what we have seen in the aggregate-level analysis in Table 2. A one-unit shift upwards in tone makes a story roughly

⁸Preliminary models included an interaction between Column and Row, to test for the possibility that the two had an interactive rather than just an additive effect. The interaction was not statistically significant, and so it is not included here.

⁹The varied reading time for experiments was included as one possible test of the possibility that the selection of negative or strategic content is rooted not just in the "entertainment value" of these stories, but in a (likely subconscious) belief that these stories are of greater value where becoming informed about politics is concerned. Our expectation was that when respondents knew how much time they had to read, they might choose stories more strategically. This was not the case, however — there is no interaction between time and a tendency to select either negative or strategy-oriented headlines.

¹⁰Note that a more stringent approach is to use a cross-nested hierarchical model, allowing for heteroskedasticity both within respondents, and within stories. Results do not change dramatically when we shift to that more complex estimation, though the statistical significance of story-level factors is of course reduced when we estimate 111 (respondents) times 30 (stories) random effects. We accordingly rely on the simpler models here; but all results are available upon request.

Table 3: Modelling Story Selection

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Column	.873 (.105)	.874 (.105)	.869 (.105)	.866 (.105)	.864 (.104)	.861 (.104)	.868 (.105)	.873 (.106)
Row	.970* (.013)	.969* (.013)	.971* (.013)	.971* (.014)	.970* (.014)	.970* (.013)	.970* (.013)	.971* (.013)
Time	1.116* (.050)	1.116* (.050)	1.127** (.051)	1.128** (.052)	1.125** (.051)	1.127** (.051)	1.126** (.051)	1.126** (.051)
Topic (Strat=1)	.626** (.078)	.596** (.077)	.619** (.077)	.260** (.098)	.620** (.077)	.443** (.090)	.619** (.077)	.569** (.092)
Tone (-1/+1)	.871a (.070)	1.007 (.109)	.934 (.213)	.864a (.069)	1.027 (.129)	.861a (.069)	.847 (.139)	.864a (.069)
Topic * Tone		.727* (.118)						
Interest			1.151 (.349)	.723 (.256)				
Interest*Tone			.889 (.283)					
Interest*Topic				3.587* (1.859)				
Country (dom=1)					.916 (.141)	.762 (.139)		
Country*Tone					.750a (.122)			
Country*Topic						1.724* (.441)		
Prefs:Neg							.929 (.293)	
Prefs:Neg*Tone							1.050 (.354)	
Prefs:Strategic								0.832 (.244)
Prefs:Strat*Topic								1.386 (.552)
Constant	.077** (.025)	.077** (.026)	.066** (.026)	.089** (.037)	.078** (.027)	.086** (.030)	.076** (.027)	.077** (.026)
lnsig2u	.208** (.077)	.209** (.077)	.201** (.076)	.206** (.077)	.204** (.077)	.203** (.077)	.202** (.076)	.201** (.076)
sigma u	.456	.457	.449	.454	.451	.451	.449	.449
rho	.059	.060	.058	.059	.058	.058	.058	.058
N (cases)	3360	3360	3330	3330	3330	3330	3330	3330
N (individuals)	111	111	111	111	111	111	111	111

** p < .01; * p < .05; ^a p < .10; Cells contain odds ratios from random effects logistic regressions with standard errors in parentheses.

13% less likely to be selected. Note that the range of this variable is from -1 to +1, so positive stories are 26% less likely to be selected than were negative stories. That said, the effect of *Tone* is significant only at $p < .10$. The impact of *Topic* is more robust: strategic stories were 33% less likely to be selected than were policy stories.

Model 2 tests the possibility that *Topic* and *Tone* interact. Results suggest that they do: in this interacted model, there is no discernible direct effect of *Tone*, but the direct impact of *Topic* strengthens somewhat, and is augmented by *Tone*. In short, strategic stories are particularly unpopular when they are positive. But the combined effects of *Topic* and *Tone* are difficult to discern from the coefficients in Table 3 alone. Table 4 thus shows the estimated probability of story selection (holding other variables at their current values) by both *Topic* and *Tone*. Note that changing the tone makes no difference to the likelihood of selection for policy-oriented stories; but it clearly matters to the likelihood of story selection for strategic stories (cutting the likelihood of selection nearly in half). Put differently, strategic stories are only interesting when they are negative. That said, these estimates also make clear the fact that strategic stories are in this case systematically less popular than policy stories.

