



# How the Online News Act Has Harmed Journalistic Objectivity

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This study was commissioned by the Centre for Civic Engagement. The CCE is a non-partisan Canadian charity dedicated to conducting original research on public policy issues related to Canadian prosperity, productivity, and national flourishing. The CCE's research informs an active program of policy seminars, events, conferences, and lectures all aimed at providing the policy making community with actionable insights that encourage informed decision making on issues that matter to Canadians.

# Introduction

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Amid closing newsrooms,<sup>1</sup> corporate layoffs,<sup>2</sup> and declining engagement,<sup>3</sup> Canada's traditional news media has turned to governments for support. The Trudeau government responded with a dizzying array of laws,<sup>4</sup> regulations, subsidies, tax breaks, and incentives for journalism. Many of these initially temporary policies<sup>5</sup> have since become permanent, sometimes with increased funding.<sup>6</sup> A recent report<sup>7</sup> concluded the feds will spend over \$325 million in 2024–25 alone between the Canada Periodical Fund (\$86.5 million), Canada Media Fund (\$154.1 million), Local Journalism Initiative (\$19.6 million), and Canadian Journalism Labour Tax Credit (\$65 million).

Yet the most prominent federal news policy is the 2023 Online News Act, which forces “major digital platforms” (Google and Meta) which publish news links to distribute money to Canadian news organizations in order to ensure “news media and journalists receive fair compensation for their work.”<sup>8</sup> In response to the law, Meta (which runs Facebook and Instagram) opted out<sup>9</sup> of news sharing, but Google agreed to distribute \$100 million annually to newsrooms.

Many were<sup>10</sup> concerned<sup>11</sup> the law would further entrench a relationship of dependency between the federal government and news outlets. The public shares this concern: polling from 2024<sup>12</sup> showed that although few Canadians were aware of the Online News Act, 76 percent agreed that government funding could undermine journalistic objectivity and 67 percent did not trust the government to decide which media qualifies as journalism.

<sup>1</sup> “Government introduces a bill to ensure fair compensation for news media and the sustainability of local news,” *Government of Canada* online, April 5, 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/news/2022/04/government-introduces-a-bill-to-ensure-fair-compensation-for-news-media-and-the-sustainability-of-local-news.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Marc Edge, “How the government got involved and the bottom fell out of Canada’s news media,” *Thehub.ca*, October 16, 2024, <https://thehub.ca/2024/10/16/marc-edge-how-the-government-got-involved-and-the-bottom-fell-out-of-canadas-news-media/>.

<sup>3</sup> Kiernan Green, “Local Canadian news has lost 58 percent of online engagement, national news 24 percent, thanks to the Online News Act and Meta’s news ban,” *Thehub.ca*, August 8, 2024, <https://thehub.ca/2024/08/08/local-canadian-news-has-lost-58-percent-of-online-engagement-national-news-24-percent-thanks-to-the-online-news-act-and-metas-news-ban/>.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Hill, “Can government funding dig media out of its trust deficit? Or is it only making matters worse?,” *Thehub.ca*, July 17, 2024, <https://thehub.ca/2024/07/17/can-government-funding-dig-media-out-of-its-trust-deficit/>.

<sup>5</sup> How Subsidies Failed,” *Blacklock’s Reporter*, [https://www.blacklocks.ca/guest\\_commentary/our-submission-to-the-commons-heritage-committee/](https://www.blacklocks.ca/guest_commentary/our-submission-to-the-commons-heritage-committee/).

<sup>6</sup> “Canadian journalism labour tax credit,” *Government of Canada* online, September 27, 2024, <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/tax/businesses/topics/corporations/business-tax-credits/canadian-journalism-labour-tax-credit.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Jake Fuss and Grady Munro, “Identifying Potential Savings from Specific Reductions to Federal Government Spending,” *Fraser Institute*, 2025, <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/identifying-potential-savings-specific-reductions-federal-government-spending.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> “Government introduces a bill to ensure fair compensation for news media and the sustainability of local news.”

