

Dimensions of an intensifying polycrisis: A critical policy discourse analysis exploring the cost-of-living crisis in Canada

Tracy Smith-Carrier

Professor and Canada Research Chair in Advancing the UN Sustainable Development Goals,
School of Humanitarian Studies, Royal Roads University

Abstract

In the face of rising inflation, increasing hunger, and intensifying inequalities, Canada, like countries elsewhere, is amidst a cost-of-living crisis. What is the arc of this inflationary turn? Some suggest broken supply chains after the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine triggered the crisis, while others argue that corporations have been riding the ‘inflation gravy train’, increasing their prices and reporting record profits while the average family is struggling to put food on the table. Applying the analytic tools of critical policy discourse analysis, this paper analyzes parliamentary speeches given by former prime minister Justin Trudeau to explore the various dimensions of the inflationary trend in Canada, including related food, housing, and cost-of-living crises and how these are (re)constituted and shaped by neoliberal forces. Given the interlinked architecture of the neoliberal world order, the crises emergent in Canada are not unique but provide a useful study on how the polycrisis is unfolding globally. The paper urges state leaders to consider policy proposals that have the potential to tackle the systemic roots of crises.

Keywords: Canada, cost-of-living crisis, critical policy discourse analysis, food insecurity, housing, inflation, polycrisis

Résumé

Face à l’inflation en hausse, à la faim croissante et aux inégalités grandissantes, le Canada, comme d’autres pays, traverse une crise du coût de la vie. Quelle est la progression de cette flambée inflationniste ? Certains avancent que la rupture des chaînes d’approvisionnement à la suite de la pandémie de Covid-19 et la guerre en Ukraine sont à l’origine de cette crise, tandis que d’autres soutiennent que les entreprises ont profité de l’inflation galopante pour augmenter leurs prix et enregistrer des profits sans précédent, alors même qu’une famille moyenne peine à se nourrir. En utilisant des outils d’analyse critique du discours politique, cet article examine les discours parlementaires de l’ancien premier ministre Justin Trudeau afin d’explorer les diverses dimensions de la tendance inflationniste au Canada, notamment les crises en lien avec l’alimentation, le logement et le coût de la vie, ainsi que la manière dont celles-ci sont (ré) organisées et façonnées par les forces néolibérales. Étant donné le fonctionnement interdépendant de l’ordre mondial néolibéral, les crises qui émergent au Canada ne sont pas un cas isolé, mais offrent un exemple pertinent de la façon dont cette polycrise se développe à l’échelle mondiale. Cet article incite aux dirigeants d’États d’envisager des propositions politiques susceptibles de s’attaquer aux causes profondes de ces crises.

Mots clés : Canada, crise du coût de la vie, analyse critique du discours politique, insécurité alimentaire, logement, inflation, polycrise

Introduction

In the face of rising inflation, increasing hunger (Pasieka, 2023), and intensifying inequalities (Oxfam, 2023), Canada is amidst a ‘cost-of-living crisis’ (Angus Reid Institute, 2023). Yet what is the nature and origin of this inflationary trend? Some suggest it was triggered by disrupted supply chains in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine (Chen & Tombe, 2023; Macklem, 2022), while others argue that corporations have been riding the ‘inflation gravy train’, increasing their product prices and reporting record profits at a time when the average family is struggling to put food on the table (Macdonald, 2022).

While initially there was a vision to ‘build back better’, to create a more just society after the COVID-19 pandemic, the material conditions of Canadians have only worsened with time. Food insecurity is on the rise with 18.4% of the population (nearly seven million people) in 2022 unable to acquire the food they need to survive, a rate double that of other industrialized countries, including Sweden, Norway, Switzerland, Japan, and Germany (Stern, 2023). In a September 2023 poll, nearly half (47%) of Canadians surveyed indicated that they were living paycheque-to-paycheque and struggling to afford the bare essentials (Ritchie, 2023). The situation is growingly increasingly stark. In 2025, a poll by RBC revealed that 55% of Canadians described themselves as being “financially paralyzed”. Food Banks Canada noted a dramatic 90% rise in food bank visits over the 2019-2024 period, with more people using food banks now than at any other point in Canadian history. The cost-of-living crisis appears entangled with other crises simultaneously, including a housing and homelessness crisis, an affordability crisis (Beyer, 2025), and a deepening food insecurity crisis (Rezaee, 2024), all of which are adversely affecting individuals and families’ health, well-being, and livelihoods. The crises arise from multifarious sources and collide in ways that animate the ‘global polycrisis’, which Lawrence et al. (2024) define as “the causal entanglement of crises in multiple global systems in ways that significantly degrade humanity’s prospects” (p. 2).

This study applies a critical policy discourse analysis to explore recent inflationary trends in Canada and how these are represented in parliamentary debate speeches by former prime minister Justin Trudeau. The research questions posed in the study include: (a) what is the nature of the present cost-of-living crisis in Canada according to the former federal leader?; (b) what discourses, ideologies, arguments, and social representations are advanced, silenced, or omitted by the former prime minister in relation to the crisis (and others attendant to it); and (c) in what ways, if any, does this crisis contribute to broader understandings of the polycrisis in Canada and beyond?

Materials and Methods

Stemming from the late 1980s, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has become a well-established interdisciplinary, eclectic, and problem-oriented approach to illuminate and explicate the ways in which power, domination, inequality, and injustice are reproduced in society through language use. Through the systematic and retroductable study of semiotic data (written, spoken and visual) (Wodak, 2014), the CDA analyst draws attention to discourse—a form of social

practice defined as a “dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s), and social structure(s) which frame it: the discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258). The key tenets of CDA, as identified by Fairclough and Wodak (1997), are as follows:

1. CDA addresses social problems.
2. Power relations are discursive.
3. Discourse constitutes society and culture.
4. Discourse does ideological work.
5. Discourse is historical.
6. The link between text and society is mediated.
7. Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory.
8. Discourse is a form of social action.

Central to CDA are notions of ideology, power, and critique. As these are polysemic concepts, they require further definition and unpacking. According to Reisigl and Wodak (2009), *ideology* is defined as the “(often) one-sided perspective or world view composed of related mental representations, convictions, opinions, attitudes and evaluations, which is shared by members of a specific social group” (p. 88). Through discourse, ideology serves to establish and maintain unequal power relations; it does so through controlling access to specific discourses and/or public spheres and through the construction of hegemonic identity narratives (Wodak, 2012). Those who wield power can advance their vested interests through language that delimits social categorizations that forge the divisions between ‘us’ and ‘them’. As such, *power* “relates to an asymmetric relationship among social actors who assume different social positions or belong to different social groups” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009, p. 88). *Critique*, emanating from the critical theoretical tradition of the Frankfurt School, involves an analytic enterprise inclined to emancipatory social change. In a broad sense, it involves “making visible the interconnectedness of things” (Fairclough, 1985, p. 747) by revealing the ideologies, power relationships, and social representations embedded in texts and discourses.

Critical Policy Discourse Analysis (CPDA) represents a fruitful integration of CDA with Critical Policy Studies (CPS) as a means to enrich policy discourse analyses (Farrelly et al., 2024). CPS recognizes the role policy discourses play in constituting policy problems, ascribing their solutions (Papadopoulos & O’Keeffe, 2024), and conveying the underlying interests, values, and assumptions attendant to these as they are (re)articulated over time (Montesano Montessori & Lautensach, 2024). CPS thus requires the tools and strategies of deliberation, argumentation, and interpretation (Fischer et al., 2015). The aims of CPDA are to: (a) facilitate a relational analysis of policy; (b) emphasize the constitutive role of discourse in policy analysis; (c) support an analysis of the context of policy discourse and of the constitutive relationship between them; and (d) cultivate an analysis drawing attention to the connection between policy and power (Farrelly et al., 2019, p. 264).

Embracing an interpretive orientation, CPDA involves the close and systematic analysis of texts to uncover aspects typically overlooked yet which influence how policy is understood, designed, and applied. Importantly, CPDA inspires both a normative critique of problematic policy discourses and an explanatory critique that elucidates the links between discursive elements, social processes, and the broader social and political conditions in which they develop (Farrelly et al., 2019). The analysis applies an abductive approach, which requires the analyst to recurrently move back and forth between theory and data (Wodak, 2002). This study seeks to identify the discourses, ideologies, and discursive and argumentation strategies instrumentalized by the former Canadian prime minister to legitimize policy (in)actions in political speeches about the cost-of-living crisis in Canada.

