

Crisis or Transformation? Debates over Journalistic Work in Canada

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ABSTRACT

Background *There is a broad recognition that journalism is facing difficult times in Canada and internationally.*

Analysis *This article reviews the literature on the state of journalism and then focuses on one element of the perceived crisis of journalism in the Canadian context: claims that the number of employed journalists has fallen sharply in recent years. Using data from Statistics Canada and the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, the authors find that, unlike the United States, the number of journalists employed in Canada has risen slightly in absolute terms over the past two decades.*

Conclusions and implications *These findings have important implications for how researchers, politicians and the public think about the state of journalism in Canada and what types of policy prescriptions might be more or less appropriate to deal with the real but not necessarily calamitous changes that are taking place.*

Keywords *Journalism; New media; News work; Policy; Public relations*

RÉSUMÉ

Contexte *On reconnaît généralement que le journalisme est en train de traverser des moments difficiles tant au Canada qu'au niveau international.*

Analyse *Cet article passe en revue la littérature sur l'état du journalisme, après quoi il se focalise sur un élément particulier de la crise apparente du journalisme au Canada : l'idée que le nombre de journalistes a chuté depuis quelques années. Au moyen de données provenant de Statistique Canada et du United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, les auteurs constatent que, contrairement à ce qui s'est passé aux États-Unis, le nombre de journalistes au Canada a connu une légère augmentation au cours des deux dernières décennies.*

Conclusion et implications *Ces données ont des implications importantes sur la manière dont les chercheurs, les politiciens et le public perçoivent l'état du journalisme au Canada et*

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sur les types de politiques qui seraient appropriés pour gérer les changements incontestables mais non calamiteux qui sont en train d'avoir lieu.

Mots clés *Journalisme; Nouveaux médias; Travail journalistique; Politiques; Relations publiques*

There is a broadly shared understanding that journalism is facing tough times, in Canada and elsewhere around the world. Many sources have chronicled the situation in Canada: plummeting revenues, falling profits, waning audiences, budget cuts, newspaper closures, scaled back production schedules, and news workers laid off (Edge, 2014; Gasher, Brin, Crowther, King, Salamon, & Thibault, 2016; Public Policy Forum, 2017). According to such views, these trends show no signs of abating any time soon, causing many to speak of a crisis of journalism in Canada (CBC Radio, 2017; Diamantopoulos, 2017; Potter, 2017). Consequently, a number of public policy inquiries and regulatory proceedings by the Government of Canada and the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) have followed in a bid to shine a light on the plight of the news media in the “age of the internet” (CRTC, 2016; Parliament of Canada, 2006; Parliament of Canada, Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2017).

These efforts have prompted numerous policy proposals designed to head off the impending calamity allegedly on the doorstep of Canadian journalism (Parliament of Canada, 2006; Parliament of Canada, Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 2017; Public Policy Forum, 2017). Recommendations include requiring publishers to provide reasonable notice prior to closing news outlets, encouraging greater philanthropic support for journalism, and removing alleged tax disadvantages for Canadian firms selling online advertisements and subscriptions (Public Policy Forum, 2017¹). Many of these proposals seem aimed at recovering revenue lost to Google and Facebook—companies purportedly embodying a “vampire economics” (Public Policy Forum, 2017, p. 31), sucking the lifeblood out of journalism and the media in Canada and around the world.

Amid these ongoing discussions and efforts to shape the policy agenda, dire claims of steep and ongoing losses in journalistic jobs abound. Nearly 10,000 news jobs were lost between 2008 and 2013, according to the Canadian Media Guild (CMG) (2013a, 2013b), a trade union representing 6,000 workers employed in the Canadian media. This claim, or similar ones, have been repeated in journalistic coverage (CBC Radio, 2016; Millar, 2018) and public policy reports on the state of journalism in Canada, even though the assertion seems to be based only on a running tally of jobs lost, with no equivalent effort to keep track of new hires (Public Policy Forum, 2017). In this telling, the situation in Canada seems much like that in the United States, where the number of working journalists decreased from just under 60,000 in 2005 to 44,480 in 2017 (United States, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018d). Other studies point to the de-skilling and retooling of the “multiskilled” journalist, the rise of freelancers and contract-based journalistic work, growing precarity, and other conditions that undercut the quality of such work (Cohen, 2011, 2012; McKercher, 2002; Mosco & McKercher, 2008). The message seems clear: journalism in Canada is in crisis.²

This article interrogates one element of this perceived calamity in a Canadian context: the number of journalists employed across the country. The article is structured as follows: the first section reviews some of the more prominent contributions to the literature on

the state of journalism more broadly. It outlines the debate between those who view the situation as one of crisis (Almiron, 2010; McChesney, 2003) versus one of potential transformation (Benkler, 2006; Gorman, 2015; van der Haak, Parks, & Castells, 2012).

In this latter conceptualization, two things stand out: first, that established media forms and practices such as journalism have developed in close proximity to the far larger arenas of information and communications technologies, infrastructures, and corporations since the consolidation of industrial capitalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Such relations have become especially contentious on an episodic basis ever since, for example, with the advent of broadcasting in the 1920s, television in the 1950s, cable television in the 1960s, and again from the late 1970s onwards with the structural transformation of the media industries through a combination of new technologies, market liberalization, and changes in how people use media (Miege, 1989). Arguably, the widespread uptake of the internet and mobile technologies, and the consolidation of the commercial internet model around a small number of internet giants (e.g., Google, Apple, Facebook, Twitter, and Amazon) from the turn of the twenty-first century until the present defines another such moment. Second, while crisis narratives often speak in terms of “the death of” specific media and cultural forms (McChesney & Nichols, 2010), the perspective of institutional and cultural industries approaches to political economy that inform our work tend to highlight instead wrenching changes that episodically remake particular media sectors. The remaking of the press and journalism now underway in our own time is one such instance (George, 2012; Miege, 1989).

Next we review one aspect of this debate, which relates specifically to the qualitative and quantitative aspects of contemporary journalistic work. We explore recent research in this area (Cohen, 2011, 2012; McKercher, 2002; Mosco & McKercher, 2008) and review claims made about the number of journalists in Canada, which are often composed of counts of journalists laid off, with little regard for those hired (CBC Radio, 2016; Millar, 2018; Public Policy Forum, 2017). A discussion of methodology follows, which outlines how we collected and used data from Statistics Canada (2018c; also Statistics Canada Labour Division, personal communication, August 30, 2017; December 14, 2018) to investigate these assertions. Our analysis of Statistics Canada data on the number of employed journalists in the country shows that the count increased from near 6,000 in 1998 to a peak of 13,000 in 2013, before falling back to the 11,000 range in 2017—a figure in line with the annual long-term average since the turn of the twenty-first century (see Figure 1). The data also show that there is no correspondence between the advent of the internet and a decline in the number of journalist jobs in absolute terms—either in its 1990s dial-up form or its broadband version since then. In sum, accounting for the limitations that exist in the Labour Force Survey itself, we find that the number of journalists employed in Canada has actually increased slightly based on absolute terms. Accordingly, we find that claims about the crisis in journalism in this country (CBC Radio, 2017; Diamantopoulos, 2017; Potter, 2017) hide the more nuanced realities of the situation.