<sup>9</sup> Nadine Yousef, “Meta’s news ban in Canada remains as Online News Act goes into effect,” *BBC News*, December 19, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-67755133>.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Menzies, “Subsidized journalists are praising the government hand that feeds,” *Thehub.ca*, August 18, 2024, <https://thehub.ca/2024/08/18/peter-menzies-subsidized-journalists-are-praising-the-government-hand-that-feeds/>.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Coyne, “With Google’s agreement to pay off the Canadian media, the shakedown in C-18 is made explicit,” *The Globe and Mail* online, December 5, 2023, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-with-googles-agreement-to-pay-off-the-canadian-media-the-shakedown-in/>.

<sup>12</sup> Heather Bastedo and Taylor Jackson, “DeepDive: New polling shows government funding of the news industry could further erode Canadians’ trust in the media,” *Thehub.ca*, July 8, 2024, <https://thehub.ca/2024/07/08/deepdive-government-funding-of-the-news-industry-is-eroding-canadians-trust-in-the-media/>.

My analysis of news coverage of Google's \$100 million deal shows concerns about media coverage have been borne out. In particular, the *Toronto Star* and (especially) the *National Post* have strongly promoted the Online News Act, vilified "tech giants," and published opinion pieces and editorials advocating for an ever-increasing share of money and entitlements. Such coverage does not bode well for the upcoming federal election, where government-funded news outlets will be tasked with providing objective news coverage on the party whose policies help pay their salaries.

# The Online News Act: Changing the Relationship Between Government and Journalism

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The Online News Act was introduced in April 2022 and passed in June 2023. After Meta opted out of news sharing, Google inked a deal with the federal government in November 2023 to pay \$100 million annually (indexed to inflation) to Canadian news organizations via a single “collective” that will then distribute the money. Regulations<sup>13</sup> published in 2023 specified the maximum amount of the \$100 million to be distributed to the CBC (7 percent) and other broadcasters (30 percent).

In June 2024, Google surprised observers<sup>14</sup> by selecting the Canadian Journalism Collective (CJC), composed primarily of independent broadcasters, to distribute the \$100 million, rather than News Media Canada, a consortium of large media organizations. Google officially transferred<sup>15</sup> the \$100 million in January 2025 and the CJC began distributing<sup>16</sup> the money in March.

For those concerned about the effect of such policies on journalistic objectivity, two incidents in 2024 were especially notable. First, the editor-in-chief of *Niagara Now*, a small outlet funded by the Local Journalism Initiative, wrote an article<sup>17</sup> that critiqued Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre’s position on media subsidies and called the Online News Act “simple, fair, and in the best interest of Canadian journalism organizations.” That article—emblazoned with a Government of Canada watermark and the text “The Local Journalism Initiative is funded by the Government of Canada”—was subsequently praised<sup>18</sup> by then PMO chief of staff Katie Telford<sup>19</sup> and Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland.<sup>20</sup>

Second, there was a bizarre spectacle wherein parliamentary secretary for Canadian Heritage Taleb Noormohamed responded on X<sup>21</sup> to *National Post* senior editor Terry Newman’s criticism of the Liberal government.

“Your paper wouldn’t be in business were it not for the subsidies that the government that you hate put in place,” Noormohamed wrote. Newman’s sardonic response—“Okay. You win. You pay my salary. I’ll stop criticizing your government now. Please don’t fire me”—may have been pitch-perfect.<sup>22</sup> But the incident demonstrated the inherent conflict of interest that arises when governments fund newsrooms.

<sup>13</sup> *Online News Act Application and Exemption Regulations*, <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/PDF/SOR-2023-276.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Geist, “Sour Grapes: Big Media Lobby Wants to Squash the New Collective Responsible For Administering Google’s \$100 Million Online News Act Money,” *michaelgeist.ca*, June 12, 2024, <https://www.michaelgeist.ca/2024/06/sour-grapes-big-media-lobby-wants-to-squash-the-new-collective-responsible-for-administering-googles-100-million-online-news-act-money/>.

<sup>15</sup> Tara Deschamps, “Google makes \$100M payment to news groups for Online News Act exemption,” *National Post* online, January 3, 2025, <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/google-payment-online-news-act>.

