

NEWS MEDIA AND THE UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES: JOURNALISM FOR RECONCILIATION AND JUSTICE

MATTHEW TEGELBERG¹

ABSTRACT. This research article examines journalism pertaining to the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in Canada. First, UNDRIP legislation is introduced and situated in relation to a wider legacy of news discourses about Indigenous peoples and reconciliation in the Canadian media. The next step is to analyze a diverse sample of mainstream news media and Local Journalism Initiative reporting on UNDRIP over a two-year period surrounding the Royal Assent of Bill C-15 in 2021. Drawing on examples of journalistic practices in the UNDRIP sample, the article argues for robust, situated, and relational approaches to Indigenous journalism that can support the advancement of reconciliation and ongoing struggles to decolonize Canada's dominant legal frameworks.

Keywords. UNDRIP, journalism, Indigenous Peoples, Canada, Bill C-15, Reconciliation, Justice

1. POSITIONALITY

I must acknowledge my own subjective position in relation to this material. I am a non-Indigenous researcher with a background studying environmental and climate change communications that includes past research on Indigenous climate justice activism at annual UN climate summits (Roosvall & Tegelberg, 2018). This previous work triggered an interest in exploring the connections journalists made between UNDRIP and ongoing struggles for Indigenous environmental and climate justice, which is a focal point of the analysis that follows. Consequently, a key limitation of this research is its lack of consideration of Indigenous treaty rights, linguistic and cultural revitalization efforts, Indigenous health and well-being concerns, and other Indigenous rights-based struggles that materialized with varying degrees of frequency in the UNDRIP sample but were outside the scope of this analysis.

Date: Received: March 21, 2025

* Corresponding author Matthew Tegelberg

© The Author(s) 2025. This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. To view a copy of the licence, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.

2. INTRODUCTION

If reconciliation is to be reflected across all sectors of Canadian society, journalists and journalism researchers have a crucial role to play in engaging diverse publics in this process. Callison and Young (2020) urge scholars and journalists alike to question “the systems of knowledge and social order that journalism is part of” (pp. 11–12) in order to facilitate a long overdue reckoning with harms caused by journalism while simultaneously mapping what “repair, reform, and transformation might look like in the study and practice of journalism” (pp. 11–12). Heeding their call, the present study examines news coverage over the course of the slow and complex legal process of implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in Canada. The moment when the UNDRIP legislation was proclaimed in 2021 represented a significant legislative step in an enduring process of advancing reconciliation between Canadians and Indigenous peoples. The Royal Assent of Bill C-15 was celebrated as a significant legal victory for Indigenous peoples, whose lives and communities remain profoundly impacted by Canada’s colonial legal frameworks. Yet, as this research demonstrates, critical assessments of the federal government’s process of implementing UNDRIP and its implications for Indigenous communities struggling for social and environmental justice received limited attention in the mainstream Canadian news media. Consequently, the Canadian public arguably remains ill informed regarding the watershed legal significance of Bill C-15 and the responsibilities that extend from the adoption of UNDRIP in Canadian law.

This article draws methodological inspiration from Anderson and Robertson’s (2011) foundational discourse analysis of representations of Indigenous peoples in mainstream print newspapers in English since Confederation. In each chapter, the authors carefully select and critically analyze press coverage surrounding key events in Canada’s settler-colonial history, thoroughly demonstrating how “the colonial imaginary has thrived, even dominated, and continues to do so” in Canadian news narratives about Indigenous peoples (p. 3). In the wake of *Seeing Red*, tectonic shifts have occurred in the news media landscape as the hegemony of legacy print newspapers has rapidly waned (Winseck, 2024). After peaking in 2008, newspaper revenues have been steadily declining, ushering in a “crisis of journalism” that has led to sustained cuts, layoffs, and closures in newsrooms across the country (Winseck, 2024, pp. 218–222). The same period has been marked by an emergence of digital newsrooms and niche journalism start-ups; spaces have opened up for previously marginalized Indigenous voices and perspectives to enter into digitally mediated public discourses.¹ Building on *Seeing*

¹It is beyond the scope of the present study to contextualize and discuss these transformative changes to the news media industry in the Canadian context and beyond. See Callison and Young (2020) for a critical investigation of these changes that draws upon extensive field research conducted with journalists and editors in diverse newsrooms across Canada and the United States. See Winseck (2024) for comprehensive empirical analysis of media trends over this period which have culminated in what the author calls a “dual-track media economy . . . that consists of the waning legacy media and fast-growing digital media markets” (p. 274).

Red, the present study explores these developments through the prism of the UNDRIP implementation process currently underway in Canada.

After introducing the UNDRIP legislation, I differentiate news coverage of this slow-moving legislative process from recent Indigenous news flashpoints (Waisbord & Russell, 2020) that have drawn sustained attention from journalists and non-Indigenous publics alike. My next step is to analyze salient news discourses and journalistic practices in UNDRIP journalism collected over a two-year period following the Royal Assent of Bill C-15 in 2021.² Drawing conceptually on Callison and Young's (2020) calls for "situated, systems journalism" (p. 212), I conclude by discussing how examples from the UNDRIP sample of robust, situated, and relational journalistic practices can be employed in other contexts to support wider systemic struggles to decolonize Canada's dominant legal orders.