At the same time, however, elements of the data do highlight changes to the journalistic profession in Canada. For instance, increases in journalism jobs in absolute

terms have been vastly outstripped by growth in the number of public relations, advertising, and marketing positions (see Figure 5). The modest increase in journalistic jobs over time has also been outpaced by the massive growth in the size and complexity of the media economy (Canadian Media Concentration Research Project [CMCRP], 2018). Furthermore, the jobs that do exist have changed, becoming more temporary and less frequently tied to any single, recognizable news organization (see Figures 2, 3, and 4).

Contending views: Contemporary journalism— crisis or transformation?

It is common knowledge that traditional print and broadcast media's advertising-driven business model is in disarray. In 2006, U.S. newspaper ad revenue was U.S.\$49.3 billion, whereas in 2017, estimates put it at U.S.\$16.5 billion—roughly a third of what it had been just a decade earlier. Advertising revenues fell by nearly half between 2005 and 2010 alone, from U.S.\$49.4 billion to U.S.\$25.8 billion (Pew Research Center, 2018). Canadian daily newspaper advertising revenues have decreased too, from \$2.75 billion at their high point in 2006 to less than half that amount in 2017, that is, \$1 billion (CMCRP, 2018; News Media Canada, 2017). The sharpest decline, outside of the Great Recession in 2008, took place after 2012, several years later than in the United States (CMCRP, 2018). While analysts in Canada and other Western capitalist democracies generally agree that falling advertising revenues are a pivotal part of the present precarious state of journalism (Public Policy Forum, 2017), their assessment of what else might have contributed to this state of affairs, the severity of the problems, and what might be done to turn things around varies greatly.

Many researchers explore the ways technological change has contributed to the present state of journalism (Ahlers, 2006; Boczkowski & Ferris, 2005; Bruns, 2008; Larsson, 2009; O'Sullivan & Heinonen, 2008). They highlight how the emergence of the internet has played a part in changes to the operations of newsrooms and, correspondingly, the labour of journalists, who hold novel responsibilities and use a range of new digital tools to do their work (Deuze, 2007; Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009; Redden & Witschge, 2009; Singer, 2010; Spyridou, Masiola, Veglis, Kalliris, & Dimoulas, 2013). Some emphasize how the internet has prompted new relationships between journalists and their sources, particularly public relations workers (Larsson, 2009). Other researchers are concerned about the increasingly mobile and fragmented news audience, who can access journalistic content for a fraction of the cost of traditional print or cable subscriptions, and from a widening array of distribution channels (Mythen, 2008; O'Sullivan & Heinonen, 2008). A few suggest traditional news firms are relying on outdated business models predicated on an industrial logic that no longer applies in the digital age (Bruns, 2008).

Many critical scholars focus on the political economy of journalism. Some posit that the consolidation of news media groups in the past two decades has left them with excessively capitalized corporate edifices unable to meet the aims that justified such mergers in the first place, and with bloated and unsustainable debts (Edge, 2011a). In this view, the financialization of the media, and the excessive profit motive of news firms, are key contributors to the crisis of the present press system (Almiron, 2010; Edge, 2014; McChesney & Nichols, 2010; Winseck, 2010).

These factors exacerbate the grave difficulties already faced by the traditional press, such as the dominance of digital advertising revenue by Google and Facebook—indeed, these two behemoths alone accounted for nearly three-quarters of the \$6.8-billion internet advertising market in Canada in 2017 (CMCRP, 2018). The global financial crisis compounded these developments, with a decrease of advertising revenue from which the press has never fully recovered (other advertising-based media, like broadcast television, have experienced much the same results—albeit in varying degrees) (CMCRP, 2018). Other observers contend that a history of weak regulation in Canada has intensified these problems, with the Competition Bureau's guiding legislation ill-equipped to deal with media consolidation and the agency seemingly ill-disposed to do much about the issue even if it could (Durocher, 2016; Edge, 2011a, 2014; Skinner, Compton, & Gasher, 2005; Winseck, 2010). Still others have considered the state of affairs inside the CBC, Canada's public broadcaster (Mosco & McKercher, 2005). Through all of this, media reports of large-scale job cuts across the news industries seem to come in waves, but with a clear direction to the tide: things are bad and getting worse. For more than a few observers, all of this adds up to a crisis of great proportion (Almiron, 2010; Alterman, 2008; Meyer, 2006).

Another group, however, examines the potential for emerging internet-centric forms of networked journalism to fill the void left by incumbent news firms. These scholars tell us that it is the conventional business model, and not journalism itself, that is in crisis (Beckett, 2008; Benkler, 2011; George, 2012; Gorman, 2015; Johnson, 2009; van der Haak et al., 2012). Benkler (2006) suggests the internet has the *potential* to foster increasingly democratic, diverse, autonomous, and participatory forms of journalism in an economy based on an exchange of information and “a communications environment built on cheap processors with high computation capacities” (p. 3). He argues that we are in the midst of a long-term shift from a mass media-dominated public sphere predicated on a one-way, hub-and-spoke structure to a networked public sphere, and from an industrial information economy to a networked information economy. Similarly, others see the potential of a networked journalism where the journalist is a node whose work relies on professional and unprofessional sources and feedback within a network of information gathering, analysis, and distribution (van der Haak et al., 2012). According to this view, networked journalism is an opportunity for a new form of journalism where society can benefit from a plethora of information and its meaningful interpretation.

As Benkler (2006) and others are careful to note, however, openness and diversity are not preordained outcomes of these processes. Gatekeepers and bottlenecks both within, and in gaining access to, the network can “create threats to the autonomy of individuals in that environment” (p. 147) that may warrant policy interventions to support diverse *access* to network communications. As Benkler (2006) emphasizes later, this shift to a networked public sphere is not inevitable, nor will it be easy: “the twentieth-century industrial producers of information, culture and communications ... stand to lose too much” (pp. 379–380). Moreover, the well-established giants of the media industries will not take these changes without a fight, and this includes traditional news firms. Seen from this angle, whatever public policy measures and public

funding arrangements are adopted should be directed toward emerging digital native news firms instead of traditional news firms (Gorman, 2015). It might also be prudent to avoid spur-of-the-moment policy reactions in favour of continuing to wait and see how emergent new forms of journalism develop on their own (Benkler, 2011).