Data and analysis

The data for this study include political debates addressed to the Speaker of the House of Commons during the Parliamentary proceedings in 2022 and 2023. Entering the search terms ‘inflation’, ‘food’ and ‘housing’ revealed a copious amount of data. Therefore, to keep the search manageable, remarks were limited to those by former prime minister Justin Trudeau. In this search, from August 23, 2022 to August 23, 2023, the terms entered revealed the following number of remarks: ‘inflation’: 178 remarks; ‘cost of living’: 166 remarks; ‘food’: 28 remarks; and ‘housing’: 952 remarks. Housing appears to have garnered the lion’s share of the government’s attention. The body of data was entered into one document so that the identified speeches could be read and re-read, highlighted, and with notes taken on the page margins. Quotations were selected for inclusion in the analysis based on their representativeness of a particular discourse, narrative, social representation, or policy framing.

It is important to situate the data in their specific genre (and subgenre) of political speech. Political speech involves political performance yet typically serves different functions, including *inter alia*, to convey positive self- and other-presentations (for recognition, to emphasize exemplariness) and negative self- and other-presentations (offering admonition or warning); to engage in political advertising (to acquire or maintain power); influence the formation of public opinion, attitudes, and will (for identity formation, to manufacture consent, or justify political norms); and to advance political control (Reisigl, 2008, p. 258).

Debate speeches, a subgenre of political speech, are primarily dissent-oriented and contribute to identity politics through discursive resources of inclusion (formation of group solidarity) and exclusion (via the denigration of certain groups). A variant of the debate speech, the parliamentary debate speech, serves multiple purposes, including to (de)legitimize specific policies, to present one’s own political position in a favourable light, and to negatively portray political opponents and their proposals (Reisigl, 2008). Political actors engage in debate speeches to instrumentalize rhetoric to persuade their audiences using constructed narratives and discourses that suit their ideological purposes (Fairclough, 2006). Speeches by Justin Trudeau are analyzed in this study (see Canada, 2023) to better understand how the ideologies,

discourses, and representations espoused by the state have shaped the realities of the cost-of-living crisis in Canada today.

Results

Historical and socio-political context

In 2020, the Bank of Canada announced that the COVID-19 pandemic had triggered the “biggest global downturn since the Great Depression” (Macklem, 2020, para. 2), and that the “recession has been exceptionally severe. It is also unusual in how unevenly it is affecting businesses and people” (para. 5). The pandemic had profound effects on everyone in society, but there were specific differential impacts based on social identity. Women, racialized people, disabled people, 2SLGBTQIA+ populations, and people already subjected to impoverishment, deprivation, and marginalization bore the brunt of the health emergency (Canadian Human Rights Commission [CHRC], 2020). In the aftermath of the pandemic, it was hoped that the post-COVID era would bring about an inclusive recovery, one that would rectify ever-widening inequities (e.g., Segal et al., 2021). Sadly, however, inflation began picking up in early 2021, such that by April 2022,

Nearly 3 in 4 Canadians reported that rising prices were affecting their ability to meet day-to-day expenses, while 3 in 10 Canadians were very concerned about whether they could afford housing or rent. By fall 2022, almost half (44%) said they were very concerned with their household’s ability to afford housing or rent, while one in four Canadians said they were unable to cover an unexpected expense of \$500. (Statistics Canada, 2023c)

The global backdrop of this inflationary trend reveals an unsettled geopolitical environment (Brands, 2022), including the expansion of authoritarian regimes (Repucci & Slipowitz, 2022), conflict (e.g., in Gaza; Jobain et al., 2023), and rising global displacement, principally related to poverty, conflict, and climate-related disasters (UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 2023). Social unrest has also been prompted by the unprovoked attack on Ukraine by Russian President Vladimir Putin, and as Ukraine is “one of the European breadbaskets”, and food one of its most important exports, global food supply chain disruptions had ripple effects across the globe (Jagtap et al., 2022, p. 1).

Justin Trudeau was the prime minister of Canada for ten years. He was first elected Leader of the Liberal Party in April 2013, won a majority government in 2015, and was subsequently re-elected twice, in 2019 and 2021. Amidst concerns over the future of the Liberal Party and misgivings about his leadership (Wendling et al., 2025), Trudeau announced on January 6, 2025 that he would resign his post as prime minister. Mark Carney, the former Governor of both the Bank of Canada and the Bank of England, was subsequently elected by Liberal Party of Canada members as the next leader on March 14, 2025. A federal election on April 28, 2025 resulted in Carney securing his seat as prime minister for the next electoral term (Otis, 2025). Prior to his departure, Trudeau’s stated vision of Canada was of “a country where everyone has a real and fair chance to succeed” (Canada, n.d., para. 2).

The economic growth and job creation imperative

In speeches about the cost-of-living crisis, the former prime minister consistently affirmed a discourse of unremitting economic growth. Trudeau stated,

Mr. Speaker, we are going to continue to grow the economy. We are going to continue to create great, well-paying jobs for Canadians right across the country, because that is what Canadians continue to need. (Canada, 2023, p. 15060)

Economic growth—the proposed solution to the inflationary crisis—dominated the leader’s speeches and were commonly tied to job creation. However, the link between economic growth and job creation remains uncertain. The International Labour Organization (n.d.), for example, finds that “economic growth alone does not necessarily translate into more and better jobs, especially for the poor, vulnerable and those at risk of being left behind” (para. 1). Maxton (2015) goes so far as to say that economic growth actually destroys jobs rather than creating labour market opportunities:

(T)he way the current economic system is designed, it does the opposite. The constant drive to increase productivity, which is what economic growth really is, requires manufacturers to steadily reduce input costs. Economic growth destroys jobs. (para. 1)

Indeed, in the face of steady economic growth over the past four decades, albeit with fluctuations (e.g., a major dip over the COVID-19 pandemic; McCormack & Wang, 2024), work has become increasingly more insecure, precarious, and low-waged, with few, if any, occupational benefits or pensions. New technologies are reshaping the workplace and giving ever-greater control to employers over the time and labour of workers. The narrow focus on economic growth (typically measured by the gross domestic product [GDP] and the unemployment rate alone) obscures many important dimensions of work, including income, quality of employment, and job security (Thomas et al., 2025). As such, the drive for continuous economic growth may not be helping the country to generate the kind of decent jobs necessary to adequately support Canadians, particularly in the face of escalating food and housing costs.

Targeted supports and charity

The pro-growth discourse reiterated by Trudeau rendered the state’s commitment to providing supports for individuals and their families of subsidiary import, with those on offer being targeted and not readily available to all who required assistance. The support for ‘Canadians who need it’ was extended through the charitable food model i.e., food banks and other unnamed investments to counter homelessness.

We have seen significant job growth and economic growth post pandemic, and we will continue to be there to support Canadians who need it, by investing in food banks, investing in countering homelessness and investing in supporting families from coast to coast to coast. (Canada, 2023, p. 15055)

These (unspecified) investments are targeted to two groups, as outlined in the quote below.

That is why we have invested in the middle class and people working hard to join it: to create economic growth, to create jobs, to lift people out of poverty, to create a plan to fight climate change and to build a future. That is what we are going to continue to do. (Canada, 2023, p. 13486)

Here, only the middle class and those ‘working hard to join it’ are considered deserving of state assistance. If food insecurity is understood to result from an inability to work sufficiently hard, then the locus of the problem inherently resides within the individual, implying that people experiencing food shortages are at fault or deficient in ways that warrant their exclusion from the benefits of societal resources. To cast individuals in this light legitimates the state’s reliance on the charitable food model, one shown in the research literature to be stigmatizing, undignified, unpredictable, and inefficient (Riches & Tarasuk, 2014; Smith-Carrier, 2020; Tarasuk et al., 2020). Moreover, by making food insecurity a problem of individual failings, the state absolves itself from its obligations—as the principal duty-bearers of human rights—to ensure food and an adequate standard of living as substantive rights (see McCloskey, 2020).

The right to food not only includes access to nutritious and culturally appropriate diets but to dignified means of food acquisition. Canada (2020) defines food insecurity as “the inability to acquire or consume an adequate diet quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so” (para. 1). This means that food procurement must be done in ‘socially acceptable ways’ (i.e., purchased in grocery stores), with the financial means necessary to enable people to buy their own food (Riches, 2018). Obtaining one’s food at a food bank does not render an individual food secure, nor does it provide a dignified and non-stigmatized means of food acquisition. Yet, adopting a discourse that valorizes ‘hard-working families’ (Canada, 2022, p. 10877) and those ‘working hard to join the middle class’, the federal leader seeks to justify the ambition of the state to invest more, or entrench further, charity as the solution to Canada’s ever-rising hunger problem.