3. UNDRIP, THE CANADIAN NEWS MEDIA, AND THE SLOW PATH TO RECONCILIATION

UNDRIP was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007 to recognize the individual and collective rights of Indigenous peoples (United Nations, 2007). The resolution contains 46 articles that expand on basic human rights, ranging from the right to self-determination and participation in all decision making that impacts Indigenous rights in the economic, social, cultural, and environmental spheres. In the Canadian context, the process of legal recognition and implementation of UNDRIP has moved slowly. After initially opposing UNDRIP, former Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservative government tepidly endorsed the UN resolution as an "aspirational document" in 2010. In 2016, the Liberal government led by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, expressed its commitment "to adopt and implement the declaration in accordance with the Canadian Constitution" (Fontaine, 2016). Six years and two federal elections later, Bill C-15 finally received Royal Assent on June 21, 2021. The act provided the Government of Canada with a legal framework to guide the process of bringing federal laws and policies into line with UNDRIP. Since then, three annual progress reports and a UNDA Action Plan have established "a roadmap of actions Canada needs to take *in partnership with Indigenous peoples* to implement the principles and rights set out in the UN Declaration and *to further advance reconciliation in a tangible way*" (Government of Canada, 2023, emphasis added).

The action plan outlines a wide range of rights-based priority areas that address each of the 46 articles in UNDRIP (Government of Canada, 2023). This includes 13 legislative priorities concerning lands, territories, and resources, and an additional six priority areas specifically tied to environmental rights (Government of Canada, 2023, pp. 33–37, especially items 32 to 51). In the case of the former, the Government of Canada (2023) underscores a commitment to ensuring that "Indigenous jurisdiction over lands and resources is fully exercised and respected" (p. 31). As to the latter, Canada commits to ensuring that Indigenous

²<https://www.parl.ca/documentviewer/en/43-2/bill/C-15/royal-assent>.

peoples “enjoy the right to a healthy environment” while emphasizing that “self-determined climate action is supported as critical to advancing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples” (p. 34). Reed et al. (2022) identify how similar commitments to Indigenous environmental rights have been used to bolster the Government of Canada’s national climate action strategy. In a systematic analysis of federal climate policies and practices, the authors find that such language has remained aspirational at best. In practice, Reed et al. (2022) point to the Government of Canada’s persistent “unwillingness to recognize Indigenous jurisdiction over land” and a corresponding failure to embrace “Indigenous understandings of land as systems of reciprocal relations and obligations” (pp. 528–529).

Callison and Young (2020) identify a recent “surge of mainstream reporting on Indigenous issues in Canadian media” (p. 163). The Idle No More movement in 2012, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s 94 calls to action in 2015, the multi-site Shut Down Canada protests in 2020, and the revelations about unmarked graves on the grounds of several former residential schools in 2021 all generated considerable journalistic interest and corresponding attention in public discourses. Waisbord and Russell (2020) characterize moments like these as news flashpoints, when “interest in specific topics rises and falls rapidly” (p. 377). On one hand, news flashpoints function as “attention magnets” (Waisbord & Russell, 2020, p. 378) that prompt greater public recognition and engagement with critical social issues, such as the violent and enduring legacy of settler-colonialism in Canada. Yet, on the contrary, in an era where news cycles “are faster and shorter” such ephemeral flashpoints do not always yield to the kinds of sustained and robust journalism that contribute to the systemic changes that redressing such social injustice demands (Waisbord & Russell, 2020, p. 380).

Nagy and Gillespie (2015) demonstrate how this process transpired in a study of mainstream print news framings of the residential school system. While the researchers identified key events that triggered wider public interest in reconciliation, the mainstream press did not challenge “Canadians to think about Indian residential schools in expansive terms that frame reconciliation as requiring decolonization and systemic change” (Nagy & Gillespie, 2015, p. 39). Similarly, in a study of mainstream Canadian news reporting on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG), among other Indigenous news events, Drache et al. (2016) observed a “searchlight phenomenon” by which intensive flashes of journalistic and public interest in these issues were followed by a “reporting void.” These findings suggest that Indigenous news flashpoints, particularly those pertinent to reconciliation, can function to temporarily heighten public awareness and engagement with the surrounding issues. Yet the ephemeral nature of this news coverage has failed to produce sustained public pressure for the wider systemic changes—such as the decolonizing of Canada’s legal orders—that a genuine commitment to advancing reconciliation demands (Callison & Young, 2020, pp. 153–157).

There is clearly a pressing need for journalists and citizens alike to hold the Government of Canada accountable to the legislative commitment outlined in its

own action plan. Yet the slow-moving nature of UNDRIP’s legal implementation process poses challenges for sustaining robust public interest and journalistic attention that contrasts with rapidly developing and evolving Indigenous news flashpoint stories. That is, despite the legal significance of Bill C-15 as a critical step toward advancing reconciliation, a slow-moving implementation process does not readily translate into captivating headlines or powerful journalistic imagery. This close examination of different approaches to covering UNDRIP across the Canadian media landscape offers critical insights into the types of journalistic practices that can be mobilized to sustain public engagement with processes of reconciliation and decolonization beyond Indigenous news flashpoints, once heightened levels of attention and recognition are no longer a given.

4. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The materials examined in this article were gathered using automated and manual searching techniques. Automated searches for the keywords “United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” and “UNDRIP” were conducted in two major journalism research databases: Canadian Major Dailies (CMD) and Canadian Press (CP).³ The search timeline was between June 1, 2021 and December 31, 2023, which captured a wide range of UNDRIP-related print news coverage over the period three weeks prior until two years after Bill C-15’s Royal Assent on June 21, 2021. After filtering the initial search results to remove any duplicate stories,⁴ the automated search yielded 242 news items with references to UNDRIP. The search results included news reports and opinion pieces, with both genres subjected to analysis. Manual searches for the same keywords and dates were conducted on the websites for CBC News and APTN News. The scope of this manual searching was limited to online news stories and thus did not include any broadcast journalism produced for either of these outlets over the study period. These manual searches generated an additional 33 relevant online news items.⁵ In sum, automated and manual keyword searching resulted in a sample of 275 news items (see Table 1). While not exhaustive, the UNDRIP material captures a broad spectrum of the contemporary news media landscape in Canada ranging from legacy print newspapers and national online news to niche digital start-ups, Indigenous newsrooms, and local media.