Journalistic work as one aspect of the state of journalism

Below this broader dialogue about crisis and potential transformation is a discussion about recent changes to the quality and quantity of journalistic labour. Academic research has emphasized the growth of contract work and freelancers, as well as the changing balance between unionized versus non-unionized work (Cohen, 2011, 2012). Some analysts highlight the strikes, lockouts, and labour strife at specific news firms in Canada, for example, Québecor and its protracted lockout of journalists, editorial staff, and others at its flagship *Journal de Montréal* and *Journal de Québec* (Edge, 2011b, 2016; Gorman, 2004).

Moreover, academic research has found that the structural powers at work in the contemporary news landscape have resulted in various changes to the qualitative aspects of journalists' work (Cohen, 2016; Gollmitzer, 2014; Ornebring, 2018). In *Writers' Rights*, Cohen (2016) investigates the struggles of freelance journalists in English Canada, including low pay, exploitative labour practices, overwork, and heightened competition. Ornebring (2018) comments on the extent to which this precarity is exacerbated within a profession so predicated on meritocracy, which "engenders a habit of thought where acquiring new digital skill sets and adopting to a technologized workplace simply is part of being able to 'do the job'" (p. 123). Moreover, Gollmitzer (2014) adds, these challenges are complicated due to the fact that journalists are not always ready to acknowledge their rights as workers within a capitalist system, "especially when it comes to gaps in social and legal security or possibilities for collectively improving working conditions" (p. 838). Plus, those who do leave the field often face real challenges, including feelings of betrayal, anxiety, and resignation (O'Donnell, Zion, & Sherwood, 2016).

It is easy to see why a sense of crisis hangs over the public discussion about journalism (CBC Radio, 2017; Diamantopoulos, 2017; Potter, 2017), including in relation to both print and broadcast media. Experts, academics, and journalists alike seem to share a narrow range of common claims, at least with respect to the number of journalists employed in Canada (CBC Radio, 2016; Millar, 2018; Public Policy Forum, 2017). For example, on CBC Radio's (2016) current affairs show *The Current* in early 2016, Romaine Smith-Fullerton, associate professor in the Faculty of Information Studies at Western University, suggested, "[W]e're losing those jobs in Canada. I think in the last seven or eight years, we've lost more than 10,000 journalism jobs." The Public Policy Forum's (2017) report titled *The Shattered Mirror* provided "directional data" collected from the three major unions in Canadian journalism. Along with information from the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and Unifor, the Public Policy Forum (2017) included another finding from the Canadian Media Guild that suggested roughly 12,000 jobs had been lost. But the data from these three organizations varies in time frame; it also gives no sense of the proportion of full-time to part-time jobs, or even how many of these jobs were journalistic versus administrative. Nonetheless, the

report's authors declared, "The extraordinary financial strain on the journalistic system Canadians have known for a century has led to successive waves of newsroom buyouts and layoffs. As the mirror the media holds up to society shatters, a disruptive new system is rising in its place" (p. 39).

It is not only newspapers that are facing such challenges, either. At least eight local broadcast television stations have been shut down in the past decade (CMCRP, 2016). Another study prepared for Unifor and the Friends of Canadian Broadcasting suggested that up to 30 more local TV stations could go dark by 2020 unless dramatic policy changes were adopted (Miller, 2015). Such evidence seems clear and compelling: the number of working journalists is in sharp decline as news firms opt for business models that are increasingly lean and staffed by a slimmer number of workers.

Things look different, however, when we go beyond tallying up only the number of journalists and news media workers cut to count new hires. We must also consider what more authoritative sources say about the size, composition, and status of the journalistic work force in Canada, such as Statistics Canada. Its figures tell another story, but a narrative that warrants its own questions too. Things also look different when we consider where journalists end up after they have been laid off.

Methodological considerations and limitations

The subsequent section takes up these points by drawing on data from Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey (LFS), a monthly mandatory self-reported survey that measures the current state of the Canadian labour market (Statistics Canada, 2016), as well as occupational employment statistics from the United States' Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) (2018d). The data on the Canadian situation included in this article were requested and received at no cost via email correspondence with a data production and dissemination coordinator at Statistics Canada (Statistics Canada Labour Division, personal communication, August 30, 2017, & December 14, 2018) and collected from publicly available online sources (Statistics Canada, 2016c).³ The U.S. data were collected directly from the BLS (2018d) website.

The Canadian data set covers the number of journalists (national occupation classification [NOC] 5123) (Statistics Canada, 2017) employed in Canada over a 30-year period from 1987 to 2017 as well as the number of professional workers in advertising, marketing, and public relations (NOC 1123) in Canada during the same period (Statistics Canada, 2018a). Journalists, as per the LFS's definition, are those who "research, investigate, interpret and communicate news and public affairs through newspapers, television, radio and other media" (Statistics Canada, 2017). According to the survey's website, they may be employed by print (e.g., newspapers and magazines) or broadcast media outlets (e.g., radio and television networks and stations), or be self-employed (i.e., freelance). Although it seems certain the LFS would also collect information from journalists employed at digital-first news outlets. The survey does not count either editors or photo-journalists within this national occupation code (Statistics Canada, 2017).

The LFS data received also provide information about "job permanency" and "class of worker." Job permanency refers to whether or not a journalist employed for a news organization (i.e., not self-employed) holds a permanent job, "one that is expected to last as long as the employee wants it, business conditions permitting" and

has no established end-date (Statistics Canada, 2018b; Statistics Canada Labour Division, personal communication, December 14, 2018). For our purposes then, this classification refers to salaried journalists as well as any others who are in employment arrangements that they consider indefinite given the outlet's present circumstances, whether that is on a full-time or part-time basis. In contrast, temporary jobs are those "with a predetermined end date" (Statistics Canada, 2018b). The LFS categorizes temporary workers as those who are seasonal, temporary, term, or contract, "including work done through a temporary help agency, casual job and other temporary work" (Statistics Canada, 2018b, n.p.). With regard to journalists, then, the designation "temporary" characterizes any journalist employed for a news organization—whether full-time or part-time—who has a fixed end-date to their employment. Class of worker, meanwhile, refers to whether or not the LFS survey respondent is an employee or self-employed. If a journalist is primarily employed by a news outlet, they are an employee. Alternatively, if they consider their primary occupation to be as a freelance journalist, they would be considered self-employed. This designation is again unrelated to any distinction between part-time and full-time work (Statistics Canada, 2018b).

