

## Impact report

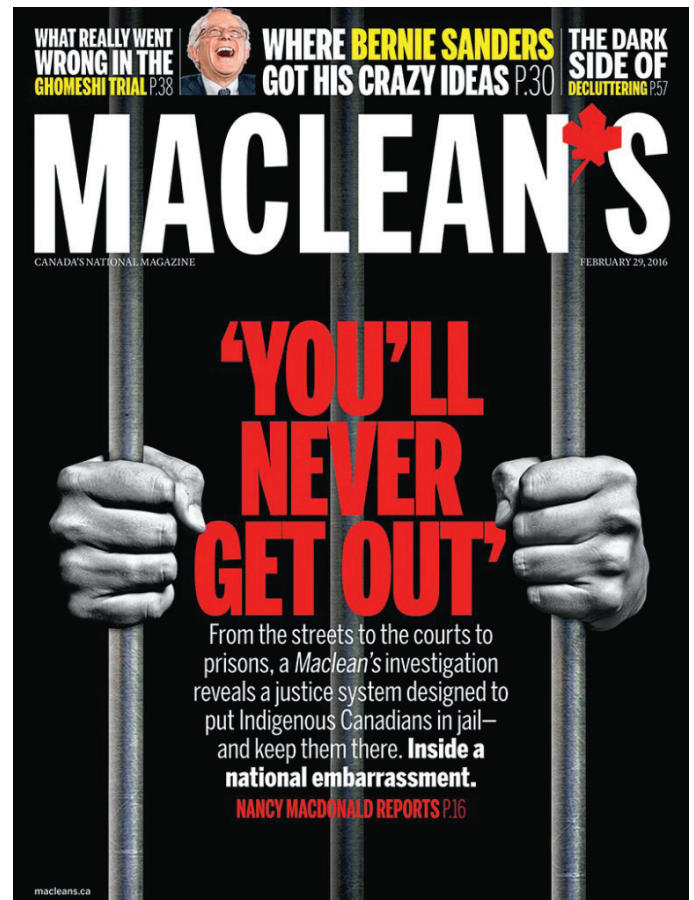
What happened when Discourse Media teamed up with Maclean's Magazine to investigate Indigenous incarceration rates?

"At every step — from arrest to trial to sentencing — Canada's justice system is set up against Indigenous people. How it has made prison the new residential school," reads the subhead of the cover story in the February 29, 2016 issue of Maclean's. The eight-page feature is the result of a months-long investigation Maclean's associate editor Nancy Macdonald and Discourse Media conducted into why Indigenous people are so overrepresented in the Canadian justice system.

The piece, an example of the power of bringing together rigorous evidence with humanizing narrative, was made possible by something that rarely happens in the Canadian media industry: collaboration between media organizations. Discourse Media, an independent media organization in Vancouver, partnered with Maclean's to produce and analyze data and conduct community-based reporting that Maclean's didn't have the capacity to accomplish alone. Maclean's brought to Discourse Media a large platform to extend the impact of their work.

"Working with Discourse Media allowed Maclean's to pursue a project we could never otherwise have completed on our own. Discourse Media added capacity, vision and tremendous value. Their work was extraordinary."

NANCY MACDONALD, Maclean's associate editor



### February 29, 2016

The eight-page feature is the result of a months-long investigation Maclean's associate editor Nancy Macdonald and Discourse Media conducted into why Indigenous people are so overrepresented in the Canadian justice system.

## What we did

Macdonald had heard about multiple reports from Indigenous people claiming they had been racially profiled by police in western Canadian cities. The police departments denied the claims or brushed them off as isolated cases, and there was little available data or research to verify whether or not the complaints were symptomatic of a larger systemic issue. And so Macdonald collaborated with Discourse Media (with the support of the Bob Carty Fellowship awarded by Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE)).

“We sought data from police forces and federal agencies and were told again and again that racial data about policing is not collected or is inaccessible,” said Erin Millar, Discourse Media co-founder and CEO and CJFE Bob Carty fellow.