Table 4: The Estimated Impact of Topic and Tone

	Policy		Strategy	
Negative	.103	(.013)	.086	(.011)
Neutral	.104	(.008)	.064	(.007)
Positive	.104	(.013)	.048	(.009)

Cells contain estimated marginal effects with standard errors in parentheses based on results in Table 3.

The Moderating Effects of Political Interest

What accounts for the apparent popularity of policy versus strategic stories in our sample? There are several possibilities. One is that we are looking at story selection in a non-campaign context, and this may matter greatly for the relative popularity of strategic stories. If this is the case, there is little we can do to demonstrate it except to re-run the experiment in the midst of an election campaign. Another possibility, however, is that we have a sample of participants (drawn from a university population) that is highly attentive to news content. More attentive participants may well have an abnormally high interest in policy-oriented stories. This is a testable proposition. We examine it by relying on the following question capturing interest in politics, included in the post-experimental survey:

- *Political Interest*: How interested in politics are you generally, on a scale where 0 means 'no interest at all', and 10 means 'a great deal of interest'?

We are interested here not in the direct effect of political interest (in fact, we do not expect any direct effect), but rather in the moderating effect that *Interest* may have on either or both of *Tone* and *Topic*. Models 3 and 4 in Table 3 thus show results allowing both *Tone* and *Topic* to interact with our measure of political interest.

In order to avoid problems with collinearity, interactions with *Tone* and *Topic* are included in separate models. Model 3 shows results in which *Interest* interacts with *Tone*. The interaction is negative, pointing towards the possibility that those with high levels of interest may be less likely to select positive stories. The coefficient is insignificant, however. Model 4 shows results in which *Interest* interacts with *Topic* — here, the interaction clearly matters. Those with low interest in politics are highly unlikely to select strategic stories (as evidenced by the now-very negative coefficient for *Topic*); those with very high interest are, in contrast, very likely to select strategic stories. The results for Model 4 are laid out in more detail in Table 5.

Table 5: The Estimated Impact of Topic and Tone, by Interest

	Low Interest		High Interest	
	Policy	Strategy	Policy	Strategy
Negative	.131 (.018)	.057 (.011)	.108 (.017)	.101 (.017)
Neutral	.115 (.008)	.049 (.009)	.095 (.013)	.089 (.014)
Positive	.101 (.015)	.042 (.009)	.083 (.013)	.078 (.014)

Cells contain estimated marginal effects with standard errors in parentheses based on results in Table 3.

Table 5 repeats what we have already seen in Table 4, though here we show results for low interest (*Interest*=.33, the 10th percentile) and high interest (*Interest*=1, the 90th percentile) participants. Including the direct effect of political interest serves to strengthen results for Tone — this is apparent in the coefficient for Tone in Table 3; it is also clear in these predicted values — the likelihood of story selection decreases as tone increases across all four columns (albeit marginally in some). But the critical result in this table is the gap between policy and strategy stories for low-interest participants, which is very high, and the same gap for high-interest participants, which is very low (indeed, insignificant). Results suggest, then, that is high-interest, not low-interest, participants who are drawn to strategic stories. This finding supports the notion that interest in strategic stories is driven by a rational desire to acquire information. (That is, it may not be driven by strategic stories just being more entertaining; but see the conclusions for a further discussion.)

Our data offer one additional means of exploring what leads participants to select negative and/or horserace stories. The [redacted] campus has a good number of international students, and our experiment accordingly includes a significant sub-

sample that is not Canadian.¹¹ We might well expect non-Canadians to approach our Canadian political news stories differently; put more precisely, we might expect that Canadians see a greater utility in negative and strategy news than do individuals from other countries. As such, we would expect that these categories are viewed relatively more frequently by Canadians.