<sup>16</sup> Tara Deschamps, “Media outlets start receiving Google payments from Online News Act: journalism group,” *Citynews Halifax*, March 13, 2025, <https://halifax.citynews.ca/2025/03/13/media-outlets-start-receiving-google-payments-from-online-news-act-journalism-group/>.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Harley, “Editorial: Poilievre is truly great — at pandering,” *Niagara Now*, August 14, 2024, <https://niagaranow.com/opinion.phtml/editorial-poilievre-is-truly-great-at-pandering/>.

<sup>18</sup> Menzies, “Subsidized journalists are praising the government hand that feeds.”

<sup>19</sup> Katie Telford (@telfordk), “Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre delivered a plethora of lies during his visit to NOTL, forcing The Lake Report to respond with the longest editorial it has ever published.” X, August 15, 2024, <https://x.com/telfordk/status/1824196942403932263>.

<sup>20</sup> Chrystia Freeland (@cafreeland), “This is exactly why local journalism matters.” X, August 16, 2024, <https://x.com/cafreeland/status/1824468206742016069>.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Menzies, “The Liberals say the quiet part out loud,” *The Line*, September 12, 2024, <https://www.readtheline.ca/p/peter-menzies-the-liberals-say-the>.

<sup>22</sup> Terry Newman, “Okay. You win. You pay my salary. I’ll stop criticizing your government now. Please don’t fire me.” X, September 7, 2024, <https://x.com/TLNewmanMTL/status/1832544859820802051>.

# Empirically Evaluating Coverage of Google's \$100 Million Deal

Law professor Michael Geist<sup>23</sup> has shown that newspaper op-eds and editorials were uniformly supportive of the Online News Act when it was introduced in 2022, although news coverage was even-handed. My research sought to determine whether a similar skew occurred when potential beneficiaries of the Online News Act covered Google's \$100 million deal with the federal government.

To find out, I conducted a content analysis of coverage at three major Canadian newspapers (the *Globe and Mail*, the *National Post*, and the *Toronto Star*) and the CBC over two time periods: from November 29 to December 31, 2023, the period following the federal government's announcement of the \$100 million deal with Google; and from June 7 to July 31, 2024, the period following Google's decision about how it would distribute its \$100 million.

In total, I found 31 unique stories across the four outlets during the first period (25 "hard news" and six opinion pieces) and 17 during the second period (nine news and seven opinion pieces) in which the Online News Act and/or Google's \$100 million decision was featured in some substantive way. While CBC's coverage was minimal, the three newspapers each gave the deal considerable attention. The breakdown by venue is shown below.

## Articles about Google's \$100 million Deal (Opinion Pieces/Editorials in Parentheses)

	Google Deal Announced (2023)	Google Chooses CJC (2024)	Total Stories
CBC	3 (0)	1 (0)	4 (0)
Globe and Mail	9 (2)	5 (2)	14 (4)
National Post	7 (1)	9 (4)	16 (5)
Toronto Star	14 (3)	7 (1)	21 (4)
<b>Total Unique Stories*</b>	<b>31 (6)</b>	<b>17 (7)</b>	<b>48 (13)</b>

\* Total number of unique stories is lower than the sum of the column due to venues' use of identical wire service news stories.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Geist, "Spiking Op-Eds: How the Government's Online News Act is Already Leading to Media Self-Censorship," *michaelgeist.ca*, April 14, 2022, <https://www.michaelgeist.ca/2022/04/spiking-op-eds-how-the-governments-online-news-act-is-already-leading-to-media-self-censorship/>.

During the first period, the Online News Act was a central topic in six opinion pieces (two from the *Globe*, three from the *Star*, and one editorial from the *National Post*). Five of the six were<sup>24</sup> positive<sup>25</sup> about<sup>26</sup> the<sup>27</sup> concept<sup>28</sup> of Google and Meta being forced to pay to share news links. The lone holdout was the *Globe's* Andrew Coyne, who wrote<sup>29</sup> that journalists had engaged in “transparent lies” and had been “been exposed as not only extortionists, but frauds.”

