



Continued Concern in Atlantic Canada over Inadequate  
Provincial News Programming on CBC

A COMPAS Survey for the University of King's College  
School of Journalism in association with the  
Friends of Canadian Broadcasting

COMPAS Inc.  
Multi-Audience Research  
Ottawa and Toronto  
November 17, 2000

## Continued Concern in Atlantic Canada about

### Inadequate Provincial News Programming on CBC

#### Overview

CBC cutbacks to regional and provincial news programming provoked intense concern in Atlantic Canada when implemented earlier this year, and this concern remains unabated, according to a COMPAS survey conducted November 13-14, 2000.

Across the region, an almost two-thirds majority finds the reduced provincial news programming to be inadequate. Passions are intense with sizeable minorities finding the reduced programming "totally" or "very inadequate" rather than merely inadequate.

Atlantic Canadians blame the federal government and the CBC itself in about equal measure for the cutbacks in provincial news programming. Atlantic concern about provincial programming has led to a virtual consensus that MPs from the region should make it a priority to restore provincial news programming after the federal election.

The decision to cut regional supertime news programs may be undermining support for the Liberal Party. It is striking to note that even though voters in Atlantic Canada are pre-occupied with a wide range of diverse issues, 37% of Atlantic Canadians said that they would be somewhat (21%) or much (16%) less likely to consider voting Liberal when thinking about the decision to cut CBC regional television news.

These are some of the key findings from a recent COMPAS survey conducted in the midst of the current federal election campaign, during which many issues, not just CBC provincial programming, have been coming to the fore. The continued evidence of Atlantic Canadians' preoccupation with provincial programming amounts to strong proof that this issue will likely continue to preoccupy the region.

#### **New Provincial News Allocation a Failure, according to Atlantic Residents**

Respondents were asked if the "reduced time devoted to provincial news...was totally adequate, very adequate, adequate, inadequate, very inadequate, or totally inadequate." Respondents were asked this question six weeks after the cuts had been implemented so that local residents would have had time to acclimatise themselves to the new pattern of reduced provincial news. Furthermore, respondents were being surveyed in the midst of a federal election that necessarily touches on countless non-broadcasting issues ranging from federal-provincial grants to healthcare, the provincial



economy, tax cuts, and party leadership. This is not a setting in which Atlantic Canadians could be expected to be especially perturbed about cuts to provincial programming. Yet, they are.

Overall across the region, respondents who feel that the new programming is inadequate outnumber about 2:1 those who find it adequate. Among those with intense views, i.e. those who find the new programming totally adequate or totally inadequate, critics outnumber defenders by a margin of about 3:1. Critics are especially passionate and numerous in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, least so on PEI. The distribution of responses for the region is as follows:

*Cross-Atlantic Region Judgements about the Adequacy or Inadequacy of the Reduced Format for Provincial News*

	%
<u>Totally adequate</u>	<u>6</u>
<u>Very adequate</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>Adequate</u>	<u>21</u>
<u>Inadequate</u>	<u>33</u>
<u>Very inadequate</u>	<u>11</u>
<u>Totally inadequate</u>	<u>19</u>
<u>Refused</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>DNK</u>	<u>6</u>

Atlantic Canadians Blame Ottawa, the CBC, and Canadians as a Whole in About Equal Measure

Respondents were asked the following question: "Do you think that reduced provincial CBC television services reflect any lack of understanding or concern by the federal Liberal government, the CBC, or Canadians in other regions of the country...(ROTATE)...about the needs and desires of Atlantic Canadians...a great deal, some, a little, not at all? DON'T PROMPT BUT RECORD DNK/REF."

Atlantic Canadians remain stable in their views in that they continue to blame the federal government, the CBC, and Canadians as a whole in about equal measure. In each instance, about two-thirds say that the federal government (or the CBC or Canadians as a whole) lacks a great deal or some understanding of the informational needs of the region.

The ensuing tables display the propensity of Atlantic Canadians to hold the federal government and the CBC accountable for what they perceive as programming failure.