Before examining these findings, it is important to clarify how news discourses and journalistic practices are understood analytically for the purpose of this investigation. By news discourses, I refer to the different types of material that

³CMD is a full-text database that contains an archive of daily press coverage that includes over 35 major regional and national newspapers. CP is a national news agency that provides a news wire service and a searchable online archive.

⁴For example, Postmedia Network owned over 20 national and regional dailies at the time of the study. When the same Postmedia story appeared in multiple publications, it was only selected and counted once.

⁵Manual keyword searching was necessary for these two national newsrooms because neither has a publicly accessible news archive.

audiences may encounter when they turn to news media to make sense of particular events and issues (Bednarek & Caple, 2012; van Dijk, 2009). In *Seeing Red*, Anderson and Robinson make the case for studying mainstream Canadian newspapers as “the country’s most ubiquitous agents of popular education” (p. 3). Those authors go on to provide abundant historical evidence of the ways in which dominant news discourses about Indigenous peoples in Canadian journalism have helped propagate and bolster violent settler-colonial ideology for more than a century. Given the transformations underway in Canada’s journalism landscape, the present study considers the degree to which such historical news discourses continued to be reproduced in the UNDRIP journalism sample. The research is also attuned to journalistic practices that reckon with and work to repair harms caused by the role of Canadian media in these enduring colonial legacies. By journalistic practices, I refer to the different ways that journalists and columnists told stories about UNDRIP across the diverse news organizations and geographical contexts captured by this sample. In particular, the analysis points to a set of journalistic practices that serve to illuminate connections between federal commitments to UNDRIP and community-based struggles for Indigenous reconciliation and justice across Turtle Island.

5. FINDINGS

Table 1 shows the volume of reporting on UNDRIP over the study period across a diverse sample of news media in English.⁶ To structure the analysis, this sample was divided into what are viewed analytically as two distinct clusters of UNDRIP journalism. The first, referred to as “mainstream news media” below, consists of 114 news reports and columns written by staff journalists working at one of two mainstream national broadcasters (CBC News or APTN News) or at one of Canada’s remaining legacy print newspapers (e.g., *Globe and Mail*, *Winnipeg Free Press*). The second cluster, referred to as “Local Journalism Initiative reporting” or “LJI reporting” below, consists of 161 news items. These reports were mostly produced by journalists working at small, independent, on-line and/or community-based news organizations, including several Indigenous newsrooms such as *Windspeaker*, *IndigiNews*, *Iori:wase*, and *Nation News*.

The sample size reflects journalistic interest in UNDRIP that tended to ebb and flow over the course of the 31-month study period. This is explained in part by the time scale of a legislative process that produces newsworthy developments at a slower rate than rapidly changing, event-driven coverage of Indigenous news flashpoints (Waisbord & Russell, 2020). For example, a recent case study on

⁶This is not an exhaustive sample of news coverage of UNDRIP during the study period. First, keyword searches were limited to English-language print and online news media, thus excluding all media in French and Indigenous languages. Second, the material gathered from national broadcasters was limited to online print journalism and thus excluded national news coverage in other national news outlets, such as CTV News and Global News, that largely produce broadcast journalism. Finally, Yukon, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut are underrepresented in the search results since greater inclusion would have entailed additional manual keyword searching across several small digital newsrooms and local news outlets that serve these regions.

TABLE 1. UNDRIP journalism across English-language news media (June 1, 2021–Dec. 31, 2023)

Source	
Canadian Major Dailies	81
Canadian National Broadcasters (manual)	33
CBC News	26
APTN News	7
Canadian Press	161
Local Journalism Initiative reporters	133
Total	275

how three widely circulated newspapers covered the Coastal GasLink pipeline conflict in Wet’suwet’en territory identified 255 relevant news articles that had been published on these events during the three-month period after the story broke in January 2020 (McLinden, 2021). Similarly, Munshaw (2022) collected and examined 202 news items published by three large national news corporations during a 10-month period after a 2021 announcement by Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation concerning the location of unmarked graves on the grounds of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School. By contrast, the slower pace of the legal proceedings surrounding the UNDRIP legislation resulted in a much slower drip of relevant news coverage with 275 news items collected from more than 40 different news outlets over a two-year duration. This underscores the challenges newsrooms confront when it comes to sustaining public attention and engagement with a complex legal process with critical implications for Indigenous reconciliation and justice.

Yet, Table 1 concurrently reveals that the small, independent, online, local, and Indigenous newsrooms represented in the CP sample (161) devoted more resources and sustained attention to UNDRIP. Notably, in this cluster, 83 percent (133) of UNDRIP-related news stories acknowledged that the LJI supported the journalists who filed these stories. Another relevant finding was the salience of news reports that positioned UNDRIP as federally significant legislation in relation to ongoing environmental and climate-related issues or actions playing out in local contexts. Nearly a third (31 percent, $n = 85$) of these reports contained one or more reference to “environment” and/or “climate change.” Each of these broader findings in the UNDRIP material is given closer scrutiny in the analysis below.