However, of the five opinion pieces supportive of government funding journalism, only two were positive about the announcement. Jonah Prousky at the *Globe* said “On balance, the deal is good for Canada,”<sup>30</sup> while the *National Post* editorial board called the deal “good news for readers and the public.”<sup>31</sup>

The other three—all at the *Toronto Star*—were critical of the deal for not giving newsrooms *enough*. Heather Mallick wrote that “The Liberal government is bravely fighting back against online behemoths”<sup>32</sup> but called the \$100 million sum “measly.” Althia Raj said, “The Online News Act has the laudable goal of supporting local journalism in Canada” but claimed the law “allows the tech giants to opt-out, leaving us all worse off.”<sup>33</sup> Edward Keenan wrote<sup>34</sup> that the money was “not nearly enough to solve the financial problem that Canada’s news industry faces—a problem that ultimately threatens the functioning of Canadian democracy.”

By contrast, the 25 hard news stories during this period were largely written objectively, with no obvious favouritism. The one notable exception was the *Toronto Star* piece entitled “Torstar critical of Liberal online news compensation deal with Google,”<sup>35</sup> which quoted Torstar owner Jordan Bitove calling the deal “disappointing.”

However, one interesting aspect stood out: 22 of the 25 hard news stories (88 percent) used the term “tech giant” to refer to Google and Meta, with one other story using “online giant” and “internet search giant.” The news industry—and the federal government<sup>36</sup>—has clearly settled on describing Google and Meta as “tech giants.”

<sup>24</sup> Heather Mallick, “Why the Google media deal is too weak to help rescue journalism,” *Toronto Star* online, December 4, 2023, [https://www.thestar.com/opinion/star-columnists/why-the-google-media-deal-is-too-weak-to-help-rescue-journalism/article\\_5eblleece-907a-11ee-825f-e722108c9923.html](https://www.thestar.com/opinion/star-columnists/why-the-google-media-deal-is-too-weak-to-help-rescue-journalism/article_5eblleece-907a-11ee-825f-e722108c9923.html).

<sup>25</sup> Althia Raj, “Justin Trudeau’s government badly fumbled the Online News Act—and a deal with Google doesn’t fix its fatal flaw,” *Toronto Star* online, November 29, 2023, [https://www.thestar.com/politics/political-opinion/justin-trudeau-s-government-badly-fumbled-the-online-news-act-and-a-deal-with-google/article\\_9ad85e88-08d1-58a6-90ca-46ae635b1958.html](https://www.thestar.com/politics/political-opinion/justin-trudeau-s-government-badly-fumbled-the-online-news-act-and-a-deal-with-google/article_9ad85e88-08d1-58a6-90ca-46ae635b1958.html).

<sup>26</sup> Jonah Prousky, “Media got \$100-million from Google, but can they also get \$100-million from Meta?,” *The Globe and Mail* online, December 6, 2023, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/commentary/article-bill-c-18-online-news-act-google-meta/>.

<sup>27</sup> “NP View: Deal with Google a big step forward for the news industry,” *National Post* online, December 4, 2023, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/np-view-deal-with-google-a-big-step-forward-for-the-news-industry>.

<sup>28</sup> Edward Keenan, “Google deal is a start but doesn’t do what’s needed to dave the news,” *Toronto Star* online, December 12, 2023, [https://www.thestar.com/opinion/google-deal-is-a-start-but-doesn-t-do-what-s-needed-to-save-the/article\\_4f6f5936-983d-11ee-ba1d-9bad53d5855f.html](https://www.thestar.com/opinion/google-deal-is-a-start-but-doesn-t-do-what-s-needed-to-save-the/article_4f6f5936-983d-11ee-ba1d-9bad53d5855f.html).

<sup>29</sup> Coyne, “With Google’s agreement to pay off the Canadian media, the shakedown in C-18 is made explicit.”

<sup>30</sup> Prousky, “Media got \$100-million from Google, but can they also get \$100-million from Meta?”

<sup>31</sup> “NP View: Deal with Google a big step forward for the news industry.”

<sup>32</sup> Mallick, “Why the Google media deal is too weak to help rescue journalism.”

<sup>33</sup> Raj, “Justin Trudeau’s government badly fumbled the Online News Act—and a deal with Google doesn’t fix its fatal flaw.”