*Concern in Atlantic Canada about Cutbacks in CBC's Local News Programming  
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*By the Federal Liberal Government*

	June 2000	Nov 15 <sup>th</sup>
A great deal	35	30
Some	32	31
A little	17	13
Not at all	9	16
Refused	-	*
DNK	8	10

*By the CBC...*

	June 2000	Nov 15 <sup>th</sup>
A great deal	34	31
Some	35	33
A little	13	11
Not at all	9	16
Refused	-	1
DNK	9	8

When obliged to choose between blaming the federal government and the CBC, respondents tend to blame the federal government. The greater propensity to blame the federal government than the CBC itself emerged in COMPAS June poll and re-emerges in November. The striking difference between the two polls is a drop in the undecided rate, which is an indicator that Atlantic Canadians have been thinking about the issue a great deal and are hence more likely to offer an opinion about where blame should be layed.

The question asked of respondents and the response distribution are as follows:

*Thinking of the cuts to provincial news programming here in [name of province, in Nfld...use "Newfoundland and Labrador"], which of the following statements best explains why this happened, so far as you can tell [rotate]*

	June 2000	Nov 15 <sup>th</sup>
Funding cuts made to the CBC over the past several years by the federal Liberal government	47	53
A preference by the CBC management to make the most of the cuts to provincial television compared to national shows	26	33
DON'T PROMPT No opinion	28	14



The passion among Atlantic Canadians for provincial news programming leads to their crying out for a major political offensive after the election for the purpose of restoring such programming. Respondents were asked: "How important is it for your MP and other MPs in the province to make the restoration of [INSERT PROVINCIAL CATEGORIES] a high priority after the election...Very important, Important, Somewhat Important, or Not Important? DON'T PROMPT DNK/REF."

As evidenced in the table below, only a tiny minority, 15%, deem it "not important" for MPs from the region to make restoration of programming "a high priority after the election."

*Perceived Importance of Restoring Provincial Programming after the Election*

	%
Very Important	23
Important	26
Somewhat Important	32
Not Important	15
DON'T PROMPT: REFUSED	1
DON'T PROMPT :DNK	3

## Hints of Growing Optimism about Provincial Programming

While Atlantic Canadians are frustrated by the provincial programming cuts and many are irate, a hint of optimism is emerging. Atlantic Canadians are somewhat more likely to say that this summer's programming cuts are not a harbinger of worse things to come.

Respondents were specifically asked the following question: "Some people believe the CBC's decision to cut back provincial news shows to thirty minutes, and cancel the late night CBC provincial news is just a first step and is a clear sign that the CBC is going to cancel all of its provincial news shows in a year or two. Do you think this is ...not at all likely, not very likely, somewhat likely, likely or very likely? DON'T PROMPT BUT RECORD DNK/REF."

As evidence in the table below, the proportion confident that the CBC will cancel all its provincial news shows has dropped by almost half. Thus, 42% said in June that the abolition of provincial news programming was likely or very likely. Today, the corresponding proportion is 23%.

	June 2000	Nov 15 <sup>th</sup>
Not at all likely	5	12
Not very likely	19	26



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Somewhat likely	30	37
Likely	18	6
Very Likely	24	17
Refused	-	*
DNK/No opinion	6	3

## The Election Campaign

The Liberals remain in a strong first place position with the Tories in second position and the Alliance fractionally above their basement position in June, as evidenced in the table below. The undecided rate remains very high—33% compared to 36% in June—suggesting that the electorate remains uncertain and somewhat volatile.

Atlantic Canadians' uncertainty about how to vote is paralleled by a certain uncertainty about where the parties stand on the issue of provincial broadcasting. Respondents were asked the question: "Which of the federal party leaders do you think is most concerned with maintaining local CBC television news in Atlantic Canada? [rotate]." Half of the respondents offered no opinion. Among the remainder, the NDP leader was given the most credit for caring about provincial news in Atlantic Canada, followed in the distance by Clark and Chretien and by Day in last place.