The externalization of challenging times

Although there are some who persistently experience crisis due to poverty and income inequality, the cost-of-living crisis is often presented as a time-limited period of financial strain. Trudeau conceded that “Canadians are facing challenging times right now” (Canada, 2023, p. 12354) but lumps them all together in this assertion as a means to perhaps obscure the fact that those at the highest end of the income distribution have not been positioned for such suffering when in fact they have seen their earnings skyrocket since the pandemic (Oxfam, 2025), allowing them to improve their quality of life and financial security while others struggle for mere survival. Rather than claiming any responsibility for the crisis either in perpetuating it (e.g., enabling it through, for example, the financialization of the housing market; August, 2022; Kalman-Lamb, 2017) or helping to mitigate it, the federal leader assigned blame on exogenous factors, specifically the COVID-19 pandemic, supply chain disruptions in the aftermath of the health emergency, and the war in Ukraine. In doing so, Trudeau denies the state’s culpability in engendering the cost-of-living crisis, assuming the problem originated outside Canada and thus

exists outside its control. The former prime minister was quick to suggest however that the government's response has led to its solution - a "faster" economic recovery, particularly relative to an earlier recession witnessed by his political predecessors:

We can say that Canada's economic recovery has been much faster than it was during the much shallower recession in 2008 under the previous government and that employment is up higher than it has ever been. (Canada, 2023, p. 15492)

The middle class

The Liberal government had, since its initial term in office, grounded its policy proposals on what is presumably best for the 'middle class'. This class of society, rarely subject to definition, has become an amorphous term, albeit one with significant political cache and traction. Although it would suggest a referent category anchored roughly to the average or median national income, people of all socio-economic stripes appear to affiliate themselves with it. The perceptions of those with higher incomes tend however to be misplaced, as the wealthy are far more likely to assume that they belong to the middle class than those located on the bottom end (Genest-Grégoire et al., 2019). The investments made to bolster the middle class referred to in these data may be insufficient as ever greater numbers of Canadians are feeling that they are being squeezed out of the middle class (or are languishing in harsher depths of poverty; Maytree, 2022) and are pessimistic about the future (Bricker & Colledge, 2022). This would suggest that the economic growth pursued by the government has not, contrary to the passage below, benefitted everyone, and that it may in fact translate into the same trickle-down approach purportedly embraced by the opposition party at that time:

We have continued to step up on supports for workers and continued to step up on supports for families. That has created economic growth that has benefited everyone, as opposed to the trickle-down that the Conservatives still push, with tax breaks for the wealthiest. We have continued to grow the economy in meaningful ways for everyone. (Canada, 2023, p. 12620)

Paradoxically, the idea of the middle class, with its perceived lifestyle and materiality, emerged in the 1950s out of a Keynesian socio-economic milieu featuring a robust welfare state, although governments have since employed the discourse to advance neoliberal aims, leading to increasingly more stratified and polarized societies (Thomas, 2019). During his tenure, Trudeau's government had, for instance, introduced middle-class tax cuts while also expanding regressive tax measures that principally benefitted high-income earners (Macdonald, 2016). At the same time, cuts on taxes, or the unwillingness to levy or collect them (e.g., on capital gains, inheritances, estates, or wealth; Rubin, 2020) have the regrettable consequence of reducing government revenues, potentially making spending on necessary public goods and services less feasible. Heading into the pandemic, Canada's public social expenditures as a percentage of GDP were low at 17.3%, almost half that of other affluent countries e.g., France (31.2%), Belgium (28.9%), Finland (28.7%), and Denmark (28%) (Segal et al., 2020).

Fiscally responsible policy

Trudeau recurrently employed the deixis ‘we’ (often applied to manufacture consent or solidarity; Mulderrig, 2012) in the data to affirm that “we will continue to deliver for Canadians” (Canada, 2023, p. 15060). What is being delivered, however, appears to be (more) fiscally responsive spending:

We are going to continue to be there in responsible, targeted ways, keeping our fiscal responsibility at the centre of what we do, while we support Canadians in targeted, noninflationary ways. That is what Canadians need right now. (Canada, 2023, p. 15488)

The choice of words used by the former leader when he says, “We are going to continue...” suggests that the government has not taken a dramatic departure from its pre-crisis approach in the ‘age of austerity’ (see Farnsworth & Irving, 2015) but rather reconfirmed its commitment to maintaining the status quo.

Given the detrimental impacts of austerity policies globally (Brand et al., 2013), a discourse of austerity may not be an entirely palatable one in Canada today. Rather, fiscal responsibility has emerged as a counter discourse. Trudeau admitted that

Canadians are hurting, and the Conservatives’ answer is cuts to programs, cuts to supports for families and cuts to Canadians at a time when they need it. Austerity is not the answer, and a responsible fiscal approach is. That is exactly what we are doing by supporting Canadians who need it. (Canada, 2023, p. 15487)

Similarly in Europe, politicians are promoting public finance sustainability that accentuates “the need to use fiscal laws, independent institutions and mechanisms that put constraints on policymakers and determine that they spend more efficiently, invest more wisely, and obtain better results” (Tofan et al., 2020, p. 1). This discourse has also surfaced in the US in recent years, and although, as Cox et al. (2024) suggest, Republicans have been just as likely to behave in fiscally irresponsible ways as the Democrats, the

Literature on US welfare policy implies that GOP (Grand Old Party) rhetoric about small, fiscally responsible government is at least partially cheap talk, useful for providing politicians cover in their goals of dismantling safety-net programs that are thought to help racial minorities rather than a reflection of real ideological beliefs about fiscal policy. (p. 2)

By employing the discourse of fiscal responsibility, a potential recontextualization of the unpopular austerity discourse, political actors can justify policies that limit government spending and further retrench social welfare provision. Trudeau boasted that Canada has the lowest deficit and debt levels (markers of public spending):

... (T)he lowest deficit of any G7 country. We have the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio of any G7 country. We are continuing to be there for Canadians in a non-inflationary way that is targeted and right. (Canada, 2023, p. 15491)

The fiscal responsibility discourse adopted by the federal leader suggests a limited commitment to assistance, which includes three short-term policy fixes:

Canadians are struggling, and that is why we continue to step up with investments to help them out: with dental care, with support for low-income renters, with investments in housing and with investments in supporting families. At the same time as the Conservative Party is proposing cuts and austerity, we are continuing to invest. (Canada, 2023, p. 16325)

The investments the government leader alluded to here refer to the newly rolled out dental care program, a one-time GST rebate, and one-time top-up to the Canada Housing Benefit.

Solutions

Policy fix #1

The Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP), announced in 2022, provides coverage for dental expenses for children under 12 whose families earn less than \$90,000 annually and are not insured through private insurance plans (Canadian Dental Association, 2022). In 2024, the government sought to expand the program to include uninsured people under age 18, seniors, and people with disabilities (with annual family incomes under \$90,000), with the goal of including all Canadians who meet the income thresholds in 2025 (Osman, 2023).

The absence of publicly funded dental care (outside of meagre provisions afforded through disability-related and income assistance policies administered by the provinces and territories) has meant that individuals and families have had to pay out-of-pocket for 44% of all dental services. As many older adults do not have private insurance after they retire, 42% avoid seeing a dentist when they need to because of the cost (Lexchin, 2022). In 2021, the cost for out-of-pocket dental care, per household, adjusted for inflation, was \$448. While helpful in providing access to oral care that many had previously avoided (Gondro et al., 2025), the CDCP in no way resolves all the other issues associated with the skyrocketing cost of goods and services (including proposed increases to dental care; Rolfe, 2023) facing families over the post-COVID period.

Policy fix #2

The GST rebate, a tax credit for people living with low incomes calculated over a six-month period, provided recipients a double payment in November 2022. According to the Government of Canada (2022a), the maximum amount for the added benefit for a single person with no children was \$234. Consequently, the total credit in 2022 for this person would amount to \$700 (with the boost of \$234 added to the \$467 of the standard rebate) (Canada, 2022b). The average cost of food alone for a single woman (ages 19-30) in 2022, however, was \$3,564 (Dalhousie University et al., 2023). Thus, the GST rebate, while providing a measure of relief in 2022, contributed only a fraction of what would have been needed to access adequate nutritious food, let alone meet all the other costs of living in Canada that year.

Policy fix #3

A one-time top-up to the Canada Housing Benefit was introduced by the Liberal government in 2022, providing a maximum \$500 (tax-free) to applicants whose adjusted family net income was \$35,000 or less, or individuals with an income of \$20,000 or less (Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation [CMHC], 2023a). Although \$500 would help offset some housing expenses, the cost of housing in Canada has climbed steadily in recent years, making the most populated cities in Canada some of the most unaffordable in the world (Lu, 2023). In Vancouver, the cost of renting a one-bedroom apartment in August 2023 was \$3,000 per month (Zumper, 2023). The monthly rent for a comparable apartment in Toronto would run over \$2,500 (Fox, 2023). Homebuyers have also witnessed an ever-escalating housing market. The cost of housing in Canada grew by a whopping 41% over the 2020-2022 period (Better Dwelling, 2023) making it “the largest housing bubble of all time” (Poshnjari, 2023). The average price of a detached home in Vancouver in July 2023 sat at \$2.16 million (Wowa.ca, 2023b), and in Toronto, the average was \$1.43 million (Wowa.ca, 2023a). Meanwhile, wages have not kept pace with the surge in accommodation costs. The median after-tax income of families in 2021 was a paltry \$59,300 (Statistics Canada, 2023a). Thus, a one-time bump to those in the lowest income bracket, although no doubt welcome, does little to assuage the housing crisis the country now faces.