<sup>34</sup> Keenan, “Google deal is a start but doesn’t do what’s needed to dave the news.”

<sup>35</sup> “Torstar critical of Liberal online news compensation deal with Google,” *Toronto Star* online, November 30, 2024, [https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/torstar-critical-of-liberal-online-news-compensation-deal-with-google/article\\_9a7470e6-cf06-5718-90f7-715dd5c0ab05.html](https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/torstar-critical-of-liberal-online-news-compensation-deal-with-google/article_9a7470e6-cf06-5718-90f7-715dd5c0ab05.html).

<sup>36</sup> “Government introduces a bill to ensure fair compensation for news media and the sustainability of local news.”



# Distributing the Loot: How the Media Framed Google's Decision

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In June 2024, Google shocked many when it chose the Canadian Journalism Collective,<sup>37</sup> a group of independent media outlets representing smaller organizations such as<sup>38</sup> Pivot, IndigiNews, and Village Media, to distribute the funds. Google rejected the Online News Media Collective, which represents 95 percent<sup>39</sup> of news outlets in Canada and includes the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB), News Media Canada (which represents larger legacy newspaper companies), and the CBC. As Peter Menzies wrote in *The Hub*,<sup>40</sup> “both winners and losers still qualify for the Google loot,” but “those who drove the Online News Act bus will now be sitting much further toward the back of it than they may have expected.”

In the six weeks following the announcement, there were 17 unique stories that discussed the Online News Act. My analysis focuses on the 12 of those stories where Google's \$100 million distribution decision was the main topic. Of these 12 stories—eight hard news and four opinion pieces—what stood out most was the ferocity with which the *National Post* attacked Google's choice of the CJC over the Online News Media Collective, of which Postmedia is a member. In what followed, the *Post* appeared to turn its op-ed page into a platform for its own advocacy.

The *Post* published seven articles about the Google deal during this period: four hard news and three opinion pieces. Each of the four hard news stories contained headlines raising concerns about how Google chose to distribute the \$100 million, such as “Google's choice of organization to distribute \$100 million raises conflict-of-interest concerns.”<sup>41</sup> While all four stories were careful to mention that Postmedia was a member of News Media Canada, they primarily quoted from people—including News Media Canada's CEO and the president of Unifor—who were critical of both Google's decision and the CJC as an entity.

Of the *Post*'s four hard news stories focusing on the Online News Act, two<sup>42</sup> raised<sup>43</sup> a potential conflict of interest between CJC board members and Indiegaf, a startup platform with a prior connection to Google. Another<sup>44</sup> quoted the *Toronto Star*'s vice president of public and government relations, who described Google's decision to choose the CJC as “frankly fairly perplexing” insofar as the CJC “has relatively little experience in this area” (presumably, the “area” of distributing funds to journalists). The fourth story<sup>45</sup> focused on anti-Israel tweets from CJC board director Sadia Zaman, and included a quote

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<sup>37</sup> Mickey Djuric, “Google signs deal with organization to distribute \$100-million to Canadian news companies,” *The Globe and Mail* online, June 7, 2024, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/article-google-signs-deal-with-organization-to-distribute-100-million-to/>.

<sup>38</sup> “Canadian Journalism Collective,” <https://cjc-ccj.ca/en/>.

<sup>39</sup> Matthew Hanick, “Google's choice of organization to distribute \$100M raises conflict-of-interest concerns,” *National Post* online, June 25, 2024, <https://nationalpost.com/news/google-100m-online-news-act>.

<sup>40</sup> Peter Menzies, “Google shuns the big media moguls in decision over news fund—but it's Canadian consumers who will pay the heaviest price,” *Thehub.ca*, June 11, 2024, <https://thehub.ca/2024/06/11/peter-menzies-google-shuns-the-big-media-moguls-for-control-of-its-news-fund-but-its-canadian-consumers-who-will-pay-the-heaviest-price/>.

<sup>41</sup> Hanick, “Google's choice of organization to distribute \$100M raises conflict-of-interest concerns.”

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Matthew Hanick, “News publishers ask CRTC to ensure ‘good faith’ in Google funding,” *National Post* online, June 27, 2024, <https://nationalpost.com/news/news-publishers-ask-crtc-to-ensure-good-faith-in-google-funding/>.