6. UNDRIP IN MAINSTREAM NEWS MEDIA

In mainstream news media, the UNDRIP story was largely bound to an established news discourse that highlighted substantive political issues that remain

at stake for a genuine reckoning with colonial legal orders to occur.⁷ CBC News and APTN News devoted sustained attention to reporting on contentious political dynamics surrounding the legal implementation of UNDRIP: namely, the growing contention between the federal Liberal government and national Indigenous leaders around establishing a process for UNDRIP implementation. Justice Minister David Lametti's voice features prominently in this reporting as the Liberal government's leading proponent of the UNDRIP Action Plan. The Justice Minister is mentioned 31 times in six reports by journalists from CBC News and 19 times in four reports for APTN News. Reporters at both national news outlets positioned Lametti as being on the defensive in response to a "chilly reception" of the action plan from national Indigenous leaders (Forester, 2023a).

Four national Indigenous leaders are consistently represented as primary voices of opposition to the action plan: former Assembly of First Nations (AFN) National Chief Perry Bellegarde (20 mentions), former Justice Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould (13 mentions), former AFN National Chief RoseAnne Archibald (11 mentions), and AFN British Columbia Regional Chief Terry Teegee (10 mentions). CBC News reported on how these leaders reacted to an "imperfect UNDRIP plan" (Forester, 2023a) that provided "grossly inadequate time" for consultation (Forester, 2023b). APTN News reported on criticism stemming from the action plan's "noncommittal language" (2023), weak language on "free, prior and informed consent" (Forester, 2023b), culminating in a story with the headline, "Former Justice Minister [Jody Wilson-Raybould] Pays Surprise Visit to AFN Assembly, Lambastes Liberals' UNDRIP Action Plan" (Needham, 2023). By reporting on UNDRIP as a political wedge issue, the journalism produced by these national newsrooms remained consistent with an enduring trope that Anderson and Robertson previously characterized as "a thirty-year political debate concerning self-government, with no end in sight" (p. 172). At one end, the Liberal federal government sought to defend its rhetorical commitments. At the other, the national Indigenous leadership of the time forcefully took Canada's government to task for once again failing to reckon with longstanding legal issues that must be redressed to transcend the settler-colonial status quo. These political dynamics are a crucial element of the UNDRIP story, but this political journalism alone does not offer a full picture of what Canada's implementation of the UNDRIP legislation means for challenging colonial legal orders in local contexts where federal commitments and promises, such as those delineated in the UNDA Act, have direct implications for ongoing struggles to rectify social and environmental injustices. By overlooking this story angle, such coverage arguably missed opportunities to heighten public awareness of UNDRIP beyond the temporal constraints of a slow-moving legislative process in Ottawa.

Legacy newspapers mostly followed a related trajectory of missing opportunities to produce more sustained, nuanced, and in-depth journalism about UNDRIP

⁷See, for example, Anderson and Robertson (2011, 155–172) for a discourse analysis of how the Pierre Trudeau government's release of a white paper was covered by 18 daily newspapers across Canada between June 25, 1969, and December 30, 1970.

(see CMD results in Table 1). On the contrary, when UNDRIP was mentioned in legacy print newspapers (81 items) it tended to be as a tangential element in reporting on another Indigenous topic (e.g. politics, health, economic reconciliation). There were, however, a few noteworthy exceptions. Over the study period, Niigaan Sinclair was the only staff columnist at a legacy newspaper, *Winnipeg Free Press*, to write multiple columns (five) on UNDRIP. This commentary continually draws attention to connections between the UNDRIP Act and Canada's ongoing failure to redress broken historical promises and realize current commitments (Sinclair, 2023b, 2023c). In "You Can't Ignore Your Own Law," Sinclair argues that it took a public outcry over the discovery of unmarked graves at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School to generate enough momentum for the UNDRIP legislation to pass:

The most essential principle in the UNDRIP Act ... is that any project, partnership or initiative involving Indigenous peoples must attain the "free, prior, and informed consent" of Indigenous peoples. That simple principle is one of respect, but it's also to stop Canada's century-and-a-half practice of ignoring, denying or obliterating Indigenous lands, resources and rights with little to no permission or engagement. Canada's entire economy and infrastructure was (and still is) built on the principle that Indigenous rights don't matter. *From June 2021 onwards, this was supposed to change, and Canada is supposed to include Indigenous peoples in everything that will impact them. Almost two years later, it's like nobody in Ottawa has read the memo* (Sinclair, 2023a, emphasis added).

Sinclair positions UNDRIP within the wider nexus of enduring Indigenous struggle against systemic violence and oppression enacted by the Canadian state. The UNDRIP Act is contextualized here as a critical new legal means with which to continue challenging and dismantling the violent and enduring settler-colonial logics that remain deeply entrenched in Canadian society.

Tanya Talaga (2022) cites environmental rights outlined in UNDRIP (Article 29; see also legislated priority items 46–51 in the UNDA Action Plan; Government of Canada, especially pp. 34–35) to report on fierce opposition from the Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) leadership to an Ontario provincial government plan to bury radioactive nuclear waste at a site where several different treaty territories intersect. She writes of "many health and safety concerns ... [the] potential for devastating environmental impacts, [and] a complete lack of consent for this repository from NAN communities." Talaga (2022) later emphasizes that each of these practices represent violations of UNDRIP Article 29, which establishes the right to "free, prior and informed consent" before any "storage or disposal of hazardous materials shall take place in the lands or territories of Indigenous peoples." Talaga (2022) connects NAN's local struggle for environmental justice on treaty lands to the legislative priorities Canada has promised to undertake as part of its commitment to adopting UNDRIP. Yet, as Talaga underscores, the reality on

the ground for NAN is that Ontario’s provincial government remains unwilling to recognise Indigenous jurisdiction over decision making on these lands.