### *How the Region Plans to Vote*

	Jun 2000	Nov 15 <sup>th</sup>
Liberals led by Jean Chretien	48	43
Canadian Alliance led by Stockwell Day	7	13
NDP led by Alexa McDonough	18	18
Progressive Conservatives led by Joe Clark	24	23
DON'T PROMPT: Other (volunteered)	3	3
(FOR COMPAS USE ONLY) Percent DNK excluded from final percent calculation.	36	33

*"Which of the federal party leaders do you think is most concerned with maintaining local CBC television news in Atlantic Canada? [rotate]."*

	Nov 15 <sup>th</sup>
Jean Chretien	10
Stockwell Day	3
Alexa McDonough	22
Joe Clark	12
Refused	3



DNK

49

Very little difference in attitudes towards provincial programming emerged among the different voter segments except for the greater propensity of NDP voters to place a high priority on the restoration issue along with very little difference in the opinions of Liberals and Tories.

Respondents were asked if the issue of supertime news programming might impact on their vote:

Is the decision to cut regional supertime news programs like [INSERT PROVINCIAL CATEGORIES] important enough to you that it might have some impact on your likelihood of voting for the federal Liberals in the next federal election...that is, would it make you much more likely, somewhat more likely, somewhat less likely or much less likely to consider voting for the federal Liberals? DON'T PROMPT BUT RECORD No impact vs. dnk/ref.

As reported in many other COMPAS polls, voters in Atlantic Canada, as elsewhere in the country, are preoccupied with a wide range of diverse issues. In response to the preceding question, 37% of Atlantic Canadians said that they would be somewhat (21%) or much (16%) less likely to consider voting Liberal when thinking of the issue. The propensity of respondents to think this way is striking given the diversity of issues preoccupying Atlantic Canadians as well as Canadians as a whole. The finding is all the more striking given the substantial popularity of the Liberals across the region.

*Impact on Likelihood of Voting Liberal by Voter Segment*

	Region	Liberal voters	Alliance voters	NDP voters	PC voters	Other voters
More likely	8	6	18	8	10	0
Somewhat more likely	19	25	13	25	14	22
Somewhat less likely	21	20	18	24	24	13
Much less likely	16	12	24	21	25	31
No impact	30	33	23	18	25	34
Refused	1	1	0	0	0	0
DNK/Don't know	4	3	4	3	3	0



## Conclusion

CBC cutbacks to provincial and provincial news programming provoked intense concern in Atlantic Canada when implemented earlier this year, and this concern remains unabated despite the sundry new issues associated with the current election campaign and despite several weeks experience with the new, reduced format for provincial news programming.

Across the region, an almost two-thirds majority finds the reduced provincial news programming to be inadequate. Passions are intense with sizeable minorities finding the reduced programming "totally" or "very inadequate" rather than merely inadequate. Perhaps the most potent evidence of Atlantic Canadians' concern about the issue is that two-fifths say that they would seriously consider voting against the regionally popular Liberal party over the issue.

## Methodology

Parallel samples of n=100 were conducted in the four provinces November 13-14 for a total of n=400. For the Atlantic region as a whole, the subsamples were reweighted to reflect the actual populations of the provinces. The individual provincial samples can be deemed accurate to within 10 percentage points 19 times out of 20 while results for the region as a whole can be deemed accurate to within approximately 6 percentage points 19 times out of 20.

## Contact Information

The principal investigator, Dr. Conrad Winn, can be reached at 416-459-6600.



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☞ 1). Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I'm phoning on behalf of COMPAS, the national public opinion research firm. You've probably heard about COMPAS as a result of the polls we do for the media. This evening, we're doing a very short poll on a policy issue in the news. But, first, I'd like to ask you a question about the current federal election.