A team of four reporters surveyed and interviewed over 850 people in Winnipeg, Saskatoon and Regina. We found that Indigenous students are more likely to be stopped by police than non-Indigenous students, and staying away from illegal activity does not shield them from unwanted police attention.

Our data journalism team analyzed this original research in collaboration with experts at the University of British Columbia and Nipissing University. We then designed and programmed two data interactives to communicate the results to the public, which were published by Maclean's and made available to other media partners under Creative Commons licensing. Our data analyst also worked closely with Macdonald and Maclean's to accurately describe data and research at the heart of this whole system investigation.

“Our research fills a gaping hole in data available to the public about racial profiling. These results make a strong case for more transparency.”

ERIN MILLAR, Discourse Media co-founder and CEO

## HOW RACE IMPACTS INTERACTIONS WITH POLICE

Indigenous post-secondary students surveyed are 16 times more likely to be stopped by police than non-Indigenous students – and they believe their race is a factor

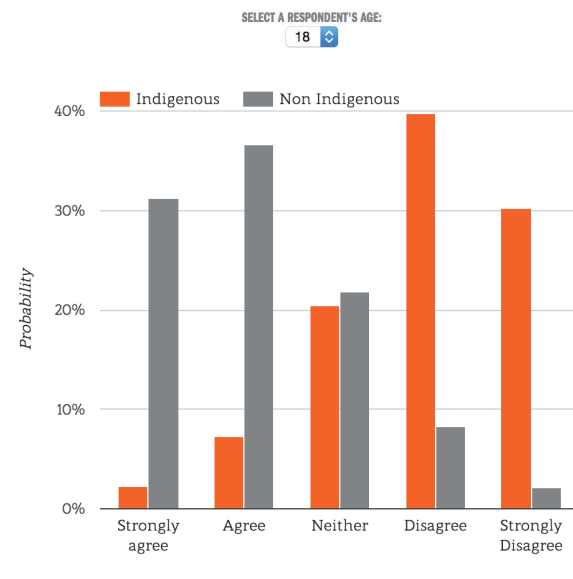
69% - 84%

Chance that Indigenous students 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' that their racial group is viewed positively by police, depending on age.

10% - 21%

Chance that non-Indigenous students 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' that their racial group is viewed positively by police, depending on age.

Students were asked if they agree or disagree that their racial group is viewed positively by police



## How we measure impact

- 1. Dialogue:** we track the quantity and quality of social media dialogue, media pick-up and responses from those with power or influence.
- 2. Actions:** we log any actions taken by advocates, community organizations, individuals or others in response to the work.
- 3. Decisions:** we track any resulting policy, funding or other decisions.
- 4. Media industry influence:** we track engagements with journalists, organizations and media outlets to understand whether our work is having impact on how the industry approaches the issue covered.

## 1. Dialogue

### 1.1 Social media

In comments on Twitter, Facebook and the Maclean's website, the most common sentiment was shock. The tone was urgency. Critical commentary included concerns that the investigation reinforced negative stereotypes.

A number of influencers added depth and nuance to the online conversation, such as the attached Twitter essay posted by Wab Kinew.

### 1.2 Media pick-up

The Saskatoon StarPhoenix reported on the findings of our survey and have advanced local reporting, putting pressure on the local police department to address racial profiling. Their stories include “Indigenous university students more likely to be stopped by police, survey says” and “Aboriginal Affairs Coalition wants to put street checks under the spotlight”.

CTV Regina conducted an investigation into racial profiling by police, based on our research, and have maintained pressure on police to address concerns. The reporters are contrasting our data with a community engagement survey recently published by the police department in which Indigenous people were underrepresented in the sample.

Canadaland published a story by Discourse Media reporter Nelly Bouevitch about our challenges obtaining racial data from police. See “Police in western Canada don't collect, release racial data”.

Nancy Macdonald appeared on western Canadian CBC programs and Rogers radio stations.