Professional workers in advertising, marketing, and public relations, according to the LFS, are those "who analyse, develop and implement communication and promotion strategies and information programs, analyse advertising needs and develop appropriate advertising and marketing plans, publicize activities and events, and maintain media relations" (Statistics Canada, 2018a, n.p.). As we discuss in further detail in the subsequent section, we have incorporated this latter group into our analysis because their field is seen by many former journalists as a viable career option (Obermaier & Koch, 2015; O'Donnell et al., 2016; Wilkinson, 2016). Advertising, marketing, and public relations also represent another facet of the media industries more broadly. Qualitatively, these activities are seen by academic observers as dedicated to persuasive communications, and thus as functioning in the service of specific interests, whether commercial, governmental, or otherwise, in contrast to the vocation of journalism, which stresses the independent pursuit of knowledge and fostering an informed citizenry and democracy (McChesney & Nichols, 2010; McChesney & Pickard, 2015).

Accordingly, the advertising, marketing, and public relations professions can help to shed further light on the ramifications surrounding the employment of journalists in Canada while also providing a better picture of the wider information and communications environment in Canada. In more pointed terms, looking at the relative balance between these two groups also tells us that losses in journalism jobs are being more than offset by increased capacities in the "persuasion professions," thereby contributing to a deepening chasm between communicators who might help people make sense of their world versus those whose *raison d'être* is not to inform people but to persuade them.

With respect to the United States, we examine the number of reporters, correspondents, and broadcast analysts (occupational code [OC] 27-3020), and public relations specialists (OC 27-3031) employed in the United States over a 30-year period (BLS, 2018d). The former category is made up of two groups of workers: broadcast news analysts, who "[a]nalyze, interpret, and broadcast news received from various sources" (BLS, 2018a), and reporters and correspondents, who "collect and analyze facts about news-

worthy events by interview, investigation, or observation [and report] and write stories for newspaper, news magazine, radio, or television” (BLS, 2018b). As in Canada, editors and photojournalists are included under other occupational codes. Public relations specialists, meanwhile, are defined by the BLS as those who “[e]ngage in promoting or creating an intended public image for individuals, groups, or organizations” (BLS, 2018c). While this categorization is decidedly narrower than the Canadian equivalent, we believe it still provides depth to an analysis of the number of journalists employed in the United States and provides a useful basis for comparing the situation in the two countries.

Although the LFS gives us a good sense of journalistic employment in Canada in the aggregate over the past 30 years, it cannot, however, be said to provide an entirely accurate picture of this sector. The LFS (Statistics Canada, 2016), for example, samples only 54,000 households across Canada, a much smaller sample than the National Household Survey, which can result in a high risk of variability when industries as small as journalism are examined. Moreover, in contrast to the BLS’s numbers, the LFS does not provide information regarding the type of journalists employed in Canada (e.g., distinctions between print, broadcast, digital) (Statistics Canada, 2017). Another concern is that while the LFS does survey a cross-sectional sample of more than 98 percent of the total population of Canada, it does not sample low-density areas and Indigenous people living on reserves (Statistics Canada, 2016). Given that a robust journalistic system in Canada should foster the production and dissemination of news in all the country’s communities, further research in the disciplines of journalism and media studies would do well to collect representative data from these areas. Despite these challenges, however, the LFS provides the best available data and accordingly its analysis represents a relevant contribution to this conversation.

Journalistic work in Canada based on Statistics Canada data

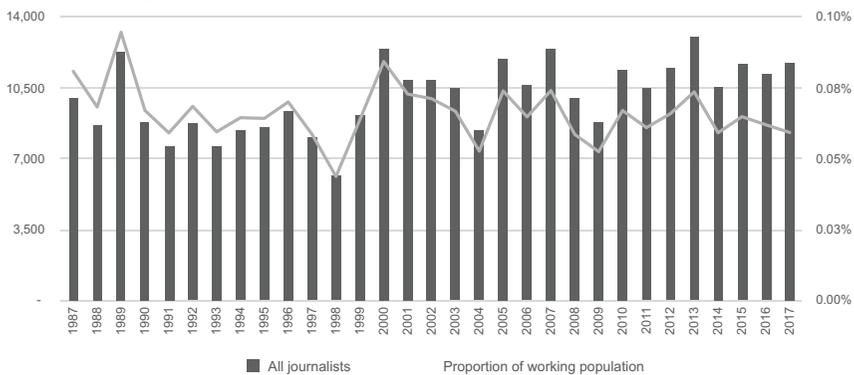
Our analysis of Statistics Canada data (Statistics Canada, 2018c; Statistics Canada Labour Division, personal communication, August 30, 2017, December 14, 2018) reveals that there are more journalists in Canada than many sources suggest (CBC Radio, 2016; Millar, 2018; Public Policy Forum, 2017). Furthermore, it suggests that the growth in the number of journalist positions has not been cut short by the advent of the internet. Based on the number of employed journalists in Canada alone, we find that there are in fact more journalists in absolute terms at the time of writing than at most points in the past 30 years.

There are, however, differences in the kinds of journalistic work being done. Journalists are increasingly employed in temporary positions and without an institutional link to a stable and recognizable news enterprise. What is more, the data reveal a huge increase in workers employed in advertising, marketing, and public relations in Canada. It is impossible to tell whether the fluctuating number of journalists are employed at traditional news firms, vertically integrated telecommunications firms that also have some kind of stake in journalism, or new and evolving forms of independent and digital native forms of journalism, or are just people who call themselves journalists. This latter point is of particular significance because the LFS relies on self-identification (Statistics Canada, 2016). In addition, the sheer number of reported cuts at the former two groups of firms—i.e., traditional news firms and vertically integrated

telecommunications firms that also have a stake in journalism—raises the possibility that many more journalists are working in novel forms of digital journalism. It also suggests there may be many unemployed journalists who still call themselves such, even though they may never be paid a stable wage or salary to practise their craft again. Also worth further consideration is the possibility that jobs not considered journalistic in the traditional sense (e.g., in the marketing departments of news outlets) are now being staffed by journalists who would still self-identify as such.