The series of interest rate spikes initiated by the Bank of Canada to respond to the growing inflationary trend has taken a toll on many homeowners, some of whom saw their mortgages rise dramatically over a short period. There were ten rate hikes over 2022 to 2023, and even though inflation was on a steep decline, moving from 8.1% in the summer of 2022 down to 2.8% in June 2023 (Lord, 2023), the Bank of Canada did not veer from its inflation-fighting fervor. Yet, as Macdonald (2023) demonstrates in disaggregating inflation on profits, wages, and other costs, inflationary prices in Canada yielded tremendous profits for corporations over this time frame, particularly in the oil, gas, and mining sectors. Simply put, in the third quarter of 2022 (July-September) alone, when prices rose by 19%, almost half of every dollar in higher prices (a total of \$72 billion directed to the business sector) was converted into (\$30 billion) corporate profits. Consequently, Macdonald (2023) noted at the time that “25 cents out of every extra dollar spent on inflation is going straight to higher oil, gas and mining profits” (p. 5). Inflation was thus a boon to industries directly contributing to the climate crisis while wreaking havoc on individuals’ finances. Significant discussion in the House of Commons surrounded the housing crisis, and then-prime minister Trudeau claimed that his government would

Continue to be there with programs and plans to address this housing crisis across the country. Our plan is to collaborate with the municipalities, including by investing \$4 billion to speed up residential construction approvals, and by creating 100,000 new housing units. We are tying infrastructure investment to housing. We are helping Canadians save money to buy their first home. We are providing help to low-income renters, and we are converting surplus federal lands to affordable housing, among other things. (Canada, 2023, p. 16326)

On several occasions, Trudeau mentioned that the government intended to create 100,000 new units of affordable housing. Yet, for a country of over 40 million people (Statistics Canada, 2025), 100,000 units appear entirely insufficient. These new units will certainly not address the housing security needs of roughly 235,000 people currently experiencing homelessness in

Canada (numbers significantly underestimated as they do not account for the hidden homeless population e.g., in 2013, 1.3 million Canadians indicated that they had experienced insecure housing or homelessness) (Simpson, 2020). As such, CMHC (2023b) has indicated that Canada would need to build 3.5 million more homes than projected by 2030 “to restore affordability” (para. 1).

Upon its release in March 2023, Federal Housing Advocate Marie-Josée Houle claimed that the Federal Budget was

(A) sorry disappointment. It completely misses the mark on addressing the most pressing housing crisis this country has ever seen. There are no new ideas, and not nearly enough new money announced for housing. The homelessness crisis was not even mentioned. This is simply unacceptable. (CHRC, 2023, para. 1)

Houle contends that the “investments fall drastically far short of what is required to reckon with the tide of housing loss and homelessness across the country” (CHRC, 2023, para. 2). Aside from \$4 billion over seven years for a co-developed Urban, Rural and Northern Indigenous Housing Strategy, no new funding was earmarked to advance the National Housing Strategy and redress the housing crisis, despite the Auditor General’s finding that the “Strategy is not translating into measurable decreases in chronic homelessness” (CHRC, 2023, para. 8). To tackle the housing crisis, Houle argues that the government must make significant investments in Canada’s non-market housing supply (i.e., co-operative, non-profit, public housing) – housing with the potential to provide affordability and accessibility. Whitzman (2023) notes that close to 4 million households have incomes so low that a monthly rent of over \$1,050 would be financially taxing, including those on income assistance programs who have not seen their benefits increase in real terms since the 1990s. A far cry from the 100,000 affordable units proposed, the Federal Housing Advocate argues that an additional 4.2 million non-market units (roughly 20% of all housing units) would be a necessary start to redress the housing crisis in Canada (CHRC, 2023).

Data omissions, (mis)representations, and erasures

Congruent with a CPDA analysis, it is important to consider the omissions and erasures in the data, and the ways social actors are represented—or not—within it. Promising to deliver ‘real solutions’ for Canadians, Trudeau claimed,

Mr. Speaker, our focus on this side of the House is delivering real solutions for Canadians, which is why we are moving forward with a plan to double the GST credit for families that need it, moving forward on dental supports for low-income families...and moving forward with supports for low-income renters as well. These are things that we know will make a real difference in the lives of Canadians who are hurting. (Canada, 2022, p. 7678)

Here Trudeau positions the government (and himself at the helm) as the all-powerful hero of the story, the one with the power to make the ‘real difference in the lives of Canadians’ (with

no acknowledgement of the constellation of other civic actors working to do the same). As with the externalization of the causes of the crisis, this positioning allows the state to negate its role and culpability in the creation of the cost-of-living crisis, and to define the solutions however (in)effectual to its attenuation.

In relation to the housing crisis, the former prime minister does not once mention housing as a human right. Much work has been done by advocates and researchers across Canada to ensure that the right to housing was included in the National Housing Strategy, *A Place to Call Home*, introduced in 2018. The inclusion of language in the strategy that affirmed housing as a human right was deemed a momentous feat, and it was hoped that this insertion would lead to both greater investments in affordable housing and enhanced transparency and accountability. As passed, however, it lacked “any meaningful accountability for the commitment to the right to housing and didn’t provide for hearings” (The National Right to Housing Network, n.d., para. 4). In fact, professor and housing advocate, David Hulchanski, found that in the year the strategy was released the actual funds allocated to housing represented only 0.8% of the overall federal budget, only 0.1% higher than the lowest year (in 2016) on record for housing expenditures since the 1970s (Gold, 2019, para. 10).

In *A Place to Call Home*, the federal government indicated that it would “progressively implement the right of every Canadian to access adequate housing” (Canada, 2017, p. 8). This commitment “includes a duty to dedicate the maximum available resources and incorporates immediate obligations to address urgent violations, as well as longer-term responsibilities to show progress over time” (Paradis, 2018, p. 6). Yet “commitments to housing” were rarely mentioned in the Hansard speeches, and those that were put forward will not, as the Federal Housing Advocate aptly pointed out, begin to remedy the pervasive housing and homelessness issues across the country.

In relation to the food crisis, the term ‘food’ received a paltry 28 mentions in the data. Again, no reference was made to ensuring Canadians have the right to adequate or nutritious food. This is perhaps unsurprising given that Canada, despite being an eager leader to sign rights agreements internationally (Smith-Carrier et al., 2017), has few explicit legal protections affirming that the right to food be not only respected but actively fulfilled (Rideout et al., 2007; Riches, 2018). It, like other social and economic rights, has been interpreted to be largely aspirational in nature, confined to charity and market-oriented solutions (Smith-Carrier & Manion, 2022). With little chance of resolving the food crisis, the penchant for food charity actively diminishes individuals’ right to food and ensures that people go hungry.

To curb expectations of greater expenditures on public goods and services over the cost-of-living crisis, the government applied a discourse of fiscal responsibility in the data, perhaps under the assumption that the accumulation of debt by state actors, a *debt crisis*, can have significant adverse consequences on society (see Fuss & Whalen, 2022). No mention, however, was made in the Hansard speeches about the exorbitant debt (and with it, the potential mortgage defaults, evictions, and/or bankruptcies) accumulated by individuals and families resulting from

soaring interest rates and the inflationary crisis. Similar to the Great Recession, individuals and families in financial difficulty are rarely bailed out by the state (in 2008, this was reserved only for the financiers who had instigated the crisis), and despite being a political economy prone to crisis, more recent global crises (i.e., COVID-19 pandemic) have not served to temper the fervor of and commitment to neoliberal fiscal orthodoxy. Rather than serving as openings for transformative change, these crises have been used to re-embed and normalize austerity responses (Krubnik & McBride, 2024). Regrettably, they are missed opportunities to eliminate punitive welfare systems (which continuously divide populations based on faulty assumptions of deservingness) in favour of more dignified and effective income supports like a basic income guarantee (Smith-Carrier et al., 2024).