Models 5 and 6 in Table 3 thus show results from models in which nationality (Canadian=1) is interacted with both *Tone* and *Topic*. We see from model 5 that the coefficient for *Tone* - here the result for non-Canadians - approaches one and is not statistically significant, meaning these individuals selected positive and negative news in equal proportions. The result for the interaction - which represents the coefficient for Canadians - reveals that Canadians are increasingly likely to read news articles as they become more negative, with negative articles being 50% more likely to be selected than positive articles. Model 6 interacts nationality and *Topic*. The coefficient for *Topic* - the result for non-Canadians - reveals that they are nearly 66% more likely to read policy stories over strategy stories. Canadians, on the other hands, are significantly more likely to read strategy stories.

These results for nationality are clearer in Table 6, which shows predicted likelihood of story selection by *Topic* and *Tone* interacted with the nationality of participants. The top panel shows results from the model in which nationality and *Topic* are interacted. Here, we see the greater likelihood of native participants selecting strategy stories. It is still the case that policy stories are selected more; but the gap between the two narrows considerably – particularly compared to the foreign participants, who select policy stories two to three times more often than strategy ones.

Table 6: The Estimated Impact of Topic and Tone, by Nationality

<i>Nat * Topic</i>	Foreign Participants				Native Participants			
	Policy		Strategy		Policy		Strategy	
Negative	.138	(.019)	.066	(.012)	.109	(.014)	.085	(.011)
Neutral	.121	(.015)	.058	(.010)	.095	(.010)	.074	(.009)
Positive	.106	(.015)	.050	(.010)	.083	(.011)	.064	(.010)
<i>Nat * Tone</i>								
Negative	.107	(.017)	.069	(.012)	.128	(.016)	.083	(.011)
Neutral	.110	(.012)	.071	(.009)	.101	(.010)	.065	(.008)
Positive	.112	(.018)	.072	(.013)	.080	(.012)	.051	(.009)

Cells contain estimated marginal effects with standard errors in parentheses based on results in Table 3.

The bottom panel of Table 6 shows results from the model in which nationality and *Tone* are interacted (Model 6). Here, we see the much steeper impact of *Tone*

¹¹The other countries represented are (n in brackets): Albania (1), Bangladesh(1), China (2), France(10), India(1), Pakistan(1), Sri Lanka(1), Trinidad and Tobago (1), USA (18), UK(1).

for native participants. Indeed, *Tone* does not appear to matter at all for foreign participants at all. For native participants, negative stories are selected roughly 50% more than positive ones.

These differences between native and foreign audiences may, again, shed light on what motivates the selection of negative and/or strategic stories. If selection is driven solely by entertainment value, we would expect that strategic and negative stories would be appealing to people no matter their background. This is not the case: those with a more direct stake in Canadian politics are drawn to what make be seen as more informative stories.

There are admittedly alternative explanations for the findings in Table 6. Canadians, having had a great deal of exposure to these types of news frames, may be more accustomed to them, and thus demand them. If this was to be true, however, we might also expect to see significant differences within the Canadian sample for people who consume more or less media. In other words, if attraction to negative and horse-race news is a function of familiarity/exposure, media consumption should affect news selection. Interacting a variable for overall media consumption with both tone and topic of article headlines produces no significant results, however.¹²

Does Behavior Match Preferences?

Recall that previous work finds a disjuncture between what people say they want from media content, and what they seem to consume (e.g., Graber 1984; Neuman 1991). Previous work has not been able to compare directly the preferences and behaviours of media consumers, however. This is one advantage of the study conducted here.