Figure 1 illustrates the point. As it shows, the number of journalists in Canada has fluctuated, but ultimately risen in absolute terms over the past 30 years, from 9,959 in 1987 to 11,700 in 2017 and peaking in 2013, when there were about 13,000 journalists. This number was higher than at any point in the past three decades. The lowest ebb during this period, in contrast, was in 1998, when the number of journalists fell to 6,149 as the newspaper industry went through a major bout of consolidation and did so right on the heels of the tough economic recession of the early 1990s (Winseck, 2010). What is particularly striking about the data in the context of common refrains about the “crisis of journalism” (CBC Radio, 2017; Diamantopoulos, 2017; Potter, 2017) and the steady stream of reported job losses, however, is the fact that Statistics Canada’s data show that the number of journalists in absolute terms has nearly doubled in the past 20 years, from just over 6,000 in 1998 to 11,700 in 2017. That the number of jobs closely follows the general state of the economy—just like advertising revenue—is also illustrated by the fact that the number of journalism jobs decreased again in 2008 and 2009 with the onset of the Great Recession. The tide reversed once again in 2010, when there were 11,361 self-identified journalists. That level appears to be a point around which job levels seem to have fluctuated since the turn of the twenty-first century.

Figure 1: Number of journalists employed in Canada, 1987–2017



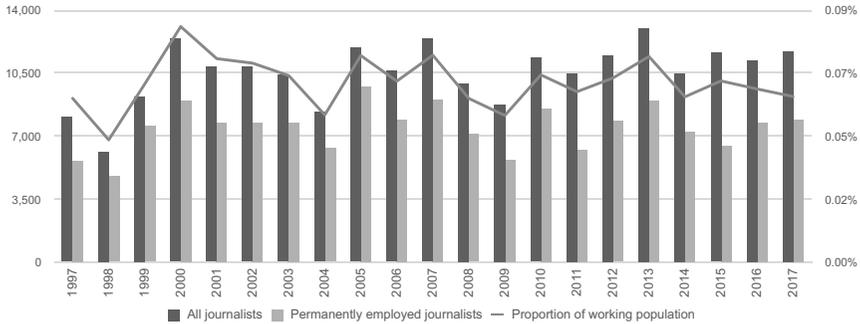
Source: Statistics Canada, 2018c; Statistics Canada Labour Division, personal communication, August 30, 2017, December 14, 2018.

Notably, the situation does look slightly different when we examine the change in the number of journalists employed in Canada against the total work force. As Figure 1 reveals, where journalists represented roughly 0.08 percent of all working Canadians in 1987, in 2017 they reflected around 0.06 percent. In other words, the industry has not kept up with the growth of the working population as a whole. This

point should not be forgotten, yet it is worth noting that the common rhetoric around this topic generally relies on absolute terms—i.e., counts of reported layoffs (CBC Radio, 2016; Millar, 2018; Public Policy Forum, 2017).

Moreover, while labour statistics indicate that the number of individuals who identify their primary occupation as a journalist has increased in absolute terms, the proportion of permanent positions within the ranks has fallen. Figure 2 illustrates the point by depicting the number of journalists employed in permanent positions relative

Figure 2: Number of permanently employed journalists in Canada, 1997–2017

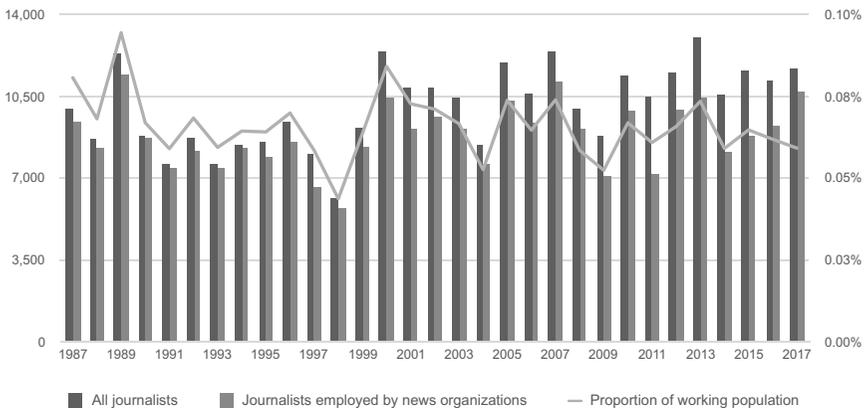


Source: Statistics Canada, 2018c; Statistics Canada Labour Division, personal communication, August 30, 2017, December 14, 2018.

to the total number of journalists employed between 1997 and 2017—a subset of data that covers a shorter period but which is still the most comprehensive available. As Figure 2 shows, the proportion of permanent jobs fell from 70 to 80 percent at the outset to roughly 60 to 70 percent in recent years. We will take a closer look at this data set in Figure 4.

Figure 3 shows that the number of journalists in Canada employed by news organizations (rather than self-employed) between 1987 and 2017 is decreasing as well. In 1987,

Figure 3: Number of journalists employed by news organizations in Canada, 1987–2017

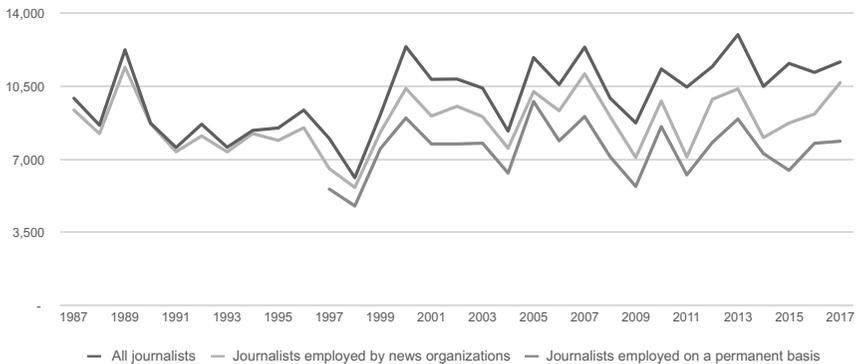


Source: Statistics Canada, 2018c; Statistics Canada Labour Division, personal communication, August 30, 2017, December 14, 2018.

the LFS recorded that 94.3 percent of surveyed journalists were employed by news organizations, while in 2017, this number sat at 91.5 percent, which as we will show in a moment is a significantly higher percentage than the average for that decade (2008 to 2017). In actuality, the data show a consistent downward trend. The average between the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s indeed sits near 95 percent, while the average in the past 10 years falls close to 82 percent. Although there are undoubtedly some questions to raise about the LFS data—as discussed earlier in this article—the long-term trends are difficult to dispute: the number of journalists employed in news organizations has fallen.

Figure 4 displays the data sets from the previous two figures together to show the full picture. It illustrates the number of journalists working for news organizations between 1987 and 2017 as well as the number employed in permanent positions between 1997 and 2017.

Figure 4: Number of journalists employed by news organizations and number of permanently employed journalists in Canada, 1987–2017



Source: Statistics Canada, 2018c; Statistics Canada Labour Division, personal communication, August 30, 2017, December 14, 2018.