Interestingly, many of the traditional discourses that have shaped and permeated the welfare literature were absent in these data. The government leader did not, in his various remarks to Parliament, invoke the discourses of resiliency (Smith-Carrier & On, 2021), self-sufficiency (Breitkreuz & Williamson, 2012), or (in/)dependence (Fraser & Gordon, 1994) to affirm individuals' 'personal responsibility' to care for themselves and their families. Indeed, those most, and least, affected by the various crises at play in Canada appeared to have been erased entirely. 'The middle class' and 'people working hard to join it' were the predominant groups represented in the data (with a few mentions of young families, families, young people, seniors, tradespeople, and workers). Aside from references to low-income renters, people experiencing poverty were largely identified in abstraction. For example, Trudeau stated, "Mr. Speaker, 2.7 million Canadians have been lifted out of poverty since 2015 because of the supports and investments this government made" (Canada, 2023, p. 15493). Although certain groups (i.e., racialized individuals, immigrants, disabled people) are disproportionately positioned for systemic impoverishment (Statistics Canada, 2023b), they were largely absent in these data. Those with capital were also omitted, obscuring the power and privilege of this group and the ways that sustaining and enlarging it perpetuates poverty and income inequality.

Discussion

Former prime minister Justin Trudeau was forthcoming when he referred to the inflationary trend across Canada as a crisis. Yet this crisis (like all others associated with the present political economy) glosses over the deep-seated and long-term assemblage of policy choices—embedded ideationally and materially—that engender its (re)production. Here, the crisis appears to unfold as a series of triggers (or trigger events) that politicians must continuously respond to, or put out, as has been the case for the many wildfires (Lawrence & Homer-Dixon, 2023) that the country must increasingly reckon with (Canadian Climate Institute, 2024), all the while avoiding any disquiet about the neoliberal order that is inherently oriented to crisis (see Saad-Filho, 2021). While Trudeau expressed concern over the 'inflationary crisis' beleaguering the country, he did not specifically use the term 'polycrisis'. The concept illuminates the interlinkages of crises, not only in Canada but globally.

Dimensions of an intensifying polycrisis

Adam Tooze (2022) captured the zeitgeist marker in a *Financial Times* article “Welcome to the world of the polycrisis”. The neologism ‘polycrisis’ was subsequently referred to in another *Financial Times* piece by columnist Jonathan Derbyshire (2022), as a “collective term for interlocking and simultaneous crises of an environmental, geopolitical and economic nature” (para. 1). Neither contributor coined the term, however; this credit is assigned to complexity scientists Morin and Kern (1999) who initially employed the term to refer to the “interwoven and overlapping crises” emerging on the world stage. It has since been applied ubiquitously by leaders and media figures around the globe (e.g., at the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2023), although its definition has been obscured by a lack of consistent usage, with some referring to *a* polycrisis and others to *the* polycrisis (i.e., the only one in this historical moment, albeit with the potential to wholly derail society and the planet) (Lähde, 2023). Janzwood and Homer-Dixon (2022) define polycrisis as

(A)ny combination of three or more interacting systemic risks with the potential to cause a cascading, runaway failure of Earth’s natural and social systems that irreversibly and catastrophically degrades humanity’s prospects. (p. 3)

Although individual crises enmeshed in the polycrisis may have distinct origins (Murphy, 2024), they are deeply rooted within the neoliberal world order (Monbiot, 2016). Continuously (re)constituting new permutations of free-market orthodoxy, neoliberalism includes variegated processes of deregulation, privatization, fiscal responsibility (or austerity), and financial liberalization, and through these, inequality and the mass hoarding of wealth (see Hickel, 2017). Peck et al. (2010) argue that although the intellectual project of neoliberalism may be “practically dead, (but), as a mode of crisis-driven governance, it could be entering its zombie phase” (p. 105). It is adaptive and therefore impervious to radical transformation or dissolution. Globally, Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann (2019) argue that we are not witnessing the collapse of the current political economy but “rather its transformation and adaptation into a broader, more flexible and multifaceted system of global governance—a change *within* the order rather than *of* the order” (p. 1077, emphasis in the original). Polycrises can occur on multiple scales, including at the local, regional, national, and international level. The assemblage of crises impacting Canada, for example, do not appear unique but rather are emergent in a variety of forms elsewhere (in the US, see Rothstein, 2023; in the UK, see Broadbent et al., 2023; Hoff & Happer, 2025). This is likely the case because at the heart of the polycrisis is “interlinked architecture” (Lawrence et al., 2023, p. 11) that has the proclivity to worsen the risks attendant to globalization (i.e., instability, inequality, ecological destruction); risks that, according to Goldin and Mariathan (2014), can only be managed, not eradicated entirely.

Austerity, at the core of the neoliberal fiscal responsibility discourse, is attuned to “parsimony, frugality, morality, and a pathological fear of the consequences of public debt” (Blyth, 2013, p. 115). The latter is assumed to accumulate from “state profligacy to which spending cuts provide the answer” (Whiteside et al., 2021, p. 4). While government spending (e.g., on income supports, non-market housing) to better tackle the cost-of-living crisis could

conceivably be achieved through increased taxation on the ultra-rich (while still yielding balanced budgets), this has largely been deemed undesirable by neoliberal states (Whiteside et al., 2021). The position and power of capitalist elites are thus upheld when fiscal responsibility (read: austerity) is actuated by the state to neutralize calls for interventionism and redirect public attention to the necessity of fiscal constraint (McBride & Whiteside, 2011; Whiteside et al., 2021).

Crises can present windows of opportunity for change (Baumgartner et al., 2018). Sadly, however, the COVID-19 pandemic has not spurred radical change but rather has sustained a legacy of stasis and continuity (Béland et al., 2021) and further intensified pre-existing inequalities (Bryant et al., 2020; Krubnik & McBride, 2024). Rather than maintaining the status quo, state actors could pursue a more transformative suite of policies that seek to tackle the systemic issues underlying the financial crisis. Such actions could include the provision of more generous and expansive income support policies (e.g., a basic income guarantee for all who need one), responses built on substantive human rights (e.g., investments in income and housing reflecting a maximum of available resources), the insertion of regulatory measures (e.g., to curb speculation and the financialization of housing in the banking and housing sectors; Kalman-Lamb, 2017), and more progressive tax arrangements that would provide the revenues required to finance necessary public expenditures (e.g., capturing windfall profit taxes, corporate and wealth taxes, and jettisoning subsidies to the oil, gas, and mining industries; Cochrane & Miller, 2023). That said, the adoption of one (or several) of these policy options would not be a panacea as the risks and drivers of the polycrisis are globally entangled (Lawrence et al., 2024). What is required, then, is a more radical upending of and departure from hegemonic financialized capitalism, an anti-neoliberal project that, according to American philosopher Nancy Fraser, hinges upon the restoration of a new and reinvigorated Left. Without a persuasive voice of dissent, it is doubtful that state actors, including those in Canada, will veer outside the confines of austere neoliberal policy terrain (see Brenner & Fraser, 2017) to imagine new possibilities.

While the concept of the polycrisis is helpful for understanding the interlinked crises of neoliberalism, it could also be considered problematic given its characterization as being subject to indeterminate complexity and uncertainty, with no immediate end. This rendering, as Murphy (2024) argues, could lead to futility and a sense of powerlessness, potentially undermining the agency and resistance of progressive policy advocates and enabling political actors to engage more technocratic policy ‘solutions’ assuming that more transformative approaches are not possible. As noted, however, there are policy levers at governments’ disposal that have the potential to ameliorate the substantial pressures of the financial crisis today. Regrettably, political leaders have gravitated toward limited, targeted, and temporary (or one-off) policy instruments—typically those with little potential to significantly alter the structures and systems that continuously reproduce crises.

