

Changing the Narrative: A Racial Reckoning in Canada's Newsrooms Can't Wait

Shree Paradkar (2025). *Narratives in Neglect: Representation, racism, and reckoning in Canadian media*. Prepared for the Canadian Network for Equity and Racial Justice (CNERJ). Toronto, ON. [You can read the full report here.](#)

The Past: Historical Context

- Canadian media has gone from being a tool of government to being tools of political parties to being a highly commercialized enterprise.
- Throughout, it had a history of being strongly associated with the politics of imperialism and colonialism.
- Since the 2010s, the meteoric rise of social media contributed to legacy media losing primacy in its role of information gatekeeping.

The Present: Mechanisms & Impact of Exclusion in Mainstream Media

Underrepresentation and Tokenism:

- Newsroom leadership remains overwhelmingly white.
- Some progress was made diversity sourcing (see the *#DiversityYourSources* campaign launched in 2021) but this did not lead to redistributing editorial power.

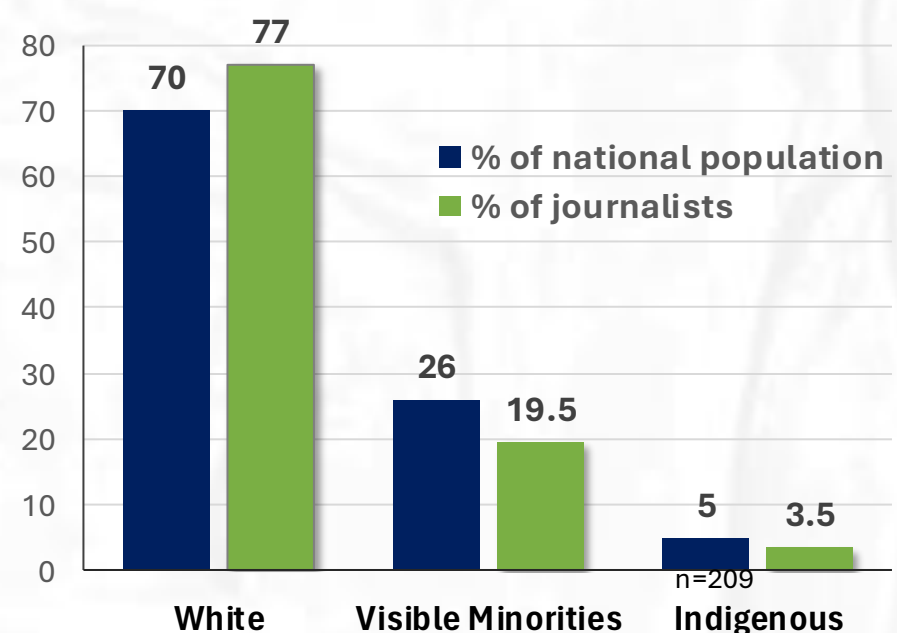
Coverage and Perspectives:

- “Objectivity” and “balance” are terms still used to to **restrict and silence narratives** that challenge dominant powers in Canadian society.
- Canadian media continues to **downplay structural racism, prioritize white comfort**, and normalize state violence, particularly in the coverage of Indigenous, Black, and Muslim communities.

Consequences and Concerns

- Two key moments of reckoning in 2015 (Truth & Reconciliation Commission's report) and 2020 (Black Lives Matter Movement) led **only to temporary self-reflection** but not to sustainable change.
- Mainstream news reinforced identity-based oppression and **reproduced imperial hierarchies** - for example, during the 2023–2025 Israel-Palestine crisis, mainstream outlets like CBC and CTV amplified Israeli voices while muting Palestinian perspectives - thus, aligning themselves with the government position on foreign policy at the time.
- Reporting on marginalized communities in Canada favours intense, brief attention to **sensational, crisis-related stories vs. structural causes** and solutions.
- Non-white journalists advocating for racial justice experience a significant **psychological burden**.
- Social media** created citizen journalism and effective social movements but increasingly also “echo chambers” in which conversations are limited to a very narrow range of perspectives.

Racial Representation: Newsrooms vs. Population



Adapted from CAJ Annual Newsroom Diversity Survey 2024 and 2021 Census Data.



Mainstream media newsrooms are **rapidly losing trust with the public**, and this occurs across the ideological spectrum.



Preserving trust requires a **media that stands on principle** and offers a robust defence of truth and human rights. Canada's media needs to change the **WHO** among its decision makers, the **HOW** of its coverage and **WHOM** it privileges as sources.

From Representation to Reform: Reclaiming Truth in Canada's Newsrooms

1. Structural Reform

- Replace token representation and symbolic diversity with real power-sharing and leadership roles for racialized journalists.
- Include and contextualize different perspectives to limit the space for mis- and dis-information to flourish.

2. Journalistic Standards

- Integrate critical race and Indigenous perspectives in all Canadian journalism programs.
- Promote and teach the examples of journalistic work that *have* investigated systemic oppression - for example, when reporting on residential schools or racial profiling.
- Redefine journalistic neutrality to prioritize factual accuracy, social context and human rights over ideological alignment.
- Establish ethical frameworks for global coverage that ensure consistent humanitarian standards across all regions.

3. Public Accountability Mechanisms

- Require transparency in regular newsroom demographics and coverage audits, with results made public.
- Fund external reviews of historical archives and current coverage for systemic bias.

“Canadian media has historically functioned as an enforcer of the oppressive machinery.”

- Narratives in Neglect (2025), p.7