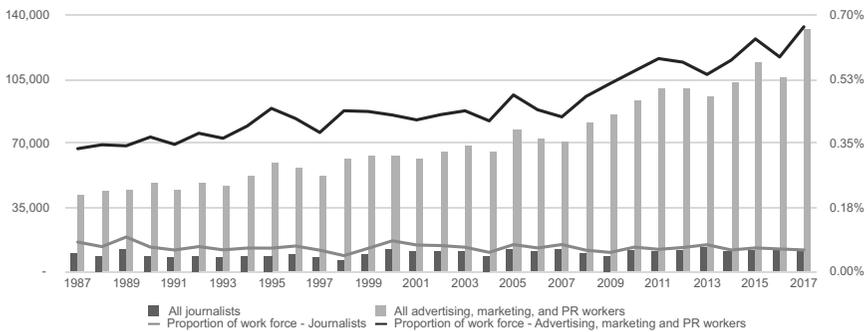
Figure 4 illustrates that the number of journalists employed by news firms and the number of permanent journalism jobs within those organizations have steadily declined along roughly similar trend lines. It tells us that the proportion of temporary journalistic jobs nearly doubled, from about 15 percent of journalists employed in news organizations having temporary roles in 1998 to roughly one-quarter in 2017. At the same time, Figure 4 reveals that the proportion of journalists who are self-employed has ultimately risen over the past 30 years.

These observations suggest that the case at hand is better understood as not a huge decline in the number of journalists in Canada, but a decrease in the number working for news organizations and in permanent positions. All of this adds up to the idea that journalists in Canada are increasingly defined by temporary work (i.e., freelance, contract, and casual work)—consistent with academic research in this area (Cohen, 2011; Mosco & McKercher, 2008). In many regards, this is indeed cause for apprehension, but it also casts those concerns within a different light, one that is more nuanced and defined by change rather than the outright decline of the journalistic

work force so often portrayed in both journalistic and public policy accounts, and as reviewed earlier in this article (CBC Radio, 2016; Millar, 2018; Public Policy Forum, 2017).

Figure 5 also shows that journalists are increasingly outranked by a growing number of public relations, marketing, and advertising workers. In 1987, 41,382 of these workers were employed in Canada. This number has risen steadily, to roughly 132,000 in 2017. Whether seen in the long, mid, or short term, the trend is up, with approximately 39,000 positions added since 2010. Moreover, Figure 5 reveals that while these workers outnumbered journalists by about 4:1 in 1987, there are now about 12 public relations, marketing, and advertising workers per every one journalist. Relative to the total work force, the number of public relations, marketing, and advertising workers has also risen—from 0.34 percent of the working population in 1987 to 0.67 percent in 2017.

Figure 5: Number of journalists, and advertising, marketing, and public relations workers employed in Canada, 1987–2017



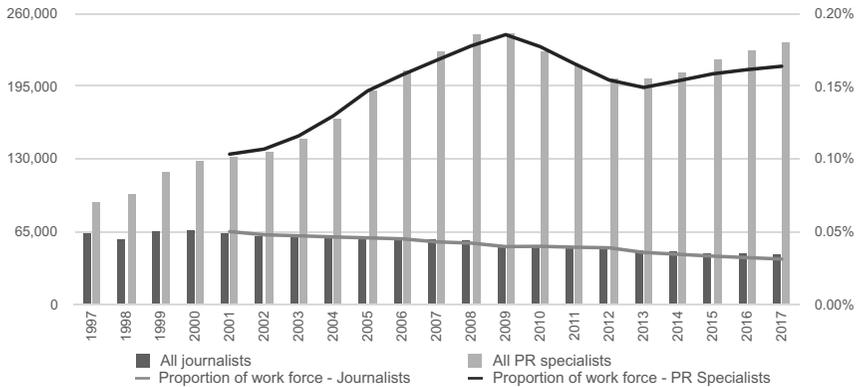
Source: Statistics Canada, 2018c; Statistics Canada Labour Division, personal communication, August 30, 2017, December 14, 2018.

Comparing data from the Labour Force Survey against the closest equivalent figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018d) in the United States provides another layer of depth to our analysis. The BLS’s occupational statistics prior to 1997 are not directly comparable, so we have included only the numbers of journalists and public relations specialists from that year until 2017.

Figure 6 reveals some diverging trends between journalistic work in Canada and the United States. In contrast to the Canadian figures, the number of journalists employed in the United States has dropped in absolute terms, from 63,330 in 1997 to 44,480 in 2017. Relative to the entire work force, that is a drop from 0.05 percent of the total working population in 2001 (the earliest available data point for this measure) to 0.03 percent in 2017. The greatest slip occurred from the 57,000 journalistic jobs in 2008 to 51,950 in 2009. The BLS (2018e) also suggested this downward drift will continue with an expected decline of nine percent employment (against an average growth rate of seven percent for all occupations) for reporters, correspondents, and broadcast news analysts between 2016 and 2026.

Where Canada and the United States see a similar trend is in the rise of those working in communications-type roles (i.e., in public relations, marketing, and adver-

Figure 6: Number of journalists and public relations specialists employed in the United States, 1997–2017



Source: United States, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018d

tising). As Figure 6 shows, the number of public relations specialists in the United States grew from 91,870 in 1997 to 242,670 in 2009. Declines in the three years after that were partially offset by an increase from 201,280 public relations specialists in 2012 to 233,730 in 2017. Although there were only 1.5 public relations specialists to every journalist in the United States in 1997, the ratio is now near 5:1. Relative to the total work force, public relations specialists in the United States have increased from 0.1 percent of the working population in 2001 to 0.16 percent in 2017.

These figures and the data they depict reveal several important things about journalistic work in Canada, while leaving a few unanswered questions. First, they show that much of the public discourse about the steep fall in the number of journalists in Canada is wide of the mark and exaggerated (see, for example, CBC Radio, 2016; Millar, 2018; Public Policy Forum, 2017). Second, based on the vast number of reported layoffs at traditional news firms, these figures could indicate a migration toward journalistic employment at emerging forms of digital journalism. They could also indicate that a minority of laid off journalists still report their primary occupation as journalism—or that jobs not considered journalism before are now being counted as such (e.g., journalists employed in the marketing departments of news outlets). Third, our brief comparison of journalistic employment in Canada and the United States illustrates that Canada appears to be faring better than its southern neighbour, strictly in terms of the absolute number of journalists employed in these respective countries. And while the final word on this matter is beyond the scope of this article, it does seem worth noting that these diverging numbers *could* be used to support an argument that the crisis of journalism in the United States is, in fact, real. In other words, the case for there being a crisis of journalism seems a lot stronger when made in relation to the United States than when applied to Canada. Indeed, in contrast to our assessment of the Canadian situation, it is evident there are factors playing a role in a sharp decline in the absolute number of journalists employed in the United States—as well as a decline proportional to the total U.S. work force. One possible upshot of this observation is that, steeped in

accounts of what is happening in the United States, observers are simply transposing conclusions that fit the situation there to conditions in Canada, where the evidence is very different and far less convincing.