References

- Angus Reid Institute. (2023, April 6). Tightening up, drawing down: Vast majority of Canadians making tough decisions to handle cost-of-living crisis. <https://angusreid.org/cost-of-living-inflation-discretionary-spending-savings-canada/>
- August, M. (2022, June). The Financialization of Multi-family Rental Housing in Canada: A Report for the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate. Ottawa: Office of the Federal Housing Advocate, Canadian Human Rights Commission. <https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/august-financialization-rental-housing-ofha-en.pdf>
- Baumgartner, F. R., Bry D., Jones, F. D., & Mortensen, P. B. (2018). Punctuated equilibrium theory: Explaining stability and change in public policymaking. In C. M. Weible, & P. A. Sabatier (Eds.), *Theories of the policy process* (4th ed, pp. 55-101). Routledge.
- Béland, D., Cantillon, B., Hick, R., & Moreira, A. (2021). Social policy in the face of a global pandemic: Policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis. *Social Policy & Administration*, 55(2), 249-260. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spol.12718>
- Better Dwelling. (2023, February 23). Canadian real estate price correction to be one of the largest in the world: Fitch. <https://betterdwelling.com/canadian-real-estate-price-correction-to-be-one-of-the-largest-in-the-world-fitch/>
- Beyer, S. (2025, June 12). Breaking down interprovincial barriers can tackle the housing crisis, too. *Policy Options*. <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/june-2025/housing-crisis-interprovincial-barriers/>
- Blyth, M. (2013). *Austerity: The history of a dangerous idea*. Oxford University Press.
- Brand, H., Rosenkötter, N., Clemens, T., & Michelsen, K. (2013). Austerity policies in Europe—Bad for health. *BMJ*, 346, 1-2. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.f3716>
- Brands, H. (2022, January 20). Inflation's biggest risk is geopolitical unrest. *Bloomberg*. <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2022-01-20/inflation-s-biggest-risk-is-geopolitical-unrest?embedded-checkout=true>
- Breitkreuz, R. S., & Williamson, D. L. (2012). The self-sufficiency trap: A critical examination of welfare-to-work. *Social Service Review*, 86(4), 660-689. <https://doi.org/10.1086/668815>

Brenner, J., & Fraser, N. (2017). What is progressive neoliberalism? A debate. *Dissent*, 64(2), 130-130. <https://doi.org/10.1353/dss.2017.0051>

Bricker, D., & Colledge, M. (2022, April 6). The danger of the fading middle-class dream. *Global News*. <https://globalnews.ca/news/8736782/fading-middle-class-dream/>

Broadbent, P., Thomson, R., Kopasker, D., McCartney, G., Meier, P., Matteo, R., McKee, M., & Katikireddi, S. V. (2023). The public health implications of the cost-of-living crisis: Outlining mechanisms and modelling consequences. *The Lancet Regional Health–Europe*, 27. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lanepe.2023.100585>

Bryant, T., Aquanno, S., & Dennis Raphael, D. (2020). Unequal impact of COVID-19: Emergency neoliberalism and welfare policy in Canada. *Critical Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Journal*, 15(1), 22-39. <https://doi.org/10.51357/cs.v15i1.108>

Canada. (n.d.). The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada. <https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/about>

Canada. (2023). Publication search. House of Commons. <https://www.ourcommons.ca/publicationsearch/en/?View=D&Item=&ParlSes=from2022-09-23to2023-09-23&oob=&Topic=&Proc=&Per=58733&Prov=&Cauc=&Text=inflation&RPP=15&order=&targetLang=&SBS=0&MRR=150000&Page=1&PubType=37>

Canada. (2022a, November 4). Six month doubling of GST credit payment starts. <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/news/newsroom/tax-tips/tax-tips-2022/six-month-doubling-gst-credit-payment-starts-november-4-2022.html>

Canada. (2022b, September 29). Making Life More Affordable: Doubling the Goods and Services Tax Credit for Six Months. Department of Finance Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/news/2022/09/making-life-more-affordable-doubling-the-goods-and-services-tax-credit-for-sixmonths.html>

Canada. (2020). Household food insecurity in Canada: Overview. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/food-nutrition-surveillance/health-nutrition-surveys/canadian-community-health-survey-cchs/household-food-insecurity-canada-overview.html>

Dimensions of an intensifying polycrisis

- Canada. (2017). Canada's National Housing Strategy: A Place to Call Home. <https://www.placetocallhome.ca/pdfs/Canada-National-Housing-Strategy.pdf>
- Canadian Dental Association. (2022, September 13). CDA responds to federal dental care announcement. https://www.cda-adc.ca/EN/about/media_room/news_releases/2022/09_13_federal_announcement.asp
- Canadian Climate Institute. (2024, July 23). Fact Sheet: Climate change and wildfires. <https://climateinstitute.ca/news/fact-sheet-wildfires/>
- CHRC. (2023, March 31). Budget 2023 fails to address Canada's housing emergency. <https://www.housingchrc.ca/en/budget-2023-fails-to-address-canadas-housing-emergency>
- CHRC. (2020, March 31). Inequality amplified by COVID-19 crisis. <https://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/en/resources/inequality-amplified-covid-19-crisis>
- Chen, Y., & Tombe, T. (2023). The rise (and fall?) of inflation in Canada: A detailed analysis of its post-pandemic experience. *Canadian Public Policy*, 49(2), 197-217. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cpp.2022-068>
- CMHC. (2023a, April 1). One-time top-up to the Canada Housing Benefit. <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/consumers/renting-a-home/one-time-top-up-canada-housing-benefit>
- CMHC. (2023b, September 13). Estimating how much housing we'll need by 2030. <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/observer/2023/estimating-how-much-housing-we-need-by-2030>
- Cochrane, D. T., & Miller, K. (2023, September 29). Taxes and the path to a green economy. *Canadians for Tax Fairness*. https://www.taxfairness.ca/sites/default/files/2023-10/tax-fairness_green-economy_2023_final-version.pdf
- Cox, C., Epp, D., & Shapiro, I. (2024, June 6). Chasing fiscal responsibility through balanced budgets: The collision of ideology with political realities. Yale University. https://shapiro.macmillan.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/CES_deficit_draft.pdf
- Dalhousie University, University of Guelph, University of Saskatchewan, & University of British Columbia. (2023). Canada's Food Price Report 2023 (13th ed). https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/sites/agri-food/Canada%27s%20Food%20Price%20Report%202023_Digital.pdf

- Derbyshire, J. (2022, December 31). Year in a word: Polycrisis. *Financial Times*.
<https://www.ft.com/content/f6c4f63c-aa71-46f0-a0a7-c2a4c4a3c0f1>
- Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, M., & Hofmann, S. C. (2020). Of the contemporary global order, crisis, and change. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 27(7), 1077-1089.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2019.1678665>
- Fairclough, N. (2006, December 20). Tony Blair and the language of politics. *openDemocracy*.
https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/blair_language_4205jsp/
- Fairclough, N. (1985). Critical and descriptive goals in discourse analysis. *Journal of Pragmatics* 9(6), 739-63. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166\(85\)90002-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(85)90002-5)
- Fairclough, N., & Wodak, R. (1997). Critical discourse analysis. In T. A. van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse as social interaction* (pp. 258–284). Sage.
- Farnsworth, K., & Irving Z. (2015). Introduction: Social policy in the age of austerity. In K. Farnsworth, & Z. Irving (Eds.), *Social policy in times of austerity: Global economic crisis and the new politics of welfare* (pp. 1-8). Bristol University Press.
- Farrelly, M., Mulderrig, J., & Montessori, N. M. (2019). Concluding remarks on critical policy discourse analysis. In N. M. Montessori, M. Farrelly, & J. Mulderrig (Eds.), *Critical policy discourse analysis* (pp. 264-270). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Fischer, F., Torgerson, D., Durnová, A., & Orsini, M. (2015). Introduction to critical policy studies. In F. Fischer, F., D. Torgerson, A. Durnová, & M. Orsini (Eds.). *Handbook of critical policy studies* (pp. 1-24). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Food Banks Canada. (2024, March). HungerCount 2024: Buckling under the strain.
<https://foodbankscanada.ca/hungercount/>
- Fox, C. (2023, March 14). Looking to rent one-bedroom apartment in Toronto? New report suggests you'll pay more than \$2,500 a month. *CTV News Toronto*.
<https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/looking-to-rent-one-bedroom-apartment-in-toronto-new-report-suggests-you-ll-pay-more-than-2-500-a-month-1.6312568>
- Fraser, N., & Gordon, L. (1994). A genealogy of dependency: Tracing a keyword of the US welfare state. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 19(2), 309-336.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3174801>

Dimensions of an intensifying polycrisis

- Fuss, J., & Whalen, A. (2022, August 3). Government debt accumulation—learning painful lessons, again. *The Fraser Institute Blog*.
<https://www.fraserinstitute.org/blogs/government-debt-accumulation-learning-painful-lessons-again>
- Genest-Grégoire, A., Guay, J. H., & Godbout, L. (2019). Never too rich to be middle-class: An assessment of the reference-group theory and implications for redistributive taxation. In K. Decancq, & P. Van Kerm (Eds.), *What drives inequality?* (pp. 123-137). Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Gold, K. (2019, May 2). ‘They’ve taken baby steps’: Professor slams Ottawa’s housing strategy. *The Globe and Mail*. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/real-estate/vancouver/article-theyve-taken-baby-steps-housing-professor-slams-liberals-approach/>
- Goldin, I., & Mariathasan, M. (2014). *The butterfly defect: How globalization creates systemic risks, and what to do about it*. Princeton University Press.
- Gondro, J. V., Emode, M., Ivancevic, D., & Clarke, J. (2025, February 12). Cost-related avoidance of oral health services. Statistics Canada.
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2025001/article/00003-eng.htm>
- Hickel, J. (2017). *The divide: A brief guide to global inequality and its solutions*. Random House.
- Hoff, I., & Happer, C. (2025). Mediating the cost-of-living crisis: The meaning of a ‘keyphrase’ in UK contemporary cultural discourse. *Critical Sociology*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/08969205241311560>
- Homer-Dixon, T., Ortwin, R., Rockstrom, J., Donges, J. F., & Janzwood, S. (2021). A call for an international research program on the risk of a global polycrisis. *SSRN*.
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4058592
- International Labour Organization. (n.d.). Employment-rich economic growth.
<https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/dw4sd/themes/employment-rich/lang-en/index.htm#:~:text=Economic%20growth%20alone%20does%20not,and%20increases%20in%20labour%20productivity>
- Jagtap, S., Trollman, H., Trollman, F., Garcia-Garcia, G., Parra-López, C., Duong, L., Martindale, W., Munekata, P. E. S., Lorenzo, J. M., Hdaifeh, A., Hassoun, A., Salonitis, K., & Afy-Shararah, M. (2022). The Russia-Ukraine conflict: Its implications for the