We are able to examine the relationship between behavior and preferences using the following questions:

- *Prefs:Neg* — The media is too negative and cynical about politicians and politics. [strongly agree (0), agree (1), disagree (2), strongly disagree (3)]
- *Prefs:Strategy* — Would you like to see more or less horserace coverage, that is, coverage focused on polls and political competition? [more coverage (0), the same amount of coverage (1), or less coverage (2)]

The measures are intended to capture stated preferences about both negativity and strategic coverage, respectively. Model 7 in Table 3 includes the direct effect of *Prefs:Neg*, interacted with *Tone*; the model thus tests for the possibility that those with preferences for more (less) negativity are more (less) prone to selection negative stories. Model 8 in Table 3 includes the direct effect of *Prefs:Strategy*, interacted with *Topic*; the model thus tests for the possibility that those with preferences for more (less) strategic coverage are more (less) prone to select strategic stories. In

¹²Results are available upon request.

short, the models test for the possibility that actual story selection varies alongside stated preferences for news content.

Neither interaction is statistically significant.¹³ Results thus suggest that story selection does not vary with stated preferences. Those who eschew negative stories in survey questions do not avoid them when reading the news; those who are concerned about too much strategic coverage are no more likely to read policy stories. These findings help make sense of the disjuncture between attitudes and behavior noted in previous work; or, at least, these findings make clear that that disjuncture is not an error — it appears to be an accurate reflection of a gap between preferences and behavior.

Discussion and Conclusion

One motivating question behind this research was why negative and strategic news frames are repeatedly presented in audience-seeking media, given that they do not appear to match the public's stated preferences for news. It has not been the purpose of this paper to discount the supply side explanations that are prominent in the literature — journalistic norms and news values almost certainly contribute to the the negative nature of news. Rather, our aim has been to add to the literature that focuses on consumer demand.

Understanding the nature of consumer demand is, we argue, central to understanding the nature of media content. And the fact that surveys find that media consumers want less negative, less strategic stories does not necessarily mean that they actually do. What we need, and what we have tried to extract in the experiment outlined above, is a measure of actual news selection. Our results suggest that, regardless of their preferences as stated in a survey, participants are more likely to select negative content. More informed participants are drawn to strategic frames as well.¹⁴

There are some important caveats. First, the bias towards negative content is greater for politically-interested respondents. (In fact, the bias is barely evident for less interested respondents.) This finding — along with the results for Canadians versus non-Canadians — lends support to the notion that media consumers select negative frames because they seem more informative. (Although we cannot really discount the possibility that highly-interested individuals just find these frames entertaining.)

Second, this experiment took place in a non-election context, and that may well

¹³Results do not change when the two interactions are included simultaneously; results are available upon request.

¹⁴Considering that low-interest individuals are those that self-select out of 'hard' news anyways (see e.g. Prior 2007), the selections (i.e. demand) of higher interest individuals are therefore far more important in determining the make-up of news content.

have affected levels of interest in strategic versus policy frames. It is not unreasonable to assume that individuals change their news consumption habits when elections become more proximate. The disparity between the results of this experiment and those of Iyengar et al. — implemented during the 2000 US Presidential election — may be a function of this shift in context. This possibility can be easily examined, of course, by replicating this study with a similar sample in an election time. In the meantime, the finding we find most valuable where strategic and policy stories are concerned is the fact that high-interest participants are drawn towards the former.

Third, we do not intend for these results to suggest that it is alright that media content is overwhelmingly negative, or strategic, or both. We are agnostic on that issue. But we nevertheless do not want to use consumer interest as an excuse for media content. The relationship between demand and supply is almost certainly reciprocal — media supply what consumers demand, but they likely help shape demand as well. Efforts on the part of journalists to produce more positive, substantive news content may well lead to a shift in consumer behavior. That seems more likely over the long than the short term, however.

Perhaps the important distinction is not between positive and negative news, but between news that is negative, and news that is cynical. As far back as Edmund Burke, who regarded the press as the “fourth estate” of democracy, we’ve regarded a press that monitors the error of politicians to be a pillar of a functioning system. When political communication scholars write about the unhealthy impact of a negative press, they are certainly not speaking of this classic role, but rather the type of media which unfairly paints politicians as untrustworthy bad-people – recall Patterson’s (1994) assertion that journalists have moved from “silent skeptics” to “vocal cynics”. Perhaps what is needed is a move towards negative, yet *constructive*, political news. Efforts on the part of journalists to produce a brand of journalism that is line with their role as watchdogs might allow them to hold the attention of citizens, while also avoiding the corrosive effects of political cynicism(see e.g. Mann and Ornstein 1994; Moy and Pfau 2000).