Tanya Talaga and Niigaan Sinclair were the only staff writers at legacy print newspapers that took situated approaches to UNDRIP in delineating what a true federal commitment to implementing this legislation would entail. Furthermore, both writers brought attention to UNDRIP by connecting Canada’s legislative commitments to ongoing Indigenous struggles for social and environmental justice. Aside from these exceptions, Canada’s mainstream press largely persisted in its failure to call dominant settler-colonial legal orders into question by holding the federal government accountable to a promise to work *in partnership* with Indigenous communities toward realizing the rights and principles established in UNDRIP.

7. UNDRIP IN LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTING

The LJI is a five-year federal program that provides funding for civic journalism in communities deemed “underserved” by the current news system in Canada.⁸ The program was established in 2019 as a federal response to an ongoing crisis of journalism driven by a decade of closures, cuts, and layoffs in legacy newsrooms (Winseck, 2024). Since then, the LJI initiative has funded staff positions in newsrooms across the country⁹ and provided support for collaborative partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous news organizations, such as *IndigiNews*; a digital platform jointly run by APTN News and The Discourse to serve Indigenous communities in British Columbia. To qualify for LJI funding, newsrooms must make this reporting publicly accessible through the CP news portal and a Creative Commons license (Scire, 2020). This made it possible to identify and examine 137 news stories filed by LJI reporters, which notably accounted for almost half the full UNDRIP sample (49 percent). A substantial amount of this LJI reporting was produced by journalists working in digital newsrooms, including several with mandates to serve Indigenous communities. For example, three LJI reporters filed 33 relevant news stories for *Canada’s National Observer* (10), *Iorì:wase* (11), and *Windspeaker* (12). Many of these LJI-backed reporters produced in-depth and sustained news coverage that took deeper dives into UNDRIP, often by detailing the relevance of this legislation to Indigenous struggles for social, environmental and climate justice unfolding in local context. Others made UNDRIP salient in reporting on Indigenous communities that are leading efforts to enhance climate resiliency and transition away from fossil fuels toward a more sustainable and just renewable energy system.

7.1. UNDRIP in Struggles for Environmental and Climate Justice. UNDRIP reporting in the LJI sample followed a trajectory that diverged from the coverage in the mainstream news media. First, UNDRIP is mentioned with

⁸<https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/funding/local-journalism-initiative.html>

⁹For a list of news organizations hosting LJI reporters, see <https://nmc-mic.ca/lji/news-organizations/host-news-organizations-list/>.

greater frequency in the LJI sample (133 news items; see Table 1). While these stories seldom engage with legal issues surrounding the legislation itself, UNDRIP is frequently invoked in this reporting as a critical legal instrument for holding governments accountable to promises made in the UNDA Action Plan. One clear example of such accountability journalism came across in reporting that draws on UNDRIP to bolster enduring struggles for land rights and environmental justice in Indigenous communities across Turtle Island.

With the implementation of British Columbia's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA) underway since 2019, territorial disputes between Indigenous nations, the Province of British Columbia, and the federal government featured prominently in such reporting. Several stories detailed powerful opposition to the Coastal GasLink Pipeline (CGL) by Wet'suwet'en land defenders and their allies (Gilpin, 2021; Simmons, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c). Paul Binny (2022) described a CGL opposition group's submission to the UN Human Rights Council which emphasized that "forced industrialization and police militarization of Wet'suwet'en land" contravenes Canada's obligations to UNDRIP" (see also Gidimt'en Land Defenders, 2022). Chadd Cawson (2022) reported on a letter from the Ktunaxa Nation to Canada that demanded international action to redress longstanding issues with industrial pollution in the Kootenay watershed caused by decades of mining operations, which constitutes a violation of the 1909 Boundary Waters Treaty. In Cawson's report, Yaq'it ?a·knuq̓it Chief Heidi Gravelle stresses that honouring UNDRIP and other treaty commitments means empowering Indigenous communities to develop and pursue their own solutions to river pollution "independent of the political and economic drivers that have created this situation." Similarly, in an in-depth report for *Indiginews*, Meral Jamal (2023) writes of growing pressure on "the 'B.C.' government to undertake an environmental review of a proposed open-pit mine expansion that syilx communities and advocates say threatens the Similkameen River." Jamal cited a letter signed by 22 environmental groups reminding the provincial government of its obligation to protect Indigenous land rights under UNDRIP, DRIPA, and Section 35 of the Constitution Act (see also Wilderness Committee, 2023).

Other LJI reporters related UNDRIP to ongoing community-based and territorial struggles for environmental justice outside British Columbia. These reports call attention to Indigenous communities across Turtle Island who are grappling with acute environmental harms and climate-related disasters that range from wildfires and flooding to tailings ponds breaches and unsolicited nuclear waste disposal. In these stories, LJI reporters consistently center voices emerging from within the Indigenous communities who are confronting these challenges. Readers encounter voices of engaged citizens, community leaders, and non-Indigenous allies who collectively underscore how such environmental injustice on Indigenous lands infringes upon several of the rights delineated in UNDRIP. These local stakeholders do not directly engage with issues surrounding the UNDRIP legislation. However, they call attention to specific local contexts where Canadian governments continue to shirk their responsibility to ensure Indigenous jurisdiction over lands and resources and/or deny these communities the right to healthy

environments and self-determined climate action. In Connie Tabbert’s LJI reporting (*The Eganville Leader*), Amanda Two-Axe Kohoko of the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation in Ontario cites Article 29(2) of UNDRIP to argue that the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission must have “free, prior and informed consent” from the members of her First Nation before proceeding with development of a radioactive waste disposal site on unceded Algonquin traditional territory (Tabbert, 2022; see also Logan, 2020). After describing acute climate disasters that are disproportionately affecting Indigenous communities across Turtle Island, Rosalyn Boucha, a spokesperson for Indigenous Climate Action, cites

the continued restraint of Indigenous land management as a *violation of articles 25, 26 and 29* of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). The articles declare the right of Indigenous Peoples to maintain, conserve and strengthen their relationship with their ancestral territories, including the right to use and develop those lands, including through ancestral practices (Cimellaro, 2023, emphasis added).