<sup>44</sup> “News publishers call for clear rules for doling out Google's \$100-million fund,” *National Post* online, June 12, 2024, <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/publishers-look-clear-rules-for-google-funding>.

<sup>45</sup> “Board director of organization that will help decide how Google's \$100M is distributed regrets her anti-Israel retweets,” *National Post* online, July 5, 2024, <https://nationalpost.com/news/board-director-of-organization-that-will-help-decide-how-googles-100m-is-distributed-regrets-her-anti-israel-retweets>.



from the president of the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs that questioned “the objectivity and balanced perspectives of some members of the newly formed Canadian Journalism Collective Steering Committee.”

Google’s \$100 million decision also featured heavily in the *National Post* opinion pages during this period, with all 46 three<sup>47</sup> op-eds<sup>48</sup> critical of Google’s choice of the CJC. (The only other<sup>49</sup> op-ed on Google’s \$100 million decision during this period, from the *Toronto Star*, praised the Online News Act as an example “of how to hold Big Tech accountable and make sure they pay news businesses” but did not criticize the CJC.)

The most scathing *Post* op-ed was Michael Taube’s piece,<sup>50</sup> “Google partners with lefty collective in attempted end run around Online News.” Normally a staunch<sup>51</sup> advocate<sup>52</sup> for<sup>53</sup> fiscal conservatism, Taube seemed—here and elsewhere<sup>54</sup>—unperturbed by the government funding of journalism. Taube described all but one of the members of the CJC as “involved with relatively obscure left-wing, alternative publications,” claimed the CRTC’s “call for comments”<sup>55</sup> about the \$100 million deal raised “numerous red flags,” and concluded that “the tech giant...is not acting in good faith in its dealings with Canadian media.”

The other two opinion pieces from the *Post* also praised the Online News Act and questioned Google’s choice of distributor. Benoit Chartier, the owner of several Quebec newspapers represented by the Online News Media Collective, said<sup>56</sup> the Online News Act, “will help entrepreneurs like me and countless others in small communities across Canada keep the lights on” and encouraged the CRTC to create regulations “to make certain that [the CJC] plays fair and follows the rules.” The *Post* also published an op-ed from Dave Adsett, the chair of News Media Canada, who echoed<sup>57</sup> concerns about the composition of the CJC’s board and urged the CRTC to enforce its regulations vigorously. There were no opinion pieces praising the CJC.

The Online News Act wasn’t the only government news policy praised in the normally conservative-leaning *Post* opinion pages during this period. On July 3, the *Post* also published an op-ed<sup>58</sup> by Paul Deegan, the CEO of News Media Canada, praising the Ontario government’s policy mandating that provincial Crown corporations dedicate 25 percent of their advertising budgets to Ontario news outlets (a number that Deegan had specifically proposed<sup>59</sup> in a *Post* op-ed nine months earlier). Michael Taube penned an op-ed praising<sup>60</sup> Ontario’s policy less than two weeks later.

<sup>46</sup> Dave Adsett, “Community newspaper publishers deserve a seat at the table,” *National Post* online, July 6, 2024, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/community-newspaper-publishers-deserve-a-seat-at-the-table>.

<sup>47</sup> Michael Taube, “Google partners with lefty collective in attempted end run around Online News Act,” *National Post* online, July 5, 2024, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/google-partners-with-lefty-collective-in-attempted-end-run-around-online-news-act>.

<sup>48</sup> Benoit Chartier, “Guardrails needed in disbursing Google funding to media,” *National Post* online, June 11, 2024, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/guardrails-needed-in-disbursing-google-funding-to-media>.

<sup>49</sup> Maria Saras-Voutsinas and Joe Volpe, “A new law is meant to put money into newsrooms. We need rules to make sure that happens,” *Toronto Star* online, June 15, 2024, [https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/a-new-law-is-meant-to-put-money-into-newsrooms-we-need-rules-to-make/article\\_5daf442c-29bd-11ef-8774-4bbeb1a99c7c.html](https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/a-new-law-is-meant-to-put-money-into-newsrooms-we-need-rules-to-make/article_5daf442c-29bd-11ef-8774-4bbeb1a99c7c.html).