For the time being, we take our findings as evidence of the importance of demand-based accounts of media content. Indeed, demand-focused research is increasingly important given the increasing importance of the Internet as a source of news consumption, and the fact that the Internet provides a much larger degree of consumer choice than other mass mediums.¹⁵ Online competition for readers may lead to particularly negative and strategic coverage; and readers’ own biases in news consumption may lead them to a selection of news that is particularly negative and strategic as well. Whether this is a bad thing is of course another matter – it may be that selecting negative and/or strategic coverage is an efficient way of learning

¹⁵There is of course a growing body of work on how increasing choice in media affects what people learn about politics. See Mutz and Martin (e.g., 2001); Negroponte (e.g., 1995); Prior (e.g., 2005, 2007); Sunstein (e.g., 2007).

about the state of politics. This is only speculation at this stage, however. What is clear above is that biases in news consumption likely play an important role in the degree to which news content is both negative and strategic.

Appendix

Experimental Briefings

Pre- Experiment Briefing (oral)

[after participants are seated at their individual computer stations]

If everyone is ready we'll begin.

Before the video starts, we need to get some baseline measures. So first you'll get a webpage with some recent newspaper articles. Go ahead and click on the links and read some of the articles as you normally would - click around to whatever you find interesting. This will take about [5,7,9] minutes.

Be comfortable - you can move your head and eyes naturally.

When the baseline measures are completed, the actual experiment will begin.

You'll get a warning screen and then the video will start automatically. Again, you can move your head and eyes normally - just as you would when watching any other video. After the video ends, the survey will come up.

Post-Experiment Briefing (written)

This was an experiment on how people choose the news they read. While we told you we were monitoring your eye movement, we did not. What we are really interested in is which stories you selected to read in the first party of the experiment.

We are studying the ways in which people choose news that is negative or positive, or that is horserace-orientated or substantive. What we needed to do was create an environment in which you knew you should be reading, but reading whatever you were interested in, and in which that reading time was limited. Our goal is now to gather more data, across many individuals, and explore the kinds of stories people choose to read.

News Stories

The news headlines used in the experiment are as follows. Both Topic and Tone are listed after each headline, where Topic is the modal code from three expert coders, and Tone is the mean code from three expert coders on a scale of -1 to 1.

- Budget cuts require a scalpel, not an axe, executives argue; Policy; -0.5
- Call was a low-down trick,' says Guelph voter; From Pierre Poutine,' an unprecedented attempt to disrupt an election; Strategy; -1
- Canada's F-35 project hits pricing turbulence; Policy; -1
- Canada's promise needs to be kept; Neither; 0
- Candidates press wedge issues in NDP debate; Strategy; -0.5

- Celil case full of missteps, government records reveal; Bureaucratic wrangling behind the scenes as Canadian citizen extradited from Uzbekistan held in Chinese jail; Policy; -1
- CPI retooling could affect pensions, wages; If Statscan finds that consumer price inflation is overestimated, hikes in wages, pensions tied to CPI could drop; Policy; -0.5
- Dirty political game gets dirtier; Scale of the voter-suppression scheme alleged in Guelph has never been seen before in Canada; Strategy; -1
- Federal immigration policies hurt Ontario, minister says; Charles Sousa responds by creating province's first immigration strategy; Policy; -0.75
- Feds warn provinces: Get in line; Tensions rise as Ottawa insists only less business tax, more spending cuts will deliver fiscal prosperity; Policy; -0.75
- Flaherty taps Conservative riding president as port authority; Policy; 0
- Glimmer of hope' for Cape Breton seawall; Policy; 1
- Government to close loophole threatening gay marriages; Policy; 0.25
- Immigration overhaul to let employers choose prospects; Kenney wants a more flexible system that emphasizes language skills and youth, with a view to creating a new stream for tradespeople; Policy; 0.5
- LAW AND DISORDER; This week, an Ontario judge rebelled against mandatory-minimum sentencing; Policy; -1
- Leaders, not genders, for a better world; Key choices made by any sex must combine hard- and soft-power skills to produce smart strategies, argues Joseph Nye; Policy; 1
- Mobilicity calls for U.S.-style spectrum screen' in auction; Policy; 0
- Montreal builds its cultural brand; The city doesn't have pots of money, but it's got a plan to intensify its already vibrant culture one building at a time; Policy; 1
- Mulcair's leftist credentials under fire in Montreal debate; Strategy; -1
- Native leaders wary of Ottawa relationship; Manitoba joins Saskatchewan saying action plan between AFN and federal government did not have their input; Strategy; -1
- Ottawa set to lift entry ban on ANC members; Long-standing ban, which has kept some of the heroes of the anti-apartheid struggle out of Canada, will be addressed, Kenney says; Policy; 0.5
- Putting a face on underfunding of reserve schools; Policy; -0.5
- Redford, McGuinty square off over oil sands benefits; Strategy; -0.75
- Robo-calls worse than Watergate, dirty trickster says; Strategy; -1