The report ends with a quote from Boucha, who states that “Indigenous communities [should be] leading the decision-making, and that they should be local and community-based solutions” (Cimellaro, 2023). These examples demonstrate how LJI reporters made UNDRIP a salient feature of their reporting by foregrounding the voices of those leading situated struggles for Indigenous environmental justice or by calling for Indigenous jurisdiction over decision-making processes that concern their traditional territories.

7.2. UNDRIP and Indigenous-led Climate Solutions. Another palpable theme in LJI reporting was to invoke UNDRIP to highlight Indigenous-led climate solutions. Several stories profiled the actions of Indigenous activists, entrepreneurs, and leaders who are steering efforts to enhance local, regional, and territorial climate resilience. This reporting often coincided with UN events, such as the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the annual UN Climate and Biodiversity summit. For LJI journalists, these UN events offered strategic moments with the potential to amplify public attention to UNDRIP by connecting this new federal legislation to Indigenous-led biodiversity and climate solutions. Rochelle Baker (2021a) called attention to UNDRIP in her reporting on the 2021 UN climate summit in Glasgow, Scotland (COP26) and again in her coverage of the 2022 UN Biodiversity Conference that took place in Montreal (COP15; Baker, 2022). In the latter, Hadley Archer of Nature United urged Canada

to take a leadership role at the upcoming climate talks by acting on natural solutions domestically to meet its climate targets within the context of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples... Indigenous territories cover a huge portion of Canada and need to be involved in decisions on natural climate solutions (Baker, 2022).

In a report for *Windspeaker*, Sam Laskaris underscored the presence of officials representing Indigenous Clean Energy (ICE) at COP26. These ICE officials hosted three sessions on Indigenous-led renewable energy projects, including one entitled “Indigenous Clean Energy and UNDRIP” (Laskaris, 2021). In “Indigenous-Led Clean Energy Projects Can Fuel Reconciliation,” Baker centered the voices of several ICE delegates to highlight their collective efforts to lead renewable energy projects “in almost 200 Indigenous communities in Canada” (2021b). Interviewee Mihsakwan James Harper, from Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation in Treaty 8 territory, described his role in “an energy storage company that has partnered 50/50 with the economic development corporation of Six Nations of the Grand River” (Baker, 2021b). Harper emphasized that Indigenous nations and communities need more of these opportunities since “clean energy projects through the framework of UNDRIP . . . better address the wrongdoings of colonization and really empower communities in a better way than large-scale extractive projects” (Baker, 2021b). These journalistic practices connect UNDRIP to the leadership role already being played by Indigenous communities in transitioning toward renewable energy systems and enhancing climate resiliency. LJI-backed journalism focused attention on systemic transformation, showcasing how processes of decolonization and decarbonization can be intertwined in collaborations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders who share a commitment to advancing reconciliation. These journalistic practices serve to exemplify how self-determined Indigenous climate actions can be scaled up and supported by the government of Canada to meet commitments outlined in the UNDA Action Plan.

8. PRIORITIZING VIEWS FROM SOMEWHERE IN CANADIAN JOURNALISM

Knowledge, we argue, is always produced from somewhere, and journalism is no different in this respect even while good methods are required to produce good facts and interpretations. We suggest this so that journalism might repair, reform, and possibly transform its potential to live up to its own ideals and hopefully intervene at the intersections of systems that continue to perpetuate injustice and suffering (Callison & Young, p. 212).

The research findings presented in this article reflect a journalism environment marked by significant and ongoing transformation. In the case of UNDRIP, analysis of two distinct clusters of news material illuminated certain limitations and possibilities for Canadian journalism at this critical juncture. By comparing these perspectives, this conclusion follows Callison and Young in contending that prioritizing *views from somewhere* offers a constructive way forward for journalists and journalism scholars committed to transgressing and transcending the status quo by producing work that advances reconciliation and justice.

One drawback of UNDRIP journalism in mainstream Canadian news media was reflected in missed opportunities to expand the scope of that coverage beyond well-established news discourses. In national broadcast media, federal and

Indigenous political leaders were pitted against one another in reporting that cast UNDRIP as the latest impasse in a long and contentious political struggle between these groups. Another salient pattern in this reporting was to ignore or minimize voices emerging from local settings, where legislative priorities established by Bill C-15 in 2021 and outlined in the UNDA Action Plan (Government of Canada, 2023) have real-world implications for ensuring Indigenous jurisdiction over lands and resources, the right to a healthy environment, and the right to self-determined climate action, among others. By disregarding these critical and situated perspectives on UNDRIP, Canada's mainstream press largely failed to hold the federal government to its commitments or to reckon with Canadian journalism's own historical complicity in perpetuating settler-colonialism (Anderson & Robertson, 2011).