☞ 2. Speaking personally, would you vote for [rotate]

	%
The Liberals led by Jean Chretien	23
The Canadian Alliance led by Stockwell Day	6
The NDP led by Alexa McDonough	10
The Progressive Conservatives led by Joe Clark	13
DON'T PROMPT: Other	2
DON'T PROMPT: Refused	13
DON'T PROMPT: DNK	33

☞ 3. IF UNDECIDED OR REFUSED: Which party would you then be leaning to?  
[READ CATEGORIES ONLY IF NECESSARY]

Combined Vote and lean with DNKs excluded

	Jun 2000	Nov 15 <sup>th</sup>
Liberals led by Jean Chretien	48	43
Canadian Alliance led by Stockwell Day	7	13
NDP led by Alexa McDonough	18	18
Progressive Conservatives led by Joe Clark	24	23
DON'T PROMPT: Other (volunteered)	3	3
(FOR COMPAS USE ONLY) Percent DNK excluded form final percent calculation.	36	33





3). Turning now to the subject of broadcasting, as you may know, there's a law governing the CBC. The law says that the CBC must "serve the special needs of Canada's regions." Until last September, the CBC-TV program [INSERT PROVINCIAL CATEGORIES.] Thinking of the reduced time devoted to provincial news, would you say this is [DON'T PROMPT: DNK/REF]

~~IN NEWFOUNDLAND~~: "Here and Now" provided 90 minutes of news from Newfoundland and Labrador, and this was cut back to 30 minutes.

	%
Totally adequate	9
Very adequate	3
Adequate	16
Inadequate	33
Very inadequate	10
Totally inadequate	25
Refused	0
DNK	4

~~IN NEW BRUNSWICK (ENGLISH-SPEAKERS ONLY)~~: "NB Now" provided 90 minutes of New Brunswick news, and this was cut back to 30 minutes

	%
Totally adequate	5
Very adequate	3
Adequate	24
Inadequate	34
Very inadequate	9
Totally inadequate	15
Refused	2
DNK	8



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✂️ IN NOVA SCOTIA: "1<sup>st</sup> Edition" provided 90 minutes of Nova Scotia news, and this was cut back to 30 minutes

	%
Totally adequate	5
Very adequate	4
Adequate	22
Inadequate	33
Very inadequate	12
Totally inadequate	19
Refused	1
DNK	5

✂️ IN PEI: "COMPASS" provided 60 minutes of Island news, and this was cut back to 30 minutes.

	%
Totally adequate	10
Very adequate	8
Adequate	22
Inadequate	32
Very inadequate	11
Totally inadequate	13
Refused	1
DNK	3

Atlantic Region as a Whole

	%
Totally adequate	6
Very adequate	4
Adequate	21
Inadequate	33
Very inadequate	11
Totally inadequate	19
Refused	1
DNK	6





4. Thinking of the cuts to provincial news programming here in [name of province, in Nfld...use "Newfoundland and Labrador" ], which of the following statements best explains why this happened, so far as you can tell [rotate]

	June 2000	Nov 15 <sup>th</sup>
Funding cuts made to the CBC over the past several years by the federal Liberal government	47	53
A preference by the CBC management to make the most of the cuts to regional television compared to national shows	26	33
DON'T PROMPT No opinion	28	14



5. Do you think that reduced regional CBC television services reflect any lack of understanding or concern by the federal Liberal government, the CBC, or Canadians in other regions of the country...(ROTATE)...about the needs and desires of Atlantic Canadians...a great deal, some, a little, not at all? DON'T PROMPT BUT RECORD DNK/REF

~~By the Federal Liberal Government...~~

	June 2000	Nov 15 <sup>th</sup>
A great deal	35	30
Some	32	31
A little	17	13
Not at all	9	16
Refused	-	*
DNK	8	10

~~By the CBC...~~

	June 2000	Nov 15 <sup>th</sup>
A great deal	34	31
Some	35	33
A little	13	11
Not at all	9	16
Refused	-	1
DNK	9	8



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☞☞ By Canadians...