- Safe-injection plans divide Montreal; The city wants to move ahead with life-saving program, but there is much disagreement about where sites should be located; Policy; -1
- Shrinking federal deficit gives Flaherty breathing room for budget; Policy; 1
- The bullies, the bill and the bystanders; As Ontario examines anti-bullying laws, a legal adviser weighs the merits of getting silent witnesses to stop empowering the abusers; Policy; -0.25
- The other age issue; Policy; -0.25
- Topp battles to regain lead in NDP race; The party strategist takes aim at Dewar's French and Mulcair's centrist policies as the gloves come off in the leadership contest; Strategy; -1
- Tories accuse NDP of playing dirty, sleazy Internet game' over cybercrime bill; Strategy; -1
- Tories clear hurdle in bid to uphold Wheat Board abolition; Policy; 0.25
- Tories downplay timing for OAS reform; Finance Minister's comment that pension reform is years away quickly reinterpreted to mean it just isn't imminent; Policy; -0.25
- Tories stung by e-privacy backlash; Strategy; -1
- NDP winning Toronto-Danforth riding a safe bet, poll predicts; Byelection candidate Craig Scott leads in race for Layton's old seat with 61 per cent support; Strategy; 0.75
- NDP's support in Quebec eroding: Poll; Down from 42 in May to 33; Strategy; -1
- Tories surge ahead of rivals; Redford PCs grab 53% of support as election looms; Strategy; 0.75
- Poll shows Liberal rebound; Strategy; 1
- Peggy Nash, a pit bull who is always there for her 'hood; What makes Parkdale-High Park's MP run: 'It matters who is actually there'; Strategy; 0.75
- Tide could still turn for Charest; Strategy; 0.75
- Layton named 2011's top newsmaker; Neither; 1
- Ottawa to seek innovative business migrants; Policy; 1
- Rebuilding Ontario: A plan for the way forward; Policy; 0.75
- The Bob Rae Bounce: Liberals continue to gain steam New polls shows the liberas have increased their support by three points, led in part by Bob Rae's increasing popularity.; Strategy; 1
- Liberals reach post election high, but Tories rule the polls; Trudeau gains

support for Liberal leader, Mulcair tops NDP; Strategy; 0.5

- Dewar's not a man to be ruffled by polls; Strategy; 0.5
- With elections over, who's still popular? Saskatchewan's Brad Wal continues to top; Strategy; 0.75
- Opportunity (finally) knocks for the Liberals; Paul Martin's former strategic advisor explains how changing regional dynamics could allow a chastened party to restore itself.; Strategy; 1
- NDP fears Tories won't act on pledge to strengthen elections watchdog; For two days running, Conservatives fail to give direct answer when asked if they'll follow through on non-binding motion with six months; Strategy; -1
- Political fates tied to pipeline progress; Strategy; 0
- Fault lines will soon be exposed; Tory budget, new NDP leader set the tone; Strategy; -0.5

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