By contrast, another group of stories shed light on the transformative potential of situated, systems-oriented approaches to journalism. Sinclair of the *Winnipeg Free Press*, Talaga of the *Toronto Star*, and several LJI-supported journalists working at smaller digital newsrooms, all produced robust, reflexive, and relationally grounded reporting on UNDRIP that diverged radically from mainstream Canadian press coverage. These journalists departed from established news discourses by embracing and nurturing what Callison and Young (2013) call the view from somewhere. Indigenous journalists, those authors add, are often exemplars of such storytelling because they do not merely prioritize "deeper context and more credible voices on the ground but . . . frame their stories as stories of resilience and of historical narratives repeating themselves even while acts of resistance persist" (p. 213; see also pp. 16–19, 212–214, and 160–199). Journalistic practices that situated UNDRIP in relation to themes of meaningful truth and reconciliation, environmental (in)justice, and Indigenous-led climate solutions had several comparable impacts. First, these stories demonstrated how complex legal processes like UNDRIP can be connected to lived realities and community struggles on the ground. Second, in spotlighting voices from inside Indigenous communities and across diverse geographies, this situated reporting simultaneously served to illuminate historical injustices, contemporary resistance, and local resilience. Third, by invoking specific federal legislative priorities and commitments, these journalists critically leveraged UNDRIP in support of enduring rights-based struggles in contexts where that federal legislation has significant practical implications. Finally, journalists used UNDRIP to highlight how Indigenous communities have been leading efforts to enhance climate resilience and the transition to a renewable energy system that is more sustainable and just.

This research intentionally aimed to look beyond Indigenous news flashpoints toward moments when non-Indigenous publics in particular are less inclined to pay attention to Indigenous stories. In doing so, the study provides evidence of approaches that a few journalists—namely, Indigenous storytellers—are taking to repair, reform and transform settler-colonial relations and institutions. While this study mostly limits focus to examples from environmental and climate journalism, the journalistic practices examined here are easily adaptable to reporting on a wide variety of other newsworthy Indigenous topics, issues and events. The

challenge that lies ahead is in scaling up these efforts so that Canadian journalism begins taking its own meaningful institutional strides toward truth, reconciliation and decolonization by fostering journalistic practices that prioritize reckoning with historical injustices and that are thus grounded in good relations.

9. REFERENCES

- Anderson, M., & Robertson, C. (2011). *Seeing red: A history of Natives in Canadian newspapers*. University of Manitoba Press.
- APTN News. (2020, May 5). APTN and The Discourse launch IndigiNews, a new local journalism platform. May 5, 2020.
<https://www.aptn.ca/indiginews-a-new-local-journalism-platform-launches-to-serve-local-first-nations-inuit-and-metis-communities>
- Baker, R. (2021a, October 15). Preventing biodiversity collapse critical to COP26 climate goals, say world leaders. *National Observer*.
<https://www.nationalobserver.com/2021/10/15/news/preventing-biodiversity-collapse-critical-cop26-climate-goals-say-world-leaders>
- Baker, R. (2021b, November 23). Indigenous-led clean energy projects can fuel reconciliation. *National Observer*.
<https://www.nationalobserver.com/2021/11/04/news/indigenous-led-clean-energy-projects-can-fuel-reconciliation>
- Baker, R. (2022, November 17). Saving B.C.'s at-risk species is pivotal to Canada's biodiversity promises at COP15. *National Observer*.
<https://www.nationalobserver.com/2022/11/16/news/protecting-bc-risk-species-pivotal-canada-biodiversity-goals-cop15>
- Bednarek, M., Caple, H. (2012). *News discourse*. Continuum Books.
- Binny, P. (2022, February 9). Northwest B.C. pipeline opposition group submits report on militarization of Indigenous land to UN panel. The Interior News.
<https://www.interior-news.com/news/northwest-b-c-pipeline-opposition-group-submits-report-on-militarization-of-indigenous-land-to-un-panel-6500751>
- Callison, C., & Young, M. L. (2020). *Reckoning: Journalism's limits and possibilities*. Oxford University Press.
- Canadian Press. (2023, June 22). Ottawa releases action plan to implement UNDRIP, despite calls for more consultation. *APTN News*.
<https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/ottawa-releases-action-plan-to-implement-undrip-despite-calls-for-more-consultation/>
- Cawson, C. (2022, June 2). Global Affairs Canada ignores request. *The Canadian Press*.

- Cimellaro, M. (2023, May 23). As the Prairies burn, Indigenous communities deserve equal support: Indigenous climate action. *National Observer*.
<https://www.nationalobserver.com/2023/05/19/news/prairies-burn-indigenous-deserve-equal-support-indigenous-climate-action>
- Drache, D., Fletcher F., & Voss, C. (2016). What the Canadian public is being told about the more than 1200 missing & murdered Indigenous women and First Nations issues: A content and context analysis of major mainstream Canadian media, 2014–2015. Working paper.
<https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2758140>
- Gidimt'en Land Defenders, Wet'suwet'en Nation. (2022, February 7). *Militarization of Wet'suwet'en lands and Canada's ongoing violations. Submission to the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner.
<https://rb.gy/2vb5u6>
- Gilpin, E. (2021, November 24). I stand with the Wet'suwet'en and all the Indigenous land and water protectors. *Indiginews.com*.
<https://indiginews.com/vancouver-island/ellen-gabriel-offers-support-for-wetsuweten>
- Government of Canada. (2023). United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan 2023–2028.
<https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/declaration/ap-pa/index.html>
- Fontaine, T. (2010, May 10). Canada Officially Adopts UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples. *CBC News*.
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/canada-adopting-implementing-un-rights-declaration-1.3575272>
- Forester, B. (2023a, April 5). Justice minister pitches Assembly of First Nations with “imperfect” UNDRIP plan. *CBC News*.
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/lametti-afn-undrip-imperfect-1.6802904>
- Forester, B. (2023b, April 6). Assembly of First Nations wants federal UNDRIP plan overhauled, slams consultation process. *CBC News*.
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/afn-undrip-draft-plan-delay-1.6803777>
- Jamal, M. (2023, October 6). Pressure builds on ‘B.C.’ to review mine expansion that syilx communities say threatens the Similkameen River. *IndigiNews*.
<https://indiginews.com/features/pressure-builds-on-b-c-to-review-mine-expansion-that-syilx-communities-say-threatens-the-similkameen-river>
- Laskaris, S. (2021, November 3). Indigenous energy leaders to present at the COP26 climate change conference. *Windspeaker*.
<https://windspeaker.com/news/windspeaker-news/indigenous-energy-leaders-present-cop26-climate-change-conference>