- global food supply chains. *Foods*, 11(14), 2098. <https://doi.org/10.3390/foods11142098>
- Janzwood, S., & Homer-Dixon, T. (2022, April 27). What is a global polycrisis? And how is it different from a systemic risk? *Cascade Institute*. Discussion Paper, Version 1.1. <https://cascadeinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/What-is-a-global-polycrisis-version-1.1-27April2022.pdf>
- Jobain, N., Kullab, S., & Krauss, J. (2023, October 20). Amid continued airstrikes, Israel says it has no plan for Gaza after destroying Hamas. *PBS News Hour*. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/amid-continued-airstrikes-israel-says-it-has-no-plan-for-gaza-after-destroying-hamas>
- Kalman-Lamb, G. (2017). The financialization of housing in Canada: Intensifying contradictions of neoliberal accumulation. *Studies in Political Economy*, 98(3), 298-323. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07078552.2017.1393911>
- Krubnik, A. P., & McBride, S. (2024). Crises and austerity: The political economy of post-crisis alternatives in Canada. *Alternate Routes: A Journal of Critical Social Research*, 34(1), 1-20. <https://alternateroutes.ca/index.php/ar/article/view/22565>
- Lähde, V. (2023, August 17). The polycrisis. *Aeon*. <https://aeon.co/essays/the-case-for-polycrisis-as-a-keyword-of-our-interconnected-times>
- Lawrence, M., & Homer-Dixon, T. (2023, August 18). When it comes to wildfires or COVID-19, focusing on simple explanations might make things worse. *Globe and Mail*. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-when-it-comes-to-the-problems-plaguing-our-world-focusing-on-simple/>
- Lawrence, M., Homer-Dixon, T., Janzwood, S., Rockstöm, J., Renn, O., & Donges, J. F. (2024). Global polycrisis: The causal mechanisms of crisis entanglement. *Global Sustainability*, 7(e6), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1017/sus.2024.1>
- Lexchin, J. (2022). After more than 50 years, pharmacare (and dental care) are coming to Canada. *International Journal of Health Services*, 52(3), 341-346. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00207314221100654>
- Lord, C. (2023, July 18). Inflation falls into the Bank of Canada's target range. Are rate hikes done? *Global News*. <https://globalnews.ca/news/9838996/canada-inflation-june-2023/#:~:text=The%20annual%20rate%20of%20inflation,cools%20to%202.8%25%20in%20June>

- Lu, G. (2023, March 6). Sydney is now the world's 2nd most expensive housing market. *Boss Hunting*. <https://www.bosshunting.com.au/lifestyle/real-estate/most-expensive-housing-markets/>
- Macdonald, D. (2023, January 18). Your inflation dollars may not be going where you think: Report. *Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives*.
<https://share.google/RurQW19Sw3bF7UjI8>
- Macdonald, D. (2022, June 7). Opinion: Canada's richest companies riding the inflation gravy train. *SaskToday*. <https://www.sasktoday.ca/north/opinion/opinion-canadas-richest-companies-riding-the-inflation-gravy-train-5453492>
- Macdonald, D. (2016, December 5). Out of the shadows: Shining a light on Canada's unequal distribution of federal tax expenditures. *Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives*.
<https://policyalternatives.ca/loopholes>
- Macklem, T. (2022, March 3). Economic progress report: Controlling inflation. *Bank of Canada*.
<https://www.bankofcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/remarks-2022-03-03.pdf>
- Maxton, G. (2015, April 21). Economic growth doesn't create jobs, it destroys them. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2015/apr/21/jobs-economic-growth-inequality-environment-club-of-rome>
- Maytree. (2022, November 23). Latest Welfare in Canada report finds depth of poverty worse in 2021, after 2020 bump. <https://maytree.com/media-releases/latest-welfare-in-canada-report-finds-depth-of-poverty-worse-in-2021-after-2020-bump/>
- McBride, S., & Whiteside, H. (2011). Austerity for whom? *Socialist Studies/Études Socialistes, Special Section*. <https://doi.org/10.18740/S4VS3P>
- McCloskey, S. (2020). Poverty is a political choice: A UN Rapporteur has delivered a withering critique of the international system. *A Development Education Review*.
<https://www.sloga-platform.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Issue-31-Final-2.pdf#page=87>
- McCormack, C., & Wang, W. (2024, April 24). Canada's gross domestic product per capita: Perspectives on the return to trend. Statistics Canada.
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/36-28-0001/2024004/article/00001-eng.htm>

- Monbiot, G. (2016, April 15). Neoliberalism – the ideology at the root of all our problems. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/15/neoliberalism-ideology-problem-george-monbiot>
- Montesano Montessori, N., & Lautensach, A. (2024). A blueprint for what? From a critical policy discursive analysis of UN’s Sustainable Development Goals to a constructive rearticulation for their application. *Critical Policy Studies*, 19(2), 222–241. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2024.2355140>
- Morin, E., & Kern, A. B. (1999). *Homeland earth: A manifesto for the new millennium*. Hampton Press.
- Mulderrig, J. (2012). The hegemony of inclusion: A corpus-based critical discourse analysis of deixis in education policy. *Discourse & Society*, 23(6), 701-728. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926512455377>
- Murphy, C. (2024). The polycrisis diagnosis and its problems. In P. Diamond, & A. Skrzypek (Eds.), *The politics of polycrisis: Transforming social democracy in Europe*. Foundation for European Progressive Studies. https://feeps-europe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/241120_BOOK_3106-4_FEPS_Oxford_v6_web-1.pdf
- Osman, L. (2023, March 28). Budget 2023 expands dental-care program, but expected cost balloons to \$13B. *Global News*. <https://globalnews.ca/news/9585059/budget-2023-dental-care-program/>
- Otis, D. (2025, April 28). Canadians give Liberals 4th mandate as Carney leads party to minority win. *CTV News*. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/article/canadians-give-liberals-4th-mandate-as-carney-leads-party-to-minority-win/>
- Oxfam. (2025, January 20). Billionaire wealth rises \$2.8T in 2024, Poverty unchanged since 1990. <https://www.oxfam.ca/news/billionaire-wealth-surges-by-2-8-trillion-in-2024-three-times-faster-than-the-year-before-while-the-number-of-people-living-in-poverty-has-barely-changed-since-1990/>
- Oxfam. (2023, January 16). Richest 1% bag nearly twice as much wealth as the rest of the world put together over the past two years. <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/richest-1-bag-nearly-twice-much-wealth-rest-world-put-together-over-past-two-years>
- Papadopoulos, A., & O’Keeffe, P. (2024). Automating activation in Australia: A critical policy discourse analysis of the new employment services model. *Critical Policy Studies*, 18(1),

131-149. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2023.2207618>

Paradis, E. (2018, June 1). If you build it, they will claim: Rights-based participation and accountability in Canada's National Housing Strategy. *Maytree*. <https://maytree.com/wp-content/uploads/Paradis-submission-Rights-based-participation-and-accountability-1-June-2018.pdf>

Pasieka, C. (2023, January 11). 60% more Canadians per month expected to use food banks, other programs in 2023, survey finds. *CBC News (Toronto)*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/60-rise-use-of-food-banks-programs-canada-2023-1.6711094>

Peck, J., Theodore, N., & Brenner, N. (2010). Postneoliberalism and its malcontents. *Antipode*, 41(S1), 94-116. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2009.00718.x>

Poshnjari, I. (2023, August 22). Canada likely sitting on the largest housing bubble of all time: Strategist. *BNN Bloomberg*. <https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/canada-likely-sitting-on-the-largest-housing-bubble-of-all-time-strategist-1.1962134>

RBC. (2025, January 23). "Financially paralyzed": Higher costs have Canadians feeling unable to move forward - RBC poll. <https://www.rbc.com/newsroom/news/article.html?article=125971>

Reisigl, M. (2008). Rhetoric of political speeches. In R. Wodak, & V. Koller (Eds.), *Handbook of communication in the public sphere* (Vol. 4, pp. 243-269). De Gruyter.