While the LFS data are somewhat ambivalent with respect to the *quantity* of journalistic work in Canada, they seem far less ambiguous with regard to how the craft of journalism is practised and organized. In line with research from Cohen (2011, 2012, 2016), these figures suggest that journalists are often employed in temporary positions at news organizations or are self-employed (i.e., freelance). McChesney and Nichols (2010) also highlight the extent to which journalists are being outnumbered by a surge in the size of the public relations, marketing, and advertising work force. Although the LFS data do not tell us where this large influx of workers came from or where, exactly, they are working, academic research suggests that news workers, while sometimes having mixed feelings about making the move to the communications industries, often view the “persuasion professions” as a viable career option. While some contend that public relations and other related fields are a logical career move with an array of transferable skills, others, however, worry that the shift could compromise the legitimacy of their previous journalistic work (Obermaier & Koch, 2015; Wilkinson, 2016).

The challenges to measuring journalistic work in Canada

As we observed earlier, many of the reported and commented upon accounts of journalistic employment numbers in Canada seem to be largely based on conjecture and anecdote (CBC Radio, 2016; Millar, 2018; Public Policy Forum, 2017). This is a source of several key problems. For one, other than Statistics Canada, quantitative accounts of journalistic labour in Canada are overwhelmingly focused on jobs lost rather than those gained. Second, news firms are not required to publicize these numbers either way and, when they do, they often do not specify what type of worker is being cut (i.e., journalistic, production, or administrative, for example) (CMG, 2013a, 2013b). There is also a dearth of academic research on journalistic labour in Canada (particularly with respect to quantitative accounts of journalistic work). That said, there is however some excellent new research, such as the Local News Initiative, that is trying to systematically map the ongoing state of affairs (Lindgren, Hodson, & Corbett, 2016; Local News Research Project, n.d.).

An article by Chad Skelton (2010) in the *Vancouver Sun* is also somewhat of an exception. Skelton relied on data from the 2001 and 2006 censuses, as well as the 2011 National Household Survey, to show that the number of journalists employed in Canada remained relatively stable during the first decade of the twenty-first century. He tempered any firm assessment of the reasons behind these numbers but did lay out a few ideas that are closely aligned with how we understand the LFS figures. For instance, Skelton (2010) suggested that some news media have greater economic difficulties than others. Specifically, print is undergoing the greatest decline in revenue while television revenues have remained relatively stable. Further, Skelton (2010) outlined how the internet has opened new doors for digital native news firms focused on niche interests.

While a compelling article, the piece received little attention in contrast to claims from two documents from the Canadian Media Guild (CMG), which seem to have in-

fluenced several recent media reports about the state of journalism in Canada (CBC Radio, 2016; Millar, 2018). The two documents outline “preliminary” numbers on job cuts in the Canadian broadcast and print industries between 2008 and 2013. In the span of five years, the CMG (2013a; 2013b) reported job losses of about 10,000: 6,000 to those working in print, with another 3,700 in broadcast. The numbers were garnered from news articles that drew their information from corporate statements (CMG, 2013a, 2013b). Although the CMG numbers provide a useful snapshot of media workers laid off during this time, they also have a few shortcomings—some of which it rightly identifies. For one, the CMG (2013a, 2013b) documents do not list any data regarding the number of employees hired between 2008 and 2013, giving its readers only one part of an already complicated story—a shortcoming referenced multiple times above. On the broadcasting side, the CMG (2013b) suggested it might be missing some data from Québec, a fact that is particularly important given the comparative lack of French news outlets in other provinces and territories in Canada. Importantly, both of the CMG (2013a, 2013b) documents explicitly reflect on the guild’s efforts to gather robust data from Statistics Canada:

We reached out to Statistics Canada to see what information they have on job loss in the media industry; their response was that there would be “severe data suppression” which they explained “occurs when there is insufficient sample to produce reliable estimates or for reasons of confidentiality.” (CMG, 2013a, 2013b)

It is unclear to the authors of this article why Statistics Canada was not willing to provide data to the CMG. Indeed, all of this must also be set against the broader backdrop of the reality that collecting robust data from the Government of Canada about the media industries is a notoriously difficult task (Wagman, 2010; Winseck, 2019), often involving extensive time and resources.⁴ Winseck (2019) has written about the difficulties of gathering data from the CRTC on the telecommunications and broadcasting sectors due to “primitive” data storage, industry pressure under claims of corporate confidentiality, and the deliberate dispersing of analytical measures like revenues and market shares—so as to make long-term and comparative analyses across media sectors (and countries) nearly impossible. The government’s on-again off-again relationship with the long-form census has been yet another issue in the recent past (Grant, 2015), although the ascent of the current liberal administration in late 2015 has gone some way to rectify that problem (Harris, 2015).

Conclusion

As Edge (2014) puts it, “Nothing is quite so helpful as a bit of hard data in sorting out media myths and getting to the bottom of a complex story” (p. 238). We agree. Too often, however, discussions about journalism in Canada are predicated on questionable claims and devoid of a robust evidentiary base. Our research leads us to the view that we should talk not so much of the decline of journalism, but of a constitutive moment of transformation. Although the Statistics Canada data relied upon is not without its flaws, it is the best we have right now. Based on it, the state of journalistic employment in recent years appears to be less dire and more complex than commonly asserted

(CBC Radio, 2016, Millar, 2018; Public Policy Forum, 2017). The number of journalists in Canada is indeed fluctuating, but in absolute terms the trend has been upwards since 1987 and relatively stable at or near the high-water mark set in the early years of the twenty-first century.

The end result of the period of transition described here and across a burgeoning literature on the subject is far from certain (Benkler, 2006; Gorman, 2015; van der Haak et al., 2012). The ranks of journalists relative to the size of the total working population, and the expanded size and complexity of the media ecology (CMCRP, 2018) have diminished. In addition, the number of employed journalists in Canada has been dwarfed by the rapid rise in marketing, public relations, and advertising workers. The decline of stable, reasonably well-paid and well-resourced journalistic work against the massive and seemingly corresponding ballooning of the “persuasion profession” is a big concern. The “crisis of journalism” narrative, however, is also a problem because it risks calling forth protectionist policy responses that miss the complex realities of the situation. Indeed, all too often this narrative appears to be opportunistically deployed to reverse changes that have been opening the media in Canada to a wider array of sources, forces, and voices.