- Logan, C. (2020, May 22). Opposition mounts against 25-year licence extension request from N.B. nuclear plant with no long-term waste disposal plan. *National Observer*.
<https://www.nationalobserver.com/2022/05/20/news/opposition-against-25-year-licence-extension-request-nb-nuclear-plant>
- McLinden, A. (2021). The role of legacy media: An examination of coverage during the Coastal Gaslink conflict [Master's Thesis, Carleton University].
<https://doi.org/10.22215/etd/2022-14910>
- Munshaw, S. (2022). Canada's "Reckoning": A qualitative content analysis of Canadian news media coverage on unmarked graves of residential school children [Honours thesis, Douglas College].
<https://dc.arcabc.ca/islandora/object/dc:55713>
- Nagy, R., & Gillespie, E. (2015). Representing reconciliation: A news frame analysis of print media coverage of Indian residential schools. *Transitional Justice Review*, 1(3), 3–40. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5206/tjr.2015.1.3.2>
- Needham, F. (2023, July 14). Former justice minister pays surprise visit to AFN Assembly, lambastes Liberals' UNDRIP Action Plan. *APTN News*.
<https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/former-justice-minister-pays-surprise-visit-to-afn-assembly-lambastes-liberals-undrip-action-plan/>
- Reed, G., Brunet, N. D., McGregor, D., Scurr, C., Sadik, T., Lavigne J., & Longboat, S. (2022). Toward Indigenous visions of nature-based solutions: An exploration into Canadian federal climate policy. *Climate Policy*, 22(4), 514–533. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14693062.2022.2047585>
- Roosvall, A., & Tegelberg, M. (2018). *Media and transnational climate justice: Indigenous activism and climate politics*. Peter Lang.
- Scire, S. (2020, May 8). In Canada, a government program to support local news tries to determine who's most deserving. Nieman Lab.
<https://www.niemanlab.org/2020/05/in-canada-a-government-program-to-support-local-news-tries-to-determine-whos-most-deserving>
- Simmons, M. (2021a, November 1). How the Blueberry ruling in B.C. is a gamechanger for the Site C dam, extractive industries and indigenous rights. *The Narwhal*. <https://thenarwhal.ca/blueberry-river-explainer-indigenous-rights-and-indigenous-rights/>
- Simmons, M. (2021b, November 16). Wet'suwet'en land defenders say B.C., federal inaction prompted enforcement of Coastal Gaslink eviction. *The Narwhal*. <https://thenarwhal.ca/wetsuweten-coastal-gaslink-gidimten-order/>
- Simmons, M. (2021c, December 13). Two years after B.C. passed its landmark Indigenous Rights Act, has anything changed? *The Narwhal*.
<https://thenarwhal.ca/bc-undrip-two-years/>

- Sinclair, N. (2023a, February 24). You can't ignore your own law. *Winnipeg Free Press*. <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/2023/02/24/ignorance-of-the-law-no-excuse-when-you-make-the-law>
- Sinclair, N. (2023b, March 10). Hopeful time (sort of) for Indigenous people. *Winnipeg Free Press*. <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/2023/03/10/hopeful-time-sort-of-for-indigenous-people>
- Sinclair, N. (2023c, June 16). Interim report reveals “common concerns.” *Winnipeg Free Press*. <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2023/06/16/interim-report-reveals-common-concerns>
- Tabbert, C. (2022, June 15). Pikwakanagan says proposed NSDF project needs revision. *The Eganville Leader*. <https://www.eganvilleleader.ca/breaking-news/algonquins-dont-consent-to-current-nsdf-proposal/>
- Talaga, T. (2022, August 12). In Northern Ontario, governments engage in a two-faced climate change response. *The Globe and Mail*. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-in-northern-ontario-governments-engage-in-a-two-faced-climate-change/>
- United Nations. (2007). United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/indigenous-peoples/united-nations-declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples>
- van Dijk, T. A. (2009). News, discourse and ideology. In K. Wahl-Jorgensen & T. Hanitzsch (Eds.), *The handbook of journalism studies*. Routledge.
- Waisbord, S., & Russell, A. (2020). News flashpoints: Networked journalism and waves of coverage of social problems. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 97(2), 376–392. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699020917116>
- Wilderness Committee. (2023, September 14). ENGO sign on letter requesting an Environmental Assessment for Copper Mountain Mine's tailings pond expansion. <https://rb.gy/qnwqtn>
- Winseck, D. (2024). Canada's network media economy: Growth, concentration and upheaval, 1984–2023. Global Media and Internet Concentration Project, Carleton University. <https://gmicp.org/canadas-network-media-economy-growth-concentration-and-upheaval-2019-2023/>

¹ DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SCIENCE, YORK UNIVERSITY, CANADA.

Email address: [rgb]0.00,0.00,0.84mtegel@yorku.ca