Reisigl, M., & Wodak, R. (2017). The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA). In J. Flowerdew, & J. Richardson (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of Critical Discourse Studies* (pp. 44-59). Routledge.

Reisigl, M., & Wodak, R. (2009). The discourse historical approach. In R. Wodak, & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (pp. 87-121). Sage.

Repucci, S., & Slipowitz, A. (2022, February 17). Freedom in the world 2022: The global expansion of authoritarian rule. *Candid. Issue Lab*. <https://search.issuelab.org/resource/freedom-in-the-world-2022-the-global-expansion-of-authoritarian-rule.html>

Rezaee, J. R. (2024, June 4). A national plan to end food insecurity in Canada is within reach.

- Policy Options*. <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/june-2024/food-insecurity/#:~:text=New%20data%20shows%20that%20nearly,or%20went%20days%20without%20eating>.
- Riches, G. (2018). *Food bank nations: Poverty, corporate charity and the right to food*. Routledge.
- Riches, G., & Tarasuk, V. (2014). Canada: Thirty years of food charity and public policy neglect. In G. Riches & T. Silvasti (Eds.), *First world hunger revisited: Food charity or the right to food?* (pp. 42-56). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rideout, K., Riches, G., Ostry, A., Buckingham, D., & MacRae, R. (2007). Bringing home the right to food in Canada: Challenges and possibilities for achieving food security. *Public Health Nutrition*, 10(6), 566-573. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980007246622>
- Ritchie, S. (2023, September 1). Almost half of Canadians living paycheque to paycheque as Conservative support grows: Poll. *The Globe and Mail*. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-almost-half-of-canadians-living-paycheque-to-paycheque-as-tory-support/>
- Rolfe, K. (2023, August 15). Dental costs soaring across Canada as fee guides get updated. *The Globe and Mail*. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/investing/personal-finance/article-dental-cost-increase-inflation-canada/#:~:text=In%20comparison%2C%20fee%20guide%20increases,per%20cent%20in%20British%20Columbia>
- Rothstein, R. (2023, August 24). Examining the cost of living by state in 2023. *Forbes Advisor*. <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/mortgages/cost-of-living-by-state/>
- Rubin, J. (2020, August 22). Why do Canada's wealthiest families get huge tax breaks? *Toronto Star*. https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/why-do-canada-s-wealthiest-families-get-huge-tax-breaks/article_180052a9-bc7
- Saad-Filho, A. (2021). Endgame: From crisis in neoliberalism to crises of neoliberalism. *Human Geography*, 14(1), 133-137. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1942778620962026>
- Segal, H., Banting, K., & Forget, E. (2021, March 25). The need for a federal basic income feature within any coherent post-COVID-19 economic recovery plan. *Facets*. <https://doi.org/10.1139/facets-2021-0015>

- Segal, H., Forget, E., & Banting, K. (2020). A federal Basic Income within the post COVID-19 economic recovery plan. *Royal Society of Canada Policy Briefing*. https://rsc-src.ca/sites/default/files/FBI%20PB_EN.pdf
- Simpson, V. (2020, April 20). What percentage of the Canadian population is homeless. *WorldAtlas*. <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-percentage-of-the-canadian-population-is-homeless.html>
- Smith-Carrier, T., Forget, E., Power, E., & Halpenny, C. (2024). ‘Covering all the [welfare] basics’: A critical policy study of the Expert Panel on Basic Income report in British Columbia, Canada. *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice*, 32(3), 443-469. <https://doi.org/10.1332/17598273Y2024D000000016>
- Smith-Carrier, T., Ross, K., Kirkham, J., & Decker Pierce, B. (2017). ‘Food is a right... Nobody should be starving on our streets’: perceptions of food bank usage in a mid-sized city in Ontario, Canada. *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, 9(1), 29-49. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhuman/huw021>
- Smith-Carrier, T., & Manion, K. (2022). Bringing it all together: Leveraging social movements and the courts to advance substantive human rights and climate justice. *Human Rights Review*, 23(4), 551-574. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12142-022-00674-0>
- Smith-Carrier, T., & On, J. (2021). Debunking myths about poverty: Social actor representation of the participants of the canceled Ontario Basic Income Pilot project. *Journal of Poverty*, 26(6), 500–519. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10875549.2021.1957070>
- Smith-Carrier, T. (2020). Charity isn’t just, or always charitable: Exploring charitable and justice models of social support. *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*, 5(3), 157-163. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41134-020-00124-2>
- Statistics Canada. (2025). Canada’s population clock (real-time model). <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/71-607-x/71-607-x2018005-eng.htm>
- Statistics Canada. (2023a, August 9). Main highlights on income of families and individuals: Subprovincial data from the T1 Family File, 2021. <https://collections.irshdc.ubc.ca/index.php/Detail/objects/9464>
- Statistics Canada. (2023b, August 23). Poverty persists among some racialized Canadians from the first generation to the third generation or more. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/230823/dq230823b-eng.htm>

- Statistics Canada. (2023c, February 27). A snapshot of how inflation is affecting Canadians. <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/o1/en/plus/3096-snapshot-how-inflation-affecting-canadians>
- Stern, S. (2023, October 16). Food insecurity is a national crisis. How should Canada step up? *The Future Economy.ca*. <https://thefutureeconomy.ca/op-eds/food-insecurity-sarah-stern-maple-leaf-foods/>
- Tarasuk, V., Fafard St-Germain, A. A., & Loopstra, R. (2020). The relationship between food banks and food insecurity: insights from Canada. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 31, 841-852. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-019-00092-w>
- The National Right to Housing Network. (n.d.). Right to housing legislation in Canada. [https://housingrights.ca/right-to-housing-legislation-in-canada/#:~:text=The%20National%20Housing%20Strategy%20\(NHS,Economic%2C%20Social%20and%20Cultural%20Rights](https://housingrights.ca/right-to-housing-legislation-in-canada/#:~:text=The%20National%20Housing%20Strategy%20(NHS,Economic%2C%20Social%20and%20Cultural%20Rights)
- Thomas, M. P. (2019). Being “middle class”. In D. Brock, A. Martin, R. Raby, & M. P. Thomas (Eds.), *Power and everyday practices* (2nd ed, pp. 171-192). University of Toronto Press.
- Thomas, M. P., King, A. D., & Jackson, A. (2025). *Work and labour in Canada: Critical issues*. Canadian Scholars.
- Tofan, M., Onofrei, M., & Vatamanu, A. F. (2020). Fiscal responsibility legal framework—New paradigm for fiscal discipline in the EU. *Risks*, 8(3), 79. <https://doi.org/10.3390/risks8030079>
- Tooze, A. (2022, October 28). Welcome to the world of the polycrisis. *Financial Times*. <https://www.ft.com/content/498398e7-11b1-494b-9cd3-6d669dc3de33>
- UN High Commissioner for Refugees. (2023). 2023: A moment of truth for global displacement. <https://www.unhcr.org/spotlight/2023/01/2023-a-moment-of-truth-for-global-displacement/>
- Wendling, M., Yousif, N., & Sudworth, J. (2025, January 6). Canada’s Justin Trudeau cites 'internal battles' as he ends nine-year run. *BBC*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c878ryr04p8o>
- Whiteside, H., McBride, S., & Evans, B. (2021). *Varieties of austerity*. Policy Press.

- Whitzman, C. (2023, August 18). Canada's progressive parties have lost the plot on the housing crisis. *Global and Mail*. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-canadas-progressive-parties-have-lost-the-plot-on-the-housing-crisis/>
- Wodak, R. (2014). Critical discourse analysis. In C. Leung, & B. V. Street (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to English studies* (pp. 302-316). Routledge.
- Wodak, R. (2012). Language, power and identity. *Language Teaching*, 45(2), 215-233. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444811000048>
- Wodak, R. (2008). Introduction: Discourse studies – Important concepts and terms. In R. Wodak, & M. Krzyżanowski (Eds.), *Qualitative discourse analysis in the social sciences* (pp. xii-xvi). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wodak, R. (2002). Aspects of critical discourse analysis. *Zeitschrift für angewandte Linguistik*, 36(10), 5-31. <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=939ed07528ca2c534455baa6fc1c6784138bf743>
- Wowo.ca. (2023a, August 3). Toronto Housing Market Report. <https://wowa.ca/toronto-housing-market>
- Wowo.ca. (2023b, August 3). Vancouver Housing Market Report. <https://wowa.ca/vancouver-housing-market>
- Zumper. (2023, August 28). Downtown Vancouver, Vancouver, BC rent prices. <https://www.zumper.com/rent-research/vancouver-bc/downtown-vancouver>