	June 2000	Nov 15 <sup>th</sup>
A great deal	30	31
Some	38	32
A little	15	13
Not at all	9	16
Refused	-	1
DNK	8	8

☞

6. Some people believe the CBC's decision to cut back regional news shows to thirty minutes, and cancel the late night CBC regional news is just a first step and is a clear sign that the CBC is going to cancel all of its regional news shows in a year or two. Do you think this is ...not at all likely, not very likely, somewhat likely, likely or very likely? DON'T PROMPT BUT RECORD DNK/REF

	June 2000	Nov 15 <sup>th</sup>
Not at all likely	5	12
Not very likely	19	26
Somewhat likely	30	37
Likely	18	6
Very Likely	24	17
Refused	-	*
DNK/No opinion	6	3

☞

7. Which of the federal party leaders do you think is most concerned with maintaining local CBC television news in Atlantic Canada? [rotate]

	Nov 15 <sup>th</sup>
The Liberals led by Jean Chretien	10
The Canadian Alliance led by Stockwell Day	3
The NDP led by Alexa McDonough	22
The PCs led by Joe Clark	12
Refused	3
DNK	49





8. How important is it for your MP and other MPs in the province to make the restoration of [INSERT PROVINCIAL CATEGORIES] a high priority after the election...Very important, Important, Somewhat Important, or Not Important?  
DON'T PROMPT DNK/REF

*IN NEWFOUNDLAND: "Here and Now"*

	Nov 15 <sup>th</sup>
Very Important	34
Important	35
Somewhat Important	22
Not Important	8
DON'T PROMPT DNK	1

*IN NEW BRUNSWICK (ENGLISH-SPEAKERS ONLY): "NB Now"*

	Nov 15 <sup>th</sup>
Very Important	22
Important	17
Somewhat Important	38
Not Important	19
DON'T PROMPT REFUSED	1
DON'T PROMPT DNK	3

*IN NOVA SCOTIA: "1<sup>st</sup> Edition"*

	Nov 15 <sup>th</sup>
Very Important	17
Important	30
Somewhat Important	34
Not Important	16
DON'T PROMPT REFUSED	1
DON'T PROMPT DNK	3

*IN PEI: "COMPASS"*

	Nov 15 <sup>th</sup>
Very Important	26
Important	21
Somewhat Important	30
Not Important	19
DON'T PROMPT: REFUSED	0
DON'T PROMPT :DNK	4



Atlantic Region as a Whole

	%
Very Important	23
Important	26
Somewhat Important	32
Not Important	15
DON'T PROMPT: REFUSED	1
DON'T PROMPT :DNK	3



9. Is the decision to cut regional supertime news programs like [INSERT PROVINCIAL CATEGORIES] important enough to you that it might have some impact on your likelihood of voting for the federal Liberals in the next federal election...that is, would it make you much more likely, somewhat more likely, somewhat less likely or much less likely to consider voting for the federal Liberals? DON'T PROMPT BUT RECORD No impact vs. dnk/ref.

*IN NEWFOUNDLAND: "Here and Now"*

	Nov 15 <sup>th</sup>
More Likely	10
Somewhat more likely	18
Somewhat less likely	26
Much less likely	18
No impact	26
DNK	2

*IN NEW BRUNSWICK (ENGLISH-SPEAKERS ONLY): "NB Now"*

	Nov 15 <sup>th</sup>
More Likely	7
Somewhat more likely	19
Somewhat less likely	20
Much less likely	18
No impact	35
DNK	1



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☞ IN NOVA SCOTIA: "1<sup>st</sup> Edition"

	Nov 15 <sup>th</sup>
More Likely	9
Somewhat more likely	20
Somewhat less likely	19
Much less likely	14
No impact	28
Refused	3
DNK	8

☞ IN PEI: "COMPASS"

	Nov 15 <sup>th</sup>
More Likely	3
Somewhat more likely	19
Somewhat less likely	23
Much less likely	14
No impact	31
	3
DNK	7

Atlantic Region as a Whole

	June 2000	Nov 15 <sup>th</sup>
More Likely	7	8
Somewhat more likely	16	19
Somewhat less likely	25	21
Much less likely	23	16
No impact	19	30
Refused	-	1
DNK	10	4



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	Region	Liberal voters	Alliance voters	NDP voters	PC voters	Other voters
More likely	8	6	18	8	10	
Somewhat more likely	19	25	13	25	14	22
Somewhat less likely	21	20	18	24	24	13
Much less likely	16	12	24	21	25	31
No impact	30	33	23	18	25	34
Refused	1	1	0	0		
DNKDon't know	4	3	4	3	3	



Thank and conclude.