To be clear, this assessment does not deny that the field of journalism is undergoing a period of wrenching transformation. Instead, it is a call for a better engagement with the evidence that does exist and a more open mind in its interpretation. We believe research that investigates and gathers evidence about the realities of the state of journalism is well worth doing, not least because it helps shine a light on the more nuanced state of affairs and what might be done to address the very real problems that do exist.

The public record reveals that the state of journalism has been an enduring feature of policy discussions since at least the mid-twentieth century, including the Davey Committee, the Bryce Commission, and the Kent Commission—albeit all regarding the concentration of ownership, with their recommendations largely ignored. Further, renewed interest in these issues, illustrated in recent proceedings held by the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage (Parliament of Canada, 2017) and CRTC (2016) decisions that have trended toward consumer and broader public interests, presents opportunities for public policy that acts in favour of diverse and robust journalism in Canada. At the same time, however, recent budgetary decisions from the Government of Canada that seem inclined to support traditional news firms over new entrants highlight how quickly the tide can turn with these issues (Rowe, 2019). These decisions are especially troubling given that the overall rise in employment numbers in Canadian journalism indicates that some journalists may be moving from traditional news firms toward digital native journalistic endeavours. The available data is not good enough to know the answer to that question one way or another; however, protectionist measures such as those referenced above do little support digital-first news firms if that is indeed the case.

We conclude this article with four modest recommendations. First, in line with the BLS’s approach, Statistics Canada should endeavour to collect information about the type of media outlets (e.g., print, broadcast, digital) that employ Canadian jour-

nalists. Second, and in broader terms, researchers in the disciplines of journalism and media studies should aim to track the number of journalists in Canada in ways that better reflect the diverse manifestations of the role on the internet, including citizen journalists, bloggers, and podcasters. Third, scholars, journalists, students, and analysts should pay close attention to the evidence that does exist in relation to the number of journalists, and advertising, marketing, and public relations workers employed in Canada. For instance, ongoing comparisons of the number of those employed in journalism against the fast-growing promotional industries would do well to shine a light on the broader information economy that journalism exists *within*. In any case, better use of the available data would surely help to bolster public conversation, inform decision-makers, and garner a more robust empirical record on journalistic work in Canada. And finally, at least in a Canadian context, academics working in this area should consider adopting the more nuanced and complex understanding of the state of journalism as one of transformation rather than too eagerly relying upon the notion of crisis. Such a perspective allows a better understanding of the various dimensions of the industry—including the number of journalists in Canada—and make better policy decisions accordingly.

Notes

1. See pp. 85, 86, and 96.

2. Too often it seems that the “crisis of journalism” narrative opportunistically draws on the tradition of crisis theory and critical social theory without acknowledging that history or staying faithful to it. Jürgen Habermas (1976), Claus Offe (1985), Bob Jessop (2002), and many others, for example, offered their theory of “legitimation crisis” in explicit opposition to conservative critics who complained bitterly that the new social movements of the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., environmentalism, feminism, black liberation, etc.) revealed an excess of popular and political expectations that the institutions of representative democracy and consumer capitalism were ill-equipped to meet (e.g., political parties, parliament, trade unions, commercial media and the fourth estate role of journalists, periodic voting, and the market). To conservative critics, such “excesses of democracy” should be tamped down to avoid a “crisis of democracy.”

According to Habermas, Offe, and Jessop, in stark contrast, the problem was not *too much* democracy but *too little*. According to them, people’s expectations and demands for a greater say in all areas of their life had indeed increased alongside and as a function of improved access to knowledge, education, and the capacity to organize and express themselves while, however, the channels of expression and participation open to them within the framework of representative democracy and consumer society were incapable of meeting these demands. This gap was the basis of what Habermas, in particular, called the “legitimation crisis.” In other words, the machinery of democracy was out of whack with the strengthening *culture* of democracy—a gap that political theorist Pippa Norris (1999) would later refer to as the gulf between strong citizens versus weak democracy.

Thus, unlike their conservative counterparts who wanted to roll back what they saw as the excesses of democracy, Offe, Habermas, Jessop, and other critical theorists wanted to revitalize what democracy meant in order to make the state, market, and media more responsive and open to people’s wants, needs, and desires. In other words, they wanted *more democracy*, not less. The “crisis of journalism” narrative appears to opportunistically play on this deeper backstory of critical social theory and democracy, but instead of referring explicitly to the shortcomings of the institutions of representative democracy, it often seems to be rather conservative pleas designed to retain the institutional status quo. In sum, while crisis theory offers a potentially powerful way to understand how the state, market, media, journalism, and other organizations function or fail to function in relation to the normative horizon of citizens and democracy, we believe that the concept has been too eagerly applied to

the state of journalism in Canada and without a fuller and more faithful account of the history of the idea just sketched.

3. Interested parties can request this data or other information from the LFS via the email address statcan.labour-travail.statcan@canada.ca.

4. Statistics Canada has made efforts in recent years to make its data more accessible to academic and non-academic researchers. A key initiative has been the department's Research Data Centres (RDC) program, which provides "researchers with access, in a secure university setting, to microdata from population and household surveys, administrative data holdings and linked data" (Statistics Canada, 2019a). Notably, these centres are located across the country—not simply in Ottawa (Statistics Canada, 2019a).

Yet accessing data through the RDC program requires time and effort, and includes a multistep process that varies based on the profession and funding of the individual conducting the research (Statistics Canada, 2019b). A master's or doctoral research student, for instance, must complete a project proposal, obtain a letter of support, complete an online application form on the SSHRC website, complete the security screening process (which includes fingerprinting, a criminal record check, and a credit check), sign a microdata research contract with Statistics Canada, and submit a product on the conclusion of the research and its analysis (e.g., a thesis or dissertation)—all of which are serious deterrents not only to routine use of these resources by scholars, but also to their use by members of the public (Statistics Canada, 2019c). Indeed, such restrictive controls over access to the national statistical agency and the data it collects are out of step with improving public access to data and knowledge.

As noted in the body of this article, the Statistics Canada data used in this article was not collected through the RDC program. Instead, some of it was acquired through publicly available data sets (Statistics Canada, 2018c). Key data, however, was acquired by email inquiries to the department, and while it has been our experience that Statistics Canada staff have been very helpful in meeting our requests, it is also extremely likely that our requests have been successful because of nearly two decades of efforts by this article's senior author to cultivate cordial personal relationships with senior staff at Statistics Canada (Statistics Canada Labour Division, personal communication, August 30, 2017, & December 14, 2018). While this has been an enormous benefit for our research and to other graduate students who have also taken advantage of these long-standing relationships, the limitations of such an approach for scholarly and public access to Statistics Canada data and expertise are obvious.

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