### 1.3 Responses from those with power/influence

The day after the cover story was published, Robert-Falcon Ouellette, the Liberal MP for Winnipeg Centre, responded with an impassioned nine-minute speech in the House of Commons. He followed up by visiting women's correctional facilities in Manitoba to hear inmates' experiences and concerns. Ouellette is organizing pipe ceremonies at remand centres to draw attention to the issue.



Robert-Falcon Ouellette

We received official responses from Alberta Justice Minister Kathleen Ganley, the Ontario Justice Ministry and the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba. Each of these responses included pledges to address Indigenous incarceration rates. We will be following these stories to report on whether policy makers follow through and on the effectiveness of any policy changes.

Senior political advisor to the Prime Minister Gerald Butts tweeted “This is a powerful piece of work” in response to the Maclean's article.



Nicole Kish

“The article touched my heart and the hearts of many of the women at the Grand Valley Institution for Women, where I am imprisoned. The words resonated with us as truths we are not allowed to understand. When I read the comparison of prisons to 'new residential schools,' I felt validated.”

NICOLE KISH, inmate at Grand Valley Institution for Women

## 2. Actions

Dozens of peaceful protestors marched in Regina on March 15, International Day Against Police Brutality, to demand local police address profiling concerns.

Kim Beaudin, president of the Aboriginal Affairs Coalition of Saskatchewan, used the investigation to advocate for addressing racial bias in street checks at the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples' National Grassroots Engagement Tour.

Elizabeth Cormack, a sociologist at the University of Manitoba, is citing the data in her inquiry into whether racism was a factor in the police shooting death of Craig McDougall, an Aboriginal 26-year old from Winnipeg.

## 3. Decisions

While it is still too soon to measure any decisions or policy changes as a result of this work, we have received multiple pledges for change from provincial and federal politicians. We will continue to follow up on these pledges and the impact of any resulting changes, and will report to the public on how our governments address discrimination in Canada's justice system (or fail to).

## 4. Media Industry Influence

Discourse Media wants to improve representation of underrepresented groups in media, and so we are continually documenting lessons learned as we experiment with community engagement strategies. We've shared some of these lessons in articles published by CJFE and J-Source ("Journalism startups carve out niches for themselves in Canada" by H.G. Watson.) Canadaland is also preparing an episode focused on Discourse Media and collaborative practices, using this investigation as a case study.

Discourse Media is an independent media company that produces in-depth journalism focused on complex challenges facing society today. Our work is collaborative, solutions-oriented and designed to make an impact.

In a radio interview with Roundhouse Radio, host Minelle Mahtani (who is also a professor at the University of Toronto's school of journalism) spoke to Millar about the practices used in the Maclean's collaboration and how these techniques will be advanced in our broader reconciliation project.

"An incredible amount of information and knowledge in the public interest of all Canadians is going unreported today because of a lack of access," said CJFE Executive Director Tom Henheffer.

### Social Media

A portion of a Twitter essay from Manitoba NDP candidate Wab Kinew in response to the Maclean's cover story (read from the bottom up).

**You Retweeted**  
**Wab Kinew** @WabKinew · Feb 18  
...those who are most likely impacted by the legacy of colonization are most often the least likely to know about it. That's important...

**You Retweeted**  
**Wab Kinew** @WabKinew · Feb 18  
...along with CFS, Rx drug abuse, MMIWG2S, violence & family breakdown. One thing I've been thinking about lately is that...

**You Retweeted**  
**Wab Kinew** @WabKinew · Feb 18  
...A more apt line (though less effective lede) is that prisons are a modern facet of the intergenerational impact of residential schools...

**You Retweeted**  
**Wab Kinew** @WabKinew · Feb 18  
I do however take exception to the "prison is the new residential school" line. Let's please not cheapen that era of cultural genocide...

**You Retweeted**  
**Wab Kinew** @WabKinew · Feb 18  
3. Is @MacleansMag the new Britney cuz Oops! They just did it again. The new piece on anti-Indigenous bias in the justice system is legit...