<sup>50</sup> Taube, “Google partners with lefty collective in attempted end run around Online News Act.”

<sup>51</sup> Michael Taube, “May Doug Ford’s third majority win herald an era of fiscal conservatism,” *National Post* online, February 26, 2025, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/michael-taube-may-doug-fords-third-majority-win-herald-an-era-of-fiscal-conservatism>.

<sup>52</sup> Michael Taube, “The Ontario government needs to get out of the booze business,” *National Post* online, February 7, 2025, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/the-ontario-government-needs-to-get-out-of-the-booze-business>.

<sup>53</sup> Michael Taube, “Trudeau’s GST holiday and \$250 cheques are not fooling Canadians,” *National Post* online, December 4, 2024, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/trudeaus-gst-holiday-and-250-cheques-are-not-fooling-canadians>.

<sup>54</sup> Michael Taube, “Ontario’s plan to support local news without direct subsidies is groundbreaking,” *National Post* online, July 15, 2024, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/ontarios-plan-to-support-local-news-without-direct-subsidies-is-groundbreaking>.

<sup>55</sup> *Online News Notice of Consultation CRTC 2024-143*, <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/2024/2024-143.htm>.

<sup>56</sup> Chartier, “Guardrails needed in disbursing Google funding to media.”

<sup>57</sup> Adsett, “Community newspaper publishers deserve a seat at the table.”

<sup>58</sup> Paul Deegan, “Ontario leads the way on sustaining quality journalism,” *National Post* online, July 3, 2024, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/ontario-leads-the-way-on-sustaining-quality-journalism>.

<sup>59</sup> Paul Deegan, “Supporting local journalism from the ground up,” *National Post* online, October 3, 2023, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/supporting-local-journalism-from-the-ground-up>.

<sup>60</sup> Taube, “Ontario’s plan to support local news without direct subsidies is groundbreaking.”

# From Anecdote to Data: Takeaways From Google's \$100 Million Funding Coverage

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My analysis shows that coverage of Google's \$100 million deal in major newspaper opinion pages reflected those major papers' self-interest in three ways: supporting the Online News Act in principle; suggesting the \$100 million was insufficient;<sup>61</sup> and critiquing Google's decision to distribute the money via the Canadian Journalism Collective.

However, there was important opinion variation by venue. *The Globe and Mail* published<sup>62</sup> (and continues to publish<sup>63</sup>) critiques of government-funded journalism from columnist Andrew Coyne as well as *Hub* contributors Michael<sup>64</sup> Geist<sup>65</sup> and Peter<sup>66</sup> Menzies.<sup>67</sup> By contrast, when the Online News Act was criticized in the opinion pages of the *Toronto Star*, it was only for not going far<sup>68</sup> enough.<sup>69</sup>

By far the most interesting case is the *National Post*, which provided the most strident criticism of Google's choice of the Canadian Journalism Collective (CJC) in both its opinion pages and news coverage. In this case, the *Post's* incentives aligned perfectly: by criticizing the CJC as a "lefty collective,"<sup>70</sup> it was able to maintain its conservative editorial dispositions in a manner that coincided with its financial and institutional self-interest. The opinion pages of the left-leaning *Toronto Star* raised no comparable concerns about the CJC in mid-2024, though a more recent *Star* op-ed<sup>71</sup> did claim Google made an "odd choice" to select "a ragtag bunch of small, left-wing, and independent local news outlets."

<sup>61</sup> Keenan, "Google deal is a start but doesn't do what's needed to save the news."

<sup>62</sup> Coyne, "With Google's agreement to pay off the Canadian media, the shutdown in C-18 is made explicit."

<sup>63</sup> Andrew Coyne, "Please stop helping us: the newspaper bailout is a comprehensive policy failure," *The Globe and Mail* online, August 2, 2024, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-government-subsidies-are-not-saving-canadas-newspapers-its-time-to-end/>.

<sup>64</sup> Michael Geist, "There's a global plan to tax Big Tech. Why did Canada act alone with digital services tax?," *The Globe and Mail* online, July 10, 2024, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/commentary/article-theres-a-global-plan-to-tax-big-tech-why-did-canada-act-alone-with/>.

<sup>65</sup> Michael Geist, "Artificial intelligence makes Bill C-18, Canada's Online News Act, already outdated," *The Globe and Mail* online, June 18, 2023, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/commentary/article-artificial-intelligence-makes-bill-c-18-canadas-online-news-act/>.

<sup>66</sup> Peter Menzies, "The government is taking a puzzling approach to newspaper subscriptions," *The Globe and Mail* online, September 6, 2024, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-the-government-is-taking-a-puzzling-approach-to-newspaper/>.

<sup>67</sup> Peter Menzies, "With its new focus on the internet, the CRTC has abandoned broadcasting," September 5, 2023, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-with-its-new-focus-on-the-internet-the-crtc-has-abandoned-broadcasting/>.

<sup>68</sup> Keenan, "Google deal is a start but doesn't do what's needed to save the news."

<sup>69</sup> Mallick, "Why the Google media deal is too weak to help rescue journalism."

<sup>70</sup> Taube, "Google partners with lefty collective in attempted end run around Online News Act."

<sup>71</sup> Justin Ling, "Justin Trudeau tried to save journalism. This is why he failed," *Toronto Star* online, July 30, 2024, [https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/justin-trudeau-tried-to-save-journalism-this-is-why-he-failed/article\\_bdac2360-4dce-11ef-85f4-ff703f825e15.html](https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/justin-trudeau-tried-to-save-journalism-this-is-why-he-failed/article_bdac2360-4dce-11ef-85f4-ff703f825e15.html).

Although it was refreshing to see *Post* journalists push back<sup>72</sup> against veiled threats from Liberal MPs on social media—and there is little concern the newspaper will become a bastion of Liberal support—the *Post*’s all-hands-on-deck campaign for preferential governmental funding treatment has continued in recent months. Its editorial board criticized<sup>73</sup> the CBC for “pilfering” the Google fund by receiving \$7 million of the \$100 million. It subsequently praised governments for making “an honest effort from Canadian governments to provide support to an industry at risk of implosion” while imploring<sup>74</sup> the federal government to close a tax “loophole” that permits businesses to claim tax deductions for foreign Internet advertising. The paper subsequently ran a one-sided news story<sup>75</sup> on the same topic.

Yet the *Post* is not alone. From *Niagara Now* to the *Toronto Star*, Canadian newspapers have made a Faustian bargain with the federal government. Having framed the decline of traditional journalism as<sup>76</sup> “an existential threat to the very foundation of our democracy,” many could argue they have become convinced of their own righteousness and entitled to their entitlements.<sup>77</sup> The Canadian public’s concerns<sup>78</sup> about the effect of government funding on journalistic independence have been vindicated. News coverage of the upcoming election will only amplify such concerns.

<sup>72</sup> Newman, “Okay. You win. You pay my salary. I’ll stop criticizing your government now. Please don’t fire me.”

<sup>73</sup> “NP View: The CBC exploits its unfair advantage,” *National Post* online, January 18, 2025, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/the-cbc-exploits-its-unfair-advantage>.

<sup>74</sup> “NP View: Close the tax loophole that allows foreign tech giants to bleed Canadian media dry,” *National Post* online, November 2, 2024, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/close-the-tax-loophole-that-allows-foreign-tech-giants-to-bleed-canadian-media-dry>.

<sup>75</sup> Antoine Trépanier, “Protect Canadian unity ‘through the protection of its media,’ industry execs say,” *National Post* online, March 4, 2025, <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/protect-canadian-unity-through-the-protection-of-its-media-industry-execs-say>.

<sup>76</sup> “NP View: Close the tax loophole that allows foreign tech giants to bleed Canadian media dry.”

<sup>77</sup> “I’m Entitled To My Entitlements – David Dingwall,” November, 2008, short clips, 0:01–0:05, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ulo-bEsoMgA>.

<sup>78</sup> Heather Bastedo and Taylor Jackson, “DeepDive: New polling shows government funding of the news industry could further erode Canadians’ trust in the media.”

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